MARK B. STEPHENS

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Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 307

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The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of my PhD thesis, which was submitted in April 2009 to the Department of Ancient History of Macquarie University. To begin with, I would like to express my profound thanks to my two supervisors, Dr Chris Forbes and Rev. Dr Paul Barnett. My thanks to Chris extend further back than simply this thesis, for it was Chris' influence (along with other Macquarie lecturers) who helped convince a young philosopher to ultimately ply his academic trade in the field of history. To Paul, my hearty thanks is borne out of the enormous respect I have for one who is so clearly a great scholar, but who is astonishingly humble at the same time. I am also grateful to my examiners, Dr Craig Keener, Professor Barbara Rossing, and Ian Boxall, all of whom provided me with useful feedback, and a great deal of encouragement. Additionally, I am indebted to the editor of this series, Prof Dr. Jörg Frey, for accepting this thesis, and to Dr Henning Ziebritzki and the whole team at Mohr Siebeck (in particular, Matthias Spitzner), who have helped shepherd the manuscript towards publication.

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My greatest source of encouragement for my endeavours has always been my family and my close friends. My Mum and Dad have never begrudged the fact that their youngest son, who first showed an interest in economics, and then psychology, eventually ended up being a historian, with all the monetary disadvantages that entails. They have always wanted me to be the best I can be at whatever I would like to do. So here is my best, Mum and Dad, at least for now.

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To my three children, Amelia, Joe, and Jenna, you have always been a reminder that there is more to life than academic degrees and impressive credentials. I can't imagine life without you. I don't suspect you will ever read this book, and that doesn't really matter, so long as you continue to grant me the joy of reading to you before bed each night.

Finally, the person who I treasure most on this earth is my beautiful wife Linda. During the production of this work (both the original dissertation and this book), Linda gave birth to all three of our children, whilst I struggled to bring one PhD to birth. Linda has always encouraged me to chase my dream, even though that has meant profound sacrifices on her part. Now, nearly a decade on from when I started, with multiple changes in location, I am left with an overwhelming sense of gratitude for a woman I don't deserve. If this thesis is for anyone, it's for her.

Soli Deo Gloria

10th June 2011 Mark B. Stephens

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning and function of "new creation" within the book of Revelation. To begin with, we must define some of the key terms contained within this purpose statement. With regards to the term *new creation*, we intend it to refer to Revelation's peculiar constellation of images that relate to the subject of cosmic eschatology, with a particular focus on the place of the nonhuman material order in its eschatological scenario.[1] Under the rubric of *meaning* we primarily intend to investigate the issue of continuity and discontinuity between this present creation and the new creation which is to come. That is to say, with regard

[1] It is important to note that Revelation does not actually use the term "new creation" in its text. Instead it employs a range of images such as a new heaven (Rev 21:1), a new earth (Rev 21:1), a new Jerusalem (Rev 3:12; 21:2, 9–27), a new song which is voiced by every creature (Rev 5:13), a new Eden (Rev 22:1–5) etc. However, our use of the term "new creation" reflects common scholarly parlance in which the term functions as a conceptual label to collate a range of cosmic eschatological images, not only within early Christian texts, but also in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism (see, for example, the comment of Matthew Black: "Although the idea of a New Creation has a classic place in Jewish apocalyptic literature, the actual expression itself is extremely rare." ["New Creation in 1 Enoch," in *Creation, Christ and Culture: Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance* {ed. R. W. A. McKinney; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976}, 13]). Intriguingly, when the expression "new creation," or something similar to it, does occasionally appear in Second Temple Judaism (*1 En.* 72:1; 1QS IV, 22ff; *Jub.* 1:29; 4:26; *2 Bar.* 44:12) or within early Christianity (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), it does not always have connotations of cosmic eschatology. Within both the Qumran literature (1QS IV, 22ff), and the two Pauline texts cited above (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), it may well be that "new creation" discourse is applied to more anthropological concerns (for a provocative discussion of the anthropological orientation of Paul's "new creation" language, see Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul's Letters and Thought* [SNTSMS 119; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002]; for an alternative perspective on Paul's language, which prioritises cosmic eschatology, see Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996], 19–21). Despite this potential for non-cosmological reference, the common use of the label "new creation" as a broad rubric for cosmic eschatology will continue to be adopted for this study.

to the nonhuman material world, does John the Seer[2] envisage an eschatological annihilation of the cosmos, and its replacement with something else, or does he instead envisage an eschatological renewal of the present cosmos, which despite its significant experience of transformation, stands in some kind of material continuity with the present order of things.

In framing the question in this manner, one needs to immediately acknowledge that Revelation was not written to address such concerns. It neither intends to, nor does it provide, a systematic set of answers to our various eschatological questions. On the contrary, the book of Revelation is a highly strategic piece of pastoral and polemical discourse, designed to shape attitudes, elicit feelings and call its audience to profound behavioural commitments.[3] To phrase things in terms of George Caird's taxonomy of linguistic usage, Revelation's language is not only informative, but also performative, expressive and cohesive.[4] Yet another way of expressing this would be to say that Revelation is a text with a rhetorical agenda, meaning that it possesses a persuasive intent that is designed to sway the reader to adopt its perspective on the world.

Consequently, the questions we are putting to the text of Revelation cannot merely be limited to the meaning of new creation alone, but must also extend to an examination of the pragmatic *function* of new creation discourse within the broader rhetorical strategy of Revelation. By function, we intend such things as rhetorical function, literary function and social function, all of which overlap in a myriad of ways, and all of which relate to the text's goals as a piece of strategic discourse. Yet this combined analysis of both *meaning* and *function* is ultimately designed to be complementary and mutually beneficial. By understanding the way that new creation discourse functions within John's broader argument, we gain greater insight into the underlying beliefs, values, and worldview which our author has towards the present material world.[5]

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[2] By referring to the author of Revelation as John the Seer, we do not attempt to engage the issue of who actually authored Revelation. John is the name given to us by the text itself (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8), and therefore we follow its convention. For more on authorship see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5* (WBC 52A; Dallas: Word, 1997), xlvii–lvi.

[3] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 144.

[4] For this taxonomy of language, see George B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 7–36.

[5] James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 172–173. Cf. Lauri Thurén's comments: "When the goal is to reconstruct any ideological or theological systems or patterns, these must be considered in their contexts – not only their historical, but especially their argumentative contexts" (Lauri Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis* [JSNTSup 144; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 31).

Broadly speaking, what follows in this work is an attempt to critically reconstruct the eschatological outlook of one early Christian author. Inevitably, such an historical-critical investigation may well have potential implications for other disciplines, such as New Testament theology, theological ethics, and even environmental ethics. Despite the inherent attractions of extending our analysis into those domains, our analysis will be confined to elucidating the cosmic eschatological outlook of Revelation as a first-century text. It remains for others to explore how the insights proffered here might prove profitable in other disciplines.

1.2 Previous Approaches to Questions of Continuity

The kinds of questions we are asking here, in particular those pertaining to material continuity, can hardly be construed as new. Throughout previous generations of scholarship such questions have received a wide range of answers, many of which conflict in substantial measure. For some, the very fact that Revelation can be subsumed within the literary genre of apocalypse logically entailed that its eschatology must be read in terms of cosmic dissolution and annihilation.[6] Such judgements explicitly relied upon presupposed generic conventions concerning the inherent "pessimism" of apocalyptic literature, a pessimism which included the abandoning of all hope for the existing material world.[7] Yet other biblical scholars, in partic-

[6] See Leon M. Morris, *Revelation* (2d edn; TNTC 20; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1987), 236; Robert H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 2:145.

[7] Perhaps pride of place should here go to Robert H. Charles, who confidently states that "the older doctrine in the O.T. was the eternity of the present order of things. This was the received view down to the second century B.C. From the 1st century B.C. onward in Judaism and Christianity, the transitoriness of the present heaven and earth was *universally accepted*." (*The Revelation of St. John*, 2:193). In this Charles reflects a perspective which dominated twentieth century scholarship. So, for example, Philip Vielhauer regarded it as axiomatic that apocalyptic authors believed "there is no continuity" between present and future worlds ("Introduction: Apocalypses and Related Subjects," in *New Testament Apocrypha* [ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; trans. E. Best et al.; 2 vols; London: Lutterworth, 1965], 2:588). Rudolf Bultmann (*The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology* [New York: Harper, 1957], 30) expressed similar sentiments: "The end is not the completion of history but its breaking off, it is, so to speak, the death of the world due to its age. The old world will be replaced by a new creation, and there is no continuity between the two Aeons". William R. Murdock ("History and Revelation in Jewish Apocalyptic," *Int* 21 [1967]: 175) agreed that "there was no essential connection between the two aeons nor between the future aeon and the eschaton," whilst in the 1970's, Leon Morris (*Apocalyptic* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 50) summed up his perspective on apocalyptic as "this present world is full of evil and hopeless, the apoca-

ular those belonging to the conservative Reformed tradition, were equally strident that Revelation did articulate a hope of material continuity between the present and the eschatological future.[8] This perspective was often argued for on the basis of theological and canonical concerns, as part of a wider effort to harmonise and synthesise the eschatology of Revelation with broader dogmatic formulations.[9] A third way of engaging these questions was found in those scholars who chose to remain highly cautious in their judgements, advocating a position of ambivalence towards the issue, in effect arguing that whilst either option (replacement or renewal) might be true, the question was of little consequence to John's eschatological scenario.[10]

Within the recent spate of commentaries devoted to Revelation, the same diversity of answers persists. Indeed, a rudimentary sample demonstrates that this issue continues to be locked in a stalemate, with no clear consensus developing, and roughly even proportions of scholars simply choosing one position over another, often without any extended argumentation.[11] Generally speaking, the topic is engaged only briefly, being the subject of but a few parenthetical remarks, or at best an excursus.

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lypticists abandoned it." In this respect, apocalyptic was often set over against its putative "other," namely the classical prophetic traditions of Israel, which articulated a future earthly hope which stood in continuity with the present.

[8] Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* ([S.I.]: C.C. Cook, 1900; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987), 483–492; Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274–287.

[9] Of course, there were other conservative Protestant traditions, such as classical dispensationalism, which tended in the other direction, arguing for discontinuity as part of their broader schematic of premillennialism (see John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1966], 311).

[10] See Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction With a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 750; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1974), 306–307 (although Beasley-Murray expresses preference for the idea of discontinuity).

[11] In the last twenty years, commentaries stressing ideas of transformation and renewal have included M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 220; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation* (SP 16; Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1993), 207; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (BNTC 18; London: Hendrickson, 2006), 293. Those stressing destruction include Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (trans. John E. Alsup; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 231, 235; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 440; Heinz Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1997), 451–52; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1117–20; Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (The New Testament in Context; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), 404, 406–408. Those who appear to equivocate on the issue include Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the*

Yet even in those cases where a specific monograph or article is devoted to the issue, the presence of radically differing conclusions remains apparent. As a way of illustrating this, we will here provide a select overview of five recent engagements with the topic, all of which have appeared in the last two decades or so.

1.3 Five Recent Engagements with the Topic

1.3.1 Anton Vögtle (1985)

In 1985, Anton Vögtle published an article titled "'Dann sah ich einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde...' (Apk 21,1): Zur kosmischen Dimension neutestamentlicher Eschatologie," in a *Festschrift* for Werner Kümmel.[12] This contribution was itself a further expansion of Vögtle's earlier monograph, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos*, which had been published in 1970.[13] In his earlier work, Vögtle applied a Bultmannian hermeneutic to the question of cosmic redemption, concluding that the New Testament did not speak authoritatively to the issue. Vögtle's 1985 article reflects a conscious attempt to return to the issue of cosmic eschatology, a return which is partly fuelled by the growing sense of ecological crisis that was becoming apparent in the 1970's and 80's.[14] To this challenge, Vögtle offers a twofold response.

First, he argues that passages such as 6:12–17 and 20:11 unequivocally testify to a belief in the real destruction of the physical universe. For Vögtle the particular sequence of events depicted in 20:11–21:1, with its correlated account of *Ortlosigkeit* ("placelessness") for the present earth and heaven (20:11), followed by the appearance of a new (καινὸν) heaven and earth (21:1a), in which the sea is no more (οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι; 21:1c), can only be read as descriptive of the "Totaluntergang des bestehenden Kosmos."[15]

Second, Vögtle does not believe that cosmic destruction is a primary emphasis of John's new creation vision, and therefore Revelation's value

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Greek Text (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1040; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 485.

[12] Anton Vögtle, "'Dann sah ich einen neuen Himmel und neue Erde…' (Apk 21,1): Zur kosmischen Dimension neutestamentlicher Eschatologie," in *Glaube und Eschatologie: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel zum 80 Geburtstag* (ed. Erich Grässer et al.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 303–333.

[13] Anton Vögtle, *Das Neue Testament und die Zukunft des Kosmos* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verl., 1970).

[14] Vögtle, "Dann sah ich," 303.

[15] Vögtle, "Dann sah ich," 305.

as a source for environmental ethics is limited. Instead, Vögtle propounds a "konsequente sinnbildliche Deutung," in which the new creation vision of chapters 21 and 22 is primarily focussed on the perfected reality of relationship between God and his people, as God comes to live amongst the "Heilsgemeinde."[16]

1.3.2 Jürgen Roloff (1990)

Jürgen Roloff, in a 1990 paper entitled "Neuschöpfung in der Offenbarung des Johannes," agrees with Vögtle that "Die Spitze der Neuschöpfungsaussagen ist ekklesiologisch bestimmt."[17] Nevertheless, Roloff is also adamant that the cosmological vision presented within Revelation admits of no continuity between the present and the future, and therefore describes an absolutely new beginning.[18] Amongst other reasons, Roloff particularly argues that John's use of the adjective καινός is determinative for interpretation, because eschatological usage of this adjective in the New Testament always implies a strong sense of discontinuity with the present world.[19]

1.3.3 David M. Russell (1996)

In 1996 David M. Russell published his work, *The "New Heavens and New Earth": Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, a very minor revision of his 1991 doctoral dissertation. The burden of Russell's study was to give a comprehensive examination of "the apocalyptic perspective of creation and its ultimate redemption,"[20] as it was represented in traditions from the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, and the New Testament. Within the context of this larger survey, Russell devotes but a mere thirteen pages to a consideration of Revelation. Nevertheless, within this small frame, Russell stridently argues that the new creation envisaged in Revelation "will surely retain the constituent elements of the original creation."[21] For Russell, three considerations are determinative for his perspective. First, the cosmic hope of Revelation is

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[16] Vögtle, "Dann sah ich," 320-333.

[17] Jürgen Roloff, "Neuschöpfung in der Offenbarung des Johannes," in *Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung* (ed. I. Baldermann et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 138.

[18] Roloff, "Neuschöpfung," 125. This judgement is confirmed in Roloff's 1993 commentary, *The Revelation of John*, 235.

[19] Roloff, "Neuschöpfung," 125.

[20] David M. Russell, *The "New Heavens and New Earth": Hope for the Creation in Jewish Apocalyptic and the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Apocalyptic Literature 1; Philadelphia: Visionary, 1996), i.

[21] Russell, *"New Heavens and New Earth,"* 209.

primarily expressed in terms of negation, implying that the future world is to be conceived as a material order whose discontinuity with the present is primarily located in the fact that evil, death and suffering do not persist. Second, the language of Rev 21:5, in which the divine voice declares that he is making "all things new", implies the notion of renewal. Third, the depiction of the new age in a "this-worldly" manner further suggests notions of continuity.[22]

1.3.4 Gale Z. Heide (1997)

Gale Z. Heide's 1997 article, "What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," sets out to examine the question of whether the concept of a "new heavens and new earth" in two early Christian texts is to be regarded as a creation *ex nihilo*.[23] Like Vögtle before him, Heide is partly motivated by ethical concerns of environmental stewardship, and the way that eschatological texts often impinge upon such questions.[24] However, Heide reaches vastly different conclusions to those of Vögtle. With regard to Revelation, Heide argues that its stark depiction of the earth fleeing from the presence of God (20:11) is primarily to be taken as a theological metaphor, designed to emphasise the comprehensive nature of divine judgement.[25] Furthermore, the language of 21:1, with its crucial verb ἀπέρχομαι (lit. "to go away, depart"), is regarded by Heide as phenomenological language, which is properly understood as "John .... conveying what he sees and what he does not see."[26] Hence, John's point is not to make metaphysical statements as regards the eternity (or otherwise) of matter, but is simply the language of visionary description. Consequently, Heide understands Revelation to be articulating a cosmic hope in rich metaphorical language, in which God will "finally correct every deviation from his original creation."[27]

1.3.5 Edward M. Adams (2007)

The most recent monograph specifically addressing our topic is Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New*

[22] Russell, *The "New Heavens and New Earth,"* 208-209.

[23] Gale Z. Heide, "What is New About the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *JETS* 40 (1997): 38.

[24] Heide, "What is New," 39–40.

[25] Heide, "What is New," 41–42.

[26] Heide, "What is New," 43.

[27] Heide, "What is New," 45.

Testament and its World.[28] Adams' monograph aims at examining the language of cosmic catastrophe in the New Testament, to ascertain whether such language indicates the idea of "real" physical catastrophe.[29] In particular, Adams seeks to critique the work of N. T. Wright, whose metaphorical approach to apocalyptic imagery effectively precludes interpreting "catastrophic" language as referring to real cosmic disturbances.[30] Adams' own conclusions are that in "the key New Testament passages employing this language, a catastrophe of cosmic dimensions (within an ancient cosmological framework) is genuinely in view."[31] Adams' critique of Wright is fueled by a comprehensive re-examination of various New Testament texts, as well as comparative material from the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. Importantly, Adams extends the range of his comparisons to include perspectives from Greco-Roman literature, in particular the insights of Stoic eschatology, which Adams thinks exercised an important influence on the eschatological scenarios of the New Testament. Within the larger concerns of this monograph Adams gives over one chapter to the book of Revelation. In a similar fashion to Vögtle, Adams regards the wording of 20:11 and 21:1 as thoroughly determinative for all considerations on this topic. According to Adams, these verses can only be understood as referring to the dissolution of creation back into a chaotic state, from which a new act of creation then takes place.[32]

1.4 Reasons for This Study

As the above outline demonstrates, there is a clear lack of consensus over this issue, and this fact alone invites further consideration of the topic. But in addition to this, there are two additional reasons for reengaging the debate.

First, there is a clear need for a holistic analysis of the topic, in which the theme of new creation is examined as it appears throughout the entirety of Revelation. It is frequently the case, even within detailed monographs and articles, that individual passages from Revelation are simply isolated

[28] Edward M. Adams, *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World* (LNTS 347; London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[29] Adams, *The Stars Will Fall*, 1.

[30] For an introduction to Wright's views, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 280-286, 297–99.

[31] Adams, *The Stars Will Fall*, 253. It is important to note that Adams recognises another strand within New Testament eschatology, represented in Romans 8:18–25, in which the cosmic future is represented in terms of non-destructive transformation (*The Stars Will Fall*, 257).

[32] Adams, *The Stars Will Fall*, 238–239.

and privileged, with scant regard being paid to countervailing passages which may challenge an "easy" conclusion. Our aim is to provide a satisfying and comprehensive engagement with Revelation as a whole.

Second, there is a need to re-examine the eschatological perspectives of Revelation in light of the revised paradigms of apocalyptic literature which have begun to emerge since the 1970's. To cite but one example, the presupposed generic convention that apocalypses necessarily manifest an other-worldly, materially-discontinuous eschatology simply cannot be assumed any longer.[33]

1.5 The Structure of Our Investigation

Before we embark upon our analysis, it is crucial that we outline the broad structure of our investigation, and the methodological approaches which underlie it. To begin with, our study will commence with historical concerns, with three chapters devoted to situating John's new creation discourse within its broader historical context. The reasoning behind such an historical approach is simple: John was not the first writer in antiquity to speak of new creation. Consequently, if we seek to understand John's perspective, it is imperative that we survey various antecedent traditions which may have served as potential backgrounds for his thought. For our purposes, there are three broad clusters of antecedent traditions which can be profitably consulted.

First of all, John's great indebtedness to the Hebrew Bible is almost universally acknowledged, as any number of "intertextual" investigations over the last two decades bears witness.[34] Although substantial debate re-

[33] See George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Where is the Place of Eschatological Blessing?," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone* (ed. E. G. Chazon et al.; JSJSup 89; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 53–71.

[34] As a representative sample, one could consult Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development* (JSNTSup 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); Beale, *Revelation*, 76–99; Steve Moyise, "The Language of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse," *JSNT* 76 (1999): 97–113; Paul B. Decock, "The Scriptures in the Book of Revelation," *Neot* 33 (1999): 373–410; Ian Paul, "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (ed. S. Moyise; JSNTSup 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 256–276; David A. deSilva, "Final Topics: The Rhetorical Functions of Intertexture in Revelation 14:14–16:21," in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament* (ed. D. F. Watson; SBLSymS 14; Atlanta: SBL, 2002), 215–241; David Mathewson, "Assessing Old Testament Allusions in the book of Revelation," *EQ* 75 (2003): 311–325; idem, *A New Heaven and A New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21:1–22:5* (JSNTSup 238; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

mains over John's hermeneutical stance towards the Hebrew Bible,[35] scholarship is agreed that John draws upon the scriptures of Israel as a fundamental resource for his imagery, style, and theology. Therefore, our first chapter will be given over to an examination of new creation traditions within the Hebrew Bible.

Second, the formal and conceptual affinities between Revelation and certain types of literature within Second Temple Judaism demand the inclusion of a separate chapter, one in which John's new creation discourse is situated within the diverse traditions of Second Temple Jewish apocalyptic and oracular writing.[36] In this section, a select sample of texts will be explored, in particular for the way they depict the present material creation and its role in their eschatological scenarios.

Third, John's apocalyptic discourse on new creation is itself part of a broader early Christian discourse on the topic, embedded as it is within a range of literary types and genres, including narratives, letters, and in our case, an apocalypse. Although we do not seek to give here a comprehensive account of early Christian attitudes to the eschatological future of the earth, it is important we provide some brief reflections on how other early Christians configured the issue. For the sake of brevity, our survey will be restricted to a sample of two contrasting traditions, Romans 8:19–22 and 2 Peter 3:5–13, both of which provide important illumination for our own study.

Together, these opening three chapters will provide the historical backdrop against which we can situate John's apocalyptic discourse. If we were to neglect consideration of this background, we would lack the necessary literary and cultural competence to understand the various assumptions, allusions, social conventions, and linguistic codes that are represented in our primary text.[37] It is important to note, however, that we do not see his-

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[35] For the hermeneutical debate over John's appropriation of the Old Testament, see the exchange between Jon Paulien, Steve Moyise and Gregory Beale: Jon Paulien, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertextuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 5–22; Gregory K. Beale, "A Response to Jon Paulien on the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *AUSS* 39 (2001): 23–33; Steve Moyise, "Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures?," *AUSS* 40 (2002): 3–21.

[36] For a summary of how Revelation uses the specific literary forms and theological traditions of Jewish apocalyptic, see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 6-9.

[37] This way of framing the importance of historical background for our competence as a reader draws inspiration from James L. Resseguie's discussion of the "reader" in *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John's Apocalypse* (Biblical Interpretation Series 32; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 29–30. Resseguie's own conception of the reader involves a creative synthesis of elements from various proposals, such as those of Wolf-

torical context as utterly determinative for interpretation. As our investigation moves forward, part of our analysis will inevitably be given over to examining how John has variously adopted, recontextualised, transformed and rejected both earlier and contemporaneous new creation traditions.[38] In other words, John does not stand as a passive figure within the tradition. Nevertheless, the historical portion of our analysis is vital to the success of our enterprise.

Having surveyed the various antecedent traditions which serve as background to our text, the remaining two chapters of our investigation will then move to an intensive study of new creation discourse throughout the entirety of Revelation. In contrast to a great many studies of this topic, our investigation will not be narrowly limited to an exegesis of Revelation 21:1–22:5. Instead, we will seek to outline how the theme of new creation is employed throughout the overall composition, tracing its many and varied appearances in the ongoing vision-narrative.[39] Edith Humphrey, in her work on feminine imagery in Revelation, has spoken eloquently about this process of tracing a theme or image:

> Obviously, the Apocalypse is a complex book, and the city/women images are only one, or perhaps, two threads in the fabric. The purpose of this study is to follow this thread and to use it to consider the entire sweep of the Apocalypse.[40]

A similar kind of holistic approach governs our own investigation, in that we seek to follow the thread of new creation throughout the entire work, to engage in what Stanley P. Saunders would call "an integral reading."[41] As David L. Barr has remarked, "whereas our concern is to divide the book,

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gang Iser and Peter Rabinowitz. Cf. also the comments of Mathewson on the "model reader" in *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 31–32.

[38] Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 25. For a penetrating analysis of the various ways a later text appropriates language from earlier texts see Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 40–70.

[39] Of particular importance here will be a strong emphasis on the eschatological significance of chapters 4 and 5, which are often undervalued in considerations of this topic.

[40] Edith Humphrey, "A Tale of Two Cities and (At Least) Three Women: Transformation, Continuity, and Contrast in the Apocalypse," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. D. L. Barr; Resources for Biblical Study 44; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 82.

[41] Stanley P. Saunders, "Revelation and Resistance: Narrative and Worship in John's Apocalypse," in *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching: Reuniting New Testament Interpretation and Proclamation* (ed. J. B. Green and M. Pasquarello III; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 122. For a similar kind of approach, but in this case applied to the motif of the New Jerusalem, see Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of its Background in Jewish Tradition* (WUNT 129; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 239.

John's concern was to bind it together."[42] Too many studies of new creation within Revelation ignore the prefatory remarks John has already made about the topic *prior to chapter 21*. In his own illuminating study of the millennium in Revelation, J. Webb Mealy has drawn our attention to the highly self-referential and contextual character of Revelation. As Mealy states:

> In the past, commentators have most often tended to approach the idea of "context" in a textually localised way, in spite of the fact that attention has been drawn to the extensive network of cross-references and allusions that affects the interpretation of virtually every passage in Revelation. That is, *context in Revelation consists of a system of references that progressively build up hermeneutical precedents in the text, precedents that precondition the meaning of each new passage in highly significant ways.* It is thus only by placing passages and their elements correctly in the network of such precedents that they can be effectively interpreted.[43]

Two chapters are required in order for us to fulfil the demands of a "holistic" reading of new creation in Revelation. In the first chapter, we will address a number of introductory issues, ranging from social and historical context all the way through to Revelation's literary structure. In the second chapter, we will engage in exegesis proper of a range of significant passages, climaxing with a consideration of Revelation 21:1–22:5. Our methodological approach will primarily revolve around a traditional historical-critical exegesis of the text.[44] However, our analysis will also be augmented and enhanced through the incorporation of two newer methodologies, namely rhetorical criticism and narrative criticism. To a brief elaboration of these methods, and their applicability to our task, we now turn.

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[42] David L. Barr, "The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World," *Int* 38 (1984): 43. Stephen D. O'Leary makes the intriguing suggestion that Revelation itself contains an implicit warning against partitive analyses in that its injunction to hearers to neither add or take away from its words (22:18–19) is a caution "against interpretations that [ignore] portions of the text" ("A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *QJS* 79 [1993]: 389).

[43] J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgement in Revelation 20* (JSNTSup 70; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 13 (emphasis mine). Cf. Bauckham, *Theology*, 18. See also Alan Garrow's discussion of co-textual context, in which subsequent portions of text are guided in their interpretation by the portions of text which have already been received (*Revelation* [New Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 1997], 3), or Stephen Pattemore's comment that the cognitive environment of the work is shaped by earlier chapters ("How Green is your Bible? Ecology and the End of the World in Translation," *BT* 58 [2007]: 3).

[44] For a basic overview of historical criticism, see Stephen Barton, "Historical Criticism and Social Scientific Perspectives in New Testament Study," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (ed. J. B. Green; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 61–67.

1.5.1 Rhetorical Criticism and Revelation

Critical to an integral reading of Revelation is attention to its rhetorical dimensions, a feature which we have already alluded to in our opening remarks. To study the rhetoric of Revelation means to consider both the work as a whole, and the elements found within it, in light of its *overall persuasive strategy*. The assumption which is operative here is that "apocalyptic texts are acts of persuasion,"[45] designed not only to inform the reader, but also to affect the audience's beliefs, emotions, dispositions and behaviours.[46] To study a text rhetorically is to study the ways and means it employs to win over its hearers to its view of the world and its assessment of a correct response to that world.[47] Thus, rhetorical analysis privileges the functional dimensions of discourse, examining the ways that a discourse *does* something to a reader. On this point, Allen Callahan's summation of the impact of Revelation is particularly apt:

> The auditors who came together to hear the Apocalypse were summoned to a transformative experience. Those first ancient auditors of the Apocalypse came together not merely to be informed, but to be transformed, to undergo a collective change in consciousness, an aspiration that makes modern individual and group reading practices trivial by comparison, with the possible exception of the reading of wills. Reading the Apocalypse aloud, and hearing the Apocalypse read aloud, was effectual: through exhortations and exclamations, threats and thunder, the reading of the Apocalypse moved its hearers, effected them; the text did something to them.[48]

Within the last two decades, the discipline of rhetorical criticism has exploded in popularity, particularly as it applies to the epistolary discourse of Paul. At the same time a substantial debate has developed over precisely what is meant by "rhetorical criticism," and what methods should be employed in properly analysing a text's rhetorical power. Of particular concern has been the legitimacy of employing the formal categories of classi-

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[45] Greg Carey, "Introduction: Apocalyptic Discourse, Apocalyptic Rhetoric," in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. G. Carey & L. Gregory Bloomquist; St Louis: Chalice, 1999), 15.

[46] Carey, "Introduction," 11; Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 144.

[47] David A. deSilva, "The Persuasive Strategy of the Apocalypse: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6–13," *SBL Seminar Papers 1998* (2 vols.; SBLSP 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 2:785. Other definitions of rhetoric could also include that of Aristotle: "the faculty of discovering in each case the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever" (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.1), or that of George A. Kennedy, "Rhetoric is that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purposes" (*New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*, [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984], 3).

[48] Allen D. Callahan, "The Language of Apocalypse," *HTR* 88 (1995): 460. See also David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 1998), 175.

cal (Greco-Roman) rhetoric to New Testament texts, a practice which has been enthusiastically endorsed by many, yet derided by some.[49] Of all the texts located within the New Testament corpus, Revelation in particular "defies strict rhetorical analysis in terms of appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos, or in terms of the classical division of an oration into four or five parts."[50] Indeed, John's "narrative demonstration" of the future is a type of rhetorical strategy which explicitly lies beyond the considerations of rhetorical theorists such as Aristotle, for he regarded it as impossible to "narrate things to come" (*Rhet*. 3.16.11).[51] Nevertheless, it remains the case that Revelation *is* a piece of argumentative discourse, strategically designed to both affect and effect, and on this basis we may properly term it "rhetorical."[52] Broadly speaking, we are in agreement with Greg Carey,

[49] The classic text on this is Kennedy's *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*. For other volumes citing a range of perspectives on the application of rhetorical theory, both positive and negative, see Duane F. Watson, ed., *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy,* (JSNTSup 50; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, eds., *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht, eds., *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, (JSNTSup 146; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); Philip H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle* (SNTSMS 101; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stanley E. Porter, et al., eds., *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (JSNTSup 195; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); Carl Joachim Classen, *Rhetorical Criticism of the New Testament*, (Boston: Brill, 2002).

[50] David A. deSilva, "Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 71 (1998): 79. Despite these difficulties, numerous attempts have been made to specifically classify Revelation's genre of rhetoric using the classical categories of deliberative, epideictic and forensic rhetoric. For deliberative, see John T. Kirby, "The Rhetorical Situations of Revelation 1-3," *NTS* 34 (1988): 200; for epideictic see Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon: Mercer, 1998), 127; for forensic see Ben Witherington, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has argued for the interpenetrating presence of all three (*Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 26). Yet most of these scholars concede that John was by no means a trained rhetorician, at least in the classical sense, nor even that he was consciously trying to emulate rhetorical models, although some scholars have gone so far as to argue that John was intimately acquainted with the principles of ancient rhetoric (See Manfred Diefenbach, "Die "Offenbarung des Johannes" offenbart, dass der Seher Johannes die antike Rhetoriklehre kennt," *BN* 73 [1994]: 50–57).

[51] deSilva, "Final Topics," 220.

[52] There is a sense in which rhetoric is a universal phenomenon within human society, and that the functional features of rhetoric can be paralleled across cultures, without the necessity of a formal dependence. See Jeffery T. Reed, "Using Ancient Rhetorical Categories to Interpret Paul's Letters," in Porter and Olbricht, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 293–324; Roy R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of*

who states that "apocalyptic discourse should be treated as a flexible set of resources that early Jews and Christians could employ for a variety of persuasive tasks."[53] But our methods of rhetorical criticism will inevitably need to be nuanced and flexible, in recognition of the unique type of discourse which Revelation employs.[54] In the following study, our rhetorical approach could best be labeled as eclectic, [55] in that we regard it as legitimate to incorporate insights from a range of rhetorical traditions, be they classical rhetoric, socio-rhetorical criticism,[56] or the works of modern rhetoricians such as Chaim Perelman,[57] Walter Fisher,[58] and Stephen D. O'Leary.[59] Our aim throughout is to name and understand the rhetorical power of the text, rather than trying to make it conform to some predetermined model. In adopting such an approach, it is critical to remember that rhetorical theory, both ancient and modern, has usually proceeded from

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Communication (Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 43; Lewiston: Edward Mellen, 2000), 31. As Carl J. Classen states, "…in any speech or any piece of writing, elements or features occur which we know from handbooks of rhetoric and are inclined to classify and designate accordingly." ("St Paul's Epistles and Greco-Roman Rhetoric" in Porter and Olbricht, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 268).

[53] Carey, "Introduction," 10.

[54] Many scholars have recognized the limitations of trying to force New Testament discourse into the pure generic categories of Aristotle or Quintilian. This has led to some proposing new "genres" of rhetoric, in order to reflect the differing social contexts to which New Testament discourse is addressed. See Roy R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics*, 30–52; Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Foundations of Ethos in Paul and in the Classical Rhetoricians," in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse: Essays from the 2002 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. T. H. Olbricht and A. Eriksson; Emory Studies in Early Christianity 11; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 138–159.

[55] Cf. the Hebrew Bible scholar, Dale Patrick, and his summary of an eclectic rhetorical approach to the Hebrew Scriptures: "we are eclectic because we regard the study of rhetoric not to be a method but an art – the art of reading and reflecting on the way the text engages us" (*The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible* [OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999], 7). Lauri Thurén makes the comment that "rhetorical features in the New Testament are seen as general human communication, and should be analysed with the best means available, whether ancient or modern" (*Argument and Theology*, 34), although Thurén's interests move beyond rhetoric to the broader study of argumentation. Cf. also Edith Humphrey's cautious eclecticism in *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 153–154.

[56] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1996).

[57] Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, eds., *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise in Argumentation* (trans. J. Wilkinson and P. Weaver; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969); Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (trans. William Kluback; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

[58] Walter Fisher, "A Motive View of Communication," *QJS* 56 (1970): 131–139.

[59] O'Leary, "A Dramatistic Theory," 385–426.

rhetoric as it is found in practice, insofar as the development of "rules" and "principles" is derived inductively from concrete examples.[60] Therefore, in studying the rhetoric of Revelation, we must prioritise the text before us, and ask the question: Why does *this text* have persuasive power? How does *this text* engage, affect, and persuade its listeners?[61] Inasmuch as outside resources, both ancient and modern, can provide insight into the persuasive features of the text, without occluding the idiosyncrasies of Revelation's rhetoric, then they can be drawn upon with great profit.

It is also vital to note that attending to the rhetorical dimensions of Revelation involves much more than simply elucidating individual features of this or that passage. It means understanding how each part of the discourse contributes to the overall strategy of the work, such that the desired effect is had upon the audience. As such it helps integrate analysis by enabling the interpreter to consider the text as a purposive whole, in which individual images and themes are deployed in a particular manner in order to achieve a desired effect.[62] Thus, a rhetorical approach enables what Fiorenza calls a "proportional" analysis, where the meaning of images is understood "by determining the phase of action in which they are invoked."[63]

1.5.2 Narrative Criticism and Revelation

A second feature of integral reading is attending to the narrative dimensions of Revelation. Narrative readings of early Christian literature focus on how these writings work as literature, thus opening the world of the text to the insights of literary theory.[64] Narrative criticism intentionally resists

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[60] Greg Carey, "How to Do Things with (Apocalyptic) Words: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse," *LTQ* 33 (1998): 89; Classen, "St Paul's Epistles and Ancient Greek and Roman Rhetoric," 290–291.

[61] The insights of Nickelsburg with regard to the use of modern sociological data in the study of apocalypticism could well be applied to the use of classical rhetoric in the interpretation of the New Testament: "These theories may serve as useful models that help to understand ancient texts, but primary attention must be given to the documents themselves and their peculiar contours. The model must not become a die that shapes the ancient materials or a filter that highlights or obliterates textual data in a predetermined way." (George W. E. Nickelsburg, as cited in David C. Sim, "The Social Setting of Ancient Apocalypticism: A Question of Method," *JSP* 13 [1995]: 15).

[62] Cf. Thurén, *Argument and Theology*, 20.

[63] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Visionary Rhetoric and Social Political Situation," in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement* (2d edn; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 188; repr. from *Semeia* 36 (1986).

[64] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 18. Narrative criticism does not necessarily mean the abandonment of historical criticism as a valid enterprise, instead it is often construed as a separate, or complementary exercise. As Mark Allan Powell comments, "narrative criticism has not become a domain for those who reject the processes or conclusions of historical-critical scholarship but has attracted those who feel

"atomisation" by regarding the text as a complete tapestry, an organic whole, in an effort to discern how a particular story functions poetically to create certain effects upon the reader.[65] S. Scott Bartchy summarises the perspective of narrative criticism as follows:

> Historical criticism seeks to look *through* the text in order to see the events, circumstances and motivations that led to the production of the text. Literary criticism, including narrative criticism, looks *at* the text in order to discern there the inner workings of the story world presented by the text. In other words, while historical criticism focuses on the degree to which a narrative refers to the real world (its referential function), narrative criticism deals directly with the contributions the various literary features of the text make to the telling of the story itself (its poetic function).[66]

Attending to the narrative dimensions of a text involves considering a wide variety of literary dynamics such as the ordering of events, the place of conflict in the story, characterization, point of view, the use of setting, and imagery, to name but a few.[67]

This type of narrative analysis is highly pertinent to Revelation. In common with other apocalyptic literature, Revelation's vision-report is articulated within a narrative framework.[68] By this, we do not simply mean that John tells us his story of how he received such visions, but more than that, the visions themselves function as story, creating their own complex narrative world. Within the major vision-report (chps. 4–22) there is a discernible beginning, middle and end, in which we see characters develop, settings change, and conflicts resolved.[69] Furthermore, we find narratives embedded within other narratives, meaning that we must consider multiple levels of narrativity within the text.[70] Thus, we may meaningfully speak

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that something other than historical criticism ought also to be done" ("Narrative Criticism," in Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament*, 240).

[65] Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 19, 40.

[66] S. Scott Bartchy, "Narrative Criticism," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments* (ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Leicester: InterVarsity, 1997), 788.

[67] For lists of potential narrative features, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 242-244; Powell, "Narrative Criticism," 244–248.

[68] Note that the famous definition of apocalyptic proposed by the SBL Seminar Group on Apocalyptic defined apocalypse as "a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework". See John J. Collins, "Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9.

[69] Aristotle defined a plot (*mythos*) as a continuous sequence of events or actions with a beginning, middle and end. See Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450b 27–31.

[70] For the multiple levels of narrativity in Revelation, see M. Eugene Boring, "Narrative Christology in the Apocalypse," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 702–723; Jan A. du Rand, "Your Kingdom Come 'On Earth as it is in Heaven': The Theological Motif of the Apocalypse of John," *Neot* 31 (1997): 59–74. For embedded narratives in general, see Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 54–56.