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Issues in Review

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Introduction: Queer and Trans Issues in Medieval Drama

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This essay provides a landscape of queer and trans theoretical approaches, particularly as applied to medieval studies. Despite queer studies having been practiced since at least since the 1980s, medieval drama studies has seen fewer queer (and now trans) readings of medieval dramatic texts and bodies with few exceptions until recent years. Such approaches are more important now than ever given the ongoing assault against LGBTQIA individuals around the globe. Medieval drama is a fecund field for work in queer and trans studies, and through doing such work, we may indeed learn much about ourselves in the twenty-first century.

Queer studies has been a continually evolving field since its inception in the 1990s. At that time, after a decade of the AIDS epidemic, the queer community had been forced to become a viable, loud political force to make known the untold genocide perpetrated by the Reagan administration in its unwillingness to help gay men afflicted with this disease whom they saw as less than human and who, from their evangelical wing's perspective, were sinners who deserved to suffer. In the three decades since then, queer studies has remade itself a few times, focusing less on just gay men and recognizing the vibrant spectrum of queer identities within the LGBTQIA community. Trans studies has emerged from queer studies as a separate field, addressing the particular struggles and triumphs of trans people in an increasingly hostile political environment around the globe but especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. Much like queer theory in the 1990s, trans studies in the late 2010s and now 2020s has been born out of

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urgency — an urgency to quite literally combat the life or death situations that too many trans people find themselves in.

Queer and trans studies both have important work to offer medieval studies, demonstrating to readers the history of queer and trans identities available in the textual records and possible in the ambiguity that exists outside of the scant extant records we have in many cases — particularly, the focus of this Issue in Review, medieval drama. Representation matters for queer and trans people living in the twenty-first century (and beyond), and of course part of representation includes finding oneself in history. Even though many contemporary conservatives, especially Christian nationalists, would have us believe that queer and trans people just suddenly appeared in the twentieth century, history tells a different story. Part of our goal here is to amplify that story further, turning up the volume so that queer and trans voices project over the backwards censors attempting to silence them.

Readers may sense that my tone is rather personal.[1] Queer and trans studies *are* personal to me as a gay man. Queer and trans studies *are* personal to me as a queer studies scholar of medieval drama. I want to know that my queer ancestors are there in the textual records and/or apparatus around them, waiting to be found. I want my queer and trans colleagues and students, too, to be able to find themselves in these dramatic texts and records. I am tired of sitting through conference panels where senior scholars had until only recently wielded the claim of anachronism like a billy club. We as a field need to be better. Representation matters in our field and in the work that we do.

For a field for which performance or the potential of performance is arguably the primary focus, medieval drama studies has been conspicuously slow to embrace queer and trans readings of these texts. Really, scholars of medieval studies writ large seem to struggle to fully accept such theoretical approaches (along with our siblings in critical race theory) with rebuttals of anachronism and/or overreading. Thankfully, the tide may be turning with more and more special issues (such as this section) addressing queer and trans issues in medieval literature. Such approaches are more important now than ever given the ongoing assault against LGBTQIA individuals around the globe — but specifically the evangelical right's attempts to erase and to ultimately kill through denying gender-affirming healthcare to transgender people.

This Issues in Review section stems from a panel sponsored by the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society at the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds in July 2022. Titled 'The Queerness of Early English Drama', this session borrowed from the title of Tison Pugh's book, *On the Queerness of*

Early English Drama: Sex in the Subjunctive. Pugh writes, 'The word *queerness* alludes to an ambiguous yet highly productive mode of critical inquiry, pertaining to disruptions of social, ideological, and sexual normativity that allow repressed, subversive, "sinful", or otherwise unexpected gendered and erotic identities to become visible'.[2] I believe the IMC panel achieved such a productive mode of inquiry, and I believe this collection of essays, too, achieves it.

This Issues in Review shows the eclecticness of queer and trans readings; that is, these approaches provide critics with vast opportunities to experiment. Each essay here is part of the project of queer and trans studies, but each essay takes its own path, too. Frankly, I would not want it any other way — the variety is indeed the strength of queer and trans studies. The shifting terminology reflects the experimentation that each author uses. It shows us how this field is a big tent that includes rather than excludes, that invites fresh approaches rather than rejects anything that does not fall in line. I will return to terminology a bit later. This collection opens with a trans reading, rather than beginning with a queer reading, because I think it is important to focus on where we are going in queer and trans studies. Trans studies is now, but it is also the hopeful future we must lift up and protect.

Each and every time I return to queer and trans readings of medieval drama, I remember the seminal essay written by Robert Clarke and Claire Sponsler, 'Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Crossdressing in Medieval Drama'. At the end of the essay, they ask, 'why should we assume that medieval spectators could not ask: "What if?"'[3] This question continues to inspire my work and the work of others in queer and trans studies in medieval drama. It is a necessary question; we cannot make assumptions about performances barring the very few that have detailed performance records. All readers and scholars of medieval literature — especially medieval drama — should embrace the potential of 'What if?' in interpreting these texts. Possibility is so much more interesting than certainty, and so here we are, twenty-seven years later, honoring the question of our too-soon lost mentors, Bob and Claire. *What if* these queer moments in medieval dramatic texts are opportunities for us to discover an erased milieu of queer and trans identities on the medieval stage? *What if* we shed the heteronormative framework with which so many of us have been taught to read? *What if* we attend to the margins of texts, literally and metaphorically, to find our queer and trans ancestors waiting for us?

An entire generation of scholarship on the Middle Ages, too, has been written and accepted *without* any critical examination of such biases. Obviously the Middle Ages had its own set of norms and mores, but their normal is not our normal.[4]

Much of queer and trans studies speaks to what is 'normal' as opposed to what might be considered deviant or, well, queer in the broadest sense of the word. Heather Love's *Feeling Backwards* addresses this position, particularly how queers today look to the past to find their histories and their ancestors. Love opens her discussion of 'The Backward Turn' alluding to Sodom and Gomorrah: 'A central myth of queer existence describes the paralyzing effects of loss. The story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 is significant not only as an account of violence perpetrated against those accused of the grave sin of homosexuality; it also describes the consequences of the refusal to forget such losses'.[5] In other words, remembering becomes its own sort of violence — or specifically remembering queer moments in straight history. Love explores backwardness, specifically how backwardness needs to be 'disavowed or overcome' to achieve modernity: 'For queers, having been branded as nonmodern or as a drag on the progress of civilization, the desire to be recognized as part of the modern social order is strong. Narratives of gay and lesbian progress inevitably recall the painful history of the homosexual's birth as one of modernity's backward children'.[6] Love focuses specifically on modernity here because she will go on to analyze modernist texts in the body of her monograph, but it is worth noting that modernity, too, is the birth of modern literary criticism. The ways in which the academy has read (and continues to read in many cases) is a project of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their proclivities.

Love explores another important sense of backwardness, too — backward feelings. She reflects, 'As queer readers we tend to see ourselves as reaching back toward isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them. It is hard to know what to do with texts that resist our advances'.[7] As a queer reader of medieval drama, I know this is the case for me — or at least has been in some cases. But backward feelings need not be our only feelings with such rediscovery of queer and trans voices. There has been a general trend in queer studies and trans studies to seek hope. José Esteban Muñoz advocates 'that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always on the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon'.[8] I have some issue with Muñoz's definition here, namely that the horizon suggests a position in view but not yet reached. It reminds me of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow in that way — a reward never achieved and likely unachievable. But I suppose this perspective ultimately offers hope and potential rather than regret and loss.[9] Inevitably, individual queer and trans readers will have their own responses to looking to the past to listen for their ancestors, but to say the least, the feelings are always complicated.

Seeking queer and trans voices in the past inevitably involves engaging in queer time and space. Jack Halberstam provides a useful definition of both in *In a Queer Time and Place*:

> 'Queer time' is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. 'Queer space' refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics.[10]

I contend we might consider these same queer elements in premodernism — which is to say the Middle Ages. We are not projecting our own time backward, then; rather, we are looking for similar contextual characteristics that are distinctively 'not modern'. We are searching for perspectives that we might call queer. Like Halberstam, Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* asks us to reconsider orientations — to queer our orientations, really. She discusses orientations as 'feeling at home' or 'finding our way' and then 'how "finding our way" involves what we could call "homing devices"', concluding 'In a way, we learn what home means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home'.[11] For queer and trans folx, home might often be a complicated space. Ahmed acknowledges as much. She adds, 'phenomenology reminds us that spaces are not exterior to bodies; instead, spaces are like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body'.[12] The queer and trans spaces in which such scholars engage, then, are often the very spaces of their bodies, as are the orientations past, present, and future that complicate our bodies' spaces. This fact should not come as a surprise to those of us reading, studying, and performing (medieval) drama, and it seems to be almost a central tenet of the essays collected here.

Returning to queer and trans studies within medieval studies, I would be derelict of duty to not cite perhaps the most famous queer studies medieval scholar, Carolyn Dinshaw. In both of her books, *Getting Medieval* and *How Soon is Now?*, Dinshaw pushes boundaries, asking us to see the queer potential of the medieval past in conversation with now. In *Getting Medieval*, Dinshaw writes, 'the medieval, as well as other dank stretches of time, becomes itself a resource for subject and community formation and materially engaged coalition building. By using this concept of making relations with the past we realize a temporal dimension of the self and of community'.[13] Dinshaw seems to develop this temporal dimension into a sense of now, then, in *How Soon is Now?* She defines now: 'this *now*

is linked indissoluably to other moments past and future, and thereby to other people, other situations, other worlds; this *now* is impossible to delimit as a single discrete unit, yes, but exactly because it is so complex and vascular, it can prompt us to think and experience time differently'.[14] Dinshaw demonstrates that we are connected to what might seem to be the chronological past in this now she establishes. More importantly, perhaps, this entire enterprise of temporal discovery and (re)location builds queer and trans communities. We have to know our histories because our histories are still with us in the present, shaping our lives in myriad ways.

Recent texts have taken up the question of queer and trans identities in the medieval past and what these approaches mean for the future of the field.[15] Many of these texts question the particular historicism that Dinshaw rebuts above — the historicism that, in essence, perpetuates heterosexual patriarchy by marginalizing other identities, including those of BIPOC and LGBTQIA individuals. This work is recovery; it takes pains to show us that queer and trans identities were clearly a part of early English texts that have since been erased or dismissed.

Trans studies has only recently begun to be published in medieval studies scholarship. The seminal issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*, co-edited by M.W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim, establishes the centrality of trans studies to fully interrogating the Middle Ages.[16] Bychowski adds, in her article on John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, 'Gower's Narcissus reflects a medieval history of isolation, exclusion, dysphoria, and death in the trans community. Consequently, an imagined life such as this invites readers (medieval and modern) to critique, witness, and resist these systems in their own time'.[17] I especially like Bychowski's use of the verb 'reflects' here because that is precisely what literature offers to us irrespective of its time period of origin. Literature is indeed a way to reflect on the issues that affect humans then and now, and seeing trans lives in the past makes them all the more visible in the present.

In their introduction to *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality before the Modern*, editors Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska write:

> The dynamism of current ways of understanding diversity in gendered presentation and behavior … both expands and limits what the past looks like to twenty-first century readers, and at times makes it more difficult to perceive what medieval and early modern texts have to say about how gendered experience, knowledge, performance, and embodiment were understood in their own times. The trans past cannot be considered without a commensurate reckoning with the politics of historiography.[18]

We must query history and its construction in order to find queer and trans experiences. Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt in their co-edited volume, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, add 'Working for transgender rights entails striving toward the visibility and acceptance of transgender lives. Yet something more than tolerance of trans people's physical existence in the present is required. That something is full ideological existence — the ability to imagine a transgender past, and a transgender future'.[19]

And although her focus is not specifically trans studies, Leah DeVun's *The Shape of Sex* and its argument surrounding the medieval history of intersex and nonbinary bodies provides insight into similar issues in the time period of the Middle Ages that did little to differentiate beyond male and not male. DeVun explains how some of the histories of gender-crossing that she investigates 'attributed to "hermaphrodites" in premodern Europe more closely resemble what we now call "transgender" than what we now call "intersex"'.[20] She cautions readers to not assume ancient and medieval attitudes about sex and gender were necessarily better or worse than our own: 'sometimes they are far more restrictive and derogatory than our current ones, but at other times they are more accepting and can present themselves in rich and imaginative ways'.[21] This caveat is always a necessary one to keep in mind — particularly when teaching medieval texts from a queer perspective — because we cannot misrepresent the Middle Ages as some sort of queer utopia of tolerance and acceptance. It was *not* that. DeVun details the heinous 'medical' practices of the later Middle Ages in 'correcting' intersex bodies: 'If the patient was deemed male, surgeons sometimes recommended interventions to restore the masculine surface of the body. For patients deemed female, surgeons recommended amputations of masculine-looking genitals to return the body to a "natural form"'.[22]

In medieval drama studies, there has thankfully been critical movement in this area, too. As mentioned above, Pugh's *On the Queerness of Early English Drama* is a seminal text to our field. Reflecting on early English drama's Christian context, Pugh writes, 'Sin and other such transgressions spark the necessary conflicts for a plot and its resolution, with queerness serving as such a necessary transgression and frequently appearing furtively in the sideways interactions of the performers and their audiences, in actors encoding subversive elements in their roles, and in audiences viewing according to their personal sense of pleasure'.[23] Queerness can be read as sin in many instances in medieval drama to be sure, but I find Pugh's recognition of the pleasure that audiences may achieve in witnessing queerness — what he calls 'scopophilic pleasures'[24] — to be more productive for the purposes of this collection. Daisy Black offers some excellent

insight on the potential queerness of medieval biblical drama: 'To stage the Bible involves introducing characters whose viewpoints might not necessarily align with their scriptural sources. Drama is in the business of enacting messy histories: resisting linearity and supersession, offering alternative narratives, forming diversions and raiding questions which cannot easily be answered'.[25] The 'messy histories' in these plays often involve the dominant culture defeating minority groups, as Black specifically explores with anti-Semitism in the N-Town plays in her first chapter. Queer and trans bodies and voices are often those silenced in these conflicts, and so in the performance of them, what might drama offer to us as a counternarrative?[26]

For all of the queer and trans work being done in medieval drama, including that in this issue, John J. McGavin and Greg Walker's *Imagining Spectatorship* has been an important study. They advocate for speculation in studying medieval and early modern drama, considering how varying perspectives that arise through differences in physical space or a viewer's identity affect the experience of a play: 'Both socially inflected and embodied cognitive aspects of audience response would have been affected and inflected by physical location, and all of these factors need to be folded into our analysis of spectatorial experience. This point has rarely been made overtly in analyses of early drama in performance, and is often quietly subsumed in references to "the audience" as a single organic unit in wider studies'.[27] And so speculating about queer and trans issues in medieval drama is in fact necessary to better comprehend the range of audience (and actor) experiences in these performances. McGavin and Walker obviously are not the first scholars to ever *think* this thought, but they deserve credit for being the first to publish it as a call to action. They reinvigorate the potential of Clarke and Sponsler's question — 'What if?' — and encourage readers to confront the panoply of responses available in this, what they term, 'spectatorial turn'.

I should add that the support of the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society has been instrumental in lifting up the voices and work of folx in queer and trans studies (as well as critical race theory). By sponsoring panels at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University ('K'zoo') and the International Medieval Congress at the University of Leeds (as well as panels at the Modern Language Association Convention and the Sewanee Medieval Colloquium), the MRDS is helping us carve out space to be seen and to be heard. Without the support of the MRDS, particularly Emma Maggie Solberg, work like this might never have seen the light of day.

The essays that follow use a variety of terminology to discuss queer and trans experiences in the dramatic texts under study. I offer some brief definitions here,

but each contributor, too, will offer specific definitions of the terms they engage, along with supporting citations. Trans misogyny refers to the general demeaning of feminine persons compared to their masculine counterparts. Gender-affirming healthcare is healthcare that serves to affirm a person's chosen gender rather than their gender assigned at birth. Transvestite drama is older terminology used in medieval drama studies that refers to female roles played by men, which of course carries through to the early modern period. Gender fluidity refers to the spectrum of gender that any one character may inhabit when we consider the gender of the actor in combination with the gender of the character they are playing. Drag kings are, usually, female-identifying bodies dressed as hyper-masculine men, exaggerating the male-coded physical features and dress.[28] Chrononormativity refers to the experiencing of straight time — the capitalist, normative way of understanding time as linear that undergirds modern, western history. All of these terms are explored (and cited at length) in the individual essays that make up this Issue in Review, and so readers should seek more information in the essays themselves.

Framing this Issue in Review with this terminology should give readers an idea of the scope of queer and trans studies. Again, this theoretical field is rather large and growing larger. However, I should also point out that terminology in queer and trans studies itself is often unstable, shifting from person to person, performance to performance, reader to reader, etc.[29] We do not even touch on a number of identities from the LGBTQIA spectrum yet to be explored in medieval drama precisely because we hope these essays serve as an invitation to others to join us in this work (and for our colleagues in the field to be open to hearing, reading, and publishing such work). What might asexuality look like in a performance of a Noah pageant, for example? How might we conceive of polyamory or pansexuality in such dramatic texts? These are the questions that will animate queer studies moving forward, and maybe they, like trans studies, will become their own subfields. Irrespective of the path there, it is clear the future for queer and trans studies is bright if we allow them to shine.

The four essays in this collection are important, fresh queer and trans readings of well-known and oft-taught medieval dramatic texts: the N-Town 'Nativity', the Chester 'Play of the Flood', the Digby *Mary Magdalene*, and *Everyman*. Conveniently, this collection contains queer and/or trans readings of each of the three major genres of medieval English drama: the biblical plays, a saint's life/legend, and the morality play. Yes, each essay has its own particular interpretation and unique approach to queer and/or trans studies. Again, this is a feature and not a bug. Queer and trans studies offer a variety of opportunities for approaching texts, and the readings these various approaches produce are generative in their

respective ways. This Issue in Review is meant to show the breadth of the field — the potential that it offers to medieval drama as a way of reading and a way of expanding these texts to new audiences, interpretations, and possibilities.

Nat Rivkin examines 'trans misogyny' in the N-Town 'Nativity', engaging the play-text with trans studies scholarship to reflect on how the play contests histories of women's medicine and healthcare.[30] Specifically, they focus on Mary's experience having her body doubted, questioned, and probed by Salomé. Rivkin deftly depicts the historically specific iteration of trans misogyny — late medieval East Anglian — that the text portrays, positing that from this framework we may read Mary as gender variant. The text does not question that Mary is a woman *per se*, but, as Rivkin so well puts, 'it requires profane evaluations of precisely what kind of woman she is'.[31] This repeated probing, then, invokes what trans studies scholars refer to as 'the reveal', that is, essentially a dramatic outing or undressing of the gender variant individual under question for all of the audience to see. Rivkin's essay, too, makes one reflect on current debates concerning gender-affirming healthcare for trans people in light of the trans misogyny critiqued in their reading of the play.

Gillian Redfern reflects on trans-civic and trans-gender fluidity in the Chester 'Play of the Flood' to consider the potential queer futures this pageant offers.[32] Mrs. Noah serves as the focal point for this essay, but Redfern specifically entertains the trans potential of this character and audience reception of them. In her essay, Redfern notes that she applies terms such as cross-dressing, drag, and transvestite interchangeably as an inclusive rhetorical move, and while some readers may find this problematic at first blush, I believe Redfern's approach here is exactly how we have to read medieval texts from queer/trans perspectives. Because we are, by and large, speculating, we can better do so broadly rather than narrowly.[33] Redfern suggests that reading Mrs. Noah through the available genders of medieval transvestite drama may indeed 'drag' modern readers back to medieval drama to unfold potential futures available and, in doing so, allow them to stand in solidarity with gender variant persons who, then and now, experience transphobia.

Daisy Black reads the Digby *Mary Magdalene* through 'drag king cultures', also investigating the lesbian relationships possible in the play.[34] She makes the point that this play seems to resist heteronormativity at every turn — such a claim, to my mind, makes this play infinitely more interesting.[35] Black takes to task, too, medieval drama critics who insist on denying the humanity of the actors playing allegories on stage. Indeed, it is difficult for one to talk about gender with allegories themselves, but the actors on the stage are bodies that are gendered and

perform gender. Black asserts that the play's attentiveness to the gender of allegorical figures, particularly Lechery, contributes to the potential lesbianism there. She then explores the Digby Gallant as a drag king, specifically as a hyperbolic performance of masculinity. At the end of her essay, Black tantalizingly speculates on how such a queer performance could be staged. May we all be so lucky as to witness such a production some day.

Matthew Irvin articulates the potential for religious content in *Everyman* as a site for queer resistances.[36] Using Giorgio Agamben's concept of messianic time, Irvin suggests that, paradoxically, such time may indeed produce queer moments. He argues that *Everyman* creates time for friendship — a sort of 'gaye' time that exists outside of theological order. Friendship, in Irvin's argument, may function as queer resistance not in spite of the religious content of the play but by virtue of such content. Indeed, it is the messianic time defined by Agamben that supersedes the chrononormativity of secular time. Everyman, the character, invites queerness into the play by his failure at penitential progress through his focus on his friends. By the play's end, then, Everyman and his group of friends offer a queer alternative to singular individuality. Irvin offers erudite close readings of what is often a rather obtuse morality play, and his queer reading has made me reconsider how this play works — or better put, what work this play does. His conclusion reminds us of the power of queer community and how queer community may be the solution to toxic individuality, then and now.

All of these essays offer insightful, thought-provoking queer and/or trans readings of familiar medieval dramatic texts. I will end by unpacking this term, 'familiar'. By calling these texts familiar, I am implicitly marking them as normative and comfortable. I imagine for some readers of the essays that follow feelings of normalcy and comfort will be anything but their experience. The important essays that follow engage in the very disorientation Ahmed defines in my discussion above. For queer and trans readers, I hope these readings help in providing the histories that you all have been told do not exist or that have been intentionally erased by previous generations of scholars. These texts and the authors' readings of them here are just the beginning of the rediscovery. To paraphrase the gay activist slogan from the 1990s, we're here and we've always been queer.

Notes

1 I must point out that, although I am by no means accusing readers of this position, such accusations have been made against queer/trans scholars as a passive aggressive attempt at censorship for decades.

2 Tison Pugh, *On the Queerness of Early English Drama: Sex in the Subjunctive* (Toronto, 2021), 11, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487538866.

3 Robert L.A. Clarke and Claire Sponsler, 'Queer Play: The Cultural Work of Cross-dressing in Medieval Drama', *New Literary History* 28.2 (1997), 319–44, 341, https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.1997.0017.

4 See Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncracies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't* (Minneapolis, 2005), 5. She writes, 'Before the advent of the normal, no sexuality or any other cultural idea was normative. This assertion finds strength when one charts out the historical idea of normativity as that idea created social issues, social groups, and social pressures. The specific evolution of sexual normativity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries further reinforces this assertion. By contrast, the Middle Ages, including its people, institutions, and culture, never aspired to be normal, nor did medieval cultures know how to normativize their ideals in the way that modern (American) culture does'.

5 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, 2007), 4–5, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjghxr0.

6 Ibid, 6–7.

7 Ibid, 8.

8 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, 2009), 11, https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479868780.001.0001.

9 See also Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis, 2009), 3. Snediker defines queer optimism: 'Queer optimism doesn't aspire toward happiness, but instead finds happiness *interesting*. Queer optimism, in this sense, can be considered a form of meta-optimism: it wants to *think* about feeling good, to make disparate aspects of feeling good thinkable. *Queer Optimism*, then, seeks to take positive affects as serious and interesting sites of critical investigation'.

10 Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York, 2005), 5–6, https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814790892.001.0001.

11 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, 2006), 9, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822388074.

12 Ibid.

13 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, 1999), 21, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822382188.

14 Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Durham, 2012), 4, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822395911.

15 Will Rogers and Christopher Michael Roman, eds, *Medieval Futurity: Essays for the Future of A Queer Medieval Studies* (Berlin, 2021), 3, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501513701. Erik Wade, 'Skeletons in the Closet: Scholarly Erasure of Queer and Trans Themes in Early Medieval Texts', *English Literary History* 89.2 (2022), 282–3, https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2022.0011. Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691210889.

16 They write, 'medieval trans feminism calls on us to look at ourselves and our pasts in diverse ways if we are to perceive the trans lives that might be shown there'. M.W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim, 'Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction', *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55.1 (2019), 6–41, 7, https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2185.

17 M.W. Bychowski, 'The Necropolitics of Narcissus: Confessions of Transgender Suicide in the Middle Ages', *Medieval Feminist Forum* 55.1 (2019), 207–48, 209, https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2188. Another useful source is M.W. Bychowski's website *Transliterature: Things Transform*, last modified April 2022, http://www.things-transform.com/2022/04/the-trans-poetics-of-dysphoric-history.html.

18 Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska, *Trans Historical: Gender Plurality Before the Modern* (Ithaca, 2021), 3, https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501759086.001.0001.

19 Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* (Amsterdam, 2021), 11, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ks0cj4.

20 Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York, 2021), 9, https://doi.org/10.7312/devu19550.

21 Ibid, 10.

22 Ibid, 137.

23 Pugh, *On the Queerness of Early English Drama*, 17.

24 Ibid, 24.

25 Daisy Black, *Play Time: Gender, Anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama* (Manchester, 2020), 22, https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526146878.

26 In my essay 'Queer and Working Class while Reading *The Second Shepherds' Play*', I offer a potential answer: 'As queer, working-class readers in the present, we must identify our presents in the past of this text while acknowledging its call to re-present its message of hope for queer, working-class persons today'. Jeffery G. Stoyanoff,

'Queer and Working Class while Reading *The Second Shepherds' Play*', *postmedieval* 11.2–3 (2020), 220–7, 222, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-020-00180-x.

27 John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford, 2016), 17, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198768616.001.0001.

28 I should be clear that there is no one way to do drag — male or female. I am simply trying to provide basic definitions here for readers.

29 One need only look to Tison Pugh's book to see a rather male-centric definition of queer compared to say how Carolyn Dinshaw or Karma Lochrie have explored the term in medieval literature.

30 Nat Rivkin, '"Lely-wyte, clene with pure virginyté": The N-Town "Nativity", the Virgin Mary, and Trans Misogyny', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 23–36, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5846.

31 Ibid, 23.

32 Gillian Redfern, 'On Unstable Ground:Trans-civic, Trans Gender Fluidity in Chester's Play of The Flood', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 37–50, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5840.

33 Indeed, DeVun comes up against this issue time and again in her monograph *The Shape of Sex*, cited above.

34 Daisy Black, 'Lesbians, Drag Kings, and Pregnant Queens: The Digby *Mary Magdalene*'s Queer Relationships', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 51–70, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5799. A point of clarification here: even though Black's essay might be read as using Pugh's idea of the scopophilic gaze, cited earlier, Black had been developing this argument before Pugh's *On the Queerness of Early English Drama* was published. Her argument exists independent of Pugh's even if we might read them together in fruitful ways.

35 As long as this play is, I do find that it can drag, but if we instead 'drag' the play, we have an entirely new sort of performance to consider.

36 Matthew W. Irvin, ''Be You Never So Gaye': A Queer *Everyman*', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 71–86, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5845.