N.T. WRONG AND THE BIBLIOBLOGGERS

James Crossley, *University of Sheffield*
Correspondence to James Crossley: james.crossley@shef.ac.uk

This article builds upon an earlier political analysis of the phenomenon of biblical scholars blogging ('bibliobloggers') by incorporating the pseudonymous bibliobogger, 'N.T. Wrong'. Developing Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model and various ideas concerning surveillance, it is clear Wrong was (and is) a stark opposite to the consistent trend among bibliobloggers that buys into the language and ideas of US-led power, most notably concerning the 'war on terror' and Orientalism. Through the pseudonymous persona, Wrong's blog also ran counter to a culture of surveillance, of which blogging and related internet phenomena are now an integral part. While running counter to these trends in biblioblogging, Wrong became the exception proving the 'rule' of the Propaganda Model. Through biblioblogers ignoring Wrong's politics on issues relating to US foreign policy so central to the Propaganda Model (and while freely discussing equally 'non-biblical' topics), the analysis of biblioblogging as a reflection of the concerns of the Propaganda Model is reinforced. This is shown through dicussion of a number of Wrong's blog entries and further suggestions are then made concerning the function of liberal and former leftist supporters of imperialism in relation to biblioblogging and the Propaganda Model.

> **Jim West**: What, may I ask, are your professional goals?
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> **N.T. Wrong**: To reconfigure the manner in which biblical studies is carried out in the entire world (West, February 2009).

INTRODUCTION

Biblical scholars, ranging from interested amateurs through to famous professors, blogging on the Bible (known collectively as 'biblioblogers') took off earlier this decade and now number, remarkably, over 300 (Anonymous, undated).[1] They also seem to be popular among biblical scholars, and not simply because people regularly encounter biblical scholars who read blogs. For on August 26, 2008, Mark Goodacre's NT Blog received four million visits since September 2, 2003 (Goodacre, August 26 2008). Biblioblogging tends to be conservative in both intellectual and religious terms, with scholars such as N. T. Wright, Walter Brueggemann, Bruce Malina, and John Meier being perennial favourites and with the bloggers being generally white, middle-class, aged 20s-40s, and male.[2] While possibly a white, middle class, male aged between 20 and 50, for all that is known, in April 2008 the very antithesis of the archetypal biblioblogger, at least in terms of intellectual and religious ideas, burst on to the scene with an array of satirical, humorous and sometimes controversial posts before finally bowing out in February 2009. I am speaking, of course, of the infamous pseudonymous blogger N.T. 'Tom' Wrong.[3]

The identity of Wrong has been the subject of some debate (some serious, some humorous). With this in mind I should point out from the start that I am emphatically *not* Wrong and that I could only make guesses as to who Wrong actually is. Without wanting to continue the quest for the historical Wrong, some comments on Wrong's online personality can be made without establishing the true identity of this pseudonymous blogger. Wrong is happily blasphemous (or at least happily prepared to mock the sacred), regularly swears (unlike virtually all biblioblogers),

discusses topics most bloggers might deem risqué (more on that later, fear not), and pokes fun at numerous biblical scholars (e.g. Eisenmann, Dever, Witherington, and, of course, N. T. Wright). I would guess that Wrong is a non-believer but it is certainly fair to say that religion and fundamentalism (of whatever religion) are frequently teased. Wrong is no atheist apologist though. Of Hector Avalos,author of the controversial and provocative book, *The End of Biblical Studies*, Wrong claimed, 'Once a fundie always a fundie. He's just batting for the other side, now…Avalos is a fundie in manner and to a lesser extent in content. In manner, he is doctrinaire about his own beliefs, with a tendency to generalise about the opposition' (Wrong, 5 August, 2008).

Wrong is comfortable with broader interdisciplinary work, including that of Talal Asad, Walter Benjamin, Slavoj Žižek, and Edward Said and areas such as postcolonialism and critical theory in general, along with ideological critiques of scholarship. Wrong is just as comfortable with more traditional historical critical approaches to the Bible as well as Ancient Near Eastern archaeology and is clearly what is conventionally labelled 'minimalist'('maximalist' was deemed a swear word by Wrong). Wrong seems to be an expert in Hebrew Bible and early Judaism but is still in the comfort zone in New Testament studies, with posts ranging from topics such as the 'pistis christou' debate to Jesus' resurrection. It is highly likely that we are dealing with a trained biblical scholar (a point admitted by Wrong in an interview (West, February 2009) and easily one of the most broadly learned and intellectually sophisticated of any of the bibliobloggers.

SURVEILLANCE AND THE POLITICS OF WRONG

> Surveillance has become ubiquitous and taken for granted in today's world. It appears in many sectors of life, not necessarily in some developmental order, but in each certain features are displayed: rationalization, the application of science and technology, classification and knowledgeabilty of subjects…the internet provides games and spaces where surveillance may be explored as well as experienced…In the worlds of theme parks and shopping malls, too, surveillance is not merely an external process but something participatory. The overlapping and cross-cutting cultures of surveillance may be reinforced and normalized by their interactions with entertainment media…Because of the widespread, systematic and routine ways in which personal data are processed in the twenty-first century, it is appropriate to talk of the 'surveillance society'.
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> – David Lyon (2007: 1, 6, 7).

This sort-of-biographical material is important because, as we will see, it becomes part of the focus of the controversies surrounding N. T. Wrong in the world of biblioblogging, in contrast to what might be considered to be highly controversial, namely, Wrong's politics. Wrong's political output has been highly critical of the 'war on terror' and the cultural support it has amassed in the form of a 'hideously emboldened Orientalism'.[4] Wrong has also been fiercely critical of uncritical support for Israeli state policies towards Palestinians.

Wrong's openly expressed politics are at odds with almost all the world of biblioblogging and it is to this issue I now turn because in 2008 I published *Jesus in an Age of Terror* which includes a lengthy pre-Wrong chapter on the politics of biblioblogging (Crossley, 2008: 20–55). Here I turned to the Propaganda Model developed by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky to

understand the political emphases in biblioblogging and which I now summarise.[5] The Propaganda Model shows that the press is not really an important tool of democracy and it is not really disagreeable, argumentative or subversive of political power, at least not in any significant sense. The function of the mass media is to provide support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity. This is reflected in their choices, emphases, and omissions. It is the powerful who fix the assumptions of media discourse and decide what is allowed to be seen and heard, often with the support of academics, intellectuals and (following Gramsci) other 'experts in legitimation'.[6] Disagreements reflect disagreements among the elites. Although individuals may hold very different views from the agenda of the mass media, these views will not be seriously reflected in the overall agenda or agendas. Fundamental dissent is largely missing from the press: it is more likely to be squeezed towards the back pages or left to some marginalised press. Censorship, then, effectively becomes self-censorship behind the rhetoric of free and open debate. Hence Herman and Chomsky borrow the loaded phrase 'manufacturing consent' (Crossley, 2008: 3–9).

This model can be applied to the role of biblioblogging and the political emphases therein, not least because blogging can now be seen as at least connected with the mass media and certain bibliobloggers explicitly tie their blogging in with the world of the mass media. The key areas of the contemporary application of the Propaganda Model were covered, such as Iraq, the Middle East, and the 'war on terror', the myth of unique suffering, stereotyping of Muslims and Arabs, and Israel and Palestine. In each case biblioblogging overwhelming came down in support of dominant positions in the Anglo-American mass media and among the supportive political and intellectual elites, though not infrequently in direct contrast to views of the general public. This support included: endorsement or avoidance of the Iraq war; a strongly pro-Israeli line over against Palestinians; highlighting of the suffering of British and Americans with no expressed concern for the suffering of victims of US power in the 'war on terror', in some cases even when bibliobloggers were confronted directly with such evidence; and even somehow placing the explicitly anti-Bush N.T. Wright on the side of George W. Bush, alongside 'maximalist' scholars of the Hebrew Bible, and against scholars deemed too intellectually and politically liberal, including the 'minimalist' scholars of the Hebrew Bible! Alternative views were typically either ignored or rejected (Crossley, 2008: 20–52).

I would also like to develop these ideas further here, particularly as ever new means of media communication related to blogging (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) are being used by biblical scholars. In particular it is helpful to see more mundane ways in which cultural and political power is maintained and developed. We can begin with the observation that Herman and Chomsky make a crucial distinction between their reading of the US media and the propaganda system of a totalitarian state (Herman and Chomsky, 1988: 302). In a totalitarian or military state, as Chomsky put it, 'you just hold a bludgeon over their heads, and if they get out of line you smash them over the head' whereas in more democratic contexts this capacity has been lost and hence the turn to different forms of propaganda of the implicit variety outlined in the Propaganda Model. Chomsky adds, 'The logic is clear. Propaganda is to a democracy what the bludgeon is to a totalitarian state' (Chomsky, 2002: 20–21). As we saw in passing above, part of the Propaganda Model is the idea that journalists, intellectuals, academics and so on are not intentionally buying into the system (though some might) and that as individuals they may well hold different views

from the propaganda system but it typically remains that the views of dominant elites are perpetuated.

With such ideas relating to the unintentional in mind, we might recall ideas about societal and cultural surveillance, from Foucault's famous analysis of the Panopticon to the various forms of bodily surveillance (and, notably, bodily surveillance under empire) now being analyzed in biblical scholarship.[7] Surveillance is central to modern societies and democratic systems for categorizing, group shaping, boundary guarding, social control, social predicting (are you a *potential* suspect?) and an ever increasing observation of the individual or the group in an array of cultural contexts. These contexts might include: endless political debates over 'liberties' versus 'security'; the controversial USA Patriot Act; the ever increasing use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance cameras on British high streets; the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) from hikers to concerned parents; loyalty cards (perfect for establishing consumer profiles); the rise and the rise of the reality television genre (e.g. *Big Brother*); celebrity-driven tabloids and magazines; and even the academic categorization and 'overview' such as that given by this author.[8]

Probably one of the most remarkable instances (at least in terms of success) of unintentional conformity to a general system of surveillance has to be the emergence of social networking and micro-blogging sites such as Facebook and Twitter. With such examples we can find not only masses of personal details stored about countless and often willing individuals – infamously convenient for marketing purposes – but as a means of keeping an eye on the whereabouts of the individual and monitoring of employees by employers. Online gossiping behind the boss's back is now riskier than ever, as a certain ambitious English footballer has found out to his dismay, though another was able to manipulate Twitter in order to orchestrate a big money move to another club, no doubt aware his bosses would read his disgruntled 'tweets' (as it turned out they did)! (McMillan, 2008; Caulkin, 2009)

In terms of bibliobloggers we can, should we wish, regularly monitor the travel plans, sporting habits, locations, and television tastes, alongside the latest updates on biblical scholarship and biblioblog entries, on Facebook and Twitter.[9] On the biblioblogs, Michael Bird gave the most regimented daily timetable imaginable, from waking up at 7.00am and getting in to work at 8.15am, through German practice, prayer readings, and collecting various pious writings at 8.30–8.50am, 8.50–9.00am, and 9.00–9.10am respectively, right up to an evening of book reviews, articles, research, devotionals, blogging and winding down, each given their allotted time (Bird, 1 February 2007). This might be an extreme example, as some fellow bloggers pointed out, but others still posted their timetables and many still blog where they have been, who they have seen, what they will be doing, and what their precise short term career and travel intentions are.[10] These are extremely common features on the biblioblogs.

It is now worth analysing Wrong in light of the above conclusions on propaganda and surveillance. Wrong does not fit into this model in terms of a pandering academic; quite the opposite, in fact. As Wrong has said to me in an email conversation (and, yes, I am blissfully aware of the absurdity), this character is 'a photo negative, more or less' (email dated 24 January, 2009). In terms of surveillance, Wrong's identity remains a mystery and our masked hero has managed to escape capture and identification. At best the person behind the mask seems to have been physically present at International SBL 2008 in Auckland, and at least promised to be physically present at Annual SBL 2008 in Boston, but these remain teasing because of the mystery person

lurking behind the mask and his non-conformity to being precisely monitored has hardly gone unnoticed. [11] Even when some serious attempts by other bibliobloggers were made to find out who was behind the mask through tracing IP addresses and comparing Wrong's ideas and humour to known academics, Wrong stayed silent on any precise allegations of location and identity, adding,

> This was one of the most absurd things I've seen in a long time. There were dozens of posts dedicated to discovering N. T. Wrong's identity, thousands of words written, with greater or lesser degrees of seriousness. I loved it. I felt like I was watching from the box-seat at the theatre of the absurd. It was pure pathos at its most Pythonesque. Like waiting for Godot – who you deep down know will never come, but that's not the point. Brilliant. Thanks to all who orchestrated it, and to those – even more absurdly – who took it seriously (West, February, 2009).

Wrong's anonymity provided an obvious means of avoiding the surveillance of the person behind Wrong, even inverting the surveillance by gazing at those trying to monitor the whereabouts and identity of the person behind Wrong, and thus constantly maintaining the 'photo negative' image, not least through one of the oldest forms of those resisting being caught: taunting.

We can take this idea of a 'photo negative' further by analysing the key areas taken from the Propaganda Model when we look at Wrong's politics in more detail and when compared with other bibliobloggers. N.T. Wrong satirized negative stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims in the American media and popular culture, a key area in the contemporary application of the Propaganda Model, and referenced arguments about how such stereotyping is part of the ways in which American soldiers tortured and abused Iraqi citizens (Wrong, 4 July 2008; 18 October 2008; 16 November 2008). Closer to biblical studies, Wrong ridiculed a picture used by Yigael Yadin with the caption 'A girl from North Africa felt "at home" operating the two grinding stones, which are over 3,000 years old'. Wrong, echoing Said, argued that such views suggest that the 'Arab world is unchanging, permanent, in contrast to Western progress and change'(Wrong,10 November 2008). During the recent Israeli invasion of Gaza, Wrong wrote of

> ...any number of Hollywood terrorist films, American television shows, etc, in which the problem is always portrayed as crazed individuals arriving *ex nihilo* (or rather, arriving, from the primeval chaos out East) and the solution is conversely portrayed as the action of smart and justice-restoring individuals. The former is unglorified and complex; the latter is hyped, simplified to the level of the (dangerously widespread) shit-for-brains lowest common denominator of a viewer (Crossley, 9 January 2009).

Perhaps the most sensitive issue of all within the contemporary application of the Propaganda Model is that of Israel and Palestine. Yet Wrong is similarly forthright in his politics. He has fired at Christian Zionism and its uncritical support for Israel (Wrong, 21 June 2008). In terms of biblical studies, or related areas, he has been strongly critical of the alliance of Eilat Mazar, the Christian 'fundamentalism' of the unaccredited Armstrong College and support for Israeli

nationalism through so-called 'biblical archaeology' in the discovery of a tunnel in Jerusalem which was tied in with the story of David (2 Sam. 5.6-8; 1 Chron. 11.4-6) (Wrong, 2 January 2009). Wrong also defended Jewish groups in the UK, as well as a Palestinian group, opposed to Israeli policies towards Palestinians for their Christmas carols attacking Israeli policy. Wrong defended certain members of the Church of England for allowing such an event to take place while mocking criticisms made by the Israeli ambassador and a number of what Wrong called 'bandwagon-riding half-arses' such as the former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey (Wrong, 11 December, 2008).[12]

We might contrast this with one example of the pressure to conform (and there are plenty of others), namely, Chris Tilling and his nine-part series on Christian Zionism.[13] Tilling is critical of Christian Zionism and was initially keen to show that it was not merely a theological curiosity because it 'impacts world politics'. He wrote explicitly of political issues surrounding the British Mandate, the founding of the State of Israel, Christian Zionist involvement in Israeli politics and so on. Tilling received plenty of emails and comments and it became clear that there was increasing pressure from Christian Zionists and others for him to not be critical (even before Tilling had made any judgment in some cases!) and so Tilling had to emphasise that he was more interested in the theology and hermeneutics rather than politics. Eventually, the political issues were abandoned by Tilling and it seems to be that this was due to the pressure placed on him.

Presumably, applying such pressure on someone like Wrong would be difficult enough under normal circumstances and even more so given that it is a pseudonymous blog. As Wrong put it

> It [blogging anonymously] gives you a degree of freedom to say what you really think, without worrying about what those who might employ you think. I encourage everybody to do it. In fact, most books should be published pseudonymously, too. Who doesn't want to write a scathing refutation of what they wrote ten years ago? I think it could encourage more open writing. It might also make it easier for people to approach works without bias against the author. It wouldn't help with The Man's academic publishing requirements – but you know what they can do (West, February 2009; see also Carlson 14 February 2009).

However, what I would argue is that Wrong was the exception that proves the rule, and only partly because the blog was pseudonymous and that this meant an alleviation of the pressures to conform and an ability to poke fun at attempts at surveillance. Wrong boosts the success of using the Propaganda Model for the analysis of blogging because his political output was more-or-less ignored. Certainly there were occasional comments left on the blog but Wrong's explicit politics were effectively 'dealt with' by other bloggers largely refusing to engage with them. It might be argued that biblioblogging is really only concerned with biblical studies and religion but we should not forget that there is a widespread concern for politics and political discussion, including almost immediate reactions to certain high profile news events. Wrong did not, therefore, *have* to be ignored because blog topics were supposedly too off-topic. In this sense, Wrong fits a pattern of political (non-) biblioblogging in the pre-Wrong years. This ignoring was seen, for instance, when the issue of Falluja was raised and in the ways in which the July 7 murders in London were handled whereby any question of the possibility that foreign policy was involved

was ignored and the British government was praised. On the July 7 murders (and Falluja for that matter), bibliobloggers reflected the responses in the British press and by the British government but, crucially, in direct contrast to the views of the majority of the British public (Crossley, 2008: 31–36).

THE WRONG CONTROVERSIES

What also makes Wrong all the more significant for understanding the Propaganda Model is the simple fact that there is now no N. T. Wrong blog available, even though Wrong still lurks online. It is also possible to factor in some of the hostility towards Wrong's pseudonymous identity which frequently arose in comments sections on blogs (including Wrong's blog), alongside, perhaps, the quests for the real identity of Wrong and Stephen Carlson's raising of various potential problems for the career of pseudonymous bloggers (Carlson, 14 February 2004). Perhaps if Wrong's true identity were to have been revealed, the controversial posts would have been difficult to maintain. Some people may well have explicitly wanted to 'out' Wrong and/or get rid of Wrong but we might speculate that this fits into the Propaganda Model in that, if successful, it effectively contributes to the marginalising of his views.

Perhaps. But whatever the reasons we can certainly say that the overall effect of the reception of Wrong certainly marginalised his political views. This is especially highlighted by the ways in which Wrong has caused controversy and where he has made a number of bibliobloggers take note. Wrong, with tongue partly in cheek, listed 129 biblioblogs on a five-point scale from 'very conservative' to 'very liberal' using the following criteria:

> 1. Very conservative: You probably hold to the doctrine of inerrancy, or some version close to it. You can name a number of heresies offhand. And you have DA Carson, FF Bruce, or an Apollos Commentary in your bookshelf.
>
> 2. Fairly conservative: The Bible is 'The Word of God' in some sense. You have spent time wondering whether 'emergent' or 'emerging' better describes yourself. You have an NT Wright or James Dunn book in your bookshelf.
>
> 3. Conservative liberal: You really like the Jesus Seminar, and believe that what Jesus was really on about was people loving each other rather than condemning people. You have books by Marcus Borg and John Spong on your bookshelf.
>
> 4. Liberal: You esteem the Bible for the work it is. You spend a lot of time working out ways to read the Bible which can liberate it for different readers. You have a book on queer readings of the Bible on your bookshelf.
>
> 5. Very Liberal: You approach biblical books like any other books, taking the good stuff with the bad shit. You often stop and wonder why you bother with a field riddled with so many apologists. You have Foucault, Said, and Philip Pullman on your bookshelf (Wrong, 30 October 2008).[14]

Labelled by John Lyons as 'an inspired burst of pedantic and nerdish endeavour' (Lyons, 29 October 2008), this comical playing around with surveillance and categorization caused a huge amount of interest in both the comments section (42 comments on the first post, 40 comments

on the follow up post) and on other blogs, many bibliobloggers not a little touchy about their allotted label.[15] However, probably the most controversial legacy of N. T. Wrong was one word mentioned in his interview with Jim West:

JW: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

NTW: I read fiction. I recently quite enjoyed Darkmans by Nicola Barker. I quite like music such as Nick Cave, Conor Oberst, Iron & Wine, and Lily Allen. I like a good movie, too – I recently blahed out on Tom Tykwer movies on DVD. I do a bit of gardening, and aim to create a self-sufficient vegetable garden, and am currently preparing soil for the upcoming season. I also enjoy the occasional subversive art attack on cityscapes.

JW: Do you have any secret hobbies or interests that our readers might find surprising?

NTW: Fisting.

This *Brüno*-esque moment led to what can only be described as moral outrage or a defence against moral outrage. Some, such as David Ker, did not see this merely as a joke:

It's one thing to slaughter a pig on the sacred altar. It's quite another to fall down and worship it. But that's in fact what has occurred at Biblioblogs.com. This august blog highlighting the best of Biblical scholars has featured a reprobate heretic and pervert as their featured blogger of the month...He confessed in the interview with Jim West that he has a special addiction for the most reprehensible sexual practice while claiming to be a husband and father…Who is this supposedly note-worthy blogger? Who should we as bloggers interested in the finest in Biblical studies look to as the apex of academia? It is the pseudonymous NT Wrong. NT Wrong is an excellent writer. He is a scholar of some distinction…He is vulgar in the extreme. Not satisfied to pepper his posted with the most disgusting language, Wrong actually wrote a summary post proudly listing his wretched vocabulary…he [Jim West] positively slobbers all over a flaming pervert and two-bit scholar who does not even claim to be a believer in the Bible or the God of the Bible! (Ker, 2 February 2009; see also Ker 15 February 2009)

Mark Goodacre was not quite as outraged. He liked the interview but still had a notable reservation:

The interview is actually very entertaining, and the anti-bishop reveals a bit more of his voice. He is clearly enjoying trying to see what he can get away with, though, since there is an obscenity of the kind that is surprising (and frankly not entirely welcome) in an academic venue (Goodacre, 3 February 2009).

Goodacre later added:

> …in linking to an article that includes an obscenity, I think it is important to mention the fact to my readers given that, by linking to it, I am encouraging them to go there. My general rule about blogging is that I avoid saying anything that I would not say in the classroom. That is my rule of thumb. I quite understand, of course, that others would feel differently (in Crossley, 3 February 2009).

To underscore the controversial nature of this topic, a discussion of the controversy attracted 145 comments both for and against, and about which Goodacre claimed we must be dealing with 'the longest comment thread of all time on the biblioblogs' (Goodacre, 17 February 2009).[16] Not only does the ability to shock such academics speak volumes about social locations and intellectual restrictions of bibliobloggers, and perhaps biblical scholarship more widely, but it also shows that bloggers certainly do get heated and emotional about both personal and wider issues. This only amplifies the deafening volume of the silence on the political issues. Put one way, the aforementioned penetrative act is not, as far as I am aware, a topic which crops up in the Bible. Put another way, however, we could say that a concern with what biblical texts deem sexual immorality does but then so do issues of Israel and the 'other', as well as imperialism and Empire. Why does the sexual issue provoke all the debate and the 'political' one not?

A 'VERY CONSERVATIVE' DEFENCE OF MURDER?

However, ignoring Wrong is not through a lack of effort on Wrong's part and it is not as if Wrong has been *entirely* ignored. Wrong has attempted to make bibliobloggers explain their political statements, most notably the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholar John Hobbins, and this in direct relationship to the Propaganda Model. On my own work on the political locations of scholarship, Hobbins made various polemical remarks about *Jesus in an Age of Terror*, not to mention his puzzling claim of the 'politics of the Copenhagen / Sheffield school of "postcolonial Biblical Studies"', and then, by his own admission, it turned out that he had not even seen a physical copy of the book, never mind actually having read it (Hobbins, 23 March 2009; 24 March 2009)![17] Roland Boer was unimpressed: 'Ths [sic] stuff from Hobbins is plain stupid – a mish-mash of political bullshit and biblical comments – and he seems to know little about both. I don't why you grace it with a response' (Crossley 23 March 2009). Niels Peter Lemche commented, 'So far I haven't seen any argument from this Hobbit, but nevermind, we do not normally see that from the conservative part. Just assertions. I believe that people over here do not really care. It's a N-American discourse – utterly uninteresting' (in West 23 March 2009).

Whatever we may or may not think about Hobbins' views, I still think there is a case to be made to take Hobbins more seriously, albeit in a different sense to the sentiments expressed by Boer and Lemche. In the world of blogging, Hobbins is now a major biblioblogger, often referenced among other bibliobloggers, and now co-runs the website which holds the interviews with bibliobloggers and provides a 'canonical' list of bibliobloggers. His voice is now a significant one within the world of biblioblogging, irrespective of his abilities to form an argument. Of course, we might again say, 'why bother?' but with the ever expanding biblioblogs, such people may well be making up a notable section of the guild and even if they do not make a splash they will still write books and publish articles (as many have), support consensus views (at least if

most of their scholarly tastes are anything to go by) and so on. For such reasons bibliobloggers are, I think, to be taken seriously, irrespective of the validity of their ideas.

Back to Hobbins, what is significant is that he repeatedly engages in dismissal without dealing with the details of a given argument, as Wrong repeatedly pointed out. Dismissal without substance or argument is part of the Propaganda Model and Chomsky, more than most, has suffered with slurs ranging from Holocaust denial to irrelevance (see Crossley, 2008:128-41, with bibliography). Of Chomsky, and without any engagement with the details of Chomsky's argument (and let us not forget the voluminous output of Chomsky), Hobbins dismissed his detailed and heavily supported work. According to Hobbins, Chomsky 'is in fact a starry-eyed dreamer of sorts, a Zionist of the old school. It's charming in a way. But it does not make for precise analysis' (Hobbins, 24 March, 2009). Of Wrong, Hobbins claimed, 'Like Chomsky, I can only assume at this point that you are a de facto supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas…I think you expose yourself rather often, though not as blatantly as Chomsky, to the accusation that you must be a supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas. I appreciate your disclaimers to the effect that you are not.' This was in response to Wrong's claim that about 'Palestine, invaded by Israelis (after forcing the majority of the land to be given to a minority 6% of the population)', a 'little box or two for Palestinians to "live" within', and the issue of Israeli troops killing Palestinians, before asking if there is a case to be made for this sort of apparently benign imperialism (Hobbins, 24 March, 2009). Obviously this does not make Wrong a supporter of Hezbollah and Hamas but the detail-free dismissal gives a good insight into the political agenda underlying Hobbins' rhetoric.

In doing this Wrong, thanks unintentionally to Hobbins too, was able to highlight an additional feature and development of the work of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, namely the role of former leftists and communists, or those deemed leftists but are supportive of state approved invasions, because they give greater and 'liberal' credibility to a brutal system or have seen the darker side and apparent lack of pragmatism of those in opposition to certain wars. Edward Herman, for instance, speaks of the value for the mainstream media of a figure such as Christopher Hitchens and his polemical assertions and substance-free arguments:

> Christopher Hitchens is a real asset to the war party…His value is enhanced by the fact that he is a 'straddler,' that is, a man in transition from an earlier left politics to apologetics for imperial wars, but with a foot still in The Nation's door and a harsh critic of Kissinger and Pinochet. He is therefore presentable as a member of the 'rational left' or left that has 'seen the light.' Such folks are much honored by the mainstream media (Herman, 2002).

In some detail, Richard Seymour, in his recent book, *The Liberal Defence of Murder*, looks at the historic roots of the importance of 'credible' and intellectual liberal and socialist support for imperialism right up to contemporary figures such as Christopher Hitchens and Bernard-Henri Lévy and other purveyors of 'humanitarian barbarism' in their support for the 'war on terror', with their emphasising of the rhetoric of pure intentions in American foreign policy while making out enemies to be wholly evil (Seymour, 2008). Wrong's interaction with Hobbins has highlighted a similar role for Hobbins. Indeed, one response by Hobbins is particularly important in seeing how he can be brought in line with the Hitchens of this world, namely, Hobbins' connections with Italian communism:

Yet the only political party I've ever actually belonged to, the Italian Communist Party (to be precise, the successor party thereto), supported the US-led bombing of Serbia. That's because, in the real world, Isa 2:1-5 remains a distant horizon (Hobbins, 24 March, 2009).[18]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

After a recent poll of over 70 bibliobloggers asking for their top five most influential scholars, the results were collected and a top ten was compiled. N.T. Wright and Walter Brueggemann were one and two respectively in a top ten which also included James Dunn, Peter Enns, Gordon Fee, and Bruce Malina (Brown, 20 June 2009). With this celebration of conservatism in mind, Wrong's satirical blogging was like something from another, much more entertaining and pro-vocative, planet, not least for its attacks on the not infrequent pomposity of the blogging and academic worlds. More analytically, Wrong is also important for political analysis because of the highlighting of the sensitive points in the manufacture of consent. Moreover, Wrong shows it is possible to disturb the dominant views, irrespective of whether we think this is a good or bad thing. Unlike the mass media, biblioblogging is not directly dependent on corporate financial backing and so more and more figures from overtly different perspectives would be able to follow Wrong's lead and open up different ways of thinking about the politics of biblioblogging from within the world of biblioblogging, perhaps even donning the mask. There are now also occa-sional exceptions, such as Roland Boer's blog, *Stalin's Moustache*, and the collective, *Dunedin School*, which also have a far higher level of political sophistication and learned interaction with a wider array of scholarship in the humanities than other blogs. Yet it is probably fair to say that not even Boer, should he wish, can solely change the tide of blogging politics! Indeed Boer's blog typically attracts those sympathetic to Marxist critique and critical theory rather than part of the wider discussions across the still very conservative (intellectually and religiously) biblioblogs. I say this less because I personally want necessarily to change the world of biblioblogging but more because I want to understand the subtle ways in which politics and power operate in a context where there is no obvious censorship.

Whether the numbers game will ultimately make sure different political voices are not heard or are marginalized remains to be seen. Maybe Wrong will do something about this situation given that he has promised more things satirical, teasing, 'And I can now reveal that I have a particular scandalous new internet project bubbling away, which I have been thinking about for a few months now, and which I'm rather excited about' (West, February 2009). The audience awaits...[19]

ENDNOTES

[1] For overviews of biblioblogging, including the origins of the terms 'biblioblogger' and 'biblioblogging' see Davila (undated); Crossley, 2008, 20–25; Boer, 2009.

[2] This is a repeated topic on biblioblogs and there was even a heated discussion at an SBL session on biblioblogging in Philadelphia, 2005, as to why this sort of person was attracted to biblioblogging. For a summary with links to the discussion on the biblioblogs see Carlson, 25 November, 2005.

[3] The N.T. Wrong Blog is now locked but was found at http://ntwrong.wordpress.com. I am grateful to N.T. Wrong for giving me access to the N.T. Wrong Blog. The site has been now been made

available through password only. I will still give the original links but where possible I will provide supportive evidence by way of Wrong's comments on other, still publically available blogs.

4   On this phrase see Gregory 2004, 18.

5   See especially Herman and Chomsky, 1988.

6   See e.g. Chomsky, 1973.

7   Recent examples include Reis, 2008; Stichele and Penner, 2009: 63–71.

8   On recent surveillance studies see especially Lyon, 2007. For related work see e.g. Lyon, 2003, Lyon 2006; Haggerty and Ericson, 2006. The ideas on surveillance used in this article were also helped in no small part through discussion with Todd Penner and a paper of his which touched on issues of surveillance, categorization and historical criticism in '"Home Is Where the Heart Is" – A Concluding Methodological Prescript', unpublished paper delivered to the 'Holy Land as Homeland?' seminar, University of Oslo, March 6–8 2009.

9   Arguably the most prominent is Mark Goodacre. See e.g. http://twitter.com/goodacre.

10   For discussion and links see Lyons, 9 February 2007.

11   E.g. in July 2008 Wrong posted five reports from Auckland SBL on various genuine sessions. On SBL Boston see Lyons, 13 November 2008.

12   For further criticisms of Israel state actions see e.g..Wrong, 13 August 2008 and 24 November 2008.

13   For full discussion of this and several other examples see Crossley, 2008: 31–48. Links to Tilling's nine-part series on Christian Zionism are collected in Tilling, February 2007.

14   This was the follow-up to N.T. Wrong, 29 October 2008.

15   For a selection see the links given in McCullough, 31 October 2008.

16   For the comments see Crossley, 3 February 2009. Some of the comments were irrelevant to the topic but without these the number still well exceeds 100.

17   Hobbins, 23 March 2009; 24 March 2009 include more detailed responses to Hobbins as does Crossley, 23 March, 2009. Niels Peter Lemche also pointed out, 'And thank you for lumping me among the post-colonialists. If only I had earned this label'. Lemche's comments were written on Jim West's old blog which now locked (West, 23 March 2009).

18   For Hobbins' past engagements with Marxism see also Hobbins, 27 March 2009.

19   I would like to dedicate this article to Keith Whitelam on the occasion of his retirement. Keep reaching for those stars!

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