Forum

Subject to whose authority?¹

'The problematic nature of Romans 13:1-7, the famous "church-state" text, is well known.' With this remark Jan Botha introduces his study of this text which has played such an important part in the history of the church and particularly in the history of our country. Botha believes that New Testament scholars have the responsibility to propose valid interpretations of this—and other—problematic passages in the Bible.

In his book, which started life as a doctoral dissertation (presented to the Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch in 1992 under the supervision of Bernard C Lategan), Botha reasons from the 'multi-dimensional nature of textual communication' and selects four approaches with which to interpret Romans 13:1-7. Consequently his study consists of four chapters: reading Romans 13:1-7 from linguistic, literary, rhetorical, and social-scientific perspectives. The various chapters include extensive theoretical reflection which leads to nuanced qualifications. In his 'General Summary and Conclusions' Botha emphasises an important tenet of his study: a responsible and serious reading of the text of Romans 13:1-7 must take place before any study of the possible extrinsic relations (or ethical inferences drawn from the text) can be undertaken with confidence (cf 1994b:219).

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At the outset let me say unequivocally that this study of Botha is a most important contribution not simply to rhetorical criticism but to the task of

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exegesis as a whole and especially to the clarification and consolidation of its methods. If the balcanisation of the exegetical terrain is ever to be overcome, it will have to occur with the help of investigations such as Botha’s.

This study clarifies four important and indispensable exegetical operations in the analysis and understanding of any biblical text, and in the case of this study, Rm 13:1–7. The operations he describes and illustrates with respect to Rm 13:1–7 are linguistic analysis, literary analysis, rhetorical analysis and social-scientific analysis—four exegetical operations he deems essential to a responsible biblical interpretation (1994b:4). Botha also notes something of the complementarity and overlap of these operations. I especially welcome this latter feature, since the relation of rhetorical criticism and social-scientific criticism is something that I, along with Vernon Robbins, have long been stressing.

This work offers a splendid historical and methodological overview of four indispensable operations of the exegetical method, their features, history of development, potentials and limits as interpretive procedures. Since Botha was wise, indeed inspired, enough to include social-scientific criticism among the indispensable tools of the interpretive task, my remarks will focus on this operation in particular.

In regard to social-scientific criticism, my general impression is that while Botha has accurately identified certain aspects of this exegetical operation, he has not said enough about the actual aims and procedures of social-scientific criticism. The result is that the general reader is not sufficiently informed about this method and that Botha’s own social-scientific critical analysis of Rm 13:1–7 and the letter as a whole is less than complete and compelling. As a further consequence, we are left wondering about the complementarity and coordination of these four operations in one integrated exegetical process. With respect to Rm 13:1–7, this means that the fundamental question of how this text segment and Romans as a whole is designed socially as well as linguistically, literarily, and rhetorically to accomplish its pragmatic and social purpose still awaits a definitive answer. Finally, in regard to his broader aim, namely clarifying what these exegetical operations have to contribute to an ‘ethically responsible reading’ of Rm 13:1–7, Botha has not gone far enough. He has raised splendid questions but has left us wishing for more.

In his social-scientific treatment of Rm 13:1–7, the briefest of his four discussions (1994b:189–218), Botha begins with the text rather than thoughts about its possible social context. As I have elsewhere stated (see Elliott 1991; 1993:70–80) I agree with this empirical starting point. This allows the content and features of the text to raise the social and cultural issues that must be further analysed. Botha himself analyses two main issues from a social-scientific perspective: first, the nature and function of paraenesis with reference to the
sociological concepts of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*, ‘structure/anti-
structure,’ and *communitas*. Secondly, he relates the issue of honour men-
tioned in this text segment to the prevailing ancient Mediterranean values of
honour and shame.

This analysis is full of excellent observations. But one is left wondering
whether there are not other pressing social, political, and cultural issues
which also cry out for social-scientific analysis and how the two issues he do
address relate Romans 13 to the pragmatic aim of the letter as a whole.

Social-scientific criticism of a specific biblical document, I agree, begins
with that document or one of its text segments, in this case Rm 13:1-7.
However, this exegetical operation then goes on to examine the function of
this segment within the document as a whole, its coherence with the larger
line of argumentation, and the question of how both the text segment and its
entire co-text is designed as an effective means of communication in response
to some social situation or exigency. Botha’s social-scientific treatment,
however, includes little if anything about the actual social situation of
Romans, although he did discuss aspects of this question earlier in his study.

The distinction he draws between the fictive social world represented
within the text and the actual social world beyond the text (1994b:243, 272) is,
of course, important. But in Botha’s work it appears so restrictive that the
analysis of the actual social context of Romans from a social-scientific per-
spective is seriously short-changed. Even granting the valid distinction
between the world in the text and the world beyond the text, it still holds
true that the features and dynamics of the social world within the text encode, and are dependent for their plausibility and rhetorical power, on the
features, conditions, and scripts of the actual social world within which this
text has been produced. This is saying more than Botha does in his statement
that ‘narrative worlds and social reality are somehow akin in terms of construc-
tion and operation’ (:191-92). Precisely how they are akin or different is
a factor that cries out for clarification. And this includes what Botha
excludes; namely, ‘the goal-specific interaction (or persuasion) represented by
this specific [paraenetic] type of discourse’ (:193). In this regard I wonder if
Botha’s restrictive procedure does not fall prey to his own caveats about a
narrow, ‘scientist’ interpretation (:6).

The distinction between the world within and the world beyond the text
appears to have immobilised Botha from investigating the actual social loca-
tion and situation of Paul and his addressees from a social-scientific perspec-
tive. The chief focus of social-scientific criticism, however, concerns the cor-
relation of a text’s situation and strategy; that is, how the text is designed
internally to be a persuasive means of communication for an audience in the
society outside the text. One step toward an answer to this question could
have involved the utilisation of data about Paul and the Roman community
treated earlier in the study, along with other historical information to discuss
the situation out of which and to which Paul was writing.

Other elements of Rm 13:1-7 could also have been probed more fully. I
mention only four.

(1) This text raises a question concerning the actual political structures and
conceptions of authority in Paul's day and Paul's position thereon. These
structures and conceptions deserved analysis from a social-scientific perspec-
tive.

(2) The text presumes a concept of order (social, political, cosmic) underlying
the call for subordination and the implicit warning against resistance of order
in Romans 13, that is, the relation of the cluster of 'order' terms (tassô, hypotassô, antitassô, diatagê) to a central issue of the Roman world, namely taxis (order). To what extent does Paul agree or disagree with prevailing con-
ceptions of order and what are the consequences of his position?

(3) The text poses the issue of taxes and revenue (13:7) as instruments of
political power. This, in turn, raises the question concerning the varying
Christian perspectives on this issue as manifest in the New Testament and
the motivations for Paul's position in particular.

(4) The text addresses the issue of honourable and dishonourable behaviour
(13:3-4) and thus poses the question of a possible clash of norms between
Roman macrosociety and the messianic movement.

Now these are all issues manifest or latent in this text of Romans, but
reading Botha's work would not alert one to them nor inform one that they
could be examined from a social-scientific perspective. In broader terms,
what are the political implications of this text, especially with the issue of the
relation of the messianic movement and state looming so large on the
horizon not only of Romans but in all subsequent receptions of this docu-
ment? What type of social group, what form of sectarianism, adopts the
strategy Botha associates with the implied author and under what sets of
social conditions? A social-scientific analysis would also have attempted to
situate this text and its ideology within the development and growth of the
messianic movement as a whole.

A necessary exegetical operation to be performed in rhetorical and
certainly social-scientific criticism is the analysis of the correlation between
text and its historical context or situation. Botha, however, explicitly and
intentionally excludes what he calls 'historical matters' altogether from his
textual reading (1994b:143). But is this not an arbitrary and self-crippling
move? Without a sense of the actual historical, political and social contours
of Paul's world, how is the rhetorical plausibility and power of Romans and
of 13:1-7 in particular to be evaluated? Is Rm 13:1-7 and its co-text a utopic construction of reality totally at odds with the social world in which it was produced? Or does this construction and its co-text correlate with what is known about first century Roman society and the conditions, praxis, and ideologies of the early messianic movement? Can degrees of correlation and non-correlation be identified? And if so, what might this indicate about Paul’s perspective, program and strategy in this letter in particular? Is the ethic of Rm 13:1-17 as ‘conformist’ as Botha suggests (:213, 238)? Are the alternatives Paul faces only those of ‘compromise’ or ‘confrontation’ with established authority (:238)?

With his employment of a conflict model, including Turner’s model of structure/antistructure, and with his identification of two features of the co-text (Rm 12:1-2 and 13:11-14) which qualify the thrust of 13:1-7, Botha identifies two tantalising textual features whose implications could have been further explicated. Within the embracing co-text of the letter emphasising non-conformity and transformation (Rm 12:1-2, 13:11-14), the supposedly ‘conformist’ ethic advocated in Rm 13:1-7 must be seen as actually involving a different norm to which to conform; not the law and custom of Roman society but the will of God, of which the readers are urged to be mindful (syneidésis, 13:5 meaning not ‘conscience’, a modern individualist concept, but ‘sensitivity to the opinion of others’, and in this case to the most important ‘other’, namely God. Hence syneidésis, in my opinion, is best rendered here as ‘mindfulness of God (and God’s will)’. Of course this exhortation is not articulating values aimed at subverting the general social structure of society. Rather it encourages, along traditional lines, a mode of conduct at once amenable to Roman culture but bound by a distinctively different norm, the will of God. In this way the sectarian movement simultaneously distinguished itself from the society at large, the Gesellschaft to use Botha’s term, while also manifesting itself as innocent of any intent to subvert the social order as such—an aim which it, as a tiny minority, would hardly have been in a position to execute in any case. At the same time, the movement establishes its distinctive unity as a community transformed by the mercy of God and bound ultimately to God’s will. That is, Paul adopts the strategy typical of conversionist sects (Elliott 1990:73-78) and this sectarian character of the argument throughout Romans might have been further explored (on the sectarian features of the messianic movements, see also Elliott 1995a).

In this connection Botha might also have shown how a social-scientific analysis might criticise or corroborate his six conclusions concerning the ‘communicative axis’ of Romans in the literary-critical part of his study (1994b:118-19). A similar complementarity might also have been demonstrated between the concerns and procedures of rhetorical and social-
scientific criticism, both of which are focused on the conditions and pragmatic effect of a communication.

In regard to the issue of honour and shame, Botha has shown that Paul, and one can add the author of 1 Peter and most of the New Testament authors, is fully sensitive to the honour and shame code of his time. However, Paul and his soul-brothers and soul-sisters are of one accord in identifying and affirming God and not humans as the ultimate arbiter of honour and shame. Thus in this regard as well, Paul employs an argumentative position and strategy which affirms a similarity in certain values between sect and society while at the same time distinguishing the specific motivation of Christian morality, namely ultimate subordination to the will of God and reliance upon God as the final arbiter of the community's honour and shame (cf Elliott 1995b).

In regard to the lexical meaning of other terms such as hypotassomai and syneidésis, consideration of key characteristics of ancient culture, namely the preoccupation with order and the group-orientation of ancient personality, would have suggested other meanings than the ones Botha espoused. This includes 'subordination' rather than 'submission' for hypotassomai and 'mindfulness' of God and God's will rather than 'conscience' for syneidésis. Here he might have shown how cultural anthropology works in tandem with, and aids, linguistic analysis.

A consideration of the similarities and differences between Rm 13:1–7 and 1 Pt 2:13–17, that is, the intertextuality of Romans 13, might also have shed some light on both Romans 13 and the diverging ideologies within early Christianity. A comparison and contrast of these two text segments and their respective co-texts would not have been simply a study in intertextuality, but would have illuminated (1) the hortatory or paraenetic tradition adopted but adapted differently in Romans and 1 Peter, (2) different Christian assessments of civil authority, (3) different modes of distinguishing the Christian community from society, and (4) the possibly different historical and social situations in respect to which Romans and 1 Peter were written. Expanding this comparative analysis to include the book of Revelation would have presented three texts illustrating three different perspectives on the Christian-State relationship, three different social situations, three different rhetorical strategies, and three different biblical models for contemporary political theological reflection.

In his social-scientific analysis of Rm 13:1–7 Botha restricts his attention to the social function of this text and the cultural values of honour and shame. As I have already intimated, I wish he had proceeded to an analysis of the actual historical and social location of this text and the letter as a whole. This would also have involved a probing of the relation of this text segment and
its implications for the situation of Romans to both the situation and strategy of the letter as a whole. I agree with Botha that ‘a serious reading of the text of Rm 13:1-7 must take place before any study of the possible extrinsic relations (or ethical inferences derived from this text) can be undertaken with confidence’ (1994b:219). But this is analogous to agreeing that mixing the dough precedes making the pie and eating it. What I miss, especially in Botha’s treatment of social-scientific criticism, are convincing conclusions about the baked interpretive pie, to say nothing of the ethics and etiquette of eating it. His study seems to me to duck the most difficult and urgent questions this text raises and in the process by-passes the potentially helpful insights that a social-scientific criticism of this text might provide. This description of social-scientific criticism in particular is so brief that it obscures several of the operation’s most fundamental aims and potential contributions to an illumination of this notorious crux interpretum.

This thought relates directly to Botha’s larger concern with an ‘ethical reading’ of biblical texts which supposedly does not dodge the difficult issue of the ethical responsibility of the interpreters. Botha (1994b:4-8) is inspired by Schüssler Fiorenza’s call for an ethics of historical reading and public accountability. In my opinion this twofold goal cannot be achieved without a critical determination of the social locations and ideologies of the actual authors and readers ancient and modern. But here Botha is all too quiet. A social-scientific criticism could have helped in addressing these issues by probing both the presuppositions and perspectives, social locations and ideologies, of subsequent interpreters of Romans 13 as well as those of the original implied and actual authors. Social-scientific criticism, and not rhetorical criticism alone (pace Botha 1994b:225) bridges the gap between a ‘historical reading’ and an ethics of public accountability. Would not a reluctance or failure to address this issue amount to a ‘scientist approach’, the very method Botha justly condemns and seeks to overcome? In brief I wish this already venturesome study were more radical yet.

In sum, my criticisms on the whole are not that Botha’s study is off course or that his methodological integration attempts too much, but that it does not go far enough. This pertains especially to biting the bullets of the relation of internal and external worlds of the text and probing the self-interests and ideologies involved in writing and reading. Or as the ad for Wendy’s hamburgers once put it, ‘where’s (a lot of) the beef?’

Botha and I are both concerned for developing an integrated method that is at once scientifically adequate and ethically responsible. With this as the framework for my comments, I offer these remarks as constructive criticism aimed at the improvement of our exegetical method, a goal to which his study makes an admirable contribution.
APPENDIX: The relation of 1 Pt 2:13-17 and Rm 13:1-7

The exhortation of 1 Pt 2:13-17 reflects the influence of traditional teaching on early Christian political responsibility (cf Mk 12:13-17 par; Mt 17:24-27; Rm 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-3; Tit 3:1-3, 8; 1 Clem. 60:2-61:2). This tradition, in turn, as is particularly evident in 1 Peter, corresponds in theme, if not in specific detail with traditional moral instruction on civic responsibility (politeia); cf Balch 1981 and Elliott 1990:171-82. In general, all these early Christian texts encourage a respect for civil authority, in contrast to Revelation where Rome and its Asian allies are demonised as agents of Satan (Rv 13-18). The formulation of 1 Peter comes closest to that of Rm 13:1-7, though with some noteworthy differences.

On the one hand, the similarities involve both linguistic and certain conceptual affinities. Linguistic affinities include the terms hypotasso, hypotassomai (1 Pt 2:13; Rm 13:1, 5); pas (1 Pt 2:12; Rm 13:1); hyperechonti/hyperechousais (1 Pt 2:13/Rm 13:1); agathopoion, agathopoionta (1 Pt 2:14, 15)/agathoi ergo (Rm 13:3), to agathon poiei (Rm 13:3), to agathon (Rm 13:4); kakopoion (1 Pt 2:14), kakis (1 Pt 2:16), toi kakoi (Rm 13:3), to kakon poieis (Rm 13:4), to kakon prassontai (Rm 13:4); epainos (1 Pt 2:14; Rm 13:3); ekdikesis (1 Pt 2:14)/ekdikos (Rm 13:4); timese, timate (1 Pt 2:17a, 17d)/timan (Rm 13:7); phobeisthe (1 Pt 2:17)/phobos, phobeisthai (Rm 13:3). Comparable ideas in a comparable sequence include (1) the exhortation to subordination (hypotasso) to civil authorities (1 Pt 2:13; Rm 13:1, 5); (2) divine sanction (dia ton kyrion [1 Pt 2:13]; dia ten synedesis [Rm 13:5]; reference to God's will [1 Pt 2:15] or action [Rm 13:5]); (3) the dual function of civil authorities (punishment of wrong-doing and reward of good behaviour [1 Pt 2:14; Rm 13:3-4]; (4) incentives for doing what is right (1 Pt 2:15; Rm 13:3-5); (5) conclusion with a series of injunctions which include showing honour and reverence (1 Pt 2:17; Rm 13:7). Finally, the encouragement of mutual love in Rm 13:8-10 corresponds to 1 Pt 2:17 'love the brotherhood.'

On the other hand, these two texts display important differences. 1 Peter makes no mention of paying taxes and revenues (cf Rm 13:7), makes no reference to divine wrath (cf Rm 13:4), uses phobos for 'reverence' for God (cf Rm 12:3, 4, 7: 'fear' of humans); includes thoughts (2:15, 16) and terms (2:13b-14, 17) without parallel in Rm 13:1-7, and most importantly, makes no assertion that civil authorities are 'servants' of God (cf Rm 13:4) representing God's authority (cf Rm 13:2, 4). The Petrine conception of the function of civil authority is a simple utilitarian one devoid of divine warrant. The chief aim of the Petrine author is not to encourage or discourage resistance to authorities, or to affirm their authority as established by God (cf Rm 13:2), but to encourage doing what is right as a sign of subordination to God's will and as a means to silence detractors. The differences, in addition to the similarities, between these two texts therefore demonstrate that their correspondences are due not to literary dependence but rather to independent use of traditional parenetic material transmitted in oral form. 1 Peter's view of civil government stands midpoint between the thoroughly positive position of Paul and the entirely negative view of the author of Revelation who depicts the civil authorities (Roman and local) as agents of Satan (Rv 13-18).

3 The following material will appear in my forthcoming commentary on 1 Peter in the Anchor Bible series (New York: Doubleday, ca 1998).
This more sober conception of Roman government may reflect the change in political conditions after the composition of Romans (mid-50s) and Nero’s actions against the Christians in connection with the fire of Rome (64 CE). However, the neutral stance of the Petrine author concerning the emperor and his representatives would be inconceivable if, in fact, the Christian community throughout the world (cf 5:9) were under official Roman prosecution. This Petrine passage thus provides one of several reasons for dating 1 Peter somewhere during the early Flavian period (73–92 CE) for which there is no evidence of Roman opposition to the messianic movement. The position advocated by Paul in Romans, on the other hand, accords well with the earlier situation of the 50s when Paul had no reason to suspect Roman animus against the movement and no cause to question the traditional notion that governing authorities were servants of God.

EVELYN R THIBEAUX:

To begin at the proper place, I wish to say how much I admire Botha’s study—or, to use his word, ‘reading’—of Romans 13. I will enumerate briefly some of the ways in which the book contributes substantially to scholarship on this passage and to the ongoing project of finding interdisciplinary methods, including rhetorical ones, for reading biblical texts.

The book covers an extensive range of material. One of its valuable contributions is that it reviews so many of the issues relevant to the four disciplines it uses to read Romans 13. In addition, I completely agree with Botha’s setting his reading within an ‘ethics of biblical scholarship,’ (as articulated by Schüssler Fiorenza) as a way to supersede the ‘scientist ethos’ that has dominated the field in the last few decades.

I also found Botha’s conclusions about the meaning of Romans 13:1–7 cogent and sound as far as they go—that is, well argued on the basis of the text itself and from the perspectives that he chose.

The book’s preface, by Robbins and Gowler, underscores the importance of maintaining the integrity of the various disciplines even while searching out interdisciplinary strategies for reading and understanding the texts. Botha has certainly accomplished the first of these aims. The second remains more an elusive goal—and ironically, I think, since the possibilities for achieving it, as well as progress toward doing so, are present in almost every part of the study.

The rest of my response will be directed to these methodological issues. In brief, I wonder if Botha has gone to unnecessary lengths to maintain the disciplinary distinctions, in the process making the project of reading

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Romans 13:1-7 more fragmented than it need be. A closely related issue is whether he has too narrowly defined and focused each discipline within a particular concept of ‘reading’—that is, one which assumes too clear and consistent a distinction between the world of the text and the world(s) that are the text’s contexts.

Part of Botha’s discipline in using each of his methods is to define the parameters, the approaches and provinces of each one. He recognises, for the most part, that the choices he makes are some among the many that are possible. I would suggest that the definitions are sometimes too confining—and again, unnecessarily so.

Botha explains his procedure in the first chapter, ‘Reading Romans 13:1-7 from a linguistic perspective’ by noting that

a serious and systematic attempt to determine the lexical sense of the words being used in the text, linked with a serious and systematic attempt to describe the semantic relations of different parts of the text and of the text in its co-text have to precede any attempt to study with confidence any extrinsic relations of the text (:60).

As he says elsewhere, much of what he does in this chapter ‘enacts a structuralist view of the nature of language’ which ‘tends to be further away from real life and specific contexts’ (:19, 20). He contrasts this approach with ‘the idealistic or mentalistic, approach [which] sees a strong correlation between the structures of a language and the ethnic peculiarities of its speakers as well as between those linguistic structures and both the mental conceptions of people and the extra-linguistic realities which are thought and talked about’ (:19).

Yet Botha makes it clear that he favours the latter approach in general and will develop it further when he reads from a social-scientific perspective three chapters later. At the same time, he acknowledges that a linguistic reading of a text ‘does not take place in isolation from the act of reading itself’ (:60), which is inevitably tied up with the ‘extrinsic relations’ impinging upon the reader and with the ethical imperatives chosen, consciously or not, by the reader. Therefore, when he persists in saying that a structuralist linguistic analysis is prior to any study of ‘extrinsic relations’ between the text and the world ‘outside’ the text, he seems to me to be proceeding on two questionable assumptions. The first is that only the present reader’s ideological and other ‘text-extrinsic’ contexts (:60) are relevant to understanding the linguistic meanings of a text. The second is broader and includes the first: that we can determine the lexical sense and the semantic relations of the words and other parts of the text apart from the worlds within which they function to shape meaning—the worlds whose meaning, indeed, they help shape. The ‘worlds’ here are both past and present: the original world in which the text was written by particular people and for particular people,
and the actual worlds within which the text continues to be read by particular people.

My question regarding Botha’s rationale for chapter one is this: Why give priority in terms of a linguistic reading to a perspective on language that has a strictly limited value, that one recognises is not consistent with one’s overall reading strategy, nor with one’s ultimate interpretive strategy? Is there not in this procedure a tendency toward the very ‘scientist’ ethos that Botha so vigorously opposes?

The same pattern and thus the same critique holds for each of the reading perspectives from which Botha approaches Romans 13:1-7.

With respect to the literary perspective taken up in chapter two, given Botha’s conviction that readings of biblical texts ought to lead to and guide us in our interpretation of them within real worlds (then and now), I wonder why he places such emphasis on ‘formalist’ conceptions of literary genre and form, on what he identifies as a ‘text-immanent’ approach (:66, 70) and acknowledges as part of a ‘scientist ethos of biblical scholarship’ (:70).

His answer is that such an approach takes seriously the ‘literariness’ of the text, which he defines, with Jakobson, primarily in terms of aesthetic codes as distinct from pragmatic functions. Yet he differs from Jakobson in taking ‘literariness’ as ‘not something “out there” in the text’ but ‘rather a quality that the interpretive community ascribes to certain texts in terms of the cultural and literary conventions of that interpretive community’ (:64). To me, there is something of a contradiction in these principles, especially when they are used to describe a literary method for reading the New Testament letters, especially Paul’s undisputed letters.

First of all, it would seem that the original readers of these texts—their original ‘interpretive community’—would have ascribed the quality of ‘textuality’ to these texts only within the broader ‘contextuality’ of their relationship, or possible relationship, to the real person Paul. In other words, the fact that Romans is a text—with a world of its own and undeniably ‘aesthetic’ qualities—was for them surely secondary to the fact that it was a communication between Paul and themselves and that this communication was part of their real-life relationship, their social interaction, with Paul. Even while recognising with Botha that letters have their own ‘narrative worlds,’ I find it difficult to conceive of their being read in the same way as, say, the gospels and Acts, which are clearly narrative in genre—that is, where the gap between textworld and real world is understood to be generically constitutive of the text.

Thus, if ‘literary approaches applied to a text’ should be guided by goal-specific and text-specific criteria and if ‘the original significance that a literary text had for both author and reader is tied to the genre of that text’ (:65), it
would seem to me appropriate to take an approach to literary study that focuses primarily on letters as pragmatic communication, or social action.

Botha discusses such an approach in the work of Stowers, but then says that he will 'move beyond', his position (my emphasis) 'to a more consistent text-immanent literary approach' (:75). One of the moves he considers necessary to this approach is the elimination of 'audience' (i.e., real readers) as a criterion for determining the exact genre of the text (paraenesis or protreptic). He will then, however, go on to a 'more communicative approach' in the second part of this chapter, which is also a move 'closer to life and reality.' But even this approach will not consider the (real) author (the genesis of the text) and will reveal strictly the inner-textual communication that 'must not simplistically be equated with life and reality and history' (:97). This puts him in the position of having to insist constantly—that is, in the rest of this chapter and in the next two chapters—that any communication, any purposeful use of language, any social action he discusses in relation to the letter is to be understood as limited to the world within the text.

At the same time, Botha must continually protest that the steps he is taking are only partial—specifically because they do not cross the (mythical) line between the textual world and the real world. And in fact, he continually acknowledges that the task he has set for himself is at least problematic and probably not possible. In reading Romans from a 'communication' approach within a literary perspective, for example, through which he seeks the 'identification of the possible social action performed by the letter,' he says that 'a clear and consistent distinction between a pure textual approach and a mixture of textual and historical considerations was not possible' (:118).

Botha's correct attribution of the genre 'paraenesis' to Romans 13:1-7 only compounds the problem inherent with his literary approach. Of all the literary genres one might ascribe to a text, paraenesis seems to be among those that are least 'literary' in the sense in which Botha wants to define that term—that is, least likely to be conceivable apart from communication and social interaction between real-world authors and readers. Botha's 'deviation,' from Jakobson's concept of 'literariness' applies equally, in my view, to an adequate concept of genre: it is not simply 'in' texts, but is rather a set of characteristics and expectations that 'the interpretive community ascribes' to a text in terms of their 'cultural and literary conventions' (:64).

The difficulties caused by an insistence on a text-immanent literary approach are especially evident when one is considering the distinction between the so-called 'epistolary situation' and 'historical situation,' as Botha does when he moves from the formalist section of chapter two to a communicative literary approach. Theoretically, this distinction between situa-
tions has some value, but to my mind its value for reading Romans is severely limited.

Take this statement: 'While the epistolary situation as a literary projection does refer to a life situation characterised by spatial and temporal separation between correspondents, its primary function is to provide a framework for the interpretation of the letter and not to “reconstruct” its historical occasion' (:100). Consider now how Botha describes the ‘epistolary situation’ of Romans:

The letter supposes a situation where an addresser “Paul” writes a letter to addressees, identified as communities in Rome. Although it seems as if the addressee knows some of the addressees with whom he seeks to maintain and promote cordial relations, the basic characteristic of the epistolary situation is that he wants to establish a relationship with his addressees, most of whom he has never met and does not know personally (:106).

Could one simply remove the quotation marks from around the name ‘Paul’ and propose this summary as a hypothesis about how the real man Paul saw the real world situation of himself in relation to those to whom he was writing: his assumptions, his motives, his purposes? On what basis would one deny that this summary constitutes at least one element of the ‘situation of the utterance’—‘the situation in which the text is produced concretely and in which the categories of space and time and participating people are contained’ (:108)? In a genre—that of the letter—in which ‘traces of the utterance’ are ‘constitutive of the genre’ (:109) would it indeed be the case that ‘a study of the textual world (with all its consequences and complications) he has to precede any inferences or conclusions about...the first century historical world’ (:120)?

It seems to me that it would only if history is defined in terms of the very ‘scientist’ ethos that Botha is trying to go beyond: history as objective ‘fact’ that exists apart from the textual and material records available to us, which themselves shape what ‘happened’ and which inevitably shape what we understand about a historical situation. Botha himself notes that narration of history can never completely reconstruct a historical situation, but can only ‘construct’ a partial and perspectival view of it. Therefore, if ‘historical situation’ is to be understood as ‘encompassing the events, objects, persons, abstractions and relations (social, political, personal, cultural, ideological, ecological, or whatever) that constituted a situation which existed in the past in time and space, and which could have been or was in actual fact experienced by human beings’ (:141), then why cannot the ‘epistolary situation’—and also the ‘rhetorical situation”—be seen as elements within, as constitutive parts of the ‘historical situation’?

Perhaps what we should do is to admit, and begin with, the principle that the most fruitful way to read and understand texts is to see them as integrally part of a historical situation, and to read them always—not just last—in light of whatever other elements we can know of the historical situation as a
whole. We should not pretend, or protest, that what we are doing in ‘reading’ a particular text does not depend on what we can bring to bear upon that text from its contexts—precisely, all the aspects of the historical situation as described by Botha.

In Botha’s chapter on reading from a rhetorical perspective, he points to the broad conceptions of rhetoric that constitute modern rhetorical theory and practice. At the same time, he limits the interest and aim of rhetoric in ways that restrict its value for the kind of project he ultimately urges we carry out. For example, he asserts that ‘the values and beliefs that underlie and ultimately determine the meaning which a work may have are attributed by the rhetorical critic to the implied or encoded author, the second self of the actual author’ (132); and the same holds true for the implied versus the actual reader. But it seems to me that the thrust of rhetorical criticism on the whole is toward discerning what rhetoricians see as values and beliefs among actual people-actual speakers or authors, actual hearers or readers, in actual situations.

Indeed, in the process of arguing against the concept of ‘rhetoric restrained,’ Botha notes approvingly ‘the emphasis of modern rhetoric and theories of argumentation on audience, interaction within situations, social values and strategies to bring about changes in beliefs, values and attitudes’ (129). The fact that the ‘situations’ here are defined as rhetorical situations does not deny that they are embedded within historical situations and have their meaning within those historical situations. And one can make a distinction between the implied author and audience and the actual author and audience without having to deny that we can discern relationships between them. To limit oneself to saying that rhetorical criticism can only lead us to conclusions about the ‘intra-textual social interaction’ is, I suggest, another form of ‘rhetoric restrained’—this time not by a literary aesthetic divorced from argument but by a literary fiction divorced from reality.

Wire (1990) clarifies this issue in laying out the rationale for her study. Against Theissen’s proposal that historical reconstruction of a social group ‘can proceed both from direct social statements in a text and from the social implications of norms, events, and symbols within the text,’ she recognises that most such statements in documents such as Paul’s letters ‘cannot be taken as objective evidence’ about the historical situation because they are part of Paul’s argument and reflect his viewpoint (Wire 1990:1). Wire therefore turns to rhetoric, as described by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca as a way of reading ‘through’ the text to the author and the audience, on these principles:

The precision of the new rhetoric comes from its axiom that all argument serves the function of persuasion. In no detail can a persuader afford to ignore those who are to be persuaded.
Because everything spoken [or written] must be shaped for them, the measure of the audience as the speaker [or writer] knows it can be read in the arguments that are chosen... [The] rhetorical or argumentative situation includes both the goals of the speaker and the counterarguments that are anticipated as the [discourse] progresses (Wire 1990:3).

While Wire knows that what we can know about the author and audience is not everything there is to know about them or their situation, she can still speak of the text, analysed with the tools of rhetoric, as 'a window' into the situation in which they interact. In other words, she considers herself a historian even as she uses the tools of rhetorical criticism—and, by the way, of the social sciences—to reconstruct history. She defends this procedure against charges of heresy from some rhetoricians and literary critics in a telling (and perhaps overgeneralised) critique of their most treasured assumptions:

Rhetoricians evade [the question of how history can be reconstructed through texts] by limiting themselves to reconstructing the rhetorical situation and disclaiming any interest in history. Recently, literary critics have created an entire hierarchy of figures—from the real author to implied author to narrator to narratee to implied reader to real reader—in order to insulate fiction's fragile world from the heavy hand of history. But Paul's letter [to the Corinthians] is as close to history as writing can get—a proxy for his presence in a specific historical context. Historians cannot ignore this fact. Where others see history as a monolithic reality set in a determined past outside the literary creation, historians know history is a piecing together of fragile textual and material remains (Wire 1990:4).

For Wire, the perspective gained by a rhetorical analysis of a particular letter is limited; but, she says, 'the historian willing to settle for the reconstruction of a particular conflict in a particular year [i.e., time] can only see this source as a bonanza' (1990:5). She clarifies why this is so:

When each ancient text is read with attention to its rhetorical situation the result can be a more intricate and accurate kind of history drawn from the mutual informing of the rhetorical situations of all extant texts. Literary scholars may call this 'intertextuality' and deny any interest in reconstructing what was going on at the time. The literary critic's peelings make the historian's banquet! (1990:9)

In short, Wire defines and works with rhetoric in such a way that it not only allows her to speak about the real world—about history—but creates the possibility of doing so. She in fact practices the 'ethics of historical reading' that Schüessler Fiorenza advocates and Botha embraces as one of the ultimate goals of our study of texts. That is to say, she finds in rhetoric a kind of reading that 'can do justice to the text in its historical contexts' (Schüessler Fiorenza 1988:14).

My assumption, to sum it up, is that rhetorical analysis can and should be a way of moving across the boundaries between textual (even fictional) and real worlds. Booth (1983:415) describes how Mikhail Bakhtin does so:

On the one hand, he looks closely at how authors and readers are made, made in their cultures, made in part by the narratives they have consumed. On the other hand, he...[infers] from a given fiction something of what its actual author had to believe in order to write it and, especially, what that author must have believed about potential readers.
Further, there are a number of other approaches to rhetoric, or rhetorical critical approaches that do not rely on a restrictive definition of rhetoric as inner-textual analysis and that for the most part cross the traditional boundaries of disciplines. The range of approaches is evident, for example, in a collection titled *Methods of rhetorical criticism* (Brock, Scott & Chesebro 1990). Among what they call 'symbolic interactionist theories of rhetoric' they list approaches that interface with literary concerns, including narrative approaches. There is also a group of approaches that have a 'sociological perspective' viewing 'human communication as a generating force and one reflective of society'; this kind of rhetorical criticism 'assesses human communication in terms of societal structures, traditions, norms, and conventions,' and it includes approaches that are 'sociolinguistic' or 'generic' (i.e., having to do with genres), and those that relate rhetoric to 'social movements.' Another type of rhetorical criticism is one that 'conceives of the critical endeavour as profoundly persuasive and ideological and directed toward a realignment of political relationships' (Brock, Scott & Chesebro 1990:21).

Finally, a brief word about Botha's discussion of Romans 13:1-7 from a social-scientific perspective (his fourth chapter). Once again, I have no quarrel with the conclusions he draws about the social interaction and social phenomena he sees at work in Romans 13:1-7 situated within its 'co-text.' But here, as in other chapters, I find myself disconcerted by his insistence that he is not speaking of real-world interactions and phenomena, motives and patterns of behaviour, relationships between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft.* Here it seems especially evident that one cannot know what most of these things *mean* without taking into account the world in which Christians lived, their place in it, who Paul is and what Rome is—to name only some of the things involved. And one can only take these things properly into account on the basis of at least some knowledge gained from outside the text, prior to or concurrent with one's reading of the text. Further, when one speaks of the 'social function of the paraenesis' found in a text, it seems absurd to try to think of that function—in this case, a transformation and replacement of social values 'on the basis of a newly-envisioned view of God and human society'—taking place apart from real human beings (217). So one is compelled by the very force of Botha's argument to consider not only the text but its author and its readers.

My argument has been that one's definition of rhetoric, like one's definition of linguistics or literary criticism and one's conception of the social sciences in relation to texts, determines whether one's 'reading' of a text must remain ahistorical—claiming to be detached from the 'real world'—or can instead make legitimate connections between text and reality. Botha has
chosen—he makes this very clear—to do the one while wanting to do the other: an academic version of delayed gratification, if you will. Again, considering how much trouble this puts him to, and how many alternatives there are for achieving even greater results, I would suggest instead an academic version of ‘just do it’: choose those approaches which are themselves interdisciplinary and which lend themselves more readily to integrating texts with their worlds.

As Botha consistently recognises, Schüssler Fiorenza’s call for an ‘ethics of historical reading’ and an ‘ethics of accountability’ leads her to call specifically for a rhetorical approach to reading biblical texts as a way of overcoming the limitations of the scientist ethos of biblical scholarship. I am reminded of the well-known principle that rhetoric deals with those areas of human life between what is arbitrary and what is necessary, between what can be ‘proven’ with certainty and what cannot make sense. The criterion for effective rhetorical argument is therefore ‘plausibility’: it is this that we look for in the texts we study and this that we hope to achieve in our own discourses about the texts. While I found Botha’s argument regarding the meaning of Romans 13:1-7 highly plausible, his argument regarding how he arrived at that meaning was less so; and it is implausible to me that the path he took to get there was the best one.

Perhaps this is so because of the difference in the metaphors we would use to explain the process of reading texts. Botha’s analogy is ‘counting from one to ten’ (see, e.g., 60-61). I would choose a less linear one. Geertz’s famous ‘weaving webs of significance’ is more apt than ever. Another one I thought of is painting a picture: it is a process in which whatever one does with a brush stroke must take into account what one intends to do with the others. A line moving this way calls for a line moving that way, another line can change the whole movement. Using one colour may not be best considering the other colours, and each colour ‘adjusts’ to the other colours one places it next to. And one can always leave parts of the picture unfinished for a time while one works on other parts. It seems to me that this interactive approach would more fully take into account the holistic and dynamic understanding of reality that even science has recognised as a new paradigm.

**DUANE F WATSON:**

With his study Botha makes an important contribution to the study of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, attesting to the value of the growing interest in inter-
disciplinary study of the New Testament. Botha's use of linguistic, literary, rhetorical and social-scientific criticisms in the analysis of Romans 13:1-7 is a model of methodological rigour. Each method is painstakingly described, terminology carefully defined, the impact of the method on New Testament studies assessed, choices made among options within the method clearly delineated, and application to Romans in general and Romans 13:1-7 in particular made with circumspection and sophistication. As is true of worthwhile volumes in our field, each chapter invites further research and integration.

One of Botha's stated purposes is to alert us that the ethics of reading a text responsibly involves multiple readings. He rightly emphasises the ethics of interpretation—that people should accept public accountability for their acts of reading. His message is clear that the world of the text must be completely investigated before inferences can be made about the relationship of the text to its historical world and the world of the interpreter. Either to stop with the text or to move too quickly from the text to its historical world or the world of the interpreter is not a responsible reading. The sequential analysis of the text by linguistic, literary, rhetorical and social-scientific criticism goes a long way toward a responsible reading. However, it is disappointing that Botha does not offer the implications of his readings of Romans 13:1-7 for his own South African context. Although his multiple readings of the text are excellent, he does not move to a complete, responsible reading as he defines it.

The editorial foreword by Robbins and Gowler describes the two major alternative approaches in current New Testament studies as disciplinary analysis, and eclectic or interdisciplinary analysis. The disciplines that Botha uses—the linguistic, literary, rhetorical and social-scientific—are themselves interdisciplinary in nature. Each is informed by numerous other disciplines. His use of each discipline maintains the integrity of that discipline and its findings while anticipating the next. The sequence of disciplines facilitates the incorporation of the careful findings made using one discipline in the use of the next. Within the confines of the overall argument of the volume, Botha's application of the four disciplines still functions primarily in a disciplinary manner, 'hoping' that the four disciplines taken together 'perform most of the important tasks of a scientific interpretation of an ancient text' (4).

I realise that Botha did not propose to integrate the four disciplines used into a comprehensive hermeneutical model. As he states in his introduction,
Such an integration is not necessary for a responsible reading (only, perhaps, a more complete one). However, Botha’s careful use of his four chosen disciplines leads us to pose the question: ‘How could further integration of the disciplines involved be achieved so that more of an interdisciplinary analysis and the beginnings of a new paradigm emerge, and a more complete responsible reading be possible?’ Botha has given the field a good understanding of the four disciplines he uses and their interconnections and has made strides toward full interdisciplinary study. He has prepared us for further integration for which this session today is attempting to suggest creative direction.

In trying to foster further integration of these disciplines, I would like to comment on Botha’s literary and rhetorical analyses in particular, with an eye toward the social scientific analysis as well. These comments are coloured by my historical interests (which have a bearing on one direction interdisciplinary study can take). Botha raises the historical question quite often but does not choose to address it directly. However, a carefully constructed historical situation is a natural component of the integration of the disciplines with which Botha works.

Within his literary study Botha works within the world created by the text rather than the real or historical world. He maintains the distinctions between ‘real author’ and ‘encoded author,’ and ‘real historical readers’ and ‘implied readers,’ the latter in each pair being textual constructions (:119). Botha understands the epistolary situation to be is a ‘text-internal, literary, phenomenon...created by the structural framework that identifies the writing as a letter’ (:149). The rhetorical situation is the creation of the rhetor or author out of the facts of the historical situation for the sake of argumentation. The narrative world is a literary construction of the narrator, akin to the ‘real world’ in terms of construction and operation. The audiences and situations are constructs of the narrator, but they cannot be effective in communication if they are completely dissimilar to the historical situation (:191).

In maintaining these distinctions in his textual readings, Botha does not concern himself with historical considerations. However, he does grapple in many helpful and suggestive ways with the relationship of the above to the historical situation. The historical situation encompasses ‘the events, objects, persons, abstractions and relations...that constituted a situation which existed in the past in time and space, and which could have been or was in actual fact experienced by human beings’ (:141). Certainly we can never reconstruct the ‘actual historical situation.’ It is always a construction of the interpreter, not simply a reconstruction of historical facts. However, as Botha rightly observes, the text cannot ‘be cut loose totally from the ideal of providing and clarifying historical information’ (:142). I think a construction of the his-
torical situation as completely as possible is a key factor in creating an interdisciplinary paradigm. Such a historical situation derived from all the findings of the linguistic, epistolary, rhetorical and social-scientific disciplines, and making sense of them, as well as being faithful to findings of historical studies, is an important unifying factor. I am not proposing that we fall back to the inadequacies of historical situations derived from historical criticism alone or that we naively assume that social data derived from a text leads us back directly to the historical situation as if the text were a mirror of the real world (mirror-reading). Rather I propose that a construction of the historical situation provides a grounding for all the text-internal situations which in turn are grounded in the real historical situation.

The role of the constructed historical situation in integration of these disciplines is a natural one. As Botha argues, the epistolary situation is embedded in the rhetorical situation as one possible manifestation of the rhetorical situation. In turn the rhetorical situation is embedded in a historical situation (:149). The rhetorical situation is always an element of a specific type of a human communication situation or goal-oriented social interaction or persuasion. It is a creation of the rhetor out of the basic facts of the historical situation. It is primarily interested in the ethical and ideological "content" of a message (whether transmitted in oral or written form) how such "content" comes into existence in the process of interaction between sender and receiver (encoded author and implied reader in the case of a written text), and finally, how the discourse functions as a power that influences the values and actions of people (:133).

The narrative world constructed by the narrator shares the same symbolic forms and social arrangements as the real world. Thus many facets of the epistolary and rhetorical situations and the narrative world derive from the actual historical communicative situation. The historical situation conditions the epistolary and rhetorical responses and the construction of the narrative world.

Botha is correct to argue that 'a study of the "textual world" (with all its consequences and complications) has to precede any inferences or conclusions about either the first century historical world or the historical world of the modern interpreter which are made on the basis of this text' (:120). 'An analysis of the world created by the text should always precede any conclusions about the "real world" which the text may represent' (:191). To determine the meaning and intentions of a text, its textuality and rhetoricity need to be investigated and then the historical considerations brought to bear. As Botha argues 'an ethics of reading thus has preference over an "ethics of historical reading"' and 'an ethically responsible reading of an ancient text inevitably has to deal with historical matters somewhere in the act of interpretation' (:143).
Certainly the construction of the epistolary and rhetorical situations and narrative world assists more careful construction of the historical situation. The legitimate distinctions that Botha and others are making between the epistolary, rhetorical and historical situations and the narrative world constructed by the narrator raise important questions: How do we make a bridge from the epistolary and rhetorical situations and the narrative world to the historical situation without making unwarranted assumptions or merely perform a mirror-reading? How do we devise a practical way to make the move from the epistolary and rhetorical situations and narrative world to the historical situation and maintain the distinctions between them? In making this move these distinctions are often blurred, making them all equivalent.

I think there is another entire dimension to this discussion which could help us make the move from epistolary and rhetorical situations and narrative world to the historical situation with more assurance. I think that both epistolary and rhetorical theory and practice which undergird such analysis can provide more material to construct the historical situation than has yet been fully recognised.

Regarding epistolary analysis, Botha does an admirable job of describing the epistolary situation and providing an epistolary analysis from both formalist and communicative approaches. This valuable literary analysis could be expanded to include more of the study of the letter from epistolary theory and examples of ancient letters. There is a relationship between epistolary types and their social settings as Botha has pointed out. However, epistolary theory and practice say much more that may be helpful here. For example, the proportion of an epistle devoted to a certain element (opening, body, or closing) is indicative of its primary purpose in a communicative situation. Epistolary conventions and formulae (their presence or absence, simplicity or elaboration), as well as style are indicators of social relationships and the communicative situation.

Regarding rhetorical analysis, I agree with Botha that rhetoric needs to be freed from the fixation on genre and form and focus on argumentation as social interaction (:140). His rhetorical approach of teasing out the implicit and unspoken/written values underpinning the argumentation is very helpful in analyzing a text. He describes this as a "movement beyond "reading the lines" or "describing the forms" towards "reading between the lines". However, I think that we are currently too afraid of being 'fixed' on genre and form and are overlooking the value that the description of the genre and forms themselves has for understanding argumentation as social interaction. Genre and forms themselves have more to offer this process of reading between the lines. For example, audiences and situations are suitably addressed by specific rhetorical genre (judicial, deliberative, and epideictic).
The stasis of the argument(s) is indicative of the nature of the problem(s) addressed. Inventional strategies have appropriate contexts for their use. Types of argumentation and *topoi* used in invention have specific purposes which are indicative of the situation and social background of the audience. As Botha has recognised and used so well, expressed and unexpressed premises in argumentation (especially in enthymemes) indicate what the author assumes the audience accepts as true of its value system. The order of arguments is indicative of the relationship between author and audience. The presence and absence of the elements of arrangement or specific features (e.g., *insinuatio*) shed light on the relationship of author and audience and the author’s assumptions about the audience. Certainly these and other features of genre and form provide direction for constructing the historical situation as well as a more complete rhetorical reading.

Regarding social scientific analysis, the rhetorical situation is always an element of a specific type of a human communication situation of goal-oriented social interaction, and is created out of the basic facts of the historical situation. Modern rhetoric, with its focus on the audience/reader, argues that a text must reveal its context, ‘the attitudinising conventions, precepts that condition (both the writer’s and the reader’s) stance toward experience, knowledge, tradition, language, and other people’ (:125, citing Wuellner). Modern rhetoric considers the values, beliefs, and emotions of the audience as viewed by the speaker/writer and the strategies which a speaker/writer uses to influence the audience. To fully use rhetorical analysis (and epistolary analysis for that matter) with social scientific analysis, we have to construct a historical situation in which human communication took place and which provided the values and beliefs of author and audience.

In turn social scientific analysis provides a wealth of information to test the validity of both the epistolary and rhetorical analysis and situations proposed as well as guide the move from these to the historical situation. For example, as Botha has pointed out, rhetorical criticism discovers the social values underpinning the argumentation which social-scientific studies describe and assess in light of their social functions. Here historical study and a construction of the historical situation are central for the integration of rhetoric and social-scientific study.

In conclusion, I think Botha has provided us with a wealth of insight and material from which we can build as we try to begin integrating disciplines into greater interdisciplinary paradigms and strive for more responsible readings. I do not think, however, that this process can be whole without historical considerations and constructions of the historical situation. This is a conclusion which, regardless of his own views, Botha’s study leads me to make even more strongly. The disciplines Botha uses and their combination
do offer the preliminary work for further integration of these disciplines and the move to the constructed historical situation as a unifying factor.

JAN BOTHA responds:

All three reviews take up the difficult issue which (in a certain sense) has been of central concern to me, namely, the relation between (a) the world of the text (as a fiction) and (b) the actual historical world within which this fiction came into being.

In various degrees the reviewers consider the choice that I have made, to focus on the world of the text, limiting or restrictive or immobilising. For Thibeaux such a distinction and preference smack of working with ‘a literary fiction divorced from reality’. Elliott argues that the rhetorical plausibility and power of Romans 13:1-7 cannot be evaluated without a sense of the ‘actual historical, political and social contours of Paul’s world.’ He finds the relative lack of attention to the ‘actual social location of Paul and the situation of Paul and his addressees’ in the book akin to missing (much of) the meat in a hamburger. Watson maintains that a carefully constructed historical situation is a natural component of the integration of the four disciplines used in the book.

This brief response is not the place to repeat my whole argument and (as is clear from these reviews, my controversial) preference for a ‘text-first’ approach. An illustration might, however, serve to explain aspects of my suggestion for a possible approach to this issue (see Figure 1 on page 218).

I agree with the reviewers that it is (almost) impossible to separate the world(s) present in a literary text from the actual historical world. Elsewhere I have considered the (im)possibility of drawing fixed and firm borders between text and context (1994a). The ‘borders’ of the ‘containers’ of such extremely complex phenomena as ‘text’ and ‘context’ are very porous. It leaks continuously on all sides (therefore the dotted lines of the circles in the illustration). Nevertheless, a systematic approach to the interpretation of a written text has to begin somewhere. In order to do so, certain intermediate distinctions need to be made, even though this is done only for the moment. It has to be done simply because one cannot do all things simultaneously. As one moves on through the interpretive process, earlier distinctions dissolve in the broader picture that is developing. Both the metaphors of seeing the process of interpretation as a process of painting or a process of weaving a
Actual First Century Mediterranean World

Fictional world "in" text XXX

Fictional world "in" text YYY

Fictional world "in" text ZZZ

Figure 1
tapestry serve well to illustrate this point. To weave a tapestry means that one has to begin somewhere—usually with a single or a very few strings.

My intention, as made clear in the book, is not to do everything that could (or should) be done in a ‘comprehensive’ process of interpretation (1994b:4). In order to understand the fictive world(s) of texts x, y and z in the illustration adequately, the interpretive process is obviously influenced by the available historical and social information about the first-century Mediterranean world. Yet, to a large extent such information is available only through the cumulative picture that can be constructed from the constructions of the fictional worlds of the written texts that remained from that world (see further Petersen 1983). Those very texts provide the information that inform and guide the interpretation of the texts. It is thus a circular process. For methodological purposes—since this circular process has to begin somewhere—a suitable place to begin is to make a construction of the fictional world(s) of one particular text. I have tried to explain and illustrate how such constructions can be made of various text-internal worlds in Romans 13:1–7, using (some of) the tools available in (aspects of) current approaches in linguistics, literary theory, rhetorical criticism and social-scientific criticism. It entails a serious endeavour to first construct the epistolary and rhetorical situations and narrative world, which are all related to, but (for the purposes of methodological rigour) distinguishable from the actual historical world.

To do so is thus not to ignore ‘actual’ historical and social information or to read the text as if it did not originate within a social system. Yet, it does give a particular focus to one particular phase in the interpretive process as a whole. Exactly how these constructions are to be related to our constructions of the actual historical world in which the text came into being and was originally read is, of course, the very issue that is addressed again and again in the book and which all three reviewers have also taken up. All three reviewers offer valuable insights to move this debate forward. Elliott provides valuable social and cultural information, especially with his valid criticism of the anachronistic individualistic rendering of the meaning of συνείδησις to which Louw and Nida (1988, 1:324) have tempted me as well as with his informative exposition of the similarities between 1 Pt 2:13–17 and Rm 13:1–7. Thibeaux calls attention to the work of other scholars (Wire and Booth) who have dealt with this issue. Watson moves the debate forward on a methodological and theoretical level. He succeeds in formulating my intuition aptly and pushing it forward when he writes: ‘I propose that a construction of the historical situation provides a grounding for all the text-internal

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6 On this point Craffert (1996:47) has misread my argument.
situations which are in turn grounded in the real historical situation’ and thereby acknowledging the validity of maintaining a (methodological) distinction between the text-internal and text-external situations.

Elliott and Thibeaux are quite correct when they point out that much more remains to be done once the constructions of the epistolary and rhetorical situations and the narrative world have been made. However, to repeat, in my book I did not attempt to undertake such a broad and ‘comprehensive’ interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 (1994b:4). To use Elliott’s metaphor: I argue that it is important to mix the dough before you begin baking or eating the pie. I made it clear in the book where in the process I wanted to stop and why I decided to stop there.

The complexity of textuality, textual communication and the process of interpretation necessitates such specialisation and focus while one recognises at the same time that such a limitation (indeed any limitation!) is exactly that: a limitation and thus inevitably also a distortion of the whole picture. What is presented in the book is an analysis of a limited aspect of this whole complex process. I believe that there is good reason to focus on a clearly delimited aspect of the larger complex of interpretation. How can one bake and eat a pie if you are not doing a good job with those things one needs to do before you can begin to bake the pie?

To belabour the point with yet another metaphor (remaining more or less in the realm of dough and pies!): our colleague in the Faculty of Agriculture analyses a grain of wheat under a microscope in order to try to understand its complexity and, hopefully, enhance its performance in the rest of the process (that is, in growing into good wheat to be used in a deliciously tasting pie). It makes good sense for the agricultural scientist to focus on the grain of wheat and growing better wheat. This very same person need not necessarily and always complete the process of baking and eating the pie.

Thus, I agree with all three reviewers that the more interesting aspects of the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 would perhaps be information about its historical, cultural and social context and even more so a consideration of its possible implications for current contexts (such as the contemporary South African context). Those things should indeed be done in a comprehensive interpretation of this interesting text—but then in section B of the interpretive process. In this book only section A has been presented.7

Thibeaux asks the question why preference is given to a structuralist linguistic approach and a formalist literary approach even though the limits

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7 I consider the work of Robbins (1996) an excellent suggestion for the methodological integration of various disciplines and a more comprehensive approach to interpretation.
of these approaches are pointed out. In a sense the four approaches used reflect the history of New Testament interpretation in the past twenty years or so in South Africa. There was a time (in the seventies and early eighties) when linguistics was a major interest of many scholars. This was followed (more or less consecutively, although with significant overlaps) by interests in contemporary literary theory, rhetoric and the social sciences and the light it could shed on the interpretation of the New Testament. New Testament scholars influential during the first phase (like Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida) produced various helpful tools (for example, the *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament based on semantic domains*) for interpretation. The availability of such tools and my familiarity with such an approach, admittedly, played a role in the decision to use it. My aim has been, *inter alia*, to illustrate and evaluate the various theories and tools available for use in a text-first approach to interpretation. I have argued that these tools take us a long way although not all the way, because I insist that a 'text-first' approach does not imply a 'text-only' approach.

Finally, I want to express my sincere appreciation to John Elliott, Duane Watson and Evelyn Thibeaux, as well as to Vernon Robbins, editor of *Emory Studies in Early Christianity*, for their fair but critical appraisal of my work.

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