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## "With a Woman's Bitterness": Early Propaganda Against Female Rulers in Medieval Chronicles in the Twelfth and Fifteenth Centuries

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"WITH A WOMAN'S BITTERNESS":  
EARLY PROPAGANDA AGAINST FEMALE RULERS  
IN MEDIEVAL CHRONICLES IN THE TWELFTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

A Thesis

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Designation

University Honors with Distinction

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Chronicles in the Twelfth and Fifteenth Centuries

Has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Designation University Honors with  
Distinction

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## "With A Woman's Bitterness":

### Early Propaganda in Medieval Chronicles in the Twelfth and Fifteenth Centuries

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## Introduction

In a survey course on English history, the stories that are analyzed in this paper are most likely not emphasized, if they are mentioned at all. They are, in some ways, not stories that greatly changed the European landscape, although their long-term impact on historical events should not be underestimated. They are certainly not success stories, at least not for the women involved. It is precisely the failures involved that make these stories important, that leave them the potential to impact European history. In the first instance, it is the Empress Matilda's failure to capture the crown from her cousin Stephen that makes her successful in the long course of history; in the second instance, it is because of Queen Margaret of Anjou's failure to capture the crown from Edward IV for her son Edward that we know her today. This is because in its most basic definition, failure involves an attempted action, and it is the active role that these women assume that makes them important. It is the attempt that I would like to focus on, not the failure or the success.

Let us take a brief look at some examples of the more exciting events in the lives of these two women where failure plays an important role. In late 1141, the Empress Matilda was besieged in a castle by her cousin, King Stephen I of England. Running out of food, and constantly harassed by royal troops, she made a daring escape in the middle of the night, escaping to Oxford. This is probably the most famous episode of Matilda's three year bid for the throne and is recorded in many of the chronicles that describe the events of those years. The anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen* gives the most descriptive account:

...she issued forth one night, attended only by three knights chosen for their wary prudence. The ground was white with snow, which lay deep over the whole country, the

rivers were frozen hard, and for six miles she and her companions had to make their toilsome way, on foot, over snow and ice. What was very remarkable, and indeed truly miraculous...she passed too through the royal posts, while the silence of the night was broken all around, by the clang of trumpets and the cries of the guard, without losing a single man of her escort, and observed only by one man of the king's troops who had been wrought with to favour her escape.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly this is a particularly sensational episode from Matilda's life. In this story, it is Matilda's success in escaping from Oxford that marks her failure to keep her kingdom and her inability to protect her people from Stephen's forces. It is after this episode that Matilda gives up her quest for the throne of England, leaving the battles to be fought by her eldest son, Henry II, who would one day become Stephen's heir and the King of England.

Medieval historians often find the portents of doom early in a subject's life, especially if they seem to face a harsh and negative reality towards the end of their days. This can also be said of modern historians, however, and happens often with Margaret of Anjou. Margaret spent her time as Queen of England hated by the English people and died in exile, having lost her husband and son along with her kingdom. Historian and biographer Philippe Erlanger describes Margaret's journey to England from France before her marriage, when a storm threatened a shipwreck:

As in a Homeric storm, rival gods strove against each other; those hostile to the princess encouraging the sailors and keeping the ship afloat, while those friendly to her united to keep her from reaching the shore which must be her bane. More than once, shipwreck came near to being her soul's salvation. But the hostile gods were bent on her tragic destiny; and they triumphed...Still the storm did not abate...Sick and dishevelled, her clothes in rags, Margaret set foot in her new country. No welcome awaited her...Every

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Forester, trans. and ed., *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon. Comprising the History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry II. Also, the Acts of Stephen, King of England and Duke of Normandy* (1853; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968), 395.

violent gust of wind threatened to tear the hovel apart and the rain beat savagely at roof and walls...Such was England's greeting to her Queen.<sup>2</sup>

The image of a group of hostile gods attempting to keep Margaret alive to face her destiny, while those sympathetic to her plight would have killed her before she ever came to England, is quite an interesting, and certainly poetically fanciful, demonstration of the portents of doom.

Ostensibly, this is a story about success: the success of Margaret in reaching England's shores and becoming the Queen of England. But it is also about failure, because here we find predictions of Margaret's failure as a ruler and her eventual failure to keep her throne. It is significant to point out that both the Empress Matilda and Queen Margaret die in exile in France.

This essay examines the attempts of two women to become queen. However, it should be noted that the type of queenship that will be mentioned is not the same as the usual conception of the word; it is not queen as consort, mediator, or intercessor. What these women wanted was to become queen, yes, but in their own right. This concept has been defined by some with the term queen regnant, or reigning queen.\* This distinction between queen regnant and queen consort is important, because it is their attempts to become reigning queens that are criticized in medieval chronicles. These criticisms, I would argue, take the form of propaganda, as will be explained later. This propaganda was extremely effectual in not only condemning the contemporary efforts of these two women, but also in creating extremely negative images of these women that would last until modern times.

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou: Queen of England* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), 76.

\* The definition of queen regnant that I am assuming is that of a queen who reigns in her own right. This is distinct from the definition of queen consort, which I am using to mean the wife of a king.



*Thesis*

In reading the descriptions of the Empress Matilda and Queen Margaret of Anjou by their contemporaries, it is clear that their male counterparts were threatened by their attempts to participate in the politics and governance of England. It is also clear that male rulers believed that these two women's use of power was a usurpation of the traditional gender hierarchy. Therefore, male chroniclers, living contemporaneously with either the Empress Matilda or Queen Margaret, created descriptions of them that reflected the propaganda promulgated against them during their lifetimes. This propaganda imposed a strict dichotomization of gender roles in order to prevent women from gaining and holding leadership in the public sphere.

This was done primarily through the careful use of imagery. With both of these women, the images generally fall into two groups. The first group contains depictions that demonstrate the two rulers adopting "male" qualities, often cited as pride, arrogance, ambition, imperiousness, or a lack of mercy. In other words, they depict the two queens regnant behaving as kings would. With Margaret, these images also include the adoption of male actions, such as leading an army in battle. The second group of images depicts the two rulers with an emphasis on their "feminine" qualities or context. These images emphasize qualities such as indecisiveness, haughtiness, mercy, revenge, vengeance, bitterness, etc. They also can focus on Matilda or Margaret's relationship with the rest of their family, be it with their fathers, brothers, cousins, or with their male sons. In Margaret's case, we also find evidence of propaganda about the parentage of the Prince of Wales.

This paper will thus focus on the use of imagery as propaganda. As such, I will be looking at the images of Matilda and Margaret as they are represented in contemporary medieval chronicles. In particular, what I will analyze are the depictions of Matilda and Margaret's agency or activity. I will ask the following research questions: (1) How active were they in their attempts to gain the throne? (2) Were their activities performed primarily on their own, or were they active in conjunction with a man? (3) What, in particular, are the criticisms made against these women? (4) How effective was this type of propaganda? My method in answering these questions focused primarily on the language these chroniclers used. Are these two women depicted using passive or active verbs? What are the adjectives used to describe them? Are they depicted displaying "male" qualities or characteristics? Or do they primarily have "female" qualities or characteristics? At what point in their lives do these authors introduce them as characters on the stage of politics? How are other people described in relation to Matilda or Margaret? What will become clear, I believe, is that the use of imagery by male chroniclers was an effective use of an early form of propaganda, done in order to actively defend a patriarchal monopoly of political power, and that it should be recognized as such.

### *Definitions and Concepts at Play*

The study of reigning queens is certainly nothing new. Indeed, in the course of English history, we are able to find many examples of queens regnant from later periods. Beginning with Mary I (r. 1553-1558), and then her sister Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603), we can continue on through the Stuart queens, Mary II (r. 1689-1694) and Anne (r. 1702-1714), to Victoria (r. 1837-1901)

and, finally, Elizabeth II (r. 1952 to present). All of these women were recognized as reigning queens, whether or not they ruled with a consort. The line of succession came to them, and then went through them to their children, if they had any. These women all held different amounts of power during their lifetimes; arguably, some queen consorts may have had more power than some of these queens regnant. What is important for the purpose of this paper is not the level of power, however, but that these women were recognized as having a legitimate claim to the throne. Inherent in this assertion is that they also held enough theoretical authority or had the ability to *act* as queen regnant and rule their country based on their own rights and supremacy.

Scholars have long debated how these women established their authority, and indeed, how effective they were. Some reigning queens are seen to be dominated by their husbands, while others are viewed as forging their own identities even with a prince consort in the wings.<sup>3</sup> Still others famously chose to remain single, believing this to be the only way to have a clear power identity. In examining the two most famous representatives of English queen regnants, the renaissance Elizabeth I and the industrialized Victoria, we see two women who forged powerful identities. The later example, Victoria, certainly had an easier time establishing herself. Her succession to the throne had never really been contended, and when she ascended the throne after the death of her uncle she was the clear and apparent heir. It was not until her marriage to Prince

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<sup>3</sup> Most historians today believe Mary I and Mary II to have been dominated by their husbands, Philip II of Spain and William of Orange respectively. Indeed, even though Mary II was the heir to her father's throne, when Parliament offered her the crown it was only in conjunction with her husband; they would rule jointly as William II and Mary II until Mary's death in 1694, after which her husband ruled as sole king until his death in 1702. See John Van Der Kiste, *William and Mary* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2003). On the other hand, at least in the first few years of her marriage to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria was known by the English peoples to be an active female ruler. However, towards to end of his life, some considered the Prince to be King of England in all but name. See Gillian Gill, *We Two: Victoria and Albert: Rulers, Partners, and Rivals* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009).

Albert in 1840 that she began to lose some of her authority, if only for the simple reason that she was very often incapacitated by childbirth after this point. Indeed, her position as a wife and mother necessitated that she give up some of her power as queen; the slack was picked up by Prince Albert, who effectively ruled as king in all but name until his death in 1861.<sup>4</sup>

In our former example of Elizabeth I, however, we find a successful image of a powerful reigning queen who was able to keep and assert her authority throughout the entirety of her life. Historian Susan Frye suggests that it was Elizabeth herself who, in choosing to remain unmarried, was able to create the image of an authoritative monarch. She differs from others in this, however, in her focus on Elizabeth's agency\*, "instead of assuming either that Elizabeth was in full control of how she was represented or that she was controlled by the special-interest groups surrounding her." Frye "concentrate[s] on Elizabeth's actions and words...in order to ascertain the conscious and unconscious strategies through which she worked to create an identity beyond accepted gender definitions."<sup>5</sup> Frye's emphasis on agency is significant for this study, because, as I have noted above, it is not the success of the attempts made by these women to become reigning queens, but the attempts themselves that are important.

Unfortunately for our study we often do not have the words of Matilda or Margaret themselves to examine like we do with Elizabeth I. This is especially true of Matilda, few of

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<sup>4</sup> See Daphne Bennett, *King without a Crown: Albert, Prince Consort of England 1819-1861* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1977) and Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

\* Agency here means the action or means by which something is accomplished.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii.

whose letters, due to the span of the centuries, have survived.<sup>6</sup> Margaret of Anjou, on the other hand, excelled at letter writing, and her letters are still extant. However, because we are more concerned with imagery, and the presentation of these women in history, we must turn our attention from the words they themselves used to the chronicles written about them during their lifetimes. Underlying the argument of this paper is a belief, accurately expressed by Lois Huneycutt, that "a careful study of the language and the omissions" of medieval chroniclers "show that, while they were quite comfortable with the idea of females as regents or transmitters of power, their tolerance did not often extend to acceptance of a female exercising authority in her own name."<sup>7</sup> This was because, as Huneycutt points out, medieval chroniclers thought of ruling as an exercise that needed "active, vigorous, and 'masculine' virtues." They are therefore able to praise some women who adopt these characteristics at certain points in time, i.e. during times of war when a husband or male relative was away from home. On the other hand, they are also able to condemn a woman who would seem to be denying her femininity with an attempt to be "male" in order to rule. As Huneycutt writes:

...it is clear that medieval thinkers were not able or even willing to exclude women from sharing in public authority, [but] it is not so clear that their tolerance extended to accepting a female ruler in her own right. [The Empress] Matilda enjoyed the approbation of French and German chroniclers who could fit her into the familiar patterns

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<sup>6</sup> We do find some letters, most notably written during the latter half of her life, while her son Henry II was king of England. One of these can be found, written by Matilda to Thomas a Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, regarding his quarrel with her son, in Anne Crawford, *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100-1547* (Phoenix Mill: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1994), 28-29. For the letters of Margaret of Anjou, see also Cecil Monro, *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Becketon and Others. Written in the Reigns of Henry V and Henry VI*, (repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Lois Huneycutt, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 191.

of female intercessor or regent, but the English chroniclers who saw her claiming power in her own right often saw her as haughty, arrogant and unwomanish.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, in order to establish a clear picture of the activity of our two subjects, we need to realize that they were fighting an uphill battle. They needed to adopt male characteristics in order to be respected, but crossing too far over that line could open them up to vicious attacks on their femininity, and indeed, lead to the rejection of their right to rule under the auspices of patriarchal hegemony.<sup>9</sup>

We therefore find women sharing power with their male relatives in traditionally male roles. Often, this arose from the fact that women's public roles were often extensions of their private roles as wife and mother. This idea is expressed by Shulamith Shahar, who argues that women's situation in the Middle Ages does not allow for a strict dichotomization between public and private.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, we can see that traditional feminine tasks such as the raising and education of children could have lasting repercussions in the public sphere, especially in the political arena. Women could also have far-reaching influence on the marriages of their daughters, whether this was by educating them as to their proper role in the household

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<sup>8</sup> Huneycutt, "Female Succession," 201.

<sup>9</sup> Huneycutt gives us a good definition of male or female qualities that I have adapted to use in this study. "Feminine virtues such as prudence, wisdom, patience, and compassion" complement "the masculine qualities of strength, bravery, resolve, and fidelity." Opposing these virtues are negative qualities. For women these include "capriciousness, physical weakness, lust, instability, lack of intelligence, irrationality, and a tendency toward duplicity." It should also be noted that male characteristics are often anything described as "active, vigorous" whereas feminine characteristics are marked by passivity. See Huneycutt, *Female Succession*, 190-201.

<sup>10</sup> Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A history of women in the Middle Ages*, trans. Chaya Galai (1983; rev. and repr., New York: Routledge, 2007). Huneycutt also believes that medieval persons did not recognize a distinction between public and private spheres, where she writes that "the medieval world drew little distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres of life and authority, or between public and private rights." See Huneycutt, "Female Succession," 190.

beforehand, or by participating in the marital negotiations themselves. John Parsons writes, "despite their membership in patriarchal families that traded them in marriage, noblewomen's unique participation in matrimonial politics did afford them opportunities to claim power."<sup>11</sup>

André Poulet goes even further, connecting the public role of noblewoman with queenship, and a mother's role as the educator of her daughter with her role in the politics of marriage:

...however "domestic" or "private" an activity the education of children may appear, the implications of the queen's role as instructor and her capacity to object (if temporarily) to a diplomatic marriage point up the inadequacy of positing modern boundaries between public and private when considering the power of medieval noblewomen. Daughters and their [education before their] marriages in effect emerge as a practical means by which queens crossed limits between the unofficial sphere to which popular expectations and royal ritual directed them...and the magisterial sphere in which their husbands functioned.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence shows that the thin line between these public and private spheres, as noted above, was not only sometimes obscured, but completely obliterated. Throughout the Middle Ages, war was an almost constant threat, and husbands or fathers could be gone for months or even years at a time. In their absence, women were often expected to wield aspects of their husband's authority in the protection of their homes and lands, or even to do so alone as heiresses or widows.

Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this is found in the Paston letters, wherein Margaret Paston writes to her husband John I asking for war materials to protect their home and lands in

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<sup>11</sup> John Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 65.

<sup>12</sup> André Poulet, "Capetian Women and the Regency: The Genesis of a Vocation," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 75.

his absence.<sup>13</sup> As Eileen Power writes, "throughout the period, social and physical conditions of life, constant wars and slow communications, inevitably threw a great deal of responsibility on ladies as representatives of absent husbands... She had to be prepared to take his place at any moment, were she Queen Regent or obscure gentlewoman."<sup>14</sup> The ways in which private roles gave rise to public images and the implications of women's private tasks in this way suggest a blending between the public and private spheres, allowing for women to assert power in atypical ways throughout the course of the Middle Ages.

This blending between public and private roles for women holds especially true when applied to the idea of queenship. The accepted image of the queen consort as intercessor or mediator was a direct outcome of her role within the family as wife or mother. Pauline Stafford writes that the image of the queen as intercessor "allowed the public roles of women to emerge from their familial ones, but at the same time constrained the public woman with the idealized behavior of the wife, mother, and daughter."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this role of intercessor was, as Parsons asserts, often applicable to other members of the royal family, including daughters of the king:

Even before marriage... royal women could find in kingship's evolving ritual setting many opportunities to serve their families... Following their mother's example, royal daughters interceded for petitioners, implying that the supplicants had reason to think the king would listen to his daughters' request; by doing so, he confirmed the young women's

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Davis, ed. *The Paston Letters: A Selection in Modern Spelling* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 13-14. What is particularly interesting is that in the same letter in which she describes the defenses she is preparing for the household, Margaret asks for food and cloth to take care of the children as well, a particularly feminine task.

<sup>14</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 145.



status as mediators with him, and thus tacitly encouraged others to seek their friendship and patronage.<sup>16</sup>

A queen's image as mediator, while allowing her to have power and authority, could also open her to criticism over her use of that authority. This is especially true during periods when the succession to the throne was unclear, as would happen time and again throughout the Middle Ages. As the female head of her family, a queen would necessarily have a vested interest in seeing her son or husband succeed as king, and she could, and very often did, use her influence behind the scenes to try to make this happen.<sup>17</sup>

What differentiates the use of unofficial influence from the actions of the Empress Matilda and Queen Margaret of Anjou is their emergence as active players in the political machinery of their time. When examining Matilda, it is important to note that she is not acting on behalf of a male family member; instead, she is grasping power for herself as daughter of the former king of England. With Margaret, we find a woman attempting to hold the crown for family members who were unfit to rule, namely a mentally unfit husband and a young son. While other queens could be attacked for their use of unofficial power, such as for interfering with the decisions of their husbands, or as happened often in succession conflicts, with questions regarding the legitimacy of their offspring, both of these women were accused of abusing the use of power in and of itself. As Marjorie Chibnall writes, "Conduct acceptable in a powerful king...

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<sup>16</sup> Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power," 71.

<sup>17</sup> Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England," 145-146. See also the articles by André Poulet, "Capetian Women and the Regency" and by John Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power" for further evidence of wives and mothers using their "unofficial" influence as queen to affect "official" politics.

was not acceptable in a 'Lady of the English' fighting an uphill struggle to establish her authority."<sup>18</sup> The same could easily be said of Margaret of Anjou.

In addition to noting the blending of public and private spheres in the lives of medieval women, one must also take into consideration the particular ways that they are being portrayed. This is especially true of medieval chronicles, where the author had a vested interest in their portrayal of their subject. Thus it is particularly crucial to recognize the relationship the chronicler had to the Empress Matilda or Queen Margaret of Anjou and whether or not the accounts were written during the subject's lifetime. This is for several reasons, as Stafford outlines:

The relationship of writer and subject, in time and place, as patron and client, can be critical here. Dead women may be treated differently from the living, more readily sanctified or vilified according to the needs and purposes of the writer; a patroness or powerful queen is treated more circumspectly. A powerful woman filled different roles at different stages of her life, and she learned from experience. Pictures of her created at different times should be separated, not just according to author and intention, but into those produced during and after her lifetime, in her youth, middle, and old age.<sup>19</sup>

In dynastic struggles such as the two examined here, we must pay attention to who is writing the chronicle and for what reason. In this way, we can begin to understand the bias that is inherent in every source, and, through comparison with other chronicles, build a fuller and more complete picture of our subjects. As M.A. Hicks writes:

Chronicles cannot safely be regarded as mere repositories of miscellaneous facts. That information comes from a chronicle is no guarantee of veracity or objectivity. Chronicles can be misinformed; they disagree, often on crucial points, and present different versions of events. Historians need to recognise such defects and discriminate between different accounts...Chronicles vary not only in accuracy, but in interpretation. They were all

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<sup>18</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1991), 63.

<sup>19</sup> Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England," 148.

written for a purpose from a particular point of view, and with a particular audience in mind.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between chronicler and subject is thus imperative to forming a full analysis of the deeds of the Empress Matilda and Queen Margaret of Anjou, and the ways in which they were perceived and promulgated by their contemporaries.

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<sup>20</sup> M.A. Hicks, "The Sources," in *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. A.J. Pollard (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 25-27.

## The Empress Matilda

(1102-1167, r. 1141)

### *Biography*

Matilda was born in February of 1102, the eldest legitimate child of Henry I of England. Her mother was Queen Matilda (Edith), King Henry's first wife.<sup>21</sup> Little is known of her early years, but at age 8, she was betrothed to the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry V. She moved to Germany in 1110, and was married in January 1114. As Henry V's wife, the evidence shows that she judged court cases, interceded with her husband on behalf of petitioners, and ruled parts of Italy as regent on behalf of her husband.<sup>22</sup> During this time that we encounter descriptions of her as the "good Matilda," a woman who "frequently appeared at her husband's side."<sup>23</sup> The experience Matilda gained here would be invaluable to her in later years, but in some ways it would also be detrimental. Marjorie Chibnall explains:

German queens and empresses traditionally played an important part in the ceremonial and often in the actual work of government. When the anonymous imperial chronicler wrote that the emperor took Matilda as his wife and made her his consort in the kingdom, it should not be supposed that the term had the somewhat neutral meaning of 'queen consort' in a modern constitutional monarchy...Matilda frequently intervened to sponsor royal grants...she also petitioned from time to time on behalf of those seeking reconciliation with her husband.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-45.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

When compared to her mother's experience and level of power as queen of England, Matilda's experience was considerably more fruitful.<sup>25</sup> She learned not only the more accepted queenly duties of intercessor and regent, but also how to rule as a king would, albeit in consort with her husband. This would be important later, as she asserted her right to hold the English throne.

Matilda's husband, Henry V, died in 1125, and shortly thereafter, Matilda was recalled by her father back to England, where she was designated as the official heir to the kingdom of England.<sup>26</sup> In an oath taken in the presence of the king, the English nobles promised "to defend her loyally against all others if she outlived her father and he left no legitimate son" or "to accept Matilda as their lady if Henry died without a male heir."<sup>27</sup> First to swear was the king's nephew, Stephen of Blois, (though after Henry I of England died in 1135, he wasted no time seizing the crown of England, becoming Stephen I). In 1128, Matilda was married for a second time, in this case to Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, to whom she bore three sons, including the future king of England, Henry II. When her father died in 1135, Matilda was in Anjou, and while moving quickly to take over Normandy, she failed to be fast enough to claim the English throne, which was assumed by Stephen I.

While the entirety of Stephen's reign is known to history as "The Anarchy," the part that can be most accurately deemed a civil war is the period between 1139 and 1142. This is the most

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<sup>25</sup> For more information on Matilda (Edith) and her reign as queen, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 9-15.

<sup>26</sup> Her brother William, the heir apparent, died in 1120 in the White Ship disaster. A complicated succession crisis ensued; presumptive heirs included William Clito and Stephen of Blois, both nephews of the king, and Earl Robert of Gloucester, the king's illegitimate son. For more information on the succession crisis and the presumptive heirs, see R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen: 1135-1154* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 6-14, and Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 38, 51.

<sup>27</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 52.

active period of resistance by Matilda's forces to the reign of Stephen. Early in 1139, Matilda appealed for support from Pope Innocent II, who instead of granting this support to the rightful heir, "accepted Stephen's gifts and in letters to the king confirmed his occupation of the kingdom of England and the duchy of Normandy."<sup>28</sup> Even without papal support, Matilda and her illegitimate brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, invaded England in September of 1139.<sup>29</sup> Making her way to Gloucester, she established the royal castle there as her primary residence for the remainder of this period of her life. Chibnall describes the next year and a half as "a war of sieges and attrition, with no more than local gains for either side."<sup>30</sup> From Gloucester, Matilda's support slowly grew; late in 1139 she gained much of Cornwall under the forces led by her illegitimate brother Reginald of Dunstanville.<sup>31</sup>

The year of 1140 was indeed a period of give and take between the two sides, until finally negotiations were begun by Stephen's brother, Henry, bishop of Winchester and the papal legate. Ultimately, these negotiations did not have the support of the king, and were eventually proved unsuccessful. However, on February 2, 1141, Matilda experienced a great success in the battle at Lincoln, during which Stephen was captured and taken hostage to Bristol. At this point, Matilda moved to London, declared herself "Lady of the English" and prepared herself for her coronation. It was now that "Matilda moved into the most active years of her personal struggle for the succession."<sup>32</sup> In order to legitimize herself, she needed the support of the papacy, and

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<sup>28</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, 84. Quoted in Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 76.

<sup>29</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

appealed to Henry, bishop of Winchester in order to achieve this. In a meeting on March 2, she received the support of the bishop, and was formally recognized by him as Lady of the English. However, she soon lost the support of the people of London, who "threatened as they were by the armies loyal to Stephen and with nothing to hope for from the empress, decided to throw in their lot with the queen. As preparations for a ceremonial entry into the city were being made at Westminster on 24 June, they rang their bells as a call to arms and swarmed out of the gates. The empress...retreated hastily to Oxford."<sup>33</sup> From here, she made preparations to march on Winchester, apparently to threaten the bishop into remaining supportive of her cause. When it became clear to her that she would not capture the heavily fortified castle, she retreated to Devizes; it was from here that she negotiated the release of her brother the Earl of Gloucester in exchange for the release of the king.<sup>34</sup>

The release of the king can be considered the realistic end of Matilda's bid for the throne. In late 1141 she traveled from Devizes to Oxford; it is from here that she made her infamous escape back to Devizes by walking across the frozen Thames six or seven miles to Abindon, before riding to Devizes.<sup>35</sup> Matilda remained in Devizes until 1148, when she left England to return to Normandy. After 1142, Matilda focused her efforts more on designating her son, Henry, as Stephen's legitimate heir. After Stephen's death in 1154, Matilda's son became Henry II, and Matilda retired to Rouen, where she died in 1161.

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<sup>33</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 104-105.

<sup>34</sup> For a more detailed description of Matilda's time as Lady of the English, see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 88-117.

<sup>35</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 117.

### *The Chronicles*

This essay focuses on the contemporary chronicles of the Empress Matilda during the years 1139-1142. The chronicles themselves should be separated by those written during the lifetime of the subject, as suggested above, and those written posthumously. For Matilda, the chronicles that I have chosen to analyze were all written either during her lifetime, or were published shortly after her death. The first of these is written by Henry of Huntingdon, born in Lincoln between 1080 and 1090. The portion of his work that examines Matilda was originally published around 1148, still within Matilda's lifetime. This means that it was written either during the time of the events it records or shortly thereafter. The most notable contribution of his work is actually his silence on Matilda; he mentions her only twice, which suggests a marginalization of her and her actions. The second chronicler I used is William of Malmesbury, who also wrote contemporaneously to the events he recorded, probably dying around 1143. Since he dedicated his work to Matilda's brother, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, one would expect a sympathetic account of Matilda in his work. However, as will be shown, his sympathies actually rest with her brother Robert, while Matilda is simply a passive participant in recorded events. The third account is the first continuation of *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*. It was written, most likely by John, a monk at Worcester, who took up the work begun by Florence in 1117. Worcester's continuation ends in the year 1141. After this point some manuscripts of the chronicle contain a copy of the work by Henry of Huntingdon, others just resume the account with the accession of Henry II. Worcester's chronicle contributes to the negative image of Matilda, as it records some of the early propaganda used by Stephen's allies in their campaigns



against her.<sup>36</sup> Last is the anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen, King of England and Duke of Normandy*. Little is known about the author of this account, but evidence suggests it was written "by an author contemporaneous with the events related, an eye-witness of many of them, and not only present at the councils where affairs of state were debated, but [by someone who was] privy to the king's most secret designs...As he also appears to have been an ecclesiastic, it has been conjectured that he was the king's confessor."<sup>37</sup> He provides us with a scathing attack on Matilda for her many abuses of what he perceived to be traditionally feminine attributes.

### *Henry of Huntingdon*

Interestingly, Henry of Huntingdon only mentions Matilda by name twice during this period of life, although she is presumed to have been a major participant in the events of England during this time. The first of these is simply a short introduction, wherein he writes "the Empress Maud, the daughter of the late King Henry, who had received the fealty of the English, came over to England, and was received into Arundel Castle."<sup>38</sup> What is interesting in this short

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Forester, trans. and ed., *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon. Comprising the History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry II. Also, the Acts of Stephen, King of England and Duke of Normandy* (1853; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968). In order to differentiate between the two chronicles contained in this volume, references to the account written by Henry of Huntingdon will be cited as such, while the account known as *Acts of Stephen* will be cited separately under the same editor. J.A. Giles, *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England. From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen* (1947; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968). Thomas Forester, trans. and ed., *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester With the Two Continuations: Comprising Annals of English History, From the Departure of the Romans to the Reign of Edward I* (1854; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968).

<sup>37</sup> Forester, preface to *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon*, viii.

<sup>38</sup> Forester, *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon*, 272.

introduction is the mention of the oath of fealty that Matilda presumably received in 1126, although it is not recorded in this chronicle in the events of that year. This is a significant absence, for the oath appears in all the other chronicles of the time. It might suggest Huntingdon's support for Stephen, wherein the absence of the oath would allow Stephen to assume the throne in all legality without violating his role as a vassal to the rightful heir.

The second passage in which Matilda is mentioned is more significant. Huntingdon describes the events of 1141:

The whole English nation now acknowledged her [the Empress] as their sovereign, except the men of Kent, who, with the Queen [Stephen's wife, Matilda] and William de Ypres, made all the resistance in their power. The empress was first recognised by the Legate, bishop of Winchester, and the Londoners. But she was elated with insufferable pride at the success of her adherents in the uncertain vicissitudes of war, so that she alienated from her the hearts of most men. Therefore, either by some secret conspiracy, or by the providence of God...she was driven out of London. In revenge, with a woman's bitterness, she caused the Lord's anointed to be bound with fetters.<sup>39</sup>

There is a lot going on in this excerpt, but here we see the first glimpse of propaganda directed against Matilda. Note the use of the term "insufferable pride." Pride is, in this instance, a "male" quality, as defined by Huneycutt, that Matilda has adopted in order to be perceived as an adequate opposition to Stephen. But her adoption of it "alienated from her the hearts of most men" because, as a woman, she was not meant to possess such a "manly" characteristic. Then, in the final sentence of the passage, Matilda's femininity is emphasized with the phrase "with a woman's bitterness." This is a demonstration of Huntingdon attacking Matilda simply for being a woman, especially one who was attempting to be active in the political sphere.

Another significant aspect of Huntingdon's chronicle that should be addressed is actually the lack of material about Matilda in it. For example, the oath that is sworn to Matilda in 1126 is

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<sup>39</sup> Forester, *The Chronicles of Henry of Huntingdon*, 280.

nowhere mentioned in the chronicle. Nor do we find any examples of propaganda directed toward the illegitimacy of Matilda's sons. Two centuries later, the propaganda against Margaret of Anjou is promulgated directly against the illegitimacy of her claim or the illegitimacy of her son. This is not the case with Matilda, where an actual assertion that her claim was not legitimate happens only rarely, or occurs in passing. This suggests that Huntingdon is using silence to marginalize Matilda's efforts, emphasizing his supposed support for Stephen and his forces.

*William of Malmesbury*

In contrast to Huntingdon's marginalization, William of Malmesbury introduces Matilda as an active participant in political events; he even describes her as the catalyst for civil war with Stephen, writing, "I shall now begin...from the year in which this heroine came to England, to assert her right against Stephen."<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that soon after this it is Robert, Earl of Gloucester and Matilda's half-brother, who emerges as the lead in the narrative, actively pursuing Stephen and manipulating his sister. Indeed, Malmesbury never purports to place Matilda on the same level as her male counterparts; in his account, Matilda is a passive observer of events, not an active participant. This is evident when he describes Matilda's entrance into England in October of 1139:

...on the day previous to the calends of October, earl Robert, having at length surmounted every cause of delay, arrived with the empress his sister in England, relying on the protection of God and observance of his lawful oath;...He landed, then, at Arundel, and for a time delivered his sister into the safe keeping...of her mother-in-law...

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<sup>40</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 497.

Himself proceeded through the hostile country to Bristol...The earl...committed the empress to Henry bishop of Winchester and Waleran earl of Mellent for safe conduct... She was afterwards received into Gloucester...

One should notice the use of passive and active verbs. Suddenly, Matilda's heroic entrance becomes a series of passive movements, where all the action is performed by the Earl:

...on the day previous to the calends of October, earl Robert, having at length *surmounted* every cause of delay, *arrived* with the empress *his* sister in England, *relying* on the protection of God and observance of his lawful oath;...*He landed*, then, at Arundel, and for a time *delivered* his sister into the safe keeping...of her mother-in-law... Himself *proceeded* through the hostile country to Bristol...The earl...*committed* the empress to Henry bishop of Winchester and Waleran earl of Mellent for safe conduct... *She was afterwards received* into Gloucester... [emphasis mine].<sup>41</sup>

One can then see that this is a passage about movement, but it is Earl Robert doing the moving, with Matilda being moved. I would like to suggest that this long parade of movements, wherein Matilda is a passive object, much like a pawn on a chessboard, means that Matilda was subject to her brother's authority in matters of safety. While this would make sense, being that it would be quite dangerous for Matilda to be in England at this time, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of Matilda's authority over her brother within their supposed relationship as ruler and subject.

Furthermore, while describing the course of the civil war itself, very little mention is made in Malmesbury's chronicle of Matilda herself. Instead, the subject of Malmesbury's commentary is primarily her half-brother, Robert, the Earl of Gloucester. Take, for example, the way that Malmesbury describes Robert's efforts to garner support for his sister:

Meanwhile, the earl of Gloucester conducted himself with caution, and his most earnest endeavours were directed to gaining conquests with the smaller loss to his adherents. Such of the English nobility as he could not prevail upon to regard the obligation of their

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<sup>41</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 505-506.

oath, he held it sufficient if he could so restrain, that, if they did not assist, they would not injure the cause...<sup>42</sup>

The oath that Malmesbury is referring to here is the oath that the nobility of England took to accept Matilda as the lawful heir to the throne in 1126.<sup>43</sup> Again, the image one gets is one of Robert doing all he could to use the oath to get men to support Matilda; it is Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who is in control of Matilda's efforts to gain the throne. What is interesting about this passage is that, objectively, Matilda should have been the one taking action here to gain supporters, as the legitimate heir to the throne. The fact that there is no mention of her at all, nor even a mention of her absence, suggests that Malmesbury was succumbing to outside pressures in silencing Matilda yet again, attempting to separate her from her male counterparts by relegating her to a supposedly feminized private sphere.

Later, Malmesbury does portray an active Matilda when describing a peace conference between the two sides in 1140. He depicts her here as genuinely seeking peace for her subjects and an end to the war, writing "the empress and the earl assented to them [the advice given by members of the conference] immediately, but the king delayed from day to day, and finally rejected them altogether."<sup>44</sup> However, it should be noted that even when Matilda assumes an active role, she is still closely linked to her brother the Earl, as if he will legitimize her and her claim to the throne.

The next year, Matilda became the de facto ruler of England after her forces captured Stephen in battle. She reigned in this way for ten months, before she was forced to resign her

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<sup>42</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 510.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 482. Also described by John of Worcester in Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, 241.

<sup>44</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 513.

throne and release Stephen from prison, in exchange for her brother Robert. This is the only time in Malmesbury's account when Matilda is portrayed as an active participant in events, without the assistance of male relatives. What is interesting here is that he chooses not to portray her positively, but instead recounts the negative feelings of her opponents, in this case the papal legate and the king's brother, the Bishop of Winchester:

...his complaints against the empress were disseminated through England, that she wished to seize his person; that she observed nothing which she had sworn to him; that all the barons of England had performed their engagements towards her, but that she had violated hers, as she knew not how to use her prosperity with moderation...that she had obstinately persevered in breaking every promise she had made pertaining to the right of the churches: and that he had it from unquestionable authority, that she, and her partisans, had not only had designs on his dignity, but even on his life: that, however, God in his mercy, had caused matters to fall out contrary to her hopes, so that he should himself escape destruction, and rescue his brother from captivity...<sup>45</sup>

In this passage, one sees a very different depiction of Matilda than what has previously been mentioned. Here, the bishop suggests that Matilda is a liar, breaking her oaths to the nobles of England; indeed, he asserts that she is capable of murder, trying to kill a man of God. Certainly, this was one of the worst attacks that could be made against a king during this time, and it is made against Matilda. The relationship between ruler and vassal was a sacred bond, and for medieval society to function, both ends needed to be upheld. As a ruler, Matilda's ability to fulfill her promises to her vassals could be very beneficial to her ability to hold the throne; her inability to keep her end of the bargain, however, could be highly detrimental. Attacking her in this way would suggest to her vassals that she did not either have the support of the people, or the will on her own, to fulfill her promises, and would likely have led to some deserting her cause in favor of the king.

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<sup>45</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 522-525.

*John of Worcester*

Attacks against Matilda's use of power are also visible in the first continuation of the chronicle of Florence of Worcester, written by the monk John of Worcester. Unlike his contemporary, Henry of Huntingdon, Worcester gives us a good account of the oath sworn to Matilda in 1126, writing that it took place soon after Christmas in London. He writes that the nobles, including Stephen, swore "fealty to the king's daughter." He continues:

[They promised to] defend her right to the crown of England, if she should survive her father, against all opposers [sic], unless he should yet before his death beget a son in lawful wedlock, to become his successor... The king, therefore, having lost his son William in the manner already described, and there being as yet no other direct heir to the kingdom, for that reason made over the right to the crown to his daughter, under the provisoe just mentioned.<sup>46</sup>

Worcester thus establishes the proper relationship between Matilda and her future vassals, with them swearing fealty and obedience to her in return for the promise of security and protection for the kingdom. This is Matilda's introduction in this chronicle, and it clearly establishes her legitimate claim to the throne of England. However, this claim is later all but ignored once Stephen usurps the throne in 1135. Indeed, in his account of Stephen's succession, Worcester nowhere mentions Matilda.<sup>47</sup> She doesn't reenter the chronicle until her arrival in England in 1139, where, like in Malmesbury's chronicle, Worcester records that "their [or more particularly, her] arrival filled all England with alarm."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, 241.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

Worcester goes on to describe Matilda as a sort of devil-like character, taking vengeance on anyone who refused to join her cause: "...tortures worthy of Decius and Nero, and death in various shapes, were inflicted on those who refused to do her homage, and chose to maintain their fealty to the king; and the city [of Gloucester], glorious in past ages, were filled with shrieks and fearful torments, and became horrible to those who inhabited it."<sup>49</sup> Certainly the comparison to Nero is damaging indeed to Matilda's character, but it also serves a point. In comparing Matilda to past emperors, Worcester is in fact reinforcing Matilda's royalty, and therefore reinforcing her claim to the throne.

The continuation of Florence's chronicle ends with an account of the exchange of the king, then being held prisoner by Matilda, for her half-brother, the Earl of Gloucester. Worcester records that negotiations for the release of both men were carried on by Stephen's wife, Queen Matilda, and the Empress Matilda. The terms were as follows:

...the king being restored to his royal dignity, and the earl being invested with the dominion of the whole of England under him, both should become just administrators and restorers of the peace in the government and country, as they had hitherto been the authors and promoters of all its dissensions and disturbances. But the earl refusing to carry this into effect, without the consent of the empress, his sister, repudiated all that had been concerted in the affair, and utterly rejected all terms of peace and alliance with the king.<sup>50</sup>

No mention is made of negotiations for Matilda and Stephen to rule the country jointly after his release; instead, the implication is that Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and the king would rule the country between the two of them. Robert, however, rejected this negotiation, *without Matilda's consent*. What Matilda would have done at this point is unknown, and one cannot imagine that

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<sup>49</sup> Forester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, 269.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.



she was happy about these results. Thus it all seems unlikely to me that the earl refused the conditions of the exchange without Matilda's support; instead, continuing the civil war, fighting to retain Matilda's right to the throne, seems to be more likely the agreement between Robert and his sister. As the account ends so abruptly with this episode, we have no mention of Worcester's views on the further downfall of Matilda's efforts, as the second continuation of the chronicle begins with the ascension of her son, Henry II, in 1154.

### *Acts of Stephen*

Negative views against Matilda are also recounted by the anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen*; he provides a scathing report of Matilda, depicting her as scheming, manipulative, and devoid of any traditional female attributes. She makes her first major appearance in the chronicle with her entrance into England in 1139:

While the king's attention was directed to other quarters...Robert, earl of Gloucester, and his sister the Countess of Anjou, landing at Arundel with a strong body of soldiers, were received into the castle and hospitably entertained. All England was struck with alarm, and men's minds were agitated in various ways: those who either secretly or openly favoured the invaders were roused to more than usual activity against the king, while his own partisans were terrified as if a thunderbolt had fallen.

This passage would suggest that Matilda was fairly powerful upon her entrance into England.

The author uses many words to suggest this strength, from her "strong body of soldiers" to the whole of England being "terrified as if a thunderbolt had fallen." Notice what happens if one, again, emphasizes the passive and active verbs in this passage, however:

While the king's attention *was directed* to other quarters...Robert, earl of Gloucester, and his sister the Countess of Anjou, *landing* at Arundel with a strong body of soldiers, *were received* into the castle and hospitably entertained. All England *was struck* with alarm,

and men's minds *were agitated* in various ways: those who either secretly or openly favoured the invaders *were roused* to more than usual activity against the king, while his own partisans *were terrified* as if a thunderbolt had fallen [emphasis mine].<sup>51</sup>

Here, interestingly enough, one finds the men in the story the passive victims of an active Matilda; it is Matilda, "*landing at Arundel*" that terrifies all of England. While overwhelming a negative portrait of Matilda, it is nevertheless important for depicting an active Matilda, fighting against Stephen.

The author continues with a description of Matilda's disagreement with the papal legate and King Stephen's brother, Henry, the Bishop of Winchester:

She took counsel how she might attach to her cause Henry, the bishop of Winchester, the king's brother, who ranked higher than all the nobles of England in wisdom, in policy, in courage, and in wealth. If he should be willing to espouse her cause, he should be first in honour and in council; but if he should oppose her, and manifest any symptoms of rebellion, she would rally the whole power of England against him.<sup>52</sup>

It should be remembered that Malmesbury described this situation with a clear view of Matilda's passivity in the situation, whereas the author of the *Acts of Stephen* is attempting to portray Matilda as threatening the bishop into supporting her cause. What we thus see is a glimpse of a powerful Matilda, actively participating in the politics of England, though what is suggested is that this participation is unseemly, eventually leading to her political downfall.

The *Acts of Stephen* is often focused on Matilda's adoption of male characteristics: her coldness, her arrogance, her lack of mercy in the face of her enemies. All of these could be viewed as qualities of an effective male ruler, though, granted, maybe not highly desirable personal qualities. However, here, they become a hindrance to Matilda's cause:

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<sup>51</sup> Forester, *Acts of Stephen*, 366.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

Having now arrived at the summit of her ambition, she began to conduct her affairs imperiously and rashly. Some of those who were attached to the king, but had now agreed to submit themselves and all they had to her, were received with coldness, and at times with manifest displeasure; others she drove from her, overwhelmed with reproaches and threats. Indiscreetly changing the order of things, she began to diminish or to deprive them of those lands and possessions which the king allowed them to hold; and to declare forfeited, and bestow on others, the fiefs and honours of the few nobles who still adhered to the king's cause. Whatever the king had enacted by royal ordinances, she despotically reversed by word of mouth; and the grants which he had firmly and irrevocably made to churches and his followers in the wars, she at once revoked and bestowed on her own partisans.<sup>53</sup>

The language used in this passage is particularly telling. It is Matilda's "imperiousness" and "rashness" that are attacked. What is clear here is that Matilda is attempting to adopt an attitude or posture similar to what she would have seen in her male counterparts. This adoption of a kingly attitude, as opposed to the more traditional feminine attributes of submission, mercy that is attacked by the anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen*.

Further on, we find more descriptions of Matilda's adoption of a kingly air, wherein, again, the qualities that are particularly noted by the author are Matilda's pride, superiority, and condescension to her male relatives:

...she gave the most flagrant proof of her superciliousness and arrogance in her conduct to the King of Scots, the Bishop of Winchester, and her brother the Earl of Gloucester, the most powerful men in England. When these, who were in constant attendance on her, having any petition to present, bent the knee as they came into the presence, so far from desiring them to rise, when bowing before her, as would have been becoming, or granting their requests, she repeatedly refused to hear them, and dismissed them, slighted, with some haughty reply. She did not rely on their counsels, as would have been fitting and she had promised, but ordered all affairs at her own will and mere motion.

Phrases such as "superciliousness" and "arrogance" towards "the most powerful men in England" again imply that Matilda has adopted "male" characteristics in order to be perceived as an

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<sup>53</sup> Forester, *Acts of Stephen*, 382.

authoritative ruler. Certainly it is clear from this passage that this adoption was successful; she is in an authoritative position over her male relatives. Moreover, she is attempting to rule without their influence or "counsel...but ordered all affairs at her own will." However, her presumption to place herself ahead of men, especially her male relatives, who were supposed to advise her, is clearly not "becoming" or "fitting" for her to do as a woman.

Here, however, what is also interesting is the depiction we get of Matilda's brother, the Earl of Gloucester, her uncle the King of Scotland, and the Bishop of Winchester. Notice what happens when we emphasize those phrases describing the actions of the three men, supposedly the "most powerful men in England":

...she gave the most flagrant proof of her superciliousness and arrogance in her conduct to the King of Scots, the Bishop of Winchester, and her brother the Earl of Gloucester, the most powerful men in England. *When these, who were in constant attendance on her, having any petition to present, bent the knee as they came into the presence, so far from desiring them to rise, when bowing before her, as would have been becoming, or granting their requests, she repeatedly refused to hear them, and dismissed them, slighted, with some haughty reply. She did not rely on their counsels, as would have been fitting and she had promised, but ordered all affairs at her own will and mere motion [emphasis mine].*<sup>54</sup>

The inversion of male and female virtues here is quite intriguing. What we see is three men who are subordinate and obsequious to Matilda, their ruler; when they do not get their way, they come away "slighted" and offended. It is not a good picture of the two men. However, I would suggest that the purpose of this passage is still primarily an attack against Matilda, which focuses on her distortion of traditional feminine qualities; her lack of submission and her pride as qualities that are not appropriate for a female ruler are emphasized by the inversion of the qualities displayed by her supposedly powerful male relatives.

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<sup>54</sup> Forester, *Acts of Stephen*, 382.

What is interesting about this passage is that the anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen* is clearly portraying Matilda as displaying characteristics that she would have seen in her male counterparts. In other words, she wanted to be seen as a king. What should be noticed here, however, is that while she wanted to be seen as a king, she did not necessarily adopt characteristics that were qualities of a good king. Perhaps this was because she was basing her idea of kingship on the model given to her by her father, who rather notoriously gained his throne after the suspicious death of his elder brother in a hunting accident. Or maybe the author just chose not to tell us about Matilda's adoption of "good" male qualities, but instead wanted to emphasize characteristics that would lead others to criticize Matilda's behavior. What is clear, however, about all of this is that the author is not saying that a king would necessarily behave differently than Matilda, but that Matilda was not behaving like a queen should. He is promulgating a gendered notion of queenship, comparing Matilda's behavior to qualities of queenship that he would have seen, for example, in Stephen's wife Matilda, the exemplar of a submissive wife who could also assume a position of authority in the absence of her husband with the aid of a male council. Matilda, in assuming a position of authority on her own without the aid of her male relatives or council, is incongruous with the author's idea of femininity.

### ***Conclusion***

There was almost no place for reigning queens in twelfth century Western society. The queens of that age were the wives of kings, or kings' daughters transmitting an inheritance. If, after the death of a ruler, a female heir welded the scepter, it was normally for a very brief period, until a suitable husband could be found to wear the

crown in his wife's right, or a young son reach an age to be associated with his mother in government.<sup>55</sup>

In this assertion, Marjorie Chibnall is certainly correct. However, one woman stands out during this time as rejecting all of the above images of the royal woman, at least for a short period of time. Although Matilda was the wife of a king, the daughter of a king, and the mother of a king, she also tried to hold power on her own, as a reigning queen. Although she did not succeed, her attempt is important, if only because it was the first such effort made by a woman in medieval English history.

The descriptions of Matilda found in the accounts of contemporary chroniclers are therefore significant for two reasons. The first is their overall characterization of Matilda as either passive or active, good or bad. This would suggest that chroniclers were using a dichotomization of gender roles to construct the rules of proper feminine behavior. When Matilda is portrayed as passive, she fits into the category of acceptable norms; when she is active, however, she is felt to be outside the social norms, and is then forced back into the private sphere with remarkably negative descriptions of her perceived abuses of feminine characteristics. The second reason these descriptions are significant is for their representations of an early form of propaganda, constructed and disseminated by Matilda's counterparts in an attempt to prevent women from gaining power in the public sphere. Moreover, the propaganda promulgated against Matilda differs considerably from that used against her later counterparts who also attempted to become reigning queens. Overwhelmingly, Matilda is attacked simply for being a woman. Her legitimacy is hardly ever questioned; it was established early in the fight that she had a legitimate claim to the throne as the daughter of Henry I, and as the heir to whom the nobles had sworn an

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<sup>55</sup> Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 1.

oath of fealty. There was no question that Stephen had usurped her rightful place on the throne; the question was, could Matilda achieve and maintain the security of a kingdom when she could not even lead an army? She is therefore attacked for aspects relating to the security of her power: she lies, she cheats her vassals out of their benefits, she does not listen to the advice of her male family members. Medieval chroniclers, such as William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, John of Worcester, and the anonymous author of the *Acts of Stephen*, are therefore indicative of an overarching pattern of patriarchal domination in the political sphere, in an attempt to impose a strict dichotomization between a male political sphere and a feminized private sphere. Matilda, in attempting to straddle the divide between the two spheres, could only be the loser in this scenario.

## **Queen Margaret of Anjou**

(1430-1482, r. 1445-1461, 1470-1471)

### *Biography*

Margaret of Anjou was the second daughter of King Rene of Naples and his wife Isabel of Lorraine, born on March 24, 1430. From her birth it was predicted that she would live a sad life, although it is more probable that these legends arose much later in response to the events in her life. One story we hear is that of Tiphaine la Magine, the nurse of Margaret's father, "rocking the baby Margaret of Anjou in her arms" and muttering "Ah, the poor little thing." Philippe Erlanger writes of the episode: "Perhaps the faithful old servant's instinct gave her a premonition of the fate of her charge, of the woman who was to find herself at the conjuncture of so many tragedies- the tragedies of Lorraine, of Naples, of France and England."<sup>56</sup>

Her father was brother-in-law to the King of France, Charles VII, making his daughter something of a great catch on the marriage market. Her father was also the titular king of Naples and Jerusalem; however, he was also apt to focus on art and reading over his duties as a ruler. Erlanger describes him as "a man of rather mediocre intellect and mild spirit, attractive, sensitive, tolerant, incapable of long-term calculation...fond of works of art and craft, of his particular pleasures, and of peace and quiet...And throughout his life he was dominated by a series of women."<sup>57</sup> The first of these women was his mother, Yolande of Aragon, who became

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<sup>56</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 38-39.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.



the "pivot of the 'national' party" during the Hundred Year's War in France. Erlanger writes that she "enjoyed the exercise of power without seeking its appearance, if only because she knew that her actions were more effective if they did not seem to be her own."<sup>58</sup> It might have been good for Margaret to take lessons from her grandmother in the art of ruling as a woman, but perhaps this did not occur to the Anjou family. In 1434-1435, Rene became the ruler of Anjou, Maine, Provence, and of the Two Sicilies (Naples), and he and his wife set about attempting to gain the kingdom of Naples in actuality instead of in name only.

During these years Margaret was raised by her paternal grandmother, Yolande, where she was fast becoming a typically accomplished aristocratic daughter. Erlanger describes her personality:

From all her ancestors she had inherited contempt for physical fatigue, a love of hunting, horses and warlike spectacles; from her father, keen artistic sensibility, that taste for refinements which the austere northern peoples held blameworthy in the southerners; from her mother, tenacity, courage and contempt for obstacles. The distaff and her book of hours were destined to play only a secondary role in her life.<sup>59</sup>

While sources disagree on her personality, its virtues or negative qualities, they all agree that she was very beautiful. Her grandmother made the most of her beauty, arranging for her to meet the ambassadors of Emperor Frederick III, although a marriage was not arranged due to the absence of her father. Here, Erlanger again returns to the dismal portents of Margaret's future, writing that "Margaret was not to seize this chance of escaping her fate. She was not destined peacefully to procreate the family which was to have dominion in the future [the Hapsburgs]; but to bring

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<sup>58</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

down, in an ocean of blood, the blood of a million men, one of the proudest fabrics of Europe's past."<sup>60</sup>

Instead, Margaret married Henry VI of England in 1445; although she was poor and French, the people of England would pay for her trousseau and travel expenses.<sup>61</sup> So, at the age of fourteen, she was betrothed, married, and Queen of England. Unfortunately for her, she was not well received by her new compatriots. As Erlanger writes:

Margaret might well have been presented to the people as a symbol of peace, and have had her advent blessed as heralding an era of tranquillity, [sic] disarmament and reduced taxation. Thanks to the Lord Protector's [the Duke of Gloucester, the King's uncle] manoeuvres she was received as a personification of defeat. Her smile should have been irresistible: instead it evoked the memory of Joan of Arc, of fifteen years of reverses, and the loss of an empire. And English patriotism was roused and irritated.<sup>62</sup>

Essentially hated by her people, Margaret did not make any more friends when the gossip mills got news of her rather infamous friendship with the Duke of Somerset. It began to be rumored that they were lovers. While the truth of this matter is probably known only to the two participants, the rumor of her adultery was played and repeated to the fullest extent by Margaret's great enemy, the Duke of York. A descendent of royalty himself by the second son of King Edward III, some of the English people believed the Duke to have a better claim to the throne than King Henry VI. For Margaret, the Duke was a threat to her husband, a threat that needed to be taken seriously. The queen was nothing if not passionate about protecting her husband, and therefore refused to take the advice of the Duke, choosing to listen instead to her friend the Duke of Somerset. This would cost her greatly in the future.

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<sup>60</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

In 1453, Margaret became pregnant with her first and only child. The child as the heir to the throne greatly aided in strengthening Margaret's position. The English people would forgive her for much of the problems caused by the Hundred Years War and her French kinsman if she could provide them with a healthy heir to the throne. However, shortly after the discovery of her pregnancy, her husband began acting very strangely. Erlanger writes that he was "peevish" and would "fall into a strange lethargy in which his intelligence seemed extinguished." He continues:

On 15 August 1453, after eating a large meal of spiced meats, he became very sleepy. He slept, and when he awoke his mind was gone. The King of England was nothing but a shadow now- speechless, his memory and intelligence quite gone, a sort of sleep-walker incapable of uttering a word, or even expressing a wish or a want... Few fates can be more poignant than that of this young woman isolated among a people with whom she was incompatible; stalked by so many enemies; in charge of a government undermined by defeat and anarchy; watching her husband sink into madness, and guessing what battles she would have to fight for the life of the child still in her womb?<sup>63</sup>

The situation could only be termed a disaster for Margaret. On October 13, 1453, she gave birth to her son Edward, the Prince of Wales, at Westminster Palace in London. It was a grave blow to the Duke of York, who could previously mask his rebellious intentions as the heir to Henry VI; now he could be forced to act in open defiance of his supposed lord and master.

Henry VI was still too ill to recognize his son as the legitimate heir to the throne; later, this would cause lingering problems for Margaret later. Her main difficulty at this point, however, was not with her son, who seemed to be a healthy and happy baby boy, but with her husband. No one knew when Henry VI would regain his sanity, if ever, and a sane king was needed to rule the kingdom effectively and to bring victory in the continuing difficulties with France. In 1454, Margaret's mortal enemy, Richard, Duke of York, was proclaimed Lord Protector by Parliament. He was now the ruler of England. Although she demanded to be

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<sup>63</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 143-146.

declared Regent for her young son, Margaret's pleas went ignored by the new powers that were. The Duke of Somerset, Margaret's great friend and advisor, was arrested by the Protector's forces in the Queen's apartments and taken to the Tower of London.<sup>64</sup>

Luckily for Margaret, Henry regained his sanity by the beginning of 1455, recognized his son and heir as his own child, and declared to Parliament that he was once again able to rule his kingdom with his wife. The Duke of York was kindly asked to leave his post as Protector, and he returned to his property in the north of England.<sup>65</sup> He did not stay there long. By May, the Duke of York had returned to London with a substantial army, ready to stage his coup d'etat. His ally, the Earl of Warwick, the Duke of York attacked the king's forces at St. Albans in Hertfordshire, and thus began the Wars of the Roses. The battle was won by the Duke, who quickly routed the king's forces, killed the Duke of Somerset, and injured the king, to whom he still professed loyalty. Henry was carried back to London as a sort of prize, and the Duke of York resumed his rule of the kingdom as a pseudo-Protector and Regent for the king.

Margaret's friendship with the Duke of Somerset was blamed for all the problems in the kingdom, and she was condemned by Parliament for "the part which she had played and...[it was said] that her rule and Somerset's had been [a] 'great tyranny'."<sup>66</sup> She retired to Greenwich Palace, gathered her friends about her, and began to plot her return. Erlanger reports:

A war chest was amassed in secrecy, and an army created without arousing suspicion. Exasperated by Yorkist excesses, public opinion was veering in favour of Lancaster. Now there was nothing to be done but wait for the King's mind to be restored to him again. That happened during the winter... On 24 February 1456 Henry went through the same performance as in the previous year. He appeared suddenly before Parliament...

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<sup>64</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 149.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

[and] withdrew the Protectorate from him... The Duke was arrested on 27 May and brought to trial before his fellow Peers... After her years of failure and humiliation, Margaret felt herself to be more surely the ruler of England than she had been since her arrival on the scene.<sup>67</sup>

She was only 26 years old. Due to the continually deteriorating mental state of her husband, Margaret was in fact, if not in name, the sole ruler of England. She focused her efforts for one purpose only: to protect the crown from the Yorkists until her son reached an age where he could rule on his own. In this goal, however, she would be foiled once again.

In 1458, the Earl of Warwick was nearly killed in a brawl that started when a Yorkist called the Prince of Wales a bastard. It is unclear precisely what happened, but Erlanger records that after this incident, the Earl of Warwick began to spread rumors that Margaret was bent on revenge for his rebellion against her husband. "From there he published to the four winds that the Frenchwoman [Margaret] had tried to murder him. Margaret riposted by giving orders to seize or kill him. Warwick escaped to Yorkshire... Responding to Warwick's urging, Richard [the Duke of York] made up his mind to issue a proclamation in which he claimed the crown."<sup>68</sup> The two sides met in a series of small battles, the first at Blore Heath in October of 1459, and then again at Northampton in July of 1460. It was here, at Northampton, that the Yorkists again captured the king, and Margaret was forced to flee with her son into the English countryside. She was removed by her allies, mainly Owen Tudor, to Wales and Harlech Castle, where she waited again for her chance to rule. The Duke of York, in the meantime, entered London, and forced the king to recognize him as his presumptive heir over the Prince of Wales, again making the Duke of York the Protector of the realm.

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<sup>67</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 158-159.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

With help from Scottish allies, the Queen raised another army, and met with the Yorkist forces at the small town of Wakefield. Margaret herself took the field against him, and shortly won the battle. The Duke of York and his second son, the Earl of Rutland, were both killed by Lancastrian allies. She then ordered that all the Yorkist leaders be decapitated; she herself placed a paper crown on the head of the Duke of York and then attached it to a spike to be placed on top of the walls at York. It was not the first atrocity to be committed during the Wars, nor was it the last, but it became the most infamous in posterity:

...the Wakefield executions seemed to have made much the deepest impression on the imagination of the mass of the people, both then and later. Certainly Margaret's reputation never recovered from them, and even today her memory bears a terrible blemish because of them. After Wakefield she became and has remained the Bloody Queen.<sup>69</sup>

Margaret sought to follow up her victory by routing the Yorkists once and for all. She split her army into two forces, one led by herself, the other by her great ally Owen Tudor. It was a mistake. Owen Tudor was killed in a skirmish with Edward, now the Duke of York after the death of his father, and Warwick took on the army of the queen at St. Albans. Margaret won the battle, and as Erlanger writes, "Margaret proved that the will to serve the cause of a beloved son can make a great military strategist of a woman."<sup>70</sup> The King was once again with his wife, and was healthy enough to grant a knighthood to his young son. Edward, the young Duke of York, was not yet finished, however. He entered London, and from there Parliament declared him King on March 4, 1461. The two armies met again, however, at the town of Towton. After 40 hours of bloody fighting, the battle was won by York. "When Monday's dawn shone through the

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<sup>69</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 176.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

clouds, 36,000 corpses lay on the battlefield; of these 28,000 were Lancaster's dead and the rivers Cock and Warf still ran red with blood."<sup>71</sup>

Margaret and her family retreated to Scotland and from there to France, seeking allies to help her regain her throne. From here, she continued her machinations. She attempted a disastrous invasion of England in 1462, at which point Margaret was again forced to flee into the English countryside with her son without anyone to aid her. She again returned to France. After a falling out between the Earl of Warwick and the new king, she married her son to Warwick's young daughter, Anne, in 1470. With Warwick, she raised an army and invaded England in 1471, where Warwick, who had landed late in 1470, was currently engaged with Yorkist forces at the Battle of Barnet. It was a decisive Yorkist victory, and Warwick was killed. Margaret continued the fight, however, much at the urging of her son, and enough reinforcements arrived from France for them to stage a battle at Tewkesbury. It was the end of Margaret's war.

The Prince of Wales was captured and brought before Edward IV where he was killed by Yorkist lords. The next day, Margaret herself was brought to the King, ignorant of the death of her son. Erlanger paints a grand picture:

Margaret, still ignorant of this tragedy and ready to fight for her son's life with the ferocity of a lioness defending her young, was taken from her convent cell to appear in her turn before the King. On the way the captain of the escort gave himself the pleasure of telling her what had happened to the Prince. Under that terrible blow her reason deserted her and the creature who confronted her child's murderer was a Niobe, possessed by the rage of the Furies. She overwhelmed Edward with insults and curses, hoping to provoke him into killing her likewise.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

She was not killed, instead, thrown into the Tower. Whether or not she knew of her husband's death, which occurred later that week while she was in the same building is unknown, but she certainly found out later. She remained in the Tower for the next four years, a prisoner of her enemies, until her ransom was paid by her cousin the King of France. She renounced her claim to the throne of England, and returned, penniless, to Anjou. She died in 1482, "with the proud stoicism which no reverse could disturb: without Court, without servants, kinless and friendless, lying in threadbare sheets, worn out, burnt out, the Queen died as she had lived, nobly true to herself..."<sup>73</sup>

### *The Chronicles*

This essay will use chronicles examining the portion of Margaret's life from 1445 to 1471. As such, it will cover not only the time Margaret reigned as Queen Consort of England, but also her rebellion against Edward IV, and the reestablishment of her husband Henry VI as king from 1470 to 1471. The chronicles will be separated by those written during her lifetime, and those written about her posthumously. Thus, the first two chronicles were written during her lifetime; the second two were written centuries after her death, but still hold significant examples of propaganda against Margaret. William Gregory, the Mayor of London wrote the first

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<sup>73</sup> Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou*, 245.



chronicle between 1451 and 1452, the year he held the mayoralty of London.<sup>74</sup> He died before 1466, but leaves to us in the chronicle bearing his name some interesting episodes of Margaret's agency during the Wars of the Roses. The second is the English Chronicle, written by an unknown author between 1461 and 1471.<sup>75</sup> Although short, this account aptly supplements our image of Margaret, with some examples of very early propaganda against Margaret by her contemporaries. Our other chronicle was written considerably after Margaret's death in 1485; it was published originally in 1534, during the reign of Henry VIII, by the ambassador to the English court from the papacy, Polydore Vergil.<sup>76</sup> Finally, also written considerably after the dates described, is the play *Henry VI* by William Shakespeare. While this play is certainly not a chronicle, it is a prime example of how Margaret was depicted in the propaganda against her. It is also the account that has had the most influence on modern views of Margaret.

#### *Gregory's Chronicle*

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<sup>74</sup> Although he is the recognized author of the work, he died before it was completed and published between 1470 and 1471, as it ends suddenly in 1469. For our purposes, however, it will be known as Gregory's Chronicle of London. James Gairdner, ed., *The Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century. Containing: I. John Page's Poem on the Siege of Rouen. II. Lydgate's Verses on the Kings of England. III. William Gregory's Chronicle of London* (Reprint New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), xvi.

<sup>75</sup> John Silvester Davies, ed., *An English Chronicle of the Reigns of Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI Written Before the Year 1471* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), vii.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Ellis, ed., *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III*, (Reprint New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968). William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, ed. Tucker Brooke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923). William Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, ed. Tucker Brooke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

In *Gregory's Chronicle*, Margaret is introduced to us as the new bride of the young and beloved King Henry VI, arriving in England to general fanfare and appreciation. This differs greatly from the account we find in Erlanger's account where Margaret came to England through a great storm to no welcome from the people. Erlanger, writing long after Margaret's death, read events and moods that occurred at the end of her life into the beginning of her life and her arrival in England. However, the author of *Gregory's Chronicle* sees Margaret as symbolizing the end of the Hundred Years War and the peace between France and England. The people of England were, for the most part, happy to have her arrive on their shores, believing that she would, with her marriage, bring with her a treaty of peace with France. Thus, when the author is describing her entrance to her new country, we should have no reason to doubt that the acclaim of the people was generous and notable. The author writes<sup>77</sup>:

And a pon the fyrste day of Aprylle Quene Margarete londyd at Portysmowthe, and a-pon the x day of the same monythe sche was weddyd at a lytylle velage in Hampschyre...And a gayne hyr comynge to London was ordaynyde many notabyllle devysys in the cytte, as at the brygge of London...And upon the morowe, that was the Fryday, lordys of the realme, whythe nobylle and grete and costelowe araye, the Mayre of London and the aldyrmen in scharlet, whythe all the craftys of London in blewe, wythe dyvers dyvysyngys, every crafte to be knowe from othyr, rydyng agayne Quene Margarete and brought hyr unto the Toure of London...And upon the morowe the Sondag was the coronacyon..

*And upon the first day of April Queen Margaret landed at Portsmouth, and upon the tenth day of the same month she was wedded at a little village in Hampshire...And again her coming to London was ordained [with] many notable devices\* in the city, as the bridge of*

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<sup>77</sup> For ease of reading and comprehension, I have translated the passages from the chronicle from Middle English to its modern form. The original transcription is in print, while the translation will follow in italics. All translations are my own.

\* Devices: a drawing or design; an emblematic or heraldic design (Oxford Dictionary). What the author probably means is that the people of England hung banners or other celebratory colors around the city of London, probably in Margaret's colors and containing Margaret's coat of arms.

*London...And upon the morrow, that was the Friday, lords of the realm, with noble and great and costly array, the Mayor of London and the aldermen in scarlet, with all the crafts[men] of London in blue, with diverse devisings<sup>∞</sup>, every craft to be known from [an] other; [went] riding again [with] Queen Margaret and brought her unto the Tower of London...And upon the morrow the Sunday was the coronation...<sup>78</sup>*

Margaret was certainly adored by the English people at the beginning. The fact that she was French did not seem, at this point, to be a significant barrier to goodwill. In the above passage, we find the people of England displaying the Queen's colors and coat of arms in various places throughout London in celebration of her coronation. The Mayor of London, along with all the nobles of the city, welcomed her to the capital with all the pomp and circumstance they could muster. The admiration of Margaret is echoed in other chronicles, including Polydore Vergil, writing almost a century later, who writes that Margaret was "a yonge lady exceeding others of her time, as well in beautie as wisdom, endued with an hault courage above the nature of her sexe, according as her noble actes...have manifestly declared."<sup>79</sup> Margaret was clearly beloved by her people at the beginning of her marriage, and was thought to be a good match for her husband the king, both in beauty and in intellect. This goodwill, however, was not to last long. Just thirteen years later, Margaret would find herself embroiled in a severe civil war and about to lose her throne after losing the goodwill of the people. After all, the author of *Gregory's Chronicle* writes that the Earl of Warwick, that famous kingmaker, was able to convince Edward IV to seize the throne and declare himself king after declaring that it was the will of the people:

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<sup>∞</sup> Like devices, devisings here means the herald or marking of each craftsmen's guild, i.e. the coat of arms of the guild. The devising was meant to differentiate the guilds from one another, as the author further indicates in the passage.

<sup>78</sup> Gairdner, *Gregory's Chronicle*, 186.

<sup>79</sup> Ellis, *Polydore Vergil*, 68.

There the Erle of Warwycke informyd hym of the gydyngge and dysposyscyon of Kyng Harry, and of the Quene, and of the love and favyr that the comyns hadde unto hym, and by right to occupy the crowne of Inglonde, and soo hys hert was sum what made gladd and comfortyd.

*There the Earl of Warwick informed him of the guiding and disposition of King Henry [VI], and of the Queen, and of the love and favor that the commons had unto him, and by right to occupy the crown of England, and so his heart was somewhat made glad and comforted.*<sup>80</sup>

Before her mortal enemy Edward IV became the king, however, the bitter civil war began. Her battle for the throne began in 1455, when, as mentioned previously, the Duke of York, father to King Edward IV, made his first bid for the throne at the Battle of St. Albans. In Gregory's Chronicle, Margaret is nowhere mentioned in the description of the battle or the aftermath that followed; instead, her husband takes center stage as an injured prisoner, taken after the battle to the Tower of London by the Duke of York. Noticeably, on the other hand, when the author writes of the Battle of Blore Heath in 1458, the king's forces are described as the "Quenys galentys" or, we could say, the Queen's forces. He continues:

And [the] batayle or jornay lastyd alle the aftyr none, fro one of the clocke tulle v aftyr non, and the chasse lastyd unto vij at the belle in the mornynge. And men were maymyd many one in the Quenys party. There were in the Quenys party v M., and in that othyr party v C, a grete wondyr that evyr they myght stoned the grete multitude not ferynge, the kyng being with yn x myle and the queen with yn v myle at the castelle of Eglyllyssale.

*And [the] battle or journey lasted all the afternoon, from one o'clock 'til 5 after noon [5 o'clock], and the chase lasted unto 7 at the bell in the morning. And men were maimed many [a] one in the Queen's party. There were in the Queen's party 5,000, and in that other party 500, a great wonder that ever they might stand the great multitude not faring, the king being within 10 miles and the queen within 5 miles at the castle of Eglyllyssale.*<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Gairdner, *Gregory's Chronicle*, 215.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

What is most interesting about this chronicle is this example, followed by many others, in which the royalist army is described as being led, if not physically than at least in theory, by Margaret, and not by the king. While this is most likely due to the continued fragility of the king's mental health, it is a significant departure from traditional norms. Just as at Blore Heath, the Queen is described as having led her own forces at the Battle of Wakefield, where the royalist army is called the Queen's party. At this battle the Queen was clearly thought to be the winner, reportedly losing only 200 men while the Yorkist's lost most of their leadership as well as a significant number of men. More significantly, at the second Battle of St. Albans, we find Margaret giving council to the king in leading the army in battle. The author writes that King Henry, "in the myddys of the batayle...wente unto hys Quene and for-soke alle hys lordys, ande truste better to hyr party thenne unto hys owne lordys."<sup>82</sup> The battle itself is described briefly:

The number of ded men was xxxv C an moo pat were slayne. The lordys in Kyng Harrys party pycchyd a fylde and fortifyd hyt fulle stronge, and lyke unwise men brake hyr raye and fylde and toke a-nothyr...the Quenys parte was at hond whythe hem in towne of Synt Albonyes, and then alle pyng was to seke and owte of ordyr, for hyr pryckyngers come not home to bring no tydyng howe ny that the Quene was, save one come and sayd that she was ix myle of.

*The number of dead men was 3,500 and more that were slain. The lords in King Henry's party pitched a field and fortified it full strong, and like unwise men broke her ray [line] and field and took another... the Queen's party was at hand with him in [the] town of St. Albans, and then all [the only] thing [left] was to seek and out of order, for her pricklers\* came not home to bring any tiding how nigh the Queen was, save one [that] came and said that she was 9 miles off.*<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Gairdner, *Gregory's Chronicle*, 213. Translation: "...in the midst of the battle King Henry went unto his Queen and forsook all his lords, and trust[ed] better her party [or council] then unto his own lords."

\* scouts

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Clearly Margaret thought that her presence was necessary to aid in the rallying of the troops, and in all of the battles described in the chronicle she is mentioned as being nearby, if not actually helping to lead the forces herself. It should be clearly noted, however, that for the most part, she was to be found in a nearby town. Her gender limited her, and she was often not allowed to be on the battlefield itself. It is in this role, as the general of the royal army, that Margaret was most out of place in her society.

In addition to this, however, there is one more interesting episode, found only in Gregory's Chronicle, which needs to be mentioned. After the Battle of Blore Heath, the Duke of York captured King Henry VI and declared himself to be the king's rightful heir over the Prince of Wales. Margaret, knowing her life to be in danger, fled alone with her son to Wales. The chronicle describes all of this and then mentions the men who accompanied her. The author writes:

And thenn the queen hyrynge thys she voydyde unto Walys, but she was met with besyde the Castelle of Malepas, and a servand of hyr owne that she hadde made bothe yeman and gentylman, and aftyre a-poyntyd for to be in offysce with hyr sone the prynce, spoylyde hyr and robbyde hyr, and put hyr soo in dowl of hyr lyffe and sonys lyffe also. And thenn she com to the Castelle of Hardelowe in Walys, and she hadde many grete gyftys and gretely comfortyd, for she hadde need there of...And moste comynly she rode by-hynde a yonge poore gentylle-man of xiiij yere age, hys name was Jon Combe, i-borne at Amysbery in Wyltschyre. And there hens she remevyd fulle prevely unto the Lorde Jesper, Lorde and Erle of Penbroke, for she durste not a byde in noo place that [was] opyn but in pryvatt.

*And then the queen, hearing this, she voyaged unto Wales, but she was met with beside the Castle of Malepas, and a servant of her own that she had made both yeoman and gentleman, and after[ward] appointed for to be in office with her son the prince, spoiled her and robbed her; and put her so in doubt of her life and [her] son's life also. And then she came to the Castle of Hardelowe in Wales, and she had many great gifts and [was] greatly comforted, for she had need thereof...And most commonly she rode behind a young poor gentleman of 14 years [of] age, his name was Jon Combe, born at Amysbery*

*in Wiltshire. And there hence she removed full privately unto the Lord Jasper, Lord and Earl of Pembroke, for she dared not abide in any place that [was in the] open but in private.<sup>84</sup>*

There are some significant phrases in this passage. First, the author felt Margaret's behavior, in riding behind a young gentleman, to be "most common," and after this she lived with the Earl of Pembroke, Jasper Tudor, "in private." The author fails to leave us with anything more than this vague hint, but what we can decipher clearly is that Margaret gave the people some reason to be displeased with her behavior. Perhaps she had an affair with Jasper Tudor; the answer to this question is not relevant to this analysis. What should become clear is that others, most especially those that followed the Duke of York, thought that she had behaved with some sort of impropriety. Other chronicles report rumors of clandestine affairs with many noblemen in England, most especially the Duke of Somerset, who was reported by those in the Yorkist camp to be the father of the Prince of Wales. These attacks were aimed at Margaret's sexuality, which demonstrates a significant diversion from the propaganda against the Empress Matilda two centuries earlier. These attacks that focused on the illegitimacy of the Prince of Wales were, in fact, attacks on the illegitimacy of Margaret's claims to keep the throne, because if her son was not actually the Prince of Wales, she had no right to gain the throne on his behalf.

From Wales, Margaret rallied her forces and allies for an invasion of England late in 1460. In order to know when to come back, however, the chronicle reports that she and the king had decided to send secret tokens to each other, which were known only to herself and the king. The tokens were, however, falsified and forged by those in the Duke of York's camp, who wanted Margaret to return early in order to capture and neutralize her as a threat. The author writes:

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<sup>84</sup> Gairdner, *Gregory's Chronicle*, 208-209.

...for at the kyngys departynge fro Covyntre towarde the fylde of Northehampton, he kyste hyr and blessyd the prynce, and commaundyd hyr that she shulde not com unto hym tylle that [he] sende a specyalle tokyn unto hyr that no man knewe but the kyng and she. For the lordys wolde fayne hadde hyr unto Lndon, for they knewe welle that alle the workyngys that were done growe by hyr, for she was more wyttyer then the kyng, and that apperythe by hys dedys, &c.

*... for at the king's departing from Coventry toward the field of Northampton, he kissed her and blessed the prince, and commanded her that she should not come unto him 'til that [he] sent a special token unto her that no man knew but the king and she. For the lords would fain have her unto London, for they knew well that all the workings that were done grow by her, for she was more wise than the king, and that appeared by his deeds, etc.*<sup>85</sup>

The last sentence is important. The nobility of England, i.e. the Duke of York and the Earl of Warwick, did not want Margaret to come back to England, "for they knew well that all the workings [of the government] that were done grow by her, for she was more wittier [wise] than the king..." This is by far the most telling statement about Margaret's influence on the government in England during this time. What should become clear to us after reading this is that it was Margaret, not Henry VI, who actually ruled England, most likely because of the king's faltering mental health. A strong hand was needed, and Margaret stepped up to provide it. Her hand, however, would prove to be not quite strong enough.

### *An English Chronicle*

Another chronicle written contemporaneously to the events it describes is *An English Chronicle*, which was published sometime between 1461 and 1471. The image of Margaret that we receive from it differs slightly from that presented in *Gregory's Chronicle*. Her first major

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<sup>85</sup> Gairdner, *Gregory's Chronicle*, 209.



appearance is in the accounts of the years 1459-1460, during the height of the Wars of the Roses.

The author writes that the country was "oute of alle good gouernaunce" because the king could not control the nobility or govern the realm properly, as he should have done. After a scathing report of the king's inabilities, he turns to Margaret:

The queene with such as were of her affynyte rewled the reame as her liked, gaderyng ryches innumerable. The offices of the reme, and specially the erle of Wylshyre tresorere of Engelond for to enryche himself, peled the pore peple, and disheryted ryghtefulle eyres, and dede many wronges.

*The queen, with such as were of her affinity, ruled the realm as [she] liked, gathering riches innumerable. The offices of the realm, and specially the Earl of Wiltshire, treasurer of England, for to enrich himself, peled\* the poor people, and disinherited rightful eyres<sup>∞</sup>, and did many wrongs.* <sup>86</sup>

Margaret is reported to be using her office to abuse the rights of the people, in conjunction with the actions of the Earl of Wiltshire. The king is presented here as an ineffective ruler, completely under the influence and dominion of his wife. Certainly, this is a reversal of the traditional gender roles within a marriage, but this assumption of male qualities is not the primary attack made against Margaret in the chronicle at this point. The author continues on to write:

The queen was defamed and desclaudered, that he that was called Prince, was nat hir sone, but a bastard goten avoutry; wherefore she dreding that he shulde nat succeed hys fadre in the crowne of Englond, allyed vn to her alle the knyghtes and squyers of Chestreshyre for to haue theyre benyuolence, and helde open householde among theym... trusting thorough thayre streynghete to make her sone kyng; making pryue menys to some of the lordes of Englond for to styre the kyng that he shulde resygne the crowne to hyre sone...

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\* Pele: to rob from, steal, or generally defraud.

<sup>∞</sup> Eyre: the courts of England. The author is saying that the Earl, and consequently the Queen, held no respect for the laws and courts of England, but made their own justice system with their own laws, which defrauded the people of their rights.

<sup>86</sup> Davies, *An English Chronicle*, 79.

*The queen was defamed and slandered, that he that was called Prince, was not her son, but a bastard gotten [in] adultery; wherefore she dreading that he should not succeed his father in the crown of England, allied unto her all the knights and squires of Chestershire for to have their benevolence, and held open household among them...trusting through their strength to make her son king; making private means to some of the lords of England for to stir the king that he should resign the crown to her son...*<sup>87</sup>

Later on in the chronicle, the king is reported to have visited "his quene Margarete...and hyr sone Edward..."<sup>88</sup> The rumor that the queen had committed adultery, and the idea that her son, Edward, the Prince of Wales, was not the son and rightful heir of King Henry VI, was a common attack made against her, and is clearly delineated in this passage. We can attribute this attack to the Yorkists, most especially the Duke of York, who attempted to style himself as the rightful heir to the throne upon the death of Henry VI.<sup>89</sup> It was this type of propaganda that seems to be most prevalent during Margaret's life. However, the second half of this passage is also significant and should not be ignored. In it, the author blames the Wars of the Roses on Margaret. It is she who gathers forces, "trusting through their strength to make her son king" and who "stir[s] the king" in order to get what she wants. Because she cannot convince the king to "resign the crown to her son" she begins the Wars of the Roses so as to deny the Duke of York's claim as heir to the throne.

To be fair to Margaret, however, *An English Chronicle* does not simply depict her as a vengeful mother, but it also presents her as the power behind the throne, similar to *Gregory's Chronicle*. Just before the Battle of Blore Heath, the author writes that the Yorkist leaders wanted to seek peace with the king, and set out to disprove the accusations made against them by

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<sup>87</sup> Davies, *An English Chronicle*, 80.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>89</sup> The author writes that because of the king's sickness, "the duk of York was made protector of Englund." Davies, *An English Chronicle*, 78.

"his enemyes and specially of the quene and hyre company the whiche hated hym dedly..." But Margaret, upon hearing this, reportedly roused the king to a fight and battle; "...and anone by hire stiryng the kyng assembled a grete power whereof the lorde Audeley was chyef and had the ledyng of thaym, and wente for the in to the felde called Borehethe..."<sup>90</sup> Clearly, in this account it is Margaret who is the ruler, who has the ability to govern England during those difficult times. It is also clear, however, that this is not approved by the author, for her leadership only leads to dissension among the nobility, and ultimately, leads to war.

The rule of the queen leads to problems not only for the nobility of England, but also for the common people. While the chronicler writes that Margaret is leading the army by herself, he also writes that she allows her forces to plunder the English countryside, and rape and pillage in English cities. Undoubtedly, this did nothing to ingratiate her to the English people, who most likely saw her solely as a Frenchwoman, their most hated enemy, coming to pillage their English country. This becomes clear in a passage from *An English Chronicle*, after the Second Battle of St. Albans:

Whan thys batayle was doon, London dredyng the manas and the malyce of the quene and the duke of Somerset and others, leste they wolde have spoyled the cyte,--for as moche as the quene with her counselle had graunted and yeue leve to the Northurmen for to spoyle and robbe the sayde cyte...--then ther was sent vnto the sayde quene owte of the cyte of Londoun the duchesse of Bukynghame, with other wytty men with her, to trete with thaym for to be benyuolent and owe good wyllle to the cyte, the whyche was dyuyded withyn hyt self...and for to stond in sewrte of the cyte both of bodyes and of goodes no robry to be had, graunted and promytted a certayne some of money to the sayde quene and duk of Somerset...

*When this battle was done, London, dreading the menace and malice of the queen and the Duke of Somerset and others, lest they would have spoiled the city,-- for as much as the queen with her council had granted and gave leave to the Northernmen for to spoil and rob the said city...--then there was sent unto the said queen out of the city of London the*

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<sup>90</sup> Davies, *An English Chronicle*, 80.

*Duchess of Buckingham, with other witty men with her; to treat with them for to be benevolent and owe good will to the city, the which was divided within itself...and for to stand in surety of the city both of bodies and goods no robbery to be had, granted and permitted a certain sum of money to the said queen and duke of Somerset...<sup>91</sup>*

What is interesting in the above passage is that the people of London send out a woman, the Duchess of Buckingham, to negotiate with the queen; the men accompany her, not the other way around. We should also notice that the queen is thought to be filled with "malice" and is a "menace" to the people of London. Certainly these are not qualities to which she would have been happy to be attributed; this passage therefore gives us a good picture of the people turning against the queen. Shortly after this time, Margaret will be forced to flee to France, after the usurpation by Edward IV, though this chronicle ends before that point.

#### *Polydore Vergil*

The chronicle penned by the Italian ambassador Polydore Vergil was not first published until the reign of King Henry VIII. As chronicles go, then, it relies on our other sources and chronicles to give it credibility. However, as a piece of anti-Margaret propaganda, it is worthy of analysis. The image of Margaret that this chronicle leaves for posterity is one that is somewhat similar to those that came before. We still find the warlord queen, a woman who is trying to protect her family against her perceived enemies at any cost. The image, however, is almost a caricature of the Margaret we found in *Gregory's Chronicle* or in *An English Chronicle*. After the passage of time, Margaret's manly qualities become more and more pronounced.

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<sup>91</sup> Davies, *An English Chronicle*, 109.

This is clear in the first description that Vergil gives of Margaret's character. He reports that Margaret was "a woman of sufficient forecast, very desirous of renowne, full of policie, councell, comely behaviour, and all manly qualities, in whom appeared great witt, great diligence, great heede, and carefulnes..." As with Matilda, it is Margaret's adoption of "manly" qualities that makes her a suitable queen consort. It is her feminine qualities, on the other hand, that give her trouble. Vergil writes:

But she was of the kinde of other women, who commonly are much geuen and very readie to mutabilitie and chaunge. This woman when she perceaved the king her husbände to doo nothing of his owne head...and that himself tooke no great heede nor thought as concerning the government, determined to take upon her that charge, and by litle and litle to deprive the duke of that great authoritie which he had...With these persuasions the queene incensed, taketh on hande with her husband king Henry to rule the realme. And...yet did she with great haultines undergo that charge, who firste of all other thinges did not onely cleere sequestre the Duke of Glocester from dealing in publike affaires, but also afterwarde thought him unworthy to be protected from thinjurye of his enemyes.<sup>92</sup>

Margaret's "mutability" and her inclination to "change" her mind are therefore bad qualities for a ruler to have. In addition, Margaret has superceded her husband's authority and the authority of his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, who was at that time the Lord Protector during the king's minority, in order to rule the kingdom on her own. This idea, that Margaret ruled the kingdom, either in conjunction with a male council or on her own, is repeated again and again in Vergil's chronicle: "while the king gave no great regard...neither that Margarete his wife, who...had the government of the whole realme" and again, later, "the duke of Soommerset...with Margarete the queene ruled all thinges."<sup>93</sup> Indeed, in a later episode, we find Margaret convincing the king to move his capital from London to Coventry, where they can be better protected from the

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<sup>92</sup> Ellis, *Polydore Vergil*, 71-72.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 90.

Yorkist forces. And finally, it is Margaret's feminine qualities that again get her into trouble. Her inability to compromise after being offended is often cited as the worst of these characteristics.

Vergil describes it thusly:

The duke and the earle of Salesbury, much moved with this offence, spake openly betwixt themselves in bitter and sharpe termes, that the matter was nothing els but the fraude and fury of a woman, meaning the queene, who, thinking she might do whatsoever she listed, sought nor minded any thing so much as by womanish sleight to torment, consume, and utterly destroy all the nobilitie of the lande. But afterwards they came to the matter, and resolved betwixt them, that the earle of Salsbury should, with an armie in good array of battaile, marche to London, there to complaine unto the king for this injurious breache of amitie and agreement; and that if he should perceave himselfe able to prevaile, not to omit thoccasion of revenging his honor against the queene and her counsellours, who so evill governed the realme.<sup>94</sup>

What becomes clear from the above passage is that the image of Margaret that was promulgated during her lifetime becomes exaggerated after her death. In *Gregory's Chronicle* there are only hints of Margaret being allowed to rule on her own because of her husband's infirmity. Polydore Vergil portrays Margaret as actively seizing the reins of power. While *Gregory's Chronicle* and *An English Chronicle* give a hint that Margaret's ruling and authority gave cause for some of the grievances that led to a civil war, here, the idea is prominently asserted.

In a similar manner, while the anonymous authors of our other two sources report that Margaret was nearby during battles, or that she might have felt herself to be the titular head of the royal army, Vergil writes that she was actively leading her forces in battle against the Duke of York and his allies:

...the queene, who was resolved in minde to demaunde her husbände [taken prisoner by the Duke of York after the Battle of Northampton] by dint of swoorde, and for that cause had alreadie assembled a puissant armie, when she understoode that thenemie approached, forthwith she made head against them and gave them the charge... Then the queene encouraging her men, vanquished the residue of her enemyes in the moment of an

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<sup>94</sup> Ellis, *Polydore Vergil*, 101-102.

houre. There fell in that conflict Richard duke of Yorke, the head of that faction... After that, the queene, with an armie well appoynted, made speede to London for delyverie of her husbände, and by the way, at St. Albones, mett the earle of Warwicke coming to ayde the duke of Yorke, and bringing as prisoner with him king Henry. Here the woman with no lesse courage than she had done before in Yorkshire, gave charge upon thenemy, put him to flight, and recovered her husbände. Surely this Margarete, wife unto the king, warred much more happily by her owne conduct and authoritie then by the kinges.<sup>95</sup>

Vergil is almost depicting Margaret wearing armor, carrying a sword, on a warhorse at the head of the army, leading the charge herself. This differs greatly from the image of Margaret we found in *Gregory's Chronicle*. Polydore Vergil puts Margaret in a manly role that called for her to possess "manly" characteristics. It is significant that nowhere in the passage does Vergil actively suggest that this adoption of male qualities is necessarily a bad thing, but the implication is clear. It is Margaret who is the knight, riding in on a white horse to save her husband, who is the metaphorical damsel in distress. This is both a criticism of Margaret and of Henry, and is probably a result of the time period in which the chronicle was written. Vergil wrote his chronicle during the reign of Henry VIII, the son of Henry VII who took the throne from Richard III, a Yorkist. It would have been Henry VIII's desire to depict all those involved in the Wars of the Roses as inadequate rulers in order to legitimate his father's claim to the throne, and therefore to legitimate his own rule. Thus we get a criticism and report of propaganda directed against Margaret's adoption of male characteristics, but it is also significant to note that she would not have had to adopt a kingly attitude if her husband had been a stronger ruler.

*William Shakespeare*

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<sup>95</sup> Ellis, *Polydore Vergil*, 108-109.

The first scene of Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part Two* begins with Margaret of Anjou's introduction to her husband. She is presented as "the fairest queen that ever king receiv'd" and the king thanks God for giving him "in this beauteous face / A world of earthly blessings to my soul..."<sup>96</sup> It is an auspicious beginning for Margaret's part. Again, we find Margaret to be beloved by her husband and her new people at the beginning of her marriage. As in our other sources, however, this goodwill soon sours.

In Shakespeare's play, Margaret is portrayed as worse than a shrew. She is bent on vengeance and revenge against those that have wronged her. In the third part of the play, Margaret rants at her husband for allowing himself to be forced by the Duke of York to declare that man his heir over her son. Margaret speaks:

...art thou king, and wilt be forc'd?  
 I shame to hear thee speak. Ah! timorous wretch;  
 Thou hast undone thyself, thy son, and me;  
 And given unto the house of York such head  
 As thou shalt reign but by their sufferance...  
 Until that act of parliament be repeal'd  
 Whereby my son is disinherited.  
 The northern lords that have forsworn thy colours  
 Will follow mine, if once they see them spread;  
 And spread they shall be, to thy foul disgrace,  
 And utter ruin of the house of York.  
 Thus do I leave thee. Come, son, let's away;  
 Our army is ready; come, we'll after them.<sup>97</sup>

Margaret is again portrayed as the head of the royal forces. However, she needs no male help or authority to assert herself. In fact, she is rejecting the help and authority of her husband, the king, whose forces "have forsworn thy colours," and is taking control of the army herself to

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<sup>96</sup> Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, 9-10.



"ruin" the "house of York." Indeed, Shakespeare uses the phrase "the army of the queen" numerous times again throughout the play.<sup>98</sup> Clearly Margaret is no meek queen consort to him; she is instead a warrior queen, protecting her son's inheritance to the detriment of the peace in the kingdom.

The imagery gets even more negative as the play goes on. After Margaret defeated the Duke of York at the Battle of Wakefield, she mocked him by showing him a napkin soaked in the blood of his dead son the Earl of Rutland. She then puts a paper crown on his head and orders him to be killed. The Duke of York responds:

She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,  
Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!  
How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex  
To triumph, like an Amazonian trull,  
Upon their woes whom fortune captivates!  
...O tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide!  
How couldst thou drain the life-blood of the child,  
To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,  
Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;  
Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.<sup>99</sup>

Margaret, angered by his response to her mockery, goes on to stab the Duke of York, killing him without regret or mercy. Clearly Shakespeare's version of Margaret has no problem taking action. Moreover, all of her actions are done of her own accord; she does not consult her husband regarding his wishes. She is not acting in conjunction with a man, as we saw with the Empress Matilda; her agency is a solo act demonstrating her capabilities as an effective ruler, and conversely, her husband's ineffectiveness as a leader.

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<sup>98</sup> Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, 13, 16.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

As if to further reinforce the idea of Margaret's manliness and her husband's femininity, Shakespeare gives us another scene, in which the Queen is showing King Henry the Duke of York's head on a spike:

*Queen.* Welcome, my lord, to this brave town of York.

Yonder's the head of that arch-enemy,

That sought to be encompass'd with your crown:

Doth not the object cheer your heart, my lord?

*King.* Ay, as the rocks cheer them that fear their wrack:

To see this sight, it irks my very soul.

Withhold revenge, dear God! 'tis not my fault,

Nor wittingly have I infring'd my vow.<sup>100</sup>

Shakespeare plays on the dichotomy of gender qualities by portraying the King as a merciful, meek, submissive, and obedient man; his wife, on the other hand, is the powerful, authoritative, and courageous leader. What is significant about Shakespeare's portrayal of Margaret is its evidence of an evolution of thought about Margaret in the years after her death. While she was disliked by the English people during her lifetime, in Shakespeare's play she becomes the "she-wolf of France." This is often how she is portrayed and envisaged today. The prominence of Shakespeare's image of Margaret has become the accepted one. Unfortunately, queen Margaret of Anjou remains the vengeful, bitter shrew who started a war to gain her own glory and a throne for her son.

### ***Conclusion***

What is significant about the propaganda directed against Margaret in contemporary chronicles, as seen in *Gregory's Chronicle* and *An English Chronicle*, is that most of the imagery

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<sup>100</sup> Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth*, 32.

centers around their relationships with their male family members. These criticisms can focus on Margaret's relationship to her husband, or more often than not, to her son. In this case, we often find evidence of propaganda that asserted that King Henry VI was not the actual father of Margaret's son, Edward, the Prince of Wales. This is a serious accusation, because if the Prince of Wales was not the rightful heir to the throne, then Margaret's efforts to keep her throne were completely illegitimate.

However, in adding the chronicle written by Polydore Vergil, and the play *Henry VI* by William Shakespeare, we can begin to see the effectiveness of this propaganda in the evolution of the images of Margaret. In these later sources, the focus of the propaganda against Margaret moves from her relationships to male family members to her adoption of male qualities. With Margaret, these qualities are often cited as pride or arrogance; in addition, she is often imagined to be acting as a male ruler would, leading an army or rallying royalist forces. However, as we have seen, she is also depicted with an emphasis on remarkably negative feminine characteristics such as revenge, vengeance, and a duplicitous nature. The accounts and imagery also get remarkably more negative as time passes from when *Gregory's Chronicle* was written, during Margaret's lifetime, to when Shakespeare publishes *Henry VI* a century later. Thus, with Margaret, we can begin to see how effective this propaganda was over time. Images that appear in the earlier sources are repeated and enhanced in the later sources, leading to an overwhelmingly negative picture of Margaret today.

### **Final Conclusion: Other Explanations?**

It should be noted that there could be other reasons behind the negative descriptions of the Empress Matilda and Queen Margaret of Anjou. It could be that the author of the chronicle was simply biased against Matilda or Margaret because they did not like them personally. I find this hard to accept as a reason if only because there are so many diverse examples of the negative descriptions directed at these two women. A simple explanation such as this would not account for the sheer amount of examples we have addressed in this paper. It could also be that these writers were biased against our female rulers because they were supporters of the ruling dynasty. For example, Henry of Huntingdon could have marginalized Matilda because he was against the Angevin dynasty to which Matilda belonged via her husband Geoffrey of Anjou. Or Polydore Vergil could be promulgating negative views of Margaret of Anjou due simply to his support for the Tudor kings that followed the Lancastrian dynasty that Margaret had married into. This could certainly be a factor, and one that needs further exploration.

A final alternative explanation is more complicated. The chroniclers could be attempting to define how a good ruler looked and acted. Thus, they would have outlined the good qualities displayed by a ruler, such as their ability to effectively exercise their authority, their ability to lead an army and protect their citizens, or their ability to dispense justice. This would have been done while at the same time also criticizing the negative characteristics of a person who was challenging their concept of what a good ruler should look like. Thus, negative descriptions of Matilda and Margaret could be accounted for simply by saying that they were not demonstrating

the qualities of a good ruler. Again, the evidence would support this if only Matilda and Margaret were criticized. However, in our chronicles we find both sides being criticized for their bad qualities. Moreover, the qualities for which our male rulers are disparaged are overwhelmingly "feminine" characteristics. Take, for example, this description of King Stephen, Matilda's opposition, after negotiations were made for peace in 1140. William of Malmesbury writes, "the empress and the earl assented to [the advice given by members of the peace conference] immediately, but the king delayed from day to day, and finally rejected them altogether."<sup>101</sup> Here, we find a portrayal of King Stephen displaying characteristics such as capriciousness and fickleness, qualities that would have been considered "feminine" in nature. Thus it seems unlikely to me that the criticisms we find in the chronicles are based solely on dynastic concerns, though this might be a factor.

I believe that the fullest explanation for the negative descriptions of Matilda and Margaret is that male chroniclers repeated propaganda that was circulating during their lifetimes in order to defend their patriarchal monopoly on political power. This propaganda functioned to marginalize or criticize the agency of these two women in their attempts to control and lead the kingdom of England. Male chroniclers did this by creating a strict dichotomization in the gendered imagery of traditional ideas of rulers. In effect, this disallowed the idea that a woman could rule, either because they were incapable of adopting the correct male characteristics needed to rule, or because they were denying their femininity in so doing. This propaganda was extremely effective in condemning the contemporary efforts of these two women.

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<sup>101</sup> Giles, *William of Malmesbury*, 513.

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