

THE STRAIGHT MIND IN CORINTH

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THE STRAIGHT MIND IN CORINTH

Queer Readings across 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

Gillian Townsley

SBL Press



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ABBREVIATIONS

Primary Sources

<i>Ab urbe cond.</i>	Livy, <i>Ab urbe condita</i>
Acts Andr.	Acts of Andrew
Acts Paul	Acts of Paul
<i>Aen.</i>	Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i>
b.	Babylonian Talmud
<i>Bacch.</i>	Euripides, <i>Bacchae</i>
<i>Bib. hist.</i>	Diodorus Siculus, <i>Bibliotheca historica</i>
<i>Contempl. Life</i>	Philo, <i>On the Contemplative Life</i>
<i>Cult. fem.</i>	Tertullian, <i>De cultu feminarum</i>
<i>Dial. meretr.</i>	Lucian, <i>Dialogi meretricii</i>
<i>Diatr.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Diatribai</i> (Discourses)
<i>Diatr.</i>	Musonius Rufus, <i>Diatribai</i> (Discourses)
<i>Epod.</i>	Horace, <i>Epodi</i>
<i>Gen. an.</i>	Aristotle, <i>De generatione animalium</i>
Gos. Thom.	Gospel of Thomas
<i>Is. Os.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Isis and Osiris</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>Od.</i>	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Politica</i>
QE	Philo, <i>Questions and Answers on Exodus</i>
<i>Quaest. gr.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Quaestiones graece</i>
Rewards	Philo, <i>On Rewards and Punishments</i>
Shabb.	Shabbat
Sat.	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>
<i>Spec. Laws</i>	Philo, <i>On the Special Laws</i>

Secondary Sources

AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AFS	<i>Australian Feminist Studies Journal</i>
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
ASNU	Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis
ATR	<i>Australasian Theological Review</i>
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
BSNA	Biblical Scholarship in North America
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	Barth, Karl. 1936–1977. <i>Church Dogmatics</i> . Translated by G. T. Thomson et al. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. 4 vols. in 14. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
CEV	Contemporary English Version
EKKNT	Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
EvT	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FCNTECW	Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings
FS	<i>Feminist Studies</i>
GLQ	<i>GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies</i>
GNB	Good News Bible
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship

GW	God's Word Translation
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJBS	<i>International Journal of Baudrillard Studies</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JAARSup	Journal of the American Academy of Religion Supplements
JAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSSR	<i>Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KD	Barth, Karl. 1932–1970. <i>Die kirchliche Dogmatik</i> . 4 vols. in 14. Zurich: EVZ.
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KJV	King James Version
LB	Living Bible
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
MNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary

NEB	New English Bible
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIRV	New International Reader's Version
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTG	New Testament Guides
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
Phillips	<i>The New Testament in Modern English</i> , J. B. Phillips
PMLA	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>
PRSt	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
RefR	<i>Reformed Review</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
SBEC	Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SCJ	<i>Stone-Campbell Journal</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SP	Sacra Pagina
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
STS	Studies in Theology and Sexuality
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha
Sup	Supplement
<i>T&S</i>	<i>Trouble and Strife</i>
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TDNT	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. <i>Theologi-</i>

	<i>cal Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–2006.
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TQ	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>
<i>Virg.</i>	Tertullian, <i>De virginibus velandis</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Introduction: Ideological Inter(sex)ions

Whatever it was that the Corinthians were doing with their hair or head coverings while praying and prophesying during public worship, it was something that appears to have disconcerted Paul. In 1 Cor 11:2–16 Paul addresses this issue, creating a text that while presumably intended to be clear to the Corinthians has confused and confounded its readers ever since. The result has been the spawning of countless articles, chapters, theses, and books, with scholars divided on virtually every issue. Yet, despite the lack of both historical and exegetical clarity, this passage has been fundamental to understandings of gender and sexuality in many Christian traditions. In particular, although it has been used to bolster a variety of gender models, from the strictly hierarchical and patriarchal through to those that emphasize the equality of the sexes, with regard to the issue of sexuality there is almost always an assumption of heteronormativity.¹

While many studies on 1 Cor 11:2–16 concentrate on the multitude of exegetical and historical issues presented by the text, this one focuses instead on the ideologies that lie behind these models of gender and sexuality. Given that these models, arising from various readings of this and other biblical texts, have been instrumental in reinforcing certain relational structures in Western societies, from the level of personal identity through to familial, ecclesial, and societal formations, these models of gender and sexuality are profoundly political.² While heteronormative relational models tend to be viewed as normal or natural (or God-ordained) and are thus positioned at the privileged center of society, other models are deemed as abnormal or unnatural and are pushed to the disadvantaged margins. Binary/oppositional relations are favored, which at best emphasize the mutuality and interdependence of the sexes; but given that misogynist and homophobic currents still run deep in Western societies, it seems clear that an androcentric, heteropatriarchal model nevertheless predominates. That 1 Cor 11:2–16 can be read as supporting such a model highlights the importance of examining the ideologies of gender

and sexuality reflected in this text as well as the politics and power relations that lie behind both the text itself and the various interpretations and utilizations of it.

I propose that an engagement with queer theory enables such a critical examination. Queer theory reveals models of gender and sexuality as ideological constructs—as social constructs maintained through systems of power relations. But it goes further than this and challenges these models by both exposing the instabilities of the supposedly normal (androcentric heteropatriarchal) model and also presenting alternative models of gendered and sexed being. One of the originators of queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994, xii), observes that the word *queer* has its origins in the Indo-European root *-twerkw* meaning “across,” which she states “also yields the German *quer* (transverse)” and thus has a sense of being “transitive—multiply transitive.” In other words, that which is queer is that which cuts across various ideologies of gender and sexuality and transverses the terrain of the supposedly normal. As key queer theorists Michael Warner and Teresa de Lauretis both explain, “‘queer’ is also a way of cutting against mandatory gender divisions” (Warner 1993, xxvi) and a way “to avoid all of these fine distinctions in our discursive protocols ... to both transgress and transcend them” (de Lauretis 1991, v).

More broadly, Sarah Cooper (2000, 18) suggests that queer theory also places these issues of gender and sexuality “at points of intersection with other critical discourses on identity” and thus invites a methodological approach that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries.³ One result of this process of intersection according to Cooper is that “queer theory is seen to trouble compartmentalized kinds of academic theorizing” (18). Warner (1993, xxvi) also notes this aspect of “queer”: “For both academics and activists, ‘queer’ gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy.”

My intention in this project therefore is to enable various biblical, theological, and queer lines of inquiry to intersect *across* 1 Cor 11:2–16 and consider the various ideologies of gender and sexuality that are revealed by the resulting connections and collisions. I do not, therefore, take a traditional historical-critical approach that either looks *into* the passage, seeking to pull *out* of it the supposed meaning of specific words or phrases, or that looks *behind* the text in order to build the most plausible reconstruction *around* it. While at times I consider particular words or historical backgrounds, the purpose is not to determine the correct

meaning or sociocultural context, but to consider and critique the various ideologies of gender and sexuality that inform the interpretations of the text on those issues.

Stephen Moore (2007, 10) has noted that queer theory “has the capacity to shift the increasingly tired debates on biblical texts that apparently deal with homosexuality [and, he adds later, heterosexuality] into a radically different register.” It is into this particular space, then, that I situate this project. Rather than rehashing the “increasingly tired debates” on the various exegetical and historical issues that occupy much of the scholarship on this passage, I aim to shift the discussion on 1 Cor 11:2–16 into “a radically different register” whereby various lines of inquiry will intersect across this passage—traversing, troubling, transgressing, and even transcending the normal.

My approach will therefore be queer in that it not only cuts across these traditional attempts to examine this passage but also raises issues of gender, sexuality, and power in ways that are troubling to the androcentric heteropatriarchal norm that continues to dominate the field of biblical studies. By intersecting biblical studies and queer theory, this project creates a marginal zone of critical inquiry, something that theorist Judith Butler (1999, xxxii) reminds us is required when examining the complex issues of gender and sexuality. The creation of this zone of inquiry out of the “transgressive juxtapositions of things normally kept apart” (Stone 2001b, 31)—in this instance biblical studies and queer theory—might be resisted or rejected by some, as something “abject” and alien to both these fields;⁴ but my suspicion is that the fruit of such a supposedly unnatural pairing enables a new que(e)rying of 1 Cor 11:2–16.

I begin in chapter 1 with an investigation into the “queer” (troubling, strange, questionable) state of current research on this passage. While historical-critical approaches have often resulted in greater insight into and awareness of its context and content, not only has little consensus emerged on these issues but also little attention has been paid to issues of gender and sexuality. When we take into account an understanding of gender and sexuality that views these as ideological constructs, it becomes clear that a heteronormative (if not heteropatriarchal) model tends to dominate the various ways biblical scholars have interpreted 1 Cor 11:2–16. In this chapter I also situate queer theory in relation to its poststructuralist context as well as in relation to the history of gay and lesbian studies. Within this section I also situate myself, given the contested matter of *who* can *do* queer theory. Finally, I consider the particular subfield of queer biblical

studies, discussing the development of this coupling of two fields often perceived as diametrically opposed.

In chapter 2, I seek to respond to the challenge posed by French feminist lesbian philosopher Monique Wittig (1992c, 87) to “systematically particularize” the masculine gender. The persistent focus by historical-critical scholars on the “problematic women” of Corinth (M. MacDonald 1990, 164) betrays an androcentric framework whereby women are seen as specific—gendered—objects and men are deemed universal subjects, thus rendered invisible and able to avoid scrutiny. This has meant scholars have tended to either ignore the role of the Corinthian men in Paul’s argument or have deemed their behavior hypothetical. By exploring the possibility that the “problematic” men of Corinth are also involved in behavior that Paul wishes to correct, I render these men highly visible and specific. In this process, one scenario for the men’s behavior emerges that needs close scrutiny: the suggestion that behind Paul’s argumentation lies a “horror of homosexuality” (Barrett 1971, 257). This is an oft-cited but seldom justified explanation, but a consideration of the sex-gender ideologies of the first-century Mediterranean world reveals that the biblical commentators have not adequately understood the complex relationships between effeminacy, masculinity, and sexual relations that emerge from a careful reading of the first-century data. This exploration also reveals how this passage is currently being used to bolster heteronormative models of gender and sexuality.

The materialist lesbian theory of Wittig provides a strong avenue of exploration regarding ideologies of gender and sexuality and therefore provides the theoretical basis for discussion in the rest of this project. Wittig’s work was brought to the attention of academic feminist circles in the West through Butler’s reading (and critique) of her theory, and so in chapter 3 I not only outline Wittig’s theory but also examine Butler’s concerns. However, many Wittig scholars argue that Butler’s critique of Wittig’s theory is a *misreading*. Daniel Boyarin (2003, 14) uses Wittig’s theory to explore early Christian formulations of gender (such as found in 1 Cor 11:2–16) in light of a discussion on the “dominant fiction” of the phallus in Western ideologies of gender. But as his reading of 1 Cor 11:2–16 is dependent on Butler’s *misreading* of Wittig, in this chapter I offer a *rereading* of this passage in light of a *rereading* of Wittig’s theory. While Boyarin focuses on the dominant voices of Butler and Paul (and the phallus) and considers the behavior of only the Corinthian women, I offer a *rereading* of this passage that seeks to hear the subdominant voices of Wittig and the Corinthians (and Wittig’s lesbian figure), focusing on the behavior of the

men. In this way I take up Wittig's (1992c, 87; 2005b, 47) challenge to "lesbianize the men" and present the possibility that the "problematic" men in the Corinthian congregation may be comparable to Wittig's theoretical lesbian figure.

Wittig also challenges us not only to "attack the order of heterosexuality in texts" (1992c, 87; 2005b, 47) but also to "produce a political transformation of the key concepts" (1992i, 30). In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I explore three key concepts from 1 Cor 11:2–16, seeking to reveal and challenge the ideologies of gender and sexuality that lie behind traditional interpretations of these problematic verses by intersecting these with Wittig's theory: *κεφαλή* ("head") from verse 3, the *imago Dei* from verse 7, and *ἡ φύσις* ("nature") from verses 14–15. I introduce each of these chapters with a short vignette (a "scene") that will play, albeit in a serious way, with these concepts. The intent of these scenes is twofold. First, they serve to remind the reader that debates about gender and sexuality are not just academic or theoretical but are fundamental to issues of personal identity formation within broader relations of power and desire. Second, they highlight how that which is queer troubles the academic and theoretical by also being creative and sensual, engaging not just the rational but also the imaginative and visual.

In chapter 4, I examine the first key concept, the term *κεφαλή* ("head") from 1 Cor 11:3. This term has been the subject of heated debate, especially within evangelical circles in the United States, with the traditional metaphorical meaning for *κεφαλή*, *authority over*, pitted against the meaning *source, origin*. I examine both views in this chapter through an exploration of two evangelical organizations: the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). While they hold opposing views on issues of gender, both organizations subscribe to a heteronormative ideology of sexuality, which ultimately serves a capitalist political ideology. I also consider an alternative understanding of this highly controversial word—as *prominent, foremost, pre-eminent*—although it proves to be no less problematic than the previous options. In this chapter, I also examine the hierarchy that Paul outlines in this verse by placing it alongside that found in Rom 1:18–32—a passage with many connections to 1 Cor 11:2–16—in particular exploring three of the ambiguous ontologies positioned within this framework, that of "human," "female," and "Christ."

In chapter 5, I focus on 1 Cor 11:7 and in particular explore the binary pairing of *ὁ ἀνὴρ* and *ἡ γυνή* ("man" and "woman") as asymmetrically

related to each other and to God through the notion of the *imago Dei*. Marcella Althaus-Reid (2005, 267) critiques what she calls the “patriarchal heterosexual order” of much Christian theology, which I would also equate with the “whole conglomerate of sciences and disciplines” that Wittig (1992i, 29) describes as “the straight mind.” Perhaps no better example of this can be found than in the influential work of theologian Karl Barth (CD 3.1:184, 288), who argues that the *imago Dei* is seen most clearly in the fundamental “I-Thou” relationship of “the unequal duality” of the heterosexual married couple. Because such a view finds support in 1 Cor 11:7, I reveal and challenge the ways in which Barth’s theology on “Man and Woman” reflects androcentric and patriarchal ideologies. His affirmation of this “natural dualism” of man and woman is also linked with a rejection of what he describes as the “malady called homosexuality,” thus also revealing a heterosexist ideology (3.4:121, 166). Barth’s understanding of Jesus as the *imago Dei* also finds support in 1 Cor 11:7 in that Jesus is not to be thought of as an isolated figure but as the “Husband,” an “I” paired with a “Thou,” both as Israel’s Christ and as Christ with his bride, the church (3.2:303). Yet Barth elsewhere speaks of Jesus as “Real” and “Whole,” a “One” who is “a true and absolute Counterpart” for all people (3.2:134). Consequently, I conclude this chapter by contrasting Barth’s vision of the *imago Dei*, the “unequal duality” of the “I-Thou,” with Wittig’s vision of the ungendered, universal, whole lesbian “I,” whom I argue is mirrored in Barth’s “Real” and “Whole” Jesus.

Finally, in chapter 6, I focus on 1 Cor 11:14–15a, where Paul turns to an argument from “nature itself” (ἡ φύσις αὐτῆς). Arguments over what is “natural” (and “unnatural”) are common in contemporary political and religious debates in the West (particularly in the United States) concerning gender and sexuality, and particularly over issues of sexual orientation and same-sex marriage. I begin this chapter by briefly examining some of the Stoic philosophical rhetoric that parallels Paul’s statement in this verse, showing that appeals to “nature” in the first century were part of a potent ideological discourse aimed at shaping both the individual and sociopolitical body. This rhetoric is also evident in some contemporary evangelical arguments concerning “proper” understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality that are seen as part of “God’s design in creation.”

At the center of the evangelical notion of “God’s design in creation,” with its emphasis on sexual differentiation, is the view that heterosexual intercourse is “natural” and same-sex intercourse is “unnatural.” What is “natural” becomes equated with the anatomical, and thus reproductive

“complementarity” becomes determinative for ethics regarding sexual behavior. Robert Gagnon is currently the leading spokesman for those who subscribe to the complementarity argument against homosexuality, and in chapter 6 I proceed to examine his arguments in detail. Underlying his “natural” view of gender and sexuality is an androcentric heteropatriarchal ideology that is not only also infused with a conservative capitalist view of society but also utilizes a rhetoric of fear and shame in order to promote androcentric heterosexuality as normative behavior.

In order to que(e)ry the androcentric heteropatriarchal construct of gender and sexuality found in Gagnon’s book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, I also explore in chapter 6 Wittig’s fictional writings, in particular her third text, *The Lesbian Body*. Both these books include a barrage of anatomical detail, but whereas Gagnon (2001, 70–71) consistently rejects same-sex erotic behavior as “inherently degrading” and “destructive,” Wittig deliberately adopts these qualities in the form of the “monstrous lesbian” in order to transgress conventional categories of sex, gender, genre, and even language (Scanlon 1998, 73; see also Whatling 1997, 238–40). Because both of these texts place an emphasis on the physical body, the discussion on these two texts is undertaken in a physical form that plays with the positions of the material on the page. The discussion on *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* begins as the dominant piece on the page, since the androcentric heteropatriarchal construct of gender and sexuality is the dominant ideology in society, while the discussion on *The Lesbian Body* is positioned beneath this, as the subdominant voice. However, the material on *The Lesbian Body* slowly but surely physically pushes up against the space on the page dedicated to Gagnon’s work, diminishing the presence and power of the androcentric heteropatriarchal ideology and increasing that of the queer view. By the end of the chapter, *The Lesbian Body* forcibly removes the discussion on *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* from the page altogether in an appropriate stylistic gesture of critique.

By intersecting queer theory and biblical studies, I offer a new exploration of this passage. In my view, far more is at stake in a study of this passage than the exegetical or contextual issues (of headgear and hairstyles, or what Paul meant by his reference to “the angels,” for example) that are often the concern of traditional historical-critical approaches. Indeed, while this passage has now elicited much important feminist work in the area of gender, a queer approach enables us to do more than this and to examine not only the critical issues of gender *and* sexuality, but also the deeply embedded issues of politics and power that pervade the scholarship

on this passage. In particular, this approach reveals that models of gendered and sexed being are ideological constructs, be they the androcentric hierarchical ideologies of the Mediterranean context or the androcentric heteropatriarchal ideologies presumed by many contemporary readers of the text. Finally, this approach enables the imaginative exploration of alternative models of gendered and sexed being, thus affirming Wittig's (1992e, 19–20) proposal that “a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man).”

Notes

1. This term, and the terms *gender* and *sexuality*, will be discussed in more detail in ch. 1.

2. I would also suggest, therefore, that this may also be the case in societies that have been subject to Western colonialism and the influence of the various Christianities that have subsequently been imported (Punt 2007). I use the problematic term *Western* precisely because of the hegemonic connotations of the term and not as part of “an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West” (Spivak 1988, 271).

3. See Voss (2000, 184), for example, who considers the intersections and connections between archaeology, feminism, and queer theory.

4. I discuss this notion of the “abject” in more detail in ch. 1; see also Kristeva 1982, 1–4; Butler 1999, 169–70.

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