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Graham Holderness

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RE-WRITING JESUS

Christ in 20th-Century Fiction and Film



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Graham Holderness : Re-Writing Jesus: Christ in 20th-Century Fiction and Film before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Re-Writing Jesus: Christ in 20th-Century Fiction and Film:

At the heart of Christian theology lies a paradox unintelligible to other religions and to secular humanism: that in the person of Jesus, God became man, and suffered on the cross to effect humanity's salvation. In his dual nature as mortal and divinity, and unlike the impassable God of other monotheisms, Christ thus became accessible to artistic representation. Hence the figure of Jesus has haunted and compelled the imagination of artists and writers for 2,000 years. This was never more so than in the 20th Century, in a supposedly secular age, when the Jesus of popular fiction and film became perhaps more familiar than the Christ of the New Testament. In *Re-Writing Jesus: Christ in 20th Century Fiction and Film* Graham Holderness explores how writers and film-makers have sought to recreate Christ in work as diverse as Anthony Burgess's *Man of Nazareth* and Jim Crace's *Quarantine*, to Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*. These works are set within a longer and broader history of 'Jesus novels' and 'Jesus films', a lineage traced back to Ernest Renan and George Moore, and explored both for their reflections of contemporary Christological debates, and their positive contributions to Christian theology. In its final chapter, the book draws on the insights of this tradition of Christological representation to creatively construct a new life of Christ, an original work of theological fiction that both subsumes the history of the form, and offers a startlingly new perspective on the biography of Christ.

No-one interested in the presentation of Christ in modern fiction and film should miss [this book]. *Times Literary Supplement* This book's first part makes an immensely useful contribution to the increasing volume of works covering the interface between theology and film. Taken together with Holderness's own novella, it does demonstrate that it is not only possible but also fruitful to explore the dual nature of Christ in a fictional literary vehicle. *Religion and Theology* Re-writing Jesus is a rare and refreshing example of how rigorous scholarship can inform and strengthen imaginative art. ... This is quite a different kind of scholarly work. It is rigorous in attention to texts and sources and historical precedents, but it is also the starting point for a creative encounter with implications for today. Holderness studies in order to be inspired, to be renewed, to find something to share with others. ... This would make a great supplemental text within a religion and film or religion and literature class. It is written in a learned but lucid style that undergraduates or seminary students would find accessible. .. Graham Holderness is an encouraging companion in endeavoring to unite what academia repeatedly strives to divide: faith and doubt, the ancient and the contemporary, rigorous analysis and creative response. *Christianity and Literature* Re-Writing Jesus is an unusual, provocative, theologically well-informed, and sensitive study of a Christ 'without form nor comeliness', existing for Holderness far beyond the word or image. *Cambridge Quarterly* One of the most balanced and scholarly analyses of Jesus-fictions ever produced. Well-argued and strongly supported, Re-writing Jesus is an invaluable addition to the fields of both Christ studies and popular culture studies. *Journal of Popular Culture* This is in a quite different class of originality and excellence from anything so far written about the fictional transformations of Jesus' life. Acute analysis of a wide variety of novels, films and plays is combined with a rare sensitivity to the large underlying issues not only about the nature of doctrine but about religious language itself as it works and fails to work and reinvents itself in modern culture. A really stimulating and welcome book. Dr Rowan Williams, Master of Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, UK, and formerly Archbishop of Canterbury In Holderness' book we encounter, with historical and theological sureness of touch, the Jesus who mysteriously persists in contemporary film and fiction. Beginning with *The Da Vinci Code*, Holderness takes us back to the nineteenth century, and through the fiction of George Moore, leads us into the theological terrain of the late twentieth century. For readers who have never progressed much beyond Dan Brown, this book will be a fascinating journey into the continuing power of the central figure of the gospels in the culture of our time. David Jasper, University of Glasgow, UK Re-writing Jesus shows Jesus to be much more among us than we knew, kicking in the womb and on his cross in so much contemporary film and fiction. But Graham Holderness also demonstrates that such incarnations are part of a neglected 'great tradition' stretching back to Renan's *Vie de Jesus*. Holderness takes that tradition more than usually seriously, showing what it can do for theology. He even goes so far as to supplement it himself, in *Ecce Homo*, his original life of Christ, which is distinctive in really taking on the imaginative challenge of what it would mean to be both divine and human. Lucid, learned, and above all alive, this is a magnetic book. Ewan Fernie, author of *The Demonic: Literature and Experience* and editor of *Redcrosse: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World* Deeply learned and splendidly accessible, Graham Holderness's brilliant book serves as a fair-minded and thoughtful guide on the quest for last century's literary and cinematic Jesus. Here, readers will find a plurality of Jesus - and Christ - figures on display, each one revealing as much, if not more, about the novelist or the auteur as they do about the Nazarene. Re-writing Jesus is a theological tour de force! Darren J. N. Middleton, Honors Faculty Fellow and Professor of Religion, The John V. Roach Honors College, Texas Christian University, USA Every generation or so, Jesus must be re-written, re-imaged, and re-heard. Such cultural resurrections always carry with them the possibility of misrecognition, and so we need a guide to point the way. Graham Holderness proves an astute and alert docent as he travels with us on the Road to Emmaus, allowing us to recognize the re-written Jesus in film and novels of the past century. Along the way Holderness reveals the sacred in science, sacrifice in cinema, and ends with a poetically charged Jesus for the twenty-first century. S. Brent Plate, author of *A History of Religion in 51/2 Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to Its Senses*, Visiting Associate

Professor of Religious Studies, Hamilton College, USA
About the Author
Graham Holderness is Professor of English at the University of Hertfordshire, UK, author or editor of numerous studies in early modern and modern literature and drama, and General Editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Critical Survey*. He is also a creative writer, novelist and award-winning poet and his previous books include *Nine Lives of William Shakespeare* (2010).