

`Gender Trouble' (Judith Butler):
Describing English Women
in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

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‘To what extent is “identity” a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience?’¹

If we then wish to assume that an elementary (and probably unsophisticated) key to female identity or identities inheres in the descriptions or *cognomina* of medieval women, we might be well informed to consider Judith Butler’s question.² Simply put, in the context of naming, identifying and describing, does the description of women through their *cognomina* equate to a discursive formation as well as an integral part of female experience?³ How far and in what ways does the describing and naming of females contribute to the social and cultural construction of gender?⁴ Not only that, however, but how far do these processes reveal how far gender identity was fragmentary—that is, an unstable category of analysis?⁵ In some recent feminist tradition, that instability of gender as a category has been associated with the transactions of class, colour and

¹ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1990), p. 16.

² Of course, Butler’s work poses the fundamental question of whether we are still in the phase of identity/ies or have moved on to post-identity/ies. For the debate on historical terms, *Feminism & History*, edited by J. W. Scott (Oxford, 1996).

³ To some extent involved in this question is the critique of the phenomenological approach by those who wish to reinsert the Foucauldian micro-politics of *la vie quotidienne*.

⁴ For an exploration of some of these issues in ‘southern Italy’, P. Skinner, “‘And her name was...?’ gender and naming in medieval southern Italy’, *Medieval Prosopography*, 20 (1999), 23–49, and for Flanders, E. Kittell, ‘The construction of women’s social identity in medieval Douai: evidence from identifying epithets’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 25 (1999), 215–27.

⁵ For the main part, this discussion will focus on social identity, although it is impossible to separate that from personal identity and cultural identity.

age/status in particular.⁶ On the other hand, those who argue for the persistent influence of patriarchy as an organising principle of social and cultural life, emphasise subordination to males as the principal, pervasive and enduring criterion.⁷ How far do the processes of naming, describing and identifying twelfth- to early- fourteenth-century English females elucidate those epistemological differences?⁸

Consequently, the concern here is with the descriptions of females in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in reflecting on how age and status influenced the referents for females, as daughters, but as significantly as wives and widows. In different documents relating to different events, women were described in diverse ways, in relation to their life-cycle status, but in relation to males and in relation to males in connection with the

⁶ In an historical context, I take as seminal here the recent work of Amy Froide and Judith Bennett indicating the very different status of singlewomen in widowhood and in (young) spinsterhood: A Froide, 'Marital status as a category of difference: singlewomen and widows in early modern England', in *Singlewomen in the European Past 1250–1800*, edited by J. Bennett and A. Froide (Chicago, 1999), pp. 236–69. For other approaches to life-cycle stages of women, most recently *Young Medieval Women*, edited by K. Lewis, N. Menuge and K. Phillips (Stroud, 1999) and *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, edited by S. Cavallo and L. Warner (Harlow, 1999). The demographic aspects of singlewomen are succinctly and excellently described in M. Kowaleski, 'Singlewomen in medieval and early modern Europe: the demographic perspective', in *Singlewomen*, pp. 38–81, and must form the context for any discussion of female descriptions in relation to the proportions of different categories of female.

⁷ For the wider context of male authority over females, Froide, 'Marital status', and P. Griffiths, 'Masterless young people in Norwich, 1560–1645', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, edited by Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (London, 1996), pp. 146–86. For the most impressive consideration of patriarchy as a continuous organising concept in historical contexts, J. M. Bennett, 'Confronting continuity', *Journal of Women's History*, 9 (1997), 73–94, which expands and refines her earlier deliberations. See also her *Medieval Women in Modern Perspective* (American Historical Association, 2000). For the philosophical approach, S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford, 1990).

⁸ For introductions to these epistemological differences, R. Tong, *Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction* (London, 1992) and, from a more didactic perspective, L. Segal, *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology, Politics* (Cambridge, 1999).

descent and provenance of land. It is the flexibility of those descriptions which is explored here to try to determine how far patriarchy was the most potent influence or whether in this case gender as an analytical category contains some instability. A range of sources of different provenance is employed: charters relating to a burgess community; the *Rotuli de Dominabus* (1185) produced by central government to audit widows in the King's gift; manorial surveys of the twelfth and thirteenth century which enumerate peasant tenants on particular estates; the government survey of 1279–80, the *Rotuli Hundredorum*; and lay subsidies (taxations) of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. An attempt is thus made to relate descriptions of women to status and, indeed, to the influences and nuances of different records.

Before any analysis of that problem can be addressed, however, we have to recognise the limitations and deficiencies of the material at our disposal. It is almost universally the case—although there are occasional exceptions—that written records do not reflect the speech acts of the speech community. How far the colloquial speech acts are mediated by the written record is thus an immediate problem. How much account did the clerical redactors take of the form of the speech forms of the information provided to them? Moreover, different records were produced for different purposes and intentions, which will, at the very least, inform the need or not to define status. Written records thus present a representation, not intimate personal and social experience. Nevertheless, there remains a fascinating question of how far that representation—as discourse—reacted with experience.⁹

How then were women described in the twelfth to early fourteenth centuries in England? Perhaps a reasonable starting point is the accumulation of charters relating to urban property in Coventry in the thirteenth century edited by Peter Coss. There are two important aspects to this source. Firstly, charters provide the most immediate and informative prosopography and descriptions of the women involved, whether as donor/grantors/benefactors or as grantees/beneficiaries. Secondly, the amount of material allows a quantitative analysis of a fairly prescribed location with presumably fairly consistent local cultural values. Finally, a

⁹ See, for example, N. Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge, 1992). For Foucault's concept of discourse, M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972) and, for a succinct account, G. Danaher, A. Schirato and J. Webb, *Understanding Foucault* (London, 2000), pp. 30–36.

burgess community is likely in the thirteenth century to have been an aspiring one with some civic sensitivity. Of course, the charters are subject to the same deficiency of all formal, written records, which is how far scribal practice represented the cultural values of the local speech community. Moreover, such records were compiled in the higher register of Latin, not the language of the speech community.¹⁰ Such a question remains, in the current terminology, problematic—in other words, it cannot be adequately resolved. A final point is that all the charters relate to urban property from the early thirteenth century to very early in the fourteenth.

Table 1 Singletons as donors in Coventry charters

Described by relation to father (a dau xy)	32
Described by relationship to mother (a dau of xy)	1
Allocated a byname (ab)	4 ¹¹
Compound of byname and relationship to father (ay dau of xy)	2
Described by relationship to other male (a sister of xy)	1

Table 2 Wives as joint donors in Coventry charters¹²

<i>Description</i>	<i>Relationship to land transferred</i>	<i>N</i>
xy and a his wife dau of pq father's or her family's land		2

¹⁰ Middle English intrudes into some name forms in the fourteenth century, the implications of which I hope to consider elsewhere, but see, for example, D. Postles, 'Defining the "North": some linguistic evidence', *Northern History*, 38 (2001), 28–46 (pp. 40–41). Unusually, a Middle English form appears in the Ely bishopric surveys of 1222, where, at Tydd, we encounter *Silkewif* [sic with no forename]: British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B II, fos 151v–153r (Tydd).

¹¹ Their singleton status is testified by the phrase 'in her virginity'.

¹² Here, the criterion is the phrase xy and his wife (some sort of naming) give/grant etc. Excluded is the *laudatio parentum* or consents clause (xy with the consent of his wife a).

xy and a his wife dau of pq unknown		3
xy and a his wife (forename only)	see comments below	37
xy and his wife ab (different byname)	unknown	4

Table 3 Widows as sole donors in Coventry charters

<i>Description</i>	<i>Relationship to land transferred</i>	<i>N</i>
relationship to husband (a widow of xy)	unknown	30
relationship to husband (ditto)	husband's/dower	15
relationship to husband (ditto)	<i>maritagium</i>	2
relationship to husband (ditto)	<i>maritagium</i> +dower	1
relationship to husband (ditto)	from her uncle	1
relationship to husband (ditto)	by her purchase	1
byname and widow of (ab widow of xy)	unknown	2
relationship to father (a dau of xy)	unknown	10
relationship to father (ditto)	father's/ <i>maritagium</i>	8
compound (dau of xy and widow of pq)	unknown	3
relationship to mother	mother's	1
byname (ab)	unknown	8

Table 4 Women as grantees/beneficiaries in Coventry charters

To xy and his wife a		129
To xy and his wife a dau of pq		1
To a widow of xy	11	
To a dau of xy		8
To ay widow of xy (i.e. same byname)		1
To ay dau of xy (ditto)		1
To xy and his wife ab (different bynames)		1

Of course, these categories are not themselves stable and some flexibility inhered in descriptions. Thus Christine widow of William Rimild in one charter became Christine Rimild widow of William Rimild in another (1280s).¹³ Similarly, Margery Pake widow of Pain Pake in one charter was transformed into simply Margery Pake in another (also 1280s).¹⁴ Most demonstrably, whereas at Michaelmas 1259 Emma was styled as widow of Robert Beufys, within six months she was described simply as Emma Beufiz.¹⁵

What the analysis of donors attempts to elicit is how far the relationship of women was predominantly expressed first through periphrases and secondly through those elaborate descriptions as one to males (husbands or fathers) and how far to land, although in terms of lineage the two cannot be inextricably divided. Of course, periphrases were employed in describing some men, but women were preponderantly described by that means in the Coventry charters. Consequently, the predominant use of periphrases to refer to women became discursive, informing then experience. Obviously there is also a predominant association of women to males. How far, however, is that relationship to males determined by the provenance of the urban property at issue? For example, if the property originated in a wife's family—whether as gift to her by her father, by inheritance, or as a *maritagium*—was the wife's description engendered in terms of her relationship to her father (or indeed other male from the distaff lineage)? If the source of the property was her husband—through his inheritance or as a widow's dower—is the description of a female expressed in terms of her relationship to her husband?¹⁶ Both relationships, of course, were mediated by *cui in vita*—that is, the subordination of a woman's right in her property

¹³ *The Early Records of Medieval Coventry*, edited by P. R. Coss (British Academy, Records of Economic and Social History, new series 11, London, 1986), pp. 278 (598) and 300 (655).

¹⁴ *Early Records of Medieval Coventry*, p. 312 (685–86).

¹⁵ *Early Records of Medieval Coventry*, p. 328 (719–20).

¹⁶ See, for example, the close association between description of a woman as widow of xy in charters relating to dower in *The Kniveton Leiger*, edited by A. Saltman (Derbyshire Archaeological Society Record Series 7, 1977 for 1972–73), pp. 35 (43), 57 (91), 61 (101), 64 (107), 80 (141), 89 (164), 90 (167), 124 (241), 174 (355) and 185 (376).

to her husband's patriarchal responsibility. Nevertheless, the associations in the charters reveal sufficient to suggest that the provenance of the land sometimes exerted an influence, if in an indeterminate manner.

Confusion of this influence occurred quite often. In several charters, a wife as joint donor was described by the simplest relationship to her husband—that is the gift or grant was executed by xy and his wife a, by her forename only—yet the land did not derive from a husband's interest. Examples are dower from a wife's first marriage; a wife's land from her father; a wife's land from her first husband; a wife's inheritance (twice); and a wife's gift from father to daughter.¹⁷

How a normative principle might have operated, however, is illustrated by the benefaction of Margaret to the nuns of St Mary Clerkenwell in 1190 × 1206. Styled as Margaret *que fuit filia Roberti filii Harding'* in the address of her charter, nevertheless the charter explicitly stated that she made the benefaction in her widowhood from her own free patrimony. The relationship to principal male was thus connected to the provenance of the land.¹⁸ Another charter relating to London confirms that aspect. In the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, Simon Hurel and his wife Margaret [sic] transferred a rent of 2s to Westminster Abbey. In her subsequent confirmation charter of the early thirteenth century, Margery [sic] styled as *filia Hugonis de Fonte* referred to the rent as formerly paid to her and her husband Simon Hurrell from a tenement which she received from her father, Hugh.¹⁹ Evident is the same principle determining the relationship to a principal male based on the descent of the land.

In considering free tenants and tenures, furthermore, the question of relationship of females to lineage is encountered. Particularly is that so at the highest social levels. The Basset–Ridel marriage in 1123 was one such occasion when lineage was a consideration, in which case the notion of

¹⁷ *Early Records of Medieval Coventry*, pp. 69 (45), 88 (93), 149 (256), 166 (305), 171–72 (319, 322), 179 (343) and 334 (732). Bodleian Library, Oxford, Fairfax MS 9, fo 78r: *Dionisia que fuit uxor Willelmi Russel de Northcaue* (rent from a bovate *quam Daniel' pater meus mihi dedit*).

¹⁸ *The Cartulary of St Mary Clerkenwell*, edited by W. O. Hassall (Camden, 3rd ser. 71 (1949), pp. 104–05 (no. 166): *Hanc donationem feci eis in viduitate mea de meo libero patrimonio*).

¹⁹ *Westminster Abbey Charters 1066–c.1214*, edited by E. Mason and others (London Record Society xxv, 1988), pp. 255–56 (nos 417–18).

hypogamy intervenes, that is the relative importance of the two families conjoined.²⁰ Elevated from relative, but not total, obscurity in the reign of Henry I, the Bassets acquired the barony which had been held in 1086 by Robert de Buci but which escheated to the King and was, sometime after 1122, awarded by Henry I to the Bassets in return for their service. The precise origin of the Bassets remains obscure, but Loyd suggested the region of Montreuil-au-Holme (Orme, arrondissement of Argentan, canton of Briouze) where Ralph, father of Richard I Basset and Henry I's justiciar, was lord of Doumfront in the reign of William II. Additionally, W. T. Reedy noted the relationship of the Bassets to a superior lord, the d'Oilly family, particularly associated with the placename Oully-le-Basset.²¹ Orderic Vitalis referred disparagingly to the inferiority of the Basset fee in Normandy, but more instructively mentioned also the nature of the Basset's description at that time: *Ricardus enim cognomento Bassetus*, a moniker confirmed by the Abingdon chronicler on the death of Ralph. Of course, the nickname *cognomen* was not only seemingly recent, but also rather uncomplimentary, and certainly did not pertain to the corpus of honorific Norman toponyms.²²

The fortunes of the Bassets were established by the service of Ralph to Henry I as one of the *novi homines* or *curiales* 'raised from the dust'. In particular, the Basset elevation was sealed by the marriage, promoted by Henry I, of Maud Ridel to Richard Basset in about 1123. Maud's father, Geoffrey Ridel, another of the *curiales* of Henry I, not a magnate and thus a

²⁰ For hypergamy and hypogamy, I. M. Lewis, *Social Anthropology in Perspective. The Relevance of Social Anthropology*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1985), p. 251.

²¹ C. F. Slade, *The Leicestershire Survey (c.A.D. 1130)* (Leicester University Occasional Paper in English Local History, 1st series, 7, 1956), passim; I. J. Sanders, *English Baronies. A Study of their Origins and Descent* (Oxford, 1960), pp. 49–50; L. C. Loyd, *The Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families* (Harleian Society, 103, 1955), p. 12; W. T. Reedy, 'The first two Bassets of Weldon', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 4 (1966–72), 241–45 and 295–98.

²² *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Book VI*, edited by M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1980), p. 468; *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon*, edited by J. Stephenson (Rolls Series, 1858), p. 170. That the nickname byname was, moreover, 'common', is attested by M-Th. Morlet, *Etude d'Anthroponymie Picard. Les Noms de Personne en Haute Picardie au XIIIe, XIVE, Xve Siècles* (Amiens, 1967), p. 184 and 'Les noms de personne à Eu du xiiiè au xve siècle', *Revue Internationale d'Onomastique*, 12 (1960), 205–19 (p. 205).

peer of Basset, had died in the White Ship in 1120. Geva, Maud's mother, however, was the daughter of Hugh, late earl of Chester, and the marriage of 1123 was apparently arranged at the instigation of Maud's first cousin, Ranulph, earl of Chester. The union thus exhibited some of the characteristics of hypogamy.²³ By the time of the marriage, the Basset *cognomen* had become hereditary.²⁴ Seven years later, however, in the Leicestershire Survey of about 1130, the original Basset fees were ascribed to Richard Basset by the Basset *cognomen*, but Maud, described as Maud Ridel, still responded for the Ridel fees autonomously. Subsequent heirs who received the Ridel lands adopted the surname of Ridel.²⁵ At the highest social levels, then, a specific meaning—hypogamy—might inform the description of females who retained the *cognomen* of their natal lineage.

Perhaps something of the influence of lineage at the highest social levels is visible in the *Rotuli de Dominabus* of 1185, the description of widows (and wards) at the level of tenures in chief.²⁶ Analysing widows only, twenty-one were described as *uxor* of one male and *filia* of another, that is, representing a relationship to two males, deceased husband and father. The reference to five others was through an association with two males, but in these cases former husband and brother, thus as *uxor* of one male and *soror* of another. Another twenty-seven were represented by a relationship to only one male, the former husband, thus as *uxor* of xy. Finally, and interestingly, thirty-one women who seem to have been widows were described simply by a *nomen* and *cognomen* without any relationship to a male. Although two of these last females known in the record by *nomen* and *cognomen* only were young, nineteen were aged between fifty and eighty, suggesting an association between description and age/status, perhaps implying that the

²³ *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis VI*, p. 468; J. Green, *The Government of England under Henry I* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 231–32; R. de Aragon, 'In pursuit of aristocratic women: a key to success in Anglo-Norman England', *Albion*, 14 (1982), 258–67 (p. 263), from which account I differ somewhat.

²⁴ As illustrated by the references to Bassets in the writ-charter of Henry I notifying the marriage: *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum 1066–1154 II: Regesta Henrici Primi 1100–1135*, edited by C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne (Oxford, 1956), p. 184 (no. 1389).

²⁵ *Leicestershire Survey*, passim; *Magnum Rotulum Scaccarii vel Magnum Rotulum Pipae*, edited by J. Hunter (Record Commission, 1833), p. 31.

²⁶ *Rotuli de Dominabus et Pueris et Puellis de xii Comitatus (1185)*, edited by J. H. Round (Pipe Roll Society 35, 1913).

women were no longer of marriageable status. In the case of the females described by their relationship to a male, the periphrase was usually in the forms *Alicia uxor xy* or simply *Uxor xy*. In some few—but only a few—cases, the widow was referenced by her late husband's *cognomen*: Alice de Eincurt *que fuit uxor Johannis de Eincurt* and Alice de Beauflow *que fuit uxor Thome de Beauflow*.²⁷ In an apparent instance of hypogamy, however, Matilda de Pecche was described only in relationship to her father—*que fuit filia Hamonis de Pecche*—despite the fact that she was obviously a widow, having eleven children by three marriages and attributed the age of fifty.²⁸

Whether and how hypogamy operated at the lower social levels of the free constitutes a very difficult question. For example, is this the reason why Agnes Gynes *relicta luce messoris* was so styled in her charter which in her widowhood contained her quitclaim to Newenham Abbey of lands which she and Luke used to hold of the Abbey?²⁹ Is it also possible that Joan, in her charter to St Augustine's Bristol, was styled *Johanna de Tokinton' uxor quondam Hamelini Blundi* because her family was superior to her husband's?³⁰ On more certain ground, the transactions of the females of the Escrop family recorded in the cartulary of Bridlington Priory provide a window on the influence of hypogamy. In two separate charters, 9.5a and 1r were conveyed to the Priory by *Ivo filius Walteri de Staxton et Alicia Escrop' uxor eius* and by *Ivo filius Walteri de Staxton et Alicia Escrop' uxor eius filia Philippi Escrop'*.³¹ Accordingly, in her widowhood, Alice was styled in her charters *Alicia Escrop quondam uxor Yuonis filii Walteri de Staxton'* and *Alicia Escrop'*.³²

Occurrences of this sort of difference in spousal *cognomina* amongst the free were not infrequent and have sometimes been explained as an aspect of the general instability of female *cognomina* by comparison with male *cognomina*.³³ In many cases, that general explanation probably must

²⁷ *Rotuli de Dominabus*, pp. 19 and 45.

²⁸ *Rotuli de Dominabus*, p. 85.

²⁹ Bodleian Library MS Top Devon d 5, fo 31r.

³⁰ *The Cartulary of St Augustine's Abbey, Bristol*, edited by D. Walker (Gloucestershire Record Society, 10, 1998), p. 292 (no. 464).

³¹ British Library Add MS 40,008, fos 83r–84r.

³² British Library Add MS 40,008, fo 84v.

³³ Now summarised by C. Clark, 'Onomastics: 7.2.8: Women's names', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language Volume II 1066-1476*, edited by N.

suffice, but in others an understanding of the specific prosopographical circumstances may elicit some sort of rationale for the differences.³⁴

Although the quantitative data from the charters concerning urban property in Coventry derive from the 1220s to the first decades of the fourteenth century, they do represent a fairly synchronic situation. Although a long period is contained, what exists in this long period of c.1220–1320 is a stage in the processes of describing women. Moreover, the cultural and social context is also an homologous one—an urban situation mainly involving burgesses. Perhaps we need to consider also an even more secular trend of those different processes between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries and furthermore a different social and cultural milieu. How far diachrony evolved can best be illustrated by reference to the rural peasantry as enumerated in manorial surveys. Whilst these records are no less rhetorical in their description and purpose, a relationship to experience seems to be present.

Table 5 presents the data for a secular period for the processes of description of rural peasant women in manorial surveys and in the *Rotuli Hundredorum* of 1279–80. Any analysis must be prefaced by some more caveats. First, there was a general movement in personal naming processes from a relatively less complicated to a more sophisticated form of identification which applies to males as well as females. Thus, whilst it is true, for example, that female tenants, because of their inherently conspicuous position, needed less sophisticated forms of description at some times, those very formations of description became iterative.

Conclusively, the manorial surveys through until the late twelfth century recorded female tenants in two forms: either (a) a *nomen* with *vidua* (for example, simply *Alicia vidua*); or (b) a *nomen* only. Importantly, no relationship is stated to a male. The form of *nomen* plus *vidua* described a status not a precise relationship to a male. In the early thirteenth century, in the Domesday of St Paul's of 1222, the position was aberrant, for the predominant description of female tenants involved periphrases, either: (a) the *nomen* with *relicta xy* or *quondam uxor xy* (such as *Alicia relicta*

Blake (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 585–87 after R. McKinley, esp. *The Surnames of Oxfordshire* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 188–91.

³⁴ As briefly suggested by M. Bourin, 'Les difficultés d'une étude de la designation des femmes', in *Génèse Médiévale de l'Anthroponymie Moderne Tome II-2*, edited by Bourin and P. Chareille (Tours, 1992), pp. 2–3.

Johannis Petit); or (b) the *nomen* with *filia xy* (such as *Alicia filia Johannis Petit*). Again, however, complexity exists, because it is not clear whether the purpose of the manorial surveys of St Paul's in 1222 was primarily to subordinate a female tenant to an association with a male or to relate that female tenant to the descent of land—that is, to authenticate the descent and tenure of the land. Whilst either may have obtained, such a form of description was not widely applied to male tenants. Nevertheless, the manorial surveys of the mid-thirteenth century and the governmental *Rotuli Hundredorum* of 1279–80 abandoned the use of periphrasal descriptions of women, with women predominantly identified by their *nomen* and the status as *vidua* or by their *nomen* and a byname.³⁵ In general, therefore, manorial surveys were not concerned to associate women with a male through periphrasal descriptions.

Nevertheless, complexity again intervenes, for many of the bynames assumed a possessive form, the genitival *-s*, particularly in the south and west, and so not least in the Gloucestershire surveys. Association with a male could thus be represented by the genitival *-s* on bynames. An example of this formation may suffice here. In the 1280s, Susanna the wife of Roger Doge was widowed. The homage elected William Russel to marry Susanna and to hold the land which her husband had held: *Willelmus Russel qui electus fuit ad contrahendum matrimonium cum Susanna Doge et ad tenendum terram que fuit Rogeri Doge quondam viri predictae Susanne*. William made a fine to avoid the imposition. Subsequently the court rolls record Susanna Doges convicted for illicitly reaping another tenant's grain, but her fine was condoned because she was poor. Here then a widow assumed her late husband's *cognomen* with the inflection of the genitival *-s*.³⁶ The gender differentiation is visible also in the court rolls of Halesowen, for members of the Brid family who were female were

³⁵ Additionally, widows were described by simply a *nomen* and the status *vidua* (e.g. *Alicia vidua*) in the survey of the Lincoln episcopal estate in 1225 × 1258, but I have not collected any statistics: The Queen's College, Oxford, MS 366; I am grateful to the College for permission to examine and use this MS.

³⁶ Bodleian Library Queen's Rolls 95 and 97: *Susanna Doges conuicta est in plena Curia quod nocte diei sancti Jacobi ingrediit super unam acram <Ade Batecok> et ibidem messuit frumentum ad valenciam unius denarii. [Marginal note] Condonatur quia pauper* (97). I am grateful to Queen's College for permission to examine and cite these documents.

designated consistently as Brid(de)s in the rolls, but male members as Brid.³⁷ This inflection is prevalent throughout the south and west. Although it was occasionally affixed for males' names, it was normatively associated with females. Again, whilst such a formation applied to males as well as females, it was more predominantly attached to females and thus assumed a discursive influence—became a discursive formation.³⁸

Here then we encounter differences according to legal status and the consequent records. In manorial surveys, the description of unfree peasant women was succinct. By contrast, free women were accorded the legal privilege of appearance in charters, which paradoxically produced a discursive formation of description which tended to their subordination to males and to the males from whom land was received. These relationships were not free of ambiguity. In some cases, (free) women were described in charters in relation to their husbands even when the land descended from their father. Nevertheless, despite some inconsistencies, the relationship to male and provenance of land does seem to have been an organising principle in describing females in charters.

If, however, lay subsidies are included in the analysis, the descriptions of females are slightly different. Legal differences are possibly dissolved in the lay subsidies, since, with some exceptions, the unfree as well as the free were assessed. Moreover, the association with land is removed, since lay subsidies were assessed on personal estate only. On the other hand, since there was a lower threshold of taxation, the lay subsidies are socially exclusive. Taking a purposive sample from three subsidies (Table 6) for Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Cumberland, temporal and spatial differences seem to have obtained in the description of women. In the 1296

³⁷ *Court Rolls of the Manor of Hales 1272 [sic]–1307*, edited by J. Amphlett and S. G. Hamilton (Worcestershire Historical Society, 1910), pp. 60, 66, 78, 107, 110, 119, 136, 159–60, 166, 174–75, 188, 209, 221 and 229; see also Felawes, Brunnes, Kinges, Bedeles, Rolues and Springes at pp. 71, 93, 107, 175, 179, 230, 233–34, 257, 261, 264, 266 and 290.

³⁸ In court rolls, moreover, it was not unusual to refer to wives and widows simply as *uxor* or *relict*a of *xy* without any identifying forename, since that succinct description sufficed to identify them, not least in presentments for brewing. See also Richard Cok v. Matilda la Valante at Halesowen in which plaintiff failed *cum non nominatur nec vocatur tali cognomine*; whilst such miskenning of name might have involved a male, it seems perhaps symptomatic that the confusion surrounded a female. *Court Rolls of the Manor of Hales*, p. 72 (1275).

taxation of Northumberland, the form of *nomen* and *vidua* (e.g. *Alicia vidua*) continued to account for 35 percent of women. That description by status did not occur at all frequently in the later subsidies in the sample. Only 15 percent of women were described as *uxor* or *relicta* of *xy* in that subsidy of 1296. The pattern in Cumberland in 1332 was much different, for here 43 percent of women were encompassed as *uxor* or *relicta* of *xy*. The component of females identified by a byname, however, was consistent in Northumberland in 1296 and Cumberland in 1332: 42 percent and 39 percent. The difference in time and space thus pertained to the change from simply *vidua* as a denotation of status and no relationship to a male in Northumberland in 1296 to *uxor* or *relicta* of a named male in Cumberland in 1332. Compare now Lincolnshire in 1332, where the predominant identification of women was by byname, but widows by the formula *uxor* or *relicta* of a named male. The data, of course, contain inherent difficulties, not least that the records which remain to us are Exchequer redactions not the original locally-produced records. It is not clear how far clerical redactions relate to the local forms or, indeed, how individual *scriptores* mediated the record. Even so, it is sufficiently evident that the description of women was fluid in all written records.

Another relationship between women, males and land, however, can occasionally be glimpsed in manorial court rolls, elucidated by Paul Harvey for the manor of Cuxham.³⁹ In at least two cases when a widow who held land by right of her first husband remarried, her new husband assumed the *cognomen* of her first husband. Thus, Robert Waldrugge, when he married Agnes widow of Robert Oldman, changed his name in 1296 to Oldman. What is witnessed here is the continuity of the *cognomen* associated with the tenement. Perhaps this notion can be extended further since the association of *cognomen* and tenement constituted and reinforced local social memory and widows thus acted as a cipher for the perpetuation of that social memory.⁴⁰

³⁹ P. D. A. Harvey, *A Medieval Oxfordshire Village. Cuxham 1240 to 1400* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 127–28.

⁴⁰ The concept of social memory is not uncritically accepted, but the literature, from Maurice Halbwachs onwards, is summarised by P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989) and J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992). I am grateful to Sherri Olson for sight of her paper which associates tenements and names as social memory.

Thus far, the discussion has concentrated on the relationship between women and males and the provenance of land. Is it possible, however, that some women established something of an independent identity? That possibility exists, as in the case of Rose *la custurere* in her charter to Westminster Abbey before 1214, in which she was styled *Roesia la custurere que fui* [sic] *uxor Willelmi Turpin de camera Domini Regis Henrici*.⁴¹ The implication here is surely that Rose established a personal and social identity through her occupational activity, although a relationship to a male was still appended as an additional periphrase so that identity was still fragmented. Similarly some nickname bynames with negative connotations might have indicated a social identity, although, as Cecily Clark astutely observed, such *cognomina* are rarely associated with women.⁴² In addition to the few cited by Clark, encountered also are Agnes Brysetymbr', Christine *Maucouant* and Agnes Brekewall', two of whom seem to be implicated in hedgebreaking.⁴³ Such bynames were not usually conferred on women, so that they too were more gender-specific, but where women were identified by such monikers, it suggests that that was indeed the local social identity of these women.⁴⁴ It might be remarked here that the attribute of women's descriptions in formal written records was usually prestige or polite forms which confirms the Ave/Eva paradox concerning women whose virtue was construed largely in terms of sexual behaviour.⁴⁵

Another circumstance which induced a separate social identity of a

⁴¹ *Westminster Abbey Charters*, p. 229 (no. 387).

⁴² Clark, 'Women's names', p. 587.

⁴³ PRO E179/135/15, mm. 4, 39 and 56. For this offence, M. K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370–1600* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 84–88.

⁴⁴ For a recent recapitulation of research by others into these nickname bynames, D. Postles, "'Oneself as another' and Middle English nickname bynames', *Nomina*, 22 (1999), 117–32. Add now to the examples cited there, Robert Schakeballoke of Gussage (Dorset) in the 1280s: Bodleian Library Queen's Roll 93; I am grateful to Queen's College for permission to use and cite these documents.

⁴⁵ L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers. Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1996), is the best illustration of this social concern. For our period, cf. Rose Bindebere v. Ralph Blay in trespass in which Rose called Ralph a thief and he called her a whore, the jurors deciding that Ralph had suffered the greater trespass than Rose and she was placed in mercy (1321): *The Court Baron*, edited by F. W. Maitland and W. P. Baildon (Selden Society, 4, 1891 for 1890), p. 133.

woman from her husband was desertion. At the request of Mariota *dicta Carter* in 1298, Oliver Sutton, bishop of Lincoln, issued a mandate to the archdeacon of Ely to deal with Robert Huthe of Grantham and Agnes *la Rus* of the same place who were living in adultery at Babraham in Cambridgeshire, Mariota being Robert's lawful wife and mother of his six children. A year later, Sutton was required to settle the dispute between Agnes *dicta Maydended* and her husband, Gilbert de Humberstone, who had deserted her, although he denied the marriage.⁴⁶

There is here then something of a difference between female social networks and the discursive representation of females—a difference between discourse and experience—in that, according to Judith Bennett, peasant female associations altered during the married period of their life-cycle.⁴⁷ Whilst that was undoubtedly a significant part of female experience, there were also discursive representations of females through their descriptions in different records, which also informed female experience. What these descriptive representations of females seem to suggest is that identities of free women were fluid and fragmented, influenced by the provenance of land and consequently by a relationship to different males. Although those sorts of periphrasal descriptions were also applied to some males, the predominance of their application to females was a serious discursive formation along gendered lines. Why such formations were not associated with unfree peasant females requires further investigation, but perhaps less importance attached to inheritance of unfree land by females was one explanation. By and large, it seems that legal status transected gender as far as the records allow a perception of difference.

⁴⁶ *The Rolls and Register of Bishop Oliver Sutton 1280–1299 VI*, edited by R. M. T. Hill (Lincoln Record Society, 64, 1969), pp. 84 and 202.

⁴⁷ J. M. Bennett, 'The tie that binds: peasant marriages and families in late medieval England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 15 (1983), 26–46.

Table 5 Description of rural women, 11th–13th centuries⁴⁸

Description	1065x1098	1114x1126	1166x1171
Nomen + vidua	12 (48%)	1 (5%)	28 (33%)
<i>Nomen + uxor/relicta x(y)</i>	0	0	6 (7%)
<i>Nomen only</i>	8 (32%)	11 (58%)	38 (45%)
<i>Nomen + cognomen</i>	2	2	4
<i>Nomen + filia x(y)</i>	1	0	1
Total of women	25	19	85

Table 5 (cont)

Description	1170x1182	1185	1222(a)
<i>Nomen + vidua</i>	20 (41%)	62 (43%)	23 (13%)
<i>Nomen + uxor/relicta x(y)</i>	1	2	87 (48%)
<i>Nomen only</i>	15 (31%)	53 (37%)	6 (3%)
<i>Nomen + cognomen</i>	1	12 (8%)	11 (6%)
<i>Nomen + filia x(y)</i>	0	6 (4%)	45 (25%)
Total of women	49	145	181

Table 5 (cont)

Description	1222(b)	1251–52	1265–68	1279
<i>Nomen + vidua</i>	166(44%)	55 (36%)	18 (8%)	137 (23%)

⁴⁸ *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, edited by D. C. Douglas (London, 1932), pp. 25–44; G. C. O. Bridgman, ‘The Burton Abbey twelfth-century surveys,’ in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (William Salt Archaeological Society) (1918 for 1916), pp. 212–47; *The Red Book of Worcester*, edited by M. Hollings (Worcestershire Historical Society, 1934–50) (for the date, C. Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society. The Estates of the Bishopric of Worcester 680–1540* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 3); *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century*, edited by B. A. Lees (London, 1935), pp. 1–135; *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae III*, edited by W. H. Hart (Rolls Series, 1867), pp. 35–213; *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia I*, edited by W. H. Hart and P. A. Lyons (Rolls Series, 1884), pp. 241–396; *The Domesday of St Paul’s of the Year M.CC.XXII*, edited by W. H. Hale (Camden Society o.s. 69, 1858), pp. 1–106; *The Warwickshire Hundred Rolls of 1279–80. Stoneleigh and Kineton Hundreds*, edited by T. John (Oxford, 1992); British Library Cotton MS Tiberius B II (Ely bishopric estate).

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<i>Nomen + uxor/relicta x(y)</i>	28(7%)	21 (15%)	51 (22%)	8
<i>Nomen + cognomen</i>	98(26%)	51 (39%)	164 (70%)	380 (63%)
<i>Nomen + filia x(y)</i>	23(6%)	13 (9%)	few	71 (12%)
<i>Nomen only</i>	66(17%)	few	few	8
Total of women	381	140	233	604

Notes to Table 5

Only the major categories of descriptions are included in the table.

1065x1098 Bury St Edmunds Abbey estate

1170x1182

Bishop of Worcester's estate

1251–55 Gloucester Abbey estate

1114x1126 Burton Abbey estate

1185 Templars' estate

1265–68 Ramsey Abbey estate

1166x1171 Ramsey Abbey estate

1222(a) St Paul's, London, estate

1279 Warws Hundred Rolls

1222(b) Ely bishopric estate (excluding Wisbech, since it is urban)

The totals include other forms of name not included in the table, but these are small numbers.

Table 6 Female *cognomina* and descriptions in lay subsidies

Description	Northumberland 1296	
	Kesteven/Holland 1332	Lindsey 1332
	Cumberland 1332*	
Byname	85 (42%)	735 (75%)
	1013 (77%)	39 (39%)
<i>Uxor/relicta x(y)</i>	30 (15%)	203 (21%)
	227 (17%)	43 (43%)
<i>Vidua</i>	70 (35%)	7 (<1%)
	16 (1%)	10 (10%)
<i>Filia x(y)</i>	9 (5%)	32 (3%)
	59 (4%)	5 (5%)
<i>Nomen only</i>	7 (3%)	
	4 (<1%)	3 (3%)
Total women	201	977
	1319	100

Notes to Table 6

* -wyf (2) and -doghter (1).

PRO E179/135/14–15 (Kesteven and Holland); PRO E179/135/16

(Lindsey); *Cumberland Lay Subsidy ... 6th Edward III* ed. J. P. Steel (Kendal, 1912); *The Northumberland Lay Subsidy Roll of 1296* ed. C. M. Fraser (Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Record Series, 1, 1968).