

Gender Queerness in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe
By Sydney Evans

The researching and writing process of this thesis was a labor of love; I could not have possibly completed it absent of the immense support and guidance extended to me by my peers and friends in Professor Bradley Bouley's Senior History Honors Colloquium. To my Pre-Modern comrades, James Scherrer and John Young, thank you for listening to my (often incoherent) ramblings, and providing useful and thoughtful feedback in every step of the process. To Carolina Sanchez, I am so happy that we were able to review each other's theses. Because of your passion and dedication to Xicanx history and struggle, I have been inspired and encouraged to deepen my knowledge in this area as I continue to build my Historical career. I am certain that I am not the last person who will be impacted by your work in this way. I have learned so much about regions and periods that I was wholly ignorant to prior, thanks to the careful work of these three people and of each of my peers. My world has become so much bigger throughout this journey, all thanks to the knowledge, relationships, and skills that I have been able to build.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my late great-grandmother, Margarita. Margarita was an intersex person born in Palermo, Sicily in 1919. Margarita was left orphaned by her parents mere hours after her birth, which was a common occurrence during the 19th and early 20th century in the poverty-stricken Mediterranean island of Sicily, even to parents of cisgender children with binary sexual anatomy. It is unknown then, what Margarita's parents were precisely motivated by when they brought their newborn, intersex child to the nearby orphanage to be raised by nuns and to live their adolescent years in their convent. Was it due to simple poverty, or was it perhaps due to shock or horror? Although these questions remain unanswered, I can happily report that Margarita went on to have a rich, long life and a healthy marriage with an Engineer named Diego, with whom she raised three children and over a dozen grandchildren.

My great-grandmother was unlike the grandparents of any of my peers while I attended Catholic school in my childhood, given that she never expressed any discomfort with family members who openly identified as transgender or homosexual. In fact, she had several LGBT+ friends while living in Miami, Florida at over eighty years old who she treated with the same care that she had for her family. She embodied what love, acceptance, and family means, by

always respecting and supporting the individuality of those around her. Margarita never implied or asserted that there was a proper way to embody womanhood or femininity; she only ever expressed affection and pride in her grandchildren in all of my lasting memories of her, regardless of our gender presentations or behaviors. It is likely that Margarita's acceptance, and even celebration, of queerness can be attributed to the ostracization and pain that others inflicted on her as an intersex person. Life was more difficult than it should have been for Margarita, and I wish that I could have listened to more of her own accounts of her life story, especially those painful early years which she was so reluctant to discuss. The fragments that I do have, however, are more precious than I have the words to articulate them with. Instead, I will conclude by simply saying: *Ti amo eterno, mia dolce Bisnonna*.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Understanding the Queer Middle Ages Through Critical Theories of Gender, Class, and Race

At the very heart of this project, I endeavor to argue for- and to demonstrate the importance of- learning and understanding Queer History. Towards this end, I will be presenting an intersectional, critical analysis of some of the lives of individuals living in late medieval and early modern Western Europe who would be considered “queer” today, due to their embodiments of gender and sexuality which stood at odds with structures of power and authority. By historicizing instances of gender non-conformity between c. 1200-1600 CE, I will discuss some of the driving factors which led individuals to be conceptualized as scandalous, heretical, or even “beastly” by their contemporary authority figures and peer networks alike. As Medievalist R.I Moore writes in his widely cited 1987 work *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, “Whether we choose to see the epoch since 1100 as one of progress or decline, to step back a little further is to see that around that time Europe *became* a persecuting society.”¹ Therefore, it is with respect to the exclusionary nature of late medieval and early modern European society, that much of the resulting discussion of gender and sexuality as a methodological tool will be predicated upon.

Through the Middle Ages, as I will demonstrate, the many ways that gender and sexual nonconformity have been conceptualized depended a great deal upon the degree to which an individual was willing to conform to other concurrent, dominant social hierarchies. One of the subjects of chapter three is “Lieutenant Nun” Catalina de Erauso, who demonstrates an instance of gender non-conformity which was accepted and even praised, in early modern Europe. Erauso

¹ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*: R.I. Moore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell)

was a male-presenting Conquistador born in 1592 in San Sebastian, Spain, with female sexual anatomy. Catalina de Erauso, unlike many of their gender-transgressive contemporaries, was afforded a unique freedom to dress and behave in traditionally masculine ways, according to their two-hundred page memoir. Erauso's relative privilege in how they self-express to others was due in no small part to their conformity to powerful social and moral hierarchies. Erauso's memoir details their contributions to Spanish imperial conquest through their military service, and their assistance in the genocide of Indigenous peoples in the New World. Eventually, it was discovered that Erauso possessed female anatomy, and they were allowed to return to Spain to (allegedly) meet with Pope Urban VII.

In other cases, as in the case of mid-fifteenth-century German Katherina Hetzeldorfer-who was, like Catalina de Erauso, born with female sexual anatomy- gender nonconformity was policed intensely, and punished by death. Hetzeldorfer was brought to court in Speyer, Germany in 1477, after charges of same-sex sexuality were brought against them by multiple women in their town. Hetzeldorfer, unlike Erauso, did not advance the political or economic projects of the German Empire and did not conform with hierarchies of morality which forbade "sodomy" between females. As a result, they are remembered in historical canon in a much more tragic light; Hetzeldorfer was drowned

Before delving into historical intricacies any further, it may be useful to clarify the terminology that will be used throughout this paper. The term "Queer" appears as a nebulous umbrella term to some, yet it has a specific history of being weaponized against people who fail to conform with their so-called biological sex through presentation and/or behavior. In recent decades, with the growth of Queer Liberation movements worldwide, the term has been reclaimed in academic and activist circles alike. It is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to

precisely define queerness, yet the description provided by bell hooks speaks to many, myself included: “Queer- not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.”² In essence, queerness stands in a position of “otherness” from systems and structures of material power and cultural influence in the realms of sexual and gendered supremacy. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Asexual, Intersex people, along with many others who do not define their identities or behaviors as precisely (LGBTQIA+), by virtue of embodying something besides being simultaneously cisgender and heterosexual, are thus labeled and conceptualized as “other.” As a useful shorthand, queer, and gender-nonconforming individuals will be referred to through acronym: QGNC. This is not intended to negate the differences between gender and sexual behavior and orientation regarding queerness, but to draw similarity between queer people and groups with similar experiences, when useful and appropriate.

The words “gay”, “lesbian”, “transgender”, and “intersex” are all terms which emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries. These terms were certainly not part of the medieval or early modern lexicon in any region. Nevertheless, as an umbrella term, I will be using “transgender” when appropriate, to describe aspects of subjects’ lives which display patterns of gender dysphoria and/or active attempts to align themselves with gender labor and kinship arrangements that are inconsistent with expectations of their biological sex. I will also be using the term “intersex” to describe individuals with anatomical features that do not correspond with a sexual binary, as an

² bell hooks, “Bell Hooks - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body | Eugene Lang College,” YouTube (The New School, May 7, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=rJk0hNROvzs.

alternative to outdated or harmful terms such as “hermaphrodite.” In the following chapters, I will discuss the lives and trials of the 13th century Jewish-Iberian philosopher Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, the 14th century English transgender woman Eleanor Rykener, the 15th century German person Katherina Hetzeldorfer, and the 16th century Spanish individuals Catalina de Erauso and Elenx de Céspedes, to better understand the institutional and cultural transformations which have shaped the queer medieval past.

These individuals and their cases, coming from geographic and temporal regions that are largely separate, should not be discussed merely as a way to highlight the queer aspects of these individuals’ lives. To focus exclusively on the queer identity of a subject exemplifies the liberal tendency of “identity politics.” As Butler states, “identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures, or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression.”³ In other words, identities are often used to advance a political goal, both in combatting and perpetuating systems of inequality. Therefore, I argue that one’s identity alone does not inherently signify their relationship to liberatory politics. This point will be demonstrated through an intersectional discussion of gender non-conformity as practiced by individuals with varying relationships to repressive power structures, such as race/ethnicity, religion, and class status. Patricia Hill Collins describes intersectionality as a tool of historic discourse which “bundles together ideas from disparate places, times, and perspectives, enabling people to share points of view that formerly were forbidden, outlawed, or simply obscured.”⁴

³ Ablove, Henry, Michèle Aina Barale, David M. Halperin, and Judith Butler. *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2012. P. 308.

⁴ Hill Patricia Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

Views of gender nonconformity within the history, queer, and trans studies disciplines have consistently changed and evolved, seeking to incorporate language which is more accurate and appropriate. In older works, authors may use outdated terms that many queer individuals and groups now rarely use to describe themselves, such as ‘transsexual’ or ‘hermaphrodite.’ Transsexual, as a word, developed according to the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), “in the medical and psychological communities.” The term is “still preferred by some people who have permanently changed - or seek to change - their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries.”⁵ However, “Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender.” Intersex individuals in the past have often been wrongfully described as “hermaphrodites.” However, GLAAD advises others to, “Avoid the outdated and derogatory term “hermaphrodite.” Intersex is described as “An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female.”⁶

Sodomy was considered in the middle ages and early modern period to be a “crime against nature” which was applied in legal and secular contexts-to both men and women, though today it is a term that is typically used in relation to penetrative intercourse between men. Michael Rocke’s *Forbidden Friendships* illustrates early modern European relationships between political and ideological hegemony, through the discussion of the prevalence of same-sex sexual relationships between men and boys within fifteenth century Renaissance Florence. In a seventy-year period between 1432-1502, Florence’s “Office of the Night” wielded a considerable

5 “GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Transgender.” GLAAD. Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, March 28, 2021. <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>.

6 Ibid

amount of social control through intensified surveillance, accelerated trial procedures, and expansion and innovations in penalties. With these measures in place, the Office of the Night transformed the control of sodomy in Florence, and left extensive documentation of their processes. In this brief time, 17,000 individuals were questioned over suspicions of “sodomy”, 3,000 of those suspects were convicted, and confessions were acquired from thousands more who sought amnesty for their crimes. In a population of only 40,000 people, over 40% of Florentine citizens were involved in the Office’s crusade against sodomy. One cannot be certain exactly how many of these 3,000+ convicted individuals engaged in exclusively homosexual activity, or if they punctuated periods of homosexual activity with periods of heterosexual activity. The primary reason for this uncertainty lies in “the 20th-century attitude that structured the development of sexuality as a (often antagonistic) dichotomy of hetero and homosexual identities.” Meanwhile, “scholars have noted that in premodern societies this homo/hetero divide simply did not apply, that is to say that certain social and epistemological changes took place in the 17th and 18th centuries that paved way for ‘modern erotic identities.’” In effect, it would be anachronistic to understand individuals who came under investigation by the Office of the Night as “homosexuals” or as “gay people” in the same fashion that people in the twenty-first century can be termed.

The Middle Ages have long been conceptualized as a period wrought with extensive or excessive cruelty, barbarism, and suffering within Western Europe. The Middle Ages were termed the “Dark Ages” by previous generations of Historians, generally encompassing the period lasting from the fall of Rome in 456 BC, to the beginning of the Italian Renaissance of the 15th century. The so-called “Dark Ages” are often held in stark contrast with the Italian Renaissance, a period with immense progress in art, technology, and Humanist philosophy.

However, medievalists have rejected the existence of the Dark Ages altogether. In the twelfth century, as historians have discovered, concurrent cultural and social transformations in secular and non-secular society complicates an understanding of the time period. Charles Homer Haskins argues in his widely cited 1957 book, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, “Modern research shows us the Middle Ages less dark and less static, the Renaissance less bright and less sudden, than one was supposed. The Middle Ages exhibit life and color and change, much eager search after knowledge and beauty, much creative accomplishment in art, in literature, in institutions.”⁷ Expanding on the Twelfth Century Renaissance, Caroline Walker Bynum argues for the importance of understanding the shifting notions of spirituality and authority during the period, as “clerical authority and mediation grew steadily in importance, through the elaboration of canon law, the growth of the penitential system, and the elaboration of ecclesiastical bureaucracy.”⁸ Synthesizing these perspectives, the Middle Ages was as a period of substantial innovation and progress, which can be seen alongside forms of repression which were often violent. In particular, twelfth century developments in clerical and secular organization led to increased persecution for minority groups. As R.I. Moore argues in *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*, “What heretics, lepers, and Jews had in common, was that they were all victims of a zeal for persecution which seized European society at this time.”⁹ In Moore’s view, c. 950-1250 in Western Europe was a period in which a newly-intensified fervor for persecution was fostered by the literati, educated clerks, and bureaucrats serving in church and state institutions as they each came to wield more influence over the lives of common people. Moore

⁷ Haskins, Charles Homer. *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* / by Charles Homer Haskins. New York: Meridian Books, 1957. v-vi.

⁸ Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother : Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* / Caroline Walker Bynum. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. p.250.

⁹ Moore, R. I. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society : Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* / R.I. Moore. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. p.67.

and Marx are not in total agreement, given that Moore viewed persecution of minority groups as the invention of insecure clerks, rather than the invention of kings and popes.

Robert Chazan argues emerging authorities had “a vested interest in expanding the power of their institutional masters and in the process safeguarding and solidifying their own positions.”¹⁰ The tendency for elites to maintain and increase the scale and exercise of power during the middle ages is a trend which continued, Karl Marx argued in the late 19th century, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.” As material wealth became increasingly linked to state building and sociocultural influence, ruling elites were often occupied with questions and concerns of gender and sexuality. Elite anxieties about gender and sexuality at times led to new forms of institutionalized violence and repression, which led gender hierarchies and inequalities to be produced and reproduced in new ways. Accused ‘sodomites’ from prosperous, respected families were treated less severely than lower status people. Roche demonstrates the double-standard 16th century Florence, showing that penalties varied not only by age but by status as citizens eligible for political office. “Within each age category...both the sanctions and the number of convictions allowed before incurring the harshest penalty varied according to political status; the scale of possible convictions was more limited for sodomites ineligible for civic office and more generous for citizens.” With expanding institutional power and growing anxieties about gender and sexuality in the later Middle Ages, efforts to repress and punish sodomy varied according to social and political status.

¹⁰ Chazan, Robert. *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 201 p. 61.

Notably, none of the documents produced by the Office of the Night contain any references to same-sex sexuality between women, suggesting that the officials policing male sexual behavior were not preoccupied with investigating or persecuting female sexuality. However, this finding does not support the “myth of lesbian impunity.” As Louis Crompton has pointed out, “the standard history of antihomosexual legislation (which) states that lesbian acts were not punished by medieval or later laws.”¹¹ As I will detail in later chapters, medieval and early modern women who practiced and embodied sexual and gender nonconformity were met with brutality and repression as well as men.

These developments were linked to a redefinition of Latin Christianity and papal monarchy as universal. As Dominique Iogna-Prat details in *Order & Exclusion : Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000-1150*, “Christendom was an institutional entity that steadily affirmed its differences from the outside- the Orthodox, Judaism, and Islam- and a universalist utopia that accompanied, justified, and spurred on the expansion of the Latin west in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.” In essence, the eleventh and twelfth century expansion of secular and non-secular authority in Europe was dependent upon asserting the supremacy of Christianity, at the expense of groups which stood outside of the Catholic tradition.

So far, by tracing more than a few decades of debate regarding the developments of the twelfth century and by analyzing Michael Rocke’s fascinating study of sodomy’s persecution within fifteenth century Florence, I have shown that the Middle Ages was neither as a period of universal oppressive stagnation, nor a period of universal vibrant progress and freedom. As this more nuanced perspective of late medieval and early modern Europe suggests, the historical forms of exclusivity and violence practiced by Christians against minority groups, including

¹¹ Crompton, Louis. “The Myth of Lesbian Impunity Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6, no. 1-2 (1981): 11–25. https://doi.org/10.1300/j082v06n01_03.

Jewish people, and QGNC individuals, reveal that gender identity is best understood as a constructed phenomenon.

Judith Butler famously argued in her 1999 *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, that elements of the subject, including gender, are neither natural nor innate. In other words, gender is not based in biology, but is constituted through performances of behaviors that are deemed “masculine” or “feminine.” Expectations of appropriate embodiments and behaviors are socially and historically constructed. As Butler writes, “Gender is a construction which regularly conceals its genesis. The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions- and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them.”¹²

Butler’s theories of gender as performance depict development of one’s gender identity as a collective process which limits one’s freedom of self-expression through the prospect of experiencing consequences for gender nonconformity. Marx expressed a similar sentiment regarding the limited range of options available to workers under Capitalism, “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”¹³ In the Marxian sense, identity politics should be rejected because they encourage solidarity amongst

¹² Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* / Judith Butler. New York: Routledge, 1999.

¹³ Karl Freidrich Heinrich Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. 1852, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>.

groups with competing class interests, which cannot result in a more equitable distribution of wealth and power.

CHAPTER TWO

Intersections of Anti-Semitism and Gender Nonconformity in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

In the Middle Ages, male Christian authorities were wielding considerable influence in the lives of their populations- resulting in a generally hierarchical organization of social norms and roles with “male” at the top, and “female” at the bottom. The European Middle Ages also saw extensive clashing between Christian and Jewish populations, as power relationships between these groups became increasingly asymmetrical. As Christians gradually gained economic and political power, they emerged as the undisputed dominant religious group in the region by the Early-Modern period. To fully understand the development of the gender binary requires understanding interactions between Judaism and Christianity.

In this chapter, I will endeavor to answer the following questions: In what ways do the concepts of gender binaries differ in Judaism and Christianity? How has the historical anti-semitism in Catholic kingdoms intersected with concepts and constructions of gender binaries? To answer these questions, I will highlight some of the differences between Christian and Jewish interpretations of a gender binary by describing the categories and terminologies of gender used in their respective theological texts. Then, I will briefly trace the history of anti-semitism in Western Europe, to provide context for medieval Christian depictions of Jewish

people as monstrous violators of gender binaries. Through excerpts of Jewish philosopher Kalonymus ben Kalonymus's "Prayer for Transformation, I conclude this chapter by presenting readers with an instance of apparent gender dysphoria.

The concept of a gender binary differs considerably within Judaism and Christianity. The Talmud, which is a compilation of the teachings and opinions of thousands of rabbis dating from before CE to c. 500 CE, includes hundreds of references to non-binary gender identities within its pages. The six genders described in the Talmud are *zachar* and *nekeva*, meaning male and female, along with four others: *androgynos*, *tumtum*, *ay'lonit*, and *saris*. *Androgynos* refers to people that have both 'male' and 'female' sex characteristics while *tumtum* refers to those with indiscriminate or obscured sexual characteristics. *Ay'lonit* refers to those who are 'female' upon birth and develop 'male' sex characteristics during puberty, while *saris* refers to those who are 'male' upon birth and develop 'female' sexual characteristics during puberty; both *ay'lonit* and *saris* are infertile.¹⁴ It must be noted that, although these terms reveal how Jewish people conceptualized and categorized people who did not fit neatly into "male" and "female" boxes, they do not indicate an overarching theme of gender equality within Jewish legal tradition.

In contrast, the Christian Bible includes only references to "male" and "female", and lacks terms to describe individuals who have characteristics or exhibit behaviors that lie beyond this binary. Nevertheless, there was much ontological debate by medieval Christian theologians centered around differences in gender and sex. A particularly lively debate concerned what is meant in Genesis 5:1-2 which states, "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man." Some

¹⁴ Kukla, Elliott. "Classical Jewish Terms for Gender Diversity." Terms for Gender Diversity in Classical Jewish Texts. Trans Torah. http://transtorah.org/PDFs/Classical_Jewish_Terms_for_Gender_Diversity.pdf.

theologians believed that these lines bolstered the concept of “primal androgyny”, asserting that at creation, Adam was androgynous and had sexual characteristics that could be distinguished as neither male or female, but rather as a perfect union of the two. This interpretation was held by a minority of Christian thinkers, and had become increasingly unpopular by the 12th century. According to Leah DeVun, “During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, (Christian) theologians conflated the primal androgyne with a corporeal, double-sexed "hermaphrodite," which they described in deeply negative terms.”¹⁵ In effect, a gender binary was more rigidly constructed in medieval Christianity than in medieval Judaism.

To understand the relation between Judaism and Christianity in matters of gender requires awareness of the historical power relationships between the two faiths. In brief, anti-semitism flourished throughout the Middle Ages in Western Europe, and often was expressed through violence and repression on a state level.¹⁶ There are at least fifteen documented expulsions of Jewish people from Christian territories between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, in the lands of modern-day France, Germany, England, Portugal, and Spain, among others. The largest of these expulsions in terms of how many people were displaced, as well as the longest lasting expulsion, took place in Spain during the Inquisition, with the issuance of the Alhambra Decree in 1492. The Alhambra Decree, given by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand II of Spain, required all Jewish people to convert to Catholicism. If they refused, they were required to leave Spanish territory indefinitely. Between 40,000 and 100,000 Jewish people emigrated following the Decree, and thousands more were subject to Pogroms and violence for decades prior and after.

¹⁵ DeVun, Leah. “The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance.” Columbia University Press, February 22, 2017. <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-shape-of-sex/9780231195515>.

¹⁶ Karras, Ruth Mazo. “The Regulation of ‘Sodomy’ in the Latin East and West.” *Speculum* 95, no. 4 (2020): 969–86. <https://doi.org/10.1086/710639>.

Indeed, the Alhambra Decree, impactful as it was, was only one of many expulsions of Jewish people from Christian territories by Western European nations and kingdoms through the period. This Decree was part of innumerable acts of state, clerical, and individual violence which resulted in the proliferation of intensely anti-jewish libels. Some of the Christian charges brought against Jewish people include the ritual murder of Christians, forced conversion of Christians to Judaism, poisoning of Christians by contaminating water supplies/ prescribing harmful medications or remedies, abusing eucharist wafers which Christians believed to be the literal body of Christ, and financial exploitation of Christians through usury.¹⁷ With these anti-semitic sentiments and acts in mind, one can better grasp the animosities that underpins Christian interactions with Jewish people during the period. These animosities were not solely a matter of theology, but also shaped the ways that Christian people viewed the sexual behaviors, anatomy, and gender presentations of Jewish people.



An early example of the animosities described above appears in The Aberdeen Bestiary, an 11th century collection of images and descriptions of dozens of plants and animals, both Earthly and fictional. Many of the Bestiary's descriptions draw parallels between

¹⁷ Tartakoff, Paola. "From Circumcision to Ritual Murder." In *Conversion, Circumcision, and Ritual Murder in Medieval Europe*, 47–69. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16t67g3.6>.

animal and human behavior, suggesting ways in which Christians can strengthen their morals or virtues by studying the natural world. One such image appears in Folio 11V of the Aberdeen Bestiary, an illustration of a Hyena with with multiple sexual organs and large spikes along its spine and tail, engulfing (presumably a Christian man) with its sharp teeth while it devours his human flesh. Directly under this illustration, a caption states, “There is an animal called the hyena, which inhabits the tombs of the dead and feeds on their bodies. Its nature is that it is sometimes male, sometimes female, and it is therefore an unclean animal... The sons of Israel resemble the hyena.”¹⁸

In effect, the illustrator and author of Folio 11V sought to leave Christian viewers with the message that Jewish people, like hyenas, are unclean, murderous, and can be ambiguous in their sexual anatomy. As Leah DeVun states in *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance*, this illustration ultimately depicts Jewish people as “violators of the fundamental taboos that defined humankind.”¹⁹ The illustration, therefore, does not only reify the anti-semitic concept of ritual murder, but also entrenches the binary between male and female by casting intersex people (people born with a combination of traditionally male and female biological traits) as irreconcilably impure and monstrous. As Steven Kruger states, “Christian anxieties about Jews expressed themselves both in a discourse of foreignness and distance- Jews were often depicted as beyond the pale of the human- and in one of proximity.”²⁰ Folio 11V of the Aberdeen Bestiary is a clear example of these depictions: Jewish people are literally dehumanized by being compared to flesh-eating “hermaphrodite” hyenas.

¹⁸ “The Aberdeen Bestiary - Folio IIV.” The Aberdeen Bestiary . The University of Aberdeen. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f11v>.

¹⁹ DeVun, Leah. “The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance.” Columbia University Press, February 22, 2017. <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-shape-of-sex/9780231195515>.

²⁰ Kruger, Steven F. *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

KALONYMUS BEN KALONYMUS

Kalonymus ben Kalonymus was a Jewish philosopher, translator, and author who is known for their 14th century ethical treatise, *Even Bohan*. *Even Bohan* includes a poem titled “Prayer for Transformation” which contains expressions of gender dysphoria, as Kalonymus laments being born with male reproductive organs and fantasizes about becoming a woman. Gender dysphoria is described in the DSM-5, the most influential psychiatric diagnostic manual, as “significant distress related to a strong desire to be of another gender.”²¹ Kalonymus’s sentiments are consistent with this definition of gender dysphoria and in my view, Kalonymus’s gender cannot be described as definitely male. For this reason, I will refer to Kalonymus using they/them pronouns. The first and final stanzas are excerpted below:

Woe to me, my mother, that you ever bore a son.
 What a great loss and no gain!
 I was created closed-eyed and hardhearted.
 Uncircumcised of heart and flesh was I born.
 At three days, they cut my umbilical cord,
 and at eight days my foreskin.
 However, my ears, heart, and mind [remained uncircumcised
 and] were not ready to join Hashem’s covenant. They didn’t take
 off their disgrace Or remove it from their being.
 Their foreskin indeed remains as a blemish.
 For a lie they guarded hitherward, and for nothing they labored.

²¹ Turban, Jack. “What Is Gender Dysphoria?” American Psychiatric Association.
<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>.

That from the day they were brought into the world that is all darkness,
they were not circumcised.

What shall I say?

Why cry or be bitter?

If my father in heaven has decreed upon me and
has gained me with an immutable deformity
then I do not wish to remove it.

The sorrow of the impossible is a human pain that nothing will cure
and for which no comfort can be found.

So, I will bear and suffer until I die and wither in the
ground. Since I have learned from our tradition that we bless
both, the good and the bitter I will bless in a voice hushed
and weak: blessed are you YHVH who has not made me a
woman.²²

Evidently, Kalonymus’s Prayer for Transformation explicitly contains a desire to distance themselves from maleness, going as far as to describe their foreskin as a “blemish” and their penis as an “immutable deformity” which causes them to experience constant, immense, and incurable sorrow. Kalonymus also expresses a sense of existential dread by describing the world as being composed of “all darkness” that they must navigate until their death. Though Kalonymus reluctantly accepts their status as a man by the final stanza, they do not attach positive emotions with this acceptance. Rather, Kalonymus’s Jewish faith overtakes their desire to change their

22 Prayer for Transformation, from the poem “Even Boḥan” by Rabbi Kalonymus ben Kalonymus ben Meir (1322 C.E.)
<https://opensiddur.org/prayers/civic-calendar/international/transgender-day-of-visibility/prayer-of-kalonymus-from-s-efer-even-bohan-1322/>

physical anatomy, as they reframe their assigned gender as a blessed, yet unfortunate decree from God with the line, “we bless both, the good and the bitter.”

Alternative interpretations of “Prayer for Transformation” suggest that it is not clear whether Kalonymus was expressing a genuine desire to change his gender or anatomy. One such interpretation, asserted by Rabbi Steven Greenberg in his book, “Wrestling with God and Man: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition”, is that Kalonymus was instead expressing sexual and romantic desire for men, and that they wished to become a woman in order to be perceived as heterosexual. Greenberg writes, “However, it might also be possible to think of Kalonymus as an example of how homosexual desire plays out in a world that cannot name it. Might it be that for Kalonymus the only way to make sense of the desire to be loved by a man is to fantasize being a woman?”²³ To answer this this (likely rhetorical) question: No, fantasizing about being a woman is not the *only* way that Kalonymus can understand and express a desire to have sexual and romantic relations with men. It is also quite possible that Kalonymus was earnest in their writings, and that the suffering that they describe is directly related to gender dysphoria instead. To insist that Kalonymus *must* be a closeted homosexual man, is to discard their gender dysphoria which negates the possibility of them being transgender. The erasure of transgender and nonbinary people through time is something that M.W. Bychowski cautions against, stating “transgender histories, real and imagined, provide a sense of continuity that sustains lives across time and genres of embodiment and invites audiences to ethically engage with the demands for transgender lives to enter narratives in order to make the process of change culturally

²³ Greenberg, Steven. "7: The Queer Middle Ages." In *Wrestling with God & Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition*, 113-23. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C2055430.

intelligible.”²⁴In effect, while excluding transgender people from historical record- by assuming homosexuality and centering gender dysphoria as it relates to sexual activity- historians risk unethical engagement with all transgender people of the past, present, and future.

However, my goal in discussing this poem is not to declare any specific identity for Kalonymus, bearing in mind that anatomies, behaviors, and presentations come to be attributed to masculinity or womanhood through a process of socialization which occurs throughout one’s lifetime. Instead, I argue that questioning one’s gender identity is a human experience that can be seen throughout the Middle Ages across religious lines, and it is not accurate to describe Kalonymus as a homosexual man given their expressions of gender dysphoria in *Even Bohan*. By contrast, many of the QGNC individuals discussed in other chapters are canonized only in testimony acquired through coercion or by the threat of institutional punishment and violence. Therefore, it is important to include records of QGNC people which detail their emotions and experiences related to gender outside of legal contexts. In effect, rather than being memorialized as a victim of transphobia or homophobia as too many medieval QGNC subjects often are, Kalonymus can be understood and celebrated for their rare perspective on gender nonconformity as Jewish person in 14th century France.

24 Gabrielle M.W. Bychowski, "Trans Literature: Transgender Histories and Genres of Embodiment, Medieval and Post-Medieval" (George Washington University, 2017).

CHAPTER THREE

Performances and Embodiments of Masculinity in the Spanish Golden Age (1500-1681):

The Lives of Catalina de Erauso and Elenx de Céspedes

The Spanish Golden Age, which roughly encompassed the years 1500-1681, was a period of great Spanish military and economic achievement, religious fervor, and production of cultural works in literature and art. In this period, emergent forms of political economy sometimes enabled a heightened level of social flexibility among Spaniards, who were nearly all connected to the New World economy in some fashion. This chapter will outline two cases whereby masculinity was performed by individuals that transgressed gender-binaries, coming under investigation by Church authorities while also achieving social and economic status. The similarities between Catalina de Erauso and Elenx de Céspedes of Spain are described by Nerea Aresti, “By adopting a masculine appearance and identity, (Erauso) was able to escape from the narrow limits imposed on women’s activities at the time and enjoy the sort of freedom and social prerogatives reserved for men. Such social and professional advancement is observable in other

contemporaries of Erauso, such as Eleno de Céspedes.”²⁵ In doing so, I hope to offer insight towards answering questions of how gender was defined and policed in the contexts of Spanish Imperial Conquest and Inquisition, with particular attention paid to the performance of masculinity by individuals who did not possess “binary male anatomy.”

CATALINA DE ERAUSO

Catalina de Erauso, otherwise known as “The Lieutenant Nun”, was born in the Basque town of San Sebastian, in either 1585 or 1592, though the exact year is unknown. It is believed that they died in Cotaxtla, Mexico, sometime after the year 1630. Catalina de Erauso is a mystifying character to those that study gender presentation in early modern Europe, due to their fascinating autobiography titled *La Historia de la Monja Alférez* which chronicles their life as an escaped nun who consistently transgressed gender binaries by cross-dressing and traveling to the New World, and by engaging in convincing performances of masculinity that were embodied through their speech and actions, as they travel to the Spanish New World Colonies: Venezuela, Peru, Chile, and Mexico. document their experiences as a conquistador who climbs the ranks of the Spanish Army, accumulating prestige as they advance colonialism through their participation in genocide against

Through twenty-six chapters which span decades of travel throughout Europe and South America, Erauso describes winning numerous sword and gun fights which result in the murder of dozens of men, including their own brother. They also describe nights of gambling, flirtation

²⁵ Aresti, Nerea. “The Gendered Identities of the ‘Lieutenant Nun’: Rethinking the Story of a Female Warrior in Early Modern Spain.” *Gender & history* 19, no. 3 (2007): 401–418.

with women, non-lethal street fights, and their participation in military campaigns against native peoples of the New World. Ultimately, Erauso was tried for a murder in Guamanga, Chile and confessed their identity as a biological woman with their virginity intact, to the town's bishop, writing, "I felt as if I were humbled before God, that things were simpler than they had seemed before, and that I was very small and insignificant."²⁶ Consequently, Erauso became a sensationalized figure across the New World, Iberia, and beyond, and they donned the veil once again, living in convents for a few years until it was revealed that they were never a professed nun in Spain. Then, after this revelation, Erauso leaves the convent, dresses again in male clothing, and returns to Europe where they have a meeting with Pope Urban VIII. Recounting the meeting where Erauso retells their life story to the Pope, Erauso claims "His Holiness seemed amazed to hear such things, and graciously gave me leave to pursue my life in men's clothing, all the while reminding me it was my duty to lead an honest existence from that day forward."²⁷

This story, with all of its drama and intrigue, has aroused scholarly suspicions of authenticity for several reasons. First, there are no extant records of Erauso's meeting with Pope Urban VIII, though Erauso was in Rome at the time of the alleged meeting. Further, Erauso takes several names while traveling and living in the New World. Among them are Antonio de Erauso and Alonso Diaz- which increases the level of difficulty in confirming the details of their autobiography. It is suspected by some historians that Erauso was exaggerating or outright fabricating their experiences, perhaps in an attempt to portray masculinity to readers in a more convincing manner. It is likely that Erauso's auto-biography was not intended to be self-effacing,

²⁶ De Erauso, Catalina. "CHAPTER 20." In *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, 61-67. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995. P. 66.

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C2117871.

²⁷ De Erauso, Catalina. "CHAPTER 7." In *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, 75-78. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995.

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C2117871.

but it is unlikely that it is entirely fabricated, due to the testimonies that survive from friends that verify their participation in the Battle of Valdivia, among other military and personal exploits. Moreover, their examination which confirmed their biological sex and virginity is documented, which lends some degree of validity to their story.

The question of Catalina de Erauso's gender identity stands in the background of much of this story, especially as Erauso details several relationships that nearly resulted in marriage, until they left with pre-marital gifts from suitors, bound for a different city without ever consummating a relationship. Thus, it is uncertain whether Erauso could be understood as a lesbian, a transgender man, or simply as a cisgender woman that performs masculinity to attain freedom and wealth in burgeoning New Spain, where boundaries of traditional masculinity and femininity were being obscured by the promise of upward mobility at the expense of Indigenous populations and lands. Contextualizing the historical moment that Erauso lived in is a vital piece of understanding the mechanisms whereby Erauso, a former "nun" was able to live freely as a man in the 17th century, dressing and engaging in strongly masculine coded ways, and eventually winning Papal approval for their heroic bravery. As noted by Jason Stinnett, "In early modern Europe, nobility was often an inseparable component of masculinity. In contrast, the reality of the New World restructured class-based notions of masculine performance, leveling the playing field for the accumulation of wealth and social mobility.²⁸" Accordingly, the class-restructuring that unfolded during the Spanish conquest of Peru and Chile lent a wealth of labor opportunities to Erauso. Between the years 1603 and 1623, they worked in New Spain as a merchant's shopkeeper, a *camerero* (steward), a bounty hunter, a sailor, and as a lieutenant. These occupations were those that were almost exclusively occupied by men in the New World,

²⁸ Stinnett, Jason. "New World Masculinity: The Lieutenant Nun—Hyperbole or Reality?" *Confluencia (Greeley, Colo.)* 35, no. 1 (2019): 2–14.

and it was through Erauso's participation in them, combined with their masculine attire, mannerisms, and military accomplishments, that they were able to navigate and thrive within the shifting, yet evidently hierarchical gendered social structure of the early 17th-century.

Erauso's military participation cannot be understated or downplayed in its role of legitimizing their masculinity, and shaping their national identity. The indigenous people that Erauso killed during their travels are merely stepping stones which allow Erauso to navigate the New World as a Spanish male soldier. They describe one brutal encounter with an indigenous population where they, along with a few fellow soldiers "carved (a) boy into ten thousand pieces."²⁹ The death of the adolescent indigenous boy in question led to a retaliation from indigenous armies, to which the Spaniards "fell at them again with such spirit, and butchered so many of them, that blood ran like a river across the plaza, and we chased them to the Dorado River, and beyond, slaughtering all the way."³⁰ Perhaps their greatest contribution to the imperial and colonial aspirations of the Spanish Kingdom was their "recapturing" of the Spanish flag from enemy indigenous forces during the Chilean Battle of Valdivia, while they were serving as attaché to the sergeant major. They describe the success of the battle as such,

"When I saw the flag being carried off I rode after it, with two horsemen at my side, through the midst of a great multitude of Indians, trampling and slashing away and taking some wounds in return."³¹

After the triumphant battle and nine months of recovery, Erauso was promoted for their efforts in the Battle of Valdivia, and went on to serve five years as a lieutenant in Chile. In this military

²⁹ De Erauso, Cataline. "CHAPTER 6." In *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*, 61-67. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995.

https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C2117871.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

victory, Erauso solidified themselves as a figure that advanced Spanish conquest for economic and religious supremacy in the New World, an accomplishment that proudly shaped their national identity, as they called upon this experience while petitioning a Spanish noble for a salary and while seeking Papal counsel and approval.

Effectively, Erauso's participation in the genocide and evangelizing of indigenous populations in the New World was analogous to masculine forms of national achievement and identity formation. "White western masculinity is shown to be the parody of an unachievable and self-defeating idea(l) or fantasy that is both shared and lived out in specific ways by individuals." It was of no consequence to the Pope, or to other state officials, that Erauso was a woman in biological terms, considering their great service to the maintenance of Spanish colonial hegemony. According to Aresti, "a woman's reputation depended more on her actions and moral choices than on her anatomical and biological limitations" in 17th century Western Europe. With their virginity intact, Erauso's moral character was not called into question, and there were no charges of sodomy or witchcraft brought against them, unlike several contemporary female cross-dressers. Aresti elaborates on this point, writing, "In a society that was strongly misogynist, but only partially organized along lines of sexual difference, Erauso was universally treated not as a representative of her sex but as an exception to it. And as such, she was granted the privilege of masculinity." Erauso, situated in a time period and geographic location which offered many opportunities to align themselves with manhood, for one reason or another, seized these opportunities and is remembered not as a monstrous figure that was banished in shame or sentenced to death, but rather celebrated by holy people and members of the Spanish bourgeoisie alike.

The intention of discussing Erauso's life, like other medical and early modern QGNC subjects, is not to exemplify an instance of early modern transgenderism or lesbianism. Their autobiography is inexplicit in the way that they conceptualized their gender and sexuality, leaving readers to form assumptions around their actions instead. Rejecting cloistered living and heterosexual marriage, Erauso instead chose to cross-dress and engage in masculine behaviors for decades of their life, uninterrupted at times. It could be argued that it was due to their dramatic displays of masculinity that Erauso was brought to eventual confession of their biological sex, meaning that they may have lived the rest of their life being purposefully perceived as a male conquistador, had it not been for their run-ins with the law. Indeed, Erauso was at odds with accepted forms of femininity, and primarily engaged in masculine forms of labor and behaviors throughout their life which legitimized their masculinity. It was not a sin to abstain from sexual activity, and Erauso's apparent virginity, taken with their autobiography which contains no mention of engaging in homosexual activity or "sodomy", creates the foundation for Erauso's gender presentation to be respected in accordance with established gender hierarchies. Due to their transgressive nature as a biological woman that frequently lived as a man, the intersections between Erauso's national and personal identities as a Spanish Lieutenant and Nun during a period of intensive imperial conquest and pillage, demonstrate a case that is almost contradictory.

While it is clear that while Erauso embodied an orientation of gender that was scarcely documented in the Early Modern period, they did not seek to realign accepted notions of masculinity or femininity through their actions. Jen Marion writes in their book *Female Husbands : a Trans History*, "Because most people assigned female at birth [during the Middle Ages] had so little access to economic advancement, educational achievement, or legal

autonomy, no one was surprised when they claimed the rights and privileges reserved for men.”³²

In this view, Erauso was presented with a very narrow set of options in the face of their unhappiness with convent life. Instead of seeking to overthrow the institutions which narrowed their choices in the first place, Erauso saw it more fitting to expand their choices by aligning with the “normal” behaviors and presentations of the “opposite” sex, as sixteenth century Spanish men were afforded far greater legal and social privileges than their female counterparts.

However, Caroline Walker-Bynum’s *Jesus as Mother : Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* argues that, beginning in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, “The presence of institutions within which women could be socialized by women and the privileges that many women enjoyed as members of the nobility made it possible for them to develop genuinely positive images of their substitute religious roles despite a prevalent theological conception of their gender as naturally inferior.”³³ In other words, predominantly female religious institutions, such as convents, were not spaces which embodied a sense of female clerical inferiority as a rule. Quite the opposite is true, as these spaces were often ones in which women, as members of the clergy and/or nobility, were able to gain, and maintain, a level of status and respectability that was not possible for (often peasant) women living uncloistered lives. Thus, one cannot situate Erauso’s actions as an inevitable and justified reaction to their unjustified, diminished social status as a Spanish nun.

It should be stressed that speculative judgments into Erauso’s true intentions or desires as they relate to their gender identity are not entirely unfruitful, yet such judgments are only that-speculative. Ultimately, it is not more important to understand Erauso as a narrowly-defined

³² Manion, Jen. *Female Husbands : a Trans History* / Jen Manion. Cambridge, United Kingdom ;: Cambridge University Press, 2020. p.6.

³³ Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Jesus as Mother : Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* / Caroline Walker Bynum. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. P.250.

queer historical figure, but rather to view their life as one that, while transgressive, did not formally challenge established gender hierarchies or undermine Spain's blossoming capitalist aspirations, which were facilitated by their military participation during the long process of violent Spanish colonialism.

ELENX DE CÉSPEDES

Another intriguing case of gender hybridity in 16th century Spain involves a soldier and surgeon who lived as both a woman and a man at various points of their life, due to having non-binary reproductive organs, which drew attention from Spanish Inquisitors. Born in 1545 in Alhama de Granada, Spain, Elenx de Céspedes was an enslaved mulatto raised and socialized as a woman. After gaining their independence as a child, Céspedes married and became pregnant at age fifteen, giving birth to a boy named Christóbal. Due to interpersonal conflicts between Céspedes and the father of their child, Céspedes left their family and began traveling around Spain and working in a male-dominated profession- tailoring. Having gotten into a violent physical altercation with a pimp, Céspedes began dressing in male clothing and later served in the Spanish military during the War of the Alpujarras (1568-71.) Eventually, Céspedes trained as a surgeon, and traveled to Madrid, where they married a woman named Maria del Caño. Rousing suspicion from townspeople, Céspedes was accused of being "male and female" simultaneously, and was forced to undergo genital inspections to confirm their biological masculinity before being allowed to marry. Céspedes and Caño moved to Toledo, Spain, and after one year of marriage, neighbors brought accusations of sodomy to officials which resulted in both of their arrests. They accrued charges not only of sodomy, but also of witchcraft and violating the sacrament of marriage. Due to their charge of witchcraft, secular authorities turned over the jurisdiction of Céspedes' case to the Toledo Inquisitors. Inquisitors conducted lengthy

interviews, and again Céspedes was forced to undergo anatomical examination by Church authorities. When confronted with these charges, which each carry potential punishment of death, Céspedes remarked, “In reality, I am and was a hermaphrodite.”...“Though this may be a prodigious and rare thing that is not often seen, hermaphrodites, as I am and have been, are not unnatural.” Finally, the court convicted them of Sorcery; the inquisitors claimed that collaboration with the Devil was necessary for Céspedes to change their sexual anatomy and to deceive examiners.

Céspedes themselves conceptualized their gender as neither exclusively male or female, and instead described themselves as a hermaphrodite, to convince the courts that they were not attempting to deceive them or the public. Further, Céspedes appeals to the notion of “naturalness” being aligned with morality, stating that they did not act in manners inconsistent with the natural order of gender and sexuality. Presenting either as a man or a woman, Céspedes engaged in heterosexual acts, thus absolving them of the charge of a “sin against nature.” One potential cause for the charge of Sorcery to remain may have been the prevailing anxieties of Spanish society. In this period, “Early modern Spanish society was gripped with anxiety relating to the boundaries between reality and unreality.”³⁴ In this light, while absolutist concepts of masculinity and femininity flourished, those who did not conform to these ideals, particularly women, were sometimes accused of performing witchcraft. The urge to categorize and understand the natural world as the basis of reality necessarily aligns behaviors and embodiments that are not neatly categorized into natural binaries with unreality, requiring supernatural and/or blasphemous intervention to exist. The ways that intersex people were understood often intersected with medieval anxieties of (un)reality and witchcraft, “Medieval and early modern

³⁴ Roper, Lyndal. *Oedipus and the Devil Witchcraft, Religion and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe*. Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2013.

views of intersex people (then referred to as hermaphrodites) were principally physiological, about bodies that were both male and female. The specificity of these views varies, with different weight given to visible anatomy, reproductive capacity, or secondary sex characteristics in determining if someone was truly intersex.” Physical features were often the basis which intersex people were judged, and as Céspedes had the capacity for “female” reproduction while possessing “male” sexual anatomy along with masculine presentations in their later life, they were described not primarily as male or female, but as an intersex person, with the outdated term “hermaphrodite.”

In Céspedes' case, it is important to understand the motivations and judicial perspectives of Inquisitors. Why was it of concern to them whether Céspedes had male or female reproductive organs? Many historians conceptualize the Spanish Inquisition as a process that functioned as an “organ of social-moral control”, stemming from perceived heresy in Roman Catholic controlled Spanish territory. Henry Kamen problematizes this characterization, stating, "It was the political events of those years, rather than any perceived heresy, that eventually brought the Inquisition into existence."³⁵ According to Kamen, late 15th century clashes and riots (which Kamen describes as civil war) that involve conversos, or New Christians, and Jewish people are what led Old Christian Inquisitors to investigate heresy, rather than the existence of widespread and well-documented heresy itself. However, without regard to the nature of its origin, it is well-documented fact that the Inquisition was occupied with the question of sodomy, and through its course enforced normative expectations upon expressions of same-sex sexuality and upon non-binary gender embodiments and presentations.

According to Christian Berco, the Spanish Inquisition can be said to have engaged in persecution of homosexual behavior which “cannot be separated from both local and social

³⁵ Kamen, Henry. *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*. United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 1998.

hierarchies and the various sexual economies that delineated its course."³⁶ Céspedes' actions have been described as "conservative" due to their performances of heterosexuality. In their early life through young adulthood, Céspedes navigated the world as a woman in socially acceptable and viable manners; by dressing in female clothing, marrying a man, and giving birth to a child. Then, according to Elenx in their testimony,

"What happened is that when I gave birth, I did so with such force in my [woman's] part, that a piece of skin broke out above my urethra and a head emerged about half the size of a thumb, like so, which resembled the swollen head of a male member."

This event is what allowed Céspedes to justify their actions while dressing and living as a man, including their marriage to a woman and their participation in traditionally male trades and occupations as a tailor, soldier, and surgeon. In doing so, Elenx aligns themselves with the "naturalness" of heterosexuality and the gendered behaviors that align with binary sexual anatomy, stating:

" I married first as a woman to a man, then as a man to a woman, because when I married a man, the feminine sex heated up and prevailed in me. Then, when my husband died, the masculine sex heated up and I could marry a woman."

³⁶ Berco, Cristian. *Sexual hierarchies, public status : men, sodomy, and society in Spain's golden age*. Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007. P. 18

Through their testimony, Céspedes was able to avoid imprisonment or death for sodomy and blasphemy, yet was unable to convince Inquisitors of their unequivocal innocence, and were sentenced to ten years of unpaid labor at a local hospital. One of the contributing factors to this sentencing is discussed in Fransico Soyer's work on Ambiguous Gender in early modern Spain and Portugal, which demonstrated through medical literature that "most authorities agreed that postpartum female to male transsexualism was possible."³⁷ Christian Berco notes the limited success in Inquisitorial attempts at disciplining deviant behavior, stating "Social control was not wholly effective, particularly because individuals, even under unrelenting pressure, could always find ways to resist and avenues, however subtle, to affirm their individuality."³⁸ This structural shortcoming of the Inquisitorial process, paired with Céspedes' use of naturalizing rhetoric, historically enlightens one way in which (what could be described using 21st century terminology) an intersex person navigated and conceptualized the world and their relation to it, along with their reaction to receiving charges of deceit and sin.

Both Catalina de Erauso and Elenx de Céspedes exemplify forms of gender presentations and behaviors that are transgressive to the societal norms of their biological sexes. Erauso as a person with female sexual anatomy, and Céspedes with non-binary sexual anatomy, both chose to live in the "Spanish Golden Age" with the privileges that masculinity afforded them; especially in the labor market. Both serving in branches of the Spanish military in order to reify the imperial projects of Spain, Erauso and Céspedes forged a masculinity that was inseparable from Spanish nationality, in turn enhancing their respective reputations in the eyes of judgmental bodies of authority. Erauso recieved no punishment at all for their transgressions of femininity,

³⁷ Soyer, Francois. *Ambiguous Gender in Early Modern Spain and Portugal: Inquisitors, Doctors and the Transgression of Gender Norms*. Netherlands: Brill, 2012./?"

³⁸ Berco, Cristian. "Social Control and Its Limits: Sodomy, Local Sexual Economies, and Inquisitors during Spain's Golden Age." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 2 (2005): 331–58. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20477358>.

perhaps due to their confirmed virginity and lack of sexual and physical co-habitation with women.

Céspedes, on the other hand, was viewed with more skepticism, due in part to the nature of the Spanish Inquisition which brought their experiences to light, and due to their sexual behaviors with women, while having presented and functioned effectively as a woman at a previous point in life. The suspected sodomy, or homosexuality, of Céspedes is a departure from the ways that Erauso was conceptualized and even approved of in Spanish society, yet both individuals complicate the ways in which early modern Spanish society was thought to have conceptualized of gender pluralism and hybridity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gender-F---ers of the Past: Lesbianism and Transgenderism in Late Medieval England and Early Modern Germany

The question of whether transgender people have existed throughout history may seem silly to transgender people themselves. Certainly, gender dysphoria and gender euphoria related to affirmation, are merely two of the countless feelings that humans are capable of experiencing. These feelings may intersect with sexual behaviors or feelings, but they are not mutually constitutive, as gender non-conforming behaviors by celibate monks and nuns in Western Europe can be found at least as far back as the eighth century, as much scholarly work has been produced on Saint Marina The Monk (715-750 A.D).³⁹ In this chapter, I will discuss the historicization of transgender people in medieval and early modern Europe, through comparison between the cases of English Eleanor Rykener(arr. 1394) and German Katherina Hetzeldorfer (c.1440-1477). These individuals were brought to trial by court officials following arrest for gender nonconformity in their behaviors and appearances. It is not useful to describe instances of

³⁹ Gutt, Blake, and Alicia Spencer-Hall. *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* / Edited by Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021.

gender nonconformity as examples of transgenderism where there are insufficient details to demonstrate the social and labor arrangements of an individual's life, and a context that allows for the accused to express the description of self-conceptualization. However, I argue that there are instances in which historical research benefits from the use of modern terminology. My example is Eleanor Rykener as a transgender woman.

Eleanor Rykener

City officials arrested a “John Rykener” in London in December of 1394 after Rykener was solicited for prostitution while wearing “women’s clothing” and found by a police officer to be engaging in “sodomy” with a man named John Britby. The sole record of this event is roughly one page in length, and was first translated in 1995 by David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras for *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*. The document is a record of Rykener’s trial, including testimony from Rykener and others involving her early experiences in cross-dressing and prostitution, as well as her sexual and labor/employment histories. Nearly all of Rykener’s actions were described with palpable contempt by the Aldermen, as evidenced by the first line of the transcript which terms sodomy as “that detestahle, unmentionable, and ignominious vice.”⁴⁰

The hostility of officials towards Eleanor’s gender presentation and sexual behaviors is evident through their usage of the masculine name “John” and, at times, he/him pronouns. The document details extended periods in which Rykener was fully living as a woman, identifying to others with a woman’s name, dressing in feminine clothing, and engaging in historically feminine forms of labor. The Aldermen write, “Rykener further confessed that for five weeks

⁴⁰ Boyd, David Lorenzo, and Ruth Mazo Karras. “The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 459–65. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-4-459>.

before the feast of St. Michael's last [he] was staying at Oxford, and there, in women's clothing and calling himself Eleanor", and "John Rykener, dressed up as a woman, thinking he was a woman"⁴¹, demonstrating that they were aware that Rykener's female gender presentation was formed through patterns of behavior over a period of years, and was central to her concept of self. They describe Rykener's bisexual sexual activity further, stating, "he often had sex as a man with many nuns and also had sex as a man with many women both married and otherwise...many priests had committed that vice with him as with a woman, how many he did not know, and said that he accomodated priests more readily than other people because they wished to give him more than others."⁴² These descriptions include accusations of numerous sins, which, if true, would illustrate that for Eleanor to behave and present in the manners that she did was a noteworthy and condemnable offense to the clergy, the sacrament of marriage, and to God. If they are false, either due to Eleanor's false testimony or due to the scribe's inaccuracy, the document would support a reading that demonstrates "the deployment of accusations of sodomy in confronting the masculinity of a celibate clergy."⁴³

Understandably, the case of John/Eleanor Rykener has drawn much attention across historical fields and disciplines, ie medieval and early-modernists, historians of gender and sexuality, and feminist and queer theorists alike. The trial's transcript has understandably raised many questions about how to historicize Rykener as a subject. I endeavor to discuss some of the prevailing views- Rykener as a male bisexual cross-dresser, a "transgender-like" person, and as a transgender woman- to work towards formulating an answer.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴²Boyd, David Lorenzo, and Ruth Mazo Karras. "The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 4 (1995): 459–65. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-4-459>.

⁴³Ibid.

David Lorenzo Boyd and Ruth Mazo Karras in “The Interrogation of a Male Transvestite Prostitute in Fourteenth-Century London” refer to Rykener with he/him/his pronouns, and see the case as significant as it “stands practically alone for medieval England as a description of *same-sex* intercourse and *male* transvestism.”⁴⁴ In describing Rykener’s sexual behaviors as “same-sex”, as well as her gender performance as a form of “male transvestism”, Boyd and Karras simply exclude the possibility that Rykener could be understood as transgender.

In contrast, Kadin Henningsen writes in her 2019 article, “Rykener ought to be understood as a transgender woman because she lived and worked for periods of her life as a woman, and other people in her social milieu accepted her as such...[Rykener] may have strategically used common understandings of femininity and womanhood of the period to mark herself as a woman.”⁴⁵ Henningsen, writing 24 years later than Boyd and Karras, refers to Rykener’s use of she/her/her’s pronouns and asserts that due to her reliance upon gendered as female labor, Rykener lived as a woman and sought not only to be perceived as a woman by their peers, but also to identify herself in court documentation and historical record as female. What is the significance of these scholars historicizing Rykener’s experiences in such different ways? Why is Boyd and Karras’ primary reading of the case pertaining primarily to sexuality, and secondarily to gender, considered out-dated today?

Ruth Karras in a 2016 article revisits the case noting that “we might understand Rykener as a transgender person rather than as ‘transvestite,’ the term used in [the earlier] article[s].”⁴⁶

Karras writes that Rykener made an active, tangible effort to “perform this social gender role”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Henningsen, Kadin. “‘Calling [Herself] Eleanor’: Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case.” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*. University of Iowa, October 2, 2019. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2189&context=mff>.

⁴⁶ Ruth Karras and Tom Linkinen, “John/Eleanor Rykener Revisited,” in *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns*, ed. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O’Sullivan (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 111-21, 111.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

chiefly through their labor- as a sex-worker, embroiderer, and tapster. Other trades or occupations were likely available to Rykener which may have offered higher pay, had she presented and identified as a man. Records do not indicate if Eleanor had relationships with her family members, or what their class status may have been. We can reasonably speculate that Eleanor did not have access to generational wealth due to their participation in sex work, which was often done by individuals in precarious financial situations. Thus, it is likely that Rykener's options for employment were limited by her family and class status, placing her in the economic position to perform labor driven by survival rather than her aspirations. Nevertheless, Rykener held some degree of agency- however small- in choosing occupations which were almost exclusively held by women in 14th century England. By performing these traditionally female roles, Rykener was able to use their participation in them to legitimize their other feminine behaviors. They included: cohabitative and homosocial relationships with women, dressing as a woman, and identifying themselves as Eleanor, before hostile judiciary bodies.

In her 2016 revision, Karras described Rykener not as a man practicing sodomy or cross-dressing, but instead as a person who can be understood as “transgender-like” or even as a “transgender person.” Karras sees the utility in employing these terms particularly through the use of fictional and artistic representations in the retelling of Rykener's history. Karras evidently thinks that Eleanor Rykener cannot be accurately described as a transgender woman, as she does not refer to Rykener transgender, instead insisting that Eleanor as a subject occupies a niche that allows for malleable interpretations and retellings; Rykener “stakes out, not a middle position, but a flexible one that went back and forth.”⁴⁸ Karras's understanding of Rykener has developed, she has come to place more emphasis on their actions as they relate to gender and gender identity, and sees Rykener as a figure that was constantly fluid in their gender behaviors and

⁴⁸ Ibid.

presentations. However, Henningsen argues that Karras reluctance to describe to Rykener as a transgender woman “risks perpetuating harmful ideas about transgender people as “evil deceivers and make-believers” in both the past and the present.” Henningsen cautions, “We do not, however, need to resort to fiction to write Eleanor’s history. The historical record indicates that she lived and worked as a woman, and therefore, I believe that it makes sense to think of her as a transgender *woman*.”⁴⁹ The question is now whether, if we fail to acknowledge Rykener as a transgender *woman*, are we doing a disservice to not only the historical accuracy of this particular case and individual, but also to transgender history and historians themselves?

To answer this question, I return to the text with Henningsen’s critiques in mind. The court document itself can only be read as openly hostile to gender non-conformity as it was practiced by Eleanor. Adjectives used in the text, such as “detestable”, “libidinous”, “unspeakable”, “unmentionable”, and “ignominious” enforce a clear notion of morality. To engage in gendered labor and behaviors that do not align with one’s biological sex is analogous to sin. This framing of Eleanor as a clear villain, guilty of numerous sins which include sodomy, lust, prostitution, desanctifying marriage, and trickery, perfectly align with the exact tropes that Henningsen thinks should be avoided in a retelling of Eleanor’s life and trial. Transgender people The oppressive, transphobic language employed in the only surviving document of the case cannot be ignored within secondary accounts, even if such accounts are fictional. It is clear that the trial actively sought to delegitimize Eleanor’s femininity, which could be perpetuated by using terms such as “transgender-like” that impose a non-binary identity onto Eleanor, despite compelling evidence that Eleanor identified as a woman. Thus, modern writers embracing a

⁴⁹ Henningsen, Kadin. ““Calling [Herself] Eleanor’: Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case.” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*. University of Iowa, October 2, 2019. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2189&context=mff>.

“shapeshifter” narrative to describe Eleanor may unwittingly contribute to negative and even transphobic characterizations that are inherent in the primary trial document.

In *One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?* Jacqueline Murray draws upon a wide array of cases of people before the modern era who deviated from binary conceptions of gender. Clerical writings of the medieval period sometimes detail individuals who did not identify with their assigned genders. The concept of a “third gender” or “third sex” is especially applicable to individuals who were highly and devoutly religious, the celibate clergy. Murray writes of cases detailing departures from common misconceptions of sex and gender, “Given the inextricable relationship between sex and gender, which cannot be decoupled completely from each other, it is perhaps possible to find a third sex or third gender in medieval society.”⁵⁰ In my view, describing medieval gender non-conformity as a “third gender” is useful when intimate details of a subject’s life are unknown, such as their long-term labor patterns, social relationships, and sexual histories. For Eleanor Rykener, these details are known, and it is clear that Rykener made an active, even rebellious, decision to align herself with femininity through cohabitative female living and working arrangements.

Because the documentation of Rykener’s patterns of labor and social arrangements are known, I share Henningsen’s view that Rykener can be understood not broadly as a transgender person, but precisely as a transgender woman. As discussed, the court document itself can only be read as London’s Aldermen holding openly hostile perspectives of gender non-conformity as it was practiced by Eleanor. Their descriptions of Rykener portray her in a manner that would have been offensive to Rykener’s gender identity and lived experiences. This means that we cannot rely on the court’s usage of he/him/his pronouns alongside descriptions of female labor

⁵⁰ Murray, Jacqueline. “Chapter 2. One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?” *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, 2008, 34–51. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204490.34>.

and gender performance to decisively cast Rykener as a “shapeshifter” who intended to be perceived with a high degree of gender-hybridity. After all, “The overwhelming number of indiscriminate pronouns at least indicates that the scribe recording the case was unclear about how to gender Rykener.⁵¹” It should be noted that Rykener’s experience as a transgender woman is, in many ways, unlike the experiences of transgender women today. Rykener should be understood as a transgender woman insofar as “she may have strategically used common understandings of femininity and womanhood of the period to mark herself as a woman.” Many, if not all, transgender women through history have done this to varying extents.

Katherina Hetzeldorfer

The earliest recorded case of execution for female homosexual activity occurred in 1477 in Speyer, Germany, a land-locked town in South Germany. By contrast, it was fairly common for men to be executed for the crime of sodomy in this period in Western Europe. The trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer offers insight into social and legal conceptions of a person who was born as a woman, that dressed in male clothing and engaged in sexual relationships with women during Pre-Reformation early modern Germany. In essence, this case reveals the hostility that can often be found in early modern Christian European legal texts towards embodiments of non-traditional gender roles.

⁵¹ Henningsen, Kadin. ““Calling [Herself] Eleanor’: Gender Labor and Becoming a Woman in the Rykener Case.” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*. University of Iowa, October 2, 2019. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2189&context=fff>. Pg. 251.

The only surviving document from this trial, which seems to have taken place throughout a short time period, is roughly two pages in length, and includes the testimony from three people: Hetzeldorfer, and two women who claimed to have had sexual intercourse with her on several different occasions. This document includes Christian terminology, and was likely intended to stand as a cautionary tale to other Speyer residents; those found engaging in gender non-conformity or homosexuality were to be brutally punished by the town's authority figures. Katherina Hetzeldorfer did not live alone, and they claimed that the woman who they lived with was their sister, to numerous people on numerous occasions. This court document reveals that this woman was not in fact their "sister", but rather somebody that Hetzeldorfer was in a long-term romantic and sexual cohabitative relationship with. Katherina was identified as being originally from Nuremberg, meaning that they, along with their partner, chose to move away from their homes and families to live and work in Speyer. In pre-industrial Europe, it was not extremely common for two women to move to a different city together, and the nature of their relationship could have immediately aroused suspicion or violence if they were openly homosexual.

Perhaps it is the case then, that Hetzeldorfer decided to dress and present as a man in order to avoid being ostracized by her community for their same-sex attraction. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Hetzeldorfer was not comfortable identifying with female roles and identities, and would have preferred to have been referred to and conceptualized as a man by their peers if it were possible. Due to the ambiguity of this case, and the sparse testimony of the accused, I will be referring to Hetzeldorfer with they/them pronouns for the remainder of this paper.

The first woman to testify, identified as Else, wife of Wendel Mutter, accused Hetzeldorfer of coercing their way into her home while her husband was away, by profusely knocking on her door until she relented. Hetzeldorfer's attempts resulted in what Mutter described as "many quarrels" which culminated in Hetzeldorfer trying to "have her manly way with her."⁵² Mutter also explained that Hetzeldorfer used a phallic object that they fashioned themselves as, "a huge thing, as big as half an arm" and, "she urinated through this thing." Mutter claims that Hetzeldorfer's partner confided in her, revealing that "she who is supposed to be her sister said to her in brief that she who stands in the dock had deflowered her and had made love to her during two years." Further, Mutter claims that Hetzeldorfer pressured her to remain silent about their encounter, even offering to pay eight florins, as she expressed the final opinion that "men should not be granted such roguery."⁵³ In testifying against Hetzeldorfer in this way, by describing her experiences with them as non-consensual and the result of persistent coercion, while also using female pronouns, creates a depiction of Hetzeldorfer that is sexually deviant and dangerous or threatening to other married women in Speyer. As sodomy and infidelity are sinful in the eyes of the Catholic Church, it is likely that Else Mutter was aware of the consequences that could befall her if she did not appear to condemn Hetzeldorfer's actions. By claiming that Hetzeldorfer offered to pay her for the encounter, and that she was thoroughly under the impression that they were biologically male, Else Mutter is able to avoid the punishment that befell Hetzeldorfer, and was banished 10 miles away from Speyer's borders for participating in the crime.

⁵² The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477). In *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* no. 30, edited by Helmut Puff. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

⁵³ Ibid.

An additional woman's testimony is briefly included in this document. A woman identified only as "Schreckenspönn" claimed to have "committed an act of knavery with her three times" and "did not know anything other than that she took her for a man."⁵⁴ The testimony from Schreckenspönn is considerably less detailed, and includes much less personal or direct evidence than the testimony of Else Mutter. Schreckenspönn, despite having more encounters, does not seem to have been extensively interviewed. This could have been due to simple a lack of cooperation, as giving more details to the Catholic court could have put her at a higher risk of implicating herself. Or perhaps the sparse testimony was due to Shreckenspönn's positionality; she could have been unwed, as it was not indicated that she was the wife of anybody, unlike Mutter. As such, Schreckenspönn may have had less incentive of self-preservation; divorce due to sodomy may not have been a consequence for her, and she may have found it less necessary to morally distance herself from such "knavery." Regardless, due to the fact that Schreckenspönn maintained her ignorance of Hetzeldorfer's female anatomy, she was given the same punishment as Mutter: exile ten miles away from the city.

Finally, Katherina Hetzeldorfer themselves testified before the court, explaining in relative detail how they used their hand-fashioned phallus, describing it as "a red piece of leather, at the front filled with cotton, and a wooden stick stuck into it." In total, Hetzeldorfer admits to having "had her roguery" with three women, including "her who is supposed to be her sister" with this object. Hetzeldorfer dispels rumors that their "sister" was kidnapped, or taken against their will to Speyer, by stating that "she did not court her or do anything dishonest with her"⁵⁵, and in doing so, attempts to distance themselves from further villainous conceptions that they

⁵⁴ The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477). In *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* no. 30, edited by Helmut Puff. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

claimed were not based in reality. However, as it evidently turned out, the town of Speyer was not able to accept Hetzeldorfer's gender expression or patterns of sexual activity, due to their biological sex, and they were drowned in 1477. The sentence that Hetzeldorfer received, death by drowning in the Rhine river, did not afford their family and loved ones the opportunity to perform a proper Catholic burial procedure, and thus was considered disgraceful.

Through the testimonies of Else Mutter and Schreckenspönn, Katherina Hetzeldorfer is memorialized as the first biological woman to be sentenced to death for homosexuality. The trial states, "She was drowned — requiescat in pace — on Friday before the deposition of Saint Guido." Speyer authorities, who were in all likelihood devout Catholics, were inclined to bestow the most harsh punishment upon Hetzeldorfer that was possible. By doing so, the message was sent to other Speyer residents that sodomy, even between women, was sinful and punishable by death. In the best case, even when one was unaware that they were engaging in homosexuality, there came a shameful sentencing of banishment, affording very little to no tolerance for fluidity in gender presentation or sexual orientation.

Interestingly, the document does not contain a listing of a formal charge. Helmut Puff writes of the case, "this lack of a term is not atypical for court documents before the Reformation, that is, before the German reception of Roman law, the extended training of government officials, and the professionalization among lawyers, legal advisors, and civil servants—developments that had a profound impact on the wording of court documents."⁵⁶ Thus, pre-Reformation Germany had a different way of cataloging and articulating crimes through court documents, which lends a much lower degree of detail and specificity to historical record.

⁵⁶ The Trial of Katherina Hetzeldorfer (1477). In *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* no. 30, edited by Helmut Puff. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

It is true that there was no legal term to describe Hetzeldorfer's actions, this did not mean that Speyers' legal authorities or Hetzeldorfer's peers regarded their same sex-sexuality as morally neutral, or that it went undiscussed or undisclosed. In Judith Brown's (they/them) 1986 book *Immodest Acts*, they write, "Lacking a precise vocabulary and precise concepts, a large array of words and circumlocutions came to be used to describe what women allegedly did: mutual masturbation, pollution, fornication, sodomy, buggery, mutual corruption, coitus, copulation, mutual vice, [and] the defilement or impurity of women by one another."⁵⁷ Indeed, Hetzeldorfer was sentenced to death by drowning. Why is it, besides geographical difference, that Hetzeldorfer was punished by death, while Rykener was not recorded as receiving any punishment for their numerous crimes of gender nonconformity? According to Puff, "Her downfall was precipitated by an isolation from urban social networks. This isolation must have triggered the whispers around her relationship with her "sister."⁵⁸ This case confirms the description of lesbian repression provided by Michelle Sauer in her article entitled, *Representing the Negative: Positing the Lesbian Void in Medieval English Anchoritism*, regarding England in the tenth to fifteenth centuries, "The most severe penalties for lesbian activities were reserved for those women who resorted to 'unnatural devices.' Women who penetrated other women performed a masculine role, thus displacing men and appropriating masculine power."⁵⁹ This reversal of acceptable gendered sexual behavior present in Hetzeldorfer's case, given their female anatomy, illustrates a double standard that often appears in records of the period, in the ways which male and female sodomy came to be understood and punished, respectively. Michaela Rocke expands upon this double-standard, writing that people across Western Europe in the late

⁵⁷ Brown, Judith C. *Immodest Acts : the Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* / Judith C. Brown. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. P. 17.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Sauer, Michelle M. "Representing the Negative: Positing the Lesbian Void in Medieval English Anchoritism." *Thirdspace* 3, no. 2 (2004).

medieval and early modern period, “commonly construed the active-passive sexual roles in terms of such value laden dichotomies as masculinity and femininity, dominance and submission, honor and shame.”

The particular history of Hetzeldorfer’s town, Speyer, Germany, may have a role in explaining their deadly sentencing. In 1327, guild masters in Speyer began a wave of open revolt against the oligarchical patrician class, embodying “an attempt by the guildsmen as industrial producers to free urban industry from the tight control exercised by the merchant patriciate.” The result was an increased zeal for assertions of secular society within the context of a largely rural, agrarian territory. German society, largely rural and disconnected from centers of faith, increasingly came to resent corruption of the church. In the 15th century, About 2,800 of the total existing German cities were “extremely small, with populations varying from 100 to 1,000.”⁶⁰ These social arrangements and class conflicts were fueled by large wealth and income disparities, and contributed to the decreasing power and legitimacy of nonsecular authority in Germany. Following the Black Death of 1348-50 which lowered all European populations- including German priesthood- prelates were commonly, “sons of the nobility and did not allow election to church office to interfere with their aristocratic ardor for war and territorial acquisition. They were expert in the accumulation of benefices and were notoriously lax in the performance of their spiritual duties.”⁶¹ By aligning themselves with territorial expansion and wealth accumulation, the priesthood naturally waned in popularity as the disillusioned German population began to turn to alternative forms of Christian spirituality or mysticism. These clashes

⁶⁰ “German Society, Economy, and Culture in the 14th and 15th Centuries.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/German-society-economy-and-culture-in-the-14th-and-15th-centuries>.

⁶¹ “Government and Society.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/Government-and-society>.

occurring in 14th and 15th century Germany, which would eventually culminate in the Protestant Reformation and later forms of class war, likely contributed to the harsh repression of individual sexual behavior in Speyer. Perhaps as a desperate attempt to exercise and symbolize their power in the absence of a strong, centralized monarchical power structure, Speyer authorities ruled in a considerably harsher manner in this case than London authorities ruled in Rykener's case.

Both Eleanor Rykener and Hetzeldorfer's cases illuminate the ways in which English and German courts respectively conceptualized instances of so-called "homosexual" behavior (often recorded vaguely as sodomy) and gender non-conformity. Each of these individuals have been described as "transgender-like" by queer theorists and Medievalists alike, as testimonies from witnesses verified their patterns of cross-dressing, among other behaviors. I offer a critique of the erasure of transgender people from historical record that the modifier "-like" performs in describing Eleanor Rykener, specifically, as "transgender-like" by placing these cases in conversation with one another.

Hetzeldorfer's case stands in contrast with Rykener's in the sense that surviving documents of Hetzeldorfer's case do not include details that relate to their lifestyle and labor patterns, or their self-conceptualizations as it relates to their gender. Rather, Hetzeldorfer's case is centered around documentation of cross-dressing and "female sodomy", enabling historical discourse to be more keenly related to sexual behavior than gender identity. Furthermore, Hetzeldorfer did not appear to take on a masculine name that would have transgressed their biological sex, as Eleanor did. Trial documents, failing to include a masculine name that Hetzeldorfer identified with, coupled with the imperial and ecclesiastical struggles described above, suggest that Hetzeldorfer may have identified themselves instead as "Katherina" due to the higher degree of state repression and punishment that they were subjected to in 15th century

Germany, as compared to Rykener in 14th century England. Hetzeldorfer's case includes much less biographical detail, including only that they were from Nuremberg and came to Speyer with a woman they identified as their sister to court authorities. It is not made known through this document which occupation Hetzeldorfer held or how their sexual relationships with women began, whereas London officials documented these details relatively extensively in Rykener's case. Due to this lack of evidence, I can describe Hetzeldorfer neither as a transgender man, nor as a cisgender lesbian, with the same confidence in which Rykener can be described as a transgender woman. Hetzeldorfer, by virtue of existing in a geographical and temporal sphere wherein female same-sex sexual behaviors were silenced and erased, met a fate that "The contradictory notions that Western Europeans had about women's sexuality made it impossible to discuss lesbian sexuality openly, if at all. Silence bred confusion and confusion bred fear. On these foundations Western society built an impenetrable barrier that has lasted for nearly two thousand years."

The use of she/her/her's pronouns in relation to Eleanor, and the use of they/them/their's pronoun in relation to Hetzeldorfer, reflect the nuance in the historical utility in the term "transgender-like", and demonstrate cases that are enriched by a trans-historical reading. These cases offer great insight into the relationship between queer theory and trans studies, and the historical methods that are employed through their rhetoric. As stated succinctly by scholars Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Klosowska, "Queer theory has a symbiotic-some have said parasitic- relationship to trans studies; the inverts and gender-fuckers of the past have done double duty for both fields."⁶² It is my hope that this chapter is a celebration of the

⁶² LaFleur, Greta, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Klosowska. *Trans Historical : Gender Plurality before the Modern* / Edited by Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Klosowska. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2021. Pg. 6.

resistance and self-expression of these individuals, and an undoing of the historical parasitism between queer theory and trans studies, through a Late Medieval/ Early-Modern Western European context.

CONCLUSION

The Present and Future of Our Collectively Queer Past

Gabrielle M.W. Bychowski writes, any discussion of queer, transgender, and intersex people throughout the Middle Ages is “full of those cultural genealogies that inform human culture and expression today. And it is riven with the battlegrounds between self and society, body, and culture, that seem to be bottomless wells of philosophical insights and debates.”⁶³ Many of the philosophical debates concerning expectations of gender that late medieval and early modern European societies were enmeshed in, were confined by secular and non-secular frameworks and institutions which frequently, though in varied ways, exercised social and moral control of individuals who embodied non-heteronormative understandings of sex, sexuality, and gender.

⁶³ Bychowski, Gabrielle. “Were There Transgender People in the Middle Ages?” *The Public Medievalist*, November 5, 2018. <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/transgender-middle-ages/>.

It should be clear to anybody living in the United States in 2022, that the legal and social frameworks in which gender nonconformity was understood and policed throughout the Middle Ages, have in many ways, experienced a drastic transformation. Homosexual marriage was legally recognized in the U.S. in 2015, which was not a component of any legal code of Western Europe prior to the 20th century. However, with legal privileges does not come the elimination of harmful and persistent ideology towards homosexuality. Frank Caprio claims in his 1954 book entitled *Female Homosexuality: A Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism*, the “lesbian” sexual orientation is a socially-constructed phenomenon which is “like other forms of inversion... the symptom of a more fundamental ‘personality problem’ associated with feelings of sexual immaturity and insecurity.”⁶⁴ Caprio goes on to write of the social failures which result in homosexuality, “Many so-called homosexuals are really normal; they have simply got off on the wrong track for one reason or another. They can be restored to a normal sex outlook by sympathetic and expert treatment... at the hands of a psychiatrist or psychoanalyst who believes in cure.” Caprio’s sentiments are cited in Robert Leslie’s 1966 text *Casebook: Homophile*, as Leslie warns readers, “the homosexual life is not a life to emulate, regardless of the claims made by the homophile apologist.” To Caprio and Leslie, by refusing to assume “normal” responsibilities associated with Christian marriage and domestic life, homosexuals are at risk of succumbing to “a morass of twisted, warped desires” until their lives are reduced to mere “torments of unhappiness.” This rhetoric was not then, nor is it now, based in scientific fact. I include this segment of twentieth century homophobia to demonstrate some of the ideological underpinnings of the repression of queerness and gender nonconformity present throughout the Middle Ages. Caprio and Leslie, as well as 13th century London authorities, 15th century Speyer

64 Caprio, Frank Samuel. *Female Homosexuality; a Psychodynamic Study of Lesbianism*. New York: Grove Press, 1971.

authorities, and 16th century Spanish authorities, all held displays of homosexual behavior and other embodiments of gender nonconformity as wrong, sinful, or a form of willful ignorance which can be corrected through proper guidance. At points in History when this ideology has been applied liberally, the “sin” of sodomy has been eliminated through repression, violence, or death.

As we have seen, homosexual behaviors and gender nonconformity can be observed across temporal and geographic regions during the Long Middle Ages. Conceptions of gendered hierarchies and sexual roles thrived in the medieval and early modern periods, alongside a rapid and massive growth in the exercise of institutionalized forms of repression. Through recounting and historicizing the lives and experiences of Western Europeans such as Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, Eleanor Rykener, Katherina Hetzeldorfer, Elenx de Céspedes, and Catalina de Erauso, a multiplicity of experiences and conceptions of gender non-conformity during the Late medieval and early modern period can be observed. Critical theory, along with gender/queer/trans theory, has enabled these experiences to be grounded in discussion of historical and material realities, which often illuminate dialectical contradictions between conflicting groups and ideologies.

I, like more and more young people today, have no particular interest in defining my gender or sexuality at the moment. I try to live and present in the ways that feel authentic and meaningful to me, regardless of whether a behavior or presentation is traditionally male or female-coded. At the same time, I am trying to consciously unlearn the narrow constructions of gender which I have been socialized to understand, which I believe is crucial in eliminating gender hierarchy in any social organization. This process of learning and unlearning, especially due to the difficulties, has opened my life to more happiness and love than I would have ever

thought possible. I live with a privilege of self-expression that was not afforded to many of my Queer elders. The horrors of the 20th and 21st century include the Holocaust- and its genocidal policies against LGBTQ+ people- along with the AIDS crisis which resulted in the deaths of millions. From listening to stories from my queer elders who were lucky enough to survive these terrifying, dark periods of time, I know that the queer community is healing deep historical wounds that are far from healed. However, it would be an incomplete account of any minority group's character and history to limit our discussion and interests to suffering and pain alone. I feel grateful for my own privileges of self-expression, and the sense of joy and pride I feel to be part of a queer community, with the support of a chosen family of individuals who struggle against the same structures that I do. A sense of loving community, belonging, and self-acceptance is something I hope all queer people can find without exception.

It may be obvious by now that the themes, topics, and questions of this thesis are ones that are very close to my own heart. It is my hope that this small, secondary contribution to Queer medieval and early modern, (and in some respects, Marxist) history, will better enlighten some of the crucial intersections between gender and sexuality that have been central to debates of humanity and morality centuries prior to the invention of terms such as "transgender." May the individuals that I have discussed one day become well-known and (when appropriate) well-celebrated figures.

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