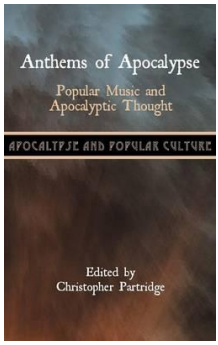
Anthems of Apocalypse: Popular Music and Apocalyptic Thought, edited by Christopher Partridge



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This volume presents a collection of essays that certainly achieves Christopher Partridge's aim to introduce readers to the subject of apocalyptic thought in relation to popular music. While dealing with a vast subject, the eight contributions included provide specific case studies exhibiting the range of apocalyptic resonances in music. Authors thus demonstrate the pervasiveness of apocalyptic thought in popular culture while also gesturing toward further work to be done, establishing frameworks for theorizing generally and analyzing specific examples as models.

In his introduction, Partridge establishes the foundational themes of apocalyptic thought that reappear in the essays to follow. Rather than ranging widely, he focuses on a view of apocalyptic rhetoric related to what he calls "occulture," indicating social currents of subculture in which "spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial ideas emerge, are disseminated, and be-

come influential in the lives of individuals and in the societies in which they live" (xii–xiii). This sociological approach is useful background for many of the essays—especially since the majority of them deal with hard rock and metal music, which Partridge links to occulture. Rather than delivering a summary of contributions, he weaves references throughout the introduction, providing a helpful starting point for reading the book as a unified project.

Roland Boer's "Some Routine Atrocity, or, Letting the Curse of God Roar: Nick Cave and Apocalyptic" is a logical extension of Partridge's introduction. It is clear that Cave is an important figure for considering apocalyptic influences on popular music, and Boer argues that Cave is an artist with a distinctly apocalyptic worldview. Cave combines apocalyptic traditions with innovative processes to address his contemporaries through aesthetic poetics. Generally, the apocalyptic roots of his music align with ideas of God's anger, which are fundamentally related to punk sensibilities and resolve in a type of redemptive apocalypse associated particularly with women.

Mark S. Sweetnam's essay, "Evangelical Millennialism in the Lyrics of Johnny Cash," is even more specific than its title, as he explores influences of Hal Lindsey's brand of dispensationalism on Cash's lyrics. Finding Cash in a collection of this type is not surprising, and Sweetnam historicizes his music in terms of both gospel culture and specific popular dispensationalist rhetoric from the 1970s and 1980s. Sweetnam emphasizes the lack of specific doctrinal attitudes in Cash's music—the exception being Cash's treatment of apocalyptic prophecy. Influenced by apocalyptic sentiments and Cold War tensions, Cash appropriated dispensationalist prophecies for his music not in a system of theology but as representative of his own millenarianism.

In an essay titled "Metal, the End of the World, and Radical Environmentalism: Ecological Apocalypse in the Lyrics of Earth Crisis," Kennet Granholm explores the intersection of traditional apocalyptic eschatology with straight edge punk subculture—in this case, a movement associated with animal rights and ecological anxieties. Much of Granholm's essay is concerned with the importance of framing the discussion with definitions and methodological considerations. Overall, he argues that Earth Crisis's eschatology is derived from Christian apocalyptic rhetoric, but takes on new shape as it is mediated through conventions of metal music and, further, directed at pointing out impending ecological collapse.

Another name associated with hard rock and metal is Tom Morello (guitarist for Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave), but Michael J. Gilmour

explores his solo acoustic career in the essay titled "Raging against the Machine: Tom Morello's Nightwatchman Persona and the Sound of Apocalypse-Inspired *Schadenfreude*." Morello's shift toward a solo career marked his increased engagement with social and political causes, using biblical literacy to infuse his music with calls for reform. For Morello, inherent appeals to societal upheaval in apocalyptic imagery are appropriate, and apocalyptic rhetoric "becomes a vehicle for advocacy, political posturing and social commentary" (48). Central to the ideology of Morello's Nightwatchman project, Gilmour argues, is the concept of *Schadenfreude*—using apocalyptic ideas to imagine the downfall of social and political enemies.

Marcus Moberg's examination of "Portrayals of the End Times, the Apocalypse, and the Last Judgment in Christian Metal Music" shifts away from secular music to consider trends in explicitly religious music. For this, Moberg uses Partridge's concept of occulture to trace developments of Christian metal from its roots in the secular genre to a type of "anti-occultural" phenomenon. Moberg adapts this framework with a nuanced view of interactions between religious and secular apocalyptic thought for evangelical musicians—who are ideologically influenced by literal biblical interpretations and popular dispensationalism in service of a project to evangelize potentially secular audiences crossing over from mainstream metal fandom.

In the essay "'When Rome Falls, Falls the World': Current 93 and Apocalyptic Folk," Sérgio Fava traces the appeal of Current 93 for young, urban audiences to the band's self-proclaimed identity as propagators of a new genre deemed "apocalyptic folk." While Current 93 is clearly dedicated to engaging with religious imagery to depict the end of the world, Fava never clearly defines "apocalyptic folk," relying mainly on the words of Current 93's front man David Tibet, who associates "folk" with audiences individually and culturally (82). Central to the concept, it appears, are certain temporal and societal elements: the futurity of eschatology, present urban anxieties, and hopes for restoration of idealized, past rural life.

Rupert Till explores the ways in which metal culture came to rest on apocalyptic associations and diabolic imagery in his essay titled "The Number of the Beast: The Adoption of Apocalyptic Imagery in Heavy Metal." He also considers headbanging as a dance form alongside the Jungian conception of "the shadow," though this is a less convincing argument. Till's most compelling ideas are in his examination of bands and personas as cultural icons of apocalyptic metal ideals, with special attention paid to Ozzy Osbourne. A major strength of this essay is the array of aspects of metal subculture an-

alyzed: bands, audiences, album covers, lyrics, personas, even musicological considerations.

The final essay is Steven Knowles's "Who Cares? Apocalyptic Thought in Extreme's *III Sides to Every Story*," in which he examines Extreme's concept album as representative of "the American fascination with the idea of apocalypse" (109). Here parallels are found with a number of previous essays, including anxieties about apocalyptic crises, historical contexts of American politics, and Christian dispensationalism. Singular to Knowles's approach—and a strength for his analysis—is his focus on reception theory, drawing on fans' reactions in order to understand Extreme's connections to popular apocalyptic thought.

The relevance of *Anthems of Apocalypse* for reception history is apparent from its title and content as well as its place in two Sheffield Phoenix Press series focused on reception: volume 42 of The Bible in the Modern World and volume 4 of Apocalypse and Popular Culture. As part of two series concerned with the inheritance of ancient ideas in modern culture, readers might expect more explicit interactions with the long history of biblical and apocalyptic traditions. In addressing methodological frameworks, contributors account for recent examinations of apocalyptic ideas in popular culture (principally in America), though not always historical traditions behind these developments. For example, throughout the volume there is a curious lack of definitions and distinctions for apocalypse and eschatology (which are often used interchangeably)—a common quibble among scholars of early Judaism and Christianity. Further, Partridge's concept of occulture, which is adopted in various contributions, should be tempered by acknowledging that this approach addresses only one aspect within the diversity of subcultures associated with popular music. Related to the last point, there is an implicit assumption of a separation between Christian and postmodern apocalyptic thought, rather than seeing them as part of shared traditions; indeed, this is a development in other recent scholarship that should be reconsidered in light of past historical contexts. One particular exception is Granholm's essay, in which he does explicitly distinguish between apocalypse and eschatology, addresses challenging aspects of Partridge's concept of occulture, and accounts for connections between traditional apocalyptic rhetoric and modern appropriations. With such a range of scholarship in this volume, it is also disappointing that so few female voices appear: none of the contributors are female, and only passing references are made to female musicians like Sheryl Crow and Jocelyn Pook.

The expertise of the authors ranges across a variety of disciplines, including the study of digital humanities, history, literature, media, music, the New Testament, philosophy, and religion. It is also clear that some of the contributors write as both critics and fans, most notable in certain autobiographical moments that portray how musicians have influenced the critics. The collection is made complete with the expected bibliography and index, supplemented by a discography for quick reference to specific artists and albums. As the first of its kind, *Anthems of Apocalypse* is worthwhile for providing a way into the subject as well as signaling avenues for future studies.

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