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Sarah's Laugh, Sodom's Sin, Hagar's Kin: Queering Time and Belonging in Genesis 16-21

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Abstract

The story of Sodom's destruction bears the weight of a long history of violence against queer people. The now-standard revisionist view argues the story has nothing to do with sexuality, but rather the ancient ethic of hospitality toward strangers. This article reconsiders both Sodom's sin and the hospitality ethic of "inclusion" through a series of tropological readings linking Sodom to Sarah's laugh and Hagar's wandering. Parts 1 and 2 suggest that, in Sarah's cynicism and Sodom's violent grasp for control, the text shows readers competing modes of response to the temporality of strange flesh—to queer futures arriving as wandering divine visitors. Part 3 examines how this reading recasts contemporary debates among Christian interpreters concerning sexuality and among queer theorists concerning temporality and inclusion. Part 4 on Jude's reinterpretation of Sodom and Part 5 on Hagar imagine ethical possibilities otherwise—beyond "including" strangers, toward undermining the logic of estrangement itself.

Keywords

Genesis – Sodom – sexuality – race – womanism – theology – black studies – queer temporality

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> Queerness is not yet here.... Put another way, we are not yet queer. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queer-

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> ness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.
>
> JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ[1]

In the book of Genesis, Sarah's laughter interrupts God along the road that leads to Sodom. Both stories are famous, but we forget they unfold together, a shared narrative movement across Genesis 18, 19, and beyond. What happens to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah when read through the echoes of Sarah's laugh?[2] How does Sarah's reaction to the promise of Isaac exact pressure upon how we read God's destruction of the famous cities, and hence also upon the sexuality debates with which the Sodom story—through centuries of commentary and interpretation—has become so irrevocably entangled?[3] And if Sarah performs a certain mode of relation to time and to the stranger, as I'll suggest below, how might Hagar, illumined by womanist hermeneutic traditions, open the text toward an alternative field of possibility for imagining temporality, toward a future of queer belonging elsewhere than and in excess of both the "genealogical" community of Sarah and the "civic" community of Sodom?[4]

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1 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 1.

2 Nachman Levine likewise proposes reading the two stories as a "cohesive narrative unit," noting they are one paragraph in the Masoretic division rather than two chapters, though the concerns driving his overall framework remain distinct from those that follow here. See "Sarah/Sodom: Birth, Destruction, and Synchronic Transaction," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31.2 (2006), pp. 131–146.

3 Lynne Huffer points out that the Sodom and Gomorrah story not only has "justified and sustained centuries of hatred, exclusion, and homophobic violence," but also seems to bear something in its form which "produces the feeling of a haunting—of a text that, like a ghost, literally returns again and again." *Are the Lips a Grave? A Queer Feminist on the Ethics of Sex* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 43. The present essay may be read as an attempt to dwell within the haunting we have in this text, since its ghosts seem unlikely to stay away.

4 I use the term "civic" in relation to Sodom advisedly, as it implies connections (which are contested) to a Latin lexicon of city-related terms—*civis* (citizen), *civitas* (city), etc—as well as a connection to the Greek *polités* and *polis*. Nonetheless, I follow Luke Emehiele Ijezie's view (contra H. Strathmann) that the semantic range of the Hebrew עִיר includes "city" as a political unit and that the LXX translation of "polis" is appropriate. See the helpful discussion in Ijezie, *The Interpretation of the Hebrew Word* עַם (*People*) *in Samuel* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 110ff. I thank Anathea Portier-Young for pressing me to think more carefully about how "citizenship" works throughout the essay.

This paper offers not Hebrew Bible criticism proper so much as an experimentally tropological reading: a precarious attempt to "distill" queerness from the past that is represented in and by these Genesis narratives, and thereby use it to imagine a future. How might reckoning anew with Sarah's laugh, Sodom's sin, and Hagar's kin interrupt our now in the way Muñoz describes above, that is, interrupt the "quagmire" of our present affective and intellectual investments in debating human sexuality?[5] My reading primarily engages Christian hermeneutic debates among theologians[6] and certain questions in queer studies concerning temporality (more on this below), knowing these two discourses far from exhaust the interpretive possibilities opened by our text.[7] I offer no determinate theory or system by which to tame the unruliness of these stories, so much as an experiment in the risk of rereading them. *Dabar aher,* as the rabbinic tradition has it, *another word,* something else: in this case, a particular revisiting of the Sodom and Gomorrah story which proposes, *pace* several decades of Protestant liberal revisionist scholarship, that what's at stake in these Genesis texts goes beyond the now-standard "hospitality ethic" reading of Sodom.[8] Rather, I suggest, the story indeed has much to say to queer

5 I draw the use of "interrupt" in this way from Saidiya Hartman, who speaks of composing "a history of the present" in order to "write our now as it is interrupted by this past." Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008), pp. 1–14 (4).

6 A good recent representative sample is *Anglican Theological Review* 93, vol. 1 (Winter 2011), a thematic issue titled "Same-Sex Relationships and the Nature of Marriage: A Theological Colloquy."

7 This inexhaustibility of biblical texts for queer readings was anticipated in a remarkable, early volume of queer readings of scripture: *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Ken Stone (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). Now fifteen years later, it is striking to revisit Ken Stone's prescient introduction, which assessed the intellectual "situation" as one "in which the proliferation of queer readings of the Bible seems today like a real future possibility—if not, unfortunately, very much of a present reality." The present special issue of *Biblical Interpretation* to which my essay belongs might itself be read as part of that "future possibility" Stone had glimpsed. See Stone, "Queer Commentary and Biblical Interpretation: An Introduction," pp. 11–34 (11). No less prescient was Tat-Siong Benny Liew's critical observation that *race* often gets "pushed to the background" in queer readings, as well as his call to take seriously Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality as an analytic framework. I try to heed this call below in part V by making Hagar—and the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality which her presence introduces—the culmination of my reading. See Liew, "(Cor)Responding: A Letter to the Editor," pp. 182–92 (188).

8 E.g., Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), pp. 3–4; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 92–6; Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex, and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 159–61. With

sexuality debates, if not at all the way its antigay interpreters once imagined.[9] How so?

At the present cultural moment—"the post-Obergefell world," as some call it[10]—the popular narrative emerging is something like this: The pressing question is no longer whether LGBTQ[11] persons will be accepted into mainstream American civil and political life, nor whether some will live lives of visible devotion as Christians. That's no longer a hypothesis. It's happening—indeed in many ways already has happened.[12] It's something to observe, not theorize.

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this invocation of the rabbinic approach, I wish to echo both Michael Garden's "trepidation" concerning the issue of Gentile "appropriation" of Jewish texts and practices and his clarification that the aim of doing so is "to yield from ancient tales new meanings to new generations, liberating meanings." See his wide-ranging essay on Sodom, "Remembering Pelotit: A Queer Midrash on Calling Down Fire" in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible,* pp. 152–68 (153).

9 I say "antigay" here with reference to interpreters such as then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: "Thus, in Genesis 19:1-11, the deterioration due to sin continues in the story of the men of Sodom. There can be no doubt of the moral judgment made there against homosexual relations." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Catholic Bishops on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons," paragraph 6, as printed in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings,* ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 249–58 (252).

10 See for instance Douglas NeJaime, "Marriage Equality and the New Parenthood," *Harvard Law Review* 129, no. 5 (March 2016), p. 1252, and Peter Nicolas, "Fundamental Rights in a Post-Obergefell World," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 27, no. 2, article 4 (2016). Obergefell v. Hodges was a landmark 2015 decision in which the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution guarantees same-sex couples the right to marry, while striking down state laws barring the validity of same-sex marriages.

11 Like many, I employ this term with several key reservations, noting here first, that the lived experiences at stake differ profoundly across the "identities" represented by each letter in the ever-expanding and perhaps strategically useful shorthand; second, that the unifying of sexually "non-normative" acts and persons into a category like LGBTQ says much more about the normative society than it does the individuals placed thereby outside it (and thus risks erasing, for instance, the specificity of the ongoing epidemic of violence against trans people); and third, that as Mark Jordan observes, this descriptor partly belongs in an "astonishing succession of characters for same-sex desire within church discourses." See his "Conclusion: How Not to Talk About Sex in Church" in *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk About Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 210ff. My thanks to Sean Larsen for pressing me toward greater precision on these matters of description. In general, in what follows, I use "LGBTQ" only when engaging that mainstream discourse which prefers the term. Otherwise I mostly use "queer" (rather than LGBTQ or "gay" for instance) in acknowledgment of both its liabilities and gifts along the lines sketched in David Halperin's now-classic, still very helpful discussion in *Saint Foucault: Toward a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 62–66.

12 I take this line of thought from the very instructive theological reading of Eugene Rogers, who analogizes the coming into God's community of Gentiles—without becoming

So the pressing question for Christian hermeneutic traditions, instead, is this: How best to narrate—in words natural to the way Christians talk—this arrival *already* underway, this future already in our midst: the temporality of those long constituted as strangers, as an "outside" to the "inside" of communities civil and religious?

This, I suggest in Parts 1 and 2 of this article, is the sort of question Genesis helps answer in a series of stories about wandering divine visitors. By reading this narrative movement as one linking Sarah's laugh to Sodom's fall and beyond, I develop a "thick" description of the range of responses which present themselves upon the arrival of new flesh, the arrival of future in the form of the bodies of strangers. Part 1 reads Sarah's response as representing the option of cynical refusal, Part 2 reads that of Sodom's citizens as representing the option of violent control, and Part 3 makes explicit the connections of these "types" to participants in present day sexuality debates. In deploying the Genesis stories toward a history of the present, this section further argues the story presses us beyond both toward something else: a "something else" which not only challenges "traditionalist" *and* "progressive"[13] responses to the stranger, but also questions the *logic of estrangement* itself.

In doing so, Part 3 also grapples with the way the "inclusion" framework (as in "welcoming" or "including" strangers)—a framework which differently animates both the "liberal" side of Christian hermeneutic debates and the logic of much queer theological thought—risks *reinscribing* the logic of estrangement by the power of what Linn Tonstad has called "the affective life of binaries."[14] After clarifying Tonstad's challenge in relation to the argument, Parts 4 and 5 turn to explore how two sites of interpreting the Genesis tradition—Jude's gloss on Sodom's sin and Hagar's wilderness stories, respectively—might open new pathways for interrupting the present logic of estrangement toward a queer future, one in which "strangeness" no longer names the "other" of kinship, but its condition of possibility.

Jews—to the reality of LGBTQ persons coming into the church today, without becoming "straight." The Christian hermeneutic and indeed, theological, task becomes catching up with this phenomenon, already in motion. See *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 48–9. I wish to thank Gene for reading early drafts of this essay, and for the many conversations which informed it, both during and after his brilliant course, "God, the Body, and Sexual Orientation," where it originated.

13 Here too, the question of naming the groups involved is a sensitive one. I generally follow the terms "traditionalist" and "liberal," as set by Ellen T. Charry's preface to the colloquy published in the *Anglican Theological Review* 93:1 (Winter 2011), though as she notes, these are misleading in various ways. See p. XIV.

14 Linn Marie Tonstad, "The Limits of Inclusion: Queer Theology and Its Others," *Theology and Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (2015), pp. 1–19 (5).

Part 1

Sarah's Laugh, Futures, and the Problematic of Time

> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."
>
> GENESIS 18:12-15, NRSV

Three men—strange, somehow divine—appear to Abraham one day by the oaks of Mamre, he falls face to the ground, and they all share water, curds, and a calf that is "tender and good." (This was no third-rate calf—that detail seems important to our narrator.) In the midst of their meal of hospitality beneath the trees, Sarah stands perched at the flap of the tent, at the split of inside and out, overhearing in their talk her own preposterous future. She cannot help it—she laughs. "To herself," she laughs. In that private, under-the-breath way that's so hard to suppress when someone is saying things naïve and stupid.

It's a response we recognize in ourselves. To scold Sarah would be to miss the point. So too do those interpretations that play Sarah off against Abraham as though she doubts where he trusts.[15] We forget the previous chapter says Abraham likewise "fell on his face and laughed" at the news (Gen. 17:17). But I suggest here that whether Sarah's laugh is being vilified, moralized, or celebrated, we most often avoid risking what must be said: *this is, in one key sense, a perverse kind of laughter.*

We balk at that word's use, rightly—especially in this context. I use "perverse" advisedly, to suggest it's laughter which—as Latin resonances of *perversus* suggest[16]—is "turned away" from the sort of things natural to it: jokes, mirth, joy of all kinds. It's reflexive laughter—"to herself" (*qereb*) the text says—laughter at the edge of the tent, laughter with its back turned to the communal meal beneath the tree. It is, in short, *cynical* laughter, and I want

15 A classic example is Gerhard von Rad: "In our narrative it is Sarah who because of her laugh stands out from the mutely attentive Abraham." Her laugh is an "unbelieving and perhaps somewhat evil laugh," while his "silence is beautiful; it gives the reader time for many thoughts….Abraham treated the strangers in an exemplary fashion." *Genesis: A Commentary*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 207–9.

16 The OED entry for "perverse" names as "its etymon classical Latin *perversus* turned the wrong way, awry, unnatural, abnormal…."

to suggest that cynicism—its ancient philosophical roots left aside—always involves a particular way of knowing time, and knowing in time.

Behind Sarah's deeply human laughter lies a certain strategy of reading: a way of encoding past, present, future—indeed, a way of reading God and self inside these frames. Her years past ("after I have grown old, and my husband is old") reasonably condition her years present ("shall I [now] have pleasure?"), rendering her future a simple matter in this regard: obviously it will be childless. What could be wrong with this? It's the way creatures like us, creatures with spatial and finite bodies, know things—we know them in time. From pasts and presents we assess futures as best we can. Cynicism, I think, consists not simply in this way of knowing in time; it is the elevation of this way into a principle, into a stabilizing of time itself, of how it works. Let's try a definition like this: Cynicism is a way to say *futures are nothing*, in the end, nothing but more of these pasts, more of these presents. One damn thing after another. In my position as cynic, I am sneering and wry because *I already know* this 'future' (which now must bear the annoying weight of inverted commas), and my 'I already know' is a belief about how time works—viz., that futures are more of the same. Cynicism is the refusal of the possibility of time as difference, time as something *else*, as futures *otherwise* than pasts.[17]

But of course, there is a real sense in which futures aren't just pasts. If they were, we could anticipate them, control them even. Instead every moment opens a window: through it come a thousand contingencies, a thousand escapes. Nothing could be more obvious than this unpredictability. But the cynic armed with the stable principle of past—of my "I already know"—*resists*, self-protects, somehow, against this ineluctable state of affairs. Paradoxically, then, cynicism betrays a sort of naïve belief in my own exemption, my being exempt from the risks entailed in genuine futures. Placing naïve trust in a doomed attempt, the cynic tries to escape the risk of being disappointed. In short, cynicism's apparent distrust of motives, persons, and God is possible *only because it more deeply trusts itself*—its own access to stable, knowable patterns in time. For the cynic, time is not of the essence; time *is* a kind of essence,

17 Here and throughout, my use of the word "otherwise" is indebted to its creative theoretical and imaginative elaborations in the writings of Ashon Crawley. "Otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*. And what *is* is about being, about existence, about ontology. But if infinite alternatives exist, if otherwise possibility is a resource that is never exhausted, what *is,* what exists, is but one of many." See *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), p. 2. See also "Otherwise Movements," in *The New Inquiry,* January 19, 2015, available here: <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/otherwise-movements/>.

a law-governed, nature-like thing—frozen and transparent to my own cynical reason. There I place my trust.[18]

And it's precisely *that* belief—implausible and credulous—which must be subjected to the harshest suspicion. Maybe that's why Foucault, supposed nihilist, pessimist of power, can in fact say, "if you are suspicious, it is because you have a certain hope."[19] I must learn to be too suspicious to accept a time running on timeless principles, he says, too suspicious to take as natural, inalterable, and closed whatever happens already to be the case. I am too suspicious to think nothing changes, and in this way am not gullible enough for cynicism. The social constructionists, of course, are supposed to be depressing, theirs a bleak world where all is mask for power and violence. But in this strange sense, to historicize is to hope. If the social world is made, it can be remade.[20]

Let's return to Sarah then, where we ask: *but why laughter?* If it's cynicism, why not cutting remark? Here laughter is the visceral expression that erupts when one is presented with a certain kind of contradiction: that between, let us say, *knowledge* and *promise*. Between time as the sameness the cynic knows, manages, accepts, and time as the difference God promises as gift. Laughter comes from being caught, stuck between time as good news and time as nothing new.

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18 It's worth noting that this conception of cynicism departs from that which Muñoz takes from Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitudes*, in which certain "bad sentiments" like cynicism can function positively, as the laborer's "escape or exit from late capitalism's mandate to work and be productive." Still, for Muñoz himself, the point is precisely the way such sentiments, even cynicism, "signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness." *Cruising Utopia,* p. 176–7. I thank Stephen Moore for drawing my attention to this connection.

19 From an unpublished public discussion at Berkeley, now preserved as Document D250 (7) of the Foucault Archive, Paris, 21 April 1983, with P. Rabinow, B. Dreyfus, C. Taylor, R. Bellah, M. Jay and L. Lowenthal, 32 pages, p. 11. As cited in the foreword to Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture,* selected and edited by Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. xvi.

20 In this respect, Mark Jordan's analysis of the essentialism of the very term "Sodomy" is especially apt: "The prescriptions against Sodomitic intercourse are not the same as the construction of the category *sodomia,* for which the appearance of the abstract noun serves as an important index. What are the implications of abstracting from a historical name? To abstract an essence from a proper name is to reduce the person named to a single quality. All that you need to know about the Sodomites is that they practiced Sodomy. In this way, *abstraction from a proper name is deeply connected with the project of essentializing persons.* A term like Sodomy suggests, by its very grammatical form, that it is possible to reduce persons to a single essence, which can then be found in other persons, remote from them in time or place. This kind of essentialism is necessarily antihistorical." Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 42.

Positioned at the threshold of the tent, Sarah's life stands bisected by this border, caught in contradiction between in and out. On one side is what she knows: the same old world, the tent side, the "inside." On the other, the "outside," the tree side, there are bodies foreign and strange, outsiders brought close: difference and newness, gathered around curds and good calf. And emerging from beneath that tree, Sarah hears future sound forth: No longer burdened by inverted commas, it is time as *genuine* promise, *genuine* difference, as gift. *Children*. "Surely," Sarah says—alone, "to herself," the text reads, as she turns her body away—"surely that sort of time is too good to be true."[21]

And so she turns back inside, tent side, to evade the tension, to resolve it, and thus, to foreclose on its risks of disappointment. But this turning away, which just *is* cynicism, always fires a millisecond late, and so within its very words, even in that act of turning away, the tree side—the "out" side—has already been set loose in her. Already it bounces around like echoes: *what if what if what if it's not too good to be true?* And so the contradiction between no news and good news bubbles to the surface, a tension in search of release: she laughs. What she overheard was naïve and stupid, sure, but what if its too-good-ness didn't rule out its being true? What are God's promises if not this excessiveness, this news which—as it turns out—is both good *and* true? The text itself says: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" (18:14)

Chastened by the question, Sarah disavows her response. To laugh off the Lord's excessive goodness, it turns out, is nothing to joke around about. Cynical laughter is serious business. And here's the point: if, as I've suggested, cynicism names a way of *knowing* time which, in the end, *denies* time as genuine future, then it's also a refusal of the gift of difference; that is, the refusal to receive God's future, God's own arrival in the form of new bodies, wandering strangers. And as Sarah rightly recognizes, to be cut off from this newness, this source of life flowing from the "outside" of what we know: this is a grave danger indeed. She isn't wrong to be afraid.

21 Given the Muñoz quote in the epigraph, one may consider here Lee Edelman's putatively opposing view: "Queerness names the side of 'not fighting for the children,' the side of outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism." *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3. See Muñoz, pp. 94ff especially and chapter 5 as a whole for the respectfully critical response. On a flat reading, my narration of Sarah may seem a prime example of such "reproductive futurism." However, my point is that, within the context of the Genesis narrative, the futurism of normative reproductive capacities has clearly already been exhausted. It is reproductive futurism's unambiguous *failure* which provides the occasion for a narrative at all through the movements of the divine strangers, and thus, which elicits the provocation by which God promises a child *otherwise* than the Child available to normative futurity, the one who never could have provoked, or been named, *laughter*.

Part 2

Sodom's Sin, Strangers, and the Prolematic of Space

> He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh." Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way…
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> GENESIS 18:15B-16

> The men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they replied…"This fellow came here as an alien and he would play the judge!"
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> GENESIS 19:4-9A

The men—alien, somehow divine—take leave of Sarah and Abraham and continue along the path. Greeted by Lot at Sodom's gate, they become aliens in the home of an alien, strange men beneath the roof of the city's own stranger. Night falls, and all "the men of the city"—its proper citizens—approach Lot's door, a glint in their eyes. You know how the story goes. It's one made famous for its apparent condemning of same sex acts, its depiction of supposed homosexuals not merely as immoral, but dangerous, insatiable. In the wake of Derrick Sherwin Bailey's pathbreaking 1955 study, modern scholarship has forcefully challenged this reading, proposing the story isn't about sexual practices at all, but rather the ancient ethic of hospitality.[22] Even scholars like Richard Hays who find the biblical assessment of homosexuality "unambiguously and unremittingly negative" now insist "there is nothing in the passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse."[23]

22 Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition.*

23 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), p. 381. Kent Brintnall notes it as a "marker of a certain kind of progress" that when teaching this text, "it takes some work to convince even my students with conservative theological views that it has been read to condemn

Centuries of interpretive dispute hinge on the meaning of *yada'* in verse 5. "Bring them out to us, that we may *yada'* them."[24] Know them? Have intercourse with them? Be acquainted with them? Read in light of the broader narrative movement of Genesis, in the echoes of Sarah's laugh, I think a different set of questions can be raised. The divine wanderers encounter one sort of response in Sarah, quite another in Sodom. Sarah, presented with the arrival of the strangers, turns back from their promise in an all-too-human world weariness—an unwillingness to be disappointed yet one more time. As a variant of cynicism, it is not the Machiavellianism of elites, but rather what Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* calls "the intelligence of the disadvantaged."[25]

The response of Sodom's male citizens is different. The conversation between Sarah and the visitors was filled with dramatic tension, laced with pathos; between Sodom's men and the visitors there is no conversation at all. "Bring them out to us!" shout Sodom's men. They do not say "come out." They do not speak *to*, but *about*, these wandering strangers. It's third person, not second; no I-thou to be found. The new bodies are for Sodom not addressable subjects, but objects to be controlled, things to be mastered.[26] And significantly, this holds true whether the intention is to bring them out for rape, or

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homosexuality." See "Who Weeps for the Sodomite?" in *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies,* eds. Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchal, and Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), footnote 9.

24 For a helpful summation of some aspects of these longstanding debates, see Ron Pierson, "Does Lot Know About *Yada'*?" in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pierson,* ed. Diana Lipton (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), pp. 203–12; still useful is Brian Doyle, "The Sin of Sodom: yāda', yāda' yāda'? A Reading of the Mamre-Sodom Narrative in Genesis 18-19," *Theology and Sexuality* 9 (January 1998), pp. 84–100.

25 Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 143.

26 Interestingly, both Lot's offering his daughter's bodies for the men's use ('do to them as you please,' v. 8) and his daughters' later use of his body for their own (v. 31–34), might then be read as Sodom's violent mode of response to flesh-as-object working its way quietly into Lot's family, and through his family, into the very generational kinship it at once threatens and enables. *Threatens*, in that that mode of violence invites divine punishment, leading to Lot's family very nearly being destroyed totally (and *is* destroyed in part, with Lot's wife and likely his married daughters, its causalities). *Enables,* in that, as Michael Carden points out, it is the daughters' rape of their father that "initiate[s] the line of the Messiah. The Messiah comes from Sodom and Edith's [Lot's wife's] looking back is a messianic moment." See Carden, "Remembering Pelotit: A Queer Midrash on Calling Down Fire," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), p. 158. (I came across this point in Brintnall, p. 155.) This dual enabling and threatening role, and the note of profound moral ambivalence it injects into the messianic line, invites further reflection than I can offer here. I thank Reviewer 2 for prompting me to reflect on Lot's daughters and wife.

more likely, some form of interrogation.[27] In either case, the men of Sodom find in the stranger's body something to capture, pin down and "know." Like an insect split open for dissection, the stranger's body is a target to be stripped bare, exposed, *seen*.

And the key to this frightening scene resides, I suggest, in the boundary logic structuring the encounter. That is, the dynamic between inside and outside, citizen and alien.[28] Where the relevant distinction in Sarah was expressed temporally—the boundary between future and past—in Sodom it's *spatial*: Lot waits at the "gate of the city," the liminal position of in and out; and throughout the passage there is this interplay between Lot as alien inside the city, the visitors as aliens outside it, and the men as its proper citizens.[29] Sodom's citizens demand to see "the men who *came in* (*bow'*)" (v. 5), then denounce Lot four verses later, using the exact same language, as one "who *came in* (*bow'*) as alien" (v. 9). Their own lips confess it's this movement from outside to inside that incites their threat of violence: "we will do to you even more evil than them" (v. 9).[30]

In short, for Sodom—a city beset by warfare (Gen. 14)—the arrival of new bodies can pose only a threat to be contained; new bodies cannot appear to them as blessings, only occasions for violent regulation, for knowledge that is a form of control. This helps explain why they decline to take Lot up on his seemingly bizarre offer of his daughters. If they wanted a random sexual outlet, they could have had it already. Instead, what they seem to get off on—whether literally or figuratively—is a violent form of *yada',* a passionate knowing which is nonetheless nonrelational, nonreciprocal. A knowing which constitutes strangers as objects to be seen for the sake of being seized, seized for the sake of ever more scrutinizing seeing—all this without words, without

27 Ron Pierson makes this point (see nt. 24) as does MacDonald who notes that the visiting men present a "threat to the town just as Joshua's spies were a threat to Jericho." See Nathan MacDonald, "Hospitality and Hostility: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of 2 Samuel 10 (And Vice Versa)" in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah,* pp. 179- 90 (183).

28 On the historical complexity of thinking about "citizenship" in the context of this ancient city, see footnote 2 above.

29 Although I find associating Sarah with time and Sodom with space (here and in the section subtitles) to be useful, I am not invested in a strong oppositional distinction between "space" and "time" as though our metaphorical language allowed any easy or clean opposition between them. To discuss this further would carry me too far afield this essay's concerns, but for one starting point, see the discussion of how "spatial-relation concepts" work across multiple perceptual and conceptual systems in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), see esp. pp. 30–36 and 58–9. Again, I thank Anathea Portier-Young.

30 I thank Ashleigh Elser for noticing this in the Hebrew text.

the risk of address. Pure gaze. And so the response of the divine strangers is no accident: They *blind* them (Gen. 19:11).

Part 3

Decentering LGBTQ Debates Today: On Strangers and the Logic of Estrangement

I have offered here a reading of the Genesis narratives about Sarah and Sodom, finding in them something like "typologies" of response to the arrival of strangers. And I've further suggested these may illumine, indeed, *interrupt* how Christian discourses on left and right respond to the increasing visibility of LGBTQ persons in contemporary social and cultural life. In this section, I make these connections more explicit.

Against Cynicism: The Challenge to "Traditionalist" Interpreters

Read in the most charitable possible way, presented in its most thoughtful form, the contemporary "traditionalist" position can be likened to the sensibility of Sarah: a fearful cynicism toward a newness too good to be true, a refusal to risk being tricked by an unknowable future. As the world ruled by elites appears to be rapidly accepting a certain form of mainstream "gay rights," traditionalists fear that demands for inclusion in marriage, family, and sexuality constitute, in the end, a demand to give up the faith itself; to lose the gospel. Surely the arrival of strangers, of difference and newness, could not be gift to their churches and society—only trap, only ambush, the loss of something precious waiting to happen. The news is too good to be true.[31] They must turn away then, back inside, into the tent. My narration, at its best, offers a description which humanizes this response even in rejecting it.

As I've argued above, this cynicism, it turns out, belies naïve trust in one's exemption from the risks of history: it conceals the attempt to stabilize time into an essence, running on timeless principles, a lawlike and knowable thing. And this is precisely what we see in recent articulations of the antigay

31 Although I wrote this before becoming aware of it, the 2014 address delivered by Pope Francis upon the conclusion of the Synod on the family strikes a similar note, identifying the key "temptation" among traditionalists as "not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, by the God of surprises." His warning to "progressives and liberals," interestingly, concerns the "temptation to a destructive tendency to goodness [It. *buonismo*]." <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_conclusione-sinodo-dei-vescovi.html >.

Christian position: we don't hate gay people; we oppose the *redefinition* of marriage. Recently, in the religion and politics journal *First Things,* an ecumenical group of prominent signatories called "Catholics and Evangelicals Together" issued a statement which indeed *obsesses* over time: Male-female marriage is something unchanged "for centuries," an "age-old truth," a "primordial human institution," recognized "throughout history and across all cultures."[32] The group's driving intellectual force comes from "new natural law" theory,[33] an influential conservative movement whose key proponents, led by Princeton's Robert George, insist "marriage has an objective core, *fixed* by our nature."[34]

My interest here is not in criticizing such views directly, as many have already done so,[35] but simply in flagging two ways the Genesis narrative might provide tools for a critical redescription of them: first, in narrating this fixation on *fixation* itself as a species of the cynical attempt to stabilize time, as already suggested, and second, in pressing concreteness upon a question new natural law theorists prefer to keep abstract: the vexed place of *consent* in their "primordial" history of marriage.[36] Concreteness, as I'll merely suggest here but return to later, arrives in the figure of Hagar, the enslaved woman whom Sarah

32 "The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Reclaiming Marriage" by Catholics and Evangelicals Together, March 2015. <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/03/the-two-shall-become-one-flesh-reclaiming-marriage-2>.

33 As Nicolas Wolterstorff summarizes, these theorists offer natural law as "a mode of ethical inquiry independent both of all comprehensive religions and philosophical perspectives, and of all concrete moral communities," deriving moral norms instead from "human nature as such." Wolterstorff, "Foreword" in Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 11, quoted in Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Aquinas and the Supreme Court: Race, Gender, and the Failure of Natural Law in Thomas's Biblical Commentaries* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 5–6. Rogers's book is the most rigorous and persuasive critique available of how new natural law's attempt to build itself upon the thought of Thomas Aquinas fails.

34 Sherif Girgis, Robert P. George, and Ryan T. Anderson, *What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), p. 48 (emphasis mine).

35 For a starting point, see Nicholas Bamforth and David A. J. Richards, *Patriarchal Religion, Sexuality, and Gender: A Critique of New Natural Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. p. 2, footnote 6.

36 This abstraction, or what the authors call a "zooming back out" in the following, suggest a troubling lack of seriousness about the histories of violence which accompany any reckoning with marriage across time: "Everyone knows, for example, that consent is critical to the morality of sexual interactions. But if we spent thousands of words splicing the fine distinctions between what does and does not count as consent (there are some very hard cases), we might similarly be left cold, and in need of reminding ourselves—*by zooming back out*, so to speak—just why consent mattered in the first place." *What is Marriage?* p. 108 (emphasis mine). Inherent in these "hard cases" are what Christina Sharpe examines as "monstrous intimacies" in order to interrupt those "master narratives

"gave to Abram, her husband, as a wife" (Gen. 16:3), and whose presence in the text highlights the troubling entanglements of sex and unfreedom, of marriage and property relations. The voice of the captive woman interrupts the cynical attempt to secure coherence through a timeless sort of time.

But interestingly, in the contemporary context, liberals often subtly mirror this attempt to stabilize time when they invoke the "wrong side of history" concerning acceptance of LGBTQ persons, or in incredulous statements like, "It's 2020, how does x *still* happen?" Here too time is encoded as steadily and lawlikely moving toward "progress." And this too is temporality without ruptures, without futures. A time that is not yet queer. This too is an anxious refusal of strangeness. And precisely because time resists being so stabilized (whether by "progress" *or* "tradition"), the cynical response lends itself to a more overtly malignant form: the path of violent regulation, that is, the path of Sodom. The bodies of strangers, upon arrival, can look only like objects to be seized, managed, and in this way *and this way only*, known.

On my reading then, ironically, the architects of something like "sodomy laws" are themselves the Sodomites of the story: those "proper" citizens (the "men of Sodom") who see in strange bodies only targets for control.[37] This deep, visceral impulse toward a violent *yada'* is seen in the perennial marshaling of

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of violence and forced submission that are read or reinscribed as consent and affection." Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 4.

37 In identifying something like an ironic reversal generated by my rereading of the Sodomites here, I think of several characteristically rich and challenging points from Kent Brintnall's recent article, "Who Weeps for the Sodomite?" (see nt. 23). I am grateful to the peer reviewer who invited me to consider my arguments alongside its Edelman-inspired provocations, which concern the limits and dangers of pro-LGBT readings which recast the role of Sodomite and thus incite a second-order rejection of a different kind of queerness or strangeness. In Brintnall's own words: "In some narrative framings, the queer is the sodomite-as-pervert; in others, the queer is the sodomite-as- inhospitable-rapist" (p. 153). His point is that in either case, "the structural position of queerness," as Edelman has maintained, "marks the site of that which must be demeaned, denied, excluded, foreclosed, negated, vilified, denounced, or resisted so that the social can cohere. Every social order requires a queer" (p. 153). The general thrust of the point is well-taken. It is indeed a tempting pro-LGBT option to safely direct the ethical challenges of an essay like this one away from ourselves and strictly in the direction of reactionary homophobes. (Motivated by a similar spirit, I devote much more space in the following section to pro-gay inclusionists than I do their conservative detractors.) And perhaps my strongest point of agreement with Brintnall (and Edelman) is that "irony" reveals "the impossibility of narrative closure and the difficulty of making definitive statements" (p. 147), which goes some way to helping me make sense of why I felt compelled, from the start and throughout, to offer this reading modestly—as a little "something else," as an opening out of the text's excesses, not a confident pronouncement of the text's "meaning," of the sort Brintnall criticizes. Still, there are implications of Brintnall's point about which I have questions. If the

social scientific knowledge to establish, for instance, the inherent promiscuity of gay men, or the danger to children posed by non-heterosexual two-parent adoption, or the curability of non-normative desires through conversion therapy, or the link between homosexuality and pedophilia, and so on. The bodies of queer people pose threats to be dissected and analyzed. Knowledge production—as in Sodom's interrogation—serves to ratify a spatial logic of boundaries and purity, to order bodies inside and outside, proper and improper.

In the context of religious communities thus ordered, these knowledges in turn generate the bizarre and, in many cases, damaging practical counsel traditionalists must offer their LGBTQ friends: *celibacy*. Not as calling nor as gift—as celibacy would be for straight people—but as default, mandated behavior. Eugene Rogers clarifies by analogy the disastrous logic at work: "All gay people have a vocation to celibacy that some straight people also have—as if all black people had the vocation to service that some white people have, or all women had the vocation to homemaking that some men have."[38]

In either case, Sarah's laugh or Sodom's sin, what is being rejected is the queerness of the future: the possibility of an outside which might interrupt the known. This is the challenge to the traditionalists: that whether in Sarah's weary cynicism, or Sodom's violent regulatory practices, what gets rejected is the possibility of receiving from "outside" the gifts of strangers, and the strangers themselves as gifts. And indeed, the line running between those two modes of response, between the fear of cynicism and the violence of control, becomes hard to maintain in the end. Even when her preposterous future arrives—that "time of which God had spoken" (Gen. 21:2)—Sarah's gaze soon drifts from Isaac back to the son of "this slave woman," another strange body in her midst, one whose existence alone suffices to place her line and her future once again under threat (21:10). She casts Ishmael and Hagar into the wilderness.

Sodomite has been recast as "inhospitable-rapist" in some narratives, and if this character too can come to fill the structural position of queerness, as Brintnall contends, then this is also to posit the existence of a "social order" which "coheres" by denying, negating, and denouncing inhospitable rapists. Surely, we can imagine such an order existing. But equally sure is the fact that this would be *imaginative*. For in our society as presently constituted, and as particularly displayed in the hearing of Brett Kavanaugh and the wider #MeToo movement, there seem to be no limits to the roles inhospitable rapists (of a certain sort: white, male, cis, elite, etc.) can play, and no apparent threat presented to the coherence of the order itself. Indeed, to the contrary, the order seems built to ensure their preservation, troubling any suggestion that the rapist or sexual assaulter can become "structurally queer" anytime soon in the way Brintnall worries. Nevertheless, the challenge of shifting the terms of social life without reproducing its (ineluctable?) founding violence, is a real and interminable issue, and the questions it poses recur throughout my reading of Hagar's kin in part 5.

38 Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, p. 22.

Beyond Inclusion: The Challenge to "Liberal" Interpreters

But this reading issues challenges to the liberal position too. And these challenges turn out to place pressure upon the binaries my own essay has presumed—presumed at the start, in hope of unmaking by the end: inside/outside, citizen/stranger (for Sodom), kindred/stranger (for Sarah), proper/improper, and most troublingly, the implicit attachment of each in my tropology to the pairing straight/queer. By identifying this attachment as troubling, this associative link between queer people and the category of the stranger, I want to flag here a profound risk, then try to address it in what follows: Does the experimental reading above—like the "liberal position" of which it offers a sympathetic critique—actually reinscribe the very interpretive habits which *generate* (and sustain) categories of personhood like "strange," "outside," and "improper," and in this way, maintain the status of such persons *as a problem*, as something then to be dealt with by the nonstrange, by the normative community?[39]

And if so, then, whether the problem of strangeness is "dealt with" in cynical distance and violent regulation, *or* by various liberal strategies of inclusion, does reframing LGBTQ debates through stories of wandering strangers risk enacting a kind of re-enclosure, a locking of some persons within the category of the stranger, and thus leave intact the dominant symbolic activity which rendered them "strange" in the first place? Or put differently: Is it enough to raise new possibilities for receiving the gift of strangers, as I have attempted, or must one then push deeper into the *logic of estrangement* itself—that is, into how the binaries structuring the syntactic and symbolic world of the dominant *estrange bodies* in the first place? If so, how might one interrupt this logic of estrangement, subject its symbolic forms to semiotic unmaking and remaking?

Moving in the shadows cast by such questions, I am interested in the implications of this: Perhaps the "stranger," that figure whose movements of arrival I have suggested push the narrative arc of Genesis forward, is not merely to be *included, accepted, or tolerated.* Such verbs mark the semantic world liberals call home. Pursuing "inclusion" typically entails strategies of symbolic recognition, or increasing "representation," as a mechanism for reducing strangeness to citizenship, impropriety to normality. As Lee Edelman suggests, even a further left version of liberal inclusion like that advanced in Judith Butler's *Antigone's Claim* winds up placing a demand upon those with "unintelligible loves" to discover "new schemes of intelligibility," and thereby present themselves as "legitimate and recognizable."[40] The problems we've been dealing with here,

39 I thank Sean Larsen for his insightful thinking on some of the questions posed here.

40 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 105.

then, demand more than simply sliding a particular signifier like "gay" across the slash, from one side to the other, within a binary left intact. Indeed, more than left intact: this selective sliding of one term across a stable binary, on the contrary, may further *stabilize* the intelligibility of the dominant symbolic system itself, by the power of what Linn Marie Tonstad calls "the affective life of binaries."[41] I want to note first how this notion poses a challenge to attempts at "queering" theology and biblical interpretation, then in Parts 4 and 5 turn to two ways in which the Genesis texts might indicate paths forward.

By highlighting what she calls the affective life of binaries, Tonstad contests a key assumption entrenched among inclusivist interpretive frameworks: that the fluid or transgressive movements of particular bodies within a given symbol system can "undo" that system's determining power by "a queering of the available positions."[42] Her incisive warning focuses on a longstanding habit in queer theology, viz., celebrating as subversive instances of gender fluidity found in traditional sites of Christian sexual-symbolic differentiation: homosocial relations among the members of the trinity, the gender bending of females to males in hagiographic literature, and so on. But I find her point germane here too. It clarifies how binary symbolic orders work and thus how difficult it is to avoid restabilizing them, reinscribing them in just the way I flagged above.

To forget the affective, associative life of binaries, Tonstad argues, is to "forget the very nature of symbolic systems"—to forget precisely how binaries do their work in sustaining unjustly hierarchical social orders. That work consists *not* in a "straightforward limitation of all humans to one or the other position in a single, determined pair," but rather in the deep "affective, associative relationships" they establish *across and between* multiple binaries working together.[43] It's well and good, for instance, that Gregory of Nyssa has St. Macrina "transcending her nature" as his narrative subtly renders her male, but this in no way undermines the affective and associative linkage of the signifier "male" with reason, "female" with the passions. To the contrary, what could more decisively lock such linkages in place than a story in which a holy woman's overcoming the passions is synonymous with her refusing to "react in an ignoble and womanish fashion," that is, with her becoming symbolically male?[44]

41 Tonstad, "The Limits of Inclusion: Queer Theology and Its Others," p. 5.

42 Tonstad, "The Limits of Inclusion: Queer Theology and Its Others," p. 5.

43 Tonstad, p. 5.

44 Gregory of Nyssa, *Ascetical Works* (*The Fathers of the Church,* vol. 58), trans. Virginia Woods Callahan (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), p. 170.

Consider a contrastive example: the grocery store conceptual set, "paper or plastic," fails to meet at least two conditions necessary to constitute, in the relevant sense, a binary. First, "grocery bag material" is a neutral category, here containing two indifferent constituents ("paper" and "plastic"), neither being *internally* privileged over the other, that is, privileged by the category itself. By contrast, within each of the symbolic sets above—stranger/citizen, inside/outside, proper/improper—inscribing the two within a single category is the same signifying act which *qualitatively orders* the first term over the second. Second, the differentiation of "paper" from "plastic" does not generate the *meaning* of either term; that is: the meaning of paper can be defined independently of a contrast with plastic, and vice versa. Again, by contrast, a binary system is one in which the meaning of each term in sets like male/female, light/dark, rational/irrational, and stranger/citizen are derived precisely from its contrast with and differentiation from the other.

Hence if we want to press beyond a simple ethic of "including the stranger," and instead hope to begin interrupting the logic of estrangement itself, here's a place to begin, in the wake of what I've done in parts 1 and 2: whether the stranger appears within a binary of stranger/kin as in Sarah's story or in a binary of stranger/citizen as in Sodom's, the category of "strangeness" has been yet preserved as the other of community, the other of belonging, of knowing and being known. How then might one not simply move one subject from the space of stranger to the space of kin, but unmake that associative binary which defines strangeness itself as kinship's other?

Following Tonstad's lead, I suggest here that the functioning of such an order is more intractable, less susceptible to being destabilized than queer theologians have sometimes maintained. I do not intend that by noting this difficulty I will have overcome it, but rather, mean to clarify the stakes and purpose of the rest of this essay, which aims to raise some possibilities concerning how the texts themselves might provide not simply affirmations of a stranger being welcomed through hospitality (and thus a baptism of a liberal ethic of "inclusion" for queer people), but instead, provide resources for considering more closely the logic of *estrangement* itself. One which is not invested in reducing strangeness either to citizenship or kinship, but in opening glimpses into a different future of being kin, into a transformation of the existing possibilities of belonging itself.

To name the insufficiency of sliding one body across the slash of a binary to the other side is to propose that the order made by the slashes must itself change. Which is to say: the arrival of those constituted as "outside" instead calls into question modes of belonging premised upon the stability of inside and outside in the first place. What if the Genesis story, as interpreted here,

then, *undercuts* the sort of liberal ethic of "inclusion" which would welcome strangers without unmaking the logic of estrangement itself? That is, without questioning whether and how a particular civil or religious community has self-constituted precisely by making other flesh "strange"—*by estranging the other, by locking her inside an eternal present, never to arrive.* Perhaps the very category "stranger" is not a given, nor a fact, but rather an achievement. The end point of a process, one internal to the self-making of the community itself. And if this logic of estrangement is real, then the stranger herself is a kind of fiction—an especially useful one. Could relations of belonging be imagined otherwise and elsewhere, other than by rigid lines marking in from out? Which I take it is only an extended way of saying: Could belonging become queer?

To open the Genesis text and its histories of interpretation toward such questions is thus to intervene upon the very binaries this essay presumed—presumed, indeed, in the hope of unmaking. And this is possible, as Judith Butler suggests, because the options are not limited, finally, to presuming or negating the terms set by a binary. Rather, a critical practice can and must learn "to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power…[to] *mobilize* the signifier[s for] an alternative production."[45] In the following section, then, I undertake an extended scriptural re-reading of an unlikely source, the New Testament epistle of Jude, a textual experiment which invites us deeper into such work—repetition, displacement, mobilization—in the service of an alternative production: a construal of the "outside," against and beyond what I have called the logic of estrangement.[46] Then, in the closing section, I reflect on legacies of the figure of Hagar as one place in which we witness what such an "outside" looks like in and as human life, learning both to recognize the gifts of queer kinship and the immense forces of violence which prohibit romanticizing the vulnerabilities thereof.

45 Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations," in Seyla Benhabib, et al., *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 35–57; here, pp. 51–52, paragraph boundary elided. As cited by Eugene Rogers, "Bridegroom of Blood: Desire and the Blood of Christ," invited lecture at the University of Virginia Graduate Colloquium in Theology, Ethics, and Culture, 2014.

46 Though I had not read James Alison until a late stage in the preparation of this essay, I find the approach I have sketched here resonates deeply with his attempt to offer a "reading [which] will not be a simple commentary, but an attempt to experiment with the perspective of the reading…In this sense what I'm trying out is an attempt at a search for a theological method which I have not yet mastered and which, if developed, will, I hope, prove somewhat

Part 4

Jude's Gift: God and "Other Flesh"

> And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, served as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.
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> JUDE 6-7, NRSV

My task in this section is to make a case that the strange gloss developed upon the Sodom story in the epistle of Jude opens, perhaps in spite of itself, a kind of gift—a surprising set of possibilities for addressing the concerns I've been raising above. Locating Sodom's citizens within a biblical and pseudepigraphical catalogue of the disobedient, Jude identifies the sin of the Sodomites as "chasing after *sarkos heteras*"—"other flesh," or "strange flesh" (v. 7). What is the significance of this interpretive move Jude makes, and how might unfolding its implications (its in-foldings) help generate an alternative reading of the arc of the Genesis stories?

To introduce Jude's text here is to bring into contact two textual traditions of interpreting Sodom. On one hand, the story belongs broadly to the ancient genre of theoxeny, that "specific subset of hospitality myth in which, unknown to the host, his guest (*xenos*) is a god (*theos*) in disguise…Theoxeny as a genre of myth explains why hospitality is sacred: *any* guest could be a god in disguise."[47] Read this way, the fault of Sodom's men consists in failing to respect the sacred and inviolable character of strangers. Their actions demonstrate that they have failed to learn that in the wandering body, the presence of the divine has drawn near. They do not recognize the possibility that the stranger could be God incognito. My reading, of course, stands broadly, if idiosyncratically, within this tradition.

But Jude's gloss deploys Sodom differently. In a rereading of the story which places it within a different strand of scriptural texts,[48] his version centers upon

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emancipatory for all of us." James Alison, *Faith Beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), p. 3.

47 Bruce Louden, *Homer's* Odyssey *and the Near East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 31.

48 There has been significant scholarly debate in the past several decades on the complex intellectual milieu of Jude's epistle, both its relation to particular Jewish text traditions as

the rather different problem of angelic-human sexual intercourse. In the sixth and seventh verses, Jude aligns his Sodomites with the "Nephilim" of Genesis 6 and the "Watchers of Heaven" in the pseudepigraphical book *1 Enoch,* of which the author was clearly aware.[49] On this reading, Sodom's sin lies not in *failing* to recognize the possibility that the divine has appeared in the body of the stranger, as in theoxeny, but nearly the opposite: for the comparison to bad angels to work, it seems, the sin of Sodom's men must entail recognizing something divine about the strangers, since they have noted the human-divine boundary *precisely in order to cross it*.[50]

My point here is not to resolve the contradictions between the two interpretive strands, but to bring them to the surface. To put them, I hope, to better use. One could say, perhaps blandly, that the two strands simply have different concerns in mind for the story, different reasons for telling it. But again, what if Jude's (mis)reading bestows a gift—the gift of making Sodom's sin strange again?[51] Perhaps in opening Jude's logic to the intervention of theoxeny, to an "impure" reading which brings it into contact with my reading in part 2 above, a specific reading otherwise becomes possible, a "something else." Here's my attempt at it.

For the logic of Jude's comparison of Sodom to bad angels to work, the reader must see the Sodomites as damnable not merely for mistreating strangers, but for desiring the wrong sort of body, for crossing the boundaries governing proper bodily contact. Jennifer Wright Knust puts the comparison compactly:

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well as broader issues in the problem of the relation of "Judaism" and "Hellenism" in biblical literature. On the latter see Anders Gerdmar, *Rethinking the Judaism-Hellenism Dichotomy: A Historiographical Study of Second Peter and Jude*, ConBNT 36 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2001). For an up-to-date review of these debates, see Blake A. Jurgens, "Is It Pesher? Readdressing the Relationship between the Epistle of Jude and the Qumran Pesharim," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, no. 2 (Summer 2017), pp. 491–510, esp. pp. 491–2.

49 I am indebted to the discussion in Jennifer Wright Knust, *Abandoned to Lust: Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 119–26.

50 Also worth considering in this context is the appearance of Sodom's sin in the *Testament of Naphtali* 3:4–5 from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.* Similar to Jude, the key point of commonality in this text which links the men of Sodom to the Watchers is that both are said to have "changed the order of nature." See the discussion in Daniel J. Harrington, S. J., "Jude and 2 Peter" in *Sacra Pagina: 1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter,* ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S. J. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), p. 205–6, as well as David A. DeSilva, *The Jewish Teachers of Jesus, James, and Jude: What Earliest Christianity Learned from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 8, "The *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs:* A Legacy of Ethics and Eschatology for a New Generation," esp. pp. 188ff. I thank Stephen Moore for bringing this aspect of Jude's background to my attention.

51 I borrow this phrase—the gift of making *x* strange again—from Rogers, "Bridegroom of Blood."

"Whereas the Watchers desired the daughters of men, the men of Sodom desired angels."[52] Or again: As human beings "chasing after" divine flesh, the citizens of Sodom commit inversely—but "in the same way" (*homoion tropon,* v. 7)—the sin of those angels who "chased" the flesh of humans. In other words, and this is what matters for my purposes, by comparing them with the angels, Jude suggests that the Sodomites too committed the damnable sin of those who did not "keep their own domain" (*tērēsantas tēn heautōn archēn*), but rather "abandoned their proper dwelling" (*apolipontas to idion oikētērion,* v. 6). They crossed. They traversed the slash of the human/divine binary.

For Jude, this crossing just *is* their sin, full stop. They went after the wrong type of flesh—tracked it, hounded it, like a dog after a car. (And like the dog, the chase itself seems to be the point….) But this chasing, reconsidered in light of my reading in part 2, and *pace* Jude, suggests the possibility that Sodom's sin consists not simply in crossing, but in the *manner* of how they cross. They cross *only* in order to seize, lock down, and thereby know, and it seems it is the allure of seizure itself, more than whatever further purpose they announce, which truly gets them off.[53] So Sodom crosses *by force* what God would offer in riskier form—gift: the gift of the "strange" body, the divine flesh received. The Sodomites' sin consists in regarding flesh a thing to be grasped, crossing the slash only for the sake of pinning down the other side. And so the angelic strangers reject their advances in the strongest possible terms—blinding, flames, sulfur.

The strongest textual evidence for this argument—that the problem is the manner of crossing, rather than the crossing itself—is also the most obvious. The sin to be condemned simply cannot be the bare fact of transgressing the slash of the divine/human boundary *because this is what God has been doing throughout the entire narrative arc*. In these angelic strangers, God has been wandering around Canaan, having conversation, eating meals, sharing news. It's this crossing which drives the action of each episode and arguably constitutes the most theologically salient point of these texts as a whole: In the *sarkos heteras*, the "strange flesh" that *is* these angelic wanderers, the God of promise has already been drawing near Sarah, near Abraham and Lot, and *even* near Sodom, in hospitality, eating, and cohabitation, which is to say, *in*

52 Knust, p. 123.

53 To return briefly to the tropology above, if this specifically Sodomitic style of "getting off" seems to characterize certain of the anti-LGBTQ initiatives mentioned—that is, homophobes who seemingly *cannot* stop talking about gay sex—well, perhaps that reading shouldn't be too quickly ruled out.

the intimacy of shared bodily life.[54] It matters that the calf is tender and good. And it matters, when Lot's back is "pressed hard" against the wall, that the divine strangers do not shout, but "reach out their hands" to pull his body inside to safety (Gen. 19: 9-10). As their arms extend through the doorway toward Lot's shoulders and his back and his neck, with faceless faces of a raging crowd before them, it is as though Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam,* classic scene of divine-human contact, has been thrown down into the chaos of this world, our world.

Although God utterly rejects the violent crossing attempt of the Sodomites, it turns out to be the case—by extending Jude's logic to its furthest edges—that *God too* does not "keep [God's] own domain." God too "abandons [God's] proper dwelling." God too instead favors improper "dwelling"—oikētērion *with the "wrong" sort of body.* It's household language, recalling homes, abodes, domestic life. God takes the sin of the Sodomites and says, No, *this* is how you cross. *This* is how you encounter the "wrong" sort of body, traverse the slash, unmake the boundary.

God's oikētērion thus evokes even as it reworks the classic hospitality theme: now it is unclear who is doing the welcoming, who is being welcomed. For God is the stranger, but God is also the one showing precisely how estrangement—the rigid in/out boundary—is being unmade. At once nomad and host, God takes the very Sodomitic inclination for violent border-crossing, and turns it toward a meal of peace, a communion beyond the logic of estrangement.[55] Not by force but in risk, in the possibility of rejection, God's strange flesh wanders. Across the border into mortal life, amidst our deaths and births, God rambles. Beneath the oaks of Mamre, eats. Through hellish cities rising with smoke, roams. As it once was: "in the cool of the day," walks. God's footfalls from then and there, present here and now, in the world we have, echoes of an Eden elsewhere lost. And so it turns out to be *God* who crosses the divine-human boundary. God thwarts the slash, wandering through the world God loves,

54 I take it that this is a way of saying, in narrative form, what Gene Rogers says theologically, following Rowan Williams and Paul Evdokimov: "God does not leave my body out of God's desire for me." *Sexuality and the Christian Body,* 83.

55 This argument is quite similar, if not structurally isomorphic, to Gene Rogers's reading of *para phusin* in the Jew/Gentile issues in Paul: "God shows solidarity with something of their nature, the very feature that had led the Jew Paul [or in my case, the author of Jude] to distinguish himself from them: their excessive sexuality [or their crossing of the proper]… God saves the Gentiles by adapting to God's own purposes that apparently most offensive Gentile characteristic. Just as God saved flesh by taking it on and defeated death by dying, here God saves those who act in excess of nature by an act in excess of nature." *Sexuality and the Christian Body,* 65.

subverting from within its binaries of proper and improper dwelling.[56] And God, it seems, shows no shame in doing so. What Jude condemns, God flaunts. God is—in at least one sense—*promiscuous.*[57]

Part 5

Hagar's Kin: Toward "Improper Dwelling"

> Theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now.... The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.
>
> JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ, PP. 94, 96

In the previous section I enlisted the epistle of Jude to unfold the logic of Sodom's sin further, and in this way, made available a biblically-derived lexicon for God's action in these Genesis passages: Through the divine presence in these angelic wanderers, God does not keep God's own "domain," but instead "abandons proper *oikētērion,*" forming a sociality of "strange flesh" which exceeds stable boundary lines between human and divine bodies. I have called this communion with the "wrong" sort of body "improper dwelling." Having (re)narrated the activity of the *divine* agents in that manner, this brief final section turns to sketch the ways in which we might view Hagar as the *human* figure in the text whose actions most clearly invite, reflect, and participate in God's promiscuous moves of belonging—this future breaking in from the outside.

To make this turn toward interpreting Hagar's central significance is to follow the grain of the text, as I'll contend. But at the level of the tropological reading

56 I borrow (and slightly repurpose) the language of "subversion from within" from James Alison, pp. 15ff.

57 The OED has for one part of its etymology: "...post-classical Latin *promiscere* to mix up (4th cent.)." Although she uses it in somewhat different ways, I also am indebted to the use of promiscuity in Sarah Jane Cervenak's brilliant *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

developed here, and following the lines from Muñoz above, Hagar's presence also pushes the reading of queer temporality beyond an implied "crypto-universal white gay subject," though not merely by tacking "race or class" onto a pre-formed and otherwise adequate analysis, as in the additive model often implied by the standard listing of serial 'differences' ("race, class, gender, sexuality, etc."). Rather, in the concreteness of the figure of Hagar, we find that a set of social dynamics parallel to the realities indexed in "race and class" was *already* present in the story, *already* elicits interpretive consideration. We need not undertake a vast comparative historical study, nor be overly fretful about "anachronism" simply to note here what the intellectual tradition(s) of womanism have long pointed out: just to the extent that what moderns call "class" indexes social standing within a community and what we call "race" indexes, in key part, the structural power of master/slave relations, Hagar's presence signals that the Genesis narratives have already centrally involved these things, indeed, depended on them in order to make sense at all.[58]

I do not directly take up or elaborate directly the complex histories thereby indicated, but rather presume them as the territory in which the reader must encounter the figure of Hagar, so often overlooked. More specifically, I am interested in what it means that the enslaved Egyptian woman stands outside both the proper genealogical community of Israel, *and* outside the proper civic community of Sodom. She is excluded from the dominant community as structured by family and politics, by home and city. And there, doubly "strange," from the "outside," *from the wilderness* (Gen. 16:7), she does something no one else in the Bible does: She names God. "You are *el-ro'iy,* God who sees…And have I lived even though I have *seen you?"* (Gen. 16:13).[59] Here emerges a wild sociality of seeing *and* being seen, of reciprocity and relation—a way of knowing, which is to say, a *kinship* in excess of what was available to Sodom in its

58 See the classic work of Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993/2013), esp. chapter 1, as well as her chapter entitled "Hagar in African American Biblical Appropriation" in *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). Also see more recently Nyasha Junior, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), esp. chapter 6. Consider also James C. Okoye, "Sarah and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 2 (2007), pp. 163–75, which aims to reread the story "from the 'downside of history', as an African American would," but then, rather bizarrely, nowhere cites, engages, or acknowledges the existence of the womanist hermeneutic tradition.

59 Williams, citing Phyllis Trible but going far beyond her, makes much of the ethical and theological significance of this act of naming. See *Sisters,* p. 22–3. Of course, making precise grammatical and semantic sense of verse thirteen is notoriously difficult. For one attempt

blind gaze and Sarah in her cynicism. Here an enslaved person on the run communes with God's *heteras sarkos,* with God's own "strange flesh," an act so unthinkable it can exist only in the future, but a future that is now here. Here Hagar the stranger and God the stranger trade words, the echoes of a life to come—decentered, wandering—for those with the ears to hear it.

But what is the precise significance of this narration, given the challenges raised in part 3 to the liberal ethic of inclusion and the affective life of binaries? In her meeting with the angelic stranger (Gen. 16), Hagar participates in what Jude calls "*improper dwelling,*" in an oikētērion of the wilderness. Stranger with stranger, other flesh with other flesh. What makes that so significant, in key part, comes into view only by reading it in relation to the crucial, somewhat disturbing fact of the events of chapter 21. After the expulsion, and for the remainder of the Genesis narratives (and indeed beyond), *Hagar is never again welcomed back into, included in, made intelligible to the community of the dominant and their structures of legitimacy*. She really is expelled from Abraham and Sarah's line.[60] And more, as an enslaved person, it's hard to imagine what it would mean for her to be "included" among "the men of the city" (Gen. 19:4), that is, achieve inclusion within the proper civic community of Sodom. So in either case, from the vantage of the genealogical community or the civic-political community, Hagar is and *will remain* heteras sarkos—unassimilated and illegitimate, illegible and unrecognized.[61]

And knowing that it's precisely there in the outside, the space where Gen. 21 glimpses her just as she slips from view into the brush, never to be integrated back into the domain of the narrator's concern, there we can view her encounter in Gen. 16 more clearly. God's presence—made known in the enfleshed, divine wandering stranger—meets her, sanctifies her, protects her child, furnishes her with tools for survival, sees her and is seen by her, names her child and is named by her, designating thereby a different sort of intimacy,

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which helpfully engages the German critical scholarship, see Th. Booij, "Hagar's Words in Genesis xvi 13B," *Novus Testamentum* 30, Fasc. 1 (January 1980), pp. 1–7. More recently, John T. Noble offers a sensitive assessment of the difficulties, with careful attention to the source material, in *A Place for Hagar's Son: Ishmael as a Case Study in the Priestly Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), pp. 33ff.

60 As Delores Williams points out, Paul too "relegated her and her progeny to a position *outside of and antagonistic to* the great promise," such that "Hagar and her descendants represent the outsider position par excellence." Williams, *Sisters,* 4.

61 Again, I have in mind these questions from Tonstad, describing the Edelman's critiques of Butler, which are in turn addressed and expanded upon by Muñoz: "In short, does queer aim at inclusion? Or is the task of queer thinking to focus our attention on the non-integrability that structures every subject and every social order—that is, on the impossibility of inclusion, and the destructive effects of aiming at it?" Tonstad, "Limits," pp. 1–2.

a different sort of kin, *of the strange with the strange, and thus, of a kinship grounded in "strangeness" itself.* But what can such a formulation mean? "Kinship" and "strangeness" form a binary. Each helps generate the meaning of the other, and each affectively works across related binaries of inside/outside, belonging/nonbelonging. But if strangeness here *is* a kind of kinship, the improper dwelling of the outside with the outside—*without thereby generating an "inside"*[62]—then a strain has been placed upon the lexical stability of the binary itself, draining some of the force of its coherence. Hagar does not slide across the slash from one category to the other. Instead, the improper dwelling she inhabits and which inhabits her begins to confound such categories, open them toward something in excess of, inassimilable to, a vision of belonging premised on an oppositional logic of estrangement. Not in spite of, but precisely because—at least in the received tradition we have—Hagar is not in the end to be "included," she instead opens a glimpse into the then and there of a kinship elsewhere, an "outdoors,"[63] an improper sociality and a belonging worthy to be called queer.

Conclusion: on Dark Hope and/as Hagar's Time

In this wide-ranging series of explorations in Genesis 16-21, I have sought to do something tropological with these ancient texts, to wander through them and experiment with how we might find within them different ways of seeing ourselves and our present discursive context around sexuality, Christianity, and time. The interpretive construal of Sarah and Sodom aimed to give a narration of some traditionalists as weary cynics, fearful of disappointment, and others as violent chasers of a knowing indistinguishable from control, while in the end suggesting that the boundary between the two types is never really something to count on. I then turned to pose some problems with the binaries implied in the liberal framework of "inclusion," which my own essay subtly presumed

62 I think of this: The foreword to Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* points out the "paradoxical" nature of the famous title. Cheryl Clarke, "Foreword," in Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), p. 6.

63 This word, and much of the spirit of this essay, is the result of conversations with dear friends Sarah Jane Cervenak, J. Kameron Carter, and Candice Benbow, as well to folks who participated in the working group series which Drs. Cervenak and Carter curated, titled "The Black Outdoors: Humanities Futures After Property and Possession," supported by the Franklin Humanities Institute's Humanities Futures Initiative at Duke University. For more, see their essay, "Untitled and Outdoors: Thinking with Saidiya Hartman," in *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* (2017), p. 1–11.

at the start, whereby LGBTQ people are like strangers whose primary end is to be "accepted" or "welcomed" into a community which itself is left unchanged. In pursuit of other possibilities, I went on to suggest ways in which the interpretive tradition of the Genesis stories might help us reimagine belonging itself beyond the binary logic of estrangement. Jude's interpretation of Sodom, repurposed and redeployed, provided an alternative lexicon in which God enacts an improper dwelling, a space and time of queer belonging in which strange flesh communes with strange flesh, forming a kinship which neither achieves nor desires inclusion among the dominant—nor even reframes the dominant as a new "outside." I then developed a series of meditations upon Hagar as the human agent of these stories who most powerfully performs this sort of improper dwelling with God's strange flesh in the wilderness.

In closing, it's worth underscoring that none of these meditations upon the outside, upon improper dwelling, can be allowed to sentimentalize what such a form of life looks like: it looks like a pregnant woman alone, without resources, and on the run in the first instance (Gen. 16), and a single mother stranded at the edge of death in the second (Gen. 21). That God meets her there both times does not detract from the double valence of the wilderness symbol. As Delores Williams points out, in Black consciousness the wild has variously signified a sacred space of freedom *and* an experience of "economic insecurity, social displacement and the new forms of oppression ex-slaves encountered in a free world."[64] This doubly charged valence of what I have been calling "improper dwelling" cannot be lost insofar as it was not lost and cannot be ignored by Hagar and all her children, whose lives remain imperiled in and by the world of white cis-heteropatriarchy as it presently exists. Indeed, the point of this turn to Hagar is precisely the same as the essay as a whole: to distill queer possibilities from the past for the sake of a "then and there," for the sake of utopian futures beyond the stranglehold of the present, *precisely because the present is—for Hagar and her children especially—so unlivable, so unbearable, so scarcely survivable.* It cannot be enough to accept the "hollowing and hollowed out present," as Muñoz points out. Nor will it do to romanticize what that hollowing engenders, as though vulnerability itself provides a way out of the present.[65] It is with that in mind that, by way of conclusion, I return to the issue raised above in the meditations upon Sarah's laugh as a cynical sort of

64 Williams, *Sisters,* p. 104.

65 See Linn Marie Tonstad, "The Entrepreneur and the Big Drag: Risky Affirmation in Capital's Time," in *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies,* eds. Kent L. Brintnall, Joseph A. Marchal, and Stephen D. Moore (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), esp. the critique of "vulnerability" discourse in Daniel Bell, Jr. et al., on p. 220–3 and following.

temporality. How might Hagar suggest something different? What sort of temporality is implied in Hagar's voice and action?

The divine stranger asks the fugitive, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" (Gen. 16:8). Subtly but strikingly, Hagar declines to answer directly, instead saying only: "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." As Delores Williams points out, the angel is asking about her past and her future.[66] Implying she cares little for the former and knows little of the latter, she answers only in the present: I am running away, I am in motion, I am unstill, and this is all I can know for now. She moves and lives within a present which does not already know, and *does not pretend* already to know. Hagar denies the illusion of time as a stable and coherent principle which might thereby be predicted and controlled; she refuses enclosure within the naïveté of the cynic's "I already know." Neither laughter nor tears, her refusal stands open to its own not knowing, and there a space unfolds for Hagar's survival, an opening in which to act.

"Hope," writes Rebecca Solnit, "locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that *in the spaciousness of uncertainty* is room to act."[67] There is "hope in the dark," for Solnit, and perhaps there is a darkness to hope itself, a "hope draped in black," as Joseph Winters calls it, which lingers with "the indeterminate moment."[68] Such hope involves the spaciousness opened by Hagar's refusal, her unwillingness to stabilize time with notions of progress *or* tradition, with any law by which to make peace with the present as it happens already to exist. For Hagar, that world won't do. It cannot satisfy. And so her unknowing hope is indistinguishable from fugitive movement, from unyielding longings toward the horizon of queer futures, since "queerness should and could be about a desire…that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough,"[69] and its possibilities elsewhere and otherwise, it turns out, are the only things worth chasing.

66 Williams, *Sisters,* p. 20.

67 Rebecca Solnit, "Foreword to the Third Edition (2015)" in *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories and Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), p. xiv (emphasis mine).

68 Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholia, and the Agony of Progress* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 244.

69 Muñoz, p. 96.