BIBLE TROUBLE

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Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship

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Contents

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
BerOl	Berit Olam
BA	*Biblical Archaeologist*
BBC	Blackwell Bible Commentaries
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BL	Bible and Literature
BRev	*Bible Review*
BSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CH	*Church History*
ChrCent	*Christian Century*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
Int	*Interpretation*
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRMA	*Journal of the Royal Musical Association*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*

JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
NAC	New American Commentary
NCB	New Century Bible
Neot	*Neotestamentica*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum, Supplement Series
NPNF[1]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1
NPNF[2]	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2
OTL	Old Testament Library
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
RelSRev	*Religious Studies Review*
SBLEJL	Society of Biblical Literature Early Judaism and Its Literature
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SP	Sacra Pagina
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.* Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
TJ	*Trinity Journal*
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

Already Queer: A Preface

Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone

Nearly twenty years after feminist film theorist Teresa de Lauretis (1991) first coined the term, "queer theory" continues to develop in dynamic and unpredictable ways.[1] While queer studies have become well-known for interrogating the boundaries and categories that structure discourses of sexuality and gender (e.g., the binary distinctions between "heterosexual" and "homosexual," "straight" and "gay," "male" and "female," etc.), queer analysis today increasingly brings a critical lens to bear on the intersection of sexual dynamics with other dynamics such as race, class, nation, and culture. Rather than forming a separate academic discipline or subdiscipline, queer theories thrive best in the interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary modes of scholarship that first generated them. Refusing academic as well as sexual normalization, queer analyses remain, in the words of Judith Butler, "against proper objects" (1994, title), methodologically as well as sexually.

A number of attempts have now been made by biblical scholars to bring queer theory to bear on biblical texts and biblical studies.[2] Nevertheless, queer readings of biblical texts not only remain, to use a term long associated with Semeia Studies, "experimental." They also remain remarkably rare.

Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship hopes to help close that gap by bringing together a series of essays that engage queer theories and styles of reading for purposes of biblical interpretation. The title phrase "Bible Trouble" is, of course, a play

1. We would like to thank Brock Perry and Adam Yates for their assistance with this volume.

2. See, e.g., Moore 1998, 2001; Stone 2001b; Runions 2003; Martin 2006; Guest et al. 2006; Hornsby 2006; Stone 2005, 2006, 2008.

on Judith Butler's now-classic volume *Gender Trouble* (1990); and so it gestures toward one of the primary texts for contemporary queer theory. By including "boundaries" in the subtitle, however, we hope to indicate the desirability not only of "troubling" the boundaries between biblical scholarship and queer theory but also of "troubling" boundaries between different rubrics used currently in the analysis of biblical literature: sexuality, gender, class, race, nation and border, history, culture, literature, film, music, etc. As it emerges in these essays, then, queer reading does not simply spell "trouble" for gender and sexuality. It also "troubles" the norms of biblical scholarship and widespread assumptions about the ways in which biblical scholars ought to turn biblical texts into proper objects to be penetrated with proper tools. Queer reading is characterized not simply by attention to diverse genders and sexualities but also by diversities of style, form, critical approach, and so forth (cf. Stone 2001a).

Many biblical scholars will no doubt conclude that any queer "trouble" found in these essays is simply imposed on the Bible by perverse readers. Against such a conclusion, one might argue instead, in dialogue with queer theories and the sources that inform them, that our very notion of "Bible," our very sense of "Bible" as a material product with a fixed form and meaning, is itself a performative effect of our engagement with particular texts and our engagement in particular interpretive practices (including but not limited to those practices most widely accepted in biblical scholarship) in very specific contexts (cf. Stone 2008; Martin 2006). Such an argument raises critical questions about the extent to which a single, stable "Bible" preexists our interactions with diverse manuscripts, texts, translations, hermeneutical assumptions, scholarly and other collective traditions, strategies (implicit or explicit) for reading, contexts for teaching, or institutions of publishing. "Bible" may not be a foundation upon which interpretation takes place but rather a product of the very practices that are assumed to rest upon that foundation.

This sort of argument may appear to be a recipe for chaos. But is chaos entirely negative? More importantly, can it be avoided entirely? Should we even attempt to avoid it entirely?

As we were ruminating on the essays found in this volume, one of us (Hornsby) generated the following reflection:

> There are a few phrases I pull out when someone I care about deeply comes to me for advice, particularly when she or he seems to be in that "dark night of the soul." As we all know, there are no quick fixes; and

> no matter what one may have experienced personally, or how wise we may think we are because of those experiences, there is really nothing I can say or do that will help. Still, I fall back on one thing that I believe with all my heart, because I know it, perhaps the only thing I know, to be "true," true in a way that I, as a 50-year-old, former Southern Baptist "lesbian" from East Tennessee, after twenty years as a Bible scholar, can know. It is this: creation only comes from chaos. But what I do not say is also something I know to be true: that all creation remains as chaos—and despite what Western mythology claims as its ground, chaos is indeed a good thing. As queer scholars, we know that *creation*, the tidiness that G-d arranges, the imposed order, is disparate, messy, blurry, unstable, and dynamic. I am reminded of this saying, that creation comes from chaos, as I read the essays in this volume; and this is why: queerness is chaos.

As this reflection recognizes, the association with chaos may be understood as a positive feature of queer movement rather than a criticism of it. Of course, if you think like a Westerner (and we suspect that, if you are reading this, you do to some extent at least), you have been culturally trained (indoctrinated) to be something of a structuralist: everything is (should be) in its proper place; everything can be divided into two parts, with one being better than the other; and those things that do not fit neatly are not kosher, they are not holy, they are not aligned with *good*; they are liminal, they are other, they are queer. When we read in Genesis that out of the deep (the undefined, the chaos) G-d makes order, or in *Enuma Elish* that Marduk defeats Tiamat as the symbol of the deep and of disarray, and from her eviscerated, divided body come the earth and sky, we know that it is from *queerness* that all creation comes. Creation out of chaos is often perceived in terms of a neat categorization into which all things fit. In sexual terms, heterosexuality (allegedly the normative and the naturalized) is aligned in this hegemonic binary with *creation* and queerness with *chaos*. It is not accidental that theologian Catherine Keller, grasping for language to speak about fears of chaos in relation to the biblical account of God's interaction with *tehom*, "Deep," at the time of creation (Gen 1:2), coins the term "tehomophobia" (Keller 2003). For our fears of the forces of chaos (*tehom*) and our fears of gender and sexual heterogeneity (homophobia) have much in common. Yet, pardon our repetition, all creation comes from chaos. And if creation (cosmos) continues to resist easy categorization and is, as we know it, blurry, messy, unstable, and dynamic, what distinguishes creation (and heteronormativity) from the chaos, from

the queer? As Edwin Starr said, absolutely nothing. The origin and the evolution of the normative are enveloped within the queer.

As Judith Butler notes in *Gender Trouble*, queerness stands to heterosexuality not as copy to original but as copy to copy (1990, 128). Or perhaps, to draw out this relationship in a slightly different direction, a direction informed by the chaotic water imagery that informs biblical and many other ancient texts, queerness is to heterosexuality as the ocean is to a wave. The production of heterosexuality is from the deep, appears briefly as a precisely formed entity, but moves, shifts, takes on new forms, and dissipates, dissolving back into queerness. Heterosexuality, as a constructed category of modernity, is fleeting, and its permanence is illusory (see, e.g., Katz 1995). It is but one of an infinite number of "sexualities." Across time and space the waves appear again and again, both simultaneously and consecutively, all seemingly identical in appearance, but all different from the other.

One implication of the "ocean to wave" model of the production of heterosexuality for this present volume is that we do not see our work simply as a matter of "queering" the biblical narratives. The stories are in certain respects already queer. Centuries of interpreters have sought to put these texts in a box—to concretize and canonize meaning—a snapshot of an ocean's wave. The stories, the characters, the meanings, and the truths of these passages cannot be organized—or, we should say, cannot be organized for any extended amount of time. The *time* of meaning is what distinguishes queer scholarship from what we would call "mainstream" scholarship. Queer scholars understand that meaning is fleeting; what is true is only true right here, right now, then gone. When time moves (as it always does unless we're dead), I change, you change, meaning changes. And in this volume, Jione Havea's rendering of the Lazarus story, Sean Burke's and Manuel Villalobos's elaborative work with the Ethiopian eunuch, Teresa Hornsby's questions about a New Testament call to submit, Lynn Huber's whoring of assimilation, Joseph Marchal's and Gillian Townsley's analyses of the Corinthian correspondence, Deryn Guest's highlighting of "gender trouble" in Judg 4 and 5, Jay Twomey's account of the Pastoral Epistles, Erin Runions's reading of the figure of Rahab, Heidi Epstein's musical journey alongside the Song of Songs, Jeremy Punt's mixing of queer and postcolonial questions, Ken Stone's unorthodox coupling of the books of Samuel and the film *Paris Is Burning*—all of these mean what they mean *when* they mean. As Ellen Armour notes in her opening "response" to these essays (which, in an appropriately "queer" fashion, serves in this volume as a kind

of second introduction), "[r]ather than a two dimensional window, 'the Bible' produced by these essays is multidimensional in time and space" (4). This Bible is chaotic. This Bible is queer.

Like the waves a moment before they dissolve back into the deep, biblical texts have been delivered to readers and believers as stable, coherent narratives at work in the service of "the norm." Yet, the *essence* of the wave is the ocean; from the chaos comes [the appearance of] creation, then it folds [or crashes] once again into the chaos. We are not dealing here simply with "queer" interpretation of the Bible; the Bible is always already queer.

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