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Matthew Clifton Brown

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Sacral Kingship and Resistance to Authority in the Middle English *Life of Edward the Confessor*[1]

Matthew Clifton Brown
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

Abstract: In medieval England, the life of St. Edward the Confessor functioned as ideological myth; Henry III used it to show that the Plantagenet dynasty had reconciled two 'nations' within England after the Norman Conquest. Edward's post-Conquest hagiography generally supports a sacralized monarchy and its prerogatives. However, a lesser-known, anonymous version of Edward's life exists in Middle English verse and resists royalist mythmaking from a more populist perspective. In the *South English Legendary* and in several Middle English chronicles, a counter-tradition of writing about Edward continues to sacralize the saint-king but simultaneously positions him as a symbol of resistance to Plantagenet rule. In this tradition, the rhetoric of sacral kingship works unexpectedly: rather than sanctifying the authority of the ruling house, it reminds readers of a previous, dead monarch, whose claim to sanctity (the fulfillment of Edward's famous prophecy of the green tree) should act as a check on the abuse of power by the presently-reigning dynasty. From this point of view, resistance to the Crown can be seen, not as discouraged and limited by the idea of sacral monarchy, but instead as partly motivated by it.

Keywords: Edward the Confessor; sacral kingship; nationalism; Middle English; hagiography; chronicle; South English Legendary

Beginning with the reign of Henry III, Edward the Confessor appears as a pivotal symbol in the development of an English conception of sacral kingship, emerging as the sacral king *par excellance* in later medieval England.[2] After the Confessor's canonization in the reign of Henry II, several hagiographic accounts—the most

[1] I would like to thank Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Susanna Fein, Kathleen Neal, and Monika Otter for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this material.

[2] On Edward's cult and the tradition of sacral kingship in England, see: Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets 1200–1400: Kingship and the Representation of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Chapter 3; Paul Binski, "Reflections on *La estoire de Seint Aedward le rei*: Hagiography and Kingship in Thirteenth-Century England," *Journal of Medieval History* 16 (1990): 333–350; Emily O'Brien, "The Cult of Edward the Confessor" (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2001); David A. Carpenter, "King Henry III and Saint Edward the Confessor: The Origins of the Cult," *English Historical Review* 122 (2007): 865–891. See also: Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), Chapter 2, for a broader overview of sacral kingship in England. Like much of the scholarship just cited, I take no position on the alleged continuity of British kingship with a tradition of antique Germanic sacral kingship; for a sense of this issue, see Francis Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

prominent being the *Vita Sancti Edwardi* of Aelred of Rievaulx—used Edward's life in an attempt to shore up the legitimacy of the Plantagenet line. Numerous scholars have explored the extraordinary flexibility of Edward's *vitae* for a variety of ideological purposes related to sacral kinship.[3] The picture of sacral kingship rhetoric that has emerged is, as one might expect, a decidedly royalist one: the *vitae* are used to emphasize positive attributes of Edward and his descendants; to offer pro-Plantagenet interpretations of political history; and to serve a mildly (at most) admonitory function, encouraging the Plantagenet king to live up to Edward's example. In other words, the rhetoric of sacral kingship seems inherently conservative, in the following sense: it is aimed at discouraging the questioning of royal prerogatives by implying that the 'powers that be' are sanctioned by God, and that resistance to them is religiously as well as politically discouraged. One implication of this view is that, in the face of a sacralized king, rebellious rhetoric must necessarily be desacralizing; it has typically been explained as nationalist in some sense, and as transferring allegiance to a proto-nation, and thus away from the sacral king. However, when examined closely, a minority tradition of writing about the life of Edward the Confessor, emerging in Middle English in the late thirteenth century, casts this assumption into doubt. I argue that this tradition both continues to sacralize Edward, *and* sees in his *vita* a means of resistance to Plantagenet power. These texts are less invested in a discourse of nationhood than is often supposed. Rather than desacralizing the office of kingship, the Middle English lives of Edward use the rhetoric of sacral kingship to construct a radical alternative position, by proposing that the sacral power of kingship is potentially separate from the reigning king's government.

Edward the Confessor as National Symbol

The main reason for Edward's ideological importance to the Plantagenets stems from the fact that the end of his reign coincided with the Norman Conquest. Scott Waugh remarks that "although Edward's reign was not particularly auspicious ... in the hands of historians it became a pivotal ideological moment in English history. In fact, the entire exaltation and acceptance of Edward as a model king and saint was a triumph of historical imagination and writing."[4] This exaltation was an attempt to retroactively cover over the most significant break

[3] See, among others: Christopher Baswell, "King Edward and the Cripple," in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of Henry Ansgar Kelly*, ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinkle (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 15–29; Binski, "Reflections on *La estoire de Seint Aedward*"; Jennifer Brown, "Body, Gender, and Nation in the Lives of Edward the Confessor," in *Barking Abbey and Medieval Literary Culture*, ed. Jennifer Brown and Donna Bussell, (Cambridge: Boydell, 2012), 146–154; Cynthia T. Camp, *Anglo-Saxon Saints Lives as History Writing in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2015), Chapter 4; Tamara Drukker, "Historicising Sainthood: The Case of Edward the Confessor in Vernacular Narratives," in *The Medieval Chronicle IV,* ed. Erik Kooper (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 56–80; Joanna Huntington, "Saintly Power as a Model of Royal Authority: The 'Royal Touch' and Other Miracles in the Early Vitae of Edward the Confessor," in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 327–343; Scott Waugh, "The Lives of Edward the Confessor and the Meaning of History in the Middle Ages," in *The Medieval Chronicle III*, ed. Erik Kooper (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 200–218; and Katherine Yohe, "Aelred's Recrafting of the Life of Edward the Confessor," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2003): 177–189.

[4] Waugh, "The Lives of Edward the Confessor," 202. See: Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) for the standard biography of Edward.

in English dynastic history, the accession of William I.[5] The five lives of Edward that were written for this purpose in French and Latin between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries had varying degrees of royal support, and Aelred of Rievaulx's *Vita Sancti Edwardi* was the basis of all later versions of Edward's life. The lives functioned as a mythography of sacral kingship that reflected especially upon the king's bodily relationship to the unity of the kingdom.[6] Henry III saw Edward's cult, enshrined at huge cost in a rebuilt Westminster Abbey, as a way to guarantee the Plantagenets' sacred legitimacy, as David Carpenter has shown.[7] Paul Binski has described how the centralization of administrative government at Westminster, and the sacralization of the monarchy under the sign of the Confessor, proceeded as complementary aspects of the same process.[8] Edward's regalia—his crown, scepter, and ring—were believed to symbolize royal continuity since the Anglo-Saxon line, and were used in all subsequent medieval royal coronations. So, despite the fact that Edward's cult never became popular, and he was soon eclipsed as a national saint by St. George, the Confessor was literally "built in" to the theory and practice of English monarchy. At least until the deposition of Richard II, the Confessor's name, image, and hagiography played a significant role in shaping English conceptions of sacral kingship at an elite level. In what follows, however, I will argue that the ideological potential of the Confessor for contesting political power was also found in a group of texts written for a less elite audience.

By the thirteenth century, the basic narrative of Edward's life was more or less settled among medieval hagiographers and chroniclers, but it would inevitably invoke three potentially conflicting types of claim to legitimacy: by blood-right, by a divinely sanctioned decision (election), and by conquest. Edward was the son of the Anglo-Saxon king Aethelred II and the Norman Emma, but lived his early life in exile in Normandy while the invading Danes ruled England. After the death of his half-brother, the Danish king Harthacanute (whose claim to the throne was through Emma), Edward returned to England and was crowned king. Edward's younger brother Alfred had been murdered by Earl Godwin, a powerful Anglo-Saxon nobleman sympathetic to the Danes, in an attempt to advance his own son, Harold, to the throne. Despite this, Edward later reconciled with Godwin at the behest of other powerful magnates, and married Godwin's daughter Edith, reputedly a wise and holy woman. The fact that Edward and Edith had no offspring was explained away by their saintliness, but it created a pressing problem of succession. After Edward's death, Harold Godwinson seems to have usurped the throne, violating a promise which was said to have been made by Edward himself to William of Normandy that William would be heir.[9] Harold was also said to have promised William to support his claim, and the chroniclers' blame for the Norman Conquest most

[5] Marsha L. Dutton, "Aelred, Historian: Two Portraits in Plantagenet Myth," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 28 (1993): 127ff.; Monika Otter, "1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest," *Speculum* 74 (1999): 565–586; and Waugh, "The Lives of Edward the Confessor."

[6] For a useful overview of the five Lives see Thelma Fenster and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *The History of Saint Edward the King* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 1–25. On Aelred as a Plantagenet mythographer see Dutton, "Aelred, Historian: Two Portraits in Plantagenet Myth." For the myths' focus on the body, see Fenster and Wogan-Browne, *The History of Saint Edward*, 20–21 and Brown, "Body, Gender, and Nation in the Lives of Edward the Confessor."

[7] Carpenter, "King Henry III and Saint Edward the Confessor."

[8] Binski, *Westminster Abbey*, 4.

[9] The fact that William was Emma the Norman's great-nephew offered some additional support for this claim.

commonly fell on Harold's breaking of this oath. According to most medieval accounts, which were predominantly pro-Norman, William invaded England in pursuit of his rightful claim, killed Harold, and became king of England and Duke of Normandy.

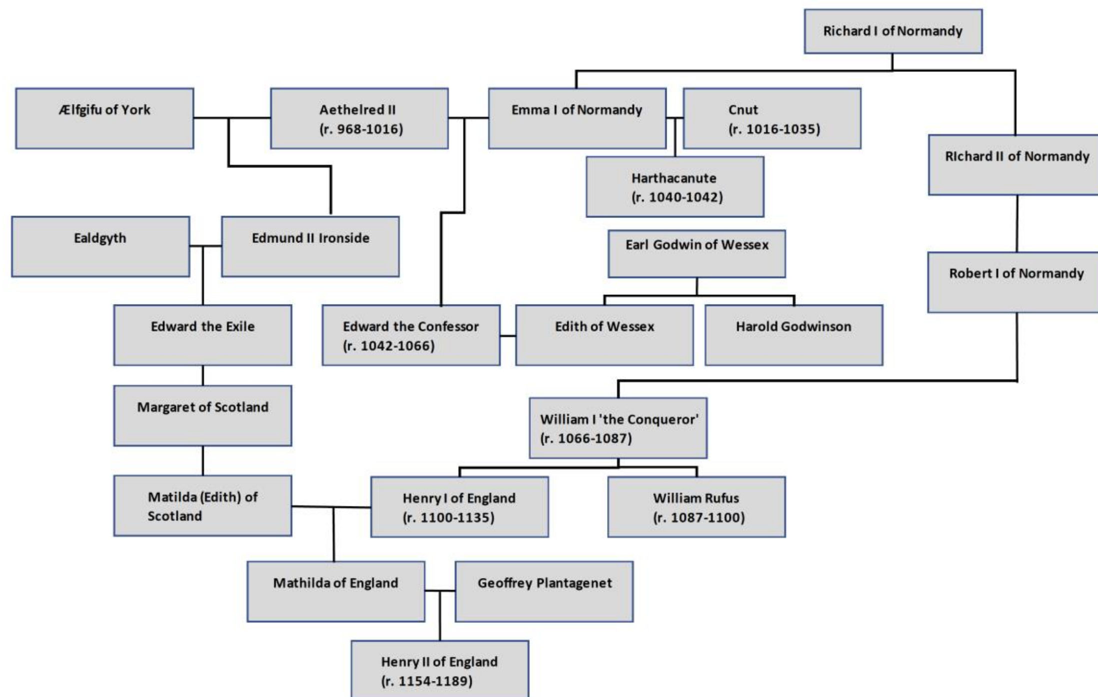

Figure 1: Family tree of Edward the Confessor

As Edward was perceived to be both the source of William's claim to rule England and the last legitimate king of the Anglo-Saxons, his reputation had to be carefully managed in order to justify Norman rule. The promise made by Edward to William is historically doubtful but formed a significant part of pro-Norman claims to legitimacy; it was crucial to seeing William not as a conqueror by force but as a successor by right.[10] Not the foreign Normans, but the native Godwins therefore had to be seen as the enemy, and they were portrayed as such by chroniclers with few exceptions.[11] Edward's decision to designate William had to be seen as a product of his saintly and providentially-guided judgment, the only kind of 'election' that might compete ideologically with more legitimate blood-right. Edward was "a powerful touchstone, a fetish almost, in this legal fiction, invoked by links of genealogy, bodily presence and Latin texts" and the Normans drew enthusiastically on his reputation for saintliness not only in their histories but in their coronation orders and in (often forged) charters used to

[10] For the doubtfulness of this promise see Barlow, *Edward,* 107–109. The legal importance of this bequest and its implications have been discussed most extensively in George Garnett, *Conquered England: Kingship, Succession, and Tenure 1066–1166* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Laura Ashe, "The Anomalous King of Conquered England," in *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Lynette Mitchell and Charles Melville (Boston: Brill, 2013), 173–193.

[11] For a few attempts to rehabilitate Godwin, see Robert Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority 1025-1180* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 127–128.

uphold Norman rights.[12] Downplaying Harold's ten-month reign as well as the actions of Godwin and William, medieval accounts of the Conquest thus tend to try to frame the story through Edward rather than the other players in the story, despite his minimal direct effect on the events.

Aelred of Rievaulx's version of the *Life of Edward* was by far the most influential, and forcefully develops a rhetoric of sacral kingship, claiming that "beyond all the civilizations and kingdoms of the earth, England is renowned for the sanctity of her kings."[13] Aelred's most important innovation was in the realm of prophecy, reimagining a well-known apocryphal story of a prophetic dream-vision which came to Edward on his deathbed. Just before his death and the ensuing Norman Conquest, Edward sees a vision of chaos and suffering descending upon England; two monks appear and explain that it is a punishment for the immorality of the realm. When Edward asks when the suffering will end, they reply cryptically that England's trials will be over when a green tree, severed from its root, is carried away the lengths of three lands, is then rejoined to its trunk, and then begins to flower and bear fruit.

Versions of this dream vision had existed before Aelred's *vita*, but the vision was considered an *impossibilia*, or a plainly impossible condition that indicated an everlasting state of disorder.[14] Although William might have received a rightful promise to the realm, he was not an English king by blood, and his successors William II, Henry I, and Stephen all lacked Anglo-Saxon blood. Aelred's interpretation changed the message of the story from a basically pro-Norman one to a more specifically pro-Plantagenet one. Writing during the reign of Henry II, Aelred was the first to be able to interpret the rejoining of the tree as referring to the marriage of Henry I and Mathilda of Scotland, who was the great-granddaughter of Edmund Ironside, and the fruit as their grandson Henry II, who carried the rightful lineage.[15] The accession of Henry II thus apparently fulfilled the prophecy.

In theory at least, the union of the lineages in Henry suggested that the Plantagenets would quell any residual Anglo-Saxon nativist opposition to Norman rule, since they could be said to equally embody both Norman and Anglo-Saxon interests. Henry III's reign could advertise itself as a reinstatement of the peace and justice that was thought to have prevailed under St. Edward, who had prophesied the Plantagenet dynasty and thereby given it divine sanction. This aimed to prevent the memory of Edward from giving comfort to those who might identify with the conquered English against Norman power.

That worry was not unfounded, since the Conquest, despite its historical distance, was still an embarrassing historical fact, one accompanied by an ineradicable suggestion of national defeat. Conquest was an uncertain basis for power; if Edward's reign was idealized as just and peaceful, it could be compared critically to the contemporary reign. The Plantagenet promotion of this metaphor of lineage allowed them to reject the "Normans" to some degree, but there was still a taint of foreignness. Specifically, complaints were directed at Henry III's favoring of his own Poitevin half-brothers, the Lusignans, and the queen's Savoyard uncles,

[12] Christopher Baswell, "Latinitas," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 128–129.
[13] Marsha Dutton and Jane Freeland, ed., *Aelred of Rievaulx, The Historical Works* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 126.
[14] Writing before the reign of Henry II, William of Malmesbury and Osbert of Clare both note its impossibility, pointing out the lack of any suitable heir from the Anglo-Saxon line.
[15] Dutton and Freeland, *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, 207–208.

allowing them to encroach upon local courts and officials, resulting in widespread corruption of the judicial system.[16] This oppression, not so much a result of absolutism on Henry's part as overindulgence of one faction of his magnates, was coded as ethnic in widespread complaints against alien *curiales*, and it provoked the baronial rebellion led by Simon de Montfort in 1258. The barons portrayed the rebellion "as intended to save the English race from destruction by foreigners" and they were successful in persuading members of lower social orders, including peasants, that their interests were encompassed by the reform movement.[17] The *Song of Lewes* and other propaganda in English, French, and Latin spread xenophobic rhetoric, sacralized de Montfort, and encouraged violent action against the king and his supporters. Thus, the Plantagenet promotion of Edward, as well as the propaganda emanating from this rebellion, both encouraged an ethnic rhetorical framing of history (one that, it should be noted, had long ceased to reflect reality) and imagined a sacralized leader.[18]

The struggle between Henry and his barons is often thought of as a moment when English "nationalism" emerged as a political force.[19] The very act of writing in English at this period has been frequently linked to the assertion of nationalism, especially following the influential argument of Thorlac Turville-Petre's book, *England the Nation*. For example, in a recent article on English writing in the late thirteenth century, Mark N. Taylor argues that a group of literary works written within a few years of the baronial rebellion reflect a sense of national unity that transcended class, exemplifying "the nationalism implicit in the choice [to write in English]" during this period.[20] Though prevalent, this "linguistic nationalism" hypothesis has proved controversial, since the modern conception of "nation" has appeared anachronistic and distorting for various reasons to many historians.[21] The present article will

[16] David A. Carpenter, "King, Magnates, and Society: The Personal Rule of King Henry III, 1234–1258," *Speculum* 60 (1985): 39–70.

[17] David A. Carpenter, "English Peasants in Politics 1258-1267," *Past and Present* 136 (1992): 21. "Chroniclers began to see the movement of reform almost exclusively in terms of preserving the English people from the oppressions of foreigners, a view with which peasants could naturally identify, having suffered from the harsh lordship of both Lusignans and Savoyards," Carpenter, "English Peasants in Politics," 31. Besides the work of Carpenter, see also Tim Machan, "The Baron's War and Henry's Letters" in his *English in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003), 21–69, for a discussion and reassessment of the 'foreigner question' as it relates to the Second Barons' War.

[18] As Linda Georgianna puts it, "To be sure, in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest, 'English' and 'Norman' are ethnic terms used to distinguish the conquered from the conquering people or *gens*. But by 1100, that is, within less than two generations, the distinction has already outlived its usefulness and become a "a relic"; in the twelfth century, the terms 'English' and 'Norman' are far more likely to have a territorial or political than an ethnic valence," Linda Georgianna, "Coming to Terms with the Norman Conquest," in *Literature and the Nation*, ed. Brook Thomas (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1998), 47. On these aspects of the propaganda see Machan, *English in the Middle Ages*, Chapters 2–3; Carpenter, "English Peasants in Politics, 1258-1267," 6 and 31ff.; and Claire Valente, "Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, and the Utility of Sanctity in Thirteenth-Century England," *Journal of Medieval History* 21 (1995): 27–49.

[19] For a typical view of this development, see Michael Clanchy, *England and its Rulers: 1066-1307*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 248–250.

[20] Mark Taylor, "'*Aultre Manier de Language*': English Usage as a Political Act in Thirteenth-Century England," in *Medieval Multilingualism*, ed. Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 114. However, the decision to write in English at this period may be a "political act" without necessarily being a "nationalist act," as I argue below.

[21] For overviews of this debate, see Nicholas Watson, "The Politics of Middle English Writing," in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park:

not attempt to resolve this debate; however, it will suggest that a closer attention to how texts in this period figure power relations may shed new light on the issue. Simply rejecting the concept of nation leaves open the question of how these writers conceive the relation of power to people. Because of their linguistic and historical context, the Middle English lives of Edward are a privileged place for examining the dynamic interrelation of royal power, ethnicity, and people at this time. Although these texts are invested in discourses of ethnicity, they should not be framed as nationalist and instead demonstrate a tendency to read ethnic division through the framework of royal sacrality. What sometimes appear to be proto-nationalist statements about ethnic conflict turn out to be an unexpectedly complex analysis of power relations. As these texts show, the political common sense of the period still conceived of peoples as something closer to Susan Reynold's 'regnal communities' than to modern 'nations.'[22] Their putatively nationalist discourse is better read as a debate over royal sovereignty, centered upon Edward the Confessor. Surprisingly, it is Edward's sacrality, rather than ethnic nationalism, that underwrites resistance to Plantagenet power in the Middle English verse lives of Edward.[23]

Edward the Confessor in Vernacular Writing

In the late thirteenth century, a Middle English *Life* of Edward was made in the West Midlands, derived from an English prose version of an Anglo-Norman translation of Aelred's Latin.[24] The extent of this Middle English *Life*'s revision of Aelred's Edward has been

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Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 331–352; Anne Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 21–57; and most recently, Andrea Ruddick, *English Identity and Political Culture in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 155–167.

[22] Susan Reynolds, "Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm," *History* 68 (1983): 375–390; esp. 383 on the medieval use of the word "nation."

[23] I avoid much direct discussion of the concept of race here partly because, in the texts presently under consideration, I argue that concepts of race or ethnicity are less salient than a sense of group cohesion based on sacral kingship belief. This should not be taken to imply a dismissal of the applicability of the concept of race in the medieval period, only that it must be treated carefully. Some historians, such as Susan Reynolds and William Chester Jordan, have doubted the medieval applicability of the term 'race', while other scholars have defended its usage. For major statements in this debate, see: Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31 (2001), 39–56; William C. Jordan, "Why 'Race'?," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31 (2001), 165–73; Hugh Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c.1220* (Oxford University Press, 2003); Stephen J. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Jeremy J. Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: Of Difficult Middles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 11–42; David Nirenberg, "Was there Race before Modernity? The Example of 'Jewish' blood in Late Medieval Spain," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 232–264. Most recently, Geraldine Heng's book *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) is a sophisticated defense of the applicability of the concept of race to the medieval period. Also useful for its discussion of race in the present context of vernacular historical writing in England in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries is Jon Davis-Secord, "Revising Race in Laȝamon's *Brut*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116.2 (2017): 156–181.

[24] It survives in three manuscripts of the South English Legendary (MS Ashmole 43, MS Bodley 779, and MS Cotton Julius D.IX). The prose version survives in Oxford, MS Trinity College XI. See the modern edition by Grace E. Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life of Edward the Confessor* (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1942). This version reached a much broader audience through the partial incorporation of its language and ideas

downplayed by scholars.[25] But the West Midlands version makes several striking changes which give it a much more populist, "English" perspective, including shifting much of the French-derived diction of the prose into Anglo-Saxon terminology. For example, the West Midlands version replaces the English prose version's word "promised" to "bihet," "roialme" to "kindom," and "precious" to "gode."[26] According to Moore, is likely that the West Midlands poet introduced the verbal and political changes himself. This tendency in the Middle English Verse *Life* of Edward bears a strong resemblance to the "conservative lexis" and paucity of French loanwords in several other thirteenth-century English literary texts (such as "The Owl and the Nightingale" and Layamon's *Brut*), a phenomenon also pointed out by Mark Taylor: "given a choice, the translator preferred an Anglo-Saxon word to a French loan."[27] Taylor links the lexical choices of these texts to a broader politics of language stemming from the baronial rebellion in the second half of the thirteenth century. The Middle English verse *Life* emerges, like these texts, from the area of strongest support for the rebellion.[28]

The Middle English verse *Life of Edward the Confessor* is uninterested in exalting Henry's monarchy and it omits Aelred's prefatory material on holy kings and his address to Henry III.[29] It begins with the following lines, which concisely set out the main themes that dominate the entire work:

> Seint edward þe gode king riȝt is to haue in mende
> Ibore he was in englond ichol sigge of whiche kende
> þer was ofte in englond worre bifore his daie
> For men fondeþe as ȝut doþ ech oþer to bitraie.[30]

The *Life* stresses that Edward was a good, natively-born king of England (glossing over the fact that he spent his early life in Normandy), and that his reign was peaceful. Invoking "treason" ("bitraie") the phrase "as yut doth" hints that present-day England may be more like

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into the chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, as discussed below.

[25] Brown, "Cut From Its Stump," 68–69.

[26] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lxvii–lxviii, calls this a likely conscious attempt at archaism.

[27] Taylor, "*Aultre Manier de Language*," 118.

[28] Thomas Heffernan has shown that the West Midlands versions of the *South English Legendary* have a tendency to add polemical changes to their source texts, especially in ways that seem supportive of the de Montfort rebellion; Thomas Heffernan, "Dangerous Sympathies: Political Commentary in the *South English Legendary*," in *The South English Legendary: A Critical Assesment*, ed. Klaus Jankofsky (Tübingen: Franke, 1992) 1–17; see also Thompson, *Everyday Saints*, Chapter 2; Renee Hamelinck, "St. Kenelm and the Legends of the English Saints in the South English Legendary," in *Companion to Early Middle English Literature*, ed. N.H.G.E. Veldhoen and Henk Aertsen, 2nd ed (Amsterdam: VU University Press 1995), 19–28; Jill Frederick, "The *South English Legendary*: Anglo-Saxon Saints and National Identity," in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57–73; and Klaus Jankofsky, "National Characteristics in the Portrayal of English Saints in the *South English Legendary*," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 81–93.

[29] Another central concern of the *Life*, the justification of the special privileges of Westminster Abbey, is pared down from Aelred's version.

[30] "It is right to keep Saint Edward, the good king, in mind, / He was born in England; I shall tell of his kind [lineage]. There was often war in England before his day / For then, men used to betray each other, as they still do." Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life,* lines 1–4.

the war-torn England before Edward's reign than the return to peace advertised by Plantagenet rule. "Kende" and "treason" are the two key words that dominate the work, appearing frequently at pivotal moments.[31] "Kende" (or "kunde" or "kynde") is predominantly used to mean "lineage" and is given heavy moral and political significance; Edward's lineage and its fate in the Conquest are the center of gravity in this vita. Though he removes much of Aelred's effusive praise of Henry's lineage, the Middle English author carefully preserves Aelred's treatment of Edward's relatives, which indicates how the Anglo-Saxon lineage would eventually produce Henry II: Edmund Ironside's birth,[32] Queen Emma's birth,[33] and the detailed genealogical interpretation of Edward's vision at lines 1096-1109. "Treson" is used to indicate division within the realm;[34] i.e., actions either by groups or individuals detrimental to the "lond." Totally at odds with Aelred's vita, treason's contemporary relevance is stressed—similar passages making explicit reference to contemporary "treason" or disorder occur at lines 141, 144, 155-6, 520, and 796-7.

Though the Middle English author will later agree with Aelred that the Plantagenets represent the "kende" kingship of Edward, his insistence on contemporary "treason" shows that he does not agree with Aelred's claim that this status ensures stability and harmony. He is preoccupied with explaining how a truly sacral king may yet have strife in his reign; or in other words, with the conceptual relationship between "kende" and treason. In his account, the wars that precede Edward's reign, in the reign of Athelred, are a direct result of Athelred's mother's murder of the heir to the throne. Thus the reign of the otherwise good Athelred, who inherited the sanctified lineage from the previous divinely-elected king Edgar,[35] is afflicted by the sacrificial killing of Edward's double, the earlier St Edward the Martyr—an event Aelred omits in his effort to glorify royalty more generally.[36]

This does not undermine the author's confidence in sacral kingship *per se*. His account of Edward's pre-natal election indicates the importance he attributed to divine election, as does Aelred's version. After Edward's conception, but before his birth, king Athelred holds a "parlement," which, as in Aelred's vita, functions as a dramatic setpiece.[37] Though Athelred had "ofte" held parliaments amid the Viking raids, this one is marked by special divine revelations: two "grislich & stronge" omens or "toknings" appear.[38] Aelred includes only one,

[31] "Kende" or "unkende" appears in lines 293, 331, 332, 380, 1076, 1077, 1081, 1089, 1091, 1096, 1097, 1099, 1101, 1111; the related word "heritage" is also frequent. "Treason" or related words like "traitor" appear in lines 155, 156, 160, 171, 172, 179, 180, 182, 186, 187, 296, 303, 305, 330, 332, 834, 865, 869, 875, 903, 1144.
[32] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life,* line 26.
[33] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, line 29.
[34] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 134–141.
[35] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, line 11.
[36] Other alterations to Aelred's account explore the limits of right 'kende' as a solution to treason. In Edward's minority, when Edmund Ironside becomes king, warfare continues and its cause is again stressed in an aside: since Athelred's "eritage" is tainted, peace can only be restored by the accession of the chosen Edward; Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, line 130. At line 1015, he adds to Edward's vision of the green tree an element of genealogical determinism: the comment that the sins of the father are to be visited upon the son. Later, yet another alteration to Aelred's version of Edward's vision of the Seven Sleepers changes it into a prophecy of intra-kingdom (and even intral-lineal) strife ("þe sone aȝen þe faþer þe broþer aȝen þe broþer," Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, line 901), rather than only referring to international war against the Saracens, as in Aelred.
[37] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, line 34.
[38] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 34–36.

a revelation that a great sorrow is soon coming to England. The Middle English adds a second revelation, which is unusual in that it is not a revelation of future events but of why they happen: "& þet our lord sente in ech londe ofte of suche þinge / þe more oþer lasse op þe lif of þe kinge."[39] The life of the king determines the suffering visited upon the "londe" by the Lord. On account of these two revelations, the king decides, against tradition, to select his successor immediately, without further deliberation (presumably to take advantage of the prophetic atmosphere).[40] The choice appears to be between Edmund Ironside, who has proven himself a great warrior, and Aldred, who has the benefit of Norman lineage, just as the unborn Edward will have.[41] No rational weighing of the possibilities could lead anyone to choose the unborn Edward, who might not even survive, or be male, as the story explicitly points out.[42] So the divine election of Edward is an amazing choice, and since it is improper (given better options) by the standards of succession at the time of writing, it is even more amazing that everyone assents without argument.[43] This parliament scene attests to a strong conviction of the importance of divine election (rivaling that of blood) and it associates Edward with the legitimizing power of such prophetic decisions, which here take precedence over primogeniture, tradition, or rationality in selecting the king's successor. This decision will later echo in Edward's designation of William, legitimized only by his own prophetic power (which, as here, is derived directly from God and unmediated by the church).

The Middle English verse *Life*'s championing of poor people is, like its view of the strife afflicting even kingdoms with sanctified leaders, another striking difference from Aelred. It shifts criticism onto oppressive aristocratic "heiemen" instead of clerics, which is where Aelred's few criticisms tend to fall. A couple of polemical asides oppose the interests of the poor to the nobility.[44] At lines 519-528, the author claims that Edward relieved war-taxation (using the anachronistic contemporary term "talliage"), which nobles now exact illegally, taking more from the poor from year to year. The author idealistically imagines that in Edward's reign, the voices of "poor men," not just nobles, were included in parliamentary decisions.[45] According to this *Life*, suffering in the kingdom can be explained both by divine punishment for the sins of kings (even legitimate ones), and oppression of the poor by the nobility. These elements are absent from Aelred's version.

The Middle English author's revision of the relationship of legitimacy to social disorder, and his opposition of "highmen" to "lowmen," only begins to suggest an alternative model of sacral kingship. These ideas were expanded when the Middle English *Life* was partly incorporated by Robert of Gloucester into his more widely read Chronicle. Written around 1300 in the southwest Midlands, Robert's was one of the most popular English chronicles of

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[39] "and that our Lord often sent such things into each land / more or less, based upon the life of the king." Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 39–40. Though a seemingly minor addition, this also makes the next action, *prima facie* unbelievable, somewhat more comprehensible if this parliament was recognized by its participants as being charged with divine power (at line 37, "among hom" implies that divine insight was granted to all present).
[40] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life* line 41.
[41] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 44–46.
[42] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 55–56.
[43] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 51–58.
[44] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 1040–1041 and 1072.
[45] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 393 and 430.

the fourteenth century.[46] Robert's chronicle shares 233 lines, exactly or near-exactly, with the Middle English *Life* of Edward, and Moore has shown that Robert borrowed from the hagiography.[47] Robert builds on the ideological cues of the Middle English *Life* to develop an even more sophisticated, polemical account of the relationship of royal power to its subjects.

Robert's preoccupation with sacral kingship and with the baronial rebellion, which for him is intimately linked to the Norman Conquest, have been demonstrated by Susan Mitchell.[48] Although Robert's chronicle encompasses earliest British history, the Conquest is proleptically emphasized at the beginning of the chronicle and commented upon out of sequence in several other places, indicating its central role.[49] For Robert, the Conquest and the rebellion of Simon de Montfort—the only event in the narrative Robert claims to have personally witnessed—are intelligible only by reference to one another.[50]

The chronicle's opening section catalogs the first four peoples "þat ofte wonne engelond and helde it bi maistrie," drawing upon Henry of Huntingdon's account of the five plagues of England.[51] This is not just a historical issue for Robert, for he insists on the Conquest's relevance to contemporary events:

> þe vifþe time ȝwan engelond þat folc of normandie
> þat among vs wonieþ ȝvt & ssulleþ euere mo
> We ssulleþ her after in þise boc telle of al þis wo.[52]

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[46] For recent overviews of this work, see Thea Summerfield and Rosamund Allen, "Chronicles and Historical Narratives," in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, Volume 1,* ed. Roger Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 338–344; and Philip Shaw, "Robert of Gloucester and the Medieval Chronicle," *Literature Compass* 8/10 (2011): 700–709. Though we know little about him, it is now generally accepted that a single author compiled the entire work; see Summerfield and Allen, "Chronicles," 339; and Oliver Pickering, "*South English Legendary* Style in Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle," *Medium Aevum* 70, no. 1 (2001): 10–13. It exists in two recensions that are identical up to the reign of Henry I in 1135. Seven manuscripts of each recension are extant.

[47] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lvii–lix.

[48] According to Mitchell, Robert's history is "preoccupied with kings and governance. History, to Robert, comprises the succession of monarchs and their acts (good and ill) of policy"; it is also "a contemporary (and maybe proleptic) polemic." Mitchell, "Kings, Constitution, and Crisis," 40.

[49] Thousands of lines before the conquest, Robert comments upon the Norman lineage: "& þoru þulke blode suþþe willam bastard com / As ȝe ssolle her after ihure & wan þis kinedom," William A. Wright, ed., *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, Rolls Series 86 (London, 1887), lines 5970–5971 "and through that blood then William the Bastard came / As you shall hear hereafter, and [he] won this kingdom"; cf. lines 53–56, 5911–5912, 7076, 9639–9642.

[50] Mitchell, "Kings, Constitution, and Crisis." Robert tells us that he was present at the battle of Evesham: "…þis isei roberd / þat verst þis boc made & was wel sore aferd" (11748a–11750) "Robert, who first made this book / saw this, and [he] was sorely afraid". He sees Simon de Montfort as a messianic figure, the double of Edward and Christ, and explicitly compares his death to Christ's on the cross: "Suich was þe morþre of einesham uor bataile non it nas / & þerwiþ Iesu crist wel vuele ipaied was / As he ssewede bi tokninge grisliche & gode / As it vel of him sulue þo he deide on þe rode / þat þorou al þe middelerd derkhede þer was inou" (11736–11740) "Such was the murder of Eynsham, for it wasn't a battle / and by it Jesus Christ was evilly wronged / as he revealed by a sign (tokening), grisly and good / as it happened, when he himself died on the Cross, / that there was great darkness all through middle Earth". The same words, "grisliche toknynges," are used in the Middle English *Life* of Edward for the signs at his pre-natal election to the throne. On the political "canonization" of de Montfort, see also Valente, "Simon de Montfort."

[51] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 53.

[52] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 54–56. "The fifth time, the folk of Normandy conquered England, / who still live among us and will evermore, / We shall in this book hereafter tell of all this woe."

Ruling by "maistrie," the Normans "wonieþ ȝut" in the present, continuing the "wo" of the Conquest.[53] For Robert and the Plantagenet historians alike, the most significant problem posed by the Conquest is how legitimacy was transferred from Edward the Confessor to William I, and thus to the Plantagenets. In the Anglo-Saxon section of his history, Robert draws on the ideas of the Middle English *Life* to lay the groundwork for his interpretation of the Conquest in terms of an emphatically sacred Edward. Robert tells us that sacral kingship in England stems from Alfred the Great's anointment by Pope Leo.[54] Sacrality is absolutely vital to Robert's conception of kingship, and as Mitchell notes "he maintains that a king obtains the throne legitimately only if he is anointed by the archbishop and if he is of the blood of Alfred because Alfred was anointed by the Pope (God's viceregent on earth)."[55] Robert takes Alfred as paradigmatic of good kingship, and the Anglo-Saxon era, up to Edward's reign, as a golden age of saints and justice.[56] This holy lineage guarantees royal legitimacy; throughout the entire chronicle Robert is careful to note whether subsequent kings are correctly anointed in order to carry on the ordination.[57]

However, maintaining the bloodline is also critical for Robert, as his account is littered with pointed comments about the non-anointed bearers of this lineage, which foreshadow its fate at the Conquest and its restoration with Henry II. At line 6464 Robert says of the offspring of Edward and Agatha (i.e., Edward, St Margaret, Christina): "þis gode children aȝte be eueremore in munde / Vor engelond ȝif hii nere were ȝut out of kunde / As ȝe mowe ihure herafterward in king Henries lif / Hou engelond com to kunde aȝen þoru þe gode quene mold is wif."[58] Robert thus continues the Middle English *Life*'s usage of the word "kynde" or "kunde" as a key word for interpreting the problem of sovereignty at the Conquest. This term "kunde" itself has a dual meaning for Robert, since he uses it to emphasize the importance of continuing the ordination from Pope Leo as much as bloodline.[59] At times he uses it for the

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[53] As Mitchell points out, Robert's use of the phrase "euere mo" (55) does not imply resignation, because later Robert expresses belief in the possibility of ejecting the Normans from England (lines 11016–11018).

[54] "þe pope leon him blessede þo he þuder com / & þe kinges croune of þis lond þat in þis lond ȝut is / & elede him to be king ar he were king ywis / & he was king of engelond of alle þat þer come / þat verst þus yeled was of þe pope of rome," Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 5327–5331. "The pope Leo blessed him when he came there / and the royal crown of this land that is still here / and anointed him to be king before he was king indeed / and he was the king of England from which all [later kings] come / that was first thus anointed by the pope of Rome."

[55] Mitchell, "Kings, Constitution, and Crisis," 51.

[56] Mitchell, "Kings, Constitution, and Crisis," 47–50, 54.

[57] Robert stresses that it is the same crown, the same office, corresponding to the same coronation ritual, that is now followed in England; Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle,* lines 5327–5328. Mitchell says that "Robert's ideas are consistent with thirteenth century coronation procedures," and he believes that it is this coronation procedure, not lineage alone, that guarantees the proper divine sanction for kingship; Mitchell, "Kings, Constitution, and Crisis," 49.

[58] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 6464–6467. "These good children should be remembered evermore / for if they had not been, England would still be out of kind / as you will hear afterward in King Henry's life / how England came to kind again through the good queen Mathilda, his wife." Other examples include the comment out of sequence at lines 5968–5969, indicating the birth of Edward the Confessor and his brother to king "Aeldredus" (Æthelred II); and again at 6405–6406, reminding us of Edward and his brother's status as heirs before this comes into play in the narrative.

[59] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 7243ff.

former, and at other times for the latter.

Robert's rewriting of the green tree prophecy further develops his strategically ambiguous view of 'kunde'. Just prior to narrating the Conquest, Robert inserts the Middle English verse *Life*'s account of Edward's prophecy of the green tree:[60]

> þis tre þe noble kinedom bitokneþ of engelonde
> þe more bitokneþ þe riȝte kunde þat ech of oþere come
> Fram king alfred þe kunde more þat uerst was yeled at rome
> To seint edwardes fader & to him sulue al so.[61]

Following the Middle English *Life*, Robert interprets the tree as simultaneously representing the realm and the royal "kunde" or anointed lineage. This usage of the word "kunde" implies that the same signifier, the tree, can mean both the political kingdom and the lineage. Since the welfare of the kingdom depends upon the kingly lineage, the king can stand in for the nation as a whole.

Due to his ambivalent use of "kunde" to mean both sacral legitimacy and blood-lineage, Robert's notion of royal continuity, like that of Middle English verse *Life,* allows for a distinction between a legitimate king "in kunde" and "out of kunde"—that is, between legal right and the legitimacy of the bloodline. Ideally, the two are joined. But, crucially, a distinction in the degree of legitimacy between Edward and William (who are both called legitimate) is allowed by this difference between political continuity and genealogical continuity, as we can see in Robert's comments on the Conquest itself.

Robert's narration of the battle is only partly determined by the medieval moral conventions that demand righteous victors and sinful losers. The English are sinful, in accordance with Edward's prophecy. Led by Harold Godwinson, they drink late into the night; the French pray before battle. William's bravery and skill are praised highly. Robert's commentary after the battle sums up his view of the effects of the Norman Conquest:

> þus lo þe englisse folc vor noȝt to grounde com
> Vor a fals king þat nadde no riȝt to þe kinedom
> & come to a nywe louerd þat more in riȝte was
> Ac hor noþer as me may ise in pur riȝte nas
> & þus was in normannes hond þat lond ibroȝt iwis
> þat anaunter ȝif euermo keueringe þer of is
> Of þe normans beþ heyemen þat beþ of engelonde
> & þe lowemen of saxons as ich vnderstonde
> So þat ȝe seþ in eiþer side wat riȝte ȝe abbeþ þerto
> Ac ich vnderstonde þat it was þoru godes wille ydo
> Vor þe wule þe men of þis lond pur heþene were
> No lond ne no folc aȝen hom in armes nere
> Ac nou suþþe þat þet folc auenge cristendom
> & wel lute wule hulde þe biheste þat he nom
> & turnde to sleuþe & to prute & to lecherie

[60] Lines 7234–7249 are taken verbatim from the Middle English Verse *Life* of Edward.

[61] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 7241–7244. "This tree betokens the noble kingdom of England / and the root betokens the right kind that each passes to the next / from King Alfred, the kind root, that was first anointed at Rome / to Saint Edward himself and his father also."

To glotonie & heyemen muche to robberie
As þe gostes in avision to seint edward sede.[62]

That this is a stylized view of history goes without saying, but these lines lay out a complex position that cannot be reduced to a lament about Norman oppression. According to Robert, England was brought from a king with no right (Harold) to one with more right (William), but not a "pure" right.[63] William and his successors ruled with an "impure" right, until Henry II's accession restored its purity. William's conquest was, however, accomplished by the will of God, just like the conquest of heathen Britain by the Anglo-Saxons. As a present-day consequence of all this, the Normans are the highmen and the Saxons are the lowmen.[64]

That there are degrees of legitimacy is something many medieval writers were prepared to accept on some level; but in Robert's narrative this idea allows him to begin to suggest a separation between the power that is theoretically held by the royal house and that which is actually being exerted over the people—a separation the Middle English *Life* had to some degree already suggested, by the contrast between the saintliness of Edward and the sinfulness of the nation he supposedly embodied. Robert attempts to explain how it could happen that royal power might be held simultaneously "rightly" and "unrightly" through a historical argument. The steps taken to resolve this paradox are revealing because they offer a social diagnosis relevant to Robert's own day. His account shows that the "kynde" lineage, which seems to more truly embody the interests of the English people, can be suppressed; whereas the power of "riȝt" can exist in a legitimate king without this sacred lineage.

One factor that must be noted in Robert's staging of the conflict between "English" and "Norman" is that there are not, as "nationalist" readings presuppose, two "nations" in conflict here. When England is brought into "normannes hond,"[65] we do have an act of conquest, with one group of people "winning" and the other "losing." But the central issue of the king's legitimacy disrupts any simple Norman/English national opposition. Robert agrees that Edward, by his own sovereign decision, has granted the kingdom to William "right lawe thei it nere."[66] With the kingdom threatened by Viking invasion, and lacking other heirs due to the saintliness that had brought it internal peace, Edward is put in the position of having to act above the law. His very sanctity paradoxically both brings about the dire state of necessity and makes his extralegal act legitimate. The "kynde" lineage is only broken when Harold takes the

[62] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 7494–7510. "Thus the English folk were brought low to the ground / through a false king that had no right to the kingdom, / and came to have a new lord that had more right; / but, as may be seen, he did not have a pure right, either. / And thus that land was brought into Norman hands, indeed, / So that it is doubtful whether it will ever be recovered. / The highmen that are in England are of the Normans, / And the lowmen are of the Saxons, as I understand; / So you see, on both sides, what right they have to it. / But I understand that this was done through God's will; / for while the men of this land were entirely heathen, / no land nor folk was against them in arms. / But now since that folk has converted to Christianity, / and kept very little to the promise that it took, / it has turned to sloth, and to pride, and to lechery, / to gluttony and its highmen turned to robbery, / As the ghosts in the vision said to St. Edward."
[63] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 7497.
[64] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 7500–7501.
[65] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 7498.
[66] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 7057.

throne in defiance of William; despite the fact that Harold is Anglo-Saxon by blood, he does not hold the sacralized lineage of Alfred. Thus, before the invasion, since Robert agrees with tradition that Harold the Anglo-Saxon is the enemy, there is no question of a "nation" of England fighting for freedom against a "nation" of Normandy. It is only at and following the moment of the Conquest that it is really stressed that William's right is not pure; prior to this moment Robert is an apologist for William. Because William is closely related to the Norman *gens*, that *gens* is the victor. The "kynde" of the English, associated with the English people, is defeated. William is the legitimate king of the English nevertheless, signified by the fact that Robert thereafter refers to him as if he were English.

From the perspective of lines 7494-7510, the Conquest has a retrospectively clarifying effect on what exactly has occurred to sovereignty over the realm. In Robert's account, two disasters have occurred: one that befalls the "kynde" lineage and one that befalls the kingdom's "riȝt." The first disaster, for which the Conquest is an apocalyptic corrective, had already befallen England when Harold assumed the throne, putting the kingdom "out of kunde"; this disaster is purely "English" since William was not involved at that point. The apocalyptic corrective itself is the second disaster. Framed through the prophetic interpretation of the green tree vision, the meaning of the Conquest hangs on two utterances of Edward which come close to contradicting each other: his early promise of the kingdom to William, and the prophetic dream he announces on his deathbed. The promise seems to legitimize William, yet the prophecy announces that his reign is fundamentally a wrong that needs to be corrected. The two sides of the conflict are determined not by ethnicity or nation but by whether-or-not Edward's cause is being supported. William is English by right, and because he is king, he can be considered to embody English interests.

Yet the Conquest is unambiguously a disaster, not a triumphant restoration. The second disaster, afflicting the kingdom's "riȝt," is that "al the franchise of england"[67] is lost when William conquers England, making the Normans "maistres," as they still are.[68] How can this be explained? Despite the apparent confusion, there seems to have been a basic unanimity among several fourteenth century English vernacular chroniclers about what this meant. This view diverges significantly from royalist interpretations, even those which agreed that the conquest was a disaster. Several other chroniclers from the first half of the fourteenth century read the conquest, as Robert does, as a literal total loss of freedom. Thomas Castleford, writing in 1327, tells of the effects of the Conquest:

> Fra Englisse blode Englande he [William] refte,
> Na maner soile wiþ þam he lefte ...
> Duelle þai salle alls bondes and thralles
> And do alle þat to thraldum falles,
> Lif forth and trauaile in bondage,
> þai and þar blode euer in seruage.[69]

[67] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 7264.

[68] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 7330. The Middle English Verse Life also insists on the total loss of franchise at this moment, despite William's legitimacy, at lines 1140–1141.

[69] Caroline Eckhardt, ed., *Castleford's Chronicle or The Boke of Brut* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), lines 31925–31926, 31935–31938. "William took England from English blood, / He left them without any land… / They shall all dwell as bondsmen and thralls, / And do everything pertaining to thralldom, / Live forever and work in bondage, / They and their blood forever in servitude."

A similar interpretation appears in the chronicle of Robert Mannyng a few years later:

> Siþen he [William] and his haf had þe lond in heritage,
> þat þe Inglis haf so lad þat þei lyue in seruage.
> He sette þe Inglis to be þralle, þat or was so fre.[70]

Like Robert of Gloucester, Mannyng stresses the present-day continuance of this predicament: [William] "Sette vs in seruage, of fredom felle þe floure; / þe Inglis þorgh taliage lyue ȝit in sorow fulle soure";[71] and again later adds: "Now ere þei in seruage fulle fele þat or was fre. / Our fredom þat day for euer toke þe leue."[72]

Even more extreme ideas occur in the *South English Legendary*'s Life of St. Wulfstan, which was written in the late thirteenth century and is set at the time of the Conquest. The *Life of Wulfstan* stresses Edward's holiness, shares the obsession with "kunde" and "tricherie," and the dualism of Norman and English; but more importantly elaborates the view that the "strange men" brought over by William at the Conquest are the source of a division within society that extends to the present day.[73] The *Life of Wulfstan* denies that Willam ever had any right, implying that the entire Plantagenet line is illegitimate. Even the common version of the *Life of Wulfstan* reads this way, but one West Midlands manuscript makes it explicit. The Bodley MS Ashmole 43 (called the A manuscript, from the second quarter of the fourteenth century) adds additional lines claiming that William

> ... ibroȝt [Harold] to gronde & alle his & al engelond also
> Ibrouȝt in strange menne hond þat lute riȝt hadde þerto
> þat neuer eft hit ne com aȝen to riȝt heires non
> Vnkunde heires ȝut hi beþ oure kynges euerichon
> And neiwat alle þis heie men & þis lowe also
> Vor þis Willam him lette crouny kyng þo þis was al ido
> & bisette muchedel of þe lond myd men of strange londe
> Neuereft to his kunde heires hit ne com ich vnderstonde.[74]

This manuscript also contains one of the three surviving copies of the Middle English

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70 Idelle Sullens, ed., *Robert Mannyng of Brunne: The Chronicle* (Binghamton: SUNY Press, 1996), Part Two, lines 139–141. "Since William and his kin have possessed the land in heritage / the English have had to live in servitude. / He put the English into thralldom, who once had been so free."

71 Sullens, *Robert Mannyng*, Part Two, lines 1620–1621. "William set us in servitude; the flower of freedom fell; / the English through talliage live still in very great sorrow."

72 Sullens, *Robert Mannyng*, Part Two, lines 1761–1762. "Now they have fallen into servitude, who before were ever free. / Our freedom left us forever that day."

73 Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna Mill, ed., *The South English Legendary*. 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), Vol. 1, "St. Wulfstan," lines 91–92.

74 D'Evelyn and Mill, *South English Legendary*, Vol. 1, 11, note to "St. Wulfstan" line 86. "brought Harold to the ground, along with his kin and all England / also brought in foreigners that had little right to the land / so that it never again came to its rightful heirs. / Each of our kings are still unrightful heirs / and nearly all the highmen and the lowmen also; / this all came about because William was crowned king / and he granted much of the land to foreigners / never again to return to its rightful heirs, as I understand."

Life of Saint Edward.[75] Its radical nativist stance, however, is not shared by the other chroniclers. Why is there such consistency among these early fourteenth century chronicles, in which the Conquest is represented as enslavement in polarized, nativist terms? This is not an image the Plantagenets, or for that matter any aristocrats, would have particularly wanted. Why slavery specifically? It is at the same time both strikingly consistent as well as inappropriate to the legal reality of servitude in England, and since the authors themselves were obviously not bondsmen it is hard to understand why they would identify with the unfree.[76] Turville-Petre has tried to explain this by suggesting that Mannyng, as a Gilbertine monk, may have been appealing to the more wealthy peasants as a means of financial support; yet as Douglas Moffat points out, if this is the case, "his legally baseless assertion of identity with those who are truly unfree must have rung hollow," nor would the wealthier peasants recognize themselves as being in a legal state of servitude.[77] The picture offered does not fit actual legal status of anyone likely to form an audience (whether textually or aurally) for one of these chronicles, so it is unclear who the "English" are supposed to be.[78] Moffat is correct to suggest that the chroniclers are rhetorically accentuating the gulf between the free "Normans" and unfree "English," while associating their audience with servitude, in order to play on feelings of resentment at the normal oppressions experienced by the lower strata of medieval English society, whether they were free or unfree and the hardships economic or judicial. Such appeals to common cause with peasants in matters of reform had been effective in the Montfort rebellion, as Carpenter has shown.[79]

This mode of complaint implies a specific analysis of contemporary power relations that these chronicles' historical vision goes to support. Far from mere rhetoric, the use of slavery-language has analytical value in the following sense. Whereas property rights and hierarchical social relations were traditional, the result of necessary human institutions in the fallen state, slavery (i.e. feudal bondage) was not just a more intense hierarchical relation but the qualitatively different result of war. Throughout the Middle Ages, the conventional understanding was that the state of slavery was inseparable from conquest in battle.[80] Bracton

[75] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, iii.

[76] As David Pelteret has shown, slavery had disappeared from England by the second half of the 1100s. See David Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995).

[77] Douglas Moffat, "Sin, Conquest, Servitude: English Self-Image in the Chronicles of the Early Fourteenth Century," in *The Work of Work*, ed. Allen Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994), 150–151. I follow Moffat's explanation of the rhetorical aims of the text, but not his conclusion that it is representative of a climate of actual ethnic conflict. One quote from the *Dialogus de Scaccario*, from the 1180s, is eloquent on whether societal dualism should be seen as ethnic or political: "The nations are so mixed that it can scarcely be decided (I mean in the case of the freemen) who is of English birth and who of Norman, except, of course, the villeins," quoted in Thorlac Turville-Petre, "Politics and Poetry in the Early Fourteenth Century: The Case of Robert Manning's Chronicle," *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 39 (1988): 24; that is, the ethnic divide is muddy, but the dualism of free/bonded is evident to everyone.

[78] On Mannyng and the reception of Mannyng's chronicle, see Thea Summerfield, *The Matter of Kings' Lives: The Design of Past and Present in the Early Fourteenth-Century Verse Chronicles by Pierre de Langtoft and Robert Mannyng* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 129–158; and Sullens, *Robert Mannyng*, 22–76. Three manuscripts survive which contain Mannyng's chronicle or part of it: Petyt MS 511, vol. 7 (Inner Temple Library, London), Lambeth MS 131 (Lambeth Palace Library, London), and a fragment of 175 lines in Rawlinson Miscellany MS D.913 (Bodleian Library, Oxford).

[79] Carpenter, "English Peasants in Politics 1258–1267."

[80] As Augustine points out in the *City of God*, Book XIX, chapter 15, the word 'slave' derived from the Latin word

attributed this rule to the "law of nations": "Free men are made bond by capture, by virtue of the *jus gentium* as was said above, 'for wars broke out and captures were their consequence etc'."[81] In other words, there was "a widespread recognition, not confined to the learned, that ... servitude is a consequence of war."[82]

In the context of this quasi-legal construal, the chroniclers' comments on slavery are less interesting as statements about national feeling than as statements about historical sovereignty. National pride is not aided by saying the English are a nation of slaves, although resentment might be. This device is aimed at persuading its audience to accept the idea that their present-day "slavery," which encompasses all who are not "heiemen," is abnormal and can be traced to a historical defeat. The term "slavery" is not used to accentuate the intensity or injustice of this inequality, but precisely its historical origin. According to Robert, the exercise of present-day power in its prevailing form is a direct consequence of the fact that William was the designated, though nonlineal, successor of Edward, yet had to enforce his right by conquest. Robert's point, expanding on the Middle English *Life* of Edward, is that what happened to the royal lineage and what happened to the power that is being exercised over the people are two different things. The type of power that began with William is not illegitimate but it is hateful and oppressive.

Saying that something is both legitimate *and* abhorrent perhaps seems more anarchically disruptive than merely saying it is illegitimate, but Robert's scheme does not require him to go so far as to reject kingship, or even Plantagenet kingship (unlike the *Wulfstan* author). Instead, Robert directs attention elsewhere; the real problem is that William installed an aristocracy of Norman lords (this echoes a complaint about Henry III's favorites). The apocalyptic punishment occurred because, in St Edward's reign—and Robert draws upon the Middle English Verse *Life* of Edward here—the nobility and bishops (or "heiemen") were corrupt, primarily in lechery and in stealing from the poor. After the Conquest, William replaced them with Norman lords and bishops who also afflicted the people with loss of freedom (irrespective of their moral qualities, which were appalling as well). Later, with Henry II's accession, the Middle English *Life* relates that "oure kings of englond beþ nou of riȝt kynde / & mony erles & bischoppis icome ek of þilke sed."[83] This implies that although *many* lords and bishops hold power legitimately, some may not. Robert and the later chroniclers expand upon this hint, carefully spelling out the implications for the present:

> Ac sone aȝen to engelond a sein Nicolas day he [William] com
> & kniȝtes of biȝonde se & oþer men al so
> He ȝef londes in engelond þat liȝtliche come þer to
> þat ȝute hor eirs holdeþ alonde monion
> & deseritede moni kundemen þat he huld is fon
> So þat þe mestedel of heyemen þat in engelond beþ
> Beþ icome of þe normans as ȝe nou iseþ

servare ('to conserve'), since slaves were those who were 'conserved' from the slaughter of the battlefield.

[81] Henry de Bracton, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae*. *Bracton Online*, Harvard Law School Library, 2003. http://bracton.law.harvard.edu/Framed/mframe.htm; volume 2, 30–31.

[82] Moffat, "Sin, Conquest, Servitude," 160.

[83] Moore, *The Middle English Verse Life*, lines 1111–1112. "Our English kings are now of the right lineage / and many earls and bishops also come of that lineage."

& men of religion of normandie al so
He feffede here mid londes & mid rentes al so
So þat vewe contreies beþ in engelonde
þat monekes nabbeþ of normandie somwat in hor honde.[84]

According to this interpretation, the most important consequence of the Conquest for the present is that, during the time of the three "unkynde" kings, a "Norman" power structure was put in place that was not (and could not be) corrected merely by the restoration of the legitimate royal line.[85] Therefore, although the Plantagenet kings may have carried both Anglo-Saxon and Norman blood, their claim to heal divisions within the kingdom is denied. When he reaches the reign of Henry II, as if to rebut the Plantagenet claim to have reconciled Norman and English, Robert of Gloucester traces the source of the conflict between Henry and Thomas Becket directly to the Norman laws introduced by William I and his successors.[86] The logic of his position, at least, is that only a physical replacement of the "Norman" aristocracy (as opposed to legal reform or other measures) could correct the legacy of the post-Conquest regime.[87]

Whether or not it constituted their wholesale belief, this discursive position was shared by the chroniclers Robert Mannyng and Thomas Castleford, and the *Wulfstan*-author. All seem to be in agreement that William I's accession was only partly legitimate, and the period of Norman domination introduced a new kind of slavery into England, which, despite Plantagenet claims to have united the blood of the two peoples, continues to divide the people of the realm against themselves. I will call this the "radical view" of the Conquest. In this way they are able to combine an acceptance and possibly even respect for Plantagenet legitimacy with an uncompromisingly critical view of power. Though these writers lack a sophisticated vocabulary for sociopolitical analysis, they are sure that conquest entails slavery, and that contemporary social arrangements can be explained historically. Above all, they see the consequences of the Conquest as being evident in fourteenth-century law. One of the clearest expressions of the implications of this view is that of Thomas Castleford, who bitterly

[84] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 7577–7587. "But soon, on St. Nicholas' Day, William came to England again / and knights and also other men from overseas. / He gave lands to them in England recklessly / that their heirs still hold in many areas; / and he disinherited many gentlemen that he considered his foes / so that the majority of highmen that are now in England / descend from the normans, as you now see / and Norman men of religion as well; / he gave them their lands and rents also /so that there are few parts of England / that monks of Normandy do not hold, to some degree."

[85] Robert's assessment of King John also condemns his importation of foreign lords while hinting at the present day; after first being forced by his barons to grant again "þe gode olde lawe / þat was bi seint edwardes day," in 1215, John later reneged and "wanne him muche strange folc of biȝonde se / & some as god it wolde ne come neuere aȝe / & largeliche hom ȝef inou of is barones londe," Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 10495–10496 and 10508–10510. John "gathered to himself many foreigners from overseas / (and may God will that such never come again) / and gave them large amounts of his barons' lands." Robert is fairly consistent throughout in associating the term "heiemen" with *normanitas* and "englisse" with his favored side; see for instance the account of the civil war during Henry III's minority between supporters of Robert Fitzwalter and Louis of France; Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 10585–10588 and 10621–10623. Even the idolized Simon de Montfort comes in for criticism when certain "frensse men" whom he made wardens of castles oppress the people, until by order of parliament "iremewed al clene þe frenssemen were," Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, line 11455.

[86] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, lines 9639–9642.

[87] Wright, *The Metrical Chronicle*, cf. lines 11016–11018 and 11455.

elucidates how Norman domination exists in the present:

> Shirefes he [William] sette and ek iustise
> On alle þas walde agains him rise,
> þe domes to saie in Frankisse toung,
> þe folk to deme, baþ aelde and yong,
> Fore þe bondes of Englisse linage
> Salde noght witte, bi þe langage,
> How þai þam dampnede, wele oþer ille,
> Bot als bestes stande to þar wille.[88]

That French was the language of the law-court was a reality everyone knew, but the view Castleford advances here is more about power and legality in the fourteenth century than about language. The "English" are not dealt with as humans, but are excluded from legality "als bestes" and governed not by right but by pure "wille." In Castleford's eyes, the salient characteristic of these laws is not their Frenchness *per se*, in a nationalist sense, but their incomprehensibility to the "folk." What seem to be laws are not laws at all because they cannot be understood and responded to; their meaning is hidden, and as a consequence they are mere instruments of coercion.

According to the radical view, the Conquest introduced slavery only to the English, and not to the Normans, who now coexist with them in society. This leads to a dualistic interpretation of society, one that rejects as illusory any unitary "nationalism." The originary "English" freedom represented by the reign of St Edward is still waiting to be restored. In this view, the true, original legal system and customary freedoms are English, and associated with the partly subordinated lineage of Edward; but the power being exercised is Norman, and also ostensibly legitimate (or, granted legitimacy by a coercive legal system). The radical chroniclers build these ideas into a vivid narrative of English history that connects it to deeply felt injustices in concrete terms. Whether they appealed to existing nativist sentiments, or helped to create them, the chronicle accounts are not nationalist or impulsively anti-French in an ethnic sense; they praise the virtue of William and the Normans where appropriate. They are more interested in power than ethnicity or nation.

Robert's view is of course highly stylized, modeling the situation of the Conquest on that of the rebellion and vice versa. However, we should not see the schemas deployed by Robert of Gloucester and Mannyng as simply reducible to the Montfortian-inspired discourse, because they differ substantially. Robert's vision of the Conquest's legacy is not one that the barons would have wanted. While the rebellion's appeal to a dualist nativist dynamic, support for the poor, and a cult figure like de Montfort may have energized a writer like Robert, his attempt to historically situate the conflict in the events of the Conquest and his creative expansions on Monfortian tropes are original (but suggested by the Middle English *Life of Edward*). Robert picks up on the two aspects of the rebellion's discourse that were least congenial to the barons' interests: concern for the poor, and dislike of anything to do with

[88] Eckhardt, *Castleford's Chronicle*, lines 31943–31950. "William ordered the sheriffs and judges, / for all who would stand against him, / to pronounce judgments in the French language, / to judge the folk, both old and young, / so that the bondsmen of England lineage / would not understand, by the language, / how they were condemned, fairly or unfairly, / but would obey their will like beasts."

Norman "heiemen," which translated into a disdain for feudal servitude generally. In Robert's hands the political language of the rebellion produced a version of history contrary to its ideological aims—whereas it was a conservative form of rebellion, his vision implies radicalism. As Joel Rosenthal once pointed out (and Claire Valente more recently affirmed), baronial rebellions were "a ritualized form of rebellion and, therefore, a conservative one. This was important, because the aims of the barons always had to be quite limited—to destroy the king (or, Rosenthal adds, the administrative state) was to destroy the basis of their own authority."[89] Robert's chronicle embodies a point of view congenial to commoners who would sympathize with baronial rebellion as it presented itself in their interests, but not its true conservative form. His deployment of the idea of slavery amounts to a rejection of conservatism. The barons' cultivation of anti-French sentiment is not the same as Robert's overheated identification of all "heiemen" with foreign enslavers.

The radical view of the conquest, beginning with the Middle English verse *Life* of Edward, frames the issue of sovereignty at the Conquest through ideas of sacral kingship. The distinctive perspective on politics found in the Middle English lives of Edward has been neglected in favor of their role in promoting either a successful or unsuccessful nationalist movement. If we look at the way sacral kingship is used to frame the chroniclers' complaints, however, this body of writing can be seen as a coherent mode of critical history; it is a critique of the way royal power relates to the realm.

In being counterposed to views such as Aelred's, the sacral qualities of Edward invoked by the radical chroniclers recall an opposition between two different models of holy kingship that has been discussed by André Vauchez and Janet Nelson.[90] Nelson points out that one view of royal sacrality implies the holiness of the royal line's authority in and of itself, as ascribed and not achieved, in a quasi-"imperial" fashion that is conceptually similar to Roman rulership. On the other hand, an alternative model of saint-king is typically presented in the fashion of a "crowned monk" or as a martyr: humble, innocent, and ostensibly weak in a military sense. This concept of sanctity in effect opposes the former model of rulership because "what distinguishes a saint from a sacral or holy person is the very obvious, but crucial, fact that a saint is dead… The living determine the criteria of sanctity and establish the qualifications of the prospective saint."[91] Since it was granted by the church and popular acclaim, sanctity was dependent on powers outside the monarchy itself. Being dead, the holy king could function as a check on his descendents, a yardstick for measuring their behavior. While Edward is not a martyr, his positioning as part of a defeated lineage aligns him somewhat more closely with this oppositional model—yet the model is also radicalized by its historical framing. This way of looking at Edward fits within, and is to some degree supported by, a broader tendency toward the "canonization of opposition to the King" in England, delineated by Josiah Cox Russell, John Theilmann, and several others.[92] Paradoxically, Edward

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[89] Joel Rosenthal, "The King's 'Wicked Advisers' and Medieval Baronial Rebellions," *Political Science Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (1967): 597; and Claire Valente, *The Theory and Practice of Revolt in Medieval England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

[90] Janet Nelson, "Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship," in *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 39–44; André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158–167.

[91] Nelson, "Royal Saints," 43.

[92] Josiah C. Russell, "The Canonization of Opposition to the King in Angevin England," in *Anniversary Essays in Medieval History*, ed. C. H. Taylor (New York, 1929), 279–290; John Theilmann, "Political Canonization and

here functions as a symbol of opposition to the reigning king, despite being a king himself, and he joins a succession of other oppositional "saints" or similar figures such as Hugh of Lincoln, Edmund Rich, Thomas of Cantilupe, Thomas of Lancaster, and of course Simon de Montfort. However, precisely because he is a king, and because of the particular nature of his reign, Edward's relationship to the law and to national history is pointedly different than that of the other "oppositional saints." Rather than promoting a more generalized opposition or a prestigious royal lineage, Edward's sanctity is used first and foremost to provide authoritative truth-value to one interpretation of the Conquest through his vision. This is 'apocalyptic' in the etymological, revelatory sense: Edward's sovereignty consists partly in his supernatural ability to determine the true meaning of the Conquest. Though suppressed, he is a more authoritative locus of truth than the legal system enforced by the reigning, living kings; above all, he is seen as a dead king who represents the people or values that are out of favor. He is messianic in that his suppressed power, which guarantees a utopian peace for the kingdom, is destined to return.[93] For those who agree with Robert of Gloucester's interpretation of Edward's vision, Edward's apocalyptic return is at best incomplete in the Plantagenets—and at worst, their policy of favoritism to French officials represents a violent renewal of the Conquest.

Political Symbolism in Medieval England," *Journal of British Studies* 29 (1990): 241–266; John W. McKenna, "Popular Canonization as Political Propaganda: The Cult of Archbishop Scrope," *Speculum* 45 (1970): 608–623; Mary-Anne Stouck, "Saints and Rebels: Hagiography and Opposition to the King in Late Fourteenth-Century England," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, n.s., 24 (1997): 75–94; and Valente, "Simon de Montfort."

[93] On the late medieval prophecies of Edward the Confessor's return, see: Lesley Coote, *Prophecy and Public Affairs in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000).