

Appalling Afterlives in Appalling Times: Constructing Counter Kyriarchal Survival Kits in Response

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Abstract

Joseph Marchal responds to reviews of *Appalling Bodies*.

An Appalling Prelude, After

Time bends and drags, warps and weaves in queer and cataclysmic fashion—or at least it has felt that way in the last few years—too often moving and feeling by turns ferociously and numbingly awful. Given the range and the depth and the interconnected mess of horrors and challenges, inequities and injustices we are facing, it would hardly be surprising for anyone to descend into anxious uncertainty, deep despair, or knowing cynicism. Yet, these times also look and sound and feel like an extended moment of reckoning and even uprising. Through rounds of isolation and then increased and often-enforced precarity, a remarkable range of people demonstrated their willingness to adapt and change and (where they can) resist with and for others, weighing risks to come out and organize and demand change to the broader patterns of our social structures, connecting their own fates to goods that can only be held in common. We have perhaps never been more connected, even as an unprecedented set of forces keep driving us apart. Still, I have received many gifts from my attempts to study ancient letters (like the ones we call “Paul’s”), including a healthy suspicion of apocalypticisms, whether they are my own or others’. Many of these arguments or just sensations tend only to feed fears, expending what limited energies we have toward exhaustion. Yet, if participants in the Minneapolis uprising remind us that “another end of the world is possible” now (see Stanley 2021, 84), then we all have parts to play in countering the cruel and cunning kyriarchies of our times whenever we can.¹

For all of my suspicions, I do not think I could have guessed how appalling the times would be between now and when I finished writing *Appalling Bodies*. To be sure, I have long known that biblical images and ideas, arguments and affects have been enlisted, evoked, or amplified to create or perpetuate the kyriarchal structures and relations that still shape our increasingly precarious conditions on this planet. For better or for worse (and often a mixture), then, this biblical heritage is with us

¹ Schüssler Fiorenza coined this term to describe the multiple, intersecting, and mutually reinforcing pyramidal structures and relations of oppression, instead of single-factored terms like patriarchy, slavery, poverty, or empire. It is based on the Greek word for lord or master, *kyrios*, a title that would have also been used for a husband, father, enslaver, and/or an imperial authority. For introductory definitions to this neologism, see Schüssler Fiorenza 2001, 1, 118–24, 211; 1999, ix.

and within us. If people are going to collaborate to survive and transform these conditions to make another way in the (end of the) world, then we need to get better at naming and negotiating this heritage and its ongoing impacts and afterlives. This might be where a book like *Appalling Bodies* could be helpful. Indeed, the times and places where people are still most likely to hear biblical and often specifically Pauline images or arguments raised, in a number of public and interpersonal settings, are when people are contending over matters of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Some of the loudest, repeated, and persistent citations or allusions to biblical and, again, specifically Pauline materials stoke fear and disgust, and generate or reinforce condemnation and vilification, stigmatization and marginalization, particularly toward those people cast as figures of gender and sexual variation. I can understand why so many reflexively recoil from the biblical; in such overwhelming conditions it is hard to see how engaging Paul's letters could make anything better.

Appalling Bodies aims to resist and reframe these uses of the letters by reaching past Paul toward other, arguably more fascinating figures that appear before, after, and thus within the letters: gender variant women, castrated males, enslaved and therefore sexually vulnerable people, and foreign outsiders or "Others." Because each of these ancient figures—labeled as androgynes, eunuchs, slaves, and barbarians, respectively—are deployed in these letters, this book situates them within their specifically Roman imperial setting, an ambiance that cast them as complicated, debased, and dangerous. While the letters repeat and reinscribe the prevailing perspectives on this constellation of embodied figures, *Appalling Bodies* repositions them and presents new ways of thinking about the dangers and complications they represented, in part, by drawing upon the critical theories people have come to call queer. In juxtaposing them against more recent figures of gender and sexual variation, also subject to vilification and marginalization, this book provides a series of alternative angles on these figures and the assemblies who spark and receive these letters, then or now. In staging a series of "touches across time" (inspired and informed by Dinshaw 1999), *Appalling Bodies* defamiliarizes and reorients what can be known about both the historical figures active in these ancient communities and those rhetorical figures that continue to be activated in contemporary settings. The aim is not to claim, anachronistically, that these figures are somehow identical to each other; rather, it is through anachronistic juxtaposition that the book highlights contingent connections—partial, particular, but shared practices of gender, sexuality, and embodiment that depart from prevailing perspectives and demonstrate a range of unexpected impacts for the interpretation of politically and religiously loaded materials.

One of the impacts I hope for *Appalling Bodies* continues to be greater attention to the figures other than Paul in these letters and their assemblies. The book opens with the (possible) provocation, which is also a rhetorical judgment or just an affective preference, that "Paul is probably the least interesting thing about Paul's letters" (Marchal 2020a: 1). This is because, when I read the letters, and indeed the reason

I keep getting sucked back into studying them, is the sense they give of all of these other people in them, in the assemblies that sparked, co-created, received, responded, and at times recirculated these letters. To be sure, many of these people are cast as appalling figures, in these epistles and in the histories of their interpretation. The letters repeat, repurpose, and thus reinforce ancient stereotypes of women, eunuchs, slaves, and, or, as barbarians. I do not think we can or should evade their appearances in these letters and their broader affective and rhetorical force as sexualized scare-figures, particularly for those aligned with the prevailing kyriarchal perspectives of a past that is not so past. Yet, we can and should consider how to historically and rhetorically reconfigure those people who are figured in inter-related fashion as gender variant women and other “unmen” (see Walters 1991)—castrated, enslaved, penetrated, conquered, and/or/as barbaric outsiders marked by overlapping and reinforcing gender, sexual, colonial, ethnoracial, and religious difference. Each of these inter-connected figures were vexing from an ancient kyriarchal angle, their troubling presence however indicates that there is more to them than how they are handled by the prevailing forces of their times. This might be especially compelling once we recognize how the letters call up these figures in order to call out people in these ancient assemblies. Instead of assenting to this targeting or, worse, piling on such appalling arguments, *Appalling Bodies* asserts that these people deserve our attention. Whereas it seems hard to justify adding yet another book to the countless mass of studies focused on Paul, it is past time to reconsider and reconfigure our approaches to the many other people populating these arguments and assemblies, particularly considering those cast as *Appalling Bodies*, then and now.

Thus, in spite of the most vociferous (if, frankly, relatively recent) insistence that the Christian scriptures clearly and repeatedly condemn LGBTIQ+ people and practices, built in large part on imprecise references to passages like Romans 1:26–27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10, *Appalling Bodies* demonstrates that the study of these letters can be a queer resource. This might be a startling proposition to make, but queer approaches to these epistles and their interpretation are well fashioned to help us see both the past and the present differently. One of the things queer theory does is reorient our perspectives on the modes of gender and sexual normalization and naturalization, marginalization and minoritization. Such queer angles will be essential for counter-kyriarchal efforts in the present-day, even as connecting struggles against kyriarchy (in origins an intersectional conceptualization of feminist biblical scholars) can keep queer critical and reflexive, intersectional and adaptable. These approaches and their broader reconfiguration of appalling figures highlight that the letters are not what most people see or hear about them. This is true as much for the regressive and reactionary forces persistently targeting queer and trans people, as for many liberal and progressive groups (particularly within religious communities). The letters we call “Paul’s” are emphatically not screeds against homosexuality, but their purported main author and self-described “apostle to the

gentiles” is far from the icon of inclusion some might want to claim. These letters maintain and amplify normalizing, stigmatizing, and minoritizing forces, their arguments dependent upon and deploying vilification and marginalization. These texts and traditions have done and still do harm.

It is not a mistake to detect judgment and condemnation in these texts, these are more commonly characteristic features of those gathered in the New Testament than many Marcion-like Christians want to admit. In fact, these letters’ consonance with their Roman imperial ambiance, especially in their recirculation of sexualized scare-figures, demonstrate how unexceptional these texts were within their times. Thus, the tendency of *Appalling Bodies* corresponds to how other works, most especially Bernadette Brooten’s unparalleled *Love Between Women* (1996), historically situate Paul’s letters as mostly fitting in, rather than departing from, the prevailing kyriarchal perspectives of that period and place.² Feminist and now also queer approaches to these materials, though, help us to push beyond the approaches whose main object is figuring out what Paul was arguing—as if this is the real, full, or total picture historically for the first century, as if this will then tell us what we should be doing now ethically and politically in the twenty-first century. Without a doubt, I think it is helpful to examine the considerably more complicated picture for ancient norms and forms of practices like androgyny (or castration or surviving enslavement). I hope that the way *Appalling Bodies* examines and pushes upon the anxieties embedded within prevailing perspectives on androgynous females, castrated males, enslaved people, and those cast as “barbaric,” is instructive. However, my aim is to insist that we do more than this examination and then contextualization for the canonized letters, more with our approaches to the past.

Once we have situated and recognized how a letter fits within the prevailing kyriarchal point of view in the past, what else can we do, if we do not seek to perpetuate these patterns or presume that their part of the view is the whole—particularly for those cast as appalling figures of gender and sexual variation? Some of this comes from re-routing our attentions and energies, toward all of these other figures beside Paul. From there, I hope *Appalling Bodies* displays a willingness to explore, improvise, and connect, in part by both “reading against the grain” (as recurrently pursued by feminist biblical scholars like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Antoinette Clark Wire) and then tracing where bodies might “touch across time” (as beautifully evoked by Carolyn Dinshaw). One test of the touches (re)constructed in this approach will be how well they help us to see other people and ourselves differently—and hopefully better. Those marginalized and stigmatized then and now might contingently link or connect, but neither perfectly nor absolutely. Thus, the contingent connections within *Appalling Bodies* could have only been assembled by learning from the best and more reflexive approaches that

² For further reflections on the impacts of Brooten’s work, see both the recent English translation of the German edition of her preface, Brooten 2021; as well as the “Special Section: The Influence and Impact of Bernadette J. Brooten’s *Love Between Women*,” *JFSR* 38:2 (2022):143-99.

came before these queer reconfigurations. I hope that this book and the present response article can function as an adequate acknowledgment of my conceptual, procedural, and ethical debts and, in turn, make a compelling case for engaging both these resources and some others that have arrived since I finished writing this book. Along the way, I believe this could also show why more of us should engage a wider range of queer partners in our approaches to the past and the present. Reaching for scare-figures of gender and sexual variation on such contingent terms can give us a different feel for history, demonstrating how histories of scriptures can alter the histories of sexuality (and vice versa).

The three main articles in this issue of *Bible and Critical Theory* build upon a similar and often overlapping set of resources, even as they engage different contexts for the study of these texts and traditions. Thus, they do more than respond to *Appalling Bodies*, each turning to contexts and communities of accountability that animate their own lives and lines of inquiry. These take readers and receivers of these texts and traditions beyond the Americas to sites in Europe and Africa, and outside, or beside, the strict disciplines of biblical studies—toward churches and other publics, theology and archaeology, classrooms and (other) colonized spaces, theory and materiality, the ancient past and various present-day conditions. Each of them can contribute, along different, if occasionally overlapping trajectories, to counter-kyriarchal efforts in these appalling times. I am profoundly grateful for this set of articles, as well as those who began, but could not complete their own response articles, given the many and expanding demands on our time and energy in this ongoing pandemic and all of its associated apocalypses. These often build upon a similar or overlapping group of resources with *Appalling Bodies*, even as they push us to consider a wider range of partners and purposes. Their insights and connections indicate that learning about the operation of marginalizing and stigmatizing rhetorics in one site can bolster our abilities to recognize and resist their reappearance in other times and places.

These Appalling Articles

While sharing an appalling affection for punning and occasionally playful language, Susannah Cornwall takes *Appalling Bodies* as an occasion for interrogating related modes of distraction in both Christian theological and then wider political, legal, and cultures sites in the present-day. Cornwall connects such rhetorical patterns as one set of afterlives for these appalling bodies, “namely the deflection of attention by Christian and other commentators from things which should actually shock and trouble people of conscience (such as sexual abuse) onto scapegoated groups, notably trans people” (2022, 2). Cornwall recognizes a range of resonances between the times we call then and now, including the ways that gendered and sexualized stigma and transgression map onto and multiply claims about ethnic and racial minorities as greater predators or perpetrators (2022, 3). Such twinned practices of

projection and evasion could be depressingly familiar, their persistence potentially leading to despair. Yet, Cornwall insists, with *Appalling Bodies*, that it is better to confront rather than evade or, worse still, erase the horrifying heritage and the ongoing afterlives of biblical and other ancient perspectives.

At several points, Cornwall notes how the scapegoating faced by or routed through the ancient characterization of gender variant women and various other unmen is similar to that faced more recently by trans women “from a range of quarters, notably including conservative evangelical Christians (mainly men) and self-styled gender-critical radical feminists (usually cis women)” (2022, 4). The anxiety and fear these groups recirculate and deploy feeds both reductions and misperceptions of trans people. Ultimately, these lead toward outlandish slander and stigma, so that trans young people are cast as hapless victims unable to consent to their own care and treatment, as in the legal findings of *Bell v. Tavistock* (Judiciary of England and Wales 2020), while trans women are paradoxically preternaturally empowered and nefarious predators “in disguise” (see Cornwall 2022, 7). This is one danger of simply accepting prevailing narratives about people, including some about eunuchs within the Roman empire: “What is most interesting or noteworthy about them to their detractors, or those who are suspicious of them, is probably not what is most interesting or noteworthy about them to themselves” (2022, 6). Cornwall astutely recognizes the manifest problems of warping some small part of one’s perception for the whole picture.

This scapegoating, then, leads to or otherwise facilitates or functions as monstrous distractions and deflections. Here, Cornwall turns back to the letters of Paul, pursuing a stimulating line of thought around those notorious “bashing passages” as results of Paul’s own insecurities: “In order to deflect attention from himself and the precarity of his own situation, Paul scapegoats others (in Romans 1, as we have seen, as well as in texts like 1 Corinthians 6) whose situation is already even less certain than his own, picking out what seem like obviously egregious vices” (2022, 8). While these letters are not discussing gay or trans people then or now, we cannot ignore or leave the pattern at work in the letters entirely behind, as this practice of deflection is echoed in similar forms among present-day Christian figures who are pointedly and loudly and repeatedly, even anxiously discussing and disavowing trans and gay people (2022, 8), likely as one means of deflecting or distracting from their own anxieties and/or boosting their own authority. Such monstrous deflections could prove distracting in at least two directions. First, while some trans academics and/as activists have reclaimed figures of abjection like the monster, Cornwall highlights the ambivalent risk of such moves, particularly given their similarity to reactionary and regressive narratives. “Evidently, plenty of trans people nonetheless just plain *do not want* to be portentous or noteworthy, or to carry the responsibility of reminding others of the contested, precarious status of systems which only function by ongoing common consent” (2022, 9). In a second direction, then, these deflections desensitize us to the horrors of the contexts with which we

are supposedly “overly familiar,” including both Paul’s letters and our own lives. The directives toward silence, subordination, and obedience for women and/among enslaved people hidden “in plain sight” in the ancient epistles (2022, 10) find their distressing match in cultures of secrecy and coercion that facilitate abuse and authoritarianism in (and out of) church communities. These sites are of course linked: “If everyone is looking at (and being appalled by the supposed excesses and transgressions of) trans women, for example, then there is less energy and will available to challenge the structures that mean trans and cis women alike continue to suffer disproportionate sexual and gendered violence and abuse” (2022, 13). Cornwall then pointedly repurposes the title figures of the study under consideration to inquire: “Are the *really* appalling bodies not the institutional bodies which fail to protect those made most vulnerable, and which perpetuate systemic sin via their own hierarchies?” (2022, 13).

Jennifer Quigley shares a similar concern with the impact of the arguments and affects derived from Paul’s letters in our present context, but turns our attention more specifically to historiographic methods within biblical studies and their relevance for teaching and learning. In doing so, Quigley places *Appalling Bodies* in the flattering company of Krister Stendahl and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, bell hooks and Paulo Freire, giants within biblical interpretation and transformative pedagogy. Stendahl in particular insists on the practices of distance and defamiliarization, but Quigley highlights how her students, and especially the queer students, proceed from different histories and affects in their contacts: “They have been taught and told, they have felt the ways the Bible sure has stuff to say *about* them, even as it is not a text *for* them” (Quigley 2022, 2). This strong impression was not only created by an overwhelming set of figures and institutions claiming Christianity for themselves, but has also circulated in the wider culture as the common sense about sex in the bible for decades. How can one focus exclusively on defamiliarization, then, when so many arrive already dispossessed of these texts and traditions? Some of the strategies within *Appalling Bodies* seem to settle between these factors in signaling some partial connections through a range of anachronistic juxtapositions. Quigley asserts: “The variety and depth of these juxtapositions offer students multiple entry points for thinking about folk often overlooked or boxed in by prevailing understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality” (2022, 4).

Such multiple entry points could provide resources for surviving and altering these kyriarchal conditions, generating conditions for a different kind of authority for these dispossessed interpreters and their interpretations. In such places Quigley hears a resonance between moving “toward a critical ‘elsewhere’” (Marchal 2020a, 3–4) and Ashon Crawley’s description of “otherwise possibilities” (2016, 23), a resonance which, in turn, points to practices of teaching and learning that move

toward freedom.³ As hooks highlights, students crave meaningful knowledge, to learn and to make connections back to their own lives. Quigley argues:

Queer historiography, then, might be exactly what biblical studies classrooms need; by centring transgressive juxtapositions students encounter a model by which they can imagine their own transgressive movements against and beyond boundaries. “Anachronistic” subversive juxtapositions are not offered as therapy for students, but rather they invite knowledge that is meaningful (2022, 6).

These practices underscore, then, the especial importance of theory, not just as some disciplinary exercise, but for helping people negotiate other ways of learning and surviving cultures that have done significant harm, to put words and images, arguments and affects to analyze these kyriarchal conditions and then envision the otherwise, elsewhere, even elsewhen.

Quigley demonstrates how increasing attention to the multiple perspectives and voices in our studies of the letters helps in these efforts. For one, it specifies Freire’s emphasis on education as humanization, for the participants as well as longer histories in the making. “Queer historiography, with its push to move beyond binaries, fits well within a classroom that is trying to humanize both presents and pasts without oversimplified connections between the two” (Quigley 2022, 7). Quigley then herself further specifies how this works in the classroom with reflections upon two common exercises she plans to adapt in light of *Appalling Bodies*. The first encourages students to engage with ancient evidence creatively by imagining responses to arguments like those in 1 Cor 7. When working toward contemporary reflection and historical insight, students often notice distance, but could use more self-reflexivity. To Quigley, many students are, like *Appalling Bodies*, already “moving beyond the binary between a past which is ‘obviously applicable or distantly dated’” (2022, 9; quoting Marchal 2020a, 2). The second sends them on a scavenger hunt for what materials might survive to be studied two thousand years from now! This exercise underscores how partial our perspectives are, given the fragmentary nature of the available evidence. Yet, Quigley justifiably worries that there is not enough attention to the materiality of the past, in *Appalling Bodies* and elsewhere. Given the shared focus of Quigley’s and my own work, this is a particular concern: “One of the reasons the letters of Paul are so compelling is because of their proximity to the potential historical figures in whom I, and Marchal, and many other biblical scholars are interested: the non-elite who are often categorized into ‘perverse gender and strange embodiment’ by elite figures” (Quigley 2022, 11). A greater and more carefully theorized and reflexive engagement with wider sets of materials than just literary remains holds the potential of closer, if still partial

³ Indeed, Crawley’s repeated meditations (2017; and 2020, to start) on silence and speaking in tongues, withdrawal within and fugitive flesh, and even the very form of letters and repeated performance, suggest a range of otherwise possibilities for our approaches to biblical texts and traditions.

contacts with all of these other, non-elite people (and pushes scholars and other readers past other false binaries, like the one between “text” and “materiality”, see Quigley 2022, 12).

Jeremy Punt raises a different set of provocative questions about biblical interpretation and critical theory in the wake of *Appalling Bodies*. Punt is especially critical of the kind of predominantly theological approach in what has come before this work in the history of Pauline interpretation: “There has been little room for corporeality in Pauline interpretive frameworks that formed over time, except perhaps for terms like σῶμα (body) reserved as positive metaphor for faith communities, or σὰρξ (flesh) framed as negative image for sin and depravity—both understood as and in their binary simplicities” (2022, 1). This characterization is mostly true of the vanilla mainline, or pale mainstream of Pauline interpreters. Yet, one point this study has tried to demonstrate is their own anxious to obsessive phallogocentric focus—their specific, if persistent focus on only particular body parts—even as they have insisted that it was always *other* people, either cast as Paul’s opponents, or as Jewish or Orientalized others (see, for instance, Marchal 2020a, 89–112), not they or “their” apostle, who were obsessed with the flesh. In many ways, though, Punt and I are in alignment about how the non- or even anti-corporeal history of (mostly Eurocentric Protestant) interpretation has obscured some of the more interesting contours and comrades reflected in these letters. “Retrieving and making sense (rather than sin) (out) of Pauline bodies require attention not only for embodied texts in their corporeal contexts, but also demands critical attention to a protracted history of anti-body interpretation” (Punt 2022, 2). These hold great potential to trouble the stark contrasts generated between spirit and flesh or mind and body.

Punt also helpfully locates *Appalling Bodies* within the anti-normative trajectories of queer scholarship. Yet, he also meditates on how queer functions here and in other places as not only oppositional and resistant, but also “restorative and coalitional” (2022, 5). The willful anachronisms therein generate intriguing, if also affectively loaded questions for Punt:

when appalling turns into appealing, does the latter become a form of resisting, or a matter of attraction and allure? Or, what happens when appealing is reinscribed and challenged as appalling, when the normal becomes the aberrant, when the socially desired becomes the rejected? Can and does this switch also happen, at large scale, and is it sustainable? And who benefits or derives power when creating a new-normal in the process, and conversely, who loses out? Such questions cannot be avoided in a queer reading (2022, 6).

The relations between such affects and transformation matter for our approaches to the past and practices in the present. If the aim is to properly situate Paul, Punt is right to highlight my own debts to Tat-siong Benny Liew’s examination of Paul’s colonized consciousness (see Liew 2008; and Marchal 2020a, 192–95) to account

for how the letters repeat and recirculate kyriarchal arguments and affects. Yet, Punt remains concerned about the centripetal force of prior approaches to or images of this apostle: “is it in fact possible to read past Paul, or is a side-lining of Paul perhaps the best that can be achieved, especially as Paul retains the authorial imbalance of power, propped up by a centuries-old interpretive history? Can readers today duck under the Pauline reach, or step outside interpretive history’s fences in sustained ways?” (Punt 2022, 7). Both of these clusters of questions raise the spectre of reinscription even within our own efforts to resist and decentre, imagine and construct otherwise.

Punt senses an embodied emphasis on marginalized and stigmatized people in “real-life,” then and now, even as he also stresses the necessity of grappling with the social construction of identity (2022, 8). He also helpfully grasps that the sequence of four juxtapositions that structure the bulk of *Appalling Bodies* are focused on figurative categories that are far from distinct. Indeed, the lines of argument moving us through and toward each of the core chapters shows how the consecutive and seemingly separate sets of ancient figures are in turn connected to the preceding. Some eunuchs are described as androgynous, some enslaved people were castrated (including to make them more sexually “useful”), and the figuration of barbarian others weaves each of these together even further in order to produce a stigmatized ethnoracial other in support of the Roman imperial version of sexual exceptionalism. Yet, Punt signals a potential problem when queer approaches proceed by folding more and more figures into an analysis and counter-kyriarchal assembly: “an all too inclusive queer-umbrella may leave queers in the lurch and (re)instigate a(nother) normativity, again” (2022, 12). From another vantage point, Punt both recognizes and questions the value of focused sub-themes, like demonstrating the ongoing androcentrism of these texts and traditions, wondering how interpreters and other receivers of these materials can adequately name without perpetuating this centralization and its constrained views of masculinity.

Appalling, in Theory

Individually and collectively, these articles grapple with both the historic and ongoing significance of these texts and traditions for a range of contexts. They also demonstrate the immense value of bringing biblical studies and critical theories, including especially queer theories, into closer contacts, eclectic overlaps, and more promiscuous combinations. Indeed, I am encouraged by how each of them (and Quigley’s article in particular) recognizes how “theory” need not connote (only) distanced or detached, abstract and therefore irrelevant reflections. For those touched by histories of harm and (what might look like or in fact *be*) overwhelming oppressive forces, the work called “theory” often provides indispensable resources for survival and connection, imagination and transformation. If you live in or through such difficult times and places, sometimes getting through and getting out, on individual, interpersonal, and further interconnected levels, requires “difficult”

reading or thinking. When to so many others the work some still call “difficult” are rather experienced as a necessity, a pleasure, a consolation, a possibility, said difficulty then is plainly in the eye of the beholder—as is the label “theory.” I only know that others are most inclined to call some of my work “too theoretical” when I am focused on counter-kyriarchal efforts that draw upon others who are also laboring in explicitly feminist, postcolonial, queer, and increasingly race-critical directions. Theoretical might just be a byword for an apparently unacceptable promiscuity, *to them*. Yet, theory is just a kind of communicating that uses words that are new *to you*, new or different or unfamiliar modes of expression, or known words assembled differently, often to get us to think and feel and organize and be otherwise.

In appalling times like these, it helps to get a different feel for what seems natural and inevitable, what queer theorists in the wake of Judith Butler (1990; 1993; 2004) and Michel Foucault (1979; 1990) would call naturalization or normalization. These are among the concepts (that some might call “theory”) that have sparked or assisted my own efforts to move along counter-kyriarchal trajectories, but so are the analytic concepts and hermeneutical practices that have been circulating in feminist biblical studies for decades now. Prominent among these are, of course, kyriarchy, but also practices for resisting identification and reading against the grain of textual remains with kyriarchal impulses or effects (as exemplified in Wire 1990 and Schüssler Fiorenza 1999, among others). Thus, even as *Appalling Bodies* is in part a case for considering a wider range of resources from queer studies, I hope it also demonstrates why more scholars and other receivers of biblical texts and traditions should also reconsider some of the already existing concepts, principles, and practices within feminist approaches to inform and inspire intersectional, counter-kyriarchal efforts and alliances.⁴ In addition to these, then, the approaches *Appalling Bodies* took toward a range of marginalized and stigmatized figures of gender and sexual variation were inspired by a larger cluster of concepts, often, if eclectically assembled under umbrellas like “queer theory.” It is one of my fervent hopes that this book and the present set of articles in this issue of *Bible & Critical Theory* will cue more readers and receivers of biblical texts and traditions into normalization and performativity, to be sure, but also the operation of monstrous intimacies (Spillers 1987; and Sharpe 2010) and sexual exceptionalisms (Alexander 2005; and Puar 2007), or the possibilities of female masculinity (Halberstam 1998) and temporal drag (Freeman 2010), exploring or improvising upon our relations to pasts that are not yet past, people that still touch or haunt us across time (Dinshaw 1999; and Freccero 2006). Along the way such theoretical insights also allow us to rethink some of the most “traditional” concepts in the study of Paul’s letters, from prophecy

⁴ For further discussion of feminist debts in relation to a broader range of queer concepts (or queer debts and feminist concepts within queer projects), see Marchal 2020a, 1–29; and then Marchal 2019a.

and women's participation, to baptism and circumcision, patronage and enslavement, the mission to the gentiles and dynamics of communal belonging.

These ideas and practices remain my queer companions, so much so that they still reside in what Sara Ahmed would call my "feminist killjoy survival kit" (2017, 251–68).⁵ Indeed, books are the first item in Ahmed's own killjoy survival kit; they are key resources because "it is often books that name the problem that help us handle the problem" (2017, 240). Since many exploitative and abusive forces persist when we are distracted or waylaid in our uncertainty, despair, or cynicism, there is no way to address kyriarchal structures and practices without naming them as such first. Still, queer and specifically trans approaches to temporality recognize that history might be loopier than expected, less sequential or progressive than cyclical (see Gossett, Stanley, and Burton 2017; Bychowski et al. 2018; DeVun and Tortorici 2018; and, briefly, Marchal 2020b), with occasional celebrations of inclusion, arrival, or rediscovery, often matched with amnesia or interspersed within "backlashes" of persistent violence. A range of scholars in postcolonial and critical race theory (including Eng 2016; Stoler 2016; and Stuelke 2021) also note the durably recursive operation of imperialism, including colonialism's notorious "boomerang" effect: the haunting return of imperial and enslaving violence back to Eurocentric metropolises as sites themselves plagued by fascisms, wars, and genocides (as stressed in Arendt 1951; Césaire 1972; and Sartre 2005). This need not cause despair, but rather highlight the necessity of our counter-kyriarchal efforts. As Ahmed succinctly explains, "we are in the time of revival because of what is not over" (2017, 30). Because these forces return, repeat, and persist, we need concepts to see these patterns.

In recognizing and resisting these patterns, we must learn from the struggles in the past, and not negate or evade these histories of massive harm and their haunting or dragging effects. Practices of reading against the grain can also then operate as practices of "remembering against the grain," as evocatively conceptualized by Joseph Winters (2016). "Remembering against the grain enables us to not only seize images, events, and ideas from the past but to cut, challenge, and undo narratives that justify, redeem, and make us comfortable with suffering and loss" (Winter 2016, 248). Such remembering against the grain of kyriarchal arguments and affects, structures and practices challenges the prevailing narratives about the past and its potential relations to the present, acknowledging trauma, loss, pain, and suffering without exhausted resignation or naïve recuperation.

Appalling Survival Kits

We are going to need such practices in our survival kits, particularly if we pay attention to the sensations and strategies our students bring, including Quigley's student producing "A Brown, Queer Survival Guide to the Apostle Paul" (2022, 1).

⁵ For further reflections on the potential relations of such survival kits for feminist, queer, and anti-racist approaches to biblical interpretation, see Marchal forthcoming.

For me it is both flattering and flummoxing to think that *Appalling Bodies* might end up in such guides or kits. Yet, as I think through what could be the ongoing afterlives of *Appalling Bodies*, how it might speak to or link up with other efforts, I turn increasingly to what else I would add to my own counter-kyriarchal survival kit. Indeed, assembling such a kit can assist in addressing several of the key points and questions raised by the set of articles in this special issue, and provide us further resources for remembering, reading, feeling, and ultimately resisting differently in our present conditions.

As Cornwall's article stresses, trans people have been the regular targets of scapegoating and are still treated as monstrous distractions or deflections for groups claiming to be especially feminist or particularly religious. The years since I finished writing *Appalling Bodies* have been marked by persistent, even resurgent violence against trans and, or, as gender-nonconforming people. Further, in this same short period, reactionary and regressive forces have directed a concerted, rapid-fire effort to pass dozens of laws targeting especially trans and gender-nonconforming young people, stoking panic and fear. These conditions alone are enough to explain why biblical studies needs more sustained engagement with trans studies, even before we notice that many of these phobic and violent efforts appeal to biblical or historical claims to justify themselves. There is noticeable growth within trans approaches to biblical interpretation (see, for example, Guest and Hornsby 2016; Ladin 2019; and Sellew 2020), but the present conditions suggest the particular value of Max Strassfeld's interventions (see Strassfeld 2016; 2018; 2022, to start).

Indeed, Strassfeld's thrilling *Trans Talmud: Androgynes and Eunuchs in Rabbinic Literature* (2022) focuses on some of the same kinds of people in ancient imperial-colonial contexts as *Appalling Bodies* does, while also explicitly exploring how this historical and textual work can address how trans people are targeted in the present. Strassfeld centres androgynes and eunuchs more than I did, while also regularly emphasizing the links between these two groups in the rabbinic materials (whereas *Appalling Bodies* treated them a bit more separately in successive chapters). Strassfeld also demonstrates that these groups of people were central to rabbinic ideas and categories. These figures of gender, sexual, and embodied variation were employed by the rabbis to draw boundaries, even as these very same discourses indicate ongoing tensions, instabilities, inconsistencies, and complications. The care *and* anxiety shown in the rabbinic treatment of the various types of androgynes and eunuchs in this literature—the acquired saris, the born *saris*, *aylonit*, *androgynos*, and *tuntum*—demonstrate how the rabbis themselves did not invest in a stable system of binary sex.⁶ While this sort of system will come to prevail in other times and places (including those especially shaped, founded, or reinscribed by various Christian cultures), Strassfeld underscores how important it is to not impose our categories onto the past. Strassfeld's work always has one eye on the potential relevance of

⁶ For some specific elaboration on these, also at times linked or intertwined groups, see Strassfeld 2022, 7–9.

history for the present, but as a conscientious and candid historian and textual critic he refuses to flatten the rich complexity and difference of the rabbinic materials from our “here and now.”

This refusal to simplify the past connects then to our present relations to these materials. The rabbinic disinterest in naturalizing sex and gender is somewhat encouraging in our current contexts, even as we should not then mistake their arguments (and the connected worldviews of their ancient surroundings) as particularly liberating (see Strassfeld 2022, 15). Still, Strassfeld insists that the gendering of law in the past could matter in the present given, for instance, the different uses of Genesis in both rabbinic discourse and contemporary arguments within and against anti-trans laws in the USA, as with the so-called “bathroom bills” (see especially Strassfeld 2022, 81–88). As Cornwall might be, Strassfeld is also cautious about treating ancient eunuchs and androgynes as figures of subversion, given the potential costs borne by those people (2022, 188). Yet, he also holds out the potential in creatively reappropriating rabbinic figures like the *tumtum* as “transcestors” (2022, 187, 195–201) by and for present-day trans and intersex Jews. At the very least, the mutability of the body in the earliest layers of these traditions pushes back against claims within some reluctant Orthodox Jewish settings and most especially among anti-trans “Christian conservative” groups who construct a supposedly timeless and univocal “Judeo-Christian” view of gender as binary and stable.

Strassfeld’s projects certainly expand the options for trans and intersex receivers and interpreters of these materials beyond the reclamation of the abject or the monstrous. Cornwall is wise to critically reflect on the function of such attempted reclamations by and for trans people, particularly given the rhetorics of monstrosity in certain right-wing, nationalist, and increasingly fascist Christian contexts. However, I am not so sure that *Appalling Bodies* itself reclaims the monstrous, so much as traces how various monstrous figures operate as a site for alternative angles on the sexual exceptionalism that projects such images on a range of people lower in the kyriarchal orders of our past (and present). This is why monstrous intimacies and interrelated figurations do not fade into the background once the book focuses increasingly on enslaved and (or as) ethnoracialized others (past the chapter most explicitly focused on gender variant women). Even sticking with the chapter that staged a juxtaposition between ancient androgyny and some of the more recent trans approaches to gender, sexuality, and embodiment, though, it highlighted multiple modes of masculinity, including female, butch, drag, and trans masculinities. It aimed not to collapse these, but to gesture to their array in a constellation, and hardly limited the movement of these bodies to the monstrous. It was, admittedly, an ambivalent risk, but one buoyed by my sense that the timing of *Appalling Bodies* would ensure that it was presenting just one set, not *the only* set of queer approaches to these bodies. Indeed, though I completed the writing of *Appalling Bodies* before I had the fabulous honor of assembling and editing the range of approaches to Pauline

epistles and interpretations featured in *Bodies on the Verge*; the sometimes queer temporalities of publication led to the latter's quicker delivery to readers, months ahead of its longer-simmering, yet distinctly appalling companion.

Still, this cyclical, or recurrent persistence of monstrous figures gives me further reasons to pause over Cornwall's characterization of "trans-suspicious" conservative Christians and feminists (see, for instance, Cornwall 2022, 4, 6, 9). First, there are already fairly descriptive terms for these people and practices, such as trans exclusive or, more pointedly, transphobic or cis-sexist. These better name the so-called "gender critical" or "radical" feminist people, when frankly these groups seem to be neither very critically reflective about gender nor radical, unless by radical one means finding common cause or making alliances with rising nationalist, fascist, and white supremacist forces (see, for example, the latest special issue of *TSQ* 9:3, Bassi and LaFleur 2022). Such alliances further give the lie to any genuine concern about violence against women, since the most common source of such violence is and has long been our intimate partners, guardians, or caregivers. In the face of their monstrous figurations of people "in disguise" in our shared spaces, more of us are facing violence of various sorts from growing, and increasingly open and explicit, white supremacist and Christian nationalist groups, the very people with whom these "feminists" concerned with violence are making alliances.

This brings me to my second concern about the term "trans-suspicious," since so many of us need to keep suspicion, as a hermeneutic, an affect, and an analytic, learned from decades of feminist scholarship and activism.⁷ We need a hermeneutic of suspicion because of the patterns or repetitions of violence and exploitation that are far from over (see Ahmed 2017, 30). When practiced within counter-kyriarchal efforts, then, suspicion demonstrates how crucial the analysis of kyriarchy remains. Few, if any trans people are anywhere near the apex of the intertwined, pyramidal relations of power; rather, trans, non-binary, and or as gender-nonconforming people are much more frequently harmed by forces that are imposed on all of us, yet with even greater disparities in life chances (see, for example, Spade 2015). Once focused on those most affected by kyriarchal relations and structures, on diminished life chances, it becomes clear that "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2007: 28) targets and affects racially minoritized groups even more so. The effects of kyriarchy are unevenly borne on the basis of these intersecting and force multiplying trajectories of oppression.

Back more "strictly" within biblical studies, then, some of the most concentrated efforts to think through the interrelations of race, ethnicity, and economy to gender, sexuality, and embodiment have come from womanist scholars. Quigley's article (2022, 5) specifically nods to the breathing evoked in Angela N. Parker's *If God Still*

⁷ See the more extended discussion of feminist suspicion as a queer affect and ongoing strategy, in Marchal forthcoming, b.

Breathes, Why Can't I? Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority (2021). Here, Parker calls the potentially “God-breathed” status of Christian scriptures to account for the ghastly gasping cries of “I can’t breathe,” hauntingly recorded in the police killings of both Eric Garner and George Floyd (2021, 9–10). Indeed, a growing number of womanist biblical scholars are (re)turning specifically to matters of authority and audience in the study and reception of Paul’s letters, often decentring Paul in the process (including Shanell Smith 2019; M. Smith 2020, 2022; Kaalund 2020, 2021; as well as Parker 2018, 2020, 2021). Womanist interpreters have long focused on embodiment as a crucial topic for any kind of exegesis, whether concerned with ancient people or those still facing premature death in the present.⁸ Jennifer Kaalund, for instance, connects the two, highlighting the harm historically done to African Americans, treated as disposable bodies, to explain why she is (justifiably) “suspicious of Paul’s desire to control Galatian bodies” (2020, 38). These are among the reasons womanists advocate talking back to these letters (see especially M. Smith 2018; 2020; and Kaalund 2020).

Parker’s *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?* grapples with the ongoing politics of identification with these biblical epistles and apostles (or our constructs of them), by taking on the even stronger, often surrounding claims about inerrancy and infallibility. Though these texts are still authoritative for Parker, she separates that function from how claims of their infallibility and inerrancy operate as tools of White supremacist authoritarianism.⁹ Parker shows how this not only leads to bibliolatry, but it also stifles any genuine attention to the biblical texts. Essentially, and in a scenario familiar to anyone who has had one or more texts of terror shouted at them, biblical citation becomes an emphatic conversation closer, rather than a starter (2021, 29–30). These practices and their associated doctrines work, then, as tools of control for white male biblical scholars. Such modes of teaching and preaching cannot be fixed by graduate training in what Parker candidly describes as “crap no one cares about” (2021, 15–17). Indeed, Parker pointedly describes her own graduate studies as one in which she was trained to be a white male scholar.

The doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility go hand in hand with such modes of exclusion and identification, even if scholars do not themselves subscribe to those doctrines. These tools protect those who already “have” the text, the cultural or theological capital that already empowered white male (and, I will add, mostly straight and Protestant) scholars possess to determine what are and are not the “correct” ways to read, view, and use scriptures (Parker 2021, 22–23). Such modes cannot then address those who come in already alienated from or even by biblical texts and traditions of interpretation, like many of the students Quigley describes in her article. This is another reminder of why we still need suspicion—it is not

⁸ On womanist approaches, see M. Smith 2015; and Byron and Lovelace 2016. For Clarice Martin’s innovative approaches to Pauline materials, in particular, see C. Martin 1990; 1991; and 2005.

⁹ Parker’s womanist engagement of biblical authority in light of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the ongoing struggle for justice resonates, or perhaps just rhymes, with previous feminist and queer approaches to the challenges of biblical authority, such as Tolbert 1983; 1998; and 2000.

paranoia if marginalized and stigmatized people have been and are still being targeted and harmed by how these texts have been used. Yet, Parker's own career trajectory demonstrates why we need these different approaches to biblical interpretation, seeking new and different questions to and about Paul (2021, 17), particularly if we want to avoid just creating more crap irrelevant to people and our problems in the present and, thus, unable to address the injustices of our times.

For Parker, a womanist commitment to centre her own embodied identity in relation to Black and Brown lives whose suffering is most directly addressed by the #BlackLivesMatter movement (see Parker 2021, 3–4) requires a different approach to biblical translation and interpretation. Parker ponders what would constitute a “faithful translation” of a text when it reflects oppressive ideas or arguments (2021, 65–67), particularly if one is not seeking to further harm already targeted people. Such concerns matter for Parker as she maintains authority without authoritarianism, thus, further suggesting that one should proceed with a more dynamic notion of faith that refuses to treat it as a decontextualized certainty. This allows, even requires that we bring our experience and knowledge, as when womanists come in knowing, often viscerally, a history of how Black people, and especially Black women, have been reduced to body parts (see Parker 2021, 22, as well as Shanell Smith 2019). This knowledge matters, informing how we interpret the embodied arguments within Paul's letters, as when Parker critiques Paul's occasional self-identification as either an enslaved person or a birthing mother (2021, 77–80; as well as 2018; 2020). Both of these are particularly galling when one attends to the glib ways Paul uses the enslaved and sexually used woman Hagar in his allegorical argument in Galatians. Parker wonders specifically about how the Galatian women who were enslaved, conquered, and/or assaulted would respond when Paul co-opted such bodies for his own purposes while gaslighting the Galatians (2021, 87)! Parker closes by recognizing how such texts and our still stifling living conditions could leave us breathless in mourning and despair, yet we can always counter these by reclaiming the fuller and more complicated memories of those whose inspired breath they tried to suffocate (2021, 95).

Parker's projects bring attention to these appalling bodies by moving past Paul and further developing the approaches broached by womanist and (often mostly white) feminist scholars. They also challenge me to extend and specify my own treatment of these Christian scriptures as engines of normalization and naturalization. Whether we reconsider how Paul treats a tradition about Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham from Genesis or how white male scholars historically (claim to) possess an almost exclusive authority to hold and interpret these texts, scriptures are looking increasingly like a status property not unlike whiteness. Cheryl Harris describes whiteness as a status property that can only be owned by some people—it is one of the main ways “whites” have defined themselves. Whiteness is not some inherent cultural, historical, let alone biological characteristic of people; it is something that can and has been asserted as a privilege and property owned only by

some. She examines how this operates legally in the USA: “The right to exclude was the central principle...of whiteness as identity, for mainly whiteness has been characterized, not by an inherent unifying characteristic, but by the exclusion of others deemed to be ‘not white.’ The possessors of whiteness were granted the legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness” (1993: 1736).¹⁰ There is nothing that unifies whiteness more than excluding those who do not conform enough to whatever assemblage of characteristics that those who wield whiteness claim.

The exclusionary dynamics of whiteness as a status property also rhymes with the recurrent patterns Parker identifies—biblical citations as conversation stoppers—as well as a wide range of biblical texts and traditions, including but extending well beyond the “bashing passages” of Gen 19, Lev 18 and 20, Rom 1, and 1 Cor 6. These texts are hardly unified, let alone identical in their messaging, and despite vociferous claims from the middle of the twentieth century or so forward (a relatively young tradition of biblical interpretation at that!), they are not particularly focused on homosexuality. Rather, they are strikingly similar in their projections upon and exclusions of people targeted as ethnoracial Others (including Sodomites, Canaanites, and recurrently “the gentiles”). As I have tried to show in *Appalling Bodies*, these are much clearer examples of sexual exceptionalism than sexual orientation (see Marchal 2020a, 157–85). This pattern of sexual othering has long been covered by scholars like Randall Bailey.¹¹ To me, Bailey’s work highlights our ongoing, white supremacist appetites for purity and/through projection onto others, distancing ourselves by recirculating xenophobia and/through sexual stigma—these sexualized, because ethnoracialized Others were not the “us” of those who generated and circulated these texts, and they are almost never claimed as the “us” of those who receive and continuously repurpose these texts and traditions of interpretation. For queer and trans approaches to live into their stated aims and full potential (including of the sort Punt’s article highlights), our approaches must further engage ongoing womanist projects, and draw upon, learn from, and explicitly cite our predecessors and colleagues (like Bailey) in speaking to those subject to sexualized othering, invective, stigmatization, and minoritization. Indeed, there are a lot of us—particularly ethnoracial minorities and/among/as queer folks. While the upshot here cannot and perhaps should not be reduced to “we have the same struggle,” the forms that sexual and/as gendered othering take (a topic and force ostensibly squarely in the centre of queer and trans approaches) are sites that demand more frequent coalitions, alliances, and even solidarities.

As this discussion of scriptures as status property indicates, these texts and traditions are also powerful objects of attachment, or objects of powerful attachments! These sensations are as much felt as thought, further troubling the

¹⁰ For the relation of whiteness as status property to biblical interpretation, see also Wan 2012.

¹¹ Exemplary in this regard is Bailey’s simultaneously classic and criminally under-recognized “They’re Nothing But Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives” essay (1995).

attempts to make disembodied distinctions between spirit and flesh or mind and body, as Punt's article highlights (2022, 2). In such a discussion of *Appalling Bodies* and the books in my own counter-kyriarchal survival kit, then, affect feels inevitable. As I noted about this project elsewhere (see Marchal 2019c, 124–5), I may have been feeling my way around affect for over a decade now—and it shows in this response article! It is already teeming with a variety of sensations, touching on disgust and stigma, despair and uncertainty, trauma and loss, horror and alienation, anxiety and care, suspicion and hope. Punt's article returned to the muddled boundaries between or combinations of appealing and appalling (2022, 5–6). Yet, in only recently turning to focus more explicitly on affects, I am also a relative latecomer to the exploration of affects in, of, and around biblical interpretation, including among scholars with related feminist, queer, decolonizing, or otherwise counter-kyriarchal aims (including: Runions 2011; Kotrosits 2011; Knust 2014; Waller 2014; Kotrosits 2015; Kotrosits 2016; Whipple 2018; Black and Koosed 2019; Waller 2020; Graybill 2020; Graybill 2021).

One recent project that combines a number of these commitments in order to develop a feminist and queer affective critique is Jimmy Hoke's *Feminism, Queerness, Affect, and Romans: Under God?* (2021). Though the development of affect studies within and beyond biblical studies is moving quickly and in many different directions, I believe Hoke's project is the first-ever book-length affect-attuned reading of a Pauline letter, in this case, the letter to the Romans. As Parker did, among other feminist, womanist, and now also queer interpreters (see not only Marchal 2020a, but also Guy 2019, Hoke 2019, Hartman 2019, Schwaller 2019, and Luckritz Marquis 2019), Hoke also proceeds by decentring Paul at several turns, even dedicating two separate chapters to constructing theo-Christological impulses and ethical impulses that could have been alternatives to those found in the letter. Hoke and I shared some of our previous work on the function of sexual exceptionalism in Paul's letters (Marchal 2015; Hoke 2019), so it is no surprise that our projects are informed by an overlapping set of theoretical sources, including especially Jasbir Puar (2007) and Ahmed (2004; 2017). While *Appalling Bodies* circled back around to Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 as examples of sexual exceptionalism in its final full chapter (Marchal 2020a, 157–98), Hoke starts his sequence of more exegetical chapters with an analysis of Rom 1:26–27, explicitly so that we might move past the bashing passages he cheekily describes as “tired texts” (Hoke 2021, 79–138). Hoke also stresses a similar set of ethical, theoretical, and hermeneutical debts to feminist biblical scholars who precede us, turning for example to the many wo/men named in Romans 16 for further context (just as many of our feminist teachers and inspirations in common have, including especially Schüssler Fiorenza 1986; D'Angelo 1990; and Brooten 1996; see both Hoke 2021, 91–118 and Marchal 2019b, 2019c, and 2020a, 185–98).¹² After such a

¹² Hoke's more faithfully maintains Schüssler Fiorenza's terminology of “wo/men,” in order to highlight the many differences among and between women (and, mostly secondarily, to stress that

careful analysis, Hoke also imagines a series of responses from these wo/men, talking back to the claims made in Rom 1:26-27 (2021, 133–34; inspired and informed by a similar technique in Brooten 1996, 300–302; and Fox 2020).

In keeping with a focus on sexual exceptionalism and, more specifically still, homonationalism, Hoke attends closely to dynamics of complicity and resistance, within the past and the present. Hoke coins the term *Romanormativity* to describe “the tactics by which certain populations, who were deemed more marginal than elite Roman men, emphasized how they and their communities were | *nearly* Romosexual—that is, their sexual embodiments are as natural as the most virtuous Romans” (Hoke 2021, 47–48). This term helps Hoke name how people from non-Roman ethnic groups, including Philo and Paul, aimed to mirror and maintain Roman imperial norms for gender and sexuality. Hoke’s examination of the affective contours of this relation is particularly striking, articulating how the force, the effects, *the pull* toward submission appears within the kyriarchal aspects of the letter, mostly in alignment with the broader imperial context. This explains the replications or reinscriptions evident in the letter to the Romans: though somewhat re-oriented toward (Paul’s version of) Christ, this reign of God is still “Roman without Rome” (Hoke 2021, 186). As Parker did, Hoke also resituates faith, or *pistis* (mostly left untranslated), in a way both unique and important. Lauren Berlant’s conceptualization of cruel optimism (2011) brings out important contours to the argument of the letter and its fantastic promises, especially in the discussion of Rom 3:21–26 (2021, 149–64). Cruel optimism could explain the potential appeals and affects of the willed submission emphasized in Paul’s arguments, a re-directed hope for eventual apocalyptic benefits. Yet, Hoke and Berlant help us to see how both Paul’s and Rome’s *pistis* encourage attachments that actually compound, by incorporating people further into, submission—through a promise that morphs into a threat, as “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 2011, 1).

In Hoke’s hands, then, affect can give us a better feel for some of the more vexing elements of this most-studied letter in the Christian scriptures. Indeed, I believe we are well-nigh overdue for a re-examination of the ongoing pull of the scriptural in the light of affect. *Appalling Bodies*, in part, was one attempt to work through how sticky specifically figures of gender and sexual variation can be, within and beyond biblical sites. All of the bodies within *Appalling Bodies* have been addressed as objects of disgust, so in the interim I have tried to further work through this fraught feeling and how the epistles and the assemblies grapple with desire and difference (Marchal 2019c). Yet, the people targeted with disgust are always much more than that, which is why I am increasingly turning to the affects around trauma (Marchal 2019b; 2021), as well as mourning and loss (Marchal 2022), to trace how people in a range of precarious positions negotiate their difficult conditions. If people neither deny nor

many males also cast as unmen could also assemble under this term). See especially Hoke 2021, xii, 25–26.

multiply these “negative” affects, I wonder if modes of solidarity might be found and felt more through what Joseph Winters calls “melancholic hope” (2016)—a shared remembrance of pain and loss as a haunting performance that generates capacity for survival together (see also, initially, Marchal 2020b).

As in *Appalling Bodies* and many previous projects, then, I remain haunted by the possibilities of better understanding the marginalized, stigmatized, and minoritized people so often obscured in biblical texts and traditions of interpretation. I am recurrently drawn to all of these other people, a political, historical, and affective orientation I share with several scholars. Yet, as Quigley’s article rightly highlights (as I noted above), a more theoretically attuned approach to a wider set of materials than (mostly just) literary remains expands the possibilities for those elusive “touches across time” with those non-elites. She notes: “I miss the materiality of the past in *Appalling Bodies*, a materiality that is more vibrantly present in the contemporary juxtapositions of the volume. For all of its rich rhetorical engagements, which help to flesh out the diversities of bodies and sexualities in the past, the *comparanda* come almost entirely from literary sources” (2022, 11). Indeed, Quigley would know what a difference this would make, being an inventive interpreter herself of literary and (other) material remains, as reflected in her articles, in this present special issue and beyond (Quigley 2020; 2021b), and most notably her fascinating and important *Divine Accounting: Theo-Economics in Early Christianity* (2021a). Quigley’s work, alongside others by Katherine Shaner (2018), Tyler Schwaller (2019), and Laura Nasrallah (2019), demonstrates the immense potential of approaching material culture differently, by attending to the rhetorics of texts and (other) material remains as one mode for shaping a fuller and more complicated picture of people living in the lower positions within kyriarchal orders.

New Testament and early Christian studies in particular have persistently deployed non-canonical materials in un-nuanced and often mechanical fashion, as if these make for a stable and easily separated “background” to the “real” issues or authorities, or a just a flat context into which we can “plug in” texts. Quigley’s *Divine Accounting*, however, brings methodological sophistication to the study of archaeological materials and then, in turn, moves carefully in relation to often fraught, and extensively treated texts, like those found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians. When scholars begin with and center these texts, they often replicate protracted (and exhausted) struggles over how to properly situate or adequately contextualize these scripturalized or other “patristic” texts. If we follow Quigley’s lead, we can start over by pursuing different research questions and focusing on other documentary, epigraphic, and non-elite material evidence. When reading these texts alongside and within these remains, the resulting juxtapositions and mixtures allow scholars to see the rest of the people in these movements and communities, the people who were in fact the vast majority of the participants. Quigley, in particular, shows how the day-to-day activities of divine economies can reframe the extreme differentiations and extraordinary measures in the arguments

of texts like Paul's letters. Quigley dubs these activities "theo-economics": "an intertwined theological and economic logic in which divine and human beings regularly enter into transactions with one another" (2021a, 3).

Divine Accounting, then, cuts across not only any artificial distinctions between text and materiality, but also the presumed distinction between religion and economics. From within this complex entanglement Paul had tried to establish his own authority as a "broker" between the Philippians and (this) God. Quigley occasionally tries to decentre Paul, alongside other people and non-human entities (both objects and gods), in order to trace their full participation and collectivity, especially through their own transactions with divine forces. The letter to the Philippians indicates the risk shared between Paul and the assembly community at Philippi. In the face of the letter's evasive re-routing of obligation away from Paul and toward the divine, I am particularly intrigued by Quigley's approach to the important role of Epaphroditus in these interwoven theo-economic relationships (2021a, 60–64). This interest in a more vibrant economic and social portrait that included poor people in these communities provides ample motivation for examining the more technical aspects of contracts, markets, and (other) non-elite material evidence, including inscriptions and statues, coins and weight standards (see especially Quigley 2021a, 16–33). Quigley's methods help us to reconsider objects, which then end up re-animating the humans who made and were shaped in return by them. In short, *Divine Accounting* demonstrates how much the ordinary and the everyday are infused with the remarkable and the revelatory, if we but approach them in these complex entanglements.

Moving back closer to the subjects of *Appalling Bodies*, Quigley is correct to observe that "A phallic graffito carved into plaster or a sexual scene stamped onto a ceramic lamp add additional layers to the cultural milieu, and they are perhaps more likely to be created or regularly encountered by those non-elite whose bodies are being figured as perverse, strange, or passive" (2022, 11). In fact, one can find an increasing engagement with the sexual graffiti that survives from the Roman imperial period among biblical scholars with precisely these kinds of interest—including in some of my follow-up projects to *Appalling Bodies* (see Marchal 2019b; and forthcoming, a), as in Hoke's book (2021, 32–34, 111–16, and 320–22; and see also now Cobb 2022 JFSR). Cobb, Hoke, and I each draw upon the incredible groundwork and provocative proposals of Sarah Levin-Richardson and Deborah Kamen (see Kamen 2014; Kamen and Levin-Richardson 2015a; 2015b; and Levin-Richardson 2011; 2013; 2015; 2019). The graffiti from Pompeii are intriguing resources for pushing back on totalizing visions of the past that obscure other possibilities for people and practices that are disparaged (yet clearly also desired) in more elite literary materials, including especially sex-laboring, enslaved, or otherwise disreputable people. They indicate a different way of evaluating these rhetorics of ancient materials, while the graffiti could offer rare access to the marginalized groups who likely wrote or certainly could have read, heard, and "tried

on” their perspective (first suggested in Levin-Richardson 2011, 2013). Juxtaposing these with ancient epistles or apocryphal acts (as Cobb 2022 does) provides another angle on lower-status women and unmen, mapping the potentials and pleasures of waywardness and willfulness, while challenging presumptions about receptivity within and beside passivity. These represent an exciting, if also still troubling way to visualize the historical and rhetorical, ethical and affective practices of so many of the people addressed by *Appalling Bodies*.

Appalling Postlude, Before...

These appalling times produce and reinforce a range of appalling affects. I hope that *Appalling Bodies* provides multiple entry points for grappling with these, particularly once accompanied by some of the resources described in this article’s counter-kyriarchal survival kit. To find and reach out toward these queer touches across time, we need practice at reading against the grain of kyriarchal materials (sexual, textual, or otherwise). In learning from previous struggles, we cannot evade or excuse haunting histories and their ongoing effects. Particularly when so many face discouragement and division, debilitation and dispossession, these haunting bodies cannot be figures of our exhausted resignation or naïve recuperation. Rather, they can move us toward melancholic hope, a hope with the potential for transforming the world, as it attunes us toward a greater capacity for and receptivity to remembering loss and harm, suffering and violence (see, for instance, Winters 2016, 7, 16, and 17).

Such affective, historiographic, ethical, and political practices of interpretation, translation, and reception can re-route our energies and attentions, to explore, improvise, and connect more queerly, more promiscuously, more capaciously. In the times before us, it remains to be seen what relations between queer and trans, or anti-racist and queer, or affect and materiality, and all of their assembled combinations, will still be, within and beyond what people call “biblical studies and critical theories.” However, in feeling and assembling, surviving and transforming, toward melancholic hope, I begin to get a better sense of what Mariame Kaba means, when she famously insists that “hope is a discipline” (Kaba 2021, 26-28). Such hope does not dismiss negative affects or avoid horrifying histories, too many of which persist in these appalling times, but it gestures toward ongoing, material practices, repeated modes of survival and resistance. Assembling these survival kits, learning from and collaborating with these scholars, and our colleagues and comrades in common, these other books, are all reasons for hope. I venture that we would do well to remember that hope is a discipline. This hope does not rest in a discipline like biblical studies that still trains people as if they were vanilla white male scholars, but in a queer melancholic reading and remembrance, reach and resistance, toward survival and connection, imagination and transformation, with, for, as the appalling bodies still before us.

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