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Mother, Wife, Temptress, Virgin and Tyrant: Defining Images of Feminine Power in Medieval Queenship and Modern Politics

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MOTHER, WIFE, TEMPTRESS, VIRGIN AND TYRANT: DEFINING
IMAGES OF FEMININE POWER IN MEDIEVAL QUEENSHIP AND MODERN
POLITICS

A thesis submitted to

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by

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1 Introduction

The Queens of Anglo-Saxon England were restricted and defined by traditional gender expectations and images. Though these ideals are less rigid, gender roles and images of femininity still restrict women. Standards have changed over time, but women continue to be defined by their position as wives and mothers which in turn can restrict actions in the public sphere. The sexual state of a woman is still intimately linked to personal quality. Motherhood was and is currently seen as a state of superior development for women. Women are defined by motherhood and the social obligations and expectations such as emotionality and nurturance that accompany this position. These are not necessarily negative images, but the mother is still expected to have the more dominant role in a child's life. Similarly, in modern society wives are expected to perform most of the domestic duties in the home. Traditional social expectations which restrict women to the private sphere, or the household, have made it difficult for women to participate in matter outside of domestic duties. Though progress is being made and women are working in professions that would have traditionally been limited to men, Patrice DiQuinzio argues that "the 'male' comes to stand for the mind, the social, and the public, and the 'female' for the body, the natural, and the private."[1] In this way, gender expectations restrict the way modern women can behave and participate in public and

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[1] DiQuinzio, Patrice. *The Impossibilit of Motherhood.* 11

these same characteristics that Patrice DiQuinzio recognizes as modern images of femininity also characterize medieval interpretations.

Historical narratives and sources that record the actions of medieval peasant women are almost non-existent. The sources that chronicle the lives of queens are scarce compared to the sources which describe the accounts of men, but what few references and documents do exist reveal the strict social structures which defined and limited the queenship and femininity. Most of the sources that do exist were colored by the bias of the male chroniclers that authored and commissioned historical works. Traditionally queens were not in the position to record their own actions and influences in the world leaving outside sources to use their lives and positions for political and social purposes. For this reason many of the queens depicted in the sources for this era did not resemble actual, complex characters. Queens represented absolutized images of femininity; queens were portrayed as icons representing idealized or malicious aspects of femininity.

Documents recording the early period of Anglo-Saxon England are scarce. Often, historical works chronicling large spans of history were commissioned hundreds of years after the events described occurred. Many of the sources for this era originated during the time of Alfred the Great and were commissioned under his influence. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which tells the early history of Britain and the Anglo-Saxon people from the year 500A.D was actually composed during the reign of King Alfred (871-99). This is a useful source, but also must be seen in context. It originated during a time of Viking invasions as an effort to further legitimize the rule of a dynasty under attack. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was greatly influenced and biased by King Alfred's political needs.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relied heavily on the research and writings of Bede, a Northumbrian monk, who concluded his Ecclesiastic History of the English People in 731.[2] Bede, who wrote without the influence of Alfred's court, mentions Queens often in relation to their part in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. Bede writes of a Frankish princess, Bertha, who was married to the Pagan king of Kent, Ethelburt. She was allowed become the queen of an Anglo-Saxon king under certain conditions: she must be permitted to practice her own faith. [3] This inspired Rome to send more missionaries and St. Augustine of Canterbury in order to re-establish ties between Rome and Britain. Augustine was granted a see at Canterbury and from there made efforts to convert the Anglo-Saxon kings. Bertha and Ethelbert's daughter went on to marry a Northumbrian king who followed suit with Ethelbert and agreed to convert to Christianity. This princess had direct dialogue with Pope Gregory who instructed her on the duties of a wife, and urged her to work towards the spiritual salvation of her husband. Similar situations were also recorded by Bede implying that the political nature of marriage and religion made the wives of Anglo-Saxon kings an important force in the conversion of Britain. Queens often found a source significant power through her role in church matters and her relationship with church officials; this connection would become more important with time.

The terms that gave a woman these titles, Queen or Kings Wife, were not well defined and their meaning varied from era to era. There were different categories of

[2] Campbell, James. *The Anglo-Saxons.* 70
[3] Trans. Jane, L.C. *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation.* http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/bede-book1.html. book 1 Ch. XXV

relationships between a man and woman during this time. Concubinage was legalized during the late Roman Empire, and often the distinction between wife and concubine was ambiguous. Pauline Stafford writes: "Early Christian ideas on marriage chose to stress consent above dowry as the constitute of a legal marriage."[4] The most important political difference between the titles of concubine and wife is that only a wife, through a marriage with an agreed dowry, produces legitimate children. This became an important factor to a King who wished to save his kingdom from the strife that results from dynastic instability. Perhaps this is another clue as to why queens were often not included in the history of the Anglo-Saxons. It was not really until the time after King Alfred that there was some degree of dynastic continuity. Before this time, the throne was open to all male relatives of the former king. This led to instability and civil strife that a kingdom under siege, like Alfred's, could not afford; the status of the queen would then play an important role in the legitimation of an heir. A child produced by a concubine would not be throne-worthy making a marriage with a legitimate wife more appealing to kings. This increase in status gave the 'queen' or 'king's wife' more power and influence over affairs of state.

The institution of marriage and what constitutes a marriage was not well defined in the early medieval period, but became an important topic during periods of monastic reform in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The relationship between the church and the legitimization of power developed into an important factor which affected the politics of

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4 Stafford, Pauline. *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*. 63

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a kingdom and often served to raise the status of queens.[5] Consecration was not the only factor assigning the title queen, but it was an important one because it anointed the body of a woman as holy. This gave greater legitimacy to her children, but also to the marriage itself. Serial monogamy was common among Anglo-Saxon kings, and marriage was an important factor in forging political alliances, but the numerous heirs that resulted from this practice in combination with the other male relatives made this practice dangerous for the stability of a kingdom. A legitimate, consecrated wife could prove to be a powerful force inspiring regional peace as it elevated the importance and sanctity of the woman and her children.

Considering the implications the title of 'queen' has on the influence of the individual it is not surprising that the relationship between the church and the 'queen' was of the utmost importance. Churchmen were often scholars as well; these men recorded the history of the Anglo-Saxon, and it is in this light that kings and queens were judged by their posterity. It would then be important for royalty to maintain a good relationship with the church, and this was especially true for queens. The periods of conversion and monastic reform seem to coincide with an increase of queenly power over regional politics.[6] Queens and king's wives were granted lands and received an income from these properties. Often, these women would establish convents or monasteries from the proceeds of these lands. The church was a major land holder in almost all parts of Christendom, and Anglo-Saxon England was no different. Religion was a central factor in politics making a queen's relationship with the church all the more important. Religion

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[5] Stafford, Pauline. *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers.* 124
[6] Pauline, Stafford. *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*. 124

elevated queens, but could also restrict them if the relationship were not satisfactory. In these cases character defamation could be used against the queen, and these smears likened queens evil or malevolent biblical women. A queen could easily become an example of female sinfulness in the eyes of the church and popular opinion if the relationship between the queen and the church was not respected.

Biblical images became a powerful political factor for the queens of the time. The most important of these images was that of Mary mother of God, and Queen of heaven, an ideal that began to develop around the tenth century.[7] These images were powerful and if properly manipulated could increase the influence and improve the reputation of the queen, but these images also represented a contradiction in the duties and attributes of women. Examples for how to live life were taken from the bible and saint stories as well as contemporary, secular literature. Gender roles were defined by these sources, and queens as well as common women were expected to emulate these characters. The nature of politics, however, often did not allow a queen to be submissive and obedient like Esther or Ruth; these women were expected to be relatively savvy politicians. The most important image in influencing the roles and expectations of women was Mary. The attributes for which she is respected, virginity and motherhood, are entirely unachievable for most women who were expected to become mothers by giving up their purity and virginity. However, Mary was seen as the ideal woman due to these conflicting states— virginity and motherhood. The most successful and powerful queens during the period of monastic reform, and to a lesser extent the queens of the period of conversion, capitalized

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[7] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Edith and Queen Emma*. 178

on the respect that comes with these contradictory attributes. Queens had to negotiate between being seen as chaste and virginal and still producing heir.

Queen Emma, a Norman born late Anglo-Saxon Queen, found herself in political circumstances that required justification. She was the Queen of two kings of England; one who was the natural king, Aethelred the Unready and the other, Cnut, his Danish conqueror. The powerful position of the Normans during this time allowed such an alliance to take place, but also put Emma in a precarious situation. She had sons by both of her husbands and upon her second husband's death she was forced to take sides. Emma initially maneuvered against the succession of her sons by her first husband, Aethelred, Edward and Alfred. Her duel roles as mother and queen diverged at this time; a political leader has different and conflicting obligations. Emma understood this and used the seemingly restrictive ideals to her advantage.

Emma was expected to be a dutiful wife and mother, but the nature of the political situation of the time did not always allow the duties of a mother and the duties of a queen to correspond. Emma, as Pauline Stafford argues, realized the contradiction that she faced in having to both a loving mother and a politically conscious queen. Though her political actions did not always serve the best interest of all of her children—in fact her actions led to the death of Alfred, her youngest son by Aethelred, but she was able to negotiate "her way out of an ideological contradiction inscribed in the imagery of her own society."[8] Queen Emma commissioned her a work about her own life and was able to justify her actions through this medium. In this source Emma used the powerful image of the Mary

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[8] Stafford, Pauline. "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries" <u>Medieval Queenship</u>. 164

of Nazareth to her advantage and attempted to portray herself as an influential queen, but also a caring mother—attributes all ideal and righteous women possessed. Religious imagery was incredibly important to the royalty of the time. A firm Christian foundation was important for any royal family, and any holy association strengthened as well the political position of the family. Dynasties valued the importance of saints when attempting to further legitimize their claim to power. The powerful figure of the time were obliged to operate under social conditions dictated by the bible, these perception were important in gathering influence.

The conflicts and dilemmas that these queens faced are different, but also similar to the issues that women face today. Religious interpretations of the duties of these women influence the works of modern feminists, and are still a cause of conflict in the lives of women. These issues are of course, not quite the same, but as the English people are influenced by the history of this civilization so too are modern issues of femininity born from the society in which these queens lived and were judged by history. Though these images and obligations were often paradoxical, successful queens and powerful. Queens were obliged to maintain the highest standards of the duties and responsibilities of a Christian wife and mother as presented in images from the Bible while also performing the responsibilities that were implicit in their political title. Powerful and venerated queens were able to negotiate between familial and political responsibilities by

using the traditional gender images and expectation which defined their roles and duties

to their advantage.[9]

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[9] Power being defined by Pauline Stafford as "the ability to take part in the events, to have the means at your disposal to give some chance of success…i.e. the means of strategic action…"Stafford, Pauline. *Gender Family and the Legitimation of Power*. X. 11.

2   Images of Queenship

In the middle ages, the role of a Queen was twofold. She was expected to be the epitome of motherhood and womanly virtue and also a political companion for her husband. These two duties often came into conflict with the perceptions on idealized womanhood prevalent in the medieval era. The duties of queens and all women were dictated by biblical and secular sources and images. Poems and epics recorded the roles of women in relation to heroic and important men. Sally Cunneen writes, "Most people could not read, write, or understand the Latin used in the mass. Visual art, therefore, was their main medium of instruction; the cathedrals were their schools."[10] These images became symbols that developed dynamic, powerful and widely recognized interpretations. Many sources offered explanations on these powerful images but there was little consensus on the concrete meaning of these symbols in the wealth of commentary by theologians. Indeed, the sheer number of interpretations led to contradictions in the nature of many symbols. While these images were difficult to completely embody for numerous reasons, negotiating the contradictions inherent in Biblical and realistic expectations of women was essential for successful and powerful queens.

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[10] Cunneen, Sally. In Search of Mary The Woman and the Symbol. 146

There is no person in biblical literature more important, with possible exception of Eve, to understanding medieval perceptions on women than Mary of Nazareth. She is the epitome of womanhood according to the medieval church. In medieval teachings, Mary was a dutiful mother; chaste, and also obedient. The interpretation of Mary became important in defining the roles of women in the works of early theologians and church fathers. For example in the fourth century "Helvidius declared Mary a perfect model of virginity before the birth of Christ, and of married love and motherhood after…"[11] For Helvidius, Mary was the ideal woman and this was a generally accepted truth by theologians and church fathers. However, it was impossible to fully represent Mary of Nazareth because she was a wife and mother, but she was also a perpetual virgin in most church teachings. Women and queens were expected to be chaste. Yet birth was viewed as an unclean and unnecessary act as thinkers of the time widely thought that the end of times was near making reproduction superfluous and all the more sinful.[12] Though, the production of children was the primary duty of women and queens. Dynastic continuity and regional peace depended on the birth of heirs. Queens, with few exceptions, could not live in accordance with this virginal ideal. Despite this unreasonable contradiction, Mary's perpetual virginity became increasingly important in the teachings of this church. This diminished her humanity by creating an unachievable representation of the ideal women. Queens were obligated to perform wifely and motherly duties not in keeping with Mary's virginal image, and therefore could not identify with her fully.

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[11] Ibid 108
[12] Ibid 108

Images of women were therefore absolutes; a woman did not have characteristics of Mary or Eve because they were complete opposites. Eve was directly responsible for the fall of human kind from Grace, and church leaders were by no means forgiving of this sin. Tertullian, a theologian writing in the late second and early third centuries, wrote the following of all women and Eve, "The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack."[13] Tertullian's meaning here is quite clear. He fully believed that the women of his age could be living embodiments of Eve: "The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age." Though Mary's conception of Jesus brought the salvation of man she was also more detached. There was no earthly equivalent of Mary; she was a divine and unique individual while Eve was all too human.

Despite the power of the symbol of the virgin, a uniform idea on the nature of Mary did not exist. The conflicting images that formed the early and medieval understandings of Mary in the church were diverse and dynamic. While childbirth and intercourse were inherently impure, they were also important components of society. Mary was praised for her virginity, but also for her motherhood. The innate contradictions in this interpretation are impossible to resolve completely; however, the duties of a mother and wife were also honored. Through the birth of Christ Mary became the antithesis of Eve. Her mortal body was the vessel for human salvation, and while the

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[13] http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf04/anf04-06.htm#P265_52058

idea of Mary's humanity declined, the implications of this birth were implicitly accepted—the act of birth resulted in the salvation of mankind. Though less ideal than virginity, matrimony was still an important duty of women, and a powerful tool of queens who depended greatly on their families for political support. Motherhood was expected of many women and was an acceptable and even valued state. Despite this respect for mothers, the most important duty expected of a queen was still less respected than virginity and chastity. A childless queen was at a political disadvantage, and chastity was not an advisable option to these powerful women.

Mary was the diametric opposite of Eve. While the images which defined the nature of Mary were contradictory and often in opposition to realistic expectations of queens, Eve was an all too human example of a flawed and more common image of womanhood. Sally Cunneen writes, "a careful theological parallel between Eve and Mary[was drawn] by the earliest Fathers of the church..."[14] Mary was the quintessence of idealized and impossible womanhood while Eve was a more earthly representation of human, womanly conditions. The greatest difference in the nature of these two figures was obedience; Mary was described as obedient to God, while Eve possessed a strong willed nature that represented the exact opposite of Mary's idealized personality.[15] Eve's disobedience resulted in human kind's expulsion from paradise; she was a truly detestable figure, and a dangerous image to become associated with.

Queens were expected to be obedient and dutiful wives and mothers, but were also political partners. They were expected to offer advice to their husbands, as were all

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[14] Cunneen, Sally. In Search of Mary the Woman and the Symbol. 63
[15] Ibid

wives: "Notwithstanding feminine frailty, the husband of a prudent queen should be grateful her advice. St Paul had said, 'the pagan husband will be sanctified by his believing wife."[16] Marriage was a partnership, and this was especially true for royal couples. However, wifely advice could be interpreted differently by political opposition. The Queen often represented a foreign power, and this had the potential to make her unpopular in sects within kingdoms. It was important for a queen to be portrayed as a dutiful wife and advisor, but also as an obedient woman.

Character defamation was employed against powerful women. It was important that the queen's royal image be one of an obedient, but prudent wife and mother. However, the very political nature of royal marriage made the duty of advisement precarious for queens. The families of queens were always powerful political powers in their own right, and the entitlement of a daughter or sister could prove to be incredibly advantageous. The motivations of a queen were often viewed with suspect, and these suspicions were often voiced by referencing powerful, threatening female figures, like Eve, who usurped masculine authority. Propaganda was a political tool, and a form of slander which was especially effective against queens due to their contradictory and difficult political and familial duties.

Though negative biblical examples of femininity were powerful and commonly used as slander, constructive models of the female character were also very influential. However the interpretation and meaning of these symbols were by no means static; this point is can be seen in the symbolic history of Mary of Nazareth. She is an ever changing

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[16] Nelson, Janet. "Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship" <u>Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe.</u> 305.

image. Historically speaking, the image of Mary as the epitome of womanhood had been prevalent since the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries.[17] However, during the tenth and early eleventh centuries a new interpretation of Mary as the "Queen of Heaven" emerged: "The presentations of Mary not only stress her queenship, but gives an idea of the dignity which could be attached to it in contemporary eyes."[18] The duties and characteristics of Mary became queenly and she was viewed as a heavenly embodiment of feminine ideals. This shift may seem superficial, but it had important implications for queenship and the perceptions and duties of queens. This image legitimized queenly power. This new image offered a different interpretation on the connection between divine and human queenship; Mary became not only a dutiful wife and mother, but also a divine and powerful woman in her own right—crowned and connected to the rest of the trinity and holy family.[19]

Mary was the most important and powerful positive representation of femininity and queenship in Biblical literature, but by no means the only one. Queen Esther is an excellent example of a dutiful wife who advises her husband within the acceptable boundaries of social expectations for women. Therefore Esther was also an idealized queen: "Esther's role as intercessor with her husband was spelled out, and the concluding phrase highlighted chastity as the queenly virtue par excellence."[20] She was chaste, virtuous and therefore an adequate and useful advisor to her husband. Esther appeals to her husband in a submissive and feminine way making her intervention acceptable. She

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[17] Cunneen, Sally. Ibid. 101
[18] Stafford, Pauline. "Emma: The Powers of the Queen" Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. 13
[19] Ibid. 13
[20] Nelson, Janet. "Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship" Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe. 308

performs the duty of a wife and entertains and feeds her husband and his guests. She is not aggressive even though the fate of the Jewish people is at stake. She appeals to her husband for help in a feminine and submissive manner always acknowledging his superiority on the matter over her own: "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."[21] Idealized images of feminine obedience defined how Ester was allowed to influence her husband and exercise power. Esther's submissiveness as a wife gave her the power to win the favor of her husband and so her appeal and interference was acceptable.

She was an intercessor, but still an ideal female. While she represented a powerful image of femininity, the idealized nature of her personality could prove difficult for real queens to embody. The title queen was political, but also maternal and traditional. The roles of a wife and mother were dictated by a narrow set of expectations. Politics could be divisive and corrupting and female participation in the traditionally public sphere could corrupt a queen's image as an idealized woman. Esther's actions represented acceptable channels of womanly power but the admirable queenly traits which Esther embodied (obedience and submissiveness) created a very narrow image of womanhood and queenship. In an earthly royal court it was much more difficult for queens to exercise feminine attributes of submissiveness and obedience if a queen desired to influence her

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[21] King James Bible. Esther, 7

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husband. It was therefore very easy to view a queen as a woman with unnatural influence—as a woman who did not embody the cherished characteristics of an obedient wife. In this way a queen was either seen as obedient and submissive, an ideal state, or as a woman with undeserved influence and power and therefore a potential corrupter of her husband.

Despite the positive, if narrow, interpretations of biblical women the Church's teachings on gender for the most part restricted women. Women could offer advice in accordance with their wifely duties. The images and prejudices that originated from imperfect biblical women and traditional cultural assumptions inspired church fathers to solidify the ideas of the inferior nature of women: "By the fifth century, the male leaders and theologians of Christianity had accepted and restated the most denigrating traditional views of women. All that was inferior or evil they associated with the female, all that was good and superior with the male."[22] Women were undoubtedly treated unequally. Interestingly, important female martyrs and saints, for example, often became more masculine as they became closer to God. Even Mary was described in masculine terms in the Ode of Solomon. According to Sally Cunneen "a virginal Mary was said to 'have brought forth [Jesus] like a strong man with desire.'"[23] Even the birth of Christ, because of its important and divine nature, becomes masculine. The term feminine became firmly associated with negative images of temptation, seduction and generally inferiority. This prejudice was impossible to evade. However, queens were able to negotiate between this concretely negative perception on femininity and the positive images of motherhood and

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[22] Anderson, Bonnie. A History of Their Own. 78
[23] Cunneen, Sally. In Search of Mary the Woman and the Symbol. 90

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queenship in other examples. This consciously formed perception, however, was incredibly difficult to achieve and maintain.

Biblical sources were exceptionally important in defining medieval gender roles, but not the exclusive foundation of important imagery. Secular literature was also offered examples on female duty and queenship. The poem *Beowulf* is probably the most well known example of Anglo-Saxon literature, and includes a brief but important passage describing the duties of a queen in the house of a king. Queen Wealhtheow serves her husband and the men of the hall as would have been expected of any wife. Her duty is to be accommodating, and she expresses motherly affection and concern, but her role is also political: "Take delight in this torque, dear Beowulf, wear it for luck and wear also this mail from our people's armory: may you prosper in them!"[24] Beowulf has arrived at her home with the hope of defeating an enemy of the house and her people. Through this act of hospitality, she is also arming and complementing a man who is vital to the survival of her family and people. In her address to Beowulf she also appeals on behalf of her children: "Treat my sons with tender care, be strong and kind."[25] She is both a mother and a queen. Queen Wealhtheow servers her house and guests, but in this capacity acts as an ambassador for her husband relaying his wishes with her obligations as a wife. This subtle form of politics is an important duty of the queen; a queen must never be overtly political even if her duty is to express or highlight an important idea or message. Successful Anglo-Saxon queenship was rooted in understated expressions of power in keeping with gender roles of the age.

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[24] Beowulf. Ed. Heaney, Seamus. 86-87.
[25] Ibid. 87

Biblical images were certainly the most powerful depictions of feminine duty and obligation, but local, secular sources represented the ideas of Anglo-Saxon culture. Though Queen Wealhtheow and Queen Esther were representations of women in completely different times and circumstances, the both had similar characteristics. They were equally dutiful wives, even if their motives were political, and they felt an obvious obligation to improve the conditions of their people. Positive images of women did exist, but were often overpowered by representations of feminine deficiency. Eve exemplified the reasons the church fathers had for harsh views on women: she was disobedient and this flaw led to the fall of human kind. Eve's sins were, however, were canceled out by the virgin birth and the virtues of Mary. While the mother of Christ is an incredibly important and positive representation of womanhood, her purity is impossible to attain fully.

The social expectations for queens of this era were rigid and restrictive, but not impossible to exploit. Queens could be perceived to represent positive biblical characters when it was politically necessary for a queen to be viewed as an idea to advance her own interests. Often queens were able to capitalize on these restrictive ideals and use these images to their advantage, but this was always a difficult task. It was very easy to become associated with flawed female figure instead of an idealized one as images of women were absolutized leaving little room for deviation from strict character examples. Character defamation became an important political tool in Anglo-Saxon courts if a queen was perceived to have deviated from the strict images which defined how women were allowed to act. Propaganda through the association of queens with biblical and

secular images of female figures was therefore an essential political tool which could be used by and against queens.

3 Polarizing and Passive images of the Conversion

The historical narratives about queens during the time of conversion to Christianity, approximately 600-800 A.D, are rare but what few exists offer insights into the traditional gender expectations of queens. In this age Christianity was a new phenomenon and was relatively superficially practiced among the Anglo-Saxon elite. The relationship between Queen and Church which would become so important in later eras was new and undeveloped during this time. Marriage laws often put wives at a disadvantage as concubinage was a common practice. In late ages queens were important during succession disputes as their status as a legitimate wife decided the legitimacy of their children, but the age of conversion was a time of uncertain royal inheritance. Any number of male relatives of the king could compete for the throne. The choice was not limited to an immediate family of sons and brothers. Furthermore, during the age of conversion, Queens did not have the social channels at their disposal to promote their own political ambitions. The images of queens were often used by members of the church in historical writings as social images and lessons. Queens had little real influence over the meaning or message relayed by these churchmen.

The first stage of the conversion of Anglo-Saxons England took place towards the very end of the sixth century, but very little is known about the period after the initial wave of Anglo-Saxon invasions after the fall of Roman influence in Britain in the late fifth century. The sixth century in the history England can be best determined through

examination of archeological records, and the single primary source, Gildas' The Ruin of Britain.[26] Grave evidence suggests that much of the western most part of the Island remained Roman-Briton, Christian hands while the eastern and largest portion of the island was seized by the Anglo-Saxons. These Germanic invaders were pagan and illiterate and came to dominate the island's power structure sometime before the arrival of St. Augustine of Canterbury in 597.[27] Archeological evidence suggests that paganism became more prevalent in the fifth and sixth centuries as burial with grave goods became more and more common.[28]

As difficult as it is to derive any definitive information from this period, there is evidence that the Pagan invaders considered themselves inherently superior to their Christian counterparts.[29] In light of this information, the spread of Christianity to the noble Anglo-Saxon class is intriguing. Christianity was viewed as a lesser religion to the numerous pagan practices brought to Britain by the Germanic invaders, and was probably practiced in the Anglo-Saxon dominated areas by the lower echelons of society. Therefore, the conversion of Kings was not inspired by the lowest members of society; it was a political move meant to cement alliances with Roman and Frankish powers. Furthermore, the initial conversions were superficial and Christian traditions were incorporated into existing practices. Conversion was not immediate and Christian practices were not always uniform.

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[26] Campbell, James. The Anglo-Saxons. 20-21
[27] Ibid. 27
[28] Ibid. 34
[29] Yorke, Barbara. The Conversion of Britian. 119

The main source for this period is a work by a Northumbrian monk entitled Bede's <u>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</u>. It was composed in 731 as a record of Anglo-Saxon history since the beginning of Roman Britain.[30] While this is a historical work, Bede intended to describe the catalyst of the conversion as holy rather than political. He was careful to record the conversion of Anglo-Saxon kings as a divine event. Queens were often brought their Christian beliefs to pagan courts and influenced the court and king with their practices. Bede wanted to ensure that conversions were recorded as true religious changes by divorcing the conversion from queenship and politics from royal marriages.

Frankia was a major political and economic influence in southern Britain, and it is no coincidence that the period of conversion began in the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Kent. Christianity was first brought to the Anglo-Saxons through a marriage between the Kentish, King Ethelbert and the Frankish Princess Bertha under specific conditions dictated by Bertha's parents. Bede writes "[Ethelbert]having a Christian wife of the royal family of the Franks, called Bertha; whom he had received from her parents, upon condition that she should be permitted to practice her religion with the Bishop Luidhard, who was sent with her to preserve her faith."[31] Note the description surrounding Bertha's marriage; as Stacy Klein notes: "The passive nature of queens' spirituality is evident in Bede's first account of royal conversion."[32] Bertha was given to Ethelbert by her parents.

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[30] Campbell, James. Ibid. 70
[31] Bede. Ibid. Book 1. Chapter XXV
[32] Klein, Stacy. <u>Rule of Women</u>. 23

She does not greatly influence her husband and it is St. Augustine's arrival in 597 that truly catalyzes the conversion process according to Bede.

Bede emphasizes the passive nature of queens for several reasons. He wished to stress the purity of Ethelbert's and all Anglo-Saxon kings conversions. Ethelbert's marriage to Bertha was political and meant to cement Kent's political allegiances with the powerful Frankia.[33] Bede would have intended to down play the significance of Bertha and Ethelbert's marriage in this circumstance by describing the action of marriage for a woman as passive. He would have wanted to argue for the insignificance of Bishop Luidhard's contribution to the conversion. Luidhard was a Frankish Bishop, and Bede would not have wanted to present Kent, a powerful Anglo-Saxon force, as a kingdom greatly influenced by a foreign power. Bede, as a supporter of the Roman rather than Irish Catholicism, focused on the connection to Augustine in order to emphasize Rome's importance in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.[34] Bede's disregard for the political importance of conversion to Christianity diminishes the role that queens played in the process of conversion.

In Bede's mind, willingness and an active part in personal salvation was all important. According to Luigi Gambero, Bede considered Mary, as the first woman to take a vow of celibacy, to be superior to other women because of the active nature of her

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[33] Barbara Yorke writes, "Frankish influence in Kent, the Anglo-Saxon province closest to Frankia, is relatively wall attested, and it may be no coincidence that Kent is the earliest known Anglo-Saxon kingdom"(64) Yorke, Barbara. The Conversion of Britain. 64

[34] The influences for the period of conversion were numerous and included both Rome and Ireland. Irish monks probably played a key part in the conversion but operated somewhat separately from Rome and this point. The dates for Easter were different, and Bede would have played up the Roman rather than Irish connection.Wallace—Hadrill, J. M. Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary"(39).

faith.[35] She committed to virginity, and this elevated her personal status. She married

Joseph but had already made a commitment to a higher power than earthly unions. The

marriage to Joseph was useful as it prevented Mary from being charged with crimes

associated with being pregnant and unmarried; she was saved from being stoned to

death.[36] For Bede Mary's marriage was idyllic and her choice of lifelong virginity an

example of womanly holiness and morality that had no earthly comparison.

It is imperative to note that Bertha was the daughter of a powerful Frankish king,

but in Bede's work this merits little attention beyond her capacities as a wife and mother.

This is probably due to the nature of marriage during the conversion period. Often, a king

would take many wives, a form of serial monogamy. Barbara York comments on this in

her work, *The Conversion of Britain*, stating that early medieval marriages were by no

means permanent and this would often produce many "legitimate" heirs to the throne.[37]

Bertha was therefore not only a religiously passive figure, but in the matters of the

kingdom a passive political figure as well. The practice of concubinage and polygamy

served to contribute to the dynastic discontinuity and civil wars which enviably resulted

from the death of a king in so many Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Bertha, though a politically

advantageous spouse, was not King Ethelbert's only wife. Bede writes that after the death

of Ethelbert, his son "not only refused to embrace the faith of Christ, but was also defiled

with such a sort of fornication, as the apostle testifies, was not heard of, even among the

Gentiles; for he kept his father's wife."[38] Ethelbert took another wife after Bertha; Bede

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[35] Gambero, Luigi. Mary in the Middle Ages. 38
[36] Ibid. 38
[37] Yorke, Barbara. The Conversion of Britain. 75
[38] Bede's Ecclesiastic History of the English People. Book II. Ch. V

does not reveal whether or not it was death or retirement that parted the previous couple, but this practice was common among Anglo-Saxon kings. Both of the wives described by Bede in this case were legitimate, meaning they were unified through marriage. Often, a king would not only have wives, but also concubines who would also produced legitimate heirs during this time.

The insecure nature of marriage diminished the power of queens; they were disposable and easily removed from power. Often the retired queens would not be ignored entirely—many became wealthy abbesses after separation from their husbands.[39]However the queens of this age certainly had less direct hand in political matters of inheritance than the later queens. There is however, one exception to this theory in the later age of the conversion period. King Offa's wife, Cynethryth, was consecrated and legitimized by the Roman church in an effort to stabilize the inheritance of the kingdom by Offa.[40] King Offa (757-96) elevated her position and title as queen in order to ensure that his son succeed him to the throne. Cynethryth's name appears on laws and charters during his reign suggesting that her position as queen increased in importance through religious legitimization and monogamy.

Legitimization and consecration were not common practices in queenship during this time, and in general, Anglo-Saxon queens were not as high profile as Queen Cynethryth. Most Anglo-Saxon queens served in an advisory capacity to their husbands, as condoned by Biblical images of Queen Esther and the like. Indeed, Pope Gregory composed a letter addressing Queen Ethelberga of Northumbria to assist in the

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[39] Yorke, Barbara. *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal House.* 23
[40] Yorke, Barbara. *The Conversion of Britain.* 227

conversion of her husband, "Persist, therefore, illustrious daughter, and to the utmost of your power endeavor to soften the hardness of his heart by insinuating the Divine precepts… the heat of Divine faith may enlighten his understanding through your frequent exhortations… 'The unbelieving husband shall be saved by the believing wife.'"[41]Here, Pope Gregory is actively advising the Queen to counsel her husband on this matter through "frequent exhortations" on the merits of conversion. However, Bede's rigid, patriarchal social structure confuses the importance of this document and of the importance of Queens during this time in general.

Bede follows Pope Gregory's to Queen Ethelberga by stating that the queen's advice does not lead her husband, Edwin, to convert. Rather, Bede writes that it was a divine vision which inspired him to finally believe in Christianity.[42] Bede's description of events in this sense would seem to offer rather perplexing evidence. Queen Ethelberga was required as a wife to assist in the conversion of her husband, but writes Stacy S. Klein, "for Bede, steeped in biblical and patristic writings that emphasized the husband as the rightful possessor of superior wisdom, to acknowledge the superior wisdom of one's wife may well have been accompanied by a sense of masculine failure or an unnatural gender hierarchy within the household."[43] This reveals a very significant bias in the writings of Bede regarding the position of women. Pope Gregory deemed it appropriate for a wife to advise her husband, but Bede could not make it appear that the influence of a foreign and sexually inferior woman inspired the king to convert.

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[41] *Bede's Ecclesiastic History of the English People.*Book II. Ch XI.
[42] *Ibid. Book II. Ch XII.*
[43] Klein, Stacy S. Ibid. 27

The main primary source for this period is Bede's work. Considering the evidence and the heavily prejudiced nature of Bede's opinion on women, it is difficult to determine whether or not these queens exercised power. It is probable that these women played a larger role in the conversion than Bede would have liked readers to think; however, whatever power the queens of this era possessed cannot compare to the influence held by queens of a later age. Bede's insecurity and attempts to diminish the role of queens in the age of conversion oddly serves as evidence of the importance of queens. Pope Gregory would not have written to Queen Ethelberga had he believed it unnatural for a wife to advise her husband in certain circumstances—especially in matters of salvation which could instigate mass conversion. This suggests that Pope Gregory believed that a wife could adviser her husband on important religious matters, even if Bede did not think this type of relationship appropriate.

Bede, however, does record one relationship between a King and a Queen in which the Queen actively advises a king on political matters. King Rewald's wife advises him not to kill King Edwin, an exile at his court.[44] However, this good advice is countered by the part that she plays in King Redwald's decision to return to pagan worship, "Redwald had long before been admitted to the sacrament of the Christian faith in Kent, but in vain; for on his return home, he was seduced by his wife and certain perverse teachers, and turned back from the sincerity of the faith."[45] Stacy Klein maintains that this description of the Queen is a result of Bede's assertion that only pagan

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[44] Ibid. 35
[45] Bede's Ecclesiastic History of the English People. (Book II. Chapter XV).

couples advise the king in political matters.[46] This may also be indicative of something else all together.

King Redwald's queen initially gives him useful advice, in this way she is fulfilling her role as a wife as dictated by numerous biblical sources. Throughout his work, Bede attempts to diminish the importance of wives in political and familial matters, and it is very interesting that King Redwald's wife ultimately "seduces" her husband back to paganism. Bede is attempting to convey the perverse nature of this type of relationship. Character defamation by implicating the queen in the spiritual downfall of the king through seduction would both discredit the queen in question and restrict the advocatory duties of a wife.

In this instance Bede describes a Queen in as active spirituality and in an advisory position to her husband. This brand of influence results in the spiritual downfall of her husband. Bede's motives are clear; he wished to vilify the pagan, disobedient queen. Interestingly, Redwalds fall involves sexual seduction. Not only does a disobedient wife promote false ideals, but she is also a temptress. It would seem that this pagan queen very much resembles the striking biblical image of Eve—a woman who seduced her partner into great ruin. Eve is the embodiment of temptation, and this subtle use of imagery by Bede suggests a great deal about the nature of Redwald's marriage and the disingenuous and dangerous nature of his queen.

Two diametric religious roles of women are described by Bede: activity and passiveness. Bertha and Ethelberga do not directly, in the mind of Bede, influence the

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[46] Klein, Stacy. Ibid. 35

conversions of their husbands. They are passive figures in a larger divinely inspired movement by the nobles of Anglo-Saxon England towards the creation of Christian kingdoms. They represent the spread of Christianity, but are not a vital part in the religion of any of their male husbands. Redwald's wife is the lone active character and her influence is disastrous. Bede praised the active nature of Mary's spirituality and therefore the passive, Christian Queens could never mirror the divinity of the perfect Mary. Redwald's Queen was an earthly image of Eve right down to the focus on the sexual temptation of her husband. Bertha and Ethelberga were given by their families to their husbands. This relationship was defined by sex and the production of heir. Herein lies the similarities between Bertha, Ethelberga and Redwald's wife: active sexuality. They were born to produce heirs through impure, biological means while Mary was created to bring her own maker into the world through virginal purity.

Thus far, two images have been presented of queens. One is of obedient, pious queens whose presence seems relatively unimportant in the grand political and religious scheme of the kingdom and the other is of an influential queen who leads her husband into spiritual corruption. These images are presented by sources that the queens could not control. It would have been impossible for queens to influence their images during this time because they did not take a public role in the workings of the kingdom.[47] Furthermore, their role as queen was constantly in jeopardy due to the marriage practices of the time. It would have been nearly impossible to exercise considerable influence over succession when so many laid claim to the throne. Offa's wife Cynethryth was the

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[47] Yorke, Barbara. *The Conversion of Britain*. 75

exception to this marriage practice. She was his single wife and she was consecrated, anointed by God as a legitimate heir. She plays an active political role in Mercia, and is sited in charters after her husband further emphasizing her position of authority. Divinity and power are intimately linked in this circumstance.

The nature of queenship during this time is very ambiguous and difficult to determine. Did these queens exercise power? They did not seem to have great influence over larger public perceptions, but they most likely did wield influence within their own home. In this way, the importance of their position was defined by their role as a wife, and not a public leader, though, the wife of a powerful husband would have greater chance to influence and advise her husband. Whatever the advisory position of queens this age served to reinforce the political nature of marriage. Despite Bede's assertions, marriage and kingdom-church relationships were very much political tools. In later ages, with redistribution of power and in a time of crisis and church reformation, the role of queens became more important.

4 Crisis and Queenship

The late eight century signaled a time of great change for Anglo-Saxon Britain. The year 793 of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes in dramatic detail the arrival of the Viking invaders and the sack of Lindisfarne: "In this year dire portents appeared over Northumbria and sorely frightened the people. They consisted of immense whirlwinds and flashes of lightning, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air…"[48] This account was composed during a later date, in the time of Alfred the Great (871-899), but the vivid and ominous description of this monumental event is powerful narrative evidence of how dramatically the Viking invasions altered Anglo-Saxon England. The invasion and subsequent political unification of England changed the nature of queenship and the power queens exercised over matters of the household and politics. The queens themselves would have little direct influence over the images and perceptions which represented the private duty of a queen as wife and mother. However, in this era stabilizing succession, reformed marriage practices and the growing crisis defined how effectively queens could exercise power in the public sphere.

The invasion and conquest of Northumbria and East Anglia, two ancient Saxon kingdoms, by Danish Vikings, was a catalyst for a dramatic political change in England. The fall of Northumbria and East Anglia in the years between the landing of the "great heathen army" in 865 and the Viking assault on Wessex in 870[49] placed Anglo-Saxon

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[48] English Historical Documents. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Vol. 1. 181
[49] Ibid 1 180.

military power in the southern allied kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex. Throughout most of the ninth century Viking invasion from the north posed a serious threat to both Wessex and Mercia and the rulers of these two kingdoms fought a defensive war against the Danish invaders. However, the Danish offensive eventually ended leaving Wessex and Mercian power and rule to combine and expand northwards into the Danelaw. The supremacy and expansion of Wessex placed the King's of Alfred's line as the dominant and eventually supreme kings of Anglo-Saxon England.

The house of King Alfred the Great achieved this degree of power through a series of relatively linear family successions. Alfred's father Aethelwulf passed the throne in succession to his four sons.[50] A line of succeeding kings of any kingdom dictated by the commands of a former king was by no means common place. Therefore successful execution of Aethelwulf's command was quite an accomplishment. Asser, King Alfred's Biographer writes "he [Aelthelwulf] had a testamentary—or rather advisory—document drawn up, so that his sons should not quarrel unnecessarily among themselves after the death of their father"[51] This piece of news, most likely, was not taken well by the rest of the eligible potential successors of the throne. Nevertheless, Aelthewulf's wished did come to fruition, though not without some familial succession strife his four sons succeeded him one after another. [52] The first three sons did not reign for significant portions of time, but Aelthewulf's youngest son, Alfred, made a lasting impression on Anglo-Saxon history.

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[50] Campbell, James. The Anglo-Saxons. 140
[51] Asser's Life of King Alfred. 72
[52] Aethelwulf's son attempted to take over the throne while Aethelwulf was in Rome. This was shortly after the marriage of Aethelwulf to Judith, a consecrate wife and queen. Had Aethelwulf and Judith ad any children, they may have been regarded as more legitimate successors to the throne.

King Alfred led a famously successful resistance against Viking invasions, but was also directly responsible for many historical narrative sources chronicling the history of Anglo-Saxon England. Modern historical methods and understandings differ greatly from Anglo-Saxon perceptions on the past. To the Anglo-Saxons, narrative history could utilize literary techniques. Anglo-Saxon historians did not believe that literary and historical works needed radically different modes of discourse.[53] This serves to explain the often dramatic and unrealistic narratives of the age; both Asser and the Chronicler use techniques that would be fitting in pieces of fiction to describe history.

The images used by the composers of Anglo-Saxon primary sources often seem surreal at times and were influenced by biblical imagery and stories. Malcolm Godden writes, "For the Anglo-Saxons the Old Testament was a veiled way of talking about their own situation…"[54] The importance of this point should not be underestimated. The Viking invasions were considered a blight sent by God as a punishment for the wicked ways of the Anglo-Saxons, and King Alfred was greatly influenced by this notion. Ideas about the religious state of the kingdom made ideas on Pastoral Care became increasingly important. Education became significant during Alfred's reign and in his campaign for education and knowledge that he believed would lead Anglo-Saxon England away from the sinful ways of the past, Alfred translated Gregory's *Pastoral Care* himself.[55] The idea that the cleansing of past sins could help to preserve the kingdom of Wessex was taken

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[53] Giandrea, Mary Frances. <u>Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England.</u> 11
[54] Godden, Malcolm. "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament" *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. 225.
[55] Asser. Ibid. 127

very seriously, and Alfred's reign was characterized by a close link to church teachings and Biblical examples that helped to define morality.

Asser's Life of King Alfred bears striking narrative similarities to Biblical king stories. In this work, historical events are often linked to notions of divine providence and intervention. It discusses a military campaign against pagan invaders, but also a moral struggle on the part of King Alfred. Asser writes of Alfred's sexual desires before his wedding night and the moral dilemma this caused for the pious prince: "when he[Alfred] realized that he was unable to abstain from carnal desire, fearing that he would incur God's disfavor if he did anything contrary to His will, he very often got up secretly in the early morning at cockcrow and visited churches and relics of saints in order to pray…"[56] The fact that Asser included this detail from Alfred's story is exceptionally interesting. Janet Nelson in her work "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2" argues that perhaps this was included to enforce public perceptions on Alfred's chastity and piety and to counter rumors on a possible illegitimate son, Osferth.[57] Another theory suggested that Alfred's fear of sexuality may have been because, being the youngest of four sons, he had been intended for religious life. Whatever the reasons behind Asser's inclusion of the piece of evidence, this information reveals a very interesting connection between morality, sexuality and just leadership.

Chastity and morality in this age were inextricably linked. Celibacy was the ideal lifestyle as dictated by the church and theologians of the time. This had been the case throughout the earlier periods of that have been studied, but the crisis of the Viking

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[56] Ibid. 89
[57] Nelson, Janet. "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2." 61

invasions brought the implications of leading a moral life into a new light. Alfred seemed to believe that previous sinfulness had caused the Viking invasions. As Pauline Stafford notes, this belief was in keeping with evolving ideas on Biblical messages and the nature of Anglo-Saxon historical record. Stafford writes, "Alfred…wrote history as moral commentary, seeing the Viking invasions in each case as a punishment for sin and negligence."[58] The images and lessons relayed through Biblical lessons were poignant and inspirational, and the growing importance of the church in relation to political and military events and catastrophes only served to further link the church and divinity with political power and action. Alfred was, or needed to be perceived as, a pious individual and therefore needed to stress the idea that he was chaste and sexually controlled. Christian morality and especially chastity became linked with ideas on legitimate and righteous leadership for kings and particularly queens.

In *Asser's life of King Alfred* very few queens or kings wives are mentioned, and only two are referred to by name: Judith and Eadburh. Both were cited in *Asser's Life of King Alfred the Great* as being more than just king's wives, they were queens and both were noted for their sexual deviance. Judith was consecrated pending her marriage to Alfred's father, King Aethelwulf. Little is mentioned of her other then bestowing the title of queen on the wife of a king of Wessex was highly unusual.[59] Judith also married Aethelwulf son upon the death of the aged king, an act of indecency as father and son should never share a wife, "Once King Aethelwulf was dead, Aethelbald, his son, against God's prohibition and Chrstian dignity, and also contrary to the practice of all pagans,

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[58] Stafford, Pauline. *Unification and Conquest.* 181
[59] *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources.71*

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took over his father's marriage-bed and married Judith…"[60] The political usefulness of a consecrated and powerfully connected queen drove Aethelbald to sin against God by taking the wife of his father.

Asser uses this story to support the argument against consecrated queenship. Janet Nelson suggests that this is probably due to political circumstances of the time. Alfred's own wife was not consecrated and neither was his mother. Though succession was becoming more stable, disputes between cousins, nephews and brothers for the throne were likely common. Wulfthryth, the wife of Alfred's older brother Aethelred, was consecrated and accorded the title of queen in a charter from 868.[61] This fact, which is omitted from *Asser's life of King Alfred*, may have given her sons a more legitimate claim to the throne as the sons of a wife consecrated and divinely anointed. Alfred may have needed to argue against consecrated queenship through the story of Judith in order to make an argument for the succession of his sons above his nephews.

The story of Eadburh in *Asser's life of King Alfred* is also a case against the elevation of a king's wife to the title of queen. Queen Eadburh exercised great authority over the court of Wessex as the daughter of the devious and murderous King Offa of Mercia.[62] Asser writes, "As soon as she had won the king's friendship, and power throughout almost the entire kingdom, she began to behave like a tyrant after the manner of her father…"[63] Eadburh was manipulative and the powers that she had acquired eventually lead her to poison her husband and many of his close advisors and friends.

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[60] *Ibid. 73*
[61] Nelson, Janet. "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2." 55
[62] *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources.* 71
[63] *Ibid.* 71

After the death of her husband she fled Wessex to the court of Charlemagne where she was given a convent to control as abbess. However, according to Asser, her lust brings her to disobey her vows of celibacy and her story ends in poverty and ruin for the once powerful queen. The murder of her husband is not what leads to her ultimate downfall, though it is a step towards it, her affair and sexual licentiousness is the final cause of her misery and condemnation.

Eadburh was a powerful, but tyrannical queen. She played an active role in politics and the decisions of her husband. Eadburh was not the ideal wife and was manipulative and easily tempted. Her character, downfall, and expulsion from a place of religious devotion somewhat mirrors the story of Eve. She leads her husband to ruin and causes her own downfall; she exercises authority over her husband as a woman should not, and this places the throne and monarchy of Wessex in danger. The other king's wives mentioned in *Asser's Life of King Alfred* are directly related to King Alfred. Both are praised for their piety, chastity, and obedience and fade into the background of the story. Asser writes, "She [Alfred's wife] was a notable woman, who remained for many years after the death of her husband a chaste widow, until her death."[64] Alfred's wife receives almost no mention except for this passage where she as credited as being "notable." Her only action is remaining chaste and this praise-worthy resolution was a conscious choice on her part. As mentioned in the previous chapter Bede, a venerated Anglo-Saxon historian by Alfred's age, praised Mary's active choice of celibacy in many

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[64] Ibid. 77

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works.[65] Mary was praised for being a chaste wife and mother. Other biblical queens, like Esther advised their husbands and families in positive ways, but never took a leading or superior role or even equal role to that of their husband. Eadburh possessed none of the qualities of these women. She represented the extreme opposite of the revered biblical queens and women, and she is one of two politically active queens in *Asser's Life of King Alfred*. This works depicts powerful women and queens to be corrupt and against the natural order. In this instance power and femininity are conflicting ideals that are not easily reconciled.

Alfred's influence was not limited to the assertions of his own family's power in works of the time. He was an adept and powerful monarch whose legacy includes the establishment of a relatively stable line of royal succession. After his time there are few deviations from the inheritance of the throne from father and son and brother to brother. Though, as Janet Nelson points out, the stability of his line was exaggerated by the sources of his time and reflected an "aspiration rather than reality," succession was becoming increasingly stable in comparison to earlier ages. [66] Formerly large numbers of male nobility vied for the throne after the death of a king; some with distant and unproven relationships to the deceased king. During Alfred's age, disputes between lines of kin for the throne still occurred, but the house of Alfred the Great of Wessex and the direct descendants of King Alfred ruled England, with one period interruption, until the Norman Conquest. It is likely that the stabilization of royal succession would increase the power of the queen. An anointed queen and wife added legitimacy to the claims of her

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[65] Gambero, Luigi. *Mary in the Middle Ages*. 38
[66] Nelson, Janet. "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2." 62

children, and as a queen was consecrated and legitimized by the church there could be only one at a time making her influence greater than that of other royal women.

However, the information about queens during this age is ambiguous at best and misleading the majority of the time. One reading of the source evidence suggests that Wessex during the time of Alfred the Great did not have a tradition of strong female influence. Pauline Stafford in her work "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066" makes the argument that queenship was not an established institution during Alfred's time and that the wives of West-Saxon queens played a smaller role in comparison to their Mercian counterparts.[67] While Janet Nelson argues that the primary source evidence is misleading and down plays the importance of queens because it was politically necessary for Alfred to diminish their importance. Nelson writes that "…in the period before Alfred's own reign, Osburh [Alfred's wife] is the only West Saxon king's wife whose lack of a queenly title is clear."[68] Succession was becoming more stable, but disputes between cousins and brothers for the throne were still common. All of Alfred's brother's wives were referred to as queen. Alfred's own wife was the only one of his generation not to be consecrated and not given the title of queen in any documents. His wife's lack of title could have lessened the legitimacy of his own son's claim to the throne. Alfred therefore would have wanted to present an argument against the consecration of king's wives by making the practice of anointing royal wives as queen seem uncommon and

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[67] Stafford, Pauline"The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066."<u>Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power</u>. 4

[68] Nelson, Janet. "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2." 55

unnatural, and he had the medium to do so in the historical work he commissioned and influenced.

Alfred most likely intentionally lessens the role of queens in his biography in an effort to legitimize the claims of his own sons to the throne over her nephews. The expansion of the military and political power of Wessex and the dissolution of two formerly powerful Anglo-Saxon kingdoms consolidated royal authority in the hands of the king of Wessex. Succession was slowly becoming more stable and therefore a legitimate wife who held the political but also religious title of queen would have been very advantageous. Maternal ancestry likely increased in importance during or before this time. The choice of Alfred's brothers in choosing powerful wives and conferring the title of queen upon the suggests an importance of maternal ancestry that Alfred would have desired to down play in order to better control the succession and limit possible heir to members of his own line.

The two queens mentioned by name, in light of Janet Nelson's arguments, become political cautionary tales meant to limit succession. Asser writes that Wessex had no queens because of the wicked Queen Eadburh who was unjustly elevated to a position of power through her title that lead her to poison many of the members of her husband's court and ultimately her husband, King Beorhtic, himself.[69] The next entry describing a Queen of Wessex is the story of Judith, the young Frankish Princess who was anointed, crowned and married to Aethelwulf with "full Christian legitimacy" as a precaution to

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[69] *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources.* 72

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secure her position in her husband's house.[70] The practice of anointing and consecrating a

king's wife would not become common until later, but this indicates a distinct connection

between the church and legitimacy of power. A queen was more than a King's wife; a

queen was a political position and one which indicated that a woman was more than

simply a wife if consecrated by the church. In this respect, the church through the

practice of consecration legitimized a position where a woman could fulfill her wifely

duties as well as exercise power in a public sphere as a political figure.

In chapter two the differences between active and passive women were discussed,

and this dichotomy is once again relevant in the discussion of the queens of Alfred's age.

In Wessex during and before the age of Alfred queens were expected to fill more

traditional, private, household related roles. The idea of a public and powerful female

ruler was a new concept. Queens were viewed with suspect and the majority of the few

examples of queens mentioned by Asser are overtly negative. Judith married Alfred's

father Aethelwulf and was consecrated as queen in order to ensure the legitimacy and

supremacy of her sons in matters of succession. After Aethelwulf's death, Judith married

his son, Aethelbald, a practice that Asser writes of as unnatural. The other queen

mentioned by names is the dangerous and dominant Queen Eadburh, wife of King

Beorhric and daughter of the ruthless, in the minds of the rulers of Wessex, King Offa.

[71][72] Both of these women were in a position of power because of their status as

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[70] Stafford, Pauline. "Charles the Bald, Judith and England." Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power. 145
[71] Stafford, Pauline. "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066." 3
[72] Asser describes King Offa in chapter 14 by characterizing the political relationship between Offa's Mercia and the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms as overtly hostile: "There was in Mercia in fairly recent times

consecrated queen and because of familial connections. In both cases the fallout of unrestrained feminine influence in the in Wessex, according to Asser, was one of disaster and undeserved power. Eadburh and Judith were more than simply wives, they were queens, and this was a title which placed them in an active position politically. A position both women abused as a result of the weakness of their sex.

The institution of marriage was beginning to change in importance; only a church sanctioned marriage could produce legitimate heir. While in the past the sons of concubines could also inherit the throne. These restrictions were promoted to discourage the practice of concubinage and impose stricter limitations on sexual behavior.[73] As marriage was a sexual union and the perceptions of sexuality was a definitively moral question arbitrated by the church, religion helped to shape and solidify ideas of a legitimate marriage.[74] Stricter marriage practices and the political practicality of limiting the potential heirs and decreasing chances of civil dispute upon the death of a king helped to popularize monogamy. Mercia and Wessex were the only remaining Anglo-Saxon kingdoms creating a firm foundation for alliance and intermarriage between the two kingdoms.

In an era where holy punishment for past sins was a reality, the idea, in the words of Pauline Stafford of "One life, one wife…" became all the more important.[75] Though serial monogamy, the practice retiring wives to abbes and wedding other women, would remain relatively common, the practice of concubinage became less popular. The

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a certain vigorous king called Offa, who terrified all the neighboring kings and provinces around him…"(71).

[73] Nelson, Janet. "Reconstructing A Royal Family: Reflections of Alfred, From Asser, chapter 2." 61

[74] Stafford, Pauline. *Unification and Conquest.* 165

[75] Stafford, Pauline. *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers.* 71

necessity of limiting sexual interactions and conforming to Church-dictated practices for

marriage became very essential to the superstitious Alfred. Through the enforcement of

stricter regulations on marriage only legitimate marriages could produce throne worthy

sons. The choice and position of a kings wife increased in importance with this reform. A

king's wife as defined by a Christian marriage became the only legitimate form of sexual

union and a legitimate wife with powerful connections would help to secure dynastic

continuity in a time of crisis and dispute.

The duty of a queen or a king's wife was generally limited to the rule of a

household. She did not, during and before the age of Alfred, traditionally play a large part

in political or military issues. King Offa's wife, Cynethryth, was sited in his charters as a

witness and legal authority after the birth of their son.[76] However, most queens were

expected to be mothers and the administrators of households; Pauline Stafford writes of

these worlds as two distinct if at times overlapping spheres of influence.[77] The role of the

king's wife in this case was not a public one and her role as a political tool was ideally

limited the alliances and land that would be gained from marriage. The companions of

kings were not always referred to as queens throughout most of the Anglo-Saxon period

and the establishment of a queenship through consecration did not become commonly

practiced until the late ninth and tenth centuries and by that time the line between wife,

mother, and queen was blurred.[78]

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[76] Stafford, Pauline. "Political women in Mercia, eighth to early tenth centuries" Gender, Family, and the Legitimation of Power. 37
[77] Ibid. 253
[78] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. 164

The crisis of the Viking invasions did not always allow for such a traditional arrangement. The politics behind royal marriages gave the queen power and influence. Aethelflaed was the daughter of a powerful West-Saxon king, Alfred. Her father was in a dominant political position to the king of Mercia and during the Viking invasions Aethelflaed played an active military and political role in Wessex and Mercia. Political ties strengthened a queen's position but she was still expected to conform to traditional gender expectations of wifely submission and passiveness. However, these ideals were not always pertinent to the political situation. In a time of crisis, military duties and responsibilities could not always be limited to the traditional male military ideal.

Aethelflaed, Lady of Mercia, was the daughter of King Alfred of Wessex, and following the death of her husband she ruled Mercia from 911 to 918. She ruled in a time of Danish invasion of England, and her leadership was vital in the defense of England against Viking onslaught. However, such a position was not the natural order; women were not to be the ruling force in a kingdom, they were expected to gain power through their husband's influence. Aethelflaed, however, was forced into a new role after the death of her husband as recorded by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: "This year also came Aethelflaed, lady of the Mercians, on the holy eve called the invention of the holy cross, to Shergate, and built the fortress there…"[79] The construction of fortresses, generally, does not require such references to the divine; other records of Aethelflaed's actions are similar in that the divine is commonly invoked to justify her actions. The author of the chronicle intended to make it clear that although Aethelflaed was not performing her

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[79] English Historical Documents. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 912. 185

normal duties, her actions were approved, and commended by God. Aethelflaed was favored by the divine and therefore her actions and power were not contrary to the natural order.

Church influence affected queens differently throughout medieval England, but all were constrained by church expectations. The case of Aethelflaed, lady of Mercia, was an extreme example of a queen who had to become a powerful ruler; and although she was a competent leader in her own right, the author of the chronicle was careful to record Aethelflaed's action in a divine context. Her power needed justification due to her sex. Biblical examples and social norms established strong limitations for the rule and actions of a queen; she could achieve power through channels condoned by the church. The wife of a king was expected to take a submissive position to the male relatives, but Aethelflaed inherited the throne of her husband and ruled Mercia independently until the time of her death. After that period, Mercia was absorbed into Wessex and Aethelflaed's daughter was not given the chance, though there was popular support for her rule, to reign over Mercia as her mother.[80]

Alfred's era singled a time of change for the larger Anglo-Saxon political structure and also for the accepted duties of a king's wife and perceptions on queens and royal marriages. In a time of crisis necessity dictated activity and Queens were expected to rise to the occasion. Though monastic and marriage reforms were mostly a tenth century phenomenon, the growing importance of the role of a mother in the legitimacy of a marriage and the resulting children altered the nature of royal unions. The children of

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[80] Stafford, Pauline. "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066." Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power. 4

concubines, regardless of whether or not the concubine was of high birth, could not be eligible for royal inheritance. An ever increasing disdain of sexuality and the idea that piousness and morality were linked to ideals on a successful and just ruler made the need of kings and queens to be seen as morally and spiritually sound all the more important. Alfred's emphasis on repentance as linked to the Viking invasions and a revival of education and learning helped to fuel to monastic reforms of the tenth century. These reforms coupled with evolving images of the Virgin Mary and consecration would help to re-define queenship in Anglo-Saxon England. This gave the last two Anglo-Saxon queens the ability to finally influence history through self-commissioned images of themselves.

5 Motherhood and the Queen of Heaven: Conflicting and Controlled Images of 10th and 11th century Queenship

The age of Alfred marked a distinct change in the monarchy of Anglo-Saxon England. The subsequent unification and relatively consistent succession altered not only the position of the king, but also the queen. The final chapter in this study of Anglo-Saxon queenship is one in which the powers and influences of the queens are most evident. The consecration of queens became commonly practiced and the relationship between king and queen developed into a partnership between relatively equal parties.[81] These changes allowed queens to wield more public influence. However, the ways in which they could participate in politics were limited by their gendered duties. Women were wives and mothers; a queen was something different from these two identities, but was also expected to perform the domestic function of ordinary women. Queens were consecrated—legitimized and anointed by the church and this relationship between the queen and the church is imperative to an understanding of the profound changes that took place over the course of the last age of Anglo-Saxon England. The radical re-conceptualization of the Virgin Mary in the tenth century altered the way queen were perceived and subsequently the level of influence they possessed. In the eleventh century at Canterbury Cathedral, the heart of the Church in England, Mary is depicted as a queen with crown and scepters, according to Sally Cunning, "symbols of power that suggested

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[81] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. 229

her active participation in redemption."[82] The changing images of queenship embodied by the altered, newly royal and unquestionably powerful image of the Virgin Mary in conjunction with practices of consecration made it socially acceptable for a queen to take a more active part in the political workings of the kingdom giving queens a historical voice absent in earlier ages.

The prominent images of queenship during the previous ages depicted queens as subordinate partners to their husbands. Their roles were limited to advisory positions, but the way in which queens were allowed to influence the political workings of a court had to be subtle. Interpretations of biblical queens created an acceptable position for royal women limiting their influence to the family and household. This created a conflicting feminine ideal for queens whose household and family were by definition political. However, in the tenth century a change occurred in a fundamental interpretation of a powerful biblical image. In the tenth century, the Virgin Mary began to be depicted as a queen in literary and pictorial sources. She became the Queen of Heaven, and this position helped to legitimize the role of queens in the teachings of the church. That said the monastic reforms which inspired the growing veneration of the Virgin Mary were often also more critical on women in general. [83] The reform movement spoke out against sexuality and endorsed chastity to a greater degree than any other age. The voices of this movement were powerful and the Benedictine reforms and monasticism which gave rise to many new images regarding the Virgin Mary, also spoke out against the inherently sinful nature of human sexuality.

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[82] Cunneen, Sally. Ibid 148
[83] Yorke, Barbara. *Nunneries and Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses.* 188

Although many church teachings were overtly prejudiced against women, queens often found a convenient alliance with the church and the monastic theologians inspired by the new image of Mary as Queen of Heaven. Bishop Aethelwold of Winchester was an influential theologian in Anglo-Saxon England during the second half of the tenth century. Aethelwold composed a work which was heavily influenced by the image of Mary as the Queen of Heaven.[84] According to Mary Clayton, Bishop Aethelwold's *Benedictional of St Aethelwold* was "probably the most important of all reform manuscripts" and it is interesting to note that the Virgin Mary is an honored and powerful figure as the queen of heaven in this text. [85] Furthermore, this is the first Western text in which the Virgin Mary's coronation is represented.[86] This deviation in interpretation had a monumental impact on Anglo-Saxon queenship. In earlier periods there had been queens who were consecrated by the church, but the consecration of Aefthryth by Bishop Aethelwold in 973 was an entirely different ceremony as it reflected a new understanding of coronation as an earthly representation of a divine hierarchy.

Aefthryth was granted an official office and the title of *Regina* in subsequent charters. The exact meaning of this fact is not entirely known, but the existing theories are very interesting. Barbara Yorke theorizes that perhaps this ceremony created an "office of Queen" which was decidedly different from any position granted to the wife of a King before that time.[87] Yorke goes on to explain that this position was somewhat more permanent than in earlier times; the wife of a King could no longer be retired from her

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[84] Cunnen, Sally. Ibid. 146
[85] Clayton, Mary. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England.*159
[86] Ibid. 159.
[87] Yorke, Barbara. Ibid. 192

position or resign to live at an abbes. The title of *Regina* granted to Queen Aefthryth by Bishop Aethelwold was unique and previously unused by wives of earlier kings, and she was the first in a series of powerful Anglo-Saxon queen to have this title. Pauline Stafford writes, "The queen's witness in charters, beginning in the 940s, signified her inclusion in the hierarchy of the new expanded kingdom. Aelfthryth…heralded a new dawn in the history of English queens…"[88] There is little doubt that the nature of queenship changed during this period, but the extent and meaning of the change is a point of debate. As the quotation by Barbara Yorke above suggests, she theorizes that this title marked a new role of queen—possibly one which was more permanent. Pauline Stafford, however, argues that while the title of *Regina* was unique, the exact meaning is unknown, but it probably did not make the queen immune to being removed.[89]

Serial monogamy was still practiced, though less frequently than in earlier times, among the Kings following the age of Alfred. Therefore, in theory the wives were elevated but in practice they could be deposed. Whatever the precise meaning of this title and position the effect on queenship was nevertheless profound. Biblical teaching and examples were of the utmost importance to the Anglo-Saxons. The stories and situations described in the Old and New Testament were by no means metaphorical; they reflected reality. Therefore, the image of Mary as the Queen of Heaven had very real impacts on the political and social natures of queenship. Royal power and femininity combined in this powerful image of the Virgin Mary.

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[88] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. 164
[89] Ibid. 63

Mary was commonly portrayed in early medieval art as a mother with the Christ-child. The Virgin Mary was first and foremost a mother. In works produced in earlier ages, the virgin was depicted with the Christ child emphasizing her role as a mother.[90] This type of image was prevalent and powerful. In these images Mary was a mother, but lacked any royal pedigree. However, the emphasis on the motherly aspect of Mary's identity was not lost with the development of the image of Mary as the Queen of Heaven. The ideas complemented each other to create an image of a divine, royal mother. Starting in the mid-tenth century the royal aspect of the Virgin Mary played an important part in the political position of a queen, but motherhood was still an important part of queenship. Often, queens wielded the most power in the reign of sons. The position of a queen in this case as mother was, writes Pauline Stafford, more acceptable to Anglo-Saxon society: "The queen was a queen by virtue of her family relationship to the king, through marriage as his wife, physically as his mother. As a wife she married in; whatever being a queen meant always derived from the relationship of husband and wife. Motherhood fully incorporated her, as the mother of a future king, in the fullness of time of the king himself."[91] This implies that the position of queen alone did not always grant permanent power, even with consecration and the image of Mary as the Queen of Heaven. In many cases queens show up in charters as signatories signaling a place in the royal hierarchy of the kingdom after they had given birth to sons. Wives were viewed with suspect in

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[90] Clayton, Mary. Ibid. 147
[91] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. 66

Anglo-Saxon society and the advisory position of mother was more socially acceptable than that of a wife.[92]

A queen was a wife and a mother, but also *Regina,* the consecrated earthly representation of Mary Queen of Heaven. Her position reflected a larger divine hierarchy in the kingdom which changed her status and the image of queenship. However, the change in the standing of a queen could be used differently by different women and their families. This title and the prestige were nothing if a queen were not a savvy politician with a powerful family. Imagery set an ideal image, but it was up to an individual queen to access the power inherent in the new concept of queenship. The final two queens of Anglo-Saxon England were powerful and intelligent women who understood the importance of imagery and perception. Queen Emma and Queen Edith added their own voices to the historical record of England by commissioning and influencing two historical narratives: *Encomium Emmae* and *The Life of Kind Edward who Rests at Westminster*. Until this point, the image presented of a queen was depicted by outside sources that had specific agendas—often contrary to the political ambitions of a queen. Often, the Queens of Anglo-Saxon England were left as a footnote of history, briefly being mentioned in relation to their husbands as gentle wives or as a temptress and corrupters. Never before were queens able to influence imagery and perception, and the fact that Edith and Emma had the ability and desire to manipulate their own images is a testament to their power as queens.

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[92] Ibid. 66

Motherhood and the production of an heir was one of the few way through which a queen could maintain power. Motherhood was a powerful tool for queens as, writes Pauline Stafford: '"A woman was more likely to play a large part in the rule of a son than in that of a husband…"[93] A queen's duty was to become a mother in order to ensure peaceful succession, and a queen could exercise a certain amount of power over her son. The unification of England brought further power and legitimacy to the rulers, and it was during this time the consecration of queens became common practice.[94] Queen Emma was the second bride of King Aethelred and an example of a queen that benefited from consecration. She was ordained by God, and this gave her legitimacy and power, but she was still constricted by the expectations of the church; a woman should not be too powerful due to their nature—as demonstrated by Eve and the fall. However, through motherhood a queen could perform her duty and exercise power in a socially acceptable manner.

Queen Emma was a Norman born queen, daughter to the Duke of Normandy and therefore a valuable political ally for England. She married King Athelred the Unready in approximately 1002.[95] Emma was his second wife and entered into a family of already grown royal sons. Athelred and Emma had three children together, Edward, Alfred and a daughter Godgifu. Though Emma was formally given the title of Queen by Athelred, she exercised little apparent power during the time of her first marriage.[96] Athelred's reign was a time once again of Viking invasion and the Danish King Swein conquered England

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[93] Ibid. 200
[94] Ibid. 163
[95] Ibid.. 209
[96].Ibid. 229

and deposed Athelred as the king in 1013.[97] Emma, with her family, fled to Normandy but upon the death of Swein was allowed to return to England. Shortly after, King Athelred died and Swein's son Cnut took the throne of England. This put Emma in a precarious situation; she remained in England, but her children were exiled. After Cnut became King of England, he and Emma were married. The exact circumstances leading to this union are not completely understood. As the daughter of the Duke of Normandy, she would have been a valuable political asset to the new, foreign king. She represented a continuation of the English monarchy, despite her Norman roots. There is no doubt form charter evidence that Emma played a vital role in English politics during the reign Cnut, but the meaning of marriage during this age was not fixed. Pauline Stafford writes, "In the early eleventh century it[marriage] could simultaneously be conceived as a partnership of equals, as a hierarchy, or as a conquest and acquisition resulting in domination"[98] Regardless of the actual context for the marriage, Emma exercised the most power in the reign of Cnut.

Despite her significance in her second marriage, Emma was Cnut's second wife. Cnut had married the daughter of a powerful family from Northampton called Aelfgifu in order to cement an important political alliance with northern powers.[99] Aelfgifu and Cnut also had a son, Harold Harefoot; this conflicting and difficult familial situation was remedied, to a point, by giving the two queen different spheres of influence. Aelfgifu ruled in Denmark while Emma represented the English. Though she had a rival in her

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[97] Keynes, Simon. *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. "Introduction" [xx]
[98] Stafford, Pauline. *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. 230
[99] Ibid. 9

marriage, she was by no means considered disposable. In earlier ages concubinage and polygamy had been practices which negated the influence of queens. Though Emma shares a husband, she was still a powerful queen in her own right. She was a consecrated and therefore legitimate English queen—a representative of the divine hierarchy on earth. This relationship between divine consecration and legitimacy is exceedingly important to Queen Emma's power. During Cnut's reign, writes Pauline Stafford, Queen Emma is even "...presented visually at Winchester as a parallel of Mary on earth…"[100] Queen Emma's position in England reflects a larger divine design; in this way Emma represented more than continuity with a former regime, she was a consecrated Queen—anointed to a position of power in England. In this age Mary remains the ideal woman, contradictions and all, but the increasingly important royal and powerful attribute of the Virgin gives queens a legitimacy to act in a public way as never before.

At the death of Cnut, Emma was the mother of three princes from two husbands, therefore upon the death of her second husband she was essentially forced to choose between her sons. Edward and Alfred had remained in Normandy, but Cnut had two sons who were also eligible to inherit the throne. Emma showed favor to her son by Cnut, Harthacnut, over Alfred and Edward the Confessor, the children of her first husband.[101] Following Cnut's death, records show that Emma ruled as regent for her son from 1035-7.[102] This brings up an interesting point regarding the nature of Emma's power as queen and regent. Emma was the consecrated queen of England, but she was also the mother of

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[100] Ibid *232*
[101] Ibid 17
[102] Ibid 190

the king. The basis for her power as queen, at this point, was due to her role as a mother, but she was also the legitimate Queen of England in the eyes of the church. Through which title did she gain power?

It would seem that the title of queen gave Emma power, but her role as a mother allowed for her guardianship over her son, the king. Emma was a powerful queen during her time; she organized the defense of the city of Laon, and organized a military offensive from the city.[103] The areas of her influence during her regency are debatable, and sources do not definitively show how far her power stretched during this time. Emma was an influential queen, and her title and motherhood gave her this power, but she was limited by her gender. A queen regent was uncommon during this time and it is likely that her power was the result of her actions as a queen and role of a mother, but limited by her sex and gender expectations as defined by the church. [104] It is clear that the interests of mother and son during were intertwined, and Queen Emma possessed political influence allowed to her as a result of the changing image of the Mary and church-anointing rituals. Though she held greater influence than her predecessors she was still restricted by the gender expectations of her age.

It is likely that when the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* was written, Queen Emma would have felt the need to justify and explain her actions and positions. The struggle for the throne of England led to the death of her son Alfred. He was killed by Earl Godwin, a former ally of the queen who switched to support Harold Harefoot, Cnut's son by Aelfigifu of Northampton. There is much debate over whether or not it was actually

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[103] Stafford, Pauline. <u>Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers</u> 117
[104] Stafford, Pauline. <u>Queen Emma and Queen</u> Edith 190

Emma who asked that her oldest sons return to England because she felt that her struggle for Harthacnut was unsuccessful.[105] In the *Encomium* Emma argues that the letter that brought her Edward and Alfred to England was a forgery made by Harold. Whatever the exact circumstances of this situation it is clear that Emma wanted to place the blame for the death of Alfred on the shoulders of Harold Harefoot. Emma was a queen, but her role as a loving mother was also an important idea to stress especially in a time of such political turmoil. In the *Encomium*, the author speaks of Emma's anguish upon the death of her son in vivid and passionate prose, "I should multiply the grief of many people and particularly of you, Lady Queen. In this matter I beg you, lady, not to ask more than this, which I, sparing your feelings, will briefly tell. For many things could be told if I were not sparing your sorrow."[106] A Queen was a political leader at this point in history, but a mother first and foremost. Yet, motherhood was an ideal characterized by unselfish love as well as, chastity, piety, and loving devotion. The ultimate image of motherly agony is of the Virgin holding her son after his crucifixion. There is no grief that compares to the death of a child and therefore the death of Alfred probably as a result of his mother's political ambitions was seen as un-regal, un-feminine and most importantly as a direct contrast to the image of the Queen of Heaven as a mother.

The image of Mary as the Queen of heaven and the distinct connection between this power figure and earthly queens helped to legitimize the role of a queen in public matters, but pre-conceived gender identities continued to limit the powers of a queen. After the death of Cnut, Emma's role as a loving mother could be called into question.

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[105] Keynes. Simon. *Introduction [xxxiv]*
[106] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. ed Campbell, Alistair. 45

She was an undoubtedly a talented politician, but crisis of succession that she found herself in did not allow for a great deal of motherly compassion if she was to maintain power. She backed her son by Cnut who, when Emma commissioned the work *Encomium Emmae Reginae,* was still king. Her son Harthacnut was deeply unpopular and the dispute between two brothers backed by two politically active wives was incredibly bitter and cruel. [107] Not surprisingly, the royal family in this time of dispute and conflict did not truly represent the idea image of a unified and happy family. Mary Queen of Heaven was a queen, but she was also a mother. Her divinity came from her position as the mother of Christ; a queen was meant to represent the private, domestic sphere of the monarchy, but Emma's ruthlessness in many cases called this image into question. Images were of the utmost importance, and Emma understood that the Virgin Mary was a powerful, but complex and absolute figure. A Queen could not embody characteristics of the Virgin Mary, she had to be her earthly equivalent in every way to maintain her public image.

At the very end of the *Encomium*, Emma is described with her remaining sons as a loving and united family. Emma once again stresses her role as a mother as she stresses her role as a queen throughout the *Encomium*. The encominuist writes, "Obeying his[Edwards] brother's command, he was conveyed to England, and the mother and both sons, having no disagreement between them, enjoy the ready amenities of the kingdom. Here there *is* loyalty among sharers of rule, here the bond of motherly and brotherly love

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[107] Keynes, Simon. *Introduction [xxxvii]*

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is of strength indestructible."[108] This statement more than likely did not reflect the true condition of the family; after the death of Harthacnut Emma was deprived of her position of queen as well as her wealth by her son Edward. The entry for the year 1043 A.D describes the fallout of Harthacnut's death and Edward's reaction to his mother: "…it was advised the king, that he and Earl Leofric and Earl Godwin and Earl Siward with their retinue, should ride from Gloucester to Winchester unawares upon the lady; and they deprived her of all the treasures that she had; which were immense; because she was formerly very hard upon the king her son, and did less for him than he wished before he was king…"[109] Edward's reaction here is hardly that of the loving son and brother portrayed by Emma's narrative; this entry describes her wealth, which was apparently considerable. She probably held great power during the reign of Harthacnut, but Edward was deeply frustrated with the situation of his family. By the time the *Encomium* was written Emma was wealthy and still enjoyed a great deal of power. A divinely protected household would not have had the sort of divisions that were obviously evident in her own. Emma's image as a queen mirrored the image of Mary Queen of heaven: a consecrated queen, but also a mother. The two images could not stand alone.

Edward's wife Edith, the final queen of Anglo-Saxon England, possessed a different sort of influence than her mother in law Emma. She was the daughter of the Earl of Godwin, probably the most powerful man in England besides the king during the time of Edward the Confessor. A queen was expected to be a mother. Her duty as a wife was

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[108] *Encomium Emmae Reginae 53*
[109] *English Historical Documents. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* 1043

to provide an heir. However, Edith and Edward's marriage was childless. Edward and Edith childlessness led to the Norman Conquest by Edward's cousin, William of Normandy as well as the death of her brother, Harold Godwin, who had claimed the throne upon Edward's death *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster* was composed after the Norman Conquest anywhere from 1070 to 1075.[110] It is likely given the recent conquest of England and the end of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, Edith would have felt the need to justify her position as a seemingly barren wife. Edith's relationship with Edward therefore became an intentionally celibate one. The author of *The life* maintains that both parties took a willing vow of chastity and looked upon each other more as father and daughter than husband and wife.[111] This sort of relationship in a marriage would not usually be tolerated, but the celibacy of both parties was stressed and this image of a pious, royal couple lasted even after the Norman Conquest. In the second half of *the Life* Edward becomes prophetic with saint like powers of healing and the looming conquest is a result of the sins of the people rather than the lack of a royal heir. [112] Once again powerful religious concepts like divine will, repentance, and chastity become common themes in the explanation of the end of a dynasty.

Though Edith's similarities to Mary Queen of Heaven are less obvious than those of Queen Emma, she still uses idyllic feminine attributes and roles to describe her relationship to her husband. Furthermore, she is depicted as the ideal woman in almost all respects by the author of *The Life*, "In fact this exquisite young woman was from infancy

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[110] Barlow, Frank. *Introduction.* The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster. *xxix.*
[111] Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*. 82
[112] *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster*. 93

immersed in the study of letters in the monastery at Wilton…Christ had indeed prepared her for His beloved Edward, kindling in her from very childhood the love of chastity, the hatred of vice, and the desire for virtue…"[113] Edith's qualities as a Christian woman are heavily emphasized along with the divine will which inspired the marriage of Edward and Edith. This account of Edith argues that there was simply no other woman worthy of such a man. Edith places her importance and worthiness on her perfection as a virtuous woman, and the regality these characteristics naturally reflect. In this respect, like the Virgin Mary she was divinely inspired to marry due to her qualities and the virtue of her husband, and like Mary she lived a celibate life.

Edith had no children of her own, yet she is still described as having motherly attributes: "Also, why should we pass over in silence how zealously she reared, educated, adorned and showered with motherly love those boys who were said to be of royal stock."[114] The children that she cared for her go unnamed; their identities are unimportant. Presenting Edith as a motherly and caring figure further stresses an image of the Queen that is more socially acceptable and relatable. Emma too worked to stress her motherhood because it was a title that had implied attributes like warmth and caring, the very definition of the term "motherly." Edith, however, would not have been at an advantage by raising the royal children because none of them would inherit the throne. The fact that this was included in *The Life of King Edward* reveals something more about the nature of queenship and the imagery that defined gender expectations. Motherhood and femininity were, and remain, inextricably linked. This may seem like an obvious

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[113] Ibid. 24
[114] Ibid. 25

statement, but it has long lasting social implications. Women, if they had not taken a vow of celibacy to the church, were expected to become mothers. Though Edith took a vow of celibacy, she was still a queen and the earthly parallel of the Queen of heaven who was celibate, but also a mother. This important and defining characteristic could not be ignored by Edith and her anonymous author if Edith was truly the embodiment of feminine virtue and queenlyness.

In reality, Edith was more than likely a shrewd politician backed by the power of her influential family who was often at odds with King Edward.[115] Edith, the wife of Edward the Confessor, was skilled at this task and she used her knowledge and power to establish political strength and security.[116] The familial ties of queens were also central to her political power. A queen was a wife and mother, but also a representative of a foreign court or powerful family, and these connections gave the queen influence. Queen Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor, was exiled from her court following a fall out between her family and her husband in 1051.[117] The marriage was childless and the conflict this could inspire upon the death of King Edward did not go unconsidered. Edith's family was under political attack, and she did not escape this battle without incident. In 1051, six years into the marriage, Edward accused Edith of adultery and confiscated her land and riches.[118] Her banishment, however, was short lived as her powerful family soon returned to England and installed her, once again, as queen.

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[115] Edith's father was in all likely hood involved in the murder of Edward's brother Alfred. *Introduction* [1xiii]
[116] Stafford, Pauline *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* 98
[117] Ibid. 76
[118] Ibid. 265

Slander was a useful political device and the contrasting images of Edith presented by the anonymous author of *The Life* and the accusations of King Edward in 1051 paint entirely different pictures of the royal marriage. Both include sexuality as a key defining characteristic. In *the Life* Edith is chaste and obedient, and the accusations of Edward paint her as sexually devious in combination with the condemnation of her family. Sexuality in this circumstance is all important; chastity is liked to piety, devotion and just rule while adultery and the images of sexual depravity and sin lead to eternal but also earthly damnation. A virtuous queen could never be an adulterer, and sexuality was only barley tolerated in relation to motherhood. This accusation would have been an effective excuse for Edward to divorce Edith; promiscuity was the ultimate sin for a women. Defamation of character was a powerful tool in royal courts and this coupled with the church's views on the weak nature of women could make such accusations very harmful. However, women could gain respect and power by fulfilling God's purpose through motherhood.

The view on women by the church is contradictory and complex, but important in understanding the limitations and basis of queenly power during the middle ages. The contradiction lies in the concept of and purpose of sex. According to biblical lore Eve was responsible for the initial fall of man; she is easily tempted and the source of Adam's fall; women is the source of temptation and sin. However, woman makes amends for these sins through the Virgin Mary. Mary possesses all the attributes of the ideal women: piety, devotion and obedience to family and God, she is the antithesis of Eve, yet also a direct descendant. It is in motherhood that a woman is both, according to theology,

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punished by God and fulfilling his intentions for humankind.[119] This contradiction in the purposes of women is both a source of their influence and an example of their corruptible nature. Eve had sinned and been open to temptation therefore, women were more likely to fall prey to sin. Accusations on these grounds were used for political purposes during this time; Queen Edith, for example, was an exceptionally skilled politician. However, she was also barren. In an attempt to be rid of her, Edward the Confessor, her husband, accused her of adultery with the Bishop of Winchester.[120]

A queen could influence and guard her son, like Emma, and gain a certain amount of power through these means. Or, she could attempt to influence her husband and in this way affect change; the political aspect of royal power and a queen's family connections could also do much to sway the opinion or intimidate her husband. However, a queen's power rested on her position as wife and mother, and her ability to manipulate situations her favor; yet it was important for a queen to adhere to church ideas on women Domestic positions were roles approved and respected by the church, but queens were also expected to follow biblical examples of queenship. These stories were not always relevant examples for the times, but never the less, queens were expected to live by church example which, generally, consisted of two extremes: Eve or Mary. It was in this way that queenship was defined, and though a queen could become powerful through her duties of wife and mother and the political nature of these roles, she was constrained by the gender expectations in which she lived.

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[119] King James Bible Genesis 3
[120] Stafford, Pauline. Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers. 94

6 Modern Images of Acceptable Power

Femininity is an ancient construction. It is an ideal that has been transmitted and adapted throughout the generations. The queens in Anglo-Saxon England had to conform to popular images of womanhood and motherhood in order to maintain power. Gender implies expectation, and while these medieval queens were able to negotiate between ideals and reality, the images of femininity were subservient. A queen was a wife and a mother and these titles limited the queen as the domestic, obedient partner to the king. Whatever change was inspired by the idea of Mary as the Queen of Heaven this was still true. Images of gender are powerful and their development and influence can be traced throughout the ages of history. Though modern constructs are less rigid than medieval images of gender, the social expectations by which women are judged currently have their origins in traditional images of sexuality that defined the queens of medieval England.

There are attributes associated with gender which define modern individuals and associate power, and leadership with masculinity. The archetypal image of a mother, for example, is caring and emotional—a being who thinks by feeling rather than by reason. Reason as a thought process is associated with being masculine, calm, and logical. This unfortunate dichotomy defines a leader as masculine—as one who follows reason rather than emotion and is logical, strong, and decisive. The human race has come a long way towards a society which promotes gender equality and to say that the modern concepts

that define femininity were as rigid as the medieval concepts studied earlier would be false. However it would also be false to say that social constructs which define women are completely absent from modernity. Patrice DiQuinzio argues that "it[feminist theory] has argued that women's oppressive social contexts, rather than any innate female characteristics, limit women's development and accomplishment."[121] Though traditions and society has changed dramatically from medieval times, "social contexts" still define and limit the actions of women. Social expectations which limit the actions of men and women still exist and for women, these gender biases are brought to public attention poignantly when a woman faces the prospect of real power.

Female exclusion from political power is a common phenomenon throughout history. In many societies, women by default of their gender and femininity were excluded from the political arena. However, these rules were not always explicitly stated. In Anglo-Saxon England, for example, women were allowed to inherit and some such as Aethelflaed lady of the Mercians even ruled on their own. Yet these instances in history were the exception rather then the rule and represent leadership out of necessity rather than any real gain in women's rights. Women were seen as ill suited for the pressures of leadership with their feminine emotionality which defined and served them well as mothers but was not useful for exercising political power over men as independent political leaders in their own right. These perceptions still represent the defining issues in female power "Masculinity is still defined as mind, act, aggressiveness, rationality, and penetration—and hence opposed to feminine receptivity, passive expectancy, nurturing,

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[121] DiQuinzio, Patrice. *The Impossibility of Motherhood.* 23

intuition, and so on."[122] These gender images defined men and women in medieval times and still affect the respective social roles of men and women.

Though the images that have traditionally defined women are being questioned and in place more complex representations of femininity are developing. In tenth-century England the Virgin Mary came to embody the image of Mary Queen of Heaven as well. She held different meanings and different titles all of which impacted the way women and queens were expected to act. Modernly these dimensions of Mary's character which have traditionally defined and limited the actions of women are being questioned. In *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* Elizabeth Johnson asks the following question "What would be a theologically sound, ecumenically fruitful, spiritually empowering, ethically challenging, and socially liberating interpretation of Mary for the twenty-first century?"[123] In this work she analyzes the traditional images of Mary and studies the history and life of the actual woman in an effort to understand the most powerful female figure in Christianity. Her work is part of a growing movement in theology which strives to understand influential ideals in a way which benefits and empowers modern women. Notably, Johnson asks the exceedingly important question of "What happens to all other women when one woman is made a symbol?"[124] The limitations of historical writings and media reports in capturing the complexity of any individual are profound. A human's entire complexity and disposition can never be captured by a series of news articles or by biblical entities. Too often these figures are

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[122] Callanhan, Sidney Cornelia. *The Illusion of Eve: Modern Womens Quest for Identity.* 75
[123] Johnson, Elizabeth. *Truly Our Sister.* 3
[124] Ibid. 100

reduced to specific attributes which by no means capture true nature of the individual, yet these figures have been used for ages as examples to dictate gender roles and limitations. It is essential to view important figures such as Mary of Nazareth as complex individuals in their own right and Johnson's work on the subject offers an enlightening and hopeful interpretation of the impressive and empowering figure of the true Mary of Nazareth.

However the traditions and limitations which have resulted from a limited interpretation of defining and powerful figures are difficult to dispel entirely. A paradigm shift takes time and therefore the more restrictive and unconstructive images of womanliness still greatly influence how society judges women. For example, the principle objection many writes have voiced about Eve was her disobedience. Both Tertullian, a second century theologian, to Jean Mouroux, a priest writing in the mid-twentieth century, condemn Eve for her disobedience and "unsubmissiveness."[125] Their writings on women are unfair and widely criticized. Certainly in an age of social progress like the current one, these broad generalizations used to classify and condemn women based on ambiguous traits like "unsubmissiveness" would have no place in modern thought or politics. Sadly, this is untrue. Though many men and women are conscious of these gender stereotypes and act accordingly, many still use gender stereotypes which condemn unsubmissive and aggressive women to prove points and slander modern figures.

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[125] Callahan, Sidney.Ibid. 58

Glenn Beck is a popular commentator who on March 15, 2007 demonstrated how useful gender stereotypes still are in character defamation. [126] In this broadcast he said the following:

"I don't want to sound like the old ball-and-chain guy, but Hillary Clinton cannot be elected president because -- am I wrong in feeling, am I the only one in America that feels this way? -- That there's something about her vocal range. There's something about her voice that just drives me -- it's not what she says, it's how she says it. She is like the stereotypical -- excuse the expression, but this is the way to -- she's the stereotypical bitch, you know what I mean? She's that stereotypical, nagging, [unintelligible], you know what I mean? And she doesn't have to be saying -- she could be saying happy things, but after four years, don't you think every man in America will go insane? Is it just me? I mean, I know this is horrible to say, but I mean it not -- I would say this if she were Condi Rice…"
[127]

Beck was recently hired to be a regular commentator on ABC's Good Morning America and hosts a show on the cable Fox News channel.[128] He has the ear of millions of Americans and judging from the popularity of his show, his views reflect a large number of Americans as well. That is not to say that everyone who listens to his show is sexist, but his ideas are transmitted to the public and reflect the degree to which gender stereotypes, such as shrew or bitch, are still used in politics. His thoughtlessness reflects a

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[126] I acknowledge that Glenn Beck's apparent misogynistic views by no means represent the majority of conservatives or Republicans. His ignorance reflects a problem that is larger than any specific party.
[127] http://mediamatters.org/items/200703150011
[128] http://mediamatters.org/items/200703150011

larger social problem with power and femininity. Beck says that she is a "stereotypical bitch" as if that broad insult were enough to discredit a competent and qualified woman for president. The final bit regarding household nagging about taking out the trash is just the final indication of what images and messages gender stereotypes can conjure.

Hilary Clinton is an assertive and aggressive leader, and her manner of speaking translated, for Glenn Beck, as shrew like. It seems as though her masculine mannerisms and ability to command in this case associate her with the archetypal "shrew." This statement struck many as unfair and discriminatory. He even seemed to acknowledge what he was saying was wrong. He qualified his statement by saying "I'm sorry for being such a pig" but he continues on with his diatribe even though he understands it is not socially acceptable. This statement did not go un-criticized, but the fact that it was said in the first place means that such stereotypes are both effective and still a problem in America. If men are rational and aggressive than women are emotional and passive. Here a rational and aggressive woman is depicted as "nagging," and easily angered—overly emotional. Though modern feminists have fought against these gendered perceptions they are still effective forms of slander for public women.

The private sphere, or the household, is still where a great deal of gender stereotypes originate. Motherhood and the characteristics that define this institution such as emotionality, passiveness, and nurturing are still defining factors of modern femininity. Not all of these characteristics are negative; motherhood is a respected and important part of society, but the images of nurturing and caring that exemplify motherhood are not easily reconciled with ideas on public power. Therefore, in a

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discussion of gender-power issues, the idea of motherhood must be addressed, "The

concept of mothering and the image of the mother represented in essential motherhood

are perhaps the two most significant elements of dominant definitions of femininity, the

determination of women's inequality and oppression, and the rationalization and

justification of sexism and male dominance."[129] The image of a mother has historically

limited the role of women to the private sphere. The challenge for medieval queens was

to manipulate this social expectation to their advantage as did Emma and Edith. Currently

feminists are aware of the "problem" that motherhood presents for modern women, yet

this state of being still holds power over the public images of modern women.

In the most recent presidential election gender was an important part of the

Republican Presidential ticket. Sarah Palin electrified the Republican Party with her

speech in the 2008 convention. She was not afraid to promote her femininity and image

as a mother. In fact, maternity and the characteristics that define it played an interesting

role in the campaign. During the campaign the phrase "doing it all" was constantly used

when questioning Sarah Palin's ability to hold high office and raise a family of still very

young children.[130] Furthermore, her qualities as a mother were a subject of scrutiny when

it was made public that her oldest daughter, Bristol who seventeen at that time, was

pregnant. This issue did not only call into question her responsibility as a mother, but also

inspired criticisms of her ability as a world leader. If she could not control her daughter,

how could she handle the responsibility of national office? Though this was not implied

by her running mate or the Obama campaign, it did ignite debate over her qualifications

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[129] DiQuinzo, Patrice. Ibid 4

[130] http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0905/p09s01-coop.html

on popular blogs and in every day conversation. [131] No media source ever questioned if Barack Obama could balance the responsibility of taking care of two young daughters with running the country because it was assumed that Michelle Obama would provide the parental support necessary to raise children. Sarah Palin has a husband; assumedly he would have been able to take care of his children if his wife were preoccupied with duties of state. However this logical argument did not take hold with popular media sources because motherhood and the ability to lead a country in Sarah Palin's case were linked. Maternity and the nurturing characteristics that are associated with motherhood are still seen as more integral to parenting than fatherhood. This both diminishes the importance of a father and restricts the accepted public duties of a mother who is associated with her position as a parent more so than males in our society.

Hillary Clinton, it could be argued, represented the opposite end of the spectrum of females in politics. She was more than once accused of being overly masculine or even shrew like. During her campaign she tried to downplay the exceedingly masculine image that she had worked to develop in order to be seen as a competent leader by showing a more feminine or softer side, which included videos from her friends, dress designers, wedding coordinators, and mother.[132] Clinton had to actively work to disassociate herself with her "hawkish" and masculine image when attempting to appeal to the American Public, but these attempts were futile. Hillary Clinton did not fit comfortably into any overly feminine stereotypes. She is a wife and a mother, but these images were not an effective part of her public personality. Clinton was not defined by her domestic roles

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[131] http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/09/01/palin.daughter/
[132] http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2007/12/17/clinton-shows-her-soft-side/

though she attempted to "show a softer side" throughout her campaign. She is an experienced and talented stateswoman and politician, but she simply could not shed her "hawkish," masculine image. Her attempts to reconcile power and femininity during the final part of her bid for the presidential nomination failed because she was already seen as unfeminine. She was a qualified stateswoman but difficult for sections of the public to relate to her because she did not represent typical images of femininity.

Gender is a powerful political factor. In this groundbreaking and historical time where the fruition of civil and social rights movements are being witnessed in the highest office of the nation strict images still define social expectations for both genders. Masculinity continues to be associated with logical, aggressive, strong and calm, and therefore is still the defining characteristic of power. Femininity and power are not easily reconciled because the very mannerisms and qualities that define the modern image of a leader do not include emotionality or "softness." The Obama and McCain campaigns did not see fit to record personal testimonies from the male candidates tailor or wedding planner in order to win votes because social expectations. It would not have been necessary for a male candidate launch such a promotion. Neither McCain nor Obama had to show the public such information because as men they are already gender qualified to take office. Power is masculine, but Palin and Clinton had to stress their femininity in order to seem relatable. Yet it was gender stereotypes which limited the ways in which they could express power.

Modern women should not have to adapt to restrictive associations of femininity which limit their ability to express themselves in order to appear powerful. Archetypes

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and traditional gender ideals never capture true human complexity. Though feminists work to dispel these traditional ideals they persist and restrict modern women. Femininity is still defined by the private sphere. The titles of mother and wife are socially accepted archetypes of femininity neither of which conjures images of power. Yet just as they were vital to the public image of a woman of power in medieval times, they remain central to concepts of femininity. The difficulty lies in reconciling women's newly found channels of power with these very influential and traditional, but polarizing images. Gender differences do exist, but the traditional images and expectations that have restricted women for centuries must be reconsidered and examined if femininity and power are ever to be reconciled. The queens of the Middle Ages were so defined by their images that their narrow recorded image and personality was completely embodied by one, unrealistic ideal. Though social expectations and images of the ideal woman have changed over time, these images remain embedded in the minds and expectations of much of the population. Prejudice can be powerful and unintentional because the images which have traditionally defined the sexes are ingrained in modern social constructs. Women are finding ways to achieve power in modern society, but femininity should not have to be sacrificed in order to be perceived as competent and powerful.

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