

## INTRODUCTION: THE ANTIPODEAN UNDERSIDE OF SEXUALITY, IDEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

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The gaps in between the conceptual fields of sexuality, ideology, and the Bible are now well-trodden areas of scholarly investigation in at least some quarters of biblical studies today. Given the highly contested landscape of these topics both inside and outside the academy, however, there is still much work to be done. This volume seeks to make its own modest contribution. Going beyond some of the more obvious examples of sexual and gender performance in the Bible, the chapters in this volume collectively uncover a sexual logic that is encoded throughout much of the text. The essays are not limited to questions of sexual im/morality and/or acceptable sexual conduct. Rather, we seek to expose the antipodean underside of the Bible. The 'Antipodes' refers to that point diametrically opposed to the norm. In the northern hemisphere, it is typically used to refer to Australia and New Zealand, and 'antipodeans' to their inhabitants. Within this book, a number of antipodean biblical scholars seek to unmask a sexual ideology that structures our wider interpretive and contextual frameworks. By sexuality we mean broadly the capacity to have erotic experiences and expressions. This includes, but is not limited to, one's experience and performance of gender, attraction, and, of course, the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of these experiences. The category of human sexuality is taken up by contributors not only as a thematic and heuristic lens in their re-reading of particular texts, but also in order to call for a re-thinking of conventional approaches to the Bible, sexuality, and the added complexification of ideology.

The Bible is both a sexual and ideological product. It emerges through acts of consummation, reproduction, and cultural liaison, written on the page and canonized into a 'normative' collection of authoritative writings that encode a certain set of ideological and sexual assumptions. It is our task in this collection to begin to unpick some of those assumptions. By penetrating the text from its underside we glean unexpected and often

surprising insights. Indeed, queer critics have often pointed out that the Bible is itself already queer. Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone contend that

[l]ike 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.<sup>1</sup>

We could make similar remarks about the 'essential nature' (or, we might say the 'social construction') of biblical criticism. Are the methods of biblical studies not also complicit in reiterating a (queer) heterosexual matrix? The Bible, dressed in seductive leather binding, serves as the passive partner in the interpretive act. The critic ventures forth, protruding his or her exegetical instrument, intending to spread wide open the text's logical gaps and inconsistencies. Or perhaps in a gesture of pious devotion, does s/he aspire to cover up these blemishes? Either way, the critic's role constitutes a violent imposition on the text: its internal cavities are probed, its delicate inner texture ruptured, and its naked signification is exposed, all in the hopes of arousing a pleasurable flow of meaning.

This volume offers its own distinctive queerness to the emerging discussion on the Bible and sexuality. Specifically, its authors are all situated in the geographical region of the Antipodes. Essayists draw on their academic training and expertise as biblical scholars to probe the intersection of sexuality, ideology, and the Bible, but we are also conscious that geographical location has a bearing on academic discourse. At stake, therefore, are two overarching contentions: first, it is observed that the meaning of the biblical text is typically 'desexualized' by conventional interpretative practices; and secondly, the geographical-contextual situated-ness of academic discourse also shapes our interpretive predilections.

In light of responding to the northern strongholds of biblical and theological discourse, the collection begins with no less than a queer reconsideration of both N.T. Wright and early church hero Saint Augustine's respective readings of Paul. Deane Galbraith argues in his chapter, 'The Perfect Penis of Eden and Queer Time in Augustine's Reading of Paul', that an integral but disavowed element in the conceptualization of the perfect, prelapsarian human body and its

1. Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone (eds.), *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship* (Semeia Studies, 67; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), p. xiii.

converse, the fallen corrupted body, is the corporeal fantasy of the penis-as-hand. Galbraith detects a conjunction of penile and theological reflection within the development of Augustine's theology, which, while regularly overlooked, accounts for the gap between Paul's understanding of universal human sin and Augustine's concept of original sin. Although they are indeed different conceptions of sin, Augustine claims to have derived his understanding through Paul. While the explanation for this gap is conventionally reduced to purely theological and exegetical reasons, Galbraith contends that there are also bodily and queer temporal dynamics which should be taken into consideration.

Emily Colgan's chapter, "Come Upon Her": Land as Raped in Jeremiah 6.1-8' employs an eco-feminist lens to uncover a sexual logic within the text of Jeremiah that polarizes a masculine, penetrative God against a feminized, emasculated Land. Traditional commentators have typically desexualized this text, bypassing crucial gendered metaphors and sexual innuendo that encode a variety of potentially oppressive and undesirable social and sexual codifications. For example, in the attack on the feminized Land, the shepherds 'come upon her' (v. 3), 'her places' are violated (v. 5), and her public 'stripping' is couched in terms of deforestation (v. 6). By paying close attention to the text's language and imagery, Colgan suggests that underlying the poem in Jer. 6.1-8 is a rhetoric of sexual abuse that should be read as a description of the Land's rape. In this respect, the way in which sexuality and gender is used to constitute certain dynamics of power are problematized; the text perpetuates a normalization of gendered violence, one that the dissenting reader should identify and denounce.

Following this, Christina Petterson's chapter, 'Imagining the Body of Christ', explores the mid-eighteenth-century community of the Moravian Brethren in Germany whose hermaphrodite Christ bore *both* the male and female genitalia. As such, the body of Christ functioned to represent all genders within the community. Petterson contextualizes the shift in the production of a collective body in light of broader movements towards the fragmentation of the body in the emerging capitalist political economy. She then examines the body of Christ as a way of mediating between the individual and the community and its use of abstraction in the case of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

Roland Boer's chapter, 'The Matriarch's Muff', is concerned with the antipodean regions of the body, especially the matriarchal bodies of the Bible. While it may be the case, according to Boer, that the 'patriarch's nuts' are crucial for the very structure (as he puts it the 'testicular logic') of the myths and legends of the Hebrew Bible, he contends that the

matriarch's muff (*reḥem 'am*—Num. 12.12) is of comparable importance. It is from here that the generations promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob emerge. Boer's chapter focuses on the earthier language of the Hebrew Bible. What materializes is a distinct linguistic crudeness that is all-too-frequently understated in contemporary 'desexualized' English translations.

Moving from muffs back to the masculine Paul and orality, Alan H. Cadwallader's chapter, 'Paul Speaks Like a Girl: When Phoebe Reads Romans', rethinks the way in which Paul's rhetorical gender-bending might uncover limitations to traditional exegetical methods. This is achieved by undermining the fixity of Paul's assumed masculinity and its relation to the meaning of his writings. Cadwallader examines what happens to Paul and his penetrative, authoritarian voice when his letter is read by a woman, namely Phoebe, who was the probable bearer of the letter to the Romans. He suggests that the very presence of diverse ways of interpreting Romans, and even of interpreting how Phoebe might have engaged it, indicates that the male/female binary is unstable at best.

Gillian Townsley's chapter, "'We're Here, We're Queer—Get Used to It!' Exclamations in the Margins (Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4.2)', draws on New Zealand's Marriage Amendment Act of 2013, which expanded the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, as a point of departure in her discussion of the reception of Phil. 4.2 in recent scholarship. Paul's instruction, 'I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord', is suggestive of a same-sex partnership. What is deemed to be 'possible' or even 'probable' in biblical interpretation, however, is always already shaped by the often implicit lenses we bring to the text, influenced not only by our cultural and social contexts but also our expectations of what we think we may or may not find within a text. Townsley uses her own life journey through varying hermeneutical viewpoints, from conservative, to feminist, and now queer, to examine the varying appropriations of this verse, arguing that the presence of such a socio-sexual configuration within the New Testament is potentially affirming for queer Christians in contemporary society.

Following this, Elaine M. Wainwright, in 'Queer[y]ing the Sermon on the Mount', explores the queer presence and function of animals in Matthew 5–7. While queer theory was initially concerned with undoing 'normal' categories in relation to human gender and sexuality, more recently scholars have begun queering and querying diverse conceptual categories and social constructions including the arena of the other-than-human or 'non-human'. Drawing on convergences between queer theory

and the emerging discipline of animal studies, Wainwright performs what might be called an eco-queer reading of the Sermon on the Mount. Her exploration focuses in particular on the categories of time and space and also draws on indigenous Australian cultures and the contemporary Australian artist Patricia Piccinini, in order to open up broader possibilities of meaning-making for the reader of the Matthean text.

The presence of animals is taken further in Yael Klangwisan's chapter 'Promethea's Song of Songs' to suggest a queer blurring and reconstitution of the human and animal. Indeed, animal and human characters are frequently fused in the book of Song of Songs, in ways that converge with Hélène Cixous's *The Book of Promethea*. Klangwisan's phenomenological approach to the text seeks to explore its nuances of orientation and its bending of subjectivity; in particular, the bodily identification of readers with characters. She explores what happens when we embed ourselves in the text and suggests that because the reader finds him or herself shifting between the feminine and masculine gazes, this produces a remarkable erotic reading experience that is curiously bisexual in character.

In *The Delilah Monologues*, Caroline Blyth and Teguh Wijaya Mulya give voice to the character of Delilah both in the book of Judges and also in light of her afterlives through Western culture. This queer performance of Delilah, as both biblical character and critic, laments that interpretations of Judges 16 objectify her in a straight-jacket of assumptions about her sexual, gendered, and racial identity. Why is Delilah's femininity and portrayal as a 'dangerous woman' so often highlighted as the primary feature of her characterization? Is not Delilah more than binarized categories? Blyth and Mulya give voice to the persona of Delilah as somebody on the border, in the gaps, absences, and ambiguities of the text.

Finally, because this collection on the Bible, ideology and sexuality is grounded in the geographical 'wasteland' of the Antipodes, we thought it only fair to invite a northern hemisphere respondent to see what s/he might make of it all. To round out the volume, then, Hugh S. Pyper contributes a response with both his amicable Scottish wit and from the perspective of one who queerries the Bible from the Antipodes to the Antipodes, that is, the imperial centre of the United Kingdom. In a chapter from his recent monograph *The Unchained Bible*, Pyper reflects on the strangeness of an occasion in which he gave a public lecture in London, 'the imaginative heartland of white male Protestant Anglo-Saxondom and the imperial seat of the British Empire'. He then goes on to remark in jest (and I include this quote slightly out of context): '...the

New Zealander, that most remote and barbaric of colonial subjects...'<sup>2</sup>  
We antipodean subjects do protest!

Before we begin our journey by going down under, it is worth pondering the distinct queerness of the Antipodes. Intriguingly, a thread that connects many of the chapters in this volume is the notion of queer space and time. In his book on the Bible and postcolonialism in Australia, Roland Boer, one of the essayists in this collection, describes the condition of *antipodality* as

the term from classical Greece, used through the Middle Ages and then reappearing with more derogatory associations during the period of capitalist imperialism, the Antipodes refers literally to those lands—Australia, or Terra Australis, the Southern Land, New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and so on—where the inhabitants have their feet opposite to Europeans, where they walk upside-down, contrary to the correct way of walking and then of being itself.<sup>3</sup>

Like the Bible, a reading site of the Antipodes is itself already queer in that it stands upside-down and 'other' to the norm, that socially constructed but rarely acknowledged locus of centrality more precisely known as the Anglo-Euro-North American context. The Antipodes to the Antipodes still dominate the construction of scholarly discourse, even queer discourse. The experiment contained in the following pages is to see what critical engagements with the Bible and sexuality might look like if a truly queer reading site of the Antipodes were to dominate the conversation. The distinctive reading loci carved out in this volume speaks back to the dominant power base of North Atlantic scholarship.

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2. Hugh S. Pyper, *The Unchained Bible: Cultural Appropriations of Biblical Texts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 66.

3. Roland Boer, *Last Stop before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia* (Semeia Studies, 64; Atlanta: SBL, 2nd edn, 2008), p. 17.