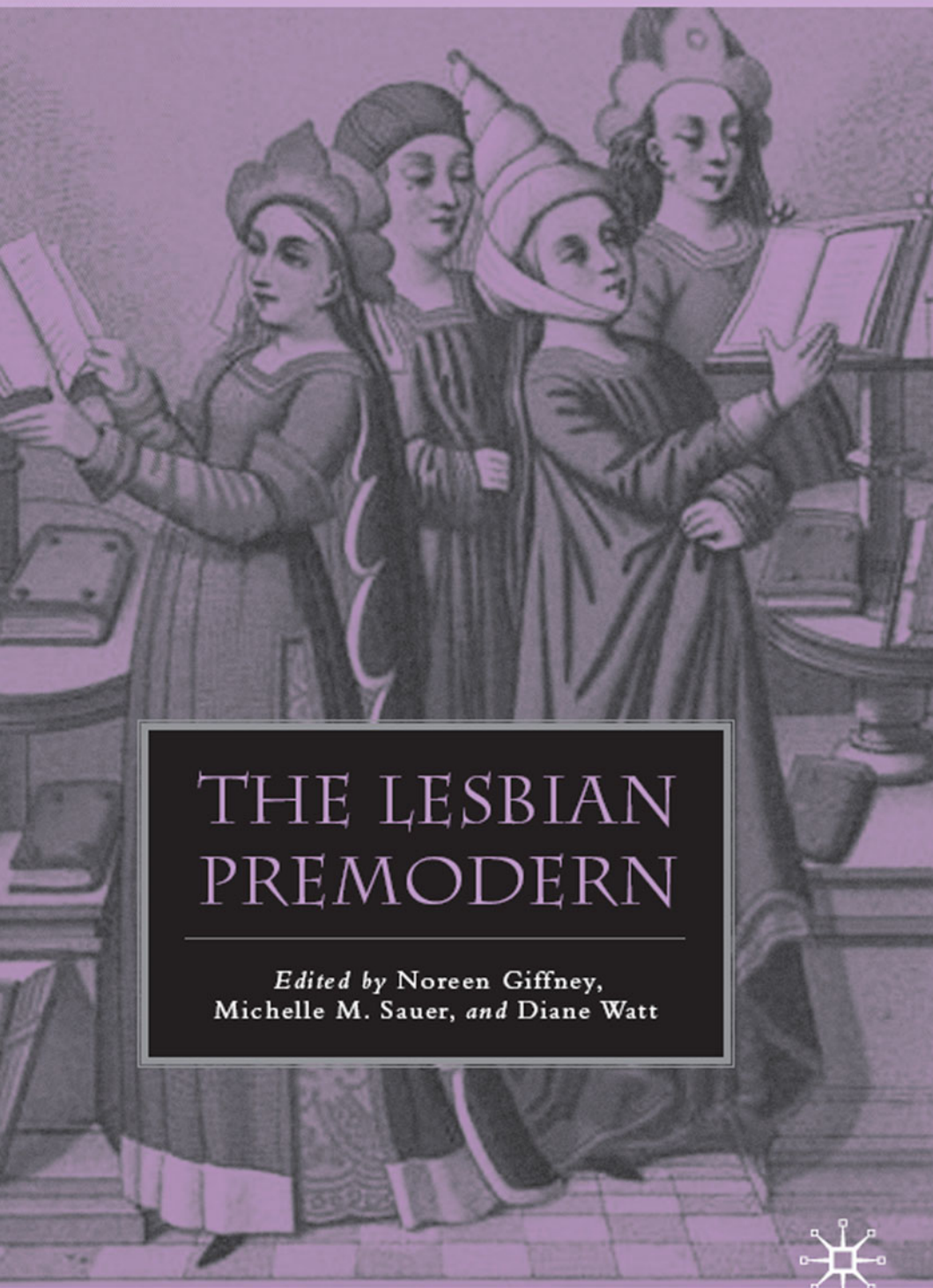
THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



THE LESBIAN PREMODERN

Edited by Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer, *and* Diane Watt

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

BONNIE WHEELER, *Series Editor*

The New Middle Ages is a series dedicated to pluridisciplinary studies of medieval cultures, with particular emphasis on recuperating women's history and on feminist and gender analyses. This peer-reviewed series includes both scholarly monographs and essay collections.

PUBLISHED BY PALGRAVE:

Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety
edited by Gavin R. G. Hambly

The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics
by Gregory B. Stone

Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition
edited by Sherry J. Mou

The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France
by Constant J. Mews

Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault
by Philipp W. Rosemann

For Her Good Estate: The Life of Elizabeth de Burgh
by Frances A. Underhill

Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages
edited by Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl

Motherhood and Mothering in Anglo-Saxon England
by Mary Dockray-Miller

Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman
edited by Bonnie Wheeler

The Postcolonial Middle Ages
edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Chaucer's Pardoner *and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse*
by Robert S. Sturges

Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers
edited by Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho

Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages
by Laurel Amtower

Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture
edited by Stewart Gordon

Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature
edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose

Same Sex Love and Desire among Women in the Middle Ages
edited by Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn

Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages: Ocular Desires
by Suzannah Biernoff

Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum *and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*
edited by Constant J. Mews

Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology
by Richard A. Lee, Jr.

Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance
edited by Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees

Malory's Morte D'Arthur*: Remaking Arthurian Tradition*
by Catherine Batt

The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature
edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Warren

Popular Piety and Art in the Late Middle Ages: Image Worship and Idolatry in England 1350–1500
by Kathleen Kamerick

Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England
by Elizabeth Scala

Creating Community with Food and Drink in Merovingian Gaul
by Bonnie Effros

Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire
by Anne McClanan

Encountering Medieval Textiles and Dress: Objects, Texts, Images
edited by Désirée G. Koslin and Janet Snyder

Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady
edited by Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons

Isabel La Católica, Queen of Castile: Critical Essays
edited by David A. Boruchoff

Homoeroticism and Chivalry: Discourses of Male Same-Sex Desire in the Fourteenth Century
by Richard E. Zeikowitz

Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England 1225–1350
by Linda E. Mitchell

Eloquent Virgins: From Thecla to Joan of Arc
by Maud Burnett McInerney

The Persistence of Medievalism: Narrative Adventures in Contemporary Culture
by Angela Jane Weisl

Capetian Women
edited by Kathleen D. Nolan

Joan of Arc and Spirituality
edited by Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler

The Texture of Society: Medieval Women in the Southern Low Countries
edited by Ellen E. Kittell and Mary A. Suydam

Charlemagne's Mustache: And Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age
by Paul Edward Dutton

Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image
edited by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills

Queering Medieval Genres
by Tison Pugh

Sacred Place in Early Medieval Neoplatonism
by L. Michael Harrington

The Middle Ages at Work
edited by Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel

Chaucer's Jobs
by David R. Carlson

Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity
by John M. Ganim

Queer Love in the Middle Ages
by Anna Kłosowska

Performing Women in the Middle Ages: Sex, Gender, and the Iberian Lyric
by Denise K. Filios

Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England
by David Gary Shaw

Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages
edited by Kathryn Starkey and Horst Wenzel

Medieval Paradigms: Essays in Honor of Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, Volumes 1 and 2
edited by Stephanie Hayes-Healy

False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature
by Elizabeth Allen

Ecstatic Transformation: On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages
by Michael Uebel

Sacred and Secular in Medieval and Early Modern Cultures: New Essays
edited by Lawrence Besserman

Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages
edited by Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers

Representing Righteous Heathens in Late Medieval England
by Frank Grady

Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth- to Twelfth-Century Painting
by Jennifer L. Ball

The Laborer's Two Bodies: Labor and the "Work" of the Text in Medieval Britain, 1350–1500
by Kellie Robertson

The Dogaressa of Venice, 1250–1500: Wife and Icon
by Holly S. Hurlburt

Logic, Theology, and Poetry in Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille: Words in the Absence of Things
by Eileen C. Sweeney

The Theology of Work: Peter Damian and the Medieval Religious Renewal Movement
by Patricia Ranft

On the Purification of Women: Churching in Northern France, 1100–1500
by Paula M. Rieder

Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays
edited by Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones

Lonesome Words: The Vocal Poetics of the Old English Lament and the African-American Blues Song
by M.G. McGeachy

Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries
by Anne Bagnell Yardley

The Flight from Desire: Augustine and Ovid to Chaucer
by Robert R. Edwards

Mindful Spirit in Late Medieval Literature: Essays in Honor of Elizabeth D. Kirk
edited by Bonnie Wheeler

Medieval Fabrications: Dress, Textiles, Clothwork, and Other Cultural Imaginings
edited by E. Jane Burns

Was the Bayeux Tapestry Made in France?: The Case for St. Florent of Saumur
by George Beech

Women, Power, and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages
by Erin L. Jordan

Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles
by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Medieval Go-betweens and Chaucer's Pandarus
by Gretchen Mieszkowski

The Surgeon in Medieval English Literature
by Jeremy J. Citrome

Temporal Circumstances: Form and History in the Canterbury Tales
by Lee Patterson

Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing
by Lara Farina

Odd Bodies and Visible Ends in Medieval Literature
by Sachi Shimomura

On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages
by Valerie Allen

Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity
edited by Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman

Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema
edited by Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh

Allegory and Sexual Ethics in the High Middle Ages
by Noah D. Guynn

England and Iberia in the Middle Ages, 12th–15th Century: Cultural, Literary, and Political Exchanges
edited by María Bullón-Fernández

The Medieval Chastity Belt: A Myth-Making Process
by Albrecht Classen

Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature
by Cary Howie

Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature
by Heather Blurton

The Drama of Masculinity and Medieval English Guild Culture
by Christina M. Fitzgerald

Chaucer's Visions of Manhood
by Holly A. Crocker

The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women
by Jane Chance

Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature
by Scott Lightsey

American Chaucers
by Candace Barrington

Representing Others in Medieval Iberian Literature
by Michelle M. Hamilton

Paradigms and Methods in Early Medieval Studies
edited by Celia Chazelle and Felice Lifshitz

The King and the Whore: King Roderick and La Cava
by Elizabeth Drayson

Langland's Early Modern Identities
by Sarah A. Kelen

Cultural Studies of the Modern Middle Ages
edited by Eileen A. Joy, Myra J. Seaman, Kimberly K. Bell, and Mary K. Ramsey

Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language: An Edition, Translation, and Discussion
by Sarah L. Higley

Medieval Romance and the Construction of Heterosexuality
by Louise M. Sylvester

Communal Discord, Child Abduction, and Rape in the Later Middle Ages
by Jeremy Goldberg

Lydgate Matters: Poetry and Material Culture in the Fifteenth Century
edited by Lisa H. Cooper and Andrea Denny-Brown

Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature
by Tison Pugh

Sex, Scandal, and Sermon in Fourteenth-Century Spain: Juan Ruiz's Libro de Buen Amor
by Louise M. Haywood

The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Late Middle Ages
edited by Catherine E. Léglu and Stephen J. Milner

Battlefronts Real and Imagined: War, Border, and Identity in the Chinese Middle Period
edited by Don J. Wyatt

Wisdom and Her Lovers in Medieval and Early Modern Hispanic Literature
by Emily C. Francomano

Power, Piety, and Patronage in Late Medieval Queenship: Maria de Luna
by Nuria Silleras-Fernandez

In the Light of Medieval Spain: Islam, the West, and the Relevance of the Past
edited by Simon R. Doubleday and David Coleman, foreword by Giles Tremlett

Chaucerian Aesthetics
by Peggy A. Knapp

Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama
by Theodore K. Lerud

Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England
edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetics
by Susan Signe Morrison

Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales
edited by Ruth Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones

The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance
by Seeta Chaganti

The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade
edited by Matthew Gabriele and Jace Stuckey

The Poems of Oswald von Wolkenstein: An English Translation of the Complete Works (1376/77–1445)
by Albrecht Classen

Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life
edited by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy

Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature: Singular Fortunes
by J. Allan Mitchell

Maintenance, Meed, and Marriage in Medieval English Literature
by Kathleen E. Kennedy

The Post-Historical Middle Ages
edited by Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico

Constructing Chaucer: Author and Autofiction in the Critical Tradition
by Geoffrey W. Gust

Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France
by Kathleen Nolan

Finding Saint Francis in Literature and Art
edited by Cynthia Ho, Beth A. Mulvaney, and John K. Downey

Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape
by Alfred K. Siewers

Berenguela of Castile (1180–1246) and Political Women in the High Middle Ages
by Miriam Shadis

Julian of Norwich's Legacy: Medieval Mysticism and Post-Medieval Reception
edited by Sarah Salih and Denise N. Baker

Medievalism, Multilingualism, and Chaucer
by Mary Catherine Davidson

The Letters of Heloise and Abelard: A Translation of Their Complete Correspondence and Related Writings
translated and edited by Mary Martin McLaughlin with Bonnie Wheeler

Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe
edited by Theresa Earenfight

Visual Power and Fame in René d'Anjou, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Black Prince
by SunHee Kim Gertz

Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog: Medieval Studies and New Media
by Brantley L. Bryant

Margaret Paston's Piety
by Joel T. Rosenthal

Gender and Power in Medieval Exegesis
by Theresa Tinkle

Antimercantilism in Late Medieval English Literature
by Roger A. Ladd

Magnificence and the Sublime in Medieval Aesthetics: Art, Architecture, Literature, Music
edited by C. Stephen Jaeger

Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Objects in Global Perspective: Translations of the Sacred
edited by Elizabeth Robertson and Jennifer Jahner

Late Medieval Jewish Identities: Iberia and Beyond
edited by Carmen Caballero-Navas and Esperanza Alfonso

Outlawry in Medieval Literature
by Timothy S. Jones

Women and Disability in Medieval Literature
by Tory Vandeventer Pearman

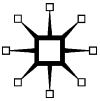
The Lesbian Premodern
edited by Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer, and Diane Watt

Heloise and the Paraclete: A Twelfth-Century Quest (forthcoming)
by Mary Martin McLaughlin

THE LESBIAN PREMODERN

Edited by
Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer, and Diane Watt

palgrave
macmillan



THE LESBIAN PREMODERN

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2011 978-0-230-61676-9

First published in 2011 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®
in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-38018-3 ISBN 978-0-230-11719-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9780230117198

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The lesbian premodern / edited by Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer, and Diane Watt.
p. cm.—(The New Middle Ages)

1. Lesbians—History. 2. Homosexuality—History. I. Giffney, Noreen. II. Sauer, Michelle M., 1972– III. Watt, Diane, 1965–

HQ75.5.L444 2011
306.76'6309—dc22 2010025623

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: February 2011

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Heike Bauer for her support and enthusiasm
For Nicole Murray, my hot water bottle
For Adam Bures for his love and encouragement

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Karma Lochrie

I am an unlikely prefacer of a volume on the lesbian premodern. In my own work I have endeavored to recast queer historical projects in terms of the role that normativity plays in establishing modern sexualities—and that it does not play in premodern ones. The term "lesbian" in the titles of this volume and many of the essays, like the terms homosexual, gay, and even queer, is attached at the hip, so to speak, with the concept of heteronormativity, both in its historical development and its fundamental meaning. "Lesbian" cites a departure from heteronormativity; queer cites a disruption of heteronormativity; and so on. I approach medieval female sexuality by revising the premodern landscape of sexuality from its presumed configuration around a transhistorical heteronormativity. Because so much of queer history takes heteronormativity as a given, I have argued, we have tended to structure queerness in opposition to the sexually normative—a configuration that, while it makes arguable sense for modernity and postmodernity, does not describe premodern sexual representations, behaviors, or beliefs. This assertion might strike one as outlandish, but that is because we have become so heavily invested in heteronormative longevity as the key to queer and lesbian histories alike. The jettisoning of normativity as it inflects our understanding of disparate premodern sexualities complicates the projects of queering our histories and examining "conditions of intelligibility" for historically specific sexual acts and affections.[1] I am not opposed to the use of modern categories to describe gender and sexual conditions in premodernity, as *The Lesbian Premodern* does, but I am opposed to "heteronormativity" as a concept, not because it is anachronistic, but because of its self-mythologizing effects. I have maintained that I think the postmodern age has much to gain from a new understanding of sexualities before norms in developing strategies for contending with a norm-saturated present.

So, I come to this "lesbian premodern" with some hesitation and discomfort. Whether the category of lesbian is used as a noun, suggesting a recuperative project, or as an adjective, suggesting a strategic one, we need to be wary of the *effects* of using this term, namely, the replication of heteronormativity in the wings of the lesbian premodern stage. Lesbian-in-scare-quotes or -italics might indeed remind us, through its "typological strangeness," of the "epistemological inadequacy, psychological coarseness, and historical contingency" of the term, as Valerie Traub contends, but I worry that it ultimately succumbs to the desires of modern scholars to recuperate lesbians in the past. And let's face it, the term "lesbian" has often carried a more identitarian and resolutely literal meaning than most of the other terms for homosexuals, making it the least portable of them. This is precisely why its deployment in *The Lesbian Premodern* is potentially so unsettling and useful for understanding past sexualities along with a self-critical view of the present—precisely because it resists abstraction and generalization. In addition, there is the problem of the invisibility of women in some queer studies that this title attempts to redress. Why is it that I remain unsettled by the title of this volume when it clearly has the kind of transgressive potential that I admire in some queer studies?

The use of "lesbian" in the titles of this volume and the various essays contained in it is a "deliberately provocative" strategy aimed at harassing historicism's most potent critique, the charge of anachronism. *Strategic* anachronism refuses the discrete categories of past and present in traditional historicism in order to "induce the untimely," in the words of Elizabeth Grosz, and to "query the pervasive logic of orderly temporal difference and distance that informs mainstream historicism," according to Jonathan Gil Harris.[2] If "lesbian" functions strategically, the question is, what is the work of its strategy? Bennett provides one analysis of her strategic use of "lesbian-like" both to "expand the evidentiary possibilities of the field," but also to destabilize the term "lesbian" itself, "introducing a productive uncertainty born of likeness and resemblance, not identity." With regard to the conception of this volume, the editors deliberately raise the specter of anachronism in order to invite the reader to "think across boundaries and classifications, to think across time, geographies, disciplines, and methodologies." This particular strategy for thinking across boundaries always risks a certain restabilizing of the term "lesbian," rather than opening it up to historical, theoretical, and contemporary investigations. As long as we are still committed to such goals as "visibility," "celebration," and lesbian "experience," I am not sure that our strategy succeeds in changing old conversations about how to do histories of sexuality. Such assertions as the following, in the editors' introduction, seem to me to be especially fraught with problems for reading lesbian presents as much as pasts: "Lesbianism

aligns sexuality with power (not desire): thus, for women, homosexuality is a choice to become powerful, and consequently, feared."

As I have already suggested, the project of stripping "heteronormativity" of its trans-historical portability is crucial to the kindred project of this volume of seeking out affinities and salience of sexual behaviors and eroticisms across historical periods. Lesbian historiography is never only concerned with the search for a lesbian past, or even a "lesbian-like" past, but with the relationship between that past and other sexualites, genders, and social discourses. In the case of premodernity, we have to ask ourselves *how* visibility is configured without the prevailing umbra of heterosexuality or the technology of normativity. I am suggesting that the pursuit of a "lesbian-like" past must be coordinated with a serious dismantling of the heterosexuality-like-it-or-not past that underlies some queer and historical scholarship. We might want to call this coordinated component of lesbian historiography the "unliking" of modern heterosexuality from its premodern past. "Heterosexual-not!" could serve as the twin mantra of "lesbian-like," or of other efforts to interrogate the resemblances of sexual practices, categories, and affections across historical periods. Or "heterosexual-like" could be invoked to opposite ends of "lesbian-like": instead of opening up possibilities for a lesbian past, as "lesbian-like" does, "heterosexual-like" would emphasize the historicity of heterosexuality itself, and it would also provide another kind of temporal "drag" (to borrow Freeman's term) on the presumed universality and uniformity of heterosexual history. Heterosexuality needs a history, and it is up to the queer, gender, and lesbian scholars to insist on some of the same kinds of historically specific patterning for heterosexuality across periods that we have become attuned to finding among alternative sexualities, identities, and eroticisms. At the same time, our own taxonomies of sexual practices and relations in the past will surely benefit from the nuancing of past heterosexualities, permitting the kinds of alliances across genders and sexualities that the concept of "heteronormativity" currently obscures. In his essay, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," James A. Schultz demonstrates some of the absurdities that ensue from "reading heterosexuality backward" onto the Middle Ages, but more importantly, he elucidates some of the crucial distinctions between medieval understandings of sexuality and modern heteronormativity, such as the elevation of abstinence and virginity as the ideal sexuality and the relegation of homosexuality to a scale of increasingly sinful venereal acts. Invoking a modern understanding of heterosexuality to understand medieval sexualities obscures the principles underlying medieval taxonomies of *luxuria* (lust), but it confers a kind of legitimacy on some "heterosexual acts" (such as oral sex) that these acts did not have

in the Middle Ages. To read Aquinas or the penitentials on the gradations of fornication is to induct the modern reader into a heterosexuality that is as utterly confused as it is alien to modern understandings.[3] The promise of abandoning heteronormativity as a concept is the emergence of queer possibilities that emerge, including the queerness of virgins (as Jankowski and others have argued), prevailing homosocial imaginaries (according to Rebecca Ann Bach), and even the queer possibilities of courtly love (James Schultz). Such studies of premodern sexualities without heterosexuality as a presumed historical standard powerfully suggest a past that is more heterosexually-unlike, if you will, than it is now, and a future that could be, too.

The unsetting and reconfiguration of lesbianism in the present and for the future is one of the goals that studying sexualities of the past should afford us. At the same time, as Valerie Traub argues here and elsewhere, the search for typologies of same-sex behaviors, intimacies, and practices in scholarship on lesbian history has sought "to render female-female desires intelligible—both in their own historical terms, and in ours."[4] Typologies of historical sexualities, however, can present their own danger of too narrow a devotion to alterity in the name of discontinuist history. Traub rightly poses the challenge of a new lesbian historiography: "To do the history of sexuality is not to turn a blind eye to perennial features of the erotic system in the name of historical alterity. But neither is it to too quickly assume homology when not every facet repeats."[5]

The Lesbian Premodern's search for a lesbian historiography takes place within an ongoing queer critique of traditional historicism, chronology, and periodization. Lee Edelman, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Jonathan Goldberg, and Madhavi Menon have all critiqued such aspects of historiography as its presumed teleology, successionism, periodization, and "reproductive futurism." As ways of intervening in heterohistorical projects, these queer scholars have variously and productively advocated homohistory, "dechronolization," strategic anachronism, "temporal drag," "fantasmatic historiography," and, in this volume, "cycles of salience."[6] The older debate over acts and identities or continuist and discontinuist histories has been either superceded or transformed into more fruitful queer histories that engage in the historically particular, as well as recurrent, sexual configurations across history. To this ongoing conversation, what does this volume on the "lesbian premodern" have to offer?

The essays that follow inhabit a wide range of positions in the debate about lesbian historiography, from the theoretical attempts to reconfigure it in the work of Traub, Freccero, Freeman, Bauer, Faderman, Garber, and Bennett, to reflections on connections between Victorian writer Vernon Lee and the lesbian premodern, to a range of discussions on the pleasures of reading and writing, the virgin as gendered and

sexual category, cultures of friendship between women, queer "femme" representations of ascetic ideals, philological evidence for the historical "salience" of the premodern lesbian, Bengali narratives of female-female sex and even reproduction, and the unique joint memorial brasses of Elizabeth Etchingham and Agnes Oxenbridge from the fifteenth century. The theoretical investments in the essays also range from creating a usable lesbian past, to making visible affinities across historical periods, to insisting on the "affectional" component of the term when doing history, to unsettling the contemporary term, to disrupting the transhistorical category of heterosexuality. One cannot read the entire volume of essays without appreciating some of the vibrancy and disagreement about both what it means to do lesbian history and what the stakes in doing it are.

As a premodernist myself, I am sympathetic with the desire to engage, in a more urgent way, our premodern histories and theories of sexuality with modern sexuality studies, as well as the studies of other "later" past sexualities. I am less sanguine, however, about collapsing history and theory as a methodology, or in the words of the editors, to consider the work of premodern scholars "not simply as informed by theory, but *as* theory in and of itself." Although medievalism has contributed significantly to modern theory, as Bruce Holsinger has shown, I am not at all convinced that this fact supports the idea that "premodern scholarship not only permeates theory but *is* theory." There is little doubt that premodern scholarship on sexualities generates and even revises sexuality theories: witness the revision of Foucault's acts-to-identities model of doing sexual history over the past decade. I worry that something becomes lost, however, when premodern studies of sexuality are regarded as theory *itself*—something, that is, of the diversity of archives, literary analyses, and cultural mappings, all of which have so much to offer modern theory and sexual historiography. Yet, out of an explicit desire for a lesbian past, the editors and contributors have been careful to "reimagine spaces and categories," a project with which I am deeply sympathetic.

To conclude, let me raise a last point about this preface and its "place" in the volume by confessing to my own "postscript envy." Just as lesbian assumes the "aura of the premodern," (244) as Freeman remarks, so too, I suspect, does the preface seem more suited to the premodernist, while the postmodern scholar of gender and sexuality finds her disciplinary affinity with the postscript. It is as if premodernity invented "the before" of histories and prefaces, and postmodernity, the "after," which is, ironically, also the present. The etymology of prefaces and postscripts would seem to bolster this impression. The use of the "preface" to mean a preliminary statement to a work began with William Caxton's 1484 printed translation of *Aesop's Fables* at the end of the Middle Ages, while the "postscript," meaning something appended to the end of a written work, dates from the sixteenth century (if

the *OED* is to be believed). I desperately wished, when I first consulted the *OED*, that it had been the reverse, but I am not sure it would have made any difference in our deeply ingrained habit of associating the past with all that is before, including prefaces, and the present and future with all that is after and postscripted. But we do not have to do the same with premodernists and postmodernists by consigning them to prefaces and postscripts, respectively. In fact, the occasion of the preface and postscript might provide just another opportunity for a kind of strategic anachronism that defines this volume: by giving the place of "the before," i.e., the preface, to the postmodernist, and the "post" to the premodernist, we "induce the untimely," so to speak, in the implicitly chronological logics of the academic essay collection. In effect, we reserve the last word for the out-of-place. In concert with our strategies of anachronism, therefore, I propose that, in the future, we defy book production sequencing, with its own logic of befores and afters derived from historical time, and give the last word to the lesbian premodern. If nothing else, it will lend an aura of the perverse to the lesbian pre- and postmodern, as well as the scholars who desire them.

Notes

1. Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 28.
2. Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 14; Jonathan Gil Harris, "Untimely Mediations," *Early Modern Culture* 6 (2007): par. 13 at http://emc.eserver.org/1–6/harris.html (accessed October 5, 2009).
3. James A. Schultz, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15.1 (2006): 14–29.
4. Valerie Traub, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 127.
5. Traub, "Present Future of Lesbian Historiography," 132.
6. See Elizabeth Freeman on temporal drag, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31.4 (2000): 727–44; Jonathan Goldberg and Madhavi Menon on homohistory, "Queering History," *PMLA* 120.5 (2005): 1608–17; and Carolyn Dinshaw and Karma Lochrie, Letters to the Editor, PMLA 121.3 (2006): 837–38; Menon Reply, *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 838–39; Carla Freccero on "fantasmatic historiography," *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 31–50; and Lee Edelman on "reproductive futurism," *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). See also Traub's essay in this volume, along with the longer version, "The Present Future of Lesbian Historiography."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would first like to express their deep appreciation for all the contributors, without whom this project would not have been possible. Many of these individuals have been a part of our vision since its inception as a series of conference sessions at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the International Medieval Conference in Leeds, Yorkshire. We sincerely admire their professional dedication and collegiality throughout the process. Additionally, the editors wish to acknowledge the importance of SSHMA (the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages), which sponsored the sessions at Kalamazoo.

Similarly, the editorial team at Palgrave, especially series editor Bonnie Wheeler, has been most helpful in seeing this project through to its completion. Without their assistance, we would not have been able to so successfully present the materials gathered here.

Two outstanding students deserve special recognition for their invaluable assistance in producing this volume. The first, Kendall Klym, was a graduate student at Aberystwyth University, and is responsible for putting together the general bibliography, as well as confirming sources throughout. This task is one that required close attention to detail as well as perseverance, and for both, we extend our sincere thanks. The second, Laura Ashburn, was an undergraduate at the University of North Dakota and is now a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire. She assisted with the final formatting of the volume, again, a task requiring careful attention and dedication, and we extend our sincere appreciation to her.

Noreen Giffney would like to acknowledge the continued support, inspiration, and hope for the future offered by her friendship with Michael O'Rourke. Few projects have been as pleasurable to work on as *The Lesbian Premodern*, for which she owes her thanks to Diane and Michelle.

Michelle M. Sauer wishes to acknowledge Audrey Johnson, who provided initial feedback on early drafts of introductory materials and project schema. She would also like to thank her coeditors for a wonderful collaborative experience.

Diane Watt would like to thank her coeditors for everything they have done to make this project possible.

INTRODUCTION

THE LESBIAN PREMODERN[1]

Noreen Giffney, Michelle M. Sauer, and Diane Watt

> *Over the next four years every journal whose concern is sexuality [should] ask a pod of writers who do not usually read over one another's shoulders to do precisely that. Let five or six read the same text—new, old, in between—and write about it. Do that every year for half a decade and see where we are. I doubt that any of us will convert any of us. But I do suspect that such conversations in print will spur conversations elsewhere.*[2]

The Lesbian Premodern is a collection of essays that responds to, and adapts, Michèle Aina Barale's suggestion by inviting some key scholars in the fields of lesbian studies and queer theory to take part in an innovative conversation in print. This textual discussion transgresses traditional period boundaries and offers a radical new methodology for writing lesbian history, geography, literary criticism, and theory. *The Lesbian Premodern* aims to engage those interested primarily in contemporary lesbian theory, history, and literature with the important and often overlooked theoretical, empirical, and textual work being done on female same-sex desire and identity in relation to premodern cultures. Our title, *The Lesbian Premodern*, is deliberately provocative: both anachronistic and tautological. The term "lesbian" is widely regarded as essentialist, historically redundant, and limiting. One response to this would be to argue, following Karma Lochrie and James Schultz, that the concept of heterosexuality is equally anachronistic when applied to the premodern and that heteronormativity itself must be subject to scrutiny.[3] However, one of the central questions this book addresses is, when has using the term "lesbian" *not* been considered an anachronistic gesture? It is a question that is of particular interest to those of us trained in medieval and early modern studies with a research interest in tracing love, sex, and desire

between women and their reception in historical contexts prior to the Enlightenment—scholars who also work in the fields of lesbian and queer studies more generally. This question is of importance to us because we are all too familiar with the charge of anachronism leveled by others who insist that "lesbians" did not exist then. "The charge of anachronism recurs endlessly," Valerie Rohy insists, "because no one is ever innocent of it." This is, she explains, due to the fact "that there is no truly historical historicism. As its canniest practitioners acknowledge, historicism is always to some degree ahistorical—or rather, anachronistic."[4]

Our title also deliberately reworks that of Laura Doan's influential edited collection, *The Lesbian Postmodern*.[5] The chapters in *The Lesbian Premodern* engage with a number of similar theoretical questions relating to sexuality, class, ethnicity, difference, and marginality. At the same time, they are concerned with historicizing premodern sexualities, with thinking through the consequences of this research—and the implications of the problems raised by it—for those working in later periods and, crucially, with thinking through and responding to the theoretical and methodological innovations that arise out of it. In staging an interdisciplinary and cross-temporal conversation between premodernists and scholars working on later periods, *The Lesbian Premodern*'s central aim is to intervene in what currently amounts to one-way traffic of knowledge (from modern theory to medieval practice) and invite respondents and readers of this book to consider the work of premodernists, not simply as informed by theory, but *as* theory in and of itself. We see premodernist scholarship *as* theoretically informed, rich, and useful as research by scholars who work in later periods, and therefore believe it demands the same sort of careful attention. This has potentially far-reaching implications for the way we practice the history of sexuality and work in gender and sexuality studies more generally, as it compels scholars who might not usually take into account the work of premodernists to seriously consider our input when undertaking their own research.[6] *The Lesbian Premodern* is divided into three main parts. The first two parts, "Theories and Historiographies" and "Histories and Texts" serve, at least somewhat, an anthologizing function, insofar as they include contributions by some of the most influential scholars on premodern lesbian and queer studies. These scholars have been invited to revisit, often in relation to new material, their theories and methodologies. The first two parts also introduce our readers to important but less well-known recent research and analysis within the field. In the third part, "Encounters with the Lesbian Premodern," scholars of later periods are brought into conversation with and invited to respond to this work on the medieval and early modern scholarship.

Theories and Historiographies

The Lesbian Premodern concerns, among other things, an erasure from history and theory, and, to some extent, the "anthologizing function" that is the revisiting of themes, positions, and theories by scholars serves the function of redressing this problem so we do not forget what has happened in the past and can look forward to what will happen in the future. While the part on texts and histories is primarily concerned with recovery work, the essays gathered together in this part explore new ways of reading in an attempt to clarify the premodern lesbian experience and to find what has been obscured through misguided, misdirected, or misunderstood readings. Some of these readings are based on previous work done by the scholar, but that does not preclude new ways of theorizing.

The erasure of the lesbian from history begins with the difficulty scholars face not only in uncovering premodern lesbians and their experiences, but also in identifying the lesbian experience and the lesbian herself. Scholars continue to struggle with naming the woman-identified-woman of the past. Jacqueline Murray uses it as a term of convenience to "distinguish those women whose primary relationships, emotional or sexual, appear to be woman-identified."[7] Building on this, Judith Bennett, in her famous essay, "'Lesbian-like' and the Social History of Lesbianism," first suggested the term "lesbian-like" to describe women previously not considered lesbians, such as cross-dressers and prostitutes,[8] and has expanded the discussion in *History Matters*.[9] Both of these came out of a search for a lesbian past, more specifically even, the medieval lesbian—neither of which is easy to find, nor yet easy to define. In order to discover and recover the past, we need to determine a new way of thinking about, writing about, and talking about "lesbians."

Seeking the premodern lesbian is challenging. Using a modern term—"lesbian"—limits both vision and history, but not using the modern term also limits understanding and recovery. Complicating matters even further is the presumptive heterosexuality of phallocentric, patriarchal societies. Historically, individuals have been, essentially, assumed to be heterosexual unless proved otherwise, and sex has been defined as penetrative in nature. Moreover, in historical examinations, when women are categorized as lesbians it is often because they exclude men from their sexual self, whereas men are labeled "homosexual," or at least discussed in terms of homosexuality, when they include other men. The Lesbian History Group notes: "what our critics want is incontrovertible evidence of sexual activity between women."[10] The very few studies of female homosexuality struggle with this issue, often overlooking women in nonheteronormative

positions and instead seeking women who exclusively prefer women. Why is it that we feel exclusivity is a necessary component of premodern lesbianism, but not of male homosexuality? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that scholars should acknowledge "the rationalized coexistence of different models during the times they do coexist," meaning that context must be considered and modern standards must be set aside, or at least willingly extended.[11] Premodern societies virtually demanded childbearing and allowed little room for the single woman, leaving women little choice about engaging in heterosexual relationships, at least to some degree. Modern labels may not fit because they cannot match categories that were not named. Reimagining spaces and categories—and reclaiming underexplored texts and artifacts—are both necessary if the premodern lesbian is to be demarginalized and celebrated.

Theodora Jankowski, for instance, challenges readers to consider cloistered nuns as occupying a space both literally and literarily. Women who stand outside the traditional patriarchal system for any sexual reason—even virginity—pose a threat to male order and run the risk of being labeled "perverse." Male voyeurs simultaneously enjoy the secret sexual titillation while publicly denouncing any sexual expression that functions without a man, fearing not only uselessness, but also replacement. Her exploration of vowed virginity aptly considers the shift during the Reformation from natural to unnatural: virginity, once so prized, is now to be feared and loathed. While the central argument is related to her work in *Pure Resistance*, this essay concentrates more directly on "looking for the lesbian" in early modern literature.[12] In particular, here she considers "lesbian potential" in an effort to suggest a new way of reading both traditional and more obscure works, while also playing on the notion of exclusivity—women who are not phallically penetrated retain the possibility of woman-woman erotic activities.

Modern theories of the lesbian are deeply concerned with politics, a point Martha Vicinus makes in her essay later in this collection, and to a certain degree, so are theories regarding the premodern lesbian. Questions about cross-dressing queens and powerful abbesses lend themselves to politics of a different era. More importantly, however, whether defined as a political position, a sexual preference, a community of sisterhood, or an escape from patriarchal heterosexual desire, lesbianism aligns sexuality with power (not desire); thus, for women, homosexuality is a choice to become powerful and, consequently, feared. Ignoring and redefining evidence negates this power, which is a negation we hope to overcome in this collection. It is our intent to restore subjectivity and provide the rudiments of a language that allows for premodern lesbian desire and suggests a new mode of dialogue.

Anne Laskaya's essay takes up this challenge of terminology, framing the discussion in terms of reading strategies, and grounding it in a "search" for premodern lesbian existence. Laskaya does not shy away from the "queer" controversy, choosing instead to use queer theory as one of the lenses through which she explores connotations of the term "lesbian." While acknowledging queer theory's institutional power, Laskaya also draws on its strong connection to identity politics and poststructuralism in order to suggest productive ways of reading that work outside of reductive terminology, choosing to seek an "undocumented" premodern lesbian history, one that considers audience and is a different approach to reading between the lines.

Queer history in general often spends too much time trying to define "homosexuality," and lesbian history in particular has been plagued by the problem of defining "the lesbian." It is this problem that underlies Laskaya's essay and is also one of the central foci of Valerie Traub's piece. Concerns regarding historical methodology resonate within the search for a "true" lesbian past, but Traub is primarily interested in pursuing how the scholarship on lesbian history has framed ways of reading woman-woman experiences. While some authors, such as Lisa Moore, insist that certain texts create categories of female homosexuality,[13] Traub insists, rather, that a focus on "typologies" does not aid in answering questions about the premodern lesbian past. Arguing against standard periodization, Traub instead seeks out social definitions that can be adapted depending upon the goals, audience, and era.

If anything emerges as an overall trend in this part on theories and historiographies it is an emphasis on reading, rereading, resistant reading, and variant reading strategies. Lara Farina suggests that "erotic reading" may be a fruitful way to explore a premodern lesbian history. Lesbian studies have often been uncomfortably situated between a balance of social constructionist and essentialist views: how much sex should be put back into lesbian history? Farina's essay explores the role eroticization, if not actual sex, plays in rereading history to uncover the premodern lesbian. In fact, this type of reading can be resituated as a lesbian practice, the function of which is almost certainly to establish the existence and visibility of lesbian cultural unity.

Anna Kłosowska, in her book *Queer Love in the Middle Ages*, states a preference for using terms such as "lesbian-like," "proto-feminist," and "queer" because they allow for contextualizing such modern descriptions within a medieval framework.[14] Debates about usage of the term *queer* plague, and at the same time invigorate, the fields of feminist and gender studies. Farina and Laskaya both deliberately use the term while holding it up to scrutiny. Carla Freccero conflates queer time and the lesbian premodern in an