

The University of Sheffield

**Ideology and Ideological Criticism
Of Old Testament Texts**

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Thomas Merton wrote, 'There is always a temptation to diddle around in the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues.'

Ezekiel excoriates false prophets as those who have 'not gone up into the gaps.' **The gaps are the thing.** The gaps are the spirit's one home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man unbound. The gaps are the clefts in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the ice narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery.

Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too. Stalk the gaps. **Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock a universe.** This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.

From: Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim At Tinker Creek* (Picador, Pan Books, 1976)

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Summary

Ideology and Ideological Criticism Of Old Testament Texts

The first chapter of the thesis traces the history of the term ‘ideology’; elucidates a range of definitions and connotations for the term; and offers a brief review of recent usage within Old Testament Studies.

The second chapter turns more specifically to Ideological *Criticism*, offering a critical overview of the approaches of Terry Eagleton and Frederic Jameson, prominent theorists within the field. The chapter concludes by adopting a three fold ‘mapping’ of ideological criticism for Old Testament Studies: social-scientific, interpretative-sociological, and social-critical approaches.

The third and fourth chapters consist of a critical evaluation of a range of attempts at ideological criticism within Biblical Studies from each of the social-scientific, interpretative-sociological, and social-critical perspectives. These include (among others) a specifically Eagletonian approach; a Jamesonian approach; a black-feminist approach; and an approach based on post-colonial theory.

Chapter five discusses a variety of relevant issues and perspectives, including the interaction of ideological criticism with postmodernism.

The concluding chapter surveys the four modes in which ideological criticism operates: criticism of the biblical *texts* themselves; criticism of *readings* and *interpretations*; criticism of the *use* of the Bible as an ideological instrument; and criticism of *scholarly practices* within the Academy. This final chapter then seeks to evaluate the lasting contribution of ideological criticism within Old Testament Studies and its future potential.

The overall conclusion is that *the advent of ideological criticism has marked a significant watershed in the annals of biblical criticism*. Ideological criticism *as a distinct and separate methodology* may not become the one-and-only focus of biblical-critical methodology in the coming decades; but, arguably, no significant biblical criticism can now take place without serious ideological critique, not only of the writing, publishing, and dissemination of ancient texts but also of the interpretative tradition and of the academic hegemony.

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I wish at this point to acknowledge my indebtedness to a number of people who have assisted in the preparation of this thesis.

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I have appreciated the help and advice of Alison Bygraves in the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies Office and also the support of the library and administration staff of the Urban Theology Unit. Mention should also be made of the staff of my own College (Union Theological College, Belfast): the librarian, Stephen Gregory and his staff were always helpful as were all the members of the administration team, not least my secretary, Linda Cameron.

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biblical exegesis may be freely granted but the way that it has been worked out, so far at least, has been little short of chaotic'.⁸

Against this background, this thesis will seek:

- to survey the history of the term 'ideology', particularly as used within Old Testament⁹ studies;
- to investigate the development of *ideological criticism* within the wider world of literary criticism;
- to evaluate a variety of attempts to apply ideological criticism within Old Testament Studies (including feminist, liberationist, and third-world perspectives);
- to offer, in a concluding summary chapter, an overall appraisal of ideological criticism within Old Testament Studies, together with some brief suggestions for its future use and development.

⁸ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 139.

⁹ I have chosen to use the term 'Old Testament' rather than 'Hebrew Bible' throughout this thesis. I do not regard the two as the same thing, nor the latter as simply a more politically correct way of denoting the former. The Old Testament is what is found in my Christian Bible and it is the Old Testament, interpreted in that context, that has been formative in the western civilisation of which I am part. The Hebrew Bible has a quite different tradition of religious and scholarly interpretation. In adopting this terminology I doubtless betray my own ideological position! However, I am reassured by a prominent Jewish Rabbi friend, who, when I apologised to him for an inadvertent reference in his company to the 'Old Testament', replied: 'Don't apologise! Of course we call it the Old Testament! It would be pedantic to do otherwise!'

Abbreviations

<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
ET	English Translation
GNB	Good News Bible
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

1. What Is *Ideology*?

1.1 Brief History¹ of the Term ‘Ideology’

It is generally accepted that the term *idéologie* was first used in the late *eighteenth* century by the French rationalist philosopher, Destutt de Tracy, as a name for his own ‘science of ideas’ or ‘philosophy of mind’.² He aimed to rid people’s minds of prejudice by preparing them for the sovereignty of reason.³

The *nineteenth* century⁴ has been called *the age of ideology*, because much of the thinking of the period can be distinguished by ideological features. ‘Ideology’ offered a comprehensive social theory; it involved political action with an intellectual leadership; it envisaged opposition and demanded commitment from followers; it represented a revolutionary challenge to established secular and religious leadership.⁵

¹ A thorough historical survey is to be found in Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). Eagleton charts the phases of development of the use of the term ‘ideology’: from the Enlightenment; through Lukás and Gramsci; Adorno and Bourdieu; and Schopenhauer and Sorel; to the present day.

A useful summary of historical and contemporary usage, which I have found helpful in preparing this introductory section, is Maurice Cranston’s article on ‘Ideology’ in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Mactopaedia*, Vol 20, pp. 828-833 (CD version 1999).

John Plamenatz also provides a clear and uncomplicated study of the subject in John Plamenatz, *Ideology* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

Martin Seliger offers interpretations of ideology that are directly opposed to Marxist theory in *The Marxist Conception of Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Also useful is Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

² Destutt de Tracy was an heir to the epistemology of John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, as well as to Francis Bacon’s stress on the value of scientific knowledge. Human intellectual faculties are simply another aspect of our animal nature, he wrote, and ‘ideology is a part of zoology’ (quoted in Cranston, ‘Ideology’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [CD version, 1999]). See Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 169, for a succinct summary.

³ De Tracy and his fellow *idéologues* went on to propose a system of national education designed to transform France into a rational and scientific society. Napoleon at first supported their cause but in 1812 he scornfully attributed France’s military defeats to the weakening influence of the *idéologues*.

⁴ However, the seeds of the concept of ideology, especially positive ideology, had been sown much earlier than the 19th century, with the growing use of concepts such as *the rights of man* and of *liberty*.

⁵ Maurice Cranston observes: ‘One has only to consider the prose style of the founders of most ideologies to be struck by the military and warlike language that they habitually used, including words like struggle, resist, march, victory, and overcome. ... In such a view, commitment to an ideology becomes a form of enlistment; so that to become the adherent of an ideology is to become a combatant or partisan’ (Maurice Cranston, ‘Ideology’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [CD version, 1999]).

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In the *twentieth* century, the term acquired a particular association with Marxism: ideology became the medium by which Marxists sought to articulate the relationship between the cultural world of ideas and the realms of political economy, class structures, and means of production. Marx's well known maxim, 'Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life', has been described as 'the mother of all theories of ideology'.⁶

Louis Althusser has been particularly influential in more recent Marxist circles.⁷ He stresses that the *economic* infrastructure is the base on which a superstructure of ideology is built, which in turn serves to reinforce the economic base. 'Ideological State Apparatuses'⁸ are what keep the state in power and ensure the continuance of class structures and the conditions of material production. For Althusser, ideologies

⁶ Thus 'what men say, imagine, conceive', all the products of consciousness, are but 'the ideological reflexes and echoes of the life process'. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy* (ed. L.S. Feuer; New York: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 247. Marx and Engels at first advocated a polemical definition of 'ideology', a definition which still influences the political analyses of the far left. This classic Marxist usage, focussing on 'ideology' as 'false consciousness', can be summed up as follows:

- ideology has to be understood in the context of a *materialistic* concept of history;
- the ideology of the bourgeois class reflects their own class interests rather than an objective analysis of society;
- this (false) ideology is imposed on the proletariat in order to preserve the dominant position of the bourgeoisie;
- ideology is thus a system of *illusions* about the nature of society.

However, Marx himself did not develop a comprehensive philosophical theory of ideology; and in later writings Marx and Engels both developed broader understandings of the term. For a useful summary of the usage of Marx and Engels, see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (trans. Ben Brewster; 2nd edn.; London: New Left Books, 1977), pp. 149-50.

Twentieth-century Marxists have sought to downplay or discard altogether the more pejorative overtones of the term 'ideology'. Communist Party philosophers have even been called ideologists. In fact, Marxism itself could be described as an excellent paradigm of an ideology that is regarded as positive by its followers.

⁷ See, in particular, Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*. Althusser combined elements of psychoanalytic theory (in particular notions of 'subject formation') with Saussure's structuralism. Ideology designates a system of representations that forms individuals into 'social subjects', who 'internalise' a picture of their social world and their place in it. For Althusser, ideology is not just a set of narrowly political ideas but is to do with the subject's 'lived relations to the real', what James Kavanagh describes as 'a fundamental framework of assumptions that defines the parameters of the real and the self' (James H. Kavanagh, 'Ideology' in Lentricchia and McLaughlin [eds.], *Critical Terms*, pp. 306-320 [310]). For another brief but useful summary of Althusser's philosophy, see Beverley J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2-3* (JSOTSup. 208; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 173-176.

⁸ 'Repressive State Apparatuses' (public institutions such as law, army, police, courts, etc.) are the *explicit* means of control by the state; but 'Ideological State Apparatuses' are, for Althusser, much more effective in perpetuating social formations and means of production. These include Churches, Trade Unions, family institutions, schools, newspapers, cultural traditions, and the like. See Louis Althusser, 'Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 121-173. James Kavanagh puts it this way:

It is much more effective – and cheaper – to put 'You can't fight City Hall' or 'The poor will always be with us' or 'Every revolution just leads to worse tyranny' on everyone's lips than to put all the cops on all the corners that would be necessary to confront any determined struggle of the poor and the homeless against the social system that produces poverty and homelessness (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 309).

Kavanagh further observes that Ideological State Apparatuses are even more effective than overt political persuasion: 'Declining political interest does not mean the system is not working; to the contrary, it is a sign that the system is ... working for more people more of the time through apparatuses of ideological interpellation / subjection, rather than those of political persuasion' (p. 313).

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exist *materially* in their practices: yet they are also illusory. Ideology represents ‘the *imaginary* relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’.⁹

From the outset the term ‘ideology’ has been variously used in neutral, in positive, and in negative senses. However, the classic use of the term by Marx and Engels,¹⁰ with a dominant connotation of ‘false consciousness’,¹¹ has made it difficult ever

⁹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 127 (my emphasis). Marc Z. Brettler draws attention to a modification of Althusser’s definition by George Duby: ‘a system (possessing its own logic and structure) of representations (images, myths, ideas, or concepts) existing and playing a historical whole within a given society’ (Marc Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* [London: Routledge, 1995], p. 13).

¹⁰ See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (ET; New York: International Publications, 1970; originally published in German in 1932).

James Kavanagh writes:

Perhaps ‘ideology’ was most powerfully developed in Marxism because Marxism always sought to be not just narrowly ‘political’ but a more comprehensive kind of theory that could understand the important relations among the political, economic, and cultural elements in specific societies. ‘Ideology’ in fact became the term through which Marxists tried to articulate, in various ways, the relation between the world of culture (including, but not limited to ‘ideas’) and the realm of political economy (including ‘production’) (Kavanagh, ‘Ideology’, p. 307).

Marx and Engels were greatly influenced by Hegel, who had argued that people were instruments of history, enacting roles assigned to them by forces they did not understand. However, Marx and Engels expressly rejected the idea that, if people’s actions were determined by external forces, there was little point in trying to change or improve political and other circumstances. They were critical of a Hegelian tendency to dispute about *ideas* while doing nothing to change conditions in the real world.

J.B. Thompson characterises the earlier usage of ‘ideology’ by Marx and Engels as follows:

Ideology ... is a theoretical and doctrinal activity which erroneously regards ideas as autonomous and efficacious and which fails to grasp the real conditions and characteristics of social-historical life (J.B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communications* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990], p. 35).

‘Ideology’ came to be specifically associated by Marxists with the critique of *class* relations: ideology functions as ‘a system of ideas which expresses the interests of the dominant class’ and ‘which represents class relations in an illusory form’. Thompson offers the following combination of these two strands as implicit within Marxism (though never actually expressed by Marx explicitly in these terms):

Ideology is a system of representation which serves to sustain existing relations of class domination by orienting individuals towards the past rather than the future, or towards images and ideals which conceal class relations and detract from the collective pursuit of social change (Thompson, *Ideology*, p. 41).

In later writings, Marx and Engels both operated with diverse understandings of ‘ideology’, thus creating tensions as to the usage of the word within Marxism as well as in non-Marxist discourse.

¹¹ It is a basic premise of their *The German Ideology* that all thought, all consciousness, is *socially* determined. See Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings*, p. 247. Jonathan Dyck makes this comment:

The juxtaposition of ‘consciousness’ and ‘life’ for the sake of his argument (and for rhetorical effect) has led to a rather mechanistic understanding of human existence as implied in the base-superstructure model of society, where causal priority is assigned to the economic base over the ideological superstructure. But if we isolate this statement from its rhetorical context, these ‘ideological reflexes’ can be defined as but ‘one part of the socio-cultural system’ (to use Raymond Geuss’s terms) though not the basic or determinative part (Jonathan Dyck, *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler* [Leiden: Brill, 1998], p. 55, referring to Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]).

Dyck also draws attention to the more developed and more pejorative use of the term ‘ideology’ elsewhere in the writings of Marx, for example, in his essay, ‘The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof’:

Here ideology is treated not so much in terms of what is thought or said (ideology in terms of its discursive aspect and manifest content) but in terms of what ideology does and the social structures in which it is embedded (ideology in terms of its functional properties). Tackling this ‘falseness’ is not simply a matter of changing one’s thinking from, say, an idealist position to a materialist one, for the social consciousness of the capitalist mode of production as a whole is distorted (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 58, referring to Karl Marx, ‘The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof’ in *A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* [New York: International Publishers, 1967], pp. 76-87).

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since to use the word without at least some negative connotations.¹² Yet even Althusser conceives of a positive function for ideology when he writes:

In a *class* society, ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is settled to the profit of the ruling class. In a *classless* society, ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their condition of existence is lived to the profit of all men.¹³

World events in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries have increasingly been dominated by major political / religious ideologies. To the extent that any ideology insists upon its own particular programmatic theory of society to the exclusion of all others, it will inevitably be at odds with pluralistic democracies.¹⁴ An important contemporary development is the rise of a *popular* ideological perspective, which (according to Cranston) 'has acquired increasing significance as the general public has come to play a role in considering questions of war and peace'.¹⁵

¹² A similarly pejorative use of 'ideology', in the sense of false consciousness, was also found in early exponents of the sociology of knowledge, such as Max Weber and Karl Mannheim. See in particular: Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936; originally published in Germany, 1929) and Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and D. Martindale; Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1993; first published, 1952). They regarded all idea systems as the reflection of vested interests; and they considered it to be part of the task of the sociologist to *unmask* the life conditions that produce ideologies. Thus, they attributed negative connotations to the term 'ideology', using it to denote tainted idea systems that reflect bias or partiality. Neither Weber nor Mannheim, however, used the word 'ideology' consistently.

It is particularly significant that Weber rejected Marx's theory that all idea systems are products of *economic* structures, seeking to demonstrate that, conversely, some economic structures are the product of idea systems. He argued, for example, that Protestantism generated capitalism rather than that capitalism generated Protestantism. Mannheim suggested that the word 'ideology' should be reserved for *past* (flawed) idea systems and preferred the word 'utopia' for idea systems of a revolutionary future nature.

Similar approaches to the sociology of knowledge have also been developed in terms of Freudian psychology, with ideologies as the *unconscious* rationalisations of class interests.

The fact that ideological activism has sometimes led to what has been perceived as extremism, often associated with revolutionary violence, has compounded the negative shades of meaning often attributed to the term. Machiavelli had perhaps been the first to make this link (based in Florence, at the end of 15th century and the beginning of 16th century). In more recent times, the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, has also written in terms of the necessity of violence for achieving ideological aims. He constructed a theory of ideology as a 'marginal system of ideas', consciously designed as an alternative to Marxist theory.

¹³ Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (trans. Ben Brewster; London: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1985), pp. 235-36. Althusser also uses 'ideology' in a neutral sense, describing it as 'indispensable in any society if men [sic] are to be formed, transformed, and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence' (*For Marx*, p. 234). From this perspective, the problem with specific ideological discourses is not that they are ideological but what kind of ideology they espouse, what 'conditions of existence' they undergird, and by what means they 'form, transform, and equip'.

¹⁴ In the aftermath of the bombings on the London Underground in 2005, the phrase 'evil ideology' was given wide currency by the British Prime Minister with reference to the ideological systems supporting terrorism.

¹⁵ Cranston, 'Ideology', subsection 'Ideology: the Context of International Relations' (my emphasis). Cranston continues:

What came to be called the Cold War in the 1950s must be understood, to a large extent, as an ideological confrontation; and, whereas Communism is manifestly an ideology, the 'non-Communism', or even the 'anti-Communism' of the West is negatively ideological. To oppose one ideology is not necessarily to subscribe to another, although there is a strong body of opinion in the West that feels that the free world needs a coherent ideology if it is to resist successfully an opposing ideology.

Wars may be caused by a mixture of ideology and other factors, though this is scarcely a new phenomenon, especially as regards religiously based ideology! The Old Testament 'conquest' under

1.2 Definitions of 'Ideology'

1.21 The Semantic Range of 'Ideology'

The Oxford English Dictionary has:-

1. The system of ideas at the basis of an economic or political theory (*Marxist ideology*).
2. the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or individual (*bourgeois ideology*).
3. visionary speculation.
4. *archaic* the science of ideas.

However, the usage of 'ideology' is so complex and varied that it soon becomes clear that a brief, dictionary-style definition of the word¹⁶ will not suffice.¹⁷ A more detailed mapping of the semantic range of the term is required.¹⁸

Terry Eagleton is probably the most widely regarded exponent of the subject in the English-speaking world. In his 1991, *Ideology: an Introduction*, he offers a wide-ranging list of possible meanings,¹⁹ which he then organises into a more specific list of six *workable* definitions:

Joshua is presented as having a strong ideological undergirding. The Crusades, the wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants in early modern Europe, the recent Iran-Iraq war, the strife between Muslims and Hindus in Kashmir (Pakistan-India), the current 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, the struggle in contemporary Israel-Palestine, recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq and the advent of international terrorism are all examples of conflict with a strong religious-ideological dimension. In many of these cases, political, cultural, and religious ideologies are inextricably entwined. One suspects, however, that in many cases, the ideology serves largely as a 'cover' for motivations that have more to do with territorial aspirations and economic advantage than with religion. This is certainly true of Afghanistan, where much of this thesis was written.

¹⁶ I have tried throughout this work to make a careful distinction between the *word* 'ideology' and the various *concepts* that it may be used to denote.

¹⁷ Two possible general definitions are suggested by Cranston (Cranston, 'Ideology', subsection 'Ideology: Introduction'):

Ideology is a systematic body of beliefs about the structure and working of society that includes a program of practical politics based on a comprehensive theory of human nature and requiring a protracted social struggle to enact.

An ideology is a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones; it is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it.

¹⁸ Martin Rose rightly points out that the connotations of cognate terms may vary from language to language. He observes that in German the prevailing connotations are negative, citing the 'Duden' Reference Dictionary definition of *Ideologie* (K.H. Ahlheim, *Fremdwörterbuch* [der Grosse Duden. V; Mannheim: Dudenverlag, 2nd edn., 1966], p. 292):

Designates an artificial [weltfremd] theory, a false [unechte] view of the world.

In French, by contrast, Rose maintains that the ideas of Marx and Engels have been less influential. Consequently, the definition of *idéologie* in the *Petit Robert* is (*Le Petit Robert. I. Dictionnaire Alphaabétique et Analogique* [Paris: Dictionnaire Le Robert, 1984 and 1993], p. 957):

An assemblage of ideas, beliefs, and doctrines specific to an epoch, to a society, or a class.

See Martin Rose, 'Deuteronomistic Ideology and Theology of the Old Testament' in A. de Pury, T. Römer, and J-D. Macchi (eds.), *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in the Light of Recent Research* (JSOTSup. 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; original French edition: *Israël construit son histoire: L'historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* [Le Monde de la Bible 34; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996]), pp. 424-480 (424-25).

¹⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 1-2. The full list is:

- the process of the production of meanings, signs, and values in social life;
- a body of ideas characteristic of a particular group or social class;
- ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power:

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- the general material process of production of ideas, beliefs, and values in social life;
- ideas and beliefs (whether true or false) that symbolise the conditions and life-experiences of a specific, socially significant group or class;
- the promotion and legitimation of the interests of such society groups in the face of opposing interests;
- the promotion and legitimation of the interests of the dominant group;
- ideas and beliefs that help to legitimate the interests of a ruling group or class specifically by distortion or dissimulation;
- false or deceptive ideas that arise from the material structure of society as a whole.²⁰

The first four of these definitions are successively more specific in terms of the *group* within society to which they relate and also in terms of the *function* that ideology serves. In each of these four, though perhaps less so in the fourth, the term ‘ideology’ is used in a neutral and descriptive way, though, arguably, Eagleton underplays the extent to which over-simplification, partisanship, distortion, and false consciousness are inevitably implicit in even the most benign usage. In the remaining two definitions, ‘ideology’ is used to imply not just *false* consciousness but deliberate *dissimulation* or *deception*.

Not all of Eagleton’s definitions are mutually compatible. Indeed, ‘ideology’ resists a neat summary definition: The usage of the word, suggests Eagleton, is more like:

a *text*, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands ... and it is probably more important to assess what is valuable or can be discarded in each of these than to merge them forcibly into some Grand Global Theory.²¹

Eagleton here focuses on the use of ideology by those in power, whereas opposition to the dominant power can equally be ideological, whether in terms of false consciousness or rigid preconception. It should also be added that ideology is not just a matter of *class* interests. Feminism, for example, can also be described as ideological; and increasingly in the contemporary world the term ‘ideology’ is used of religious groupings. Furthermore, ideology is often closely to do with establishing and maintaining *group identity* and solidarity, whether it is the ideology of one group

-
- systematically distorted communication;
 - that which offers a position for a subject;
 - forms of thought motivated by social interests;
 - identity thinking;
 - socially necessary illusion;
 - the conjuncture of discourse and power;
 - the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world;
 - action-oriented sets of beliefs;
 - the confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality;
 - semiotic closure;
 - the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to social structure;
 - the process by which social life is converted to a natural reality.

²⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 28-30.

²¹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 1. He further suggests that it is useful to think along the lines of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s doctrine of family resemblances, a network of overlapping semantic features rather than some constant essence.

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within a divided community, as in Northern Ireland or South Africa, or the world-view of a guild or profession, such as that of biblical scholarship.

Within Biblical Studies, one of the best surveys of the usage of 'ideology' is offered by James Barr in his recent *History and Ideology of the Old Testament* (2000).²² Barr defines 'ideology' primarily by *what it is not* or by what it is opposed to, which is helpful in drawing the boundaries around the semantic range of the term. I have here adapted Barr's definitions slightly and have added examples to illustrate some of the distinctions.

Ideology is not just any set of ideas but an *action-oriented* system.

Not everyone who believes in peace is necessarily committed to a pacifist ideology; nor does everyone who is committed to social justice necessarily

²² Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 102-140.

Another useful survey within Biblical Studies of the semantic range of 'ideology' is found in the introductory chapter of David J.A. Clines, *Interested Parties: the Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup. 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Clines makes a distinction between four possible *denotations* for the word 'ideology' and a further list of what might be better regarded as *connotations* that attach to the term only in certain specific contexts. His four possible *denotations* are:

- A more or less connected group of ideas;
- A relatively coherent set of ideas amounting to a world-view or outlook on life;
- A set of ideas special to a particular class or group;
- The set of ideas held by the dominant group in a society (p. 10).

His suggested *connotations* include (in a summarised form):

- ideas wrongly passed off as natural or obvious;
- ideas serving the interests of a dominant group;
- ideas oriented towards action;
- false ideas;
- other people's ideas, different from our own;
- metaphysical ideas as distinct from practical politics;
- an idolising of the ideal and a scorning of the actual;
- a totalitarian attitude;
- a pseudo-scientific attitude (p. 11).

Like Eagleton, Clines acknowledges the overlaps among these denotations and connotations, together with the fact that some of them are mutually exclusive. He also acknowledges that some of the distinctions made in his list of connotations may not be relevant to *ancient* cultures, in particular, the last five.

Yet another approach to the different meanings of 'ideology', as used within biblical criticism, comes from A.K.M. Adam. He offers a threefold classification: 'The first stresses the *falsity* of ideology; the second stresses the *generality* of ideology; and the third stresses the *work* of ideology'. He explains:

Some critics define 'ideology' starting from the Marxist conviction that people put up with oppressive conditions in part because the social practices that dominate their lives express a misleading justification for their situation. ... The means of production, the character of class relations, and the vocabulary of political life all constitute an enacted description of 'how things are'. ... This sort of ideology is always deceptive. ...

Another group of interpreters treats 'ideology' as any set of political goals and assumptions. Most casual English speakers use the term this way. ... When we use the term this way, we risk allowing it to become redundant. If everyone has an ideology, then the term often ends up meaning nothing other than 'opinion' or 'conviction'. ...

A third body finds the first definition too limiting and the second too idealistic and vague. These critics define 'ideology' as a description of all the social interactions that ascribe 'significance' to our behaviour. ... They go on to use the term not only for cases of 'false consciousness' but as a condition for the possibility of all consciousness. ... Certain ideological assumptions may have liberating effects (the assumption that human beings have innate 'rights', for example) (A.K.A Adam, 'Political Criticism: Ideologies and their Discontents' in *What is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], pp. 45-60 [47-48]).

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subscribe to a comprehensive socialist ideology. Ideology integrates abstract ideas or beliefs with a programme for action.

Ideological is opposed to pragmatic.

This usage is particularly found in the political realm.²³ The *pragmatic* approach treats particular issues and problems purely on their merits and does not attempt to apply solutions based on *ideological* (ie doctrinal and preconceived) principles. In the world of British politics,²⁴ the Labour party has traditionally been criticised for imposing socialist *ideology*, whether or not it works in practice: what Labour politicians extol as matters of ‘principle’, their opponents dismiss as ‘ideology’.²⁵

Ideology is a complex of *second-hand* as opposed to original ideas.

In Barr’s words:

An original thinker ... might investigate a problem and produce an answer – say, a historical work, a scientific solution, or a volume of philosophy. ... Ideology would appear when some few elements or rough outlines from such work came to be picked up at second hand and become part of the world-view of people who have never followed out the original investigation.²⁶

So on this definition, Marx would have been an *original* thinker, as distinct from much of later Marxism, which is *ideological*.

Ideology is the *unconscious* as opposed to the conscious determinant of a person’s inherited world-view.

The complex of inherited beliefs and attitudes which *unconsciously* determines a person’s world-view includes factors such as gender, race, social class, and place of birth. Things that seem commonsensical and self-evident to one person because of their inherited perspective will be instinctively rejected by others as ideology. The politics of my own adopted homeland, Northern Ireland, offer a clear illustration of the power of an inherited ideology from which it is difficult for individuals to escape. There is often much that is good in the inherited ideology but it is difficult at close range and in a polemical context to disentangle the destructive elements from those that are positive.

Ideology is a *social* rather than an individual phenomenon.

Although the term ‘ideology’ is sometimes applied to individuals, the predominant usage is of a *corporate, social phenomenon*. Ideology is something shared with a particular class or group or party or professional

²³ Cranston comments:

Almost any approach to politics constitutes a belief system of one kind or another. Some such belief systems are more structured, more ordered, and generally systematic than others. Though an ideology is a type of belief system, not all belief systems are ideologies. One man’s belief system may consist of ... ill-assorted prejudices and inarticulate assumptions. Another’s may be the result of deep reflection and careful study. It is sometimes felt to be convenient to speak of a belief system of this latter type as a philosophy. ... The confrontation between ideology and pragmatism may be more instructive if it is translated into a distinction between the ideological and the pragmatic, taking these two adjectives as extremes on a sliding scale. From this perspective, it becomes possible to speak of differences of degree, to speak of an approach to politics as being more or less ideological, more or less pragmatic (Cranston, ‘Ideology’, subsection ‘Ideology: Ideology and Pragmatism’).

²⁴ I make no comment here on the rightness or otherwise of this criticism of the Labour party. I offer this only as an example of the usage of ‘ideology’. It should be added that the Conservative party, by contrast, has been conversely accused of being devoid of principle.

²⁵ In Barr’s words, ideology ‘is a world-view or set of ideas that is so intensely held that factual realities and practical considerations have no power to alter it’ (James Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 102). One might comment that the ultimate exemplar is the person who says, in effect, ‘My mind is made up. Please do not confuse me with the facts’.

²⁶ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 103.

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guild. Or it may be the collective ideology of a movement, such as feminism or pacifism.

Ideology is the antithesis of objectivity.

The term is sometimes used pejoratively for views that arise from vested interests rather than on the basis of logic and objectivity. Secular academics, for example, have sometimes dismissed theologians as incapable of scholarly objectivity because of their prior commitment to a religious ideology.²⁷ The term 'ideology' may also apply to loyalty to a cause that is based on sentiment or emotion rather than rational argumentation.

Ideology is a false set of ideas – usually (but not always) associated with the dominant social group.

This is the traditional Marxist understanding of the word as it has filtered down into popular thinking. Ideologies are sets of mistaken or false ideas, imposed by the dominant group as a means of social control. In this sense, Marxists dismiss religion as inherently ideological.²⁸

Some scholars have expressed doubt about the applicability of certain definitions of 'ideology' to *ancient* cultures, in particular because of the paucity of available data.²⁹ A simplified (neutral) definition of 'ideology', which Niels Lemche regards as workable within Biblical Studies, is given in these terms: 'that set of opinions which dominated Israelite society and which made up the system of values with which the Israelites' actions corresponded'.³⁰

²⁷ However, more recently there has been increasing awareness that the world of university scholarship is itself ideologically conditioned and that those who lay claim to complete objectivity are themselves ideologically suspect. There is something inherently patronising about the 'objective' critic who writes dismissively about the 'ideology' of others! Indeed, it is sometimes the very use of the word 'ideology' that betrays a critic's own ideological bias! Iain Provan's clash with Philip Davies and T.L. Thompson, which is discussed below (pp. 40-44), is an example of this phenomenon.

²⁸ Barr also draws attention to the use of the related term 'propaganda'. 'Propaganda' refers to the *dissemination* of a world-view, while 'ideology' denotes the world-view itself (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 117). The word 'propaganda' is almost always used in a pejorative sense, though (like ideology) not all propaganda is *necessarily* entirely false. See, for example, Rex Mason, *Propaganda and Subversion in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1997), in which 'propaganda' is used in a relatively neutral sense (referring, for example, to royal and priestly propaganda) and in which the 'subversiveness' of the prophets is positive. Keith Whitlam has also offered a neutral definition of 'propaganda', as 'the process by which a particular world-view (ideology) is disseminated to a particular audience' (Keith W. Whitlam, 'The Symbols of Power: Aspects of Royal Propaganda in the United Monarchy', *Biblical Archaeology* 49 [1986], pp. 166-73 [166]). Whitlam has also commented that the propagandist often seeks to 'bring to the fore certain *emotions* in order to produce the desired effect within a particular audience' (Keith W. Whitlam, 'The Defence of David', *JSOT* 29 [1984], pp. 61-87 [67] [my emphasis]). Marc Brettler has defined 'propaganda' as 'methods used to foster and disseminate ideological beliefs' (Brettler, *Creation of History*, pp. 13-14, quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 116).

²⁹ Clines, for example, makes this comment as to his own usage of the term:

The fuller [ie the technical] sense of 'ideology' is one that I entirely accept, but it is not the sense in which I use it. ... For I find it hard to conceive how a detailed ideological analysis – in the fuller sense – could be made of ancient Israel, given the paucity of the data we have for the reconstruction of social reality in that culture (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 11).

³⁰ Niels P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), p. 34, note 1. He continues: 'In an oriental society like Israel's, one should furthermore be aware that ideology, religion, and theology are to a large extent synonyms, since the separation between the sacred and the profane realms, which characterises our contemporary European culture, was unknown in antiquity'.

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1.22 Popular Definitions of 'Ideology'

It is always useful (arguably it is essential³¹) to investigate how a technical term might be understood in *popular* usage. What would be meant in the course of a pub conversation if someone remarked, 'Oh, that's just ideological'? It would not necessarily imply that the statement was wholly false, though an *element* of falsity would almost certainly be implied. The pub-conversationalist would certainly not be attempting to initiate discussion on the distinction between linguistic and phenomenal reality, though he might be alluding to an attempt to use words to mask the reality of experience. Eagleton puts it this way:

To claim in ordinary conversation that someone is speaking ideologically is surely to hold that they are judging a particular issue through some *rigid* framework of *pre-conceived* ideas which distorts their understanding. I view things as they really are; you squint at them through a tunnel vision imposed by some extraneous system of doctrine. There is usually a suggestion that this involves an oversimplifying view of the world – that to speak or judge 'ideologically' is to do so schematically, stereotypically, and perhaps with the faintest hint of fanaticism.³²

Ideology is associated, on the one hand, with misconception and, on the other hand, with straitjacketing dogma.³³

One might add to Eagleton's observations that the opposite of ideology in such a conversation would have more to do with the pragmatic than with questions of truth or falsehood. Furthermore, the pub-speaker is unlikely to use the term 'ideology' to refer to his /her own thinking but rather to refer pejoratively to *someone else's point of view*. The term might also imply an element of threat or warning against the voicing of ideas that are contrary to the perceived interests of speaker's class or group.

Another way of gauging popular usage would be to turn to the newspaper world, where the word 'ideology' has acquired a considerable currency in recent years.³⁴ On

Stephen Fowl has offered this summary definition: 'a consensual collection of beliefs, attitudes, and convictions that is related in certain specifiable ways to a whole range of social, political, and material artifacts and practices' (Stephen Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', *Biblical Interpretation* 3.1 [1995], pp. 15-34 [17]).

While some of these definitions, such as that of Stephen Fowl, have sought to allow for a neutral or even positive understanding of ideology, the reality is that the word is almost always used with connotations of 'false consciousness' or even of deception.

³¹ Some would argue that popular usage should always be the final arbiter of meaning, even of a technical term. This is a view that normally prevails in legal contexts. Such a view could itself of course be regarded as ideological! See Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 3.

³² Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 3 (my emphasis).

³³ However, one person's rigidity is another person's openness or liberalism, e.g: 'My views are based on genuine concern for the rights of others; yours are mere political correctness'; or, 'The Soviet Union is in the grip of ideology while the US sees things as they really are'. Or, to use Eagleton's tongue-in-cheek example: 'To seek some humble, pragmatic political goal, such as bringing down the democratically elected government of Chile, is a question of adapting oneself realistically to the facts; to send one's tanks into Czechoslovakia is an instance of ideological fanaticism' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 4).

³⁴ In general in the journalistic world, 'ideology' is used of rigidly held systems of political ideas. It is a pejorative term, used of someone who seeks to impose an abstract, often extremist, anti-pragmatic system as opposed to a 'moderate' political framework. James Kavanagh has observed of American newspaper usage:

There are a few people on the right and left (like Robert Bork and Fidel Castro) who 'have' an ideology, and who are *therefore* likely to mess things up, and there are the great majority of sensible people (and

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the day of writing, one of the leading articles in the *Times* has the headline: ‘Brazil at the Crossroads: Now is the time for Pragmatism not Ideology’. The article observes:

Brazil is set to become an *ideological* battleground ... as the ill-informed try to attach labels and ‘-isms’ to government policy. It is whether the new government will have the courage and the credibility to pursue a rational economic policy and create the kind of opportunities that will ultimately reduce poverty.³⁵

Here ‘ideology’ is the opposite of ‘pragmatism’. Readers are warned against the danger of becoming embroiled in the ‘ideological battlefield’ as opposed to ‘rational’ policy. Ideology is the province of the ‘ill-informed’. It is an obstacle to the elimination of poverty. One might further add that in popular journalistic usage ‘ideology’ is often used as a *slogan* word, dismissively rejecting a body of opinion without any actual engagement with the issues.

Another significant point, well illustrated by journalistic usage,³⁶ is that an ideology is not just any set of beliefs, nor even any set of beliefs rigidly adhered to. It is almost always to do with *belief systems that are associated with issues of politics and power*.³⁷ Eagleton maintains that the term properly belongs to ‘any kind of intersection between belief systems and political power’.³⁸

1.23 Descriptive, Pejorative, and Positive Definitions of ‘Ideology’

From the outset, ‘ideology’ has been used in neutral, positive, and negative senses. Eagleton notes that this variety of usage reflects ‘a dissonance between two of the mainstream traditions we find inscribed within the term’:

Roughly speaking, one central lineage, from Hegel and Marx to Georg Lukács and some later Marxist thinkers, has been much preoccupied with ideas of true and false cognition, with ideology as illusion, distortion, and mystification; whereas an alternative tradition of thought has been less epistemological than sociological, concerned more with function of ideas within social life than with reality or unreality. The Marxist heritage has itself straddled these two intellectual currents.³⁹

He concludes:

My own view is that both of these senses of the term have their uses, but that a great deal of confusion has arisen from the failure to disentangle them.⁴⁰

politicians) who get along quite well because they do not ‘have’ one. ‘Ideology’, in this language, works as the opposite of ‘pragmatism’, ‘common sense’, or even ‘reality’ (Kavanagh, ‘Ideology’, p. 306 [Kavanagh’s emphasis]).

³⁵ *The Times*, 30 October 2002, p. 21 (my emphasis).

³⁶ for example, the widespread reference after the London Underground bombings in 2005 to the ‘evil ideology’ of the perpetrators.

³⁷ Eagleton notes that ‘the force of the term ideology lies in its capacity to discriminate between the power struggles which are somehow central to a whole form of social life, and those which are not’ (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 8). As an example of a non-ideological quarrel, Eagleton takes the example of a breakfast-time quarrel between husband and wife over who burnt the toast. One might add, however, that such a quarrel could well become ideological if it revolved around gender-role questions of whose job it was to make the toast in the first place!

³⁸ Martin Seliger, noted for his broad view of ideology, puts it this way:

What defines the inclusive use of ‘ideology’ in the context of social and political theory and science is that it covers sets of ideas by which men [sic] posit, explain, and justify ends and means of organised social action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given order (Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1976], p. 14).

³⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 221. Eagleton further observes that, because of divergent political and conceptual histories, the word ‘ideology’ will continue to be used in a wide variety of different ways. He sums up in these words:

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Raymond Geuss explores in more detail the distinctions between ‘descriptive’, ‘pejorative’, and ‘positive’ definitions of ideology.⁴¹ He maintains that, in the *descriptive* (or anthropological) sense, ideologies are belief systems characteristic of certain social groups or classes. This notion of ideology comes close to meaning little more than the *world-view* of a given group or class. On this usage Eagleton comments:

*The rationalist view of ideologies as conscious, well-articulated systems of belief is clearly inadequate: it misses the affective, unconscious, mythical or symbolic dimensions of ideology; the way it constitutes the subject’s lived, apparently spontaneous relations to a power-structure and comes to provide the invisible colour of daily life itself.*⁴²

The more common *pejorative* definitions of ‘ideology’ regard it as a set of values or beliefs that are to be viewed *critically*. In particular ideology is associated with ideas mobilised in the service of dominant groups.⁴³ It may be that the beliefs in question are *genetically* flawed. For example, if a set of beliefs arises out of the life experience of one particular group or class, then the *partiality* of that experience and the *blindspots* of that perspective will inevitably distort. Ideology may also be *functionally* false (even if it is factually true) when it is used for an illegitimate purpose, such as the propping up of an oppressive form of power.⁴⁴ On Geuss’s approach, religious ideology, whether true or false in terms of faith content, would be functionally false if misappropriated as a tool of social domination. An example within the realm of Biblical Studies would be the royal ideology of Jerusalem, religious in content but functionally applied to political and economic control.

James Kavanagh draws attention to a negative understanding of ideology that has prevailed in certain schools of literary criticism. He writes:

In this kind of criticism, the ideological aspects of a literary work will be felt at best irrelevant to, and at worst detracting from, its aesthetic value. ... Ideology is the unfortunate irruption of opinions and doctrine within what should be a fully ‘creative’ or ‘imaginative’ work. This critical perspective is part of a general framework of assumptions ... within which ‘ideology’ is assigned a negative value and is always seen in a zero-sum relationship to some more positively valued terms such as ‘common sense’ or ‘creativity’.⁴⁵

The term ideology has a wide range of historical meanings, all the way from the unworkably broad sense of the social determination of thought to the suspiciously narrow idea of the deployment of false ideas in the direct interests of the ruling class. Very often it refers to the ways in which signs, meanings, and values help to reproduce a dominant social power; but it can also denote any significant conjuncture between discourse and political interests. From a radical standpoint, the former meaning is pejorative, while the latter is more neutral.

⁴¹ See Geuss, *Idea of a Critical Theory*, chapter 1, especially pp. 1-25.

⁴² Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 222 (my emphasis).

⁴³ For example, J.B. Thompson has written:

The concept of ideology ... calls our attention ... to the ways in which meaning is mobilized ... to establish and sustain structured social relations from which some individuals and some groups benefit more than others, and which some individuals have an interest in preserving while others may seek to contest. The study of ideology, understood in this sense, plunges the analyst into a realm of meaning and power ... where the object of analysis is a weapon employed in a battle carried out on the terrain of symbols and signs (Thompson, *Ideology*, pp. 72-73).

⁴⁴ Eagleton uses the illustration that the statement, ‘Prince Charles is a thoughtful, conscientious fellow,’ is true; but those who thought it worth remarking on the fact might be doing so in order to promote the cause of monarchy. And, arguably, it may not be the case that monarchy is a good thing (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 17).

⁴⁵ Kavanagh, ‘Ideology’, pp. 306-07. Kavanagh associates this perspective particularly with Anglo-American New Criticism of the 1940s and 1950s. He observes that ‘this tendency has lost much of its influence in the Academy but still remains strong in the culture at large’ (p. 306).

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A similarly negative understanding prevails in popular thinking, in which ‘ideology’ is often perceived in a ‘zero-sum’ relationship to ‘truth’ or ‘science’. There is also a current in biblical scholarship in which ‘ideology’ is perceived as having a ‘zero-sum relationship’ to theology or to true religion.

However, it is also possible to speak of ideology with *positive* connotations, such as when modern Marxists can even speak of ‘socialist ideology’. Ideology can involve a set of beliefs that cohere and inspire a specific group or class in pursuit of laudable political interests. One might describe the ideology of certain resistance groups in this positive light. However, elements of over-simplification and of partisanship are inevitable ingredients even of ideology that is harnessed in a just cause. A degree of ‘false-consciousness’ seems inescapable. One might go further than Geuss and observe that the ideology of an oppositional group is even more likely to be partial and unbalanced, however laudable the group’s overall objectives. It will focus on aspects that support the cause and will pass in silence over arguments in favour of other points of view. This may involve an element of ‘the end justifies the means’, a sacrifice of some measure of truth for what is believed to be a greater good.

In all its definitions ‘ideology’ denotes *a body of ideas*. Arguably, Geuss has not made a sharp enough distinction between a body of ideas and the use to which that body of ideas is put. Bodies of ideas can be the abstract views of the ivory-tower philosopher, detached from the realities of daily life. Bodies of ideas can also be the driving force behind a religious or political cause, which may or may not be a noble cause. A body of ideas can be used to deceive and oppress; the same body of ideas can also be deployed towards liberation or revolution. It is the use to which the body of ideas is put that is ultimately what is positive or negative. So even those who regard the word ‘ideology’ itself as a neutral term may want to speak in negative or positive terms about the *use* made of a given ideology in a particular context. The word ‘ideology’ is thus in some ways like the word ‘religion’. The term itself may theoretically be neutral. However, religion has, arguably, been the cause of much good in the world and also the cause of much suffering and oppression.

1.24 Ideology as Discourse

Eagleton maintains that ideology is primarily a matter of *discourse* rather than of *language*:⁴⁶ it is concerned with the *functional* use of language, with the purpose (hidden or otherwise) for which a statement is being used. Ideological statements may be functionally false even though factually accurate. Also, ideologies may be true in what they assert but false in what they deny *or simply in what they do not*

⁴⁶ This distinction is based on the terminology used, in particular, by Michel Foucault. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (ed. L.D. Kritzman; New York: Routledge, 1984). For a good summary discussion of ‘discourse’ as used in literary criticism, see Paul A. Bové, ‘Discourse’ in Lentricchia and McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms*, pp. 50-65.

There are some who would say that there is no disinterested use of language. However, the conceptual distinction between ‘discourse’ and ‘language’ nonetheless serves a useful purpose.

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say.⁴⁷ In other words, the ideological statement may be true as a piece of *language* but false as a piece of *discourse*.⁴⁸

It is not only in speech and written material that ideological discourse manifests itself but also in popular customs and images. As Louis Althusser has demonstrated, the institutions of the 'democratic' political process create and transmit ideological systems in which we all participate and which we instinctively believe to be normal and natural.⁴⁹ Education, the media, customary family behaviour, procedures at formal meetings, and informal social events are all numbered among Althusser's 'ideological state apparatuses', which function to reproduce the dominant ideology of the state in successive generations.⁵⁰ One might add to Althusser's list the worlds of sport⁵¹ and mass entertainment.⁵²

Clines comments that the Althusserian concept of ideological state apparatuses is difficult to apply within Biblical Studies because of the paucity of data available on social structures in the ancient world.⁵³ I do not agree with Clines on this point. Old Testament texts give a significant amount of information about what might be regarded as 'ideological state apparatuses', including: the sacrificial system; the various law codes, including the regulations on land tenure and the provisions for social and community justice; insights into popular customs, for example, in the book

⁴⁷ As an example, Eagleton suggests that a particular statement (say: 'Girls always score higher in school tests than boys') in some contexts may be a mere statement of fact but in other contexts it may serve a clear ideological agenda. In such cases, other relevant statistics or factors may be deliberately suppressed (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 17).

⁴⁸ Eagleton further elaborates the point: 'It would seem then ... that at least some of what we call ideological discourse is true at one level but not at another: true in its empirical content but deceptive in its force, or true in its surface meaning but false in its underlying assumptions' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 17). The following maxim from Mikhail Bakhtin seems relevant here:

Every discourse has its own selfish and biased proprietor; there are no words with meanings shared by all ... What matters is the actual and always self-interested use to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position (social class, etc) and by the concrete situation. *Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines ... meaning*. All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions (Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* [ed. M. Holquist; trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; Austin and London: University of Texas, 1981], p. 401 [my emphasis]).

Bakhtin is here speaking of the usage of individual *words*; but what he says is equally true of *statements* or longer *discourses*.

⁴⁹ See Louis Althusser's essay, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. Alice Jardine describes ideology as 'the conceptual glue of culture, that which makes culture seem natural, that which holds any cultural system together, that which, in fact, makes any system of relationships seem natural' (Alice Jardine, 'Death Sentences: Writing Couples and Ideology', in S.R. Suileiman [ed.], *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986], p. 85, cited in Stratton, *Out of Eden*, p. 175).

⁵⁰ Their particular practices may be described as 'signifying practices', the different institutions evolving their own sets of signifying practices or 'discourses' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15).

⁵¹ I am revising this section some days after Northern Ireland's unexpected (some would say miraculous!) victory over England at Windsor Park in Belfast in the football world-cup qualifying match on 7 September, 2005. The cross-community euphoria in Belfast for days after this event, the emotions that it aroused, and the community differences that were at least temporarily forgotten posed a fascinating example of the ideological power of sport in community identity and cohesion.

⁵² David Clines observes: 'Hollywood is as much embroiled in ideology as any Marxist text' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15). See also James Kavanagh's comment that institutions of mass entertainment have a 'heavily ideological function', despite the fact that 'most of these institutions make every effort to disavow "politics"' (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 313).

⁵³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15.

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of Ruth; the rituals associated with warfare; the institutions associated with the monarchy; the liturgy of the temple. It may be that the historicity of much of what the Old Testament describes of such institutions is open to question but the allusions in the text to ideological apparatuses are nonetheless a significant source of insight into the ideology of the writer and of the group or class to which the writer belongs.⁵⁴

1.25 Ideology as False Consciousness

In recent years, the focus on ideology as *false* consciousness has been called in question on *epistemological* grounds, since it implies the possibility (now widely questioned from a postmodern perspective) of some unequivocally correct or non-false way of viewing the world. Martin Seligson, for example, has sought to discard any pejorative meaning for ideology altogether. From his postmodern perspective, all consciousness is to some degree false consciousness, since no one can have a complete overview.⁵⁵ However, against Seligson, it should be said that those who emphasise the false-consciousness element are generally referring not to falseness in general but to a falseness that has been deliberately or deceptively induced.

Eagleton also raises a number of caveats with regard to an over-emphasis on the false-consciousness element. Even though ideology is primarily performative discourse, Eagleton argues that it is not necessarily lacking in important propositional content. Nor does it necessarily follow that such propositions as it advances, including moral and normative ones, cannot be assessed for their truth or falsehood.⁵⁶ Setting aside general epistemological considerations, a constant imputation of false consciousness seems to Eagleton to undermine human dignity and to deny the rationality of human beings in general. To be effective, ideologies must conform, to some significant degree at least, to what people know from experience of social reality.⁵⁷ Against Eagleton it may be said, however, that it is this very element of truth that is often used to mask the element that is false.

Despite these misgivings, Eagleton reluctantly comes to the conclusion that it is impossible in practice to escape completely from the 'false consciousness' ingredient of ideology.⁵⁸ Equally, it should be stressed that ideology does not consist *entirely* of

⁵⁴ Clines comments favourably, however, on some success on this score in the work of Gottwald, Jobling, and others with regard to their 'theoretical attention to the social realities of ancient Israel as the matrix of biblical ideologies' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15).

⁵⁵ Seliger, *Ideology and Politics*. See Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 11 for a discussion of this viewpoint.

⁵⁶ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 222 (my emphasis).

⁵⁷ It is worth quoting Eagleton's argument in full here:

Aristotle held that there was an element of truth in most beliefs; and though we have witnessed enough pathological irrationalism in the politics of our own century to be nervous of any too sanguine trust in some robust human rationality, it is surely hard to credit that whole masses of human beings would hold over some extensive period ideas and beliefs which were simply nonsensical. Deeply persistent beliefs have to be supported to some extent, however meagrely, by the world our practical activity discloses to us; and to believe that immense numbers of people would live and sometimes die in the name of ideas which were absolutely vacuous and absurd is to take up an unpleasantly demeaning attitude towards ordinary men and women. It is a typically conservative estimate of human beings to see them as sunk in irrational prejudice; ... and it is a more radical attitude to hold that ... we nevertheless have some capacity for making sense of our world in a moderately cogent way (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 12).

⁵⁸ He adds the comment:

Whether or not one is a moral realist ... will make a difference to one's assessment of how far ideological language involves falsehood. A moral realist will not be persuaded out of the 'false

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false consciousness: even the self-interested pronouncements of a ruling class⁵⁹ must contain a certain measure of truth if they are to gain acceptance.⁶⁰

A possible criticism of Eagleton is that, while he acknowledges that ‘much of what ideology says is true’,⁶¹ like Pontius Pilate of old, he does not pursue the question, ‘What is truth?’ For example, he does not fully engage with the view that there is no such thing as truth, only ideology.⁶² From another perspective, for Louis Althusser, ideology is not a matter of truth or falsehood at all: rather, it is to do with an individual’s *lived relations* to society. Althusser stresses the ‘materiality’⁶³ of

consciousness’ case just because it can be shown that some ideological proposition is empirically true, since that proposition might always be shown to encode a normative claim that was in fact false (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 18).

⁵⁹ It is also worthy of note that the dominant are not necessarily the victims of their own propaganda. Both the dominant and the underclass may for their own pragmatic purposes tacitly give assent to an ideological package in which they do not actually believe. In later Graeco-Roman times, it may be that few held to a literal belief in the mythology associated with the Graeco-Roman pantheon. However, ruling classes and underclasses, for their own respective reasons, maintained a tacit assent to the traditional religious system.

⁶⁰ Eagleton sums up:

Much of what ideologies say is true, and would be ineffectual if it were not; but ideologies also contain a good many propositions which are flagrantly false, and do so less because of some inherent quality than because of the distortions into which they are commonly forced in their attempts to ratify and legitimate unjust, oppressive political systems. The falsity in question, may be epistemic, functional, or generic, or some combination of the three (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 222).

⁶¹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 222.

⁶² Robert Carroll does seek to engage with this issue. He wishes to uphold the possibility of truth over against ideology but he acknowledges that the definition, evaluation, and defence of truth in these postmodern times is a very complex matter. Carroll cites Hans Barth’s (1945) *Wahrheit und Ideologie*, which analyses a very wide range of treatments of ideology and which concludes that ideologies can contain truth and are not *just* systems serving the machinations of some special interests. The following extract from a 1976 translation of Barth’s work is worth quoting in full here:

The ideas of truth and justice are not invalidated because under different conditions men [sic] hold different things to be true and just. Though all intellectual systems, including law and social theory, lay claim to these ideas, they may in practice well fall far short of them. Yet this does not mean that the ideas themselves are reducible to other forms or modes of being, such as economic activity, folk spirit, culture soul, race, or social power. On the contrary, the ideas are inherent in human nature. *The disastrous effect of ideological thinking in its radical form is not only to cast doubt on the quality and structure of the mind that constitute man’s distinguishing characteristic, but also to undermine the foundation of his social life. Human association is dependent on agreement, and the essence of agreement, be it concerned with common behaviour, rational action, or scientific investigation, is the idea of truth.* If this idea is denounced as ideological, we are left, in Nietzsche’s language, with individual quanta of will which, according to the measure of their power, arbitrarily determine what truth and justice are to be. Against this monstrous misconception, we set the insight of the German eighteenth century philosopher Christian Wolf, ‘Truth and justice are the pillars of the common life: remove them and it crumbles’ (Hans Barth, *Truth and Ideology* [ET; California: University of California Press, 1976], pp. 193-94 [my emphasis]).

Carroll concurs with Barth’s endorsement of the search for truth, which for Carroll must be ‘the kind of truth which only yields to hard struggle, much searching and the lifelong quest for critical realism’ (Robert P. Carroll, ‘On Representation in the Bible’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 20/2 [1995], pp. 1-15 [13]).

⁶³ Louis Althusser, *Selected Texts* (ed. Terry Eagleton; London: Verso, 1994), p. 149. The materiality of ideology in Althusser arises from a Marxist economic determinism deriving ultimately from the relations of production. In discussing the ideology of the capitalist state, Althusser distinguishes between *repressive state apparatuses* and *ideological state apparatuses*, the latter including schools, churches, the family, the law, the media, social customs, which function to perpetuate the ideology of the dominant class, particularly to ensure the ‘reproduction of the means of production’ and the ‘reproduction of labour power’. The *repressive state apparatuses* are to some considerable degree ideologically inspired and the *ideological state apparatuses* are ultimately repressive in their function: there is thus a sliding scale between the two poles.

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ideology: 'the "ideas" of a human subject exist in his actions', which are inserted into practices which in turn form part of the 'institutional apparatuses of the state'.⁶⁴ Ideology is 'lived'.⁶⁵ Ideology is a 'particular organisation of signifying practices ... which produces the lived relations by which ... subjects are connected to the dominant relations of production in a society'.⁶⁶ A key phrase of Althusser's in this context is: 'All recognition is miscognition'. What is represented in ideology is 'not the system of real relations which govern the existence of individuals but the *imaginary* relations of those individuals to the real relations in which they live'.⁶⁷ Ideological analysis is concerned with the devices that work on the readers' imaginary conceptions of self and of society in order to 'interpellate' them into a specific form of social subjectivity.

However, this need not mean that ideology contains no cognitive elements, nor that it is purely subjective, nor that it is devoid of elements that might reasonably be described as 'true'. Eagleton argues that, although ideology may indeed focus on lived relations, 'there are no such relations which do not tacitly involve a set of beliefs

Althusser defines Marx's own early understanding of ideology as 'the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group'. He also notes that Marx did not in the end formulate a formal theory of ideology.

⁶⁴ Althusser, *Selected Texts*, p. 105. Jonathan Dyck comments: 'Although the modality of this material existence is not the same as that of a stone, it can nonetheless be described as "material" at the level of social structure' (Jonathan Dyck, 'A Map of Ideology for Biblical Critics' in M. Daniel Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts, Rereading Texts: Contributions from the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation* (JSOTSup. 299: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 108-128.

⁶⁵ Althusser, *Selected Texts*, pp. 123 and 149.

⁶⁶ Althusser locates ideology in:

our unconscious relations with the world, the ways in which we are pre-reflectively bound up in social reality. It is a matter of how that reality 'strikes' us in the form of apparently spontaneous experience, of the ways in which human subjects are ceaselessly *at stake* in it, investing in their relations to social life as a crucial part of what it is to be themselves. ... *Ideology ... expresses a will, a hope, or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality; it is fundamentally a matter of fearing and denouncing, reverencing and reviling, all of which sometimes gets encoded into a discourse which looks as though it is describing the way things actually are*' (Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 234 [my emphasis], quoted in Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 18).

Althusser thus advocates an *affective* rather than a *cognitive* theory of interpreting ideology. Ideology 'is 'performative' rather than 'constative' language: it belongs to 'the class of speech-acts which get something done ... rather than to the discourse of description' (Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 234). Another significant aspect of Althusser's contribution to the subject is that ideology *interpellates* or summons individuals as *subjects*. This complex notion is elucidated by Jonathan Dyck in these terms:

By this Althusser means that ideology is a particular organisation of signifying practices, which constitutes us as social subjects. Just as we are named by our parents and called by name a thousand times over, so too we are 'named' by society and made subjects of the state. Like our own name, we take our status as subjects as obvious; to be a subject is to immediately recognise oneself and be recognised without considering how recognition is possible. According to Althusser, the 'taken-for-grantedness' of our subjectivity is but an effect of an ideological process. Ideology is a reality insofar as it is embodied in social practices but it is nevertheless the reality of something which is illusory. ... Thus, *the fundamental illusion of ideology is the illusion of subjectivity*. For Althusser, to recognise oneself as subject is to be recognised by the State as subject to and as object of the State (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 60 [my emphasis]).

Elizabeth Grosz offers a useful summary of Althusser's theory of ideology. Ideology functions to produce social subjects out of biological 'raw materials'. Thus ideology is to be found in systems of ideas, beliefs, and values that are internalised and lived as true by the subject (Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* [Sydney and Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1989], pp. 15-16, cited in Stratton, *Out of Eden*, p. 175).

⁶⁷ Althusser, *Selected Texts*, p. 103 (my emphasis). On the general question of 'truth' and ideology, see Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

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and assumptions, and these beliefs and assumptions may themselves be open to judgments of truth and falsehood'.⁶⁸

1.26 Ideology as the *Unconscious* Determinant of Worldview

A common connotation is that ideology, though inherently false, is nonetheless given the *appearance* of naturalness or common sense. For example, Slavoj Žižek observes:

One of the fundamental stratagems of ideology is the reference to some self-evidence – ‘Look, you can see for yourself how things are!’ ‘Let the facts speak for themselves’ is perhaps the arch-statement of ideology – the point being, precisely, that facts never ‘speak for themselves’ but are always made to speak by a network of discursive devices.⁶⁹

This seductive ‘obviousness’ of an ideological statement underlies the often-expressed view that it is virtually impossible to hold ideological views and simultaneously be aware that they are ideology. Eagleton observes, for example: ‘Ideologies are discourses unable to curve back critically upon themselves’.⁷⁰ Louis Althusser goes further: ‘Ideology never says, “I am ideological”’.⁷¹

However, this cannot be regarded as an absolute. It is possible to have a general awareness of the social origin, function, self-interest, and motivation of one’s ideological holdings while still continuing to hold on to them. The mere occupancy of some place within society will not automatically result in a predictable set of political beliefs and desires. Indeed, even Post-Marxism, says Eagleton, is now given to ‘denying that there is any *necessary* connexion between one’s socio-economic

⁶⁸ Eagleton illustrates this point by the example of the racist, who is ‘usually someone in the grip of fear, hatred, and insecurity, rather than someone who has dispassionately arrived at certain intellectual judgments on other races; but even if his feelings are not motivated by such judgments, they are likely to be deeply entwined with them; and these judgments - that certain races are inferior to others, for example - are plainly false’ (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 21). Eagleton later comments on the need to deconstruct the familiar opposition between ideologies as a ‘rigid, explicit doctrine’ on the one hand and the supposedly inchoate nature of lived experience on the other. This opposition, he points out, is itself ‘ideologically eloquent’. From what social standpoint, he asks, does lived experience appear utterly shapeless and chaotic? ‘Virginia Woolf may well have experienced her life in this way, but her servants are less likely to have regarded their days as deliciously fluid and indeterminate’ (Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 48-49).

⁶⁹ Slavoj Žižek ‘The Spectre of Ideology’ in Slavoj Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 1-33 (11). He takes this point further:

An ideology is really ‘holding us’ only when we do not feel any opposition between it and reality – that is, when the ideology succeeds in determining the mode of our everyday experience, of reality itself ... An ideology really succeeds when the facts which at first sight contradict it start to function in its favour (Slavoj [ed.], *Mapping Ideology*, p. 327).

James Kavanagh asserts that ideology is not just a set of ideas but:

... a system of representations, perceptions, and images that precisely encourages men and women to ‘see’ their specific place in a historically peculiar social formation as inevitable, natural, a necessary function of the ‘real’ itself. ... Ideology is a social process that works on and through every social subject, that, like any other social process, everyone is ‘in’. whether or not they ‘know’ or understand it. It has the function of producing an *obvious* ‘reality’ that social subjects can assume and accept, precisely as if it had not been socially produced and did not need to be ‘known’ at all (Kavanagh, ‘Ideology’, pp. 310-311).

⁷⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 60.

⁷¹ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 175.

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location and one's politico-ideological interests'.⁷² A simple example would be that not all women are feminists.

1.27 Ideology and Religion

There has been much discussion about the relationship of ideology and religion. Both involve comprehensive systems of ideas, embodying questions of truth and behaviour. Both generally require commitment and demand loyalty and activism from their adherents.⁷³ However, there are also significant contrasts:

- a religious system generally involves belief in a deity who orders world events;
- religious systems usually depend on a belief in some form of *revelation*, whereas ideological systems are humanistic in origin;
- religions seek to be universal in their appeal, whereas ideologies typically represent a particular class or group;
- religions may have a vision for a just society but they rarely involve a practical political programme.⁷⁴

Some would regard ideological and religious systems as mutually exclusive, even though many political ideologies have originated from a religious inspiration.⁷⁵ The most common view, however, is to regard religious systems as a *subset* of ideological systems, parallel, for example, to political ideologies.⁷⁶ Louis Althusser regards religion as one of his 'ideological state apparatuses'.⁷⁷

Norman Gottwald, one of the first to make significant use of the term 'ideology' in Biblical Studies, employs the term to denote:

the consensual religious ideas which were structurally embedded in and functionally correlated to other social phenomena within the larger social system *and which served in a more or less comprehensive manner* to provide explanations or interpretations of distinctive

⁷² However, Eagleton ably illustrates, by means of an extended example based on the lot of the galley slave, that there is inevitably *some* connexion – even though the effect of that connexion is not wholly inevitable or predictable (Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 60-62).

⁷³ Cranston's comment is noteworthy, however: 'it may be doubted whether commitment has ever been a marked feature of those religions into which a believer is inducted in infancy' (Cranston, 'Ideology'). Cranston's comment may be true of (say) the Church of England, or other religious groupings that hold a national or quasi-national status. However, it could scarcely be said (for example) of Judaism, despite the practice of infant circumcision.

⁷⁴ The recent rise of militant Islam is perhaps a significant exception to this general rule. Also, of course, major reformers such as Shaftsbury and Wilberforce were motivated by religious ideology.

⁷⁵ One often quoted example is Savonarola in fifteenth-century Florence, who cherished the vision of Christian community as a model to be realised in contemporary society. His method was to achieve power through popular appeal and then to control both the economy and the private lives of the citizens. The movement combined a corporate struggle against social and religious oppression together with a personal struggle against worldly ambitions and carnal desires. Savonarola was part of the inspiration of Calvin's Geneva and of English and New-World Puritanism.

⁷⁶ Similarly, there is a dichotomy within Biblical Studies between those who regard *ideology* and *theology* as oppositional terms and those who regard theology as a sub-set of ideology.

⁷⁷ See Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', pp. 165-170.

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social relations and historical experience of Israel *and also* to define and energize the Israelite social system oppositionally or polemically over against other social systems.⁷⁸

1.28 Ideological Strategies

Ideology is not a merely speculative or theoretical system but an *action-oriented* set of beliefs. Accordingly, it is not possible to understand what ideology *is* without consideration of how ideology is *used*.⁷⁹ The use of ideology to legitimate dominance may involve a variety of different strategies, for example:

- *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it;
- *naturalising* and *universalising* such beliefs as to render them apparently self-evident and inevitable;
- *denigrating* ideas that might challenge it;
- *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but apparently systematic logic;
- *obscuring* social reality in convenient ways.⁸⁰

However, Eagleton questions the Marxist notion that ideology is the *all-important* means by which a dominant class imposes social cohesion:

Such ideologies may effectively unify the ruling class; but they are usually much less successful ... in infiltrating the consciousness of their subordinates. In feudalist and early capitalist societies, for example, the mechanisms for transmitting such ideologies to the masses were notably weak. ... *Insofar as the consent of the dominated to their masters is won at all, it is achieved much more by economic than by ideological means.* ... Subaltern social groups often have their own rich, resistant cultures, which cannot be incorporated without a struggle into the value systems of those who govern them.⁸¹

For most peoples it is ‘the routine *material* logic of everyday life, not some body of doctrine or ideological “superstructure” which keeps the system ticking over’.⁸² One might add that this will have been especially true in the ancient world. For most ordinary people in biblical times, eking out an existence amid the harsh exigencies of daily life, struggling to meet the taxation demands of the urban elite, it will have mattered little whether the official ideology was a royal ideology or a priestly ideology, or whether it emanated from a native hegemony or from a distant imperial

⁷⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2nd edn, 1999; first published Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 1979), p. 66.

On this issue, Niels P. Lemche perceptively remarks: ‘In an oriental society like Israel’s, one should furthermore be aware that ideology, religion, and theology are to a large extent synonyms, since the separation between the sacral and the profane realms, which characterises our contemporary European culture, was unknown in antiquity’ (Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, p. 34, note 1[my emphasis]).

⁷⁹ The distinction between *meaning* and *use* is somewhat artificial when one recalls Wittgenstein’s maxim, ‘the meaning of a word is its use’.

⁸⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 6. Closely associated with this view is the notion that ideology is generally used to *mask* or *suppress* social conflicts. Hence, ideology is often understood as an *imaginary* resolution of *real* contradictions; and the process is sometimes referred to as a process of *mystification*.

⁸¹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 35 (my emphasis). For a fuller discussion of the view that Eagleton is citing here, see N.S. Abercrombie, S. Hill, and B.S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980). Eagleton later comments: ‘Ideology contributes to the constitution of certain social interests, rather than passively reflecting pre-given positions; but it does not, for all that, legislate such positions into existence by its own discursive omnipotence’ (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 223).

⁸² Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 37.

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overlord. They will have given lip-service to the ideology of the current ruling class while maintaining their own resistant culture and ideology.

Ideology also functions as a means of rationalising social interests that might otherwise be regarded as illegitimate.⁸³ Eagleton makes the interesting point that oppressed groups in society may adopt an ideological rationalisation of their plight just as thoroughly as their rulers:

They may perceive that their conditions leave a lot to be desired, but rationalise this on the grounds that they deserve to suffer, or that everyone else suffers too, or that it is somehow inevitable, or that the alternative would be a great deal worse. *Since these attitudes will generally benefit the rulers, it might be claimed that ruling classes sometimes allow those they subjugate to do most of the rationalising for them.*⁸⁴

Up to now the discussion has, for the sake of simplicity, proceeded as if ideologies were generally unified and homogeneous. In fact, ideologies are usually internally complex and differentiated formations, with conflicts among their various elements that constantly need to be resolved.⁸⁵ Ideologies blend beliefs and disbeliefs, moral norms, a modicum of factual evidence, and a set of technical prescriptions, all of which are woven together to ensure concerted action for the preservation or reconstruction of a given social order. Even ideologies that might be regarded overall as positive may nonetheless contain false, partial, or distorting features. Eagleton observes:

What we call a dominant ideology is typically that of a dominant social bloc, made up of classes and factions whose interests are not always at one; *and these compromises and divisions will be reflected in the ideology itself.*⁸⁶

One might add to Eagleton's comment that this complexity is likely to be even more a feature of an oppositional ideology than of a dominant ideology. Groups that unite in opposition may for the time being entwine interests that are ultimately incompatible. This factor helps to elucidate the tendency, when a dominant group is displaced or overthrown, for one group among those who had been united in opposition to jettison erstwhile allies and assert a new dominance, as, for example, with the Taliban's recent rise to power in Afghanistan.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ancient society generally saw nothing reprehensible in slavery and, therefore, saw little need to indulge in rationalisation of the practice. Where a rationalising ideology does appear, however, the very fact of a rationalisation implies unease about the practice, an instinctive need to cover up or mask structures that are felt to be unjust. As Eagleton puts it: 'To call ideologies rationalising is already to imply that there is something discreditable about them – that they try to defend the indefensible, cloaking some disreputable motive in high-sounding ethical terms' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 51). Motives nearly always contain a mixture of positive and negative elements; and an overall desirable state of affairs can be pursued for questionable motives. Eagleton gives as an example: 'Some Americans really do believe that throwing their military weight around is in the interests of global freedom; whereas others perceive more cynically that it is in the interests of protecting American property' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 52).

⁸⁴ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 52 (my emphasis).

⁸⁵ Eagleton observes that we 'are likely to find within an ideological formation a process of compromise, adjustment, and trade-off between its overall world-view and its more concrete prescriptive elements' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 48).

⁸⁶ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 45 (my emphasis).

⁸⁷ in which they jettisoned many of those who had been their allies in the struggle against communism and Russian occupation.

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It should be further added to Eagleton's discussion that ideologies arise and evolve *in contradistinction to other opposing ideologies*. A dominant ideology has constantly to *negotiate* with the ideologies of oppositional groups, to divide and conquer among oppressed groups. To a greater or lesser extent, the dominant group must constantly engage with the needs, wants, and aspirations of subordinates if it is to remain in power. Hence both the dominant and any oppositional ideologies are constantly in a state of flux and inevitably prone to interactive tensions and contradictions.⁸⁸ Part of the purpose of a dominant ideology is in fact to strive for an *appearance* of resolution to such areas of social conflict.

1.29 Summary

It is important at the outset not to adopt so broad a definition of 'ideology' as to be of no meaningful value (such as, 'everything is ideology').⁸⁹ It is also important to be aware that the more specific definitions that are offered (whether neutral, positive, or pejorative) are in themselves ideological, in that their exponents are often inextricably bound up with particular political or philosophical perspectives.

A case can be made for a neutral and / or positive use of the word 'ideology'.⁹⁰ However, the term has become so closely entwined with notions such as false consciousness, rigid pre-determined views, imposed 'closure', and a partial world-view that it is difficult to use it without some negative connotations. In theory, ideology is not necessarily false; but, in practice, it is inevitably partial or incomplete. In popular and journalistic usage, ideology is almost always a negative phenomenon.

False-consciousness is thus a dominant component in most approaches to ideology, even where the false-consciousness is unconscious. The element of false-consciousness may result from partiality in pursuit of a noble cause but it is still false-consciousness. However, an ideology almost always contains at least some significant measure of truth: it could not function otherwise. Furthermore, ideology that is factually true may be functionally false, or *vice versa*.

Five other features must surely be regarded as essentials of a meaningful use of the term. First, 'ideology' consists of a body of ideas or a world-view held *collectively* by a specific class or group. Secondly, ideology intersects with issues of *power and control*. Thirdly, the term denotes idea-systems that are *action-oriented*, purpose-driven to bring about change. Fourthly, it is not possible to understand ideology

⁸⁸ James Kavanagh puts it this way:

Any concrete society incorporates a spectrum of ideologies and social subjectivities, and this field tends to be worked into an asymmetrical whole that must be continually readjusted, a structure in which most ideological positions take up an unequal, subordinate relation to the dominant ideology (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 311).

⁸⁹ A.K.M. Adam observes:

If everyone has an ideology, then the term 'ideology' often ends up meaning nothing other than 'opinion or 'conviction'. Moreover, the term tends to float free from the Marxist emphasis on material and social conditions, which emphasis helps make the term valuable. This use of 'ideology' is more characteristic of the opponents of ideological criticism than of its exponents (Adam, 'Political Criticism', p. 48).

⁹⁰ Clifford Geertz is a well known exponent of the 'neutral' definition. See, for example his 'Ideology as a Cultural System' in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 47-76.

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separately from the vested interests of the relevant class or group. Fifthly, ideology is often unconscious or hidden: hence the specific need for ideological criticism.

Dissimulation can readily arise by slipping imperceptibly from one usage of the term 'ideology' to another. Another device to watch out for is the use of 'ideology' as a slogan word, as a means of dismissing the views of others by means of a slur rather than by proper argumentation and discussion.

1.3 Increasing Awareness of *Ideology* within Old Testament Scholarship

1.31 Ideology of texts

In the world of biblical scholarship, the term 'ideology' is often used in a general and neutral way to denote individual belief-systems portrayed within the text, such as kingship ideology or priestly ideology.⁹¹ Some writers also speak of the ideological nature of the biblical text itself.⁹² More recently, the term has come to be used in a more critical sense, for example, to indicate that Old Testament texts encode the (hidden) ideology of an intellectual and literary elite, who had their own gender, class, social, psychological, political, as well as religious interests.⁹³

⁹¹Good examples would be R. Davidson, 'Covenant Ideology in Ancient Israel' in R.E. Clements (ed.), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 323-47; Keith W. Whitelam, 'Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and its Opponents' in R.E. Clements (ed.), *World Of Ancient Israel*, pp. 119-39; and Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989). Clines gives a comprehensive list of examples of use of the word 'ideology' in this 'weaker' sense in *Interested Parties*, p. 12, note 4.

⁹²For Meir Sternberg, for example, ideology is to do with the rhetorical persuasiveness of the biblical text, how the text motivates and manipulates reader. Sternberg distinguishes between the *didactic* and the *ideological* nature of biblical texts. He observes: 'Didacticism is ideological writing, but not vice versa, and the dividing line is precisely where ethics and aesthetics meet to generate the art of persuasion' (Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985], p. 483).

⁹³For example, as Philip Davies puts it, historiography, as we find it in the Bible, is written from the *ideological* perspective of a ruling elite and is, therefore, 'not a history that Judaeans might have told, or a merchant from Jaffa, or a priest of a local sanctuary, or a foreign mercenary, or a pragmatic royal political adviser, or any number of religious intermediaries' (Philip R. Davies, 'Whose History? Whose Israel? Whose Bible? Biblical Historians, Ancient and Modern' in Lester L. Grabbe [ed.], *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?* [JSOTSup. 245; The First European Seminar on Historical Methodology; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997], pp. 104-122 [111]). A similar point had been made as long ago as 1964, when Moshe Weinfield wrote of the reaction of Judaeans to Josiah's Passover:

Let us bear in mind the far-reaching consequences of this reform: a people who are in every aspect of their daily life bound to the sacral institutions around them ... are one day forcibly denied them and are instead presented a single, central sanctuary, necessitating pilgrimage, which from distant areas was not an easy matter and for some (the aged and the infirm) an impossibility (Moshe Weinfield, 'Cult Centralisation in Israel in the light of a Neo-Babylonian Analogy', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 23 [1964], pp. 202-12 [202]).

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This is not necessarily to imply that biblical writers consciously distorted the facts. As Philip Davies points out,⁹⁴ the same agreed *facts* can portray Cromwell or Columbus or Stalin as villains or heroes or both.⁹⁵ A simple biblical example might be the portrayal of Manasseh in the Deuteronomistic history as an out-and-out villain, while for the Chronicler he was a model of repentance and reconstruction. Neither historian has necessarily distorted the *facts*: it is a matter of selection, omission, emphasis and interpretation of the facts, a process conditioned by the writer's conscious or unconscious ideological perspective.⁹⁶ It is particularly illustrative in this connection that the Bible offers us two different ideological perspectives on the early Israelite monarchy, Samuel-Kings⁹⁷ and Chronicles. For the Chronicler, the Israelites are represented as indigenous to the land.⁹⁸ It is only the Davidic monarchy that can lay *any* claim to *theological* legitimacy. The Jerusalem kings can do no wrong – or if they do wrong, they repent. The writer's ideological convictions also underlie his highlighting of the role of the Levites, his stress on the involvement of northerners in the Jerusalem cult, and his emphasis on 'all Israel'. These issues were no doubt the subject of controversy in the Jerusalem of the Chronicler's own day. The significant differences of perspective between the two histories suggest different or competing contemporary environments for the authors. However, it is also true

⁹⁴ Davies, 'Whose History?' p. 111.

⁹⁵ In Northern Ireland, one might add William of Orange, Wolfe Tone, Edward Carson, or Gerry Adams. Similarly, the same *facts* could have been used to portray Saul or David or Solomon as villain or hero or both.

⁹⁶ We must also take account of the 'human' tendency for historical writers to focus on what they approve of and gloss over less palatable aspects of what actually took place, without necessarily implying any deliberate revisionism.

Some commentators go much further. For example, Robert Carroll was well known for his view that the Bible, as ideological literature, should not be read as history at all, but as propaganda. See, for example, Robert P. Carroll, 'Madonna of Silences: Clio and the Bible' in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?*, pp. 84-103 (101). Israel was by no means alone in the ANE in generating ideologically based 'history', as is ably demonstrated, for example, by K. Lawson Younger Jr, in *Ancient Conquest Accounts: A study in ANE and Biblical History Writing* (JSOTSup.98; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990). See also John Van Seters, 'Solomon's Temple: Fact and Ideology in Biblical and ANE Historiography', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 (1996), pp. 45-57.

⁹⁷ The ideological considerations lying behind the Deuteronomistic history include: that Israel is a single entity with a common pre-history, though later divided; that it had a God-given right to occupy the whole of what we now call Israel / Palestine; that Israelite and Canaanite are distinct ethnic / cultural / religious entities; that worship of Yahweh as the sole God was regarded as orthodoxy among the Israelites; that the Davidic line, to which all the Kings of Judah belonged, is the only line through which Yahweh has promised a future for Israel; that Jerusalem is the only wholly legitimate place for the worship of Yahweh; and that the cult of Jerusalem, under faithful kings at least, conformed to the orthodoxy of the Deuteronomist's own day.

Robert Carroll has argued that the so-called Deuteronomistic *theology* would be better referred to as *ideology*, in order to take account of the political organisation and control intended by the Deuteronomists in the power struggles for control in their contemporary situation. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (London: SCM, 1986); and also see James Barr's comments in Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 121-122. Philip Davies, having given his own summary of the Deuteronomistic ideology, goes on to conclude that 'the exploits of Joshua, the institution of the "judgeship", the "empire" of David and Solomon, and the conflict between prophet (a Deuteronomist category) and king are all by-products of this ideology' (Davies, 'Whose History?' p. 111).

See also Andrew D.H. Mayes, 'Deuteronomistic Ideology and the Theology of the Old Testament', *JSOT* 82 (1999), pp. 57-82, reprinted in De Pury, Römer, and Macchi (eds.), *Israel Constructs its History*, pp. 465-489; and also Martin Rose, 'Deuteronomistic Ideology and Theology of the Old Testament' in Pury, Römer, Macchi (eds.), *Israel Constructs its History*, pp. 424-480.

⁹⁸ There is no interest in Chronicles in the traditions of conquest or settlement from *outside*, still less in descent from slavery in Egypt.

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that both ‘histories’ have much of their ideology in common, in that both encode the general class, gender, and theological interests of the intellectual-religious elite of their day.⁹⁹

In the case of King David, a third ideological perspective is offered to us by whoever provided the superscriptions to the Psalms. The fact that David has gone down in history, among both Jews and Christians, as a pious and humble man of God has surely more to do with these attributions in the Psalter than with the narrative of 1-2 Samuel or even that of Chronicles.

To take a modern parallel, the different descriptions of King David might be compared to different accounts of (say) King William of Orange and his exploits in Ireland. A history written in contemporary Northern Ireland for a Roman Catholic audience would be significantly different from an account by a Protestant historian. The differences would spring from ideological issues that are crucial to the *current* self identity of the two communities. A totally different set of perspectives on King William would characterise an English historian writing of the 1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’; and quite different again would be the King William of a Dutch history of the House of Orange.

It is important to add that it is not just the ideology of *authors* that has to be considered but also the ideology of the collectors, editors, compilers, and ‘publishers’, that is, all who were involved in the complex process that led ultimately to the emergence and dissemination of the Old Testament canon as we know it. The significance of ideological influence in this *ongoing* process is often overlooked. The ideological factors determining the inclusion of a book in the canon may be quite distinct from the ideological focus of the original author.¹⁰⁰

1.32 Ideology of Scholars and Critics

A section of the scholarly world has in the past regarded those who approach the text from a theological or confessional standpoint as inevitably less capable of objectivity than those of the secular academy. However, it is now more generally recognised that all scholars carry ideological baggage, whatever their claims to objectivity and neutrality.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ For a fuller discussion of the Deuteronomist’s and the Chronicler’s David see Diana V. Edelman, ‘The Deuteronomist’s David and the Chronicler’s David: Competing or Contrasting Ideologies’ in T. Römer (ed.), *The Future of the Deuteronomist History* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 14; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), pp. 67-83.

¹⁰⁰ Take the example of the book of Ruth. For the sake of the argument, the underlying story may have developed (say) as a story for a mother to tell her daughters, communicating an ideology of family and community from the perspective of female heroes of the past. The reason for the inclusion of the eventual text in the biblical canon, however, may have been quite different, to do with propaganda in connexion with the Davidic dynasty. For a different approach to Ruth, see David Jobling, ‘Ruth Finds a Home: Canon, Politics, Method’ in David J.A. Clines and J Cheryl Exum (eds.), *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup. 143; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 125-139.

See also the discussion on canonical ideology in Robert P. Carroll, ‘Biblical Ideology: *Ideologiekritik*, Biblical Studies, and the Problematics of Ideology’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 24.1 (1998), pp. 101-114.

¹⁰¹ J.H. Elliott observes:

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Keith Whitelam has drawn particular attention to aspects of the ideology of a previous generation of scholars that from a contemporary standpoint seem nothing short of outrageous. As an example, he cites the ideology that lay behind Albright's perspective on the Israelite settlement:

From the impartial [sic] standpoint of a philosopher of history, it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities.¹⁰²

His view is further compounded by the fact that the conquest of the Canaanites is paralleled by him to the '*inevitable if regrettable*' extermination of Native Americans! It is quite remarkable, says Whitelam, that this undisguised racism has never been commented on by biblical scholars. It is often only in retrospect that the ideological presuppositions of the historian or critic have become clear, for none of us can fully divest ourselves of the ideological holdings of the scholarly 'discourse'¹⁰³ to which we belong.

This unconscious influence of ideology extends beyond the academy and into the realm of homiletical and popular reading of the Bible. In the era when the sun never set on the Queen's dominions, the 'civilising' influence that the British Empire brought to 'native' peoples was regarded as so beneficial that one could gloss over

The exegete, himself and herself, no less than the biblical authors, is conditioned by his or her own social and psychological experiences. We bring to the texts questions that we have been conditioned to ask, not only theologically, but also socially. *As the biblical writers wrote, so we exegetes interpret, out of self-interest.* What we see in the text, especially its implications, is what our experience, our gender, our social position, and our political affiliations have prepared us to (J.H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], p. 12 [my emphasis]).

A.K.M. Adam remarks: 'One might apply the heuristic rule that interpreters who press you to accept their objectivity are probably concealing an ideological aim, whether consciously or unconsciously' (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 53).

It is perhaps with something of the same thought in mind that Philip Davies urges, 'Let there be lots of historiographies . . . let there be Fascist and Marxist, Zionist and Palestinian, Western and Oriental historiographies, maximal and minimal, so that indeed no reader may ever pardonably be deluded into believing in an objective historical truth' ('Whose History?' p. 120). Similarly, one might add, let there be lots of 'readings' of the text, lest anyone suppose that there is but one objective interpretation.

¹⁰² The quotation is worth giving in full:

From the impartial [sic] standpoint of a philosopher of history, it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities. . . . It was fortunate for the future of monotheism that the Israelites of the Conquest were a wild folk, endowed with primitive energy and ruthless will to exist, since the resulting decimation of the Canaanites prevented the complete fusion of the two kindred folk which would almost inevitably have depressed Yahwistic standards to a point where recovery was impossible. Thus the Canaanites, with their orgiastic nature worship . . . and their gross mythology, were replaced by Israel, with its pastoral simplicity and purity of life, its lofty monotheism and its severe code of ethics. In a not altogether dissimilar way, a millennium later, the African Canaanites, as they still called themselves, or the Carthaginians, as we call them, with the gross Phoenician mythology which we know from Ugarit and Philo Byblius, with human sacrifice and the cult of sex, were crushed by the immensely superior Romans, whose stern code of morals and singularly elevated paganism remind us in many ways of early Israel (W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* [New York: Doubleday, 1957], pp. 280-81, quoted in Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History* [London: Routledge, 1996], pp. 83-84).

It is a striking example of ideological 'false consciousness' (or perhaps better 'false *unconsciousness*') that prevented Albright from seeing the apparent paradox of Israel's 'lofty ethical monotheism' and 'severe code of ethics', preserved only by the extermination of an indigenous population! Whitelam also quotes from G.E. Wright, who had observed that it was 'a great thing in the long run' for the indigenous peoples that they should be wiped out and their land appropriated by Israelites, since out of the surviving remnant came 'the Phoenicians', who aspired to trading and economic achievements that would not have been possible for them in central Palestine (G.E. Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment* [London: SCM, 1950], p. 110, cited in Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 94).

¹⁰³ This is the sense of the word 'discourse' established by Michel Foucault.

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oppression and exploitation as the inevitable concomitants of an ultimately benign enterprise. There was a tendency to regard Britain's imperial success as the result of God's blessing on a faithful nation.¹⁰⁴ Against this ideological background, the empire-building policies of David and Solomon were instinctively regarded by church-goers in a positive light, as a function of God's blessing and as an outworking of what it meant for David to be 'a man after God's own heart'. If the biblical David and Solomon had faults it was in the realm of their sexual rather than their imperial exploits. The oppression and exploitation for which they were responsible, the tens of thousands whom they slaughtered, and the forced labour programmes that they imposed were not regarded in a negative light. Indeed, their power was regarded as the proof of God's blessing. This kind of thinking lingers on in church circles,¹⁰⁵ despite the general abhorrence in wider contemporary society of imperial or colonial exploitation. More recently, however, there is an emerging popular awareness of the extent to which the Bible has been used to provide an ideological undergirding for colonial and imperialist policies.¹⁰⁶

Rather than conceal or divest themselves of their presuppositions and worldview, it is now more widely accepted that critics should allow their own ideological holdings to interact *explicitly* with the text under investigation. This may involve rejection of the prevailing ideology in the traditional world of scholarship. This has not always proved easy. Liberation theologians, for example, have found it difficult to break free from the 'discourse' of western scholarship.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Kipling's hymn, *God Of Our Fathers, Known Of Old*, still found in the hymn-books of major denominations, refers to other nations as 'lesser breeds without the law'.

¹⁰⁵ as I know from ongoing teaching and discussion with theological students.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example: L.N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1992) and M. Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Biblical Seminar 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). See also M. Daniel Carroll R., 'Introduction: Issues of "Context" within Social Science Approaches to Biblical Studies' in Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts*, pp. 13-23 (especially p. 18).

¹⁰⁷ Itumeleng Mosala (whose work will be considered in more detail below, pp. 154-168) points to the particular difficulties of the struggle of black theology to break with western ideological assumptions. 'Oppressive texts,' he says, 'cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts' (Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* [Exeter and Grand Rapids: Paternoster and Eerdmans, 1989], p. 30). Commitment to liberty and justice are not in themselves sufficient if those who are committed to the struggle are themselves enslaved to the dominant discourse, 'to the biblical hermeneutics of dominant ideologies' (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 4; see also pp. 66-68). Mosala acknowledges the difficulty of writing an account of power struggles in the ancient world on the basis of the scanty evidence now available to us. What is innovative and daring about his interpretative approach is his engagement with the biblical text from the perspective of the 'underside' of *contemporary* struggles. He calls on black theologians to make a complete ideological break with contemporary biblical criticism and theology. Chris Rowland observes:

He [Mosala] argues that the reason Christianity has so often been such a conservative force in society is that dominant groups in society have been able to claim to be grounded in the best traditions of Christianity, simply because the powerful groups have found resources to maintain their hegemony in the outlook of those who constructed texts and canon in their own interest. This has determined the way in which the more 'non-conformist' texts of history should be read. So, he argues, if liberation theology presents the text as a divine discourse which unequivocally opts for the poor, it can find itself colluding with the submission to the dominant ideology which is not always in the interests of the poor and the oppressed (Christopher Rowland, 'In Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala: a Contribution to Liberation Exegesis', *JSNT* 50 [1993], pp. 43-57 [44-45]).

Similarly, for J.L. Segundo, faith cannot easily disassociate itself from the ideologies in which it is embedded. However, it must resist subordination to the ideology that undergirds oppression. Nonetheless, he maintains that 'faith without ideology is dead!', presumably because real faith must be

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In contrast with this negative picture of the influence of ideological factors within biblical scholarship, Norman Gottwald has recently made this significantly *positive* comment:

Now if ideology consists of incorrigible biases that no investigator can elude, little hope remains for regarding the reconstructed object of study in any other way than as a projection of the investigator. It is, however, a grave misjudgement to believe that ideology is solely the fixed idea that holds us captive, *for it is also the generative idea that gets us interested in any subject and enables us to form a point of entrée for our inquiry.*¹⁰⁸

Gottwald is an important voice against those who maintain that we are *irretrievably* captive to an inherited ideology. He believes that the underlying message of the Old Testament is ultimately the liberation of the oppressed, even although the text *as we have it* may have been overlaid by an editorial elite allied to the oppressors. For Gottwald, a search beneath the surface of the text may reveal an original core, or even an embryonic idea embedded within the material, that is ideologically commendable and relevant for today.¹⁰⁹ There are others, however, who would regard the biblical text as ideologically irredeemable, such as Robert Carroll, who claims that *in actual practice* ‘the Bible never generated an ideology of freedom’.¹¹⁰

A similar division is seen among feminist scholars. There are those who hold that the biblical narratives are irretrievably patriarchal¹¹¹ and those who hold that it is possible, *by means of an ideological-critical hermeneutic*, to penetrate through the Bible’s androcentric framework and to engage the biblical text with contemporary gender issues in helpful and constructive ways.¹¹²

It is worth noting at this point John Rogerson’s warning note against ‘the kind of ideological criticism that adopts the holier-than-thou perspective of today’s world in condemning such things as patriarchy or class divisions in ancient Israel’. Such criticism, he maintains, is ‘merely another instance of domination and self-deception’.

action-oriented (J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985]), p. 37, note 37, cited in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 130).

¹⁰⁸ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. xliii (my emphasis). He continues:

The point is, I think, that what we call ‘ideology’ is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it designates those initial conceptions about and interests in a subject that are absolutely necessary to ‘jump start’ our inquiry; and, on the other hand, it designates our tendency to resist modifying, refining or discarding our initial conceptions as we proceed more deeply into the study and as the data incline towards confirming, disconfirming, modifying or refining our initial ‘hunches’ (p. xliii).

However, he also gives this warning:

There does not appear to be any rule of thumb, other than vigilant criticism of self and others, to ensure the allowances and corrections in our interpretations required by our conscious or unconscious desire to conceive the past as we wish it had been or even ‘as it ought to have been’ (p. xlii).

¹⁰⁹ Presumably Gottwald means ‘ideologically commendable’ from the perspective of the critic – which, for Gottwald, presumably involves both Marxist and Christian social-justice perspectives.

¹¹⁰ Robert P. Carroll, ‘An Infinity of Traces, on Making an Inventory of our Ideological Holdings: An Introduction to *Ideologiekritik* in Biblical Studies’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 21/2 (1995), pp. 25-43 (37). Carroll overstates the case here: he seems to have forgotten the many historical examples of Christians who have been inspired by a biblically-based Christian ideology to challenge injustice and oppression, Shaftsbury and Wilberforce being two prominent examples from English history.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Cheryl Exum, ‘The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women’ in J. Rogerson, M. Davies, M.D. Carroll R. (eds.), *The Bible and Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (JSOTSup. 207; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 248-71.

¹¹² See, for example, P.A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

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Rogerson looks for ‘an ideological criticism that is in solidarity and in sympathy with ... the Old Testament writers and with their attempts to be creative *within the limitations of their situations*’.¹¹³

Rogerson is open to the criticism of applying double standards to the ancient and modern worlds. What I think he is asking for, however, is an approach that builds on attempts by biblical writers to rise above the oppressive ideology of their day. He calls for a form of ideological criticism that has ‘implications for praxis’ in the *contemporary* situation. He therefore is much in sympathy with Gottwald’s approach.

1.33 Ideology and Theology

James Barr offers a useful discussion¹¹⁴ of the complex interplay among biblical scholars of the terms ‘ideology’ and ‘theology’, of which the following is an adapted summary, with additional examples:

- For some, theology is primarily to do with *revelation*, whereas ideology is an essentially *human* construct. From this perspective, ‘theology’ and ‘ideology’ are mutually exclusive terms. On this view, theology is the mark of true Israelite religion, whereas false religionists peddle ideology. The critic can seek to distinguish between those parts of the Old Testament which are ideological and those which belong to a higher theological plane.
- Andrew Mayes cites a slightly different usage in which ‘on the one hand there is the *ideology* [of a particular Bible book] ... that belongs to a particular time and place; on the other hand, there is the [non-ideological] *theology* of the Old Testament, which has a *normative* role independent of those circumstances’.¹¹⁵
- Historians tend to view religion as a subset of ideology. Theologians might counter this by the claim that all history writing is inevitably ideological.¹¹⁶
- The term ‘ideology’ is used within some biblical scholarship in a positive sense in order to avoid what are perceived to be authoritarian and other undesirable overtones of the word ‘theology’. This, for example, is the usage of Gottwald in the *Tribes of Yahweh*.
- Sociologists use the word ‘ideology’ freely but tend to avoid ‘theology’ as an unscientific term. The word ‘ideology’ fits the sociological perspective of the Bible as a community production arising from the struggle of competing groups or

¹¹³ John W. Rogerson, ‘The Potential of the Negative: Approaching the Old Testament through the Work of Adorno’ in Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts*, pp. 24-47 (41-42) (my emphasis). The alternative proposed by Rogerson is to employ a form of ‘negative dialectics’, a methodology that derives from the philosophy of the German-American scholar, T.W. Adorno. For a critical introduction to Adorno, see S. Jarvis, *Adorno: a Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

¹¹⁴ Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 108-123. Another useful discussion of these issues is Mayes, ‘Deuteronomistic Ideology’.

¹¹⁵ Mayes, ‘Deuteronomistic Ideology’, p. 57. In a footnote, Mayes here makes reference to J.J. Collins, ‘Is a Critical Biblical Theology Possible’ in W.H. Propp, B Halpern, and D.N. Freedman (eds.), *The Hebrew Bible and its Interpreters* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 1-17, in which Collins discusses the significance of the ideological use of ‘God-language’ in Old Testament texts.

¹¹⁶ As Barr observes:

Historians might classify theology as a prime example of ideology: theology is not an ‘objective’ study as history is. Theologians in reply could argue that every historian has ... some ‘agenda’. History is not an impartial ‘science’ but ... ideologically influenced. ... Theology by contrast is a science, with its base well set on reality (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 110).

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classes. For sociologists, all theology is ideology; and for some sociologists, theology inevitably involves a significant measure of false consciousness.¹¹⁷

- Some theologians use the word ‘ideology’ pejoratively to describe their opponents’ views. An example of this is the work of Brevard Childs, for whom ‘theology’ is an extremely positive word and ‘ideology’ is a term for contradictory points of view.¹¹⁸ More generally, readings by feminists or other minority groups are often spoken of dismissively as ‘ideological’ readings.¹¹⁹
- Edward Schweizer argued that the narrative tradition of the Gospels arose to prevent Christianity becoming mere ideology: the gospel emphasis on a *historical* inheritance is for him the *antidote* to ideology.¹²⁰
- Otto Kaiser contrasts ideology with *faith*, the latter involving personal commitment that is not derived from vested interests.¹²¹
- Patrick Miller regards ideology as a theoretically ‘neutral’ term. No human thought is immune to the ideologising influences of its social context. However, like Kaiser, Miller regards ideology as a phenomenon inferior to faith, in that it is an expression of *material* interests and is to be distinguished from that which transcends self-interest and so is non-ideological.¹²²
- Norman Habel observes:

By a biblical *theology* I mean the doctrine and discourse about God expressed within a given literary unit that reflect the living faith of a given community. Biblical *ideology* refers to a wider complex of images and ideas that may employ theological doctrines, traditions, or symbols to justify and promote the social, economic, and political interest of a group within society.¹²³

¹¹⁷ There is an interesting discussion on the interrelationship of ‘ideology’ and ‘theology’ as used in the world of sociology, including Norman Gottwald’s usage, in Charles Carter, ‘Powerful Ideologies: Challenging Models and Lasting Changes: Continuing the Journey of *Tribes*’, in Roland Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes of Yahweh’: On the Trail of a Classic* (JSOTSup. 351; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 46-58 (51-52).

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Brevard Childs’s comment on liberation theology in Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 49. By contrast, Christian Becker regards many of the views held by Childs as ideological! See also C.D. Batson, J.C. Becker, and W.M. Clark (eds.), *Commitment without Ideology* (London: SCM 1973), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁹ Tina Pippin observes: ‘In mainstream biblical studies, any reading that is not based on the post-Enlightenment tenets of the historical-critical method is seen as ideological’ (Tina Pippin, ‘Ideology, Ideological Criticism, and the Bible’ in *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* (eds. Alan J. Hauser and Philip Sellew), vol. 4 (1996), pp. 51-78 (51)).

¹²⁰ Edward Schweizer, *A Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 127, quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 120.

¹²¹ O. Kaiser, *Idéologie und Glaube* (Stuttgart: 1984), quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 119.

¹²² Patrick D. Miller Jr, ‘Faith and Ideology in the Old Testament’ in F.M. Cross, W.E. Lemke, and P.D. Miller Jr (eds.), *Magnalia Dei: the Mighty Acts of God* (Festschrift G.E. Wright; New York: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 464-79 (465). Miller seeks to trace the history of conflict between ideology and faith. Israel’s early poetry (e.g. Exodus 15, Judges 5) is clearly ideological: the material interests of Israel are projected as the interests of Yahweh also. Relationships with other groups are hostile and there is no demand for justice. But self-interest is also transcended, for example, where the divine blessing on Israel is only realised in the context of universal blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). The prophets perceived that the national theology was ideological but worked to redeem it.

Andrew Mayes rejects Miller’s position (and the similar position adopted in some of his writings by Walter Brueggemann) and argues that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between ideology and theology, since both ‘connote a systematic expression of ideas, the articulation of a world view *in opposition to others*’ (Mayes, ‘Deuteronomistic Ideology’, pp. 73-81 [73]).

¹²³ Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), p. 10.

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In summary, the main usage of ‘ideology’ among biblical scholars is to denote an integrated complex of beliefs, not necessarily either true or false, common to a particular class or group, and generally involving polemical connotations. Often, however, the negative or pejorative connotations of popular usage are carried over into biblical scholarship.¹²⁴ Scholars tend not to like to hear their own opinions described as ideology; and most theologians think of theology and faith as on a higher plane than ideology. Ironically, one might say that the term ‘ideology’ has itself become highly ideologised!

1.4 Examples of Discussion of *Ideology* in Recent Old Testament Scholarship

A number of recent publications within Old Testament Studies have had a particular focus on ideology. This section is intended to be no more than a snapshot of the variety of sometimes conflicting usage among biblical critics. This preliminary overview does *not* extend to those scholars who have engaged in full-blown *ideological criticism*, which will be the subject-matter of the succeeding chapters.

1.41 Walter Brueggemann (1988 and 1992)

In *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (1988), Walter Brueggemann explicitly uses ‘ideology’ in the pejorative sense of ‘false consciousness’. His definition of ‘ideology’ is:

vested interest which is passed off as truth, partial truth which counterfeits as whole truth, theological claim functioning as a model of social control.¹²⁵

Indeed, the title of the book comes close to equating ideology with idolatry. Ideology is incompatible with true religion. However, Brueggemann seems to have missed the point that every writer, whether ancient historian or modern critic, inevitably writes from some ideological standpoint. What is required is a comparative critique of the respective ideologies, not a contrast between ideology (which is bad) and theology (which is good).¹²⁶

¹²⁴ This, however, is not universally so. As an example of a consistently neutral use of the term, Barr cites John Elliott’s *Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1995), especially p. 52 (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 106).

¹²⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 111.

¹²⁶ David Clines makes the following comment, with which I agree:

I am sympathetic to this definition [of ‘ideology’] and especially to his [Brueggemann’s] identification and evaluation of royal, statist, cultic ideology in ancient Israel. But I would rather say that those who opposed that ‘bad’ ideology were themselves caught up in some ideology or other, and the fault with the royal ideology is not that it is ideology but that it deceptively promotes the interests of those in power – which Brueggemann and I do not approve of (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 14).

In the final phrase of this quotation, Clines neatly demonstrates the relevance of the ideology of the commentator as well as that of the biblical writer.

With regard to those who view their outlook as non-ideological, James Kavanagh comments that an insistence on being non-ideological ‘does not mark one’s freedom from ideology, but one’s involvement in a specific, quite narrow ideology which has the exact social function of obscuring – even to the person who inhabits it – the specificity and peculiarity of one’s social and political position,

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In his (1992) *Old Testament Theology*, Brueggemann offers an ideological critique of historical criticism:

Historical Criticism has become a mode of silencing the text by eliminating its artistic, dramatic, subversive power. ... It is increasingly clear that historical criticism is no objective, disinterested tool of interpretation, but it has become a way to trim texts down to the *ideology of Enlightenment reason and autonomy* and to explain away from the text all the hurts and hopes that do not conform to *the ideology of objectivity*. In the end the text is therefore rendered voiceless. It becomes only an echo of the passionless containment of knowledge by the teaching, interpreting monopoly. ... If the texts can be silenced by their disuse or reinterpretation, then the marginal lose their chance of speech and power. In an odd interpretive manoeuvre long established among us, we tend not to notice that the voiceless text has been made into a silent support for the status quo ... numbed to protest, resistant to alternative, and all in the interest of objectivity.¹²⁷

According to James Barr, Brueggemann is here 'plunging deeply into the waters of postmodernism'. He is no longer content with a traditional conservative critique of historical criticism. Instead, he rejects historical criticism because he regards it as a means of imposing a now discredited Enlightenment ideology.

Brueggemann undoubtedly overstates his case here, for example, in claiming that historical criticism is responsible for depriving the marginalised of their 'chance of speech and power' - although it might be true to say that a focus on historical criticism has deflected attention from the ideological implications of the biblical text.¹²⁸ However, Barr's resort to argument by sarcasm is scarcely an adequate response:

All the beaten wives, exploited labourers, and political prisoners of these centuries could have been free from their miseries if only they could have used the Bible without the bonds of historical criticism.¹²⁹

Barr is on stronger ground, however, when he continues:

I do not believe that the Churches of the Enlightenment period, or the Churches that were accustomed to historical criticism, ever thought or did anything of what Brueggemann says here. Even the most ardent foes of the Enlightenment inheritance never produced such an argument.

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that though the outcomes Brueggemann decries may never have been the *intention* of the focus on historical criticism, they may well on some occasions have been its effects.

and of preventing any knowledge of the real processes that found one's social life' (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 312).

¹²⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 64-65 (my emphasis). An interesting overview of the current prospects of Historical Criticism is to be found in Karle Möller, 'Renewing Historical Criticism' in C. Bartholomew, C. Green, K. Möller (eds.), *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 145-171.

¹²⁸ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 138. It was certainly true of my days as a theological student that total preoccupation with historical-critical questions precluded any time or opportunity for engagement of the text with contemporary social or political issues. In my early days as a Bible College lecturer, I suggested to an examination board an examination question on *contemporary* application of social justice in the prophets. I was immediately told by those teaching the course that the time taken teaching the 'academic' issues, such as date, authorship, sources, and historicity, precluded any time for class consideration of issues of social justice. This statement may have reflected a second-hand and ill-informed understanding of the 'academic' agenda but I suspect it was not untypical of the Bible College world.

¹²⁹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 138

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1.42 Giovanni Garbini (1988)

For Giovanni Garbini in *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel*,¹³⁰ the historical books of the Bible are scarcely to be regarded as history at all but as wholly *ideological*. ‘History’ and ‘ideology’ are contrasting terms. He contends that ‘ideology has *created* a historical past’.¹³¹ However, the word ‘ideology’ is not a pejorative term for Garbini.¹³² It denotes an integrated belief system that proactively seeks to implement political reform. This necessitates the *creation* of history. Garbini does not make clear, however, whether he believes the ‘creation’ of history to have been a calculated misrepresentation of the past to serve (albeit positive) ideological ends or if he envisages an audience consciously aware that they were reading a fictional story told in legitimate pursuit of some kind of non-historical ‘truth’.¹³³

A modern example of the latter kind of enterprise might be the novels of Leon Uris, such as *the Haj* (which is set in Palestine in the period of the emergence of the modern State of Israel) and *Trinity*, which depicts the three nineteenth century religious-

¹³⁰ Giovanni Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1988; originally published in Italian in 1986). Garbini traces what he sees as the emerging struggle of monotheistic Yahwism over the generality of Phoenician religions, from the ideological conflict of the seventh-century reform movement, whose programme was cultural and political as well as religious, right down to the tension between the royal and priestly world-views that form the ideological background to the New Testament characterisation of Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah.

David Clines has remarked that Garbini’s main concern is with the ideology of modern commentators rather than that of the ancient writers, ‘namely theologians who masquerade as historians’ (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 14). Garbini certainly makes this complaint, in particular against German ‘Alttestamentler’, whom he criticises for bringing theological presuppositions to bear on the text (Garbini, *History and Ideology*, pp. 2-3 and 23). However, Garbini does not actually use the word ‘ideology’ in this particular context; nor does it seem to me to be that this is the main thrust of the book. The word ‘ideology’ in the book’s title refers primarily to the ideology of the *writers* of the Old Testament books.

¹³¹ Garbini, *History and Ideology*, p. xiv (my emphasis).

¹³² He observes:

In reality the Old Testament is not the more or less objective history of a people and its religious fortunes, but only the final result and at the same time the basic ideal of a religious reform. In it everything is markedly ideologised and bent to the sole purpose of showing the *truth* of a particular religious vision – a vision which presents the history of the Hebrew people as a theatre for the work of God, thus creating a new type of mythology (Garbini, *History and Ideology*, p. 61 [my emphasis]).

¹³³ Another later and more developed exponent of the same kind of approach to biblical historiography is the ‘revisionist’ historian Thomas Thompson. He dates Israelite historiography to the Persian period. He regards the biblical texts as containing no more than fragments of memory from the past, essentially folklorist, and reflecting an ideologically ‘constructed entity’ called Israel:

The concept of a *benei Israel*: a people and an ethnicity, bound in union and by ties of family and common descent, possessing a common past and oriented towards a common goal, is a reflection of no sociopolitical entity of the historical state of Israel of the Assyrian period, nor is it an entirely realistic refraction of the post-state Persian period in which the biblical tradition took its shape as a cohering self-understanding of *Palestine*’s population. It rather has its origins and finds its meaning within the development of the tradition and within the utopian religious perceptions that the tradition created, rather than within the real world of the past that the tradition restructured in terms of a coherent ethnicity and religion (Thomas L. Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People from the Written and Archaeological Sources* [Leiden: Brill, 1992], p. 422.

The function of such a construction by the biblical writers would undoubtedly be ‘the legitimation and justification of the present’ (Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 22). Space does not permit a critique of Thompson here, though it strikes me as odd that, if the documents arise from the ideological struggles of the Persian period, they should not then prove to be a ‘realistic refraction of the post-state Persian period’.

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political ideologies that form the backcloth to the present-day Northern Ireland ‘troubles’. These are fictional stories. However, the person who wants to understand the historical background to either conflict might well learn more from a Leon Uris novel than from many a history text book.¹³⁴ Of course, the Leon Uris readers will learn their history through a specific ideological lens, as is the case with readers of biblical history.

A serious criticism of Garbini’s work is that his depiction of the ideology that led to the creation of the historical books is ultimately derived from the books themselves, involving a classic circular argument. There is much speculative theorising, with little hard evidence, textual or otherwise, for some of the claims that are made. A considerable measure of doubt must surely attach to Garbini’s presupposition that ideology alone can ‘create’ history. James Barr perceptively observes:

Basically it seems to me that it has been a mistake to suppose that ideology can or could initiate historical narrative. ... It can affect historical narrative and bias it, but it does not originate it. ... The story has to come from somewhere else – from memories, from traditions, from older books – and then ideology may build upon it, revise it, embellish it.¹³⁵

In conclusion, the comment of one reviewer is perhaps worth quoting:

One can agree with the author that the Old Testament contains severe historical problems, many of which await a solution. But Garbini simply substitutes one ideology (his own) for another.¹³⁶

1.43 Yairah Amit (1999)

The Israeli scholar Yairah Amit adopts a similar approach to that of Garbini, seeing ideology in contrast with history but nonetheless in a positive light.¹³⁷ She makes this opening gambit:

I have attempted to show that while denying the historicity of certain narratives, *we move to a higher level, namely their ideology.*¹³⁸

Another introductory comment is:

The biblical writers may therefore be compared to the writers of Marxist, feminist, or some other ‘official’ history which reflects a particular ideology.¹³⁹

For Amit, ideology reaches beyond mere historicity into the ‘spiritual’ realm. Ideological literature can achieve political ends and advance spiritual objectives in a way that could not be achieved by mere history writing.

A modern literary illustration might elucidate the point that Amit is making. The world created by Charles Dickens, though fictional, proved to be more of a catalyst for social change than many a historical treatise. In a similar way, the ideology espoused by an ancient work is for Amit of greater relevance than its historicity.

¹³⁴ This was in fact my own experience when I first came to live and work in Northern Ireland.

¹³⁵ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 88.

¹³⁶ Roland Murphy in *Old Testament Abstracts* (CD version, 1988). In the end Garbini has perhaps fallen into the same trap as in his own critique of the Alttestamentler: he has imposed his own ideology on the text.

¹³⁷ Yairah Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999). See also Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literature Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001); and *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. J. Chipman; BibIntSer; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

¹³⁸ Amit, *History and Ideology*, p. 8 (my emphasis).

¹³⁹ Amit, *History and Ideology*, p. 13.

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However, Amit is not completely consistent. In her chapter dealing with the 'conquest', she concludes that the *herem* was an exilic ideological creation. At this point she is not at all convinced that the ideology of *herem* is on a higher plane than history!¹⁴⁰

A point of interest is that Amit's *History and Ideology* originated as a series of lectures given on Israeli military radio, which surely is a highly charged ideological context. Yet there is no discussion in Amit's work of issues surrounding the application of the ancient scriptures to the ideological undergirding of the contemporary state of Israel and its military exploits.

1.44 Norman C. Habel (1995)

Habel's *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*¹⁴¹ was one of the first publications within biblical studies to make use of 'ideology' as a key term in the title. Habel identifies six discrete ideologies in the Old Testament regarding land, namely, royal, agrarian, theocratic, prophetic, ancestral household, and immigrant.

Habel recognises the 'false consciousness' connotations of 'ideology' but prefers to use the term in a neutral sense.¹⁴² He regards 'ideology' as denoting a wider complex of images and ideas than theology and as inevitably involving an element of contestation and struggle:

A biblical ideology ... is a complex and contested set of ideas, values, symbols, and aspirations being promoted with social and political force in a given literary complex to persuade the implied audience within that text of the truth of a given ideology. This cluster of beliefs may be intended to uphold the position or rights of a dominant group in society or, as is often the case, to counter the dominant position, presenting it as alien to the will of God. ... *An ideology, by this definition, incorporates the factor of contestation, the text being the literary product of that struggle.*¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Amit, *History and Ideology*, pp. 65-67.

¹⁴¹ Norman C Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). The contemporary Australian context that inspired Habel's work is that of 'recent claims of indigenous peoples to ancestral lands taken by colonial invaders' which have forced existing landowners and governments to reflect on their claims to ownership and the ideologies that justify their claims. Religious bodies also 'have been exploring theologies appropriate to the competing claims of indigenous peoples, mining companies, farmers, governments, and householders ... and have been turning to the biblical sources for guidance', in particular 'passages from the Hebrew Scriptures that seem to support one position or another' (p. xi). In particular, Habel seeks to build on the earlier work of Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

¹⁴² Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 11. Habel at this point cites K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, as providing 'a useful critique of the definitions of ideology for biblical studies'. Lawson in turn cites Clifford Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System'.

¹⁴³ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 11. He continues:

Although it may not be possible within the limits of each text to identify precisely the 'other' whose ideas are being opposed, the dominant images and aspirations of extended literary complexes usually provide sufficient images, beliefs, and aspirations to formulate the basic elements of the ideology being espoused. ... In some cases the 'other' may be reconstructed as an evil opponent rather than faithfully reflecting the ambiguities of an actual historical situation. The rhetoric of some texts is blatant and aggressive, whereas others are more subtle and aesthetic in tone. Some ideologies present a frontal attack; others stand without comment like silent parables (Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 12).

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Though Habel distances himself from a Marxist position, his close linkage of land and ideology is much akin to the Marxist tradition, which closely associates ideology with mode of production. Habel's eventual conclusion is:

These studies make it clear that there is no monolithic concept of land in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is, rather, a spectrum of land ideologies with diverse images and doctrines of land. These ideologies are promoted by social groups with vested interests in promoting a given ideology to gain, regain, or maintain land.¹⁴⁴

Significantly, Habel stresses that his six ideologies are not:

reconstructions of historical movements in Israel but of *positions that are promoted* in the texts. ... *It is the ideology of that text rather than the actual social history behind it that has had, and continues to have an influence on generations of readers of that text.*¹⁴⁵

He continues:

Recent studies have made us acutely aware of ourselves as readers who construct meaning with the stuff of the text. We are affected by factors within ourselves and our world that influence our meaning-making as we read the text. ... The apparently objective questions that we, as source, form, or tradition critics asked a generation ago actually created texts with certain kinds of meanings that suited the 'enlightenment' thinking of our age. We are still unable to completely mask our own ideological interests.¹⁴⁶

To sum up in the words of Walter Brueggemann:

The upshot of this book is to show in powerful ways both (a) that the Bible should not be read innocently, and that the God portrayed in the several ideologies is a player in Israel's propertied life, and (b) that those old 'ideological-theological' positions continue to be poignantly pertinent in the world of contemporary interpretation.¹⁴⁷

1.45 Keith Whitelam (1996)

Though Keith Whitelam's *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History*¹⁴⁸ does not use the word 'ideology' in the title, *ideological* distortion of history by contemporary scholars is nonetheless an essential aspect of Whitelam's thesis. His main presupposition is that a history of Israel / Palestine should deal with all the peoples of the region, not only the Israelites, and that it should focus not just on religion but on the wider themes of history, including settlement, demography, economics, and material realities. Furthermore, history should encompass the whole of the populace, not just 'a few powerful and influential males'. It should seek to uncover and reveal 'excluded histories'.¹⁴⁹ The reason that this has not been the case, argues Whitelam, is because of the *ideological* perspectives of 'biblical' historians and scholars.

¹⁴⁴ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 148.

¹⁴⁵ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 6. He further explains:

I do not examine the text of Joshua, for example, to ascertain its contribution to the discussion of how Israelites emerged historically or socially as a people. Rather my concern is to ascertain the set of beliefs located by a given literary complex that promulgates a social and political ideology of Israel.

¹⁴⁶ Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁷ Walter Brueggemann, 'Editor's Foreword' in Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. x. Habel, himself, makes this concluding comment, however:

It is not within the parameters of this book to draw out the implications of this study for the various land and land-rights issues being debated in political and religious circles in the twentieth century. I hope that these studies in the land ideologies of the Hebrew Scriptures will provide resources that can be used by those interested in biblical materials and may contribute to the resolution of these issues (p. 148).

¹⁴⁸ Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History* (London, Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 2.

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Whitelam seeks to demonstrate that the ‘discourse’ of Biblical Studies has developed a ‘master story’ for the history of Israel that has been shaped by the modern political context in which the discourse arose.¹⁵⁰ This process has distorted, even prevented, genuine historical enquiry, in particular dispossessing the Palestinians of their rightful place in history.

Whitelam concedes that some recent works have moved in the direction of writing a history of Palestine as a whole. However, though such works refer to Palestine, and may speak of the Palestinian coast or the Palestinian economy, Whitelam maintains that there is still a studied avoidance of referring to the people as Palestinians.¹⁵¹ If the presence of non-Israelites is acknowledged at all, they are at best anonymous and at worst inferior. It could be argued against Whitelam, however, that to refer the ancient inhabitants as ‘Palestinians’ would imply a direct linear connexion with modern Palestinians, which would be quite unsustainable on historical or ethnic grounds. However, it might equally be argued in Whitelam’s defence that the focus on ‘Israelites’ in most depictions of ancient Palestine similarly implies a simplistic connexion with modern Israelis, providing an illegitimate ideological undergirding to the claims of modern Israelis to possession and dominance.

For Whitelam, the politics of the present has shaped the interpretation of the past.¹⁵² Palestinians have been denied both geographical space and chronological existence in the ancient past for reasons that are to do with ideologies of the present.¹⁵³ To illustrate this thesis, Whitelam discusses the three classic models of the ‘settlement’ of

¹⁵⁰ Whitelam is significantly influenced by E.W. Said’s well known critique of ‘orientalism’, in particular Said’s view of the excessive influence of key *texts* in historical reconstruction:

A text ... is not easily dismissed. Expertise is attributed to it. The authority of academics, institutions, and governments can accrue to it, surrounding it with still greater prestige Most importantly, such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it (Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 4, quoting from E.W. Said, *Orientalism* [London: Penguin Books, 1991; first published, New York: Pantheon, 1978], p. 94).

¹⁵¹ As an example, he cites: G.W. Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine from the Palaeolithic Period to Alexander’s Conquest* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). However, Whitelam’s criticism is perhaps not altogether fair. Ahlström uses ‘Palestine’ as a geographical term; and though he does not refer to Palestinians, he does address the history of Aramaeans, Edomites, Phoenicians, and Philistines. No one in the ancient world would have described themselves as ‘Palestinian’, which is a modern nomenclature.

¹⁵² One might add that the reverse is also true and that the interpretation of the past has influenced the politics of the present.

¹⁵³ Whitelam quotes from S. Herrman as an example of this ‘ideological’ Israel:

Israel’s territory and its potential as a world power were necessarily limited. Its fate was bound up in a network of unavoidable dependent relationships. However, what took place almost in a corner of the world was to have far more influence on world history than might ever have been expected. Tiny Israel, historically weak and really insignificant, unleashed forces which were stronger than any calculation in world politics. This Israel became a phenomenon pointing beyond itself and raising in a paradigmatic manner the fundamental question of the nature of historical existence (Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 38, quoting from S. Herrman, *A History of Israel in OT Times* [London: SCM, 1975], p. 22).

In particular Whitelam draws attention to the clearly Eurocentric reference to Palestine as ‘a corner of the world’! It is not only the politics of the contemporary state of Israel, maintains Whitelam, that has influenced biblical interpretation. The process had begun long before 1948: ancient Israel had already been constructed in the image of the western European nation state and had already come to serve as an ideological undergirding for it.

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Israel in Canaan.¹⁵⁴ It is no coincidence, Whitelam maintains, that the sweeping away of the Canaanite people, whose religion and culture is regarded as inferior by the exponents of *all three* models, is a mirror image of the ideology of 1948-style Zionism.¹⁵⁵

The conquest and immigration models both presuppose that it was *immigrants* who made possible the greatness of the David and Solomon kingdoms, just as the *immigrant* population that forms the modern State of Israel is viewed as the only group who can facilitate a viable state in contemporary Palestine.¹⁵⁶ Turning to the peasant-revolt model, Whitelam observes that even George Mendenhall fails to escape from the ideology of the traditional biblical discourse. Mendenhall stresses the inherent corruption of the indigenous Canaanite culture and the transforming nature of a new religion brought from *outside* Palestine.¹⁵⁷ With regard to Norman Gottwald, Whitelam finds it astonishing that *The Tribes of Yahweh* was dedicated to the suffering people not of Palestine but of Vietnam, with no mention anywhere of the struggle and plight of contemporary Palestinians.¹⁵⁸ Gottwald's depiction of the ancient Israelites as ethnically and culturally diverse sounds remarkably like Zionism; and his use of the phrase 'aggressive self defence' echoes the apologetic rhetoric of the modern state of Israel.¹⁵⁹ Despite the emphasis of Gottwald on *internal* revolt, the positive impetus in Gottwald's thesis still came from *outside* Palestine. Gottwald also is rooted in the discourse that has silenced the Palestinians:

His insistence upon the central role of Canaanite peasants in throwing off the control of the urban elite appears to offer a voice to Palestinian history. In fact, he goes on to say that 'it is only in the literature of early Israel that the revolutionary consciousness of the Canaanite underclass finds an articulate voice'. *These groups are only given a voice by Israel.*¹⁶⁰

Simply to equate ancient Palestine and its inhabitants with 'Israel'¹⁶¹ is for Whitelam a form of historical colonialism, which is an inevitable consequence of the fact that the whole western historiographical tradition is closely entwined with colonialism.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁴ Albright's conquest model, Alt's immigration model, and the peasant-revolt theories associated with the names of Mendenhall and Gottwald.

¹⁵⁵ He argues that the debate has been conducted with a veneer of scholarly objectivity but that much of the discussion has had as much to do with questions of *contemporary* ideology and power as with disinterested reconstruction of the past. He further argues that, because of the influence of these contemporary ideological considerations, all three of the models have failed to take account of the growing amount of archaeological evidence; and that such archaeological material as has been considered has been illegitimately interpreted in terms of the Hebrew Bible. See Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 73.

¹⁵⁶ Alt's view in particular mirrors the specific events in Palestine in his own day: a long period of peaceful immigration by Jews, followed by a sudden influx, sweeping away what was regarded as an inferior indigenous culture, not capable of self-betterment.

¹⁵⁷ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, pp. 101-108. See George E. Mendenhall, 'The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', *Biblical Archaeologist* 25 (1962), pp. 66-87; and *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Traditions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

¹⁵⁸ Gottwald offers at least a partial answer to this criticism in the preface to the 1999 edition of *Tribes* (p. xlvii).

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 215.

¹⁶⁰ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 115 (my emphasis). Whitelam maintains that, like the others, Gottwald is still wedded to the idea that the main catalyst for the emergence of Israel came from *outside*, which mirrors contemporary Israeli ideology that those who have come from outside have a prior claim. Whitelam points out elsewhere, however, that this ideology of settlement from outside is not the universal picture within the Hebrew Bible itself: the Chronicler views the Israelites as a primarily indigenous people. See Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 204.

¹⁶¹ Whitelam conducts a lengthy examination of the evidence for the existence of ancient Israel (from the Merneptah Stele, through the early iron-age settlements in the Palestinian Highlands, to the era of

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Whitelam has demonstrated that even the most ideologically-aware of scholars are not without ideological blind spots! On the other hand, for many of the scholars whom he critiques, the ideological influences may well have been largely unconscious, in the Althusserian sense of an inherited world view of which we are not always consciously aware.

Whitelam's overall conclusion to this section is as follows:

The driving force of Biblical Studies has been the [ideological] need to search for ancient Israel as the taproot of western civilisation, a need that has been reinforced by the demands of Christian theology in search of the root of its own uniqueness ... reinforced by the search of modern Israel for its own roots in the past.¹⁶³

Arguably, it is not so much ideology as sheer vested interest that Whitelam exposes.

Niels Lemche, in a review article, offers a nuanced critique of Whitelam's work.¹⁶⁴ He commends Whitelam's probing of traditional European and North American reconstructions of ancient Israel, though he rightly points out that in places Whitelam

the 'monarchy', and onward to the Persian Province of Yehud) with a survey of recent scholarly histories. He finds the evidence for the early existence of an entity known as 'Israel' to be sparse (Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, pp. 157-237). He quotes from Philip Davies, who speaks of a tradition of interpretation that has exported a literary construct and dumped it in iron-age Palestine 'like a cuckoo in the nest', obscuring the real history of the region, including that of an iron-age kingdom called Israel: 'If what I am saying is right, biblical scholarship is guilty of retrojective imperialism, which displaces an otherwise unknown and uncared-for population in the interests of an *ideological* construct' (Philip R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], p. 31, quoted in Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 222 [my emphasis]).

¹⁶² Philip Davies similarly observes:

The history of the Bible's use is also a colonial one (intruders always win over indigenous people) ... and it has subsequently served colonialism very well. ... The modern historian of 'ancient Israel', however, lives in a post-colonial world, and should realise perfectly well the contemporary implications of retrospectively colonising the whole area west of the Jordan with 'Israelites'. ... Histories have frequently had identity-forming functions and as such aim to promote ideological and political conflict (Davies, 'Whose History?' p. 113).

¹⁶³ Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 119. Whitelam also turns his attention to the work of modern Israeli archaeologists, such as Finkelstein. Finkelstein regards the Davidic monarchy as 'for the first time a local independent political entity, a national ethnic state with a distinctive ideological and religious identity' (I. Finkelstein, 'The Emergence of the Israelite Monarchy: the Environmental and Socio-Economic Aspects', *JSOT* 44 [1989], pp. 43-74). In his work Finkelstein gives an impressive catalogue of demographic statistics: but he simply assumes that this statistical information relates to *Israelite* settlement. His work appears to give 'Israel' an impressive claim to the past. But, asks Whitelam, what if he had used the term 'Palestinian' instead of 'Israelite'? It is not that it is necessarily illegitimate to refer to Israelites in this period: the problem is the implication that they are the only inhabitants of the region, or the only ones that matter. Israeli archaeologists are conditioned, maintains Whitelam, perhaps more than they realise, by the ideological basis of the state of Israel. Bringing the discussion right up to the present day, Whitelam further elucidates the extent of the vested interest of the modern state of Israel in maintaining the traditional reading of Old Testament history. The Davidic state is central to the ideology of modern Israel, in particular as justification for the annexation of Jerusalem. Yet the Davidic state and the splendour of ancient Jerusalem are rapidly disappearing from the history books! Only time will tell whether Israeli scholars, such as Finkelstein, will be able to distance themselves from this state-driven ideology. Whitelam is at pains to stress that his purpose is not to deny the existence of the Israelite and Judaeen monarchies. His is 'an attempt to redress the balance whereby Israelite and Judaeen history has (for ideological reasons) been presented as *the* history of the region rather than as a *part* of a history of ancient Palestine' (Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 232).

¹⁶⁴ Niels P. Lemche, 'Clio is also among the Muses! Keith W. Whitelam and the History of Palestine: A Review and Commentary', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 10 (1996), pp. 88-104, reprinted in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?*, pp. 123-155.

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lapses into caricature of the views of earlier scholars. He perceptively remarks that Whitelam's Alt is no more to be equated with the Alt of history than the Deuteronomist's David with the David of history!¹⁶⁵

I would add that Whitelam is himself open to the objection that he also has 'denied geographical and conceptual space' to *contemporary* Palestinians by his lack of discussion of their *actual* origins and history. He acknowledges that any direct linear connexion between modern Palestinians and the ancient inhabitants of Palestine is dubious. However, he nonetheless argues that the exclusion of Iron-Age 'Palestinians' from the history books is in some sense to deny the history of contemporary Palestinians. He comes near to equating the history of the non-Israelite indigenous peoples of ancient Canaan with the history of contemporary Palestinians. They too are 'retrojected' into ancient Palestine; and they are allowed no history of their own other than as a convenience of Whitelam's polemic!

Despite these criticisms, Whitelam has certainly demonstrated that discussion of Israel's past, and especially of the defining moments of Israel's past, is no mere 'ivory tower' pursuit of objective academic interest. What happened in Israel's past *matters* to people in today's world, because of the implicit biblical undergirding of so much of contemporary western ideology. It might be added, however, that the traditional readings of Israelite history that Whitelam rejects also 'matter' to many of the *dispossessed* in the contemporary world. In the words of Gerald West:

For those who stand in some form of continuity with the biblical traditions it is important to believe that there are lines of connection between their particular stance and the founding moments of the tradition. It matters whether early Israel emerged from among the marginalized classes of Palestine; it matters whether women in early Israel were part of a non-hierarchical society. ... For the previously dispossessed it matters whether they too have a place in the founding moments of a tradition that is meaningful, powerful, and true for them, but who do not find themselves represented in the dominant discourse.¹⁶⁶

Whitelam's alternative history of ancient Palestine is in preparation (I believe). When it is eventually published, it will be interesting to see how far he is able to give due weight to the historically displaced peoples of ancient Palestine, or if, like others before him, he will flounder in his attempt to do so because of the lack of evidence.

1.46 The Iain Provan debate (1995)

In the *JBL* of 1995, Iain Provan published an article entitled, 'Ideologies, Literary, and Critical: Reflections on recent Writing on the History of Israel'.¹⁶⁷ Provan was responding to the growing enthusiasm in the scholarly world for 'the Bible as literature' and to the further tendency to regard the narrative books of the Bible not as

¹⁶⁵ A critical review article is also published by Iain Provan, in which he systematically challenges Whitelam's argument and assumptions. He also objects to Whitelam's caricature of the discipline of Biblical Studies (Iain Provan, 'The End of (Israel's) History? A Review Article on K.W. Whitelam's *Invention of Ancient Israel*', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 42 [1997], pp. 283-300). James Barr expresses sympathy with Provan's critique (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 74).

¹⁶⁶ Gerald O. West, 'Gauging the Grain in a Nuanced Literary Manner: a Cautionary Tale concerning the Contribution of the Social Sciences to Biblical Interpretation' in Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts*, pp.75-105 (86).

¹⁶⁷ Iain Provan, 'Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel', *JBL* 114/4 (1995), pp. 585-606.

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historiography, nor even as fictionalised history, but rather as ‘an ideological construct created by its authors for their own purposes’.¹⁶⁸

Provan in particular critiques four recent major works on the history of Israel, by Niels P. Lemche, G.W. Ahlström, Philip R. Davies, and Thomas L. Thompson, respectively.¹⁶⁹ In Lemche, he maintains, ‘history is played off against ideology’.¹⁷⁰ For Ahlström ideology is the antithesis of objectivity.¹⁷¹ For Davies, literary artistry takes the place of historical referentiality.¹⁷² In Thompson, the story world is sharply distinguished from the real world.¹⁷³ Provan maintains, however, that what these summaries do not illustrate is ‘the extent to which it is not simply the ideologies of the biblical *texts* that are seen as problematic by these authors but the ideology also of many of their colleagues in the academic world as well’.¹⁷⁴

Davies, for example, argues that ‘ancient Israel’ is a ‘scholarly construct invented by people with a particular religious ideology’.¹⁷⁵ Thompson speaks of a religiously motivated interpretation based on ‘an ideologically saturated indifference to any history of Palestine that does not directly involve the history of Israel in biblical exegesis’.¹⁷⁶ Provan argues that these four scholars are in fact open to the same critique that they have applied to the biblical histories: *they too are writing ideological literature*.¹⁷⁷

While agreeing with Ahlström that ‘there will always be a need for a method that uses reasoning, hypothesis, logic, and imagination’,¹⁷⁸ in Provan’s view the hypothesising and imagination of these scholars is much more driven by their own ideological agenda than they care to admit. In particular, Provan suggests that their claims of critical inquiry and objectivity serve as a disguise for sheer opposition to any form of religious confessionalism. The biblical text, he argues, is ‘treated with a scepticism

¹⁶⁸ Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 586.

¹⁶⁹ Lemche, *Ancient Israel*; Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*; Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’*; and Thompson, *Early History of the Israelite People*.

¹⁷⁰ ‘The traditional materials about David cannot be regarded as an attempt to write *history* as such. Rather they represent an *ideological* programmatic composition which defends the assumption of power by the Davidic dynasty’ (Lemche, *Ancient Israel*, p. 53, quoted in Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 586).

¹⁷¹ ‘Biblical historiography is not a product built on facts. It reflects the narrator’s outlook and ideology rather than known facts’ (Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*, p. 134, quoted in Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 587 [my emphasis]).

¹⁷² ‘The reason why many things are told in the biblical literature, and the way they are told, has virtually everything to do with literary artistry and virtually nothing to do with anything that might have happened’ (Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, p. 29, quoted in Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 587).

¹⁷³ ‘If we do not have corroborative evidence that such deities and laws existed ... then we can hardly have any form-critical or literary and interpretative grounds for using such materials for historical reconstruction’ (Thompson *Early History*, p. 29).

¹⁷⁴ Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 588.

¹⁷⁵ Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 588. See Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel*, pp. 44-48.

¹⁷⁶ Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 588, quoting from Thompson, *Early History*, p. 29.

¹⁷⁷ He maintains: ‘We are beginning to understand ... how the myth of the neutral, uninvolved observer has functioned and continues to function as an ideological tool in the hands of those whose political interests it has served’ (Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 589).

¹⁷⁸ Ahlström, *History of Ancient Palestine*, p. 50, quoted in Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 591.

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quite out of proportion to that which is evident when any of the other data relating to Israel's history are being considered'. Of Davies, he maintains:

The reality is, of course, that the approach to historiography that Davies advocates with such passion is no less representative of a confessional stance or ideology, is indeed no more free of unverifiable presuppositions, than those other approaches he so vehemently attacks.¹⁷⁹

He continues:

Given the great emphasis ... on 'what really happened'; given its dogmatic anti-narrative stance, its inherent reductionism, and its secular, antitheological and anti-metaphysical orientation ... the label 'positivist' does not seem out of place. ... If one wanted to supplement this label with another ... then one could do worse, I think, than 'materialist'.¹⁸⁰

Provan sums up his complaint as follows:

Confessionalism of a religious sort is attacked in the name of critical enquiry and objectivity; but the noisy rejection of religious conviction by the front door of the scholarly house is only a cover for the quieter smuggling in ... of a different form of commitment through the rear.

Provan therefore calls for:

an intellectually liberal, pluralist, broad world, where different philosophies and beliefs are recognised as just that ... where differing approaches to the subject deriving from those beliefs and philosophies are accepted as valid.¹⁸¹

The tolerance that Provan asked for was not evident in the replies by Davies and Thompson, which were published in the same issue of *JBL*.¹⁸² Davies's very title, 'Method and Madness', is provocative, with the clear implication that Davies represents method and that Provan represents madness. Davies maintains that Provan misuses the terms 'positivist' and 'materialistic', fails to distinguish between history and historiography, and displays an uncritical confusion between bias and method.¹⁸³ However, he displays little tolerance when he represents Provan as disguising an

¹⁷⁹ Provan, 'Ideologies, Literary and Critical', p. 600. In defence of Davies, it may be said that he himself acknowledges the speculative nature of the later chapters of *In Search of Ancient Israel*. The point that Davies is seeking to make is that his speculative theory is no less plausible (perhaps even it is more plausible), and no less based on available evidence, than the traditional interpretations.

¹⁸⁰ Provan, 'Ideologies, Literary and Critical', p. 601.

¹⁸¹ Provan, 'Ideologies, Literary and Critical', pp. 605-06. He further pleads for 'greater awareness of one's own presuppositions and predispositions'. He asks that the scholarly world should not anathematise one another but should be more tolerant of different approaches in exploring Israel's history. In a later publication, he further clarifies this call for pluralism and tolerance:

I certainly do not believe that any story about the past is as good as any other. There are histories that ... do a god job of weaving testimonies about the past together ... and histories which do not. There are histories that ... do better justice than others to the various testimonies and interpretations upon which we depend for access to the past. There are histories that in my view falsify the past. ... I do not believe ... that the past is simply an indeterminate mess out of which one can make anything one wishes. ... However, I also do not believe that history is one objectively observable story which has one empirically verifiable 'correct' interpretation. It is not simply that we have such a small amount of data to go on ... and must therefore fill in thousands of gaps. ... There is an inevitably subjective aspect to all our storytelling about the past (Iain W. Provan, 'In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith, and the History of Israel' in V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham [eds.], *Windows into Old Testament History* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] pp. 161-197 [186-87]).

¹⁸² Thomas L. Thompson, 'Neo-Albrightean School in History and Biblical Scholarship', *JBL* 114/4 (1995), pp. 683-698; and Philip R. Davies, 'Method and Madness: Some Remarks on Doing History with the Bible', *JBL* 114/4 (1995), pp. 699-705.

Niels Lemche also published a reply to Provan, namely: Niels P. Lemche, 'Ideology and the History of Ancient Israel', *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 14 (2000), pp. 165-193. Lemche rejects the criticisms of Provan (and of James Barr) that this group of scholars are revisionist 'ideologues' who allow their ideology to govern their research, though acknowledging that they have come to adopt an ideological approach to the text that is more in line with 'postmodern' thinking.

¹⁸³ Davies, 'Method and Madness', p. 700.

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underlying belief ‘that the Bible is in some way a divine or at least specially privileged source ... not amenable to rationalistic methods of investigation’. He even accuses Provan of ‘outright falsification’.¹⁸⁴ Despite the fact that Davies’s own case is stronger on rhetoric than on argumentation, his closing remark about Provan is: ‘A bit more substance and a bit less rhetoric on his part and perhaps one day the two of us can have a serious debate’.¹⁸⁵ In fact, Davies clearly parades his own underlying prejudice that those who regard the Bible ‘as in some way divine’ cannot engage in ‘rationalistic methods of interpretation’ or participate on equal terms in the world of biblical scholarship. He personalises the debate:

Provan is an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland. I think this vocation is pertinent to any debate about presuppositions, bias, and ideology, because it commits Provan to a view that the Bible is in some way inspired’.¹⁸⁶

However, Davies does not establish why it should *necessarily* follow that Provan is lacking in scholarly objectivity as a historian any more than Davies himself, who conspicuously fails to acknowledge that he too has beliefs that influence his scholarship. While there may be legitimate questions to ask as to how his scholarship might be influenced by his conservative confessional stance,¹⁸⁷ Provan had not attempted to ‘disguise’ (Davies’s word) his confessional standpoint nor had he maintained that the confessional approach was right and all else wrong. Ironically, it is Provan who calls for ‘an intellectually liberal, pluralist, broad world, where different philosophies and beliefs are recognised as just that’, a pluralism to which Davies seems unwilling to accede, and remarkably so in the light of Davies’s writings elsewhere.¹⁸⁸

Thompson also seeks to refute the charge that he and other recent historians use critical scholarship to disguise their ideological stance. He accuses Provan of ‘consistently misrepresenting the positions he purports to attack’, in particular by use of quotations out of context. He claims that Provan had grouped a number of historians together as a ‘school’, as if they were engaged in some kind of conspiracy.¹⁸⁹ However, Thompson also makes use of emotively polemical phrases against Provan, such as ‘ubiquitous distortion’ and ‘fundamentalism as defined by

¹⁸⁴ The question at issue is Provan’s assertion that, in the case of Ezra-Nehemiah, Davies had abandoned his own principles and had resorted to writing history out of the biblical text, a claim that Davies strongly refutes. See Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 604 and Davies, ‘Method and Madness’, p. 704.

¹⁸⁵ Davies, ‘Method and Madness’, p. 705.

¹⁸⁶ Davies, ‘Method and Madness’, p. 704.

¹⁸⁷ In a later publication, ‘In the Stable’, Provan seeks to clarify what he believes to be misunderstandings and misrepresentations of his *JBL* article. In this he is quite adamant:

I have not taken my stand ... because of my Theology. I do not in fact hold a view of the Bible as Scripture which commits me to treating it, *as a historical source*, any different from any other historical source. ... I should have thought it perfectly clear that I was opposing them on the grounds of epistemology and logic ... because I do not regard the position adopted as well argued, or indeed intellectually coherent (Provan, ‘In the Stable’, pp. 163-64 [my emphasis]).

¹⁸⁸ for example, in the passage already quoted above: ‘Let there be lots of historiographies . . . let there be fascist and Marxist, Zionist and Palestinian, Western and Oriental historiographies, maximal and minimal, so that indeed no reader may ever pardonably be deluded into believing in an objective historical truth’ (Davies, ‘Whose History?’ p. 120).

¹⁸⁹ He remarks, ‘The adjectives “positivist” and “materialist” seem hardly appropriate descriptions in describing a Joycean Catholic Irish-American émigré, a Welsh atheist, a happy Protestant Dane, and a disrespectfully Protestant Swede!’ (Thompson, ‘Neo-Albrightean School’, p. 696).

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James Barr'.¹⁹⁰ It is noteworthy that James Barr himself declares that his sympathies lie in the end with Provan.¹⁹¹

Space does not permit any fuller discussion of the respective merits of this particular debate,¹⁹² which has aroused strong feelings and intemperate language. However, this sharp exchange of views clearly demonstrates the importance of the ideological position of the scholar.

It is particularly significant that for both sides in this debate, it is only the opposing point of view that is described as ideology.

1.47 James Barr's Overview (2000)

In 2000, James Barr published *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium*.¹⁹³ His work applies a number of warnings and

¹⁹⁰ Thompson, 'Neo-Albrightean School', pp. 685-694. The reference is to James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977).

¹⁹¹ However, Barr is not without his criticisms of some aspects of Provan's argument and some of the implications of Provan's confessional stance (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 68). A full critique of this debate is given in James Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 66-68. There is also a brief negative critique of Provan by Lester Grabbe in Grabbe (ed.), *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?*, p. 29.

¹⁹² For the next 'round' in the debate, see Iain W. Provan, 'Review of L.L. Grabbe, *Can a 'History of Israel' be Written?*' in *JTS* 50 (1999), pp. 178-181. For an overview of Provan's ongoing perspective, see Iain W. Provan, *1-2 Kings* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997); and 'The Historical Books of the Old Testament' in John Barton (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 198-211.

More recently, in his (2003) article, 'In the Stable', Provan specifically returns to discussion of the *JBL* debate. In a section entitled 'Clarifications' (pp. 163-166), he rejects the charge that he is improperly influenced as a historian by a prior commitment to the Bible as 'inspired' and that he regards the Bible as 'unproblematic' as a historical source: 'My position is, rather, that the Hebrew Bible is indeed problematic for the historian, but that it is no more essentially problematic as a window into the past than any other kinds of material available' (p. 165). In response to the claim that the biblical accounts run counter to what historians 'know' to have happened, he makes this further point:

All testimony about the past is also interpretation of the past. It has its ideology or its theology ... presuppositions ... narrative structure ... rhetoric. ... We cannot avoid interpretation. We also cannot avoid faith. ... What we call knowledge of the past is more accurately described as faith in the ... interpretation of the past offered by others. We consider the gathered testimonies. ... We reflect on the various interpretations offered; and we decide in various ways and to various extents to invest faith in these. ... If our faith is very strong ... then we tend to call our faith knowledge [as do the revisionist historians]; but it is a dangerous term to use, since it leads us into self-delusion (Provan, 'In the Stable', pp. 168-69).

Provan is particularly resistant to the 'verification' principle as applied to biblical texts ('In the Stable', pp. 170-75), which is applied disproportionately to the biblical text as compared with other texts or interpretation of artefactual evidence – because of the ideological presuppositions of the historian. He reserves the right to critique the canons of Enlightenment Historical Method, 'since nothing should be sacrosanct in the pursuit of truth' (p. 164), and to challenge the 'rules of evidence' that pass for scientific methodology. In particular, he questions that eyewitness accounts are *necessarily* more reliable than third-party accounts, that non-ideological accounts are *necessarily* to be preferred to ideological accounts [if indeed there can be such a thing as a non-ideological account], and that 'accounts which fit our preconceptions about what is normal ... are to be preferred to accounts which do not fit' (p. 176). He illustrates his position by an extended discussion of Sennacherib's invasion, weighing the respective merits, including the perceived ideological biases, of biblical and non-biblical evidence (pp. 188-196).

¹⁹³ James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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correctives to what he regards as the overuse, and also the questionable use, of the concept of *ideology* within Biblical Studies in the closing years of the twentieth century. At one point he goes so far as to refer to ‘the obnoxious term “ideology”’.¹⁹⁴

1.471 Barr and the new Narrative-Critical Approaches

While acknowledging some of their shortcomings, Barr is defensive on behalf of the older methods of historical and source criticism and is critical of the postmodernist¹⁹⁵ tendency towards rejection of Enlightenment notions of objectivity and truth. He takes issue, for example, with David Gunn and Danna Fewell who, in their recent *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*,¹⁹⁶ mount a rejection of traditional historical and source criticism on ideological grounds. In particular, Gunn and Fewell complain:

- that *privilege* is accorded to the *original* or earlier forms of the text, which are hypothetical if not speculative;¹⁹⁷
- that interpretation is concentrated in the hands of a scholarly elite;
- that there is an assumption that texts have only one (original) meaning, accompanied by a dogmatic belief that historical criticism is the only legitimate way to reach that meaning.¹⁹⁸

Gunn and Fewell also observe:

Because of its multivocal nature, the Bible, despite its biases of gender, race / ethnicity, and class, makes provision for its own critique. It points to its own incongruity ... The Bible shows us not merely patriarchy, elitism, and nationalism; it show us the fragility of these ideologies through irony and counter-voices.¹⁹⁹

Barr dismisses Gunn and Fewell’s position in acid terms:

Basically, then, the Bible operates through the diversity of its own ideologies and through the ironic counter-voices which are heard here and there. This may seem a rather ‘thin testimony’ to the importance of the Bible. ... Nonetheless postmodernists of this kind are not lacking in a conviction of their own importance. Describing the intellectual changes in which they consider themselves to be taking part, they write grandiosely: ‘We find ourselves participants

¹⁹⁴ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 101.

¹⁹⁵ Barr is particularly sceptical of the terms ‘postmodern’ and ‘postmodernism’. He writes: ‘To utter the word “postmodern” is equivalent to saying, “I am now going to start talking nonsense”’ (*History and Ideology*, p. 30). Later he protests against the whole new vocabulary that emanates from postmodernism. He observes: ‘One *has to say* “totalising”, “marginalised”, “closure”, “re-inscription”, “metanarrative”, and, of course, “deconstruction”’ (*History and Ideology*, p. 156 [Barr’s emphasis]).

¹⁹⁶ David M. Gunn and Danna N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, Barr dismisses this point as quite untrue to experience. His own detailed knowledge of source criticism ‘has never constituted any difficulty for reading the texts as they are, whether devotionally or liturgically or in any other way’ (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 35, note 7). Barr also notes that the word ‘privilege’ is a key postmodern term; and it is, of course, also a key term in ideological criticism.

¹⁹⁸ Gunn and Fewell *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 8. I have made my own summary here of Gunn and Fewell’s position; but it does not differ significantly from that in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 34. Gunn and Fewell also maintain that there is often a circularity of argument by which sources are dated by events and events dated by sources; and that the analysis of sources is dependent on arbitrary, often aesthetic, criteria.

¹⁹⁹ Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 204, as quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 39. The quotation continues:

Xenophobic Joshua and Ezra are undermined by the Book of Ruth. ... The patriarchy of Persia is countered by the single woman, Vashti. Voices from the margins, voices from the fissures and cracks in the text, assure us that male sovereignty is contrived and precarious, that racial / ethnic chauvinism is ultimately unsupportable, that social-elitism is self-deluding, that religious rectitude is self-serving. ... This is the kind of reading that can transform us.

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in a major epistemological shift which is ... but a phase in a long-standing Western debate, stretching back to Aristotle and beyond'. Few of us can do better than that!²⁰⁰

Barr concludes his discussion of Gunn and Fewell with this devastating²⁰¹ critique of the overuse of the concept of ideology in the new literary criticism:

This is an example of where we may go if historical criticism is abandoned and ideology given a central place. As you will have seen actual history hardly comes into Gunn and Fewell's exposition: we just have stories with their ideologies. ... Ideology being so omnipresent, it will not be surprising if the entire picture of historical criticism presented by these two authors is also a piece of ideology. It certainly has the advantage of not being objective truth!²⁰²

While there is some substance in Barr's strictures, he depends over much on rhetoric and sarcasm and does not engage directly with the trenchant criticisms made by Gunn and Fewell of traditional methodologies. In fact, what Barr offers is an *ideological* defence of traditional scholarship rather than detailed argumentation. He does not seem to have considered or comprehended the positive applications of an ideological-narrative-critical approach.²⁰³ Because of a fear of undermining the particular tradition of scholarly objectivity to which he has had a lifelong commitment, Barr is apparently not open to new methodologies or perspectives.

1.472 Barr and 'revisionist' historians²⁰⁴

Barr is similarly severe in his critique of recent 'revisionist' historians, again because of the 'excessive weight they place on ideology'.²⁰⁵ He cites as an example Robert Carroll's 'Madonna of Silences', in which Carroll presumes an ideological motivation for the brevity of the account of Omri in 1 Kings without considering any of a variety of other possible explanations.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁰ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 41, quoting from Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 10.

²⁰¹ Barr's acid tone is reminiscent of his widely respected early crusade against misuse of linguistic argumentation (see *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961] and *Biblical Words for Time* [2nd edn., revised; Studies in Biblical Theology 33; London: SCM, 1969]). However, unlike those earlier works, his polemic in the present volume is not backed up by the same level of trenchant argumentation.

²⁰² Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 39-40. Barr is at pains to stress in his critique of Gunn and Fewell that the 'historical method' that they are seeking to undermine has, in fact, never existed as such. Biblical criticism is not a unified 'method' as they seem to presuppose but 'a group of theories that formalise valuable intuitions'. He concludes: 'What Biblical Criticism furnishes is not a meaning where formerly there was none, but a means of criticism of those with which the reader approaches the text. Meaning, more exactly alleged meanings, are there already, having been provided (most commonly) by the churches or synagogues and the theological traditions, sometimes, less commonly, by other educational instances, by current world views, and so on' (p. 47).

²⁰³ For example, Gunn and Fewell follow up their conviction that the Bible has 'many voices, many ideologies' with an intriguing illustration of how the Bible might actually engage with a contemporary world-view in need of challenge and redemption. See Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 204-205.

²⁰⁴ Several discussions of the relationship between history and ideology are contained in Lester L. Grabbe (ed.), *Leading Captivity Captive: the 'Exile' as History and Ideology* (JSOTSup. 278; The Second European Seminar on Historical Methodology; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). In the earlier *Transactions of the First European Seminar on Historical Methodology*, several of the contributors had made use of the term 'ideology' and had discussed the problem of disentangling history from ideology (Grabbe [ed.], *Can a History of Israel be Written?*). The contributors to these two volumes might be regarded as typical of what Barr regards as 'revisionist historians'.

²⁰⁵ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 82.

²⁰⁶ Carroll, 'Madonna of Silences', pp. 95-96. Barr himself does not suggest alternative explanations at this point. However, one possibility is that the author simply did not have available to him any source-material on the reign of Omri, by contrast with the period of Ahab's reign, for which he had 'the life and times of Elijah and Elisha', handed down in prophetic circles.

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Barr rightly points out that just as historical texts may be ideological, equally, ideological texts may have considerable historical value.²⁰⁷ Barr's argument could be illustrated from the modern world of newspapers, which, despite their respective ideological biases, may nonetheless record historical facts with reasonable factual accuracy. However, many of the readings by revisionist historians seem, in Barr's view, from the outset to be 'biased to produce results that point towards ideology' and away from historicity.²⁰⁸ He insists, rightly, that ancient history cannot have been *totally* invented on the basis of ideology: it must have had some significant factual basis. However, Barr misses what seems to me to be the more important point at issue. Wherever the stories came from, memories, traditions, or otherwise, the question is: what was it that motivated the publication and circulation of these traditions, together with the selectivity of the material within them? What political or propagandistic purpose were they designed to serve? It is at these levels that ideological criticism has a major part to play.

At several points in the discussion Barr lapses into argument by caricature. For example, he dismissively rejects much of Gottwald's earlier work as 'governed by his Marxist ideology', commenting:

Why should we believe this? ... At a time when, after a long period of tyrannical cruel oppression, it [Marxism] has proved a total political and economic failure in the countries where it has been dominant, it is not evident why we should be impressed by its ability to interpret the Bible.²⁰⁹

This is a blatant example of Barr substituting ideological slogan for a nuanced critique. He is prepared to write off a major work of modern scholarship on ideological grounds, without engaging seriously with Gottwald's argumentation.²¹⁰

Barr is on stronger ground when he complains of Whitlam's unsubstantiated claim that the absence of any reference to nomads in the biblical text means that they have

²⁰⁷ Barr approvingly quotes these words from Hans M. Barstad:

'Bias', 'preconceived opinions', 'underlying motifs', or whatever one chooses to call it, has formed a natural part of historiography at all times and the current distinction between history and ideology must be judged as rather artificial. Even if the historiographies of the Hebrew Bible have as their prime aim the production of 'ideology' and the reuse of the ancient traditions in order to demonstrate something for contemporary society ... this does not imply that these texts do not yield a lot of historical information. ... Despite the scepticism of some recent scholarship, somewhere in the cognitive 'force-field' between 'what happened', and the 'ideology' of the sources, and the 'ideology' of the modern scholars there are some 'facts' to be learned (H.M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land* [Symbolae Osloenses, Fasc. Suppl. xxviii; Oslo: Scandinavia University Press, 1996], p. 36, note 18, quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 82).

²⁰⁸ He rejects, for example, Niels Lemche's view that the David of Samuel-Kings is written to provide ideological support for the dynasty, contrasting it with Gunn's denial that it is pro-David propaganda. For Barr, the story suggests 'a tragic and empathetic, but critical as well as accepting view of David'. He sees it 'much more as a story told by someone who knew a lot of factual detail about David, even if it was embellished by fancy' (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 83).

²⁰⁹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 84. By contrast, Charles Carter has written:

I confess that when I first read *Tribes* [Gottwald's *Tribes of Yahweh*], my own ideology had little place for Marxist perspectives. This less a result of opposition to Marx's political leanings than it was a reaction to the failure of the Marxist-Leninist experiments. I had in my 'pre-academic life' done some research ... concerning the plight of Christian communities in communist countries. ... Given my first-hand experience ... I have always found it curious that Western intellectuals have embraced this particular ideology. ... In the years since ... I have come to see the value of terms such as political economy and mode of production (Charles Carter, 'Powerful Ideologies', pp. 46-58).

²¹⁰ One even wonders if Barr is to be numbered among those critics, whom Gottwald refers to in the preface to the 1999 edition of the *Tribes*, who seem not to have actually read the book!

1. *What is Ideology?*

been ‘silenced by the literary elite of the Second Temple period’.²¹¹ He regards ‘conspiracy by the elite’ as one of a number of recent ideological theories that are ‘obviously absurd’.²¹² He is scathing of Whitelam’s theory that kingship ideology served as an alternative to the use of force in maintaining royal and elite power, since the former was too costly and inefficient. Barr describes this as an argument of ‘desperation’, though he does not explain what exactly he finds wrong with it.²¹³ Overall, Barr is surely right to warn against a tendency to overuse and overplay the role of an ‘elite’ in silencing and marginalizing, a sort of reds-under-the bed in reverse. Expressions like ‘literary elite’ and ‘silenced’ have a tendency to become jargonistic. Barr also criticises the ‘new historicism’²¹⁴ for what he regards as an

²¹¹ Keith W. Whitelam, ‘The Social World of the Bible’ in Barton (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 35-49 (43). Whitelam was later to publish a devastating critique of Barr’s *History and Ideology*, namely, Keith W. Whitelam, ‘Interested Parties: History and Ideology at the End of the Century’ in J. Cheryl Exum and Hugh G.M. Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left: Essays in Honour of David J.A. Clines* (JSOTSup. 373; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), pp. 402-22.

²¹² Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 84.

²¹³ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 88. See Whitelam, ‘Israelite Kingship’, pp. 119–39. Whitelam’s point is essentially Althusserian. Against Barr, the following comment from James Kavanagh might be noted:

A constant reliance on force, on the power of the ‘government’, is an expensive and inefficient way to assure the stable reproduction of class relations. This is the sign, in fact, of a weak social regime, one in which a lot of people from the subordinate classes (as well as some from the dominant classes) perceive themselves as being in an unjust situation, and are trying to do something to change it. Much better is a situation in which everyone – from dominant and subordinate class alike – understands and perceives the prevailing system of social relations as fundamentally fair on the whole (even if it hasn’t done so well by them), and/or as better than any possible alternative, and/or as impossible to change anyway [one might add ‘and/or as God-given or God-ordained’]. This is a situation in which *ideology*, rather than force, is the primary means of managing social contradictions and reproducing class relations. ... Society ... uses apparatuses of ideology to form members of its various classes into social subjects who are unlikely ever to consider rebellion (Kavanagh, ‘Ideology’, pp. 308-09).

²¹⁴ New Historicism, as a post-Enlightenment movement, is well summed up in the words of Louis Montrose as ‘a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and with the textuality of history’ (Louis A. Montrose, ‘Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture’ in H. Aram Veesser [ed.], *The New Historicism* [London: Routledge, 1989], p. 20, quoted in Robert P. Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches: New Historicism and Postmodernism’ in Barton [ed.], *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 50-66 [52]).

Michel Foucault would be widely regarded as another exemplar of revisionist history. A.K.M. Adam writes that while traditional historians ‘typically seek the roots of events and ideas, tying them together in a long causal chain, Foucault seeks out discontinuities’. He wrote ‘to change the world by telling an ostensibly objective story with rhetorical devices designed to startle the reader’. Modern historians seek (though they may not obtain) ‘objectivity’. ‘New Historicists regard objectivity as a charade. ... They seek to situate the texts in the competing cultural impulses of the every-day life of their texts’ times and they are more candid about the role of their own imaginative reconstructions’ (Adam, *Postmodern biblical Criticism*, p. 46).

Robert Carroll particularly associates the name of John Van Seters with ‘laying the foundation of New Historicism Approach to reading the Hebrew Bible’. Though drawing on deconstructionist methodology, New Historicism is interested in ‘history’, by contrast with the generality of structuralist and poststructuralist approaches, which deny the relevance of any extra-textual reference. A feature of the New Historicism is insistence that texts reveal more of the history of the period in which they are written than of the period that they purport to describe. They are also ‘formative of their times and of ours’ (Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 55). New Historicism seeks to challenge the monopoly of the Bible’s presentation of history, which has sought to ‘isolate, exclude, repress, and misrepresent’ as much as it ‘may be deemed to advocate’. In Carroll’s words: ‘New Historicism has as one of its aims the re-inscription of the repressed, the inclusion of the excluded, and the breaking of the silences which have lasted since the documents of the Bible were written’ (Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 55, quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 145).

Carroll at one point suggests ‘cultural poetics of the Bible’ as an alternative designation to ‘New Historicism’ (Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, pp. 56-57).

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unreasonable insistence on proof, for example, the insistence that there is no proof that David and Solomon ever existed. Yet there is even less evidence for the existence of a literary elite!²¹⁵ And even if they did exist, Barr questions the postmodernist prejudice against any such elite.²¹⁶ It might be added that ‘elite’ is itself a loaded ideological term. However, Barr does not address the questions that arise if a literary elite is *not* presupposed. Who then wrote the biblical histories? Who were sufficiently educated to do so? What social and economic circumstances enabled people to have the time and leisure to write books? Where was the audience that would have been able to read them? What group were the books designed to motivate or influence?

One of the contemporary truisms which Barr rejects as ‘absurd’ is that ‘history is written by the victors’, with the implied corollary that a true account will always lie with the defeated or ‘marginalised’.²¹⁷ However, again Barr slips into caricature. For this maxim does not necessarily imply that truth or right always lies with the vanquished. The point is that the perspective of the vanquished does not often *survive* in written texts. As an example of a history written by the defeated, Barr cites Thucydides’ account of the disastrous Athenian Sicilian Expedition. However, the Thucydides example is not apposite, since the Athenians did ‘live to tell the tale’, unlike the Canaanites of the book of Joshua.

1.473 Barr and Ideological criticism

Barr then moves to a discussion of full-blown ideological criticism.²¹⁸ In the following chapters, I will undertake a detailed review of ideological criticism in recent biblical scholarship. It will be a useful bridge to that next section to review Barr’s general comments on the subject.

Ideological criticism is not just about the group interests of those who brought the text into being. It is equally about the impact that texts have had across the centuries on those who have read and used them.²¹⁹ Barr particularly rejects what he sees as

²¹⁵ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 95. The ‘new historians’ whom Barr has in mind at this point seem to include those critiqued by Provan in the 1995 *JBL* debate, Niels P. Lemche, G.W. Ahlström, Philip R. Davies, and Thomas L. Thompson, together with Keith Whitelam. However, as Barr seems to acknowledge later (*History and Ideology*, pp. 146 & 157), most of these ‘biblical’ historians have not, in fact, *wholly* embraced the New Historicism. They remain largely wedded to Enlightenment philosophy and Enlightenment ‘scientific method’ (as argued by Davies and Thompson in the 1995 *JBL*) – although they have adopted *some* new-historical insights and an ideological-critical awareness that was absent for the previous generation of ‘Histories of Israel’. Perhaps it might be better to refer to them as ‘Newer Historians’, which is less pejorative than the alternative phrase ‘revisionist history’, which is also used by Barr (eg, p. 61).

²¹⁶ Barr is particularly scathing that this prejudice against elites in the ancient world comes ‘almost always from persons enjoying modern elite positions’. For Barr this prejudice is to be ‘absolutely repudiated’ (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 150).

²¹⁷ If this were true, says Barr, then the true history of the Second World War ought to be written by the surviving Fascists (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 83).

²¹⁸ Barr comments that ideological criticism is often known by the German word *Ideologiekritik* (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 132). Robert Carroll is particularly noted for his preference for the German word *Ideologiekritik*, which he seemingly intends (no doubt as a reflection of his own ideology) to convey an almost sinister tone! Carroll expands more fully on his understanding of *Ideologiekritik* in his series of articles in the *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 1993-1996, which are discussed more fully below (pp. 212-221).

²¹⁹ Barr quotes from Robert Carroll, who maintains that the text, the interpretative communities, and the later teaching guilds down to present-day scholarship ‘all become necessary subjects of the

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underlying presuppositions to most ideological criticism: that no one ever does anything except out of self or group interest; and that everything can be reduced to questions of power and wealth. Barr rightly maintains that people can and do have specifically religious motivations, though not necessarily all good. And, although religion cannot be divorced from the totality of social structures, religious motivations are a distinct phenomenon, distinct from economic and political considerations, that must be given due weight in their own right.

I would certainly agree with Barr that due consideration must be given to non-material and religious motivations. However, it has to be said that Barr's final summary critique of ideological criticism is amazingly patronising, towards women and others:

Some modern tendencies have so emphasised ideology as to make it a destructive force once again. I think it regrettable that, in the process in which women have become much more prominent in both religion and education, so many women scholars ... have so totally and consciously embraced ideology as their key instrument for the understanding of the world – an action which is likely to have negative effects upon the position of women in the long run. It is even more regrettable that, in the well-meant attempt to overcome racial tension and racial prejudice, here again the primacy of ideology has been so widely accepted. Ideology here can lead to the conception of a racial truth, a truth that is true only for the experience of a racial or ethnic group. *The role of ideology can be properly assessed and understood only when it is balanced by a concept of truth that is not defined by racial, ethnic, or other identity.*²²⁰ And, *within religion, the role of ideology within the Bible and within its interpretation can be properly assessed only by a theology that has truth as its primary canon and standard.*²²¹

It is undoubtedly true that ideology can be, and has been, invoked in a destructive way; but Barr offers no evidence for his condescending statement that a focus on ideology is 'likely to have negative effects upon the position of women in the long run'. Nor does he explain why awareness of ideology in 'the well-meant attempt to overcome racial tension' should necessarily lead to a 'racial truth' that is not truth at all. I for one would agree with the sentiments of the final two sentences of the quotation – and I suspect that this view would be shared by many who engage in ideological criticism and by many of those who espouse feminist or anti-racist ideologies. The real underlying issue, however, is not to do with the destructive nature of ideology but with the debate on the possibility or otherwise of 'truth' in some absolute sense.

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Ideologiekritik enterprise' (Robert P. Carroll, 'Ideology' in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden [eds.], *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* [London: SCM, 1990], pp. 309-11). Barr expresses surprise that Carroll should focus in this way on the ideology of *readers* rather than the ideology of the *text*, which had been so heavily emphasised in Carroll's own work on Jeremiah.

²²⁰ Gale Yee observes:

'Meaning' and 'truth' in the biblical text involve a dynamic interplay among these three [author, text, and reader], with power as the pivotal variable. 'Meaning' and 'truth' must be critically analysed to determine the answer to the question: Whose meaning and whose truth? (Gale A. Yee, 'The Author / Text / Reader and Power: Suggestions for a Critical Framework for Biblical Studies' in F. Segovia and M. Tolbert [eds.], *Reading from this Place* (volume 1): *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], pp. 109-118 [118]).

²²¹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 136-37 (my emphasis). Intriguingly, on the aspect of feminism, Barr is able to cite Robert Carroll in his support. He quotes, for example, from Carroll's *Jeremiah*: 'Contrary to modern feminist rhetoric, biblical condemnation of sexual activity, whether real or metaphorical, is a balanced matter of condemning male as well as female behaviour' (p. 134).

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Barr's conclusion on the recent upsurge of interest in ideology within biblical scholarship is overall a negative:

The entry of the concept of ideology into biblical scholarship cannot be said to have been a happy event. That there is such a thing as ideology and that the term may be useful for biblical exegesis may be freely granted but the way that it has been worked out, so far at least, has been little short of chaotic. Widely various definitions of it have been in use. ... Many writers ... move back and forwards between one usage and another, according as they wish to express favour or disfavour.²²²

Those who do not agree with this overall negativity will nonetheless do well to pay attention to the warning notes that he sounds against slipping from one usage of the term 'ideology' to another and against using 'ideology' as a slogan or jargon term.

Finally, one more comment from Barr is worth noting, not least since it seems to run counter to his general wariness of ideological criticism:

It is interesting to note that religion is the only sphere today where texts from the ancient world are read, studied, and interpreted within a wide and popular set of communities of widely various educational, cultural, racial, and ethnic identities.²²³

It surely follows from this statement that ideological critique both of biblical texts and of biblical interpretations is of vital importance. It also suggests that the opening up of ancient *canonical* texts from an ideological perspective may prove to be an infinitely more complex, fascinating, and rewarding task than for any other type of ancient, or indeed modern, text. The remaining chapters of this thesis will offer a detailed review of a range of significant attempts to do just that.

²²² Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 139.

²²³ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 162. Barr continues: 'There was religion in the time of past "modernity", but, though influenced by that modernity, it was not swallowed up by it. It should not let itself be identified with postmodernism either, or be swallowed up in it'.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

Until now I have been focussing on what David Clines has called the ‘weaker’²²⁴ use of the word ‘ideology’. Now detailed attention will be given to the development of *ideological criticism* as a specific methodological approach.

Ideological criticism has its primary roots in the Marxist literary criticism associated with names such as Terry Eagleton and Frederic Jameson. It is important, therefore, to undertake a full consideration of this Marxist tradition: first of all Terry Eagleton, whose *Criticism and Ideology: a Study of Marxist Literary Theory*²²⁵ is still regarded as the classic theoretical exposition in English; followed by Frederic Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*,²²⁶ which has been similarly influential within Biblical Studies.

2.1 Terry Eagleton

2.11

Eagleton begins his *Criticism and Ideology* with the following warning:

It is difficult to see criticism as anything but an innocent discipline. Its origins seem spontaneous, its existence natural: there is literature, and so – because we wish to understand and appreciate it – there is also criticism.

But criticism is not an ‘innocent’ discipline. There is always the risk that criticism intrudes ‘its own ungainly bulk’ between product and consumer. Marxism has therefore traditionally stressed the need ‘to enquire into the history of criticism itself:

²²⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 12. Other works, not specifically discussed, that make significant use of this ‘weaker’ sense of the word ideology include: Antti Laato, ‘Psalm 132 and the Development of the Jerusalemite / Israelite Royal Ideology’, *CBQ* 54 (1992), pp. 49-66; J. Cheryl Exum, ‘Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative’ in Alice Bach (ed.), *The Pleasure of Her Text* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 45-67, reprinted in David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal’s Story: an Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (JSOTSup. 119, Sheffield; JSOT, 1991), pp. 176-98; Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Studies on Personalities in the Old Testament; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992; 2nd edn. with Postscript: Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2001); Sara Japhet, *Ideology of the Book of Chronicles*; Seth Schwartz, ‘A Note on the Social Type and Political Ideology of the Hasmonean Family’, *JBL* 112 (1993), pp. 305-309; and W.J. Wessels, ‘Jeremiah 22:24-30: A Proposed Ideological Reading’, *ZAW* 101 (1989), pp. 232-49.

²²⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study of Marxist Literary Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

²²⁶ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

to pose the questions of under what conditions, and for what need, a literary criticism comes about'.²²⁷ The task of literary criticism is not about smoothing the passage from text to reader: 'the myth of a passage, of criticism as a midwife to the text, must itself be eradicated'.²²⁸ Eagleton argues:

Criticism is not a passage from text to reader, to collude with its object in a conspiracy of eloquence. *Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself*, to manifest those conditions of its making ... about which it is necessarily silent. ... To achieve such a showing, criticism must break with its ideological prehistory, situating itself outside the space of the text on the alternative terrain of scientific knowledge.²²⁹

This definition of the task goes well beyond the detached 'objective' forms of literary criticism with which the world of biblical scholarship has long been familiar. The critical task is not confined to the *explication* of the authorial meaning, or even to the elucidation of the rhetorical devices deployed in the text. Criticism must not 'collude' with the text; it must 'manifest those conditions of its making about which it is necessarily silent'; it must unmask and expose what is hidden under the surface; it must peer into the cracks and fault-lines revealed by the contradictions in the text; it must focus on the margins of the text and give a voice to the marginalised.

Marxist criticism does not lay claim to objectivity: it judges the text on the basis of an external value base.

Eagleton does not offer ideological criticism as one critical methodology alongside others: ideological criticism is the whole critical task.

2.12 The six main constituents of a Marxist theory of literature

Eagleton summarises²³⁰ the six main constituents of a Marxist theory of literature as:

- General Mode of Production
- Literary Mode of Production
- General Ideology
- Authorial Ideology
- Aesthetic Ideology
- Text²³¹

The task of criticism is 'to analyse the complex historical articulations of these structures that produce the text'.²³²

²²⁷ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 17.

²²⁸ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 42.

²²⁹ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 43 (my emphasis).

²³⁰ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 44. Eagleton refers here to the work of Raymond Williams as a precursor of Marxist literary criticism, despite the fact that, in Eagleton's view, his work is 'flawed by "humanism" and idealism'. However, Eagleton particularly commends Williams for his insistence on the 'reality of art as "material practice"'. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (Hammondsworth, 1963).

²³¹ He acknowledges that strictly speaking the last of these, the text itself, is not a *constituent* of literary theory but its *object*. But insofar as the text must be examined with regard to its relationship to the other elements in the list, it can be regarded *methodologically* as a particular level of the critical enterprise.

²³² Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 45.

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2.121 General Mode of Production

The first stage is consideration of the General Mode of Production or *social formation* from which the text originates. Eagleton's definition is: 'a mode of production may be characterised as a unity of certain forms and social relations of *material* production'.²³³ In terms of biblical criticism, this will involve distinguishing between the different modes of production and social formations associated respectively with the tribal, monarchic, and second-temple social formations.

2.122 Literary Mode of Production

Associated with a given General Mode of Production is a corresponding Literary Mode of Production. The General Mode of Production bears upon the Literary Mode of Production to exclude certain social groups and classes from literary production and consumption. As is regularly stressed in much recent biblical scholarship, literary texts in the ancient world tend to emerge from the elite classes with their own distinctive ideological base. Hard-pressed peasants have little opportunity for writing (or reading) texts.

The Literary Mode of Production can be analysed under a number of headings. There is first the basic distinction between oral and written, obviously important for Biblical Studies. With regard to written material, some texts in the ancient world may have consisted of single archival copies. Others may have existed in multiple copies, reproduced for discussion by an educated class. Some texts may have originated as oppositional party 'tracts', circulated to promote or to undermine a political or religious cause.

Different Literary Modes of Production can co-exist synchronously, although one of them will normally be dominant.²³⁴ Literary Modes of Production generated by a historically previous social formation may also survive and interpenetrate later modes. The classic example of this is the transition from oral to written. The written mode is facilitated by a new social formation in which scribal activity becomes an economic possibility. At first written texts may consist primarily of oral material committed to writing. Eventually a distinct written mode emerges. This may also enable 'certain more complex and extensive oral products'. A particular text may arise from a complex of different literary modes. A biblical example would be the representation of *oral* prophetic utterances within the narrative framework of a later *written* prophetic text.²³⁵ Eagleton further draws attention to the possibility of *diachronic disjunction*, in which Literary Modes of Production 'anticipate the productive forms and social relations of a future social formation'.²³⁶ In biblical terms, an example might be the emergence *outside* of royal patronage of a 'court history' genre that is not necessarily flattering to the dynasty (such as 2 Samuel).

²³³ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 45 (my emphasis).

²³⁴ Eagleton further notes that structurally conflictual Literary Modes of Production may co-exist within a given social formation. He cites as an example that 'it is possible in Western societies to produce fiction for the capitalist market; it is also possible to distribute one's own handwritten poetry on the streets' (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 45).

²³⁵ I suggest this only for illustration of the present argument, not to advance a particular view of the origin or development of prophetic texts.

²³⁶ As a contemporary example of this, Eagleton cites the revolutionary artists' commune.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

Social relationships are also determinant of texts: the bard professionally commissioned to produce for the king; the poet presenting to his patron; the peripatetic storyteller, housed and fed by his peasant audience; the author who writes for a patron for a dedication fee; the independent author who sells his commodity to a bookseller-publisher; the state-patronised producer. Biblical examples might include the court historian, the levitical chorister producing psalms for temple worship, the scribe or disciple of the charismatic prophetic figure.

The salient issues from Eagleton's discussion of the Literary Mode of Production are well summed up as follows:

Every Literary Mode of Production is constituted by *structures of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption*. Production presupposes a producer, materials, instruments and techniques of production, and the product itself. ... The forces of literary production consist in the application of labour power organised in certain 'relations of production' (scribes, collaborative producers, printing and publishing organisations).²³⁷

2.123 General Ideology

A given General Mode of Production always generates a dominant General Ideology, that is:

a relatively coherent set of 'discourses' of values, representations, and beliefs, which, realised in certain *material* apparatuses and related to the structures of *material* production, so reflect the experiential relations of individual subjects to their social conditions as to guarantee those misperceptions of the 'real' which contribute to the reproduction of the dominant social relations.²³⁸

The *materiality* of the General Ideology is an important emphasis for Eagleton. As an example from the biblical world, it is clear that a different theological / ideological ethos is associated with the tribal-agricultural phase from that of the economically-centralised monarchic era and different again from that of Second Temple Yehud.

A typical General Ideology does not just contain political and cultural elements but also is marked by key linguistic features:

A literary text is related to the General Ideology by the *language* it deploys. Language, that most innocent and spontaneous of common currencies, is in reality a terrain scarred, fissured, and divided by the cataclysms of political history, strewn with the relics of imperialist, regionalist, and class combat.²³⁹

A biblical example would be the use of 'jargon' by the Deuteronomist historian, such as his pejorative use of the term 'high places'.²⁴⁰ Another example might be the differential use by various authors of terms such as 'Israel' and 'Israelite'. Samuel-Kings normally uses 'Israel' to denote the northern kingdom; and, even before the time of David, Israel and Judah are represented as separate jurisdictions. The

²³⁷ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 47 (my emphasis). He continues:

The handwritten manuscript can only be distributed and consumed on a hand-to-hand basis, within, let us say, a courtly caste; the multiply dictated work (one copied simultaneously by several scribes) is able to achieve a wider social consumption; the ballads pedalled by a chapman may be consumed by an even wider audience; the 'yellowback' railway novel is available to a mass public.

²³⁸ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 54.

²³⁹ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 55. It is worth quoting Eagleton's further comment: 'Language is first and foremost a physical, material reality, and as such it is part of the forces of *material* production. The specific historical forms of this general human reality are then constituted at the social, political, and ideological levels' (p. 55, note 2).

²⁴⁰ כְּמוֹת

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

Chronicler, by contrast, is well known for his inclusive use of the phrase ‘all Israel’.²⁴¹ In Isaiah, ‘Israel’ normally denotes a religious community, while the northern kingdom is referred to as Samaria or Ephraim. It is not at all clear when, or if, the ordinary citizens would have described themselves as Israelite, either in a political or religious sense. What we do know is that, in the ninth century BCE, the northern kingdom was known internationally as ‘the land of the House of Omri’. A similar ideologically charged use of nationality terms pertains in my own part of the world, where the question as to whether ‘Northern Ireland’ is part of, or a distinct entity from, ‘Ireland’ has highly charged ideological overtones, religious as well as political.

2.124 Authorial Ideology

Next Eagleton moves to what he calls Authorial Ideology, which he defines as:

the effect of the author’s specific mode of biographical insertion into General Ideology, a mode of insertion overdetermined [sic] by a series of factors: social class; sex; nationality; religion; geographical region; and so on.²⁴²

Between General Ideology and Authorial Ideology there can be ‘effective homogeneity, partial disjunction, and severe contradiction’. A given Authorial Ideology is always a General Ideology as ‘lived, worked, and represented from a particular overdetermined standpoint within it’.²⁴³ Biblical examples of disjunction between General and Authorial Ideology might include the prophetic protest against the royal establishment; or the authorial ideology of a book like Job, challenging general religious orthodoxy from within.

According to the *classic* Marxist tradition, Authorial Ideology is *wholly* predetermined by biographical factors such as ‘social class; sex; nationality; religion; geographical region’. Eagleton moves somewhat away from that position; but he seems to make no allowance for the *conscious* adoption of an ideological position in *total* disjunction with personal background. One might suggest Tony Benn, a well known figure from British politics, as an example of such a *volte face*.²⁴⁴ Such ‘conversions’ can be particularly significant in light of the maxim that a convert is often the most ardent of all advocates of a given belief system.²⁴⁵ However, it is also true that none of us can *completely* dispossess ourselves of the ‘false consciousness’ that is derived from our social location. Even if we struggle against our inherited ideology, our thinking is still largely determined by it. In the case of biblical authors, the Authorial Ideology may be in support of, or in opposition to, the General Ideology of the day; but even in the latter case, a given author will inevitably share some of the overall ideology of the group or class to which he belongs.

Eagleton warns that the *ideology of the text* is more than just a simple or direct *expression* of Authorial Ideology. *The ideology of the text is a complex interweaving*

²⁴¹ – though often with the subtle implication that it is Judah that is the only true embodiment of ‘all Israel’. This particular point is discussed by Jonathan Dyck in *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 158-60 (see below, pp. 133-34).

²⁴² Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 57.

²⁴³ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 58.

²⁴⁴ Eagleton does, however, discuss a variety of factors that may bring Authorial Ideology into disjunction with General Ideology, including the case of the insertion of an author into the General Ideology of another society (*Criticism and Ideology*, p. 59, note 3).

²⁴⁵ In a later work, Eagleton acknowledges that there need be nothing ‘automatic’ about the connexion between social background and eventual ideological holdings (*Ideology*, p. 206).

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

*of the General Ideology and the Authorial Ideology, encoded by means of the Aesthetic Ideology, within the constraints of the General and Literary Modes of Production.*²⁴⁶

2.125 Aesthetic Ideology

Eagleton then briefly considers the phenomenon of Aesthetic Ideology,²⁴⁷ which is described as a 'region' of General Ideology, as are ethics, politics, and religion. Aesthetic ideology is conditioned both by the General and Literary Modes of Production and by General Ideology. Aesthetic Ideology consists of a number of subdivisions, of which the literary is one, which in turn subdivides into questions of 'theories of literature, critical practices, literary traditions, genres, conventions, devices, and discourses'.²⁴⁸ Different varieties of biblical literature (for example poetry over against prose, narrative discourse against prophetic diatribe, or lament over against hymn) might be usefully classified in terms of Aesthetic Ideology.

2.126 Production and Consumption of Texts

Having analysed each of these different levels of ideology, it should then be possible to move towards 'a science of the text'.²⁴⁹ *The individual literary text is the product of a specific overdetermined conjuncture of the elements or formations set out schematically above.* The relationships among the first five levels, as they impinge on the text, are summed up as follows:

The General Mode of Production produces a General Ideology which contributes to reproducing it. It also produces a (dominant) Literary Mode of Production which in general reproduces and is reproduced by both the General Mode of Production and the General Ideology. The ideology of the Literary Mode of Production is the mutually reproductive relation which holds between General Ideology and Literary Mode of Production ... This ideology is encoded within Aesthetic Ideology.²⁵⁰

On this basis, different genres are determined by the differential interplay of General Mode of Production, Literary Mode of Production, General Ideology, and Aesthetic Ideology.²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ The ideology of the text he defines as: 'the product of an aesthetic working of General Ideology as that ideology is itself worked and "produced" by an over-determination of authorial-biographical factors' (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 59). This perspective seriously undermines any simplistic author-intention approach to the interpretation of texts.

²⁴⁷ The whole question of aesthetics is a particular issue for Marxists. Eagleton in fact devotes a final chapter of the book to 'Marxism and Aesthetic Value' (pp. 162-187), in which he acknowledges the difficulty of developing a 'materialist' explanation of the bases of literary value. The concluding words of the chapter (and indeed of the book) are:

If Marxism has maintained a certain silence about aesthetic value, it may well be because the material conditions (emancipation from material scarcity, liberation from labour) that would make such discourse fully possible do not yet exist. ... The same holds for morality ... It is not a question of injecting a different content into these categories, but of transvaluating [*sic*] the categories themselves. ... The 'aesthetic' is too valuable to be surrendered without a struggle to the bourgeois aestheticians, and too contaminated by that ideology to be appropriated as it is. It is perhaps in the provisional, strategic silence of those who refuse to speak 'morally' and 'aesthetically' that something of the true meaning of both terms is articulated (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 187).

²⁴⁸ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 60. Eagleton distinguishes between 'aesthetic ideology' and the 'ideology of the aesthetic' within a given culture. For the latter, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

²⁴⁹ See Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, ch 3, pp. 64-102.

²⁵⁰ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 60

²⁵¹ Frederic Jameson defines *genres* in slightly different terms: 'Genres are essentially literary institutions or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact'. He maintains that there are two seemingly incompatible tendencies in contemporary genre criticism, to be distinguished as the *semantic* and the *syntactic*.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

It is important to note that these five factors determine not only the process of production, publication, and distribution of the text but also the process of *consumption* of the text, *immediate and future*. 'The history of literary criticism is the history of the possible conjunctures between the ideologies of the text's productive and consumptive moments'.²⁵²

2.13 Ideology and Literature

2.131

For Eagleton, a literary text is not to be regarded as the mere *expression* of ideology. The text rather is 'a certain *production* of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some ways appropriate'. Just as every production of a play is the same yet different, so every text is a distinct 'production' of its underlying ideology.²⁵³ Eagleton elaborates on what it is that the text 'produces'. He rejects, for example, as 'naïve empiricism' any notion that there can be a 'direct and spontaneous relation between text and history'.²⁵⁴ He maintains:

*The text exists in the 'hollow' it has scooped out between itself and history.*²⁵⁵

These he seeks to illustrate from the realm of comedy. In traditional theories of comedy, the *semantic* approach concerns itself with the ultimate comic vision of which individual comic texts 'offer so many embodiments'. For some, comedy has the function of 'preserving social norms by castigating deviancy with ridicule'; for others 'the comic serves to make the fundamental absurdity of human existence tolerable'. Jameson observes:

Such approaches, whatever their content, aim to describe the essence or meaning of a given genre by way of reconstruction of an imaginary entity – the 'spirit' of comedy or tragedy, the melodramatic or epic 'world-view', the pastoral 'sensibility' or the satiric 'vision' – which is something like the generalised existential experience behind the individual texts (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 107).

The alternative, *syntactic*, approach is summed up by Jameson as follows:

The second, syntactic approach to genre, which condemns the semantic option as intuitive and impressionistic, proposes rather to analyze the mechanisms and structures of a genre such as comedy, and to determine its laws and limits. ... For the semantic or phenomenological approach, the contrary in terms of which comedy will be defined always proves to be another mode: tragedy, say, or irony. For structural analysis, the 'opposite' of comedy will simply be the non-comic or the non-funny (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 108).

The contrast between these two approaches to genre criticism is, for Jameson, an instance of the more general rivalry between 'old-fashioned interpretation', which asks the text *what it means*, and the newer kind of analysis, which is concerned with *how the text works*. The basic text for Jameson for this syntactic approach is Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of a Folk Tale* (trans. L Wagner; Austin: University of Texas Press, 2nd edn, revised, 1968). A biblical commentary based on Propp's principles is J.M. Sassoon, *Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological and Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation commentary on Ruth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2nd edn, 1989). Jameson later acknowledges the complexity of the concept of *genre* – particularly of the embedding of one genre into another and of the survival of genres that have their origin in earlier mode-of-production stages. See Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 106-108 and 141-142.

²⁵² Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 80.

²⁵³ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 64-73. This analogy from drama is taken up and developed by Gale A. Yee in her 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body' in Gale Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 146-170 (149).

²⁵⁴ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 70.

²⁵⁵ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 62. For an application of this concept within Biblical Studies, see the discussion below of Norman Gottwald's Eagletonian analysis of Isaiah 40-55 (pp. 139-47, especially p. 140).

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

History enters the text: ‘but it enters it precisely as ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its *measurable absences*’.²⁵⁶ The foregrounding of ‘absences’, of ‘not saids’, is an integral feature of ideological criticism. Absences may be elucidated by reading between the lines, by attention to marginal and peripheral voices, and by glimpsing through cracks and fissures in the text. Elsewhere Eagleton describes the process as *reading against the grain* of the text.²⁵⁷

However, although there cannot be a naïve equation of the text with history, Eagleton also completely rejects the structuralist / reader-response notion that ‘the text is simply a ceaselessly self-signifying practice, without source or object’. This is a view that he regards as a product of ‘the bourgeois mythology of individual freedom’.²⁵⁸

The relationship between text and ideology is summarised as follows:

- ideology presents itself to the text as a set of significations that are already articulated in a structural way;
- ideology also presents to the text a specific set of aesthetic modes of production;
- the text displaces, recasts, or mutates this ideology;
- this process of displacement and mutation reveals itself to criticism as a complex series of transactions between text and ideology.²⁵⁹

Eagleton’s model undoubtedly opens up a range of interpretative avenues that should prove of considerable value within Biblical Studies. Even for those who are unable to accept the Marxist undergirding of the model, exploration of the interaction of a given text with each of Eagleton’s five levels will inevitably lead to new critical insights. This focus on the ideological context of the text’s production will also open up (or unmask) ideological features of an ancient text that might otherwise remain opaque when viewed only through the ideological lens of contemporary culture.

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Eagleton has a very positive view of literature. Access to literature is part of what we regard as human: denial of literacy is denial of a fundamental human right.²⁶⁰ He observes:

Literature ... is the most revealing mode of experiential access to ideology that we possess. It is in literature above all that we observe in a peculiarly complex, coherent, intensive and immediate fashion the workings of ideology in the textures of lived experience of class societies. It is a mode of access more immediate than that of science, and more coherent than that normally available in daily living itself.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 61 (my emphasis).

²⁵⁷ See Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-85* (London: Verso, 1986).

²⁵⁸ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 73.

²⁵⁹ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 73.

²⁶⁰ Eagleton makes the point that literature is different in this respect from other forms of ‘art’. The art gallery and concert hall are ‘flagrantly privileged spaces’; but this is not so of literature:

The character of literary productions in advanced social formations is such that it ceaselessly surpasses such cloistered, isolable spheres: literature is multiple and polycentric, saturating the very textures of our social life, pervasively present as consolation, information, persuasion, infatuation. Secondly an advanced social formation demands that literacy should be widely diffused, so that today its relatively marked absence ... is inevitably scandalous, signifying a loss of full humanity (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 164-165).

This egalitarian function of literature is, of course, much less applicable in ancient non-literate cultures.

²⁶¹ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 101.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

But he sounds this warning note:

Like private property, the literary text thus appears as a 'natural' object, typically denying the determinants of its productive process. *The function of criticism is to refuse the spontaneous presence of the work* – to deny that 'naturalness' in order to make its real determinants appear.²⁶²

2.13 Summary and Evaluation

Eagleton offers a clear and helpful exposition of the various levels of Marxist literary analysis and of the inter-relationships among them.²⁶³ He sounds an important warning note against viewing the text simplistically as an 'expression' of the ideology of the writer.

It is important to emphasise that ideological criticism, in its classic Eagletonian form at least, understands the ideology of the text to be earthed in the *materiality* of the modes of production from which the text has arisen. Eagleton explicitly rejects the postmodern reader-response notion that the text is simply 'a ceaselessly self-signifying practice'.

However, there is of course considerable room for debate on the Marxist presupposition that ideology always follows *from* material and economic conditions and not *vice versa*. It should also be noted that other scholars (such as Clifford Geertz and Paul Ricoeur) have argued for a more *complex* relationship between the material world and the world of ideas / ideology than the traditional Marxist base-superstructure model.²⁶⁴

An attempt at a specifically Eagletonian analysis by Norman Gottwald of the text of Isaiah 40-55 is reviewed below.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 101 (my emphasis).

²⁶³ Eagleton has not himself attempted to apply his methodology to biblical texts. He has, however, written an intriguing article on the book of Jonah, which is reviewed below in Appendix 2 (pp. 274-77).

²⁶⁴ Clifford Geertz questions the *materialist* view of ideology, a usage that stretches back to the earlier writings of Marx, in which material and economic considerations are said directly to give rise to ideology. Geertz questions whether physical causes can have mental effects, whether material conditions can generate ideas. The idea that physical conditions can cause thought does not reckon with the subjective, conscious, human activity in the very creation of those material conditions which are reckoned to cause human thinking. Geertz's alternative perspective is summed up by Andrew Mayes in these terms:

Physical reality is rather *recognised* by the human mind by the symbolic ordering of reality in perception. This symbolic ordering is ideology, and its basic function is to integrate: an ideology is a coherent body of shared images and ideas which provides for those who share it 'a coherent, if systematically oversimplified, overall orientation in space and time' (Mayes, 'Deuteronomic Ideology', p. 60, quoting from Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 216).

Paul Ricoeur largely follows Geertz. See the fuller discussion of Ricoeur, below, pp. 77-78.

²⁶⁵ Norman K. Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: an Eagletonian Reading', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 43-58, reprinted in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsely (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), pp. 329-342. See below, pp. 139-147.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

2.2 Fredric Jameson

2.21 *The Political Unconscious*

Another Marxist classic is Frederic Jameson's (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.²⁶⁶ For Jameson, ideological criticism is the 'appropriate designation for the critical "method" specific to Marxism'. Like Eagleton, Jameson offers ideological criticism as a comprehensive model, not as one methodology that will sit alongside others. The world of meaning in the text, which Jameson calls its 'political unconscious' is correlated with the ideology under which it was produced. For Jameson, all texts have a 'political unconscious'.²⁶⁷ Jameson's underlying presuppositions are broadly similar to those of Eagleton but he offers an alternative methodological approach.²⁶⁸

The main aim of *The Political Unconscious* is as follows:

This book will argue the priority of *political* interpretation of literary texts. It conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today – the psychoanalytic, or the myth-critical, the stylistic, the ethical, the structural – but rather as *the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretations*. ... This is evidently a much more extreme position than the modest claim, surely acceptable to everyone, that certain texts have social and historical – sometimes even political – resonance.²⁶⁹

Jameson further maintains that to make a distinction between cultural texts that are political and those which are not is 'something worse than an error'.²⁷⁰ All texts have a political dimension, even if neither the author nor the reader is consciously aware of the fact: hence the title of the book, *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson is much more insistent on the universality of this political dimension than Eagleton. In the broadest sense, politics is to do with the interaction and struggle for control among different groups in society.²⁷¹ However, Jameson's claim that *all* texts are political,

²⁶⁶ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981). William C. Dowling offers a useful text-book summary and explanation of Jameson's *Political Unconscious* in his *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to 'The Political Unconscious'* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984).

²⁶⁷ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 12. Jameson adopts an Althusserian definition of 'ideology': 'a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relations to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history' (p. 30).

²⁶⁸ Jameson is particularly influenced by the *structuralism* of the Lévi-Strauss school. In a foreword to the English translation of one of the works of A.J. Greimas, Jameson acknowledges the extent to which Greimas's semiotics is of relevance to ideological criticism (Frederic Jameson, 'Foreword' to Greimas, *On Meaning*, pp. vi-xxii [vi-xiv]. See the further comments below, footnote 1062, p. 227.

²⁶⁹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 17 (my emphasis).

²⁷⁰ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 20.

²⁷¹ James Kavanagh observes that insistence that a given text is 'non-ideological' because it 'disavows any current *political* theory is as silly as would be one's insistence that s/he is 'non-biological' because s/he has no coherent theory of cell-production' (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 311). He continues: 'Ideological analysis maintains its edge ... only by keeping our eyes on the relations of *cultural* texts to questions of *politics*, power, and/or class' (p. 312 [my emphasis]).

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

especially in the strong form in which he expresses this view, is open to debate; and Jameson does not engage explicitly with opposing points of view on the issue.²⁷²

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Jameson's concern is not only with the origins of texts themselves but also with 'that more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand these things'.²⁷³ He thus makes this important introductory statement:

We never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing in itself. Rather texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations or – if the text is brand-new – through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited traditions.

He continues:

This presumption then dictates the use of a method (which I have elsewhere termed the 'metacommentary') according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretation through which we attempt to confront and to appreciate it. *Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code.*²⁷⁴

Texts, Jameson maintains, have always been (re)interpreted in the light of a prevailing allegorical 'master narrative'. A prime example is the 'ideological mission' by which the Old Testament was assimilated to the New Testament, 'rewriting Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles'.²⁷⁵ This emphasis on critique not just of texts but of the prevailing master-code by which texts have traditionally been interpreted is of particular significance for Biblical Studies.²⁷⁶

For Jameson, ideological criticism has more in common with 'old-fashioned interpretation' than with contemporary 'deconstructionism', in that it is still concerned with the question, 'What does the text mean?'²⁷⁷ Jameson continues:

²⁷² It may depend on what is meant by 'political'. It may also have to do with the definition of 'a literary text'. Jameson does not offer any formal definition of a literary text: it may be that a written document that is demonstrably non-political would simply not be regarded by Jameson as a *literary* text.

²⁷³ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 9. He continues:

We are thus confronted with a choice between study of the nature of the 'objective' structures of a given cultural text (the historicity of its forms and content, the historical moment of emergence of its linguistic possibilities, the situation-specific function of its aesthetic) and something rather different which would instead foreground the interpretative categories or codes through which we read and receive the text in question.

²⁷⁴ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 9 (my emphasis).

²⁷⁵ Jameson observes:

So it is that the life of Christ, the text of the New Testament, which comes as the fulfilment of the hidden prophecies and annunciatory signs of the Old, constitutes a second, properly allegorical level, in terms of which the latter may be rewritten. Allegory is here the opening up of the texts to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and so many supplementary interpretations. *The allegory prepares the text for further ideological investment* (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 29-30 [my emphasis]).

Jameson also notes here that, by contrast with the treatment of (for example) classic Homeric texts by later Greek philosophers, the 'rewriting' of the Old Testament was done in a way which preserved its 'literality', with an ongoing commitment to its accounts as historical fact.

²⁷⁶ For example, several of the essays in David Clines's *Interested Parties* (reviewed in detail below, pp. 178-201) offer critique of the prevailing tradition of interpretation.

²⁷⁷ He further observes:

Leaving aside for the moment the possibility of a genuinely immanent criticism, we will assume that a criticism which asks the question 'What does it mean?' constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which the text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master-code (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 58).

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

This is perhaps the place to answer the objection of the ordinary reader, when confronted with elaborate and ingenious interpretations, that the text *means* just what it says. Unfortunately, no society has ever been quite so mystified in quite so many ways as our own. ... *If everything were transparent, then no ideology would be possible, and no domination either.*²⁷⁸

2.22 Three-phase Critical Reading of Texts

The heart of *The Political Unconscious* is Jameson's three-phase method of reading texts, which aligns their logical flaws (that is their failure to close their internal semantic system or to 'make sense') with the 'contradictions' in the social formations that generate them, particularly the precarious co-existence of overlapping historical modes of production.²⁷⁹ This interpretative process should provide vital clues to the 'real' significance of the text, both what it seeks to affirm and what it seeks to mask, consciously or otherwise.

Jameson maintains that texts should be viewed within three concentric frameworks,²⁸⁰ or 'distinct semantic horizons', in a three-stage reading process:²⁸¹

- (1) The text's internal semantic system is analysed in its immediate political / historical context.
- (2) The view is broadened to consider the individual text against the wider social horizon, particularly against the background of ongoing class struggle, and in relation to other contemporary texts that demonstrate the literary options available to the social formation (the given text representing one option).

Jameson particularly acknowledges the contribution of 'myth criticism', especially the work of Northrop Frye, who, unlike most of those involved in myth criticism, is aware of issues of community and of the nature of religion as *collective* representation. See Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 68-74 and Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

²⁷⁸ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 60. Jameson adds that he is not primarily concerned with validity of a *particular* interpretation: for no interpretation can be totally disqualified 'by a simple enumeration of inaccuracies or omissions'. He continues: 'Interpretation is not an isolated act, but takes place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict. ... I would much prefer to endorse the current provocative celebration of strong misreadings over weak ones' (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 13).

²⁷⁹ It is worth quoting in full the philosophical basis for Jameson's position:

The literary or aesthetic act always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow 'reality' to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are to be traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext. Insofar ... as symbolic action - what Burke will map as 'dream', 'prayer', or 'chart' - is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling 'world' must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformation of form. *The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view towards its own projects of transformation* (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 80 [my emphasis], referring to Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973]).

²⁸⁰ He explains that these three frameworks:

mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first of political history in the narrow sense of punctual event ...; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and, ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 75).

²⁸¹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 77-102.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

(3) The social formation is then read as a conflict of modes of production against the background of history in the vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production; and the findings of the textual analysis are then aligned with this conflict.²⁸²

2.221 Immediate Political / Historical Context

In the first phase, the individual text is evaluated in relation to the political circumstances of its origin, in particular seeking contradictions in the text, the points where it fails to adhere to its own logic.²⁸³ These logical flaws are then aligned with conflicts in the political context. The logical scandal in the text will correspond to a contradiction in the 'ideological subtext(s)'. The critic attempts the 'rewriting of the text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration [sic] of a prior historical or ideological subtext'.²⁸⁴ The subtext, however, is not presumed to have any actual existence apart from the text; and there may be several subtexts posited. A biblical example might be the ideological fiction of prophetic designation and popular acclamation associated with the northern Israelite monarchy by the Deuteronomistic historian, which contradicts the actual practice, whereby prophetic designation could be bought and popular acclamation 'arranged' by the army.

Jameson's emphasis on the search for contradictions begs the question as to whether there are *always* contradictions in a text. Jameson does not discuss this as an issue but seems to presume that this is so, or at least that it will be so of any text of significance.

Jameson stresses that this first stage is much more than defining what conventional criticism refers to as the 'context'.²⁸⁵ His method is also much more than a search for the author's intention. It is equally, if not more, concerned with what the author has concealed or masked, consciously *or unconsciously*. The method is focussed on what the author is *doing* with the text. It is more to do with *how the text works* than with *what the text means*.

2.222 The Wider Social and Literary Horizon

In the second phase of the methodology, a given text is reconstituted as an instance, or *parole*, or utterance of 'the great collective class of discourses'. This larger class-discourse can be said to be organised around minimal units which Jameson calls 'ideologemes'. Within this second horizon, the primary object of analysis is the ideologeme. An ideologeme is defined as 'the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes'.²⁸⁶ Jameson

²⁸² Jameson insists on the relation of the text to history, though not in the sense of facile correspondence between the text and some history external to the text. All texts need to be historicised but so also all history needs to be textualised.

²⁸³ Jameson here acknowledges the influence of the structuralist methodology of Levy-Strauss (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 77).

²⁸⁴ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 81.

²⁸⁵ Jameson comments forcefully: 'The conventional sociology of literature or culture, which modestly limits itself to the identification of class motifs or values in a given text, and feels that its work is done when it shows how a given text "reflects" its social background, is utterly unacceptable' (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 80-81).

²⁸⁶ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 87. An alternative definition is 'the unit of one class's fantasy about another'. This is one of the points on which Jameson owes most to the structuralist influence of

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acknowledges, however, that 'the immense preparatory task of identifying and inventorying such ideologemes has scarcely even begun'.²⁸⁷

The norm in any society, according to Jameson, is a dichotomy of class values between a dominant and a labouring class. The literary critic is normally presented with a piece that encodes the ideologemes of the dominant class, involving strategies for the legitimisation of power. A literary piece may also encode (or seek to mask) the ideologemes of an underclass ideology, seeking to undermine the dominant value system.²⁸⁸

Part of the task of the critic is to reconstruct the voices of the opposing ideological framework. The voice of the underclass does not often survive explicitly in literary form; but it can often be accessed using, for example, contemporary folk literature, and other such materials.²⁸⁹ This will prove a difficulty in the case of biblical literature, because of the paucity of available non-biblical material. However, like Eagleton, Jameson makes the point that the text's 'other' can often be deduced by reading between the lines of the text itself. An example of an attempt to do this from within biblical scholarship is the work of Itumeleng Mosala, reading from the 'underside' of the text.²⁹⁰ In addition to the social *class* struggles on which Jameson focuses, I would argue that the struggles encoded in biblical texts may also include conflict along gender or ethnic grounds or between rival religious groups. It also may include struggle among rival groups of elites, for example a priestly versus a merchant class.

2.223 The wider historical framework: the conflict of modes of production

The final stage in Jameson's scheme is primarily related to the interplay of successive and overlapping modes of production.²⁹¹ There is a conventional *form* of ideological coding specific to each specific mode of production.²⁹² Hence, in this third horizon, there must be study of a text against the background of the ideological conflict among

structuralist scholars such as Algirdas Greimas. See above, footnote 268, p. 61 and below, footnote 1062, p. 227.

²⁸⁷ He also acknowledges that *The Political Unconscious* will 'make but the most modest contribution' to this enterprise.

²⁸⁸ He continues:

The individual text retains its formal structure as a symbolic act: yet the value and the character of such symbolic action are now significantly modified and enlarged. On this rewriting [the application of the second phase of the methodology], the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes, and to describe it in these terms demands a whole set of different instruments (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 89).

²⁸⁹ In his development of this issue, Jameson makes considerable use of the structuralist work of Vladimir Propp and of Algirdas Julien Greimas (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 119-129). The work of scholars writing from a structuralist perspective has generally been of considerable influence on Jameson's work.

²⁹⁰ See below, pp. 154-68.

²⁹¹ Early Marxism had posited a linear development of modes of production; but Jameson follows Louis Althusser and others who have moved to a multilinear scheme: 'every social formation or historically existing society has in fact coexisted in the overlay and coexistence of several modes of production' (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 95). Revolution is thus not a sudden transition from one mode to another but the emergence to the surface of dynamics of conflict long present.

²⁹² which Eagleton denotes as General Ideology.

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the relevant modes of production.²⁹³ An example of this within Biblical Studies would be Gale Yee's analysis of the Book of Judges in terms of elements of an outmoded tribal-agriculturalist mode of production surviving into the centralised monarchic social formation of the author's day.²⁹⁴ Jameson depicts this third phase of the task of the literary critic in these terms:

I will suggest that ... the individual text ... is here reconstructed as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ It may be helpful at this point to summarise the respective Modes of Production as they are traditionally understood in the Marxist historical scheme. I have based this on the outline in Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 89, with additional comments for further clarification:

- Primitive tribal society, sometimes called primitive communism (hunting and gathering, agriculture and husbandry).
- Hierarchical kinship societies (neolithic agricultural society).
- Oriental despotism (also referred to as the Asiatic mode of production or tributary mode of production).
- Ancient or classical mode of production, e.g. the *polis* (an oligarchical slaveholding society).
- Feudalism.
- Capitalism.
- Communism.

'There is a good deal of debate,' adds Jameson, 'whether the "transitional" stage between these last [capitalism and communism] - sometimes called 'socialism' - is a genuine mode of production in its own right or not' (p. 89). Jameson also discusses some theoretical objections to this overall scheme (pp. 94-95). Generally, it is acknowledged that the scheme is an oversimplification, not least as to the extent to which these 'stages' should be viewed synchronically rather than diachronically.

This conception of historical stages includes the notion that there is a culture-dominant form of ideological coding specific to each mode of production. Following the same order, Jameson summarises these as (pp. 88-90):

- Magic and mythic narrative;
- Kinship;
- Religion or the sacred;
- Politics ('according to the narrower definition of citizenship in the ancient city state');
- Relations of personal domination;
- Commodity reification;
- Fully developed forms of collective or communal association ('as yet nowhere fully developed').

Jameson also discusses the concept of 'cultural revolution', that is the process (not necessarily sudden and dramatic) of shift from one stage to the next (pp. 95-97).

²⁹⁴ See below, pp. 104-14.

²⁹⁵ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 98. He continues:

These dynamics - the newly constituted 'text' of our third horizon - make up what can be termed the *ideology of form*, that is, the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the various sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.

Jameson helpfully illustrates what he means by taking as an example the debated relationship between Marxist and feminist categories as encoded in literary texts:

The notion of overlapping modes of production ... has indeed the advantage of allowing us to short-circuit the false problem of the priority of the economic over the sexual, or of sexual oppression over that of social class. In our present perspective, it becomes clear that sexism and the patriarchal are to be grasped as the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labour between men and women, and its division of power between youth and elder. The analysis of the ideology of form, properly completed, should reveal the formal persistence of such archaic structures of alienation - and the sign systems specific to them - beneath the overlay of all the more recent and historically original types of alienation - such as political domination and commodity reification - which have become the dominants of that most complex of all cultural revolutions, late capitalism, *in which all the earlier modes of production in one way or another structurally coexist* (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 100 [my emphasis]).

For an interesting article on mode of production and women's issues, see David Jobling, 'Feminism and "Mode of Production" in Ancient Israel' in David Jobling, Peggy L. Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (eds.), *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Norman K. Gottwald on his Sixty-*

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2.224

In a published interview with a group of biblical scholars, Jameson has usefully summed up his three-phase approach to literary criticism in these terms:

I am committed to the notion that there is a first level generally in which a text probably (if you can decipher it) responds to immediate events. *Context is very hard to determine, and obviously as you go into the past it is harder and harder to determine.* But that immediate level of the context of events exists.²⁹⁶ ...

Then I think there is a less time-bound level ... in which texts are often a dialogue between groups. These groups are ultimately social classes, but obviously before they are classes they are gender groups and racial groups and class interactions. *We do not see that movement often because readers from a different period or place do not know how to read the signals.*²⁹⁷ ... There is a whole reconstruction to be done on the very meaning of codes which are invisible for one reason to the speaker and for another reason to the more distant listener. To reconstruct these would be important. ...

Finally the third level ... is that of the mode of production. ... This is not really meant as a set of clues or directions for interpretation but as a way of sorting out interpretations afterwards. We all, from our various vantage points in society, perform distinct interpretive acts. ... *The least interesting thing to do with an interpretive quarrel is to decide that one of them is right and the other one is wrong.*²⁹⁸

2.23 Utopia and Ideology

Before leaving Jameson, some comments are required on the concluding chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, 'The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology'.²⁹⁹ Indeed, Jameson himself has referred to this chapter as one that 'people comment on less', but as the section with 'most relevance to biblical criticism'.³⁰⁰

The essential question is: if a cultural text fulfils a demonstrably hegemonic ideological function in securing the legitimisation of some form of class domination, can it also, by means of a collective dialectic, come to 'embody a properly utopian

Fifth Birthday (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1991), pp. 239-51, reprinted in D. Jobling, T. Pippin, R. Schleifer (eds.), *the Postmodern Bible Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 239-252.

See also Roland Boer, 'Women First? On the Legacy of Primitive Communism', *JSOT* 30.1 (2005), pp. 3-28.

²⁹⁶ He gives here an analogy of how texts can be influenced by political or newspaper comments or by other texts.

²⁹⁷ For example, Americans commenting on British writing may miss relevant signals because of their unfamiliarity with the language and culture or, indeed, because they are unaware that they are unfamiliar with the language and culture!

²⁹⁸ Frederic Jameson, 'A Conversation with Frederic Jameson' (edited transcript of a talk by Frederic Jameson to the first meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts* Consultation, New Orleans, 1990), *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 227-237 (232-33[my emphasis]).

²⁹⁹ For a fuller discussion of utopia, see Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (ed. G.H. Taylor; New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), to which reference is also made below, pp. 77-78. The concept is ultimately Mannheimian in origin: see, especially, Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*.

³⁰⁰ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 227. Jameson begins the chapter with this well known quotation from Walter Benjamin:

As in all previous history, whoever emerges as the victor still participates in that triumph in which today's rulers march over the prostrate bodies of their victims. As is customary, the spoils are borne aloft in that triumphal parade. These are generally called the cultural heritage. ... They owe their existence, not merely to the toil of the great creators who have produced them. but equally to the anonymous forced labour of the latter's contemporaries. There never has been a document of culture which was not at one and the same time a document of barbarism (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 281, quoting from Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'. VII).

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impulse, or to resonate a universal value inconsistent with the narrower limits of class privilege which inform its more immediate ideological vocation'?³⁰¹

Utopian impulses, Jameson maintains, are to be found embedded in all texts:

If the function of the mass cultural text is ... seen as the production of false consciousness and the symbolic reaffirmation of this or that legitimising strategy, even this process ... must involve a complex strategy of rhetorical persuasion in which substantial incentives are offered for ideological adherence. *We will say that such incentives, as well as the impulses to be managed by the mass cultural text, are necessarily utopian in nature.*³⁰²

In fact, Jameson argues that ruling-class ideology emerges secondarily as a reaction against a developing underclass ideology, which ultimately derives from the growing resentment of those who must work to produce surplus value for those who enjoy structural privilege. It therefore has within it from the outset the seeds of a utopian vision.³⁰³

Jameson concludes that a Marxist analysis:

can no longer be content with its demystifying vocation to unmask ... the ways in which a cultural artifact fulfils a specific ideological mission, in legitimising a given power structure ... and in generating specific forms of false consciousness (or ideology in the narrower sense). *It must also seek ... to project its simultaneously utopian power.*³⁰⁴

Elsewhere Jameson asks: 'How can a text which is maimed and deformed and which bears the nasty marks and traces of its own class and gender and racial and other kinds of stances – how can such a text project a utopian appeal?' His answer is that 'a text can be both ideological and utopian, and our task is to figure out in these specific instances how that dialectic comes about'.³⁰⁵ Ideological criticism can therefore yield a utopian vision even from an oppressive text, a thesis that is of relevance to those who struggle with the oppressive nature of Old Testament texts (patriarchal and otherwise). This phenomenon may explain why many of those who complain of the patriarchal or oppressive nature of the biblical text are nonetheless often able to derive

³⁰¹ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 288. Or, in other words: How can we formulate a 'collective dialectic' that will 'project an imperative to thought in which the ideological would be grasped as somehow at one with the utopian, and the utopian at one with the ideology'?

³⁰² Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 287 (my emphasis). He specifically notes the utopian impulses at work even in 'that most degraded of all mass cultural texts, advertising slogans – visions of eternal life, of the transfigured body, of preternatural sexual gratification', which may 'serve as the model for an analysis of the dependence of the crudest forms of manipulation on the oldest utopian longings of humankind'.

³⁰³ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 289-91. From Jameson's Marxist perspective, ideological commitment is 'not first and foremost a matter of moral choice, but of *the taking of sides in the struggle* between embattled groups'. However: 'Even hegemonic or ruling class cultures or ideologies are utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power, but rather precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity'. This is because 'all such [ruling-class] collectives are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved utopian or classless society' (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 291 [my emphasis]).

³⁰⁴ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 291.

³⁰⁵ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 228. He continues: 'One must not allow the social demystification of the thing to become simple debunking. ... On the other hand, one must not overlook the whole concrete sociological motives, because then it sails off into the most empty and idealistic form of visionary utopianism' (p. 229). However, Jameson does not make clear if he regards all texts as *necessarily* possessing this utopian dimension.

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from it a positive (or 'utopian') vision that enables them to maintain their regard for it as 'scripture'.³⁰⁶

Jameson then goes on to speak of 'visionary ideological constructions', such as those of an opposition group in exile:

Ideological construction that wants to persuade people and to grip people will have to be visionary in some sense – and vision of that kind has to project a form of universality beyond its own narrow class interests. ... What an ideological vision tries to do is to construct a kind of popular front in which a whole range of different class interests are all marshalled together under the fraternal leadership of the exile party. That is you arrange the universality of this language in such a way that it draws in a following from all other necessary groups and classes, but secures itself by crucial positioning.³⁰⁷

Gottwald's peasant-revolt theory for the settlement of Canaan envisages a disparate group coming together around a 'visionary ideological construction' such as Jameson describes here.³⁰⁸

Jameson insists that the negative hermeneutic traditionally associated with Marxism must therefore be balanced by a positive hermeneutic.³⁰⁹ He warns, however, that a positive hermeneutic should not be practised in isolation, otherwise it 'relapses into the religious or theological, the edifying or the moralistic, if it is not informed by a sense of the class dynamics of social life and cultural production'.³¹⁰ Nor must hermeneutics lapse into a purely intellectual activity.³¹¹ Indeed, elsewhere Jameson observes: 'I would want critical struggle to be more moralistic and to take a more combative position and try to restore a presence of social struggle to texts'.³¹²

³⁰⁶ Jameson, however, specifically rejects the suggestion that 'the greatness of a given writer may be separated from his deplorable opinions, and is achieved in spite of them or even over against them' (p. 289).

³⁰⁷ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 228.

³⁰⁸ Another biblical example may be the coming together of different group interests within the books of Ezra-Nehemiah.

³⁰⁹ For those for whom 'the Mannheimian overtones of this dual perspective – ideology and utopia – remain active enough to offer communicational noise and conceptual interference', Jameson proposes some alternative formulations, for example, he suggests *instrumental* analysis combined with a *communal* reading, or a *functional* method associated with an *anticipatory* one (Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 296).

The final sentence of Jameson's *Political Unconscious* underlines this need for positive as well as negative hermeneutics: 'It is only at this price – that of simultaneous recognition of the ideological and the utopian functions of the artistic text – that a Marxist cultural study can hope to play its part in political praxis, which remains, of course, what Marxism is all about' (p. 299).

³¹⁰ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 292. See also pp. 296-97. With this latter danger he associates Frye's doctrine of 'the collective origins of art'. He also goes on to argue against a Durkheimian view of religion as 'the symbolic affirmation of the unity of a given tribe, collectivity, or even social formation'.

³¹¹ James Kavanagh observes:

More committed forms of ideological analysis also attempt to change the association of influential ideological ensembles and particular political programmes. For there can be no successful political programme that is not driven by powerful and comprehensive forms of ideological address. Thus literary and cultural texts of all kinds constitute a society's ideological practice, and literary criticism constitutes an activity that ... either submits to, or self-consciously attempts to transform, the political effects of that indispensable social practice (Kavanagh, 'Ideology', p. 320).

For theologians, this move to challenge and transform should be an essential ingredient of the ideological analysis of biblical texts.

³¹² Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 235. In that context, Jameson also remarks that the purpose of *The Political Unconscious* was 'to restore to the very activity of cultural interpretation some of its urgency as being not a sandbox but a place in which human struggle takes place' (p. 235).

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This is a timely challenge to any process of interpretation of biblical texts that would reduce them to a source of theological propositions, denude them of their political nature, rationalise away the element of struggle, and smother the combative challenge-to-action embodied in the text.

2.24 Biblical Example

As Jameson himself acknowledges, there are difficulties in applying his methodology to ancient texts, because of lack of information as to the political context and the paucity of comparative texts.³¹³ However, as an example of a text to which the methodology might be heuristically applied, I suggest the books of Chronicles.³¹⁴

The underlying presupposition would be that the books of Chronicles are essentially political in nature, emerging from social struggle within the Second Temple era. In the first Jamesonian stage, the tensions and contradictions in the books would be aligned with what we know of the politics of the Second Temple period. The ideological sub-texts might include the struggle between priest and levite; the theological debate over judgement and reward; questions of land tenure; and the rival claims of northerners and southerners, masked by the deceptively inclusive phrase 'all Israel'.

The second stage would include a comparison of Chronicles with Samuel-Kings, Ezra-Nehemiah and other associated biblical literature, such as relevant psalms and prophetic material. An attempt might also be made to elucidate the voices of the silenced and the marginalised by reading between the lines of the text. A possible model would be that of Mosala, whose methodology involves reading from the underside of the text (his work is discussed more fully below).³¹⁵ This second stage would also involve an attempt to enumerate ideologemes, the particular units of conflict, and the structural inter-connexions between theological, social, economic, and political aspects.

The third stage would involve an alignment of the text with conflicts of modes of production. There is particularly a tension between the mode of production of the monarchic era (the period described) and the later social formation of the Second Temple period ('the day of small things', the period of writing). The tension between priests and levites might be aligned to this tension of modes of production, if, for example, the mode of production of the Second Temple was no longer able to support a large non-productive priestly caste on the scale of the monarchy era.

A further stage could then be an attempt to reconstruct the utopian vision embodied in the text, which might include (say) hope of restoration of the great days of the

³¹³ An example of an application of Jameson's three-stage methodology to a biblical text is David Jobling's 'Deconstruction and the Political Analysis of Biblical texts: a Jamesonian Reading of Psalm 72', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 95-127, which is reviewed in detail below, pp. 148-153. See also a list of some other applications of Jamesonian methodology within biblical studies in footnote 666 below (p. 148).

³¹⁴ For a different ideological critique of Chronicles, see the discussion below (pp. 128-138) of Jonathan Dyck's *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*.

³¹⁵ See below, pp. 154-168.

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monarchical past; or hope of a day when northerners and southerners could come together under the umbrella of 'all Israel'; or an eschatological vision of the kingdom of Yahweh. A Jamesonian critique would not be complete if the elucidation of the utopian impulse did not then result in a call to action in the world of the commentator: for example, an engagement of the text with issues of contemporary struggle.

This Jamesonian approach would seem to me *prima facie* to have the potential for opening up a variety of productive new avenues of interpretation for a text such as the Chronicles. Significantly, the Chronicles text itself was already a re-inscribing of the ideological 'master-narrative' that prevailed in the author's day, as represented, presumably, in Samuel-Kings. Ideological criticism has the further potential for enabling a break with the 'allegorical master-narratives' of interpretation that have prevailed in the world of western biblical scholarship.

An example of the application of the methodology on a more detailed basis to a much shorter text is David Jobling, 'Deconstruction and the Political Analysis of Biblical texts: a Jamesonian Reading of Psalm 72', which is reviewed below.³¹⁶

2.25 Summary and Evaluation

In attempting a summary evaluation of Jameson's work, I would echo the comments of David Carr in introducing a question to Jameson in a public session:

As I read *The Political Unconscious*, I was really struck with the immense amount of knowledge you are able to put together, and as I read it I sometimes found myself wondering whom I could recommend the book to who would understand it. I was not fully in that camp (of understanding) at times, but I got a lot out of it!³¹⁷

Jameson makes no apology for his Marxist stance. However, he observes:

In my experience ... most of the people who call themselves pluralists are absolutely intolerant of other kinds of interpretation. ... In my experience I am the only true pluralist I have ever met. *Unlike the pluralists, I do happen to believe in something*, or I am willing to admit I do.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ See below, pp. 148-53.

For a rather different application of Jamesonian methodology, to a New Testament text, see Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992), which Pippin herself summarises in the following terms:

In my reading of the Apocalypse of John (Revelation), I reject the text as a male, misogynist fantasy of the end of time. I use Jameson to read against the grain of the text and to push further his idea of the link of ideology and utopian vision in a narrative. There is an ethical push and pull in ideological criticism that is dialectal on the theory level and practical on the social level. The incredible tension of the not yet and the not said pushes and pulls the reader who is not doing (Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 65 citing Pippin, *Death and Desire*, p. 37).

Pippin further comments that Jameson incorporates some fantasy theory (of Bloch) in *The Political Unconscious*, which Pippin develops further, using the Marxist fantasy theorist Jackson, whose definition of fantasy, in Pippin's view, relates well to biblical literature: 'Fantasy re-combines and invents the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real' (R. Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* [New York: Methuen, 1981], cited in Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 65). Pippin concludes: 'The fantastic representation and reproduction of patriarchal power in the book of Revelation raises important issues for the ethics of reading and the reconstructing of this text as liberatory for women (or men)' (Pippin, 'Ideology', pp. 65-66).

³¹⁷ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 234.

³¹⁸ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 231 (my emphasis).

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On this point, Jameson has much in common with those who approach the text as theologians, *as those who believe in something and who admit to it*. His criticism of those who claim to be pluralist might well also be levelled at those who lay claim to critical objectivity or neutrality but who are, in fact, intolerant of interpretative approaches other than their own.³¹⁹

For Jameson, the *political* dimension both of texts and of interpretation is clearly to the fore. In Biblical Studies, there is a growing awareness of the political nature of much, if not all, of the Old Testament material. Within biblical scholarship, there are undoubtedly those who see politics and theology as antithetical but also those who see theology as embracing politics. All will surely agree, however, that theology and politics are at least reciprocally interactive. Few will dispute that the political dimension must be an essential ingredient of interpretation, even though not going the whole way with Jameson's claim that the political is the be-all-and-end-all. In particular, theologians need to heed Jameson's warning that the political often operates at an 'unconscious' level both in the texts themselves and in interpretative strategies.

Another important insight is that all texts come to us as 'already read', in the light of an inherited 'allegorical master-narrative'.³²⁰ This is especially so of ancient texts, and the more so of canonical texts, which have long been inextricably bound up with issues of authoritative interpretation and control. *Ideological criticism therefore will not just be about the text itself but will demand a critique of the master narrative, a metacommentary on the history and the received orthodoxy of interpretation.*

A possible problem with Jameson's methodology is its focus on the logical flaws and contradictions rather than on the main substance of the text. The logical flaws, the 'cracks' and 'fault-lines' of the text, can certainly reveal a hidden agenda and open up a new interpretative perspective. However, a focus solely on the contradictions runs the risk of a skewed and distorted interpretation unless it is balanced by equally close attention to the mainstream of the text. The ideology of the text is located not just in the margins and cracks but in the *tension* between the voices from the margin and the central voices of the text. The contradictions may reveal the context of oppression which the text is seeking to mask or obscure; the mainstream of the text may represent

³¹⁹ See, for example, the debate between Provan and Clines / Thompson discussed above, pp. 40-44.

³²⁰ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp. 29-30.

Compare A.K.M. Adam's description of intertextuality as:

the principle that every text is constituted by other texts, every text borrows words and ideas from predecessor texts, and loans them to successors. When we follow the tracks of these borrowings and lendings, we need not posit an author's *conscious* allusion (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 64 [my emphasis]).

Robert Carroll draws attention to a similar claim by Roland Barthes that 'every text, being itself the intertext of another text, belongs to the intertextual'. Barthes continues, 'The quotations from which a text is constructed are anonymous, irrecoverable ... quotations without quotation marks' (Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text' in J.V. Harari [ed.], *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* [New York: Cornell University Press, 1979], pp. 73-81 [77], cited in Robert P. Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality and *Ideologiekritik*', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 22.1 (1996), pp. 15-34 [17]).

Carroll also draws on Julia Kristeva's maxim, 'any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' in T. Moi [ed.], *The Kristeva Reader* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1986], pp. 34-61 [36-37], quoted in Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 17).

For Carroll's discussion of intertextuality. see below, pp. 218-220.

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(say) the legitimate concerns of the ruling classes in seeking to maintain stable government and order.

Interestingly, Jameson's model of three concentric circles or horizons of interpretation moves in reverse order from the Eagletonian approach, in that Eagleton begins with the General Mode of Production, which broadly represents Jameson's final stage. In the case of ancient texts, the Jamesonian approach seems to make more sense, in that it begins with the text, the tangible entity in the critic's hands, moving from there to more speculative discussion of General and Literary Modes of Production and General Ideology. However, with ancient texts, both approaches are open to the charge of circularity, in that much of what is said about the modes of production and other aspects of the context are inferred from the text and then used as the basis for interpretation of the text. It may be that the Eagletonian approach is less likely to result in circularity since it begins with a focus on factors that are not wholly derived from the text itself.

In Jameson's second phase, a major theoretical element is the identification of ideologemes. Jameson acknowledges that little or no work has been done on identifying and inventorying these minimal units of class or group interests and conflict. There is also a danger of forgetting that such ideologemes can never be more than a theoretical construct, without any objective reality in their own right. Without the ability to list basic ideologemes, even in a preliminary way, it may be that Jameson's three-stage approach breaks down at this point. On the other hand, within the relatively limited horizons of biblical literature, it may well be a manageable and valuable research project to identify and classify basic ideological units.

Finally, Jameson's concept of utopia has considerable resonance with the theological enterprise, for those who seek in the biblical text to find a vision and an impetus towards a better world. Equally as importantly, the emphasis in the Jamesonian approach on the *materiality* of the ideology of the text, originating in a concrete historical situation, may serve as an antidote to 'visionary ideological constructions' that are fanciful or 'eisegetical'.

2.3 Map of Ideological Criticism for Old Testament Studies

2.31

In 1995 Stephen Fowl wrote:

Over the last fifteen years, 'ideological criticism' of the Bible has grown to become an accepted practice within the academy. It has provided a site where feminists, Marxists, liberation theologians, and other interested parties have been able to engage in a discussion aimed largely at displaying the wide variety of competing interests operating in both the production and the reading of the Bible.³²¹

The phrase *ideological criticism* has primarily been used for Marxist-inspired studies of the networks of *social-class* relations involved in the production and transmission

³²¹ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 15.

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of the biblical text. However, investigation of gender or racial ideologies can also be understood as ideological criticism in the broad sense, even though these areas have tended to develop as separate modes of criticism in their own right.

The work of Marxist literary theorists such as Eagleton and Jameson has been the immediate inspiration for ideological criticism within Biblical Studies. However, in a recent article, Sheila Briggs has demonstrated that ideological criticism is not just a completely new ‘-ism’ imported into Biblical Studies from Marxism but that it has firm roots within the long-standing tradition of biblical criticism.³²²

Tina Pippin observes:

Biblical Studies has always been a contested field. ... The Bible can be read to support slavery, monarchy, the death penalty, racism, sexism ... or it can be used to support an opposite set of structures. ... In ideological criticism, readers are required to own their own commitments and agendas, which can be difficult and uncomfortable. Focus has been on ‘the hard sayings of Jesus’ or ‘the ethics of the Tanakh’, as if ideology were isolated in the more difficult passages. Ideological Criticism (especially of the Marxist-influenced variety) takes the whole text to task, from the social formation of biblical books to the canonisation process to the social location and the ethical responsibility of the reader.³²³

Ideological criticism within Biblical Studies has yet fully to develop its own methodology. As Philip Davies has remarked, the idea is ‘risible’ that we can simply filter away the ideology and keep the facts!³²⁴ Subsequent chapters of this thesis will survey a variety of different approaches, including feminist and liberationist, and including scholars who are themselves ‘on the margins’. The studies will also include scholars who have sought to break with the Marxist philosophical basis.³²⁵ However, consideration is first given to a recent (2000) article by Jonathan Dyck, in which he offers what he calls ‘a map of ideology’ for ideological critics.³²⁶

³²² Sheila Briggs, ‘The Deceit of the Sublime: An Investigation into the Origins of Ideological Criticism of the Bible in Early Nineteenth Century German Biblical Studies’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 1-23. Briggs traces the roots of ideological criticism of the Bible back as far as post-enlightenment biblical criticism, especially to early nineteenth century German Biblical Studies. It was as a result of the Enlightenment, she maintains, that the Bible became a legitimate object of what would now be called ideological criticism. This article is reviewed in more detail below in Appendix 1 (pp. 272-74).

³²³ Pippin, ‘Ideology’, p. 51.

³²⁴ Davies, ‘Whose History?’, p. 111.

³²⁵ Jonathan Dyck observes: ‘All social theories of ideology are thus either neo-Marxist or post-Marxist’ (‘Map of Ideology’, p. 113).

³²⁶ Dyck, ‘Map of Ideology’. See also Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*. Dyck adapts a scheme first suggested by Raymond Geuss. See Geuss, *Idea of a Critical Theory*, especially pp. 1-25. He is also dependent on the Slovakian neo-Marxist scholar, Slavoj Žižek’s *Mapping Ideology*, though Dyck adapts Žižek’s work in terms of a Ricoeurian theoretical base.

Žižek in fact adopts an overall positive definition of ‘ideology’. He is representative of a multidisciplinary approach to ideological criticism. Combining Marxist presuppositions with Freudian ideas, and influenced both by Louis Althusser and J. Lacan, Žižek writes that ‘ideology has nothing to do with “illusion”, with a wrong, distorted view of its social content’. He continues:

Herein lies one of the tasks of the ‘postmodern’ critic of ideology: to designate the elements within an existing social order which – in the guise of ‘fiction’, i.e., of the ‘utopian’ narratives of possible but failed alternative histories – point towards the system’s antagonistic character and thus ‘estrangle’ us from the self-evidence of its established identity (Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 230-31).

Žižek uses the phrase ‘ideological fantasy’ rather than the Marxian ‘illusion’. Much of ideological fantasy is to be found in (Freudian) analysis of dreams and myths, with their surplus of meaning.

2. What is Ideological Criticism?

2.32 Dyck's 'Map of Ideology for Biblical Critics'

Dyck makes a useful distinction as to whether 'ideology' is used in the context of *social science*, *interpretative sociology*, or *social criticism*. This three-fold classification is closely correlated with the distinction between descriptive, positive, and pejorative definitions of ideology:

- In the context of *social science*, 'ideology' is used primarily in a *descriptive* sense, 'to denote the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of a social group'.
- Within an *interpretative sociology*, the term is generally used in a *positive* sense 'to denote the symbolic universe by means of which social life is meaningfully structured'.
- In the realm of *social criticism*, the term is mostly found 'in a *pejorative* sense, to denote false or distorted ideas, beliefs, or attitudes'.³²⁷

2.321 The Social-Scientific Model

By *social science* Dyck means 'the empirical study of human groups', in which 'the subjective position of the scientist is at best irrelevant and at worst detrimental' and in which the investigator makes no value-judgements on the culture of the groups under consideration.³²⁸ 'Ideology' is a neutral term for the communal world-view of the group in question. Ideologies may be classified by their factual content or by their functional properties. Classification of ideologies on the basis of function is determined by the kind of behaviour they bring about:

A religious ideology in this [functional] sense would be a set of beliefs which influences religious behaviour, whether or not the manifest content of the ideology has anything to do with religion. ... A religious ideology (in terms of content) may also serve to influence political behaviour or ... economic behaviour. ... *Perceived clashes between content and function will be of particular interest to ideological theorists.*³²⁹

Another approach to the classification of different ideologies is by means of the *identifiable group* within society to which they belong. In traditional Marxism, this is primarily to do with conflicting class interests, though equally the groups may be

³²⁷ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', pp.110-119.

³²⁸ He goes on: 'The aim of the scientist is to observe descriptive social phenomena from a value-neutral perspective and to explain cause and effect from an etic perspective'.

Geuss had used the term 'anthropology' to designate this research context; but Dyck prefers the broader term 'social science'. Various models have been used within a social-science approach to relate the ideological part of a socio-cultural system to the other constituent parts; but the most influential has been the Marxist base-superstructure model. According to this model, the economic base determines the ideological superstructure. In Marx's well known words: 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life' (Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings*, p. 247). Even outside of Marxist circles, 'the social determination of consciousness' has become a central tenet of much sociology. However, Dyck notes that recent theorists, including neo-Marxists, are more willing to think in terms of a reciprocal interaction between ideology, including religion, and socio-economic factors.

³²⁹ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 114 (my emphasis). The issue of perceived clashes between content and function may well be further complicated in the case of the biblical text by the editorial dimension, whereby a later editor may incorporate an earlier story with a different ideological spin from its original function. See the discussion below (pp. 205-11) of Stephen Fowl's comments on this issue.

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(Weberian) status groups, political parties, or gender groups. In the biblical world, one might cite the tension between priestly and prophetic ideologies.

2.322 The Interpretative-Sociological Model

In interpretative sociology, the emphasis is on ‘the hermeneutical understanding of the socio-cultural system’. The posture of the anthropologist is that of ‘the conversation partner in dialogue with the participants with the aim of gaining access to the conceptual world in which the subjects live’.³³⁰ ‘Ideology’ is used in a positive sense to denote the socially constructed world-view, or symbolic universe, of the group, which functions to give meaning to problematic social situations that might otherwise be incomprehensible.³³¹ An example from the biblical realm might be an investigation of the ‘socially constructed world-view’ that enabled Judaism to maintain its exclusive identity in the midst of the prevailing imperial culture of the Second Temple period.

2.323 The Social-Critical Model

By contrast with social-science and interpretative-sociology, *social criticism* involves *value judgments* by the critic. ‘Ideology’ is mostly used in a *pejorative* sense, to denote a false or distorted consciousness that has to be unmasked or exposed. Dyck uses an analogy from medicine: anthropology is to social criticism as anatomy is to pathology. ‘In the former, ideology is a “normal” part of social life whilst the latter deals with “distortion” within social life’.³³²

The social-critical objective is to evaluate a group’s ideology in the light of one’s own social theory and value base, with the aim of freeing the participants from the delusions under which they labour. The distinction between classification of ideologies by content and function is particularly relevant here. Elements of ideology can be regarded as false consciousness if they function to legitimise, promote, or stabilise a form of domination, even if they are factually true. The social-critical approach may lay claim to some form of scientific objectivity or it can operate in an openly intuitive way.³³³ The value base underlying the critique may be Marxist, as in

³³⁰ Dyck, ‘Map of Ideology’, p. 115.

³³¹ Dyck quotes from Clifford Geertz: ‘Whatever else ideologies may be – projections of unacknowledged fears, disguise for ulterior motives, phatic expression of group solidarity – they are, most distinctively, *maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience*’ (Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* [New York: Basic Books, 1973], p. 200, quoted in Dyck, ‘Map of Ideology’, pp. 115-6 [my emphasis]).

In a subsequent article, Dyck offers a ideological critique of Ezra 2, with this quotation from Geertz as his starting point (Jonathan Dyck, ‘Ezra 2 in Ideological Perspective’ in Carroll R. [ed.], *Rethinking Contexts*, pp. 129 –145). In this article, Dyck treats Ezra 2 as a list of returnees to Jerusalem from exile. By contrast with the traditional historical-critical approaches (which tend to assume that only bureaucrats make lists and for purely record purposes), Dyck’s ideological-critical approach to the list ‘is sensitive to the constructed and contested nature of social identity and attune to the possibility that a list such as this may be deeply implicated in the ideological struggles for identity and legitimacy’ (p. 135). In his analysis, however, Dyck moves on from the interpretative-sociological framework towards the social-critical, when he refers to the central problem of ideology as ‘the way in which ideology purports to describe social reality when in fact it is part of the construction of that reality’.

³³² Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 21.

³³³ See also Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 11-13.

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the Eagletonian and Jamesonian approaches, or some other political, moral, or theological value base to which the critic subscribes.³³⁴

2.324 Paul Ricoeur

The classic form of ideological criticism is the Marxist critique, which primarily aims at exposing the ideology which undergirds the interests of the ruling class. However, Dyck outlines an alternative non-Marxist (or perhaps post-Marxist) model, namely that of Paul Ricoeur's (1986) *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.³³⁵ Dyck regards Ricoeur as representing 'an original (if not so well known) exposition and hermeneutical reconstruction of the concept of ideology'.³³⁶ Dyck sums up Ricoeur's approach as follows:

Ricoeur notes significant intersections between the different functions of ideology relating to *distortion*, *legitimation*, and *integration*. He uncovers these interconnections via a 'regressive phenomenology', beginning with Marx's understanding of ideology as a systematically-distorted consciousness and ending with a discussion of the *integrative* function of ideology, which he believes is the fundamental function of ideology.³³⁷

According to Ricoeur, one cannot simplistically correlate ruling class ideology with economic interest: 'an ideology of *legitimation* must incorporate an ideology of *identity*, which *integrates* the group and provides for mutual orientation of action'.³³⁸ These three levels, *legitimation*, *identity*, and *integration* are essential to the

³³⁴ In practice, maintains Dyck, 'most ideological critics of biblical texts adopt scientific or humanistic standards or some combination of these two' (Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 127). The social-critical ideological critics that are reviewed below include: David Clines, for whom the default point of reference should be one's own personal standards and values; David Jobling, who offers a critique from a specifically Marxist standpoint; and Itumeleng Mosala, who adopts a specifically Black-African value-base over against the western critical hegemony. For Dyck himself, the alternative critical standpoint is the Ricoeurian (or Jamesonian) *utopian* vision. It is also possible to practice what Dyck calls an 'immanent' critique, for example, judging one biblical text by standards found elsewhere within the biblical corpus. As an example of this approach, I would suggest Brueggemann's evaluation of Jerusalem royal ideology as 'theological claim functioning as a mode of social control', where Brueggemann explicitly applies a biblical prophetic critique to the Jerusalem ideology (Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, p. 111).

³³⁵ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, as discussed in Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', pp. 119-125.

³³⁶ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 119.

³³⁷ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 53 (my emphasis). He continues:

As is well known, Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy attempts to transcend the opposition between understanding and explanation, hermeneutics and science, especially as it relates to the so called human sciences. The various modes of explanation, from the structuralist approaches to language and text to the explanatory moves of sociology and psychoanalysis, are retained as one axis within Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy. The goal of hermeneutics – to reach an understanding of a person, text, or culture – may require what Ricoeur calls 'explanatory detours' in order to overcome systematic distortion in communication, that is, a hermeneutic of suspicion as well as a hermeneutic of retrieval. Thus ideological criticism, as one of a number of 'explanatory detours', has a significant role to play in hermeneutics. ... Ricoeur would define social criticism, insofar as it is critical of ideology from the point of view of how society really works, as a mode of explanation and locate it within the broader hermeneutical agenda of anthropology.

³³⁸ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 122 (my emphasis). Dyck also comments:

If one wants to understand systems of domination and the role of ideology within them one has to look at the ways ideologies of legitimation work on the *inside*, seeking to determine where distortion is 'anchored' in the lifeworld. The link between ruling ideology and ruling class, between power structures and economic interests, is in the first instance the individual self-conscious ruler and the self-conscious work of legitimation that the ruler performs. Ricoeur therefore turns to Weber's motivational model as an alternative way of modelling systems of domination and attendant modes of legitimation (*Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 68, referring to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 184-86 and to Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* [eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978]).

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outworking of the Ricoeurian system.³³⁹ Ricoeur thus develops in a quite different direction from the Althusserian approach³⁴⁰ that is largely followed by Eagleton and Jameson:

To say ... that ideology represents the 'imaginary relations' of individuals ... implies a pre-distorted constative function of the imagination and consciousness. If everything is distorted and if all recognition is miscognition, then nothing is distorted. If there is no symbolic structure *from the start* then there is nothing to distort. Althusser ... ignores this primary anthropological level of imagination and representation and thus shifts from the language of representation to that of apparatus. ... Ricoeur, on the other hand, distinguishes between recognition and miscognition for it is not a question of either / or but rather a question of how to disentangle the two.³⁴¹

An important aspect of Ricoeur's model is that a critical judgement on a given ideology must always spring from a *utopian* vision.³⁴² Ricoeur thus articulates a more complex understanding of ideology within a social-critical perspective, *permitting*

³³⁹ Ricoeur argues that even the distorting function of ideology presupposes a prior integrating function: ideology can only distort because it originally integrated. Andrew Mayes observes that 'there is a connecting link between these two functions of ideology, where ideology serves not to *integrate* nor to *distort* reality but to *legitimise*. As soon as a differentiation appears between a ruling group and the rest of the community, ideology comes in to legitimise the authority of the ruling group' (Mayes, *Deuteronomic Ideology*, p. 61). In Ricoeur's own words: 'Ideology occurs in the gap between a system's claim to legitimacy and our response in terms of belief' (Ricoeur, *Lectures*, p. 183).

³⁴⁰ Ricoeur's theory builds on the fact that even Marx seems to allow for a basic *pre-distorted* level of consciousness and communication when he (Marx) states:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material course of men [sic], the language of real life. ... Consciousness can never be anything else than *conscious existence*, and the existence of men is their actual life process (Karl Marx, *German Ideology*, quoted in Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 60).

Ricoeur then links this definition of consciousness with an earlier statement of Marx about language:

Language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well: language, like consciousness arises from need, the necessity of intercourse with other men (Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* [ed. D.J. Struik; New York: International Publishers, 1964], pp. 50-51, quoted in Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 61).

Ricoeur comments that 'Marx's whole description of language here does not belong to a theory of class but to a fundamental anthropology, because all humans speak, and they all have a language' (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 83). Dyck summarises Ricoeur's ongoing line of reasoning:

From this Ricoeur seeks to recover a non-idealist anthropology from Marx, while at the same time preserving his insight into human existence under certain conditions. To use the base-superstructure model against itself, if human existence is irreducibly linguistic, even as it relates to material activity, *then language and indeed ideology belong to the base* (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 61 [my emphasis]).

In other words, Ricoeur seeks to replace the Marxist notion of 'the individual as simply contingent with regard to its conditions' with a sense of 'individuals living in definite conditions' (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 100, quoted in Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 60).

³⁴¹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 62 (my emphasis), quoting from Marx, *German Ideology*, p. 247. Dyck digresses at this point (pp. 63-67) to introduce ideas from A. Giddens to do with 'transcending the dichotomy between the autonomous individual and the determined individual' and from J. Habermas, who has constructed 'a theory of meaningful action in terms of a theory of communicative action'. Habermas has used cognitive psychology to analyse not just the moral condition of the individual but also that of society. See: A. Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), especially pp. 2-18; and J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*; vol.1, *Reason and Rationalization of Society* (trans. T. McCarthy, Cambridge: Polity, 1984), especially pp. 107-150; and *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (London: Heinemann, 1979).

³⁴² Mannheim had previously introduced the connexion between ideology and utopia. See Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 174; and Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 74, notes 55 & 56.

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*constructive evaluation of ideological systems as opposed to the primarily deconstructionist tendency of the Marxist-Althusserian model.*³⁴³ In this emphasis on a utopian vision, Ricoeur clearly has much in common with Frederic Jameson.³⁴⁴

2.325 Summary and Evaluation

Dyck's analysis of these three distinct sociological perspectives is immensely helpful in disentangling and classifying some of the different approaches to ideology within Biblical Studies. Whether 'ideology' is used descriptively (in the case of a social-scientific perspective), positively (in an interpretative-sociological perspective), or negatively / pejoratively (in a social-critical hermeneutic of suspicion), depends on the sociological standpoint of the scholar. In his own (1998) work, *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler* (reviewed below), Dyck has sought to distinguish, but then also to blend, each of the three approaches.³⁴⁵ Indeed, as will become clear below, most Old Testament ideological critics to a greater or lesser extent blend at least two of Dyck's categories.

While the first two models³⁴⁶ are by no means without significance, it is the third model, whether in Marxist-Althusserian or in Ricoeurian mode, that has particularly proved to be a 'watershed' for Biblical Studies. Dyck puts it in these words:

On the one side of the divide you have social science that by definition *does not* inquire about ideological distortion and the hermeneutical project of understanding that *cannot* deal with it. On the other side you have a critique that says, 'Distortion happens'. On the one side of the divide you have descriptive or positive definition, and on the other you have pejorative definitions. *An awareness that distortion happens means that you approach the text with suspicion, an attitude biblical scholars are not, generally speaking, conditioned to have.*³⁴⁷

³⁴³ In Ricoeur's words: 'The only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on that basis' (Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 172-73). Dyck further explains Ricoeur's *utopian* approach as follows:

At the level of *integration*, ideology functions to preserve the order, whereas utopia puts into question what presently exists. ... At the level of *legitimation*, ideology serves to maintain systems of domination, whereas utopia challenges authority ... and represents an awareness of the credibility gap that exists in all forms of legitimation. At the level of *distortion*, ideology reifies and alienates whereas utopia is mere escapist fantasy with no link between the future and the present. ... *The task of ideological criticism is to disentangle recognition from misrecognition from the vantage point of a utopia ... and from a 'deep-rooted interest in the plenitude of individual existence'* (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 74-75, quoting from Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 153).

See also Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 124.

³⁴⁴ So far as I can gather, Ricoeur makes no reference to Jameson's work. Presumably the two scholars have developed the notion of utopia independently, each adapting and developing Mannheim's earlier thinking.

³⁴⁵ See below, pp. 128-138.

³⁴⁶ The pioneering example in Biblical Studies of the *social-scientific* model of ideological criticism is Norman Gottwald's classic, *The Tribes of Yahweh*. In this social-scientific category, Dyck also places the work of Gale Yee (though, in my view, Yee's work ventures somewhat beyond the social-science parameters into social-critical mode). See Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21'.

As an example of an *interpretative-sociological* approach, Dyck cites Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art and Political Rhetoric* (JSOTSup. 209; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), especially chapter 4, pp. 103-141. These works are each reviewed in the next chapter.

³⁴⁷ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 126 (my emphasis).

3. Social-Scientific and Interpretative-Sociological Models

3.1 Norman Gottwald: the Pioneer

3.11 Introductory

Following Dyck's threefold classification of ideological criticism, I turn first to the social-scientific model and to Norman Gottwald's *Tribes of Yahweh*.³⁴⁸ Gottwald is widely regarded as the founder of ideological criticism within contemporary Old Testament studies.³⁴⁹ The *Tribes* is a 'classic' text on the application of sociological methodology³⁵⁰ and a pioneering work in the application of techniques drawn from Marxism.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 BCE* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2nd edn, 1999; first published Maryknoll, New York: Orbis 1979).

³⁴⁹ Charles Carter has written: 'I'm not sure where the term "Ideological Criticism" originated, but it is very definitely embodied in Gottwald's *Tribes*' (Carter, 'Powerful Ideologies', p. 49).

Gottwald has modified and refined his methodology and some of his ideas in later work, as is indicated below, where relevant. It is because of the 'classic' and 'pioneering' status of *Tribes*, which 'set the ball rolling' of ideological criticism within Biblical Studies, that this original 'classic' is analysed here. An example of Gottwald's later work, in which he moves into Eagletonian social-critical mode, is reviewed in detail below (pp. 139-47).

³⁵⁰ Charles Carter notes that *Tribes* has been likened by Walter Brueggemann to the classic texts of Wellhausen and Albright in 'significance, potential, and authority' but also that it was critiqued by A. Rainey as a work 'one may safely and profitably ignore!' Carter observes that, with such extreme assessments, 'the author knows that he has written a major work!' (Carter, 'Powerful Ideologies' p. 46, referring to Walter Brueggemann, 'The Tribes of Yahweh: an Essay Review', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 [1980], pp. 441-51; and to A. Rainey, 'Review of *The Tribes of Yahweh* by Norman Gottwald', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 [1987], pp. 541-43).

Roland Boer similarly writes of *Tribes* as a 'classic' of biblical scholarship: 'It now belongs to that rare collection of critical texts that have not fallen by the wayside of criticism – Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* (1885), ... Gunkel's *Die Psalmen* (1926) ... Tribes's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978)' (Roland Boer, 'Introduction: On Re-reading *The Tribes in Yahweh*' in Boer [ed.], *Tracking 'The Tribes'*, pp. 1-9 [1]).

³⁵¹ Boer argues that *Tribes* should be regarded as a 'classic' of Marxist Criticism as well as a 'classic' of Biblical Studies' (p. 8). He attributes to Gottwald the credit for the widespread use in recent biblical scholarship of terms such as ideology, class, and mode of production - though he notes that there is only a handful of scholars who would actually call themselves Marxist (Roland Boer, 'Marx, Method, and Gottwald' in Boer [ed.], *Tracking 'The Tribes'*, pp. 98-156 [98]). Biblical scholars who would adopt an explicitly Marxist perspective include David Jobling, David Penchansky, José Miranda, Jorge Pixley, and Itumeleng Mosala.

Jacques Berlinerblau takes a different approach, questioning both the appropriateness of Marxism as a tool for biblical critical study and also the effectiveness of Gottwald's usage of the model (Jacques

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In the preface to the recently re-published (1999) edition, Gottwald writes:

Ideological criticism underscores and formalizes what has long been sensed but seldom faced. ... Whatever authentic historical memories there may be [in historical texts], they are not unmediated transcripts of the past. ... The texts have been ideologically saturated in the process of selecting, arranging, and commenting upon them within successive frames of meaning. Consequently, we encounter *multiple ideologies* ... Ideological criticism highlights the reality that layered and concentric frames of meaning, together with scars and fissures in the text, reflect contradictions in the social and religious worlds of the traditionalists. *More startling still, ideological criticism suggests that the frames of meaning we are disposed to see in texts are closely connected with the frames of meaning we bring to texts.* ... When the interplay of multiple meanings in the text is scanned by the multiple predispositions of interpreters, we are bound to have a wealth of competing interpretations. ... One form that this ideological disquiet takes is ambivalence as to how much it matters to present interpreters whether Israel originated one way or another.³⁵²

Gottwald states the main aim of *The Tribes* to be a response to:

the challenge of clarifying the place of religious ideas and practices within the changeful social totality *at one of the critical points in Western history and culture.*

He continues:

By combining traditional literary, historical, and theological methods of enquiry with more unaccustomed sociological methods, I shall attempt to reconstruct the origins and early development of *that remarkable ancient socio-religiously mutant people who called themselves Israel.* Such a study is necessarily not only a study of *social totality* but a study of radical *social change* that was also *liberating social change.*³⁵³

This opening statement echoes Gottwald's own personal commitment to social change.³⁵⁴ It also reveals some of his ideological holdings, several of which would be questioned today: for example, that the 'settlement' of Canaan represents 'one of the critical points in Western history and culture'; and that Israel is to be singled out as 'that remarkable ancient socio-religiously mutant people'.

The following are Gottwald's stated methodological presuppositions:

- that humanistic and sociological methods are equally valuable and complimentary methods;
- that religion is best approached as an aspect of a wider network of social relations in which it has intelligible functions to perform;
- that changes in religious behaviour and thought are best viewed as aspects of change in the wider network of social and economic relations;

Berlinerblau, 'The Delicate Flower of Biblical Sociology', in Boer [ed.], *Tracking 'The Tribes'*, pp. 59-76).

³⁵² Gottwald, *Tribes* (2nd edn., revised), p. xli (my emphasis).

³⁵³ Gottwald, *Tribes* (2nd edn., revised), p. xxii (my emphasis). Gottwald proposes to go beyond traditional historical and literary methods by applying the methods of the social sciences in order to 'delineate and conceptualise *early Israel as a total social system*' and to view Israel's religion as 'an integral dimension of the Israelite social system, lawfully and intelligibly correlated with other elements of that system'.

³⁵⁴ Gottwald was writing in the mid-60s, amid the political turmoil of Berkley, California. Roland Boer has commented:

In that turbulent and creative decade, with its protests, demonstrations, alliance politics ... the Vietnam War, nuclear armament and the Cold War, sexism, environmental degradation, capitalist exploitation and depredation, racism ... and the pressing need to 'speak the truth to power'. the long process of researching and writing *The Tribes* began. And the book is soaked in this era, from the epigraph to freedom fighters of Vietnam to the political engagement with Marx in its later pages. Gottwald's own involvement in this political unrest is crucial for the very production and construction of the book (Boer 'Introduction' in Boer [ed.], *Tracking 'The Tribes'*, pp. 3-4).

3. *Social-Scientific and Interpretative-Sociological Models*

- that religion is intelligible to the degree that it exhibits lawful behaviour and symbolic forms which can be predicted and retrodicted within parameters set by changing total mixes of social and economic relations.³⁵⁵

Few nowadays would want to challenge Gottwald's assertion that religion must be viewed as 'an aspect of a wider network of social relations'; but not everyone would be prepared to accept *as a presupposition* that changes in religious behaviour necessarily *follow* from social change. This view represents Gottwald's outworking of the Marxist base-superstructure model, in which religion belongs to the superstructure, whereas economic-material realities (in particular modes of production) form the base.³⁵⁶ Gottwald's stress on religion as 'lawful behaviour... which can be predicted and retrodicted' excludes at the outset the possibility that Israel's religion may have been unique or exceptional.³⁵⁷ Any such possibilities are rejected by Gottwald as idealist and non-verifiable.³⁵⁸

Dyck cites Gottwald as the classic example of the *social-scientific* methodology. However, Gottwald frequently moves beyond a descriptive social-science approach into an interpretative-sociology mode, seeking a *hermeneutical understanding* of the socio-cultural system of early Israel. Accordingly, Gottwald operates with a neutral-to-positive understanding of ideology as:

the consensual religious ideas which were structurally embedded in and functionally correlated to other social phenomena within the larger social system, and which served in a more or less comprehensive manner to provide explanations or interpretations of distinctive social relations and historical experience of Israel, and also to define and energize the Israelite social system oppositionally or polemically over against other social systems.³⁵⁹

It is noteworthy that, at this point, Gottwald's definition of 'ideology' is significantly different from the false-consciousness connotations of Marx and Engels.

3.12

Gottwald's work is divided into eleven parts with a total of fifty six chapters. There follows here a brief survey of each of the main sections followed by an overall assessment.

³⁵⁵ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. xxiii.

³⁵⁶ It should be noted, however, that a full outline and explanation of Gottwald's Marxist 'model' does not appear until pp. 631-649 of *Tribes* - though his Marxist presuppositions are implicit from the outset. Gottwald often uses the phrase 'historical cultural materialism' as a designation for his Marxist perspective, for example, in the title to chapter 50 (p. 622).

For an excellent diagrammatic representation of the Marxist base-superstructure model, see Boer, 'Marx, Method, and Gottwald', p. 114.

³⁵⁷ The possibility that the social phenomena that Gottwald surveys with such analytical clarity could have been wholly or partly the result of the revelation from a Yahweh who actually exists, or even as the result of inspired and charismatic religious leadership, is thus specifically excluded at the outset.

³⁵⁸ This is an essentially philosophical debate that is beyond the scope of this present work. The point here is to note that Gottwald's eventual conclusions are inevitably determined by his presuppositions. Or to put it another way, those prepared to allow even for the theoretical possibility of objective reality for religious beliefs might come to quite different conclusions.

³⁵⁹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 66.

3. Social-Scientific and Interpretative-Sociological Models

Part 1 – Biblical History and Biblical Sociology

Gottwald draws attention to a resistance to sociological methodology among contemporary biblical scholars.³⁶⁰ He attributes this to the ‘canonical sanctity’ of the biblical text; to the ‘myopia of academic overspecialisation’; to the difficulty for those schooled in the humanities of thinking in terms of what is ‘*typically* rather than *individually* human’; and to the *social class position of most biblical scholars*.³⁶¹ Gottwald is one of the first to critique the ideological influence of *social-class* background on biblical scholarship.

It is Gottwald’s intention to demonstrate that sociological methodology can contribute to a distinctively new perspective,³⁶² enabling the scholar to ‘*grasp new relations between old facts*’.³⁶³

Part 2 – The Historical Starting Point and a Source Compendium

For Gottwald historical reconstruction is an essential preliminary to sociological critique. He acknowledges, however, the limited extent to which historical reconstruction can be achieved on the basis of texts that are ‘shaped by ideological considerations’.³⁶⁴ Gottwald writes prior to the new historicism of recent decades but he anticipates their focus on the ideological nature of historical texts.³⁶⁵ He maintains that, under the monarchy, there arose a ‘cultured, urbane interest in unifying traditions

³⁶⁰ Gottwald was writing in the 1970’s but the resistance of which he speaks is by no means completely dissipated today. Gottwald further protests (echoing Jameson) that, where sociological study is found, it is often limited to the provision of *background* information about customs and culture.

³⁶¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 11.

³⁶² For Gottwald: ‘The question about the form and function of Israel’s religion as a social complex is the *sociological* equivalent of the *theological* question: Wherein lay the uniqueness of Israel’s faith?’ (*Tribes*, p.19 [my emphasis]).

³⁶³ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 16. ‘New relations between old facts’ is a recurring theme in *Tribes*. In later work, Gottwald uses the phrase ‘lines of connection’, in particular referring to socially engaged biblical scholars in solidarity with the struggles of early Israel and to the ‘connections’ between socially engaged scholars in different contexts of contemporary struggle. See, for example, Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), p. 225.

³⁶⁴ and by ‘selective emphases, which delete, interject, condense, transpose, join ... to serve cultic ideological needs’ (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 28).

Gottwald frequently warns against reading the Hebrew Bible (or other ancient Near Eastern sources) at face value (eg, pp. 4, 27, 397, 408, 498, 597): for example, he doubts the historicity of the biblical conquest tradition (pp. 192-203) or the authenticity of the tribal lists. Yet in seeming contradiction to this, Gottwald frequently and uncritically uses the Hebrew Bible ‘as a means of historical and sociological reconstruction’. For example, ‘Everything we know of the Moses Group’, he assures us, ‘confirms that it was socially egalitarian’ (p. 643); and in 1 Samuel 20 he finds ‘a highly reliable allusion to one function of the *mishpahah* in old Israel’ (p. 282). Berlinerblau observes:

In this regard, *The Tribes of Yahweh* must be compared to the other great work of biblical sociology, Max Weber’s *Ancient Judaism*. Both writers advance extraordinarily – and often preposterously – detailed reconstructions of early Israelite history on the basis of the reality represented in assorted biblical verses (Berlinerblau, ‘Delicate Flower’, p. 71).

³⁶⁵ Largely basing his approach on the work of Martin Noth, Gottwald asserts that the extant early history of Israel has come down to us in small independent units of tradition, which have been gathered into sub collections and then incorporated into the JEDP sources. He regards the hands of J and E as extending into Joshua and Judges. The units of tradition have been grouped by pervasive ‘basic themes’ (exodus, covenant, etc), by a number of ‘sub themes’, and by ‘horizontal linkages’ (such as genealogies). The fundamental ideological framework which holds the whole together is the ‘notion of a united Israel as the people of Yahweh’ which is ‘the conceptual counterpart of actual constitutional arrangements by which diverse peoples became a single self-conscious functioning system called Israel’ (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 66).

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and tracing origins'.³⁶⁶ This is the period in which the texts as we now have them were given their current ideological shape. There must therefore be an acute awareness of the 'politically centralising monarchic filter through which the earlier traditions have passed'.³⁶⁷ Gottwald expresses a confidence that that the rigorous application of form and tradition criticism will 'crack open' the 'cult-ideological' formation of the underlying texts and reveal the ideology of early Israel.

While more recent scholars might have less confidence in 'rigorous application of form and tradition criticism', what Gottwald proposes here is, in fact, something akin to the Eagletonian procedure of aligning textual fault-lines with a clash of *modes of production* and using the results to 'crack open' the ideology of the text. He also anticipates the (Jamesonian) stress on aligning textual *contradictions* with contradictions in the world of social reality.

Gottwald believes that the underlying texts represent 'the imaginative folk refraction of communal experience'. Ideology is something created by all members of the Israelite community for the good of the community as a whole. No one person or group is the author, certainly not 'self-conscious literary figures who take credit as "poets" or "authors" or "historians"'. Instead the texts originate from 'many individuals who helped to articulate the traditions ... under the sustaining pressure of communal needs'.³⁶⁸

However, Gottwald offers no *structured* discussion of the *literary* mode of production. He does not discuss the socio-economic circumstances or the processes by which the original source texts might have been written or circulated. Nor does he discuss the circumstances or processes under which the later editing, production, and circulation of the final form of the text took place. He simply presupposes a social formation that supported a 'cultured, urbane class' with the leisure to research traditions and re-produce texts.³⁶⁹ Also missing is discussion of associated questions to do with literacy, readership, the dissemination of written material, and the use of the written word as an ideological tool or as a means of social control.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ For Gottwald, tradition is closely linked with ideology. As a definition of what he means by 'tradition', Gottwald offers:

Tradition will be viewed as the communal production of ideology, intimately interwoven with the practices and institutions and values of the social system. The traditions of Israel project the ideological component of its experimental constitutional arrangements and its intense social struggle (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 66 [my emphasis]).

³⁶⁷ He continues:

The main outlines of a pre-monarchic and in critical respects an antimonarchic form of Israelite life conflict so fundamentally with the presuppositions and impulses of monarchic traditions that we cannot possibly understand them as a late fabrication. Such a body of traditions about old Israel makes sense only as the direct product of a pre-monarchic form of life (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 41).

³⁶⁸ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 64.

³⁶⁹ Furthermore, Boer observes:

It is not enough to suggest that a small collection of scribes undertook such a wholesale reconstruction at their own political whim. ... What needs to be thought about are the social and economic processes at work that generate that kind of writing (Boer, 'Marx, Method, and Gottwald', p. 152).

³⁷⁰ Gottwald does, at a later stage in the book, make the following proposition:

The underclasses of Canaan who joined in early Israel decided that writing was too valuable a tool to be left to the ruling class: they seized upon the alphabetic script as a simple instrument of expression that could serve an egalitarian community instead of aiding ruling elite to control and manipulate the process (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 409).

See also Norman K. Gottwald, 'The Theological Task after *The Tribes of Yahweh*' (an address delivered on October 28, 1981, in Yale Divinity School) in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A.

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Berlinerblau makes the further point that Gottwald does not ‘identify [one might add that he does not even envisage] any internal tensions or contradictions between the mode of production, consciousness / ideology (i.e. Yahwism), the Yahwist cult, and biblical literature’³⁷¹ – which is inherently implausible, especially given the wide range of people-groups, with differing interests, whom Gottwald believes to have combined and integrated to form the early Israelite ‘social mutation’.

Later Gottwald states, ‘Yahwistic religion was the praxis and ideology of an *actual* social community’.³⁷² However, his presupposition that the texts give access to an *actual* community would be widely questioned by those (such as Philip Davies, for example) who see ‘Ancient Israel’ as the literary construct of the Second-Temple era.

Part 3 – The Cultic Ideological Framework of the Sources

Gottwald’s main propositions in Part 3 are summed up as follows:

The anachronising periodization of the traditions in the service of an approved standardised ‘history’ is striking evidence of the tendency of the *cult* of early Israel to unify the diverse peoples of Israel by unifying their cultic practice and ideological outlook. It is this process of *cultic-ideological stylisation* that we want to examine in greater detail.³⁷³

Gottwald views the *cult*³⁷⁴ ‘as the life-setting for the development of the *traditions*’.³⁷⁵

Gottwald makes the assumption that the texts point to the actual *historicity* of a unified pre-monarchy cult such as he describes.³⁷⁶ He also assumes that selected

Horsely (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), pp. 239-249 (especially, p. 243).

See comment on this theory as to the adoption of an ‘egalitarian’ alphabetic system in Berlinerblau, ‘Delicate Flower’, p. 73.

Charles Carter comments that recent archaeological material may call in question this understanding of the development of the Canaanite script (Carter, ‘Powerful Ideologies’, p. 49, note 3).

For a discussion of writing and its use in the ANE to control access to power and resources, see C.L. Redman, *The Rise of Civilisation: from Early Farmer to Urban Society in the Ancient Near East* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1978).

³⁷¹ Berlinerblau, ‘Delicate Flower’, p. 73.

³⁷² Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 700.

³⁷³ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 63 (my emphasis).

³⁷⁴ Gottwald hypothesises that, with regard to later periods in Israelite history:

This interrelation between cult and the wider social and historical experience of the people means that there always existed a hiatus between what the traditions claimed and what the people experienced. The traditions asserted the massive unity of early Israel but the community knew very well from its contemporary experience that existing Israel was torn with divisions and tensions and repeatedly exposed to dangers from without (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 122).

It might be added that this tension or contradiction is explicit within the Old Testament in the contrast between the Joshua and the Judges versions of events.

³⁷⁵ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 87 (my emphasis). He continues:

The refraction of history in the narrative traditions of Israel is not a matter of careless recording and inattentive observation by aspiring historians. ... It is, on the contrary, a matter of very selective recording and very specialised observation ... about the way in which a range of diverse and yet broadly similar events among a spectrum of hitherto unrelated peoples could be viewed so as to affirm their cohesion as a people in transit from disunity to unity, from bondage to freedom, from being ‘no-people’ to being ‘the people of Yahweh’ (p. 87).

³⁷⁶ In his later work, however, Gottwald acknowledges that a unified, centralised cult in early Israel cannot be considered a certainty. The tribes may have been united religiously in some way but it cannot be certain that there was a central shrine. For example, he has written:

We now understand that the cult and ideology of Yahweh was not the only religious contender in early Israel, so that we cannot assume pan-Israelite unanimity in devotion to Yahweh, as I did in *Tribes* under the spell of Noth’s simplistic projection of a uniform pre-monarchic cult (Norman K. Gottwald, ‘Response to the Contributors’ in Boer [ed.], *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, pp. 172-185 [176]).

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passages of the Old Testament can be used at face value as evidence of the actual ideology of the early Israelites. Once again, *Tribes* pre-dates the view that this centralised cult may be the literary-theological construct of a much later (perhaps even Second-Temple) authorship.

Despite his earlier neutral-to-positive definitions, Gottwald here acknowledges that the ideology of the final form of the text may function in the classic Marxist sense of 'masking' reality, of seeking to resolve the contradictions between the claims of tradition and the lived experience of the people.³⁷⁷

Part 4 – The Tradition History and Composition of the Books of Joshua and Judges

Gottwald sets himself the task of penetrating behind the deuteronomistic editorial framework, which he believes to have impressed the ideology of the deuteronomistic reform movement onto the text. He delineates a range of (hypothetical) *underlying* sources, each with its own ideological imprint.³⁷⁸ Again, however, Gottwald's detailed conclusions in this section are predicated on a literary-historical methodology that few scholars would accept today.

Part 5 – Models of the Israelite Settlement in Canaan³⁷⁹

Gottwald analyses in turn each of the three main models for the settlement.³⁸⁰ The *conquest* model is deeply rooted in the most ancient Israelite traditions. However, neither archaeological evidence, nor indeed the biblical traditions themselves, support a total conquest model, especially when the ideology of the centralising editorial framework is stripped away. With an almost Jamesonian reference to the 'utopian' impulse, Gottwald observes:

Elsewhere, Gottwald refers to the 'multiple often competitive forms of pre-exilic religion' and observes:

It is reasonable to conclude that the Cult of Yahweh, while a creative force in the tribal era and the state religion under the monarchy, was neither dominant enough nor sufficiently unified in its diverse manifestations to shape the politics of the Israelite states in a decisive manner. ... A royal theology, premised on a divine covenant with David and the sanctity of Jerusalem, gave ideological validation to the state, but it was counterbalanced and often opposed by familial, local, and regional forms of Yahweh worship, especially in the North, but also in Judah (Norman K. Gottwald, 'The Puzzling Politics of Ancient Israel' in Exum and Williamson [eds.], *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 196-204 [199]).

³⁷⁷ Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 65-66.

³⁷⁸ Namely:

- Centralised Conquest Stories (Joshua 1-12);
- Localised Settlement Annals (Judges 1-2:5 and certain cognate passages in Numbers and Joshua);
- Land Allotment Traditions (Joshua 13-19);
- Localised Stories of victory by various Judges.

It is interesting that Gottwald makes no study of the book of Ruth (though he had earlier listed *pastoral idyll* in his summary of the biblical source-types). In many ways, Ruth presents an idealised picture of the outworking of the egalitarian non-hierarchical model that Gottwald postulates for the pre-monarchic community; and (in the LXX and EVV) it does so in sharp contrast to the immediately preceding episodes (the closing chapters of Judges), which depict the failure of that system.

³⁷⁹ Though Gottwald did not regard Part Five as the main thrust of his work, it is one of the sections of the book that are best known and that have proved most controversial.

³⁸⁰ though acknowledging that in practice the models are seldom if ever held in absolute distinction from one another.

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The utopian editorial framework dominates the accounts ... but the reality of a limited occupation obtrudes so starkly that it is amazing that so many Bible readers have managed to overlook the decided limits of the conquests actually described.³⁸¹

However, Gottwald somewhat oversimplifies the issues here, speaking as if ideology were something that can simply be 'stripped away' from the text.

Turning to the *immigration* model,³⁸² Gottwald is particularly critical of the assumption that the pre-Israelite groups were nomadic or semi-nomadic. He demolishes this hypothesis on sociological grounds as totally non-feasible.³⁸³

He therefore maintains that some variation of Mendenhall's *peasant-revolt* model³⁸⁴ alone provides a vital connecting link between the ideological thrust of Yahwism and the socio-economic realities of Canaan.³⁸⁵ The Israelite-Canaanite polarisation is seen

³⁸¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 197.

³⁸² Because of the fundamental problems inherent in the conquest model, the immigration model had gained widespread support among scholars, notably Alt and Noth. The polarisation of Israelite and Canaanite was felt to be better explained by a long ongoing tension between semi-nomadic Israelites and settled Canaanites. Also, large portions of the land seem to have been occupied without a struggle, which suggested peaceful immigration over a long period, to which the patriarchal and other traditions within the Bible were also regarded as a pointer.

³⁸³ Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 208-209. From a sociological perspective, he maintains that it is absurd to suggest that nomads eked out a precarious existence in the wilderness while large tracts of fertile grazing land remained unoccupied. The reverse is much more likely: that nomadism arises when there is no more land available for settled husbandry. Gottwald also demonstrates the necessary *interdependence* of settled and nomadic groups in the mode of production operative in desert fringe areas.

However, A. Rainey, in a review of *Tribes*, is critical of Gottwald's failure 'to grasp the fundamentals' of Alt's *Immigration* hypothesis. He also maintains that Gottwald has failed to appreciate the significance of a plethora of newly established Iron I archaeological sites, the evidence of which 'is steadily adding confirmation to the basic correctness of Alt's original thesis' (A. Rainey, 'Review of *The Tribes of Yahweh* by Norman Gottwald', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107.3 [1987], pp. 541-43 [542]).

By contrast, Duane Christensen, in an earlier review, refers to Gottwald's rejection of the pastoral nomadic model as 'persuasive and may well constitute a definitive statement on the matter' (Duane L. Christensen, 'Book Review: *The Tribes of Yahweh*', *JSOT* 18 (1980), pp. 113-120 [117]). This latter view has by and large prevailed in more recent scholarship.

³⁸⁴ Mendenhall, 'Hebrew Conquest of Palestine' and *The Tenth Generation*. Gottwald is not without his criticisms of Mendenhall's formulation of the thesis. For example, he questions Mendenhall's suzerain-vassal analogy for Israel's covenant. Mendenhall speaks of the early Israel's 'rejection of power' whereas Gottwald would prefer to speak of the way in which 'early Israel distributed, mobilised, and rationalised power' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 226, citing Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, p. 195). Furthermore, whereas, for Mendenhall, Yahwism, as a unique phenomenon, is the *causation* of the peasant revolt, for Gottwald Yahwism is the ideological *product* of the socio-economic mutation.

³⁸⁵ He continues:

The revolt model offers the intriguing proposal that we can account for most if not all of what the Bible tells us of Israel's entrance into Canaan on the model that Israel was in fact composed in considerable part of native Canaanites who revolted against their overlords and joined forces with a nuclear group of invaders and / or infiltrators from the desert (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 210).

Gottwald then outlines at length the feudal system of Canaanite city states under Egyptian hegemony, which had imposed a double layer of hierarchical structures on the agricultural producers. He also explicates the role of the *'apiru* people, who, though often rebels against the feudal system, nonetheless were to some degree dependent on that system and lacked the will and the co-ordination to overthrow it. The entrance of the 'Exodus Israelites' provided a catalyst for a variety of groups, including the Canaanite underclass, to throw off their overlords and to form 'tribal rule by elders in deliberate rejection of centralised political rule by imperial-feudal kings'. Gottwald argues persuasively that all the important basic themes of the source material in the text can be understood as rooted in the matrix

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not as an *ethnic* struggle but as a *class* struggle, in which a variety of underclass groups are motivated by what Jameson would call a 'visionary ideological construction'.³⁸⁶

However, objections to the peasant-revolt model are, in Gottwald's own words, 'not hard to come by', not least, the lack of specific textual and archaeological evidence.³⁸⁷ Is the revolt model any more than 'wishful retrojection' by those who wish to find in scripture a basis for contemporary liberation ideology?³⁸⁸ A.A. Rainey depicts Gottwald's efforts to make the early Israelites into 'idealised peasants, bearing the torch for the "New Left" under the banner of Yahweh' as 'merely an amateur's attempt at pseudo-Marxism'!³⁸⁹ Has the model more to do with the ideology [or utopian vision] of the critic than with the text? Gottwald counters this latter objection by alleging that contemporary proponents of the conquest model have equally been motivated by ideological factors.³⁹⁰ This whole discussion clearly demonstrates the significance of the ideological position of the critic.

Gottwald's eventual conclusion is that there is at least 'ample evidence' for the revolt model to demand 'further elaboration and application'.³⁹¹ Undoubtedly, the strength of the model is that it takes seriously the wider socio-economic circumstances from which 'egalitarian'³⁹² early Israel emerged and, in Jamesonian fashion, seeks *to align*

of invading 'Exodus Yahwists'. Gottwald further seeks to demonstrate that the revolt model perhaps best of all the fits the archaeological evidence.

³⁸⁶ Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 228. See above, pp. 68-69.

³⁸⁷ except perhaps for the Assembly at Shechem (Joshua 24), which, says Gottwald, 'can be construed not unfairly as a great act of incorporation in which part of the Canaanite populace, purged of their oppressive kings, also threw off their Baal religion ... and accepted the God of Israel' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 126). However, the same criticism which Gottwald applied to the proponents of the immigration model could be applied equally to the revolt model: 'The notion may be said to depend excessively on bits and pieces of materials drawn randomly from the text without regard to the overall Biblical perspective' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 208).

³⁸⁸ Rainey points out that Gottwald admits that in the biblical text 'we meet no clear articulation of an egalitarian social movement that directly challenged the feudal system of Canaan' (*Tribes*, p. 406); and maintains that Gottwald's subsequent attempt to prove that they did stage a revolt anyway 'is nothing but wishful thinking and has no basis in fact' (Rainey, Review of *Tribes*, p. 542).

³⁸⁹ Rainey, Review of *Tribes*, p. 543.

³⁹⁰ – such as a desire to prove the truth of the Bible or even to justify conquest in the modern world. He also suggests that the immigration model had been unduly 'stimulated by modish but mistaken ways of reconstructing history and social evolution' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 128). Compare the view of Whitlam (discussed above, pp. 37-38) that the immigration model reflects the process of the establishment of the *contemporary* state of Israel.

³⁹¹ Gottwald concludes the section by tackling an important objection to the peasant-revolt theory: how was it Israel took power into its own hands and at the same time attributed the source of power to Yahweh? This is a significant issue, especially in view of the preoccupation of ideological criticism with issues of power. Gottwald argues:

Such a model must incorporate the highly centralised and richly articulated religion of Yahweh, but it must do so sociologically by understanding the religion as a social phenomenon related to all the other social phenomena within the system. And it must do so without simplistic recourse to the tautological, philosophically idealist claim that because religion was central to the social system, it can be posited as the unmoved mover of the Israelite mutation (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 233).

³⁹² In later work, Gottwald prefers 'agrarian social revolution' to the phrase 'peasant revolt'; and 'communitarian mode of production' is preferred to 'egalitarian society'. See, for example, Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours*, p. 81. Within *Tribes* itself, Gottwald later makes clear in a footnote that 'egalitarianism' is not used in the modern sense of the legally established rights of the individual but rather 'a social-organisational arrangement lacking ranking and stratification' with

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these with the ideology of the text and with the cracks and fissures in the text. The immense value of the revolt model lies in its insistence *on a new way of looking at old data* that opens up fresh possibilities and opportunities for research and interpretation.³⁹³

Part 6 - Models of the Synchronic Structure (1) – All Israel; Tribes; Protective Associations; Extended Families

Gottwald's comprehensive analysis of Israel's subdivision into tribes, clans, and families cannot be detailed here, though it must stand as one of the major sociological achievements of *The Tribes*.³⁹⁴ An important aspect of Gottwald's claim to fame is, in fact, the *detailed* sociological analysis offered in this chapter and elsewhere, which goes well beyond the sociological generalisations that characterise some later attempts at ideological criticism.³⁹⁵

Part 7 - Models of Social Structure (2): All Israel, Amphictyony or Confederacy?

Gottwald rejects the amphictyonic model for early Israel (which was still being canvassed in his day).³⁹⁶ Furthermore, he insists that there is no evidence of any pre-

'undifferentiated access to resources' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 798, note 635). In other words, it denotes a 'classless' society, in which everyone (as the Australians would say) has a 'fair go'.

³⁹³ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 226. In fact, Gottwald ultimately concludes that only some combination of the conquest model and the revolt model would seem to do justice both to the deep-rooted biblical traditions and also to the socio-economic environment.

Given impetus by *The Tribes*, a number of other studies followed, offering a variety of models for the emergence of Israel as an essentially indigenous process. An example of these is the 'transformation' model of Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam (Robert B. Coote and Keith W. Whitelam, 'The Emergence of Israel: Social Transformation and State Formation Following the Decline in Late Bronze Age Trade', *Semeia* 37 [1986], pp. 107-47).

³⁹⁴ The common assumption that Israel was divided and subdivided into tribes, clans, and families is not self-evident from the texts and requires further explication, as does the function of these units within Israelite society as a whole. Gottwald therefore sets out in Part 6 to do three things: to develop a model of the levels and functions of social organisation of Israel based primarily on biblical data; to clarify the model by reference to wider sociological and anthropological research on tribal systems; to undertake initial exploration of the sequences of interaction among the different levels in a diachronic model of the formation of the system. At the conclusion of his analysis, Gottwald highlights a number of profound questions. To what extent was early Israel's tribal formation a result of deliberate choice and to what extent the result of circumstances beyond its control? In what respects and for what reasons did the Israelite radical mutation in Canaan differ from the Phoenician and Aramaean patterns? Can we actually say that Israel's break with Canaan was 'ethically and religiously based' or should we more properly speak of Israel's break with previous Canaanite social organisation as being 'ethically and religiously *expressed*'? Here Gottwald is commenting on quotations from Mendenhall, *Tenth Generation*, pp. 12 and 14 and he concludes: 'In my judgement, if Mendenhall's work contained no other issues, it would be significant for its posing of these methodologically crucial questions'. Finally Gottwald asks, Was Israel's socially revolutionary tribalism 'bottom-up' or 'top-down' in its formation? He maintains that it is wise to view 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' analyses as complimentary approaches in a single process in which complicated forces are working in both directions. On this last point, Gottwald provides two very illuminating charts, which show the bottom-up and top-down interplay of forces that brought pre-monarchic Israel into being (Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 327 – 331).

³⁹⁵ It should be noted that Gottwald later somewhat revised his thinking, acknowledging in the light of more recent scholarship, anthropological and archaeological, that he may earlier have oversimplified the concept of 'tribe'. See Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible in its Social World and Ours*, pp. 79-80. See also the comments by Carol Meyers in 'Tribes and Tribulations: Rethorising Earliest "Israel"' in Boer (ed.), *Tracking 'The Tribes'*, pp. 35-45.

³⁹⁶ Gottwald gives a full discussion in *Tribes*, pp. 345-357. Duane Christensen, in an early review of *Tribes* (in which he acknowledges that the work had the potential to become a classic) admires Gottwald's 'systematic demolition' of the amphictyonic hypothesis as advanced by Noth' but remains unconvinced (Review of *Tribes*, p. 116).

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monarchic prominence for the number *twelve* in the tribal set-up.³⁹⁷ This begs the question as to why the memory of the twelve-tribe scheme survived so persistently. The answer Gottwald gives is that the symbolic twelve-tribe scheme fulfilled an important *ideological* function, as a continuing *symbol* of the unity of Israel in the face of political and social divisiveness.³⁹⁸ A particular significance of this section of Gottwald's work is this demonstration of the power of *ideological symbols*.

Part 8 - Comparative Social Systems and Economic Modes: The Sociohistoric Matrices of Liberated Israel

Gottwald describes in detail the Canaanite feudalism and the wider Egyptian imperialism from which he believes Israel to have emerged.³⁹⁹ As we have seen, he strongly resists any idea that Israelite occupation is to be understood as a movement from pastoral nomadism to settled agriculture. The real polarisation was between city and countryside, between statist and tribal ideologies. Gottwald explicates this rural-urban antithesis by using the structuralist concept of social *dimorphemes* and *antimorphemes*. The coexistence of agriculturist and pastoralists, or of town and tribe in a single community, are forms of *dimorphism*. Gottwald posits the antimorphemes of city and countryside as two conflicting and clashing forms of sociopolitical life,⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁷ He maintains that the twelve-tribe scheme originated as an administrative convenience around the time of the Davidic monarchy and that it was later replaced by Solomon with a more logical and centralised system.

³⁹⁸ Despite Gottwald's efforts to explain it away, and despite the variations in tribal lists, the number 'twelve' does seem to be deeply rooted in the biblical traditions from earliest to latest. I draw a parallel from my own part of the world, where, as in ancient Israel, selectively remembered traditions interact with current community identities and political tensions. Northern Ireland is often referred to by Irish Nationalists as 'the Six Counties', whereas the Republic of Ireland is 'the twenty six counties'. These have come to serve as ideologically charged propaganda phrases, though there are many, North and South, who could not give the thirty two county names! It is the nationalist / republican dream that one day there will be a 'thirty-two county state'. Such is the ideological force of the *thirty-two* county symbolism that no government in the Republic would dare to replace the county basis for local government with a more logical administrative set-up. The number thirty two has become *ideologically* sacrosanct. In a not dissimilar way, the biblical traditions suggest a deep-rooted and highly ideological memory of a *twelve-tribe* Israel, even though not everyone could have recited the list of the twelve. After the partition of the kingdom, there might well have arisen a yearning for a return to the twelve-tribe state (parallel to the longing for a thirty-two county Ireland), which was an ideological (rather than a numerical) way of speaking of 'all Israel'.

³⁹⁹ There is also an extensive discussion of the role and place of the '*apiru*', a social rather than an ethnic group, often with outsider or outlaw status, largely dependent on the feudal status-quo for their livelihood, whether as contract labourers, mercenary soldiers, or brigands, who are, in part at least, the antecedents of the Israelites. This analysis is based largely on the diplomatic correspondence of the Amarna age (c 1410 – 1350 BCE).

⁴⁰⁰ Gottwald helpfully elaborates on the antithetical traits between city and countryside in a useful table (p. 462), which is summarised here:

City	Countryside
Urbanism	Village life
Maximal division of labour	Minimal division of labour
Social stratification	Class levelling
Imposed quasi-feudal social relations	Egalitarian social relations
Political hierarchy	Diffused and limited self-government
Military imperialism	Military self-defence
Latifundist agriculture	Autonomous peasant agriculture
Commercialism	Barter trade
Concentration of surplus wealth in a sociopolitical elite	Consumption of wealth by immediate producers

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representing ideological conflict between clashing modes of production (tributary and communitarian). The antimorpheme of the countryside represents an egalitarian blend of the dimorphemes of agriculture and pastoralism. The antimorpheme of the city represents an intrusive centralisation of power and expropriation of the produce of the rural dimorphemes in order to sustain the basically parasitic life of the urban centre. The structural and interlocking nature of the rural-statist tension means that even if the countryside people overthrow the central power, 'the tenacity of the hierarchic and stratified forms of sociopolitical life is so great that the formerly egalitarian-minded victims tend to slip into the city-dictated roles as a new group of oppressors'. And so, a 'seemingly endless' contest goes on between countryside and city.⁴⁰¹

Gottwald postulates the gradual coming together in the post-Amarna period of 'apiru, pastoral nomads and exploited peasant farmers in common cause against the urban, statist, Canaanite system.⁴⁰² These diverse groups are united as one antimorpheme of the city / countryside or state / tribe dimorphism. These groups are not outside invaders but elements from within the Canaanite social world. With the appearance of Israel, the local tribes at last found an ideological base and an organisational mode for successfully challenging the Canaanite city state.

Using a Marxist model, Gottwald's detailed analysis concludes that the 'settlement' arose out of what Eagleton would describe as a clash of different *modes of production*, rural and urban. Gottwald's thesis is that the tributary (or Asiatic) mode of production of the ruling Canaanites was overthrown and replaced by a 'communitarian' mode of production, which lasted until the advent of the monarchy.⁴⁰³ However, it should be remembered that the use of sociological *models* in this way can point only to the *probabilities* of social structures, which must not then be treated as proven historical reconstruction. One should perhaps also exercise caution about applying to the ancient Near East a model derived from more contemporary western phenomena.

Gottwald's concept of dimorphemes and antimorphemes is one that has not been pursued in any of the more recent experiments with ideological criticism among biblical scholars. It anticipates and is closely allied to the Jamesonian notion of ideologemes or basic ideological units. There is clear scope for further detailed research along these lines.

Gottwald draws attention to the way in which disparate groups can be welded together under a common ideological banner. He could have made the further point that the complex nature of such an integrated ideology, masking inevitable underlying tensions among the diverse groups, is also part of the explanation for the tendency for

⁴⁰¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 467.

⁴⁰² Rainey rejects Gottwald's interpretation of the role and status of the 'apiru. In view of evidence (which Gottwald mentions but explains away) that various 'apiru groups were capable of operating chariots in warfare, Rainey maintains that they do not have their origin in some exploited lower peasant class. He states that every instance in which 'apiru, as mercenaries or as rebels, make a political or military move, it was for the purpose of establishing a state or dynasty along Canaanite feudal lines (Rainey, *Review of Tribes*, p. 542). In fact, however, Gottwald characterises 'apiru as a term for a wide range of 'outlaw' groups, who had the potential to become slaves, but who also had the potential to acquire considerable political or military power [such as Abraham].

⁴⁰³ The tension and crisis of the Philistine threat meant that a central military organisation was required, which inevitably led to the breakdown of the 'communitarian' mode of production and a return to a centralised tributary mode (Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 464-65).

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‘formerly egalitarian-minded victims to slip into the city-dictated roles as a new group of oppressors’. The clash of interests among the different groups may help to explain the turbulent post-settlement period depicted in the book of Judges.

Part 9 - A New Egalitarian Canaanite Society: Liberated Israel vis-à-vis Indigenous Peoples

Gottwald maintains that the Yahwist community developed a remarkable ‘unitary culture and social order’⁴⁰⁴ that had been totally lacking in Amarna Canaan. The religious cult and ideology of Yahweh were thus ‘potent organisational and symbolic forces’. Israel broke totally free from the Canaanite feudal system and ‘extended its outlaw system over an entire region and an entire people so that outlawry became inlawry, the basis for a new order’. Gottwald perceives Yahwism not just as a religion but as the whole ideological system undergirding the new social order.⁴⁰⁵

Gottwald argues strongly for the hypothesis that the Hebrew substantive **יֹשֵׁב** means ‘ruler’ rather than ‘inhabitant’. Gottwald’s thesis, if correct, means that the call for the extermination of Canaanites is directed not against ordinary inhabitants but against the oppressive rulers within the Canaanite feudal system. It is in this light that Gottwald reinterprets the *herem*.⁴⁰⁶ This theory is well argued linguistically and it holds an attractive plausibility.⁴⁰⁷ However, although the theory may be heuristic for

⁴⁰⁴ It has been noted (for example, in Boer, ‘Marx Method, and Gottwald’, pp. 118-120) that, despite his Marxist perspective, Gottwald speaks little of *class* conflict within early Israel. Essentially, Gottwald saw egalitarian early Israel as a classless society – or, rather, as a class ‘in itself’ and ‘for itself’ (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 489). In his later work on monarchic Israel, Gottwald focuses more specifically on *class* divisions within Israel: see, for example, Gottwald, *Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and Ours*, pp. 130-64.

⁴⁰⁵ The levitical priesthood is credited with providing an intellectual and organisational cadre of leadership:

The Exodus Levites introduced the cult of Yahweh ... not strictly as a substitute for Canaanite El, but as a deity who could absorb valued El attributes ... for meeting coalition needs, particularly for symbolising, defining, and defending the locus of sovereignty within a diffuse egalitarian community (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 496).

⁴⁰⁶ He notes, however:

Much additional work has to be done to test and refine the hypothesis proposed, namely, that behind the *herem* lie selective expulsion and annihilation of kings and upper classes and the selective expropriation of resources such as metals – all with the aim of buttressing the egalitarian mechanisms of Israelite society and providing a solid, renewable support base for the peasant economy. Whatever the detailed outcome of further research, such a proposal is already more coherent and testable than vague invocations of pastoral nomadic background, not to mention endeavours to explain *herem* solely by religious ideology or psycho-logistic taboo theories (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 550).

⁴⁰⁷ The full argument is given in Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 512-530 and is summarised briefly here. The verb **יָשַׁב** is normally taken to mean ‘sit’ or ‘dwell’; but Gottwald suggests that the basic meaning is ‘sit’, not ‘dwell’; and that a meaning ‘ruler’ has arisen from ‘sit’ in specialised contexts [e.g., throne-sitters, or, as in English, where a judge ‘sits’ in a particular court]. This seems to me to be not implausible: government terms often have quite a different meaning from ordinary usage, for example the word ‘secretary’ in English when used in a phrase such as Home Secretary. Another example, somewhat parallel to Gottwald’s proposal for **יֹשֵׁב**, is the Irish usage of the title ‘Resident’ for a local magistrate or judge. Gottwald also contends that the term ‘Canaanite’, originally denoting ‘merchantman’, was, like the word *‘apiru*, originally a class term rather than an ethnic designation. These two factors combine to give a completely different ‘spin’ on the phrase traditionally translated ‘inhabitants of Canaan’, which is construed by Gottwald as denoting not the ordinary inhabitants but the *ruling elite* of the Canaanite merchant-class.

Gottwald’s theory has not found universal acceptance, by any means. Typical of early reaction to the hypothesis is Rainey’s review, in which he speaks dismissively of the ‘superficiality’ of Gottwald’s

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theologians anxious to find an escape-clause from the ethnic-cleansing of Canaanites, it runs counter to the import of the biblical texts as we *now* have them. Gottwald, however, claims to have pierced through the Deuteronomistic ideology that was later impressed on the text, an ideology that *later* envisaged a complete cleansing of pre-Israelite inhabitants from Canaan, reflecting issues of power and struggle in the Deuteronomist's own contemporary world.⁴⁰⁸

The merit of Gottwald's approach is that he interprets the settlement against the wider socio-political background (again anticipating Jamesonian methodology). He has demonstrated that such approaches may well prove more fertile than those based on literary-historical methods alone. He offers a new reading strategy, in which a text that has been used (in Apartheid South Africa, for example) as an undergirding for oppression emerges as a programme for liberation. In effect, Gottwald is deriving a utopian vision from the ideology of the text, not unlike the utopian concept of Jameson and Ricoeur.

On the other hand, Whitelam's criticisms⁴⁰⁹ of Gottwald should be recalled at this point. The peasant-revolt theory still views the main impetus for change as coming from *outside*; and Gottwald speaks of the sweeping away of the *inferior* religion and culture of the Canaanites. What is the evidence, asks Whitelam, on which Gottwald bases this negative assessment of Canaanite culture? The detailed spadework, so characteristic of Gottwald's work elsewhere, is missing on this issue.⁴¹⁰

Part 10 - The Religion of the New Egalitarian Society: Idealist, Structural-Functional, and Historical Cultural-material Models

In Part 10, the systematic interconnections between religion and society are set forth in what is described as 'a model of structural-functional interdependence'.⁴¹¹

Gottwald's proposition is that mono-Yahwism (as distinct from monotheism)⁴¹² was 'the *function* of sociopolitical egalitarianism in pre-monarchic Israel'. His summary conclusion is:

Mono-Yahwism was, in short, a delicately balanced, innovative, cultic-ideological instrument for selectively strengthening both egalitarianism in social relations and an effective united

philological method. Rainey remains convinced that יושב denotes a lawful resident or citizen (Rainey, Review of *Tribes*, p. 541).

⁴⁰⁸ The later Deuteronomistic editor had presumably already come to construe יושב as referring to the general 'inhabitants'; and in this may have been influenced by the ethnic conflicts of his own day.

⁴⁰⁹ See Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, p. 204.

⁴¹⁰ Furthermore, Gottwald's depiction of the ancient Israelites as 'diverse ethnically and culturally' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 215) sounds to Whitelam suspiciously like the language of twentieth-century Zionism.

⁴¹¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 608. Gottwald sets out three essential methodological criteria for a *functional* interpretative model: a method that will plot the correlations between Israelite society and Israelite religion; a method that will mandate the clarification of causal relationships according to laws of probability; a method that will facilitate the comparative differentiation of the Israelite religion-society complex in a field of other religion-society complexes, both historically and typically. 'Function' is defined by Gottwald as 'the relation of dependence or interdependence between two or more variables in a field of social action' (p. 609).

Charles Carter observes that one of the lasting contributions that *Tribes* has made to biblical scholarship 'is a thorough-going commitment to *modelling*'. He also comments that biblical scholars, unfamiliar with sociological modelling, often 'question the validity of applying what they consider "external" models to biblical cultures' (Carter, 'Powerful Ideology', p. 53).

⁴¹² that is, *recognition* of only one god, Yahweh, as distinct from belief in the existence of only one god.

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front against enemies ... in the direct command over the production and consumption of goods and in self-rule of the community through diffused and limited powers.⁴¹³

Gottwald's analysis is based on a cultural-materialist approach along Marxian⁴¹⁴ lines. The Marxian model presupposes at the outset 'the priority of Israelite *social* relations over Yahwist *religion* in the initiation of cultural innovation'.⁴¹⁵ It was not a new religion that brought about Israel's egalitarian revolution but a new set of *social* relations that gave rise to a new religion.⁴¹⁶ However, Gottwald also asserts that a cultural-materialist model need not exclude 'the reciprocal, reinforcing impact of Yahwism on the primary social relations rooted in production'. Yahwism, in other words, functioned as a 'feed-back loop' or a 'servo-mechanism', which reinforced social change.⁴¹⁷ To put Gottwald's argument in Eagletonian terms, he is proposing that a new social formation (general mode of production) gave rise to a new general ideology (Yahwism), which in turn served to reinforce the new social formation, and which was inscribed in 'communitarian' texts (literary mode of production).⁴¹⁸

This hypothesis, maintains Gottwald, takes full account of material conditions. The hypothesis is testable: it can be falsified or verified by (sociological) probability calculations. Such a hypothesis, he claims, is a 'real hypothesis', which contrasts with the idealist 'non-hypotheses'⁴¹⁹ of traditional interpretation. However, Gottwald has not actually demonstrated that religion is *necessarily* derived from social factors and not *vice versa*. He has simply developed a hypothesis predicated upon that Marxist model.⁴²⁰ He has not set out (by probability calculations or otherwise) to test the inverse hypothesis that a religious phenomenon was the catalyst for social change and that it was social egalitarianism that was the reinforcing 'servo-mechanism' of the

⁴¹³ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 611 (my emphasis).

⁴¹⁴ After a survey of Durkheim and Weber as 'initiators of continuing streams of sociological tradition that to date have been only infrequently and unmethodically applied to a study of the religion of ancient Israel', Gottwald settles on the Marxian [sic] model as the most appropriate for his purpose and most likely to yield results. At this point, he explicates more fully his Marxist philosophical base and methodology (*Tribes*, pp. 631-640).

⁴¹⁵ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 640 (my emphasis). Marx had also stressed the 'masking or mystifying function of religion in giving ideological justification to those power relations by which some dominated the means of production at the expense of others'. However, Gottwald observes:

It should be emphasised that an historical cultural-materialist account of religion as the mystifying validation of social order does not necessitate the attribution of hypocrisy or deceit to the social actors who entertain the religious beliefs, nor even to those at the top of society who profit most from the religion's social security function (p. 640).

⁴¹⁶ He continues:

The cultural-materialist priority of social relations over the religious formations *is attested in the biblical traditions* by the recognition that the ancestors of Israel struggled towards social-egalitarian existence with the help of older religious forms, such as the gods of the fathers and El, before they realised their objective more fully as an intertribal association with a Yahweh cult and ideology (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 647 [my emphasis]).

⁴¹⁷ Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 642-49.

⁴¹⁸ Nonetheless, he cautions:

Lest this cultural-material reduction seem to deprive Yahwism of its admittedly immense significance ... let it be emphatically repeated that the feedback effect of Yahwism within the social-egalitarian formation of Israel was of such importance as a servo-mechanism that only as the social actors were able to produce just such innovative ideas of 'transcending' sources of social energy were they able to 'clinch' the social relations of equality in an enduring pattern over some two centuries of time (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 648).

⁴¹⁹ an example of an ideological slogan used where the argument is weak!

⁴²⁰ It should be noted that more recent scholars in the Marxist tradition are less insistent on the priority of the *material* over the *ideological*. It should also be noted that Gottwald differs sharply from Mendenhall on this point.

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religious ideology. Indeed, throughout the earlier sections of the work, Gottwald had actually made the claim that it was a small religious group of levitical Yahwists from outside who were the ‘ideological and organisational spearhead’ of the revolution,⁴²¹ a view that seems to run counter to his later insistence on the priority of socio-economic over religious causation.

Part 11 - Biblical Theology or Biblical Sociology

Gottwald aims in this final section to produce a social hermeneutic of the Bible that will be both scientifically and religiously cogent: not so much a new theology as a new theological method that will ‘employ the biblical records as *ideological instruments* of the social formation of Israel’.⁴²² In effect, Gottwald is seeking to develop a new ideological-critical *hermeneutic*.

Gottwald draws attention to the fact that there is much in common between Yahwism and the generality of ancient Near Eastern religion.⁴²³ He also identifies points where he believes ‘mutant Israelite religion’ to stand out as a ‘highly idiosyncratic version of the common theological pattern’.⁴²⁴ He suggests that the tendency in the ancient Near East towards ‘high gods’ was carried forward by Israel with unusual rigour to the point of exclusive recognition of one deity. This sole high-God was conceived by ‘egalitarian sociopolitical analogies’. Yahweh was in bond with an egalitarian people, not a ruling class or dynasty, and was interpreted by ‘egalitarian functionaries’.⁴²⁵ Gottwald restates the uniqueness of Yahwism not in terms of religious idealism but by rooting the religion of early Israel in ‘its distinctive social-constitutional framework’. Yahwism thus arose when ‘a radical social experiment birthed a radical theology without which it could not have succeeded as well as it did’.⁴²⁶ All of the main articles of Yahwist faith, maintains Gottwald, can thus be socio-economically demythologised:

- Yahweh is the historically concretised, primordial power to establish and sustain social equality in the face of counter-oppression;
- The chosen people is the distinctive self-consciousness of a society of equals;
- Covenant is the bonding of decentralised social groups in a larger society of equals without authoritarian leadership;

⁴²¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 491.

⁴²² Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 667 (my emphasis).

⁴²³ Gottwald cites one significant study that had sought to demonstrate that Israel’s uniqueness did not lie (as has been commonly supposed) in their attitude to history: Bertil Albrektson, *History and the Gods: An Essay on the Idea of Historical Events as Divine Manifestations in the Ancient Near East and in Israel* (Coneiectanea Biblica, OT series 1: 1967).

⁴²⁴ Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 679-91.

⁴²⁵ A fuller summary of Gottwald’s list of the unique features of Yahwism is as follows (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 676-78):

- the sole high-God was conceived by egalitarian sociopolitical analogies (though Yahweh’s apparent masculinity prevented a challenge to the male dominance of the ancient world);
- the sole high-God was coherently manifest in power, justice, and mercy;
- the sole high-God was in bond with an egalitarian people (not with a land or region or city or dynasty);
- the sole high-God was interpreted by egalitarian functionaries.

Some of these points of difference are perhaps overstated: for example, the high-gods of other regions were also committed to ‘power, justice, and mercy’.

⁴²⁶ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 700.

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- Eschatology ... is the sustained commitment of fellow-tribesmen to a society of equals with the confidence and determination that this way of life can prevail against great environmental odds.⁴²⁷

Gottwald, however, seems to have had an ideological blind-spot to the down-side of a 'chosen people' who can only enjoy 'a society of equals' at the expense of the elimination of Canaanite culture. Another set of issues that Gottwald overlooks are those to do with the apparent masculinity of Yahweh. However, Gottwald maintains that 'theological conundrums', such as Yahweh's apparently arbitrary 'election' of Israel, only arise because the cult of Yahweh did not die out when the social matrix that gave it birth disappeared. *Yahwism lingered on as a religious ideology under social conditions that no longer corresponded to the social conditions obtaining in earliest Israel*. Indeed, one might add that, with the emergence of the centralised social formation associated with the Jerusalem monarchy, egalitarian Yahwism was turned completely on its head and used as a means of social control and exploitation, the very antithesis of its original function. A key conclusion to Gottwald's work is summed up in these words:

To purport to believe the same things in different social and intellectual conditions is in fact not to believe the same things at all.⁴²⁸

In order for Gottwald to achieve his theological conclusions, it was necessary for him to 'privilege' the hypothetical underlying sources over against the statist, elitist ideology which he believes to have been later impressed on the text. At the outset of the 1999 edition, Gottwald emphasises that in the biblical text we 'encounter *multiple ideologies*' to be discerned through 'layered and concentric frames of meaning'. He also emphasises 'the multiple predispositions of interpreters'.⁴²⁹ Presumably the fact that Gottwald privileges the underlying egalitarian ideology is a function of his own egalitarian ideology. In effect, Gottwald, in this final section, has moved through the social-scientific and interpretative-sociological modes into social-critical mode, in which he evaluates the distinctive ideologies discerned in the text by his own contemporary, action-oriented value-base. A social-critical critique of this kind is essential if it is the intention, as it was for Gottwald, that the ideological analysis of the ancient text should have action-oriented implications for contemporary praxis.

'What does this ancient Yahwism have to say to our modern situation?' asks Gottwald. There is but one way, he maintains, in which those ancient religious symbols can be employed today in anything like their full range and power, and that is in a situation of social struggle, where people are attempting a breakthrough towards a freer and fuller life based on equality and communal self-possession. Even then, however:

⁴²⁷ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 692.

⁴²⁸ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 704. Gottwald here assumes a pre-monarchic origin for the 'election' traditions, whereas much modern scholarship would see this as a post-monarchic idealisation. It is significant that Gottwald, in later work, speaks of the ethos of the tribal era as undergirding the emerging Judaism of the 'colonial' era. He writes:

The cultural and religious vibrancy of Israel's tribal era, surviving as a substratum under the monarchy, eventually fructified the energies and commitments of colonial Israelites to fashion a fundamentally a-political mode of communal life. In the process, the ancient tribal cult of Yahweh, emerging out of its Canaanite milieu, enriched by royal, wisdom, and prophetic elements during the monarchy, was shaped into the literate monotheism of colonial times (Gottwald, *Puzzling Politics*, p. 200).

⁴²⁹ Gottwald, *Tribes* (2nd edn., revised), p. xli.

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it is a risky business to 'summon up' powerful symbolism out of a distant past unless the symbol users are very self-conscious of their choices and applications, and fully aware of how their social struggle is like and unlike the social struggles of the architects of the symbols.⁴³⁰

Efforts to draw 'religious inspiration' or 'biblical values' from, for example, early Israel 'will be romantic and utopian unless resolutely correlated to both the ancient and the contemporary cultural-material and social-organisational foundations'.⁴³¹

3.13 Summary and Concluding Comments

Clearly, Gottwald has laid an important foundation for ideological criticism within Biblical Studies. In particular, he has demonstrated that Yahwism cannot be studied as a purely religious phenomenon in isolation from the wider social-political-economic system of which it is a functional part. He has highlighted the ideological nature of historical texts and also the ideological biases of contemporary interpreters. He has demonstrated the productivity of using sociological methodology (including sociological 'models') alongside more traditional methods of literary and historical enquiry. He has introduced into biblical scholarship important concepts, such as mode of production, and the inter-relationship of religion and the socio-economic-material context. He has amply demonstrated the truth of his maxim that a sociological approach can enable the discovery of 'new relations between old facts'.

An important principle for Gottwald is that historical reconstruction is an essential preliminary to sociological enquiry. However, Gottwald's confidence (in the 1970s) in the assured results of form-critical and traditio-historical methodology in reconstructing the history of pre-monarchic Israel from biblical texts would now be widely questioned. The cumulative effect of conclusions based on the probability and conjecture of such methods must compound to a significant margin of error. Many of Gottwald's conclusions, including his claims for the uniqueness of Yahwism and for the egalitarian nature of early Israelite faith, are thus dependent on a questionable historical reconstruction.⁴³² Gottwald's methodology is therefore of more ongoing value than his specific historical (or even ideological) reconstructions.⁴³³

⁴³⁰ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 701. Gottwald devotes considerable space to discussion of this point, which he clearly regarded as of considerable significance.

⁴³¹ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 706. A problem with this proposition is that it restricts biblical interpretation to a scholarly elite and runs counter to the contemporary move in Third-World contexts towards the significance of 'popular' readings. In later work, he particularly warns against the 'habit of biblical proof-texting to validate one form or another of politics' (Gottwald, 'Puzzling Politics', p. 202).

⁴³² Nonetheless, in one of his most recent publications, Gottwald still makes this claim:

While a history of the tribal era, or even a full profile of its tribal organisation, is not reconstructible at present, the clear signs of a loose pre-state association of peasants and herders are evident in the biblical text and in archaeological finds (Gottwald, 'Puzzling Politics', p. 200).

He further notes that the Hebrew Bible stands out as different among texts from comparable ancient Near East states in that it contains 'a sizeable body of traditions from the tribal era'. He attributes this to the fact that it 'served the political and religious interests of subsequent Israelites in the colonial era when Israelites were thrown into a stateless condition analogous in some ways to the tribal period (p. 200).

⁴³³ Gottwald himself observes (in the Preface to the 2nd edition) that 'every one of the book's major claims, and much of its detailed argumentation, would today require re-formulation and fresh substantiation'. He continues:

The value of keeping *Tribes* in print, I believe, lies chiefly in the far-reaching challenge that it has posed to traditional biblical scholarship, challenges that are as pertinent today. *Indeed one can think of Tribes as having opened a Pandora's box of problems and possibilities in the social-critical study of the Bible* (Gottwald, *Tribes* [2nd edn., 1999], p. xxvi [my emphasis]).

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Gottwald makes a strong case that, of the three models of the Israelite settlement, only the revolt model makes any sustained attempt to take proper account of *both* the socio-political circumstances *and* the biblical text. He ably illustrates that Yahwism must have functioned within an overall social system, from which it cannot be abstracted or detached; and that there was a reciprocal interaction and interdependence between the cult of Yahweh and the social formation.

A promising point of departure for further study is Gottwald's delineation of the *dimorphemes* and *antimorphemes* of rural and urban, or tribal and statist, as representing the essential dichotomy of pre-Israelite social structure and the essential ingredients of its eventual dissolution. The process by which the rise of the monarchy eventually asserted the dominance of urban-statist mode over against the continuing rural-tribal mode would be a potentially fruitful avenue of research for further ideological-critical analysis.

Gottwald has not been without his critics.⁴³⁴ Among earlier reviewers, Rainey dismissively claimed that 'Gottwald himself had no real control over any of the relevant source material, linguistic, sociological, or archaeological'. Rainey viewed the *Tribes* as 'the work of an outsider, one who has read books about sociology and anthropology but who has never been a practitioner'.⁴³⁵

Jacques Berlinerblau has more recently offered what he claims this to be the first extended sociological critique of *Tribes*⁴³⁶ (which has never been reviewed by an academic *sociological* journal).⁴³⁷ Although acknowledging that Gottwald has achieved a major breakthrough in introducing sociological methodology to Biblical Studies,⁴³⁸ Berlinerblau particularly takes issue with Gottwald's 'superimposition of a Marxist lens directly upon a structuralist-functional one',⁴³⁹ which for Berlinerblau

⁴³⁴ *Tribes* did, of course, also receive a number of very positive reviews, for example, Walter Brueggemann, 'The Tribes of Yahweh: an Essay Review' and Carol Meyers, 'Review of Tribes of Yahweh', *CBQ* 43 (1981), pp. 104-109. Meyers writes:

At every step of the long path through this wide-ranging scholarly achievement, even when disagreement with dense social-scientific terminology occurs, the serious reader will find the author's erudition and intellectual energy ... provocative and enlightening. ... One senses that *The Tribes of Yahweh* is monumental both in scope and in contribution to the turbulent field of biblical studies, with ... refinement and expansion of its conclusions constituting the measure of its impact (p. 109).

⁴³⁵ Rainey, 'Review of Tribes', pp. 541 & 543.

⁴³⁶ Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', pp. 59-76.

⁴³⁷ Much to Gottwald's disappointment: see *Tribes* (2nd edn., 1999), pp. xxx-xxxi.

⁴³⁸ However, Berlinerblau is generally critical of Gottwald's 'lack of disciplinary balance' in his use of sociological methodology. He comments:

The sociological theorising, so lauded early in the book, virtually disappears for some six hundred pages. For the most part, Gottwald speaks and reasons like an exegete – a state of affairs that does not always help us to understand his references to freighted theoretical terms such as 'system', 'consciousness', and 'ideology'. Only in the forty-ninth and fiftieth chapters did the author marshal those resources which could help him frame a sociology of Israelite religion (Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower' p. 60).

⁴³⁹ Berlinerblau is puzzled by the lack of explicit theoretical basis for Gottwald's 'systems analysis'. He comments: 'One might plausibly refer to Gottwald as a Marxist systems theorist, were it not for a curious omission. For some reason, his text and footnotes give very little indication as to which systems theorists helped him craft his ubiquitous concept of system' (Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', p. 63). Berlinerblau concludes, however, that the main influence on Gottwald was Talcott Parsons, who is only occasionally mentioned in footnotes, but whose influence is evidenced by repeated use of phrases such as 'action system', 'servo-mechanisms', 'feedback loops', and 'cybernetics'. Berlinerblau then observes:

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has blurred Gottwald's conclusions.⁴⁴⁰ Berlinerblau also observes that Gottwald's premonarchical Israelites must be 'the most acutely self-conscious people in ancient history'.⁴⁴¹ They have contemplated every significant aspect of their social, economic, and political circumstances with great insight, as a nation of 'progressive theoretical sociologists', who are able to make sense of their socio-economic coordinates and are (uniquely) capable of 'coupling consciousness with action'!⁴⁴² Berlinerblau makes the point that this type of revolutionary self-consciousness is exactly what Marx himself failed to stimulate in his own day. Gottwald has not cited any historical parallel of a liberated group who consciously made the eradication of all oppression a corner-stone of their future society.⁴⁴³

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Gottwald's *Tribes* is his insistence on the Marxist base-superstructure model. For Gottwald, Yahwism is the *product* or *function* of a sociological mutation rather than its cause - albeit that Yahwism also functioned as a reinforcing servo-mechanism for the early Israelite egalitarian society.⁴⁴⁴ However, it is important also to note the significant extent to which Gottwald parts company with classic Marxism at this point. For Marx, religion was the product of 'alienation' in the socio-economic 'base', a function of the unequal division of resources, a projection into the future of an *illusory* happiness not to be

Yet instead of hugging the Parsonian coast line, Gottwald turns his stern recklessly to the shore and heads out to sea. Bereft of sociological citations to guide his journey, he nearly capsizes in the swirling and complex currents of modern systems theory as he makes questionable and oversimplified statements *about one of sociology's most abstruse traditions*. ... Be that as it may, the author somehow emerged from his misadventure intact. His notion of system will not impress systems theorists ... but it is still ... a workable theoretical model (Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', pp. 63-64).

See Talcott Parsons, 'Social System' in D.L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol 15 (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 458-73.

For a good introduction to systems theory, Berlinerblau (p. 63, note 8) recommends Walter Buckley, *Sociology and Modern Systems Theory* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1967).

⁴⁴⁰ More generally, Charles Carter has noted the complaint by several scholars (including Niels Lemche and John Rogerson) that Gottwald is eclectic in his methodology. The complaint has also been that Gottwald used too many approaches. Carter comments:

Instead of eclectic, I would characterise the work as *inclusive*: it attempted, and often succeeded, to approach the vast amount of data in multiple ways in order not to be reliant on one particular approach. ... This combination of approaches is what Philip Davies has suggested holds the most promise for biblical scholarship for the future. ... His choice of combination: literary and social-science analyses of biblical traditions, a combination modelled for us in *Tribes* (Carter, 'Powerful Ideologies', p. 49).

The reference to Philip Davies is to his *In search of Ancient Israel* and his 'The Society of Biblical Israel' in Tamara C. Eskenazi and Kent H. Richards (eds.) *Second Temple Studies*, vol. 2: *Temple and Community in the Persian Period* (JSOTSup. 175; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), pp. 22-33.

⁴⁴¹ Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', p. 62.

⁴⁴² Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', p. 68.

⁴⁴³ In his 'Response to Contributors', Gottwald argues that Berlinerblau has oversimplified [one might say 'caricatured'] his argument. In the response, Gottwald offers, as a historical parallel to the Israelite retribalisation and social mutation, the formation of the North-American Sioux 'Nation' out of previously separate tribal groupings (Gottwald, 'Response to Contributors', p. 176).

⁴⁴⁴ Duane Christensen, while applauding much of the material in the earlier sections of *Tribes*, has noted that it is in the final sections of the work that many readers will part company with Gottwald, with his thesis that Yahwism is the *product* of a sociological mutation rather than its *cause*. Christensen observes: 'Even though a scientific methodology, by its very nature, must exclude God and the supernatural, such a procedure by no means eliminates God!' Christensen claims that Gottwald is in fact 'exchanging biblical theology for an ideology' and concludes that Gottwald's Marxian historical cultural-material ideology can never be an alternative to theology (Christensen, Review of *Tribes*, pp. 118 and 120).

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found on earth, the ‘opium of the people’.⁴⁴⁵ Marx expected that, in a classless society, religion would die out. For Marx, it was not possible for a non-alienating or positive form of religion to emerge out of a liberated social formation. Yet this is exactly how Gottwald conceives of Yahwism, as a religion produced by a liberated society that contributes to the ongoing liberation of that society.⁴⁴⁶ This may be cold comfort for those who are aghast that Yahwism should be reduced to a ‘feed-back loop’ and that Yahweh should be denied any objective reality: but it is nonetheless a significant departure from classical Marxism.⁴⁴⁷

To be religious in the sense of religion in the world of early Israel, for Gottwald, is not a matter of historic creeds; it is not even to have a ‘pre-established religion drawn out of the past’: it is a ‘matter of finding out what has to be done to master our social circumstances’.⁴⁴⁸ For Gottwald, this must involve a willingness to discard old models and to create new religious praxis and ideology in the contemporary as well as in the ancient world. In *Tribes* we find an inescapable linking of detailed scholarly analysis with a clear passion for contemporary social and political action for change.⁴⁴⁹ In fact, Roland Boer remarks that it is this ‘linking of politics and scholarship that remains one of the signal achievements of this text, part of its claim to be a classic’.⁴⁵⁰ This linkage presumably also explains the widespread enthusiasm for *Tribes* in third-world and other situations of struggle for liberation.⁴⁵¹

Gottwald could be said to have launched a whole new *discourse* of Biblical Studies. David Jobling refers to ‘Gottwald’ as ‘the name of a whole discourse utterly tied to praxis: a praxis of changing the world, of political liberation, of a day of justice; a discourse of how Biblical Studies may belong to such a praxis’.⁴⁵² The action-

⁴⁴⁵ Karl Marx, ‘A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: Introduction’ in Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, in association with New Left Books, 1975), pp. 243-58 (244).

⁴⁴⁶ Boer analyses this in Marxist terms: ‘Here Gottwald takes up an argument that gives some autonomy to elements from the superstructure [religion] ... so that they may foreshadow the superstructural forms of new and unheralded shapes of the economic base’ (Boer, ‘Marx, Method, and Gottwald’, p. 141).

⁴⁴⁷ and sufficient for Gottwald to continue to regard himself as a practising Baptist Christian.

⁴⁴⁸ Gottwald *Tribes*, p. 703.

⁴⁴⁹ An example of Gottwald’s own personal praxis is his conscious choice, for his last professional appointment, of a post in New York Theological Seminary, with its poorer black and Hispanic students and no international reputation or *kudos*.

⁴⁵⁰ Boer ‘Introduction’ in Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, p. 4.

⁴⁵¹ See Gottwald, *Tribes* (2nd edn., revised), p. xxx. For a full discussion of the impact of *Tribes* on African communities, see Gerald O. West, ‘*Tribes* in Africa: The Impact of Norman Gottwald’s *The Tribes of Yahweh* on African Biblical Hermeneutics (with an Emphasis on Liberation and Inculturation Paradigms)’ in Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, pp. 85-97. West concludes:

Whatever the contributions of Norman Gottwald and *Tribes* to biblical scholarship (‘proper’), the contribution to socially engaged scholars in their collaboration with poor and marginalised ‘readers’ of the Bible is massive. *Tribes* as both a product and a process – as a project – provides resources that are *useful* to those who stand in continuity with the biblical tradition and struggle for survival, liberation, and life. That *Tribes* and the project it pioneers is useful in the struggle for survival, liberation, and life is the highest praise I have to offer (West, ‘*Tribes* in Africa’, pp. 96-97).

⁴⁵² Jobling, ‘Specters of Tribes’, p. 12.

Jacques Berlinerblau offers a different perspective:

We can only marvel at how things have changed in the decades since the publication of *The Tribes of Yahweh*. Whereas Gottwald finds revolutionary consciousness on the pages of the Old Testament, many contemporary exegetes incline to find reactionary religious dogma. Absent from his [Gottwald’s] approach is the belief that the Hebrew Bible is pure fiction, elitist propaganda, a patriarchal prison house

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oriented focus of his analysis makes it ideological criticism at its best.⁴⁵³ One might sum up Gottwald's overall purpose with a paraphrase of words from the New Testament: *scholarship without works is dead*.

Gottwald's final and challenging words to contemporary theologians are as follows:

In this rapidly complexifying and maturing sociocultural transitional period, all forms of religious faith and practice that fail to grasp and to act upon their connection with and dependence upon the cultural-material evolution of humankind are doomed to irrationality and irrelevance. ... Forms of religion capable of grasping and acting on that connection and dependence have something to contribute to the next stages in the long struggle for human liberation; and in commitment to that project they will have something to learn, or relearn, from the social religion of liberated Israel.⁴⁵⁴

3.2 Gale A. Yee: A Social-Scientific Perspective

3.21 A Comprehensive Strategy

One of the best recent summaries of ideological criticism within contemporary Biblical Studies is Yee's article on the subject in the (1999) *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*,⁴⁵⁵ in which she promotes ideological criticism as a '*comprehensive strategy for reading biblical texts*'.⁴⁵⁶ Yee acknowledges the negative and pejorative connotations that often attach to the word *ideology*. However, for Biblical Studies, Yee prefers a neutral, social-science approach.⁴⁵⁷

... and so on. ... No longer can we expect that the Hebrew Bible can tell us 'how it really was' in early Iron Age Palestine (Berlinerblau, 'Delicate Flower', p. 75).

Even though many of his presuppositions and aspects of his methodology are now open to question, Gottwald's *Tribes* stands as a forerunner of those ideological critics who believe that a positive ideology can be derived from what Mosala was to describe as the 'underside' of the text, with challenging implications for contemporary practice.

⁴⁵³ Nonetheless, Roland Boer points to a 'string of tensions' in Gottwald's work, many of them arising from his being a 'Marxist Hebrew Bible scholar who continues to work within the Christian Church', which results 'in the difficulty of being heard in either constituency'. Boer also suggests that Gottwald's personal ideological orientation, his convincedness of 'the essential rightness of the communitarian mode of production' predisposes him to a historical reconstruction that is 'very much utopian' (Roland Boer, 'Western Marxism and the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible', *JSOT* 78 [1998], pp. 3-21 [10-12]).

⁴⁵⁴ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 709.

⁴⁵⁵ Gale A. Yee, 'Ideological Criticism' in J.H. Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), pp. 534-537.

⁴⁵⁶ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535 (my emphasis). An example of Yee's application of her methodology is discussed below, namely, Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21'.

⁴⁵⁷ For example, she gives this definition: 'A complex system of ideas, values, and perceptions held by a particular group that provides a framework for the group's members to understand their place in the social order' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535). It is ideology that 'motivates men and women to "see" their particular place in the social order as natural, inevitable, and necessary'. All people have an ideology or, more correctly, ideologies, which organize and direct their lives:

Ideology constructs a reality for people, making the bewildering and often brutal world intelligible. Ideology motivates people to behave in specific ways and to accept their social position as natural, inevitable, and necessary. ... Ideologies also disguise or explain away features of society that may be unjust. ... In these and other ways ideologies 'resolve' inequalities, struggles, and contradictions that individuals or groups may experience in their everyday lives (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535).

See also Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 148.

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Writing from a broadly Marxist perspective, Yee regards literature as '*an ideological reproduction of social practices*'.⁴⁵⁸ The Marxist usage of the term 'ideology' has mostly been concerned with *class* relations. However, Yee favours a much broader understanding, recognising divisions and conflicts among genders, races, ethnicities, educational levels, and religious groups.⁴⁵⁹

A literary text is a production of a specific, ideologically charged historical world. It reproduces a particular ideology with an internal logic of its own.⁴⁶⁰ Ideological criticism seeks to identify and explore ideology at work in three variables: the author, the text, and the reader.⁴⁶¹

3.211 Extrinsic Analysis

Yee's critical strategy divides into two parts: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* analysis of the text. The extrinsic analysis focuses on the historical and sociological circumstances of the text's production, 'unmasking' the ideological and material conditions under which the text was produced, using historical and social-scientific tools.

Yee emphasises that the extrinsic analysis will particularly concern itself with questions of power.⁴⁶² So, the critic must ask: Where are the sites of power? What

⁴⁵⁸ She elaborates: 'Ideological criticisms of the Bible appropriate the models developed by Marxist literary critics. However much these literary critics redefine Marx's relationship between *base* (socio-economic) relations and *superstructure* (culture, ideology, politics, and legal systems), the core insight remains that literature is grounded in historical, real-life power relations' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 147).

⁴⁵⁹ She explains:

Differences among genders, races, ethnicities, educational levels, and religion also exist and interconnect in complex ways. ... These ideologies cooperate, confront, and often clash with one another in the 'real' world. They articulate 'reasons' for these differences and provide a basis for social conflict or control or social resistance when conflict erupts because of them. For example, in the antebellum South, racist, classist, and sexist ideologies cooperated in providing an excuse for the rape of black female slaves by their owners (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', pp. 148-49).

⁴⁶⁰ Ideological strategies unify social groups. They link the abstract level of ideas with the concrete level of social practices: ideologies are *action-oriented*. They *rationalise* and *legitimate* certain beliefs, behaviours, and interests by providing credible explanations. They *naturalise* them by identifying them with the common sense of society, so that they appear self-evident and natural (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 149).

⁴⁶¹ One can understand the relationship among text, ideology, and history by comparing these relationships in a dramatic production. Using an analogy similar to that used by Eagleton, Yee explains: a staging of Hamlet does not mechanically reflect or mirror or express the text. It manipulates the text, and performs it interpretively in a unique production. 'Ideology, like the dramatic script, is a production of sociohistorical realities; the literary text, like the dramatic production, orchestrates and reworks this ideology to "re-produce" it in its own way' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 149).

History / ideology > dramatic text > dramatic production

as

History > ideology > literary text

Compare the similar analogy in Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 64-69.

Against this background, ideological critics should aim to investigate: the *production* of a text by an author 'in a specific, ideologically charged historical context'; the reproduction of that ideology in the text itself; and the consumption of the text by readers 'who are themselves motivated and constrained by different ideologies' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535).

⁴⁶² She writes:

Extrinsic analysis investigates power groups according to gender, class, race, religion, region, to see if any patterns of power emerge. ... and it examines whose interests are being served by ideology. ... Extrinsic analysis identifies and locates a society's disempowered voices or interests. ... It tries to

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kind of power? What is the breakdown into class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and occupation? Who controls the means of production; who benefits and who is deprived by it? What are the conflicts, struggles, and contradictions among these social arrangements? What ideologies do the groups produce? Which is dominant? What voices do they distort or exclude? What is the social location of the text? The extrinsic analysis then explores the ideologies themselves, their social location in the dominant and subordinate power groups, and the levels of cooperation or conflict among these groups.

For Yee, this process must involve an analysis of the *author's* social position, noting the author's degree of complicity with or challenge to the dominant ideology. A problem with Yee's methodology, however, is that for the most part little or nothing is known of the authors of biblical texts. She does not tackle the question of multiplicity of authorship and the consequent possibility of multiple ideological perspectives interwoven in the text (as stressed by Gottwald). She also fails to make a methodological distinction between the actual author and the implied author.⁴⁶³ A circularity of argument inevitably arises if we infer the author and the author's social location from the text and then use that implied author as a means of interpreting the text.⁴⁶⁴

One might add to Yee's summary that an extrinsic analysis should entail a more specific and detailed focus on the *literary* mode of production. Questions of the ideological import of texts cannot be divorced from consideration of the economic and political constraints under which texts are written and disseminated.

3.212 Intrinsic Analysis

Yee offers this summary:

In an intrinsic analysis, the ideological critic takes up literary critical methods to examine how the text assimilates or 'encodes'⁴⁶⁵ socio-economic conditions to reproduce a particular ideology in its rhetoric. ... The text symbolically resolves real social contradictions by inventing and adapting 'solutions' for them. ... An intrinsic analysis, then, tries to discover the precise relationship of the specific text's ideology to the ideologies surrounding and affecting its production.⁴⁶⁶

Intrinsic analysis may make use of narrative criticism, structuralism, and even deconstructionism. *For Yee, ideological criticism harnesses the results of a variety of other critical approaches into a comprehensive reading strategy.* Her extrinsic analysis broadly corresponds to the Eagletonian first stage. The intrinsic analysis largely corresponds to the first and second stages of the Jamesonian procedure, though it omits any explicit dimension of *intertextual* comparison. *Contradictions* in the text are important considerations. This emphasis places Yee firmly in the Jamesonian

reconstruct alternative ideologies that may have resisted the dominant ones (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535).

⁴⁶³ A text may, for example, purport to be written, by an eye-witness to events, that is, the *implied* author; whereas the *actual* author may have belonged to a much later period. In practice, in Biblical Studies, we have little knowledge of actual authors.

⁴⁶⁴ as is often said, for example, of the so called 'Court History of David', in the latter chapters of 2 Samuel.

⁴⁶⁵ She also observes that texts do not just 'encode' ideology: 'the text can also confront and challenge ideology in reproducing its own ideology' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 151).

⁴⁶⁶ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536. The literary critical methods to be employed, according to Yee, include Narrative Criticism, Feminist Criticism, Structural Criticism, and Deconstruction.

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school as does her focus on *absences* in the text. In particular, this includes voices that are excluded, for example women, non-Israelite tribal groups, and others who are 'marginalized by the society's power structures'. These groups are 'encoded in the text by their very absence'. The text 'conceals and represses these voices in its attempt to resolve the contradictory opinions they pose'. Similarly, the critic must also pay special attention to the *not-saids* in the text.⁴⁶⁷ These not-saids may be unconscious on the part of the author but they are nonetheless indicative of the ideological import of the text. This focus on absences and not-saids in the text gives Yee's work a distinct Eagletonian flavour.

Yee's intrinsic analysis also necessitates a close reading of the text's *rhetoric*, the text's 'artful ability to persuade its audience to accept a particular ideology'.⁴⁶⁸ This involves examination of the text's use of characterisation, plot, repetition, perspective, irony, symbolism, foreshadowing, and framing.⁴⁶⁹

Yee maintains that extrinsic and intrinsic analysis must operate in tandem. The first stage is a *preliminary intrinsic analysis*, taking note of gaps, inconsistencies, contradictions, and dissonant voices in the text. The procedure then works 'backward' to determine the social location of production of the text, which is then illuminated by a *full extrinsic analysis*. Finally, a *full intrinsic analysis* 'determines how the text encodes and reworks the ideological conditions of its production'.⁴⁷⁰

3.22 Yee on Judges

A detailed outworking of Yee's methodology is to be found in the final chapter of her (1995) *Judges and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies*,⁴⁷¹ which offers an

⁴⁶⁷ Yee quotes from the Marxist critic, Pierre Macherey, who observes: 'In order to say anything, there are other things *which must not be said*' (Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* [trans. Geoffrey Wall; London: Routledge, 1978], p. 85). Therefore, Yee maintains:

By focussing on the text's gaps and absences, one can unmask the dominant ideologies and recover the voices of the silenced – perhaps women, the conquered, the foreign, and the poor. In attempting to resolve contradictory opinions and articulate the 'truth', the text must conceal and repress these voices. An intrinsic analysis attempts to retrieve them (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536).

Yee might have added the further comment of Macherey that an apparent *naturalness* in a text is an indispensable property of ideology. For Macherey, ideology is: 'the invisible colour of daily life, too close to the eyeball to be properly objectified, a centreless, apparently limitless medium in which we move like a fish in water, with no more ability than a fish to grasp this elusive environment as a whole'. It is possible, however, to render ideology visible, suggests Macherey, by a contrast with other ideologies, a process that 'highlights its hidden limits, thrusts it up against its own boundaries, and reveals its gaps and elisions, thus forcing its necessary silences to speak' (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 46, citing Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production*).

⁴⁶⁸ Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, p. 152.

⁴⁶⁹ She observes:

Because it is a means of persuasion, rhetoric too is a form of power; it unites groups, moves them to action, reinforces attitudes and beliefs, and universalises local standards and principles. The text reproduces ideology in a style pitched to a specific audience. It appropriates literary genres and devices ... that will particularly appeal to and persuade this audience. The text manipulates literary features, such as irony, plot, characterisation, and point of view to convey a certain ideology. This ideology is revealed in who speaks, who sees, and who acts in a text – *and especially in who does not* (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536 [my emphasis]).

⁴⁷⁰ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536. See also Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 150.

⁴⁷¹ Gale A. Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body' in Gale Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 146-170.

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ideological analysis of the intriguing concluding chapters of the book of Judges (chapters 17-21).⁴⁷² Her application of the methodology leads her to conclude that Judges 17-21 is not a late (Second Temple) *addition* to the Book of Judges, as is often assumed by scholars, but that it is fully *integral* to the first edition of the Deuteronomic History, serving as propaganda for the Josianic reform.

In accordance with the methodology already outlined, Yee begins with a *preliminary intrinsic analysis*, concluding that ‘the most obvious ideological comment of Judges 17-21 is that the violence and anarchy of Israel’s tribal period is explained by the *absence of a king*’.⁴⁷³ The first step of the main *extrinsic analysis* is then to determine when such an ideology could have been produced.

3.221 Extrinsic Analysis

The pre-state period depicted in Judges operated under what Yee calls a *familial mode of production*.⁴⁷⁴ The seventh-century Deuteronomist, however, belonged to a *native tributary mode*, during Josiah’s reign. The conflict between these two modes of production underlies the refrain, ‘There was no king in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes’.⁴⁷⁵

By the time of the Deuteronomic historian, the king and his ruling elite made up the top of a social pyramid, with the peasant-producers at the bottom. In order to finance a centralised bureaucracy, war efforts, building projects, and the court lifestyle, the king and the elite sought to extract the peasant surpluses, both in human and material resources, leading to considerable underclass impoverishment. In order to achieve this, maintains Yee, the state had to undermine and dismantle the social solidarity of

⁴⁷² In the earlier chapters of the book, Yee provides critique of the book of Judges by a variety of scholars employing a range of methodologies, from narrative and social scientific criticism, through feminist criticism, to structuralist and deconstructive criticism. In her own final chapter, Yee seeks to identify the distinctives of *ideological criticism*.

For another critique of Judges from an ideological-critical perspective, see Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: the Art of Editing* (ET from Hebrew, 1992; Leiden: Brill 1999).

A different approach to Judges 17-21 is offered in Andrew D.H. Mayes, ‘Deuteronomist Royal Ideology in Judges 17-21’, *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001), pp. 241-258. Mayes contrasts historical critical approaches with literary approaches to these chapters. He identifies an underlying pro-Davidic tendency for these chapters (the voice of the ‘narrator’) before their adoption and adaptation by the Deuteronomist historian (‘the implied author’).

⁴⁷³ See especially Judges 17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25.

⁴⁷⁴ The familial (or hierarchical kinship) mode was characterised by highland agriculture and pastoral production. The tribal lineages owned and administered the land, which was the principal means of production:

The tribes were self-sufficient, self-protecting entities ... tributary-free, that is they paid no tribute or taxes to a king or ruling elite who appropriated their surplus wealth. ... Women were materially and ideologically subordinate to men. Nevertheless they wielded considerable informal power and authority in family household management (Yee, ‘Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21’, p. 153).

Yee’s assumption that ‘women were materially and ideologically subordinate to men’ may require some qualification with reference to the world depicted in Judges. For example, in the earlier portion of the book (Judges 4-5), the leadership of Deborah, a married woman, passes without any comment from the narrator. The very *absence* of comment on this state of affairs, arguably, implies that women in leadership was unremarkable for the author. It could even be argued that Judges 4-5 offers a positive critique of women in power, since it is just about the only period in the book (if not in the whole Deuteronomic History) in which justice and peace prevails. Even military objectives are achieved under her overall guidance (though admittedly without full participation by all of the tribes).

⁴⁷⁵ Judges 17.6; 18.1; 19.1; and 21.25.

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the old familial and lineage groups and the tribal structures. For women,⁴⁷⁶ this would have had a particularly devastating effect.⁴⁷⁷

However, although the monarchical-tributary mode did supplant the tribal structure, it was never able to do so completely. Tribal and kinship loyalties persisted and the old familial mode of production survived, particularly in rural areas remote from the centre. Consequently, Judges 17-21 seeks 'to resolve ideologically the conflicts between the two modes of production, one dominant, the other subordinate (but still stubbornly present), in their specific historical forms during King Josiah's time'.⁴⁷⁸

Josiah is commended by the Deuteronomist as the ideal by which all other kings are to be judged, in particular, for his religious reforms, the finding of the book of the law, the covenant renewal, and the centralised Passover in Jerusalem. Yee might have added that, to Josiah's credit, he looked to a woman, Huldah, as the final authority on the authenticity of the newly found law book and its message. However, Yee opines:

By examining the sub-text of the narrative critically, one realises that Josiah's cultic reform involved the ruthless destruction in God's name of all high places and local shrines except the Jerusalem temple. These native Israelite shrines were licit under older laws and ministered to a substantial portion of the population. The Deuteronomist glosses over the class conflicts that Josiah's 'religious' reform entailed. However, when the reform is viewed from an economic standpoint, these class conflicts are strongly foregrounded.⁴⁷⁹

It should be noted that in her sociological analysis, Yee (uncritically) follows the line of William Claburn and Shigeyuki Nakanose.⁴⁸⁰ As Assyrian power declined, Josiah saw the opportunity to expand his influence and to increase his financial resources. The aim of the reform was to reorganise the collection of taxes and surpluses directly into Jerusalem, bypassing the local shrines, whose leaders had previously taken their 'cut'.⁴⁸¹ Significant for the study of Judges 17-21 is that the local priestly class,

⁴⁷⁶ Yee ('Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 154) cites a number of authorities for the effects of state formation on the position of women, including: S.B. Ortner, 'The Virgin and the State', *Feminist Studies* 4 (1978), pp. 10-33; R. Rohlich, 'State Formation in Sumer and the Subjugation of Women', *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980), pp. 76-102; Barbara S. Lesko, 'Women of Egypt and the ANE' in R. Bridenthal, C. Koontz, and S. Stuard (eds.), *Becoming Women: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 41-77.

⁴⁷⁷ Yale elaborates:

As power shifted from the family household to the state, with its male king and male political and religious bureaucracies, female power and prestige receded. When the family household became more and more impoverished by the state, women would bear the greater burden. Hierarchical relationships among male and female members intensified as society itself became more politically and economically stratified by the state (Yee [ed.], *Judges and Method*, p. 154).

While what Yee says is largely true, it is also true that the Old Testament notes a number of women who exercised considerable influence: Jezebel (from whom Elijah fled); Bathsheba (who determined the succession on David's death); and Huldah, a more positive figure, who was called to give counsel to Josiah despite the apparent availability of male prophets, such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, in Jerusalem at that time.

For an interesting recent article on the role of women in the mode of production of early Israel, see Boer, 'Women First?'

⁴⁷⁸ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 154.

⁴⁷⁹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 155.

⁴⁸⁰ See William Claburn, 'The Fiscal Basis of Josiah's Reform', *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 11-22; and Shigeyuki Nakanose, *Josiah's Passover* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993).

⁴⁸¹ This, according to Yee ('Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 156), was also the motivation behind the enactment of the pilgrimage law in Deuteronomy 16.16.

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which was pocketing its share of peasant funds, was largely composed of Levites of the Mushite house, arch-rivals of the Jerusalem Zadokite priesthood.⁴⁸²

Yee argues that Josiah's centralised Passover illustrates the tension between the tribal and tributary modes of production. At an earlier stage the Passover had been a family-oriented meal, promoting 'communal values and kinship relations'. The new Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem had the effect that 'the family values of the tribal mode of production were thus co-opted by the Jerusalem elite to exercise its social, economic, and ideological power over the people'.⁴⁸³ In summary:

The socio-economic and ideological conflicts between the tribal body and the tributary mode of production, the competition between the Jerusalem priesthood and the rural Levitic priesthood, the fiscal ambitions of King Josiah, the destruction of regional sanctuaries, and the centralisation of worship in Jerusalem all provide the material and ideological circumstances that produced Judges 17-21. It is these power struggles, ideological dilemmas, and social contradictions that the text tries to 'resolve'.⁴⁸⁴

3.222 Intrinsic Analysis

The next stage is the detailed *intrinsic* analysis, seeking to determine how the text encodes these struggles. Judges 17-21 provides Yee with excellent illustrations of the significance of absences and contradictions. In a book devoted to judges and heroes, there is a notable absence of such figures in these five chapters. Instead we have 'a ratbag bunch of questionable virtue'.⁴⁸⁵ Another absence is the orderly progression of apostasy, oppression, crying out, and deliverance that characterises the first half of Judges.

The most striking absence is textually explicit: the absence of a king, with the refrain, 'Every *man* did what was right in his own eyes'.⁴⁸⁶ Significantly, Yee does not call for an inclusive-language translation of this phrase.⁴⁸⁷ She points out that the text literally refers to every *man* (שׂרָא), not every *person*:

What is 'right' in men's eyes are a woman's rape and torture at the hands of a predatory mob, her ghastly dismemberment, an inter-tribal war that almost extinguishes one of Israel's members, and the seizure and rape of more women to replenish the tribe!⁴⁸⁸

Yee also makes the significant point that the notion of absence and contradiction can be applied not just to the text but also to critique those in the (largely male) scholarly world who regard these chapters as a mere appendix to the book:

Mieke Bal is likely correct in arguing that the elimination of Judges 17-21 from the so-called authentic material depends on a politics of coherence that privileges a reading focused on male heroes, political nationalism, and military accomplishments.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸² Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 155.

⁴⁸³ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 156.

⁴⁸⁴ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 156.

⁴⁸⁵ including 'a son who embezzles from his own mother; a corrupt Levite on the look-out for a fast buck; another Levite who sacrifices his wife to save his own hide; an assortment of inhospitable, idolatrous, and warmongering tribes' (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 157).

⁴⁸⁶ Judges 17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25.

⁴⁸⁷ such as is found in most of the more recent (politically correct) modern translations, for example, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, New Living Translation.

⁴⁸⁸ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 157. It might be argued against Yee that שׂרָא may in fact be used to mean 'person' rather than 'man', as is often the case with pronominal expressions in many languages, and as was the case for the English word 'man' until relatively recently. However, the context of the book of Judges, which is very much a book about 'men behaving badly' towards women, especially but not exclusively in the latter chapters, lends credibility to Yee's point.

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One might add that while Judges 1-16 is largely about male-hero accomplishments, Judges 17-21 foregrounds 'men behaving badly', which may also help to explain the relegation of these chapters by male commentators to the status of an appendix!

The ideological thrust of the editorial remarks within the text is explicit and clear: the chaos is the result of the absence of a king. However:

This explicit absence masks an imperceptible one. In order to extol the monarchy, the text must conceal the social hardships and contradictions of a society governed by a king and his ruling elite. Embedded ideologically in the text are the conflicts between familial and tributary modes of production. The text implies a positive appraisal of the latter at the expense of the former.⁴⁹⁰

The next step in the intrinsic analysis is an examination of the text's rhetoric, the means employed to persuade the reader to collude with the text's ideology. A main theme is cultic chaos. Each chapter employs irony, humour, and ambiguity to mock the cultic decline of this era. Micah and his mother⁴⁹¹ display a cavalier indifference to any sense of true religion. The behaviour of the freelance, money-grabbing Levite is even more disreputable, as is that of the Danites, who readily persuade the Levite to service their purloined idol in their newly captured city.

For Yee, all of this serves as propaganda for Josiah's reform, with its polemic against northern religion, not least at Dan, and its vested interest in undermining any claim to economic or priestly rights by the Mushite-Levites. Portraying the Levites as money-grabbing opportunists might well have sounded a certain ring of truth for those in rural Judah who resented the levitical exaction of resources. It also would have deflected attention from the *financial* implications of Josiah's centralisation of religion under the Jerusalem-based Zadokites.

The tribal era was supposedly characterised by strong kinship bonds; but tribal bonds are ridiculed in these chapters, where traditional tribal hospitality fails to materialise, a Levite delivers his concubine to gang-rapists, and tribal lineages almost wipe one another out. Yee might also have pointed to the significance of the Levite bypassing Jerusalem for fear of lack of hospitality only to find total betrayal of hospitality-obligations in Bethlehem: an episode which could well have mirrored Judah versus Jerusalem tensions⁴⁹² in the Josianic era.

Yee finds a significant intersection of gender and class interests in the unequal power relations between the Levite and his concubine. A concubine was a *secondary*

⁴⁸⁹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 157, referring to Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 9-16. Bal combines anthropology and narratology in her feminist readings of Judges.

Deborah is, of course, an exception to the claim that Judges 1-16 is entirely about male heroes. However, Yee might have countered this point by challenging the male commentators, from the writer to the Hebrews onwards (Heb. 11.32), who tend to give credit to Barak rather than to Deborah.

⁴⁹⁰ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 158.

⁴⁹¹ Was she Delilah, who in the preceding chapter betrayed Samson for the exact sum that is stolen from her by her son? – the question is tantalisingly left hanging in the text.

⁴⁹² Such tensions may have been rural versus urban or provincial town versus capital city. The prominence of Bethlehem in the latter chapters of Judges may point to a particular Bethlehem-Jerusalem tension. A passage such as Micah 5.2, in which the 'messianic' figure is of Bethlehem not Jerusalem origin, may point to a theological dimension to this Jerusalem-Bethlehem tension.

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wife,⁴⁹³ often of lower social class than her 'master'.⁴⁹⁴ Here, however, there is a conspicuous *absence* of a primary wife: 'the Levite apparently eschews a primary wife and uses his secondary wife for sexual gratification'.⁴⁹⁵ So this story is about a man's loss of dignity that his lower-class concubine should presume to desert him. It is about the complexities of male-male guest-host relationships. It is not about the suffering of a woman but about the indignity *to the Levite* that *his* concubine should be raped!

The proposed homosexual rape by the Gibeah townsmen, argues Yee, is to do with gender-power relations, rather than sexuality.⁴⁹⁶ A man who is raped by other men becomes emasculated and 'feminized'. Apparently, the rape of the host's own daughter was less repugnant to the old man than the rape of his male guest. He tells the mob to do 'what is good in your eyes' (19.24), echoing the refrain that 'every *man* did what was right in his own eyes'.

As the story moves from bad to worse, the ideological disparagement of the Levite class continues, with the Levite's betrayal of his wife in a callous act of self-preservation, the undignified treatment of her body the next morning, the dismemberment of her remains 'in a perversion of sacrificial ritual', and the self-justifying spin⁴⁹⁷ which the Levite puts on the story when he later relates it to his tribal leaders. Yee might have added that this depiction of the childless Levite as cowardly and un-masculine may reflect a popular caricature of that non-warrior class.

Having completed this humiliation and censure of the Levites, the rest of the story proceeds to parody traditional *tribal* behaviour. In the end, the rape of one woman becomes the rape of six hundred. To replenish the tribe of Benjamin, four hundred virgins are seized from Jabesh Gilead, after a needless slaughter of the population, contrasting with the monarchical protection that city received under King Saul. Furthermore, two hundred maidens are taken from Shiloh, a local shrine, where the local deity apparently cannot protect the people, for the Benjaminites to seize and make wives by force.

Yee's overall conclusion is given as follows:

An ideological analysis reveals that Judges 17-21 should be contextualised during the time of King Josiah. ... To support Josiah's so-called religious reform, which demolished popular cult centres that competed with Jerusalem, the Deuteronomist conducts a propaganda war against their clergy. ... But repressed in the text are Josiah's own fiscal ambitions for the state and his redirection of the enormous revenues collected by the Levites into the Jerusalem treasury. ... Moreover, Judges 17-21 is a systematic attempt by the Deuteronomist to break up the tribal body in service to the monarchy. It encodes the conflicts between the familial

⁴⁹³ A concubine might provide children in circumstances where the first wife was childless. Where a man had children by his primary wife, the main purpose of a concubine was that of sexual gratification.

⁴⁹⁴ וְיָרָא. See Judges 19: 26-27.

⁴⁹⁵ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 162. Yee makes this further observation:

Feminist scholars have already pointed out that the biblical text primarily encodes male-male power relations. Women's voices are usually absent, muzzled, or mediated by the male narrator. Stories ostensibly about male-female relations are often more about the struggles among men for honour and status. Men frequently manipulate their relations with women in order to achieve certain goals in their relations with other men (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 162).

⁴⁹⁶ It may also reflect Saulide-Davidide rivalry of a later period.

⁴⁹⁷ by claiming that it was the 'lords' rather than the thugs of Gibeah who attacked him, and glossing over the fact that he was the one who through cowardice surrendered his wife to the mob.

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and tributary modes of production. ... It subverts tribal kinship connections in order to centralise and stabilise monarchic sovereignty.⁴⁹⁸

3.223 Evaluation

Yee certainly offers a significant demonstration of how ideological-critical procedures might be applied in a manner that enables the biblical text to be viewed in a new light. However, a number of serious questions need to be raised about the detail of her argumentation.

In the first place, she adopts uncritically the reading of the Josianic monarchy that is proposed by Claburn and Nakanose. Certainly, the centralising reforms must have had far-reaching economic consequences and it is hard to resist the view that the motivation must also have been in large part socio-economic. The picture presented in Judges 17-21 of the Levites as a disreputable, money grabbing, un-masculine bunch, who no longer fulfilled any *productive* purpose, may well be a reflection of how the country Levites were caricatured in Josiah's day. However, this portrayal of the Josianic era begs a number of questions.

Why, for instance, should Josiah have needed substantial extra income just at the very point when tribute no longer had to be paid to a weakening Assyria? Alternative portrayals of the Josianic reform are not considered. A major social factor of Josiah's time, not accounted for by Yee, is the likelihood of a growing class of urban poor in Jerusalem. Refugees from the fall of the Northern Kingdom, together with the ravages of successive Assyrian invasions, must have contributed to a large urban under-class on a scale unprecedented in Jerusalem, precipitating a crisis that the traditional mixture of rural-tribal and urban modes of production-distribution could no longer sustain. Freedom from Assyrian control may have given Josiah a new opportunity to tackle this problem; and a more efficient method of collecting and redistributing agricultural surpluses, missing out the corrupt middle-man, would be an obvious course of action.⁴⁹⁹ The newly centralised Passover, if viewed as a free distribution of food on a large scale to the urban underclass, would also fit with this interpretation. On this basis, Josiah would be a champion of social justice. He certainly is represented by the Deuteronomist as the first and perhaps the only king to take seriously the Deuteronomic ideal of a king, with a rediscovered Book of the Law beside him.⁵⁰⁰ The fact that the prophetic books of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, with their concern for social justice, are favourable to Josiah also supports this approach.

⁴⁹⁸ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 167.

⁴⁹⁹ There may also have been growing economic pressure from increasing Egyptian hegemony over Judah at this time.

⁵⁰⁰ Indeed, Josiah's reign marks the first significant mention of the Book of the Law since Joshua 24, where it had been promulgated as the constitutional basis for the new State of Israel. In Joshua, the Book of the Law features prominently: at the beginning (as the basis for Joshua's rule); in the middle (when read to the people after the capture of Jericho); and at the end (as the constitutional basis for the new State of Israel). Surprisingly, this Book of the Law is then scarcely mentioned in the Deuteronomistic History until it is eventually found in the Temple by Josiah – who, in this and other ways, is seemingly represented as a second Joshua. Arguably, therefore, a major overarching theme in the Deuteronomistic History as a whole is the total absence of regard for the Book of the Law between Joshua and Josiah.

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This is not the place to argue in detail for this or any one particular interpretation of the Josianic reforms. I simply seek to make the point that my line of interpretation is at least as plausible as the one that Yee has taken over from Claburn and Nakanose without consideration of other options. Yee's conclusions are thus heavily dependent on an extrinsic analysis that is largely speculative. There is also a considerable circularity of argument: the preliminary intrinsic analysis associates the text with the Josianic era; the extrinsic analysis offers one particular explication of that era; the full intrinsic analysis is then dependent on this particular extrinsic analysis and is used to confirm it.

A notable *absence* in Yee's extrinsic analysis is detailed discussion of the *literary* mode of production. Her thesis that these chapters were produced to bolster the ideology of the Josianic reform begs a number of questions. Who might have written them? Who were the intended audience? Were they read aloud in the Temple precincts or were multiple copies made and circulated as political tracts? Did they emanate from official government circles, or from the Zadokite priesthood, or from prophetic circles, or from independent political activists? Furthermore, these questions need to be addressed not just with regard to Judges 17-21 but with regard to the whole of the Deuteronomic History, of which Yee insists these chapters are an integral part.

This leads to another significant *absence* in Yee's line of argument. She argues that Judges 17-21 is no mere appendix, but integral to Judges and, indeed, to the overall Deuteronomic History. However, she then treats the chapters in isolation and does not consider their wider literary context. Judges 17-21 may indeed ridicule the tribal kinship structures in favour of a pro-monarchy approach. However, as the ideological critic must be aware, a text speaks with many voices; and in the earlier chapters of the book of Judges it is anti-monarchy voices that are foregrounded.⁵⁰¹ Some consideration of the *literary* context of Judges 17-21 ideology is needed here, which could be developed along the following lines.

When Gideon is offered the crown (Judges 8), he refuses on the grounds that Yahweh alone is king.⁵⁰² There follows Jotham's parable (Judges 9), in which only the thorn-bush will agree to take on the role of king of the trees, a parable that is scarcely favourable to monarchical ideology. Still less favourable is the disastrous thorn-bush-style attempt at kingship by Gideon's illegitimate son, Abimelech (Judges 9). In the earlier part of Judges, the authorial rhetoric is thus highlighting the 'we have no king but Yahweh' ideology. By the end of the book, the pendulum has swung and the rhetoric now persuades the reader that things have got so bad that only monarchy is the answer! There is a thus strong ideological tension between the two sections of the book, which Yee has not considered.

⁵⁰¹ Indeed, there are anti-monarchy undercurrents within Judges 17-21, which Yee fails to elucidate: for example, the bad press given to both Gibeah and Bethlehem, associated respectively with Saul and David.

⁵⁰² In the view of the author, this was not just a matter of abstract theology: the whole bottom-up structure of community justice, enshrined in the Book of the Law, which in Joshua 24 had been promulgated as the constitutional basis for the new egalitarian Israel, would be undermined if the people were to adopt the top-down structures of government associated with kingship. As Gottwald argues in the *Tribes*, the whole egalitarian basis of early Israel, as it is presented in the biblical text, was inextricably bound up with the notion 'we have no king but Yahweh'.

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Immediately after Judges 21 (in the LXX and EVV canon, at least) comes the book of Ruth, in which the pendulum has swung again. The first-named character in the book is Elimelech, which means 'My God is the King', signalling a return to the 'Yahweh is King' ideology. The Book of Ruth is in many ways an antidote to Judges 17-21. In Ruth's Bethlehem (by contrast with Judges 19), hospitality is extended even to a Moabitess; women are properly treated and given their rights under the law; the poor, the widow, and the orphan are given due recognition; the legal system operates in a fair and incorrupt manner – and all of this without any need for a king.⁵⁰³

Moving into 1 Samuel, the pendulum swings again. The popular demand for a king has grown in intensity to the point that Samuel is unable to resist the pressure. In 1 Samuel 8: 10-18, he spells out to the people the demerits of kingship, which could be summed under the two headings of excessive taxation and forced-labour. Yahweh is clearly presented as unsympathetic to the monarchy. Much of the rest of Samuel-Kings is devoted to the outworking of Samuel's grim forebodings in the ongoing monarchies of the northern and southern kingdoms.

So Judges 17-21 is but one pro-monarchy strand in a complex discussion that swings back and forth throughout the Deuteronomic History, debating the pros and cons of monarchy from a variety of different perspectives. Having herself insisted that these last five chapters of Judges are not a separate composition appended at a later date, it will not do for Yee to treat them in isolation from the rest of the History. It is the History as a whole, not just these chapters in isolation, which would need to be fitted to the Josianic era in order to sustain Yee's thesis. And it is by no means clear that the History as a whole encodes the simplistic anti-tribal, pro-monarchy ideology that Yee postulates.

Another criticism of Yee's argument is that she seems oblivious to the time-span involved. By Josiah's time *four hundred years*⁵⁰⁴ had passed since the inception of the monarchical mode of production. One only has to think back four hundred years in our own history, to the very different world of the early seventeenth century, to realise just how long a period of time is involved. Yet Yee writes as if the conflict between tribal and monarchic modes of production was still an immediate issue, with some cherished hope of turning the clock back and restoring 'the good old days'. Such a hope may have been cherished in David's time, or even in Solomon's or Rehoboam's (periods not discussed by Yee but which conceivably might equally fit the ideology of the text) but surely not after four hundred years, or not at least in the simplistic terms that Yee imagines.

On the other hand, a debate for and against monarchy may plausibly have arisen in the early post-exilic period,⁵⁰⁵ when those in favour of a return to monarchical government⁵⁰⁶ were opposed by those advocating a priestly hierarchy. All parties to

⁵⁰³ Indeed, Ruth's Bethlehem is, arguably, the only period in the Old Testament narratives where the deuteronomic law operates in anything like a meaningful way, for women as well as for men.

⁵⁰⁴ assuming the biblical chronology here, for the sake of the argument.

⁵⁰⁵ I am of course aware of the difficulties that have been raised in recent scholarship over terms like 'exile' and 'post-exilic', but am using the conventional terms here (as Yee has done) for the sake of the argument.

⁵⁰⁶ under a Davidic descendant, or even reviving the claims of the House of Saul, as Diana Edelman has suggested. See Diana V. Edelman, 'Did Saulide-Davidide Rivalry Resurface in Early Persian Yehud?' in A. Dearman and M.P. Graham (eds.), *The Land that I will Show You: Essays in the History*

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this debate would no doubt wish to pin their colours to the mast of historical precedent and to interpret, or re-inscribe, the history of Israel to suit their party cause. One might plausibly argue that Judges 17-24 would fit better with an extrinsic analysis along these lines. The chapters are disdainful of a return to a supposedly egalitarian tribal golden age; but the History as a whole lends only cautious support to the idea of monarchy, only so long as the king is a king like Josiah, who upholds the community justice enshrined in the law. The ridiculing of the Levites could reflect a struggle in the post-exilic era between rival claimants for levitical and priestly roles, Zadokite returnee against Mushite remainee perhaps. Or it may simply reflect disdain for any kind of 'clerical' rule. Once again, the point here is not to argue for this (or any other) particular historical contextualisation of the Judges ideology, but to demonstrate that the theory espoused by Yee is by no means the only plausible conclusion.

On a different issue, Yee rightly draws attention to significant issues of gender-power encoded in the text. She highlights the tendency of male scholars to dismiss the closing chapters of Judges as an appendix to a book that is otherwise to do with male heroes. With her focus on absences, however, Yee misses the significant *presence* of women⁵⁰⁷ in these chapters and, indeed, in the book of Judges as a whole. A comparative *intertextual* exercise, as in the Jamesonian second stage, might have helped here. In most Old Testament narrative texts, including the rest of the Deuteronomistic History, women are usually no more than incidental to a plot that is progressed through the male characters and the text is for the most part silent on the subjugation and mistreatment of women. Neither of these statements is true of Judges. In Judges 4-5, a married woman can rise even to military leadership. The situation has degenerated considerably by chapters 17-21. But, even in those chapters, the mistreatment of women by men is openly acknowledged and surely disapproved of. The plight of women is certainly not 'masked' or hidden or relegated to the gaps or margins of the text.

It might conceivably be argued that the foregrounding of the plight of women in the closing chapters of Judges is designed to mask the subordinate role of women at the time of the text's *production*. The text may in effect be saying to contemporary women, 'You may think you are hard done by but be thankful you do not live in the old days before we had a king!' But at least it should be granted that the plight of women is overtly acknowledged. Certainly, men do not emerge from these chapters with much credit!⁵⁰⁸

3.23 Concluding Comments

In conclusion, it appears that Yee has not demonstrated in a completely satisfactory manner the application of her methodology for ideological criticism. Her extrinsic

and Archaeology of the ANE in Honour of J Maxwell Miller (JSOTSup. 343; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 70-92.

However, a revival of Saulide dynastic claims seems to me inherently unlikely after over 500 years! It is over four hundred or so years since the Stuart kings were displaced from the British throne; and it is difficult to imagine that the claims of the Young Pretender might still be credibly revived today!

⁵⁰⁷ or 'absence of the absence of women', the absence of women being normal in Old Testament narratives.

⁵⁰⁸ Neither of course do all of the women emerge with credit, if Micah's mother is taken as an example.

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analysis is largely speculative and there is a considerable element of circularity in the argument. Her focus on absences may have led her to miss the significance of features that are actually foregrounded in the text. However, she has certainly demonstrated in principle that a broadly Eagletonian / Jamesonian ideological-critical approach can bring new insights to the reading of a difficult text such as Judges 17-21, not least with regard to gender issues. A more nuanced application of the method is therefore likely to achieve significant and perhaps challenging results.

Yee sums up the advantage of ideological criticism over other methodological approaches in the following terms:

Because ideological criticism investigates both text and context inclusively, it helps to shed light on the economic, political, and historical circumstances of the text's production, often overlooked by literary-critical methods. Because it grapples with the text as an ideological reproduction of a sociohistorical context, ideological criticism often uncovers a textual politics often overlooked by historical and social-scientific methods.⁵⁰⁹

Yee stresses the importance of absences and gaps, of the 'not-said' and the 'invisible' elements of the text. Ideological criticism, however, is always open to the criticism that a focus on 'gaps, inconsistencies, and dissonant voices' to the exclusion of the central voices and mainstream of the text will inevitably produce interpretative distortion. Yee counterbalances this to some degree by her stress on rhetorical analysis of the text as a whole. Yet the focus on *absences* led to a failure by Yee to notice the significance of the *presence* of women in Judges.

The strength of Yee's approach is that it combines historical-sociological approaches with the new literary approaches, producing a more comprehensive reading of the text than is possible for either approach on its own. This is a significant point, given that the contemporary reader-response literary critics often show little interest in the circumstance of the text's production, while socio-historical studies are often uninformed by the nuances of literary criticism. In fact, for Yee, all aspects of criticism need to be undergirded by an ideological awareness, making ideological criticism not just one critical approach among others but the umbrella approach under which other critical methodologies make their contribution.

Yee does not have much to say in this essay about the ideology of the reader / critic,⁵¹⁰ despite the fact that, in the introduction, she had defined ideological criticism as an approach that 'integrates socio-historical and literary criticisms in order to investigate the *twofold* manifestations of ideology', that is, the ideology of the text and the ideology of readers / commentators.⁵¹¹

At the outset, Yee's work was classified as belonging to the social-science model for ideological criticism, because of her initially neutral definition of 'ideology'. In her

⁵⁰⁹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536.

⁵¹⁰ other than her references to the ideological blindspots of male critics as to gender issues in the text.

⁵¹¹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21', p. 13.

Previously, Yee also had made the following comment, raising a dimension which she does not develop in her essay of Judges:

Because of its focus on the biblical text as a site of struggle for competing ideologies during its production in antiquity, ideological criticism may help the exegete to become more aware of how the biblical text is currently being used to support opposing groups. Such an analysis can enable the exegete to become conscious of personal ideological blind-spots and constraints to produce a more ethically responsible reading (Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 537).

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analysis of Judges, however, Yee goes further, adopting many of the features of a social-critical approach, attempting a critical exposure of ideology that is hidden or masked under the surface of the text.

3.3 Patricia Dutcher-Walls: An Interpretative-Sociological Perspective

3.31

As an example of the *interpretative-sociological approach*, Dyck cites the work of Patricia Dutcher-Walls in *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash*.⁵¹² In this model, the emphasis is on ‘the *hermeneutical understanding* of the socio-cultural system’ and ‘ideology’ is used in a positive sense.

Dutcher-Walls stresses at the outset that:

a text cannot be considered ... without considering the context of the interpreter ... because interpreters always bring their own social world, their own assumptions and judgments to the act of interpretation.⁵¹³

However, she does not pursue this aspect by offering any significant insight into her own personal interpretative context. The assertion by Dutcher-Walls of her own scholarly neutrality begs all kinds of questions as to her own ideological predisposition.⁵¹⁴

Like Yee, Dutcher-Walls advocates that ideological criticism should operate as a *multi-disciplinary* approach. The stated purpose of her book is:

I want to add another voice to the growing list of critics who have attempted a synthesis of methodologies To do this, I want to read a story from the Old Testament, 2 Kings 11-12, the story of Athaliah and Joash. ... I propose that a conscious attempt to use literary and rhetorical methods in tandem with ideological and sociological methods can help interpret a multi-faceted story.⁵¹⁵

Dutcher-Walls regards a given text as situated at the centre of four concentric circles of interpretation, namely: narrative, rhetorical, ideological, and sociological analysis. She sums up her aim in the following terms:

By the end of this study, the narrative, rhetorical, ideological, and sociological aspects of the Athaliah-Joash narrative as a well told story should appear. ... The narrative form itself creates persuasiveness by giving structure to arguments. The rhetoric gets its power and shape from the ideology on which it is based. Both the rhetoric and the ideology reflect the social location of the author.⁵¹⁶

3.32 Narrative and Rhetorical Analysis

Under the heading of narrative analysis, Dutcher-Walls begins with a ‘close reading’ of the text, without recourse to questions of historical accuracy, but focusing on issues

⁵¹² Patricia Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art and Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash* (JSOTSup. 209, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

⁵¹³ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 13.

⁵¹⁴ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 13.

⁵¹⁵ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 13.

⁵¹⁶ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 21 (my emphasis).

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such as ‘narrated and narrative time; characterisation; plot development; repetitions; the presence of gaps and ambiguity; the uses of dialogue, summaries, and command-enactment sequences; and the narrator’s omniscience, visibility, and evaluative presence’.⁵¹⁷

Next, the rhetorical dimension⁵¹⁸ is defined as an analysis of ‘the whole range of linguistic instrumentalities by which a discourse constructs a particular relationship with an audience in order to communicate a message’; or more broadly as ‘the management of symbols in order to coordinate social action’.⁵¹⁹ Accordingly, Dutcher-Walls embarks on a further close reading of the text, this time elucidating the devices by which the author persuades and shapes the audience’s perception of the events.⁵²⁰ Dutcher-Walls seeks to identify two types of *argumentation* in the text: one set of techniques aims to establish ‘*associational* arguments, in which the adherence that an audience has to a set of premises is transferred to the theses or conclusions being argued’. Another set of techniques creates ‘*disassociational* arguments, in which elements previously linked in the audience’s traditions or perceptions are separated’.⁵²¹

Dutcher-Walls then sums up her analysis of the author’s rhetorical intentions in 2 Kings 11-12 as follows:

Athaliah represents an evil Omride intruder ... Jehoida’s actions on behalf of the true king are ... thoroughly justified by Yahwistic and Davidic tradition and *mores*. Joash is the legitimate heir ... Joash is a good king. ... Even as a good king, however, he faces the complexities of

⁵¹⁷ Dutcher-Walls adopts a close-reading strategy that ‘has been employed by a number of biblical literary critics – Alter, Berlin, Bar-Efrat and Sternberg’. She is particularly dependent on W. Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press, 1986) and J.T. Walsh, ‘Methods and Meanings: Multiple Studies of 1 Kings 21’, *JBL* 111.2 (1992), pp. 193-211.

⁵¹⁸ In particular, Dutcher-Walls refers to: C. Preelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); G.A. Hauser, *Introduction to Rhetorical Theory* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1991); and D. Patrick and A. Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990).

⁵¹⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 65-66, quoting respectively from Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric*, p. 12 and from Hauser, *Rhetorical Theory*, p. 3.

⁵²⁰ Dutcher-Walls maintains that, whereas narrative analysis deals with a *narrator*, rhetorical analysis assumes that behind the narrator there is an *author* – that is ‘a person consciously constructing a story for certain purposes that include but go beyond well-crafted story-telling’. This is similar to the methodological distinction between implied author and actual author. Also assumed in rhetorical criticism is not just a *reader* but a specific *audience*, ‘situated at a certain time and place with certain presuppositions and perceptions already in place that the story must also presume or it will fail to communicate’. Furthermore, ‘a “situation” beyond the telling of the story is assumed – some contingency wherein persuasive discourse can make sense and perhaps make a difference in the audience’s opinions or actions’ (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 67).

⁵²¹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 99. She explains that techniques that create *associations* include: arguments based on the structure of accepted reality in which authority or definition make a thesis defensible; arguments in which a structure of reality is established by the author and then used as an illustration or a model; the use of symbolic liaisons which evoke powerful mythic or visionary realities; persuasion based on analogic patterning; the setting of a scene creating expectations and responses; and the use of associational clusters in which juxtaposition and coordination of a number of terms indicates a desired conclusion.

Techniques that tend towards argument by *disassociation* include:

the pointed omission of expected forms; a play of perspectives that creates opposition; a lack of emphasis and attention which denotes the subject’s lack of importance; the portrayal of a drastic, negative act which reduces support or sympathy; and the use of counter-analogy to induce negative evaluation.

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evaluation in his failure to remove the high places and in the necessities of international politics.⁵²²

In support of these contentions, the biblical author has deployed a number of *ideological premises*, which are presumed in the text as self-evident, rather than argued for. These include the priest as a powerful, authoritative leader and the House of Yahweh as a central sacral location with a nation-wide power-base. The ideological symbolism of the Temple and dynasty is potent and evocative.⁵²³

The narrative and rhetorical analyses thus lay an essential foundation for the ideological criticism that is to follow:

The rhetorical structure has as its basis an appeal to an ideology centred on the concepts of temple, kingship, dynasty, and covenant. And this ideology is rooted in and expressive of a social structure in which elites hold power. ... So, the rhetorical analysis of any text is incomplete without an equally thorough analysis of the larger circles that it is connected to – the ideological and social structures in which it stands and to which it appeals.⁵²⁴

3.33 Ideological Analysis

In her fourth chapter, Dutcher-Walls proceeds to specifically ideological analysis:

Since the story emphasises particular opinions and viewpoints, a suspicion arises that these are not just included simply because the story happens to be about the king and the temple. ... In other words, the story and its rhetoric are contained in a larger circle of ideas which are expressed in and through the narrative. ... A study of ideology is necessary in order to understand the referents and the context of the narrative's language and argumentation.⁵²⁵

Accordingly, it is Dutcher-Walls's overall aim 'to gain access to the conceptual world of the author through an ideological analysis of the narrative'. She cites the work of Clifford Geertz, who has offered a particularly relevant focus on the relationship of conceptual struggles to power relations. For Geertz, the task of the anthropologist is: 'gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live' ... and uncovering 'the conceptual structures that inform our subject's acts'.⁵²⁶ Geertz further observes:

Ideas – religious, moral, practical, aesthetic – must be carried by powerful social groups to have powerful social effects; someone must revere them, celebrate them, defend them, impose them. They have to be institutionalised in order to find not just an intellectual existence in society, but, so to speak, a material one as well.⁵²⁷

⁵²² Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 100.

⁵²³ 'The House of Yahweh and true Davidic kingship leave no room for non-Yahwistic worship or power ... everyone supports the true Davidide ... the covenant is significant as a formative and politically potent expression of the bond between Yahweh, king, and people ... a good king rests with his ancestors' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 100-101).

⁵²⁴ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 101. She had earlier observed :

The connection between rhetoric and ideology is conceptually grounded in the idea that any representation of life, whether in literature, art, politics, religion, or even in one's own self-consciousness, is a part of *the social construction of reality*. ... A socially constructed reality is the means by which people represent to themselves and others the values, qualities, structures, forms, and language of their common life. Any particular formulation of these elements is an 'ideology' by which people seek to express or shape their reality (p. 19).

The phrase 'social construction of reality' is borrowed from the title of the book by P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966: 2nd edn Anchor Books, 1989).

⁵²⁵ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 103.

⁵²⁶ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 107, quoting from Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 24 and 27.

⁵²⁷ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 107, quoting from Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 314.

Dutcher-Walls acknowledges some of the limitations of Geertz's work, particularly referring to the

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Dutcher-Walls favours a *non-Marxist* approach to ideological criticism, adapted from Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, which she believes fits better with ancient texts. Berger and Luckmann focus on 'the "generation" of knowledge and thus "reality" as constructs of the social interactions of human beings' and on 'the processes by which *any* body of "knowledge" comes to be socially understood as "reality"'.⁵²⁸

On this basis, Dutcher-Walls assumes that the biblical authors 'dwelled in a socially constructed ideational "world", created over time through the influence of the ancient Near Eastern contexts in which they lived and the particular events their communities had experienced'. This world of ideas determined what they regarded as 'real', forming their economic, social, and political institutions, interpreting to them their day-to-day lives, informing their decisions, guiding their actions, and engendering their language, literature, and art. Religious ideas or 'theology' are certainly a part of this world but only one part integrated with a comprehensive view of life.⁵²⁹

The need to pass on these social 'realities' to successive generations (and / or to outsiders) necessitates an ongoing production of 'symbolic universes',⁵³⁰ which must absorb, explain away, or eliminate anything that threatens the social order.⁵³¹ Conflict inevitably arises when 'deviant versions' of the symbolic universe arise 'as the "official" version fights off any challenge that could undermine its integrative hegemony'. And these conflicts always involve power struggles 'in which conflicts

critique of Geertz's work by fellow anthropologist, Henry Munson Jr, in his *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), especially pp. 10 and 183.

⁵²⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 103, quoting from Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, p. 52. She further summarises Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, pp. 52-66, in these words:

Berger and Luckmann describe the particular social order in which any person lives as a social product, created by the ongoing processes of human beings externalising and objectifying their shared social habits so that they stand over against them as institutions. The roles and expectations of these institutions are then internalised by the society's members through socialization of the 'knowledge' they need to inhabit the social order thus created. A dialectical relationship is inherent in the process in which human beings produce a social world, which in turn produces what the human beings understand as reality. Language is a significant force in this process, in that it facilitates the objectification of social habits by constructing symbolic representations that transcend 'here and now' realities (*Narrative Art*, p. 104).

She also quotes Berger and Luckmann's own summary:

What is taken for granted as knowledge in the society comes to be co-extensive with the knowable ... Knowledge, in this sense, is at the heart of the fundamental dialectic of society. It 'programs' the channels in which externalisation produces an objective world. It objectifies this world through language and the cognitive apparatus based on language, that is, it orders it into objects to be apprehended as reality. It is internalised again as objectively valid truth in the course of socialisation (Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 66, quoted in Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 104).

⁵²⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 104. In this Berger-and-Luckmann scheme, *institutions* often play a key role: the king, for example, represents 'the integration of all institutions in a meaningful world' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 105, quoting from Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, p. 76). Institutions can have bestowed on them 'an ontological status independent of human activity and signification': for example, the belief that a particular institution is god-created is an example of such 'reification' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 105, quoting from Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, p. 90).

⁵³⁰ that is, 'bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 104).

⁵³¹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 105, quoting from Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, p. 95.

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between definitions are played out in the social-structural base, from the theoretical and literary battles of “experts” to the flesh and blood battles of rulers and soldiers’.⁵³²

Against this theoretical background, Dutcher-Walls’s ideological analysis will seek to elucidate ‘the conceptual structures on which the author evidently relies and to which the author tries to win the audience’s adherence’.⁵³³ Her proposed methodology is as follows:

The ideological analysis will be largely descriptive. I want to draw together the evident rhetorical indications into a more systematic description of the various ideas that seem important, always basing the description in what the story says. Again, my theoretical point is that this ideology is intrinsic to the narrative itself. However, because the story is part of the Deuteronomistic History, it will be appropriate and necessary to set the story and its ideology within that wider context. Tracing the important ideological themes present within the Deuteronomistic History will thus fill out the ideas and concepts used by the author.⁵³⁴

This sounds like a grandiose plan, avoiding the criticism made above of Yee, who failed to consider the literary context of Judges within the History as a whole. However, what Dutcher-Walls in fact does in practice is to give a mere potted summary⁵³⁵ of certain key concepts, such as temple and priest, covenant, king and dynasty, which scholarship has traditionally understood to have been encompassed by the Deuteronomistic theology.⁵³⁶ Little or no fresh ideological analysis is undertaken. The narrative and rhetorical analysis of 2 Kings 11-12 is then treated as a ‘window’⁵³⁷ through which to view these various conceptions at work in one particular episode. Dutcher-Walls concludes that the passage reflects: the importance of the Temple as a legitimising agency, both religiously and politically, ‘placing its awesome symbolic power behind Jehoida’s conspiracy’; the significance of the priest, Jehoida, as ‘a legitimating figure within the temple’s legitimating ideology’; the centrality of the covenant as determining ‘the proper relationship between Yahweh and the people by which kings can be made and rule’; and kingship as ‘by far the primary social institution in the story and in the Deuteronomistic universe’.⁵³⁸

There is, however, a significant element of circularity in the argument here. The various general deuteronomic concepts are presupposed at the outset; 2 Kings 11-12 is read in the light of these presuppositions; and then 2 Kings 11-12 becomes evidence in support of the overall ideological analysis.

⁵³² Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 105, referring to Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, pp. 107-120.

⁵³³ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 109.

⁵³⁴ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 109. Dutcher-Walls explains that she will, for the most part, assume the contemporary scholarly consensus on most aspects of Deuteronomistic ideology and theology. Her purpose is to show how these concepts are at work in the particular story under consideration.

⁵³⁵ Her own words are:

No attempt was made to be comprehensive in describing the ‘world’, nor in citing scholarly works. Rather the most important concepts were studied with enough reference to the wider History and modern scholarship to propose a solid, if not definitive, version of key aspects of Deuteronomistic ideology (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 140).

⁵³⁶ She also attempts to interpret these concepts against the background of ancient Near Eastern culture, noting where Israelite ideology may have differed from the generality of ancient Near Eastern norms. Here and there, she seeks to explain the institutions in terms of the Berger-Luckmann and / or the Geertz models.

⁵³⁷ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 112.

⁵³⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 140.

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One particular feature of Dutcher-Walls's overall survey of the deuteronomic ideology is her perception that the historian demonstrates a consistent *bias* against women, and, in particular, foreign women. She regards the characterisation of Athaliah as 'a pre-eminent example of this androcentric perspective'.⁵³⁹

She [Athaliah] is cast by the world-view of the Deuteronomist to fit ideas of evil, danger, and illegitimate power – all of which are inherent in her status as foreign, female, and apostate. ... Strategies such as explicit moral censure, guilt by association, and analogic patterns allow the male author of the text to deny legitimacy, authority, or credibility to the female character. What is particularly striking in Athaliah's case is the use of multiple condemnations (foreign, female, apostate), which create integrated and mutually reinforcing negative judgments.⁵⁴⁰

However, Dutcher-Walls has not in fact identified any specific *evidence* of androcentric prejudice. There is no textual reason to suppose that the author would have portrayed a male apostate usurper in more lenient terms. It does not seem unreasonable, whether from a masculine or feminine perspective, that a character guilty of infanticide should be 'denied legitimacy, authority, or credibility'! Not all females are described in negative terms in the text: certainly not Jehosheba, for example (though, admittedly, Jehosheba does not receive the full credit she deserves, being eclipsed by Jehoida as the hero of the story).⁵⁴¹ I am not seeking to deny that there is a certain patriarchal undergirding to the text. However, the androcentric card can be overplayed if it is read willy-nilly into every episode. Dutcher-Walls seems here to have jumped onto a band-wagon of reading androcentric prejudice into every text, which perhaps says more about her own (gynocentric) ideological position than it does about the text.⁵⁴²

Another area in which Dutcher-Walls's argument is weak is in her discussion of the role of 'covenant' in the passage.⁵⁴³ She gives a summary account of the extensive and contentious literature on the subject of 'covenant' within biblical scholarship.⁵⁴⁴ She fails, however, to make a methodological distinction between the Hebrew *word* ברית and the theological *concept* of covenant. She offers no nuanced discussion of the actual usage of the term ברית in 2 Kings 11-12. In 11.4, the word is used in the everyday sense of a pact or 'deal' made between Jehoida and the Temple security police, where it seems to carry no particular theological overtones. In verse 17, Jehoida 'made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people, that they should be the LORD's people; also between the king and the people'. Arguably, even in this instance, the term need mean little more than a 'pact' or 'treaty'.⁵⁴⁵ Detailed argumentation, and a much more nuanced discussion of the usage of the Hebrew word ברית, would surely be necessary to justify Dutcher-Walls's far-reaching conclusion

⁵³⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 112. She cites at this point J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, (JSOTSup. 163: Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), especially p. 9.

⁵⁴⁰ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 112.

⁵⁴¹ A few chapters later in the text of 2 Kings, the prophetess Huldah appears as the ultimate authority in authentication of the Book of the Law, an authority to which both the king and the high priest submit without any apparent reluctance.

⁵⁴² as my reaction to it may also display a certain ideological defensiveness!

⁵⁴³ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 122-127.

⁵⁴⁴ in which she appears to equate the history of the *concept* 'covenant' with the history of the Hebrew *term* ברית.

⁵⁴⁵ I have quoted here from the NRSV text, which in verse 17 has 'a covenant' (as do all the major English versions and also the LXX). However, it should be noted that the MT in fact has הברית, which may give stronger grounds for associating this incident with 'the covenant'.

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that ‘the evocation of the concept of covenant in 2 Kings 11 ... *seems deliberately to call to mind a broad and fundamental view of God’s cosmic order*’.⁵⁴⁶ There is a danger that 2,000 years of biblical theology are illegitimately read into these verses.

Dutcher-Walls’s overall conclusion to her ideological criticism of 2 Kings 11-12 is thus somewhat of an overstatement:

Evident at the end of this analysis is that the story is set within ideas that do define a ‘symbolic universe’ from a Deuteronomistic perspective. ... *Clearly a whole ‘world’ is posited behind the text.* This universe is integrated and comprehensive, evident in an ideology shaping the story and expressed by the story. There is indeed ‘reason’ behind the rhetoric, a world of ideas to which the rhetoric appeals. And these ideas have to do with the most basic institutions that shape the state and its relation to its God.⁵⁴⁷

3.34 Sociological Analysis

This then brings us to the final dimension of Dutcher-Walls’s study, namely her sociological analysis, for which her particular aim is to deduce ‘what kind of group would use an ideology like the one explored here and express it in a story like 2 Kings 11-12?’ and ‘what can an understanding of the social world from which the story emerges add to the story’s interpretation?’⁵⁴⁸

Ancient Israel is presumed to be an advanced agrarian society without industrialisation.⁵⁴⁹ In such a society, a small percentage of people in an urbanized, aristocratic or elite class is in control, ‘depending ultimately on the use of force to extract produce, goods, taxes, fees, labour, and services ... from the majority of the population’.⁵⁵⁰ Dutcher-Walls pose the question: ‘Given the model of an agrarian monarchy, who would write such a story and why?’⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁶ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 122-127 (my emphasis). She continues: ‘Ideologically, the mention of covenant-making thus functions to set the specific action of king-making within its symbolic universe. ... The king can only be properly installed by remembering the larger, universal world in which all actions make sense’.

⁵⁴⁷ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 141 (my emphasis).

⁵⁴⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 141-143.

⁵⁴⁹ Societies are divided into types based on their technological level of existence. On this scheme, Israel is an advanced agrarian society. In an agrarian society, the introduction of the plough, with accompanying use of animal energy, greatly increases the economic surplus. In an *advanced* agrarian society, this ongoing process has enabled developments such as urbanization, literacy, and empire building:

Typical characteristics of advanced agrarian societies include: class structure, social inequality, the division of labour, the distinctive role of urban populations in the larger society, the cleavage between rural and urban subcultures, the disdain of the governing class for both work and workers, the widespread belief in magic and fatalism, the use of the economic surplus for the benefit of the governing class and for the construction of monumental edifices, high birth and death rates (G. Lenski, P. Nolan, and J. Lenski, *Human Societies* [New York: McGraw Hill, 7th edn, 1995], p. 219, quoted in Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 143-144).

⁵⁵⁰ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 144. Typically there is a considerable propensity to internal conflict and power struggles and a tendency to strive towards conquest and empire. Dutcher-Walls makes the further assertion that it is not just the world of the story that can be characterised as an advanced agrarian monarchy but also the contemporary world of the author. She makes the working assumption that the Deuteronomistic History achieved primary form in the Josianic era in Judah.

⁵⁵¹ She observes:

But even this type of analysis is based on *an aspect that is intrinsic to the narrative itself*, because the realities of the author’s social context are expressed through the social world of the story. So, two types of analysis will be done at the same time – of sociological realities in the story (the ‘story world’) and in

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Dutcher-Walls argues that force alone is rarely sufficient for the maintenance of power. The exercise of power is always justified through various types of *ideological* legitimation, particularly religious legitimation.⁵⁵² Using this agrarian, aristocratic type of economic and political power structure as an interpretative sociological *model* ‘can suggest useful answers to questions about the social location, power, and concerns of the Deuteronomist world-view’.⁵⁵³ An analysis of this kind cannot reconstruct history. However, it can uncover ‘sociological probabilities’.⁵⁵⁴ She gives as an example:

To know, for example, that the murder of a royal family in pursuit of the throne is an action entirely typical of aristocratic power struggles is to shield Athaliah’s action from modern anachronistic morality judgments and to set it in its own context as a brutal but not unusual case.⁵⁵⁵

One might well argue, however, that the modern world is no more immune than the ancient world from political bloodshed⁵⁵⁶ and that the Athaliah described in the text scarcely deserves to be ‘shielded’ from morality judgments, ancient or modern! It may or may not be that the murder of a whole royal family in pursuit of the throne was ‘entirely typical’ of aristocratic power struggles in the ancient Near East; but, even if this premise is granted, the case has not been made that it was ‘not unusual’ for a mother to murder her own children or grandchildren. Surely the people of

the context that created the narrative (the ‘social context’). For both types, characteristic patterns will alert us to what is significant, without making historical claims (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 147 [my emphasis]).

⁵⁵² She further explains:

Prominent among the forms of legitimation is religion, which provides rulers ... with divine sanction and authority. Because the survival of elites and of the state rests on exploitation, an ideology is needed which justifies the power of the few over the many. ... ‘Ideology has the function of presenting exploitation in a favourable light to the exploited, as advantageous to the disadvantaged’. But it also plays a role for those who benefit from the system, for ‘the ideological motivation provides them with greater credibility and effectiveness to others and to themselves’ (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 145, quoting from M. Liverani, ‘The Ideology of the Assyrian Empire’ in M.T. Larsen (Ed), *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires* [Copenhagen Studies in Assyriology 7; Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979], p. 298).

Before applying this schema as a ‘model’ for analysis of the biblical text, Dutcher-Walls draws further theoretical inspiration from T.F. Carney:

By providing ‘a set of measures with which to conduct cross-comparisons’, a *model* guards against anachronistic assumptions. For a biblical interpretation, using a model will keep the analysis grounded in an ancient agrarian monarchical context. Further, the model indicates the complexity of the issues being considered and gives guidance for the types and levels of analysis. This analysis can thus be aware of social conflicts among elites. ... And since the analysis is being applied to one story involving just a few incidents, ‘a model provides some norms against which to interpret the significance of what we find to be going on’ (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 146, quoting from T.F. Carney, *The Shape of the Past: Models and Antiquity* [Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1975], p. 73).

⁵⁵³ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 20. Dutcher-Walls acknowledges here her dependence on G. Lenski, P. Nolan, and J. Lenski, *Human Societies*, especially pp. 23-51. Lenski, Nolan, and Lenski see societies as ‘dynamic entities, whose changes are largely fuelled by technological advances’; and who adopt ‘a macro-sociological standpoint that examines society as a systemic, evolutionary whole which responds to changes in its environment’ (Lenski, Nolan, and Lenski, *Human Societies*, pp. 67 and 81, quoted in Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 14).

⁵⁵⁴ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 146. She continues:

Typical social roles, typical individual actions, and typical power struggles are portrayed, or in some cases significantly not portrayed, in the narrative. But this finding of probabilities is still an advance in analysis over any approach that is ignorant of the dynamics of social interactions in the social world from which the Bible emerged.

⁵⁵⁵ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 146.

⁵⁵⁶ I am revising this section while serving in post-Taliban Afghanistan, where the evidence of contemporary ruthless brutality is all too visible!

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Jerusalem would not have simply shrugged off such an event as a ‘brutal but not unusual case’? One might have expected Dutcher-Walls, as an ideological critic, to take a different approach to this incident, suggesting, say, that the author is seeking to discredit the Omride dynasty (or the whole northern monarchy) by deliberately attributing to a *female Omride pretender* unspeakably evil actions that were far from the acceptable cultural norm.

Dutcher-Walls usefully illustrates the importance of the roles that the characters in the story play as *social functionaries* rather than just as individuals.⁵⁵⁷ In particular, she notes, as a significant *absence*, that ‘nowhere do the concerns or the life of the peasant majority have an impact on the story’.⁵⁵⁸ All the characters in the story belong to an aristocratic class, which includes the elite military personnel, who wield considerable political power, and the skilled-artisan the Temple workers, who are closely tied to the ruling class.

The ‘people of the land’, who figure prominently in the Josiah story also, are presumed by Dutcher-Walls to be landed aristocracy. She might have considered the possibility that this ambiguous phrase is deliberately used by the author to evoke an *appearance* of ‘democratic’ support for Jehoida, to give an *impression* of involvement by the rural peasantry. She does not consider any alternative understandings of the phrase,⁵⁵⁹ for example, the possibility that the phrase is used, as it is in the Pentateuch, to denote native non-Israelite people.⁵⁶⁰ On this latter interpretation, the use of the phrase in this passage would point to an unusual, and therefore significant, alliance between Israelite and non-Israelite elements in Judahite society, running counter to the norms of deuteronomistic ideology.

Dutcher-Walls infers that the alliance of the ‘people of the land’ with the urban elite indicates that the primary social polarity is not between rural and urban but between the powerful (rural plus urban) and the underclasses. She fails to note, however, that the Joash and Josiah accessions appear to be the only two occasions in Samuel-Kings when ‘the people of the land’ involve themselves proactively in the political affairs of Jerusalem. These two episodes may therefore represent an *atypical* set of alliances rather than ‘the primary polarity’. The specific textual *contrast* between ‘the people of the land’ and ‘the city’ in 1 Kings 11.20 suggests that the rural-urban polarity was very much an underlying element in the Athaliah episode. More generally, Dutcher-Walls uses blanket terms such as ‘aristocratic’ and ‘elite’ in an oversimplified and jargonistic way, which obscures the differing, and sometimes conflicting, interests of different elite groups: priests, military, artisans, bankers, land-owners, etc.

Dutcher-Walls notes the *absence* in the text of any reference to a support base for Athaliah’s rise to power, though it is impossible that she could have succeeded

⁵⁵⁷ She also illustrates the sociological and ideological role of key *locations*. The Temple and the palace are both shown to have combined ideological significance as the institutions by which economic wealth is directed towards the centre through taxation and through the oversight of state bureaucracy and public works (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 151).

⁵⁵⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 151.

⁵⁵⁹ There are some occurrences of the phrase עַם־הָאָרֶץ in 2 Kings which are difficult to construe in this sense of ‘landed gentry’, for example, 2 Kings 15.5. Norman Gottwald believes that the phrase refers to ‘ad hoc groupings with particular political interests’ (Gottwald, ‘Puzzling Politics’, p. 199).

⁵⁶⁰ See, for example, Genesis 23:12-13 and Numbers 14:9.

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without the support of a significant element of the military establishment. Supporters are also totally absent when she is eventually overthrown (though this is more plausible if her supporters had ‘jumped ship’ in the new political environment). Dutcher-Walls suggests that the author has deliberately rendered Athaliah’s collaborators as ‘narratively invisible’ in order to give the impression that no one in Judah-Jerusalem could have been associated with such an evil Omride personage. The ideological issues of the author’s own (Josianic) period may thus be perceived in the gaps in the narrative.

However, supporters for Athaliah are not so totally invisible in the text as Dutcher-Walls suggests. Immediately after the assassination of Athaliah, we are told of the destruction of the House of Baal, contrasted with the House of Yahweh, and the execution of Mattan, the priest of Baal, contrasted with Jehoida. The House of Baal is thus represented in the narrative as the major locus of support for the Athaliah regime, narratively parallel to Jezebel and the prophets of Baal in the Northern Kingdom.⁵⁶¹ One might add that it may well have been the conscious intention of the Deuteronomist to deflect blame away from other sections of Judahite society who may have initially supported Athaliah, such as the palace guard – what today we would call a ‘cover-up’ or ‘spin’.

Dutcher-Walls attaches particular significance to the story’s form as *written* communication.⁵⁶² In a highly stratified society, literary propaganda⁵⁶³ is confined to communication between elite groups.⁵⁶⁴ This suggests that the author was a member of the aristocratic class with a real vested interest in the story’s ability to persuade or

⁵⁶¹ The Deuteronomistic opposition to the so-called ‘High Places’, including the criticism in 2 Kings 12 of Joash for his failure in this regard, may also be part of a process of tainting non-orthodox religious groups, reflecting the power struggles of the Josianic period (which involved a royal move against these rural shrines).

⁵⁶² At this point (pp. 168-176), Dutcher-Walls introduces some communication theory, drawn largely from the introduction to H.D. Lasswell, D. Lerner, and H. Speier (eds.), *Propaganda and Communication in World History I: The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times* (East West Center, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979).

Any act of communication can be described by asking: ‘Who / says what / in what channel / to whom / with what effect?’ (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 169, referring to Lasswell, Lerner, and Speier [eds.], *Symbolic Instrument*, p. 7). The latter in fact gives an expanded form of this set of questions: ‘Who initiates the message? What is the content of the message? With what intention are messages initiated? In what situations do communications take place? What channels and other assets are available to the communicators? What strategies render the assets effective in accomplishing a communicator’s message? What audiences are reached? With what effects?’ A similar point is made by Eagleton, who sums up ideological criticism in the words, ‘Who is saying what to whom and for what purpose?’ (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 9).

⁵⁶³ Dutcher-Walls defines propaganda as ‘deliberately manipulated communication’ or ‘a deliberate effort to influence the outcomes of controversy in favour of a preference’ (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 169, quoting from Lasswell, Lerner, and Speier [eds.], *Symbolic Instrument*, pp. 4-5). She notes that among the ‘symbols which carry deliberately manipulated messages’ are: the Temple location for the action; the use of David’s spear and shields; the actions of anointing, trumpet-blowing, and acclamation; the ‘pillar’ by which Joash stands; and the procession from Temple to palace. While it may well be true that these symbolic features are deliberately foregrounded for ideological effect, Dutcher-Walls does not make clear in what sense she regards this as ‘manipulation’ or propaganda.

⁵⁶⁴ Dutcher-Walls quotes from Keith Whitelam at this point:

The struggle for power is between factions of the elite ... and so the greatest concentration of propaganda is directed at this restricted audience. The elite form the most serious threat or potential threat to the king ... and therefore much propaganda is aimed at this elite audience in order to reiterate and reinforce the right of the king to rule (Whitelam, ‘The Symbols of Power’, p. 168, quoted by Dutcher-Walls, p. 171).

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convince. The sociological model further suggests that the intended audience was not the generality of the populace but other groups within the elite classes.⁵⁶⁵ Dutcher-Walls is clearly aware here of questions associated with the literary mode of production. However, the issue would have benefited from further exploration: for example, how were texts produced and by whom and by what methods of publication and circulation? Nor does she explore the possibility that this text may have been produced by an opposition group *after* the Josianic era.

Dutcher-Walls's offers some analysis of the social world of the *author*. The story has been written in such a way as to give narrative expression to particular ideological issues of the world of the author and audience. Abhorrence of northern dynasties, support for the Davidic lineage, a model of royal military loyalty, allegiance to the Jerusalem king by the landed as well as the urban aristocracy, the importance of priestly duty towards king, Temple, and finances, and a portrayal of royal compliance with the Yahwistic covenant, are not only features of this episode, but also of the Josianic period, which is presumed to be contemporary with the author.⁵⁶⁶ Since historical narrative does not arise out of mere antiquarian interest, but to serve a political agenda contemporary to the author, Dutcher-Walls concludes that the composition of this narrative can be located in the Josianic period. However, like Yee, she does not consider any alternative historical contextualisation of the authorial ideology.

It might be argued that the ideological aspects of Dutcher-Walls's four-fold analysis are so heavily dependent on the wider sociological picture that it would have been better for the sociological level of analysis to have preceded the specifically ideological, as would have been the case in an Eagletonian approach. Indeed, one might further argue that the sociological and ideological perspectives could have usefully preceded the rhetorical analysis, since an understanding of the symbolic world that lies behind the text is, arguably, a prerequisite for understanding the issues on which the author is trying to persuade the audience. On the other hand, Dutcher-Walls's methodology has the advantage of beginning with, and focussing on, the text, rather than on speculation regarding the world of the author and audience. In this aspect, her methodology has considerable affinity with the Jamesonian scheme.

3.35 Summary and Evaluation

Dutcher-Walls's does not offer an actual definition of 'ideology' beyond indicating that she often uses 'ideology' where previous scholars might have used 'theology'.⁵⁶⁷ Sometimes she seems to use 'ideology' to denote little more than the *world-view* of the biblical author. However, she sees the overall purpose of ideological analysis as to elucidate 'the conceptual structures on which the author evidently relies and to which the author tries to win the audience's adherence'.⁵⁶⁸ This usage represents the

⁵⁶⁵ She continues: 'Thus sociological sensitivity aids in viewing the narrative as a deliberate message from an elite author, such as a scribe ... in Josiah's court, to an elite audience, such as the aristocratic supporters of and dissenters from Josiah's reign and policies' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 176). Again Dutcher-Walls (p. 176) cites Whitelam at this point: Whitelam, 'Symbols of Power', p. 172.

⁵⁶⁶ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 178.

⁵⁶⁷ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 103.

⁵⁶⁸ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 109.

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neutral-to-positive understanding of 'ideology' that is associated with interpretative sociology.

Dutcher-Walls also refers to the illegitimate use of ideology to undergird the abuse of power. However, she specifically eschews a Marxist critical base,⁵⁶⁹ adopting instead sociological approaches derived from Berger and Luckmann and from Geertz. Nonetheless, her analysis of the advanced agrarian society as dependent on a particular mode of agricultural production has much in common with an Eagletonian approach. She also focuses on the role of elites, on the significance of power struggles, and on the element of conflict that typically underlies literary texts, themes that suggest she might feel more at home in Marxist company than she acknowledges.

Dutcher-Walls regards the text as a window through which one can gain a glimpse of a 'symbolic universe', common to author and audience, and on which the rhetoric of the narrative depends. Ideological analysis is not so much about what the text communicates; rather, it is the elucidation of the world that lies *behind* the text. At this point, Dutcher-Walls is in danger of reducing ideological criticism to a secondary role, *ancillary* to the interpretative process rather than at the heart of the process. This contrasts with the Eagletonian / Jamesonian approach, in which criticism is the unmasking and critique of what the text *really* means over against the apparent surface meaning of the narrative.

Dutcher-Walls draws attention to gaps or omissions in the narrative, such as the lack of reference to Athaliah's support base. However, generally, her approach takes full account of the text as a whole, not *just* the gaps, margins, and silences. While some other approaches may be criticised for their neglect of the *foreground* of the text, arguably, Dutcher-Walls's approach fails to develop the voices of those who are silenced by the text, for example: the rural peasantry; the unskilled labourers in the Temple; the landless peasants spuriously subsumed in that phrase, 'the people of the land'; or even the supporters of Athaliah.

Commendably, Dutcher-Walls insists that ideological criticism cannot stand in isolation from other interpretative perspectives. She demonstrates a model for the integration of ideological criticism with narrative and rhetorical approaches; and the inseparability of ideological criticism from wider sociological perspectives. *An ideological awareness is required in all four of Dutcher-Walls's sections*, which might, therefore, be regarded collectively as ideological criticism in a broad sense. Her whole study, not just the one specific chapter, could thus be described as ideological criticism. Of the inter-relationship of her four analytical perspectives, Dutcher-Walls has this to say:

While the analyses work independently, the real strength of an inter-disciplinary approach is seen in the interactions between the perspectives. When the four analyses work together, building on, commenting on, or contrasting with each other, a necessary comprehensive understanding of the story in its posited context can be found. Without all four analyses, significant aspects of the story, its conceptual structures, and its context might have been overlooked. ... The story 'means' not just *one* thing *or* another in its context; but several interrelated meanings are conveyed by the same words of the text.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 103.

⁵⁷⁰ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, pp. 182-183.

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Dutcher-Walls attaches particular significance to tensions between the results of the respective analytical perspectives. For example, from a narrative perspective, Jehoida is the central character. However:

The twist comes in the rhetorical analysis: most of the rhetoric of the chapter is *not* about the priest but about the king and the restoration of legitimate kingship. ... The ideological and sociological patterns behind this twist are evident when all four analyses are completed. This role of service to the king emerges from the particular Deuteronomistic conception of the priest. And the presentation of the priest as subservient to the king bears sociological weight.⁵⁷¹

She does not use the term 'deconstruction', but her argument could be further developed along deconstructionist lines. This tension between the narrative and rhetorical analytical perspectives points to an ideological fault line along which the narrative may be said to deconstruct itself.

Despite her disavowal of a Marxist philosophical base, Dutcher-Walls's four-fold structure for literary criticism is not in fact dissimilar to the Jamesonian methodology. Her narrative and rhetorical criticism involves a close reading of the text, broadly corresponding to Jameson's first stage; the section entitled 'Ideological Analysis' largely corresponds to Jameson's second stage; and her sociological phase is not unlike the final stage of the Jamesonian procedure, with its focus on reading the text against the background of changing social formation.

However, Dutcher-Walls concludes her final chapter with a striking circularity of argument:

The multi-disciplinary approach has suggested a confirmation of one of the study's assumptions. The idea that the Deuteronomistic History received its primary shaping within the Josianic context was used as a working hypothesis ... The Joash narrative contains reference, by symbol, analogy, and direct parallel, to the Josianic era. ... The multi-disciplinary approach has been sensitive to the rhetorical, ideological, and sociological elements of writing as propaganda in an agrarian monarchic context. Such 'sensitivity' has shown how the Joash story 'makes sense' as part of a posited Josianic world-view.⁵⁷²

In fact, all that Dutcher-Walls has demonstrated is that there is a close connexion between the Athaliah-Joash narrative and the Josiah narrative. Both involve the accession of a boy king whose father had been assassinated. Both involve the proactive participation of 'the people of the land'. Both have Temple repairs as a major focus. Both are concerned with the allegiance of the king to the Yahwistic covenant. Dutcher-Walls has demonstrated further close connexions between the two stories at the ideological level. However, it does not *necessarily* follow from any or all of this that the author is to be located in the Josianic era. It is equally possible that the author has tailored both of these parallel narratives to the ideological issues of a later period, for example, the Second Temple era. Alternatively, the similarities may have arisen because both episodes have later been made to conform to an established tradition of interpretation (or Jamesonian meta-narrative). Such alternatives have not been considered or discussed by Dutcher-Walls.

In her overall conclusion, Dutcher-Walls acknowledges:

A story is basically a communicative event between an author and an audience in a particular context. In the case of a biblical text, all three – author, audience, and context – are plural, as the text is formulated and handed on through various incarnations and engages people in a variety of times and places.

⁵⁷¹ Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 185.

⁵⁷² Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 187.

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She perceptively observes here that the plurality of authorship and audience of much of the Old Testament is a major complicating factor for ideological analysis (a factor overlooked by Yee). However, she does not seek to extend her discussion to the ongoing future reception and interpretation of the biblical text by successive ‘audiences’ across the generations, a project which would make an interesting sequel to her present study.

Overall, Dutcher-Walls has certainly illustrated the value of an interpretive-sociological approach and the value of integrating ideological analysis with other interpretative strategies. She does not make her own ideological perspectives explicit at the outset, though some of these intrude into the discussion, for example, her distancing herself from Marxism and her adoption of an overtly feminist stance. Insofar as the discussion focuses almost entirely on the ideology of authors and of the original audience, and not on that of contemporary readers and interpreters, Dutcher-Walls passes over what most regard as a major aspect of what ideological criticism is all about. Nor is it part of her declared purpose to offer any *critique* (Marxist, moral, theological or otherwise) of the ideology that she uncovers from the text. She does not seek to cross the line from an interpretative-sociological approach to a social-critical perspective. This contrasts with the work of Jonathan Dyck, who seeks to blend all three perspectives in his *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, which is the subject of the next section.

3.4 Jonathan Dyck: *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*

3.41 The theoretical basis of Dyck’s analysis of Chronicles

Dyck’s analysis of Chronicles⁵⁷³ falls *primarily* within the *interpretative-sociological* purview. However, it was Dyck’s stated intention to blend all three perspectives.⁵⁷⁴ He seeks respectively to ‘understand’, to ‘explain’, and to ‘expose’ the ideology that underlies Chronicles.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Jonathan Dyck, *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁵⁷⁴ He observes in the introduction:

There is a tendency to put hermeneutics on one side and critique on the other: interpreters try to *understand* while critics try to *explain* in terms of causal forces and *expose* the false consciousness involved. The attitude of the former is empathy; the attitude of the latter suspicion. In opposition to this juxtaposition, I will argue that interpretation and critique are complimentary moves within a broader hermeneutical perspective. At the core of this argument is Ricoeur’s three-stage analysis of ideology as it relates to distortion, legitimation, and integration / identity (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 5 [my emphasis]).

⁵⁷⁵ In this he is largely dependent on the Ricoeurian dictum ‘that aspects of the social phenomena called ideology are intertwined and demand a number of attitudes, approaches, and conceptual models, ranging from suspicion and critique to interpretative empathy’ (as quoted in Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 5).

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Ideological criticism begins with the question, ‘Who is saying what to whom and for what *purpose*?’⁵⁷⁶ Dyck argues, however, that what is meant by ‘purpose’ in ideological criticism is significantly different from traditional historical criticism. He maintains that scholarly discussion of the ‘purpose’ of Chronicles is confused ‘since the concept of purpose is undifferentiated in terms of motive, intention, and verbal meaning’.⁵⁷⁷ Ideological criticism is concerned with motives and intentions, including unconscious motives.

Dyck’s study is thus not a traditional *exegetical* exercise, focussing on the verbal meaning of the book. It sets out to be an examination of the *contextual* functions and of the conscious and unconscious motives and intentions of the author.⁵⁷⁸ In moving beyond social interpretation into the realm of social criticism, one is then ‘evaluating another ideology in light of one’s own social theory (or ideology)’.⁵⁷⁹

In Ricoeurian terms, the objective of ideological criticism is ‘to disentangle recognition from miscognition’.⁵⁸⁰ Dyck adopts from Ricoeur a threefold approach, in which ideology is considered as systematic *distortion*, as a means of *legitimation* of

⁵⁷⁶ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 7, quoting from Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 9 (Dyck’s emphasis). In a survey of previous scholarly work on Chronicles, Dyck identifies four main proposals regarding the ‘purpose’ of the Chronicler, consisting of two contrasting pairs and one minor proposal: (1) the Chronicler as *exclusivist* versus the Chronicler as *inclusivist*; (2) the Chronicler as *theocrat* versus the Chronicler as *royalist*; and (3) the Chronicler as apologist for the Levites. Dyck expresses his own preference for the exclusivist and theocratic approaches, but he adds: ‘The question still remains as to the function of Chronicles in its context. What is the ideology of the Chronicler? To what extent do his motives and intentions cohere with the contextual functions of the text?’ (*Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 50).

⁵⁷⁷ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 25. He develops this in terms of the *performative* distinctions, associated with the name of J.L. Austin, namely, *locution*, *illocution*, and *perlocution*, respectively. See J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edn; Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), especially pp. 99-100. In terms of the Books of Chronicles, Dyck applies this as follows: (*Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 11):

- Locution = what the Chronicler *said*.
- Illocution = what the Chronicler *meant* by what he said, which has to do with *intentions*.
- Perlocution = what the Chronicler *did* by saying, which has to do with *motives*.

⁵⁷⁸ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 24 (my emphasis). Dyck, therefore, views his work on Chronicles as significantly different from Sara Japhet’s recent commentary, in which the ‘ideology’ of the Chronicler means little more than ‘the set of ideas characteristic of the Chronicler’. See Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles* (London: SCM Press, 1993). Japhet uses ‘ideology’ where others might have used ‘theology’ because of its broader and more secular overtones; but in the end Japhet does not move beyond a descriptive analysis of the Chronicler’s world-view. Japhet is concerned only with the Chronicler’s *conscious* motives and intentions, without any reference to the *social and community* status of those ideas. By contrast, within Dyck’s interpretative-sociology approach, the focus is not on the ideas of one individual but on the ideas of the group or society as one part of a socio-cultural system. Dyck further explains:

One can *describe* the author’s social context, reconstructing the author’s ideology (as in system of ideas) and context ‘from the inside’, attempting to understand what it is like to live in the situation being described and how his or her motives and intentions relate to this context. One can also *explain* how the text relates to the context of its production using sociological models without referring to the author’s or participant’s point of view (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 17).

⁵⁷⁹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 20. He adds, ‘Such an evaluation is often negative or pejorative – though it need not necessarily be so’ (p. 21). Another recent work on Chronicles that is broadly within the realm of ideological criticism is John Jarick, *1 Chronicles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁵⁸⁰ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 68.

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authority,⁵⁸¹ and as a means of community *integration*.⁵⁸² Dyck sums up this model in diagrammatic form (of which a simplified and slightly adapted form is given in the footnote).⁵⁸³

Dyck further maintains that the integrative function of ideology gives participants a coherent, if systematically over-simplified, orientation for action.⁵⁸⁴ Despite the integrative function, however, ideology is inevitably associated with resistance and struggle. Ricoeur puts it this way: ‘Ideology operates at the turning point between integrative function and resistance’.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ Dyck assumes, with Ricoeur, the inevitability of at least an element of *distortion* in any ideology. With regard to *legitimation*, Dyck adopts Ricoeur’s thesis, that ‘ideology fills the gap between claim and belief’ (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 70, referring to Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 211-12). Dyck continues:

His [Ricoeur’s] thesis rests on a concept of surplus value now linked to power, not work. According to Marx’s analysis of capitalism, the capitalist employer steals the surplus value produced by the worker. ... The capitalist makes an investment ... and can on this basis claim the surplus ‘produced by’ the investment. ... The real source of productivity, the labourer, is not recognised. Applying this concept of alienation to *power*, one could say that the ruler makes an ideological investment which disguises the real source of power. There is always more in the claim to legitimacy ... than the normal course of legitimation can satisfy, that is to say there is a surplus of belief provided by an ideological system.

Dyck then suggests that charismatic leadership is a good example of this.

In this form of authority the leader is completely dependent on the belief of the people, yet the leader cannot make his claim to authority in these terms. These sorts of claims are the ideological investment made by the charismatic leader and when successful pay a dividend in terms of what Ricoeur calls a surplus of belief.

⁵⁸² With regard to *integration*, Dyck adopts the model of ‘the anthropologist in conversation with the subject’; and, therefore, the appropriate theoretical undergirding is drawn from the field of semiotics. Dyck poses the question: how is a *material interest* actually expressed in an *idea*? A correlation is needed between ideology and the rhetorical devices of discourse, that is a semiotic approach ‘which treats ideology in terms of its rhetorical capacities’. He quotes from Clifford Geertz: ‘With no notion of how metaphor, analogy, irony, ambiguity, pun, paradox, hyperbole, rhythm, and all the other elements of what we lamely call “style” operate ... [we cannot construe] the import of ideological assertions’ (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 72). It is at this point that he picks up Ricoeur’s point, contra Althusser, that it takes a prior system of symbols to have a system of distorted symbols (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 70-72).

⁵⁸³ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 71-72.

Distortion	Legitimation	Integration / Identity
Key Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ruling class interests expressed by ruling ideas • Systematic distortion 	Key Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority as implied in ruling ideas • Forms of legitimate authority • Gap between claims and belief 	Key Concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbolization
Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That of critic • Attitude of suspicion • Dismantle distortion 	Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value-free sociologist • Motivational framework 	Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That of anthropologist • Interpretative attitude • Conversation
Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marxist base-superstructure 	Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal types 	Model <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semiotics

⁵⁸⁴ He quotes from Geertz:

The function of ideology is to make a politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by which it can sensibly be grasped. ... Whatever else ideologies may be ... they are, most distinctly, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience (Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 218-220, cited in Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 73).

See also a similar discussion in Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 259.

⁵⁸⁵ Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 256-66. The full quotation is:

[Ideology is always] on the brink of becoming pathological. ... Ideology preserves identity, but it also wants to conserve what exists and is therefore already a resistance. Something becomes ideological – in the negative sense of the term – when the integrative function becomes frozen, when it becomes

3.42 Dyck and Chronicles

Dyck offers three readings of Chronicles, following (in reverse order) the Ricoeurian scheme of identity (integration), legitimation, and distortion. Where relevant, the ideology of Chronicles is contrasted with that of Ezra-Nehemiah,⁵⁸⁶ and occasionally with Samuel-Kings.⁵⁸⁷

Dyck first considers the wider imperial context from which Chronicles emerged. This includes a lengthy survey of the *Persian* perspective on the Jews.⁵⁸⁸ There is also discussion of the nature of the Second Temple community within this Persian imperial context, in light of other known temple-communities within the Empire.⁵⁸⁹ Reading

rhetorical in the bad sense, when schematisation and rationalisation prevail. Ideology operates at the turning point between integrative function and resistance.

⁵⁸⁶ For the sake of the argument, Dyck makes the (debatable) assumption that the writers of Chronicles and of Ezra-Nehemiah are contemporaries living in 4th century Judah as part of the theocratic Temple community within an imperial Persian context.

⁵⁸⁷ Looking first at the closing section of Chronicles, Dyck makes the initial observation that, for the Chronicler, the exile serves as a seventy-year *sabbath rest* for the land (echoes of Jeremiah 28-29 and Leviticus 26 & 43). For the Chronicler, this is not a catastrophe (as in Samuel-Kings) but a 'gap in the story of Israel that is immediately overcome' (*Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 81-83). Robert Carroll makes a not dissimilar point in Robert P. Carroll, 'The Myth of the Empty Land', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 79-94.

The concluding postscript to Chronicles and the overlap with Ezra 1 for Dyck serve as a 'directive' to read the continuation of the story in Ezra-Nehemiah. In all sections of Ezra-Nehemiah, the returned exiles have a dominant role:

The community they construct is a conception of Israel that unites those who returned to the land with those in the diaspora *within the imperial framework*. ... The argument to be advanced is that this account which concerns the very foundations of the Jewish community in Judah represents one 'voice' in an ideological debate (if not conflict) about the nature and identity of the Jewish community within the Persian empire (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 90).

⁵⁸⁸ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 91-109. Dyck's survey of the Persian perspective on the restoration of the Jews, against the background of the general Persian imperial ideology, is largely based on the Cyrus Cylinder (pp. 91-94). Dyck notes that:

the subtleties of the ideology (written or visual) would, of course, be lost on the majority of the population (for whom the identity of the empire of the day may have been a matter of some indifference to the drudgery of daily life), but the audience of the ideology had to be broad enough, and the correspondence between the ideology and the realities of their administration had to be close enough, in order for it to keep this select group of subjects imaginatively participating in the imperial order (p. 97).

⁵⁸⁹ He sums this up:

The citizen-temple community in Judah, like its Mesopotamian counterparts, was a theocratic community in which the temple was the central institution, not a hierarchy ruled solely by priests. Another point of contact with the Mesopotamian examples is that membership in the Judaeon citizen-temple community seems to have been determined by ethnic criteria ... in which social boundaries were all-important. And while there was no doubt considerable overlap between the citizen-temple community and the province of Judah in terms of 'personnel' and leadership, the political status of the province would have been of secondary importance (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 109).

Dyck is particularly dependent on J.P. Weinberg, *The Citizen-Temple Community* (trans. D.L. Smith-Christopher; JSOTSup. 151; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), especially pp. 34-48 and 105-26. He also cites J. Blenkinsopp, 'Temple and Society in Achaemenid Society' in Philip R. Davies (ed.), *Second Temple Studies*, vol 1: *The Persian Period* (JSOTSup. 117; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

In a footnote Dyck cites some of the latest archaeological information of relevance (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 103, note 84).

In all of this, Dyck is adopting what he regards to be a scholarly consensus on these points: he is not laying claim to any independent research on the subject.

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Ezra-Nehemiah and the Persian evidence together, Dyck concludes that the 'outside-initiative' theory of the origin of the Jerusalem community, as put forward in Ezra-Nehemiah, is a plausible one.⁵⁹⁰ Dyck then turns his attention to contrasting the ways in which *identity* is handled in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.⁵⁹¹

At this point, he introduces a system for the typology of ethnic groups proposed by A.D. Smith.⁵⁹² *Vertical* ethnicity is characterised by deep penetration of culture, in a relatively unified, egalitarian minority group or enclave within a wider social context. The 'outside' is a threat to the community but, paradoxically, the enclave is dependent on an accommodation with the 'outside'. *Lateral* ethnicity, by contrast, is 'best exemplified by the multi-ethnic state in which one group is dominant'.⁵⁹³ By contrast with the narrow 'vertical' Ezra-Nehemiah perspective,⁵⁹⁴ Dyck maintains that the ideology of identity in Chronicles represents 'a lateral ethnicity versus a vertical one'.⁵⁹⁵ The particular issue of mixed marriages demonstrates the 'internal contradictions' and 'dynamic tensions' between different aspects of ethnic identity.⁵⁹⁶

On the complexity of the Temple community, I see a parallel with my own home Province of Northern Ireland, where the Unionist / Protestant community once preserved an ethnic-religious exclusivity and dominant role within the wider community of the Province, with considerable overlap of personnel among the leadership of the Unionist Party, the religious leadership, and that of the political institutions of the Province. A reverse situation operates in the Republic of Ireland with regard to the hegemony of the Roman Catholic community.

⁵⁹⁰ He continues:

This assumes the collaboration of the Jews living in Babylon, especially the Jews of the former ruling classes in Judah, who saw themselves as representing the heart and soul of Israel, and also the Persian imperial administration. ... The ethnic criteria which had served the purpose of maintaining identity in a minority situation in Babylon were transformed in the post-exilic setting and adapted for the purpose of establishing the social boundaries of, and social control over, the affairs of the post-exilic community which ultimately came to dominate the province of Judah (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 101 and 107).

⁵⁹¹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 109.

⁵⁹² A.D. Smith, 'The Politics of Culture: Ethnicity and Nationalism' in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (London: Routledge 1994), especially p. 713.

⁵⁹³ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 110. Dyck also observes:

The merit of this typology ... is that, unlike a strictly etic approach, it takes into account the way in which groups perceive themselves (emics) but allows for a broadly etic classification of the cultural strategies that underlie ideologies of identity. ... It can also take account of the fact that ideologies of identity are also the subject of internal debate and conflict. ... Thus, although the post-exilic community was an enclave, sociologically speaking, this does not mean that its 'culture' was uniformly enclavist or that its ethnic strategy was strictly vertical (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 111).

Again it is interesting that Northern Ireland Unionism fits this model of conflict between enclavist and lateral modes of expression and ideological rationalisation.

⁵⁹⁴ Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13.

⁵⁹⁵ He elaborates:

The model the Chronicler uses for his community, the united monarchy of David and Solomon, represents the golden age of a greater Israel and contrasts sharply with the picture presented in Ezra-Nehemiah of a small community within a large and powerful empire. ... The outer boundaries of 'Israel' are similarly defined in both texts. ... The internal boundaries within Israel are, however, radically different. ... The Chronicler maintains an 'all Israel' perspective. ... This is not to say that Judah and Jerusalem do not have a distinct place within 'all Israel', but ... the Chronicler is clearly trying to represent an 'encompassing whole' (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 118-21).

The differences between the two perspectives are particularly evident in the genealogies offered in the respective texts.

⁵⁹⁶ He further explains:

Ezra's [or the author's?] concern for ethnic purity cannot be explained in terms of some unambiguous rationale. ... Nor can we assume that the foreign wives of Ezra 9-10 were really foreign. ... The issue was as much the *definition* of a 'mixed' marriage as the *reality* of mixed marriages. ... [The situation can be compared to] the issue of marriage in modern Israel and the Haredim. ... The Haredim call non-Haredim Jews 'gentiles' and a marriage involving such a person is considered a mixed marriage. ...

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When viewed in this way, the contrast between the ideologies of identity expressed in Ezra-Nehemiah and in Chronicles is stark.

In his fourth chapter, Dyck moves to his second 'reading' of Chronicles, from the perspective of legitimacy and hegemony, with the thesis that 'the ideology of identity in Chronicles is at the same time an ideology which legitimates Jerusalem's rule as the sole legitimate centre of Israel in the Chronicler's day'.⁵⁹⁷ He observes that the opening genealogies of Chronicles are 'led by Judah and centre on Levi', legitimising both the royal and the priestly lines.⁵⁹⁸ The *story* of Israel (as opposed to that initial genealogical *portrait*) begins with David and Solomon⁵⁹⁹ and focuses on the intertwined themes of Temple, dynasty, people, and land: themes that establish the legitimacy of 'the kingdom of Yahweh in the hands of the sons of David' (2 Chronicles 13.5, cf 28.5). From the outset, David's capture of Jerusalem is with the help of 'all Israel' (1 Chronicles 11.4).⁶⁰⁰ By the time of the dedication of Solomon's Temple, 'all Israel' includes the tribes, the leaders of the people, priests, the Levites, all of whom have been inextricably entwined into the temple-dynasty story.

A particularly significant point is the comparison between the psalm in 1 Chronicles 1.8-36 and Psalm 105 in the Psalter. Psalm 105 develops the opening theme of praise for God's mighty acts in terms of the exodus but the Chronicler's psalm moves straight from patriarchal promise to the fulfilment of that promise in land and Temple. By side-stepping the Exodus and Conquest, maintains Dyck, Chronicles makes Israel and the land inalienable. This serves as an excellent example of how a literary text can be adapted for differing ideological purposes.

The most obvious example of an inclusive definition of Israel in Chronicles is in the account of Hezekiah's Passover. However, the 'positive' references to the North refer only to those northern residents who are loyal and submissive towards Judah and Jerusalem: '*they are included on Judah's terms*'.⁶⁰¹ Furthermore, in addition to the inclusive 'all Israel' references, there are in Chronicles fourteen instances⁶⁰² of 'Israel' used with reference to Judah alone.⁶⁰³ It is clear, maintains Dyck, that the Chronicler was deliberately using 'Israel' in two different ways as part of the

One should not therefore take Ezra's condemnation at face value as referring to non-Jewish practice but rather as referring to less strict Jewish practice (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 114-15).

Dyck here is particularly dependent on D.L. Smith-Christopher, 'The Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9-10 and Nehemiah 13: A Study of the Post-Exilic Jewish Community' in Eskenazi and Richards (eds.), *Second Temple Studies*, vol. 2, especially p. 252; and T.C. Eskenazi and E.P. Judd, 'Marriage to a Stranger in Ezra 1-9' in Eskenazi and Richards (eds.) *Second Temple Studies*, vol 2, pp. 266-285.

⁵⁹⁷ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 126.

⁵⁹⁸ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 131.

⁵⁹⁹ Dyck suggests that the account of Saul's death in 1 Chronicles 'is but the "steady" between "ready" and "go!"' (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler* p. 135).

⁶⁰⁰ 1 Chronicles 11.4.

⁶⁰¹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 158. Dyck, however, rejects Noth's proposition that the Chronicler's purpose was to establish the legitimacy of the Jerusalem temple over against the Samaritan sanctuary, not only on archaeological grounds, but because one must resist the assumption that apologetic language must be directed at outside rivals.

⁶⁰² 2 Chronicles 11.13; 12.1,6; 15.17; 19.8; 20.29; 21.2,4; 24.5,16; 28.19,23,27; and 29.24

⁶⁰³ Dyck might have discussed here the sharp contrast between the Chronicler's usage of 'Israel' and that of the Deuteronomist who, after the death of Solomon, uses Israel only with reference to the Northern Kingdom. The usage of other biblical books is different again. See my brief discussion of this point above, pp. 55-56.

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legitimising process. Dyck does not develop this point but slippage from one usage of a term to another is a regular device in the ideologue's armoury.

From my own perspective, I see a clear parallel in Irish politics to the point that Dyck is making. In the contemporary Irish context, the phrase 'all-Ireland', like the Chronicler's 'all-Israel', can sometimes be used in a genuinely conciliatory attempt to encompass both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland together. However, it can also be used as a divisive rhetorical device by those who are seeking to extend the hegemony of the Republic over the North or to imply that true Irishness exists only in the Republic. In fact, my experience suggests that Dyck has *underestimated* the ideological and rhetorical significance of the phrase 'all-Israel' and that further detailed examination of the use of the ideological use of term 'Israel' throughout the Old Testament might prove especially illuminating.

Who, then, is making these claims and to whom? Dyck's view is that:

The Chronicler was addressing in the first instance the ruling and priestly classes in Jerusalem of which he was a part. ... The Chronicler is asking his audience to imagine Jerusalem as the centre of a nation, territorially defined, and not simply the cultic centre of a small citizen-temple community within an empire. Whereas the author of Ezra-Nehemiah exhibits a defensive posture, the Chronicler articulates a more confident understanding of Jerusalem's role as the *centre* of Israel.⁶⁰⁴

Dyck's fifth chapter, 'Hierarchy Within', aims to explore the 'internal consequences' of the Chronicler's ideology, including unintended consequences.⁶⁰⁵ It is unlikely that the Chronicler's peers needed any convincing about the importance of the Temple. So why rewrite the history of Israel with a Temple focus? Comparison with Ezra-Nehemiah suggests that the Chronicler was seeking to broaden the political horizons of his immediate community. However, despite its apparent inclusiveness, 'the Chronicler's claim to the legitimacy of the Temple as the cultic centre for "all Israel" is, in effect, a claim to hegemony over regions and peoples who would not necessarily welcome such hegemony'.⁶⁰⁶ Nor can we simply assume that the claims of the Chronicler were supported by or in the interests of the majority within his immediate community.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁴ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 162 (my emphasis). He goes on to suggest that 'the (immanent or actual) demise of the Persians and the rise of the Macedonians may have presented itself as an opportunity to think big' (p. 164). He refers to the story in Josephus of the High Priest and his entourage welcoming Alexander to Jerusalem. Could the Chronicler have been one of the High Priest's entourage, literally or conceptually?

⁶⁰⁵ He observes: 'As applied to Chronicles, "consequences" is shorthand for the view that Chronicles was embedded in and is an expression of a particular discourse which in turn was connected with the hierarchical structure of the theocratic community with the Second Temple as its apex' (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, 165).

⁶⁰⁶ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 166.

⁶⁰⁷ Dyck surveys the Temple community and the wider Persian Empire, in terms of mode of production (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, pp. 166-212). Both levels represent an interaction of what is termed the Ancient Mode of Production with the so called Asiatic Mode of Production. This spectrum of relations of production gave rise to three social groups within the empire: citizens of cities with full rights (who participated in the central cult and had a right to a share of temple income as derived from its estates, including state and temple civil servants, priests, scribes, merchants, free craftsmen, and farmers, often owning land in the vicinity of the temple and with hereditary status); freemen who were deprived of civil rights because they did not own land and were not therefore members of the popular assembly; and slaves (and the semi-free). In order to explicate this further, Dyck analyses the wider context of Second Temple Jerusalem, based on parallels with other temple communities in the Persian Empire, concluding:

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The question then addressed in Dyck's final chapter is: how does the Chronicler's theocratic ideology fit into this context? In particular, this chapter is concerned with the level of *distortion*. Dyck's argument is that 'the degree to which the Second Temple was an oppressive presence ... is the degree to which the Chronicler's ideology ... is distorted'. The measure of this distortion will be achieved by 'conceptualising the Chronicler's ideology in terms of its *consequences*', including unintended consequences, by contrast with the chapters on *identity* and *legitimation* which had focussed on the Chronicler's 'communicative intentions and motives'.

He explains:

In talking about the consequences of Chronicles, I am talking about the way in which the text has taken hold of the beliefs of its readers in the interests of power. ... I am making a judgment about the Chronicler's ideology; specifically, that it represents a functionally-false consciousness ... In making this judgment I am simply standing with the women of Nehemiah 5 who felt that 'kinship' entailed social and economic solidarity, affirming with them the cultural value of egalitarianism in the face of alienation.⁶⁰⁸

Dyck justifies this methodological stance with the claim:

Ideological criticism of this sort is ... not so much a matter of dispassionately proving a case but a matter of demonstrating that an attitude of suspicion is appropriate. In other words, *this third reading is less objective and more speculative than the first two*, but, as I see it, that is all for the good. The aim of the entire project is understanding; but, insofar as understanding may run into obstacles, detours around these obstacles are required. This is such a detour.

In order to identify distortion, one has to adopt a social-critical stance, reading 'against the grain of the text, taking up a position extrinsic to the text in order to get at systematic distortion within'.⁶⁰⁹ He begins this third, social-critical, reading, by noting that 'the massive effort needed to write this history suggests that something was at stake for the Chronicler'.⁶¹⁰ He continues:

The trick is to generate *belief*. It is one thing to intend to urge one's audience to support the Second Temple as the leading institution of the day (an illocutionary act), quite another to successfully persuade one's readers to actively support the Temple (a perlocutionary act). It is the task of ideology to ensure the success of the perlocutionary act and to secure a belief in legitimate order, hierarchies, and all.⁶¹¹

The [Jerusalem] temple was the focal point of a system of hierarchies. ... It fulfilled contradictory functions as an institution of the empire, of the local elite, and of the community. The community was constructed on the basis of a system of kinship and pseudo-kinship differentiations which probably originated in the exile but which came to serve purposes quite unlike the straightforward concern for identity maintenance in a minority context. In fact, identity turns out to be a very complex notion indeed, playing host to ideologies and practices which distort at one level the very values which are affirmed at another. It is my view, therefore, that objectification – 'the positive transformation of values into discourses, practices, and institutions' – has given rise to alienation – 'the distortion of these values, the reification of discourses, practices, and institutions' (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 212, quoting from G.H. Taylor, 'Editor's Introduction' in Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. xxvii).

⁶⁰⁸ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 213 (my emphasis).

⁶⁰⁹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 215. He elaborates:

This extrinsic position is always in danger if losing touch with the symbolic nature of even ideologically distorted reality. *Ideological criticism is thus always on the brink of counter-distortion* in referring to models, forces, and causes and in its tendency to radically separate meaning and function, system and symbol, mind and body (my emphasis).

⁶¹⁰ more than just to do with issues relating 'to local competition from Gerizim (Torrey, Noth), to sagging revenues (Braun), or to social divisions (Williamson)' (Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 216).

⁶¹¹ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 216. Dyck continues by noting that beliefs are like 'a ratchet that can only be turned one way'. The dominance of the Second Temple was not a matter of chance, it was an ideological achievement that 'needed to be secured generation after generation'. The

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How, then, does the Chronicler's ideology persuade? How does he *secure* belief in the legitimacy of the Second Temple order? Dyck explains this in terms of the Chronicler's presentation of the theocratic 'kingdom of Yahweh'.⁶¹² Thus, 'whilst the Davidic dynasty for the post-exilic community remains a question mark, Yahweh's universal kingship is forever recognizable in the Temple and its cult', the legacy of the Davidic dynasty. The persuasive force of the Chronicler's argument is aimed at the 'inner religious disposition' of the individual worshipper in the Temple, generating a tension between the interests of the individual and those of the Temple institution. While it was the Chronicler's *intention* to portray the Temple in terms of 'assisting' the individual, when viewed in terms of consequences, the Chronicler's ideology, in fact, had the reverse effect: 'it was the individual who was assisting the Temple in restoring its fortunes, in maintaining its dominant position in the community, and perhaps even in extending its hegemony over the region as a whole'.⁶¹³

Dyck's summary conclusion is:

The Chronicler's ideology of identity and legitimacy was, in my view, a conscious reformulation of the ideology of the Second Temple; a reformulation which sought not only to reinforce its leading role in Judah but also to expand its claims over the whole land of Israel. The Chronicler adapted the history of the first temple to this purpose by showing how the temple in Jerusalem was, from the beginning, the theocratic capital of all Israel. Identity and legitimacy are thereby secured in terms of the origins of the theocratic 'kingdom of Yahweh'. But also at work within the Chronicler's ideology are the interests of the Jerusalem's ruling classes, including the clergy. Chronicles can, therefore, be thought of as a cross-section of the discourse of the Jerusalem elite, perhaps in the period of its ascendancy.⁶¹⁴

3.43 Summary and Assessment

The Ricoeurian threefold model of identity, legitimation, and distortion serves Dyck well in seeking to apply to the books of Chronicles all three of the perspectives on ideological criticism that he had outlined in his previous article. In particular, the model enables him to move beyond the interpretative-sociological approach into the realm of social criticism, beyond the search for hermeneutical understanding into a hermeneutic of suspicion. It enables him to attempt the Ricoeurian objective of 'disentangling recognition from misrecognition' and, in Gottwald's phrase, to grasp 'new connexions between old facts'. It is an excellent example of how use of a sociological *model* can open up new avenues of interpretation. By contrast with much ideological criticism, it is a non-Marxist model that is deployed, although the regular

ratchet had to turn but in one direction only. 'It is in this sense that I would argue that the theocratic ideology of the Chronicler is distorting. The Chronicler provides the grease for the axle; the Second Temple, discourse and all, supplies the catch' (pp. 216-17).

⁶¹² for example, in 2 Chronicles 13.8.

⁶¹³ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 220. I am reminded here of the evangelistic preacher who complained that once upon a time Churches were built so that the people might be 'saved'. Now the clergy are looking for people so that the churches might be 'saved' (from closure or whatever). In a not dissimilar way, Dyck is arguing that the surface of the text presents the Temple as supporting the community; but the real underlying motive is to encourage popular support *for* the Temple.

⁶¹⁴ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 220. Dyck at this point cites B. Kelly, *Restoration and Eschatology in Chronicles* (JSOTSup. 211; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 109.

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use of phrases such as ‘mode of production’ and ‘false consciousness’ does give the discussion a Marxian flavour.

The sociological model enables Dyck to go beyond the question, *What does the text mean?* to the questions, *What purpose did the text serve?* and *What were its intended and unintended consequences?* It also enables him to offer a critique of the motive and consequences of the Chronicler’s ideology from a standpoint outside of the text (in Jamesonian social-critical fashion). His elucidation of the concept of purpose has proved helpful in this regard. His perspective on the Jerusalem situation from a Persian context has added a significant dimension to the discussion, though it has to be said that he has relied uncritically on a range of scholarly hypotheses about the Persian period, some of which are open to challenge. In line with the Jamesonian principle of comparative textuality, comparisons with other contemporary Old Testament texts, including both Psalm 105 and Ezra-Nehemiah, have enabled Dyck to foreground the ideological distinctives of Chronicles, though comparison with Samuel-Kings could have been further developed. Specific sociological *models*, such as the distinction between lateral and vertical ethnicity, have proved helpful.

Dyck’s conclusion that the Book of Chronicles must have emerged from the literary-elite class for an audience also belonging to that class is based on discussion of both the General and the Literary Modes of Production and reflects an Eagletonian methodology, though discussion of the literary mode of production could have been expanded. How might such a work as Chronicles have been published and disseminated? How possible would it have been for an opposition party to put a major work into circulation or should we assume that a work on the scale of Chronicles could only have circulated with the sanction or sponsorship of those in power? Who would have read the books and would they have been the subject of public debate and discussion? Were works like Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah *consciously* offering competing viewpoints; or is it simply fortuitous that they reflect the ideology of different parties or different periods? Did the Chronicler have Samuel-Kings in front of him when he wrote? Do the books of Chronicles presuppose that readers would have a knowledge of Samuel-Kings; or did the author intend Chronicles to supercede the earlier History?

Dyck poses the question, How does the Chronicler’s ideology persuade? However, he does not offer the kind of detailed rhetorical analysis that Dutcher-Walls deploys in answer to such a question. He also poses the question of ‘the massive effort needed to write this history’, which suggests that ‘something was at stake’ for the Chronicler’s immediate social group’. But he has not identified ‘massive’ issues commensurate with the massive effort that must have been involved in the ancient world in producing texts on the scale of the books of Chronicles.

Dyck *hints* at what might be a possible answer when he claims to be ‘standing with the women of Nehemiah 5 who felt that “kinship” entailed social and economic solidarity, affirming with them the cultural value of egalitarianism in the face of alienation’.⁶¹⁵ Could it be that the purpose of Chronicles (by contrast with Nehemiah) is to rationalise support away from the social justice demands of the community by means of a focus on the cultic and the religious as legitimating the power of the

⁶¹⁵ Dyck, *Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, p. 213.

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Temple elite? Dyck hints at another possible overall purpose of the book in terms of promoting the claim that only those loyal to Judah-Jerusalem are to be included in the deceptively inclusive phrase, 'all Israel'. A clear conclusion from Dyck on these issues would have been helpful. A comprehensive comparison of Chronicles with Samuel-Kings might have been illuminating in this regard.

Unlike much ideological criticism, Dyck does not focus on gaps and absences in the text. He makes reference to (but does not develop) the omission of the Exodus-Settlement traditions from Chronicles. Other obvious omissions that might have merited discussion are the silence in Chronicles on the negative side of the reigns of David and Solomon and the exclusion by the Chronicler of the old northern-kingdom institutions from his concept of all-Israel. Another dimension missing from Dyck's discussion is any discussion of the ideology of interpreters. Dyck gives little insight into his own ideological predispositions or of the specific moral or ethical standpoint from which his social-critical comments arise.

Overall, however, Dyck's work serves as a useful bridge between the social-interpretative model and the more fully fledged social-critical ideological criticism, examples of which are discussed in the next chapter.

4. Experiments in Ideological Criticism from a Social-Critical Perspective

The third model of ideological criticism is the social-critical model, which operates with a largely negative definition of ‘ideology’. Under this heading, consideration is given to experiments with ideological criticism from a variety of perspectives, including articles published in the seminal 1992 edition of *Semeia* (volume 59).⁶¹⁶

4.1 Norman Gottwald: an Eagletonian Approach

4.11

A significant example of Gottwald’s later work is his article, ‘Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: an Eagletonian Reading’.⁶¹⁷ In this article, Gottwald has moved beyond the social-science and interpretative-sociology perspectives of *Tribes* into social-critical mode. His purpose is to show that the text of Isaiah 40-55⁶¹⁸ emerged as:

a weapon of struggle to preserve the sociocultural identity and political future of a former Judahite ruling elite faced with dissolution in Babylonian society after two generations of severance from its original institutional matrix of meaning and base of power.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁶ *Semeia* 59 (1992) (ed. David Jobling and Tina Pippin, under the title, *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts*).

⁶¹⁷ Norman K. Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55: an Eagletonian Reading’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 43-58, reprinted in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsely (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), pp. 329-342. Gottwald has been prolific in his output since the publication of *The Tribes*, and much of his writing is *implicitly* concerned with ideological considerations. I have chosen this particular article for consideration because it *explicitly* addresses ideological criticism, both in its title and contents, because of its overt application of the Eagletonian methodology, and because Gottwald here moves into the social-critical field.

For another example of Gottwald’s later ideological-critical work, see his *Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and Ours*, in which, in the introduction, he sets out a specifically Althusserian method for doing biblical criticism. However, I concur with David Jobling, who observes: ‘I could not fail to notice how little, or how very imprecisely, he employs this method in the body of the book – except for the postexilic period where he uses it consistently and impressively’ (David Jobling, ‘Specters of Tribes: On the “Revenance” of a Classic’, in Boer [ed.], *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, pp. 10-16).

See also Gottwald’s *The Politics of Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 2001).

⁶¹⁸ For the purposes of this study, Gottwald adopts the scholarly consensus that Isaiah 40-55 derives from the period of the neo-Babylonian Empire. He presupposes the text to be a coherent whole, addressed to Jewish deportees between 550 and 538 BCE. The oppressed servant is Israel; but Israel is mirrored and modelled in the author’s own relationship to his audience (see especially p. 44).

⁶¹⁹ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 43.

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Gottwald maintains that the aim of the text's 'stunning rhetoric' was to galvanise this disillusioned group into a pro-Persian political movement and 'to lobby for a restoration of the Judahite homeland with itself as the core leadership'. Gottwald's methodology is based on this key maxim from Eagleton:

*The text exists in the 'hollow' it has scooped out between itself and history.*⁶²⁰

Gottwald utilises the Eagletonian five-point scheme.⁶²¹ Under *General Mode of Production*, Gottwald takes the Babylonian Empire to be a complex tributary mode. In the conquered territories, there would have been a two-tier tributary system, with imperial taxation superimposed on a native system. The audience of Isaiah 40-55 was a group of Jews who had been inserted into this mode of production as 'neutralised' ex-officials from Judah, which had been defunct for two to three generations. This audience group would have included priests and musicians as well as artisans and civil servants, 'a disempowered body of skilled professionals'.⁶²² They regarded the Babylonian system as foreign and they resisted integration.⁶²³ It is not clear to me, however, how a class of 'defunct ex-officials' could continue to function and maintain their class identity across two or three generations of exile, with the luxury of time for literary activity, and with an ongoing hegemony over the working Jewish population.⁶²⁴

Turning to the *Literary Mode of Production*, Gottwald notes that, in the ancient world, writing, including religious texts, was mostly to do with administration and propaganda needs and was controlled by a scribal profession. Most communication outside of these circles was oral.⁶²⁵ Gottwald argues that Isaiah 40-55 is not *state-*originated, since the text approvingly foretells the overthrow of Babylon.⁶²⁶ The text presupposes readers or hearers with a professional literacy, albeit attenuated by decades of political detention. It contains a 'dazzling display of genres and motifs'.⁶²⁷ It was probably produced in clandestine conditions, since it shows traces of conflict between a powerless Judahite and an all-powerful Babylonian identity. The discourse employs overtly persuasive forms of speech, shaped by older Judahite prophetic discourse, 'with a maximum of cultic genres that saturate the political thrust of the document with powerful religious associations'. Gottwald argues that the verbose

⁶²⁰ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 80.

⁶²¹ He stresses: 'The text exists in a specific space within the larger complex of social life ... its very inviolate individuality as text is itself a form of social and ideological production whose full shape we cannot see unless we work to reconstruct the web of social forces at work in the production' (Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 44).

⁶²² Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 45.

⁶²³ Gottwald notes that 'they were becoming babylonised gradually' but remained in distinct communities unlike those deported by the Assyrians in 722 (Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 45).

⁶²⁴ Gottwald acknowledges that in Babylon they may well have functioned within self-sustaining agricultural communities; and that those of talent may have been taken into imperial administration (as the biblical tradition itself maintains) or become involved in such private business as was permitted. But this still leaves the central question unanswered as to how they could have maintained a distinct identity as a proactive group of descendants of ex-officials.

⁶²⁵ Even political edicts were disseminated by reading aloud. Furthermore, 'orality survives to a striking extent in writing that is politically or religiously declamatory' (Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 45).

⁶²⁶ This of course would not be a problem if the text were dated in the Persian era and not (as Gottwald assumes) in the Babylonian era.

⁶²⁷ Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 45.

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rhetoric and the extensive religious-literary allusions serve as a cover for the underlying ideological thrust of the piece and for the weakness of its argument: ‘*Why so much speech to make so few points?*’⁶²⁸

Surprisingly, Gottwald does not discuss the use of *Hebrew* in this Babylonian context, which is surely a significant aspect of the literary mode of production. The ongoing use of Hebrew was presumably important for the maintenance of community identity and for resistance to integration and it may well have served as a useful medium for subversive literature. The question also arises as to the extent to which Hebrew was still spoken or understood after several generations of exile.

Gottwald offers the intriguing suggestion that in these chapters we hear ‘one voice in a community debate’:

The direct address throughout, the impassioned rhetoric, the incorporation of audience objections directly and indirectly - all these indicate a dialogical even conflictual matrix for Isaiah 40-55.⁶²⁹

The context of this *community debate* is the conflict between Babylon and Persia. Gottwald speculates:

The matrix of Isaiah 40-55 was gatherings of Judahites where all the facets of their life were deliberated and ritualised, where the lines between ‘town meeting’ and ‘public worship’ were not strictly drawn. This would be a context of spontaneous debate and ritualised celebration ... Some of it may have been orally delivered ... other parts read from written texts. ... Once deliverance came, the present Isaiah 40-55 may have been put together as a summary of these debates over many years.⁶³⁰

While this hypothesis is plausible, it is speculative. Gottwald does not cite any external evidence of gatherings for ‘spontaneous debate and ritualised celebration’. It may be that Gottwald’s own (in places verbose) rhetoric obscures a lack of evidence! He, too, could be asked, ‘Why so much speech to make so few points?’ It should also be noted that Gottwald does not explore the function that these chapters play in the overall literary context in which we now find them, the book of Isaiah as a whole.

Turning to the heading of *General Ideology*, Gottwald assumes Babylonian ideology to be the ordering of society into a class structure, in which subject peoples should accept their inferior position as ‘part of this cosmic-political hegemony’.⁶³¹ The contrasting ideology of the Judahite deportees is reconstructed by Gottwald from earlier sections of Isaiah, from Jeremiah, and from other biblical texts:

They saw themselves as privileged representatives of the cosmic-political order once established in Jerusalem. They resisted strongly the judgments of prophets and the Deuteronomic historian that the state of Judah had forfeited its claim to be a legal state. ... They kept their ideology of privilege alive ... Thus their religion existed in a kind of limbo.⁶³²

⁶²⁸ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 46 (my emphasis). Gottwald elaborates:

The imagery is exceptionally rich, as are the concentrations of key words and tradition-historical motifs that relentlessly focus Judah’s rich heritage on the crucial moment for the audience. The profuseness of verbiage is disproportionate to the argumentation ... but the elegance of language and adroit interweaving of imagery, together with shifts in mood and pace, give the work a linguistic spaciousness.

⁶²⁹ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 46. He continues: ‘The controlling voice in Isaiah 40-55 couches this debate in heavily religious terms by drawing on an armoury of traditions and by ... cultic theological language that has been provocatively “secularised” by its radical application to a present political crisis’.

⁶³⁰ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, pp. 46-47.

⁶³¹ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 47. He further comments that the eccentric reign of Nabonidus may have threatened this and even some Babylonians may thus have preferred Cyrus.

⁶³² Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 47.

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Some, however, were willing to relinquish this 'nagging ideological contradiction' by adopting Babylonian religion and culture and hence the diatribes against integration in Isaiah 40-55.⁶³³

Gottwald observes that it is difficult to say much in an ancient context on Aesthetic Ideology. There was nothing quite like our understanding of 'the arts'. However, the aesthetic and the religious can be closely identified in ancient society. Gottwald speculates that, by contrast with the Babylonians, who did have visual arts, it was *words* that were all-important for the aniconic Judahite culture.⁶³⁴ It might have been helpful at this point for Gottwald to have offered further discussion on aesthetic literary forms, especially the role and function of *poetic* compositions.⁶³⁵

The next level is *Authorial Ideology*. We have, of course, no biographical information regarding the actual author(s) of these chapters, beyond what can be inferred from the text. According to Gottwald, the text represents the author as a Judahite ex-official, a master of cultic-historical traditions, a gifted rhetorician, a committed monotheist, and a Persian sympathiser. What Gottwald depicts, however, is the *implied* author, not the real author. We have no way of knowing what relationship obtained between this implied author and the real author. There is a significant danger of circularity of argument when the text is interpreted in the light of an author who has been wholly reconstructed from the text.

The ideology of this author, Gottwald argues, can be summed up as a belief in the rise and fall of the nations in the hands of the one God of Israel, who is the unrecognised (by Jews as well as others) God of the world. Judah will be restored by the Persians if the present Judahites commit themselves to resistance and rebellion against the Babylonians.

Gottwald also maintains that the authorial ideology involves a fascination with the role of suffering: the 'surplus of suffering' includes 'bearing the ignominy of a God who seems to have failed in the eyes of the Babylonians'. Now that they have paid for their past sin, the suffering of the Jews is voluntary in order to achieve restoration and to bring non-Jews to recognise and worship their God. Hence, Gottwald speculates that the oppressed-servant figure:

can only have been a compelling message if somehow encoded in the life of the author and in the lives of those who shared his outlook ... in an active mission of persuasion and resistance ... a veritable template of Israel itself as Yahweh's servant.⁶³⁶

This outline of Authorial Ideology, claims Gottwald, can be inferred from the text and from the conjunction of the social forces described above.⁶³⁷ However, again it should be noted that this is the ideology of the *implied* author.

⁶³³ Presumably Gottwald has in mind passages such as 41.21-29; 44.9-20; and 45.20-23.

⁶³⁴ Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 47. However, Gottwald goes on to say that we must not exaggerate the polarity between Israelite *word* and pagan *representation* (as was done in older Biblical Theology). He notes, for example, that Isaiah 40-55 wants a new (and presumably ornate) temple; but nonetheless the aim is to 'out-talk' the Babylonians!

⁶³⁵ In fact, as we have seen, Gottwald is dismissive of highly charged poetic passages in Isaiah. Roland Boer comments: 'Rather than seeking out the utopian significance of the heights of Deutero-Isaianic language, such poetic flights become an overheated and turbo-charged use of language designed to entice the deported ruling class in Babylon back to Judah' (Boer, 'Western Marxism', p. 7).

⁶³⁶ Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 49-50.

⁶³⁷ Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 49.

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Finally, Gottwald turns to the ideology of the text.⁶³⁸ When we take a stance *inside* the text, he argues, then we see an enormous dramatic production, a ‘bricolage’ of fantasy, the deliverance of Jewish exiles, conversion of the nations to Yahweh, a text not just descriptive or even predictive, but persuasive, eliciting the agency of the audience to make its predictions happen.⁶³⁹ He then refers to a key Eagletonian concept:

History then enters the text ... but it enters it precisely as ideology, as a presence determined and distorted by its *measurable absences*.⁶⁴⁰

Gottwald maintains that there are two distinctive ‘absences’ in the text: first, nothing is said about the Judahites still in Judah; and, secondly, nothing is said regarding the eventual constitution of the restored community with regard to justice and equity. A third absence, not mentioned by Gottwald, is the perspective of those Jews who preferred a closer collaboration with the Babylonian system.⁶⁴¹

With regard to the first of these absences, Gottwald notes that the Judahites in Judah represent 90% of the total and yet their only role is as a welcoming chorus for the returnees. It seems that ‘either naiveté or hard-ball politics governs the author’s disinterest in the people back home’.⁶⁴²

Turning to the second ‘absence’, Gottwald argues that there are two *oblique* indicators in the text as to the constitution of a restored Judah. One is the role of Cyrus as Yahweh’s ‘messiah’. The other is the announcement of a covenant between Yahweh and the community, incorporating and continuing Yahweh’s ‘dependable covenant loyalties to David’:

Isaiah 40-55 parcels out the functions of the former Davidic dynasty, some to Cyrus, and some to the exiled community, thereby dissolving any need for a Judahite Prince. ... In one stroke, the Davidic covenant, with its close intermesh of politics and religion, is preserved in principle – but without David’s dynastic successors having a part to play.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁸ He quotes Eagleton’s definition: ‘The literary text is the product of a specific overdetermined conjuncture of the elements or formations set out systematically above. It is not however a merely passive product’ (Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 50, quoting from Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 63).

⁶³⁹ Gottwald elaborates:

The forthcoming deliverance is enacted in the imagination of discourse between author and audience, and the very discourse itself will assist in bringing the events to pass. ... The project is ‘iffy’ [sic] ... hence the need for the persuasiveness of the text. ... Such is the ‘pseudo-real’ world that Isaiah 40-55 conjures up. Is it capricious fantasy or does it bear a coherent ideological formation that signifies history? (Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 50).

⁶⁴⁰ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 72, quoted in Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 50.

⁶⁴¹ of which the stories in the earlier chapters of Daniel might serve as literary examples.

⁶⁴² In Lamentations, we see a different view of the indigenous population, disillusioned and unlikely to welcome the exiles back as leaders.

Frederic Jameson has spoken approvingly of Gottwald’s analysis here: ‘I find the social picture that Professor Gottwald presents ... very plausible. A government in exile, coming back home, is clearly going to face a great many problems of legitimation’ (Jameson, ‘A Conversation with Frederic Jameson’, p. 228).

I am revising this section whilst engaged on a project in Afghanistan in the immediate post-Taliban era, which serves as an excellent contemporary illustration for this kind of situation, when political leaders come home from exile expecting a ‘welcoming chorus’ but without any real empathy with the majority of the population and struggling to achieve legitimacy.

⁶⁴³ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 54. He adds, ‘Ezekiel provided for a Judahite “prince” with sharply reduced powers (45:7-12)... The Deuteronomic History ... also implies a continuation of

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Gottwald further asserts that these ‘measurable absences’ seriously call into question the traditional view of Isaiah 40-55 as a ‘liberative’ platform. Instead, the chapters point to exiled officials [in fact, it is to their descendants] who believe themselves to be ‘fully competent to lead a restored community’ without explicit ‘safeguards against the abuses and corruptions ... that undermined the old Davidic rule’ and with ‘no felt need to enlist the undeported populace of Judah in their project’.⁶⁴⁴ This, he maintains, is ‘the ‘hollow’ that Isaiah 40-55 ‘has scooped out between itself and history’.⁶⁴⁵

This ideology did eventually contribute to the restoration, ‘although without the empire-wide effects that Isaiah 40-55 expected’. The exiled officials, therefore, ‘bequeathed to post-exilic Judah and to Dispersion Jewry both their intended abounding self-confidence and their unintended, indeed totally unforeseen, dragon’s teeth, seeding divisiveness and disillusion’.⁶⁴⁶

A key question that remains unanswered by Gottwald is how and why these chapters found their way into the eventual canonical book of Isaiah if their empire-wide prophetic vision proved to be so wrong.

4.12 Critique by John Milbank

The 1992 *Semeia* included two responses to Gottwald’s article. In the first,⁶⁴⁷ John Milbank rejects the Eagletonian Marxism on which Gottwald’s article is based, in particular, the universal dependence of ideology on *material* production.⁶⁴⁸ Instead of

the Davidic line as a possible kernel of hope for eventual restoration (2 Kings 25:27-30). The author of Isaiah 40-55 takes a step further in discountenancing any Davidic rule’.

⁶⁴⁴ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 55.

⁶⁴⁵ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 55. He elaborates on this as ‘the ideological formation of a professional political and religious elite, possessing the means and confidence to be the bearers of historic change in the re-division of the political and religious map of the ancient Near East’.

⁶⁴⁶ Gottwald, ‘Social Class and Ideology’, p. 55.

⁶⁴⁷ John Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’: Deutero-Isaiah and the Birth of the Suffering Subject’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 59-71.

⁶⁴⁸ This is argued in detail by Milbank, who rejects Eagletonian Marxism as, at best, an oversimplification that readily gives rise to ‘historical anachronisms’. In particular, he questions the fundamental Eagletonian assumption that there is a basic level of mode of production that in a hierarchical system determines the supervening layers of general, aesthetic, authorial, and textual ideology. Milbank rejects the implied causality in the Eagletonian system of the sequence of levels and, in particular, the universal dependence of ideology on material production (‘I will Gasp and Pant’, pp. 60-61). However, Milbank later notes that his criticisms of Eagleton here only apply to the text of Eagleton used by Gottwald, and not necessarily to Eagleton’s later position (‘I will Gasp and Pant’, p. 70, note 1). Milbank also maintains that oriental systems can only with difficulty be forced into the classic Marxist scheme of modes of production. He gives two reasons for this:

First of all, the mode of production is here immediately political, given that the state is the ultimate owner and producer. Secondly, it is also immediately ideological, because state power is not merely represented in a religious discourse; it is also constituted as a religious discourse. The tributary system is itself enacted as a mode of sacrificial offering, and as a system for storing up produce, not merely for use in future emergencies, but also as a replenishment of divine energy in reserve.

This results in a ‘coincidence of political, economic, and religious’ (Milbank, ‘I will Gasp and Pant’, pp. 62-63).

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an Eagletonian ‘hierarchy of material production and ideology’, Milbank prefers ‘a plateau of material discursive practice’.⁶⁴⁹

Milbank takes issue with Gottwald that the textual absences of Isaiah 40-55 reveal ‘the less than universal aspirations of an Israelite ruling elite’. He agrees that, for Deutero-Isaiah, ‘Judah is essentially Judah in exile, and that the exiled elite consistently assume that that they can impersonate Judah’.⁶⁵⁰ However, he observes:

It is simply unsurprising that the exiles should speak out of their own experience; they probably had no personal memory of their native land, as second or third generation exiles. Their bureaucratic official knowledge of Judah cannot be taken as a substitute for such first-hand experience, nor even as providing any good information on actual physical conditions: think of the elite official Nehemiah’s surprise when he returned to Jerusalem.⁶⁵¹

One might draw a parallel with contemporary Irish Americans whose political comment on Irish affairs often has more to do with ideology from the time of their ancestors’ emigration than with present-day realities. Many a visiting US envoy finds himself as perplexed as Nehemiah!

Milbank perceptively questions Gottwald’s assumption that ‘elitist assumptions and concern for social justice ... must necessarily be in conflict’.⁶⁵² His own view of the exiled elite is that it must:

re-invent Zion if it is to speak about her at all. Now when one reflects that we know very little for certain about pre-exilic Judah, this appears highly significant. Far from betraying the social egalitarianism of pre-exilic Yahwism, it is possible that in Deutero-Isaiah we find recorded the moment of constitution of Yahwism in its universal, monotheistic form, and that the project of social justice specific to the Hebrews is intimately linked to this invention.⁶⁵³

As for Gottwald’s second point regarding the ‘absence’ in the Isaiah vision of any ‘protocols against political abuse’ in a restored Jerusalem, Milbank argues that Gottwald has overlooked language about the establishment of righteousness. ‘Why else’, he asks, ‘is Judah exemplary, a covenant and a light to the nations?’⁶⁵⁴

Milbank thus defends ‘the received view that Deutero-Isaiah points in a universalising direction’. However, Milbank’s own conclusion is that it is ‘precisely this universalism itself ... which needs to be viewed with a certain wary eye’.⁶⁵⁵ He seeks to upstage Gottwald with an even more deconstructive reading. He stresses: ‘I am not trying to establish its innocence. ... I can conceive of how suspicion of this text might run much deeper’. He argues:

For in rejecting the empire ... Israel is adopting the expedient of yoking her smallness, her vanishing, her futility, to the greatest imaginable power. ... The name of this power may be Yahweh, but it is also, at least for the foreseeable future, *Cyrus*. ... Perhaps, indeed, this yoking is freighted with the hope of a greater scope for justice but there is also an element of sheer exultation in the turning of the tables, the submission of the nations to Israel. ... And just as God’s act of re-creation seems to require preceding destruction and levelling, so also it seems to demand gratuitous human suffering.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁴⁹ Milbank, ‘I will Gasp and Pant’, p. 61. In particular, he rejects Gottwald’s describing ‘cosmic-political hegemony’ as an ideology: for Milbank it is a ‘mode of material discursive practice’.

⁶⁵⁰ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, p. 63. This, however, is not exactly what Gottwald had said! Milbank adds his own *spin* by use of the word ‘impersonate’.

⁶⁵¹ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, p. 63.

⁶⁵² Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, p. 64.

⁶⁵³ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, p. 65.

⁶⁵⁴ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, p. 65.

⁶⁵⁵ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, pp. 59-60.

⁶⁵⁶ Milbank, “‘I will Gasp and Pant’”, pp. 68-69.

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Though he does not develop or expand this line of thinking, Milbank shows a willingness to move much further than Gottwald into the social-critical mode of evaluating the text by standards that are external to the text.

4.13 Critique by Carol Newsom

The second critique of Gottwald's article is by Carol Newsom.⁶⁵⁷ Though describing Gottwald's article as 'a fascinating exercise in the possibilities of political criticism', Newsom is unhappy that Gottwald is party to a certain 'slipperiness of terminology in Marxist criticism',⁶⁵⁸ in particular, his oversimplified use of 'measurable absences'.

For Gottwald, this phrase seems to denote an empirical datum of history that may or may not be explicit in a given text. Newsom contends that Eagleton is making more of a theoretical point that 'while such historical references may or may not be present, "real history" cannot, by its very nature, be explicitly present in a text any more than one can have direct access to the unconscious'.⁶⁵⁹ I am not convinced that Newsom is right here. Eagleton's phrase quite clearly indicates *measurable* absences, which implies hard facts, not just 'a theoretical point'. What is at stake for Gottwald is not just the omission of *any* historical facts but of certain specific ideological-historical features that he believes to be of particular significance.

Furthermore, Newsom is not sure that the Judahite community in Jerusalem is as absent from the text as Gottwald claims. She maintains that 'identifiably Judahite speech' is 'not only taken up but reaccented in Second Isaiah, infused with the perspectives and intentions of the exilic community', including 'evocations of the book of Lamentations that cluster around the figure of the personified Zion'.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁷ Carol A. Newsom, 'Response to Norman K. Gottwald, "Social Class and Ideology in Isaiah 40-55"', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 73-78.

⁶⁵⁸ She goes so far as to observe:

Gottwald tends to use the terms with a degree of elasticity that can produce occasions of cognitive seasickness! This arises partly because terms have a technical sense in Marxism that is not coextensive with popular usage; partly because there is a difference in usage from one Marxist theorist to another; and partly because of ambiguities in Gottwald's own usage (Newsom, 'Response', p. 73).

⁶⁵⁹ Newsom, 'Response', p. 73. Newsom does not cite any particular reference to Eagleton at this point.

⁶⁶⁰ Newsom, 'Response', pp. 74-75. Newsom here makes use of the insights of the 'Bakhtin circle', which can 'show us how to perceive the nature of the struggle that takes place between the two groups at the site of language' (citing Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*). A Bakhtinian analysis employs the literary theories of a group of Russian theorists, Mikhail Bakhtin, Pavel Medvedev, and Valentin Volshinov. They considered a literary text to be an utterance, which is an act of communication between at least two social beings. The speaker / author not only responds to previous approaches but also anticipates the response of an audience. In the case of a literary text, a change of literary style may indicate a new speaker (Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres' in C. Emerson and M. Holquist [eds.], *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* [trans. V.W. McGee; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986], pp. 64-75 [71]).

For a recent application of the insights of the Bakhtin Circle to Biblical Studies, see Seth Sykes, 'Time and Space in Haggai-Zechariah 1-8: A Bakhtinian Analysis of a Prophetic Chronicle, *JSOT* 76 (1997), pp. 97-124.

Frederic Jameson refers to such textual engagements as 'dialogical struggles', 'where the language of another cultural group is appropriated by the dominant group, used, and defused, and thereby a kind of discursive hegemony is achieved' (Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 232). On Bakhtin, Jameson then comments: 'The problem with Bakhtin is that the language in which he framed

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She notes that there is ambiguity within Lamentations regarding the leadership, who are both mourned and yet also blamed, and she maintains that this is ideologically transformed in Second Isaiah, which was written for the children of that leadership class.⁶⁶¹ Newsom suggests that the debate in these chapters of Isaiah is a dialogical engagement between *texts* rather than directly between different *communities*. She thus demonstrates the significance for ideological criticism not just of inter-textual allusions but of instances of specifically inter-textual *debate*.

It is certainly a weakness of Gottwald's article that there is no discussion of aspects of inter-textuality (which would have been an essential had he followed a Jamesonian approach), especially in view of the fact that the Isaiah text contains so many verbal allusions to other Old Testament texts. These may represent some of the other voices in the 'debate' that Gottwald postulates behind Isaiah 40-55.

4.14 Summary and Evaluation

My own critique of Gottwald's article would focus on the far-reaching theological conclusions he bases on his 'measurable absences'. Gottwald claims: 'My conclusion is that Isaiah 40-55 parcels out the functions of the former Davidic dynasty, some to Cyrus, and some to the exiled community, thereby dissolving any need for a Judahite Prince'. This is, in effect, a whole new messianic theory predicated solely on debateable 'absences' from the text!

While Gottwald's line of argument has a certain plausibility, much of it is speculative and without evidence, textual or otherwise. There is circularity of argument throughout the article, particularly in the way in which Gottwald constructs the original author(s) and audience entirely on the basis of hints and allusions in the text and then interprets the text in the light of that reconstruction.⁶⁶² There is an 'absence' of the detailed sociological analysis that is characteristic of Gottwald's work elsewhere. The article also reflects Gottwald's own ideological presuppositions. Milbank, for example, questions Gottwald's assertion that 'elitist assumptions and concern for social justice ... must necessarily be in conflict with each other'.⁶⁶³ This Marxist dogma perhaps blinds Gottwald to alternative interpretations of the Isaiah text.

his concepts does not ... convey the embattled nature of the conflicts, and ultimately the class conflicts, that are going on'.

⁶⁶¹ In the light of this dialogical engagement in the text with voices from Judah, Newsom maintains:
I do not agree with Gottwald that there is in Second Isaiah either a naïve or a complacently 'hard ball' assumption that the exiles will be welcomed back home. Rather, the use of the Judahite speech of Lamentations is an acknowledgement that there are some social and ideological problems attached to going home again (Newsom, 'Response', p. 75).

Newsom provides a survey of this 'dialogical engagement' of Lamentations and Second Isaiah, acknowledging that it is far from an exhaustive analysis.

⁶⁶² Norman Habel has made this comment, which is pertinent here:

Our search for ... audience has always been a rather circular process. We have scrutinized a given literary unit closely to discover allusions, messages, terms, or ideas that might yield clues about the historical audience. Evidence of the audience was often entirely internal to the text itself. The meaning of the literary unit was then analyzed in terms of this hypothetical audience found within the text (Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 8).

⁶⁶³ Milbank continues: 'To assume that they were seems anachronistic and to equate the Bible's social concern too simply with a modern egalitarian consciousness (which is not to say that the Bible can't provide inspiration for the latter)' (Milbank, "I will Gasp and Pant", p. 64).

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However, overall, there is much that is positive in Gottwald's study. In particular, his (at least partial) consideration of the literary mode of production represents an area of investigation often overlooked. His suggestion that Isaiah 40-55 may be the later record of some form of *community debate* deserves serious consideration, especially in light of Newsom's further notion of *inter-textual* debate. Further study may elucidate whether these chapters only present one voice in this debate, as Gottwald maintains, or whether traces of other voices can be detected on the margins or between the lines of text. If the material was, indeed, collected and published *after* the event, then further study may distinguish the ideological perspective of the post-event editor.

4.2 David Jobling: a Jamesonian Approach

In his 'Deconstruction and the Political Analysis of Biblical Texts: a Jamesonian Reading of Psalm 72',⁶⁶⁴ David Jobling⁶⁶⁵ expressly adopts Jameson's three-stage methodology.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁴ David Jobling, 'Deconstruction and the Political Analysis of Biblical Texts: a Jamesonian Reading of Psalm 72', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 95-127.

For another discussion of Psalm 72 and Royal Ideology, see Norman C. Habel, 'Land as the Source of Wealth: A Royal Ideology' in *The Land is Mine*, pp. 17-32 (especially pp. 24-28). Royal Ideology is also discussed in Antti Laato, 'Psalm 132'.

⁶⁶⁵ Much of Jobling's earlier work was in the field of structuralist criticism, described by Boer as 'heavy and tough texts which require their own index of technical terms to assist the novice' (Boer, 'Western Marxism', p. 13). These works included: *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup. 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978) and *The Sense of Biblical Narrative. II. Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup. 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986). Jobling's more recent move into the field of Ideological Criticism is much under the influence of Frederic Jameson (himself a devotee of structuralist methodology). This influence is first evident in Jobling's 'Forced Labour: Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Literary Representation', *Semeia* 54 (1992), pp. 57-76, in which he conducts an 'isotopic analysis' of the three semantic fields of economics, sexuality, and wisdom and ultimately proposes a clash between the communitarian and the tributary [Gottwald's terms] modes of production as the final ground for the isotopic contradictions. The essay on Psalm 72, which is reviewed here, adopts an explicitly Jamesonian methodology. The notion of 'mode of production' becomes key in Jobling's subsequent publications, for example, 'Ruth Finds a Home'.

⁶⁶⁶ First, the text's internal semantic system is analysed in its immediate context. Secondly, the text is viewed against the backcloth of a selection of contemporary texts from within the same social formation. Finally, the social formation is viewed as a conflict of modes of production, and the textual findings are correlated with this conflict.

For another, more extended attempt to engage Jamesonian thinking with biblical criticism, see Roland Boer, *Jameson and Jeroboam* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), in which Boer applies Jamesonian theory to the Kings (MT and LXX) and Chronicles accounts of the reign of Jeroboam I. In particular, Boer focuses on the question, 'How might the ideological features of the text, which come in the form of religious issues, be understood as a *class* discourse' (p. 100). Using Jameson's three horizons of analysis, Boer finds that features of class and royal ideology are different in each of the three rescensions of the text. Boer also makes use of the Jamesonian concept of utopia – and finds in the text the utopian ideology of those classes who are in control of the mode of production.

For a somewhat different application of the Jamesonian methodology (to a New Testament text), see Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992).

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Jobling takes only the first seventeen verses of the psalm, regarding the remaining verses as a later addition. This decision to omit the closing verses betrays ideological presuppositions, in terms of Jobling's compliance with the form-critical hegemony. The truncated psalm is a different psalm from the canonical one in that, arguably, the closing verses impress their own ideological spin on the psalm as a whole. Jobling might have noted that the addition of the closing verses, if they are a later interpretative addition, is an illustration of the Jamesonian principle that 'texts come before us as the *always-already-read*: we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations'.⁶⁶⁷

Jobling applies the Jamesonian three-stage methodology to demonstrate that the ideological conflicts in a text are closely correlated with the social and semiotic systems that produce it. Texts are unstable, always open to deconstruction, with fault lines corresponding to the network of social, political, and economic considerations from which they emerge. Psalm 72 exposes several dimensions of contradictory political relationships, which deconstruct ideas of royal justice.

Jobling acknowledges at the outset: 'The results achieved by the study never escape the "undecidability" of the literary text, but some alignments between the textual and the political are plausible and suggestive'. Jobling seems here to retreat from a Jamesonian confidence in the assured results of the methodology. However, he rightly concedes that an exercise such as this needs ultimately to be part of a larger project, suggesting, for example, 'a *deconstructive* reading of the Bible in the light of liberation theology'.⁶⁶⁸

Jobling's first-stage reading of Psalm 72 demonstrates the failure of the psalm to reconcile a sense of mythic inevitability with actual political cause-and-effect. The psalm is shown to evoke a system centred on the king: the king's justice, the prosperity associated with his reign, and his rule over the nations. Jobling notes that all three aspects of the king's rule have a prominent economic dimension; yet the

David Penchansky uses both the theories of Frederic Jameson and the (structuralist) theories of Pierre Macherey (on textual production) in his *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Know Press, 1990). In the words of Tina Pippin's summary:

Penchansky traces the philosophical and literary movements of Formalism, Marxism and Neo-Marxism, and Deconstruction to set up his reading for 'the ideological conflict in Job'. Dissonance is in the text (for instance, historical and structural dissonance) and in the readings of the text. Penchansky explains: 'The disharmonic elements of the book of Job create a kind of whole; not in hopeless disarray, as some would claim, but neither as a coherent story'. Most traditional readings of Job search for answers to the problem of evil and suffering in the world, but Penchansky states, '*There are in fact no answers in Job*'. The book of Job is a text in relation to other texts (such as *the Testament of Job*; Greek and Hebrew renditions of Job) and its history of interpretation. It is a text full of multiple signifiers and interpretative impact – all through its conflicting ideologies (of the friends, Job's wife, God, and Job) (Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 56, quoting from Penchansky, *Betrayal of God*, pp. 70 & 71 respectively).

⁶⁶⁷ Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 9. We can never completely escape from what Jameson calls the master-narrative of interpretation across the centuries, a process which had already begun well within the biblical period.

Another feature of the canonical psalm that Jobling completely ignores is the superscription לְשִׁלְמָה, which is also indicative of a later contextualisation of the psalm.

⁶⁶⁸ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 96. For Jobling the object of *deconstruction* is directed against 'the accumulation of power in and through discourse which maintains and justifies political power'. He observes that 'deconstruction' has to date had little influence in biblical studies: even feminists and liberative readings have tended to be positivist, positing a 'biblical point of view' with a stance of 'take it or leave it', with black liberationists generally 'taking' it and feminists generally 'leaving' it!

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universal rule of the king is ultimately more to do with the bringing of blessing than the receiving of tribute. There is hidden conflict in the text, in the oppressors from whom the king must protect the poor but whose very existence betrays a failure in the king's rule of justice.⁶⁶⁹ God sustains the system, though there is a striking absence of reference to God after the first verse. There is also the implicit assumption that the system is somehow maintained by the prayers of the worshippers.

It is difficult to deduce who is the speaker and who the intended audience: the likeliest conclusion, in Jobling's view, is that the psalm is an official prayer for the king within the authorised cult. Against Jobling, however, the psalm could equally represent a prayer for change, voiced by those disillusioned with the king's failure to live up to the ideals of kingship that are held forth in the psalm.

Jobling notes a distinct semantic shift at verse 8, which divides the psalm into two sections. The first section, he maintains, depicts a 'perpetual motion machine' in which the royal system has a definite permanence. To this theme, verse 7 gives a clear impression of 'closure'; indeed the first seven verses could be a separate psalm.⁶⁷⁰ In the second section, this sense of permanence recedes: it is the king's righteousness that is now the 'motor' on which the system depends. Kingly defence of the poor is now a condition of the ongoing functioning of the political system. Verses 15-17 are a 'poor attempt' to integrate the myth of God's perpetual blessing into this new logic. Jobling also notes that the second section has a 'rhetorical distance' from the mention of God back in verse 1. The essential contradiction is between a divine system in verses 1-7, which works with an inevitability of God's supremacy, and a contrasting system of justice in the second section, which is conditional upon the king's defence of the poor.

Jobling notes that the second stage of the Jamesonian methodology is often squeezed out in Biblical Studies because of the lack of comparative literary data.⁶⁷¹ Jobling will make use of the category of royal psalms⁶⁷² as his wider interpretative context.⁶⁷³ Full implementation of the Jamesonian methodology, however, would have necessitated a much wider survey of literary possibilities.

Jobling summarises the main features of the royal psalms in the following terms. They portray a mythic system centred on Mt Zion as Yahweh's dwelling, a centre from which grace and blessings flow and from which protection is provided to Yahweh's people as an exclusive group. From Mt Zion, praise and thanks flow back

⁶⁶⁹ He questions (but does not pursue in any depth) the distinction apparently made in verse 2, in which the king 'judges the people with *righteousness* and the poor with *justice*' (Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 96).

⁶⁷⁰ - as indeed it may well have been. There is ample evidence that new psalms were regularly created by joining together or integrating previously existing psalms. Psalm 72 as we now have it may be composed of what were originally three separate entities, verses 1-7, verses 8-17, and verses 18-19 as a closing doxology. This may be an alternative explanation for the ideological disjunction among the sections that Jobling underlines.

⁶⁷¹ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 98. Note the similar criticism of Gottwald by Newsom, in which she draws attention to this neglect of comparison of one text with another (see above, pp. 146-47).

⁶⁷² In fact, he confines himself to a minimal list of royal psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 89, 101, 110, 118, 132, and 144.

⁶⁷³ Jobling is aware of the narrow base for his argument and the possibility of over-reading one text.

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to Yahweh.⁶⁷⁴ Surprisingly, the themes of the king's justice and of his defence of the poor are found *not* to be a regular theme in the royal psalms.⁶⁷⁵

There are two threats to the system implied by these psalms: a mythic threat of chaos and the moral threat of an unworthy king. As part of an uneasy assimilation of the Zion and Davidic traditions, the former reserves the right to ditch the king. Indeed, some Zion texts make no reference to a king at all. Though the Davidic covenant tradition in some ways reinforces the permanence of the Zion mythology, to some extent it undermines that tradition: if the Davidic covenant had a beginning, why should it not also have an end, and Zion with it?⁶⁷⁶

In effect, Jobling is talking here about a *deconstructive* tendency within the royal psalms. Another deconstructive tendency concerns the tension as to the king's righteousness: the king has been drawn into Yahweh's righteousness; yet righteousness is also regarded as his own achievement and, indeed, it is often lacking.⁶⁷⁷

Jobling then argues⁶⁷⁸ that Psalm 72, by contrast with the generality of the royal psalms, presents an exceptional emphasis on economic justice. Jobling describes this as the 'dominant isotopy'⁶⁷⁹ of Psalm 72. The king must protect the poor and channel natural wealth to the people. The text's desire is to reduce the system to a one-way flow from king to people. The text evokes an imaginary economic norm: those who fall below this are reintegrated; those who aspire to be above it are removed. In the first half of the psalm, this is an inevitable process; but, in the second half, it is dependent on the king.

⁶⁷⁴ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', pp. 106-107. He further elaborates that the mythology embraces all the nations as ultimate beneficiaries of Yahweh's blessing, with the king as a major focus of this mythology. The king's enemies are Yahweh's enemies, including the mythical forces of chaos; and the blessing brought by the king to subject nations is a regular theme. The people offer their support to the king through prayer. Jobling notes that the semantic content of these psalms regularly implies dialogue; first and second person usage predominates over third person description; and the dialogue is among kings, priests, people, and deity. There is permanence about this arrangement, but also a periodisation, in that the zone of blessing and protection expands and contracts from time to time.

⁶⁷⁵ Although the covenant with David is referred to frequently, Jobling regards this (without argumentation) as 'a secondary mythology, not integrated with the dominant Zion-mythology, even in some tension with it' (Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 107). He further comments: 'I have suggested that the mythology of the Davidic Covenant is uneasily incorporated into that of Zion. Part of the reason ... is that the irrelevance of the King's righteousness to his tenure, a central feature of the Davidic covenant, collides with a deep ambiguity in the Zion mythology' (p. 109).

⁶⁷⁶ He continues:

While it certainly affirms permanence for the *future*, it denies permanence in the *past*, when it persistently celebrates the *beginning* of the Davidic monarchy. ... This sense of *origin* is quite at odds with the dehistoricization of the Zion-myth (or, for purposes of comparison, with the dehistoricization of *Mesopotamian* kingship in a text like the Sumerian King List [Pritchard: 265-66]. Why should that which had a beginning not have an end? (Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 108).

⁶⁷⁷ 2 Samuel 7 makes clear that sin by an individual king does not negate the covenant. Psalm 89 seems to agree with this view but not Psalm 132.

⁶⁷⁸ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', pp. 110-112.

⁶⁷⁹ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 111. Jobling also observes that, on this point, the ideology of Psalm 72 is very close to that of the Solomon narrative in 1 Kings (though he does not discuss the Solomonic link claimed in the title of the psalm). See also Jobling, 'Forced Labour'.

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The text, however, evokes wider economic issues ‘of which it is not aware ... or which it has an interest in keeping undisclosed’.⁶⁸⁰ There is resolution for the rich and for the poor: but what about the neutrals who are neither rich nor poor? How did the poor become poor? What labour, forced or otherwise, is required to produce the king’s plenty and what relationship is there between this labour and poverty? What about the costs incurred by the whole institution of cult? How does the fact of the king’s wealth relate him to the oppressors of the poor? The psalm gives only an *appearance* of resolution.⁶⁸¹

The second stage of the Jamesonian methodology would include reconstructing the voices of the *opposing* ideological framework *by reading between the lines of the text*. Presumably, Jobling does not explicitly implement this because of the brevity of the text, though there might be some scope for inference from the text as to how the king’s righteousness was viewed by different sections of the community. An example of this might be the foregrounding of the phrase ‘*your* righteousness’ in the opening verse. The phrase is given an emphatic position before the verb and, arguably, implies a contrast between God’s righteousness and what the king regards as righteousness.⁶⁸²

Turning to the third stage, Jobling describes the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP),⁶⁸³ under which the psalm is presumed to have arisen. He demonstrates that the contradictions in the psalm can be closely correlated with two possible contradictions in the social formation of monarchical Israel: the coexistence of an emergent tribal-monarchical mode of production with a repressed communitarian mode; and the possibility that a tribal-monarchical mode cannot succeed in so small a society. Such a system is based on ‘a state apparatus which extracts the villagers’ surplus product’. The surplus, however, is marginal; so the number of village-units must be large for the state to be viable. There tends to be a growth of bankers and merchants, who are not only a burden on the people but also a threat to the royal apparatus by accumulation of wealth independently of the ‘system’.⁶⁸⁴

Jobling expresses doubt as to whether Israel was large enough to have operated such a system, though it is possible that a small state ‘might temporarily have sufficient access to other revenue to maintain itself as a quasi-AMP for a time’. This extra

⁶⁸⁰ Jobling, ‘Deconstruction’, p. 112.

⁶⁸¹ Norman Habel makes a similar point, noting that Psalm 72 refers to an ideal of deliverance or justice for the poor that is scarcely worked out in practice (Habel, *The Land is Mine*, p. 28).

⁶⁸² In the next verse, there is a similar emphasis that the people are God’s people rather than the king’s people. The near juxtaposition of these sentiments with the title *לְשִׁמְחָה* may suggest that, in the opinion of whoever added the superscription, this was a message that Solomon (and his descendants) particularly needed to hear!

⁶⁸³ Gottwald is cited as viewing the mode of production of this period as one of the weaker variants of the so-called Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) (Jobling, ‘Deconstruction’, p. 113, quoting from an unpublished paper by Gottwald).

⁶⁸⁴ Jobling, ‘Deconstruction’, p. 113. He further explains that there is little contact between the state and the villages apart from the procedures for extraction of the surplus. This apparatus is vast and therefore bureaucratic. Urban life is weakly developed. The state undertakes public works on a large scale. There is normally little private ownership of land: in principle all belongs to the state and tax paid by villagers is rent for the use of the land. However, it is noteworthy that in Israel there apparently was significant private ownership of land, as a result of a process of ‘*laitifundialisation*’. There is no elaborate concealment of the processes of exploitation: rather they receive ‘powerful ideological / religious justification’. In the AMP the religious / sacred is the primary *cultural* mode.

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revenue might consist of tribute from lesser political entities and / or of trade surpluses, much as described in the biblical traditions regarding Solomon.⁶⁸⁵

While Israel broadly follows this AMP pattern, the Israelite monarchy emerged out of an earlier 'liberated and retribalised' Israel.⁶⁸⁶ Hence, there is a conflict between two modes of production, especially 'the survival of the ideologeme that Yahweh gives the land on an egalitarian basis to the families and tribes'.⁶⁸⁷ It should be noted that Jobling is uncritically dependent here on Gottwald's *Tribes*.

Moving then to his third-stage reading, Jobling correlates the contradictions inherent in this complex social formation with the contradictions in the psalm. He concludes firstly that:

There seems to be a good 'fit' between the textual shift from mythic to political and an ideological hesitancy about the Asiatic mode of production in its classic form. ... Such a movement away from 'high' ideology may correlate with a sense that ideology and political reality are out of kilter ... because it must share public loyalty with an alternative ideology, left over from a suppressed mode of production.⁶⁸⁸

The second 'fit' is between the psalm's treatment of rich and poor and the necessity in an AMP for the king to counteract those who oppressively accumulate wealth independently of the system, for example, the merchant classes.

Jobling's overall conclusion is couched in these terms:

It is fair to claim a definite correspondence between the points where tension arises in the text, and the points where it arises in the political analysis. ... What is needed is the building and the testing of general theory; pending this we can try to extract, from exercises like the present one, such 'surplus of meaning' as we may.⁶⁸⁹

Jobling's essay is a significant attempt to apply the Jamesonian methodology, yielding fresh interpretative perspectives on Psalm 72.⁶⁹⁰ It recognises the *political* dimension and the element of social struggle inherent in what has traditionally been regarded as a *religious* text, an essential focus of Jameson's approach. Jobling's attempt to align the logical flaws in the text to the social and political 'contradictions' in the context of the text's production is plausible, taking account of the paucity of available sociological data. By his close attention to the psalm overall,⁶⁹¹ Jobling avoids the criticism that a disproportionate focus on absences and contradictions may result in distorted interpretation.

Jobling follows Jameson's lead in giving priority to the question, *How does the text work?* rather than, *What does it mean?* His second-stage comparison of Psalm 72 with the wider grouping of royal psalms brings into focus significant features of the psalm's ideology. This comparative element (in Jamesonian language: interpreting a given text as a *parole* of the wider *discourse*) is missing from many attempts at ideological criticism.

⁶⁸⁵ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 116.

⁶⁸⁶ Jobling here follows the reconstruction of early Israelite history as set out in Gottwald's *Tribes*.

⁶⁸⁷ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 117. See Gottwald, *Tribes* (passim).

⁶⁸⁸ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 120.

⁶⁸⁹ Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 123.

⁶⁹⁰ Gottwald's phrase: see Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 16.

⁶⁹¹ or at least the first seventeen verses of the psalm.

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Three particular criticisms might be made of Jobling, although I recognise that it was not possible for him to cover every angle in one short article. One is that Jobling makes uncritical, perhaps even speculative, assumptions about the Literary and General Modes of Production. Though very dependent on Gottwald, he lacks the kind of detailed sociological spadework for which Gottwald's work is the exemplar. In particular, questions to do with the literary mode of production of psalms remain unanswered. How were psalms written; by whom; and for whom? Did they originate in the Temple or the royal court or among opposition groups? How were they circulated? Were they used in liturgical worship or did they serve some other function?

The second point is not so much a criticism as a suggestion for an alternative approach to the psalm. The contrast that Jobling points to, between a sense of mythic inevitability and actual political reality, could have been handled in terms of the Jamesonian concept of *utopian* vision over against contemporary reality.⁶⁹² Jameson's concept of utopian vision has been largely undeveloped in Biblical Studies.

The third criticism is to point to a significant omission: there is no reference in the article to Jobling's own ideological position. Lacking is that element of metacommentary that David Penchansky has maintained is an essential ingredient of ideological criticism.⁶⁹³

4.3 **Itumeleng Mosala: from the Perspective of Black Theology of Liberation**

4.31 *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*

An early (1989) approach to ideological criticism is found in Itumeleng Mosala's *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*.⁶⁹⁴ Mosala's basic contention is that black theology has been ineffective as a weapon of struggle because of its enslavement 'to the biblical hermeneutics of dominant ideologies'.⁶⁹⁵ For

⁶⁹² Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, pp.281-99. Indeed, Jameson himself later refers to the section on utopia as one which 'people comment on less' but as the section of the book with 'most relevance to biblical criticism' (Jameson, 'Conversation with Frederic Jameson', p. 227).

⁶⁹³ See David Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs: a Tentative Proposal for Doing Ideological Criticism', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 35-42. Penchansky's article is reviewed and discussed below (pp. 202-204).

⁶⁹⁴ Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Exeter and Grand Rapids: Paternoster and Eerdmans, 1989). See also Itumeleng J. Mosala, 'The Use of the Bible in Black Theology' in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995; first published, London: SPCK, 1991), pp. 50-60.

In the discussion of Mosala which follows, I am indebted to the critique of Mosala's work in Christopher Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala' and to that in Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context* (Pietermaritzburg & Maryknoll, New York: Cluster Publications & Orbis Books, 2000), pp. 73-79. See also West, 'Gauging the Grain', pp. 75-105.

⁶⁹⁵ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 4. An example of the kind of third-world ideological-critical reading that, in Mosala's view is insufficiently resistant to the 'biblical hermeneutics of dominant

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Mosala, black liberation theology must break with inherited (usually European) historical assumptions.⁶⁹⁶ It must also expose the way in which the *texts themselves* were produced by those who wielded power in the ancient world. Christianity has often been an oppressive force because dominant groups have identified with a biblical tradition that originated with powerful groups who constructed texts and determined canon in their own interests.

In particular, Mosala maintains that black theology has all too readily embraced 'the ideological form of the text'.⁶⁹⁷ He regards biblical texts as 'products, records and sites of social, historical, cultural, gender, racial, and ideological struggles', which 'radically and indelibly bear the marks of their origins and history'. He insists that '*oppressive texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts*'.⁶⁹⁸

Mosala is wary of 'a fundamentalism of the left' that 'attempts to transplant biblical paradigms and situations into our world without understanding their historical

ideologies' would be Elsa Tamez, *The Bible of the Oppressed* (trans. M.J. O'Connell; Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982). Tamez (of Costa Rica) offers a critique of 'oppression' in the Bible: poverty, violence against women, slavery. Oppression is idolatry. Tamez is engaged in a reconstructive reading that is Bible-centred; that is, the Bible is a liberatory text, granting hope, good news, and liberatory strategies.

Within the US, the groundbreaking book in 'reconstructive' hermeneutics was Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), a collection of essays that relate the black experience of oppression to biblical exegesis. Mosala wishes to go well beyond this *reconstructive* approach. He comments:

The insistence on the Bible as the Word of God must be seen for what it is, an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests evident in the Bible are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual, and economic divisions (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 18).

Mosala's work has been followed by various essays in publications such as Fernando Segovia (ed.), *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (The Bible and Postcolonialism 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); F. Segovia and M. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place* (volume 1): *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*; and *Reading from this Place* (volume 2): *Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); R.S.

Sugirtharajah, (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*; and R.S. Sugirtharajah, R.S. (ed.), *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). See also R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). These publications seek to dislodge the white, male, Eurocentric dominance within Biblical Studies and to give a voice to (especially) Third-World scholars 'on the margins'.

Sugirtharajah observes: 'The margin is a site of "creative revisioning"', in which 'the continuing task of the interpreter is to investigate and articulate the truth and to confront the powers that be' (R.S.

Sugirtharajah, 'Introduction: The Margin as a Site of Creative Revisioning' in R.S. Sugirtharajah [ed.], *Voices from the Margin*, pp. 1-8 [7]. The Bible has been used as a tool of oppression and the voices from the margins are claiming the Bible back on their own, often revolutionary, terms. These scholars reject completely the notion that one (usually white, western male) interpreter can produce a universal reading of a text: they move in a world of multiple readings.

⁶⁹⁶ A.K.M. Adam comments on a similar predicament facing African-American interpreters. He writes:

While generations of African-American preachers and orators sustained a vital tradition of biblical interpretation, the official documents of academic biblical interpretation disregard those contributions. Most institutions of academic biblical interpretation will offer African-Americans who pursue a vocation of academic biblical interpretation a choice. Either they may turn their backs on the interpretative traditions that could well have inspired their interest in biblical studies or they may isolate themselves from the means of accreditation, employment, and publication (Adam, 'Political Criticism', p. 52).

⁶⁹⁷ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 28.

⁶⁹⁸ He accepts that 'texts that are against oppressed people may be co-opted by the interlocutors of the liberation struggle'. However, he argues strongly that in most cases 'the fact that these texts have their ideological roots in oppressive practices means that the texts are capable of undergirding the interests of the oppressors even when used by the oppressed' (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 30).

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circumstances'. He criticises liberation theologians who draw on liberation symbolism but who fail to 'push those biblical symbols all the way back to their socio-historic foundations'. They are unable to 'grasp concretely the inner-biblical strands of oppression and liberation in all their stark multiplicity'. There is not enough 'structural analysis of biblical societies' to make possible a valid comparison with contemporary situations; and the consequence of this can be a reinforcing of 'unstructural understanding of the present'.⁶⁹⁹

Mosala's aim is to develop a liberation hermeneutic that depends on a structural analysis of both the biblical text and the contemporary black socio-historical context. With regard to the text, he advocates a Marxist (Eagletonian) approach.⁷⁰⁰ He argues that black theology has not interrogated the text ideologically in terms of class, culture, and gender, with the result that black theologians continue to 'spar with the ghost of the oppressor' in its most dangerous guise, the ideological form of the text.⁷⁰¹ The Bible, Mosala maintains, 'cannot be reduced to a simple socially and ideologically unmediated "Word of God"'. Nor can it be seen merely as a straightforward mirror of events in ancient Israel. On the contrary, it is a *production*, an ideological remaking of those events and processes.⁷⁰²

Mosala holds that the different layers of the text, identified by historical and redaction criticism, each display a distinct ideological 'code', which must be separately identified in a structural analysis.⁷⁰³ It is only by distinguishing the different layers that interpreters can avoid an unconscious collusion with hegemonic and dominant discourse and can profitably read the texts 'against the grain'.⁷⁰⁴ This Eagletonian phrase is symbolic of the fact 'that the appropriation of works and events is always a contradictory process, involving some form of a "struggle"'.⁷⁰⁵

Mosala does not deny that black interpreters are correct in detecting in the biblical text 'glimpses of liberation and of a determinate social movement galvanised by a powerful religious ideology'.⁷⁰⁶ Where he takes issue with the majority of black

⁶⁹⁹ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 31-32. Gottwald makes a similar point when he says that the drawing of 'religious inspiration' or 'biblical values' from the biblical text 'will be romantic and utopian unless resolutely correlated to both the ancient and the contemporary cultural-material and social-organisational foundations' (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 706).

⁷⁰⁰ For another Third-World discussion (from South America) of the use of Marxist critical tools to break the stranglehold of Western hermeneutics, see José Miguez-Bonino, 'Marxist Critical Tools: Are they Helpful in Breaking the Stranglehold of Idealist Hermeneutics?' in Sugirtharajah, (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*, pp. 58-68.

⁷⁰¹ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 28.

⁷⁰² Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 3.

⁷⁰³ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 41-42. These 'codes' include: 'hegemonic codes', which encode the historical and cultural context in terms of the interests of the ruling class; 'professional codes', which represent the ideology of other elite groups; 'negotiated codes', which contain some oppositional features but still work within the dominant discourse; and 'oppositional codes', which point to the interests of the underclass of Israelite society. Mosala's 'codes' here might be usefully developed in terms of Jameson's notion of *ideologemes*.

⁷⁰⁴ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 4 (my emphasis). He continues: 'The critic must adopt an analytic approach to the text of the Bible *that exposes the underlying literary and ideological plurality in the text* without denying the hegemonic totality or shall we say unity of the final product'.

Gerald West refers to a similar criticism by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza of the tendency among liberation scholars to 'proof-texting'. See West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 78, note 2.

⁷⁰⁵ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 32.

⁷⁰⁶ Mosala here shows the influence of Gottwald's *Tribes*.

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interpreters is in the need to develop 'an adequate hermeneutical framework that can rescue those liberative themes from the biblical text'. He continues: 'One cannot successfully perform this task by denying the oppressive structures that frame what liberating themes the texts encode'. Resources and methodology from the social-science world are, for Mosala, indispensable aids in this process.⁷⁰⁷

Mosala illustrates his approach to biblical texts through a study of the 'underside' of the book of Micah.⁷⁰⁸ He maintains that his innovative contribution is made possible only by *the personal insight that comes from knowing the underside of struggle at first hand*. From this standpoint, he argues, it is possible for him to retrieve from the text an alternative perspective to the dominant ideology of the final form of the text.

Mosala regards the canonical text as reflecting the competing ideas and interests of the society when the text reached its final form. However, it retains traces of the social struggles that produced it, which can be detected by means of social and literary analysis by the 'socially committed' biblical scholar. The contradictions, the gaps, and the silences in the text can 'enable eyes hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kindred struggle of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absence of those struggles in the text'.⁷⁰⁹ The peasants, artisans, day labourers, and underclassness of Micah's Judah are 'entirely absent in the signifying practice' of the final form of the text, which emanates from the ruling class. However, 'something of their project and their voice has almost accidentally survived' in the underlying layers.⁷¹⁰

One of the main criticisms of liberation / contextual theology is that prior commitment to a cause can result in subjectivity of interpretation. Mosala admits his own interests as the starting point of his exegetical enterprise. However, he suggests 'struggle' as the exegetical bridge: the struggle of writers, readers, editors, interpreters, etc. The 'underside' of the text reveals traces of the struggle of the poor as oppressed by the Jerusalem elite and of their hope and vision for the future. Those Jerusalem oppressors, however, had come to regard themselves not as oppressors but as the victims of the foreign invader and empire. God's judgment on the ruling classes of Judah has been transferred to the oppression of those ruling classes by the Babylonians. The final text has been overlaid by a representation of Yahweh as the God who will restore the former power structures of oppression.

⁷⁰⁷ It is noteworthy that Gerald West writes in a similar vein: 'The social sciences provide the resources for this task, the task of identifying, unmasking, and demystifying the ideological agenda of particular biblical texts. The social sciences are thus the preferred tools of ideological criticism' (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 79). He goes on: 'The social sciences provide useful resources for establishing lines of connexion between our present locations and the socio-historical originary events that we believe partially constitute our present locations' (p. 81).

Mosala and West both here show the influence of Gottwald's *Tribes* in their enthusiasm for sociological method.

⁷⁰⁸ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 101-53. Mosala here draws on a not dissimilar study on Amos in Robert Coote, *Amos among the Prophets: Composition and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

See also an abridgement of Mosala's chapter in Micah, which appeared as 'A Materialist Reading of Micah' in Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsely (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), pp. 264-95.

⁷⁰⁹ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 121.

⁷¹⁰ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 151.

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To identify this alternative perspective, Mosala largely uses traditional methods of source and historical criticism, combined with a liberation *hermeneutic of suspicion*.⁷¹¹ Mosala is heavily dependent on hypothetical earlier stages of the text's production. An alternative synchronic approach might better serve Mosala's purpose, in which the text is interpreted as preserving a dialogue or debate between oppressors and underclasses, along the lines proposed by Gottwald for Isaiah 40-55. Mosala might also have elucidated the effect of the final form of the text by giving more explicit attention to the Eagletonian categories of General and Literary Modes of Production and of General and Authorial Ideology.

Mosala's line of argument is sometimes difficult to follow. His analysis is confusing in places⁷¹² and it is open to the suspicion that he is seeking to force the text into a pre-determined mould.⁷¹³ He speaks of the insight that comes from personal knowledge of the underside of struggle, coming dangerously close to saying that his personal experience of struggle enables him to see things that are not actually there in the text!

Christopher Rowland makes some perceptive comments on Mosala's work. He writes positively:

Mosala is a warning to the Barthians who work with the surface of the text and not the influences under it. ... He recognises diversity both religiously and politically within one text

⁷¹¹ It should be noted that the phrase 'hermeneutic of suspicion' need not *necessarily* imply a distrust of the Bible and its historicity or authority. More properly, the phrase should be applied to a 'suspicion of distrust of the self or of the interpreter' (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 142, note 5). Anthony Thiselton has written: 'The axis of suspicion encourages *Ideologiekritik* of the text and *suspicion concerning the interests of the interpreter and the interpreter's community tradition*' (Anthony Thiselton, 'Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics' in Barton [ed.], *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 95-113 [105-106, my emphasis]).

However, a certain 'suspicion' of the text is also implicit in many cases. For example, A.K.M. Adam writes:

The former way of thinking about literary texts assumed that great books automatically shared the great ideas of their culture; as a result, one might never imagine that writers were paid, or had unpopular views, or wrote out of partisan political motives (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 47).

⁷¹² Compare the comment of Gerald West, who describes Mosala's analysis of Micah here as 'somewhat muddled' (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 89, note 12).

⁷¹³ In addition to his discussion of Micah, Mosala also proceeds to give a similar analysis of the book of Luke (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 153ff). Luke starts out, maintains Mosala, as gospel for the poor but ends up accommodated to the needs of the Roman rich. It thus brings Jesus into line with the *status quo*. Luke's purpose is to establish the acceptability of Christianity in the later empire, to persuade or placate those in power. However, Rowland rightly maintains that Mosala's critique of Luke is much more superficial than his critique of Micah. Rowland points to the critique of the rich and powerful that is present in the final form of the text (for example, Luke 14.16) and in particular the prominence given to women in the book. Modern readers have, in fact, been able to retrieve the liberation strand from Luke without the difficulty that Mosala suggests (Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala', pp. 51-52). Rowland notes that in Acts there is much more accommodation with the establishment, and comments: 'We should resist seeking to resolve the tensions of Luke-Acts. Mosala's method offers us a way to explore them'. Rowland further comments that Christian historiography from Luke onwards certainly does display more concern to placate the powerful than to speak on behalf of the oppressed. The retrieval of the history of the poor is often the task of sympathetic voices from another culture or class. Christology has towered over other concerns in the Gospels, such as the needs of the poor, and has obscured the 'excitement and ethos of that Galilean messianic movement. But at least Luke's apology to Theophilus has ensured that it should be written down!' (Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala', pp. 52-53).

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... but does Mosala ignore those parts or layers of the text which do not conform to his prejudices?⁷¹⁴

He also comments:

Care needs to be taken with the kind of interpretative method adopted by Mosala. Its concern with what lies behind the text makes the ordinary reader dependent on the skills of the sophisticated interpreter so as to make a reading that is ideologically aware.⁷¹⁵

This criticism that Mosala's methodology, dependent on hermeneutical training and sociological insight, disempowers ordinary black (and other) readers is a crucial issue. It puts Mosala in the same kind of elitist position that he complains of in those who framed the final form of the text.

Gerald West points to a significant tension in Mosala's work:

Mosala works with a strong notion of ideological hegemony. ... The problem with, and hence the tension within, Mosala's form of ideological analysis is that it does not allow for a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the relationship between domination and resistance.⁷¹⁶

For West, quoting from J.C. Scott,⁷¹⁷ the result of ideological domination:

is to define for subordinate groups what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain aspirations and grievances into the realm of the impossible, of idle dreams. By persuading underclass that their position, their life-chances, their tribulations are unalterable and inevitable, such a limited hegemony can produce the behavioural results of consent without necessarily changing people's values.⁷¹⁸

A consequence can be that oppressed peoples come to use the words of their oppressors to describe their oppression, are reluctant to 'create their own language', and may even resist emancipatory forms of knowledge.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁴ Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala', p. 48 (my emphasis). Rowland also comments: 'More important ... than disentangling the ideological struggles in scripture is the attention to the understanding of the *effect* of the text in a particular context and what it is about the situation which conditions its reception' (Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala', p. 56).

Rowland's point here could be put a different way by saying that it is the *perlocutionary* effect of the text rather than any *illocutionary* intention that is paramount.

Nakanose's, *Josiah's Passover*, is an attempt along the lines of what Rowland asks for here, combining a scholarly study of the Josianic Reformation along liberationist lines with an account of the reception of that study among base communities.

⁷¹⁵ Rowland, 'Dialogue with Itumeleng Mosala', p. 56.

⁷¹⁶ West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 90.

⁷¹⁷ West subscribes to the view that there are distinct 'thick and thin accounts of ideological hegemony', a view that he derives from J.C. Scott. The 'thick' account primarily involves the [Althusserian] ideological state apparatuses, whose 'ideological work secures the active consent of subordinate groups to the social arrangements that reproduce their subordination' (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 91). The 'thin' account is defined in the quotation given in main text. West is here citing J.C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 73-74.

⁷¹⁸ Scott, *Domination*, p. 74, quoted in West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 91.

⁷¹⁹ West at this point digresses to outline a 'thinner' theory of hegemony, associated with the names of Jean and John Comaroff, who posit a triangular relationship between culture, ideology, and hegemony:

Culture ... can be viewed as the shared repertoire of practices, symbols, and meanings in which and with which the dialectics of domination and resistance operate. Hegemony and ideology are the two dominant forms in which power is entailed in culture. ... Hegemony and ideology are the two faces of power. Hegemony is the nonagentive face of power that hides itself in the forms of everyday life. ... Ideology is the agentive face of power that refers to the (relative) capacity of human beings to exercise control over the production, circulation, and consumption of signs and objects in specific historical contexts. Ideology articulates and owns systems of meanings, values, and beliefs for any group within a communal identity, whether dominant or subordinate, within a historically situated cultural field. While hegemony hegemonises, ideology articulates. ... The particularly creative and insightful contribution of the Comaroffs ... is their suggestion that hegemony exists in a reciprocal interdependence with ideology in that it is part of a dominant world-view that has been naturalised (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 92, citing Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991], p. 22).

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West points to a useful concept from Scott, namely, that of the 'hidden transcript', the discourse that subordinate groups develop 'behind the back' of the dominant, creating a behind-the-scenes social space in which 'offstage dissent to the official transcript may be voiced'.⁷²⁰ It follows that 'the public transcript ... is unlikely to tell the whole story about power relations, because it is frequently in the interests of *both parties* tacitly to conspire in the misrepresentation'.⁷²¹ Accordingly, West suggests that the critic should search out traces of the *hidden* transcript. The latter might include rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, jokes, and other forms of popular culture. In biblical terms, one might suggest prophetic preaching against the establishment. West elaborates his argument in the following terms:

Those of us who work within a liberation paradigm ... refuse to accept the final form of the biblical text, the public transcript, as the last word. The text as we have it ... is an ideological product, usually of the ruling classes. The text has grain. While we accept that determining ... the ideology of the text is problematic, we persist because we hope to find lines of connection between our present faith struggles and the faith struggles of communities similar to ours in the originary moments of our tradition. ... However, there have been a number of contradictions, tensions, and inconsistencies in our accounts of ideological hegemony that have prevented us from recognising just how much the resistance of subordinate groups is present in the public transcript.⁷²²

West therefore observes of Mosala:

Mosala would, I suspect, want to agree ... that instead of focussing on the public transcript we ought to attempt to 'read, interpret, and understand the often fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups'. But his account of ideology leaves little space for a real presence of such forms of discourse in the public transcript.⁷²³

What is thus needed, West argues, is a *more nuanced literary reading of the text and less dependence on social-scientific perspectives*. West's concept of a *literary* reading strategy is one that enables 'postmodern,⁷²⁴ socially engaged, biblical scholars and *premodern marginalized readers* to collaborate'. As a result, 'the socio-historical questions that emerge are those of the reading group and not those of white, male,

⁷²⁰ Scott, *Domination*, p. x1. West adds:

The practices and rituals routinely generated by slavery, serfdom, the caste system, colonialism, patriarchy, and racism usually deny subordinates the ordinary response of asserting their dignity through negative reciprocity: a slap for a slap, an insult for an insult. ... Instead subordinates establish their dignity, register their resistance, and elaborate their hidden transcript, a restricted 'public' social circle. ... In this relatively safe space, subordinates find a partial refuge from the humiliations of domination (West, 'Gauging the Grain', pp. 94-95).

⁷²¹ West, 'Gauging the Grain', 95, citing Scott, *Domination*, pp. 114-155.

⁷²² West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 98, quoting from Scott, *Domination*, p. xii.

As an example of finding 'lines of connection' using socio-historical methods, West commends Carol Meyers, who offers a detailed historical and sociological reconstruction of the life of ordinary women in early Israelite society. See West 'Gauging the Grain', pp. 82-83 and Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷²³ West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 98.

⁷²⁴ Among the specifically postmodern critics are the contributors to *The Bible and Culture Collective*, 1995. Mention should also be made of Walter Brueggemann, whose earlier work sought to situate 'theological trajectories' in clearly delineated socio-historical contexts. See, for example, Walter Brueggemann, 'Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel', *JBL* 98 (1984), pp. 161-85, reprinted in Gottwald and Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation*, pp. 201-26. However, in his more recent work, Brueggemann is more influenced by literary and postmodern means of interpretation: see, for example, Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

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First World, and usually dead, scholars'.⁷²⁵ West thus seeks to build on Mosala's approach, while minimising the implicit elitism.⁷²⁶

West concludes his critique of Mosala with these telling comments:

For those of us working on the margins, in collaboration with poor and marginalized 'readers' of the Bible, matters of survival, liberation, and life drive us to find resources that are useful, that work. So we are not perturbed about crossing disciplinary boundaries. We are prepared to take whatever tools are at hand to do the job. This is why most of the attempts at integrating literary and socio-historical modes of criticism are to be found outside the mainstream of Biblical Studies.⁷²⁷

4.32 The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa

A significant later piece by Mosala is his 'The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa',⁷²⁸ a reading of Esther 'from the perspective of a revolt of the black, feminist, South African reader'.⁷²⁹ The thoroughly political nature of the Bible, maintains Mosala, is evidenced above all else

⁷²⁵ He continues: 'Furthermore, by breaking the hegemonic hold of social-scientific biblical interpretation and giving space and a place to literary forms of interpretation, socially engaged biblical scholars and poor and marginalized readers can begin their collaborative readings with the text ... [rather than with] the social sciences ... behind the text' (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 101).

⁷²⁶ West asks how he as a 'white, middle-class, South African male' can speak for the oppressed. His answer is that even from his own social location he 'can choose to be accountable to and to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed'. He seeks to work with 'communities of ordinary readers' (in the Institute for the Study of the Bible in South Africa) to produce contextual readings of biblical texts (West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 215 & 234).

⁷²⁷ West, 'Gauging the Grain', pp. 103-104. The works outside the mainstream of biblical scholarship that West cites as examples include: Meyers, 'Discovering Eve'; the various essays in F. Segovia and M. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place* (volumes 1 & 2); and in R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*. To these I would add Nakanose, *Josiah's Passover*.

⁷²⁸ Itumeleng Mosala, 'The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 129-137.

⁷²⁹ Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 129-30. In South Africa, black theologians have for more than a decade been 'wrestling with the many issues of the nature, the method, the specific form, the epistemology, the sources, and the goals of the Black Theology of Liberation movement'. As part of this, the question of the Black Feminist Theology of Liberation has now been firmly established as a high priority on the agenda.

Mosala had begun by maintaining a distinction between the *Theology of Liberation* and *Liberation Theology*, the latter referring to the specific Latin American form of the former, associated with the names of activist scholars such as Segundo, Gutiérrez, Assmann, and Bonino. The broader expression, Theology of Liberation, is generic. It denotes 'a movement of Third World people involved in a struggle to break the chains of cultural-religious imperialism that help to perpetuate their political and economic exploitation' (Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 129). The use of the narrower phrase, Liberation Theology, for all theologies of poor and oppressed peoples involves a form of 'discourse imperialism', in that it tends to subsume them all under the Latin America version, a mistake often made by 'white radical people who identify culturally more with the European descendants of Latin America than with Third World people'. Mosala quotes from Cornel West:

For oppressed coloured peoples, the central problem is not only repressive capitalist regimes, but also oppressive European civilising attitudes. And even Marxists who reject oppressive capitalist regimes often display oppressive European civilising attitudes towards coloured peoples (Cornel West, 'The North American Blacks' in S. Torres and J. Eagleson [eds.], *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities: Papers from the International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, 1980* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1981], pp. 255-257 [256]).

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by the way in which it has been used to bolster up Apartheid.⁷³⁰ The white liberal-humanist agenda countered this use of the Bible, not by expressing fundamental disapproval of biblical texts, such as the conquest texts, but by contesting the interpretation of texts by Apartheid ideologues. The debate was dominated by ‘a hermeneutics of textual or authorial collusion / collaboration rather than one of struggle or revolt’. This inevitably alienated black people, ‘as their reality constantly contradicted their supposed inclusion in the biblically based love of God’.⁷³¹

It was not until 1976 that ‘revolutionary reading practice became an integral part of the social insurgency of the black masses’.⁷³² Black Theology became part of the ‘Revolt of the Reader’ movement, summed up by Eagleton in these words:

That readers should be forcibly subjected to textual authority is disturbing enough; that they should be insultingly invited to hug their chains, merge into empathetic harmony with their oppressors to the point where they befuddledly cease to recognise whether they are subject or object, worker, boss, or product is surely the ultimate opiate.⁷³³

Mosala turns to the implications of the book of Esther for the Black African women’s struggle. His analysis sets out to be in the Revolt-of-the-Reader tradition, resisting the liberation theology tradition. Instead, it will ‘contend against the “regimes of truth” of these traditions as they manifest themselves in the text of the Bible itself’.⁷³⁴ The Black African Women’s struggle takes the form simultaneously of gender, national, and class struggle. It follows that hermeneutics of liberation for an African women’s struggle should simultaneously be human, African, and feminist hermeneutics.⁷³⁵

Mosala distances himself from preoccupation with questions of Esther’s canonicity, historicity, and ‘irreligiosity’. He accepts the prevailing view that the story is novelistic, originating in the Maccabean-Hasmoenean era. However, he contends:

... that traditional scholarship consistently fails to draw the *ideological* implications of its historical and literary studies. This is because it is often in *ideological collusion* with the text.⁷³⁶

The task of criticism, argues Mosala, is not to explain the story, nor even to supply what is ‘not said’ in the text. In Eagleton’s words, criticism must ‘install itself in the very incompleteness of the work ... to explain the ideological necessity of the “not-

⁷³⁰ Mosala contends: ‘No other political or ideological system in the modern world ... derives itself so directly from the Bible’ (Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 130).

⁷³¹ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 130.

⁷³² Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 131.

⁷³³ Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-85* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 182. See Mosala’s later article, ‘The Politics of Debt and the Liberation of the Scriptures’, in Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, pp. 77-84, in which Mosala builds on Eagleton’s concept of the ‘revolt of the reader’.

⁷³⁴ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 132. The phrase ‘regimes of truth’ is a quotation from Cornel West, ‘The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual’, *Cultural Critique* 7 (1985), pp. 109-124 (120).

⁷³⁵ Such a hermeneutic has a threefold task:

It will be *polemical* in the sense of being critical of the history, the culture, the ideologies, and the agendas of both the text and itself; it will be *appropriative* of the resources and victories inscribed in the biblical text as well as its own contemporary text; it will be *projective* in that its task is performed in the service of a transformed and liberated social order (Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 134).

The italicised terms are taken from Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin: or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 113.

⁷³⁶ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 132 (my emphasis).

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said”, unmasking the ‘unconsciousness of the work – that of which it is not, and cannot be aware’.⁷³⁷

Mosala, intriguingly, describes Esther 1 as ‘a fairly straightforward descriptive text’, noting that the social formation implied by the text involves a tributary mode of production. The depiction of Vashti portrays ‘the private property character of the sexuality of the king’s wife’. Indeed, ‘the fundamental problematic of this chapter, as indeed of the whole text of Esther, is the gender structuring of politics’. Mosala categorises Esther as a ‘feudal-tributary text’, though one might question his assumption that a text purporting to *describe* a feudal-tributary society need necessarily have been *produced* in a feudal-tributary society. Esther is also, in Mosala’s view, a ‘survival text’ and a ‘patriarchal text’.

A Feudal-Tributary Text. The exploitation associated with this feudal-tributary system is represented by the ‘not-said’ of the text. Explicit is the squandering of surplus production on luxury goods by the ruling classes. However, the description of this wasteful expenditure:

... functions to obscure the social relations of production on which this consumptionist practice is premised. It mystifies the fact that behind these luxurious goods and extravaganzas lie exploited, oppressed, and dispossessed peasants, serfs, and sub-classes. This text which is otherwise excellent in its provision of socio-economic data is eloquent by its silence on conditions and struggles of the non-kings, non-office holders, non-chiefs, non-governors, and non-queens.⁷³⁸

However, if Esther is a *novelistic* account, as Mosala asserts, then, presumably, the exploitation of Persian sub-classes is as fictional as the luxurious exploits of the ruling classes. The text may well have functioned to mask the exploitation of underclasses in the author’s world. However, if that is so, the text’s ‘excellent provision of socio-economic data’ will relate to the Maccabean-Hasmoenean period and not to the Persian era.

It *may* be that Esther has functioned for modern readers as a justification for ruling class extravagance at the expense of exploited underclasses. Modern readers who suffer oppression may, therefore, locate themselves in the ‘not-said’ of the text as a quite legitimate reading strategy. But this is quite a different matter from looking to the text for information as to the socio-economic circumstances of any actual historical empire.

A Survival Text. For Mosala, Esther ‘suggests a pure survival strategy, which is not underpinned by any liberative political ideology’. This ‘ideological capitulation’ is summed up in these terms:

The price that the oppressed must pay for this turn of events favourable for them is at least two-fold. Firstly the oppressed must be seen to have bought heavily into the dominant ideology. ... Secondly ... the survival of the group is achieved ... by the alienation of Esther’s gender power and its integration into the patriarchal structures of feudalism.⁷³⁹

Mosala comments on the thrice repeated statement in Esther 9 that the Jews did no looting: ‘this principle of upholding the sanctity of property over the life of people is

⁷³⁷ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 133, quoting from Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 89.

⁷³⁸ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 134.

⁷³⁹ Mosala, ‘Implications of the Text of Esther’, p. 135.

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well known as part of ruling-class ideology'. However, the motive in the text for abstinence from looting was not to do with an ideology of private property. It was to underscore the text's claim that the killing took place as legitimate self-defence, not motivated by any agenda for material gain. Arguably, the text is seeking to credit the Jews with respect for the sanctity of life: taking life is permissible in self-defence, but not in the pursuit of property gain.

Mosala misses the opportunity to engage the text with contemporary issues of the legitimacy or otherwise of revolutionary violence.

A Patriarchal Text. Mosala seems uncertain whether the text expresses approval of Vashti's actions. On the one hand, 'the audacity of one woman unleashed the political possibilities reflected approvingly in the rest of this book'. On the other hand, there is an 'explicit condemnation of Vashti in the text', with which the African Biblical feminist cannot collude.⁷⁴⁰ His main criticism of the book's ideology, however, is that Esther's preoccupation with national survival obscures issues of *gender-power*, parallel to the way in which oppression of African women has been subsumed by the wider struggle against colonialist oppression. The book of Esther sacrifices gender struggles to national struggles: 'it disprivileges the question of gender exploitation'.

There are two further objections that a biblical hermeneutics of liberation must raise against Esther. First is 'the text's choice of a female character to achieve patriarchal ends':

The fact that the story is woven around Esther does not make her the heroine. The hero of the story is Mordecai who needless to say gives nothing of himself for what he gets. ... African women who work within liberation movements and other groups will be very familiar with these kinds of dynamics.⁷⁴¹

Secondly, the discourse of Esther suppresses class issues, including the class character of cultural practices such as the Feast of Purim:

The Feast of Purim ... is not located in class terms in such a way that proper ideological choices can be made about it. In this it is very much like many cultural practices that seem inherently autocratic in the demands they place on their people.⁷⁴²

Mosala, however, does not make it at all clear why he perceives Purim to be 'inherently autocratic'.

Mosala's overall conviction is that oppressed communities must liberate the Bible so that the Bible can liberate them: 'An oppressed Bible oppresses and a liberated Bible liberates'.⁷⁴³ Liberation hermeneutics must 'raise questions of the material, ideological, and cultural conditions of production of the text' in order that 'the political issues affecting nations, women, races, age groups, and classes' may receive proper treatment.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴⁰ Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 135.

⁷⁴¹ Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 136.

⁷⁴² Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 136.

⁷⁴³ Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 137, quoting from Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 193.

⁷⁴⁴ Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 137. Mosala describes this process as the outworking of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's 'hermeneutics of consent'. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), p. 15 & *passim*.

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There seem to me to be two serious flaws in Mosala's analysis. The first arises from his claim that liberation hermeneutics must 'raise questions of the material, ideological, and cultural conditions of *production* of the text'. Mosala has not focussed on the conditions underlying the *production* of the text but rather on the conditions prevailing in the fictional Persian society that the text purports to describe. There is no doubt a connexion between the material and social conditions described (or 'not-described') in the text and the writer's contemporary social conditions. It is no doubt also true that the ideology of the writer, which arises from his /her contemporary context, may somehow be inscribed in the text's description of the past. But these are not simple connexions. A much more nuanced analysis is needed to draw connexions between the material conditions described in the text and the conditions that gave rise to the text's production.

The second flaw in Mosala's argument is indicated by his opening statement that Esther 1 is 'a fairly straightforward descriptive text'. In fact, Esther 1 is far from 'a straightforward descriptive text'. It could, for example, be understood as satire, perhaps even as comedy. Let me offer, by way of illustration, an alternative reading strategy for the book.⁷⁴⁵

It is generally assumed that Ahasuerus is another name for Xerxes, though it is difficult to fit the biblical story with the Xerxes of Greek or Persian sources.⁷⁴⁶ The Hebrew seems to imply something like King *Quiet and Poor*, an unlikely name for an all-powerful emperor. So it could be a 'nick-name' among the Jews for one of the Persian Emperors or possibly even a 'stage name' for a *typical* Persian Emperor, signalling that this text was never intended to be a straightforward narrative-historical account.

The opening verses describe this new king as all powerful, ruling an empire from India right round to Ethiopia. Yet it quickly becomes clear that, in fact, he has no control even over his own household. He does not know what is happening in his own court and those who surround him manipulate him at every stage! This seemingly all-powerful potentate turns out to be more like a dim-witted buffoon, a figure of stage comedy.

At the end of seven days of feasting, the king, well under the influence of the wine, decides to show off the beauty of Queen Vashti to the assembled men-folk. She quite rightly makes a principled stand against being an object for male entertainment. So the king summons those whom he is accustomed to consult for 'expert opinion on questions of law and order' (1.13)! This is an excellent example of the tongue-in-

⁷⁴⁵ Different ideological-critical reading strategies for Esther include: Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*; and David J.A. Clines, 'Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text' in D.J.A. Clines, S.E. Fowl, and S.E. Porter (eds.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (JSOTSup. 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 31-52, reprinted in David J.A. Clines, *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1968-1998* (JSOTSup. 292-293; 2 vols; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 3-22.

⁷⁴⁶ For example, Herodotus, the Greek historian, tells us that Xerxes' wife's name was Amestris and there is no extra-biblical record anywhere of Vashti or Esther as wives for Xerxes. It should also be noted that LXX tradition seemingly identified Ahasuerus not with Xerxes (486 –465 BCE) but with the later Emperor Artaxerxes II (404 – 359 BCE).

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cheek way in which the story is told.⁷⁴⁷ The absurdity intensifies when these top jurists give their legal opinion. If Vashti is allowed to get away with it, then every woman in the empire will refuse to obey her husband! And so they devise a law to declare *that that every man should be master in his own house* (verse 19). We began with a seemingly all-powerful king who was not, in fact, in charge of anything; and now we have this facile emphasis on male supremacy at the beginning of a story in which all the men are eventually controlled or manipulated by women. Even Haman does what his wife tells him! Men cause all the problems in the story and a woman solves them. This is the very stuff of comedy, as is the choice of the new Queen Esther, on the basis of a grand 'beauty' contest.⁷⁴⁸ It is literary satire - not 'straightforward descriptive text'.

The two main male characters are Mordecai, the hero, and Haman, the villain. Haman is a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite ruler whom Saul had defeated in battle.⁷⁴⁹ Mordecai, a Benjaminite, is from the tribe of Saul. This may not mean much to a modern reader but any Jew would have known of the age-old biblical enmity between Israelites and Amalekites. Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman sets in motion a chain of events that almost leads to the extermination of the Jews. Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down? Did he have a good *religious* reason for his refusal? Certainly, the Jews would be expected to refuse to bow to any idol or image, as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3). But was it forbidden for a Jew to show customary respect before royal officials? The writer of Genesis did not regard it as a problem for Joseph's brothers to offer such obeisance before the Governor of Egypt;⁷⁵⁰ and throughout the Old Testament there are numerous other examples that use the same Hebrew expression for obeisance as in Esther.⁷⁵¹ So it is not at all certain that there was any genuine *religious* reason for Mordecai's behaviour. The reason was rather the 500-year-old enmity between Jews and Amalekites. Mordecai might have argued that the Amalekites were God's enemies, to give a semi-religious justification for his actions. But I suspect that today we would describe his behaviour as motivated by racism or sectarianism, under the cloak of religion. One might further argue that the text caricatures the behaviour of both Mordecai and Haman as a typically *male* pig-headedness!

I acknowledge at this point that my reading is influenced by my own ideological background in Northern Ireland, in which a similar cocktail of religious, political, and gender ideologies prevails and in which ancient battles (from as long ago as the period from Mordecai and Haman to Saul and Agag) are still fresh in the popular memory.⁷⁵² This ideological undergirding to my reading of the text parallels to some degree

⁷⁴⁷ - pointing up the absurdity of the king's behaviour, though possibly true enough of the kind of thing that typically happened in the courts of ancient potentates!

⁷⁴⁸ It was not of course actually a beauty contest but a contest based on a night in bed with the king!

⁷⁴⁹ See 1 Samuel 15. In fact, it was Samuel who eventually killed King Agag, after rebuking Saul for not doing so.

⁷⁵⁰ See Genesis 43.28. The same Hebrew for 'obeisance' is used in Genesis 43 as in Esther 3.

⁷⁵¹ - for example, David before Saul in 1 Samuel 24.8.

⁷⁵² For example, the annual commemoration in Northern Ireland on 12 July (a Bank Holiday) of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

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Mosala's claim that his first-hand experience of struggle enables him to see in a text dimensions that would not otherwise have been apparent.⁷⁵³

Returning to Esther, notice how the king is persuaded to go along with Haman's diabolical plan by a promise of considerable income for the royal treasury. The kind of language used by Haman here has been used countless times across the centuries as a means of justifying persecution against minority populations. *They keep themselves separate, they have strange customs, they do not keep our laws, and they have too much money!* The king authorised the plot without even asking who the race of people were: so it was not a specifically anti-Jewish matter for the king. There is, in fact, no suggestion in the book of any antagonism among the *Persians* (king or people) against the Jews.

In chapter 4, Mordecai manages to get word to Esther of the crisis. After initial reluctance, Esther develops the strategy that saves the day. From this point on it is no longer Esther who obeys Mordecai: Esther now gives instructions and Mordecai obeys. A woman takes control of the plot. Once Haman⁷⁵⁴ is exposed, Mordecai becomes 'Prime Minister'. But the problem still remains of the edict for the destruction of the Jews. Not even the king himself could change the law of the Medes and Persians.⁷⁵⁵ The king abdicates all responsibility for the matter. It is left to Esther to undo this bizarre situation, by a decree authorising self-defence. However, it soon becomes clear that the Jews did far more than defend themselves. They took the opportunity to rid themselves of their enemies, killing over 75,000 people throughout the Empire. In the city of Susa, 500 were killed on the first day and Esther is granted permission for a second day of slaughter. Not one Jew was killed, which suggests that there were few who actually tried to attack them.

Significantly, the narrator maintains a studied 'absence' of comment on this revenge slaughter: judgment is left to the reader. Traditional interpretation has assumed that the book approves of the actions of the Jews.⁷⁵⁶ However, if the book is primarily satire rather than 'straightforward descriptive text', it would be unwise to take this section of the story at face-value. Mordecai's refusal to bow down appeared, at first sight, to be on religious grounds as in Daniel but, on closer inspection, it proved to be more to do with a sectarian clash. Similarly, the slaughter may at first appear to be in same tradition of slaughter of enemies as the book of Joshua but, on closer inspection, it is not at all clear that the narrator expresses approval. Certainly, there is a studied

⁷⁵³ However, I readily admit that, unlike Mosala, my experience is not primarily from the *underside* of struggle, though I have lived and ministered in one of Belfast's most disturbed communities at the height of the 'troubles' in the 1970s and 1980s..

⁷⁵⁴ The extent of Haman's bitterness is vividly portrayed by the narrator. He cannot enjoy any of his wealth and power because of his personal resentment towards Mordecai. Governmental ideologies are often a masking of bitterness, hatred, jealousy, sectarianism, or racism, with deep and unconscious roots in the national *psyche*.

⁷⁵⁵ It should be noted in passing that there is no extra-biblical evidence for this constitutional principle.

⁷⁵⁶ and this interpretation may have provided an ideological undergirding for violent self-assertion in a variety of contexts, right down to contemporary Israel-Palestine (for some Israelis) and contemporary southern Africa (for Mosala).

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‘absence’⁷⁵⁷ of imputing any *divine* approval to the slaughter, which is significantly different from the Joshua accounts.

The chapter ends with the institution of Purim. A letter from Mordecai is not enough to establish this new feast. The matter has to be confirmed by Esther. The book, which began with a satirical parading of male supremacy, ends on a note in which a woman’s word is required as the final authority, even in religious matters - a point that Mosala appears to have missed.

The closing chapter of the book seems on the surface to be a happy-ever-after ending. However, there is a sting in the tail. The final words of the book speak of forced labour imposed on peoples of the Empire. It is surely an irony for the Jews, who traced their origins to deliverance from slavery in Egypt, that the last ‘historical’ episode in the Hebrew Bible is Mordecai’s complicity in the enslavement of others. Though the book may overall be comic, arguably, it ends in tragedy. Satire or comedy as literary devices can be used to convey a serious message: satire is an ideal medium for undermining official ideology.

This alternative reading leads to very different conclusions from those drawn by Mosala. The first of Mosala’s three objections is that Esther affirms ‘feudal tributary’ values. On my reading, the book is a biting satire against the ideological absurdities of such a system.

Mosala’s second objection is that Esther is a ‘survival text’. The book may well have arisen out of the survivalist ideologies of Jewish groups in the Maccabean-Hasmonean era. However, the book does *not* represent a ‘pure survivalist ideology’. The opportunity taken by the Jews to go beyond self-defence and to make a pre-emptive strike against their enemies moves them well beyond pure survivalism. Where Mosala is right is that the actions of the Jews are ‘not underpinned by any *liberative* political ideology’. Instead, they outpace the Persians at their own game. The same might be said of Mordecai’s complicity in the enslavement of others. For those seeking to ‘locate themselves in the text’, there is a warning against the tendency for the oppressed to become oppressor, a warning that is surely as relevant to Black African Liberation movements as it is (among others) to freedom fighters in Kosovo or to those involved in the contemporary Israel-Palestine conflict.

Thirdly, there is Mosala’s objection to Esther as a ‘patriarchal text’, in which gender issues are subsumed by a patriarchal nationalism. But, in fact, the text pokes a lot of satirical fun at the pompous protestations of male supremacy. The crisis is caused by a typically male display of sectarian pig-headedness. The problems are resolved by a woman’s ingenuity, with even Mordecai adopting a position of obedience to Esther. And when it comes to the founding of the Festival of Purim, Esther’s word is final. So I submit that the book has a great deal more to say on the ‘gender structuring of politics’ than Mosala allows.

The book is still open to the criticism that Esther obtains her goals by colluding with male, imperial ideology. Who is the heroine: Vashti, who takes an uncompromising

⁷⁵⁷ This is so at least of the MT. The longer version of Esther in the LXX introduces a range of quite different ideological perspectives, which would make an interesting avenue for comparative ideological study.

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stand against an outrageous display of patriarchy, achieving nothing except banishment, or Esther, who ‘plays the system’, achieves her goals, and saves her people? This is a dilemma that I imagine is understood only too well by Black African women.

My point, in summary, is that if one adopts a reading strategy that does not simply assume that Esther is a ‘straightforward descriptive text’, the book does much to undermine, or deconstruct, feudal-tributary, survivalist, and patriarchal ideology. It may be that a more nuanced reading would enable the Black African *Woman’s* perspective to be located within the core of the book itself and not just in the ‘not-saids’ of the text.

4.4 Renita Weems: a Black Feminist Approach

The article by Renita J. Weems, ‘Hebrew Women are not like the Egyptian Women: the Ideology of Race, Gender, and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1’,⁷⁵⁸ serves as a good example of ideological criticism from a *black feminist* perspective. It serves as an example of ‘resistant’ readings, readings that challenge the ideology of the text and the ideology of the text’s interpretative history.

Weems begins with the observation that interpreters have paid little attention to the ‘story under the text’, which, in Exodus 1, is the struggle between masters and slaves.⁷⁵⁹ Like Mosala, Weems will focus on the underside of the text.

For Weems, biblical texts are *social* productions: they promote views regarding power and social identity. Texts *take sides in debates* (a perspective not unlike Gottwald’s approach to Isaiah 40-55). In Jamesonian fashion, the Exodus critic must read between the lines to discover the assumptions underlying the text, asking whose race, gender, and class interests are being served.

We have no way of knowing the gender of the writer of Exodus; but for Weems it is relatively clear that the writer identified her/himself with the Hebrews and was sympathetic to their cause.⁷⁶⁰ What Weems gives, however, is a description of the narrator, or of the implied author. We have no knowledge of the real author.

⁷⁵⁸ Renita J. Weems, ‘Hebrew Women are not like the Egyptian Women: the Ideology of Race, Gender, and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1’, *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 25-41.

For an overview of Weems’s underlying feminist perspective, see Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist’s Views of Women’s Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media, 1988). See also Renita J. Weems, ‘Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?’ *Semeia* 47 (1989), pp. 87-104; and ‘Reading *Her Way* through the Struggle: African American Women and the Bible’ in Gottwald Norman K. and Richard A. Horsely (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993), pp. 31-50, reprinted from Cain Hope Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod*, pp. 57-77.

⁷⁵⁹ Weems, ‘Hebrew Women’, p. 25.

⁷⁶⁰ Weems maintains that the author is unlikely to have been an Egyptian. She seems not to have considered the possibility that the author was an Egyptian sympathetic to the Hebrew cause. Indeed, according to Exodus, Moses himself was virtually an Egyptian!

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Weems maintains that the *story* originally circulated among ‘a band of Hebrew slaves who would have taken pride in stories of how ... they or their ancestors were able ... to circumvent the designs of the slave-masters’.⁷⁶¹ However, Weems makes no distinction between the origin of the *story* and the origin of the *text* in which the story is now embedded. It is the *text* that is ultimately the object of Weems’s critique. The *story* may well have circulated widely in oral form; but the *text* could hardly have envisaged as its original audience a ‘band of Hebrew slaves’, who would scarcely have had much scope for bed-time reading. In fact, Weems slips back and forward between the *story* and the *text*, as if the two are to be identified. An important aspect of ideological criticism that Weems overlooks is to analyse the way in which a well known *story* has been encoded in a particular *text*. Furthermore, Weems considers Exodus 1 in isolation from the book of Exodus as a whole. When she speaks of author and audience, it is never made clear if she is thinking in terms of the author / audience of Exodus as we now have it or the author / audience of Exodus 1 as an originally independent text. Weems’s study would have benefited from a more nuanced discussion of different levels of *audience*.⁷⁶²

In ideological criticism, issues of *power* are important and Weems makes the significant point that, in the world of the text, the narrator is ‘more powerful’ than the Egyptians. The author crafts the story such that the audience is always one step ahead of the Pharaoh. We should note the ‘narrator’s consistent caricature of the Pharaoh: the Pharaoh’s ignorance, faulty assumptions, repeated blunders, and foolhardy schemes’.⁷⁶³ One might add that, by means of this rhetorical device, readers who are the victims of oppression are perhaps able to identify with the narrator and to experience some sense of superiority over the ‘Pharaohs’ of their own context.

What the Pharaoh perceives in political categories, maintains Weems, the text encodes in religious categories. The whole of Exodus 1-11 is played out as a struggle between Yahweh, God of the Hebrews, and the gods of Egypt, presumably including the Pharaoh himself.

Weems argues that the text actually displays little *real* understanding of the harsh realities of slavery, suggesting that the author and original audience of the *text* are not to be located among some later band of Hebrew slaves but, rather, among the literary elite of a later Jerusalem establishment. ‘The narrator, like any good rhetorician, has fashioned the story in such a way as to debunk, supplant, reinforce, co-opt, caricature,

⁷⁶¹ Weems, ‘Hebrew Women’, p.26.

⁷⁶² Diana Edelman offers a helpful discussion of different levels of ‘audience’ in her introduction to *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* ((Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), especially pp.17-18 and 21-25. She distinguishes between: the ‘*actual audience*, reading an ancient text in any given cultural setting’; the ‘*authorial audience*, for whom the writer has rhetorically designed his work and with whom he has presume a shared set of beliefs, knowledge, and conventions’; the ‘*narrative audience*, whom the authorial audience is asked to become a part of’ by adopting the world view of the narrator; and the ‘*ideal narrative audience*, who accept everything from the narrator’s point of view, even if he or she is unreliable’ (p. 17). Edelman notes that communication between any author and audience is largely dependent on ‘shared literary conventions’ and ‘a common world-view’ (p. 24).

Edelman also discusses related issues such as: the extent of literacy in monarchic Jerusalem; whether historical texts were intended only for a literary-elite audience or designed to be ‘read aloud’ to groups of people at (say) religious festivals; and other matters to do with what Eagleton would call the Literary Mode of Production (pp. 21-24).

⁷⁶³ Weems, ‘Hebrew Women’, p. 29.

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dismantle, or build upon the predilections of his / her ideal audience'.⁷⁶⁴

Accordingly, Weems points to issues of race, gender, and sexual reproduction that are 'encoded' under the surface of the text:

The details of that debate are summed up in the way the author characterises the Pharaoh's assumptions regarding supposed differences between Egyptian people and the Hebrew people. The differences between the two groups are 'quintessentialized' in racial / ethnic, gender, and biological stereotypes.⁷⁶⁵

According to Weems, growth of the Hebrew population is a dominant theme, echoing the blessing of Genesis 1.28 (and 9.17). When the religious differentiation of the Hebrews is marked out by their proliferation, their social status deteriorates from refugees to slaves. Fearful of this growth, and of the threat of support of Egypt's enemies, the Pharaoh takes steps to reduce the birth-rate. He invites the Egyptian population to join him in the 'wise' plan of forced labour, yet the Hebrews multiply all the more. He then 'conscripts' the Hebrew midwives to slaughter the male infants.

It is at this point that the story becomes a woman's story. Had it not been for the midwives' actions, the liberation of the Hebrews could not have taken place. When the midwives disobey the Pharaoh, he takes his policy back to the people and commands *them* to kill the male Hebrew children. At the heart of this is the ongoing assumption by the Pharaoh that 'Egyptians and Hebrews are different'. It is because of difference⁷⁶⁶ that the Hebrews are a threat to the Egyptian hegemony, because of a fertility that is linked to their religious heritage: 'be fruitful and multiply'.

Developing the theme of difference, Weems notes the assumption made by the Pharaoh that the births of male and female children have different social implications. Males pose a threat both materially and politically and male children will eventually beget more males. Women are presumed to pose no threat and the Pharaoh simply assumes that the Hebrew midwives will be compliant. Weems somewhat oversimplifies this issue, however. Male children may well have posed more threat in military terms but not necessarily in economic terms. Arguably, it could have been more in the Pharaoh's material interest to kill the girls, since it was presumably males that were preferred for slave-labour building projects. Arguably also, the killing of females would have been more effective in reducing the population, since males were scarcely going to beget more males without female help! From Weems's 'silence' on these points we might infer something of her own feminist ideology. However, she rightly observes that the text ultimately ridicules (one might say, deconstructs) the idea that male children are more of a threat than female children. It is the midwives and the Hebrew women whose defiance of the Pharaoh lays the foundation for the liberation of Israel.

The midwives cleverly arrogate to their own defence the Pharaoh's prejudiced assumption that Egyptians and Hebrews are *different*. Hebrew women, they say, are not like Egyptian women; they give birth easily before the midwives get there. This, of course, is not true; and Weems comments:

⁷⁶⁴ Weems, 'Hebrew Women', p. 27. Weems refers here (and elsewhere) to the *narrator* but, presumably, she intends to refer to the *author* of the text in question.

⁷⁶⁵ Weems, 'Hebrew Women', p. 28.

⁷⁶⁶ For other perspectives on the theme of gender and 'difference' in the Old Testament, see the essays in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg / Fortress, 1989), especially pp. 1-11.

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It is the conventional weapon of the powerless, especially women, in the Old Testament against those in power. ... It becomes the priority of the underclass to interpret and shape their own reality. Their refusal to tell the truth becomes tantamount to the refusal ... to adopt hegemonic assertions ... a most effective counter to Egyptian ideology.⁷⁶⁷

Another example of the use of deception would be Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar. Although Weems may overstate the case when she refers to deception as the *conventional* weapon of the powerless in the Old Testament, she perceptively draws attention to the classic ideological priority of *power* over *truth*, especially when *truth* is defined by those in power.

Weems concludes that the whole story is predicated on an ideology of difference or on the false assumption (false consciousness) of difference: differences between Egyptian and Hebrew, slave and master, male and female. Also inscribed in the story is fear of difference, which is ultimately outmatched by the midwives' fear of God.

The narrator's ultimate aim is 'to *expose* Egyptian hegemony as a farce'. Again, Weems overstates the case. It may have been the author's intention to *portray* Egyptian hegemony as a farce. The word 'expose' implies that the hegemony was a farce in historical reality. But, for any Israelites who actually endured the slave-driver's lash, it was probably difficult to see the funny side. There is a confusion here of text, story, and history.

Weems is on surer ground when she claims that the whole introduction to Exodus exposes the Pharaoh's illegitimacy, demythologises his divine reputation, and deconstructs his divine wisdom and power.⁷⁶⁸ The climax of the ideological struggle in these chapters is the deconstruction of the Pharaoh's divine status and his claim to determine the destiny of the Hebrew people. The story deals with the power of the powerful to define reality and the ultimate power of the powerless to redefine reality.

For Weems, however, the Exodus story has a sting in the tail. Like Gale Yee,⁷⁶⁹ she stresses that ideological criticism must pay attention to what the text does *not* say. In Eagletonian fashion, she questions if 'the story is as eloquent in what it does *not* say as in what it does say'. It does not challenge the notion of 'difference'. The author has simply 'inverted and co-opted [the assumptions of difference] for his or her own purposes or ideological interest'.⁷⁷⁰ The narrator deconstructs the ethnic superiority of the Egyptians but lays claim to the religious superiority of the Hebrews. The narrator does not challenge the premise that women are different: he/she has simply shown how women made use of those assumptions. Neither does the narrative challenge the assumption that males are more valuable. And so, Weems majestically deconstructs her own commentary by her closing riposte:

Can those involved in race, gender, and / or class struggles in modern society use this story as a positive example in their struggle for liberation? Not without due caution!⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁷ Weems, 'Hebrew Women', pp. 29-30.

⁷⁶⁸ It might be added to Weems's comments that the events of Exodus 1.15-2.10 in particular deconstruct Pharaoh's divine wisdom, whereas the 'plagues' deconstruct his divine power.

⁷⁶⁹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 536.

⁷⁷⁰ Weems, 'Hebrew Women', p. 32.

⁷⁷¹ Weems, 'Hebrew Women', p. 33.

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It might well be argued against Weems that women *are* different from men, not just biologically; and that this particular story foregrounds the *positive* significance of women's *distinctive* role. Difference is not *necessarily* a matter of superiority or inferiority. Weems is right to stress the fact that, had it not been for the midwives' stand, there could have been no liberation of the Hebrews, a point rarely made by (usually male) commentators. She might also have given credit to the Pharaoh's daughter for her role in deconstructing the ideology of difference and facilitating the liberation of the Hebrews. I suggest that contemporary male interpreters should take stock of the women who actually stood in the palace and defied the Pharaoh long before either Moses or Aaron. The centuries-long succession of male commentators has not given them due credit as the true instigators of Israelite liberation. As Mosala points out, gender issues are often subsumed to a wider, nationalistic liberation cause and this is what has happened in the interpretative tradition of this episode.

Weems's understanding of the text as focussed on the ideology of *difference* is perceptive. She maintains that, in the end, the text deconstructs itself along this fault line. This perception might have been lessened, however, if the study had been based on Exodus as a whole and not just on this one episode. The legal material in the latter portion of the book seeks to give civic rights to the asylum-seeker and to the alien as well as to the citizen, which is, to some degree, an undermining of the ideology of difference, though admittedly not much on the gender-issue. At several points, Weems seems to presuppose that the text in question forms part of a larger corpus of material, which even includes the early chapters of Genesis. However, inter-textual links of this sort are not pursued in the article. In fact, for most of the article Exodus 1 is considered in isolation from its literary context.

Marxist critics focus strongly on the notion that texts encode power struggles in the social formation from which they originate. Weems's presupposition is that texts '*take sides in debates*'. This use of the word 'debate' rather than 'struggle' represents a broader view than the narrowly Marxist perspective. Part of the task of the ideological critic is to identify the other point(s) of view in the debate, for example, listening, as here with Weems, for voices that come from the margins of the text.

Overall, Weems has made a significant contribution to interpretation of this passage, though her work is not without its shortcomings. Having declared a particular interest in the later era in which she believes the text to have been produced, Weems has not sought to relate the text to the sociological formation of that later era. In particular, consideration of the literary mode of production in that era might have helped in arriving at more nuanced conclusions as to the implied audience of the text as we now have it and given a different view of the social formation and ideology underlying the encoding of the midwives' story in this particular text.⁷⁷²

⁷⁷² The following comment by Gottwald (already quoted above) is relevant here:

The text exists in a specific space within the larger complex of social life with which it is connected in a variety of ways and, as a result, its very inviolate individuality as text is itself a form of social and ideological production whose full shape we cannot see unless we work to reconstruct the web of social forces at work in the production (Gottwald, 'Social Class and Ideology', p. 44).

4.5 Mark Brett: from a Post-Colonial Perspective

In 'Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: the Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis',⁷⁷³ Mark Brett highlights the shift in scholarship away from a focus on *original* readers⁷⁷⁴ towards 'the analysis of scholarly discourses and even "autobiographical criticism"'.⁷⁷⁵ He describes the autobiographical factors ('the heterogeneous collocation of identity markers') that establish his own 'horizon of expectation'. Each institutional matrix in which he has studied has made its mark, layering post-structuralist, feminist, and post-colonial influences 'on a biography that begins with expatriate identity and has taken shape within the post-colonial contestations of Papua New Guinea' and 'Australian civic republicanism'.⁷⁷⁶ His 'non-conformist'⁷⁷⁷ Protestant background is also a significant dimension.

Brett's 'horizon of expectation' can be summed up by 'heterogeneity' and 'contestation'. Genesis is similarly shaped by heterogeneity and contestation, 'in the diversity of its cultural influences, in its representation of ethnic relations, and in its explicit and implicit questioning of the political authorities of the day'.⁷⁷⁸ Like Mosala, Brett contends that his background enables him to have an enhanced awareness of these dimensions. However, there is a danger in laying claim to a privileged interpretative position that it is hard for others to gainsay.

While acknowledging this plurality of conscious and unconscious influences, Brett strenuously resists the conclusion that a *reasonable* scholarly objectivity is therefore unattainable.⁷⁷⁹ Brett maintains that autobiographical factors should form an *explicit* ingredient in the interpretative *conversation* between the commentator and the text, as part of the process by which a text engages us, even changes us.⁷⁸⁰ Brett's preferred

⁷⁷³ Mark G. Brett, 'Reading the Bible in the Context of Methodological Pluralism: the Undermining of Ethnic Exclusivism in Genesis' in Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts*, pp. 48-74.

⁷⁷⁴ or even, one might add, from *implied* original readers who are constructed from the text itself.

⁷⁷⁵ Brett, 'Reading the Bible', p.46. Brett cites as earlier examples of autobiographical criticism: H.A. Veaser, *Confessions of the Critics* (London: Routledge, 1996); and Ingrid R. Kitzberger (ed.), *The Personal Voice in Biblical Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998). To these should be added: Ingrid R. Kitzberger (ed.), *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism* (London: SCM, 2002); and Philip R. Davies (ed.), *First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

⁷⁷⁶ A fuller discussion of these influences on Brett is to be found in Mark G. Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible*, (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1996), pp. 123-43.

⁷⁷⁷ 'Non-conformist' here presumably means 'non-Anglican', an expression that may be meaningful in England, where the established Church is Anglican. However, the underlying assumption that Anglicanism is somehow the norm, to which everyone else either 'conforms' or otherwise, is itself an instance of an ideological hegemony, especially when (as in this case) neither the writer nor the reader is English. I, for one, grew up in Scotland, where the established Church is Presbyterian, and where Anglicans are 'non-conformist'! It is therefore not at all clear to me what 'non-conformist' means in an Australian context of civic republicanism!

⁷⁷⁸ Brett, 'Reading the Bible', pp. 50-51.

⁷⁷⁹ The pursuit of objectivity, he continues, should not require 'the total eclipse of a reader's subjectivity': neither 'the focussed questions of an explicit interpretative tradition' nor even 'the customarily unacknowledged backgrounds of culture, gender, class and institutional matrixes' (Brett, 'Reading the Bible', pp. 48-49). Eagleton makes a similar point in Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 206.

⁷⁸⁰ Key words for Brett are 'dialogue' and 'conversation': 'Whatever one's religious or non-religious commitments, a genuine conversation with the primary text requires neither full understanding nor full agreement' (Brett, 'Reading the Bible', p. 50). He continues:

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approach also involves ‘dialogue between the disciplines’,⁷⁸¹ combining ‘older styles of historical scholarship with a pastiche of narratology, reader-oriented criticism, anthropology, new historicism and postcolonial theory’⁷⁸² Brett makes particular use of what he calls ‘narrative poetics’, though insisting that the primacy of this synchronic approach must not altogether exclude questions about the text’s composition. Nor must the analysis confine itself to matters of aesthetics and form: it must also include engagement with the ideological matrices within which the text was produced and read. He speaks of how he wishes to ‘deconstruct the opposition between narratological analyses and the old historicism’.⁷⁸³

Brett’s particular contribution is to develop the application of ‘post-colonial theory’.⁷⁸⁴ He perceptively uses post-colonial theory to question the presumption that an editor will leave original source material largely unaltered⁷⁸⁵ and that the communicative intention of editors is therefore to be deduced from the ‘peculiar additions’ they make to their sources. Equally as significant, from an ideological-critical perspective, must be what the editor has retained and what he has cut out.⁷⁸⁶ The editor may have retained the material that suited his ideological purpose, while the additions, far from being the primary bearer of editorial ideology, need be no more than connectives.⁷⁸⁷

There is no reason why a reader cannot play the role of an anthropologist, feeling their way into the weave of a foreign culture, or the role of the literary critic, illuminating the nuances of the language. ... Neither the holiness of the text nor the religious convictions of the reader need determine interpretative outcomes in advance. Genuine *conversations* are more unpredictable than that.

He notes that reading Genesis as a Protestant, it is for him ‘ironic to find how resolutely the book resists the Reformation’s presumption of textual perspicuity’ (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 50.). He continues:

The laconic style of Genesis, its opacities and ambiguities, suggest that we can only ever deal with it partially; we can never exhaust the full meaning of its history and the peregrinations of its meaning. This precludes the pretensions of scholarly objectivity that have too often marred the historical biblical scholarship of the last two centuries, pretensions which are redolent with the confident epistemological tone of both Protestantism and the Enlightenment’.

J.D. Levenson, a Jewish scholar, has similarly drawn attention to what he perceives as Protestant ideology influencing historical research on Genesis. See J.D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox, Westminster, 1993), pp. 25-32 & 52-61.

⁷⁸¹ He is at pains, however, to stress that he is not advocating a ‘kind of genial pluralism’ that overlooks any genuine cases of disagreement (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 56).

⁷⁸² This pluralism ‘begins by confessing the variety of readers’ questions, contextual concerns and interpretative frameworks and then enters into a reading process, expecting to be enriched by the conversation’ (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 48).

⁷⁸³ He continues: ‘On the one hand, narratology does not require unified texts, and on the other hand, the old source-critical dissections of the biblical text have habitually excluded a legitimate historical question – the communicative purpose of the final Hebrew text’ (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 48). He is also at pains to defend the legitimacy of the notions of ‘communicative intention’ and ‘authorial agency’, ‘bringing together considerations from poetics, pragmatics, and reader theory’, and resisting the various challenges to these notions from structuralism and post-structuralism (pp. 59-68). Space does not permit a critique of Brett’s argument on these issues.

⁷⁸⁴ At this point, Brett cites the work on post-colonial theory by Mikhail Bakhtin, in particular in *Dialogic Imagination*. He also cites R. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), especially pp. 20-26. For a recent presentation of postcolonial criticism, see R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁷⁸⁵ - whether out of antiquarianism, or religious respect for the tradition, or whatever.

⁷⁸⁶ which, of course we cannot normally know, though in a comparison of Chronicles with 1-2 Samuel, for example, it may be possible to deduce what the editor has cut out as well as what he has added.

⁷⁸⁷ Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 69.

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Brett contends that the presumptions of final editors are better characterised by what is known in post-colonial criticism as ‘intentional hybridity’:

Intentional hybridity is a blending of two or more voices ... into an unstable symphony – sometimes speaking univocally but more often juxtaposing alternative points of view such that the authority of the dominant voice is put into question. ... In the case of Genesis, the overriding ideologies have been juxtaposed with so many traces of otherness that the dominant voices can be *deconstructed* by audiences who have ears to hear.⁷⁸⁸

He further explains

My purpose in reading Genesis is to trace the patterns of incongruity ... and to suggest that these patterns point to an editorial agency which is contesting the privileged grasp of colonial power in the Persian period. ... The text of Genesis seems to reveal a hybrid inter-subjectivity, not necessarily perspicuous to itself, incorporating diverse cultural traditions. ... Older literary sources may have been used without any knowledge of the origins of such sources.⁷⁸⁹

Brett’s thesis is that Genesis is to be regarded as resistance literature, in opposition to the ethnic exclusiveness of the native administrators of Persian Yehud, arguing that the text subtly uses ancient traditions to undermine ‘the theologically legitimated ethnocentrism found in Ezra and Nehemiah’. It may be that ‘the earlier layers of the Genesis traditions were ... xenophobic but the final editors have organised their materials to *exclude* this possibility’.⁷⁹⁰

Brett illustrates his theory by means of an analysis of Genesis 17,⁷⁹¹ a text customarily associated with the *exclusivism* of the Priestly tradition. The essential problem for traditional interpretation is that, at the end of the chapter, Ishmael is the first to be circumcised, whereas, earlier in the chapter, Ishmael is to be excluded from the covenant. Brett comments:

The standard historicist response ... is to reconstruct the layers of the text so that the first layer ... is seen to be coherent, while the clumsy additions have rendered the final text illogical. ... This kind of interpretative response ... leaves ... unexplained: *why would anyone want to add a contradiction to a text?* This question can only be avoided by assuming that the editors were cognitively less gifted than the authors of the earliest traditions. ... It seems much more likely that the editors had a purpose in view, but this purpose could not be conveyed by a perspicuous logic, since the issue lay at the heart of the dominant ideology of the Persian period. ... *In short the editors have smudged the edges of the covenant tradition by gently undermining its exclusivist tendency.*⁷⁹²

⁷⁸⁸ Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, pp. 69-70 (my emphasis). Brett distinguishes his concept of *intentional hybridity* from ‘an organic hybridity wherein the complex prehistory of cultural elements is entirely unknown (the characteristic assumption behind Saussure’s synchronic emphasis)’ and from ‘a serial addition of traditions, all equally coherent and perspicuous’. On this post-colonial deconstructionism, Brett further comments that it ‘has nothing to do with the deconstructive criticism that Terry Eagleton has caricatured as a “libertarian pessimism, blessedly free from the shackles of meaning and sociality”’. ... There are indeed free forms of literary criticism which advocate the “free play” of textuality, but deconstruction is construed differently within postcolonial theory’ (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 70, citing Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 38).

For further discussion of this issue, see H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially p. 183; and C. Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

⁷⁸⁹ Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 70.

⁷⁹⁰ Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 71.

⁷⁹¹ Brett has subsequently applied his approach to the whole of the Book of Genesis. See Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Ethics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁷⁹² Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, p. 73 (my emphasis). Furthermore, anyone in an ancient audience who was familiar with the political orthodoxy of the ‘holy seed’ as exemplified in Ezra 9:1-2 would be

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Brett raises a number of significant issues. His open acknowledgement of autobiographical factors is not only a safeguard against hidden subjectivity but is used constructively in his 'conversation' with the text. However, a potential problem is the inevitable selectivity in the autobiographical information Brett has chosen to reveal and what he has 'cut out', consciously (by intentional hybridity) or otherwise. Ideologically aware readers will immediately find themselves asking: are there other life-influences, omitted from the self-description, that form a hidden agenda to his textual 'conversation'?⁷⁹³

Talk of 'pluralism of methodology' can sometimes be a 'cop out', an unwillingness to engage with the relative merits of different theories. However, Brett's approach, enjoining a dialogue between methodologies rather than a contest, is used constructively. He observes: 'the agency of the final editors can be illuminated by drawing on a wide range of methods ... but *the particular combination of reading strategies can only be formulated with respect to the specific goals of interpretation*'.⁷⁹⁴ There is, however, a danger in this approach that the particular methodologies chosen are over-determined by the desired end-product. There will always be a tension between subjective engagement with the text and the 'reasonable' scholarly objectivity to which Brett aspires.

Brett's use of postcolonial theory runs counter to those, such as Mosala, who maintain that it is only the texts of the dominant that survive.⁷⁹⁵ Brett treats Genesis as a resistance text, produced to undermine the dominant ideology of the native colonial rulers of the Persian period, whose economic interest was to maintain a system of land-tenure through a religiously based ethnic exclusivism. His argument is persuasive that apparent contradictions in the text, far from being the slipshod work of inept editors, may be a quite deliberate ploy ('intentional hybridity') in circumstances in which more direct opposition would scarcely be feasible. This concept of *intentional hybridity* may well be useful in elucidating other biblical 'contradictions' that are perennial puzzles - such as 1 Samuel 8-10, where pro-monarchic and anti-monarchic voices coexist in tension. On the other hand, questions to do with the literary mode of production are not faced by Brett. How feasible would it have been for members of the 'resistance' to produce, edit, or circulate a work on the scale of Genesis? Is it not more probable that the editorial hand represents the politics of one powerful lobby in confrontation with another? Why should we assume a single dominant group rather than *competing* factions amongst the elite?

Overall, however, Brett has brought about a new perspective on Genesis, through blending post-colonial theory with more traditional methodologies, making new connexions between old facts, and locating editorial ideology in the finished product of Genesis rather than simply in the editorial additions or linkages.

really struck by Genesis 17:12, which clearly provides for the circumcision of foreigners and their consequent inclusion in the covenant. Again exclusivism is subtly undermined.

⁷⁹³ a possibility that Clines acknowledges in *Interested Parties*. See Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 25.

⁷⁹⁴ Brett, 'Reading the Bible', p. 74 (my emphasis).

⁷⁹⁵ even though one may catch glimpses of an underclass ideology through the cracks and fissures in the text. For example: it is only 'eyes hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today' who are able 'to observe the kindred struggles of the oppressed and the exploited in the biblical communities in the very absence of those struggles in the text' (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 121).

4.6 David Clines: *Interested Parties*

4.61 General Comments

4.611

The most provocative and extensive of the social-critical publications mentioned so far is David Clines, *Interested Parties: the Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (1995).⁷⁹⁶ He writes:

It has become something of a *crusade* for me to try to reach behind the surface of the text of the Hebrew Bible *and the texts of biblical scholars* and to expose what I think is ‘really’ going on ... at the level of big ideas ... of ideology.⁷⁹⁷

Clines is particularly conscious of the ‘will to power’ expressed in ideologies, ‘whether ... the royal ideology of ancient Israel or the religious ideology of the guild of modern biblical scholars’. He is not concerned with ‘old’ questions of date, authorship, and composition of texts but about matters such as social class and gender locations.⁷⁹⁸

Clines is equally concerned with ‘the ideology of scholarly interpreters, especially where they uncritically interpret the ideology of the text ... or impose the values of their own ideology’.⁷⁹⁹ Generally, the authors of introductions and commentaries deliberately keep themselves hidden: ‘the author goes underground, implicitly representing the contents of his, or her? [sic], book as impersonal, objective, normative scholarship’.⁸⁰⁰

4.612 The distinction between understanding and critique

Clines’s most important emphasis is his distinction between *understanding* and *critique*.⁸⁰¹ The former is ‘the Enlightenment project to which most scholars of the present day still subscribe’, aiming at ‘a fair minded, patient and sympathetic re-creation of the meaning, significance, and intentions of the ancient text’.⁸⁰² However,

⁷⁹⁶ David Clines, *Interested Parties: the Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup. 205; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

⁷⁹⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 12 (my emphasis).

⁷⁹⁸ Clines comments favourably on the work of Gottwald, Jobling, and others for their ‘theoretical attention to the *social* realities of ancient Israel as the matrix of biblical ideologies’ (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15 [my emphasis]).

For a recent critique of Clines’s linking of ideology and power in his analysis of biblical texts, see Carol Smith, ‘Biblical Perspectives of Power’, *JSOT* 93 (2001), pp. 93-110 (especially pp. 97-100).

⁷⁹⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 18. Clines regards *Interested Parties* as unusual in this regard, because it gives as much attention to *readers* as it does to the process of the composition of texts.

⁸⁰⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 16.

⁸⁰¹ This distinction was made at an earlier stage by Robert Carroll, though never fully developed by him. See below, p. 217.

⁸⁰² Even at this level, Clines seeks to be alert for ways in which ideologies threaten to skew understanding. Understanding is particularly at risk when any of the following are ignored:

- that the biblical text is an ideological production;
- that the interpreter is reading the text from within a particular ideological formation;

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Clines believes that *understanding* cannot be the final goal of interpretation: there is an essential further step of *critique* or *evaluation*:

It is a measure of our commitment to our own standards and values that we register disappointment, dismay, or disgust when we encounter in the texts ancient Israelite ideologies that we judge to be inferior to ours. And it is a measure of our open-mindedness and our eagerness to learn ... that we remark with pleasure, respect, and envy values and ideologies within the biblical texts that we judge to be superior to our own. 'Critique' ... implies *evaluation of the texts by a standard of reference outside themselves* – which usually means ... by the standards to which we ourselves are committed. ... *We have a responsibility ... to evaluate the Bible's claims and assumptions, and if we abdicate that responsibility, whether as scholars or readers-in-general of the Bible, we are in my opinion guilty of an ethical fault.*⁸⁰³

This emphasis on *evaluation* by a standard *outside* of the text is not new. For example, from a feminist perspective, Esther Fuchs has similarly charged that, by simply paraphrasing the text, biblical exegetes serve only to re-encode, or even to worsen, the Bible's patriarchal agenda.⁸⁰⁴ However, Clines goes a stage further, calling for a deliberate procedure of *reading the text from left to right*.⁸⁰⁵ He explains:

Historical criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism always read from right to left, asking as they do about origins, intentions, and effects, *but never, in principle, critiquing them*. So too does rhetorical criticism, with its concern for the words on the page ... but with *a studied unconcern for meaning or value*.⁸⁰⁶

He continues:

For myself, I think that the only way of taking a text seriously is to ask whether I accept it, whether I buy it, whether I believe it, whether I want to call it 'true' ... it is only if I think that its 'truth' is worth arguing with – worth confronting that is, from my own standpoint – that I give it any honour ... which is of course exactly what we do when we pick up a newspaper, a political tract, or a new novel.⁸⁰⁷

This is an approach that should be shared by those who approach the text from a theological or faith-based perspective. If we are taking the text seriously, we need to evaluate it, engage with it, take it at least as seriously as we would 'a newspaper, a political tract, or a new novel'. On this view, ideological criticism must involve not

-
- that the ideologies of ancient Israel are historically and culturally far removed from the ideologies of our own day.

⁸⁰³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 19-20 (my emphasis). Later he writes:

What it boils down to is this: to be truly academic, and worthy of its place in the academy, biblical studies has to be truly critical, critical not just about lower order questions like the authorship of biblical books ... but critical about the Bible's contents, its theology, its ideology. And that is what biblical studies has notoriously not been critical about at all (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 110).

Elsewhere Clines has written:

If we are not all the time making *judgments* on what we read ... what claims can we make to be intellectual or ethical? Perhaps, in fact, the almost unchallenged assumption that the task of biblical scholars is essentially to *interpret* the text represents a systematic repression of our ethical instincts (David J. A. Clines, 'Possibilities and Priorities of Biblical Interpretation in an International Perspective', *Biblical Interpretation 1* [1993], pp. 67-87 [86-87], reprinted in David J.A. Clines, *Way to the Postmodern*, pp. 46-67).

⁸⁰⁴ Esther Fuchs, 'Contemporary Biblical Literary Criticism: the Objective Phallacy' in V.L. Tollers and J. Maier (eds.), *Mapping of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text* (Lewisburg, PA; Bucknell University Press, 1990), pp. 134-42, cited in Stratton, *Out of Eden*, p. 178.

John Rogerson has written of how, early in his teaching career [the early 1970s], he 'felt the pressing need to gain a vantage point from which I could survey from outside, as it were, the academic discipline of biblical studies' (Rogerson, 'Potential of the Negative', pp. 24-47 [25]).

⁸⁰⁵ When applied to a Hebrew text, which is written orthographically from right to left, the phrase 'reading from left to right' implies reading against the direction or grain intended by the author.

⁸⁰⁶ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 26 (my emphasis). Clines gives a helpful bibliographical list of references for rhetorical and reader-response criticism (*Interested Parties*, p. 17).

⁸⁰⁷ Clines *Interested Parties*, p. 27.

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just the elucidation but also an evaluative critique of the ideology of the text. For Eagleton, that evaluation would be in terms of Marxist philosophy; for Clines, the external standard is his own personal set of values; for the Christian theologian, the standard might be the New Testament or the mainstream of Christian tradition.

Clines also makes use of the Eagletonian phrase *reading against the grain*.⁸⁰⁸ He observes:

Reading against the grain⁸⁰⁹ ... implies that texts have designs on readers and wish to persuade them of something or other. It implies that there are ideologies inscribed in texts and that the readers implied by the texts share the texts' ideologies. But readers are free to resist the ideologies of texts, and what is more, *texts themselves sometimes provoke readers into resisting them by manifesting tensions within the texts themselves*. All the same, there is no obligation to resist ... All that is wrong is not knowing and admitting that that is what you are doing or not permitting other people to resist the ideology of the text.⁸¹⁰

Readers must be wide awake and on guard, otherwise they will:

unconsciously find themselves succumbing to the ideology of the text ... finding it obvious, and natural, and commonsensical. That is the default mode for commentators ... In confining themselves to 'understanding' and 'explaining' ... they typically screen out or suppress questions of value – and so leave half their proper task unattempted.⁸¹¹

However, against Clines it should be argued that to say that texts have 'grain' is not necessarily the same as saying that a text has an ideology that readers find hard to resist. A disease may leave behind scars or antibodies, clear markers of its past effects, even though the disease itself is no longer in control. In a similar way, the grain of a text may be said to bear traces, clear evidence, of the ideological factors involved in its production. However, that ideology need not necessarily *control* later reception of the text.

4.613 Why is the book called *Interested Parties*?

Not only do we all have ideologies, we all have *interests*:

We have interests whether or not we know of them, even whether or not we are interested in them. ... We do not have a lot of choice about what our interests are, for they are implicates of our identity. ... I can of course act against my interests, whether recklessly or high-mindedly; but ... it cannot be in my *interest* to act against them.⁸¹²

⁸⁰⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 191. Clines had earlier made use of the phrase in Clines and Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal's Story*, pp. 129-30.

⁸⁰⁹ In a footnote, Clines acknowledges the argument made by Stephen Fowl that texts as such do not 'have' ideologies any more than they 'have' meanings (and Clines adds that strictly speaking writers do not have ideologies either: rather ideologies have writers!). However, Clines is nonetheless quite clear that texts do have 'grain' and that there are ideologies 'inscribed in texts' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 17, note 17). See Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', pp. 15-34 and the full discussion of his article below (pp. 205-11).

⁸¹⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 207 (my emphasis).

⁸¹¹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 21 (my emphasis). This process, he [dubiously] maintains, need not be regarded as disrespectful to the text, even by those within the church and synagogue communities:

What is disrespectful to the text is to assume it will say what we would like it to say. Nor is it harmful to the church or the synagogue to hear of readings against the grain. We should not assume that 'believing communities' always want to hear, or should hear only, the ideology of the text being rehearsed.

Perhaps they also need to know what their texts are capable of (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 192).

It is surely naïve of Clines to assume that Churches and Synagogues will not be hugely threatened by an approach that undermines their 'rehearsed' authoritative understanding of the Bible text. The tone of Clines's comments here betrays something of his own ideological agenda.

⁸¹² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 31.

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Two caveats need to be applied to Clines's statement. The first is the point made by Eagleton that it is useful to distinguish between two kinds of interests: ideological and non-ideological.⁸¹³ Secondly, again in the words of Eagleton, 'there is no reason to suppose that ... the mere occupancy of some place within society will *automatically* supply you with an appropriate set of political beliefs and desires'.⁸¹⁴ The fact that not all women are feminists readily attests to Eagleton's caveat.

It is certainly true that writers and readers alike all have 'ideological investments'⁸¹⁵ in the text:

Writers do not, on the whole, write their texts just for the fun of it: they have a case to put, and argument to advance, an opponent to overcome. ... The text is a realisation of their ideology. ... Readers too have an ideological investment – expressed by what they choose to read, how they incorporate or fail to incorporate what they read into their own structure of opinions, how they ... recommend to others that they read the same works.⁸¹⁶

For Clines there is more than this at stake: for ideologies are 'ideas that influence other people's actions':⁸¹⁷

I am thinking of the tendency to concealment (deliberate or unconscious) by ideologues of the motivation or rationale for what they are saying. On the surface, their texts ... give the appearance of sincerity and either moral fervour or objectivity. But beneath the surface there are issues of power, of self-identity and security, of group solidarity, of fear and desire, of need and greed, that have also played a role in the production of the text, sometimes a leading role.⁸¹⁸

This is the issue that leads Clines to describe his work as a 'crusade'. His language is often harshly critical of the scholarly hegemony. For example, at the conclusion of his essay on Haggai, in which he unmasks what he regards as the ugly social and economic realities underlying the text, he bewails the fact that, even though 'interpretation has been wrested from ecclesiastics', commentators still all too readily acquiesce in the ideology of the text. He stridently complains:

This is the depth of the corruption in our academic discipline that surrounds us – for all the splendours of the enlightenment and the glories of social scientific criticism. It would be

⁸¹³ Eagleton explains:

Human beings have certain 'deep' interests generated by the nature of their bodies: interests in eating, communicating, understanding and controlling their environment, and so on. There seems no useful sense in which these kinds of interests can be dubbed ideological, as opposed, for example, to having an interest in bringing down the government or laying on more childcare.

He continues:

Postmodernist thought ... has typically conflated these different sorts of interests in an illicit way. ... The political effect of this move is to blur the specificity of certain points of social conflict, grossly inflating the whole category of 'interests' to the point where it picks out nothing in particular (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 10).

⁸¹⁴ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 206 (my emphasis).

⁸¹⁵ The 'interest' of writers (and perhaps also readers) can of course be pecuniary. Clines's use of the word 'investment' here may have a literal meaning. Indeed, Raymond Williams points to the inevitable pecuniary associations of the very word 'interest', noting that it has 'developed from a formal objective term in property and finance' and is therefore 'saturated with the experience of a society based on money relationships' (Raymond Williams, *Keywords* [London: 1976], pp. 143-44, quoted in Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 10). It may therefore be that the hegemony by which certain views and certain scholars are more acceptable than others in the mainstream publishing houses within Biblical Studies is at least partly to do with the pecuniary 'interest' of those who have cornered the publishing market and need to commission books that will sell.

⁸¹⁶ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 23-24. On p. 25, he draws attention to the fact that in the writing of *Interested Parties* he too has his 'motivation': *caveat lector*, he warns!

⁸¹⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 24, quoting from Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 2.

⁸¹⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 24.

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ironic if Haggai's book should come to serve for the unmasking of the abomination of religious authority standing where it should not be and for the breaking loose of conflicts within the scholarly community that have been too long hushed up in the name of collegiality and tolerance.⁸¹⁹

4.614

Clines's focus is not normally on *real* authors, who are generally inaccessible in the case of ancient texts, but rather on the *implied* authors and readers whom the extant texts presuppose.⁸²⁰ The problem with Clines's inattention to 'real' authors, however, is that the ideology of the text is often said to be located in the gap between the real and the implied author, in what the real author has sought to mask or conceal.

In answer to the charge that, in the case of ancient texts, we cannot reconstruct the actual social reality from which the texts have emerged, Clines argues that, just as we can access *implied* readers, as distinct from actual original readers, so we can profile the social reality *implied* in a text. A major tool for deriving the social conflict underlying the text is a study of the fault lines along which the text 'deconstructs' itself. It must be said, however, that this sounds like a dangerously circular argument, if the interpretation of the text is dependent on a 'social reality' that has no 'reality' other than that it has been '(de)constructed' from the text itself.

Clines acknowledges the criticism that the search for patterns of interest behind *ancient* texts is inevitably speculative. He agrees that the process is 'certainly in the area of the contingent' but argues that it is 'not necessarily in the area of the speculative':

Because it deals with social locations and social relations, and thus with typicalities, it is on rather firmer ground than we tread when we enquire after discrete historical 'facts'. And being concerned with public and observable realities rather than private mental processes, it is on much firmer ground than ... the common enquiry in biblical criticism after authors' intentions.⁸²¹

I suspect, however, that there is a fine dividing line between 'contingent' and 'speculative' and that a close watch should be maintained on Clines's assertions as to what is 'typical' in the ancient world.

4.615

Another frequent reference by Clines is to the (Jamesonian) principle that texts are produced in order to suppress or repress⁸²² unresolved social conflict. Texts enable oppressors to deny responsibility; and they also serve to lessen the sense of oppression among the disadvantaged. 'They carry out that programme,' says Clines, 'by papering over the cracks in the social fabric, writing (literally) the conflict out of existence'.⁸²³ 'Why was the text written?' can thus be answered by reconstituting the underlying social conflict. If a conflict is resolved it will not generate a text.

⁸¹⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 75.

⁸²⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 15.

⁸²¹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 32.

⁸²² using the word 'repress' in the Freudian sense. This is the only issue on which Clines specifically cites Jameson in *Interested Parties*, though he does so on three separate occasions (pp. 61, 101, and 132).

⁸²³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 132-3. See also pp. 68 and 101.

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Clines does not make clear whether, in his view, *every* text is generated by conflict - a view that would be open to debate.⁸²⁴ However, it seems reasonable that this principle is particularly applicable to ancient texts, which belong to a world before the notion of literature as entertainment or of texts produced for professional 'academic' study only. Texts were produced and distributed for a purpose, to serve particular *interests*, to advance particular causes, religious and otherwise. Clines goes further than Jameson, by maintaining that texts reflect not just class struggle but also other group tensions, such as gender relations, as, for example, the Song of Songs.⁸²⁵

John Rogerson perceptively sounds a warning note against seeing everything in terms of classes and groups to the exclusion of individuality.⁸²⁶ Some prophetic texts, for example, may well represent *individual* protest against coercion, rather than necessarily being the expression of *collective* interests. On the other hand, individuals are inevitably caught up, consciously or unconsciously, in the group struggles of their day and it is doubtful if any protest can ever be totally individualistic.

4.62 Overview of the Essays in *Interested Parties*

Together with the introductory chapter, *Interested Parties* consists of ten essays, each focussed on a different biblical text. Most of them have been previously published elsewhere. Space does not permit a detailed discussion of each of Clines's essays. Three of the essays are reviewed in more detail below and the remainder are summarised briefly here.

4.621

In '**Haggai's Temple, Constructed, Deconstructed, and Reconstructed**',⁸²⁷ Clines maintains, by means of a deconstructionist approach, that the author of Haggai conceives of the Temple more as a treasury than as a place of worship. A deconstructionist approach brings conflict to the surface: it opens up a chasm, so that we can peer in to what is below the surface. This reveals conflict between people and governing group. The people can see that rebuilding the temple is not going to contribute to GNP; and the governing group despise the very people they are dependent on. Scholarly readers have generally made a theological reading out of

⁸²⁴ It should perhaps be acknowledged, as Eagleton has observed, that ideology is encountered in the discourse of every text, 'in both what a text says *and in what it does not say*' (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 89 [my emphasis]).

⁸²⁵ He observes:

The Song of Songs represents the author's desire to repress the conflict of interest between the sexes by representing the female and male lovers as more or less equal, and their desire, capacities and satisfactions as more or less identical. ... The social reality ... in ancient Israel ... is quite different: it is the reality of men having power over women (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 101).

Clines's assertion of 'social reality' here may be true of the *public* sphere; but a more nuanced discussion would be needed of the *private* and domestic spheres, where women may indeed have been more equal in their influence and control.

⁸²⁶ Rogerson, 'Potential of the Negative', p. 35. He complains that often 'individuals have lost their individuality through the need to perform in ways appropriate to class or profession'. Rogerson here bases his remarks on the philosophy of the German-American philosopher, T.W. Adorno. For an introductory critique of Adorno, see S. Jarvis, *Adorno*.

⁸²⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 46-75. An earlier version of the essay appeared as 'Haggai's Temple, Constructed, Deconstructed, and Reconstructed' in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 7 (1993), pp. 51-77; and also Eskenazi and Richards (eds.) *Second Temple Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 51-58.

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what is ‘an essentially political text’, ignoring the ugly social and economic realities.⁸²⁸

Clines then asks what kind of ‘reconstruction’ of a text can follow on a ‘deconstruction’. He seeks to focus ‘first on reconstructing the realities surrounding the text’s composition, and secondarily upon reconstructing the eventualities surrounding the text’s reception’.⁸²⁹ In this, of course, he differs from pure deconstructionists, who, he says, would proceed instead to deconstruct the deconstruction. Perhaps, a deconstruction of his deconstruction would unmask Clines’ own underlying ideological agenda!

4.622

In ‘**Why is there a Song of Songs and What Does It Do to You If You Read It?**’,⁸³⁰ the accent is on the influence that the ideology of the ancient text exerts on uncritical *modern* readers. The key question is not what does the text *mean* but what does it *do* to you. So what does Song of Songs ‘do’ to readers? Clines maintains that the female characters in the book are reduced to being the illegitimate object of the male gaze (for she is the woman of the male imagination). He concludes:

This is a dangerous text, not a gross one. A more blatantly sexist text would do less damage than one which beguiles. On the other hand, once you see its programme, perhaps you sharpen up your reflexes. ‘What does it do to you?’ depends a lot on how you have already constructed yourself.⁸³¹

Clines also maintains that the focus on love keeps other issues off the agenda: it makes it hard to worry about global issues, even about the politics of gender relations. It is a utopian text, envisioning a return to Eden. But Eden was not paradise; and this is escapist fancy, which deflects attention from what needs to be done, as Marx would contend is the purpose of utopian literature. One might reply that Clines has overstated his case: that many of us manage to be very much in love without being deflected from a proactive concern for global issues, including gender equality!⁸³²

4.623

In ‘**God in the Pentateuch: Reading against the Grain**’,⁸³³ Clines’s aim is to discover the ‘ideology of the divine’ behind the text. Is it comfortable for a modern reader or is it ‘troublesome, inconsistent, or subversive’?⁸³⁴

⁸²⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 21.

⁸²⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 68.

⁸³⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 94-121. A previous version of this essay appeared in *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 1 (1994), pp. 3-27.

For a different perspective, see John Goldingay, ‘So what might the Song of Songs do to them?’ in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 173-183.

See also: Tamara C. Eskenazi, ‘Song of Songs as an “Answer” to Clines’s Book of Job’, in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 128-140; J. Cheryl Exum, ‘“The Voice of My Lover”: Double Voice and Poetic Illusion in Song of Songs 2:8-3:5’ in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 141-152; Athalya Brenner, ‘“My” Song of Songs’ in Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies* (Feminist Companion to the Bible 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 567-579.

⁸³¹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 121.

⁸³² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 121.

⁸³³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 187-211. A previous version of this essay appeared as ‘God in the Pentateuch’ in R.L. Hubbard Jr, R.K. Johnston, and R.P. Meye (eds.), *Studies in Old Testament Theology: Historical and Contemporary Images of God and God’s People* (Festschrift for David L.

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Clines seeks to illustrate the dialectic that can obtain between text and reader, especially where the reader takes up an ideological position not shared by the text.⁸³⁵ A stance external to the text enables the reader to discern the dialectic between elements of tension *within* the text. Clines illustrates this from the Pentateuch by demonstrating the three-way tension of: what the character God says about himself in the text; what the narrator says about God; and what the narrator depicts God as saying and doing. Clines claims to unmask a view of the deity that goes against the grain of the text. It is also counter to the grain of Christian tradition - which has sought a harmonisation between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.⁸³⁶

Clines presumes here that the 'grain' of the text is to be derived from the narrator's comments. This contrasts with Brett's handling of tensions in Genesis in terms of intentional hybridity.⁸³⁷

4.624

In '**David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible**',⁸³⁸ Clines compares modern ideologies of masculinity with that of the biblical texts that portray David.⁸³⁹ According to the Bible, David was responsible for the deaths of 140,000 men;⁸⁴⁰ yet the most striking aspect of the modern scholarly response to biblical David is an uncritical acquiescence in the narrator's strong note of approval for David.⁸⁴¹ One well known Bible dictionary article has even described David as 'all that men find wholesome and admirable in a man'.⁸⁴² Clines suggests that this kind of depiction of David arises from male [and perhaps female?] commentators who are subconsciously responding to David's perceived masculinity.⁸⁴³ One might

Hubbard; Dallas: Word Books, 1992), pp. 79-98. See also David J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (2nd edn.; first published 1978; JSOTSup. 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

⁸³⁴ At this point, Clines explicitly acknowledges the powerful effect that his own personal ideology inevitably has had on his reading of texts (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 201).

⁸³⁵ Clines treats the Pentateuch as a 'novel' or at least as 'having some elements in common with a novel' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 189, note 2). In that same footnote, Clines cites a number of references for the use of 'novel' with regard to ancient literature: Graham Anderson, *Ancient Fiction. The Novel in the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); and Thomas Hagg, *The Novel in Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

⁸³⁶ He continues: 'This standpoint is of course quite legitimate - provided only that it is recognised that, like all *standpoints* [presumably including Clines's!], *it restricts the range of vision*' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 201-02 [my emphasis]).

⁸³⁷ See above, pp. 176-77.

⁸³⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 212-243. Clines has pursued this theme of 'masculinity' in the Bible in a number of other essays, for example: 'He-Prophets: Masculinity as a Problem for the Hebrew Prophets and their Interpreters' in Alastair G. Hunter and Philip Davies (eds.), *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll* (JSOTSup. 348; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 311-28.

⁸³⁹ Clines focuses primarily on 1 Samuel 16:8.

⁸⁴⁰ including fifteen whose deaths David was personally responsible for outside of the context of battle.

⁸⁴¹ I would question whether the narrator expresses a strong note of approval for David or whether 1-2 Samuel is, in fact, written to *deconstruct* the whole idea of David as 'the man after God's own heart'. However, space does not permit to enter into this debate here. For some thought-provoking insights, see Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

⁸⁴² T.H. Jones, 'David' in *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1, pp. 364-69 (369).

⁸⁴³ He continues: 'In a word, and metacommentatingly, I conclude: once again we see that the function of the commentary on biblical texts has been to familiarize the Bible, to normalise it to our own cultural standards, to render it as undisturbing as possible, to press it into the service of a different world-view' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 243).

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suggest as a contemporary parallel the willingness of the American public to overlook Bill Clinton's sexual misadventures because of a sub-conscious desire to have a President who is a 'real man'. This kind of acquiescence in the ideology of the text blinds the reader to the negative critique of David that would surely emerge from an ideological-critical reading of the text.

4.625

There are two essays in the collection based on the book of Job. In the first, '**Why is there a Book of Job and What does It Do to You If You Read It?**',⁸⁴⁴ Clines begins with the question, Why the book of Job? He focuses on the text as a text, as a product, made to be copied and sold. A text such as Job requires a highly literate public, with a stomach for elaborate and extended rhetoric. These are questions to do with the literary mode of production. However, much of what Clines says is speculative and unsubstantiated. He seeks to dismiss the idea that the book could have been written by a poor man, in that there is a lack of realism regarding poverty. In terms of gender issues, there are apparently no wise women, only foolish ones.⁸⁴⁵ In his dismissive rejection of the final verses, for giving inheritance only to *beautiful* women, Clines ignores the futuristic nature of the fact that the named daughters inherit on the same basis as the unnamed sons.⁸⁴⁶ Why, then the book? Clines' answer is that there was a social, gender, and political need for it, 'a reading public, a social conflict, and an author's psychic needs'.⁸⁴⁷

4.626

In '**Job and the Spirituality of the Reformation**',⁸⁴⁸ it is the ideology of the 16th century reformers that is under scrutiny, 'with the intention of showing the distinctive contours of readings by Luther and Calvin that uncritically imposed their own ideology on the ancient text'. Clines's case is that we should not readily slip into the assumption that 'there is no difference between the values inscribed in the biblical texts and those of interpreters of another culture'.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 122-144. A previous version of the essay was published in W.A.M. Beuken (ed.), *The Book of Job* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 114; Leuven: Leuven University Press and Peeters, 1994), pp. 1-20. For another perspective on Job by Clines, see his 'Deconstructing the Book of Job' in Martin Warner (ed.), *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

See also Eskenazi, 'Song of Songs as an "Answer" to Clines's Book of Job'; and also Carol A. Newsom, "'The Consolation of God": Assessing Job's Friends across a Cultural Abyss' in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 347-358. Reference has already been made to David Penchansky's *Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job*.

⁸⁴⁵ It has, however, been observed by some of my more feminist students that Mrs Job says more in one verse than the men do in thirty five chapters of debate! See Ellen van Wolde, *Mr and Mrs Job* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1997).

⁸⁴⁶ – a concept of equality well ahead of its time, so much so that, regrettably, I don't think my own father-in-law has heard of it!

⁸⁴⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 133.

⁸⁴⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 145-171. A previous version of this essay appeared as 'Job and the Spirituality of the Reformers' in W.P. Stephens (ed.), *The Bible in the Spirituality of the Church: Essays in Honour of James Atkinson* (JSOTSup. 105; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 49-72.

⁸⁴⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 22.

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4.627

In 'Psalm 2 and the MLF (Moabite Liberation Front)',⁸⁵⁰ Clines's complaint is that commentators simply adopt the ideology of the text, with total blindness to the 'Moabite'⁸⁵¹ point of view.⁸⁵² Few commentators see how inimical this response is to the overall theology of the Bible. Furthermore, with regard to Yahweh, what kind of love is it that brings denunciation and death if it is rejected? The poem is widely acclaimed for its aesthetic qualities. However, Clines contends:

One wonders whether this chorus of approval for the psalm's aesthetic qualities is not a systematic deflection from its political dimensions and its ethical shortcomings.⁸⁵³

He goes further, observing that this Psalm is the most quoted in the New Testament:

If the reign of the messiah is to be founded on violence and the suppression of what we would today call the legitimate interests of others, then that constitutes a problem for Christianity.⁸⁵⁴

Clines's conclusion to this essay, and indeed to the book as a whole, is a tongue-in-cheek call for a 'Bible readers' liberation movement', liberation not from 'the authority of the Bible', nor even from ecclesiastical hegemony, but from the power of the academic community.⁸⁵⁵

4.63 'The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right'

In his essay on the Ten Commandments,⁸⁵⁶ Clines illustrates his procedure of 'reading from left to right' by seeking to uncover the class and gender ideology of a text that is generally regarded as theological rather than ideological in nature. His aim is to enable readers to subject the text to a critique based on their own ideological values.

The opening section focuses on the initial words of the Decalogue, 'And God spoke'. Although the vast majority of commentators do not believe that God *literally* spoke

⁸⁵⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 244-275. An earlier version of this essay appeared in M. Daniel Carroll R., David J.A. Clines, and Philip R. Davies (eds.), *The Bible in Human Society: Essays in Honour of John Rogerson* (JSOTSup. 200; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 158-85. See also David J.A. Clines, 'Universal Dominion in Psalm 2' in Clines, *Way to the Postmodern*, pp. 701-707.

⁸⁵¹ 'Moabite' is here used here, Clines explains, not of a particular ethnic group, but 'as a symbolic name for people who found themselves in bondage to an Israelite king and who desired liberation from their overlord' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 246).

⁸⁵² If the poem originated at a time when Israel was, in fact, herself an oppressed minority under imperial rule, then Clines observes: 'If this is the way an oppressed minority comforts itself, by aping the language and the ambitions of an oriental empire, then truly Assyria and Egypt have won the battle for their hearts and minds and it is their ideology that has triumphed' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 256).

⁸⁵³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 256.

⁸⁵⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 272.

⁸⁵⁵ He continues:

Being free from the authority of the text and of its professional interpreters does not mean denying everything they say. It is not obligatory to deny the psalm's claim that it is foolish to resist God or that God wants humanity to be obedient to his will. But it does mean being free to decide for oneself whether one will accept that these are appropriate terms in which to speak of the divine. It is a sad day for theism if the only language its adherents can find to express their sense of the divine is the language of oriental despotism (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 274).

⁸⁵⁶ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 26-45. An earlier version of this essay appeared in Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G.E. Watson (eds.), *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer* (JSOTSup. 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 97-112. See also the brief later discussion of the Ten Commandments in Clines, 'Possibilities and Priorities', pp. 84-87.

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these words, hardly any of them engage with this issue in their commentary.⁸⁵⁷ The effect of passing over this issue is that commentators do not question the motive behind the ascription of The Ten Commandments to the divine. In fact, maintains Clines, the Decalogue consists of:

social and religious laws that their authors want to ascribe to God because they want other people to obey them. Let us not beat around the bush: reading from left to right, stepping outside the conventions and beliefs that the text wants to impose on us ... we have to say (do we not?) that it stands written in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 because it was in the interests of its framers to promulgate its contents.⁸⁵⁸

The very existence of different groups in a given society presupposes conflict and usually it is the winners whose texts are preserved. So Clines considers elites and powerholders as the originators of the Decalogue, resisting the prevailing but (in his view) naïve assumption that the Ten Commandments were intended to serve for the greater good of the whole community.⁸⁵⁹ He rejects almost totally the notion that groups ever act against self-interest, out of humanitarian, egalitarian, or religious impulses. Motives that are seemingly egalitarian may, in fact, be designed to project the benevolent image of the ruling classes or to win the popular support on which the continuance of power and privilege depends.⁸⁶⁰

Clines argues that the implied narratee of the Ten Commandments⁸⁶¹ is clearly:

... an individual, a male, an Israelite, employed, a house-owner, married, old enough to have working children but young enough to have living parents, living in a 'city', wealthy enough to possess an ox or an ass and slaves, important enough to be called to give evidence in a lawsuit. It is a man who is capable of committing, and probably tempted to commit, everything forbidden here.⁸⁶²

Other members of Israelite society are sidelined: women, whose work apparently does not count and whose sexuality passes without notice, resident aliens, slaves, children, the unmarried, the disabled, beggars, the landless, the dispossessed, day labourers, and the urban poor:

The text screens these people out: they are not neighbours. The text is busily pretending that the whole society is made up entirely of a group of 'neighbours', who are men of a certain income and a certain social standing. ... It makes them more comfortable not to have to worry

⁸⁵⁷ Some commentators may tacitly assume that these are the words of Moses. Others may take them as legal traditions inherited by the Israelites from their precursors. Generally, however, the words are passed over as a literary device or a theological convention.

⁸⁵⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 31.

⁸⁵⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 32. He notes that, even where scholars have written on the sociological background to the Ten Commandments, they have generally concerned themselves not with *class* interests so much as with 'clan' groups and the like.

⁸⁶⁰ He concludes:

The natural (not the cynical) assumption is that powerful groups do nothing against their interests; if they do, they threaten their own power. And it is in the interest of the dominant (hegemonic) class to secure the assent of the greatest number of people not of their class: that makes for social stability and thus the continuance of their own power (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 38).

It is certainly my (reader-response) reaction to Clines at this point that his assumption verges more towards the *cynical* than the *natural*!

⁸⁶¹ Clines does not seek to deal with *actual* authors or *original* readers, since these are unknown to us. His focus is on the narrators and narratees that are implied by the text itself.

⁸⁶² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 33-34. He goes on to caricature the implied narratee as a 'balding Israelite urban male, with a mid life crisis and a weight problem, in danger of losing his faith'!

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that their privilege may be the cause of other people's poverty – and if the underprivileged can be made to believe in this equality, it lessens the chances of social friction.⁸⁶³

In whose interests is it to have such a text? Not slaves or women or resident aliens, though admittedly they do stand to benefit from some of the commandments. Clines's answer is that it must be the fathers of those addressed, the old men whose interests are represented in every one of these commandments, in particular the fifth commandment, which is the apex of the text.

However, there are numerous examples in the contemporary world of legislation enacted to protect disadvantaged groups. Clines has not established any convincing reason as to why such a programme of social reform was not feasible in the ancient world. Indeed it is patronising of him to assume that ancient Israelites were incapable of any genuine altruism.

Clines takes as an example the Sabbath commandment, which *appears* to be in the interests of children, slaves, and aliens, Clines insists, without any argumentation:

Well, yes, it is in their interest. But I cannot accept that that is the *reason* for the commandment; I want to say it is only the side-effect. ... I am not disposed to believe that some commandments are in the interests of one group and others of other groups, for that would mean that the Ten Commandments do not form a unity. ... Children, slaves, and resident aliens do not usually manage to have legislation enacted that benefits them.⁸⁶⁴

Nor was the commandment in the interests of traders and merchants, nor of those of their workers who could not make the income of six days last for seven. It was presumably not in the interests of the poor or the little people who needed every opportunity to earn any living they could get. The commandment in the end only serves the interests of the 'urban elite, administrators, officials, and the wealthiest of traders'.

Clines concedes that the commandment may not specifically *advance* the interests of the urban elite; but he insists that it was *not contrary* to their interests. He does not explain, however, why the father-figures of society should want to impose legislation that is burdensome to several groups while bringing little or no actual advantage to themselves.

On a Jamesonian reading, presupposing conflict underlying the text, Clines might have taken a different line. For example, it is arguable that the commandment masks a conflict of interest among *different elite groups*, perhaps between the traditional ruling classes and the rising merchant-craftsman classes, whose activities the former might well wish to curtail: a classic case of conflict of modes of production.⁸⁶⁵

Turning to the first three commandments, Clines maintains that laws that *impose* religious observance take us out of the realm of beliefs into the realm of social

⁸⁶³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 35. In this quotation Clines seems to assume that the implied narratee is the underprivileged, whereas previously he had insisted that the implied narratee was the wealthy, middle-class male.

⁸⁶⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 38.

⁸⁶⁵ Interestingly, Clines includes the priests in the list of those whose interests are *not* served by this commandment, since they are required to work extra hard on the Sabbath! However, surely, within the terms of Clines's own argument, the priests were the main group to benefit from this commandment. The enforcement of the Sabbath would surely have resulted in more scope for religious activities and for the financial institutions associated with Temple worship.

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control. He argues that these commandments serve essentially as ‘markers of identity’, ‘boundaries around someone’s view of what is legitimately Israel’.⁸⁶⁶ Who are this group?

They are not the subsistence farmer trying to jog along peacefully with the Philistines ... nor the itinerant potter who has always found a Canaanite shekel to be worth as much as an Israelite one; they are not the man or woman in the street or in the suk [sic]. They are the wealthy at the apex of power, whose position becomes precarious if social change is allowed to happen.⁸⁶⁷

I am not persuaded that Clines’s sociological analysis is correct here. In Northern Ireland, where I live, it is the working-class who seek to maintain religious-ethnic boundary markers. The middle classes affect a liberal, pluralist agenda. So, to play back Clines’s argument, those whose interests were most served by an insistence on religious identity-markers could just as well be the Israelite small farmers resisting land acquisition by Philistines, or Israelite traders seeking to exclude Canaanite craftsmen from the market place. Alternatively, on a Gottwaldian approach, the maintaining of Yahwist religious boundaries would be directed against Canaanite feudalism.

Turning to the ‘social’ commandments, Clines maintains that the pivotal law, regarding respect for parents, clearly reflects the interests of the older non-productive generation, not just because of economic needs, but because social stability depends on transmission of the ideological base to successive generations.⁸⁶⁸ Clines does not specifically mention the fact that this is the only positive commandment, a fact which might add weight to his view that it is central and pivotal within the Decalogue.

Laws against stealing and coveting presuppose people with property. False witness is something that men of property have to fear, such as Naboth - though it could be argued against Clines that false testimony was equally feared by peasants unable to mount a proper defence. The prohibition of adultery for Clines is also reducible to economic interests, to fear of property going out of the family.⁸⁶⁹

As for ‘thou shalt not kill’, Clines curiously argues that this commandment was directed against the practice of blood revenge.⁸⁷⁰ He offers no convincing reason against the natural interpretation that the commandment forbids murder, as opposed to military killing or capital punishment. The traditional interpretation would fit well with Clines’s overall theory: presumably, property-owners, who are the most afraid of being murdered in their beds, or murdered judicially by false witness, like Naboth, are the ones who have the strongest interest in promulgating a law against *any* kind of unauthorised killing.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁶ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 41.

⁸⁶⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 41.

⁸⁶⁸ Nor does he mention the view that this commandment may be aimed at the elimination of ancestor cults.

⁸⁶⁹ An interesting parallel to this, which might support Clines’s view, is the development of Scottish marriage law. Until the 1929 Marriage (Scotland) Act, marriages in Scotland were valid if declared publicly in the presence of two witnesses, without any need for religious or civil formality. The 1929 Act, which introduced registration of marriages along English lines, was primarily motivated by the property and inheritance disputes that were generated by ‘common law’ marriages. Laws to do with marriage are thus often as much to do with property rights as with personal morality or family values.

⁸⁷⁰ He rightly notes that the Hebrew verb cannot *here* refer to ‘unintentional killing’, although it does so elsewhere in the Old Testament.

⁸⁷¹ See Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 44.

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There is considerable confusion in Clines's essay as to the historical matrix of the Ten Commandments. His reference to 'the subsistence farmer trying to jog along peacefully with the Philistines' and to 'the Canaanite shekel' presuppose a monarchical or pre-monarchical setting, whereas Clines elsewhere attributes the Decalogue to the Second Temple period.

A further significant weakness is that Clines fails to consider that the Decalogue does not come down to us as a text in isolation. In his own words, 'it stands written in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5' - yet he treats the Decalogue in complete isolation from those literary contexts in which we now find it, as if it were a free-floating, independent text.⁸⁷²

In the literary context of the book of Exodus, the Decalogue follows the rescue of the people from slavery. It presents a vision (arguably a utopian vision in the Jamesonian / Ricoeurian sense) of a society that would be the antithesis of Egyptian society. It is followed by detailed legal provisions that undergird the rights of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. This wider literary context raises a quite different set of questions as to whose 'interests' are served by the overall text.

In his essay on Song of Songs, Clines labours the point that what we have in that book is not a *song*, though it may be the imitation of a song, or the record of a song, or the preparation for a song. *It is a text:*

A text is a production, a product, made in order to be copied, circulated ... a commodity, created to be sold in the market place, consumed by customers. That is what texts are.⁸⁷³

By a similar line of argument, the Decalogue is not law, though it may be the literary imitation of laws or a proposal for a set of laws. Even if it is the record of actual law in some historical context, we now have it *as part of a literary text*. Clines's conclusions as to the implied author and implied reader might have been quite different had he considered Exodus and Deuteronomy overall as literary texts. It was, arguably, the whole book, not just the Decalogue in isolation, which was 'a commodity, created to be sold in the market place, consumed by consumers'. It might have further clarified some of the issues if Clines, in Eagletonian fashion, had considered the literary mode of production from which Exodus and Deuteronomy emerged.⁸⁷⁴

There is also a significant measure of circularity of argument in interpreting texts in light of implied authors and implied narratees who have been constructed entirely from the text itself. Clines could do well to heed the danger that Mark Brett points to when he warns against 'the formalist fantasy of interpretation which constructs an ideal reader entirely fabricated by the dictates of the text'.⁸⁷⁵

James Barr offers strong criticism of (a previous version of) Clines's essay:⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷² Presumably, Clines is making the assumption that the Decalogue arose as a separate text prior to its incorporation in its present literary contexts, though he offers no evidence or rationale for this assumption.

⁸⁷³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 98

⁸⁷⁴ as, in fact, Clines takes pains to do in his essay on Job: see *Interested Parties*, p. 124.

⁸⁷⁵ Brett, 'Reading the Bible', p. 48.

⁸⁷⁶ Clines, 'Ten Commandments' and also the brief discussion of that article in 'Possibilities and Priorities', pp. 84-87. Barr in particular alludes to this comment by Clines:

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He [Clines] pins the identification of ideology resolutely to the discovery of *social conflict*. ... Take the command, 'Thou shalt not steal'. Are we to believe that there was a Pro-Stealing Class or Party whose interests were silenced by the Anti-Stealing Party, which latter group were victors in this conflict? Who were the Pro-Stealing people? ... We need to know, because these people are the 'silenced', the 'marginalised', from whom the real message of the text is to come.⁸⁷⁷

However, Barr misrepresents Clines here. Clines's counter-argument might be along these lines. No group in society is pro-stealing. So why promulgate a command against stealing? The absolute prohibition serves the interests of a wealthy class, afraid that the less fortunate might seek a moral justification for helping themselves to property that was not legally theirs. Such an action might seem justifiable in the popular mind, (say) on the grounds that the distribution of wealth was intrinsically unjust in the first place. In such a situation, it might well be in the *class* interests of property owners to promulgate a *divine* sanction against any form of 'stealing'. The question is not, as Barr seems to think, why is there a law against stealing? Rather, Clines's question is, Why did someone think it necessary to promulgate such a law?⁸⁷⁸

Barr is on stronger ground, however, when he rejects Clines's presupposition that no one ever does anything except out of self-interest. In Barr's view, with which I agree, people can and do have specifically religious motivations, even if they are not necessarily all good. Though religion cannot be divorced from the totality of social structures, religious motivations are nonetheless a distinct phenomenon that must be given due weight. Clines is seemingly not open to this option.

Barr is equally critical of Clines's insistence that ideology must always be traced back to *social conflict*. Barr argues:

Ideology points towards a *consensus* ... a substantial general consensus. People who say 'Australians like a man to have a fair go' ... mean that this is the general consensus. ... And it fits in very obviously with the Ten Commandments. For it was a consensus in society that stealing was wrong and must be forbidden. ... The commandment was there because of consensus.⁸⁷⁹

Barr is right in linking ideology to consensus: almost all definitions of 'ideology' emphasise that it is a consensus-view. Barr seems to have missed the point, however, that ideology reflects the consensus of one group *over and against another*. The

I ask, In which group's interests are these commandments? And since groups are usually in some kind of conflict with other groups, I ask, What kind of social conflict is alluded to, or repressed by this text? And since it is usually the victors in any social conflict whose texts get preserved, I look carefully at elites and powerholders in Israelite society for the matrix of these laws (Clines 'Possibilities and Priorities', p. 84, quoted in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 133).

⁸⁷⁷ Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 134-35.

⁸⁷⁸ From a more recent period, one might take the Dickensian parallel, from *Oliver Twist*, where a sentence of transportation is imposed for the theft of a silk handkerchief. Dickens is pointing to a society in which it was in the ideological interests of the wealthy to insist on the criminality of *any* form of stealing, thereby obscuring the even greater injustice of desperation poverty. So an ideological critique of the stealing commandment does not necessarily presuppose, as Barr implies, a pro-stealing party. It could rather presuppose one group in society who felt it necessary to emphasise a divine sanction against stealing as a means of protecting their own property interests against under-privileged underclasses. I do not offer this as my own interpretation of the Ten Commandments. It is offered only as a hypothetical illustration of how an ideological critic *might* argue, without any need to postulate Pro and Anti Stealing parties! The kind of position postulated here is perhaps that against which Amos rails (e.g. in 5:10-13&21-24) or Isaiah (1:11-14), those who use religion as a cover for social injustice.

For a different perspective, see the interesting discussion in Robert Gnuse, *You shall not steal: Community and Property in the Biblical Tradition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985).

⁸⁷⁹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 135.

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Australian only invokes the 'fair go' concept against those who are denying it to someone. Those who promulgated the Ten Commandments may have been invoking an *apparent* consensus to obscure an underlying class or group conflict. The real point at issue is why a particular ideological statement is promulgated *as a text*. It is the need to publish, to *assert* the commandments that is the pointer to conflict.

While some aspects of Clines' analysis are open to question, his concluding comments, albeit lapsing into sarcasm, present a challenge to traditional interpretation:

Ask any question that steps outside the framework of the text and you relativise the Ten Commandments. Somehow the standard questions, Are the Ten Commandments Mosaic? What did they originally mean? How are they reinterpreted in later Jewish literature? have evaded the question of their value or 'truth' ... And the most sophisticated of historical scholars and redaction critics have gone on entertaining the most appallingly uncritical views about the ideological and ethical status of the Ten Commandments. Is there a chance that an analysis like the present one ... will demythologise them – without at the same time bringing western civilisation tumbling?⁸⁸⁰

4.64 'Metacommenting Amos'

In 'Metacommenting Amos',⁸⁸¹ Clines' emphasis is on discerning the ideology of the text by 'counterposing it to our own ideological stances'. He introduces his understanding of *meta-commentary*: 'when we write commentary we read what commentators *say*; when we write meta-commentary, we notice what commentators *do*'. He observes: 'The main thing they do but not say is not say what they do not say. To every text there is a sub-text which the author has suppressed'. He thus makes the tongue-in-cheek complaint:

We innocent members of the public [Clines is scarcely an innocent member of the public!], who go on laying out good money on commentaries, need protection against those commentators who are failing to tell us what they are failing to tell us. So it becomes an urgent public duty to create a neighbourhood watch committee of metacommentators who will investigate for us how much we are being short-changed.⁸⁸²

Clines can find no contemporary metacommentary on Amos that will step outside the ideology of the text, except for one scholar whose feminism gives her a vantage point outside the text.⁸⁸³

Clines takes as his focus the condemnation of the rich in Amos 6:4-7. Its spirit of denunciation against idleness and luxury 'strikes a chord with democratically minded and hard-working readers'. But a reader who has not yet opened a commentary

⁸⁸⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 44-45.

⁸⁸¹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 76-93. An earlier version of this essay appeared in Heather A. McKay and David J.A. Clines (eds.), *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on his Seventieth Birthday* (JSOTSup. 162; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 142-160.

⁸⁸² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 76

⁸⁸³ Namely, Judith Sanderson, 'Amos' in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992).

Clines observes in a footnote, however, that a previous generation of avowedly Christian commentators, writing from a progressive-revelation perspective, were actually more able to offer critical evaluation of the text than the current generation of supposedly objective scholarship (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 77, note 3). He quotes as an example Richard Cripps, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos* (London: SPCK, 1929).

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‘pauses ... to ask ... how serious is self-indulgence? Is it a crime ... that deserves a sentence of deportation?’⁸⁸⁴

Clines resists the glib assumption that Amos is right in holding the rich accountable for the poverty in the land. After all, do not most biblical commentators like nice furniture, enjoy dinner parties, and sometimes purchase expensive perfumes, without holding themselves responsible for all the oppression in the world?

Surely, however, Clines misrepresents Amos here. Amos condemns those who condone specifically oppressive practices, such as falsification of weights and measures. He also condemns those who *knowingly* acquiesce in a system that allows oppression to go unchecked. That is not to say that Amos is beyond critique; and so Clines observes:

Somehow we need to ... recognise that the prophet's voice is only one voice. ... The prophet and the text have a corner to fight, a position to uphold, and for our part we have to identify that position, and to relativise it, not so as to discard it but only so as to give it its proper due. But, hardly surprisingly, most of the books about Amos simply take Amos's view for granted. Amos is right, his opponents are wrong; Amos is fair; Amos is accurate; Amos is immensely perceptive; Amos is inspired.⁸⁸⁵

It would be possible, if space permitted, to mount a defence of Amos' ideology over against Clines's oversimplified critique. The thrust of his argument runs counter to his emphasis elsewhere that texts are often designed to mask the neglect or oppression of the poor by the rich.⁸⁸⁶ However, the salient point of Clines' argument in this essay is to demonstrate the extent to which commentators have *uncritically* adopted the ideology of the text, without argument or evaluation.⁸⁸⁷ He brings the argument to a climax with a bruising denunciation:

Things were awful for rich and poor alike. But it is even more awful to ascribe the destruction of the state and the forceable [sic] deportation of its citizens to an avenging God. If that is

⁸⁸⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 80. The quotation is worth giving more fully:

A reader who has not yet opened a commentary pauses at least long enough to ask, What exactly is the crime of these Samaritans for which they are being threatened with exile? Is there some sin in having ivory inlays on your bed-frame? (Amos, we may presume, is not worried about the fate of elephants.) No doubt meat of any kind was a delicacy in ancient Israel ... but is that wrong? And, as for singing idle songs, who among the readers of Amos can cast a stone? ... Drinking wine out of bowls instead of cups does admittedly sound greedy, and anointing yourself with the finest ... oil is certainly self-indulgent. But how serious is self-indulgence? Is it a crime ... that deserves a sentence of deportation? ... What are the rich supposed to be doing? If expensive oil is for sale in the market place, and you have the money in your pocket to buy it, where is the sin? (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 80).

⁸⁸⁵ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 81. He is particularly scathing of John Bright's acquiescence in Amos's view that 'the best way, or perhaps the only way, of dealing with heartlessness, dishonesty, immorality and luxury ... is to wipe the offenders out of existence' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 91). Clines pursues a 'close reading' of a selection of commentaries on Amos. Surveying commentaries by A.D.H. Mayes, R. Martin-Achard, H.W. Wolff, and E. Hammershaimb, he demonstrates how they each have uncritically adopted the ideology of the text. ... He comments: 'The metacommentator observes ... how, when the deity is doing the punishing, high-minded commentators suddenly join the hanging, flogging brigade. They do not notice the injustice of punishing the innocent with the guilty' (*Interested Parties*, p. 91).

⁸⁸⁶ - for example, in his essay on the Ten Commandments, discussed in the previous section. The Decalogue, he there maintains, 'makes them more comfortable not to have to worry that their privilege may be the cause of other people's poverty - and if the underprivileged can be made to believe in this equality, it lessens the chances of social friction' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 35).

Compare also Clines's critique of Job, where he complains that wealth is regarded as unproblematic and where he identifies a lack of realism in the text as to what real poverty is like (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 132).

⁸⁸⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 92-93.

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how a believer finds himself or herself impelled to conclude, that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, the metacommentator can respect that. But to affirm it casually, to pretend that it is unproblematic – *that* is not scholarly, it is not even human.

He concludes the essay provocatively:

Is it truly scholarly to question the motives and interests of our colleagues? ... Yes, it must be, once we admit ... that our ideologies, our locations, our interests, and our personalities determine our scholarship. ... Strip away the bonhomie that passes for scholarly interchange in the corridors of the international congresses, and we find that there is a lot we do not like ... and will not stand for in our colleagues. ... Managing personal conflict within the academy may well be the new skill, harder than Assyriology or deconstruction, that scholars will need to acquire in this decade.⁸⁸⁸

4.65 'A World Established on Water (Psalm 24): Reader-Response, Deconstruction, and Bespoke Interpretation'⁸⁸⁹

This is one of the most intriguing essays in the collection. Clines's initial complaint is that the psalm is 'riddled with theological ideas as unacceptable as its cosmology'.⁸⁹⁰ *What is to be done, he asks, with 'sacred literature so ideologically and religiously alien even to a reader of good will'?*⁸⁹¹ He explores three possible approaches.

First, he employs *an ideologically slanted reader-response criticism*, rejecting the ideologies of holiness and of war on which the text depends and which Clines abhors. It is a strange concept of holiness, he maintains, that the temple needs protection from contamination by the unholy who might enter. Worse still is the ethically unacceptable warlikeness of the deity, who is 'mighty in battle'.⁸⁹² If we *buy* the psalm, he maintains, we buy its ideology of war, the validity of war-images for the deity, and the notion that war solves problems. However, arguably, the textual allusions to Yahweh's warrior prowess are primarily to his victory over primeval chaos (implicit in verses 1-2), not to his involvement in contemporary human conflict.

Secondly, *by means of a deconstructionist technique*, Clines claims that the psalm does not even affirm itself. The psalm deconstructs itself in at least four ways:

- The whole world belongs to the Lord but it is not all holy.
- Those who live on the earth belong to the Lord but some are his enemies.

⁸⁸⁸ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 93.

⁸⁸⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 172-186. An earlier version of this essay appeared in Exum and Clines (eds.), *New Literary Criticism*, pp. 79-90.

See the critique of, and response to, this essay in Francis Landy, 'From David to David: Psalm 24 and David Clines' in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 275-289.

Another attempt at a 'Clinesian-style' deconstruction of Zionist ideology is to be found in Erich Zenger, 'Psalm 87: A Case for Ideological Criticism' in Exum and Williamson (eds.), *Reading from Right to Left*, pp. 450-460.

⁸⁹⁰ a world understood as floating on a vast underground sea (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 172). What about continental shelves and tectonic plates? one might ask!

⁸⁹¹ Clines maintains that he would, in fact, like to be positive about Psalm 24 as a grand and lofty psalm that has had an important place in Jewish and Christian worship over the centuries, and which he himself has found rousing and uplifting in the past.

⁸⁹² In the end, God is not celebrated primarily for his creative powers (as in strophe 1), nor as the fount of human goodness (as in strophe 2), but because he is 'mighty in battle' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 175).

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- Ascending the hill proves innocence but the worshipers still need vindication: in whose eyes do they need this vindication?
- Those who worship on the hill must have clean hands and not lift the soul to vanity but the deity is not so required.⁸⁹³

Clines is not the first to notice the element of contradiction in the psalm. This has usually been explained in terms of source criticism. However, perhaps the real answer is that the poet *deliberately* draws together in tension contradictory ideas and metaphors. By virtue of that tension, the ideology of the psalm coheres to form an integrated vision that is somehow more than the sum of the parts, preventing the reader from stretching any one individual metaphor (such as the warrior nature of Yahweh) to a logical (but ethically unacceptable) conclusion.⁸⁹⁴ Had Clines followed the three-stage Jamesonian procedure for aligning contradictions in the psalm with contradictions in the social formation and general ideology of the day, including comparison of the psalm with other contemporary psalm literature (such as Psalm 15), he might have come to more nuanced conclusions.⁸⁹⁵

As the third possible way of approaching the psalm, Clines introduces his proposed *bespoke or customised interpretation*, which he describes as:

goal-oriented interpretation, an end-user theory of interpretation, a market philosophy of interpretation, a discipline of 'comparative interpretation'. This framework has two axes. ... First there is the indeterminacy of meaning. Second there is the authority of the interpretative community.⁸⁹⁶

Many different interpretations of a text are equally valid. Legitimatization of an interpretation is only possible when it is accepted by a group, whether an ecclesiastical body, the Society of Biblical Literature,⁸⁹⁷ or some other interpretative community.⁸⁹⁸ Clines therefore maintains that:

Biblical interpreters have to give up their goal of determinate and universally acceptable interpretations and devote themselves to producing interpretations they can *sell*. ... This is what I call customised interpretation. ... There are some views of Psalm 24 that churches will

⁸⁹³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 176-78.

⁸⁹⁴ Francis Landy makes a not dissimilar point: 'What Clines has missed, I think, is that the abrupt transitions and inconcinnities [sic] are characteristic of metaphorical thinking, whereby two or more apparently unrelated or contradictory terms are perceived in relation to each other, to contribute to a collective vision' (Landy, 'David to David', p. 280).

My own view echoes the comment of David Penchansky on the book of Job: 'The disharmonic elements of the book of Job create a kind of whole' (Penchansky, *Betrayal of God*, p. 70).

⁸⁹⁵ An example of an examination of Psalm 24 against a wider mythological background is Alan J. Cooper, 'Psalm 24:7-10: Mythology and Exegesis', *JBL* 102 (1983), pp. 37-60.

Zenger's 'Psalm 87', also a deconstructive approach to Zion ideology, compares Psalm 87 with other psalms and analyses its place within the overall structure of the Psalter.

⁸⁹⁶ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 178. This is not new: for it is already possible for Christians to shop around different faith communities until they find a group whose authoritative interpretation they can accept.

⁸⁹⁷ Clines notes that, for academics, legitimization traditionally comes from other academics, papers accepted by *VT*, etc. However, he observes that there is an increasing fragmentation of this world and that more and more commentators are seeking legitimacy from communities that are not entirely academic.

⁸⁹⁸ For a fuller discussion of the role of interpretative communities, see Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). See also discussion of the issue in Renita Weems, 'Gomer'.

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‘buy’ and ‘wear’, and others that only paid up deconstructionists, footloose academics, and other deviants will even try on for size.⁸⁹⁹

Clines further argues that it is not necessary for bespoke interpretations to confine themselves to the original context.

Must I, as a Christian of the last decade of the twentieth century (if that is what I am), care so much about ancient Israelites, dead every one of them, that I must forever read this psalm, in my own Bible, for which I paid good money, as something belonging to them more than to me? ... May I not ask, Who for me is the King of Glory? What have these words to do with me and with the central figure of Christian faith? And if you, interpreter of the Old Testament, cannot tell me that ... will you kindly tell me what you are doing with my money from the church collection plate?⁹⁰⁰

Bespoke interpretation does not have to start from scratch: ‘it envisages the recycling of old waste interpretations that have been discarded’ (“green interpretation”!).⁹⁰¹

Accordingly, Clines surveys a number of interpretations of Psalm 24 from across the centuries. He also offers a personal example of a bespoke interpretation of Psalm 24, a seemingly non-religious one:

Let’s say the world that is being built is the world of meaning, and the poem concerns making a world of meanings, meanings secure enough to be going on with ... a world where we can find the directions to the Lord’s hill, for example, a world where Wittgenstein could say, ‘Now I can go on’.⁹⁰²

Some would say that this bespoke interpretation is an almost autobiographical depiction of Clines’s own search for meaning,⁹⁰³ his own search for a way ‘to the Lord’s hill’, through a career in Biblical Studies.

Clines makes this final comment:

I have often wondered what one should do after deconstructing a text. ... It is very difficult to forget a deconstruction ... the mind ... will go on wilfully constructing, inventing new connotations, new contexts, new interrelationships, which will shore up the text. ... Weaving and interweaving of interpretations that mean something to someone, that meet a cry of recognition ... from some interpretative community – that resolidifies the text. That is the best we can hope to do. *It is something like building a universe, intelligently knit together but resting ultimately on unpredictable and ever shifting underground waters. Which was itself an interpretation of Psalm 24.*⁹⁰⁴

This last interpretation may well fall within the parameters of contemporary reader-response interpretation; but, despite Clines’s flamboyant ‘rhetoric’, it is not, on the face of it, ideological criticism.⁹⁰⁵ Ideological criticism investigates the ideology of the text in its *original* context of material production and *then* engages that ideology with questions of contemporary concern.

⁸⁹⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 180.

⁹⁰⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 182.

⁹⁰¹ He rejects the assumption that what is new in the way of interpretation is necessarily the best: ‘In fact, what is often called the “history of interpretation” is ripe for being reconceived as a discipline of “comparative interpretation”, providing raw materials, methods, critiques and samples for the work of designing creative and intelligible interpretations for end-users’ (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 181).

⁹⁰² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 185

⁹⁰³ Francis Landy has written: ‘The fragility of texts of which Clines speaks evokes the fragility of the self who writes them and comments on them. The question that pervades our poem, “Who will go up to the mountain of YHWH?”, “Who is this king of glory?”, inevitably provokes questions such as “Who is this Clines?” and “Who am I?”’ (Landy, *David to David*, p. 276).

⁹⁰⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 186 (my emphasis).

⁹⁰⁵ Nor is the approach likely to find much support in church or synagogue communities.

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I have some sympathy with Francis Landy's comment on Clines's opening question, as to the dilemma of sacred literature that is 'ideologically and religiously alien even to a reader of good will':

How can we take pleasure in a text indifferent to the values which it promotes? The question goes back to Plato and, if pursued consistently, would eliminate much of world literature. I don't see it troubling our colleagues in Classics or Sanskrit. But it seems to be prevalent in contemporary Biblical Studies. In part this is a consequence of a half acknowledged theological agenda, and the ambivalent attachment of many of us [including Clines] to the Bible and its authoritative claims. But it reflects also an awareness that none of us can be purely 'etic', uncommitted observers of textual phenomena. We are all of us textual constructs, read by the text as well as reading it.⁹⁰⁶

Clines's notion of 'bespoke interpretation' is nonetheless worthy of further consideration. It, in effect, proposes *a new kind of scholarly neutrality*: scholars should think themselves into the shoes of the group for whom they are writing, to provide an interpretation that is not necessarily their own but which will 'fit' the intended audience. It is not clear to me, however, whether Clines puts this forward as a serious philosophy or whether it is a tongue-in-cheek critique of what scholarship is covertly doing already. In order to win acceptance in the scholarly (or ecclesiastical) community, to obtain jobs in the best university departments, to secure contracts from a respectable publisher, to sell books, the scholar already must cut her suit according to the prevailing cloth, must offer what the intended audience is willing to buy, irrespective of his own values and standards.

Is this essay autobiographical? Has Clines moved beyond his 'crusade' to expose hidden ideology, beyond presenting interpretations he believes in, into an almost cynical disposition to produce material that people will 'buy'? He certainly makes this defensive comment:

And there is nothing unethical in this. ... As a bespoke interpreter responding to the needs of the market, I will be interested, not in the 'truth' about Psalm 24, not in a universally acceptable interpretation of it, but in eradicating shoddy interpretations that are badly stitched together and have no durability, and I will be giving my energies to producing attractive interpretations that represent good value for money.⁹⁰⁷

Perhaps Clines's real point is that there is nothing wrong with 'bespoke interpretation', *so long as it is declared as such upfront*.⁹⁰⁸ Arguably, one might further suggest that there is no reason why (say) a faith community should not commission an eminent scholar to articulate for them their particular interpretative

⁹⁰⁶ Landy, 'David to David' pp. 276-77. This question of readerly ethics engaging or clashing with the ethics of the text was the subject of a special issue of *Semeia*: Danna N. Fewell and Gary A. Philips (eds.), *Bible and Ethics of Reading (Semeia 77)*; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997).

⁹⁰⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 180-81. In *Interested Parties*, there are, in fact, several references to money, to the buying and selling of interpretations. On several occasions, Clines refers to the 'good money' that customers pay out or which biblical scholars earn! See, for example, pp. 76, 90, 181, and 182. On p. 180 he writes: 'What are we exegetes then to be doing with ourselves? To whom shall we appeal for our authorisation, from whom shall we gain approval for our activities, and, *above all, who will pay us?*' These references may be a 'fault line' (in the deconstructionist sense), which reveals something of Clines's own 'interests' as author and publisher! Is this a fault line along which Clines's work deconstructs?

⁹⁰⁸ Bartholomew Craig offers a critique of Clines's view that biblical interpretations are no longer 'right' but must be 'sold' as customised interpretations for particular communities, which he describes as a pragmatic pluralism in tandem with a kind of 'democratic consumerism that stands in tension with Clines's equally held concern of ideological critique' (Bartholomew Craig, 'Reading the Old Testament in Postmodern Times', *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 [1998], pp. 91-114 [especially, pp. 102-106]).

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tradition, without necessarily requiring that the scholar should share their values and beliefs. A barrister will represent her clients, without necessarily sympathising with their case, because all have a right to have their views articulated in the best possible way. Faith communities, arguably, have as much right as any other group to a scholarly ‘advocate’ to publish their interpretative tradition in a well argued and coherent manner. As part of this process, the scholar, like the barrister, can critique the client’s case, enabling the client to distinguish not so much between right and wrong interpretations as between good and bad ones, between shoddy, badly stitched together interpretations and those that will stand the test of scholarly scrutiny.

It is certainly one of the implications of Clines’s argument that there is a place in the academy for interpretations that have not hitherto been regarded as within the purview of critical scholarship. Gone, then, surely, is the assumption that faith-based interpretations are biased whereas scholarly interpretations are neutral. The former is as legitimate as any other mode of interpretation, so long as there is no attempt to impose it on others. The latter is no more objective, no less bespoke, and neither should it be imposed.

But there is an important warning note to be sounded. All traditions of interpretation may be equally legitimate. But there can be ‘shoddy interpretations that are badly stitched together’ and interpretations in which there is an unevaluative or unacknowledged succumbing to the ideology of the text. To promote awareness of the distinction between bad and good commentary remains an important part of the task of critical scholarship, as does exposing ideological bias masquerading as scholarly objectivity.

4.66 Concluding Comments and Evaluation

4.661 James Barr and Clines

James Barr observes that to some extent Clines is in line with traditional *theology*. The task of criticism is not just to elucidate the past but to follow the texts into the present and to engage them with present-day issues. Clines rejects the much vaunted *neutrality* of supposedly *objective* scholarship as *unethical*, because it fails to challenge the ideology of the text. Nonetheless, Barr complains that the end product of Clines’s ideological criticism is not to affirm but rather ‘to dismantle most or all of the theological realities referred to in the text’. Part of the debate between Barr and Clines arises because Barr seeks to remain within the social-scientific mode (of Dyck’s three categories), whereas Clines has moved well within the social-critical mode.

Barr perceptively comments that Clines falls into his own trap of concealed ideological bias:

It is difficult to accept Clines’s assurance that his form of ideological criticism does not ‘subscribe’ to a particular political or philosophical position It is based ... on the ‘framework that is given by our pluralist society’. ... What the ‘pluralist’ society definitely affirms is, so far as I can see from Clines’s exposition, not pluralist at all: what it affirms is a sort of Hobbesian, Nietzschean world-view, according to which no one does or says or writes anything except for the sake of *power* for their own group.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 133-34.

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Up to this point, Barr's critique seems reasonable. However, he continues:

If this kind of argument were applied consistently to everything, there could be no knowledge of anything. For it is obvious, under this world-view, that Clines has no reason behind his own arguments other than his desire for the greater power of his own group. ... If he told us his real motive – something we are often bidden to do – namely, that he was writing purely for the sake of greater power, he would of course suffer a loss of credibility. If on the other hand, he is unconscious of any such motivation – well, that is just normal with ideology.

Clines may well have overstated his case, and Barr may well be right to take him to task for the implication that *nothing* is ever written except in the interests of one's own power group. However, Clines and others involved in the ideological-critical enterprise are surely right to draw to our attention the other extreme: the almost total neglect of ideological issues in traditional 'objective' historical criticism.

4.662 Summary and Final Comments

In many ways *Interested Parties* is an experimental, kite-flying enterprise. The essays are varied in both scope and methodology. Sometimes they draw almost contradictory conclusions.⁹¹⁰ They read like an assortment of essays written at different times; and, in most cases, they have been previously published elsewhere. They do not present a clear and consistent line of argument and do not offer a specific model or methodology for ideological criticism. The essays raise more questions than they offer answers. Nonetheless, this provocative volume by Clines undoubtedly presents a timely challenge to some of the sacred cows of contemporary scholarship.

The most important thrust of *Interested Parties* is the 'demand to press beyond mere *description* of the text to a *critique* of it'.⁹¹¹ Two key approaches that Clines employs in resisting the hidden ideology of the text are *reading the text from left to right* and (Eagletonian) *reading against the grain of the text*.⁹¹² He is also well within the Eagletonian tradition in his stress on incorporating moral value judgments within critical scholarship.⁹¹³ Clines also draws on the Jamesonian tradition, especially in his insistence on the political nature of biblical texts and that texts generally emerge from class or group conflicts. However, he makes no attempt to apply either the Eagletonian or the Jamesonian methodology in detail. In particular, more detailed and nuanced consideration of the literary mode of production would have served his argument well in a number of places.

Clines specifically seeks to broaden ideological criticism beyond its Marxist roots. By contrast with Eagleton, he frequently adopts a reader-response perspective. He

⁹¹⁰ In Clines's own words:

Some [of the essays in the volume] suggest it is a good idea to read the Hebrew Bible from the standpoint of our own ideologies; some of them try to point out how foolish that can be. Some of them attempt to expose the uncritical complicity of modern readers with the ideology of the ancient texts, and some, contrariwise, take issue with the colonisation of the ancient texts by alien modern ideologies (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 18).

⁹¹¹ The quotation is taken from Clines's, 'Possibilities and Priorities', p. 84 - but it nonetheless sums up the thrust of *Interested Parties*.

⁹¹² The phrases are first introduced in *Interested Parties* on pp. 26 and 191 respectively.

⁹¹³ As Eagleton puts it:

One reason why moral judgments do not seem as solid as judgments about the physical world is that we live in a society where there are fundamental conflicts of value. ... Because we cannot agree at a fundamental level, it is tempting to believe that values are somehow free-floating – that moral judgments cannot be subject to criteria of truth and falsehood. We can be reasonably sure about whether Abraham Lincoln was taller than four feet, but not about whether there are circumstances in which it is permissible to kill. The fact that we cannot arrive at any consensus in the matter, however, is no reason to assume that it is just a question of some unarguable personal option or intuition (Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 18).

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tends towards a deconstructionist approach, though he draws back from the brink of a full-blown deconstructionism that allows for no possibility of reconstruction or stability. Clines's overall aim is to come up with interpretations, however 'bespoke', that are of value and relevance to interpretative communities.

For Eagleton, the ethical standards against which the text is to be evaluated are Marxist. Clines argues that readers must bring to bear on the text their own personal ideological convictions. Ordinary readers must be set free from the ideological holdings of the scholarly hegemony as much as from ecclesiastical domination. Ideological critique must be applied not just to the ancient text but also to scholarly interpreters and commentators, by a process of metacommentary. Indeed, Clines goes so far as to describe this task as a personal 'crusade'.⁹¹⁴ He argues that critique of the motives and interests of fellow scholars must form part of the academic agenda. His essay on 'bespoke interpretation', however autobiographical, serves as an exposé of commentary that *claims* scholarly objectivity but is, in fact, customised to the prevailing scholarly hegemony, or, to put it more bluntly, to the market place for selling scholarly books.

Despite his complaint that commentators tell us little about themselves, Clines offers us little by way of autobiographical information; nor is he up-front about his own presuppositions and motivations. When it suits his purpose, he adopts the moral high ground of studied neutrality that he castigates in others. There is a lurking suspicion that much of his work is provocatively head-line grabbing, material that will sell books, deconstruction of traditional scholarly perspectives without much real prospect of reconstruction.

On balance, it should be acknowledged that Clines has foregrounded issues that have hitherto been avoided in the scholarly community. Like many of the other critics whose work has been reviewed above, he has exposed significant areas of false consciousness in the scholarly world, he has alerted readers to the 'designs' that texts (and commentaries) have on them, and he has deconstructed along fault-lines that have been masked by the dominant tradition of interpretation. He also has made scope for opening up the world of the academy to the 'interests' of faith and other interpretative communities, over against the prevailing scholarly hegemony.

In many ways, however, Clinesian deconstruction is the easier part of the task. It remains to be seen what reconstruction may yet emerge from Clines's pen in the ongoing development of the ideological-critical tradition.

⁹¹⁴ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 12.

5. Issues and Questions

5.1 David Penchansky: The Ideological Stance of the Critic

A thought-provoking article is David Penchansky's 'Up for Grabs, a Tentative Proposal for Doing Ideological Criticism'.⁹¹⁵ Penchansky's title, 'Up for Grabs', is chosen because of the 'anarchic feel' of the phrase and for its connotations of aggression. He explains:

I will examine the process of grabbing in literary activity. ... I will engage in exegetical activity ... to expose textual aggression in a particular passage. We also see this grabbing in our own readings of texts. I will reflect on the process as well, a reflection commonly called metacriticism.⁹¹⁶

Penchansky focuses on Judges 2:10-23, a passage that he styles 'the deuteronomic template', as setting out the ideological position of the deuteronomic editor.⁹¹⁷ For Penchansky, '*the Biblical text is not the story*. It spins off stories at the point of contact between the reader and the text'.⁹¹⁸ One might add that the biblical text represents one particular ideological encoding of an existing *story* that was already well known in the folk-culture of the day. To adapt Penchansky's metaphor slightly, the text takes up an existing story that is central to popular ideology and 'spins off' new stories (or stories with a new 'spin') 'at the point of contact between the reader and the text'.

From this particular text, Penchansky derives three 'stories': the *textual*, the *critical*, and the *metacritical*. The *textual* story consists of the theological sequence: departure from Yahweh, enemy oppression, appeal to Yahweh, delivery by a judge.

Penchansky describes this as a 'boring schema, meant to determine our reading of subsequent passages'. As an illustration, he takes the Ehud / Eglon story in Judges 3, 'originally told ... to engender jingoistic hatred and feelings of superiority over the Moabites' but converted by the 'deuteronomic template' into a 'moral tale about Yahweh's gracious deliverance of Israel'.

Penchansky assumes that the Ehud / Eglon story has an oral prehistory with a distinct ideology, which is then 'subjugated' or 'grabbed' by that of the editor. Arguably,

⁹¹⁵ David Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs: a Tentative Proposal for Doing Ideological Criticism', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 35-42. For other examples of Penchansky's work, see his *Betrayal of God* (which is summarised above in footnote 666, p. 149); and *The Politics of Biblical Theology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1995).

⁹¹⁶ Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs', p. 35.

⁹¹⁷ This contrasts with Mark Brett's view (see above, pp. 175-76) that the editorial ideology is not primarily to be located in editorial additions and comments but in the selectivity of source material.

⁹¹⁸ Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs', p. 35 (my emphasis).

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however, the somewhat crude Ehud story sits more uneasily with the ‘deuteronomic template’ than Penchansky allows. It would have been interesting for Penchansky to develop this not as ideological subjugation but as a *clash* of ideologies between the (albeit hypothetical) earlier source and the later editorial perspective. An ideological clash may be deliberately allowed by an author / editor as creative tension, as a synergy of ideological perspectives. It need not necessarily be ‘textual aggression’.

According to Penchansky, the foremost tactical device used by the deuteronomic editor is *generalisation*. The chronology is indeterminate, using words such as ‘whenever’.⁹¹⁹ The text uses generalised designations such as ‘Israelites’ rather than individual tribes or clans and refers to ‘oppressors’ rather than naming particular groups, abstracting the plot from any specific historical context. Penchansky argues:

Such abstractions are coercive. They seek to tell us, in the most general way possible, what will happen in every concrete situation. They therefore compel commitment to a particular ideology, a carefully managed way to define the world.⁹²⁰

Penchansky’s comments on the ideological use of *generalisation* are perceptive. In Northern Ireland, we know well the tendency of the media to generalise the attitudes of vocal minority groups to imply that all Northern Ireland people think the same way. No doubt generalisation of this sort serves many a propaganda purpose across the world,⁹²¹ though, presumably, generalisation can be used to reinforce a positive as well as a negative impression. An example of the latter might be generalisations of the United States as a liberal and prosperous democracy, masking the racial tensions and the poverty that also exist.

Penchansky concludes this section as follows:

The ‘deuteronomic template’ is meant to be an invisible reading strategy, shaping the reading of the later stories while the reader remains unaware that she is being manipulated. ... The ideological material ... may be exposed by examining the cracks or fault lines in the text. In the case of this text, the primary fault line lies between the deuteronomic template and the texts it seeks to interpret.⁹²²

On first reading, Penchansky seems somewhat to over-egg the pudding. Terms like ‘coercion’ and the ‘magnitude of the [editor’s] effort’ and the claim that the editor’s purpose was ‘self-consciously polemic’ seem over-the-top for what Penchansky had earlier described as a ‘boring schema’ in which the author-editor has openly outlined his ideological stance. The reason for the exaggerated strength of Penchansky’s language, however, becomes clearer when he turns to the *critical* story.

⁹¹⁹ Particular grammatical devices in Hebrew used to create this effect are illustrated by Penchansky on p. 37.

⁹²⁰ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 37.

⁹²¹ At a more local level, I know of a situation where an inner-city congregation was persuaded to allow local children from a different community background to play football and other games in the Church grounds – as a response to the lack of safe play-areas in the district. When vandalism to Church property increased, those in the congregation opposed to this policy made statements like: “This is typical of *those* people. You allowed *them* to play in the church grounds: and look at the thanks you got. *They* came and damaged our property.” Those making this allegation knew perfectly well that the children and the vandals were different groups of people but the use of the generalising words ‘them’ and ‘they’ were used as a propaganda device to discredit that particular community at large.

⁹²² Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 38.

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Penchansky acknowledges that, when he was espousing the role of objective critic, he was, in fact, far from objective. He now foregrounds his personal dislike of this particular text, which he regards as ‘an attempt to hermetically seal Israel against outside influence, by means of a rigid historical interpretive framework’.⁹²³ He comments:

Although I might claim to be presenting ‘just the text’ ... consciously or not, I am concealing or clouding over elements that do not fit my thesis. ... *For instance, when I railed against the abstracting nature of the text, I neglected to highlight the one part of the text that remains concrete and generates a high degree of empathy.*⁹²⁴

Penchansky concludes:

Interpretation is as much a reflection of the reader / interpreter, her social / cultural / political / sexual / racial / economic milieu, as it is of the text. *There is no reliable way to separate out that part of the reading from the ‘actual’ [text].*⁹²⁵

There is, however, one more story to be told, the *metacritical* story:

I made a frightening observation during my consideration of this text. I realised that the sins of the Deuteronomist are exactly my own. I too put forward a template, a reading strategy, and seek through persuasion to influence others to read texts my way. My intentions too are ideological and concealed.⁹²⁶

How can this barrier be overcome so as to enable objective interpretation?⁹²⁷

Penchansky rejects as futile any attempt to eliminate the ideological element in criticism by simply imposing ‘ever harsher restrictions’ on the critic.

His suggestion is that the commentator should write ‘under erasure’, a phrase that he has taken from Derrida. Derrida actually had his printers indicate statements under erasure by means of a word with crossed lines through it. Penchansky does not seek to do this literally but observes that interpretative assertions may be declared as ‘under erasure’ when they spring from ‘an awareness and willingness to confess one’s double-dealing, and therefore always making qualified critical judgements’. His conclusion is:

I would suggest that this three-fold process serves as an effective and important way to read texts. I say this under erasure!⁹²⁸

Put in other terms, ideological criticism must always be accompanied by a self-critical metacriticism, the latter ‘under erasure’, though one might comment that such a metacritical process could be repeated *ad infinitum!*

It would be interesting to go further and to apply this concept of writing ‘under erasure’ to the biblical text itself. Did the redactors of biblical texts themselves embed comments ‘under erasure’ in the text as interpretative clues to their ideological perspective? An example of an editorial expression ‘under erasure’ might be Judges 2.23,⁹²⁹ which, arguably, runs counter to the standard Deuteronomic line.

⁹²³ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 39.

⁹²⁴ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 39 (my emphasis). The ‘concrete’ section in question is vv 15-18.

⁹²⁵ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 40 (my emphasis).

⁹²⁶ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 40. Penchansky comments elsewhere:

The ideological critic recognises that the act of interpretation is a political act and those who have controlled the reins of interpretation wield much power in the various institutions. ... There is no such thing as value-free or objective interpretation (Penchansky, *Politics*, p. 27).

⁹²⁷ Of course, there is ultimately no such thing as ‘an objective interpretation’ of a text but presumably Penchansky is seeking a methodology that increases the level of objectivity.

⁹²⁸ Penchansky, ‘Up for Grabs’, p. 40.

⁹²⁹ ‘So the LORD allowed those nations to remain in the land; he did not give Joshua victory over them, nor did he drive them out soon after Joshua’s death’ (GNB).

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Penchansky demonstrates that an important task of the ideological critic is to unmask situations where a later editorial process has impressed its ideology on earlier texts. This phenomenon is clearly of considerable significance in Biblical Studies, since a large proportion of the biblical material has reached its final form by a complex editorial process. This process, maintains Penchansky, can be elucidated by attention to the 'cracks' and 'fault lines' in the text, though it is a pity that he has not elaborated on the process by which the 'cracks' and 'fault lines' might be detected. He might also have acknowledged that identifying earlier *sources* is itself an ideological minefield that rests on scholarly assumptions as to text formation and rhetorical technique. Useful also would have been discussion of the effect of deliberate *clash* of different ideologies in the process of text formation.

Penchansky's overall thesis is that ideological criticism must involve a significant element of metacriticism that is not just an appendix to the process. However, a difficulty with the up-front declaration by the critic of her ideological prejudices, under erasure or otherwise, is that much of our ideological inheritance is *unconscious*. Furthermore, by drawing attention to one aspect of his ideological perspective, the critic may, deliberately or otherwise, deflect the reader's attention from another aspect that is the real hidden agenda of the interpretative process. Possibly, the way forward is for the metacritical element to be conducted by a third party, for criticism to be subjected to some sort of 'ideological peer review', perhaps even included as part of the eventual publication!

In the end, rather than indulge in what theoretically might become an infinite process of metacommentary on the metacommentary, it is best to stress that one critic's commentary must always stand in juxtaposition and tension with others, so that in Penchansky's own words:

The richest reading of a text, then, is not the one that can most effectively defend a particular angle of vision, but one that can hear a number of perspectives in juxtaposition.⁹³⁰

One attempt to achieve this kind of synthesis is the collaborative work of the Bible and Cultural Collective, whose *Postmodern Bible* is reviewed below.⁹³¹

5.2 Stephen Fowl: *Do texts have ideologies?*

In 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies',⁹³² Stephen Fowl takes issue with the wide range of scholars who speak of ideology⁹³³ as *a property inherent in the text* from the time of its production.⁹³⁴ Fowl acknowledges that 'those who produced the biblical texts

⁹³⁰ Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs', p. 35.

⁹³¹ See below, pp. 222-43.

⁹³² Stephen E. Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', *Biblical Interpretation* 3.1 (1995), pp. 15-34.

⁹³³ For the sake of his argument, Fowl offers this definition of ideology, which he believes to be reasonably non-controversial:

a consensual collection of beliefs, attitudes, and convictions that is related in certain specifiable ways to a whole range of social, political, and material artifacts and practices (Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 17).

⁹³⁴ For a general discussion of this issue (outside of Biblical Studies) see Christopher Hampton, *The Ideology of the Text* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

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shaped them in the light of their own economic, ethnic, social, or gender based interests'.⁹³⁵ However, he questions the legitimacy of referring to an author's 'racism, androcentrism, or elitism' as a *property* of the text, such that the text 'has' an ideology.⁹³⁶ However, Fowl oversimplifies the issue from the outset: for, as Eagleton has made clear, the ideology of the text is significantly more complex than a *simple* expression of authorial ideology.⁹³⁷

Fowl resists any view of the text as: 'a relatively stable element into which an author inserts, hides, or dissolves ... ideologies and meanings', so that 'the task of the critic is to dig out, uncover, or distil these properties from it'.⁹³⁸ Again, his analogy is oversimplified. An alternative, Eagletonian, analogy would be of the warp and the woof, in which the warp represents the *fixed* elements of Mode of Production and General Ideology into which the woof of Authorial Ideology is woven to produce the Ideology of the Text.

Fowl's reasoning is largely an *argument by analogy* from the question as to whether texts have *meaning*: just as the author's intention is no longer regarded as *the* meaning of a text, so the author's ideology is not *the* ideology of the text.⁹³⁹ Reference to the 'ideology of the text', just like reference to the 'meaning of the text', is, for Fowl, a kind of loose or shorthand speaking that 'introduces a whole range of conceptual confusions'.⁹⁴⁰

Fowl takes the Abraham 'story' as a case study. He seeks to illustrate 'the variety of ways the Abraham *story* has been read and the various ideological interests which shape and are shaped by such readings'.⁹⁴¹ He presupposes that the Abraham *story* originated as a 'discrete ancestral story' of one segment of the population over and against those who adhered to stories about Isaac or Jacob. When the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were eventually integrated into the book of Genesis, the Abraham *story* was utilised for a quite different ideological purpose, serving to

⁹³⁵ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 15.

⁹³⁶ He cites both Itumeleng Mosala and the feminist scholar, Sandra Schneiders, as exemplars of this approach. Mosala regards biblical texts as 'products, records and sites of social, historical, cultural, gender, racial, and ideological struggles', which 'radically and indelibly bear the marks of their origins and history' (Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 30). Schneiders insists that 'the biblical text itself is ideologically biased against women' (Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* [San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991]).

⁹³⁷ Eagleton defines 'the ideology of the text' as:

the product of an aesthetic working of General Ideology as that ideology is itself worked and 'produced' by an over-determination of authorial-biographical factors (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 59).

⁹³⁸ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 16.

⁹³⁹ Fowl refers to a previous article in which he had argued against 'confused notions of textual meaning', namely, Stephen E. Fowl, 'The Ethics of Interpretation; or, What's Left over after the Elimination of Meaning' in D.J.A Clines, S.E. Fowl, and S.E. Porter (eds.), *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (JSOTSup. 87; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 379-98. In this article, Fowl had discussed the issue of whether texts can be said to have *meaning*. However, he does not seek to establish that the analogy between 'meaning' and 'ideology' holds - or whether, perhaps, it holds only partially. Fowl acknowledges the influence of Jeffrey Stout, 'What is the Meaning of a Text?', *New Literary History* 14 (1982), pp. 1-12.

⁹⁴⁰ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 15-16. He continues:

Dropping the idea that texts *have* ideologies will allow us to think in clearer more productive ways about particular texts, about the relationships between texts and social practices and about how one might alter the social practices underwritten by particular texts (especially biblical texts).

⁹⁴¹ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', pp. 18-29 (my emphasis).

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cement the *unity* of the Israelite tribal confederation.⁹⁴² The initial producers of the *stories* were interested in *excluding* the Isaac and Jacob groups, whereas the later integrated *text* used the *stories* to *unite* divergent groups. Fowl argues that neither the ideological concerns of those who originally produced the stories nor the concerns of those who later integrated them are ‘properties of the *stories* themselves’.⁹⁴³ Ideology, he therefore maintains, is not inherent in the *text*.

Fowl next discusses the later use of Abraham in Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel⁹⁴⁴ to support the ‘competing interests of the exiles’.⁹⁴⁵ He then jumps several centuries to Philo’s usage, where the stories serve a strategy ‘of universalising the appeal of Judaism to non-Jewish Alexandrians’ and of ‘subordinating Hellenistic cultural ideals to scripture’.⁹⁴⁶ Clearly, the ideological interests ‘which shape and are shaped’ by Philo’s use of the *stories* are vastly different from those which operated among the early Israelites.

Moving to the New Testament, Fowl discusses Paul’s use of the Abraham material,⁹⁴⁷ which reflects a new range of ideological interests. Paul particularly uses the Abraham *story* to illustrate that Gentiles are to be *included* with Jews in the ‘Israel of God’. Looking beyond the New Testament, he then considers the contrasting work of Justin Martyr,⁹⁴⁸ whose reading canvasses the view that ‘Christians have *supplanted* Jews as the people of God’.⁹⁴⁹

Having demonstrated that the *story* of Abraham has been viewed from several quite discontinuous ideological perspectives, Fowl catalogues the difficulties that he perceives ‘if one persists in talking about a text *having* an ideology’. The main question is: ‘Which of these or other ideologically loaded interpretations of Abraham is *the* ideology of the *text*?’ He rejects any claim that it is ‘the ideological interests at work in the *production* of a text that count as *the* ideology of the text’.⁹⁵⁰ If the focus is to be on the original production of the text, what are we to make of Philo, Paul, Justin, and the rest? ‘Have they misunderstood the ideology of the Abraham *story* in Genesis?’ he asks. ‘Have they been subtly taken over by the text’s ideology? Have they distorted it or violated it?’⁹⁵¹ Fowl’s conclusion is:

It becomes very clumsy and difficult to continue to talk about a text’s ideology in the same way it is clumsy and difficult to talk about a text’s meaning. ... We need a better way of thinking and talking about these issues without becoming muddled by a bad vocabulary.⁹⁵²

⁹⁴² Clearly, Fowl’s reconstruction is dependent on a range of questionable assumptions, not least that there ever was a ‘tribal confederation’. However, such issues do not materially affect the line of argument.

⁹⁴³ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, p. 19.

⁹⁴⁴ Isaiah 51.1-5 and Ezekiel 3.23-24.

⁹⁴⁵ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, p. 19 (see note 11).

⁹⁴⁶ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, pp. 19-22. For Philo, Abraham serves as ‘an archetypical exemplar of wisdom, virtue, and piety ... the prototypical stoic’. In his discussion of Philo, Fowl draws primarily from David Dawson, *Allegorical Readings and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁹⁴⁷ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, pp. 22-26.

⁹⁴⁸ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, pp. 26-28.

⁹⁴⁹ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, p. 26 (my emphasis).

⁹⁵⁰ He insists, ‘I do not know of any persuasive argument ... to support the valorization of this particular point in a text’s history’ (Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, p. 29).

⁹⁵¹ Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, p. 29.

⁹⁵² Fowl, ‘Texts Don’t Have Ideologies’, pp. 30-31. Fowl argues that if we avoid the phrase ‘the ideology of the text’, we will have greater conceptual clarity in investigating the ‘relationships between

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However, Fowl's analysis contains a number of serious flaws. He is over-dependent on the analogy between the questions, 'Do texts have ideologies?' and 'Do texts have meanings?' He assumes this analogy to be valid but does not fully explore it. It is at best an oversimplification.

Furthermore, Fowl's own use of terminology is imprecise. He frequently uses the phrase 'story of Abraham'. More correct might be 'stories'. Sometimes, the reference seems more to the *character* of Abraham rather than to the story.

Even more problematic is the fact that Fowl uses the words 'story' and 'text' almost interchangeably (as I have sought to illustrate by highlighting these terms in the above summary of Fowl's argument). Fowl fails to make a distinction between the *story* of Abraham and the various *texts* in which that story has been encoded. A text may take a well known *story* and encode it with a new and original 'spin'. The question that Fowl poses is whether *texts* have ideologies but the question that he actually discusses is whether the Abraham *story* has an inherent ideology. The two are quite different.

It is true that, across the centuries, the *stories* of Abraham have been pressed into serving a variety of ideological agendas, not all of them compatible. But each of these authors has produced a different *text*, each possessing its own ideology, its own grain. The author of the 'original' pre-Genesis source-text may well have used the *stories* to encode an exclusivist ideology. That original *text*,⁹⁵³ if we had it, could be said to have encoded an exclusivist ideology. If the producer of the final form of Genesis has later pressed the *story* into the service of a different, unifying, ideological agenda, then he has produced a quite distinct *text*, inscribed with a quite different ideology, even though traces of the ideology of an underlying source-text may still be discernable and amenable to ideological-critical investigation.

When it comes to Philo, Paul, and Justin Martyr, these authors have undoubtedly used Abraham *stories* in quite distinctive ways; but this is quite different from saying that they have ascribed a new or different ideology to the *Genesis text*. Rather, they have engaged the text of Genesis with a new context and have produced new *texts*, each with its own inherent ideology, its own grain, and its own subsequent interpretative history. We can legitimately compare and contrast the ideology inherent in the 'parent' Genesis text with the ideology of each the subsequent 'child' texts.⁹⁵⁴

ideology, textual production / interpretation and the practices such interpretations underwrite by examining specific phases in the interpretative life of particular texts'. There is nothing in this, he maintains, which undermines those scholars whose preoccupation is, quite legitimately, with the original production of texts. However, terminological precision, he maintains, will aid those who seek an overview of the history of interpretation (Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 32).

If Fowl is right that it is 'muddled' to speak of texts as having ideology, then presumably it is equally inappropriate to speak of texts as having *grain*, as in the usage, among others, of Eagleton, Mosala and Clines.

⁹⁵³ I use the word 'text' here for convenience. The argument would still hold if this hypothetical original version of the story was an *oral* rather than a written composition.

⁹⁵⁴ A text may of course inherit something of the ideological perspective of a predecessor text, just as a child may inherit aspects of a parent's appearance and personality while still being a quite distinct and independent personage. The texts of Paul, Philo, and Justin Martyr may bear traces of the ideology of the parent Genesis text, but they are nonetheless quite independent texts, each with its own distinctive ideology, and each with its own distinctive interpretative tradition.

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At one point Fowl seems to anticipate this objection to his thesis:

An alternative strategy might be to claim that texts have ideologies and it is simply the case that each of these interpretations of Abraham is a different text. There is no one text of Genesis. Each interpretation of Genesis is its own text and such texts clearly have ideologies.⁹⁵⁵

Fowl rightly rejects as impractical the view that every *reading* of an individual text is in itself a new text. Each reading is a different 'performance' of the text rather than a different text. It would not be useful to regard the text of Genesis as read by Paul as a different text from the text of Genesis as read by Philo so that 'there is no one text of Genesis'.

This is not the point I am making, however. Fowl has not compared different readings of the Genesis text. He has compared the use made of the *stories* of Abraham in a series of quite different *texts*. Genesis, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel, the Pauline Epistles, and the writings of Philo and of Justin Martyr are all distinct texts. Each has used the *story/ies* of Abraham to serve a different ideological agenda, though undoubtedly with significant inter-textual influences, from Genesis onwards. Each new text may (consciously or unconsciously) have preserved something of the ideology of the parent Genesis text and / or other predecessor texts in the tradition: but they are still independent, autonomous texts, each with its own complex ideology, produced as a result of the engagement of the textual tradition with a new context of ideological struggle. They each give a new 'spin' to the Abraham *story*.

It therefore seems to me that Fowl has far from established⁹⁵⁶ that it is invalid, or even 'muddled', to use the phrase 'the ideology of the text'.⁹⁵⁷ Texts do emerge from the circumstances of their production with an inherent ideology, with a distinctive 'grain'. As Gottwald, Mosala, West and others have ably contended, 'misappropriating a biblical text by failing to detect its ideological grain' can, in fact, be 'dangerous', in enabling texts to reinforce oppression.⁹⁵⁸ That does *not* mean that we unnecessarily privilege the earliest phase of a text's interpretative history.⁹⁵⁹ The ongoing process

⁹⁵⁵ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 30.

⁹⁵⁶ In fact, at the outset of the article, Fowl qualifies his thesis by stating that he cannot 'demonstrate that texts do not have ideologies'. Rather he makes the more modest claim that, 'if one insists on talking as if texts have ideologies, then one also has to hold a whole range of other inelegant, awkward, or incoherent positions' and that 'dropping the idea that texts have ideologies will allow us to think in clearer, more productive ways about particular texts, about the relationships between texts and social practices underwritten by particular texts' (Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 16). Despite this initial disclaimer, however, most of Fowl's article is, in fact, geared to establishing that it is not valid to speak of texts having ideologies. Even as regards his more modest claim, I remain unconvinced, for the reasons stated. For a more generous assessment of Fowl on the latter point, see West, 'Gauging the Grain', pp. 79-80.

⁹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that David Clines, in a footnote in *Interested Parties*, acknowledges some merit in the point made by Stephen Fowl that texts as such do not 'have' ideologies any more than they 'have' meanings (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 17, note 17). Clines adds the view that strictly speaking writers do not have ideologies *either*: rather 'ideologies have writers'! However, despite this footnote caveat, Clines continues to make heuristic use of the phrase, 'the ideology of the text'.

I also accept something of the caveat sounded by A.K.M. Adam, when he says that we will have 'to deal delicately with the tendency to assume that ideologies can abide within texts'; and to remember that 'the people who inscribe texts, the social groups that preserve texts, and the people and groups that read texts, teach, think, select, and interpret ideologically' (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 53).

⁹⁵⁸ West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 88. See also West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 140-146.

⁹⁵⁹ Fowl makes a strong case against over-privileging the earliest phases of a text's history of interpretation. Gerald West, however, argues differently:

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of engagement of the *ideology of the text* with the ideology of successive generations of readers and interpreters is certainly a legitimate object of scholarly attention; but that very process of ongoing engagement is only possible if the text has an ideological grain in the first place.

However, Fowl makes one significant caveat that should not be overlooked. He reminds us that hardly anything is known about the original production of the Genesis text. It is very difficult to 'read back from an ancient textual artifact to the ideological interests behind its production'. *Theories* about the author can actually have the effect of illegitimately 'ideologising' the text. M.D. Carroll R. similarly warns against a *glib* use of the phrase 'the ideology of the text' and in particular against the tendency for commentators to read their own ideology back into the text.⁹⁶⁰

Nonetheless, it has seemed almost self-evident to a range of biblical scholars⁹⁶¹ that texts do emerge from the phase of their initial production with a definite 'grain', inscribed with detectable signs, or scars, of the ideological struggles from which they have emerged.⁹⁶² Robert Carroll offers what may be helpful clarification when he observes: 'Some ... writers deny that texts have ideologies; I think I would prefer to say that texts contain *traces* of ideology'.⁹⁶³ It has seemed valid and useful, certainly heuristic, to be able to discuss whether a later reader or interpreter, ancient or modern, is reading with or against the 'grain' that is *inherent* in the text. This is especially so in the light of comments such as the well known claim by Mosala that texts with ideological roots in oppressive practices 'cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts'.

It should be noted that Fowl particularly directs his argument against those who claim that the ideology of a text is 'irredeemable':

Marginalized sectors of a society have a legitimate interest in both the ideological uses to which a text is and has been put and the ideological aims of the text's author or of its production. ... Because for biblical scholars the most important phases of a particular text's interpretative life are those initial phases associated with the production and first reception of biblical texts ... we who work with the poor and the marginalized cannot permit these initial phases to remain uncontested (West, 'Gauging the Grain', p. 87).

⁹⁶⁰ Carroll R., *Rethinking Contexts*, p. 163. He continues:

More circumspect approaches would acknowledge just how difficult it is to ascertain solid enough information from within and outside a text to identify its possible ideology (the issue of available data) and would also recognise that there is no transparent and neat connection between the ideology and the producers of the text and what is actually 'put down on paper' (the issue of theory). ... Is our discovery of a text's ideology simply another self-projection upon the text? (Carroll R., *Rethinking Contexts*, p. 163).

⁹⁶¹ For example, David Clines writes:

Writers do not, on the whole, write their texts just for the fun of it: they have a case to put, an argument to advance, an opponent to overcome. ... The text is a realisation of their ideology, a performance of their investment in their ideology; one could say that their ideology is inscribed in their texts (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 23).

Clines also observes:

Reading against the grain implies that there is a grain. It implies that texts have designs on their readers and wish to persuade them of something or other. It implies that there are ideologies inscribed in texts and that the readers implied by the texts share the texts' ideologies (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 207).

Terry Eagleton, however, draws attention to the complexity of the issue:

Ideology pre-exists the text; but the *ideology of the text* defines, operates, and constitutes that ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 870).

⁹⁶² Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 30.

⁹⁶³ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 28 (my emphasis). A useful analogy might be that a disease or poison can leave traces in the body, antibodies for example, which enable medical experts to diagnose the original disease or toxin long after the outward effects of the ailment have disappeared.

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We will need to stop talking about texts as hopelessly or irredeemably racist or patriarchal or elitist ... The history of interpretation of Abraham's *story* should make it clear to us that ... texts can both shape and be shaped by a wide (and sometimes incompatible) variety of social, material, political, and theological practices and convictions. ... If we find that the conventional reading of a text helps to underwrite racism, we can offer a counter-reading which resists racism. ... We need to recognise that the qualifiers 'hopeless' or 'irredeemable' are really statements about the ... extent of our imagination and not comments about a text's character.⁹⁶⁴

Tina Pippin dismissively rejects this line of argument as deriving from prejudice by Fowl against Third-World readings. She observes: 'Fowl does ideological criticism from a position of privilege, putting ideological criticism back into the control of white male scholars'.⁹⁶⁵ In fact, however, Fowl's article makes no general critique of Third-World scholarship and specifically cites only Mosala and Schneiders among Third-World scholars. His critique is aimed against a wide constituency of 'feminists, Marxists, liberation theologians, and other interested parties', many of whom are white, western, males.⁹⁶⁶ He acknowledges that 'those who produced the biblical texts shaped them in the light of their own economic, ethnic, social or gender based interests'.⁹⁶⁷ He is not defending the 'innocence' of the text, nor is he denying that texts have significant ideological associations. He is simply questioning whether the ideological factors associated with the *initial* phase of the text's production are appropriately described as '*the* ideology of the text'. He wishes to avoid what he regards as terminological confusion and to find 'a better way of thinking and talking about these issues',⁹⁶⁸ so that we might seek 'to alter the social practices underwritten by particular texts (especially biblical texts)'.⁹⁶⁹ He stresses the importance of scholarly evaluation of the *ongoing* interpretative tradition, as much a cause of oppression as anything in the initial phase of the text's production. *He calls for a new engagement with the text that will confront rather than undergird 'racism' and other forms of oppression.*

Pippin may be right in pointing to what she regards as a dangerous consequence of a claim that texts have no ideologies. However, she does not seek to engage with Fowl's argument: she simply dismisses his thesis on ideological grounds. Her criticism is greatly overstated and clearly reflects her own ideological sensitivity:

If biblical texts have no ideologies, then they are all redeemable, regardless of the violence of the text and its interpretative history. The colonizer can retain power and control over the colonized because the biblical text is 'innocent'. Therefore the cries of the colonised, like Mosala, Sugirtharajah, and certain feminists that the text is not innocent can be ignored or deemed as so much ideologising of the biblical text. At this stage in ideological criticism, the post-colonialist is standing face to face with the colonizer. The colonizer is still embedded in a system of privilege even if the colonizer has experienced a liberal conscientization towards post-colonial thought.⁹⁷⁰

As a white, male, western scholar it is hard to engage with Pippin's critique. By definition, she excludes from ideological criticism those of us who write from a position of privilege, no matter how much we may have 'experienced a liberal

⁹⁶⁴ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', pp. 32-33 (my emphasis).

⁹⁶⁵ Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 59

⁹⁶⁶ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 15.

⁹⁶⁷ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 15.

⁹⁶⁸ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 31

⁹⁶⁹ Fowl, 'Texts Don't Have Ideologies', p. 16.

⁹⁷⁰ Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 59

conscientization'. However, it has to be said that Pippin's sweeping ideological rejection of Fowl's position is neither nuanced nor fair. There is a need to cry 'foul'!

While I do not myself agree with Fowl's claim that texts cannot be said to 'have' ideologies, Pippin's (in my view) over-the-top reaction to Fowl's article, coming from a scholar normally measured and insightful in her critique, is a significant indication *of the ideological nature of ideological criticism!*

5.3 Robert Carroll and *Ideologiekritik*

A name particularly associated with *Ideologiekritik* (as he preferred to call it)⁹⁷¹ is Robert Carroll.⁹⁷² There now follows consideration of three of his series of articles in the *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* (1993-98). These articles are not so much attempts to put ideological criticism into practice but to raise a variety of significant questions and issues as to the nature of ideological criticism.

The first in this series of articles deals with the ideological factors involved in Bible translation. This is an important topic; but as it is somewhat at a tangent to the main thrust of this present volume, fuller discussion of this article is given below in an appendix.⁹⁷³ This whole area of Bible translation, ancient and modern, is capable of substantial further development. Specific ideological-critical techniques could illuminate comparisons among (for example) the MT, the LXX, and other ancient versions. In the modern world, there is clearly scope for investigating the influence of the ideological holdings of translating groups, especially the issues that arise when First-Word translators translate for Third-World communities. Closely related to translation are the issues raised by Carroll in his second article on 'Representation'.

5.31 'On Representation in the Bible: an *Ideologiekritik* Approach'⁹⁷⁴

Carroll's basic premise in this article is summed up as follows:

⁹⁷¹ In a later publication, Carroll refers to *Ideologiekritik* as 'a formidable *poststructuralist* approach to reading the Bible' (Carroll, *Poststructuralist Approaches*, p. 54, my emphasis). In fact, however, ideological criticism predates poststructuralism.

⁹⁷² Other more general early publications by Robert Carroll that relate to the subject of ideology include: 'The Myth of the Empty Land'; 'Ideology'; and 'Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period' in Davies (ed.), *Second Temple Studies*, vol. 1, pp. 108-24.

⁹⁷³ See Robert P. Carroll, 'As Seeing the Invisible: Ideology in Bible Translation', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 19 (1993), pp. 79-93 and the discussion below, appendix 3, pp. 277-79. The fifth article in the series, not reviewed here, also for reasons of space, is Robert P. Carroll, 'Biblical Ideology: *Ideologiekritik*, Biblical Studies, and the Problematics of Ideology', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 24.1 (1998), pp. 101-114.

⁹⁷⁴ Robert P. Carroll, 'On Representation in the Bible', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 20.2 (1995), pp. 1-15. For another approach to 'literary representation' in the Bible see: David Jobling, 'Forced Labour: Solomon's Golden Age and the Question of Literary Representation', *Semeia* 54 (1991), pp. 57-76. For an excellent summary discussion of the notion of 'representation' in general literary criticism, see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Representation' in Lentricchia and McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical Terms*, pp. 11-22.

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In so-called objective reality ... there are things and events which happen to people. But the moment anyone attempts to describe or represent in speech or writing ... rhetoric and representation enter the lists. ... It is not so much ... as Nietzsche insisted, 'no facts only interpretations'; but when we try to represent things ... by means of language a lot of slippage takes place. ... We sometimes entertain the delusion that speech and language are like a camera ... so that statements, whether written or oral, are like 'snaps', reproducing in hard outline, *and without interpretation*.⁹⁷⁵

Carroll calls for more discussion on the nature of *linguistic representation*. 'Because of ecclesiastical commitments,' he maintains, 'often commentators represent biblical discourse as if it were fundamental truth rather than linguistic representation'. Furthermore, readers and writers often 'internalise what is read in the Bible and then reproduce it ... in their own language':

As a shaping force in the evolution and construction of Western European civilisation ... the Bible has already left many ideological traces on our culture. ... Our languages and literatures have internalised biblical tropes and figures, values and judgments, making them our own in various transformed ways. ... But the long history of such internalised reception has tended to blind us to the practice of reproducing biblical representations as if they were other than the time-conditioned, culturally driven tropes of specific writers from ancient times.⁹⁷⁶

Carroll illustrates his point by a long extract from Andersen and Freedman's commentary on Hosea,⁹⁷⁷ which claims that 'the perversion of sex, and an excessive preoccupation with it, are common factors in Canaanite religion'. These two 'facts' are derived from associating Exodus 22.17 with Hosea 1.2 and then associating both with Canaanite religion, *even though there is no reference to Canaanites in either text*:

What the viewpoint represents is a modern, scholarly, and cultural prejudice about ancient non-Israelite religion entirely dependent on internalisation of biblical tropes about such *imagined* religion. ... The combination of biblical trope and cultural prejudice masquerades as scholarship. ... Andersen and Freedman have failed completely to make any allowance whatsoever for biblical discourse as *ideological representation*.⁹⁷⁸

Carroll complains that it is 'not just fundamentalists' who indulge in this practice but 'senior members of the Guild of Biblical Scholarship, privileged editors of major and seminal commentary series'. The kind of prejudiced commentary is what Carroll calls 'copy-cat writing of tired text books',⁹⁷⁹ with unchecked assumptions peddled from commentary to commentary.

Carroll proceeds to assert that innuendo of sexual malpractice is a conventional usage in many cultures as rhetoric against enemies:

This is where *representation* comes into the picture. When abusing opponents, polemic demands certain fixed conventions of a rhetorical kind. ... With the passage of time, this kind

⁹⁷⁵ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 2.

⁹⁷⁶ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 3.

⁹⁷⁷ F.I. Andersen and D.N. Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 24; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1980).

⁹⁷⁸ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 4 (my emphasis). For an interesting recent analysis of popular religion in Amos, drawing a distinction between an 'etic' and an 'emic' approach, see M. Daniel Carroll R., "'For you love so to do": Probing Popular Religion' in Carroll R. (ed.), *Rethinking Contexts*, pp. 168-189.

⁹⁷⁹ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 6. Carroll attributes the phrase ultimately to David Clines, in an unpublished paper.

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of abuse becomes stereotypical. ... It is handed down through the generations. ... The enemy is invariably a whore, a sodomite, an abuser of children, or a cannibal.⁹⁸⁰

Quite astonishingly, Carroll then offers this ‘illustration’:

If you investigate Ulster society (Northern Ireland), you will find among hardened Orangemen ... the *ingrained belief* that Catholics are cannibals because in the Mass they eat the body and blood of Jesus Christ. If the average biblical scholar were to hear this accusation, then, using standard Bible-reading hermeneutics, they would have to conclude that Ulster was full of cannibals. A more informed point of view might attempt to understand the *rhetoric* of such representations. ... A similar sophistication would be no bad thing among biblical scholars, especially when they read ... prophetic diatribes. ... Such rhetoric as Ulster Orangemen *regularly* employ against their Catholic neighbours reflects the *representation* of ideology. The jibe ... only works for a *willed ignorance* on the part of the abusers. ... Such Orange rhetoric feeds on prejudice and ignorance, thus producing a discourse devoted to identity-reinforcing stereotypes of the Other.⁹⁸¹

Carroll here exhibits an astonishing anti-Northern Ireland prejudice without any regard for fact or truth. It is over thirty years since I came to live in Northern Ireland. I have known many Orangemen personally and I have never on any occasion heard this particular abuse that Carroll claims is ‘regularly’ used. Undoubtedly, the popular polemic exhibits, on both sides, a variety of stereotypical jibes; but I have never encountered Carroll’s supposed ‘ingrained belief’. Since reading Carroll’s article, I have consulted numerous local people, both Catholics and Protestants, whose astonishment is as great as mine.⁹⁸² That such an unfounded ‘accusation’ should be permitted in a reputable scholarly journal, from the pen of ‘a senior member of the Guild of Biblical Scholarship’, is outrageous. It is an example of the ‘willed ignorance’ of which Carroll himself complains. It amazes me even more that the *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*, which insists on political correctness on a range of gender, ethnic and other issues, and which rightly would not consider publishing racist or sexist innuendo, should gratuitously publish such grossly prejudiced comments about a part of the United Kingdom.

Carroll’s own ideological inheritance, from elsewhere on the island of Ireland,⁹⁸³ may have predisposed him into accepting uncritically the source of his comments. He has obviously not applied to himself or to his source the rigours of *Ideologiekritik* that he demands of others. In his own words:

To find out about the *Other* would require the investigator abandoning prejudice and rhetoric in order to go out and find out about the Other. Do some market research, find out what real people are like, what they think, how they feel, what they believe, how they act.⁹⁸⁴

It is a pity that Carroll did not practice what he preached. He illustrates more effectively than he has realised that commentators all too easily slip into unchecked assertions, stereotypes, and ‘representations’ about religion and culture! The publication of Carroll’s ill-judged comments also represents a significant warning that journal editors and publishers, as well as contributors, have their ideological blind-

⁹⁸⁰ Carroll, ‘Representation’, p. 7.

⁹⁸¹ Carroll, ‘Representation’, p. 8 (my emphasis).

⁹⁸² I can only conclude that perhaps one particular instance of Catholics being described as cannibals has been ‘generalised’ in Carroll’s mind with his own stereotypical picture of ‘hardened Orangemen’ – and that Carroll has ‘internalised’ this generalisation as uncritically as he maintains biblical scholars have ‘internalised’ the anti-Canaanite ideology of the biblical text.

⁹⁸³ In another article, he describes his own family background as belonging to the ‘Irish republican struggle for liberation’ (Carroll, ‘Infinity of Traces’, p. 40).

⁹⁸⁴ Carroll, ‘Representation’, p. 8.

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spots, despite much paraded claims to objectivity. Carroll has demonstrated the need not just for the scholar but also for the publisher to apply some metacritical *Ideologiekritik*.

Returning to the Canaanites, Carroll maintains:

The so called sexual promiscuity of the Canaanites then becomes an ideological representation. ... It is the mode of representation which should engage our attention and not any reference beyond the text to an imagined reality.⁹⁸⁵

Carroll's point is that long familiarity blinds us to the fact that representations are not literal statements. He observes:

What *representation* does is to choose a mode of discourse in which to tell a story, creating it and shaping it by means of tropes and images employed. The story is not a list of facts strung together, but a highly and creatively shaped account constructed out of linguistic elements which carry specific charges. ... A proper *Ideologiekritik* reading of the text must pay serious attention to the *representational* modes used by the writers.⁹⁸⁶

Carroll believes ideology to be the antithesis of truth but he is convinced that, in Ricoeurian terms, it should be possible to 'disentangle recognition from miscognition'. Significantly, he believes that ideological criticism involves a search for truth:

I do believe that *truth*, which may be defined as the opposite of ideology (in its bad sense) may be discovered and lived (though with great difficulty). ... *There is that kind of truth which only yields to hard struggle, much searching, and the lifelong quest for critical realism.*⁹⁸⁷

Carroll undoubtedly draws attention to significant ideological issues that arise from *representation*.⁹⁸⁸ He has demonstrated how there can be a conventional rhetoric of abuse, not to be taken at face value. One might further ask: is there correspondingly a *positive* conventional rhetoric of (say) affection, loyalty, prayer, worship, or whatever? Certainly, the commentator needs to analyse *how* language is used as well as its semantic content. Hyperbole must not be misunderstood as factual, nor metaphor as literal. However, as Carroll acknowledges in a concluding footnote,⁹⁸⁹ his article 'is at best but the beginnings of an articulation of the problems'. As often, Carroll's article is 'broad-brush stroke', raising issues but not tackling them in depth or giving any practical illustration of how progress might be made.

5.32 'An Infinity of Traces ...'

The next article in the series is entitled 'An Infinity of Traces: On Making an Inventory of our Ideological Holdings: an Introduction to *Ideologiekritik* in Biblical Studies'.⁹⁹⁰ The phrase 'Infinity of Traces' comes from Antonio Gramsci:

⁹⁸⁵ Carroll, 'Representation', pp. 9 -11.

⁹⁸⁶ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 13.

⁹⁸⁷ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 13 (my emphasis).

⁹⁸⁸ Eagleton similarly calls for special attention to the various ways in which the text's system of representation operates to instantiate and empower particular notions of truth, whether individual, corporate, or transcendental truth, and particular values and actions. See Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 14-15; and also Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 1.

⁹⁸⁹ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 14.

⁹⁹⁰ Robert P. Carroll, 'An Infinity of Traces, On making an Inventory of our Ideological Holdings: An Introduction to *Ideologiekritik* in Biblical Studies', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 21/2 (1995), pp. 25-43.

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The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is ... as a product of historical processes to date, which has deposited ... an *infinity of traces*, without leaving an inventory. *It is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.*⁹⁹¹

An essential preliminary to *Ideologiekritik*, Carroll maintains, is to produce an inventory of that 'infinity of traces'. However, against Carroll, it should be noted that it is impossible to enumerate 'an infinity': we can never be *fully* conscious of the sociological factors that condition our reading. What the ideological critic fails to acknowledge by way of ideological holdings may be more significant than what is made explicit. It is noteworthy that Carroll does not offer us an inventory of his own ideological holdings.

At last, Carroll attempts a definition of what he means by *Ideologiekritik*:

It applies to any and all analyses of the *situatedness* of every reading of the Bible. Who is doing the reading, under what conditions is the reading being done, and for what purpose? *Ideologiekritik* is therefore about *the reading processes* involved in the study of the Bible. It may also be extended to analyse the factors involved in the production of the Bible.⁹⁹²

Significantly, Carroll here describes ideological criticism as primarily to do with readers and only by extension to the conditions under which books are written.

For Carroll, a major problem is that:

Much of what passes for knowledge about the Bible today ... is at best scholarly hypothesis or reconstruction. The facts – or unfacts, as James Joyce might put the matter – are constructed by scholars from the theories of previous scholars and then assumed into the discussion as if they were real facts. ... So what most of us would claim to know about the Bible must be assigned to that 'infinity of traces'. ... Such an ideological world may reflect benign ideology or malign ideology. ... *Which it may be is for critical analysis to determine and such analysis is the foundation for any 'Ideologiekritik' approach.*⁹⁹³

For Carroll here, ideology is false consciousness, located in the gap between reality and an inherited perception of reality.⁹⁹⁴ *Ideologiekritik* must have a double perspective, scrutinizing the text for ideological traces and scrutinizing the ideological factors at play in interpretation.

Having described *Ideologiekritik* as 'a very complex activity, open to many difficulties and questionings', Carroll, surprisingly, continues:

Applying an *Ideologiekritik* approach to the Bible is not a difficult task when it comes to reading Deuteronomy or any of the *deuteronomistically* influenced texts in the Bible. ... It may pose more complicated problems when reading Job or Qoheleth. But what I call 'deuteronomistic' *looks like* an ideology.⁹⁹⁵

What on earth does Carroll mean by 'looks like an ideology'? No explanation is offered. For most ideological critics, ideology is something that is disguised, not 'easy to detect'. Carroll seems to be saying little more than that the Deuteronomistic History represents a particular world-view. Ideological criticism surely seeks to go further, to search for what is hidden under the surface. There is little new in Carroll's observation that 'some of the values inherent ... in the prophetic denunciations, using

⁹⁹¹ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 25 (my emphasis). The quotation is from Antonio Gramsci, 'Quaderni del Carcere', ET in Q. Hoare and Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

⁹⁹² Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 26.

⁹⁹³ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', pp. 27-28 (my emphasis).

⁹⁹⁴ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 28.

⁹⁹⁵ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 29.

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highly metaphorized [sic] language,' have been incorporated into 'subsequent theopolitical philosophies'.⁹⁹⁶

Where Carroll does step beyond the bounds of traditional scholarship is in his call for a scholarly *critique* of the values undergirding the text and its reception history. He anticipates David Clines's call to critique the text from the standpoint of the commentator's own values. Carroll sums it up:

All our readings are corrupted by ... past readings and past ideologies inscribed in the translated text, as well as by the prevailing ideologies of contemporary values. Self-scrutiny and self-criticism are the only controls we have to protect ourselves from the lure of the ideological. ... *In my opinion ideological readings of the Bible are lazy readings.* They are readings which assume too many unwarranted things ... where the text's meaning and functions have already been determined for it by the controlling, authorising group for such readings of the Bible.⁹⁹⁷

By 'lazy' ideological readings, Carroll presumably means readings that uncritically adopt the received tradition of interpretation. The 'controlling groups' include not just ecclesiastical authorities but also academic hegemonies.

Carroll takes as an example the use of Exodus within liberation theology. Like Mosala, he regards liberation theology as a form of fundamentalism: 'it belongs to the dogmatism side of things, which *Ideologiekritik* is morally bound to criticize'.⁹⁹⁸ However, the real problem for the liberationist is the Bible itself. It may be easy to use Exodus in polemic against slavery but there is also a biblical strand that allows for slavery. Claiming that his own family background in the Irish republican struggle for 'liberation',⁹⁹⁹ gives him a privileged insight, he observes:

The people of Israel were no sooner out of Egypt than their leaders were making rules for the purchase and control of slaves! ... Freedom is not simply the experience of being released from Egypt. For it to be real freedom it must also mean 'no more slaves', nowhere and nohow. That for me might be how the Exodus legend might be read today in the light of an *Ideologiekritik*. ... My *Ideologiekritik* approach to the reading of the Bible warns me *that I cannot read this book, except in conjunction with a liberating ethic derived from non-biblical sources*.¹⁰⁰⁰

Carroll maintains that, though the Bible may have 'dreams and fragments' of liberation, in the long history of the reception-history of the Bible in Europe, it has 'never generated an ideology of freedom' other than of a metaphysical kind.¹⁰⁰¹

⁹⁹⁶ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', pp. 29-30. As an example of what he means by this, he suggests the deuteronomistic separatist ideology as an undergirding for the South African ideology of apartheid. He cites: F.E. Deist, 'The Dangers of Deuteronomy: A Page from the Reception History of the Book', in A. Garcia Martinez, A. Hilhorst, J.T. Van Ruiten, and A.S. Van der Woude (eds.), *Studies in Deuteronomy in Honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (VTSup 53; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), pp. 13-29.

⁹⁹⁷ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 34 (my emphasis).

⁹⁹⁸ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 39. Compare Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 31-32.

⁹⁹⁹ Those of us who have been on the receiving end of Irish republican violence in recent years find it hard to think of it as a 'liberation' movement. Furthermore, I am unaware that Carroll's experience of this so called 'liberation' movement is anything other than second-hand, which somewhat undermines his claim to interpretative privilege in this regard. In this he is quite unlike Mosala. Carroll's example from Irish politics illustrates what was no doubt true of biblical times also that one person's liberation struggle may be perceived as oppression and terrorism by another, or simply as an attempt to replace one hegemony by another, under the guise of 'liberation'.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', pp. 40-41 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁰¹ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 39. Carroll's statement here is of course open to debate. One might, for example, urge the crusade of Wilberforce against slavery as an example of an ideology of liberation inspired by the Bible.

Once again, Carroll's article raises significant issues, albeit in a discursive and repetitive way. He provides a definition of *Ideologiekritik*, criticises unsatisfactory readings, and provides anecdotal examples. Despite his claim to be 'clearing a path through the forests by means of *Ideologiekritik* ... in the construction of a critical theory in Biblical Studies',¹⁰⁰² he offers no criteria or methodology by which we might critique the ideological holdings of commentators.

5.33 'Jeremiah, Intertextuality, and *Ideologiekritik*'¹⁰⁰³

This article is primarily about *intertextuality*. Carroll draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's 'dialogic notion of texts'¹⁰⁰⁴ and on Roland Barthes's claim that 'every text, being itself the intertext of another text, belongs to the intertextual'.¹⁰⁰⁵ This is similar to the Jamesonian principle that all texts come to us as 'already read'.¹⁰⁰⁶ The significance of this phenomenon is summed up by Carroll:

Recognition of the intertextuality of texts leads on to *Ideologiekritik* because in the generation of multiple meanings of any text, it becomes necessary to ask questions about who determines any specific reading and under what conditions are such readings produced.¹⁰⁰⁷

Carroll turns to Jeremiah, which he describes as having a 'strong intertextual character'.¹⁰⁰⁸ He summarises his (previously published) theory that Jeremiah consists of an anthology of anonymous poems, woven together by an editor for a specific ideological purpose.¹⁰⁰⁹ Each text within the book is a reflection on previous texts within 'a complex structure'.¹⁰¹⁰ He comments:

What strikes me ... is the sense that the writer(s) of the book was (were) readers in the first place. ... *The producers of scrolls were readers and used their scrolls to carry on a dialogue with other scrolls.* The book of Jeremiah is ... a reading of readings.¹⁰¹¹

¹⁰⁰² Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 39.

¹⁰⁰³ Robert P. Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality and *Ideologiekritik*', *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 22.1 (1996), pp. 15-34.

See also Robert P. Carroll, 'Intertextuality and the Book of Jeremiah: Animadversions on Text and Theory' in Exum and Clines (eds.), *New Literary Criticism*, pp. 55-78.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 399-410 (especially, p. 401); and also Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences' in *Speech Genres and other Late Essays* (eds. C. Emerson and M. Holquist; trans. V.W. McGee; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 165-177.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Barthes, 'Work to Text', p. 77. Barthes continues: 'The quotations from which a text is constructed are anonymous, irrecoverable ... quotations without quotation marks'. Carroll also draws on Julia Kristeva's maxim, 'any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', p. 37). For Frederic Jameson's discussion of intertextuality, see above, p. 72, including the quotation from A.K.M. Adam in note 320.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 29-30.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality and *Ideologiekritik*', p. 17. He also comments: 'The writers of the biblical texts produced their texts in conversation with other texts and we try to read their texts with even larger intertextual holdings' (Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 31).

¹⁰⁰⁸ especially with cross-references to the books of Kings and to the books in the prophetic corpus.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', pp. 19-20. See also Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1981); and Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: a Commentary* (Old Testament Library; London: SCM Press, 1986).

¹⁰¹⁰ 'of inclusios, chiasmic structures, repetitions, mediations on other texts, echoes, borrowings, and interweavings' (Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 21).

¹⁰¹¹ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', pp. 21-22 (my emphasis). Carroll cites William McKane's (1986) ICC commentary on Jeremiah in which he offers a similar theory of Jeremiah as a *rolling corpus* of material; and also C.C. Torrey's conjecture that 'a sacred library of the prophets' was

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Carroll turns to issues surrounding the production of scrolls.¹⁰¹² He cites Timothy Beal:

Who, or what, controls the means of production. And controlling the means of production is always an ideological activity. ... It demands an ideological-critical approach to reading readings.¹⁰¹³

Given that Yehud was a backwater province, it is difficult to know who would have had time and material resources for production of the whole range of long and complex Bible scrolls. Carroll suggests that the temple bureaucracy of the Hellenistic period is the period most likely to have been able to support a literary centre with the necessary scribal and financial resources. Carroll is usefully raising questions to do with the literary mode of production, though he does not refer explicitly to the Marxist tradition of criticism. Carroll rightly stresses that this quest does not just involve *material* questions as to production and distribution of scrolls but also questions of who *controls* this process (though, presumably, this may also be reducible to economic considerations). This issue of control seems to me to be of particular significance. Disappointingly, however, Carroll does not follow through this line of investigation. On the basis of tentative discussion, he suggests that Jeremiah is one more biblical scroll 'devoted to presenting the ideological claims of the power elite controlling Jerusalem and responsible for constructing representations of its past'.¹⁰¹⁴

The scroll, however, is a 'polyphomous' collection; and among the many voices scattered through its poems are protests, 'dim echoes', traces of outrage at the 'cruelty, suffering, and outrageous experiences of the community' at the hands of Yahweh.¹⁰¹⁵ There is a future hope embedded in Jeremiah, represented as an arcadian vision of return from Babylon, even for the blind and the lame and the pregnant (31.8) (which Carroll might have developed in terms of a Jamesonian / Ricoeurian utopian vision). However, the apparently benevolent message for returning fugitives *masks* the silent dispossession of the people already in occupation. Citing Jameson's 'strategies of containment',¹⁰¹⁶ he concludes that 'Jeremiah is therefore a text

produced in the 3rd Century BCE. See C.C. Torrey, 'The background of Jeremiah 1-10', *JBL* 56 (1937), pp. 193-216. Space does not permit at this point a critique of Carroll's theory as to the origin of the book of Jeremiah.

¹⁰¹² taking into account not just the MT but also the shorter Greek scrolls of Jeremiah as evidence that a variety of versions was in circulation.

¹⁰¹³ Timothy Beal, 'Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production' in D.N. Fewell (ed.), *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 25-34 (28), quoted in Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality and *Ideologiekritik*', p. 18. Despite this focus on control of the means of production, Carroll indicates a preference for a non-Marxian (or pre-Marxian) usage of 'ideology', though he believes that ideology is nonetheless inextricably linked to politics. He rejects an over-broad definition of ideology as meaningless:

If we all have ideologies (as *Ideologiekritiks* regularly assert) then *Ideologiekritik* becomes fairly meaningless. ... The term ideology would need to have much more bite to it to become a useful analytical tool and readers of texts would have to state what their political programmes were in relation to the reading of texts for *Ideologiekritik* to be able to make any constructive contribution to the interpretative enterprise (Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 19).

¹⁰¹⁴ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 15.

¹⁰¹⁵ Again, Carroll maintains that he personally is particularly attuned to hearing these 'dim echoes', because of his own 'ideological holdings' from the Irish Republican struggle.

¹⁰¹⁶ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 31, citing Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, p. 53.

reflecting the dominant ideology of the second temple possessors of power ... and the scribes of that power centre produced the book of Jeremiah'.¹⁰¹⁷

Finishing, as he had begun, with a quotation from Bakhtin, Carroll exhorts the biblical critic 'to probe the gaps and silences, the fractures and fault-lines that expose the operation of a monologism which seeks to effect an ideological closure'.¹⁰¹⁸ He continues:

In short, his [Bakhtin's] is *a critical hermeneutics without guarantees*. The Bakhtinian justification of critique is a moral one, which is ultimately connected to our immediate ethical concerns. This is what could be called Bakhtin's gamble, his Pascalian wager.¹⁰¹⁹

In response to Bakhtin's comment, and with a characteristically open-ended conclusion to the article, Carroll calls on the guild of Biblical Studies to note:

that a great deal more attention will have to be paid to the intertextual and ideological traces in the book. But the reading of Jeremiah in the light of 'a critical hermeneutics without guarantees' may not have that much appeal for theological readers who wish to read the Bible only with guarantees supplied.¹⁰²⁰

Carroll still does not develop a methodology for probing 'the gaps and silences, the fractures and fault-lines'. Nonetheless, Carroll here comes nearer than in any of his previous articles to an ideological-critical approach to a specific text. He is particularly to be commended for his questions to do with the *control* of the *production* of scrolls and for his emphasis on the 'polyphomous' nature of the text. He also makes significant points on the question of intertextuality, though without fully integrating his remarks with the wider topic of *Ideologiekritik*.

5.34 Overall summary of Carroll's contribution to ideological criticism

Carroll's style is anecdotal, repetitive, and discursive. He is better at raising questions than proposing solutions and seldom tackles an issue in depth. He regularly calls for a more thoroughgoing spirit of *Ideologiekritik* but rarely offers any indication of what *Ideologiekritik* might involve in practice. Sometimes *Ideologiekritik* seems to mean no more than awareness of the ideological nature of texts, as an antidote to fundamentalism. At other times, it is a disentangling of history from ideology, or truth from ideology, or ideology from theology.

It is hard to categorise Carroll in terms of Dyck's categories. Sometimes, he seems to advocate a social-scientific approach, using 'ideology' in a *descriptive* sense. In the final article, he adopts an interpretative-sociological definition of ideology.¹⁰²¹ At other points, his focus is towards a social-critical approach, using 'ideology' to connote *distortion* in the interests of power. Carroll expresses unease with Marxian usage but nonetheless sees ideology as inextricably linked to politics.

¹⁰¹⁷ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 30.

¹⁰¹⁸ Quoted in Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 31 from M. Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰¹⁹ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 31, quoting from Gardiner, *Dialogics of Critique*, p. 194.

¹⁰²⁰ Carroll, 'Jeremiah: Intertextuality', p. 32.

¹⁰²¹ Ideology denotes 'codes, networks, and systems of ideas which afford category-constructing space for reflection and analysis in communities. ... In this sense ideology provides a community or group with explanatory, evaluative, orientative, and programmatic functions, allowing them to situate themselves in the word by means of language' (Carroll, 'Biblical Ideology', p. 106.).

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At one point, he complains that senior members of the guild of Biblical Scholarship 'appear not to be able to carry out a simple *Ideologiekritik* of the Bible'.¹⁰²² He castigates commentators who uncritically adopt the ideology of the text, bequeathing 'unfacts' from one generation to the next.¹⁰²³ In another article, Carroll complains of an overuse of 'ideology' and comments that there is much biblical material that contains 'little or no ideology'.¹⁰²⁴ At yet another point, he remarks: 'Given the plurality of viewpoints ... *the whole Bible* is a magnificent opportunity to do ideological criticism'.¹⁰²⁵

Carroll's broad-brush-stroke approach avoids the pitfalls of a narrow focus on a short portion of text abstracted from its literary and canonical context. On the other hand, lack of detailed attention to the text results in over-generalisation and superficiality. Carroll is aware of the relevance of intertextuality and of the ideological shaping of the canon. He gives some attention to the literary mode of production, with a perceptive emphasis on questions of *control* in the production, reception, and collection of scrolls. However, these issues are not developed.

Carroll is aware of the ideological factors affecting biblical commentary. He perceives a positive side of this, illustrated by his self-styled ability to discern 'struggle' under the surface of texts as a result of his links with 'the Irish republican struggle'. However, he does not provide an inventory of his own ideological holdings and his repeated appeal to his oppressed past is a rhetorical device that masks a dubious claim to interpretative privilege. There are undoubtedly places where Carroll displays an astonishing lack of awareness of his own ideological blind-spots.

There is passion in Carroll's work, in pursuit of 'that kind of truth which only yields to hard struggle, much searching, and the lifelong quest for critical reasoning'.¹⁰²⁶ He is ultimately committed to a social-critical approach that is not afraid to pose difficult ethical questions to both texts and interpreters. Intriguingly, he concludes one of his articles with this challenging comment:

If there is only ideology ... then Orwell's image of the future as 'a boot stamping on a human face – for ever' (1984) must be regarded as the future. ... No human community is likely to want to contemplate such a future without ... the possibility of an alternative grounded in truth and justice. *Ideology cannot be the last word.* But if it is not to be, then human groups ... have to commit themselves fully to the battle against ideology, to the eternal task of *Ideologiekritik*. Biblical scholarship will also have to join that struggle.¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰²² Carroll, 'Representation', p. 6.

¹⁰²³ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 6.

¹⁰²⁴ Carroll, 'Biblical Ideolatry', p. 106.

¹⁰²⁵ Carroll, 'Biblical Ideolatry', p. 112 (my emphasis).

¹⁰²⁶ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 13.

¹⁰²⁷ Carroll, 'Representation', p. 14.

5.4 Ideological Criticism and Postmodernism

Ideological criticism predates ‘postmodernism’. However, the rise of postmodernism,¹⁰²⁸ with its probing of issues of power and control, has undoubtedly promoted an increasing awareness of ideological issues. This section will elucidate the interaction of ideological criticism with postmodernism, primarily through a review of *The Postmodern Bible*, the recent publication of the Bible and Culture Collective.¹⁰²⁹ The comments and critique of other scholars will also be introduced where appropriate.

A.K.A Adams stresses the de-mystifying¹⁰³⁰ nature of postmodernism: it rejects ‘claims that certain assumptions are “natural” and tries to show that these are in fact *ideological propositions*’. Postmodernism ‘problematizes legitimation’. It is ‘antifoundational’ and ‘antitotalizing’.¹⁰³¹ Postmodern literary critics particularly explore the complexity of the relationship between text and reader.¹⁰³²

¹⁰²⁸ There are as many definitions of postmodernism as there are publications on the subject! See, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Imitations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992). The following definition of postmodern criticism will serve for the present purpose:

The various critical stances brought together under the sign ‘postmodernism’ ... share a suspicion of the claim to mastery that characterises traditional readings. ... This suspicion is at once epistemological and political. ... By sweeping away secure notions of meaning ... on which traditional interpretation is situated ... postmodern readings lay bare the contingent and constructed character of meaning itself. Moreover, by challenging traditional interpretations that claim universality ... postmodern readings demonstrate that traditional interpretations are themselves enactments of domination (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 2-3: see also pp. 8-12 and pp. 260-267 for a fuller discussion).

A different approach to postmodernism comes from the pen of Jürgen Habermas, who regards it not as a new phenomenon but as an inevitable development of the Enlightenment modernist trend (*Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophy of Modernity* [eds. M. Passerin d’Entrèves and S. Benhabib; Cambridge, Polity, 1996]).

¹⁰²⁹ The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (Castelli, Elizabeth et al, eds.; Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1995). See also the companion volume, Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer (eds.), *The Postmodern Bible Reader*.

¹⁰³⁰ It should also be observed that there was already much in *modernism* that was de-mystifying: the rationalist critique of religion, the Marxist critique of capitalism, the psychoanalytic critique of consciousness, etc.

¹⁰³¹ Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 5. Adam quotes from Cornel West’s lectures at Yale this fuller explanation of postmodernism as ‘antifoundational, antitotalizing, and demystifying’:

Postmodernism is *antifoundational* in that it absolutely refuses to posit any one premise as *the* privileged and unassailable starting point for establishing claims to truth. It is *antitotalizing* because postmodern discourse suspects that any theory that claims to account for everything is suppressing counterexamples, or is applying warped criteria so that it can include recalcitrant cases. Postmodernism is also *demystifying*: it attends to claims that certain assumptions are ‘natural’ and tries to show that these are in fact ideological projections. All of these characteristics deal with one of the most common characteristics of postmodern thinking: postmodern critics characteristically problematize *legitimation*, the means by which claims about truth or justice or reality are validated or rejected. These characteristics ... are not exhaustive but they provide a useful beginning point for exploring Postmodernity (*Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 5 [Adam’s emphasis]).

¹⁰³² A.K.A Adam comments:

One’s interpretations depend on one’s commitments to various social institutions, on the interpretations of one’s closest peers, and on the experiences to which one has been exposed in life. ... The text would not be an autonomous object of contemplation, but would be viewed with ... sundry interpretative interests, some ... highlighting particular passages, others obliterating passages, others adding words here and there, and still others thrusting filters between the reader and the text (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 18-19).

Like ideological criticism, postmodernism is concerned with questions of power and with the undermining of domination. However, the rejection by postmodernism of *all* claims to universality sits uncomfortably with the outlook of (say) a Frederic Jameson, who asserts Marxism as the *only* right perspective for textual interpretation.

5.41 The Postmodern Bible

The Postmodern Bible is an *overall ideological critique* of contemporary biblical scholarship. It examines the inter-relationship of ideological criticism and newer forms of literary criticism and applies an ideological critique to the latter.¹⁰³³ *Indeed, the Collective authorship understands ideological criticism as 'a criticism encompassing criticism'*.¹⁰³⁴ Accordingly, the whole book, not just the chapter on ideological criticism, is significant for our purpose.¹⁰³⁵

The book is produced by a *collective authorship*, 'collective' in an almost Marxist sense: all the members collaboratively accept collective responsibility for each section. This approach serves as a form of *collective bargaining* by scholars on the margins, enabling them to challenge the prevailing scholarly hegemony.¹⁰³⁶ The downside of this collective arrangement is that it allows individual contributors to mask their own ideological holdings behind the collective anonymity. In effect, therefore, the members of the Collective become impervious to ideological critique and unaccountable to readers.¹⁰³⁷

The Collective authors are at pains to deny that their distinctively postmodern perspective implies 'political or moral relativism'. Their strategies of reading '*call*

¹⁰³³ For a good 'reference-book' explanation of the newer forms of literary criticism, see Lentricchia and McLaughlin (eds.), *Critical terms for Literary Study*. For fuller discussion, see Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*.

¹⁰³⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 285.

¹⁰³⁵ Furthermore, several of the contributors to the Collective have themselves been key players in the development of ideological criticism of the Bible, including David Jobling and Tina Pippin.

¹⁰³⁶ This methodology was not without its problems for the members of the Collective, not least in the sublimation of the individual authorial ego: 'The "we" used throughout this volume is problematic. As a corporate identity ... it is a highly unstable construct – and indeed "we" have struggled over the creative and difficult consequences of our construction of this collaborative self' (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 16-17). Another danger was 'that our distinctive voices would become homogenised by cooptation and compromise, that our individual critical concerns would become dulled, that the nuances of our personal positions might lose their subtlety in the group voice' (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 17). On the other hand, as one member of the group put it: 'The group process has been better for me than the isolationist model of scholarly work. Ideological biases, which I otherwise would not have noticed, have been exposed, and insecurities ... could be admitted' (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 18). Or, in the words of another member: 'I feel ultimately that my contribution is being swept up in an exciting process whereby the sum is truly greater (and radically different) than its parts' (p. 18).

The Collective therefore reject George Steiner's statement, which had served as the epigraph to the introductory chapter: 'In the humanities, collective formulations are almost invariably trivial (what worthwhile book since the Pentateuch has been written by a committee?)'. See George Steiner, *Real Presence* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), p. 36.

¹⁰³⁷ Robert Carroll makes a similar point when he says of the Collective: 'While insisting on open acknowledgement of individual personal and ideological commitments, the writers themselves are able to hide their own personal and political baggage behind the anonymity afforded by being members of the Collective' (Carroll, 'Poststructuralist Approaches', p. 59).

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reigning structures of power and meaning into question and thereby contribute to and enable change'.¹⁰³⁸

The introductory chapter begins with the truism that 'the Bible has exerted more cultural influence on the West than any other single document'. The Collective also claims that traditional historical criticism has been 'the major obstacle to making any sense of the Bible's ongoing formative influence'. Historical criticism 'brackets out the contemporary milieu and excludes any examination of the ongoing formative effects of the Bible'.¹⁰³⁹ As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has put it:

If scriptural texts have served ... to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, to justify the exploitation of slavery, and to promote colonial dehumanisation ... then the responsibility of the biblical critic cannot be restricted to giving readers ... access to the intentions of the biblical writers. It must also include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts in their historical as well as in their contemporary sociopolitical contexts.¹⁰⁴⁰

Furthermore, 'historical criticism ... has left unexamined its own critical and theoretical assumptions'.¹⁰⁴¹ There can be 'no reading that is not already ideological'. As Louis Althusser has written, 'As there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of'.¹⁰⁴² What, then, has the Collective been 'guilty of'? The participants claim that their collective, self-reflexive process 'became our means to contest an epistemology and a set of disciplinary practices that privilege the autonomous self, an ideology that values private ownership, and a professional discursive practice that legitimises the dissemination of knowledge in one form at the expense of another'.¹⁰⁴³

5.42 Reader-Response Criticism¹⁰⁴⁴

The first main chapter deals with reader-response criticism, which has served as 'a primary gateway' for biblical critics entering postmodern territory. However, in the

¹⁰³⁸ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 3.

¹⁰³⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 1. They continue:

By embracing scientific method as the key in the search for historical truth, modern biblical scholarship has kept faith with the Enlightenment's desire to do away with all ambivalence and uncertainty once and for all by effectively isolating the text and its criticisms from the reader's cultural context, values, and interests ... turning the Bible into an historical relic, and antiquarian artefact (pp. 1-2).

¹⁰⁴⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 'The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Interpretation', *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 3-17 (15). The Collective authors note that Schüssler Fiorenza nonetheless remained suspicious of post-structuralist and postmodernist discourses (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 15).

¹⁰⁴¹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴² *Postmodern Bible*, p. 4, quoting from Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (New York: Verso, 1970), p. 14. See also Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. viii.

¹⁰⁴³ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 16. Another key assertion in the introduction to *The Postmodern Bible* is:

We would want to distinguish our own collaborative volume, both in the mode of its production and in its content, from Alter and Kermode's *Literary Guide to the Bible*, for example, which quite conspicuously excludes feminist, ideological, psycho-analytic, deconstructive, or Marxist approaches ... *This conscious exclusion seems to underwrite a broader project of protecting a certain form of canonical literary criticism without acknowledging its own ideological character. ... What they have dispatched to the margins, we find to be central and energising* (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 7 [my emphasis]).

By contrast, a distinctively postmodern biblical criticism will be one that 'foregrounds, heightens, and problematizes modernity's enabling assumptions about reference, representation, method, and subjectivity' (p. 13).

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 20-69.

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view of the Collective, it has also ‘covertly functioned as a safe-house for biblical critics who prefer to stay within the confines of traditional scholarship and not plunge into the defamiliarising world of the postmodern’.¹⁰⁴⁵ The majority of reader-response critics within biblical scholarship have been slow to ‘read against the grain’ either the grain of the text or the grain of traditional scholarship’.¹⁰⁴⁶

Reader-response critics ‘locate meaning within an individual’s imagination or within an amorphous reading community ... ruthlessly avoiding questions of politics and power by promoting the adjudication of different readings through dialogue and consensus’. They are therefore open to criticism for ‘their refusal to give some kind of moral justification for their reading practices’.¹⁰⁴⁷ The Collective rightly maintains that reader-response critics must ‘take ideological criticism seriously as a constant corrective to their current apolitical approaches’.¹⁰⁴⁸

One might add that this should entail an analysis of the constraints over the *production* of readings, the economic, political, and ecclesiastical factors which enable publication of some readings and deny opportunities to others. Is academic ‘peer review’ in effect a euphemism for ideological censorship?¹⁰⁴⁹ In effect, what is required is an Eagletonian-style analysis of the literary mode of production of *contemporary biblical scholarship*.¹⁰⁵⁰

In short, the Collective is arguing that reader-response criticism is a toothless tiger unless integrated with a strong *ideological-critical* awareness. It requires

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 14. The Collective continues:

Biblical scholars have been slow to awaken from the dream in which positivist science occupies a space apart from interests and values, to awaken to the realisation that our representations of and discourse about what the text means and how it means are inseparable from what we want it to mean.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 15. The view of the Collective is here very similar to the overall thrust of Clines, *Interested Parties*.

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 58. The Collective are particularly critical in this regard of the implicit influence on biblical scholarship of Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, both of whom are associated with an egalitarian communication model ‘which effaces the insights offered by ideological critics that every reading is a contextualised reading and that different readers of biblical texts (whether they be male or female, white, black, Latino, Asian, and so on) stand in asymmetrical relationships concerning power and in their ability to speak about the text even within the same general interpretative community’. See Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class*; and Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader-response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). See also the critique of Fish in Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader Response Criticism* (New York: Methuen, 1987): she remarks that ‘Fish’s view can chill the spines of readers whose experience of the community is less happily benign than Fish assumes’ (pp. 110-11).

¹⁰⁴⁸ In fact, it is doubtful if any readings are in fact totally ‘apolitical’, given the personal prejudices of readers and interpreters, however unacknowledged.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Scholarship should also entail awareness that the ideological basis of much biblical criticism ‘obscures that fact that textual power is political power’ (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 57). See also the similar comment in Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 73.

It remains to be seen whether the possibility of publication of material on the World-Wide Web will eventually dismantle the control over publication presently held by the publishing hegemony.

¹⁰⁵⁰ However, the Collective is able to catalogue some newer voices and strategies from within biblical scholarship that are already presenting a powerful challenge. In particular, they highlight those employing specifically *liberationist* reading strategies:

It is a pressing ethical concern for biblical reader-response critics to hear voices of the poor and the oppressed, so that the latter can show more clearly who controls the power of meaning production, who adjudicates acceptable readings, who controls the majority of theological educational institutions, and, most important, how the present production of biblical readings supports their oppression or liberation (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 66).

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accountability to reading communities, with something of the action-oriented focus of the ideological critic. The Collective concludes:

If, as historical critics seem to agree, the message of the Bible is indeed the story of the liberation of the poor and of the oppressed ... then the stories of reading that biblical reader-response critics have so far produced have little relation to the liberation of the contemporary poor and oppressed.¹⁰⁵¹

5.43 Structuralist and Narratological Criticism¹⁰⁵²

Structuralism has its origins in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure¹⁰⁵³ and has been developed by scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss,¹⁰⁵⁴ Vladimir Propp,¹⁰⁵⁵ Gérard Genette,¹⁰⁵⁶ and Algirdas Greimas.¹⁰⁵⁷ The main features are: the distinction between *parole* and *langue*; the distinction between *diachronic* and *synchronic*; and the notion that elements of a system have meaning only in terms of their systemic relations to all other elements in the system.¹⁰⁵⁸

Structuralists argue that all structures within which meaning can be generated can be analysed in terms of pairs of opposites or binary contrasts.¹⁰⁵⁹ Language and social

¹⁰⁵¹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 66. It will be recalled that Robert Carroll similarly maintains that, though the Bible may have 'dreams and fragments' of liberation, in the long history of the reception-history of the Bible in Europe, it has 'never generated an ideology of freedom' other than of a metaphysical kind (Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 39).

¹⁰⁵² *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 70-118. For a good overview of structuralism generally and within Biblical Studies, see David Jobling, 'Structuralism and Deconstruction' in Hayes (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, vol 1, pp. 509-514.

¹⁰⁵³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (ed. Charles Bally et al; trans. Wade Baskin; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).

¹⁰⁵⁴ With regard to Claude Lévi-Strauss, the Collective cites his anthropological work, in particular: *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (trans. James Bell et al; revised edn; Boston: Beacon, 1969); and his work on myth, in particular: *Structural Anthropology* (revised edn; New York: Basic Books, 1963), especially, pp. 206-31. Lévi-Strauss's analysis of myth is developed in terms of the transformations that are possible at the most abstract level on the basis of binary opposites (male and female, life and death, and so on).

¹⁰⁵⁵ See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (trans. Laurence Scott; Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series 9; 2nd edn.; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). As an illustration of the application of this methodology to a biblical passage, the Collective offer a brief Proppian analysis of 1 Kings 17-18 (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 71-74).

¹⁰⁵⁶ See Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (trans. Jane Lewin; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), especially pp. 33-85.

¹⁰⁵⁷ See, for example, Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: an Attempt at a Method* (trans. Danielle McDowell et al; Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); and *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (trans. P.J. Perron and F.H. Collins; Theory and History of Literature 38; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁵⁸ Saussure worked at the level of the sentence. The method was broadened, however, to the structural study of narrative (as in the work of Vladimir Propp) and for the purposes of anthropology (as in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss). A distinction can also be made between 'deep structures' (as in Propp and Lévi-Strauss) and 'surface structures' (as in the work of Gérard Genette). In structuralist and narratological criticism, there are five key terms in two groupings: *structuralism*, *formalism*, *semiotics*; and *narratology*, *poetics*. The term 'poetics' is often preferred to 'narratology' in biblical criticism, largely as a result of the influence of Meir Sternberg of the Tel Aviv school of poetics. See Meir Sternberg, *Poetics*.

¹⁰⁵⁹ John Barton comments: 'Although it is going too far to make so much of the *binary* character of the contrasts through which meaning is produced (since ... it is often a matter of multiple contrasts), it is surely right to see contrast as of the essence of meaning' (John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984], p. 111).

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structures have proved particularly amenable to structuralist analysis. However, not everyone accepts the contention of literary structuralists that literature is wholly analysable in this way as a cultural 'system'. James Barr, for example, insists that this contention is 'simply wrong'.¹⁰⁶⁰

It should be added that structuralism is particularly associated with a *rejection of historicism*: a text should be analysed in terms of its *internal* structures, not in terms of the external processes that produced it. Within Biblical Studies, structuralism has emerged in the context of the revolt that began in the 1960s against the predominance of historical criticism in Biblical Studies.¹⁰⁶¹ This anti-historicism clashes sharply with the focus on modes of production in Marxist criticism. Nonetheless, Frederic Jameson's work is significantly influenced by aspects of structuralist theory. Jameson both draws structuralism into the service of ideological criticism and offers an ideological analysis of structuralism itself.¹⁰⁶²

Structuralists claim a global, objective validity for structuralist models.¹⁰⁶³

Structuralism is fundamentally positivistic, 'holding out the promise of *the right answer* to problems'.¹⁰⁶⁴ It 'brackets the role of subjectivity in both the production and the reading of the text', for the individual work is simply one instance of general laws.¹⁰⁶⁵ One might add that it also brackets the role of creativity. All of these underlying assumptions are open to critique from an ideological perspective.¹⁰⁶⁶ The

¹⁰⁶⁰ Bar, *History and Ideology*, p. 141.

¹⁰⁶¹ An early application of structuralist methodology within Biblical Studies is Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), which closely follows Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth analysis.

A more significant work is David Jobling's *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament* and his *The Sense of Biblical Narrative. II. Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible*. Much of Jobling's earlier work was in the field of structuralism. See also his 'Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning' in Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, pp. 91-118.

Of particular interest is *Semeia* 18 (ed. Daniel Patte, under the title *Kaleidoscopic Structural Readings*; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1980), which offers a collection of structural exegeses of Genesis 2-3. See also Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives' in Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* (trans. Richard Howard; New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), pp. 95-135.

¹⁰⁶² See Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, chapter 3. Jameson is particularly influenced by the work of the Lévi-Strauss school. In a foreword to the English translation of one of the works of A.J. Greimas, Jameson acknowledges the extent to which Greimas's semiotics is of relevance to ideological criticism (Jameson, 'Foreword' to Greimas, *On Meaning*, pp. vi-xxii [vi-xiv]). Jameson's indebtedness to structuralism is summarised by the Collective in the following terms:

Jameson insists on the historical embeddedness of the text, but not on a facile correspondence between the text and some 'history' thought of as independent of the text. The correlation between the world created by the text and the real social formation that generated it is at the point of contradiction. The text's contradictions, *the points where it fails to close its structured system of meaning*, are to be correlated with the contradictions inherent in the social formation, *the points where it fails to close its structured system of exchange* (of goods, power, beliefs, and so on) (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 106 [my emphasis]).

¹⁰⁶³ Assuming, in vain, that the scientific accuracy claimed by structural linguistics can be transferred to all other fields of study.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 98.

¹⁰⁶⁶ The inventory of problems with structuralism identified by the Collective at this point is closely correlated to the critique set out in the 1990 double issue of *Poetics Today (Narratology Revisited)*. However, the Collective also summarises the robust defence of structuralism given in Peter Caws, *Structuralism: the Art of the Intelligible* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1988), pp. 28-37. Essentially, Caws acknowledges the problems but believes that further refinement of the methodology will overcome these. See *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 99-104.

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main danger of structuralism, warns the Collective, is that it can be harnessed by those who ‘wish to maintain for the interpretation of the Bible a privileged and protected place’.¹⁰⁶⁷

Nevertheless, in the postmodern context, structuralism has been used effectively in ‘methodologically and politically radical biblical writing’,¹⁰⁶⁸ not least in the work of Mieke Bal.¹⁰⁶⁹ The structuralist debate has provided the impetus for much of the experimental work now going on in Biblical Studies, as is particularly attested by the emergence of the journal *Semeia* and by the *Structuralism and Exegesis Group* within the Society of Biblical Literature.¹⁰⁷⁰ Structuralism has thus given a considerable fillip to the development of ideological-critical insights.

5.44 Post-Structuralism and Deconstructionism¹⁰⁷¹

The Collective then turns to post-structuralism, in particular, the controversial Derridean deconstructionism. Jacques Derrida rejected any notion of a fixed centre from which everything else can be derived, be it God, consciousness, human reason, or whatever. Deconstruction attempts a radical *de-centring*, unmasking the assumptions undergirding the western metaphysical tradition by exposing their inner contradictions. Deconstructionists make use of structuralist methodology but reject its absolutist claims.

Structuralism works with binary oppositions (for example: male / female; rich / poor).¹⁰⁷² For deconstructionists, such oppositions are founded on repression: the first term in each pair is forcibly elevated over the second. Deconstruction seeks to unmask all such claims to power. Deconstructionist criticism is associated with the *limitless plurality* and the *undecidability* of meaning and is ‘suspicious of any view that there is a natural fit between language, the world, and meaning’.¹⁰⁷³ *There is a focus on the marginal, the repressed, and the peripheral* – emphases that link closely with ideological-critical approaches.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶⁹ for example, Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*. See also David Jobling, ‘Mieke Bal on Biblical Narrative’, *Religious Studies Review* 17 (1992), pp. 1-10.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 116. Daniel Patte’s long leadership of the Structuralism and Exegesis Group is acknowledged. He also has served as general editor of *Semeia* since 1993.

¹⁰⁷¹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 119-148. For a good overview of poststructuralism and deconstruction, generally and within Biblical Studies, see Jobling, ‘Structuralism and Deconstruction’.

¹⁰⁷² Other examples of binary oppositions include: rational / irrational; original / imitation; central / peripheral; transcendent/ immanent; spirit / body; nature/ culture; speech / writing; white / black.

¹⁰⁷³ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 128. The Collective continues:

Deconstruction is text-centred. Yet for deconstruction, there is no centre to the text. Text is not limited to written language. The self is a text; experience is a text; any instance of signification is a text. ... Text is the product of signifying difference. Text and its related terms (such as writing and reading) are, for deconstruction, complex, fluid, and powerful metaphors. Whatever a text is, it is not a stable, self-identical, enduring object but a place of intersection in an network of signification. ... There is no extra-textual reality to which texts refer or which gives texts their meaning; meaning or reference is possible only in relation to this network, as functions of intertextuality.

In fact, however, there is an important sense in which a literary text *is* ‘a stable, self-identical, enduring object’, in that it is a collection of fixed signs, fixed words in a fixed order. It is the reception / meaning / interpretation of the text that is fluid and unstable.

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Literary deconstruction is a theory about the character of all texts, which claims that every text ‘always and necessarily undermines or contradicts the philosophy on which its own plausibility relies’.¹⁰⁷⁴ Deconstruction claims to have demonstrated that ‘textuality is a disordering force, even within biblical texts that appear to be referentially stable’.¹⁰⁷⁵ It is an important principle that *critics do not deconstruct texts: texts deconstruct themselves*.

However, the fact that we can show that a text deconstructs itself ‘does not imply hostility to that text, for it is not just bad texts that can be deconstructed but all texts’. For the deconstructionist, ‘learning systematically to *distrust* texts is a necessary part of reading’.¹⁰⁷⁶

Derrida had emphasised (an emphasis often neglected by his critics) that *deconstruction* was not intended to be *destruction*¹⁰⁷⁷ but rather ‘a dismantling of structures ... designed to show how they were put together in the first place’. However, putting something together again is more difficult than taking it apart,¹⁰⁷⁸ as every young child discovers who has dismantled a favourite toy to see how it works!¹⁰⁷⁹

The Collective might have noted that traditional source-criticism also seeks to *dismantle* the text. However, the construction that deconstruction seeks to dismantle is not the history of the text’s *production* but ‘the logic of the text’s linguistic organisation (its structure)’:

To deconstruct seeks out those points within a system where it disguises the fact of its incompleteness. ... By locating these points, and by applying a kind of leverage to them, one deconstructs the system ... demonstrating how the (w)hole, through the masking of its logical and rhetorical contradictions, maintains the illusion of its completeness.¹⁰⁸⁰

The Collective offers this useful summary of deconstructive reading:

Deconstructive interpretation ... consists of *very close readings*¹⁰⁸¹ of specific texts. ... These readings ... have rejected certain well established and central values: the univocity of meaning, the privileging of the author’s intention, the location of meaning ‘in’ the text, the separability of the text’s ‘inside’ from its ‘outside’ (text from reader, text from context), the objective reality of history. ... As a practice of reading, *deconstruction makes explicit what is hidden, repressed, or denied in any ordinary reading*. ... No neutral or objective reading is ever possible. ... Meaning is not in the text but is brought to it and imposed on it. ... *Texts*

¹⁰⁷⁴ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (2nd edn.), p. 224.

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (2nd edn.), p. 226 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁷⁷ In popular usage, however, ‘deconstruction’ is frequently equated with ‘destruction’! For Derrida’s own elucidation of deconstruction, see, in particular, Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. GC Spivak; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), which is regarded as Derrida’s most influential work. See also his *Dissemination* (trans. B Johnson; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), which includes a deconstructive reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

¹⁰⁷⁸ As Clines has observed, the ‘purist deconstructionist’ would not even want to attempt a re-*assemblage* but would rather set out to ‘deconstruct the deconstruction’! (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 68). It is also noted that ‘deconstruction has profound implications for translation, a topic that in turn has important ideological dimensions’ (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 128-29).

¹⁰⁷⁹ The alternative analogy that is more often used is that of pulling a loose thread and then gleefully unravelling the whole garment – which, of course, cannot then be reconstituted.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁸¹ A.K.M. Adam writes: ‘This *painstakingly minute deconstructive examination* reveals ways in which the text always undoes the arguments it is making’ (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 31 [my emphasis]).

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*may lend themselves more to some readings than to others,*¹⁰⁸² but the results of any reading have more to do with the reader's interests. ... Interpretation is an expression of power ... an act of appropriation, a taking of possession.¹⁰⁸³

Biblical scholarship has been slow to take up the challenge of deconstructionism, despite the fact that Derrida himself regarded the foundational documents of western culture as particularly amenable to deconstructive criticism.¹⁰⁸⁴ However, a watershed in the application of deconstruction came with the publication of the (1982) *Semeia* 23, which was devoted to the subject.¹⁰⁸⁵

A typical reaction to deconstruction, bolstered by the popular press, is that 'deconstruction is the arch-enemy of Western civilisation' and that it has nothing to contribute either in the Academy or in the Church.¹⁰⁸⁶ However, the Collective insists that deconstruction 'does not negate the practice of historical criticism nor eliminate the notion of history' (or, presumably, of theology):

On the contrary, deconstructive reading relies necessarily on traditional historical criticism as an 'indispensable guardrail' or 'safeguard' for reading. ... It argues for a subtler understanding of the ways texts refer, represent, and bring about a new opening onto the

¹⁰⁸² The phrase in italics seems to me to be a key phrase, which deconstructs any view that meaning resides *entirely* in the reader. It also suggests that texts have 'grain'.

¹⁰⁸³ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 130-31 (my emphasis).

¹⁰⁸⁴ Derrida himself was particularly interested in the deconstruction of philosophically and culturally foundational texts, such as Plato and the Bible.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Robert Detwiler (ed.), *Derrida and Biblical Studies* (*Semeia* 23: Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982). See also the various essays in several later editions of *Semeia*, including: Gary A. Phillips (ed.), *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text / History / Discourse* (*Semeia* 51; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990); and David Jobling and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Poststructuralism as Exegesis* (*Semeia* 54; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

In addition to the works of ideological criticism employing deconstructive methodology that have already been reviewed above, other key works on deconstruction within biblical studies include: Barthes, 'Work to Text' (1979); Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), *Death and Dissymmetry* (1988), and *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sisera's Death* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); William Beardslee, 'Poststructuralist Criticism' in Stephen L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (eds.), *To Each its own Meaning: an Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Meanings* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), pp. 221-36; Danna N. Fewell, 'Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing' in Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method* (1995), pp. 119-145; A.K.M. Adam, 'Deconstruction: On Making a Difference' in *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, pp. 27-44; David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series 21; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 62. The Collective continues: 'Ill-informed pronouncements about Derrida and deconstruction amount to little more than sloganeering'. A similarly dismissive response to deconstruction often comes from within Biblical Scholarship. For example, William Dever speaks of 'the *fad* of deconstructionism, belatedly discovered by the revisionists', which has 'already run its course in many other disciplines' (William G. Dever, 'What did the Biblical Writers Know and When did they Know it?', in J. Magness and S. Gitin [eds.], *Hesed ve-Emet* [Festschrift for E.S. Frerichs; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998], pp. 241-53 [243, my emphasis], quoted approvingly in James Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 72).

Nevertheless, A.K.M. Adam is also right when he says of deconstruction that it:

strikes at the heart of the dominant practices in the academy and, usually, in the Church. Both of these institutions reflect and reproduce the assumption that biblical interpretation is properly the domain of an elite group of authorised interpreters. ... [They] claim faithfully to reproduce the 'meaning' or 'message' of the text. ... If the deconstructors are right, however, all these aspects of our biblical interpretation industry are intensely problematic. ... Just as a deconstructive reading will no longer allow a simple binary opposition separating the legitimate interpreters ... from those who are not authorised ... it will likewise undermine the hitherto sacred distinction between historical interpretation and all other sorts (Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 32-33).

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world; it seeks a subtler understanding of the relations of speech, thought, and reality; it seeks a subtler, more 'originary' understanding of the relation between text, context, and critical commentary. There is, finally, no one way to practice deconstructionist reading, and it does not necessarily entail trying to tumble the discipline.¹⁰⁸⁷

As an illustration of an early deconstructive reading of biblical texts, the Collective cites the work of Roland Barthes on Genesis 32,¹⁰⁸⁸ where a distinction is made between historical criticism (where the text comes from), structural analysis (how the text is made), and textual analysis ('how [the text] is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates in that 'open network, which is the very infinity of language').¹⁰⁸⁹ Barthes states that the goal of criticism is not to reduce the text to a *signified*¹⁰⁹⁰ (historical, theological, or otherwise) but 'to keep its signifying power open'. Barthes's poststructuralist reading explores questions of linguistic form, narrative logic, and semantic productivity in Genesis 32.¹⁰⁹¹ He examines the text's use of pronouns and names, the repetitive narrative structure, and the semantic irresolution facing the reader by the text's end. Barthes's style of analysis features the search for multiple rather than singular meanings, an open rather than a closed narrative structure, textual tensions and ambiguities as an alternative to resolution and clarity. For Barthes, the reader takes an aggressive role in creating meaning. There are no neutral or innocent readings: every reading is an ethical and ultimately political act.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Wrestling with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32: 23-33' in Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge* (trans. Richard Howard; New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), pp. 246-60, discussed in *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 131-35.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Barthes, 'Wrestling with the Angel', p. 247 cited in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 132. What the last phrase (in brackets) means is not at all clear to me. It has a definite postmodern ring to it and so perhaps doesn't need to mean anything very specific! No doubt, poststructuralist jargon is itself open to deconstruction!

¹⁰⁹⁰ 'Signified' and 'signifier' are important terms in poststructuralist vocabulary. John Barton, quoting from Terry Eagleton, explains:

'Every signified is also a signifier', or, in other words, texts refer to objects but the objects the texts refer to themselves refer to further objects, and so on, ad infinitum. It makes as much sense to say that a text reads me as that I read a text. ... The difference between the text and the reader dissolves, to be replaced by the institution of textuality, in which the difference between reading and writing no longer exists, but the social reality of the interplay between readers and writers becomes 'yet more shimmering webs of undecidability stretching to the horizon' (Barton. *Reading the Old Testament* [2nd edn.], pp. 220-21).

¹⁰⁹¹ Barthes, 'Wrestling with the Angel', p. 260, cited in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 132. These last few sentences are a good example of the whole new vocabulary that is required for deconstruction-speak. It is certainly not a popularist interpretative strategy!

¹⁰⁹² An example of Barthes's approach is given as follows (in which the influence of structural analysis is specially pronounced):

In his analysis of Genesis 32, Barthes locates three sequences: the Crossing (of the Jabbok River, vv 23-25), the Combat (vv 25-30), and the Namings (vv 28-33). Each sequence contains a critical ambiguity. In the first sequence it is unclear whether Jacob has already crossed the river when the wrestling occurs (v23) or whether he has remained behind on the (foreign) side (vv 24-25); however, the side of the river that Jacob is on is crucial for determining the nature of the wrestling match and the identity of his opponent. Barthes argues that this ambiguity creates 'two different pressures of readability'. On the one hand, if Jacob has not yet crossed the river, then a folklorist reading would interpret the wrestling as a mythic trial by combat: once victorious, Jacob can cross the river, achieve his goal. On the other hand, if Jacob has already crossed the river and his household has gone on ahead, the reading is less clearly determined. It would appear that Jacob struggles 'to *mark himself* by solitude (this is the familiar *setting apart* of the chosen of God)'. ... Barthes has located a point where the reader reaches an impasse and must decide whether the story belongs to one of two genres. ... However, the text does not offer an unambiguous resolution of this difficulty, and this in turn will have an important bearing on the last (Naming) sequence. A chain reaction has begun with the first ambiguous sequence, a ripple of uncertainty that runs throughout the whole episode (Barthes 'Wrestling with the Angel', p. 250, cited in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 133).

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Herein lies a crucial difference between deconstructionist and reader-response criticism. For the deconstructionist, ‘the text is never fully in the possession of any reader, nor the reader ever fully in the possession of any text. ... The text retains the power to elude and overturn every reading – while the reader retains the power endlessly to rewrite the text’.¹⁰⁹³ However, against this definition of deconstructionism it should be said that readers do *not*, in fact, have power ‘endlessly to rewrite’ the words of the text, though they may have the power ‘endlessly to *reinterpret* the text’. Each reading is a different *performance*: but the text remains fixed.

Post-structuralism has had considerable influence on ideological criticism, even among those who would not fully accept Derrida’s philosophical basis. The Collective remarks that ‘Jameson might be described as a *post-structuralist* Marxist theorist’,¹⁰⁹⁴ in particular with his stress on cracks and fault-lines (along which the text may be said to deconstruct). Deconstructionist methodology has frequently been used by ideological critics¹⁰⁹⁵ as an effective tool for exposing ideological fault-lines.

The Collective speaks of possible ways forward for post-structuralism in terms of the *new historicism*.¹⁰⁹⁶ Deconstruction may also make a contribution in the re-examination of questions of *ethics*. Post-structuralists are concerned to undermine those forms of ethics that have undergirded repression and violence. The Collective rightly concludes:

The extent to which biblical scholarship will find in poststructuralism resources for historical and ethical reflection will depend on how willing it is to undertake the [ideological] self-critique demanded of its own historical methods and critical practices.¹⁰⁹⁷

A.K.M. Adam writes of the ‘positive face’ or ‘converse’ of deconstructionism, which he terms ‘transgressive interpretation’: ‘while deconstruction chastens our efforts to ascertain anything about a text, *transgressive* readers assert “audacious versions” of texts: “inversions, extraversions, conversions, contraversions, diversions, transversions, subversions”’.¹⁰⁹⁸ In particular, this involves crossing (or transgressing) arbitrary disciplinary boundaries (academic, historical, and theological), using insights from sociology, psychoanalysis, or whatever; disregarding traditional conventions and rules; dissolving binary distinctions such as truth / fiction; mixing genres; deploying imagination and allegory. Transgressive interpretation sounds fun! Indeed post-structuralism is often marked by playfulness and irony. But is this necessarily productive? It engenders the fear that we simply make the Bible mean what we want it to mean. However, as Adam points out, ‘no interpretation is self-authenticating’: the validity of any interpretation depends on ‘the assent of some

¹⁰⁹³ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 272, note 1.

¹⁰⁹⁵ including several of the contributors to *Semeia* 59 and also David Clines in several of the essays in *Interested Parties*.

¹⁰⁹⁶ The Collective explains (somewhat enigmatically):

A re-examination of the relation of the text, its reading, and its reader through the lens of poststructuralist theory may serve as a bridge which enables traditional critics to see that traditional criticism may yet be salvageable, *but not before an ideological critique of scholarship and of culture occurs* (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 146, my emphasis).

For an outline critique of the ‘new historicism’, see above, p. 48, note 214.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 61.

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audience'. While modern interpreters 'obey the modern commandment to seek the approval of academically trained disciplinary specialists, postmodern interpreters will seek out a different audience, one that has ears to hear and understand their readings'.¹⁰⁹⁹ David Clines's notion of 'bespoke' interpretations has some affinity with this approach.

The Collective fails to engage with the critical stance towards deconstructionist philosophy among exponents of more traditional ideological criticism. Deconstruction may share common ground with Marxism;¹¹⁰⁰ but Eagleton has described it as 'libertarian pessimism, blessedly free from the shackles of meaning and sociality'.¹¹⁰¹ It allows for no centre and no absolutes, not even Marxism! The ultimate question is: does deconstruction make a positive contribution to Althusser's 'lived relations'? Eagleton's answer (and probably, in the end Jameson's) would be 'No'. *It fails to serve as a catalyst for social change.* In practice, it allows little scope for reconstruction and no scope for a utopian vision or programme for action that is not itself open to deconstruction.

5.45 Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism¹¹⁰² stretches back at least as far as classical Greece. It has not been as prominent within the field of Old Testament studies as some other methodologies, with some notable exceptions.¹¹⁰³ The Collective offers a case for a revival of rhetorical criticism within Biblical Studies.¹¹⁰⁴ However, they argue:

A rhetorical criticism that is not radically self-reflexive can too easily be harnessed to an ideologically conservative program of reaffirming classical texts and values. What happens when a modern scholar, through a skilled practice of rhetorical criticism, demonstrates the persuasiveness of an ancient text? ... The rhetorical effect, intended or not, may be to establish the truth of the classics. ... Such considerations are of particular importance for the Bible, which carries enormous cultural (that is, rhetorical) authority.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, p. 68. Adam cites, as an example, Stephen Moore's 'extraordinary' *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspective*, in which Moore reads these two Gospels through the intertextual mediation of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and James (Jacques) Joyce, 'using puns, coincidences, allusions, and his thorough acquaintance with postmodern theory and biblical scholarship ... to weave an astonishing interpretative tapestry' (pp. 68-69).

¹¹⁰⁰ It highlights the 'bankruptcy of the academy, the demise of the renaissance intellectual, the abandonment of tradition, the turning away from historicism' (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 146).

¹¹⁰¹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 38. Contrast H. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 183.

¹¹⁰² See *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 149-186.

¹¹⁰³ These include: Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Meir Sternberg, 'The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric and Poetics in Saul's Fall', *Hebrew University College Annual* 54 (1983), pp. 45-82, reprinted in P.R. House (ed.), *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 234-71; Sternberg, *Poetics* (1985); Stratton, *Out of Eden* (1995); Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art and Political Rhetoric* (1996); together with the various essays in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn, and A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (JSOTSup. 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), the essays in D. Patrick and A. Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), and the essays in Martin Warner (ed.), *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹¹⁰⁴ They observe: 'Most current rhetorical criticism functions as a kind of conservative reader-response criticism, perceiving the reader as necessary to activate the text's rhetorical power. What is usually lacking is the recognition and critical evaluation of the interactive part played by readers in the creation of meaning' (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 163).

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The Collective concludes:

The 'new' rhetorical critic needs to study 'discursive practices' and try to understand them 'as forms of power and performance'. ... This provides a basis for relating the new rhetoric to political, social, and ideological criticisms.¹¹⁰⁵

As with reader-response criticism, rhetorical criticism must develop a strong *ideological-critical* awareness if it is to be an effective tool in exposing issues of power and control in the production and reception of texts.

5.46 Feminist and Womanist Criticism¹¹⁰⁶

Feminist criticism is perhaps the most familiar and the most extensive form of ideological criticism of the Bible. Indeed, it is regarded as a discipline in its own right. It is concerned with the effects of over 2,000 years of male-only criticism and with ongoing male dominance within the contemporary Academy. The Collective examines a range of feminist readings that demonstrate 'how texts construct readers by imposing ideologies of gender and power and how readers can resist those constructions'.¹¹⁰⁷ A thread that runs through the whole of *The Postmodern Bible* is particularly well exemplified in this chapter: namely, that 'reading and interpretative strategies are socially, politically, and institutionally situated and ... draw their force from the subject positions of readers and interpreters'.¹¹⁰⁸

Feminist interpretation is not itself a singular reading strategy but 'a set of political positions and strategies':

That one can identify several viable womanist and feminist readings of the same text is not symptomatic of a problem requiring solution (that is, women can't make up their minds), but rather enacts ... a foundational shift in biblical criticism *away* from ... the unitary truth of the text and *towards* projects focussed on multiplicities of meanings. Secondly ... [it] serves to highlight the varieties of feminisms at work in interpretation, feminisms variously shaped by historical circumstances, political and theological allegiances, social identities, institutional locations, and intellectual interests.¹¹⁰⁹

Feminist Biblical Studies emerged as a separate academic discipline in the 1980s. Early feminist critique was primarily a *hermeneutic of recuperation*, redeeming the

¹¹⁰⁵ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 166. Compare Eagleton, who describes rhetoric 'as forms of activity inseparable from the wider social relations between writers and readers' (Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, pp. 205-206).

¹¹⁰⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 225-271. See also Adam, *Postmodern Biblical Criticism*, pp. 49-50; and Ann Loades, 'Feminist Interpretation' in John Barton (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, pp. 81-94.

¹¹⁰⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 225.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 268.

¹¹⁰⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 225-26. The Collective proceeds by comparing and contrasting a variety of feminist / womanist approaches to Hosea 1-3, in which metaphors involving abuse of women are employed to make a theological point, citing articles by Renita J. Weems, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, and Mary J.W. Leith. For Weems 'the intersection of politics and theology ... highlights the problem of power in the text'. Frymer-Kensky's historical and theological concerns cause her 'to emphasise both the disjunctures between the imagery and life in ancient Israel and the ideological evocativeness of the marriage metaphor'. For Leith, the text is 'more of an artifact than living scripture'; and in contrast to the two other scholars, therefore, she does not approach the text from a theological perspective. See Renita J. Weems, 'Gomer'; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'The Wanton Wife of God' in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992); and Mary J.W. Leith, 'Verse and Reverse: the Transformation of the Woman, Israel, in Hosea 1-3' in: Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference*, pp. 95-108.

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tradition ‘through the retrieval of strong fore-mothers, with whom contemporary women might identify’.¹¹¹⁰ This gave way to a *hermeneutic of suspicion*, closely identified with the interpretative strategy of Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and with the presupposition that ‘biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions’.¹¹¹¹ Her strategy employs an essentially deconstructionist methodology, though with a constructive theological purpose. The Collective then describes the work of Phyllis Trible as ‘a critical strategy, suspicious and recuperative at once’.¹¹¹² Trible seeks to be positive about the Bible, while unmasking its androcentric and patriarchal ethos.¹¹¹³ A further development came with the *hermeneutic of survival*, articulated by African American and Third-World scholars. Finally, the work of Mieke Bal is ‘paradigmatic’ for *postmodern feminist criticism*: she is not interested in recovering original meanings nor in seeking a kind of ‘postmodern replacement for divine authority’ but in critiquing the cultural impact of the Bible’s reception history.¹¹¹⁴

¹¹¹⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 245-246. The tradition stretches back to Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* (2 vols.; repr.; Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1991 [first published 1898]).

¹¹¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread not Stone*, p. 15. See also Schüssler Fiorenza’s *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Bloomington: Beacon, 1992); and her ‘Ethics in Biblical Interpretation’.

¹¹¹² *Postmodern Bible*, p. 248. See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978); and *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Trible’s *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* was largely a response to Mary Daly’s insistence that the Christian tradition is *irredeemably* damaging to women. Daly was particularly influential in the early days of feminist criticism and was both anti-biblical and anti-Christian in her stance. Curiously, Daly is scarcely mentioned in *The Postmodern Bible*, not even in the (extensive) bibliography.

¹¹¹³ Other key works from the 80’s include: Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), who contests the view that the Hebrew Bible is *irredeemably* patriarchal; and Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Biblical Seminar 2; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985). Brenner is not mentioned by the Collective, not even in the bibliography.

From the 90’s comes Alice Bach (ed.), *The Pleasure of Her Text* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990) and P.A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), neither of whom receives more than a passing mention by the Collective. Notable also is the work of J. Cheryl Exum (who also receives only a passing mention), including: ‘Murder They Wrote’ (1990); *Fragmented Women* (1993); ‘The Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women’ (1995); ‘Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests are being Served?’ in Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method* (1995), pp. 65-90; and ‘The Voice of My Lover’ (2003). Important reference books are Athalya Brenner (ed.), *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* (10 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-1996); Brenner and Fontaine (eds.), *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, and Strategies*; and Lisa Isherwood and Dorothy McEwan (eds.), *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

¹¹¹⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 255. Bal has written:

I do not claim the Bible to be either a feminist resource or a sexist manifesto. That kind of assumption can only be an issue for those who attribute moral, religious, or political authority to these texts, which is precisely the opposite of what I am interested in. It is the cultural function of one of the most influential mythical and literary documents of our culture that I discuss, as a strong representative instance of what language and literature can do to a culture, specifically to its articulation of gender (Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 1, quoted in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 255).

See also Bal’s *Death and Dissymmetry* and her *Murder and Difference*.

It should be noted that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza tends to downplay postmodernist influence in favour of a more traditional feminism. She comments, for example: ‘By tracing out the feminine/masculine binary structures of the biblical text ... structuralist and deconstructionist readings run the risk of re-inscribing rather than dislodging the dualistic gender politics of the text’ (Schüssler-Fiorenza, *But She Said*, pp. 34-35).

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The term 'womanist' interpretation originated amongst those who 'believe that mainline feminism has failed to acknowledge the complexities that women of colour face as members of at least two socially oppressed groups'. Womanists 'challenge interlocking systems of oppression: racism, classism, homophobia, and ecological abuses'.¹¹¹⁵ The work of Renita Weems belongs in this category.¹¹¹⁶

The Collective's conclusion is that feminist / womanist criticism still has much it can achieve within biblical scholarship: 'Despite some small success ... feminism and womanism remain oppositional discourses at the margins of power institutionally'.¹¹¹⁷

Clearly, ideological criticism will serve as a major tool in the womanist / feminist armoury.

5.47 Ideological criticism in the postmodern context

Turning to ideological criticism itself,¹¹¹⁸ the Collective notes considerable overlap with liberation hermeneutics, cultural criticism, rhetorical criticism, sociological criticism, Marxist literary criticism, reader-response criticism, and ethical critique.

Ideological criticism is not a separate methodology but an umbrella strategy:

It comes in many voices, speaks many languages, and resides in many different disciplines. ... In this postmodern context, *ideological criticism of the Bible is one place where critical forces are converging with common purpose.*¹¹¹⁹

For the Collective, the focus of *ideological criticism* is to expose three dimensions of the 'struggle' in the production of meaning:

- the tensive relation between the production of meaning and language;
- the multiple discourses operating within the text;
- the complex nature of power relations that produce texts, construct the institutional contexts of texts and their reception, and affect readers of those texts.¹¹²⁰

¹¹¹⁵ V.C. Phillips, 'Feminist Interpretation' in Hayes, (ed.), *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 388-98 (393).

Ann Loades observes:

White *feminists* have been brought sharply to task for presuming to speak for 'womanist' / African-American, '*mujerista*' / Hispanic, and Far East Asian women theologians, so feminist interpretation is perhaps particularly sensitive to the complexities of race and class and economic status (Loades, 'Feminist Interpretation', p. 82).

¹¹¹⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 251-52. See Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away*; 'Gomer: Victim of Violence'; 'Reading *Her Way* through the Struggle'; and *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Overtures in Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). In *Battered Love*, Weems explores the sexual and sexist metaphors employed by Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel to ascertain the capacity of the books to condone sexist human power.

See also Weems, 'Hebrew Women', which is critiqued above, pp. 169-173.

¹¹¹⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 270.

¹¹¹⁸ See *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 272-308. The Collective adopts an essentially neutral definition of 'ideology': 'Ideology is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, and transformed' (Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991], p. 97, cited in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 272).

¹¹¹⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 280 (my emphasis).

¹¹²⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 272-73.

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Ideological criticism is primarily concerned with power-relations.¹¹²¹ Literature enjoys a special relationship to power in the ideological operations of a culture.

‘Texts are implicated in both the representation and reproduction of ideology’:

From this point of view, ideological criticism has ... the task of exposing and charting the structure and dynamics of those power relations ... in the conflicting ideologies operating in discourse and in flesh and blood readers of texts in their concrete social locations and relationships.

Ideological criticism of the Bible therefore has a twofold task:

- read the ancient biblical stories¹¹²² for their ideological content and mode of production;
- grasp the ideological character of contemporary reading strategies.¹¹²³

Tina Pippin (one of the Collective members) sums up the Collective’s approach to ideological criticism as follows:

Ideological criticism is a *postmodern* move that questions the power relations in reading, discourse, and the production of commentaries on the Bible. ... Ideological criticism removes the stable ground or center of the dominant interpreter, creating new possibilities of meaning *and action*. ‘Ideological criticism ... is a deliberate effort to read against the grain – of texts, of disciplinary norms, of tradition, of cultures’. Ideological criticism ... asks: Who is in control? ... Who is not represented or over-represented? ... Is the Bible always a liberating text? ... What is the ethical responsibility of the biblical critic?¹¹²⁴

Notice that Pippin regards ideological criticism as primarily a *postmodern* phenomenon; as primarily to do with critique of readers and commentators; and as demanding *action*.

Ideological criticism demands an *ethical response*, ‘designed to expose cultural systems of power that shape the “lived relations” not only of readers of the Bible but of the vast majority of the world’s peoples who ... have suffered real poverty, oppression, and violence’.¹¹²⁵ Althusser’s emphasis on ‘lived relations’ puts the ethical question at the heart of ideological discussion.¹¹²⁶ Jameson puts it with a different focus, more true to Althusser, when he writes: ‘Ideological commitment is not first and foremost a matter of *moral* choice but of *taking sides* in a struggle between embattled groups’.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²¹ J.B. Thompson describes ideology as ‘meaning in the service of power’ (Thompson, *Ideology*, pp. 7 and 20, quoted in *Postmodern Bible*, p. 274). Compare also Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 5.

¹¹²² *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 275. See also Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 15 and *Criticism and Ideology*, pp. 88-89.

The Collective quotes from Catherine Belsey: ‘To learn what is ideologically important about a community or a culture, we need only listen carefully to the *stories* it tells and how it tells them. *In Western culture, the stories most influential in shaping and producing its ideology are found in the Bible* (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 276, citing Belsey, *Critical Practice*, pp. 5-7).

¹¹²³ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 274.

¹¹²⁴ Pippin, ‘Ideology’, p. 67, quoting from *Postmodern Bible*, p. 275 (my emphasis).

¹¹²⁵ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 277.

¹¹²⁶ The Collective continues:

Althusser’s emphasis ... is meant to expose and underscore the differences and conflicts of these human relations as systemic and corporate realities, that is, something more than the individual’s actions and desires. ... *Ideological criticism ... at root has to do with the ethical character and response to the text and to those lived relations that are represented and reproduced in the act of reading*. When it comes to reading biblical texts in particular and making sense of the ideological discourse, struggles, and conflicts in the Bible, the reader is faced with the challenge of and responsibility for ethical questioning and action (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 275 [my emphasis]).

¹¹²⁷ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 290 (my emphasis).

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The main methodological focus of ideological criticism is *reading against the grain*. It is not clear whether the Collective view reading against the grain as something that was an option for the *original* ancient audience¹¹²⁸ or whether it is envisaged solely as a *contemporary* means of unmasking struggle and conflict in the text. The notion of reading against the grain is not just confined to the text: reading must also be against the grain of the prevailing scholarly hegemony.¹¹²⁹ One might add that ideological criticism must also read against the grain of the tradition of interpretation that has allowed the Bible to undergird oppressive practices in the contemporary world.

For the Collective, an essential ingredient of ideological criticism is that it should serve as a catalyst for change. It should make ‘an explicit, unabashed appeal to justice’:

As an ethically grounded act, ideological reading intends to raise critical consciousness about what is just and unjust about those lived relations that Althusser describes, and to change those power relationships for the better. *It challenges readers to accept political responsibility for themselves and for the world in which they live.*¹¹³⁰

However, ‘not all ideological readings are transformative: some are resistant readings; but others strive to reinforce ... the status quo’. The ideological critic must therefore face a number of significant issues, such as:

- How are we to distinguish one kind of ideological reading from another?
- How can biblical critics read the Bible without being coopted?
- What are the implications for today’s postmodern culture of reading the Bible against the grain?
- What possible practical difference does ideological critique make in readers’ individual and corporate lives?¹¹³¹

These issues raise a number of further questions, including:

- Do texts have one or several ideologies?
- Is ideology a hermeneutical construct that resides outside of the text, and, if so, where precisely is it?
- Does every text have its own ideology(ies)?
- Is there such a thing as a corporate ideology located in the canon of scripture?
- What happens ideologically when reader-hearer-audience and text meet and converge?
- Is there an ‘ideology of meaning’?
- How do these criticisms connect specifically with issues of social justice, ethical action, and transformation?¹¹³²

¹¹²⁸ An example of editorial comment against the grain in the *ancient* context might be found in the books of Samuel. Presumably these books were originally written for an audience already aware of Saul and David as historical figures from the past and of a dominant tradition which saw Saul as bad and David as good. While the text of 1-2 Samuel on the surface appears to support this traditional view, reading between the lines, or reading against the grain, might well suggest to the discerning reader that the author is sympathetic to Saul while laying great emphasis on David’s demerits. The books might thus be said to deconstruct the traditions of Saul and David: a deliberate ploy by an author who could not have *openly* criticised David in a Jerusalem ruled by a Davidic descendant. The text, therefore, implicitly *invites* the reader to read against the grain.

¹¹²⁹ The Collective argues that the postmodern milieu sets the stage for contemporary reading against the grain - not only of those historical approaches that would bracket or deny ideology but also of those critical approaches that would posit a singular, unitary reading of the Bible’s ideology. As an example of those who ‘posit a singular, unitary reading of the Bible’, the Collective cite Meir Sternberg’s assertion that the Bible is ‘ideologically singular’ in its values and ideas. See Sternberg, *Poetics*, pp. 36-37.

¹¹³⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 275 (my emphasis).

¹¹³¹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 277.

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*There is also the specific danger of an ideological use of ideological criticism:*¹¹³³

The ideological use of ideological criticism *per se* is a matter of extreme concern. *It is incumbent on ideological critics to subject their approaches to critical self-appraisal to expose their own agendas, knowing all the while that it is impossible to expose everything completely.*¹¹³⁴

As a simple example of the ideological use of ideological criticism, the Collective examines the use made of the Exodus narrative in early liberation theology,¹¹³⁵ with a narrative identification between ancient Israel and the contemporary context of the reader. However, ideological criticism should seek to bring out all ‘those voices which have been subject to suppression, marginalisation, even exclusion and violence’.¹¹³⁶ From a Native American perspective, the natural identification is not with the enslaved Israelites but with the indigenous Canaanite population, whom the Israelites proceed to suppress.¹¹³⁷ The Native American scholar, Robert Warrior observes: ‘As long as people believe in the Yahweh of deliverance, the world will not be safe from Yahweh the conqueror’.¹¹³⁸

Ideological criticism is itself ‘a *contested* field’, Tina Pippin observes; and ‘the movement is not away from contestation but rather towards the montage of images and technologies and bodies of the postmodern world’. However, ‘the definitions of ideology and of ideological criticism are slowly moving into a more positive focus in their more postmodern manifestations’.¹¹³⁹

5.18 Summary Critique of *The Postmodern Bible*

The ideological critique mounted by the Collective pulls the rug from under much traditional scholarship and lays a foundation for more radical thinking within the Academy. An important contribution is their ideological scrutiny of newer forms of literary criticism. In particular, the Collective has highlighted the danger of reader-

¹¹³² *Postmodern Bible*, p. 278.

¹¹³³ Indeed: ‘the various definitions of “ideology” are themselves all marked by vested interests and are therefore “as “ideological” as ideological criticism itself’ (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 272).

¹¹³⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 280 (my emphasis).

¹¹³⁵ Liberation hermeneutics is regarded by the Collective as a key form of ideological criticism: ‘readings from below’, which attempt to interpret the Bible out of their own concrete, political, economic, and social circumstances. Marxist or otherwise, liberation readings are constantly ‘pushing against the boundaries of the text’ (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 281). Liberation forms of ideological criticism are important because they declare their ideological stance up-front.

¹¹³⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 284.

¹¹³⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 284-85. See, for example, Robert A. Warrior, ‘Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today’, *Christianity in Crisis* 29 (1989), pp. 261-265, reprinted in Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*, pp. 287-95.

In Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margin*, a variety of other essays are presented on the exodus (Latin American, Korean, Black African, Asian Feminist, and Palestinian) in a section entitled, ‘The Exodus: One Theme, Many Perspectives’ (pp. 227-296). Palestinian readers in particular share the same kind of concerns as those of the Native Americans.

¹¹³⁸ Warrior, ‘Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians’, p. 265. Warrior’s reading reveals ‘the “strategies of containment” used in liberation readings that make it possible to ignore and even erase the voices and history of the Canaanites’ (*Postmodern Bible*, p. 286). The phrase ‘strategies of containment’ is from Jameson.

¹¹³⁹ Pippin, ‘Ideology’, p. 67.

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response and of rhetorical-critical methodologies that are not infused with ideological-critical awareness. Biblical exegesis is never a neutral act: there are always class interests and institutional power-relations at stake.

A major weakness on the part of the Collective is their failure to critique the resistance to postmodernism among traditional exponents of ideological criticism. Although postmodern perspectives may contain the *potential* for unravelling the conceptual undergirding of power, for Eagleton postmodern influence has undermined the struggle - by denying the possibility of the coherent and galvanised political vision needed to challenge capitalism.¹¹⁴⁰ The Collective might well have answered Eagleton by pointing to their own clear commitment to challenging the structures of power and control within the Academy; and by their scrutiny even of postmodern perspectives and methods through an ideologically-critical lens. Indeed, the Collective could be described as almost *post-postmodern*, in that its members subscribe to an ideological critique that is action-oriented and striving for change.

One individual member of the Collective is quoted as having made this introductory comment:

I feel ultimately that my contribution is being swept up in an exciting process whereby the sum is truly greater (and radically different) than its parts.¹¹⁴¹

However, this initial promise of *excitement*, of a radically new approach, is not sustained throughout the volume, which, overall, is dull and text-book in style rather than at the cutting edge of innovation.¹¹⁴² Regrettably, the Collective does not, in this volume, offer concrete alternatives to the scholarly hegemony that the contributors are seeking to undermine; nor do they initiate a specific programme for bringing about change. The volume lacks sustained readings of biblical texts. However, the companion volume, *The Postmodern Bible Reader*, does offer a number of significant essays that are at the cutting edge of scholarship.¹¹⁴³

The *Postmodern Bible* has received negative reviews from both Robert Carroll and James Barr – the former less expected than the latter. Carroll acknowledges that ‘the book’s summary chapters ... are good exemplary expositions of the theoretical sophistication involved in postmodernist ways of reading the Bible’.¹¹⁴⁴ However, he perceptively describes the work as having ‘a highly authoritarian and totalising

¹¹⁴⁰ In *Literary Theory*, Eagleton gives his own overview of New Criticism: phenomenology, hermeneutics, reception theory, structuralism, semiotics, post-structuralism, and psychoanalysis. He elucidates the ideological undergirding of each of these theoretical positions and concludes with a call to *politically motivated criticism*. Eagleton’s recent (1996) book-title, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, speaks for itself as to his overall view of the phenomenon. Frederic Jameson’s (1991) title, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* similarly speaks for itself as to Jameson’s view that postmodernism is the ultimate outworking of capitalism and therefore at odds with Marxist philosophy.

¹¹⁴¹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 17.

¹¹⁴² Robert Carroll makes a similar comment when he says that the writers of *The Postmodern Bible* have succeeded only ‘in being didactic and deadly dull’ (Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 58) - certainly not a criticism that would ever be made of Carroll’s work! James Barr comments that ‘playfulness and irony are conspicuously lacking in it [*The Postmodern Bible*]’ (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 148) – and notes that these are just the very qualities which John Barton considers to be the only attractive features of postmodernism! (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 148, note35, citing Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 235).

¹¹⁴³ See, for example, the article by Terry Eagleton on Jonah, which is contained in that volume and which is reviewed below, in appendix 2 (pp. 274-77).

¹¹⁴⁴ Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 58.

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ideology of its own (made up of so many parts race and gender and so many parts egalitarianism)' and as 'making a bid for intellectual hegemony'.¹¹⁴⁵ Carroll gives a witty listing of the 'gods' by whom the Collective swears: Althusser, Barthes, Culler, Derrida, Eagleton, Foucault, Genette, Bal, Jameson, and Kristeva. No criticism of these gods, observes Carroll, is to be found anywhere in their work.¹¹⁴⁶ Carroll rightly points out that *The Postmodern Bible* easily 'deconstructs itself': ten white, privileged academics denounce white academicism; its advocacy of populist readings is undermined by its theoretical complexity; its insistence on acknowledgement by scholars of their ideological predispositions is inconsistent with the collective anonymity of its authors. Carroll concludes:

The book illustrates the fundamental *doubleplusgood duckspeak* of postmodernism, which will undoubtedly provide a field day of criticism for the many 'modernist' (that is, old-fashioned) biblical scholars who will welcome the opportunity to get back at the flawed praxis of postmodernism.¹¹⁴⁷

5.19 Final Reflections on Postmodernist Criticism

John Barton writes dismissively of postmodernism as a phenomenon:

As 'a theory' (sometimes, with staggering imperialism just 'theory' with no article) claiming to explain or to expose culture, art, meaning, and truth, I find postmodernism absurd, rather despicable in its delight in debunking all serious beliefs, decadent and corrupt in its indifference to questions of truth; I do not believe it for a moment. But as a game, a set of *jeux d'esprit*, a way of having fun with words, I find it diverting and entertaining. I enjoy the absurd and the surreal and postmodernism supplies this in ample measure.¹¹⁴⁸

Robert Carroll sums up the effect of postmodern influences on biblical scholarship in the following terms: the 'new generation of theory-driven scholars' has turned texts into 'mirror images of the readers, who assume into their textual readings their own values, as explicit modes and strategies for their reading processes'. They seek to transform biblical criticism from 'being in the (concealed) service of traditional western cultural hegemonic values into serving newer values reflecting [contemporary] theopolitical¹¹⁴⁹ demands'.¹¹⁵⁰

¹¹⁴⁵ Carroll, 'Poststructuralist Approaches', p. 58. See also Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 148.

¹¹⁴⁶ The converse is not so, however. The Marxist critics in the list are resistant to much postmodernist thinking. As has already been said, this is amply illustrated by the titles of some of their more recent publications, such as Eagleton, *Illusions of Postmodernism* and Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

¹¹⁴⁷ Carroll, 'Poststructuralist Approaches', p. 59.

¹¹⁴⁸ Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 235, quoted approvingly in Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 161.

¹¹⁴⁹ James Barr comments on Carroll's use of the word 'theopolitical', which he sees as representing the combination of traditional theological perspectives with the dictates of contemporary political correctness, which are the new dominance within the Academy. The older theological concerns are not abandoned but they are marginalised. Barr continues:

Commitments to the theopolitical demands are serious. ... They apply, for instance, to the making of appointments, which are in many cases influenced by matters of race, sex, and ideology; this may be denied officially, but everyone knows that it is so. ... In respect of these theopolitical demands a sort of liberal fundamentalism can come into existence. It is strict, narrow-minded, and intolerant in respect of these drives as it is open-minded and tolerant in other respects. Fundamentalists often say ... about liberal Christianity that in it 'anything goes'. They are much mistaken. There can be found in it a Pharisaic, inquisitorial watching over words and deeds that runs parallel to the same phenomenon in conservative fundamentalism. ... Certain ideas cannot be expressed. 'Political correctness' ... is an important ingredient in the liberal-fundamentalist gospel (Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 152-53).

¹¹⁵⁰ Carroll, 'Poststructuralist Approaches', p. 50.

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Nonetheless, Carroll is not totally negative about postmodern biblical scholarship and cites examples of what he regards as good postmodern criticism,¹¹⁵¹ publications that use postmodern theory ‘in the most sophisticated ways to illuminate their readings of the Bible’:

The application of postmodern theories to specific biblical texts [lacking in *The Postmodern Bible*] allows readers to determine for themselves how such theories help in the construction of meaning for the text and also engages readers in such interpretative praxis. ... *They effect a marriage between modernity and postmodernity. ... In my opinion they are also representative of some of the best work now being done in biblical studies.*¹¹⁵²

However, Carroll makes this further significant observation:

Poststructural approaches to the Bible have not only permitted new avenues of theoretical readings to be explored, *they have also greatly assisted older and more reactionary theological values and practices to revamp themselves* and to regroup for a concerted attack on the common enemy identified as the Enlightenment and historical-critical biblical scholarship. This principle of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’ has allowed poststructuralism to bracket out the Enlightenment, to ward off the critical reading of the Bible. ... Much of what passes for postmodernistic practice looks like a kind of neo-fundamentalism.¹¹⁵³

Not only has the postmodern assault on the hegemony of historical-critical scholarship allowed a voice to new liberationist, feminist, post-colonial, and marginal readings but it has also allowed those with a more traditional (‘conservative’) faith perspective to re-establish a place within the Academy.¹¹⁵⁴ Surely this is to be welcomed, not on the basis of ‘my enemy’s enemy is my friend’, but in the interests of opening the academy to all reading traditions that are willing to take their place in the market place of academic critique in a pluralist context. However, a pre-modern / postmodern alliance that seeks to bracket out the Enlightenment-modernist tradition would be equally as unacceptable as the bracketing out of a faith or any other legitimate perspective.

However, the common cause between ‘conservative’¹¹⁵⁵ and postmodern scholarship is ultimately superficial. Conservative polemic is mostly directed against biblical criticism (let’s read the Bible without all this ‘critical stuff’); whereas the anti-enlightenment crusade of postmodernism is directed against the very notions of

Barr calls in question the tendency to speak as if modernism and postmodernism were the only two states recognised within the world of scholarship. Barr maintains that ‘religion is a different state and a different tradition’ (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 161-62). As religion was not subsumed by modernism, so it should not allow itself to be subsumed by postmodernism.

¹¹⁵¹ These include: Hugh C. White, *Narrative and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Hugh S. Pypers, *David as Reader: 2 Samuel 12: 1-15 and the Poetics of Fatherhood* (Biblical Interpretation Series 23; Leiden: Brill, 1996); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series 21; Leiden: Brill, 1996); and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea’s Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (Gender, Culture, Theory 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

¹¹⁵² Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 60 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁵³ Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 51 (my emphasis). James Barr concurs with Carroll’s angst at the revival of ‘fundamentalist’ perspectives under the guise of postmodernism (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 143).

¹¹⁵⁴ Whether that faith perspective be of Church or Synagogue, of European conservative evangelicalism or traditional Black American religion, or whatever. With regard to African-American readings, see above, footnote 695, p. 155.

¹¹⁵⁵ Carroll and Barr both make frequent use of the term ‘fundamentalist’, which is an ideologically loaded and pejorative term. I suggest that ‘conservative’ might be a more neutral term for much of the scholarship that Barr and Carroll have in mind.

5. Issues and Perspectives

absolute truth and morality that are central to conservative Christianity. James Barr warns ‘fundamentalists’ against coming under the postmodernist spell.¹¹⁵⁶ Ironically, Barr seems more at home with fundamentalists than with postmodernists! It certainly is evidence that postmodernism has brought about a paradigmatic shift in ‘alliances’ within the scholarly world, when James Barr is making common cause with ‘fundamentalism’ against the common enemy of postmodernism!¹¹⁵⁷

Carroll indicates his scepticism of a postmodern utopia where ‘even a reconstituted South African apartheid reading ... would stand on all fours with post-Bakhtinian ... and post-Derridean deconstructive readings’:

The future will be a paradise of different readings with none privileged and all equally valid: the modernistic wolf will lie down with the postmodernist lamb, the Marxist bear will eat straw with the capitalist goat, the pre/postmodernist fundamentalist sheep will safely trade biblical proof texts with the modernist wolf, and the ecclesiastical dove will dwell in peace with the academic serpent. ... The old hierarchies and hegemonies of historical-critical biblical studies will be gone for ever.¹¹⁵⁸

Carroll reassures us, however, that such a utopia will never come to pass! It will soon *deconstruct itself* as different reading strategies seek to establish power and dominance over others.

Carroll at one point speaks approvingly of ‘a marriage between modernity and postmodernity’. Whether ‘marriage’ is the best metaphor for what is more of a parent-child relationship is doubtful. However, I agree with Carroll that it may well be possible to adopt an eclectic position that seeks to take the best from both worlds.¹¹⁵⁹ It may be that traditional (Marxist) ideological criticism is one significant bridge between the two modes: ideological criticism is very much earthed in material reality and concrete ongoing struggle but it shares with postmodernism a distrust of power and hegemony and it lends itself to deconstructive methodology.¹¹⁶⁰ It is therefore appropriate to allow Terry Eagleton the last word on postmodernism, from the closing paragraph of his *Illusion of Postmodernism*:

¹¹⁵⁶ Barr reminds ‘fundamentalists’ of the importance to them of: not allying themselves with ‘a totally non-Christian and non-religious philosophy’; of not abandoning the historical nature of Christian belief; of standing firm by the centrality of ‘truth and rationality’; of caution at the ambiguity of reader-response criticism; and of not forgetting that traditional Protestant thinking ultimately has its toots in the Enlightenment. With regard to reader-response criticism, Barr further warns that, though this approach might appear at first sight to work to the advantage of the fundamentalist (‘all meaning is created by the reader so it is entirely proper for evangelical readers to create evangelical readings’), ‘a more secure foothold is offered if one goes the other way and thinks that the Bible has its own clear meaning which anyone can perceive’ (Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 151).

With regard to what Barr means by the ‘non-Christian nature’ of postmodern ‘religion’, see Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 171-72.

¹¹⁵⁷ See Barr, *Fundamentalism*.

¹¹⁵⁸ Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 62.

¹¹⁵⁹ David Clines makes a similar point in his recent essay, ‘The Pyramid and the Net’. The ‘pyramid’ represents the permanent and immovable, the collaborative and the incremental world of modernism; while the ‘net’ serves as a metaphor for the diverse, multivalent malleability of postmodern methodology. Clines argues in the essay that the two need not be mutually exclusive (‘“The Pyramid and the Net”: the Postmodern Adventure in Biblical Studies’ in *On the Way to the Postmodern*, pp. 138-57, a revised and expanded version of ‘The Postmodern Adventure in Biblical Studies’ in David J.A. Clines and Stephen D. Moore (eds.), *Auguries: The Jubilee Volume of the Sheffield Department of Biblical Studies* (JSOTSup. 269; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 23-45).

¹¹⁶⁰ Carroll, ‘Poststructuralist Approaches’, p. 60. New Historicism may be another such bridge (see above, p. 48, footnote 214).

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Postmodern end-of-history thinking does not envisage a future for us much different from the present, a prospect it oddly views as a cause for celebration. ... Its rich body of work on racism and ethnicity, on the paranoia of identity thinking, on the perils of totality and the fear of otherness: all this along with its deepened insight into the cunning of power, would no doubt be of considerable value. But its cultural relativism and moral conventionalism, its scepticism, its pragmatism and localism, its distaste for ideas of solidarity and disciplined organisation, its lack of any adequate theory of political agency: all of these would tell heavily against it.¹¹⁶¹

¹¹⁶¹ Eagleton, *Illusions*, cited also by Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 159.

6. Summary and Conclusions

6.1

In the preceding pages, I have offered a detailed critique of a variety of perspectives and methodologies for ideological criticism within Old Testament studies. It would be inappropriate for me at this stage to attempt to indicate the ‘best’ perspective or the ‘most effective’ methodology. The best approach and methodology for a given ideological-critical project will be determined by its purpose, location, and objectives. However, an attempt will be here made to offer some kind of overall evaluation of ideological criticism within Old Testament Studies and to provide, if not a road-map, at least some signposts for future development.

6.101 Modes of Ideological Criticism

Four distinct but overlapping *modes* of ideological criticism have been identified and analysed:

- **Ideological criticism of the biblical *texts* themselves**, in particular:
 - (i) the circumstances that gave rise to the production, redaction, publication, and reception of texts;
 - (ii) the use to which texts were put in the ancient context (for example, as a tool of social control);
 - (iii) the ideology that is encoded or inscribed or hidden / masked within or under the surface of the text;
 - (iv) the process of incorporation of texts into the Canon;
 - (v) the ongoing engagement of the text with successive interpretative contexts (for example, the incorporation of Old Testament texts into the Christian Bible).
- **Ideological criticism of *readings* and *interpretations* of biblical texts**, across the centuries but particularly in the contemporary context, focussing especially on the influence of the ideological holdings of the reader / interpreter.
- **Ideological criticism of the *use* of the Bible as an ideological instrument** of control or influence in society: for example, to justify slavery or apartheid, to reinforce patriarchy, to undergird empire, or to rationalise the status quo (the Bible functioning as one of Althusser’s ‘ideological state apparatuses’).
- **Ideological criticism of *scholarly practices* within the Academy**, including ideological critique of other critical methodologies.

The first of these four modes is primarily concerned with the *ancient* context of textual production and dissemination. The remaining three modes are more to do with the *subsequent* interpretative contexts in which texts have been received, read, and applied and with the interpretative tradition(s) and allegorical master-narratives that

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have arisen. Engagement of the ideological factors inherent in a text's *production* with the complex of ideological factors involved in the diverse history of the text's *reception* results in myriad competing interpretative possibilities. In the words of Norman Gottwald:

The texts have been ideologically saturated in the process of selecting, arranging, and commenting upon them within successive frames of meaning. Consequently, we encounter multiple ideologies. ... When the interplay of multiple meanings in the text is scanned by the multiple predispositions of interpreters, we are bound to have a wealth of competing interpretations.¹¹⁶²

For most practitioners of ideological criticism, the four modes of application overlap and intersect, whatever the primary focus of the critic. The Marxist Eagletonian and Jamesonian methodologies focus on the *original* context of a text's production; but, especially in the Jamesonian approach, importance is also attached to the ongoing interpretative tradition. Robert Carroll's *Ideologiekritik* is mostly directed against contemporary readers and interpreters, though he is by no means unaware of the ideological factors involved in the production of texts / scrolls. Liberationist (including feminist / womanist) scholars generally highlight the abuse of the Bible as a tool of social control but they are also interested in the ideological features inherent in the text's production and in the stream of interpretative tradition. The Collective authorship of the *Postmodern Bible* has focused primarily on the ideological factors undergirding critical practices in the Academy but they also call for ideological critique at all four levels.

6.102 Methodology

In terms of *methodology*, a variety of approaches has been identified and analysed for ideological criticism of texts, including:

- Eagletonian analysis of the five levels of ideological context from which the text originates: general and literary modes of production; general, authorial, and aesthetic ideology.
- Jamesonian alignment of the text with three distinct interpretative horizons: the immediate political context; the wider social horizon, particularly other contemporary literary reproductions of class struggle; and the ongoing historical conflict of modes of production – with a focus on aligning the contradictions in the text with the contradictions inherent in the socio-political context at each of these three levels.
- Reading 'against the grain' of the text (or Clinesian reading 'from left to right').
- Focus on 'absences' and the 'not saids' of the text.
- Foregrounding of voices from the 'margins' or from the 'underside' of the text.
- Deconstructionist techniques, investigating the cracks and fault-lines along which a text deconstructs itself, revealing its inner tensions and contradictions.
- Awareness of the multivocal nature of texts, especially texts that have undergone a complex editorial process and of the significance of tensions / discords / counterpoint among different textual 'voices'.
- Highlighting of the political /class/ gender / religious conflicts and struggles that are 'masked' or rationalised by the text.

¹¹⁶² Gottwald, *Tribes* (2nd edn., revised), p. xli.

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- Intertextual comparison, especially the possibilities of inter-textual *dialogue*;
- Identification of specific ‘ideologemes’ (or, in Gottwald’s terms, ‘dimorphemes’ and ‘antimorphemes’) for structuralist analysis;
- Hermeneutics of *suspicion*;
- Illumination of the text’s *utopian* vision, especially where this may have implications for contemporary praxis within a given interpretative community.

These approaches are overlapping and intersecting and they will not all necessarily cohere in any one work of criticism. Their use may depend on the aims and context of interpretation and on the predisposition of the interpreter (Marxist, Christian, or whatever). Several of these methods are themselves ideologically ‘loaded’ (for example, deconstructionist approaches).

With regard to the other three modes (ideological critique of readers and interpreters, of the uses to which the Bible has been put, and of structural and critical practices within the Academy), no general methodological schemes have been identified, though many of the approaches on the above list are applicable. Commentaries, for example, are amenable to full ideological investigation as texts in their own right. Particular textual applications (for example, those that have been used to undergird unacceptable social practice, such as apartheid) are open to deconstructive analysis. The absences and ‘not saids’ in a given interpretative tradition, or in a particular scholar’s work, may be as significant as those aspects that are foregrounded. Commentators may seek, consciously or unconsciously, to mask the influence of their own ideological holdings.

I have made heuristic use of Dyck’s threefold distinction (social-scientific, interpretative-sociological, and social-critical) as a convenient and functional means of classification of different approaches to ideological criticism. However, in practice, as has been seen, most scholars mix two or more of these perspectives; and, indeed, Dyck, as a practitioner himself, has sought to blend all three. Dyck has also highlighted a close correlation between these three perspectives and the *definitions* of ideology employed by different scholars (neutral, negative, and pejorative, respectively). However, the examples of ideological criticism reviewed above have shown this correlation to be somewhat of an oversimplification: most practitioners move (with varying degrees of legitimacy) from one definition to another.

Significant also is the *philosophical* perspective of the individual critic (whether Marxist or Ricoeurian, Christian or Jewish, or whatever). This might have provided an alternative means of classification of critics. It is significant that explicitly Marxist and explicitly non-Marxist approaches were both found within each of Dyck’s classifications. Also, within each of Dyck’s classifications, there are to be found scholars adopting Christian, non-Christian, and anti-Christian positions. As regards postmodernist influence, we have noted a sliding scale: from resistance (from the very different perspectives both of Terry Eagleton and a James Barr), through positive acquiescence (as with David Clines), to wholesale engagement with postmodernism by the Bible and Cultural Collective.¹¹⁶³

¹¹⁶³ I have even suggested that there is a sense in which the Collective are post-postmodern!

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Great importance is attached by all ideological critics to the social 'location' of the reader / interpreter, in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, geography, and academic or ecclesiastical background – though it is acknowledged that social location need not be *wholly* determinative of an interpreter's ideological holdings. The suggestion has been made (by Mosala and others) that it is only possible to discern the underside of the text, the underlying contestation and struggle, if writing out of contemporary experience of struggle and oppression. Tina Pippin is scornful of the role in ideological criticism of white, male, western academics (however Marxist or 'conscientized' their credentials).¹¹⁶⁴ Others (myself included) are wary of the 'interpretative privilege' that scholars such as Mosala claim from their experience of struggle, while acknowledging that their location may indeed open up new interpretative possibilities.¹¹⁶⁵ Issues have been raised regarding the 'elitism' of scholars such as Mosala, whose methodology requires considerable academic specialisation, over against (for example) Shigeyuki Nakanose's popularist work with South American base communities.

It is generally agreed that ideological criticism must move beyond lower levels of criticism into critique and evaluation of the text from an external ethical standpoint. As Eagleton has observed, 'Criticism is not a passage from text to reader, to collude with its object in a conspiracy of eloquence. *Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself*'.¹¹⁶⁶ David Clines similarly writes that ideological criticism must move beyond 'a fair minded, patient and sympathetic re-creation of the meaning, significance, and intentions of the ancient text' (the Enlightenment project to which most scholars of the present day still subscribe)' to a new level of *critique* or *evaluation*:

'Critique' ... implies evaluation of the texts by a standard of reference outside themselves. ... We have a responsibility ... to evaluate the Bible's claims and assumptions, and if we abdicate that responsibility, whether as scholars or readers-in-general of the Bible, we are in my opinion guilty of an ethical fault.¹¹⁶⁷

The external standard of evaluation may for some be Marxist; for others (such as Clines) it may be an eclectic set of personal standards and values; for others it may be a Christian or Jewish interpretative tradition;¹¹⁶⁸ for others it may be the imperatives that arise from their first-hand experience of oppression. This evaluative nature of ideological criticism is more to do with justice issues and with 'taking sides in the struggle' than it is to do with metaphysical truth or belief.

For most of the scholars discussed in the preceding pages, ideological criticism, with its roots in Marxism, must have *implications for praxis* in the contemporary situation. This is perhaps least so for David Clines, whose 'crusade' often seems more to do

¹¹⁶⁴ See Pippin, 'Ideology', p. 53. Roland Boer also writes of 'the impossible situation of politically committed white males in the "First World" ... and their efforts at producing liberatory, specifically Marxist, theory and praxis' ('Western Marxism', pp. 4-5).

¹¹⁶⁵ I realise that I myself fall into the 'white, male, western' category. However, given that I have lived through the sharp end of contestation and struggle in inner-city Belfast, and have had active service in the contemporary struggle in Afghanistan, I can perhaps lay claim to some 'interpretative privilege'!

¹¹⁶⁶ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 43 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁶⁷ Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 19-20.

¹¹⁶⁸ Clines makes the interesting observation that a previous generation of avowedly Christian commentators, writing from a progressive-revelation perspective, were actually more able to offer critical evaluation of the text than the current generation of supposedly objective scholarship (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 77, note 3; see above, footnote 833, p. 184).

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with deconstruction than reconstruction. David Jobling, by contrast, has described ideological-critical discourse as ‘a whole discourse utterly tied to praxis: a praxis of changing the world, of political liberation, of a day of justice; a discourse of how Biblical Studies may belong to such a praxis’. Jobling maintains that an action-oriented focus is essential for ideological criticism ‘at its best’.¹¹⁶⁹ This view is echoed by Robert Carroll’s longing for ‘an ideology of freedom’,¹¹⁷⁰ an alternative form of scholarship ‘grounded in truth and justice’.¹¹⁷¹

Third-world and feminist scholars also demand implications for praxis. However, they may be sceptical of the extent to which a positive hermeneutic of biblical texts is possible; and for some, as we have seen, the Bible is irredeemably patriarchal and oppressive.

Even the avowedly postmodernist authors of the Bible and Culture Collective depict ideological criticism as ‘an ethically grounded act’, designed ‘to raise critical consciousness about what is just and unjust’ and ‘to change those power relationships for the better’. *They challenge readers to accept political responsibility for themselves and for the world in which they live.*¹¹⁷² It must be remembered, however, that any project of ideological criticism is itself open to ideological critique. As Tina Pippin observes, ideological criticism is ‘a contested field’.¹¹⁷³ The Collective authors of *The Postmodern Bible* remind us of ‘the specific danger of an ideological use of ideological criticism’, with the warning that ‘it is incumbent on ideological critics to subject their approaches to critical self-appraisal to expose their own agendas’.¹¹⁷⁴

6.2 Key Questions

There are a number of specific questions to which answers might reasonably be expected in this concluding chapter. These include:

1. Which of the definitions of ideology has proved most useful within Old Testament studies and which of Dyck’s three interpretative perspectives has proved most productive?
2. To what extent have the Marxist origins of ideological criticism rendered it problematic for biblical scholars?
3. How far has a methodology developed for the critique of *contemporary* literature proved transferable to *ancient* literature?
4. Does the focus of ideological criticism on the *gaps* and the *margins* genuinely enable new, and hitherto silenced, voices to be heard or does it simply distort the central thrust of the text?
5. Has ideological criticism enabled the reader to grasp ‘new relations between old facts’ or has it led up an interpretative cul-de-sac?
6. Has it opened up fruitful new avenues of interpretation or has it simply enabled critics to adapt the text to their own interpretative bias?

¹¹⁶⁹ Jobling, ‘Specters of Tribes’, p. 12.

¹¹⁷⁰ Carroll, ‘Infinity of Traces’, p. 37.

¹¹⁷¹ Carroll, ‘Representation’, p. 14.

¹¹⁷² *Postmodern Bible*, p. 275 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁷³ Pippin, ‘Ideology’, p. 67.

¹¹⁷⁴ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 280 (my emphasis).

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7. Does it facilitate 'imaginative points of connexion' between the text and the contemporary agenda or does it simply give free rein to subjective application?
8. Has ideological criticism opened the eyes of interpreters to their own ideological predispositions or has it needlessly pulled the rug from under all genuine attempts at objectivity?
9. Has it exposed the flaws and fallacies in traditional methodologies or have its proponents recklessly deconstructed approaches that have stood the test of time?
10. Has it undermined the prevailing hegemony within Biblical Studies only to impose a new political (or ideological) correctness of its own? How does one reckon with the inevitably ideological nature of ideological criticism itself?
11. Has it broken the grip of patriarchal and oppressive interpretation without enabling a liberative programme of action?
12. Has ideological criticism just been a passing fad of the nineties or has it brought about a watershed in biblical criticism? Has it been overtaken by the rise of postmodernism?

It will not be possible to answer all of these questions conclusively. Some are open-ended, demanding ongoing debate. Others will only be answerable with hindsight. Others depend on the ideological stance of the critic.

6.201 Which of the definitions of ideology has proved most useful within Old Testament studies and which of Dyck's three interpretative perspectives has predominated?

Positive, neutral, and negative definitions of ideology are all to be found within biblical ideological criticism. As Dyck has demonstrated, definitions are closely correlated with the critic's interpretative perspective. In practice, however, most critics do not confine themselves to a single perspective.

Norman Gottwald begins with a neutral, social-scientific definition. However, he later moves to an interpretative-sociological perspective, when he treats early Israelite ideology as a major *positive* driving force in the social and economic spheres. With regard to the ideology of the modern interpreter, Gottwald resists the pejorative notion that ideology consists of fixed ideas that 'hold us captive'. Rather, ideology is positive: it serves as 'the generative idea that gets us interested in any subject and enables us to form a point of entrée for our inquiry'.¹¹⁷⁵ Gottwald acknowledges, however, that ideology inevitably contains an *element* of false consciousness, of oversimplification or of partisanship; and towards the end of *Tribes* he effectively moves into social-critical mode.¹¹⁷⁶ Robert Carroll likewise adopts an initially positive definition of ideology, as providing a community or group with 'explanatory, evaluative, orientative, and programmatic functions, allowing them to situate themselves in the world by means of language'.¹¹⁷⁷ However, despite this positive perspective, much of Carroll's invective is directed against 'false' ideology.

Gale Yee similarly adopts a *neutral to positive* definition. Ideology is 'a complex system of ideas, values, and perceptions ... that provides a framework for group

¹¹⁷⁵ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. xliii.

¹¹⁷⁶ Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 65-66.

¹¹⁷⁷ Carroll, 'Biblical Ideology', p. 106.

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members to understand their place in the social order'.¹¹⁷⁸ However, it proved impossible for Yee to escape completely from connotations of false consciousness and distortion. She concedes that ideologies are frequently used to 'disguise or explain away features of society that may be unjust'.¹¹⁷⁹

Garbini regards ideology positively, as an integrated belief system that proactively seeks to implement political reform; and Yairah Amit argues that ideological literature can advance spiritual objectives in a way that could not be achieved by mere history-writing.¹¹⁸⁰ Patricia Dutcher-Walls, adopts an essentially positive, interpretative-sociological definition; but she also draws attention to the *illegitimate* use of ideology to undergird the abuse of power.

The majority of ideological critics, however, adopt a social-critical perspective, with an overall negative or pejorative use of the term. Walter Brueggemann, for example, defines 'ideology' as 'vested interest which is passed off as truth, partial truth which counterfeits as whole truth'.¹¹⁸¹ Social-critical commentators search for ideology that is false, hidden, distorted, or masking reality in order to legitimise power. It is something to be *exposed* not just identified. The irony is that such critics generally come to the text with strong (though not always fully acknowledged) ideological holdings of their own, often oriented towards programmatic action. They generally regard their own ideological perspective as *positive*. Examples would include the feminist ideology of Renita Weems or the black African ideological standpoint of Itumeleng Mosala. Ideological criticism must, therefore, encompass ideological critique of the *commentator's* perspective and motivation. Almost all exponents of ideological criticism acknowledge this but are not always in practice open to critique of their own ideological holdings.

David Clines leans towards Althusser's definition of ideology as 'the representation of the *imaginary* relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'.¹¹⁸² Clines is particularly conscious of the will to power expressed in ideologies, which are often disguised, or passed off as obvious or commonsensical, *in order to exert control*. For Clines, ideological criticism must therefore 'press beyond mere description of the text to a critique of it'.¹¹⁸³ However, Clines also acknowledges a positive function for the ideology of the interpreter, not far removed from Gottwald's position that the ideology of the critic is the 'generative idea' that is an indispensable catalyst to the critical process.

The more negative definitions associated with the social-critical approach have undoubtedly predominated within Biblical Studies. Even those such as Gottwald, Yee, Carroll, and Dutcher-Walls, who begin from a social-scientific or interpretative-sociological position, move on to social-critical mode to some degree at least. Jonathan Dyck's own attempt to blend all three perspectives is instructive. It may well be that those who have adopted a purely social-critical stance might have

¹¹⁷⁸ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535.

¹¹⁷⁹ Yee, 'Ideological Criticism', p. 535. See also Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method*, p. 148.

¹¹⁸⁰ Garbini, *History and Ideology*, p. 61 and Amit, *History and Ideology*, p. 8.

¹¹⁸¹ Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, p. 111.

¹¹⁸² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 11, quoting from Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 144 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁸³ Clines, 'Possibilities and Priorities', p. 84 (my emphasis).

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benefited from a preliminary social-scientific and / or interpretative-sociological investigation.

Such a blending of interpretative perspectives is, I believe, implicit in both the Eagletonian and Jamesonian methodologies, if followed fully. For example, the Eagletonian analysis of general mode of production and of literary mode of production is an essentially social-scientific task. Discussion of general ideology may be best approached from an interpretative-sociological perspective. For critique of authorial ideology and the ideology of the text the commentator must move into social-critical mode. Similarly, on the Jamesonian approach, the initial phase of textual analysis will be in social-critical mode; the second phase might adopt an interpretative-sociological methodology; while the final phase lends itself to a more neutral social-scientific mode.

6.202 To what extent have the Marxist origins of ideological criticism rendered it problematic for biblical scholars?

The origins of contemporary ideological criticism are rooted in Marxism; and the methodology has been espoused within Biblical Studies primarily by those who represent a left-wing and radical agenda. The two main models of ideological criticism, the Eagletonian and the Jamesonian, are firmly grounded in Marxist philosophy. The very phrase 'ideological criticism' thus connotes a Marxist perspective that is alien to the ideological heritage of most biblical critics. This association has proved problematic for many within the guild of Old Testament scholarship, as exemplified by James Barr's dismissive rejection of Gottwald's *Tribes* simply because it is 'governed by his Marxist ideology'.¹¹⁸⁴ Barr is undoubtedly not alone among biblical scholars who have a knee-jerk aversion to ideological criticism because of their instinctively anti-Marxist perspective and because of the anti-religious element within traditional Marxism.

Several of the critics who have experimented with ideological criticism have explicitly sought to distance themselves from a Marxist approach,¹¹⁸⁵ in some cases proposing an alternative, non-Marxist, model, for example, that of Paul Ricoeur.¹¹⁸⁶ In Dyck's view, Ricoeur articulates a more nuanced understanding of ideology, designed to permit *constructive* evaluation of ideological systems, as opposed to the primarily deconstructive tendency of the Marxist-Althusserian model. Nonetheless, the regular use by Dyck of phrases such as 'mode of production' and 'false consciousness' gives his discussion an undeniably Marxian flavour.

Similarly, Dutcher-Walls specifically rejects a Marxist perspective, favouring an approach outlined by Berger and Luckmann.¹¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, her focus on the role of elites, on the significance of power struggles, and on the element of conflict

¹¹⁸⁴ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 84. Another example would be Alter and Kermode's *Literary Guide to the Bible*, which quite explicitly excludes ideological or Marxist approaches.

¹¹⁸⁵ Robert Carroll, for example, rejects Marxist definitions of ideology, preferring instead what he refers to as a non-Marxist or pre-Marxist approach (Carroll, 'Biblical Ideology', p. 106).

¹¹⁸⁶ See Paul Ricoeur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and the discussion in Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', pp. 119-125.

¹¹⁸⁷ which focuses on 'the "generation" of knowledge and thus "reality" as constructs of the social interactions of human beings' (Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, p. 103, quoting from Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, p. 52).

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underlying literary texts suggests that she, too, might feel more at home in Marxist company than she acknowledges.

There are also those who have shied away from a Marxist approach for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons, in particular because of the difficulty in applying Marxist categories to *ancient* literature. John Milbank, for example, maintains that oriental systems can only with difficulty be forced into the traditional Marxist scheme of modes of production.¹¹⁸⁸

More generally, biblical scholarship, with its traditional theological preoccupations, has been slow to recognise the importance of the economic, social-class, and political dimensions undergirding biblical texts.¹¹⁸⁹ The Marxist influence has been valuable in bringing these dimensions to the fore. However, a specific cause of objection to a wholly Marxist approach has been the classic Marxist base-superstructure model, under which the economic base is wholly determinant of the ideological superstructure, including religion.¹¹⁹⁰ Gottwald's *Tribes* was largely based on this presupposition.¹¹⁹¹ However, Dyck has noted that contemporary theorists, including neo-Marxists, are more willing to think in terms of a reciprocal interaction between ideology, including religion, and socio-economic factors.¹¹⁹² This has been the standpoint adopted by most of the biblical ideological criticism surveyed above.

John Milbank, James Barr and others have also strongly questioned the ideological assumption, implicit in Marxist dogma, that it is impossible for members of an elite group to have a genuinely altruistic concern for social justice, with or without a religious motivation.¹¹⁹³ Several scholars have also stressed that ideological criticism must take account not just of the narrower Marxist focus on social *class* but also of gender and other social groupings. John Rogerson takes this a step further, sounding a warning note against the *total* exclusion of individuality.¹¹⁹⁴

David Clines is well grounded in the Eagletonian tradition, in particular in his insistence that texts inevitably emerge from class or group conflict. However, Clines seeks to broaden ideological criticism beyond its Marxist roots. By explicit contrast with Eagleton, who had rejected both structuralist and reader-response notions as products of 'the bourgeois mythology of individual freedom',¹¹⁹⁵ Clines employs a variety of contemporary literary-critical approaches, promoting a variety of

¹¹⁸⁸ Milbank, "I will Gasp and Pant", pp. 62-63.

¹¹⁸⁹ It will be recalled that Gottwald attributes this to the 'canonical sanctity' of the biblical text; to the 'myopia of academic overspecialisation'; to the difficulty for those schooled in the humanities of thinking in terms of what is 'typically rather than individually human'; and to the social class position of most biblical scholars (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 11 [my emphasis]).

¹¹⁹⁰ In Marx's well known words: 'Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life' (Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings*, p. 247). Even outside of Marxist circles, 'the social determination of consciousness' is a central tenet of much sociology.

¹¹⁹¹ Though Gottwald did modify the concept to some extent by his suggestion that Yahwist ideology functioned as a 'feed-back loop' or a 'servo-mechanism' that reinforced ongoing social change (Gottwald, *Tribes*, pp. 642-49).

¹¹⁹² Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 113.

¹¹⁹³ Milbank, "I will Gasp and Pant", p. 64. For James Barr, see above, p. 49.

¹¹⁹⁴ Rogerson, 'Potential of the Negative', p. 35.

¹¹⁹⁵ Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 73.

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interpretative strategies, however 'bespoke', that may be of value to differing interpretative communities.¹¹⁹⁶

For Eagleton and Jameson, the ethical standards against which the text is to be evaluated are those associated with Marxism. Clines argues that commentators must bring to bear on the text their own ideological or theological convictions, whatever those may be. Indeed, for Clines, ordinary readers must also be enabled to do this and need to be set free from the ideological holdings of the scholarly hegemony as much as from ecclesiastical domination.

Of all the attempts at ideological criticism surveyed in the preceding chapters, Clines is perhaps the most successful at taking inspiration and methodology from Marxist-based ideological criticism and combining this with methodology drawn from other contemporary trends in literary criticism, not least deconstructionism. Ideological-critical methodology in this expanded format can serve as a vehicle for those of whatever philosophical / political persuasion to critique the text by the standard of their own ethics and values. It seems to me, therefore, that the Marxist origins of ideological criticism need not be a barrier to its heuristic use by biblical critics of all persuasions.

6.203 How far has a methodology developed for the critique of *contemporary* literature proved transferable to the study of literature from an *ancient* civilisation?

It is significant that there have been relatively few attempts within Biblical Studies to apply *in detail* the methodologies advocated by either of the classic Marxist exponents of ideological criticism. Of those surveyed, the only approach which specifically applies the Eagletonian five-point scheme is Gottwald's 'Social Class and ideology'. David Jobling offers a similarly lone attempt in his Jamesonian study of Psalm 72.¹¹⁹⁷

Part of the explanation may be the difficulties involved with the application of these methodologies to *ancient* literature, owing to lack of available comparative literary material, lack of detailed knowledge of ancient social formations and modes of production, and lack of data from outside of the text as to general (non-religious) ideology. Those who adopt a broadly Eagletonian approach are open to the criticism of a *circularity* of argument, if social formation and general ideology are inferred from the text and then used as a means of interpreting the text. Authorial ideology is particularly problematic if all that we know about the author is what can be deduced from the text itself. The Jamesonian methodology requires comparison of the subject text with other contemporary texts, a procedure that is particularly difficult to apply to biblical literature because of lack of comparative textual data.¹¹⁹⁸

¹¹⁹⁶ See, for example, Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 172-186.

¹¹⁹⁷ However, some other general or partial applications of Jamesonian methodology are cited above in footnote 666, p. 148.

¹¹⁹⁸ Jobling in particular notes that the second stage of the Jamesonian methodology (in which the text is viewed against the backcloth of a selection of texts from the same social formation) is more often than not squeezed out in Biblical Studies, largely because of lack of available comparative literature (Jobling, 'Deconstruction', p. 98).

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On the other hand, while the lack of available data will always be a difficulty, and the danger of circularity of argument always to be considered, issues such as the social formation from which the text emerges should surely form an integral (not just preliminary or peripheral) aspect of any textual critique. On several occasions, I have drawn attention to places where investigation of the *literary* mode of production would elucidate the discussion. Indeed, it seems to me to be regrettable that there have not been more attempts to subject biblical books, not just short excerpts, to a rigorous Eagletonian or Jamesonian analysis. I suspect that much might emerge (in Gottwald's words) by way of 'new relations between old facts', even although the method might prove to have some limitations in an ancient context.

Despite the paucity of *comprehensive* application of the Eagleton / Jamesonian methodologies, the above studies have demonstrated that various key insights from this ideological-critical tradition have nonetheless proved extremely productive within the world of biblical scholarship. Mention should be made of Gale Yee's work, which is largely an adaptation of the Eagletonian and Jamesonian approaches. More generally, an Eagletonian awareness of mode of production and social formation, a Jamesonian emphasis on the political nature of texts, and a general focus on the margins, gaps, cracks, and fault-lines in the text have enabled a variety of interpreters to open up new avenues of investigation that have not hitherto been discernible. The notion of voices from the margins has elucidated the polyphonic nature of texts, allowing non-dominant voices to be heard. There is an increasing awareness of the significance of 'absences' and 'not-saids' in the text. Such approaches have enabled a Mosala to align himself with the underside of the text, developing a black-liberation hermeneutic that breaks free from the hegemony of the western critical tradition.

Other more recent developments in literary theory, including indeterminacy, reader-response, and deconstructionism, have contributed to the development of these ideological-critical emphases. David Clines has illustrated how ideological criticism might be integrated with some of these newer approaches. Overall, it seems that, despite the need for caution at the inherent difficulties and pitfalls, there has proved to be plenty of scope for productive application of ideological-critical methodology to biblical texts.

6.204 Does the focus on the gaps and the margins genuinely enable new voices to be heard or does it simply distort the central thrust of the text?

Ideological-critical approaches are open to the criticism that they skew or distort the text by focusing on contradictions, gaps, absences, fault-lines, cracks, and margins *rather than on the central thrust of the text*. It is sometimes as if the critical lens is deliberately set out of focus to highlight the peripheral aspects of the picture at the expense of the foreground. This refocusing, however, is a vital aspect of the ideological-critical methodology, as may be illustrated by a different analogy. It is an essential ingredient of the conjurer's technique to direct audience attention away from what is actually happening in order to produce the required illusion. Similarly, writers may use a literary sleight of hand to focus the reader's attention away from economic realities they wish to hide, social conflicts they seek to mask, contradictions in their rhetoric, or weak points in their argument. Ideological criticism focuses attention on whatever it is that the text is seeking to obscure, especially factors that readers from a different age and culture may not be instinctively aware. Mosala's work is an

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excellent example of this. However, these processes should not neglect the *central* thrust of the text. I have taken issue with Mosala for his tendency to keep the interpretative lens out of focus all of the time, ignoring the issues that are foregrounded by the text. Focussing on the gaps and the margins to the exclusion of the foreground is, in effect, a license for interpreters to make the text mean whatever they want it to mean. The object of the exercise should be to throw the *overall* picture into sharper relief, elucidating the *tension* between the margins and the centre, between the dominant and the peripheral voices and perspectives.

It is frequently observed that the not-saids of the text are as significant as what is said. This is an emphasis in Yee's and in Gottwald's later work. However, a comprehensive critique of the text must also take full account of the dominant voices. Despite the fact that Gottwald's Eagletonian analysis of Isaiah 40 opens a variety of worthwhile new insights, he ultimately devises a whole new messianic theory predicated solely on what is 'not said' in the text! The ideological critic will want to adjust the 'balance' (to change to a metaphor from sound engineering), so that voices from the margins, from the cracks and undercurrents in the text, are heard in counterpoint with the dominant voices. Often the overall thrust of the text lies in the symphonic tension, or even discord, between the dominant voices and the marginal voices. Mark Brett's notion of intentional hybridity is a significant attempt to reckon with the counterpoint of different textual voices.¹¹⁹⁹ An awareness of the polyphonic nature of texts has made it easier for Brett to engage the text with political and economic issues in the *contemporary* world. By illuminating the complex ideological context from which texts emerge, ideological criticism makes possible 'imaginative points of contact' with the contemporary context¹²⁰⁰ that are actually grounded in the text and not *just* in the imagination of the interpreter.

6.205 Has ideological criticism in fact enabled the reader to grasp 'new relations between old facts' or has it led up an interpretative cul-de-sac?

Gottwald's *Tribes* inaugurated a whole new interpretative horizon, pioneering an awareness of religion as part of a wider ideological complex, closely intertwined with social, economic, and political factors. For Gottwald, a major aspect of ideological criticism is to discern 'new relations between old facts',¹²⁰¹ particularly where those 'relations' are masked or hidden below the surface of the text. Another part of the task is to engage ideological factors embedded in the text with factors that arise from the ideological perspective of the interpreter. Gottwald's specifically Marxist perspective enabled him to foreground textual features and connexions that had not been highlighted by more traditional critical methodology.

Examples of a similar 'engagement' abound in the preceding pages. Gale Yee's interpretative stance has enabled her both to relate the text of Judges to *fiscal* issues in monarchic Israel and also to explore *gender* issues embedded in the text. Renita Weems declares her own, feminist, ideological perspective from the outset in her

¹¹⁹⁹ See Brett, 'Reading the Bible', especially pp. 69-70. Another example would be Clines's 'God in the Pentateuch' in *Interested Parties*, pp. 187-211.

¹²⁰⁰ I am indebted to John Vincent of the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, who in his seminars regularly applies the phrase 'imaginative points of contact' to the hermeneutical relationship between text and contemporary context.

¹²⁰¹ Gottwald *Tribes*, p. 16.

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article on Exodus. Through that interpretative lens, she foregrounds the stance of the midwives before the Pharaoh, without which there could have been no liberation for the Hebrews. Weems's proposition is that texts 'take sides in debates'.¹²⁰² She claims to discern voices in the debate to which male critical ears have been deaf.

Itumeleng Mosala criticises those liberation theologians who draw on liberation symbolism but fail to 'push those biblical symbols all the way back to their socio-historic foundations'. They are thus unable to 'grasp concretely the inner-biblical strands of oppression in all their stark multiplicity and contradictory interactions'.¹²⁰³ By using ideological-critical methodology, Mosala has sought to remedy this situation, to grasp 'new relations between old facts' that will break free from the stranglehold of western critical ideology¹²⁰⁴ *and also from the ideological form of texts themselves*. Mosala's aim is to develop a hermeneutic of liberation, built on *structural* analysis of both the text and of the contemporary black socio-historical context.

While the work of each of these authors is not without shortcomings, as indicated in the more detailed studies above, their approaches undoubtedly deserve to be honed and developed. In particular, they have demonstrated how readers who themselves are on the margins of the biblical-critical hegemony can find a fruitful engagement with voices from the margins of the text. Far from leading up an interpretative cul-de-sac, ideological critical methodologies, arguably, have rescued biblical criticism from the cul-de-sac of a traditional historical and source criticism that is unrelated to the actual issues and struggles of the contemporary world.

6.206 Has ideological criticism opened up fruitful new avenues of interpretation or has it simply enabled critics to adapt the text to their own interpretative bias?

Questions might well be asked as to the legitimacy of ideological-critical approaches if, in fact, commentators simply use the text as a mirror to reflect their own ideological holdings and biases. Do feminists use ideological criticism as a means of making the text say what they want it to say on the subject of gender relations? Is Mosala's reading from the 'underside' of the text an artificial device to emancipate texts that, in fact, 'cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberative texts'?¹²⁰⁵ Clearly, there are dangers of what used to be called *eisegesis*, of reading one's own ideological position into the text and then claiming biblical authority for it. On the other hand, those who belong to the established critical tradition have long brought *their* own ideological holdings to bear, even though they were unaware or unwilling to admit that they were doing so. A more pertinent question is whether ideological-critical methodology has opened up legitimate new avenues of *exegesis*.

Many of the studies critiqued in the preceding pages have uncovered issues and connexions that had previously passed unnoticed or without comment when viewed through the lens of traditional scholarship. Different things jump out of the page at

¹²⁰² Weems, 'Hebrew Women', p. 25.

¹²⁰³ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 31-32.

¹²⁰⁴ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 4.

¹²⁰⁵ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 30 (my emphasis). Terry Eagleton's article on Jonah serves perhaps as a different kind of example of an author who uses the text as a mirror image of the ideological polemics of his own scholarly discipline. See below, appendix 2, pp. 274-77.

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this new generation of scholars, who look at the text from a new angle, through a new ideological prism, feminist, liberationist, post-colonialist, or whatever. Ideological-critical methodology has provided significant tools and methods for these new perspectives to be illuminated and developed.

6.207 Does ideological criticism facilitate ‘imaginative points of connexion’ between the text and our contemporary agenda or does it simply give free rein to subjective application?

One of the complaints often heard in faith communities is of the *irrelevance* of biblical scholarship to twenty-first century issues and concerns. Ideological criticism facilitates a two-way engagement of the text with the contemporary agenda. Mark Brett’s work draws on contemporary post-colonial experience to illuminate issues of ethnic exclusiveness behind the text of Genesis, which in turn find application in contemporary scenarios. Itumeleng Mosala’s article on Esther seeks an engagement with the contemporary plight of black, female victims of oppression. In a different vein, David Clines’s ‘bespoke interpretation’ is an attempt to engage the biblical text with issues of actual concern to different reader-groups, while maintaining scholarly integrity.

Imaginative points of connexion between the text and the contemporary agenda need not be *imaginary*. In ideological criticism, unlike some reader-response approaches, the points of contact are earthed in the text and in the materiality of the text’s production. Ideological-critical methodology should be a defence against interpretation that is simply imaginary or fanciful. The aim is to precipitate a genuine dialogue between the multi-faceted world of the ancient text and the multi-faceted contemporary world of the interpreter.

6.208 Has ideological criticism opened the eyes of interpreters to their own ideological predispositions or has it needlessly pulled the rug from under all genuine attempts at objectivity?

All scholars carry ideological baggage. What we see in a text is largely determined by our life-experience, our gender, our social position, our political affiliations, our theological predispositions – our ‘location’. Furthermore, there is an element of self-interest in all criticism and in all scholarly publication. In the words of the Bible and Culture Collective, there can be no ‘innocent’ reading that is not already ideological.¹²⁰⁶

Scholarship has come a long way since Albright’s prejudice against ‘inferior’ peoples was passed off as ‘impartial’ scholarship.¹²⁰⁷ However, there is still a lack of awareness of the ideological factors influencing scholarship. Keith Whitelam, for instance, argues that the debate over the three models of the settlement of Canaan, though conducted with a ‘vener of scholarly objectivity’, has had as much to do with

¹²⁰⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 4

¹²⁰⁷ The relevant quotation is: ‘From the impartial [sic] standpoint of a philosopher of history, it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type should vanish before a people of superior potentialities’ (quoted in Whitelam, *Invention of Ancient Israel*, pp. 83-84).

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‘important questions of contemporary identity and power’ as with disinterested reconstruction of the past.¹²⁰⁸

Iain Provan points to ongoing claims within historical-critical scholarship to scholarly objectivity – claims that, in Provan’s view, serve as a disguise for ideological opposition to any form of confessionalism.¹²⁰⁹ It is surely significant that it is from the pen of a *conservative* theologian that we find a call for ‘an intellectually liberal, pluralist, broad world, where different philosophies and beliefs ... are accepted as valid’. The warning from Frederic Jameson is worth repeating here: ‘In my experience ... most of the people who call themselves pluralists are absolutely intolerant of other kinds of interpretation’.¹²¹⁰

It is part of Clines’s ‘crusade’ to expose what are in effect bespoke interpretations, tailor-made to the market place *but which masquerade as scholarly objectivity*.¹²¹¹ He complains that the authors of introductions and commentaries keep themselves hidden, ‘implicitly representing the contents ... as impersonal, objective, normative scholarship’,¹²¹² when in fact such detached objectivity is an impossibility.

This is not to say that critics are *totally* conditioned by their personal ideological holdings. Those with a similar biography will not necessarily arrive at the same conclusions.¹²¹³ Mark Brett strenuously resists the conclusion that a *reasonable* scholarly objectivity is unattainable; and he further argues that a proper objectivity need not require ‘the total eclipse of a reader’s subjectivity’.¹²¹⁴ Instead, these autobiographical factors should form an *explicit* ingredient in the interpretative *conversation* between commentator and text.

Ideological criticism has undoubtedly given a fillip to a growing tendency for scholars to be ‘up front’ about their personal ideological holdings. Pechansky even advocates the ingenious, Derridean, device of introducing the writer’s ideological position ‘under erasure’. A major problem with this tendency, however, is that what we know of the ideological holdings of commentators is limited to what they choose to reveal. It remains a strong possibility that those aspects of their ideological holdings that writers choose not to tell us, the ‘absences’ and ‘not saids’ of which they may not even be consciously aware, may have more influence on their interpretative

¹²⁰⁸ See above, footnote 155, p. 38.

¹²⁰⁹ The biblical text, he argues, is ‘treated with a scepticism quite out of proportion to that which is evident when any of the other data relating to Israel’s history are being considered’. For example, of Philip Davies he maintains: ‘The reality is ... that the approach to historiography that Davies advocates with such passion is no less representative of a confessional stance or ideology, *is indeed no more free of unverifiable presuppositions*, than those other approaches he so vehemently attacks’ (Provan, ‘Ideologies, Literary and Critical’, p. 600 [my emphasis]).

¹²¹⁰ Jameson, ‘Conversation with Frederic Jameson’, p. 231. He continues: ‘In my experience I am the only true pluralist I have ever met. Unlike the pluralists, I do happen to believe in something, or I am willing to admit I do’.

¹²¹¹ Clines goes so far as to insist that ‘the bonhomie that passes for scholarly interchange in the corridors of international congresses’ must not be allowed to stand in the way of exposing this tendency (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 93).

¹²¹² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 16.

¹²¹³ Eagleton makes a similar point in *Ideology*, p. 206.

¹²¹⁴ neither ‘the focussed questions of an explicit interpretative tradition’ nor even ‘the customarily unacknowledged backgrounds of culture, gender, class and institutional matrixes that are inevitably part of a reader’s subjectivity’ (Brett, ‘Reading the Bible’, pp. 48-49).

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perspective than factors that are declared up front. For example, I have drawn attention above to the extent to which Robert Carroll trails personal political prejudice across his supposedly objective scholarship.¹²¹⁵

6.209 Has ideological criticism exposed flaws and fallacies in traditional approaches to interpretation or have its proponents recklessly deconstructed methodologies that have stood the test of time?

One of the most trenchant criticisms of traditional historical criticism comes from Walter Brueggemann, who writes:

It is increasingly clear that historical criticism is no objective, disinterested tool of interpretation, but it has become a way to ... explain away from the text all the hurts and hopes that do not conform to *the ideology of objectivity*. In the end the text ... becomes an echo of the passionless containment of knowledge by the teaching, interpreting monopoly. ... The voiceless text has been made into a silent support for the status quo ... numbed to protest, resistant to alternative, and all in the interest of objectivity.¹²¹⁶

Gunn and Fewell have also mounted a wholesale rejection of historical criticism on similar ideological grounds.¹²¹⁷

Not all ideological critics have been so negative about historical criticism. The early exponents, such as Norman Gottwald, accepted the historical and source critical methodologies of their day. Itumeleng Mosala largely uses the traditional methods of historical and source criticism, integrating them with his liberation hermeneutics of suspicion. He has demonstrated that it is possible for historical-critical methodology and ideological-critical approaches to co-exist in a constructive way.

However, from the postmodern perspective of the Bible and Culture Collective, the dominant methodologies of historical criticism have proved to be 'the major obstacle to making any sense of the Bible's ongoing formative influence over culture and society'.¹²¹⁸ Historical criticism has often 'left unexamined its own critical and theoretical assumptions as well as the cultural conditions that produced, sustained and validated them'.¹²¹⁹

The scholar who most vehemently resists this critique of traditional criticism is James Barr.¹²²⁰ He criticises revisionist historians, for example, for what he regards as their 'overuse' of the concept of ideology. In Barr's view they are 'biased to produce results that point towards ideology' and away from historicity.¹²²¹

The problems with traditional historical criticism can be summed up under three headings. First, traditional historical criticism is closely associated with notions of the *unbiased neutrality of scholarship* and with a search for *one single interpretative conclusion*. The traditional methods are not without value but they have become tainted by ideological assumptions that are out of favour in the current postmodern climate.

¹²¹⁵ See especially Carroll, 'Representation', p. 8 and my comments above, p. 214.

¹²¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 64-65.

¹²¹⁷ See the discussion above, p. 45.

¹²¹⁸ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 1.

¹²¹⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 2.

¹²²⁰ See above, pp. 45-49.

¹²²¹ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 83.

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Secondly, historical criticism is closely associated with the scholarly hegemony, with those who control the university jobs, the selection of material for the journals, and the output of the publishing houses. Resistance to this hegemony has led to the founding of new journals such as *Semeia*. More recently, traditional journals are less unwilling to accept articles in an ideological-critical vein. However, it is significant that the Bible and Cultural Collective in 2001 still felt the need for a 'collective bargaining' approach to challenge the prevailing hegemony.

Thirdly, historical criticism and its associated methodologies are increasingly being dismissed because of their *irrelevance*. Their methods might be likened to a critique of a famous tapestry that is confined to discussion of the type and colour of thread and the technicalities of production, without standing back to consider the audience-impact of the tapestry as a whole. For the activist, Marxist or otherwise, historical criticism does not advance the cause or enable the struggle. For the feminist, historical criticism has not challenged the endemic patriarchy of the texts. For ordinary believers in a faith community, historical criticism has not engaged the biblical text with issues that matter to them in their everyday world.

It should be acknowledged, however, that historical critics have become more aware of the ideological factors that consciously or unconsciously condition even the most genuine attempts at scholarly objectivity. The new historical criticism has moved away from the assumption of a single correct interpretative approach. This move has in large part been due to the influence of ideological-critical thinking, as, for example, with David Clines, who has moved a long way from his early historical-critical work.¹²²²

However, the *goals* of even new historical criticism and those of ideological criticism remain fundamentally different. Sheila Briggs observes:

To hold oneself morally accountable as a scholar to the experiences of a socially marginalised group, as the group itself articulates them, and to consider the ideological effect of one's research as part of one's scholarly results, is a goal sought by many engaged in ideological criticism of the Bible.¹²²³

This has not typically been the goal even of the new historical criticism.¹²²⁴

Overall, then, historical-critical approaches can no longer sustain a role as the *main* or *primary* methodologies in biblical scholarship. To become relevant, they must form part of a more comprehensive interpretative strategy, of which ideological-critical awareness will form an all-important dimension. Those who practise historical criticism must be prepared to subject themselves to an ideological metacriticism of their aims and motivations as well as their biases and predispositions. As Robert Carroll has stressed, it is not just the text and the interpretative communities of the past but also the later teaching guilds right down to present-day scholarship that 'all become necessary subjects of the *Ideologiekritik* enterprise'.¹²²⁵ Even those who

¹²²² See above, note 803.

¹²²³ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 17.

¹²²⁴ In the words of David Clines: 'Historical criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism always read from right to left, asking as they do about origins, intentions, and effects, but never, in principle, critiquing them. So too does rhetorical criticism, with its concern for the words on the page ... but with a studied unconcern for meaning or value' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 26).

¹²²⁵ Carroll, 'Ideology', pp. 309-11.

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regard themselves primarily as historians, rather than biblical critics, must take full account of the ideological nature not just of texts but also of the whole interpretative tradition. Ideological-critical awareness must therefore be an essential hand-maiden of those who practice both 'new' historicism and 'new' criticism.

6.210 How does one reckon with the inevitably ideological nature of ideological criticism itself? Has ideological criticism undermined the prevailing hegemony within Biblical Studies only to impose a new political (or ideological) correctness of its own?

Many of those who have been in the forefront of ideological criticism within Biblical Studies have done so with an explicitly ideological agenda of their own. Norman Gottwald adopted a Marxist perspective. Gale Yee makes clear that issues of gender-relations are an important determinant of her ideological agenda. Itumeleng Mosala sets out his ideological stall as from a black theology-of-liberation perspective.¹²²⁶ Renita Weems declares her black-feminist ideology at the beginning of her article. Mark Brett and Robert Carroll both contend that their own background experience of contestation or struggle gives them an enhanced awareness of this dimension in the text. The Bible and Culture Collective further notes that the various definitions of 'ideology' that abound are all marked by vested interests and are 'as "ideological" as ideological criticism itself'.¹²²⁷

An example of the ideological use of biblical criticism is the treatment of the Exodus narrative. In early liberation theology, there was a simplistic identification of the slave context of the ancient Hebrews with modern contexts of oppression. However, this is not the only identification possible, as the Native American scholar, Robert Warrior has made clear. From a Native American perspective, the natural identification is with the plight of the indigenous Canaanite population.¹²²⁸ Ideological criticism should seek to bring out all 'those voices which have been subject to suppression, marginalisation, even exclusion and violence'.¹²²⁹

The Bible and Culture Collective, however, cite *developed* liberation hermeneutic as a key form of ideological criticism, in particular, 'readings from below', in which readers attempt to interpret the Bible out of their own concrete, political, economic, and social circumstances. Marxist or otherwise, liberation readings are constantly 'pushing against the boundaries of the text'.¹²³⁰ The Collective insist that 'it is incumbent on ideological critics to subject their approaches to critical self-appraisal to expose their own agendas, knowing all the while that it is impossible to expose everything completely'.¹²³¹

The danger is that an ideologically driven agenda may come to impose a whole new hegemony of political (or ideological) correctness on scholarship. Is the day coming when it will be impossible to have an article published in the major journals if it does

¹²²⁶ He makes a careful distinction between *liberation theology* and *theology of liberation*. See Mosala, 'Implications of the Text of Esther', p. 129.

¹²²⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 272.

¹²²⁸ Warrior, 'Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians', p. 265.

¹²²⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 284.

¹²³⁰ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 281.

¹²³¹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 280.

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not conform to the new dogmas of the various feminist, liberationist, and post-colonialist schools? Will a reverse discrimination now apply to applicants for academic posts if they do not conform to the new ideological correctness of the age?¹²³²

Robert Carroll points to contemporary Bible *translation* as an example of the imposition of a new ideological correctness, for example, insistence on inclusive or gender-free language in translation where this is not justified by the underlying Hebrew text. To what extent is it legitimate in translation to adapt the text to contemporary ideological sensibilities?¹²³³ However desirable it may seem to some to use *translation* as a means of making the Bible conform to the canons of twenty-first century political correctness, Carroll is surely right in his insistence that this practice represents a form of ideologically inspired *distortion* of the text. It also begs further questions of the extent to which translations are influenced by a wide range of other, less overt, ideological factors to do with the ideological correctness of the age.¹²³⁴

James Barr points to a whole new ideologically-charged vocabulary pervading Biblical Studies, for example, the frequent use of 'literary elite'. He further rejects the presuppositions often underlying ideological criticism that no one ever does anything except out of self or group interest and that everything can be reduced to questions of power and wealth.

Part of the task of the ideological critic is to expose ideology that is masquerading as truth. Renita Weems has perceptively drawn attention to the ideological dilemma for those involved in the underside of the struggle, in circumstances in which 'truth' is defined by those who are in power.¹²³⁵ James Barr also draws attention to the conflicts that may arise between *ideology* and *truth* in a contemporary context. He maintains that 'the role of ideology can be properly ... understood only when it is balanced by a concept of truth that is not defined by racial, ethnic, or other identity'.¹²³⁶ Undoubtedly, there is a need to resist claims that one particular interpretative perspective represents *the* truth over against all others, whether within the ecclesiastical community or the traditional academic hegemony. However, this need not mean that the notion of truth, or striving after truth, should be abandoned altogether, so that truth, so to speak, is thrown out with the ideological bathwater. One of Robert Carroll's most challenging conclusions in his series of articles on *Ideologiekritik* is as follows:

I do believe that truth, which may be defined as the opposite of ideology (in its bad sense), may be discovered and lived (though with great difficulty). ... There is that kind of truth which only yields to hard struggle, much searching, and the lifelong quest for critical realism.

¹²³² I have already noted anecdotal examples of this tendency in the questions put to applicants applying for junior academic posts in the UK. Time will tell.

¹²³³ He rightly has strong words of criticism for the New Jerusalem Bible on this score:

It is a good example of naked ideology (or perhaps a counter-ideology) in action: it distorts and changes the text in order to suit a contemporary consumerist ideology. It strikes me as an outrage against history, integrity, and the scholarly vocation. It deliberately and for ideological reasons interferes with the text (Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 89).

¹²³⁴ See the fuller discussion of Carroll's article, below, appendix 3, pp. 277-79.

¹²³⁵ See Weems, 'Hebrew Women', pp. 29-30.

¹²³⁶ Barr, *History and Ideology*, p. 136-37.

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Carroll acknowledges, however, that truth is ‘a very complex matter and in these postmodern times its definition, evaluation, and defence are much more difficult than used to be imagined to be the case’.¹²³⁷

It seems to me that the Guild must resist attempts at an ideological use of ideological criticism to impose a new set of absolutes, a new set of dogmas that one dare not question or transgress. Even in a postmodern environment, dogmas of political or ideological correctness arise. For those of us who approach the Old Testament from a faith perspective, the quest for truth through the maze of ideology remains paramount, even though we must equally resist the temptation to claim a monopoly on truth for our own theological standpoint.

6.211 Has ideological criticism broken the grip of patriarchal and oppressive interpretation of the bible without enabling a liberative programme of action?

Much ideological criticism has been directed against patriarchy and oppressive ideology enshrined in the biblical text and against the use of the Bible as a means of undergirding oppression. There are those who hold that the biblical narratives are *irredeemably* oppressive and who would dispense completely with any notion of biblical authority or canonicity.¹²³⁸ On the other hand, the majority of the scholars critiqued in this volume have held that it is possible, *by means of an ideological-critical hermeneutic*, to penetrate through the Bible’s cultural presuppositions and to engage the biblical text with contemporary issues in constructive ways. Several have sought to achieve this by adopting the Eagletonian device of ‘reading against the grain’ of the text (or, in David Clines’s adaptation, ‘reading from right to left’), in order to access underlying themes that are liberative and constructive. Mosala has sought to develop a hermeneutical framework that can constructively engage underlying liberative themes with the world of contemporary struggle, without the need for the critic to remain captive to the surface ideology of oppression.¹²³⁹

Ideological criticism, at least in social-critical mode, demands an *ethical* response to the text. David Clines argues strongly that *understanding* cannot be the final goal of interpretation: there is an essential further step of *critique* or *evaluation*, which is a specific task of the ideological critic.¹²⁴⁰ The ethical standard by which the text is evaluated will depend on the ideological holdings of the author: Marxist, Christian, or whatever.

The Bible and Culture Collective similarly argues that ideological criticism ‘at root has to do with the ethical character and response to the text and to those “lived relations” that are represented and reproduced in the act of reading’.¹²⁴¹ The Collective take this a step further, arguing that ideological criticism should not merely be evaluative but should serve as a *catalyst for change*:

As an ethically grounded act, ideological reading intends to raise critical consciousness about what is just and unjust about those lived relations ... and to change those power relationships

¹²³⁷ Carroll, ‘Representation’, p. 13.

¹²³⁸ See, for example, Exum, ‘Ethics of Biblical Violence against Women’.

¹²³⁹ Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 32.

¹²⁴⁰ He maintains: ‘We have a responsibility ... to evaluate the Bible’s claims and assumptions, and if we abdicate that responsibility, whether as scholars or readers-in-general of the Bible, we are in my opinion guilty of an ethical fault’ (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 20). See also above, note 803.

¹²⁴¹ *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 275 (my emphasis).

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for the better. It challenges readers to accept political responsibility ... for the world in which they live.¹²⁴²

John Rogerson has also called for an ideological criticism that has ‘implications for praxis’, though he warns against ‘the kind of ideological criticism that adopts the holier-than-thou perspective of today’s world in condemning such things as patriarchy or class divisions in ancient Israel’, an approach that he describes as ‘merely another instance of domination and self-deception’.¹²⁴³

The question arises as to what extent ideological criticism has actually proved to be a stimulus for action, a catalyst for change in the contemporary world. The worldwide response to Gottwald’s *Tribes* is one significant positive indicator, though Gottwald himself warns that the drawing of religious inspiration from the Old Testament text ‘will be romantic and utopian’ unless firmly grounded in ideological-critical methodology, ‘resolutely correlated to both the ancient and the contemporary cultural-material and social-organisational foundations’.¹²⁴⁴ Mark Brett has sought to illumine the interpretation of the Old Testament from the experience of post-colonialism and simultaneously to use the text to illumine and empower the contemporary post-colonial struggle. Gale Yee and Renita Weems have similarly sought to engage texts with contemporary issues of gender and power. Norman Habel’s *Six Biblical Land Ideologies* sought to illuminate issues of debate over aboriginal land-rights in Australia.

On the other hand, twenty years after the publication of Gottwald’s *Tribes*, Robert Carroll was still able to maintain that, though the Bible may have ‘dreams and fragments’ of liberation, it has ‘never generated an ideology of freedom’ other than of a metaphysical kind.¹²⁴⁵ For the collective authors of *The Postmodern Bible*, it is the task of ideological critics to challenge this state of affairs: they must enable the text to ‘connect specifically with issues of social justice, ethical action, and transformation?’¹²⁴⁶ The Collective refers to this as a question that ‘hounds’ ideological critics, as to how their conclusions might specifically connect with contemporary issues of social justice.¹²⁴⁷

It is inevitable that many in the academic community will not see programmatic action as part of their role. Indeed, many scholars have vested interests that render them irretrievably wedded to the status quo. Ideological criticism, however, has its roots in Marxism, and those in the Eagletonian and Jamesonian schools come already motivated for programmatic action. From their perspective, biblical criticism is not an end in itself but a means towards social change and engagement with issues of justice and power. Those whose motivation for Biblical Studies springs from their faith perspective, from some sense of the Bible as authoritative, should also be

¹²⁴² *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 275 (my emphasis).

¹²⁴³ Rogerson, ‘Potential of the Negative’, pp. 41-42.

¹²⁴⁴ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 706. Much of the feedback that Gottwald received contained accounts of ways in which his work had inspired and empowered those on the under-side of the struggle for justice and freedom in the Third World. See, for example, West, ‘*Tribes* in Africa’, which outlines the widespread reception of *Tribes* on the African continent.

Nearer home, Gottwald’s work has enabled people within faith communities to have a renewed awareness of the Old Testament as a charter for support for social action.

¹²⁴⁵ or at least not in the western, European tradition. See Carroll, ‘Infinity of Traces’, p. 39.

¹²⁴⁶ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 278.

¹²⁴⁷ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 278.

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inspired towards programmatic action by the results of ideological criticism. It will be a disappointment if ideological-critical insights are not, in the end, a major influence in galvanising faith communities into tangible support for the struggle for justice.

6.212 Has ideological criticism been a passing fad of the nineties or has it brought about a watershed in biblical criticism? Has it been neutralised by the rise of a *postmodern* agenda with its own associated critical methodologies?

It remains to be seen whether ideological criticism will secure a firm foothold within mainstream biblical criticism, or whether it will prove only to be a fashion of the moment. In the year 2000, Jonathan Dyck remarked:

One has to wonder ... whether or not ideological criticism lends itself to methodological domestication within Biblical Studies. The conceptual territory covered by the term 'ideology' and presupposed in the practice of critique is broad, uneven, and highly contested by social theorists themselves, all of which stands in the way of standardisation within Biblical Studies. Simply put, ideology, and ideological criticism, does and will continue to mean different things to different people both within and outside the guild.¹²⁴⁸

There is always the danger within biblical scholarship that ideas or methodologies are imported experimentally from other disciplines without a clear understanding of the wider ramifications of the theory or method within the originating discipline. Sometimes biblical scholarship takes over a 'new' theory only when it is already on the wane in the field from which it has been drawn. Ideological criticism found a niche within Biblical Studies during the mid to late 1990s. Yet, it is interesting that, as long ago as 1991, Terry Eagleton had already observed: 'The very notion of ideology has evaporated without trace from the writings of postmodernism and post-structuralism', despite the fact that 'the last decade has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of ideological movements throughout the world'. He continues:

Consider the following paradox. The last decade has witnessed a remarkable resurgence of ideological movements throughout the world. In the Middle East, Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as a potent political force. In the so called Third World, and in one region of the British Isles, revolutionary nationalism continues to join battle with the imperialist power. In some of the post-capitalist states of the Eastern bloc, a still tenacious neo-Stalinism remains locked in combat with an array of oppositional forces. The most powerful capitalist nation in history has been swept from end to end by a peculiarly noxious brand of Christian Evangelicalism. Throughout this period, Britain has suffered the most ideologically aggressive and explicit regime of living political memory, in a society which traditionally prefers its ruling values to remain oblique. Meanwhile, somewhere on the left bank, it is announced that the concept of ideology is now obsolete. ... How are we to account for this absurdity? Why is it that in a world racked by ideological conflict, the very notion of ideology has evaporated without trace from the writings of postmodernism and post-structuralism?¹²⁴⁹

Ideological criticism has developed in parallel with newer literary approaches to biblical texts,¹²⁵⁰ in which questions of historicity, together with the search for

¹²⁴⁸ Dyck, 'Map of Ideology', p. 108.

¹²⁴⁹ Eagleton, *Ideology: an Introduction*, p. xi.

¹²⁵⁰ For excellent surveys of new literary approaches see John Barton, *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*. A succinct summary of this and the other underlying tendencies of recent criticism is given in Barr, *History and Ideology*, pp. 21-24. Barr also comments on the important influence of canonical criticism, associated with the name of Brevard Childs, in focussing the attention of scholarship on the final form of the text. He also discusses some of the philosophical influences that underlie this new movement in literary criticism within Biblical Studies, not least that of Paul Ricoeur. Another important underlying influence has been the philosophy of H.G. Gadamer. For a discussion of

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underlying literary sources, are no longer regarded as of primary significance. These new approaches are closely entwined with the rise of postmodernism. For postmodernists, the central reality is power, not truth, which resonates with the focus of ideological criticism. With its emphasis on reading from the margins and through the cracks in the text, ideological criticism also has much in common with post-structuralism and deconstructionism.

However, despite the superficial similarities, Eagleton suggests that three key doctrines of postmodernism ‘have conspired to discredit the classical concept of ideology’:

The first of these doctrines turns on a rejection of the notion of representation – in fact a rejection of an *empiricist* model of representation, in which the representational baby has been nonchalantly slung out with the empiricist bathwater. The second involves an epistemological scepticism which would hold that the very act of identifying a form of consciousness as ideological entails some untenable notion of absolute truth. ... The third doctrine concerns a reformulation of the relations between rationality, interests, and power ... which is thought to render the whole notion of ideology redundant. Taken together, these three theses have been thought by some to dispose of the whole question of ideology.¹²⁵¹

However, Eagleton insists:

Taken as a whole ... this end-of-ideology thesis is vastly implausible. If it were true, it would be hard to know why so many individuals flock to church, wrangle over politics, care about what their children are being taught in school, and lose sleep over the steady erosion of the social services. The dystopian view that the typical citizen of advanced capitalism is the doped telly viewer is a myth, as the ruling class is itself uncomfortably aware.¹²⁵²

Eagleton further observes: ‘One can understand well enough how human beings may struggle and murder for good material reasons – reasons connected, for example, with their physical survival. It is much harder to grasp how they may come to do so in the name of something as apparently abstract as ideas’. Remarkably, however, ‘ideas are what men and women live by, and will occasionally die for’.¹²⁵³ The truth of Eagleton’s statement has since been most vividly illustrated in recent years by the September 11th (2001) and the ensuing ideological conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon.¹²⁵⁴

In an age so dominated by ideological issues, many of them of a specifically religious nature, ideological criticism will surely be an essential tool for those who seek to engage the Bible with the world of today. This perhaps partly explains why ideological criticism has come to the fore in Biblical Studies when it was already being eclipsed in the wider world of literary criticism.

the influence of Gadamer, Barr refers to James M. Robinson, *The New Hermeneutic* (New York, 1964) and Mark G. Brett, *Biblical Criticism in Crisis? The Impact of the Canonical Approach on Old Testament Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Reference should also be made directly to H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (ET, London: Sheed and Ward, 1975).

¹²⁵¹ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. xii.

¹²⁵² Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 42. He also rejects the theory that ideology has become an irrelevance for those who live under advanced capitalism, where politics has become ‘less a matter of preaching or indoctrination than technical management and manipulation’.

¹²⁵³ Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. xiii.

¹²⁵⁴ This final chapter was first drafted in Masar-e Shariff in Afghanistan in early 2004; and the present writer is all too aware at first hand of the outworking of religiously based ideological conflict.

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The interplay of Marxist-based ideological criticism and postmodernism within biblical criticism has proved significant. The two movements have in common that they are both concerned with issues of power and control and are resistant to the hegemony of the establishment. From both perspectives, biblical literature is approached with a hermeneutic of suspicion, in particular suspicion that the biblical text has served to undergird illegitimate power structures in both the ancient and the contemporary worlds. Reader-response criticism had already enabled the marginalised and the oppressed to engage with the text in a meaningful way. Post-structuralist deconstructionism appears on the face of it to serve well a Marxist agenda of undermining (or deconstructing) the prevailing hegemony.

However, there are fundamental differences in the deep structure of the two movements. Marxism aims at programmatic action for change, with clear goals, and a utopian vision. Postmodernism shies away from objective goals and utopian perspectives. Hence, Terry Eagleton has consistently mounted a sustained critique of postmodernism. For though postmodern perspectives may contain the *potential* for unravelling the conceptual undergirding of power, for Eagleton the movement has in fact undermined this struggle by denying the possibility of the coherent and unfolding political vision needed to challenge capitalism. Arguably, therefore, within Biblical Studies, it has been the undermining influence of the postmodern culture that has prevented ideological-critical approaches from sustaining a liberative programme of action.

However, it is significant in this regard that the collective authors of the *Postmodern Bible* have so comprehensively embraced an ideological-critical agenda, despite the avowedly postmodern context of their work. I have suggested that the Collective is, in a sense, post-postmodern in their call for programmatic action. It seems, therefore, that ideological-critical methods and approaches do still have an important role to play, as a counter to the lack of impetus to action that is a 'down-side' of the current postmodern ethos.

6.3 What has been the lasting impact of ideological criticism within Biblical Studies?

In the approaches surveyed above, ideological criticism has been applied for a variety of different purposes. In some cases, it has served a primarily antiquarian agenda, enabling the historian to read between the lines of the ancient text to a more nuanced understanding of ancient societies, with particular regard to issues of politics and power. Ideological-critical awareness has served the newer historicism well. Giovanni Garbini and Keith Whitelam have made use of ideological-critical insights as a means of uncovering 'excluded' histories. Walter Brueggemann has sought to expose 'theological claim functioning as a model of social control'¹²⁵⁵ and to challenge traditional interpretations that have bolstered the illegitimate use of power.

Ideological criticism has been a vital weapon in the armoury of those who have sought to pursue a biblical criticism through to programmatic action in the sphere of social justice. Even more than Brueggemann, Gottwald has called for an ideological

¹²⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, p. 111.

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critique of the Bible to serve as an impetus for faith communities towards involvement in the global struggle for justice.¹²⁵⁶ He stresses the importance of an ideological-critical approach if ancient texts are to speak across the centuries to contemporary issues, though warning that ‘it is a risky business to “summon up” powerful symbolism out of a distant past unless the symbol users are very self-conscious of their choices and applications, and fully aware of how their social struggle is like and unlike the social struggles of the architects of the symbols’.¹²⁵⁷

Gottwald had dedicated *Tribes* in the service of those who are ‘attempting a breakthrough towards a freer and fuller life based on equality and communal self-possession’. Roland Boer rightly remarks that it is Gottwald’s ‘linking of politics and scholarship that remains one of the signal achievements of his text, part of its claim to be a classic’.¹²⁵⁸ David Jobling refers to ‘Gottwald’ as ‘the name of a whole discourse utterly tied to praxis: a praxis of changing the world, of political liberation, of a day of justice; a discourse of how Biblical Studies may belong to such a praxis’.¹²⁵⁹ Others have been inspired by Gottwald’s vision, notably those who have written from a liberationist perspective, such as Mosala.

Ideological criticism has particularly served to expose the extent to which ancient texts have arisen as a result of power struggles, as attempts at the masking of conflict, injustice, and oppression. Clines stresses the ‘partisanship of every text’.¹²⁶⁰ Mosala seeks by means of ideological-critical methods to discern the ‘underside’ of the struggle within the text.¹²⁶¹ In most applications of ideological-critical methodology there is a focus on the ‘not-saids’ of the text, on perspectives visible only through the cracks and fissures, and on the ‘voices from the margins’, voices of underclasses, of women, of the conquered, of the oppressed. This approach has demonstrated the multi-dimensional and polyphonic nature of biblical texts, which has opened up a range of new interpretative possibilities.

Texts have ‘designs’ on readers, Clines observes. However, he maintains that it is possible for readers to resist the ideology of the text, to read against the grain.¹²⁶² The biblical text has been used across the centuries to undergird many oppressive structures and ideological criticism should be an antidote, a safeguard, against such misuse of ‘scripture’. For some critics, ideological criticism has enabled patriarchal and androcentric texts to be ‘redeemed’. Furthermore, the ‘silenced’ and the ‘marginalised’ in the text are at last allowed to speak, opening up a whole new dimension to the engagement of the biblical text with contemporary issues of justice and power.

¹²⁵⁶ What does this ancient Yahwism have to say to our modern situation? he asks. ‘There is but one context, maintains Gottwald, in which those ancient religious symbols can be employed today in anything like their full range and power, and that is in a *situation of social struggle, where people are attempting a breakthrough towards a freer and fuller life based on equality and communal self-possession*’ (Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 701 [Gottwald’s emphasis]).

¹²⁵⁷ Gottwald, *Tribes*, p. 706.

¹²⁵⁸ Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, p. 4.

¹²⁵⁹ Boer (ed.), *Tracking ‘The Tribes’*, p. 12.

¹²⁶⁰ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 132-33.

¹²⁶¹ See in particular, Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 101-53.

¹²⁶² Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 207.

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Ideological criticism has also concerned itself with the ideology of readers and commentators. Increasing emphasis on the role of the reader in the generation of meaning, along with rejection of the notion of the unbiased and neutral scholarly interpreter, has focussed attention on the ideological agendas that operate within the guild of biblical scholarship itself. Clines has emerged as a particularly vocal exponent of the need to critique the ideology of scholarly interpreters.¹²⁶³ Ordinary readers, he maintains, must be set free from the ideological holdings of the scholarly hegemony as much as they need to be set free from ecclesiastical domination.¹²⁶⁴ Similarly, for Robert Carroll, ideological criticism must focus on *the reading processes* involved in the study of the Bible.¹²⁶⁵

Penchansky rejects as futile any attempt to eliminate ideological bias among scholars by simply imposing 'ever harsher restrictions' on the critic. Penchansky's suggestion is that commentators should declare their ideological holdings 'under erasure'.¹²⁶⁶ Clines calls for commentators to offer an explicit critique of the text from their own ideological standpoint. In this, Clines is very much an heir to the Eagletonian position.¹²⁶⁷

The collective authors of *The Postmodern Bible* have provided a detailed *ideological* critique of contemporary biblical scholarship, in particular of the various newer forms of literary criticism that have arisen in the contemporary postmodern milieu. For the Collective, the notion of reading against the grain is not just confined to the reading of texts. Reading must also be against the grain of the established interpretative tradition and the prevailing scholarly hegemony – and collective resistance is needed to the hegemony that not only dominates the interpretative agenda but also controls the publishing houses and the academic job appointments.¹²⁶⁸

In summary, it may be said that while ideological criticism *as a distinct and separate methodology* is unlikely to become *the* main focus of biblical-critical methodology in the coming decades, it is arguable that no significant biblical criticism can now take place without serious critique of the ideological factors involved not only in the writing, publishing, and dissemination of texts but also in the interpretative tradition and the hegemony of contemporary scholarship. The tools and methodologies that have been developed within ideological criticism will be widely applied in conjunction with a wide variety of interpretative processes. Hence, ideological criticism is described by the Bible and Culture Collective as 'a criticism encompassing criticism'.¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶³ Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 18.

¹²⁶⁴ Hence we find Clines's (albeit tongue-in-cheek) call for a 'Bible Readers' liberation movement'.

See Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 23 and pp. 244-275.

¹²⁶⁵ Carroll, 'Infinity of Traces', p. 26.

¹²⁶⁶ Penchansky, 'Up for Grabs', p. 40.

¹²⁶⁷ For example, Eagleton has written:

Criticism is not a passage from text to reader, to collude with its object in a conspiracy of eloquence. Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its every letter) about which it is necessarily silent (Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology*, p. 43).

¹²⁶⁸ See *Postmodern Bible*, pp. 272-308.

¹²⁶⁹ *Postmodern Bible*, p. 285.

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Overall then, it can be said that the advent of ideological criticism has marked a significant watershed in the annals of biblical criticism from which there is no turning back.

Appendix 1

The Origins of Ideological Criticism in Biblical Studies: Sheila Briggs

Sheila Briggs traces the roots of ideological criticism of the Bible back as far as post-enlightenment biblical criticism, especially to early nineteenth century German biblical studies.¹²⁷⁰ It was as a result of the Enlightenment, Briggs maintains, that the Bible became a legitimate object of criticism. She writes:

As a result the Bible was integrated into modern culture and *made amenable to the interests of its modern interpreters*. It became an *ideological artifact* upon which the desires of an emergent middle class were inscribed. The transcendental origins of the sacred text wrote those desires into the reality of the world and its history, *so that, although bourgeois identity and sensibility were of recent date, they seemed always to have existed*.¹²⁷¹

However, as Briggs observes, this was to be a two-edged sword:

Biblical criticism was often a too transparent ideological practice. The truth, moral worth, and literary quality of the Bible were to be judged according to modern criteria, an exercise which not too subtly replaced the immediate authority of the Bible with the authority of its modern mediator, the biblical critic. ... The Bible was a sacred text because it embraced to an incomparable degree the sacred desires of the bourgeoisie. Yet at a stroke this robbed the Bible of its independent transcendental origins.¹²⁷²

This dilemma, according to Briggs, inevitably led to the rise of middle class pietism and evangelicalism, a movement that continues to flourish to this day, bitterly opposing modern biblical criticism:

Their contention that 'traditional values' (that is modern ideas of the western middle classes) are to be found literally prescribed in biblical texts is historical invention. But the conservative middle-class aspirations of these believers are more reliably served through such historical invention than through the laborious historical reconstructions of biblical criticism.¹²⁷³

It should be said, however, that while a certain middle-class pietism may indeed have origins such as Briggs describes, her sweeping dismissal of evangelicalism as no more than a self-interested mechanism to bolster middle class hegemony shows little acquaintance or understanding of what evangelicalism stands for and ignores the contribution to social justice of many evangelicals.¹²⁷⁴

Critical methods, however, were 'essential ammunition' for the middle class in their struggle against 'older authoritarian aristocratic cultures'. 'Yet before Marx as well as after him, bourgeois scholars had realised that critical methods could cut the ideological ground from under their feet'.¹²⁷⁵ Much of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie continued to look to religion for objective grounding of values, whereas for Briggs, quoting from Eagleton: 'The only compelling moral ideology is one which succeeds in grounding itself to some degree in real political conditions; if it fails to do so, its idealism will prove a constant source of political embarrassment'.¹²⁷⁶

According to Eagleton's analysis, which Briggs follows, religion had become a prominent form of 'the aesthetic', its role in society being 'to mediate between the public realm of political struggle and economic competitiveness and a private realm of domestic harmony'.¹²⁷⁷ Wilhelm de Wette, who is

¹²⁷⁰ Sheila Briggs, 'The Deceit of the Sublime: an Investigation into the Origins of Ideological Criticism of the Bible in Early Nineteenth Century German Biblical Studies', *Semeia* 59 (1992), pp. 1-23.

¹²⁷¹ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 1 (my emphasis).

¹²⁷² Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 1.

¹²⁷³ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 2.

¹²⁷⁴ As we approach the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 2007, mention might particularly be made of Wilberforce and Shaftsbury.

¹²⁷⁵ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 2.

¹²⁷⁶ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 3, quoting from Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 62-63.

¹²⁷⁷ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 3.

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often regarded as the founder of biblical studies as a modern critical discipline, thus formulated a 'biblical aesthetic' in which he attempted to 'make the results of critical scholarship the basis for a more refined and more satisfying religious experience'.¹²⁷⁸ Against 'the rhetoric of a reactionary theology and politics', de Wette wanted to 'establish one that acknowledged the cognitive claims of the Enlightenment but without its prejudices against the aesthetic / religious realm'.¹²⁷⁹ He sought after 'the serene, undismayed view of the world, which lets us intuit the eternal purposefulness in the temporal phenomenon, *a Kingdom of God on earth*'.¹²⁸⁰ Critical methods should be harnessed in the service of this 'sublime' against 'a public life dissolved and emptied of ideas and elation, a selfish and hedonistic orientation to business and gain, tastelessness and indifference towards the fine arts'. Briggs concludes: 'De Wette's aesthetics, although not themselves devoid of any ideological function, were able to unmask the ideology of criticism itself'.¹²⁸¹

Having traced back the roots of ideological criticism as far back as de Wette, Briggs then moves on to examine the contribution of Ferdinand Christian Bauer and his pupil David Friedrich Straus. The political consequences of critical doubt about the Bible were, she contends, most sharply to be seen in the controversy surrounding Straus's *Life of Jesus*. Bauer identified this as the point at which anti-critical ecclesiastical reaction began to set in. The ascendancy of orthodoxy in the church coincided with political repression. Briggs concludes: 'Radical biblical criticism was thus from its inception ideological criticism'.¹²⁸²

Turning to contemporary ideological criticism, Briggs asserts that there are three significant characteristics that distinguish it from the emergent nineteenth century criticism she has described. Firstly, there is no longer a sharp polarisation of aesthetics and criticism:

Ideological criticism of the Bible today can bring new socio-historical and literary approaches to biblical texts together because it utilises theoretical materials where this is already done, especially (but not exclusively) the Marxist literary criticism of Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton.¹²⁸³

Secondly, those involved in contemporary ideological criticism of the Bible tend not to adopt a 'theoretical perspective *in toto*'. Rather, they select from a variety of 'constructs which they think will elucidate a specific textual complex or hermeneutical point'.¹²⁸⁴

Thirdly, the political situation, and in particular the role of the state, has changed since the days of the Prussian Monarchy. We tend today to talk about 'social control and cultural hegemony' rather than simply about the 'state'. She goes on:

Ideological criticism of the Bible has been profoundly influenced by the liberation theologies of the last quarter century. Like newer theology since Schleiermacher, these newer theologies start from human experience, but not from a generic one and not from a generic religious one; instead they proceed from the experience of a specific group of the socially marginalised.¹²⁸⁵

She makes clear, however, that this has not proved to be a unified venture:

In the case of an authoritative social text such as the Bible, the previous modern appeals to experience in its interpretation have been joined by explicit recognition of a politics of interpretation, of the relationship between claims to social power and the experiences held to be validated in the biblical text. The Bible has become a cultural artifact on which many different social groups seek to inscribe their desires. A wide variety of politics interrogate its text, wanting to discover there how the several exercises of power coagulated in the formation, transmission, and interpretation of its writings.¹²⁸⁶

¹²⁷⁸ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 3, referring to Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Über Religion und Theologie: Erläuterungen zu seinen Lehrbuche der Dogmatic* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1815).

¹²⁷⁹ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 5.

¹²⁸⁰ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 5, quoting from de Wette, *Religion und Theologie*, pp. 59-60.

¹²⁸¹ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 9, quoting from de Wette, *Religion und Theologie*, p. 122. Briggs continues with a summary of the criticism of de Wette by Ferdinand Christian Bauer and the Tübingen school, who 'could see no value in aesthetic feelings and intuitions when their content could not be cognitively validated'.

¹²⁸² Briggs, p. 12. See Ferdinand Christian Bauer, *Kirkengeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben* (ed. Klaus Scholder; Volume 4; Stuttgart: 1970), pp. 504-505.

¹²⁸³ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 16.

¹²⁸⁴ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 16. She goes on:

They are not really enamoured of the 'system' as their German precursors were. This seems to be in large part a difference between the Anglo-American and German scholarly *mentalitas*. There is of course a danger in an eclectic appropriation of insights from here and there without integrating them into an overall theoretical framework.

¹²⁸⁵ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 17.

¹²⁸⁶ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 19.

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Her final conclusion:

An adequate ideological criticism cannot be satisfied with demystifying ascriptions of power to God and to agents of the divine in the biblical texts. ... The definitions of power and subjectivity, of the political and experience ... and the political reality in which they are embedded, mould critical biblical inquiry and its underlying sensibilities today. Only when they themselves are subject to ideological critique can we speak some truth in language as well as uncover its falsehoods. Only then will the Bible be freed from the alternatives of being enclosed in its sacred origins remote from ordinary human experience or of being the sacralisation of power.¹²⁸⁷

Briggs demonstrates in this article that ideological criticism has roots within the longer tradition of biblical scholarship, especially 19th century German scholarship; and that it is therefore not *just* a phenomenon that has been imported from Marxism or from recent literary-critical theory. On the other hand, much of what she has to say could be said of critical scholarship in general and not just of ideological criticism in particular. She has not fully tackled the question of how contemporary ideological criticism as a specific phenomenon came to flower from those particular roots, though she correctly identifies liberation theology as one major impetus to the development of ideological criticism within biblical studies. Liberation theology was indeed a major catalyst in foregrounding issues of power, both the issues of power inscribed in texts and the issues of power surrounding the interpretative process. While ideological criticism may owe much in terms of methodology to non-biblical influences from Marxism or elsewhere, the primary causes for its emergence lie in the conjunction of traditional biblical tradition with the new political environment of the 20th century, with liberation theology as a major catalyst.

Of the several pointers for contemporary scholarship that Briggs seeks to emphasise, the following is perhaps the most significant:

To hold oneself morally accountable as a scholar to the experiences of a socially marginalised group, as the group itself articulates them, and to consider the ideological effect of one's research as part of one's scholarly results, is a goal sought by many engaged in ideological criticism of the Bible.¹²⁸⁸

This has not been the goal of post-enlightenment historical criticism. The quotation sums up well one of the major factors which distinguishes contemporary ideological criticism from traditional historical criticism. It is doubtful if such a goal has ever before been the declared aim of mainstream biblical scholarship. Hopefully, the goal set out by Briggs in the quotation may in the 21st century come to the fore within mainstream scholarship and not just as the 'hobby horse' of those few who call themselves ideological critics.

Appendix 2

Terry Eagleton on Jonah

An interesting example of ideological-criticism-with-a-difference comes from outside the world of biblical scholarship, from the pen of Terry Eagleton himself.¹²⁸⁹ His essay on Jonah¹²⁹⁰ is a reading of

¹²⁸⁷ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 20.

¹²⁸⁸ Briggs, 'Deceit of the Sublime', p. 17. A good example of an attempt to put this into practice is the work of Shigeyuki Nakanose, whose *Josiah's Passover* was produced in close association with, and accountability to, the South American base communities with whom he worked.

¹²⁸⁹ Eagleton, who is a professor of English at Oxford, and foremost among English-speaking Marxist literary critics, has not written much in the realm of religion, apart from some early writings from the perspective of left-wing Catholicism. He has consistently mounted a sustained critique of postmodernism. For though postmodern perspectives may contain the *potential* for unravelling the conceptual undergirding of power, for Eagleton the movement has, in fact, undermined this struggle by denying the possibility of the coherent and unfolding political vision needed to challenge capitalism.

¹²⁹⁰ Terry Eagleton, 'J.L. Austin and the Book of Jonah' in Jobling, Pippin, and Schleifer (eds.). *Postmodern Bible Reader*, pp. 177-182; reprinted from: R.M. Schwartz (ed.). *The Bible and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 231-236.

For a contrasting article on Jonah, see Kenneth M. Craig Jr, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993; 2nd edn., Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). Craig considers Jonah in the light of Aristotle's *Poetics* and other classical literary traditions. Though Craig

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Jonah from his own personal ideological perspective, making particular use of J.L. Austin's speech-act theory and also drawing on the American arch-deconstructor, Paul de Man. For Eagleton, the Book of Jonah is not about unity but about chaos, 'the vertiginous collapse of meaning'.¹²⁹¹ Everything in the text is questionable and unstable.

Eagleton describes Jonah as a 'surrealist farce'. This is particularly clear in the final scene where 'God fools around with him briefly, sending a plant to shade him, then a worm to devour the plant, then a sultry wind to make him faint from heat, and finally treats him to a short homily about his mercy'.¹²⁹² Why does Jonah not go to Nineveh in the first place? It is not that he is afraid for his life, as is made clear in the storm scene. According to Eagleton, Jonah regards God as 'a spineless liberal, given to hollow authoritarian threats, who would never have the guts to perform what he promises'. Jonah 'understands the divine psychology too well', so why bother to make the journey? Jonah can foresee the outcome, and he is angry that God cannot see it himself. 'If only he [God] wasn't so mystified by his own macho image of himself'.¹²⁹³

Jonah is thrown overboard to force God to save him. If God can find a great fish to save Jonah, surely he can find a way out for Nineveh. Jonah's risk of drowning is subtle flattery of God, a form of emotional blackmail. 'Disobeying God is a crafty way of telling him what a nice chap he is'.¹²⁹⁴ In the end Jonah has to go to Nineveh, where he perfunctorily plays at being a prophet and is amazed that it works! 'God is using Jonah as a fall guy to get him off the hook of his own soft-bellied liberalism'. Jonah has been used in 'the perpetuation of divine false consciousness',¹²⁹⁵ leaving him looking like a complete idiot. The only successful prophet is an ineffectual one, whose warnings fail to materialise.

'All good prophets are false prophets, undoing their utterances in the very act of producing them'.¹²⁹⁶ Jonah's journey was superfluous, because God knew the outcome!

Eagleton observes:

In terms of Austin's *How to do things with Words*,¹²⁹⁷ prophetic utterances of Jonah's sort are 'constative' (descriptive of some real or possible state of affairs) only in ... their surface grammar; as far as their 'deep structure' goes, they actually belong to Austin's class of 'performatives', linguistic acts which get something done. What they get done is to produce a state of affairs in which the state of affairs they describe will not be the case. *Declarations of imminent catastrophe cancel themselves out, containing as they do a contradiction between what they say and what they do.* In this sense they exactly fit the prototype of what the deconstructionist critic Paul de Man ... calls a 'literary' enunciation ... the kind of speech act within which the grammatical and the rhetorical [or performative] are somehow at odds, and which therefore either subvert what they say by what they do or undo what they do by what they say. ... All such prophets are self-deconstructing fools.¹²⁹⁸

Jonah's anger is not just that he is made to look a fool but that he is a pawn in God's game. Hence the 'existential angst and nausea' at the end of the story: he can 'no longer stomach a history struck utterly pointless by God's self-blindness and self indulgence'.¹²⁹⁹ If disobedience on the scale of a Nineveh

acknowledges the multivocal nature of the narrative (in the Bakhtinian sense), by contrast with Eagleton, Craig sees a unified ideological system in Jonah overall. The author uses ideology as a means of holding the plot together. The author of Jonah has a goal; and ideological criticism can uncover the author's interests and strategies.

For other interesting articles on Jonah, see A.K.M. Adam, 'The Sign of Jonah: a Fish-Eye View', *Semeia* 51 (1990), pp. 177-92; and Serge Frolov, 'Returning the Ticket: God and his Prophet in the Book of Jonah', *JSOT* 86 (1999), pp. 85-105, in which Frolov argues that the author intended his audience to be sympathetic to Jonah, not with God, contrary to the prevailing tradition of interpretation.

¹²⁹¹ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 180.

¹²⁹² Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 178.

¹²⁹³ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 178.

¹²⁹⁴ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 178.

¹²⁹⁵ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 179.

¹²⁹⁶ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 180.

¹²⁹⁷ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edn; ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

¹²⁹⁸ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', pp.179-80 (my emphasis), citing Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

¹²⁹⁹ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p.180.

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goes cavalierly unpunished, then obedience ceases to have meaning. 'God's mercy simply makes a mockery of human effort'.¹³⁰⁰

This is Jonah's problem. Even if he could persuade himself that his 'crying doom was performatively effective rather than farcically redundant', he can never know for sure! Is he in a 'meta-position' regarding God, with a superior insight into divine psychology? Or is God one step ahead of him all the time? 'For what if God's narrative had always reckoned Jonah's into it, and the whole point of the pantomime was to bring Jonah to the point where he knew that he did not know whether he was doing anything or not?'¹³⁰¹

Eagleton maintains that Jonah is calling into question not so much action as 'a particular ideological model of it', the assumption that at the source of all practice is an autonomous subject in control. As Marx and Freud have attacked that presumption, so Jonah's God does so in a way that haunts the liberal humanist. At first, the pointlessness of action might tend to nihilism; but, for Eagleton, to be able to act efficaciously one must have gone through the shaking and emerged on the other side. Jonah thus deploys Jonah to engage the dilemma between an old liberalism and 'a new subjectivity struggling to be born'.¹³⁰²

Finally, the end of the book shows Jonah that God is not as nice a chap as he seemed:

God's mercy is indeed a kind of absurdity, but there's no need for Jonah to make a song and dance about it, which is why God makes a mocking song and dance of it. Jonah just has to find some way of living with the fact that he can never know whether he is doing anything or not, which was perhaps the point of the whole futile narrative after all.¹³⁰³

This essay is not an attempt to apply the 'Eagletonian methodology' to the Jonah text. There is no consideration of modes of production or of the general ideology of the time of writing: the essay moves straight to the ideology of the text. Indeed, it might be described not as an attempt at ideological criticism at all but as a reader-response interpretation, in which the original modes of production are irrelevant. Eagleton treats Jonah as he might treat a more recent short story in which contemporary philosophical issues are inscribed. He engages the text with ideological issues that are to the fore in his own world of literary scholarship and political activism. This is ideological criticism, but of a different kind: using the text to engage with the ideological issues at stake in the contemporary world of academia while ignoring the original context of production.

The knee-jerk reaction of a biblical critic to Eagleton's analysis may well be to dismiss it as an idiosyncratic piece in which Jonah is divorced from its canonical context and which takes little account of the long interpretative history. Eagleton reads into the text issues that could not have formed part of the ancient context. Viewed in this light, Eagleton's article may seem, at best, an interesting aside, at worst, an irrelevance, to the mainstream of biblical scholarship. However, perhaps Eagleton's article should serve conversely as a salutary reminder of the irrelevance of much biblical scholarship to the mainstream of contemporary life and to the mainstream of the academic and political worlds in which Eagleton is a highly respected figure. Eagleton's article may represent a challenge for *relevance* to the scholarly hegemony within Biblical Studies.

Eagleton engages the text with issues that are of contemporary relevance at the juncture of literary criticism and political activism. One might debate the degree to which *meaning* resides in the author's intention, in the text, or in the reader. However, *relevance* surely resides in the engagement of the ancient text with a contemporary context. That is not to say that the circumstances of the text's production or the history of the interpretative tradition are irrelevant. Indeed, the more the reader is

¹³⁰⁰ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p.180. Paul de Man goes further and seeks to deconstruct the very idea of 'performativity': 'If performance is caught up in language, and if language is irreducibly figurative or tropological, then there may come a point ... *when we cannot know if we are doing anything or not*' (Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading*, p. 131-32, quoted in Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p.180 [Eagleton's emphasis]).

¹³⁰¹ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p.181.

¹³⁰² Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p.181. He elaborates:

To act effectively, you must have some positive sense of who you are; but if oppressed groups and peoples were able to have such a sense they would not need to act in the first place. Political action consists not primarily in expressing an already well founded identity, but in creating the social conditions in which it might just become possible to say what I was or to discover what I would like to be. It is the rulers not the oppressed who are happily disposed from worrying what they are.

¹³⁰³ Eagleton, 'Austin and Jonah', p. 182.

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aware of the interpretative history, the more scope there is for engagement of text with contemporary reality. On the other hand, the perspective of a scholar such as Eagleton, who is unbiased by the *biblical* scholarly tradition but engages the text afresh with the world of postmodern thought, may well offer new insights to biblical scholars whose immersion in the interpretative tradition has left them unable to see the wood for the trees.

In this essay, Eagleton anticipates the call by David Clines for ‘bespoke interpretations’, tailor-made to fit particular interpretative contexts.¹³⁰⁴ Clines argues that, though a wide variety of readings of a given text may be legitimate, not all are suited to the interpretative context in which they are found. Ideological criticism is about finding imaginative but legitimate points of connexion between the ideology of the text and ideological issues at stake in a given contemporary context. It is also about the evaluation of such bespoke interpretations.

What can be said by way of overall evaluation of Eagleton’s ‘bespoke’ interpretation? Certainly, there seems to be a ‘fit’ between the text and the specialised interpretative context with which Eagleton engages it. On the other hand, he is only able to achieve this ‘fit’ by wrenching the book from its original context and from the master-narrative of mainstream interpretation. It is an interesting question why Eagleton chose a *biblical* text for an essay on speech-act theory and literary deconstructionism. There must have been some element, however embryonic, already embedded in the text that enabled the imaginative points of connexion. That element, however hard to isolate or define, might be regarded as an *ideological imprint* in the text. It is also possible that the use of a canonical text, or even just an ancient text, is designed to lend more weight to the argument. Is there a hidden or subconscious appeal to authority here on Eagleton’s part that is itself open to deconstruction?

From the point of view of biblical criticism, Eagleton’s fresh perspective on the text opens up avenues for further exploration. Can the text be viewed as a surrealist farce rather than as a historical narrative or serious parable? Is the book less to do with Jewish universalism than with the dilemma of the prophet for whom, paradoxically, real success can only come about through the non-fulfilment of his denunciations? What are we to make of the statement: ‘all good prophets are false prophets undoing their own utterances in the very act of producing them’? Is the book facing us with the pointlessness of political (or prophetic) activism, when God has things all sown up already? And finally, does Eagleton on Jonah challenge the scholarly hegemony to consider the priority of relevance over meaning? I suspect it does.

Appendix 3

Robert Carroll: ‘As Seeing the Invisible: Ideology in Bible Translation’

The first of Carroll’s series of articles in the *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* deals with Bible translation, a topic rarely considered in the literature on ideological criticism.¹³⁰⁵ Carroll observes that the vernacularisation of scripture has always involved ideological controversy: ‘all the great heresiarchs have had the Bible on their side’. The Reformation, with its multiplicity of vernacular translations, was the instigator of ‘a great era of heresy construction’ and yet also turned scripture into the sole arbiter of orthodoxy, ‘thus institutionalising the great source of heresy as the definer and detective of heresy’.¹³⁰⁶

¹³⁰⁴ See above, pp. 196-199.

¹³⁰⁵ Robert P. Carroll, ‘As Seeing the Invisible: Ideology in Bible Translation’, *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* XIX (1993), pp. 79-93. A recent work of some significance in the field of Bible translation is Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Bible Translation on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

¹³⁰⁶ Carroll, ‘Seeing the Invisible’, p. 79. See also the comments of Briggs, referred to above, pp. 268-69.

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Carroll prefers to replace 'terms' such as heresy and heresiarch with 'notions'¹³⁰⁷ such as ideology or ideological conflict, since the former 'represent attributions *from positions of power*'.¹³⁰⁸ Many of the early translations were accompanied by notes offering reformed interpretations. The 1611 Authorised Version was produced partly because of dislike of the radical interpretations of the Geneva Bible.¹³⁰⁹

As Carroll observes:

All the different translation projects were intended to produce Bibles which reflected the ideological holdings of the translating groups. ... The multitude of translations indicates ... the struggle to achieve ideological supremacy. ... *Translating the Bible ... allows the translators to build into the translation their own values, prejudices, preferences, and ideological holdings.*¹³¹⁰

He continues:

The address to the King, which serves as an introduction to the Authorised Version, seeks to signal to readers that they are neither traditional benighted uninformed ecclesiastics nor radical malcontents, but are, in fact, good moderates who will not threaten the state's equilibrium.¹³¹¹

However, no ideological analysis is undertaken by Carroll *of the actual translation*. He does not consider whether the translation conformed to its introductory statement or whether the latter was simply a preliminary appeasement of those in power, who were unlikely to probe too deeply into the actual text.

Turning to the modern period, Carroll maintains that translating the Bible is never 'an innocent act of scholarship ... in search of the most accurate translation possible'.¹³¹² Commenting on the introduction to the New International Version (NIV), Carroll is at his scathing best:

The translators are ... 'transdenominational'. What can this odd word mean? I think it is code for 'fundamentalist' or 'evangelical' ... as seems to be indicated by the code-word 'International' in its title. ... The translators were chosen from all the different denominations because ... they were all evangelicals and / or fundamentalists. Why not say that? ... The ideology behind the NIV is also very clearly stated: 'the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word'. Hardly surprising then that the translating group was not made up of official church representatives – no critical scholar or intelligent reader of the Bible familiar with *Ideologiekritik* ... would put their hand to an 'infallible' Bible. According to the Preface, 'the first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation'. ... My impression of the translators' first concern was not that of 'accuracy' but of commitment to an ideological purity of a fundamentalist nature.¹³¹³

This quotation says as much about Robert Carroll as it does about the NIV. He too is engaged in ideological conflict and he makes no secret of his ideological disdain for evangelicals. His use of 'fundamentalist' is typical of the ideologue's tendency to use 'scare' words where argument is weak, a tactic compounded by the juxtaposition of 'fundamentalist' with 'intelligent reader'. He caricatures rather than engaging with those who attribute authority to the Bible. His frequent use of *Ideologiekritik* in German deliberately adds a spurious ethos of rigour to his 'argument'.

The NIV translators may well have sought to produce a translation consistent with their particular theological (or ideological) world-view. In so far as this is so, it is an ironic inversion of the 'evangelical' conviction that beliefs should be determined by the Bible, not the other way round! However, the NIV translators have at least been up-front in declaring what they stand for. Carroll has not laid bare his own ideological predilections up front; and he might have better reserved his invective for translations that lay claim to scholarly objectivity while *masking* their ideological bias.

One such group might have been the New English Bible (NEB) / Revised English Bible (REB) translators, whose world-view more closely reflects Carroll's own bias. He commends their 'critical spirit of scholarship', which serves as a defence against 'claims of infallibility'.¹³¹⁴ Carroll seems to make the flawed assumption that 'scholarly' translators are somehow free of ideological predisposition or bias.

¹³⁰⁷ It should be noted that Carroll displays confusion here between *terms* and *concepts* (or 'notions').

¹³⁰⁸ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 79 (my emphasis).

¹³⁰⁹ For a full discussion of the political and ideological function of the KJV in 1611, see Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, pp. 128-131.

¹³¹⁰ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', pp. 80-81 (my emphasis).

¹³¹¹ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 84.

¹³¹² Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 81.

¹³¹³ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 81.

¹³¹⁴ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 87.

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Turning next to the recently revised Jerusalem Bible, and in particular to its use of gender-inclusive language, Carroll opines:

It is a good example of naked ideology (or perhaps counter-ideology) in action: it distorts and changes the text in order to suit a contemporary consumerist ideology. It strikes me as an outrage against history, integrity, and the scholarly vocation. ... I am not against editing out ... *unnecessary* gendered references ... nor am I against ... comment on gendered translations. ... I just happen to think that we must accept ancient texts, whether sacred scripture or otherwise, as we find them.¹³¹⁵

On this issue, I agree with Carroll. It serves as an excellent illustration of the extent to which Bible translation may involve a clash of ideologies. In the case of other ancient texts, gender is not generally a problem. Translators represent the original as it is, irrespective of its patriarchal or sexist nature. But because of the authority claims associated with scripture, such issues come much more to the fore. However desirable it may seem to use *translation* as a means of 'correcting' the Bible to conform to twenty-first century political correctness, Carroll is surely right that this practice represents a form of ideologically inspired *distortion* of the text. Carroll might have developed this point further: it begs further questions of the extent to which translations are covertly influenced by other ideological factors. It is not just evangelical translators who make the Bible conform to their pre-determined ideological position.

Disappointingly, Carroll has not sought to elucidate these issues systematically or to offer a detailed ideological evaluation of any actual translation, as opposed to discussion of the preface. Nor does he offer pointers as to how translators might traverse the ideological minefield unscathed. Nonetheless, he draws attention to important ideological issues in Bible translation that require extended consideration. These issues are likely to be of even greater significance for translation into third world vernaculars, since the oppressive interpretative tradition of the text may have been compounded by the ideological intrusions of colonialist translators.¹³¹⁶

¹³¹⁵ Carroll, 'Seeing the Invisible', p. 89.

¹³¹⁶ For a full discussion of the influence of English translations in colonial contexts and of the significance of translation in post-colonial Bible criticism, see Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, pp. 127-178.

The authors of *The Postmodern Bible* make this telling comment:

For Judaism and Christianity, the question of scripture – its nature, meaning, and authority – is inseparable from that of translation. ... Readers of all sorts tend to regard an original work ... as superior to, and more authoritative than, any of its translated versions. However ... the Hebrew Bible itself includes the myth that the original is lost. ... Every reading is a translation, a commentary on and supplement to the original text. ... In this sense, all reading is inter-textual and endless juxtaposition and interchange of texts, a kind of translation (*Postmodern Bible*, pp. 128-29).

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