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The Woman Who Would Be King: Representations of Women, Rulers, and Empress Matilda in the Primary Sources



The Woman Who Would Be King

Representations of Women, Rulers, and Empress Matilda in the Primary Sources

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Empress Matilda—daughter of Henry I of England, wife of Henry V of Germany, and claimant to the English throne—fought from 1135-1148 in both Normandy and England to wrest the English crown from her cousin, Stephen, who ruled from 1135-1154. She is best known for her determination to win back the crown and for being unpleasant and disagreeable in her attempts. The historiography is nearly unanimous in its approach to the personality of Empress Matilda. From J.H. Round's account to that of R.H.C. Davis, all but two of the modern historians are quite free with their labels of "arrogance" and "foolishness" when describing the empress. Of the two exceptions, Richard William Alan, the fifth earl of Onslow, seems quite taken with Empress Matilda. The second historian, Marjorie Chibnall, with a more thorough examination of the evidence than the earl, wrote a favorable biography of the empress in which she argued that the reports of Matilda's arrogance and foolishness were negative because the chronicles were written by misogynist churchmen. She offers the theory that, while the empress may not have been a person with whom it was easy to get along, it is the chroniclers' views of women that clouds the reports.

Chibnall is correct in her perception that the chronicles are biased; however, her explanation for the bias does not stand up to a reevaluation of the texts. For the sake of

clarity, however, I will first examine and offer a comparison of the language used to describe the roles of women and rulers. In the second part I will return to Empress Matilda. In this section I wish to argue that the bias of the hostile chroniclers lies not in their misogynist backgrounds, but in their political positions *vis a vis* Matilda and Stephen. Moreover, both the chroniclers who sympathized with Matilda and those who opposed her supported their positions by drawing on traditional stereotypes of good or bad rulership rather than the stereotypes of good or bad women. The third part of the paper will be a discussion of whether she is ever actually described as acting within the traditional roles of a medieval woman, wife, or daughter in any of the chronicles which I will examine.

Like the descriptions of Good Ruler vs. Bad Ruler, misogynist descriptions required women to fall into certain categories of existence and behavior. Orderic Vitalis, one of the chroniclers of the twelfth-century, wrote about women in terms of Good Wife/Woman vs. Bad Wife/Woman. The role of the Good Wife was to influence her husband, urge him on to great deeds, encourage, support, and nudge him into righteous and pious behaviour.[1] Orderic, who thought that there was too much of a feminine influence in the men of England, generally felt

that there were many more Bad Wives influencing their husbands, mostly through use of sex.[2] When describing women, he and other chroniclers used the language associated with the role of the medieval wife/woman.

In her efforts to gain the throne of England, Empress Matilda falls outside of these categories. She was married, but Count Geoffrey of Anjou, her second husband, had little to do with her campaign in England, and it was pretty clear that she was fighting for *her* claim to the throne, not *his*, or even *their* claim to the throne. So how could she be put into the category of the supportive medieval wife? In a way, the empress forced even her detractors to see her as a possible ruler of England, rather than as a woman campaigning for or influencing her unpopular husband. Most of the chroniclers described the empress in terms of Good Ruler vs. Bad Ruler, rather than as Good Wife/Woman vs. Bad Wife/Woman.

Why should there be any confusion about how the chroniclers describe women and rulers? It would seem that they are such different entities that they might even inspire entirely separate vocabulary. Yet Bad Women and Bad Rulers seem to have the same faults; Good Women and Good Rulers have virtues and responsibilities which, if not always the same,

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[1] Sharon Farmer. "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives". Speculum. 61, no. 3 (1986): 517-44
[2] Farmer, 522

complement each other. The solution to this lies in the understanding of the roles of medieval women, medieval queens, and medieval kings. For the sake of my argument I will focus on the role of the aristocratic women in medieval society. As Eileen Power asserts:

> what passed for contemporary opinion [about women] came from two sources: the Church and the aristocracy. In other words, the ideas about women were formed on the one hand by the clerkly order, usually celibate, and on the other hand by a narrow caste, who could afford to regard its women as an ornamental asset, while strictly subordinating them to the interests of its primary asset, the land. Indeed, it might with truth be said that the accepted theory about the nature and sphere of women was the work of the classes least familiar with the great mass of womankind.[3]

Thus, the accepted roles and activities of the medieval woman were ordained by priests and the nobility (and, eventually, the troubador poets: the various women in such works as *Erec and Enide*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and any of the Arthurian legends, were not just for entertainment, but also

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[3] Eileen Power. Medieval Women. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975 (9)

to serve as examples of what courtly/aristocratic women should be or not be).

Popular belief holds that women were important in the Middle Ages only as far as their dowries and childbearing capabilities were concerned. While these were two very important assets for a woman to bring with her, other things were usually required of her. A woman was expected to run the household, keeping track of everything. The running of the household included all sorts of responsibilities, from providing clothes and food for all, to the manufacturing of those things, to the running of the farms and dairies under her control. When her husband was away for whatever reason, she performed these functions, also taking care of necessary repairs, collecting rent and taxes, protecting the surrounding territories and interests, and dealing with any of the negotiations necessary in order that the household and lands be whole and healthy when her husband returned.[4] She was to supervise the servants, which responsibility included hiring and firing, looking into their backgrounds, keeping them moral and spiritually clean, making sure they were fed properly, and clothing them.[5] In order to take care of supervising a large

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[4] Power, 46-47
[5] Power, 50-51

household in such a way, a woman would also need some sort of education—minimal though it might be.

However, a woman must also be ready to take over anything and everything from her husband in the case of his death, capture, or jailing—at the taking of husbands, women were known to hold their fortresses against siege, at least until reinforcements arrived. Queen Matilda, Stephen's wife, took control of the army while he was incarcerated, and also led negotiations for his release. Since the men of the aristocracy were fighting men, this happened more often than one would normally expect; during the Crusades many women had to take over, some of them permanently, when the husband never returned. It should be noted that most of the woman's roles and responsibilities were taken on and performed in the interests of her husband, and in the case of her husband's capture or death, in the interest of her son, if she had one.

Women were not allowed direct access to politics and political expression or action. This included holding public office. Occasionally, a woman would get past this: Ela, countess of Salisbury, became sheriff of Wiltshire—this was in the thirteenth century, and though it was an office that had been passed down in her family for generations, she had to wait until the death of her husband and pay the king a hefty

sum before she could claim the office.[6] When a woman was able to take any kind of political action or office, she was expected to rely heavily on support from a staff of men for the running of her court, military operations, and daily issues. Actually, this applies to any women who had to take control of things in the absence of men.

Women rarely owned land in their own right in medieval England. Landholding rights were generally linked to military service, and since women were not allowed to fight, landholding rights were restricted to men. However, a woman could, if she were the only heir to her father's estates, inherit land (though in England, the king could control her inheritance through wardship), or have control of her dower after the death of her husband. A woman could wield power, then, through the land and income from her possessions: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Eleanor of Castile were both such women. However, in general, a woman had control over the household and estates by default.

In addition to her household responsibilities, since she was usually unable to take part in politics, the medieval woman was expected to take part in other activities, such as patronage and charity. Patronage was a way for the woman to

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[6] Christine Owens. "Noblewomen and Political Activity" *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999 (209)

support the arts, and religion. It was also a way for a woman to affect politics, if indirectly. By choosing to support a specific cause or project, a medieval woman could affect the course of that cause or project.[7] Patronage was also a way to claim and gain status by making one's money and power a bit more visible. In this way women gained status for themselves and their families.[8]

It was the general understanding that an aristocractic woman in the Middle Ages would run the household and that her activities would be recreation, charity, or patronage. Her activities were not the only things to be limited by the people around her. The same men who prescribed and proscribed activities for the medieval woman also set the standards for character—standards which we see in some of the literature of the time. For example, in *Erec and Enide*, Erec requires that his wife obey him, even to the point of keeping silent when he is in danger. Enide, on the other hand, unable to physically defend herself or her husband, must use verbal defense—disobeying her husband even as she saves his life. There is a similar motif in *Tristan and Isolde*, when it is only through Isolde's wit and words that she is able to warn Tristan about Mark, who was spying on their tryst, and also to "prove" that

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[7] Owens, 216
[8] Owens, 216

she was not Tristan's lover before King Arthur and his knights.[9] It is Tristan's job to protect her and provide for her when they are hiding in the forest. Both of these women, though clever with words, required the protection of the men around them, made no real decisions throughout the stories, and, with the exception of verbal defense, were passive characters. Women of this sort would be clever enough to run large households, otherwise leading lives of leisure (occasionally doling out charity and patronizing the arts), and passive enough to let the men take care of politics and run the state.

Like most aristocratic women, queens were usually limited in the political actions they could take, the activities available to them, and in their expression of power. Even more so than the average aristocratic woman, the boundaries of her public and private life were indistinct[10]—anything she did in her private life very easily spilled over into her public reputation, and vice versa. For this reason, she was often used as an intermediary between a person or group and her husband, the king. However, she was generally not allowed to take political action herself. She might plead for the life of a man, but she could not pardon the man, herself. This example

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[9] Cynthia Brown, French 138X Lecture, winter 2000

illustrates another expectation of a queen's behavior. As John Carmi Parsons states:

> the hierarchical ambience in which she functioned…was likewise figured as a queen's compliance and submission, ideally manifest in the humble position of an intercessor, affirmed the king's superior authority and the male hierarchy he embodied.[11]

In other words, the queen was always subject to the king, should always follow his lead, obey him, and, as in Orderic Vitalis, have a positive influence on him whenever possible.

Her roles and responsibilities as queen were often merely a more wealthy and slightly more powerful version of the noblewoman's. She was even more criticized, though, for falling outside of the accepted boundaries, and often criticized for things over which she had little control. For instance, part of Eleanor of Castile's revenue came out of taxes and the debts owed to the king through the Jews—she was therefore considered as having profited from Jewish business practices, that is, having profited by usury and the

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[10] Pauline Stafford. "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries". *Medieval Queenship*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993 (145)

[11] John Carmi Parsons. Eleanor of Castile: Queen and Society in Thirteenth Century England. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995 (63)

misfortunes of others.[12] By the same token, queens were sometimes criticized for avidly pursuing wealth. Thus, the same Eleanor of Castile was known and criticized for collecting as many estates and sources of revenue as she could, and engaging in business and politics, all in order to protect and strengthen the interests of herself and her family.[13]

The woman in power had to submit to the man in power—queen to king. The man in power had other roles which he needed to play, and was just as heavily criticized for not submitting to those roles. There were kings famous for not submitting to the assigned role. Some kings, such as William Rufus, Henry I and Henry II, (in relative order the uncle, father, and son of Empress Matilda), were well known for such "flaws". However, the descriptions of kings, their roles, their forgivable flaws and unforgivable trespasses did not begin with William Rufus.

Vivian Galbraith spends a chapter in Kings and Chroniclers describing the values involved in the description of good and bad medieval kings. He offers explanations for why some kings managed to earn favorable reports from the chroniclers and some could not. For instance, he notes that

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[12] Parsons, 75
[13] Parsons, 75

Cnut (who ruled a full century before Henry I), "a man of many murders" could be readily forgiven for his temporal sins by his clerical chroniclers because of his spiritual piety, while men such as William Rufus were to have no forgiveness, as they were both unfair to the church and immoral in their behavior.[14] Thomas Callahan, Jr. mentions that Eadmer, very hostile to William Rufus, had not one good thing to say about his king. In the end, his various complaints about William are condensed by Callahan into: "…deceitful, unjust, greedy, corrupt, tyrannical, and sacrilegious"[15]. Callahan actually misses one: Eadmer really criticizes William for being fickle, especially with respect to his relationship with St. Anselm: kind and receptive one moment and hostile the next ("at the instigation of the devil and of evil men").[16] Promising one thing and delivering another, good one day and evil another—these are things of which many rulers were guilty, and which usually earned them negative reports from the clerical chroniclers, especially when the fickleness of a ruler affected the fortunes of men of the church. Such complaints were made about William Rufus, Henry I, Stephen, and Empress Matilda.

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[14] Galbraith, 124

[15] Thomas Callahan, Jr. "The Making of a Monster: the Historical Image of William Rufus". Journal of Medieval History. 7, no. 2 (1981): 175-85

[16] Eadmer. Vita Anselmi. trans. R. W. Southern. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962

Both Galbraith and Callahan make the observation that medieval chroniclers copied each other, stuck with "a limited number of phrases, from which [they made their] choice."[17] We know that many of the longer chronicles of the twelfth-century took a great deal of their histories from a select few, sometimes simply changing the words. Such is the case, as Callahan points out, with the later reports of William Rufus' character. Most of the chroniclers went to Eadmer to research recent history, and as a result we have descriptions of William that closely match Eadmer's account. Orderic Vitalis, Henry of Huntingdon, and William of Malmesbury, were a few of the chroniclers that did this.[18] So what often happens in the accounts of an unpopular ruler is that one chronicler will write a very nasty account and other chroniclers will simply copy that.

In the early medieval Frankish kingdom, that of Pepin, Charlemagne, and their successors, bad kingship was partially defined by anti-Merovingian propaganda. The Merovingian kings were useless kings, "do-nothing" kings, and were therefore bad kings. Charlemagne and later Carolingians often had to go out of their way in times of peace in order to be seen as men of

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[17] Galbraith, 120; Callahan 178-9
[18] Callahan, 180

action, so as not to become victims of their own propaganda.[19] In the time of the Viking invasions, a bad king was still a man of inaction, but there was the added evil of not protecting, or not being able to protect his people from the Viking attacks. As propaganda got more vicious in the ninth-century, bad kings were described as drunks, gluttons, and generally disgusting people.[20] Tyrants were men whose wars, "driven by greed and lust for domination, brought suffering to subjects"[21]. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century chroniclers would look to these and other early pictures of good and bad kingship when making their own judgments on their rulers.[22]

John of Salisbury, a contemporary of the empress, described those qualities desirable and undesirable in a ruler. He introduces his ideal ruler with a description that would daunt any would-be ruler:

> …the prince is the public power and a certain image on earth of the divine majesty. Beyond doubt the greatest part of the divine virtue is revealed to belong to the prince, in so far as at his nod men bow their heads to him and generally offer their

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[19] Janet Nelson. "Bad Kingship in the Earlier Middle Ages". Haskins Society Journal .8 (1996)
[20] Nelson, 7
[21] Nelson, 11
[22] Deborah Gerish. "Shaping the Crown of Gold: Constructions of the Royal Identity in the First Kingdom of Jerusalem". (Doctoral Dissertation: UCSB, 1999) [103]

necks to the axe in sacrifice, and by divine impulse everyone fears him who is fear itself.[23]

John of Salisbury envisions a ruler who is half-man and half-God, with both crown and halo. He describes a good ruler as a man obedient to law and justice, who accepts the sword of rulership from the church—and is therefore inferior to the church and its servants, who is well educated and not avaricious. The law and justice which the ruler follows are the law and justice of God, according to John of Salisbury. The justice distributed by the ruler is (or ought to be) not really his own, but passed through him by God.[24] A good ruler is also a man who provides for his people: sustenance, religion and safety, especially. So essentially a twelfth-century Good Ruler is one who is the ideal man and the ideal Christian: he wins every battle, distributes wealth, protects his people, and bends his royal knee to the church. More than anything, he is not a tyrant—he obeys the same laws as everybody else.

The language of Woman and the language of Ruler are closely related, or perhaps, hopelessly intertwined. As previously mentioned, the Bad Ruler was a man of inaction. This seems to have been a major complaint, perhaps more for

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[23] John of Salisbury. *Policraticus*. Cary J. Nederman, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 (28)
[24] John of Salisbury, 29

early medieval France. The propaganda of the Carolingians and the long lasting effects of their propaganda was very focused on the problem of the "do-nothing kings" that (according to them) made up the late Merovingian dynasty. The Normans might have taken these ideas with them to England in 1066—in any case, a bad king is still a man of inaction, but it is not the central complaint that it had become in Merovingian and Carolingian France. However, I will begin with the inactive ruler. As the passive character in government, war, or any other situation requiring some kind of action, the king was likely to be described as effeminate or weak. It is the woman's role to be passive, to let men take action—if a man is passive when he should be a man of action, then he is nothing more than a woman. Inaction can also translate into lack of prowess, especially in battle. Prowess in battle was always important—from petty territory and boundary wars, to the Crusades, to the Hundred Years War—for a king had to show that he was able to hold his own on the battlefield, as a soldier and a general. Richard I was praised as a good king for his prowess on the battlefield—his prowess allowed people to forgive him his lack of any real interest in or governance of England. Richard was even forgiven the lack of an heir and rumors of homosexuality. His brother John, on the other hand, has always been ridiculed for his loss of most of his

hereditary lands in France and seeming inability to win a battle, even though he was a much more organized and capable administrator than Richard ever was.[25] Even in modern day representations John is portrayed as effeminate—note any of the *Robin Hood* movies ever made. Even Disney depicts Prince John as a weakling who sucks his thumb and cries every time he thinks about "mummy". A king who could not win wars and keep his own lands from being swallowed by the king of France carried accusations of weakness and effeminacy—such a king might as well be a woman.

John of Salisbury also used misogyny in order to describe the actions of Bad Rulers. One of his main examples of Bad Rulership is Vergil's Dido, queen of Carthage. Dido is the reason why "women and the effeminate" should not rule, for she is weak, inconstant, remiss in her duties as ruler, and too eager to offer herself and her power to a stranger—frivolous, according to John of Salisbury:

> For with how much frivolity was Aeneas admitted, how much favour was soon found for an unknown man…whose motives were unknown and whose person was suspect? …Therefore, persuasive words paved the way for the man's entrance, the enticements of praise procured

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[25] Ralph V. Turner. "Good or Bad Kingship? The Case of Richard Lionheart". The Haskins Society Journal. 8 (1996): 63-78

the favours of his hosts…He was frivolously admitted who, however much by reason of the duty of piety he was not to be excluded from hospitality, should still more suitably have entered as a stranger, not like a ruler.[26]

Dido is weak and inconstant in that she so easily and quickly gives up her responsibilities to her state—leaving building and fortifications unfinished in her new obsession with Aeneas:

> *non coeptae adsurgunt turres; non arma iuventus/ exercet, portusve aut propugnacula bello/ tuta parant: pendent opera interrupta, minaeque/ murorum ingentes, aequataque machina caelo.*[27]

She is remiss in her duties as ruler in that she leaves those fortifications and protections unfinished, even though she is surrounded by very hostile enemies (some of whom she angered by choosing the unstable suit of Aeneas over theirs)—she is not protecting her people, or providing for them. She finally betrays and abandons her people by killing herself when Aeneas leaves her. Dido is John of Salisbury's example of Bad Rulership and of the rulership of women and the

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[26] John of Salisbury. *Policraticus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990

[27] Vergil. *Aeneid* (IV). H.E. Gould and J.L. Whiteley, editors. London: Bristol Classical Press, 1943 (22-3)
"The towers begun do not rise; youths do not practice at arms or prepare harbors or safe battlements for war: the works having been interrupted hang fire and huge, frowning walls, and cranes are reaching to the sky."

effeminate: all three kinds of rulership seem to blend in his description and use of the story of Dido.

It is necessary to understand the roles of medieval women/queens and the roles of the medieval ruler, or king, because Empress Matilda wished to cross over from one role to the other. She was a woman who wished to fill the shoes of a man, and, as I will soon demonstrate, the chroniclers caught on to that. First, however, a brief biography of Matilda.

Empress Matilda was set to become England's first ruling queen when her father named her his heir to the throne following the deaths of his only legitimate son William in 1120 and of Matilda's first husband, Henry V of Germany in 1125. However, at Henry I's death in December of 1135, it was Matilda's cousin Stephen who seized his uncle's ample treasury and then the crown. Matilda, who was at Anjou at the time of her father's death, first acted to take control of Normandy and then came over to England in 1139 to continue her struggle. In 1141 she defeated and captured Stephen, earning herself the title: Lady of the English. This was the title granted to her in negotiation, and was supposed to be an honor in advance of the title of queen. Unfortunately for Matilda, things fell apart when she got to London. Though many men swore allegiance to her between Stephen's capture and her arrival at London, she lost the necessary goodwill of the

citizens of London by denying their request for lowered taxes; they and the guardian of the Tower of London, Geoffrey de Mandeville, betrayed her and opened the gates of London to an army which was led by Stephen's queen. Matilda was forced to flee and in the retreat her brother Robert of Gloucester was taken prisoner. Forced to trade Robert for Stephen, Matilda lost any leverage she had and any realistic chance to gain the throne of England. She continued to fight until 1148, when she returned to Anjou and her son Henry (who would become Henry II of England after Stephen) took over the struggle. She never returned to England, though she remained active on her son's behalf until her death in 1167.

What we know of Matilda during this period comes from a small collection of primary sources. There are five main chronicles which will exemplify three different alignments of interest regarding Matilda's campaign for the English throne—Supportive, Neutral, and Hostile. These then fall into subcategories in regard to how they treat Stephen in comparison to the empress—that is, in the degree to which they contrast the two as Good Ruler or Bad Ruler. The *Gesta Stephani* is the most hostile to the empress, and the most supportive of Stephen. The chronicle of Orderic Vitalis is hostile to Empress Matilda's cause (he never fires directly at Matilda, herself) and supportive of Stephen. In the Neutral

area we have the chronicle of Florence of Worcester, which seems to be supportive of whoever is in power—as events fluctuate, so does the chronicle. William of Malmesbury's chronicle, *Historia Novella*, is supportive of the empress and somewhat hostile to Stephen—he makes it clear who he thinks should be on the throne. Henry of Huntingdon's chronicle, *Historia Anglorum*, is neutral: Henry does not seem to care who is on the throne, or off of it. Henry's chronicle stands out because it does not use Good/Bad King language. Instead, it is an example of misogynist language, which I will use to demonstrate the differences between the language of misogyny and that of Good/Bad Ruler.

We do not know who wrote the *Gesta Stephani*, but R.H.C. Davis speculates in the introduction to the chronicle that it was Robert of Lewes, bishop of Bath (1136-1166). He was placed there by the bishop of Winchester, Henry of Blois, who was also Stephen's brother, and he worked closely with Henry and Stephen on a program of reform. Davis relies on a lot of circumstantial evidence to place the bishop of Bath as the author of the *Gesta*, such as the tone and vocabulary (authoritative, well-traveled) of the chronicle and local concerns and loyalties. If Davis is right, then this would help explain the attitude of the chronicle, which is very supportive of Stephen. Even if the author is not Robert of

Lewes, it is clear that he is a contemporary of and in the camp of the bishop of Winchester and the king of England[28].

The author of the *Gesta Stephani* spares no effort to make Matilda look the evil empress. He writes nothing about the empress that is favorable, and openly criticizes her for mistakes she made at critical times during her campaign. The author describes the men who swore allegiance to her in London after her victory in 1141 as "a slavish and abominable breed of men, who, when their lord and king was afflicted by ill fortune…so suddenly changed the allegiance they had promised to him."[29] The men who supported her were fickle, easily bought and cruel, as Earl Alan discovered, having been "captured, put in chains, and subjected to torment in a filthy dungeon until he assumed the yoke of forced submission and the most degraded servility" by the Earl of Chester. A Good Ruler would not permit such men around him, so they could only be adherents of a Bad Ruler, who is naturally surrounded by bad men. Clearly, the author of the *Gesta Stephani* was not a man who was glad to see the empress gain the upper hand. He never actually describes her as doing anything that is not negative or evil in some way. He emphasizes the cruelty with which she imprisons her adversary, Stephen, in the deepest, filthiest

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[28] K.R. Potter (trans. & ed.) *Gesta Stephani*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976 (xxxii)
[29] *Gesta Stephani*, 117

dungeon she can find, and he is constantly frustrated by how she manages to escape every sort of pursuit or trap throughout the rebellion. He complains:

> I do not know whether it was to heighten the greatness of her fame in time to come, or by God's judgement to increase…the disturbance of the kingdom, but never have I read of another woman so luckily rescued from so many mortal foes and from the threat of dangers so great…[30]

The author of the *Gesta Stephani* does make complaints about the empress that can be perceived as related to medieval standards of acceptable feminine behaviour. He complains that instead of using the money she had inherited from her father to distribute to the poor, she used it to fortify castles against the king. His main complaint is that she was able to fortify anything against his good and noble Stephen, but he manages to make her appear greedy, without compassion for the condition of her father's soul, and indirectly, without compassion for the poor: "because on the death of her father she had appropriated his treasures, which it would have been more just to distribute to the poor for the benefit of his soul, and fortified some castles of her own property."[31] I am

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[30] *Gesta Stephani*, 145
[31] *Gesta Stephani*, 47

unclear what treasures the author is describing; Stephen had possession of Henry I's accumulated wealth. In any case, distributing wealth to the poor and making donations to the church were among the things that a Good Ruler was expected to do. The author also emphasizes Matilda's arrogance, for after Stephen was captured by her brother, "she at once put on an extremely arrogant demeanour instead of the modest gait and bearing proper to the gentle sex…"[32] He goes on to describe her in London:

> Then she, on being raised with such splendour and distinction to this pre-eminent position, began to be arbitrary, or rather headstrong, in all that she did. Some former adherents of the king, who had agreed to submit themselves and what was theirs to her, she received ungraciously and at times with unconcealed annoyance, others she drove from her presence in fury after insulting and threatening them….What was a sign of extreme haughtiness and insolence, when the King of Scotland and the Bishop of Winchester [and the other important men] came before her with bended knee to make a request, she did not rise respectfully, as she should have…but

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[32] *Gesta Stephani*, 119

> repeatedly sent them away…rebuffing them by an arrogant answer…[33]

These descriptions are less an attack on Matilda's femininity and more an attack on her personality and ability to be a Good Ruler. The first thing we notice from this description is that she is politically inept—arrogant *and* insolent—the anti-Stephen. She is finally about to receive the thing for which she has been fighting, and she is turning people against her. We might take that a step further by noting that by angering her supporters, she leaves herself and her people open to attack. "Arbitrary" and "headstrong" are words that are closely related and sometimes synonymous to "tyrannical". While this is certainly a trait that seems to run in her family (we see it manifest in Henry I and Henry II), this was a bad time for it to take over. A lack of control over her emotion would also be seen as a weakness, and not just a feminine weakness. What the author of the *Gesta Stephani* is doing, though, is not just an attack on the empress. He is setting her faults up for comparison with Stephen's virtues. This really becomes clear when we look at the descriptions of Stephen in the *Gesta Stephani* and compare them to the descriptions of the empress.

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[33] *Gesta Stephani*, 121

> So the king…was energetic in calming the kingdom and establishing peace; he showed himself good-natured and agreeable to all; he restored the disinherited to their own…; he bowed with humble reverence to all who were bound by any religious vows; he made himself affable and amenable to all of whatever age. He was even of such a kind and gentle disposition that he commonly forgot a king's exalted rank and in many affairs saw himself not superior to his men, but in every way their equal, sometimes actually their inferior.[34]

The descriptions of the empress by themselves are quite unfavorable enough. When compared to such descriptions of Stephen as the one above, she comes out positively monstrous. Matilda brings war to the kingdom, while Stephen brings peace—we are often shown how it is her adherents who rebel and how it is Stephen who comes to rescue and bring peace to various towns and villages throughout England. For instance, when Baldwin de Redvers rebels (this is actually before he joins the Angevins, but he is always linked to them) it is Stephen to the rescue, and the saviour is met with "honour and triumph [and] with gifts and ovations".[35] The empress is easily annoyed

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[34] *Gesta Stephani*, 23
[35] *Gesta Stephani*, 33

and unfriendly, while Stephen is "good-natured and agreeable to all"—a Good Ruler is accessible to his or her people. Clearly, Stephen is the more accessible of the two; in fact, Matilda does not seem to be congenial to anybody, even her uncle and supporter King David. Throughout the rebellion her transactions with people are marked by arrogance and anger, such as when she "abused in harsh and insulting language" Stephen's queen when she came to beg for Stephen's release.[36] She arbitrarily took titles and wealth away from some to give to others, while Stephen restored them to disinherited men; she was arrogant, never forgetting her rank, and Stephen was humble showing respect to all. This outlook overlooks several facts: that several of the men who supported the empress were men disinherited by Stephen, that Stephen had acted quite unfavorably toward members of the church during his reign, and that when the empress had accepted terms for peace, it was Stephen who let the chance go by[37].

If, as the author wishes us to think, Matilda is greedy, brings war and strife to her people, and is arrogant and cruel—then she is a tyrant. She is a Bad Ruler. Stephen, on the other hand, is energetic, humble, and agreeable. He brings

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[36] *Gesta Stephani*, 123

[37] R.H.C. Davis. King Stephen. 3rd ed. London: Longman, 1990 (43)

peace wherever he goes, and is not greedy or arrogant. He is a Good Ruler.

Though the author criticizes Matilda for leading armies, forgetting her royal/queenly responsibility to protect and provide for the poor, and acting a bit like her autocratic father in tense situations, he praises Queen Matilda (Stephen's wife), for doing essentially the same thing. The empress is criticized for showing "too much boldness and confidence"[38] in leading an army and making demands "not with unassuming gentleness but with a voice of authority"[39], but the queen, for leading armies to free Stephen, is described as having forgotten "the weakness of her sex, [bearing] herself with the valor of a man..."[40]

Although the author does use some complaints about feminine roles and responsibilities, the assumption of misogyny really can only go so far. We have his willingness to ignore the weaknesses in Stephen's case. Then we have his praise of Stephen's queen for doing the same thing as the empress does (with, perhaps, an easier personality). Then we have his praise of Stephen, which is so perfectly opposite to his descriptions of the empress that it is almost impossible

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[38] *Gesta Stephani*, 125
[39] *Gesta Stephani*, 121
[40] *Gesta Stephani*, 126

not to see it as pro-Stephen propaganda—a political text, Good Ruler vs. Bad Ruler: not misogyny.

The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy, by Orderic Vitalis, is another chronicle that can be described as loyal to Stephen. Orderic rarely has anything to say about Matilda herself, but he has plenty to say about the atrocities committed by her adherents, the Angevins in France, and by any of her supporters in England. He does not seem to feel that Matilda could have governed Normandy well; rather, he is upset that Stephen delayed his coming to Normandy, leaving the province "without a protector and prince".[41] Apparently Matilda, or even her husband Geoffrey, was not the protection and governing presence needed or desired by Normandy. His position on the empress is mostly given through descriptions of the atrocities committed by her adherents. The Angevins are described as beastly and crude: "They slaughtered many flocks and herds of animals and ate the flesh raw or half-cooked without salt or bread..."[42] This is not just a negative interpretation of a specific action of Matilda or her adherents. This is a description of outright savage behavior—a very good reason not to follow or support the empress or the men that follow her. Ordéric gives us a revolting picture of

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[41] Orderic Vitalis. The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy. Thomas Forester, ed. & trans. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1856 (v. 4, 157)

the men that the empress had fighting for her; the strength of Matilda's claim and her campaign suffer by association. In fact, just about anything done by any of Matilda's supporters results in terrible things for the people of England and Normandy. The Welsh, brought in by Robert of Gloucester, also pillage and burn everything, including churches and monasteries, "having no reverence for religion".[43] All of these examples indicate that Matilda had no control over those fighting for her—suggesting that she was an ineffectual ruler. When Stephen is taken at the battle of Lincoln, Orderic waxes dramatic: "Thus, by a turn of the wheel of fortune, King Stephen was hurled from his throne, and, alas! incarcerated in the important fortress of Bristol in anguish and misery."[44]

Orderic offers little information on the personality of the empress. Only once does he mention the *way* Matilda did something. When Ranulf, the earl of Chester, comes to her and asks her for help at Lincoln, that help is "most graciously granted". We hear little more about her, especially as his chronicle ends just when she is received in Winchester. We do not know how he felt about her actions in London, though it is likely that he would have been pleased with her expulsion.

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[42] Orderic Vitalis, iv 168
[43] Orderic Vitalis, iv 213
[44] Orderic Vitalis, iv 218

The chronicles that are the most obviously anti-Matilda, *Gesta Stephani* and Orderic's chronicle, are the chronicles written by men who had specific reasons for painting an ugly picture of the empress. The author of the *Gesta* was truly loyal to Stephen and Orderic did not describe Matilda as a worthy ruler, wishing always for Stephen to bring an army to Normandy and relieve the situation. The continuation of the Chronicle of Florence of Worcester is, by contrast, not particularly laudatory in its description of the empress, but neither does it go out of its way to heap scorn and disapproval on her.

The continuator of the Chronicle of Florence of Worcester was John of Worcester (?-1141?), who was living and writing during the beginning years of Empress Matilda's rebellion, beginning in 1138 and ending abruptly in 1141. During the first part of his continuation he could certainly be described as loyal to Stephen. He refers to Stephen as a "loving and peaceable king" and "the magnificent king of England", and he generally seems to think of him as a capable ruler.[45] However, with one notable exception, he does not have anything terrible to say about Matilda as a ruler, and in fact he is a lot more unbiased, or even friendly, in his descriptions of her than

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[45] Florence of Worcester. The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester (With the Two Continuations). trans. Thomas Forester. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854 (259)

are most of the other chroniclers. He describes her as "joyful", rather than overconfident or haughty, when she receives the good news of Stephen's capture. He always calls to mind that she is an empress, and due many honors (and therefore reminding the reader of her eligibility to rule), and he does not seem to think her arrogant or headstrong in her actions at London, but rather unwise. He does not describe her as any less accessible to the people than Stephen—the off-putting arrogance and anger we see in the *Gesta Stephani* is absent in John of Worcester's continuation. He does not describe 'crimes' of Bad Rulership, such as arbitrary disinheritance or unfairness to the church. On the contrary, he seems quite content that "[h]er first care [upon entering London] was to take measures for the good of God's holy church"[46]. In other words, she was performing the role of a Good Ruler—providing for and protecting the interests of the church. John of Worcester just does not have a vested interest in destroying her reputation as does the author of the *Gesta Stephani*. The lack of that desire makes the one exception in his chronicle a very interesting one. The chronicle states that, after being expelled by Stephen from the castle of Arundel, the empress stayed in the area of Bristol for a time and then went on to Gloucester. Apparently this was a dark

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[46] Florence of Worcester, 281

time for the people of Gloucester. She had received the fealty of many people, but

> tortures worthy of Decius and Nero, and death in various shapes, were inflicted on those who refused to do her homage, and chose to maintain their fealty to the king; and the city, glorious in past ages, was filled with shrieks and fearful torments, and became horrible to those who inhabited it.[47]

No mention of these events can be found in any other chronicle. One might think that those who were hostile to Matilda and her cause, such as the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, would have heard of such a scene and put it into their own accounts. The absence of these events in the other chronicles suggests the possibility that they never occurred. Directly after this description of torture in the name of the empress, John of Worcester describes how an army from Gloucester attacked, pillaged, and burned Worcester.[48] Since Gloucester was under the control of Robert, Matilda's brother, these men would have been adherents to the cause of the empress. While this cannot have made John of Worcester like Matilda any more, it did not seem to create a truly negative bias against her in his writing.

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[47] Florence of Worcester, 269
[48] Florence of Worcester, 271

His description of Matilda's mistakes in London bears this out, to some extent. He does not speak of her in terms of arrogance or overconfidence. He calls her "the lady empress-queen" and denies her nothing in the way of honors. He validates her claim to the throne, calling to memory the fact that all had sworn fealty to her, in effect giving the impression that she is merely taking that which is rightfully hers.[49] Her actions in London are described with a similar attitude. When Stephen's queen and various others asked her to release the king, so that he might have his freedom if not the kingship, "she would not listen to them"[50]. She is accessible, she does not utterly reject them—the lack of control which indicates a Bad Ruler is absent. She "refused also to listen" when Henry of Blois, the bishop of Winchester and Stephen's brother, asked that she give the county of Mortain to Stephen's son. She "very harshly rejected [the] petition" of the citizens of London (all the chronicles except *Historia Novella* agree on that), but the author does not really judge her for it. We do not get the feeling that he is telling us that she is a Bad Ruler for this. In fact, he seems to be unhappy with the citizens for then forming a conspiracy against Matilda as their rightful ruler and causing an

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[49] Florence of Worcester, 280
[50] Florence of Worcester, 280

uprising in the city.[51] It can be argued that, had Matilda successfully taken the throne, John of Worcester would have been just as likely to praise her for her magnificence as ruler of England as he did Stephen. He never shows any real bias when regarding Matilda's claim to the throne, her mistakes in London, or just about anything else she did throughout her career in England. At worst, he seems to express disappointment that everything did not work out for her. He also does not seem to hold her responsible for the attack on Worcester or even the supposed torture going on in the city of Gloucester. If he had any desire to attack her at all, it seems he had quite a bit of material to use.

The final example of the Good/Bad Ruler language used in the chronicles is in the *Historia Novella*, by William of Malmesbury. The monks at Malmesbury, after the death of Queen Matilda (Henry I's wife) had turned to Robert of Gloucester, the brother of the empress, for support.[52] *Historia Novella* was actually commissioned by Robert of Gloucester, which helps to explain the tone of *Historia Novella*, and the direction in which William of Malmesbury takes it. The *Historia Novella* is supportive of Matilda's cause more than of Matilda herself. William of Malmesbury seems to support Matilda more because of

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[51] Florence of Worcester, 281-2

who commissioned the history and who was the nearest wealthy nobleman (Robert of Gloucester was both of these) and less because of any personal conviction, though he finds plenty for which he can criticize Stephen.

Considering the fawning tone that the *Historia Novella* takes towards Robert of Gloucester, it might as well be called *Acta Roberti*. Though William of Malmesbury addresses Matilda's career, it is almost always in the shadow of her brother's career. However, whatever the reason, this does result in a chronicle that is supportive of Matilda and her cause, at least when one is able to extract Matilda from the doings of her brother.

William of Malmesbury is the only chronicler [so far] to tell us that on his deathbed Henry I reaffirmed Matilda as his heir to the throne.[53] Perhaps this was an effort to counteract the claims of Stephen that Henry I had changed his mind and designated Stephen as the heir, or perhaps it was an attempt to begin his post-Henry account with a strong reminder of who was really supposed to be on the throne. In any case, William has begun this part of his account with a description of Matilda as designated ruler—already in support of the Good Ruler: Matilda.

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[52] William of Malmesbury. *The Historia Novella*. K.R. Potter, trans. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd. 1955 (xxiii)

Unlike the complaint of the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, William describes Matilda as the one attempting to bring peace to the realm (Good Ruler), while it is Stephen who does not allow this to happen (Bad Ruler). Matilda had appealed to the pope when Stephen first took the throne, and in 1140 she again wished the pope to arbitrate. In 1140 they came together in vain, William writes,

> they wasted both words and time and parted without making peace. Yet the two sides did not separate for the same reasons, the empress, more inclined to good, having sent a message that she did not fear the decision of the Church; but the king was most concerned to guard against this, foolishly lending his ear to the counsels of those who desired nothing less than peace, while they were able to manipulate him to their own advantage.[54]

William ascribes to Matilda all the qualities of a Good Ruler. She is fair, attempting to work together with Stephen for peace, and she has only good in her mind. She does not fear and is willing to uphold the decision of the church, and she is therefore more honest and well-advised than Stephen, who fails in this respect. She surrounds herself with good men and

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[53] William of Malmesbury, 25
[54] William of Malmesbury, 79

advisors (especially Robert of Gloucester) as a Good Ruler should; Stephen is surrounded by treacherous, manipulative men who give him advice contrary to the good of the kingdom. Stephen, in this case, is the Bad Ruler—surrounded by evil advisors and easily manipulated away from Good Rulership.

The fiasco of London, according to William, was due to the hatred of the citizens—not to any royal failing of Matilda. He begins this part of the account with a description of the reticence of the Londoners to accept Matilda, even though "[by] that time the greater part of England had graciously accepted her lordship."[55] Again, he is thinking of Matilda as a ruler—it is not her husband's lordship they are accepting, but hers. William attributes her expulsion from London to the Londoners,

> who had always been under suspicion and in a state of secret indignation, [who] gave vent to expressions of unconcealed hatred; they even laid a plot, it is said, against their lady and her companions. The latter, forewarned of it and avoiding it, left the city gradually and calmly and with some kind of military discipline.[56]

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[55] William of Malmesbury, 97
[56] William of Malmesbury, 99

Her expulsion, then (according to William), has nothing to do with her being a Bad Ruler and everything to do with a plot made by the citizens of London against their rightful ruler. And unlike accounts of the same events in the other chronicles, William of Malmesbury describes Matilda's flight from London as orderly and calm. This is a decided difference from the "disorderly flight" described in the *Gesta Stephani*, where the empress and her adherents flee down "a multitude of by-roads" in total confusion.[57] William's account is a description of a confident ruler and leader of armies, one who is able to keep her men and army in order, even in retreat. A Good Ruler is able to do this, and thereby protect her people, as a Good Ruler ought.

We have seen three examples of Good/Bad Ruler language, and one example of a more or less impartial chronicle. The final example, *Historia Anglorum*, is an example of misogyny in the medieval chronicles. It is written by Henry, the archdeacon of Huntingdon (1110-1156), who, because he includes pre-rebellion history, is able to describe Matilda as Woman, complete with the faults of the Bad Woman. He includes parts of her life from before the death of her father, before she separated herself and her role from her husband and sons. His chronicle, *Historia Anglorum*, is essentially filled with a

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[57] *Gesta Stephani*, 125

history of England according to the will of God. Everything that happens in his chronicle is good, for it happened according to God's will. He makes little judgment of his own regarding the principal players in the rebellion—when Stephen is taken hostage it is good—"God's judgement on the king having been carried out"[58]--and when Matilda is expelled from London, that is also, as we will see in a moment, by God's will. However, he writes a very brief disapproval of her attitude in London:

> But she was lifted up to an insufferable arrogance, because the hazard of war had favoured her supporters, and she alienated the hearts of almost everyone. So either at the instigation of crafty men or by God's will—indeed, whatever men may have done was by God's will—she was driven out of London.[59]

Henry of Huntingdon does not tell us what Matilda did in London, only that she was insufferably arrogant. Here it is not clear whether she is a Bad Ruler or a Bad Woman. She is arrogant, uncivil, impolitic—attributes that really describe a bad ruler, but could also be used to describe a bad woman. She is not a woman one would want as a Ruler or as a Wife. This is also the extent of his record of the events in London. Perhaps

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[58] Henry of Huntingdon. *Historia Anglorum.* trans. Diana Greenway. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 (739)
[59] Henry of Huntingdon, 739

he did not feel it was all that important to write about, or perhaps this was something for which he relied on other chronicles. In any case, he does not offer very much at all in the way of specific information.

However, his earlier descriptions of her are more negative, and fall more within the realm of Bad Woman than Bad Ruler. In this part of the chronicle, however, Matilda could still be placed in the traditional role of the medieval woman—acting within or outside of the interests of the men around her. Henry describes the strife between her husband and her father as "due to the machinations of none other than the king's daughter"[60] and he even manages to suggest that the death of Henry I was brought about in by the actions of Matilda, if indirectly (the accepted story in most historical accounts was that he died from the effects of his favorite dish of lamprey eels—Henry of Huntingdon suggests that the king was so angry at Matilda that the lampreys had much more of an effect than they normally would).[61] So the Bad Woman, in this case, is not just a bad influence on the men in her life—she comes between them, comes between them and peace, and even manages to bring the king more swiftly to his end. Henry of Huntingdon's Matilda is a woman: a daughter and a wife—he

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[60] Henry of Huntingdon, 491
[61] Henry of Huntingdon, 491

describes her in relation to the men around her, as a bad influence on her husband and her father.

The primary sources I have discussed contain examples of the three different kinds of the language used by medieval chroniclers: Bad Ruler (*Gesta Stephani*, Orderic Vitalis), Good Ruler (*Historia Novella*), and Bad Woman (*Historia Anglorum*). All but one of them place her almost entirely in the role of a medieval ruler rather than that of the medieval woman. I have already discussed the similarity of the languages, but the similarities of language do not explain why Empress Matilda was described by the chroniclers (especially Orderic Vitalis, with his views on the role of the medieval woman)as a ruler instead of a woman. That answer lies again in the various chronicles that have been discussed: *Gesta Stephani*, The Chronicle of Orderic Vitalis, The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester, *Historia Novella* and *Historia Anglorum*. Only in Henry of Huntingdon's description of Matilda in *Historia Anglorum* do we find her in the role of daughter and wife, rather than in the role of ruler/would-be ruler. All of the chronicles make it clear who she was, of course. We are told in every chronicle discussed that she was Henry I's daughter, the wife of both Henry V of Germany and Geoffrey of Anjou, and the mother of Henry II. But these are not the overwhelming roles assigned to her throughout most of the accounts. Now

that I have outlined the roles of medieval women and rulers, the language used to describe them, and how Empress Matilda fit into those roles, it is possible to go back into the chronicles to see how Matilda is portrayed in the accounts—is she ever in the role of wife, mother, or daughter, or is she portrayed as a separate entity (which may have been what forced the chroniclers to describe her as a ruler)? She did not act to influence her father in this matter, for he was four years in the grave by the time she landed in England in 1139. She was not acting in the interests of her husband or taking over any kind of battle or negotiations for him. Though the end result of her fight was that her son would attain the throne, she was not acting in his interests, nor did she intend to act as regent for him if she won, but as ruler in her own right (though one wonders what her husband would have had to say about that). Even Orderic Vitalis, one of the men to set the role of women as influences on their husbands, was unable to fit Matilda into his definition. Matilda was acting independently from the roles of wife, mother and daughter. A brief summary of her relationships with the men around her, as defined by each chronicle, will reflect this.

The *Gesta Stephani* begins just following the death of Henry I, precluding any description of Matilda as daughter unless in retrospect. When the author mentions Henry I and

Matilda together—a total of four times[62], it is merely to establish Matilda's relationship to Henry I and her claim to the throne. Even more insubstantial are the mentions of Matilda and her husband (1)[63] and Matilda and her son (2)[64]. She is never actually said to have interacted with any of these men in her life, with the exception of her son, who was in need of money for his first attempt to lead armies in England in 1147 and "appealed to his mother, but she herself was… powerless to relieve his great need".[65]

In a similar, but slightly more complicated, manner as the *Gesta Stephani*, Orderic's chronicle, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy* only places Matilda with her father, husband and son for the sake of reference. She is mentioned twice with her father[66], once with her son[67], and six times with her husband[68]. Orderic places them together in history to establish certain facts. Henry I married Matilda to Henry V and, after Henry V's death, to Geoffrey of Anjou. Matilda led her own armies, but worked with her husband (Geoffrey). Matilda's son was Henry II of England. Thus, Matilda's breeding, titles, and familial accomplishments are

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[62] *Gesta Stephani* 11, 23, 47, 53
[63] *Gesta Stephani* 11
[64] *Gesta Stephani* 179, 207
[65] *Gesta Stephani* 207
[66] Orderic Vitalis 198, 199
[67] Orderic Vitalis 199
[68] Orderic Vitalis 105, 156, 169, 199, 219, 221

established, and buried under other accomplishments, such as the capture of Stephen, or her success in Normandy.

There are noticeably more mentions of Matilda with her husband in Orderic's account than in the *Gesta Stephani*. This may result from Orderic's desire to fit Matilda into his definitive role of a medieval woman or from the fact that he is including Normandy in his account (which few other chroniclers do). He associates her with her husband more often, and for the beginning of her campaign, describes her as more a tool of her husband's than as working for herself: "In the first week of December, Geoffrey of Anjou receiving intelligence of King Henry's death, sent forward to Normandy his wife Matilda without loss of time"[69]. This method of description is only used once, and very quickly changes to a relationship between Matilda and Geoffrey that is more that of allies than of Geoffrey and tool once Matilda lands in England.

The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester offers far fewer descriptions of Matilda's relationships with the men around her. Though the continuator, John of Worcester, mentions her three times in conjunction with her father[70] and twice with her

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[69] Orderic Vitalis 156
[70] Florence of Worcester 219, 225, 241

first husband, Henry V of Germany[71], he neglects to mention her second husband, Geoffrey of Anjou. Instead he throws the fact out, almost as an afterthought, that Matilda came over to England, "formerly empress of the Romans, and now countess of Anjou".[72] Clearly her second marriage and her second husband held little significance for John of Worcester. That he does not mention Matilda's son Henry is less surprising: John's continuation stops abruptly in the middle of the events of 1141. It was as yet unclear who would be sitting on the throne when all was done, and young Henry did not come to England until the next year, and then only to continue his education at his uncle's estates at the age of eight.[73]

Two out of the three times Matilda is mentioned with her father, it is to tell us that he gave her to her first husband in marriage, Henry V. So, to be really accurate, Matilda is only mentioned as wife and daughter a total of three times, the only independent mention as daughter being a description of Henry I confirming her as his heir after the death of his son.

William of Malmesbury, in *Historia Novella*, follows the same pattern as the other chronicles. Matilda is mentioned with her father three times, to establish their relationship,

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[71] Florence of Worcester 225, 241
[72] Florence of Worcester, 268

her two marriages, and the confirmation of her as his heir[74]. He offers a bit more information on her husband Geoffrey, but only to describe how, instead of coming to the aid of his wife, he managed to take from her her best general, Robert of Gloucester.[75] William briefly mentions that there was a boy by the name of Henry, who was the son of the empress[76], but that is the extent of their relationship in *Historia Novella*.

The final chronicle, *Historia Anglorum*, takes a different path, both in the descriptions of Matilda, as has already been discussed, and in the actual accounting of the historical events. Though Henry of Huntingdon really only uses two different events for the establishment of Matilda's character—her disruptive influence on her father and husband and her actions in London—the main part of that establishment is set with her father, before his death. After the death of Henry I, even Henry of Huntingdon was unable to fit her into the traditional role. The point is almost moot—he hardly mentions her throughout his account of the rebellion, either as performing actions alone or with others.

As previously mentioned, Matilda came over to England with her brother in 1139. Her husband was in Anjou and

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[73] Chibnall, 143
[74] William of Malmesbury 5, 9-11, 24
[75] William of Malmesbury 123-7
[76] William of Malmesbury 126

Normandy, she had no intentions of being a regent for her son, and her father was already dead. It would have been nearly impossible for any of these chroniclers to logically place her in the traditional role of the medieval aristocratic woman. Nearly all of the chronicles I have discussed have borne this out.

Conclusion:

I have attempted to demonstrate that Empress Matilda, in her attempts to bring the throne of England back into the direct succession, stepped out of the role of Woman and into the role of Ruler, and that the chronicles reflect that. This paper is divided into two larger parts, one in which I discuss the roles of Women and Rulers, and the similarities used to describe them, another in which I examine the primary sources and their descriptions of Matilda, in action and character. A third, smaller section demonstrates the near-impossibility of the chroniclers describing Matilda as a traditional medieval woman—acting within the interests of the men around her.

Empress Matilda was unique in that she was a woman who wished to fit into the role of a king—independent of the men around her. For most of the rebellion she acted independently of her father, husband, and sons, and was clearly the leader of her own party. She fought for her own right to rule—not with the power of a queen, but with the power and authority of a king.

It is fascinating then, that modern historians are so focused on fitting her into the traditional role of the medieval woman, in the role that even the chroniclers could not manage to place her.

Nesta Pain, one of Matilda's modern biographers, ends her account of Matilda's life with this statement:

> Matilda's greatest claim to immortality must rest on the fact that if she had not fought for her right to the English crown, and had not kept up the struggle until Henry was old enough to take it over, he might never have succeeded to the throne and England would have lost one of her greatest kings.[77]

Thus, Matilda's accomplishments, strengths, weaknesses, desires, birth, life, and death are all boiled down to what just happened to be the final result of her struggle for the throne. It is ironic that after fighting for thirteen years for the right to step out of one prescribed role, Matilda is only to be pushed back into it eight hundred years later.

What Nesta Pain failed to realize is that what made Matilda so extraordinary was her ability to choose her role and fight for it—for the right to be king.

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[77] Nesta Pain. The Empress Matilda: Uncrowned Queen of England. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978 (179)

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