Text and context: author and audience in John Lydgate's *Life of St Edmund*

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1. Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1433, the twelve year-old King Henry VI arrived at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. He was greeted by five-hundred townspeople, his confessor William Alnwick, Bishop of Norwich, and William Curteys, the Abbot of Bury. Henry remained the guest of the Abbey until Easter the following year, dividing his time between the Abbey itself and the Abbot's palace at Elmswell.[1] The Abbey of Bury St Edmunds was one of the largest and wealthiest religious houses in fifteenth-century England and therefore a suitable choice for such an extended stay.[2] Renowned as a shrewd clerical politician, it is unsurprising that Abbot Curteys chose to mark the occasion of the royal visit by commissioning John Lydgate, a monk of the abbey and prolific author, to produce a translation of the legend of St Edmund, the abbey's patron and erstwhile king of the region, 'out of Latin', with the intention, as Lydgate recounts, 'to yeue it to the kyng' as a 'remembraunce' of his stay.[3] Lydgate already enjoyed an established relationship with the Lancastrian monarchy to the extent that he is often described as the unofficial propagandist for the regime.[4] It is likely that

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[1] Curteys's Register, British Library Add. MS 14848, fol. 128r-v; this passage is reprinted in Craven Ord, 'Account of the Entertainment of King Henry the Sixth at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', *Archaeologia*, 15 (1806), 65-71.

[2] See Walter F. Schirmer, John Lydgate, *A Study in the Culture of the Fifteenth Century*, tr. Ann Keep (London: Methuen, 1961) pp. 8-23 for a concise account of the Abbey. More detailed discussions of the Abbey's history, architecture, culture and artistic role and finances can be found in *Bury St Edmunds: medieval art, architecture, archaeology and economy,* ed. Antonia Grandsden, British Archaeological Association conference transactions, 20 (Great Britain: BAA, 1998).

[3] For an account of Curteys's career see Thomas Arnold, ed., *Memorials of Bury St Edmunds Abbey*, 3 vols. (Rolls Series, 189-96), III, xxix-xxxiii. John Lydgate's 'Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund' is printed in *Altenglische Legenden. Neue Folge*, ed. Carl Horstmann (Heilbronn: Henniger, 1881), pp. 376-445, I.192. All other references will be in accordance with this edition and will be given in parantheses in the text.

[4] Recent discussions of Lydgate's laureate activities include Maura Nolan, *John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 2005) and Scott Morgan-Straker, 'Propaganda, Intentionality and the Lancastrain Lydgate', in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 98-128.

Curteys sought to capitalise on this connection in order to promote Bury's status, privileges and prestige.[5]

Lydgate's poem is divided into three Books: the first describes Edmund's parentage and upbringing and the circumstances in which he came to succeed to the throne of East Anglia; the second tells of his reign, the events which precipitate his martyrdom and his death at the hands of invading Vikings; the third is initially concerned with Edmund's cousin Fremund, the story of whose martyrdom is followed by details of miracles associated with St Edmund and concludes with the building of a new abbey church and shrine under the abbacy of Baldwin (1065-97). The poem was a popular success; twelve manuscripts of the complete text plus a number of selections or fragments survive.[6]

2. The *Life* as a devotional text

John Lydgate was the most prolific English poet of his day, producing nearly one hundred and forty five thousand lines of verse and around two hundred prose texts. He wrote several *vitae* in addition to the *Life*, including his most popular work, the *Life of Our Lady*, which survives in fifty manuscripts, as well as those of Sts. Alban and Amphibal, Austin, George, Giles, Margaret and Petronilla.[7] He was well-versed in the traditions of late-medieval hagiography, and therefore ideally placed to undertake Abbot Curteys's commission. A saint's *Life* was an appropriate gift with which to present the young king, as at the age of twelve Henry was already demonstrating the profound religious piety that was to be one of the most

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[5] Other cultural artefacts produced at Bury during the period of Curetys' abbacy evince similar promotional aims. These are discussed by Nicholas J. Heale, 'Religious and Intellectual Interests at Bury St Edmunds Abbey at Bury and the Nature of English Benedictinism: MS Bodely 240 in Context'. D.Phil thesis, Oxford, 1994.

[6] The manuscripts are detailed in *The Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr, A Facsimile of British Library MS Harley 2278, with an introduction by A.S.G. Edwards* (London: British Library, 2004) p. 16, and it is no. 3440 in Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards, *A New Index of Middle English Verse* (London: British Library, 2005).

[7] *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's* Life of Our Lady, ed. Joseph A. Lauritis, Ralph A. Klinefekter and Vernon F. Gallagher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961); *The Life of St Alban and Saint Amphibal*, ed. J.E. van der Westhuizen (Leider: Brill, 1974); 'St Austin', pp. 193-206; 'St George', pp. 145-54; 'St Gyle', pp. 161-73; 'St Margaret', pp. 173-92; 'St Petronilla', pp. 154-9, specify that each of these texts is included in the following volume *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part 1, ed. Henry Noble McCracken, Early English Texts Society, es 107 (London: Oxford University Press, 1911). Reference can be simplified: EETS e.s. 107, (1911)

characteristic features of his reign.[8] During his stay at Bury Henry displayed particular devotion to the abbey's patron, praying regularly before his tomb, and Lydgate records that before the king departed he was 'meuyd in him-silf of his benignyte,/ of ther chapitle a brother forto be' (I.154-5), prostrating himself before Edmund's shrine as he was admitted to the confraternity of the abbey.[9]

The *Life* is ostensibly a characteristic, if lengthy, example of late-medieval hagiography: a branch of devotional literature intended simultaneously to glorify the saint whose tale it told and provide a didactic exemplum for the reader.[10] It is firmly located within the St Edmund devotional tradition, which by the fifteenth century had grown lengthy and complex.[11] The first devotional text concerning Edmund was written sometime between 986-988 by Abbo, a monk of Fleury, who enjoyed a considerable reputation as a hagiographer in England.[12] Abbo's *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* proved popular and influential; it was subsequently translated into Old English by Ælfric, and, by the time Archdeacon Hermann was writing at Bury a century later, the story of the martyrdom seemed well enough known for him to feel no need to repeat it, referring his readers instead to Abbo's text.[13] Lydgate, like numerous authors before him, sought to produce a text which glorified its sainted subject and sought to 'putte in remembraunce' 'the noble story' of Edmund's life and martyrdom (I.81).

Lydgate's poem is the culmination of the medieval legendary tradition concerning St Edmund. At 3,693 lines it is one of the longest versions produced, and,

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[8] For a description of Henry VI's religious proclivities see Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981) especially pp. 3-21.

[9] Curteys's Register, in Craven Ord, 'Account of the Entertainment of King Henry the Sixth at the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', 65-71.

[10] See, for example, a *Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), especially Sarah Salih, 'Introduction: Saints, Cults and Lives in Late Medieval England', pp. 1-25.

[11] For a concise account of the legend see Grant Loomis, 'The Growth of the St Edmund Legend', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology, Language and Literature*, 14 (1932), 83-113 and Dorothy Whitelock, 'Fact and Fiction in the Legend of St Edmund', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 31 (1969), 217-33 and Antonia Gransden, 'Legends and Traditions concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', in her/ Gransden *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London & Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1992), pp.81-106.

[12] The most recent version of Abbo is in *Three Lives of English Saints*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Toronto Medieval Latin Tests, 1972), pp. 67-87.

[13] Ælfric's translation is printed in *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. with a translation into modern English by W.W. Skeat (Early English Text Society, os, lxxxvi, lxxxii, xciv, cxiv, 1881-1900, 2 vols. In 4 parts), ii.314-35. Hermann's *De Miraculis Sancti Eadmundi* is reproduced in *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, vol. I, ed. Thomas Arnold, pp. 26-92.

written largely in rhyme royal stanzas, is the first rendering of the legend into English verse. The copy presented to Henry VI, preserved in British Library MS Harley 2278, is lavishly illustrated with one hundred and twenty high quality miniatures which provide a unique visual parallel to the text. It is therefore interesting in its own right for the insight it offers into the development of the textual cult of one of the most popular devotional figures of the Middle Ages, and the *Life* has traditionally been discussed in relation to Lydgate's sizeable canon of devotional works.[14] However, its creation for the young King Henry simultaneously locates it within a political sphere and in this article I will argue that re-reading the *Life* alongside its oft-neglected illustrative scheme in relation to its intended audience reveals its concerns with contemporary politics and affairs of state to an extent which has hitherto largely been overlooked.

3.   The *Life* as a work of secular instruction

Lydgate was clearly writing within a well-established hagiographic tradition, but closer reading reveals that the *Life* is far more than a simple 'translacion' (I.135) and is, in fact. extremely complex in its intertextual indebtedness. Lydgate's *vita* is sophisticated and elaborate and includes details not found in previous written sources. Arguably, the most striking departure from the established tradition may be found in Lydgate's description of the events precipitating the martyrdom. Abbo of Fleury, and the subsequent *vitae* and *passio* based upon his seminal text, depict Edmund as peaceable to the extent that, in the wake of the terrible destruction wrought by the invading Danes, he willingly surrenders himself and his kingdom of his 'own free will' in order to prevent bloodshed.[15] Abbo presents this choice as integral to Edmund's sanctity: willingness to die in defence of your faith was fundamental to the identity of a Christian martyr, and an almost certain route to saintliness. In contrast to the established model, Lydgate's Edmund goes into battle against the Danes, attacking the invading army camped outside Thetford (II.365-395). In his description of the ensuing battle, which rages 'from the morwe' until 'it drouh to nyht', Lydgate

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[14] See, for example, Derek Pearsall, John Lydgate (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) pp. 255-293 and more recently Fiona Somerset, '"Hard is with seyntis for to make affray": Lydgate the "Poet-Propagandist" as Hagiographer', in *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture and Lancastrian England*, ed. Larry Scanlon and James Simpson, pp. 258-278.

[15] Abbo of Fleury, *Passio Sancti Eadmund, ed. Michael Winterbottom,* esp. pp. 74-8.

is unequivocal in the part played by Edmund: he proves himself a 'ful manly knyht', from whom the enemy fly 'lik sheepe', and who sheds 'ful gret plente' 'of paynym blood'. Lydgate describes the battle in lurid detail:

> The soil of slauhtre I-steynyd was with blood,
> The sharp swerd of Edmond turnyd red:
> For there was noon that his strook withstood
> Nor durste abide afforn him for his hed;
> And many a paynym in the feeld lay ded,
> And many cristen in that mortal striff
> Our feith defendyng that day lost his liff.
>
> (II.386-392)

A detailed miniature accompanies the text, depicting Edmund in full armour in the midst of the fray, wielding a mighty sword to great effect, the Danish dead heaped around him (folio 50). Despite his resounding defeat of the Danes, as Edmund surveys the carnage of the battle field, he is so appalled by the loss of life that he resolves 'for Cristis sake shedyng of blood teschew', vowing to give his own life to prevent further bloodshed (II.427). It is at this point, when Edmund chooses the path of martyrdom in favour of further conflict, that the narrative of the *Life* rejoins that of the other *vitae*. Edmund is still described in martial terms but now, rather than fighting a physical battle, he bears a 'myhti sheeld' of 'Cristes feith' and a 'gostly swerd whettid with constance' (II.710-11). He renounces the way of war and submits meekly and patiently to his fate.

These differences may be accounted for by Lydgate's desire as an author to leave his mark upon the Edmund tradition, but it also seems likely that the circumstances in which the *Life* was produced, specifically the audience for which it was written and illustrated, influenced his presentation of the material. Lydgate frequently evokes Henry as the imagined audience of the *Life* and offers Edmund as an 'exaumplaire' (I.419) whose devotional practices the young king should seek to emulate. However, the emphasis upon Edmund's martial exploits and his active defence of his realm attests to an alternative version of his identity which accords with the behaviour expected of a successful temporal king. Lydgate's assertion that Edmund will be 'a merour cler' (I.419) into which Henry may gaze in order to see an image of regal perfection is a verbal echo of the 'mirror for princes' genre, didactic

texts outlining the character and behaviour of the ideal ruler.[16] Katherine Lewis has argued convincingly that this emphasis upon Edmund's exemplary kingship is due to Lydgate's intention that the *Life* should function as a mirror for princes, comparing it with the most popular example of the genre in later medieval England, the *Secreta Secretorum*, and demonstrating the ways in which Lydgate's depiction of Edmund accords with the ideal king described by this and other literary mirrors.[17]

A mirror for princes was a particularly appropriate gift for the young king. Henry VI succeeded to the throne at the age of just nine months after the death of his celebrated father Henry V and as such was denied the opportunity of emulating a successful reigning monarch.[18] Frequently characterised as the semi-official propagandist for the Lancastrian regime, Lydgate was writing for the son of one of his most significant former patrons, and in the absence of Henry senior, offers Edmund as a surrogate model of exemplary kingly behaviour. On several occasions Lydgate makes it clear that Edmund is a role model whom Henry should seek to imitate; within the opening lines of the poem Lydgate advises that 'Edmund shal be his [Henry's] guide' (Prologue, 45), equating the saint with the nine worthies as a figure deserving of emulation.

The manner in which Lydgate offers Edmund as an exemplar is particularly apparent in a number of seemingly anachronistic passages which describe Edmund engaging with fifteenth rather than ninth-century enemies. Thus Lydgate's account of Edmund's suppression of the Lollard heresy, where he claims that 'to holichirche he was so strong a wal' and that he 'hated fals doctryn in especial' (I.1015-16), should not be read as an historical anachronism or an authorial error, but rather an allusion to the contemporary monarch and the difficulties he could expect to encounter during his reign. Less than two years before Lydgate was commissioned to write the *Life*, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, suppressed a Lollard uprising on the king's behalf

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[16] For the uses of mirrors for princes in royal education see Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry. The Education of English Kings and Aristocracy 1066-1530* (London & New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 88-103 and John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, pp. 16-38 for the norms of kingship established by mirrors for princes.

[17] Katherine J. Lewis, 'Edmund of East Anglia, Henry VI and Ideals of Kingly Masculinity', *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P.H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 158-73.

[18] On Henry's youth and upbringing see Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 51-7.

whilst Henry VI was in France for his coronation.[19] Derek Pearsall describes the anxiety experienced by the clerical establishment upon the succession of Henry VI, as it was feared that he would not prove to be so dedicated an upholder of the Church and persecutor of heterodoxy as his father.[20] On this occasion Lydgate was commissioned to write *A Defense of Holy Church* as a means of reassuring the establishment, and in the ballad composed for Henry VI's coronation in 1429 he urged that he would 'heretykes and Lollards for to oppresse'.[21] The reference to Lollards in the *Life* is therefore another means of suggesting to King Henry the approach he should adopt towards the defence of the Church, by means of the exemplum of the saint-king Edmund.

Lydgate is also keen to emphasise the similarities between the two rulers. On several occasions he makes reference to Edmund's youth, claiming that he was fifteen at the time of his coronation (I.857). Yet Edmund's youth is not seen as problematic, but serves to emphasise his exemplary nature, as Lydgate writes that despite his youth he was a wise ruler: 'Yong of yeeris, old of discresciuon/ Flourying in age, fructuous of sanesse' (I.396-7). The natural imagery suggests that the young Edmund was vital and imbued with life and potential. Henry was himself a young king, and Edmund would therefore have been a particularly appropriate role model, with such positive references to Edmund's youth at the time of his succession emphasising that good kingship was possible at any age.

In order to corroborate his portrayal of Edmund as a regal role model, Lydgate refers his readers to 'cronycle' sources (Prologue, 51) where they may find further evidence of Edmund's 'Royal dignyte' (Prologue, 52). Lydgate's recourse to chronicles is in keeping with the education prescribed for young princes.[22] When Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, was appointed in 1428 as Henry VI's guardian during the king's minority he was instructed to 'use examples culled from history books to teach the young king to 'love, worship and drede God'.[23] This imperative goes some way to accounting for Lydgate's deviation from the established devotional

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[19] For details of this incident see, for example, Richard Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI,* pp. 139-141.

[20] Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-bibliography,* p. 18.

[21] 'Ballad to King Henry VI on His Coronation', *Minor Poems*, II, ed. H.N. MacCracken (Early English Text Society, os, cxcii (London: Oxford University Press, 1934) 31: lines 9-10.

[22] See Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, pp. 88-103.

[23] John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, p.54.

tradition, as although Lydgate's account of Edmund's battle with the Danes is unique amongst the *vitae*, the first 'secular' account of his death in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* presents an account of a similarly militaristic hero:

> In this year the [Danish] army rode over Mercia into East Anglia, and took winter-quarters at Thetford; and in that winter King Eadmund fought against them, and the Danes gained the victory, and slew the king, and subdued all that land and destroyed all the monasteries which they came to.[24]

Although brief, the status of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as the source for numerous subsequent historical works meant that its description of Edmund's demise was repeated virtually unchanged throughout the Middle Ages.[25] Lydgate's recourse to this alternate version of Edmund's identity undermines his claim that his *vita* is a 'translation'; his intertextuality is clearly far more subtle and complex. He unites both strands of a bifurcated tradition in order to present St Edmund as a role model which would appeal both to Henry VI's religious proclivities whilst also fulfilling the requirement for him to be taught the principles of successful Christian kingship, demonstrating the fundamental role of an audience in determining the content of a text.

4.   Codicological context

This is reiterated when we consider the *Life* in its codicological context. It has been a common phenomenon in hagiographic scholarship to consider literary sources in isolation from their manuscript contexts. Cynthia Hahn suggests that 'it is often assumed that pictures merely illustrate their texts' and are entirely dependent on the words they illustrate, rendering them secondary and subordinate to the verbal narrative.[26] However, such logocentrism robs a text of its original performative context. In her discussion of manuscripts containing late-medieval English hagiographic texts, Mary Beth Long maintains that 'to ignore the physical context in which hagiographical texts are found – pictures, page material and thickness, and ink colour, as well as the content of accompanying texts and marginalia – is to miss a

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[24] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a revised translation ed. Dorothy Whitelock with D.C Douglas and S.I Tucker (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961) p. 46.

[25] Loomis, 'The Growth of the St Edmund Legend', 83-113.

[26] Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictoria Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Centuries* (Berkely and London: University of California Press, 2001) p.45.

vital piece of the interpretative experience medieval readers would have of the individual *vitae*.'[27] Considering a work in its original context is particularly important in the case of a poet such as Lydgate. He truly was a multimedia poet: his poems were frequently accompanied by images, not only in manuscripts but also stitched into wall-hangings and alongside paintings, perhaps most famously accompanying a large painting of the Dance of Death on the wall of the cloisters of Old St Paul's Cathedral or accompanying a series of decorative allegorical pastries presented at Henry VI's coronation banquet. A number of his other works were written to be performed, either acted or sung.[28]

Three copies of the *Life* are extensively illustrated.[29] Of these, the first to be produced was the presentation copy made for Henry VI contained in British Library MS Harley 2278. MS Harley 2278 contains a single verse text of the *Life* accompanied by 120 miniatures. The manuscript consists of 119 parchment leaves, with each leaf measuring approximately 250 x 170mm. The text is contained in a ruled frame 140 x 110mm. The manuscript is largely in quires of eight leaves.[30] It was copied by a single scribe in a semi-cursive hand who wrote in a Suffolk dialect.[31] In this manuscript the ratio of illustrations to text is extremely high: they average more than one for each leaf and are more or less equally distributed throughout the text. Apart from the two full-page illustrations at the front of the manuscript, the rest are usually carefully positioned in relation to the verbal narrative. A.S.G. Edwards claims that the overall effect is to create 'an unusually powerful synthesis in which the verbal and visual elements of the manuscript complement one another in a carefully integrated way', noting that it is hard to point to precedents for this degree of integration of text and image in the preparation of fifteenth-century Middle English verse manuscripts.[32] Except for a few scenes which may derive from older

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[27] Mary Beth Long, 'Corpora and Manuscripts, Authors and Audiences', in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006) pp. 47-69, p. 49.

[28] Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371-1449): A Bio-bibliography,* esp. pp. 25-32.

[29] These are British Library MS Harley 2278, British Library MS Yates Thompson 27 and the Arundel Castle Manuscript.

[30] For further description of the manuscript see A.S.G. Edwards's 'Introduction' to *The Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr*, pp. 13-15.

[31] The scribal characteristics of the manuscript are described by C.E. Wright, *English Vernacular Hands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 18; on the dialect see A. McIntosh et al., *A Linguistic Atlas of Later Middle English*, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), III, pp. 489-90.

[32] A.S.G. Edwards's 'Introduction' to *The Life of St Edmund, King and Martyr*, p. 11.

iconographies it is likely that most of the pictures were created for Lydgate's newly composed poem.[33] It is also probable that Lydgate was involved in the selection of scenes. The inclusion of a miniature draws attention to the aspect of the narrative which it illustrates, and the range of miniatures throughout the *Life* certainly supports the role of a text as a mirror for princes.

In a 'chaptile' describing 'the Roial gouernance of seynt Edmond aftir he was crownyd kyng of Estyngland' (I.858-1088) Lydgate describes in detail Edmund's rule of good government, his provision of justice and his concern with matters of state. He ensures that the Church, the law and trade are honourably run by honest men (I.892-934), and defends the Church vigorously against heresy (I.1015-16). Edmund is charitable: 'geyn poore folk shet was not his gate,/His warderope open, alle needy to releue' (I.1084-5). He governs in accordance with the four cardinal virtues and his rule is one of temperance and 'noon excesse' (I.869). Lydgate uses the conventional image of the body politic to illustrate Edmund's maintenance of 'dew ordre' and the balance between the various social estates (I.941). He encourages his nobles to follow his example by ensuring they attend church and by joining them in suitable past-times such as hunting and hawking and other knightly activities at which he excels (I.1047-53). These lengthy descriptions of Edmund's kingship are accompanied by several miniatures. First, we see Edmund's coronation, depicted in a larger miniature, underlining its importance (folio 31). The next folio contains an image of Edmund holding court (folio 32), followed by illustrations of Edmund on his throne (folio 34), Edmund hearing pleas (folio 36) and Edmund engaging in kingly sports (folio 37). By way of contrast, we next see the Danish king Lothbroc and his sons worshipping idols (folio 39): Edmund's just Christian kingship is directly contrasted with the pagan Danes. In this instance the illustrations of Harley 2278 are clearly reinforcing the *Life's* didactic 'mirror for princes' message by placing considerable emphasis upon Edmund engaged in appropriate kingly behaviour. So in Harley 2278 the pictures form a coherent visual parallel to the text of the poem and both the verbal and visual narratives reinforce the understanding of the *Life* as a mirror for princes.

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[33] Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, II, p. 228.

The role of the audience in determining the presentation of a narrative is emphasised by comparison of the presentation copy with subsequent copies of the *Life*. Two other versions of the *Life*, in British Library MS Yates Thompson 47 and the Arundel Castle Manuscript, are extensively illustrated[34]. The manuscripts are similar in size, with MS Yates Thompson 47 being slightly smaller than the Arundel Castle MS: 245 x 170mm and 267 x 184mm respectively. Both are written on parchment. Yates Thompson 47 contains fifty three miniatures, half-page or smaller, in colour and gold. The page by page arrangement of the Arundel Castle MS is identical, although a number of leaves are missing with the result that it contains four fewer miniatures than is Yates Thompson counterpart.[35] The manuscripts were written by the same scribe in a gothic cursive script, although their miniatures were executed by different artists. Both can be dated to after 1461 by the substitution of Edward IV's name for Henry VI's in the appeals to the monarch found throughout the poem. Kathleen Scott describes these two manuscripts as 'virtual twins'.[36] There are few differences in illustration and only minor variations in iconography and composition: the miniatures always have the same subject, always occur in the same position on the page, are always made to the same height of one or two stanzas and are usually identical in composition and frequently in their repetition of colours for the same objects, and henceforth will be referred to as a group. There are more than twice as many illustrations in Harley 2278 so there is no question of a page by page similarity between the three manuscripts. However, the extent to which there are thematic similarities, in the sense of similar episodes being depicted in similar ways, enables the emphasis of the presentation manuscript to be further considered.

Harley 2278 seems to have exerted some influence over the format of the pictures in the descendent manuscripts as they are similarly embedded within the text. Its influence on their iconography, however, appears limited: only five miniatures from the presentation manuscript appear to have been used as models in the later copies. All the major episodes of the legend are illustrated in Yates Thompson 47 and Arundel Castle; the martyrdom sequence, for example, is illustrated in ten miniatures

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[34] For Yates Thompson 47 see Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, II, pp. 307-10 and for the Arundel Castle MS see Kathleen Scott, 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: A newly located manuscript in Arundel Castle', *Viator*, 13 (1982), 335-66.

[35] For comparative descriptions of the manuscripts see Kathleen Scott, 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: A newly located manuscript in Arundel Castle', 340-7.

[36] Kathleen Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390-1490*, II, p. 308.

in Harley 2278 and seven in the descendent manuscripts, a remarkably similar number given the relative total number of miniatures. Other important episodes, such as the murder of Lothbroc which precipitates the Danish invasion, are illustrated in similar detail. There are, however, some notable disparities. In particular, sequences of miniatures in Harley 2278 which endorse the *Life* as a mirror for princes are absent from the later copies. For example, all three manuscripts show Edmund being crowned and in each the illustrations are of the larger size. However, in Yates Thompson 47 and the Arundel Castle manuscript the next illustration occurs at the beginning of Book 2 where we see Lothbroc hunting with his hounds. The sequence of miniatures illustrating Edmund's kingly conduct is similarly lacking.

These differences between the illustrative schemes may be variously accounted for.[37] I would suggest that whilst it was appropriate in the presentation copy to emphasise the role of the *Life* as a mirror for princes, when the poem was reproduced for a different audience this was no longer fitting or desirable and the illustrative scheme was adjusted to accommodate these new conditions. Far from merely illustrating the text they accompany, the miniatures are possessed of their own agency and are able to influence reception and understanding. Cynthia Hahn suggests that the relationship between text and image is shaped by the principle of selection, as 'depending upon which parts of a written story they choose to represent, artists can shape pictorial narrative in ways radically different from texts'[38]. This is certainly the case with the three manuscripts discussed above and demonstrates the fundamental importance of the presence of Henry VI as imagined audience of the *Life* in determining both its visual and verbal character.

5. Conclusion

Whether the young king read the poem which Lydgate wrote for him or admired the lavish illustrations is unknown. Yet how the *Life* was received in actuality does not diminish the significance of its ability to function simultaneously as both a devotional manuscript and a work of secular instruction. As a devotional object the *Life* seeks to

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[37] Kathleen Scott, 'Lydgate's Lives of Saints Edmund and Fremund: A newly located manuscript in Arundel Castle', 357-66.
[38] Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart*, p. 46.

offer Edmund as a model of kingly piety whom Henry VI should seek to emulate. It is likely that Abbot Curteys was taking advantage of the king's visit to promote the rights and liberties of the abbey and ensure a place for it in his benefactions. Lydgate hopes that the king will be 'diffence and protectour' (I.166) of the Abbey, and suggests that in return Saint Edmund 'shal to the kyng be ful proteccioun / Ageyn alle enemies' (I.160-1). This concept of mutual assistance and dependence attests to the special relationship perceived to exist between kings and saints, mediated here through the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds. It establishes from the outset of the poem the notion that, whilst the king's benefaction may be of value to the Abbey and its saintly patron, St Edmund's support would be of equal worth to any upon whom he chose to bestow it. However, by writing his audience into the text Lydgate transforms the *Life* from simply a devotional object into one which is simultaneously sacred and secular. In order to present the saint as a suitable kingly role model Lydgate was able to capitalize on his position as both a monk of Bury and apologist for the Lancastrian regime to recast the legend in order to fit his own purposes. It seems likely that he played on the young King Henry's religious sensibilities to exhort the virtues of kingly conduct (a model of kingship which might accord with Henry's own proclivities and ideals) in order to demonstrate that it was possible to be both kingly and holy. Ultimately it was the unique combination of circumstances and individuals which led to the creation of Lydgate's *Life of St Edmund*, demonstrating the fluidity of hagiographic tradition and the subtle interplay between author and audience.