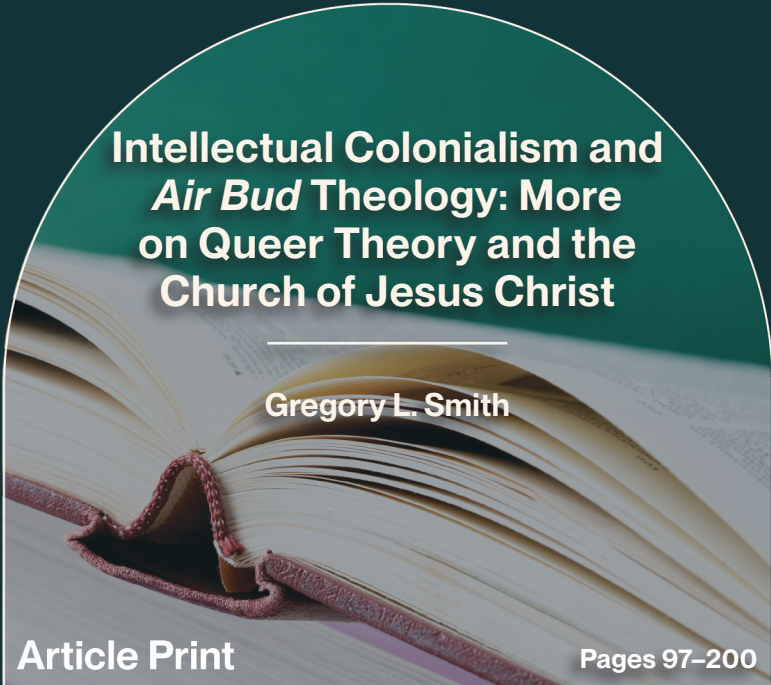


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Intellectual Colonialism and *Air Bud* Theology: More on Queer Theory and the Church of Jesus Christ

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Intellectual Colonialism and *Air Bud* Theology: More on Queer Theory and the Church of Jesus Christ

Gregory L. Smith

Review of Taylor G. Petrey, Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024). 214 pages. \$21.94 (paperback).

Abstract: *Taylor Petrey's Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos attempts to "queer" Latter-day Saint concepts to create an account more congenial to queer theory, a postmodern philosophy and approach to texts. Here the aim is to destabilize and deny sexual essentialism, the law of chastity, and the eternal destiny of humanity as understood by the Saints. The words of Church leaders are misrepresented through omission and reorganization. Readings of Latter-day Saint scholars and scripture likewise suffer distortion and inaccurate representation. The work betrays several double standards, including the intellectual colonialism inherent in the efforts to distort and thereby appropriate Latter-day Saint culture and writings for its own purposes. Means to avoid this negative pattern are suggested, including rigorous honesty in textual claims and the participation of the scholarly community in effective peer review of irresponsible or misleading work.*

Taylor Petrey is one of many in academia who undertake the "queering" of history and theology. His latest book, *Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos*,¹ is the second half of a project begun in his previous work, *Tabernacles of Clay* (p. 7).² As I previously reviewed Petrey's earlier work,³ I thought it appropriate to examine his latest scholarship.

Foundational Concepts

What exactly is queering? And why ought the “Mormon” Cosmos be subjected to it? *Queer* was long used as a slur against homosexuals.⁴ Gay rights activists reappropriated it and “used [it] provocatively . . . to convey an assertive and radical alternative to conventional notions of sexuality and gender.”⁵ (Latter-day Saints can doubtless understand why a persecuted minority might, in a show of resilience or defiance, embrace a mocking label—like *Mormon*—bestowed by their enemies.)

The term *queering* is part of queer theory, an academic movement that is notoriously difficult to define—and this is regarded by its advocates as a good thing.⁶ In this regard, *queering* is a verb—it is something that is done to something else; it is a process or an evaluation from a particular point of view. In the balance of this review, when I use *queer*, *queered*, or *queering* (lowercase, non-italicized), I am using the term as a verb, referring to a process. If, however, I refer to *Queering* (uppercase first letter, in italic), then I am specifically referring to Petrey’s book—the subject of this review essay.

It should be clear that it is important to define terms in an effort to facilitate understanding. Toward that end, I will first distinguish between *sex* and *gender* and then sketch queer theory’s intellectual antecedents in broad strokes.⁷ Doing so requires a brief tour of post-modernism, with emphasis on its strategy of deconstruction. This will bring us to queer theory proper.

Sex versus gender

Until relatively recently, *sex* and *gender* were essentially synonyms when describing humans.⁸ During the last century, “sex came increasingly to mean sexual intercourse,” which led to *gender* often “replac[ing] it (in early use euphemistically) as the usual word for the biological grouping of males and females.”⁹

Current scientific, medical, and sociologic work makes a clear distinction between the two. (Feminist scholarship often insisted on the differences, though these distinctions were subsequently challenged by some queer theorists.¹⁰) In present-day technical discussions *sex* refers to *biologic* sex—the physical state of being an embodied male or female, normally with reproductive potential and the appropriate internal and external genitalia and secondary sexual traits.¹¹ *Gender*, on the other hand, refers to the traits or social roles *attributed* to individuals by their culture because of their sex and their internal psychology.¹²

Queer theory draws on these distinctions, but given its suspicion of binaries and skepticism of claims about the essence of things (see discussion below), there is often considerable blurring.¹³ In making my argument, I will use the terms in the precise sense described above but will reproduce the terminology used by queer theorists when quoting them.

Postmodernism

Queer theory derives in large part from the postmodern project, especially the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. It shares the methods and intellectual stance of many other species of so-called *Critical Theory* in the humanities' academic hothouses.¹⁴ (American readers may be familiar with Critical Race Theory, which applies similar tactics to issues of race, rather than sexuality.¹⁵)

Fundamental to these ideologies is the idea that all communication — or *discourse*, in the jargon — must involve issues of power and hierarchy. This power is not necessarily imposed top-down, though it might be, but is instead an omnipresent web of social control and influence of which we may be completely unaware, but in which we all participate.¹⁶ (It is worth noting that any who dispute this characterization can simply be said to be unaware of the real truth of the matter, which only the enlightened theorist can see. This is a handy — if circular and unfalsifiable — escape hatch. We can also enjoy the paradox of such an absolutist claim about the truth of how things really are being made by those who ostensibly reject claims of absolutes and settled truth from anyone else.)

The fixation on issues of power is combined with the broader postmodern concern about subjectivity. Put briefly, postmodernism denies our ability to access objective truth, since all evidence is filtered and interpreted through our biases, often in self-serving ways. Even if we found truth, we would not know we had. There are no stable categories, no fixed points of reference. Insisting otherwise is said to be a delusion or part of an illegitimate effort (conscious or not) to enforce unjust power relationships. (From whence comes the fixed category of just or unjust in this analysis? It is best not to expect logical consistency.¹⁷) While some believe that the message found in any act of discourse is a joint product of author and audience,¹⁸ in its more extreme forms, postmodernism holds that no meaning exists until it is *created* by the audience, independent of any facts outside the subjectivity of

the audience. Even the author's intent has no bearing on what the audience can or should receive.¹⁹

Deconstruction

To justify these stances, postmodern theorists often use *deconstruction*—a complex set of tactics difficult to summarize fully. To deconstruct a text is “to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies, by identifying in the text the rhetorical operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise.”²⁰

Postmodernists are critical of *logocentrism*, “the privileged role that *logos*, or speech, has been accorded in the Western tradition.”²¹ Critics have summarized deconstruction as opposing “the concern with truth, rationality, logic, and ‘the word’ that marks the Western philosophical tradition.”²² “Deconstruction is better viewed as *unduction*: as the negation, reversal, and contradiction of all methodological attempts to achieve knowledge or truth. . . . induction without end and without conclusion.”²³

Philosopher John Searle mentions three of the deconstructionists' many strategies, and we will soon see how prominent they are in queer theory:

1. First, and most important, the deconstructionist is on the lookout for any of the traditional binary oppositions in Western intellectual history, e.g., speech/writing, male/female, truth/fiction, literal/metaphorical. . . . These hierarchical oppositions allegedly lie at the very heart of logocentrism.²⁴ . . . The aim is to resituate, undo, or displace the entire system of values expressed by the classical opposition.
2. A second strategy is to look for certain key words in the text that, so to speak, give the game away.
3. A third strategy is to pay close attention to marginal features of the text such as the sort of metaphors that occur in it, because such marginal features “are clues to what is truly important.”²⁵

We see this worldview at work when *Queering's* author writes on social media that “the Bible . . . is always read through a specific lens and it is the lens that matters, not the book itself.”²⁶

Queer theory proper

If postmodernism and deconstruction are difficult to describe succinctly, queer theory is even more so. "The pliant nature of queer theory has enabled it to maintain relevance by insisting on its own 'radical unknowability.'" ²⁷ "Queer is a 'deliberately ambiguous term' that is simultaneously a way of naming, describing, doing and being. This is where queer theory finds its radical potential as a term to challenge, interrogate, destabilize and subvert, but it also means there is difficulty in pinpointing queer theory's meaning." ²⁸

Above all, queer theory seeks to undermine the sexual binary and all that goes with it. "It is a radically anti-essentialist theory, arguing that everything—desire, sexual norms and gender, certainly—is interpretable as social construction and open to challenge and change." ²⁹

Social construction implies that sex and/or gender are not genuine, essential categories that exist regardless of what humans think or desire. Instead, they are merely conventions established and maintained by society—often with oppressive intent or results. ³⁰ For the queer theorist, being either male/female is certainly not essential or foundational to who and what we are. For example, Petrey claims that both sex (presumably biological) and gender "are historical and ideological, not natural and fixed." ³¹ Since sex and gender are merely cultural creations, we are free to modify or ignore them at will and such things certainly cannot tell us how we ought to behave. ³²

This attack on heterosexual, male/female norms is foundational and explicit:

Michael Warner most famously notes: "The task of queer social theory . . . must be to confront the default heteronormativity of modern culture with its worst nightmare, a queer planet." . . . Warner coined the term "heteronormativity" to describe the pervasive and largely invisible heterosexual norms that underpin society. An example of heteronormativity in practice is the representation of "ordinary" family units as comprising a "mother" and a "father," and where alternative family arrangements are either not represented, or are depicted as a deviation from this norm. ³³

We note that activism is a prominent part of the theory: "Beginning in the 1990s, [queer theory took] . . . radical political energy and translated it into philosophical/academic language and applied it to the interpretation of a variety of cultural forms." ³⁴ "Several of the main areas of

thinking and political action that have influenced queer theory” include “lesbian color theory and activism; lesbian feminism; poststructuralism; postmodernism; lesbian, gay, and bisexual activism; gay and lesbian studies, trans activism and theory.”³⁵

This is no shameful secret—its partisans are quite clear: “When we situate queer theory within a particular academic genealogy, we must acknowledge that it has *always also been inflected by histories of activism* and resistance to oppressions.”³⁶

A map for what follows

We will explore Petrey’s ideological project in four parts.

In Part 1, we will examine how he treats historical material from Church leaders. We will see blatant misrepresentation and distortion of their words, and a failure to follow the basics of sound historical practice.

In Part 2, we see how these flaws grow out of queer theory’s approach to texts.

In Part 3, having thereby established the intellectual context, we will examine three attempts by *Queering* to queer scripture and Church doctrine. We will again see unjustified claims, including citations to the literature that do not support the argument being made and a failure to grapple with the extensive literature that disagrees.

In Part 4, we will conclude with some broader perspectives on intellectual colonialism and the double standards embodied in *Queering*’s approach.

Part 1—Disordered Cosmos, Distorted Texts

“I argue,” *Queering* declares, “that the [scriptural] text and its interpretative history do not preclude gender and sexual fluidity” in God or humanity (p. 72).

This claim requires considerable unpacking, but we should first recognize it as a striking example of what one wise friend has called “*Air Bud* theology.”³⁷ For those who do not recall this cinematic gem, *Air Bud* is a Disney film starring a dog who plays basketball. When the opposing team protests at the manifest absurdity of having a dog on a basketball team, the dog’s coach retorts, “You check in your rulebook. Bet you don’t find anything in there that says the dog can’t play.”

Now, the proper answer to this would be, “Only a moron would think there would be.” In the interests of the story, the referee replies, “He’s right. Ain’t no rule says a dog can’t play basketball.”³⁸ Hijinks ensue.

As we will see, *Queering* offers us *Air Bud* theology—"ain't nothing in scripture that explicitly comes right out and says that God and humanity can't be sexually fluid." That's slightly sillier than a dog wearing high-top sneakers.

This sort of sophistry is a good example of why ambitious intellectuals have always preferred a religion based on a book to one based on living prophets.³⁹ As queer theory affirms, and as we will see *Queering* demonstrate in shameful detail, any scriptural text can be made to say anything if one works at it doggedly.

Infuriatingly, modern prophets talk back.

Distorting Spencer W. Kimball

Back-talking prophets are more easily dealt with once safely deceased. The humble ellipsis (. . .) is a marvelous tool for such efforts—and much other propaganda, for that matter. It is unmatched in its ability to hide while revealing, especially if the target is not around to protest. It gives a scholarly sheen to dull dishonesty.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, for instance, are masters of the technique. All too often, I've seen ellipses used to disguise an inconvenient fact.⁴⁰ Their methodological heirs have continued the tradition. *Queering* and its predecessor volume are no exception.

For example, Spencer W. Kimball could sue *Tabernacles* for libel if he were still alive. *Tabernacles* claimed: "Kimball noted that homosexuality and bestiality both were deserving of the death penalty and that 'regrettably,' 'the law is less severe now,' as was the community's attitude."⁴¹ What Kimball wrote, in fact, was that "like adultery, incest, and bestiality they ['homosexual practices'] carried the death penalty *under the Mosaic law*."⁴² Note that this says nothing about such acts "deserving" the death penalty. Instead, he argues that in the Old Testament God declared such acts sinful—just like heterosexual adultery. Kimball elsewhere points out that Sabbath breaking is a rebellion with dire consequences. Although "Israel's swift and severe punishment for infractions is not exacted today, this does not lessen the seriousness of the offense to the Lord for violating his day."⁴³ By *Tabernacle's* logic, the prophet therefore believed Sunday shoppers deserved to be shot at dawn.⁴⁴

When we check the original statement, we find the deception is even worse. *Tabernacles* altered Kimball's meaning to the extent that an ellipsis would not suffice. Instead, it resorted to rearranging his words. Kimball's original read: "The law is less severe now, and so

*regrettably is the community's attitude to these grave sins.*⁴⁵ What Kimball saw as regrettable was not (as *Tabernacles* would have it) that homosexuals aren't executed, but that society regards homosexual sin indulgently.

This type of misrepresentation quickly erodes trust in any author purporting to do "history."⁴⁶ It is not a question of a different emphasis or an alternate interpretation of the evidence. Instead, this is simply distortion in service of an ideology.

Distorting Erastus Snow

So, as soon as I saw *Queering* cite an 1878 address of Apostle Erastus Snow with ellipses, I was immediately suspicious.⁴⁷ Those suspicions proved well-founded.

Queering wishes to use Snow as evidence that a "line of interpretation [in the Church] depicting" Adam as initially androgynous and unsexed "was not an aberration" (p. 85). In plainer terms, he wishes to argue that within the Church there is a stream of thought that does not regard Adam as having a sex at his creation. This *Air Bud*-esque loophole can then allegedly be used to argue against the importance of sex in Genesis, and thereby minimize or deny the eternal nature of biological sex for God's children and their actions before, during, and after this life. (We will shortly explore these efforts in greater detail.)

Let us examine the entirety of *Queering's* citation of Snow's 1878 address. (All omitted material is *Queering's*, indicated by ellipses.)

LDS Apostle Erastus Snow made a[n] observation about the lack of distinction between male and female in the original creation by citing Genesis 5:20:

The being we call man, but which in the language of these Scriptures was called Adam—*male and female created he them, and called their name Adam* [Gen. 5:2], which in the original, in which these Scriptures were written by Moses, signifies "the first man." There was no effort at distinguishing between the one half and the other, and calling one man and the other woman. This was an after distinction, but the explanation of it is—one man, one being, and he called their name Adam. But he created them male and female, for they were one, and he says not unto the woman "multiply," and unto the

man "multiply," but he says unto them, "multiply and reproduce your species." He speaks unto them as belonging together, as constituting one being, and as organized in his image and likeness. . . . [338 words are here omitted] One party says [God] is a man, and the other says he is a woman. I say he is both. . . . He created man *in the image of God, male and female created he them, he called their name Adam*, which signifies in Hebrew, the first man. So that the beings we call Adam and Eve were the first man placed here on this earth, and their name was Adam, and they were the express image of God.⁴⁸

Snow interprets Genesis 5:2, when the "male and female" are both called Adam, as referring to a singular intersex being. . . . From this, Snow concludes, "Deity consists of man and woman." Snow is not referring here to LDS teachings of a male god and a separate female god but rather to a divine hybrid in a single God — he uses a singular (masculine) pronoun for God and Adam consistently in this speech. Then, just as this singular God is both male and female simultaneously, so is Adam originally male and female simultaneously. Snow describes this singular Adam as "blended" and made of "component parts." Snow's account depicts a genderqueer deity who creates the genderqueer Adam without calling them "man" or "woman" and making "no effort at distinguishing between the one half and the other." As noted above, this reference to a "primal androgyne" has a long history in Jewish and Christian exegesis, and Snow applies it here to describe God in the LDS tradition as well. (pp. 85–86, ellipses in original.)

Snow treated this matter in three talks, not the single one mentioned by Queering. One that is unmentioned was also in 1878, and the other in 1885.

Examining 1878 without ellipses

Queering begins poorly by omitting vital context. Snow's talk began by describing the creedal God of Catholicism and Protestantism "without body, [or] parts."⁴⁹ Snow's sentence immediately preceding the mention of Adam is a description of the human body:

If we study physiology or anatomy, we are led to exclaim with the Psalmist of old, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made,” and see a beautiful harmony in all the parts, and a most exquisite design. This is proven by an examination of the various parts of the human form. And every organ adapted to its special use, and for its special purpose, and combining a whole, a grand union—a little kingdom composed of many kingdoms, united and constituting the grand whole, the being we call man.⁵⁰

So even here, *Queering*’s tidy story of an androgynous, “gender-queer”⁵¹ humanity is questionable when we read more of the talk. Snow is asking us to consider the *present* human form—which is clearly sexed, and constitutes *man* (meaning *humanity*, male and female, not an androgynous being).

It is profitable to consider Snow’s 1878 words *without* the ellipses that *Queering* uses. In the following excerpt from Snow’s words, I use boldface to indicate the words that were excised in *Queering*. (These lengthy paragraphs are mostly to allow the reader to check the context and thrust of Snow’s actual argument. I will discuss the excised bits one at a time following the full text.)

The being we call man, but which in the language of these Scriptures was called Adam—male and female created he them, and called their name Adam, which in the original, in which these Scriptures were written by Moses, signifies “the first man.” There was no effort at distinguishing between the one half and the other, and calling one man and the other woman. This was an after distinction, but the explanation of it is—one man, one being, and he called their name Adam. But he created them male and female, for they were one, and he says not unto the woman multiply, and to the man multiply, but he says unto them, multiply and reproduce your species, and replenish the earth. He speaks unto them as belonging together, as constituting one being, and as organized in his image and after his likeness. **And the Apostle Paul, treating upon this subject in the same way, says that man was created in the likeness of God, and after the express image of his person. John, the Apostle, in writing the history of Jesus, speaks in the same way; that Jesus was in the likeness of his Father, and express**

image of his person. And if the revelations that God has made of himself to man, agree and harmonize upon this theory, and if mankind would be more believing, and accept the simple, plain, clear definition of Deity, and description of himself which he has given us, instead of hunting for some great mystery, and seeking to find out God where he is not and as he is not, we all might understand him. There is no great mystery about it; no more mystery about it than there is about ourselves, and our own relationship to our father and mother, and the relationship of our own children to us. That which we see before our eyes, and which we are experiencing from time to time, day to day, and year to year, is an exemplification of Deity.

"What," says one, "do you mean we should understand that Deity consists of man and woman?" Most, certainly I do. If I believe anything that God has ever said about himself, and anything pertaining to the creation and organization of man upon the earth, I must believe that Deity consists of man and woman. Now this is simplifying it down to our understanding, and the great Christian world will be ready to open their mouths and cry, "Blasphemy! Sacrilege!" Open wide their eyes and wide their mouths in the utmost astonishment. What! God a man and woman? The Shakers say he was, and Ann Lee says, "Christ came in the form of a man in the first place, and now comes in the form of a woman," and she was that form.

Then these Christians — they say he has no form, neither body, parts nor passions. One party says he is a man, and the other says he is a woman. I say he is both. **How do you know? I only repeat what he says of himself;** that he created man in the image of God, male and female created he them, and he called their name Adam, which signifies in Hebrew, the first man. So that the beings we call Adam and Eve were the first man placed here on this earth, and their name was Adam, and they were the express image of God. **Now, if anybody is disposed to say that the woman is in the likeness of God and that the man was not, and if vice**

versa, I say you are both wrong, or else God has not told us the truth.⁵²

As mentioned, Snow is rebutting the creedal view of God as a mystery, a being without body, parts, or passions. He makes his point of view clear in the omitted material:

There is no great mystery about it; no more mystery about it than there is about ourselves, *and our own relationship to our father and mother*, and the relationship of our own children to us. That which we see before our eyes, and which we are experiencing from time to time, day to day, and year to year, is an exemplification of Deity.⁵³

In the excised material, Snow teaches that humanity is in the “image” of God in precisely the same way as children are in the image of earthly parents. Our own mortal experience of parents and children mirrors God’s experience with us. This is not androgynous, or unsexed. *Queering* tells us that “Snow is not referring here to LDS teachings of a male god and a separate female god but rather to a divine hybrid in a single God” (p. 85)—but this is nonsense. Snow is doing precisely what *Queering* claims he is not doing. Human parents are clearly separate, are clearly two individuals, and clearly sexed. Snow tells us that women and men are *both* in the image of God in that sense.

Later in the 1878 talk, Snow says that Satan wishes to possess “the tabernacles [bodies] of Adam, which means a man and his wife—male and female, whom he called Adam, and rule the earth.”⁵⁴ For Snow, *Adam* is explicitly “a man and his wife” with two separate, physically sexed bodies, which demonic powers wish to control. Contra *Queering*, Adam is not an androgynous proto-being that will only later be sexed.

Snow references Darwin’s explanation for “the present order of beings we call man”—the plural, present-day *beings* are here too referred to by the singular *man*. Furthermore, Snow later demonstrates his use of the singular *man* in situations that indisputably involve sexed men and women when he writes:

This being we call man, is only God in embryo. And Moses tells us that the Creator conversed with this man whom he called Adam, consisting of male and female. He conversed with *them*, showed himself to *them*, spoke with *them* at different times, gave *them* instructions, gave *them* his law, visited *them* repeatedly in *their* new home, in the place we call

the Garden of Eden, the garden that the Lord planted for man — eastward in Eden.⁵⁵

It is clear, then, that *Adam* (in other words, humanity) is being used by Snow for both male Adam and female Eve, not as reference to a single androgynous being.

Does Snow give us any further hints as to how he sees this? Indeed, he does, only one sentence after the quoted section, but we will not learn it from *Queering*:

I sometimes illustrate this matter by taking up a pair of shears . . . you all know they are composed of two halves, but they are necessarily parts, one of another, and to perform their work for each other, as designed, they belong together, and neither one of them is fitted for the accomplishment of their works alone. And for this reason says St. Paul, "the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord." In other words, *there can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united*, and there is not in all the eternities that exist, nor ever will be, a God in any other way.⁵⁶

A pair of scissors has two blades that work in unity. They work together, meshing, and are part of a larger whole, but there is no genderqueer gobbledygook here — "there can be no God except he is composed of the man and woman united"; "there [never] will be . . . a God in any other way."

Perhaps even this is not clear enough? "I have another description," continues Snow: "There never was a God, and there never will be in all eternities, except *they* are made of these two component parts; a man and a woman; the male and the female."⁵⁷

The term *God*, for Snow, is not the single androgynous being of queer theory's fever dreams. God does not consist of an amorphous blend of male and female essence or potentiality. God is "a man" and "a woman."

Despite *Queering*'s distortions, Snow certainly is "referring here to LDS teachings of a male god and a separate female god," and not at all "to a divine hybrid in a single God." When Snow says that "deity consists in man and woman," it is simply indefensible to read him as *Queering* does, if historical standards mean anything.

Queering says that "Snow describes this singular Adam as 'blended' and made of 'component parts'" (p. 85). In another affront to

scholarly norms, those terms are misused as they become bereft of their context. Consider Snow's discussion of mortal death as he compares it to a male and female participant in Godhood:

As I said, man was created, male and female, and two principles are blended in one; and the man is not without the woman nor the woman without the man in the Lord; and there is no Lord, there is no God in which the two principles are not blended, nor can be; and we may never hope to attain unto the eternal power and the Godhead upon any other principle. Not only so, but *this Godhead composing two parts, male and female, is also composed of two elements, spiritual and temporal*. Or in other words, two organisms; the one capable of dwelling within the other. The spirit dwelling within the outer tabernacle, answering to the spirit what our clothing answers to this body, as a covering and shield and protection. (p. 272)

The spirit teaches the tabernacle; and the spirit makes use of the tabernacle. When once it finds itself embodied in this tabernacle, it begins to use the fingers and hands of the tabernacle, and makes these its servants. The moment it is separated this tabernacle lies senseless. . . . It cannot set itself in motion, it cannot keep itself in motion; it is the spirit that does all this. (p. 273)⁵⁸

Godhood requires both *spiritual* (the spirit) and *temporal* (the physical) bodies. These are two separate things that work in close unity, "one capable of dwelling within the other." But it is senseless to read this as Snow saying that the spirit and body are entirely the same thing, or undifferentiated. There is a tight union, just as Paul requires a blend of man and woman for the Christian life — but Paul is not talking about an androgynous primordial Adam, nor a single being with male and female essences blended. And neither is Snow.

"Time," continues Snow, is "a term . . . used in reference to the short period belonging to mortality, while eternity is used in the measure of the time of the Gods. . . . But this course of God being 'one eternal round,' is marvelous in our eyes, and who can comprehend it? But we see, yes, *we see right before us to-day*, his image, man — male and female."⁵⁹

Snow summarizes all this by saying:

As I said, a union of two principles — the refined element

that is organized into spirit, and the grosser element we call tabernacle, organized as an outer clothing, the two united and blended together, and *the two principles, male and female, united. And for what purpose? Why, we see here, for the purpose of **procreation**; for the purpose of endless increase, and the building up, and enlarging, and extending the kingdoms and dominions of eternity. Else why are all these vast creations, the shining orbs, that indicate to feeble man on this lower earth the existence of these glorified worlds! Why all this if there were not the works of the Gods of eternity going on, and that continually?*⁶⁰

For Snow, the "blending" of male and female is about *procreation* (another not-inconsequential detail left out by *Queering*). This is as far from its "primal androgyne," or being "male and female simultaneously" (p. 85) as you can get. Snow even uses an analogy that makes explicit mention of male and female parents and children:

And we may say to every child, though there are fathers many and mothers many, but to you there is but one . . . Honor your father and your mother, and let your father and mother honor their father and mother, and this is the chain of the Priesthood, and power let down from the eternities to man on the earth. And may God enable us to grow in this chain, and climb higher and higher, onward and upward, and work ourselves up to the eternal power and godhead.

...

[God] is enlarging and extending his dominions, he is multiplying his kingdoms, and his offsprings, over which he is extending his benign influence, and blessings, and glory, and honor, for ever and ever.

...

[The divine purpose] is to gather out men and women, and locate and organize them, and classify them together, and instruct them, and lead them on and inspire them with faith, and build them up, and teach them the laws of life and health, and lift them up that they may exercise faith, and lay hold upon the promises of God and climb up upon this chain that is laid down from the Gods of eternity to their children on earth.⁶¹

Even as the 1878 talk stands, *Queering* has grossly misread and misrepresented it. It is difficult to be this wrong by accident.

A talk from 1885

Having seen how much additional text has been stripped away from Snow and how his meaning has been twisted beyond recognition, let's reflect on the duties of a serious historian. A decent historian helps contextualize a speaker's remarks. So says the American Historical Association.⁶² A decent historian, then, would perhaps question if Snow had spoken on the same topic elsewhere. Though *Queering* does not mention it, there is an 1885 talk that further contradicts the ideas imputed to Erastus Snow:

So that when the Father said unto His Son in the beginning, let us make man in our image and after our likeness, it conveys to us the idea that man was organized in the same form and general appearance of both the Father and the Son. This especially in relation to the man himself; for you will remark the wording of the text which we have read — "in the image of God created He him" — referring to Adam — "male and female created He them." You will perceive a difference in the language in regard to the creation of females.

Now, it is not said in so many words in the Scriptures, that we have a Mother in heaven as well as a Father. It is left for us to infer this from what we see and know of all living things in the earth including man. The male and female principle is united and both necessary to the accomplishment of the object of their being, and if this be not the case with our Father in heaven after whose image we are created, then it is an anomaly in nature. But to our minds the idea of a Father suggests that of a Mother: As one of our poets says:

"In the heavens are parents single?
No; the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me, I've a Mother there."⁶³

It seems unfair that we weren't shown this talk. As we've just seen, *Queering's* claim about the 1878 talk is mostly bluster: "Snow is not referring here to LDS teachings of a male god and a separate female god but rather to a divine hybrid in a single God" (p. 85). But as can easily be seen, Snow precisely and unequivocally taught in 1885

about two separate divine beings, one of each sex. He refers, in fact, to Eliza R. Snow's "O My Father"—a very explicit articulation of the idea. It turns out that *Queering* has cited some bits of Snow's 1878 talk, which can be warped if one excludes enough of it, while not even disclosing that the 1885 one exists:

Hence when it is said that God created our first parents in His likeness—"in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them"—*it is intimated in language sufficiently plain to my understanding that the male and female principle was present with the Gods as it is with man.* It needs only a common understanding of the organism of man and of all living creatures, and the functions of this organism to show the primary object of the Creator, and that is the multiplication of the species, the fulfillment of the commandment given, to multiply and replenish the earth, given to both man and beast. We need only to study the anatomy and construction of the human system, and to understand its powers and capabilities, to comprehend the object and purpose of the Creator.⁶⁴

We see again male and female plural Gods, the physical bodies of living things, and the emphasis on reproduction. All of this may be "in language sufficiently plain" to Snow's understanding and any reader not blinded by queer theory, but it will escape *Queering's* readers because they have not been given the necessary facts. For Snow, humans, animals, and Gods are all sexed. And the purpose of that sex is "the multiplication of the species . . . to multiply and replenish the earth," via "the anatomy . . . of the human system . . . [with] its powers and capabilities."

As in 1878, for Snow this is all ultimately about *procreation*—not gender fluidity.

A second talk from 1878

A competent historian thus needs to consider all the speaker's other statements. In the present case, this duty extends to a *third* instance of Snow treating the same ideas in terms fatal to *Queering's* ahistorical reading. In a talk given only about a month *before* the 1878 address vivisected by *Queering*, Snow said,

We must believe that man is made in the image of God, and consequently that we are of the same species as the gods.

However child-like and feeble we are in this condition of mortality, we are nevertheless descended from the gods, made in their image and after their likeness. . . . The fathers have told us we have descended from the Gods.⁶⁵

Queering's "singular God who is both male and female simultaneously" (p. 85) is again nowhere to be found. "Gods" is plural. Snow goes on to insist that the divine "we"⁶⁶ means others were involved in the creation:

And that when God said to his associates, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, he was not alone. And as Paul said, "there be gods many and lords many," but so far as we are concerned, there is given unto us one God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶⁷

Further, Snow says that Jesus

was in the likeness of his Father, and the express image of his person. And the accounts we have of Jesus represent him as being physically and in all essential parts, in the likeness of man. That he ate and drank, and partook of the elements that enter into the composition of our earthly tabernacle. . . . Otherwise there was, so far as his person and outward appearance was concerned, no essential difference between him and Adam's race generally.⁶⁸

Queering is a work of poor (or dishonest) history

The 1885 talk confirms beyond doubt that *Queering* has misrepresented Snow's thought, unless we are to believe the Apostle changed his mind between 1878 and 1885. That is implausible on three grounds:

1. Snow's meaning in 1878 is not what *Queering* claims, as I have demonstrated;
2. The 1878 and 1885 talks use the same terms, expressions, and scriptures to discuss the same topic. The 1885 address is a recapitulation of the materials and teachings Snow used in 1878; and
3. The second unmentioned 1878 talk *predates* the cited one — proving that Snow's thoughts have followed a consistent line throughout, both before and after the 1878 address twisted in *Queering*.

It is hard to imagine a more iron-clad historical demonstration that *Queering's* reading is tendentious.

After this disaster of interpretation and representation, it is worth asking—is Erastus Snow the best one can offer? It appears the author sought any scrap that could be twisted or deformed into a queer shape if one squints and doesn't look too closely. The bankruptcy of its treatment of Snow is compelling evidence that the author can find or manufacture nothing better. Someone less ideologically driven would have faced and reported the facts squarely.⁶⁹ As the American Historical Association warns,

The desire to score points as an advocate should never tempt a historian to misrepresent the historical record or the critical methods that the profession uses to interpret that record.⁷⁰

"This book looks to the LDS tradition," we are told, "as a resource of undoing gender and sexuality by revealing the lack of a coherent heterosexuality or heterogender in the tradition itself" (pp. 160–61). This is a *historical* claim—that the tradition is not coherent in some way, which is to say that certain facts about it are true or not true. And *that* requires reading texts and interpreting them. To claim there is a "lack of coherency" on these points explicitly commits *Queering* to representing the texts fully and fairly to argue for their incoherency. The author cannot simply give an incomplete account of Snow's thought and then claim *mission accomplished*.

There simply is no convincing way to read Snow's statements, in their full context, and conclude that they support *Queering's* account. Either this is lying to the reader, or the author is a poor reader indeed.

Part 2—What is the Point?

Wise readers might simply stop here—they have heard enough to see where this is going. Only camera tricks can make *Air Bud* into Michael Jordan.

Still, those who cannot turn away, drawn by the horrible fascination of a plane wreck or a so-bad-it's-good movie, might wonder what all this is in aid of.

Performativity and "queering"

One prominent queer theorist is Judith Butler, and *Queering's* debt to her is clear (pp. 4–5, 15, 19–20, 61–62, 124–25, 130, 142, 158).⁷¹

"Butler's main idea," wrote Martha Nussbaum, "first introduced in *Gender Trouble* in 1989 and repeated throughout her books, is that gender is a social artifice. Our ideas of what women and men are reflect nothing that exists eternally in nature. Instead they derive from customs that embed social relations of power."⁷²

Butler emphasizes "performance" as an analytical category that also allows for radical political and critical intervention. . . . Butler suggests that all identities — gendered and sexual, in particular — are forms of scripted performance that are always available for subversive reinterpretation.⁷³

This "subversive reinterpretation" gets at what is meant by "queering"—evidence of queer theory's inextricable link to politics and advocacy:

To "queer" becomes an act by which stable boundaries of sexual identity are transgressed, reversed, mimicked, or otherwise critiqued. "Queering" can be enacted on behalf of all non-normative sexualities and identities as well, all that is considered by the dominant paradigms of culture to be alien, strange, unfamiliar, transgressive, odd—in short, queer.⁷⁴

Despite its post-modern cachet, this approach is hardly new. It is a new cut of an old fashion, described by Isaiah as putting "darkness for light, and light for darkness . . . bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

Queering and parody

To "queer" the "Mormon cosmos," then, is a sort of parody in service of a political project: "Not surprisingly, postmodern[ism] and queer theory and practice share both a theoretical base . . . and artistic techniques (*irony and parody*)."⁷⁵

In one sense, therefore, we could decide that it is pointless to review a parody. A parody and its irony are not to be taken seriously, and any distortions, exaggerations, or misrepresentations are part of the fun — though they may have a serious point to make. (It would be obtuse to review Jonathan Swift's devastating satire of English policy toward Ireland by indignantly pointing out that no one in the English government was truly urging cannibalism. Then again, being an altogether more skilled writer fighting for a better cause, Swift didn't need to stoop to misrepresenting texts to make it appear as if the government

actually did say so.) As we have already seen, *Queering* is not a parody in that sense. It retains all the outward dress of an academic undertaking—for example, it quotes Erastus Snow and then argues that his words *demonstrate* a stream of androgyny in the concept of God and humanity.

If the reader is supposed to catch that all this is just a bit of exaggerated fun, it is probably too subtle. The disguised weaknesses of *Queering's* tactics *are* in some ways parodic of scholarship—but that is unlikely to be what the author is aiming for.

"This isn't a matter of making queer theory compatible or reconciled with Latter-day Saint thought," we are told. "Rather, it is a method or approach that may be taken to any system, including Latter-day Saint thought" (p. 5). Petrey explicitly states that the book's goal is to show that "in a delightfully perverse way, Mormonism could be a central example in a queer religious imaginary" (p. 2).

The end goal is to invert, send-up, or undermine its source. The plan is subversive, in Judith Butler's sense—to deconstruct and destabilize in support of what is ultimately a political undertaking. As *Queering* puts it,

The emphasis here on "queering" religion as a destabilizing verb rather than as an adjective suggests that there is not only an active role on the part of the interpreter but also no essence to a tradition, only its interpretation. . . . This is not a reclamation but a resignification. (p. 3)

Thus, *Queering* wants to appropriate Church symbols, history, and doctrine, and turn them to its own ends:

Judith Butler's concept of resignification refers to the process of reinterpreting and reusing existing language, symbols, and cultural norms in order to *challenge* and *subvert* their traditional meanings. . . .

Not only . . . does the project of redescription engage at the level of language and the possible, but such possibilities are already present. (p. 4, emphasis added.)

If the desire, though, is simply to appropriate symbols (not to reclaim, but to resignify) and not to argue for any compatibility or reconciliation—why does Erastus Snow need to be misrepresented? What does it matter what any Church leader, member, or text said about anything?

It matters because the point of deconstruction is to weaken and

call into doubt texts and the ideas upon which they are based. It is disingenuous to imply that one is only exploring “possibilities.” The whole *point* of deconstruction and queer theory is destabilization.

As Searle observed, deconstruction attempts to set up shop in the microscopic cracks and interstices of the text—the simple words supposedly freighted with hidden meaning and the text’s “marginal features.”⁷⁶ The industrious queer theorist is thus always on the lookout for these footholds and pry-points, imaginary or otherwise. The intent is to expose “the inconsistencies and possibilities embedded within the tradition” (p. 3). “Rather than starting from the normative system, queer theory then looks to what is repressed or ignored for clues about to where to begin any analysis” (p. 5).

This doesn’t happen with Erastus Snow—we aren’t shown what Snow ignores or represses. Instead, we’re told what he is supposedly saying *overtly*, even when it turns out he isn’t saying it. The only things ignored or repressed are the sections from Snow that *Queering* leaves safely unmentioned.

“These projects often blur the boundaries between properly constructed historical analysis and constructive theology” (p. 5). But doesn’t “properly constructed historical analysis” require at the very least that we not misrepresent our sources? There are ground rules of historical analysis—no matter how “logocentric” a committed post-modernist might regard them—that historians need to observe if they are going to drape their work in that idiom.⁷⁷ After all, *Queering* asserts:

The sources that I use to analyze these questions are largely the conventional, even canonical ones. . . . These voices are neither as stable nor as inhospitable to queer analysis as they might hope to be. (p. 6)

Note well, this is a *historical* claim—that the sources really are saying some things somewhere that really are “hospitable” to *Queering*’s worldview.

Queering clearly wants to have it both ways. It is steeped in post-modernism, which at times even insists that the meaning that texts have is only created by readers as they encounter the text. We see this when it says there is “no essence to a tradition, only its interpretation” (p. 3). Yet, it also implicitly wants us to conclude that the texts truly mean something helpful to its political project, and that this somehow proves something.

We’re told this approach is a means of “thinking”⁷⁸ through

issues—but if I must mislead you to get you to think, you might join postmodernists in suspecting that my discourse is about manipulation and power, not truth or genuine thought.

Queer theory seeks to “undo” “gender and sexuality”—vital and treasured absolutes in the worldview of believing Church members—using postmodern tools founded on the stance that discourse is about power. And power is a zero-sum game in queer theory’s telling. So let us have no nonsense about this being a benevolent or neutral exercise.

But is it a historically or textually supported exercise? If so, then its motives do not matter. If not, we can then return to the motives to understand why it stumbles so badly.

Part 3—God, Adam, and Genesis

We will now examine *Queering*’s approach to scriptural texts. We will consider three cases:

1. An attempt to make the Godhead “genderqueer” and “homoerotic.”
2. An attempt to undermine the Church’s reading of the creation (the abuse of Erastus Snow’s talk was part of this effort, as demonstrated in Part 1).
3. An attempt to make Adam androgynous, only later separated into male and female (Part 1 has likewise already seen Snow as an unwilling participant in this undertaking).

Case #1: A “Genderqueer” Godhead

Given that an embodied, sexed God is foundational to Latter-day Saint thought (p. 28), destabilizing that view is *Queering*’s first task: “There is much more ambiguity and fluidity of gender and sexuality in LDS narratives about the Godhead than has been previously recognized” (p. 28). Again, we have a textual, historical claim.

Given that the Church rejects the “divine essence” oneness of the creedal God of trinitarianism, *Queering* tells us:

Divine unity is rooted in solidarity, covenant, and relationship. This notion of divine love, then, fully open and expansive in its variety, not only is the basis for the Mormon challenge to trinitarian ontology but also may be the very basis of a queer approach to a projectionist Godhead. . . . (p. 30)

The ideal relationship in cisgender male-female marriage is difficult to distinguish from the relationship between the male members of the Godhead in LDS teaching. The metaphysics of “oneness” and “unity of purpose” describe the covenant relationship both between husband and wife and between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Godhead is explicitly invoked in relationship to male-female marriage. (p. 31)⁷⁹

So far, so good. The queering soon follows. Given the desire of Jesus that his followers be one, as he and the Father are one (John 17:21), we are told:

All relationships should follow this model. Seeing divine love between same-sex partners in the Godhead as the archetype for heterosexual love also reverses the foundations. Same-sex love is not a perverse counterfeit of mixed-sex love, but rather both draw on the same principles of unity, commitment, and effort to achieve oneness. (p. 32)

This is an enormous leap. Does anyone really fall for such rhetorical tricks if they don’t start out wanting to be fooled? Let’s examine the problems with it.

First, the argument relies on the fallacy of equivocation, reading all love as the same, when in fact there are many kinds of love (e.g., charity, brotherly love, and parental love, which are desirable but not sexualized, versus marital love, which is).

Second, to describe the Godhead as “same-sex partners” misrepresents the doctrine — certainly the Godhead are “partners” in a certain sense, but not in a sexual one however, as the term inevitably implies to a twenty-first century reader. Rather than “same-sex love,” the archetype is *familial* love between Father and Son. (Unfortunately for *Queering*, that entails heterosexual families and reproduction.)

Third, the Saints have never regarded “same-sex love” as anything but an ideal, if it means “two people of the same sex with love for each other.” It is when that love is combined with sexual desires and acts that the problems arise. We note that *Queering* talks about “unity, commitment, and effort to achieve oneness” — which were never the problem. We’re told that it is “difficult to distinguish” between a male-female marriage and the relationship of the Father and Son. It isn’t. For one, the former properly includes sexuality and reproduction; the latter does not because it is parental.

For Latter-day Saints, the parent-child relationship between Father and Son is not a metaphor; it instead describes their relationship as literally as it does that of John Adams and John Quincy Adams.⁸⁰ It is strange (but evidently necessary) to have to spell out that parent-child incest—as either corrupt symbol or horrific literal reality—has nothing of the holy or divine about it. This is certainly true in a Latter-day Saint cosmos and would be true in virtually any human society not afflicted with queer theorists.⁸¹ Use of that kind of subtext is troubling, to say the least.

Beyond parody

Still, the text will not remain *sub-* for long. *Queering* quotes Latter-day Saint philosopher Blake Ostler:

Blake Ostler's description of the all-male Godhead, for instance, holds some resources for imagining this divine unit among these men: "It is the relationship of the other that inspires the divinity in the divine persons. For they are divine because they love with a self-giving love so that they are one in each other. What distinguishes the Mormon view most from the conventional tradition is that the divine nature is possessed by more than one instance of that nature and is shared with others through a freely chosen relationship of indwelling love." (p. 32–33)⁸²

It was here that I realized that queer theory truly is beyond parody:

The *homoeroticism* here describes long-standing LDS views on the Godhead. *Ostler frequently uses language to describe this divine love as penetration, indwelling, inside, in, and opening.* He explains, "They actually are 'one' 'in' each other. The intelligence, knowledge, power, light, truth or life that proceeds from God's presence is like a spiritual force-field that penetrates into each of the divine persons and imparts the same spiritual energy and life to each of the divine persons." Drawing on the Gospel of John to make this point, as Ostler does for divine love . . . is also significant since this gospel has a man whom Jesus loves at the center of its story, *replete with homoerotic themes.* (p. 33, emphasis added)

Difficult as it is to believe, *Queering* takes Ostler (and Jesus' love for a disciple) as grist for the homoerotic mill the author is attempting to

build. Ostler said “penetrating” and “indwelling,” to describe the oneness of the Godhead, and in queer theory, that’s all it takes to be off and running. This has all the intellectual sophistication and insight of pre-teen boys sniggering when someone says *but* or *under where*.

Ostler also joins Snow and Kimball as an author whose meaning has been twisted by omission. Just prior to the sentence quoted, Ostler makes his meaning clear: “The divine persons exist in a unity that includes loving, interpenetrating, and intersubjective *awareness of another*.”⁸³ Authors simply can’t protect themselves from a reader so determined to be so wrong — “Being misunderstood is one thing, being willfully misunderstood quite another.”⁸⁴ (As one commentator wrote of similar queering to create a homosexual divinity, this is “the worst kind of literalism.”⁸⁵)

Queering gets worse:

The *interpenetrative love shared here* [D&C 35:2] between three men, which makes them “one” (flesh?) “in” one another, calls into question the heteronormative logic of the divine realm in Mormon thought. Further, this passage notes that it is through this love that kinship with God is formed, “that they may become the sons of God.” Kinship here is not merely a biological relation but a relationship of becoming formed intentionally and through practice. The *Father and the Son are equally one “in” one another, and a disciple joins their homoerotic fellowship* by sharing their unity with them and with others. (p. 33)

This is a spectacular example of deconstructionist tactics: here a supposedly “significant” and revealing word from the first misrepresented text (Ostler) is used to distort a second (the Doctrine and Covenants). Once again, it seems sadly necessary to point out that becoming a redeemed “son” through adoption ought not to involve parent-child incest any more than Jesus’s literal Sonship does. Coyly sneaking “flesh?” between parentheses doesn’t change this.

In short, hearing “interpenetrating love” or “Father-Son” and thinking “homoeroticism” may tell us a great deal about the author and his method — but nothing useful about the text, Church theology, or the thought of Ostler or anyone else.⁸⁶

It is disturbing to see father-son love reflexively and repeatedly read in sexual terms. But even this supposed homosexual subtext cannot be permitted by *Queering* to imply masculinity or fixed sexual/gender

categories (we will forgo a detailed discussion of the incoherence of seeing same-sex eroticism while denying the fixity and reality of biological sex):

The notion of interpenetration is a point to critically evaluate. This phallogentric description of God's presence as a force that penetrates in order to impart life into other divine persons belongs to a specifically masculine-gendered metaphysics. The homoerotic elements of this relationship need not be occasion to reinstall androcentrism, gender essentialism, or even the phallogentrism of the penetrative logic ("in-ness") of love. Love, it seems, is meant to unite, not divide. A reformulation of such imagery, while preserving the notion that love accommodates otherness, is one resource for thinking about how all kinds of bodies, persons, subjectivities, and identities may be incorporated into LDS articulations of deity. (p. 34)

The analysis of the Godhead as an idealized same-sex relationship need not reify the notion of maleness and femaleness as an unreconstructed binary. (p. 48)

We are once again struck by the realization that if this is the best the author can offer — "critically evaluate" seems mighty generous — the evidence really is overwhelmingly against him. It all reads like a bad joke.

Ostler argues that "the divine persons are essentially related to each other in a genetic sense as members of the same divine family. . . . [Jesus] is the Father's *Son* — the perfect reflection of the Father's likeness and image because he is begotten as issue of the Father."⁸⁷

Queering takes the same material and incredibly concludes: "The very insistence that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are 'male' produces an acutely homoerotic scene of divine love" (p. 48). If the reader finds this consistent with any sort of legitimate intellectual or historical methodology — or at all insightful, illuminating, persuasive, or honest — I simply cannot help him.

If you truly believe a dog can shoot free throws — well, reasoned argument won't get far. But reason and logic are logocentric and so targets of queer theory as well.

Does God have a body or a sex?

Most non-LDS commentaries see God as unembodied or unsexed

in Genesis, albeit with some potential ambiguity in the background, as the *Yale Anchor Bible* discusses:

In this crescendo of the poem, God's creation of 'adam in his image is now shown to include the human duality of sex and gender, which yet still corresponds to "the image of God." The meanings of these parallel phrases and concepts are not explicitly articulated, leaving a residue of ambiguity regarding how the human duality of male and female articulates "the image of God." God in [Genesis 1] does not have sexual features, but these differential qualities — human and divine, male and female, unity and duality — are here interrelated. . . . The humans' ability to reproduce — involving their sexual complementary as male and female — is entailed in their creation in God's image. (p. 135)

The text may be reticent for good reason, perhaps because of the topics of God's body and sexuality, but the implications of this text go beyond simple obscurity. (p. 136)⁸⁸

Others see the text more strongly against God having a sex and/or a body.⁸⁹ That said, there are some that insist on God's corporeality and his maleness:

Does the image [of God] refer primarily to the spiritual nature or to the bodily form . . . of man? The idea of a corporeal resemblance seems free from objection on the level of OT theology; and it is certainly strongly suggested. . . . God is expressly said to have a "form" which can be seen . . . and that they ever advanced to the conception of God as formless spirit would be difficult to prove.⁹⁰

Without question, in the broader background of this [Genesis 1] statement about God's image in man there is the notion of Yahweh's human form.⁹¹

A closer look reveals that Genesis 1 does mean that: humans were made in the bodily image of God.⁹²

God had the human bodily form *first*. Humans did not project it onto God. God made humans — men and women — in the image and likeness that God already had.⁹³

We may not share the text's assumption that God has a human form. . . . But the Bible's first description of human

beings asserts that we were created, male and female, in the bodily image of God. We bear God's form, not first in our brains, spirits, or souls, but in our entire male and female embodied selves. Sex is included in this. This is already implicit in how Genesis goes out of its way to affirm that both men and women were made in God's image. . . . Here, male and female bodies are both godlike and sexual, and there is no contradiction between the two.⁹⁴

We [moderns] can no longer assume, as the text's authors did, that God had a body. The Bible itself emphasizes this idea much less than many texts of its time. And even Genesis 1—in shifting to plural language at the crucial point ("let *us* make humanity in *our* image")—averts its eyes from God's body. The focus is not on God's body. That is assumed. Instead, the focus of this text is on the creation of male and female embodied humans as the climax of creation and the extension of God's power and blessing.⁹⁵

There is thus more support for the Latter-day Saints than *Queering* concedes, and certainly more support than *Queering* has successfully conjured for itself. Opinion may be divided about God's sex and body, but an incestuous homoerotic genderqueer trinity is pure fantasy, and a distasteful one at that.

Case #2: The Creation

There are at least four creation accounts recognized in the Church—Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the temple endowment. *Queering* claims that

it should be clear that the temple rites do not resolve these interpretive issues by providing some fixed point, nor should these private rites play a role in the public interpretation of Genesis 1–3 as found in the Proclamation. Rather, the temple version of the creation is one more alternative that adds instability to the interpretive tradition. (p. 74)

This conclusion is anything but "clear." Joseph Fielding Smith, for example, evidently saw the temple as uniquely normative. Of Genesis, Moses, and the temple, he wrote, "I think the temple account, which was given by revelation, is the clearest of all of these."⁹⁶ I think most Saints see it thus.⁹⁷

In any case, *Queering* benefits from the fact that most Church members will not engage in public discussion or disputation about the temple endowment:

It is a sacred rite, and recipients covenant not to discuss it publicly. While there is room for interpretation about what specific parts of the ceremony must not be disclosed, devotees and many scholars tend to err on the side of caution. There are some important gender critiques of the ritual. Yet, exegesis of the ritual is complicated not only because it is a sacred, secret rite but because the rite as text is unstable. The endowment ritual has undergone revisions most recently in 1990 and again in 2018. Changes include gendered pronouns and significant changes in gendered covenants. For these reasons, I leave it out of my analysis of LDS interpretations of Genesis 1–3 here. (p. 74)

Given the interpretive fantasies of an interpenetrative homoerotic Godhead to which readers have already been witness, they can heave a trembling sigh of relief to hear that the author will not subject the temple to similar distortion. No changes to the temple ritual affect the teaching of a literally sexed Godhead or humanity, despite an attempt to imply it.

Perhaps the postmodern quest for hidden subtext was stealing over me, but by this point I began to suspect that if the temple was more amenable to distortion, it would not have been spared.

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

Queering is particularly keen to deconstruct Latter-day Saint readings of the creation, since Genesis is used in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*.⁹⁸

However, few have analyzed the source texts in scripture alluded to in the Proclamation. . . . Does the text of Genesis and the various LDS canonical iterations of Genesis support the interpretation of the Proclamation that Adam and Eve are archetypes of fixed, binary gender identity, roles, and heterosexuality? In all cases, I argue that the text and its interpretative history do not preclude gender and sexual fluidity. (p. 72)

As before, we see that the intent is not a simple repurposing of symbolism or doctrine to describe a different cognitive world. Instead,

we have what might be called a historical-textual approach — a claim that foundational texts do not mean what the Church and its leaders claim they mean. And the clear goal is to delegitimize the Church's articulation of its doctrine. This is not a benign endeavor.

Incompatible?

Queering declares the four accounts contradictory or incompatible, and there are certainly ways in which they could be thus read (pp. 73–77). We must not ignore, however, that the Saints have overwhelmingly tended to view them as *complimentary*, with the temple seen as the best and most authoritative account, with all others read in its light.⁹⁹

Even if there were ways of reading Genesis in isolation that supported a rejection, by queer theory, of heterosexuality and binary gender, Church members would not have read it that way when the temple taught otherwise. It is difficult to see how the most sacred, important rites would not have always been uniquely authoritative. I certainly know of no case in which a Church leader says otherwise.

Why does it matter? Because *Queering* wishes to deconstruct the orthodox ways of reading Genesis in part through appeals to historical-critical claims about the Genesis text while claiming that even the temple cannot save the orthodox interpretation.

The post-modern credentials of this undertaking are a bit shaky. The only reason to quote the Bible and claim that the Church's reading is wrong or unstable is because the Bible is seen as normative in some way. It is a text with authority about what one ought to do or believe — and that requires an author (be it God or human) with a point of view that can be discerned and understood. A queer theory that appeals to the "proper" exegesis of the Bible (or the claim that their opponents have misread the Bible) is sneaking the author and his intentionality through the back door. Either that, or the appeal is a pure power play, a cynical effort to manipulate.

It has long been recognized that the upshot of such efforts (and likely not an incidental one) is that deconstructionists

effectively strip the Bible of any stable meaning so that it cannot state a fact, issue a command, or make a promise. [By extension, the same logic applies to Latter-day Saint scriptures, temple worship, and leaders.] Furthermore, without the author to serve as touchstone of the distinction between meaning and significance, every interpretation

becomes just as authorized a version as another. A text that cannot be set over against its commentary is no authority at all. Finally, biblical authority is undermined by the instability of meaning because, if nothing specific is said, the text cannot call for any specific response. Interpreters can give neither obedience nor belief to texts that lack specificity. If there is no meaning in the text, then there is nothing to which the reader can be held accountable.¹⁰⁰

As we will now see, even if we follow *Queering* and eliminate the temple's vital interpretive role from consideration, its reading of Genesis is dubious. *Queering* uses the tropes and style of an academic, historical, "we can actually read texts and be better or worse at getting at what they mean" approach. If it is sincere in this undertaking, then its approach can be evaluated and critiqued. If it is insincere—merely putting on a show of critical assessment to disguise an infinite regress of textual play or a determined ideological advocacy drenched in eisegesis—then it is not to be trusted. It promises "a close reading of [the] text" (p. 77). We will assume it means what it says and engage on those terms.

Genesis and genre

Many have pointed out that different texts have different expectations and conventions that control how they are written and read. In a word, *genre*.¹⁰¹ *Queering* largely ignores this aspect of the text, and instead engages in "queer hermeneutics" (p. 71).¹⁰²

Jan Fokkelman argued passionately for an appreciation of genre and the coherence of the biblical text as it now stands:

How often do we hear that there is contradiction in the text, or that there is a tension that must be a trace of a complex genetical process, or that there is too much repetition, another sure sign that more than one writer has worked on the text? And as soon as one encounters a textual seam, a doubling, or a locus of tension, one is supposed to stop listening and to forge hypotheses about the background of the text, the intention of the author, and especially about its origins, growth and redactional reworkings.¹⁰³

Queer theory is obsessed with these textual seams and points of tension—the heritage of deconstruction's focus on the marginal features of the text. In this case, that approach reflects a particularly

naïve, tone-deaf approach to the Bible, because its genre and narrative style use just such traits to communicate meaning.

"No precise designation for [narratives] has been agreed upon; *saga*, *legend*, *myth*, *folktale*, *etiology*, *story*, and *theological narrative* have all been candidates. The designation *story* (or *story of the past*) is perhaps most helpful in determining how these materials functioned."¹⁰⁴ They "express . . . a people's understanding of reality . . . not simply of facts . . . but of the inner meaning of those facts."¹⁰⁵

"Like many ancient creation myths, this familiar story is more a mythic description of the dynamics of present human life than an attempt to reconstruct early history," writes one.¹⁰⁶ This will be no surprise to temple-going members, who there experience a ritual drama that uses creation to articulate their own past, present, and future.¹⁰⁷ Genesis 2 in particular is written "in the fashion of narrative literary forms."¹⁰⁸

There are certainly Saints who have read Genesis and parallel texts as literalistic history — but if *Queering* is going to appeal to the text, it must be read in its genre, and not in one mistakenly imputed to it. To willfully violate what one author has called the "covenant" between communicator and listener as regards genre is to assure misunderstanding.¹⁰⁹

One dictionary of the Old Testament agrees:

One of narrative criticism's most significant contributions has been the discovery and description of the distinctive character of Hebrew narrative. Diverse cultures do not tell stories in the same way. The fact would seem obvious, but in practice the chasm between the conventions encoded in biblical narrative and those that configure Western literary tradition has not been readily apparent. . . . Hebrew narrative is marked by its distinctive appreciation for symmetry, expressed most often through myriad forms of *repetition*. Repetition of vocabulary, grammatical structures, events or images unites diverse events and signals their common import.¹¹⁰

If *Queering* is going to appeal to historical-critical data, the failure to grapple with genre is one of its historical missteps, with significant consequences.

Genesis: two accounts?

One of the earliest conclusions of Old Testament textual critics was that Genesis contains *two* creation accounts.¹¹¹ *Queering* assumes that view, which serves the postmodern approach to texts very well. It provides another opportunity to claim that the accounts do not all say the same thing: “The account of the creation of human beings in the first creation story in Genesis 1–2:4a is significantly different from the one in Genesis 2:4b–3” (p. 77).¹¹²

Queering adopts the standard “Documentary Hypothesis”¹¹³ approach to the text: “This problem is well-known and may be explained by identifying different sources behind the final text, the ‘Priestly’ source for Genesis 1 and the ‘Yahwist’ source for Genesis 2–3. The differences between them are instructive for the question of how to think about the place of sexual difference in these creation accounts” (p. 77). The author will later be more blunt, labeling them “contradictory stories” (p. 79).

This tidy division of the Creation into disparate sources that fundamentally disagree has, however, come under sustained attack for decades. It can no longer be assumed as the default critical position. A 2005 dissertation noted, “It was so easy to affirm a diversity of sources through genre or content that the possibility of an editor or author who saw them as interconnected was essentially dismissed.”¹¹⁴ “We should not speak of a second, parallel story of creation,” wrote Walter Brueggemann. “Rather, [Genesis 2] is a more intense reflection upon the implications of creation for the destiny of humanity.”¹¹⁵

Many authors have emphasized that, regardless of the sources used, the author of Genesis has placed the two accounts together in the final text. Whereas early source critics saw this as a “patchwork” approach where disparate and even contradictory sources were simply preserved side-by-side, many modern exegetes insist that the author saw no contradiction or inconsistency between them:

The exact shaping power we find in Chapters I and II [of Genesis] renders it highly probable that [the final authors] were conscious of the fact that by shaping and by creating structures their own contribution was considerable, if not decisive.¹¹⁶

“While the two accounts have different origins and transmission histories, they have been brought together in a theologically sophisticated fashion to function *together*.”¹¹⁷ “In spite of the initial difficulty in

establishing the inner relationship between [Genesis 1 and 2] both on the oral and literary levels, it is clear at some period in the composition of the book of Genesis that the two accounts were linked in one continuous narrative."¹¹⁸

In 2013, the *Oxford Bible Commentary* observed: "The general trend in OT study at present is towards a greater interest in the present form of the text . . . [which] is often more coherent than an older generation of critics was willing to accept, even though evidence of reworked older material often remains apparent."¹¹⁹

Queering is thus reading anachronistically,¹²⁰ as did the giants of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German biblical scholarship:¹²¹

The biblical writers and redactors . . . had certain notions of unity rather different from our own, and that the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence.¹²²

Genesis 1–2 is sophisticated enough that if we think we have spotted a genuine contradiction, we are probably the ones who are confused, and not the ancient author.¹²³ One dissertation cautions against "an emphasis on the *contemporary* relevance of Genesis 1–11 for social equality, gender ideologies, and ecology. It is in this latter emphasis that aggressive socio political and advocacy criticisms have taken hold."¹²⁴ But, it urges, "it is crucial in our analysis that we strive to understand the text as it would have been read and understood by the ancient community."¹²⁵ That's certainly how the Church uses it in the Proclamation, while *Queering* is of the "aggressive socio political and advocacy" stream.

Discussions of the essential unity and harmony of Genesis 1–2 are legion.¹²⁶ Hamilton, in 1990, stated,

The rhetorical features of Gen. 1–11 are so distinctly woven into one tapestry as to constitute an unassailable case for the unity of the section, and most likely composition by a single hand. In particular they find chiasmus in these biblical accounts. . . . The detection of two Creation stories . . . based on different names for deity and inconsistencies loses its appeal. The case for homogeneity is much greater than the case for heterogeneity.¹²⁷

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 are thus now seen by many as "two complimentary portrayals of creation."¹²⁸ The Jewish Publication Society

says that “Chapter 2 is not another creation story. As such it would be singularly incomplete. In fact, it presupposes a knowledge of much of the preceding account of Creation. Many of the leading ideas in the earlier account are here reiterated, though the mode of presentation is different.”¹²⁹ *The Oxford Bible Commentary* declares, “It is hardly correct to call ch[apter] 2 a second and alternative creation story. . . . [Creation of the world] is introduced in order to provide a setting for the main story.”¹³⁰

The *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* points out that “contemporary studies in literary theory have taught us that a passage’s context is the most important determining feature of interpretation.”¹³¹ For Genesis 2, that context is Genesis 1.

Thomas Brodie puts it more colorfully:

The two creation texts (Genesis 1–2) are indeed very different, but in the context of ancient literature they are also deeply complementary: together they represent the two basic literary forms for depicting creation. . . . As such, and in their content, these creation narratives form a unity. But much modern biblical criticism was virtually founded on the separating of these two texts (Genesis 1–2), and biblical studies as a whole became contaminated by the example of that foundational barbarism.¹³²

Bill Arnold emphasizes, “They may have come from different authors originally, but Gen 1 and Gen 2–3 have been edited together in such an intentional way as to produce a binocular or synoptic view of creation.”¹³³

Iain Provan agrees: “Whatever the truth of the process by which Genesis 1–2 came into their current form, they certainly do not sit on the page *now* as two creation stories. They exist now as one entity, albeit looking at creation from slightly differing perspectives.”¹³⁴ The recent *Anchor Yale Bible* translation concurs.¹³⁵ Childs urges,

The [Genesis 2] material thereafter functions, not as a duplicate creation account, but as a description of the unfolding of the history of mankind as intended by the creation of the heavens and the earth. The structure of the book has thus altered the semantic level of chapter 2 by assigning it a different role. The [Genesis 2] material functions on the level of figurative language, once-removed now from its original literal sense. The remarkable success of the redactional

linkage is attested to by the history of interpretation which had little difficulty reading the chapters as a unity until the Enlightenment.¹³⁶

There is irony in queer theory — whose postmodernism opposes and denies virtually everything the Enlightenment stood for — now insisting on Western canons of strict logical consistency, or demanding that people reflexively accept an approach to Genesis derived from Enlightenment categories of thought. How strange to insist we embrace Brodie's "foundational barbarism."

Concludes Bird:

The union of the [Genesis 1] and [Genesis 2] accounts of creation as successive episodes in a comprehensive statement of origins requires the canonical interpreter to observe both the order of the component accounts and the tension between them. It also requires attention to new meanings that move beyond the original terms and intentions of the individual accounts as they are brought within a new and larger context of interpretation.¹³⁷

In sum, the Latter-day Saint habit of reading the accounts as a complimentary whole is well justified and may even represent the majority view today. This does not mean it is *true* — but the point is that many informed observers of diverse ideologies believe other than *Queering*. To make anything more than ideologically driven assertions, it must offer an actual argument and show why the other side is wrong. We are instead given no good reason to accede to *Queering's* presentist reading, and no good tools in the references for determining if we are being misled.

Is there a source in this text?

Unsurprisingly, *Queering* wants to queer the idea of sexual essentialism — the idea that biological sex has something fundamental and unchangeable to say about human or divine nature independent of human culture or convention.¹³⁸ It gets an early start by queering even God's name: "Elohim — the Israelite deity whose name is queerly morphologically plural but functions as a singular when it takes a verb" (p. 77). The text is said to be "immediately ambiguously gendered," in part by God's creative act in Genesis 1:

Elohim speaks in the plural: "Let us make *adam* in our image, according to our likeness" (1:26). The "image" of Elohim is

reflected in the male and female *adam*. There is no sense that male and female are preexistent forms; rather, they are contingent, created features that appear at the moment of the creation of the world. (p. 78)¹³⁹

Remarkably, *Queering's* section on Genesis 1–2 contains only six sources¹⁴⁰ for the author's reliance on textual interpretation:

1. References to later Jewish and Christians sources that saw the primal Adam as androgynous (p. 79n42).¹⁴¹
2. A feminist reading arguing for “intersex creation” (p. 79n43).¹⁴²
3. Two queer-theory sources on the passage (p. 77n39).¹⁴³
4. On the translation of *adam* (p. 78n40).¹⁴⁴
5. On the translation of *rib* (p. 78n41).¹⁴⁵
6. On NRSV translation of “in the image of God created he them” vs. “he him” (p. 77n38).¹⁴⁶

I will briefly assess each in the following sections.

Later Jewish and Christian sources (Source #1)

Later Jewish and Christian readings are of limited utility for determining what the original author(s) believed and are of no value in assessing Latter-day Saint readings. If *Queering* just wanted any old texts for queer readings, these quite late ones would suffice without involving Restoration theology. (If the Saints appealed to a late rabbinic reading that supported their doctrine on sex, one suspects this would not pass unchallenged.) But the underlying goal is to queer (destabilize and delegitimize) the Church's doctrine.

Feminist reading (Source #2) and Queer Theory (Sources #3a and #3b)

The feminist reading and two queer-theory sources (#2, #3a, and #3b) are also of limited help—they merely tell us that other gender theorists, using the same tactics and techniques utilized in *Queering*, achieved similar readings. But that is precisely the point at issue—are these readings *justifiable* from the text if we use the criteria of history and critical study? Are they anything but postmodern *ex nihilo* conjuration from the void?

Source #2 by Mieke Bal contains no novel argument for an androgynous Adam. It simply appeals to and repeats a previous feminist reading by Phyllis Trible,¹⁴⁷ who is even said by a later analyst to be

"not interested in the intentionality of the author."¹⁴⁸ It is thus not clear why her approach should carry any weight in the case being made in *Queering*. Tribble is frequently cited by later commentaries, but almost always to explain why her reading is ill-founded.¹⁴⁹ A detailed treatment by Susan Lanser was published a decade later. Lanser's paper rebutted both Tribble and Bal by name. Neither author comes off well if one cares what the text likely meant to its ancient audience.¹⁵⁰

(Source #3a and source #3b's queer-theory references are examined below in Case #3, which treats Adam's alleged androgyny.)

Appeals to Hebrew lexicon (Sources #4, #5, and #6)

The fourth note appeals to a paper by David Clines¹⁵¹ to argue that "*adam* is not a proper name, as it has become in common English usage, but a gender-neutral term meaning a human being that takes the definite article 'the': the *adam*" (pp. 77–78).

This is correct so far as it goes, and not controversial for our purposes. The same paper, however, contradicts a key part of *Queering's* thesis. *Queering* insists that the being created in Genesis 2 is not initially male. Clines disagrees completely:

The human in question, from the beginning of the narrative, *is* a man, a man with a woman/wife (eventually) but the text, for its own good reasons, does not want to call him a "man" [*adam*] but "the human" [*ha-adam*]. . . . The fact that the human *is* a man, and *is* Adam, does not mean that [*ha-adam*] *means* a man, any more than it *means* Adam (the proper name).¹⁵²

It thus turns out that this is another source whose inconvenient details *Queering* does not disclose. (We will again defer full treatment of Adam's alleged androgyny to Case #3).

Queering's sources #5 and #6 likewise appeal to text-critical scholarship on the meaning of Hebrew words. Sources #4–6 therefore imply (a) that the original text matters more than the translation because it gets us closer to the proper meaning; (b) that one can understand the original text to assess its proper meaning and translation; and (c) that a translation can convey the meaning of the original with varying degrees of accuracy. All these implicit assumptions are foreign to queer theory and postmodern readings generally.

Such an appeal to historical-critical information cannot, with consistency, ignore data that run against its theories. It cannot claim its

translation is more accurate and then refuse to consider whether more apt cultural translation or historical-critical concepts might undercut its views.

(This is *not* to say that one must accept every argument so advanced. Each must be assessed on its merits. But one cannot use an approach on the one hand and then rule it out as irrelevant as soon as it becomes inconvenient on the other—if rigor is valued.)

It thus remains clear that although, at times, *Queering* wishes to leverage historical-critical perspectives, it will warp its method as its agenda requires. There is no intellectual consistency here, no fundamental method. If “queer hermeneutics” (p. 71) is simply a free pass that allows arbitrary appeals to anything one likes without regard for completeness or self-consistency, then it is valueless.

Putting a basketball jersey on a dog won’t really let him score slam dunks.

Case #3: An Androgynous Adam?

All the above leads to a key issue in *Queering*’s exegesis—does Genesis make *adam* initially an androgynous being, only later differentiated into sexes? Avoiding sexual essentialism for Adam and Eve is arguably even more important for the purposes of *Queering* than denying it to God. As the Proclamation demonstrates, for humans to be fundamentally male or female is fatal to the entire worldview of queer theory.

Queering tries to find sexual ambiguity in Genesis 1:

As the text explains, “In the image of God he created him; male [*zakar*] and female [*nəqebah*] he created them” (Gen. 1:27). The text is immediately ambiguously gendered. First, the human being is singular (“him”), and then the human being is plural (“them”). Second, the human being seems to be male in the singular but both male and female in the plural. (p. 78)

Queering argues further of Genesis 2:

Many interpreters have conflated the two creation stories in an attempt to resolve this problem. In this conflation, following Genesis 1:27, the *adam* is both male and female, an intersex creation, who is subsequently divided in the second creation account in Genesis 2:21. Such an interpretation that the *adam* is a “primal androgyne” has a long history

in both Jewish and Christian contexts. In this interpretation, the woman was "taken from" (2:22, 23) the man because the *adam* was both "male and female" before this moment. Indeed, the interpretive weight must be placed on the claim that the woman was "taken from" the *adam*, that the separation between male and female occurs only at that moment. (p. 79)

As noted above, *Queering* provides a footnote to later commentary that sees Adam as a "primal androgyne." Unfortunately for the queer argument, it would be difficult to find a topic about which textual critics have been more scathing, or more generally united. (Complete unity is a rare thing in biblical studies.) As summarized in one dissertation on Genesis 2, "That some would argue for man and woman being created from an original bisexual, or asexual being (around [Genesis] 2:23) is unfounded and historically naïve."¹⁵³

Next I consider Genesis 1 and 2, in turn.

Genesis 1 androgyny

On this theme in Genesis 1, scholars have been relatively univocal:

The persistent idea that man as first created was bi-sexual and the sexes separated afterwards [he here cites Jewish material referenced by *Queering*] is far from the thought of the passage.¹⁵⁴

The plural in [Genesis 1:]27 ("he created them") is intentionally contrasted with the singular ("him") and prevents one from assuming the creation of an originally androgynous man.¹⁵⁵

It is an important part of [Genesis 1's] presentation that the division of the sexes belongs to the immediate creation of humanity. A consequence of this is that there can be no question of an "essence of man" apart from existence as two sexes . . . there can only be anything like humanity and human relations where the human species exists in twos. . . . Every theoretical and institutional separation of man and woman, every deliberate detachment of male from female, can endanger the very existence of humanity as determined by creation.¹⁵⁶

Hebrew 'adam is a generic term for humankind; it never

appears in Hebrew in the feminine or plural. . . . The term encompasses both man and woman, as shown in [Genesis 1:]27–28 and 5:1–2.¹⁵⁷

The idea is not unknown in ancient literature that man was first created bisexual and only subsequently were the sexes differentiated. *Such is clearly not the meaning here.* Rather, the verse affirms that God created in his image a male and a female 'āḏām. Both share the image of God. Sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead it is a gift of God.¹⁵⁸

That the species *adam* is still understood as collective/plural and bisexual (i.e., sexually dimorphic) is evident in [the] recapitulation of 1:27 in 5:2 and in [the] explicit referral of the name/common noun to the plural object: “Male and female he created them; and he blessed them and named *them adam* (5:2).¹⁵⁹

[Genesis 1] is not concerned with sexual roles, the status or relationship of the sexes to one another, or marriage. It describes the biological pair, not a social partnership; male and female, not man and wife. The specification is not dictated by any prehistory that told of a separate creation of man and woman. . . . dependent upon [the] overarching theme of the sustainability (fertility) of the created order. . . . Sex at its most fundamental, biological level is not to be despised or deprecated. It is God's gift and it serves God's purpose in creation by giving to humans the power and the responsibility to participate in the process of continuing creation by which the species is perpetuated. . . . To be human means also to be male or female (*the plural of [Genesis] v. 27 also works against any notion of androgyny*).¹⁶⁰

This systematic change in the two most important texts about the creation of 'āḏām as zākār ur'qēbāh [male and female] *do not support the thesis of an androgynous being* in the [Genesis 1] account of creation. The [Genesis 1] writer needs a differentiation in male and female because it foreshadows the blessing of fertility of v. 28.¹⁶¹

It is better to translate *hādām* not as “the (sexless) earthling/groundling” but as “the man.”¹⁶²

There is no evidence that *haadam* suddenly gains gender at the end of the chapter. Rather, his song in Gen. 2:23 presupposes that woman was taken from him when he was already a "man."¹⁶³

Without reference to "male" and "female" the reader [in Genesis 1] would intuit the gender of human beings. However, with gender stipulation the narrator not only gives sexuality special weight but also anticipates their ensuing roles in the blessing. . . . The [Septuagint] follows this shift with τὸν ἄνθρωπον [ton anthropon], "humankind." This makes better sense than presuming a bisexual, androgynous, or even two persons.¹⁶⁴

There is no possibility that the verse is teaching that humans were first androgynous (having both male and female physical characteristics) and afterward were separated.¹⁶⁵

Robert Alter translates Genesis 1:27 as "God created the human in his image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." His translation notes read,

The term 'adam [in verse 26], afterward consistently with a definite article . . . is a generic term for human beings, not a proper noun. It also does not automatically suggest maleness . . . and so the traditional rendering "man" is misleading, and an exclusively male "*adam*" would make nonsense of the last clause of verse 27. . . . In the middle clause of . . . verse [27], "him," as in the Hebrew, is *grammatically but not anatomically masculine*. Feminist critics have raised the question as to whether here and . . . in chapter 2, 'adam is to be *imagined as sexually undifferentiated until the fashioning of woman, though that proposal leads to certain dizzying paradoxes in following the story*.¹⁶⁶

One of *Queering's* own queer theory sources (Source #3a) discusses Genesis 1 and essentially concedes that it cannot be read in *Queering's* needed way. It then abandons any further discussion of Genesis 1. The source states:

The [Genesis 1] account notes at the first appearance of humanity its twofold sexual division [which thus does not support *Queering's* reading]. . . . The binary sexual differentiation of humankind seems, therefore, to be part of God's

orderly cosmos from the beginning. . . . Because the linguistic structure of Genesis 1:27 does underscore a binary division of humankind (“male and female he created them”) and moves immediately to an emphasis upon reproduction, the text easily lends itself to interpretations that valorize the relation between woman and man and make that relation key to the understanding of human ontology and vocation. . . .

The primary point I wish to make, however, is that whatever the original authorial intentions behind Genesis 1:27 might have been, the structure and content of the text as it stands do seem to encourage interpretations that grant a foundational status to binary sexual division as a crucial defining feature of humankind.¹⁶⁷

Even the Family Proclamation would not argue with much of that. Aside from complaints about theologians who have used the text to conclude negative things about homosexuality and a weak appeal to Greek and Roman evidence that men who had reproductive sex did not always abstain from same-sex activity (the relevance of which for ancient Judaism seems marginal), the source provides little support for the treatment of Genesis 1 by *Queering*.¹⁶⁸ It concedes far more than *Queering* does but is probably wise to do so.

Ironically, the queer author complains of Tribble: “It has to be recognized that her argument veers perilously close to the rhetoric of ‘gender complementarity’ so often used in support of heterosexist positions.”¹⁶⁹

Tellingly, then, *Queering*’s sources do not even agree with each other about the implications of their ideologically-driven readings.¹⁷⁰

Genesis 2 androgyny

What about Genesis 2? The *Anchor Yale Bible* writes in terms that will resonate with any temple-going Saint:

ha’adam [the adam] is the ancestor and symbol of all humans. At the same time *ha’adam* is, as the story unfolds, a single **male** character. The first mention of ’adam in 2:5—in his absence—states his role “to work the soil.” This is a predominantly male role in the biblical world. The singleness and implicit or incipient maleness of the first man becomes foregrounded when Yahweh sets out to make a partner for him. . . .

Some scholars have tried to de-patriarchalize the figure of *ha'adam* by emphasizing the collective, gender-neutral meaning, sometimes arguing that *ha'adam* has no sex or gender at all until the creation of woman. . . . But to regard *ha'adam* as a sexually polymorphous or unsexed creature is to miss the multivalence of this character, who is both "the human" and "the man." In other words, the de-patriarchalized interpretation treats the word as if it were simply a floating signifier, independent of the story's implied meanings or "implicature." In the context of its creation, *ha'adam* is implicitly a symbolically collective "humankind" and a single "man," with the dual meanings circulating in different proportions throughout the story.¹⁷¹

This analysis serves as an overall summary of the commentary on these verses. We've already seen one of *Queering's* sources contradict it on this point.¹⁷² Skinner states that "the notion that the first human being was androgynous, and afterwards separated into man and woman . . . finds no countenance in the passage."¹⁷³ This assessment is cited with agreement by Gordon Wenham.¹⁷⁴ Lanser is very specific on this point:

A fairly standard process of inference is at work . . . in the conventional reading of *hā'ādām's* maleness in Genesis 2. Let me postulate that when a being assumed to be human is introduced into a narrative, that being is also assumed to have sexual as well as grammatical gender. The masculine form of *hā'ādām* and its associated pronouns will, by inference, define *hā'ādām* as male. I am not suggesting that one *cannot* read *hā'ādām* as a sex-neutral figure; I am saying that readers *will* not ordinarily read Genesis 2 in this way. Gendered humans are the unmarked case; it is not *hā'ādām's* maleness that would have to be marked but the *absence* of maleness. In this instance . . . two reinforcing systems of inference are at work: the inference brought, a priori, to the reading of Genesis 2:7 that a living creature named with masculine pronouns will be male, and the inference drawn, a posteriori, from the reading that since the creature being created as a helper is "woman," then the creature for and from whom she has been created is already "man." As far as I can determine, this process of inference operates as

fully in Biblical Hebrew as, say, in modern French, which is also a language of dual gender. . . .

Ironically, Bal's [*Queering's* source] own description of this moment unwittingly reproduces precisely the androcentrism of Genesis 2 itself: "God brings the woman 'to *hā'ādām*,' she says, 'who, by the recognition of *the other*, assumes *his own* sexual identity" (emphasis mine). This focus on the male subject is reinforced by the narrator's use, in the very next two verses (2:24 and 2:25) and on three occasions thereafter, of the possessive structure *hā'ādām wē'īštō* — the (hu)man and his woman.¹⁷⁵

Some further examples:

We should not conclude either from [Genesis 2] or from 1:27 that the first human being was androgynous. . . . To suggest that the primal being was an androgyne is to read into the text what is not there.¹⁷⁶

[An androgyny] theory requires some gymnastics. . . . God does not propose to divide an earth creature into two beings who are counterparts for each other. Rather, God decides to make a counterpart for the 'adam, for the already existing (hu)man being. . . . He is not an earth creature before the separation and a male human being afterwards. . . . [When he meets Eve he] has not changed physically; sexuality has not been newly created. . . . the first creature in the story is a (male) man from the beginning.¹⁷⁷

That the story [of Genesis 2] is *told* from the point of view of the man and is thus clearly androcentric in construction does not alter this basic tone of the account as a tone of mutuality and equality.¹⁷⁸

If we are reading Genesis 2 along with Genesis 1, we have already been told in Genesis 1.27 that the '*adam* . . . is both male and female.'¹⁷⁹

Bird provides a fitting conclusion:

Presented as an individual (*ha'adam*, with the article, in contrast to [Genesis 1's] collective '*adam*, without the article) and envisioned as a male (specifically, a peasant farmer), the name by which he is designated betrays his true identity — and the problem of his singularity. For although he bears the

appellation of the species, he does not fully represent it. The personification is defective in its limitation to the male alone. The remainder of the chapter describes in dramatic action the overcoming of that defect and the resolution of the tension latent in the initial presentation.¹⁸⁰

It would seem the Church's doctrinal view is on much firmer ground than *Queering* will allow. It is definitely on firmer ground than is *Queering* itself.

Queering's queer-theory source (Source #3a) says of Genesis 2:

[Genesis 2] can also be seen as serving the interests of hegemonic heterosexuality. . . . The story as a whole seems not only to insist upon binary sexual difference but also to underscore the inevitability of sexual reproduction. . . .

Yet there are certain features of this text that make its support for the heterosexual contract somewhat problematic. It is interesting to note, for example, that the text finds it necessary to specify in 3:16b that the woman's "desire" or "longing" will be directed toward her man, and that this specification of heterosexual desire occurs in a list of those features of human existence that result from the pair's transgressions. What are we to make of this surprising and often ignored statement? A reader might very well conclude from it that heterosexual desire on the part of the woman is itself a consequence of—or even a punishment for—the woman's misdeeds rather than an original component of her created nature. . . .

And it is striking that the text as worded seems to display a certain amount of insecurity about the woman's desire for the man, having to insist upon that desire as something that God ordains while also allowing a reader to reach the conclusion that such desire is a consequence of the woman's rebellion, a consequence that might not have been any more certain than other such consequences as, for example, the woman's increased pain in childbirth, the man's having to toil and labor as he works a recalcitrant earth, or the snake's having to crawl upon its belly.¹⁸¹

With allies like this, *Queering* needs no opponents. The "insecurity" about heterosexual desire is only visible to those seeking to undercut the pre-Fall sexual complementarity that is everywhere implied and

stated. God's "very good" creation can hardly proceed to "be fruitful and multiply" (for animals *and* humans) if the two sexes are intended to have no mutual desire or instinctual drive toward reproduction.

Queering's source also appeals to Tribble and Bal for an androgynous reading, but we have already seen how weak and ill-supported they are.¹⁸² There is nothing novel in its treatment of the same issues. The author even goes on to acknowledge the saliency of the critiques of Tribble and Bal's reading and concludes by rather lamely claiming the Genesis 2 account is "riven with tensions and contradictions."¹⁸³ This is *Queering's* approach, but as we've seen, such a reading is anachronistic and flat.¹⁸⁴ The supposed problems and "contradictions" come mainly from trying vainly to make the text say something it resolutely doesn't want to say, and reading it in a presentist style foreign to its genre.

The queer theory source then moves on—with some evident relief—to a completely different tactic:

It may be productive to read this text in dialogue with the work of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz. For, in a provocative study indebted to Freud, Eilberg-Schwartz argues that the discourse of the Hebrew Bible is overdetermined at numerous points by an attempt to deny the implications of an unconscious homoerotic relation between Israel's male deity and that deity's male worshiper. Is it possible, then, that the representation of Yahweh's search for an appropriate partner for Adam is the reflex of a felt need, on the part of the text's writer, to preclude the possibility of this sort of homoerotic relationship?¹⁸⁵

The answer, in a word, is "no." The study is doubtless "provocative," but that hardly means reasoned or plausible. ("Provocative" even seems calculated to sound like praise without having to commit to an opinion on the actual merits of an argument. "It *may* be productive to read"—well, is it, or isn't it? And if it is, why don't you tell us why?)

Regardless, Eilberg-Schwartz and concerns about Butlerian performativity occupy the remainder of the queer theory essay.¹⁸⁶ This is much more in *Queering's* vein, and it is no more convincing here. Eilberg-Schwartz's oeuvre is entitled *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*. That, and its debt to Freud, perhaps tell us all we need to know, at least in a family publication. It demonstrates, at least, the level of erudition that *Queering* offers.¹⁸⁷

Mark S. Smith's treatment of Israelite monotheism contains a blunt castigation of this stunted approach: "It is unnecessary and it is not supported by *any* biblical text to argue that monotheistic Yahweh involved either androgyny or homoeroticism. Such views appear eisegetical and seem based on a wooden reading."¹⁸⁸ *Queering* uses this source (p. 82n45) but didn't listen.

The debt to Freud also demonstrates one of the many enormous self-contradictions in queer theory and the other post-modernisms — they are fiercely proud of their radical skepticism about almost everything, while often enthusiastically swallowing, wholesale, the pseudoscientific bilge of Freud and fellow-traveler Ludwig Feuerbach.¹⁸⁹ (Feuerbach's central claim was that ideas about God were nothing but humans projecting themselves onto the divine.¹⁹⁰ Karl Marx was deeply enamored of this supposed "solution" to the issue of religion, though he extended and critiqued Feuerbach's approach.¹⁹¹)

Anyone who thinks Feuerbach's or Freud's just-so stories explain anything is hard to take seriously.¹⁹² Their approaches are the poster children for unfalsifiability.¹⁹³

After all we've seen, can it *really* be fairly said with *Queering* that "as *many* interpreters have noted, even the version in Genesis is *far more compatible* with gender fluidity than gender essentialism" (p. 77, emphasis added)?

No. And, the dog can't really slam dunk, either.

No unanimity

We must acknowledge that a few of the sources considered above contain some marginal support for *Queering's* reading. Noort writes that "describing the human being as androgynous does not fit into the scope of the narrative" in Genesis 2. He also argues that the "ʾādām in Gen 2:7–17 is 'neither man nor woman,'" which helps *Queering's* case.¹⁹⁴ But, he also says that in Genesis 1 that there is no androgyny.¹⁹⁵

Provan likewise sees Genesis 2 as featuring an initial "protohuman" or "earthling," but also emphasizes that the reader will already have encountered Genesis 1, in which there is no androgyny.¹⁹⁶ Thus neither of these authors supports *Queering's* reading of Genesis 1, though agreeing somewhat with its take on Genesis 2.¹⁹⁷ In any case, we have just seen the many authorities who reject androgyny in the primordial ʾādām in Genesis 2.

Provan also avoids calling the ʾādām in Genesis 2 a "male" since he argues (like *Queering*) that we require gender differentiation before we

can speak meaningfully of “male” and “female.” He also wants to avoid the idea that males preceded females.¹⁹⁸ (This idea has certainly been abused throughout the history of interpretation to give men power over women.) This avoidance is not without a double edge, however, since it also deprives feminist readers of the astute observation that God creates in an ascending hierarchy with woman as the crowning finale — if the initial *’āqām* is not male, then males and females come into existence at the same moment of the *’āqām*’s fission.¹⁹⁹

Demanding both sexes be created before either can be described is a weak argument in the context of Latter-day Saint theology, which has embodied Heavenly Parents. Adam and Eve are, thereby, hardly the first male and female. Rather, sex differentiation long predates the Genesis creation. And Adam has just seen all the animals paraded in front of him to be named — are we to presume that *they* were not already sexed? The text will not support it.

Besides, how dim must we make the first human, to think that he/it sees each paired species, and yet could not conceive of him/itself as male without ever having seen a human female? Part of the pathos of the scene — and the reason for the man’s joyful burst of poetry upon meeting the woman — comes precisely because of what Adam knows was missing. The Biblical account would be the poorer without this dimension.

Holotypes

Queering is keen to find any shred of gender ambiguity and triumphantly brandishes the fact that in the JST revision of Genesis (Moses 2:27) God and Jesus’s sexed bodies are said to be the “image” after which male *and* female bodies are created (p. 80).

Note that *either* scenario can be recruited to the queer reading. In Genesis, God is not given a sex and this is claimed to support a queer reading:

The “image” of Elohim is reflected in the male and female *adam*. There is no sense that male and female are preexistent forms; rather they are contingent, created features that appear at the moment of the creation of the world. (p. 78)

But, when Joseph Smith makes God’s sex utterly unambiguous in Moses, then *this* is flipped around and queered as well. And in the bargain, *Queering* can claim that there are thereby “new contradictions

and gaps" (p. 79) between these passages, which supposedly just goes to prove their interpretive instability.

Using a get-out-of-jail-free card like this is nice work if you can get it, but it is transparently self-serving. The answer is determined upfront. It is also deeply uninformed to think that any fuzziness or ambiguity or "queerness" is introduced by creating a female body that uses a male as the template (the Father's and the Son's, in this case).

The confusion is not surprising, since queer theorists seem to know little about biology and accept even less.²⁰⁰ The idea, however, is simple for those without an ideological need to deny sexual essentialism.

Each species described by science has a *holotype*. As the American Museum of Natural History puts it, this "is the single specimen that a researcher designates as the name-bearing representative of a new species."²⁰¹ So, if a new species of mammal were discovered (say a canine gifted at hoops, species *Airus budis*), a *single individual* (female or male) would be designated the species holotype by its discoverer. All other classification, study, and identification of other members of the species must refer to that single individual.²⁰²

For those species for whom males and females are greatly dissimilar, "researchers sometimes designate an *allotype* — a specimen of the opposite sex of the holotype." This is done much more informally, and is not even officially regulated or tracked.²⁰³ (We can well imagine a critical theorist in high dudgeon if females *could not* be encompassed in a male "holotype" definition.)

Just as a modern scientist can define a species by a single exemplar of *either* sex, so does God act as the "holotype" for humanity in Moses. Sexes are a fundamental *part* of species. It's almost incoherent to think of species without this core aspect. There must be a Mrs. Air Bud, even if we've never met her.

No biologist is so ill-informed (or so incompetent) as to be unable to recognize the female of a species based on a male holotype specimen unless there are massive anatomical differences — which there assuredly are not in humans. One would not (as both *Queering* and a few commentators seem to think) even need to have *seen* a female example of the species to: (1) identify the holotype as a novelty; (2) recognize that the holotype was male; (3) predict that a female must also exist; and (4) have a decent idea of what she would be like. The biologist, like Adam, has seen many animals, and their sexed complementarity is a given.

I daresay most nonprofessionals would not struggle either, save in

a few unusual cases. No ancient audience, with their intimate knowledge of domestic and prey animals, would have any trouble either. If a detail-oriented field like present-day biology can get by like this, the premodern scripture surely can.

Genre, again

In one of the twentieth century's magisterial commentaries, Gerhard von Rad underlined how vulnerable Genesis 2 was to misappropriation and misreading by those ignorant of its conventions:

The text of [Genesis 2] presents a *narrative*. It is not doctrine (at least not in direct sense), but rather it tells a story, a part of a traveled road that cannot be traversed again. One must therefore bear in mind that here a factual report is meant to be given about facts which everyone knows and whose reality no one can question. They concern the field upon which the story of man with God is played; and the means of presentation, which serve to make the process more tangible, are correspondingly different from those applied by the historian. We read a narrative that proceeds amidst the simplest and clearest imagery; but that, of course, does not mean it does not intend throughout to report actuality. The story certainly also contains a didactic element, but much less directly than does [Genesis 1]; it is concealed in the facts that are placed before the reader. And here is the source of so many false expositions. The narrative demands that we follow the way it goes precisely. . . . There is perhaps no other biblical text . . . whose witness proceeds from a road as narrow as a razor's edge. One misses the road completely if one does not entrust oneself to it completely.²⁰⁴

But it is this trust that queer theory simply will not permit itself. It clings to postmodernism's "hermeneutic of suspicion."²⁰⁵ To obsess, as it does, about precisely where in a linear temporal sequence of an origin story the sexing of humanity occurs will virtually guarantee that it will be misled, because that is simply not how this type of story works.²⁰⁶ Queer theory's vision of a proper reading wants answers that the Genesis author would never have given to questions he would never have asked.

Claus Westermann was the other twentieth-century titan of Genesis commentary and he, too, emphasized chapters 2–3:

The passage has shown that there are certain extremes which are to be avoided. Among these are approaches which are purely literary-historical or belong merely to the history of religions as well as those which begin from an already formulated ideology and from fixed dogmatic principles.²⁰⁷

What could better describe queer theory than the last? He continues:

The text of Gen 2–3 is complex and contains many different elements; account must be taken of this complexity. All attempts to explain Gen 2–3 which look for the key to the explanation in one motif or in a single detail of the text are of their very nature questionable. The history of exegesis has shown that the starting point must be the text as a whole and its structure, and that only exegesis based thereon leads anywhere.²⁰⁸

Bird is likewise adamant about the genre and its conventions:

Of fundamental importance for an understanding of the author's statements about sexuality is the literary form and structure of the narrative. In the [Genesis 2] account, story and the storyteller's art replace the liturgical cadences and technical terminology of priestly declaration [in Genesis 1]. Circular movement marks the narrative structure, in contrast to the linear progression of Genesis 1, and dramatic action is employed to describe states and relationships. *Time has no meaning here and sequence of action no ontological significance. The first and final acts of creation together describe a single action*; the creation of humankind is not complete until the woman stands beside the man, manifesting that essential aspect of humanity hidden or latent in the first exemplar. Only when the pair appear together on the stage do the divine-human interaction and the consequential action of the story begin.²⁰⁹

Summing up

Ironically, even if we grant *Queering's* reading of an androgynous or unsexed Adam for the sake of argument, we can now see that the scripture undermines the argument that sex isn't foundational to God's creative work. Critical commentary is unanimous that the sexual nature of humans, and the vital complementarity inherent in heterosexual

pairing is the whole point: “The intention is clear: the process of creation itself explains how man and woman belong together.”²¹⁰

Queer theory presents a ludicrous spectacle as it ties itself in knots to eke out even a brief sliver of primordial time in which there was a potential transient “non-sexed” humanity.²¹¹ Meanwhile the Bible goes to extraordinary lengths to celebrate, affirm, and insist upon the necessity and divine origin of sexed humanity²¹² and heterosexual marriage.²¹³

Queer theory is reduced to plucking the grit from the gears of the story and then relying on false bravado to claim that such scraps were the *real* reason for the machine’s construction. Its decision to ignore genre conventions makes nonsense of the text, and it can only find its own distorted reflection in it. In short, to read Genesis 2 as *Queering* does is to fail exegetically on almost every level. *Queering* strolls into a game of chess and insists on playing Candyland — a game where the outcome is predetermined from the start and the players consume imaginary empty calories.

Part 4—The Double Standards

We could pursue the foregoing type of analysis indefinitely. Even if the reader’s patience is not already exhausted, mine is. If you choose to read *Queering*, prepare for lots more of the same. If you’ve seen one *Air Bud*, you’ve essentially seen the sequels.

The most maddening thing about postmodern theories is how thoroughly saturated they are with double standards. They assure us confidently that no one can be confident about much. They are skeptical of almost everything except themselves and their tribe. They tell us all discourse is about unrecognized power plays — and proceed as if they are revealing hidden truths with no ulterior motives: “The cliché that one often ends up where one started points out how assumptions about gender might shape how one reads these texts” (pp. 71–72). Very likely true, and certainly a cliché — but doesn’t that apply at least as much to *Queering*?

Postmodern theorists offer us logical arguments containing logical flaws to convince us that logic is impotent.²¹⁴ They insist that communication acts can only reflect the recipient’s culture, bias, and power quest, not the mind or message of the author — and then brandish textual proofs when someone’s reading disagrees with theirs.²¹⁵

The author of *Queering* provided a beautiful example recently: An online post offered an early Christian work as proof that God has a

body. Our queer theorist took issue: "Posts like this are historical, philological, and theological malpractice. Its fine to look for precedents of LDS theology in ancient Christianity, but such efforts need to not distort it for cheap apologetics."²¹⁶

What can one say but, *Amen*? I'm even tempted to say, "It's fine to look for precedents of [queer theory] in LDS theology, but such efforts need to not distort it for cheap [queer] apologetics." Otherwise, what you get is "historical, philological, and theological malpractice"—as demonstrated.

This sounds a lot like someone who believes that texts have an inherent meaning to them, and that we need to consider historical and philological factors before we opine about what they mean. It sounds like he thinks one could misrepresent texts and make them say things they don't say, and that others can tell when we're misrepresenting them.

He has further posts arguing that pro-gun advocates are guilty of "an incredibly tortured misreading of the second amendment"²¹⁷ and that Donald Trump has offered "as clear of a document to justify authoritarianism as you can possibly imagine."²¹⁸

Couldn't we reply that he just hasn't "queered" Trump's blueprint adequately to appreciate that it is really a map for egalitarianism? I suspect that would meet spirited resistance. Why should his reading of the Second Amendment be accepted in preference to an allegedly tortured pro-gun interpretation? Queer theory cannot provide a cogent answer—in fact, if consistent, it should welcome the queer, tortured reading above the supposedly clear and commonplace.

Quite simply no one lives—no one *can* live—their life as if queer theory or the other Critical Theories are actually true. I suspect everyone—like *Queering's* author, apparently—believes deep down that texts *do* have an intended meaning, and that we *can* usually discern what that is to a reasonable degree, and that it *is* wrong to torture the text or distort it for ideological purposes, at least if it is for an ideology we dislike.

(If you doubt it, refuse to pay the theorists their salaries and watch how quickly they become believers in a definitive meaning of written contracts. There will be no kibbitzing about a hidden subtext to be queered to support contract-breaking instead of contract-keeping, even if thieves *are* an oppressed, underrepresented minority.)

After all, queer theorists write texts arguing for their views—a strange choice if no one can understand their meaning.

Everyone—including *Queering's* author—would be upset if *their* texts were misrepresented. He'd be outraged if I "queered" his book and claimed it praised Adolf Hitler or Donald Trump. We all *know* that this is the case. And yet, we're expected to humor the fiction that they really believe the ideology that pervades their books.

Power and influence

Not only is queer theory and its attendant worldview hostile to the core of Latter-day Saint practice and theology, but *Queering* goes out of its way to describe its prominence and legitimacy:

Today, queer studies of religion may be transgressive in some quarters but at the same time enjoy a claim to the academic mainstream. Most major seminaries and divinity schools employ scholars who specialize in these methods or offer classes on them, for instance. University presses publish this work, and there are numerous subgroups at the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion that deal with these topics. These are hardly fringe movements anymore, at least within the elite and rarefied halls of the academic study of religion. (p. 3)

By this description, key elite areas of our culture have embraced queer theory and its metaphysical commitments. It is, as we have seen, an ideology that is all-consuming and does not brook rivals. It is philosophically founded on the premise that all discourse is a zero-sum exercise of power over societal rivals.

A maligned minority

The Church of Jesus Christ has been a minority faith since its founding. Their lot was persecution and repeated attempts to force conformity with the religious, political, economic, and social views of the dominant culture.²¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, anti-Mormons used cultural power to mis-define what members were and how they should be viewed. They did this by systematically misrepresenting Church doctrine and texts, attempting to shame them, and encouraging those on the cultural fringes of the Church to act as spokespeople or paragons of how a sensible "Mormon" "should" behave.

While the Church and its members became more tolerated as the twentieth century progressed, American society has retained

a significant core of bigotry and bias against them.²²⁰ Conservative Protestants go to great lengths, for example, to deny the Saints' self-understanding as Christians.²²¹

Matters have improved from the days in which members of the Church were jailed and disenfranchised because of their beliefs, to say nothing of violence committed against them. But being a member of the Church remains a substantial liability in the American political arena, for example. Warned one researcher, "Aversion to Mormons is still an important force in American public opinion, and if anything it is increasing."²²² Fully 18% of the electorate would not vote for a "Mormon" as president as of 2015.²²³ Gay presidential candidates were ruled out by 24% of voters in the same survey. Queer theory is keen to paint itself as defending the weak and marginalized LGBTQ+, but Church members cannot be said on these grounds to have much advantage.

In terms of those who have negative perceptions of them, "Mormons . . . have fallen below evangelical Christians, Muslims, and atheists."²²⁴ David Smith noted in 2014 that although there is hostility against Mormons from both the secular left and religious right, "it is the former that has increased heavily over the last five years."²²⁵

Queer theory is clearly part of this ideological coalition on the secular left. "If anti-Mormonism is not more widespread than other prejudices," warned Smith, "it is certainly more socially acceptable."²²⁶ As of 2023, "One quarter of Americans hold an unfavorable view of Latter-day Saints,"²²⁷ which is about the same percentage as those who believe same-sex relationships are morally wrong.²²⁸

Media

We can be glad that the caricature and cruelty previously directed toward homosexuals in media and entertainment is much reduced from what it once was. Many modern media properties are careful to include gay characters and to paint them in a favorable light. (Some would argue that this is even done when it ill-serves the story.)

Similar consideration does not apply, however, to members of the Church. Any religious believer tends to be stereotyped or maligned in modern Hollywood, but the Saints continue to be singled out for even worse treatment.

A Broadway musical that mocks Church members and their beliefs continues to be an enormous hit.²²⁹ In 2025, a Netflix miniseries portrays the Saints as exceedingly violent, blames Brigham Young for the

massacre at Mountain Meadows, resurrects the murderous Danite trope, frames Church members as domestic terrorists, blames them for attempting to exterminate Native Americans, says that the Saints saw violence as a way of spreading their faith, and paints women as powerless victims of a brutal patriarchy.²³⁰

A 2024 horror movie starring Hugh Grant murdering sister missionaries made over \$58 million²³¹ with an aggregator reporting 91% approval from critics.²³² One sister missionary who suffered a real-life stabbing attack in her apartment wrote, “The more realistic portrayal of these missionaries made the doctrinal and social inaccuracies more nuanced and harder to identify for those unfamiliar with the Church. . . . With no consequence, Hollywood creates a false narrative and presents \$52 million worth of moviegoers with a distorted perception while hiding behind ‘artistic license’ as an explanation.”²³³ (As we will see below, Petrey is a fan of the movie.)

As Terry Givens concluded of the twenty-first century media environment, “Beneath the trendy veil of appreciative diversity and difference lurk the familiar nineteenth-century slurs.”²³⁴

Who has the power?

As queer theorists are quick to point out when discussing *sexual* minorities, living as a minority of *any sort* in a host society has unique challenges.²³⁵ One psychologist—highly educated, and a voluntary immigrant to the United States from his native Philippines—asked:

“Why do I think that anything made in the United States is better than anything made in my motherland of the Philippines?”

“Why do I believe that speaking fluent English without a Filipino accent is a marker of intelligence and higher social status?” “Why do I feel ashamed and embarrassed to admit that I am proficient in Tagalog and that I am Filipino?” and “Why do I stay away from the sun and use skin-whitening products to make my skin lighter?”²³⁶

His answer was “internalized oppression”; that is: “a devaluation or inferiorization of one’s self and one’s group.”²³⁷ The problem does not arise in a vacuum—“oppression occurs when one group has more access to power and privilege than another group, and when that power and privilege is used to maintain the status quo (i.e., domination of one group over another).”²³⁸

Who has the power in the case of queer theory and the Latter-day

Saints? *Queering* begins with its author detailing how mainstream and broadly disseminated queer studies has become in academia (pp. 3, 13). It certainly sounds like it has power and cachet. His book, after all, has been published by an academic press. His previous book, which misrepresented the historical record egregiously, nevertheless received the Best Book Award from the Mormon History Association.²³⁹ The author has also been the editor of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, which gave him yet more power and influence in Mormon Studies. He is framed as an expert by the press.²⁴⁰ In sum, he can subtly or overtly affect how the academy and the world sees the Church and its members.

Now, a thought experiment—how welcome would someone with *my* views about sex and gender be in *his* gender studies class, *his* academic religion class, or the university department that *he* chairs? What are the chances that I could ever be hired in that environment, and what are the chances that I could keep a job if I did get one, without constantly self-censoring?

After all, the author tells us that my faith—the most important thing in my world, the core of my identity—“is deeply imbued within its contextual values of patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism” (p. 3). What’s more, this isn’t a problem only in the distant past, but “Mormonism” has an “ongoing, active participation in such a culture” (p. 3). Those don’t sound like good things. Who would even want to associate with such a culture?

Don’t worry, though—despite all the racism, patriarchy, and so forth, “the tradition is unable to be reduced to and caricatured by this description” (p. 3). Well, thank goodness we won’t be stooping to reductive caricature! All “the tradition” needs is a little queering. The theology can then be salvaged from itself.

Who has more influence on how elite opinion sees the Church—the average member in the pew or Petrey? The question answers itself. This would *seem*, at least at first glance, to be a case where oppression is possible, maybe even probable by the lights of Critical Theory. Queer theory teaches us that *all* discourse is fundamentally about power—and that includes books written by a gender studies professor about a religious group for the academy. I *don’t* think all discourse is about power, but I’m willing to believe some *do* think this and *do* act accordingly.

Intellectual colonialism

The point is simple — *Queering* is part of an attempt by a dominant elite and evangelizing worldview to colonize the thought and practice of an unpopular minority group.²⁴¹ If this kind of thing were happening to a more fashionable minority instead of the Saints, critical and queer theorists would regard it as morally reprehensible. The double standard is striking. Oppression, it seems,

is “the act of imposing on . . . others . . . a label [such as “racist” or “sexist”], role experience . . . that is unwanted, needlessly painful, and detracts from physical or psychological well-being . . . [such as] . . . degrading job roles, ridicule, and negative media images and messages that foster and maintain distorted beliefs.”²⁴²

One example is “anti-Mormonism”:

In the case of anti-Mormonism . . . non-Mormons hold power and privilege over Mormons (i.e., non-Mormons are more likely to be in positions of power), and that position is used to maintain power and privilege. . . . This justification is often based on the supposed superiority of one group over another. Again, in the case of anti-Mormonism, non-Mormons deny access to resources based on the argument that Mormons are abnormal, deviant, pathological, and are abominations [racist, heterosexist, patriarchal, their leaders wanting homosexuals killed, etc.] — inferiorizing labels and perceptions imposed onto them by the dominant group.²⁴³

Now, I must immediately ‘fess up. The authors didn’t quite say this — in fact, instead of “Mormon” and “non-Mormon,” they used the terms “nonheterosexual” and “heterosexual,” respectively. *Mea culpa*. The argument is otherwise unchanged. I trust that if Petrey had read the paragraph as it originally stood, he would be nodding enthusiastically — no one should be treated that way.

So why doesn’t he bother to apply the lesson to a *different* minority group? “The paradigm of oppression . . . can be applied to any group with a common identity and an historical narrative bound up in oppression.”²⁴⁴

One need not have a recent “forceful entry by a foreign group” to see these dynamics at work. All that is needed is a “society . . . characterized by social inequalities, cultural or worldview imposition of

the dominant group [like queering your theology and misrepresenting your leaders and history], . . . devaluation of oppressed groups' cultures or worldviews, and stereotypical recreation of oppressed groups' identities by the dominant group."²⁴⁵

Franz Fanon on colonialism

Franz Fanon was born on the island of Martinique, one of the French Caribbean colonial possessions. He served in the Free French Forces in World War II and later practiced psychiatry in Algeria during the revolts against French colonialism that convulsed that country during the 1950s.

Now, I hardly endorse all of Fanon's views or choices—I don't admire his Communist sympathies (though I think I understand their appeal to him) or aspects of his personal life. He was, however, a keen observer and extraordinarily articulate. His psychiatric case studies from victims on both sides of the Algerian wars are harrowing reading, and they betray a deep sensitivity and humanity.²⁴⁶ His analysis of colonialism is still a landmark. He described various phases of the colonial experience, and it is worthwhile to see what they might teach us here.²⁴⁷

Phase 1: "Forced entry of a foreign group into a territory to exploit its natural resources"

In intellectual terms, this is precisely what *Queering* is attempting. It says as much—the intent is to take “sources” that “are largely the conventional, even canonical ones . . . reinterpreting them from a queer perspective and challenging heteronormative representations within the faith” (p. 6). It will “look at theological questions and texts, not to reify their authority but to *destabilize the interpretative traditions* that have been built up around them” (p. 157, emphasis added).

Amusingly, *Queering* even says that Ostler's work “holds some resources” (p. 32) it can use. These “resources” from “the LDS tradition” (p. 160) are then misappropriated and distorted for its ends.

At best, then, Latter-day Saint thought is a raw material of which the natives are not making proper use. It is necessary that their academic betters intervene. All that bauxite is just *sitting there*.²⁴⁸

Petrey's manipulative use of statements by Church leaders is emblematic of this phase. When he disagrees with leaders, he is willing to misrepresent them and works mightily to problematize or queer

their discourse, regardless of the facts. Yet he also pushes a list of quotes from them that support the use of other Bible translations.²⁴⁹

If he regards apostolic teachings as authoritative, why does he strain out the gnat of a matter, like which Bible version to read, while swallowing the camel of legitimizing gay sex? It looks rather cynical — he obviously doesn't regard two centuries of unanimous apostolic teaching on chastity as inspired or binding.²⁵⁰ Then, despite his manifest disdain for and distrust of these leaders, he is willing to exploit his co-religionists' respect for them to push what he wants.

A trusting theological native might assume that anyone quoting leaders as authoritative has friendly intentions. But at base, the Saints' convictions and norms are made just another fulcrum for alien priorities. Fanon describes the typical reactions:

The native's reactions are not unanimous. While the mass of the people maintain intact traditions which are completely different from those of the colonial situation . . . the intellectual throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture.²⁵¹

What then happens?

The native intellectual has thrown himself greedily upon Western culture. Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche, the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own. He will not be content to get to know Rabelais and Diderot, Shakespeare and Edgar Allen Poe; he will bind them to his intelligence as closely as possible.²⁵²

Trade *Western culture* for *secular queer theory*, *Shakespeare* for *Judith Butler*, and *Diderot* for *Derrida*, and we have a close match (though the queer theorist gets shortchanged compared to the Algerian).

Phase 2: "Recreate the indigenous culture as defined by the colonizer"

"This isn't," we're told, "a matter of making queer theory compatible or reconciled with Latter-day Saint thought. Rather, it is a method or

approach that may be taken to any system, including Latter-day Saint thought" (p. 5).

So, the goal is not to create a harmony, nor is it even to elevate minority voices within the tradition. It allegedly needn't even be the Latter-day Saint tradition that gets this treatment. Any would do. Notwithstanding, the leaders and the canon will be seized, to queer "the gendered assumptions of each of the central characters of the Godhead *from within the tradition*" (p. 6, emphasis added). This will redefine the tradition in queer theory's own image and starts with the most sacred beings and relationships in Restoration theology.

Fanon's model says that "the colonizer imposes its culture, disintegrates the indigenous culture [that sounds a lot like deconstruction, actually], and recreates the indigenous culture *as defined by the colonizer*."²⁵³ As *Queering* states, "this is not a reclamation but a resignification" (p. 3). Quite so — it is not taking *back* something that once belonged to queer theory. It is seizing and fundamentally *altering* the resources to mean something entirely different in order to undermine the original.

Queering will instead create a "Mormon cosmos not as an idealization of either sex or kinship but rather as a desire, a lust, a *fantasy expression* of human relations" (p. 13, emphasis added). The point is to "traverse the Mormon cosmos in ways that often turn it on its head or inside out" (p. 7). Indeed; a Disney-fied native village, a lovely backdrop for the tourists: "Kinship must not be collapsed into the family, the domestic, or the heterosexual" — which is to say the entire meaning it is given in the Saints' actual theology — "but must be disruptive of these concepts" (p. 13).

"The notion of a humanoid god itself is ontologically and philosophically unsustainable without veering into science fiction, yet that does not mean it is not useful to think with," we are told (p. 23). *The benighted savages have charming myths, which might provide an aesthetic for my next operetta — but no thinking man can take them seriously*. There's not even a pause to acknowledge that the Saints might have had some ontological or philosophical thoughts about the matter beyond the realm of *Buck Rogers*.

A Victorian citizen-scientist could not be more condescending than this:

The approach offered here participates in some respects in what has broadly been called "the ontological turn" in the social sciences and religious studies, which emphasizes

“taking seriously” the worlds constructed by cultural subjects as theoretical elaborations. (p. 24)

But this *isn't* taking it seriously—*Queering* expressly intends to invert the meaning and undermine these ideas. *We really treasure your culture. How about we make it a logo on a Coca-Cola cup?* It is the syrupy insincerity that cloyes the most. I prefer my intellectual imperialism as open flourishments on the gunboats.²⁵⁴

For many, this cosmos is real, and really present. The analysis in the current volume does not take away from this, but it does allow a Mormon cosmos to be accessed and found meaningful by those who may view its metaphysical claims as otherwise nonsensical or irrelevant. (p. 24)

For some, the “Latter-day Saint sloganeering that ‘family is forever’ does not seem like a description of heavenly bliss” (p. 15). The Saints’ deepest doctrines, the pinnacle of their worship, and the sum of their theology is reduced by *Queering* to “sloganeering” to accommodate those who find it either “nonsensical” or “irrelevant.” We are patted on the head and assured that this portrayal takes nothing away from us—but I am not so sure.

Phase 3a: “The colonized are portrayed as wild, savage, and uncivilized”

“Colonialism,” says one introductory work, “regularly includes the shaming of native people and alienated groups for the putative inferiority of their culture.”²⁵⁵ The barbarians need to be tamed, brought to the light, “the colonizer has to nobly monitor, tame, and civilize. . . . [It] essentially conveys that tyranny and domination, and hence oppression, are necessary.”²⁵⁶

This attitude litters *Queering*. “The mainstream church . . . held its *hegemony* over the bulk of its membership” (p. 10, emphasis added). “My primary purpose is not an analysis of early Mormon plural marriage practices to get to the ‘truth’ of the matter—and certainly not to redeem them” (p. 12). That’s a fairly candid statement—they won’t be dispassionately analyzed, ascertaining the *truth* (which gets postmodern scare quotes) isn’t the goal, nor can they hope for the redemption that sympathetic understanding or study might provide. But they *will* be queered.

Even those who might be thought ideological fellow travelers don’t escape the need for correction; beware “the lack of intersectional

analysis in earlier Mormon feminist depictions of Heavenly Mother" (p. 62). Fortunately, they have a white, male academic to uplift them with the latest swanky Critical Theory.

A Latter-day Saint "conservative feminist," Valerie M. Hudson Cassler, is chastised because she supposedly "takes for granted men's indispensability, while women's indispensability must be rooted in a function of their bodies" (p. 64). That sounds pretty primitive and backward. It also sounds like a summary that Hudson would not agree accurately reflects her views.²⁵⁷ But one suspects Petrey is still smarting from the philosophical and theological drubbing she gave him during his last foray into these woods.²⁵⁸ All discourse is about power.

Unlike Petrey, those who have sought to oppose the Family Proclamation have only thought to emphasize "its noncanonical status or laid out ideological objections to its teachings" (p. 72). So, even those who were supposedly on the right ideological track remained too blinkered to see where the *real* solution lies.

(Postmodernism reminds us that whatever *Queering* offers must be just as much an "ideological objection," but that goes safely unanalyzed.)

"The teaching of 'spirit birth' holds some popular support" (we can practically hear the condescending chuckle as a titter runs round the seminar room), but "the doctrine itself is historically, logically, and ethically dubious" (p. 68).

Those poor Mormons—they don't know their history, they don't do logic, and the popular masses can't think through the ethical implications either. (I do not intend here to defend or debunk the teaching itself, merely to highlight the author's implicit attitude and approach.)

You can almost hear Rudyard Kipling—"half devil, and half child."²⁵⁹

Phase 3b: "Improving" the world

No culture is perfect; they all have their injustices and imperfections. In Algeria, Fanon observed how the French colonizers tried to use the "plight" of Algerian women (who tended to be veiled and not seen on their own in public) as both an excuse for their domination and as a tool to extend it:

Around the family life of the Algerian, the occupier piled up a whole mass of judgments, appraisals, reasons, accumulated anecdotes and edifying examples, thus attempting to confine the Algerian within a circle of guilt. . . . Colonial society blazes up vehemently against this inferior status of

the Algerian woman. Its members worry and show concern for those unfortunate women, doomed “to produce brats,” kept behind walls, banned. . . . The occupier, smarting from his failures, presents in a simplified and pejorative way the system of values by means of which the colonized person resists his innumerable offensives. What is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior.²⁶⁰

Petrey likewise complains about the “traditional” preoccupations of some thinkers within the Church: “It has long been an annoyance of mine that so much intellectual and financial capital was invested in LDS-Evangelical dialogues in earlier decades, where LDS tried to prove they were Christians.”²⁶¹

A secularist might well find this difficult to understand — as Petrey does too — but many of these efforts were not and are not motivated by a desire to “prove” something. I know many who participated in those discussions, and they typically doubted that they would convince those who made such claims — but a reply was given to help others who might be listening. The nineteenth century gave us considerable experience with what happens when other religions define us to government and the popular mind. In any case, someone who spends years trying to prove that queer theory has anything worthwhile to say about Restoration scripture has no standing to cast aspersions on another’s wasted intellectual capital.

Frankly put, one thing that sincere Christians cannot do is allow the claim that we do not follow Christ to pass unchallenged. We may be terrible Christians — in fact, Christianity is predicated on the idea that we all *are* terrible at it, which is why we need Christ in the first place. But, if someone denies we follow Christ as Lord, Savior, and God — well, we must resist that claim however we can with whatever poor tools we have — even if it annoys Petrey, even if it costs money, and even if we tire of repeating ourselves. If he does not understand this, he has understood nothing, whatever his pretensions.

The author tells us what he would prefer:

[As a consequence, the Saints] took very seriously debates about faith and works, Christology, biblical authority, etc. These seemed a profound waste of time to me, who sought

different and more challenging conversation partners to deal with more weighty philosophical questions.²⁶²

Petrey is welcome to whatever questions please him, with any conversation partners who will have him, but this statement drips with arrogance. How dare those devout Christians defend their views on matters that have interested Christians for the last two millennia! What a waste to spend time and money on questions of eternal significance, if the restored gospel means anything at all.

He is annoyed that some with intellectual gifts spent time on questions that might have worried their less sophisticated brothers and sisters. It falls to the self-anointed wise and enlightened, those who are bored by the preoccupations of the masses, to deal with the "challenging" and "weighty" matters.

"Such approaches [as I sought]," he tells us, "would be less worried about proving the myths, and more invested in making the world better."²⁶³ Let us give him the benefit of the doubt, and assume that the term *myth* is being used in the sense of "founding narrative" or "story which gives metaphysical meaning," and not in the sense of *fiction*—though a similar supposedly revealing "slip" would be seized on by a queer theorist to launch the deconstruction. We can see plainly, though, the same sort of claims that Fanon highlighted with the colonizer's preoccupation with Algerian women—the way the natives are doing it doesn't help the world. If anything, it makes it worse. The intellectuals (as representatives of the superior culture) must save the day, as Petrey tells us:

Some of the LDS intellectual class have begun to take more seriously secularism not as an enemy but as a real conversation partner, and begun a post-secular Mormonism. Such a conversation must join in the examination of power. . . . Perhaps such a venture is also a dead end, but at least it might have something to say to the anti-temple of secular religion other than violence. Otherwise, we are all lost.²⁶⁴

This really is extraordinary—post-secular Mormonism (whatever that might be besides trendy buzz words) is potentially the only possible response "other than violence." Without it, "we are all lost."

This borders on the delusional. Queer theory is not going to save the world or the Church, if that's what "we" means. I wager more good is done for the world in one month by an average ward (notwithstanding

its members' sins and foibles) than queer theory has done in its entire existence.

One assumes Petrey thinks queer theory is an important part of this undertaking. Otherwise, it would be criminal to waste time with it. But to expect us to believe that queer theory can be anything but a tool for secular colonialism and religious parasitism is blind faith at best.

This is the same type of messianic conviction one sees with other intellectual salvational schemes—from the Jacobins to the colonial apologists to the Marxists. We're assured this is about "the examination of power," but it is surely also about the *exercise* of power in its own right. Imagine reposing confidence or power in someone who in the same breath is so manifestly and arrogantly devoid of empathy for those not in his clique.

If we *are* truly otherwise all lost (in whatever senses), then doesn't it become very tempting to do whatever it takes to make sure the worst doesn't happen? In the various Marxist iterations, for example, the ostensible goal of a fair and better world justified the slaughter of millions. Even if this is seen only in academic or intellectual terms—why shouldn't I shade the data? Why shouldn't I misrepresent the facts? Why shouldn't I shout down those who disagree? Why shouldn't I exercise whatever power I accrue to assure my own ascension? The stakes are simply too high to tolerate "the LDS intellectual class" losing. Such considerations could explain much of what so mars Petrey's work.

What luck that the colonists will get wealth, land, and dominion while *also* being the only ones to do the right thing and spread civilization. It is very convenient. If Petrey took his philosophical postmodernism sincerely and consistently, he could avoid such foolishness.

Phase 4: Institutional capture and assimilation

By now, some may be thinking, "Surely none of this can apply because *Queering's* author is a member of the Church." Such a reaction is superficially appealing, but it ignores a great deal of what we know about colonialism and its fourth phase. Fanon sees it as the culmination of the first three—"the establishment of a society where the political, social, and economic institutions are designed to benefit and maintain the superiority of the colonizer while simultaneously subjugating the colonized." An important part of this is "institutions . . . that

reward those who assimilate into the colonizers' ways, while punishing those who do not."²⁶⁵

For example, studies of Asian-Americans found that "when [they] were not recognized as being 'American' and were seen as 'foreigners,' they were more likely . . . [to] attempt to prove that [they] belong[ed] to the dominant in-group . . . by demonstrating culture knowledge and practices of that group."²⁶⁶

Due to intense psychological and social pressure, the "colonized might develop a desire to rid [themselves] of such identities and to emulate the colonizer because their ways are seen as superior. Further, the colonized may eventually feel a sense of gratitude and indebtedness toward the colonizer for civilizing and enlightening the colonized."²⁶⁷

There is, I think, something of a tragic sense of this in the sole section of *Queering* that struck me as disarmingly, unexpectedly candid:

I concede that I too am haunted by polygamy, not only because it was a part of my own family lineage but because my own hard-fought respectability has come at the expense of a disavowal of polygamy at an individual and a corporate level. Latter-day Saints were able to enter into the mainstream of American politics, education, business, and culture by embracing a respectability politics of conventional sexual and kinship practices. My subjectivity as an integrated, assimilated Mormon who has benefited from elite institutions has depended on my own normalization into conventional American sexualities. And I am just one example of the largely successful Mormon assimilation project that has hinged on a disavowal of patriarchal polygamy . . . such a disavowal is the condition for contemporary Mormon assimilation, and the fear of its undoing remains palpable. (p. 154)

We see all the hallmarks to which Fanon points—the almost pathetic gratitude for acceptance, the sense that all of this is potentially tenuous, the need to *personally* disavow polygamy to keep his "own hard-fought respectability," and the sincere conviction that he really is better off and more enlightened because of what the colonizer has offered. (Irony remains abundant—Petrey recognizes the nineteenth-century oppression, likely because he was at risk from its

legacy. He is blind to the twenty-first century colonial oppression that he is part of, perhaps because he stands to benefit from it.)

“One of the most destructive and insidious consequences of colonialism,” writes one, “happens when the colonized begin to think, feel, and act like the colonizers, particularly as it relates to the stereotypes and prejudices of themselves and their own people.”²⁶⁸ One can certainly see that spirit in Petrey’s caricature of Latter-day Saint intellectual life before the glorious advent of “post-secular Mormonism.”

Personally, I am not nearly so convinced of the success of “the largely successful Mormon assimilation project.” I am grateful that I do not have the risks that my ancestors did — but I do not regard my family’s continued economic or political safety and acceptance as a done deal, polygamy or no.

As illustrated previously, the elite academic and media worlds largely continue in an implacable hostility and often outright bigotry, while our doctrine on sex and gender increasingly threatens any place we might have had in “the mainstream.” Queer theory is at the forefront of these efforts to marginalize us. The fact is, we are at risk for precisely the same reason as we were with plural marriage — we refuse to accede to the dominant society’s stance on sex and marriage, even if the political meaning of that refusal has changed.²⁶⁹

I know professionals in the academy, social work, psychology, and medicine who keep their heads down in training, lest they run afoul of similar moral crusaders who could threaten their licensure or tenure. Medical trainees are blackballed — and told so in writing — because of their faith’s social views. That’s the sort of thing elites only do when they are implacably convinced of both their own rectitude and their own overwhelming power.

Church members who dared to flout elite opinion on gay marriage in California often suffered substantial personal and economic harm. Their ongoing right to “express their beliefs” was explicitly challenged by a government official, who made barely veiled threats.²⁷⁰

In short, if Petrey is convinced of the success of Latter-day Saint assimilation, that is likely only because *he* has assimilated and no aspects of his personal beliefs are seriously at odds with the dominant culture in which he swims. He is, as he says, an “integrated, assimilated Mormon” — and evidently working to colonize the rest.

His assurance is typical of the reactions of many to colonialism — those who hope to assimilate typically feel pressure to actively deny the on-going racism or prejudice that their group experiences.²⁷¹

It is also typical for some of the colonized to turn on their fellows:

Oppressed group members may begin to discriminate against one another and choose to emulate and identify with oppressors. . . . The oppressor becomes the model of acceptable humanity. To effectively emulate the oppressor, the oppressed must devalue his or her own group membership.²⁷²

Native American authors believe that it matters a great deal

whether or not our own people, our story tellers, content creators, professors, lawyers, doctors, scholars, engineers, scientists, teachers . . . and so on maliciously laugh at, make fun of, criticize, speak ill of, or degrade even for the slightest moment in their own mental process, any spiritual practice, or expressive natures of our own . . . practices.²⁷³

Those who opt for assimilation and denigration of their past identity are valuable to the colonizer: "The oppressors would always 'hold-up' and point to the few Natives who were supportive" of what the rest saw as racist imagery.²⁷⁴

Petrey provides a sterling example of the same phenomenon. When *Heretic*—the Hugh Grant movie featuring the torment and murder of sister missionaries—came out, his reaction was striking:

As a scholar of religion and a Latter-day Saint, I consider that this is perhaps the greatest LDS story ever told and a crucial commentary . . . I'll get straight to the point. Only an endowed Latter-day Saint can understand this film fully. It is written for them and many missed it.²⁷⁵

We first note the gushing, over-the-top praise. Even if we grant that the film is a genuine work of art (which may be stretching even Latter-day Saint generosity too far) this seems a bit much—"the *greatest* LDS story ever told?" "Crucial?" Please. At least Fanon's colonized intellectual could embrace Shakespeare. This isn't a considered, measured judgment; this is a full-throated rendition of "Rule, Britannia."

We see, too, the frantic waving of credentials: Latter-day Saint, scholar of religion, temple initiate—I *should be taken seriously here, I am uniquely qualified to hold forth*. Who would dare challenge such an intersectional flush of identities?²⁷⁶

Petrey goes on to explain that *Heretic* is a somewhat coded reenactment of the temple endowment:

The entire film is an inversion of the LDS endowment ceremony. The home is the anti-temple: the movement from room to room; specific words and phrases; the instructions at the doors; the visual aids; the altar. The location of the cuts the two sister missionaries receive. . . .

If you don't know the temple symbolism, you cannot fully understand the film's message. Yes, it is a secular critique of religion (sometimes quite powerful and sometimes quite silly). But it does so from a place so deeply embedded in Mormonism that it is not just a superficial trotting out of embarrassing facts or logical problems, but one that turns its symbolic universe upside down. Painfully so.²⁷⁷

The film is, it would seem, yet another form of queering. It helps to invoke the temple, which he knows no believing member is going to debate in public (p. 74). The non-member audience will be inclined to think this is great — *how could his claims be unfair to Mormons? He does know about the temple* — and no member will gainsay him. He is the ultimate outsider-insider, with neither group inclined or positioned to challenge him.

As always in these cases, it is the dominant group who are the good guys. Petrey reproves Church members for not appreciating what the gracious outsiders offer them: "It's written for *them* and many missed it." How ungrateful and shortsighted of us! The Hollywood horror-film writers tried to reach across the aisle and enlighten us, and we were too ill-informed or blind to plunk down our money at the Odeon. Even if we grant the film enough sophistication to do what Petrey claims, it is telling that he thinks we should respond positively to the twisted recapitulation of our most sacred rites ("painfully so") in a horror movie that is, at times, a "quite powerful" secular critique of religion.

In fact, repurposing sacred rites for a horror film would be an excellent — if overwrought — symbolic take on colonialism in general. A fiction that used it would probably be seen as inadequately subtle, but it is all real in this case.²⁷⁸ Note that my point is not the movie's merits or lack thereof. Instead, what's revealing is the stereotypical tactics and reaction.

There remains a faint undercurrent of fear in Petrey's *pro forma* disavowals of polygamy, the over-the-top enthusiasm for a horror movie, all the calling-out of racism and patriarchy, and the zealous queering of the tradition. That fear is, I warrant, fully justified.²⁷⁹ After all, how long would Petrey last in academic queer theory and gender studies if he

was even mistakenly thought guilty of *Wrongthink*? There might even be a tendency to overcompensate to avoid risking that "hard-fought respectability."²⁸⁰ These departments and worldviews are not bastions of irenic tolerance, whatever they may claim.

Furthermore, his employer (Kalamazoo College) receives a great deal of funding from The Arcus Foundation — \$66 million as of 2018.²⁸¹ The Foundation's CEO and founder is gay billionaire Jon Stryker.²⁸² Arcus has not hesitated to use funding to target attitudes in conservative religious groups:

The Arcus Foundation dispenses millions of dollars in grants every year to support LGBT activism. Its 2014 grants included \$120,000 to the Religion Newswriters Foundation, the owner of the widely syndicated Religion News Service.

The Arcus Foundation's grant listing said the one year of support was intended "to recruit and equip LGBT supportive leaders and advocates to counter rejection and antagonism within traditionally conservative Christian churches."²⁸³

Massive amounts of money from ideological allies of queer theory are thus poured in. One need not receive any money directly to be affected. Are we to believe that this has no influence on university pressures and policies? No impact on chances for professional advancement? Do the risks of power that Petrey is so keen to highlight and interrogate in others somehow vanish when he is involved? Would not *conservative* billionaires leveraging their money for power attract his ire?²⁸⁴ Why hasn't he gone on the offensive to deconstruct a mega-rich donor's largely unaccountable concentration of power on his home turf? Admittedly, that would be dangerous to perceived power.

Postmodernism is right when it reminds us that none of us are without biases and blind-spots — and what could be more tyrannical than to be professionally at risk on these terms? I'm certainly *not* saying that Petrey is insincere or mercenary in what he says or does, but one would hope there would be more self-awareness of the power imbalance and risks. Fanon's colonized native intellectuals were also totally sincere and still useful tools of oppression.

Queering seems like a textbook case of "intraethnic othering" — a process

whereby an individual singles out and discriminates against other individuals of the same . . . group who are less

assimilated to American [i.e., academic, secular, left, queer] culture . . . [to] create distance from the stigma created by Asian [Mormon] stereotypes of inferiority as well as a way to gain acceptance from White [dominant] acquaintances.²⁸⁵

In the postmodern colonialist view, problematic heteronormative Mormon theology can be transformed through the magic of deconstruction and some historical legerdemain into a social and professional asset instead of a grave liability. As a bonus, he who helps pay the bills will not be displeased.

At this remove, the colonizing pattern fits remarkably well. Whether it matches reality, only the author could tell us. And the postmodernisms would caution that even he may not know.

A safe sort of bravery

Queer theory flatters itself that it is edgy and daring, subverting oppressive structures, and cutting the oppressor down to size.²⁸⁶ As Martha Nussbaum warned more than a quarter century ago:

You will quickly find that subversion takes many forms, not all of them congenial to [Critical Theory]. As a perceptive libertarian student said to me, Why can't I use these ideas to resist the tax structure, or the antidiscrimination laws, or perhaps even to join the militias? Others, less fond of liberty, might engage in the subversive performances of making fun of feminist remarks in class, or ripping down the posters of the lesbian and gay law students' association. These things happen. They are parodic and subversive. Why, then, aren't they daring and good?²⁸⁷

Would it be legitimate to queer the Talmud in support of National Socialism? Why not turn Bantu mythology into a call for imperialism? Couldn't we put Amish literature on its head to support a jingoistic militarism? Couldn't we take Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and rework its cosmos in defense of Jim Crow, apartheid, and the Ku Klux Klan? Couldn't the writings of suffragettes help repeal the Nineteenth Amendment?

Any of these would be far more daring and transgressive than anything *Queering* does, and certainly the voices of fascists, imperialists, white supremacists, or those who oppose women's voting are marginalized in the academy and society far more than homosexuals or the genderqueer. But how would that "hard-fought respectability" fare?

Doubtless all these *could* be done. But would we regard those who did so as admirable or insightful? Or even possessed of a modicum of good taste or scholastic ability? It requires no particular gifts besides shamelessness and a sort of low cunning. We can imagine the results before they are done, and they will probably be more tedious than we imagine. Such an undertaking would be at best a vapid academic — I cannot bring myself to say *intellectual* — game, played for a small self-congratulatory coterie of one's peers.

It is risible to think any of this, or *Queering's* parallel tactics, could somehow make the world a better place.

Avoiding intellectual colonialism

How, then, can we disagree without historical misrepresentation and manipulative intellectual colonization? I think the foundation is honesty.²⁸⁸ I personally have no problem if the Church's history, leaders, scriptures, or doctrines are critiqued or analyzed. It doesn't even particularly trouble me if someone's verdict is negative. I could not care less if someone is enamored of queer theory, astrology, geocentrism, or even phlogiston.

What I have a problem with is the evident conviction that the author can distort the record and trust that either no one will check or no one who matters will care. I am weary of the severe misrepresentation, significant falsehoods, sloppy work, sophistry, banal logical lapses, special pleading, and double standards. More bluntly — *don't lie to me or about me*.

As one author noted perceptively (in terms that resonate with Doctrine and Covenants 93:30–32):

Immanuel Kant . . . gives us one quite stringent rule: 'It is always wrong to lie under any circumstances.' . . .

Because when you lie to somebody, you are robbing them of all of the information they need to make autonomous decisions. And if you rob somebody of their autonomy, you're not only doing them a disservice, but you're also reducing their humanity. Because for Kant, a human is defined by our ability to choose. We are defined by freedom.

But when you lie to somebody, you are treating them as a puppet, dancing to your plans and not their own. . . . For Kant, we should never infantilise [sic] people. We should never lie to them. We should treat them with the dignity that their human autonomy deserves.²⁸⁹

Religious matters can reflect “deep differences” — worldviews that cannot be reconciled, where neither party is likely to convince the other. Philosopher David Hancock asked:

Under what circumstances if any is it reasonable for someone engaged in an argumentative exchange . . . to decide that the two of them have a deep disagreement . . . [and] to abandon the use of argument and resort to non-argumentative means of persuasion — means that do not involve an appeal to reasons — in an effort to get the other person to adopt their position on the issue? . . . To put the question another way, is it legitimate (morally, epistemically, politically) in discussion with someone who approaches a question from within a different form of life to abandon appeal to reasons altogether and, instead, seek to persuade them exclusively by means that do not appeal to reason?²⁹⁰

This is precisely the situation in which queer studies finds itself vis-à-vis the Church of Jesus Christ. Our views are incommensurable, the exertions of a few to pretend otherwise notwithstanding.²⁹¹ *Queering*, at its base, is an attempt to alter how either members or non-members of the Church see its scripture, leaders, and doctrine.

Queering does not do this via a reasoned appeal to evidence, and it misrepresents such evidence as it uses to a degree that can only be called calculated and willful. It is an attempt at unreasoning manipulation. It is propaganda.

Hancock answered his own question of whether such tactics are ever proper:

My answer is: No, this is intellectual colonialism, which should be condemned in the same way and for the same reasons as forcible colonial domination of indigenous populations. Persuasion without the use of reasons colonizes the interlocutor’s mind, displacing strongly held commitments without the “free, informed and prior consent” of the sort required for legislative and administrative measures that may affect indigenous peoples.

Someone who approaches an issue from within a different form of life should be respected in interpersonal discussion by being given reasons rather than being manipulated, and by being listened to when they give their reasons.²⁹²

Clearly, Latter-day Saint thinkers are not “listened to” by *Queering*

and *Tabernacles*. The views of those such as Blake Ostler, Valerie Hudson Cassler, Erastus Snow, and Spencer W. Kimball are instead warped via a parody of scholarly practice to further the manipulation. That effort ends either in these Saints' further marginalization, or the assimilation of their community's beliefs into the worldview of the post-modern secular academic left.

Mormon Studies

All of this points to a broader malaise at the heart of too much of Mormon Studies.²⁹³ Most fields of study would at least have the moral courage to defend their subject from misrepresentation or patently unjust historical treatment. They might even see that as their mandate.

If, for political reasons, an anthropologist misrepresented another culture's view of divine things by describing them in terms suggestive of homosexual parent-child incest—a violation of one of the most universal human taboos—he or she would likely never recover professionally. But when this procedure is applied to "Mormons," you get tenure and book awards.

Thus, for Mormon Studies, the tactics employed in Petrey's books demonstrate that the community does not police itself well—members of the guild evidently have few fears that historic or philosophic malpractice will be called out, much less that they will thereby suffer any adverse career consequences. (It is hard to imagine what whoppers won't be tolerated in the proper ideological context if *Tabernacles* is getting awards for *history*.²⁹⁴)

Accountability to non-complicit peer review—which used to be the definitive control on all scholarly activity, and the best solution we've ever found for the biases that postmodernity highlights—is sorely lacking. At the same time, there seems to be a great deal of informal policing for "proper" opinions and social attitudes. These factors get you exactly what you'd expect, and exactly what you don't want in genuine thought—ideological conformity based on fear and a tolerance or encouragement of shoddy work if it conforms ideologically.

Petrey notes, somewhat condescendingly:

Here is a secret for outsiders: the humanist ex-Mormon vs fundamentalist apologist Mormon dynamic that attracts so much online attention and massive amounts of money is a side show in the actual practice of Mormon studies scholarship. Almost everyone is friendly to one another.²⁹⁵

Cordiality is a virtue, to be sure. Differences about ideas should not become personality clashes.²⁹⁶ But, in the spirit of a postmodern interrogation of this text—is it not just possible that everyone “is friendly” to each other in part because no one dares or bothers to correct even the most egregious errors? Could it not be that the editor of *Dialogue* has some implied (or explicit, if he has used it before) power over those who might otherwise differ with his nonsense? And why the note of resentment that creeps in over the alleged “massive amounts of money” that “fundamentalist apologist[s]” somehow attract?

More discourse, more power plays.

The cluster of perverse incentives that thus infects the field has led to a proliferation of a certain unfortunate subspecies of Mormon Studies scholar whose work is both predictable and pedestrian despite the assurances of fellow scholars.²⁹⁷ These scholars settle for dull thrills when it is their turn to *epater les bourgeois*, procuring an ink-stained fifteen minutes of fame when the *Salt Lake Tribune* anoints them as the expert *du jour* on anything remotely connected to the Church. Such scholars enjoy self-satisfying bursts of moral grandstanding on social media and, if they are lucky, a sinecure at a third-rate college.

Sycophantic, over-the-top reviews (which the scholars will be expected to reciprocate) round out the deal. Petrey provides specimens of exactly what is wanted:

- “So grateful for the first review by theologian Bea-Ryan Ward . . . ‘Fundamentally transformative potential.’ ‘Had me awestruck and grinning.’ ‘Patient and generous.’ What dream reviews are of made of.”²⁹⁸ (Highlighted screenshots are available in case any should doubt the praise.)
- “So grateful for this in depth interview with the great Caroline Kline . . . she says ‘It will be one of the most important books in Mormon studies.’”²⁹⁹
- “Very honored by this thoughtful and sanguine review of my [book] by the amazing scholar John Turner. Worth reading the whole thing.”³⁰⁰

There is no sign, incidentally, that *these* texts are to be deconstructed so that what sounds like fulsome praise is really condemnation.

As with *Heretic*, we see again the gushing superlatives at every opportunity: “very honored,” “*amazing* scholar,” “so grateful,” “the *great* Caroline Kline,” “one of the *most important* books in Mormon studies,”

"fundamentally transformative potential," "awestruck." Everyone is declared stellar, and everything they produce is greeted as the most brilliant or pathbreaking work yet—even the book reviews. The field goes from strength to strength, apparently.

Yet there's an insecure, forced, fixed-grin quality to all this back-slapping bonhomie and mutual admiration—it doesn't sound healthy or candid. Someone even has to chime in on Petrey's take on *Heretic*: "This is a *very smart* take. Thanks Taylor."³⁰¹ If only it were sometimes said, "This is a *really bad* take. Do better Taylor." But perhaps it is too much to assume that one academic can see how another uses or, more properly, misuses sources. It *is* much easier to go along with the in-crowd and give shallow kudos and cheap praise.

Given what we have seen of the book, is it not possible that this praise is a tad excessive? And should such a deceptive and manipulative attempt at intellectual colonization be lauded? Do the enthusiastic reviewers know the facts and do not care? Or are they too ignorant to know?

Maybe the dog can't really play basketball after all.

Conclusion

In the end, the surprise is not that some will give over honesty, rigor, and fairness for assimilation, self-preservation, or power—if queer theory is to be believed, that is all there is, in the end. But it is astonishing what trivial gains are accounted worth that price and how many play along via silence. At least Richard Rich got Wales and a shiny chain of office.³⁰²

Petrey can, of course, continue to write and say and do whatever he likes, and doubtless will. Others can continue to gush and fawn at whatever they please, and doubtless will. I would not have it otherwise. I just hope the latter are doing so out of honesty and genuine conviction. Is it too much to ask that our history and texts not be misrepresented, and that our leaders be quoted and characterized accurately? *Queering* and its predecessor volume fail this minimum standard in ways that are both indisputable and inexcusable.

There *are* some in Mormon Studies—safe from the legitimate fears that others have of speaking up—that could disincentivize such behavior, had they the will. The American Historical Association even says it's their duty.³⁰³

In any case, we neither asked for, nor want, the strip mining of our

theology for the queer-industrial complex. You can put down your “White Man’s Burden.”

We’ve seen this movie before. We already have enough installments of *Air Bud*.



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Notes

1. Taylor G. Petrey, *Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024).
2. Taylor G. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).
3. Gregory L. Smith, “Feet of Clay: Queer Theory and the Church of Jesus Christ,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 43 (2021): 107–278, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/feet-of-clay-queer-theory-and-the-church-of-jesus-christ/.
4. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “queer, (adj.¹, sense 3.a),” doi.org/10.1093/OED/1749304289.
5. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “queer, (adj.¹, sense 3.b),” doi.org/10.1093/OED/1749304289. See discussion in Lorenzo Bernini, *Queer Theories: An Introduction, From Mario Mieli to the Antisocial Turn*, trans. Michela Baldo and Elena Basile (New York: Routledge, 2021), 100–11.
6. “Both feminist and queer theories...exist in the plural, and constitute a vast field of political and academic debate, which only by way of extreme distortions can be compressed into a unitary ideology,” Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 98.
7. For discussion of Petrey’s use of queer theory in *Queering*’s sister volume, *Tabernacles of Clay*, see Smith, “Feet of Clay,” 109–10.
8. “Sex” in the sense of reproductive identity as male and female dates to at least the 1380s. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “sex, (n.1),” doi.org/10.1093/OED/6273469846. “Gender” was used in this way by 1474, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “gender, (n., sense 3.a),” doi.org/10.1093/OED/7839815540.

9. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "gender, (n., sense 3.a)." One sees this euphemistic dynamic at work in the Church's reiteration of its core doctrines in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Released in 1995 by the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Proclamation states that "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. . . . Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose," churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world.

Gender as biological sex—male and female—is the clear meaning in context. President Dallin H. Oaks confirmed that "the intended meaning of gender in the family proclamation and as used in Church statements and publications since that time is biological sex at birth." "General Conference Leadership Meetings Begin," Church Newsroom, 2 October 2019, newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/october-2019-general-conference-first-presidency-leadership-session.

Various translations of the Proclamation make this tension apparent. For example, the Brazilian Portuguese translation uses sex: "O **sexo** (masculino ou feminino) é uma característica essencial da identidade" churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=por, emphasis added, while European Portuguese uses a cognate of gender: "O **género** é uma característica essencial da identidade," churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world/the-family-a-proclamation-to-the-world?lang=ept, emphasis added.

The decision by late twentieth-century apostles to reach for the more euphemistic *gender* can be contrasted with James E. Talmage's treatment of these ideas in 1922: "We affirm as reasonable, scriptural, and true, the *eternity of sex* among the children of God. The distinction between male and female is no condition peculiar to the relatively brief period of mortal life." "The Eternity of Sex," *Millennial Star* 84, no. 34 (24 August 1922): 539, emphasis added, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc02d406-b283-411c-926e-3f0f9d55ba09/0/0. The Proclamation's audience would probably hear talk of an "eternity of sex" in a more prurient sense than Talmage's audience.

10. Hannah McCann and Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures* (London: Red Globe Press, 2020), 55–60, 120–21; Selina Todd, "Sex and Gender in Second-Wave Feminism," in *Sex and Gender: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd (New York: Routledge, 2024), 86–103.
11. Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (Aldershot, UK: Gower, 1985), 18–48.
12. Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, 158–88. *Gender identity* was first used in the 1960s to describe internal subjective experience—"an individual's personal sense of being or belonging to a particular gender or genders, or of not having a gender." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "gender identity, (n.)," doi.org/10.1093/OED/6273469846.
13. See, for example, Judith Butler who "does not ask us to consider gender as

cultural versus sex as biological/natural.” Instead, sex “is just ‘as culturally constructed as gender’ . . . gender is the discursive and cultural means by which sex is produced,” and “not . . . an . . . essence to gender identity. . . . Gender does not refer to a singular, coherent or stable identity category.” Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), as quoted in McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 123–25. Furthermore, “For Butler this means challenging the very notion of an original ‘sex’ underlying gender,” 127.

14. Proponents of Critical Theory seem to almost revel in deliberate obscurity, jargon, and a pretentious language and style. It can be difficult to find a concise account of what is actually being claimed. Readers who want an accessible introduction in plain language (albeit one that is philosophically opposed to Critical Theory) should see Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020). A relatively accessible account by proponents is McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*.
15. “Queer theory first entered the academy during the so-called ‘postmodern turn,’ a period marked by an emphasis on language, deconstruction, difference, fragmentation, multiple truths, discourse and rethinking old grand narratives and ideas of how power is structured.” David Walton, *Doing Cultural Theory* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2012), 186–87, as quoted in McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 7–8.
16. Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 32–34, 48; Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (Los Angeles: Altson, 2004), 63, archive.org/details/queertheorygende0000wilc.
17. Postmodernism “sometimes appears circular and without a point, since it is not making its own claims about what really is but rather providing tools for dismantling other people’s claims about what really is. . . . The frustration many people experience when confronting postmodernism . . . is not a sign of failure; it’s the point of the exercise.” Wilchins, *Queer Theory*, 98. “Without an objective view of the world, without an idea of what is true, how can we be sure if we are thinking and acting rightly? . . . The answer is not relativism but pluralism—making room for others.” Wilchins, *Queer Theory*, 102.

This requires us to decide “Which others?” Presumably sexists, Nazis, pedophiles, and the Westboro Baptists are not wanted—so some idea or standard of justice is going to be smuggled in the back door in any case, whether the postmodernists want to admit it or not. If that claim troubles them, they are invited to simply make room for my addition as one of many pluralistic points of view on the matter.

18. “Meaning is never considered single, authentic, pure, closed and homogeneous—and guaranteed by the author’s authority and originality; instead it is plural, hybrid, shifting, open and heterogeneous—and thus inviting collaboration with the reader . . . again, both inward-looking and outward-looking.” Linda Hutcheon, “Postmodernism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory*, ed. Simon Malpas and Paul Wake, 2nd ed. (New York:

Routledge, 2013), learning.oreilly.com/library/view/the-routledge-companion/9780415668293/020_9781134123346_chapter11.html.

19. "Whereas I had once agreed . . . on the need to control interpretation lest it overwhelm and obscure texts, facts, authors, and intentions, I now believe that interpretation is the source of texts, facts, authors, and intentions." Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text In this Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 16. Fish further writes, "Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them," 327. See also Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge*, e-book (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 131–32; J. Goldingay, "Hermeneutics," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 398–400.
20. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 86; cited also in John R. Searle's review of *On Deconstruction*, "The Word Turned Upside Down," *The New York Review of Books* (27 October 1983), nybooks.com/articles/1983/10/27/the-word-turned-upside-down/.
21. Jack Reynolds, "Jacques Derrida," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/jacques-derrida/#H3. See also Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 45–46.
22. Searle, "Word Turned."
23. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 34. See further discussion at 50–52.
24. There is yet more irony here, since even prominent queer theorists have been criticized by others for creating their own set of dualities: "David Ruffolo's book *Postqueer Politics* . . . critiques queer theory for valorising a dualism between queer and heteronormativity." McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 17. Unfortunately for such theorists and their worries about logocentrism, thinking via dualities is probably inescapable—it is a human cultural universal, as is the concept of the male/female binary and the belief that men and women are "naturally different." Logic compatible with the western, Aristotelian tradition is also omnipresent in human culture. Derrida notwithstanding, these are not habits unique to the west. Even "*thinking with dualities* versus *thinking without dualities*" is a duality; see Christoph Antweiler, "Universals: Examples from Several Realms," in *Our Common Denominator: Human Universals Revisited* (Berghahn Books, 2016), 129–32, 151.
25. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, as quoted in Searle, "Word Turned."
26. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), post on X.com, 30 June 2024, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1807518208880263533.
27. Annamarie Jagose, "Feminism's Queer Theory," *Feminism & Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2009), as quoted in McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 17.
28. Whitney Monaghan, *Queer Girls, Temporality and Screen Media: Not 'Just a Phase'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), as quoted in McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 1.

29. Donald E. Hall, "Gender and Queer Theory," in *Routledge Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory*, learning.oreilly.com/library/view/the-routledge-companion/9780415668293/019_9781134123346_chapter10.html.
30. "We can describe queer theories as critical political philosophies that deploy the perspectives of sexual minorities and denounce as arbitrary, illegal, and intolerable the very regime that produces them as minoritarian in the first place." Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 48.
31. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 10, and Smith, "Feet of Clay," 108–9. Such a claim is indefensible from the standpoint of human biology. For a scientifically succinct but devastating rebuttal of this ideological stance, see Emma Hilton and Colin Wright, "Two Sexes," in *Sex and Gender: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Alice Sullivan and Selina Todd (New York: Routledge, 2024), 16–34. Ann Oakley, a sociologist who in 1972 was among the first to distinguish gender and sex (see notes 11 and 12 herein) wrote in 2024 that "societies invent gender, but sex is an immutable biological fact," frontispiece of *Sex and Gender: A Contemporary Reader*.
32. "A core tenet of [Judith] Butler's work is the suggestion that if identity categories are not innate, if they are always in the process of formation, then they can be refused, resisted and subverted." McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 129. See also Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 114–22.

One of the many ironies of queer theory is that at times it asks us to reify *gender identity* (one's psychological self-sense as man, woman, or otherwise) and treat it as an indisputable truth that cannot be gainsaid. Yet, this subjective interior sense of gender is far less concrete and verifiable than the iron realities of biological sex. Queer theory joins the postmodernisms in telling us that notwithstanding any evidence we might offer, all claims to knowledge are subjective and ruled by bias, and thus not to be trusted as a route to truth. In the next breath, we are then urged to accept the reality and truth of gender identity—something that is nothing *but* subjective, and not amenable to any proof or testing whatever. Given such inconsistency, it is not surprising that postmodernism wishes to undercut the West's devotion to logic via its critique of "logocentrism."

33. McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 11.
34. Hall, "Gender and Queer Theory."
35. McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 7, figure 1.1.
36. McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 9, emphasis added.
37. This economical and exquisitely descriptive term is discussed in detail in Stephen O. Smoot, "Air Bud Doctrine: How Ambiguity Becomes Strategy—and Undermines Faith," *Public Square Magazine*, 12 May 2025, publicsquaremag.org/faith/gospel-fare/doctrinal-ambiguity-loophole. Part II of the article is "Air Bud Theology Meets Queer Theory: Loopholes in Latter-day Saint Doctrine," 14 May 2025, publicsquaremag.org/faith/gospel-fare/doctrinal-ambiguity-vs-queer-theory-revisionism.
38. *Air Bud*, Walt Disney Pictures, 1997. A clip of the relevant scene is available at youtube.com/watch?v=Jvf0WWxrYRM.

39. Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, 3rd ed., ed. John W. Welch, Gary P. Gillum, and Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1987), especially 26–43, 71–97, 268–83, archive.org/details/worldprophets0000nibl. In a phrase worthy of the present case, Nibley wrote that “disdain for evidence and passion for method guaranteed that the philosophers never got anywhere” (p. 42).
40. For multiple examples, see “Quote Mining: Jerald and Sandra Tanner,” *FAIR Answers Wiki*, fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Quote_mining/Jerald_and_Sandra_Tanner.
41. Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 71.
42. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 78–79, emphasis added.
43. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, 46; see Exodus 31:14, 15, which required the death penalty for breaking the Sabbath.
44. For more details on the misrepresentation of Kimball and his administration, see Smith, “Feet of Clay,” 192–250.
45. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, 79, emphasis added.
46. The American Historical Association (AHA) is blunt regarding such behavior:

By practicing their craft with integrity, historians acquire a reputation for trustworthiness that is arguably their single most precious professional asset. The trust and respect both of one’s peers and of the public at large are among the greatest and most hard-won achievements that any historian can attain. It is foolish indeed to put them at risk. . . . Historians pride themselves on the accuracy with which they use and document sources. The sloppier their apparatus, the harder it is for other historians to trust their work. . . . They should oppose false or erroneous use of evidence, along with any efforts to ignore or conceal such false or erroneous use.

“Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct,” 7 January 2023, 2, [historians.org/resource/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct](https://www.historians.org/resource/statement-on-standards-of-professional-conduct).
47. “All historians believe in honoring the **integrity of the historical record**. They do not fabricate evidence. . . . Those who invent, *alter*, ignore, remove, or destroy evidence of any kind make it difficult for any serious historian ever wholly to trust their work again.” AHA, “Standards of Professional Conduct,” bold in original, emphasis added.
48. *Queering*, p. 181n48, provides the source for this quote as, “‘There is a God—Communion with Him an Inherent Craving of the Human Heart—Man in His Image—Male and Female Created He them—Spirit and Flesh—Mortal and Immortal,’ March 3, 1878, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:269.”
49. Erastus Snow, “There is a God,” in *Journal of Discourses* 19:268–69 (3 March 1878), contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/875.
50. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:269.
51. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “genderqueer, (adj., sensa a),” This term

“designat[es] a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions, but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.”

52. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:269, emphasis added.
53. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:269, emphasis added.
54. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:274.
55. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:271, emphasis added. A typographical error in the original source identifies the page in the top-right corner as 371.
56. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:270.
57. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:270, emphasis added.
58. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:272–73.
59. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:274, emphasis added.
60. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:277, all emphasis added.
61. Snow, “There is a God,” 19:278–79.
62. “Good teaching entails **accuracy and rigor** in communicating factual information, and strives always to place such information in context to convey its larger significance. Integrity in teaching means presenting competing interpretations with fairness and intellectual honesty.” AHA, “Standards of Professional Conduct,” 8, emphasis in original.
63. Erastus Snow, “The Creation, Male and Female,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 26:214 (31 May 1885), emphasis added, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/9314/rec/27.
64. Snow, “The Creation,” 26:214, emphasis added.
65. Erastus Snow, “Origin of Man and Attributes of Deity,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:323, 325 (20 January 1878), contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/821.
66. *Queering* argues that “we” in Genesis 1 is likely the Father and the Son (p. 80). That cannot be the entirety of Snow’s view: he has God speaking to plural *associates*, which requires more than one other person.
67. Snow, “Origin of Man,” 19:325.
68. Snow, “Origin of Man,” 19:322–23.
69. *Queering’s* reading also relies upon fine details of pronouns and plurals. It is well-known that the *Journal of Discourses* often does not report verbatim what was said. It is in precisely the small details and nuances that we may be most easily misled. See LaJean Purcell Carruth, “‘His Accuracy was not What it Ought’: Comparing George D. Watt’s Original Shorthand Record to his Published Transcripts in the Journal of Discourses” (FAIR Conference, Provo, UT, 3 August 2023), fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2023/02carruth.
70. AHA, “Standards of Professional Conduct,” 9.

71. On Butler, see Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 127–32 and McCann and Monaghan, *Queer Theory Now*, 119–36.
72. Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody," *The New Republic* (22 February 1999), newrepublic.com/article/150687/professor-parody.
73. Hall, "Gender and Queer Theory," emphasis omitted. See further Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 51n15, in which the use of a male pronoun in referring to Kant was justified because Kant was understood as *male*.
74. Vince Brewton, "Literary Theory," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, iep.utm.edu/literary/#H8.
75. Hutcheon, "Postmodernism," emphasis omitted.
76. See note 25.
77. AHA, "Standards of Professional Conduct," 2–3.
78. "Each chapter examines a different element of Mormon cosmology as a place to think through these problems" (p. 6); "religion may be seen as a tool for thinking through these problems" (p. 21); "Thinking with Mormon theology can be vexing" (p. 21); "The analysis in the current volume . . . does allow a Mormon cosmos to be accessed and found meaningful by those who may view its metaphysical claims as otherwise nonsensical or irrelevant" (p. 24).
79. This is hardly unique to the Latter-day Saint view. Ephesians 5:22–33 explicitly uses male-female marriage to explicate Christ's relationship to the Church: "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (p. 32). The "mystery" is not male-female marriage; marriage is the given and serves as the metaphor's interpretive key that explicates the oneness of Christ and the Church.
80. "We believe Jesus Christ is the literal Son of God and a distinct member of the Godhead along with God the Father and the Holy Spirit." "Jesus Christ Is Your Savior," Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (website), churchofjesuschrist.org/welcome/savior-jesus-christ.
81. Jonathan H. Turner and Alexandra Maryanski, *Incest: Origins of the Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 53, 59, 63. See also Antweiler, "Universals," 32–33, 202.
82. For the Ostler quote, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 257.
83. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 261, emphasis added. This Ostler quote is cited twice in *Queering* (pp. 33, 169).
84. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 140.
85. Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 40, also cited in Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 248nn50, 51.
86. "To use texts rather than to receive them is to read in bad faith. Users take the text as a pretext for some activity of their own. Users resist what the text, as a specific literary act, can do for them. A text that is merely used rather than

received, however, prevents one from ever getting beyond oneself. The User is condemned to the narcissistic hermeneutics of Socrates: *read thyself*." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 331.

87. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 260, emphasis in original.
88. Ronald Hendel, *Genesis 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024), 135–36; 131–32, and sources therein. See also extensive discussion in Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 89–93.
89. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, ed. John Bright, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 58–59; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., e-book (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 23, 153; Phyllis A. Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them: Genesis 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," in *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 142, 160, e-book; Andrew J. Schmutzer, "The Creation Mandate to 'Be Fruitful and Multiply': A Crux of Thematic Repetition in Genesis 1–11" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2005), 329–30.
90. John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 32. One could debate whether conceiving of God as formless spirit is truly an advance or evidence of more sophistication. Nicene orthodoxy combined with the era's reflexive tendency to evolutionary schemas makes the idea almost inevitable.
91. von Rad, *Genesis*, 59.
92. David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17–18.
93. Carr, *Erotic Word*, 21.
94. Carr, *Erotic Word*, 23–24.
95. Carr, *Erotic Word*, 25.
96. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 75, archive.org/details/doctrinesofsalva01smit/page/74/mode/2up.
97. See discussion in Alonzo L. Gaskill, "Chapter 2: You and I As Adam and Eve," in *The Savior and the Serpent: Unlocking the Doctrine of the Fall* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), e-book.
98. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World."
99. See an extended and typical example in Gaskill, "Chapter 4: Textual Insights into the Doctrine of the Fall," in *Savior and the Serpent*.
100. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 73.
101. See discussion in John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Zondervan, 1999), 2.2.1.4, and Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 296–307.

102. *Hermeneutics* is the study or practice of textual interpretation.
103. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, vol. 12, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), viii.
104. Bruce C. Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., digital (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 44, emphasis in original.
105. William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Dower's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 62, e-book.
106. Carr, *Erotic Word*, 29.
107. Alma P. Burton, "Endowment," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:454–56, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/EoM/id/5707.
108. Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 231.
109. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 356. This reading does not preclude the existence of a literal Adam and Eve. For example, Gaskill writes, "While I have no doubts as to the existence of Adam and Eve as historical figures and as to the historicity of the event we refer to as the Fall, nevertheless I had never supposed that one attending the temple would take as entirely literal every detail of the story told therein. In other words, I had always assumed that the fact that the temple and scriptural accounts of the Fall were laden with symbols went without saying." Gaskill, "Chapter 2: You and I As Adam and Eve."
110. L. D. Hawk, "Literary/Narrative Criticism," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 539–40.
111. John Barton, "Introduction to the Old Testament," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6–7; Birch et al., *Theological Introduction*, 42–43, e-book; Richard S. Hess, *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 64–67, e-book; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Patrick D. Miller, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xxi, 48–50; von Rad, *Genesis*, 18, 24–31; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 1–2, 187–97.
112. In what follows, I will typically refer to the first account as "Genesis 1" and the second as "Genesis 2," even though the first extends from Genesis 1–2:4a. I will also refer to the "author" of Genesis as shorthand for "whatever person(s) put Genesis into the form in which we now have it, by whatever process."
113. One of the foundational claims of Old Testament criticism was that the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) was composed of four textual layers or traditions. Of these, only three are relevant for Genesis: [1] "P" (priestly); [2] "J" (Yahwist); [3] "E" (Elohist). See note 111 for discussions.
114. Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 6.

115. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, ed. Patrick D. Miller Jr., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 40.
116. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 7.
117. Birch et al., *Theological Introduction*, 48, emphasis added.
118. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 113.
119. Barton, "Introduction to the Old Testament," 7.
120. "Many interpreters have conflated the two creation stories in an attempt to resolve this problem," says *Queering* (p. 79)—but this does not speak to what is claimed here. The issue is not that the stories can be plausibly conflated to avoid contradiction or in some way harmonized. The point is that the Genesis author did not see them in contradiction or in need of conflation or harmonization.
121. Jeremy Cohen, *"Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It": The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 46–47.
122. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 133, as quoted in Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 664n75.
123. "It is highly misleading to charge the text with obscurity when in fact the unclarity resides in the psychology of the human knower." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 278, emphasis in original.
124. Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 28.
125. Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 35.
126. For others, see Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985); Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 133, as quoted in Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 664–65n75; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 127.
127. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 46–47.
128. James McKeown, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), section 2:4b–7, e-book.
129. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, vol. 1, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 16 (section 2:4–3:24), e-book.
130. R. N. Whybray, "Genesis," in *Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 43.
131. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29.
132. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical, and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), x.
133. Arnold, *Genesis NCBC*, 55.

134. Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 60, e-book.
135. Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 156.
136. Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 113.
137. Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality," *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 166–67.
138. "The essentialist conception holds that there are two binary categories of 'man' and 'woman' and that each of these categories has certain properties which precede its definition." Alex Harris, "Non-Binary Gender Concepts and the Evolving Legal Treatment of UK Transsexed Individuals: A Practical Consideration of the Possibilities of Butler," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13, no. 6 (2012): 58, vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss6/6/.
139. There is probably no passage of the Hebrew bible that has occasioned more comment and uncertainty than "likeness and image." "The history of modern exegesis demonstrates convincingly how a consensus regarding its meaning only momentarily emerges which is then shortly dissolved into newer forms of dissension." Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 567. "The amount of scholarly literature on this expression is enormous." Arnold, *Genesis NCBC*, 44.
140. Sources are all identified in *Queering* (p. 180) and as appropriate in this review.
141. For source #1, *Queering* uses Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 35–46.
142. For source #2, *Queering* relies on Mieke Bal, "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character (A Reading of Genesis 1–3)," *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 "The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives" (1985) 21–42, 28–29, doi.org/10.2307/1772119.
143. Two queer-theory sources are used for source #3: Ken Stone, "The Garden of Eden and the Heterosexual Contract," in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 48–70; and Michael Carden, "Genesis/Bereshit," in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest et al. (London: SCM Press, 2006), 23–30.
144. For source #4, *Queering* uses David J. A. Clines, "אָדָם, the Hebrew for 'Human, Humanity': A Response to James Barr," *Vetus Testamentum* 53, no. 3 (2003): 297–310.
145. For source #5, *Queering* uses Heinz-Josef Fabry, "שֵׁלָה sela," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 12:400–5.
146. *Queering* uses Genesis 1:26, NRSV, for source #6, altering "he created them" to "he created him," because "the final pronoun here is the third-person masculine single 'him'. I have adopted this more accurate translation" (p. 248n38).
147. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 80–140, as quoted in Bal, "Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow." On Bal's dependence

- on Tribble, see Susan S. Lanser, "(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2–3," *Semeia* 41 (31 December 1988): 68.
148. "Tribble's literary approach is distinguished from my own in that *she is not interested in the intentionality of the author*, while my concern is precisely to recover the author's intention, to whatever extent this is possible using literary-historical methods." Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source," 159n9, emphasis added.
149. A non-exhaustive list includes: Birch et al, *Theological Introduction*, 51; Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 138; Carr, *Erotic Word*, 184n5; Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 69n43; Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 130, 203; Ed Noort, "The Creation of Man and Woman in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Traditions," in *The Creation of Man and Woman: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian traditions*, ed. Gerald P. Luttikhuisen (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2000), 11; Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 323–24n128; Beverly J. Stratton, *Out of Eden: Reading, Rhetoric, and Ideology in Genesis 2–3*, ed. David J.A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 102–4.
150. Lanser, "Criticism in the Garden," 73–74.
151. Clines, "אָדָם, the Hebrew for 'Human, Humanity,'" 297–310.
152. Clines, "Response to James Barr," 304, emphasis in original. I have replaced the Hebrew characters with the transliteration for ease of reading.
153. Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 323–24n128.
154. Skinner, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 33.
155. von Rad, *Genesis*, 60.
156. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 160.
157. Sarna, *Genesis: JPS*, 1:12.
158. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 156, emphasis added.
159. Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source," 168, emphasis in original.
160. Bird, "Male and Female," 149, 152, 153, emphasis added.
161. Noort, "Creation of Man and Woman," 8.
162. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue*, 138.
163. Carr, *Erotic Word*, 184n5.
164. Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 323n128.
165. Genesis 1:27n55, *NET Bible—New English Translation*, netbible.org/bible/Genesis+1.
166. Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: Torah*, vol. 1, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), e-book, notes to Genesis 1:26–27, emphasis added.
167. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 51, 53.
168. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 51–52.
169. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 53.

170. As noted previously, *Queering's* source (Bal) relies on Tribble for the relevant portions of her argument, and the two were reviewed and rebutted together decades ago—see note 148.
171. Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 160, citations omitted, emphasis in original, bold added.
172. See note 153.
173. Skinner, *Commentary on Genesis*, 68.
174. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word Books, 2014), 33.
175. Lanser, "Criticism in the Garden," 72, 74, emphasis in original.
176. Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 194.
177. Stratton, *Out of Eden*, 102–4.
178. Bird, "Male and Female," 152.
179. Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 71.
180. Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source," 164.
181. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 55–56.
182. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 56–57.
183. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 57.
184. See Case #2, "Genesis and genre."
185. Stone, "Garden of Eden," 59.
186. "Eilberg-Schwartz works with intensely body-focused constructions of both gender and sexual relations, which are at home in his initial Freudian framework but somewhat alien to the Biblical context." Carr, *Erotic Word*, 186n10. See also Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 40, as quoted in Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 248n50–251:

[As for] the heavy-handed interpretation of H. Eilberg-Schwartz, . . . the question would be whether the homoeroticism belongs to the text or this author. There is no biblical evidence for the subordinate clause in the following claim: "these men [Moses and the patriarchs] love, in ways that are imagined as erotically and sensually, a male deity" . . . Eilberg-Schwartz also writes wrongly of Israelite religion as "imagining men as wives of God." The logic for the claim is flawed: because Israel is imagined as God's lover and men are part of Israel (including ones who author such images), it is assumed that men then imagined themselves as lovers. This logic indeed manifests "the worst kind of literalism."

On the role of psychoanalysis in Judith Butler's thought, see McCann and Whitney, *Queer Theory Now*, 125–26. On the prominence of Freud and other psychoanalytic thought in some recent iterations of queer theory, see Bernini, *Queer Theories*, 134–42.

187. As *Queering's* second queer-theory source (#3b), Carden paces over the same ground with more brevity and contains no real argument beyond assertion.

It describes Eilberg-Schwartz as “raising . . . valid questions” though avoids talk of the believers’ supposed homoerotic relation with the deity. Carden, “Genesis/Bereshit,” 26.

188. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 91.
189. On Freud’s familiarity with Feuerbach’s formulation and his adaptation of it, see Adolf Grünbaum, “Sigmund Freud,” in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Graham Robert Oppy and Nick Trakakis, *The History of Western Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 4 (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2009), 331–32.
190. Mustafa Kinaç, “God as the Implication of Alienation: A Criticism of Religion in Ludwig Feuerbach’s Anthropological Atheism,” *Kilis 7 December University Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (30 December 2022): 417–40, doi.org/10.46353/k7auifd.1181030; Van A. Harvey, “Ludwig Feuerbach,” in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy of Religion*, 172; Jon Stewart, “Feuerbach’s Doctrine of the Humanity of the Divine in *The Essence of Christianity*,” in *Hegel’s Century: Alienation and Recognition in a Time of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 89–117, cambridge.org/core/product/D9B216F799D00D38B4515B994664C6EC.
191. See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 60. On Marx and Feuerbach, see Bernard E. Harcourt, “Introduction to Marx 1/13: On Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach and Ernst Bloch,” *The 13/13/ Essays, Columbia Center for Contemporary Critical Thought*, 21 October 2024, the1313.law.columbia.edu/2024/10/14/bernard-e-harcourt-marxs-theses-on-feuerbach-introduction-to-marx-1-13/.
192. *Queering* includes a disclaimer that “Feuerbach’s reductionism is insufficient for a complete analysis” (p. 24). While this may deserve an award for understatement of the year, *Queering* nevertheless repeatedly invokes Feuerbach as if he explains anything: “In the theological mode of anthropomorphic Feuerbachian projection and imitation, the queer love and queer masculinity of the Godhead in the LDS tradition opens up the possibility for new kinds of relationships in theological representation” (p. 49); “Her argument begins from Ludwig Feuerbach’s notion that religion is a projection of human ideals” (p. 53); “A Feuerbachian hermeneutic indeed. This has implications far beyond parochial LDS interests. The goal is not to condemn the historical contingency of LDS interpretations but to point out that historical contingency is a feature of any interpretation” (p. 105).

It is not clear what these invocations of Feuerbach add to the analysis. I suspect this type of linguistic genuflection is a shibboleth in Critical Theory circles, harking back to its Marxist roots. It is this sort of pretentious vaguely allusive, often jargon-ridden prose that makes much of queer theory feel particularly tiresome.

Some have argued that Feuerbach has many affinities with Critical Theory. See Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Feuerbach and the Philosophy of Critical Theory,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 66 (2014): 1217–18. Too, Feuerbach has a deep quasi-religious approach to political matters. Copleston quoted him as saying “politics must become our religion,” and then commented “though, paradoxically, atheism is a condition of this.” Frederick

Copleston, *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche* (New York: Image Books, 1994), 7:299.

Feuerbach's flaws are echoed by a great deal of postmodernist writing: "[His] thought is scarcely a model of rigorous and conclusive philosophical analysis. In general its mode of expression is literary rather than strictly philosophical, relying often on the illuminating aphorism instead of detailed critical argument." Patrick Masterson, "Feuerbach and the Apotheosis of Man," in *Atheism and Alienation: A Study of the Philosophical Sources of Contemporary Atheism* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), 63–78, as quoted in "Ludwig Feuerbach," ed. Marie C. Toft and Russel Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1800 and 1900, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations* (Detroit: Gale, 2004), 139:264.

"His sentences are often fragmentary and aphoristic. His excessive hyperbole and his inversion of sentences obscure rather than clarify." Francis Schuessler Fiorenza, "Feuerbach's Interpretation of Religion and Christianity," *Philosophical Forum* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1979–80): 161–81, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 316.

"A historical argument . . . is in principle incapable of establishing the thesis Feuerbach needs to establish." Says another, "We are struck by the number of crucial premises which, while being highly problematic, appear as mere assertions." Peter Preuss, "Feuerbach on Man and God," *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* 11, no. 2 (1972): 204–23, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 276–77.

Friedrich Engels complained of his "resort" to "etymological tricks." "Feuerbach's Philosophy of Religion and Ethics," in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1935), 43–51, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* 238. Others bemoaned "his use of certain conveniently ambiguous terms." Charles A. Bennett, "Symbolical Theories: Feuerbach," in *The Dilemma of Religious Knowledge*, ed. William Ernest Hocking (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1931), 27–48, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* 249. "The confusions," wrote another, "are as incredible as they are clever." "Feuerbach begins," says the same author, "by a very bad but clever allusion (it is scarcely an analysis)." Charles N. R. McCoy, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the Humanist Critique of Philosophy," in *The Structure of Political Thought: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 269–90, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 254, 252.

These concerns thus prefigure issues that bedevil many postmodern approaches to texts. The double standards and self-contradiction that so often grip Critical Theory are also manifest: "Feuerbach did not understand how projection worked regarding himself. As an atheist, Feuerbach projected his own unbelief into his methodology." Bradley C. Jenson, "Christology through the Fires of Feuerbach," *Lutheran Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2020): 307. "Regarded from a purely theoretical standpoint," wrote one historian,

"Feuerbach's philosophy is certainly not outstanding. . . . His attempt to dispose of theism by an account of the genesis of the idea of God is superficial." Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 299–300. "He is already adopting the standpoint to be achieved. . . . This circumstance introduces a vicious circularity into his philosophical enterprise insofar as it already presupposes what must first be demonstrated. (277) . . . [Feuerbach's work is] the ruins of an attempt, by a vastly inferior mind, to surpass the Hegelian philosophy" (281). Preuss, "Feuerbach on Man and God," as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 277, 281.

"If we are looking for penetrating and consistent formulations, then Feuerbach will disappoint us." Charles Taylor, "Feuerbach and the Roots of Materialism," *Political Studies* 26, no. 3 (September 1978): 417–21, as quoted in Toft and Whitaker, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, 313.

As it turns out, these many complaints against Feuerbach could easily be adapted to *Queering*.

193. Karl Popper, "Replies to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974), 2:985, archive.org/details/philosophyofkarl0014unse/page/984/mode/2up.
194. Noort, "Creation of Man and Woman," 3:11.
195. Noort, "Creation of Man and Woman," 3:7–8.
196. Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 66–72.
197. We recall that these approaches are not, however, terribly consistent with a Latter-day Saint reading, which sees a harmony rather than a discontinuity between Genesis 1 and 2.
198. Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 66.
199. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*, Kindle ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009), loc. 469.
200. Petrey insists that both sex (presumably biological) and gender "are historical and ideological, not natural and fixed." Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 10, and Smith, "Feet of Clay," 108–9. Despite this misplaced certainty, there is not much that is *more* natural and fixed than biological sex. See Kevin Lee Teather, *The Evolution of Sex: Strategies of Males and Females* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024). See also any first-year textbook in anatomy, animal husbandry, botany, cell biology, ecology, ethology, endocrinology, evolutionary biology, embryology, genetics, histology, medicine, mitochondrial biochemistry, obstetrics, paleontology, physiology, teratology, veterinary studies, or zoology.
201. "Just Our Types: A Short Guide to Type Specimens," *American Museum of Natural History* (website), 26 February 2015, amnh.org/explore/news-blogs/type-specimens-guide.
202. The reader is reassured that no animals, including Air Bud himself, were harmed in the writing of this essay.
203. "Just Our Types."

204. von Rad, *Genesis*, 75, emphasis in original.
205. Though the English translation does not use the exact phrase, in a post-modern context this concept was given its canonical formulation by Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 32–37, archive.org/details/freudphilosophye0000ricu.
206. As Hannah Arendt reminds us, "No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story." "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts About Lessing," trans. Clara Winston and Richard Winston, in *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 22.
207. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 189.
208. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 189.
209. Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source," 163.
210. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 230.
211. Similar desperate efforts to find space in Church history or doctrine for a non-sexed premortal state likewise caused a great deal of the decontextualization and distortion of texts that mar *Tabernacles*. Smith, "Feet of Clay," 152–81. Other quixotic misadventures tried to claim some post-mortal states as non-sexed. Smith, "Feet of Clay," 181–86.
212. Bird, "Genesis 1–3 as a Source," 170–71; Herbert Chanan Brichto, *The Names of God: Poetic Readings in Biblical Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 76–77; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 156; Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 172; Sarna, *Genesis: JPS*, 22–23; Andreas Schuele, "Uniquely Human: The Ethics of the Imago Dei in Genesis 1–11," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 10–12, doi.org/10.3138/tjt.27.1.5; Schmutzer, "Creation Mandate," 363–65; von Rad, *Genesis*, 60–61; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 160–61.
213. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 21–22; Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 196; Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 130, 203; Schuele, "Uniquely Human," 10.
214. "Derrida's mistake is to conclude that, because there are no certain foundations for determining the author's intention, there is neither knowledge nor meaning. In other words, Derrida asks us to choose between the alternative of absolute certainty and utter skepticism. . . . Our knowledge of text acts may not be founded on metaphysical certainties, but that does not mean that it has no basis at all." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 185.

"It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding." ED Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 17, as quoted by Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 248. "It is one thing to say that all interpretation is theory-laden, quite another to say that all textual evidence in literary criticism is 'totally determined by the reader's perspective, theory, or prejudices.'" Paisley Livingstone, *Literary Knowledge: Humanistic Inquiry and the Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 82, as quoted in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 283.

215. These sorts of problems are admitted, if not solved, in Wilchins, *Queer Theory*, 107–9. The answer is said to be yet more deconstruction: “This will only be remedied as writers step forward to wield deconstruction in ways that take [various] dimensions into account, particularly race.” Theorists seem, at the least, to have founded a system that mandates their employment (and publishing opportunities en route to tenure) for the foreseeable future.
216. Taylor Petrey, @TaylorPetrey x.com, “Malpractice,” 19 February 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1892233157727887709.
217. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “Incredibly tortured,” x.com, 8 May 2023, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1655778665320292353.
218. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “Justify authoritarianism,” x.com, 20 February 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1892567015082045852.
219. Terry L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths and the Construction of Heresy*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Patrick Q. Mason, *The Mormon Menace: Violence and Anti-Mormonism in the Postbellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Contingent Citizens: Shifting Perceptions of Latter-day Saints in American Political Culture*, ed. Spencer W. McBride, Brent M. Rogers, and Keith A. Erikson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).
220. For a long list of modern anti-Mormon works, see “Analysis of Books Critical of Mormonism,” FAIR Answers Wiki, fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Criticism_of_Mormonism/Books.
221. For one example among many, see Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Basic Books: 2002), 378.
222. David T. Smith, “The Mormon dilemma: How old and new religious divides hurt Mormon candidates in the United States,” *Electoral Studies* 35 (September 2014): 283, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.02.006).
223. Justin McCarthy, “In U.S., Socialist Presidential Candidates Least Appealing,” *Gallup News* (website), (22 June 2015), news.gallup.com/poll/183713/socialist-presidential-candidates-least-appealing.aspx.
224. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “‘We have work to do’—Latter-day Saint Image Takes Another Hit in New Poll,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 March 2023, sltrib.com/religion/2023/03/15/we-have-work-do-latter-day-saint/.
225. Smith, “Mormon Dilemma,” 284.
226. Smith, “Mormon Dilemma,” 284.
227. Kelsey Dallas, “How Americans Feel about Latter-day Saints and Other Faith Groups, According to a New Pew Survey,” *Deseret News*, 15 March 2023, deseret.com/faith/2023/3/15/23638040/how-americans-view-latter-day-saints-mormons-pew-mormons/. The article cites a Pew survey from 13–18 September 2022, with error ± 1.5 percent.
228. “Moral Stance Towards Gay or Lesbian Relations in the United States 2022,” Statista Research Department, Statista (website), 3 March 2025, [statista.com/statistics/225968/americans-moral-stance-towards-gay-or-lesbian-relations/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/225968/americans-moral-stance-towards-gay-or-lesbian-relations/).

229. "The Book of Mormon. Musical Theater. Missionary Style," The Eugene O'Neil Theatre, New York, bookofmormonbroadway.com/#tickets.
230. "Fact-Checking *American Primeval*: What's Real and What's Fiction?," FAIR, fairlatterdaysaints.org/home-page/current-events/fact-check-american-primeval.
231. "Heretic – Financial Information," *The Numbers* (website), [the-numbers.com/movie/Heretic-\(2024\)#tab=summary](http://the-numbers.com/movie/Heretic-(2024)#tab=summary).
232. "*Heretic*," from *Rotten Tomatoes* and *Fandango Media*, as quoted by Wikipedia, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heretic_\(film\)#cite_note-Rotten_Tomatoes-24](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heretic_(film)#cite_note-Rotten_Tomatoes-24).
233. Lauren Willardson, "Heretic in Real Life: A Missionary's True Story of Survival and Faith," *Public Square Magazine*, 7 February 2025, publicsquaremag.org/media-education/heretic-movie-vs-reality-survivor-speaks/.
234. Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 181. See also Terryl Givens, "How Mormons Became American," *ARC Magazine*, 14 November 2012, arcmag.org/how-mormons-became-american/.
235. Terryl Givens writes of "the paradox of Mormon quasi-ethnicity" (*Viper on the Hearth*, 139) and describes how various commentators have seen them as an "indigenously developed ethnic minority," a "subculture," a "global tribe," and "a religion that became a people." 5, citations omitted.
236. E. J. R. David, ed., "Preface," in *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (New York: Springer, 2014), xix.
237. E. J. R. David and Annie O. Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression, and So What?," in *Internalized Oppression*, 2.
238. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 3.
239. "Past awards," Mormon History Association (website), mormonhistoryassociation.org/awards/past-awards/.
240. Tamarra Kemsley, "Why Latter-day Saints Should be Skeptical about Using Adam and Eve to Define Marriage and Gender," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 October 2024, sltrib.com/religion/local/2024/10/01/what-lds-accounts-adam-eve-may/. See other examples at taylorgpetrey.com/news.
241. Smoot, "Air Bud Theology," also discusses this idea, though I wrote this review before encountering it.
242. Fred J. Hanna, William B. Talley, and Mary H. Guindon, "The Power of Perception: Toward a Model of Cultural Oppression and Liberation," *Journal of Counseling and Development* 78, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 430–41, as quoted by David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 3–4.
243. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 4.
244. E. J. R. David, "Afterward," in *Internalized Oppression*, 284.
245. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 12.
246. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* [Les damnés de la terre], trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 249–89.
247. Except where indicated, quotes about the phases in the following sections are

- from the treatment in David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 7–8.
248. It's worth remembering that Church members are not all white Americans. The global south is an area of thriving membership and explosive missionary work. This is not merely a case of one privileged white male destabilizing the beliefs of other privileged white males. Cultural views in Africa, for example, about the morality of same-sex behavior are just as much in the crosshairs.
249. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), "non-KJV texts," x.com, 1 March 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1895870930867667378. The list is John Hilton III, "Is It Okay to Use Bibles Besides the King James?" johnhiltoniii.com/is-it-okay-to-use-bibles-besides-the-king-james/.
250. "Virtually every latter-day church president has spoken or written against homosexual behavior." Gregory L. Smith and Cassandra Hedelius, "It's Not Loving to Mislead People About Reality," *Public Square Magazine*, 14 October 2022, publicsquaromag.org/sexuality-family/its-not-loving-to-mislead-people-about-reality/.
251. Fanon, *Wretched*, 236–37.
252. Fanon, *Wretched*, 218–19.
253. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 8, emphasis added.
254. As for the ontological turn, which holds that "anthropological analysis ought to mirror the conceptual apparatus of those under study," what *Queering* is offering seems the exact opposite of this attitude, since it seeks to undermine and problematize the Saints' "conceptual apparatus," not faithfully reflect it. Citation from Paolo Heywood, "Ontological turn, the" in *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, edited by Felix Stein. Facsimile of the first edition in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2017/2023). Online: doi.org/10.29164/17ontology.
255. Patrick Colm Hogan, *What is Colonialism?* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2024), 134.
256. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 8.
257. Infact, Hudson Cassler complains about Petrey's refusal to see it otherwise: "The idea that women could be simultaneously indispensable but not dehumanized as instruments does not appear as an alternative in Petrey's [earlier] essay." . . . "Motherhood is," she argues "no simple physical act, no mere instrumentality, but rather the deepest incarnation of all that is meant by love, an embodied ordinance of the greatest meaning and the greatest power." Of his failure on this front, Cassler quotes French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski: "You'd have to have no experience of maternity, and no imagination, to reduce childbearing to [its] biological aspects." Valerie Hudson Cassler, "Plato's Son, Augustine's Heir: 'A Post-Heterosexual Mormon Theology'?", *SquareTwo* 5, no. 2 (Summer 2012), squaretwo.org/Sq2ArticleCasslerPlatosSon.html. *Queering's* claim that "indispensability must be rooted in bodies" sounds a lot like "reducing child-bearing to its biological aspects."

258. Cassler, "Plato's Son." Note particularly the exchange between Cassler and Petrey in the comments.
259. Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," 1899, kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm.
260. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* [L'An Cinq de la Révolution Algérienne], trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 38, 40–41.
261. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), "Post secular Mormonism," x.com, 15 November 2024.
262. Petrey, "Post secular Mormonism."
263. Petrey, "Post secular Mormonism."
264. Petrey, "Post secular Mormonism."
265. Fanon, *Wretched*, as quoted in David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 8.
266. James B. Millan and Alvin N. Alvarez, "Asian Americans and Internalized Oppression: Do We Deserve This?," in *Internalized Oppression*, 179.
267. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 8, relying on Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).
268. John Gonzalez et al., "The Internalized Oppression of North American Indigenous Peoples," in *Internalized Oppression*, 32.
269. Givens observes, "It is now because Mormons occupy *what used to be* the center that they fall into contempt. Their embrace of ultraconservative values, not their flagrant rejection, is now construed as the source of Mormon perfidy. . . . The culprit in this case is not sexual deviance but rather its opposite: sanctimonious sexual piety. . . . We have reached a point in contemporary culture where the politics of the periphery have devalued the center." Givens, *Viper on the Hearth*, 178–79, emphasis added.
270. "California Proposition 8: Post Election Events," *FAIR Answers Wiki*, fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Mormonism_and_politics/California_Proposition_8/Post-Election_Events. FAIR cites San Francisco supervisor Bevan Duffy: "The Mormon church has had to rely on our tolerance in the past, to be able to express their beliefs. . . . This is a huge mistake for them. It looks like they've forgotten some lessons."
271. Millan and Alvarez, "Asian Americans," 177.
272. David and Derthick, "What Is Internalized Oppression?," 9–10.
273. Gonzalez et al., "North American Indigenous," 42.
274. Gonzalez et al., "North American Indigenous," 43.
275. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), "As a scholar of religion," x.com, 15 November 2024.
276. Fanon calls attention to the tendency of native intellectuals to use similar language:

It will be also quite normal to hear certain natives declare, "I speak as

a Senegalese and as a Frenchman . . . I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman . . .” The intellectual who is Arab and French, or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations.

Fanon, *Wretched*, 218, ellipses in original. One identity or the other will always dominate when the two come into conflict. This is akin to Neal A. Maxwell’s admonition: “The orthodox Latter-day Saint scholar should remember that his citizenship is in the Kingdom and that his professional passport takes him abroad into his specialty. It is not the other way around. That fact is true not only for the professor but also for the plumber in his relationships with his union.” Neal A. Maxwell, *Deposition of a Disciple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 15.

277. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “The entire film is an inversion,” x.com, 15 November 2024, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1857630252077322409.

278. One cannot but sympathize with Roman Catholics, who have seen their imagery and ceremonies repeatedly appropriated for pot-boilers, horror, and other purposes for many decades.

279. We recall Fanon, who characterized native intellectuals’ denigration of their own culture and their ravenous appetite for the west as due ultimately to fearful insecurity: “Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche.” Fanon, *Wretched*, 218.

280. Sociologically, we could see the manifest historical and textual distortions of *Queering* and *Tabernacles* as a *costly signal* of group membership. Contrary to popular wisdom, most people are not generally deceived or convinced by the propaganda targeting them. Instead,

Most people exercise a considerable degree of what is known as *epistemic vigilance*; they are not blind followers of ideology but rather evaluate information by relying on cues of trustworthiness, informational likelihood, and theory of mind. Along these lines, most audiences recognize inflammatory speech, blatant misinformation, and absurd conspiracies, but remarkably they often support it anyway because it strengthens their coalitions . . . by increasing group commitments around inflammatory content that functions as a signal, around which like-minded individuals can convey their allegiances. In other words, the conspicuously outrageous claims of a propagandist can serve as badges for an ingroup to communicate their group commitments and trustworthiness to one another; that is, as a hard-to-fake signal.

Jordan Kiper, “Religious Hate Propaganda: Dangerous Accusations and the Meaning of Religious Persecution in Light of the Cognitive Science of Religion. *Religions* 23, no. 14 (2023): 6, emphasis in original, doi.org/10.3390/rel14020185.

281. Andy Brown, “Kalamazoo College Alumnus Jon Stryker Commits \$20 Million in Student Scholarships,” *kzoo.edu*, 15 June 2018, kzoo.edu/news/stryker-scholarships/.

282. "Interview with Jon Stryker: A Journey to Inclusive Philanthropy," *synergos.org* (2008), synergos.org/news-and-insights/2008/interview-jon-stryker-journey-inclusive-philanthropy.
283. Kevin J. Jones, "An Arcus News Service? RNS Denies LGBT Money Influences Religion Coverage," *Catholic News Agency*, 1 April 2015, emphasis added, catholicnewsagency.com/news/31788/an-arcus-news-service-rns-denies-lgbt-money-influences-religion-coverage.
284. In Elon Musk's case, it does: Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), "I will say that," x.com, 11 February 2025.
285. Millan and Alvarez, "Asian Americans," 174.
286. Hutcheon, "Postmodernism."
287. Nussbaum, "Professor of Parody."
288. "One should never be too casual, therefore, in claiming understanding. When it comes to interpreting texts, honesty forbids certainty. Human knowing, of books and of the Book of Nature, is mediate and approximate. Here Christians can agree with chastened postmoderns." Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning?*, 181.
289. Jonny Thomson (philosophyminis), "About 200 years ago," Instagram, 12 March 2025. While extreme edge cases might properly temper Kant somewhat, at the very least his argument gives us a sense of the moral burden we take on when we knowingly resort to lies.
290. David Hitchcock, "Deep Disagreement as Intellectual Colonialism," (paper presented at the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation (OSSA), 12th annual Conference, University of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, 3 June 2020), 3, uwindor.scholaris.ca/items/56e31b0b-ca56-40cd-98d2-759baf356280/full.
291. Smith and Hedelius, "It's Not Loving."
292. Hitchcock, "Deep Disagreement," 3–4.
293. Similar issues and their potential causes are discussed in John Gee, "Wither Mormon Studies?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 93–130, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/whither-mormon-studies/.
294. Though beyond the scope of this review, the entire dynamic is worth thinking about as a case in which academics (especially in the humanities) suffer increased competition, political pressure, and societal distrust, and so respond to shore up their positions individually and collectively. Such behavior is more common for groups that suffer "economic downturns," those that are "perceiving a loss of social capital, prestige, rank, or extinction," and those with a combative ethos that "incentivize[s] . . . intergroup competition for resources." Kiper, "Religious Hate Propaganda," 10.

While traditional societies launch attacks against out-groups via formal ritual events, modern ones tend to rely on "sacred spaces, political platforms, or *publications that are trusted by the community*, by which the audience commits to the apparent importance of the information. In these situations, the audience presumes that because accusations against a targeted other are overseen by *trusted cultural authorities*, they . . . are socially accepted *because of the*

process and role of the authority. This does not mean the audience believes that the information is necessarily true, but rather that it is a *social* fact, which the audience should accept and to which they should collectively commit.” Kiper, “Religious Hate Propaganda,” 9–10, emphasis added. Postmodernists should get it.

In this case, the Mormon Studies scholar can commit to the social facts by giving awards to work that outwardly honors the forms and tropes of the scholarly process and role, even while remaining well aware of its grave factual errors. Kiper, “Religious Hate Propaganda,” 11–12, including discussion of attacks that use “counterintuitive content that is often difficult even for the ingroup to rationalize, yet adherents accept it anyway.”

295. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “Here is a secret,” x.com, 26 January 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1883617549176459348.
296. Historians “believe in vigorous debate, but they also believe in civility. They rely on their own perspectives as they probe the past for meaning, but they also subject those perspectives to critical scrutiny by testing them against the views of others. Historians celebrate intellectual communities governed by **mutual respect and constructive criticism.**” AHA, “Standards of Professional Conduct,” 4, emphasis in original.
297. Carl Trueman has identified an evangelical species of the same genus: “the familiar and tiresome figure of the social climbing evangelical academic who never misses a chance to trash anybody who happens to stand just to his right theologically . . . [but] always finds something of value in, and even fawns over, those to his left.” Carl R. Trueman, *The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 4, e-book.
298. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “First review,” x.com, 27 October 2024, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1850620309906317725.
299. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “So grateful,” x.com, 13 January 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1878801843998113922.
300. Taylor Petrey (@TaylorPetrey), “Very honored,” x.com, 27 January 2025, x.com/TaylorPetrey/status/1857630255516721454.
301. Patrick Q. Mason (@patrickqmason), “Smart take,” x.com, 30 November 2024, x.com/patrickqmason/status/1863110166662770967.
302. In Bolt’s play, Sir Thomas More ironically compliments Richard Rich’s chain of office marking him Attorney-General of Wales, his reward for perjury against More. More pities Rich, saying famously, “Why, Richard, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world. . . . But for Wales!” Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons: A Play of Sir Thomas More*, Kindle ed. (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013), loc. 1923–39.
303. “All historians share responsibility for defending high standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials.” AHA, “Standards of Professional Conduct,” 7.

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