



Then I Saw

The Influence of Albrecht Dürer's Apocalypse as Paratext

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Abstract

In 1498, artist Albrecht Dürer published a series of woodcuts depicting scenes from the Book of Revelation, entitled *Apocalypse*. The impact and reach of Dürer's work has been widely acknowledged by scholars, and its importance is difficult to overstate. Sixteen images were produced, each depicting scenes from the text of Revelation. This was a remarkable achievement, given the complexity and difficulty of the source material, and has influenced all subsequent depictions of the Apocalypse in the Western tradition. *Apocalypse* is therefore defined as a paratext, an artifact that affects the reading or interpretation of the original text, in this case the Book of Revelation. This essay will briefly discuss both the origins of *Apocalypse* and its paratextual influence, particularly with regards to Lucas Cranach's illustrations for the Luther Bible. This essay will also briefly visually exegete selected *Apocalypse* illustrations and their engagement with the text of the Book of Revelation.

Keywords

Albrecht Durer – *Apocalypse* – Book of Revelation – Lucas Cranach – apocalyptic – Woodcut

1 Albrecht Dürer and His Context

The story of Albrecht Dürer (and that of the Protestant Reformation) must be understood alongside the story of Johannes Gutenberg and his innovation of the printing press in 1440 (Man). By the time Dürer was born in Nuremburg on 21 May 1471 (Vaisse 14), the printing press had firmly established its place in society. With accurate printing on a large scale now a firm reality, the stage was set for a cultural revolution whereby ideas and information could be reproduced and transmitted widely.

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The printing press enabled a number of innovations in European society that laid the foundations for both the coming Reformation and Renaissance. First, it made Bibles accessible to those who previously would have relied upon oral transmission, allowing lay people greater access to studying and interpreting the texts. For the first time, physically reading the Bible was not restricted to those who could afford to purchase a copy, but was now theoretically available to members of the middle class. Of course, most printed copies of the Bible were still in Latin, at least until Martin Luther published his German translation of the New Testament in 1522, marking one of the first widespread publications of the Biblical text in a vernacular translation.

Even before the start of the sixteenth century, this new, relatively widespread access to the Bible meant that lay people could now study the text, arriving at their own interpretations of the text's meaning. When combined with the various hardships faced by people in the fifteenth century CE, such as peasant revolts, famine, church criticism, and invasions, this led to a "rich proliferation of popular preachers of the end" (McGinn 292), each with their own unique take on the coming "end times," and many people were convinced that the Apocalypse was imminent (Hartman 1). Those who were hardest hit by the various plagues, famines, invasions, and other disasters needed to look beyond themselves and those around them for help, and were "prone to seek messianic leaders and to imagine themselves as warrior-saints" (Cohn 88), utilizing the eschatology and imagery of the book of Revelation as a touchstone to help provide some form of eschatological doomsday relief.

One example is Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican friar with a large following who prophesied that judgment would come to begin the renewal of the Church (Weinstein 87–96). Savonarola was excommunicated by the pope, was challenged to a trial by fire by rival preacher, and eventually executed in Florence where he had first amassed a following. Another example is the Renaissance artist Sandro Boticelli (who many scholars argue was influenced by Savonarola), whose painting *The Mystical Nativity* bears an inscription in Greek that translates as follows:

This picture, at the end of the year 1500, in the troubles of Italy, I Alessandro, in the half-time after the time, painted, following the eleventh of Saint John, in the second woe of the Apocalypse, during the release of the devil for three-and-a-half years; then he shall be bound in the twelfth and we shall see as is shown in this picture.

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Importantly, both Savonarola and Boticelli would base many of their eschatological ideas on the book of Revelation, as would many others after them. We do not have the time to fully explore these; for now, let us simply note Revelation's importance in stoking the fires of eschatological imagination for Europeans coming into the sixteenth century.

The printing press also allowed those who could afford it (or, at any rate, those with patrons who could afford it) to be able to propagate their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs widely through the printing of pamphlets, manifestos and tracts. Later in Dürer's life, of course, this would become all the more important as the Reformers engaged in their battles with the Catholics. During Dürer's younger years, however, the printing press allowed the "popular preachers" to be able to spread their doctrines "through the new medium of the printed page" (McGinn 292). In other words, not only was the full text of Revelation available to the average person, but numerous apocalyptic theories based on the text were widely disseminated as the end of the fifteenth century approached. This greatly contributed to the apocalyptic fervor of the time, and set the stage for Dürer's work.

After completing some years of travel, where he studied with other artists in Germany and Italy,¹ Dürer returned to Nuremburg in 1495 where he set up his own workshop. He had already shown a great degree of skill and talent from a young age, and he had been apprenticed to Michael Wolgemut from the age of fifteen. In 1498, Dürer published *Apocalypse*, which is "generally credited with having been not only the first biblical text but also the first book of any kind that was designed, illustrated, and published by an artist" (Price 32). *Apocalypse* proved to be hugely popular—as a woodcut series in print, it was more affordable than an engraving (Koerner 18–19), and as we have already seen, its subject matter was highly popular at the time of its publishing. Dürer's *Apocalypse* was, like many significant events, a case of the right person producing the right work at the right time.

Dürer was by no means the first to make a woodcut of the Apocalypse, nor was he the first to publish a series like this. Kurth, for example, argues that Dürer adopted Anton Koberger's scheme and iconographic details of the Nuremburg Bible for his own work (20). However, Dürer's woodcuts were recognized as being of exceptional quality, and they became widespread, influencing many others. Dürer's work was famously influential; best-known of his devotees was Lucas Cranach the Elder, who reworked the images of Dürer's *Apocalypse* into

¹ Dürer's life is well documented, and it is neither within the scope of this essay nor helpful to restate it here. I simply refer those interested to a biography of Dürer, such as Hutchison's.

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the newly completed Luther Bible, which he was responsible for illustrating (de Hamel 216). The Luther Bible was first printed in 1534, and contained illustrations from artists working in the workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder. These illustrations were intended as a visual representation of the text, and would most likely have formed the basis for their readers' imaginings when considering the text—in other words, a deliberate paratext guiding the reader. As we shall see, a side-by-side comparison of Dürer's depiction of John kneeling at the feet of the one "like the Son of Man" to the matching image found in the 1534 edition of the Luther Bible immediately demonstrates Dürer's influence; Cranach's workshop produced an image that was clearly modeled on Dürer's, the main difference being the mastery and detail of Dürer's work.

Unlike Cranach, however, Dürer does not seem to have been overly motivated by a desire for religious reform. One biographer argues that Dürer simply wanted to provide a service for his religious friends who were not clergymen, for whom an illustrated Revelation with German text would have been invaluable (Hutchison 61). The most likely explanation is the simplest: that he "recognized the creation of a more accessible Apocalypse as a financial opportunity to satisfy a social demand" (Hartman 2). Dürer was also a canny and astute businessman who was well aware of the moneymaking potential of his art (Box 36). Whatever the case, it became clear that *Apocalypse* was a truly exceptional piece of artwork, one that would "promot[e] the whole of German art to a higher position within the artistic efforts of the European peoples" (Dvorák 59). His work is described with a high level of praise:

His scenes are often of enormous complexity but organized with an unerring eye for the dramatic glance and gesture and combined in many cases with vignettes of landscape as detailed and evocative as many of the Alpine water-colours.

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Dürer would go on to become an important and influential artist in many media, and many of his works are still popular today. His ink drawing *Praying Hands*, for example, continues to be used in a wide variety of settings in the contemporary world. It is *Apocalypse*, however, that continues to capture the human imagination time and again. Despite its clear grounding in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Germanic context, Dürer's work has a quality that, like the greatest of artworks, transcends time, space, and culture. Aside from being a bestseller in its own right, *Apocalypse's* influence on Cranach and the Luther Bible is significant; this meant that Dürer's vision of the events in the Book of Revelation were transmitted to a wide-ranging audience. As such, I shall argue

that *Apocalypse* is a vital paratext that informs both sixteenth century and contemporary readings of the Book of Revelation.

2 Paratexts and Visual Exegesis

An important and helpful tool for understanding the importance of Dürer's work is the "paratext," defined by Gérard Genette as productions that "surround and extend [a text], precisely in order to *present* it ... to ensure the text's presence in the world."² The term is often applied to literary devices such as "titles, prefaces, and tables of contents," but can theoretically be applied to any artifact that "affects the reading" of a particular text (Lang and Crawford). One might argue, for example, that Lucas Cranach's illustrations of the Book of Revelation formed a paratext within the Luther Bibles, and both helped to present the text, but also influenced the reader's perception of the text. Given that Cranach's illustrations were largely based on Dürer's work, one might therefore extend the argument to include Dürer's *Apocalypse* as a paratext to the Book of Revelation.

Paratexts are, generally speaking, considered to be of paramount importance given their influence on the way texts are received; "the matter of the paratext is always—albeit often imperceptibly—already at work in the hermeneutic process" (Jansen 1). Given that printed Bibles had hitherto been rare and highly exclusive, the inclusion of imagery in the Luther Bible, one of the most popular-selling books of its time, was highly influential. Cranach's (and by extension Dürer's) imagery would go on to form one of the main paratexts for the Book of Revelation, and indeed many of Dürer's prints continue to be influential well into the twenty-first century CE.

Closely linked to an understanding of paratexts is the concept of visual exegesis, a method that uses an understanding of the imagery and visual motifs used by the culture surrounding a text in order to examine how the text redeploys the imagery of said culture—how it "evokes these images and reuses them for its own purpose" (Canavan 150). Applying the tools of visual exegesis to both text and paratext should enable scholars to explore the interplay between both, and therefore provide an opportunity to ascertain the text's meaning for a particular culture and context. In the case of the Book of Revelation, the text is known for its use of *ekphrasis*, defined as both "vivid language

² Genette 2. I am grateful to W. Gordon Campbell for his introduction to paratexts via Cranach's work in a presentation at the 2017 SBL International Meeting in Berlin.

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that enlivens the imagination” (Canavan 149) and “a context of communication through statements or signs that conjure visual images in the mind which, in turn, evoke ‘familiar’ contexts that provide meaning for the reader or hearer” (Robbins 81). The text therefore makes use of strong visual language in order to evoke (contextualized) imagery in the minds of its audience, using this imagery to achieve particular goals.

Important also for our subsequent discussion of Dürer’s visual exegesis are Martin O’Kane’s understanding of the artist “as an active reader of the Bible and not merely an illustrator of biblical scenes” (339), and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s argument that there are no fundamental differences between textual and artistic hermeneutical experiences (Gadamer). As O’Kane points out, religious art is not (and by its nature cannot be) an objective, faithful depiction of a divine presence but rather a subjective “presentation” (*Darstellung*) or a “coming into picture” (344). This reminds us that artists are themselves exegetes of the Biblical text, and so actively create a representation of the text that reflects their context, theology, and cultural understandings.

In short, Dürer’s *Apocalypse* is an artifact, an artwork strongly grounded within both its own context and the context of the book it is attempting to represent. *Apocalypse* is indicative of both Dürer’s own visualization (and interpretation) of the Book of Revelation, and perhaps indicative of Dürer’s Germanic culture’s perception of the text. *Apocalypse* may also hint at how the text was understood by those who read Revelation either after, or alongside, viewing *Apocalypse*, given that their own interpretations and visualizations of the text would be inevitably intertwined with *Apocalypse*. An example of this may be the pro-Reformation (or at least, anti-papal) sentiment that is sometimes ascribed to *Apocalypse*.

It is important to remember that *Apocalypse* was first completed and printed in 1498, and so scholars must be wary of ascribing pro-Reformation sentiment to it, an issue that often occurs with older scholarship. Whilst anti-papal sentiment was certainly spreading—a key example being the popularity of the preaching of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus against indulgences and corruption in the church—(Cangelosi; Barnett), it is difficult to ascertain just how much Dürer was swayed by these arguments in his early life. Given Dürer’s business acumen, it seems likely that he remained (at least on the surface) politically neutral, neither overtly critiquing nor supporting the papacy or the Reformers, allowing him to market his art to both sides. His *Apocalypse* certainly depicts both kings and Pope amongst the masses of humanity being slain, but it is unclear whether Dürer intended this as subtle protest, or symbolic of the familiar structures of power his audience would have been familiar with.

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This points us at a much larger task that falls well beyond the scope of this essay; that is, the question of untangling both the paratext's influence on the audience of the text in question, as well as ascertaining the level of said influence. To do so will push towards what Dubuisson suggests as a "new paradigm" that more closely links "visual culture studies" with "religious studies" (307). For now, however, let us merely be content with remembering his dictum that in the Western context, "art and religion are given responsibility for defending and illustrating a whole set of aesthetic, individual, moral and spiritual values" which have "also served as timeless and transcultural norms" (303). This reminds us that both *Apocalypse* and the Book of Revelation are important cultural artifacts, with much to offer a twenty-first-century audience. As we assess *Apocalypse*, it is helpful to remember its position as paratext, and ask ourselves how much of our own visualizations of the text are derived from this series of woodcuts.

3 A Visual-Exegetical Assessment of Dürer's Use of Revelation

In creating *Apocalypse*, it seems that Dürer did not draw inspiration solely from the text of Revelation. Willi Kurth argues that Dürer "adopted the scheme and iconographic details" of his godfather Anton Koberger's Bible, and it is readily apparent that Dürer's work draws upon the illustrations in Koberger's Bible (20). Where Koberger's illustrations are descriptive and basic, Dürer's woodcuts are masterful, and show a deep engagement with both the text and the culture of his time. Kurth goes on to describe Dürer as "the first to become permeated with the overwhelming inner meaning and the superhuman power of expression of the poet-evangelist, and the first to epitomise the drama of the world's destiny in the revelation of a personal spiritual creed" (20). Whilst this may seem exaggerated, it is apparent to any viewer that *Apocalypse* is truly an accomplished work.

Previous scholars have been keen to demonstrate that Dürer's art was strongly anti-Papal. Moriz Thausing argues: "Unlike the author of Revelation, Dürer was not thinking of the old city on the seven hills but of papal Rome of his day. With this necessary assumption the apocalyptic text certainly sounds like a religious song of revolution" (256). Along similar lines, Max Dvorák argues that Dürer "intended his *Apocalypse* also to be a revolutionary hymn directed at Rome" (59). Both these critiques seem somewhat overstated. Dürer's life does not reflect overtly Reformationist tendencies, despite his later contact with prominent Reformers. Nor does *Apocalypse* appear to be overtly anti-Papal. Dürer seems to have heavily contextualized his work as part of his hermeneu-

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tic, setting the events of Revelation within fifteenth-century Germany, in order to embody this hermeneutic for his audience.

Dürer made fifteen different woodcuts, each a masterwork in its own right. As a collection, they are remarkable given Dürer's ability to "conjure up a series of fixed and tangible images from the elusive and elastic movements of visionary language" (Parshall 102). Revelation's text speaks in "synaesthetic evocations" (102), and so Dürer's work is remarkable in its translation of the seemingly impossible into sophisticated art that propelled the medium to new heights.

As we shall see, Dürer has focused on providing a literal depiction of Revelation, and has particularly chosen to emphasize the strong contrasts and reversals found in the text.

3.1 *The Martyrdom of St John the Evangelist*

The first illustration in *Apocalypse* is an engraving of John's attempted martyrdom, an act that is not contained within Revelation. Although the image is not included in this discussion, it is helpful to briefly discuss it, as it sets the parameters for many of the subsequent works. Tertullian attests that John was banished to Patmos during Domitian's reign after "being immersed in boiling oil and taking no hurt" (36). Leaving to one side the discussion on the veracity of the story, it is clear that Dürer has included this to help his audience visualize John's context, and alludes to the martyrdoms discussed within the text itself. John sits naked, placed in a large cauldron above a bellows-stoked fire, whilst oil is being ladled over his head. John's nakedness and his praying hands are set in stark contrast to the crowds of nobility gathered around to watch his execution, who are richly dressed. Dürer has not attempted to set this scene in its first-century context, but has transposed his own *Sitz im Leben*, meaning that they are set in late fifteenth-century Europe. This illustration sets the scene for the remaining woodcuts; as we shall see, the theme of contrast is reflected in almost all of the other woodcuts. Dürer interprets Revelation as a book of comparisons, and he visually demonstrates the differences between God's kingdom and human empires. The theme of suffering in the face of persecution is also first seen here.

3.2 *St John's Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks*

The second illustration (fig. 1) engages with the text of Revelation 1:12–16 and shows Dürer's remarkable imagination in being able to translate what seems like an impossible portrait to a visual setting. Dürer has attempted to interpret John's words literally, and so there are some very strange occurrences in the image. The Seer here describes a great figure, the "one like the Son of Man," and



FIGURE 1 Albrecht Dürer, *St. John's Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks*, 1498. Woodcut on paper, 46 cm × 31.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

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Dürer has (perhaps reflecting later descriptions) decided to show this figure as seated. Though Dürer has clearly based his work on Koberger's illustration, Dürer has elaborated in great detail the face of the "one like the Son of Man," depicting a "head and hair white as white wool" by making it seem like sheep's wool and showing fire coming out of his eyes. He is seated upon two rainbows, and a double-edged sword is suspended in front of his mouth. Two significant variations from the text occur in the figure's feet and the book in its left hand; Dürer seems to have decided that it was too difficult to show "feet like burnished bronze," and the book is a clear reflection of John's context, hinting once again at the text's later descriptions of God. The viewer's attention is drawn between the foreground and John's bare feet and praying hands, rendered in remarkable detail, and the seated figure. John is depicted as a humble, kneeling peasant, and both his robes and the robes of "the one like the Son of Man" are plain, in contrast with the king and nobility in the previous image. Although "the one like the Son of Man" is shown to be the ruler of all, he (and the heavenly host) are almost always seen to be dressed in these simple robes, unlike the king and nobility, those opposed to the work of the Lamb. Dürer has here altered John's position to be one of worship and reverence rather than genuflection. Overall, the image presented here is of theophany—the revelation of the full glory of God—with Dürer choosing to interpret the text somewhat more loosely, incorporating allusions to later depictions of God in the book of Revelation.

3.3 *St John and the Twenty-Four Elders in Heaven*

This illustration (fig. 2) is extraordinarily detailed, appropriate given that it is an illustration of two full chapters from the Book of Revelation. A first glance reveals an immediate dualism: the busy splendor of Heaven (above) is contrasted with a peaceful earthly scene of the German countryside (below). John is high up in Heaven, and forms a rough circle with the twenty-four elders (Rev. 4:4), surrounding God, the "one seated on a throne" (Rev. 4:2–3). Each of these elders are offering their crowns to God in worship (Rev. 4:10, 5:14)—notably, there does not seem to be a papal tiara present among the crowns—and are dressed relatively simply in white robes similar to John and God's garb (Rev. 4:4). Of note is the Lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, which sits / stands at the right hand of God (Rev. 5:5–6), which is in the act of opening the scroll with seven seals in God's lap (Rev. 5:1, 7–8). Dürer has depicted a set of open doors, an archway and a floor of clouds encircling Heaven and particularly the throne room of God, indicating that Heaven is "open" (Rev. 19:11) and breaking into the ordinary world of humans. Amidst the twenty-four elders, we also see the angel who proclaims the scroll (Rev. 5:2) and the four living creatures "full of

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FIGURE 2
Albrecht Dürer, *St John and the Twenty-Four Elders in Heaven*, 1498. Woodcut on paper, 38.7 cm × 27.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

eyes front and behind” (Rev. 4:6–8) which lead Heaven in worshipping God. As with the previous image, Dürer is not so much interested in accuracy as impact and narrative; he has sacrificed some minor details in the pursuit of portraying an event in motion.

3.4 *Opening the Fifth and Sixth Seals*

This illustration (fig. 3) is a deeply complex one, yet one that is immediately striking. Dürer has chosen to illustrate two separate events in one continuous portrayal, the opening of both the fifth (Rev. 6:9–11) and sixth (Rev. 6:12–17) seals. The viewer’s eye is first drawn to the symmetry in Dürer’s work; as with the previous pieces, Dürer has created a distinct contrast between Heaven and Earth, whereby Heaven seems to be insulated from Earth by a layer of cloud. In contrast to *St John and the Twenty-Four Elders in Heaven*, this piece depicts the Earth in turmoil: flaming stars cascade down from under the altar in Heaven, flanked by both Sun and Moon, whilst those on the Earth suffer (“Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free ...”) (Rev. 6:15). Dürer has interestingly chosen to continue his contrasts in his depiction of those on Earth: the poor (standing on the left), reflected in the simplicity of their clothing, raise their hands and kneel in supplication, whereas the rich and powerful (on the right) simply cower. Among the rich and powerful we find some small hints at popular sentiment: depicted are not just crowns and turbans, but a bishop’s mitre



FIGURE 3
Albrecht Dürer, *Opening the Fifth and Sixth Seals*, 1498. Woodcut on paper, 44.1 cm × 30.8 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

and a papal tiara. The viewer's eye is then drawn back up to Heaven, where the martyrs are crowded around and under the altar (Rev. 6:9), and are receiving their white robes (Rev. 6:11). A second look causes the viewer to begin from the top and move to the bottom; this strategy helps the narrative to flow more smoothly, and does not reduce the initial impact of the illustration. By depicting the two events simultaneously, Dürer has chosen to show that the two are interlinked; faithfulness and piety on Earth are more important than wealth, riches and power.

As we have seen, Dürer's engagement with Revelation shows a deep passion for the text, and a desire to visualize imagery that might have been considered impossible to depict. Dürer chose to depict Revelation whilst deeply engaged in naturalism (Parshall 101), and the results are spectacular: an Apocalypse that is striking, vivid, yet deeply grounded in the everyday reality of the late fifteenth century, where the impossible nature of God's coming kingdom has been made manifest through a series of woodcuts. Whilst his works were clearly attempting to stay true to the spirit of the text, we have seen that Dürer was also willing to make some smaller artistic changes along the way for the sake of providing a more coherent narrative. In creating *Apocalypse*, Dürer translated the impossible into the real, and demonstrated it being outworked in the everyday lives of the German people.

3.5 *A Brief Comparison with Lucas Cranach's Woodcuts*

When we compare Cranach's work to Dürer's, the similarities are immediate and obvious. Cranach's illustration of Revelation 1 very closely follows Dürer's in almost every single way, with a few key differences (fig. 4). Cranach depicts the "One like the Son of Man" as standing, reversing Dürer's decision to create a composite image drawn from later textual references to him being seated on two rainbows. The bare feet of this figure are shown, and the belt or sash is more accurately depicted across his chest rather than his waist (Rev. 1:13 reads *mastois*, commonly translated to "breast"). The sword emerges from the open mouth of this figure, rather than Dürer's depiction of it hanging in front. The most striking difference is the figure of John himself. Cranach has altered Dürer's depiction from pious genuflection to a more literal interpretation of the text: John "falls at his feet as though dead," and so is depicted lying prostrate on the ground, facing away from the "one like the Son of Man" (but continuing to fold his hands in prayer). Overall, we see that Cranach's work, whilst having been altered to be a more accurate depiction of the text, undeniably draws strongly from Dürer's, to the extent that the images could be mistaken for one another. Cranach, perhaps due to the knowledge that his own paratext would be printed alongside the text of Revelation, has chosen a less theological and more verbatim interpretation of John's words—yet in doing so has also created a close to a copy of Dürer's work! Whilst Cranach's work may be closer to the text, Dürer's work is clearly technically superior, and a fine example of this can be seen in comparing the quality of the candlesticks in both woodcuts, or in the level of detail found in the robes of each figure.

4 *The Influence of Apocalypse as Paratext*

It is difficult to conclusively measure the extent of the influence of Dürer's work. Dürer produced a collection of imagery that was brilliant by any standard, and would have been widely admired and studied as a definitive example of religious art. That his work was created just after the popularization of the printing press allowed it to be distributed widely to a population that was eager to consume art; that *Apocalypse* was reprinted as a second edition demonstrates its popularity. Although Dürer does not seem to have publicly aligned himself alongside the German Reformers, it seems that he was an immensely respected and therefore influential figure in their ranks; upon his death, tributes were written by Martin Luther, Erasmus, Melanchthon and Pirkheimer (Francis 60). Luther wrote that "it is natural and right to weep for so excellent



FIGURE 4 Lucas Cranach, *St John's Vision of Christ and the Seven Candlesticks* (in Martin Luther's "December Testament," 1522). Woodcut on paper. Bridwell Library Special Collections, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

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a man ... who was worthy to look upon nothing but excellence" (Conway 136), worthy praise for an artist who strongly believed that art could play a role in faith.

Aside from written tributes to Dürer following his death, a helpful way to measure *Apocalypse's* influence is to explore how it was imitated or alluded to by other artists. *Apocalypse* certainly influenced other artists when it was published. The fact that many examples of it remain today is a testament to its widespread popularity. As Parshall puts it, Dürer's *Apocalypse* "became the undeniable precedent for most subsequent attempts to illustrate Revelation" (102). As we have already discussed, *Apocalypse* also formed the basis for Lucas Cranach's illustrations for the first few editions of the Luther Bible, a widely influential and important printing of the Biblical text in German.

Of course, Cranach does alter Dürer's work to suit his own purposes—as is clear when one compares both artists' depictions of the Whore of Babylon. Here, it is once again clear that Cranach has based his woodcut on Dürer's, as the grouping and orientation of the elements of each image are virtually identical. Most of the details are also similar—including the depiction of the assembled kings of the earth and the beast with seven heads and ten horns. Both depict the Whore of Babylon as a younger woman with bared shoulders atop the beast, and holding goblets that are virtually identical. There is, of course, one important distinction—Cranach has replaced the simple crown of Dürer's Babylon with a papal tiara, complete with crowning cross.³ This seems to have been the norm within the Lutheran tradition of depicting Revelation—to be based upon Dürer's work, but altering aspects of the neutral composition to be overtly pro-Reformation.

The 1551 edition of the Luther Bible, held at the Australian Lutheran College, also shows clear signs of Dürer's influence. Artists Hans Brosamer and Georg Lemberger created new woodcuts for this edition of the Bible, with twenty-six illustrations for Revelation. Of these, at least the first image, according to Trevor Schaefer, librarian at the Australian Lutheran College's Löhe Memorial Library, "bears a strong resemblance to the opening woodcut in Dürer's sequence" (176). Schaefer also strongly implies that Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is similarly influential on the illustration of the 1551 Bible—and a substantial number of subsequent depictions of the Four Horsemen are based on Dürer's work (176).

³ The 1534 edition of the Luther Bible would go on to make the headdress even more obviously a papal tiara.

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As is well known, Luther's Bible became one of the most important and influential books ever printed. Although German-language bibles already existed,⁴ Luther's was unique in that it was based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts available to him, and was translated into a vernacular, contemporary German that everyone could understand (Moore 37–38). Luther's Bible was so popular that a second edition was printed and sold just three months after the first (the "September Testament" and the "December Testament") (Moger 256), and was so influential that a new Catholic German Bible was produced under the direction of Johannes Dietenberger to "counter Luther's translation" (Fischer and Moger 280).

Given the widespread popularity of Luther's Bible, this meant that almost every Lutheran or Reformer's view of the Apocalypse was at least partly based on Albrecht Dürer's woodcuts from the turn of the century before. When we go on to consider the standalone popularity of Dürer's woodcuts, which by then had already been in circulation for four decades, it is not inconceivable that a large portion of the German-speaking world's conception of Revelation was heavily influenced by Dürer's initial work. Ironically enough, many continue to overemphasize Luther's prioritization of written word over image by separating texts from images,⁵ to the extent that these "Lutheran debts" (Squire 1–86) continue to unwittingly guide many to ignore paratexts in favor of the written text, to "relegate texts and objects to opposite corners of the room" (Lopez 281).

5 Conclusion

Albrecht Dürer's *Apocalypse* coincided with several momentous events: the development of the printing press, the rise of apocalyptic fervor in the Western world, and the beginnings of the German Reformation. Given these factors as well as its beauty, *Apocalypse* could be argued to be one of the definitive paratexts accompanying the Book of Revelation. Dürer's work was greatly admired, and was reworked by artists like Cranach to be included in the Luther Bible, furthering his influence. At this point in history, few people actually owned a Bible for themselves, and so the woodcuts in the hugely popular Luther Bible, both inspired and based on the imagery given form by Dürer's powerful imagination in *Apocalypse*, shaped the entire Western world's understanding of Revelation

⁴ Stephan Füssel argues that eighteen separate German translations of the Bible existed before Luther's (4).

⁵ See, in particular, Davina Lopez's argument regarding the lack of visual interpretation (281).

for decades to come. We must not forget that Dürer's work was also immensely popular in its own right, and sold very well independently.

Although his work was popular enough in his own lifetime, Dürer's work continues to influence, to inspire, and to challenge people five hundred years later—a paratext that has stood the test of time. As one of the earliest, most readily available depictions of the book of Revelation, Dürer's *Apocalypse* has played a large part in shaping the way the entire Western world views the text.

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