Angry Women in Premodern England
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Recent work on heroic anger in Anglo-Saxon England has, perhaps justly, focused largely on anger exhibited by men. Historically, anger has always been the prerogative of men—of those, in other words, who were socially empowered to enact the violence or display that anger (seemingly) demands. The close association of anger with violence, and violence with heroic models of masculinity, would thus seem to foreclose the possibility of violence being enacted out of other emotional motivations or by other—specifically feminine—actors.

This paper seeks to complicate gendered aspects of anger in both Latin and vernacular material from Anglo-Saxon England through a wider consideration of the literature than that offered by previous scholars. The specter of the angry, hectoring wife in Ecclesiasticus 25 and 26 and Juvenal’s Satires on wicked women haunts texts that eventually come to be regarded as “paradigmatic” misogynist and misogamous literature; she may come to life in Wulfstan’s Canon 130 (second recension) and numerous penitentials, which inveigh against angry wives and women who abuse their servants. Taken together, a wider consideration of the Anglo-Saxon textual record suggests that women’s anger was acknowledged, even if it was condemned.