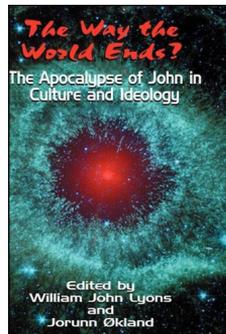


○ **REVIEW OF WILLIAM JOHN LYONS AND JORUNN ØKLAND (EDS), *THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS? THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN IN CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY***

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This volume is a collection of essays arising from the proceedings of an interdisciplinary colloquium – organised by the editors and held at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Bristol (UK) in September 2006 – which primarily interacted with Kovacs’ and Rowland’s recent reception-historical commentary, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). These essays ‘showcase effects, uses, and appropriations of Revelation in literature and poetry, film, music, philosophy, political theology, and religious ideology’ (1).

Jorunn Økland’s introductory chapter provides an orientation to the volume. She begins by examining the various ironies and paradoxes (historical, hermeneutical, and spatio-temporal) involved in the effective history of the Book of Revelation. For instance, she underscores the irony in writing a reception history of a book that for two millennia has predicted the imminent end of the world (Rev. 22:6–7) and has presented itself as giving the final word in a temporal and qualitative sense. She then gives a brief overview of the background issues of the Apocalypse, most of which, she states, are moot for this volume. Økland discusses the significance of its canonisation and how this ‘unstable’ text eventually gained a place of prominence in cultural memory. She also presents a key characteristic of this volume, which is a ‘commentary on a commentary’ (i.e. Kovacs’ and Rowland’s). Then she introduces the work’s structure, organisation, and contents, and concludes by highlighting the contribution of this volume to the developing field of reception history of the Bible. In addition to indicating how the contributors’ essays go beyond and even subvert the current state of reception history (and Kovacs’ and Rowland’s commentary), Økland situates the popular engagement of Revelation in a Blair-Bush era.

The book contains two groups of essays. The first part of the book contains essays on the reception of Revelation in art and literature. The first essay, by Jonathan Roberts, considers the poet Wordsworth's hermeneutical use of Revelation and the implications for reception study of Revelation. While assessing the method of 'decoding' and Hans-Georg Gadamer's notions of time and 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), Roberts advances a new method to examine the chronological demands of Revelation – the employment of a poetic form as demonstrated by Wordsworth. Next, Jo Carruthers, explores Christina Rossetti's innovative work *The Face of the Deep* (1892) – especially as a 'feminine writing' – that functions as a devotional commentary on Revelation punctuated by prayers, poems, hymns, and dialogues. Carruthers shows how Rossetti coped with the dual challenge of Rev. 22:18–19 by bringing together the 'opposing' activities of 'prayer' and 'interpretation.' Following is Alison Jack's analysis of the influence of Revelation on Robert Louis Stevenson's personal life and novella, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. She highlights the allusive and thematic similarities and differences in the intertextuality between the two works (e.g. the bottomless pit, key, door, and beast), and points out how a dialogue between the two works leads to new understandings of the biblical text.

Melanie Wright's essay is devoted to the appropriations of Revelation in various films, such as *The Rapture* (1941), *The Omega Code* (1999) and *Left Behind* (2000). She explores how these films can provide interesting avenues for understanding Revelation, since they attempt to fill in gaps in Revelation's narrative – for instance, the films' insistence on depicting the miraculous in Revelation. In the following chapter, William John Lyons examines the impact of the Apocalypse on Johnny Cash's song 'The Man Comes Around' (2002). While appreciating Heikki Räisänen's view on the Bible's 'effective history,' Lyons uses Cash's song and retrospective thoughts to suggest a different sort of 'effect type' and to examine the cultural impact and the afterlives of the song and the Bible. James Harding's essay ends this first part with an exploration of Revelation through the prism of Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980), seeking insights into the multidimensional complexity of the interpretive process. Harding draws out the multivalence of the Apocalypse and the intertextuality between it and Eco's book. He also demonstrates how interpreters often seek to control the text and limit interpretations in order to establish new interpretations and appropriations within new interpretive communities.

In the introduction to the book, Økland explains that while the first part of the book focuses on positive appropriations of Revelation, the second part shifts to the troubling effective history of Revelation in history and ideology. Heikki Räisänen examines the use of Revelation in recent US imperial politics, in particular the use of Rev. 19:11–21. Räisänen contends that this description of a rider on a white horse who brings righteousness by making war has fuelled the notion that justice and righteousness can only be properly attained through the use of violence, by destroying and demonising those who resist such values: the 'Other.'

Anke Holdenried's essay examines the important medieval text *Sibilla erithea babilonica* to study important aspects of Revelation's reception. Holdenried finds that although Revelation was not received and understood in isolation from other apocalyptic texts, it had a role in being a frame of reference for people to make sense of their world. The next essay is Simon Woodman's analysis of the disputes over the 'plain' meaning of Revelation in British Baptist movements of the 17th century. He shows that although Revelation is a text that does not invite 'plain' readings, the increasing accessibility to the Bible combined with the multiple backgrounds of the readers produces an endless range of interpretations and millenarian expectations. Then Kenneth Newport

examines the final days of the Waco sectarian group as an 'effect' of the biblical text. He demonstrates that when predictions based on Revelation do not come to fruition, these predictions and interpretations of Revelation become outdated, and as a result there is the persistent need to produce new ones.

Michael Northcott's essay follows with a discussion of the various forms of American eschatologies that all claim to be accurate interpretations of Revelation. He explores how these eschatological stances foster apathy towards ecological concerns, and how they are products of American imperialism around the globe. In the following chapter, Hanna Stenström examines the ambiguities that feminists have faced while approaching the Apocalypse, especially during the formative years of feminist interpretation in the 1970s and 1980s. She focuses on how Revelation has not only negative implications for women (e.g. its grotesque images of women), but also positive ones. Finally, Jorunn Økland explores the use of Revelation by Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. In particular, she finds that although both recognised the importance of Revelation in their contemporary settings, the differences between their uses are based on their level of knowledge of the book.

The final chapter of the book comes from Christopher Rowland and responds to, and gives further reflections on, the interdisciplinary colloquium, his recent commentary, and reception history in general and of Revelation in particular. The book concludes with indices of references, subjects, and modern authors.

It is very difficult to find any fault in this book. This volume does not aim to cover every area of the effective history of Revelation. One cannot expect such a volume to do so, since effective or reception history is still a developing field of research, and there are many aspects of this field (e.g. terminology and method) with which scholars are wrestling. Moreover, the book of Revelation lends itself to be malleable and multivalent. This study, appropriately, not only covers some overlooked ways that Revelation has been appropriated throughout history (e.g. film, literature, and music), but it provides critical challenges to the study of reception history. Thus, this volume does not merely describe the effective history of Revelation, but it engages in the dialogue about that effective history.

Although this is a well-produced book, there are two related quibbles worth pointing out. Looking at the table of contents, there is no recognisable structure to the book. But after reading the first chapter, which the reader finds out to be basically the introduction to the book, the structure is found. It would have been helpful to include in the table of contents the book's bipartite structure, 'Revelation in Art and Literature' and 'Revelation in History and Ideology'. Also, it is only after reading through the book that one realises the book's intention to be a response or commentary on Kovacs' and Rowland's commentary. In fact, Økland states that it 'is recommended to have their commentary at hand when reading this volume' (10). This characteristic of the volume should be initially stated in the book's description or subtitle.

Quibbles aside, this is an excellent volume that provides innovative excavations into the effective history of Revelation, and whets readers' appetites for more interdisciplinary explorations. It is a welcome contribution not only to the study of the reception history of Revelation, but also to development of this field of research. It is highly recommended for reception-historical scholars and anyone interested in the cultural appropriations of Revelation.