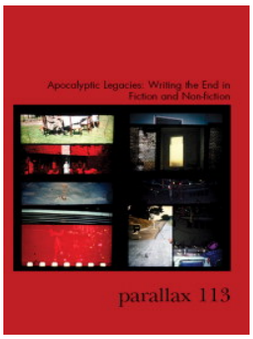

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Last Christmas? Depicting Christmas in Apocalyptic and Postapocalyptic Film and Television

Andrew Crome

Associated in popular thought with joy, unity and peace on earth, Christmas might seem to be a counterintuitive link with the end of the world. Although some may feel like they have survived the Battle of Armageddon after wading through the chaos of hyperactive children and drunken office parties that mark the festive season, the apocalypse is not generally linked to the 'most wonderful time of the year'.

Yet the connection between the two is not as far from the surface as it might first appear. The advent season, the period of waiting leading into Christmas, is designed to encourage Christians to bring Christ's Second Coming to mind. The Collect for Advent in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, for example, enjoins worshippers to recall Christ's birth so as to reflect on 'when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead'. Those who pray look forward to the time when 'we may rise to the life immortal'.[1] From a different angle, Sandro Botticelli's *Mystical Nativity* (1500), a popular choice for Christmas cards, includes a Greek inscription from the artist declaring himself to be living in the 'second woe of the apocalypse'. Along with the nativity scene, the painting shows the binding of Satan drawn directly from the book of Revelation, and depicts the apocalyptic ideas of the radical Savonarola.[2]

Christmas has also featured in a number of different pieces of contemporary apocalyptic and postapocalyptic media in recent years. While, as Sheila Whiteley notes, Christmas on screen can depict 'a shared imaginary utopia', at the same time these images often crash against the more prosaic reality of loneliness, financial hardship, and family conflict.[3] This dystopian edge to Christmas opens up opportunities for creatives to explore humanity's darker side through the annual celebration. This oscillation between utopic and dystopic poles has also often been noted as one of the key aspects of apocalyptic popular culture.[4]

Deploying Christmas in apocalyptic media provides an opportunity to generate stronger affective connections and resonances for the audience. As the

most important cultural festival in the West, Christmas settings and imagery summon up deeply felt emotional responses and memories in audiences.[5] Including the festivities provides a creative way to explore the breakdown of society – both in generating a sense of loss and nostalgia for the pre-apocalyptic world and examining the attempted preservation of culture after apocalyptic events. On the one hand, this might seem to support the contention of some scholars that apocalyptic media is incapable of imagining an alternative to the contemporary world, even after the collapse of capitalist society.[6] Yet this viewpoint can overlook the continued imaginations of hope and revelatory community that appear in these productions. Using Christmas in this setting proves particularly powerful, combining two themes that recur repeatedly in modern media – the concept of apocalypse as revelation (as per its original Greek meaning), and Christmas as a time of personal and communal transformation.

This article examines a number of these instances in film and television since the 1950s, spanning a variety of genres. Given space limitations, it makes no claims to comprehensiveness. Instead, it will focus on key illustrative examples produced in the United States and United Kingdom, national contexts which have produced strikingly different approaches. It identifies two contrasting ways of combining apocalyptic events with Christmas. The first imagines the endurance of festive rituals beyond the end of civilisation. The festival, including its commercial aspects, becomes hard baked into the fabric of the world. An alternative approach emphasises the essential artificiality of human ritual. It uses the absence of Christmas to highlight the precarious nature of social norms, as the magnitude of apocalyptic events destroys even the holiday.

The central focus of these two types of text therefore differs. In the first, primarily American examples imagine capitalist culture surviving in a form of (increasingly secularised) civil religion. These productions are revelatory, but on a personal level, with the implication that fundamental political change remains impossible. The second set of examples, featuring British productions, instead focuses on the scale of a disaster so large as to erase cultural norms. Here, the revelatory aspect of the text serves an 'avertive' function, encouraging political responses to contemporary problems and attempting to provoke change in the present.

The Ideology of Apocalyptic Film

Defining 'apocalyptic' when examining popular media is notoriously difficult. Influential suggestions have included focusing on threats of extinction,[7] dividing into 'secular' and 'traditional' (e.g., biblical) categories,[8] or adopting a 'worldview' approach which looks for certain tropes in the framing of these media.[9] This debate is important, and something I address elsewhere, but for reasons of space I avoid extended discussion here.[10] The examples focused on in this article have been popularly identified as apocalyptic or

postapocalyptic by film/television reviewers, fans and (at least some) scholars. My aim is not to establish whether they are 'really' apocalyptic or not, but instead to see how media viewed through this lens deploy Christmas. That they display both revelatory aspects found in biblical apocalypse and the threat of human destruction is suggestive but should not be taken as establishing a normative category for broader definitions.

Attempting to attach a dominant ideological valence to apocalyptic media is equally problematic. Apocalyptic film and television have global appeal and span genres as diverse as religious confessional fiction, horror, science fiction and realist drama. As such, different uses of the theme are affected by both their particular generic format and the cultural and geographical settings of their production. They are also often the product of large media corporations and therefore motivated by commercial concerns that can overwrite creative intentions.[11]

Scholarship on apocalyptic media has often adopted a critical perspective. Influenced by a critical studies approach, this work focuses on the commercial background of these cultural products, their perceived lack of depth, and their supposed inability to imagine a world beyond the current capitalist status quo.[12] Other interpretations have attacked films, games, and TV as increasingly leaning into extremist views on both the left and the right, producing a form of 'apocalypse porn'.[13] Apocalyptic media is therefore sometimes viewed as pessimistic about humanity. Mervyn Bendle accused apocalyptic film of depicting the masses 'as mindless, barely functional vermin, ready to tear each other apart in a desperate rage for survival'.[14] Mark McCarthy has discussed the prevalence of films centred on the 'lost apocalypse' in which humanity's destruction seems guaranteed, and Elisabeth Rosen has described the 'neo-apocalypse' marked by hopelessness as increasingly preponderant in recent apocalyptic media.[15] Barbara Brodmen despairs of a lack of 'creative responses' to threats in apocalyptic media that enable us 'to think beyond fear of extinction'.[16] In many ways this echoes the critique of some religion scholars, such as Conrad Ostwalt, who see contemporary apocalyptic media as lacking the revelatory and hopeful aspect of biblical apocalypse.[17]

However, it is also possible to interpret apocalyptic popular media more positively. As Ostwalt points out, ancient apocalyptic texts *welcomed* apocalyptic events. They proclaimed God's control over history, promising the ultimate vindication of the righteous, an end to injustice, and redemption of the body.[18] This is not necessarily absent from apocalyptic media. Rosen therefore suggested that along with 'neo-apocalyptic', many contemporary apocalyptic works can be read as depicting a secularised New Jerusalem, 'less a place than a new way of seeing: a new vision … a new way of understanding the old world'.[19] This hopeful aspect can, contra-Ostwalt, move beyond attempts to preserve the present world into new imaginations of the future.[20] As Cornelius and Ginn note, the apocalyptic and utopian 'are in essence, the

same thing – or at the very least – two sides of a very thin coin'.[21] The potential for destruction contains the possibility of a new start; the utopian imagination always suggests the question of how the old order will break down. Building on this, Connor Pitetti has argued that many examples of postapocalyptic media allow for viewers to historicise their own experience and political situation. In response to the criticisms of Žižek and Baudrillard that such productions only imagine a continuation of the status quo, he argues that they rather demonstrate its temporary, historically contingent nature, 'thus open[-ing] onto a wide field of utopian possibilities for political action'.[22]

It is striking that these observations in many ways mirror those surrounding popular representations of Christmas. Criticisms of the holiday's materialism and hollowing out of Christian symbolism clash with its more positive presentation as a site for utopian potential.[23] Like apocalyptic media, Christmas films and television are also often dismissed as overly commercialised and sanitised in their failure to depict the realities of the world; a form of dangerous escapism and superficiality. A negative reading sees them as valorising the marketplace and capitalist status quo, although where apocalyptic film plays on audience fears, Christmas films play on hope and nostalgia.[24] Even where they seem to criticise cynical capitalism (in plots attacking the commercialisation of the holiday, for example), these productions continue to promote the same through product placement, corporate endorsement, or licensed tie-ins.[25]

Others, however, have emphasised the utopian aspects of Christmas, as in Adam Kuper's contention that the festival represents the creation of a secularised sacred utopic community within the family.[26] Similarly, for Klassen and Scheer it becomes a ritualised opportunity to escape the marketplace, albeit temporarily.[27] Christopher Deacy has therefore emphasised how Christmas, even in a secularised form, contains an essential eschatological link to the idea of a New Jerusalem and renewed hope for experiencing the world.[28] Where Deacy argues that Christmas is 'the supreme paradox – a contested site of ideas, values, and hopes, the language of which crosses boundaries between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane',[29] exactly the same points can be applied to apocalyptic media. The intersection of Christmas and apocalypse therefore provides opportunities to explore both the cultural importance of the holiday, and conceptions of the end.

Surviving Christmas: Endurance of Festivities after the End

If apocalypse is taken to mean mass destruction, what will survive the eradication of the human race? This section examines media that imagine Christmas as that which endures, sometimes the only thing that endures, after the end. It becomes naturalised, a festival that outlives our world. Here I focus on three American examples: 1955 animation *Good Will to Men*, sitcom *The Last Man on Earth* (Fox, 2015-2018) and Netflix comedy *Carol and the End of the World* (2023). These productions reflect a form of civil religion, but one that

becomes increasingly secularised over time in ways that progressively reflect the logic of the marketplace. They remain 'revelatory', but only in the sense that they open up spaces of change on a personal rather than political and social level.

Hanna-Barbera's *Good Will to Men* reworks *Peace on Earth*, an MGM cartoon short that had already imagined a post-apocalyptic world of animals surviving humanity's destruction. The earlier cartoon was released in December 1939, its application to the global situation at the time obvious. Updated to reflect both changing weaponry and more overt festive imagery, *Good Will* was nominated for best short subject animation at the 1956 Academy Awards.

Once again focusing on anthropomorphic animals, the short depicts a Dickensian Christmas. In the basement of a ruined church, a choir of mice perform 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing'. After singing of 'good will to men', one chorister quizzically asks the elderly choirmaster what 'men' are. The older mouse then narrates a vivid depiction of the horrors of war, including trench warfare, devastation bombing, and finally the development and use of the 'biggest, most awful-est [*sic*] bomb ever' resulting in the death of humanity.

Seemingly immune to the fallout, the animals emerge from the petrified forests to discover a ruined church with a Bible laying open on the lectern. As in the earlier cartoon, a wise owl reads both the commandment not to kill and the gospel imperative to 'love thy neighbour', setting the moral template for the new animal society. Yet whereas *Peace on Earth* featured animals labouring to reconstruct society (as befit the New Deal era), *Good Will* includes no depiction of the rebuilding of civilisation. Instead, the animals appear to have co-opted existing human structures and society unproblematically. At the centre of this is Christmas, depicted in terms of an idealised Dickensian celebration. Mice, racoons, and foxes gather in holly-strewn pews dressed in their finery. Outside, snow gently falls while the surpliced choir sings carols by candlelight.

Good Will represents a significant artefact of American civil religion. As Angela Lahr has noted, in the mid-1950s religious faith was often seen as a vital element in differentiating Americans from communists. In a context in which 'One Nation Under God' was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, a generalised Christianity was often used to indicate the ultimate superiority of capitalist ideology and its inevitable victory.[30] This link is deepened by the way in which religion is used within the film. As Thompson noted of later Christmas specials, the cartoon contains only the 'vague trappings associated in the popular imagination of religious life'.[31] There is no direct reference made to Jesus or the reasons for celebrating beyond a general sense of 'good will'. While the short opens with a recognisable carol ('Hark! The Herald Angels Sing') the lyrics are altered so as to remove any reference to Christ.[32] The Bible itself is foregrounded, but (unlike *Peace on Earth*) it is

described only as a 'good book of rules' by the choirmaster. This serves to ground the idealised world firmly within the realm of American civil religion. That is, it represents a theologically non-descript faith in the deity that replaces explicit theological content, enabling Jews, Protestants and Catholics to feel part of the same imagined community and work together for shared political aims.[33] The shared cultural rituals of Christmas, as Evelina Lundmark recently noted, help constitute a sense of national identity even while the Christian roots of those rituals may be lost.[34] While *Good Will* thus depicts a society without any explicit national framing, the celebration of idealised American festive rituals and decorations points to which ideology will win out in the end.

That Christmas mass media often remove overtly religious references is hardly an unexpected finding.[35] What is more important is what it leads to: a society in which the central festive message of peace and love becomes naturalised to the extent that the animal world is obliged to continue it into their new postapocalyptic reality. The conception of time, in which the calendar of the modern (Christian) west becomes synonymous with the calendar of nature itself, demonstrates the link between ideas about Christmas and sacred time often highlighted in the literature.[36] From the perspective of civil religion, it also serves to naturalise the calendar of official (e.g., government-sanctioned) holidays as a cultural marker without specific theological content. Christmas, the nuclear family and American (read: capitalist) culture are woven into the fabric of reality that lives on beyond the end. Regardless of the outcome of the ideological clash of the 1950s, the cartoon affirms that the culturally specific festivals of modern America are hardwired into the world. The Soviets may destroy all life on earth, but Christmas, as a symbol of all that was central to American ideology, survives.

Where the cartoon differs from more recent examples, however, is that the commercial aspects of festivities remain hidden within a religious shell. A (albeit theologically vague) church service remains the central communal structure around which society is rebuilt after the bomb falls. In later productions, the theological is entirely removed with commercial consumption being foregrounded instead.

In the Fox series *The Last Man on Earth* (2015-2018), affable loser Phil 'Tandy' Miller initially appears to be the only survivor of a global pandemic. However, he soon encounters various others (Carol, Melissa, Gail, Todd, Erica, and another Phil Miller), who form a loose group over the next four seasons. The season two episode 'Secret Santa' (2015) is based around a gift exchange between characters, at this point in the show's timeline living in an abandoned Malibu mansion. The gifting brings difficult postapocalyptic community dynamics to the fore: Todd and Melissa's breakup and his subsequent secret attachment to Gail; and Tandy's desire to be appreciated by the second Phil Miller, who is dealing with his exile from the house as a result of his treatment of his ex, Erica.

Whereas in *Good Will* the church service was centre stage, here events revolve around gifting. *Last Man* displays a conflicted approach to materialism at Christmas. Faced with a postapocalyptic playground in which money is meaningless, many of the characters scavenge gifts that possessed both high material value and cultural capital prior to the collapse of society. Tandy, for example, offers the Hope Diamond; Carol receives a chair from Oprah Winfrey's studio; Gail, the Ford Eliminator that belonged to ZZ Top. It is possible to read this as a parody of hyper-consumerism, as characters procure ever greater gifts to impress one another in a setting in which such items have no value, engaging in an orgy of consumeristic excess. Tandy's gift to himself of a luxury yacht simply so that he can blow it up suggests the episode can be read as a commentary on the nihilistic and self-consumptive nature of festive capitalism.

This, however, goes too far. Due to the postapocalyptic setting, financial one-upmanship presumed by competitive gift-giving is undercut. As Deacy notes, Christmas gifts transform in their giving from consumer items into deeply personalised emotional objects.[37] So Daniel Miller has argued, festive giving changes the apparently inauthentic mass-produced goods of the marketplace 'into the very instrument for [the] crucial version of pure sociality'.[38] The postapocalyptic setting of *Last Man* increases that connection as the gifts work on two levels simultaneously. First, they provide tangible links to the preapocalyptic world and the characters' lives. It is the reminder of affective connections to fandoms developed before the pandemic (e.g., Oprah, ZZ Top) that endows the gifts with meaning. Indeed, not all have financial value. Todd, for example, receives a crown, sceptre and 'prom king' sash in response to the difficult emotional experience he had in high school. Secondly, they serve to reconstitute the postapocalyptic community. The second Phil Miller is reintegrated into the group via the gift exchange. Indeed, he is able to give the most 'meaningful' gift, bringing Erica an ultrasound so that she may see her unborn child. Similarly, the previously emotionally cold Melissa is able to open up, proclaim her 'love' for Carol's eccentricity, and propose marriage to Todd. The act of festive sharing works to empower her emotional openness. Through the ritual, she admits, she is now 'feeling things'.

A similar dynamic appears in *Carol and the End of the World* (2023), an animated sitcom based around the countdown towards a rogue planet smashing into the earth and destroying all life. With the inevitability of death accepted, the majority focus on living their dreams of travel, sex, or self-development. Protagonist Carol, however, is a lonely woman who longs only for the patterns of mundanity and finds them in 'The Distraction' – a remaining office building where those who cannot face the end recreate an anonymous, 9-5 corporate existence in an open plan office. Despite this, by the show's conclusion the co-workers have bonded, formed a communal and social life together, and come to terms with the reality of their impending fate.

The episode 'Holidays' focuses on Carol's co-worker Donna celebrating Christmas in April, prior to the collision later in the year. Donna, who has several adult children and young grandchildren, is notably the only single character in her extended family. As in *Last Man*, her approach to gifting could be read as reflecting an inherent emptiness to the festive spending spree. Rather than being purchased, Donna's gifts are looted from an abandoned store. Commodities lose their financial value in this world, yet Donna cannot contemplate Christmas without the ritual of holiday shopping in line with her preapocalyptic pattern. Christmas at her son Marlon's house is similarly marked by a continuation of materialistic rituals. Despite an emphasis on family, the centrality of gift giving, wearing of novelty sweaters, and an overabundance of commercial festive decoration dominate the day.

While its timing on the calendar may be arbitrary in *Carol*, Christmas is presented here as a utopian space in which reconciliation and transformation can take place. The festivities allow Donna to confront her guilt for missing previous Christmas celebrations as a working mother, reaffirming her connections to her children and discovering their appreciation of her sacrifices for them. The gifting ritual once again reconstitutes family. Donna receives an old photo album containing memories of her children and their experience growing up. When she expresses the wish that she could have been more present, her children reassure her that she 'did enough'. The episode closes with Donna visibly moved, while 'Silent Night' plays.

Both *Carol* and *Last Man* are examples of what Rustard and Schwind have called the 'metamodern sitcom' that 'encompass a human warmth often missing in their predecessors and are often characterised by a sincere yearning for meaning'.[39] They emphasise emotion and a belief in the goodness of characters, even in the face of their inherent faults. As Vermeulen and van den Akker note, 'metamodern irony is intrinsically bound to desire, whereas postmodern irony is inherently tied to apathy.'[40] Indeed Christmas – which is marked by anticipation of annual utopianism with full awareness that the *actual* celebration will never live up to it – might even be characterised as the archetypal metamodern festival.[41] Applying this further to apocalyptic media, Rosen's postmodern apocalypse and its traces of the New Jerusalem becomes fully metamodern when it acknowledges its own flawed utopianism, but nonetheless roots its utopic hopes in community.

Therefore, it is not the shared (albeit generalised) religious community of *Good Will* that ensures the structure of late capitalist culture survives the end in these examples; rather, it is the relationships and family structures that are key. The reconstitution of meaningful community is a central part of postapocalyptic narratives, particularly in terms of constructing a sense of familial belonging.[42] In this, they share a focus with Christmas media in general, particularly in their emphasis on gift giving as a key process by which relationships are restored.[43] For the wider concept of 'apocalyptic', the nature of the revelation is important here. What is apocalyptic in a revelatory sense in these

shows is not the 'apocalyptic' events themselves. Instead, the apocalyptic revelation of community emerges through the process of gift-exchange. Capitalism here does not just survive the apocalypse but instead becomes the agent of the apocalyptic discovery of the true self and community. Simultaneously, this means that the *political* function of apocalyptic texts tends to be effaced in these productions. Change, even within a communal context, remains personalised.

This can be linked to the previous discussion of civil religion. Whereas the specifically *religious* aspects of civil religion appear to have been erased in *Last Man* and *Carol*, the concepts of family and American cultural norms present in earlier work nonetheless remain a structuring principle for maintaining social and cultural cohesion after the end. Indeed, the continuity of consumption and appropriate exchange plays the key role in creating community. This could be read as resistive, following Carrier in their suggestion that Christmas shopping and gifting 'proves to [people] that they can create a sphere of familial love in the face of a world of money'.[44] Yet issues remain. After the end, the capitalist logic that creates this 'world of money' continues to function, even when its governing economic structures have ceased to exist. Its ending appears unthinkable. Melissa in *Last Man* is not only '*feeling* things' emotionally, but 'feeling *things*' in the sense that it appears that only through consumption and acquisition of goods can true emotional connection develop. This can be characterised as another example of Jeffrey Richards's criticism of festive media where 'consumerist and materialist themes are dragged to confession without true repentance'.[45]

The End of the World and the End of Christmas

The second set of productions that I focus on contain a very different view of Christmas after the end. In these examples, drawn from British media, Christmas comes to represent wider sacred cultural categories that are dissolved in the apocalyptic disaster. The scale of the catastrophe is so great that very few prior social norms survive. Yet this does not necessarily imply that these productions are hopeless or nihilistic. Instead, it suggests that they aim to fulfil another function of the classical apocalyptic text in revealing potential futures in order to encourage change in the present. Unlike the examples above, this change is political and social by necessity, rather than only personal or communal.

This applies particularly to examples focused upon nuclear war. Christmas has commonly been used in times of conflict 'to bolster ideas about community and shared values'.[46] The explosion in popularity of Christmas films as a recognised genre occurred in the mid-1940s, as audiences sought messages of nostalgia, peace and family in the midst of war and separation from loved ones.[47] In the postwar period, driven in part by the development of the atomic bomb, films portraying humanity's destruction rose in popularity.[48] In this context, the deployment of Christmas had a similar function to festive

films in wartime. As Sarah Street argued in regard to the 1940s, Christmas, in wartime, becomes increasingly symbolically powerful, representing 'a memory of normality – peace, optimism, hope'.[49] In the midst of the threat of human destruction, or even *after* that destruction, the deployment of Christmas therefore offers a particularly strong affective connection for viewers. As wartime Christmas could remind populations of what they were fighting for, so Christmas in apocalyptic media can have what Daniel Wojcik has termed an 'avertive' function.[50] That is, its depictions of horrific destruction highlight the danger of what might be lost, encouraging the viewer to political action. Žižek has emphasised a similar idea in recent reflections on apocalypse. Following Jean-Pierre Dupuy, he suggests that seemingly fatalistic and inevitable apocalyptic scenarios allow for projection into imagined futures. Paradoxically, this allows the development of an alternative 'past of the future'. In adopting the standpoint of those who will face inevitable apocalypse, the individual can devise 'counterfactual possibilities […] upon which we then act today'.[51]

The use of Christmas in Peter Watkin's docudrama *War Game* (1966) explicitly aims for this political dynamic. The fictionalised documentary depicts a nuclear attack on Britain and its immediate aftermath, concluding with a scene set at Christmas. The film was controversial on completion and judged too upsetting for television viewers by the BBC who had commissioned it. Instead, it enjoyed a short release run at the British Film Institute and won the Academy Award for best documentary in 1967.[52]

The final segment of *War Game* is set at Christmas in a Dover refugee camp, four months after the attack. The scene is in sharp contrast to the Victoriana of *Good Will*; here, an unshaven and haggard vicar plays 'Silent Night' on a hand-cranked gramophone to a congregation of silent, morose survivors. While the music begins as diegetic, it shifts to provide a mournful soundtrack to the dramatized interviews and credits of the film's final five minutes.

Intercut with the carol are images of badly burned and traumatised survivors. Standard Christmas imagery is deployed ironically in order to increase the horror of the situation. Viewers see a child listening to the carol and are told by the narrator that they will be bed bound for seven years and then die. A pregnant young woman is shown staring directly but blankly into the camera. In sharp contrast to the lyrics focused on a joyful birth 'she has no idea if her baby will be born alive'. A number of children are then interviewed and asked about their aspirations, each replying in turn that they 'don't want to be nothing'.[53] The film therefore undermines several standard festive tropes through its focus on suffering – the child waking on Christmas morning, the hopeful pregnancy of a young girl, and children expressing their dreams at Christmas are all replaced by their opposites.

The music fades out after lingering on these images, replaced by scenes of deeply traumatised refugees suffering from PTSD. The narration recalls the

carol's title through its emphasis on silence in the press and (ironically) television around the topic of nuclear war. While there is 'hope in any unresolved situation, is there a *real* hope to be found in this silence'? Close-ups emphasise the burned faces and limbs of refugees while the narration notes the growing size of the planet's nuclear stockpile, leading directly into a non-diegetic use of 'Silent Night' to accompany the closing credits. The peace and silence of Bethlehem is reimagined as the silence and horror of civilisation's ending.

The use of music is particularly important here. Whiteley notes that by the 1950s carols had become part of a generalised sense of romantic Christmas nostalgia, with both tune and lyrics able to immediately situate the listener in an idealised imaginary.[54] The use of carols and congregational singing is therefore particularly important in generating an affective sense of shared community in depictions of Christmas, as well as instilling the 'correct' mood in the listener.[55] The use of 'Hark!' in *Good Will* showed this dynamic in action. *War Game* flips this. Where shared singing of familiar tunes generates a sense of community, so the absence of singing from the congregation in the film demonstrates the collapse of social norms. The use of 'Silent Night' is therefore not just important for its connection to *War Game*'s emphasis on the silence surrounding its subject matter. The carol has a distinctive cultural power and was already mythologised in the popular mind by its role in encouraging the spontaneous 'Christmas truce' on the front lines in 1914.[56] Its use here, then, is doubly ironic.

Bleaker still is Christmas in the BBC's 1984 film *Threads*. The film, presented as a docudrama depicting a nuclear attack on the city of Sheffield and subsequent destruction of civilisation, includes among its darkest moments the first Christmas after the attack. The scene focuses on shattered survivors rounded up to work as agricultural labourers on starvation rations. Survivor Ruth, having recently given birth, is pictured among a group of traumatised workers sheltering by a fire in a stable, holding her baby unseeingly. There is no soundtrack to the scene beyond the crackle of the fire and the baby's incessant crying, and no dialogue. None of the survivors acknowledges the others as present, if indeed they are even aware of them. The camera focuses on the hollow eyes of those gathered, at times lingering on sores and open wounds. One man's eyes dart furtively at every crackle of the fire, constantly reliving the attack. The baby's wail provides an audio accompaniment to the grim parody of the nativity scene, in marked contrast to a 'silent night' or blissful peace of the infant Christ.

Both of these depictions challenge the naturalisation of Christmas highlighted in previous examples. Much of the scholarship on Christmas films has focused on the way in which they represent an entry to sacred time. As Deacy notes, this need not reflect specifically Christian images, but instead represents Christmas as a '"sacred time" per se'.[57] *Good Will* provides a clear example of this. While humanity and human notions of temporality have

been destroyed, Christmas remains so inherently sacred and naturalised that it survives humanity's extinction. *Threads*, however, depicts the wholesale destruction of human conceptions of the sacred. There is no celebration in the film's reversal of the expected image of Christmas. It remains a day of subsistence survival as any other. It is significant that the caption on screen does not identify the date as 'Christmas Day, but instead as 'Sunday 25th December'.

Threads and *War Game* present a dark picture of a landscape in which the sacred has ceased to function. This is clear in their depictions of the transgressions of what Gordon Lynch has described as key categories of secular sacrality, such as the sanctity of life and the cherishing and education of children.[58] This includes a dulling of emotion towards family and the dead, with *Threads* in particular showing those who grew up after the attack as content to allow relatives' bodies to remain and rot where they fell at their deaths. That Christmas is explicitly included in the film's depictions of transgressions of key social markers shows the extent to which it is seen as a touchstone of civilisation, providing additional support to Deacy's contention that it has become a key sign of sacrality in the modern world.[59]

A more recent British film uses dark comedy to explore the threats of climate change through a festive lens. *Silent Night* (2021) is based around a reunion of middle-aged, upper-class school friends gathering together for a final Christmas in the English countryside, hosted by Nell, Simon and their three children. In response to the impending arrival of a toxic cloud now shrouding the globe, the British government issue suicide pills to all citizens as a way of avoiding an agonising death.[60] As the government's *Exit* app tells characters: 'Take your Exit pill. Die with dignity'.

Silent Night reflects an ongoing fascination with the British upper-class experience of Christmas on film that has persisted since before the Second World War.[61] Its setting, a lavishly decorated country house in which formalwear is worn to dinner, evokes a sense of nostalgia, particularly recalling a tradition of British period dramas. As reviews noted, the film's initial coding seems to place it alongside popular festive romantic comedies focusing on the wealthy, particularly Kenneth Branagh's *Peter's Friends* (1992) and the work of *Love Actually* (2003) writer/director Richard Curtis.[62] It also draws on the traditional British Christmas chiller and ghost story; notably the BBC's *Ghost Story for Christmas*, a festive staple in various periods (1971-8, 2005-6, 2010, 2013, 2018-2024). *Silent Night* invokes many of the tropes that Derek Johnston saw as key to the programme. These include characters journeying from the city to a picturesque rural setting, autumnal rather than typically winter weather, and the role of the landscape as a source of creeping horror 'rather than horrific in itself'.[63] These tropes, however, are given a distinctive apocalyptic twist. The landscape is unseasonable due to anthropogenic climate change; the journey from city to country is specifically to *embrace* death through suicide; and the horror is not supernatural, but a toxic gas that rolls oppressively

across the hills and fields of southern England. The guests' meeting place becomes liminal not only in the sense that characters leave ordinary time on their entrance to their ritual celebration of Christmas, but also in the way in which it heralds entry to a state somewhere between life and death.

The film performs a difficult balancing act in establishing both a comforting Christmas *mise-en-scène*, and one equally marked by lingering apocalypse. The idyllic elements – the luxury house, sumptuous decoration, and glamourous dress of guests – are subtly undermined by oblique, seemingly innocuous references to coming events. The supermarkets run out of potatoes, the house has no bottled water remaining, and characters speak of a shared 'pact'. Light-hearted greetings which appear throwaway at the start of the film gain additional, disturbing meaning as the situation becomes clear. Oncologist James's response to Nell's observation that the group are '[a]ll getting old', for example, is to reflect breezily, 'Well, we *were* all getting old'.

Background elements increasingly move away from typical festive coding, towards what Marcus O'Donnell has described as the 'ambient apocalypse'. Here, minor details encourage active audience reading to provide a sense of pervasive decay, tragedy and inevitable destruction.[64] These elements (such as the *Exit* app, gifts wrapped only in newspaper, brown water running from the tap, or Nell's increasingly emotional grace at dinner) give way to a more typical apocalyptic framing as the film progresses. Discussions of global death rates, images of twisters ripping across the landscape, poison gas blowing through cities and characters bleeding from the mouth and eyes replace Christmas imagery by the end of the film.

This gradual shift in coding works to undermine several of the usual tropes of the festive movie. Applying a Durkheimian reading of Christmas, Miller argues that the festival functions as a utopian microcosm in which family is reaffirmed and made symbolic of the wider family of humanity in an abstracted 'spirit of Christmas'.[65] *Silent Night* deftly reverses this, as the sacrality of the family is increasingly undermined until entirely destroyed. Consider the following confrontation between Nell's oldest child Art and his parents regarding the suicide pills:

> NELL: We are your parents!
> ART: You want to murder me!
> SIMON: Stop it. Stop it. Stop it!
> ART: God says 'Thou shalt not kill'
> SIMON: Fuck God!
> ART: I knew it. […] So, you don't even believe in God, you're just afraid?
> SIMON: Yes, Art. I am. I am. I am afraid. I'm absolutely terrified.

Here, rather than Christmas re-establishing the family unit, it destroys it; by the conclusion, all of the characters have killed their children, albeit

rationalised as acts of kindness in the face of impending disaster. This apocalyptic scenario reworks the standard exploration of belief in Christmas films. It is common for these movies to portray a shift, as a sceptical adult is brought to accept the perspective of a credulous child – for example, when Maureen O'Hara's cynical mother or Judge Reinhold's sceptical psychiatrist come to believe in Santa Claus in *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947) and *The Santa Clause* (1994) respectively.[66] *Silent Night* reverses this trope. Belief is instead revealed as a façade for children, masking the cruel realities of life. While characters offer professions of hope in an afterlife (the only religious content in the film), it is clear that they are as empty as the claims about Father Christmas made to children.

In contrast to the naturalised depictions of Christmas examined in the first section of this article, the sacred-utopic nature of the holiday is used to ask questions about the wider nature of the capitalist society that the characters inhabit. As socially sacred categories of time, family and belief are stripped back, so the constructed nature of the economic world comes into sharp focus. Although characters attempt to remain within social boundaries and the systems of economic exchange, this becomes impossible. A 'normal' Christmas dinner can only be facilitated by breaking into a petrol station, for example. Participation in the festive ritual of spending and gifting therefore destroys rather than builds family and community.[67] The spoiled tween Kitty, for example, embraces the gift of a doll that has been modelled on her with joy, but refuses to hug her mother, accusing her of spending her education fund on high-end fashion. Art refuses to accept his gift, confronting his father over the pointlessness of the festive ritual in the face of destruction: 'Like it isn't cruel enough to give us toys we can't even play with. It's so wrong. And so stupid.' As he notes, 'The batteries are going to last longer than us.'

Returning to Biskind's claim that apocalyptic media tends towards extremist positions, both left- and right-wing readings of the film are possible.[68] On the one hand, *Silent Night* critiques government social and immigration policy. Illegal immigrants and the homeless are denied access to the Exit pill and abandoned to a horrific death. Art further condemns the older generation for their treatment of the planet: 'For years the planet has absorbed people's filthy rubbish and it's had enough, it can't take any more. So it's spitting it back out as a "fuck you" to the world! […] You should all be ashamed of yourselves.' At a later point, characters regret previously voting Conservative rather than Green, while Kitty is mocked for claiming that Russia rather than climate change is responsible for the toxic cloud.

On the other hand, as many reviews noted, the film could also be read as support for climate change deniers and (although completed before the Covid-19 pandemic) anti-vaxx conspiracy theorists.[69] Art explicitly questions the analysis that leads his elders to engage in murder/suicide, suggesting that the science adults are putting their faith in is likely mistaken. The film's twist

ending – in which Art, exposed to the poison cloud and presumed dead, reawakens after it passes among the bodies of those who've committed suicide – reveals that the science *was* wrong. The government's medical advice, official warnings, and mandated medication guaranteed death rather than survival. While this raises the prospect of the meek inheriting the earth (presumably only illegal immigrants and homeless people now survive), it also encourages a popular scepticism towards science that is widely critiqued in other recent climate change films.[70]

Despite the generic difference, *Silent Night* should be viewed in the same tradition as *War Game* and *Threads*. It challenges the naturalisation of Christmas and its combination with civil religion found in the American productions. This is not necessarily a hopeless apocalypse, but one that presents the potential horrors of the end in order to encourage the audience to take avertive political action, even if the precise nature of that politics is confused at times.

CONCLUSION

Spanning the utopian and dystopian, popular representations of apocalypse have been proclaimed both inherently hopeful and intrinsically fatalistic. That similar debates about utopic and dystopic modes centre around popular portrayals of Christmas makes it a particularly interesting lens through which to examine apocalyptic media. This article has examined two models for combining Christmas and apocalypse. In the first, the festivities endure and with them the structures and logics of late capitalism. Such productions are 'revelatory' but focus on personal and communal development at the expense of imagining social change. The fact that those examined here were American suggests a link to wider conceptions of an increasingly secularised, and indeed personalised, civil religion.

The second model uses Christmas to emphasise the scale of the disaster that has occurred. The effacing of core festive celebrations becomes a shorthand for demonstrating the destruction of social and cultural norms. These productions are not without hope, however. Instead, they aim to encourage audiences to take avertive political and social action to change wider structures and prevent disasters such as nuclear war or climate change. For Christmas to survive the end, they suggest, the present needs to change.

Given the differences between British and American productions examined here, it would be easy to presume that these are purely attributable to different national attitudes. They can certainly be linked to a wider fatalism that has been identified in British culture around nuclear war and subsequently climate change.[71] However, an attribution of 'positive' and 'negative' approaches to American and British productions respectively would be too simplistic. After all, British science fiction was also responsible for the apocalyptic 'cosy catastrophe' as found in John Wyndham's novels.[72] Where the British productions differ is their lack of confidence in civil religion as found

in the American media analysed above. This serves to reflect the decaying of Christian narratives that Callum Brown has traced in his studies of British society over recent years.[73] Where even more recent media can therefore imagine that festive rituals (and thus contemporary culture) will endure to preserve communities past the end, these productions instead view such concepts as a chimera. The only answer is for change to be pressed for in the present in order that this fate might be avoided. If Christmas is to be preserved, then the present must change.

The differences in the presentations of both apocalypse and Christmas in these models also shows the danger of reductionistic readings. Is apocalyptic media unduly optimistic and ideologically problematic? Is Christmas media inherently naïve and utopian? In some cases, both criticisms undoubtedly hold true. But such sweeping statements are unhelpful and potentially ideologically or theologically loaded themselves. A focus on production conditions, national, political and historical contexts is needed before such critiques are wielded.

Therefore, where much of the literature on both apocalypse and Christmas in popular culture has concentrated on the way in which they have been transformed (or, more negatively, deformed) from a scriptural ideal, or sought to trace an overarching ideological position within them, these approaches are problematic. Creating a reductionistic definition of the function and value of contemporary apocalyptic popular culture presumes that a singular reading of the apocalyptic is possible. Doing likewise for Christmas media equally ignores the multivalence of the festival and its celebration. Whether depicting the galloping of the four horsemen or the sound of reindeer hooves on the rooftops, both forms of media deserve better.

Notes

[1] Church of England, 'First Sunday in Advent', *Book of Common Prayer*.

[2] Rab Hatfield, 'Botticelli's Mystical Nativity, Savonarola and the Millennium', Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 58 (1995), pp. 88-114.

[3] Sheila Whiteley, 'Introduction', in *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, ed. by Sheila Whiteley (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 1-14 (p. 10).

[4] Elizabeth Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination* (Lexington, 2008); Peter Y. Paik, *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 122-124.

[5] Juliane Brauer, "'Stile Nacht" Time and Again: Christmas Songs and Feelings', in *The Public Work of Christmas: Difference and Belonging in Multicultural Societies*, ed. by Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), pp. 60-85.

[6] Barbara Brodmen, 'Apocalyptic Chic: Post-Apocalyptic Images in Twenty-First-Century Graphic Arts, Film and Literature', in *Apocalyptic Chic: Post-Apocalyptic in Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Barbara Brodmen and James E. Doran (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 251-262; Paik, *From Utopia to Apocalypse*, pp. 122-124; Maria Manuel Lisboa, *The End of the World: Apocalypse and Its Aftermaths in Western Culture* (Open Books, 2011), pp. 1-16.

[7] Charles Mitchell, *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema* (Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. xi-xxv; Stephen Prince, *Apocalyptic Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), pp. 1-2.

[8] Conrad Ostwalt, 'Apocalyptic', in *Routledge Companion to Religion and Film*, ed. by John Lyden (Routledge, 2009), pp. 368-83 (pp. 375-77).

[9] Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'Apocalypticism in the Contemporary World', in *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. by Colin McAllister (Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 316-41 (pp. 316-19).

[10] Andrew Crome, 'Apocalyptic and Millennial Popular Culture', in *Bloomsbury Handbook of Apocalypticism and Millennialism*, ed. by Tristan Sturm and Andrew Crome (Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

[11] Stephen Joyce, *Transmedia Storytelling & The Apocalypse* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 67-74.

[12] Frederic Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review*, 21 (2003), pp. 65-79 (p. 76). For more on this positions adoption by Slavoj Žižek in particular see Matthew Beaumont, 'Imagining the End Times: Ideology, the Contemporary Disaster Movie, *Contagion*', in *Žižek and Media Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Matthew Filsfeder and Louis-Paul Willis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 79-89.

[13] Peter Biskind, *The Sky is Falling: How Vampires, Zombies, Androids, and Superheroes Made America Great for Extremism* (Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 22-33.

[14] Mervyn Bendle, 'The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 11.1 (2005), n.p.

[15] Mark McCarthy, 'The Emergence of the Lost Apocalypse from 28 Days Later to Snowpiercer', in *The Last Midnight: Essays on Apocalyptic Narratives in Millennial Media*, ed. by Leisa A. Clark, Amanda Firestone and Mary R. Pharr (Jefferson, McFarland, 2016), pp. 69-78; Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation.*

[16] Brodmen, 'Apocalyptic Chic', p. 259.

[17] Ostwalt, 'Apocalyptic', pp. 375-76.

[18] Ostwalt, 'Apocalyptic', pp. 375-76.

[19] Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation*, p. xxiii.

[20] Ostwalt, Apocalyptic', p. 379.

[21] Michael G. Cornelius and Sherry Ginn, 'Introduction', in *Apocalypse TV: Essays on Society and Self at the End of the World*, ed. by Michael G. Cornelius and Sherry Ginn (McFarland, 2020), pp. 1-22 (p. 4).

[22] Pitetti, 'Uses of the End of the World: Apocalyptic and Postapocalyptic as Narrative Modes', *Science Fiction Studies*, 44.3 (2017), pp. 437-54 (p. 450).

[23] See Monique Scheer, 'Tense Holidays: Approaching Christmas through Conflict', in *The Public Work of Christmas: Difference and Belonging in Multicultural Societies*, ed. by Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), pp. 17-35.

[24] For example, Richard Horsley and and James Tracy, *Christmas Unwrapped: Consumerism, Christ and Culture* (Trinity, 2001). For more on this trend see Christopher Deacy, *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 148-151 and Scheer, 'Tense Holidays', pp. 18-22.

[25] Mark Connelly, 'Santa Claus: The Movie', in *Christmas at the Movies*, ed. by Mark Connelly (Tauris, 2000), pp. 115-134 (pp. 115-122); Robert J. Thompson, 'Consecrating Consumer Culture: Christmas Television Specials', in *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, ed. by Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey K. Mahan (University of California Press, 2000), pp. 44-55 (p. 51).

[26] Adam Kuper, 'The English Christmas and the Family: Time Out and Alternative Realities', in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 157-75 (pp. 163-69).

[27] Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer, 'The Difference that Christmas Makes: Thoughts on Christian Affordances in Multicultural Societies', in *The Public Work of Christmas: Difference and Belonging in Multicultural Societies*, ed. by Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), pp. 3-16 (pp. 14-15).

[28] Deacy, *Christmas as Religion,* pp. 19-21.

[29] Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, p. 32.

[30] Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 18-46.

[31] Thompson, 'Consecrating Consumer Culture', p. 48.

[32] The verse sung here replaces 'Glory to the newborn king' with 'Glory to the Lord our king'. While the carol's lyrics continue with 'Peace on earth and mercy mild | God and sinners reconciled', the version sung here is 'Peace on earth, good will to men | Peace on earth shall reign again'.

[33] On this see Raymond Haberski Jr., *God and War: American Civil Religion Since 1945* (Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 36-54.

[34] Evelina Lundmark, 'Banal and Nostalgic: Memories of Swedishness in the Christmas Calendar', *Temenos*, 59.1 (2023), pp. 29-51 (pp. 29-32).

[35] Stephen J. Lind, 'Christmas in the 1960s: *A Charlie Brown Christmas,* Religion, and the Conventions of the Television Genre', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26.1 (2014), pp. 1-22 (pp. 2-7).

[36] Kuper, 'English Christmas', pp. 163-67; Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, pp. 17-24.
[37] Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, pp. 29-32.
[38] Daniel Miller, 'A Theory of Christmas', in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 3-37 (p. 31).
[39] Gary C. Rustard and Kai Hanno Schwind, 'The Joke that Wasn't Funny Anymore: Reflections on the Metamodern Sitcom', in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van der Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 131-145 (p. 132).
[40] Timothy Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on Metamodernism', *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2.1 (2010), article reference 5677, n.p.
[41] Timothy Vermuelen and Robin van den Akker, 'Utopia, Sort of: A Case Study of Metamodernism', *Studia Neophilologica* 87.sup 1 (2015), pp. 55-67 (pp. 64-66). As they argue, the metamodern search for utopia 'forever seeks a truth that it never expects to find. Indeed, because it never finds it, it never stops its search' (p. 66).
[42] Maren Conrad, 'Beginning at the End: Romantic Visions of the Last Man in Post-Apocalyptic Robinsonades', in *Apocalyptic Chic: Post-Apocalyptic in Literature and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Barbara Brodmen and James E. Doran (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), pp. 63-75 (pp. 65-69).
[43] Mundy, 'Christmas and the Movies: Frames of Mind', in *Christmas, Ideology, and Popular Culture*, ed. by Sheila Whiteley (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 164-176 (p. 171).
[44] James G. Carrier, 'The Rituals of Christmas Giving', in *Unwrapping Christmas*, ed. by Daniel Miller (Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 56-74 (p. 63).
[45] Jeffery Richards, 'Crisis at Christmas: *Turkey Time*, *The Holly and the Ivy*, *The Cheaters*', in *Christmas at the Movies*, ed. by Mark Connelly (Tauris, 2000), pp. 97-113 (p. 122).
[46] Christine Agius, 'Christmas and War', in *The Public Work of Christmas: Difference and Belonging in Multicultural Societies*, ed. by Pamela E. Klassen and Monique Scheer (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), pp. 137-148 (p. 137).
[47] H. Mark Glancy, 'Dreaming of Christmas: Hollywood and the Second World War', in *Christmas at the Movies*, ed. by Mark Connelly (Tauris, 2000), pp. 59-76 (pp. 59-60).
[48] Stephen Prince, *Apocalyptic Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 2020), pp. 22-30.
[49] Sarah Street, 'Christmas Under Fire: The Wartime Christmas in Britain', in *Christmas at the Movies*, ed. by Mark Connelly (Tauris, 2000), pp. 77-95 (p. 77).
[50] Daniel Wojcik, 'Avertive Apocalypticism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. by Catherine Wessinger (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 66-88. See also Jon R. Stone, 'Apocalyptic Fiction: Revelatory Elements within Post-War American Films', in *Reel Revelations*, ed. by John Walliss and Lee Quinby (Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), pp. 54-75 (pp. 62-64).
[51] Slavoj Žižek, 'From Catastrophe to Apocalypse … and Back', *Apocalyptica*, 1.1 (2022), pp. 36-53 (p. 46).
[52] On reasons for the film's non-appearance, see James Chapman, 'The BBC and Censorship of the *War Game* (1965)', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41.1 (2006), pp.75-94; K. M. Flanagan, *War Representation in British Cinema and Television: From Suez to Thatcher, and Beyond* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 171-180.
[53] Used here as a double negative – i.e., they have no imagination of the future.
[54] Sheila Whiteley, 'Christmas Songs – Sentiments and Subjectivities', in *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, ed. by Sheila Whiteley (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 98-112.
[55] Brauer, "'Stile Nacht'", pp. 61-64.
[56] Brauer, "'Stile Nacht'", pp. 66-71.
[57] Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, p. 24
[58] Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World: A Cultural Sociological Approach* (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 54-113.
[59] Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, p. 183.
[60] This recalls key plot points in Neville Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) and its 1959 cinematic adaptation.
[61] Street, 'Christmas Under Fire', pp. 86-92.
[62] For example Guy Lodge, '*Silent Night* Review', *Variety*, 16 September 2021.
[63] Derek Johnston, 'Landscape, Season and Identity in *Ghost Story for Christmas*', *Journal of Popular Television*, 6.1 (2018), pp. 105-18 (pp. 105-07).
[64] Marcus O'Donnell, '*Children of Men*'s Ambient Apocalyptic Visions', *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 27.1 (2015), pp. 16-30.

[65] Miller, 'A Theory of Christmas', pp. 26-29. See also Kuper, 'English Christmas'.
[66] Mundy, 'Christmas and the Movies', pp. 169-70; Deacy, *Christmas as Religion*, pp. 157-164.
[67] See, for example, Miller, 'A Theory of Christmas', pp. 117-22; Mundy, 'Christmas at the Movies', pp. 170-71.
[68] Biskind, *The Sky is Falling*, pp. 7-13.
[69] Although completed in early 2020, the film was not released until late 2021, in the midst of controversy over vaccinations and government Covid advice. A number of reviewers therefore noted the potential for a damaging anti-vaccination reading. See Clarisse Loughrey, 'Silent Night Review', *The Independent*, 3 December 2021; Charlotte O'Sullivan, 'Silent Night Review', *The Standard*, 3 December 2021; Jessica Kiang, 'An Unpleasant *Silent Night* with the Dreary Dozen', *Los Angeles Times*, 2 December 2021.
[70] George Gruber, '*Don't Look Up*. Climate Change Dooming Boomers, Nihilistic Teenagers and Underfunded Scientists Against/For the World', *English Literature*, 10.1 (2023), pp. 83–100.
[71] Andrew Hammond, *Cold War Stories: British Dystopian Fiction, 1945-1990* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[72] See Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 7-11 for a discussion of this tradition.
[73] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, 2nd edn (Routledge, 2009).

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