Teaching and Touches Across Time:

Queer Historiography, Pedagogy, and *Appalling Bodies*

Jennifer Quigley, Vanderbilt Divinity School

Abstract

This paper responds to Joseph Marchal's *Appalling Bodies,* asking what might it look like to take *Marchal's* queer historiography as a pedagogical intervention for biblical studies? I begin by centring the needs and experiences of queer students in biblical studies classrooms as a means of interrogating traditional methods of pedagogy focused solely on defamiliarization, asking who gets to say the Bible is or is not about them? I then read Marchal alongside pedagogical theorists bell hooks and Paolo Freire to consider the intersections of queer historiography, hook's notion of transgressions across boundaries as a practice of freedom and Freire's interest in humanization. I conclude by analysing two of my own classroom activities in light of Marchal's work to model what it might look like to reconsider pedagogy in a biblical studies classroom.

Keywords: queer historiography, pedagogy, Paul

In one of my Letters of Paul classes, a student proposed a final project titled "A Brown, Queer Survival Guide to the Apostle Paul." The student and their proposal and project were brilliant. Many students who take my classes are working on projects like this one, whether or not they write papers or produce creative pieces with such a title. Every semester, I meet students who are working on projects like this one with their bodies and their lives. Students often enrol in a class on the Letters of Paul to learn how to survive Paul, or at least the Paul they have imbibed in particular political, cultural, and very often theological waters, which have made enrolling in an academic class on the topic a first, tentative, transgressive step. One of my primary goals in teaching classes for students like these is that they will indeed learn to survive Paul and perhaps even thrive in and beyond the classroom as readers and as whole, embodied persons, in spite of this spectral Paul.

Because of brilliant, living, breathing students like this one, I am always asking of the scholarship I read: will it teach? As I read Joseph Marchal's *Appalling Bodies*, I kept marking passages, sections, even whole chapters, imagining how I might teach with this text in my classrooms. There are many options, from the introduction's clear and concise introduction to queer theory, to the incisive and also expansive connections between pasts and presents: between androgyne and gender queer, between eunuch and intersex, between constraint and consent, between barbarian and terrorist. *Appalling Bodies* will definitely teach. Marchal's

book, though, offers something for teachers as well—and all of us, instructors and students, are trying to teach one another something. This book offers not just disciplinary or transdisciplinary contributions to biblical studies, queer studies, religion, and beyond, but it also invites a pedagogical response to the historiographical method presented.

This response essay asks: what might it look like to take *Appalling Bodies*, in which Marchal models a queer historiography, attempts to preempt critiques of anachronism, and imaginatively expands Carolyn Dinshaw's notion of "touches across time,"[1] as a pedagogical intervention for biblical studies? Can you teach a queer historiography in a class on biblical texts, whether or not these texts are used by students for practices of meaning making? Does anachronism, so often the scapegoat of our scholarship and teaching, potentially offer something helpful to the classroom? In biblical studies, who hides or reveals their historical proximity or investments through claims of anachronism? And, perhaps most urgently, can students connect through queer touches across time to find themselves and folks like them in, through, and beyond these texts?

I begin by considering Marchal's model of queer touches across time alongside the classroom tension in which students find themselves: are these texts about them or not? Next, I read Marchal's queer historiography alongside the work of bell hooks and Paulo Freire on pedagogy and freedom. What can queer historiography offer to folks engaged in the practices of engaged and liberative pedagogy?[2] Last, using two classroom exercises from my own teaching, I consider the ways in which *Appalling Bodies* pushes both biblical studies and biblical studies classrooms to decentre Paul to focus on the people beside Paul.[3]

The Bible is About Me and the Bible is Not About Me: Queer Students and Touches Across Time

In an essay for the Harvard Divinity School Bulletin, adapted from his 2001 Edward L. Mark lecture, Krister Stendahl named his love for the Bible as living in the tension that the Bible was both about him and not about him.

> This was the time when I was naïve and arrogant enough to identify with the people I read about, or whose writings I read…. It was about many other things—in the long run, much more interesting things. It was about many things in many distant lands, from many distant ages…. Now it spoke to me from a great distance, of centuries and cultures deeply different from my own. And it began to be, just by its difference, that the fascination grew, that it had a way of saying to me, there are other ways of seeing and thinking and

[1] *Getting Medieval* (1999).

[2] hooks uses "engaged pedagogy" in *Teaching to Transgress* (1994, 15), while Freire discusses his dialogical method as teaching in terms of liberation (2018, 26–27; 30).

[3] This commitment is reflected in much of Marchal's work, especially *The People Beside Paul* (2015).

> feeling and believing than you have taken for granted. And it just added to my love—for love is not just fascination. When I short-circuited my reading in those earlier days of having it just be about me, I slowly learned that this was a greedy way to deal with the richness of the scriptures (Stendahl 2007, xx).

For the students who learn and read together in my classrooms, especially queer students, this tension often is experienced and embodied in different affective ways. They have felt the ways the Bible sure has stuff to say *about* them, even as it is not a text *for* them. Whether or not these students were raised in particular Christian communities espousing exclusionary biblical interpretation, they often enter classrooms within the context of North American higher education having encountered such interpretations through political, cultural, and theological discourses that lay claim to the Bible, especially, when it comes to sexuality, the New Testament. Who gets to say that the Bible is about them, and who has the privilege to say that the Bible is not only about and for them, but also that the Bible is about others different from them? Stendahl's phrase a "greedy way to deal with the richness of the scriptures" names ways of reading which presume the Bible is a possession which some have and others do not. Stendahl finds deeper love and desire in the distance of biblical texts, in the process of defamiliarization that includes an experience of distance not only through thought, but feeling and belief.

Biblical studies classrooms often lean into practices of defamiliarization, and these practices remain a primary methodological and pedagogical need of a class on texts from such distant pasts. Many students, though, enter introductory classes on the Letters of Paul already dispossessed of these texts. The tension of familiarity and defamiliarity for students might require a different pedagogy for students who have already been defamiliarized with these texts, for whom familiarity is perhaps unimaginable or violent.

Appalling Bodies also teaches a process of defamiliarization, but it is a defamiliarization aimed as much towards traditional modes of biblical studies scholarship as at introductory classrooms. Marchal's historiographic methodology of "queer touches across time" both echoes and challenges the tension named by Stendahl of the Bible being about and not about. In offering connections across distant time and space, Marchal argues that

> my project defamiliarizes and reorients what can be known about both these other historical figures active in these ancient assemblies and those rhetorical figures that continue to be activated in contemporary settings…. The aim is not to claim that they are somehow identical to each other. Rather, it is through these subversively anachronistic juxtapositions that this book highlights the particular, but still only partial connections between them: a set of shared features shaped by their practices of gender, sexuality, and

> embodiment that depart from prevailing perspectives (in both the times we call "then" and "now"). Such a strategy takes the biblical interpretation of such topics beyond the most common practices of condemnation or apology, in between assumptions of historical alterity or identity toward a critical "elsewhere" that reflects more consistently and capaciously on those before-and-after figures who have been targeted by biblically based claims (2020, 3–4).

The "subversive, anachronistic juxtapositions" of *Appalling Bodies* draw attention to folk, both in historical assembly and rhetorical imagination, whose "gender, sexuality, and embodiment … depart from prevailing perspectives" in pasts and presents. These juxtapositions form the core of the volume. In Chapter 2, "A Close Corinthian Shave: Trans/Androgyne," Marchal juxtaposes androgyny and references to head hair in 1 Cor 11:1–16 with the multiple markers of gender variety more recently among drag kings, butch lesbians, transgender dykes, and gender queers. How do individuals and communities deploy markers to delineate gender variety and performance? In Chapter 3, "Uncut Galatians: Intersex/Eunuch," Marchal considers Galatians and its arguments about genital cutting (circumcision and castration) alongside critical reflections on the body modifications often performed upon persons with intersex conditions. This comparison highlights the phallic fixation of much of Pauline scholarship on this letter. Chapter 4, "Use: Bottom/Slave," juxtaposes the rhetoric about the enslaved person Onesimus in Philemon with the ways in which BDSM practices make what Christina Sharp calls "monstrous intimacies" visible (Sharpe 2010). Marchal provokes us to ask: What monstrous intimacies are hinted at in this briefest of letters, and how can biblical scholarship not reinscribe a use of Onesimus for canonizing and confessional readings? Chapter 5, "Assembled Gentiles: Terrorist Barbarian" resituates the "clobber passages" from 1 Corinthians and Romans within the figuration of barbarian and foreigner language by juxtaposing the work of Jasbir Puar on "terrorists" and sexual exceptionalism in contemporary (neo)imperial settings. 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.

I wonder whether, at least in the context of the biblical studies classroom, Marchal's historiography has as much to do with familiarization as defamiliarization. Marchal's juxtapositions can also serve as an invitation for students to imagine their own subversive, anachronistic juxtapositions, to make particular if only partial connections between their own lives and persons from the past. Biblical studies classrooms which centre historical critical processes of defamiliarization often warn against anachronism. These pedagogical approaches are often meant to break the over-identification of the (often theological, white,

male) contemporary reader with the ancient text.[4] Marchal's juxtapositions invite identifying with ancient texts in a different way—or with different persons. This is an invitation, especially for queer students, to experiment with the notion, often for the first time, that the Bible might be about them, or for them, or at least for persons who departed from prevailing perspectives like them in distant and not-so-distant pasts.

To teach with "queer touches across time" is to offer my students the same freedom that a Lutheran professor and bishop felt to say some no's to and about the Bible. Stendahl's conclusions, after all, are a short list of negatives. "It is not primarily about me. Second, it is not always as deep as we think. Third, even Paul isn't always totally sure. Fourth, don't be so uptight. And fifth, it is probably not as universal as we think" (Stendahl 2007, xx). To teach with "queer touches across time" invites students who already have been dispossessed of the Bible, to make their own list of no's, in ways that echo and challenge Stendahl's list. To say no to readings that exist to do them harm. To let texts not be as universal as they have been told.

Who is able to say the Bible is or is not about them? Who has the privilege, or perhaps the "authority," to say the Bible is or is not about them? These are not light-hearted questions. Students often come to classes asking whether they can live, or even, to echo Angela Parker, breathe,[5] with these texts. To invite students to consider "queer touches across time" bestows a different kind of authority to their readings of the Bible, whether or not they participate in communities which consider these texts authoritative. "Queer touches across time" invite students not to universalize these texts but to find glimpses of themselves in their particularity within those figures intimately close but partially occluded by the rhetoric of these ancient texts.

In Marchal's capacious move "toward a critical 'elsewhere,'" I also hear notes whose sounds harmonize with the chords of Ashon Crawley's description of "otherwise possibilities" in his book *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. "I have come to think of … 'otherwise possibilities' for organizing, for thinking projects that neither make the flesh diminutive nor discardable. Rather, I want to give careful and thoughtful attention to the flesh—life in the flesh as the liberative position…as the way of empathy" (Crawley 2016, 23). Inviting students to consider and create subversive, anachronistic juxtapositions, might allow students to experience brilliance, to live, to breathe towards "otherwise possibilities"

---

[4] This pedagogical strategy of defamiliarization seems intended to combat what Willie James Jennings (2020) names as "whiteness" in theological education, that is, the centering of individualized, gendered, and racialized notions of mastery. Whom does a process of defamiliarization center and benefit, and does defamiliarization applied as a supposedly neutral pedagogical arbiter reinscribe notions of mastery and whiteness, especially in theological education?

[5] Parker (2021). Parker incisively connects white supremacist authoritarianism with the reduction of biblical "authority" to doctrines of inerrancy and infallibility. She also offers a narrative of her own formation as a biblical scholar in these systems and her process of finding ways to breathe in spite of suffocating uses of the Bible.

and to experience a different kind of authority in their readings of these texts and in their sense of connection or disconnection with people like them and not like them from distant pasts. Empowering students to make their own queer touches across time encourages them to practice their own thinking projects that do not diminish or discard their own fleshly selves. To teach with and to invite queer touches across time and to give attention to life in the flesh is an embodiment of liberative and empathetic pedagogy.

Transgressive Teaching and Practices of Freedom

Thinking with "queer touches across time" as a pedagogical strategy within biblical studies classrooms invites engagement with pedagogical theory, especially scholars such as bell hooks and Paolo Freire who have centered their work around teaching and freedom.

hooks and Freire have emphasized the importance of personal experience and the inclusion of students' whole selves in learning. In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks is clear that "Students do not want therapy from me…. They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful. They rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences."[6] Thus, hooks chooses the term 'engaged pedagogy' for its emphasis on well-being.[7] Teaching about history, including historical texts, with methodology modelled by Marchal in *Appalling Bodies* takes seriously student connections between their learning and their life experience across boundaries of historical distance. This aligns well with hooks, for whom the goal is a pedagogy which "enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom" (hooks 1994, 12).

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. By modelling and inviting students to imagine their own queer touches across time, students can make meaning with biblical texts whether or not they are invested in particular communities of interpretation or theological commitments. Queer historiography in a biblical studies classroom invites students to explore the intersections of the Bible and critical theory.

Empowering students to engage with theory is of vital importance. hooks reflects on her own experience with pedagogy and theory, "I came to theory because I was

[6] 1994, 19. Engaged pedagogy is not about "coddling" students, a phrase around which some higher education discourse has tried to cause panic. An infamous example of the rise of this problematic type of commentary on classrooms is Lukianoff and Haidt 2018.

[7] hooks chooses this term over conventional critical or feminist pedagogy (1994, 15).

hurting—the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate—wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing" (hooks 1994, 59). It is precisely because so many students have experienced these texts in death-dealing ways that engaging with the Bible alongside theory is so important. The intersections of the Bible and critical theory do not exist only to expand scholarly conversation within a guild. They offer students "otherwise possibilities" for empathy, and to practice "thinking projects that neither make the flesh diminutive nor discardable" (Crawley 2016, 23). Marchal is rightly critical of oversimplified affirmative and condemnatory readings of the letters of Paul. But students thinking through readings of these texts without diminishing and discarding attention for their own flesh are not participating in oversimplified affirmation or condemnation. Such attention raises different questions and different readings perhaps less attuned to seeking a singular and solo-authored Pauline perspective on sexuality and more attuned to multiple voices, figures, and perspectives beyond a heroic (or condemnatory) Paul.[8]

Queer historiography also aligns with the prioritization of the personal in liberative pedagogy. hooks names the centrality of the personal, "Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making" (hooks 1994, 70). Paulo Freire, too, centers the personal in his dialogical method. Critical and liberating dialogue, as opposed to the banking model of education, is a fundamentally humanizing project for its participants. And humanization is not only a project for the present; it is a historical project as well. "At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become imperative when one does not erroneously attempt to dichotomize the content of humanity from its historical forms" (Freire 1997, 47–48). For Freire, humans are always producing history, which is part of the fundamental vocational task of becoming human. Humanization, in turn, can transform social realities. "If humankind produces social reality (which in the "inversion of the praxis" turns back upon them and conditions them), then transforming that reality is an historical task, a task for humanity" (Freire 1997, 3). In Freire's framework, to attempt to separate the ancient world with students' own process of becoming more human would be to create a false dichotomy that dehumanizes both students and history. 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.

[8] For more on decentering the scholarly impulses toward a heroic Paul, see Johnson-Debaufre and Nasrallah 2011.

Teaching Queer Historiography and the People Beside Paul

What might it look like to take seriously the possibility that students might imagine their own queer "touches across" time in the classroom? In this section, I will explore the possibilities and limitations of two exercises that I often use in two classes, including The Letters of Paul and Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Christianity.

I often dedicate an entire class session to an exercise on 1 Corinthians 7. After breaking students into small groups, I give them the text. I ask them to pretend they have travelled back to first century CE Corinth and to read and respond to this text. I ask the following questions: If you received this letter and heard it for the first time, what would you think Paul is asking you to do? What is Paul asking you not to do? What questions might you still have, especially if you are a woman and/or an enslaved person? I ask students to create lists in response to each of these questions, a sort of "to (not) do" list accompanied by a "follow-up questions" list. Students arrive at this exercise after several weeks with dedicated topics on enslavement, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in the ancient world and their multiple intersections. In many ways, this historiographic work is the culmination of an entire semester of engaging with evidence from the ancient world.

On the one hand, this is a risky exercise that represents the height of anachronism; students are of course not able to access the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of persons who are so distant, no matter how many contextualizing classes precede this exercise. On the other hand, at its most basic, this is an exercise in the skills that any biblical studies (or perhaps even any humanities) classroom teaches: close and critical reading, analysing rhetoric, formulating careful questions, community deliberation.

Students often notice the great distances between the "to (not) do's" from Paul and today: the notion of sexual consent is glaringly absent, Paul would prefer that no one is having sex, and the arguments are undergirded with the notion that the present form of the world is passing away (7:31). They also notice the silences, internal contradictions, and confusions that members of the Corinthian assemblies might have experienced from such instructions, especially women and enslaved persons. With this attention, they often touch upon the insights of scholars such as Jennifer Glancy, Tyler Schwaller, and Katherine Shaner, who have explored the tensions in these texts which reveal evidence of communities which included women and enslaved persons in leadership alongside rhetorical arguments which did not account for the lived realities and limited options available to persons who were not free, male heads of households.[9] Students also come up with their own creative, subversive juxtapositions. One student wondered if readers could just let Paul be ace [asexual/aromantic] while pressing that they could not understand why

[9] For a study on the leadership of enslaved persons in early Christianity, see Shaner 2018. For a comprehensive study of slavery in early Christianity, see Glancy 2006. For a queer reading of the letters of Paul and slavery, see Schwaller 2019 and 2018.

Paul needed everyone else to be like him. These juxtapositions provide both historical insight and contemporary reflection.

The next time I teach this class, I will assign the introduction to *Appalling Bodies* as preparation for this class day. I will do so because what I often find missing from this exercise is a self-reflexive moment in which the students consider what they are doing by attempting this activity. What are the implications of giving students permission to travel across time and space, and to attempt to imagine the perspective of persons in the past while asking questions grounded in the present? Marchal is clear, cautious, and also capacious about such attempts.

> Yet the distance in space and time between the "there and then" of these first century epistles and audiences and the "here and now" of these twenty-first century people who receive, interpret, and use them has also proved troubling…. Our expectations around these texts and indeed studies of them are conditioned by present-day assumptions as people are still most likely to hear biblical, and specifically Pauline, arguments when groups are disputing matters of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. The most common positions taken in such conflicts involve primarily condemnatory or defensive responses and invoke a biblical past as either obviously applicable or distantly outdated. Neither is exactly correct (Marchal 2020, 2).

Students are already moving beyond the binary between a past which is "obviously applicable or distantly dated" when they ask questions about consent or wonder about the chronological urgency of a passage on sex. I hope that reading Marchal's work will help them to notice their own positionality as readers, their own embodiment, and to begin to notice and describe their own interpretations. And I hope in doing so they begin to think about how their historiographical choices reflect and build an ethics of interpretation.[10]

In a second classroom activity, I often send students on a scavenger hunt around campus,[11] asking them to look for evidence that archaeologists in 2,000 years might find about what folks in the early 21st century thought about gender, sex, and sexuality. I ask them to look especially for where they might find evidence of women's leadership in 2000 years. Students take and share photos of objects, and then the class discusses the evidence they have compiled. I remind students that many materials such as paper and wood are almost certain not to last, while objects in stone or plastic have a better chance of survival, even if in fragmentary form. The exercise helps students reflect on the fragmentary evidence available to them, and it helps them to consider the accidents of time and materiality and the ways in which

[10] Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza called for ethics of biblical interpretation as an "institutionalized academic practice" in her 1987 Society of Biblical Literature Presidential Address (1988, 5).

[11] I have had to adapt this exercise recently for COVID. When teaching on Zoom or in a hybrid format, I have had students search through their own homes or places from which they were joining the class and then journal on their findings.

they press upon history. This is an especially helpful exercise for helping students to see the texts they study as embedded within a material world. It also helps them realize, by comparison, the fact that the letters of Paul, as occasional documents, only reflect partial evidence of a conversation.

This exercise is an eye-opener for students. Students often first turn to signs marking bathroom spaces, noticing the vague images designating particular bathrooms for particular persons and the private/public amalgamation of toilet stalls and urinals. Otherwise, they often hunt in vain. They are shocked at the lack of enduring evidence for women's leadership on campus; even when there are significant percentages of women on the faculty or in the administration, the evidence for this presence is often ephemeral. They are startled to notice that the objects they gravitate towards, displays of recent faculty publications and oil portraits, will likely be some of the first to disappear. They notice the prevalence of dedicatory inscriptions, and wonder at names of donors of buildings, at small metal and plastic plaques they had overlooked before. What do those little plaques communicate about the history of places and communities and people, and what do they omit about the experience of most students studying and moving through spaces labelled with them?

Students also notice how easy it might be to misread evidence. In the most recent iteration of my Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Christianity class, students on campus for the first time since March 2020 noticed ubiquitous plastic signs around campus encouraging social distancing. The signs, bright red plastic circles affixed to floors throughout campus, feature two human figures with an arrow separating them, labelled 2m/6ft. The two figures are the same figures one finds on many bathroom signs, in other words, a "man" and a "woman" figure, separated by the arrow. A significant concentration of these signs exists inside the campus chapel, down the centre aisle. Students were quite taken with these signs as they realized that historians of the future might infer from these signs that gender separation became a sudden and urgent practice in the early 21st century, especially in religious spaces. Such a conclusion would, of course, grossly misread the evidence, but the conclusions are legible when these signs and their imagery are compared with bathroom signage.

Before students embark on their campus search, I have students read Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre's "Gazing Upon the Invisible: Archaeology, Historiography, and the Elusive Wo/men of 1 Thessalonians." The combination of this reading and their campus search help them to ask: what from history lasts, and who is remembered or forgotten? They begin to understand the adage that absence of evidence is not always evidence of absence, and they realize that those who are talked about, who gets re-membered in stone and in text, is not always reflective of who might have been there.

Appalling Bodies, too, draws attention away from Paul, who has been such a dominant focus of biblical scholarship. The book refocuses us

> toward other, far more fascinating figures, before and after these letters: androgynes, eunuchs, slaves, and barbarians—each depicted as perversely gendered and strangely embodied figures in their own distinctive, though interrelated ways, before and after the letters. Once called up, these people can be used to call out others in the audiences, figures targeted by the letters and often ignored in traditions about these texts. The rhetorical figures… were circulating in the Roman imperial context before the letters were dictated and directed to their respective assembly audiences…. The potential historical figures addressed by these letters gathered together in these assemblies before anyone sent such epistles, and likely persisted after their arrival, even as it now looks like the letters were sent to target them, to call out, to pursue these people-to come after them (Marchal 2018, 2).

Marchal describes a complex amalgamation of rhetorical figures, the tropes by which these persons othered by "Romosexuality" are depicted as "perversely gendered and strangely embodied," and the potential historical figures who received, recited, and recirculated the letters that eventually become biblical. There is no way to reconstruct the latter without addressing the former, and neither can do justice to the present and persistent persons who gathered in the assemblies to which Paul wrote. To enflesh these figures within our historical imagination requires catching imperfect glimpses of them through the tangled mass of rhetoric from Paul and from the broader system of Romosexuality.

For this class session, the introduction to *Appalling Bodies* might help students to reflect on historiography. Queer historiography opens expansive possibilities for finding a way between rhetorical and potential historical figures. The campus search is similarly an exercise in creative imagination and a realization of the limitations and pitfalls of fragmentary evidence. However, 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. This is not to say that material evidence lacks rhetoric; it is no more accessible through "plain readings" than the texts from the letters of Paul and is equally one-sided and fragmentary.[12]

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. Most other literary evidence, from satirical plays to philosophical treatises, are sourced from more elite sources—those creating, reinforcing, and dominating the tropes of Romosexuality. A phallic graffito carved into plaster or a sexual scene moulded onto a ceramic lamp

[12] For a model of reading material evidence alongside the letters of Paul, see Nasrallah 2019.

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.

I often end this class session with a quotation from Paula Fredriksen's *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle*: "Paul lives his life—as we all must live our lives—innocent of the future. As historians, we conjure that innocence as a disciplined act of imagination, through appeals to our ancient evidence" (Fredriksen 2017, xii). This exercise helps students to notice the discipline and imagination required to write about the past, their own innocence of the future, and the fragmentary nature of the evidence. *Appalling Bodies* offers important contributions to classroom sessions, like this scavenger hunt, by asking students to self-reflect on what it means to write and think about the past, particularly to deal with the fragmentary nature of the evidence available. But its contribution is complicated by its own set of gathered, fragmentary evidence, which is expansive and embodied and deeply material in its presents but slightly less so in its pasts. This is both a reality of the available evidence and also a historiographical choice which can be expanded in further scholarly conversation and in classroom practice. After all, queer historiography pushes us to think beyond false binaries, and one of the methodological binaries which remains in biblical scholarship is the binary between materiality and text. Overcoming this binary seems especially urgent for scholarship and teaching that takes seriously embodiment both in the past and in the present.

Conclusion

Appalling Bodies, because of its rich descriptions of the vibrant diversity of bodies and sexual and gender expression in antiquity and today, is an essential addition to any syllabus on gender and sexuality in early Christianity, on the letters of Paul, or even an introductory class. It also offers important contributions to broader religious studies classrooms, and its introduction would be useful for a theory and methods course in the study of religion. This text is important not just for biblical studies scholarship and queer studies scholarship, but for classroom teaching in these fields. The latter is no less important than the former, and the classroom is no less in need of and informed by critical theory.

Book-length models of queer historiography within biblical studies are deeply needed in the guild, and teachers and students also need models like the one offered by Joseph Marchal in *Appalling Bodies* for classroom spaces. For students who have experienced being "perversely gendered and strangely embodied" by particular readings of biblical texts, to enter a classroom on the letters of Paul can itself be a transgressive act. Teachers who wish to embody what bell hooks calls engaged pedagogy and classroom practices that care for students as whole, embodied persons benefit from attention to critical theory and queer historiography. Marchal's model of subversive juxtapositions invite students to imagine their own "queer touches

across time," which opens up the possibility for students to connect with folks both like them and different from them in these texts.

Students who have experienced dispossession of these texts have the opportunity to understand that the Bible is both about them and not about them in different ways than biblical studies classrooms often make space for. Reading Marchal's work alongside work in liberative pedagogy, we see how queer historiography aligns with the larger goals of scholars such as bell hooks and Paolo Freire who see education as a practice of freedom. *Appalling Bodies* invites classroom practices that invite students to give attention to the people beside Paul, to ask new and different questions, and to imagine their own queer touches across time. My hope in integrating *Appalling Bodies* into my classrooms, and to encouraging scholarly conversation which considers queer historiography alongside liberative and engaged pedagogy, is multifold. I want students to survive and thrive with or even in spite of biblical texts. I want those of us privileged enough to teach students about these texts to consider our own pedagogical ethics as a part of our institutionalized academic practice of developing an ethics of interpretation. I want to take seriously our students' longing for "knowledge that is meaningful," whether or not they see meaning in the text. I want students to find locations for healing, as bell hooks describes the urgency of theory. Students may or may not find healing or meaning in these texts from very distant pasts, but in their engagement with theory alongside these texts in classrooms, they might find ways to read that encourage them to imagine otherwise possibilities as whole, embodied persons.

Reference List

Crawley, Ashon. 2016. *Black Pentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. 1999. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre-and Postmodern*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Freire, Paulo. 1997. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 20th Anniversary Edition*. Translated by Mayra Bergman Ramos. New York: Bloomsbury.

Fredriksen, Paula. 2017. *Paul: The Pagan's Apostle*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Glancy, Jennifer. 2006. *Slavery in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Jennings, Willie James. 2020. *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Johnson-DeBaufre, Melanie and Laura Nasrallah. 2011. "Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul." In *The Colonized Apostle: Paul through Postcolonial Eyes*. Edited by Christopher D. Stanley. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

———. 2010. "Gazing Upon the Invisible: Archaeology, Historiography, and the Elusive Wo/men of 1 Thessalonians." *In From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonikē: Studies in Religion and Archaeology*. Edited by Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Lukianoff, Greg and Jonathan Haidt. "The Coddling of the American Mind." *The Atlantic*. September 2015. How Trigger Warnings Are Hurting Mental Health on Campus - The Atlantic.

Marchal, Joseph. 2020. *Appalling Bodies: Queer Figures Before and After Paul's Letters*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. ed. 2015. *The People Beside Paul: The Philippian Assembly and History from Below*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Nasrallah, Laura. 2019. *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Parker, Angela. 2021. *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I?: Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. 1987. "The Ethics of Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship." Society of Biblical Literature Presidential Address. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107.1: 3–17.

Schwaller, Tyler. 2019. "'A Slave to All': The Queerness of Paul's Slave Form." Pages 165–190 in *Bodies on the Verge: Queering Pauline Epistles*. Edited by Joseph A. Marchal. Semeia, 93. Atlanta: SBL Press.

———. 2018. *The Use of Slaves in Early Christianity: Slaves as Subjects of Life and Thought*. ThD. Dissertation: Harvard Divinity School.

Shaner, Katherine A. 2018. *Enslaved Leadership in Early Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Sharpe, Christina. 2010. *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Stendahl, Krister. "Why I Love the Bible." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*. Winter 2007. Why I Love the Bible | Harvard Divinity Bulletin.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License