

WESTERN MARXISM AND THE INTERPRETATION
OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

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Introduction

Marxist biblical criticism, particularly Marxist criticism of the Hebrew Bible, does not enjoy a great list of practitioners, yet it has a currency in biblical criticism thanks to a few such as Norman Gottwald, David Jobling, David Penchansky, José Miranda, Jorge Pixley and Itumeleng Mosala. While I have considered the work of these scholars elsewhere (Boer 1996: 110-21), I wish to focus on the writing of two scholars working in North America—Norman Gottwald and David Jobling—since they raise for me a question of an autobiographical nature: the impossible situation of politically committed white males in the ‘First World’ (to make temporary use of a troubled term) and their efforts at producing liberatory, specifically Marxist, theory and praxis.

The question of contradiction of course raises the issue of the method I am using, which owes its origin to the Hegelian Marxist tradition, where contradiction is merely one item in the larger program of dialectical interpretation. Yet—and here I follow Fredric Jameson—contradiction is a mark of a proper dialectical criticism: it is the sort of criticism that will sustain its analysis until the contradiction is flushed out. Once snared, such contradictions tell their own tales of a socio-economic nature. My approach assumes that interpretation is not an isolated act: it is invariably a contested and polemical act which takes place as part of a wider intellectual, social, political and economic

situation criss-crossed by various conflicts. It is those methods which embrace the variegated dimensions of such a situation that may be described as 'dialectical' and thus of interest to me. Gottwald and Jobling operate with interpretive programs similar to mine, so I will be investigating their work from a shared methodological and political position. Despite the drawbacks that this partisanship may bring, I feel they are outweighed by the benefits a critically sympathetic reading may produce, not least a growing and lively debate over Marxist issues in biblical studies.

Dialectical Criticism?

Contemporary cultural criticism, as well as a reasonable slab of literary criticism, is dominated by the Left.¹ The increase in this sort of criticism over the last few decades has led to some debate over method and self-designation, reflecting the influx of what is loosely called 'critical theory' over a similar period of time. As a result some would prefer to discard the self-designation 'Marxist criticism'. Michael Ryan, a cultural and particularly film critic, argues that 'political criticism' is the more proper designation for what has succeeded a now hoary Marxist criticism (although he interchanges the terms in his essay on 'Political Criticism'²). For Ryan, 'political criticism' is both broader in scope and more focused than other types of literary and cultural criticism. It is broader because it tries to include in some fashion the great wealth and variety of criticism and interpretation—particularly feminism, phenomenology, semiotics, structural psychology, deconstruction and post-structuralism, film studies, cultural criticism and so on—in its general program, by asking social and historical questions of the methods in question: it is, in other words a 'totalizing' approach, aiming for the broadest possible social context for a text. For Ryan

1. Apart from journals devoted to literary, film and cultural criticism—including *Minnesota Review*, *Social Text*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *New Orleans Review*, *New German Critique*, *Telos*, *Left Curve*, *Red Bass*, *Sub-stance*, *October*, *Screen*, *Jump Cut*, *Polygraph* and so on—this dominance is also seen in electronic journals such as *Postmodern Culture* (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu>), lists like *Badsubjects* (badsubjects-requests@uclink.berkeley.edu) and the spate of volumes on cultural criticism from the British publisher Verso (an imprint of New Left Books).

2. Ryan 1989. He flirts with 'cultural criticism' (Ryan 1989: 201) only to leave the term behind.

political criticism is also more focused because it explicitly aims to 'enable an understanding of the social and cultural world that will contribute to its transformation' (Ryan 1989: 201).

In contrast to Ryan and those who feel that critical avenues such as deconstruction constitute sufficient reason to move beyond Marxism, others like Francis Mulhern feel that describing the newer hybrids as 'political', 'sociological' and 'historical' is reductive and often defensive (Mulhern 1992: 14). 'Marxist criticism' as a descriptive label should remain; to give up the title is to surrender the scandal and offense of precisely this approach. While arguing that Marxism should be able to absorb or sublimate newer oppositional currents of thought and practice without becoming something fundamentally different, Mulhern is, however, troubled by the issue of whether overt commitment or critical practice should be the determining criterion of a Marxist criticism, settling in the end for the latter.

With Mulhern I prefer this emphasis, yet a way of both remaining properly Marxist and indicating the more recent critical diversity is to use the term 'dialectical criticism'. Here I follow the lead of Neil Larsen, for whom Marxist and dialectical criticism are virtually synonymous. If there is a difference, dialectical criticism emphasizes the specifically Hegelian background of and influence on Marxist thought.³ The advantage here is the same as Ryan's proposal—namely that there is no necessity to assume some form of adherence to the 'cause' of Marxism—but without its drawback of giving up the Marxist characterization. Thus, when faced with a critical effort which is not consciously Marxist but which feels, smells and appears as such, the 'dialectical' denomination allows a shift, if necessary, from the issue of commitment to that of critical activity.

Norman K. Gottwald

This study is dedicated to the memory
and to the honor of the first Israelites.

Think of them laughing, singing,

3. This may at first sight exclude the Althusserians with their focus on the later Marx and the central document of *Capital* at the expense of an earlier idealist, Hegelian, and not yet fully developed Marx. Yet even they would agree with the dialectical nature of the Marxist critical project (in this case Marx subverted and then dispensed with his Hegelian heritage).

loving their people and
 all people who put love
 before power
 then put love with power
 which is necessary
 to destroy power without love

—from an anonymous tribute to the people of Vietnam (Gottwald 1979: i)

My search for contradictions in Gottwald's work begins with form, particularly his measured and orderly sentences. Laden as they are at times with individual units of a forbidding social scientific terminology, as in *Tribes of Yahweh* and some other more technical studies (1987; 1993a: 139-64), the syntax of these sentences never threatens to shift to a similar level of complexity, maintaining its untrammled regularity and ease in being understood. Such sentences connote a number of things, among them being the need for these texts to be accessible to those on the exploited side of economic relations within and without the USA: workers, peasants, African Americans, Latin Americans and so on. More conscious perhaps is the Enlightenment heritage of reasoned and dispassionate analysis of the situation, the need for a cool and sober scholarly head in the midst of political passion and tension. This in itself bears with it a host of associations regarding the nature of scholarship, its earlier dependence on an older but still widely popular model of scientific research; in short the nature of what might be termed the 'ideologeme' (a coherent but restricted ideological unit) of dispassionate scholarship.

Part of this ideologeme of course is the ideal type of historical critical discourse with its desire for analytical rigor and verifiability. Gottwald's earlier work in mainline historical criticism is relevant here as is the subsequent and pioneering conjunction of social scientific methods and the biblical text, since historical criticism and the social sciences have a good deal in common. For Gottwald this is particularly so when his task is historical reconstruction of detailed sequences of events, where he relies on historical critical tools under the social scientific umbrella. And yet Gottwald is not a mere historical critic, for even when engaged in the task of historical reconstruction he prefers to deal with the complexities of social structure and formation rather than the narrower realms of individual motivation and particular politics. However, the drive to focus on ever wider categories—a desire, in other words, for totalization—takes him beyond social structures to

'modes of production', to which, paradoxically, biblical and archaeological materials lend themselves far more readily than other forms of historiography. A further signal of Gottwald's moves beyond historical criticism is the continual effort—beginning with a 1975 study of prophetic marvel stories in 1–2 Kings using Propp's study of folklore (see 1993a: 119–30)—both to keep up with developments in literary theory (see also 1993a: 207–24) and to seek out possible bridges between historical critical, social scientific and literary approaches (see especially 1985).

To return to the question of style, of which all of the above is in one sense an expansion, I would suggest that Gottwald's measured sentences may be described as 'past narration': these medium length, predicative sentences calmly attempt to recite the nature of Israel's social, religious and economic history or the status of contemporary social or economic issues. They present considered accounts of the topic at hand and there is little difficulty in assuming that such words represent the 'Real'. This may explain in part Gottwald's desire to demystify—in line with an older Marxist ideological criticism—language of a more lyrical type. Thus, 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 (1992a). It might be argued that such demystification is eminently justifiable for ruling class discourse but not for the discourse of exploited or perhaps newly liberated peoples in the Judean highlands. Yet, despite some more positive assessments, particularly in the studies on Lamentations (1962; 1993a: 165–73), even here Gottwald prefers to defuse or sidestep the language where it becomes uncomfortably belligerent or chauvinistic, as for instance in Deuteronomy 33 or Judges 5 (1993a: 357–58).

The basic contradiction in Gottwald then is one of *form* versus *content*, where the primary signals of the *form* are the conventional items of Enlightenment scholarship, embodied in the calm rational discourse of that scholarship. By contrast, the *content* of his work is loaded with all the passion, commitment and fervour that has systematically been dredged from his style; and the passion is not only pumped out of the syntax itself but also stoutly barred from the various methods which Gottwald uses. And yet anyone who has read only a small part of his corpus⁴ should be aware that he is anything but

4. The best example here is the chapter 'Are Biblical and US Societies Com-

dispassionate or uncommitted. Thus: the *content* of Gottwald's work is replete with all the political passion missing from the *form*—commitment to social transformation and revolution, Marxist critical theory (itself conflictual), a desire for democratic socialism rather than capitalism, a recovery and re-tooling of Hebrew prophecy (like Marx) in order to critique capitalism, and, perhaps most well-known of all, a reconstruction of Israelite origins in terms of social revolution as a mechanism for transition from one mode of production to another.

So Gottwald's dispassionate style finds its dialectical opposite in his commitment to social, political and economic transformation, a commitment expressed in the very language of reason. What are we to make of such a sharp bifurcation between form and content? I will argue that such a contradiction signals other equally clear divisions, but first I would like to interrogate content a little further. Apart from commitment to change in his own social situation—as most clearly seen in the organizing structure of *The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours*—and apart from the conflictual model with which Gottwald works—to the extent of expecting conflictual responses to the use of such a model (1993a: xx)—the questioning of the content of Gottwald's work will begin with the literary.

Gottwald has argued on numerous occasions that different types of literature signify different social and cultural situations. Thus Lamentations arises from the dispossessed peasantry and exploited classes who are left behind during the Babylonian exile to face up to a devastated countryside and city (1962; 1993a: 165-73). By contrast, Deuteronomy may be read as the product of a Josianic ruling elite keen to reclaim lost land and power through a radical social, religious and above all economic centralization in Jerusalem, thus denying any status to local religious practices and personnel, social groupings and economic patterns (1993b: 12-14).

While different types of literature and levels of redaction (re)construct opposed social *situations*, it is social *class* which is concerned more directly with opposition and (at times violent) conflict. Recently Gottwald has focused on social class as both an element in ancient Israelite society and as a hermeneutical category. Within the Marxist tradition class is of course inconceivable without conflict and violence: a class is defined by being in opposition with another and class conflict

parable?: The Political Analogies Toward the Next American Revolution' (1993a: 307-24).

is a primary motor of history. Thus Gottwald builds up a hypothesis concerning class and class conflict in ancient Israel (1993a: 130-64)⁵ and argues for its indispensable hermeneutical status in biblical interpretation (1993b). Closely related to, and in fact dependent on, class for its formation is ideology, which justifies the violence and exploitation of ruling classes and reinforces the insurrectionary mood of those exploited (see 1993a: 148, although elsewhere ideology is not theorized in great depth, as in 1993a: 58, 69, 179, 184, 220, 243-45, 368). However, social class in Gottwald's work is more properly theorized in relation to mode of production.⁶

'Mode of production' is the *sine qua non* of Gottwald's analytic strategy, appearing with predictable regularity in his many writings, but it is also the most bellicose and ethically antagonistic of sites. In his famous yet always refined theory of Israelite origins he argues that emergent Israel overthrew the dominant tributary (or Asiatic) mode of production and established in the Judaeen hills a communitarian mode of production with its attendant social, cultural, political and ideological features. It was only a matter of time before such an approach

5. Gottwald concludes that in monarchic Israel there were two major parts of the ruling class: state functionaries obtaining their living through state taxes and land rent and those (latifundiaris) who extended their land holdings by appropriating land through unpaid debt and then granting credit to peasants by allowing them to continue to work the land now appropriated. Two parts of the exploited class are also located: free agrarians with land tenure and tenant farmers who work the land of the latifundiaris.

6. 'For our purposes in the study of class in ancient and biblical societies, the key Marxian analytic concepts are *class* as determined by relation of people to the *mode of production* understood as a combination of the *material forces of production* (including human physical and mental powers) and the *social relations of production*, the latter meaning the way that producers (and non-producers where there is class) organize their work and appropriate the labor product. Class is seen to exist when some people live off the labor product of others. This living off the labor product of others is called *exploitation* in the objective sense that the value of one laborer's production, over and above that laborer's need for subsistence, is appropriated by someone else. This labor product beyond the subsistence need of the laborer is called *surplus product* which is also *surplus value* because the exploiter consumes or exchanges the "good" of the object produced thereby denying the producer the use or exchange of the object that embodies the producer's labor... Similarly, then, *class conflict* is...an objective description in that producers and nonproducers struggle to increase, diminish, or arrest the appropriation of labor surplus' (1993a: 147-48).

was extended to the whole biblical canon: in a number of places (1985; 1992b; 1993a: 351-57, 366-73) the socio-economic history of Israel in the ancient Near East is set out in terms of communitarian, native tributary, foreign tributary and slave-based modes of production in various stages of tension, conflict and transition. In another way of viewing, the communitarian mode takes a more central role in relation to the others, from its dominance in emergent Israel through to its persistence despite external pressure past the turn of the era into Christian and Jewish traditions. Indeed, for Gottwald the message of Jesus and the reconstruction of Judaism by the Pharisees after the two revolts (66-74 CE and 132-135 CE) follow essential communitarian ideals which stretch back to early Israel. Yet in these instances the most persistent and sharpest contradictions and tensions take place, namely when modes of production grind against each other in processes of conflict and violent transition. The violence in fact supports Gottwald's thesis, for it might be argued that efforts to restore a wider communitarian base have left a host of traces of violence in the texts, from the material in Joshua-Judges through the violent ending to Jesus's ministry to the echoes of at least the first Jewish revolt in the New Testament. So it seems that mode of production provides the most comprehensive category for understanding contradiction, and that violent conflict is thus the prime location of these elements in Gottwald's theoretical framework.

There are, however, some significant transitions concerning 'mode of production' which recall the sharp difference between style and content noted earlier, as well as contradictions in Gottwald's own production of biblical criticism. To begin with, there is more in replacing titles for various modes of production than mere theoretical refinement: the most obvious is substituting 'tributary' for 'Asiatic' mode of production (the designation of Marx and Engels). A more symptomatic substitution is 'communitarian' for 'primitive commune', although this is much less clear on Gottwald's part.⁷ In both cases a more specific and historically bound form is replaced by one that is less so. Gottwald is convinced of the essential rightness of the communitarian mode of production over against the tributary; or, to use a different terminology, there is a massive libidinal charge in the communitarian mode. Such a sharp ethical distinction between what one would normally expect to evoke a

7. In fact, he seems to have collapsed hunting and gathering (tribal society, primitive communism or the horde) with neolithic agriculture (the *gens* or hierarchical kinship).

mix of ethical responses, if indeed any, is one of the enduringly curious features of Gottwald's work, but at the same time it provides, in yet another transition, the basic structure of his hermeneutics and a more satisfactory reason as to why and how his work might be described as 'committed scholarship'. On the hermeneutical side I suggest that the terminological shift noted earlier enables Gottwald to subsume other modes of production under the communitarian/tributary opposition—namely democratic socialism and capitalism—while at the same time retrojecting this later opposition onto the earlier one. It is then along this axis that he is able to make comparisons between biblical and contemporary societies, and to shift ethical assessments back and forth along the same axis—as with the dedication of *Tribes of Yahweh* quoted earlier. One side of the equation receives approbation and the other denigration. This is why I would suggest that Gottwald's historical reconstruction is also very much utopian. Although he would be wary of the description of his work as utopian, preferring to think of it as scientific historiography, there is the heavy ethical weighting given to communitarian ideals. This translates into a similar weighting for democratic socialism, for which Utopia—for some at least—is merely another name, and which itself is then seen to be essentially biblical. All of this rehearses how the idea of the primitive commune acts for Marxism as a myth of origin on which to draw for the final mode of production at the other end of history.

There is, then, a string of related tensions in Gottwald's work, running from restrained style versus passionate content (which then mark the two poles of commitment and critical activity noted earlier), to tributary (Asiatic) versus communitarian (primitive commune) modes of production, to capitalism versus democratic socialism, to historiography versus utopian literature. Yet these splits or oppositions may also be understood as a systematic figures or markers of Gottwald's own impossible situation of being a western Marxist, of being a Marxist living in the most advanced—and thereby most decayed—capitalist society in the world, and also of being a Marxist Hebrew Bible scholar who continues to work within the Christian Church rather than outside. The turn to praxis at this point is of course a characteristic Marxist move in itself, but it seems to me that the tensions in Gottwald's work are intrinsically connected with his own situation. The difficulties facing any western Marxist have been spelled out in Perry Anderson's much read monograph, *Consideration on Western Marxism* (1979): the problems

of the lack of a significant revolutionary political base, the lack of unity between widely scattered western Marxists, the associated individualism of many, and the sheer strength of the forces of capitalism have all led to a predominant focus by western Marxists on aesthetics and economics. In other words, the disappointments of activism—that, despite many local victories, the prospect of revolutionary social change has not been possible—have led many into the areas of academia, literature and philosophy. For Gottwald, and for any Marxist working in the United States, all of this is exacerbated by the dominant status of the USA in world capitalism, although in one sense—like Marx in London—it is the best vantage point to see capitalism at work. The final tension lies in being both a Marxist and a Christian scholar (of the Hebrew Bible, a significant tension in itself)⁸: here the contradiction manifests itself in the difficulty of being heard in either constituency—Marxists being wary of any religiously committed person, and the Christian (for Gottwald, Baptist) Church not overly happy with a Marxist in its midst.

David Jobling

the threat of bad faith *for anyone* who tries to be a male feminist... a rich advocate of the poor, an American socialist—an existence increasingly oxymoronic (Jobling 1990: 82).

'forced labor' ... is that which 'history' (in the Marxist sense) *forces* upon us—work for the revolution (in biblical studies), unalienated labor (Jobling 1992a: 74).

While the measured pulse of Gottwald's sentences acts as a scholarly foil for the fervent and conflict-ridden content and method, David Jobling's style appears at first more conducive, for when his sentences are let loose from their structuralist constraints they take on an energetic or explosive quality, full of promise of the new. However, despite the tension which lies barely concealed in the almost carnivalesque passages of some of Jobling's works I will focus here on his attempted conjunction of deconstruction and liberation. Once again, my search is for the figures or marks of the tensions generated out of the scholar's situation—marks already foreshadowed by the quotations from Jobling above.

8. A point made by Philip Davies in private correspondence.

In the case of Gottwald, contradiction characterized dialectical method and signalled wider issues such as political desire, ethical investment, and assumptions about the nature of history. Jobling's work is somewhat different: contradiction is ubiquitous yet undergoes change as his emphasis moves from structuralism (1978; 1986; see also 1979) to poststructuralism. In the earlier phase, the bristling technologists and scientificity of the structuralist program as well as the passionate devotion of its converts are initially forbidding prospects for the visitor or *flâneur*. The intricate detail of textual analysis and a whole new and often unattractive vocabulary—binary thinking, paradigm, syntagm, isotopy, actant, and so on—including the motley crew of '-eme' neologisms, give structuralism the feel of a foreign territory more akin to the physical and chemical sciences. Yet, as Jameson reminds us, this is finally the territory of literary critics too, that of narrative, meaning, discourse, ideological connotation and representation (Jameson 1987: vi). It is here we find the early Jobling, producing heavy and tough texts (Jobling 1978; 1986) which require their own index of technical terms to assist the novice (1978: 101-102). Here contradictions, binary oppositions and their mediations are foregrounded; or, to put it otherwise, the working hypothesis is that myth, and by extension narrative and other forms of artistic production, comprise various cultural efforts at resolving contradictions from the social and political sphere. While this formulation owes more to Lévi-Strauss,⁹ despite his own hesitations about applying his methods to the Hebrew Bible, there is also a heavy debt to Greimas, where contradiction receives one of its most sustained treatments, and whose own particular brand of structuralist exegesis remains open to the vagaries and contours of the text under investigation rather than insisting on interpretive orthodoxy (Jobling 1984: 197). Thus in Jobling's early phase there are studies on the dynastic change of divinely ordained kingship in 1 Samuel 13–21 (1978: 4-25), troubles with Moses in Numbers 11–12 (1978: 26-62), tensions between text and literary context in 1 Kings 17–18 (1978: 63-88), or between narrative models projected by the text: here 'creation and fall'

9. Jobling identifies the main ideas from Lévi-Strauss as '*binary thinking and mediation*; myth as generated by *contradictions* in experience; the substitution of *paradigm* for *syntagm*; the notion of *code*, with its value for preliminary semantic organization; that of *residue*, leading to an iterative process whereby what is bracketed at one stage of analysis becomes the material for the next stage; myths as *transformations* of each other' (Jobling 1984: 196; see also 1983: 92-95).

versus 'a man to till the earth' in Genesis 2–3 (1980b; 1986: 17–43), narrative difficulties of judgeship against kingship in Judg. 2.11–1 Samuel 12 (1986: 44–87), and the permutations of the Jordan as a Cisjordan/Transjordan boundary in Numbers 32 and Joshua 22 (1980a; 1984; 1986: 88–134).

These studies, for all their intricate brilliance remain tied up in the 'frozen dialectic' of structuralism (Jameson's term, in a discussion on 16 November 1994), only fleetingly pushing the contradictions further than the conceptual patterns enmeshed with the texts's structures. Jobling's interest, in other words, is with the conceptual paradox or oxymoron whose solution is beyond the exercise of the mind under its own power. As Jameson has suggested, this is where structuralist analyses like Greimas's work best, tracking the patterns of ideological oppositions and antinomies at work in texts and their interpretations (Jameson 1981: 83). However, the whole point of bringing Jameson's reflections to bear on Jobling's earlier production is to push hard the contradictions, which, if shadowed with sufficient determination, open out into the realm of mode of production and thereby conflict as an economic issue. For Jameson, antinomies themselves are products of social contradictions, but the inability to resolve the ideological antinomy at the level of pure thought generates a narrative text, where resolution is attempted at a formal level. In other words, imaginary resolutions (text) of social contradictions (base or context) are mediated by the ideological friction of antinomies. The step for Jobling then is from the realm of text and the 'underlying' antinomies towards a social and political base, and it is precisely through Jameson's work that Jobling pursues the dialectical logic of his structuralist interpretations. Thus, in an essay which is more continuous than discontinuous with his earlier work (but see also the deconstructionist precursors in Jobling 1979), Jobling focuses on the golden age of Solomon's reign in 1 Kings 3–10 with a Jamesonian extension of his former methods (1992a). He begins with an interest in the literary structure of these chapters, moves to an 'isotopic analysis' of the three semantic fields of economics, sexuality and wisdom, and finally suggests a clash between the communitarian and the tributary (Gottwald's terms) modes of production as the final ground of the isotopic contradictions. This study is partner to an essay on Psalm 72 (1992b), in which Jobling offers three 'readings' comparable to those of 1 Kings 3–10. The first reading traces the opposition of the ideological patterns of a 'perpetual motion

machine' (Ps. 72.1-7) over against 'the king's righteousness as motor' (vv. 8-17), which are then, in a second reading, set in the broader contradiction of the two 'codes' of economics and law. A final reading relates the text's contradictions to those of the Asiatic mode of production. A third study is less concerned with three phases of interpretation than with the transition from a patrilocal (husband moves to the wife's father's house) to virilocal (wife moves to the husband's house) form of a 'proposed household' or domestic mode of production (Ruth; see 1993b: 28-29; 1994). The major element in these readings of biblical texts is the inclusion of 'mode of production' as a fundamental aspect of biblical interpretation (see 1991a; 1992a: 72-74; 1992b: 16-19),¹⁰ which is then the ground of political conflict and contradiction, as identified in the discussion of Gottwald.¹¹

Like Gottwald, 'mode of production' is fundamental to Jobling's way of reading, but in my search for the tensions and contradictions of Jobling's work I move to one of the most significant essays in biblical studies—'Writing the Wrongs of the World' (1990; see also 1989: 129-30). Here is a commitment to socio-economic transformation, noted earlier as a feature of dialectical approaches, along with a systematic effort to engage feminism, deconstruction and liberation struggles (into which feminism is subsumed) in a program for biblical interpretation. However, the most interesting aspect of this essay is in the type of theorist with which Jobling engages. He interacts with European materialist exegesis of the Bible, engages with left-wing biblical interpretation (mainly Norman Gottwald), and is most heavily indebted to feminist work, as is indicated by a number of more recent studies—feminism and mode of production with regard to the Hebrew Bible (1991a), reflection on the work of Mieke Bal (1991b), recent studies of Samuel (1993b), the place of Ruth in the canon (1993c) and the

10. Alternatively, with debts to Freudian notions of repression and displacement, mode of production may be identified as the absent cause of history (1987: 92; 1992b: 3), since it is virtually impossible for people to conceptualize that which forms the very framework of existence.

11. In another place (Boer 1996: 118-19) I suggest that Jobling's readings might be extended with the argument that these texts attempt not only narrative and poetic resolutions of ideological contradictions but also vainly struggle for a way to overcome conflict at the level of mode of production. In so doing Ps. 72 and 1 Kgs 1-10 constitute desperate efforts to suppress oppositional political and economic violence by ultimately flawed legitimations of royalty as the means of maintaining peace, justice and prosperity.

boundaries of books and the role of Hannah (1994). Indeed, feminism provides the source for the political radicalization that Jobling's own Marxist credentials require, a radicalization intended to recover the political edge deconstruction had before making its Atlantic crossing. This of course has already been taking place outside biblical studies: Jobling's desire is to bring the interaction of feminism and deconstruction into his own discipline. Yet in this whole exercise lies a fundamental contradiction of Jobling's work: the theoretical sources of this work lie in Europe and North America, yet his political orientations are much more clearly outside this north hemispheric focus. That is to say, the political praxis of Jobling's Marxism has a greater presence in those areas often termed the Second and Third Worlds rather than his own First World domicile—despite the long history of Marxism in the United States and England, and the role of the Communist Party in France.

Yet, an abiding interest of Jobling's is the physical and social location of biblical criticism and biblical critics. (This is where the autobiographical dimension of this essay comes closest to the surface as well.) This concern runs at a number of levels, of which the ideological and the economic are perhaps the most important. Jobling is aware of his own institutionally and geographically marginal space within North America (St Andrew's College in Saskatoon, Canada), but what comes through at points in his writing is the awareness that literary production and criticism take place in a 'contested ideological space' (1993b: 31). Contrary to the model of scholarship unwittingly indicated by Gottwald's style—detached and 'objective' discourse—Jobling makes the point that all (biblical) scholarship is inherently polemical, that it makes its arguments in contest with others. This refers not only to the strictly confined debates, such as over the origin of Israel or the nature of second temple Judaism, but more importantly to the ideological and political positions of the scholars themselves. The stakes for this contest are considerably higher, since they involve, often implicitly, the values and viability of liberal, capitalist society, as well as the contested discourses of feminism, indigenous peoples, gay and lesbian activism, and (post-)colonialism. Alongside these ideological concerns, Jobling's reflections on economic issues relating to the situation of the critic are found under the title of 'economies of globalization' (1993a: 97-101). The point to be made here is that the globalizing economics within which all biblical critics operate is that of capitalism,

particularly 'late' capitalism—the name given to the present phase in which multinational corporations and computer technology dominate. The effects of this on the way biblical scholars think, write and teach has yet to be charted, but Jobling has made a start in identifying it as an issue.

Yet it is precisely on the issue of globalization that the ambiguity I noted earlier returns, this time in terms of institutional relations rather than economics. What is interesting, then, is that Jobling—in his most sustained consideration of Third World scholarship which itself takes place in a discussion of globalization (1993a)—is concerned with interaction between Third and First Worlds from an institutional perspective, namely the higher education system itself. Jobling has located a crucial bridge that allows him theoretical contact between First and Third Worlds, yet in his written material the transition is not made. The possibilities in the very relation itself are significant, since the prime location of the systemic patterns of exploitation and oppression which are part and parcel of 'standard' economic relations in global late capitalism lies precisely in the intersection between First and Third Worlds (the continual US military interventions in Latin America, the Gulf War, abstention in the former Yugoslavia, and so on). Yet the relative scarcity of such discussions returns to the curious repression and displacement in Jobling's work I noted earlier. Despite his avowed commitment to liberation forms of discourse, especially liberation theology, there is a significant gap in Jobling's consideration of the original contexts of liberation movements and theology. The turn is continually to what are often more sophisticated First World texts and theorists.

Like Gottwald, then, Jobling's textual work persists to the point where the socio-economic level of mode of production is invoked both in the analysis of biblical texts and in assessing the situation of contemporary biblical scholarship. However, despite this, in contemporary biblical scholarship there is a symptomatic turn to First World critics rather than to the Third World where liberation has its basis in the praxis of people in struggle. In fact, Gottwald also, despite his continued interest in Third World material, is ultimately concerned about its lack of critical and social scientific sophistication (1993a: 267-81, although he notes that Third World scholars have attempted to allay his misgivings).¹²

12. I am of course replicating this turn to first world critics in my own focus on Gottwald and Jobling.

Conclusion

I have been interested in the ambiguities and tensions of the work of two critics whose political and ideological commitment takes them *out of* the First World, and yet whose major situation of intellectual work takes place precisely *within* the First World. Paradoxes appear at a number of levels, such as those in Gottwald's work between a dispassionate style and the passion of the content, between tributary and communitarian modes of production, capitalism and democratic socialism, and historiography and utopian writing; or in Jobling's work in an increasingly dialectical mode of analysis, coming to the fore in the turn to First World theorists for the source of political radicalism. This same paradox also turns out to be an issue for Gottwald, which then raises a further contradiction; that the methodological rigour of both Gottwald and Jobling, precisely as First World biblical critics, opens up the areas of class conflict and tensions within and between modes of production as crucial factors in biblical interpretation. Yet—to strengthen the paradox—it is precisely *because* they are First World Marxist biblical scholars, because of the blind spots produced by working in this context, that they are able to produce such critically perceptive work.

Such a reading should be taken less as a direct criticism of the work of Gottwald and Jobling than as a sympathetic reading from the same Marxist dialectical position. Indeed, I would suggest that it is only from this perspective that their full contribution, in all its limits and possibilities, may be realized and used as a basis for further work. The contradictions and tensions I have traced must then be understood not only as the result of the method of reading I have chosen, but also as the necessary feature of any worthwhile work produced in the sort of context from which Gottwald, Jobling, and others who work in a similar way, must work. This is of course the impossible situation of First World Marxism that I have traced at the beginning of this essay. Despite the difficulties of this perspective, Marxism remains one of the few discourses able to provide connections between text, ideology, class, society, politics and economics—precisely at a time when such links are themselves under severe scrutiny and assault.

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ABSTRACT

How does western Marxism influence the study of the Hebrew Bible? Through the work of scholars such as Norman Gottwald and David Jobling. The influence of both scholars is traced by using a Marxist dialectical method that seeks out contradictions, class conflict, ideology, and mode of production. Gottwald's work is characterized by a series of fruitful contradictions: dispassionate style and passionate content, tributary and communitarian modes of production, capitalism and democratic socialism and historiography and utopian writing. Jobling has moved from an earlier structuralist phase to a Marxist poststructuralism with a specific focus on liberationist hermeneutics. The basic contradiction is the use of First World critics to articulate a politics that looks outside that context. These problems are symptomatic of the tensions and class conflicts that face biblical critics working within late capitalism.



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