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A Historiography of Chastity in the Marriage of Edith of Wessex and Edward the Confessor

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Macalester College

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Title: A Historiography of Chastity in the Marriage
of Edith of Wessex and Edward the Confessor

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5/2/2011

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The seeds of this project were planted by Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*. An impressionable 12 year old when I first watched the program, the mystery of Edward the Confessor's sex life briefly mentioned in the program somehow stuck in my subconscious. But, while Dr. Schama may have planted this particular seed, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the individuals who gave me the skills to see that seed germinate and grow.

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Introduction

In a scene in *The King's Speech*, the 2011 winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture, Colin Firth as the stammering King George V prepares for his coronation in Westminster Abbey with his speech therapist Lionel Logue, portrayed by Geoffrey Rush. In one moment, while George has his back turned, Lionel steals into the coronation chair to provoke George's anger and ease his stammer. When George does turn around, he snaps: "You can't sit there! Get up!" Lionel asks, "Why not? It's a chair." George answers, "That is not a chair. That is Saint Edward's chair!" Lionel continues to ask why he should leave the seat for George, and by implication his right to the throne, to which George exclaims "Because I have a voice!" (for which Firth deserved and won his own Academy Award for Best Actor).

I begin with this scene because it demonstrates the power the figure of Saint and King Edward the Confessor still has on popular imagination and English kingship. His place in the English history books as the last Anglo-Saxon, known for his piety and his upholding of English Common Law, has enshrined him in English national consciousness for a millennium. Due to that enduring relevance, Edward's life has been constantly reinterpreted. Edward's marriage to Edith of Wessex in particular has engendered dynamic and sometimes contradictory interpretation. Indeed, the story should be simple, as only the bare bones of their marriage are known and few details of his wife's life are known.

Edith of Wessex married Edward the Confessor in 1045. Her date of birth is unknown. She was the daughter of the powerful Earl Godwin of Wessex and his Danish wife Gytha and was reared at Wilton Abbey. Six years after her marriage, in what has been called the 'crisis of 1051,' her father was accused of rebelling against Edward and banished to the

Continent, finding refuge in Flanders. Edith was sent back to Wilton by Edward. Though she (and eventually her entire family), returned to court with full favor the next year, the episode had some lasting impact on how she and her family were remembered in the coming centuries. However, her power at court was not diminished in the long-term, even after the conquest of England by William of Normandy against her brother Harold in 1066. Edith lived until 1075, outlasting both her husband and immediate family.¹

While records of Edith's life and her marriage to Edward are poor, the historiography of those who narrated her life after her death is rich. In some ways, the historiography of her life was directly related to that of her husband's. Legitimizing the canonization of her husband was a primary motivation behind the insertion of mutual chastity into the narrative of their marriage. Twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship on the subject by Frank Barlow, Pauline Stafford, and Joanna Huntingdon has drawn a direct causal relationship between the chastity narrative and Edward's canonization.² However, more complex political and religious forces acted to create this narrative of chastity. Historiographic interpretations of Edith's family (and her father's role in her husband's reign in particular) based on later dynastic³ goals, changing views of English queenship as a whole, the growth of Edward's cult, and changing religious attitudes towards chastity all contributed to necessitating the

¹ This chronology is based on Stafford's, who identifies the uncertainties with dating events in Edith's life and offers the most convincing set of dates [Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 255-257].

² Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*; Huntingdon, "Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint: Virginity in the Construction of Edward the Confessor."

³ For the purposes of this paper I will refer to the Norman dynasty as the rulers of England from 1066 to 1154, including William the Conqueror, William Rufus, Henry I, Stephen and Matilda. I will refer to the Angevins as the rulers of England from 1154 to 1216, including Henry II, Richard I, and John. And I will refer to the Plantagenets as the rulers of England from 1216 to 1485, though this paper will only concern itself with Henry III who ruled from 1216 until 1272. The distinction between the former two is based on the takeover of the English throne by Henry II, who was also the Duke of Anjou and brought many French lands into the governance of the Kings of England, constituting an Angevin Empire. The distinction between the latter two is somewhat arbitrary, but seems fitting considering the loss of French land under John. With the smaller territorial scope of his governance, Henry III had less of an "Angevin" perspective and was more focused on England and English concerns.

addition of chastity into narratives about Edith and Edward's marriage. These four factors – politics, gender, piety and sexuality – shaped changing interpretations and dictated the insertion of chastity within narratives about Edith and Edward's marriage.

The first two chapters of this investigation will examine the convergence of these four forces resulting in the narrative of chastity in sources written before and during the kingship of Henry III, who notably promoted Edward's cult. A broad survey of the English political landscape of the Early Middle Ages⁴ will provide context for the chroniclers and hagiographers who wrote about Edith and Edward. The specific biographies of those chroniclers and hagiographers will then be considered in order to understand their particular positionality and biases. Exploring political dialogues within those texts reveals both the use of the chastity narrative by the descendants of Normans for legitimization and an increasingly inflexible relationship between women and political authority. The broader shifting religious landscape of England impacted the sources just as did changing politics and will be considered to examine religious dialogues within the texts. That examination makes clear the political nature of Edward's canonization and the growing correlation between chastity and sanctity. Combined, the political and religious dialogues within the emergence of a narrative of chastity of Edward and the Confessor and Edith of Wessex demonstrate a growing rigidity of gender in politics and sexuality in piety in Early Medieval England.

The second two chapters of this investigation will examine the continued fluctuation of these same four forces in texts written after the reign of Henry III until roughly the end of the reign of Elizabeth I in 1603. As well, a sample of sources from the mid and late 17th century will be considered to bookend the broader historiographical changes in interpretation

⁴ For the purposes of this essay, I will define the Early Middle Ages as 1000-1300, the Late Middle Ages as 1300-1500 and the Early Modern as 1600-1800. This definition of period comes from Stenton's *English Society in the Early Middle Ages*.

of Edward and Edith's marriage. The changes in printing technology changed the volume and genre of historical writing produced in England. The sources will be contextualized on a broad religious, political and individual scale. The changing religious landscape of the period, marked by the Protestant Reformation, resulted in the fracturing of religious identities. The religious identities of the authors, and consequently the religious dialogues of the documents they wrote, reflect this new fracturing and adaptive reinterpretation of saints as exemplars. As well, they reflect the increasing distance between piety and sexuality and the new definitions of sanctity that became widespread throughout Late Medieval and Early Modern England. These sources also operated within the dramatic changes in English political authority wrought by intense conflict, dynastic shifts and intensive challenges to royal authority that both fractured English national identity and created a greater national consciousness in the period. Examining the political dialogues of these sources reflects the strengthened national identity, shifting gender norms and the increasingly narrow space between gender and political authority.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Examining changing interpretations of Edith of Wessex and Edward the Confessor's marriage requires examining the construction of four aspects of personal and collective Medieval and Early Modern identities: gender, politics, piety, and sexuality. The intertwined nature of these necessitates constructing a theoretical and methodological foundation in terms of intersections. To that end, I employ a post-modern and feminist post-structuralist perspective of historical interpretation in building my theoretical and methodological framework. Using such a theoretical framework and employing useful techniques of existing

scholarship on Medieval gender topics in general and Edith and Edward specifically will allow me to construct an appropriate interpretive methodology.

Post-modern historical scholarship is implicated as an analytic framework for any text, particularly historical sources. Based on the philosophy originally developed in the 1960s and 70s by philosophers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, the postmodern historian seeks to move beyond a singular “objective” narrative of history. In this process, historians must place their own identity in the text. Indeed, recognizing the positionality of the historian is the primary tenant of post-modern historical scholarship. As such, it is applicable to all historical investigation and textual analysis. The primary source-driven nature of my investigation into Edith and Edward’s marriage makes it a particularly crucial piece in my framework. My analysis of text would be irresponsible without being aware of my own positionality as well as that of the authors of the texts I examine.

In addition to self-reflective post-modern historical scholarship, the perspective of feminist post-structuralism can also add to the investigation of Edith and Edward’s marriage. Sociologists Jane Kenway, Sue Willis, Jill Blackmore, and Leonie Ronnie present a useful summary of feminist post-structuralism as “a theory which acknowledges discourses and practices of struggle and resistance, which recognizes the dynamic interplay of social forces, and which therefore can readily be deployed as a theory of and for change.”⁵ Post-structuralism thus rejects structuralism’s assumption that meaning is created and manifested in co-existent, ahistorical structure. Rather, it argues that meaning is created through text and discourse and is situated within specific historical contexts. Post-structuralism examines such texts and discourse to pinpoint the dynamics of change.

⁵ Kenway et. al., “Making ‘Hope Practical’ Rather than ‘Despair Convincing’,” 188.

Post-structuralism as a theory fits the nature of my topic because it is interested in the long-term dynamics of change. Because I am looking at the intersection of political and religious institutions with the long-term development of a specific narrative, concepts of discourse and constructed meaning are essential toward interpreting individual texts. Assuming an inherent structure and singular meaning to the text would be dangerous. Post-structuralism, unlike structuralism, allows for examining broader dynamics of change while acknowledging that pre-modern authors operated within a specific context. It does not assume ahistoric constructions of structures of meaning as does structuralism. Post-structuralism as perspective in inquiry is thus suited to my investigation.

Feminist critique is added to post-structuralist perspective in matters of gender, unequal differences and domination, and in challenges to inequitable power dynamics/relationships. Feminist post-structuralism combines the two and “uses theories of discourse to explore the ways in which the socio-cultural hegemonies of dominant groupings are acquired and challenged.”⁶ When applied to historical investigation, the implications of feminist post-structuralism as a whole are vast. Joan Scott, in her seminal article “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis” laid out the foundation. Actively engaging in questions of methodology and textual analysis, Scott calls for a “a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference.”⁷ Since the article’s publication in 1986, scholars of medieval England investigating questions of gender and sexual difference have employed the basic model established by Scott.

Historians of medieval English gender and sexuality have applied such theory to the Middle Ages and have begun to overcome the challenges the periods presents to such a

⁶ Kenway et. al., “Making 'Hope Practical' Rather than 'Despair Convincing',” 191.

⁷ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,” 1065.

theoretical methodology. Strategically drawing from the methodologies of previous medieval gender scholarship will be essential. The emergence of critical feminist interpretations of medieval gender has transformed the subject but doesn't entirely negate the usefulness of older work scholarship. For example, Betty Bandel's 1955 article "The English Chronicler's Attitude Toward Women," presents a useful methodology of "negative reading" or reading the female experience based on gaps and silences about female experiences within chronicles.⁸ While certainly more problematic than "positive reading" or analysis based on what is asserted about female experience, it is essential, given the lack of sources. Susan Stuard's argument that institutionalization of power and consequential increasing inflexibility of female political power provides another simplistic but fruitful framework through which to view changing power dynamics in Medieval/Early Modern England.⁹

More recent scholarship has presented exciting interdisciplinary modes of investigation into gender and sexuality. Lisa Bitel's *Women in Early Medieval Europe* draws on art, literature, and archeology, as well as more traditional legal and chronicle sources to construct elements of common female experience. Ruth Karras used a similar broad-based methodology to frame medieval sexuality in her recent *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*.¹⁰ Bitel and Karras' emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and broad-based methodology is important to my investigation to constructing a holistic textual analysis. While this investigation must be text-based, that textual interpretation must be based on rigorous and holistic inquiry.

Even with the comprehensive theoretical framework of feminist post-structuralism and the interdisciplinary methodology to match it, challenges of interpretation framework

⁸ Bandel, "The English Chroniclers' Attitude Toward Women," 113.

⁹ Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, 10.

¹⁰ Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 5-7.

remain. The most significant, perhaps, is that of how to interpret female agency versus oppression. The challenge of balancing a complete female agency with the limitations placed on it remains a significant debate within medieval gender history. How can historians express females' agency in the past without mitigating oppression placed on female power and freedom? Particularly for examining a woman of power like Edith, the binary between interpreting the role of women in pre-modern history as feminist/anti-feminist and agent/oppressed is far too simplistic. Ruth Karras argues that "The only solution is to find a balance of the history of oppression and the history of achievement – as Judith Zinsser and Bonnie Anderson put it in their history of women in Europe, between 'traditions subordinating women' and 'traditions empowering women'." ¹¹ Though vague in theory, a methodology involving weighing the two traditions as a fluctuating binary is the most productive means of simultaneously contextualizing and taking account of post-modern biases.

One way in which contextualization of gender construction is possible is by examining the link between sexuality, power, and economic position. As Karras' study of medieval English prostitutes demonstrates, "Money, power, and sexuality were closely intertwined in the Middle Ages, as they are today..." ¹² The continuity and change of the intersection between these aspects of identity provides a fruitful avenue of inquiry crossing spatiotemporal boundaries. For the purposes of this investigation, Edward and Edith's marriage can be constructed as a relation between dynamic notions of sexuality and power. More specially, Edith and Edward's marriage must also be constructed in the changing intersection between sexuality and *political* power.

¹¹ Karras, *Common Women*, 8.

¹² Karras, *Common Women*, 3.

The intersection between gender and political power manifests itself in specific concepts of queenship and kingship. Stafford has already applied a concept of “queenship consortship” to both Edith and her mother-in-law. Stafford uses the term to describe the dual roles that females fulfilled, one of domestic companion and the other of divinely appointed queen, as their roles in the Late Antique and Early Medieval period were increasingly formalized through religious marriage and coronation ceremonies.¹³ In constructing specific spheres of female agency, Stafford successfully complicates the notion that medieval writings were strictly “anti-feminist.”¹⁴ She describes how “Although our sources show a deep-seated bias against the politically active woman, they also recognized ways in which women could and should act.”¹⁵ Women like Edith and her mother-in-law Emma had Biblical role models from which to understand female agency and political power. The iconography of Mary, mother of Jesus, in 10th century English bibles and books portrayed a queen of heaven with agency and power that could be a model for earthly queens like Edith.¹⁶

Similarly, gender and political power found intersection in concepts of kingship. Ruth Karras has successfully complicated notions of a singular medieval masculinity in her *From Boys to Men*. She argues that masculinity was self-constructed through proving oneself in a test against other *men*.¹⁷ Kingship thus represents the top of an exclusively hierarchal chain of testing and proof. While the intersection of female gender and political authority necessitated male involvement, that of masculinity and political power was constructed through male-male relationships only. However, like Stafford’s conceptualization of “queen

¹³ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 129.

¹⁴ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 25.

¹⁵ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 25.

¹⁶ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 27.

¹⁷ Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 11.

consortship” kings maintained both earthly and divine roles. The construction of kingship mirrored that of sainthood and piety in that it needed to be tested and proven. This vision of kingship thus provides a useful lens for analyzing the intersection between masculinity and political power that can be related to that between masculinity and piety. Such a comparative framework is necessary to construct a complex figure like that of Edward the Confessor.

Just as the texts with narratives of Edith and Edward’s marriage present conclusions about complex and changing intersections, so must my theoretical framework be appropriately complex. Using a self-reflective post-modern perspective is necessary for weighing the positionality of both the text’s authors and the impact of my own positionality. As such, it is essential to conduct intensive textual analysis. Another broad analytic perspective, feminist post-structuralism, is employed in order to consider dynamic structural change of difference as resulting from discourse. Using such a perspective matches the needs of examining a specific narrative and specific texts within broad structural change. With such a theoretical perspective, Edith and Edward’s narrative can be shaped within dynamic and changing discourses of larger gender, political, sexual, and religious structures. As well, *feminist* post-structuralism is particularly relevant to discussion of a marriage, as it is particularly focused on discourses of difference.

The historiography of gender and sexuality in early medieval Europe provides useful examples of both methodologies and the application of post-structuralism to topics of gender and sexuality in medieval England. Additionally, the work of Ruth Karras and Pauline Stafford present the intersection of gender and political power as manifested in roles of queenship and kingship. The theoretical intersection is thus defined through tangible roles. Combining the threads of broad analytical perspectives, like post-modernism and feminist

post-structuralism, with more specific historiographic techniques and applications to pre-modern England will give my textual analysis the flexibility of context and the ability of cross-comparison.

The theoretical frameworks of post-modernism and feminist post-structuralism will be applied to a specific method of textual analysis. The double context of broad and author-specific will first be used to consider author positionality. Following that, changing narratives with specific reference to chastity will be detailed and analyzed as both products of author context and larger frameworks of discourse. Both “negative” reading of chronicles (looking for gaps and silences) and “positive” reading of chronicles (for narrative itself and explicit judgments) will be used to compile the historiographical trajectory of the chastity narrative. Within this analysis, Edward and Edith will be compared to both other kings/saints/queens and *expectations* of queenship/kingship and sainthood.

The Reign of Edward the Confessor and the Godwin family

Examining interpretations of Edith and Edward’s marriage requires the political context of Edward’s reign. Edward the Confessor reigned on the throne of England from 1042 to 1066. Son of Aethelred the Unready and Emma of Normandy, Edward was born in England in 1003 but exiled to Normandy at an early age, when his father died and his (eventual) stepfather, Cnut of Denmark, took the English throne in 1016. Cnut ruled from northern England, known as the Danegeld, as part of a broad, North Sea-based empire. With his death in 1035, his empire collapsed. England, however, after a brief take-over by Cnut’s illegitimate son Harold Harefoot, was retained by Emma and Cnut’s son, Harthacnut. Emma supported Harthacnut as the next king of England rather than Edward, and Edward’s chances of becoming King of England seemed slim. However, Edward’s younger half-brother invited

him to return to the English court in 1041 and, with Harthacnut's sudden death the next year, Edward assumed the English throne, restoring the Saxon line of Wessex.

After this long process of acquiring the throne, Edward began his leadership in hesitation and uncertainty. His marriage to Edith, daughter of the Earl of Wessex, early in his reign can be taken as a sign of baronial pressure to enmesh himself within Anglo-Saxon politics after his years in Normandy, as well as pressure to produce an heir.¹⁸ The choice of Godwin's daughter associated him with the most powerful barony in the land and quelled other baronial pressures and concerns. Additionally, as Stafford notes, "royal marriages to noble daughters are a feature of the entire period and are not to be identified as a sign of a dynasty in special difficulty."¹⁹ However, the marriage did set the stage for a power struggle with Godwin. Tension between father and son-in-law culminated nine years later in the 'crisis of 1051,' in which Godwin was accused of attacking Edward's Norman ally Eustace of Boulogne. Though banished to the Continent, Godwin was able to defy Edward's order and come back, restoring his power as Earl of Wessex. Defeated by Godwin politically, Edward seems to have focused more on his religious life.²⁰ Edward died without an heir in 1066, precipitating the Norman Conquest by William of Normandy, who, at the battle of Hastings, bested Edith's brother Harold for the English throne.

Even within his lifetime, Edward had a reputation for maintaining strong connections with the church and promoting a strong religious life in England. He sent bishops to Leo IX's papal council, re-establishing the crown's connection to papal authority. His building of Westminster Abbey is perhaps the most famous example of his widely known patronage of the church and religious establishments. That patronage was a part of the impetus behind

¹⁸ Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, 73.

¹⁹ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 39.

²⁰ Mortimer, "Edward the Confessor," 26-27.

canonizing Edward. The process of formal, papal canonization of Edward began when his body was found uncorrupted, or free from decomposition so as to prove saintliness, in 1102. Though the first petition for canonization was begun in 1038, the formal process wasn't complete until 1161.

Chapter 1: The Intersection of Politics and Gender in the 11th -13th Century

Sources

The Political Landscape of 11th – 13th Century England

Edward's canonization was a reflection of the goals of the Angevin and Plantagenet successors of the Norman invaders of 1066. The historiography of Edward's and Edith's lives as a whole was situated within the broader context of changing English politics from the 11th to 14th centuries. William's immediate successors imposed a hierarchy of Norman French over Anglo-Saxon both politically and linguistically. The suppression of Anglo-Saxon language and culture eventually produced a somewhat ironic memorialization and glorification of the Anglo-Saxon past. This glorification developed to legitimize Norman-based political authority by connecting it to Anglo-Saxon political authority. This trend in English historical writing began during the reign of Henry II and came to full fruition in the reign of Henry III, who renovated Westminster in his attempt to imitate Edward.²¹

Successive challenges to royal authority arose in twelfth century England. Most notable of these was the Anarchy of 1135-1141, which erupted after the disputed succession of Stephen to the throne due to the death of Henry I's son and heir. The challenger to Stephen's authority was his cousin and Henry's daughter, Matilda. Matilda's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to gain the throne is illuminating about the changing role of English queenship. Matilda's gender did preclude her from some baronial support, but England never had an equivalent of France's Salic Law, forbidding women to rule. Stephen did not necessarily overcome her due to being male, but, rather, due to Matilda's own arrogance in

²¹Carpenter dates Henry III's association with Edward the Confessor long before the rebuilding of the cathedral, to 1233 [Carpenter, "King Henry III and Edward the Confessor," 891].

refusing to lower taxes.²² Matilda's claim to the throne was recognized as more legitimate than Stephen's. Indeed, it was that more legitimate claim to the throne, in addition to his own merits, that enabled her to force Stephen to disinherit his own son in favor of Matilda's son Henry. Despite the recognition of Matilda's more legitimate claim to the throne both during and immediately following her lifetime, later historians such as Gervase of Canterbury de-emphasized both her legitimacy and role in governance.²³ Her power as a queen became deliberately excluded from the mainstream historical narrative of Later Medieval England.

The Anarchy would not be the last turbulence in Early Medieval English governance; the 13th century would bring yet more internal challenges to royal authority. The famous Magna Carta of 1215 imposed by John's barons was only a precursor to the limits that would be imposed upon English royalty under the Provisions of Oxford of 1258. Forced on Henry III by a group of Barons led by Simon de Montfort, the Provisions were the first document to force the meeting of Parliament at regular intervals and state that the king was subject to rule by consent of his barons.²⁴ Though the barons were quickly defeated by a young future King Edward I and the Provisions voided, they left an indelible mark on English royalty.²⁵

An increasing xenophobia in English political institutions emerged as another prominent shift in English royal authority under the Angevins and early Plantagenets. While under the Conqueror and early Norman/Angevin rulers, the elite of England remained informed by Norman-French customs and ways. A sense that England should be ruled strictly by the English emerged during the rule of Henry III. Henry's barons under de Montfort in

²² As well, some of the English magnates were afraid that the foreign interests of Matilda's husband Geoffrey of Anjou would become the real power behind the throne [Williams and Echols, "Between Pit and Pedestal," 190].

²³ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 197.

²⁴ Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 270-272.

²⁵ Edward and his successors were more aware of the needs of their barons and more collaborative with their barony as a whole. Deposed by his own son and mysteriously murdered at Berkley Castle, Edward II's disastrous reign demonstrated what could happen to kings who blatantly favored certain baronial families.

fact rebelled partly due to Henry's favoritism for his Poitevin half-brothers, the Lusignans. De Montfort, ironically himself French and not English, inserted an almost proto-nationalistic undertone to the rebellion.²⁶ This dialogue was influenced by 12th century writing about the past, which had glorified the Anglo-Saxon period as one in which the English truly ruled England and the nation was without the stain of French overlordship. These three trends in English politics, the acknowledgement and repudiation of female authority (as shown in the case of The Anarchy), the increasing subjection of royal authority to the barony, and anti-French xenophobia were both influenced and were influenced by historical writing about Anglo-Saxon England generally and Edward specifically.

The Sources

Just as English politics underwent broad transformations over the course of the Early Middle Ages, English historical writing underwent drastic changes. The term "Twelfth Century Renaissance" was first postulated by C.H. Haskins in the 1920s and has been applied to what has been interpreted as an intensification and growth in English literature as a whole and historic writing in particular.²⁷ Though more recent historians, like Clanchy and Given-Wilson, have challenged the term, it seems applicable in the sense that many more historical accounts survive from the 12th century onwards – a dramatic enough increase that can't be entirely ascribed to greater rates of survival alone.²⁸ As well, as previously discussed, the

²⁶ Ridgeway, H. W. "Foreign Favourites and Henry III's Problems of Patronage," 590.

²⁷ Robert Hanning effectively summarized this interpretation of 12th century historical scholarship: "The Anglo-Norman historians who reexamined and recounted the national pasts of the English and Norman peoples introduced into the tradition of Christian, early medieval historiography new methods, new interests and new concepts; they approached the human condition, the national past, and divine providence in novel and sometimes startling ways." [Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain*, 123].

²⁸ Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 162-163; Given-Wilson offers the term "historical frenzy" as a more descriptive alternative [Given-Wilson, *Chroniclers*, 165].

English historical writing of the period was marked by nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxon past.²⁹

The sources that examine Edith and Edward's marriage can, as a whole, fit within this framework, though each had their own specific goals and motivations based on their patrons and cultural backgrounds.

The earliest source to discuss Edith and Edward's marriage is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Representing the viewpoint of the Anglo-Saxon community that would be silenced post-Norman Conquest, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is one of the most important sources for Late Antique and pre-Conquest England. Compiled between the 9th century and updated as late as 1154,³⁰ the multiple manuscripts became highly localized. As such, it is the most contemporaneous account of Edward's life and reign and, due to its Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, the most sympathetic treatment of both Godwin and Edith.

The next text chronologically to describe Edith and Edward's marriage is the anonymous *Vita Aedwardi Regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit* or *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*. Written at the behest of Edith herself at some point from 1065 to circa 1100, it depicts Edith, her father, and then family positively. Parts of the text, including that which treats Edith and Edward's marriage most extensively, are missing, due to the degradation of the only existing manuscript. The work is divided into roughly two parts, the first focusing on the deeds of the Godwin family, Edith's father and brothers, while the second is an account of Edward's religious life. Both the content and the style of the work point to a highly educated male author, almost certainly a monk. Though the author's exact identity remains a mystery, his positionality about Edith is not; Edith is "the illustrious

²⁹ Southern and Thomas among other historians have linked this revival of Pre-Conquest history with the retaining of a strong sense of "Englishness" and a critical piece in the survival over the English identity over the Norman [Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 355].

³⁰ Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 38-40.

mistress whom we chiefly serve in this present account.”³¹ Because Edith herself likely funded the production of the text, it may be the closest to self-representation of Edith that exists. As a consequence of Edith’s patronage, the representation of Edith and her family, as well as Edward, is clearly positive.

William of Malmesbury’s *Chronicle of the English Kings* was the next historical work to write extensively about Edward. Completed around 1125, the work was somewhat modeled on Anglo-Saxon monk Bede’s earlier *Ecclesiastic History of the English People* in its attempt at a comprehensive narrative and attention to documentation. Born of a Norman father and Anglo-Saxon mother, Malmesbury’s dual Norman and Anglo-Saxon heritage is reflected in his text.³² As such, Malmesbury attempted to integrate both perspectives. His critical and balanced approach can be seen in his depiction of Edward and Godwin and, by association, Edith.³³

Shortly after Malmesbury’s account was produced, the first hagiography³⁴ of Edward, the *Vita beati Eadwardi*, was produced by Westminster monk Osbert of Clare. Written in 1138, Osbert’s account was written with the two-fold goals of gaining further patronage from King Stephen and furthering Edward’s canonization process, which had just been started.³⁵ Osbert’s attempt was unsuccessful, though helpful, and Edward’s canonization wasn’t complete until 1161. The other major hagiographical work about Edward, *Vita S. Eduardi Regis et confessoris* by French abbot Aelred of Rievaulx, was completed two years after

³¹ Barlow, “The Life of King Edward,” 67.

³² Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 67.

³³ Malmesbury’s depiction of Edith, Edward, and their marriage would be copied near verbatim by monk Roger of Wendover in his chronicle *The Flowers of History*, who would have access to Malmesbury’s work after his banishment to St. Albans for embezzling funds at Belvoir Abbey. As he did not say anything original about Edith’s and Edward’s chastity, I did not find his work useful to consider within the text. However, his work as a whole would influence Matthew Paris, who was a contemporary of his at St. Albans [Roger of Wendover, *The Flowers of History*].

³⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I am defining hagiography as the biography of a sainted or venerated person.

³⁵ Huntington, “Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint,” 125.

Edward's canonization. Both Osbert and Aelred aimed to emphasize Edward's piety and ability to produce miracles. They used '*fama*' or common knowledge, such as the popularity of Edward's cult, which that may or may not have actually existed in widespread form, to legitimize Edward's holy authority.³⁶ As they aimed to promote Edward's piety and sanctity, they positively portrayed both Edward and Edith, who was connected to that piety as his wife.

Like William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon faced a dual loyalty born of mixed Norman and Anglo-Saxon heritage. His privileged background as an assistant to the Bishop of Lincoln, one of the English clergy's highest ranking positions, led him to be witness to some of the inner circle of England's wealthiest. By the time he wrote his *Historia Anglorum* or *History of the English People* in 1154, he had become cynical of authority and people in general due to witnessing the importance placed on wealth and belongings rather than God.³⁷ His cynicism was certainly evident in his portrayal of Edward, Godwin, and Edith, whose faults rather than their virtues Henry was careful to detail.³⁸

While Huntingdon's personal bitterness led him to stress the vices of his historical characters, Matthew Paris³⁹ was careful to detail the positive elements of Edward's reign. Written between 1230 and 1240, Paris' positive depiction of Edward in his *Estoire de seint Aedward le rei* or *History of Saint Edward the King* directly ties to his contemporary political

³⁶ Bozoky, "The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor," 178-179.

³⁷ Given-Wilson, *Chroniclers*, 159.

³⁸ This portrayal would be copied by Roger of Hoveden, a northern clerk with royal ties, in his *Annals*. Roger shares Henry's impersonal tone and it seems fitting in a stylistic sense that Roger would be drawn to follow Henry's interpretation. As with Roger of Wendover, Hoveden's lack of shifting chastity in Edith and Edward's marriage make his inclusion in the body of my text superfluous [Roger of Hoveden, *Annals of Roger of Hoveden*].

³⁹ Though there has long been debate about Paris' authorship, Fenster and Wogan-Browne compile a convincing set of arguments in favor of Paris. Evidence includes the relationship between information in the text and Paris' better known *Chronica Majora*, the dating of the text placing it at St. Albans within Paris' time there, and direct references in other works by Paris to having written such a text [Fenster and Wogan-Browne, "Introduction," 25-26].

climate. Paris, a monk at the rich monastery of St. Albans, was on close terms with Henry III, the English monarch most noted for promoting Edward's cult, and even dedicated the *Estoire* to Henry's young wife Eleanor of Provence. In some ways, the work was intended to be a manual about English tradition and kingship for Eleanor and, at the very least, can be seen as representing a vision of Anglo-Saxon kingship propagated by Henry III.⁴⁰ Paris's work is invested in Henry and Plantagenet royal authority but at the same time critical: his emphasis of Edward's healthy relationships with his own men was certainly a pointed message against Henry's favoritism for his foreign-born relations.

Political Dialogues

All the sources about Edith and Edward's marriage contextualize Edith in relation to her father, Earl Godwin, and her family as well as in relation to Edward. Indeed, interpretations of her family's role in Edward's reign impacted depictions of Edith and chastity within their marriage. Edith and her marriage to Edward, therefore, became positively or negatively portrayed based on the authors' stance on her father. Examining the development of the two canons of interpretation about Godwin thus becomes essential to understanding the political dialogues within the sources. These interpretations were largely influenced by the dynastic politics of the authors' lives, and their writings reflected their relationship to the Norman Conquest and the Norman's successor Angevin and Plantagenet dynasties. In addition to the influence of dynastic politics, political dialogues about Edith and Edward's marriage were influenced by the changing relationship between gender and political authority and the changing place of queenship. A discussion of expectations and changing models of queenship, therefore, is necessary for interpreting the changing political

⁴⁰ Eleanor was in fact likely given a copy of Paris's work prior to her marriage coronation with the probable purpose of learning some English traditions [Carmi Parsons, "Ritual and Symbol," 61; Fenster and Wogan Browne, "Introduction," 10].

dialogues within the sources. Political dialogues within the sources as a whole reveal the desire to legitimize Norman political authority and the more rigid relationship between gender and political authority both as factors influencing the insertion of chastity in the portrayal of Edith and Edward's marriage.

The depiction of the relationship between Earl Godwin and Edward was used to either associate Edward with, or dissociate him from, pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon politics. The first group of writers about Edward were "Pro-Godwin" and depicted him in a positive light. However, this trend in historiography is small and lasts only in those sources contemporary or near contemporary to Edith's lifetime, primarily *The Life of King Edward* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This camp of historiography promotes a dynamic of mentor-protégé in the relationship between Edward and Earl Godwin. Godwin is portrayed as Edward's guide and mentor in his tumultuous coming to the throne in 1042 in both *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *The Life of King Edward*. In both, Godwin becomes the moral, upright power behind the throne, who achieves a political balance under Edward that results in kingdom-wide peace. For example, *The Life of King Edward* describes Godwin as "O happy earl, in bairns and forebears blessed,/ Siring four guarantors of England's peace."⁴¹

In the middle of this spectrum of depictions of Godwin, William of Malmesbury offers perhaps the most complex picture of the relationship between Godwin and Edward. In his *Chronicle*, Edward turns to Godwin for advice about whether he should take the throne with the death of his stepbrother, and "begging [Godwin's] assistance to effect his return to Normandy, Godwin made him the greatest promises."⁴² Godwin is not only the all-knowing adviser upon whom Edward relies to gain his throne, but also the slippery politician.

⁴¹ *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, 27.

⁴² William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 215.

Malmesbury asserts that once Edward came to the throne, Godwin “paid little reverence to the king.”⁴³ Godwin consistently puts his ambitions ahead of the kingdom, contrasting with Malmesbury’s depiction of Edward as a simple man, who loves and is beloved by his kingdom. However, Malmesbury’s depiction lacks the sinister tone later historians would use for depicting Godwin.

Later chroniclers and particularly hagiographers were more blatantly anti-Godwin, due to their patronage by, and association with, Norman, Angevin, and Plantagenet figures. Henry of Huntingdon portrays Godwin as “a mighty earl and ruthless traitor.”⁴⁴ The short space in which Godwin appears in Huntingdon’s text is punctuated by Godwin’s betrayal of Edward. For Huntingdon, it is God that has the last laugh. Godwin dies, choking on a piece of bread while telling Edward that he has never and will not betray him. Huntingdon renders the scene dramatically: “But the true and just God heard the voice of the traitor, and in a short time [Godwin] was choked by that very bread, and tasted endless death.”⁴⁵

The changing interpretations of Godwin are crucial to understanding changing interpretations of Edward and Edith’s marriage, as views of Edith were largely influenced by the political stance of the author about her father and family. Malmesbury describes Edith in much the same way as he does her father—that neither she nor her father were “entirely free from suspicion of dishonour”⁴⁶ within their lifetimes. Huntingdon places Edith firmly with her Godwin clan by identifying her as the sister of the “Future King Harold” and emphasizes that Edward married Edith “for the protection of his kingdom.”⁴⁷ The passage both acknowledges Godwin’s power, as there would be disharmony without Edward’s

⁴³ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 214.

⁴⁴ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, 19.

⁴⁵ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, 22.

⁴⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 215-216.

⁴⁷ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, 20.

appeasement of Godwin by marrying Edith, and makes their union a begrudging necessity on Edward's part. Further in the passage, Huntingdon associates their union with a famine that struck England, a sign of divine displeasure or retribution. In Huntingdon's perspective, though the political reality forced Edward to marry Edith, God demonstrated through nature that Edward was too holy to become unchaste and enter into the married state.

The crisis of 1051 is a particularly potent example of the correlation between views of Edith and her family and a context in which Edward rejects Edith based on her connection to her family. Historians who portray Godwin in a positive light portray the crisis of 1051 as a consequence of Edward's jealousy at Godwin's power. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* comments that the king felt it necessary to banish Godwin because "he had been exalted so high, even to the point of ruling the king and all England."⁴⁸ Godwin is punished for his own success rather than overreaching or threatening the positive, stabilizing force of Edward's rule. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* discusses Godwin's specific grievances that caused the crisis, indicting Eustace, Count of Boulogne, for making excursions onto his land. In the text, Godwin's reaction to these events seems natural: "indignant that such things should happen in his earldom, he began to gather his people from all over his earldom."⁴⁹ In *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the end of the dispute leads to the confirmation "of full friendship with them, and promised the full benefits of all the laws to all the people. And they outlawed all the Frenchmen who had promoted injustice."⁵⁰ Not only is the conflict completely overcome and eradicated from the men's memories, but the blame is also ascribed to Eustace and his men, making Godwin the victim rather than the villain.

⁴⁸ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 120.

⁴⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 117.

⁵⁰ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 124.

The Life of King Edward portrays these events with a similar spin. In it, Edith's damaged reputation due to these events is portrayed as short-sightedness on Edward's part, as he "put away the lady who was consecrated his queen, and deprived her of all that she owned, land and gold and silver and everything; and entrusted her to his sister a Wherwell."⁵¹ Just as in *The Life of King Edward* as a whole, both Edward and Edith are positively portrayed in the author's attempt to please Edith, his benefactor.

William of Malmesbury describes much the same scene: "All of the property of the queen was seized, and herself delivered into the custody of the king's sister."⁵² Though Malmesbury is more critical of Godwin's reasons for causing the tension between himself and Edward, he is seemingly sympathetic to the plight of Edith's situation. Huntingdon, by contrast, depicts Edward's justifiable anger at Godwin projecting onto Edith, his daughter, and that "sending the queen away he [Edward] took her treasure and lands from her."⁵³ Fitting with Huntingdon's previous characterizations, nearly the direct opposite to *The Life of King Edward*, all the characters are portrayed negatively. Edward is unreasonable and cruel, Godwin scheming and disloyal, and Edith anonymous. Huntingdon's portrayal reflects broader changes in creating Edith as a silent witness rather than a figure with agency or piety of her own. Edith's personal qualities are not detailed, and the previously quoted reference to her being sent away during the crisis of 1051 is the only reference made to her after their marriage.

In contrast to Malmesbury or Huntingdon, Paris dissociates Edith as far as possible from her father. His portrayal is unique among the secular histories in that while he still paints an unflattering portrait of Godwin, he depicts the difference between the two as "the

⁵¹ *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 120.

⁵² William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 220.

⁵³ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, 21.

rose comes from the thorn, Edith came from Godwin.”⁵⁴ Paris takes inspiration from Osbert of Clare and Aelred of Rievaulx’s hagiographical accounts by portraying Edith as aloof to Godwin’s treachery and Edward’s partner in chastity. Indeed, Paris likens their marriage to living “as in a monastic order.”⁵⁵ This conclusion was a result of his purpose of writing for Queen Eleanor as well as trying to portray everything connected to Edward as positive. Paris can’t give a positive depiction of Godwin because the Godwins represented a political challenge to Henry III’s dynastic ancestry; however, Paris can and does integrate Edith collaboratively into Edward’s religious life.

Similar to Huntingdon, Malmesbury and Paris interpret Edith and Edward’s marriage as reflecting broader shifts in changing views of queenship and female authority within the Early Middle Ages. Paris, writing for the Edward-devoted Henry III, represents Edith without agency and with loyalty to Edward alone. Her family and origins are subsumed within her rigid devotion to Edward. The subordination of queen to king was more institutionalized, formalized, and standardized throughout the Early Middle Ages⁵⁶ – particularly in England. Carmi Parsons has noted that English queens held less ceremonial power than their French counterparts – the inability to pardon a convicted criminal of her own authority and even a coronation ceremony more emphatically displaying her subordinate role to her husband.⁵⁷

Stafford’s concept of “Queen consortship” is a particularly helpful one for conceptualizing the changing relationship between women and political authority.⁵⁸ Stafford

⁵⁴ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 68.

⁵⁵ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 69.

⁵⁶ Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society*, 10.

⁵⁷ Carmi Parsons specifically identifies the use of the scepter within the ceremony and the change to having the queen seated as on the left as demonstrative of this shift [Carmi Parsons, “English Medieval Queenship,” 62-66].

⁵⁸ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 129.

uses the term to describe the dual roles that females fulfilled, one of domestic companion and the other of divinely appointed queens, as their roles in the Late Antique and Early Medieval period were increasingly formalized through religious marriage and coronation ceremonies.⁵⁹ Both roles of queen consortship came with specific situational obligations that were fulfilled both by the position of the woman and her individual characteristics. Key tenets of conduct for royal wives included, along with chastity, obedience, being sweet tempered, piety, and kindness.⁶⁰ Courage, wisdom, and intelligence were also admired traits and, when queens had an opportunity to exercise them, could strengthen their own power and position. Stafford uses a comparison between Edward's mother, Emma of Normandy, and Edith to demonstrate the possibilities of female authority during the period. While Emma's motherhood made her a strong agent in the rule of both her sons Harthacnut and Edward until her death in 1052, Edith's position after Edward's death was far more precarious.⁶¹

Not only does the portrayal of Edith reflect changing expectations of queen-consortship, but undoubtedly also reflects expectations for royal marriage. Ideally, the advantages of marriage would include wealth, property, confirming alliances, and producing heirs. Beyond just the material goods a bride could provide, in some cases "a woman's primary advantage was not her property but her lineage. A usurper, or any ruler who felt his hold on the throne was tenuous, might need such a bride."⁶² In some ways, Edward's choice of Edith can be seen as fulfilling this last goal – aligning himself with a strong Anglo-Saxon house to integrate himself with a political landscape alien to him, having been brought up in Normandy.

⁵⁹ Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, 129.

⁶⁰ Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 135-136.

⁶¹ Stafford, *Queen Emma Queen Edith*, 4.

⁶² Williams and Echols, "Between Pit and Pedestal," 185.

The exact reasons for Edward's choice of Edith as a bride are disputed among the texts. In several of the accounts, Edward's decision to marry results from baronial pressure. Aelred of Rievaulx describes Edward's marriage as resulting from "the nobles, anxious about the succession, advised the king to think about marriage."⁶³ Paris describes how the barons assembled and begged Edward "to take a wife in order to strengthen the kingdom."⁶⁴ Huntingdon also describes the marriage as "for the protection of his kingdom."⁶⁵ Several of the texts are more ambiguous. The section of *The Life of King Edward* detailing Edward's reasons for marriage is missing. Malmesbury doesn't speculate about Edward's motivations. These motivations for marriage are tied firmly into the conflicted views of Godwin and the contrast between the Pro-Godwin and Anti-Godwin interpretations of Godwin and Edward's relationship. The Pro-Godwin camp, such as *The Life of King Edward*, describes confirming the friendship as the reason while the Anti-Godwin camp, such as Huntingdon and Paris, describes the marriage happening despite Godwin's antagonism.

Just as there are differing interpretations about why Edward married Edith, there are differing interpretations about the personal qualities that Edith brought to the throne. All except Huntingdon mention that she was educated at Wilton and raised in a convent atmosphere. For Malmesbury, this is both positive and negative and he describes how she "was the school of every liberal art, though little skilled in earthly matters."⁶⁶ Osbert of Clare describes her education as both earth-bound and holy and equates her to the Roman goddess of wisdom, describing her as "another Minerva."⁶⁷ Aelred associates her education with giving her a "the dignity of an old woman" while still young and making her "not

⁶³ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 34.

⁶⁴ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 67.

⁶⁵ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, 21.

⁶⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 216.

⁶⁷ translated in Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 14.

accustomed to dissolute laziness.”⁶⁸ Paris describes her education as providing a more earthly skill in that “she had been taught to comport herself graciously.”⁶⁹

Edith’s education was correlated to her preparedness for the roles of queenship. For Malmesbury, then, the ambiguity of Edith’s education makes her authority as queen also ambiguous and she was never “entirely free from suspicion of dishonour”⁷⁰ in her lifetime. For Osbert of Clare, Edith’s convent education had prepared her to be a wise councilor and benefactress and the only one “worthy of such a husband from among the daughters of the princes.”⁷¹ Similarly, in Paris’s account, her mastery of female accomplishments qualified her to be queen and she is accepted “because of her goodness, intelligence and training.”⁷²

The one crucial role of queen-consortship that Edith didn’t fulfill was begetting an heir. For the Anglo-Norman authors, this was both contradictorily positive and negative. It was positive in that it represented Edward’s and God’s decision for a Norman supplanting the throne of England and a cut off of traditional Anglo-Saxon authority from the English throne. However, Edith then also fails in her duty to provide Edward with heirs. The most important of a queen’s responsibilities, producing an heir, increasingly defined success in queenship. For example, Queen Philipa of Hainault, wife of Edward III was beloved for her litter of male heirs.⁷³ Edith’s failure to produce an heir was not only a failure of her queenly duties, but it also incited major political upheaval. In some ways, because Edith couldn’t fulfill her queenly duties, the narrative of chastity translates her relationship to Edward to that of a father and daughter. Osbert of Clare specifically draws this analogy, describing how Edith

⁶⁸ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 35.

⁶⁹ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 68.

⁷⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 216.

⁷¹ translated in Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 14.

⁷² Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 69.

⁷³ Williams and Echols, “Between Pit and Pedestal,” 190.

“served him as a daughter.”⁷⁴ In this way, chastity allows for a positive portrayal of Edith even with the failure in her role as queen to produce offspring.

As can be seen in shifting interpretations of Edward’s and Earl Godwin’s relationship, political dialogues within the sources detailing the marriage of Edward and Edith were influenced by the changing political landscape of Early Medieval England. The development of an “Anti-Godwin” interpretation of their relationship impacted interpretations of Edward and Edith’s family, due to the connections drawn between Edith and her kin. The example of the ‘crisis of 1051’ shows how authors either associated Edith with, or dissociated her from, her family. As well, it exemplifies how political context of individual authors informed their interpretation of Edith and Edward’s marriage. Finally, Edith’s conformity or nonconformity to the increasingly prescribed roles of “queen-consortship” played a prominent role in authors’ interpretations. Her failure to produce a child, a central role, was both positive and negative, in that it paved the way for Norman kingship but also incited the political turmoil of 1066. Untangling these political dialogues from the changing interpretations of Edith and Edward’s marriage reveals both the legitimization of Norman political authority and the increasingly rigid relationship between gender and political authority as informing a more ambiguous or negative portrayal of Edith and her marriage to Edward over the course of the Early Middle Ages.

⁷⁴ translated in Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 16.

Chapter Two: The Intersection Between Piety and Sexuality in the 11th-13th Century

Sources

The Religious Landscape of 11th-13th Century England

Just as the political context of England informed political dialogues within texts about Edward and Edith's marriage, changing religious structures and mores in England impacted the religious dialogues within the texts. England was certainly party to the changes wrought in religious life on a European scale, including increasing Papal authority, the standardization of monastic life under the Gregorian Reforms, and the growth of saints' cults. The turbulent relationship between Popes and English Kings evolved from the dynamism and expansion of papal authority in the face of traditional kingship. The solidification of church practices under the Gregorian Reforms provides an example of the standardization of religious life over the Early Middle Ages in England and the institutionalization of the connection between chastity and piety. As well, saints' cults developed as an intermediary to God, and their patronage and importance intensified over the course of the Middle Ages.

The Popes and English Kings had a rocky relationship at best. The papacy's authority began expanding in the 1050s, with the solidification of the Great Schism, leaving the East and West Popes more able to generate their own authority from their respective portion of Christendom. Leo IX began a campaign for increasing papal power during this time, and started the Papacy on the road to expand its authority.⁷⁵ Leo even visited England, condemning practices of clerical marriage and concubinage and drawing the north of England back into papal authority.⁷⁶ Kings of England had to contend with growing papal authority and many resisted. Much of the contention involved the right of Kings of England

⁷⁵ Bluementhal, *The Investiture Controversy*, 160 ; Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 95.

⁷⁶ Bluementhal, *The Investiture Controversy*, 147.

to independently appoint bishops. For this very reason, William the Conqueror, Henry II and John had a notably strained relationship with the papacy.⁷⁷

Part of the reason for the contentious relations between popes and kings was the way in which England adopted new papal doctrine in the 11th century. The Gregorian Reforms, as they are known, were instituted during the 1073-1085 reign of Pope Gregory VII and, with the intent of making the church more pious and less corrupt, prohibited locally endorsed practices such as the marriage of all clergy. The Gregorian Reforms therefore also represent the increasing emphasis on chastity within religious life. Archbishop of Canterbury Lanfranc implemented his own version of the Gregorian Reforms in England but did not succeed in making William I swear fealty to the Pope.⁷⁸ Consequently, England's adoption of the Gregorian reforms was a more lengthy process. Though the unique nature of the adoption of the Gregorian Reforms in England paved the way for Royal-Papal conflict, it solidified and standardized codes of conduct for monastic religious orders.⁷⁹ As well, it gradually institutionalized a greater separation between sexual activity and piety in England.

Along with an increasing emphasis on clerical chastity, the growth of saints' cults was another trend within Early Medieval England. Saints came to be important intercessors and their piety a tool for communicating with God. They were called to intervene in broader and broader concerns, including social conditions.⁸⁰ As saints came to be seen as more significant, pilgrimages to see relics of holy martyrs, believed to cause miracles for centuries,

⁷⁷ Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 130.

⁷⁸ Clanchy, *England and its Rulers*, 95.

⁷⁹ Henry's difficulties with the papacy stemmed from his 1164 passage of the Constitutions of Clarendon, which sought to limit papal authority over English clergy. The tense situation resulting from the Constitutions of Clarendon was aggravated by the death in 1170 of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket, at the hands of Henry's knights. Becket's death would mark a turning point in the papal-crown relationship in England. Though Henry publicly repented of his role in Becket's death, his attempt at more positive papal-crown relations wouldn't prevent Henry's son John from being excommunicated in 1207 for squabbling over the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury [Clanchy *England and its Rulers*, 107].

⁸⁰ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 240.

became more common over the course of the Early Middle Ages. The building of religious sites to house relics intensified.⁸¹ Shrines were constructed to facilitate spiritual connection to individual saints and draw in pilgrims. In addition to increasing architectural displays of saints' piety through saints' shrines, hagiography became a new venue for advertising piety. In Edward's case, the particular goals of hagiography would have a measurable impact on chastity within the construction of his piety.

Religious Dialogues

Along with changing dynastic politics and visions of queenship, broader religious trends of the institutionalization of the connection between chastity and sanctity under the Gregorian Reforms and the intensification of saints' cults were other primary factors in altering interpretations of Edith and Edward's chastity. In order to understand the impact of religious dialogues on the sources, it is first necessary to examine Edward's canonization process and cult and how both were motivated by specific Plantagenet dynastic goals combined with broader religious shifts. An examination of the construction of both Edward and Edith's piety within the texts reveals both the impact of the canonization and the broader religious trends within Early Medieval England. The goal of Edward's canonization informed hagiography by Osbert of Clare and Aelred de Rievaulx, and their depictions of Edith and Edward's marriage conform to the greater mutual exclusivity between sexual activity and piety over the course of the early Middle Ages. Osbert and Aelred's depictions of Edward and Edith's chaste marriage were influenced by the scholarly work and opinion about chaste marriages. Therefore, tracing the development of the concept of chaste marriage and its impact on the specific motives of chastity cited within narratives of Edith and Edward's

⁸¹ The building of shrines was aided by the development of Gothic architecture, which allowed in light to emphasize the presence of God and glorify God, Jesus, and saints.

marriage is necessary. Ultimately, examining religious dialogues and the place of religion within changing interpretations of Edith and Edward's chastity reveals the increasing rigidity of the relationship between piety and sexuality in the Early Middle Ages.

Religious dialogues within texts about Edward were impacted by his canonization. Within hagiography, the specific goal of Edward's canonization informed those constructions of piety. Supported by King Stephen, Osbert of Clare drafted and presented the first petition of canonization in 1139. While earlier work by historian Bernhard Scholz postulated that the recent canonization of Strum of Fulda and internal strife within Westminster were the primary factors for Innocent II's denial of the first petition,⁸² medievalist Edina Bozoky more recently argued it was Stephen's arrests of the bishops of Salisbury and Lincoln that prompted the refusal of the petition.⁸³ Papal approval would come in 1161, largely a consequence of Henry II's support of Alexander III over anti-Pope Victor IV.⁸⁴ Henry used the figure of Edward and his canonization to connect himself with an ancient Anglo-Saxon seat of power. Edward was the perfect figure for Henry II to invoke in his combination of piety and authority and became, as Aelred describes, the king "who joined the English and Norman lines."⁸⁵

During and after Edward's canonization process, royal involvement in promoting Edward's cult meant that Edward's piety was shaped by authors to fit royal goals. Both Stephen and Henry II used Edward to promote their own dynastic place within English kingship, as connected to Edward by William the Conqueror, and propagate a sense of

⁸² Scholz, "Canonization," 48-49.

⁸³ Bozoky, "The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor," 181.

⁸⁴ Victor was a Ghibelline anti-Pope, a factor supporting the popes in northern Italy rather than France. His challenge to Alexander was particularly strong as he had the support of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa [Bozoky, "The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor," 185].

⁸⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*,

Englishness. Hugh Thomas argues that promotion of Edward's cult, beginning as early as Stephen's reign, resulted in greater solidarity and loyalty to England within both the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman communities by the 13th century.⁸⁶ The remaking of Edward's shrine by Henry III and even naming of a child after him, made the tie between Plantagenet political and spiritual authority and its Anglo-Saxon roots as visible as possible.

As Kings of England promoted Edward's piety and cult, Edward's kingship increasingly came to present a model for both Henry III and other Plantagenet kings to follow. To that end, the different authors, even in Malmesbury's depiction of a simplistic man, portray Edward's piety as a code of behavior which should be imitated. Good kingly practices are instilled along with piety – cooperation with the barons, sympathy for the poor, upholding of the law, and, in particular, patronage of the church. Chastity also increasingly figures into this construction, likely influenced by the Gregorian Reforms. As Paris describes, Edward “conquered the flesh through chastity, the world through his humility, and the devil by his virtues.”⁸⁷ With his canonization, Edward's piety became a model for Plantagenet rulers.

Though Edward was the first Anglo-Saxon king to be canonized, St. Edmund the Martyr, another Anglo-Saxon saint, provides another model of a saint whose cult the Normans used. As Ridyard describes, “there was no clear alignment of conquering monks and laymen against Anglo-Saxon saint.”⁸⁸ Though the Norman clergy insisted on scrutinizing Anglo-Saxon saints and verifying their holiness, they did not reject them outright and came to adopt them within their own religious practices. For both Edward and Edmund, their connections to particular religious locations, Westminster in the case of Edward and Bury St.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 296.

⁸⁷ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 54.

⁸⁸ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 229.

Edmunds in the case of Edmund, also became important in propagating their cults. Each abbey used its connections to the Anglo-Saxon saint to draw pilgrims and increase its own importance.⁸⁹ While both saints were taken up by the Normans and used by particular religious locations, the construction of their piety can be contrasted in that chastity was not inserted into narratives about Edmund. Rather, Edmund's piety derived from his martyrdom. Chastity wasn't necessary in Edmund's narratives due to the holy manner of his death.

Like Edward, Edith's piety is also constructed both within and without outside the context of chastity. *The Life of King Edward* actively compares Edward and Edith's piety. The author describes "with what zeal they showed their devout faith in the church of Christ."⁹⁰ Her building projects at Wilton Abbey are compared to Edward's at Westminster. As previously discussed, her education at Wilton was depicted within the sources. Her acts of piety fall within the traditional royal sphere of patronage. Along with her education and patronage, chastity also figures into her relationship to piety. Depictions of Edith as able or unable to collaborate in Edward's chastity are contrasted between Anti-Godwin secular histories, such as Malmesbury, to Pro-Godwin secular histories and hagiography.

Along with Edward's canonization, the concept of chaste marriage influenced the construction of both Edith and Edward's piety. Edward's two first hagiographers, Osbert of Clare and Aelred of Riveaux, were both situated in a larger context of opinion and scholarship about chaste marriages. The concept of chaste marriages developed over the course of the Late Antique and Early Middle Ages and met with conflicted response.⁹¹ On

⁸⁹ Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, 227.

⁹⁰ *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, 67.

⁹¹ This controversy derived from both differing interpretations of the luke-warm reception of marriage by St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians and the undesirability of dissolving valid marriages in both fourth and eleventh century campaigns for clerical chastity [McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages," 104-105].

one hand, for Christian scholars like St. Augustine, virginity was seen to keep men and, especially women, 'pure,' and purity resulted in being closer to God. Chaste marriages, however, called into question what defined marriage and could be seen as dangerous in that they failed to produce children. A lack of heirs, as previously discussed, could be especially problematic for rulers. The image of the chaste marriage was largely influenced by the Biblical marriage of Mary and Joseph, upon whom theologians centered this debate. However, as McGlynn and Moll point out, "hagiography presents an idealized picture of chastity and often virginity within marriage."⁹² Hagiographers portrayed the chaste marriage positively to suit their own ends: chaste marriage solved the dilemma of how to balance the added sanctity of virginity with the historical fact of their marriage.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, chastity within narratives about Edward and Edith's marriage falls into three categories: not mentioned, implied, or explicitly stated. Only *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Henry of Huntingdon fall into the first category.⁹³ The political context of the first makes this logical – the different manuscripts are concerned largely with local affairs. Logically, chastity wouldn't appear in the second because of its brevity and its emphasis on the impact of the Norman Conquest. *The Life of King Edward* falls into the second category, implied chastity, as the portion dealing directly with the marriage was lost.⁹⁴ Osbert of Clare, William of Malmesbury, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Matthew Paris all fall into the third category.⁹⁵

⁹² McGlynn and Moll, "Chaste Marriage in the Middle Ages," 103.

⁹³ As well, Roger of Hoveden who, as discussed in footnote 24, copied much of his *Annals* (or *Chronica* in the Latin) from Huntingdon [Roger of Hoveden, *Annals*].

⁹⁴ Barlow has made a case that a section of Richard of Cirencester's *Speculum historiale*, detailing the chastity explicitly, was lifted from the missing section [Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, xxxix-xl].

⁹⁵ As well, Roger of Wendover whose interpretation of Edith and Edward's marriage was largely derived from Malmesbury [Roger of Wendover, *The Flowers of History*].

Figure 1: Timeline and Chart of Chastity Narrative in 11th-13th Century Sources

Timeline	Not Mentioned	Implicit	Explicit
1066	1066: <i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>	c. 1066: <i>Vita Aedwardi regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit</i>	
1100			
1125			1125: <i>Gesta Regum Anglorum</i> (William of Malmesbury) 1135: <i>Vita beati Eadwardi</i> (Osbert of Clare)
1150	1156: <i>Historia Anglorum</i> (Henry of Huntingdon)		1163: <i>Vita Edwardi Regis</i> (Aelred of Rievaulx)
1200	c. 1200: <i>Chronica</i> (Roger of Hoveden)		
1225			1235: <i>Flores historium</i> (Roger of Wendover) 1236: <i>Estoire de seint Aedward le rei</i> (Matthew Paris)
1250			

Of the non-hagiographic sources that present the marriage of Edward and Edith as chaste, religious motivations are depicted as only a part of the motivation behind chastity. Indeed, the dynastic legitimization and changing conceptions of queenship play a more primary role. For example, William of Malmesbury cannot determine whether or not Edward's chastity stemmed "from dislike to her family, which he prudently dissembled from

the exigency of the times, or out of pure regard to chastity.”⁹⁶ By contrast, Mathew Paris is more assured that Edward’s desire for chastity came strictly from religious motives, and his prayer to stay chaste, addressed to Saints Peter and John, before choosing a wife, was answered. However, Paris does clarify that political necessity forced Edward to choose Godwin’s daughter over the assurance of staying chaste. Within Paris’ text, Edward’s ability to remain chaste results from “the goodness of the maiden.”⁹⁷ Edith’s compliance enables Edward’s chastity. The message of queenly conformity was certainly relevant for Paris’ intended audience of Queen Eleanor and reflects what Paris considered Henry III’s prized qualities for his queen.

Osbert, however, depicts Edward’s chastity as predestined and *fait accompli*. Though Edward is concerned with the outcome of his marriage, “it was decided to seek a wife worth of such a husband from among the daughters of the princes. One alone was found in that people, inferior to none, superior to all.”⁹⁸ Whereas Paris depicts Edward as lucky, Osbert depicts the choice of Edith as deliberate with the purpose of finding a spouse to share in Edward’s chastity. Joanna Huntington makes an apt comparison to Osbert’s *Vita* (Life) of Saint Ethelbert, for whom the internal dilemma about whether or not to marry is far more extensive.⁹⁹ Both of these depictions suggest predestined virginity and emphasizes Edward’s connection to, and patronage of, Westminster Abbey. Ridyard’s thesis that hagiography was increasingly used as a way to connect saints to particular religious locations to further their interests seems fitting within this context.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ William of Malmesbury, *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 216.

⁹⁷ Matthew Paris, *History of Saint Edward the King*, 69.

⁹⁸ translated in Barlow, *Life of King Edward*, 14,

⁹⁹ Huntington, “Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint,” 127.

¹⁰⁰ Ridyard, “*Condigna vereatio*: post-conquest attitudes to the saints of the Anglo-Saxons,” 179.

Aelred, who, unlike Osbert, has the luxury of glorifying an already canonized saint rather than lobbying for his canonization, depicts more of a struggle for Edward to retain his chastity than does Osbert. He describes Edward's fear of "the shipwreck of his chastity"¹⁰¹ as being his greatest concern about following his nobles' request to for him to marry. His agreement to marry comes only after a prayer wherein he promises God and the Virgin Mary to retain his chastity. In the brief search process for a wife Aelred describes, "virtuous life" is coupled with "noble birth" as the primary requirements for Edward's bride. Edward, whom Aelred depicted as "Still in the womb, chosen to be king,"¹⁰² after trying to balance his destiny to be king with his desire to uphold his faith and maintain his chastity, comes to the solution of chaste marriage.

Aelred makes clear that Edward's finding a wife with a desire to maintain chastity as well is not just luck: it is the outcome of deliberate search for the perfect mate on Edward's part. In addition, Aelred invokes divinity in Edward's choice of Edith by claiming Edith was the bride "Christ prepared for his beloved Edward."¹⁰³ Despite Godwin's self-serving motives, Edith "avoided vice and the attentions of young men."¹⁰⁴ Edith's virginal character and "desire for chastity" make her an ideal companion in a chaste marriage for Edward. Aelred compares the relationship to that of the biblical King David and his virgin servant Abishag, who shared a bed without having sexual relations. The invocation of divinity and biblical allusions stresses chastity as a major element of Edward's piety.

Edward's hagiographers found chastity an effective means to construct piety and holiness as, in Weinstein and Bell's words, "No other virtue – not humility or poverty – was

¹⁰¹ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 34.

¹⁰² Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 22.

¹⁰³ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Life of Saint Edward the Confessor*, 35.

so essential to either the performance or the perception of a holy life.”¹⁰⁵ For Edward and other nobles, it demonstrated a choice of Christ over the expectation of producing heirs and makes clear the bifurcation between sanctity and active sexuality. Aelred’s emphasis on chastity becomes clear when considering the absence of chastity in the canonization letters and process for Edward. The letter from Pope Alexander III, for whom this was the first canonization he performed, makes clear that Edward’s sainthood was on miracles performed and not prophetic dreams or an uncorrupted body. As Bozoky argues, this shows the lasting importance of miracles to twelfth century piety.¹⁰⁶ However, for Aelred especially, Edward’s chastity became an important and underdeveloped source of piety that he capitalized on within his hagiography.

The religious dialogues of the sources about Edward the Confessor were meant to legitimize his sainthood and canonization. That canonization process itself was grounded in Plantagenet political goals, and the cult that developed would become an important feature in developing a distinct sense of Englishness and English spiritual identity. Patronage of the church, miracles, and chastity were all used within the construction of Edward’s piety, while Edith’s religious education and patronage of the church were used to make her a fit companion in chastity. The development of chastity within their marriage in narratives reflected increasingly positive concepts of chaste marriage, influenced by the greater emphasis placed on chastity within religious life. Chastity falls into three types in the narratives: not stated, implicit, and explicit. Of these, hagiographical sources explicitly depicted chastity between Edith and Edward as completely religiously motivated and used chastity as an argument to legitimize Edward’s canonization. As a whole, religious dialogues

¹⁰⁵ Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 73.

¹⁰⁶ Bozoky, “The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor,” 186.

within narratives about Edith of Wessex and Edward the Confessor reveal an increasing inflexibility in the relationship of sexuality and piety and an increasing on emphasis the distinction between the two throughout the Early Middle Ages.

Part 2: Sources after Henry III

A two hundred year gap exists in sources detailing Edward and Edith's marriage. It is too simplistic to pin this silence on what has been deemed "the crisis of the 14th century." However, as Gellrich argues, historical writing of the 14th century demonstrates how "government was still an affair of the nobility and the upheavals in parliament and kingship itself were the direct result of the weakness of literacy."¹⁰⁷ The decrease in output of historical writing can, within this framework, be related to the larger events of the Black Death and the Hundred Years War, just as the greater output of the 16th century is related to the growth of printing technology.

Essential to constructing the long-term trend of chastity within Edward and Edith's marriage, however, is caution in drawing the distinction between Medieval and Early Modern historical writing. Indeed, as McMullan and Matthews argue, "the early modern must be defined not in distinction from the medieval but through it, that the urge to periodise and the development of the concept of nationhood are wholly interpenetrated."¹⁰⁸ McMullan and Matthews' collection of essays in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England* presents exciting new ways in which to view both the lasting continuities and dramatic changes between the two periods. Viewing the distinction not as a bifurcation between stagnation and progress, but as fluid, dynamic, and interrelated is essential. For, as McMullan and Matthews suggest, the use of nationhood to periodise belies the complex modes of reinterpretation of the 'Medieval' past in the 'Early Modern.'

Interpretation of chastity within Edward and Edith's marriage must be situated within this framework. The dynamic nature of that reinterpretation represents the complex

¹⁰⁷ Gellrich, *Discourse and Domination*, 190.

¹⁰⁸ McMullan and Matthews, "Introduction," 7.

interchange between Early Modern historians and their 'Medieval' past. Using McMullan and Matthews' framework, Edward and Edith's marriage, just as Edward's kingship as a whole, falls not within a binary division between two time periods, but as part of a fluid historiographic discourse. The shifting narrative would be viewed through this shifting discourse that would represent both continuity and change.

Chapter 3: The Intersection of Piety and Sexuality in the 14th-17th Century Sources

The Religious Landscape of 14th-17th Century England

The 14th-17th centuries saw more wide-scale turmoil in English religious life than the 11th-13th centuries. On a broad scale, division of religious groups into sects/denominations created intense and shifting divisions that permeated England. The 16th century divided Catholic and Protestant, and the 17th century created more divisions between the Protestant groups, creating offshoots such as Laudism and Puritanism. Besides the continuous consolidation and fracturing of religious identity, this period also wrought significant changes in views of gender, distancing women from their previous church roles as well as dissociation of virginity and piety. The declining role of saints as intercessor also resulted from the adoption of Protestant religion. These three trends - religious disunity, dissociation of virginity and piety, and the weakening of saints' roles - all impacted how Edward and Edith's marriage came to be portrayed.

The late 14th-early 15th Lollard movement was the first and only "homegrown" religious movement against the Holy Roman Church. Instigated by John Wycliffe (whose followers were known as Wyclifistas, as opposed to Lollard, which became a general term for heretic), the movement gained political influence under the regency of John of Gaunt and the reign of Richard II. However, with their opposition to the Peasants Revolt of 1381 and the ascension of Henry IV greatly weakened their political force. The early 15th century was marked by burnings of Lollard leaders, and the movement went largely underground.

Lollardism was founded on central tenets familiar to later Protestants. The belief in the authority of scripture in doctrinal matters and the Papacy as the Anti-Christ were two of the common foundational doctrines between Lollardism and the emergence of Protestantism

in the 16th century. Other similar beliefs to later Protestantism were the denial of transubstantiation, denial of saints as intercessors, and the condemnation of indulgences and priestly orders. However, debate exists about the nature of the relationship between the two movements. Recent scholarship by Richard Rex, in particular, is highly critical of linking the two. Most notably, Rex cites the divergent geographies of the two movements, noting that while Lollardism was a rural phenomenon, Protestantism was a largely urban one.¹⁰⁹

The Protestant movement that occurred in the early 16th century also had a different social structure. It, unlike Lollardism, was able to generate support among the clergy and the gentry as well as craftsmen, artisans, and merchants. Indeed, the simplistic narrative of Henry VIII's adoption of Protestantism in order to marry Anne Boleyn hides the gradual and complex arrival of Continental Protestantism to England. The humanist work of Erasmus, widely read among England's high circles, was significant in diffusing Protestant ideas. In addition to the aristocratic introduction to Protestantism through work like Erasmus', clerical adoption of Protestant ideas was also significant in its spread. Many of England's first advocates of Protestantism were former members of religious orders, particularly friars.

Nevertheless, it would be royal religious beliefs that would come to dominate the religious flux created by the Reformation. Indeed, the English Reformation could be said to have three phases: the Henrician, the Edwardian, and the Elizabethan. The first, begun in the 1530s, was instigated by the Act of Supremacy and resulted in the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. The Edwardian phase turned the country in a more Calvinist direction, resulting in the Dissolution of the Chantries in 1547 and the introduction of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549. Elizabeth issued the Act of Uniformity, standardizing the church ceremony, in 1559, and the Thirty Nine Articles, which defined the faith of the reformed

¹⁰⁹ Richard Rex, *The Lollards*, 119-131.

church, in 1563. Mary I's 1553-1558 reign between Edward and Elizabeth, wherein she tried to return England to Catholicism, has often been seen as a five year blip in the inevitable onslaught of the Reformation. However, as Cressy and Ferrell argue, without Mary's death, no reasonable basis of evidence exists to indicate England wouldn't have remained Catholic. Elizabeth's triumph wasn't divine; it was longevity.

The 17th century further splintered England's religious identity. Throughout the first half of the 17th century, continuous objection to the established church permeated the English religious landscape. The dissenters first met clandestinely and then were even forced to move abroad.¹¹⁰ Until the Civil War, membership in the Church of England was enforced. A consequence of the Civil War was the dissolution of the courts to enforce religious uniformity, opening the floodgates of religious dissent. A flourishing of religious dissent from a varied demographic throughout the years of the Commonwealth made the return to enforced membership in the Church of England after the Restoration difficult. Secret meetings still flourished. The Toleration Act of 1689 allowed the meetings of dissenters to become public, provided they registered.¹¹¹ The Toleration Act put a legal face on the religious diversity that had been consolidated over the turbulent 17th century.

The fracturing of England's religious identity resulted in changing views of women in the context of the church and an increasing emphasis on women's private spiritual lives. As Peters notes, "Pre-Reformation Catholicism identified the mistress of the household as its ritual specialist, while in Protestantism the godly woman became an emblem of piety, faith and devotion."¹¹² In Protestantism, men became the logical instrument to interpret the Scripture, but women were their complement in offering up irrational, devotional faith. Other

¹¹⁰ Cressy and Ferrell, *Religion and Society*, 7.

¹¹¹ Laurence, *Women in England*, 207.

¹¹² Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 5.

new religious groups formulated a new relationship between gender and piety. Laurence notes a general pattern between Separatist movements like Quakerism and Methodism followed wherein “women play an important part at the outset but that, as the movements became institutionalized, their role diminishes.”¹¹³ Though this is a gross exaggeration of the complex role women played within these dynamic religious movements, it suggests a growing distance between women and religious leadership. Both Laurence and Peters note that the Reformation and 17th century increasingly denied women roles in the Church and shifted their religious expression to a private, spiritual life.¹¹⁴ In addition to increasing privacy, Peters describes how Protestantism severed “the connection of female sanctity with virginity understood in a simply physical sense.”¹¹⁵

Partly a consequence of the increasing privatization of women’s spiritual lives, this distance between chastity and female piety was also partly a consequence of changing views of saints. Winstead notes that the change in hagiography of virgin saints shifts from defiance to decorousness over the Late Middle Ages.¹¹⁶ Saints became more humanized over the course of the Late Middle Ages and more specialized to problems of daily life. As Peters argues, this reflects the Christocentric piety that would come to spark the Reformation.¹¹⁷ Within the Reformation, saints’ roles became bitterly contested, but the role of saints as positive piety remained through the Henrician, Edwardian, and even Elizabethan Reformations. While Protestant authors like Bale disputed the historical accuracy of the saints and their miracles, they adulated saints who demonstrated Protestant ideals. Thus, a simplistic reading of the Reformation as getting rid of saints must be qualified. Edward’s

¹¹³ Laurence, *Women in England*, 207.

¹¹⁴ Laurence, *Women in England*, 213; Peters, *Patterns in Piety*, 343.

¹¹⁵ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 111.

¹¹⁶ Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 118.

¹¹⁷ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 7.

piety, like those of all saints, would not be rejected but reconstructed to fit Protestant understandings of sanctity.

The Sources

Beyond a doubt, historical writing of the Early Modern period provides “evidence of the value set on history: of the conviction that present rights and wrongs had their roots in the past, and that the past could help to provide solutions for present problems.”¹¹⁸ History, then as now, was weighed and interpreted on contemporary terms. Early Modern scholars of history wished to shed light on germane precedents from which they could take examples. While Chibnall has chided the craft of these historians and deplored their writing in comparison to the flowing Latin of their predecessors, Early Modern scholars focused on questions germane to their own time and situation, just as their medieval predecessors.

Nowhere is this connection more evident than the reinterpretation of early English history based on the new religious divides created in the 16th century. John Foxe’s 1563 *Book of Martyrs* is a particularly potent example of this historical reinterpretation. Foxe combed through early church documents to support his thesis that “the proud of disorder reign of Antichrist began to stir in the Church of Christ” after the Norman Conquest. He emphasized the martyrdom of Protestants from the Lollards to those under Mary’s reign. His work was highly influential on popular opinion, and it reformed views of the Catholic Church’s role in medieval England for much of the late 16th century. “Protestant histories” like Foxe’s made history a battleground for the contemporary religious conflict Britain faced.

Despite the continuities presented by Early Modern interpretation of the past, major changes also developed. Foremost was the demographic of historians. While medieval historians were primarily written by monks and those in religious orders, the antiquarian

¹¹⁸ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 29.

movement of the 16th century drew in country gentry, royal servants like William Lambarde, and manuscript collectors like Robert Cotton.¹¹⁹ Interest in Parliamentary history, begun in the late Middle Ages in the work of those such as Ranulph Hidgen, intensified over the Early Modern period.¹²⁰ The Anglo-Saxon period became of particular interest to legal scholars like Sir Henry Spelman, who began to investigate the “Norman yoke” described by Oderis Vitalis and imagine the period as one where free and equal citizens governed themselves through representative institutions.

As well as being of a different demographic, Early Modern historians also had new technologies that their Medieval counterparts did not. William Caxton printed the first book in English only twenty-one years after Gutenberg printed his Bible.¹²¹ Understating the impact of the printing press and its impact on the material culture of historical literature is difficult. Given-Wilson adeptly summarizes the most drastic changes wrought by the printing press, describing the ensuing “fragmentation and diversification of historical writing” and the promulgation of “more brief, one-off pieces, written for a wider and less discerning audience, not infrequently as works of propaganda.”¹²² Not only did the printing press make printing whole books far more efficient, but it also enabled technologies like pamphlets and broadsheets. Pamphlets and broadsheets were particularly useful in distributing ideas to a wide and socio-economically diverse audience. William Prynne, for example, was arrested multiple times for his pamphletting, one of which, *Brief Register of Parliamentary Writs*, investigated the summoning of the representatives of the commons.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 34.

¹²⁰ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 180.

¹²¹ Alexandra Gillespie, “Caxton and the Invention of Printing,” 21.

¹²² Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 213.

¹²³ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 37.

The use of new printing technology was inducted to the growing movement of scholars and antiquarians to investigate Pre-Norman English history. Spearheaded by printer William Camden, who would endow Oxford's first chair of history, and aided by Cotton and Spelman, the three were at the forefront of revitalizing historical investigation into the period. They were all members of the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries, who made use of Cotton's extensive library and petitioned to form a royal academy and library.¹²⁴

John Hardyng, a multi-faceted author, was, at different points, a chronicler, cartographer, and forger. He maintained a strong relationship with the Percy family of Northumberland and passed through the service of several noble families before becoming an employee of Henry V. Hardyng was tasked to investigate the feudal relationship of the Scottish and English crowns. In this capacity, he went to Scotland and was allegedly bribed by James I for documents. Hardyng was known to have forged many documents, including those he gave James.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, he did produce his rhyming *Chronicle* in 1437 and was in the process of a second edition at his death in 1465. The 1437 edition, produced for Henry VI, had a Lancastrian bias and his rewrite, produced for Richard of York, was an attempt to balance that bias with a Yorkist narrative.¹²⁶ Hardyng's writing, like much of his contemporaries, is therefore deeply tied into his patrons.

In contrast, William Caxton, lauded as the man who brought the printing press to England, would rely largely on his own business rather than patron support to generate income. Caxton, who was born in either 1415 or 1424, began as an apprentice and became an important merchant in Bruges. He became governor of the English nation in Bruges in 1465, but left for Cologne in 1470. Caxton returned to England in 1472, having acquired a printing

¹²⁴ Lutz, "Study of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," 11.

¹²⁵ Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries*, 120.

¹²⁶ Summerson, "Hardyng, John," 242.

press. The following year, he famously produced the first printed book in England, *The History of Troy*. His difficulty of selling books in England necessitated his return to Bruges for a time, but he was back in London by 1476. Caxton translated and produced the Middle English translation of the medieval *Brut* text as the *Chronicles of England* in 1480, and Matheson has argued for his authorship for the later dates.¹²⁷ Though Caxton's exact role in shaping the manuscript is debated, it was his edition that gained overwhelming popularity.

While Caxton's role was primarily as a merchant, Robert Fabyan held important civic roles in London, including auditor of the city's account between 1486 and 1487. He was elected sheriff in 1493 and became an alderman in 1494. A draper, he became the master of the Draper's Company between 1495-6 and 1501-2. He produced *The New Cryoncycles of England and Fraunce*, which were published in 1516, after his death. John Rastell produced a second edition in 1533, and his work was reprinted at least twice more in the 16th century. The work reflects Fabyan's London-centric view, and its later portions present a more local history of London.¹²⁸

A contemporary of Fabyan, Rastell not only reprinted Fabyan's work in 1533 but also produced a new work of his own. Probably born in 1475 to a family prominent in the town, John Rastell spent most of his life in the civically active and culturally minded Coventry. His grandfather had been warden, and his father held many civic posts. After training at Middle Temple, Rastell was called to the bar and returned to Coventry, where he served in chancery suits and frequently defended the rights of citizens over church and merchant hierarchies. Rastell was also greatly influenced by his association with Sir Thomas More, who became his brother-in-law when Rastell married Elizabeth More. By 1510, Rastell gained an

¹²⁷ Matheson, "Printer and Scribe," 593.

¹²⁸ Gross, "Fayan, Robert," 879.

inheritance and moved his family to London, where he established a printing press. Rastell's press would become noted for developing a new, innovative way to print music. *The Pastyme of the People* was published in 1529. Influenced by Rastell's humanist philosophy, the book is arranged chronologically rather than by nation, deemphasizing the importance of borders or nationhood.¹²⁹

While Rastell was invested in humanism, Polydore Vergil, like Hardyng, was dependent on royal patronage. Born around 1470, he was likely educated at the University of Bologna and came to England in 1501. He was made archdeacon of Wells in 1508. Commissioned by Henry VII, Vergil completed his *Historia Anglia* in 1512. However, it was not published until 1534, when it was rededicated to Henry VIII and reprinted twice in the next two decades with new additions of contemporary events. Vergil died in 1555, having produced three volumes and not falling from royal favor.

Unlike Vergil and others who wrote court history, John Bale was invested in reinterpreting history based on Protestant Christian beliefs. Born in 1495, Bale had become Prior of a Carmelite Monastery in Ipswich by 1533. He left the order, married, and eventually was forced to flee the country due his association with Thomas Cromwell, a strong advocate for Protestantism who fell from favor and was executed in 1540 for his role in Henry VIII's failed marriage to Anne of Cleves. Bale's most popular work was his 1538 *Kynge Johan*, the first English-language historical drama. His 1547 *Acts of the English Votaries* was inspired by his anti-monastic views and attempted to reinterpret history with the argument that the Papacy is the Anti-Christ.

Raphael Holinshed, though also a Protestant, did not share Bale's evangelical motives in his work. Born in 1525 and likely educated at Cambridge as a minister, he likely turned to

¹²⁹ Gertz, "The Life of John Rastell," 3-48.

printing during Mary's reign when he was unable to find work as a clergyman. He found work with Reyner Wolfe, and the two joined together with the goal of a "universal cosmography." After Wolfe's death in 1573, the business was taken over by Wolfe's son-in-law John Hun and he, with a small group of investors, gave Holinshed the money and support to complete the project. Holinshed thus produced the first edition of *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* in 1577. The book was dedicated to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, perhaps as a hope against censure. Holinshed, who felt the work fell short of his and Wolfe's vision, died around 1580 while serving as a steward in Warwickshire. Though the work may have been below his artistic expectations, it did well financially, and a 1587 edition was produced, spearheaded by Abraham Fleming and Henry Denham. While, significant textual variation exists between the editions of the *Chronicles* for later books, particularly as the court became involved in censoring it, the "History of England" to 1066 was largely kept intact for the second edition. Therefore, this study will focus only on the 1577 edition.¹³⁰

John Stow was involved in the production of the 1587 edition of *Holinshed's Chronicle* and used some of the text he produced for that text within his *Annales of England*. Probably born in 1525, Stow grew up in London and, with the death of his father in 1527, was part of a protracted legal battle over his father's estate. There is no record of Stow's enrollment in a school or university, but he was acquainted with humanist scholars and antiquarianists like John Dee, William Camden, and Henry Savile. He joined the Society of Antiquities in 1586. Stow's record searching and writing were both prolific and he produced twenty-one editions of chronicles. His *Annales of England* was published in 1592. Stow

¹³⁰ Tauffer, *Holinshed's Chronicles*

would be accused of both Catholicism and outdated scholarship, but his commitment to documentation and use of public records are now considered innovative.¹³¹

The next historian to address the story of Edward and Edith was Samuel Daniel. While Holinshed and Stow were both financed by private investors and book sales, Daniel received noble and royal patronage. Born in 1562, Daniel studied poetry and philosophy at Oxford. He likely spent time as a servant, became a tutor, and was briefly Poet Laureate while producing sonnets and philosophic texts. He eventually became the Master of Revels for Queen Anne of Denmark, producing masques and pastoral dramas for the court. His *History of England* was published first in 1612 and then republished in 1617.

As a whole, these texts represent broader changes in historical writing. The printing technology pioneered in England by Caxton resulted in an outpouring of historical writing in the 16th century. As well, the texts come from a diverse group of authors and in diverse forms. Traditional chronicles, poems, formal histories, political tracts, and archeological finds were all used to produce different narratives of Edward's life and reign.

Religious Dialogues Within the Sources

Authors reinterpreted Edward and Edith's chastity within this dramatically changed religious landscape of 15th-17th century England. Using the same three categories of not specified, implicit, and explicit chastity for the later sources reveals a nearly opposite pattern to the earlier sources. While chastity became explicit in later sources in the Early Middle Ages, sources through the 16th century explicitly depict Edith and Edward's chastity while 17th century sources don't specify chastity. Within this seemingly linear progression, chastity becomes de-emphasized over time in depictions of Edward's piety. Rather, it is his legal

¹³¹ Beer, "Stow [Stowe], John", 984.

legacy which becomes his piety. Edith's piety becomes constructed in terms of her ability to execute roles of queenship rather than church activities.

As illustrated in Figure 2, William Caxton, John Hardyng, Robert Fabyan, the Anonymous *The Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, John Rastell, John Stow, Raphael Holinshed, and Samuel Daniels all explicitly describe chastity between Edward and Edith. John Bale remains conflicted and uncertain. Polydore Vergil and later sources John Hare, John Gibbon, and Henry Keepe don't specify chastity.

Figure 2: Timeline and Chart of Chastity in Early Modern Texts			
Timeline	Not Mentioned	Uncertain	Explicit
1425			1437: <i>The Chronicle From the First Begynnyng of Englande</i> (John Hardyng)
1450			1480: <i>Chronicles of England</i> (William Caxton)
1500			
1525	1516: <i>Polydore Vergil's English history</i> (Polydore Vergil)		1516: <i>The New Cronycle of England and Fraunce</i> (Robert Fabyan)
1550		1547: <i>The Actes of Englysh Votaryes</i> (John Bale)	1533: <i>The Pastyme of the People</i> (John Rastell) 1534: Anonymous, <i>The Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde</i> (Anonymous)
1575			1577: <i>The Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland</i> (Raphael Holinshed)
1600	1612: <i>History of England</i> (Samuel Daniels)		1592: <i>The Annales of England</i> (John Stow)
1625			
1650	1647: <i>St. Edwards ghost</i> (John Hare)		
1688	1688: <i>Edwardus Confessor rediivus</i> (John Gibbon) Keepe, <i>A true and perfect narrative</i> (Henry Keepe)		

In general, in the sources that specify Edward and Edith's piety, chastity becomes decreasingly important. Caxton and Hardyng, both writing near the end of the 15th century, place a great deal of emphasis on, and achievement for chastity. Caxton indicates the struggle

Edward underwent to maintain his chastity and that “notheles for all tho the kyng had wife he lyved ever more in chastite and in clenness of body without any fleshly dede.”¹³² Edward’s love of chastity and God overcomes his spousal love. Hardyng establishes a similar choice-binary. He describes “That Christine kight, kyng Edward then, pfessed /In religion to live.”¹³³ Using “religious” as a stand-in for “chaste,” Hardyng establishes Edward’s piety as connected to his choice to live a chaste life. Indeed, along with his generosity in forgiving Godwin, chastity is a powerful tool of Edward’s piety in Hardyng’s description. Hardyng reinforces this piety by discussing Edward’s connection to Scottish Saint Margaret.

Fabyan, rather than portraying chastity as a struggle, portrays it as a sign of Edward’s strong character. He describes that Edward “put her not from his bed, not yet dwelt with her fleshly. Whether it were for hate of her kynne or for love of chastite, the trouth is not shewed. But all writers agree that he continued his lyfe withouten offence with women.”¹³⁴ Fabyan draws on Malmesbury’s dual possibilities for Edward’s motivations for chastity. Though Fabyan is uncertain of Edward’s motives, he acknowledges Edward’s chastity as a lack of “offence with women.” Rastell would imitate Fabyan’s description of Edward’s judicious manner of achieving chastity, specifying that Edward “was acomptyd a virgin when he dyed.”¹³⁵ Unlike Fabyan, Rastell doesn’t specify possible motivations for chastity. The 1577 edition of Holinshead’s chronicles would follow a similar phrasing and echo the speculation about whether Edward’s choice of chastity was “bicause he hadde haply vowed chastite, eyther of impotencie of nature, or for a priuie hate that hee bare to hir kinne, men

¹³² Caxton, *Chronicle*, “How the Erle Godewyne come agene into England...”

¹³³ Hardyng, *The Chronicle*, “The CXX Chapter”

¹³⁴ Fabyan, *Newe Cronycles*, 258.

¹³⁵ Rastell, *Pastyme of People*, 295.

doubted.”¹³⁶ Holinshead adds the new suggestion that perhaps it was Edward’s own physical incapability of sex that prompted his chastity.

The Anonymous *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, in contrast to Fabyan, Rastell, or Holinshead, specifies that Edward was “dredde to lose his chastite/ wherefore he commanded hymselfe onely to god.”¹³⁷ The author depicts chastity as Edward’s secret means of obeying God. Edward pleads to God to release him from the duty of marriage, comparing such a deliverance to be like that when God “delivered somtyme thy children fro the flame of fyre in the chimney.”¹³⁸ Clearly, to Edward, something essential would be irrevocably lost without his chastity. Interestingly enough, the *Lyfe* does address the doubt his marriage sheds on his chastity. It concludes that, even if there were cause for doubt, “very clenness of his mynde was suffycycent wytss of his chastyte...”¹³⁹ The cleanliness of Edward’s mind, however, is strong enough evidence for both his chastity and piety. Chastity, though significant in establishing Edward’s piety, is no longer essential.

Similarly, Stow depicts chastity only as an element in Edward’s holiness. Stow professes that Edward was “perservering in chastitite, lead all his life dedicated unto God in true marriage, wherefore as wee have known proved by good and sufficient men being witness, God greatly glorified him in which life with wonderfull signs, amongst the which, this that followeth was one.”¹⁴⁰ To Stow, Edward’s chastity is a “sign” of his holiness, but it is a reflection rather than cause of Edward’s piety. Stow goes on to describe Edward’s role in helping a young wife conceive to bear her husband a child. The miracle story, contrasted to Edward’s own chastity and therefore willful inability to have children, demonstrates the

¹³⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 235.

¹³⁷ *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, 6. (Based off the EEBO image numbers.)

¹³⁸ *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, 6.

¹³⁹ *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Stow, *Annales of England*, 124.

strength of Edward's piety and connection to God. Stow then quotes from Aelred's hagiography, further emphasizing the strength of Edward's piety. Chastity, for Stow, is only an element in the vast make-up of Edward's piety.

Daniel turns Edward's chastity from piety to emasculation. He describes Edward's childhood in Norman nunneries, from which Edward developed piety but also became soft and feminine. Daniel depicts Edward upon his arrival to England as "scarce known to be a man."¹⁴¹ Edward's inability to be masculine is demonstrated through a story Daniel relates: "And to show how little he understood himselfe' they note, how in a great anger, he sayd to a base fellow, that disrupted his game in hunting, *I would punish thee, were I able.*"¹⁴² Edward's inability to master his own people, those who should be subordinate to him, is then directly translated from hunting to his ability to master a woman sexually. For Daniel, the story becomes not just about power, but understanding and defining himself as a man. Because he cannot punish the hunter or have sex with women, Edward "little...understood himselfe." Chastity no longer just becomes piety, but an inability to perform masculine function.

For nationalistic reasons, Bale is also highly critical of Edward's chastity as a form of piety. Rather than a coming to a definitive answer to the mystery, Bale implies uncertainty in Edward and Edith's chastity. As he attempts to dispel the "quere legens" which liken Edith to King David's chaste bedmate Abisahg, he examines the available texts to determine the validity. He concludes the fault is with religious sources, decrying his reader "se what sure groundes these syled hypocrites the monkes and the priestes have to aduaunce [advanced] in

¹⁴¹ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

¹⁴² Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

Edwarde their sodomy.”¹⁴³ Bale thus challenges the chastity narrative as a product of monk sodomy and a subversive attempt to create Edward as a deviant sexual figure rather than a holy one. He cannot completely dismiss the narrative of chastity, however, as it would mean “Edwardes hypocricsy by the peruerse [perverse] counsell of thse ydell [idle] and lecherouses leaders.”¹⁴⁴ While Bale cannot produce evidence to the contrary, he laments Edward’s lack of an heir, comparing him to King David and Solomon. Bale ultimately tried to place the blame for the events of 1066 where an “enemye obtained the crowne, as brought Englshe people in moste miserable subiccyon”¹⁴⁵ on the faulty advice of Edward’s leaders. Bale’s conclusions about Edward are thus only inconclusive. His comparison to civically minded kings like Solomon and David indicate any piety of Edward’s is based on placing the people of England over the desires of the church rather than on chastity or miracles.

The one exception to the otherwise linear trend of de-emphasis on chastity is Polydore Vergil. Vergil attributes Edward’s piety wholly to miracles rather than chastity. He describes how “This goodd kinge was accustomed with onlie towchinge, bie the divine power of Godde, to heale the swellinge in the throte”¹⁴⁶ He details Edward’s healing abilities and integrates divine elements into Edward’s reign, but does not base that divine connection on chastity. Indeed, Vergil notes that Edward was predestined by God to be King. In one episode, a monk at Glastonbury and future Bishop of Winchester sees in a vision “Peter the Apostle consecrate kinge Edwarde, the sonne of Ethelredus, at that time exiled in Normandie”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Bale, *Actes*, “Edwarde showeth chastyte in bedde.”

¹⁴⁴ Bale, *Actes*, “Edwarde showeth chastyte in bedde.”

¹⁴⁵ Bale, *Actes*, “Edwarde showeth chastyte in bedde.”

¹⁴⁶ Vergil, *Polydore Vergil's English history*, 295.

¹⁴⁷ Vergil, *Polydore Vergil's English history*, 279.

This gradual de-emphasis on chastity reflects the disassociation between chastity and piety after the Reformation. Clerical marriage, after all, was a central tenant of Protestantism. Chastity became a type of behavior, rather than a physical state of virginity.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, chastity's relationship to marriage changed. As Wiesener notes, the three main purposes of marriage largely remained unchanged between the pre- and post-Reformation church: procreation, avoidance of sin, and "mutual help and companionship."¹⁴⁹ Even though it mitigated this first purpose of marriage, virginity was considered so sacred within Catholicism that the lack of procreation was a minimal violation of the purpose of marriage.

Just as changed religious interpretations of chaste marriage impacted interpretations of Edward's piety, they impacted reinterpretations of Edith's piety. In Hardyng's depiction, Edith lives a "holy life, disposed and addressed/ An holy woman of life, and of God blessed."¹⁵⁰ Edith's acceptance of living the same "religious" life as Edward merits praise in her choice of God over an heir. Hardyng's depiction offers continuity with those of the earlier Middle Ages, praising Edith's conformity to Edward's desire for chastity. Hardyng describes how "at her death her sole then uncouvered/And to our lorde, full mekely so it offered."¹⁵¹ Edith had devoted her whole life to God and therefore met him at her death. A key distinction between Hardyng's interpretation and earlier interpretations, particularly *The Life of Saint Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, is that it is Edith's internal faith rather than her acts of patronage that establish her piety.

The Anonymous *The Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde* also depicts her internal piety rather than patronage as her qualifications for marriage to Edward. It describes Edward's marriage

¹⁴⁸ Peters, *Patterns of Piety*, 252.

¹⁴⁹ Wiesener, *Women and Gender*, 22.

¹⁵⁰ Hardyng, *The Chronicle*, "The CXX Chapter"

¹⁵¹ Hardyng, *The Chronicle*, "The CXX Chapter"

search ending when “Eoythe doughter of eerle goodwyn was founde moost according to hym by her vertous condycyons.”¹⁵² Edith, though not associated with a particular monastery, becomes based on her own “vertous conycyons” rather than her religious upbringing. Stow also presents a similarly complementary portrait: “a virgin most chaste, in whose breast there was a school of all liberall sciences ...”¹⁵³ Stow cites Malmesbury as the source of his description. However, unlike Malmesbury, he does not cast doubt unto Edith’s purported chastity, only Edward’s motivations for chastity.

Daniel also casts doubt on Edward’s motivations for chastity rather than Edith’s. Indeed, Daniel goes further and turns Edith’s chastity into Edward’s emasculation. He describes how Edith “after his death, protested her selfe free from any carnall acte done by him, and yet lived he (for the most part) with her in all formall shew of marriage.”¹⁵⁴ In Daniel’s interpretation, Edith insists on her chastity and Daniel identifies it as more the product of Edward’s inability to be masculine than his piety. Rather than maintained chastity reflecting positively on Edith as a compliant wife, it emphasizes Edward’s neglect of duties.

However, Daniel is the exception and other authors were content to construct Edith’s piety only in relation to Edward or not at all. Fabyan, Rastell, and Holinshed fall into the first category and only imply her agreement to Edward’s refusal to consummate their marriage. Vergil and Bale fall into the second. Vergil only mentions the marriage and not the chastity. Bale can scarcely reach a conclusion about Edward’s chastity and does not even attempt to reconstruct Edith’s piety.

As a whole, these constructions of Edith’s piety, like Edward’s, demonstrate growing distance between virginity and sanctity within the context of marriage. They represent a

¹⁵² *Lyfe of Saynt Edward*, 6.

¹⁵³ Stow, *Annales of England*, 118.

¹⁵⁴ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

redefinition of chastity, based on the new doctrine of the Reformation. This new definition meant that chastity represented moral virtue rather than physical virginity. Breitenberg argues that chastity remained significant in that not only did a "wife's chastity functioned to secure and preserve actual economic interests (patrilineal inheritance and the avoidance of bastardy), but that it also functioned symbolically as a more generalized guarantee of social order and cohesion."¹⁵⁵ Chastity in a moral sense still had a role to play in English society, but its meaning shifted in order to regulate the production of children rather than to halt it. Thus, Edward and Edith's pieties can no longer be tied entirely to chastity, as martial virginity came to be seen as a hindrance to producing children rather than proof of faith. The increasing de-emphasis on chastity within the construction of Edward and Edith's pieties thus represents the dissociation of piety from sexual abstinence within the context of marriage.

¹⁵⁵ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 24.

Chapter 4: The Intersection of Politics and Gender in the 14th-17th Century

Sources

The Political Landscape of 14th -17th Century England

Along with religious life, the English monarchy underwent dramatic transformations in the Late Medieval/Early Modern period. War with French, two internal conflicts (the War of the Roses and the Civil War), and changing Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stuart dynasties left a profound impact on the nation. The dramatic events and shifts resulted in the growing English sense of identity throughout the 16th century. The internal conflicts within the 17th century intensified but also fractured, this burgeoning sense of identity. In respect to queenship, this period represented a reassessment of the possibilities of female authority and challenged prevailing gender norms. Elizabeth's reign would allow for the reigns of Mary II and Anne, and a type of queenship that combined both femininity and authority.

The 14th and 15th centuries brought two primary challenges to royal power: the Hundred Years War and the War of the Roses. The former was initiated by Edward III's claim to the French throne in 1337 and ultimately lasted until 1453, by which time England gained and subsequently lost vast portions of France. In the showdown between Houses of Valois (Kings of France) and Plantagenet (Kings of England and Dukes of Aquitaine at the onset of the war), a sense of distinctly English rule based on anti-French xenophobia was promulgated. The War was briefly interrupted by the Black Death of 1347-1351, but then resumed until 1453. with the loss of all English territories in France (with the notable exception of Calais) after the Battle of Castillon.

Immediately following the end of the Hundred Years War was the outbreak of intra-Plantagenet dispute in the War of the Roses. Partly as a consequence of Edward III's having numerous sons, the Plantagenet dynasty broke into warring Lancastrian and Yorkist factions.

The deposition of Richard II in 1399 by John of Gaunt's son Henry of Bolingbroke began the disputed Lancastrian succession, which ignited into conflict between Henry VI and Edward of York at the Battle of St. Albans in 1455. Edward's eventual victory in 1471 led to a brief period of peace cut short with his death and the seizure of the throne by his brother Richard of Gloucester in 1483. Richard was challenged and defeated by Henry Tudor, whose victory at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 gave him the throne. The rift within English dynastic politics was eventually healed by Henry's marriage to Elizabeth of York, combining the two Plantagenet factions and creating a truly "English" dynasty.

Creating a trend that would come to have dramatic effects on 16th century historiography, the War of the Roses and proceeding Tudor Dynasty fostered a sense of collective English identity. For example, the Tudor dynasty emphasized their Welsh heritage. Indeed, Henry VIII justified his legal union of England and Wales in 1542 with the Welsh heritage of his father's ancestors. On a broader scale, Cathy Shrank identifies seven "features of the rhetoric of the nation" that England had developed by the 16th century: 1. Boundaries, 2. Notion of nation as an integral unit, 3. Sovereignty, 4. Common cultural characteristics (e.g. language), 5. Common history, 6. Common descent, and 7. A sense of territoriality.¹⁵⁶ However, the multiple forms of national identity that spread through England in the 15th-17th were far from homogenous. As Helgerson notes, "Not even its name remained fixed."¹⁵⁷ Though, in the words of Elie Kedourie nationalism was "a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century"¹⁵⁸, the development of a collective national consciousness emerged in Early Modern England. Benedict Anderson's thesis of "imagined

¹⁵⁶ Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, 4; Shrank takes these "features" or criterion from Craig Calhoun's *Nationalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁷ Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 8.

¹⁵⁸ Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 9.

community” created by print capitalism, while not a perfect fit, seems to generally describe the national consciousness of this period.¹⁵⁹

Along with the seeds of modern nationalism, the Tudor dynasty brought relative stability to the English monarchy for the next 118 years. In addition to a stronger national identity, the Tudor dynasty also produced a new definition of queenship. The reigns of Mary I and Elizabeth I dramatically altered concepts of queenship, because there was no historical precedent in living memory. Indeed, the historical precedents that did exist were not wholly positive; Given-Wilson notes that, on a historiographical level, there is “no mistaking a sense of unease at the idea of women rulers...the ‘historical’ precedents did not exactly amount to a ringing endorsement of queenly rule.”¹⁶⁰ Not only did Mary and Elizabeth’s reigns defy historical precedent, but the fact that they ruled independently also broke new barriers. As Levin and Bucholz note, particularly with reference to Elizabeth’s long reign, “This introduced a new and potentially disruptive element to the European dynastic system.”¹⁶¹ However, Elizabeth’s independence was possible because of a lack of husband, and she appropriated elements of femininity and masculinity to become, as Linda Shenk termed it, a “female Solomon.”¹⁶²

While Elizabeth’s rule forced England to redefine the possibilities of female political authority, the new Stuart dynasty would be far more problematic and force England to redefine the relationship between monarch and state. The 1603-1625 reign of James I was stable, though the end was marked by a breakdown of government efficiency due to the death of Lord Chancellor Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. James’ favoritism of particular lords and

¹⁵⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁶⁰ Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 200.

¹⁶¹ Levin and Bucholz, *Queens and Power*, xv.

¹⁶² Shenk, “Queen Solomon,” 98.

the eventual rise of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham would set the stage for conflict in the reign of his son, Charles I. Charles, who like his father was a fanatical believer in the divine authority of kings and initiated a stronger Personal Rule, which cost him the support of Parliament, initiated the Civil War of 1642 -1651. The War raged between the “Roundhead” supporters of rule by Parliament and the “Cavalier” supporters of the King.

Charles’ loss and execution at the end of the conflict lead to the establishment of the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell, who died in 1658. The Commonwealth was officially dissolved in the 1660 Declaration of Breda, after which Charles I’s son Charles II took the English throne. Charles II, who died with twelve acknowledged illegitimate children and no legitimate heirs, ruled until 1685 and was known as the “Merry Monarch.” However, the end of his reign brought turbulence, as his only heir was his Catholic brother, James, Duke of York. Fearful of rule by a Catholic, Parliament introduced an Exclusion Bill to skip James’ succession. The Bill was narrowly defeated, but James was dethroned only 3 years into his reign by his Protestant son-in-law and daughter, who would rule as William and Mary.

William and Mary’s co-rule ended in 1694 with Mary’s death, after which William remained as sole ruler until 1702. The relative equality of their co-rulership provides an effective bookend for the radical transformations that Early Modern English queenship underwent. The 16th century rule of Elizabeth was conducted on male terms, as referenced in her famous speech at Tilbury. [Indeed, a popular epigram in James I’s early rule was “*Rex fuit Elizabeth, nunc est regina Jacobus* (Elizabeth was King, now James is Queen).”] The divide between queen-consortship and political authority would grow hazier throughout the 17th century. For example, the actions and attitudes of Charles I’s wife, Henrietta Maria, were

cited as major factors in instigation of the Civil War.¹⁶³ As well, popular perception that the weaker-willed Charles was controlled by his wife and, through her the Papacy, aggravated fears about his rule. Forty years later, Charles II's Catholic wife, Catherine of Braganza, would face similar, though less extreme, dislike and would be the target of anti-Catholic activities.

Mary II's rule, as well as that of her sister Anne, reflects broader transitions in perceptions of femininity and marriage. The 17th century was marked by a transition from an emphasis on the naturally lustful women prominent in the Later Middle Ages to emphasis on male control. As Christine Peters describes, this created a new scheme where "the naturally chaste woman could be mastered and controlled by the sexually dominant man."¹⁶⁴ This underlying change in perceptions of woman lead to the increased social control in the form of witchcraft trials and, as Peters notes, particularly manifested itself in laws about adultery.¹⁶⁵ However, ironically, this shift also led to more independent leadership like those of Mary and Anne.

The radical and complex transformations which perceptions of gender and queenship underwent in the 15th-17th centuries were mirrored by complex transformations in the foundations of political authority. James I, who authored *The True Law of Free Monarchies; or, The Reciprocal and Mutual Duty Betwixt a Free King and His Natural Subjects*, fiercely espoused the theory of divine authority of monarchs and considered his right to rule as derived from apostolic succession. Charles I held yet more extreme views of the divine right of kings. The Commonwealth would transform that relationship, and Charles II and the

¹⁶³ White, "She is the Man," 205.

¹⁶⁴ Peters, *Women in Early Modern Britain*, 71.

¹⁶⁵ Peters, *Women in Early Modern Britain*, 71; Marget Spufford's thesis that puritan social control can be compared with other movements of social control instigated by social and economic difficulty is also helpful for questioning the factors that led to 17th century social control. (Spufford, "Puritanism and Social Control?", 41.)

future Stuarts operated more carefully to ensure authority. Indeed, the long-lasting strength of the Jacobite movement, which sought restoration of the Stuart throne to James II and his descendents, reminded English monarchs that they couldn't afford to operate on their own whims.

Political Dialogues within the Sources

A stronger sense of English national identity and changing views of kingship would impact the portrayal of Edward and Edith's chastity. Increasing xenophobia against the French resulted in both a more ambiguous portrayal of Earl Godwin (embodied in the more ambiguous portrayals of the crisis of 1051), and consequently a more ambiguous relationship between Edward and Godwin. While Edward became increasingly defined politically by his legal legacy (particularly in relation to Common Law and the elimination of the Danegeld), Edith became distanced from her family and defined rather in her role as wife. Her failure to produce a child, however, did not lead to a vilification; rather, it became a contradiction of Edward's legacy as a king who produced a legal basis for the nation but not an heir to sustain it. Thus, the changing portrayal of chastity within a political context represents the changing intersection between gender and politics as nationalism hardened into "a performative ideal" over the course of the 16th and early 17th century.¹⁶⁶

The roots of the Anti-Norman historiography that would flourish in 17th century historiography are found in the 15th century and can be seen with more ambiguous portrayals of Godwin. While Godwin did not become a champion of proto-Englishness, he did become a figure that represented legitimate authority compared to the French influence in Edward's reign. Godwin, as he never had before, became a figure through which the strength of Anglo-Saxon power could be portrayed. Edward, by consequence, became a figure who represented

¹⁶⁶ McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 5.

the weakness in the collapse of Anglo-Saxon England. Rather than mentor-mentee or betrayer-betrayed in earlier depictions, Edward and Godwin's relationship became rooted in dynamic power struggles. The texts construct a gradient based on depicting Godwin's strength versus Edward's weakness.

Caxton's *Chronicles* demonstrates this modified interpretation. Godwin returns to England from Denmark despite having killed Edward's brother as he has "herde of the goodnesse of kyng Edward and that he was full of mercy and of pite."¹⁶⁷ It is pity and redemption Godwin seeks and, in Caxton's interpretation, he is a schemer but he also deeply loves the king. Indeed, Caxton credits Edward marriage to Edith because he "loved [Godwin] so much that he should wede Godewynes daughter and made hir *quene*."¹⁶⁸ While Godwin cannot be made into fully fleshed-out hero, he can be an admirable figure in his love of the king. Certainly, anti-French xenophobia at the time played into Caxton's choice

While Godwin becomes a more ambiguous character, Edward becomes a weaker one. Fabian and Rastell would offer a similar interpretation of Edward and Godwin's dynamic as Caxton. Rastell describes that Godwin "was most in the kyngis [Harthacnut's] favour and of most might next to the king."¹⁶⁹ Edward's "fere of Goodwyn sent hym again into normandy"¹⁷⁰ A key difference, then, between Fabian and Rastell's interpretations is that, though Edward is able to negotiate power with Godwin within his reign, it is Edward's weakness rather than Godwin's strength which defines their relationship. Their relationship is mediated and equilibrium achieved.

¹⁶⁷ Caxton, *Chronicles*, "How the Erle Godewyne come agene in to Englonde and had agene all his land..."

¹⁶⁸ Caxton, *Chronicles*, "How the Erle Godewyne come agene in to Englonde and had agene all his land..."

¹⁶⁹ Rastell, *Pasytme of People*, 294.

¹⁷⁰ Rastell, *Pasytme of People*, 294.

While presenting a more negative portrayal of Godwin, Vergil also emphasizes Edward's simplicity. Godwin is treacherous and deceitful, his frank confession of killing Edward's brother insincere, but it is Edward's simplicity that forces a reliance on Godwin. Yet Vergil directs that mentor-mentee relationship specifically as being one that allowed Edward to undermine his mother, Emma, "with whome, for manie causes, hee was sore agreeved."¹⁷¹ Though Vergil argues that the case against Emma was false, it is her national loyalty which caused Edward to turn against her. Fearful of her loyalty to England, Godwin is an unfortunate but necessary tool for keeping Norman power in check.

Holinshed's *Chronicles* is similar to Vergil's depiction of Godwin and presents a slightly more treacherous figure than Caxton or Rastell. Holinshed describes the inconclusive accusations of Godwin's killing of Edward's younger brother Alfred, noting that, although Godwin convinced Edward, his innocence was still in doubt. However, particularly in the events of 1051, Godwin is the victim of French influence at court, particularly by Robert Archbishop of Canterbury. While Godwin may have committed villainous acts, he presented a powerful alternative to French power. As Holinshed describes, "he bare great rule and authoritie, and so might procure to himselfe euill report for euerie thing that chanced amisse."¹⁷² If Edward represented the sweet and gentle rule of Anglo-Saxon rulers, Godwin represents the strength and ambitious of Anglo-Saxon leader lost to the Conquest.

In his 1618 work, Samuel Daniel would describe a similar dynamic between the two men and indicate that "The soft simplicity of this King gave way to the greatnesse of the Earle Godwin and his children, who for that he would seeme the especiall man in his preferment to the Crowne." Daniel identifies Godwin's power as legitimate based on his

¹⁷¹ Vergil, *Polydore Vergil's History of England*, 288.

¹⁷² Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 235.

intelligence and leadership ability. While Caxton's remains the most positive, none of the later interpretations invoke the villain of Henry of Huntingdon's depiction.

The ambiguous portrayals of Godwin resulted in less damning interpretations of the crisis of 1051. However, a camp of authors still attributed Godwin's arrogance and political miscalculation as the cause of the conflict. In *The Chronicle from the Firste Begynnyng of Englande*, John Hardyng describes the origins of the conflict between Godwin and Edward as stemming from Godwin complacency after receiving a pardon after Edward's marriage to Edith. Hardyng interprets the conflict as an innocent mistake by Godwin while defending his land. But Godwin's real mistake was when, after a summons by Edward, "he would not then appere/ But warred sore, both he and his sonnes five/ For whiche the kyng them exiled out al clere."¹⁷³ The problem was easily overcome when they arrived back in England the next year and "And afterward no more they discorded."¹⁷⁴ The political implications of Godwin's actions were ignored and peace easily restored.

Rastell, writing in the 1530s, also gave Godwin much of the agency for the events of 1051. To him, the banishment was an agreed-upon punishment between Edward and Godwin. He describes Edward, "banysshed the yerle Goodwin and his for ii yeris that was agreement made and the kyng took them agyne to grace in the tyme of which banishment."¹⁷⁵ Rastell goes further than Hardyng in that not only do the events of 1051 leave no lasting conflicts, but also shifts the narrative from one of open-ended conflict to one of punishment with a premeditated end-date. The banishment was agreed upon and fulfilled as a means of restoring justice and order. Not only does this rendition portray Godwin far more positively,

¹⁷³ Hardyng, *The Chronicle*, "The CXX Chapter"

¹⁷⁴ Hardyng, *The Chronicle*, "The CXX Chapter"

¹⁷⁵ Rastell, *Pasytme of People*, 294.

but it also falls into the trope of Edward as lawmaker that would become more and more prevalent.

Conversely, more authors placed the blame for the crisis on the French actors involved. For Holinshed, Eustace of Boulogne was the cause of the events of 1051 and Godwin's response cautious and attempts to ensure a fair treatment of those Edward requested he punish those involved. Godwin, whom Holinshed describes as a "a man of a bold courage and quicke wit,"¹⁷⁶ only misjudged the strength of Edward's anger and is forced to take to the Continent. Holinshed also condemns Edward's treatment of Edith, describing that despite Edith's qualities as a learned gentlewoman, Edward "appointed hir to streict keeping in the abbeie of Warwell." Holinshed derives much of his interpretation of these events from Malmesbury, noting also the scandal attached to Edith's name under her death and the proof of virginity offered on her deathbed. But the real perpetrators in Holinshed's depiction are Eustace and Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury. In Holinshed's interpretation, it is the decision of Robert Archbishop of Canterbury to move to Rome that prompted Godwin's return as "earle Goodwine was restored to the kings fauour, because he knew that Robert the archbishop of Canturburie had beene the chéefe procurer of the kings euill will towards him."¹⁷⁷ Thus, both French influences, Eustace and Robert, forced Godwin to act and provoked the events of 1051.

Daniel attributes the crisis of 1051 to the French and Earl Siward's cowardice in refusing to fight the Welsh. In Daniel's interpretation, Godwin is forced into acting and his banishment is unjust, the product of Edward's inability to understand political complexity. Indeed, Daniel is another one of the few authors of the period to refer to Edith's banishment

¹⁷⁶ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 235.

¹⁷⁷ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 235.

during the events. He praises Edith's virtues and mourns that the "King outs from him the Queene, to be partaker of the disgrace, and misery of her house."¹⁷⁸ She is a "Lady of rare parts"¹⁷⁹ and her disgrace along with that of her family is unnecessary and unfortunate. Moreover, it is not the will of the people and Godwin is restored due to his popular support.

Indeed, Edith came to be seen less in the context of her father and family with the respect to the crisis of 1051 than in earlier texts. Besides Holinshed and Daniel's mentions of her within the context of the crisis, she becomes far less present within the context of her father's and husband's dispute of 1051. By contrast, the more ambiguous character of Godwin meant that authors no longer had to directly disassociate Edith with her father and family to portray her and their marriage. Indeed, only the 1533 Anonymous *Lyfe of Saynt Edward* does *not* detail Edward's and Edith's marriage as instigated by Godwin. It draws on Aelred of Rievaulx's depiction of a search by Edward for a perfect bride who will share his virginity. However, it tacks on that, after the search for a perfect virgin bride has been successful, "her father made greate meanes to the kynges counseyll for to accomplysshe this maryage."¹⁸⁰

With the exception of the above depiction, the marriage is attributed solely to Godwin and his political machinations. John Bale's 1560 *The Actes of the English Votaryes* echoes William of Malmesbury's doubt about Edward's true motivation in marrying Edith, religious or political. Bale also describes "legende of lyes"¹⁸¹ about Edward and Edith's marriage, describing the popular interpretation as one where their marriage was based on "a coniugall

¹⁷⁸ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 235.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

¹⁸⁰ *Lyfe of Saynt Edward*, 6.

¹⁸¹ Bale, *Actes*, "Edward showeth chastyte in bedde."

love without coniugall act”¹⁸² Bale’s description of the legend doesn’t address Godwin’s role in the marriage, suggesting that interpretations of a relationship based on political manipulation rather than religious belief were only slowly growing more palatable. Bale constructs a historiography of documentation of Edward and Edith’s marriage to refute the popular legend. His mission of debunking of the Catholic Church is greatly served by the story, which provides him an example of how the church manipulated history to their own advantage.

Within the historiography that Bale produces, the interpretation reinforces Godwin’s manipulation of Edward into marriage and casts doubt on Edward’s motives of revenge or actual desire for a wife he could ignore. Regardless, this return to Malmesbury’s uncertain interpretation for the marriage attempts to reconstruct a more complex narrative. Bale goes as far as to cite numerous other authors, including Vergil, to add a political motivation and deliberate refusal on Edward’s part to a narrative of their chastity. Bale’s multi-faceted approach to Godwin’s role in their marriage and chastity reflects the broader trend of greater ambiguity and less strict Pro-Norman, Anti-Godwin interpretations reflecting not only on interpretations of Edward and Godwin’s relationship and the crisis of 1051, but Edith’s political relationship to her family and, by consequence, Edward.

On a broader scale, the more ambiguous interpretations of Godwin and the Godwin family reflect the strong new undercurrent of Anti-French xenophobia that translated into Anti-Norman historiography. While the 12th century authors had glorified the Anglo-Saxon past, their connections with Norman societies had produced conflicted but not wholly negative depictions of the Conquest. However, over the course of the 16th century, William’s Conquest became increasingly to be seen as imposition on a uniquely English society. Earlier

¹⁸² Bale, *Actes*, “Edwarde showeth chastyte in bedde.”

works such as Caxton's *Chronicles* describe William as "a worthy kyng."¹⁸³ However, later works present a much more damning picture. In the anonymous 1533 *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, the Conquest of 1066 is identified as a moment when the "lyberte of Englade fayled and made an ende. And than came in bondage..."¹⁸⁴ In 1560, John Bale imagined that the Conquest "brought Englshe people in moste miserable subiccyon" and emphasized William's bastardy and unfamiliarity with English ways.

The increasingly negative interpretation of the Conquest created an emphasis on the "Englishness" of the Anglo-Saxon institutions of governance and, particularly, law. Consequently, Edward's role in creating an "English" Common Law came to define his kingship. While Hardyng refers only to Edward's piety, even works as early as Caxton's construct Edward's legacy in terms of his contribution to English Common Law. Indeed, Caxton describes "This kyng Edward made all the good lawes of Englund."¹⁸⁵ Vergil describes how Edward "picked forthe everie moste holsom and necessarie decrees ordeinenge onlie certayne selected to bee used as indifferent rules and prescripts of good life unto all degrees, which bie the posteritee weare termed common lawes."¹⁸⁶ Vergil's conceptualization of the laws is as being carefully selected to create "prescripts of good life" and perpetuate a "holsom" and just society. Holinshed conceptualizes the laws in a very similar way and describes how Edward compiled and determined the laws, "whose prescript men might liue in due forme and rightfull order of a civill life. The lawes of Saint Edward insituted."¹⁸⁷ Moreover, for Holinshed, the Common Laws are Edward's lasting defeat over

¹⁸³ Caxton, *Chronicles*, "Of kyng William bastard and how he governed hym well..."

¹⁸⁴ *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Caxton, *Chronicles*, "Of the first speialte that god shewed for seint Edwardes love by his lyfe"

¹⁸⁶ Vergil, *Polydore Vergil's English History*, 293

¹⁸⁷ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 237.

the Normans, as they were “so muchesteemed of the Englishmen, that after the Conquest, when the Normans oftentimes wente about to abrogate the same.”¹⁸⁸

Just as illustrative of the increasing importance of Edward’s legal legacy is the incorporation of the elimination of the Danegeld into the mainstream narrative of Edward’s reign. The Danegeld was a tax instituted in the 10th century to ensure England’s protection from Viking raiders. Hardyng, Caxton, Vergil, Bale, and Holinshed fail to mention the elimination of the tax. Other sources actually identify the elimination of the tax a primary accomplishment of Edward’s reign. Fabyan notes “This kyng discharged Englishmen of the greate tribute called Dane Gelt”¹⁸⁹ Rastell largely echoes Fabyan’s description. Stow gives a more specific description and recounts that Edward “released the tribute of the fourtie thousand pounds called Dane gilt, which the English people, even from the very beinning of the raigne of the Danes, was compelled to pay...”¹⁹⁰ Stow thus puts a specific number and a sense of the long-term nature of the payment on the “greate” amount described by Fabyan and Rastell, giving the disbanding a sense of urgency for the English nation. Giving even more specificity, Daniel contextualizes the disbanding of the Danegeld within Edward’s reign. He describes how “The first Acte [Edward] did, was the remifision of Danegilt, imposed by his Father, which amounted to forty thousand pounds yearly, and had beene payde for forty yeares past.”¹⁹¹ In each of these four descriptions then, Edward’s legal decision to disband the tax is presented as an act of heroism on behalf of the English people.

The transition to an emphasis on Edward’s legal legacy reveals not only expectations of kingship but also the nature of the relationship between crown and nation. It presents an

¹⁸⁸ Holinshed, *Chronicle*, 237.

¹⁸⁹ Fabyan, *Newe Cronycles*, 258.

¹⁹⁰ Stow, *Annales of England*, 118.

¹⁹¹ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

idea of nationhood based on common laws and customs, something similar to Simon de Monfort's "community of the realm." An agreed-upon code of governance enforced by a legitimate sovereign is the formula for what Holinshed deems a "civill life." This broad re-imagination of the crown-nation relationship resulted in a historiographical trend that emphasized moments when "Englishness" was created. Connected to anti-French historiography, promulgating a legitimate, historical sense of Englishness became just as important as vilifying previous encounters with the French. This situation posed a happy dilemma for Tudor historians for, as Shrank argues, "The variety of ethnic identities available to Tudor writers also enabled a degree of selectivity." The emphasis on moments of "Englishness" meant, however, that "it is the invaders who are stigmatized; once settled, within generations they are seen to acquire rights of habitation. Thus, sympathies lie with the Britons displaced by the Angles and Saxons and with the Anglo-Saxons subjugated by the Danes and Normans."¹⁹² The 16th century authors' construction of Edward's kingship in terms of his legal institutionalization of *English* laws and rejection of Danish overlordship thus fits within Shrank's argument. Moreover, McEachern's concept of "poetics of nationhood" could easily be applied to this historical narrative, just as she applies it to literature of the late 16th century.¹⁹³ These "poetics of nationhood" produce an Anti-Norman and Anglo-Saxon historiography intent on presenting legitimate Englishness rooted in a shared past and legitimate monarchy.

While an increased emphasis on law and an introduction of the elimination of the Danegeld into Edward's narrative reveals the impact of changing ideas of kingship manifested in Edward, the portrayal of Edith as a queen also conforms to changing

¹⁹² Shrank, *Writing the Nation*, 19.

¹⁹³ McEachern, *Poetics of Nationhood*

contemporaneous notions of queenship. Michelle White clearly summarizes the qualities expected of an Early Modern Queen and that “her reproductive duties apart, obedient, passive, submissive, chaste, pious, kind, and decorous, but to retire to the background.”¹⁹⁴ Portrayals of Edith stuck to this “traditional Queenship” (as Bucholz and Levin label it) and emphasized her conformity to those expectations. The portrayals of Edith certainly conform to Breitenberg’s observation that after the Protestant Reformation “women were more likely to be idealized as chaste and obedient wives rather than as virgins - formerly the paragon of Catholic femininity.”¹⁹⁵

The texts that describe Edith’s personality and queenship do so positively. Caxton describes that “the queen also in hir salfe lad [led] holy lyfe.”¹⁹⁶ The Anonymous *Lyfe* describes that “There was bytwene theym a lovyng [loving] spousehede [spousehood]/ without bodily knownyng [knowing] of bede.”¹⁹⁷ Stow credits her as “a very beautifull Damosell, very well instructed...”¹⁹⁸ Daniel asserts that she was “described (by the writers of those times) to have beene a Lady of rare parts, excellently learned, beautifull, and as faire of minde as body.”¹⁹⁹ Each of these adulations reflects her personal qualities rather than deeds. None mention patronage or her upbringing at Wilton as do *The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster* or other earlier sources. Indeed, the qualities presented - beauty and knowledge - relate more to private wifhood than public queenship, fitting with White’s roles for traditional queenship. Rather than the “Queen Consort” Stafford describes as a dual role as both wife and queen, Edith becomes only a wife, when mentioned at all. Fabyan, Rastell,

¹⁹⁴ quoted in Levin and Bucholz, *Queens and Power*, xvi.

¹⁹⁵ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 26.

¹⁹⁶ Caxton, *Chronicles*, “Of the first speialte that god shewed for seint Edwardes love by his lyfe”

¹⁹⁷ *Lyfe of Saynt Edwarde*, 6.

¹⁹⁸ Stow, *Annales of England*, 118.

¹⁹⁹ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

and Holinshed, in their depiction that Edward “never dwelt with her fleshly”, present a wholly anonymous Edith. Vergil does not refer to her in the role of a queen at all.

While Edith’s increasing relegation to the background of their marriage and chastity conforms to Wiesener’s depiction of the Early Modern period as “a time of more rigid enforcement of gender hierarchy”,²⁰⁰ her childlessness represents the failure of the essential duty of wives and queens. It was her failure to bear children that precipitated the Norman Conquest and, as Hare described it, “for 500 yeares together and even for eternity... to rest under the disgraceful title of a Conquered nation.”²⁰¹ Though Hare’s rhetoric is certainly inflammatory, increasingly anti-French and anti-Norman historiography surprisingly failed to result in a vilification of Edith in duty to produce an heir.

As production of an heir is an essential duty of queenship, the lack of blame is indeed curious. Edith is not vilified for the lack of producing an heir because the sexual agency for reproducing lies with Edward.²⁰² The trend toward emphasizing Edward’s simplicity in comparison with Godwin becomes a way with which to give him agency for the chastity. The increasing emphasis on the “soft simplicity”²⁰³ Daniel describes becomes the catalyst through which Edward’s choice to remain childless is understood. The notion of simplicity negotiates the contradiction between the king who instilled law and repealed the Danegeld and the man who did not love his country enough to produce an heir against his wishes to stay chaste. It his single-minded devotion to God and the country which informed both these otherwise contradictory choices.

²⁰⁰ Wiesener, *Women and Gender*, 255.

²⁰¹ Hare, *St. Edwards Ghost*, 13.

²⁰² This exemplifies the how the new shift in ideologies of sexual agency from women as temptors to males ability to control women applies to reproduction. [For a detailed discussion of marriage, sexual agency, and reproduction see: Peters, *Women in Britain*, 7-44.]

²⁰³ Daniel, *Historie of England*, 19.

However, the rhetorical strategy of portraying Edward with “soft simplicity” does become more problematic with new concepts of national identity emerging in the late 16th century. As Breitenberg describes, “Protestantism increasingly valorized the nuclear family as a microcosm of the state.”²⁰⁴ Edward’s childlessness thus becomes more problematic as it reflects a chaos, an empty role in his personal microcosm. McEachern’s conceptualization of 16th century English nationalism as a “performative ideal” based on “social unity founded in the ideological affiliation of crown, church, and land”²⁰⁵ is helpful for framing this translation from microcosm to the English state. Edward fails to perform this childbearing role, thus opening the door for the breaking of Anglo-Saxon social unity. Because it is Edward who is responsible for regulating Edith’s wifely duties, it is his failure that becomes the tragedy. Placing the political dialogues of these sources within an intersection of political authority and gender, they reflect the increasingly narrow space within which these two aspects of identity operated.

The decidedly more ambiguous portrayal of Godwin reflects greater anti-French xenophobia that resulted in anti-Norman historiography. The crisis of 1051 thus becomes an example of ambiguity or French villainy. The growing heterogeneous sense of national identity enters these dialogues both through the increasing portrayal of anti-French xenophobia and through defining Edward’s kingship by his legal legacy in establishing Common Law and eliminating the Danegeld. Edith becomes less defined by her family and more by her conformity to the goals of Early Modern Queenship. However, her inability to fulfill the most essential goal, producing an heir, translates to Edward’s simplicity and inability to control her reproduction rather than her failure as Queen. Consequently, as a

²⁰⁴ Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 26.

²⁰⁵ McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, 5.

whole, the political dialogues of the 15th-17th century sources show a dynamic but increasingly rigid intersection between politics and gender.

Epilogue: Later 17th Century Sources

While the 16th century sources and Daniel's early 17th century work show the beginnings of the shifts in writing about Edward and Edith, those trends would come to full fruition in three sources of the later 17th century: John Hare's *St. Edward's Ghost*, John Gibbon's *Edovardus Confessor redivivus*, and Henry Keepe's *A true and perfect narrative of the strange and unexpected finding the crucifix & gold-chain of that pious prince, St. Edward the King and Confessor*. These three sources exemplify the shifts in genre, politics, and religion in the Early Modern Period. None of the three are traditional narrative histories. None indicate chastity as an element of Edward piety. None of them even mention Edith. All three, to some degree, base Edward's importance as an example of English kingship on his legal legacy.

Of primary importance is the distinction of genre, as Hare's, Gibbon's, and Keepe's short pieces were meant for political purposes rather than historical ones. Rather than to provide a descriptive history, Hare's focus is to detail the legal evils inflicted on England by the Norman. Gibbon and Keepe both have a singular purpose in their recounting the story of Edward: to relate the story of the contemporary find in his sarcophagus. Thus, while like the earlier work of Vergil, which also didn't mention chastity within the marriage, that might also be due to the limits of their targeted purposes and shorter length. Brevity may simply preclude the insertion of the chastity narrative. However, all three authors construct Edward's piety through other narrative elements. While genre might limit these later authors' scope, their decisions to ignore the chastity narrative also reflects new constructions of Edward's piety.

Indeed, Gibbon and Keepe choose not to focus on chastity, but rather to construct Edward's piety through miracles. Keepe describes how "this Holy and Religious Prince had, during his Life time, cured many most Inveterate and Malignant Distempers" and that "People affected with the life Diseases coming to his Tomb, several received Benefit thereby." To Keepe, it is Edward's miracles which draw visitors to his tomb and which are the basis of his sanctity. Though he deems it "inferior devotion", the miracles give Edward's religious legacy weight. As Gibbon and Keepe were writing to Catholic King James II, they could not discredit a saint's cult entirely. Indeed, Gibbon describes Edward as "Royal Confessor of the Religion, which our most Seren-Soveraign has Restored, and solemnly Professes."²⁰⁶ However, the fact that both wrote to the Catholic King and cited miracles rather than chastity as the source of Edward's piety indicates a weakened relationship between piety and chastity.

While Keepe's and Gibbon's pamphlets exemplify the long-term trajectory of religious dialogues in sources about Edward and Edith, John Hare's 1647 *St. Edward's Ghost or Anti-Normanisme*, exemplifies the same long-term trends in political dialogues. Even in its title it gives a full voice to the earlier trend of anti-Norman historiography. He mourns that William "be either reputed among our lawful Kings by force of Saint Edwards legacy, or adjudge an usurper; however, that he may not longer stand for the Alpha of our Kings in the Royall Catalogue."²⁰⁷ Hare's assertion that history should be rewritten reflects the turmoil of the Civil War wrought by political and cultural disunity. To Hare, Edward's reign presented the last "pure English" moment in history. Hare declares that under Edward, "we were also blest with a hopefull language and happy Lawes, Lawes envied but not equall'd in

²⁰⁶ Gibbon, *Edovardus Confessor redivivus*, 36.

²⁰⁷ Hare, *St. Edward's Ghost*, 19.

Chrisendome...²⁰⁸ To Hare, William is the ultimate betrayer of Edward's legal legacy and intention to pass on a common set of laws based on equality. He asserts that it "upon his specious and faire vows and promises to preserve inviolate our Lawes and Liberties, [William] was admitted to the throne..."²⁰⁹ By violating that trust and imposing Norman law, William and his successors had violated English custom and identity for centuries.

Hare's bottom-up vision of law as stemming from custom and cultural mores fits into the Commonwealth's ideals of rule strictly by law and not by monarch. Hare identifies Edward's laws as those without the corruption of a non-English monarch and, therefore, the most just. Just as Hare's contemporaries were drawing parallels between the Anglo-Saxon Witan and Parliament, Hare provides the Commonwealth with precedent of a law-based society. Keepe's and Gibbon's later works, addressed to King James II, emphasize the role of law in mediating between a sovereign and their subjects. Edward becomes a useful figure to depict such an equilibrium.

The trend of anti-Norman historiography is continued in Keepe's and Gibbon's 1688 pamphlets, both of which are addressed to King James II. Henry Keepe and John Gibbon each describe the accidental opening of Edward's coffin that resulted in their being able view a crucifix and staff preserved within. Each tell miracle stories of his coffin and that "The Fame wereof, drew many to pay a kind of Inferiour Devotion to his Memory."²¹⁰ Keepe's Protestant tendencies find fault with the Catholic beliefs in miracles. To Keepe, Edward's reign was miraculous in a legal sense. He adulates that Edward was always considering "how such wholesome and binding Laws might be Instituted, as not only to secure the Freedom

²⁰⁸ Hare, *St. Edward's Ghost*, 12..

²⁰⁹ Hare, *St. Edward's Ghost*, 12..

²¹⁰ Keepe, *A True and Perfect Narrative*, 23.

and Tranquility of his Subjects during his own time, but to future Ages.”²¹¹ Keepe’s work reflects well that, by the 17th century, it was Edward’s legal, and not spiritual, legacy that was present in English historical imagination. Indeed, all three pamphlets illustrate the long-term divorcing of Edward’s piety from chastity and the emphasis on his legal legacy within popular imagination of his kingship.

Conclusion

Historians of the life of Edward the Confessor, such as Frank Barlow, Pauline Stafford, and Joanna Huntington, have only ascribed the insertion of chastity into the narrative of his marriage to Edith of Wessex as a consequence of his canonization.²¹² However, a close reading of sources detailing their marriage demonstrates that the emergence of chastity within that narrative was the result of the convergence of four forces: gender, politics, piety, and sexuality. This investigation considered the junction of these four forces that motivated the narrative of chastity. The broad context of the changing English political and religious landscape of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period influenced the chroniclers and hagiographers who wrote about Edith and Edward. Their specific contexts are also key to understanding their particular motives and interpretations of Edith and Edward’s marriage.

Examining political dialogues within the 11th-13th century texts reveals that portrayals of Edith and Edward’s chastity were influenced by changing interpretations of the relationship between Edith’s husband and her father Godwin, which emerged as the result of legitimizing Norman political rule. The association and dissociation of Edith from her family were tied to these changing interpretations of her family’s role in Edward’s reign, as well as

²¹¹ Keepe, *A True and Perfect Narrative*, 18.

²¹² Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*; Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*; Huntington, “Edward the Celibate, Edward the Saint: Virginity in the Construction of Edward the Confessor.”

changing views and mores of queenship. The solidification of standards and duties of queenship created a contradictory response to the narrative of chastity. On one hand, Edith and Edward's childlessness was ideal in that it prompted the Norman kingship of England. On the other hand, it was problematic in Edith's failure to fulfill queenly duties. Consequently then, portrayals of Edith and her marriage to Edward were influenced by an increasing inflexibility over the course of the Early Middle Ages between gender and political authority.

Religious dialogues were another force shaping the emergence of chastity within the narratives of Edith and Edward's marriage in the 11th-13th centuries. The political motivations behind Edward's canonization and emerging cult meant that his sanctity was constructed as an ideal of holy kingship to be an example to Plantagenet kings. Chastity was developed within both Edward's piety and Edith's piety to legitimize Edward's sainthood. The use of chastity in Edward's hagiography reflected positive perceptions of chaste marriage as a solution for how to depict married saints. The portrayal of chastity correlates to an increasing association of chastity with sanctity in Early Medieval Christianity. Ultimately, the example of chastity within the marriage of Edith of Wessex and Edward the Confessor demonstrates the development of greater inflexibility of both gender within politics and sexuality within piety in England over the course of the Early Middle Ages.

The 15th-17th century texts were also marked by a decreasing emphasis on chastity within the construction of Edward's and Edith's sanctity. Edward's piety is increasingly either "secularized" or attributed to miracles rather than chastity. Edith's piety becomes derived from her personal, interior qualities rather than an outward show of patronage. This decreasing emphasis of chastity shows both the fractured religious identities caused by the

Reformation and the disassociation of sexual abstinence and piety within the context of marriage.

The 15th-17th century sources also show an increasing rigidity of gender within political authority. Within the context of a growing sense of nationalism that both unified and fractured English political identity, the trend of anti-Norman historiography wrought more ambiguous interpretations of Godwin, Edward, and their relationship. At the same time, Edward's legal legacy came increasingly to define his kingship. Edith's queenship, by contrast, became defined within more rigid and domestic roles. Her childlessness came to be interpreted as the product of Edward's lack of sexual control rather than her failure.

The intertwined nature of the forces that shaped the chastity narrative from the 11th century to the 17th illustrates how history does not operate within a discursive vacuum. In a broader sense, the long-term trends of the changing interpretations of chastity within the marriage of Edward the Confessor and Edith of Wessex also illustrate how history can become battleground for discourse. Chastity was established, contested, and fought over. The mutation of the chastity narrative was disagreement of historical accuracy. Rather, it provides insight into the motives and context of the authors who constructed it, just as it provides insight into the broader context of change and continuity within which those authors operated.

I began this investigation with a reference to the recent film *The Kings Speech* and it is only fitting I should end this investigation with another reference to it. After giving a speech, King George V, played by Michael Gambon, tells his son George VI, played by Colin Firth, "In the past all a King had to do was look respectable in uniform and not fall off his horse. Now we must invade people's homes and ingratiate ourselves with them. This

family is reduced to those lowest, basest of all creatures - we've become actors!" Indeed, the example of chastity in the marriage of Edward the Confessor and Edith of Wessex demonstrates that Kings of England have been actors on the historiographical stage for centuries, millennia. Examining how these narrative trends have been endlessly reinterpreted reveals the dynamic nature of both English kingship and historical study itself.

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