

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Dr. Ellie Woodacre, reader in Renaissance history at the University of Winchester and author of *Queens and Queenship*, to discuss how queens' sexuality, real, imagined, or perceived, impacts their public image. Now, in different times and places, women's sexuality has always been seen as dangerous. So can you explain why this is particularly true when it comes to queens?

EW: Absolutely. Well, the thing about queens is a lot of their role has to do with their sexual function effectively, especially when we're talking about queens consorts. I mean, their role is to be the king's wife, the king's sexual partner, and also really importantly, the bearer of heirs. And I think this is where it gets really important in two ways. One is that the queen is perceived by having a lot of agency or influence with the king based on that intimacy that she has with him, that pillow talk, those quiet moments. And this is one of the things about studying queens that makes it hard because a lot of what they do, a lot of their really important moments in terms of perhaps influencing events or perhaps changing the mind of their husbands, etc., happens behind closed doors. It's not recorded. It's not something that we can quantify. It's like dark matter. We know it's there, but it's hard to kind of find that smoking gun.

But this also made those around the king who also wanted to influence the king really suspicious of what the queen was doing in those private moments, in those areas where they could not access. And so her sexuality, i.e. her sexual access and intimacy with the king was something that was worrisome, troublesome for other men in the court particularly. Now, the other side of it is the side I touched on, the idea that they were the bearer of heirs. And this was another thing that could be, that made their sexuality particularly important perhaps, in that if they weren't faithful to the king, that meant that basically the heirs were not legitimate, that the line of succession was not true, that the royal blood was being polluted, if you like. So that was also a worry.

So in both cases, both in terms of her having too good of a relationship with the king, which meant she had too much influence and too much access through his desire to be with her, etc. Or the idea that if she wasn't again being faithful to the king, that she could then be messing with the line of succession. Both of those things made the sexuality of the queen, particularly worrisome troublesome and dangerous.

AT: And it feels like both of these, not so much the legitimate heir, but I have heard of instances where mistresses may also bear an heir where the legitimate wife cannot, and that causes its own dramas. And also, if he's busy, schtupping his mistress, he's not getting to the business of his part of producing the heir. But is this part of why we also see powerful men pushing their hot young female relatives towards the king saying, "look how pretty she is. Wouldn't you like her to be your mistress?"

EW: Absolutely. And I think there is an advantage, if you like, for family members of a mistress to gain influence through her influence with him. So absolutely. So I think that is something, and of course Henry VIII's kind of particular situation shows how perhaps someone who's being put in the path of the king might end up being more than a mistress, might end up being a queen. So yes, absolutely. The idea that, of kind of gaining influence through the sexual kind of

sexuality, if you're like, of another woman is another way that men could kind of channel that sexual activity, I guess you could say.

AT: Well, and the women could as well, I'm specifically thinking at the moment of Diane de Poitiers and her relationship with the king of France, and she was immensely powerful, which I'm sure a lot of men were very unhappy about.

EW: Absolutely. And she's just one of many. I mean, Christine and Tracy Adams have written a fantastic book on the creation of the French mistress. And one of the things that they really demonstrate, which I think is really interesting, is that there's this twin track thing that develops in France, and that the mistress, because of again, that influence and intimacy that she has with the king, becomes the one who is politically active, becomes openly acknowledged as such. Anne de Pisseleu, Madame de Pompadour, I mean, these women were seen as the women you had to go to to get things done at court, that diplomats, politicians, courtiers, everyone recognized that these were the women who had the influence of the king, and these were women that you had to kind of get in with, if you like, and sometimes fall out with Benvenuto Cellini in his time in the French court really didn't get on with Anne de Pisseleu. And again, he found it was really not good to lock horns with the king's mistress. So these women had incredible influence. And again, it was through their sexual relationship with the king.

AT: And I feel like at the same time, they didn't necessarily have the tenuousness of being as visible as the queen, like as official, and also having that responsibility of producing an heir. So it actually seems like being a mistress was a slightly safer position for the women.

EW: Yes, in some ways, you're right. They don't have the pressure of carrying on the dynasty. And of course, that does put a lot of stress on a queen, if you like, because if their primary role as a queen consort is to ensure dynastic continuity, to produce the heirs, that's a lot riding on you. And you're absolutely right. If the king is with his mistress, and he is not with you, that makes your job even harder. And certainly, I know in the case of Maria of Castile, the wife of Alfonso V of Aragon, he was literally in Naples with his mistress. And she was back kind of minding the shop in Aragon. And it was kind of put to Alfonso that, "the queen is never gonna get pregnant if you are not there, if you are in Naples with your mistress." So it does make life really hard. And if that pressure is on you to be the person who's producing heirs and making sure the dynasty kind of carries on for generations to come, a mistress can definitely be in the way.

AT: In your works, you've also mentioned the perception issue that I think we still see today with powerful women, which is if a man can't control his woman, then how can he be a strong leader?

EW: Absolutely, absolutely. And I think one of the ways of criticizing a king subtly, it's dangerous if you like to criticize a king openly to say, "you're a bad king and you're not doing a good job." And obviously it happens, but I mean, that's tantamount to kind of regime change, revolution,

etc. But a kind of backdoor way of attacking the king is to attack the queen. Because if, again, yeah, if a man can't control his wife, how can he control the realm? If his wife is seen to be leading him astray, or again, if she is sexually incontinent, etc., again, all of this reflects badly on him. So attacking the queen or making the queen look bad is also in a way, kind of in a backdoor way to kind of bring down a king, if you like, by bringing the queen down.

AT: And then going back to this idea of the person who has their attention in intimate moments and the power that that has, you've written about the idea of dangerous and destructive beauty. So that seems to take it to the next level.

Ew: Absolutely. So there is a real interesting kind of concern that we can see in contemporary documents from the pre-modern era. And in my article, I contrast Europe and China, Imperial China and looking at this. And certainly in Imperial China, there are a number of tales that demonstrate this idea that this is where dynasties fall apart. This is where kingdoms fall. This is where emperors go astray is when they're, instead of focusing on the job at hand, they are distracted by lust, effectively. So a woman who is incredibly beautiful, that can be dangerous, that can distract a king so that he is not keeping his eye on what he should do, i.e. the governance of the realm. And he is obsessed with her. He is spending too much time with her. He is not getting on with the job and things are starting to fall apart. And so that is a time-repeated tale, if you like, in Imperial China, this idea that, emperors who are distracted by lust, the dynasty will end. They will lose the Mandate of Heaven. Everything will fall apart. But it's not just China. I mean, again, a really good example as someone who we're very familiar with in terms of at least English history is King John. Now, King John, he has had a lot of different, there have been recent revisions and attempts to kind of rehabilitate his reputation, etc. But one of the things he was really criticized for was being besotted with his young wife, Isabella d'Angoulême. And contemporary chroniclers talk about this idea that the king is basically, getting up very late. He's always in bed with the queen. He's very distracted by her, and this idea that John was a bad king, that the Angevin Empire kind of fell apart, etc. A lot of that was subtly laid Isabella's door for distracting and leading him astray. And of course, his decision to marry her also upset various vassals in the region as well. So she was seen as this destructive catalyst, if you like, that was the beginning of the end for John.

AT: And then there's also the Danish queen, Caroline Matilda of Great Britain, who had an affair with the royal physician.

EW: Yeah, Struensee, yeah, again, that was the basis of the excellent film, *A Royal Affair*. Yes, absolutely. So it's something, you know, that's happened across time and place. I mean, the idea of a queen who is having an affair, if you like, is nothing new. The destructive beauty element, I suppose, maybe not so much with Caroline Matilda, but certainly she's an excellent example of what can happen when the queen strays from her marital vows.

AT: And assuming that not everyone has seen the movie, can you tell us that story?

EW: Caroline Matilda is actually a British princess that most people aren't aware of. She's a Hanoverian, she's one of the Georgian princesses, and she is married into Denmark. Now her husband is unwell, mentally unstable, etc. And the issue and the heart of the film and the heart of what we're getting to here is that she has an affair with the royal doctor, Struensee, who is treating the king, very close to the king. And again, the film portrays it as an enlightenment revolution, if you like, that the queen and her lover are trying to make Denmark a better place, and they're bringing in these new ideas, etc. But for our purposes, what's really interesting about this situation is the fact that it is a queen who is straying from her matrimonial vows with the king, she's being unfaithful. Again, her child is accused of being Struensee's, not the king's, and ultimately it leads to, death for Struensee, and obviously, exile and death for Caroline Matilda. So, her death wasn't on the block, if you like, but it was shortly afterwards. But yes, absolutely. For a queen, effectively for a queen to have an affair is more than just adultery. It is high treason. And obviously, we're more familiar with the situations of Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard, who did go to the block for it. So not all queens who were accused of adultery met that fate, but certainly to basically be unfaithful to the king was high treason. It had much more serious repercussions in every possible way than any other wife who might be, again, adulterous.

AT: And when I was researching this topic, I came across a couple of interesting examples from Joseon Korea of princesses. So one of them was Yi Gu-ji. So she was an illegitimate daughter of a Joseon prince. And even though her husband, who wasn't a royal, had died in 1470, she was later investigated for apparently having a relationship with an enslaved man in 1474, because she was not allowed to remarry as a widow. The first case was dismissed because it was basically just gossip, but then it came up again in 1489 because it was claimed that she had given birth to a child fathered by that man, and that made it an issue of "public morality." So in the name of public morality, they tortured all of her servants as part of their investigation. 40 people were arrested. The man who supposedly fathered her child died during interrogation. And she was condemned to death, which they considered more respectful than torture for a woman of the royal clan.

And then around the same time, so 1480, Uhwudong, a Korean dancer, writer, artist, poet from a noble family. She had been married to a prince, but she was forced to divorce him over charges that she had committed adultery. And they put her on trial and she was executed. So obviously this isn't something that is specific to one or even a few cultures. It does seem pretty widespread at different points in times and different places.

And then you also write about the trope of the wanton promiscuous queen, which is another one that Anne Boleyn has been sort of slotted into, whether justly or unjustly, I would say unjustly.

EW: Absolutely. Again, the Achilles heel for royal women is their sexuality. And again, it is the way in which they are often attacked and often accused again of being promiscuous, of being wanton. Now, this is equally the case for women who are queen consorts, who are married to a king like Anne Boleyn. Also the case though, for attacking ruling women. Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, Wu Zetian of China, etc. Again, all of these women were women who were not married. So therefore their affairs were not adulterous, but they were perceived as possibly

being wanton or promiscuous. And even the idea of it was something that was used to attack them, to again, make them seem as if they weren't powerful, effective rulers, that they were again ruled by their lust instead. So yes, absolutely. The idea of the wanton queen is something that kind of rings true both for consorts and for regnant queens.

AT: Speaking of Catherine the Great, you also mentioned in your writing transgressive affairs where essentially they are breaking taboos such as having relations with other women or committing incest or in the case of Catherine the Great, there was a rumor that she had sex with a horse.

EW: Yeah, that is, yeah, exactly. It's incredibly far-fetched, that rumor. I think we can all agree that that was not possible. But it does show you again, the ways in which a queen can be lampooned. I mean, even with something that is extreme like that, of course, no one really believed that she had sex with a horse, but even to say something like that, to be able to make that kind of accusation shows how there was no holds barred with accusing queens. And again, as a way to kind of undermine their authority. So absolutely.

So the transgressive affairs is again, another way of undermining them. And I think one of the situations which has been more recently kind of in the public view is that of Queen Anne because of the success of the fantastic film, *The Favorite*. And it's really interesting. Queen Anne had always been one of those queens who was kind of under the radar. I remember I went to see the RSC production of *Queen Anne*, the play by Helen Edmundson, which came out before *The Favorite*. And I remember sitting there in the audience and it's about to start, my husband turned to me and said, "so who's Queen Anne? Who is this person?" But now thanks to *The Favorite*, again, she's back in view.

Now, *The Favorite* really focuses on the idea that Queen Anne had same-sex relationships with her two favorites. Now, we do have to be a little bit careful because we don't know if that was necessarily the case or not, just like the case with men and women, we don't know what happens behind closed doors. But what we do know is that the accusation that Anne was having a same-sex relationship with Abigail Hill Mashham in particular, it was something that was very much in the water though, something that was going on. And so my queenship students and I, we look at some of this material when we talk about, again, the accusations of sexuality and again, bringing a monarch down.

Now with Anne, this is, there's a really interesting dynamic here and that is really caught up in *The Favorite* is that Anne had been very close to Sarah the Duchess of Marlborough. Again, so close that again, it's possible that their friendship may have been more than that. But whatever the case, Anne and Sarah began to fall apart for various reasons, it's a long story, but Sarah's effectively pushing her friendship too far in terms of getting what she wants for her own ambition, etc. And Anne turns to another person, Sarah's cousin Abigail Hill Mashham. Now Sarah, as her own secretary, Arthur Maynwaring, writes some pieces which basically insinuate that that Abigail and Anne are having a same-sex relationship. And so there is a number of materials that come out that allege this really quite openly, if you like.

Now, again, the truth of what's actually happening is less important than the reputational damage or how it makes Anne look, because obviously it makes Abigail look bad, but it really

makes Anne look bad. And that same way that we were talking about with kings, that if you are distracted by your affection, your relationship, or your lust for someone, again, it is skewing your behavior, that perhaps you are doing things that they want you to do, you're being influenced by them because of their kind of sexual hold on you. And again, that was the perception that Abigail was pulling Anne to the political party that she favored, away from Sarah and the political party that she favored, and therefore was being destructive, if you like. But it makes Anne look weak. It makes her look as if she is just being manipulated by those that she has affection for.

AT: I think today, hopefully most of us don't have a problem with same-sex relationships, but I think we're all still pretty creeped out by the incest. And so you've got, Anne Boleyn was accused of sleeping with her brother, among others, at her trial. The influential Mongolian warrior princess, Khultulun, was accused of incest with her own father because she didn't want to get married. And you look at things like that, and it's just a question of, "that's where your mind went, really? Really?!?"

EW: Well, there's two things with incest. I mean, first of all, royal incest is a thing. It's an actual thing. And so again, elsewhere in my work, I've talked about this and anthropologists have really studied this. So there are lots of different societies in Polynesia, in Africa, in Asia, etc., where monarchies were deliberately incestuous. So brothers marrying sisters, sometimes actually as sexual partners, sometimes in a more ritualistic sense, if you like. But royal incest and the Habsburgs, again, my students get all creeped out about this. I mean, we do all the family trees, and we talk about the war of the Spanish succession and the uncle/niece, marriages, and all the rest of it. So royal incest is a thing. And actually, it's a deliberate strategy of monarchies to keep power within the family, to keep lands, resources, etc. within the family. And again, anthropologists have talked about it in terms of that a royal woman can't marry anyone else, otherwise she loses rank, etc. So there are lots of reasons why royal incest is a thing. But in terms of sexuality, you're right, it is something that really creeps us out. It is a social faux pas, it is something that is, in theory, again, forbidden by laws, churches, etc., right? So it is considered to be the ultimate taboo. Certainly, it's something that we can see being thrown at women as a kind of, again, you've really gone beyond the pale. And you're right with Anne Boleyn being accused of with her brother, that is something that's thrown at her to make it, look, it's one thing to have an affair, it's another thing to have multiple affairs, it's another thing to be sleeping with your brother.

Now, Marie Antoinette is where we really see this happening. And obviously, we can't blame Marie Antoinette for the French Revolution, but certainly she was really the whipping boy, if you like, for the French monarchy. So she was accused of having affairs with other men, she was accused of having affairs with other women, like the Princesse de Lamballe. And then, to make things worse, she was then accused of even, again, having incestuous relationships with her own son. And that is really when they're throwing everything and the kitchen sink at her. So it's this idea of kind of accusing someone through their sexuality, goes to like the nth degree with Marie Antoinette and all the libel, if you like, that really, with very kind of pornographic language and illustrations really through everything at her.

AT: And when we're talking about the deliberate political incest, if you will, Cleopatra was married to her brother, which also makes me think of this sort of xenophobic aspect that you get where different powers are using a queen's sexuality to try and undermine the foreign queen. So, for example, you see this with the fact that a lot of what we have surviving about Cleopatra comes from the Romans, a lot of whom, shall we say, had significant biases to put it mildly. And you also see this with colonial powers undermining native rulers. So you've got Lakshmibai the Rani of Jansi, who the British press had dubbed the Jezebel of India. Because, well, I don't know if it was entirely because, but I'm assuming it was largely because she was leading a rebellion against British rule in her country.

EW: Absolutely, absolutely. And again, I think it follows the same trip that we were exploring, is the way to bring a woman down is to attack her in terms of her sexuality. And it's really interesting what you were saying about Cleopatra, because the Romans were very aware that this was a tradition that the Ptolemaic dynasty had pursued, the brother/sister marriage. And of course, that was on the back of the Pharaonic traditions that, again, had been going on for many dynasties in Egypt, etc. So they knew that was kind of the norm. This is how they did that. So to criticize Cleopatra for that would be almost ridiculous because that was the traditions. I mean, it was an othering, if you like, so that she is foreign, other, etc. And I think you're right. There's more of a xenophobic means of using that, rather, almost in the sexuality kind of side of it. And certainly her sexuality was more troublesome in terms of her influence with first Julius Caesar and then Mark Antony. And so Cleopatra really fits into this idea of dangerous and destructive beauty as far as the Romans are concerned, because they see her as using her sexual wiles to basically bend the great men of Rome to her will and therefore corrupt Rome.

AT: And I do wonder not necessarily with Cleopatra, because it is always so maddening when you look at how educated and brilliant she was as a ruler, but then so much of what people know is "sexy, sexy, sexy, sexy," and you're like, "argh, no!" That's my little vent for the moment.

EW: No, but you're absolutely right, because this is the issue, right? I mean, mud sticks, and this is the problem, is that what we tend to remember of these women and what tends to be brought up in popular culture, etc., is the sexual slander, is the juicy gossip, are these allegations, even if they are completely untrue, like the horse thing with Catherine the Great, which even comes up, the more recent series, *The Great*, she's like, "the horse thing just didn't happen." She has to address that. But it's because it sticks, we remember the juicy and the salacious bits, and so the sexual slander has a huge life of its own, it can even become greater over time, it's something that, a myth, it becomes kind of legendary that distracts you from the actual power these women had, their effectiveness as politicians, as administrators, etc., that all just gets overwritten by this focus on their sexuality, which is a tragedy.

AT: And when it comes to the colonial powers and how they're portraying native rulers, I also wonder if there's an aspect of the European tendency, or should I say the white western tendency to sexualize and over-sexualize women of color, because we still see that so often today.

EW: Absolutely, and I think with Orientalism as well, I mean, one of the things that I really work on in terms of looking at queenship globally is the fact that actually monarchy across time and space has tended to be polygamous, not monogamous, but we tend to think of it all in the framework that we're used to it being in. And so these women, we tend to kind of over-sexualize polygamy, or we kind of view the harem as being something that was very sexualized and disempowering for women, but actually, there's been some fantastic studies, particularly Leslie Peirce's work on the Ottoman Empire, which really shows that the harem was like a locus of female power. It wasn't, we have this idea of it being this very kind of sexualized place where all these women were just sexually available to the sultan and he was just lollygagging around. Again, that is our western way of kind of denigrating the sultan, if you like, by seeing him as being a victim of kind of lust or being obsessed with this. But actually, harems were female communities of power, and this is where these women had great power and influence not just over the sultan within that environment, but actually, more broadly politically, and the whole Sultanate of Women period, these incredible, really powerful, valide sultans like Kösem Sultan, Nurbanu Sultan, Turhan Sultan, etc, who were able to be running effectively the entire Ottoman Empire. So yes, I think you're absolutely right. We tend to over-sexualize, we tend to misunderstand, particularly frameworks outside of our own kind of knowledge or awareness. So we see polygamy as being incredibly sexualized and disempowering women, but actually, the reverse could be true.

AT: But what I find interesting about the fact that we, as westerners, have come to think of the harem as, I mean, what you see in the Disney cartoon *Aladdin*, where it's just these nubile, scantily clad young women. And in fact, we're talking about, as you were saying, whole family units where you've got not just the current, shall we say, partners of the Sultan, but also you've got the older women. So you've got his mother and his father's cohort, shall we say, but you've also got the kids running around. So this idea that it's just a scene from a softcore porn video, when in fact, it's actually just a family compound.

EW: Absolutely, absolutely. And it's a place where the women who are really powerful are the senior women. It's not the young nubile women. It's actually the senior women. And the thing about polygamy which is really interesting in terms of thinking about, is in a monogamous kind of scenario, sexuality is key, right? Because the king has one official sexual partner and that is the queen consort, right? But in a polygamous framework, the king or the sultan or the emperor has access to a large number of women who are his sexual partners. But actually the woman who has powers, the woman who is not his sexual partner, it's his mother because she is singular. So the king has many partners, but only one mother. And so that is the woman that has power. And so that's what's really interesting is the dynamic is almost flipped, is that the power doesn't come from that sexual nature. What we really actually started this whole conversation with is about this fear of like women's power through their sexual intimacy with the king or the ruler. In polygamy, actually it's the king's mother who has that intimacy because of her biological relationship with him and the

[Listen to our episode with Dr Woodacre on the power of queen mothers](#) or [read the transcript](#).



societal mores, which value motherhood, respect for one's mother, filial piety, etc. So they are, Leslie Peirce calls them post-sexual. And that's where they reach the peak of their power. So again, this perception that, polygamy as being this highly sexualized scenario that is actually the one that have power are those who are kind of beyond the sexual state, if that makes sense.

AT: And it's also interesting when you consider the fact that generally speaking, these marriages are always political. And so when we're talking about polygamy, a ruler like Genghis Khan can make much stronger diplomatic ties because he had several wives who were all chosen for, at least partially for political reasons. Whereas with monogamous marriages, you got one shot to get that right and it can still end up ending badly for you, shall we say.

EW: Absolutely. And I think that is the issue that matrimonial diplomacy is a huge way in which monarchies have power, they make alliances, etc. But the political winds can change and you're absolutely right. If you've made, if your queen, if you like, is representing an alliance that no longer serves you and you're stuck with this person, that can be really awkward. Certainly a great example of that is Francois Premier, Francis I of France, who was forced by the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Madrid to marry his enemy's sister, basically. So Charles V's sister, Eleanor of Austria. And she was the physical reminder of basically this horrible treaty and, he was not, they did not get on well, put it this way. And I feel better for poor Eleanor of Austria, who, this is not her fault. And she was trying to do her job, which was bring about peace between her brother and her husband. And of course, again, going right back to the royal mistress, the woman who really had power at court was Anne de Pisseleu, the king's mistress. And Eleanor was very much sidelined. So yes, absolutely. I think that is the trouble with monogamy is that you've got one shot at that deal. And if it goes badly south, you're stuck with a bad deal. But polygamy offers you lots more options in every possible way.

AT: Well, yeah, because it's also taking that pressure of "you have to produce an heir," which always seems to be the woman's fault if it doesn't happen, regardless of what the man is or is not doing. But you would think and hope it takes a degree of that pressure off, although I would assume there's still often situations where there's competition in that regard for who is going to produce the first male heir, the best loved male heir, the chosen male heir. But at least it is not entirely on you to produce the next generation of your country's ruler.

EW: Absolutely. So it really takes the pressure off the queen or the empress, etc, to be the bearer of heirs, if you like. You're absolutely right. And of course, even if the woman with the highest title has no biological children of her own, she can often adopt other children that were produced by other kind of consorts, concubines, etc, in that way. So you're right. It definitely takes the pressure off any individual woman to be the kind of conduit of dynastic reproduction, which is great.

The downside, like you said, is that competition. So motherhood is key. When you're talking about a polygamous kind of framework, it's all about being a mother, producing an heir, and then having that child become the next ruler. And that's where you get your power. Again, your power is about being a mother, not really by being kind of a sexual partner or a wife.

AT: I'm seeing a larger reflection here in patriarchal anxiety, more broadly speaking, about women having power in any form, and particularly women having bodily autonomy. So clearly that is, shall we say, ramped up when it comes to queens because of their position. But I feel like this is largely rooted in that anxiety.

EW: Absolutely. And again, as we talked about right at the beginning, it is that concern over women's sexuality and this idea that one of the main values that we can see across time and space in different societies, and it's an expectation of queens as well, is one of the most prized female traits is chastity. So chastity, and we often think of that as being having no sex whatsoever, but can also mean kind of faithfulness. If you're married again, being chaste means only sleeping with your husband and only having sex as necessary for reproduction kind of thing. Again, so it is this idea of, again, that lost, and again, women's ability to provoke lust, if you like, and men can be dangerous, can lead them astray, etc, and again, can give them undue influence. So definitely there is real concern about that. And this idea that the good woman is chaste, is faithful, is true, or completely celibate, is kind of a reflection of that anxiety over female sexuality.

AT: I mean, it seems like it all really comes back to control and a "good woman" controls herself and a good husband controls his wife and a bad ruler loses control over himself and his wife. And it just really seems like this obsession with controlling women, their behavior and their bodies.

EW: Absolutely, but it's also men, and you're right. I mean, when you're talking about men, the good ruler - the bad ruler is one who loses control and again, is subject to lust. And we can see women is kind of provoking that, but it's also a failure in him. I mean, it's this idea that both men and women should be controlling themselves and their sexuality. That sexuality is good in terms of his reproductive function and certainly with kings and queens that is incumbent upon both of them to do what needs to be done so the dynasty continues. But an excess of that or a loss of control or succumbing to lust or being controlled by lust is what creates bad rulership. And again, this idea that you're not focusing on the job at hand, which is producing the next generation of heirs and ruling the country well that you've kind of denigrated into this kind of lower form if you like where you're just really subservient to your basic animal needs.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.