Essay

Trans Saints in Old English

JONATHAN DAVIS-SECORD

Nonconforming identities are not robustly represented in Old English literature, but a careful reading of their traces reveals their presence and casts new light on important aspects of the culture of early medieval England. This article uncovers the fractured spectrum of views on sex and gender identity in early medieval England around the year 1000 CE by exploring the literary biographies of two saints who are often presented as women disguised as men. The accounts appear as entries in the collection known as the *Lives of Saints*, most of which was composed by the tenth-century monk Ælfric of Eynsham as part of his massive corpus of homilies. Ælfric's *Life of St Eugenia* upholds narrow sex and gender expectations by referring to its subject with feminine forms throughout and frequently reiterating the text's view that Eugenia is in fact a woman, even after his election as abbot of a men's monastery. An alternative version of *Eugenia*—changed at some point by a scribe and surviving only in the burned remains of a single manuscript—departs from Ælfric's original by switching from feminine to masculine forms when the saint lives as a man but displays a conflicted oscillation between acceptance and rejection of trans lives. The anonymous *Life of St Euphrosyne* diverges more strongly from the sex and gender expectations implicit in Ælfric's text by consistently accepting the saint's living as a man. I argue that these characters and the texts' competing views on sex and gender can be best understood by recognizing these two saints not as women in disguise but as trans men. A trans studies approach combined with philology and source study—attending to linguistic details of the Old English texts and the transformations produced in their translation from Latin sources and scribal reproduction—respects these two trans figures on their own terms while also uncovering elements of these Old English texts and their cultural context that might otherwise lie obscured.

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Trans Saints

The historical Saint Eugenia was beheaded in Rome in 258 CE under the persecution of Emperor Valerian (Fábrega Grau 1: 176), and the historical Saint Euphrosyne, who took the name Smaragdus, passed away in a monastery near Alexandria circa 470 CE (Henschen 536–37). The Old English texts known as *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* adapt the Latin accounts of their accomplishments in a genre known as saints' lives, which flourished in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, presenting idealized exemplars of Christian holiness who were meant to inspire the faithful either through their pious living or through their suffering as martyrs. These embellished literary biographies—not the historical persons—are the focus of this article. *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* are part of a small group of narratives within this popular medieval genre that challenge assumptions about sex and gender identity (see Hotchkiss 131–41). The Old English texts stand out as early vernacular responses, and they provide some of the clearest challenges to the dominant culture of early medieval England, thus earning fairly generous critical attention in the last four decades as the field has turned toward questions of sex, gender, and identity.

Most previous scholarship has treated these two figures as "cross-dressing" saints or "transvestites," usually not with malicious intent but often with the pernicious effects of the paradigms of their times (see Wade). While there are records of people who lived trans lives either openly or covertly dating back many centuries, it is only relatively recently that trans identities have gained mainstream recognition as legitimate and not pathological (see Stone; Stryker and Currah). More than a century ago, before this expansion of the trans paradigm, the only way scholars understood these saints was through the paradigm of "disguise" (Delehaye 197–207); the term *transvestite* then moved into common usage from medical and psychological discourses (Delcourt 84–101; Anson; Bullough; Wade 289–93). Even after the current broad conception of trans identity coalesced near the end of the twentieth century (see Williams; Valentine) and then began to gain ground in academia in the wake of Sandy Stone's 1991 essay "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto" (Stryker and Currah 3), there remains for many people a sense that the concept applies only to individuals who undergo surgical or medical intervention to produce a so-called sex change (an unacceptable term now).[1] With that mindset, and without finding such interventions in *Eugenia* or *Euphrosyne*, most scholars have concluded that the two saints can be best understood through a performative model of gender most prominently developed in critical theory by Judith Butler. In Old English studies, this performative model often acts simply as a permutation of the disguise paradigm with gender identity added to the discussion (see Szarmach, "Ælfric's Women Saints" and "St. Euphrosyne"; Roy; Frantzen; Hotchkiss; Bernau; Klein).[2] Other studies of *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* foreground the body itself, whether as a vehicle for sanctification through denial and transcendence (Lees; Lees and Overing, "Before History"; Donovan; Walker; Gulley; Norris), as a site of desire and ambiguity (Scheil; Clark; Magennis), or as a public object subjected to various structures of power (Stafford; Horner; Scheck; Olesiejko; Rabin). My own understanding of *Eugenia* began in this latter vein, taking Eugenia as a disguised woman publicly exposed (Davis-Secord, "Holy Women"), but has evolved in response to the groundbreaking work of medieval trans studies scholars. A few other scholars have read Eugenia and Smaragdus as trans within arguments focused on other subjects. For example, Eugenia and Smaragdus provide context in demonstrating medieval gendered economic domination (Feinberg 68); in analyzing the gender and sexuality of Saint Mary of Egypt, who became a desert ascetic after engaging in compulsive sexual behavior for years (Watt and Lees 60–61; Cotter-Lynch 131); and in recognizing the negative impact of modern sexological paradigms on medieval studies (Wade 292). Nonetheless, rigorous analysis of the saints as trans and the elucidation of the implications of that conclusion for early English culture have not been a priority.

The scholarly discussion of these Old English texts has thus come full circle from a comparatively straightforward focus on hiding women's bodies,

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through the fertile field of performativity, and back to the centrality of the body from different angles, while at each step seeing in these saints some disconnection between a social self and an essential reality of the body.[3] This pervasiveness of the body is usually taken as a given, with its sexed identity understood as the central point of stability in scholarly examinations of these supposed narratives of disguise. Indeed, simply employing the terms *transvestite* and *cross-dresser* implies "assumptions about a binary gender system and a conflation of sex and gender" that essentializes the body as a supposedly natural point of origin (Betancourt 90). These assumptions are surprising, given the field's awareness of the unstable, discursively produced nature of sex explained by Butler in *Gender Trouble*, even though some medieval texts employ a concrete, prediscursive understanding of the body. A careful examination of medieval intellectual history, however, shows a spectrum incorporating a great deal of nuance and complexity in the period's medical theories of sex and the nature of the body (Cadden 169–227; Betancourt 230n77; DeVun 154–56; Charmaille; Wingard 944). This complexity calls for a new analytic framework that incorporates the important insights of the performativity model while simultaneously recognizing the importance of the body in producing intersectional identities of all kinds, regardless of the era under analysis.

Trans studies answers this call with its interest in how one's embodied, lived reality intersects with one's social experience and sense of an authentic self. While identity grows partly out of performative behaviors and acculturated interpretations of the body, the embodied nature of human experience, as Stone's essay makes clear, refuses to recede entirely from a person's identity and sense of self. The culture's interpretation of a person's body figures importantly in the construction of their identity, but the essential influence of that body and one's experience of it transcends and also integrates that cultural reading; it is the combination of the two elements that produces identity (Prosser; Serano). That identity involves not just sex and gender but also the effects of racialization that impose assumptions about the body and the embodied self: just as sex and gender identities are produced by the entanglement of the cultural reading of one's performance and experiential embodiment, racialized identity forms an intrinsic part of that same tangle (Snorton; Detournay; Bey; Haritaworn).[4] The powerful, fundamental insight of trans studies and its intersections with critical race studies, then, is that identity in any era is a complex, multihelical assemblage entwining culturally contingent performative elements with an individual's embodied, lived reality and their sense of an authentic self.

One must of course take appropriate care in employing modern identity categories when analyzing the past, since "the parallels between medieval and modern categories are always only partial" (DeVun 159). Unreflective use of the term and category *trans* risks erasing the differences between past and present in addition to promoting Western whiteness as the dominant paradigm (Day; Everhart). Specifically, forcing a trans identity exactly as understood today onto a person who lived in the past might be an anachronism, but the category might nonetheless prove useful in understanding that person's life and choices, even if they never used the word. A past person's life and choices can be seen as a trans life and trans choices without those exact terms appearing in any original documents.[5] Thus, rather than *identities*, it is perhaps best to consider trans *lives* when analyzing the distant past. Important recent publications have argued forcefully for the validity of finding trans lives in the Middle Ages, most prominently the manifesto for medieval trans feminism by M. W. Bychowski and Dorothy Kim in *Medieval Feminist Forum*, now joined by the collections of medieval trans scholarship edited by Greta LaFleur, Masha Raskolnikov, and Anna Kłosowska and by Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt. These studies have shown that the surgical or medical interventions available today are not necessary for a person assigned one identity at birth to live in accordance with their own sense of self. Indeed, the term *trans* has come to embrace all manner of lives that refuse to adhere to expected categories (Stryker and Currah 8). Thus, *trans* proves to be a useful,

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legitimate analytic category for studying the past when employed with care and precision.

One obstacle to recognizing medieval individuals as trans has been the centrality of self-expression and agentive authenticity in the formation and expression of trans lives and choices (Bychowski, "Authentic Lives"). Since the centering of voices and perspectives of actual trans people is fundamental to this paradigm (Stone 229–32; Gutt 181), it is fitting to give space here to the voice of an individual speaking outside the scholarly arena. Dean Moncel, a trans freelance writer, speaks of the relationships among agency, coming out, and being read as one's assigned identity on a podcast episode about the concept of passing:[6] "When I came out to myself, my declaration that 'I am a man'—that was in my full control: I was fully in control to believe it, to live it, to alter parts of my life in order to fulfill that declaration" (Harris-Perry and Warren 45:34). Importantly, Moncel describes here not a choice to be a man but rather the choice to express the self-recognition of being a man, regardless of the external pressures of the culture of conformity around him. The internal expression of one's identity, the naming of one's self, is an act of pure agency; only the individual speaking subject is involved, and no outside authorization is necessary. In contrast, being read as one's assigned gender or sex rather than one's identified gender or sex entails "shifting that power onto the hands of someone else" (46:00). Moncel continues, "The control that you possessed in defining yourself is—it's being violated, it's being questioned. Suddenly, it's not on you to define yourself anymore, and that control is completely lost" (46:07). This shifting of power moves one further into gender performativity, which requires the judgment of an audience. Allowing oneself to be read—what was previously called "passing"—as an assigned identity constitutes an acceptance of the authority of the dominant system of sex and gender. Even if the read subject fundamentally disagrees with that authority, submitting to the assigned identity unavoidably reproduces the expected performative behaviors while denying the validity of an interior sense of self at odds with the assigned sex or gender (Stone 230). Trans studies identifies how an individual's sense of self and identity are partly removed from their own control in the performativity model.[7] While an individual may find ways to fulfill the expectations of their assigned identity, those ways depend on systems outside themself. Importantly, the internal recognition that Moncel describes need not specify a traditional category of identity: the potential for self-understanding described by trans studies allows for any identity, including traditional and newly recognized identifications that depart from traditional categories (Halberstam). The performativity model foregrounds the imposition of socially ratified categories from without, whereas the self-expression of identity is of central importance to trans studies.

We can almost never find such self-expressions of identity in the extant medieval record, and moreover the very idea of "agency" as understood today may not be applicable to early medieval England (O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing*). Nonetheless, read carefully, *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* do provide versions of self-expressed trans lives. Although this essay deals with literary representations of trans individuals and not the persons themselves, these texts reveal something about the terms in which the lived experiences of sex and gender could be imagined at the time. In both accounts, the saints run away from home to join Christian communities, where they fear being discovered and forcibly returned to their families. Eugenia's adoption of men's clothing, hairstyle, and behavior thus initially seems like an act of disguise stemming from a desire "þæt heo ne wurde ameldod" ("that she not be betrayed"; 53).[8] His reaction to being reclothed as a woman after the forced revelation of his assigned-at-birth identity, however, evinces a less pragmatic, more personal resistance. While the text does not offer access to any inner monologue, the narrator reports that the saint is put back into women's clothing "hyre unþances" ("against her will"; 255). Eugenia's life has come to rely fundamentally on his identity as a man, and that identity is being forcibly replaced in the change in clothing. His resistance to women's clothing can no longer stem from a desire simply to avoid exposure; this resistance, rather, must express Eugenia's embrace of his life as a man on a fundamental, personal level. That life is no

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longer simply pragmatic—if indeed it ever truly was. That he wants that life even after the revelation shows that it expresses his true, authentic self.

In *Euphrosyne*, the saint also explains his choice to live as a man pragmatically at first: fearing discovery in a women's monastery after running away from home, he takes on the name Smaragdus and decides, "ic wille faran to wera mynstre þær nan man min ne wene" ("I will go to a monastery of men where no man might suspect me"; sec. 22).[9] When he reveals this act on his deathbed, however, Smaragdus notes that "God ælmihtig hæfð . . . gefylled minne willan þæt ic moste þone ryne mines lifes werlice geendian" ("God almighty has . . . fulfilled my desire that I be able to end the course of my life as a man"; sec. 45). The typical translation of *werlice*—"like a man"—is easily extended to "as a man" in this context; this is also the choice Leslie Donovan makes (89), and one that Johanna Kramer, Hugh Magennis, and Robin Norris make elsewhere (sec. 49). There is perhaps some paronomasia at work here: given the importance of bodies in the text and the attention focused on Smaragdus's body in particular, the punning connection between the suffix *-lice* of the adverb and the noun *lic*, meaning "body," cannot be discounted. Indeed, the text primes the audience to take *werlice* as a full compound and not simply a suffixed adverb, even if only momentarily (Davis-Secord, *Joinings* 75–77). While the audience likely would ultimately discount that reading for its syntactic improbability, the implication activated by the homophonic similarity would remain. In other words, *werlice* might have subtly implied to an original audience the sense of "with a man's body," strongly leaning into the questions surrounding Smaragdus's trans life. Even if *werlice* is read conservatively as "like a man," the change from feminine to masculine pronouns as the saint publicly assumes his male life still indicates that the text has accepted Smaragdus as a man. The text has no hesitation in this acceptance, and neither should readers today. Ultimately, Smaragdus's declaration reveals a fundamental motivation beyond mere pragmatism. He does not express a desire to end his life as a virgin or in a monastery, which had seemed to be the original motivations for his living as a man. Rather, his expressed desire has shifted to living out his life not as Euphrosyne but as Smaragdus, the identity made publicly possible by entering the monastery. His desire to finish his life *werlice*, then, is an expression of self, and I take these moments in each saint's revelations as glimpses of their agentive recognition that their senses of self and identity are different from the ones they were assigned at birth. I take these moments to mean that Eugenia and Smaragdus are trans men.

Sexed Saintly Bodies

The body—which, as I have noted, is central to current trans studies paradigms—also figures prominently in the original medieval materials. Medieval texts' interest in the body is not always obvious, given that early Christian paradigms often called for the rejection of the physical world and the flesh; indeed, many modern readers assume that saints transcend their bodies (Schulenburg; Gulley). Nonetheless, early saints' lives center on chaste living demonstrated through bodily behaviors, focusing an "inordinate amount of attention on the living body of the saint" (Stodnick 45). It is important here to disentangle sex and sexual desire: saints are expected to transcend not the body itself but its sexual behaviors and desires, leaving in place their embodied experiences as the medium for producing their holiness (Schulenburg; Stodnick; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*). Indeed, bodily pain can paradoxically produce a dissolution of the self: torture becomes a vehicle for saints to achieve spiritual transcendence, but it is a vehicle that depends fundamentally on the body and bodily experience.[10] Even in a saint's life, then, attention to the body simmers just beneath the surface, making it impossible to ignore the centrality of the body at any point.

With this significance of the saint's body always in the background of *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne*, the appearance or mention of eunuchs brings issues of body and sex to the foreground of each narrative. The eunuchs Protus and Iacinctus accompany Eugenia in joining the monastery, and Eugenia implies that he too is a eunuch. Ælfric's text makes a point of explaining the fact that Protus and Iacinctus are

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eunuchs with a note—not found in the Latin source—that they are "belisnode" ("castrated"; 46). Ælfric could have dropped the eunuchs' status or passed over it without comment, but that terse explanation instead solidifies the presence of eunuchs in the text and also directs the audience's attention back to the status and physical presence of Eugenia's body. The same focusing effect occurs in *Euphrosyne* when Smaragdus overtly presents himself as a eunuch when joining his monastery, claiming straightforwardly, "ic eom eunuchus" ("I am a eunuch"; sec. 24). The presence or invocation of eunuchs regrounds the question of identity in the saints' physical embodiment: one cannot continue to think of identity as separate from the body in the face of a bald reminder of castration.

This recentering of the body also raises the specter of the "one sex" model, developed out of medical theories of the ancient world, which held that different sexual organs are simply different manifestations of a single underlying structure (Laqueur). Ælfric even seems to subscribe to this model at one point in a homily for a mid-Lent Sunday, claiming that any woman "werlice geworht" ("made like a man") will be "getеald to ðam werum þe æt godes mysan sittað" ("counted among the men who sit at God's table"; *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, homily 12, lines 116, 117). This claim, however, is made in an allegorical exegesis of the parable of the loaves and fishes: it is meant to elucidate the spiritual level of the parable's meaning and not as a literal claim of physical equivalence. Invoking eunuchs, in contrast, strongly suggests the idea of a separation between men and women based on physical differences that can be called anatomical. Medieval people would not have understood bodies in ways matching the term *biological*, with its implications of scientific study and chromosomes, but they were very much alive to bodily details and difference. Thus, with the term *anatomical*, I direct attention to the body's physical characteristics and the perceived sexual differences often premised on those characteristics. The physical characteristics of eunuchs, then, come close to bridging the gap of the man/woman binary, vaguely casting them as a potential third gender different from both women and men.[11] Nonetheless, Ælfric's overt reminder of castration as the process that produces a eunuch argues against taking this reading too far with relation to Eugenia himself. Eugenia may quietly use the identity of eunuch to enter the monastery, but he has not been physically castrated. Ælfric's reminder works against letting *eunuch* map a third identity option: the note suggests that a bodily intervention is essential to the eunuch identity and that only someone with testicles can undergo that intervention. Consequently, in narrating the saint's transition from woman to man, Ælfric's *Eugenia* resists that transition and promotes a narrow bodily essentialism instead.

In *Euphrosyne*, Smaragdus's cover as a eunuch does nothing to prevent the same-sex desires of his brethren:

> Þa, forþam se sylfe Smaragdus wæs wlitig on ansyne, swa oft swa ða broþra comon to cyrcan þonne besende se awyrgeda gast mænigfealde geþohtas on heora mod and wurdon þearle gecostnode þurh his fægernysse, and hi þa æt nyxtan ealle wurdon astyrode wið þone abbod forþam swa wlitigne man into heora mynstre gelædde. (sec. 27)
>
> Then, because this same Smaragdus was beautiful in appearance, as often as the brothers came to church, the accursed spirit sent various thoughts into their minds, and they were sorely tempted by his beauty. And finally they were all incited against the abbot for bringing such an attractive man into their monastery.

The other monks do not think of Smaragdus as a eunuch, or at least they do not think of him as fundamentally different from other men—their anger is over the presence of an attractive *man*. In a strict body-essentialist reading of this moment, one might object that Smaragdus's beauty is the product of his assigned-at-birth identity as a woman and that the other monks are aroused by that supposed essential nature but confused by his appearance. The text, however, gives no support to this reading, offering no comments undermining the brothers' view of Smaragdus as a man and instead referring repeatedly to "his" and not "her" beauty. Smaragdus's body remains a man's body on each diegetic level, and it elicits sexual desire as such.

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Indeed, the other monks' reaction to Smaragdus's beauty reads most clearly as a moment of anxiety regarding same-sex desire in single-sex communities (Clark 202). Instead of opening up questions of a third gender or resisting Smaragdus's transition, *Euphrosyne* supports his trans life and accepts him as a man.

The anatomical view of sex identity is clear in *Eugenia* when the saint must expose his body to exonerate himself from a charge of attempting to assault the widow Melantia. The trial's audience takes this exposure as proof that Eugenia is anatomically a woman, consequently imputing personal characteristics to the saint that refute Melantia's false accusations predicated on Eugenia's identity as a man. The nature of Eugenia's display is clearer in Ælfric's version than in its Latin source. Specifically, the Old English overtly identifies Eugenia's breasts as the area exposed: "Æfter þysum wordum heo totær hyre gewædu / and ætæwde hyre breost þam breman Philippe / and cwæð him to: 'Þu eart min fæder'" ("After these words, she tore her garments / and revealed her breasts to the raging Philip / and said to him, 'You are my father'"; 234–36). In the Latin source, in contrast, it is not even clear if Eugenia's breasts are exposed at all, since only the head and limbs are mentioned: "Et hęc dicens, scidit a capite tunica[m] qua erat induta, et apparuit fęmina. Statimque tegens, licet scissis vestibus, membra ait ad prefectum: 'Tu quidem mici secundum carnem pater [es]'" ("And saying these things, she tore from her head the tunic with which she was clothed, and appeared as a woman. Immediately covering her limbs, albeit with torn garments, she said to the prefect, 'You indeed are my father according to the flesh'"; Fábrega Grau 2: 92).[12] Of particular interest is the Latin's "et apparuit fęmina" ("and appeared as a woman"), which disappears in the Old English translation, replaced by the specific exposure of Eugenia's breasts. The act of "appear[ing] as a woman" in the Latin source could simply entail the surrounding crowd's interpretation of Eugenia's hairstyle and underclothes, but the Old English rendition changes the focus to allow for no ambiguity and to foreground Eugenia's body instead. This shift from an audience's reading of Eugenia's appearance to the simple presence of certain body parts again suggests an essentialist paradigm that takes those body parts as ironclad evidence of identity.

Eugenia's exposure is *sexed* but not *sexualized*; his perceived anatomical sex—not sexual desire or behavior—is the most salient issue in the trial. To be sure, assumptions about the correspondence of sex, gender, and desire are at play, but they are muted in the Old English text. The specification of the breasts as the particular area exposed certainly allows for a sexualized interpretation, but the following lines undermine such a reading. Philip—the governor, the judge, and Eugenia's father—is the primary audience of Eugenia's revelation, even though the proceedings are public, and his reaction is carefully nonsexual in the Old English. The Latin is again less precise than the Old English, simply identifying Philip as the father who recognizes his daughter: "Agnoscit itaque pater filiam" ("And so the father recognizes the daughter"; Fábrega Grau 2: 92). The Old English, in contrast, emphasizes the structural position of the father by noting that he recognizes Eugenia *as* a father in addition to naming him: "Đa oncneow Philippus swa swa fæder Eugenian" ("Then Philip recognized Eugenia as a father"; 248). Where the Latin identifies the characters solely by their familial roles in an unremarkable fashion, the grammar of Ælfric's version subtly lends additional significance to that relationship. Presumably, this relationship would have been most readily taken to be nonsexual, since early medieval accounts of incest like the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre* are decidedly rare and "anomalous," primarily of interest for their exaltation of licit sexual desire (Lees 18). The specification of Eugenia's breasts appears alongside an emphasis on the nonsexual relationship between a father and a daughter, and that context suppresses the potential sexualization of Eugenia's body. Moreover, Ælfric subtly advocates elsewhere against sexual desire in general, including opposite-sex desire, and in favor of monastic celibacy (Pareles). Instead of being *sexualized*, Eugenia's exposure in the Old English remains simply anatomically *sexed* by the specification of his breasts: the text aims to show that Eugenia

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has a woman's body, regardless of any audience's responses to it and independently of any sexual desire.

The Old English departs from the Latin source in several places by adding references that remind the audience of Eugenia's assigned-at-birth identity. For example, the Latin sentence "Illa vero virili habitu et animo, in prędicto virum monasterio permanebat" ("So with a masculine appearance and mind, she remained in the aforesaid monastery of men"; Fábrega Grau 2: 87) is rendered "Eugenia þa wunode on þam mynstre / mid wærlicum mode, *þeah þe heo mæden wære*" ("Then Eugenia dwelled in that monastery / with a masculine mind, *even though she was a young woman*"; 92–93; emphasis added). The term *mæden* can express a general status as a young woman or a specific status as a virginal or unmarried woman, presuming a connection between marriage and sexual activity.[13] Whichever of these meanings is primarily active here, the body remains the focus, reinforcing the text's preoccupation with anatomical identity.

Ælfric also implies a feminine essence by expressing Eugenia's masculine identity as an aspect of his *hiw*, normally translated as "appearance" in this context ("Hiw," sense 2). For example, Ælfric relates Eugenia's initial adoption of men's clothing in this way: "wolde ðam Cristenan genealecan / on wærlicum hiwe" ("She wanted to approach the Christians / in a masculine appearance"; 52–53). It is easy enough to accept the translation "appearance" (or even "behavior" or "performance") in occurrences like these, given their narrative context. It is worth noting, however, that *hiw* strongly suggests that a fundamental essence is being hidden or covered ("Hiw," sense 2a), and the word is used at least twice in glossaries to mean "pretext" (sense 2g). Even when used theologically to express figural allegory, *hiw* connotes a surface layer beneath which lies the deeper meaning (sense 1d). *Hiw* thus covers or substitutes for something's true essence (see also Clark 186–87). This connotation subtly builds into Ælfric's translation the notion that Eugenia's fundamental natural identity is that of an embodied woman, no matter what he has done to disguise or hide that supposed fact. This concern with *hiw*, along with the reminders of Eugenia's assigned-at-birth identity, argue that changes in clothes, rank, or behavior can do nothing to alter the text's view of Eugenia's womanhood, which is not sexualized but certainly anatomically sexed.

A Fractured Spectrum

The frequent reminders of Eugenia's supposed womanhood impose the idea of a stable, anatomically defined identity, but they also recognize the possibility of gender fluidity in the very act of denying it. In resisting that fluidity, the reminders call attention to it in their juxtaposition with the narrative of Eugenia's trans life. They arise from the friction of the narrated life against the opposing paradigm of bodily essentialism, in which one's gendered identity is fully determined by one's anatomy and supposedly female body parts naturally correspond to feminine behaviors and social roles.[14] Eugenia thus—in the view of this essentialist paradigm—transgresses gender expectations when entering the monastery as a man, that act having been rendered acceptable only through divine sanction. Eugenia's reinscription within the text's implicit natural order, however, takes place against the saint's will, demonstrating that the identity assigned to him at birth is not fundamentally his true self. The text has shown him living as a man for several years happily and successfully. He is forced to return to a life in conformity with his assigned identity, but the unresolved tension in Ælfric's text, with its frequent invocations of contrasting conceptions of identity, undermines the essentialist paradigm that governs the text on the surface, showing that Eugenia's assigned identity is an ill fit and unwanted.

Ælfric, however, is not the only author to consider here; the work of medieval scribes can be as revealing as an author's original choices. The process of producing a new record of a text by hand-copying a preexisting exemplar inevitably produces scribal errors such as a word or phrase copied twice (dittography) or a skip from one instance of a word to another lower on the page (known as "eye-skip").

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Scribes copying Old English verse also actively intervened in their material, whether by simply altering spelling to match their own local dialect or by changing phrases entirely for their own purposes (O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*). Consequently, every Old English text that exists in multiple copies transforms from a pure, singular urtext into a collection of individualized, sometimes unruly siblings. We should therefore give scribes some share of coauthorship: their interventions can produce meaningfully different versions of a text.

Eugenia presents just such a case. Although very nearly lost in a fire in 1731, another copy of the *Lives of Saints* collection partially survives and provides a powerful example of scribal alterations that reveal a conflict in relation to Eugenia's identity (Clark 190).[15] The version of *Eugenia* that appears in the edition by Clayton and Mullins that I have been citing (henceforth "the essentialist version") takes as its primary basis the intact, complete copy of the collection.[16] This essentialist version consistently uses feminine pronouns for Eugenia, codifying his supposed womanhood at the fundamental level of grammar. In contrast, the nearly destroyed version of *Eugenia* (henceforth "the trans version") flouts this practice and, like *Euphrosyne*, employs masculine pronouns for the saint when he lives as a man. Indeed, although it retains at least one reminder of Eugenia's womanhood, the trans version even replaces Eugenia's name with "se abbod" ("the abbot") several times (Clark 190), removing any femininity imparted by the name when it does not fit the narrative moment. As a result, the two versions of *Eugenia* are at odds, following conflicting paradigms of identity. This divergence arose because, at some point along the text's transmission, a scribe disagreed with the choice of pronouns used for Eugenia and intervened to change the identity they encode.

In the intact manuscript of the *Lives of Saints*, both *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* were copied by the same person (Magennis 398), and this scribe had no qualms about reproducing the masculine pronouns used for Smaragdus after copying the feminine forms for Eugenia. The manuscript presents the two texts as equal members of the collection without signaling their different authorship. Proceeding on the understanding of the collection as a coherent unit, the scribe of the intact manuscript incorporated conflicting approaches to the two saints' trans identities. They felt no need to alter *Euphrosyne*'s acceptance of a trans life to harmonize with *Eugenia*'s essentialist approach, but they also had no qualms about reproducing the essentialist version of *Eugenia*. The intact collection, then, contains an internal conflict with regard to the nature of sex and gender identity, while the burned manuscript, presenting both saints as trans, subtly but powerfully insists on the legitimacy of trans lives throughout.

This conflict at the grammatical level reveals the fragmented reality of ideas about sex and gender identity in early medieval England around the year 1000. In fact, these three texts—*Euphrosyne* and the two versions of *Eugenia*—trace a fractured spectrum of views on sex and gender identity. The essentialist *Eugenia*, with its active undermining of Eugenia's trans life and its promotion of bodily essentialism, occupies the conservative end of that spectrum. *Euphrosyne*, with its full support of Smaragdus's trans life in both manuscripts, falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. The trans version of *Eugenia* occupies a middle position on this spectrum: it employs masculine pronouns for Eugenia when he lives as a man but retains the reminders of his supposed woman's body. This spectrum represents a more complicated situation than one might assume existed in early medieval England, which from most of the surviving documentary and literary texts seems to have been highly conservative and repressive (see Cubitt; Treharne; Rauer; Stafford). That description certainly applies to the elites who produced most of the surviving materials: as the product of a monastic reform movement, Ælfric provides a prominent, exemplary voice for a politically dominant and socially conservative segment of society. The trans version of *Eugenia* in the burned manuscript opens up the possibility of a subversive, alternative perspective. The monastic reform movement frequently targeted women, but the trans accounts of Eugenia and Smaragdus challenge the very definition of woman, questioning

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and perhaps even threatening the reformers' consolidation of power. The veneer of a unified cultural hegemony breaks down under a careful reading of these texts that recognizes the ways they present Eugenia and Smaragdus as trans men, not as the "transvestite women" of much previous scholarship. The subtle cues in the trans versions of *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* demonstrate the quiet presence of countercultural resistance.

The subtlety of the cues is a sobering reminder of the dangers trans people face everywhere and at all times: the trans characters of these accounts of Eugenia's and Smaragdus's lives were nearly erased and survive almost by accident. The partial survival of the burned manuscript recording the trans version of *Eugenia* was a stroke of luck, and its current state viscerally allegorizes the precarious situation of actual trans people. Even if it had never been damaged, however, its trans character would likely have remained unclear to many scholars: the Old English accounts communicate the trans elements of these stories quietly, almost covertly, likely because bold statements of nonconformity would have been unwelcome at best and at worst might have elicited violent responses. The situation for trans people has barely changed in the thousand years since Ælfric's time: trans individuals remain in danger, and revelations of trans identities often make them targets of physical and psychological violence. Reading *Eugenia* and *Euphrosyne* through trans studies reveals a subversive paradigm—largely hidden in early medieval English culture—that accepted the legitimacy of trans lives and celebrated trans individuals on their own terms. May we do the same.

Notes

This article is presented in solidarity with trans scholars, many of whom must fight for their own lives, rights, and identities while recovering and studying the lives and identities of nonconforming individuals from the Middle Ages. I am deeply indebted to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ, for its support and to Mary Kate Hurley, Heather Maring, Heide Estes, and Caroline (Caz) Batten for their guidance.

1. See Betancourt's discussion of Crystal Lynn Lubinsky's argument against employing the terms *transgender* and *transsexual* (226n5) and Whittington's discussion of the term *Medieval*. On the term *sex change*, see Spencer-Hall and Gutt, "Trans and Genderqueer Studies Terminology" 312–13.

2. While Frantzen's influence on the scholarly discussion cannot be denied, his work should be read with caution given his embrace of the "men's rights" movement, which seeks to discredit and reverse the demands and accomplishments of feminist movements.

3. Butler's *Bodies That Matter* addresses the role of bodies in the performativity model, noting that the body is intrinsically involved in and subject to the iterative, citational process of performative identity formation: "gender performativity cannot be theorized apart from the forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes . . . the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the 'materiality' of sex" (xxiii–xxiv). I thank Caroline (Caz) Batten for elucidating this issue in personal communication.

4. An in-depth discussion of race in early medieval England is well beyond the scope of this article. It would be folly, however, to imagine that concepts of race did not exist in the Middle Ages, as demonstrated by Heng; Whitaker; Dockray-Miller; and Rambaran-Olm and Wade.

5. See Betancourt. Henningsen also argues that the framework of trans studies allows previously obscured insights into the famous case of Eleanor Rykener, who was arrested as a man for undertaking sex work as a woman in late medieval London. For more on this case, see Dinshaw; Bychowski, "Transgender Turn"; Karras and Boyd, employing the term *transvestite* and a performativity paradigm; and Karras and Linkinen, returning to Rykener's case twenty years later with the ideas of trans studies.

6. The term *passing* is now considered problematic, since it presumes the primacy of assigned identity and an intent to deceive on the part of the trans person (see Spencer-Hall and Gutt, "Trans and Genderqueer Studies Terminology" 308).

7. McGucken also highlights the displacement of authority from the self to the audience in the performativity model, noting the centrality of the audience's response to the visual depictions of the vices and virtues in *Psychomachia* cycles from early medieval England (46–47).

8. Quotations of *Eugenia* cite line numbers in Clayton and Mullins's edition (Ælfric, *Old English Lives* 44–73); translations from the Old English are my own unless otherwise noted.

9. Quotations of *Euphrosyne* are from Kramer, Magennis, and Norris's edition (28–53); translations from the Old English are my own unless otherwise noted.

10. Scarry explores and theorizes the effects of torture, Burrus applies her insights to late antique saints' lives, and Trilling extends that paradigm to the texts of early medieval England.

11. On the flaws of "third gender" ideas and its misapplications to trans identity, see Towle and Morgan.

12. Translations from the Latin are my own.

13. The related term *mægðhad* ("virginity") can apply to either a woman or a man, but *mæ(g)den* refers specifically to the female

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sex, often contrasting with *cniht* ("boy") or *mæcg* ("man") ("Mægðhad" and "Mægden").

14. While one might expect to encounter the language of "norms" and "normativity" here, Lochrie and Schultz each show that the concept of "natural" identities and behaviors better captures medieval views without the risk of anachronistically introducing modern implications.

15. Digital images of the surviving leaves of the burned manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Otho B.x) were generously provided by Kevin Kiernan from the Digital Atheneum project, with permission of the British Library Board.

16. Clayton and Mullins, like Skeat previously and Kramer, Magennis, and Norris subsequently, base their edition on London, British Library, Cotton Julius E. vii (*Old English Lives* 333; *Ælfric's Lives* vii; Kramer et al. 657).

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Abstract: This article uncovers the fractured and conflicting understandings of sex and gender in early medieval England around the year 1000 CE by exploring the Old English literary biographies of two saints often presented as women disguised as men. Ælfric's *Eugenia* upholds binary gender expectations, while an alternative version of *Eugenia*—changed by a scribe and surviving in the burned remains of a single manuscript—oscillates between acceptance and intolerance. The anonymous *Euphrosyne*, in contrast, challenges gender norms throughout. This article argues that these characters and the texts' competing views on sex and gender can be best understood by recognizing these two saints not as women in disguise but as trans men. A trans studies approach combined with philology and source study respects these two figures on their own terms while also uncovering elements of these texts and their cultural context that usually lie obscured.

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