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978-1-108-48386-5 — Narrative and Drama in the Book of Revelation
Lourdes García Ureña, Translated by Donald Murphy
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Narrative and Drama in the Book of Revelation

Volume 175

The book of Revelation is one of the most cryptic books of the Bible and one that raises many scholarly questions. What is its literary genre? Why is it considered to be both a narrative and a drama? Why does John disregard time–space coordinates? Why does the audience have such an important role in the text? What literary guidelines has the author designed to facilitate the reading of the book? Applying the methods of literary theory to her study, Lourdes García Ureña argues that John wrote Revelation as a book to be read aloud in a liturgical context. In her reading, John chose a literary form, similar to the short story, that allows him to use time–space coordinates flexibly, to dramatize the text, and to take his time in describing his visions. Through these techniques the audience relives and is made part of the visual and auditory experience every time the book is read.

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A Literary Approach

Lourdes García Ureña
CEU-San Pablo University, Madrid

Revised by the author and translated by Donald Murphy



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τὸ σπαρτίον τὸ ἔντρινον οὐ
ταχέως ἀπορραγήσεται (Eccles 4.12)
To Marta and Silvano

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PREFACE

Everyone agrees that there are narratives in the New Testament. These narratives are normally identified with the four Gospels and the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The Apocalypse, however, is less obviously a narrative. It certainly contains a number of brief narratives, but its overall structure is less clear. Some see it as a kind of linear narrative, in which one thing follows another. It gives the reader a series of revelations about the present and the future, which are given in a chronological sequence. Others argue that it is not a linear narrative, but one in which the same events are portrayed or predicted several times. Each time, different images are used. These two readings are sometimes combined so that the structure of the book is seen as having metaphorically a spiral form. The same events are described several times, but each time more detail is given, the narrative becomes more dramatic, and thus the action is moved forwards.

In this book, Lourdes García Ureña offers her readers a much more sophisticated narrative analysis of the Apocalypse. Her first move is simple but has profound implications. She observes that the author has chosen to present himself both as the narrator and as a character in the narrative. His role as character allows him as narrator to verify his claim to the reception of revelation. She also points out the author's preference for external focalization. He confines himself for the most part to describing external features, that is, things that any observer would notice, rather than communicating the inner thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the other characters. He emphasizes his role as observer and thus as a reliable reporter of what he has seen and heard. She also shows that the author uses the rhetorical technique of vivid description. Such description places what is seen and heard before the eyes and ears of the lector and audience so that they virtually participate in John's experience of the revelation. She shows in syntactical detail how the author uses this

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technique so that her readers can fully appreciate the way in which the Apocalypse creates its effect.

Professor García Ureña demonstrates further that the Apocalypse is not only a narrative but also a drama. In its narrative portions, the author describes places, characters, and events. In other parts of the work, the author draws upon the techniques of ancient Greek tragedies. One of these is mimesis, representing speech and events directly, rather than describing them indirectly. He also uses a device similar to the way in which the chorus comments on the action, interpreting it and revealing its significance and consequences for the audience. Another convention from Greek tragedy is the use of messenger speeches. Rather than describe the fall of ‘Babylon’ (Rome) directly, he presents characters, who give vivid portrayals of it.

Her analysis also draws upon the discipline of linguistics to illuminate the text of the Apocalypse and how it works. For example, she shows how the author communicates the meaning of certain utterances by providing contextual information. It also draws upon orality studies to show how the author ensured that the intended impact of the work would indeed be made upon the audience.

Finally, she shows that the structure of the work as a whole serves to implement the author’s intentions, as she reconstructs them. Her thesis that the work has an introductory liturgical dialogue (1.4–8) and a concluding one (22.17–21) illuminates two portions of the work that are otherwise very difficult to understand. With regard to genre, the analogy she makes between the Apocalypse and the short story as we have known it since the nineteenth century is bold but illuminating.

Professor García Ureña has employed a variety of methods in her close reading of the Apocalypse and made a significant contribution to the interpretation and appreciation of this intriguing and cryptic work. We – scholars, teachers, and students alike – are all in her debt.

Adela Yarbro Collins
Yale University Divinity School

ABBREVIATIONS

1 General

col., cols.	column, columns
LXX	Septuagint
ms., mss.	manuscript, manuscripts
MT	Masoretic Text
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

2 Bible Editions and Reference Works

<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt</i>
<i>B-UNAV</i>	<i>Sagrada Biblia</i> , ed. Professors of the University of Navarra School of Theology
<i>BDAG</i>	<i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>BDB</i>	<i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JB</i>	<i>The Jerusalem Bible</i>
<i>BNP</i>	<i>New Pauly Online</i>
<i>DGE</i>	<i>Diccionario griego-español</i>
<i>DGENT</i>	<i>Diccionario griego-español del Nuevo Testamento</i>
<i>DPAC</i>	<i>Diccionario patristico y de la Antigüedad cristiana</i>
<i>DRAE</i>	<i>Diccionario de la lengua española</i>
<i>GI</i>	<i>Vocabolario della lingua greca (greco-italiano)</i>
<i>LOUW and NIDA</i>	<i>Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains</i>
<i>NBE</i>	<i>Nueva Biblia Española</i>
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NT-BOVER</i>	<i>Nuevo Testamento Trilingüe</i>
<i>NT-IGLESIAS</i>	<i>Nuevo Testamento</i> , ed. M. Iglesias
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>

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<i>TDNT</i>	<i>The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
THAYER	<i>A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti</i> , trad. and expanded rev. by J. H. Thayer

3 Journals

<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IndTheolStud</i>	<i>Indian Theological Studies</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>NT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RevThom</i>	<i>Revue Thomiste</i>

4 Books of the Bible

4.1 Old Testament (including apocryphal books)

Amos	Amos	1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings
Bar	Baruch	Lam	Lamentations
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Lev	Leviticus
1–2 Chron	1–2 Chronicles	1–4 Macc	1–4 Maccabees
Dan	Daniel	Mal	Malachi
Deut	Deuteronomy	Mic	Micah
Eccles	Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)	Nah	Nahum
Esth	Esther	Neh	Nehemiah
Exod	Exodus	Num	Numbers
Ezek	Ezekiel	Obad	Obadiah
Ezr	Ezra (Esdras)	Odes	Odes
Gen	Genesis	Prov	Proverbs
Hab	Habakkuk	Ps	Psalms
Hag	Haggai	PssSol	Psalms of Solomon
Hos	Hosea	Ruth	Ruth
Isa	Isaiah	1–2 Sam	1–2 Samuel
Jdg	Judges	Sir	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

List of Abbreviations

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Jdth	Judith	Song	Song of Songs
Jer	Jeremiah	Sus	Susanna
Job	Job	Tob	Tobit
Joel	Joel	Wisd	Wisdom
Jon	Jonah	Zech	Zechariah
Josh	Joshua	Zeph	Zephaniah

4.2 New Testament

Acts	Acts	Mark	Mark
Col	Colossians	Matt	Matthew
1–2 Cor	1–2 Corinthians	1–2 Pet	1–2 Peter
Eph	Ephesians	Phil	Philippians
Gal	Galatians	Philem	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews	Rev	Revelation
Jas	James	Rom	Romans
John	John	1–2 Thess	1–2 Thessalonians
1–3 John	1–3 John	1–2 Tim	1–2 Timothy
Jude	Jude	Tit	Titus
Luke	Luke		

5 Pseudepigrapha

Most of these abbreviations are taken from the *Greek OT Pseudepigrapha* module of *Accordance 12.0.2*.

Abraham_B	<i>Testament of Abraham B</i>
Adam_Eve	<i>Apocalypse of Moses (Life of Adam and Eve)</i>
Aristeas	<i>Letter of Aristeas Greek</i>
3 Bar	<i>Greek Apocalypse of Baruch</i>
1 Enoch	<i>Ethiopic Book of Enoch (1 Enoch)</i>
2 Enoch	<i>The Secrets of Enoch</i>
Esdr	<i>Apocalypse of Ezra</i>
4 Ezra	<i>4 Ezra</i>
Jub	<i>Book of Jubilees</i>
Levi	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
Prayer_Jac	<i>Prayer of Jacob</i>
Pseudo_Hecat	<i>Pseudo-Hecateus</i>
Rechab	<i>History of the Rechabites</i>
Sedr	<i>Apocalypse of Sedrach</i>
SibOr	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
Sol_A	<i>Testament of Solomon A</i>

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6 Qumran texts

The abbreviations used for Qumran texts are those found in the list created by F. García Martínez (ed.), *Textos de Qumrán*, Madrid: Trotta, 1993. References are cited as shown for the following example: 4Q266 Fr. 6, col. 2,5–6.

4Q266	name of document
Fr.	number of fragment
col. and number before the comma	column in which it is found
number(s) following the comma	line or lines which contain the quotation

7 Classical and Hellenistic Works

Aristotle	<i>Po.</i>	<i>Poetics</i>
Catullus	<i>Catullus</i>	<i>Carmina</i>
Cicero	<i>Inv.</i>	<i>De Inventione</i>
	<i>Fam.</i>	<i>Epistulae ad Familiares</i>
Demetrius of Phaleron	<i>Eloc.</i>	<i>De Elocutione</i>
Homer	<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
Horace	<i>Carm.</i>	<i>Carmina</i>
Philo	<i>Agric.</i>	<i>De Agricultura</i>
	<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De Vita Contemplativa</i>
Pliny the Elder	<i>NH</i>	<i>Naturalis Historia</i>
Pliny the Younger	<i>Epis.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
Thucydides	<i>Th.</i>	<i>Historia</i>
Vitruvius	<i>Vitr.</i>	<i>De Architectura</i>

8 Patristic Literature

Clement of Alexandria	<i>QDS</i>	<i>Quis dives salvetur?</i>
	<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata</i>
Origen	<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Contra Celsus</i>
	<i>Comm. Joh.</i>	<i>Commentarius in E. Ioannis</i>
Tertullian	<i>Adv. Marc.</i>	<i>Adversus Marcionem</i>