

READING THE BIBLE AGAINST THE GRAIN

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Abstract

The idea of reading literature 'against the grain' has its origin in the writings of the Marxist literary critic, W Benjamin. This paper commences with a brief examination of some of the important trends in Marxist literary theory. We then proceed to a detailed examination of the hermeneutical theory of I J Mosala (1989), tracing its connections particularly with the working of T Eagleton. We conclude with a critique of Mosala's exegesis of Micah and Luke.

1. Introduction

Literature ... is the most revealing mode of experimental access to literature 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 science, and more coherent than that normally available in daily living itself.

(Eagleton 1978:101)

As 'the most revealing mode' for access to ideology, literature needs to be interpreted in as scientific a manner as possible. This is the goal towards which Marxist literary theory aims, but the question of the precise relationship of ideology to literature, and in turn, ideology to history, is a vexed one. As a basis for our study of the work of Itumeleng Mosala (1986 and 1989), we need to consider the path taken by Marxist literary theory since the initial writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

2. Marxist literary theory

The aim of Marxist literary criticism is to understand ideologies, which Terry Eagleton defines as 'the ideas, values and feelings' by which people 'experience their societies at various times' (1976:viii). As a discipline Marxist literary analysis ranks among the oldest forms of modern criticism, yet until comparatively recently has

been largely ignored by all but Marxist scholars. Today the situation is different, and most introductions to literary criticism reserve space for a detailed discussion of the Marxist approach and its major components from Marx and Engels, through Leon Trotsky, Georg Lukacs, Bertold Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Louis Althusser, to modern writers like Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson (see Selden 1985:23-51) and Newton 1990:102-129).

2.1 The foundations

The originality of Marxist literary theory, according to Eagleton (1976:3) lies 'not in the historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself'. Indeed, Marxist literary theory is based on the twin pillars of materialist thinking, as articulated by Marx and Engels (*The German Ideology*). The first principle is that 'being determines consciousness', and the second that the purpose of Marxist philosophy is not to interpret, but to 'change the world' (quoted by Selden 1985:23). Literary criticism is associated, therefore, in the first instance, with Marxist social analysis.

Marx and Engels visualized society as a triangle, the base of which was the relations of production (including the mode of production, such as capitalism or socialism), above which was the superstructure and finally the apex was the ideology. Major changes in society commenced not with the ideology, but with the relations of production (Marx and Engels 1959:247). Similarly, in order to understand the dominant ideology of a particular society, one should begin with its economic base (Engels 1977:389). This is true also of classical societies, as the work of Ste Croix (1981) makes clear, not least of biblical times (see Gottwald 1979, Belo 1976, Echegeray 1984, Clevenot 1985 and Meyers 1988).

2.2 Literature as reflection

Marx understood religion, art and literature as a part of the superstructure within a particular society (see further Eagleton 1976:5). From the beginning it was clear that literature as such was not directly determined by socio-economic forces. This is apparent in Marx understanding art as an active element in change, and in Engels' dialectical understanding of the superstructure and the economic base, whereby the two interact upon each other (see Eagleton 1976:5,10). Lenin, however, used the imagery of a mirror in his writings on Tolstoy, so that literature or art was understood to 'reflect' the economic base of society (quoted in Macherey 1978:119). In order to prevent a misunderstanding of such an analogy, Pierre Macherey (1978:105-156) argued that such a simplistic view was flawed. Indeed, it came to be labeled as 'vulgar Marxism' (see Newton 1990:102 and Macherey 1978:130). A better analogy was needed to express the complexity of the relationship, so as to avoid the mistake of 'raiding literary works for their ideological content and relating this directly to the class-struggle or the economy' (Eagleton 1976:24).

2.3 Literature as product

Louis Althusser (1971:203-4) argued that the mistake lay in trying to reduce art or literature to ideology. Rather literature and art exist in relationship to one another. Eagleton (1978:67-83), following Althusser, refers to literature as 'the product' of

the economic and historical forces, in which there is a sense of distance as between material (e.g. metal) and the product (e.g. a motor car). Althusser stressed that art, including literature, was not a passive reflection of the economic base, and so underlined 'the relative autonomy' of literature in that it reflected the economic base 'only in the last instance' (quoted by Newton 1990:103). Althusser went further to speak of art as 'overdetermined' by a 'complex network of factors that cannot be interpreted in simple terms' (Newton 1990:103, and see Eagleton 1978:99).

2.4 Textual contradiction and textual silences

Macherey (1978) produced the first sustained critique of Althusser in which he suggested that the text was not a unity as Althusser had believed, but rather embodied a diverse collection of meanings. He urged that:

We must examine the work in its real complexity rather than in its mythical depth. Constrained by its essential diversity, the work, in order to say one thing, has at the same time to say another thing which is not necessarily of the same nature; it unites in a single text several different lines which cannot be apportioned; it is not a question of analysing a necessary sequence, but of showing its combination. What the work says is not one or other of these lines, but their difference, their contrast, the hollow which separates and unites them.

(1978:99-100)

Macherey acknowledges his debt to Freud's 'unconscious mind' and Nietzsche's 'insidious questions' in the development of his views. Much of his work is devoted to the question of the relationship between text, ideology and history. In contrast to Lenin's idea of the text as a mirror, Macherey (1978:119) saw the reflection as partial and selective, so that its ideology exists both in what the text says and in what it does not say. He writes:

Conjecturally, the work has its margins, an area of incompleteness from which we can observe its birth and its production.

(1978:90)

Because of contradictory conditions in which it is produced, the literary work is simultaneously ... a reflection and the absence of a reflection: this is why it is itself contradictory. It would therefore be incorrect to say that the contradictions of the work are the reflection of historical conditions: rather they are the consequences of the absence of this reflection.

(1978:128)

The task of the literary critic for Macherey is to question this ideology:

Ultimately, by interrogating an ideology, one can establish the existence of its limits because they are encountered as an impassible obstacle; they are there, but they cannot be made to speak. To know what an ideology means, to express this meaning, we must therefore go beyond and outside ideology; we must attack it from the outside in an effort to give form to that which is formless. This is not an enterprise of description: the symptomatic weaknesses are not to be located in answers, which can always contrive a

display of impeccable logical coherence; they are to be located in the questions which are left unanswered.

(1978:132)

The end of such a search, according to Macherey, comes with a discovery of scientific knowledge, since in the 'defect of the work is articulated a new truth' (1978:155).

2.5 A dialectical view of literature

In response to the formative work of Macherey, Eagleton raised his own view on the relationship of text to ideology. Choosing a dialectical theory (following Jameson 1971) Eagleton requires that we think of a 'ceaseless reciprocal *operation* of text on ideology and ideology on text, a mutual structuring and destructuring in which text constantly overdetermines its own determinations' as a 'product', not a 'reflection of its ideological environs' (1978:99). One aspect of such a product is the existence of contradictory aspects within the same ideology (Eagleton 1978:90) and Newton 1990:107). In part this is because, as Jameson points out, ideologies are 'strategies of containment' (1971:53). Such strategies are designed to silence the cries of pain of the oppressed and downtrodden in history.

Jameson goes on to speak of the appearance of class conflict within literature (1971:381-384) which creates a 'reflection of contradictions' (1971:384). As Macherey pointed out, a text does not arrive unaccompanied, nor does it arise from nothing (1978:100). So, within the text are the harmonizations which conceal contradictions relating to issues like class conflict. Walter Benjamin spoke accordingly of the historical materialist who 'regards it as his task to brush history against the grain' (quoted in Eagleton 1986). In some of his more recent writings (1981 and 1986) Eagleton develops his understanding of revolutionary criticism and changes the analogy to reading the text against the grain. Finally Eagleton defines the purpose of materialist writers when he writes:

The destruction of corporate and organicist ideologies in the political sphere has always been a central task for revolutionaries; the destruction of such ideologies in the aesthetic region is essential, not only for a scientific knowledge of the literary past, but for laying the foundation on which the materialist, aesthetic and artistic practices of the future can be built.

(1978:161)

2.6 Form and content

Marxist literary theory holds together both the form and the content of the literature. So Jameson speaks of 'a dialectical criticism' which works 'from the surface of a work inward to the level where literary form is deeply related to the concrete' (1971:47). Georg Lukacs insists that 'the true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms, rather than the abstractable content, of the work itself' (quoted in Eagleton 1976:24). This means that beyond a simple materialist analysis, one needs a scientific theory of literature, which can deal adequately with the form and genre of the literature. Eagleton, for example, makes use of the psychology of Freud and the theory of Derrida (Selden 1985:43).

2.7 The challenge for biblical scholars

Among the biblical scholars who have utilized some form of materialist analysis, to date only Norman Gottwald (1990) and Itumeleng Mosala (1989) make reference to the work of critics like Eagleton. Theirs is a pioneering effort in two regards. First of all, the most important Marxist critics dealt with fiction and not with historical writings, or quasi-historical writings such as the Gospels or the 'historical' books of the Hebrew Bible. Secondly, the literature they investigate was written within the last century and a half, unlike the biblical texts. Nevertheless, the writings of Eagleton, and particularly Macherey, offer great promise for future studies of the Bible. This is evident already in the work of Gottwald and Mosala.

2.7.1 Gottwald

Gottwald's work (1990) is too short to deal in depth with the issue of ideology and text, but it does challenge the reader of the Bible to consider not just what the text says, but also to consider its silences. Here he quotes Eagleton (1978:80) and his comments on text as ideological rather than historical, and as existing in the 'hollow' between history and its expression of that history (ideology). This is what Macherey (1978:128) delineated as its 'silences', or lack of reflection. To comprehend its ideology means listening to its silences.

Gottwald then proceeds to investigate Deutero-Isaiah, noting the marked absence of reference to the majority of Jews who did not enter Exile, but were left in Judah. Instead, Isaiah focuses upon the exiles as the hope for Judah, and indeed for the conversion of the world. Gottwald concludes that the 'author's ideology of the exiles' virtue and competency to lead a reformed people was as precarious and excessive as his confidence that the inhabited world would convert to Yahweh' (1990:12). The work of Gottwald raises an important issue - the absence of the voice of the people of Judah, who were not part of the exiles. Surely, since they represent the classes previously oppressed, they deserve to be seen as the righteous remnant, rather than the ruling elite who were punished in exile.

Gottwald does not develop a formal theory of literature, but apparently sees his purpose as critical, rather than systematic - to pose questions rather than to supply answers! This is not out of line with some Marxist literary theory (see Jameson 1971:365). However, to some extent the analysis of Gottwald interprets the silences too simply. In this he fails to observe Eagleton's warning which followed on the reference to the hollow of the text (1978:80), that such a simple formulation risks falsification, because

Ideology pre-exists the text: but the ideology of the text defines, operates and constitutes the ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself.

(1978:80)

For a more detailed study we turn to the work of Mosala.

3. The hermeneutic of Mosala

Two influences have affected Mosala's approach to biblical studies. The first is his commitment to the struggle in South Africa, from within the context of Black Consciousness. Until recently he held the position of president of AZAPO alongside his full-time position as Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Cape Town. This link through AZAPO with the black consciousness struggle has determined to a large extent his attitude to what he calls 'bourgeois hermeneutics', and to some extent explains his critique of other black theologians like Tutu and Boesak. In terms of his approach to the Bible, Mosala is indebted, in the first instance, to Gottwald's use of historical materialism found in his *Tribes of Yahweh* (1979). Mosala's own reading of Eagleton has sharpened his critical edge, leading to his belief that the way forward for black theology lies in the direction of a radical hermeneutics of suspicion, based in turn on a materialist interpretation of the Bible (1989:11).

3.1 The quest for an indigenous theology

Mosala sets out to develop the basis for an indigenous theology of the black worker struggle against *apartheid*. His choice is dictated by his concern to be faithful to the material location of the black workers in South Africa, and to preserve the element of 'struggle' as his hermeneutical key (1989:10). Thus he begins with the understanding of the Bible as both the site of struggle and the weapon of gender and class struggles (1989:11). The idea of the Bible as the revealed 'Word of God' is therefore problematic, because it conveys a false sense of Bible as 'non-ideological', whereas in fact it is already 'cast in hegemonic codes' (1989:7). Uncritical readers, including black theologians, who appeal to a literal or contextual reading of the Bible, simply reproduce the oppressive or hegemonic *status quo* in direct opposition to their implied intention. They are trapped in the circle of idealistic hermeneutics, and so are unable to release their reading of the Bible as a weapon in their struggle against *apartheid*, or any other form of discrimination (1989:3). With particular reference to Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, he writes:

I argue here that the reason for black theology's failure among the oppressed has to do with its class and ideological commitments, especially with respect to its biblical hermeneutics. I contend that, unless black theologians break ideologically and theoretically with bourgeois biblical-hermeneutical assumptions, black theology cannot become an effective weapon of struggle for its oppressed people.

(1989:3)

3.2 The failure of social scientific studies

Mosala finds no assistance in the recent social scientific approaches to the Bible, describing them as one step forward and two steps backward (1986 and 1989:43-66). For example, he notes that both the Weberian 'ideal type' and the structural functionalism of Durkheim fail to take seriously 'the issues of class, ideology, and political economy', both of biblical and modern times (1986:30). In line with this double critique, he goes on to show the same weaknesses of Weber and Durkheim

repeated in the work of Meeks, Theissen, Wilson and Gager. Indeed, in the opinion of Mosala, and Mansueto whom he follows, such social scientific criticism is simply an extension of the rise of monopoly capitalism (1989:47-55) - an ideology which masquerades as scientific criticism (1989:45). The fault of the scholars is in not revealing their ideological bias. This failing, Mosala argues (1989:65), makes these approaches unacceptable for creating a truly liberatory hermeneutic within the context of the South African struggle.

In the face of the problems inherent in this approach, Mosala is apparently faced with a choice. He can go the way of other materialist studies (such as Belo 1976), or he can choose to blaze a new pathway. Mosala chooses the latter, and in so doing distances himself from both the scientific approach and the historical critical approach, the latter described by him as 'reductionist' and 'atomizing' (1989:45).

3.3 Reading the Bible against the grain

The work of Mosala (1986 and 1989) clearly shows the influence of Eagleton, containing several quotations and references to his works. For Mosala, the Bible is the product of the ruling elite of its time, and he calls upon black theologians to inquire not what the Bible says, but what it does not say! They are to question its silences, and so discover the original class conflict in which it came to be the hegemonic code (1989:119). In this Mosala describes his task as 'reading of the Bible, against the grain' (1989:32), and as employing a hermeneutic of suspicion (1989:179). Mosala believes that the reader, being conditioned by his or her own experience of contemporary class, age or sex struggles, will be able to recover such readings as are truly liberatory (1989:121). But first Mosala identifies the real enemy of liberation, namely capitalism. With approval, he quotes the words of Terry

Modern criticism was born of a struggle against the absolutist state: unless its future is now defined as a struggle against the bourgeois state, it might have no future at all.

(1984:124)

3.3.1 A materialist study of Micah

Mosala contends that since much of the biblical text was written by members of the ruling elite, an historical materialist reading of Scripture implies a process of excavation - a peeling back of the ideological veneer to expose the essence of the material situation, and in particular the class struggle which obtained in those days (1989:121). In his exegesis of Micah, Mosala states:

It is little wonder that dominant, traditional theology has found the Bible in general politically and ideologically comfortable, notwithstanding the unsuppressible evidence of a morally distorted material situation. Micah itself, as is true of most of the Bible, offers no certain starting point for a theology of liberation. There is simply too much de-ideologization to be made before it can be hermeneutically usable in the struggle for liberation. In short, viewed as a whole and ideologically, it is a ruling-class document.

(1989:121)

Mosala does not dismiss the entire biblical text out of hand. Indeed, he commits himself to a struggle for liberation and the lost land of the black workers, without losing the Bible (1989:153). In spite of Micah's ideological orientation, Mosala argues that

... enough contradictions within Micah enable eyes hermeneutically trained in the struggle for liberation today to observe the kindred struggles of the oppressed and exploited of the biblical communities in the very absence of those struggles in the text.

(1989:121)

(We see here that the thinking of Mosala comes very close to that of Mackerey, although he is never referred to directly.) The text, as it stands, however, is identified as a ruling-class document, which necessitates a reading of its silences.

In dealing with the prophet Micah, Mosala sketches the mode and relations of production for eighth century Israel and Judaea, before commencing a study of the actual text. Most of the material cited by Mosala is well known to scholars of the period, like Robert Coote (1981). In his choice of a literary method, Mosala (1989:126) follows that of Coote (1981) in the latter's study of Amos.

Coote (1989) deals with the prophet by describing the social situation of the eighth century in terms of changing land tenure from patrimonial to prebendal, and the effect this has on the living conditions of the peasant population (1981:24-32). He then breaks down the book into three levels, which he tabulates as Amos A, B and C. The historical situation of the eighth century he relates to Amos A, namely those oracles stemming directly from the prophet or at least from that time. Having dealt with the message of Amos to the ruling class (1981:32-45), Coote then develops the second level (Amos B), that of the Deuteronomistic redaction of the time of Josiah (622 BCE). He notes (1981:48-57) that this edition of Amos centres upon the contrast between Jerusalem and Bethel, typical of the Deuteronomistic emphasis on Jerusalem as the only legitimate place in which to worship God. The introduction of Bethel is therefore polemical.

Amos C Coote dates back to the late exilic period (1981:110). This edition, which is chiefly concerned with the introduction and conclusion of Amos, is marked by a different ideology, more sympathetic to the ruling elite than Amos A, and emphasizing hope instead of judgement. However, the hope includes the return of the peasants to their land (1981:123). The three editions of Coote follow the consensus of scholarly opinion on Amos and the other Northern Kingdom prophets, including some process of reworking from within a Southern Kingdom situation (such as the Deuteronomistic redaction or a similar situation). The exilic redaction which introduces the note of hope regarding the restoration of the Davidic house in the last chapter of Amos, has long been part of the scholarly consensus on Amos. What is new in Coote's work is his description of the changing forms of land tenure, and his association of Bethel with the Deuteronomistic redaction. By no stretch of imagination could the study be described as a materialistic one, but if anything it falls into the province of social history and source/redaction criticism.

Mosala in his consideration of Micah also discerns three main levels, which he calls Micah A, B and C, and a fourth level which he terms A/B. At this point he is following Coote's analysis of Amos (Mosala 1989:125-6). Mosala argues that Micah A contains the earliest material and is most easily utilized for the development of a liberatory hermeneutic (1988:148). That edition of Micah clearly addresses the ruling class and promises their punishment. Level B Mosala dates to the reforms of Josiah (1989:139). The reader has some difficulty here in determining the precise logic which lies behind Mosala's choice of passages, particularly since he does not refer to any particular theological motif relevant to the Deuteronomistic Historian. He speaks instead of 'a petite bourgeoisie orientation' (1989:141). Level C he dates to the exile, and attributes the disputed salvation passages of Micah (chapters 4 and 5) to that level (1989:127-134). The ideology is that of the ruling elite and belongs to the same socio-economic situation as Amos C (1989:131 see Coote 1981:110-134, especially 123).

In spite of their ideological orientation, Mosala emphasizes that levels B and C are not to be considered as useless for the construction of Mosala's theology of liberation. In line with Eagleton's view, the silences on the position of the peasants are said to be eloquent.

Mosala writes:

In the specific circumstances of the racist and sexist oppression and capitalist exploitation of black people in South Africa, MicahA and A/B provide a positive hermeneutical connection with the struggles of black workers; but the B and C texts of Micah serve the struggles of oppressed people negatively. These latter texts represent the forms of domination and the interests of dominant social classes that are similar to those of contemporary oppressors and exploiters. We can, through an appropriation of these texts, albeit a negative one, once again bring the category of 'struggle' to the fore.
(1989:153)

3.3.2 A note of caution

Notwithstanding the obvious truth in much of what Mosala has written about Micah and his time, certain reservations also spring to mind. In the first place, the link Mosala makes with the writings of Coote suffers from a major fault. Micah is not a Northern Kingdom prophet, but a younger contemporary of Isaiah, belonging to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Even given the possibility of a Deuteronomistic redaction of Micah, which seems to be what Mosala has in mind (1989:139), one is still hard pressed to liken this to the redaction of a Northern Kingdom prophet like Amos. Indeed there are no indications of typical Deuteronomistic theology, rather the reverse. In Micah 1:5b we have a reference to the sin of Jerusalem and in 6:4 there is a positive mention of Gilgal, a rival shrine. As both verses are attributed by Mosala to Micah B, it appears that he has either misinterpreted Coote's level B, or he does not understand the Deuteronomistic theology.

Given Mosala's description of the historical method as 'atomizing' and 'reductionist' (1989:45), one wonders why he chose a method which is clearly 'atomistic', and further why he attempted such a close parallel with the work of Coote. By focussing upon the content to the exclusion of form, Mosala fails to heed Lukacs' comment (see above) that 'the true bearers of ideology in art are the very forms, rather than abstractable content, of the work itself' (quoted by Eagleton 1976:24). Macherey, who stressed that what was important in a text is what it does not say, yet urges that 'meaning is in the relation between the implicit and the explicit, not on one or the other side of the fence' (1978:87).

3.3.3 A materialist study of Luke

Having dealt with Micah, Mosala proceeds to a study of the birth narratives in Luke 1 and 2. He commences with a detailed consideration of the relations of production in first century Palestine, which he considers to be the socio-historical setting of these two chapters (1989:154). He then refers to the class interests of Luke, who aims to present a life of Jesus, which is

... acceptable to the rich and poor of Luke's community, but in which the struggles and contradictions of the lives of the poor and exploited are conspicuous by their absence.

(1989:163).

In this way, Luke and those who take his so-called 'concern for the poor' at face value, collude with the ruling class interests, for whose sake the Gospel was written (Mosala 1989:164).

Luke links the birth of Jesus with that of John the Baptist, who was of the priestly class. Thus, argues Mosala, the dubious nature of Jesus' birth is made acceptable to the reader, for it now carries the blessing of the ruling elite, who consisted in no small part of priestly stock (1989:166). Mosala writes:

The Lucan discourse, in an attempt to depict Jesus as an acceptable figure to the ruling class, produces a discursive practice in which the priestly class has given its legitimation to the birth and subsequent mission of Jesus.

(1989:166)

The figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus, lies at the heart of the problem. For Mosala, Mary is probably 'a single mother from the ghettos of colonized Galilee' who, in the opinion of Luke, needs 'the moral cleansing of the priestly sector of the ruling class - those who were the target of Luke's Gospel' (1989:167). Luke, according to Mosala, stretches credulity in order to obscure Mary's disgrace, by introducing the virgin birth. He goes further, by bringing Joseph into the picture, so as to connect Jesus with the dynasty of David. For Mosala,

... there seems little doubt that his innovation of the Davidic royal connection was meant to suppress Jesus' unacceptable low-class origins.

(1989:171)

Mosala concludes that Luke's cover-up operation, his co-option of Jesus in the interests of the ruling class, is in the eye of the poor and exploited people of the world today, 'an art of political war against the liberation struggle' (1989:171). For the black working class, it is the silences of Luke's portrait of Jesus which speak most eloquently. To press the silences is Mosala's call, so that the real class situation becomes apparent and one feels again the pain of Mary, the single parent, and the disgrace for Jesus of his illegitimate birth. Here lie the weapons for the people's struggle, and for the creation of a theology of the black working class.

3.3.4 The silences of Mosala

Mosala raises as many questions as he answers. Most important of all is his failure to go beyond a critique of Western scholarship, so as to develop an alternative theory of literature. In place of a scientific approach like Jameson's dialectical approach (1974:306-416), the reader is left without the means to develop a thorough going analysis of the form and content of the Gospel.

In not addressing the nature of the form of the birth narratives, Mosala fails to realize that such narratives are a product of a class concerned about birth and legitimacy, namely the educated elite. These are not the concerns of the peasants of Galilee. Thus both text (content) and form (birth narratives) belong to the concern of another class - either that of Luke or his implied readers. To argue, as Mosala has done, that Jesus' illegitimacy may be used in the service of the struggle, makes no sense. Mosala is doing precisely what he accused others of doing, namely using ruling class modes of thinking to develop a literary hermeneutic. His right course of action should have been to refuse to debate the issue of legitimacy, and so to demonstrate its irrelevance to the contemporary black struggle.

4. Conclusion

Mosala's experiment in reading the Bible 'against the grain' deserves recognition as a brave step. But there is a profound silence with regard to a reliable literary approach, such as is evident in the writings of Belo (1976) and Myers (1988), and which is needed to supplement a reading of the silences. Secondly, Mosala's exegesis is silent with regard to the totality of Luke or Micah as form. In the end, the category of struggle, although important, is simply insufficient for the task of creating an alternative hermeneutic. The reader is unable to lay hold of the ideas nascent within the text, and which have for centuries, not least by Karl Marx himself, been utilized in the creation of new and opposing ideologies.

Jameson wrote that the critic is faced with a choice between Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and 'the hermeneutics of restoration of some original, forgotten meaning' - that is between negative and positive hermeneutics (1971:119). Biblical scholars face that same choice in their interpretation of the Bible. Jameson goes further when he writes that positive hermeneutics implied 'access to some essential source of life', which for Ricoeur was the realm of the divine. Indeed,

Ricoeur believed that the only form of positive hermeneutics was the religious one (Jameson 1971:119). To prove or to disprove this, is the task now facing biblical scholarship.

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