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## What Could a Trans Book History Look Like? Toward Trans Codicology

### Cover Page Footnote

This article is dedicated to my trans sisters: the trans women and femmes who are disproportionately targeted by transphobia and violence; those whose lives have been lost; and those who persist and thrive in the face of transmisogyny. I am indebted to those who came before me, especially those in premodern trans studies who have helped me locate myself within this exciting field. I am always learning from you. I would like to thank the editors of this special issue, who recognized the importance of the work and helped give it voice. All errors and omissions remain my own.

# WHAT COULD A TRANS BOOK HISTORY LOOK LIKE? TOWARD TRANS CODICOLOGY

J. D. Sargan

We have always been here. Always were. Always are. Even when people want us gone, we remain. This is the threat that trans lives pose: our existence confounds the restrictions of lineal cis hetero reproduction. We are a bioessentialist's nightmare. There is no single lineage; we have our own queer lines of descent.

We have always been here. So says Eleanor Rykener, a trans woman arrested and questioned on charges of prostitution and sodomy in 1394.<sup>1</sup> And so says the cry echoing through premodern and historical trans studies, where the recovery of trans and trans-like figures resists silences and ambiguities in the documentary record.<sup>2</sup> But, in a world where circumstances, language, and societal pressures combine to occlude trans lives from the archive, the possibilities of recovery are necessarily limited. Even as we add the names of L. M. (Lou) Alcott and George Eliot to a growing list of historical trans (or trans-like) authors, we are forced to grapple with the fact that in most places for most of history trans people did not write.<sup>3</sup> And that when their names do enter literary and documentary records, it is against a different backdrop of terminology and expectations. The recovery of such figures will always be the exception: proof of the presence, but never the richness or the extent, of trans lives.

In response to such occlusions, we develop tactics and tools to read the record and understand the trans-like hints we find there. We learn to detect transness where its presence has been obscured; to respond to the enforced cis heterosexuality of the record with new ways of looking. But to access the full extent of trans experience we also need ways to read *through* the gaps—to understand the trans experiences that never made it to the page and to see them despite their systemic exclusion. Written records remain one of our richest sources of evidence for historical lives lived. Books are records of people and as such they present a contact point between our own experiences and those of our premodern counterparts. If we are to benefit from this proximity, we need methods that understand

the capacity of the book object to act as a vehicle for trans histories. We need a trans book history that takes in the material object, as well as the texts it preserves: a trans codicology.

We have always been medievalists. Medievalism is one space in which trans people have located sustenance. So say Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, whose creative hagiography and shared affective devotional practices at STAR House reimaged medieval liturgical analogs and Marian iconography as sources of shelter, nourishment, and nurture for the racialized and gender divergent young people who lived there.<sup>4</sup> And so says Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski in a recent discussion of the ongoing process of trans community building in the “House” of medieval studies.<sup>5</sup> Understanding this means recognizing our academic endeavor as *more than* the accumulation of facts and production of knowledge. Dedicating ourselves to trans histories requires acknowledging that we are moved by, motivated by, and sustained by our studies. If we can do this, then the affective draw they have on us becomes the strength—and not the weakness—of the work. A trans book history must be guided by trans methodologies. It must sustain those it purports to historicize.

In this article I draw on critical trans studies and queer archival practice to propose a book historical mode that extends what we know about the premodern trans experience beyond the recovery of individual biographies. Instead of looking to textual sources for the identification of transness, I look to Susan Stryker’s call to “recuperat[e] embodied knowing as a formally legitimated basis of knowledge production.”<sup>6</sup> Bibliography, I suggest, makes claims of objectivity that engender a particular reluctance to respond to such calls. But the lived reality of archival research is one of affective embodiment. Affect theory is an area which, as yet, has seen little methodological uptake in bibliographical research.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I lay the ground for a trans book history that takes affective embodied response seriously as a source of trans connection to and through the past.

### Needing Trans Codicology—A Personal Introduction

The archive is a political space. What (or who) is preserved, how, and by whom are not neutral outcomes. Consequently, the archive is also a space where the political gets personal. For transgender people—as for other minority groups—the grassroots collection of archival materials has been and remains a crucial claim to space, history, and communal identity.<sup>8</sup> Transgender archives, as K. J. Rawson recognizes, are places of being and

becoming: formative and constitutive.<sup>9</sup> In acknowledging this, I recognize that my identity as a queer transmasculine person and a medieval book historian drives my need for trans codicology.

It is early 2015. I am meeting with a psychotherapist to explore transition. Is there, she asks, a relationship between my research interests and my gender identity? The idea repels me. The reason for my resistance is twofold: first, I wish to assert that my gender is not the most interesting thing about me; second, I am trained to think that to be “rigorous” scholarship must avoid what is personal, emotional, or subjective. Bibliography, in particular, reinscribes this model through its treatment of the book object as an ontologically stable and objective form to be assessed through a set of pseudoscientific transferable methodologies. But in actuality, we cannot divorce such methods from our embodied experience. “[W]ithout experience,” states Roger Bacon, defining the principals of experimental science in his *Opus Majus* (ca. 1267), “nothing can be sufficiently known.”<sup>10</sup> Knowing is the preserve of the body.

It is May 2018. I am in a panel titled “Towards a Medieval Transgender Studies” at the International Congress on Medieval Studies. The panel—sponsored by the Society for Medieval Feminist Studies—features papers by Bychowski, Alina Boyden, Ced Block, and Nicholas Hoffman and Joy Ellison and will form part of the basis for a 2019 special issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, “Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism.” I cry. I cry for trans pasts and trans futures: in mourning for voices lost and in celebration of voice-giving. I cry with recognition, with relief in being seen and in seeing myself. But my emotions are not a separable response to be annexed to the side of the room; they are a critical thinking through of the complex interwoven lives that underlie premodern trans studies. My emotions recognize and share in the labor of knowing.

It is May 2, 2022. A draft of the Supreme Court majority opinion set to overturn *Roe v. Wade*—the 1973 case that protected the right to abortion under the US Constitution—has been leaked.<sup>11</sup> The decision is part of the Court’s ruling on the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, a case questioning the constitutionality of a 2018 Mississippi state law banning abortion after fifteen weeks. Such bills are part of a sustained attack by conservative lawmakers on the rights of minority groups to privacy and bodily autonomy. Such attacks include the slashing of protections for transgender people, the restriction of access to contraception, and the denial of women’s right to choose. Transgender people are exhausted and in need of sustenance. We look to a history of survival and continuance to assure us of our own.

I position the need for a trans codicology, then, among trans people: among those like myself, engaged in archival study and in need of nourishment. By insisting on a formulation of trans book history that sees transness *in* as well as *on* the record, and by doing so in a way that recognizes knowledge as situated within the affective body, trans codicology expands the possibilities of historicizing trans experience in a way that both acknowledges and values the psychic needs of its practitioners. It asserts the transtemporal force of emotional response—positive and negative—to material form as a methodology that allows for thinking through systemic occlusions in written records.

### Locating Trans Codicology—A Critical Introduction

The archival collection of explicitly trans material is a relatively new phenomenon. Like their exclusion from other collections, this accrual of trans artifacts is guided by rhetorical choices that construct community through the ascription of value (what is and is not acceptable; what is and is not worth preserving). In institutional archives, in particular, LGBTQ2SIA+ materials are often collected to evidence approved narratives in queer history. Such collecting practices may attempt to engage in liberatory frameworks, but the sanitized narratives they present will always “privilege some while oppressing others.”<sup>12</sup> This usually means preserving records of white cis homosexual men at the expense of trans and nonbinary people of color.<sup>13</sup> But even intentionally intersectional grassroots archiving efforts must contend with the problem that records can never be fully inclusive: they will always reflect the context of their production and collection and the hierarchies (of race, class, education, etc.) that reside within those contexts. Moreover, while an archive might preserve the records of a political, geographical, or artistic movement, they rarely capture the full extent of trans personhood. All that remains of that richness is the rhetorical traces of the people and communities behind the records. As a result, as José Esteban Muñoz observes of queer history, the dynamic range of trans experience can be constructed only from the ephemeral rhetorical traces surrounding the written record.<sup>14</sup>

In premodern collections the traces of queer lives are reduced further by the limitations of language, of literacy, and of material survival. To piece together these traces, recent scholarship recognizes transness in premodern literatures of various genres and mobilizes it as a means of “perceiv(ing) the trans lives that might be shown there.”<sup>15</sup> Recovery of premodern trans (or trans-like) figures has been hugely generative. Such

work reveals scholarly, as well as archival, occlusions, opening up earlier research to new readings that challenge the reinforcement of modern cis hetero norms by framing premodern trans identities as inherently anachronistic. Anna Kłosowska, Bychowski and Dorothy Kim, Karl Whittington, and others have shown medieval people engaged in sophisticated multifaceted discourses of gender transformation and becoming.<sup>16</sup> Recent scholarship has recovered the richness of the premodern trans experience, from Kłosowska's readings of Ptolemaic astrological theory in late medieval translations, to Jonah Coman's treatment of medieval trinitarian theology as trans ontology.<sup>17</sup> Saints lives, romances, trial records, natural sciences, philosophy, theology—all have been shown to preserve spaces of transness that not only prove transgender as a category of analysis is *not* anachronistic but also position the study of premodern transness to unlock intertwined and intersectional identities.<sup>18</sup> That said, the circumstances that preserve transness remain undertheorized. Premodern trans studies, for the most part, has focused on articulating trans literary theory to facilitate textual and artistic recognition and analysis.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the scope of our understanding of the premodern trans experience is governed by the limitations of the textual record.

Feminist print bibliography has critiqued similar recovery-based approaches. In a 1998 issue of the SHARP newsletter, Leslie Howsam remarks on the limited window that the recovery of female agents provides into the gendered spaces of book production and consumption.<sup>20</sup> While small numbers of women were regular participants in the business of printing and selling books—just as they were in the copying of manuscripts<sup>21</sup>—most are not named in documentary records. Adding to a fragmentary list of names will never fully historicize women's roles in the print shop. Nor does it address the dominance of white men in the scholarly and historiographical traditions of the field. Such traditions, Kate Ozment shows, which often explicitly position bibliography as a historicist enterprise antithetical to the interventions of (most) critical theory, “created a field that if it is not openly hostile to gendered work is at best ambivalent about it.” Not only has this methodological inheritance limited the impact of important feminist interventions, it has also limited the demographic makeup of the field. Feminist book historical studies, Ozment concludes, must challenge both limitations.<sup>22</sup> Or as Sarah Werner puts it: “[Y]ou cannot keep adding recovered histories and think that it will take care of the problems our overwhelmingly white male field faces today. If you are recovering history, are you also opening doors and inviting people to write new histories?”<sup>23</sup> A trans book history requires similar methodological interventions. If we wish to challenge the limitations of

recovery, we must extend the bounds of trans experience beyond the evidence of manuscript content. We must welcome theoretical lenses that reckon with the material records' relation to the lived experience of those who come into contact with it and provide the conditions that allow such work (and the scholars who do it) to thrive.

Some progress has been made toward such an intervention. Bychowski counters the need through the formulation of "trans textuality," in which the shared ontologies of the skin of the transsexual body and that of medieval parchment reveal the manuscript page as a deep surface that facilitates trans reading through time.<sup>24</sup> In "Toward a Trans Philology," Joseph Gamble takes an etymological approach to the early modern proliferation of words with the prefix *trans*-, as a means of thinking through the material of language to a more rich and affirmative history of transness.<sup>25</sup> But at their root both approaches remain in service to the text. For Bychowski, the surface is a vehicle that activates the interplay of words and images in "The Pardoner's Tale" and "The Physician's Tale," while Gamble explores a linguistic form of identity formation. What can we say of the premodern trans lives excluded from the textual record? And how can we do it in a way that sustains and affirms trans communities today?

One supplement to recovery-based print bibliography is the recognition that archival research is also an embodied practice. Research is a lived process, mediated and regulated by bodily experience. "Embodiment," as Stryker puts it, "not only animates the research query but modulates access to the archive, in both its physical and its intellectual arrangement."<sup>26</sup> Research is, in the spirit of true Baconian empiricism, simply a series of sensory inputs and outputs. But a sensing body is also a feeling body. Our emotions are both regulated by and guide our sensory experiences. Archival research practice, then—much as we may try to deny it in the name of objectivity—relies on the entanglement of embodied knowledge and affective response. Jack Halberstam senses this in a survey of materials relating to the murder of Brandon Teena in Fall City, Nebraska, on the last day of 1993, a collection that Halberstam terms "the Brandon archive." Beyond the homophobic commodification of Brandon Teena's memory that Halberstam identifies among cis media responses, he finds that the attention the Brandon archive receives is part of a collective act of "active remembering" and trans mourning, that if well directed can result in Brandon's "unlosing."<sup>27</sup> We see the same restorative potential in Marika Cifor's encounter with a hair belonging to the sex worker and activist, Victoria Schneider. Cifor recalls feeling an "intoxicating affective mixture of surprise and (dis)pleasure" on spotting one of Schneider's hairs clinging to the surface of her lipstick while going through the archived



contents of her makeup kit.<sup>28</sup> As a piece of bodily ephemera, Cifor suggests, the hair “animates” the embodied violations and bodily acts of resistance that the textual documents show Schneider experienced, challenging “the notion that the body can be seen only in its necessary absence [from the archive].”<sup>29</sup>

The possibility of reanimating trans bodies from absence, of course, is crucial if we are to see beyond the occlusions in the premodern record. However, it is not Schneider’s hair that animates her trans archive—the hair remains a hair, the reports and interviews surrounding Brandon Teena’s death remain news clippings—it is Cifor’s affective embodied response that has animating properties; or as she puts it, “it is not that this hair looks like a body, it is that it *feels* like one.” The hair conjures Schneider’s body, because it prompts Cifor’s recognition of her own emotionally and physically charged experiences of other hairs on other bodies.<sup>30</sup> Not only is affective embodiment vital to perceiving the materials we study, but by embracing our emotional response to such archival encounters, we can trigger (re)animation through bodily recognition.

Crucially, for book historians this requires dispensing with the veil of objectivity provided by our use of material records. The tendency of book historical studies to retreat from and avoid the implications of critical theory has been critiqued from many angles in the last two decades.<sup>31</sup> Valuable studies have responded to such critiques, but it remains the case that most work (at least in manuscript studies, the area of the field with which I am most familiar) rests on the same fallacy: because we study *real* objects using pseudoscientific observational methods, we deal in proofs and establishable facts.<sup>32</sup> Such thinking preserves a position of critical distance that holds our objects and the relationships we have with them at arm’s length. If we can do this, we do not need to grapple with the mechanics of embodiment that facilitate empirical knowledge creation. For reasons of space and situation, I will not rehearse here the roots of that position in colonial kyriarchy, which has been better analyzed by others.<sup>33</sup> Rather, I issue a challenge to book historians to acknowledge, reflect on, and sit with the fact that—perhaps more so than any other discipline—we choose our objects of study because of the affective relationships we have with them. Book historians love books. In denying our affective responses to the books that we study, we inhibit a critical tool that could otherwise serve us. The material record has more to tell us, if we can accept our bodies—complicated, fraught, emotional—as a way of understanding the past rather than as a hinderance to that understanding. Emotional investments are not irrational; they are embodied responses to sensory cues and intellectual challenges issued by the world around

us. In what follows, I propose a specific mode of book historical inquiry through affective trans embodiment, but that approach, I suggest, should be embedded in a field that takes affective response seriously.

### Toward Trans Codicology—A Worked Example

The binding of a twelfth-century collections of saints' lives belonging to the Diocese of Shrewsbury was once covered in a soft fur chemise. Today, all that remains in situ is the outer left side, which is still attached to the front board with four copper corner bosses. The rest has been cut away (fig. 1).<sup>34</sup> This book is one of a collection of twelfth- and thirteenth-century books from Cistercian institutions in England and France to be bound in a sealskin chemise.<sup>35</sup> Such chemises and the haptic experiences they promote, I suggest, activate the formation of affective communities of care suitable for sustaining trans reading experiences.

Shrewsbury's furry book is an apt choice of example. Its contents exhibit, among other things, an interest in gender transcendence. The volume begins imperfectly as follows:

- f. 1r: Jerome, *Vita Pauli*, beginning imperfectly at ch. 11 “[sci]ebam. olim te conseruum meum misi promiserat deus.”
- f. 2r: Life of St Anthony the Great (January 17)
- f. 19r: Passion of St Concordius of Spoleto (January 2)
- f. 19v: Life of St Euphrosyne/Smaragdus (January 16)
- f. 24r: Passion of St Martina of Rome (January 30)
- f. 31r: St Anselm's commentary on the Pauline Epistles

The hagiographical content has several areas of overlap: all are early Christian martyrs of the Roman Empire known for their ascetism, explaining their presence alongside two apostolic tracts. But the *Life of St Euphrosyne/Smaragdus*, in particular, has received significant scholarly attention for the gender transgressions it invites. The *Life* is reasonably well attested in western Europe, where it circulated variously in Latin, Old English, and Old French manuscripts throughout the medieval period. It is one of several saints' lives that involve the miraculous obscuring or transforming of gender in order that the saint may avoid an unwanted cis heteronormative binary marriage and live a life in holy orders.

Commentary on St. Euphrosyne/Smaragdus's *Life* has traditionally characterized it as (1) an example of saintly “exceptionalism” and (2) as a pragmatic claim to male agency through the act of cross-dressing.<sup>36</sup>



*Figure 1. Shrewsbury Diocese, Moriarty MS 4, c/o Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens, Langley Park, Co. Durham. Published with kind permission of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury. My thanks to Palace Green Library, Durham University for providing access to the manuscript.*

But Amy V. Ogden's recent edition of the Old French text takes seriously the space and capacity for variance in gender and sexuality within the medieval monastic experience.<sup>37</sup> Smaragdus's abandonment of femininity, Ogden finds, is not just a strategy to navigate patriarchal power (to avoid marriage and progress within the masculine hierarchies of the church) but also a claim to a spiritual existence. "In approaching union with God, Eufrosine-Emerald [Euphrosyne-Smaragdus] moves from gender transgression (dressing a female body in masculine clothing) to

gender transcendence (inhabiting an identity without gender).”<sup>38</sup> For Ogden, then, the trappings of postlapsarian binary gender (marriage, family, and patriarchal control) are obstacles to attaining religious life that can only be overcome through “gender transcendence.”<sup>39</sup> Read alongside the other virgin martyrs in the collection, whose gender can be similarly construed as transcending postlapsarian categories, Smaragdus’s presence demonstrates a particular compilatory interest in the spiritual power of nonbinary gender.

Hagiographic collections like Moriarty MS4 posit a space for trans-like genders within orthodox, and even superlative, religious lives. In fact, we might put forward the Shrewsbury collection as a direct analog for Silvia Rivera’s practice of liturgical compilation, in which the hagiographies of a range of saints—in Rivera’s case, St. Barbara, St. Michael, La Calidad de Cobre, and St. Martha—are made to signal transness through their intertextual combinations and the context of their deployment.<sup>40</sup> The selection of the narrative contents of the Shrewsbury collection in particular carves out a conceptual space for transness within the Cistercian community of care by collating trans-like models of ascetic monasticism.

But if the contents of the volume pose the question, I argue, the material form of the book suggests some answers. Bychowski recognizes the connection between the skin of the page and the skin of the transsexual body. Both, she notes, “become culturally intelligible” through “operations of the skin:” the paradoxical cut-and-stitch that turns flesh into form while at the same time revealing the mechanics of its transformation.<sup>41</sup> In her readings of fragment VI of *The Canterbury Tales*, Bychowski looks to Jay Prosser’s foregrounding of “the bodily matter of gender crossings” and Judith Butler’s “sharp-machines” of their creation to highlight the trans materiality of the parchment page.<sup>42</sup> But what if the transitioned surface of the page is more than a window on to trans texts? For parchment was already marked by its transition before the works it bears were ever written. The text in the second column of the second page of the *Life of St Euphrosyne* is copied around two small holes. The holes are no bigger than 10 mm across at their widest points and go straight through the page with no delamination of the surrounding parchment.<sup>43</sup> They were caused by small nicks in the surface of the skin, which have been stretched during the production process, and might be compared to similar holes caused by insect bites or sheep pox. Several further small holes mark the pages that follow, and the outer edge of the final page of the life preserves a larger tear, stitched closed before the skin dried on the horse and the thread now removed.<sup>44</sup>

Such marks exist in a state of trans legibility. The marks, and beneath them the more visceral patterns of bruising and vasculature that the surface retains, are not equally construed by all readers. Many readers—now and in the past—will focus their attention on the text alone, reading past the underlying marking. But someone trained in animal husbandry or parchment making has the insights to read a different narrative. They see the “sharp-machines” of the transition in the marks of the knife, the needle, and the lunellum. But they may also see a previous existence: the size, shape, and health of the calf, and even the manner of its death.<sup>45</sup> In these selectively legible, or trans legible, marks I sense my own body’s movement through the world. As a trans person who regularly passes as male in public settings, much of the time my body is read according to the surface that I have written. But when I encounter the right readers—those who can read the signs of their own experience—the marks of my transition are laid open. Further, those who raised me, my own husbandpeople, see on my skin the continuities and shadows of a previous identity. The parchment surface retains trans experiences to be reanimated in concert with trans literate readers.

The trans legibility of the parchment surface relies on the existence of a reading community that can parse it. That community is built through the surfaces of the book. The book is a connective surface; a site of shared touch that allows the reader, in Carolyn Dinshaw’s words, to “mak[e] connections across time” and space.<sup>46</sup> Books—in this case centuries old—pass from hand to hand and on their surfaces go the touch of previous readers, whose experiences link them to further networks of books read and shared.

The Cistercian sealskin chemises present a special case. Practically speaking, the chemise acts as a layer of protection. The fur, Élodie Lévêque suggests, insulates against changes in temperature and humidity and cushions the book against shocks.<sup>47</sup> However, the chemises also function to enhance the reader’s tactile experience. The sensation of fur beneath the fingers—much softer eight hundred years ago than the worn fibers that remain—enriches the handling of the book. Such sensual experiences are an important component of the body’s role in Cistercian theology. Bernard of Clairvaux insists on bodily experience as a necessary and valuable tool in the service of spiritual enlightenment.<sup>48</sup> But these bindings, shared across different religious houses, also create a community of touch. A twelfth-century monk in the library at Byland Abbey in North Yorkshire will see the same bindings and have the same tactile interactions with them as a monk in Cîteaux,

Burgundy. Such shared experiences function as a form of community formation. For those unable to leave the monastery the affective embodied experience of interacting with their furry books functioned to reinforce community ties. Indeed, the sensory delight engendered by the soft fur encourages such interactions, playing an active role in affective community formation.

When Marika Cifor found a hair stuck to Victoria Schneider's lipstick, it "altered [her] identification" to Victoria Schneider's body. The hair was an intimate contact point that animated the absent body.<sup>49</sup> When I encounter the furry binding of the Shrewsbury hagiography the touch I share is not with an individual, but with the affective reading community it established. In the worn smooth leather on the spine edge, I find other hands that have stroked, held, and cared for this volume during their encounters with it. In stroking the remaining hair, I find, as Cifor did, intimate embodied gestures of care. With these actions then, I am participant in the community of care that these books represent; I share in those same affective communal spaces. So could this queer trans collation of saints' lives indicate a space for transness in the medieval Cistercian community? By giving my own trans body access to that affective community, the material of the book answers in the affirmative. My own touch ensures a trans readership for this volume, and in doing so situates trans belonging within the communal frame. My participation in the mechanisms of community formation through the haptics of the book activates the possibilities of other trans readers. My recognition of the volume's trans legibility reanimates potential embodied reading experiences. In effect, the book's material trans legibility validates the interpretation of the text, not just as an exploration of sanctified transcendent gender but as a representation of trans readership too.

As premodernists, we cannot divest ourselves of the manuscript record and its flaws, for we have few other sources to refer to. But by treating the manuscript record as a whole—the records that prompt identification and those that do not—we can access richer, more variegated, trans histories: histories driven not by the recovery of individual talismanic figures but by the affective possibilities afforded by material encounters with the past. The access to a trans historical affective community promised by such approaches is sustaining. In it we find an archival community of care: "a call-and-response-style dialectic that serves to change both the contemporary person and the historical object."<sup>50</sup> Such histories, Rawson and Charles E. Morris suggest, are the starting point for ensuring the futurity of queer pasts.

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## NOTES

This article is dedicated to my trans sisters: the trans women and femmes who are disproportionately targeted by transphobia and violence; those whose lives have been lost; and those who persist and thrive in the face of transmisogyny. I am indebted to those who came before me, especially those in premodern trans studies who have helped me locate myself within this exciting field. I am always learning from you. I would like to thank the editors of this special issue, who recognized the importance of the work and helped give it voice. All errors and omissions remain my own.

1. Corporation of London Records Office, Plea and Memoranda Roll A34, m. 2 (1395), qtd. in (and edited and translated by) Ruth Mazo Karras and David Lorenzo Boyd, “‘*Ut cum muliere*’: A Male Transvestite in Fourteenth-Century London,” in *Premodern Sexualities*, ed. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York: Routledge, 1996), 99–116. In recent years, Rykener has become a touchstone in the work of premodern trans studies; a rare example of a premodern trans person with a documented—albeit heavily mediated—voice: see Kadin Henningsen, “‘Calling [Herself] Eleanor’: Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case,” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 249–66, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2189>; and Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, “The Transgender Turn: Eleanor Rykener Speaks Back,” in *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern*, ed. Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 95–113.
2. Four recent collections in particular emphasize the vibrancy of premodern trans studies: Dorothy Kim and Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, eds., “Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism,” special issue, *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019); Simone Chess, Colby Gordon, and Will Fisher, eds., “Early Modern Trans Studies,” special issue, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2019); Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, eds., *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); and Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska, eds., *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021). My use of the word “trans-like” draws on Judith M. Bennett, “‘Lesbian-Like’ and the Social History of Lesbianisms,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (2000): 1–24.
3. For Alcott, see Peyton Thomas, “The Radical Acceptance Behind Little Women,” *Oprah Daily* (23 Jun 2022), <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/a40395357/the-radical-acceptance-behind-little-women/>; Peyton Thomas, “Did the Mother of Young Adult Literature Identify as a Man?,” *The New York Times* (24 Dec 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/24/opinion/did-the-mother-of-young-adult-literature-identify-as-a-man.html>; and Peyton Thomas, *Jo’s Boys: A Little Women Podcast*, podcast, MP3 audio, 2022, <https://anchor.fm/peyton-thomas0>. For Eliot, see Grace Lavery, “Trans Realism, Psychoanalytical Practice, and the Rhetoric of Technique,” *Critical Inquiry* 46 (2020): 719–44, esp. 741–44.
4. Joy Ellison and Nicholas Hoffman, “The Afterward: Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson in the Medieval Imaginary,” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 267–94, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2140>.

5. Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski (Guest), "Medieval Trans Studies," *The Multicultural Middle Ages Podcast*, produced by Jonathan Correa-Reyes, Reed O'Mara, and Logan Quigley, podcast, MP3 audio, April 25, 2022, <https://rss.com/podcasts/mmapodcast/463742/>.
6. Susan Stryker, "Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008): 145–57, quotation on 154–55, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2007-026>.
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8. K. J. Rawson, "Archive This! Queering the Archive," in *Practicing Research in Writing Studies: Reflexive and Ethically Responsible Research*, ed. Katrina M. Powell and Pamela Takayoshi (New York: Hampton Press, 2012), 237–50; K. J. Rawson and Charles E. Morris III, "Queer Archives/Archival Queers," in *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Michelle Ballif (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 74–89, esp. 75–79.
9. Rawson, "Archive This!," 238–39.
10. Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus* 1, ed. and trans. Robert Belle Burke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), 583.
11. Josh Gerstein and Alexander Ward, "Supreme Court Has Voted to Overturn Abortion Rights, Draft Opinion Shows," *Politico* (2 May 2022), <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/02/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-00029473>.
12. Rawson, "Archive This!," 238.
13. Stryker, "Transgender History," 145–49.
14. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 65.
15. Dorothy Kim and Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, "Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction," in "Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism," special issue, *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55, no. 1 (2019): 6–41, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2185>.
16. See, e.g., Anna Kłosowska, "Premodern Trans and Queer in French Manuscripts and Early Printed Texts," *postmedieval* 9 (2018): 349–66; Kim and Bychowski, "Visions," esp. 21–23; Karl Whittington, "Medieval," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (2014): 125–29.
17. Kłosowska, "Premodern Trans and Queer," 354–59; Jonah Coman, "Queering Christ: Habitus Theology as Trans-Embodied Incarnation in Late Medieval Culture" (PhD diss., Glasgow School of Art, 2019).
18. Many of the essays in the volumes cited above at n3 might be considered part of this intersectional movement. One important starting point is Bychowski's doctoral thesis: Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, "Transgender Histories and Genres of Embodiment" (PhD diss., George Washington University, 2017) and subsequent bibliography.
19. Bychowski and Kim, "Visions," 28.
20. Leslie Howsam, "In My View: Women and Book History," *SHARP News* 7, no. 4 (1998): 1–2.



21. Veronica O'Mara, "Female Scribal Ability and Scribal Activity in Late Medieval England: The Evidence?," *Leeds Studies in English*, 27 (1996): 88–130; Veronica O'Mara, "The Late Medieval English Nun and Her Scribal Activity: A Complicated Quest," in *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: the Hull Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 69–93; Alison Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Cynthia J. Cyrus, *The Scribes for Women's Convents in Late Medieval Germany* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009).
22. Kate Ozment, "Rationale for Feminist Bibliography," *Textual Cultures* 13 (2020): 149–78, quotation on 159.
23. Sarah Werner, "Working toward a Feminist Printing History," *Printing History*, 27/28 (2020): 11–25, quotation on 22.
24. Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, "Trans Textuality: Dysphoria in the Depths of Medieval Skin," *postmedieval* 9 (2018): 318–33. For related considerations, see Gabrielle M. W. Bychowski, "Reconstructing the Pardonier: Transgender Skin Operations in Fragment VI," in *Writing on Skin in the Age of Chaucer*, ed. Nicole Nyffenegger and Katrin Rupp (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 219–47.
25. Joseph Gamble, "Toward a Trans Philology," in "Early Modern Trans Studies," special issue, *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19, no. 4 (2019): 26–44.
26. Stryker, "Transgender History," 153. See also *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, ed. Gesa E. Kirsch and Liz Rohan (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).
27. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), esp. 45–75.
28. Marika Cifor, "Presence, Absence, and Victoria's Hair: Examining Affect and Embodiment in Trans Archives," *TSQ*, 2 (2015): 645–49, quotation on 645, <https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-3151565>.
29. Cifor, "Presence, Absence," 646.
30. Cifor, 647.
31. See, e.g., Leah Price, "Introduction: Reading Matter," *PMLA*, 121 (2006): 9–16, esp. 15.
32. For more on this, see Sonja Drimmer, "Connoisseurship, Art History, and the Paleographical Impasse in Middle English Studies," *Speculum* 97, no. 2 (2022): 415–68, esp. 416–26.
33. See, e.g., Stryker, "Transgender History," 153–54. People of color have been at the forefront of important conversations on this subject, which coalesces around the weaponization of the concept of "academic rigor" used to denigrate the scholarly value of work by members of minoritized groups, especially Black women: see, crucially, Donna Riley, "Rigor/Us: Building Boundaries and Disciplining Diversity with Standards of Merit," *Engineering Studies* 9, no. 3 (2017): 249–65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19378629.2017.1408631>.
34. Shrewsbury Diocese, Moriarty MS 4, c/o Ushaw Historic House, Chapels & Gardens, Langley Park, Co. Durham, England.
35. Élodie Lévêque, Claire Chahine, and Sarah Fiddymont, "Libri pilosi: la peau housée sur la reliures médiévales," *Support/Tracé: revue de l'association pour la recherche scientifique sur les arts graphique* 17 (2017): 63–71; Élodie Lévêque, "Les reliures romanes de l'abbaye de Clairvaux: Structure et Matériaux," *Gazette du livre médiéval* 63 (2017): 49–51; and Élodie

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  40. Ellison and Hoffman, "Afterward," 280.
  41. Bychowski, "Trans Textuality," 319.
  42. Bychowski, 319-20; and Bychowski, "Reconstructing the Pardoner," 226-30. See Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 66.
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  46. Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.
  47. Lévêque et al., "Libri pilosi," 63-64.
  48. Gordon Rudy, *The Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), esp. 45-66, among many others.
  49. Cifor, "Presence, Absence," 647.
  50. Rawson and Morris, "Queer Archives/Archival Queers," 83-84.