

Seeing Things John's Way: Rhetography and Conceptual Blending in Revelation 14:6–13

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During the past decade, socio-rhetorical interpretation has incorporated insights from cognitive science into its interpretive model. The result has been an emphasis on "rhetography," inviting interpreters to give more explicit attention to the mental images evoked by a particular text, and "conceptual blending," inviting interpreters to consider what conceptual frames are evoked by these images and how these larger frames supply premises that advance argumentation. This mode of analysis is especially promising in regard to uncovering the argumentative force of narrative and pictorial/visionary texts, like Revelation, that contain relatively few explicit indications of argumentation. The present study undertakes an exploration of Rev 14:6–13 with a view to demonstrating these interpretive tools at work and assessing their promise for interpretation.

Key Words: socio-rhetorical interpretation, conceptual blending, Revelation, wisdom

Although several scholars combine social-scientific exegesis and rhetorical criticism in fruitful ways that deserve the eponym "socio-rhetorical,"¹ Vernon Robbins has been at the center of developing socio-rhetorical interpretation as a distinctive, interdisciplinary mode of textual analysis that promises to facilitate "exploration of the fascinating web of reality spun by each of the New Testament writers and their worlds."² The first programmatic announcement of this "interpretive analytic" came in two forms.³ *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*

1. Most noteworthy in this regard is Ben Witherington III, who has produced a series of commentaries bringing both disciplines fruitfully to bear on the task of historical criticism and Scriptural exegesis. See especially his *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

2. L. G. Bloomquist, "A Possible Direction for Providing Programmatic Correlation of Textures in Socio-rhetorical Analysis," in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSup 195; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 61.

3. An earlier landmark work in this regard was Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). On the early development

(Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) offered a more student-centered guide to practicing this analytic. A more thorough exposition of the method (though Robbins himself resists this term), elaborated in conversation with the face of modern New Testament scholarship, appeared as *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996).⁴

In the past decade, however, socio-rhetorical interpretation has indeed been “very much an approach that is in the process of being shaped.”⁵ Three areas that have emerged alongside the analysis of the various “textures” as essential⁶ for socio-rhetorical interpretation in its new iteration are:

1. Attention to “rhetography”
2. Conceptual blending, with particular attention to the blending of “rhetorolects”
3. Critical spatiality theory

It will be immediately apparent that two of these foci involve words not previously appearing in the English language, words that have been coined by Robbins to name emerging tools of socio-rhetorical interpretation.

In a 1999 article, I attempted to present as thorough a working out of a socio-rhetorical interpretation of a biblical passage as possible for the sake of modeling Robbins’s “interpretive analytic” at work for the larger guild.⁷ I return to the same passage here in an attempt to update, as it

of socio-rhetorical interpretation, see David B. Gowler, Introduction to *New Boundaries in Old Territories: Form and Social Rhetoric in Mark*, by Vernon K. Robbins (Emory Studies in Early Christianity 3; New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 1–36.

4. This “interpretive analytic” is the methodological basis for my *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

5. L. Gregory Bloomquist, “Paul’s Inclusive Language: The Ideological Texture of Romans 1,” in *Fabrics of Discourse: Essays in Honor of Vernon K. Robbins* (ed. David B. Gowler, L. Gregory Bloomquist, and Duane F. Watson; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 165. This “process” has included—formally, at least—semiannual meetings of an ever-expanding circle of scholars over the past seven years, beginning with members of the editorial board of the *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series* (to be published by Deo Press) and extending to contracted contributors to this series and interested friends of the project: a day-long session prior to the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and a two- to three-day working session during the summer (five hosted by Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio, one by Emory University in Georgia, one by St. Paul University in Ottawa). The work of the group has been extended through the *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Seminar*, a section of the Society of Biblical Literature since 2005.

6. In a conversation about the writing of commentaries for the *Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Series*, the term “nonnegotiables” was applied at one point to these three critical tools.

7. D. A. deSilva, “A Socio-rhetorical Investigation of Revelation 14:6–13: A Call to Act Justly toward the Just and Judging God,” *BBR* 9 (1999): 65–117. A shorter version of that paper, attempting to highlight the “fruits” of the method in commentary form rather than provide a full model of the method in action, appeared as “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), 2:785–806.

were, this example of socio-rhetorical interpretation at work, taking into account the first two of these three recent developments in socio-rhetorical interpretation.⁸

METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION

Rhetography

Since 1996, rhetography has emerged as the starting point for socio-rhetorical interpretation of texts.⁹ This might be considered "pictorial texture," as the interpreter attempts to discern the images and scenes that the words of a text evoke in the mind. The term "rhetography" was born alongside its twin, "rhetology," and the two are most clearly defined in relation to one another. "Rhetology" is "expressible (*rhetos*) reasoning (*logos*). The presence of rationales and conclusions indicates that the speaker/author is engaged in some kind of reasoning about the world and the things and processes in it."¹⁰ "Rhetography," by contrast, involves the "pictorial narration" or the "expressible graphic images"¹¹ that exist alongside rhetology in a text and, indeed, constitute the flesh that gives life to the skeleton and sinews of rhetology. Because it is somewhat self-evident, interpreters rarely attend sufficiently to the rhetography of a text but, in so doing, interpreters do not sufficiently acquaint themselves with what Robbins contends is the foundation for the argument and rhetorical force of a text.

Attention to rhetography emerges as a result of Robbins and his "school's" study of the work of cognitive theorists, especially those who have pioneered "conceptual blending" and "cognitive integration networks." Starting at the most basic level, human beings make decisions based largely on their ability to run "mental simulations," that is, to project pictorially

8. The full, programmatic statement of these developments will be found in Vernon Robbins, *The Invention of Christian Discourse* (2 vols.; Brussels: Deo, forthcoming). The integration of critical spatiality theory, the last of these three, has so far received the least attention in meetings of the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Seminar in its various venues (though it has been vigorously developed in the Constructs of the Social and Cultural Worlds of Antiquity Group within the Society of Biblical Literature), and, as a result, I will not attempt to make a premature statement or demonstration.

9. In the working document, "Six Steps for Writing Socio-Rhetorical Commentary" (May 28, 2004), Vernon Robbins calls for a description of "the rhetography (visual imagery, scene construction) in the discourse" as the first step for socio-rhetorical analysis, which then becomes a basis, together with the "rhetology" of the passage (what we might more naturally recognize as "argumentation"), for the analysis of the inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.

10. Idem, "Enthymeme and Picture in the *Gospel of Thomas*," in *Thomasine Traditions in Antiquity: The Social and Cultural World of the Gospel of Thomas* (ed. John M. Asgeirsson, April D. DeConick, and Risto Uro; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 175–207, esp. p. 175. Rhetology is thus closely akin to "argumentative texture," though study of rhetography in turn contributes to the pool of what will be discoverable as "argumentation" in a text.

11. Idem, "Enthymeme and Picture," 175.

the processes they would entertain as possible courses of action and their consequences.¹² Past observation and experience (including the past cultural experience encoded in, for example, texts, rites, and traditions) provides the vast reservoir on which human beings can draw for this enterprise.¹³ Language, in turn, gives human beings the power to “share” these “mental simulations” with one another, assigning phonemes to represent the “scenes,” and thus to effect persuasion.¹⁴ Rhetography, then, “refers to the features of a spoken or written communication that create a picture (graphic image) in the mind of a hearer or reader.” These pictures, in turn, “conjure visual images in the mind which . . . evoke ‘familiar’ contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader.”¹⁵ This last step is perhaps the most significant, for it is the “conceptual domain” that is enacted—switched “on,” as it were—by the evocation of particular images or sequences of images that provides the context “in which the assertions can be understood as reasonable.”¹⁶ Here the argumentative contributions of rhetography can be most illuminating.

The socio-rhetorical interpreter explores rhetography with a view to answering the questions “What conceptual domains and lived experiences do these images evoke, upon which an audience will draw in order to supply premises, complete projections, and draw inferences and conclusions?”¹⁷ “How do these images and the conceptual domains they evoke reinforce explicated argumentation in the text?” In short, “how does rhetography work interactively with rhetology (‘expressible reasoning’) in discourse?” A mode of analysis of this sort is especially promising in regard to uncovering the argumentative force of narrative texts and pictorial/visionary texts like Revelation and other apocalypses, which contain little explicit “rhetology,” given the sparse presence of inferential particles and other signs of deductive discourse that usually suggest the presence (or absence) of argumentation, but are found on closer examination to develop a complex “rhetology” in the harmonic resonances, as it were, of the rhetography.¹⁸

12. Todd V. Oakley, “The Human Rhetorical Potential,” *Written Communication* 16 (1999): 93–128, esp. p. 98.

13. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

14. *Ibid.*, 98: “Language, along with other modes of representation, is the source material for transforming our own and others’ mental simulations from the private to the public domain.”

15. Vernon K. Robbins, “Rhetography: A New Way of Seeing the Familiar Text” (paper presented to the Rhetoric of Religious Antiquity Seminar at the 2006 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Washington, DC), 1.

16. Robbins, “Rhetography,” 15.

17. “One of the goals of [many] pictorial descriptions or explanations is to introduce either a positive or negative ‘implication’ . . . a conclusion implied from premises. . . . A positive implication, then, takes the form of persuasion to do something (protrepsis) and a negative implication takes the form of dissuasion from doing something (apotrepsis)” (*idem*, “Enthymeme and Picture,” 179).

18. The examination of rhetography is a discipline especially appropriate for apocalyptic literature, because the authors of apocalypses quite explicitly seek to introduce pictures into

"Rhetorolects" and Conceptual Blending

Based on his reading of the New Testament in the context of other biblical and extrabiblical literature, Robbins suggests that there are six basic "rhetorical dialects"—contracted as "rhetorolects"—evidenced in Christian discourse. These are the "wisdom," "priestly," "miracle," "prophetic," "pre-creation," and "apocalyptic" rhetorolects.¹⁹ It is important at the outset not to confuse these terms with their corresponding literary genres (i.e., wisdom literature, etc.). They are, rather, "cultural frames,"²⁰ constellations of *topoi* that are archetypally native to particular social spaces and that each communicate a distinctive "logic" that is at home in these spaces. For example, "wisdom rhetorolect" is a rhetorical dialect spoken in the household, where fathers instruct sons and daughters in the ways that lead to fruitful living drawn from observation and reflection on experience. "Priestly rhetorolect" is native to temples (and other sacred spaces), where priests (and other liturgical figures) mediate divine blessings according to the "logic" inherent in their rites. "Apocalyptic rhetorolect" speaks in the space of "empire," where emperors wielding massive power and resources are able to clear away all that opposes their will in a given region and plant new cities, new life, in its place, displaying the logic of power.

The "space" is vitally important to each rhetorolect, for the "logic" inherent in the discourse is ultimately grounded on observable experiences (or, at least, the narration and acceptance of narrated representation of these experiences) in the spaces. The various "*topoi*" that constitute the rhetorolect have the capacity to evoke a much larger framework of meaning, structure, and outcome based on these experiences in these spaces, a framework that becomes, in turn, the basis for nurturing argumentation in discourse. Thus, "picturing a priest at an altar evokes 'logics'"²¹ about

the minds of the hearers/readers and to accomplish their rhetorical goals by means of crafting images and sequences of images as the basis for guiding the audience's valuations and deliberations. David Barr identifies this mode of demonstration in Revelation in regard to John's "conviction that faithful witness brings both salvation and judgment," a conviction "that is not argued, or even stated." Rather, "it is portrayed. It is enacted in a story" ("The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis," *Int* 38 [1984]: 39–50, esp. p. 42).

19. Robbins first presented the six rhetorolects in "The Dialectical Nature of Early Christian Discourse" (*Scriptura* 59 [1996]: 353–62) and displayed their enthymemic structures more fully in "Argumentative Textures in Socio-rhetorical Interpretation," in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* (ed. Anders Eriksson, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Walter Uebelacker; ESEC 8; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 27–65.

20. *Idem*, "Rhetography," 17.

21. *Ibid.*, 18. Robbins (*ibid.*, 17) provides this definition of a rhetorolect: "A rhetorolect is a cultural frame containing an argumentative texture that blends rhetography and rhetology in a manner that evokes a conventional context of understanding for negotiating its reasonings and meanings. . . . An early Christian rhetorolect is a network of significations and meanings associated with social-cultural-ideological places and spaces familiar to people in a certain geophysical region."

the mediation of divine blessings, as well as the conceptual world of which a priest at an altar is a constituent part (e.g., a conceptual world that includes gods, interactions between human beings and gods, sacred spaces, personnel, rituals, purity scripts, and the like).

Rhetorolects are not, themselves, however, the object of study in socio-rhetorical interpretation. They are heuristic tools meant to facilitate analysis of the ways in which Christian authors create a distinctive mode of communication by means of their blending of these more traditional modes of discourse (rhetorolects) into new discourse.²² And it is to the work of cognitive scientists on “conceptual blending,” or “conceptual integration networks” that Robbins and his school have turned for the methodological precision to undertake this analysis.²³

Conceptual integration networks represent the attempts of cognitive scientists to understand how thought and communication work (e.g., what images a specific string of words evokes, what background information and pattern completion a hearer will bring to this string of words to make it meaningful, and the like).²⁴ The basic premise is that meaningful communication will often “blend” together elements of distinct and discrete schemes, scenarios, and experiences to produce new discourse. An analysis of a (potential) blend begins with a sample of communication and tries to break it down into its constituent “input spaces.” The analyst then examines the “mappings” between the input spaces (that is, how the “information from discrete cognitive domains” comes together, whether, for example, through analogy, identity, shared “plot” structure, and the like), turning finally to the “blended space that contains selected aspects of structure from each input space, and frequently, emergent structure of its own,” that is, an inherent “logic” or “pattern” that can be drawn on explicitly or left to be completed inferentially in argumentation.²⁵ Something

22. I lean here on Anders Eriksson’s summary of the confusion that exists within rhetorical criticism, “whether rhetoric is the tool used for analysis or the object of study” (“Enthymemes in Pauline Argumentation: Reading between the Lines in 1 Corinthians,” in *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts: Essays from the Lund 2000 Conference* [ed. Anders Eriksson et al.; ESEC 8; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002], 246).

23. Seminal works on this topic include Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind’s Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Seana Coulson and Todd Oakley provide an excellent summary of this theoretical model in their article, “Blending Basics” (*Cognitive Linguistics* 11 [2000]: 175–96).

24. “We rarely realize the extent of background knowledge and structure that we bring into a blend unconsciously” (Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 48). Within socio-rhetorical interpretation, it remains the task of exegesis to uncover as fully as possible this “background knowledge” that the audience might bring to bear on any particular blend (thus, for example, the ongoing importance of tradition history, social and cultural knowledge, scripts, and the like).

25. Coulson and Oakley, “Blending Basics,” 178. These authors provide (pp. 177–78) the clever example of the bumper sticker, “My karma ran over my dogma” (though I seem to recall

"new" inheres in the structure of the blend that takes us beyond where each input space could have taken us separately.

As an example arising from early Christian discourse, we might consider the topic "the day of the harvest" (a topos present in Rev 14:14–20), which Robbins correctly observes "exists interactively with concepts of the 'end of time.'"²⁶ What makes this a plausible image and thus an arguable claim concerning the nature of history? "The day of the harvest" is an image that first evokes a larger context of meaning—specifically, farmers laboring from seed time, through the growing season, and through the time of harvesting, the end of one cycle of agrarian experience. This conceptual domain and its inherent, teleological structure is then brought to bear on the topic of history, the course of human experience at its broadest level, with the mapping consisting of the construction of analogy between the realm of agriculture (and the structure within the cycle of planting and harvesting) and the realm of human experience in toto. The logic seems to be based on the common topic of the lesser to the greater. In the growth cycle, there comes an end point—determined not by the plants but by the farmers "from without," as it were. The assertion of analogy results in a view of the greater "growth cycle" of human history that now looks to an end point, one that, also by analogy, will be imposed by forces above and beyond normal human experience.

Robbins and his school are deeply interested in analyzing the conceptual blending that contributes to creating the arguments and insights in a New Testament text, but they are particularly interested to note how topoi that are typically associated with one rhetorolect are blended together with topoi at home in another to nurture new possibilities for argumentation that could not have arisen from either one alone or to negotiate new challenges and problems that could not be addressed by the argumentative strategies nurtured within the cultural frame of a single rhetorolect.

We turn now to Rev 14:6–13 to display these interpretive strategies at work, without any intention of rehearsing the material already included in the prequel to this essay. As with every interpretive tool, the proof of its

the bumper sticker being less confessional and more confrontational: "my karma ran over *your* dogma"). One "input space" involves the scenario of a car running over a dog, presumably killing or at least incapacitating it (this is supplied from the hearers' background knowledge). A second input space involves the theological-philosophical categories of "karma," an Eastern religious term suggesting actualized destiny (but operating here more as a symbol of pluralistic enlightenment that comes from exploring religious traditions beyond one's native tradition), and "dogma," a Western religious term suggesting, pejoratively, uncritical commitment to a particularistic tradition. In the "mapping" of these spaces, a simple substitution takes place (karma replaces car, dogma replaces dog), with the first input space continuing to provide the "organizing frame" for the blend (i.e., the forceful confrontation between the two elements, to the detriment of the latter). In the blended space, then, we have the subject's exposure and openness to new ideas clashing violently with and overcoming the subject's previous commitments to what he or she now considers to be a narrow point of view.

26. Robbins, "Enthymeme and Picture," 176.

value comes only with the answer to the question “does it help us enter into the text more fully and understand its nuances more clearly?”

(FURTHER) SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF REVELATION 14:6–13:
RHETOGRAPHY AND BLENDING OF RHETOROLECTS

“Another” Angel’s Message (Revelation 14:6–7)

The first picture that this passage evokes is an image of John, “seeing.” This mental image will be very familiar to the hearer/reader of Revelation by this point, who is invited to see John seeing things no fewer than 45 times (26 times prior to this occurrence).²⁷ This image punctuates Revelation with the effect of reinforcing ethos throughout the performance, asserting again and again the author’s claim to be not the *source* of these visions and their implications for the hearers’ responses to their situations but merely the *conduit*. Every glimpse of John, “seeing,” takes the hearer back to the opening of the book, where John is presented—strangely in the third person—as a slave of God “who testified concerning the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatsoever things that he saw (εἶδεν)” (1:2), who was ordered by the glorified Christ to “write down what you see (βλέπεις, 1:11; in 1:17, εἶπες) in a little book and send it to the seven churches” (1:11). The source of what John sees, and what we “see” second-hand as we allow his writing to stimulate our production of mental images, is God (1:1), whose message Jesus Christ, as “the Word of God” (19:13), brings to expression (1:1). In an environment where competing prophets vie to give direction to the Christian congregations in Asia Minor, John has very astutely kept his claim to authority—to the *right* to give direction to these congregations—in plain view.²⁸

We see “another messenger” or “angel,” who becomes the actual “speaker” of the message about to be announced. Again, this is an important and recurrent vehicle by means of which John continues to develop ethos, here not by drawing attention to his own authority and trustworthiness as a speaker but by submerging his voice beneath the voices of superior orders of beings whose voices he dutifully records. The angel is flying (perhaps implying wings for locomotion)²⁹ in mid-heaven (μεσοῦρανῆματι), a word that suggests this angel/messenger’s closer proximity to

27. Rev 1:12, 17; 4:1; 5:1–2, 6, 11; 6:1–2, 5, 8–9, 12; 7:1, 2, 9; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 13:1, 2, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1–2, 5; 16:13; 17:3, 6; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1–2, 22.

28. On “apocalyptic ethos” and the rhetorical gain of the apocalyptic mode of expression, see Greg Carey, “Apocalyptic Ethos,” in *SBL Seminar Papers, 1998* (2 vols.; SBLSP 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 2:731–61; idem, *Evasive Apocalypse* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999); deSilva, “Persuasive Strategy,” 789–90; idem, “A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13,” 127–28.

29. It is unclear, however, whether or not first-century hearers would have pictured angels in this way. While cherubim and seraphim were explicitly described as winged and flying (e.g., in Isa 6:2; Ezek 1:5–6), scholars are not agreed whether first-century people would have transferred the feature of wings to the lower orders of angels as well. Charles Brüttsch (*Die*

the earth and its inhabitants than, for example, the myriads of angels around God's throne or the angelic liturgists in the heavenly temple (5:11; 8:2–5), as the forces of heaven “break in” on our visible reality.³⁰ In order to see an angel flying in mid-heaven, we are forced to look up.³¹ The poles “up” and “down” are a well-established spatial metaphor for authority and hierarchy,³² so that, as we look “up,” we simultaneously become aware of the authority of the angel (and the authority of his forthcoming message) over the people on earth, including ourselves.

The angel is “equipped” somehow with a message to announce, an age-long accession announcement (εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον).³³ So we picture this angel in the role of herald of a great ruler, a supra-mundane emperor,

Offenbarung Jesu Christi [3 vols.; Zurich: Zwingli, 1970], 2:163) leans in favor of this transferral of imagery, whereas David E. Aune (*Revelation 6–16* [WBC 52b; Dallas: Word, 1998], 824) cautions that angels per se are not explicitly described as having wings before the occurrence in 1 Enoch 61:1 and, after that, not until Tertullian, *Apol.* 22.8.

30. The term refers in Revelation also to the spaces of sky where birds typically fly (Rev 19:17), suggesting a “latitudinal” clarification of where in the heavens these speakers are located. The word is also used in an inscription on a Jewish (?) magical amulet to refer to a realm over which God reigns, presumably from a higher space (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 523). Alfred Loisy (*L'Apocalypse de Jean* [Paris: Nourry, 1923], 266) and Eduard Lohse (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [NTD 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976], 85) “see” the angel more specifically at the zenith, though without supporting discussion.

31. Lori Shire made this observation in a class paper for my New Testament Introduction course.

32. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 15: “Having control or force is up; being subject to control or force is down.”

33. I argue for this sense of εὐαγγέλιον in “A Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13,” 94–95, based on the use of this term in dominant cultural rhetoric as evidenced by the Priene Inscription, which speaks of Augustus's birthday as the “beginning of the good news for the world” (F. W. Danker, *Benefactor* [St. Louis: Clayton, 1982], 215–18) and Josephus, *J.W.* 4.656, where Vespasian is greeted in Alexandria with τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης εὐαγγέλια of his acclamation of emperor. J. Massyngberde Ford (*Revelation* [AB 38; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965], 247) points strongly in this direction as well: “In secular Greek, *euaggelion* . . . is a technical term for the ‘news of victory’ (*TWNT*, II, 722) but of special interest is its use in association with the imperial cult.” G. K. Beale (*The Book of Revelation* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans / Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999], 750) also gives due attention in a note to the possibility that “the ‘eternal gospel’ could be an intentional contrast to the temporary gospel of Caesar,” even noting the use of the term in the Priene Inscription and Josephus, though he does not foreground the interpretation of “gospel” in 14:6, then, as an “accession announcement” similar to Rev 11:15, 17. Without speaking of this background, Jürgen Roloff (*Die Offenbarung des Johannes* [Zürich: Theologische Verlag, 1984], 152) nevertheless well captures its import for the meaning of this proclamation: It is “die Botschaft von Gottes Kommen zu Gericht und Heil . . . seine Welt für sich wieder in Besitz zu nehmen (vgl. 10, 7).”

This sense is, however, omitted from the discussions in Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 825–27; Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 190–91; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 361–63. Although authors of this sort are clear to distinguish this “gospel” from “the Gospel,” they tend to regard it more as “one final call to repentance” (Witherington, *Revelation*, 190; so also Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 85; Loisy, *L'Apocalypse*, 266). Few critical commentators would now agree with E.-B. Allo, however, that the angel proclaims “the Gospel, pure and simple” (*L'Apocalypse* [Paris: Gabalda, 1933], 238).

making this announcement “over” or “upon” (ἐπί) the audience, a spatial preposition again implying hierarchical superiority. We see the audience at a vast scale—the people living (“sitting,” “reclining”) on the land/earth and *every* nation and tribe and language group and people.³⁴ The use of this characteristic phrase, “every nation and tribe and language group and people,”³⁵ forces us to keep pushing our mental conceptualization outward, more and more broadly, making a “local view” of this scene impossible. The language requires of us that we see not only universal humanity but universal humanity specifically *across* all its divisions and separations. The universality of the message and of the rule that it announces unites humanity into an audience and is of such a broad scope as to suggest that “empire” space is the only scale grand enough to approximate it. We are invited to “see” this audience almost as we can only “see” when looking at a map or a globe—multiple geopolitical zones overlaid with multiple *ethnoi*, as comprehensive a “map” of peoples and spaces as we (qua the ideal late first-century audience) can possibly envision.³⁶ In other words, we see it from the angel’s point of view. This is surely strategic, for John’s overall rhetorical goal is to get his audience to see their sociopolitical and economic realities from “heaven’s” point of view and to respond to it as it appears through this lens.

In 14:7, we now see the flying angel speaking loudly, about to make the announcement with which he had been “equipped.” The volume of his speech is consistent with the broad scope of his audience, providing a single, temporarily unifying focal point as they all hear this proclamation of accession. The message is a call for action, for visibly and audibly acknowledging the power and greatness of God (visibly, in *proskynesis*; audibly, in verbalizing God’s praise, which “glorifying God” or “magnifying God” consistently envisions in the Psalms). “Fear [of] God” is a topos of wisdom discourse embedded in this apocalyptic discourse: it is quintes-

34. Whereas George W. Buchanan (*The Book of Revelation* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1993], *passim*) has suggested that we should envision γῆ as the land of Israel in particular and hence “the inhabitants of the land” as a group distinct from “every nation,” etc., most commentators view “inhabitants of the earth” and “all nations,” etc., as two phrases denoting the same reality. Thus, Wilhelm Bousset, *Die Offenbarung Johannis* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), 384 (the two phrases are a “Tautologie,” the first phrase highlighting the different spaces in view, the audience on earth, the speaker in the higher skies); Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 152 (the inhabitants are simply “Erdbewohner”); Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 749 (the καὶ introducing the second descriptive phrase is “exegetical”); Loisy, *L’Apocalypse*, 266 (the second phrase is a “paraphrase” of the first); Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 826–27 (“two parallel phrases”).

35. The phrase recurs, with minor variations, in 5:9, 7:9, 10:11, 11:9, 13:7, 17:15. On the significance of the repetitive texture of this phrase, see my “Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13,” 75–76.

36. We see this map overlaid and its breadth reinforced by the categories of “kinship groups” (at the macrolevel of “tribes”), “language groups” (invoking the image of people who distinguish themselves by speaking in different languages from one another, having highly limited comprehension of one another outside each one’s particular language group apart from the use of a nonindigenous lingua franca), and “peoples.”

entially what the “father” in Proverbs, for example, taught his sons and daughters in the household, where foundational learning occurred (Prov 1:7–8; 2:1, 5; 3:1, 7) and a “final topic” in the speeches of Wisdom herself (Prov 1:29, 8:13, 9:10).³⁷

The angel produces a rationale in support of this summons to show reverence for God: God has performed some decisive act of judgment. The angel’s speech calls us to visualize “the hour of judgment” as having already taken place. Scholars often show discomfort with the author’s use of the aorist tense here, appealing to the Hebrew “prophetic perfect,” whereby some immediately forthcoming or future action is spoken of as a past event.³⁸ Even though this might well explain the linguistic source of John’s formation of the verb tenses here and in 14:8³⁹ and thus identify it as a Semitism, it is a secondary consideration in terms of the reader’s experience of the rhetography here in terms of simple past action. To “hear” the aorist as a “prophetic perfect,” moreover, might even be found to blunt the rhetorical impact of these messages for the sake of a more congenial chronology. As we read the verb as it is presented, that is, as a simple aorist, the angel’s speech takes us to a time after the new Emperor’s defeat of his rivals and the opposition, a time when the Divine Emperor is the “last one standing,” and thus his accession can now be announced and his call for submissive acknowledgment to his rule enforced.⁴⁰ In this scene, it

37. “Final topics” are argumentative categories that are “decisive” within a particular kind of discourse, categories that cannot be “trumped.” The “honorable” is a final topic in deliberative rhetoric, according to both Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.8.1–2) and the author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, alongside either “expediency” (Quintilian, though he himself only begrudgingly admits it as a final topic alongside the “honorable,” which he prefers; *Inst.* 3.8.1) or “security” (*Rhet. Her.* 3.2.3). Even between these final topics, however, “expediency” can never trump the “honorable” (that is, an orator would never promote a course as being expedient, while admitting that it was dishonorable; Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.8.31).

38. See, for example, Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 827: “an aorist verb ἦλθεν, ‘has come’, is obviously used in a proleptic or anticipatory sense.” Similarly, Smalley labels this aorist a “prophetic perfect” (*Revelation to John*, 363). A principal, presuppositional difficulty with taking the aorist as an indication that we are transported in John’s “imaginative mental simulation” to the time after God’s decisive intervention is the persistent reading of the first angel’s message as a call to conversion and repentance, which must theologically de facto happen before the judgment: “The primary interpretive problem centers on how repentance or conversion remains a real possibility if the eschatological judgment of God has in fact arrived” (Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 827). If we read the message as an announcement of change in rule and accession of a new emperor/king, however, “repentance” is no longer an appropriate category to import into this scene. All are simply called to acknowledge the new Emperor: those whose loyalties have been misplaced will rue this accession (14:9–11); those whose loyalties have been well placed (those who have “kept faith with Jesus,” 14:12) will come at last into their own (14:12–13). While a reading of this sort is hardly in keeping with the conversionist orientation of much of the New Testament, it does seem more in keeping with John’s own rather unconversionist leanings (22:11!).

39. Thus Beale (*Revelation*, 754), on ἑπείκειν in 14:8.

40. We “see” these events, therefore, in the same time frame as do the kings who had cast in their lot with Babylon and now stand far off, viewing the city already in a state of ruin, lamenting that “in a single hour your judgment came” (18:10).

is as though we have slept away the intervening time and awakened to a new reality, just after “the kingdom of this world became the kingdom of our Lord and of his anointed one” (Rev 11:15). Again, this is a picture that the audience’s experience of empire renders imaginable and plausible (as, for example, anyone who lived through or heard about the “year of the four emperors,” 68–69 C.E., would attest).

The angel calls for his global audience to “fall down” as an act of reverence and acknowledgment before God. We visualize scenes of actual *proskynesis* as performed, for example, before oriental rulers, the subject peoples enacting with their bodies the relative status of the parties involved. The reason for this acknowledgment of God’s greater honor is supplied indirectly through an elaboration of God as “the one who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water” (14:7). In this elaboration, we are invited to see these various realms in our minds (insofar as we have all seen the sky, broad landscapes, and bodies of water) and to connect their existence (which we can see) to God’s creative activity (which we cannot see). It is an appropriately “supra-global” accumulation of images to match the “global” image of the audience evoked by 14:6. In other words, John is asking us to visualize totalities, which in turn affect our “point of view” in terms of pushing us outward toward the “divine perspective” that apocalypses (as literary forms, as well as rhetorical discourse) tend to seek.⁴¹

On the one hand, this elaboration acts as a topic of amplification, asserting the great power and achievements of this “One” in support of the call for acknowledgment in *proskynesis* (and, after all, can the beast claim these qualifications?). The topic of creation, however, also introduces implicitly the obligation that is due to this Divine Imperator. As the ultimate source of all the benefits to be derived from creation, God merits our displays of reverence and gratitude, an inference to be drawn readily from the topic of divine beneficence and social scripts of patronage and reciprocity.⁴² These scripts in general and the particular embodiment of these scripts in conceptualizations of “piety” or “duty owed the gods” provide the “conceptual domain in which the assertions [or, in this case, the exhortation] can be understood as reasonable.”⁴³

41. This is also consonant with Robbins’s characterization of apocalyptic discourse, together with precreation discourse, as “empire” language, nurtured by observation and experience of the broadest conceivable human social institutions (as opposed to “body” in miracle discourse [the narrowest], “household” in wisdom discourse, “temple” in priestly discourse, and “kingdom” in prophetic discourse).

42. See, for example, Aristotle’s affirmation concerning the worship due the gods for the gifts of creation and life itself: “no one could ever render the gods the honor they deserve, and a person is deemed virtuous if he or she pays them all the honor he or she can” (*Eth. nic.* 8.14.4).

43. Robbins, “Rhetography,” 15. By contrast, it creates a context in which the choices and activities of those who worship the beast rather than God appear “unreasonable” (John’s techniques for setting these two cultic acts in stark opposition in a context in which some Christian teachers appear to be making a case for seeing them as potentially coexisting were explored at length in my “Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13”).

As we move from description of the rhetography and its contributions to the argumentative force of the text, we take up the second new feature highlighted in socio-rhetorical interpretation, namely, the conceptual blending at work to create this discourse, with particular attention to the blending of the distinctive "rhetorolects." The scene of the first angel's announcement blends experiences of empire, in which a herald or envoy can proclaim an accession announcement to the multiethnic, multilingual people groups across the provinces or issue an edict calling for acknowledgment of imperial rule, with the traditional Jewish-Christian cosmology in which God rules over the cosmos he created and issues forth messages and brings about his will through angelic messengers and ministers. The scene speaks clearly in the "apocalyptic rhetorolect," as Robbins has defined this matrix of *topoi*—the rhetorolect that speaks about God's empire and is nurtured by reflection on the lived, observed experiences of empire by inhabitants of the first-century Mediterranean. As the message develops, the discourse continues to speak clearly in the apocalyptic rhetorolect, as we see here a cosmic ruler who has dispensed judgment and calls now for universal acknowledgment of his rule.

But John does not speak purely in apocalyptic rhetorical dialect. The language of this angel's message blends in topics traditionally brought to the fore in wisdom discourse. Proverbs is especially known for identifying "fearing God" as the starting point for wisdom (1:7, 19; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; etc.),⁴⁴ though this motif is also present in the Psalms (2:11; 19:9; 25:12, 14; 34:11; etc.), another important vehicle for conveying "wisdom" in Israel.⁴⁵ Psalm 33:6–9 is especially noteworthy for its connection of reflection on God's creation of heaven, land, and sea and the appropriateness of "fearing God" in response. Psalm 111:10 could have been displaced from Proverbs: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding."

Giving God glory is a common motif in the Psalms, as is God's coming in judgment and the summons to worship the Creator God (see, for example, Pss 96, 98). The fact that an angel is now calling human beings to worship God is something of an inversion of the motif in the Psalms whereby the psalmist calls on angels and other heavenly beings to give God "the glory due God's name" or to "bless the Lord" (Pss 29:1, 103:20–21; cf. also Sg Three 37), or a reconfiguration of the psalmist's call to "all the families of the earth" to "ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name" (Ps 96:7–8, 1 Chr 16:28–29), spoken now by an angelic herald rather than a human.

Observation of rhetography and rhetorolectic blending can already be seen to contribute to John's argument in several ways. (1) The rhetography

44. In the wisdom tradition, see also Eccl 8:12–13, 12:13; and, most lavishly, Sir 1:11–20, 27–28; 10:19–22; 19:20; 25:11. The "fear of the Lord" is, however, a far more frequent topic in Proverbs and Ben Sira than these selective lists of reference suggest.

45. Although the Psalms have their first home in the temple liturgy, they are not therefore pure specimens of "Priestly discourse." A good number address the primary *topoi* of wisdom discourse, pointing the way to fruitful living through walking in the light of God.

reaffirms the authority of the discourse by giving attention once again to John's putative role as "seer" rather than "inventor" and to angels—beings who have a higher level of access to divine truth—as the explicated speakers of the discourse. (2) The rhetography introduces a topic of amplification that simultaneously evokes the logic of the social values of reciprocity, particularly in the form of "piety." (3) The rhetography evokes images of "empire space," blending the audience's actual (and thus credible) experiences of living under an emperor with traditional affirmations (in both Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural traditions) about the superior status and power of God/the gods vis-à-vis human rulers as Creator and final Judge. The framework of "empire space" provides the context that makes 14:7 credible as a declaration of a new Emperor's accession in the form of a summons to acquiesce to the new regime.

A Second Angel's Message (Revelation 14:8)

We next see "another angel, a second one" following the first. This initiates progressive texture as we hear multiple messages from multiple envoys of this heavenly Emperor. The herald might be envisioned as making this proclamation with jubilation.⁴⁶ Within the envoy's speech, we first picture "Babylon," a particular city, announced as lying in a state of devastation. John's use of an aorist tense verb keeps us in the time beyond God's intervention, when we can see Babylon standing no more, which is, again, sure to have a powerful impact on our deliberations concerning the benefits of allying ourselves with Babylon versus enduring the temporary marginalization that this domination system can inflict for the sake of a more lasting advantage.

We have not yet heard the elaboration of this claim in chaps. 17–18, where we would be forced by the image of this Babylon sitting on "seven heads" which "are seven mountains" (Rev 17:9), like the numismatic depiction of *Roma* sitting on the seven hills by the Tiber, to identify Babylon with Rome.⁴⁷ Though the audience might well supply this from their own knowledge of Babylon's metaphorical character in post-70 C.E. discourse, the unelaborated mention of Babylon here, especially in the context of the richness of the Hebrew scriptural intertexture, might cause them for a moment to focus on historic Babylon, which indeed "fell," evoking it as a historical precedent for the claims about to be made vis-à-vis Rome.

The downward movement of the proclamation "she fell, she fell" takes us once again to the up-down spatial metaphors for power and its

46. Though this is rare in the history of interpretation, it does emerge in Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 239: "Il . . . clame toute sa joie dans le double ἐπεσεν."

47. See the excellent discussion of this *Roma* iconography and its applicability to the exposition of Revelation 17 by David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22* (WBC 52c; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 920–28. See my "Final Topics: The Rhetorical Functions of Intertexture in Revelation 14:14–16:21," in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament* (ed. Duane F. Watson; SBLSymS 14; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 215–41, esp. pp. 236–37.

cognates (e.g., shifts of power, changes in national fortune, and the like). "Down" represents a loss of power, the succumbing of one party to the force of another.⁴⁸ We also see, by recollection, the activity of this city making "all the nations" (another global image, in contrastive juxtaposition with the image seen in 14:6) drink wine described as consisting of the "passion of her fornication,"⁴⁹ thus invoking other specific, negative images (intemperance and illicit liaison/alliance) as conceptual overlays for interaction with Babylon. We see, in effect, a symposium that has gotten out of hand, with Babylon as the (female) host. The statement has the form of "radical rhetoric"—a pronouncement without supporting argument⁵⁰—but the elaborative description of Babylon as "she who made all the nations drink from the wine of the visceral passion of her fornication" (14:8c) embeds the cause that necessitated Babylon's fall (14:8b).⁵¹

This implied cause-effect relationship is rendered more persuasive through intertexture pertinent to historical Babylon (Jer 51:8; Isa 21:9).⁵² Historically, we've "seen" this sequence of events before, and sacred texts have brought these events and their interrelationship "before our eyes" before (perhaps repeatedly), such that the progression of the images and their presumed relationship is "normal." The cause-and-effect relationship presumes an agent, whom we know—and have "seen"—from 14:7 to be God, who exercises judgment over the nations of the earth ("the hour of his judgment came") and the effects of whose judgment are here

48. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 15.

49. Beale (*Revelation*, 755) captures this string of genitives more vividly as "passion for intercourse with her," taking the αὐτῆς as objective. Because the nations and their leaders will indeed be portrayed more clearly later as being "in bed" with Babylon (Rev 17:2), Beale's suggestions for these genitives are quite apropos.

50. See G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 96: "Radical rhetoric" is "a form of 'sacred language' characterized by assertion and absolute claims of authoritative truth without evidence or logical argument."

51. Once again, commentators find the aorist tense of "she fell" difficult (e.g., Smalley, *Revelation*, 363), though it corresponds perfectly with the tense of the announcement that God's "hour of judgment came" in 14:7 and, indeed, suggests that this second announcement is a corollary of the first, as, indeed, in the case of Vespasian's accession in Josephus, *B.J.* 4.656: "The people, freed at length from terrors, acclaimed Vespasian emperor, and celebrated with one common festival both his establishment in power and the overthrow of Vitellius."

Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 829) writes of the double ἔπεσε: "The aorist verbs . . . emphasize the certainty of the fall of Babylon-Rome, which, from the standpoint of the speaker, is an event that has not yet occurred," and thus must be described as "proleptic." From the standpoint of John as the "speaker," this is true, but *not* from the standpoint of the explicated speaker in the text, namely the "angel" announcing Babylon's fall as a *fait accompli*, which is precisely the scene John wishes to evoke in our minds. We see Babylon-Rome from the angel's viewpoint in future time, which impacts our deliberations concerning the benefits of alliance with Rome and the feasibility of resisting Rome. This ability to "narrate the future," even to create scenes that "look back" on future events so as to give us, as it were, that "20-20 hindsight" while it is yet foresight, is one of the greatest advantages of the genre of apocalyptic literature vis-à-vis deliberative rhetorical goals (see my "Final Topics," 220–21).

52. See further my "Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13," 90–92.

viewed.⁵³ This is an image of divine activity that is frequently brought before our eyes as we read the traditional texts of the Jewish and Jewish-Christian culture (the Psalms, 1 Chr 16:19–34, the prophetic texts of Jeremiah 51 and Isaiah 21, more specifically in connection with judging a “Babylon”).

Despite the use of topics and even verbatim phrases familiar from the prophetic literature, John still speaks in the major accent of the apocalyptic rhetorlect. He speaks of the destruction of a power that has acted against the interests of the cosmic emperor and sought to ensnare other nations in its seditious rebellion. The second angel’s message blends the space of empire, specifically in terms of international relations, with a rather more sordid vision of domestic space, a loose woman/prostitute seducing partners/clients at a drinking party with the wine she has mixed. Even though the figure of Babylon making the nations drunk with the wine in her cup is already present in a prophetic text (Jeremiah), the image is ultimately recognized as a topos familiar from wisdom discourse—the loose woman who spreads a snare for the unsuspecting, luring them into a partnership that promises pleasure in the short term but, ultimately, drags them down to destruction (most colorfully in Prov 7:6–27; see also 5:7–23, 6:23–35; Sir 9:3–9), against whose snares the good father warns his sons. Like Dame Folly, Babylon counterfeits Lady Wisdom, who has also “mixed her wine” and calls people in need of wisdom to “eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed,” though Lady Wisdom’s cup leads to insight rather than befuddlement and deception (Prov 9:1–6).

The implication for the hearers is that they play the role of the “fool” (Prov 7:6–7) if they fall for Babylon (and thus fall *with* Babylon), an inference that will move their deliberations toward the position John promotes. But the implications of the blending of the mental spaces “Babylon” and “the proverbial loose woman” also carry epideictic overtones: “all the nations”—including the Christians’ neighbors in Asia Minor—*do* play the fool in their partnership with Rome and in their drinking in of her imperial ideology. Their “lead” cannot be followed, and any disregard they show the Christians in their midst for nonalignment with Babylon cannot be taken seriously.

A Third Angel’s Message (Revelation 14:9–12)

We next see “another angel, a third one” (14:9) following the others. The progressive texture here (the repetition of “another angel” with variation in grammatical case in 14:6, 8, 9 coupled with the numerical progression) keeps us looking “up” to authoritative speakers, messengers making pronouncements on behalf of the divine Emperor who dispatches them. These images keep us looking *alongside* John, really, potentially forgetting his

53. See also Rev 18:10, where the kings of the earth, who were the privileged guests at Babylon’s symposium, lament, “in a single hour your judgment came,” using the phrase from Rev 14:7 as part of an elaboration of the scene first evoked in 14:8.

role in composing this text, continuing to reinforce this distinctive strategy for maintaining ethos found in apocalypses.

The "angel" brings scenes of potential actions and their consequences before our eyes. The first scene of potential action involves falling down to give honor to the "beast" and to its image, calling to mind scenes of idolatrous worship (familiar enough to the original audience and to we who have been schooled on those behaviors), perhaps with the "beast" present, perhaps with him merely symbolically present in the εἰκόν, as in idolatrous religion generally. The original audience might have envisioned scenes of worship at imperial temples and/or shrines in their particular locales.⁵⁴ The second scene involves people willingly allowing themselves to be branded or otherwise marked on their forehead or hand (which we would remember being the right hand from Rev 13:16), whether to indicate belonging to the beast (like slaves) or being initiated into its cult (like the branding of initiates into the cult of Dionysus in 3 Macc 2:28, 3:21). Hearers familiar with the text in Deuteronomy interpreted as prescribing the wearing of phylacteries on the forehead or right forearm (Deut 6:8, 11:18), or familiar simply with the practice of the same would find this image particularly striking.

Finally, the consequences are displayed: drinking from the wine of God's wrath. We can also almost smell the bouquet of this undiluted, spiked draught as John describes it.⁵⁵ Repetitive texture in the rhetography ("the wine of the visceral passion of her fornication"; "the wine of the

54. See the richly detailed catalog of these sites in the seven cities addressed by John in S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and the studies of the imperial cult in Ephesus in particular by Steven Friesen, *Imperial Cult and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); idem, *Twice Neokoros: Ephesus, Asia and the Cult of the Flavian Imperial Family* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

55. Commentators favor reading "mixed unmixed" (κεκρασμένου ἀκράτου) as something of a hendiadys, the first term referring to the common practice of "diluting wine with water" and the second giving the proportions of that mix, "full strength," thus yielding "undiluted" as the meaning for both (thus, e.g., Loisy, *L'Apocalypse*, 269, who admits: "la formule . . . est assez obscur, les deux . . . mots paraissant contradictoires"; Allo, *L'Apocalypse*, 239: "il y a là une sorte de jeu de mots peut être inconscient"; Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 153; Beale, *Revelation*, 759–60, following BDAG). It is tempting to postulate, however, that John is trying to evoke a more vivid impression of this heady draught by using two words to indicate two separate things about the wine. 3 Maccabees 5:1–2, 45 may offer an instructive parallel. There, Hermon, the keeper of Ptolemy's elephants, prepares the animals for their grisly task of trampling the imprisoned Egyptian Jews to death by giving them "very fragrant draughts of wine mixed with frankincense" (λελιθνομένου, 5:45), the wine having previously been described as "unmixed" (ἀκράτω) and served together with frankincense (5:2). Though he himself prefers the simple meaning "undiluted," Smalley (*The Revelation to John*, 366) helpfully refers to the practice of mixing spices with wine in Israel (referring to Ps 75:8), as does Bousset (*Offenbarung*, 385): "Der Ausdruck κεκρασμένου ἀκράτου kann bedeuten, daß der Wein zwar mit andern Ingredienzen vermischt, aber mit Wasser unvermischt." If you really want to drive your guests into a mad, drunken frenzy at a turn-of-the-era symposium, it appears that "spiking" the wine was one way to achieve this. This would be appropriate for John's portrayal of Babylon's orgy and give full weight to both words used to describe the wine ("spiked, undiluted").

visceral passion of God”) suggests a cause-and-effect connection between 14:8 and 14:9–10—this cup from God’s hand comes as a chaser, as it were, for those who have accepted the drink from Babylon’s cup. A second image depicting consequences is the sight of these people being tortured by fire and by burning, stinking liquids (sulfur liquefies at a relatively low temperature and remains flammable in that form),⁵⁶ a scene reminiscent of depictions of torture before an angry, affronted emperor, Antiochus IV (4 Macc 6:25–26, 14:9–10).⁵⁷ The scene takes place in a very public space, with the holy angels and the Lamb as an audience to this spectacle, witnesses to the degradation of the people who engaged in the rebellious scenes described in 14:9.

The scene depicting the consequences is given further embellishment as we see another image, of the smoke that results from the fire and liquid sulfur being applied to the flesh of these people going up (as smoke does) higher and higher into the sky. We have seen fires producing smoke of this sort, making an ever-rising pillar of dark smoke on a still day as the fire rages on and on. This signals the length of time of the process and the intensity of the flesh-consuming torment.⁵⁸ While commentators often focus on the question of whether or not John wishes to affirm a doctrine of never-ending punishment here, the focus of his language is actually on the image of the *smoke* rising up higher and higher, “forever and ever,” as fire over time produces an ever-rising column.⁵⁹

56. Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 835) notes that sulfur was combined with pitch in liquid form and used as a “defensive weapon in siege warfare, horribly effective because it stuck to the body (Herodian 8.4.9–10).” The resonances with the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, which have been often observed (e.g., Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 152; Lohse, *Offenbarung*, 85), might indeed lead us to think first of these elements being “rained down” on the worshipers of the beast, as at Sodom (Gen 19:24–26), though the image of the “lake of fire” that will emerge in, and dominate, the elaboration of this punishment of the beast and his party (Rev 19–20) will cause hearers to modify their images of this scene in retrospect and on rereading.

57. Beale’s attempts (*Revelation*, 760) to affirm that these torments are “primarily spiritual and psychological,” though laudable in terms of his desire to distance God from the portrait of the tyrant who quite literally torments bodies, with a view to inflicting not only the sharpest pains but also for the longest possible duration, is not a product of experiencing the rhetography of the passage, which points rather more directly to physical punishment (reinforced, for example, in the image of “smoke” going up from the burning bodies of the tormented).

58. Like the aorist verbs in 14:7–8, so the present tense of John’s narration here (“the smoke of their torment *goes up* forever and ever. . . they have [even now] no rest”) elicits explanations from commentators who try to “correct” our perceptions by reminding us that these consequences still lie off in the future (as in Beale, *Revelation*, 761). While I would readily grant that, in John’s expectation, these remain future events from the vantage point of his location in time, John nevertheless invites his hearers/readers to visualize this scene as present before the eyes. This makes it a more vivid picture and rhetorically more forceful, because it is not mitigated either by the distance or the uncertainty that we naturally associate with future events. In other words, the argument concerning the “actual” timing of the events, though accurate in one respect, fails to honor the rhetorical force of the images as John’s language—and deliberate choice of tenses—brings them before the mind’s eye.

59. Once again, Beale’s laudable sensitivity to human suffering clouds the rhetography of the passage rather than helping us see more clearly when he writes: “The genitive τῶ

The tormented are denied any respite: “they do not have rest by day and by night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and if anyone receives the mark of his name.” There is no chance for the punished to “recover” or “recuperate.” Again, the image invoked is one of prolonged torture (again, as in 4 Macc 6, 9–12). This detail of “not having rest” creates an interesting resonance with Rev 4:8, where we saw another group who “do not have rest by day and by night,” in this case from their worship of God. The correlation of these scenes adds to the cumulative effect of the scenes of these three angels: one either maintains one’s orientation toward worshiping God alone without a break (i.e., for engaging in idolatrous acts of worship, or acting as a loyal ally of God’s self-glorifying rivals), or one suffers God’s punishment without respite. At the conclusion of 14:11, John gives our mind’s eye another look at the behaviors that lead to such dire consequences—images of falling down before the beast and its image or receiving its brand.

Clearly, the combination of pain and shame in this scene is meant to act as an argument from the consequences to dissuade people from engaging in the worship of the beast and its image and the receiving of its brand. Why is this succession of images plausible, such that the audience would regard these dire scenes as consequences reasonably to be feared and avoided by (potentially costly) action in the present time? First, John’s development of ethos will undergird the connection, for, ostensibly, these claims about the future come through divine revelation and are uttered by superhuman beings who are “in the know” about forthcoming divine actions. Second, in lived experiences of “empire space,” those who have found themselves allied with the wrong (losing) side of a power struggle can reasonably expect to be punished by the victor as “disobedient rebels” or “enemies”—and history is replete with examples of this punishment being brutal. The stakes are high where showing honor to a ruler is concerned, and John portrays humanity in the familiar predicament of being caught between competing rulers with competing claims to honor. In this case, the idolaters violate the just commandments of the divine Patron/Creator (e.g., the first commandment: “You will worship the Lord your God and serve

βασανισμοῦ does not express the source of the smoke (‘the smoke arising from their torment’) but association or reference: ‘the memorial to [their] torment’ (ibid., 763). While I would not contend against his identification of an important meaning effect of this smoke, his reading allows the symbolic or extended meaning to replace the experience of “seeing” the images of the text and results in an interruption of the natural procession of images in this scene. John has just spoken of bodies being tormented with fire and sulphur (14:10); where there’s fire, there’s smoke. When the reader/hearer encounters “the smoke of their torment” in 14:11, he or she will certainly understand this smoke to eventuate from the action of fire on flesh. This raises theological and ethical problems that are not easily resolved, but these are nevertheless the images that John prompts us to *see* and that John evokes as a matrix for persuasion. One of the gifts of Robbins’s insistence that we attend to displaying the rhetoric of a text is that we will indeed *see* what the text evokes, such that our interpretations may devolve more fully from the text rather than domesticate, replace, or sanitize the text.

him only”), denying this Patron/Creator the due honor and worship for his unparalleled acts of majesty and generosity in Creation (recently recalled in 14:7). By giving the *proskynesis* to the beast and its image (14:7b // 14:9), the people in these scenes are taking away from God and giving to another what belongs by right to God and not to that other. They offer affront rather than gratitude and reap the consequences as God seeks satisfaction (in the acts of judgment described in both 14:8 and 14:10).⁶⁰ Intertexture again helps us “see” this as plausible, as God has offered a cup full of wine that makes the drinker reel before (see Ps 74:9, Jer 32:15).

The blend in this passage draws on the input space of political arrangements at the level of empire, where a herald announced a decree or law issuing forth from an emperor or other ruler, once again blending this with the invisible “space” where God dwells with other spirit beings, with the result that God is depicted as ruler of the cosmos who “makes the winds his messengers and flames his (civil) servants” (Ps 104:4). The content of this decree represents a use of the input space of the court or forum where the disobedient and rebellious are mercilessly and publicly punished by the ruler and/or the ruler’s representatives (largely to deter others from following their example, the consequences being so grievous)⁶¹ to project the postmortem spaces of judgment. It is, thus far, clearly the “empire space” of apocalyptic discourse: here, an affronted emperor inflicts punishment on the disobedient and rebellious.⁶² Even the form of the pronouncement, still from an angelic herald of the cosmic king who is asserting his reign over the rebellious part of his otherwise orderly empire (cf. 5:11–14), maintains this “social location.”

It may be significant, however, that the decree itself can be heard as a reconfiguration of a text associated with wisdom discourse, namely Daniel 3,⁶³ where another herald announces a converse decree: “You are

60. See, further, the discussion of social texture in my “Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13,” 100–102.

61. See, for example, the scenes of torture in 2 Macc 6–7 and 4 Macc 5–12, and the use of the previous victims as negative examples in the tyrant’s exhortations (4 Macc 8:5, 10:13, 12:3).

62. A solution to the difficult theological problem of this image lies well beyond the scope of this article. I find the way forward to lie in interpreting the image as an attempt to articulate the incomparable honor of God and therefore the unparalleled extent of the “satisfaction” that would be required to do justice to affronts to that honor. Because the scene is a familiar one from, at the very least, stories of how earthly monarchs have responded to the ungrateful, disloyal, or disobedient, the author may be seen to construct a visual “lesser to greater” argument here in regard to what justice would demand when God’s gifts and commands are blatantly disregarded. Because the purpose of the text is, in fact, to impress on the hearers the importance of living out a faithful response of gratitude to the Creator God, who is also coming in the role of Judge—and thus the impossibility that any act of idolatry would bring any measurable advantage when viewed within this framework—I would be reluctant to ossify the dynamic, pastoral intent of the passage by formulating an “article of faith” concerning the nature and duration of Hell on the basis of this and related images.

63. Daniel, the sage who becomes a seer, and his three companions exemplify the path of “wisdom” and “fruitful living” in the midst of the court of the Gentile emperor, Nebuchadnezzar, and his successors.

commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire" (Dan 3:4–6).⁶⁴ John's image of the smoke going up "forever and ever," though drawn as a recontextualization from a prophetic text (Isa 34:10), actually serves to elaborate the image of fiery punishment drawn from a reconfiguration of a wisdom text.

Within this, a supplementary blend looks to the input space of the practice of "spiking" wine with spices and diluting wine by pouring it out into a *krater* with water, according to a ratio determined by the host, and another input space where God "pours out" plagues and judgments upon the portion of humankind with which God is displeased. Because knowing proper etiquette at symposia was considered an important facet of knowing how to pass advantageously through life (i.e., live "fruitfully"), even to the extent that Ben Sira includes this as a major topic of wisdom instruction (Sir 31:12–32:13), and because symposia were affairs often conducted in the context of households, we might regard this as yet another instance of a wisdom topic being blended into the apocalyptic discourse of Rev 14:6–13.

In 14:12, we encounter what seems to be more of an aside spoken to us, the audience of Revelation, rather than a continuation of the speech by the third angel to the inhabitants of the world depicted within the text.⁶⁵ Our attention is drawn specifically "here" (ὧδε) to this scene of torture as the locus of the endurance of the holy ones. The adverb calls us, in other words, to view the scene painted in 14:9–11 once again in its totality. Ὑπομονή evokes images of persevering in some pursuit, showing "consistent resistance" against the forces that would thwart this pursuit.⁶⁶ In this context, resistance is necessitated by the perceived coercion inflicted by the local promoters of the cult of the beast (13:11–18; the last declaration of the locus, the ὧδε, where the saints should look for "endurance," was stated in 13:10). The pursuit in which the "holy ones" are to persevere is embedded in their further description as people who "keep the commands of God" (e.g., avoidance of all semblance of idolatry or worship of other gods) and who "keep faith with Jesus" in this situation of rival lords vying for the loyalty of human beings.⁶⁷

64. On the extensive reconfiguration of Daniel 3 in Rev 13:11–18, 14:6–13, see further my "Socio-rhetorical Interpretation of Revelation 14:6–13," 85–87.

65. Smalley (*Revelation to John*, 368), for example, considers this verse "an interpretive comment on the action in this part of the scene."

66. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (*Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 51) underscores "consistent resistance" as an important facet of ὑπομονή in Revelation.

67. The translation of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ here must be informed by the larger debates over the meaning of this phrase throughout the second half of the New Testament. Though Beale's (*Revelation*, 766–67) own preference is to take πίστις in a doctrinal sense as the "content of the

The logic within the images here continues to depend on the plausibility of the cause-and-effect relationship, or consequential relationship, of the images in 14:9–11. These images promote “endurance” in the course of faithfulness to God’s commandments by showing that the costs of doing otherwise are ever so much greater than the pains endured by the faithful. The scenes cannot fail to arouse the emotion of fear in regard to acting in a way other than “keeping God’s commandments and faith with Jesus” but also have the potential to release indignation toward those who presently act in contrary ways (i.e., they will “get theirs,” and “see” who was right all along).⁶⁸

A Voice from Heaven (Revelation 14:13)

Once again, we see John, this time listening, before our attention is drawn again to the things John is seeing and hearing. The image of John listening is not as frequent as the picture of John seeing, but still contributes significantly to the repetitive texture of the whole work (27 times overall, 18 times prior to this occasion).⁶⁹ We are kept ever mindful that our access to the otherworldly sights and sounds is entirely dependent on John’s charismatic mediation, on the one hand, but also that the sights and sounds come from beyond John’s invention and are invested with the authority not of a prophet but of the beings whose revelations and auditions he mediates.

We see John listening to “a voice from heaven.” John leaves the speaker unspecified here. However, the hearers might recall that Jesus is the first to give John explicit instructions about what to write down as he enters into this ecstatic experience (Rev 1:11, 19) and as he takes dictation for Jesus’ oracles to the seven churches (2:1, 8, 12, 17; 3:1, 7, 14).⁷⁰ The repeti-

Christian faith,” the topic of which is Jesus (Bousset [*Offenbarung*, 386] also seems to lean in this direction of a faith claim, simultaneously rejecting any sense of a subjective genitive: “Glauben an Jesus’ ist zu übersetzen und nicht ‘Glauben oder Treue Jesu’”; so also Loisy, *L’Apocalypse*, 270: “la foi en Jésus”), Beale also presents the possibility of reading the genitive here as subjective, which resonates well with the emphasis in Rev 1:5, 3:14 on Jesus’ faithfulness as a witness to God’s kingdom.

In this context, however, it seems more problematic to take Ἰησοῦ as a subjective genitive (“Jesus’ faithfulness,” so that the “saints” somehow “keep Jesus’ [kind of] faithfulness,” reenacting Jesus’ manner of showing trust and faithfulness toward God) than to take it as an objective genitive (Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 241: “toujours le genitif objectif”) and to read πίστις in the sense of faithfulness (Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 151: “Treue zu Jesus”). Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 837–38) has assembled to date the most impressive case for reading the phrase as “keeping faith with Jesus” (= “remaining loyal to Jesus”), documenting evidence from Josephus, Polybius, and several inscriptions for the use of πίστιν τηρεῖν as an idiom meaning “to keep faith.”

68. Wis 1:16–5:23 provides an extended testimony to the importance of the vindication of a group’s life choices in the sight of those who opposed and degraded them in favor of alternative life choices.

69. Rev 1:10; 4:1; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 3, 5–7; 7:4; 8:13; 9:13, 16; 10:4, 8; 12:10; 14:2 (bis), 13; 16:1, 5, 7; 18:4; 19:1, 6; 21:3; 22:8.

70. The identification of these seven communications as prophetic oracles rather than “letters” seems to stand beyond a reasonable doubt, considering the following: (1) the opening

tion of the imperative Γράψον, spoken by Jesus, might lead them to “fill in” the identity of this speaker’s voice both in 10:4 (where a “voice from heaven” similarly gives orders about what to write or, in that case, to “seal up,” that is, not to write)⁷¹ and here in 14:13 as the voice of Jesus. The command to “write” causes us again to visualize John in his role as transmitter of this content, specifically here in his scribal activity.

We “see” this unseen voice speaking a makarism, pronouncing a certain group of people “privileged.”⁷² Within the speech itself, we first visualize dead people (νεκροί) who die “in the Lord,” that is, maintaining their connection with the Lord and his favor throughout their lives and into their deaths. How we visualize this “dying” will depend on our view of the circumstances. The closely preceding scenes in Rev 13:11–18 suggest death as a result of privation or overt execution for those who refuse to worship the beast and its image, implicitly due to their commitment to God’s commandments. Because 14:9–11 so strongly recalls 13:11–18 with the former’s repetitive focus on the actions called for there by the second beast (worshiping the first beast and its image; receiving a mark) and because it is structured so as to present a “converse” scene, it is likely that the information about marginalization leading to death would continue to be supplied here.⁷³ Those who “die in the Lord,” however, are privileged—“blessed,” μακάριοι—because they have chosen the course of action that avoids participating in those terrible scenes of divine punishment.⁷⁴

“prescript” is in fact not that of a letter (“the glorified one to the church in whichever city”) but simply a command to John to take dictation (“to the church in whichever city, write this:”); (2) the words that indeed open each communication clearly replicate the “thus says the Lord” of the prophetic texts (especially notably in the LXX; see David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches [Revelation 2–3],” *NTS* 36 [1990]: 182–204, esp. p. 187), with the substitution of a more elaborate description of the speaker drawn from the material in Rev 1:9–20 replacing “the Lord”; (3) the absence of epistolary formulas at the close of each communication, as at the outset.

71. The repetitive texture is exact except for the cases of “voice” and the adjectival participle “saying,” which are accusative in 10:4 and genitive in 14:13: ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λέγουσαν (10:4); ἤκουσα φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λεγούσης (14:13).

72. K. C. Hanson, “How Honorable! How Shameful! A Cultural Analysis of Matthew’s Makarisms and Reproaches,” in *Honor and Shame in the World of the Bible* (ed. Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin; Semeia 68; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 81–111; and discussion in my “Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John,” *JSTNT* 71 (1998): 79–110, esp. pp. 103–8.

73. Commentators regularly make note of the connections between these scenes, as in Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 153.

74. Because it is textually controverted, I restrict comment on ἀπ’ ἀρτί to a note. Aune (*Revelation 6–16*, 788) makes a forceful case for hearing this as ἀπαρτί, “certainly,” and taking it with what follows (despite the redundancy, then, of the Spirit’s double affirmation, “certainly, yes”). If the reading adopted by the NA27 and UBS4 is followed, however, “from now on” opens up a kind of mental “open door” to this privileged group: any of the hearers can join this highly favored circle by remaining steadfast in their commitment to keeping God’s commandments and faith with Jesus to the point of death, whatever temporary costs that might demand.

A second voice speaks: “‘Yes,’ says the Spirit.” This poses a problem for rhetography, because it is likely that we will not “see” the *Spirit*. The word may evoke, rather, a sense of presence that the hearers have felt in times of worship and prayer, a *feeling* that is available to be recalled as “Spirit” rather than a sight. This raises the question whether rhetography may need to be conceptualized as more than “graphic images,”⁷⁵ for example, more as “recoverable or imaginable experience” to take all the lexical data into account (and all the human senses that can be “activated” by linguistic cues).⁷⁶

The words that follow invite us now to see these dead people as the spirits of the deceased in their state of postmortem rest, such as we also encounter, for example, in Isa 57:1–2, Wis 3:1–9. Where the beast-lackeys do not have rest from their punishments, the Christ-lackeys will have rest from their labors of faithful witness and their endurance of the cost of discipleship. The final image in this sequence is that of these labors or works “following along with” the dead who now enjoy rest in a state of favor before God (of blessedness, being *μακάριοι*).⁷⁷ Argumentative texture emerges here in the presence of the rationale “for” (*γάρ*), which suggests that the doing works that manifest the “keeping of God’s commandments and faith with Jesus” leads to this postmortem rest, so that, again, we see the two images in 14:13 as standing in an effect-cause relationship. The works may lead to death, but this will be “in the Lord” and it will result in “rest,” a truly favorable alternative to the destiny of those who do not produce these sorts of works but perform the contrary instead (14:9–11).

Revelation 14:12–13 may be heard to modulate into wisdom discourse. The topics here much more directly concern how to live a fruitful life (though, ironically, this fruit is only fully enjoyed after death) by walking in line with God’s revealed wisdom—the Torah (commandments) and the way of Jesus (“the faith of Jesus” or “faithfulness toward Jesus”). Again, John seems to blend in a rather straightforward manner the spaces of everyday life that give rise to wisdom discourse—here specifically, the abstraction from observations of life in the everyday realm where rewards

75. “Rhetography refers to the features of a spoken or written communication that create a picture (graphic image) in the mind of a hearer or reader.” Words “conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke ‘familiar’ contexts that provide meaning for a hearer or reader” (Robbins, “Rhetography,” 1). “Pictorial narration on its own can appropriately be called rhetography, expressible graphic images” (idem, “Enthymeme and Picture,” 175).

76. We experienced something similar above with the “wine of God’s visceral passion,” because wine is not just an image but also a scent and possibly a taste and a warm feeling as the wine goes down the esophagus.

77. The specific content of these “works” may well be filled out by recollection of the seven oracles, where “works” is a frequent topic (2:2, 5–6, 19, 23; 3:1–2, 8, 15; see Roloff, *Offenbarung*, 154; Loisy, *L’Apocalypse*, 272). Continued investment in works of this sort on the part of the audience (“works of faith, charity, service, and patient endurance,” Rev 2:19) is a major goal for John.

follow labors⁷⁸—and the space of death and postmortem existence. The makarism is a wisdom saying, and, because the blend is made by superhuman voices that speak from beyond the boundaries of our mortality, we (qua “ideal audience”) are more likely to accept the blend because we view these speakers as positioned to teach us “wisdom” regarding “fruitfulness” for the hereafter. The audience might hear this pronouncement even more particularly as a blend of the civic space where encomia or eulogies are pronounced over those who die and are recognized as “laudable,” “enviable,” and “blessed” by the state (e.g., soldiers who die defending their city),⁷⁹ and the heavenly spaces where Christians who died as martyrs (thus, censured by their local officials) can receive their due encomia on the lips of divine orators such as Christ and the Spirit, who speak here.⁸⁰

Conclusion

What, then, has analyzing the rhetography of, and conceptual blending within, the text allowed us to “see” that might contribute to the larger scholarly conversation about Rev 14:6–13 in particular and the interpretation of Revelation in general?

Attention to rhetography helps bridge the perceived gap between “apocalypse” and “argumentation,” allowing interpreters the opportunity to discover the premises, inferences, and other elements of argumentation that the author supplies descriptively rather than argumentatively (i.e., in narrative elaboration rather than argumentative elaboration), as well as those elements that an audience potentially supplies from the larger conceptual frames that it brings to the images evoked in their minds by the text. That is, this approach helps the interpreter discern how John evokes argument even as he “tells the story” that displays his convictions at work.

78. This is so proverbial that it is reflected in that most popular of progymnastic chreiai, “The root of education is bitter, but its fruits are sweet,” and its elaborations.

79. See, for example, the pronouncement of the blessedness of the Jewish martyrs who died under torture rather than betray their commitment to the Torah near the close of the exordium of 4 Maccabees: “On this anniversary it is fitting for me to praise for their virtues those who, with their mother, died for the sake of nobility and goodness, but I would also call them blessed for the honor in which they are held” (4 Macc 1:10). If it might be objected that this is a Jewish text rather than a Greco-Roman eulogy such as might be more familiar to John’s audiences, we should consider that 4 Maccabees is itself highly Hellenized and is written in a form that intentionally and explicitly combines two very Greek forms, philosophical demonstration and eulogy.

80. It may be significant that John has chosen *not* to describe any immediate response to these three proclamations, though he does on other occasions narrate the responses of the witnesses to God’s judgments within the story of Revelation (e.g., 9:20–21; 11:9–10, 13; 16:9, 11). In so doing, he has made the experience more immediate for the hearers/readers of his work, who are not thereby distanced from the proclamations by some intervening notices about how another audience responded and thus “watching” others respond. Rather, they are left the more starkly to formulate that response for themselves in their own life situations.

Further, the progression of images evoked by the rhetography of Rev 14:6–13 opens up a window into the inner “logic” of this passage (with promise for unlocking the “logic” of broader segments of Revelation and apocalyptic literature more generally) through the focus of “apocalyptic discourse” on “empire space.”⁸¹ The messages of the three angels enact in the space of cosmic “empire” a sequence that would be readily accepted as “logical” depiction of a “story” from the observable spaces of Roman imperialism and remembered experiences of former empires. The “good news” that constituted the announcement of Vespasian’s accession after the tumultuous civil wars of 68–69 C.E. and the defeat of his rivals would have provided a rather recent display of this sequence. An announcement is made concerning who is indeed the “last man standing” in a contest for rule over the empire (over “every nation and tribe and language group and people”). A second announcement follows concerning the overthrow of the loser. A third message follows, announcing forthcoming punishments for those who allied themselves with the wrong side. Even the coda follows naturally as a word of encouragement to those who are walking in line with their allegiance to the eventual winner, even though they are currently deep in enemy territory: they only need to hold out until the new Emperor liberates their province and their cities.

This exercise has allowed us to see the extent to which John blends *topoi* from wisdom discourse into the apocalyptic discourse that remains his dominant rhetorolect. By means of focusing attention on the rhetography, rather than beginning with intertextuality, we have seen, for example, how a well-developed wisdom *topos*—the loose woman who brings her partners to ruin—has been blended into John’s apocalyptic discourse, with distinctive implications for how John’s audience would engage Rev 14:8, filling out their inferences and the like.

The regularity with which John blends wisdom *topoi* into apocalyptic discourse in Rev 14:6–13 and the ways in which apocalyptic discourse modulates more fully into wisdom discourse at the conclusion of this pericope might suggest that John is attempting, in fact, to achieve the aims of wisdom discourse but that John believes he can only do so by means of the larger frame of reference facilitated by apocalyptic discourse. The goal

81. In regard to “empire space” and the particular progression of the three “episodes” brought before our eyes by the angelic heralds and other voices in 14:6–13, it is tempting to regard the remainder of Revelation almost entirely as a narrative elaboration of this passage. In chaps. 15–16, John elaborates the advent of God’s judgment announced in Rev 14:7, in light of which God is indeed accorded fear and glory (see, e.g., 15:2–4, 16:5–7); chaps. 17–18 (with 16:19 as a transitional announcement of the new theme) rather directly constitute an elaboration of 14:8 (this is commonly noted as in, e.g., Loisy, *L’Apocalypse*, 267; Allo, *L’Apocalypse*, 239); chaps. 19–20, with the repeated emphasis on the growing population of the “lake of fire burning with sulfur” (19:20, 20:14–15, 21:8b [a transitional retrojection toward the preceding scene]), is an elaboration of 14:9–11. Perhaps, then, it would not be too much of a stretch to regard the visions of the New Jerusalem as an elaboration of the (exhortation and) promise in 14:12–13 (significantly also in the context of urging courage and truth-telling in the face of hostility; cf. 21:7–8, 27).

of wisdom rhetorolect, according to Robbins, is to identify the ways in which God's light illumines the path to fruitfulness in human experience.⁸² Reflection upon the cosmic order with a view to determining how to live fruitfully in the world lies at the heart of wisdom discourse, both as traditionally understood (best exemplified by proverbs that suggest that we "go to the ant" to learn something about fruitful living; Prov 6:4–11) and as defined by Robbins under the heading "wisdom rhetorolect." But what happens when traditional values and valued behaviors no longer seem to produce the blessings—the "fruitfulness"—that ought, according to the tradition, to inhere in those behaviors? What happens when we can no longer "go to the ant" to learn something about fruitful living?

Stephen O'Leary writes that "the promise of the Apocalypse to make known the imminent End of history and the justification of evil in the cosmos is no less than the promise of the human apprehension of the divine or universal perspective."⁸³ Revelation, along with other apocalypses (4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch* immediately come to mind), can be read as an attempt on the part of the author, on behalf of his or her audience, to gain a new perspective—to see "the divine or universal perspective"—in regard to a contemporary situation when circumstances do not allow this order to be readily perceived from everyday experiences.⁸⁴ When reflection upon the visible order no longer reveals a path to fruitful living that is consonant with cherished traditional values (like monolatry), we are invited by John to go into the open heavens (Rev 4:1), to go to God's forthcoming judgments (e.g., Rev 6; 8–9; 15–16), to go to the wilderness "in the spirit" where we can see Rome beneath her facade of benign goddess (17:3). Revelation (like 4 *Ezra* and 2 *Baruch*) promises to allow the hearer/reader to

82. For example, in the working document, "Six Steps for Writing Socio-Rhetorical Commentary" (May 28, 2004), Robbins identifies the core topic of early Christian wisdom rhetorolect to be "God's speech through Christ produces fruitfulness," a blend of Christian commitment to Jesus and the Jewish conceptualization of wisdom as God's speech producing fruitfulness for all who walk in line with that speech. "Wisdom rhetorolect, then, features productivity and reproductivity."

83. S. D. O'Leary, "A Dramatistic Theory of Apocalyptic Rhetoric," *QJS* 79 (1993): 385–426, esp. p. 402. I have suggested elsewhere that the result of looking beyond the visible and historical dimensions—looking to the "transcendent reality which is both temporal . . . and spatial," as John J. Collins has highlighted in his definition of the literary genre of apocalypse (John J. Collins, "Introduction: Toward the Morphology of a Genre," in *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre* [ed. John J. Collins; Semeia 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979], 1–20, esp. p. 9)—"places everyday realities and experiences within a broader context which provides an interpretive lens for those realities and experiences" ("The Construction and Social Function of a Counter-Cosmos in the Revelation of John," *Forum* 9 [1993]: 47–61, p. 47), making continued adherence to the endangered traditional values and valued behaviors the path to advantage "in terms of the 'larger picture,'" hence the wise path (idem, "Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John," 87).

84. On the rhetoric of 4 *Ezra* as a response to the problem of theodicy and discerning the advantage path where traditional values have been shaken to the core, see my "Fourth Ezra: Reaffirming Jewish Cultural Values through Apocalyptic Rhetoric," in *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (ed. Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist; St. Louis: Chalice, 1999), 123–39.

rediscover how walking in that traditional wisdom remains the path to ultimate fruitfulness. In this regard, wisdom discourse remains the mother of much apocalyptic discourse.⁸⁵

According to Robbins's definitions of rhetorolects, the major accent of the entire passage is therefore apocalyptic, and one can hear definite traces of wisdom dialect in John's speech indicating the purpose of his deployment of apocalyptic topics, namely, to display the path to (ultimately) fruitful and productive living in the province of Asia as the audience awaits the realization of their hope: "the empire of the world became that of our Lord and his Anointed One" (11:15).⁸⁶

85. This is by no means to be understood as an exclusive claim regarding the genealogy of apocalyptic discourse—there is still room for many "suspects" to be considered as the *father* of apocalyptic discourse.

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