

MAD MAX: FALL, EXODUS, SOJOURN, AND REDEMPTION
IN A POST-APOCALYPTIC WASTELAND

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Mad Max: Fury Road. Directed by George Miller. Performed by Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, and Nicholas Hoult. Warner Brothers, 2015. HBO.

The fourth motion picture release in a franchise known for tapping into the savior motif, director George Miller says *Max's* prior "international acceptance had drawn aside the veil of reality and revealed a collective unconscious."¹ Channeling this universal unconscious acknowledgement that existential brokenness demands a redeemer, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a post-apocalyptic (post-lapsarian) narrative packed with theological themes that pits savior figures in a good versus evil battle to free captives and redeem the suffering through a race across the

¹James Douglas, "For Mad Max's George Miller, All Roads Lead to Myth and Music." *The Dissolve*. May 15, 2015. Accessed April 1, 2016. <https://thedissolve.com/features/exposition/1026-for-mad-maxs-george-miller-all-roads-lead-to-myth/>.

desert to a land of hope. Reading the last page first, the writers' motives are easily discerned. The closing quote ("Where must we go . . . we who wander this wasteland in search of our better selves?" – The First History Man) appears to be an esoteric conception of writer/director George Miller that likely points to the work of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* and its treatment of the democratic peace theory first popularized by Immanuel Kant. Clearly evident, beyond *Fury Road's* ten time Academy Award nominated production, lies a script bold in political commentary. While expressing a measured restraint, the dialogue remains robust in the incorporation of concepts that find their roots in the Bible and Western Christian literature. The *Road* unfolds in four distinct phases, fall, exodus, sojourn, and redemption, which mirror biblical metanarrative.

The Fall

As the movie opens the main character recounts the events which brought about the present condition. "My world is fire and blood. . . . As the world fell, each of us in our own way was broken." Random voices relay that, "Mankind has gone rogue, terrorizing itself . . . the earth is sour . . . our bones are poisoned . . . we have become half-life." The setting and character development communicate that the world of *Mad Max* exists in the shadow of a great fall. A post-apocalyptic war for guzzoline, aqua cola, produce, mother's milk, and bullets rages. The surviving human population is spiritually and intellectually barren. Max is one of the few free residents in this wasteland where precious resources are monopolized by the tyrant, Immortan Joe. Max was once a cop, an upholder of justice, and a person with a righteous cause. Now Max cannot discern whether he is less crazy than anyone else. He is haunted by visions of innocents who cry out to him for salvation. The freedom Max possesses is rare, and a sign of the elevated stature granted him by his physical and intellectual gifts. Like Moses, who said, "I am

slow of speech and tongue . . . please send someone else” (Exod. 4:10, 13), Max is a reluctant hero of few words. He repeatedly attempts to flee the call to save others, distancing himself from society for the sake of self-preservation. The villain emperor, Immortan Joe, is introduced when Max is taken captive by a cohort and brought to the citadel. In the citadel the Immortan governs a caste system that drives the oppressed population’s dependence on their overlord. Like many historical tyrants the Immortan has used the depressed social dynamic to exalt himself as deity. Max, in a nod to the Jewish hero type he represents, is enslaved in a dungeon and receives a systematic tattooing like the holocaust victims at Auschwitz. Max is labeled a type O-negative “blood bag,” and likened to something subhuman as he is chained and fitted with an iron muzzle.

Those privileged to be crusading warrior pawns worship in the “cult of the V8,” an automobile worshipping religion of “chrome” seekers. This false religion drives them to “karmakraze” sacrifice for the conquest of their Immortan. As the war boys martyr themselves on Fury Road, they cry out, “Witness me!” This statement finds its etymology in the Koine Greek (the language of the New Testament) word “martyr” which means witness. The war boys cry out for recognition of their witness to “the one who grabbed the sun.” They believe, as one war boy exclaims, “I live; I die; I live again!” This beckons images of wicked religious extremists who see war, murder, and death as crucial expressions of spirituality. These young warriors believe they “will be lifted up” by the hand of the Immortan as they are “awaited in Valhalla” for dying “historic on Fury Road.” The Immortan, calling himself the “redeemer” and claiming that “by his hand the people will rise from the ashes of this world,” promises his “half-life war-boys” a future glory where they “ride with [him] eternal.” This bears striking resemblance to the manipulating practices of historic evil dictators, as well as Satan, the deceiver

and author of evil himself. False religion serves as the tool by which young boys who seek glory become an “old man’s battle fodder.”

Furiosa, the Immortan’s imperator, comes from “the clan of many mothers.” Like Max, Furiosa is also a person of elevated status. She is an imperator who (also like Moses) abandons her privilege to free the captives. Furiosa, also resembling Eve, wears the results of the fall physically with a missing arm as a memento of the brokenness, imperfection, and fragility resulting from her having been stolen from the “green land.” Where Max is physically superior and self-centered, Furiosa is virtuous but physically impaired. The two collaborate to represent the Exodus savior type while each of the characters and scenes bears the marks of the fallen existence.

The Exodus

The Immortan first becomes aware that an Exodus is under way when Furiosa’s tanker truck veers off route and makes a break across the desert. The rig secretly houses the Immortan’s harem who refuse to bear future warlords, and are forsaking their former lives and risking all in search of “hope.” Furiosa on the other hand is in pursuit of “redemption.” The wives of Immortan Joe, the most exalted of all the women under his reign, are treated as mere chattel in a world of men’s wars. Furiosa represents not merely the savior of this random band of people, but the savior of femininity. Furiosa is a savior who values the “mother of all the living,” knows the equality of women in the created order, and seeks to bring about new life through *love, hope, and redemption*.

Infuriated by the exodus, Immortan Joe rallies the troops in full pursuit of the runaway tanker. Like the Pharaoh of Egypt he leads his war boys in a furious chase, racing their hot rods across the desert like post-apocalyptic battle chariots. Strapped to the grill of the war boys’ hot-

rod, Max, the type O negative “blood bag,” is intravenously imparting blood to the “half-life.” A “universal donor,” Max has blood capable of providing life for all.

In a scene resembling the parting of the Red Sea, Furiosa and the fleeing unit pass through a wavelike desert sandstorm that topples the V8 war chariots allowing Furiosa and the “breeders” to escape. The muzzled blood bag arrives on the other side of the storm still chained to the war boy Nux. Max and Nux are introduced to the female group for the first time as they find them cleansing themselves with water in an unwitting baptism. The women, clothed in white and clean of the desert sand and grease, contrast their fallen surroundings as an image of purity, innocence, and freedom. Max requests the water, and splashing it on Nux and himself, the group becomes consecrated together in this unwitting baptism. Furiosa provides Max with a file he uses to free himself from his muzzle. Having been set free from bondage, Max is increasingly compelled to help the group escape their pursuer and find their promised land.

As “The People Eater” approaches, the wives comment that he is “coming to count the cost.” An accountant, he keeps a ledger and is seeking compensation for the debts accrued by the rebels. It is the wives, however, who will soon come to learn it is they who will be counting the cost of renouncing their former existence. Having put their hand to the plow, there will be no turning back. The cost for the heart-hardened Immortan will also be high. When Immortan Joe and his cohorts catch up to the rig and threaten to put an end to the wives’ exodus, the violence throws one of the pregnant wives from the rig and beneath the wheels of Immortan Joe’s vehicle. In a moment drawing parallels to Pharaoh, the heart-hardened emperor suffers the loss of a son by the consequence of his own stubborn pride.

Sojourn

Like the biblical Exodus, the Fury Road journey transitions from the fleeing of

captivity to a prolonged Sojourn towards a new land of hope and flourishing. The Sojourn quickly becomes a desert wandering wrought with struggle, doubt, and murmuring. One of the wives, disenfranchised with the new existence far from home, desires to return to the comforts of her former captivity. She says, “The stupid green place. We don’t even know where to find it.” Another wife similarly wishes to return to her former captivity saying, “We were protected. He gave us the high life. What’s wrong with that?” This wife is told, “Wring your hands!” This is perhaps a reference to Isaiah 8:9 (MSG) which says, “Listen all of you, far and near. Prepare for the worst and wring your hands. Yes, prepare for the worst and wring your hands! Plan and plot all you want – nothing will come of it. All your talk is mere talk, empty words, because when all is said and done, the last word is Immanuel – God-With-Us.” This suggests that this wife should not turn back in the face of trial. Difficult as the pursuit of promised hope may be, recommitment to faithfully following the savior to the promised green land is the better way. Again playing into the role of the Moses figure, Furiosa instructs the grumbling followers, “Out here everything hurts,” but if “you want to get through this then do what I say.” Furiosa’s call to “follow me” will bring the company salvation through obedient faith in the savior figure’s commands.

The plot twists when the group meets the “tribe of many mothers.” These former inhabitants of the green land have been relegated to an existence as desert nomads. The mothers inform the seekers that the green land has been laid waste, and is now an uninhabitable land of desolation. In this time of “already but not yet,” the group finds themselves free, the recipients of new life, but wandering from a home.

Redemption and Life through Sacrifice

The travelling band soon comes to find that the land of their future promise is actually the land from which they fled. The former locus of their suffering will become their land of hope fulfilled. Found hiding on the rig is the war boy, Nux, who after failing in his aspirations for “shine” through “karmakrazee” mission, has experienced a real disenfranchisement with his former calling. Nux says he should be “McFeasting with the Immorta,” which sounds more like a drive-thru value meal than a holy communion. This McFeasting reflects the cheapness of the empty promises of false religion. One of the wives, in a moment of rare compassion in a brutalized wasteland, replies to Nux’s disappointment over his failure to enter the gates of Valhalla, saying, “I’d say it was your manifest destiny not to.” It is the compassion and mercy of this wife that brings the softening of Nux’s heart. What is seen is that this warrior is not beyond the reach of conversion, but merely a lost soul who has never experienced real love. The wife, in an act counterintuitive to *Fury Road*, does not return evil with evil, but instead overcomes evil with love.

In an overtly philosophical moment, while taking inventory of the weaponry, the women discuss the guns in an oddly sexual way. In contrast to the love and life associated with righteous sex, they refer to the guns in a phallic sense in which they shoot “antiseed.” Juxtaposed to the organ that shoots a seed of life, the gun is an organ that shoots seeds of death. “Plant one and watch the thing die,” one wife says. Later, while residing amongst the clan of mothers, this theme is revisited and the message is clarified. One of the mothers shows her collection of plant seeds from the green land. The mother explains that she plants the seeds when she finds soil that might be capable of supporting life. When people become seed planters, there becomes no need to kill because the harvest becomes abundant. Where the wives had an earlier discussion about bullets being seeds of death, here a message is communicated that

scattering seeds of life brings healing and chokes out evil. Christ likewise taught that the sword brings death, but the gospel of the Kingdom is the seed of life. In the gospel of Matthew, the sower scatters seed such that a harvest of life would be abundant. This harvest is plentiful but the laborers are unfortunately few. With these two scenes director George Miller clearly argues that violence is not the way to flourishing, but that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword. Prosperity is instead found in planting seeds of life. When a person seeks the prosperity of those around her, amidst their prosperity she too shall prosper.

The road back to the citadel is fraught with strife, but even as the crew begins to suffer losses at the hands of the enemy their joy grows. The more each gives to the group mission of redemption, the more they truly begin to live. As they lose their lives they begin to find life. Progressively each loses the identifying marks of the past (the muzzle, engine grease, pasty grey skin tone), and each begins to show more outward signs of their inner glow. Their hardened expressions become warm smiles and their skin tones warm. By the end of the movie even the pasty grey war boy is beginning to look like a full-life.

In a high-throttled fury road battle chase back to the citadel, many of the crew lose their lives. Most notably, Nux stays behind to drive the rig as the others climb aboard the lead car. In the climax scene, Nux lovingly sacrifices his own life for the life of his friends, flipping the rig to effectively jam the pass and disallow the pursuing enemy to give chase. As he does this, the war boy locks eyes with the red-headed wife whose compassion overcame his evil, and he mouths the words, “Witness me.” In this moment, the fruit of his conversion blooms. His desire to die furiously for the false and murderous cause of Immortan Joe, is now transformed into a perfect peace in selfless sacrifice for the life of his friends. Having been severely wounded, Furiosa simultaneously lies lifeless, losing massive amounts of blood. In an

impromptu blood transfusion, Max literally saves her by his blood. The sacrifice of Nux, and the universal blood bag's transfusion, crudely combine to reflect the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life on the cross, and poured out His blood for many to provide salvation from enslavement to sin and eternal life in Him.

Arriving back at the citadel, in a moment reminiscent of Colossians 2:14, Max declares victory over evil and death, parading the dead body of Immortan Joe on the hood of his own truck. The rulers and authorities are disarmed and put to shame. The triumphant heroes are hoisted on a lift, ascended to the throne above, and the water stores are cut loose giving life back to the people. His work complete, Max returns to the place from whence he came.

At the conclusion of *Mad Max*, the captor, oppressor, and ambassador of death is defeated. The water of life rains down from above. The poor and oppressed are blessed, and the captives are set free. The ruling class is destroyed and put to shame. A new existence is established in which the dividing walls of the social caste system are pulverized. The resources are abundant and freely distributed, and humanity is restored to fullness of life by the affirmation of equal dignity for all.

Conclusion

Present in the midst of this high-throttle, heavy metal, shoot 'em up is an unassuming post-fall redemption narrative laden with theological themes that portray collaborating savior types leading a chosen group in a good versus evil sojourn to redeem humanity by freeing the oppressed and bringing about a new world of flourishing. Some of these connections may seem less than obvious. The film's director, however, affirms that his writing samples liberally from ancient "mythologies" and religious themes, and this suffices to say that these themes are worthy of investigation. While eschewing the inclusion of a director's commentary, and having yet to

be completely forthcoming with details about the film's intended message, George Miller instructs, "The audience tell[s] you what your film is."² The themes of false worship, idolatry, salvation, desert wandering, promised-land, salvation by blood, and pouring forth life-giving waters are uniformly prominent in the Bible. Given the director's freedom to interpret the film's meaning, I contend that *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a story of fall, exodus, sojourn, and redemption in a post-apocalyptic wasteland.

²"'Mad Max' Director George Miller: The Audience Tells You 'What Your Film Is'" NPR. February 8, 2016. Accessed April 01, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/2016/02/08/465989808/mad-max-director-george-miller-the-audience-tells-you-what-your-film-is>.