

The Advantages of Reviewing Books Online and the Need for an Industry Standard

John Hobbins, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

The experience of biblical bloggers and the example of the online Review of Biblical Literature points to the advantages of reviewing books online if one's target audience is the ever-growing number of people who research a topic via an electronic search engine without wanting to be limited by the confines of ATLA or JSTOR. Online book reviews by bloggers and electronically available book reviews in peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Hebrew Scriptures, precisely because they are at everyone's fingertips with no money down and no logins required, are among the most-read and frequently accessed secondary literature in the field of biblical studies. Moreover, thanks to the fast-and-furious nature of blogging, a number of threads document responses to a book as presented in a book review with unparalleled immediacy. Finally, the elastic nature of the electronic medium has meant that very long book reviews face, technically speaking, no obstacles; at the same time, tweet-length book reviews have become commonplace. Where do we go from here? In the paper, in addition to recounting amazing episodes from the annals of the biblical blogosphere, I argue in favor of an industry standard for electronic book reviews and present a proof of concept in that sense. A proposed standard is important not because it should or will become the norm, but because the existence of a proposed standard will raise the bar on several fronts and encourage the more intrepid to put it in practice and help the field of academic biblical studies realize the full potential of electronic media for research and teaching.

Cases in Point

three-reviews-of-hacketts-a-basic-introduction-to-biblical-hebrew.html
review_hackett_bhtextbook/

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (1) Accommodation of lengthy detailed reviews of items normally accorded a review of a few paragraphs.
- (2) Multiple reviews of the same item.

Pacesetter: Review of Biblical Literature

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (3) Permanent links to pdfs of the reviewed item's introduction, TOC, first pages, [and indices].
- (4) Links or at least references to previous reviews of the reviewed item.
- (5) Spirited exchange of views among interested scholars and students in a comment thread to the review.
- (6) Trackbacks and/or manually added links to further online discussion.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers. Limiting factor: Many scholars are not inclined to engage in online discussion.

the-knoppersristau-volume-on-israelite-historiography-a-review-of-the-rbl-review.html

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (7) Accommodation of reviews of reviews of reviews.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers. Limiting factor: Bloggers who remove their production from public view. The result: what remains online is partially unintelligible.

a-review-of-the-new-niv-of-qohelet-111-2.html
bart-ehrman-is-a-reverse-fundamentalist-a-fisk-of-his-huffpo-op-ed.html

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (8) Extension of the practice of review to items and components of items of scholarly output that are not usually subject to review.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers. Limiting factor: Hit-and-miss nature of the enterprise.

bruce-waltke-reviews-michael-foxs-yab-18b.html

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (9) Full circle exchange of views between reviewers of the same item.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers. Limiting factor: Many scholars are shrinking violets.

2007/04/electronic_dict.html
2007/05/electronic_dict.html
2007/05/electronic_dict_1.html
2007/05/the_future_of_a.html

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (10) Realizing the full potential of electronic research. Toward the development of truly interactive reviews.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers. Limiting factor: Proprietary software.

a-review-of-muraokas-greekenglish-lexicon-of-the-septuagint.html

Contributions to an Industry Standard for Online Reviews:

- (11) Timeliness of review.
- (12) Links thereto in list-servs designed for scholars and students.

Pacesetters: Bibliobloggers.