

Bennett, Eve, (2019) *Gender in Post-9/11 American Apocalyptic TV: Representations of Masculinity and Femininity at the End of the World*, (NY & London: Bloomsbury, 2019); 224 pp.: ISBN 9781501331084, \$120 (hbk), ISBN 9781501331091, \$108, (PDF eBook)

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In addition to having a profound effect on global political dynamics, the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001 had a significant impact on the American media and creative industries. Eve Bennett takes this impact as the starting point for her *Gender in Post-9/11 American Apocalyptic TV*. Influenced by Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed about America* (2008), an examination of gender depictions in post 9/11 journalistic media, Bennett considers whether Faludi's observations could be usefully applied to US apocalyptic television series aired between 2002 and 2012.

Bennett's introduction is important for setting the parameters of the book. The author is careful to define 'Apocalyptic' as 'one or more events that occur or are threatened that cause or would cause large scale destruction and/or harm to the human race' (p.7) to justify the selection of her case studies. Her analysis examines trends across a decade of TVSF rather than offering a definitive argument for the way gender is depicted on screen throughout the whole period. Thorough, perceptive and theoretically and contextually engaged, Bennett's discussion considers tropes such as the melodramatic and gothic modes in relation to masculinity and female roles, as well as identifying gender-inflected narrative patterns across telefantasy series. Significant topics inform the study, including the representation of power relationships between men and women; 'recurring character types and narrative configurations' (p.6); the relationship between specific historical events and the representation of gender; and the extent to which shows may or may not uphold a re-entrenchment of traditionalism.

The book is split into four large chapters - plus an introduction and conclusion - which move roughly through a focus on depictions of men to an examination of female characters and their narrative arcs. Each chapter is divided into shorter sub-sections. Chapter One, 'Heroic Masculinity and its Pitfalls', considers the influence of the Western on *The Walking Dead*'s (2010-) characters, including Rick, Shane and the Governor, before examining the problematic identities at play in *Heroes* (2006-2010). Chapter Two, 'The Prince Hal Narrative', considers fathers and sons and the variations and repetition of the Prince Hal Narrative in popular shows like *Supernatural* (2005-) and *Battlestar Galactica*

(2003-2009). Chapter Three, 'Patriarchal Conspiracies and Female Victims', considers *Jericho* (2006-2008) and *Dollhouse* (2009-2010) in relation to their 'lack of faith in the government' and multinational corporations (p. 137). Chapter Four develops chapter three's consideration of fathers and daughters by examining women turned into weapons across a number of significant series including *Firefly* (2002-2003), and *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* (2008-2009). The conclusion draws together the wide-ranging observations and suggests future directions of study.

Informative and thoroughly researched, each chapter draws on socio-cultural context and established critical approaches to offer close readings of the shows under consideration. Thus, while this book does not seek to develop critical theory, it uses scholarship effectively to offer solid, well argued, textual analysis. Bennett effectively demonstrates that in the twenty-five series she examines, the representation of gender is more complex than Faludi had suggested in her very brief consideration of gender in post-9/11 fictional television. The discussions of character and their narrative arcs are perceptive and extensive footnotes develop many observations further. Critical approaches including genre theory, psychoanalysis and post-feminism are introduced succinctly in a manner that would orientate less-familiar readers with the methodologies utilised. Indeed the writing style and the sustained analysis are two main strengths of this text. Bennett's writing is not only accessible, clear and well structured, it is *entertaining*. The chapter subsections add to the readability of the text, without making it seem fragmented, and the short conclusions are effective in providing summative, cohesive comments.

Although Barbara Gurr's edited collection, *Race, Gender and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film* (2015) was published four years earlier, Bennett's work is the first single author study of gender across a significant group of telefantasy texts. Other works, such as Takacs's (2009) 'Monsters, Monsters Everywhere: Spooky TV and the Politics of Fear in Post-9/11 America'; Cornea and Thomas's (eds), *Dramatising Disaster* (2013); and Burkenstien, Froula and Randell's (eds.) *Reframing 9/11* (2010), consider the representation of disaster but their focus differs from Bennett's specific remit of analyzing gender. Accordingly, this book opens up new readings of significant science fiction television, as well as offering insight into related film and graphic novels.

Overall, scholars at all stages in their careers will find this a valuable and insightful study. It is a well-researched, highly readable text invaluable to those interested in gender studies, American telefantasy or disaster narratives more generally. Indeed, the greatest praise for this book is that it leaves one wanting more. TV shows produced after 2012 – for

example, *Revolution* (2012-14), *The 100* (2014-) and *Stranger Things* (2016-) – would benefit from the analysis Bennett offers. It would be fascinating for future scholars to consider whether Bennett’s conclusions about the ‘mistrust of patriarchal institutions at the heart of American society’, the conflicting depictions of gender, and the dominance of male concerns, found in the shows she examines (pp. 188-190) are still prevalent in apocalyptic television now. Accordingly, *Gender in Post 9/11 American Apocalyptic TV* is highly recommended for anybody interested in twenty-first century telefantasy.

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