SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM AND LITERARY STUDIES

Prospects for cooperation in biblical interpretation

Vernon K. Robbins

During the last two decades both literary and social-scientific approaches to biblical texts have developed at an increasing pace, significantly changing their appearance and the substance of biblical interpretation. For some interpreters, these two approaches represent opposite interests: any marriage of the two produces either bastard or stillborn children. For other interpreters, some kind of merger is desirable or even essential.

DISCIPLINARY, INTERDISCIPLINARY AND ECLECTIC METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

The dominant mode of twentieth-century biblical criticism prior to the 1960s was disciplinary, and this was the mode in which literary and social-scientific approaches began their work. Disciplines of study emerged vigorously during the nineteenth century and began to represent the ‘true nature of things’ during the twentieth century. A discipline emerges when a group of people acquires authoritative status to guide research, analysis and interpretation. The means for establishing a discipline is to identify certain phenomena for investigation and certain strategies for investigating the phenomena. Anyone who investigates the same data with different strategies is ‘out of the bounds’ of the discipline, as well as anyone who investigates different data with the same or similar strategies.

A disciplinary approach, therefore, is a power structure, and its inherent nature is hierarchical. An overarching model or method provides a framework for negotiating the use of subdisciplines and practices. During the first seventy years of the twentieth century, the disciplines of history and theology sparred with one another for ascendancy in biblical interpretation. Sparring between disciplines, of course, establishes an essentially hidden polarity that excludes a wide range of approaches from the realm of ‘serious exegesis’ of the Bible. Prior to 1970, data in the Bible was either ‘historical’ or ‘theological’, it couldn’t represent either historical theology or theological history but not something else.

The battles, victories and defeats – drawn in historical versus theological lines – kept other disciplines from entering the battlefield, or playing field if you prefer, with any kind of status. Theologians decided what kind of philosophy they would use as a subdiscipline, if they used any; historians decided on the terms on which they would incorporate insights from anthropology, sociology or literary analysis into their practices and results, if they incorporated any.

The boundaries of a discipline not only create a power structure; they evoke a purity system for interpreters whereby any ‘mixing’ of approaches, practices or methods creates ‘impurities’. The primary way to keep impurities out is to establish an overarching method or model for filtering the impurities when practices or methods are incorporated from other disciplines. In other words, a disciplinary approach only uses the methods of another discipline on the terms of the ‘home’ discipline that uses another discipline. The home discipline ‘incorporates’ methods from other disciplines in a subordinate position – as subdisciplines. I vividly recall a discussion with Martin Hengel at Emory University where he agreed that literary analysis could be informative if it were ‘kept in control’ by theology and history working together as co-partners.

For the most part, a disciplinary mood guided the emergence both of literary and social-scientific approaches during the last two decades. For most literary critics, the discipline of literary criticism – with its primary location either in New Criticism, Russian Formalism or some combination of the two – stood in a polar relation to historical criticism. Literary critics, they said, were interested in issues ‘intrinsic to texts’; historical critics in issues ‘extrinsic to texts’. Social-scientific critics, on the other hand, appear to be somewhat more divided in their relation to historical criticism. Bruce Malina appears to perceive social-scientific criticism as a discipline on its own terms. For him, social science rather than the discipline of history or literary study offers an overarching model for negotiating a comprehensive range of methods, strategies and subdisciplines (Malina 1993a). John H. Elliott, on the other hand, has consistently described social-scientific criticism as a subdiscipline of historical criticism. For him, it appears that social-scientific criticism is the subdiscipline that brings historical criticism to its fullest expression. For this reason, Elliott first called his method ‘sociological exegesis’ (Elliott 1981; 1990b) and incorporated the full range of practices of historical criticism in his work. Through the influence of Malina, he has changed the name of his activity to ‘social-scientific criticism’ (Elliott 1986, 1990b, 1993a), but he still emphasizes that his method is an expansion of historical criticism.

Whether social-scientific critics have considered their activity to be disciplinary on its own terms or part of the discipline of history, until recently most have emphasized the distinct difference between their discipline and the kind of approach that distinguishes between authors, implied authors, narrators, narratees, implied readers and real readers – i.e. literary criticism. Most social-scientific critics have simply considered time and serious intellectual activity
to be too precious to lose oneself in such esoteric activity. Bruce Malina has created a reading theory based on 'scenarios', in part, it would seem, to show either the insignificance or the misguided nature of 'literary' views of reading. For Malina, readers read on the basis of social and cultural scenarios they are able to construct in their minds (Malina 1991: 3-23). Only when readers learn how to construct strange and foreign scenarios in their minds are they able to start to read New Testament texts from the perspective of the first-century Mediterranean contexts in which they were written. In Malina's words:

an adequate scenario building involves the same steps as getting to understand a group of foreigners with whom we are inevitably and necessarily thrown together, for better or worse. On the one hand, we can choose to ignore the foreigners. In that way we can never find out what those authors said and meant to say. On the other hand...we can come to understand our strange and alien biblical ancestors in faith...it is the reading process that both enables and facilitates this task.

(Malina 1991: 23)

Here Malina has articulated a widespread presupposition among social-scientific interpreters: readers understand texts on the basis of social and cultural scenarios they are able to construct in their minds. Most readers, historians included, construct these scenarios on the basis of their own modern social and cultural experiences. Only substantive reconstruction of our social and cultural imaginations, using extensive resources from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology and from multiple foreign societies and cultures, can equip us with insights for reading texts from the perspective of their own social and cultural contexts.

When interpreters function in a highly charged disciplinary mode, they encounter others with statements like the following: 'In order for you to make any kind of significant interpretation of this text you need to take into consideration this phenomenon in the text which we have investigated and interpreted in such and such a manner.' A significant number of both social-scientific and literary critics have responded either to or about one another in this mode during the last two decades, and one of the major reasons is a 'disciplinary' perception of the task of biblical studies, which is the major model of 'serious academic studies' that has been communicated to students and colleagues alike in biblical studies during the twentieth century.

Those who consider disciplinary analysis and interpretation to be the only 'truly responsible' form of biblical study regularly consider the alternative to be 'eclecticism'. Eclecticism is a matter of selecting something here and something there to do the job, because this phenomenon is significantly different from that one. The joy of interpreting a wide range of phenomena overrides the exhilaration of interpreting a more limited range of phenomena systematically, precisely and clearly - in other words, definitively. Some people are born eclectics, it would appear; they simply cannot be bothered with all the concerns of precision and control. They will not 'sell their lives' to disciplinary investigation. In response to criticism that their approach is not truly 'scholarly' or 'academic', their response is that at least it is interesting, creative and liberating.

There is, however, another significant alternative: interdisciplinary analysis and interpretation. An interdisciplinary approach invites data into investigation in the context of boundaries that various disciplines have established. The mood is to ask: What phenomena does this particular discipline investigate, how does it investigate it and what conclusions does it draw from the investigation? Then, however, the interdisciplinary critic redraws the boundaries and asks the same questions of another discipline. The interpreter then develops strategies to place these multiple activities, insights and conclusions in dialogue with one another. The underlying presupposition is that conceptual frameworks are essential for significant analysis and interpretation, yet phenomena are constituted by a complexity that transcends any conceptual framework humans create. In other words, disciplinary approaches create a context for systematic investigation that yields significantly greater results than 'unbounded investigation', yet every disciplinary approach yields a highly insufficient explanation and interpretation of the complex phenomena of the world.

A MODEL FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY INVESTIGATION

You will have perceived that my own mode of choice is an interdisciplinary model, and the diagram on p. 278 (Figure 6) displays a model for interdisciplinary investigation and interpretation that places literary and social-scientific disciplines in dialogue with one another. It is necessary, of course, to have a mode of analysis that guides the interdisciplinary arbitration, and for me it is rhetoric (Bizzell and Herzberg 1990; Robbins 1992, 1994). Rhetoric provides a socially and culturally oriented approach to texts, forming a bridge between the disciplines of social-scientific and literary criticism.

According to this socio-rhetorical model, New Testament interpreters function in the context of their own social, cultural, historical and ideological worlds. Their instinctive social and cultural presuppositions come from their own world rather than the world of the texts they interpret. For the purpose of interpreting texts written in the context of the first-century Mediterranean world, however, they construct a tentative image of the Mediterranean world from a wide range of data. They embed this image of the Mediterranean world into their own world, and they embed New Testament texts in their image of the Mediterranean world. For this reason, there is a rectangle that separates the world of the interpreter from the ancient Mediterranean world, and there is another rectangle that separates the ancient Mediterranean world from a text produced in that world. The activity of interpretation, then, is an on-going project of reinterpreting the Mediterranean world and our modern world on the basis of interpretation of New Testament and other texts. Interpreters who do not consciously construct an image of the Mediterranean world in which to embed New
Testament texts are considered by socio-rhetorical critics, through their indebtedness to social-scientific critics, to be in danger of unexamined ethnocentrism and anachronism. Ethnocentrism arises from an absence of attentiveness to the 'foreign, strange' society and culture in which people produced New Testament texts, and the anachronism arises from an absence of attentiveness to the 'pre-industrial' social and cultural environment in which people lived during the first century CE.

Ethnocentric and anachronistic interpretations misconstrue basic social and cultural meanings and meaning effects of words, phrases, thoughts and actions evoked by texts. In addition, socio-rhetorical readers know that the real author and real reader/audience stood outside texts in the Mediterranean world. The real author, language, information in the world and the real reader/audience stand outside the text, which is represented by the innermost rectangle in the socio-rhetorical model above. Real authors are historical persons. The texts they make somehow are extensions of themselves, but the real author and the text are separate social, cultural and historical phenomena. Thus, the real author is not inside the box, but outside it. Likewise, language is a phenomenon outside of texts which authors use to write texts. Again, a text is a particular manifestation of language, but language itself is a phenomenon outside any particular text. In a related manner, information is also outside the text; some kind of manifestation of this outside information stands inside a text, but not the information itself. Also, readers and audiences to whom the text is read stand outside the text.

The boundary around the text is a broken line, because it is a human-made boundary for the purpose of focusing analysis on a text. Likewise, the boundary around the Mediterranean world is a broken line. All kinds of meanings and meaning effects travel through the gaps in these boundaries. They travelled through the boundary between the Mediterranean world and the text when the author wrote the text, and they travel through the boundaries when any person reads the text. Language and other texts travel through the boundaries just as information and material data travel through the boundaries. Interpreters at least temporarily build boundaries to keep various things out of texts, but since texts are located in the world, were created in it and are related to it, there is no way finally to keep either the Mediterranean world or the world of the interpreter out of them. Texts are in the world and of it.

Literary interpreters have concluded that the inner texture of a narrative text contains a narrator who tells the story and characters who think, act and have their being in the story. The narrator and characters, however, exist in a context of 'images' of the real author, language, information and the real reader/audience. In other words, the inside of a text is a combination of 'show' and 'tell'. The narrator tells the story. The narratee hears the narrator and sees the characters, who may themselves speak and 'look'. Readers cannot see the real authors of texts, because the real authors are hidden behind their work. But readers see an image of authors in what authors have done. The image 'implies' an author of a certain kind, so literary interpreters regularly call the image of an author in a text the 'implied author'. The implied author is the image created by everything the reader sees in the text (Robbins 1991). Also, readers do not hear language in the text; rather, they 'see' verbal signs, printed letters, to which they give 'voice'. That is, readers turn the signs into sounds that are 'language' among people. Thus, the verbal signs in a text are 'implied language'. In addition, readers cannot hear and see real information and material data in a text but they hear and see 'implied information and material data. Finally, readers of texts create an image of a reader who can read a particular text with understanding. If they themselves cannot understand the text, they create an image of a reader whom the implied author imagined could read and understand the text. Whether or not all of this is clear to the real reader who is now reading this, literary interpreters have drawn these conclusions about the inner texture of texts. These conclusions guide socio-rhetorical criticism as it approaches the inner texture of a text, and the goal is to create activities for an interpreter that will make it possible to investigate these and other inner phenomena in texts.

At the bottom of the diagram are horizontal and vertical arrows. The horizontal arrows represent what literary interpreters call the rhetorical axis. An axis is an imaginary line through the centre of something, like the imaginary
line through the centre of the earth as it spins, as we say, 'on its axis'. Through the centre of a text is an imaginary ‘rhetorical’ line between the author and the reader. The rhetorical axis is the 'speaking' or 'communicating' line through the centre of the text from the author to the reader. In addition to horizontal arrows there are vertical arrows at the bottom of the diagram. The vertical arrows indicate a 'mimetic' axis. The word mimetic comes from the Greek word mimēsis, meaning 'imitation'. The written signs in the text 'imitate' the sounds of language, and the narrator, actors and things in the 'textual world' imitate information and material data in the world. Thus, the vertical lines represent an axis of 'imitation'. This axis exists in angles in the diagram, rather than straight up through the centre, since the horizontal movement of the communication causes the vertical axis to run up and down at angles. In other words, the diagram is meant to exhibit action. There is dynamic movement from the author to the reader and from the reader to the author. In the context of this movement words, characters, represented world, implied author and implied reader all 'imitate' the world.

In the midst of all of these phenomena in the text are four arenas of texture printed in bold print: (1) inner texture; (2) intertexture; (3) social and cultural texture; and (4) ideological texture. One of the special features of socio-rhetorical criticism is its identification of these four arenas in a text. Pointing to these arenas, the method gathers practices of interpretation for each arena to enable a person to investigate each arena both on its own terms and in relation to the other arenas. Each arena is given a name for its own particular 'text-ure'. The texture of a text is so 'thick' that no discipline can satisfactorily approach all the aspects of thought, feeling, sight, sound, touch, smell and desire that its signs evoke. At present socio-rhetorical criticism uses four disciplines. In the future it will add psychological texture, but this is an additional task that very few biblical scholars at present are ready to tackle in a disciplinary manner.

**THE BEGINNING POINT FOR THE LITERARY AND SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITIC**

The standard lore suggests that a literary critic begins 'inside' the boundaries of a text and a social-scientific critic begins 'outside' the boundaries of a text. But let us test this conventional point of view with a comparison of John Dominic Crossan's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan in his book *Raid on the Articulate* (Crossan 1976) with Richard Rohrbaugh's interpretation of the parable of the Great Supper in *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (Rohrbaugh 1991). I will begin with Crossan's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Crossan establishes the context for his interpretation with a discussion of language as play and literature as a system. Language is a game. As people play with language, they create reality. Reality, then, is 'the interplay of words created by human imagination' (Crossan 1976: 28). Language creates tragic world and comic world. It breaks and cracks one kind of world with tremors that bring new worlds into being. Language actually functions in a ritual manner - a 'human interplay of structure and antistructure ... which reminds us continually that our structures are both absolutely necessary and completely relative' (Crossan 1976: 36). Literature is a particular manifestation of the game of language. Literature functions as a system that makes and breaks geniuses. For Crossan, this system is closed. Each new example of literature changes the species itself. In other words:

It is as if all the chairs and all the space in the auditorium were occupied so that one new arrival involves a total reorganization of those already present. It is of course this new arrival which stops the entire proceedings from becoming static, lifeless, and boring since all those in the audience face not the empty stage but rather the closed door. This subversive advent is necessary because without it the established forms and genres of a period's language and style would become absolutes and their frozen immobility would effectively hide the foundations of play on which and in which they operated.

(Crossan 1976: 61)

For Crossan, then, literature is a closed system created by the game of language that people play. As a result, some of the most vigorous action in literature occurs as 'forms and genres' clash with one another. Here the interpreter sees that literature not only plays with language but, as Crossan says, literature also plays with itself (1976: 61).

From the perspective of the model that is before us, Crossan begins outside any particular text with language as a particular kind of human game, and from this context he approaches literature as a closed system in which forms and genres clash with one another to create new 'literary worlds'. As Crossan explores the arena of the literary system that will inform his interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, he develops a taxonomy of forms and genres which includes law, proverb, beatitude, novel, myth, parable and allegory. This taxonomy informs the model that guides his interpretation of the parable. His beginning point, then, is the construction of a model of literary forms and genres which he perceives to function in a closed system that people create with the game of language.

Now let us turn to Rohrbaugh's interpretation of the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14. To set the context for his interpretation, he observes that 'fully one half of the references to the “city” in the New Testament are in the Lukan writings' (Rohrbaugh 1991: 123). To understand this phenomenon, Rohrbaugh investigates what he calls 'the urban system'. This system stands in contrast to Crossan's investigation of 'literature as a system'. It stands at the opposite end of the mimetic axis of representation, and it also stands outside any particular text. For Rohrbaugh, within the social world there is a phenomenon he calls 'the urban system'. This system contains 'nucleations' including villages, towns and cities, which link cities and hinterland, and make the
specialties in the nucleations intrinsic parts of a single system (Rohrbaugh 1991: 130). A correct understanding of the urban system, then, does not pit 'urban' and 'rural' as 'polar opposites or closed system' but as phenomena in 'a structure of interrelated differentiations' (p. 130).

Within this system there are, however, two opposed systems: the modern urban system and the pre-industrial system of antiquity. In the modern system the labour unit is 'the individual person' who as an aggregate constitute a flexible work-force for employers seeking to adapt to changing market conditions at minimum cost (p. 131). In modern industrial society, therefore, there is a pattern linking city and hinterlands that ensures the flow of capital and labour toward the cities. Marketplace and channels of communication/transportation come to include the hinterlands along with the city ... By contrast, pre-industrial cities existed in a system which required a socially and geographically fixed labor force. Specialists in the city primarily produced the goods and services needed by the urban elite, who were the only existing consumer market. Since that market was small the labor force needed to supply it was correspondingly small and, as Leeds notes, it thus became 'a major interest to keep others than these out of the towns, fixed in their own agrarian, mining or extractive areas'.


Both Crossan and Rohrbaugh, it will be noticed, begin by constructing a model in their own world that functions as a context for interpretation of texts written in the world of late Mediterranean antiquity. Crossan approaches the text from the bottom of the model with language as a game and literature as a system. Rohrbaugh starts at the top of the model with the social world as a playing field and the urban world as a system. Both interpreters, then, presuppose the value of identifying a system as an overall context for interpreting a text. Crossan uses modern literary theory to define the relation of phenomena in the literary system; Rohrbaugh uses modern social-scientific theory to define the relation of phenomena in the urban system. So far, then, these literary and social-scientific interpreters have a good basis for dialogue. Both presuppose the value of modern theory, of systems within the realm of human activity, of models as contexts for interpretation, of the interrelation and opposition of certain phenomena as articulated in modern theory and of the Mediterranean world as the context in which the text first attained and evoked its meanings and meaning effects. Both start with phenomena outside of texts and create a model as a context for interpretation of a text.

It would be interesting to hear a dialogue between Crossan and Rohrbaugh concerning the nature of human activity in the realm of the literary and the urban system. Crossan emphasizes the activity of 'play' in literature which creates new 'worlds of reality'. Rohrbaugh appears to presuppose that the pre-industrial urban system represents the 'social world of reality' for anyone living in Mediterranean antiquity. Yet, as Rohrbaugh proceeds, he concludes that the parable presents 'a member of the elite, a host, making a break with the "system" in the most public and radical sort of way' (Rohrbaugh 1991: 145). In Rohrbaugh's approach, does this 'break' create something new? If so, what 'new' phenomenon has been created? Crossan talks about 'new worlds of reality', because he perceives human imagination to be the source of 'reality' as humans can know it. Rohrbaugh does not analyze what occurs when the host 'breaks with the system'. Is it possible that Crossan's analysis picks up where Rohrbaugh's stops? In other words, do their approaches to interpretation stand in a continuum? In the model in Figure 6, narrator and characters represent the meeting ground between the place where Crossan starts and the place where Rohrbaugh starts. It looks like these two interpreters ought to be able to dialogue fruitfully with one another. Before moving on it may be worth our time to notice that the beginning place for Crossan's analysis challenges the conventional lore that literary critics work strictly with phenomena intrinsic to texts while social-scientific critics concern themselves with phenomena extrinsic to texts. Both, it would appear, begin with data extrinsic to texts to create a model for reading a text. Literary critics begin with language and literature to gain entrance into the verbal signs in the text; social-scientific critics begin with social and material data in the world to gain entrance into the represented world in the text. Once they have established a system to guide their interpretations, they start their readings of the text.

THE THINGS LITERARY AND SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICS PERSONIFY

As literary and social-scientific critics engage in dialogue, they may discover quite soon that one of the greatest sources of irritation is the different things they personify as they talk. As we interpret, the phenomena we personify exhibit our point of view about reality and truth in the world.

Beginning with information and material data in the world, social-scientific critics personify aspects of human activity in the social world outside of texts and transfer this 'worldly' mode of personification onto aspects of a text. This means that the social-scientific critic is interested primarily in verbal signs in texts that evoke things related to 'persons' and 'their social world'. Other aspects of verbal signs in the text are of little or no importance. Literary critics, in contrast, personify verbal signs in texts and transfer these personified aspects of 'verbal signs' onto texts. I will illustrate by continuing with the interpretations by Crossan and Rohrbaugh.

After constructing a literary context for interpretation, Crossan asks the reader to perform a particular mental act: 'I would ask you to forget everything or anything you know about the story's present setting or editorial interpretation within the Gospel of Luke. Here is the story, the whole story, and nothing but the story' (1976: 101–102). At this point, Crossan prints the entire parable
for the reader. The purpose is to get the reader to focus entirely on the story itself as a story. He is interested in the nature of story as story, in other words the nature of this particular form or genre within literature as a system. How does this story function? What makes this story different from other stories? Look, he says, at the story itself and nothing but the story.

As Crossan continues he emphasizes that he is concerned with the ‘implicit narrator’ rather than the historical author (Jesus) and with an ‘implicit hearer or audience’ (1976: 102). This language keeps him ‘inside’ the boundaries of the text in the socio-rhetorical model printed above. Then he distinguishes between an example story and a parable. At this point Crossan personifies forms of literature. As he says: The story of Jesus is not an example but a parable. It presents the audience with a paradox involving a double reversal of expectations' (1976: 104). Notice how ‘story’ has become the subject of a verb of action: the story ‘presents the audience with a paradox’. This is a matter of personifying ‘story’: this story does things to an audience. At this point, then, the literary critic depersonifies the person who tells the story – this person, he author, implied author, or narrator, is simply the device that brings the story before us, and there are great difficulties trying to talk about that device as a real person. Rather, we have the story, and it is the story that is doing things to us as readers.

I have both heard Bruce Malina object specifically to this kind of personification and have read comments he has written to me in this regard. Stories do not do anything, he says, people do. The problem, from the literary critic’s point of view, is that the ‘people’ in antiquity who told this story are no longer accessible to us. We have remnants of their language in verbal signs in texts. We activate these signs as we read them. If we are careful with our words, we know we are giving voice and action to verbal signs, not to real people. We cannot give voice and action to the person who told this story; we can only give voice and action to the story itself.

In contrast, Rohrbaugh personifies the author and the audience, both of whom stand outside the text. Rohrbaugh does not talk about an implied author or narrator, or about a narratee or implied hearer of the parable of the Great Supper. He is interested in ‘Luke’s’ version of the parable and in Luke’s ‘intended audience’. There is nothing ‘implicit’ either about the author or about the audience in Rohrbaugh’s interpretation. Luke is the author and he tells it to a particular audience with specific intentions in mind. As Rohrbaugh says: ‘our thesis is that Luke’s version of this parable knowingly uses features of the urban system in order to make its point and that these features would have been readily apparent to Luke’s intended audience’ (1991: 137).

It appears that Rohrbaugh also ‘personifies’ the parable he interprets, but he embeds that personification in ‘Luke’ who told it rather than in the nature of language as it functions in ‘parable’. In other words, for Crossan this is ‘language’s story’; for Rohrbaugh this is ‘Luke’s story. Crossan is very careful about any talk about anyone’s ‘intentions’ with the story, since the discussion of ‘the intentional fallacy’ has been an important part of literary theory (Wimsatt 1954: 3–18; Crossan 1976: 90). Rohrbaugh has no such concern. For him, people have intentions, Luke had intentions as he told this story, and therefore there are intentions in this story for an intended audience.

What about the different phenomena Crossan and Rohrbaugh personify in their interpretations? My experience has been that this difference is very difficult to overcome in dialogue. What the literary critic personifies in contrast to the social-scientific critic is the tip of an iceberg with deep roots that evoke emotional and cognitive animosity. For literary critics, neither Luke nor any other person from antiquity is available to us. We cannot bring them to life no matter what we do. We bring their verbal and material signs to life as we read and look, and we can investigate how these verbal and material signs function within language and literature as systems. For social-scientific critics, on the other hand, language and verbal signs do not do anything; people do things with language and verbal signs. Social-scientific critics are not concerned, it appears, with literary critics’ discussions of ‘mimetic’, ‘intentional’ and ‘affective’ fallacies. Most social-scientific critics presuppose that language and texts are clear windows to social reality. These windows are ‘transparent’: what you see is what you get. Here, then, we seem to have an immovable barrier between literary and social-scientific critics. At least I have not found much willingness on either side to give.

There may be one sign of hope. There is very little difference in what is personified as Crossan and Rohrbaugh talk about the characters in the parables they are interpreting. Both interpreters presuppose that the characters function in realms of social and cultural ‘realities’. Crossan posits all kinds of social and cultural aspects functioning in and through the story he interprets. In turn, Rohrbaugh posits the nature of the story as parable rather than allegory and posits a significant number of literary aspects in and around the story he interprets. But is this enough of a meeting ground to engage in fruitful dialogue? I think the answer to this question is no. The interpretation of the characters in the story is more of a battleground than a congenial playing field. The reason, I suggest, is the unexplored presuppositions on both sides of the discussion. Let us turn, then, to areas in which literary and social-scientific critics have presupposed they did not need any more refined knowledge.

UNEXAMINED PRESUPPOSITIONS OF LITERARY AND SOCIAL-SCIENTIFIC CRITICS

Given the different arena of focus for the literary and social-scientific critic, the major arena of attention of the one is the major arena of least attention for the other. By this I mean that the literary critic regularly considers the social dynamics of the Mediterranean world to be ‘transparent’ to any reasonably
intelligent historian while the nature of literature is highly complex, requiring extensive investigation. In turn, the social-scientific critic considers literature of any period to be 'transparent' to any reasonably intelligent reader while the nature of social interaction is highly complex, requiring extensive investigation. For the literary critic, it does little good to work out all kinds of theories and models about social systems and institutions if the interpreter does not read the text with intricate care, precision and theoretical guidance. For the social-scientific critic, it does little good to work out all kinds of theories and models about language and literature if the interpreter does not understand the social systems, institutions and dynamics in Mediterranean antiquity with care, precision and theoretical guidance. So is there any beginning place, any hope for cooperation?

The basic hope for serious dialogue and cooperation lies, as I see it, in an admission by both sides that the other side has data that is important for the act of interpretation. Such an approach to each other, given the highly developed nature of each field, calls for an interdisciplinary spirit. If interpreters are 'disciplinary' in their approach to things, in the spirit of nineteenth- and twentieth-century disciplinary investigation, there will be very little gain by either side — both sides will consider the central insights of the other side to be obsessive, irrelevant or simply wrong.

The question about Cossar is whether he could have a deeper interest in the social nature of the Mediterranean world. His recent books on Jesus suggest that he has such an interest (Cossar 1991, 1994). The question for Rohrbaugh is whether he could have a deeper interest in the literary nature of the parable of the Great Supper. Inasmuch as he distinguishes between parable and allegory, he may also find an interest in more detailed literary aspects of the parable.

But I suggest that this overlap of interest is still not enough. In my view, each side needs to have a much more comprehensive conception of the nature of text. This is where rhetorical criticism comes into the discussion, and here I refer to rhetorical criticism based on the tradition of rhetorical analysis and interpretation from its beginnings in pre-Socratic times to its presence today in post-modern criticism (Bizzell and Herzberg 1990). In an appendix to In Defence of Rhetoric (Vickers 1988: 491–498), Brian Vickers lists and defines forty-eight rhetorical tropes and figures. Literary criticism pays significant attention to only four of these: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Thus conventional literary criticism investigates a very limited range of phenomena of signification in a text. Social-scientific criticism explores a different range of signification in texts — namely what Aristotle calls the 'common topics'. Social-scientific critics have been exploring those topics that span all sectors of society and culture in the Mediterranean world — the knowledge, conceptions and presuppositions present with any person at any level of society. Aristotle’s analysis in his Ars Rhetorica makes it clear that the common topics are only one aspect of rhetoric both in speech and in texts. In addition to the common topics are the special or material topics and the final topics (Kennedy 1991: 45–47, 50–52, 187–204; Mack 1989: 38). Social-scientific criticism has the potential to participate fully in a context of comprehensive interpretation of signification in texts if it attends not only to the common social and cultural topics but also the specific and final topics in texts.

Bryan Wilson’s typology of sects is the most successful spectrum I can currently find to explore the specific or material topics in texts that evoke a religious view of the world. Through the specific topics in written discourse, a text evokes a response to the world that is conversionist, reformist, revolutionist, introversionist, manipulationist, thaumaturgical or utopian (Wilson 1969, 1973; Robbins 1994: 185–186). James A. Wilde began this kind of analysis with the Gospel of Mark in the 1970s (Wilde 1974, 1978). John H. Elliott included this kind of analysis in A Home for the Homeless and has been working hard to refine it in recent years (Elliott 1990b, 1993a, forthcoming). Philipp Eisel used it in his investigation of the Lukan community (Eider 1987) and has recently applied it to 4 Ezra in a study which also subjects the text to a literary analysis inspired by a central aspect of Russian formalism (Eisel 1994a: 110–130 = 1994b). Much more analysis of specific or material topics in texts needs to be undertaken to facilitate dialogue between literary and social-scientific critics.

But also social-scientific critics need to attend to the final or strategic topics. The final topics are those which specific cultures use to deliver their most decisive points of persuasion. The final topics of the rabbis often occur in contexts where brief recitation of a text from Torah contains a particular word with special meaning. The final topics in this kind of rhetoric are distinctive from the final topics at work in the speeches and writings of people deeply influenced by Homer and the tragedians. For this kind of analysis, the social-scientific critic needs to use the tools of the sociologist of culture. At present, the most suggestive taxonomy I have been able to find to explore the final topics is to correlate insights into elaboration of the oikos (pithy sayings associated with particular persons) with definitions of dominant culture, subculture, counterculture, contra-culture and liminal culture (Robbins 1994: 189–190). A beginning place is to explore the cultural nature in which each New Testament text participates both in Jewish culture and in Graeco-Roman culture (Robbins 1992). Burton Mack’s work on the Gospel of Mark (Mack 1988a) and Q (Mack 1993) presents the most advanced data currently available for this kind of analysis, but Mack himself does not use the resources of the sociology of culture to analyze and display what he has found. Extensive investigation of the final topics in New Testament texts with the aid of rhetorical criticism working in tandem with sociology of culture will bring a significant advance to dialogue between literary and social-scientific critics.
CONCLUSION

Literary and social-scientific criticism of the Bible emerged in a context where post-modern methods were moving into the humanities and the social sciences. The theoretical consciousness of both approaches is an important part of the new environment. The real antagonists of literary and social-scientific criticism are interpreters who claim to apply tested and proven methods that are free from theory. Approaches that are part of the post-modern era presuppose that every method is not only theoretically grounded but also ideologically driven. Just as no method is free from theory, so no theory is free from the particular interests and view of reality of those who formulate it.

Another characteristic of these approaches is to engage in rigorous, systematic and programmatic investigation, analysis and interpretation in the context of its theoretical and ideological discussions. The contextually limited and subjectively driven nature of its work does not introduce any special concern since that is the nature of all scientific work. Still another characteristic of both literary and social-scientific criticism is that the disciplinary work they do is inherently interdisciplinary. Both literary and social-scientific criticism have been deeply influenced by linguistics and structuralism, which are both richly informed by anthropology, which itself is a rich product of reciprocal exchange between the humanities and the social sciences. This means that the kind of literary and social-scientific criticism that was coming to birth during the last two decades presupposes cross-cultural, pluralistic investigation, analysis and interpretation.

It is natural that both literary and social-scientific approaches began with a disciplinary spirit characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century, since the spirit of historical criticism — the context out of which they emerged — is disciplinary. There is also another reason. Any approach must attain a ‘disciplinary’ rigour before colleagues in the field of biblical interpretation consider it to be a ‘significant’ practice in ‘serious exegesis’. In other words, there should be no surprise that literary critics started with types of new-critical, structuralist and Russian formalist modes of interpretation that looked as thoroughly scientific as the most rigorous historical practices of interpretation. Social-scientific critics, in turn, could claim to be the practitioners who brought historical criticism to its fullest expression. In other words, while literary critics were imitating the rigour of historical method, social-scientific critics were aspiring to fulfill the grandest dreams of historical method.

The result has been not only the practice of new historicism (Veever 1989; Thomas 1991) in biblical interpretation but also new rhetoricism (Bizzell and Herzberg 1990: 899–1266; Mack 1988a, 1990, 1993). Socio-rhetorical criticism merges new rhetoricism with new historicism (Robbins 1994). The boundaries established by earlier literary critics have openings through which social, cultural, historical and ideological data freely traffic. The insights of the social-scientific critic are more and more influenced by the textuality of society.
REFERENCES


— (1994) 'Who was Considered an Apostle in the Diaspora?', unpublished paper presented to the Conference on Tolerance and its Limits in Early Judaism and Christianity, Jerusalem.


REFERENCES


Bereitschaft zur Theologie des Lukas (SB 97), Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk.


REFERENCES


—— (1989) 'Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew' HTR 82: 13–34.


Dawes, G. (1990) "But if you can gain your freedom" (I Cor. 7:17 24), CBQ 52: 681-697.


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


Johnnes (1675) *Tractatus de fessitatem nostrae in singulis, Nuremberg.*


— (1978) *The Verb *Abhous* ("to follow") as an Index of Matthew's View of his Community*, *JBL* 97: 56–73.


Kommern, Ernst (1900) *Koordinierung*, *PfW* 4.1, cols 380–479, suppl. 4, 915ff., suppl. 5, 932ff.


REFERENCES


REFERENCES

—(1984) "Christianizing the Roman Empire", New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.


—(1986b) 'Interpreting the Bible with Anthropology: The Case of the Poor and the Rich', Listening: Journal for Culture and Religion 21: 149-159.


—(1990) 'Mary - Mediterranean Woman: Mother and Son', BTB 20: 54-64.


—(1991d) 'Interpretation: Reading, Abduction, Metaphor', in D. Jobling et. al. (eds.) The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis, Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press.


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES


REFERENCES

REFERENCES


