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Queer Divine Waters

Our gods are Queer, because they are what we want them to be.
— Marcella Althaus-Reid, Indecent Theology

The Chinese novel 西遊記 (Journey to the West) by Wu Chen'en from the Ming Dynasty (14th–17th century CE) begins with a heavenly disorder created by a naughty yet mighty monkey, the “Great Sage” Monkey King, who revolts against the gods. The Buddha Tathāgata (如來) captures him, but bets with him that if he can fly out of the right hand of the Buddha with a single somersault, he will not be punished for the revolt. The Monkey King can cover thirty-six thousand miles with a single somersault and thinks to himself that the Buddha must be an idiot, for his hand is less than a foot large! He makes the jump, thinks that he is already at the end of the sky, and thus leaves an inscription as proof. He writes, “齊天大聖到此一游” (“The Great Sage who

1 “Something is chaotically and confusingly formed before heaven and earth, so tranquil and so fragile yet independent and unchanging. It circulates and never ends. It can be regarded as the mother of all.” Daodejing, ch. 25.
equals heaven was here”) on one of the five giant pillars in front of which he also urinates. He returns and the Buddha tells him, “You never left the palm of my hand!” The Great Sage refuses to believe him, looks at the Buddha’s right hand, and sees his inscription on the Buddha’s middle finger, where one also gets a whiff of smelly monkey pee. The name Tathāgata (如來), which means the “one who has attained full realization of thatness (Tathā-ta) […] and who] neither comes from any where […] nor goes to any where,” should have already warned the Monkey King of the omnipresence of the Buddha. S/he is beyond time and space, and certainly beyond gender.

If the body of the Buddha metaphorically represents the cosmos beyond the limits of conceivable space and time, the story about the Monkey King’s revolt and subsequent failure to escape the Buddha’s palm is an allegory of the omnipresent natural order. This ultimate harmony or orderedness is only temporarily disrupted by the smelly chaos that tries in vain to conquer it. Journey to the West offers an understanding that is seemingly the opposite of the Babylonian Enuma Elish. The Monkey King is the one who tries to induce chaos through “culture,” including writing, onto the harmonious and orderly nature, whereas Marduk, also representing “culture,” is the one who brings order by subjugating Tiamat/nature, who, as a result of this imposed order, becomes known as the chaos that ought to be tamed. The Chinese text regards nature as represented by the Buddha as an “order as such.” 自然, the Chinese word for “nature,” coincides philosophically with the idea of the Sanskrit name of the Buddha Tathāgata. The Babylonian text seems to suggest the contrary; that “nature” as represented by Tiamat (and Apsu) is chaotic and therefore should be organized by a “righteous” order represented by Marduk, who, allying himself with “culture,” conquers not only through a spell but also with weaponry.

This quick comparison of the two texts installs a dichotomy between chaos and order, culture and nature, as if they were

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3 K. Krishna Murthy, A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Terminologies (New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1999), 41.
ahistorical, separable, and self-sufficient entities. Putting the two culturally diverse stories together, we can see, at least, how different cultures understand these allegedly dualistic pairs in different and even contradictory ways. However, neither the Chinese story nor the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, it seems, has assumed a dualistic separation, whose sustaining binary oppositional logic can be extended to nature/culture, passivity/activity, and femininity/masculinity in modernity. The Monkey King, the male-gendered “Great Sage,” and also the male-gendered Marduk all represent the temporary injection (seen as chaos or order) into “nature-as-it-is” or 自然 (seen as order or chaos). Expressed in the language of complexity theory, as Edgar Morin puts it, “disorder […] is the generalized dispersion and order […] is an arbitrary constrain imposed onto this diversity.”4 In both the Chinese and Babylonian texts, however, the so-called disorder and order are interchangeable concepts. What is at stake is how the dominant voice promotes the “generalized dispersion” and/or the “imposed arbitrariness.”

While the Buddha Tathāgata is gendered male, given the historical figure of the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, but ultimately transcendental in terms of gender, Tiamat is gendered female, given the motherly personification of the primordial sea in the Babylonian Epic of Creation, but is ultimately unstable and uncategorizable. Scholars of the ancient Near East remind us that “the sex of a god is not assigned based on his or her genitalia, nor is the gender of a god assigned based on the god’s sex.”5 This chapter will survey several moments in this vast and complex array of cultures and histories of the very diverse, unstable, and often confusing gendering (and ungendering) of primordial divine figures associated with water, from the Sumerian oceanic mother goddess Nammu and the Babylonian Tiamat-Apsu, to the biblical “deep” tehom.

While the Sumerians personify their primordial ocean “(the) Apsu” with a mother goddess figure Nammu, Tiamat of *Enuma Elish* assumes the male gender in Tablet II when she prepares for war with Marduk: “Tiamat assembled his creatures / And collected battle-units against the gods his / offspring.” In the post-Babylonian biblical Genesis, the primordial deep, *tehom*, even though morphologically resembling “Tiamat,” is semantically related to “Apsu.” Instead of trying to work out the confusions of the fluctuating mythological sources, we will wander back and forth with Tiamat-Apsu of *Enuma Elish* and inquire into the “queerness” of this commingling, resistant, and gender-blurred watery spaces. Like the inescapable palm of Tathāgata, the “chaotic” and “queer” Tiamat seems to have been constantly haunting Marduk’s self-appointed supremacy and righteousness. We will see how these “queer” divine waters might leak into our time and nurture our imagination for different, if not “new,” ways of thinking, embodying, and practicing queerness.

2.1 Primordial Waters

Before the “beginning” there are always other worlds, deep down. *Enuma Elish*, in any case, has not claimed to be an absolute beginning. Before *Enuma Elish*, the Sumerians had their mythology regarding the primordial waters. Author of *Sumerian Mythology*, Samuel Kramer asserts that “the Sumerian origin of the *Enuma Elish* is obvious and certain.” Nammu, “written with the ideogram for ‘sea,’ is described as ‘the mother, who gave birth to heaven and earth.’” In the myth *Enki and Ninmah*, Enki,
the supreme god, is born to Nammu in the *abzu*, the primordial sea and Nammu herself. Slightly changing his name, Enki later becomes Ea in *Enuma Elish*, overhears the infanticidal plan of Apsu and Mummu, and manages to kill them. Ea then builds his “dwelling” upon the *apsu* after he kills Apsu, the personification of the *apsu/abzu*.\(^9\) Similar to the Sumerian Enki, Ea’s son Marduk, the so-called hero god, is born and remains in the *apsu*. In the *Codex Hammurabi*, which marks Babylon’s supreme power in the region, we have a sort of synchronization of the Mesopotamian pantheon with the elevation of Marduk to the position of their patron god:

> When the august god Anu, king of the Anunnaku deities, and the god Enlil, lord of heaven and earth who determines the destinies of the land, allotted supreme power over all peoples to the god Marduk, the firstborn son of the god Ea, exalted him among the Igigú deities, named the city of Babylon with its august name and made it supreme within the regions of the world, and established for him within it eternal kingship whose foundations are fixed as heaven and earth.\(^{10}\)

In *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat occupies a role similar to that of Nammu, namely the primordial creatrix of all. This role is quickly balanced with a male-gendered creator Apsu at the outset of

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\(^9\) *Abzu* is the Sumerian pronunciation, while *apsu* is the Akkadian one.

the epic, and Tiamat is violently slaughtered by the “hero” Marduk, after which the epic proceeds to credit Marduk as “creator of heaven and earth.” In her feminist study on the relationship between the subjugation of women and state formation in Sumer, Rudy Rohrlich explains these changes as follows: “[W]ith the institutionalization of the patriarchal family, economic stratification, militarism, and the consolidation of the state in the hands of a male elite, male supremacy pervaded every social stratum.” Similarly, Tikva Frymer-Kensky points out in In the Wake of Goddess that “among the changes in religion, one trend that becomes very clear is the ongoing eclipse and the marginalization of the goddesses” in Sumerian society and the whole Mesopotamian region.

As one piece of evidence, Rohrlich invokes the goddess Nammu, whose supreme creation of heaven, earth, and human beings was transformed into “the combined efforts of Nammu; of the goddess Ninmah [...]; and of the water-god Enki.” Similarly, the deity An, now known as the first son born to Nammu, was initially “seen as female and referred to the overcast sky,” while being in some traditions “both male and female [... distinguishing] the god An (Akkadian: Anum) from the goddess An (Akkadian: Antum) to whom he was married.” Rohrlich further points out that at a later point in history Nammu, whose epithet ama-tu-an-ki actually means “the mother who gave birth to heaven and earth,” is described as merely An’s consort. Most alerting is Frymer-Kensky’s slippage in defining Nammu,

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13 Ibid., 85.
14 Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness, 137.
15 Ibid., 95.
16 Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, 114n41.
Enki’s mother, “the Sumerian prototype” of the later Tiamat of the *Enuma Elish*, as “the mistress of the watery deeps.”

The feminist political usefulness of works like Rohrlich’s and Frymer-Kensky’s notwithstanding, what is left severely unquestioned is the seemingly straightforward “naturalness” of the deities’ gender. Although “visual presentation or textual description of a god occurs after the sex has been agreed on by a culture, if any sex has been decided at all,” we are told, “how these designations are assigned is obscure and eludes any simple rationale.” If we dwell on this obscurity for a second and insist upon the fact that all the deities concerned are related to primordial waters, which were literally liquid and fluid, we might want to entertain the idea of an unstable gender system at play in these interrelated mythologies and deities.

The Sumerians personified the primordial (fresh water) ocean the Apsu/abzu as a goddess, Nammu “the mother, the ancestress who gave birth to all the gods.” In his much earlier review of Heidel’s book from 1943 mentioned above, Kramer briefly summarizes this difference of gender in Sumerian and Babylonian myths:

[B]oth the Sumerians and Babylonians conceived the primeval sea, itself probably eternal and uncreated, as the prime originator of the universe. In *Enuma Elish*, however, the primeval sea is conceived as consisting of two principles, the male Apsû (Apsû is a Sumerian loan word) and the female Tiâmat (Tiâmat is a word of Semitic origin). No such dichotomy is recognizable in the extant Sumerian mythological material and it is not unreasonable to conclude, therefore, that the introduction of Tiamat is a Semitic innovation.

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Thorkild Jacobsen contests Kramer’s association of Nammu-Apsu with the sea, arguing that “the sign with which her name is written does not [...] mean ‘sea’ [...] but] denotes — if read engur — primarily the body of sweet water [...] below the earth.” Hence, he proposes to interpret Nammu-Apsu-engur as “the ‘watery deep’ of the Mesopotamian marshes.”

He further supports this judgment by pointing out that even occasional usage of engur or abzu (apsu) to connote sea was very unlikely; since the sea was “an almost negligible factor” in the Mesopotamian life, it would be very strange if they chose it to worship it as a divine manifestation. However, the distinction between a sweet-water deep and salt-water sea “was not always as precise as modern people expect,” Tsumura contends, and “there is no evidence for distinguishing the sweet and the bitter sea [...] and] in Sumerian the sea [...] was conceived as a single body of water.”

This Sumerian “single body of water” might not be recognizable at the outset of Enuma Elish, where Apsu is said to personify the sweet-water “deep,” and Tiamat the salt-water “ocean.” What is more, the Atra-Hasis epic written in Akkadian, “known from several fragments from the Old and Neo-Babylonian period, as well as from Neo-Assyrian tablets,” depicts Enki/Ea as possessing “‘the bolt, the bar of the sea’ [...] which] may have kept Tiam(a)t(um) out, i.e. to stop its waters from mixing with the waters of Apsu.” This hypothesis, however, cannot stand. As we have seen in the first chapter, Tiamat and Apsu have been mingled from the beginning and all the gods have been dwelling in their shared watery space, which is occasionally referred to as “the Apsu,” and occasionally only as “Tiamat.” Marduk is said to have let out the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates from the eyes of Tiamat after he defeated her, suggesting that the “salt water

23 Ibid., 140n21.
24 Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2, 61.
25 Leick, A Dictionary of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology, 64.
26 Ibid., 60. According to Tsumura, The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2, 61, ùamttum or ùatmtum “could refer to both salt- and sweet-waters.”
sea” Tiamat is at this point also the “subterranean sweet water” formerly associated with Apsu. This comes without surprise, given that Apsu and Tiamat have become one.

If we stick to the Tiamat-Apsu mingling, it would be equally problematic to think of the two (in Enuma Elish at least) as a “dichotomy,” as Kramer has suggested in his summary of the differences between the Sumerian and Babylonian gendering of the primordial sea(s).\(^{27}\) Dichotomy, translated into an essentialized hierarchy of sexual differences, is very much a modern/colonial invention. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the reception history’s continuous monstirication of Tiamat is simultaneously constructive with the feminization of Tiamat, a result of the misogynist imaginary imbued in a phallocentric economy that renders the feminine side negative in the modern/colonial reception history. A firmly feminized and monstirified identification of the fluctuant and fluid Tiam(a)t(um) (Tiamat, the personified all-mother, and tiamtum, the Akkadian word for the sea) is not present in the original text, which occasionally refers to “her” as “him.” How much of a “her” is Tiamat after having mixed with the he-water-Apsu from the beginning, we better stop calculating.

What is more, as Jacobsen reminds us, “Sumerian does not differentiate semen and water: one word stands for both.”\(^{28}\) It is very thought-provoking, to say the least, that the semen-qua-water body should have been personified primarily as a goddess. Not only that, but Enki, the god who produces powerful semen, could also get himself pregnant.\(^{29}\) Outside the fantastic world of myths, we also have Nammu, the name of a goddess, used as the name of the most important Sumerian King Ur-Nammu, who apparently did not seem to be afraid of being “emasculated” by adopting a goddess’s name. The big ocean of semen personified as a goddess certainly moves Nammu’s creation story beyond

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29 Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 49.
the impoverished cliché of the so-called fertility myth, which is often no more than just a facile heteronormative self-consolation when faced with something as queer as a semen-goddess.

It is time for us to abandon or unlearn the very heteronormative and gender-essentialist logic that equates straight-forwardly a goddess with female or woman, or sees in the “sexual transformation” of An and Apsu an ontological metamorphosis between allegedly fixed identities: from female to female and male, and then to male. If we take seriously what feminists and queer theorists have reminded us of for decades, namely that gender (and sex, for that matter) is socially constructed, we need also to actually believe that it is also historically contingent, culturally variant, and textually ambiguous. It is, after all, absurd to think of mythical divinities, especially watery ones, with the vocabulary of “sexes,” a seemingly objective vocabulary contested from historical and biological perspectives.30

The Nammu-Tiamat-Apsu conjunction into/as the primordial waters has not, however, entailed their blurring into one undifferentiated and ungendered mesh. Deities of these creation myths are no exemplars for gender-ambiguity or genderqueerness. Highly identifiable individual deities “Tiamat,” “Apsu,” or “Nammu” exist in their own right and for their own sake. The Mesopotamian wor(l)d of seas and semen does not surrender to either identity politics or political nihilism, and precisely because of this, it seems to entail a queerness able

both to occupy such sites [subject positions] and to subject them to a democratizing contestation in which the exclusionary conditions of their production are perpetually reworked (even though they can never be fully overcome) in the direction of a more complex coalitional frame.31

This forecast of “queerness”—I remind those who associate what is queer with poststructuralist US academia or a certain type of “lifestyle” in the “post-Stonewall” era that David Eng succinctly calls “queer liberalism”\(^{32}\)—is made to us from the deep waters of ancient myths and history.

While the primordial waters of Mesopotamia may be recognizably gendered, often through anthropomorphic renderings, their confluences in the deep, *tehom*, of the biblical Genesis appear to be ungendered, or even unseen, as a result of the combined efforts of theologians and philosophers who attempt to reduce it to an uncreated nothingness.

2.2 The Deep

Genesis 1 is said to give testimony to the Christian orthodoxy of *creatio ex nihilo*:

> In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram, terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas. (Gen 1:1–2)

Despite the generations of theological and philosophical efforts that have transformed it into the most representative text on *creatio ex nihilo*, the text of Genesis itself continuously resists the *ex nihilo* doctrine. The text leaves many traces “before” and “within” God’s creation that resist this orthodoxy. The deep “abyss” (*tehom* in Hebrew), vibrating and dissident, has never surrendered to this purging doctrine. “Her” roaring existence before/within the creation insists. The giant watery space of the deep abyss leaks out and constantly haunts the theological efforts to ignore, erase, and murder her/it.

The text of Genesis does place an article before *tehom*, which potentially makes it a proper name. However, in Hebrew *tehom* is a feminine noun, which might suggest her/its connection to

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some earlier feminine deity in the region. Catherine Keller traces the biblical *tehom* to *Enuma Elish*: “[T]he face of the deep was first — as far as we can remember — a woman’s. Tiamat, ‘salt water, primal chaos,’ lay in primordial bliss with Apsu.” The primordial deep, in fact, goes even further, wider, and deeper than *Enuma Elish*. The philologist David T. Tsumura, working on Ancient Near East languages, contends that “Akkadian *tiāmtum* or *tâmtum*, Arabic *tihāmat* […] together with the […] Ugaritic [*thm(t)*] and Hebrew indicate that all these forms are the reflections of a common Semitic term *tihām*.”

“The primeval sea […] conceived by the Sumerian as eternal and uncreated” travels back and forth, from Sumer and Babylon and to the Bible. Nammu was the life-generating primordial all-mother, personification of the *abzu/apsu*, the fresh water that lies in the deeper memory of the “water deep.” Many discussions have been devoted to whether it was the Babylonians or the Canaanites who influenced the writing of Genesis. In his *God’s Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea*, John Day claims that “so far as tehom’s mythological background is concerned this is not Babylonian at all, but rather Canaanite,” although he does not deny the fact that “both tehom and Tiamat are derived from a common Semitic root.” He only contests a theory of “direct borrowing” from the Akkadian Tiamat into Hebrew *tehom*.

The influences on the Bible from myths in the region problematically called the Ancient Near East cannot be overstated.

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35 Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, 51–53. Here Tsumura points out that -t is the feminine ending for the Ugaritic word *thm* (ocean).
38 By “problematic,” I mean that the concept of “(Ancient) Near East,” like “the Americas” or “the Orient,” is not a value-free and constative geographical denomination. The near-ness of “Near East” or far-ness of “Far East” marks Europe as the zero point of observation.
Just like the ineffaceable *tehom* vis-à-vis the so-called *ex nihilo* God, it cannot be erased. Given the frequent interchanges between culturally and linguistically diverse yet connected groups in this region, and especially the Israelites’ exile during the “Babylonian Capture” when part of Genesis was written, any clear distinction between a “direct” or “indirect” borrowing is not very relevant to our discussion. The rejection of a direct, or, shall we say, straightforward borrowing is an unnecessary but certainly not naïve effort to try to neatly compartmentalize one fluctuant ocean of merged wor(l)ds.

The Hebrew *tehom* and Ugaritic *thm(t)* are “semantically corresponding closer to *apsu* than to *tiamtum* though morphologically corresponding to the latter.” That is to say, *tehom* becomes a “male” semanteme (i.e., gender) with a “female” morphology (i.e., body). The watery bodies, like trans bodies, are therefore not simply a surgical or sartorial mutation or “transgression” from one self-enclosed gender/sex to the supposedly oppositional other.

The clear waters of biblical misogyny, in accord with the phallic *creatio ex nihilo*, become blurred through their own lexicality. In the same way that modern reception history has monstified Tiamat by joining the Babylonian rulers in reiterating the masculine mono-power of Marduk in the name of order, Christian orthodoxy propagates the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and condemns any interpretation of Genesis that is not accordingly heteronormative as heresy. However, “the habit of producing heretics as outer boundary markers for orthodox identity also exposes a repressive evasion of evident Christian complexity.”

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40 The Akkadian *tiamtum*, which Tiamat derives from, “has a much wider semantic field than its West Semitic cognate terms” (Kramer, Sumerian Mythology, 73).


Self-appointed, authoritarian orthodoxy tries in vain to impose monochromatic and lifeless doctrine onto the rainbow-hued and vibrant act of creation. Hardly successful, the use of the Genesis account to condemn any other interpretations as either “paganism” outside Christian monotheism or blasphemy within is protested by the text of Genesis itself. A text made of a multiplicity of sources\textsuperscript{43} (a watery concept already) can be reread other-wise. I continue to learn to learn from non-modern texts to understand how they have resisted the modern categorical and hierarchical logic of segregation, long before “queer theory” was coined in the 1980s. It is also in this sense, as commitment to the ethics of queering, that I reject the \textit{ex nihilo} narrative of the single “origin of queer theory” and consequently its unsolicited canonization.

“Bereshit, bara elohim” (Gen 1:1), the most commented on line of the Old Testament, engenders numerous interpretations. The multiplicity of possible meanings from the “beginning of beginnings” is already at odds with any attempt to coerce them into one well-closeted doctrine (or the doctrine of oneness). What does the Hebrew text tell us? Sticking to the original text, by the way, only contradicts the decolonial and queer promise of pluralism, if either one pretends that the original text has or can only have one meaning, one reading and one truth; or more dangerously, if one believes that one can do just anything despite the original (by chanting the orthodoxy of the death of God, author, and so on, even though these were originally liberating).

This first sentence of Genesis has two drastically different interpretations reflected in the wording and syntax of the trans-
lated versions. Different versions have translated Genesis 1:1–2 as follows:

When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God’s breath hovering over the waters. (Robert Alter’s translation)

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (King James Version)

在起初天主创造了天地。大地还是混沌空虚，深渊上还是一团黑暗，天主的神在水面上运行。(思高本，Studium Biblicum)

Au commencement, Dieu créa le ciel et la terre. La terre était informe et vide: il y avait des ténèbres à la surface de l’abîme,

44 I have chosen two English versions: the King James Version and Robert Alter’s translation; one Chinese version: the Studium Biblicum Version (思高本); one French version: la Bible de Jérusalem; and one Spanish version: la Biblia Latinoamericana. They are all translated directly from the original languages (Old Testament — Hebrew; New Testament — Greek) and represent large speaking populations.

45 For the English translation I use the version accompanied by many useful commentaries by Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary (London: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1996). This work focuses exclusively on Genesis and is also a translation that is meant to correct “something seriously wrong with […] the familiar English translations […] of the Hebrew Bible” and to provide a new version “in a language that conveys with some precision the semantic nuances and the lively orchestration of literary effects of the Hebrew” (ix).

46 This version is used by Chinese Catholics, translated from various primal sources in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin versions and manuscripts. Another influential version in Chinese is the Chinese Union Version (和合本), used mainly by Protestants, translated from English instead of from Hebrew and Greek.
et l’esprit de Dieu se mouvait au-dessus des eaux. (La Bible de Jérusalem)

En el principio, cuando Dios creó los cielos y la tierra, todo era confusión y no había nada en la tierra. Las tinieblas cubrían los abismos mientras el espíritu de Dios aleteaba sobre la superficie de las aguas. (La Biblia Latinoamericana)

These various versions of the Bible in different modern languages are all translated from the original texts in Hebrew with reference to versions in Latin and Greek. Despite the linguistic specificity of these modern languages, I roughly divide these translations into two major groups concerning Genesis 1:1. The first group is, following the first words of the Latin Vulgate Bible, called “in principio.” The King James Version, the Chinese Statium Biblicum, and the French La Bible de Jérusalem belong to this group. The syntactic rendering of these translated versions resembles the Latin Vulgate: “in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.” The reader is told that “in the beginning,” “在太初,” “au commencement” (in principio) it was God who created (creavit Deus) the heaven and the earth. This group, opening the Bible with a full sentence describing God’s creation in line with the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, renders the Hebrew “bereshit bara elohim” as “some comprehensive creative act on the first day.” However, it contradicts the following Genesis account of creation, in which “the heaven was created on the second day to restrain the celestial water (1:7–8), and the earth on the third day (1:9–10).”

The second group is what I would call “enuma elish,” the Akkadian phrase that marks the beginning of the Babylonian Epic of Creation, meaning “when on high,” a temporal clause in

47 The French translation from Hebrew by biblical scholars.
48 The Spanish version translated by biblical scholars and widely used in Spanish-speaking countries.
50 Ibid.
grammatical terms closer to the Hebrew *bereshit* (also the Hebrew title of the book of Genesis). “Bereshit bara elohim” is here understood as a temporal clause, which highlights the connection between *Enuma Elish* and Genesis, and thus the “chaotic beginnings of Christianity.”51 More importantly, it suggests a totally different theological take on the creation act compared to the “in principio” group. In Robert Alter’s version and *la Biblia Latinoamericana*, the first sentence is translated as a temporal clause: “En el principio, *cuando* Dios creó los cielos y la tierra.” In the Rabbinic commentary by the medieval rabbi Rashi, the phrase is translated as “in the beginning of God’s creation,”52 echoing the same theological interpretation. How is this rendering different from the “in principio” group in terms of theological understanding of the creation act and how is it relevant to our discussion?

In his classic study of the Homeric and biblical narratives, Eric Auerbach argues that “the Biblical narrator was obliged to write exactly what his belief in the truth of the tradition […] demanded of him. […] What he produced […] was oriented toward truth.”53 In other words, the authors of Genesis do not nor ought to prove that God created the world. That God has created the world (*in principio* or not, from nothingness or not) needs no specification, narration, or, perhaps more unlikely, explanation in the text. Rather, one has to accept the action of creation as a given fact once informed by the authoritarian voice of the biblical narrator who speaks for God. The task of the narrator is to claim this truth through a narrative strategy that erases any suggestion of the need to prove the fact. That is to say, this claim to absolute truth should not rely on a narrated “reality,” but can

only be achieved through what Auerbach recognizes as a tyrannical gesture: “Woe to the man who did not believe it!”

In this sense, we are neither sure, nor do we need to care, about whether God has created everything out of absolute nothingness. The subject of this creation, announced to the world through a tyrannical gesture, is naturally expected to be a tyrant himself who would control man made-in-his-likeness. Don Cupitt points out:

The classical God-centered vision and the modern Man-centered visions both sought to unify the world by focusing it around a Centre, conceived in each case as a centre of understanding, power, control and self-affirmation. But precisely that wish to see the world fully understood and controlled by a self-affirming Ego is what we ought to give up. It is a sexist dream of mastery: nature as a fantasy-woman, completely subservient, responsive to one’s slightest desire [...]. I am saying that our life-practice needs to be freed from the old sexist-political ideal of a strong Ego, omnipotent power, fixed boundaries and total control.

Yet, if we move closer to the original text, to the crisp and complex Hebrew words, and listen to what bara elohim has to say, we might be surprised to find out that elohim, the plural form of eloh (god), is followed by bara, a verb in third person singular. The grammatically erroneous and unlawful phrase bara elohim occupies the very first sentence of the proclaimed absolute beginning of all beginnings, ruthlessly irritating those efforts, generation after generation, to suppress him/her/them into one enclosed, finite, and dead doctrine of the phallus. The grammatical rule of subject–predicate agreement exerts so trivial an influence on the vibrant creational force. Already in archaic times, and always inside the tyrannical narrative, we find a campy jux-

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54 Ibid.
tapproach that would be echoed by the young queer firebrand
Arthur Rimbaud in the 19th century: “je est un autre.” As Cath-
eryne Keller has noted, “Centuries before the deconstruction of
‘the subject,’ the western hypersubject, the subject of subjects,
quietly drops out.”

Elohim’s plurality remains ineffaceable and makes the bib-
lical God, at least in its Elohist account, the “One” that is not
one. “God ‘himself’ is unsure whether he is plural or singular.”
Many suggest that this apparent discrepancy in the sacred text
of monotheism should be understood as an expression that sug-
gests the “plural of majesty” or “plenitude of might.”
Those strictest monotheists who insist on elohim’s singularity, despite
the original text’s dissident indecisiveness, however, find it ac-
ceptable that the multiple should come from the one, so much
so that they feel obliged to multiply the majesty of the One God
into a plural Trinity.

Keller reconciles the discrepancy between elohim and mon-
otheism, subject and predicate, by coining a concept that pre-
serves the playfulness of the original text: the pluri-singularity
of creation. “Elohim,” as the “singular-plural being,” move(s)
to create 'adam, the human. And elohim said, “let us make a hu-
man in our image, by our likeness” (Gen 1:26); “male and female
He created them” (1:27). The original text is unsettled again:
with elohim vaiyomer the pluri-singular elohim enunciate(s)
through a singular voice (vaiyomer [“said”] is third personal
singular) a collective invitation: na’aseh (let us make). The plural
verb na’aseh is not an expression of royalty, for “the ‘royal we’
was not part of the vocabulary of kings or individual gods in the
ancient Near East.”

57 Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power & Promise: The
Subject of the Bible’s First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 23.
The biblical text seems confusing only to a mind that is trained to strictly compartmentalize everything, even divine beings, and to dogmatically follow grammatical propriety. *Elohim* is/are pluri-singular. “God’s own blurred and slipping self-definition suggests that things […] might in fact be as inherently indeterminable as the identity that creates [them].” Elohim might even seem “feminine,” though the grammatical gender of *-im* here is masculine plural. The “femininity” I am suggesting is not in the essentialist sense of a “primordial all Mother,” but in the playfulness and creativity of Luce Irigaray’s “this sex that isn’t one.” Only a male-female “He” could have created *them* in “His” likeness (Gen 1:27).

When the pluri-singular *elohim* began the creation of heaven and earth, his breath (*ruah*) hovered over the waters of deep *tehom*, which was covered by darkness. The “verb attached to God’s breath-wind-spirit (*ruah*) [*merachefet …*] might have a connotation of parturition or nurture as well as rapid back-and-forth movement.” Hornsby and Stone ponder queerness and chaos in the context of Genesis, link it with *Enuma Elish*, and suggest that the deep is “the undefined, the chaos” like Tiamat, “the symbol of the deep and of disarray, […] from [whose] eviscerated, divided body come the earth and sky.” Reading against the grain of the binary opposition in which heterosexuality is aligned with order and queerness with chaos, the authors of *Bible Trouble* are ready to conclude, “it is from queerness that

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65 Alter, *Genesis*, 3n2.
all creation comes.” The pre-fiat lux scene in Genesis 1:1–2 are either read as an unstable, chaotic, useless state of “uncreated-ness” or erased as negligible nothingness, ironically prepared for creatio ex nihilo. Yet, this moment of poetic juxtaposition, transgressive grammar, and roaring vibrancy echoes the indeterminate, multiple, and inclusive ethic of queerness. Let us suspend the lux for a second and venture (back) into the cosmic darkroom.

Temporal (bereshit), plural (elohim), watery (tehom), airy (ruah), and rhythmically moving back and forth (merachefet, as Alter explains it; tohu vabohu, as Keller explains it), the opening words of Genesis sound reparative: non-discriminating, relational, erotic, and full of life. Darkness (choshek), perhaps immediately falling prey to all thinkable negative connotations in and beyond Christian heteronormativity, was with elohim from the beginning and in many other instances68: “He [elohim] made darkness his secret place” (Ps 18:11). Darkness (choshek or not) is particularly dear to queers. Through a reading of Samuel R. Delany’s memoir The Motion of Light in Water,69 José Muñoz ties his theorization of queer futurity, that is hope, to the fraternal and fleshy night of cruising at the end of Christopher Street near the Hudson River in New York City “under the cover of a protective darkness.”70 Darkness was over the deep and God’s breath hovering over the waters (Gen 1:2).

Dark nights compress linear time (past–present–future) into queer temporality. The point of queer (time) “may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities […] and] to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless.”71 Queer

67 Ibid.
68 Gen 15:12–13, Ex 14:20–21.
71 Elizabeth Freeman, Time Binds: Queer Temporality, Queer Histories (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xiii.
futurity finds accommodation in the past. The earth, “welter and waste” (*tohu vabuhi*), declared useless and negative in the usual defense of *creatio ex nihilo*, resides with the deep waters (*tehom*) and is protected by the gentle darkness (*choshek*). *Tohu vabuhi* regains dignity in this moment of queer inclusivity, however trivial and problematic, as the *prima materia*.\(^\text{72}\) For the queer Delany, the “numberless silent sexual acts” declared welter and waste, even satanic and menacing to the public good, are “‘reassuring’ and ‘very human,’” since “the men in this space took care of one another not only by offering flesh but by performing a care for the self that encompassed a vast care for others—a delicate and loving ‘being for others.’”\(^\text{73}\)

The same intensity of entanglement is found in Pedro Almodóvar’s film *Entre tinieblas* (*Dark Habits*) from 1988 (*tinieblas* the Spanish word used to translate *choshek*). There, the impossible love of a drug-addicted Catholic nun for a female singer is declared through her dubbing of the song “Encadenado” (“Chained”) by Lucho Gatica: “Beloved, since our [love] is a punishment / that is in the soul until death /My luck needs your luck / and you need me more.”\(^\text{74}\) In between (*entre*) the obscurity (*tinieblas*) of the convent, the eccentric queer nuns throw a continuous carnival in which “individual identities dissolve and social oppositions break down” in an open text that is able to capture this “infinite interrelationship of interpretation.”\(^\text{75}\)

What is menacingly felt in every step of theo-political efforts to erase the *prima materia-qua-chaos* from the creation so as to secure a colonialist *creatio ex nihilo*, is the deep, *tehom*, a deep fear that is beyond the fears of darkness and *tohu vabuhi* altogether. I will now return to the intermingled primordial wor(l)ds: *tehom*, the *abzu*, Apsu, Tiamat, and Nammu. Their stories might reveal drastically different and visionary meanings.


\(^\text{73}\) Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 51.

\(^\text{74}\) “Cariño como el nuestro es un castigo / Que se lleva en el alma hasta la muerte / Mi suerte necesita de tu suerte / Y tu me necesitas mucho mas.”

once the clichés of creation myths’ “archetypical” order winning over chaos, allegedly represented in the Bible, have been swept away with the help of the original Hebrew lexicon.

2.3 Queer Primordial Waters

Kafka’s short story “Beim Bau der Chinesischen Mauer” (“The Great Wall of China”) may be read as a “commentary on the topic of differentiation.”76 This “building of the Great Wall of China” as the “whole ideological process of creating the notion of ‘you and me’ by searching and producing alterity”77 dissolves for queers who participate in cruising, protected by nightly darkness, entre tinieblas. Kafka might not know that in one of the “four greatest folk tales” of China, a disfranchised woman, Meng Jiangnü, brings down the wall. After learning that her newly married husband, who was forced to build the Great Wall, lies dead at the construction site, Meng weeps so plaintively that one section of the wall collapses. The mourning woman does not care about the empire’s reasons for building the wall, allegedly to separate good and bad at the expense of common life in the name of protecting their home(land) from the nomads. She stands together with the monstrified “barbarians” as the order-threatening tohu vabuhu. The “production of alterity,” of you and me, she and he, we and they needs to be rethinked from her perspective, that of the disenfranchised, the “illegal,” and the queer, who have no choice but to be (with) the so-called “chaos,” to weep the so-called “order” into collapse.

In the very beginning of Enuma Elish, Apsu and Tiamat “[h]ad mixed their waters together.” We know that they become one because “gods were born within them.” But we also know that Apsu is the “father” and Tiamat the “mother.” The epic reveals these parental identities through Mummu, the “vizier.” After Tiamat’s rage against Apsu’s plan of infanticide, Mummu

76 Dorothee Kimmich, “‘Interzones’: Spaces of a Fuzzy Cultural Logic,” in Charting the Interzone, 42–49 (EMJD Interzones Official Website, 2010), 48.
77 Ibid., 47.
“did not agree with the counsel of his / earth [sic] mother. / [and spoke to Apsu], ‘O father, put an end to (their) troublesome ways.” The mingled watery “one” between Tiamat and Apsu is likely forgotten, as we proceed to read more conflicts based on individual characters that talk to, kiss, or kill each other. If the previous discussion intends to multiply the oneness of the biblical God and the Genesis account in order to contaminate the monolithic, monotheist orthodoxy, this section takes an opposite direction by reuniting the seemingly separated divine beings into a queer one-ness. This one-ness, however, will be discussed in this section as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, or anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.”

The conflict between the primordial couple after Tiamat’s angry rejection of Apsu’s infanticide plan is followed in the epic by an interesting encounter between Mummu and Apsu, both gendered male:

(Vizier) Mummu replied and counseled Apsu;
[…]
Apsu was pleased with him [Mummu], his face lit up
[…]
(Vizier) Mummu hugged him,
Sat on his lap and kissed him rapturously.

Talon’s French version has the above-quoted verses as: “Then Apsu clung to Mummu’s neck,” and Mummu kisses back. This rather homoerotic moment has rarely been commented on. Mummu promptly comes out in the epic and as a troublesome figure. Before the Apsu–Mummu encounter, in the epic’s first stanza, mummu is already there, written together with Tiamat,

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transliterated as *mu-um-mu tia-amat mu-al-li-da-at gim-ri-šú-un.* In “The Seven Tablets of Creation,” Wallis Budge translates this as “‘Mummu’ Tiâmat, who bare each and all of / them,” rendering *mummu* an epithet of Tiamat. Leonard W. King, however, translates *mummu* as independent from Tiamat as both the “son” of Tiamat-Apsu and as the “chaos.” He also states that *mummu* is also a name of Marduk. To move out of this confusion, he argues, much like his followers who firmly hold onto the rivalry between chaos and order, that

it is possible that the application of the title to Tiamat and her son was suggested by its ambiguity of meaning; while Marduk (and also Ea) might have born the name as the ‘form’ or “idea” of order and system, Tiamat and her son might have been conceived as representing the opposing “form” or “idea” of chaos and confusion.

Heidel dedicates an article to the discussion of different opinions regarding the meaning of *mummu,* understanding it as the remnant of a Sumerian goddess or as another title for Tiamat. Reviewing these interpretations together, it almost seems that *mummu* also intends to confuse rigid modern (gender) boundaries. *Mummu,* a word borrowed from Sumerian, should be a feminine noun to the extent that some suggest it was the name for a Sumerian goddess, although in *Enuma Elish* they undergo a masculinization and becomes the “son” of Apsu and Tiamat and also occasionally goes by the name of Marduk, “the

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80 Ibid., 33.
81 Budge, *The Babylonian Legends of the Creation and the Fight between Bel and the Dragon,* 32.
84 Ibid., 100.
85 I am borrowing the singular usage of the plural pronoun “they” used by the transgender community to evade the over-determination of gendered pronouns when referring to most of the deities.
creator of heaven and earth.” Mummu has joined Tiamat and Apsu to have “mixed their waters together.” Heidel argues that “Mummu was the personified fog or mist rising from the waters of Apsû and Tiâmat,” their “son” in mythological language. As a conclusion, he suggests that this understanding of Mummu is “in full accord with the statement in Enûma eliš that the three deities Apsû, Mummu and Tiâmat ‘mingled their waters together,’ or ‘mingled their waters as one.’” The heterosexual nuclear family rendering of the trio is hardly convincing, not because it is anachronistic, but because the text of Enuma Elish actively discredits this facile modern imposition. Mummu–Apsu’s erotic encounter is one of those “dissident” instances.

To console the angry “father,” Mummu sits on Apsu’s lap and kisses him rapturously. The “lap” in the original text is birku. The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago lists several meanings for the entry birku. The editors exemplify one of the many connotations of birku, “lap — physically, referring to human beings,” with the line from Enûma Elish, “ušbamma bir-ka-ašú unnaššaq šâšu — he (Mummu) sat on his lap and began to fondle him.” We are told that birku is also “a euphemism for male and female sexual parts.” When Mummu and Apsu engage in the act of hugging, kissing, and fondling, it is difficult not to see such a euphemistic definition at play here. It might as well be a loving expression between father and son, or even between “bros.” The intensive eroticism between two “men” is explicitly described in the epic but silently ignored in reception history, whereas the intermingling of Tiamat and Apsu is immediately read as heterosexual intercourse that foregrounds fertility. One might argue that Mummu–Ap-
su’s encounter is an unimportant moment, which is at most overlooked but not deliberately silenced. The point is not to claim victimhood for some kind of primordial gay fathers, but to reveal the arbitrariness of rendering Tiamat-Apsu-Mummu in terms of a nuclear-family-like papa-Apsu + mama-Tiamat + son-Mummu; and to highlight the queer complexities of the Mummu–Apsu eroticism, Mummu–Tiamat connection, Mummu ambiguity — in another words, to perform a “perverse reading.” The work of Eve Sedgwick provides guidance here:

[B]ecoming a perverse reader was never a matter of my condescension to texts, rather of the surplus charge of my trust in them to remain powerful, refractory, and exemplary. And this doesn’t seem an unusual way for ardent reading to function in relation to queer experience.92

Mummu shakes up the certainty of the heterosexuality of the primordial couple. Right after this homoerotic moment, Ea overhears Mummu and Apsu’s plan and decides to kill them. The Apsu-Mummu pair might be easily read as a certain kind of proto-patriarchal hom(m)osexualité.93 Their effacement in reception history, however, has locked them in the closet of heteronormativity as the queer-chaos that should be controlled, rather than the hom(m)osexual patrilineality exalted by the Anshar-Ea-Marduk family (and the epic at large). Further on in Enuma Elish, Ea puts Apsu and Mummu to sleep and kills them: “He held Apsu down and slew him; / Tied up Mummu and laid him across him. / He set up his dwelling on top of Apsu.”94 Hav-

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92 Sedgwick, Tendencies, 4.
93 Hom(m)osexualité is a term coined by Luce Irigaray that combines the French word homme (man) and homosexualité (homosexuality) through her reading of Sigmund Freud. Hom(m)osexualité points to the “homosexuality” — the desire for the (male) same — of patriarchy. See Luce Irigaray, Speculum de l’autre femme (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1974), 120–29.
94 Talon translates it as “Il enchaîna Apsû et le mit à mort / après avoir enfermé Mummu et tiré sur lui le verrou” (The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enûma Eliš, 80).
ing killed Apsu and chained Mummu, Ea rests in his dwelling with his lover Damkina. Marduk is also born.

Then he [Ea] rested very quietly inside his private quarters
And named them Apsu and assigned chapels,
Founded his own residence there,
And Ea and Damkina his lover dwelt in splendor.

Bel,\textsuperscript{95} cleverest of the clever, sage of the gods, was begotten.
And inside Apsu, Marduk was created;
Inside pure Apsu, Marduk was born.

Even if “Apsu” at this moment already becomes the de-personified primordial fresh waters, it is still intriguing to notice that Marduk is born inside Apsu, in a way similar to how his elders were born inside Tiamat.\textsuperscript{96} Apsu thus becomes a womb-like place that generates life. Meanwhile, it is not difficult to notice that Marduk is also inside Tiamat, for at least two reasons. First, after the initial disturbances by the gods born inside Tiamat and the killing of Apsu by one of them, Ea, the epic has never indicated to us that the gods have moved outside of Tiamat’s belly. Second, the fact that Marduk can continue to make noise inside Tiamat in the manner of the elder gods, which at the same time annoys some of these gods, seems to suggest that they are \textit{all} still inside Tiamat. That is to say, Marduk is at the same time inside Apsu and Tiamat. In fact, from the very beginning Apsu and Tiamat have mingled together. The verb \textit{ihîqû} (to be intermixed), used in the epic’s first stanza, Tsumura contends, “does not even indirectly suggest the initial state of the primordial ocean as ‘chaotic’ [but] this ‘intermingling’ of these two waters was orderly in itself, i.e. ‘as one.’”\textsuperscript{97} Yet, as should be added at this point, this is a “one” that is not one.

\textsuperscript{95} Bel means “king,” and in some versions Marduk is called Bel-Marduk. That is to say, Bel is another name of Marduk.

\textsuperscript{96} “Then Gods were born within them.”

\textsuperscript{97} Tsumura, \textit{The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2}, 60n70.
The one-that-is-not-one defies the facile solution of seeing Apsu as “bisexual.” Bi-/homo-/hetero-sexuality ceases to hold much meaning when Apsu’s genders are regarded as malleably changeable with regard to the flux of their textual and historical resurgences. This changeability however, is not anything-goes. The skillful subterranean liquids of Tiamat and Apsu leak out from the closet of both queerphobia and essentialized identities, resonating with contemporary theorizations of queerness. Attending to their “queerness” is “to make invisible possibilities and desires visible […] to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and […] to challenge queer-eradicating impulses frontally where they are to be so challenged.”

It is important to highlight the possibilities excluded (by epistemological and physical means) in order to demarcate the boundaries of intelligibility and of normativity.

Through the reception history of *Enuma Elish*, the queer moment of homoeroticism between Apsu and Mummu is overlooked and the unstable *mummu* adjacent to “Tiamat” has been either erased in translation or fixed as the “son.” Also a primordial chaos (let us accept this simplistic rendering for just a moment), Apsu has been largely forgotten. The oblivion or erasure of the masculinized aspect of the primordially one ocean made of mingling salt, sweet, and steamy waters secures “the chaotic” as thoroughly feminine by ways of Tiamat, the essentialized “mother goddess.” Whenever the “deep” is evoked, whether in studies of *Enuma Elish* or the Bible, the immediate image that comes up is a feminized Tiamat, a sea/she monster, “queen of a hideous host,” or the “bad mother/progenitrix.”

Even if the primordial waters could be seen as chaos battling against order/creation, why is Apsu in his order-menacing function very seldom remembered, not to mention that he indeed plans...

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to kill the newly born gods for their lively noisiness? And why is Tiamat not only remembered, but also repeatedly monstrified as the proto-enemy of order/creation who “opposed creation, at every step resisted God, tempted and seduced man?”

The masculinized aspect of the primordial “chaos” (Apsu) has to be completely erased together with his suspicious “homoeroticism,” so that the allegory of order winning over chaos can justify itself through a series of phallocentric binaries: man controlling woman, activity overcoming passivity, and culture dominating nature.

“Tehomophobia,” Keller argues, is a manifestation of misogyny that complies with the doctrine of the masculine creatio ex nihilo through a “sexual economy of colonized wombs, ruled by a disembodied Word.” She alludes on several occasions to the centrality of homophobia in thinking about tehomophobia. Weaved into the imaginary of the threatening “deep,” tehomophobia is directly linked to homophobia, the masculine hatred/fear of femininity in general, including one’s own passivity embodied by the anus/rectum. In Policing Desire, Simon Watney analyses homophobia as a “displaced misogyny [… that is] a hatred of what is projected as ‘passive’ and therefore female, sanctioned by the subject’s dominant heterosexual drives.” This is a dear observation to the feminist queer Asian man that I am, constantly threatened by the fascist extirpation “no asians!,” which has become almost a slogan of a white supremacist gay “community” that coerces Asian men “to occupy the most unsexy, undesirable position […] seen as soft, effeminate, and poorly endowed” — in other words, to occupy tehomic bottomhood.

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102 Keller, Face of the Deep, 223.
Racialized tehomophobia goes further and deeper than the hatred and fear of the womb or “bottom.” After lingering so long on a lexical excavation aimed at resisting the modern, heteronormative dichotomization of etymological “beginnings,” I propose a critical survey of the correlation between these two forms of tehomophobia, misogyny and homophobia, to understand how they come together in the stigmatization of the anus, a womb-like open “scar” on the human body that makes sex/gender/sexuality irrelevant.

What holds together misogyny and homophobia is the fear of femininity reiterated through all kinds of social and cultural practices. Deeply buried below or behind this hatred and anxiety, in its modern/colonial context (that is to say, in a context in which the male/female dichotomy accompanied by heterosexuality is naturalized and normalized), is a wounded anus, an innocent organ demonized into the equivalence of immorality, transgression, “sin,” or simply being stupid, and not to mention, if penetrated, annihilation. Beatriz (now Paul) Preciado argues that the privilege of the heteronormative masculine subject is won at the price of “anal castration”:

The boys-of-castrated-anus established a community of what they called City, State, Fatherland, whose power and administrative authority excluded all those bodies whose anus remained open: women are doubly perforated as a result of their anus and vaginas [with] their entire body transformable into a uterine cavity capable of housing future citizens; however also the bodies of faggots, which the power was not able to castrate; bodies that repudiated what others would consider anatomic evidence and that create an aesthetic of life from this mutation.106

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106 Beatriz Preciado, “Terror anal,” in El deseo homosexual de Guy Hocquenghem, 133–72 (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Editorial Melusina, 2009), 137: “Los chicos-de-los-anos-castrados erigieron una comunidad de la que llamaron Ciudad, Estado, Patria, de cuyos órganos de poder y administrativos excluyeron a todos aquellos cuerpos cuyos anos permanecían abiertos: mujeres doblemente perforadas por sus anos y sus vaginas, su cuerpo entero trans-
In a nutshell, the Spanish queer theorist has subverted the phallicentric obsession with the penis in the Freudian fantasy of male “castration anxiety” and female “penis envy,” with the almost inconceivable idea of “anal castration.” After all, how can the anus be castrated if it does not even “exist?” The phallicentric psychoanalysis coerces all men to have “castration anxiety” and all women to envy the penis. Because of their “dispossession” of the penis, women were, as if by nature, already castrated. All these alleged fears or envies could only make sense in an androcentric culture so obsessed with the penis.\textsuperscript{107}

This obsession is explicitly shown in dictionary entries. After having surveyed the Spanish definitions of \textit{ano}, \textit{pene}, and \textit{vagina}, offered by the Real Academia de Español, Preciado finds that only the penis enjoys the biopolitical privilege of being considered a sexual organ. The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} offers almost the same, far from simply objective definitions in English of “anus” as the “posterior opening of the alimentary canal in animals, through which the excrements are ejected”; “penis” as the “male genital organ used (usually) for copulation and for the emission or dispersal of sperm […] and serving also for the elimination of urine”; and “vagina” as the “the membranous canal leading from the vulva to the uterus in women and female mammals.”\textsuperscript{108} It is no coincidence that “penis envy” is adjacent to the entry of “penis” and “vagina dentata” to “vagina.” These ad-

\footnotesize{formable en cavidad uterina capaz de albergar futuros ciudadanos, pero también cuerpos maricas a los que el poder no pudo castrar, cuerpos que reniegan de lo que otros consideran evidencia anatómica y que hacen de la mutación una estética de vida.”

\textsuperscript{107} I am aware of the differences between the biological penis (Freud’s focus) and symbolic phallus (Lacan’s focus); however, I follow Jane Gallop’s suggestion that although the “penis is what men have and women do not; the phallus is the attribute of power which neither men nor women have […] As long as the attribute of power is a phallus which refers to and can be confused with a ‘penis,’ this confusion will support a structure in which it seems reasonable that men have power and women do not” (Jane Gallop, \textit{The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis} [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], 97).

\textsuperscript{108} All of these definitions are from the \textit{Online Oxford English Dictionary}.}
jacent entries seem to confirm the widespread (and theorized) belief that the penis is appealing and should be envied; whereas the vagina is abhorrent and should be feared.\textsuperscript{109} However, this penis–vagina dichotomy doesn’t really apply in the text of \textit{Enuma Elish}. Apsu, as shown above, is in a suspicious relation with the enviable phallus/penis, for “he” is, after all, a watery cavity. Apsu’s existence quite literally marks the lack. “He” is the hom(m)osexual father forgotten in the closet of modern receptions. In order to secure this oblivion, the feminized/monstrified “primordial monster” Tiamat has to be deflated, first by Marduk in \textit{Enuma Elish} and then repeatedly by the reception history that continues this cry:

Let him defeat Tiamat, constrict her breath and shorten her life
So that for future people, till time grows old,
She shall be far removed, not kept here, distant forever.

The social scientific endeavor of deciphering the past is not just an innocent act of interpretation. In the critical light of queerness, Marduk’s creation act of slaughtering Tiamat is hardly righteous. Paul Ricoeur is perhaps the first to read \textit{Enuma Elish} in this social context, especially that of “justified violence.” Despite the overt pessimism that sees violence as inscribed at the origin of things, he aptly observes:

\textsuperscript{109}“Penis Envy” is defined as “(supposed) envy by the female of the male’s possession of a penis, postulated by Freud to account for some aspects of female behaviour,” suggesting possible fraud in this theory with the bracketed “supposed.” However, “Vagina Dentata” is defined as “the motif or theme of a vagina equipped with teeth which occurs in myth, folklore, and fantasy, and is said to symbolize fear of castration, the dangers of sexual intercourse, of birth or rebirth, etc.” in which the male subject who fantasizes the fear of being castrated is rendered transparent. Additionally, the alleged “fear of castration” cannot accommodate Preciado’s “anal castration,” and “sexual intercourse” is assumed to be a heterosexual penetrative one without the question of how a vagina equipped with teeth would be fearful for, say, non-vaginal sexual intercourse, whether homosexual, heterosexual, or any-sexual.
In the battle between Marduk and Tiamat, Marduk appears as the brutal power, as unethical as Tiamat’s anger. Marduk represents the creation and the destruction; by Marduk’s enthronement by the gods, human violence is then justified by the original one. The creation is a victory over an Enemy older than the creator.\textsuperscript{110}

Chanting the victory of Marduk, justifying his murderous violence with a rhetoric of order winning over chaos, sounds utterly familiar to the colonial discourse that propagates colonization as a process of bringing “light and sweetness” to the unenlightened “barbarians,” which will be looked at more closely in the two Parts to come. Here, let us take a temporal leap to look at its continuation in the “murderous representations of homosexuals unleashed and ‘legitimatized’ by AIDS” in the US media during the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{111}

Leo Bersani, in his essay “Is the Rectum a Grave?” written at the peak of the AIDS epidemic, denounces the crimes of the Reagan government’s non-response, and the increased policing of those “unacceptable ones in the AIDS crisis [who] are, of course, male homosexuals and IV drug users (many of the latter, […] poor blacks and Hispanics).”\textsuperscript{112} Despite his argument’s ethnocentric assumption that “all people of color are straight, all gay men

\textsuperscript{110} Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Philosophie de la volonté: Finitude et culpabilité 2, 2: La symbolique du mal} (Paris: Aubier, 1960), 173: “Au cours de la lutte qui oppose Mardouk à Tiamat, Mardouk apparaît comme puissance brute, aussi peu éthique que la colère de Tiamat. Mardouk figure l’identité de la création et de la destruction ; lors de l’intronisation de Mardouk par les dieux […] la violence humaine est ainsi justifiée par la violence originelle ; la création est une victoire sur un Ennemi plus vieux que le créateur.”


\textsuperscript{112} Including “criminal delays in funding research and treatment, obsession with testing instead of curing.” Besides, the US Justice Department issued a “legal opinion stating that employers could fire employees with AIDS if they had so much as the suspicion that the virus could be spread to other workers, regardless of the medical evidence.” The American Secretary of Health and Human Services “argued against the need for a deferral law guaranteeing the confidentiality of HIV antibody test results” (ibid., 4–6).
are white,” as criticized by José Muñoz.\textsuperscript{113} Bersani’s righteously angry criticism is particularly relevant to my analysis of the discursive mechanism of tehomophobia when he argues, “\textit{power} is in the hands of those who give every sign of being able to sympathize more with the murderous ‘moral’ fury of the good vicar than with the agony of a KS patient.”\textsuperscript{114}

The justified violence (homophobia in this case) is cunningly fed by the strategy of accusing and monstrifying the victim, much like the unethical treatment of Tiamat in Enuma Elish reproduced by modern scholarship, as I have shown throughout these two chapters. Simon Watney explains the overt public homophobia during the AIDS epidemic to the representation of female prostitutes in the 19th century that condemned them “as contaminated vessels, conveyancing ‘female’ venereal diseases to ‘innocent’ men.”\textsuperscript{115} Through Watney, Bersani further points out that homosexuals, “those belonging to the group hit most heavily by AIDS […] or those being killed are [demonized as the] killers” and the intentional vectors of AIDS.\textsuperscript{116}

Thus, far from an anachronistic “application” of queer theory to a remote antiquity, almost in an absurd gesture to coerce a reading that would interpret the primordial watery deities as the densely symbolized modern/colonial heteronormative asses, what I want to show is the great political potential of an “unclean,” non-identitarian, undifferentiated deep. This is at odds with the tehomophobic interpretations that are no less absurd in forcing the mingling ancient waters into the modern/colonial hetero-monogamous nuclear family composed of papa, mama, and son,\textsuperscript{117} however metaphorical these personifications might

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Muñoz, \textit{Cruising Utopia}, 33–35.
\item \textsuperscript{114} This alludes to the headline of London newspaper \textit{Sun}: “I’d Shoot My Son If He Had AIDS, Says Vicar!” that the author mentions earlier in his analysis (Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” 5–6).
\item \textsuperscript{115} Watney, \textit{Policing Desire}, 33–34.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” 17.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Preciado ironically points out in a parody of Freudian family drama/trauma of the penis, “Los miembros de la familia no tienen ano. Papá no tiene ano. Mamá no tiene ano. El niño no tiene ano. La niña, ni siquiera importa si tiene ano o no lo tiene” (“The members of the family have no anus. Papa has
claim to be. Opposing these monolithic and seemingly straightforward interpretations and appropriations is to oppose the murderous logic that translates violence on the symbolic level of mythology into a physical violence in everyday politics.

The miraculous survival of queer subjects under the life-threatening impulses to eradicate them from epistemic intelligibility and material livability in the name of “order” — be it Marduk in his “creation of heaven and earth” or the general public’s murderous moral fury against any sexual dissident — has fortunately revealed the limits and inadequacies of the dominant system. While Apsu is locked in the heteronormative closet of tehomophobia, his sexual partner Mummu leaks out, by adhering to Tiamat, “mu-um-mu tia-amat mu-al-li-da-at gim-ri-šú-un.” As monstrified chaos, Tiamat-Apsu (and Mummu) keep(s) their body open, penetrable, and malleable. The imaginations of the sometimes separated, yet always mixed, Tiamat-Apsu-Mummu-Nammu-Tehom, of penetrable “male” bodies and of long-silenced but ineradicable homoeroticism, haunt not only Marduk and the Babylonian Kings, but also the Bible and the whole tehomophobic and phallogocentric tradition of their receptions.

The survival strategies of these antique queer beings urge us to suspend our facile gender identifications and respect their embodiments as complex entanglements. Our ordinary experiences of the rectum — “the terminal, usually relatively straight, section of the large intestine in humans and other mammals, ending in the anus” (OED) — can help us to understand these queer divine beings, who convey a kind of gender parody that “reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin.”

These perpetually displaced primordial fluids lying at the origins of human imagination that oscillate between unclassifi-
able indifference, *undifferentiation*, and killable differences, *are*
forms of chaos that can never be conquered.