

Social Networks of Friendship in the
Writings of Early Medieval English Women

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

SOCIAL NETWORKS OF FRIENDSHIP IN THE
WRITINGS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ENGLISH WOMEN

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dedication

Olive Toy

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The work that goes into a dissertation project is a community effort. There are many moving parts and even more people who help those parts develop into a completed product. From late night writing parties and progress check-ins to ice cream at Sparky's and chai at Kaldi's, I wouldn't have been able to do this without you.

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chapter. After Johanna led the workshop a couple of times, Emma Lipton then transitioned into that role. As one of my dissertation committee members, it was a privilege to have Emma read my work at each stage of its development. Emma, your approach to the workshop was amazing. The environment you fostered made the workshop a very supportive writing environment. It was a joy walking into the workshop room, knowing that I would leave with great ideas. Thank you for investing your time and effort in the workshop. Your thoughts and suggestions, your encouragement and motivation were so uplifting. It's an experience that I will not soon forget and one that I hope to emulate someday in the future for other graduate students.

Early in my graduate career, when I had a significantly more amount of energy, I was motivated to write a paper for fun. After enrolling in Lee Manion's Chaucer and Spenser class, I fell in love with the literature and couldn't help myself but to write about *Daphnaïda*. Lee, you encouraged me to present my paper to the Symposium on Medieval and Renaissance Studies conference in St. Louis. This was the first conference I attended alone. It was a wonderful learning experience. Lee, thank you for investing your time and effort in helping me revise my paper even though it wasn't for a class you were teaching or for an application I was preparing. The skills I learned during that experience with you taught me what it means to write simply because you want to write. During some of my toughest days working on my dissertation, I remembered that feeling of writing because you want to, and I used that feeling to help motivate me to keep going. Sometimes, the pressure of completing a dissertation project can cloud the joy of producing new research. The memory of working on my *Daphnaïda* paper helped me remember what I love about

my dissertation project. Thank you, Lee, for helping me to remember to find joy in my writing.

Just before my comprehensive exam year, I started thinking about who I wanted to be my outside dissertation committee member. Johanna suggested that I enroll in a couple of classes with professors who I thought I might consider asking to be my outside committee member so that I could get to know them a bit better. I decided to enroll in Lois Huneycutt's Seminar in Medieval Culture from the Mizzou History Department. Near the end of that course, I arranged a meeting with Lois to ask her about being on my dissertation committee. Lois, it was a beautiful day and the sun was shining so nicely in your office. I remember that so well because when I first walked into your office I had been in a particularly sad mood. At the time, I hadn't felt like much of a graduate student. I struggled to insert myself in class conversation and hadn't quite figured out how to navigate scholarly conversations. I remember walking into your office, Lois, and somehow the conversation turned first toward how I was doing in my studies. I must have made some kind of comment about feeling imposter syndrome because you came right back with a comment that I'll never forget. You told me: 'Nicole, you're a scholar now. You are in the conversation.' That's when my mind cleared, and I realized what a beautiful day it was and how lovely your office is. We had such a nice conversation about what I hoped to research for my comprehensive exam and for my dissertation. I left your office feeling less burdened and more confident in myself. Thank you, Lois, for taking the time to address my fears of imposter syndrome. I don't easily reveal my inner feelings to people and feel particularly vulnerable when I do. I'll never forget your kindness and thoughtfulness during that

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As I progressed through my graduate career, I immersed myself in different professional development opportunities and met so many people along the way. I presented at ten conferences, enrolled in a paleography seminar, participated in an NEH Summer Institute, attended three Newberry workshops and a graduate workshop at the ISSEME conference, and participated in the mentorship program through the Medieval Academy of America several times. Each of these experiences brought amazing people into my life: Elaine Treharne, Nicole Guenther Discenza, Karl Shoemaker, Andrew Rabin, Robert Berkhofer, Jana Schulman, Timothy Graham, Karen Christianson, and so many more incredible scholars. I am very fond of networking, as many of you know. Meeting all of you was a privilege. Your work, our conversations, and your guidance have influenced my research in such positive ways. I thank you for your words of encouragement and your willingness to be a resource.

I remember getting an email from the English Department listserv about an opportunity to work at the Mizzou Special Collections and Rare Books department of Ellis library. I jumped on this opportunity and am so thankful that Kelli Hansen and John Fifield saw my potential. Thank you, Kelli and John for giving me the opportunity to work with you. My time at SCRB introduced me to my future career in the Library Sciences. John Henry Adams, I remember when you joined the team shortly after I left and returned to the English Department. I walked into the reading room looking for John to see if he could help me with the artist book I was working on for my sister's wedding. You said that he was not available but that you had experience in binding books. That was the start of our

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The English Department at Mizzou is one of the best programs I've ever seen. The level of community is one that I haven't seen in any other program. One of the main reasons I decided to pursue my PhD at Mizzou was the community the program fostered among its faculty, staff, and students. Aaron Harms, Vickie Thorp, and Herman Smith are three of the powerhouses that make the English Department what it is. You all are so good at what you do. Aaron, your work at the Writing Center is a true testament of your awesomeness. Without your dedication, the WC would not be what it is today. It has been a pleasure working for you and learning from you. Vickie, thank you for chatting with me even though you're always super busy. It is always such a pleasure popping into your office for candy and a chat. Herman, I have enjoyed our conversations about all things nerdy since we first started chatting so many years ago. Your movie recommendations and reviews of different movies and series are so enlightening. You're one of my biggest Halloween costume fans. I will continue this tradition in your honor.

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Wesap ge hale

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Abstract

Communities of women is a topic in Early Medieval English Studies that has largely been overlooked unless it's researched and discussed in the context of men, marriage, and religion. One obstacle that has prevented scholarship from researching and discussing communities of women outside of patriarchal and religious contexts is the continued focus on male-authored texts. Even though scholarship has progressed towards more feminist readings of the corpus, there is still a problem of *which* primary sources scholars choose to use as the focus of their feminist arguments. Female-composed texts of this period are often overlooked, are used as references for larger arguments about male-authored texts, or are discussed within male-centered contexts even if those arguments have a feminist lens. On the path to discovering women's perspectives in the corpus, I found that a majority of the sources composed by women were historical documents. These documents include wills and correspondence composed by women and lawsuit records that document the actions of women and their perspectives. These historical documents exhibit rhetorical features that express women's value of social networking, drive to maintain social networks, and desire to form new networks with other women. The main argument presented in this dissertation contends that early medieval English women formed social networks, in some cases friendships, with other women in order to maintain productive networks of women that yielded preservation of their properties and assets, emotional communion with one another, and protection of their persons.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Communities of women is a topic in Early Medieval English Studies that has largely been overlooked unless it's researched and discussed in the context of men, marriage, and religion. Much of the interest in communities of women has focused on interactions women had with prominent Church figures such as Bede and Boniface,¹ on the relationships between men and women within monastic houses and the struggles women religious faced under the monastic reformation,² on the dynamics between male and female

¹ The following sources offer discussions of the correspondence between Boniface and various women correspondents: Lees, Clare A., and Gillian R. Overing. *Double Agents Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2009); Diane Watt, "A Fragmentary Archive: Migratory Feelings in Early Anglo-Saxon Women's Letters," *Journal of Homosexuality* 64, no. 3 (2016): pp. 415-429. For discussions of Bede and the women who appear in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, see Máirín MacCarron, "Royal Marriage and Conversion in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (2017): pp. 650-670; and Diane Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and beyond, 650-1100* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

² These sources provide a range of discussions on the different relationships between men and women religious as well as the dynamics between men and women before, during, and after the monastic reformation: Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, vol. 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Alexander Frederick Strub, *Agents Unto Themselves: Reconstructing the Narrative of Women's Roles in the Anglo-Saxon Conversion* (Kansas City: University of Missouri-Kansas, 2015); Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (London: Verso, 1992); Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, Ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2006); McGuire, Brian Patrick. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*. 2nd ed. Cornell University Press, 2010; Helen Foxhall Forbes, "Squabbling Siblings: Gender and Monastic Life in Late Anglo-Saxon Winchester," *Gender & History* 23, no. 3 (2011): pp. 653-684; Katharine Sykes, "'Canonici Albi Et Moniales': Perceptions of the Twelfth-Century Double House," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60, no. 2 (2009): pp. 233-245; Alison I. Beach, *Women as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, and Van John Engen, *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, UK: D S Brewer, 2020).

roles within marriage,³ and on the representations of women in religious literature.⁴ The research that has been conducted on these topics is useful and has contributed much to the field, but there is a noticeable gap in research on communities of women outside of patriarchal and religious contexts.

Perhaps one obstacle that has prevented scholarship from researching and discussing communities of women outside of patriarchal and religious contexts is the continued focus on male-authored texts. While male-authored texts that discuss, describe, and document women and their communities are informative, such texts have also received an exceptional amount of attention, perhaps because they account for such a large number of extant documents available in the early medieval English corpus. Much of the discussions pertaining to women in the early medieval English period is predicated on the ways women are represented in male-authored texts. Even though scholarship has progressed towards more feminist readings of both,⁵ there is still a problem of *which*

³ For discussions on marriage practices, feuds resulting in failed alliances, and representations of women and marriage in secular poetry, see Annie Whitehead, *Women of Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Pen & Sword History, 2020); Diana Wood, ed., *Women and Religion in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003); Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013); David R. Wilton, "Fæhða Gemyndig: Hostile Acts versus Enmity," *Neophilologus* 99, no. 4 (October 2015): pp. 647-666; Joel T. Rosenthal, "Marriage and the Blood Feud in 'Heroic' Europe," *The British Journal of Sociology* 17, no. 2 (1966): pp. 133-144; Carol Parrish Jamison, "Traffic of Women in Germanic Literature: The Role of the Peace Pledge in Marital Exchanges," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 20, no. 1 (2004): pp. 13-36; Cavell, "Formulaic Friþuwebban: Reexamining Peace-Weaving in the Light of Old English Poetics," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 114, no. 3 (2015): p. 355-372.

⁴ The following sources discuss the various representations of women in religious literature written by men and from male perspectives: Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Kerryn Olsen, "Women and Englishness: Anglo-Saxon Female Saints in the South English Legendary," *Limina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013): pp. 1-9; Simon Thomson, "The Overlooked Women of the Old English Passion of Saint Christopher," *Medievalia Et Humanistica* 44 (January 2019): pp. 61-80; Penelope Scott, "Holiness in Old English: The Construction of the Sacred in Ælfric's Lives of Saints," *Neophilologus* 104, no. 4 (2020): pp. 547-566.

⁵ See Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986); Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, eds., *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling*

primary sources scholars choose to use as the focus of their feminist arguments. Feminist readings of male-authored texts during this period are profound and undeniably useful to the field, but there ought to be an equal amount of fervor in performing feminist readings of female-composed texts. Instead, female-composed texts of this period are often overlooked, are used as references for larger arguments about male-authored texts, or are discussed within male-centered contexts even if those arguments have a feminist lens.

Conducting research on communities of women is indisputably difficult due to the limited number of extant documents available to us. A majority of the texts available to us are anonymously written. Perhaps many of them are authored by women, but the bias in scholarship is still toward the assumption that most early medieval English texts are written by men. This problem is compounded by the lack of anthologies and collections that categorize extant texts according to female-centered topics. Finding early medieval English female-composed texts is, thus, a challenging endeavor and requires significant time and patience perusing indices of anthologies and collections that are organized according to male-centered priorities and topics.⁶ It is, indeed, much easier to conduct research on more traditional texts that are more readily available and more easily found.

Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience: Narratives of Agency and Identity in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Linda Olson, eds., *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (University of Notre Dame, 2005); Mary Dockray-Miller, "Female Community in the Old English *Judith*," *Studia Neophilologica* 70, no. 2 (1998): pp. 165-172; Virginia Blanton, *Signs of Devotion: The Cult of St. Æthelthryth in Medieval England, 695-1615* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

⁶ See P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (Royal Historical Society, 1968); Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*, vol. 241 (Tempe, AZ.: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001); Jacqueline A. Stodnick and Trilling Renée Rebecca, eds., *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); A. J. Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Patrick Wormald, "A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits," *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): pp. 247-281. Of all the sources listed, the only one that makes researching women accessible is Stodnick and Trilling's *Handbook*. Since there are a relatively small number of extant texts in the corpus that directly involve women, it is difficult to find their presence in

On the path to discovering women's perspectives in the corpus, I found that a majority of the sources composed by women were historical documents. These documents include wills and correspondence composed by women and lawsuit records that document the actions of women and their perspectives. One of the challenges of this project became researching and engaging with such documents as a literary scholar. A distinguishing feature of these historical sources is that they cannot be so easily categorized into one genre. Wills and lawsuit records of the period do not follow modern methods of documentation, nor do they follow modern guidelines of expected content. Rather, wills and lawsuits of the period were typically vague and brief documents; yet, there are those that have survived that contain detailed narratives, usually narratives relating to the history of land transactions or land inheritances and the social context of legal disputes. Of all the wills composed by women and the lawsuit records that preserve women's actions and perspectives, a majority of them include such narratives. Within these narratives is evidence of social networks of friendship between women that work to support them. The evidence of friendship in these narratives inform us of the ways women worked to support one another through the exchange of lands and property. Correspondence composed by women during this period also exhibit social narratives that yield valuable information about women's friendship networks, some in their infancy and others that are well-established. The final chapter of this dissertation provides a close reading of an anonymously written Old English poem, *The Wife's Lament*. This poem, while anonymous, may have been composed by a woman. We may never know. Demonstrating a contrast to the successful networks in the documentary evidence, the poem offers a woman's

handbooks and handlists that are filled primarily with male-dominant texts. Stodnick and Trilling's *Handbook* takes this into account through the method they use to organize the materials and index.

perspective on the failings of friendships and social networks more broadly. In her poem, the woman laments the circumstances she must navigate by providing poetic social narratives of her past, current, and future interactions with her communities. These narratives exhibit rhetorical features that express women's value of social networking, drive to maintain social networks, and desire to form new networks with other women. The main argument presented in this dissertation contends that early medieval English women formed social networks, in some cases friendships, with other women in order to maintain productive networks of women that yielded preservation of their properties and assets, emotional communion with one another, and protection of their persons.

Authorship During the Early Medieval English Period

The primary focus of this dissertation rests on texts that were produced by women in the early medieval English period. One of the challenges of this project has been finding documents that are written by women. This challenge brings into question the concept of authorship during this period, and, more importantly, the range in meanings behind early medieval English authorship. The representation of early medieval English women's writing production is slim at best. Two of the factors into this lack of representation is the lack of sufficient biographical information on women of the period and the tracing of women's writing production as compared to their male counterparts in literary histories.⁷ The insufficient tracing of women's writing production necessitates that we expand the range of what it means to be an author during this period. The reason for this is tied to the fact that many of the texts written during this period were anonymously written. It would

⁷ Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 1-13.

be an ill-service to women to assume that all anonymously written texts were authored by men. This is a gendered bias that is prevalent in scholarship and literary histories. For example, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing discuss the systemic forgetting of integral women in the production of written texts. They use Bede's account of Cædmon's *Hymn* as an example of how the focus in Bede's account of Caedmon overlooks the integral part Hild played in the production of Cædmon's *Hymn*. Lees and Overing assert that "Bede authors and creates both moments [i.e., Hild is worthy of memory as a celebrated Abbess and Bede's account of Cædmon], but it is Hild who is the abbess of the monastery that produces Cædmon and five bishops."⁸ This moment in Hild's tenure as Abbess is overlooked, yet it is an example of an early medieval English woman who is an integral part of a major literary work's production. In response to Lees and Overing's work, Diane Watt states that

both Anglo-Saxon religious historian Bede and twentieth-century Anglo-Saxonists have conspired in their representation of Cædmon's *Hymn* as the 'birth' of English poetry, to exclude completely his patron, Abbess Hild, from this originary narrative. Here the omission of women's involvement in cultural production is the product of 'forgetting' rather than a more symbolic negation, but it is as a result possibly more destructive in its consequences.⁹

This early example of a woman who takes part in the production of a literary work demonstrates the flexibility in what it meant to be an author during the early medieval English period. Rather than reserving the label of 'author' to those who physically write the words onto the medium, authorship during this period had many more moving parts.

⁸ Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, "Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production," *Exemplaria* 6, no. 1 (1994): pp. 35-65.

⁹ Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing: Works by and for Women in England, 1100-1500*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 4.

Just as Hild should be better represented in scholarship as an integral part of the production of Cædmon's *Hymn*, so too should other women of the period receive more representation as taking part in the production of texts.

The preservation of women's writing culture during the early medieval English period is virtually non-existent. Watt explains that women's writing prior to the fourteenth century

remains peripheral not only to conventional masculinist accounts of the literary canon but also to feminist (re-)constructions of women's literary history. The relative dearth of texts identifiable as by women and the lack of biographical information about medieval women writers have contributed to this tendency. Other factors include the often religious (and thus 'non-literary') content of surviving works, the problem of writing not in the medium of English, and the question of authorial agency in medieval culture's different models of relationship between composition and writing.¹⁰

It is necessary to address the concept of authorship as it relates to this time period. Defining an individual as an author is a little tricky when dealing with early medieval English texts. Not everyone in the period would have been literate or would have had the means or the resources to become literate. This is not the same as being uneducated. Rather, the men and women of this period may have been well-read and well-educated, but they may have lacked the skill of writing. To be unable to write would not necessarily have stopped the men and women of this period from producing texts. Instead, they may have relied upon another individual to physically write on a medium as they dictated their thoughts aloud.

¹⁰Ibid., 1.

This means that the writing process could be a collaborative experience between individuals, whereby an individual had a need to produce a text and thus dictated their words to a scribe who then transferred the oral text onto a writing surface.

This collaborative experience in the production of a text informs us that the production of a text often relied upon the relationship between a scribe and the speaker. This relationship necessitates that we consider the range of roles individuals might play in the production of a text. Diane Watt argues that “it is crucial that, for the earlier period [referring to the early medieval English period], we have more enabling and more elastic definitions of authorship (to include pseudonymous, anonymous and collaborative texts).”¹¹ Considering early medieval English texts in this way enables us to broaden the range of who might have been the author of a text. In this dissertation, I will use the terms ‘composer’ and ‘female-composed’ to make this distinction. The women in this dissertation may not have been the literal writers of their texts, but they were most assuredly the composers, the power houses of thought behind the production of the document in the first place.

Representing Early Medieval English Women

A majority of the women discussed in this dissertation come from noble families. This is largely in part due to the sources that are available to us based on the record-keeping practices of the time that privileged the literate, the nobility, and those who had an interest in composing texts, such as the Church. A common practice in the early medieval English community was the preservation of legal documents and correspondence that had

¹¹ Watt, *Medieval Women’s Writing*, 4

connections with the Church and the royal houses. Those who had those connections, primarily the nobility and religious figures, were at an advantage for having their proofs of land ownership and correspondence preserved in church records. Moreover, record-keeping practices of the period privileged those who won lawsuits that favored the Church, bequeathed property to religious houses, and corresponded with religious leaders “since literacy and manuscript production lay largely in the provenance of the Church.”¹² Andrew Rabin asserts that “it is not surprising that the majority of extant case records concern religious institutions and that the lawsuits preserved are mostly those that the Church won.”¹³ Thus, the representation of women during this period is significantly biased towards those of high social standing. While a majority of extant records documenting women’s actions and words are primarily focused on the higher social classes, there are some records that provide glimpses of women who were not part of the nobility. In the Sawyer Collection, a comprehensive archive of charters dating from the 7th to 11th centuries, is a charter (S 1242) that records Queen Ælfthryth coming to the aid of a woman named Wulfgyth. The charter provides little information about Wulfgyth other than she was the sister of a man named Leofric. This charter could be evidence of a female relationship between two women of differing social classes and is, therefore, representative, even in small part, of female social networks in general during this period. The fact remains, though, that there are very few of these sources that record social networks of this kind, which means that the topic of this dissertation is limited by the selectiveness of the extant records at our disposal.

¹² Andrew Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law: A Student Edition of Five Old English Lawsuits.” *Old English Newsletter* 41, no. 3 (2008), 35.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The Evidence of Early Medieval English Friendship

One of the main social networks discussed in this dissertation is friendship. Many of the interactions between women that are preserved in the historical records are described as friendship. The social narratives in the legal records, such as wills, often use language that refers to friends who come to the aid of others. Similarly, in lawsuits, the social narratives used to provide context for the grounds of the suit often describe friends who are called upon to provide supportive evidence. Correspondence records the affective experience of friendship through records of the grief and yearning friends feel for one another when they are separated by time and space. While there are several sources from the early medieval English period that theorize the concept of friendship, they are all focused on male friendship and only take into consideration female friendship in the sense of its detriments to men's spiritual well-being. Most of what we know about early medieval friendship comes from the Romans, primarily from Cicero, as well as from early Church male religious figures, such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. Their writings discuss the concept and practice of friendship in close detail while, at the same time, warn men against forming friendships with women. This gendered view of friendship obscures the female perspective of the concept and practice of friendship among women. The lack of primary sources that discuss women's perspectives on the concept and practice of friendship require scholars to turn to non-traditional genres for the evidence of friendship practiced among women. Turning to genres such as correspondence and legal writing offers examples of female friendship in action. While there may not be primary sources that investigate the concept and practice of friendship among women, it is still possible to gain insight on female friendship from these other genres. A brief overview of the concept of

male friendship provides insight on the similarities and differences between the ways women and men practiced friendship. Through this overview, I intend to show how female friendship ultimately shares many similarities with male friendship and is not particularly different from male friendship.

Much of the writings in the early medieval English period that conceptualize friendship draw upon the work of Cicero. While many Classical philosophers and theologians conceptualized the topic of friendship, Cicero was perhaps the most influential to the early Christian male religious writers, such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. Near the end of his life, in 44 BCE, Cicero composed his treatise *De Amicitia* in the form of a dialogue between three prominent Roman figures – Gaius Laelius, Gaius Fannius, and Quintus Mucius Scaevola – set just after the death of the politician Scipio Africanus in 129 BCE. Cicero explains that friendship between persons is “a complete accord on all subjects human and divine, joined with mutual good will and affection.”¹⁴ He writes in his treatise that “nature abhors isolation, and ever leans upon something as a stay and support; and this [stay and support] is found in its most pleasing form in our closest friend.”¹⁵ He invites his audience to imagine with him the following situation:

if it were possible that some god should carry us away from these haunts of men,
 ... and then should supply us in abundance with everything necessary to our nature,
 and yet take from us entirely the opportunity of looking upon a human being. Who

¹⁴ Cicero, “Treatises on Friendship and Old Age,” trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, *Treatises on Friendship and Old Age*, by Marcus Tullius Cicero (The Project Gutenberg, January 4, 2009), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2808/2808-h/2808-h.htm#link2H_4_0002.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

could steel himself to endure such a life? Who would not lose in his loneliness the zest for all pleasures?¹⁶

He goes on to ask his audience “what can be more delightful than to have some one [sic] whom you can say everything with the same absolute confidence as to yourself?”¹⁷ The distinguishing features of Cicero’s conceptualization of friendship is “mutual good will and affection.” If both are in concert, then all participants will grow in confidence with one another, thereby strengthening their friendship. Cicero also discusses the concept of harmony within friendship, stating that “there must be complete harmony of interests, purpose, and aims, without exception.”¹⁸ This suggests that in order for a friendship to be productive and functional, the individuals must share much of the same beliefs, goals, and intents meaning that they must be relatively equal in social class. The ideas of being able to “say everything with the same absolute confidence as to yourself” and having “complete harmony” with a friend implies that functional friendships begin with equality.

These elements of friendship are carried over into the writings of the early Church male religious writers. Similar to Cicero, Ambrose of Milan writes, in *On the Duties of the Clergy*, that “there can be no friendship between diverse characters.”¹⁹ He explains that “it is indeed a comfort in this life to have one to whom you can open your heart, with whom you can share confidences, and to whom you can entrust the secrets of your heart.”²⁰ Contemporary to Ambrose, Jerome explains in multiple letters to correspondents that part

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ambrose, “On the Duties of the Clergy,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. De Romestin, vol. 10 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 89.

²⁰ Ambrose, “On the Duties of the Clergy,” 88.

of the fabric of friendship is the corporeal experience of nearness. Seeing and speaking to a friend is the most pleasing form of friendship. Jerome writes to three of his former traveling companions that his friend Evagrius “is separated from me by a long distance, his departure has generally left me as much regret as his arrival has brought me joy.”²¹ He further explains in a letter to Rufinus that “a friend is long sought, hardly found, and with difficulty kept ... Love is not to be purchased, and affection has no price. The friendship which can cease has never been real.”²² Physical nearness may yield a more pleasing friendship and greater freedom of movement. These sentiments of friendship appear in later writings on friendship, as well. Ælred of Rievaulx writes, in *Spiritual Friendship*, that one should “share with a friend all [their] thoughts and cares, that [they] may have something either to learn or to teach, to give and to receive, to pour out and to drink in.”²³ In addition, he explains that “in their mutual relationships, friends should in fact be simple, approachable, congenial, and sensitive to the same influences.”²⁴ From Cicero to Ælred, the concept and practice of friendship relies upon a necessity of equality between the friends, a mutual exchange of good will, and the power of physical nearness in friendship.

The evidence of male friendship in early medieval writing is extensive and detailed. Perhaps most convenient is that this evidence appears in extended treatises on the concept of friendship itself. In order to gain a deeper insight on female friendship, it is necessary to turn to some pieces of canonical literature with representations of female friendship as well as to sources, such as correspondence and legal writing, with records of female friendship

²¹ Jerome, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, trans. V. H. Fremantle (Oxford: Parker, 1892), 9-10.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ Ælred, *Ælred of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

in action. It is useful, though, to also consider the representations of female friendship in some of the well-known works in the corpus. Briefly examining these literary texts enables me to draw a clearer distinction between the benefits of investigating female friendship in literature versus documentary evidence that capture actual friendships between historical women. *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and Ælfric's lives of St. Agnes and St. Lucy are a few well-known primary sources that illustrate the practice of female friendship. In each of these texts, there are varying representations of female friendships that speak to women's agency and power as active participants within their social environments. Moreover, each of these texts provides occasions of women networking with other women. These instances of female social networking, particularly through gestures of friendship, speak to the active participation women are shown to have in literary works produced during this period.

My close readings of *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and Ælfric's lives of St. Agnes and St. Lucy focus on the instances when women networked with other women and the rhetorical features that represent their friendships. In *Beowulf*, the women participate in friendships which are directed to specific individuals as well as to larger groups. Wealhtheow, queen of the Danes, and Hygd, queen of the Geats, express their agency in the friendships they share with their people by physically inserting themselves into their communities to pass encouragement to the warriors and appreciation of their efforts through the giving of treasures.²⁵ While these interactions between the queens and their male warriors are

²⁵ Of Wealhtheow, the *Beowulf*-poet writes that "hwilum mæru cwen, / friðusibb folca flet eall geondhwearf, / bædde byre geonge; oft hio beahwriðan / secge (sealde) ær hie to setle geong," Klaeber, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 2016b-2019. Similarly, the poet narrates that "meoduscencum / hwearf geond þæt side reced Hæreðes dohtor [Hygd] / lufode ða leode liðwæge bær / hæum to handa," Klaeber, *Klaeber's Beowulf*, lines 1980b-1983a. Both women walk amongst their people, reciprocating their loyalty with personal interaction and the giving of valuable gifts. Freawaru and Wealhtheow also provide insight into women's friendships with single individuals. At the celebration of Grendel's defeat, Wealhtheow bids Beowulf to be "suna minum / dædum gedefe, dreamhealdende. / Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe, / modes milde, mandrihtne hol[d]; / þegnas syndon geþwære, þeod eal gearo; / druncne dryhtguman doð swa

significant, they are also extensively discussed in scholarship.²⁶ Much of these discussions focus on the women as peace-weavers or ambassadors of their pre-marital communities. Of more interest, though, is the exchange between Wealhtheow and Hygd that is rarely discussed in scholarship. The *Beowulf*-poet writes that “hyrde ic þæt he ðone healsbeah Hygde gesealde, / wrætlicne wundurmaððum, ðone þe him Wealhðeo geaf, / ðeod(nes) dohtor.”²⁷ In this short passage, we learn that Wealhtheow gave to Beowulf a “healsbeah” [neck-ring] which she intended to then be gifted to Hygd. Wealhtheow makes it clear that she is aware of the queen, Hygd, and extends a gesture of friendship to her through the exchange of moveable property. In this exchange, Wealhtheow maintains a strong long-distant dyadic relationship with a fellow queen.²⁸ This is the only instance in *Beowulf* of a woman interacting specifically with another woman in a way that gestures toward friendship as we might understand it in a modern sense. While the large majority of their interactions are with men and larger communities, it is worth discussing the implications of this glimpse of female friendship. Rather than a highly emotional or overtly personal exchange of friendship, we witness two queens who engage in a friendship that maintains the strength of their political ties to one another. Just as the male figures in the poem engage in acts of political friendship and negotiation, the queens are legitimate players in the

ic bidde,” Klaeber, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 1225b-1231. Wealhtheow’s observations that all of the warriors in the mead-hall are “oþrum getrywe,” [true to others] and that “þegnas syndon geþwære,” [the thanes are united] reminds Beowulf of the social and political alliances the people have gained by fighting for and supporting a common cause. Her subsequent request that Beowulf be “suna minum / dædum gedefe” [to my sons indulgent in deeds] informs us of the expectations she has for his reciprocal acts of friendship.

²⁶ One such source of reference is Baker, *Honour*. He refers to other scholars’ work on the women in *Beowulf* and their influence within their communities of men. Such topics of discussion are the gendering of speech-making, dispute settlements, political agreements conducted through cultural practices, and gestures of friendship through exchanges of moveable property.

²⁷ Klaeber, *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, lines 2172-2174a. I heard that he gave the neck-ring to Hygd, the splendid wonder-jewel, of which Wealhtheow, the chieftain’s daughter, gave to him.

²⁸ A dyadic relationship is a network that consists of two individuals. I discuss this term at more length in the overview of social network theory.

political playground of the *Beowulf* universe. In this way, the women must be considered as active participants in their social environments rather than as passive figures.

Similar to the women in *Beowulf* are the women in the poem *Judith* who use their friendship to navigate a political dilemma. We see Judith and her handmaid formulate a plan to assassinate the Assyrian king in an effort to give her people a chance at victory in battle. While detained in the Assyrian camp, Judith and her handmaid are not victims of war. Instead, both women manipulate their situation to their political gain. In an act of preparedness, Judith uses the bag in which her handmaid “geðungen þyder on lædde”²⁹ to conceal the head of the assassinated Assyrian king. She gives the head to her handmaid “ham to berenne”³⁰ and, most significantly, to present as a trophy of war to her people in Bethulia. Judith and her handmaid work as a unit to motivate their people to battle. Their mutual participation in their relationship is reflected by the plural adjectives “eadhreðige”³¹ and “collenferhðe.”³² In addition to the female community the women form as they fight for a common cause, Mary Dockray-Miller contends that these adjectives “not only bond the women grammatically but point up the unique nature of their cooperative, active feminine community.”³³ Both women rely on each other to enact this plan successfully, and they do so through the violence and gore typically associated with men in heroic poetry. Their friendship and political agenda define heroism as gender inclusive.

Perhaps the most influential texts I encountered in my early research were Ælfric’s lives of St. Agnes and St. Lucy. These two lives illustrate the ways women interacted with

²⁹ Magoun, Francis Peabody. *Beowulf and Judith*. [Rev. ed.] revised by Jess B. Bessinger. Harvard Old English Series: 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966, line 129. Had brought food thither.

³⁰ Magoun, *Beowulf and Judith*, line 131b. To bear it home.

³¹ *Ibid.*, line 135a. Blessed.

³² *Ibid.*, line 134b. Bold.

³³ Dockray-Miller, Mary. “Female Community in the Old English *Judith*,” 169.

other women through different dimensions, across space and time. Ælfric's lives of St. Agnes and St. Lucy offer two examples of friendships that cross between heaven and earth and spread into networks that cross physical distances. After her death and burial, Agnes appears to her friends and family at her tomb as a spirit among a great host of women. She speaks to those mourning at her tomb, saying "warniað þæt ge ne wepon me swa swa deade / ac blyssiað mid me. Ic eom þysum mædenum geferlæht / and ic mid him underfeng swiðe fægere wununga."³⁴ By calling herself a "þysum mædenum geferlæht" [a companion to these virgins], Agnes appears to consider herself part of a close relationships with other like-minded women. This is reflected in the last part of her life when Emperor Constantine's daughter, Constantina prays at her tomb and is cured of leprosy. Afterwards, she converts to Christianity and, through her example, many other women follow suit. Ælfric writes that

heo wearð þa gefullod swa swa hire fæder wæs / and hadunga under-feng mid fægere drohtnunga / and manega oðre mædenu þurh hire mærlican gebysnunga forsawon woruld-lustas and wurdon criste gehalgode ... Þa romaniscan mædenu manega eac ðurh-wunodon / on clænum mægðhade for cristes lufe / æfter agnes gebysnunga.³⁵

Just as Agnes decides to be with her fellow spiritual virgins, Constantina follows Agnes' example of an exemplary life and "hadunga under-feng mid fægere drohtnunga" [received

³⁴ Ælfric, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: Pub. for the Early English text Society, by N. Trubner & Co., 1881), pp. 185. [Beware that ye weep not for me as if dead, / but rejoice with me, I am a companion to these virgins, / and I have received with them very fair habitations.] Skeat originally translates "þysum mædenum" as "of these virgins." Since "þysum" is a dative plural, I chose to make a slight adjustment to his translation.

³⁵ Ælfric. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, pp. 187. She [Constantia] was then baptized, as was her father, / and received the veil with fair observances, / and many other maidens through her worthy example / forsook worldly pleasures and were consecrated to Christ. ... Likewise, many of the Roman maidens continued / in pure virginity for the love of Christ / after Agnes' example.

the veil with fair observances]; and through Constantia's example, the "manega oðre mædenu" [many other maidens] and "romaniscan mædenu manega" [many of the Roman maidens] of the region follow in like manner of their own decision. The network that Agnes has with her friends and family, those who travel to her tomb to mourn her death, is a demonstration of a network that extends from heaven to earth. In addition, the network that forms between Constantia and the renown of Agnes extends across physical distance. As the spiritual influence of Agnes' life influences Constantia, so too does Constantia's example influence Roman women.³⁶ This networking between women also appears in the life of St. Lucy who is influenced by the spread of the virgin martyr Agatha's fame. Having heard the fame of the virgin martyr, Lucy and her mother, Eutychia, travel to the site of Agatha's tomb to seek spiritual aid for Eutychia's chronic bleeding.³⁷ Ælfric writes that

þa æfter þære mæssan seo modor and seo dohtor / astrehton hi on gebedum æt þære byrgene. / Mid þam þe hi lagon and gelencgdon ða gebedu / þa wearð lucia on slæpe and geseah agathen / betwux engla werodum ænlice gefretewod / and clypode hyre þus to clypigende ufenne / Min swustor lucia soð gods mæden / hwi bitst þu æt me þæs þe ðu miht sylf getiðian / þinre meder geheolp þin halga gleafa / and efne heo is gehæled halwendlice ðurh crist / and swa swa þeos burh is gemærsod þurh me fram criste / swa bið siracusa burh þurh þe gewlitegod.³⁸

³⁶ The specification that those women, who were influenced by Constantia's example, are Roman is an indication of the extent of that influence since the Roman empire was far-reaching.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 211. "Ða asprang Agathen hlisa ofer land and sæ / swa þæt fram siracusa sohte mycel meniu / ofer fiftig mila þæs mædenes byrgene ... Þa com sum wydewe seo wæs geciged euthicia / betwux oðrum mannum to þære mæran byrigene / and hire dohtor samod seo gesælige lucia" [Then Agatha's renown spread over land and sea, / so that a great multitude out of Syracuse sought / the virgin's tomb ... Then came a certain widow, named Eutychia, / amongst other people, to the famous tomb, / and her daughter with her, the blessed Lucy].

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 211-213. Then, after the mass, the mother and daughter / prostrated themselves in prayers at the tomb. / Whilst they lay there and prolonged their prayers, / Lucy fell asleep and saw Agatha / amongst hosts of angels, splendidly adorned, / and called to her thus, crying from above, 'My sister Lucy, true virgin

In an act of spiritual friendship,³⁹ Agatha appears to Lucy in a dream to communicate with her the connection they have to one another via their upstanding faith in Christ. The power of their faith is so great that both women have the ability to bring the miracle of healing upon Eutychia. Moreover, Agatha speaks to Lucy of the network that their faiths have created in the region. From the power of their faith, Agatha is “gemærsod” [made known] in the town and Lucy is “gewlitegod” [renowned] in the city. More specifically, Agatha explains that her network extends within the “burh” [town] while Lucy’s network extends through “siracusa burh” [city of Syracuse]. Not only is this an example of two women who have found a spiritual network with one another, but this is also an example of a dyadic relationship within a spiritual dimension that develops into a multi-group⁴⁰ relationship that extends beyond the limits of the spiritual realm and the limits of the town’s borders into a much larger physical region. Ælfric’s lives of St. Agnes and St. Lucy demonstrate the wide range and extensive networks, which resemble elements of friendship, that women could form with one another within the hagiographic tradition.

While the more well-known literary texts offer insight on the social networks of friendship that women formed with one another, they are literary representations of women. Historical documents offer insight into social networks of women that are unique in that they record the practice of actual friendships between women. In wills and lawsuits, there is evidence of women who demonstrate a mutual exchange of good will to one

of God, / why prayest thou of me that which thou couldst thyself grant? / Thy holy faith has helped thy mother, / and lo! She is entirely healed by Christ; / and even as this town is [made known] through me, by Christ’s favour, / so shall [the city of] Syracuse be renowned through thee.

³⁹ Stephanie Hollis discusses what she calls ‘soul friendship’ within the religious community. See Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge UK: Boydell Press, 1998), esp. 185-197.

⁴⁰ A multi-group relationship is a network that consists of groups of dyads and triads (a network that consists of three individuals). I discuss this term in greater detail in the overview of social network theory.

another. For example, a woman named Eadgifu explains in her will the circumstances surrounding the difficulty she had in repossessing her land from a man named Goda who refused to return her lands to her as agreed upon several years prior. After several years of being dispossessed of her land, her friends come to her aid by obtaining an edict from the king that returned Eadgifu's lands to her. There is evidence in correspondence of the power of physical nearness in friendship. A Bonifacian missionary named Berhtgyth expresses her distress of the emotional consequences of distance between loved ones to her brother. She laments having to watch as other women travel to their friends while she is left behind. The main difference between male and female practices of friendship is the necessity for equality between friends that Cicero, Ambrose, and Ælred discuss in their writings. In her will, Æthelgifu bequeaths equal amounts of moveable property to those who are of differing social classes. Earlier in the will, Æthelgifu identifies two women, Ælfgifu and Godwif, as being of some familial relation to her, while the relationships she has with three other women, Lufetat, Beornwynn, and Wulfgifu, are not identified. In the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* database, Lufetate has no entry, while Beornwynn and Wulfgifu have entries that simply state their inclusion in the will of Æthelgifu. This may be evidence of a bequeathal of property from a wealthy landowner to three women of no familial relation and perhaps of a lower social class. It is clear from the excerpt, though, that each woman receives nearly an equal amount of moveable property even though they may not have been of equal social standing to Æthelgifu. These excerpts are examples of friendship in action as well as the absence of friendship. The historical records available to us provide insight into the ways in which women experienced and used their friendship networks in their lives.

Types of Early Medieval English Friendship

The historical documents discussed in this dissertation offer a wide range of types of friendships. Each chapter of this dissertation engages with different aspects of friendship. One of the most common words for friend found in these historical documents is the Old English term *freond*. This term is also found in the broader Old English term *freondscype*, which generally means friendship. The use of *freond* and *freondscype* appear in a few different contexts, primarily familial, affinal, and general relationships. Much of the focus in this dissertation on social networks is on the interactions between friends and the practice of friendship; this means, that there are instances when the terminology for friends and friendship is not always used. Instead, the historical documents record the actions performed between individuals. These records speak to the types of actions that fall within the range of friendship. The instances of friendship acts that are recorded in these documents range from affective expressions of friendly love and care for others, such as in correspondence between members of the religious community, to the presence in court that individuals give to a friend in a demonstration of legal support, such as in the social narratives embedded in wills and lawsuits that provide the context surrounding land disputes. To best understand the significance of the concept of ‘friend’ in early medieval English society, it is beneficial to first review the instances of the Old English words *freond* and *freondscype* in the corpus to grasp the range of meanings of both terms as they apply to the historical documents discussed in this dissertation.

Within the corpus of early medieval English texts, there is a range of functions that a friend can perform and different levels of friendship that individuals can have with one another. These ranges in friends and friendship are not so different from what we in a

modern sense understand to be friends and friendship. Just as today, the people of early medieval England also appeared to understand friends as having different functions for different situations and friendship as having different levels of intimacy. In a general sense, the early medieval English people thought of friends as those who demonstrated a level of affection for another. We can see this in *Beowulf* when the narrator describes to the listeners that “Heorot innan wæs freondum afylled” [the interior of Heorot was filled with friends],⁴¹ or in *Juliana* when the saint’s father speaks to her about her bridegroom, saying “wiðsæcest þu to swiþe sylfre rædes þinum brydguman ... he is to freonde god”⁴² [you deny this bridegroom too harshly with your own advice... He is [or perhaps would be] a good friend]. In the law codes, this general sense of ‘freond’ is also apparent. In VI Æthelred 6, the law states “we willað biddan freonda gehwylcne & eal folc eac læran georne, þæt hy inwerdre heortan ænne God lufian & ælcne hæþendom georne ascunian”⁴³ [we shall beseech all of our friends and also eagerly enjoin all the people, that they love one God with their innermost heart, and eagerly shun all heathen customs]. Similarly in VIII Æthelred 44.1, the law states “and uton ænne cynehlaford holdlice healdan; & freonda gehwile mid rihtan getriwðan oðerne lufige & healde mid rihte”⁴⁴ [and let us loyally support one king, and let each of our friends love the other with absolute justice and hold [them] with justice]. Each of these examples pertain to the general sense of affection and kindness one demonstrates to their friendship network, which in some cases may be intimate friends and in others may be more general, such as those who might support one in a legal setting.

⁴¹ Friedrich Klaeber et al., eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), line 1017.

⁴² William, Strunk, trans., “Juliana” In *English Literature: From Its Beginning to the Year 1100*. Section I. Edited by Edward Miles Brown. Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1904, 5.

⁴³ Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze Der Angelsachsen*, vol. 1 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1960), 248.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 268.

In the corpus, it is not uncommon to see examples of what it means to be a friend that applies to a wider range of relationships. For example, a friend seems to, at times, apply to those who assume the role of family. In particular, in V Æthelred 31.1, the law states “gyf he ongean riht þurh æhlyp geonbyrde & swa gewyrce, þæt hine man afylle, licge ægyld eallan his freondan”⁴⁵ [if he strives against justice through a breach of the peace and commits a breach, that strikes down oneself, no compensation shall be fulfilled to any of his friends]. This particular law pertains to the obstruction of God’s or the king’s law and the fatal consequences that may arise from such obstruction. It is common in the law codes for the family to receive compensation for the death of a family member. Here, the friends assume the role of the family, which suggests that relatives and friends served similar roles. A friend might also be a person who takes on the role of a supporter in different circumstances, such as a protector or a supporter in a legal case. In S 1534, a man named Wulfgeat writes in his will that “he bit his hlaford for Godes lufan þ[æt] he beo his wifes freond & his dohter”⁴⁶ [he asks his lord for the love of God that he be a friend of his wife and his daughter]. In II Æthelstan 20.7, which pertains to the laws of assembly meetings and the consequences of not attending, the law states that “gif hwa hine wrecan wille oððe hine fælæce, þonne beo he fah wið ðone cyng & wið ealle his freond”⁴⁷ [if anyone wishes to avenge him or to be at feud with them, then he will be in hostility against the king and against all his friends]. Similarly, in II Edward 3, the law states “gif hwa ðifþe betogen sy, þonne niman hine on borh ða þe hine hlaforde befæston, þæt he hine þæs

⁴⁵ Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 244.

⁴⁶ S 1534.

⁴⁷ F. L. Attenborough, tran., *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, 2006), 138.

getrywsiġe; oððe oþere frynd, gif he hæbbe, don þæt sylfe”⁴⁸ [if someone is accused of theft, those who have entrusted him to a lord shall take a surety for him, so that he shall justify himself [of the crime]; or if he has any other friends, they may do the same]. From these examples, a friend might be close companion, an acquaintance, one who demonstrates kindness to others, and those who provide support in a given situation. This range in functions a friend might perform for another are not restricted to a particular gender. The terms “freond” or “frynd” are used gender-inclusive, “freond” being a masculine noun and “frynd” being one attested plural for this noun. This means that the friends mentioned in the above excerpts could have applied to both men and women.

The same is relatively true for the idea of friendship in the early medieval English period. In the corpus, friendship is a concept that is used in a variety of ways. For example, friendship might be a state of being, such as in *The Wife's Lament*. The woman reminisces on the relationships she had with her lord before she was commanded to seek sanctuary away from the individuals in her community who intended her harm. She reminisces that “ful oft wit beotedan / þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana / owiht elles: eft is þæt onhworfen, / is nu <swa> hit no wære / freondscipe uncer”⁴⁹ [very often we two vowed that nothing would part the two of us except death alone; after everything, that has been reversed. It is now as if it never were, the friendship of us two]. Similarly, in VI *Æthelstan* 7, the law states “dyde dæda se þe dyde, <þe> ure ealra teonan wræce, þæt we wæron ealle swa on anum freondscype swa on anum feondscype, swa hwæðer hit þonne wære” [whoever it be whose hands avenge wrongs done to use all, we shall all stand together,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁹ Anonymous, “The Wife's Lament,” 76-79.

both in friendship and in feud – whichever may result].⁵⁰ Friendship is also considered a demonstration of goodwill to another whether for the intent of a close friendship or general friendship. For example, in *Andreas* when St. Andreas, his disciples, and three travelers who are Jesus and two angels in disguise travel by ship to rescue St. Matthew, he speaks to Jesus telling him “wolde ic freondscipe, þeoden þrymfæst, <þinne>, gif ic mehte, begitan godne”⁵¹ [I wish, glorious prince, if I might, to obtain your good friendship], unknowing that he is indeed speaking to Jesus. Similarly in VIII *Æthelred* 32 the law states that “be þam þe ge willan Godes oððe minne freondscipe habban, filstan heora wicneran æghwar to rihte”⁵² [be [it] on the condition [that] you desire to have God's and my friendship, help their stewards everywhere to [be given their] rights]. In both of these excerpts, the individuals seeking friendship are doing so with the intent of receiving the goodwill of those who might give them the friendship they seek.

The concept of seeking friendship for the sake of attaining one's goodwill is closely connected to maintaining a friendship that is a privilege and not a right. In the case of *Andreas*, for example, he sought the friendship of the traveler he called the “þeoden þrymfæst” [glorious prince], a gift that could have been denied. Likewise, in the preface of I *Æthelstan*, the law prefaces that “ic Æðelstan cyningc, mid geþeahte Wulfhelm arcebiscop & eac minra oðera biscopa, cyð ðam grefan to hwilcere birig & eow bidde on Godes naman & on eallum his haligra & eac be minum freondscipe beode” [I, King Aethelstan, with the advice of my Archbishop Wulfhelm, and my other bishops also, inform the reeve in every borough, and pray you in the name of God and of all His saints,

⁵⁰ Attenborough, *The Laws*, 162-163.

⁵¹ George Philip Krapp and Dobbie Elliott van Kirk, eds., *The Exeter Book*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge & Sons, 1936), 19.

⁵² Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 267.

and command you also by my friendship].⁵³ This preface pertains to the command that all the reeves in the region must abide by the law code following the preface under the understanding that their friendship with the king is at stake if they do not abide by the law. This sense of friendship being tied to obligation as well as being a privilege that can be revoked or denied informs us of the tenuous nature that friendship could have depending on the circumstances. This is made abundantly clear in S 1088 which is a writ composed by King Edward to the bishops, earls, reeves, and thanes who reside on the lands owned by Archbishop of Stigand. The writ, which details the rights he gives to Archbishop Stigand, states that “ic nelle gepauian þ[æt] æni man þis tobrece be mina freondscipe”⁵⁴ [I will not allow that any man break this [writ], by my friendship]. On pain of losing a king’s friendship, the recipients of the writ are warned not to break the terms of the writ. The various types of friendship in these excerpts demonstrates the ways friendship was practiced among the early medieval English community.

These various manifestations of friendship and the functions a friend might serve apply in different ways to the chapters in this dissertation. The friendships and friends that appear in Chapters 2 and 3, which discuss lawsuits and wills, are primarily established friendships that have been maintained for long periods of time. The mutual affection that an individual shows to another is a feature of friendship and what it means to be a friend that appears in the letters discussed in Chapter 4. In addition, the intent to find goodwill from another is also apparent in the letters discussed in Chapter 4. This is an example of how individuals might choose to establish a new friendship with another person. In these historical documents, friendship and the services friends provide for others blur the lines

⁵³ Attenborough, *The Laws*, 122-123.

⁵⁴ S 1088.

between family and friend. In addition, these historical documents often portray friends as those who offer support for others during their times of need and depending on their situations. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the examples of the interactions between friends and the practice of friendship between women discussed in these chapters therefore pertain to legal situations. These various forms of friendship and services that friends provide for others offers a point of comparison for the dysfunctional relationships the woman in *The Wife's Lament* has with those who fail to perform the services of a friend (Chapter 5).

Early Medieval English Law as Literature

A large part of this dissertation engages with early medieval English legal writing, such as wills, lawsuits, and law codes. Within these documents are references to social and religious ideologies which suggests that the composers of these documents were influenced by religious and social stimuli, such as religious practices and social values. These influences in the language of the law also implies that these texts were composed as social documents rather than solely the document of the composer. A unique feature of early medieval English legal texts is the influence literature had on the writings of law codes, lawsuits, and wills. It was not uncommon to see references to biblical literature in the prefaces of the law codes, particularly King Alfred's and King Ine's prefaces,⁵⁵ and in the law codes themselves, such as in King Æthelstan I's.⁵⁶ In addition, it is also not uncommon to see religious ideological influences on the law codes, such as in King Wihtried's⁵⁷ and

⁵⁵ Attenborough, *The Laws*, 33-94.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-126.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-32.

King Alfred's,⁵⁸ and social ideological influences, such as in King Æthelstan I's.⁵⁹ While the law codes contain references to biblical texts and lawsuits and wills include social narratives, this isn't to say that such legal documents were composed through creative means or with creative intents. Rather, legal documents were composed as methods of shaping societies through documents that served as reminders of social values. This memorial aspect of legal texts contributed to society in ways that addressed past legal situations and that prepared society to avoid those same legal situations in the future.⁶⁰ This practice of preparing legal documents that attempted to avert past legal situations for the future speaks to the social values that influenced the composers.

The influence of literature on legal writing is very apparent in the introductory material to law codes, such as Alfred's *domboc*, and in the laws themselves. The preface to Alfred's laws is quite extensive and provides many references to biblical texts. In his edition of the early medieval English law codes, F.L. Attenborough explains that the "laws of Alfred are preceded by a long introduction (chapters 1-48) which contains the ten commandments (chapters 1-10), and many other precepts from the Mosaic law (chapters 11-48). These are followed by a brief account of Apostolic history and of Church law, as laid down by ecclesiastical councils, both ecumenical and English (chapter 49:1-7)."⁶¹ A majority of the influence that literature and social and religious ideologies had on legal documents appears in the prefatory material to the law codes. For example, Alfred 5:4 "eac cirican frið: gif hwelc mon cirican gesece for ðara gylta hwylcum, þara ðe ær geyppeð

⁵⁸ Ibid., 62-94.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 122-126.

⁶⁰ For more on this discussion, see Rabin, *Law and Legal Culture*, 7; Andrew Rabin, *Crime and Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 15-16.

⁶¹ Attenborough, *The Laws*, 193.

nære, 7 hine ðær on Godes namman geandette, sie hit healf forgifen” [the privilege of sanctuary belonging to a church includes also the following: if anyone takes refuge in a church, because of any offence which up to that time had been kept secret, and there confesses his sin in God’s name, half the punishment shall be remitted him].⁶² The phrase “7 hine ðær on Godes namman geandette” [and there confesses his sin in God’s name] demonstrates the ideological concern the composers had for the souls of those who committed crimes and subsequently sought sanctuary. This ideological concern is derived from the religious doctrine of salvation which Augustine of Hippo discusses at length in his letters⁶³ and which appears throughout the law codes that pertain to sanctuary.⁶⁴ In addition, Æthelstan I’s law code also makes several references to biblical passages. In Æthelstan 2, the law states “utan geþencan, hu Iacob cwæð se heahfæder: ‘Decimas et hostias pacificas offeram tibi’; 7 hu Moyses cwæð on Godes lage: ‘Decimas et primitias non tardabis offerre Domino’”⁶⁵ [let us remember how Jacob the Patriarch said ‘Decimas et hostias pacificas offeram tibi’ [I will offer tithes and peace-offerings to you,] and how Moses said on God’s law ‘Decimas et primitias non tardabis offerre Domino’ [do not delay to offer tithes and first-fruits to the Lord]]. This example not only calls the readers to remember their knowledge of Jacob the Patriarch but also provides the readers with quotes from Genesis and Exodus.⁶⁶ In Æthelstan 4.1, the law states, “se godcunde lare us gemynap, þæt we ða heofonlica ðinga mid ðam eorþlicum 7 ða ecelic mid ðam

⁶² Attenborough, *The Laws*, 66-67.

⁶³ Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. John E. Rotelle and Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ For more discussion on sanctuary and salvation, see Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 10, 37; Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400–1500* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2011), chaps. 2, 4-6.

⁶⁵ Attenborough, *The Laws*, 122.

⁶⁶ Attenborough explains that the Latin quotes are not verbatim but are most closely connected with Genesis 28:22 and Exodus 22:29, see Attenborough, *The Laws*, 206.

hwilwendlicum gearniap” [the divine teaching instructs us that we gain the things of heaven by those of the earth, and the eternal by the temporal].⁶⁷ The phrase “godcunde lare” [divine teachings] informs us that the composers of the law code were aware of the biblical resources and that the kings desired the biblical references to help shape the code of the law. These examples of biblical literature and religious ideologies inform us that the law codes were influenced by literature.

The social and religious influences on legal writing during this period also informs us that legal writing was a practice that involved the community at large. It is, of course, necessary to note that legal writing was conducted by those in prominent positions, but the contents of the legal writing applied to the community at large.⁶⁸ The community aspect of legal writing means that there is always going to be an ideological influence on the legal context. Patrick Wormald asserts that “kings and their advisors were most likely to make written law when exposed to ideological stimulation. Law-making councils can be given contexts when the course of the king’s reign, or the festal cycle of the Church and of his court, most emphasized his majesty.”⁶⁹ On this matter, Andrew Rabin explains that legal documents

served an important ideological function. The opportunity to enshrine a narrative in an official or semi-official venue, whether a Gospel book, a church library, or some sort of government archive, offered litigants the chance to communicate their own perspectives on the nature of law and legal authority. The responsibility for

⁶⁷ Ibid., 124-125.

⁶⁸ See Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 94.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 448.

producing such a document [i.e., lawsuits] generally fell to the victor, and it would have been very much in his or her interest to do so.⁷⁰

The composition of lawsuit records offered the winning litigants an opportunity to share their perspective on the suit as a method of shaping future readers' understanding of the context surrounding the suit. The same also applies to the composition of law codes. John Hudson explains that in the language in the law codes "the legal was not clearly distinguished, if distinguished at all, from the social or the religious."⁷¹ This is evident in the mixture of genres in legal documents such as the *Textus Roffensis* – of which the first part is a collection of early medieval English laws copied during the early 12th century –, the law codes of King Alfred and King Æthelstan I, and wills and lawsuits which have embedded social narratives. Ending wills with curses, referring to biblical scripture in law codes, and including social narratives in lawsuit records show how literature had an influence on legal writing. Early medieval English people may have taken what they learned about social and religious values in literature and applied it to legal writing as a way of shaping their societies. This blending of genres demonstrates the composers' efforts in shaping the society who lived under the law codes and who used legal records to not only preserve and protect their properties and assets but to also portray their part in the record favorably to future readers.⁷²

In wills and lawsuits, the social narratives that are embedded in them also contribute to the influence of literature on legal documents of the period. Many wills conclude with

⁷⁰ Andrew Rabin, "Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law: A Student Edition of Five Old English Lawsuits," *Old English Newsletter* 41, no. 3 (2008), 36.

⁷¹ John Hudson, "Court Cases and Legal Arguments in England, c. 1066-1166," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series, v. 10 (2000), 92.

⁷² For further discussion on this, see *ibid.*, 15-16, 26 and Rabin, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, 35-36.

language that emulates the curses found at the end of the Metrical Charms. For example, at the end of S 1211, the Will of Eadgifu, she composed the following statement: “7 cwæp þæt Crist sylf mid eallum heofonlicum mægne þane awyrgde on ecnesse þe þas gife æfre awende oþþe gewanude”⁷³ [and she declared that Christ himself with all the heavenly host would curse forever anyone who should ever divert or diminish this gift]. In addition, in the Will of Æthelgifu, she composed the following statement: “gif hpa bidde þ[æt] ðes cpide standan ne mote purðe he aorpen on þa pynstran hand þonne se hæled his dom deme 7 he purðe gode spa lað Iudas þæs þy hyne selfne aheng buton hio hit get self apende 7 þa ne lybben þe hit nu becpeden ys”⁷⁴ [if anyone ask that this will may not be permitted to stand may he become outcasted on the left hand when the Lord deems his doom and may he become so hated as was Judas who hanged himself unless she herself change it hereafter and those might not live to who it is now bequeathed]. In both the wills of Eadgifu and Æthelgifu, the final statements emulate the type of curse that commonly appears at the end of the metrical charms. For example, the charm “For Loss of Cattle 1” curses the thief, saying that “Iudeas Crist ahengon, dydon dæda þa wyrrestan, hælon þæt hy forhelan ne mihtan. Swa þeos dæd nænige þinga forholen ne wurþe þurh þa haligan Cristes rode”⁷⁵ [Judas has Christ hung up, doing the worst of deeds, covering him so that he could not be hidden. So by this deed may nothing be hidden through the Holy Rood of Christ]. Likewise, the charm “For Loss of Cattle 2” curses the thief, saying “eall he weornige, swa syre wudu weornie, swa breðel seo swa þystel, se ðe ðis feoh oðfergean þence oððe ðis orf oðehtian

⁷³ S 1211.

⁷⁴ Crick, “The Will of Æthelgifu,” 147.

⁷⁵ Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1942), 126.

ðence”⁷⁶ [may all of his wither away, as the woods waste away – as worthless as the thistle – him who meant to steal away these cattle, or who meant to drive away this herd]. The curses that appear at the end of some wills share many similarities with curses that appear at the end of metrical charms. At the end of many wills, there is a curse that is cast upon those who attempt to change the words in the will, which is considered as a type of violation, just as the charms cast a curse upon the thief.

Many of the lawsuits available to us are embedded in wills. This connection between the two genres is notable since wills often demonstrate literary qualities, such as the language of cursing. The merging of lawsuit record into will speaks to the social aspect of legal writing during the early medieval English period. The lawsuit often provides additional context for the readers and hearers of the will to better understand the perspective of the testatrix. This additional context can be thought of as a form of storytelling. The victors who fought legal battles to repossess their lands recount the story of that battle for the benefit of their readers and hearers who will later learn of their legal situations from the recounter’s perspective. The victor’s recounting of the legal situation also provides insight on the social aspect of the lawsuit. The recounting not only identifies the people involved but also the social values that the people upheld. For example, in S 1454, a suit between a woman named Wynflæd and a man named Leofwine, the record states that the king commanded that the councilors overseeing the suit should ensure that Wynflæd and Leofwine reconcile “swa rihtlice geseman swa him æfre rihtlicost þuhte”⁷⁷ [as justly as seemed most right to them]. This phrase suggests that the councilors should rely on their social ideologies. In this case, the reconciliation was more important than the broken social

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ S 1454.

network between two powerful landowners if the suit were to end with bitterness between the litigants. The influence of social ideologies in lawsuits informs us of the blending of literary and legal writing. This blending offers us insight on the ways in which the early medieval English people may have used their social ideologies in legal writing to shape their communities.

The influence of literature on legal writing is not always overtly obvious. There are sometimes subtle hints, such as the social narratives in lawsuits. There are also more obvious literary elements in legal writing, though, such as the curses that appear at the end of wills. And, perhaps most obvious, is the influence of biblical literature on the prefaces and laws in the early medieval English law codes. This presence of literary influence in legal writing enables scholars to approach early medieval English legal writing through a literary approach. While these legal documents were not intended to be creative texts, they used literary elements in order to convey a particular perspective that could shape the perspectives of those who would later encounter the documents.

Applying Social Network Theory to Early Medieval English Studies

The predominant theoretical lens used in this dissertation is social network theory. The application of this theoretical lens to the chapters of this dissertation enables me to closely investigate the interactions of friendship between women in the historical documents discussed in this dissertation and the functions and dysfunctions of the woman's social networks of friendship in *The Wife's Lament*. In order to understand the application of this theoretical lens to the chapters of this dissertation, it is prudent to first provide an overview of the theory itself.

Social network theory began in the 17th century as a philosophical consideration of the social contracts of labor and state authority versus individual agency. Between the 18th and 19th centuries, the discourse of social network theory incorporated mathematics to analyze graph schematics of artificial network constructs. By the 20th century, the sociologists Emile Durkheim, Jacob Levy Moreno, and George Homans combined the mathematical approach with behavioral and ethnographic analyses of extant social constructs thereby making social network theory applicable to real-world social constructs. Social network theory questions elements of relationships and communities such as social norms, emotional and affective responses to change, and active and reactive behavior.⁷⁸

The first prominent theorist of modern social network theory, George Homans' work in the 1950s pushed the field from a theoretical social science to an applicable theoretical framework. As opposed to his predecessors, Homans approached social networks from a group-centric perspective of real rather than theoretical social systems. In his book *The Human Group*, he argued that social systems were grounded in reciprocal interactions between individuals and that the effect of those interactions directly influenced the social structure of a larger social system.⁷⁹ He claimed that the motives of an individual's interaction with others is a product of his or her experience of "group life," and that, moreover, the individual's interactions inevitably serve the group as a whole rather than only the individual.⁸⁰ Homans, explains that social systems are grounded in the interactions between each individual and the effect those interactions have on the overall

⁷⁸ Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts and Findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3-12.

⁷⁹ Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), 110.

⁸⁰ Homans, *The Human Group*, 95.

social structure.⁸¹ The interactions between each individual is identified as the internal system of the social network. Homans explains that the internal system can be thought of as “group behavior that is an expression of the sentiments towards one another developed by the members of the group in the course of their life together.”⁸² Homans states that motives of self-interest “are the product of group life and serve the ends of a whole group not just an individual.”⁸³ Whether the motive originates out of self-interest or group awareness, the product of the motive will always serve the group. The phrase “serve the group,” here, denotes the residual effect of an individual’s choices on his or her surrounding community whether the effect be positive or negative. Homans articulates that in internal systems “organized wholes have some things in common with one another but also differ greatly among themselves, especially in the capacity to maintain a steady state in the face of changes in the environment.”⁸⁴ Homans theorizes that “in the external system the sentiments being expressed are those a person brings to the group from his life outside the group.”⁸⁵ While a small-group relationship, such as a monad, dyad, or triad, provides a space in which individuals have more mobility to express themselves to one another, large-group relationships often have a leader. Homans addresses the development of a relationship based on the emotional exchange, arguing that “any emotional attitude we take toward someone tends, like any other drive, to get itself expressed in activity, which may in turn arouse sentiment in the person to whom it is addressed, and so lead to reciprocal activity.”⁸⁶ John Stolte and Richard Emerson explore the dynamics of social network

⁸¹ Ibid., 110.

⁸² Ibid., 110.

⁸³ Ibid., 95.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 262.

structures, in particular the relationship between power and position in social networks. They explain that “the concept of role allows us to separate a person’s behavior as friend to one part from his actions as a lover to another party.”⁸⁷ Thus, there are multiple roles that an individual has within a social network; a person is not limited to fulfilling only one role within a social network.

Just as there are multiple roles an individual can serve within a social network, so too are there multiple connections to each relationship within a social network. Mark Granovetter theorized in his article “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited” the concept of strong and weak ties within social networks. He claims that weak ties are typically those we consider as acquaintances while strong ties are those we consider as close friends. Such social connections are often viewed as inconsequential, yet he argued that individuals who have few weak ties are more prone to social and cultural biases. Within a social structure, strong ties, or those social networks composed of close friends, are inherently densely knit communities of people who participate in the same or similar group life. Social structures with few weak ties, or exposure to acquaintances from other types of group life, are less likely to gain information about other social systems unlike their own which confines them and the other individuals within the strong tie to a provincial lifestyle and a more focused perspective of national and global societies and events.⁸⁸ In his book *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings*, Charles Kadushin also focuses his work on social systems as they are influenced by culture and social environments. He argued that social network analysis must distinguish between networks

⁸⁷ John F. Stolte and Richard M. Emerson, “Structural Inequality: Position and Power in Network Structures,” in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans*, ed. George C. Homans, Robert L. Hamblin, and John H. Kunkel (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), 122.

⁸⁸ Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” 201-202.

that are “mandated by culture and the social system [and] networks created and negotiated by people in the process of trying to mandate and work the ‘system.’”⁸⁹ He described the former as “formal named and instituted relationships” and the latter as “informal or unanticipated.”⁹⁰ He theorized that the location of a social system itself had the capability of influencing the individuals and that this mutual influence had the capacity to influence people to become alike.⁹¹ Distinguishing between instituted and unanticipated social systems, then, enables social network analysts to draw comparisons and connections between social systems based on their levels of influence from their cultural and social environments.

Julian Haseldine draws comparisons between the networks of conceptualizing pre-modern and modern experiences of friendship within the scholarly community. In his article “Friendship Networks in Medieval Europe” he claims that one of the integral disparities in criticism on the conceptualization of pre-modern and modern friendship is the distinction between acquaintance from “professed friend.”⁹² Haseldine claims that source evidence of pre-modern friendship tends to use “similar ideal terms” that obscure the “different degrees of affection or acquaintance” within friendship networks.⁹³ The ambiguity and limited lexical range of pre-modern friendship terms harkens back to the difficulties Granovetter and Kadushin discuss about provincial communities composed primarily of strong ties. This overview of select scholarship in Early Medieval English Studies and social network theory demonstrates the overlap of concepts relating to social

⁸⁹ Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 39.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹² Haseldine, “Friendship Networks”, 70-73.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71.

structures. I intend to put Early Medieval English Studies and social network theory into conversation by applying the theoretical framework of social network theory to evidence of female friendship in female-composed historical documents.

Structure of the Dissertation

The following chapters presented in this dissertation are organized in a couple of different ways. First, each chapter engages with a different genre: Chapter 1 – lawsuits, Chapter 2 – wills, Chapter 3 – correspondence, Chapter 4 – poetry, and Chapter 5 – hagiography. And, second, the chapters are also organized according to how they inform one another. Chapters 1 and 2 are foundational chapters of this dissertation. In addition to engaging with records of women’s legal actions and female-composed wills, they provide a majority of the context needed to better understand the women of this period and their social contexts as well as acknowledging the active participation women had in their communities. Chapter 3 is an exploration of this active participation through the examination of female-composed correspondence. Chapters 4 and 5 are close readings of two presumably male-authored texts. Both chapters take into consideration the contexts of women’s actions and the active rather than passive role women played in their social environments as discussed in Chapters 1 through 3. These last two chapters offer two examples of how we might reconsider the ways we read women in the Early Medieval English corpus.

Chapter 2: Early Medieval English Women, Social Networks, and Legal Disputes

Introduction

Over the past two decades, literary and historian scholars have purported differing perspectives over the efficacy and governance of early medieval English law. Some view legal authority of this period as generally subject to the ideological practices of local communities.⁹⁴ Others see a centralized governing administration ruled by an interventionist monarch and royal court.⁹⁵ One perspective that has not been considered, though, is the influence of social ideology, particularly friendship, on the administration of the law in legal disputes. The deciding factor in legal cases was often the gathering of one's friends and the testimony of one's supporters. The centralized influence of social networks on the outcome of lawsuits insinuates that friendship was considered a reliable source with which to judge a litigant's case, and perhaps was even a consideration in the very crafting of the law codes and legal system.⁹⁶ There was indeed a foundation of law codes to follow,⁹⁷ but the final judgment could be swayed by two factors: the defendant's and claimant's use of friends and supporters as witnesses, and the legal and political knowledge of the defendant and claimant.

⁹⁴ Patrick Wormald, "Giving God and King Their Due: Conflict and Its Resolution in the Early English State," in *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London: Hambledon Press, 2004), 348–54; Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁵ James Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000), 1–30; Stephen Baxter, "The Limits of the Late Anglo-Saxon State," *Medievalists.net*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.medievalists.net/2017/08/limits-late-anglo-saxon-state/>.

⁹⁶ For the scope of this project, I will not be exploring this topic, but it is worth noting that this is an area that has yet to be sufficiently explored in the field.

⁹⁷ Between the 7th to the 10th century, the law codes of Æthelberht, Ine, Alfred the Great, Edward the Elder, Æthelstan, and Æthelred were foundational codes to the whole of early medieval English law making and administration.

Just as it is today, early medieval English law was a broad and complex part of society. Ranging from ecclesiastical and secular law to inheritance to penal codes, law pertains to all aspects and functions of society. To discuss all facets of the law during the early medieval English period would exceed the scope and purpose of this chapter. Instead, this chapter will focus on litigation, specifically land disputes. Of the lawsuits available to us, a majority of the evidence of female social networks is found in legal disputes of land ownership pertaining to women of the nobility. Much of this evidence is extant because of church record-keeping practices of the period. Early medieval English churches preserved documents that recorded the properties they owned and the history of that property. Lawsuits that record the names of properties that were bequeathed, sold, or seized by the church were often preserved in church records. There may have been, at one time in the past, a plethora of lawsuit records with evidence of female social networks. We may never know. What we do know, based on the documents that remain, is that women, and in most cases women of the noble class, had extensive and influential social networks that they used to secure, regain, and maintain ownership of their lands.

In the lawsuits discussed in this chapter, four women--Eadgifu, Æthelgifu, Wynflæd, and Wulfgyth--push for the enforcement of the law to the fullest extent and use their social networks to substantiate their cases. While lawsuits involving women may not have been written by women,⁹⁸ these four lawsuits are embedded in women's wills which suggests that women had a part in the document's composition. A majority of scholarship chooses to view these women's cases through the perspective of their struggle to navigate a predominately male-favored legal system and their vulnerability in a male-dominated

⁹⁸ For example, the Herefordshire lawsuit (S 1462) is a stand-alone charter that records a woman's words. It was not composed by a woman, but it does record her words verbatim.

culture.⁹⁹ While women may have experienced unequal circumstances in a gender-biased culture, the strategic legal decisions they made must not be overlooked or overshadowed by the gender inequality they navigated. I contend that the predominate focus in scholarship on the context surrounding lawsuits involving women overlooks the evidence that shows women had more agency and authority than previously thought. Moreover, I argue that a more attentive focus should be paid to the evidence of their use of social networks.

Lawsuit Records and Authorship

Lawsuit records were social documents that recorded social narratives that portrayed particular perspectives of the legal context.¹⁰⁰ These documents were not meant for the sole use of one person but as a record for future users.¹⁰¹ As a social document, the record was most likely written by a scribe but the accounts of the litigants may have been dictated to the scribe. The litigant most likely had a part in the composition of the record since they were invested in the perspectives that others had of their legal situation. This means that even though the women may not have written the record themselves, they had a social investment to get their story right in the record in order to portray themselves in the best way possible. This means that women most likely had an active role in the composition of these documents. This active role in the composition of the documents

⁹⁹ Andrew Rabin, "Capital Punishment and the Anglo-Saxon Judicial Apparatus: A Maximum View?," in *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Jay Paul Gates and Nicole Marafioti (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2014), pp. 181-200; Andrew Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 17-39; Paul Hyams, "Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): pp. 1-43; Jurasinski, Stefan. "Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England." *Speculum* 94, no. 3 (July 2019): 849-50; Kennedy, Alan. "Law and Litigation in the *Libellus Aethelwoldi Episcopi*." *Anglo-Saxon England* 24 (1995): 131-83; and Andrew Rabin, "Law and Justice," in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, ed. Jacqueline A. Stodnick and Trilling Renée Rebecca (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 85-98.

¹⁰⁰ See *Introduction*, esp. 21-35.

¹⁰¹ See Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 7-16.

reminds us that we need to apply a more expansive concept of authorship during this period. The scribe who physically transferred the spoken word to the medium was only a part of the writing process. There are also the witnesses of the suit who provided their account of the proceedings and the litigant herself who would have provided her side of the suit.

One of the lawsuit records in which this is most evident is S 1462, a dispute between an anonymous woman and her son, Edwin, over two estates in Herefordshire and the anonymous woman's bequeathal of all her lands and property to a kinswoman, in effect an oral will.¹⁰² This land dispute record involves a number of people, for example the assembly of thanes at a meeting place in Herefordshire, several ealdormen and a bishop, the litigant (an anonymous woman), the claimant (the anonymous woman's son, Edwin), and the donee¹⁰³ (the anonymous woman's kinswoman to whom she bequeaths all of her lands and property).¹⁰⁴ Just as with Hild of Whitby, who was a critical part of the production of Cædmon's *Hymn*,¹⁰⁵ the unnamed woman is a critical part of the production of this lawsuit record. It is clear from the language in the lawsuit that the record was orally transmitted to a scribe. Phrases such as "þa acsode þe bisceop" [then asked the bishop], "þa andsweorode Ðurcil Hwita" [then answered Thurkil White], "þa ascodon heo hwylce talu heo hæfde ymbe þa land þe hire sunu æfter spæc" [they asked what claim she had to the lands for which her son was suing], "þa sæde heo" [then she said], and "gecleopade ða Leoflæde hire magan to hire Ðurcilles wif 7 beforan heom to hire þus cwæð" [then she called Leoflæd her kinswoman to her, Thurkil's wife, and, before them all, thus spoke to

¹⁰² See Chapter 3, esp. 72-81.

¹⁰³ Donee, like beneficiary, is a term often used to identify those who might receive benefits from an individual's last will and testament.

¹⁰⁴ S 1462.

¹⁰⁵ See Introduction, esp. 5-6.

her] demonstrate this aspect of the record.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the scribe records some of the anonymous woman's words verbatim: "her sit Leoflæde min mæge þe ic geann ægðer ge mines landes . ge mines goldes . ge ræglæs . ge reafes . ge ealles þe ic ah æfter minon dæge"¹⁰⁷ [here sits Leofflæd my kinswoman to whom I give [each of] my lands, money, clothes, [spoils of clothing], and all that I have after my days] and "doð þegnlice . 7 wel abeodað mine ærende to þam gemote beforan eallum þam godan mannum . 7 cyðað heom hwæm ic mines landes geunnen hæbbe . 7 ealre minre æhte . 7 minan agenan sunu næfre nam þing"¹⁰⁸ [do nobly and well and announce my message to the Moot before all the good men and tell them to whom I have given my lands and all my property, and never anything at all to my own son]. While the lawsuit record was orally transmitted, that is not to say that the record was solely authored by the scribe. Rather, the record had a number of people who participated in the composition of the record. The anonymous woman, then, must be considered one of the composers of the record because of her direct connection to the suit and her words that are, at times, copied verbatim into the record.

Just as with S 1462, the same applies to the other lawsuits that are discussed in this dissertation. Each lawsuit record is an example of multiple individuals who participate in the composition of the document which requires us to consider them to be a part of the authorship process. This dissertation strives to acknowledge the central part the women played in the composition of the lawsuits that portray their side of the suits in their land disputes.

¹⁰⁶ S 1462.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Application of Social Network Theory in Evidence of Friendship in Legal Disputes

Friendship in lawsuits appears in specific situations that require a litigant to produce supporters in law to defend them and to serve as witnesses to their case.¹⁰⁹ These types of friendships are a form of practical friendship in which an individual might make use of their friendship network as if it were a tool. This is to say that in the lawsuit records, there is little affective language used to describe the sentiments an individual feels towards those who they call upon to support them in their legal situation. The friendships in the lawsuits discussed in this chapter typically appear as large group social networks and as dyadic relationships.¹¹⁰ In some cases, a litigant may need a large number of people to defend them in court and in other cases a litigant may need only another person to defend them. For example, S 1211, the Will of Eadgifu, has an embedded lawsuit in the will. This lawsuit record explains that after struggling to repossess her lands from a man named Goda, her friends stepped in and appeared at the royal court on her behalf to obtain an edict from King Edward the Elder that returned the estates to Eadgifu. In this case, a large group of friends helped Eadgifu repossess her lands.¹¹¹ As another example, S 1454, a writ that records a how Queen Ælfthryth came to the aid of a woman named Wulfgyth who was at risk of losing her right to reside on an estate belonging to a bishop, records a dyadic relationship. In this case, Wulfgyth called upon one individual, thereby making this a

¹⁰⁹ See *Introduction*, esp. 23-24.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. 14-18.

¹¹¹ S 1211 uses the Old English term “frynd” which is a plural noun meaning friends. Since the lawsuit does not record a specific list of names for the friends referred to here, I believe we might consider that this was a relatively large group of people. In addition, this lawsuit record was written in 959. Edward the Elder died in 924, see Nicholas J. Higham and David Hill, eds., *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2001), 167–87. There is a significant amount of time between the time the lawsuit occurred and when the lawsuit was recorded. The scribe may not have been able to acquire the list of names or perhaps the list of names was too lengthy to include in the record. In either case, it is clear from the record that Eadgifu had a larger group of friends who came to her aid instead of a dyadic or triadic social group, see S 1211.

dyadic relationship. In her case, calling upon a Queen for aid may have been all the influence she would need to win her case, or perhaps this was the only person Wulfgyth had as a contact who would be able to help her win her case. Whatever her circumstances were, unfortunately we know very little about Wulfgyth, it is clear that she had a close connection with a Queen which placed her in an advantageous position with a highly influential friendship resource. These variations in social networks often depend on the connections the litigants had with those whom they called upon to support them in their legal situation.

History of Early Medieval English Legal Disputes

Written legal records and law codes preserve useful information of the past for the needs of their society's present and for their future. While lawsuit records may not emulate legal language and formulaic writing in a modern sense, they do reflect an effort to capture a legal circumstance to serve as a reference for those of the present and as a reminder for those of the future in an effort to circumvent similar legal situations. The memorial element of lawsuit records is supplemental to law codes in that they are a form of preventative law. By serving as a reference for the present and a reminder for the future, lawsuits, much akin to legal codes, use social stimuli, like land and property disputes, to avoid future litigations.¹¹²

Lawsuits of the early medieval English period do not regularly behave as a legal document might be expected to in a modern context. A notable feature of the early medieval English lawsuit is its hybridity. As a memorial device, records of lawsuits are often

¹¹² Andrew Rabin, "Law and Legal Culture in Anglo-Saxon England," *History Compass* 18, no. 10 (2020): pp. 1-13.

embedded in wills and described in charters. They served as context for inheritors and as evidence for defendants and claimants of other lawsuits. This hybridity results in early medieval English lawsuits that are virtually devoid of any formulaic elements one would expect from a legal document.¹¹³ Early medieval English lawsuits typically follow a style of writing more akin to narrative.¹¹⁴ Early medieval English lawsuits often bear a more organic form of legal recording in that they read closer to land dispute narratives than legal proceedings. Patrick Wormald explains that the extant early medieval English law codes available to us appear as documents written by “rulers in pursuit of a Hebraic or Roman image, and by peoples in defense of their traditions.”¹¹⁵ The lawmakers of the Roman Empire “took a self-consciously literary form, as a consequence of the rhetorical training that was the Quaestor’s [a public official in Ancient Rome] qualification for office.”¹¹⁶ This is especially evident in women’s lawsuit records which often incorporate detailed information related to the use of their social networks in legal disputes.¹¹⁷

In a modern court of law, legal disputes are litigated in court and are ultimately resolved according to a judge’s ruling based on a recommendation of the jury.¹¹⁸ This

¹¹³ For a general reference on the role of charters, such as lawsuit records, in early medieval English litigation, see Simon Keynes, “The ‘Cuckhamsley Chirograph,’” in *Languages of the Law in Early Medieval England: Essays in Memory of Lisi Oliver*, ed. Stefan Jurasinski and Andrew Rabin (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), pp. 193-210.

¹¹⁴ See Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume 1: Legislation and Its Limits* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 145.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 416.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Women are often described in terms of their marital status, something that you don’t see in lawsuits pertaining to men; women’s lawsuits are often focused on land disputes where they must defend their ownership of the land whereas men’s lawsuits often focus on theft of property, inheritance of land, acquiring land, but not on defending their ownership of the land they have.

¹¹⁸ See David M. Rabban, “The History of American Constitutional Law,” in *Law’s History: American Legal Thought and the Transatlantic Turn to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 309-322; David M. Rabban, “The Historical School of American Jurisprudence,” in *Law’s History: American Legal Thought and the Transatlantic Turn to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 325-377; see also Richard A. Cosgrove, “From Conflict to Community,” in *Our Lady the Common Law: An Anglo-American Legal Community, 1870-1930* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 6-24; Richard A. Cosgrove, “‘The First of Our Scholars’: Frederick William Maitland and Legal

process is not necessarily the standard approach to legal dispute resolution in the early medieval English period. While there were different levels of court – such as the shire, hundred, and royal court¹¹⁹ – not all legal disputes were resolved within the court system. Legal disputes could be resolved locally between the claimant and the opponent, for example, through violence. Premeditated homicide, the pursuit of vengeance, or the start of a feud were other ways that legal disputes could be resolved outside of a legal court proceeding.¹²⁰ One example of this type of dispute resolution is S 1377,¹²¹ a charter dated to the late 10th century, where a woman is accused of attempted murder against an opponent who stole her property. Her opponent later flouts the law by seeking capital punishment without a due trail of her crime. She is forcibly removed from her residence and taken to a river and drowned. In this case, the opponent resolved the dispute through nefarious means and outside of the court system. Legal disputes could also be resolved non-violently and instead through property seizure. A disputant may have resorted to this method of dispute resolution in the event that they believed the land belonged more rightly to them than to the opponent.¹²² In S 1211, a mid-10th century will with an embedded lawsuit narrative, provides a record of a dispute between a woman named Eadgifu and a man named Goda.

History,” in *Our Lady the Common Law: An Anglo-American Legal Community, 1870-1930* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), pp. 161-188.

¹¹⁹ See Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 192-208; John Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 43-65.

¹²⁰ For more discussion of legal disputes resolved outside of the court system, see Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 46-49; Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law,” 34-36 and 43-44; and John Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*, 5-9. For examples of rival killings, see S 877 and S 833. For examples of disputes resolved via violence, see *Lawsuits*, nos. 11, 134, and 163D.

¹²¹ Unless otherwise noted, all lawsuits come from the Electronic Sawyer collection.

¹²² For more examples of property seizure and land claims, see, Wormald, *Lawsuits*, no. 272; S 886; and Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law before the Time of Edward I* (Clark, New Jersey.: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2013), 168-169. It is fairly typical to see evidence of land seizure in lawsuits that claim the seizure was violet and unjust, see Wormald, *Lawsuits*, nos. 193, 223, 253.

She claims that he stole two of her estates because he believed his claim on that land was more just than hers. His claim of the two estates is an example of property seizure as a method of dispute resolution that did not involve the court system. Eadgifu, on the other hand, later took this injustice to the royal court and won her plaint against Goda with the help of her friendship network.¹²³ Aside from violence and force, legal disputes could be resolved by a disputant making use of their social network, specifically friends and those who held significant social influence. A disputant could benefit from the support of their lord and lady or other figures of authority. Individuals with significant social influence may have had the authority to solicit aid from officials in positions of power, such as those in the local and royal court system.¹²⁴ A disputant's friends may have been of help if they had relations or connections with officials and authority figures in the legal court system.¹²⁵ In S 1497, dated to approximately the late tenth century, a woman named Æthelgifu records in her will a land dispute in which her deceased husband's kin have refused to release the land he bequeathed to her and in response she calls upon her large network of friends and allies for support. They, in turn, gathered together at one of her estates in a demonstration of their support of her suit against her deceased husband's kin. While the demonstration did not immediately enable her to claim her land, it does provide an example of how friendship networks could be used to aid in a disputant's claim. The embedded lawsuit in Æthelgifu's will provides us with evidence of yet another method available to litigants who sought ways to settle disputes outside of the court. These various methods of dispute

¹²³ See Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 52.

¹²⁴ For the support of a lord, see P Paul R. Hyams, "Warranty and Good Lordship in Twelfth Century England," *Law and History Review* 5, no. 2 (1987), 449-451; S 1445 (the Fonthill Letter). For the support of local officials, see Wormald, *Lawsuits*, no. 323; and Hyams, "Warranty," 450.

¹²⁵ See John Hudson, "Court Cases and Legal Arguments in England, C.1066-1166," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (2000), 14. For more examples of legal disputes resolved via friendships, see Wormald, *Lawsuits*, nos. 242 and 324.

resolution indicate the importance and value of social networks. Settling a dispute outside of court appeared to only be a successful method of resolution if both sides of the suit had a significant and functioning social network. Without access to a social network, a disputant risked injury to their person and loss of their property as is apparent in the case of the woman in S 1377. This may have been a similar result in Eadgifu's case if her friends had not stepped in and brought her case to the royal court.¹²⁶ No matter the circumstances, legal dispute resolutions settled outside of court posed a significant risk to the disputant unless they had a reliable social network to turn to if needed.

One of the benefits of early medieval English legal dispute records is the amount of social context provided in the narratives that describe the circumstances surrounding the dispute. The lawsuits discussed in this chapter all have detailed narratives describing the social circumstances of the legal dispute. The variability in content and length of narrative set them apart from what a modern reader might consider to be a traditional lawsuit record. Unlike modern legal dispute records, early medieval English records did not follow a formal system for recording disputes nor did the system have any formal procedures of how a trial should be conducted or how a dispute should be documented. The only context of what might be considered a cohesive set of generic features for legal dispute records of

¹²⁶ John Hudson explains a vital difference between disputes resolved in the early medieval English period as opposed to a modern court of law: "Court hearings did not necessarily reach judgments, but might share some characteristics with extra-curial settlements. Intercession by neighbors might lead to settlement in court, or parties in court might agree to arbitration. Even following a judgment, a case might often end with the losing party being given some mercy, some sweetener, or some interest in the object of the dispute, for example life-tenure of contested rights. The honor as well as the material interests of the parties could be of importance in the origin, the conduct, and the settlement of disputes, both outside and within court," see Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*, 9; for an example of this, see Wormald, *Lawsuits*, no. 272; for mediation of neighbors in an assembly, see Wormald, *Lawsuits*, no. 368. For further discussion of court hearings and intercessions, see Paul R. Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca (N.Y.): Cornell University Press, 2003), 193 and 199-208.

this period is dependent on the accounts recorded in the extant cases that remain.¹²⁷ This means that even though there are generic features, they are not always consistent across all extant cases of early medieval English disputes. Andrew Rabin discusses this variability and offers an overview of generic features that appear most consistently:

[a] surviving case records indicate that lawsuits were brought before the court by individuals proceeding on their own or on behalf of their families rather than by agents of the state; ... [b] disputes were generally adjudicated by panels rather than individual judges (except in cases where the king himself sat as the judge); ... [c] evidence was presented in the form of witness testimony sponsored by the litigants; ... [d] though “oath-helping” (having a witness attest to the credibility of another witness) was common, it was neither as widespread nor as influential as is frequently portrayed.¹²⁸

Rabin provides an insightful analysis of the impact of these generic features. He claims that “one result of this flexible approach to legal procedure is that many surviving lawsuits record a preference for compromise over strict adjudication.”¹²⁹ According to his analysis, some of the most common evidence of this “preference for compromise over strict adjudication” include the following formulaic phrasing:

[a] Her cyð on ðysum gewrite hu [N] 7 [X] wurðon gesybsumode ‘here is made known in this document how [N] and [X] were reconciled’

¹²⁷ For further discussion of this disparity, see Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law,” 34-37.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 35. For further discussion of the variability of generic features in early medieval English legal disputes, see Patrick Wormald, “Charters, Law and the Settlement of Disputes in Anglo-Saxon England,” *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe*, 1986, pp. 149-168.

¹²⁹ Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law,” 35. In conjunction with Rabin’s claim, Paul Hyams argues that reconciliation is the principal function of a charter, suggesting that “we understand each charter as recording the reconciliation of many forces into a *convencio*, a private agreement between more or less willing partners,” see Paul R. Hyams, “The Charter as a Source for the Early Common Law,” *The Journal of Legal History* 12, no. 3 (1991), 174.

[b] swa rihtlice geseman swa him æfre rihtlicost þuhte ‘as justly as seemed most right to them’

[c] wæron þæt betere wære þæt man þene aþ aweg lete þonne hine man sealde forþan þær syþþan nan freondscype nære ‘it would be better to set aside the oath rather than give it, because thereafter there would be no friendship.’¹³⁰

While these formulaic phrases do, indeed, provide insight on the practice of “compromise over strict adjudication,” I contend that they also signal the significance of social networks in early medieval English society. The act of compromising and the mutual decision to reconcile facilitate the means for maintaining a social network. Rather than risking a broken social network for the sake of a winning a suit, litigants took into consideration the consequences of severing social ties with their rivals, as in the case of example [c]. The same can be said of examples [a] and [b]; both examples identify a joint effort in bringing a case to a close. The flexibility in legal dispute documentation may show the creative lengths litigants used to resolve suits, but they also show the value litigants placed in social networks.

The ways in which litigants resolved legal disputes and chose to record the narratives of those suits speaks to the forethought litigants had regarding the perception of their circumstances by future individuals who would read the documented suit. In addition to the methods already discussed, litigants could also use land conveyances¹³¹ to resolve a dispute. Land conveyances exhibited two fundamental aspects of legal disputes: a common perception of how property ought to be allotted in instances of land transfers and a

¹³⁰ See Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law,” 35-36. Example [a] comes from S 1456; examples [b] and [c] come from S 1454. For an additional example of reconciliation, see S 1460.

¹³¹ Exchanges of land or other forms of property between the crown, the church, and those subjects who were wealthy enough to own substantial estates, see Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 13-19.

consistency of format and language which suggests a widespread sense of the forms and formulae that should appear in a legal document in order for it to be considered official. The purpose of a land conveyance issued during or after a lawsuit was to shape the memory of interested persons, both present and future, to enable or circumvent similar actions. As the historian Warren Brown explains, each charter “reflects a conscious or unconscious effort to select and organize information from the past for the needs of the present, each reflects an effort to select and organize information from the present for the possible needs of the future.”¹³² The production of such legal texts was a directive of the winning party to supply a permanent record of their suit’s victory and to leave a lasting impression of their opponent’s misdeeds.¹³³ This post-suit legal record not only preserved the circumstances, claims, and results of the suit, but it also preserved the litigant’s perspective and use of a friendship social network.

Perhaps the most important stage of dispute resolution was the production of the lawsuit record once the dispute had been resolved. These records provided necessary documentation of the dispute resolution by preserving them in the form of a narrative. The production of these narratives enabled the litigants to control the future disposition of their property and assets as well as the way others viewed the details recorded in the case. Land disputes were not uncommon during the early medieval English period for either gender.¹³⁴

¹³² Warren Brown, “Charters as Weapons. on the Role Played by Early Medieval Dispute Records in the Disputes They Record,” *Journal of Medieval History* 28, no. 3 (2002), 230. See also Sarah Foot, “Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?,” *Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, 2006, 39–67.

¹³³ Hyams, “The Charter as a Source for the Early Common Law,” 173–76.

¹³⁴ A selection from Patrick Wormald, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): S 1254 dispute between Abbot Ecgwold of Tisbury and a monastery over land by Fontmell Brook in Dorset; S 1257 dispute between Bishop Heathored of Worcester and King Offa of Mercia over land at Bath, Warwickshire, and Worcester; S 1430 dispute between Bishops Heathored, Deneberht, and Heahberht of Worcester and Wulfheard over land at Inberrow and Bradley; S 1442 dispute between Wullaf and Aethelwulf over land at Upton; S 1445 dispute between Helmstan and Aethelhelm Higa over land at Fonthill.

While women often became entangled in disputes over inherited or bequeathed land, they showed the same level of political and legal savvy as their male counterparts. A prominent set of examples of this are two lawsuit records, S 1242 and S 1454, that both involve Queen Ælfthryth.¹³⁵ These two lawsuits are significant because they deviate from the common practice of omitting women's names from the record. A majority of lawsuit records typically record male participants, and any significantly influential individuals such as queens and abbesses, in the narrative and in the witness list. S 1242 and S 1454 are different in that they omit the male participants' names and instead record the female participants' names. This detailed accounting in both lawsuit records of the female participants effectually controls the way that future individuals perceive the records. The emphasis is placed on the network of women involved in both cases, the networks of women who testified on behalf of the litigants which inevitably resolved the disputes. While not all lawsuits involving women exhibit this degree of female networking, the four lawsuits examined in this chapter demonstrate the ways women used their social networks and how they chose to characterize the narratives of their dispute settlements. The documents associated with the lawsuits examined in the following sections demonstrate early medieval English women's keen understanding of the law and how to use the law codes to their advantage, whether that be through the reclaiming of seized property, the honored execution of land conveyances, or the preventative measures of protecting land ownership.

¹³⁵ She was a powerful political figure of the late 10th century and the first anointed queen of England, see Andrew Rabin, "Female Advocacy and Royal Protection in Tenth-Century England: The Legal Career of Queen Ælfthryth," *Speculum* 84, no. 2 (2009): 261–88.

Wynflæd's Suit Against Leofwine

The first lawsuit examined in this chapter is S 1454, a late tenth-century suit between two landowners – a woman named Wynflæd and a man named Leofwine. This lawsuit places a special amount of emphasis on the social network Wynflæd used to her advantage in order to win her suit against Leofwine. The lawsuit record explains that Wynflæd made a plea against Leofwine concerning the ownership of two estates in Berkshire. She had at her disposal an impressively powerful network: queen-mother Ælfthryth,¹³⁶ Sigeric Archbishop of Canterbury, and a lengthy list of other women who held positions of power, such as abbesses. Leofwine insisted that the suit be heard at a shire court, or county level court in the modern legal system. He may have demanded this under the assumption that it would be to his advantage to keep the suit against him outside of the royal court where the King Æthelred II's mother, Ælfthryth, would presumably have less sway. Essentially, Leofwine may have assumed that if he could keep Wynflæd's network with Ælfthryth away from the royal court that Ælfthryth would have less sway on the king's ruling of the suit. No matter Leofwine's reasons for keeping the suit at the local court level, the suit was not resolved in his favor. In fact, Wynflæd's social network was so vast and powerful that it most likely would not have mattered at what court level the suit was resolved. The civil suit required that Wynflæd provide proof of ownership of certain estates if she hoped to win her suit against Leofwine. Wynflæd singles out the queen-mother specifically in the record to explain that “þa gelædde hio þa ahnunga mid Ælfþryþe

¹³⁶ Following Edgar's sudden death in 975, Ælfthryth, one of the most powerful members of the royal court, led the court faction seeking to put Æthelred, her youngest son, on the throne. This effort finally came to fruition in 978 after the murder of her stepson Edward, Edgar's eldest son, see Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 17-18.

fultume”¹³⁷ [she [Wynflæd] brought the [proof of] ownership with Ælfthryth’s help]. In addition to the queen-mother, approximately twenty-five other witnesses appeared at the court and swore in favor of Wynflæd’s proof of ownership. While there are several points of interest in this suit, I would like to draw attention to three aspects: first, Wynflæd specifically called upon a woman of immense political power to not only support her claim of ownership but to also help her procure the proof of ownership of the estates under question; second, Wynflæd received a large number of female witnesses who came to the court to show their support of her claim; and, third, out of all the witnesses in the record, a majority of those named are women – “the abbess Eaddu and the abbess Leofrun and Aethelhild and Eadgifu of Lewknor and her sister and her daughter and Aelfgifu and her daughter, and Wulfwyn and Aethelm and Aelfwaru and Aelfgifu and Aethelflaed.”¹³⁸ Wynflæd had a large social network available to her, but, perhaps more importantly, her lawsuit record shows how she chose to use that network. She demonstrated a strategic decision to turn to the aid of the queen-mother specifically to help her procure the proof of ownership of the estates. Rather than reading Wynflæd as a woman in a vulnerable position, I contend that it is more productive to acknowledge the legal prowess she demonstrated through her strategic maneuver to call upon the aid of a powerful political figure such as Ælfthryth. By placing more emphasis on her political and legal understanding of her situation, she demonstrates that women of this period were not passive figures.

Wynflæd’s suit against Leofwine also provides us with evidence of a legal system that strived to resolve disputes so that strong social networks would remain intact. The

¹³⁷ S 1454.

¹³⁸ Christine Fell and Cecily Clark, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 98.

lawsuit record explains that while she retained possession of her estates, she also agreed to return to Leofwine his father's gold and silver as a show of good-faith and compromise in an effort to maintain peace between them. A significant indicator that early medieval English women had a high level of self-determination is their land ownership. In many cases, women exercised land ownership and a capacity for self-determination comparable to that enjoyed by men, two integral indicators of their status in society. Women acquired funds to gain political favor and to ensure that land transfers, as dictated in their wills, would be upheld. Not only does this demonstrate political savvy, but it also exhibits intuitive foresight as lawsuits were not uncommon during the execution of a will. For example, a woman named Aethelgifu secured an estate at Standon, bequeathed to her by her husband, after bringing her suit against her husband's kinsmen, who were attempting to maintain ownership of the estate, to the king.¹³⁹ To gain favor with the king and queen, she procured a large sum of money in order to protect her property and assets – a politically astute gesture. According to the lawsuit record, Wynflæd delivered her claims directly to King Æthelred.¹⁴⁰ With her, she brought several politically influential witnesses: Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury,¹⁴¹ Bishop Ordbriht, ealdorman Ælfric of Winchester,

¹³⁹ Julia Catherine Crick, “Will of Æthelgifu,” in *Charters of St Albans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147.

¹⁴⁰ We learn that it was made known to her that she might be able to reclaim the land for which she “gelædde hio þa ahnunga” [produced proof of her ownership]. The record tells us that Wynflæd was able to do this “mid Ælfþryþe fultume þæs cyninges modor” [with the assistance of Ælfþryþe, the king’s mother]. In addition to Ælfþryþe’s aid, Wynflæd also received support from “eal se fulla ge onwverum [sic] ge on wifum” [all the full [amount] of both men and women], some of which who were of great means and influence. It is also worth noting that Wynflæd had a great amount of support from women. Of the twenty-four named individuals who gave support to her, fourteen of them were women: Ælfþryþe, Abbess Eadgyfu, Abbess Liofrun, Æþelhild, Eadgyfu of Lewknor, her sister, and her daughter, Ælfgyfu and her daughter, Wulfwyn, Æþelgyfu, Ælfwaru, Ælfgyfu, and Æþelflæd. The extent of her support, “eal se fulla ge onwverum [sic] ge on wifum,” may have provided an additional advantage to her case more-so than the evidence of ownership. Wormald states that in suits “fixed totals were a function of ‘oath-helping’ ... the impression is that oath-helping not evidence was decisive” in some cases.

¹⁴¹ Æthelred ordered Archbishop Sigeric to summon Leofwine to court. For some reason, though, Leofwine refused to honor the summons. This is surprising given the level of authority of those summoning him to

and the king's mother Ælfthryth. She claimed that “Ælfric sealde Wynflæde þæt land æt Hacceburnan . 7 æt Bradanfelda ongear þæt land æt Deccet” [Ælfric had sold the estates at Hacceburnan and Bradanfelda to Wynflæd in return for the estate at Deccet].¹⁴² Leofwine, the son of Ælfric, countered that the estates belonged to him. Moreover, he refused to answer the king's summons to court and instead demanded that the suit be transferred to the local shire court. Andrew Rabin explains that this may be connected to the “laws of King Edgar [III Edgar 2, 5-5.2] decreeing that royal appeals cannot precede local judgment;” in addition he claims that “Leofwine demanded that the king withhold his ruling and recognize the jurisdiction of the regional shire-court.”¹⁴³ Upon hearing the case and Leofwine's conditions, Æthelred ordered that the local court judges should resolve the dispute in such a way that “swa him æfre rihtlicost þuhte” [so ever seemed most just to them].¹⁴⁴ Within this context, Æthelred's command to the judges in the local court that the case be decided in the manner that seemed “rihtlicost” [most just] suggests that the extent of the law had been employed with the result of the suit coming to a draw to which the subsequent settlement depended on the hearing of witness testimonies. While Leofwine may have wished to follow the law code, he may also have wished to force Wynflæd's suit against him to be heard at the shire-court so as to have the benefit of calling upon witnesses more conveniently accessible to him locally. By demanding the suit be heard at the local level, Leofwine inadvertently gave Wynflæd the same advantage of having more convenient access to her social network. In the local court proceeding, she gathered

court: the King and Archbishop. Andrew Rabin states, “possibly pointing to the laws of King Edgar (r. 959–75) decreeing that royal appeals cannot precede local judgment, Leofwine demanded that the king withhold his ruling and recognize the jurisdiction of the regional shire-court,” see Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 1.

¹⁴² S 1454.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ S 1454.

together a larger and more impressive group of witnesses than at the royal court, including more than twenty-five members of the church and nobility. Here, again, Wynflæd not only calls upon politically influential religious figures but more importantly and the king's mother, Ælfthryth.¹⁴⁵ Queen-mother Ælfthryth was a prominent *forespeca*, or advocate, in several legal cases. In this way, she occupied a key part in the early medieval English legal system as a *sæmend*, or mediator, between the crown and the claimant or defendant, depending on the case. Her actions as an advocate and mediator were largely for the benefit of female litigants, and her legal roles shows the possibilities for early medieval English women to have legal and political power. Wynflæd must have been aware of Ælfthryth's influence in court and frequent support of women in court cases which suggests that she had a wide-reaching social network that extended into the early medieval English world of politics. Wynflæd's extensive social network and her selection of powerful religious and political witnesses significantly aided her case against Leofwine. While the charter does not record Leofwine's witnesses, we can surmise that they must have also been impressive as the resolution of the lawsuit between Wynflæd and Leofwine ended in a compromise. This suggests that both landowners had immensely influential legal support, so much so that if a compromise had not been reached the judges predicted that "þær syþþan nan freondscype nære" [afterward there would not be a friendship].¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ See Rabin, "Female Advocacy," 261–288.

¹⁴⁶ S 1454.

Ælfthryth's Support of Wulfgyth

A writ¹⁴⁷ issued in the early eleventh century by queen-mother Ælfthryth illustrates the complexities of the early medieval English legal world that women aptly navigated and the ways in which women sought the support of other women within their social networks to protect their property and assets. While married to King Edgar, Ælfthryth was the earliest woman to be formally crowned queen, a title that secured her place at court as the first officially coronated Queen of England. Her political influence was so immense that Æthelwold, the Bishop of Winchester, wrote in the *Regularis Concordia* that she took it upon herself to “sanctimonialam mandras ut impauidi more custodis defenderet cautissime”¹⁴⁸ [most heedfully defend communities [lit. flocks] of pious women in the manner of a fearless guardian]. One example of her role as the defender of women is S 1242. Composed from her perspective, the writ combines two different suits into the same legal narrative: 1) her participation in a legal dispute involving her kinswoman Wulfgyth's tenure of land on the Rushton estate, and 2) a defense of accusations made against Ælfthryth for her part in securing the land for Wulfgyth. The writ is notable for a few different reasons. First, it is composed from a woman's perspective:¹⁴⁹ “Alfðryð gret Ælfric arcebiscop 7 Epelwerd ealdarman eadmodlice.”¹⁵⁰ Second, it demonstrates the exceptional range of legal roles Ælfthryth fulfilled for another woman over the course of the dispute.

¹⁴⁷ Florence Elizabeth Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Stamford: P. Watkins, 1989), pp. 396–97. On this dispute, see Rabin, “Female Advocacy,” 261–88.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Symons, ed. *Regularis Concordia Anglicae Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque* (London: Nelson, 1953), 2.

¹⁴⁹ There are relatively few writs that are composed from a woman's perspective. In fact, this is the only one that I was able to find in my research. This doesn't mean that there aren't others, it just means that it's really difficult to find them given how the texts are hidden among the more readily available male-centered documents.

¹⁵⁰ Thorpe, Benjamin, translator. *Diplomatarium anglicum aevi saxonici. A Collection of English Charters, Volume I: Miscellaneous Charters*. London: Macmillan, 1865, 295. I Ælfthryth greet Ælfric archbishop and Æthelward aldorman humbly.

She acted as [a] an advocate on Wulfgyth's behalf, [b] she negotiated the final settlement regarding her kinswoman's occupancy of land on Rushton, and [c] she safeguarded the Rushton land charter thereby ensuring that the terms of settlement were followed:

[a] 7 ic cyðe inc ðet ice om to gewitnyse þ[æt] Dunstan arcebiscop getehte Aþelwolde bioscope Tantun ealswa his bec specon.¹⁵¹

[b] 7 ic ða for þan þe heo me gesib was 7 Ælfswyð for þan þe he hyre broþor was abedon æt Aðelwold bioscope þ[æt] hi moston brucan þes lands hyra deg.¹⁵²

[c] Nu ne eom ic nanre neade gecnewe þe libbe þe ma þe he wolde þeah he lyfode ac Leofric halfde ane niwe boc.¹⁵³

This multiplex relationship with Wulfgyth shows the flexibility in social networks between women. In her effort to support Wulfgyth, Ælfthryth was fulfilling different roles in order to resolve the dispute between Wulfgyth, Archbishop Ælfric and aldorman Æthelward.

In addition, the writ also illustrates a suit made against Ælfthryth, that she and Bishop Æthelwold pressured Leofric into an allegedly self-advantageous compromise.¹⁵⁴ Ælfthryth issued the writ to primarily serve as evidence against the accusations made

¹⁵¹ Benjamin Thorpe, tran., *Diplomatarium Anglicum Aevi Saxonici* (London: Macmillan, 1865), 295. "And I make known to you that I am to witness that archbishop Dunstan assigned Taunton to bishop Æthelwold, as his charters declared."

¹⁵² Ibid. "And I then, because she was akin to me and Ælfswyth, because he was her brother, obtained from bishop Athelwold that they might enjoy the land for their day."

¹⁵³ Ibid., 296. "Now I, who am living, am not aware of any extorting more than he would be were he alive; for Leofric had a new charter."

¹⁵⁴ The litigants of the case were Archbishop Ælfric and aldorman Æthelward. Their claim was that Ælfthryth and Æthelwold pressured Leofric into surrendering and altering a charter for the Rushton land. Ælfthryth was a witness of Archbishop Dunstan giving Taunton estate to Bishop Æthelwold. King Edgar allowed this transfer and said that any thanes who occupied any of the Taunton land should get the bishop's consent to continue living there. King Edgar gave Rushton to Bishop Æthelwold, as well, even though Leofric owned the land. Wulfgyth, Leofric's sister, contacted Ælfthryth about the Rushton transfer because she lived on the land. Ælfthryth obtained Bishop Æthelwold's consent that Wulfgyth could continue living on the land and that after her death the land she occupied would go to Taunton. This consent would have required an alteration to the Rushton charter that Leofric owned. Ælfric and Æthelward accused Ælfthryth and Æthelwold of using excessive pressure to get Leofric to hand over the Rushton land charter. She claims that this isn't the case because he had a new charter for the land to which he appended that he would do nothing false after the land transfer and that his successors should not be able to deter the land transfer.

against her. In particular, it served as proof that she and Æthelwold had reached an agreement with Leofric over a number of points regarding the Rushton land charter: 1) surrender the rights of the land charter to her, 2) add an addendum that he would not pursue any falsity, and 3) add an additional addendum that his successors would not be able to deter the land transfer after Wulfgyth's death. The combination of suits within the writ provides readers with a record of the great lengths Ælfthryth took to secure the land for Wulfgyth and the repercussions of that support. Moreover, the repercussions of Ælfthryth's support of Wulfgyth suggests the strength of their friendship and perhaps the dedication Ælfthryth had for her work as the guardian of pious women.

Eadgifu's Suit Against Goda

The final lawsuit discussed in this chapter is a tenth-century suit between Eadgifu of Kent¹⁵⁵ and a landowner named Goda¹⁵⁶ which appears as a land dispute narrative in her will. Eadgifu of Kent's legal dispute record serves as an example of how a woman's friends demonstrate the maintenance of their friendship. We can see how an ordinarily negative social behavior – such as the land dispute recorded in her will for legal purposes – can consequently leave behind traces of the practical side of friendship that become the nodules of evidence scholars can use centuries later to track women's social networks and practices. I suggest that when Eadgifu's friends come to her aid, they should be understood not

¹⁵⁵ She was Edward the Elder's third wife (not to be confused with Eadgifu of Wessex who was Edward the Elder's daughter from his second wife Ælfflaed [use proper 'ashes' (æ) in OE names]) and the daughter of Sigehelm Ealdorman of Kent. She had two sons, Edmund I and Eadred who both reigned as kings of England; she also had two daughters, Eadburh of Winchester (later sainted) and Eadgifu (not the same as the Eadgifu born from Edward and Ælfflaed). See Pauline Stafford, "Eadgifu," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); and also, Appendix A: Family Trees.

¹⁵⁶ In the record, Goda is identified as a man who loaned money to her father and later denied that her father had repaid the debt before his death.

necessarily as witnesses or beneficiaries but as “supporter[s] in law” and those “who undertake responsibility on behalf of another.” They come to her aid in light of the land dispute she must resolve with Goda over the estate at Culingon. She writes about the land her father acquired from his ancestors, and that he used the land as collateral for a loan he took with a man named Goda. She explains that he repaid the debt and bequeathed the land to her. Some years later, though, Goda denied the repayment of that loan which consequently led to a lengthy dispute between Eadgifu of Kent and Goda until it finally reached the royal court for settlement.¹⁵⁷ It was at this point that she writes her friends into her narrative:

“Þa spræc hit fæstlice Byrhsige Dyrincg swa lange . oð þa witan þe þa wæron gerehton Eadgife . þæt heo sceolde hire fæder hand geclænsian be swa myclan feo . 7 heo þæs aþ lædde on ealre þeode gewitnesse to Æglesforda . 7 þær geclænsude hire fæder þæs ægiftes be .xxx. punda aþe . Þa gyt heo ne moste landes brucan ær hire frynd fundon æt Eadwearde cyncge þæt he him þæt land forbead swa he æniges brucan wolde. 7 he hit swa alet”¹⁵⁸

[Then Byrhsige Dyrincg claimed it unceasingly for so long, until the witan of that time commanded Eadgifu that she should purge her father’s possession by [an oath equivalent to] that amount of the money. And she produced the oath in the witness of all the people at Aylesford, and there purged her father’s repayment by an oath of thirty pounds. Then she was still not able to possess the estate until her friends obtained from King

¹⁵⁷ S 1211.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

Edward [the Elder] that he prohibited him [Goda] the estate, if he wanted to possess any [at all]; and so he gave it up]

Eadgifu describes this event using language that draws emphasis to the actions performed by her friends rather than her struggle to repossess her land. Specifically, she states that it was not “*ær hire frynd fundon*” [until her friends *obtained*] a royal edict from King Edward to prohibit Goda the land. The verb OE *findan* in this sentence is used within a legal context and, thus, can be defined as “to succeed in obtaining or procuring (something / someone needed or desired).”¹⁵⁹ Eadgifu’s use of *findan* insinuates the completed, in fact, the successful, act of obtaining or procuring something for another individual. This part of the narrative juxtaposes three different pairs of events that emphasize the inclusion of Eadgifu’s friends in her account of the land dispute: 1) Byrhsige Dyrincg advises her “*þæt heo sceolde hire fæder hand geclænsian*” [that she should purge her father’s possession] and Eadgifu “*þæs aþ lædde*” [produced the oath], 2) Goda refuses the oath so that “*þa gyt heo ne moste landes brucan*” [she was still not able to possess the estate] and her friends “*fundon æt Eadwearde cynce*” [obtained from King Edward] an edict, and 3) King Edward “*land forbæd swa he æniges brucan wolde*” [prohibited him [Goda] the estate, if he wanted to possess any [at all]] and Goda “*hit swa alet*” [gave it up]. To understand this sequence of events, it is not entirely necessary to have all of the details. The critical moments of this part of the narrative are that Eadgifu pays the oath, Goda fails to return the estate, and the King steps in to put a stop to the dispute. By adding that her friends come to her aid, Eadgifu places significant emphasis on the legal actions her friends perform on her behalf. Eadgifu of Kent creates a binary in which her unsuccessful

¹⁵⁹ “*findan*,” B.2, *Dictionary of Old English*.

repossession of her land is contrasted with her friends' successful acquisition of an edict from the King on her behalf, thereby drawing more attention to the powerful influence of friendship than the struggles of an individual battling a legal system alone.

The land dispute narrative Eadgifu includes in her will provide insight on the gravity of her legal situation and additional significance of her friends coming to her aid. According to the description of the land dispute, Goda committed hamsocn, an often-violent intent to dispossess or vandalize another's home and was considered a serious form of property theft. The severity of this crime is evident in the law codes of II Edmund and IV Æthelred. According to II Edmund, those guilty of hamsocn must forfeit all their possessions, while the IV Æthelred law code forbids the convicted criminals of hamsocn from burial in church grounds.¹⁶⁰ A tenth-century charter from King Æthelred to Ælfthryth reflects the seriousness of hamsocn. The charter records that a landowner named Wulfbald pillaged his stepmother's estate to seize property she had inherited from his father. When his crimes were made known to the king, he persistently refused to return the stolen goods to his stepmother to which the king confiscated his lands and later sentenced him to death.¹⁶¹ Law codes established significant protections for the rights of heirs and to ensure that disputes were settled legally and peacefully. For example, the I Edward laws are one of several codes that penalize the withholding of land granted by bequest.¹⁶² Disputes over inheritance, particularly land transfers, were relatively common during this period. One of

¹⁶⁰ II Edmund 6 and IV Æthelred 4, see Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–1916), vol. 1, pp. 186–190 and 220–224.

¹⁶¹ S 877.

¹⁶² I Edward 2, see Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–1916), vol. 1, pp. 138–40.

the most detailed accounts of an inheritance land dispute occurs in a lawsuit issued by Eadgifu whose own inheritance was wrongfully seized:

Pa Eadred geendude 7 man Eadgife berypte ælcere are, þa namon Godan twegen suna, Leofstan 7 Leofric, on Eadgife þas twa forespecenen land æt Culingon 7 æt Osterlande. 7 sædon þam cilde Eadwige þe þa gecoren wæs þæt hy rihtur hiora wæren þonne hire. Ðæt þa swa wæs oþ Eadgar astipude. 7 he 7 his wytan gerehton þæt hy manfull reaflac gedon hæfden, 7 hi hire hire are gerehton 7 agefon.¹⁶³

[When Eadred died and Eadgifu was robbed of all her property, two of Goda's sons, Leofstan and Leofric, seized from Eadgifu the two previously mentioned estates at Cooling and Osterland. And they told young Eadwige, who had just been named king, that their claim was more just than hers. That is how things stood until Edward ascended the throne. Then he and his councilors ruled that they had committed a shameful theft and they adjudged the property hers and gave it to her]

Eadgifu's lawsuit highlights the fact that high status was no protection against the unscrupulous. Andrew Rabin argues that Eadgifu's and the Aylesworth landowner's suits reflect "women's heightened vulnerability to land seizures of this sort ... Although women were not without legal recourse, their ability to assert claims to landed property often failed without the intervention of a male ally or protector."¹⁶⁴ While Eadgifu and the other women discussed in this chapter may have been vulnerable to land seizures, I contend that it is

¹⁶³ S 1211.

¹⁶⁴ Rabin, *Crime and Punishment*, 28-29.

more useful to investigate the ways in which women used their friendship networks to their advantage in order to win their suits and repossess their lands.

Conclusion

The lawsuit records discussed in this chapter have been passed down to us as narratives describing land disputes. These narratives offer detailed insight into the social networks, such as friendships, women had available to them and how they used their social networks to win their suits. While each of these suits describe significant challenges the women faced in maintaining ownership of their lands, I have argued that the more impressive and significant aspect of the lawsuit records is the evidence of the women's friendships and the ways in which women used their friendship networks to win their suits against those who would otherwise take their lands.

Chapter 3: Female Friendship in Early Medieval English Wills¹⁶⁵

Introduction

A major difficulty in the study of early medieval English women and their communities is the limited number of extant female-composed documents. Many male-authored texts, such as Ælfric's saints' lives and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, provide useful knowledge of women, yet they present such information from male-centered perspectives which often overlook social networking between women. This chapter interacts with evidence of female friendship networks found in three different female-composed wills – the will of Eadgifu, the will of Æþelgifu, and the will of Wulfgyth – and the record of the so-called Herefordshire landowner's will which was, in part, recorded verbatim. I focus on these wills because of the extensive evidence they provide of these historical women's perspectives as they record the circumstances surrounding their bequeathals, for which they drew upon their well-established social networks.

The footprints of women's relationships as evinced in wills speak to the instrumental use of friendship; for example, Eadgifu of Kent, a mid-10th century major landowner and the wife of King Edward of Wessex, the mother of two kings, King Edmund I and King Eadred, and the stepmother of King Æthelstan, used the power and influence of her friendship network to reclaim stolen property in order to bequeath it to the religious community at Christ Church, and Æþelgifu, a wealthy landowner from the mid-10th or early-11th century, who gathered an oath amounting in two thousand pledges so that she

¹⁶⁵ Throughout this chapter, the term 'will' is used quite frequently in both a modern and a medieval sense. I will use the modifier 'modern' to differentiate when I am referring to the modern versus the early medieval English will. When I do not use the modifier 'modern,' I refer to wills in the medieval sense. See pages 74-76 for a more in-depth discussion of the differences between modern and early medieval English wills.

might secure her lands to bequeath as she saw fit. These wills exhibit traces of female friendship through the legal language of bequests. From their first-hand accounts, the rhetoric of female-composed wills demonstrates the authors' keen awareness and adept use of legal terms and a familiarity with persuasive legal discourse. In this chapter, I argue that female-composed wills demonstrate a concerted effort between women to support and perpetuate well-established friendships with each other through the disposition of moveable property and landed wealth.

Early Medieval English Wills and Authorship

As discussed in the previous chapter, wills, as documents, were most likely written by a scribe, though the testatrix was an essential part of the composition of the document. Her wishes and decisions of the disposition of her possessions and properties were the driving force and motivation behind the completion of the document. This driving force and motivation meant that the testatrix was highly invested in the composition of the document and would have been an active participant in this process. In the "Will of Æthelgifu," for example, she dictates that "æt þ[æt] lond æt Þrope selle ofor hire dæg innan hire agen cyn on þa gerad þe heo selle hire ped 7 ælc yrre forgif 7 heo na mare ne bidde gif heo nelle dæle hit man hire cildon"¹⁶⁶ [the land at Thrupp she [Leofrun, her kinswoman] is to give after her lifetime within her own kindred on condition that she gives her [Aethelgifu] a pledge and lays aside all anger, and [that] she does not ask for anything more. If she is not willing, it is to be divided among her children].¹⁶⁷ This stipulation that she includes in the

¹⁶⁶ Julia Catherine Crick, "Will of Æthelgifu," in *Charters of St Albans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 146.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

will regarding Leofrun indicates the level of foresight she had in the disposition of her property to various individuals. Other examples of the direct involvement of women in their will-making process is the use of first person. For example, in S 1535, the Will of Wulfgyth, she dictates that “ic yan þet land at Stistede a Godes ywitnesse and mine vrenden into Cristes chereche” [I grant the estate at Stisted [Essex], with the witness of God and of my friends, to Christ Church].¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the anonymous woman of the Herefordshire lawsuit is quoted verbatim as she orally delivers her will to those in attendance. She dictates that “her sit Leoflæde min mæge þe ic geann ægðer ge mines landes . ge mines goldes . ge ræglæs . ge reafes . ge ealles þe ic ah æfter minon dæge . [‘Here sits Leofflæd my kinswoman to whom I give [each of] my lands, money, clothes, [spoils of clothing], and all that I have after my days, ’]¹⁶⁹ and “cyðað heom hwæm ic mines landes geunnen hæbbe . 7 ealre minre æhte”¹⁷⁰ [tell them to whom I have given my lands and all my property]. The parts of wills that are written in the first person show that women most likely dictated parts, if not all, of their wills to the scribe. Women had an active role in the composition of the will in order to protect their properties and use the power they had by bequeathing their properties and assets to those of their choosing. Women’s active involvement in the composition of their wills not only speaks to the influence they had in the disposition of their lands and property but also to the investment they had in their disposition to specific people, such as their friends and family.

¹⁶⁸ S 1535.

¹⁶⁹ S 1462; Leigh, “Some Archives,” 109-110.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

The Practice of Friendship in Wills

One of the most prominent ways that friendship is made apparent in wills is through the record of land and property bequeathals. While the beginnings of wills often identify the recipients as the lord and lady of the testatrix, her relatives, and her friends, this is not necessarily the primary way that friendship is made apparent in the wills. While friendship is not always described with the Old English term *freondscype*, it is conveyed through descriptions of interactions between people that emulate different levels and intensities of friendship.¹⁷¹ The actions of the testatrix form the evidence for friendship. Thus, friendship appears in the decisions the testatrix makes regarding what and how much she gives to her friends and family. In her will, Æthelgifu dictates that various possessions are to be distributed to a number of different women. Of these women, two are identified as kinswomen while the other three are not identified. In the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, these three women either do not have an entry or have very little information about them besides their mention in Æthelgifu's will. This indicates that the three women of unidentified relationship may have been friends with Æthelgifu rather than her relatives. Moreover, Æthelgifu bequeaths, generally, an equal amount of moveable property to each woman regardless of their relationship with her. This perhaps subtly speaks to a level of affection between her and these women. The evidence of friendship in wills does not overtly indicate any levels of intimacy through affective language. Instead, friendship is indicated through the disposition of lands and properties and through the social contexts that explain the testatrix's effort to protect her lands so that she might bequeath them as she saw fit. In this way, the social narratives found in lawsuits that are discussed in Chapter

¹⁷¹ See *Introduction*, esp. 21-24.

2 directly relate to the bequeathal of those lands to a testatrix's friends. The friendships that are evident in female-composed wills are long established friendships in which the testatrix has invested a significant amount of thought into the disposition of lands and property to those long-standing friends.

A Social Network Theory Approach to Early Medieval English Wills

A distinguishing feature of female-composed wills, similar to lawsuit records, is the presence of social narratives that record close relationships.¹⁷² The social narratives in women's wills provide information that enlightens us about the ways in which actual friendships were practiced. I approach these social narratives through a social network theory lens as a method of investigating the ways in which women practiced friendship in long-standing relationships. Much of the evidence of friendship in women's wills appears in dyadic relationships, such as the exchange of moveable property from the testatrix to the donee. The beginning of the will typically identifies who the recipients are for the bequeathals; thus, each donee that appears in the body of the will can be thought of as a dyadic relationship. Of the scholars who do research female-composed wills,¹⁷³ none have approached these social narratives either through a social network theory lens or as self-consciously composed by women, as I do in this chapter. Applying social network theory to the study of female friendship in early medieval English female-composed legal documents enables scholars and interested persons to develop a deeper understanding and

¹⁷² As a disclaimer, not all female-composed wills have social narratives. Those wills that do not exhibit this distinguishing feature instead demonstrate close social relationships through the bequeathal of personal properties to oftentimes named individuals.

¹⁷³ Marie-Françoise Alamichel, *Widows in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Britain* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008); Linda Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2011).

appreciation of women's perspectives and actions. My research contributes to early medieval English studies by relying on female-composed wills and approaching these legal documents through an analysis of the evidence of social networks between women, particularly those of friendships.

Early Medieval English Will-Making

To productively appreciate the relationship between wills and social networks among religious women and their communities, it is essential to first understand the genre of early medieval English wills and will-making.¹⁷⁴ In my discussion of the genre, I aim to draw attention to two aspects of wills: 1) since wills are traditionally oral legal agreements, the donor's spoken words wielded great authority, and 2) the bequeathals produce a 'map' of the donor's social ties that offer insight into her social networks.¹⁷⁵ Approaching wills

¹⁷⁴ Medieval historian Michael McMahon Sheehan stresses that the early medieval English will originated in Christian doctrine. He writes that "the motive of the English will must be related to a general pattern of development characteristic of all the nations of Europe as they fell under the influence of the Christian religion ... The history of the will in England is a supreme example of the part played by Christianity in the growth of western civilization; it illustrates how the injection of a religious notion into society was able to enrich and develop several secular institutions ... The process began with the Christian desire to give alms, a form of charity providing constant motive for the right of bequest. This notion was confronted by the forms of property holding and distribution accepted among the Anglo-Saxons, yet it was powerful enough to lead to the creation of legal instruments that made the bequest in alms possible," see Michael J. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England: From the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the End of the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 2000), 3. Linda Tollerton provides a succinct comparative study of modern wills and their early medieval English precursor; for further information regarding the differences between modern and early medieval English wills, see her monograph *Wills and Will-Making*, 51-55.

¹⁷⁵ The linear trajectory of the dispositions pointed towards the transfer of moveable property and land and the subsequent expectation that the will would be honored after the donor's death. The multi-gift will, in which are bequests of multiple gifts to multiple beneficiaries, could provide a 'map' of the donor's social network. Most significantly, perhaps, is how the multi-gift will can be used by scholars. Tollerton explains that what "the multi-gift will could provide was a map of the nexus of gift exchange which was crucial to *maintaining the equilibrium of social relationships* in Anglo-Saxon society," Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 281, my emphases.

in this way will enable the reader to understand wills as living documents engrained in social practices and social behavior.¹⁷⁶

For the modern reader, it may be helpful to consider briefly the nature of the modern will. In a modern context, wills serve as legal documents invested with performative power in which the legalese inoculates, or protects, the wishes of the donor; the legal rhetoric of modern wills are designed to protect the donor's last wishes rather than the selected executor's disposition of land and properties as ordered by the donor in their final testament.¹⁷⁷ The agency of the modern will resides primarily within the words recorded in the document itself.¹⁷⁸ Without the written words of the deceased's final wishes, the modern will does not exist.

Its early medieval predecessor, on the other hand, exhibited no innate powers by which to dispose of properties to their intended beneficiary.¹⁷⁹ Rather, the will functioned primarily as a spoken testament to which the written document only served as evidentiary support for the sole purpose of legitimacy.¹⁸⁰ As a spoken document first and a written document second, the early medieval English will was foremost a community-based legal

¹⁷⁶ The end-goal of a will is the donor's wish to give to others for the benefit of their soul and the souls of selected beneficiaries. In essence, the will was a significantly personal document "because their main purpose was to ensure the testator's state of grace at death rather than the worldly disposition of his property" Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record England 1066 - 1307* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Pr, 1979), 232. While the disposition of property was a key element of the early medieval English will, such 'worldly' transactions were conducted under the premise of giving for the sake of one's soul and the well-being of others after the donor's death.

¹⁷⁷ In other words, the donor's final wishes are to be followed exactly as ordered. The chosen executor does not have the power to dispose of land and properties acquired after the writing of the will unless authentic proof could be procured, such as a supplementary document to the will. For further discussion of this topic, see Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch discuss the aspect of performance and wills; see Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch, "From Oral Ceremony to Written Document: The Transitional Language of Anglo-Saxon Wills," *Language & Communication* 12, no. 2 (1992): pp. 95-122.

¹⁷⁹ Tollerton, 52.

¹⁸⁰ For further discussion of the oral tradition of will-making, see Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 51-55 and Dorothy Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), vii-xvi.

document. Medieval historian M.T. Clanchy asserts that “the will was an essentially oral act, even when it was recorded in writing. The persons present witnessed the testator making his bequests with his own mouth; they saw, were present, and heard the transaction.”¹⁸¹ Based on these grounds, then, the aural involvement of those gathered for the reading of the will was vital to the will-making process. To listen to the reading of the will meant more than the sight of those words inked into parchment. Marie-Francoise Alamichel stresses that “throughout the Middle Ages, life was always considered as a series of ties, a network of bonds resting on obedience or solidarity.”¹⁸² The “obedience [and] solidarity” of the community members involved in the will-making process would have been most effective following the traditional precedent of the donor’s authority and the executor’s duty to uphold the donor’s last wishes. Maximilian Weber, the early 20th century German sociologist and philosopher, developed theories of the social dynamics of authority and obligation. He wrote that “obedience is owed to the person ... who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority and who is (within its sphere) bound by tradition ... The obligation of obedience is not based on the impersonal order, but is a matter of personal loyalty within the area of accustomed obligations.”¹⁸³ An integral aspect of the early medieval English will is the authority of the one “who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position.” Second to that is the “obligation of obedience” that is based on “personal loyalty.” The relationship between donor and donee¹⁸⁴ was likewise rooted in the authority of the speaker and the obligatory obedience of the listeners. In the genre of early

¹⁸¹ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 254.

¹⁸² Alamichel, *Widows*, 79.

¹⁸³ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 328.

¹⁸⁴ Donee, like beneficiary, is a term often used to identify those who might receive benefits from an individual’s last will and testament.

medieval English will-making, then, women's wills must be considered as vehicles of female authority.

In conjunction with the authority of the testatrix and the obedience of her listeners was the testatrix's *intention* of bequeathing moveable and landed wealth. As stated, the early medieval English will was foremost an oral declaration; coupled with that is the weight of the testatrix's intent to bequeath her possessions and land to those within her social environment. As Linda Tollerton explains, a common phrase that appears in wills, "I give after my day' (*ic an æfter min dæg*) ... would be untenable as a concept of later law but which captured for an Anglo-Saxon donor and audience both the *declaration of intent* and the *deferment of the gift*" (my emphases).¹⁸⁵ Amidst the "declaration of intent" are the traces of social ties which influence where that intent is focused. The *exemplum*, which Tollerton refers to, "I give after my day," signifies a displacement of time as the donor declares their intent through oral gestures towards a future moment. The intent to give land and other properties to a beneficiary demonstrates how the predecessor of the modern will relied on the oral transaction and the promise of the physical transaction yet to come 'æfter min dæg.' In tandem with the forward-looking and oral nature of the will, Dorothy Whitelock, a historian of early medieval Britain, explains that wills

are *donationes irrevocabiles post obitum*; and the reason why they are irrevocable is because the donor has contractually promised by the making of [their] will, by the conclusion of a transaction *inter vivos*, that on [their] death the donees are to have conveyed to them the properties which form

¹⁸⁵ Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 52-53.

the subject-matter of [their] gift ... the gift *mortis causa* is but a promise; it is a promise which can only be fulfilled *post obitum*.¹⁸⁶

Wills were, thus, comparable to promises which were equivalent to “bilateral contracts” and were “considered to be irrevocable.”¹⁸⁷ More specifically, the will was a process that began with the donor’s reflection of past acquisitions, a consideration of present circumstances regarding the lands and properties acquired over a lifetime, and the expectation of successful transactions occurring “*æfter min dæg*.” This common phrase implies a day at some future time even though the transaction is already as good as made through the tradition of the oral agreement between donor and donee.¹⁸⁸ From a sociological perspective, a social relationship, according to Max Weber, is developed on the mutual consent of all participatory parties which implies that

the parties make promises covering their future behaviour ... In such cases each party then normally counts ... in some degree on the fact that the other will orient his actions to the meaning of the agreement as he understands it. In part, they orient their action rationally to these expectations as given facts with, to be sure, varying degrees of subjectively ‘loyal’ intention of doing their part. But in part also they are motivated each by the value to him of his ‘duty’ to adhere to the agreement in the sense in which he understands it.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, xi.

¹⁸⁷ Sheehan, *Will in Medieval England*, 27-28. He explains that “the *post obit gift* was made during the life of the donor, but its material consequences were delayed until his death” (Sheehan 10). Also see Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, xi-xiii, and Danet and Bogoch, “From Oral Ceremony to Written Document,” 98-102.

¹⁸⁸ The donor’s intent is as good as the actual giving of the land/property. In essence, once the will is made, the beneficiaries already own the land/property; they only have to wait for the donor’s death for the physical transaction to take place.

¹⁸⁹ Weber, *Theory*, 120.

With any promise between parties, then, follows an expected social action.

Remembering that the will was considered to be *irrevocabiles post obitum*, the following phrases indicate the expectation that an action must be fulfilled. We see this in the phrases “ic wylle þæt þa þe to minre are fon” [I desire that those who succeed to my property],¹⁹⁰ “geann ... ealles þe ic ah æfter minon dæge” [I give ... all that I have after my day],¹⁹¹ “ic an ... eallæs þæs þæ ic hiræ alendæð hæfdæ” [I grant ... all that I have lent her].¹⁹² While the transactions recorded in the will were considered complete upon their conception – meaning that the transferred property belonged to the beneficiary in name alone, they remained within the use of the donor until their death upon which time the transaction was physically completed. Max Weber explicates that within any social relationship in which there is a clear authority and a loyal associate, “there should be a relatively high probability that the action of a definite, supposedly reliable group of persons will be primarily oriented to the execution of the supreme authority’s general policy and specific commands.”¹⁹³ This relates to the donor's demands as they are written into the will. The actions of executing the will must be oriented towards the supreme authority of the donor's wishes and specific commands.

At some appointed time, the oral will was transmitted to a written document. This transmission required that a selection of witnesses must be present at the writing, or at least the final reading, of the will which would take place at a royal venue or the home of a prominent member of the community. The witnesses were chosen specifically by the donor to legitimize the will in front of an audience of their peers as well as the donor’s superiors.

¹⁹⁰ S 1538.

¹⁹¹ S 1462.

¹⁹² Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 20.

¹⁹³ Weber, *Theory*, 324.

The witnesses were obligated to sign the will, to physically alter it in a permanent way that sealed them to the document itself. Max Weber argued that the following “factors, custom and personal advantage, purely affectual or ideal motives of solidarity, do not, even taken together, form a sufficiently reliable basis for a system of imperative co-ordination.”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Sheehan explains that the witnesses of a medieval will and others gathered in the audience “wished to be satisfied that the written account was a correct statement of the transaction, that the undying witness was a true witness.”¹⁹⁵ While the witness list that typically appeared on wills left a physical ‘seal’ of approval, or confirmation of its legitimacy, it was the public reading of the will that resonated with the donor and community. Sheehan surmises that the reading of the will was paramount to the credibility of the donor and the donor’s bequests to beneficiaries which further substantiates the continuing oral tradition of will-making.¹⁹⁶ Thus, at the center of the will-making process was the functional use of the social network: the gathering of many individuals to discuss the components of the will, verification of the correctness of the will’s contents, the public reading of the will to an audience, and the witness list that authenticated the donor’s final wishes. The implications of this orality in relation to female-composed wills is that women’s perspectives were heard by an audience of carefully selected witnesses,¹⁹⁷ the king and queen, and guests of the royal court. The social networks at play in female-composed wills lay the foundation for the study of female friendship and female social networking in wills. Furthermore, the social networks evident in women’s wills

¹⁹⁴ Imperative co-ordination is defined as “the probability that certain commands ... from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons,” see Weber, *Theory*, 324 for further discussion.

¹⁹⁵ Sheehan, *Will in Medieval England*, 53.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-55. Sheehan discusses the process and significance of the witness selection which varied per person based on their social status, moveable and landed wealth, and political affiliations.

demonstrate that the will-making process was a social practice that women used to support one another and perpetuate their established friendships.

The will relied upon preliminary social interactions between individuals to establish the will's credibility and the promise that it would be fulfilled at the appropriate time. Wills in this social context were written with the foresight of future circumstances or disputes that may present a conflict of interest to a legal transaction that is *irrevocabiles post obitum* [irrevocable after death]. As with any community, there are those who choose not to honor certain traditional social practices, such as the irrevocability of a donor's will. Perhaps one contributing factor to the dishonoring of the irrevocable oral will, as Tollerton explains, is the "contractual, or bilateral, element ... [of] incorporating agreements related to land [into the will] which often had complex ramifications."¹⁹⁸ This particular difficulty often surfaced in land disputes between the beneficiary and other interested parties or episodes of familial unrest and in the case of ulterior political agendas. In some cases, land acquired by a royal charter may be bequeathed in a donor's will only for that land transaction to yield political tension between the beneficiary and the royal house. Sociologists John Stolte and Richard Emerson describe social interactions like these as "unilateral negatively connected" relationships.¹⁹⁹ In relationships such as these, one entity may make a decision that will subsequently affect the other individual. These decisions are made without the agreement of the affected individual, thereby rendering it as a negative connection. Part and parcel of the early medieval English will was "the care with which donors sought to protect their dispositions" and avoid these types of negative interactions and

¹⁹⁸ Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 53.

¹⁹⁹ Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel, "Structural Inequality: Position and Power in Network Structures," in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans*, ed. Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), pp. 117-138.

relationships.²⁰⁰ Wills were highly publicized to the community at large and exhibited gestures of commendation to the monarchy and the church; such elements insinuate “that the inheritance of land could be contentious.”²⁰¹ Eadgifu of Kent,²⁰² a mid-10th century major landowner and the wife of King Edward of Wessex, the mother of two kings, King Edmund I and King Eadred, and the stepmother of King Æthelstan, is a prominent example of social relationships that can sour over the disposition of moveable and landed wealth. In her will, she writes that she was confronted with a dispute over her ownership of her estate at Culingdon which resulted in the organization of a public judicial gathering for the purpose of resolving the dispute. From Eadgifu’s narrative, we learn that

hit gelamp þæt hire fæder aborgude .xxx. punda. æt Godan . 7 betæhte him þæt land þæs feos to anwedde 7 he hit hæfde .vii. winter . Ða gelamp emb þa tid þæt man beonn ealle Cantware to wigge. to Holme . Ða nolde Sigelm hire fæder to wigge faron mid nanes mannes scette unagifnum . 7 agef þa Godan .xxx. punda 7 becwæp Eadgife his dehter land 7 boc sealde Ða he on wigge afeallen wæs þa ætsoc Goda þæs feos ægiftes. 7 þæs landes wyrnde . oð þæs on syxtan geare.²⁰³

[It happened that her father borrowed thirty pounds from Goda, and entrusted the estate to him as security for the money. And [Goda] held it for seven ‘winters’. When it came about, at around this time, that all the men of Kent were summoned to the battle at the Holme, Sighelm, her father, did not want to go to the battle with any man’s account unpaid , and he repaid Goda the thirty pounds and he bequeathed the estate to his daughter Eadgifu and gave her the [land]book. After he had fallen

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 73

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Her will is dated to approximately 959 according to S 1211.

²⁰³ All translations from Old English are my own unless otherwise noted.

in the battle, Goda denied the repayment of the money, and withheld the estate until six years later].²⁰⁴

Eadgifu's recount of this transaction – particularly Sighelm's pledge of collateral for the security of the loan and the full repayment of the loan before his death – puts her father's repayment in stark contrast with Goda's dishonoring of their legal agreement. Eadgifu places especial emphasis on the legality of the financial transaction between Sighelm and Goda. She uses the terms “agef,” [repaid] “unagifnum,” [unpaid] “ætsoc,” [denied] and “ægiftes” [a legal gift]. A large-group social network of friends comes to her aid by obtaining an edict from the king that would restore her lands to her. While the original purpose of Eadgifu's narrative may have been for legal documentation, it also enlightens later readers to the social practice of friendship implemented within a woman's social network. In this case, friends come to her aid within a legal context. Eadgifu does not divulge if the friends who come to her assistance are acting as anything other than legal representatives and what stake they had in the defense of her ownership of Culingon. Moreover, the information regarding the suit between Eadgifu and Goda is used as a way for her to contextualize the bequeathal of lands that she makes to the Christ Church community. Without the integral assistance of her friendship network, her bequeathal may not have been possible. Approaching wills such as Eadgifu's through a social network theory lens enables us to identify the long-standing friendships and the ways in which those friendships were practiced.

²⁰⁴ S 1211.

Female Social Networks and Will-Making

The measures early medieval English women took to maintain ownership of their land and to protect their bestowal of land to others speaks to women's use of social networks, especially friendships, in legal battles over bequeathed land. A long-standing contender as one of the most significant female-composed wills, *Æþelgifu*,²⁰⁵ a noblewoman from the mid-11th century, stands out through her exceptionally detailed will as a woman of substantial financial and social means. In her recent edition of *Æþelgifu*'s will, Julia Crick states that the will "reveals long-term processes which sustained the community's endowment: details of revisionary arrangements, food rents, and liturgical commemoration which linked *Æþelgifu* and her heirs to St Albans and other churches in a web of obligation and expectation."²⁰⁶ Evidence of her life and dealings exists only in the preservation of the will she authored, which is dated to approximately 966x1002.²⁰⁷ based on a sequence of events and identifiable individuals recorded in her will.²⁰⁸ The context

²⁰⁵ *Æþelgifu* may have been the mother or aunt of *Ælfifu*, wife of Eadwig the All-Fair, in which case *Æþelgifu* would have either been the widow of Eadric of Wessex or the sister of his wife. She is not to be confused with *Æðelgifu* of Shaftesbury. My deductions come from the entries in PASE for "*Æþelgifu* 9" and "*Ælfifu* 2," which both cite S 1292, which states, "ðis wæs Eadwiges leaf cyninges 7 ðis syndon ða gewitnassa: *Ælfifu* þæs cininges wif 7 *Æþelgifu* þæs cyninges wifes modur . *Ælfsige* biscop . Osulf biscop . Coenwald biscop . Byrthnoð ealdorman . *Ælfheah* cyninges discðen . Eadric his brodur;" also in S 1292 are Eadwig's and *Æþelgifu*'s signatures, and finally in the New Minster *Liber Vitae*, fol. 26r 20 iii is the inscription '*Ælfgyfu* coniuix Eadwigi regis.' Further evidence of the two women's relationship is *Ælfifu*'s connection with Eadric of Wessex who, in his will, bequest his estate at Risborough to his daughter (unnamed), the same estate that *Ælfifu* declared she inherited from her father, see Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 119. Andrew Wareman's family tree of Queen Ealhswið, wife of Alfred the Great, suggests that from her line was born *Æthelgyth*, who married *Æthelfrith* of Mercia and begat a son named Eadric of Wessex, which then suggests that *Ælfifu*'s father must be the selfsame Eadric of Wessex; see Andrew Wareham, "The Transformation of Kinship and the Family in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Early Medieval Europe* 10, no. 3 (October 2003), 385-387. See Appendix A: Family Trees for a detailed tracing of *Æþelgifu* and *Ælfifu*'s relationship.

²⁰⁶ Crick, "Will of *Æþelgifu*," 99.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 92-94. According to Dorothy Whitelock, on the other hand, *Æþelgifu*'s will was composed between 985 x 1002. This dating relies on Whitelock's assertion that the unnamed *ætheling* is *Æthelstan* and the queen is *Æthelthryth*, see Dorothy Whitelock, trans. *The Will of Æþelgifu: A Tenth Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript. And Analyses of the Properties, Livestock and Chattels*. Concerned. United Kingdom: Roxburghe Club, 1968, 23-25.

²⁰⁸ For a detailed explanation of these events, see Crick, "Will of *Æþelgifu*," 92-93.

used to support this dating tells us that Æþelgifu had a considerably large social network in which she held great sway. The dispositions in her will reveal a woman who “used her landed wealth to endow the church, to *defend her husband’s pious endowment* and, no doubt, to *secure her own status and independence as a widow*, perhaps for as long as thirty years” (my emphases).²⁰⁹ Similar to Eadgifu of Kent, Æþelgifu recorded the measures she took to “defend her husband’s pious endowment,” bequeathed to her by her husband, and to “secure her own status and independence as a widow.” Æþelgifu writes in her will that she was confronted by her husband’s kin in a land dispute. She recounted at length the dispute she had with them over land he bequeathed to her, a bequeathal which his kin did not honor.²¹⁰ The land dispute only began after his death, presumably when the execution of his will was initiated. The historical context in the will informs us that she had the means by which to defend her late husband’s will – specifically his bequest to her – and to ultimately regain ownership of her property.²¹¹

The overall majority of Æþelgifu’s will is composed in the third person. There is, however, a single passage composed in the first person, which poignantly illuminates her drive for maintaining her landed power and the social practice she used to succeed. The shift from third person to first person draws much attention to Æþelgifu’s actions during the land dispute. Within the passage that explains Eadelm’s unlawful possession of the Standon estate, Æþelgifu states, “þa sohte ic þæne cing 7 gesealde. hym .xx. punda þa agef

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 94. In addition, Whitelock suggested Æthelgifu’s status as a vowed widow based on the condition of prayers by her women who lived at Standon and the extensive manumissions included in her will, see Whitelock, *Will of Æþelgifu*, 33-34.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 151.

²¹¹ Standon is the estate which she fought most diligently to repossess from her husband’s kin who did not his bequeathal of this estate to her as dictated in his own last will and testament. See Crick, “Will of Æthelgifu,” 148-149.

he me myn lond on his unþonc”²¹² [Then I appealed to the king, and gave him twenty pounds; then he gave me back my land against his will]. This passage appears at the beginning of the land dispute narrative. Immediately, the reader’s attention is focused on the three actions that occur: 1) an appeal to the king, 2) a monetary gift to the king, and 3) the return of the dispossessed land. A short way further in the narrative, we learn in what way she “sohte ic þæne cing” [appealed to the king]. While this later information broadens our understanding of the land dispute, the short first-person passage is left without further explanation before the narrative continues on in the third person. The significance of this passage is the complete focus on the legal actions of a widowed testatrix. Without the additional information presented later in the will, the reader is left with the image of Æþelgifu as the agent in control of the legal case. Unlike Eadgifu, Æþelgifu places emphasis on her part in the land dispute.

Immediately after the first-person passage, we learn that her appeal to the king came in the form of a petition. Æþelgifu responded to the land dispute by organizing a public gathering to collect signatures for a petition she intended to present to the king and queen²¹³ to gain royal support.²¹⁴ In the passage below, it is significant to note that Æþelgifu had at her disposal over two-thousand people to reach out to for support. This staggering number speaks to the vast resources she had at her disposal as well as the extensive friendship network she had built over her lifetime. She recorded the following narrative:

7 heo bit hire cynehlaford him to ælmissan for his cynescipe for Godes lufan

7 for sancta Marigan þ̅ git ne læton nænne monnan. mid feo hire cpide

²¹² Crick, “Will of Æthelgifu”, 147, 151.

²¹³ Presumably Æthelstan and Ælftryth, see *Ibid.*, 92-93.

²¹⁴ Crick, “Will of Æthelgifu,” 151.

apendan leof hit becpæð hire hlaford hire to sellanne þam þe hyo polde þe ne gelefde hire hire hlafordes magas þa *lædde heo að* to Hyccan .xx. *hund aða* þær þæs Ælfere on 7 Ælfsige .l.d 7 Byrnric þæs þ gerefa 7 ealla þa yldestan men to Bedanforda 7 to Heortforda 7 heora pif (my emphases).

[She begs her royal lord of his charity, for his royal dignity, for the love of God and of St. Mary, that you two allow no men, for money, to change her will. Sire, her lord bequeathed it [Standon] for her to give to whom she wished, which her lord's kinsmen did not allow her. Then *she produced an oath* at Hitchin, *twenty hundred oaths*: there were included Ælfere and Ælfsige cild and Byrnric who was then reeve and all the chief men belonging to Bedford and Hertford, and their wives] (my emphases).²¹⁵

This additional information explicates how Æthelgifu approached the land dispute. She is the person who reached out to her community which resulted in a reciprocal response from that community. From the brief list of names provided, it is clear that the signatures she gathered came from both men and women. Not only were men from the community called to action, but their wives were as well. Æthelgifu may have initiated the legal process of regaining ownership of her land, and, in the process, she turned to her community for support. To say that she was able to gather two thousand oaths means that she had an extensive social network of people willing to come to her aid. While the Old English words for friend and friendship are not used in this narrative, the actions performed by her community reflect the semantic range of the term. The community that came together at Hitchin for the oath gathering demonstrate actions executed by those “who undert[ake]

²¹⁵ Ibid., 147, 151.

responsibility on behalf of another,” “who [are] on good terms with another,” “who is an associate,” “[a] supporter in law,” and “[a] friend as opposed to enemy.” I suggest that based on the community’s oath-giving to Æthelgifu, we can surmise that each signature was a demonstration of friendship. As understood from the definitions for *freond* discussed in the Introduction, to be a “supporter in law” is equivalent to being a friend in early medieval English society.

Just as the land dispute narrative in Æthelgifu’s will suggests a distinct form of friendship, so too do her bequests to relatives. It is apparent from her many bequests of moveable possessions to those within her social network that Æthelgifu had a wide range of aristocratic interests. She bequeathed items ranging from drinking horns and silver cups to fine kirtles and elaborate head dresses. From her moveable possessions, we can gather that she may have had an extensive investment in entertaining others. This potential investment in a highly social endeavor suggests that she considered social relationships of great value. She specifically states at the beginning of her will that she intends to bequeath her property and lands to “hire cyne hlaforde 7 hire hlæfdian 7 hire freondon” [her royal lord and to her lady and to her friends].²¹⁶ It seems odd that Æthelgifu would not mention relatives or kin in this introductory sentence when there is clearly evidence throughout her will of various relatives to whom she bequeaths various items and lands. Taking into consideration the gender neutrality of the terms “freond” and “frynd” as discussed in the Introduction, I contend that we can approach Æthelgifu’s will under the premise that by “hire freondon” she is addressing both friends and kin. This is especially clear in a portion

²¹⁶ Ibid., 144, 148.

of her will in which several relatives are named beneficiaries. The following passage focuses only on the female beneficiaries:

“*Ʒulfwunne* mire mægan ane bledu 7 anne preon 7 an pahrift 7 an sethregl 7 eal betstop spylce heo þærto betst hæfð 7 hire rotostan cyrtelv. mancessas buton heo hit ær gedon hæfdev. *Godpife* 7 *Ælfifu* mire spustur dohtor 7 selle mon Beornpynne minne blæpenan cyrtel is neaþene unrenod 7 hire betstan heafordgepædo 7 selle man Lufetate 7 *Ælfifu* 7 *Godpife* hire .iii. godþebbenan cyrtlas 7 *Ʒulfifu* selle mon oðera hire dunnan cyrtla 7 syðþan dælan hiredpifmen þ̅ oder him betþinum ... 7 dæle *Godpif* 7 *Ælfifu* þa oðra him betþinum 7 hira ægþer .ii. mydercan” (my emphases).

[to my kinswoman, Wulfwynn, [is to be given] a dish, and a brooch and a wall-hanging and a seat-cover and all the best bedsteads she has available and her brightest kirtle ... five mancuses are to be cut from her headband ... five for Godwif and five for *Ælfifu*, my sister’s daughter. And my blue kirtle which is untrimmed at the bottom and her best head-dresses are to be given to Beornwynn. And her three purple kirtles are to be given to Lufetat and *Ælfifu* and Godwif. And *Wulfifu* is to be given some of her other, dun-colored kirtles. And afterwards her household women are to divide what is left between them ... And Godwif and *Ælfifu* are to divide the others [wall-hangings, seat-covers, and bedsteads] between them; and each of them [is to have] two chests].²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Ibid., 146-147, 150.

From this passage, it is evident that Æthelgifu bequeathed some women with more moveable possessions than others. Three of the women are bequeathed relatively the same amount of possessions. Ælfgifu is identified as Æthelgifu's niece, Godwif is named the daughter of Leofrun,²¹⁸ and Wulfwynn is referred to as a kinswoman. Æthelgifu uses the term *mæg* for both Godwif and Wulfwynn which is frequently translated as “kinsman, relative”²¹⁹ and “kinswoman.”²²⁰ We see the same definitions used for *freond*. To place known familial relations with non-specific relations together in the same passage of bequeathals implies that all individuals identified are considered kin of some kind, whether familial or not. While it is not possible to definitively claim that Wulfwynn and Godwif are biological or by-marriage relations to Æthelgifu, it is evident that the fluid concept of friendship in early medieval English culture blurred the lines between friend and relative.

Out of the other wills discussed in this chapter, the Herefordshire woman's will is the only one that appears in a lawsuit rather than the other way around, like Eadgifu's will which has an embedded lawsuit record.²²¹ The only record we have of the unnamed woman is the legal document that recounts the events surrounding her will. If there was a written record of her will, it does not survive or has not been connected with her. From the context described in the written account, we know that her will “was not made before a public

²¹⁸ Æthelgifu's will reads “selle man Leofrune mire mægan þ land æt Ðatforda 7 ... 7 þ lond æt Ðatforda ofer hire dæg hire dehter Godgife” [the land at Watford is to be given to my kinswoman Leofrun ... [and] after her lifetime the land at Watford is to be given to her daughter, Godwif], see *Ibid.*, 146, 150.

²¹⁹ “mæg.” Bosworth, Joseph. *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*. Ed. Thomas Northcote Toller and Others. Comp. Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý. Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 21 Mar. 2010. Web. 5 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.bosworthtoller.com/>>.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Dated to approximately 1016 X 1035, see Patrick Wormald, “A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988), 264. See Mynors R A B. and Rodney M. Thomson, eds., *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Hereford Cathedral Library* (Cambridge: Published on behalf of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral, D.S. Brewer, 1993), 65.

gathering but at her own residence”²²² and is the most apparent example of an oral will that is discussed in this chapter. The beginning of the document explains that the reason for the lawsuit began at an assembly of community members. The scribe writes that the woman’s son, Edwine, son of Enneawne, came to the assembly and “spæc þær on his agene modor æfter sumon dæle Landes . þ wæs Weolintun . 7 Cyrdesleah” [made complaint against his own mother concerning a certain share of lands at Wellintone and Cyrdeslea].²²³ A group of assembly elders traveled to her home to hear her defense; she disputes the plaint made against her and immediately summons a kinswoman to her home. In front of those gathered there, the unnamed woman proceeds to speak her will before them:

“her sit Leoflæde min mæge þe ic geann ægðer ge mines landes . ge mines goldes . ge ræglæs . ge reafes . ge ealles þe ic ah æfter minon dæge . 7 heo syððan to þam þegnon cwæþ . doð þegnlice . 7 wel abeodað mine ærende to þam gemote beforan eallum þam godan mannum . 7 cyðað heom hwæm ic mines landes geunnen hæbbe . 7 ealre minre æhte . 7 minan agenan sunu næfre nam þing . 7 biddað heom beon þisses to gewitnesse: .And heo þa swæ dydon . ridon to þam gemote . 7 cyðdon eallon þam godan mannum hwæt heo on heom geled gæfde.”

[‘Here sits Leofflæd my kinswoman to whom I give [each of] my lands, money, clothes, [spoils of clothing], and all that I have after my days,’ and she then said to the Thanes ‘Do nobly and well and announce my message to the Moot before all the good men and tell them to whom I have given my

²²² Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 60.

²²³ S 1462; J.W. Leigh, “Some Archives and Seals of Hereford Cathedral,” in *Transactions of the Woolhope Naturalists’ Field Club* (Herefordshire: The Club, 1957), 109-110.

lands and all my property, and never anything at all to my own son;’ and of this bid them all by witness. This they did and they rode to the Moot and told all the good men what she had laid upon them.]²²⁴

The woman outmaneuvers her son by drawing a will to protect her property and possessions. As discussed previously in this chapter, the early medieval English will was an irrevocable and finite document.²²⁵ The first complete phrase of the will, “her sit Leoflæde” [here sits Leofflæd], draws immediate attention to the physical presence of her kinswoman before the assembly elders, the scribe, and herself. This emphasizes the value of the beneficiary’s presence during the oral delivery of the will. The woman prevents any ambiguities during the drawing of her will by summoning Leofflæd to her home to hear it with her own ears.

This preventative measure makes her will all the more absolute by increasing the number of ears that hear her last will and testament. Rather than relying on the assembled elders to vouch for the legal finality of her will at the Moot, she also relies on her kinswoman’s first-hand knowledge of the will. We can see a similar preventative measure in the woman’s use of the word “eal” [all]. In the entirety of the will, the unnamed woman uses the word “eal” four times, or equivalent to five percent of the will.²²⁶ She uses “eal” as a distributive and article determiner, an indefinite pronoun, and as an intensifier. Each use of the word “eal” generates an all-encompassing and absolute phraseology that leaves no room for an executor’s interpretation, or that of any other individual who may be

²²⁴ S 1462; Leigh, “Some Archives,” 109-110. I have slightly altered Leigh’s translation for what I believe is a more accurate translation.

²²⁵ This, of course, partially depended on the will being honored after the testatrix’s death as is apparent in Eadgifu of Kent’s social narrative.

²²⁶ There are 78 Old English words in the part of the Herefordshire Lawsuit that constitute the woman’s will. The percentage of 4 uses of *eal* out of 78 total words in the will is equivalent to 5%.

interested in obtaining her property and possessions. The first instance of its use occurs in the bequeathal: “ægðer ge mines landes . ge mines goldes . ge ræglæs . ge reafes . ge ealles” [each of my lands, money, clothes, spoils of clothing, and all that I have after my days]. The construction “ægðer ge ... ealles” [each of ... all] is used as a correlative conjunction that not only joins “landes ... goldes ... ræglæs ... [, and] ræglæs . reafes” [lands ... money ... clothes ... [, and] spoils of clothing] together but also sets an absolute parameter of how much property and possessions are to be given to Leofflæd. The use of “eal” that appears in the content following the bequeathal demonstrates how the woman made her will rhetorically soundproof. “Eal” as an indefinite pronoun, seen in the phrase “eallum þam godan mannum” [all the good men], reflects the absolute quality of her oral will. She uses a very absolute adjective “eal” to specify what is to be given to her kinswoman, who is to hear her message, and who is to be a witness to her message.

After the Herefordshire landowner states her bequeathal to Leofflæd, she calls upon the lawsuit messengers and orders that they “abeodað mine ærende to þam gemote beforan eallum þam godan mannum . 7 cyðað heom hwæm ic mines landes geunnen hæbbe . 7 ealre minre æhte” [announce my message to the Moot before all the good men and tell them to whom I have given my lands and all my property]. Her return message to the Moot would have been announced to all of those in attendance and in front of her son Edwin, who would have been her closest living direct descendent. She expressly tells the witnesses to go to the Moot and tell the men there on her and her kinswoman’s behalf what had transpired. Not only did she bestow her property to her kinswoman Leofflæd, but she ensured that the transaction was proclaimed to a wider audience in an effort to legitimize the bestowal: “7 biddað heom beon þisses to gewitnesse” [and of this bid them all by

witness]. To be a witness of a will meant a relationship was conceived between the testatrix, the will's executor, and the witness. The unnamed woman, through her oral will and return message to the Moot, protected Leofflæd's inheritance upon her death, which was accomplished by calling the assembly at the Moot as witnesses. The unnamed woman demonstrated intelligent [or something to boost this] foresight by adding protection to Leofflæd's inheritance.

Thus far, I have discussed women's wills that illuminate the legal encounters women navigated as they maintained ownership of their lands. Women's wills also show the care with which they made bequeathals outside of land disputes. Wulfgyth,²²⁷ a mid-11th century noble woman, articulates early in her will that she wishes to “*yan þet land at Stistede a godes ywithnesse and mine vrenden* into Xristes cheriche þa muneken to uostre (my emphases)” [grant the estate at Stisted, with the witness of God and my friends, to Christchurch for the sustenance of the monks in the community].²²⁸ This common act of bestowal of property to a community is made unique by who Wulfgyth calls as witnesses to this bequeathal. She calls upon “*a godes ywithnesse and mine vrenden*” [the witness of God and my friends].²²⁹ One potential reason for calling upon God and her friends as witnesses is her consideration of the welfare of her sons, Elfkitel and Kytel. She articulates that the land should be given to Christchurch “*on þan hyrede þet Elfkitel and Kytel mine*

²²⁷ Whitelock dates her will to 1046. She states that “it fits well with the internal evidence, as the will was made in Edward's reign and before the death of Godwine in 1053,” see Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 197. Not much is known of her personal life beyond the names of her nuclear family. From the contents of her will, we know that she was the sister of Edwin, a thegn of King Edward, that her husband's name was Ælfwine, and that she had six children: Ealdgyth, Gode, Bote, Ælfkitel, Kytel, and Godric; see Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 197-199.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 84, 85.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* The word ‘vrenden’ appears similar to the Dutch ‘vrienden’ which means friends and the Middle High Dutch ‘vriunden.’ There's also ‘frend’ which is an Old English variant of friend that the OED marked as rare in the etymology section of ‘friend.’ I'm having trouble figuring out the etymology of the word vrenden itself though but I'm pretty sure it is connected to Dutch or German.

bearn bruke þas londes hye dey” [on condition that my sons Ælfketel and Ketel may have the use of the estate for their lifetime].²³⁰ To call upon God as a witness provides spiritual security whereas calling upon one’s friends involves a third party in the exchange between donor and beneficiary. It may seem that Wulfgyth does not turn to her relatives as witnesses but to a network of friendships. As I have discussed earlier, though, the concept of friendship in early medieval England was more fluid than the modern equivalent. To be a friend was not limited to non-familial relations but could in fact include one’s close biological and by-marriage relatives, as discussed in the Introduction. Sociological theorists John F. Stolte and Richard M. Emerson explain that a relationship in which an exchange occurs “should be studied as a longitudinal process between two parties, having a past, a present state, and an implied future.”²³¹ This “longitudinal process” is evident in Wulfgyth’s will in that she calls upon “vrenden” who are present to witness the transfer of land to the monks at Christchurch. The witnesses are now privy to Wulfgyth’s long-standing relationship with the monastery and subsequently a part of the execution of the will upon her death. They are connected with her past relationship with Christchurch and also with the relationship she created between her beneficiaries and her executor. Wulfgyth has invariably created a social environment by which her friendship network, the beneficiary, and the executor must cooperate immediately after her death.²³² The network Wulfgyth creates in her will generates a timeline that stretches from the past into the future

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ George C. Homans, Robert L. Hamblin, and John H. Kunkel, “Structural Inequality: Position and Power in Network Structures,” in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), 120.

²³² In other words, the donor’s final wishes are to be followed exactly as ordered. The chosen executor does not have the power to dispose of land and properties acquired after the writing of the will unless authentic proof could be procured, such as a supplementary document to the will. For further discussion of this topic, see Tollerton, *Wills and Will-Making*, 51.

at which point there are two possibilities: the conditions of the bestowal of Stisted are met or the conditions are violated. In either case, Wulfgyth's friends are instituted as the wardens of her transaction with the monks at Christchurch. This adds emphasis to the esteem she has for friends, whether familial or not, and indicates the degree to which friendships were respected in early medieval English society.

Conclusion

The research presented in this chapter began as an effort to find evidence of social networks, primarily friendships, between women from woman's perspective. What I found in my search for woman's perspective were legal documents – land charters, lawsuits, and wills. From the wealth of research that I collected developed an analysis of the rhetorical strategies women employed in legal documents. These strategies inform us of the investment these women had in the composition of their wills and the disposition of their lands and property to their beneficiaries. These readings of legal documents can be applied to a wider range of early medieval English literature, such as correspondence and the anonymous poem *The Wife's Lament*. Thus, implementing a deeper focus on the instrumental uses of friendship in female networks can shed insight on the power women exercised in their communities and the influence they wielded in their friendship networks.

Chapter 4: The Rhetoric of Affect in Early Medieval English Religious Women's Letter-Writing

Introduction

Letters from the early medieval English period demonstrate a cultural interest in the temporal quality of the letters' contents. The author of a personal letter used language imbued with allusions of present time, such as the adverbs *nu* (now) or *her* (here, at this time). The omphalos of this letter-writing feature is the author's manipulation of language to create a temporally flexible reading experience. Rather than composing a letter that is embedded in a past occurrence or a future circumstance, the author employs language of 'present time' that draws the addressee into a temporal space in which a past occurrence is experienced in the present and a future circumstance is hypothesized in a present context. Present time is, thus, used as a tool that manipulates the moment to serve as a cognitive reminder to the reader of a particular memory or social experience. Early medieval English letter-writing demonstrates rhetorical features that not only capture a present time but can also mark the beginnings of a social network. My research on the rhetorical features of female-composed letters reveals that the female writer formed a network between herself and her reader(s) through specific rhetorical features that make references to time and space. The women discussed in this chapter were nuns and abbesses; their relationships with other women demonstrate a use of friendship that emanates elements of instrumentality and affectivity. Women who lived and participated in religious communities during the early medieval English period used the benefits and experience of

friendship to strengthen and expand the communities in which they were a part.²³³ Additionally, they form and use their friendships in ways that enable them to depart from the tradition of cloistered religious practice. In this chapter, I investigate religious women's letter-writing to illustrate the methods women used to form and participate in communities of their choosing and, in some cases, their making. I argue that religious women in the early medieval English period formed and maintained friendships through the manipulation of letter-writing as a vehicle of affect.

Female Authorship and Letter-Writing

A popular topic of discussion regarding women's letter-writing is female authorship.²³⁴ Scholars are often concerned with the composition of letters and the subsequent question of female literacy, whether or not women wrote their own letters or if they used the services of a scribe. The fact that women may not have composed their own letters using their own hand and writing utensil doesn't necessarily indicate that women were unable to write. Rather, it was most likely that female letter-writers employed that

²³³ By the phrase 'benefits and experience of friendship,' I am referring to what Julian Haseldine describes as the multivalent form of early medieval friendship in which there were two dominant forms: formal and informal. Specifically, he asserts that friendships were used not primarily as an affective expression toward another entity but were also used instrumentally. He explains that "spiritual and idealised personal friendship is not in opposition to 'instrumental' forms but functioned to provide the ideological underpinning or shared ethical understanding which allowed friendship to be used in the pragmatic or consensus-building contexts in which we encounter it," Julian Haseldine, "Friendship Networks in Medieval Europe: New Models of a Political Relationship," *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* 1 (2013), 73.

²³⁴ See Carol M. Meale, Helen Wilcox, and Vivien Jones, eds., *Women and Literature in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginitiy and Its Authorizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and David Wallace, *Strong Women: Life, Text and Territory, 1347-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (New York, NY: American Council of Learned Societies, 2009).

“medieval tradition [which] dictated use of an amanuensis rather than a pen.”²³⁵ Connected with female letter-writers employing scribes is the issue of collaborative writing and the level of influence the scribe had over the contents of the writing. James Daybell explains that “it is worth emphasizing that it was conventional scholarly tradition to employ scribes for the drudgery of writing, an activity separated from the intellectual effort of composition.”²³⁶ This separation between “the drudgery of writing” and “the intellectual effort of composition” draws emphasis to the variety of skills necessary to complete a work of writing. While the scribe may have employed the use of a writing utensil, the woman composed the words that were then inked onto the medium.²³⁷

²³⁵ James Daybell, “Medieval Women’s Letters, 1350–1500,” in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 700-1500*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Diane Watt, vol. 1 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 178. For further discussion of this, also see V.M. O’Mara, “Female Scribal Ability and Scribal Activity in Late Medieval England: The Evidence?,” *Leeds Studies in English* 27 (1996), 109–10. Daybell defines amanuensis as “a neutral term that includes formal secretaries, in the sense of salaried individuals retained for writing services, as well as clerks or scribes and other individuals used in a ‘secretarial’ capacity for correspondence,” see Daybell, “Medieval Women’s Letters,” 179.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

²³⁷ Scholars have long recognized that Latin literacy was greatly valued and cultivated among the early medieval elite, yet the ability to read and compose Latin was not equivalent to the ability to write it down. The physical act of writing was considered a separate skill from reading or composing text, and it appears to have been studied as a specialty of a few rather than a skill acquired and practiced by all educated individuals. As such, the scribe was integral to the production of letters. Accordingly, many of the letters from this period were dictated to scribes who were expected to take dictation and, also, handle the letter’s physical production. For more in-depth discussion on female Latin literacy, see Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976); Rosamond McKitterick, *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 82-108; Virginia Blanton, Patricia Stoop, and V. M. O’Mara, eds., *Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 3-46; Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing, eds., *Double Agents Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press, 2009), 75-109; Sarah Rees Jones, *Learning and Literacy in Medieval England and Abroad* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 7-48; Joan Ferrante, “Women’s Role in Latin Letters from the Fourth to the Early Twelfth Century,” in *Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June Hall McCash (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), pp. 73-104; and Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 1-19.

A Rhetorical Approach to Early Medieval English Letter-Writing

The rhetorical features of female-composed letters reveal that the female writer formed a network between herself and her reader(s) through affective language. In particular, the writer often captured a moment of the present in order to create a specific reading experience for the reader. This method creates enables the reader to vicariously live a memory or emotion of the writer's past. Present time is the temporal foundation and rhetorical basis of the affective exchange between the participants of early medieval English personal letter-writing: specifically, the author and the addressee.²³⁸ The letters treated in this chapter are characterized by a common epistolary language and by affective experiences centered on yearning, affection, and solitude. They disclose private emotions of grief, melancholy, nostalgia, and longing that are stimulated by experiences of isolation, exile, abandonment, and loss, or separation, of kin and community. This is correspondence that reaches across time, enabling an affective response that does not, necessarily, require an understanding of the historical, social, or linguistic contexts in which it was produced. Analysis of extant letters²³⁹ can tell us more about women's lives in the early medieval English period, such as their responsibilities, friendships, and religious affiliations. As we study the surviving letters from this period, the presence of women is unmistakable. When gathered and read together, female-composed letters add to existing evidence of women's

²³⁸ I specify addressee here to draw a distinction between addressee and recipient. While a letter may have been addressed to a specific individual or individuals, the letter may have been read aloud or passed among others who were not the original intended reader; see Cherewatuk and Wiethaus, *Dear Sister*, 1-45; and McKitterick, *The Uses of Literacy*, 36-62, 226-257.

²³⁹ In the early medieval English period, ecclesiastical scribes created collections of model documents for later use, ostensibly by copying original documents and redacting specific information. These documents included model letters as well as deeds of sale, wills, manumissions, and charters. Letters, and other model documents, were typically mixed together in formularies which strongly suggests that letters and legal documents were used by the same people in the same circumstances—for example, in an educational institution, such as a religious scriptorium, where individuals were learning to formulate such texts and were accustomed to referring to these models for their own administrative needs.

deep integration in the religious, political, and social economies of early medieval English society.

As documents of practice, letters were an appropriate method of creating and maintaining personal and professional connections with others when physical presence was impractical or impossible. Surviving evidence of letter production and reception testifies to the importance of the religious network of fostering and maintaining affective bonds through collective knowledge and shared affect. Numerous letters to nuns and female religious pertained to spiritual concerns, primarily the management and allocation of the abbey's religious services. Such concerns were often alleviated through the performance of prayers, masses, and other liturgical offices. Many of the letters available to us are petitions for prayer; such correspondence reveals the creation and maintenance of prayer networks between women and their correspondents. They are connected by such religious practices and letter production. In addition, they are connected by emotions that center on the mission and that function to maintain and foster connections between the early medieval English religious community, namely spiritual kinship and friendship.

Letters are particularly interesting because they comprise some of the only direct records of the formation and maintenance of relationships such as friendship. We can see this, for example, in the letter Abbess Ælffled of Whitby sent to Abbess Adolana of Pfalzelt-Trier in Germany. This letter provides a clear example of the birth of a friendship through the use of affective language of respect and adoration. Additionally, this letter is evidence of the advantages of forming weak tied social networks.²⁴⁰ It is only through Abbess Ælffled's initiative to send a letter of greeting and request for the safe passage of a fellow

²⁴⁰ See *Introduction*, esp. 37-39.

sister on pilgrimage that the friendship between her and Adolana is born. Such letters not only reveal vital information of women's epistolary activity, but they also provide a glimpse of moments in which women were pivotal figures of social, political, and spiritual exchange.

Letters also offer the recipient tangible proof of their friend's affection and provide a way of fostering that affection. They have the power to console the recipient for the absence of their friend. Through the language of one's affection for another, letters can make the absent friend appear to be present. Letters so often describe personal relationships and circumstances of physical separation and, thus, are uniquely charged with emotive language. The writer's use of an artful phrase to describe her emotional response is not necessarily tantamount to inauthenticity or insincerity; rather, this rhetorical trope is, if not genuine, then at least credible for a specific situation. The affective language in female-composed letters draws the reader into an immersive experience that enables the reader to live a moment of the writer's past in present time and feel as if they are not alone.

Letter-Writing and Female Friendship

Discovering the founding, function, and experience of friendship within a female religious community is possible if approached from female-composed documents. An enlightening, though overlooked, source for early medieval English female friendship is the letter. Traditionally, the evidence available to us that provides interactions between religious women and their communities has been thought to appear largely in documents written by men.²⁴¹ Alternatively, when we look for evidence of women's networks in

²⁴¹ Such as Ælfric's homilies and saints' lives and Ambrose of Milan's and Jerome's treatises on monastic behavior and religious practices.

female-composed letters, the vast epistolary library of interactions between women and their communities provides fertile ground to add to our knowledge of female friendship. Many of the documents available reveal the close relationships religious women formed with others and how those relationships bolstered the practice of their faith and the religious houses they supported.

A majority of the types of friendships evident in female-composed letters pertain to either well-established relationships or the beginnings of friendships. Letter-writing was a way for individuals to maintain friendships across vast distances and over many years. For example, Egburg's letter to Boniface shows a friendship that is well-established. Egburg's friendship network with Boniface began through her brother. Both men had been friends; and through their friendship, Egburg became friends with Boniface. She writes a letter to Boniface as a means of perpetuating their friendship and as a way of seeking comfort and guidance during a difficult period of her life. In addition, letter-writing was a method for individuals to form new friendships by networking with others. For example, Abbess Ælffled of Whitby's letter to Abbess Adolana of Pfalzel shows the beginning of a friendship between two women. Ælffled writes on behalf of an abbess at Whitby who is on pilgrimage and will be traveling through the region where Adolana and her spiritual sisters live. This friendship between the abbesses shows the benefit of letter-writing as a means of connecting with others and thereby creating a friendship that will have lasting effects. The friendships that are evident in female-composed letters inform us of the practice of friendship and provide us with information about what friendships might have looked like in both their infancy and in their maturity.

An Application of Social Network Theory to Early Medieval English Letter-Writing

For the purpose of this chapter, I limit my investigation of letter-writing to that of correspondence between religious women. More particularly, I examine religious women's letters that bear evidence of friendship networks. To this end, I draw upon social network theory as a tool to analyze the beginnings and maintenance of friendships between women as they appear in letters. This theoretical approach to early medieval English letters enables me to identify the social practices of weak ties (open networks) and strong ties (closed networks) within friendships and the influential reach of both. Mark Granovetter claims that

our acquaintances (weak ties) are less likely to be socially involved with one another than are our close friends (strong ties) ... The weak tie between Ego and his acquaintance, therefore, becomes not merely a trivial acquaintance tie but rather a crucial bridge between the two densely knit clumps of close friends ... [;] these clumps would not, in fact, be connected to one another at all were it not for the existence of weak ties.²⁴²

The letters discussed in this chapter show the influence of having weak ties. For example, in a letter between Abbess Ælffled of Whitby and Abbess Adolana of Pfalzel, Ælffled forms a weak tie with Adolana by sending her a request to see the safe passage of an abbess from Whitby who was on pilgrimage. The initial letter to Adolana represents the beginning of a weak tie between two abbesses who would otherwise not have known one another.

²⁴² Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited," *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 201-202. As clarification, Granovetter personifies the human ego so as to use it as an "arbitrarily selected individual" which he then calls Ego; this is a methodological decision that proves useful as a means of discussing unidentified individuals and their social networks, see "The Strength of Weak Ties," 202.

The correspondence between them creates a bridge between both of their religious houses that not only connects the two abbesses, but also the sisters who live at both houses and the visitors who come to the houses. Granovetter explains that this type of network building is significant because weak ties “are far more likely to be bridges than are strong ties. It should follow, then, that the occupational groups making the greatest use of weak ties are those whose weak ties do connect to social circles different from one's own.”²⁴³ My aim in this chapter is to examine the evidence of friendships between women in varying degrees of social systems²⁴⁴ as they appear in the primary sources. This chapter engages with dyadic, triadic, and more extensive social networks. My analysis of the letters examines the affective phraseology used to initiate friendship, foster a pre-existing friendship, and influence the health of a friendship. My purpose in analyzing these elements of letters is to draw more attention to the manipulation of affect in friendship and the affective experience of said relationship. The traces of women’s friendships in letters speak to the instrumental use of affect to form social networks.

Affective Language of Early Medieval English Women’s Letter-Writing

The women letter-writers discussed in this chapter use affective language to capture moments in time so that their readers might experience that moment in a present time. Affective language enables the women letter-writers to explicitly express their thoughts and feelings so that their readers might also experience these during the act of reading.

²⁴³ Ibid., 208.

²⁴⁴ By this, I am referring to friendships that have a wide (weak) or narrow (strong) network of individuals.

Medievalists have approached affect through the study of religious and social practices and experiences of time, such as meditation, devotion, and the expression and experience of grief and enjoyment. In *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions*, Leslie Lockett discusses the psychological and physiological symptoms of the affective experience. She asserts that in early medieval English communities

an intense thought or emotion is analogous to a source of heat energy, so it provides heat when it arises in or near the container, which is in turn analogous to the mind or to the fleshy organs of the chest cavity. When a thought or emotion transfers its energy to the container and its contents, they too become hot, and they begin to seethe and expand.²⁴⁵

While affect may begin as a psychological experience, it becomes a physical sensation of pressure around the viscera which, in turn, causes additional psychological symptoms. This aspect of affect is evident in the highly affective language of Berhtgyth's letters to her brother, Balthard. The affective language she uses in her writing captures her present grief and yearning for companionship so that her brother might also experience her feelings. Antonina Harbus explores the reading experience in early medieval English communities. She explains that the

reader is required to call up not only narrative schema, but also emotional schema, created from memories, personal experience, and embodied feeling, to fill out the sketchy scenario, make sense of the sequence of ideas, and account for a potential cause for such extreme abandonment to the emotional life. In doing so, the reader enacts feeling, which is implicated in

²⁴⁵ Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 63.

cognitive processing, and thereby becomes emotionally engaged in the narrative.²⁴⁶

This emotional connection between writer and reader through the reading experience is evident in a letter that the 9th-century abbess Egburg sends to Boniface.²⁴⁷ She explains her emotionally dire situation, that her brother has died and her sister is in self-exile in Rome. The loss of a dear loved one and the absence of a close sister is conveyed affectively through Egburg's descriptions of emotional distress. In her time of grief, she turns to her spiritual leader and friend, Boniface, for prayers and guidance.

Close study of affect enables us to differentiate between the contemporary concept of affect and the ways early medieval societies understood affect. The flexibility of the medieval concept of affect facilitates exploring the many ways in which, for the purposes of this chapter, women used affective language in order to draw their readers into the captured moments inked into the page.

Women, Friendship Networks, and Letter-Writing

Women's letter-writing reveals a network of reciprocal exchange and socio-political positioning. In a letter between two abbess, Abbess Ælffled of Whitby and Abbess Adolana of Pfalzel, Ælffled speaks for herself and for the sisters of Whitby when she writes to Adolana. Her letter indicates that there is a line of communication between her region of England and Adolana's region in Germany. Ælffled explains that "Ex quo...me famam vestrae sanctitatis ab adventantibus ex illis partibus, rumore celebri referente, cognovimus,

²⁴⁶ Antonina Harbus, "Affective Poetics: The Cognitive Basis of Emotions in Old English Poetry," in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (London ; New York: Routledge, 2019), 30.

²⁴⁷ Nothing is known about this woman other than what is made apparent in the letter itself.

fateor in primis nos vestrum visceraliter iuxta preceptum dominicum ex intimo pectore amorem caepisse, Domino dicente: ‘Hoc est preceptum meum, ut diligatis invicem.’”²⁴⁸

This line of communication shows that there were travelers coming from Germany to England who bore news, and vice-versa. In her letter, she explains that “N., devotam ancillam Dei ac relegiosam abbatissam, karissimam fidelissimamque filiam nostram ab annis adoliscientiae”²⁴⁹ will be on pilgrimage to Rome and requests that she may be accepted into Adolana’s abbey and be given aid in her pilgrimage. This social network is indicative of a weak tie. Ælffled extends a gesture of greeting and friendship to Adolana who is outside of her primary network of women at Whitby. The act of reaching out to a woman who is not part of her primary social network indicates that Ælffled is seeking a relationship that will increase the breadth of her current social network. Charles Kadushin states that “weak ties facilitate the flow of information from otherwise-distant parts of a network. Individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends.”²⁵⁰ Ælffled’s correspondence with Adolana demonstrates understanding she has of increasing the breadth of her social networks to include more weak ties. The increase in weak ties makes her sisters more capable of embarking on pilgrimage to far-off places if there is a social network of friendship along the destination that is available for their use. Ælffled, abbess of Whitby, demonstrates a care for her sisters in Christ in her letter to

²⁴⁸ “Since we knew your fame of holiness by means of the travelers from that region, bringing back the renowned rumors, I had ascertained, I confess foremost our friend love for you took hold of me in the inmost being of my heart as according to God’s command, the Lord says: ‘This is my command, that you love one another,’” Ælffled, “A Letter from Elfed, Abbess of Whitby,” trans. Joan Ferrante, *Epistolae: Medieval Women’s Latin Letters*, 2014, <https://epistolae.columbia.edu/letter/338.html>.

²⁴⁹ “N, the devoted handmaid of God and religious abbess, our dearest and most faithful daughter from the years of her youth,” Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts and Findings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 31.

Abbess Adolana by asking her to provide assistance for a fellow religious sister on pilgrimage to Rome. On behalf of herself and the sisters of Whitby, Ælffled writes that “precamur, quatenus cum affectu verae caritatis in sinum clementiae piae a vobis suscipiatur cum his, qui secum comitantur.”²⁵¹ She and her congregation of religious women had affiliations with other religious women, some of whom went on pilgrimage. Such correspondence is evidence of women using letter-writing as a method of creating friendship networks with others. Ælffled’s affective and instrumental friendships enabled her to be an influential leader to her religious community and to those with whom she interacted in matters of state and church.

When we encounter emotional responses in letters, it is important not to dismiss them as empty letter-writing formulas. In contrast to Ælffled stands the closed network we can see in the letters Berhtgyth writes from Thuringia to her brother Balthard in the mid-8th century. According to the 11th-century Benedictine monk Otloh of St. Emmeram, the early medieval English woman Berhtgyth had traveled to the continent with her mother Cynehild to teach in Thuringia as part of the Bonifacian mission. Otloh described both women as *valde eruditae in liberali scientia*.²⁵² Berhtgyth’s three letters reveal that her mother had died and that she was now alone in Thuringia, but that she had a brother, called Balthard, who may have also been involved in missionary work, though perhaps not in a Bonifacian mission. In two letters, Berhtgyth sorrowfully writes in both prose and verse to her brother, who, she claims, ought to come and visit her. While her letters are relatively short, they overflow in emanations of grief, longing, and love. Physical distance tends to

²⁵¹ “Pray that she be received by you with the affection of true charity in the bosom of pious mercy with those who accompany her,” Ferrante, *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.columbia.edu/letter/338.html>.

²⁵² “Being greatly learned in the liberal arts,” in Wilhelmus Levison, ed., *Vitae Sancti Bonifatii Archiepiscopi Moguntini* (Hannover: Hahn, 1905), 138.

loom in Berhtgyth's imagination, particularly in the passages that reveal the strain of the distance between her and her brother. Expressions of sorrow and yearning in early medieval letter-writing often comingled with the joy of communicating with relatives and friends. In her book on the epistolary novel, theorist Janet Altman argues that the technology of the letter can serve as a substitute for face-to-face encounters; but by so doing, it can also remind writers and readers of the seemingly unending absence of their correspondents.²⁵³ The oscillation between the letter as signifier of presence and as signifier of absence is apparent in the rhetoric of early medieval letters. It was not only the difficulties of delivering letters that made receiving a letter seem an unsatisfactory means of maintaining friendships across vast distances. Besides the positive feeling associated with the receiving and writing of letters, letters may also have been experienced as a disappointing second best that was incapable of recreating the satisfaction of meeting a friend in person.

Distance posed problems in maintaining bonds between individuals. Letters exhibit attempts to create and maintain those bonds despite that distance. In her first letter, Berhtgyth writes "quare non vis cogitare quod ego sola in hac terra et nullus alius frater visited me, neque propinquorum aliquis ad me veniet?"²⁵⁴ In Berhtgyth's case, unable to return to her homeland or visit her beloved brother, she represents herself as constrained spatially and temporally. Despite her own active role as a missionary, Berhtgyth does not represent herself as one would expect a missionary. Whatever her reality may have been, she does not seem like a religious who has chosen exile as a performance of her faith, but

²⁵³ See Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1982), 13-46.

²⁵⁴ "Why do you not want to remember that I am alone on this earth and no other brother visits me, nor any family members will come to me?" Berhtgyth, *Berhtgyth's Letters*, 15.

as a religious who has been forced into exile. We see an acute failure of a letter to replace face-to-face encounters. The ability to communicate through a letter was doubtless a comfort for those who were separated by great stretches of space and time. While letter-writers may have employed emotive rhetorical tropes, it would not be prudent to ignore the very real sentiments which they express. Letters could be a source of joy, comfort, and relief; and, conversely, when letters were not received, their absence could be a cause for worry, anxiety, and suffering.

The range in responses letters could generate – worry, anxiety, and suffering, among others – speaks to the concept of imagination and memory. Michelle Karnes uses cognitive theory to investigate the relationship of the mind to the mental experience of affect and experience. She argues that imagination generates “invented images ... as perceived objects,” which results in our minds perceiving realistic “affective, intellectual, and physical effects” (330). Berhtgyth demonstrates this awareness of the power of memory when she confronts her brother by asking “quare non vis cogitare quod ego sola in hac terra” [why do you not want to remember that I am alone on this earth]. She uses the word “cogitare” [to remember] in an effort to place the emphasis on her feeling and experience of isolation from her kin and beloved brother. Berhtgyth encourages her brother to remember her current predicament of being “sola in hac terra” [alone on this earth]. The imagery Berhtgyth uses of isolation in the vastness of the earth draws upon the barrenness of her social circumstances and thereby engages Balthard to also experience that lack of a social network to activate his memory and imagination. This may indicate that Berhtgyth has narrowed her social system to a single node consisting of herself and her brother.

Berhtgyth creates a very small network which results in her negative affective experience. Kadushin explains that “eco-centric networks are those networks that are connected with a single node or individual.”²⁵⁵ The risk of an eco-centric network is the severing of all connections with other nodes, or individuals. We know from her letters, though, that she is not alone in her social environment: “quando video et audio alias ituras ad amicos suos, tunc recolo quod a parentibus in iuventute derelicta fui et sola hic permansi” [When I see and hear other women going to travel to their friends, then I recall that I was abandoned by my parents in my youth and I remain here alone].²⁵⁶ It is likely that Berhtgyth was living in a religious community, which would also explain her awareness of other women’s activities. Berhtgyth’s lament that “video et audio alias ituras ad amicos suos” [I see and hear other women going to travel to their friends] suggests that she was witnessing others’ friendships from afar. Her witness of others’ friendships places her on the fringes of her social environment. She is within reach of a social network but not quite able to partake in the network, perhaps because she has created for herself an eco-centric network. Her solitude may refer to the absence of friends and kin. Yet, she chooses to limit her social experience to the physical presence and reunion with her brother. Kathryn Maude explains that

Berhtgyth’s letters deviate from the traditions of letter writing between monastic friends by desiring the physical presence of her brother ... Berhtgyth seems to be resisting that tradition as she articulates her desire for actual rather than spiritual

²⁵⁵ Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 17.

²⁵⁶ Berhtgyth, *Berhtgyth’s Letters*, 18.

togetherness ... However, Berhtgyth states repeatedly that the textual intermediary [with her brother] is insufficient.²⁵⁷

Berhtgyth articulates this negative experience through her confession that

quamvis unius diei spatium sit et iterum perrexeris iubante domino in voluntate tua, tamen recedit tristitia ab anima mea et dolor de corde meo ... Tunc indicare possum quod mens mea desiderat, ut eveniam illuc ubi requiescunt corpora parentum nostrorum et temporalem vitam ibi finire, et pervenire ubi perfecta mansio esset cernitur, et regio vivorum et gaudia angelorum sine fine laetantium”

[even though your visit might be the space of a single day and you might leave again with the lord commanding your will, still the sadness would recede from my soul and the pain from my heart ... Then I can reveal what my mind longs for, that I come there where the bodies of our parents rest and finish this temporary life there, and arrive where the perfect home, the country of the living, and the joy of angels rejoicing without end might be distinguished].²⁵⁸

She describes her love for her brother as if it is intrinsically united with her soul and therefore directly affects her entire being. For Berhtgyth, her self-limitation to familial ties prevents her from having additional strong ties in her immediate environment or weak ties in communities abroad, the latter of which would expose her to “the flow of information from otherwise-distant parts of a network.”²⁵⁹ Even after her brother sends her a letter with a few gifts, she writes in return, “et nunc fateor tibi quod implore desidero auxiliante domino omnia quae praecepisti mihi, si dignetur voluntas tua venire ad me, quia ullomodo

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁵⁹ Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” 32.

fontem lacrimarum adquiescere non possum” [and now I confess to you that with the help of God I long to fulfill all that you instructed me, if your will might deem it worthy to come to me, because I cannot in any other way suppress my fountain of tears].²⁶⁰ Berhtgyth’s demonstration of severe emotional distress brings to mind the emotional pain that can manifest from the physical distance between two people who share affection for one another.²⁶¹ Her plea to Balthard that “ullomodo fontem lacrimarum adquiescere non possum” [I cannot in any other way suppress my fountain of tears] speaks to the dependence she has on her strong tie with Balthard as well as her lack of weak ties with other people who are part of the Bonifacian mission group. The absence of any substantial weak ties prevents her from having an extended network of friends. The result is that she must rely on her brother who is a part of her original strong ties before she left her homeland for the continent to pursue her religious calling.

The final letter discussed in this chapter provides an example of a woman who uses past memories to position her reader in her present grief so that he might better understand her situation and thus be further compelled to extend the hand of friendship to her during her time of greatest need. Egburg, a woman who we know very little about besides what is evident in the letter she wrote, reaches out through correspondence to her spiritual mentor and friend, Boniface. In her letter to him, she explains her current predicament, that her brother, Oshere, has recently died and that her sister, Wethburga, pursued a life of self-exile in Rome soon after their brother’s death. From what we know of Egburg, she had two strong ties with her siblings and one weak tie with Boniface. She may have had more social networks than this but that can only be speculation since the only surviving evidence of her

²⁶⁰ Berhtgyth, *Berhtgyth’s Letters*, 18.

²⁶¹ See *Introduction*, esp. 12-19.

existence is in the letter she wrote to Boniface. From the information that we do know, it is apparent that she suffered a severe loss of social ties after the death of her brother and sudden departure of her sister. The only remaining social network at her disposal is a long-distance relationship with Boniface.

In her letter to Boniface, Egburg uses past memories and descriptions of her emotional state during those periods to draw Boniface into her current emotional predicament. Egburg's use of the past situates Boniface in a present moment so that he might, too, experience her emotions. Her affective language draws a deeper connection between her and Boniface. For example, she states that "te summo complector amore. Et de te confido, quod numquam inmemor sis illius amicitiae, quam cum fratre meo te certum fuit habere" [I hold you in deepest affection and trust that you are never unmindful of the friendship you surely had for my brother].²⁶² This statement draws a clear connection between the Egburg and Boniface by reminding him of his past relationship with her brother. The content that follows this offers Boniface a way to immerse himself in her present situation and thus connect with her in a more intimate and personal way. She explains the primary concern of her emotional distress, the sudden absence of her sister, Wethburga. She writes to Boniface that "postquam mihi simul carissima soror Wethburg, quasi inflicto vulnere iteratoque dolore, subito ab oculis evanuit, cum qua adolevi, cum qua adoravi idem nutricum sinus; una mater ambobus in Domino et dereliquid; Iesum testor: ubique dolor, ubique pavor, ubique mortis imago" [when at the same time my dearest sister Wethburga vanished from my sight — a new wound and a new grief; she with whom I had grown up, whom I adored and who was nursed at the same mother's breast — Christ be my

²⁶² Egburg, "A Letter from Egburg," trans. Joan Ferrante, *Epistolae*, 2014, <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/359.html>.

witness, everywhere was grief and terror and the dread of death].²⁶³ The phrases “*inflicto vulnere iteratoque dolore*” [a new wound and a new grief] and “*ubique dolor, ubique pavor, ubique mortis imago*” [everywhere was grief and terror and the dread of death] places emphasis on the resulting emotional distress caused by her sister who “*subito ab oculis evanuit*” [vanished from my sight]. Relating the past memory of her sister’s departure invites Boniface to then experience the emotional damage that departure caused. The severity of her emotional distress informs us of the strength of her relationship with her sister. Moreover, Egburg’s decision to turn to Boniface for friendship and comfort informs us of her desire to make use of her weak tie with him. After losing her strong ties, she has little choice but to rely on the weak tie that she created with him. While she may have little choice in this matter, the main point is that she had a weak tie to begin with, which provided her with a wider social network to turn to during her greatest time of need.

Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with early medieval women’s letter-writing and the means by which letter-writing was used to express female friendship and build networks. We have seen how letter-writing is imbued with an affective exchange between reader and writer. The experience of receiving and reading a letter embeds readers in a present time and space that enables them to participate in an affective exchange within their friendship network. In addition, we have seen how letter-writing can be used as a tool to begin and foster friendships. Letter-writing, in this way, provides us an opportunity to see the practice of friendship in its early stages and in its well-established stages. In wills and lawsuits, it

²⁶³ Ibid.

is not always possible to easily see the various stages of a friendship. Letter, on the other hand, can provide a significant amount of context that informs us of the development of a friendship between individuals. This additional context creates a reading experience that places the reader in a present moment, which then enables us to see the practice of friendship in action.

Chapter 5: Female Agency and the Failed Social Network: A Reconsideration of *The Wife's Lament*

Introduction

A majority of the chapters, thus far, have engaged with female-composed texts. From wills, letters, and hagiography, we have seen women perform and enact their influence and power within their communities by using political, legal, and rhetorical strategies. Lawsuits, on the other hand, may and may not have been composed by women, but they record, in some cases, women's words verbatim and, in more cases, describe women's legal and political savvy. While much can be said about the authorship of the lawsuits, more can be said about the evidence they preserve on women's interactions with their communities. The same can be said of other texts that may or may not have been composed by women. In particular, this chapter will focus on the Old English poem *The Wife's Lament*.²⁶⁴

The anonymous 10th-century poem is composed from the perspective of a woman who mournfully recounts the tragedies she has encountered within her community, the deterioration of her place within that community, and her resulting departure from that community in search of a new one.²⁶⁵ She describes the departure or loss of the lord of her people, her journey to find a new lord and community, and an altercation between members of this new community which then puts her own safety at risk. In response to the growing hostilities, she is advised to seek shelter away from the new community, presumably until

²⁶⁴ See Appendix C for my translation of the poem.

²⁶⁵ As the poem is housed in the Exeter Book, which is dated to the late 10th century, we can assume that the poem is at least this old.

it is safe to return. Much has been said about the authorship and gender of the speaker, but I intend to depart from these conversations in order to present a new reading of the poem. I analyze the woman's experiences through a social network theory lens coupled with an emphasis on the legal context of her situation. Approaching the poem in this way enables me to emphasize the woman's transition between two different communities as well as the legal dispute that arises in the second community she joins. I argue in this chapter that the woman uses the oak grove as a place of legal sanctuary from her second, more dysfunctional, community; and, moreover, when sanctuary fails her, meaning that no dispute-resolution is reached between her and her feuding community, she uses this sacred place to enact revenge in the form of a curse against those who have wronged her.

Early Medieval English Sanctuary Laws and Practice

Before I begin a close analysis of the woman's actions, it is necessary to consider the concept of sanctuary itself. From the poem, it is clear that the woman finds refuge in a cave at an ancient oak grove, not a church or other Christian holy site which would have been a more traditional and socially acceptable place of legal sanctuary: "heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe, / under actreo in þam eorðscræfe"²⁶⁶ [he commanded me to live in the wood's grove under the oak tree in the earth cavern]. Understanding the woman's situation is vital to understanding her actions and experiences throughout the poem; thus, I will first begin by providing some necessary background on the concept and practice of sanctuary. A prominent feature of early medieval English law is the sanctuary function of

²⁶⁶ Anonymous, "The Wife's Lament," in *Old and Middle English: C. 890 - c. 1400: An Anthology*, 3rd ed. ed. and trans. Elaine M. Treharne (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 76-79. All quotations are taken from this edition.

sacred spaces. The laws of sanctuary were often able to provide powerful protection to those who sought the refuge of sacred spaces. While laws differed from region and over time, they in large part derived from ideas drawn from a range of classical and religious sources. The concept and practice of sanctuary originally developed from the late Roman Empire.²⁶⁷ Sanctuary in the late Roman Empire reflected an amalgamation of secular and religious concerns, in particular those of the aristocracy who were interested in legally interceding on the behalf of their clients and those of the religious community who were interested in protecting criminals from execution before they had the opportunity to do penance for their sins and therefore secure their salvation in heaven.²⁶⁸ The sanctuary laws emerging in early medieval England shared some resemblance to the Empire's model as well as to some biblical exempla,²⁶⁹ but they owed their development in larger part to the influence of ideas and values outside of the Empire and the Church, that is the long history of pagan culture. In particular, early medieval English laws perpetuated the long-standing practice of dispute-resolution in which disputing parties facilitated a period of peace so that they might negotiate terms to end a feud or other legal quarrel through the use of secular

²⁶⁷ For additional information on the development of early medieval English sanctuary, see Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), in particular Chapters 1 and 2.

²⁶⁸ This is a subject that Augustine of Hippo addressed in Epistles 153 and 268, both of which were written to Macedonius, a Roman magistrate. In the former, Augustine answered Macedonius' questions regarding intercession on behalf of criminals. He argued that interceding to prevent execution was a pastoral obligation. More specifically, he argued that it was an obligation that criminals be given the means to seek penance and therefore salvation in heaven. In the latter, Augustine rebutted Macedonius' complaints that he was encouraging criminality through his argument that mercy should precede punishment for the sake of criminals' eternal souls, no matter the gravity of the sin. For a more detailed account on this subject, see Anne Ducloux, *Ad Ecclesiam Confugere: Naissance Du Droit d' Asile Dans Les églises: 4.-Milieu Du 5.* (Paris: Édition-Diffusion de Boccard, 1994).

²⁶⁹ Biblical models of sanctuary come from Old Testament passages (see Joshua 20: 1-9, Deuteronomy 4: 41-43, 19: 1-13, Numbers 35: 1-34, Exodus 21: 13-14) that describe the practice of criminals, particularly those of involuntary manslaughter, finding safety in cities. For those who committed murder, these criminals were to endure the social practice of vengeance. While the influence of these models upon English laws seems limited, they are evident to some degree in places such as the preface to Alfred's laws and in the laws in which vengeance is an appropriate legal action. For more discussion on this particular topic, see Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 53-55.

laws. Moreover, the practice of dispute-resolution was an expression of royal power which superseded the protections of the church.²⁷⁰ Based on this context, then, early medieval English sanctuary can be understood as a legal practice that is a reflection of primarily secular ideas and as an institution rooted in peace-making purposes.

The concept of sanctuary in early medieval English laws also represented a development in the locations in which sanctuary could be sought by those who deemed it necessary to find a suitable means of protection. Perhaps the most iconic location of sanctuary in a modern context is places of Christian worship.²⁷¹ In early medieval England, the religious community recognized houses of worship to be appropriate locations of sanctuary, but they also understood sanctuary in a more secular sense in that protected spaces, such as places of residence, were also appropriate.²⁷² According to the laws of Æthelberht, churches, meeting-places, and household residences were treated identically as places appropriate for those who sought sanctuary.²⁷³ In circumstances involving feud, Alfred's laws provide a clear illustration of how sanctuary laws could be used to resolve disputes. The person who reached a church could stay within the location for seven days if they could live without the necessities of life. After the seven days, the person within the

²⁷⁰ See Charles H. Riggs, *Criminal Asylum in Anglo-Saxon Law* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963); Paul R. Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), particularly Chapter 3; and Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, particularly Chapter 5.

²⁷¹ A recent example of modern sanctuary is the case of Juana Luz Tobar Ortega of Asheboro. For Ortega, escaping the bias of the US federal ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) program was only possible by seeking sanctuary at the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Greensboro, North Carolina in 2017 where she stayed until the US government granted a stay of removal in 2021. During this time, Ortega's family and friends provided her the means of living comfortably within the church. See Barbara Sostaita and Alex Morelli, "Escape-Bound: Juana Luz Tobar Ortega's Fugitive Poetics," *Southern Cultures* 26, no. 4 (2020): pp. 42-59.

²⁷² See Tom Lambert, "The Evolution of Sanctuary in Medieval England," in *Legalism: Anthropology and History*, ed. Paul Dresch and Hannah Skoda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 124; Charles H. Riggs, *Criminal Asylum in Anglo-Saxon Law* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1963), 29-36; and Paul Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation*, 92-98.

²⁷³ I Abt, see Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903-1916), vol. 1, pp. 3-8.

walls of sanctuary would have to surrender to their opponent who would then be required to keep them unharmed for thirty days during which time the opponent would also have to inform the kin of the individual seeking sanctuary of their situation.²⁷⁴ Alfred's laws of sanctuary were not limited to churches but also included houses whereby the same seven-and-thirty day rules applied.²⁷⁵ Early medieval English sanctuary practices fit within a religious and secular pattern whereby individuals could seek the protection of safe spaces until a peaceful resolution could be negotiated. This is not to say that sanctuary laws were an assault on feuding practices. Rather, sanctuary laws provided the means to pause armed conflict between disputing parties so that they might find an appropriate method of resolution. The laws of Edmund and Edgar exhibit this close association between sanctuary and feud.²⁷⁶ Within this context, the goal of sanctuary laws was less on restricting feuding and more on facilitating a viable means of resolution to feuding parties.

Just as there were places identified as acceptable locations for sanctuary according to the law, so too were there places deemed unfit to be used for sanctuary. While sanctuary was considered a legal practice and one that could take place at Christian holy sites as well as at individuals' residences, there was a clear distinction between appropriate and inappropriate places of sanctuary. After the arrival of Christianity to the early medieval English community, pagan practices, such as ritualistic gatherings that involved natural elements like tree groves, were expressly forbidden. While these practices may have been condemned by the Christian Church, it is evident from repeated writings on the condemnation of pagan practices between the 8th to 11th centuries that they persisted, which

²⁷⁴ Af 5-5:3, see Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903–1916), vol. 1, pp. 16–20, 26–89.

²⁷⁵ Af 42-42:4, Ibid.

²⁷⁶ II Edm. I,I – I,3 Ibid., 186-190; II Edg. 5.3 Ibid., 194-206.

posed a problem to the church's agenda of enforcing the practice of Christianity. During the mid-8th century, Archbishop Egbert of York specifically stated his condemnation of pagan practices:

auguria vel sortes qui dicuntur false sanctorum vel divinationibus observare vel quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt, vel votum voverit in arbore vel in qualibet re excepto aecclesiam, si clerici vel laici, excommunicentur ab ecclesia vel tres annis clerici peniteant, laicus II. annos vel unum et dimedium²⁷⁷
[whether of the clergy or of the laity, one is to be excommunicated from the church, or, of the clergy, one may repent for three years, [or of] the laity[, one] may repent two years or one and a half, for both augury and the interpretation of omens which of the saints are called false or observing divinations and whatever writing of auspices is going to be vowed, or a vow going to be dedicated to a tree, or to anything except the church]²⁷⁸

In this excerpt from the *Paenitentiale Ecgberhti*, Egbert writes a list of pagan practices that the Church must reject. This list is broad and far-reaching. Not only does it include a rejection of all forms of divination – “auguria,” “sortes,” “divinationibus observare,”²⁷⁹ – but it also rejects any form of vows made to anyone or anything other than the Church (“scripturarum inspectione futura promittunt,” “votum voverit in arbore,” “qualibet re excepto aecclesiam.”)²⁸⁰ In addition, he clarifies that individuals, both in the religious community and within the laity, who do not conform to these rejections will be sentenced

²⁷⁷ Arthur West Haddan, William Stubbs, and Henry Spelman, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1871), 424.

²⁷⁸ I reversed the order of the phrases in the original Latin for ease of understanding in modern English.

²⁷⁹ Augury, interpretation of omens, observing divinations

²⁸⁰ Writing of auspices is going to be vowed, vow going to be dedicated to a tree, anything except the church.

to excommunication and repentance of a set number of years. Nearly three hundred years later in the early 11th century, Archbishop Wulfstan of York wrote much the same in his

Canons of Edgar:

And riht is þæt preosta gehwylc Cristendom geornlice lære and ælcne hæþendom mid ealle adwæsce; and forbeode wyllweorðunga and licwiglunga, and hwata, and galdra, and treowwurðunga and stanwurðunga, and ðone deofles cræft þe man dryhð þær man þa cild þurh þa eorðan tihð, and ða gemearr þe man drifð on gears niht on mistlicum wigelungum and on friðsplottum, and on ellenum and on on manegum mistlicum gedwimerum þe men on dreogað fela þæs þe hi ne sceoldan²⁸¹ [And it is right that every priest eagerly raise up Christianity and completely suppress every heathenism; and forbid worship of wells and necromancy, and augury and sorcery, and the worship of trees and stones, and that trick of the devil which a person does when a person draws a child through the earth, and the errors performed on the year's night in various sorceries and in places of sanctuary and at elder-trees, and in the many various delusions in which people practice even though they should not]

Yet again, there is an emphasis on the wide range of pagan practices with some additional rejections added, such as “wilweorþunga,” “licwiglunga,” “manweorðunga,” and “gewiglungum” [evil worship, necromancy, worship of humans, spells]. Carried over from Egbert's writing is the rejection of “friðsplottum and on ellenum” [places of sanctuary and at elder-trees]. which suggests a continual problem of individuals meeting at and using such locations for the practice of sanctuary.

²⁸¹ Wulfstan, “Canons of Edgar,” in *Old English Legal Writings*, trans. Andrew Rabin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 129.

It is not clear in what ways sanctuary was used in these circumstances, but it is clear that the practice of pagan rituals and of sanctuary at pagan sites was a continual problem. The 11th century *Norðhymbra preosta lagu* specifically states that “gif friðgeard sy on hwæs lande abuton stan oððe treow oððe wille oððe swilces ænigge fleard, þonne gilde se ðe hit worhte lahsliht, healf Criste healf landrican”²⁸² [if there is a place of sanctuary on someone’s land around a stone or a tree or a well or any kind of superstition, then the one who has made it [is] fined for breaking the law, half to Christ, half to the landlord]. Here, there is a clear demarcation of what areas of a person’s residence are eligible as a place of sanctuary. The residence itself, meaning the walls of the structure, are appropriate as a place of sanctuary, while the natural areas around the residence are inappropriate. Just as the Church deemed the area within the walls of a holy structure to be appropriate for sanctuary, so too was the area within the walls of the private residence acceptable for sanctuary. The mid-11th century Laws of Cnut II provide a succinct definition of what constitutes paganism:

hæðenscipe byð, þæt man deofolgyld weorðige, þæt is þæt man weorþige hæðene godas 7 sunnan oððe monan, fyr oððe flod, wæterwylas oððe stanas oððe æniges cynnes, wudutreowa, oððon wiccecræft lufige oððon morðweorc gefremme on ænige wisan, oððon on blote oððon fyrhte, oððon swylcra gedwimera ænig þingc dreoge

[heathenism is, when one may adore the worship of devils, that is when one may worship heathen gods and the sun or the moon, fire or water, water-wells or stones or any kind of forest trees, or [when one] may love witchcraft or an act which causes

²⁸² Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 383.

death on any person, or in sacrifice or fear, or may perform any such things of illusions].²⁸³

Here, abstract verbs such as “weorþige” and “lufige” (‘may worship’ and ‘may love’) broaden the rejection of paganism even further to include even the love of ritualistic practices. These subtle changes over the course of several centuries demonstrate the continual struggle the Church had in enforcing the rejection of paganism. The fact that sanctions against pagan rituals and sanctuary at pagan sites continued to appear into the 11th century makes it clear that paganism continued to be a common element of the early medieval English community’s social practices.

The Woman and Sanctuary

Considering this context of sanctuary, it seems appropriate to assume that the woman in *The Wife’s Lament* would have been familiar with the concept of using a pagan site as a place of refuge. Of particular interest to this line of thought is the line “het mec hlaford min her heard niman” (line 15), which is a point of much contention in scholarship. Karl Wentersdorf provides a succinct overview of how this line, particularly the phrase “her heard niman” has been semantically analyzed:

In the *Exeter Book* manuscript, *her* (the first element in the compound [her heard]) ends one line, and *heard* begins the next. Although other words in the manuscript are similarly separated by the scribe, simplexes as well as compounds, it is just conceivable that the reading *her heard niman* is authorial. This reading would require taking *heard* as an adjective meaning ‘stern, harsh’ and modifying *hlaford*;

²⁸³ Ibid., 312.

but the separation of the adjective from its noun results in a very awkward line. Some editors, including Leslie, not only accept the separation but emend 15b to read *her eard niman*, meaning ‘to take up abode here’. But the emendation is not required metrically, nor is it desirable for semantic reasons. As Grein suggested long ago, the compound *herheard* should be read as *herh-eard*, a variant of *hearg-eard*. Since *hearg* means ‘pagan sanctuary’, the compound must originally have meant ‘sanctuary precinct’. Hence the phrase *herheard niman* probably means ‘to take refuge in a [heathen] sanctuary’.²⁸⁴

Wentersdorf’s conclusion that the phrase “her heard niman” most probably translates to “take refuge in a [heathen] sanctuary” is substantiated when coupled with the line “heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe, / under actreo in þam eorðscræfe” (line 28) [he commanded me to live in the wood’s grove under the oak tree in the earth cavern]. While the phrase “her heard niman” could indeed be interpreted in other ways, as Wentersdorf explains, I contend that considering this phrase as a reference to seeking a pagan sanctuary is the more accurate representation of the phrase “her heard” because of its close association with the command given in line 28. Moreover, the evidence of the legal situation within early medieval England at this time regarding the laws and practice of sanctuary speaks to the continued use of pagan holy sites as places of refuge. From the woman’s description of the oak grove, it is clear that it was located in an inhospitable and presumably remote location: “eald is þes eorðsele ... / Sindon dena dimme, duna uphea, / bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne: / wic wynta leas,” (lines 29-32a) [Old is this earth hall ... / There are dark valleys, high mountains, / severe city-dwellings overgrown with briars:

²⁸⁴ Karl P. Wentersdorf, “The Situation of the Narrator in the Old English *Wife’s Lament*,” *Speculum* 56, no. 3 (1981), 508-509, all emphases and brackets are as they appear in the original text.

/ a village devoid of joys]. This pagan sanctuary, with its inhospitable features, would have been an ideal location to hide away from hostile people. The goal of sanctuary, though, as made evident by the law codes, is to resolve the issues that caused the need for sanctuary in the first place. In order for this to happen, it is necessary for an individual to have a supportive community that is willing and able to facilitate a dispute-resolution process. The woman lacks this type of social network and, instead, must navigate circumstances created by a dysfunctional community.

Rhetorical Analysis of the Woman's Actions

Starting in the second stanza of *The Wife's Lament*, it is clear that the woman places a great amount of significance on having a stable community. She spends three lines describing how her "hlaford gewat heonan of leodum / ofer yþa gelac,"²⁸⁵ lines 6-7a, and the emotional cost of that departure: "hæfde Ic uhtceare / hwær min leodfruma londes wære," (lines 7-8) [I had sorrow at dawn of where my lord of the people of the land might be]. Her description of experiencing "uhtceare" [sorrow at dawn] and distraughtly wondering "hwær min leodfruma" [where my lord of the people] might be alludes to his vital role in the community. In this pivotal event, we see evidence of what John Stolte and Richard Emerson describe as relations that are "unilateral negatively connected."²⁸⁶ Relationships of this nature are predicated on decisions made by an entity that affect one person or one cohesive group of people; more importantly, these decisions are performed without the agreement of the affected individual or group. The woman's leader made a

²⁸⁵ Ibid., lord of the people departed from here over the tossing of the waves.

²⁸⁶ Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel, "Structural Inequality: Position and Power in Network Structures," in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans*, ed. Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), pp. 117-138.

decision to depart without the agreement of his community; this in effect generated a unilateral negative relationship between himself and the community. Relationships that experience separation are typically characterized by a change in the suffering individual's social environment.²⁸⁷ Once change occurs in a relationship, it transforms into a deviant form of the original. In response to this development, the woman embarks on a journey to find a community that will correct her "weapearfe" [woeful need]. We see this deviance in the following two lines: "Ða Ic me feran gewat folgað secan, / wineleas wræcca for minre weapearfe" (lines 9-10) [Then I departed on my journey to seek those in the service of a leader, / a friendless wanderer because of my woeful need]. After the departure of her lord, she leaves her lordless community and decides to make her own departure and "folgað secan ... for minre weapearfe" [to seek those in the service of a leader ... because of my woeful need]. Upon the deterioration of the woman's original community, she embarks on a self-appointed journey dedicated to finding a new community.

Past and recent scholarship assumes that the woman identifies only one man in her recollection of past events, an assumption that invariably purports the woman has interactions with only one community of people.²⁸⁸ In my translation and reading of the poem, the phrases "folgað secan" [to seek those in the service of a leader] and "þæs monnes" [of that person] imply otherwise. Given the context from which the woman is departing, it perhaps seems most logical that she would be intent on finding another

²⁸⁷ For more on this, see George Homans, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

²⁸⁸ See Wentersdorf, "The Situation of the Narrator," 492-494; John D. Niles, "The Problem of the Ending of the Wife's 'Lament,'" *Speculum* 78, no. 4 (2003), 1109-1110; Marilyn Desmond, "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (1990), 586-588; Susan E. Deskis, "Lyric Modes and Metaphor in the *Wife's Lament*," *English Studies* 101, no. 4 (2020), 393-396; Miriam Muth, "Delete as Appropriate: Writing Between the Lines of Female Orality in *The Wife's Lament*," in *Women and Language Essays on Gendered Communication Across Media*, ed. Melissa Ames and Sarah Himsel Burcon (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Publishers, 2011), 63-70.

community in which to find protection. She identifies herself as a “wineleas wræcca” [friendless wanderer] which brings to mind the physical, emotional, and mental perils of the narrator in *The Wanderer*.²⁸⁹ Much of *The Wanderer* speaks to the desire of returning to past joys, finding a new community, and reliving the happiness of having a lord to follow. The woman is in a similar set of circumstances: she has lost her leader and embarks on a voluntary path of solitude. Both she and the narrator in *The Wanderer* seek the comforts and security of a community. Under this premise, then, I suggest that the noun “folgað,” a derivative of “folgian,” is a reference to community rather than exile, as Marilyn Desmond suggests, or asylum, as Karl Wentersdorf suggests.²⁹⁰ According to the *Dictionary of Old English*, “folgað” is defined in the following ways:

1. service (to a king, lord, the state); a position or office of service
 - 1.a. the district, area of jurisdiction in which such an office is held
2. those in the service of a leader; a retinue, following
3. independent authority; position of authority; official dignity, ministry, occupation
 - 3.a. *folgop habban* ‘to have authority (in a district)’
 - 3.b. the district over which authority is exercised²⁹¹

Considering the context surrounding the phrase “folgað secan,” “folgað” cannot refer to entries 1.a., 3, 3.a., or 3.b. The woman places special emphasis on her circumstance as a “wræcca” [wanderer] through the attributive adjective “wineleas” [friendless]. Moreover, she uses the word “weapearfe” [woeful need] as a direct reference to the objective of her

²⁸⁹ There is quite a bit of similar imagery between *The Wife’s Lament* and *The Wanderer*, in particular lines 19b-62a of *The Wanderer* describes the emotional impact of isolation from loved ones and the physical actions an exiled individual performs while existing alone for an indefinite period of time, such as walking alone at dawn.

²⁹⁰ See Wentersdorf, “The Situation of the Narrator,” 497-498; Desmond. “The Voice of Exile,” 585-588.

²⁹¹ “folgian.” *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018).

journey: “folgað” [those in the service of a leader]. Neither “wineleas wræcca” nor “weaþearfe” indicate a desire to find an office of service or to find an area of jurisdiction. Rather, the woman uses community-focused words in lines 6-10, such as “leodum” [people], “leodfruma” [lord of the people], and “wineleas” [friendless]. Given this context, the noun “folgað” most probably means “*those* (my emphasis) in the service of a leader.” This is substantiated by the phrase “þæs monnes” [of that person] in line 11. Much scholarship assumes that “monnes” refers to a husband or lover.²⁹² The ambiguity of the noun “mon,” which can also be spelled *monn*, *man*, and *mann* in Old English, negates any assumptions that the individual is only either a husband or a lover. Instead, *Bosworth-Toller* defines “mon”:

- I. MAN, a human being of either sex
- II. a man who is wnder [sic] the authority of another (cf. mann-ræden), a servant, vassal, liege-man; as an ecclesiastical term, a parishioner
- III. the name of the Rune for M, which is sometimes used instead of writing the word man²⁹³

According to sense I., “mon” in its most basic sense, means “a human being of either sex.” This ambiguity, then, does not limit the identity of this individual to being either the woman’s husband, lover, or her lord.²⁹⁴ In effect, this ambiguity expands her social network

²⁹² See Niles, “The Problem of the Ending,” 1107-1150; Desksis, “Lyric Modes and Metaphor,” 393-396; Muth, “Delete as Appropriate,” 63-70; Ashby Kinch, “The Ethical Agency of the Female Lyric Voice: The Wife’s Lament and Catullus 64,” *Studies in Philology* 103, no. 2 (2006), 121-152; Leonard Neidorf, “Hildeburh’s Mourning and the *Wife’s Lament*,” *Studia Neophilologica* 89, no. 2 (September 2017): pp. 197-204; Wentersdorf, “The Situation of the Narrator,” 492-516; Desmond, “The Voice of Exile,” 585-588.

²⁹³ Bosworth, Joseph. “MANN.” In *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, edited by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014. <https://bosworthtoller.com/22348>.

²⁹⁴ There is no clear indication in the poem that the woman is indeed married or has a lover. See Marilyn Desmond, “The Voice of Exile,” 586-587; Muth, “Delete as Appropriate,” 62-64.

beyond the limits of marriage and sexual intimacy to include a social practice often reserved for men: the *comitatus*.²⁹⁵ While the topic of women and the *comitatus* is beyond the scope of this project, the point I want to emphasize is the broadening of the woman's social network from that of a dyadic relationship characterized by marriage or sexual intimacy to a large group social system characterized by the bond between a lord and his followers.

Within the field of sociological theory, George Homans is the first theorist in social network theory of the 20th century who explains that social systems are grounded in the interactions between each individual and the effect those interactions have on the overall social structure.²⁹⁶ Homans explains that the internal system²⁹⁷ can be thought of as “group behavior that is an expression of the sentiments towards one another developed by the members of the group in the course of their life together.”²⁹⁸ He states that motives of self-interest “are the product of group life and serve the ends of a whole group not just an individual.”²⁹⁹ Whether the motive originates out of self-interest or group awareness, the product of the motive will always serve the group. The phrase “serve the group,” here, denotes the residual effect of an individual's choices on his or her surrounding community whether the effect be positive or negative. Homans articulates that, in internal systems,³⁰⁰ “organized wholes have some things in common with one another but also differ greatly

²⁹⁵ For more on this topic of women and *comitatus*, see Desmond, “The Voice of Exile,” 584-587; Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 1, 98-99; Ivan Herbison, “Heroism and Comic Subversion in the Old English *Judith*,” *English Studies* 91, no. 1 (2010): pp. 1-25. I suggest that this poem can be considered in this light if we understand the men in the poem as leaders rather than husbands or lovers.

²⁹⁶ Homans, *The Human Group*, 110.

²⁹⁷ The interactions between each individual is identified as the internal system of the social network.

²⁹⁸ Homans, *The Human Group*, 110.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁰⁰ See note 309.

among themselves, especially in the capacity to maintain a steady state in the face of changes in the environment.”³⁰¹

This is evident when the woman explains what happens to her after she has found a new community. She explains that “ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan / þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc” (lines 11-12) [the kinsmen of that person began to think through secret thought that they would separate us two]. Here, there is evidence of the deterioration of a social network after the introduction of an outside individual. David Schmitt and Gerald Marwell state that “group responses that entail a division of labor are especially prone to disruption from independent contingencies that are idiosyncratic in their efforts on individual responses. A contingency need only affect adversely the response of a single member to disrupt the entire group effort.”³⁰² In the woman’s case, she is an “independent contingenc[y]” who enters a social network with an intent that may have been “idiosyncratic” to the social network’s already established social behaviors and practices. Seeking a new community that followed a lord thereby creates a dyadic relationship between the woman and the lord and a large group social network between her and the lord’s followers. The dyadic relationship is, as a result, embedded within the large group social network. This new addition of a dyad triggered a response from the lord’s kinsmen: “ongunnon ... hycgan / þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc” (lines 11-12) [they began to think through secret thought that they would separate us]. George Homans articulates that social “interaction is accompanied by friendliness among the members of a group *only* if the group as a whole is maintaining itself in its environment. If the group fails in its

³⁰¹ Homans, *The Human Group*, 87.

³⁰² David R. Schmitt and Gerald Marwell, “Cooperation and the Human Group,” in *Behavioral Theory in Sociology: Essays in Honor of George C. Homans*, ed. Robert L. Hamblin and John H. Kunkel (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1977), pp. 171-192.

purposes and starts to break up, *its disintegration will be hastened by the increasing antagonisms and mutual incriminations of the members*” (my emphases).³⁰³ In addition, Schmitt and Marwell explain that “a common consequence of entering a cooperative relation is that the *individual substantially reduces [their] control over [their] resources* ... In such cases each person runs the risk that *[their] resources may be taken or destroyed by another*” (my emphases).³⁰⁴ These are the circumstances that develop for the woman in her second, more dysfunctional community.

With the inception of “*dyrne geþoht*” [secret thought] in her community regarding her dyadic relationship with the lord, her place within that community is jeopardized. A pivotal word in these two lines is “*todælden*” [would separate]. While much focus has been paid to the relational repercussions of this word,³⁰⁵ I suggest that the greater implication is that the woman would be deprived of her primary resource: the protection that comes from being part of a larger community with a lord. Two additional pivotal words appear in the following two lines: “*þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice, / lifdon laðlicost; ond mec longade*” (my emphasis) (lines 13-14) [so that we two in [this] worldly kingdom lived furthest apart most hatefully; and it caused longing in me]. The words “*gewidost*” [furthest] and “*longade*” [it caused longing] indicate the woman’s clear concern regarding the physical distance between her and her only ally – the lord of her new community – and her response to the threat against her safety. More specifically, she mourns for herself because of the dissolution of her dyadic relationship with the lord from the detrimental effect of physical distance. In the following line, we see evidence that the lord recognizes the implications of

³⁰³ Homans, *The Human Group*, 117.

³⁰⁴ Schmitt and Marwell, “Cooperation and the Human Group,” 182-183.

³⁰⁵ See Wentersdorf, “The Situation of the Narrator,” 492-516; Niles, “The Problem of the Ending,” 1107-1150.

this threat against one of his followers. As a result, she explains that “het mec hlaford min her heard niman” (line 15) [my lord commanded me to take refuge in a pagan sanctuary]. It is at this point in the poem that we see the woman’s transition from a place of safety within a community to a place of safety within a sanctuary.

For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on the rhetoric of the woman’s social network as she transitions into a place of sanctuary. The woman clearly states that “ahte Ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede, / holdra freonda” (lines 16-17a) [I possessed few dear ones of loyal friends in this region]. From this statement, it is clear that the woman has a limited set of strong ties. Mark Granovetter explains that “acquaintances or friends of friends [are] classified as weak [ties] whereas friends, relatives, or neighbors [are] considered strong ties.”³⁰⁶ This means that the social ties an individual has with people outside of their community are typically considered to be weak-ties whereas the social ties an individual has with people inside their community are typically considered to be strong ties. The woman is in a situation that greatly reduces the amount and strength of her strong ties. After the departure of her original lord from her first community and her subsequent journey to find “folgað” [those in the service of a leader], she separated herself from her already established strong ties in an effort to join a community in which she could form a new network of strong ties. The new community prevented that from happening because of the “dyrne gepoht” [secret thought] the leader’s kinsmen generated against her dyadic relationship with their lord. After the lord commanded her to “her heard niman” [take refuge in a pagan sanctuary], she realizes the adverse consequences of her social predicament. While Granovetter explains that “strong ties have greater motivation to be of

³⁰⁶ Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983), 207.

assistance and are typically more easily available,”³⁰⁷ strong ties are only of assistance if there is an element of reciprocity. Charles Kadushin states that

the concept of mutuality implies first, that relations are reciprocal, that is, they involve a give and take between the two parties; and second, that power or asymmetry in the relationship is of little or no consequence. Mutuality is *strongly affected by the social and cultural structure* within which the dyads are embedded. (my emphasis)³⁰⁸

For the woman, the “social and cultural structure” of her social network is so biased against her that her strong ties are of little use to her in her time of need.³⁰⁹ Even though the woman can expect to have some strong ties in her new community, specifically in the sense of having neighbors, their strength is reduced significantly because of a lack of mutuality. As a result, the lord in her new community commands her to seek the refuge and safety of a pagan sanctuary.

A crucial aspect of the poem that has not been discussed in scholarship is the ambiguity of the individual who commanded the woman to live in the wood’s grove. John Niles discusses the phrase “a scyle geong mon wesan geomormod” (line 42) [always must a young person be sad in mind], and Karl Wentersdorf discusses the phrase “ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan” (line 11) [the kinsmen of that person began to think], but no one has questioned the identity of the “mon” in the phrase “heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe” (line 27) [someone commanded me to live in the wood’s grove]. Most translations

³⁰⁷ Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” 209.

³⁰⁸ Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 21.

³⁰⁹ See Appendix B for a close reading of S 1377 which pertains to an anonymous woman who had a failed social network. Her situation is somewhat similar to the woman in “The Wife’s Lament” in the sense that she had few resources at her disposal to help her in her legal situation.

of *The Wife's Lament* assume that “mon” is the woman’s husband, lover, or lord. I would like to consider the possibility that “mon” in the phrase “heht mec mon” [someone commanded me] is *not* referring back to “min hlaford” in line 15 but instead refers to a separate individual who specifically tells the woman to “wunian on wuda bearwe” [live in the wood’s grove]. The purpose of this suggestion is to contemplate the possibility of the woman having a wider social network of strong ties by taking into consideration the broader definition of *mon*. According to *Bosworth-Toller*, an alternate spelling of *mon* is *man*, which can be defined as “one, anyone, they, people.”³¹⁰ I suggest that “mon” is a reference to a strong tie between herself and an individual who is not her lord. Unlike the instance of “mon” in line 11, “mon” in line 27 does not have a demonstrative article which would provide more clarification of who “mon” might refer to in the poem. I suggest that the “mon” in line 27 is an example of the woman interacting with a strong tie other than the lord of her new community. While it is the “hlaford” in line 15 who commands the woman to seek refuge in a pagan sanctuary, it is the “mon” in line 27 who tells her where specifically to go. Without a masculine singular demonstrative article, it is unclear if the “mon” is indeed a reference to the “hlaford min” in line 15. Approaching line 27 in a broader perspective regarding the “mon” enables us to consider the possible social ties the woman may have had in her new community. Moreover, if we consider the potential reality of the woman’s situation, it is relatively unlikely that she would have only sought or received advice from one man in her community, even if that man was her lord. It is entirely within the range of social interactions that she may have had contact with a different

³¹⁰ Bosworth, Joseph. “man.” In *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online*, edited by Thomas Northcote Toller, Christ Sean, and Ondřej Tichy. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2014. <https://bosworthtoller.com/22302>.

individual who gave her a specific pagan location to travel to for sanctuary. This ambiguity contributes to the potentiality of the woman making use of a strong tie.

While the guidance the woman receives from her lord and from the ambiguous individual of line 27 is advantageous for her safety, the refuge she seeks at the pagan sanctuary in the wood grove ultimately fails her. As discussed earlier, the end goal of sanctuary is to find a resolution to the dispute that created the circumstances in which sanctuary is necessary. For the woman, this resolution fails to develop as is made clear in lines 32b-41. The phrases “ful oft mec her wraþe begeat / fromsiþ frean” (lines 32b-33a) [full often here the absence of my lord cruelly covered me], “leger weardiað, / þonne Ic on uhtan ana gonge” (lines 34b-35) [[friends] occupy a place, while I walk alone at dawn], “sumorlangne dæg” (line 37b) [the summer long day], and “Ic æfre ne mæg / þære modceare minre gerestan” (lines 39b-40) [always I may not rest from the sorrow of my heart] demonstrate the extended period of time the woman is left in isolation in the pagan sanctuary. In addition, the phrases “þær Ic sittan mot” (line 37b) [there I must dwell], “þær Ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas” (line 38b) [there I can weep of my journey of exile], and “Ic æfre ne mæg ... gerestan ... ealles þæs longapes þe mec on þissum life begeat” (lines 39b-41) [always I may not rest of all the longing which covers me in this life] illustrate the unresolved circumstances surrounding her need for sanctuary. The extended period of isolation in her place of sanctuary and the unresolved nature of her circumstances both contribute to the last stanza of the poem, which, I argue, should be read as a curse. John Niles has proposed this reading of the final stanza of the poem “by combining the methods of philology and historical anthropology,” which enables him to propose a reading that “departs from a consensus of current critical opinion in its emphasis on the will to avenge

as opposed to the virtue of stoic endurance.”³¹¹ I support this reading of the final stanza, but I suggest that we may understand the woman’s actions and motivations even better, with more nuance, and from a specifically female perspective by approaching these final lines from a social network theory approach.

Curses in Early Medieval England as a Form of Protection

Curses were prevalent in the early medieval English community and were frequently used to protect individuals, their property, and their wishes. In addition to their use in church rituals and ecclesiastical documents,³¹² curses appeared in legal documents such as wills and charters. The curses that appear in such documents ranged in severity, from mildly excoriating to vindictive. In a tenth-century charter, a man named Ulfcytel, son of Osulf, sold an estate at Ediscum, an estate at Norðton, and a piece of land at Feregenne to St Cuthbert’s. At the end of the charter, Ulfcytel includes a short malediction, “se ðe þis awende sy he ascyred from Godes dæle 7 from eallum haligdome” [may the one who changes this be severed from [any] part of God and from all places of holiness].³¹³ This was a relatively common curse that appeared at the close of other charters.³¹⁴ In contrast, a charter by a woman named Æthelflæd demonstrates a particularly excoriating curse. Dated to the early eleventh-century, she bequeaths land at Laver and Cockhampstead to St. Paul’s minster in London. After a list of witnesses, she includes a malediction that states “and swa hwilc man swa þisne cwide awende, sy he ludas gefere ðe urne drihten

³¹¹ Niles, “The Problem of the Ending,” 1107.

³¹² See Robin Melrose, *Magic in Britain: A History of Medieval and Earlier Practices* (Jefferson: Mcfarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), 171-174; and Marc Drogin, *Anathema!: Medieval Scribes and the History of Book Curses* (Totowa: Allanheld, 1985), 46-111.

³¹³ A. J. Robertson, tran., *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 140.

³¹⁴ For example, S 1211, S 1495, S 1535.

belewde on helle wite” [and whichever person may change this bequest, may he be a companion of Judas, who betrayed our Lord, in the torment of hell]. Similar representations of curse casting are also evident in will-making.³¹⁵ We see a similarly vindictive malediction in an early tenth-century charter by a man named Æthelstan, an ealdorman of King Æthelstan, to the Church of St. Mary's at Abingdon:

7 se arcebiscop Wulfhem 7 ealla þa biscofes 7 abbodes þe þer gesomnode wæron
 amansumeden fram Criste 7 fram eallum Cristes gemænes 7 fram eallam
 cristendome þe æfre þas gife undyde oððe þis land gelytlede on læsu oððe on
 gemæru. Beo he ascyred 7 gesceofen into helle grunde aa buten ende! 7 cwæþ eall
 þ[æt] folc þe þer embstod, Sy hyt swa! Amen, amen.³¹⁶

[And the Archbishop Wulfhelm and all the bishops and abbots who were assembled there excommunicated from Christ and from all the community of Christ and from all of Christendom whoever should undo this grant or diminish this land in pasture or in borders. May he be cut off and thrown into the bottom of hell forever without end! And all the people that were standing by said, so be it! Amen, amen]

The rhetoric of this final example not only exhibits the highly vivid language of curse casting, but it also shows an element of performance and audience participation. This passage transitions from a performance of curse casting to direct speech from the audience.

³¹⁵ According to Dorothy Whitelock, this Æthelflæd may have been the sister of Ealdorman Leofsig of Essex, see Dorothy Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 176. Also, see ‘Æthelflæd 20 (Female),’ *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk>. See also Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, 30-34 and 66 for an example of a malediction at the end of the late tenth-century Will of Ælfhelm, a minister to King Edgar the Peaceful and a patron of the abbey at Ramsey, who bequests his longship to Ramsey.

³¹⁶ Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 44.

The shift from performance to participation demonstrates how the reading of a curse could create a present experience for the reader or listener.³¹⁷

Rhetorical Analysis of the Curse

Scholarship often considers the last stanza of *The Wife's Lament* to be gnomic, much like the last stanza of *The Wanderer*.³¹⁸ I challenge this reading of the final stanza, though, and instead suggest that it can be read as the woman's curse upon those who have wronged her.³¹⁹ Moreover, approaching the final stanza through a social network theory lens enables us to understand the woman's actions and motivations more clearly. Rather than focusing primarily on the philology, as Niles prefers, I contend that we may better understand the woman by considering the failings of her social network, which subsequently fuel her motivations for casting a curse upon the individuals in her failed social network and enable us as readers to be more alert to the precarious situation of an unprotected woman in early medieval society. For the entirety of the poem, the audience is exposed to the woman's intense emotional distress and offense to the hardships she has

³¹⁷ As is discussed by Lester K. Little, *Benedictine Maledictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 57.

³¹⁸ See Wentersdorf, "The Situation of the Narrator," 492-51; Kinch, "The Ethical Agency," 121-152; Niedorf, "Hildeburh's Mourning," 197-204; Deskis, "Lyric Modes," 383-398; Anonymous, "The Wanderer," in *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. Bernard James Muir, vol. 1 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), pp. 218-219.

³¹⁹ A majority of scholarship primarily engages with cursing in legal and ecclesiastical documents. I have yet to find a significant amount of scholarship that investigates curses in literary texts. The only scholar who considers the last stanza of *The Wife's Lament* to be a potential curse is John Niles, see Niles, "The Problem of the Ending," 1107-1150. For further information regarding the context and history of curses in early medieval England, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 80-85; Karen L. Jolly, "The Practice of Magic: Popular and Courtly Traditions," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Karen L. Jolly, Catharina Raudvere, and Edward Peters (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 42-52; Melrose, *Magic in Britain*, 49-56; and Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch, "'Whoever Alters This, May God Turn His Face from Him on the Day of Judgment': Curses in Anglo-Saxon Legal Documents," *The Journal of American Folklore* 105, no. 416 (1992): pp. 132-165.

faced. We experience her suffering through the affectively charged descriptions of her anguish after losing two different communities. Moreover, we witness her indefinite pain of being separated from her second community and wandering her prison-like sanctuary in wait of a resolution to the dispute which caused her need for sanctuary in the first place. To, then, read the final stanza of her story as gnomic does not seem to do justice to the evidence of her anger and pain that are so vividly depicted in the preceding lines. Furthermore, I contend that to read this final stanza as gnomic tames the woman's fierce emotions and risks rendering her as a timid woman who submits to the injustice of her situation. Instead, she is a woman who reacts to the reality of her failed social network through a defensive maneuver that creates an environment that the individuals who failed her must endure as punishment for failing to reach a dispute-resolution.

For individuals who may have lacked sufficient social, economic, or legal resources, cursing was an alternative that offered a form of retaliation that satisfied an individual's desire for emotional compensation for the wrong committed against them.³²⁰ Similar to charms and blessings, curses are written or spoken social actions used to alter an individual's circumstances through supernatural means.³²¹ While curses could not provide a monetary or legal form of compensation, they could be used as a means of

³²⁰ John Niles discusses the revocability of curses, similar to excommunication. He clarifies that in the early medieval English community, only God had the power to damn an individual's soul for all eternity. Those who chose to amend their mistakes and pay penance for their sins could be accepted back into a community and had the opportunity to save their souls from eternal punishment. With this in mind, Niles claims that those who cast curses on others did under the assumption that it could be revoked if the individual or individuals corrected the wrongs they committed. In this sense, then, he argues that curse casters were not deranged individuals who cast curses with utterly evil intent; rather, they cast curses as a direct retaliation for a wrong committed against them and as such they should be considered to be manifestations of the caster's deep offense. See Niles, "The Problem of the Ending," 1134.

³²¹ For further discussion of the similarities between charms, blessings, and curses, see Danet and Bogoch, "'Whoever Alters This,'" pp.134-136; Jolly, "The Practice of Magic," 35-42; Kieckhefer; *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 69-75.

controlling the physical, emotional, and spiritual circumstances of a wrongdoer. This control of another's circumstances manifested as punishment. In the early medieval English context, curses purported two types of punishments: those that threatened an individual's earthly well-being and those that threatened the spiritual well-being.³²² In the woman's case, in "The Wife's Lament," the curse she casts on those who have wronged her leans toward earthly punishment: in essence, a 'let them suffer as I have suffered' type of punishment. The potency of the punishment is dependent on the caster's belief in the power of the words used to form the curse, which suggests that the curse is also directly tied to the emotional and social circumstances of the one who casts the curse.³²³

The woman endures the effects of a "fæhðu" [feud], causing her to suffer a tremendous loss of community. Therein lies the problem with reading the last stanza as gnomic. Given her dire circumstances and the subsequent trauma of being relegated to a very isolated and inhospitable sanctuary, it is not unreasonable that the woman would take deep offense to the hardships she has endured because of the actions of others. In fact, retaliating with a curse is in accord with the code of honor and vengeance that was practiced during the pagan period of early medieval England, a practice that saw little decline even after the Conversion period.³²⁴ As has long been acknowledged in Early Medieval Studies, early medieval English society largely maintained its social stability through a legal system of checks and balances on criminal behavior. The conceptual foundation of this system was rooted in the principle of collective social and legal responsibility.³²⁵ A crime committed

³²² Danet and Bogoch, "'Whoever Alters This,'" 147-149.

³²³ Ibid., 134-135.

³²⁴ Dorothy Whitelock explains that "killing for the sake of vengeance was not felt to be incompatible with Christian ethics at any period in Anglo-Saxon times," see Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of 'Beowulf'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 13.

³²⁵ Af 5-5:3, 42-42:4, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 16-20, 26-89; II Edm. I,1 – I,3, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 190-191; and II Edg. 5.3, see Liebermann, *Die Gesetze*, 194-206.

against an individual was a crime committed against the kin group; similarly, a crime committed by an individual was the responsibility of that individual's entire kin group.³²⁶ The woman's situation is made even more dire by the loss of her network with her previous community. She mourns that "ahte ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede, / holdra freonda" (lines 16-17a) [I possessed few dear ones of loyal friends in this region]. Without a kin group to turn to for help, she is left with few options other than to follow her current lord's command to seek the safety of a pagan sanctuary and the command of an unidentified individual to specifically seek the safety of the wood grove. Furthermore, without a kin group to support her, there are few people who are able, or perhaps willing, to resolve the feud that is preventing her from returning to her current community. With no other options available to her, it stands to reason that she would turn to the power of words by casting a curse on those who did not come to her aid when she most needed them.

The woman's curse is specifically directed to those she considered friends and reflects the dysfunction of her social network. The first evidence of this dysfunction is in the second stanza of the poem, lines 6-14. The verb "secan" [to seek] in line 9b informs us that she is the individual who sought out a new community after her original lord "gewat," line 6, [departed]. By seeking out a new community, she sought out a network whom she could turn to during times of hardship, such as the repercussions of the kinsmen who had "dyrne gepoht" [secret thought] regarding her dyadic relationship with the lord of her new community. George Homans explains that, for those individuals who seek out a friendship,

³²⁶ As Pollock and Maitland remark, "personal injury is in the first place a cause of feud, of private war between the kindreds of the wrong-doer and of the person wronged," see Frederick Pollock and Frederic W. Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2013), 24.

“once it is established, [a person] depart[s] from it at [their own] social peril.”³²⁷ Instead of being a supportive and functional community, the lord’s kin alienate her from their community by spreading “dryne geþoht.” This alienation and the subsequent need to seek sanctuary are the motivation behind her decision to cast a curse upon her dysfunctional social network. The woman had already left her first community; she was most likely not in a position to leave, yet again, to find a more suitable and accepting community.

While the new community exhibits signs of dysfunction, the woman appears to attempt to use the strong ties in her new community to her advantage. The ambiguity of the “mon” [person] in line 27a may indicate that the woman sought the council of another individual after her new lord commanded her to seek refuge at a pagan sanctuary. This would suggest that the woman was indeed attempting to use her social network during a time of social peril. If this was the case, then this attempt was a success because the product of that outreach was the ambiguous individual’s specific command for her to go to the wood grove, which she later describes as being a particularly remote and inhospitable environment, yet, as such, was also an ideal place of sanctuary. As sanctuary was only intended to be a temporary solution to disputes, the woman would have anticipated a resolution to the feud so that she might return to her community when it was safe for her to do so, much akin to Homans’ argument that an individual who abides by the friendship in effect helps to establish a routine of reciprocity within that friendship. Perhaps the ultimate hardship she endured was the absence of any resolution enacted by her friends:

Frynd sind on eorþan,
leofe lifgende, leger weardiað,

³²⁷ Homans, *The Human Group*, 178.

þonne Ic on uhtan ana gonge
 under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.
 Þær Ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg
 þær Ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas,
 eorfoþa fela; forþon Ic æfre ne mæg
 þære modceare minre gerestan,
 ne ealles þæs longæþes þe mec on þissum life begeat, (lines 33b-41).

[Friends are on earth, dear ones are living, they occupy a place, while I walk alone before dawn under the oak tree through these earth caverns. There I must dwell the summer long day, there I can weep of my journey of exile, of [my] many hardships, therefore I may neither rest from the sorrow of my heart, nor of all the longing which covers me in this life].

Even though the woman followed through with the commands she was given by the social network and she should have been confident in relying on in times of social peril, that same social network failed to reciprocate that friendship by enacting a dispute-resolution to the feud. The above passage is organized into three parts that emphasize this dysfunction within her social network:

1) hers and her friends' contrasting social situations:

- “lifgende” [they are living]
- “leger weardiað” [they occupy a place]
- “Ic on uhtan ana gonge” [I walk alone before dawn]
- “geond þas eorðscrafu ... Ic sittan mot sumorlangne dæg” [in the earth cavern ... I must dwell the summer long day]

2) her emotional response to their contrasting social situations:

- “Ic wepan mæg mine wræcsiþas” [I can weep of my journey of exile]

3) her realization of her predicament:

- “forþon Ic æfre ne mæg / þære modceare minre gerestan, / ne ealles þæs longaðes þe mec on þissum life begeat” [therefore I may neither rest from the sorrow of my heart, nor of all the longing which covers me in this life].

The first part of this passage is a series of realizations the woman has of hers and her friends’ contrasting social situations. The juxtaposition of their social situations puts her isolation in sharp focus; this, in turn, generates her emotional response to her isolation; and, as a result, she comes to a realization of her predicament. Homans claims that “any emotional attitude we take toward someone tends, like any other drive, to get itself expressed in activity, which may in turn arouse sentiment in the person to whom it is addressed, and so lead to reciprocal activity.”³²⁸ While Homans makes this claim in relation to positive social interactions within friendship, I propose that the same can be applied to negative social interactions within friendship. It is clear from her friends’ failure to enact a dispute-resolution that they essentially abandon her to an indefinite sanctuary. Just as her friends leave her in perpetual sanctuary, she reciprocates their failure as reliable friends by casting a perpetual curse on them.

The curse the woman casts is intent on changing the circumstances of the friends who failed to come to her aid when she most needed the benefits of a social network. In particular, the curse focuses on the emotional and physical circumstances of those who should have facilitated a dispute-resolution:

³²⁸ Homans, *The Human Group*, 262.

scyle geong mon wesan geomormod,
 heard heortan geþoht, swylce habban sceal
 bliþe gebæro eac þon breostceare,
 sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong
 eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah
 feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð
 under stanhliþe storme behrimed,
 wine werigmod, wætre beflowen
 on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
 of langoþe leofes abidan, (lines 42-53).

[always must a young person be sad in mind, hard-hearted in thinking just as one must have a happy bearing in addition to cares of the heart of a multitude of perpetual griefs whether all one's joy of the world may belong for themselves, [or] if one is outcasted very far in a far away folkland so that my friend sits under rocky cliffs rimed by a storm, a friend weary in spirit, overflowed by water, in a desolate hall. That one, my friend, endures much sorrow, that one remembers too often a more joyful dwelling place. Woe will for the one who must remain in longing of a dear one].

She begins the curse with a subjunctive construction, much like curses that appear in early medieval English legal documents.³²⁹ Considering the woman's circumstances and the way

³²⁹ For example, common subjunctive constructions in curses are "gif hpa bidde þ[æt] ðes cpide standan ne mote" [if anyone ask that this will may not be permitted to stand], see Crick, "The Will of Æthelgifu," 147,

in which she describes and recounts her story, I contend that the verb “scyle,” the present subjunctive singular of the verb *sculan* (“must”) should be interpreted as a verb that invokes significant force rather than suggestion. To reiterate the woman’s circumstances, she suffered a significant loss of her first community before venturing alone to find new community; and upon finding a new community, she suffers yet again, but this time she is cast out of the new community. In addition to this double trauma, she is then forced to endure an indefinite period of sanctuary in a remote and inhospitable environment. Given this context, it is appropriate to apply significant force to her use of the subjunctive in this first line of the curse. Following the subjunctive construction is a series of phrases that invoke intense emotional turmoil: “geomormod” [sad in mind], “heard heortan” [heard-hearted], and “breostceare” [heart-care]. Each of these phrases focuses specifically on emotional states of being that she casts upon those who have wronged her. The woman adds further gravity to these states of being by specifying that they must be experienced during “sinsorgna gedreag” [a multitude of perpetual griefs]. The woman is very clever in the way she crafts the curse; she not only intends for the curse to change their social circumstances so that they experience “sinsorgna gedreag,” but she intends for them to respond to these circumstances with the three states of being: “geomormod” [sad in mind], “heard heortan” [hard-hearted], and “breostceare” [heart-care]. She demonstrates an understanding that “sinsorgna gedreag” will happen to a person in their lifetime, but she curses her wrongdoers’ to respond to those griefs in the same way that she has experienced her own griefs while in her perpetual sanctuary prison. Essentially, she is creating a

and “he purðe” [may he become], see Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1942), 126.

reciprocal environment in which the wrongs she has received from her social network are returned to them.

She further demonstrates her focus on her wrongdoers' social circumstances in the "sy ... sy" construction in lines 45b-47a and in the result clause in lines 47b-50a. The "sy ... sy" passage is a subjunctive construction and, I suggest, should be translated like the subjunctive use of "scyle" in line 42: "sy æt him sylfum gelong / eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah / feorres folclondes" [let it be [that] all one's joy of the world belong to oneself, [and] let one be outcasted very far in a far away folkland]. The curse she casts not only focuses on emotional circumstances; it also applies to a wide range of social circumstances, from a person having all the joys in the world to being outcast from their community. She is essentially cursing her wrongdoers to experience the three states of being no matter what their social circumstances may be when grief happens in their lifetime. This "sy ... sy" construction has a similar degree of force, much like the "scyle" passage, that leads directly into a result clause.

The result clause marks the beginning of the final part of her curse, the pinnacle of what she intends for her wrongdoers to experience. She begins the conclusion of the curse with the following lines: "þæt min freond siteð / under stanhlīpe storme behrimed, / wine werigmod, wætre beflowen / on dreorsele" (lines 47b-50a) [so that my friend sits under rocky cliffs rimed by a storm, a friend weary in spirit, overflowed by water, in a desolate hall]. The phrase "min freond siteð" [my friend sits] and the word "wine" [a friend] indicate that she is directing this curse to more than one individual. It is not clear who exactly she is referring to in this passage; she could be referring to a particular individual in the group that spread secret thoughts, the lord of her new community, or perhaps the individual who

advised her to go to the wood's grove. Either way, the ambiguity of this passage reinforces that this part of the curse may apply to more than one person even though "freond" is in the singular form. No matter what social situation these people may find themselves in during their lives, she intends for the result of the curse to cause them to be isolated like she is and to feel as she feels in her sanctuary prison. She accomplishes this by using geographic imagery that is reminiscent of her own sanctuary – "stanhlipe" [rocky cliffs], an area "storme behrimed" [rimed by a storm], "wætre befloweren" [overflowed by water], and "dreorsele" [a desolate hall] – and affective language that is reflective of her own state of being – "werigmod" [weary in spirit]. The geographic imagery emphasizes the severe isolation she must endure in the "eorðsele" [earth hall] that she describes as having "dena dimme, duna uphea, / bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne: / wic wylna leas" (lines 30-32a) [dark valleys, high mountains, severe city-dwellings overgrown with briars, a village devoid of joys]. The descriptive language she uses indicates that she is intent on applying a curse that forces her wrongdoers to experience her own suffering, which came about from those wrongdoers failing to enact a dispute-resolution on her behalf.

The final two sentences of the curse, lines 50-53, conclude the curse with statements of futurity. The very nature of the early medieval English curse is predicated on the power of the words taking effect at some point in the future. This interpretation of the final two sentences is further substantiated by the use of present tense³³⁰ instead of the subjunctive:

³³⁰ For a further discussion of the use of present tense in statements of futurity, see Mark Sundaram, "Anterior Future Constructions and the Structure of Old English Narratives," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 110, no. 3 (2009): pp. 267-281; Gabriele Diewald and Ilse Wischer, "Markers of Futurity in Old High German and Old English: A Comparative Corpus-Based Study," in *Comparative Studies in Early Germanic Languages: With a Focus on Verbal Categories*, ed. Gabriele Diewald, Leena Kahlas-Tarkka, and Ilse Wischer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013), pp. 195-216; and Mark Sundaram, *The Conceptualisation of Futurity in Old English* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada - Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 2004).

“dreogeð se min wine / micle modceare; he gemon to oft / wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal / of langoþe leofes abidan” (lines 50-53) [That one, my friend, endures much sorrow, that one remembers too often a more joyful dwelling place. Woe will be for the one who must remain in longing of a dear one]. The phrase “langoþe leofes” [longing of a dear one] is a reflection of the beginning of her troubles with the second community. In lines 13-14, she laments her separation from the lord of her second community, saying that “mec longade” [it caused longing in me]. The beginnings of her troubles with the second community is reflected in the final sentence of the curse. She casts a curse that will recreate the same emotional distress she felt upon her separation from her lord. Mark Sundaram argues that Old English has various kinds of linguistic means though which to express futurity, such as using the verbs “sculan” [to owe; as in shall or ought], “willan” [to wish/want], “beon” [to be], and “weorþan” [to become/happen], but that the “present tense forms [of verbs are] statistically the most common construction for expressing futurity.”³³¹ He specifies the following four areas in which the future is typically expressed: “prophecy and prognostication,” “the related area of apocalypticism in Anglo-Saxon preaching,” “futurity in Anglo-Saxon science,” and “futurity in the laws, charters, and wills.”³³² Given the context of the preceding lines of the curse, it stands to reason that the last two sentences are statements of futurity.³³³ This reading of the last two sentences reflects the rhetorical strategy of the rest of the poem. The woman begins the poem with a past trauma, then shifts into a present dilemma, and finally concludes with a future statement. John Niles draws a similar conclusion to this passage through a comparison with a passage from the second

³³¹ Sundaram, “Anterior Future Constructions,” 268.

³³² Sundaram, *The Conceptualisation of Futurity*, 149.

³³³ Niles also suggests this potential construction, see Niles, “The Problem of the Ending,” 1114-1115.

half of *The Wanderer*. Toward the end of *The Wanderer*, the narrator makes a temporal shift from describing a present individual's suffering to a future individual's reflection. Niles suggests that "a wise man of an imagined future age is imagined to be looking back upon the wasted remains of former civilizations. At that time, we are told, the wise man *geondþenceð* 'will contemplate', *gemon* 'will remember', and *acwið* 'will say' (lines 88-91), speaking from a vantage point that no person of the present age can attain."³³⁴ Based on this comparison, if we read the last part of *The Wife's Lament* as a statement of futurity, then it becomes clear that the woman is intent on a set of future events happening to her wrongdoers and for those events to cause just as much emotional turmoil in them as she has endured from trauma they have inflicted on her life. The sense of futurity is a feature that appears in other legal documents. Wills concern the proceedings of the future disposition of lands and property, lawsuits remember the past to avoid future repetitions of legal situations, and law codes reflect on the past to prepare a society for the future. These legal documents may be written in the past and present tenses, but they are intimately connected to a future time that has yet to occur. Considering this feature in legal writing, we can consider *The Wife's Lament*, too, as a type of legal poetry that reflects on the past in order to alter the course of the future.

Conclusion

Reading *The Wife's Lament* through a legal and social network theoretical lens offers a different outlook on the woman's circumstances and how she responds to those circumstances. Most translations of her story assume that she is a wife and translate her

³³⁴ Ibid., 1115.

“freond,” “hlaford,” and “wine” as epithets for a supposed husband or lover.³³⁵ Moreover, these translations often cast her as a wife who passively submits to her dire predicament.³³⁶ My analysis of the poem challenges these readings and questions the portrayal of the woman in the poem. My new reading casts the woman as being in the midst of a legal dilemma stemming from an unresolved feud; she takes refuge in a pagan sanctuary at the behest of her lord and an unidentified advisor, endures the isolation and inhospitality of the wood grove, and, at a certain point, reaches her limit of tolerance and turns to the power of cursing. Her decision to defend herself gains new meaning through my reading of the poem. She is a woman who refuses to simply endure her circumstances. Approaching the poem through a social network theory lens and a legal context reshapes our understanding of women’s agency in Old English literature. My reading of *The Wife’s Lament* presents a new translation of the poem that takes a new legal context into account and also honors the woman as an individual in a difficult situation and how she copes with it.

³³⁵ Stanley B. Greenfield, “The Wife’s Lament Reconsidered,” *PMLA* 68, no. 4 (1953): pp. 907-912; Anonymous, *Old and Middle English*, 76-79; Niles, “The Problem of the Ending,” 1107-1150; Roy Francis Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies* (Manchester: Univ. of Exeter, 1988).

³³⁶ Greenfield, “*The Wife’s Lament* Reconsidered,” 907-912; Anonymous, *Old and Middle English*, 76-79; Joseph Black and Katherine O. Acheson, eds., “The Wife’s Lament,” in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Edition*, 2nd ed., vol. A (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2014), pp. 46-47.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation has engaged with a variety of documentary sources that provide focused insight on the actions and thoughts of historical women during the early medieval English period. In each chapter, I have discussed the ways in which women form and use their social networks in lawsuits, will, and letters. Through these discussions, I have argued that we do not have to rely only on male-authored text to better understand and capture the lives of medieval women and that documentary sources, composed by women themselves, shore up existing evidence that women are not passive figures but active participants in their social environments and within their communities. One outcome of the work conducted in this project is that the insights gained about women's building and use of social networks and friendships can fruitfully be applied to non-documentary sources, facilitating new readings of the canonical literary sources that are not female-composed.

I present one example of such a new reading in my discussion of *The Wife's Lament* in the final chapter of this dissertation. I consider the woman at the center of this poem as a figure of power and vindictiveness, which goes against most traditional interpretations of this text. John Niles provides a succinct overview of the predominant trend within scholarship that treats the woman as a passive figure in a situation that is largely out of her control:

Although individual readers have lined up on either side of this crucial divide, the "genteel" view has long ruled the field. On that side are most editors, including George Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, Roy Leslie, Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson,

Anne Klinck, and John Pope and R. D. Fulk. Among commentators who have adopted this stance are Thomas M. Davis, Douglas D. Short, Karl Wentersdorf, Martin Green, and Lois Bragg, following a line of interpretation that goes back to W. W. Lawrence writing in 1908. Translators who have accepted this view include N. Kershaw, Gavin Bone, Charles W. Kennedy, Richard Hamer, and Kevin Crossley-Holland.³³⁷

According to these scholars' views, the woman is a significant figure because of her passivity and her acceptance of the circumstances she is forced to endure. While she may be forced to endure the consequences of an unresolved feud, she is far from a woman who simply and passively accepts those consequences. Rather, I contend that she is a woman who confronts the social and emotional challenges of her social trauma by casting a curse on those who have wronged her. In this way, she is a woman on the path to finding justice for herself by using the tools she has at her disposal: the power of words.

³³⁷ Krapp, *The Exeter Book*, lvii-lix; Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies*, 8 and 57-58; Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, eds., *A Guide to Old English*, 5th ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 263-67; Anne L. Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 50-51 and 185-86; and John Collins Pope and R. D. Fulk, eds., *Eight Old English Poems* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 49-54 and 177-88, provides judicious guidance to the various controversies that have surfaced in the critical literature, while Bernard James Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, vol. 2 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), 756-882, offers a comprehensive bibliography of critical studies of Exeter Book poems. Jerome Mandel, *Alternative Readings in Old English Poetry* (New York, 1987), also offers an overview of interpretations of the poem (pp. 149-55) before presenting his own views (pp. 155-73); Thomas M. Davis, "Another View of *The Wife's Lament*," *Papers on English Language and Literature* 1 (1965), 302-4; Douglas D. Short, "The Old English *Wife's Lament*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71 (1970), 600-602; Wentersdorf, "The Situation of the Narrator," 515-16; Martin Green, "Time, Memory, and Elegy in *The Wife's Lament*," in *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. Martin Green (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 129-30; Lois Bragg, *The Lyric Speakers of Old English Poetry* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; etc., 1991), 95-96; and William Witherle Lawrence, "The Banished Wife's Lament," *Modern Philology* 5, no. 3 (1908), 388-89; N. Kershaw, *Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 32-35; Gavin David Bone, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: An Essay with Specimen Translations in Verse* (Oxford: O.U.P., 1943), 64-65; Charles W. Kennedy, *An Anthology of Old English Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 10-11; Richard Hamer, *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse: Selected, with an Introduction and a Parallel Verse Translation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 71-75; and Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52-53.

Considering the woman and her power within her situation in this context opens the conversation to the issue of gender normativity in modern translations and interpretations of early medieval English women. In past scholarship up until the 1970s, women and active agency were not always seen or examined hand-in-hand. Scholars such as Alexandra Hennessey Olsen explain that scholarly approaches “assumed that, since men were responsible for public functions like king, warrior, and avenger, and since women held roles viewed as purely private such as hostesses, peaceweavers, and ritual mourners, women were.”³³⁸ But over the course of the past thirty years or so, scholars such as Carol J. Clover argue that “we misinterpret gender roles in Germanic society by viewing them in the light of beliefs developed in the late eighteenth century.”³³⁹ According to Michael J. Enbright, women play a much more active role if we examine early medieval English texts without applying modern gender role assumptions.³⁴⁰ Likewise, Peter Baker states that, for example, “when men of the nineteenth century spoke of the beauty of the word *freoðuwebbe*, they were responding to an image of their own desire, and each succeeding age has adapted this figure to mirror its own desire.”³⁴¹ The same issues are apparent in modern translations and interpretations of the woman from *The Wife’s Lament* and other sources in which women appear. In this project, I have therefore aimed at letting the women and their actions speak for themselves. Correspondingly, I offer a new translation of the poem that reflects my interpretation of the woman’s legal predicament and also highlights her motivations and deliberate actions. If scholars abide by the preconceptions of women’s

³³⁸ Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, “Gender Roles,” in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Theodore Muddock Andersson and Robert E. Bjork (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 311.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 314.

³⁴⁰ Michael J. Enbright, *Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy, and Lordship in the European Warband from La Tène to the Viking Age* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), p. 35-36.

³⁴¹ Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), p. 125.

roles and agency within early medieval English society, then they will forever be cast as passive figures who sweetly and quietly submit to the social circumstances that they must navigate.

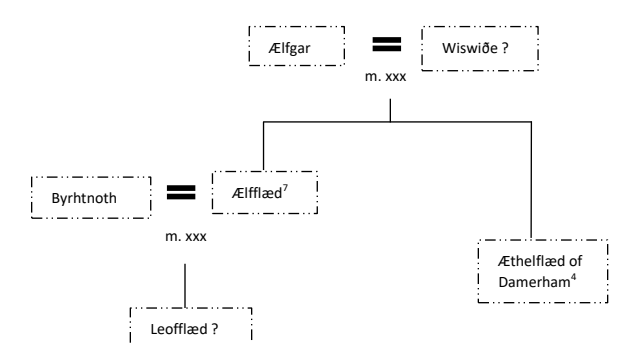
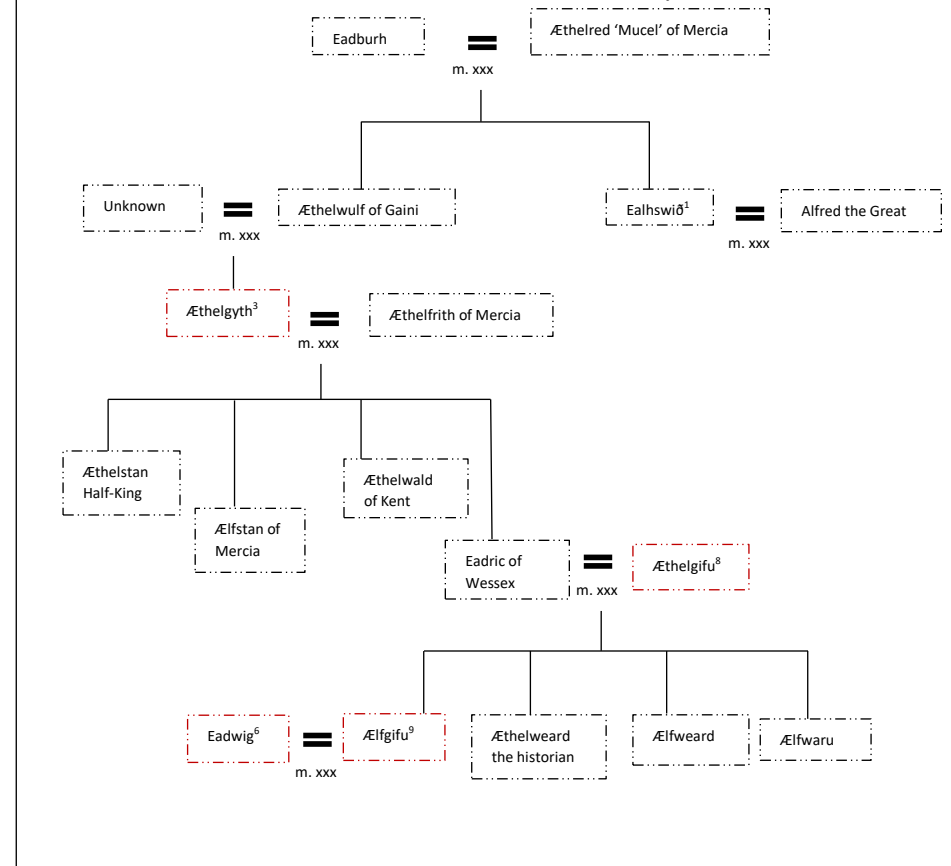
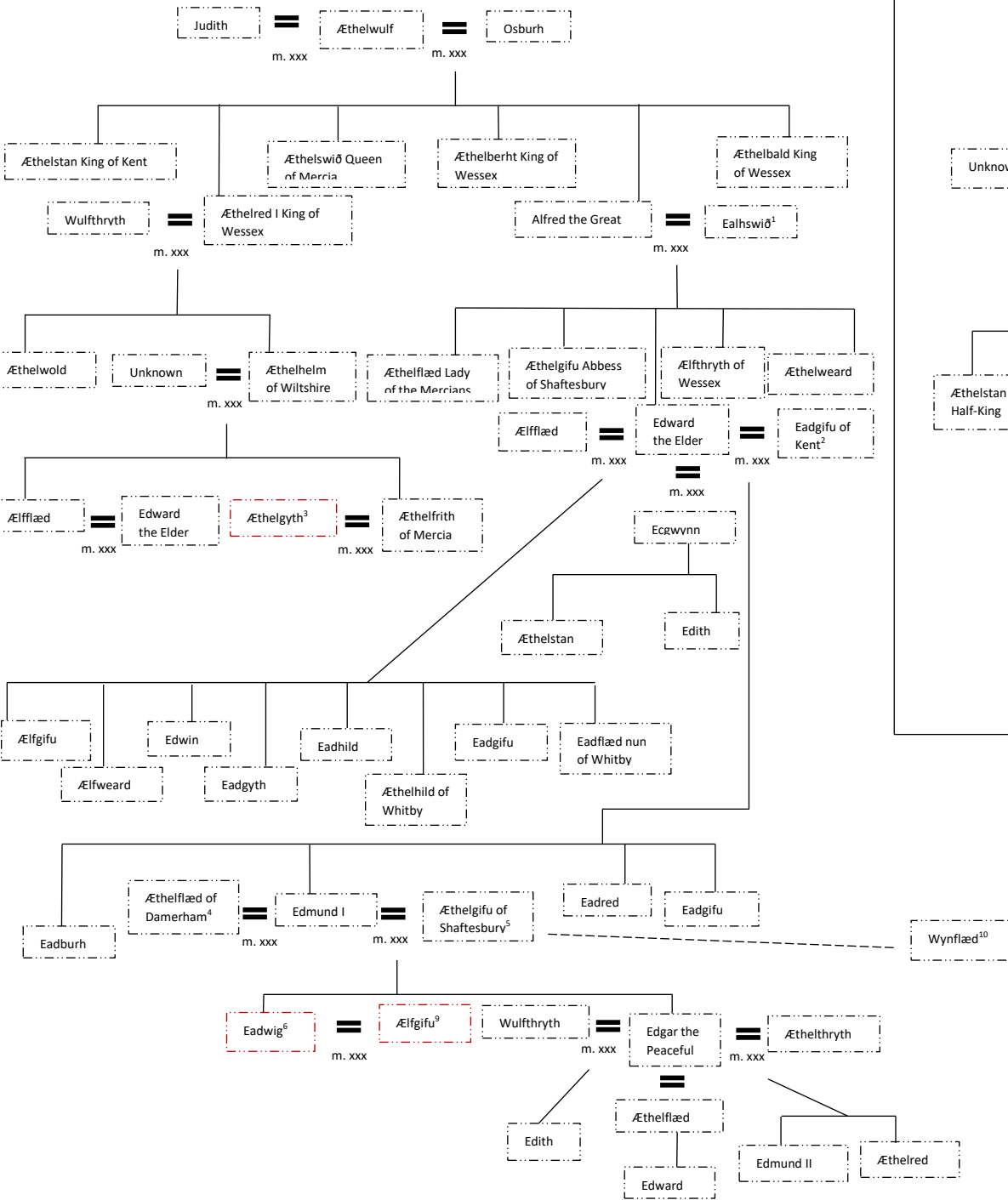
Such issues speak to a larger problem of diminishing the power and agency of women in early medieval English texts. The woman in *The Wife's Lament* shares this in common with Wealhtheow, Hildeburh, and Modthryth in *Beowulf*. Wealhtheow and Hildeburh have historically been read as passive figures, and Modthryth has been consistently read as a nasty woman. All three women, I would argue, have been diminished in terms of the power and agency they demonstrate in the story. Wealhtheow is often cast as a maternal figure who offers inspiring speeches to men but who doesn't have any other role than this; Hildeburh is typically portrayed as a mournful woman who wallows in the intense grief of slain loved ones; and Modthryth is judged as a violent and unmanageable woman who must be tamed in order to become a functional wife. The woman in *The Wife's Lament* is similarly diminished by the influence of modern gender assumptions. Stripping away the modern perceptions and assumptions of gender roles from our readings of such women and instead considering these women from early medieval English poetry through a legal and social network lens can return their power and agency to them. Wealhtheow is now a woman who uses diplomatic language to assert her political leadership; Hildeburh is now a woman who publicly mourns the death of loved ones with the intent of seeking legal compensation against the one who caused their deaths; Modthryth is now a woman who rejects the male gaze of potential suitors in favor of asserting her dominance within her social network; and the unnamed woman of *The Wife's Lament* is in fact not a wife or a lover but a woman who uses the power of words to curse those that would fail to perform

their social duties of enacting a dispute-resolution and thereby end a sanctuary that should have always only been temporary.

Just as I do in my new translation of *The Wife's Lament*, the women appearing in the historical documents discussed in this dissertation deserve to be honored as historical persons who navigated difficult legal situations and adapted to long-distance friendships. Their stories and actions have often been overlooked by scholarship in favor of well-known and overwhelmingly male-authored texts. In contrast, this dissertation has approached the study of early medieval English women through their own compositions and on their own terms. The records of their successes and triumphs of overcoming the challenges their social environments presented them are deserving not only of recognition, but also of close analysis to further expand our knowledge of medieval women's lived existences. This dissertation has brought their stories, their social networks, and their perspectives to the forefront of the formal study of early medieval English women.

Appendix A: Family Tree Ealhswið's, Alfred the Great's wife, Family Tree

Alfred the Great's Family Tree



¹ Ealhswið: Queen of England, wife of Alfred the Great, ancestor of Ælfifu and thus a distant cousin of Eadwig

² Eadgifu, Sawyer 1211; she begat Edmund I who married Æthelgifu of Shaftesbury whose mother was Wynflæd.

³ Æthelgyth: daughter of Æthelwulf of Gaini, begat a son named Eadric of Wessex. She is the relation that ties Eadwig of Alfred's kin to Ælfifu of Ealhswið's kin. Related to Ealhswið; Æthelgyth is the connection between Eadwig and Ælfifu; Ælfifu is a direct descendent of Æthelgyth; Pauline Stafford suggests this connection; see Ealhswið's family tree for Æthelgyth's children.

⁴ Æthelflæd of Damerham, see Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon," 34-37; birth/death date; will date; region; married Edmund I; she is not known to have had any children during her marriage to Edmund I nor does she name any as beneficiaries in her will; estates; connection to Ælfifu, wife of Eadwig, since she would have been her step-daughter and would therefore have been aware of their consanguineal marriage; also a connection to Ælflæd by sisterhood and her husband Byrhtnoth; she would also have been aware of Eadgifu of Kent's land dispute with Goda since her son was Edmund I

⁵ Æthelgifu of Shaftesbury: mother is Wynflæd, see Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon," 11.

⁶ Eadwig: King Alfred's and Queen Ealhswið's great-great grandson; which means he was Ælfifu's cousin twice removed.

⁷ Ælflæd, see Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon," 38-41; birth/death date; will date; region; married to Byrhtnoth who appears in the Old English poem *Battle of Maldon*; she is not known to have had any children during her marriage to Byrhtnoth, but there is a possibility that she could have been step-mother to Leoflæd, a child begat from Byrhtnoth and a previous partner; estates; like her sister Æthelflæd of Damerham, she would have had similar connections with Eadgifu of Kent's land dispute and Ælfifu's annulled marriage with Eadwig.

⁸ Æthelgifu, see Crick, "The Will of Æthelgifu," 144-147; she may have been either the mother or aunt of Ælfifu, who was married to Eadwig; likewise, she may have been the unidentified wife or the *sister* of Eadric of Wessex's unidentified wife. Æthelgifu mentions her sister's daughter named Ælfifu, but in S 1292 the witness list states "ðis wæs Eadwiges leaf cyninges 7 ðis syndon ða gewitnassa: Ælfifu þæs cininges wif 7 Æþelgifu þæs cyninges wifes modur . Ælfsige biscop . Osulf biscop . Coenwald biscop . Byrhtnoð ealdorman . Ælfheah cyninges discðen . Eadric his brodur."

⁹ Ælfifu, Whitelock, pp. ; birth/death date; will date; region; married to Eadwig the All-Fair although their union was annulled soon after by Bishop Dunstan on grounds of consanguinity; estates; thought to be the daughter of Eadric of Wessex through the estate at Risborough which she inherited from him and subsequently disposed of in her own will; Ælfifu is a direct descendent of Æthelgyth which explains the consanguinity in her marriage to Eadwig; she would have been Ealhswið's great-great grand-niece. She is also definitely the daughter of Eadric of Wessex who in his own will bequest his estate at Risborough to his unnamed daughter, and who Ælfifu in turn declares in her will that she inherited the same estate from her unnamed father and subsequently wished to dispose of it as well.

¹⁰ Wynflæd, see Whitelock, "Anglo-Saxon" 10-15; birth/death date; will date; region; husband; mother of Æthelflæd, not to be mistaken for Æthelflæd of Damerham, and also mother of Ælfifu of Shaftesbury, see Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*, 82-83; estates; she had a connection to Æthelflæd of Damerham, who was the second wife of Edmund I, because her own daughter, Ælfifu of Shaftesbury, was his first wife. Wynflæd would also have known Eadgifu of Kent who was Ælfifu of Shaftesbury's mother-in-law. Eadwig the All-Fair would have been her grandson through Ælfifu of Shaftesbury which would mean Wynflæd also knew his wife, also named Ælfifu, even though their marriage was quickly annulled by Bishop Dunstan due to accusations of consanguinity, see Constance B. Bouchard, "Consanguinity and Noble Marriages in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (1981): pp. 269-70, and Dorothy Whitelock, ed., "Vita S. Dunstani," in *English Historical Documents* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Appendix B

Ayelsworth Lawsuit

A well-known charter of the late tenth century (S 1377) records a property exchange, sanctioned by King Edgar, between Bishop Athelwold of Winchester and Wulfstan Ucea. The charter is composed of two parts. The first half records a series of land transactions that relate to estates at Jaceslea (Yaxley), Hwessingatune (Washington), and Ægeleswyrðe (Ayelsworth). The second half records the ethically questionable means by which the Ægeleswyrðe estate was obtained and subsequently given to Wulfstan Ucea. An additional charter, S 533, provides proof of Eadred giving Aelfsige, Wulfstan Ucea's father, the Ailsworth estate.³⁴² According to this dating, the crime and forfeiture of land must have occurred approximately twenty years prior to the land exchange between Æthelwold and Wulfstan Ucea.³⁴³ S 1377 presents itself as a succinct statement of past events, a brief record in which forfeiture was both justified and final based on a claim that the woman and her son had attempted to murder Ælfsige. While the events described in S 1377 may seem legitimate, the punishment without trial and the fact that Ælfsige had everything to gain makes the situation surrounding the unnamed woman rather suspect. Andrew Rabin has pointed out that “the widow’s punishment here does not conform with the penalties found in either Old English legal or penitential texts. In

³⁴² S.E. Kelly states that “an extant diploma, S 533, dates King Eadred’s grant of the Ailsworth estate to Ælfsige to 948, although it says nothing of the forfeiture that preceded the grant,” see S.E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Peterborough Abbey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), 275-276.

³⁴³ See Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 75. The account in S 533 may have been written to legitimize that the property had passed to Ælfsige in 948.

neither tradition is the sticking of pins into an effigy considered sufficient justification for capital punishment.”³⁴⁴ Scott Smith cogently explains that

the important point here, however, is not the bias in the account, but the process of documenting (and thereby justifying) the winding channels through which the Ailsworth estate finally came to Peterborough. Through both its moral logic and its attention to due procedure the memorandum erases the legitimacy of any potential claims brought by the kindred of the nameless widow and son. These ‘criminals’ (and their past claim to the property) disappear from the account in their respective moments of death and outlawry, to be replaced by the authoritative figure of the king and the legitimate transmission of land which his intervention represents.³⁴⁵

One issue with this situation is the ways in which individuals could bypass the laws in order to end up in positions that favored them. More importantly, however, is the fact that the victor of the lawsuit was effectively able to erase the side of the story that involved the loser. For the unnamed widow, it appears that she may not have had a social network to rely upon that would have helped her to avoid this kind of situation.

It is within the second half of the record that we learn of an unnamed widow and her son who faced unfounded charges of attempted murder and the subsequent seizure of their land and, in the widow’s case, execution. When interest has been shown in S 1377, scholarship has largely focused on the widow as a premise for the study of witches in the Anglo-Saxon period based on the assumptive interpretation that the unnamed widow

³⁴⁴ See Rabin, “Anglo-Saxon Women,” 43 and also Kelly, *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, 276-277.

³⁴⁵ Scott Thompson Smith, *Land and Book*, 75.

practiced magic.³⁴⁶ S 1377 does not label the Aylesworth landowner as a witch, nor is there evidence that she practiced witchcraft. Analyzing S 1377 under the assumption that the Aylesworth landowner is a witch is an example of a gender-biased approach given that the charter does not, in fact, use language that would indicate the woman was a practicing witch.³⁴⁷ The charter tells us the following:

[Ð]æt land æt Ægeleswyrðe headde an wyduwe 7 hire sune ær forwyrft
forþanþe hi drifon iserne stacan on Ælfsie, Wulfstanes feder, 7 þæt werð
æreafe, 7 man teh þæt morð forð of hire inclifan. Ða nam man þæt wif 7
adrencte hi æt Lundene brigce, 7 hire sune ætberst 7 werð utlah. 7 þæt
land eode þam kyng to handa 7 se kyng hit forgeaf þa Ælfsige 7 Wulstan
Uccea, his sunu, hit sealde eft Adeluolde bisceope swa swa hit her bufan
sægð³⁴⁸

³⁴⁶ For gender-biased readings of S 1377, see William Ryland Dent Adkins, *The Victoria History of the County of Northampton* 2. (London: Archibald Constable & Co., 1906), 475; George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 28–9, 75; Jane Crawford, “Evidences for Witchcraft in Anglo-Saxon England.” *Medium Ævum* 32 (1963): 99–116; Anthony Davies, “Witches in Anglo-Saxon England” in *Superstition and Popular Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. G. Scragg, 41–56. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 49–51; R. H. Bremmer, “Widows in Anglo-Saxon England” in *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood*, ed. Jan Bremmer, and Lourens van den Bosch, 58–88. (London: Routledge, 1995); Corinne Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance*. (Cambridge:

D. S. Brewer, 2010), 68; Andrew Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1; Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 324; and Marc Meyer, “Land Charters and the Legal Position of Anglo-Saxon Women” in *The Women of England: From Anglo-Saxon Times to the Present*, ed. Barbara Kanner, 57–82. (Hamdon: Archon Books, 1979). For readings that view the widow as a witch more skeptically, see Rabin, “Law and Justice,” 85–98; Smith, *Land and Book*, 73–6; and Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 132–3. For one of the few scholars who question the widow’s act of witchcraft, see Carole Hough, “Two Kentish Laws Concerning Women: A New Reading of Æthelberht 73 and 74” in “An Ald Reht”: *Essays on Anglo-Saxon Law*, 87–110. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), 98.

³⁴⁷ Andrew Rabin pays particular attention to the word *inclifan*, arguing that in other sources (PsGID (Roeder) 9.30 and 103.22) the term refers to an animal’s den, a lair, or a cave (*incleofa*, *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*, eds. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018)). He also reads the crime as a potential act of witchcraft, see Rabin, 2020, 24–26.

³⁴⁸ S 1377.

[The land at Aylesworth had earlier been forfeited from one widow and her son because they drove an iron stake into Wulfstan's father, Ælfsige, and it was discovered, and that a certain person took that iron pin from her inner-chamber. Then a certain one seized that woman and he drowned her at London Bridge, and her son got away and became an outlaw, and that land went to the king's control, and then the king gave it to Ælfsige, and Wulfstan Ucce, his son, afterward sold it to Bishop Æthelwold, just as is said above here]

From the charter, we learn that the Aylesworth landowner and her son are accused of driving “iserne stacan on Ælsie, Wulfstanes feder” [an iron stake into Wulfstan's father, Ælfsige] and that “man teh þæt morð forð of hire inclifan” [a certain person took that iron pin from her inner-chamber]. In fact, S 1377 refers to the Aylesworth landowner as “wyduwe” [widow] and “wif” [woman]. Additionally, the charter describes that “drifon iserne stacan” [they drove an iron pin], and it calls the weapon a “morð” [an instrument of death]. None of these details depict a witch or the practicing of magic. What we have, here, is a woman and her son who commit a physical attack on the body of another person and another person later finding the weapon in the woman's home. Nevertheless, her entry in the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (PASE) database describes her, among other descriptors, as a “woman accused of witchcraft” and catalogs her as a “witch.”³⁴⁹ The PASE entry for the Aylesworth landowner or, as PASE refers to her, the “Anonymous 1044 (Female),” nowhere recognizes that she is a widow, even though the only identifiable social and marital marker in the charter are the terms “wyduwe” and

³⁴⁹ “Anonymous 1044,” *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk>.

“wif.” Past and recent scholarship on the Aylesworth landowner, excepting the few critics who view her more favorably, presents an emphatically gendered and biased reading of this woman that does not reflect the rhetorical features, such as word choices and terms, that are evident in the charter. The sex of the litigant is identified, but this alone should not be sufficient grounds to label her as a witch.

The early medieval English legislative codes demonstrate a keen awareness of an individual’s right to justice and fair punishment. S 1377 is not only a land transaction and execution record, it is also an example of punishment without trial.³⁵⁰ According to modern courts, this would be considered an act of attainder, a legislative act that “without trial, condemned specifically designated persons or groups to death ... [and] also required the ‘corruption of blood’ ... [which] denied to the condemned’s heirs the right to inherit his [or her] estate.”³⁵¹ Many modern court systems, including that of the United States, are prohibited from passing such acts at both the Congressional and State levels in order to protect the sovereignty of life for any who come under the law. The same is true of the early medieval English legal system. Across three centuries of early medieval English law codes, the legislation makes clear that the law was to be enforced and that individuals were due the right of a fair trial. The earliest law codes that clearly state the upholding of the law are that of Ine and Alfred.³⁵² During the reigns of Edward the Elder and Edmund I, we see language denoting fair trial. Edward the Elder states that “Ic wille, þæt ælc

³⁵⁰ For further context and discussion of bills of attainder see, Daniel E. Troy, *Retroactive Legislation* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1998), 56-59.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁵² “we bebeodað þætte ealles folces æw 7 domas ðus sien gehealdene” [we command that the law and decrees of all the people may thus be upheld], Attenborough 36; “ic ða Ælfred Westseaxna cyning eallum minum witum þas geeowde, 7 hie ða cwædon, þæt him þæt licode eallum to healdanne” [I, then, Alfred King of the West Saxons have shown these [laws] to my advisors, and they then have said that [the law] has pleased them [and] is to be upheld], Attenborough, *The Laws*, 62.

gerefa hæbbe gemot a ymbe feower wucan; 7 gedon ðæt ælc man sy folcrites wyrðe, 7 ðæt ælc spræc hæbbe ende 7 andagan, hwænne hit forðcume”³⁵³ [I will that every reeve shall have a meeting around every four weeks; and they do [such] that every person has the benefit of the public law, and that every suit shall have an end and an appointed day, on which it shall be brought forth]. This same sentiment that all individuals have the right of due process is reflected in Edward the Elder’s statement regarding the continued enforcement of the law: “Eadweard cyning myngode his wytan, þa hy æt Exanceastre wæron, þæt hy smeadon ealle, hu heora frið betere beon mæhte, þonne hit ær ðam wæs; forðam him þuhte, þæt hit mæctor gelæst wære, þonne hit scolde, þæt he ær beboden hæfde”³⁵⁴ [King Edward exhorted all his councillors, when they were at Exeter, to consider how the public peace for which they were responsible could be kept better than it had been, because it seemed to him that his previous orders had not been carried out so well as they ought to have been]. It is curious, then, that the Aylesworth landowner does not seem to receive her due and lawful right in this situation. Andrew Rabin explains that “the same political networking and procedural flexibility that made possible creative resolutions to knotty legal problems also fostered an environment in which the powerful could easily prey on those without influential patrons or friends.”³⁵⁵ The extensive efforts of the claimants to obtain the land indicates the functionality of the law codes protecting individuals and their property and the great lengths one would have to take to find a viable enough loophole with which to bypass the law. While this particular charter records the injustice done to a landowning woman, it informs readers of the difficulty in

³⁵³ Ibid., 120.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 118.

³⁵⁵ Rabin, Andrew. “Anglo-Saxon Women Before the Law: A Student Edition of Five Old English Lawsuits,” *Old English Newsletter* 41, no. 3 (2008), 36.

bypassing the law. Similar occurrences of sentencing without trial, as seen in S 1377, are relatively few which perhaps suggests that the law was enforced in one way or another. Moreover, the circumstances surrounding the Aylesworth landowner emphasize the pivotal advantages of having and using a social network, which she was unable to use or perhaps lacked altogether.

Appendix C

The Wife's Lament

5	<p>Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geomorre, minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg, hwæt Ic yrmþa gebad siþþan Ic up weox, niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu. A Ic wite won minra wræcsipa.</p>	<p>I avenge a wrong in this sorrowful story about myself, on my own journey. I am able to relate the miseries, of new and old, that I endured as I grew up no more than now. Always I have made my way through the misery of my journey of exile.</p>
10	<p>Ærest min hlaford gewat heonan of leodum ofer yþa gelac; hæfde Ic uhtceare hwær min leodfruma londes wære. Ða Ic me feran gewat folgað secan, wineleas wræcca for minre weaþearfe.</p>	<p>First, my lord of the people departed from here over the tossing of the waves; I had sorrow at dawn of where my lord of the people of the land might be. Then I departed on my journey to seek those in the service of a leader, a friendless wanderer because of my woeful need.</p>
15	<p>Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc, þæt wit gewidost I woruldrice, lifdon laðlicost; ond mec longade.</p>	<p>The kinsmen of that person began to think through secret thought that they would separate us so that we two in [this] worldly kingdom lived furthest apart most hatefully and it caused longing in me.</p>
20	<p>Het mec hlaford min her heard niman. Ahte Ic leofra lyt on þissum londstede, holdra freonda; forþon is min hyge geomor. Ða Ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde heardsæligne, hygegeomorne,</p>	<p>My lord commanded me to take a refuge in a pagan sanctuary. I possessed few dear ones of loyal friends in this region. Therefore my mind is mournful. Then I found the fully well-matched person [to be] unfortunate, sad in mind,</p>
25	<p>mod miþendne, morþor hycgendne, bliþe gebæro. Ful oft wit beotedan þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana, owiht ells; eft is þæt onhworfen. Is nu swa hit no wære</p>	<p>having a concealing mind, intending crime, of a joyful disposition. Very often we two vowed that nothing would part the two of us except death alone; after everything, that has been reversed. It is now as if it never were,</p>
30	<p>freondscipe uncer. Sceal Ic feor ge neah mines felaleofan fæhðu dreogan.</p>	<p>the friendship of us two. Far or near I shall endure the feud of my much-loved friend.</p>
35	<p>Heht mec mon wunian on wuda bearwe, under actreo in þam eorðscræfe. Eald is þes eorðsele; eal Ice om oflongad. Sindon dena dimme, duna uphea, bitre burgtunas brerum beweaxne:</p>	<p>Someone commanded me to live in the wood's grove under the oak tree in the earth cavern. Old is this earth hall, I am entirely seized with longing. There are dark valleys, high mountains, Severe city-dwellings overgrown with briars, a village devoid of joys. Full often here the departure of my lord cruelly covered me. Friends are on earth,</p>
40	<p>wic wynta leas. Ful oft mec her wraþe begeat fromsiþ frean. Frynd sind on eorþan, leofe lifgende, leger weardiað, þonne Ic on uhtan ana gonge under actreo geond þas eorðscrafu.</p>	<p>dear ones are living, they occupy a place, while I walk alone before dawn under the oak tree through these earth caverns. There I must dwell the summer long day, there I can weep of my journey of exile,</p>
45	<p>þær Ic wepan mæg mine wræcsipas, eorfoþa fela; forþon Ic æfre ne mæg þære modceare minre gerestan, ne ealles þæs longapes þe mec on þissum life begeat.</p>	<p>of [my] many hardships, therefore I may neither rest from the sorrow of my heart, nor of all the longing which covers me in this life.</p>
50	<p>A scyle geong mon wesan geomormod, heard heortan geþoht, swylce habban sceal bliþe gebæro eac þon breostceare, sinsorgna gedreag, sy æt him sylfum gelong eal his worulde wyn, sy ful wide fah feorres folclondes, þæt min freond siteð under stanhlīpe storme behrimed,</p>	<p>Always must a young person³⁵⁶ be sad in mind, hard-hearted in thinking just as one must have a happy bearing in addition to heart-care of a multitude of perpetual griefs, whether all one's joy of the world may belong for themselves, [or] if one is outcasted very far in a far away folkland so that my friend sits under rocky cliffs rimed by a storm,</p>

³⁵⁶ Robert Dennis Fulk and Levin L. Schücking propose this reading, see Levin L. Schücking, "Das angelsächsische Gedicht von der 'Klage der Frau,'" *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 48 (1906), 436-49; Robert Dennis Fulk, editor. *Eight Old English Poems*. W.W. Norton, 2001, pp. 127-128.

50 | wine werigmod, wætre befloweren
 | on dreorsele. Dreogeð se min wine
 | micle modceare; he gemon to oft
 | wynlicran wic. Wa bið þam þe sceal
 | of langoþe leofes abidan.

| a friend weary in spirit, overflowed by water,
 | in a desolate hall. That one, my friend, endures
 | much sorrow, that one³⁵⁷ remembers too often
 | a more joyful dwelling place. Woe will be for the one who must
 | remain in longing of a dear one.

³⁵⁷ The pronoun 'he' can be used indefinitely, much like the noun 'man.' Due to the poems consistent ambiguity in regards to who the woman is referring to, I have chosen to translate the pronoun 'he' according to its broadest definition, see *DOE* entry 'he,' sense I.C.5.

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VITA

Nicole Songstad was born and raised in the Midwest of the United States of America. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Abilene in Abilene, Texas. Initially, she started her college career as a pre-med Biology student. After a Major British Authors class, she changed major to English Language and Literature. The summer following her change in major, she traveled to England for a Study Abroad program where she had the opportunity to visit the British Library. While there, she saw the Beowulf manuscript. She stood in front of the manuscript for so long that a security monitor walked up to her and said something like ‘step away from the glass, you’re setting off the temperature sensors.’ From that moment on, Nicole knew that she wanted to work with manuscripts and study the Early English Medieval period. After graduating from ACU, she continued her higher education at the University of Missouri-Columbia where she completed her Masters and Doctorate in English Literature with a specialization in early medieval English literature. While studying at MU, Nicole taught several semesters of varying courses for the English Department. She also had the opportunity to work at the MU Ellis Library’s Special Collections and Rare Books Department as a Graduate Library Assistant. Nicole intends to complete a Masters in Library Science and pursue a career as a Law Librarian.