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Preposterous revelations: Visions of Apocalypse and martyrdom in Hollywood cinema 1980-2000

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Chapter One

Christian Warrior: Muscular Martyrdom in **END OF DAYS**

So here we are, engulfed in a millennial madness utterly unrelated to anything performed by the earth and moon in all their natural rotations and revolutions. People really are funny—and fascinating beyond all possible description.

Stephen Jay Gould, *Questioning the Millennium* (22)

Introduction

The end of the world never seemed more imminent to people as on the last day of the twentieth century, December 31, 1999. In his book on the significance of the millennium, Stephen Jay Gould addresses the question of why this date is so central to apocalyptic thinking or, better, why it should not be since, he persistently argues, millennial thinking is not rationally or scientifically grounded in any way. The “millennial madness” Gould ridicules, as far back as 1997 when his book was published, took on many different shapes, not the least of which was in popular culture. This pre-millennium tension also pervades the film **END OF DAYS** (USA: Peter Hyams, 1999), set on the potentially ominous eve of the new millennium. In the film, Satan (Gabriel Byrne) escapes from hell to earth in the guise of a human body. If he is capable of impregnating his bride-elect, called Christine, before the turn of the millennium on January 1, 2000, she will give birth to the antichrist, a birth that will signal the inauguration of Satan’s earthly kingdom. It is the suicidal, washed-out ex-cop Jericho Cane (Arnold Schwarzenegger) who, reluctantly at first, has to protect Christine. Ultimately, he saves the world by sacrificing himself to defeat Satan.

In this first chapter, I lay out the preposterous history

approach as one way to read *END OF DAYS*. The central concept of preposterous history, quotation, is specifically applied to the final sequence of the film. This approach, I argue, differs significantly from readings that position the Bible as the precursor to cinema. To demonstrate this, I take as my point of departure the analysis of the film offered by biblical scholar Richard Walsh. His reading is a good example of the allegedly ‘interdisciplinary’ work done in the field of religion and film. Walsh’s approach shows the strengths—a strong commitment to the biblical text—as well as the weaknesses—a disregard for visual analysis—of this kind of reading between Bible and film. My analysis, on the other hand, is influenced by the work of French film theorist Raymond Bellour. Throughout this study, his method, characterized by Bellour as “a methodical kind of work” of close visual analysis is deployed (*Analysis of Film* 15).

END OF DAYS offers a case of martyrdom within the context of Hollywood film and is therefore a good place to start the analysis of cinematic representations of martyrdom. The sacrificial death of Jericho Cane, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger is, on one hand, grounded in the Book of Revelation and its concomitant iconographical tradition and, on the other, imported in the new context of Hollywood cinema, specifically of the Schwarzenegger/ action film. I argue that the effect of the finale of the film stems not only from its references to the source text in Revelation, but also from the secular context of Hollywood cinema in which it is played out. In this respect, the film is crucial to my study of preposterous relationships between Hollywood cinema and the Bible: it adds new characteristics to the action film as *well as* to the Bible. The film, as a whole, is an example of how Hollywood cinema engages with, and “re-writes” biblical images and biblical narrative structures.¹

¹ *END OF DAYS* is, however, not the sole example of a film in which Schwarzenegger chooses to sacrifice his life in order to save mankind. In *TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY* (USA: James Cameron, 1991), Schwarzenegger’s cyborg character asks to be destroyed or better yet “terminated.”

One-Way Reading: Scripture as Precursor

Richard Walsh analyzes *END OF DAYS* as a contemporary manifestation of the Book of Revelation in American culture. He argues that Revelation has acquired a popular American reading in which three themes dominate: first, the calculable end; second, sectarianism; and third, fantasies of innocent revenge. Walsh then asks the question “whether one can read Revelation in another, less American way” (*On Finding* 6). Nevertheless, Walsh proceeds to read the film exactly for these three dominant themes, which appear to be inescapable to him. In the end, he offers one possible alternative interpretation of the film. Put differently, he provides the viewer with the opportunity to turn away from Revelation’s warrior figure and focuses instead on the figure of the lamb.

As Walsh argues, in the final sequence of the film, Jericho abandons his anger, “eschews his guns for prayer,” and finds sacrificial faith. Walsh rightfully concludes, “So, while Revelation moves from suffering to (redemptive) violence, the movie moves from violence (guns) to faith” (12). This reversal is surprising: the action film presents faith as superior to guns. As Walsh is offering a close analysis situated between scripture and film, particularly examining how the former influences the latter, one can hardly disagree with his reading. However, Walsh does not take the reversal of this process of influence into account. This is most telling in the title of the introduction to the book in which Walsh’s article was published, *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections Between Scripture and Film*, called “Introduction: Scripture as Precursor.” I consider Walsh’s method of reading the film to be one-sided. Of course, Scripture “came first,” but rather than being a second and secondary scripture, *END OF DAYS* is an active re-working of its precursor. Such rereadings may reveal neglected aspects of even the most canonical of pre-texts, so that they can be claimed to “influence” their so-called

sources.² This reversed perspective is called preposterous history. I propose to set up a dialogue between the biblical and secular aspects of the film. This implies not only taking the earlier, biblical contents of the film into consideration, but also analyzing the secular elements of the film.

Exchanging Looks: Shot list of the final sequence

As a starting point for my investigation into the concept of preposterous history, I analyze the final sequence of *END OF DAYS* in detail. The film is a prime example of action cinema, the kind of blockbuster cinema of which I will discuss other examples throughout this study. The film is dominated by the presence of the action genre's most notable star, Arnold Schwarzenegger. What is interesting about the film is its finale. Uncharacteristically, it denies the viewer the usually violent and triumphant *denouement* of action cinema. Even though Schwarzenegger's character Jericho conquers the ultimate evil, Satan, he does so by sacrificing his life. Hence, the film is also a fine example of martyrdom in Hollywood cinema.

The final sequence of the film starts with a shot of the crowd gathered at Times Square, waiting for the countdown to the New Year. At the same time, Christine and Jericho are chased by an angry mob of Satan worshippers. They run into a church and bolt the doors. Jericho orders the congregation in the church, which is in heavy prayer, to leave. When there is no response, he fires his machine gun. The congregation flees, turning the church into a silent place. Jericho tells Christine to hide somewhere in the church. He moves to the front of the illuminated massive altar. The centerpiece of the altar shows a triptych depicting the crucifixion of Christ.

From this point, I will break down this sequence into a

² I define a predecessor as a pre-text. It is a "text," which can be verbal as well as visual, from the preceding artistic tradition. The Book of Revelation functions as a verbal pre-text for the film.

shot list, that is, divide the sequence into its major building blocks, the distinct shots of which it consists. This shot list will help me to focus on what Raymond Bellour has called the “textual volume” of a film, its separate shots and the relation they have to a larger group of shots. Since I will be using the heuristic tool of the shot list as the primary way to analyze the filmic image, this approach merits some explanation. As Bellour argues, the written analysis of film is “the product of a double transgression,” since the analyst has to resort to the use of words to describe a moving image. The literary analyst, in contrast, does not encounter this problem, “thanks to the signifying osmosis of writing in relation to itself” (*Analysis of Film* 17). As Bellour’s own work demonstrates, the written analysis of film can be excruciatingly detailed; however, “the written text can never capture anything but a kind of elementary skeleton” (16). Despite the inadequacy of the word to describe the image, let alone a *moving* image, it is the only tool available.³ I combine the written analysis, in this case the shot list, with a picture of the shot that is described. This combination of descriptive words and image is the closest one can get to a rendering of the moving image within a written medium.

The shot list can give insight into instances of repetition. These are significant because, as Bellour states, “meaning emerges in the succession of a story in pictures by the double constraint of repetition and variation” (28). Even though it often goes unnoticed by viewers, repetition is an important tool for making sense of a film and for assigning meaning to acts, objects, and even mental states of mind. The Hollywood style of filmmaking, represented by continuity editing, is highly efficient: every shot has its function within a scene or sequence. Furthermore, the editing style is subservient to the narrative. The aim of the film is to tell the story, as if it were unfolding

³ The inevitable paradox of film analysis is that one has to momentarily halt the flow of the moving image in order to grasp the image, an image that derives its meaning from its forward motion in time. In this sense, the filmic text is, in Bellour’s words, “unattainable.” I return to this paradox in the following two chapters.

in front of the viewer's eyes. This means that film style, represented in its editing, should be unobtrusive, that is, the viewer should not notice it at all. The editing presents a smooth flow from shot to shot. By repeating a particular shot so that the viewer becomes aware of that repetition, attention is temporarily directed at the film itself. As an effect, the narrative spell is temporarily suspended, and the viewer will try to incorporate the eye-catching element back into the narrative by treating it as a clue. The repetition of shots can occur both within a given sequence, as well as within the larger frame of several sequences and finally the film as a whole.

The scene lasts approximately one minute and 23 seconds, and contains a total of 25 shots. The average shot length in this scene is 3.3 seconds. This may imply rapid cutting but, because of the pacing of the scene, the short shots are not very numerous: I have counted only four instances of above average speed. The average shot length indicates the genre of the film, the Hollywood action film. Combined with the fact that this sequence is positioned at the very end of the film (the climax), certain assumptions about its dynamics will arise. As I will show, however, the sequence contradicts these viewer assumptions.

Let me briefly elaborate on the characteristics of cinematography and the frame. In film, the frame (the border of an image) is never simply a neutral border. The frame projects a certain vantage point onto the material within the image. The frame is important because it actively defines the image for us. Framing can supply a sense of being far away from or close to the *mise-en-scène* of the shot. This aspect of framing is usually called camera distance. The standard measure for perceiving distance from the camera is the human body. In the *extreme long shot*, the human figure is barely visible. This is the framing for landscapes, for example. In the *long shot*, figures are more prominent, but the background still dominates. The *plan Américain* ("American shot") is very common in

Hollywood cinema. Here, the human figure is framed from about the knees up. This type of shot permits a nice balance between figure and surroundings. The *medium shot* frames the human body from the waist up. The *medium close-up* frames the body from the chest up. The *close-up* traditionally shows just the head, hands, feet, or a small object. The *extreme close-up* isolates a detail and magnifies small objects. In film it is possible for the frame to move with respect to the framed material. This is called mobile framing, or more commonly, camera movement. In the *crane shot*, the camera moves above ground level. Typically, it rises or descends, often thanks to a mechanical arm, which lifts and lowers it. In the *tracking shot*, the camera, as a whole, changes position, traveling in any direction along the ground.⁴



[EoD1]



[EoD2]

- 1) Long shot of Jericho (with his back to the camera) facing the altar
- 2) Circular tracking shot, encircling a cautious Jericho. He clings to his gun and scans the church for possible intruders. He reloads his gun, or is about to, when he faces the altar directly. Jericho hesitates
- 3) Plan Américain of Jericho holding the gun [EoD1]
- 4) Plan Américain of the statue of Michael holding his sword. This shot is a mirroring of the previous shot, visually forging

⁴ For a complete list of the key terms in cinematography, see chapter seven on cinematography in: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*: 210-269.



[EoD3]



[EoD4]



[EoD5]

- a link between the two warriors
Michael and Jericho [EoD2]
- 5) Medium close-up of Jericho, who starts to lower his gun [EoD3]
 - 6) Close-up of Michael's face [EoD4]
 - 7) Medium close-up of Jericho, who turns his head at –
 - 8) Insert of a tableau depicting the four apostles and Jesus, followed by a quick cut to –
 - 9) Another part of the altar
 - 10) Jericho in medium close-up. He is still cautious and cocks the hammer of his gun
 - 11) Insert of a tableau depicting a group of saints, rapid cut to—
 - 12) Another insert, in more detail, of saints
 - 13) Medium close-up of Jericho looking at –
 - 14) The centerpiece of the altar, the triptych of the crucifixion of Christ [EoD5]
 - 15) Medium close-up of Jericho looking at the gun in his hand
 - 16) Long shot of Jericho facing the altar (exactly the same shot 1)
 - 17) Close-up of Jericho looking up to the altar and nodding his head in some kind of recognition, rapid cut to –
 - 18) Medium close-up of Jericho with

the gun, he lowers his gun. Through a rapid cut (match on action) to—

- 19) Crane shot from above, moving down and forward toward Jericho who drops his gun, resulting in a close-up of Jericho's face. The downward movement seems to suggest an encroaching of the altar upon Jericho
- 20) Close-up of the face of Christ. (This shot could also represent Jericho's point of view.) **[EoD6]**
- 21) Close-up of Jericho imploring, "please God, help me" – **[EoD7]**
- 22) Plan Américain of Jericho (with his back to the camera), "give me strength"
- 23) Close-up of Jericho closing his eyes
- 24) Close-up of the triptych (according to the rules of the continuity system, this shot cannot be a point-of-view shot)
- 25) Close-up of the face of Christ, same as in shot 19
Mere seconds after this shot, Satan makes his entrance into the church.



[EoD6]



[EoD7]

If one looks at this shot sequence, it is possible to divide it into two parts: the first part consists of shots 1 to 16. This is the first part of Jericho's quest for faith, or the initial step in the process of finding God (Christ) and letting go of his anger and violent behavior. This first part of Jericho's transformation is framed and closed off by shot 16, an exact repetition of shot 1. In my view, shots 1 and 16 bracket the first part; the symmetry of the shots gives it a rounded-off status. The second half of the sequence commences with shot 17

and ends with shot 25. In this part of the sequence, Jericho finds and accepts Christ as his leader. I will return to the second part of the sequence below.

In the first part of the sequence, there is a particular aspect that immediately stands out: the exchange of close-ups in shots 3 to 7. Through these close-ups, the warrior connection between the archangel Michael and Jericho is established. In the entire sequence, two religious icons and symbols are juxtaposed: the armed warrior-hero Michael and the crucified lamb Jesus. Yet, as becomes obvious in the rest of the sequence, though he seems torn between choosing either Michael or Christ, Jericho eventually chooses the lamb, Christ, over the warrior. In the next section, I will address Jericho's alignment with Christ.

Warrior becomes Christ

Following Panofsky's model of iconological analysis, it is necessary to analyze the figure of Michael on an iconographic level. This means one has to search the literary source that features Michael. Michael is explicitly mentioned in Revelation 12:7: "And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back."⁵ Despite being mentioned by name only once in the Book of Revelation, Judith Kovacs and Christopher Rowland argue that the scene of Michael battling with the dragon is one of the most prominent motifs in artistic representations of the Apocalypse (32).⁶

Michael is the protagonist of the war in heaven, a war between him and the dragon, Satan. According to Kovacs and Rowland, this war is a familiar theme in both Jewish and Christian

⁵ All biblical citations in this study are taken from the digital New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, <http://bible.oremus.org>.

⁶ There are two other instances in which Revelation speaks of John's angel, an allusion to Michael, namely in Rev. 1:1 and 22:6.

sources, yet it has presented interpretative problems for Christian theologians. Kovacs and Rowland point to the fact that Michael, who eventually defeats Satan, is an angel, “which seems to threaten the unique rule of Christ” (136). Several commentators have attempted to identify Michael with the figure of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Another interpretation of Michael is that his defeat of Satan in heaven is the counterpart to Christ’s earthly death on the cross.⁷ Kovacs and Rowland remark that Revelation 12 was long seen as a source giving “insight into the larger cosmic struggle between God and the forces of darkness” (136, 138-139). The image of Michael is a conventional one, and the theme of the battle between good and evil he represents is too.⁸

One can conclude from this that the figure of Michael clearly belongs to Panofsky’s history of types. By reading the figure of Michael from an iconographical perspective, the spectator of *END OF DAYS*, who may not be familiar with the Book of Revelation, may interpret the scene on another level. The iconographical method has, however, a major disadvantage. It is a method that aims at what Bal calls a “naturalization of symbolic meaning” and to fixate that meaning (*Quoting* 223). Indeed, by assuming the biblical source as crucial to the only correct understanding of Michael, the process of signification is closed off. Moreover, the specific framework in which the character of Michael occurs, Hollywood cinema, is rendered irrelevant. I believe the opposite to be the case. The manifestation of Michael in *END OF DAYS* opens up a range of possible intertextual

⁷ James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse*. Leiden: Brill, 1998: 155.

⁸ Timothy Beal considers the story of Michael defeating the dragon an inspiration for many other legends of saints slaying dragons. His examples range from *Beowulf* to the character of Draco Malfoy in the *Harry Potter* novel series. Timothy K. Beal. 2002. *Religion and Its Monsters*. New York & London: Routledge: 83-84.

meanings, which go beyond the iconographical reading of Michael.⁹

Crucial for Hollywood cinema is that the viewer can dispense with the specific iconographical reading of Michael and still make sense of the scene. The two elements that guide the viewer are the *mise-en-scene* and the editing of the scene. With regard to editing, the shot list clearly demonstrates the exchange of looks in shots 3 to 7 between Jericho and Michael. This constitutes a speechless dialogue between the two. This is repeated when Jericho turns to Christ and again, through editing, a rapport between the two is constructed. The *mise-en-scene* operates in tandem with the editing; they support each other. The *mise-en-scene* shows a strong visual resemblance between Michael and Jericho. In the juxtaposition of shots 3 to 7 in my breakdown of the scene, a strong visual alliance is forged between Jericho and Michael, as both are warriors. The key element that brings the two characters together is Jericho's gun, which is juxtaposed with Michael's sword. The mirroring of Jericho and Michael in both their stature and their weapons, which occurs in shots 3 and 4, constitutes a clear moment of recognition. This recognition happens on a diegetic level. The contemporary warrior Jericho armed with his automatic gun encounters his ancient, biblical counterpart, Michael. Likewise, the viewer connects Jericho with Michael. However, the scene continues. Almost instantly, the established alliance between Jericho and Michael is torn down in

⁹ Bal defines iconography as, "interpreting visual representation by placing its elements in a tradition that gives them a meaning other than their 'immediate' visual appearance suggests" (1991: 177). Instead of "seeing" the image, iconography uncovers the symbol and then "reads" the image. Therefore, it "subordinates the visually represented element to something else." An iconographical reading is potentially limiting, yet it can also be productive. Iconography can be deployed to "ward off threatening interpretations, to fit the works into a reassuring tradition, but which can also be taken beyond its most obvious use to yield a powerful critical reading" (178). By reading the figure of Michael iconographically, the verbal element takes over the reading, since the prime pre-text to Michael is biblical, and as such "colonizes the image". The recognition of Michael as a biblical figure is an important and primary reading strategy, but it should not be the only reading strategy.

favor of another one: the association of Jericho with Christ.

Before I turn to Jericho's transformation into a Christ-like figure, I want to explore the warrior aspects of Jericho and, more importantly, of the Schwarzenegger embodiment of the warrior. The conversion from warrior to Christ is the most important element in this sequence precisely because, in this conversion, a whole field of intertextual significance, regarding images of warriors and specifically images of the film star Arnold Schwarzenegger, is opened up. The concept of quotation functions as the key to unlocking these divergent visual connotations.

Intertextuality: star text

So far, I have looked at the warrior image from an iconographical stance. Now I will deploy the concept of intertextuality, the second concept that, together with iconography makes up quotation, to make the image both more dynamic as the medium of film requires, and more "preposterous" as historical analysis demands.

The star text of Arnold Schwarzenegger enables me to analyze the dominant conception of Schwarzenegger as film star. As I suggested at the beginning, *END OF DAYS* is an exceptional entry in the Schwarzenegger filmography. In this film, Schwarzenegger acts against the type of character that has made him an international star. Richard Dyer's theory of stars serves as a good starting point to analyze the star image of Schwarzenegger. To begin, the relationship between a star and a particular film has to be taken into account. As Dyer states, stars are made for profit: they are an integral part of the marketing of a film. Dyer argues that the presence of a star is "a promise of a certain kind of thing that you would see if you went to see the film" (*Film Stars and Society* 5). Stars play an important role in selling a film to a particular audience.

Furthermore, stars and their images are constructed.

According to Dyer and other theorists such as John Ellis and Paul McDonald, a star text consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A star text is based on the films of a particular star, and also on the promotion of those films, pin-ups, public appearances, interviews, and biographies. The latter types of text can, according to Ellis, be characterized as “subsidiary forms of circulation,” which serve to maintain the hype surrounding the activities of the film stars (91). Star texts, according to Dyer, have two main characteristics. First, a star text is by definition always extensive, multimedia, and intertextual. Second, star texts are subject to historical change; they are by no means stable and they take on different dimensions in certain stages of a star’s career. Moreover, as Dyer remarks, the star text can outlive the star’s own lifetime (*Film Stars and Society* 2-3).¹⁰

The films of a star shape a particular star text to a large extent. Hence, the filmography of Arnold Schwarzenegger should be the starting point for coming to terms with his star text. Schwarzenegger’s films predominantly belong to the genre of the action film and, more specifically, the action film of the 1980s and 1990s. As Yvonne Tasker points out in her book on action cinema, *Spectacular Bodies*, the white male bodybuilder has dominated the American action cinema since the 1980s. In her analysis of the genre, Tasker claims that the centrality of muscular heroes is by no means an entirely new phenomenon; rather, it harkens back to earlier cinematic traditions, such as the Tarzan films and the mythological epic. However, the scale of the budgets, production output, and box-office success of these muscular action films

¹⁰ The two characteristics of the star text are not exclusively applicable to film stars within the context of popular culture. In a similar vein, the epitome of “high art,” Rembrandt, can also be defined as a cultural text, and star text. By treating Rembrandt as a cultural text, the imaginary boundaries between “high” culture, that is, the work as a thing, and popular culture, meaning the reception as an event, can be transgressed. See: Mieke Bal. 1991. *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 11.

makes the genre incomparable with its predecessors. One possible explanation for the huge success of these films is that they serve as a kind of backlash against the feminism of the 1970s. In the wake of that social change, these films signal, as Tasker puts it, the “extent to which masculinity itself has been called into question” (1-5).

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the explosive genre of the action film the display of the white male body is most welcome. The bodybuilder Schwarzenegger serves as the embodiment of this muscular, white action hero. The fact that Schwarzenegger was a world famous bodybuilder (seven times Mr. Olympia) before he switched to acting explains why his star text hinges on his body. Moreover, one can easily argue that, had it not been for his spectacular physique, Schwarzenegger would never have been capable of breaking into the movies. He is generally regarded as a limited actor at best, hampered by his heavy Austrian accent. Turning this weakness into strength, Schwarzenegger’s trademark one-liners make excellent and effective use of his pronunciation. By limiting the dialogue to the bare essentials, Schwarzenegger’s comical one-liners are highlighted and provide a comical counterpoint both to his threatening physique and the menacing characters he often portrays. His best asset, the one thing that sets him apart from most other actors (except perhaps Sylvester Stallone), remains his physique. One could claim that Schwarzenegger’s films not only make excellent use of this body, but also *originate from* Schwarzenegger’s body. That is to say, the extraordinary body is the starting point for particular films. Without that body, many of Schwarzenegger’s films would never have been made. Schwarzenegger’s limited acting qualities and, even more so, his typical pronunciation play an equally important role in his oeuvre, restricting the range of characters he

plans to non-American or non-human characters (cyborgs).¹¹

The film in which these two defining characteristics of the Schwarzenegger star, the body and the accent, are put to maximum effect is the 1982 film *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* (USA: John Milius), a film adaptation of Robert E. Howard's sword and sorcery adventures of the 1930s. The film is an important one in the star text of Arnold Schwarzenegger. The film was crucial in shaping the image of Schwarzenegger as a Teutonic superman; it brought the unique qualities of Schwarzenegger to the attention of a large audience; his previous films had only been minor successes. This film marked Schwarzenegger's breakthrough in Hollywood. The success of *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* and the effect it had on Schwarzenegger's career demonstrates that the film was tailor made for Schwarzenegger: he had the body to be Conan. The story is basically a study in primitive living and fighting, set in the 8th century B.C. and is inspired by old myths, legends, and the Bible, ranging from the biblical strongman Samson and the wheel of pain to the crucifixion of Christ. Conan himself is also a hybrid of other action heroes such as Tarzan and Superman. He is skilled in the art of sword fighting, looting, and plundering.¹²

¹¹ Schwarzenegger has proven to be a skilful master in reinventing his star persona. Even though he became famous as a muscular action hero in films such as *COMMANDO* (USA: Mark I. Lester, 1985) and *PREDATOR* (USA: John McTiernan, 1987), he made a conscious decision to accept roles that went against his usual character. Films such as *TWINS* (USA: Ivan Reitman, 1988) and *KINDERGARTEN COP* (USA: Ivan Reitman, 1990) foreground Schwarzenegger's comic timing and delivery instead of his physique. I will return to stars acting against their established persona in the next chapter. With *END OF DAYS* (and one can argue, *THE 6TH DAY* (USA/Canada: Roger Spottiswoode, 2000), Schwarzenegger invented himself once more. In these two films, he wished to deal with more serious themes, expressed in Jericho Cane's fallibility and mortality. Perhaps this was prompted by Schwarzenegger's brush with mortality. In 1997, he underwent emergency open heart surgery to have an aortic valve replaced (Andrews, 2003: 233).

¹² The book of Judges (Judges 16:21) tells the story of Samson and his love for his philistine wife Delilah. After she betrayed him, he was set to grind at the mill in the prison. In *CONAN THE BARBARIAN*, this device, used only for torturing the strongest of men, is called the wheel of pain. See also, Mieke Bal. 1987. *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Reading of Biblical Love Stories*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, for a critical deconstruction of the Samson and Delilah story.

The barbarian aspect of the Conan character needs some elaboration. In a chapter on the representation of white masculinity in *White*, Richard Dyer makes an important connection between bodybuilding and the ways in which it shapes the body drawing on a number of white representational traditions. Bodybuilding makes reference to classical Greek and Roman art. This is expressed in both the body shape and the posing of bodybuilders. Bodybuilding is also an American lifestyle or, to be more specific, a Californian lifestyle characterized by health, energy, naturalness, and also pain. The aspect of pain is closely related to Christian imagery, another recurring representational tradition in bodybuilding. As Dyer claims, bodybuilding is a painful activity, which involves “bodily suffering, and with it the idea of the value of pain” (*Stars* 150). Finally, bodybuilding draws on the primitivist image of the barbarian. *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* is indeed the prime example of the relationship between primitivism and bodybuilding, and Dyer even speaks of a “host of largely straight-to-video movies” based on the barbarian theme (149).

Paradoxically, the pairing of white bodybuilding with the primitive, exotic barbarian might, at first, seems to result in the construction of a *non-white* image. This, Dyer asserts, is not the case. On the contrary, these films will always cast an unambiguously white hero, which “mobilises a sub-Nietschian rhetoric of the *Übermensch* that, however inaccurately, is strongly associated with Hitlerism and crypto-fascism” (150). Schwarzenegger, with his massive body and his persona of Teutonic confidence is, to many, the personification of the *Übermensch*. The meaning of the word Barbarian, literally a person who does not speak Greek and whose utterances sound to Greek speakers like “*bar bar bar*,” is nicely illustrated in the film. Schwarzenegger speaks very little and, if he speaks, it is barely comprehensible. The production company Universal Pictures feared that Schwarzenegger’s accent would have a negative influence on the box office result and cut much of the

dialogue out of the film.¹³

CONAN THE BARBARIAN is the key film in Schwarzenegger's subsequent career and star text. All the roles he has played since this film not only capitalize on the image of the barbarian, but also return to and expand on this image. The sequence in END OF DAYS where the Schwarzenegger character encounters Michael cannot be read without taking into account this aspect of the star text of Schwarzenegger. It is almost inescapable, if not impossible, to read this scene without remembering the template of visual representations of Schwarzenegger.¹⁴

As Bal contends, cultural images such as films "come to the subject from the outside but arrive in an environment of memories" (*Quoting* 198). Moreover, "fragments from other discourses, visual scraps are loaded with memory. The image does not forget where it has been" (100). The moment Schwarzenegger's character Jericho encounters Michael, one is instantaneously reminded not only of Michael (in the iconographical tradition of Christian imagery), but also of earlier images of Schwarzenegger as a sword-wielding barbarian. For an instant, the images of Conan and Michael collide. The clash and blend of these images recasts the image of Michael as a barbarian, instead of a Christian warrior. Michael takes on Conan-like and, as collateral effect, also Schwarzenegger-like qualities: a physical giant with a taste for death and destruction. Conversely, Jericho-Schwarzenegger is imbued with Michael's Christian qualities:

¹³ For a discussion on the designation of the Other as barbarian, see: Nikos Papastergiadis, "Tracing Hybridity in Theory." 1997. In: *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (editors). London: Zed Books, 257-281.

¹⁴ Stephen Moore makes a provocative argument regarding representations of Christ/God in the Book of Revelation. In his study of God as bodybuilder, Moore notes that the Son of Man in Revelation has feet of bronze (1:15). He links this image with the vision on the bronzed bodybuilder who is like a bronze statue. For Moore, the God of Revelation is a posing bodybuilder, an Arnold Schwarzenegger with throne in CONAN THE BARBARIAN. *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*. I owe this reference to Tina Pippin (1999: 123).

he becomes a warrior of God.

Let me stress that the viewer need not know the specific iconographical context of Michael nor, for that matter, that of Schwarzenegger. The fact that this character is positioned in the mise-en-scene as a statue in a church provides enough clues with regard to the Christian standing of Michael. Likewise, the fact that Jericho recalls familiar images of the white, super male physique provides enough clues to operate the blend. The striking facet of this scene in *END OF DAYS* is that the new image of Jericho as the Christian warrior is cast aside immediately after it is established.

Jericho Cane as Christ

In the second part of the sequence, a transformation takes place in the character of Jericho Cane: he moves away from his warrior-like characteristics, his use of guns and excessive physical force, and takes on the characteristics of a Christ-like persona. Before I analyze this conversion in detail, it is necessary to consider whether Jericho should be regarded as a personification of Christ. The Christ-figure, like the warrior, has a long history of representation in film. Depictions of Christ range from the reverential portrayals of a solemn savior in films from the 1960s, such as *KING OF KINGS* (USA: Nicholas Ray, 1961) to the 1970s musical *JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR* (USA: Norman Jewison, 1973).¹⁵ Generally speaking, the depiction of Christ reached its peak of popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, but the genre of the biblical epic can effectively be presumed dead these days. One of the last films that attempted to represent the life of Christ is *THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST* (USA: Martin Scorsese, 1989). This film has been held responsible for the extinction of the

¹⁵ For a good overview of films about Christ, see: Richard Walsh (2003), W. Barnes Tatum (1997) and, most recently, Adele Reinhartz (2007).

genre of Christ films.¹⁶

It can be argued, however, that Christ made way for an alternative manifestation: the messianic figure in film. This is a character that shares many features with the Christ figure of the biblical epic, but has moved beyond the generic boundaries of the biblical spectacular.¹⁷ The genre that has incorporated the Christ/Messiah character is the contemporary action film. Films such as *ARMAGEDDON* (USA: Michael Bay, 1998), *END OF DAYS*, and *THE MATRIX* trilogy (USA: Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999, 2003) all feature the messianic superhero character, a selfless male who is called upon to carry out a redemptive task, usually for the greater good of a society in distress. This character and script can be found in thousands of popular culture artifacts and is often considered to be the American monomyth. In their book on the divergent manifestations of this American monomyth, John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett claim that the archetypal hero functions as a replacement for the Christ figure, “explicitly designed to offer contemporary moviegoers this new Christ” (6-7).

In an analysis of the heroic Christ character, one often looks for a number of divine signature signs that relate to both the appearance and behavior of the hero. In *END OF DAYS*, the obvious clue is the initials of the protagonist: J.C. (Jericho Cane). Furthermore, Jericho has blue eyes. This may seem a trivial detail; however, the blue eyes are an established trait of celluloid saviors and belong to the cinema conventions regarding the depiction of Christ. The gentilising and whitening of Christ is the object of critical study in Dyer’s *White*. The historical fact that Christ was a Jew plays

¹⁷ Matthew McEver. 1998. “The Messianic Figure in Film: Christology Beyond the Biblical Epic.”

¹⁶ Mel Gibson’s *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST* (USA, 2004) proved to be responsible for a minor yet controversial revival of the genre. However, it remains to be seen if Gibson’s film turns out to be an incentive for the production of other biblical epics. For an overview of responses to the film, see: S. Brent Plate’s 2004 book *Re-Viewing The Passion: Mel Gibson’s Film and Its Critics*.

an important part in his representation. As Dyer contends, Jews have historically constituted the “limit case of whiteness” (*White* 53). On one hand, their racial visibility was undisputed. In the representation of Jews, certain physical differences such as skin, eyes, and hair color, were recurring. On the other, there was uncertainty. The characteristics attributed to Jews were undermined by a theory that attempted to fix Jewish color geographically and in its ability to adapt to surroundings. This “adaptability,” as Dyer explains, “could easily be viewed as the capacity to infiltrate, passing for gentile as a kind of corruption of whiteness” (57). In the depiction of Christ and the Virgin Mary as well, skin color is a mark of otherness. Even though both Christ and the Virgin Mary are Jews, “they are rendered as paler, whiter, than everyone else.” In this instance, the color of the skin is a sign of their enlightenment: “Christ and Mary are actually saved Jews, that is, Christians” (66-67).

In this respect, it is worth mentioning *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST* (USA: Mel Gibson, 2004), in which, according to some people, a more truthful representation of Christ is attempted. Hence, Christ has brown eyes and a more Semitic appearance.¹⁸ This film breaks with the Hollywood rule in order to heighten its realism and assumed truthfulness, ignoring the fact that, even though blue-eyed Messiahs may not constitute a realistic depiction of Christ, the rules of Hollywood, a system in itself, equate the color blue with divinity, truth and, fidelity. Another common sign of divinity is the evil temptation the hero has to resist, which harkens back to the biblical Satan’s lure of Christ in the desert. In *END OF DAYS*, Jericho rejects Satan’s temptation, a scene to which I will return in more detail below. By resisting this temptation, he sets himself up to be the recipient of Satan’s wrath.

¹⁸ For an overview of scholarly reconstructions of the physical appearance of the historical Jesus, see: Stephen D. Moore. *God’s Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible*. In particular the second chapter, “On the face and physique of the historical Jesus” (90-130).

Satan's particular method of punishment, crucifixion, resulting in divine (near) death points to Jericho's possible rebirth as a Christ figure or, at least, to his celestial status. Moreover, in the punishment, discourses on martyrdom and masculinity merge. In a memorable scene that takes place halfway through the film, Satan crucifies Jericho, who is left to die. However, like Jesus, Jericho is resurrected: he is found by a priest and survives. The cross as a symbol of punishment, epitomized by Jesus' slow and agonizing death on the cross, is effectively used in *END OF DAYS*. Jericho is punished as well as saved by the cross. The punishment, the physical torture, ties in with what Tasker understands to be a recurring scene in action cinema: the revelation of the body of the hero. This revelation is often characterized by "suffering, and torture in particular, [it] operates as both a set of narrative hurdles to be overcome (tests that the hero must survive) and as a set of aestheticised images to be lovingly dwelt on" (125).

The scene echoes martyr stories, in that it draws on the Christian imagery that depicts bodily suffering as benevolent to the human spirit. Consequently, pain ennobles those who are able to endure that torment. This results in what Dyer calls the establishment of "the moral superiority of not specifically Christian characters" (*White* 150). This is the case in *END OF DAYS*: Jericho Cane is marked by human weaknesses: he is an egoistic and violent alcoholic. Moreover, the crucifixion connects two different discourses, action film and martyrdom, and shows them to be remarkably similar. The two discourses converge in their conception of masculinity as the control over one's body, specifically when the body is in tremendous pain. Jericho's capacity to withstand this brutal form of torture echoes action film narratives in which the hero "struggles for physical self-

¹⁹ For a discussion of ancient hegemonic constructions of masculinity connected to martyrdom and, in particular, the classical martyr text of 4 Maccabees, see Moore and Anderson (1998).

control and for control over one's body" (Tasker 126). Ultimately, it signals Jericho's nascent talent for becoming a fully-fledged martyr in that it demonstrates his uncontested masculinity.¹⁹

What is striking is that Jericho's conversion does not take place immediately after he has been saved from being crucified. The crucifixion is an important test and foreshadows Jericho's connection to Christ. However, Jericho is not a personification of Christ. Rather, as his ability to endure torture demonstrates, he finds faith in order to become a martyr. In that sense, Jericho emulates Christ, in that he follows his example and dies a sacrificial death from which all humankind benefits. The completion of Jericho's transformation occurs in the second part of the sequence, when he faces his biblical mirror image Michael. Only then does the conversion from warrior to martyr take place.

The materialization of the Christian warrior

The conversion of Jericho is depicted in the second half of the sequence, starting with shot 17 in the shot list. As I mentioned above, the first part of the sequence runs from shot 1 to 16. In its exact mirroring of shot 1, shot 16 functions as a way of bracketing that part of the sequence. However, it could also be argued that the second part of the sequence *begins* with shot 16 instead of shot 17. The main motivation for this is that shot 16 could function as a re-establishing shot: it returns to a view of an entire space after a series of closer shots. As Bellour points out, the demarcation of a sequence is always arbitrary: "neither the beginning nor the end can properly be said to constitute this segment of film as a closed and strictly definable unit" (*Analysis of Film* 29).

I want to focus on what I consider to be the key shot of the second part of the sequence, shot 19. This shot is important because it consists of an unusual, elaborate camera movement. All previous shots were static (except for shot 2) and showed little

variation in height of framing; hence, the sequence is dominated by medium close-ups and plan Américain shots. Shot 19, however, is a descending crane shot, segueing neatly into a tracking shot, which results in framing Jericho in a medium close-up. With this shot, the symmetry and balance of the sequence is disrupted. According to Bellour, disruption serves an essential goal. Variation in the symmetry of shots has as its objective the continuity of the narrative. Bellour writes, “the regulated opposition between the closing off of symmetries and the opening up of dissymmetry gives rise to the narrative, to the very fact that there is a narrative” (*Analysis of Film* 75).

The difference of shot 19 has a crucial consequence for the point of view of the narrative. Whereas previous shots, for instance shots 8,9, and 14, can be aligned to Jericho’s point of view (or could at least be considered to be Jericho’s eyeline matches), shot 19 has the reverse effect: it is as though the altar, the figure of Christ and his saints, is “looking down” at Jericho. The position of point of view is reversed from Jericho to the altar. The altar appears to come to life, and perhaps does so literally, since this is the moment that Jericho becomes a believer. Christ, of whom the altar is a personification, has come to life for Jericho. The dialogue of the sequence underscores Jericho’s conversion. For the first time in the entire film, Jericho pleads with God for help. Moreover, for the first time, Jericho realizes that his weapon is of no use in his battle against Satan. Instead he begs God to give him spiritual strength. By casting away the gun and addressing God directly, Jericho’s conversion from warrior to lamb is completed. The redemption of the character, which began with his crucifixion by Satan, has now been achieved: Jericho is a believer and ready to sacrifice himself for God. As a warrior of a different kind, a warrior of God, Jericho is empowered by divine influence, faces Satan, and saves mankind.

The *denouement* of *END OF DAYS* offers a reworking of its

source text, Revelation: the film and its depiction of the warrior and the lamb, makes an interesting volte-face. In order to demonstrate in what respect *END OF DAYS* diverges from its iconographical source text, and thus constitutes a case of preposterous history, it is necessary to return to the source text. According to James Resseguie, there are three major visions of Christ in Revelation: the first is the Son of Man (1:12-20; 14:14), the second is the Lamb (5:6-14), and the third is the rider called Faithful and True (19:11-21) (Resseguie 111). The differences between these visions are striking. The Son of Man vision presents Christ with “sublime features of divinity.” The second depicts him as the slaughtered and resurrected lamb, which accentuates his humanity. In the first two versions, Christ appears in heaven. In the final vision, however, “Christ descends from heaven with his entourage to conquer the powers of deception on earth. Heaven and earth meet in the final and dramatic scene in which Truth dispels falsehood and casts it into the lake of fire” (113-114). This final vision has strong militaristic connotations: the rider called Faithful and True is riding a white horse together with the armies of heaven, who are also on white horses (Revelation 19:14). The rider wears a robe that is dipped in blood, unlike his armies who are dressed in white linen. The striking feature of the rider, though, is the two-edged sword that protrudes from his mouth.²⁰

The images of the robe dipped in blood and the sword have yielded diverse interpretations. Resseguie contends that the blood-soaked robe, “likely comes from the shedding of Christ’s own blood on the cross” (116). Other commentators claim that the blood belongs to those slain in battle. As these readings suggest, the image brings about opposing views. This is even more the case with

²⁰ As Kovacs and Rowland suggest, the rider called Faithful and True is, in a sense, echoed and foreshadowed by the first of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse (2004: 194).

the imagery of the sword. Again, Resseguie downplays the violent connotations of the two-edged sword by stating that it “symbolizes truth’s double-edged testimony. On one hand, it slays falsehood and releases those bound by the lies and deceits of the beast. On the other, it condemns those who reject Jesus’ testimony to the true God and cling to the beast’s delusions” (114-115). He concludes his analysis by claiming that the Christian warrior in Revelation has no need of a real sword since “The only weapon this warrior needs is the proclamation of the gospel, his confident testimony, the word of God” (115).

In their reading of Revelation 19, Kovacs and Rowland draw up a list of biblical passages in which God is portrayed as the divine warrior. Kovacs and Rowland reach the same conclusion as Resseguie. They conclude that “most of these passages suggest that judgment in the context of an eschatological battle comes by the power of the Word of God rather than through force of arms” (Kovacs and Rowland 94-195).

What both Resseguie and Kovacs and Rowland endorse is that the violent language and its corresponding metaphors in Revelation are a means of conveying the message of divinely sanctioned violence. Richard Bauckham makes a similar argument in his exhaustive study of Revelation. He states that “Revelation makes lavish use of holy war *language* while transferring its *meaning* to non-military means of triumph over evil” (*Climax* 233, emphasis in text). The conclusion he eventually reaches is somewhat confusing: “the distinctive feature of Revelation seems to be [...] its lavish use of militaristic *language* in a non-militaristic *sense*.” Nevertheless, Bauckham adds, “there is ample space of the imagery of armed violence” (233). So, though Revelation does not denounce militarism *per se*, and its language and imagery are predominantly militaristic, Revelation should be understood as *not* sanctioning militant violence. The discrepancy between language and intended or preferred

significance maneuvers its interpreters into a position to make inconsistent claims.

David L. Barr, who, unlike Bauckham, seems aware of his awkward position, attempts to read Revelation from an ethical point of view, stressing what he calls “the ethical problem of John’s language” (*Reading* 102). He states that, “while it is possible to appreciate the meaning of John’s violent language, the language itself remains a problem. There is too much violence” (102).

Though the violent nature of Revelation is partly subverted by the act of sacrifice of the lamb, its dominating rhetoric remains violent. According to Barr, the moral dilemma is that, though one may rejoice at Revelation’s “vision of the overthrow of evil [...], the images and actions that are used to portray this overthrow” are indeed very hard to stomach (105).

To come to terms with this surplus of violence, Barr divides the acts of violence into four categories: cosmic upheavals, war, harvest scenes, and judgment scenes. The fourth category of judgment is ethically the most problematic. The primary scene of judgment is the one in Revelation 19:20-21, in which the rider called Faithful and True makes his appearance. The rider exercises a judgment after the battle has been fought:

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

The most brutal aspect of this scene is the useless killing of “the rest,” the followers of the two leaders, the beast and the false

prophet. As Barr argues, “one might justify the punishments of the leaders as stemming from their crimes of war, but what of the rest? Is it right to kill combatants after the war is over?” (103). Indeed, scenes such as these highlight the brutal nature of Revelation.

As a reader, I find it hard to get past these depictions of destruction. At the end of his article, Barr gives validation for the violent language. He points out the intended purpose: “What must always be kept in mind, however, is that these images of the conquest of evil, however immoral they may appear to be, always correspond to the innocent suffering of Jesus and of those who hold the testimony of Jesus” (107).

In a sense, Barr justifies the violent nature of Revelation by suggesting that it is a means to an end. The language John uses is a way of uncovering “the violence of this world, offering a glimpse of the cosmic war between good and evil, a war only won through suffering” (107). Although Barr attempts to criticize Revelation’s violence, in the end he cannot help but rationalize and excuse that violence nonetheless. By relating violence to suffering to the point where the two converge, Revelation’s violence is morally neutralized.

An interesting parallel between biblical and cinematic violence can be observed. Namely, a similar rhetoric to the one outlined in relation to Revelation pervades discussions on extremely violent film as well. The issue of excessive violence in action cinema, and particularly the moral response to graphic violence—condone it as an element of the text, or condemn it—mirrors the exegesis of Revelation. The analogy between Revelation and *END OF DAYS* as controversial texts also affects the interpretation of the Michael, the rider called Faithful and True, and Jericho as protagonists. These are not unreservedly “good,” morally just heroes. Their use of violence is problematic because it obscures the wished-for meaning, “the good will prevail, with violence if necessary,” of both biblical and cinematic text. By placing the biblical warriors next to the cinematic one, the

analogy of violence between both texts is further accentuated. By reading backward from the contemporary warrior to its biblical predecessors, the earlier text is altered: the rider called Faithful and True and Michael are infused with the muscular qualities of Schwarzenegger's Jericho.

The End: Death Shall Be No More

The war between good and evil, violence, suffering, and eventual redemption through suffering, are all visualized in the finale of *END OF DAYS*. The devil, now no longer represented in its earlier human incarnation but in its true form of a gigantic dragon, enters Jericho's body. Although Jericho physically tries to fight this intrusion, after some struggle Satan takes over. Satan, now in the guise of Jericho, lures Christine out of her place of hiding, grabs her and lays her down at the altar where the final act, impregnating her and inaugurating Satan's reign, will take place. Christine implores Jericho to fight Satan. Jericho has not given up yet: there is an "internal" struggle taking place between Jericho and Satan. Similar to the sequence I have analyzed in detail, Jericho turns again to both Michael and Jesus, and again, seems torn between them. This time, though, Jericho first looks at the triptych of the crucified Jesus. In an instant, Jericho is inspired by the image of the lamb Jesus. It becomes clear to him that the only way to fight Satan is by committing the non-violent act of self-sacrifice, giving one's life for the greater good of mankind.

Immediately after looking at the triptych of Christ, Jericho turns to the statue of Michael, which now lays broken on the church floor. His sword is the one thing that is not broken. This is emphasized in one particular shot, which is a close-up of the shiny tip of the sword, rendered through the device of pulling focus. This is done by adjusting perspective by refocusing the lens on an object in the background and racking it to the foreground, making it "jump"

into focus. Jericho does not hesitate and falls into Michael's sword, killing, or at least casting out, Satan from his body. His release is represented by an overwhelming wave of fire erupting from Jericho's belly, which temporarily sets fire to the church. The image of Satan appears briefly in the flames before he vanishes into a hole in the church floor.

After this act, Jericho, who is dying, sees the image of his deceased wife and daughter. They look at him smiling and appear to be waiting for him. This short scene underlines Jericho's status as a martyr. In it, two recurring elements, or themes, of martyr stories are present, namely the vision and the reward. The martyr's susceptibility to visions is outlined in the next four chapters of this study. Since Jericho's vision is not a prominent feature of the film, I will not deal with it here in more detail. The apparition of Jericho's wife and daughter recalls the temptation scene earlier in the film. In that scene, Satan conjured up the past, in which Jericho's wife and child were still alive. The image was intended to coax Jericho into choosing Satan's side. Jericho saw through the deceitfulness of the image, a mirage, and denied Satan. This denial led to Jericho's crucifixion, which, I argued, was a crucial step in his transformation into a martyr. In the final scene of the film, Jericho's deceased loved ones appear once more, only this time the image is not conjured up by satanic forces but by Jericho's newfound belief in Christ. Consequently, the image should not be understood as tempting but as rewarding. Jericho's act of sacrifice is rewarded by the victory over death, the reunion with loved ones, and an afterlife.

This compensation echoes Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

The theme is also persistent in non-biblical or theological sources, as Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor point out, "the expectation of

vindication and reward beyond death, more often than not, is a prime motivation for their [the martyrs] choice of death” (75). The secular *END OF DAYS* adheres to this convention and, moreover, uses it to its own benefit. Since the film denies its viewers the usual *denouement* of action films, typified by the hero’s triumphant victory over his adversaries, Jericho’s triumph in the afterlife comes to function as a substitute. The reunion of Jericho with his family is a makeshift happy ending.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, *END OF DAYS* is a popular representation of millennial anxieties. This is illustrated by the film’s main narratological premise: the unleashing of Satan in order to thwart the turn of the millennium. This caused the disturbance of the present day situation. The return to the status quo, brought about by Jericho’s death, is confirmed by the New Year’s celebration at the very end of the film.²¹ In the film’s ending, which is neither cataclysmic nor apocalyptic since the world is saved by the sacrifice of one human being, the dreaded end, the Apocalypse, does not take place. As such, *END OF DAYS* adheres to Baudrillard’s conception of the Apocalypse, which I outlined in the introduction, as inherently disappointing. Particularly, what Baudrillard calls the temptation to calculate the end dominates the film. Its narrative structure is grounded on the anticipation of the end, signaled by the constant reminders of the remaining time before midnight, December

²¹ The imminence of the New Year, represented throughout *END OF DAYS* as a countdown to 00.00 hours, also serves another function in apocalyptically themed action cinema: that of the deadline. The notion of the countdown to a deadline returns in the next chapter.

31, 1999. Yet, this seemingly inescapable end is cancelled at the very last minute. The turn of the century takes place. The Apocalypse does not.

Conclusion: Scripture as Precursor and Successor

At this point, I return to the article of Richard Walsh, with which I started my analysis of *END OF DAYS*. I argued that Walsh's reading is one-sided, in that it posits the Book of Revelation as the inescapable precursor of the film. Walsh argues that *END OF DAYS* presents an inverted reading of Revelation: "while Revelation moves from suffering to (redemptive) violence, the movie moves from violence (guns) to faith" ("On Finding" 12). Walsh draws this conclusion, which I believe is right, by taking Revelation as the precursor of the cinematic rendering of Revelation. He concludes that "*END OF DAYS* improves Revelation because it refuses to externalize evil to the extent that Revelation does." Walsh continues, "placing *END OF DAYS* alongside Revelation, then, exposes the anger and resentment at the heart of Revelation" (13). Walsh uses the film to point out the violent nature of Revelation. By use of a contemporary film, his reading highlights a familiar and problematic trait of Revelation. Walsh credits the film for improving on its source text. However, the preposterous notion that the film might also influence our estimation of the source text is not accounted for.

In my reading of *END OF DAYS*, I have attempted not just to regard Revelation as the historical source for the film, but also to read in the opposite direction as well. The film is not merely a cinematic adaptation of Revelation, as Walsh argues; the film in turn affects Revelation as well. The focal point for my analysis is the presences of Arnold Schwarzenegger as film star, whose images, packed together in his star text, constitute a source of iconographical and intertextual meanings. By juxtaposing Schwarzenegger with archangel/warrior Michael and with Revelation's manifestation of

Christ as the rider called Faithful and True, new images emerge. The comparison between Schwarzenegger and Michael results in an augmentation of the latter, as the image of the biblical warrior becomes infused with Schwarzenegger's physical and barbarian aspects.

However, in the final part of the film, there is an ultimate reversal occurring in imagery. In Schwarzenegger's act of sacrifice, the film transcends both its pre-text Revelation, as Walsh argues, and the popular genre of the Hollywood action film. Whereas the final part of Revelation manifests Jesus personified as an uncompromising judge who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15), *END OF DAYS* emphasizes the sacrificial act performed by Schwarzenegger. In both contexts, the singularity of Schwarzenegger's martyrdom stands out. As I will argue, this act is congruent with the sacrificial acts in other films I discuss in subsequent chapters. One can claim that the motif of self-sacrifice has a strong biblical, iconographical grounding, since the motif refers back to the textual source of the martyrs in Revelation. However, the motif has been imported within a new context, that of Hollywood cinema. Interpretation should then focus on the interpretation of the borrowed motif of self-sacrifice or martyrdom in its new context. The effect of the finale of *END OF DAYS* originates not merely from its renunciation of violence, as it seeks to *improve*, to paraphrase Walsh, on its source text Revelation, but also from the context in which this is played out. In the juxtaposition of Schwarzenegger and the act that he commits, the new-fangled meaning of self-sacrifice can be found.