

EVIL AND THE DEVIL

Edited by
Ida Fröhlich
and
Erkki Koskenniemi

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Chapter 11

THE DANGEROUS LOSER:
THE NARRATIVE AND RHETORICAL FUNCTION OF THE DEVIL
AS CHARACTER IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION¹

Michael Labahn

Linguistic Evidence

Within the Book of Revelation, the narrative figure of "Satan"² is developed through a complex linguistic system, so that he could be identified as a "patchwork" character—a narrative character that is assembled from different textual data, images, and traditions. That Satan is a patchwork figure becomes obvious in Rev. 12.9 and 20.2, where he is described by a list of different designations that transfer the values associated with images and titles from various conceptual domains to his character. Here, this figure is at once the "great dragon" (ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας), the "old serpent" (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος), the "Devil" (Διάβολος), "Satan" (Σατανᾶς), and, using a substantive participial construction, "the seducer of the whole world" (ὁ πλάνων τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην). Within the narrative world of Revelation, various traditional data and allusions drawn from the Hellenistic-Jewish "encyclopaedia"³ combine to create a composite image of the Devil as

¹ This chapter is a thoroughly revised, expanded, and translated version of my Habilitationsschrift at the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, June 2009. For help with the English text and further comments, I am once again grateful to Tom Thatcher.

² According to P. Trummer, "Die Frau und der Drache. Skizzen zu Offenbarung 12," in K. Huber and B. Repschinsky SJ (eds.), *Im Geist und in der Wahrheit. Studien zum Johannesevangelium und zur Offenbarung des Johannes sowie andere Beiträge* (FS for M. Hasitschka SJ: Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, Neue Folge, 52, Münster: Aschendorf, 2008), 363–384, esp. 371, the dragon is a "Hauptfigur" ("main character"). Trummer prefers to call the figure a "symbol." However, as an actor identified by a specific name, the dragon may be analyzed as a character within the narrative of Revelation, even if he is depicted through imagery and symbols. On the Devil in Revelation in general see also K. Wengst, "The Devil in the Revelation of St. John," in H. Graf Reventlow and Y. Hoffmann (eds.), *The Problem of Evil and its Symbols in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSOTS, 366; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 68–74; Wengst, *ibid.*, 68, describes the literary character as "a person who acts quite on his own, but who is acted upon as well."

³ On the term "encyclopaedia" as designating the entire range of collective knowledge cf. U. Eco, *Lector in fabula. Die Mitarbeit der Interpretation in erzählenden Texten* (München: Hanser, 1987).

a new and distinct character, one that can be described as "the absolute anti-divine power" ("die gottesfeindliche Macht schlechtin").⁴

Among the various characterizations of the Devil in Revelation, the noun δράκων is of special interest. While this word is used nowhere else in the New Testament, it appears in Revelation thirteen times—in the contexts noted above (chapters 12–13 and 20) and also in 16.13. All the other terms noted above have already been used in the text of Revelation before Rev. 12.9,⁵ an observation that is of some importance for the overall interpretation of the figure. The combination of names and characteristics as presented in the catalog of Rev. 12.9 and of 20.2 is crucial for understanding Satan as a character within the text of Revelation.⁶

In the current chapter, the term "Satan" will be used to refer to this figure in its broad function throughout Revelation. It will be shown that this figure is a *literary construct* that is used to interpret real-world events that are understood by the narrative as a major threat to the adherents of God and of the Lamb. These events are integrated into the narrator's rhetorical vision of the final victory of God's reign. The construction of a meaningful textual world thus

⁴ J. U. Kalms, *Der Sturz des Gottesfeindes. Traditionsgeschichtliche Studien zu Apokalypse 12* (WMANT, 93; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 77, see also E. Schüssler Florenza, "The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically," in S. Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001), 1–19, esp. 10: "the anti-divine power par excellence."

⁵ Although the term "serpent" (ὄφις) has thus far only been used to describe the horses' tails in the sixth trumped vision (9.19), which is hardly a part of the literary conception of Satan in Revelation.

⁶ The lists in Rev. 12.9 and 20.2 indicate that "Satan" can be identified by different designations within the narrative world of Revelation, a fact which suggests that this figure could also be present in the story under various other guises. Rev. 9.11 refers to a "king, the angel of the bottomless pit" (βασιλεὺς τοῦ ἀβύσσου τῆς ἀβύσσου), who is called "in Hebrew Abaddon" (ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐφθαῖρτ Ἀβδδόν). Nothing this name, Aune finds in this figure a representation of "Satan" (D. E. Aune, *Revelation* [WBC, 52A–C; Dallas, Tex.: Nelson, 1997/198], 534; differently, e.g., H. Giesen, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [RNT, Regensburg: Pustet, 1997], 220: a demonic figure). This challenging thesis is not convincing, however, since the Devil is locked in the abyss as his prison (20.3) and will not be able to emerge as a ruler or king.

The same may be said of Rev. 9.1. Some scholars argue that the "fallen star" (ἀστὴρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ περὶ ἡμέραν εἰς τὴν γῆν) is a possible reference to Satan, inasmuch as this text is somehow paralleled in Rev. 20.1 (cf., e.g., G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 494: "the angel in v 1 is either Satan or one of his minions"; see also B. K. Blount, *Revelation* [New Testament Library; Louisville, Ky.: WJK, 2009], 173). A clearer argument could be deduced from the defeat of Satan in Rev. 12.9, where he is thrown from heaven (ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν), similar to the imagery of Lk. 10.18. However, it is not evident that Rev. 20.1 refers to Satan, nor is the imagery of 9.1 in itself a clear reference to the semantic concept of Satan in Revelation. It seems more natural to identify the figure in 9.1 with an angel, probably "an angelic messenger ... not to be identified with the angel of the abyss" (Aune, *Revelation*, 525; see also S. S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* [London: SPCK, 2005], 225).

In any case, the current chapter will discuss only those passages that use unambiguous terminology to identify this character ("Satan," "Devil," or "the dragon").

provides an orientation for the addressees in their actual world. For sake of precision, I will use appropriate English translations for each individual Greek term applied to this figure—i.e., “dragon,” “serpent,” “devil,” or “Satan.”

Two different hermeneutical methods might be adopted in analyzing the complex terminological system used to characterize Satan in the Book of Revelation.⁷

(a) *The intertextual paradigm*.⁸ This paradigm highlights and attempts to trace the complex combination of motifs drawn from different elements of the cultural encyclopedia, which would be accessible to any reader familiar with those motifs. Approaches of this type also provide a diachronic orientation by focusing on the pre-history of elements of the characterization of Satan.

While individual readers might recognize established elements in Revelation's portrait of Satan, every reader will be led to a new understanding through the text itself—different strands of pre-knowledge are brought together by the text to form a new and distinctive understanding. This observation points to a second methodological paradigm for understanding the concept of Satan in Revelation.

(b) *The intratextual paradigm*.⁹ Combining different characterizations of the anti-divine figure known from the lists of Rev. 12.9 and 20.2, one can see that Satan is portrayed in Revelation as a complex entity, one defined by various episodes throughout the entire story.¹⁰ Approaches of this type are essentially synchronic in their orientation, focusing on the presentation and development of Satan across the larger movement of Revelation.

While both of the above paradigms produce insightful readings, the current chapter will focus primarily on the intratextual paradigm, considering the overall development and characterization of Satan within the text itself in

⁷ In early Christian literature, the “false prophet” is closely connected to the concept of Satan (cf. 2 Thess. 2.9–10); cf. R. L. Thomas, *Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation* (LNTS, 416; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 62–64. The false prophet is, however, a separate character who belongs to the eschatological alliance with Satan; see also Rev. 19.20; 20.10.

⁸ On intertextuality cf., e.g., R. Allen, *Intertextuality* (New Critical Idiom; London: Routledge, 2000). On the exegetical use of the hermeneutical approach see also S. Alkier, “Intertextualität—Annäherung an ein texttheoretisches Paradigma,” in D. Sanger (ed.), *Heiligkeit und Herrschaft. Intertextuelle Studien zu Heiligkeitstexten und zu Psalm 110* (BThSt, 55; Neukirchener-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003), 1–26; B. Kowalski, “Intertextualität als exegetische Methode,” *ThKZ* 96 (2006), 354–361, and the bibliography of M. Schneider in S. Alkier and R. B. Hays (eds.), *Die Bibel im Dialog der Schöpfung. Konzepte intertextueller Bibellektüre* (Neuentscheidliche Einwurfe zur Theologie, 10; Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2005), 257–264.

⁹ On intratextuality cf., e.g., A. Sharrock and H. Morales (eds.), *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ However, it cannot be overlooked that the “The Apocalypse is a complex story, and no reader will ever imagine all the possible connections between incidents. What follows is one reading of one set of interconnections,” D. L. Barr, “The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for its Plot,” in idem (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (Resources for Biblical Study, 44; Atlanta, Ga., Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 11–23, esp. 13.

order to understand the function of this figure within the pragmatics of the entire document.

The Rhetoric of Revelation and Its Hermeneutical Horizon

Revelation is not a blueprint of a “reality” outside the text, nor a simple chart of events to come.¹¹ Revelation is, rather, a text that promotes a particular construction of reality in an attempt to persuade the ideal reader to affirm the book's perception of the world and to accept the program of Christian behavior advocated in the text.¹² The book's genre is pragmatic, and its rhetoric all serves this larger aim, as does its characterization of Satan.

On the *literary form* of the Book of Revelation,¹³ one notes first that the text is structured as an autobiographical narrative with a first-person narrator who is part of the story.¹⁴ The narrator describes the auditions and visions that take place where God sits enthroned: “heaven.”¹⁵ In heaven, the narrator faces the risen Christ, describes how the present time, especially the life of the Christian communities in Asia Minor, is evaluated by the risen Lord, and receives visions showing that God will implement his rule, starting with an action by the slaughtered Lamb. In God's final victory, his rule will come to its fulfillment in the cultic and moral purity of the New Jerusalem, a place of immediate community with God (21.9–22.5). Such a plot does not refer to a list of forthcoming final events, as is widely supposed in popular interpretations and by sectarian groups.¹⁶ Revelation is, rather, best understood as a *Symbildung* (construction of meaning), whose narratives, demands, visions, and auditions, including an expectation of final events, seek to help the addressees in organizing and managing their lives in the present time.

¹¹ On the understanding of Revelation as “a chart of History” in the history of interpretation cf., e.g., A. W. Mainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 49–66.

¹² Cf., e.g., D. A. Desilver, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

¹³ On the genre of the Book of Revelation cf. G. Strecker, *Literaturgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (UTB, 1682; Göttingen: V&R, 1992), 261ff., who summarizes the discussion.

¹⁴ See the discussion of the first-person narrative by J. L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 47–53, who deals mostly with stylistic features.

¹⁵ On the toponymy of the Book of Revelation cf. M. Labahn, “‘Apokalyptische’ Geographie. Einflühende Überlegungen zu einer Toponomie der Johannesoffenbarung,” in M. Labahn and O. Lehtipuu (eds.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (CBET, 60; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 107–143.

¹⁶ See the recent critique by J. Beutler, “Die Hermeneutik der Apokalypse und ihrer Bileersprache angesichts ihrer fundamentalistischen Deutungen,” in Labahn and Lehtipuu (eds.), *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, 11–27. On the millenarian interpretation of Revelation as referring to final events that will take place in the reader's time cf. Mainwright, *Mysterious Apocalypse*, 21–87.

The projection of the present into the visions and auditions of the Book of Revelation tries "to make transparent the readers' sense of meaning by which he or she is able to live."¹⁷ Marlies Gielen rightly states, "it [Revelation] is about managing the present, which receives its power through the expectation of the eschatological future."¹⁸ This formation of meaning is produced by a literary construction of the world outside the text, a construction that views the current world of the addressees against the horizon of the ultimate triumph of God's rule¹⁹—real power in the world outside the text is thus viewed by the narrative as a defeated but still dangerous power. Revelation thus evidences a subversive narrative strategy that characterizes political power beyond the text as a Satanic, demonic, already-defeated, and therefore empty rule that can harm the addressees but not overcome them.²⁰ By constructing a reality that portrays the narrative characters in a conflict between good and evil²¹ (between God and Satan), the Book of Revelation develops a system of values²² and invites the

17 K. Backhaus, "Apokalyptische Bilder? Die Vernunft der Vision in der Johannesoffenbarung," *EvT* 64 (2004), 421–437, esp. 424 ("... denn Lesenden ... Stimmgründe transparent [machen; ML], aus denen er leben kann").

18 M. Gielen, "Saßansturz und Gottesheerschaft (Offb 12). Das Verhältnis von Macht und Religion in der pragmatischen Konzeption der Johannesoffenbarung," in M. Gielen and J. Küster (eds.), *Liebe, Macht und Religion. Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Grunddimensionen menschlicher Existenz. Festschrift H. Merklem* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 163–183, esp. 163 ("es geht um Gegenwartsbewältigung, die eine Kraft aus der Erwartung der eschatologischen Zukunft schöpft"). Similarly, Jürgen Roloff, who argues that the Book of Revelation puts "alles Gewicht auf die Deutung der gegenwärtigen und zukünftigen geschichtlichen Konstellationen und Kontroversen" and highlights "die Bedeutung der jetzt anstehenden Entscheidungen für die Zukunft," *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (GNT, 10; Göttingen: V&R, 1993), 179.

19 In accordance with Gielen, "Saßansturz und Gottesheerschaft," 163, the parts of Revelation narrating the visions are a depiction of the implementation of God's final rule.

20 On the function of a subversive narrative cf. D. Rustermeier, "Welt im Text? Kurt Rottgers' Theorie kommunikativer Texte und die Literatur der Geschichte," *Journal für Phänomenologie* 14 (2000), 52–58, esp. 58, on applying this concept to the Book of Revelation cf. Labahn, "Apokalyptische Geographie."

21 Cf., e.g., the remarks by Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 46–47: "John finds that his proclamation conflicts with the statements brought by others, who claim to be prophets or who are working in such guise, prophets whom John considers to be false. It appears that John envisions the conflict ... as evocative of the conflict between the forces of good and evil."

22 On the ethical program of Revelation cf., e.g., D. L. Barr, "Towards an Ethical Reading of the Apocalypse: Reflections on John's Use of Power, Violence, and Misogyny," *SBLSP* 36 (1997), 358–373; J. A. Du Rand, "The Ethical Response of an Alternative Community in a Critical Situation: Marturia and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse of John," in J. G. Van der Watt (ed.), *Identity, Ethics, and Echos in the New Testament* (BZNW, 141; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2006), 565–593; J. Kerner, *Die Ethik der Johannes-Apokalypse im Vergleich mit der des 4. Esra, Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis von Apokalypse und Ethik* (BZNW, 94; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998); K. Scholtschek, "Mittelhafter an der Bedängnis, der Königsherrschaft und der Ausdauer in Jesus (Offb 1,9). Partizipatorische Ethik in der Offenbarung des Johannes," in K. Backhaus (ed.), *Theologie als Vision. Studien zur Johannes-Offenbarung* (SBS, 191; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2001), 172–207; D. Sanger, "Destruktive Apokalypse? Eine Erinnerung in eschatologischer und ethischer Perspektive," in C. Böttich (ed.), *Eschatologie und Ethik im frühen Christentum. Festschrift G. Haufe* (Greifswalder theologische Studien, 11; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006), 285–307, esp.

ideal reader²³ to understand himself or herself anew, according to the model presented in the text. In this respect, Revelation adopts the rhetorical strategy of a "radicalization of reality" ("Radikalisierung der Wirklichkeit": Harald Ulland), one that is evident in the various visions and the seven letters and that is particularly notable in chs. 12–14.²⁴

This radicalized reality is best understood as a narrative construction of an extratextual situation: Roman rule in the province of Asia under the Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE).²⁵ The cities mentioned in the seven letters in Rev. 2–3 played a notorious role in the spread of the Roman imperial cult, participation in which served as evidence of loyalty to the empire.²⁶ While no widespread, systematic persecution of Christians can be documented in the extratextual world of this period,²⁷ the radicalized reality constructed by Revelation reflects

229–307; M. Wolter, "Christliches Ethos nach der Offenbarung des Johannes," in F.-W. Horn (ed.), *Studien zur Johannesoffenbarung und ihrer Auslegung. Festschrift O. Böcher* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 2005), 189–209.

23 Cf., e.g., D. Meith, "Literarische Texte als Quelle ethischer Verunsicherung oder ethischer Modellbildung?" in S. and C. Krepold (eds.), *Schon und gut? Studien zu Ethik und Ästhetik in der Literatur* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 19–40, esp. 21: the narrative develops "Regulierungen ... die eine gewollte Balance herstellen, welche die Rezeption zwar nicht betriebsförmig will, aber ihr doch bestimmte Wege empfiehlt und andere versperrt [regulations ... which provide an intentional balance that is not so much about mastering a reception as about recommending particular ways of understanding it and disregarding other ways]."

24 H. Ulland, *Die Vision als Radikalisierung der Wirklichkeit in der Apokalypse des Johannes* (TANZ, 21; Tübingen: Francke, 1997), supported by, e.g., Kalms, *Der Sturz des Götzenbildes*, 26.

25 The date of the Book of Revelation is still debated. Some scholars prefer an earlier time under Emperor Nero, others a much later period under Hadrian as, e.g., T. Witulski, "Ein neuer Ansatz zur Datierung der neustamentlichen Johannesapokalypse," in *SVTUA* 30 (2005), 39–60, who claims that the text mirrors a situation of a severe intensification of the veneration of the emperor (on the history of the veneration of the Roman emperor, see T. Witulski, *Kaiser kult in Kleinasien. Die Entwicklung der kaiserlich-religiösen Kaiserverehrung in der römischen Provinz Asien von Augustus bis Antoninus Pius* [NTOA, 63; Göttingen: V&R, 2007]). All these models take certain literary constructions of the historical situation for granted, either the later portrait of Nero by the Church Fathers and negative propaganda by Roman historians or the "radicalized" view of the narrative of Revelation itself; on recent discussion and for a possible date late in Domitian's rule cf. U. Schnelle, *Einführung in das Neue Testament* (UTB, 1830; Göttingen: V&R, 2007), 551.

26 All seven cities were important for the imperial cult; cf. C. J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (ISNTS, 11; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1986) and S. Frisken, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

27 No such widespread persecution can be documented from the paucity of extrabiblical historical sources; cf., e.g., J. Ulrich, *Histories III, 14–20* und die Frage nach der Christenverfolgung unter Domitian," *ZNW* 87 (1996), 269–289; see also B. W. Jones, *The Emperor Domitian* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 114–117; J. Mollhagen, "Die Lage der Christen im römischen Reich nach dem 1. Petrusbrief. Zum Problem einer domitianischen Verfolgung," *Hist.* 44 (1995), 422–458; idem, "'Cognitionibus de Christianis interfuit nunquam'. Das Nichtwissen des Plinius und die Anfänge der Christenprozesse," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Gemeinde* 9 (2004), 112–140; U. Riemer, *Das Tier auf dem Kaiserthron? Eine Untersuchung zur Offenbarung des Johannes als historischer Quelle* (BzA, 114; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998).

the religious claims of the imperial cult,²⁸ claims that conflict with the belief and practices of Jesus' followers.²⁹ Deviation from the Roman standard of loyalty was evidently suspect and could lead to social isolation, official sanctions, and even to death, as evident from the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the Emperor Trajan (denunciation, interrogation, proof of loyalty, and condemnation).³⁰ While this exchange must be dated some twenty years after the writing of the Book of Revelation, it appears to reflect earlier legal practice.³¹

Revelation thus constructs readers who understand themselves and their present experience in light of the narrative.³² Within this larger objective, the patchwork characterization of Satan is one element of Revelation's hermeneutical strategy. Revelation attempts to develop a reader who is able to interpret himself or herself in his or her own world in light of the narrative's construction of meaning, and the characterization of Satan is a key element in this larger *Simblikung*.

While scholars have often posited a distinction between the proclamations to the seven communities in Rev. 2–3 and the subsequent visionary passages, the two sections are united by the literary concept of "Satan," an idea that develops coherence in the movement between the different elements of the story.³³ Five of the eight references to σατανᾶς (2.9, 13, 24; 3.9), one of the five occurrences of δὲ σατανᾶς (2.10), and one of the eight references to πᾶσι τοῖς ἐκκλησίαις (2.20) within the book appear in the seven proclamations. Not surprisingly, the more picturesque terms "dragon" and "serpent" are restricted to the visionary sections of the book. The distribution of the different elements of the concept "Satan" has not come purely by chance, but rather has a hermeneutical function. The main concentration of elements appears in Rev. 2–3, 12–13, and 20. *Present, past* (which helps in understanding the present), and *future* (to which present time looks and in light of which one lives in the present)³⁴ are reflected

in these sections of the story in a special way. The distribution of terminology demonstrates that the literary concept built around the references to Satan provides meaning for the present time of the addressees. It fully fits within the overall hermeneutical program of Revelation.

The "Defeat of Satan" (Rev. 12): Present Time in Light of the Past as a Time of Threat from the Defeated

The episode of the "defeat of Satan," his fall from heaven, and his war against the Christians (12.17) is placed within the timeframe of the narration of the story ("Erzählzeit").³⁵ Chapters 12–13 thus interrupt the cycles of seven within the visionary section of the book,³⁶ making it possible to speak of a centre, if not *the* centre (cf. Kalms³⁷), of the Book of Revelation.³⁸ Both the proclamations to the seven churches and the visions convey an interpretation of the contemporary world of the addressees,³⁹ a world that is newly understood and constructed by means of radicalization.

gestern besser werden? Zum Bedenken der Geschichte (Kulturwissenschaftliche Interventionen, 2; Berlin: Kadmos, 2003); idem, *Kultur macht Sinn. Orientierung zwischen Gestern und Morgen* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), 30: "Geschichte hat ihren Sinn im rekonstruktiven Rückgang auf die historische Erfahrung. Sie dient der Plausibilisierung handlungsleitender Zukunftseurwürfe. Und Sinn spielt im Verhältnis dieser Zeiten—zwischen der geschienen Vergangenheit und der gewünschten Zukunft—eine zentrale Rolle [History develops its meaning in a reconstructive deduction on the basis of historical experience. It serves to make plausible such conceptions of future time as may help advise actions. Within the relationships of the various periods—between what has taken place and the desired future—meaning plays a central role]."

35 Cf., e.g., H. Urzschneider and S. A. Nitsche, *Arbeitsbuch literaturwissenschaftlicher Bibelanslegung. Eine Methodenhilfe zur Exegese des Alten Testaments* (München: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 161–162.

36 According to T. Söding, "Siegeertypen. Der Triumph des Glaubens nach den Sendschreiben der Johannesapokalypse (Offb 2–3)," in Huber and Repschinsky SJ (eds.), *Im Geist und in der Wahrheit*, 331–362, Rev. 12–14 forms an "apocalypse in the apocalypse" ("Apokalypse in der Apokalypse"). Cf. A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (HDR, 9; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 231: "... it is a midpoint structurally speaking as the introduction to the second great circle of visions." In support of Yarbro Collins, the controversies and the victory narrated in ch. 12 are of major importance for the entire book.

37 Kalms, *Der Sturz des Gottesgeindeg*, 18: "das zentrale Kapitel des Buches," see also H. Gollinger, "Das 'Grote Zeichen'. Offb 12—das zentrale Kapitel der Offenbarung des Johannes," *BZNT* 39 (1984), 66–75.

38 On the central place of Rev. 12 in the structure of the Book of Revelation cf. Giesen, "Satanismus und Gotteskingschaft," 175, 176; see also E. McEwan Humphrey, *The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and The Shepherd of Hermas* (SPS, 17; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 100–103.

39 Any reading of the Book of Revelation which differentiates the seven letters and the visions on the grounds that the letters discuss the social, political, and historical situation of the author and his addressees while the visions are purely fictions that express future hopes is too simplistic; Söding, "Siegeertypen," 334, gives a more differentiated statement: "Johannes bespricht in den Sendschreiben die geschichtliche Gegenwart der Adressaten, in den Visionen aber beschreibt

28 T. Söding, "Teilung, heilig, heilig. Zur politischen Theologie der Johannes-Apokalypse," *ZTK* 96 (1999), 49–76, claims a political theology in Revelation.

29 Cf., e.g., H. Giesen, "Das Römische Reich im Spiegel der Johannesapokalypse," in idem, *Studien zur Johannesapokalypse* (SBAB, 29; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 100–213; on the meaning of the emperor cult for the rhetoric of Revelation see also J. Frey, "The Relevance of the Roman Imperial Cult for the Book of Revelation: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Relation between the Seven Letters and the Visionary Main Part of the Book," in J. Fotopoulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of D. E. Aune* (NT Sup., 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 231–255.

30 Pliny the Younger, Ep X 96–97.

31 K. Thraede, "Noch einmal: Plinius d. J. und die Christen," *ZNW* 95 (2004), 102–128.

32 Cf. S. J. Friesen, "The Beast from the Land: Revelation 13:11–18 and Social Setting," in Barr (ed.), *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 49–64, esp. 64: "... John's Revelation articulated a way for his hearers and readers to understand their world, a way that was at odds with the basic tenets of public culture. The text reinterpreted the audience's experiences, transforming their perspective and creating the potential for conflict."

33 It is methodologically questionable to use the parallels in the catalogues of names of "Satan" in 12.9 and 20.2 to identify out a secondary gloss (so Aune, *Revelation*, 1082). Such an intratextual phenomenon effects formation of meaning, leading the reader from one passage to another.

34 Cf. Jörn Rusen and his concept of understanding and narrating "history": Rusen, *Kann*