Original Article

Queerly productive: Women and collaboration in Cambridge, University Library, MS Ff.1.6

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Abstract Cambridge, University Library MS Ff. 1.6 (the Findern manuscript) offers a test case for a speculative exploration of the role of female queer desire in medieval theorizations of textual collaboration, and collaborative manuscript production. I argue that, whereas masculine queer desire is represented as resulting in textual as well as sexual sterility, female queer desire is potentially hyper-productive, with each female body simultaneously an inscribable surface and a prosthetic pen/penis that can inscribe. In the Findern manuscript, the narrative of the mutilated Philomena provides the nexus for multiple interrelating and mutually modifying representations of female vocality, female desire, and female-female relations that range from the supportive to the erotic. The manuscript's examples of collaboratively produced texts model ways to break away from the hierarchal model of inscriber and inscribed, masculine and feminine, and produce spaces in which desiring female speakers can recuperate from the wounds of the masculine paradigm of textual inscription, and develop their own female-centric modes of erotic expression.

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2018) 9, 334–348.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-018-0089-z>

Introduction

The modestly sized paper codex now Cambridge, University Library MS Ff. 1.6 (the Findern manuscript) generates strong emotions. In his recent review of Linda Olson's essay on the manuscript in *Opening Up Middle English Manuscripts* (Olson, 2012, 139–52), Richard Beadle characterizes a discussion of women writers who might have produced the manuscript as an 'extended sentimental fantasy' (Beadle, 2014, 299). The claim that the manuscript is the product of female pens is of long standing and often repeated (Robbins, 1954, 627–9; Kinch, 2007, 730; Olson, 2012, 142–3), and though there is a weight of scholarly evidence to the contrary (O'Mara, 1996, 87–130; Thompson, 1991, 34–5; Boffey, 1993, 169–71; Rudd, 2005, 112–132), both claims and counter-claims bear witness to a remarkable scholarly investment in this little book, an investment that sometimes tips over into something more emotional that we typically imagine the practice of manuscript scholarship to be. Desires to read into the gaps and silences of manuscripts are easily characterized as excessive, transgressive, or inappropriate, but such desires have long motivated the hands that marked the Findern manuscript. In this essay, I will demonstrate that the compilational strategies of the manuscript privilege a distinctly queer mode of female textual practice, dependent on just such attention to gaps and *lacunae*, just such erratic imagining of female collaborators and female pens (see also Giffney et al., 2011).

Female textual collaboration and same-sex desire

The target of Olson's article and Beadle's ire is found on at the foot of fol. 109v: the end of a romance, *Sir Degrevant*, followed (in the same hand as one of the two scribes of the main text) by the names of two women: Elizabeth Cotton and Elizabeth Francis. This inscription recalls the Etchingham/Oxenbridge brass, which Judith Bennett makes the focus of her influential experiment in revealing 'lesbian-like' histories in the material and textual monuments to medieval women (Bennett, 2008, 163–84 and 2011, 131–43). Like the women's names here, the brass was patently not made by the women themselves, but rather, it invites interpretation through established codes of response. The brass, as Bennett argues, suggests an intimate, quasi-marital pairing by placing two women together and represented according to the tropes of representations of husbands and wives. The names, similarly, purport to identify the hands behind the inscribing pens of the text to which it is appended. Whoever paired the names of Elizabeth Cotton and Elizabeth Francis, and wrote them together in the space where scribes sign their texts, constructed a memorial that transforms the page into a space of female-female collaboration, an invitation to imagine two women joined in generation of a romance. This imaginative possibility

seems to me more significant than the endlessly rehashed question of whether two late-medieval English women could have signed their own names, for it opens up a space in which to imagine a process with the potential to destabilize medieval theorizations of both textual and sexual reproduction.

One of the most famous medieval theorizations of textual reproduction appears in Jean de Meun's section of the *Roman de la Rose*. Here, writing is unambiguously gendered. The character Genius declares that men who refuse to write on the 'beautiful, precious tablets that Nature [...] prepare[d] for them' are deviants worthy of castration (Dahlberg, 1983, 323). Whether de Meun has in mind those men whose desires are 'queer' in that they are unnaturally celibate, or whether he is also thinking of those who seek out sexual relations with other men, is a matter for debate (Schibanoff, 2001, 41; Mills, 2015, 152), but the paradigm-threatening role of queer masculine desire is not. Men who turn their desires away from the feminine *pagina*, the penetrable female body, engender sexual and textual sterility. The pen or stylus is the tool proper to a masculine author, de Meun insists, phallic in its penetrative and generative writerly activity. As Dinshaw argues with particular regard to the Wife of Bath and the opening of the *Canterbury Tales*, English writers too viewed the page and the text as feminine surfaces, subject to masculine authorial circumscription and correction (Dinshaw, 1989, 3–27, 113–31).

What then of a female writer, constructing the feminized page? The question has been explored in different and complementary ways by two recent scholars. In her *Queer Love in the Middle Ages*, Anna Kłosowska leaves behind the medieval paradigm of textual production, and employs modern theories of identity formation to shed light on medieval women's textual practices. Noting that queer identities may be formed from the appropriation and re-assembly of pre-existing social and cultural scripts, she suggests that the dismembered and recombined books often produced by women's monasteries 'accommodate desires that cannot be fulfilled by [...] already existing, ready-made objects or identity' (Kłosowska, 2005, 91–4). Kłosowska represents this creative process not as a triumph of determination over paucity of materials, but as the construction of an object that invites us to rethink our understandings of what is complete and what is damaged. As this process celebrates what might otherwise seem a damaged object, it recalls Jack Halberstam's articulation of forms of queer creativity born out of unprepossessing materials, and of what might look like a failure to conceal the patchwork nature of the finished product (Halberstam, 2011, 2).

Acknowledging Kłosowska's contribution, Anne Laskaya suggests that even the paradigm established within medieval textual culture might afford a space for imagining female interactions with books in terms of queer erotics. She invites readers to consider the queerly erotic implications of women touching, caressing, and gazing at the feminine page, and asks '[i]f a woman takes up a quill, a pen, or a stylo and writes, is she giving pleasure to the feminized page

with a symbolic dildo?’ (Laskaya, 2011, 43). Both scholars imagine processes that are pleasurable, even erotic, encounters with manuscript pages, and both imagine processes that are *productive*, resulting in recombined books or newly copied texts. As their arguments indicate, female textual collaboration is not an inversion of the male paradigm, but rather, something qualitatively and queerly different from it.

A further conclusion can be drawn from these arguments, which is central to the case I build in this article. In Genius’s speech, masculine desire that is obverted from its feminine object is textually and sexually sterile. The logic of this textual sterility does not require that we decide whether these reluctant writers are unnaturally celibate, or actively engaged in same-sex activity, for in both cases the crucial point is that they refuse to write on the intended surfaces. Yet there is within this model a failure of correspondence potentially embarrassing to medieval adherents of orthodox sexual morality. As textual reproduction is coded as a form of generative sexual relationship, it implicitly presumes two bodies, one able to impregnate, the other to conceive. Medieval manuscript culture, by contrast, is frequently, even presumptively, a process that involves multiple inscribing hands, as Jonathan Hsy observes in his article for this Special Issue, and these hands are often plainly stimulated in response to earlier writers rather than in response to the blank feminine page itself. At least one medieval author confronts the implications of this faultline. As Carolyn Dinshaw demonstrates, Chaucer’s ‘Wordes Unto Adam’ represent failed scribal activity as a kind of ‘rape’: a crime against the author whose property is seized and misused, and a violation of the feminized textual body that is his to ‘correcte’ (Dinshaw, 1989, 3–14). The salient point for my purpose is that Chaucer depicts scribal (mis-)collaboration with an author as a form of violence within a patriarchal rather than a queer structure: as rape, and not as sodomy. The presence of two inscribing pens working on the same text does not imply a queer relationship between them, but the competition of the two for the pre-existing feminized surface of the page.

Not so female queer desire, or not by the logic of Genius’s speech. That female queer desire, as Dinshaw reminds us, is visibly defined for medieval authors by the prosthetic appropriation of male genitalia (Dinshaw, 1999, 88). Women who take up phallic pens to inscribe the feminized page engage in a prosthetic expression of sexuality, an expression of sexuality that extends and enables the body, but does not alter its pre-existing state, for the definition of a prosthetic is that it may be separated from the body to which it is appended. Women who wield pens do not, and need not, give up their pre-existing status as receptive surfaces. Their textual productivity splinters away from the original male-coded paradigm. For where the paradigm Genius sets out is rigidly hierarchal, requiring feminine subordination and masculine authorial control, this alternative paradigm admits a reciprocal, collaborative mode of sexual and textual behaviour, in which the holder of the pen may swap roles in order to become the

inscribable surface. Therefore, the expression of female same-sex desires must be fundamental to theorizations of collaborative practices in medieval manuscript culture.

The story of Philomena

To test these speculations, I turn to the Findern Manuscript, and specifically to its fragmentary witness to part of a part of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. The manuscript opens, acephalously, with Gower's Tale of Tereus. As a dismembered material object, part of a manuscript more widely marked by textual recombinations, excisions, and reassemblies, the Tale of Tereus reflects the queer aesthetic Kłosowska identifies as being particularly typical of women's manuscript culture. Its dismembered state is explicitly (and unpleasantly) sexualized by analogy with the body of its heroine, Philomena, who suffers the loss of her virginity and her tongue to her rapist brother-in-law Tereus. As a result, the tale is a perfect example for exploring what Laskaya speculates about the expression of female vocality on the page, for the bodily part Philomena loses – her tongue – is easily read as a somatic equivalent to the writerly pen. However, the compilational strategies and textual 'errors' of the manuscript constitute a mode of resistance to this idea of male circumscription.

By virtue of its contents and the manner of its compilation, the manuscript is a promising site for a scholar looking for hints of female same-sex desire. It was produced in several stages and has a complicated material history that has generated much meticulous scholarly comment, notably by Ralph Hanna, Kate Harris, and Michael Johnston, as well as the editors of the facsimile, Richard Beadle and A. E. B. Owen (Beadle and Owen, 1977, vii–xxxiii; Harris, 1983, 299–333; Hanna, 1987, 62–70; Johnston, 2015, 71–84). As it now survives, it contains some 62 items, several of them unique lyrics, others excerpted from texts by Chaucer, Gower, and their fifteenth-century imitators, others again notes or jottings relating to day-to-day practicalities of running a household. The manuscript testifies to prolonged physical contact with the same bodies of people: the same scribes and readers, the same compilers and annotators who returned over and over again to add to their manuscript, each time retrospectively reinterpreting its existing contents. The mode of production is reminiscent of Dinshaw's definition of queerness, which 'works by contingency and displacement, knocking signifiers loose' (Dinshaw, 1999, 151). It is also a mode of production that is visibly asynchronous: as new scribes and annotators added their materials, often interpolating them into pre-existing sequences on blank pages or unfilled spaces, a patchwork effect of different hands, ink colors, and layouts is built up, with shifts from planned stints of copying to hurried jotting or annotating. To think about the manuscript as a material object is to be aware that it immortalizes a moment in time – a 'now' – that constantly threatens to

splinter into what Arthur Bahr calls ‘multiple, intersecting temporalities’ (Bahr, 2013, 13). When did the extract of Gower at the beginning of the manuscript become acephalous? When were the quires linked together? Who might have read the manuscript in the form in which it now survives, and who amongst its many compilers and annotators could not have done so? These questions bear witness to a constant process of looking backwards and forwards, of keeping in mind the multiple temporal states in which the codex once existed. It is a kind of queer thinking about time which is, again, reminiscent of Dinshaw’s theorizations (Dinshaw, 2012), and its local effect is to divert focus from the content of individual texts, to the more unstable conversations that proliferate between them.

The manuscript is thematically dominated by a collection of interrelated texts that appear, in similar combinations, in three other surviving fifteenth-century manuscripts. Extracts from Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls* and part of his *Legend of Good Women*, Richard Roos’s *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Clanvowe’s *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, and Hoccleve’s *Lepistre de Cupide* all appear not only in Findern but also in Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS Fairfax 16, Tanner 346, and Bodley 638. However, in all three of those manuscripts, the texts are grouped according to author, and grouped with other materials by the same authors. In the Findern manuscript, they are interwoven, creating a dialogue. This dialogue reflects a distinct taste for writings relating to female desire, female vocality, and the *querelle des femmes* (McNamer, 1991, 279–310; Doyle, 2006, 231–61; Kinch, 2007, 729–44). The contents of the manuscript bear witness to repeated decisions to select and bring together women’s stories, while discarding accompanying material relating to men. Chaucer’s Anelida appears, minus Arcite, and his Venus, without Mars. An extract from the *Legend of Good Women* appears, separated from the frame narrative of the male narrator’s dream. A unique poem responding to the *Complaint of Venus* echoes that text’s translation of three male-voiced poems into the mouth of a female speaker, adapting ‘traditional male complaint rhetoric to a female speaker’ (Kinch, 2007, 739). Even the pronoun ‘he’ is omitted from a prominent position in one text, as the scribe copying Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Thisbe’ mistakenly writes ‘sche’ for ‘he’ in the final line of the text: ‘a woman dar and can as wel as sche’ (Benson, 1988, 923). Before the scribe remedies the text back to ‘he,’ the inversion temporarily confuses the gender of Pyramus, Thisbe’s lover, who can be seen as a feminized figure (Allen-Goss, 2018). Even the crowning celebration of reproductive desire, the song of the birds in honour of ‘Saynt Valentyn’ (683) at the end of the *Parliament of Fowls*, is omitted, leaving an oddly unexplained absence following the narrator’s promise to reproduce it, and depriving that notoriously ambivalent text its usual attempt at a heteronormative resolution.

This pattern of textual variants, errors, and omissions provides a rich context for Gower’s story of Philomena. The plot is well known. Philomena is raped by

her brother-in-law Tereus, who prevents report of the crime by cutting out her tongue. Forced into silence, Philomena weaves a tapestry recording her fate. She sends it to her sister Procne, Tereus' wife, and the two women exact a bloody revenge on Tereus, killing his son Itys and feeding the child's body to the unsuspecting father. Once Tereus realizes what has happened, he dashes after the women in a murderous rage, and the gods intervene to turn all three characters into birds. Philomena thus becomes the nightingale, emblem of song and suffering. The Findern version of the tale begins mid-text, at the pivotal moment when the eponymous villain realizes he has been tricked, and just before he and his female antagonists are transformed into birds.

The subtext of the narrative is established profoundly queer at well before the point at which the acephalous Findern text opens, and might be added to the sum of examples of queerness Diane Watt locates within the *Confessio* as a whole (Watt, 2003). Gower's Philomena responds to Tereus' sexual violation with a famously eloquent speech in which she promises to announce his crime to the world. Crucially, she codes her tongue, her speech, as penetrative: her language will refuse to be contained but will 'fulfille' (V. 5660) the world, reaching humans, birds, and even stones, until 'my vois schal the hevene perce, / That it schal soun in Goddes ere' (5674–55).¹ These final lines suggest not only prayer, but also a reversed annunciation. Having evoked the creation of the world with her reference to the orders of humans, sensate birds and inanimate stones (echoing not only *Genesis* but also the hierarchy of being), Philomena envisages her voice reaching not only through creation, but also into the ear of God, just as the Word of God that spoke all Creation into being penetrated the ear of the Virgin Mary.

The retributive violence of Tereus cuts short this eloquence (and, perhaps, its gender nonconforming forcefulness), but also marks a small but significant change from the traditional version of the narrative. Instead of silence, Gower's imprisoned heroine Philomena suffers a notably violent but incomplete glossectomy:

Bot yit whan he [Tereus] hire tunge refte,
A litel part therof belefte,
Bot sche with al no word mai sounne,
Bot chitre and as a brid jargoune. (V. 5697–700)

Left with the capacity to 'chitter,' the nightingale Philomena does *not* persist in silence. After her transformation, she is given a speech, which celebrates her avian metamorphosis as a source of freedom from 'shame':

Sche makth gret joie and merthe ...
And seith, "Ha, nou I am a brid,
Ha, nou mi face mai ben hid.
Thogh I have lost mi maidenhede,
Schal no man se my chekes rede. (V.5984–8)

1 All citations of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* refer to Peck and Galloway, 2000–2013, unless otherwise indicated.

The remainder of the song is made up of clichés commonly found in lyrical laments about the pains, not of rape, but of love. Philomena sings that

love is a wofull blisse,
A wisdom which can no man wisse,
A lusti fievere, a wounde softe (V.5993–5)

Dinshaw has argued that this passage disturbingly transforms the pain of a violated woman into a literary trope for the consumption of elite audiences (Dinshaw, 1991, 130–52). Certainly, the passage transforms the song into something *intelligible*, something that is not birdsong. Quoting a line or two in English, the narrator hastily explains how he comes to his understanding of it:

For so these olde wise saide,
Which understoden what sche mente,
Hire notes ben of such entente.
And ek *thei seide* hou in hir song
Sche makth gret joie and merthe ... (V. 5980–4)

These interpreting voices, attributed to ‘olde wise’ people, gloss Philomena’s song to explain ‘what sche mente’ and even to identify her emotions as ‘gret joie and merthe.’ They evoke the *Confessio* prologue, where Gower declares his intention to write of ‘newe som matiere, / Essampled of these olde wyse’ (Prologue, 6–7), referring back to authors who ‘writen ous tofore’ (Prologue, 1). There is an implicit transfer of learning down a masculine readerly tradition. Yet, like the Latin glosses that so visibly surround and interpret the complete *Confessio*, these voices might be understood as Magnani and Watt interpret them in their article for this collection, as voices queered by persistent multilingualism and polyvocality, crossing the borders between human and bird language as they do.

In Findern, where the tale is separated from the prologue, the implications of the moment of translation is even more evidently queer. Here, it is not gender-non-specified ‘old wise’ people who interpret Philomena’s birdsong. Rather, it is ‘holde wyffys’: old wives. Philomena is placed at the origin point of a new and female tradition of textual interpretation, her words mediated through female authorities. Likewise, the Findern text erases the standard ending. Where Gower’s narrator usually claims that he has told all he can of Philomena, ‘Wherof men mai the storie note’ (6001–2), the Findern version simply omits ‘men.’ The presumptive audience for Philomena’s tale is gendered entirely female, the ‘holde wyffys’ who understand her song. In this context, the song itself takes on a newly exclusionary tone. The nightingale refers repeatedly to things ‘no man’ can see, understand, or know, from ‘Schal no man se my chekes rede’ to the love which ‘can no man wise.’ In the newly feminized interpretative context of her song, these references seem pointedly rather than coincidentally gendered. They refer to uniquely female experience, which no man can perceive

or penetrate. Thus, Findern's community of 'holde wyffys' have a protective as well as an interpretative function: they collaborate with the heroine in placing her song's meaning beyond masculine interpretative grasp.

This mode of female-female support and textual interpretation is located in a wider subtext of female queer sexuality that augments its communicative power, concentrated in the multiply-represented figure of Nature. Gower's Nature is the product of a long tradition of writing, which can be traced back through Jean de Meun and Alan of Lille, and which is echoed in Chaucer's character from the *Parliament of Fowls*. Susan Schibanoff interprets this 'Nature' as a 'lesbian' figure, who employs her creative tools in the manner of an appropriated phallus (Schibanoff, 2006, 199–304). The Findern Tale of Tereus (or Story of Philomena) extract intensifies these queer implications in a pointed manner. We are told that the nightingale will only sing when Nature has 'clothe[d]' the bare earth 'With herbes and with floures bothe' and when the woods are 'heled al with grene leues/So that a brid hire hyde mai' (5962–7). This image of Nature recalls Macrobius' discussion of the roles of *fabulae* and integuments, which he couches in terms of Nature's proclivities. It is an influential passage, which Minnis traces through William of Conches, Alan of Lille, and Jean de Meun (Minnis, 2001, 48). Nature, Macrobius claims, dislikes to show herself in 'open and naked exposition' (Stahl, 1952, 86). She hides herself from the gazes of men by means of coverings, leaf-like 'variegated garments' which function like textual integuments to conceal her female body and her secrets. Gower's Nature thus provides Philomena with a covering that may be read not only literally, but also hermeneutically. As a potentially lesbian-like figure, Nature offers Philomena protection from the penetrative incursions of male interpreters, joining the Findern 'wyffys' in standing between Philomena and men who seek to tell her what she means.

If Philomena is doubly hidden from masculine interpreters and male eyes, for whom does she sing? And how might we change our understanding of the clichéd fragments of love-lyric she weaves together if we imagine her singing for an exclusively female audience? Here the text resonates forward into the remainder of the manuscript. It looks to Chaucer's Goddess Nature in the *Parliament*, with that text's emphasis on female collusion to defer masculine erotic advances. In turn, that text offers a sudden, jarring gap that makes retrospective sense of Philomena's song. The odd absence of a conventional love-lyric from the *Parliament* is balanced by the odd presence of a song about love in Philomena's mutilated mouth; it is as if she has appropriated the bird-voices and twisted their celebration of male-female reproductive love into a new context. The *lacuna* in the narrative of opposite-sex desire makes Philomena's mutilated speech more whole. Philomena's clichéd image of the 'wounde softe' likewise looks forward, anticipating the moment in the 'Legend of Thisbe' later in the manuscript, where a masculinized Thisbe equipped with authorial power to construct her own 'compleynt' weeps seminal tears into a receptively vaginal

wound in her lover's feminized body. These texts, taken together, make suggestive context for another nightingale: that of Clanvowe's *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*. Here, the nightingale is accused of speaking in a veiled, foreign language incomprehensible to her male interlocutor, who uses the innuendo-laden phrase 'a queynt crie' (123) to characterize its sound. The composite effect of these texts grants Philomena/the nightingale a voice that is simultaneously a blank surface requiring interpretation and circumscription by others, and a penetrative force, breaking into the other texts of the manuscript and disrupting the conventionality of love-lyric with distinctly queer genital innuendos. Thus, lyrical fragments of Philomena's song, which Dinshaw sees as a conventional aestheticisation of female pain, might here be better be understood as patriarchal discourse repurposed, and given new erotic significance when sung by one female character to other female listeners.

Female scribal collaboration and the queer erotic

This collaboratively produced love-lyric, sung to an audience of women and reciprocally interpreted by them, has its own real-life echo in the manuscript. The Cotton/Francis signatures, which loom so large in scholarly discussions, overshadow a nearby example of a kind of scribal collaboration much more likely to be the work of actual female hands. On fol. 137r is a four-line lyric, written in two uncertain and unpractised hands, whose irregular duct and letter forms resemble the kinds of writing O'Mara associates with English women writers (O'Mara, 1996, 92). It reads:

Sith Fortune hath me set thus in this wyse
 Too loue yow best callyd be
 You to serue and trwly plese
 Is my desyr and hertus esse.

The first two lines are completed and answered by the second two, written in a different hand (Figure 1).

The result may be read as a dialogue, with the second hand turning the inscribing 'me' of the first lines into the inscribed 'you' of the second; the first hand reciprocally inscribing a 'yow' who will then take up the pen as the subject of 'my desyr.' In a manuscript marked with several historical women's names, two suggestively located as would-be 'writers,' we still cannot be at all certain whether or not the hand that wrote either set of lines was female. But, in terms of medieval paradigms of textual production, because these hands are reciprocally inscribing and inscribed, they are gendered female. Like the female voices that speak to one another across the boundaries of their male-authored texts, these written lines continue an imaginative process of picturing female-

Figure 1: Cambridge, University Library MS Ff. 1.6, fol. 137r..
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female collaborations, asking and answering questions of speech, silence, and ‘desyr.’

The continuation of this lyric in two different hands is only one of many literal acts of ‘collaboration.’ Generations of readers, annotators and editors, from the fifteenth century to at least 1977, have been unable to resist further marking the pages of the Findern manuscript. An annotator writing in a sixteenth-century hand re-attributes several texts (sometimes in blatant disregard of their correct attributions elsewhere in the manuscript) to Chaucer or, in one enticing case, ‘Chaucer or Occleve’ (fol. 71r, referring to Hoccleve’s *Lepistre de Cupide*). Four centuries later, a neat pencil hand inserts line numbers and brief notes to pin down the location of extracts from longer texts and to establish the likely shape and size of missing portions of the manuscript. Their marks comment on perceived lacks, gaps, and errors, but in doing so, they add to the polyvocality of the surface on which they are located. This desire to ‘correct’ the text might be understood as a means of imposing order, of ‘straightening out’ inconsistencies and *lacunae*. However, it is also indicative of another kind of desire: the desire to extend and expand the contents of the manuscripts with further inscriptions, with the prosthetically productive dynamics of queer female sexuality. The hand that wrote a two-line continuation of the Findern lyric, and the hands that seek to mark, penetrate and fill the *lacunae* of its pages, are not involved in such very different activities, as the depth of emotions the manuscript continues to generate bears witness.

As Seth Lerer observes (Lerer, 2015, 474–98), tongues are a thematic preoccupation of the Findern manuscript. They lick across the gaps and holes of its partially-dismembered pages, give voice to mutilated lyrics stripped from elsewhere, and speak through errors of transcription that create unexpected *lacunae*, switched pronouns, and re-gendered interpretative communities. These tongues engage in a mode of queer communicative collaboration, in which each responding text functions as a prosthetic extension to the others, as well as a receptive surface onto which new interpretations can be brought to bear through juxtaposition. Elsewhere in this issue, Magnani and Watt claim that mistakes and misreadings afford a form of Halberstamian queer pleasure, a pleasure of plural glosses and *linguae* playing across the much-glossed, much-misread manuscript page. Meanwhile, Arthur Bahr’s analysis of the Trentham manuscript offers precedent for the ‘pleasurable challenge’ of unpicking the complex temporal laminations of a multi-scribed Gower compilation (Bahr, 2013, 218). These pleasures are, I argue, potentially creative and productive. In the story of Philomena, they contribute to a mode of female textual production that is not a wounded response to violently masculine circumscription, but which recuperates itself into a queer erotic, a mode of *re*-production of the female voice, which we might consider ‘queer.’

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Lucy Allen-Goss is an independent researcher, and her research focuses on Chaucer, Gower, and gendered representations of violence and desire. Her forthcoming book is titled *Female Desire in Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and Middle English Romance*. She blogs about the intersections between her research, popular culture, and contemporary feminisms, at <https://readingmedievalbooks.wordpress.com/> (E-mail: lma28@cam.ac.uk).

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