In his introductory remarks, Resseguie gives his motivation for undertaking a narrative-critical study of the Book of Revelation: “By focusing on setting, rhetoric, point of view, character, and plot, the narrative... comes alive and awakens the imagination in ways that more traditional methods of biblical study are not able to do” (p. 1). These five main elements of narrative analysis form the bulk of Resseguie’s book, but he also adds an excellent concluding chapter on the “Theological Significance of Revelation.” His study is full of interesting details and careful observations that do indeed enliven one’s reading of the Apocalypse, even if some of his exegetical conclusions are not totally convincing. Overall, what Resseguie has written is quite good; what is disappointing is what he has not written. Several elements of a complete narrative analysis that are systematically outlined in the extended introduction (pp. 1-3 1) are unfortun ately not applied in the rest of this book.

The first chapter analyzes the “Point of View” of Revelation in five different respects: phraseological, spatial, psychological, temporal, and ideological (conveniently summarized in a table on p. 32). Resseguie discusses the phraseological and spatial points of view thoroughly, but covers the last three types in only about one page each. In the “phraseological” section he argues that “John juxtaposes events that are seen with events that are heard, ... so that what he hears interprets what he sees. Whereas seeing is influenced by appearances, which may or may not be true, hearing uncovers what is hidden, the inner nature” (p. 33; emphasis original). Although the introduction admits
that both hearing and seeing can mutually interpret each other in the Apocalypse (pp. 8-9), in this chapter Resseguie consistently and exclusively gives priority to hearing over seeing. To make this point, however, he frequently reverses the narrative order of the biblical text (as if the explanations heard always followed the things seen), thereby failing to acknowledge that in some passages of Revelation seeing does take priority over hearing. He allows for this option in the introduction (“...or that what is heard [a traditional expectation] is to be reinterpreted by what is seen [a new reality],” p. 9), but fails to apply it later.

The section on “spatial point of view” is quite good, analyzing the pairs center/perimeter, outer/inner, above/below, and open/close (pp. 38-44). Missing, however, is any further discussion of Resseguie’s earlier claim (in the introduction) that a proper understanding of the above/below perspectives shows that “Michael’s climatic [sic] battle with Satan” (Rev 12:7-9) is an event that “actually takes place on the cross” (p. 7; despite the promise of the associated footnote 12, there is no real discussion of this on p. 35, except for the mere quotation of Rev 12:10-11).

While “rhetoric” was treated extensively in the introduction (as the second of the five main aspects of narrative analysis; pp. 10-15), it curiously does not receive its own chapter in the text, but is included as part of chapter 1. Even more disappointing is that “repetition” and “figurative language” (sub-sections of “rhetoric” in the introduction) are not analyzed further in this chapter. The only rhetorical elements Resseguie discusses here are the “numerals” of Revelation (pp. 48-69). Again, what he has written is fine overall, but what is missing is surprising. He covers most of the cardinal whole numbers, but barely mentions the ordinal numbers or the fractions (except for 3½), and omits any discussion of “one” or “first.” Although he discusses “666” at length, he does not mention the occurrences of “six” by itself, nor does he deal with “616, 48; the important textual variant in Rev 13:18 (except in one brief citation from B. Metzger). Resseguie further disputes that “666” is a reference to Nero, or that the “seven mountains” of Rev 17 refer to Rome, opting for purely symbolic interpretations instead (pp. 54-59). These anti-historical conclusions are probably influenced by his narrative-critical approach. But is this really an either/or choice? Can't the numbers in Revelation have both a specific historical foundation and a broader symbolic meaning?

Chapter 2 discusses the topographical settings, architectural settings, and props used in Revelation (pp. 70-102). None of these are physical settings, Resseguie asserts. Rather, all must be interpreted as spiritual settings. As such, they can be subdivided into three categories: some represent “Order/Promise/Life,” others represent “Chaos/Threat/Death,” while a few are “ambiguous” (i.e. able to represent either side). This chapter is convincing overall, although the subsequent analysis reveals that “throne” and “sea” actually belong in the “ambiguous” column (contra the otherwise helpful summary chart on p. 70). Missing here is any discussion of the “temporal settings” of Revelation (which
are different from “temporal point of view”), even though they were included in the introduction (pp. 18-19).

The longest and most detailed chapter is on “Character” (pp. 103-59). Here Resseguie emphasizes the parallels and contrasts between the narrative portrayals of the good characters (called “apocalyptic” or “idealized”) and the bad ones (called “counterfeit” or “demonic”). He rightly focuses on the major characters (God, Jesus, the animals—both demonic and apocalyptic, and the “women of the apocalypse”), but he unfortunately neglects some of the minor characters (Antipas, the elders—although these are treated in ch. 1 in the section on the number “twenty-four”). Also lacking is a full treatment of “John” himself as a character within the narrative.

Chapter 4 provides a fine summary of the “Plot and Structure” of Revelation (pp. 160-192). After describing several problems with the dominant “recapitulation theory,” Resseguie argues that the plot is better understood as a linear progression of events, although “primarily a literary progression and not a chronological progression” (p. 166). He also describes the overall structure of Revelation as “a U-shaped structure that begins with a stable condition, moves downward due to a series of threatening conditions and instabilities, and at the end moves upward to a new stable condition” (p. 166). Resseguie then provides a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the plot, where he recapitulates and applies many of the insights from his previous chapters.

In the final chapter (“Theological Significance of Revelation”), Resseguie does a fine job of summarizing the fruits of his critical analysis for certain theological themes: “The new point of view that John sets forth in the Apocalypse governs the way the church, evil, God, worship, salvation, Christ, and the future are to be viewed” (p. 194). His reading of the abiding purpose and message of Revelation is refreshing, clear, and much more pertinent than any interpretations of the Apocalypse as a mere historical document or a literal prediction of the end of the world.

The bibliography, index of authors, and index of references (mostly biblical) are quite good, although the subject index (pp. 230-33) is confusing and incomplete (to find “eagle” or “living creatures”, one must look under “apocalyptic animals”; for “beast” or “locust”, see “demonic animals”; missing are Antipas, cross, John, etc.). A survey of this subject index also shows that many narrative-critical terms that are explained in the introduction are not used again later in the book (atmosphere; flat, round, stock characters; tenor and vehicle of metaphor; mood; causality and conflict; corrupted and implied reader; etc.).

Again, most of what Resseguie has written is very good, and he has certainly shown the usefulness of a detailed narrative analysis of the text of Revelation. One would only hope that in a second edition of this book, he could expand on the other narrative-critical
aspects introduced at the beginning, so as to make his study of the Apocalypse even more comprehensive and valuable.