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The Wilderness in Medieval English Literature: Genre, Audience and Society

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THE WILDERNESS IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH LITERATURE:

GENRE, AUDIENCE AND SOCIETY

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Kenneth Myers, for his unfailing support and love.
Without you, this endeavor would not have been possible

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ABSTRACT

"The Wilderness in Medieval English Literature: Genre, Audience and Society" focuses

on the disjunction between the actual environmental conditions of medieval England and

the depiction of the wilderness in the literature of the time period from the Anglo-Saxon

conversion to the close of the Middle Ages. Using environmental history to identify the

moments of slippage between fact and fiction, this project examines the ideology behind

the representations of the wilderness in literature and the relationship of these

representations to social practices and cultural norms as well as genre and targeted

audience. The first chapter argues that the depiction of early Anglo-Saxon saints and their

relationships to the wilderness of England helped to construct a Christian countryside for

the newly converted Anglo-Saxons. The next chapter asserts that the epic *Beowulf*

employs wilderness settings in order to address Anglo-Saxon anxiety regarding the pagan

past of their ancestors on the Continent. The third chapter examines an eclectic group of

English histories written after the Norman Invasion, showing that their use of the

landscape of England subverts the Norman master-narrative of political and social

superiority. The final chapter of this study examines the earliest Middle English Robin

Hood poems, arguing that they represent the voice of the English peasant and manifest a

desire to regain control of the natural places of England that had been appropriated by the upper classes of the feudal structure. Overall, this project asserts that the literary images of the natural world in the medieval literature of England are a complicated synthesis of real environmental conditions and the ideology espoused by each particular genre and are, therefore, intimately tied to time and place.

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Introduction

"The Wilderness in Medieval English Literature: Genre, Audience and Society" focuses on the disjunction between the actual environmental conditions of medieval England and the depiction of the wilderness in the literature of the time period from the Anglo-Saxon conversion to the close of the Middle Ages. Using environmental history to identify the moments of slippage between fact and fiction, I examine the ideology behind the representation of the wilderness and the relationship of these representations to social practices and cultural norms as well as genre and the targeted audience. This project argues that the literary images of the natural world in the medieval literature of England are a complicated synthesis of real environmental conditions and the ideology espoused by each particular genre and are, therefore, intimately tied to time and place.

The first great English writer, Bede, opens his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* with a physical description of the British Isles. While much of this description is taken from his sources, both classical and British,[1] his arrangement of the material and his original additions display Bede's own interests in time and geography, a theme that is carried through many of his works from *De temporibus* and *De temporum ratione* to his descriptions of the holy land in his exegetical works as well as his consciousness of man's position in the physical world in *De natura rerum*. Even within the body of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede returns again and again to geography and time in his descriptions of the various kingdoms and in his concerns regarding the dating of Easter. Not only does the opening set this continuing theme for the *Ecclesiastical*

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[1] Merrills, *History and Geography*, lists Pliny, Orosius, Solinus, Isidore and Gildas as sources of the Geographical Introduction, 250.

History, but it also takes great pains to situate Bede's work within a specific time and place, locating England in relation to the rest of the Christian world, setting it both spatially and temporally as an extension of the evangelical mission of the New Testament.[2] England appears as a very real, physical location within Bede's narrative as it joins the kingdom of God. Yet, the *Ecclesiastical History* achieves timelessness through Bede's use of Biblical archetypes, the power of his English saints to affect miracles beyond the grave and the famous sparrow metaphor.[3] As one of the first figures in what would became a long and glorious tradition of English writing, Bede's Geographical Introduction to his most famous work sets a dichotomy of the English landscape that extends through the close of the Middle Ages in the fifteenth century: a landscape that is at once timeless and yet grounded in the specifics, both natural and political, of England's location at the edge of the world. A knight's journey into the forest or a saint's sojourn in the wilderness both contain an archetypal quality that makes the narrative universal no matter the place of production, while at the same times, medieval English texts betray their own political and social anxieties in their representation of the landscape and in their use, or lack thereof, of the real British countryside. The disconnect between the physical topography and its representation in literature reveals the ideological agenda at play in medieval writers' constructions of the natural world, especially in areas considered as wilderness.

A brief history of the English countryside illustrates the interaction between mankind and the natural world, an integral aspect of this study. The history of the English countryside begins 10,000 years ago with the retreat of the last ice age. Since that time

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[2] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 244. Merrills specifically sees the *Ecclesiastical History* as an extension of Acts.
[3] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 239-40.

Britain has been continuously inhabited by humans, the greatest single influence upon the land. From the widespread burning of land to lure animals with new growth as conducted by the Mesolithic hunter-gatherers (8,000-3,500 BCE) to the clearing of land for plants and livestock accomplished by the Neolithic farmers (4,000-2,000 BCE) to the crafting of better implements and weapons that led to the earliest large-scale land management efforts in Britain during the Bronze Age (2,200-750 BCE) and were then improved upon during the Iron Age (750 BCE-43 CE), human kind has continually modified the natural world in its progress towards civilization. The oldest records of Britain begin with the Roman occupation (43-410), which brought a fully-developed governmental system to the island. The Roman foundation of urban centers and the laying of roads influence the British countryside to this day. Recognized as a valuable source of materials, the new province was treated accordingly and the Romans cleared forests, drained wetlands and increased farmland to produce food for the Empire. Roman encroachment upon the land of England was probably so extensive that very little of what might be termed wilderness or woodlands remained in the areas controlled by the Empire at the time of their withdrawal, at which point the reclaimed wetlands flooded, but the farmland was generally maintained.

Such was the land that the Anglo-Saxons found when they migrated to England in the mid-fifth century. They did not encounter a wild, primitive landscape, but instead one that bore the mark of the previous invaders and would in turn be modified by the new wave of inhabitants, physically and ideologically. The Anglo-Saxons considered all land as a valuable resource and used everything that was available to them in some way, either for farmland, seasonal pasturage or even salt-making and fishing in the less populated

Fenland of East Anglia. Due to Roman deforestation, woodland was especially valuable and was heavily managed through techniques such as coppicing and pollarding.[4] While some areas of England were more populated and, therefore, more managed than others, there was no place that was not subjected to human control. The ideas of an English wilderness, however, played a powerful role in the imagination of English writers. The modern English word "wilderness" comes from the Anglo-Saxons. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines wilderness as "a wild or uncultivated region or tract of land, uninhabited, or inhabited only by wild animals" and traces its etymology to the Old English *wild(d)eornes*, the genitive of *wild-deōr*, which Bosworth and Toller define as "a wild animal, wild beast"; in essence the wilderness is "[the place] of the wild beasts."[5] The genitive case shows possession, making the wilderness not just the place "inhabited only by wild animals" as in the modern definition of the word, but, for the Anglo-Saxons, a place held and possessed by the wild animals. This small grammatical detail provides great insight into the Anglo-Saxon concept of both their communities and the places beyond the boundaries of civilization. The community, represented by the mead hall, was held by humanity, but the world beyond was under the control of something wild and fierce, a threatening Other. The dichotomy between country and city that Raymond Williams examines beginning with the sixteenth century[6] has its foundation in English

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[4] Coppicing is a technique in which a tree is cut very close to the ground, causing it to generate multiple trunks either from the stump or from suckers extending in concentric circles from the stump. Pollarding is similar, but the trunk is cut six to ten feet above the ground, causing the new trunks to sprout at the level of the cut. It is a more difficult process and is generally reserved for when the tree cannot be protected from animals, wild or domesticated, who prefer to feed on the tender shoots. While certain species, such as conifers, do not respond well to these techniques, many others, such as ash and elm do, and in fact, these processes extend the life and usefulness of the tree. These techniques generate an ongoing supply of wood that can be harvested at more manageable sizes.

[5] All Old English definitions are taken from the *Dictionary of Old English: A to G* and from Bosworth and Toller (H-Z), unless otherwise noted.

[6] Williams, *The Country and the City*.

literature here in the ideology expressed in this word form that instinctively locates spaces not contained within human civilization within the domain of the Other.

Anglo-Saxon dominance in England ended with the Norman Invasion of 1066, which likewise impacted the land physically and ideologically. The Normans imported continental Forest Laws that set aside land for royal use, conducted the extensive building of castle works that still dot the English countryside and supported the rapid growth of towns and urban centers. Population growth placed additional strain on the country; wetlands were drained to produce arable land and the amount of woodland in England dwindled to only seven percent.[7] The Norman Invasion also brought extensive changes in the language and terminology related to the wilderness. The Old English *wild-deōr* is preserved in the Middle English *wīlde dēr*, "An undomesticated beast in contrast to a domesticated counterpart; a woodland creature; wild animal; an animal hunted for sport; a savage beast, predatory animal, a carrion eater,"[8] but it no longer does double-duty in also providing the terminology for land beyond human control. *Wīldernes* now becomes separately differentiated and begins to take on the more modern meaning and is defined as: "Wild, uninhabited, or uncultivated territory; trackless, desolate land; a tract or region of wild or uninhabited land; a desert; a devastated or depopulated place, a ruined city; a state of ruin or desolation, the condition of devastation." While Old English *wild(d)eōrnes* conveyed both a sense of physical location as well as possession by beasts, the place and the animals become separated in the Middle English and the wilderness begins to be defined by its own qualities removed from the creatures in it. At this same time *forest* enters the English language from the French of the conquerors, who brought

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[7] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 65.
[8] Middle English definitions are from the *Middle English Dictionary* housed in the online Middle English Compendium.

the continental practice of afforestation, setting aside tracts of land for royal use. The

Middle English Dictionary defines forest as "A large tract of uninhabited, or sparsely

inhabited, woodland; a wilderness; A wooded tract belonging to a ruler, set apart for

hunting; a royal forest; also, a wood enclosed by walls, a park." The idea of the

wilderness contained in this definition displays a radical shift from the Anglo-Saxon

conception of the term. While Middle English *wīlde dēr* and *wīldernes* split the combined

essence of physical place and animal possessor contained in the Old English

wild(d)eornes, *forest*, in its definition as a preserve, maintains the presence of wild

beasts, but with a switched perspective. The Anglo-Saxon sense that civilization and

wilderness stand in opposition becomes replaced by a Norman assertion of conquest and

dominance. The wilderness embedded within the Middle English *forest* is no longer a

limitless place, but instead a location defined by legal boundaries and possessed by

humans, specifically the aristocracy, creating a sense of privilege that represents the

feudal power structure. The Anglo-Saxon primal force that stood in opposition to the

human world and threatened the tenuous civilization loses its bite and much of its threat

as the Middle English *wīlde dēr* is now "an animal hunted for sport."

  This brief environmental history, which lays the groundwork for my study of the

wilderness in medieval English literature, rises from the work of environmental historians

who study the interaction between the human world and the natural world across time.

Early in the twentieth century, H. C. Darby examined the natural features of England

before 1800. His four books cover a wide range of topics from the Roman occupation to

the extensive final draining projects of the seventeenth century.[9] Other authors have

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[9] Darby, *The Draining of the Fens* and *The Changing Fenland*. Darby, ed., *An Historical Geography of England* and *A New Historical Geography*.

focused on more specific aspects of the medieval English countryside, including Della Hooke whose extensive study on the various natural ecosystems of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms employs archaeological and historical evidence and discusses the natural terrain, including plants and animals, as well as the effect it may have had on the migrating Anglo-Saxons.[10] More recently, Hooke has directed her scholarship specifically toward the woodlands of Anglo-Saxon England and examined the importance of trees as cultural and religious symbols and as economic resources.[11] Oliver Rackham has also contributed extensive information both historical and ecological on the woodlands of Britain.[12] Other environmental historians have focused more specifically on the extensive English wetlands. Mattias Jacobsson's dissertation explores the various hydronymic terms used in Anglo-Saxon sources and in the Domesday Book of 1086.[13] Stephen Rippon's discussion of the coastal wetlands of Northern Europe includes the English fens from the Roman occupation to 1500.[14] Kelley Wickham-Crowley builds upon archaeological evidence and information on changes in the water tables during this period to create a picture of uncertainty regarding the physical reality of land along the coast, which in turn affects how the Anglo-Saxon identity relates to these places.[15] More specific to the environmental history of the High Middle Ages, scholars such as O. H. Creighton[16] and Robert Liddiard[17] examine the influence of the landscape upon the location of castle works and conversely, the resulting influence of castles upon the countryside as both estate centers and symbols of control and power.

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[10] Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*.
[11] Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England*.
[12] Rackham, *Ancient Woodlands*, *The History of the Countryside* and *Woodlands*.
[13] Jacobsson, "Wells, Meres, and Pools."
[14] Rippon, *The Transformation of Coastal Wetlands*.
[15] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*."
[16] Creighton, *Castles and Landscapes*.
[17] Liddiard, "The Castle Landscapes of Anglo-Norman East Anglia."

With such advancements in medieval English environmental history, literary scholars have recently begun to apply ecocritical methods to medieval literature. Richard Butts discusses the psychological effects of the fenlands of *Beowulf* upon the reader.[18] John Howe examines the landscapes of Anglo-Saxon hagiography.[19] Corinne Saunders' extensive exploration of the forests of medieval romance is a valuable resource for medievalists interested in environmental scholarship.[20] Alfred K. Siewers has taken a leading role in medieval ecocritical studies with his book *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape*, which examines the Otherworld trope in Irish and Welsh medieval literature and "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation Building." While ecocritical methodology has become an established form of criticism in many other literary fields, the area of medieval studies is still a fertile frontier for such scholarship and a great deal of work remains to be done.

My study is unique in that it focuses upon the interaction between literature and the true environmental conditions of England across a large period of time and in a variety of locations rather than focusing upon a specific text, time or site of production. Instead of separating environmental history and ecocriticism as separate disciplines, I use both to identify the boundary between realistic and literary landscapes in the literature of medieval England. By pinpointing these moments of slippage, I can then classify the ideology behind the construction of the wilderness in these texts and articulate the cultural work these texts and their depiction of the natural world perform. Even when the wilderness depicted in a text is a complete fabrication, the need to create a landscape so

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[18] Butts, "The Analogic Mere."
[19] Howe, "Creating Symbolic Landscapes."
[20] Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*.

removed from reality is still significant. As already discussed, little actual wilderness remained in England after the Roman occupation, but the need of writers to employ a wilderness often overrode any desire for realism. Examining literary works across the entire medieval period allows me to connect the depictions of the wilderness to cultural anxieties that result from moments of social upheaval. Moreover, this study places the various genres of English literature and their representations of nature into conversation and even conflict with each other, especially as they represent a variety of audiences: upper class, lower class, religious and common. While reinforcing an ideology regarding the natural world and the wilderness that lies beyond society, each genre also helps to create the ideology it upholds by affirming the stance of the targeted audience vis-à-vis the natural world. Genres examined in this study comprise hagiography, epic, romance, ballad, outlaw tale and history, including biography and chronicle, and represent a breadth of English works from approximately 700 CE to 1500 CE.

I engage in a variety of methods and theoretical approaches to uncover the ways in which the wilderness both shapes and transmits the ideology of the text. Following Williams's assertion that art is not just a product of society but an interactive practice,[21] my central question is always "What cultural work does this text perform?" Part of answering this question is an examination of genre. While the topic of genre in literary studies can become a perilous debate, at the very least, generic classifications and discussions seek to identify the expectations that a particular type of text or mode evokes in the targeted audience. In "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature," Hans Robert Jauss asserts that "literary forms and genres are thus neither subjective creations of the author, nor merely retrospective ordering-concepts, but rather primarily social

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[21]Williams, "Base and Superstructure."

phenomena, which means that they depend on functions in the lived world,"[22] articulating the role of literature in the life of the community and the belief that literature fulfills and addresses certain cultural needs. In Jauss's "hierarchy of genres," in which particular literary forms rise and fall according to the needs of the group, the evolution of history and culture creates a revolving system within which particular literary genres assume the prominent position at particular times according to social needs and conditions.[23] In following the "hierarchy of genres," this project moves chronologically through medieval English literature, examining the connection between each chosen genre and the social and cultural, as well as environmental, conditions of the time. Investigating the relationship between the cultural function of the genre and its implied audience illuminates the impact of the wilderness landscapes of the texts and their importance as expressions of cultural values.

Of central importance to my study is the relationship of humankind to the natural world, particularly to what we call the wilderness, a term that appears easy to define. A bevy of images comes to mind: the children of Israel wandering in the desert, Mary Shelley's bleak depiction of Mont Blanc, Lewis and Clark's exploration of the American West, the isolated location in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or the currently much-contested Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The definitions, as discussed above, imply a certain amount of indeterminacy. If an area of land is uninhabited except for wild animals, it is an unknown region colored by all the shades of mystery, fear and danger associated with the Other. Today, we romanticize "The Wilderness" as a mythical place that existed before wrecking civilization spread across the Earth and we want desperately

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[22] Jauss, "Theory of Genres," 135.
[23] Jauss, "Theory of Genres," 140-41.

to believe that we can still preserve the final, unspoiled vestiges of it through various park systems and global initiatives. The brief environmental history given above, however, demonstrates that the time when any places untouched by humans still existed in England ended a very long time before the literature of the Middle Ages was produced. The wilderness, therefore, is actually a human construct. As Simon Schama asserts, "The wilderness, after all, does not locate itself, does not name itself," nor does it "venerate itself."[24] Instead, humans create the wilderness by setting boundaries between us and the Other. Schama continues by stating that while we assume that the wilderness is free from the impact of humanity, the opposite is actually true. Our designation of the wilderness, instead, makes it a product of our culture. Indeed, as William Cronon explains, wilderness does not stand in opposition to "humanity"; it is instead a human construction which is changed and adapted according to time, place and culture: "We too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires."[25] Not only is the wilderness the Other, the opposite of the civilization that defines it, but it is also a mirror that reflects the image of civilization back upon itself. The wilderness actually defines the society through both of these functions. This applies both to the physical land designated as wilderness as well as the idea of the wilderness. For the purposes of this study, therefore, rather than defining wilderness as an untouched, primeval land, which would exclude all of Britain by the time of the Middle Ages, I define it as any area that exists beyond spaces of human civilization. This definition follows the original Old English meaning of *wild(d)eornes* as the place held by wild animals, and outside human control. This definition does not

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[24] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 7.
[25] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 69-70.

exclude places where a human might make an appearance, but instead, includes such places because the human, in these instances, is the alien Other.

The interaction between culture and natural world illustrates a system within which the physical environment helps to shape the culture while, conversely, the culture shapes the physical environment. This "environmental unconscious," as Lawrence Buell terms it,[26] asserts the influence of the natural world upon the literary imagination. In *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and the Environment in the U. S. and Beyond*, Buell reveals the elusiveness of the term "place" and its distinction from "space." A space is a location, but a place is a space that has been ascribed some special meaning and, like the wilderness, is defined simultaneously by physical boundaries and by the feelings associated with it.[27] This factor makes the definition of place extremely "flexible."[28] Buell's theories, which help to explain humanity's relationship with the natural world, describe five elements of "place-connectedness." Although not all of these methods are discussed in this project, they all nevertheless deserve brief mention here to illustrate the wide variety of ways humans connect to the natural world. First, and most commonly discussed here, is an imagination of place as a series of concentric circles beginning with the self, moving outward, growing greater but at the same time decreasing in intimacy.[29] The second is a model of place as an "archipelago of locales," scattered and remote, represented by the various facets of a person's life which rarely interconnect such as home, work, school.[30] The third imagining of place, the timescape, is one in which the perception of the space is itself not stable, but is instead an image that changes

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[26] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 26.
[27] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 59.
[28] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 60.
[29] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 64.
[30] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 64.

over time.[31] Buell's fourth category, place accumulation, consists of an amalgamation of all the significant places within one's life.[32] The final model, imagined place, describes a connection with a "fictive or virtual place." One need not have been to a particular site to ascribe meaning to it, such as in the reverence for a native home or for an imagined utopia or place that one has read or heard about.[33]

The need to connect to spaces and endow them with meaning, thus making them places, in Buell's terminology, highly influences the representations of the wilderness in medieval English literature. Authors both wanted to represent a recognizable terrain while also constructing a wilderness that performed an ideological function within the culture. The result was a sophisticated amalgamation of true environmental conditions and literary meaning that created a new space within which authors addressed the cultural concerns of their times.

This study moves chronologically, providing an overview of the changes in the perception towards the wilderness and their connection to social and political conditions. I begin with the earliest surviving writings in English, which were spurred by the conversion to Christianity and conclude with ballads that were popular at the close of the Middle Ages. The following chapter summaries are designed to provide an outline of this trajectory.

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[31] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 67.
[32] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 69.
[33] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 71-73.

Chapter 1: Conversion and the Natural World: Early Anglo-Saxon Saints and the Wilderness

Christian hagiography has made use of the wilderness since the origin of the genre in Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*, in which the desert saint relinquishes his worldly possessions and makes his home in the wilds of Egypt. Such texts as Athanasius's and Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin* depicted the natural world and wilderness as the location of trials and temptation for the Christian. When Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, however, sought to add to the Christian culture by documenting the deeds of their own saints, they were influenced by not only the Mediterranean heritage but also a uniquely Celtic perspective regarding the natural world, in which the wilderness became not just the location of trials, but the true home and natural environment of the saint. In her book *How Christianity Came to Britain and Ireland*, Michelle Brown articulates this unique blending and Eleanor Duckett, in *The Wandering Saints of the Early Middle Ages*, examines the ways in which the Irish *perigrinatio* contributed to Celtic asceticism, including its tendency to bring saints into close contact with the natural world. While charming animal stories are a recognizable result of this synergism, my primary concern in this chapter is the effect that the Anglo-Saxon combination of Mediterranean and Celtic attitudes towards the natural world had upon the earliest hagiographies in England, the ones that detail the period of conversion, including some of the hagiographical episodes in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. John M. Howe has already noted the Christian need for a "reinterpretation of geography" in the early stages of conversion,[34] and Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head have detailed the Christian use of churches, monasteries, stone crosses, wells and springs, many of these adapted from formerly

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[34] Howe, "Conversion," 63.

pagan sites, to create a "Christian topography of sacred spaces."[35] While Jennifer Neville asserts that the natural world in Anglo-Saxon poetry functions as a literary device,[36] I have found that the wilderness in Bede's depictions of Sts. Oswald, Cedd and Æthelthryth in the *Ecclesiastical History* and in the early hagiographies of St. Cuthbert and St. Guthlac balance the need to locate their figures within an appropriately hagiographical landscape with a desire to depict the countryside of England accurately for an international audience as well as a local one. These early works not only justify the addition of England, located at the edge of civilization, to the Christian world, but also provide the newly converted population with local saints, connected to very real, local places, strengthening the force of the conversion.

This chapter focuses on the earliest works that depict English saints, relating the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity to the depiction of the wilderness in these texts. After a discussion of the development and influence of the genre of hagiography, I examine its function in the early days of the conversion and its role in providing a physical location in England for the newly converted Anglo-Saxons. Although Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is not a hagiography, it does include the earliest biographies of several English saints who are integral to my study. I discuss St. Oswald, whose death in battle resulted in the creation of a holy spot that was literally steeped in the blood of the saint. I also discuss Bede's depiction of St. Æthelthryth's translation, the miraculous discovery of her sarcophagus in the wetlands of East Anglia and Bede's memorial verse to this Anglo-Saxon queen, which seeks to add Æthelthryth to the list of Christian virgins. I next examine the two lives of St. Cuthbert, one by an anonymous brother of

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[35] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxxiii.
[36] Neville, *Representations*, 1-3.

Lindisfarne and the other by Bede. These works depict the Northumbrian countryside and

Cuthbert's hermitage, not as a place of trial and tribulation, but as the proper location for

a holy man performing God's work. I conclude this chapter with an examination of

Felix's text on the life of St. Guthlac, who dwelled in the East Anglian Fenland. Felix

uses many of the tropes associated with early hagiography, but he adapts them in such a

way that he creates an integral connection between Guthlac's mission and his location on

Crowland. I assert that these texts establish the important connection between the Anglo-

Saxons, the conversion and their location as migrants within the Promised Land of

England.

Chapter 2: *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon Anxiety in the Landscape of the Pagan Past

     In my second chapter, I examine Anglo-Saxon anxiety regarding the pagan past of

the continental ancestors as acted out in the landscapes of the great Anglo-Saxon epic,

Beowulf. I discuss *Beowulf*'s classification as an epic and conclude that the epic

perspective of a community fighting for survival against outside forces is integral to the

ideological stance of the work and its depiction of the wilderness. Much of the

perspective of *Beowulf* derives from the poet's use of history, as already recognized by

Robert Hanning[37] and Roberta Frank.[38] R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, in

their Introduction to *Klaeber's Beowulf*, articulate what they call the "Pagan Past and

Christian Present" of the poem in which a Christian poet attempts to recreate the past of

the pagan ancestors on the Continent.[39] While this perspective does explain what may

appear to be a Christian overlay upon a pagan poem, a position already thoroughly

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[37] Hanning, "*Beowulf* as Heroic History."
[38] Frank, "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History."
[39] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* lxviii.

contradicted by Klaeber,[40] it also enhances the text's use of history to face the anxiety of the now converted Anglo-Saxons regarding figures from their past. Others who have examined the influence of pagan aspects on *Beowulf* include Niles in "Pagan Survivals and Popular Beliefs" and Terry A. Babb in "*Beowulf*: Myth and Meaning." While all dramatized history creates an opportunity for the audience to participate in a shared past, I assert that *Beowulf*, additionally, teaches its contemporary audience how to think about the damned, heathen ancestors, with much of the confrontation of the past taking place in the vivid wilderness of this epic.

The landscapes of *Beowulf* are captivating and have been discussed by such scholars as Richard Butts,[41] Margaret Gelling,[42] Sam Newton,[43] Alfred K. Siewers[44] and Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley.[45] The importance of an epic landscape that contributes to the mood of the scene has been detailed by Theodore M. Andersson, who also examines scenes in Beowulf.[46] I extend his concept by connecting it not only to Anglo-Saxon anxiety regarding the pagan past, but also to the poet's use of liminal spaces within the poem. Liminal figures such as Grendel, his mother, the dragon and even Beowulf and the slave who enters the dragon's lair drive the action of the poem by transgressing the boundaries between civilization and wilderness, thereby creating new spaces that allow for a renegotiation of belief regarding the ancestral past.

In this chapter, I deal solely with the epic *Beowulf*, although I do employ some examples from *Genesis A*. I focus on the battle scenes between Beowulf and Grendel's

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[40] Klaeber, *The Christian Elements*.
[41] Butts, "The Analogic Mere."
[42] Gelling, "The Landscape of *Beowulf*."
[43] Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf*.
[44] Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion."
[45] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*."
[46] Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*.

mother and between Beowulf and the dragon as these take place outside the mead hall in what I term the "Pagan Wilderness." The initial attacks of Grendel are also discussed, though not in great detail, as they embody the relentless struggle between humanity and the natural world prominent in a pagan ideology. Ronald Hutton's *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* provides insight into the paganism that the pre-conversion Anglo-Saxons would have practiced and which may have still presented something of a threat and concern in the time of the audience of the *Beowulf* poet. Among other characteristics, including the manifestation of a variety of deities within the natural world, Anglo-Saxon paganism viewed humanity and nature in an antagonistic relationship for supremacy, a relationship where humans were forced to pacify continually the deities or suffer the consequences and where humans found it necessary to fight for dominion over the animal kingdom. This sense of a relentless and merciless natural world manifests in the attacks of Grendel and his mother, outside forces from the wilderness that threaten the tenuous civilization of the Danes, and culminates in the death of Beowulf in his battle with the dragon. I show that although the ending of the poem is apocalyptic, the creation of Beowulf's Barrow permanently alters the landscape, creating a monument that looks to the time of the poet when Christianization has produced a new relationship with the natural world, making the pagan's ongoing struggle for supremacy against a harsh and relentless nature unnecessary.

Chapter 3: Landscapes of Resistance: English Histories in the Anglo-Norman Period

The Norman Conquest of 1066 marked not only a transition between the Old and Middle English periods, but a radical change in the relationship between the English and the natural world. Chapter Three considers an eclectic group of histories written for English audiences during the Anglo-Norman period (1066-1204). These texts construct the wilderness not as a site of religious conversion or the location of struggle with the past, but as a place of resistance to Norman control. As already examined by Kenneth J. Tiller, post-Conquest, Norman-sympathetic histories not only asserted the superiority of the new ruling class, but also coopted the Anglo-Saxon migration narrative, making the Normans the chosen conquerors of Britain, [47] thereby creating a master-narrative that suppressed Anglo-Saxon history and removed the English from the position of chosen people in Britain as articulated in such works as the *Battle of Brunanburh*. Another aspect of the Norman program of domination was "ecological imperialism" as first described by Alfred Crosby[48] and modified by Michael Williams to include any systematic policy that functions as a tool of empire enacted upon the natural environment.[49] Although the situation of the conquered English is not coeval with later populations oppressed by empirical aggression, their position during the first century and a half after the Battle of Hastings does bear some resemblance to more recent colonial situations and I employ some use of postcolonial theory in this chapter. I show that the wilderness constructed in these texts presents a reaction to Norman programs of domination, giving voice to

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[47] Tiller, *Laȝamon's "Brut."*
[48] Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*.
[49] Williams, "Ecology, Imperialism and Deforestation," 169.

English concerns and resulting in the creation of landscapes that cannot be controlled by the conquerors.

The first text I examine is *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. As Cecily Clark notes in her edition of the *Peterborough Chronicle 1070-1154*, it is the only surviving historical source from this time that also records the voice of the English during this period.[50] Although it provides little in the way of topographical description, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* does illustrate the Norman program of ecological imperialism and, more importantly, the reaction of the average person to these policies. Three specific areas— the construction of castles, the implementation of Continental Forest Laws and the national inquest that led to the Domesday Book—provide information on the ways Norman imperialism impacted the landscape and the English people's relationship with it. I next discuss the *Gesta Herewardi*, which details the resistance of the last English hold-out against William the Conqueror. While recognized as an important archetype for the development of the English outlaw tale, this text has received little attention in and of itself. Only two scholars, Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr.[51] and Hugh M. Thomas,[52] have examined it as a work of literature and neither devotes more than passing attention to Hereward's location within the Fenland of East Anglia in a threatening position along the frontier of the Norman holdings. I assert that the author, Richard of Ely, although writing in Latin, creates a hybrid text that both mimics the literature of the ruling classes while also subverting Norman control by constructing a wilderness that both aids and provides for the insurgents, while at the same time hindering the Normans in their attempted conquest of the Fenland.

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[50] Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, xxii.
[51] Bremmer, "*Gesta Herewardi*."
[52] Thomas, "The *Gesta Herewardi*" and *The English and the Normans*.

The final text I discuss in this chapter is Laȝamon's *Brut*, the first history written in English following the Conquest, which details the pre-Anglo-Saxon, British past. Although a translation of Wace's French, itself a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Laȝamon's use of English and his original additions and expansions create a text that returns control of history to the vanquished. As noted by scholars, most recently Rosamund Allen, this process takes the reader to a time before the contest between the Anglo-Saxons and Normans, making the land, Britain itself, the true hero of history.[53] The Arthurian section of Laȝamon's *Brut* has received the most literary attention and Laȝamon's expansion of this section shows that he himself felt that Arthur was the central figure in this narrative. My examination, however, looks at several key passages from the entire text in order to provide a more thorough image of the construction of the wilderness in the *Brut*. Among other passages, I discuss the death of Morpidus, which has received no scholarly attention, as well as the three mysterious lakes, which have received attention only from E. G. Stanley[54] and the concluding settlement in Wales by the remaining British. I argue that these passages, which again are situated along the frontier of the civilization, create areas that express resistance of the Norman program of dominance, constructing a wilderness that cannot be brought into submission.

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[53] Allen, "The Implied Audience*," 126.*
[54] Stanley, "The Date of Laȝamon's *Brut*."

Chapter 4: Class Subversion in the Forest of the Middle English Rhymes of Robin Hood

This final chapter brings my study of the wilderness in medieval English literature to the late fifteenth century through a discussion of the Rhymes of Robin Hood, as the four earliest ballads of the Robin Hood corpus are collectively known.[55] As the conclusion of my study, this chapter, fittingly, illustrates a change in class perspective from the previous chapters as I assert that the Rhymes of Robin Hood represent the voice of the English peasant and are a reaction in both content and generic form to oppressive conditions of the time. These tales consciously reverse the structure of the chivalric romance of the aristocracy, especially in the use of the forest setting. I additionally illustrate the ways in which these early Robin Hood ballads and their construction of the wilderness refuge of the outlaw create a reversal of the social structure of medieval England as the bandit becomes the voice of truth and the possessor of the king's forest, taking back the natural areas controlled by the ruling class.

The central wilderness location of both the romance and the outlaw tale is the forest and this chapter opens with a discussion of the movement of the English environmental imagination from the wetlands, so dominant in the first three chapters of my study, to the woodlands due to the population explosion that occurred between the Norman Conquest and the outbreak of the Black Death in 1348, which drove a need for arable land, resulting in whole-sale drainage projects across England. As the terrain that had captured the imagination of earlier writers faded, later medieval authors turned to the forest as the wilderness location of the Other. Even though, according to Oliver Rackham

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[55] These texts are *A Gest of Robyn Hood*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* and *Robin Hood and the Potter*.

in *Woodlands*, very little actual woodland remained,[56] the ecological imperialism of the Normans ensured that these areas continued to be viewed by the disenfranchised commoner as foreign and strange. As a counterpoint to the outlaw tales of Robin Hood, I offer an overview of the forest as depicted in the romance, which has been much discussed by scholars, especially Corinne Saunders[57] and Robert Pogue Harrison.[58] As Erich Auerbach declares, the romance is a study in literary self-affirmation;[59] correspondingly, the forest of romance provides the location for the knight to challenge himself outside of battle and tournaments. Generally reflecting an internal, psychological triumph, the knight's success in his trials in the wilderness affirms not only his position as a knight, but also the entire structure of feudalism.

I assert that the Rhymes of Robin Hood, however, serve as a counterpoint to the ideology represented in the romance. These early texts have received very little discussion as works of literature, but instead have been investigated for their ability to illuminate fourteenth-century history. Maurice Keen,[60] R. H. Hilton[61] and P. R. Coss[62] all see them as the authentic voice of the English peasant. While many scholars, including A. J. Pollard,[63] Helen Phillips[64] and Lesley Coote,[65] made a cursory nod to the greenwood theme of these poems, others, like J. C. Holt,[66] attempt to identify accurately the geography of these texts. No previous attempt has been made, however, to discuss the

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[56] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 64-5.
[57] Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*.
[58] Harrison, *Forests*.
[59] Auerbach, "The Knight Sets Forth," 418.
[60] Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, rev. ed.
[61] Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood."
[62] Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion."
[63] Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*.
[64] Phillips, "'Merry' and 'Greenwood'."
[65] Coote, "Journeys to the Edge."
[66] Holt, *Robin Hood*.

wilderness forest settings of these ballads as a conscious reversal and coopting of the structure and tropes of the aristocratic romance in order to express an alternate ideology. This chapter brings my study full circle in that, like the Anglo-Saxon hagiographies discussed in the first chapter, the outlaws travel into the wilderness and create a home. The outlaws differ from the saints, however, in that the saint seeks to modify the landscape through building structures and planting gardens to civilize and convert the wilderness, but the outlaw becomes a natural aspect of the forest, wearing green, living outdoors and feasting on abundant game. The idealized wilderness constructed in the Rhymes of Robin Hood serves as an alternative to the oppressive structures of court and town and as a refuge against social abuses in medieval England.

While the images of the wilderness in Medieval English literature changed across time, no matter the political or social situation, the need for a place standing in opposition to civilization outweighed the facts of the English countryside. Over and over again, authors constructed wilderness places in medieval England that provided natural locations for a variety of purposes. Although many writers and ecocritics today consider the North American continent as the primary contact point between humanity and wilderness, medieval writers were the first in the English language to imagine the importance of such interactions.

Chapter 1: Conversion and the Natural World:

Early Anglo-Saxon Saints and the Wilderness

Unlike areas on the Continent that had remained under Roman control for a longer period of time and had continued methods of Roman organization even after the collapse of the empire, Britain had endured Roman withdrawal and the subsequent invasion of the pagan Anglo-Saxons in the fifth century, which repressed the remnants of Roman society. Though the Celtic people of Britain remained Christian, scholars generally believe that they did not attempt to convert the invaders.[1] Roman Christianity did not return to England until 597 when Augustine of Canterbury, sent by Gregory the Great as a missionary to the Anglo-Saxons, arrived at Thanet. Even considering the expected setbacks and difficulties, Christianization was relatively swift and in a little over a century, monasteries and churches dotted the island while Bede wrote his narrative of the conversion, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, secure in his monastery at Jarrow. One of the many changes that came with the conversion was a book-based culture. Christianity, as opposed to the oral paganism of the British Isles, is a religion especially grounded in written texts. The Bible, theological treatises, commentaries and hagiographies all contributed to the understanding and spread of the new religion. The *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* positioned the Anglo-Saxons as a chosen people at the end of the world, entering Christian fellowship and fulfilling the evangelical mission of Acts. As a result of joining the Christian community, the Anglo-Saxons desired to contribute to the written culture of their new religion. Anglo-Saxon authors

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[1] Ian Wood offers an alternate interpretation of events, asserting that Gregory the Great accuses the Franks, not the British, of neglect regarding the salvation of their neighbors in his letter to Theuderic and Theudebert in 596, "Mission of Augustine," 8.

wrote Christian poetry, Biblical translations and paraphrases, Biblical commentaries, hagiographies, homilies, martyrologies and scientific treatises with a decidedly Christian purpose. While all of these genres contributed greatly to the culture of Anglo-Saxon England, hagiography especially captured the essence of the unique blend of Celtic and Roman Christianity that intersected in Britain in the early Middle Ages. Anglo-Saxon hagiographers added to the body of Christian literature by documenting the lives of home-grown saints, advocating, as all hagiography does, for their inclusion in the Church canon as well as England's addition to the Christian world, while also providing a local connection for their English audience. In making the new religion their own, these writers adapted Mediterranean hagiography by creating a more integral connection to the natural world, an aspect inherited from the Celtic church, and by placing their hagiographical figures within the real environment of Anglo-Saxon England. In locating their saints in recognizable landscapes and making the land itself an integral aspect of these figures, these authors made the new religion familiar for the recently converted audience, an aspect of these texts that has received little scholarly attention. The early figures of Æthelthryth, Cuthbert, and Guthlac especially, illustrate these elements and helped to convert the land of Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity.

Mediterranean Hagiography

Before adding their own contributions, Anglo-Saxon writers were influenced by the Mediterranean heritage of Christianity. Much has been written on the cult of the saints in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages from the early martyrs, whose passions

became the basis of hagiography,[2] to the early ascetic saints who sought a purer form of

Christianity in the face of the weakening standards created by social acceptance.[3] This

ascetic model, along with the later bishop saint to be discussed below, was more

influential in early Anglo-Saxon hagiography than the martyr. Early monastics believed

in a renunciation of both "bodily indulgences" as well as "human society"[4] and from its

inception, Christian monasticism was associated with the wilderness. It first appeared in

the deserts of Egypt in the late third century and swiftly moved to Syria and Palestine.[5]

While the organized Church was able to keep control of Christianity within the cities and

larger communities, the countryside became the site of these "radical forms,"[6] and the

term monk, from the Greek *monos* (alone), signified a person who had withdrawn from

the world to develop spiritually in solitude.[7] Desert asceticism settled into two forms:

cenobitic, from the Greek *koinos* or "common," referring to those who lived in

communities, and the eremetic, from the Greek *eremos* or "desert," referring to those who

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[2] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xix-xxi. Martyrs were the first figures recognized as Christian saints and, therefore, occupy the preeminent position in the hagiographical canon. In the early days of Christianity, persecution was common and the stories of men and women who died for their beliefs, such as Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Agnes and Cecilia, inspired and heartened Christians before and after Constantine's decree of 313, which legalized the new religion. Communities of all sizes experienced persecution and came to venerate their own local figures.

[3] Chadwick, *Early Church*, 175-76. The Eastern origins of monasticism are obscure, but it may have begun in imitation of John the Baptist or of Jesus's time in the desert or even his injunction to the young man in Matthew 19:21 to renounce all possessions. While early on the isolation necessary for monasticism may also have been a safeguard against persecution, later it was probably a reaction against softening standards in the Christian community prompted by Christ's seemingly no longer imminent return and Christianity's legal status. See Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 1-2. In the second century, the primitive church had demanded adherence to a strict form of life that renounced marriage and personal possessions, but these requirements were relaxed as time passed and as acceptance led to the religion's being practiced by "ordinary Christians living in the world," Chadwick, *Early Church*, 175-6. Early ascetics sought to separate themselves from these relaxed standards and to demonstrate a marked disinterest in the things of the world, much as the early martyrs had sacrificed their lives in exchange for heaven.

[4] Chadwick, *Early Church*, 177.

[5] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 4.

[6] Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 81.

[7] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 1.

lived alone in the wilderness.[8] The first known cenobitic community was established by St. Pachomius c. 320 in the upper Nile valley while Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*, written shortly after Anthony's death in 356 and translated from Greek into Latin by Evagrius in 374, established the Egyptian saint as the model hermit.[9]

The *Life of Anthony*, which documented its subject's life in the wilderness, became extremely influential in Western hagiography and, although eremetic asceticism was rare, Anthony's tale inspired individuals and writers throughout the Middle Ages.[10] Athanasius intended it as a model of monastic idealism—many of the themes and elements of the *Life* are present in later works[11]—and Anthony's story set the prototype of the hermit's life, including fasting, sleep deprivation and bodily mortification as tools to deny the self as well as revealing the common dangers of despair and mental breakdown, all in the hope of reestablishing the relationship with God lost in man's fall.[12] An integral aspect of Anthony's asceticism is his location within the desert of Egypt. Over the course of many years, Anthony takes a series of steps that move him farther and farther into the desert. This journey became a hagiographical trope in which the retreat into the wilderness symbolizes a return to a pre-lapsarian garden as well as a symbol of spiritual journey and growth.[13] Athanasius portrays this choice of location as resulting from a desire both for greater hardship and for a removal from human company rather than for a setting that serves as a natural representation of God. One important aspect of the wilderness as constructed in Athanasius's text is the idea that it is not an empty space waiting to be occupied, but instead, the domain of demons, whom Anthony must defeat

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[8] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 4.
[9] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 4-5.
[10] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 5-11.
[11] Ramsey, *Beginning to Read*, 159.
[12] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 3.
[13] Ramsey, *Beginning to Read*, 159-61.

and who are angry about their space being coopted by the saint for a Christian purpose (13). While several episodes in Athanasius's *Life* require the assertion that the desert is very dry, there is a notable dearth of descriptions of Anthony's various settings. Only the Inner Mountain, Anthony's final location, is afforded a brief depiction (49). While Athanasius may not have required an account of the desert for his original audience, the resulting effect is an emphasis upon Anthony's struggles rather than any details of his location. Nevertheless, the *Life of Anthony* provided later hagiographers an archetypal setting that was not so specific that it could not be used for other purposes, even by hagiographers in the vastly different land of Anglo-Saxon England.

As Christianity's role in society changed, the nature of its saints and their life stories continued to fluctuate and by the third century, hagiography was serving an even greater didactic purpose for the common person as confessors and teachers and later bishops and church officials were canonized and memorialized in hagiographies.[14] One important exemplar of the bishop saint was Martin of Tours (d. 397), whose hagiographer, Sulpicius Severus, was a "zealous publicist" who sought to prove that Gaul could produce a saint on par with the Eastern hermits[15] and whose biography of Martin (c. 403) became the most influential hagiographical work in the West.[16] A former Roman soldier who left the army for a religious life, Martin began as an ascetic, later becoming a bishop after his reputation spread. In Sulpicius's *Life*, Martin appears as a pastor who maintains his connection to asceticism but actively serves his flock while fighting paganism in the countryside, an inspiring soldier-saint. Although Sulpicius is not concerned with creating vivid natural settings, he does describe Martin's hermitage

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[14] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxvi.
[15] Chadwick, *Early Church*, 182.
[16] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxvi.

outside of Tours (X) and maintains the idea of the wilderness as the location of the demonic in the episode of the woodsman gored by the ox's horn (XXI). Martin's battle against paganism is manifested most dramatically in the narrative of the pagan tree. After allowing Martin to destroy a pagan shrine, the country people balk at his desire to cut down a sacred tree unless Martin agrees to stand where the tree will crush him as it falls. At the last minute, the tree changes direction, saving Martin and impressing the people, thereby creating a wholesale conversion (XIII). This particular incident displays an attitude towards the natural world in general, and the countryside and its inhabitants in particular, as the location of paganism that needs to be defeated or overcome rather than transformed or incorporated into Christianity.

These two examples, and many others,[17] were influential in the development of hagiography and its familiar tropes and motifs, including those concerning the wilderness. Part of the purpose of a hagiography is to advocate for sainthood for the local figure on a larger stage,[18] while also providing instruction and a "template of Christian virtue" for its audience.[19] While there do exist artistic or literary *vitae* designed for private contemplation,[20] generally the tale of a saint's life would be read on the saint's feast day and, for it to be effective, it would need to be accessible to the common people. Later hagiographers often followed the established motifs of early hagiographies, sometimes copying complete passages verbatim, in order to place their subjects within a larger Christian context, aligning their subject with an already accepted figure of

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[17] Other important early influences on hagiography include the *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, Palladius's *Lausiac History* and Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* which includes a life of Benedict of Nursia.
[18] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xvii.
[19] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xviii.
[20] Hill, "*Imago Dei*," 37.

Christianity.[21] The *Lives* of Anthony and Martin were particularly influential and established an early guide to the wilderness trope for hagiographers, even those in England.

Although Anglo-Saxon writers developed their own unique use of the wilderness that suited both their culture and location, their hagiographies are not without traditional depictions of the natural world. The models of sainthood that influenced the Anglo-Saxon converts were not devoid of a relationship with nature. Anthony's life in the desert is integral to his message of simplicity and Martin's efforts to eradicate paganism in the countryside underscore his accomplishments as bishop, but in these texts, the natural environment serves as either a hardship to be overcome through self-sacrifice, a symbol of pagan worship, or even a representation of a threatening natural world subdued through God's holy men, as in the famous tale of Jerome and the lion. Many early Anglo-Saxon hagiographies follow similar patterns. In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede relates an incident, witnessed by his tutor Trumbert, of Chad's habit of praying for mercy on behalf of the people during any violent storm. When questioned Chad replied, "Mouet enim aera Dominus, ventos excitat, iaculatur fulgora, de caelo intonat, ut terrigenas ad timendum se suscitet, ut corda eorum in memoriam futuri iudicii reuocet" (IV.iii; "For the Lord moves the air, raises the winds, hurls the lightnings, and thunders forth from heaven so as to rouse the inhabitants of the world to fear Him, to call them to remember the future judgment").[22] Here, the natural world serves as a violent reminder of sin and man's fallen state, and Chad, as a man perfected through Christianity, holds some power over it. Another example that illustrates a Roman model occurs in Stephen of Ripon's

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[21] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xviii.
[22] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 343.

Life of Wilfrid. When shipwrecked on the coast of the South Saxons, Wilfrid's party is

attacked by pagans but with God's help they are able to fend off the attackers until

Wilfrid's prayers cause the tide to rise earlier than usual, allowing the party to cast off

and escape the pagans (XIII). The use of the natural world here displays the saint as a

figure who has regained Adam's dominion over nature through his personal holiness.[23]

Many other examples exist, but these two serve to show that the views of nature's role in

Christianity brought by the Roman mission were not displaced in Anglo-Saxon England,

but rather existed alongside other images that show nature as an integral part of a saint's

holiness rather than subservient to it.

Celtic Influences

While these traditional hagiographies came to the Anglo-Saxons through the

Roman mission, Celtic Christianity, which maintained a stronghold in the northern

reaches of the island, had developed its own traditions that influenced the depiction of the

natural world in Anglo-Saxon texts. As England's position at the edge of the world, far

removed from the Mediterranean, isolated Anglo-Saxon Christianity from the heretical

controversies of the classical heritage,[24] Anglo-Saxon hagiographers were free to focus

upon a more basic good vs. evil dichotomy,[25] which found clear expression in the

wilderness setting of these works.[26] Possibly related to the influence of Sulpicius's

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[23] Neville's study of nature in Old English poetry asserts that the Anglo-Saxons often depicted the natural world as a force that moves independently of God except when he chooses to act against it either himself or through his chosen men and women. Neville, *Representations*, 172-4.
[24] Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, 275.
[25] Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, 275-76.
[26] It is not clear how monasticism came to Ireland, but when St. Patrick (d. 461) conducted his mission, asceticism was already being practiced. While Patrick brought a Roman form of organization, without a Roman social structure, since Ireland had never been a Roman province, it soon withered, and a more independent tradition developed. See Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 44-47.

depiction of Martin, semi-eremetical communities became the standard in Celtic

Christianity. Most establishments contained one or two anchorites who lived separated

from the larger group and it was not unusual for a figure to move back and forth between

the active and the contemplative states, with the hermit being accorded a higher status

than the cenobitic monk.[27] As a minority, Christians in Britain and Ireland may have

wished to emphasize the "moral purity of the few," leading to a rather severe form of

asceticism.[28] Celtic hagiographies, including the lives of Columbanus,[29] the wandering

missionary who founded the Abbeys of Luxeuil and Bobbio, Colman mac Duagh,[30] a

cave-dwelling hermit and Kevin of Glendalough,[31] who lived the life of a wild man in the

wilderness, emphasize this severity and provided models of extreme physical

mortification, [32] including submersion in icy water, extended time in the crossfigill

position,[33] extreme fasting and sleeping on rocks. This severity, though, is tempered by

engaging stories involving animals and by an inherent love of the natural world.

According to Michelle Brown, the distinctive feature of Celtic Christianity is an

"appreciation of humanity's place within the natural order" as well as an attendant need

to live in peace with the natural world.[34] It is a viewpoint in which man, animal,

environment and spirit are all intertwined[35] and is rooted in animistic paganism, where

every manifestation of nature held divinity.[36] It is the opposite of an anthropocentric view

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[27] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 44-45.
[28] Brown, *Rise of Western Christiandom*, 127-8.
[29] Jonas Bobbiensis, *Vitae Columbani*.
[30] Carew, *An Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, 434.
[31] *Vita Sancti Coemgeni*.
[32] Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 46.
[33] The crossfigill position, common in Irish hagiography, requires outstretched arms, similar to a cross, but also carries a sense of waiting, or "vigil." See Malone, "Vicissitudes of Vigil," 354.
[34] Brown, *How Christianity Came*, 97.
[35] Sorrell, "Praying to God," 18.
[36] Sorrell, "Praying to God," 18

of the creation in which man has dominion over the animals. Instead, the Celtic Christian

took a view of integration and not domination. For early Irish poets, the natural world

could reflect the joy of spirituality.[37] The poem, "Colum Cille in Exile," illustrates this

amalgamation:

> Mellach lem bith i n-ucht ailium
> for beind cairrge,
> co n-aicind and ar a menci
> féth na fairrge.
>
> Co n-aicind a tonda troma
> úas ler lethan,
> amail canait ceól dia n-Athair
> for seól co bethad.
>
> Co n-aicind a trácht réid rindglan,
> ní dál dubai,
> co cloisind, guth na n-én n-ingnad,
> seól co subai.
>
> Co cloisind torm na tond tana
> forsna cairrge,
> co cloisind, núall ri táeb reilcci,
> fúam na fairrge. . . .
>
> Co robennachainn in coimdid
> conic huile,
> nem co muintir gráid co nglaine,
> tir, tráig, tuile.
>
> Co roscrútainn óen na lebar,
> maith dom anmain,
> sel for sléchtain ar nem n-inmain,
> sel for salmaib. . . .
>
> Sel ic búain duilisc do charraic,
> sel ic aclaid,
> sel ic tabairt bid do bochtaib,
> sel i ccarcair. (Stanzas 1-4, 8-9, 11)
>
> ("It seems to me delightful on the breast of an island
> at the peak of a crag

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so that I may see the multiple
face of the ocean,

That I may see its heavy waves
above the broad sea
as they sing music to their Father
on their earthly course;

That I may see its smooth shore, clear points of land,
no gloomy meetings;
that I may hear the voice of wonderful birds,
a joyous strain;

That I may hear the roaring of breaking waves
on the rocks;
that I may hear the cry beside the church,
the sound of the sea. . . .

That I may bless the Lord
Who rules over all,
heaven with its company of orders in purity,
land, shore and flood;

That I might study one of the books,
good for the soul;
at times kneeling for dear heaven;
at times at psalms. . . .

At times gathering seaweed from the rocks;
at times fishing;
at times giving food to the poor;
at times in my cell.")[38]

This poem displays a merger between the natural world and the hallmarks of monastic

life. It mirrors a blending of a personal relationship with God with a personal relationship

with nature and the synergistic ways in which the Celts adapted their love of nature to

their religion produced a unique contribution to Christian thought.[39]

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[38] "Colum Cille in Exile," trans. by Lehmann, 38-39.
[39] Brown, *How Christianity Came*, 97.

The *peregrinatio*, or pilgrimage, also brought the Celtic saint into contact with the natural world and influenced its depiction in Celtic hagiographies.[40] Having long endured a separation from Rome, the Celts who sought monastic life did not feel bound by the strictures of Roman bureaucracy and organized coenobitic monasticism.[41] Instead, early Celtic saints felt free to wander, believing that self-exile was the ultimate in self-denial.[42] The life of Saint Columba (d. 597), the Colum Cille of the poem above, whose *peregrinatio* led him to establish the Irish monastery of Iona in present-day Scotland, provides a small sample of adventures in the wilderness. He rescued a heron, experienced what has been speculated to be the first recorded encounter with the Loch Ness Monster, and was victorious in a sailing contest against a Pictish Druid. Following Columba's example, during the Northumbrian reign of Oswald, St. Aidan (d. 651) came from Iona and established his monastery at Lindisfarne. In the seventh century, England, therefore, was under active evangelization from two fronts: the wandering Celtic missionaries in the north and the Roman priests in the south, which led to a "creative fusion of continental and Irish ideals."[43] Bede's Northumbria was where the "splendid ambition of Rome . . . met the quiet evangelism of the Hibernian Church and combined to form an extraordinarily vibrant Christian culture."[44]

Anglo-Saxon Hagiography

These influences combined to make Anglo-Saxon Christianity unique and to allow an opportunity for nature to be an important aspect of it. As Lucy Menzies

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[40] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxx.
[41] Duckett, *Wandering Saints*, 24.
[42] Duckett, *Wandering Saints*, 24.
[43] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxxiii.
[44] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 229.

articulates, "a new faith always begins by adapting itself where it can to the rites and practices of the old,"[45] and Gregory the Great's program of conversion, as described by Bede in Book I of the *Ecclesiastical History*, details the process that allowed the Anglo-Saxons to develop a uniquely English Church that fused Roman and Celtic culture, notably in its unique view of the natural world within a Christian lens.[46] The centerpiece of Bede's famous tale of the Northumbrian conversion of Edwin's court is the metaphor of the sparrow, in which human life is likened to a bird's flight through a hall in winter (II.xiii).[47] The thane who uses this metaphor states that it displays the uncertainty, for the pagan, of what comes before and after death. The successful use of the sparrow metaphor at such an important juncture expresses an Anglo-Saxon assurance in nature's representation of an entity greater than man's own understanding as well as the importance of the natural world to the Anglo-Saxon mentality.

One method that Anglo-Saxon writers employed in making the new religion tangible for the new converts was by locating religious figures in very real places and landscapes of England, while also making these places a vital aspect of the saint's character and mission. In *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and the Environment in the U. S. and Beyond*, Lawrence Buell discusses the importance of the "thereness" that is key to the environmental unconscious. All events that happen to

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[45] Menzies, *Saint Columba*, 84.

[46] Bede records several letters written by Gregory the Great to the Roman missionaries in England. Gregory, a wise and practical man who had spent time as a Roman bureaucrat before joining the religious life, understood that it would take a gentle, guiding hand to convert the Anglo-Saxons. In his letter and responses to Augustine, Gregory urges tolerance and patience, and orders that the heathen idols of the people be destroyed, but not the shrines, which are to be cleansed with holy water and remade as places of Christian worship in order to help make the new religion more palatable. These ideas of Gregory's were not mere methods of appeasement, but part of a well-thought-out philosophy. Gregory states that he has come to these conclusions only after careful thought (I.xxx). The letters that Bede records display a certain amount of tolerance of ideas and practices, as long as orthodoxy is maintained.

[47] Toswell discusses this metaphor at further length, examining the Christian significance of the sparrow. Toswell, "Bede's Sparrow."

human beings occur while their bodies are situated within a specific location[48] and the meaning ascribed to any specific place is integral to understanding the emotional connection to it.[49] Buell describes several ways in which "place-connectedness" is achieved. While a connection can be established through imagination, such as an unseen homeland, or a dynamic viewpoint across time, most forms of meaning are accomplished through an intimate, physical connection. Buell asserts that this place-connectedness is a universal need of humankind.[50] John M. Howe adds that place meaning, such as that described by Buell, cannot occur within a vacuum, implying that human willingness is required to both accept and perpetuate the meaning ascribed to the place.[51] In addition, Alfred K. Siewers asserts that environmental meaning results from the practice and performance of this relationship.[52] Anglo-Saxon hagiography demonstrates a desire to connect England with the larger Christian world by documenting holy figures from the homeplace; additionally, many early hagiographical texts are highly specific regarding locations and environmental features. These topographies simultaneously make England real to an outside audience, while also giving an Anglo-Saxon audience a stronger connection to their new religion through their local environment.

Anglo-Saxon hagiography extends beyond the symbolic, as with Bede's sparrow, to create a unique blending between the natural world and the saint's holiness, often through some physical aspect of the saint. Bede's reports of miracles associated with Oswald (d. 642) illustrate this sophisticated union most clearly in which an element of the natural world combines with a relic associated with the hagiographic figure. Scholars

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[48] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 55.
[49] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 56.
[50] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 64-73.
[51] Howe, "Conversion," 69.
[52] Siewers, "Orthodoxy and Ecopoetics," 249.

have long noted that the scene in which Oswald erects a cross before the battle of

Heavenfield holds many parallels with Eusebius's tale of Constantine's use of the *Chi-Rho* symbol before the battle of Milvian Bridge, but Oswald, who had spent many years

in exile in Dalriada, where he had been converted, is also strongly associated with Celtic

Christianity and its influence in the north of England, due to his establishment of Aidan at

Lindisfarne. The fact that the cross Oswald erected with his own hands becomes an

important relic and source of miraculous cures is typical of hagiography. Items closely

associated with a saint often become imbued with the saint's holiness and are capable of

transferring the saint's miraculous powers. Here, though, the process moves one step

further from the saint's relic and into the natural world when many years later, in Bede's

own time, Bothelm, a monk at Hexham, has a fractured arm cured not by the cross, or a

piece thereof, but by the moss that grows on it (III.ii). This process represents a

sophisticated adaptation of the pre-Christian belief that elements of nature contain a form

of divinity replaced by a more orthodox idea that elements of nature can be imbued with

a saint's holiness.

The ability of a holy figure to transfer sanctity to the natural world becomes more

explicit and begins the process of linking Christianity to specific places in England in

Bede's discussion of other miracles attributed to Oswald posthumously, an idea not

examined thus far in scholarly study. Bede tells of Oswald's death in battle at Maserfelth

against the pagan Mercians led by Penda (III.ix and III.xii) and relates "quod etiam inter

uerba orationis uitam finierit; namque cum armis et hostibus circumseptus iamiamque

uideret se esse perimendum, orauit pro animabus exercitus sui" (III.xii; " that he died

with a prayer on his lips. When he was beset by the weapons of his enemies and saw that

he was about to perish he prayed for the souls of his army").[53] The sanctity of such a holy man manifested itself in the cross mentioned above and at his tomb, as is to be expected, but more interestingly, even the blood-soaked earth where he fell became linked to his Christian martyrdom and holiness. The grass at the spot grew greener and appeared more beautiful than the rest of the field (III.x) and the dirt quickly became associated with miracles. Bede relates that both people and animals were cured there and that, by the time of his writing, enough dirt had been removed from the spot to leave a pit as deep as a man's height (III.ix).[54] Similar to the moss, there is a transfer of miraculous power into an element of the natural world. In this instance, though, the dirt literally soaks in the sanctity in its absorption of Oswald's blood[55] in a collapse of the boundary between dead earth and living body, which creates a hybrid element, both human and inhuman, living and dead, that transcends either form in its possession of miraculous powers.[56] Oswald's connection to the moss-covered cross and the dirt from the battlefield creates another level of meaning in that these elements link the saint and his holiness to a real place outside of his tomb or the location of his relics. While shrines and relics are an important aspect of the cult of the saints as they provide a physical link to the spiritual world, in Oswald's case, the dirt provides an additional physical connection to the saint while at the same time connecting Oswald to a very specific, physical site, one that Bede's

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[53] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans by Colgrave, 251.

[54] Similarly, Bede relates that the dirt from the spot where Hædde, bishop of the West Saxons, died was capable of miracles and had also been pilfered, creating a large hole (V.xviii). Hædde's tale is told less dramatically than Oswald's and his means of death is not given, though one may assume that he did not die in battle, which would remove the element of a physical transference of holiness through the blood into the earth. Also, Oswald's life occurs earlier in the *Ecclesiastical History* and Bede positions him as a savior of Northumbria, making him a more important figure in the uncertain, early days of the conversion, increasing his importance, for this study, in the connection between conversion and place.

[55] This appears to be a variant of a more common phenomenon whereby sanctity is transferred to the dirt that receives the water used in the preparation of a saint's relics. Miracles through such means are attributed to Cuthbert, Wilfrid, Æthelthryth and Oswald.

[56] For an ecocritical discussion on dirt see Mentz, "Brown," 193-202.

contemporaries knew well. Oswald's death transforms the location from an abstract spot in a field into a meaningful place within the context of Christian conversion: the sight of a martyred king fighting against a pagan army.

While at its most basic level religious conversion is a "reorientation" of an individual's soul, wholesale conversion also requires a "reinterpretation of geography itself."[57] Many physical modifications of the Anglo-Saxon countryside, designed to reinterpret it for Christianity, remain today: churches, monasteries and towering stone crosses. Shrines as well served in Anglo-Saxon England, as they did elsewhere, to create a "Christian topography of sacred places."[58] As Gregory the Great had foreseen, many sites important to the pagan Anglo-Saxons probably became associated with Christian figures, as reflected in the numerous wells and springs that later bore the names of various saints. Part of the conversion to Christianity, then, was a modification of the countryside. Hagiography, likewise, participated in this modification of the terrain. As with Bede's description of the site of Oswald's death, the location of a holy site within reach of the Anglo-Saxons was an important aspect of their connection to the new religion. While early Anglo-Saxon hagiographers did produce lives of saints who had lived far away in the Mediterranean,[59] they also sought to add to the church's family of sainthood by providing models closer to home that would speak to their own people. As Peter Hunter Blair has articulated, the impact of a hagiography is significantly increased when the audience feels close to the figure in both time and location.[60] Oswald's

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[57] Howe, "Conversion," 63.
[58] Noble and Head, Introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxxiii.
[59] Bede wrote lives of the martyrs Felix and Anastasius and an unknown monk of Whitby composed a life of Gregory the Great.
[60] Hunter Blair, *World of Bede*, 276.

narrative displays how a specific place became a powerful symbol for the new Christians in England.

While hagiographic figures can be symbols of sanctity removed from the specifics of time and place, many Anglo-Saxon saints are portrayed as having an intimate connection to the location of their labors. Bede and others are rather specific about locations, naming places and giving history a link to the real world of contemporary Anglo-Saxons. Although the *Ecclesiastical History* is not a hagiography, and therefore, serves a different purpose, it contains the earliest known biographies of many Anglo-Saxon saints, some of whom, like Oswald above, are integral to this discussion. These semi-hagiographical episodes establish a deep connection between particular saints and the environmental aspect of their locations, which is heightened by its removal from civilization. Much like in the more traditional hagiographies, isolation and self-denial help the saint transcend the human state while providing a myriad of trials. Another aspect of this removal, which is different from the Mediterranean hagiographies, is the belief that the wilderness location is more than just a test for the subject, or even a location far away from the concerns of life, but instead, the optimal location to serve God.

Cedd's (d. 664) choice of a monastic site in Northumbria presents the connection between wilderness and Christian works. After his success in evangelizing the East Saxons, King Ethelwald of Northumbria offered Cedd land for a Christian establishment that could also serve as a retreat for the king. For his foundation at Lastingham, "Antistes elegit sibi locum monasterii construendi in montibus arduis ac remotis, in quibus latronum magis latibula ac lustra ferarum quam habitacula fuisse uidebantur hominum"

(III.xxiii; "Cedd chose himself a site for the monastery amid some steep and remote hills which seemed better fitted for the haunts of robbers and the dens of wild beasts than for human habitation").[61] Though Bede writes in Latin, the Anglo-Saxon idea of the wilderness, as contained in *wild(d)eornes*, "of the wild animals," is evident in this description of Lastingham in the term *lustrum, lustri*, "a haunt or den of wild beasts."[62] Bede additionally equates criminals, whose acts serve to place them outside the community, with the wild animals, presenting Cedd's choice of location as a deliberate desire to create "bona opera" ("good works") in a place "ubi prius uel bestiae commorari uel homines bestialiter uiuere consuerant" (III.xxiii; "where once beasts dwelt or where men lived after the manner of beasts").[63] Before building at Lastingham, Cedd and one of his brothers, Cynibil, purified the site with forty days of prayer and fasting, a process that is common in hagiography, but this narrative illustrates a decidedly different purpose than the expected exorcising of demons, which are not mentioned at all in this passage. Rather, Cedd wishes to remove any stain related to the former possessors of the place, the criminals. While the need to cast demons out of a location does often play a role in early Anglo-Saxon hagiography, this episode emphasizes the need to claim the wilderness from more tangible forces, an adaptation of Anthony's struggle with the demons in the desert that also incorporates the distinctive Anglo-Saxon sense of the wilderness as a place beyond civilization and held by beasts or, in this case, those who are beast-like. In addition, Cedd's choice of location displays a deliberate desire to place his monastery away from other human habitation and civilization. While these acts serve to transform the space into a place suitable for Christian works, the key point is that Bede presents

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[61] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 287.
[62] All Latin definitions are taken from Lewis and Short, unless otherwise noted.
[63] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 287.

Lastingham's location away from others as a logical and appropriate place for Christian

works, as well as a real location in England that could be visited by Christians, such as

the king.

In addition to such shorter episodes in the *Ecclesiastical History*, several of the

earlier hagiographies from Anglo-Saxon England exhibit a more detailed connection to

the environment and will be discussed in greater detail.[64] Of the earliest known

hagiographical texts,[65] the ones that focus on Anglo-Saxon saints by and large show an

interest not just in the saint's relationship with the natural world, but also in the ways that

the saint transforms a desolate and forbidding environment into a home, changing the

meaning that is ascribed to the location, thus transforming a space into a place, to use

Buell's terminology.[66] These works serve both to declare the subject as a saint as well as

to place the saint within a well-known location. Works that display an enhanced sense of

an Anglo-Saxon environmental awareness cluster around three particular figures:

Æthelthryth, Cuthbert and Guthlac.

Water environments are especially important in understanding the wilderness

locations of these three saints. Although Cuthbert preaches in the mountains of

Northumbria and Guthlac's hagiographer Felix frequently references the desert, islands

and coastal wetlands dominate the landscapes of these texts, which is consistent with the

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[64] Throughout the entire period, Anglo-Saxons continued to produce hagiographies of both later figures as well as those discussed here and the natural world continued to be an important aspect of sanctity. As the present study focuses on the relationship between the depiction of the wilderness and the audience of the initial conversion, later works are not considered.

[65] The earliest hagiographies are the *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert* (698-705), Bede's verse *Life of Cuthbert* (c. 705), Bede's lives of Felix and Anastasius (700-710), the *Anonymous Life of Gregory the Great* by a monk of Whitby (c. 710), Stephen of Ripon's *Life of Wilfrid* (710-719), Bede's prose *Life of Cuthbert* (before 721) and Felix's *Life of Guthlac* (740's). See also Love, "Hagiography."

[66] Stephen of Ripon's *Life of Wilfrid*, briefly mentioned above, displays, when it rarely discusses the natural world, a more typical relationship in which the saint is presented as holding a type of power over nature. Considering the strict adherence of both Stephen and Wilfrid to Roman Christianity, it is unlikely that a more integrative presentation of the natural world would appear in Stephen's text.

Anglo-Saxon imagination. Northern Europe had experienced a marine resurgence in the fifth century, coinciding with the Roman withdrawal, and this rise in sea level affected Britain as well as the Anglo-Saxon homelands on the Continent. It is even possible that the loss of land in Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, where remaining land was scarce, contributed to the migration of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain.[67] This marine transgression also created, in essence, a new coastal topography, one that was in continual fluctuation, adding to the mysteriousness and danger of the coastline.[68] The Anglo-Saxons were a sea-faring people and displayed their strong interest in the intersection of land and water in ship burials at Sutton Hoo and Snape. This sense of a permeable boundary made these areas attractive locations for religious sites, pagan and Christian,[69] and in Northern England, perhaps owing to the Celtic influence, monastic sites are especially frequent along water features.[70] There is a sense that these locations between solid earth and sprawling ocean function as a mysterious and dynamic setting, much as the desert does in the hagiographies of the Eastern fathers.[71] By incorporating landscape elements familiar and intriguing, while also mysterious and otherworldly, these texts not only relate to their audience through the setting, but also intertwine the psychological and spiritual aspects apparent at the intersection of water and land.

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[67] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*," 87-89.

[68] In some areas of Britain, the coastline moved as much as ten kilometers inland. In the Fenland, always subject to flooding, the coast moved six kilometers. Rippon, *Tranformation*, 138-40.

[69] Michelle Brown discusses the attractiveness of water locations for pagan worship in the British Isles as a liminal space between the human and the spiritual. Brown, *How Christianity Came*, 17. See also Hooke, *Landscape*, 16.

[70] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*," 91.

[71] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 251-52.

Æthelthryth of Ely

Æthelthryth of Ely (d. 679) is the earliest figure discussed here in detail. Bede's portrayal of the foundation of her monastic house in the Fenland of East Anglia and the later translation of her uncorrupted body illustrate a hagiographer's use of realistic landscape details in the construction of a miracle story designed both to appeal to local audiences and to advocate for English Christianity on a larger scale. While contained in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede's passages on Æthelthryth (IV.xix-xx) provide the earliest account of her life, establishing the validity of the addition of this English figure into the cult of the saints, one of the main functions of hagiography, while at the same time emphasizing Æthelthryth's Englishness by placing her firmly within the landscape of East Anglia. While intended as a historical account, these chapters border upon encomium in their inclusion of verses written by Bede in honor of the abbess. Although Æthelthryth occupies a small section of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede's rendering of her tale serves here to illustrate the balance between the requirements of hagiography and the desire of Anglo-Saxon writers to create a setting both realistic and spiritual within England for a variety of audiences.

Bede tells how Æthelthryth, the daughter of the East Anglian King Anna, maintained her virginity through two marriages, first to the ealdorman Tondberht and, after Tondberht's death, to King Ecgfrith of Northumbria. After twelve years of marriage to the king, Æthelthryth finally left the union and entered the monastery at Coldingham. A year later, she founded a double monastery on the Isle of Ely, one of the bedrock islands in the Fenland of East Anglia. Bede praises her austerity of life, detailing her fasting, rough clothing, bathing habits and length of prayer as well as her affliction with a

tumor on her throat. Sixteen years after her death, Æthelthryth's body was translated into the church at Ely and was found uncorrupted. Bede presents her to the reader as an ideal example of female sanctity and as "an emblem of the newly Christianized country."[72]

Although there were well-established Christian locations, such as the Holy Land and Rome, it was still possible to expand Christian sacred space as new frontier areas were brought within the fold of Christianity.[73] Bede's account of Æthelthryth's life and translation in Chapter xix of Book IV includes specific environmental details designed to locate her firmly within England, providing an English saint for Bede's local audience, while also providing specifics regarding the unique features of the East Anglian wetlands for Bede's international readers who would have viewed England as located at the edge of the world, a purpose expressed through his Geographical Introduction, which has long been held to be aimed at familiarizing an international audience with the terrain of England before making the case for England's inclusion in the Christian world. It locates Britain within the context of the wider Christian community physically, while, at the same time, giving England a role within the larger history of humanity.[74] Throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede continues to describe locations for his readers to give them a sense of the physical settings of his history, which would also appeal to local readers who would appreciate Bede's descriptions of a familiar place that they could readily identify with a figure of their own land. Bede's description of Ely at the close of Chapter xix serves this purpose:

Est autem Elge in prouincia Orientalium Anglorum regio familiarum circiter sexcentarum, in similitudinem insulae uel paludibus, ut diximus, circumdata uel

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[72] Karkov, "Body of St. Æthelthryth," 398.
[73] Howe, "Conversion," 63.
[74] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 254.

aquis, unde et a copia anguillarum, quae in eisdem paludibus capiuntur nomen

accepit. (IV.xix)

("Ely is a district of about 600 hides in the kingdom of the East Angles and, as has

already been said, resembles an island in that it is surrounded by marshes or by

water. It derives its name from the large number of eels which are caught in the

marshes.")[75]

Bede's description matches the environmental history of the Fenland at this time. Ely was

founded on one of the bedrock islands that dotted the freshwater peat bogs of the

backfens of East Anglia and archeological evidence and monastic records show that fish

was an important commodity. Bede mentions the abundance of eels as the source of the

name of Æthelthryth's monastic house; this small detail adds authenticity to his

description and places Ely within a real setting at the edge of the Christian world, one

that also seems dark and dangerous.

The details of Æthelthryth's translation by her sister and successor Seaxburh, also

included in Chapter xix, intertwine the wilderness location with miracles worthy of any

female saint, English or otherwise. As part of the translation, Seaxburh wished to replace

the original wooden coffin with a stone sarcophagus, but, as Bede relates, there was no

stone available, an accurate depiction of Ely's location within a peat bog. Seaxburh sent

some of the brothers in search of stone. They rowed about the marshes, finally coming to

Grantacæstir, where they miraculously discovered a white marble sarcophagus that was

the exact dimensions required and which symbolized, in its whiteness, the purity of

Æthelthryth's uncorrupted body and perpetual virginity.[76]

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[75] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 397.
[76] Karkov, "Body of St. Æthelthryth," 400.

Miracles aside,[77] this description is an accurate depiction of not just the Fenland area but also the exact wilderness location required for such a turn of events. *Grantacæstir* indicates the original Roman settlement on what is now Castle Hill in modern-day Cambridge,[78] situated along the navigable portion of the Granta, a tributary of the River Cam. The *Dictionary of Old English* defines *cæster* as "a city, town, especially a walled town" and "specifically of Roman cities, towns and fortifications in England." In addition the *OED* etymology of "chester" shows that *cæster* derives from the Latin *castra*, "camp," and in Britain is applied to locations of Roman origin.[79] Situated along the edge of the peat fens and along the Granta, this site would have been easily accessible by boat. Due to the marine surge beginning in the fourth century and the resulting deterioration of the Roman works after the withdrawal, many Roman settlements were fully or partially covered by water and peat. It is not improbable, therefore, that such sites would have been a source of repurposed materials. Whether or not this particular site was flooded, or just closer to the encroaching waterline, Bede uses the real terrain of the Fenland as a desolate marsh in order to heighten the miraculous event of the finding of a beautiful marble sarcophagus in a "ciuitatulam … desolatam" (IV.xvii, "small deserted fortress").[80] In the Geographical Introduction, Bede positions Britain as existing at the edge of the world, emphasizing its isolation.[81] This imagery, combined with the desolate nature of Æthelthryth's Ely, works to connect the Christian

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[77] The true miracle of this story is the perfect suitability of the sarcophagus more so than the finding of it.
[78] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 395.
[79] All modern English definitions and etymologies are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
[80] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 395.
[81] Merrills, *History and Geography*, 255-57.

conversion along the edge of the known world with a very specific setting, intertwining miracle and place.[82]

Bede's next chapter campaigns more clearly for Æthelthryth as a worthy figure in Christianity and, due to the intimate connection between miracle and place, for Anglo-Saxon England as a location of miracles on the same level as already established Christian holy sites. The majority of the second chapter devoted to Æthelthryth is comprised of an original hymn of Bede's on virginity, written in Æthelthryth's honor, an ode to female chastity that names several female virgin martyrs from a variety of locations in the Christian world: Agatha of Sicily, Eulalia of Barcelona, [83] Thecla of Iconium in Asia Minor, Euphemia of Chalcedon near the Bosporus, and Agnes and Cecilia of Rome. After telling of these virgins, Bede then declares:

> Nostra quoque egregia iam tempora uirgo beauit;
>
> Aedilthryda nitet nostra quoque egregia. (IV.xx)
>
> ("Nor lacks our age its Æthelthryth as well;
>
> Its virgin wonderful nor lacks our age.")[84]

Bede emphasizes that not only can the miracles of an earlier time occur in his own,[85] but also that the Anglo-Saxons can boast of figures with the same Christian fortitude as the

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[82] In her discussion of the twelfth-century *Liber Eliensis*, Blanton-Whetsell examines the architectural metaphors that link Æthelthryth's body and sarcophagus with the Isle of Ely as it is enclosed within the Fenland, "*Tota integra*," 231.

[83] The Eulalia mentioned in this hymn is most likely Eulalia of Barcelona, whom Bede includes in his Martyrology, and not Eulalia of Mérida whom he does not seem to have known.

[84] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Colgrave, 399. Colgrave's translation preserves the epanaleptic form of the verse, which Bede would have known from Sedulius. A clearer translation would be "An extraordinary virgin has already blessed our age / Our extraordinary Æthelthryth shines" (my translation).

[85] See McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, 80-81, for a discussion of Bede's statement on the validity of contemporary miracles.

earlier virgin martyrs.[86] The emphasis on a local place within the previous chapter becomes an argument for the sanctity of the Anglo-Saxons within the larger Christian community. In choosing examples from across the Christian world and then adding an East Anglian woman, Bede clearly wishes to use Æthelthryth as a symbol of the Anglo-Saxons as a fulfillment of the English conversion of both souls and land. In addition, the previous chapter's depiction of Æthelthryth's translation into a sarcophagus recovered from a Roman site links England physically with the Roman past as well as the present in which Rome serves as the central location of the Church. Through the use of landscape details, Bede's depiction of Æthelthryth and her miracles in the wilderness of England creates a multi-dimensional connection between the Anglo-Saxons and their new religion.

Cuthbert of Lindisfarne

Cuthbert of Lindisfarne (d. 687) appears to have been the most captivating figure for early Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, due in no small part to his interaction with wildlife and his deep understanding of the wilderness of Northumbria. Of the eight earliest works produced,[87] three were devoted to him. Most likely the first hagiography written in England was a life of Cuthbert by an anonymous brother of Lindisfarne composed between 698 and 705. Bede used this *Life* as a basis for his two subsequent versions, a verse text from around 705,[88] written, according to its preface, for an otherwise unknown

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[86] This emphasis on time echoes a similar passage in the narrative in IV.xvii asserting that the details of Æthelthryth's chastity should not be doubted due to Jesus's promise in Matthew 28:18-20 to be with His followers until the end of this age.

[87] See Chapter 1, footnote 65.

[88] The metrical *Life* is an artistic version of the narrative and can be quite difficult, hence the belief that it was intended for private contemplation. As such, it would not have served the public purposes of the other hagiographies discussed here. It essentially mirrors the prose version, though the Besançon manuscript adds

priest named John embarking upon a journey to Rome, and a prose text written some time before 721 at the request of the Lindisfarne brotherhood.[89] Bede's two longer versions, in the classical tradition of the *opus geminatum*, provided the option of a verse text, suitable for individual contemplation, and a prose text more appropriate for public reading, perhaps on feast days. While there has been some debate among scholars as to whether Bede's prose version was a necessary addition to the other two *Lives*,[90] Bede's preface clearly states that he was commissioned to write it by Bishop Eadfrith, who had also commissioned the *Anonymous Life*, and that it was approved by the Lindisfarne brotherhood. Bede's prose version reorders the events of the *Anonymous Life*, presenting a more continuous narrative, designed to display Cuthbert's progression as a Christian.[91] Whether or not scholars today can know the reason for the commissioning of Bede's prose version, it appears that the Lindisfarne brotherhood wanted it. Along these lines, Lenore Abraham asserts that Bede's prose *Life* was not meant to replace the *Anonymous Life*, but to function alongside it, as the community at Lindisfarne possessed both versions.[92] This study, therefore, examines both prose texts. The public nature of these two texts contributes to their purpose within the larger agenda of Anglo-Saxon hagiography of not only participating in England's inclusion in the fellowship of Christianity, but also giving the newly Christian Anglo-Saxons a local model of sanctity,

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a tale of pregnant seals refusing to give birth until blessed by Cuthbert. See Lapidge, "Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*."

[89] Bede also included a shortened version of Cuthbert's life in his *Ecclesiastical History* (731).

[90] For more on this debate see Berschin, "*Opus deliberatum ac perfectum*," and Abraham, "Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*."

[91] Brown, *Companion to Bede*, 80-81. Also see Abraham, "Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*," 24, who believes that these changes are designed to make the hagiography conform to conventions, thus arguing more effectively for Cuthbert's sainthood.

[92] Abraham, "Bede's *Life of Cuthbert*," 24.

which, in part, accomplishes this feat by connecting the hagiographical subject to the very real terrain of Anglo-Saxon England.

Part of Cuthbert's popularity comes from both his situation within the critical early days of the conversion as well as his hagiographers' belief in his representation of the best of both the Roman and Celtic traditions that intersected most obviously in northern England,[93] as demonstrated by both traditional and more integrative images of the natural world in his *Lives*. Colgrave lists several traditional influences, including the *Lives* of Anthony and Martin as well as Jerome's *Life of Saint Paul the First Hermit*.[94] Following these sources, the *Lives* of Cuthbert at times display a traditional image of the saint's relationship with the natural world, one in which the hagiographical figure has achieved dominion over the elements of earth, air, fire and water. Cuthbert grows barley out of season, calms storms, stops fires and is provided with building materials by the sea. This image of the perfected man, though, is softened by Celtic influences that require that the saint have a more respectful relationship with the natural world, one that expresses an inherent reverence for nature that perhaps derives not just from the influence of Celtic hagiography, but also from the transitional time during which Cuthbert lived. He was born only about a decade after the missionary Paulinus first came to Edwin's court in Northumbria and an early incident in Cuthbert's *Life* as told by Bede displays the

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[93] Cuthbert spent the beginning of his religious life in service at monasteries in the Celtic tradition, but after the Synod of Whitby (664), which settled various points of contention regarding the dating of Easter, tonsure and diocesan organization, he conformed to Roman tradition and was part of the resulting reforms at the Celtic monastery of Lindisfarne. The details of his prose hagiographies show both Celtic characteristics in his asceticism and missionary activity, as well as Roman qualities in his role as bishop and his arrangement of the Lindisfarne community. With elements of both traditions seemingly harmonized in one individual, Cuthbert's *Lives* display the intersection of the Roman and Celtic in Northumbria and his popularity attests to the need for a figure that could bring together previously contentious traditions.

[94] Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 310. Jerome's *Life of Paul the First Hermit* presents a saint more closely connected with animals than Athanasius's depiction of Anthony, but the animals appear to serve Paul rather than commune with him and there is an element of the fantastical in that, in one version, Paul encounters both a centaur and a satyr.

uncertainty of the time. A group of monks bringing wood down the River Tyne suddenly

found themselves in jeopardy due to a storm. The common people upon the river bank

jeered at the monks, hoping for their destruction: "Qui et ueteres culturas hominibus

tulere, et nouas qualiter obseruare debeant nemo nouit" (III; "For they have robbed men

of their old ways of worship, and how the new worship is to be conducted, nobody

knows"),[95] displaying not just anger at the loss of the old ways, but also confusion at such

a change.[96] This episode illustrates the fluctuating religious climate during Cuthbert's

lifetime. Paganism was, if not still practiced, at least a not so distant memory and it is

easy to see that vestiges of the old pagan religion were transformed and included in the

wildlife stories of Celtic hagiography as in the various incidents in Cuthbert's *Lives* that

show his relationship with animals. These tales are a beloved aspect of his life and are an

integral feature of his character and include Cuthbert's horse finding a loaf of bread in a

thatched roof, an eagle providing a large fish for Cuthbert and an attendant, otters[97]

drying Cuthbert after he prays in the ocean and a raven bringing him a present of pig's

lard after being chastised by for taking thatch for a nest.[98] The details of these tales go

beyond a display of Cuthbert's dominion over the animal world, as found in conventional

tropes, in that they illustrate Cuthbert's love and respect towards God's creatures. He

shares the bread with his horse[99] and makes sure that the eagle receives half of the large

fish. The charming episode of the otters ends with Cuthbert blessing the animals, which

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[95] Bede, *Prose Life,* trans. by Colgrave, 165.

[96] Bequette believes that these common people were baptized Christians who had reverted to paganism possibly because of a lack of proper instruction in the new religion, a problem common during this time, "Monasticism, Evangelization and Eloquence," 336.

[97] The *Anonymous Life* calls them "duo pusilla animalia maritima" (II.iii; "two little sea animals"), trans. by Colgrave, 81.

[98] It is worth noting that these animal tales do not appear in Bede's version in the *Ecclesiastical History*, attesting to the more historical purpose of that text.

[99] Bede provides this detail in the *Prose Life*, but it is omitted in the *Anonymous Life*.

implies divine approval of the creatures and an acknowledgement of respect for the natural world. Likewise, the incident with the raven, in which the bird asks for and receives forgiveness, displays a mutual respect between God's created world and God's saint. The *Anonymous Life*, whose author was most likely more closely connected to the Celtic tradition, especially shows the animals as cooperative helpers with their own personalities and needs.[100] Cuthbert's interaction with animals reveals the Celtic penchant for the natural world, as inherited from Celtic paganism, which helped to make the new religion appealing to the common people.

Cuthbert's connection to the wilderness of Northumbria, though, is the most significant aspect of his appeal as an important figure in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. In both the active and the contemplative aspects of Cuthbert's life, the isolated landscape of northern England serves not as a trial for the saint, though it might be for others, but as the appropriate location of his activities. Following the model of Sulpicius's *Life of Martin*, Cuthbert's portrayal shows him in many roles: active bishop, evangelical priest, brother and hermit. While there are miracles detailed showing him in these various roles, such as the incident where he entertains an angel as the guest-master at Ripon or when he advises Queen Iurminburg at Carlisle,[101] more frequently, Cuthbert's hagiographers depict him as a solitary figure either in the Northumbrian wilderness or at his hermitage on Farne Island.

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[100] Cavill, "Some Dynamics," 5.

[101] Both the *Anonymous Life* and the *Prose Life* report that Cuthbert's vision of King Ecgfrith's death takes place at the Roman fountain in Carlisle, another instance of using a recognizable and real setting in the hagiographies.

Cuthbert's life and ministry fell early in the conversion and in his *Lives* he tirelessly worked to minister to those living in the isolated areas of Northumbria.[102] The *Anonymous Life* and the *Prose Life* both depict Cuthbert, during his active period, journeying through the wilderness of northern England. The *Anonymous Life* locates the episode with the eagle and the fish along the Teviot River, a tributary of the Tweed and "inter montana" (II.v; "among the mountains").[103] In the next chapter when Cuthbert has a vision of the devil, the anonymous monk tells the reader that this episode occurs during the same trip as the eagle miracle, "eo tempore ibi" (II.vi; "at that time there"),[104] but he again states that Cuthbert is working among the mountains, reiterating Cuthbert's location during these ministerial excursions as outside the civilized world of the monastery. In the *Prose Life*, Bede further emphasizes the remote nature of the places visited by Cuthbert in the chapter where he heals a dying youth, saying that Cuthbert was preaching in "montana et agrestia loca" (XXXII; "the mountainous and wild regions").[105] These short phrases serve the purpose of both giving the reader a location within the geography of England, while at the same time making it arduous enough to highlight Cuthbert's commitment to the people scattered across the countryside.

More specific locations and details develop the idea of Cuthbert's mission in the wilderness. The episode in which his horse finds a warm loaf of bread and meat in the thatch of a hut occurs at the end of a long winter's day of travel, during which, according to Bede, Cuthbert had refused sustenance due to its being a fast day. Consequently, he,

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[102] Bequette sees Cuthbert's evangelizing missions as connected to the depiction of the back-sliding Christians in the near-disaster along the Tyne. He views Cuthbert's ministering to the common people scattered throughout Northumbria as manifesting a desire to rectify a lack of proper instruction. Bequette, "Monasticism, Evangelization, and Eloquence," 337.

[103] *Anonymous Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 85.

[104] *Anonymous Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 87.

[105] Bede, *Prose Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 257.

along with the horse, found himself at evening seeking shelter in a deserted seasonal hut. Both Bede and the anonymous monk emphasize that the hut used by Cuthbert on this night is intended for occupation during the spring and summer grazing periods, reflecting the pattern of transhumance common in this area of Britain. This particular location would have served for seasonal pasturage in the spring and summer, with a minimal number of herdsmen, but would be deserted in the winter. The *Anonymous Life* even names the location as *Kuncacester*,[106] known today as Chester-le-Street. The dearth of burial sites from the time period shows that this area of Northumbria was sparsely populated until later in the Anglo-Saxon period[107] and the *Vita Sancti Oswaldi* by Reginald of Durham, although not written until the eleventh century,describes the area as "silvestrium animalium spelunca" (I; the den of wild animals),[108] again displaying the sense of Anglo-Saxon *wild(d)eornes* in describing the area outside civilization as the land of animals rather than humans. Certainly, Cuthbert was not there to minister to the wild animals, though. There would have been small farms and settlements scattered throughout the area, and although some of the episodes of both authors tell of Cuthbert stopping at various isolated homesteads, both authors construct Northumbria as a trying wilderness, at least outside the protection of its monasteries and royal centers. Bede, who makes more of an effort to connect the episodes of Cuthbert's life to Biblical parallel, references Elijah at the close of the miracle of the hidden loaf. Elijah, of course, is one of the main figures in the Christian tradition associated with the wilderness. The effect is such that even though the countryside of Northumbria is not completely devoid of human

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[106] Colgrave asserts that the manuscript reading is *Kuncacester* despite a Bollandist mistake that led to the belief that the *Anonymous Life* indicates Lanchester as the site of this miracle. Colgrave *Two Lives*, 314.
[107] Colgrave, *Two Lives*, 314.
[108] My translation.

habitation, Cuthbert's presence there is one of a lone figure serving God in the wilderness, which connects him to a larger Christian tradition, both placing him on par with other Christian figures and providing Anglo-Saxons with their own model of sanctity that is interconnected with the world around them.

Bede succinctly connects Cuthbert's travels into the wilderness to his ministry and personal saintliness at the close of Chapter IX,[109] implying that Cuthbert's journeys are not designed as a trial for his fortitude, as is often expected in hagiography, but an integral aspect of his Christian service to others:

> Solebat autem ea maxime loca peragrare, illis predicare in uiculis, qui in arduis asperisque montibus procul positi aliis hor/rori erant ad uisendum, et paupertate pariter ac rusticitate sua doctorum prohibebant accessum. Quos tamen ille pio libenter mancipatus labori, tanta doctrinae excolebat industria, ut de monasterio egrediens, sepe ebdomada integra, aliquando duabus uel tribus, nonnunquam etiam mense pleno domum non rediret, sed demoratus in montanis plebem rusticam uerbo predicationis simul et exemplo uirtutis ad coelestia uocaret. (IX) ("Now he was wont to penetrate those parts especially and to preach in those villages that were far away on steep and rugged mountains, which others dreaded to visit and whose poverty as well as ignorance prevented teachers from approaching them. And giving himself up gladly to this pious labor, he attended to their instruction with such industry, that, leaving the monastery, he would often not return home for a whole week, sometimes even for two or three weeks, and even occasionally for a full month; but he would tarry in the mountains,

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[109] Bede later uses this passage almost verbatim in IV.xxvii of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

> summoning the rustics to heavenly things by the words of his preaching as well as by the example of his virtue.")[110]

Bede presents the wilderness of Northumbria as the appropriate place for a priest to serve God by guiding the common people isolated from organized Christianity. Although not expressly stated, there is an implication that these simple rustics are coeval with the wild animals normally associated with the wilderness. Furthermore, the difficulty and necessity of this work is emphasized by the lack of others willing to do it. In general, Northumbria appears as a wilderness, foreign and terrifying to the average monk who views the monastery as his home. Even though they are fellow Northumbrians, the people outside the monastery are alien and frightening. It is an unsettling world, dangerous to the new Christians in its seeming ignorance and nonconformity and few willingly go into it. This fear of the wilderness recalls the incident of the monks in danger on the Tyne from Cuthbert's youth, when the common people refused to pray for their safety, partly due to their own ignorance regarding the new religion. Cuthbert, though, has a different relationship with the countryside. He may view the monastery as his home, but, unlike his brothers, he appears equally as comfortable in the wilderness, and the wilderness is likewise welcoming to him. In comparing Cuthbert to Elijah in Chapter IX, Bede further states that Cuthbert had no concerns for food in his journeys, as God would provide for the saint as he had for the prophet, and that the people, so daunting to the other monks, were always honest and open with Cuthbert. Using this and other passages, the two *Lives* construct Northumbria as a dangerous and trying wilderness for the average Christian, but for Cuthbert, this wilderness is a safe and welcoming place where he can accomplish God's work of converting the rustics and by extension, the wilderness, to Christianity.

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[110] Bede, *Prose Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 187.

Another important wilderness location in Cuthbert's narrative is his hermitage on Farne Island where he carried out the contemplative phase of his religious life and which articulates a different wilderness landscape than his time in the wilds of Northumbria. When Cuthbert transitioned into a solitary life, he chose island locations in keeping with the Anglo-Saxon fascination with the coastland as a permeable boundary between the physical and the spiritual. First he settled on a tidal island near Lindisfarne, and later in a hermitage on the more remote Farne Island about seven miles from the monastery and one and a half miles from the coast. Cuthbert made improvements there, building two structures, planting crops for his sustenance and miraculously producing a well. Although not as developed as the narrative of Guthlac's transformation of his hermitage, to be discussed below, these steps physically represent the conversion of the wilderness to an important Christian site. At first he received visitors, but later only spoke to others through a small window. Cuthbert apparently felt drawn to the place and both *Lives* record tales of his continuing relationship with the natural world in which he has power over the elements and animals while residing in this spot. Though he was reluctantly induced to leave Farne Island and serve as bishop, he later returned there to die.

Both authors describe Farne Island, giving a sense of its remoteness and isolation. The anonymous author states that Cuthbert went "ad insulam quam Farne nominant, undique in medio mari fluctibus circumcinctam" (III.i; "to the island called Farne, which is in the midst of the sea and surrounded on every side by water").[111] Bede is more sublime in his description: "Aliquot milibus passuum ab hac semiinsula [Lindisfarne] ad eurum secreta, et hinc altissimo, et inde infinito clauditur oceano" (XVII; "It is some miles away to the south-east of this half-island [Lindisfarne], and is shut in on the

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[111] *Anonymous Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 97.

landward side by very deep water and on the seaward side by the boundless ocean").[112]

These short descriptions serve the purpose of showing the isolation of the place,

heightening Cuthbert's withdrawal to the island and his choice of a location surrounded

by water. Bede alludes to Lindisfarne's situation on a tidal island, and contrasts the nature

of Lindisfarne, which is connected to the mainland for part of the day, with Farne Island

which is completely separated from the coast by deep waters, heightening the sense of

Cuthbert's separation from human companionship.[113] This isolation extends further in the

description of Cuthbert's main living structure as round and closed on all sides, with only

the sky visible, a detail that strengthens the sense of the water location as spiritually

closer to heaven and God. Though Farne Island gives Cuthbert the isolated hermitage he

desires, at the same time, the anonymous poet's naming of the location and Bede's more

specific direction and description place the scene of Cuthbert's hermitage in a

recognizable environment clearly in Northumbria, allowing the reader to identify with the

site and to place significant meaning upon a local place, while also acknowledging the

transformation of that site within a context of Christian conversion.

In their depiction of Cuthbert both as an active preacher in the wilderness and as a

hermit on Farne Island, the anonymous monk and Bede emphasize Cuthbert's intimate

relationship with the natural world, not as a trial for the saint, but as the proper location

for him to conduct his Christian duties. Through various details related to location and

geography, the two authors additionally allow their Northumbrian audience to situate

Cuthbert within a recognizable place, and to thereby relate to Cuthbert as one of their

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[112] Bede, *Prose Life*, trans. by Colgrave, 215.
[113] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*," 95.

own, strengthening their spirituality and connecting their place in time and geography to

the larger Christian world.

Guthlac of Crowland

Sometime in the 740's, Felix, a monk from a most likely East Anglian monastery,

wrote the *Life of St. Guthlac* (d. 714), which details the Fenland mission of this figure, at

the request of King Ælfwald of East Anglia.[114] Guthlac is the latest figure discussed here

and his *Life* is the latest of the first eight hagiographical texts produced in England.[115]

Felix's purpose in his *Life* appears to be localized, unlike the broader concerns of Bede,

who does not mention Guthlac in any work.[116] Felix does not enter into any discussion

regarding the various controversies that had interested Bede, and, while Felix does draw

upon Bede's *Prose Life* of Cuthbert for hagiographical tropes, otherwise, neither the

Celtic traditions so important to many of the other figures discussed here nor the concerns

regarding friction between the Roman and Celtic traditions seem to be a strong influence

on Felix,[117] who, nevertheless, closely connects Guthlac to the natural world. Farther

removed in time from the earlier struggles of conversion, Felix's *Life* offers the most

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[114] Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, 16.

[115] See Chapter 1, note 65.

[116] The stand-alone hagiographies of Cuthbert, the *Anonymous Life* and Bede's *Metrical Life* and *Prose Life*, were written for the brotherhood at Lindisfarne specifically and possibly for Northumbrians in general and, therefore, for a local audience. Bede's inclusion of Cuthbert in the *Ecclesiastical History*, though, may make a case for his desire to present his works on Cuthbert to an international audience, especially as he points out within the *Ecclesiastical History* that he has previously written two longer works on the Northumbrian saint.

[117] Regarding Felix, Colgrave asserts: "He was not influenced by the Celtic tradition," and, as proof of this assertion, cites a lack of concern on Felix's part regarding the various controversies involving the Celtic tradition as well as the statements of Wigfrith, a member of bishop Headda's retinue, disparaging Irish anchorites in Chapter XLVI, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, 16. Felix's education and Guthlac's training may have been thoroughly Roman, but certainly the time-frame for Felix's writing is well after these matters were resolved at the Synod of Whitby (664). The fact that Felix does not mention the typical controversies could be more indicative of his time and purpose rather than any personal bias. He certainly does not appear to have any qualms about using Bede's *Prose Life* of Cuthbert, which details the life of one of the most famous saints in the Celtic tradition.

sophisticated use of wilderness landscapes in this group of early Anglo-Saxon hagiographies. Felix accomplishes this through the integration of source material, which connects Guthlac to the heremetic tradition, with accurate environmental conditions. This amalgamation results in a fully realized place, constructed as a forbidding wilderness, which then becomes re-constructed as the site of cultural meaning within a context of Christianity. Unlike Bede's depiction of Æthelthryth, Felix is less concerned with the addition of his Fenland saint to the international Church and more interested in Guthlac's transformation of an inhospitable environment for use within the local Christian community.

Guthlac was born into a noble family in Mercia and, in his youth, was a warrior for King Æthelred of Mercia. In his twenties, however, he entered the monastic house at Repton where he was so dedicated to austerity that at first the other monks were distrustful of him, but he eventually won their respect through his sincerity. After two years, Guthlac wished for a more ascetic life and retired to Crowland, which, like the Isle of Ely, was another bedrock island surrounded by peat bogs in the backfens, located in the southwest Lincolnshire district of the Fenland. On Crowland, Guthlac inhabited an ancient barrow and constructed two buildings, though he was forced to clear the island of devils that had been allowed free use of the area. He spent the rest of his life on Crowland; his fame spread and the desolate island became the destination of pilgrims, the sick and advice seekers, high and low. One of these visitors was Æthelbald who later became king of Mercia and who, after Guthlac's death, endowed a shrine to his memory there.

In his *Life of Guthlac*, Felix creates a realistic landscape while also placing the wilderness of England within the larger Christian tradition. Considering that Felix was writing at the behest of Ælfwald, it is generally assumed that he was a brother of an East Anglian monastery, which would have given him intimate knowledge of the specific features of the Fenland.[118] Despite this knowledge, Felix repeatedly terms the area as *heremus*, *heremi*—the medieval form of *eremus, eremi*, generally translated as "desert." While this terminology appears to be a result of Felix's use of Evagrius's Latin version of the *Life of Anthony*, which Felix quotes from extensively and which established the common trope of depicting the eremetic saint within the desert, it is not inconsistent with the area surrounding Crowland. Certainly, metaphorically, the area was a desert in that it lay along the fringes of human society. While Colgrave consistently translates *heremus* as "desert," Whitaker includes "wilderness" and "wasteland" in his definition, adding a dimension to the word by which it both recalls Anthony's *Life* and more accurately describes the location of Guthlac's work as a place of wild animals (wilderness) or a place uninhabitable in a practical sense (wasteland). Later Anglo-Saxon authors, writing in their native language, preserved this multi-layered sense. Vercelli Homily XXIII, which reproduces two chapters of an Old English version of Felix's *Life*[119] and is from the late tenth-century Vercelli Manuscript, as well as *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, from the tenth-century Exeter Book, regularly use *wēsten*, which Bosworth and Toller define as "a desert, wilderness." This term is consistent with the dual meaning of *heremus, heremi* as both conveying the traditional sense of the saint in the desert while also preserving the

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[118] Due to the vividness of the descriptions of the area, Meaney theorizes that Felix must have visited Crowland at least once. Meaney, "Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac*," 30.

[119] Colgrave, *Felix's Life*, 19. The Old English translation of Felix's *Life* is found in London British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian D.xxi.

sense of a place beyond human control.[120] While Felix's terminology stands out as derived from Athanasius's desert wilderness in the *Life of Anthony*, this same vocabulary is not inconsistent with the Anglo-Saxon conception of the Fenland as a marginal area deserted and unusable. Crowland fulfills the ascetic need for a wild place where Guthlac, like Anthony, can test himself and commune with God.[121]

While the Fenland was an ecologically marginal area, meaning it was less settled due to harsh conditions, environmental history shows that it was far from deserted or useless and Felix's own descriptions betray his desire to present a desert consistent with Athanasius as well as one based on true Fenland conditions. Owing to his knowledge of the area or perhaps owing to his localized audience, which would have also been familiar with the Fenland, Felix's descriptions of the backwater fens and Crowland are more vivid and less scientific than Bede's description of the search for Æthelthryth's sarcophagus or his depiction of Farne Island:

> Est in meditullaneis Brittanniae partibus inmensae magnitudinis aterrima palus, quae, a Grontae fluminis ripis incipiens, haud procul a castello quem dicunt nomine Gronte, nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus, ab austro in aquilonem mare tenus longissimo tractu protenditur. (XXIV)
>
> ("There is in the midland district of Britain a most dismal fen of immense size, which begins at the banks of the river Granta not far from the camp which is

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[120] In addition, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* also employ the phrase *wilde deor* to describe the demons of Crowland (907) and their threats to Guthlac regarding the difficulty of life there (276), confirming the Anglo-Saxon sense of the wilderness, as contained in *wild(d)eornes*, that such places outside of human occupation are considered more appropriate for wild animals than humans.
[121] Meaney, "Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac*," 33.

called Cambridge, and stretches from the south as far north as the sea. It is a very

long tract, now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters

overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the

windings of tortuous streams.")[122]

This description is designed both to give a specific location and to create a sense of the

foreboding aspects of the region where Guthlac searches for a suitable hermitage, while

at the same time being realistic in its depiction of the various water features of the area,

including marshes, peat bogs and rivers, as well as the existence of the bedrock islands.

Felix narrows the focus from the Fenland in general to Crowland, specifically, in the

following chapter and tells how Guthlac,

> Per invia lustra inter atrae paludis margines Christo viatore ad praedictum locum
>
> usque pervenit; Crugland dicitur, insula media in palude posita quae ante paucis
>
> propter remotioris heremi solitudinem inculta vix nota habebatur. (XXV)
>
> (Made his way, travelling with Christ, through trackless bogs within the confines
>
> of the dismal marsh until he came to the said spot; it is called Crowland, an island
>
> in the middle of the marsh which on account of the wildness of this very remote
>
> desert had hitherto remained untilled and known to a very few.)[123]

The result of this description is that Felix presents Crowland as not just part of the

Fenland, but as the most remote and forbidding location possible, heightening the

austerity of Guthlac's mode of life and creating a vivid image of an area probably already

known to the audience.

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[122] Felix, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 87.
[123] Felix, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 89.

Despite Felix's portrayal of Crowland as a dismal wilderness location, designed to emphasize Guthlac's strength and resolve to emulate the desert fathers, the Fenland was an important area economically and would not have been completely deserted. Felix's attention to detail betrays this fact. Tatwine is a local who describes Crowland to Guthlac and guides him there through the fens, "arrepta piscatoria scafula" (XXV; "taking a fisherman's skiff").[124] Tatwine probably made his living in one of the marsh trades, perhaps fishing, and was intimately familiar with the backfens despite their desolate appearance. Another detail of Guthlac's island that confirms the reality of Felix's description, but also undermines his assertion of complete desolation, is the barrow[125] that Guthlac inhabits. Though there is some debate as to the age of the structure, prehistoric or Roman, either option attests to the improvements and settlements that archaeological evidence confirms for the Fenland beginning in the Bronze Age, which had fallen into disuse after the Roman withdrawal.[126] Another detail that Felix provides is that sometime before Guthlac's arrival, the barrow had been plundered, again countering the portrayal of the island as an unknown space. While Felix states that the island was uncultivated, as if it were a sort of virgin land, Tatwine's knowledge and the barrow's presence belie this description. Although Felix's realistic depiction competes with the tropes of hagiography, he succeeds in integrating the actual topography of the Fenland

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[124] Felix, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 89.

[125] Felix does not give enough detail to determine the age of the barrow. Colgrave argues for a long Roman chambered barrow due to its location in an area developed by the Romans, *Felix's Life of Guthlac*, 182-3. Siewers, though, believes that Felix may have purposely described the barrow as containing a cistern so as to represent an older work, tying the concept into Anglo-Saxon nation building, "Landscapes of Conversion," 13-18. Meaney suggests that the detail of the cist may be a borrowing from Jerome's *Life* of Paul and Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, "Felix's *Life of Guthlac*," 35. As Felix describes it, though, the cist indicates a Bronze Age structure.

[126] Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*," 98, asserts that the text is purposely ambiguous regarding the barrow, creating a merging of recent and ancient past.

with his fashioning of Guthlac as a local hermit on the same level as the desert fathers, balancing his purposes.

Another trope of hagiography that Felix intertwines with Guthlac's wilderness location is the presence of demons and devils as an attendant feature of Crowland. Inherited from Anthony's narrative, battle with demonic visitation in many forms is a common trope of hagiography. The two prose *Lives* of Cuthbert discussed here mention the banishment of demons from Farne Island, but they do so in a perfunctory manner, as a normal step within the process of choosing an eremetic site.[127] Felix, however, devotes several chapters to the process, detailing a variety of torments visited upon Guthlac: despair, false friendship, visions of hell and perceived attacks by beasts and Britons. Most of these occurrences echo Felix's hagiographical sources, including the lament of the demons over the loss of their home to an invading Christian. The most vivid episode of Guthlac's torment, though, is also the one most closely connected to his specific location within the fens. During one of his nightly vigils, Guthlac is overwhelmed with a troop of ferocious demons who invade his dwelling. Before taking him to the gates of Hell, they bind the saint:

> Et adductum in atrae paludis coenosis lactibus inmerserunt. Deinde asportantes illum per paludis asperrima loca inter densissima veprium vimina dilaceratis membrorum conpaginibus trahebant. Inter haec cum magnam partem umbrosae noctis in illis adflictionibus exigebant, sistere illum paulisper fecerunt, imperantes sibi, ut de heremo discedisset. (XXXI)

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[127] Bede's narrative of Cedd, as discussed above, modifies this trope by having Cedd and his brother fast and pray to cleanse Lastingham from the evilness of the former, criminal occupants.

("And leading him away, they plunged him into the muddy waters of the black marsh. Then they carried him through the wildest parts of the fen, and dragged him through the dense thickets of brambles, tearing his limbs and all his body. Meanwhile, when they had spent a great part of the gloomy night in these persecutions, they made him stand up for a short time, commanding him to depart from the desert.")[128]

Unlike the other torments Guthlac suffers, these tortures are performed by using the features of the location of Guthlac's work, as if the demons who demand Guthlac's departure wish to render vividly upon his body the fierceness of the fens and their own hatred of his occupation of Crowland. As in the *Life of Anthony*, the demons are angry at the loss of a space that they had previously held. While *wild(d)eornes* indicates places beyond human civilization that are held by wild animals, within this Christian context, the concept also indicates places held by demons, as shown here, and even by men who live outside the laws of God, as shown in the episode above involving Cedd. This attack is designed to make the location so hateful to Guthlac that he will leave. As any hermit must, Guthlac faces trials designed by the Devil to test his resolve and, in resisting the demons, Guthlac stands for the removal of these elements and the Christianization of the landscape both literally, as the demons leave, and symbolically, as the place becomes a Christian holy site.

In the middle section of the text, the devilish attacks against Guthlac seem relentless, but he eventually defeats the demons, resulting in a transformation in the characteristics of the landscape itself. From the time that Guthlac begins searching for a hermitage in Chapter XXIV until the night he is attacked by false beasts in Chapter

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[128] Felix, *Life of Saint Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 103.

XXXVI, descriptions of the foreboding wetlands abound, as well as multiple attacks by devils and demons, with Felix portraying the two aspects of Guthlac's location as intimately intertwined. Chapter XXXVI, though, marks the end of these tortures when Guthlac defeats the demons once and for all. After this final battle with the devils, Chapter XXXVII marks the beginning of a new relationship between Guthlac and the natural world around him on Crowland. A series of charming animal tales, probably influenced by Bede's *Prose Life*, follows. Chapters XXXVII-XL discuss jackdaws that steal various items, birds that rest on Guthlac's shoulders and fish who heed his call. Felix explains:

> Erga enim omnia eximiae caritatis ipsius gratia abundabat, in tantum ut incultae solitudinis volucres ac vagabundi coenosae paludis pisces ad vocem ipsius veluti ad pastorem ocius natantes volantesque subvenirent; de manu enim illius victum prout uniuscuiusque natura indigebat, vesci solebant. (XXXVIII)
>
> ("For the grace of his excellent charity abounded to all creatures, so that even the birds of the untamed wilderness and the wandering fishes of the muddy marshes would come flying or swimming swiftly to his call as if to a shepherd; and they were even accustomed to take from his hand such food as the nature of each demanded.")[129]

This new relationship with the animals of Crowland shows the hagiographical trope of the perfected man whose association with God puts him in balance with all of creation, but the structure that Felix follows in his hagiography relates this trope more intimately with place. First, a series of chapters details the difficulties of the location linked with demonic visitations, but when the demons are defeated, the rigors of the landscape end,

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[129] Felix, *Life of Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 121.

and next, a series of chapters detail Guthlac's new relationship with the natural world. Crowland becomes an almost bucolic setting, a Christianized place that both recalls the pre-lapsarian Garden of Eden and foreshadows the paradise to come.[130] By defeating the demons, Guthlac, in essence, defeats the fens and transforms Crowland from a desolate swamp to a paradise in which humanity has dominion over the animal kingdom and natural world.

Adding to this sense of a transformation of the fens is Guthlac's appropriation of the barrow on Crowland. While on the one hand its presence undermines the idea of an untouched island, on the other, it provides an additional image of the conversion of this landscape. One of Guthlac's first acts is to build a structure over the ruined side of the barrow to provide shelter for himself. Much has been written by scholars regarding the political aspects of the appropriation of this structure and of Felix's narrative as a whole as a metaphor for Anglo-Saxon nation building.[131] The more obvious interpretation, which is usually skimmed over, may be the more applicable here, namely, that the appropriation of the barrow is a Christian act that claims a pagan site for a Christian purpose. Felix uses the Latin *tumulus, tumuli* for the structure. *Guthlac A*, however, uses the more descriptive *beorg*, which Della Hooke asserts was most likely used to denote a "tumulus that was recognized to be ancient in Anglo-Saxon times."[132] Again, the age of the barrow is ambiguous, but the Anglo-Saxon implication is that the barrow was very old and therefore, at least in its portrayal by Felix, probably pre-Roman and pagan. Guthlac's activities in this context follow Gregory the Great's injunction to repurpose

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[130] For more on the role of gardens in Christian thought see Harrison, *Gardens*, 14-24 and 135-48.
[131] See Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion," for a discussion of the barrow as a representation of the native British, and therefore, Guthlac's possession of it as an aspect of Anglo-Saxon nation building. See also Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*," for the appropriation of the barrow as an act of asserting power over the land.
[132] Hooke, *Landscape*, 99.

pagan sites for Christian uses and Guthlac's actions serve to extend Christianity into the isolated areas of Britain, somewhat similar to Bede's agenda of fashioning Anglo-Saxon England as lying along the edge of the Christian world. As Felix's audience appears to have been one of the East Anglian monastic centers, Guthlac's coopting of the wetlands for Christianity was probably an important aspect of the audience's heritage and daily mission. As discussed previously, a common trope of hagiographies is the demonic presence in wilderness spaces, of which Felix makes liberal use in his *Life*. One of the aspects of this trope is the implication that if land is not Christian, it is therefore demonic, and must be converted for Christian use.[133] While a saint's presence, in general, will Christianize a pagan space, Guthlac's possession of the barrow is a more tangible aspect of this appropriation of the land and works in conjunction with his battles against the demons.

After the possession of the barrow, the defeat of the demons and the series of animal tales, Felix completes the transformation of Crowland from a wilderness lying beyond civilization to a Christianized place that performs a cultural function when he shifts the narrative focus to a long line of visitors to the island, some seeking healing, others seeking spiritual and political advice. These visitors range from common men to church figures to a future king. The text concludes with Guthlac's death and translation and two posthumous miracles. In one of these miracles, Guthlac visits Æthelbald in a vision and reassures him that he will be king. Felix tells the reader that Æthelbald rules currently in Mercia and has endowed Guthlac's shrine at Crowland. The progression of the narrative, in effect, creates an impression of Guthlac's having conquered the wilderness and transforming it for God's use. Guthlac begins, according to Felix, by

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[133] Howe, "Conversion," 66-67.

seeking to emulate the desert fathers and therefore establishes himself in a desolate environment. Through the strength of his convictions, though, he conquers that environment and a deserted island in the backfens becomes a popular spiritual destination with no fewer than nineteen specific visitors mentioned, and many more unspecified:

> Sub eisdem quoque temporibus ad virum Dei Guthlacum multi diversorum ordinum gradus, abbates, fratres, comites, divites, vexati, pauperes, non solum de proximis Merciorum finibus, verum etiam de remotis Brittanniae partibus. (XLV) (During these times too, many people of various ranks [crowded] to see Guthlac the man of God – abbots, brethren, *gesithas*, rich men, the afflicted and the poor – not only from the neighboring land of the Mercians, but also even from the remote parts of Britain.)[134]

Guthlac's conquering of the wilderness creates a conversion of the landscape that serves as a representation of Anglo-Saxon Christianization. The progression of Felix's narrative moves Crowland from a forbidding island inhabited by demons, to a purified site inhabited by a holy man, to a destination for those needing help and finally as a Christian shrine whose worth is confirmed by posthumous miracles. This conversion of Crowland mirrors the greater conversion of the Anglo-Saxons and creates a local history for the citizens of East Anglia.

Despite their sometimes fashioning themselves as the children of Israel, the Anglo-Saxons were under no pretenses that they were entering a pristine paradise untouched by man.[135] Instead, they chose to create new meaning out of the old sites that

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[134] Felix, *Life of Guthlac*, trans. by Colgrave, 139.
[135] Howe, "The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England," 92.

they found in Britain.[136] In this aspect, they followed Gregory the Great's instructions. At times they constructed the landscape as an empty wilderness on which they could overlay a new Christian meaning. At other times, they acknowledged the previous occupants and co-opted their sites for the new religion. Though written, hagiographies were a dynamic aspect of the conversion of the land, combining Celtic and Roman traditions, providing local saints and connecting the people to their land in a way that reflected their new religion. These works were the culmination of Anglo-Saxon England's inclusion in the greater Christian community, converting the island at the edge of the world from pagan to Christian.

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[136] Howe, "The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England," 95.

Chapter 2: *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon Anxiety in the Landscape of the Pagan Past

The English landscape portrayed in Anglo-Saxon hagiographies served as both a realistic picture of the countryside for audiences familiar and unfamiliar with England as well as a fitting backdrop for the work of religious figures seeking to convert the land for Christian use. In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, however, the poet develops a natural world that is strange and threatening even though it contains realistic elements of the English terrain. This method creates a natural world that functions as an antithesis to the civilization of the mead hall and heightens the terror created by the three monsters of the text. Unlike Cuthbert or Guthlac, Beowulf does not journey into the wilderness in order to seek a refuge, but instead, only does so when forced to deliver the community from danger. In Part I, his adventures in Denmark, Beowulf kills Grendel and Grendel's mother without any desire to convert the landscape to a more civilized purpose. In Part II, Beowulf's fight with the dragon in Geatland, Beowulf does not return from the wilderness, instead dying in battle. The two landscapes depicted in the text, the mere of the Grendelkin and the cliff-side barrow of the dragon, imbue the pagan past of the poem with a representation of the natural world in which every hard-won victory against the relentless forces of nature is short-lived. In calling up this past, the poet uses the landscape to enhance the fatalistic tone of the poem, to create terror and to reflect the lost state of the Anglo-Saxon pagan ancestors. As an epic, *Beowulf* both represents the ideals of the Anglo-Saxon people and also serves as a mediating force between the Christian present of the poet and audience and the paganism of Anglo-Saxon ancestry as represented in the poem. The liminal locations in the wilderness landscapes create a place

where the past can be re-contextualized for the new, Christian world. While the forces of nature seem relentless throughout most of the narrative, Beowulf's death, however, alters the landscape of the poem in the Geats' large monument to their king, creating a remembrance of his heroism, and thereby contextualizing the remembered past and the collective history of the Anglo-Saxons within a new framework while simultaneously looking towards the contemporary, Christianized Anglo-Saxon.

Genre and Audience

As the centerpiece and longest surviving work of Anglo-Saxon poetry, *Beowulf* is commonly categorized as an epic, an important aspect of understanding its function within Anglo-Saxon society and its portrayal of the landscape. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Hartman supply a generic definition of epic, derived from the Greek tradition of a long verse narrative told in an elevated style that relates the exploits of a hero upon whom depends "the fate of a tribe, a nation, or . . . the human race."[1] Anastasios Daskalopoulos complicates the definition somewhat by, anachronistically, adding that an epic is often written from "a national perspective."[2] Looking beyond classical exemplar, such as The *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, John Miles Foley examines epics from a variety of cultures including the *Siri Epic* of the Tulu of southern India, the *Son-Jara* from Mali, the South Slavic epics from the Balkans and *Beowulf* to advocate for the necessity of an "open ended model"[3] that emphasizes the uniqueness of various traditions, concluding that even the widest of current definitions cannot "perfectly capture

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[1] Abrams and Harpham, "Epic," 107.
[2] Daskalopoulos, "Epic," 185.
[3] Foley, "Epic as Genre," 180.

the manysidedness of 'the epic'."[4] He therefore prefers the very broad designation, taken

from the *Odyssey*, of "those things that the singers memorialize."[5] Although generic

classification is a complicated issue for *Beowulf*,[6] the poem does fit the definitions given.

It is a formal, poetic composition that centers on a great hero who fights to save the

people of Denmark and Geatland. Even though *Beowulf* is not set in Anglo-Saxon

England, it is written from the perspective of the Anglo-Saxons in that it concerns their

ancestors on the Continent, is in the Anglo-Saxon language and represents Anglo-Saxon

cultural values. In a somewhat meta-moment, the poem even declares itself an

appropriate subject for memorialization in song when Hrothgar's *scop* sings of Beowulf's

victory the morning after Grendel's death.

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[4] Foley, "Epic as Genre," 181.

[5] Foley, "Epic as Genre," 181.

[6] According to many scholars, *Beowulf* is difficult to classify generically. While it is the longest text in the Anglo-Saxon corpus, it is actually rather short, 3182 lines, when compared to epics of other cultures. At the same time, it is the only surviving Anglo-Saxon text that can possibly be categorized as an epic. In addition, only one manuscript, and hence one version of the poem, survives, making it difficult to place it within the larger Anglo-Saxon tradition, Foley, "Epic as Genre," 180. Another aspect of *Beowulf*'s uniqueness is its intricate incorporation of a variety of genres that confuse the progression of the main action of the narrative. It contains gnomic verse, elegy, heroic lay, lament, flyting, genealogy, history, creation hymn, *beot*/formal boast and sermon. Focusing on certain of these elements, Hanning classifies the work as "heroic history," the manifestation of an oral culture in which history and heroic tradition merge, "*Beowulf* as Heroic History," 77. Harris, however, prefers to term it a *summa litterarum*, a form that summarizes the literary past and represents a specific poet's take on the oral genres of Anglo-Saxon literature, "*Beowulf* as Epic," 163. J. R. R. Tolkien preferred to call it a "heroic-elegiac poem" that builds to a lament for the hero's lost life, "*Beowulf*," 38. This generic uncertainty probably results from a modern desire to force our own definitions upon the literature of a previous time, as well as the open-endedness of the epic model outside the classical period. Greenfield analyzes the heroic nature of Beowulf and the tragic elements of the narrative, comparing them with the conventions of drama to declare the poem an epic, *Hero and Exile*, 17. Although they do explore the questions regarding genre, Fulk, Bjork and Niles ultimately argue for the designation of epic, not as based upon classical models, but as a term that encompasses the elaborate form of *Beowulf*. They point to its possible development from the lay, its possible inspiration from the *Aeneid* as well as Old English models including Biblical texts such as *Judith* and those of the Junius Manuscript, especially *Genesis*, *Exodus* and *Daniel*, as well as hagiographical works like *Elene*, and *Guthlac A* and *B*, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxxxvii. They additionally admit that "long heroic poem set in the antique Northern past" may be the most accurate descriptor, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxxxvii.

For this study, the importance of *Beowulf* as an epic lies in its depiction of the natural world as a force diametrically opposed to the community, or "nation" of the epic,[7] which I argue is the same as the targeted audience. Several options for the audience of *Beowulf* have been suggested, from courtly to clerical to lay, with all being possible.[8] The various definitions of epic, however, can aid in the identification. Epics represent a particular group of people, whether a specific tribe, nation or the human race as a whole. Daskalopoulos's "national perspective" points towards the audience of an epic as the very group of people whose values it represents. Even Foley's very broad "those things that the singers memorialize" gives power to the audience in the cultural role of an epic in that a singer of tales would hardly perform works that do not connect with the listeners. In its opening, *Beowulf* itself attempts to name its own audience in a broad way by calling to a large group of people who collectively identify with a shared past on the Continent:

Hwæt, wē Gār-Dena   in ġeārdagum,

þēodcyninga   þrym ġefrūnon,

hū ðā æþelingas   ellen fremedon.

Oft Scyld Scēfing   sceaþena þrēatum,

monegum mǣġþum   meodosetla oftēah,

eġsode eorl[as],   syððan ǣrest wearð[9]

fēasceaft funden. (1-7A)[10]

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[7] Huppé identifies five types of nature descriptions, including "Sea Journey" and "Metaphors," which are not always threatening, although such episodes are rare. Context and the character's relationship with the natural world within a particular scene account for these differences. See below and Chapter 2, note 69.

[8] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxxxviii. See also Bjork and Obermeier, "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences," 31-33.

[9] As per Klaeber's 4th edition (see note 10, below), emendations made by adding letters or words are enclosed in square brackets.

[10] All *Beowulf* quotations are taken from *Klaeber's "Beowulf" and the "Fight at Finnisburg,"* 4th ed.

(Lo, we have heard of the glory of the kings of the men of the Spear-Danes in days of yore, how the princes performed deeds of valor. Often Scyld, son of Scef, snatched the mead-hall-seats of many people by means of troops of fighters; he terrified warriors from the time when he was found destitute.)

The opening line provides the only instance in the poem of the first person plural pronoun *wē*. As Fulk, Bjork and Niles discuss, this strategic use of such an inclusive word at the opening creates for the text its own projected audience: all who participate in the listening or reading of the narrative are included within the group represented by *wē*.[11] Since an epic represents the values of a particular group of people, this *wē* creates that particular group, assuming that all who would participate in the text, through reading, hearing or even writing, are a part of the tribe, or nation, represented by the text. *Wē* is followed by the genitive plural *Gār-Dena*, "of the Spear-Danes." The first line of the text is completed with *in ġeārdagum*, "in days of yore," taking the present audience of the *wē* through time and space and into the past of the continental ancestors.[12] Nicholas Howe asserts that the Anglo-Saxons regarded Germania and its surrounding areas in general as a continental homeland, not as an exact location, but as more of an idea that could be invoked by authors to create a nostalgic effect.[13] One of Buell's elements of place-connectedness is the "imagined place," which includes the idea of a perceived homeland, real or fictitious.[14] The connection to such a place can be just as meaningful as any other connection to place, even if it has never been visited. In setting his work in Denmark and Geatland, the poet invokes the idea of the ancestral homeland in the audience even

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[11] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxxxviii.
[12] For more on this opening and its use of history see Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 27-28. See also Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 148-49.
[13] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 143-44.
[14] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 71-73.

though that audience may be missing any physical connection to the place.[15] Although a variety of tribes migrated to England, the *wē* of the opening of *Beowulf* displays a desire to serve as a past for all Anglo-Saxons in England no matter their place of origin. Robert Bjork and Anita Obermeier admit that "everyman" is a possible audience for the poem[16] and, even though Robert Hanning does not classify *Beowulf* as an epic, he does affirm poetry's ability to strengthen the identity of the social group.[17] For my purposes, it is important to classify *Beowulf* as an epic and to emphasize that the audience is, at the same time, both the people who would listen to the poem as well as the people whose values and interests are represented by the poem: *Beowulf* targets a broad audience of people living in England who identify with a Northern Germanic ancestry, which serves to unite them in a shared culture and society. Such a perspective allows for the prioritization of the community over the forces that seek to destroy it, which, in *Beowulf*, often emerge from an unknowable and foreboding natural world.

Another important aspect of an epic is the epic hero. Through the inherent qualities of the genre, epic heroes are designed to represent an idealized, even if sometimes unrealistic, version of a society.[18] The key threat that the monsters bring to the world of *Beowulf* is the collapse of civilization. Beowulf, as the perfect representation of the threatened society, is the only force able to overcome the various threats and restore order.[19] In doing so, he both upholds and affirms the rightness of the society. The opening

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[15] Howe asserts that the *Beowulf* poet chose to make his hero specifically a Geat because the Geats were neither part of the invasion nor survived as a separate tribe, and therefore, were a blank slate for the epic, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 170.The poet's choice of setting is a complicated issue that may or may not have implications regarding audience, date and place of composition. See Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxii-clxxx.

[16] Bjork and Obermeier, "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences," 33.

[17] Hanning, "*Beowulf* as Heroic History," 78.

[18] Farrell, "The Epic Hero and Society," 25.

[19] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 162.

of the poem is just one element that allows the audience to identify with the people of the text and to approve later of Beowulf and his endeavors. The poet furthers Beowulf's connection to the audience by placing him within the Anglo-Saxon continental past.[20] While the poem may contain many historical references, at least one historical fact is confirmed: the final raid and death of Hygelac,[21] which displays the poet's complex interaction with historical fact and fable, a common epic convention designed to "introduce fabulous heroes into history."[22] Within the text, the poet presents Hygelac's death in a fragmentary manner, dividing it between four non-linear passages[23] separated by hundreds of lines. While the episode can be pieced together when the text is considered as a whole, these separations imply that the audience must have been familiar with the events of the story.[24] The poet's method displays an Anglo-Saxon understanding of Scandinavian history, which perhaps justifies the setting of *Beowulf*.[25] While Beowulf

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[20] Greenfield, *Hero and Exile*, 6.

[21] Gregory of Tours's *History of the Franks* (575-94), the anonymous *Book of the Franks* (727) and the anonymous *Book of Monsters of Various Kinds* (ca. 800) all corroborate Hygelac's final battle against the Frisians as depicted in *Beowulf*, providing the historical events of Hygelac's death: around 520 King Hygelac of the Geats attacked the Hetware, or Atuarii, who called for help from their Frankish overlord as well as the Frisians, who would have united with the Franks against the common enemy; the invaders were defeated, their king killed, and the plundered loot recovered. For more on this episode and its connection to historical events see Storms, "Significance of Hygelac's Raid"; Magoun, "Beowulf and King Hygelac"; and Magoun, "Geography of Hygelac's Raid."

[22] McNamara, "Beowulf and Hygelac," 55.

[23] The first passage (1202-1214A) tells of Hygelac's unprovoked raid, death and the robbing of his body. The second passage (2354-68) adds that Beowulf had been at the battle and had survived, swimming back to Geatland with thirty captured coats of armour. The third passage (2500-08) tells of Beowulf's strength and of his fight with Dæghræfn. The final passage (2910-21) introduces the prediction that with Beowulf's death will come the renewal of hostilities with the Franks and the Frisians who bear hatred towards the Geats because of Hygelac's raid.

[24] Magoun, "Beowulf and King Hygelac," 200.

[25] The poet uses time in a sophisticated manner throughout *Beowulf*. In this case he places his hero in a past that appears to be part of the collective memory of the audience, but not so far in the past as other Germanic heroes mentioned in the poem such as Scyld and Sigemund. For more on the use of time within the poem see Hanning, "*Beowulf* as Heroic History," and Frank, "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History."

is a fictional character, the poet creates an illusion of reality through the use of historical

detail.[26] The effect of this technique is that the poet

> lodge[s] his hero more securely in his audience's mind by making him a man of
>
> their own kind, not only a killer of monsters and attractor of heroic reference, but
>
> one who had sat in hall, heard minstrels, taken gifts at a lord's hand, and when the
>
> mead must be paid for, did battle for king and people, glory and riches, against
>
> such realizable adversaries as Franks and Frisians and the martial Swedes.[27]

This layering of history with fiction creates a connection between Beowulf and the

realities of Anglo-Saxon life as well as a role for the epic hero in the continental history

of the Anglo-Saxons. These aspects reinforce Beowulf as a hero whose values and

experiences represent the Anglo-Saxon people. When he defeats the monsters emanating

from the natural world that lies beyond the civilization of the mead hall, Beowulf affirms

an Anglo-Saxon belief in the glory of their past, an important aspect of their

contemporary identity.

Beowulf, therefore, encapsulates a desire both to remember and to re-

contextualize the past of the Anglo-Saxons. The date of Beowulf is a perilous topic

intimately connected to many other unanswered questions regarding the poem's origins,

with plausible suggestions ranging over nearly five hundred years. While some

archetypal elements of the narrative could have resulted from the influence of mythic

material,[28] clearly, several centuries lay between the events of the poem, dated through

historical confirmation of Hygelac's death to the early sixth century, and the surviving

text, during which two profoundly transforming events had occurred: the completion of

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[26] McNamara, "Beowulf and Hygelac," 60.
[27] Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes*, 36.
[28] See Babb, "*Beowulf*: Myth and Meaning."

migration and Christianization.[29] Cultural changes wrought by these events created a need to revisit the past in order to contextualize it within the new cultural systems and beliefs.[30] In the opening syntax, the poet draws the contemporary audience in and connects them as a whole to the past of the poem, binding their needs, desires and fates with the people within the text. All dramatized history to some extent performs this function, whether it is Shakespeare's history plays, Alex Haley's *Roots* or the film *Black Hawk Down*. Participation in the retelling creates a sense of participation in the historical event for the audience, thus creating a shared past and, in the case of the epic, reinforcing a "national" perspective. Part of the shared past addressed by *Beowulf* is the paganism of the continental ancestors.[31] The poet employs a vivid and dangerous landscape, which both strengthens the identity of the Anglo-Saxons as a community standing against an outside foe and provides a setting within which to address various aspects of Anglo-Saxon pagan ancestry.

The Epic Wilderness

The employment of a dynamic landscape is not necessarily inherent to epic. Theodore M. Andersson details what he terms the "latent space" of Homer's works in which only incidental details of the landscape are given.[32] Virgil, however, realizes the potential of the landscape in creating "a visible scene, which becomes part of the reader's

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[29] Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 7.

[30] An exact date of composition is not necessary for the present study. In general, enough time had to have passed between Christianization and the present poem for there to be some sort of social anxiety regarding both the eternal fate of the continental ancestors and their role in the heritage of the Anglo-Saxons. In any case, the construction of a terrifying landscape may be a universal literary technique that is more dependent upon subconscious fears than any specific date.

[31] The vigorous Anglo-Saxon missions to the Continent beginning in the late seventh century display the intense concern of the Anglo-Saxons for the heathen state of their sister tribes.

[32] Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*, 16.

consciousness and contributes new dimensions to the narrative it frames."[33] The influence

of Virgil upon the *Beowulf* poet has been much discussed and debated.[34] At the very

least, the *Beowulf* poet is influenced by Virgil's treatment of the landscape in the creation

of the wilderness settings of *Beowulf*, which the poet describes in such a way as to

heighten the atmosphere of the text by creating a landscape that reflects the dismal state

of the pagan present of the poem. In this sense, the poet makes the landscapes an integral

aspect of his use of the epic form, which speaks to the larger community.

The poet's desire to re-contextualize the past and, in essence, to teach the

contemporary, Christian audience how to think about their pagan ancestors, leads to the

creation of the We/They dichotomy important to the world of *Beowulf* in which the

Other, as represented by the wilderness and its monsters, is a constant threat against the

civilized human society of the mead hall.[35] The poet creates this opposition early in the

poem and states it clearly in the scene where Beowulf awaits Grendel's approach:

> Cōm on wanre niht
>
> scrīðan sceadugenġa.   Scēotend swǣfon,
>
> þā þæt hornreċed   healdan scoldon,
>
> ealle būton ānum. . . .
>
> Wōd under wol(*c*)num   tō þæs þe hē wīnreċed,[36]
>
> goldsele gumena   ġearwost wisse
>
> fǣtum fāhne. (702B-705A, 714-716A)

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[33] Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*, 53.

[34] See Andersson, "Sources and Analogues," for an overview of the discussion of Virgilian influences.

[35] There are human threats to the civilization as well, such as kin-murder, the failure of peace-weaving marriages and the problems of feud-culture.

[36] As per Klaeber's edition, round brackets with italicized letters indicate emendations that are a departure from the Thorkelin transcript of the manuscript.

(The creeping shadow-walker came in the dark night. The spearmen slept, those

who were obliged to keep watch over the gabled building, all except one

[Beowulf]. . . . He [Grendel] advanced under the clouds to where he could most

readily see the shining-with-decorations palace, the gold hall of warriors.)

Grendel, whose natural place is outside in the darkness and under the clouds, stands as an

opposing and threatening force against the human warriors in the visually shining hall,

itself a product of human civilization. As an epic, the poem prioritizes the values and

survival of the group, displayed in a series of binaries: good/evil, Christian/pagan,

human/monster, mead hall/wilderness. Anglo-Saxon terminology regarding the

wilderness further illustrates the essential nature of this dichotomy. *Wild(d)eornes*, "of

the wild animals," implies a tension between places of human control and places beyond

human control that therefore belong to animals or non-humans. This idea has already

been seen in Chapter 1 in the contrast between Cuthbert's monastery and the

Northumbrian wastelands and in Guthlac's Crowland before and after the defeat of the

demons. In the case of *Beowulf*, the poet uses this terminology in a creative way, to be

discussed in detail below, but in general, instead of wild animals holding the places

beyond civilization, in *Beowulf*, it is monsters. In addition, the poet further heightens the

participation of the contemporary audience within this dichotomy by using topographical

details that are both realistic to Anglo-Saxon England and, at the same time, foreign,

mysterious and unrecognizable, creating confusion and fear.

Order and boundaries are important to these dichotomies and are especially vital

in understanding the Anglo-Saxon concept of the natural world. In Old English creation

narratives and poems, creation does not occur *ex nihilo* but from some type of raw material.[37] In *Genesis A*, the poet explains:

> Ac þes wida grund
>
> stod deop and dim,   drihtne fremde,
>
> idel and unnyt. (104B-106A)[38]
>
> (But on the contrary this spacious earth stood solemn and dark, foreign to the
>
> Lord, void and useless.)

The earth is already present, waiting to be ordered and shaped. For Anglo-Saxon writers, therefore, creation involves the manipulation of raw materials into a specific form, which is also demonstrated in the Anglo-Saxon terminology used for God. *Scippend* is defined as "Creator" but it derives from the verb *scippan*, "to shape, form" and also "to create (of the act of the deity)." One of the key characteristics of this shaping is enclosure and boundary, which provide a separation of contrary elements.[39] The poet of *Genesis A* continues:

> Þa gesundrode   sigora waldend
>
> ofer laguflode   leoht wið þeostrum,
>
> sceade wið sciman. (126-28A)
>
> (Then, over the water, the Lord of Victory separated the light from the darkness,
>
> the shadow from the brightness.)

To create, God must separate the opposing forces, giving them boundaries and making them useful. Only then does he name these elements, which before were a confused

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[37] Michelet identifies two types of creation present in Anglo-Saxon literature. One is creation by expansion, when the genesis of a new space is presented as the expansion of an already existing place, such as when Hrothgar builds Heorot, 49-51. The other is creation as transformation, in which raw material is transformed into something else as illustrated above, *Creation, Migration and Conquest*, 44.

[38] All *Genesis A* quotations are taken from A. N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition, Revised*.

[39] Michelet, *Creation, Migration and Conquest*, 55.

jumble: *dæg*, "day" and *nihte*, "night." The separation of land from water in *Genesis A*
further illustrates this point:

> Næron metode ða gyta
>
> widlond ne wegas nytte,   ac stod bewrigen fæste
>
> folde mid flode.   Frea engla heht
>
> þurh his word wesan   wæter gemæne
>
> þa nu under roderum   heora ryne healdað,
>
> stowe gestefnde.   Ða stod hraðe
>
> holm under heofonum   swa se halga bebead,
>
> sid ætsomne,   ða gesundrod wæs
>
> lago wið lande. (155B-163A)
>
> (There were not yet for the Creator useful land paths, but on the contrary,
>
> the earth stood securely enclosed with water. The Lord of Angels
>
> commanded, by means of his words, the waters to be together in the
>
> appointed place, which beneath the heavens hold their course. Then
>
> quickly the ocean stood gathered together under the heavens, as the Holy
>
> One commanded, so that the great deep was separated from the dry land.)

As God separates water from land, he creates an enclosure for the water, giving it a *stowe
gestefnde*, an "appointed place." Boundary and separation, therefore, are keys to creation
and to making the raw material functional.

　　　With such an emphasis upon boundary and order as the primary act of creation,
when these boundaries are crossed, destruction and a collapse of order are the results.

Later in *Genesis A*, after the widespread disobedience of man, God uses the flood to effect a return to an unshaped world:

> Drihten sende
>
> regn from roderum   and eac rume let
>
> willeburnan   on woruld þringan
>
> of ædra gehwære   egorstreamas
>
> swearte swogan.   Sæs up stigon
>
> ofer stæðweallas. (1371B-1376A)
>
> (The Lord sent rain from the skies and also allowed the wide rivers in the world to advance from every stream, the flood currents roaring black. The seas rose up over the barriers of the shores.)

In line with the Anglo-Saxon conception of creation, destruction results from a violation of the boundaries that had shaped the world out of chaos.

For the Anglo-Saxons, therefore, boundaries are an important aspect of ensuring order in the natural world and the collapse of boundaries causes chaos and destruction. Liminal characters and places, therefore, present a threat to civilization in *Beowulf*. One of Victor W. Turner's forms of liminality is ritual, in which a rite of passage takes a figure away from the society but then later allows the figure to return and occupy his rightful place. Beowulf's own comments in Part II tell of his marginalization in his youth; therefore, many scholars have interpreted Part I as an adventure in which Beowulf proves himself and is later able to return to Geatland where he becomes a respected member of the court. The threat of his position as a liminal figure is revealed through the various reactions to his arrival in Denmark, from the coastguard, to Wulfgar, to Unferth, even to

Wealhtheow's reaction to Hrothgar's offer to adopt Beowulf. Although he is a hero come

to help them, Beowulf's liminal position in Denmark presents a threat to Danish stability

and he is viewed skeptically. In ritual liminality, however, the figure ultimately returns to

the proper position and so does Beowulf when he returns to Geatland where he dutifully

protects the interests of others until he is the only one left who can assume the throne.

The liminality of the monsters, however, is a different issue. Turner describes

other liminal figures as either outsiders or those who do not fit within any aspect of a

society. Grendel and his mother are both described as a *mearcstapa*, "one who wanders

about the desolate mark or borderland" (103, 1348), and *ellorgāst*, *ellorgǣst*, "alien

spirit" in the *Dictionary of Old English*, but "a spirit living or going elsewhere" in

Bosworth and Toller (807, 1349, 1617, 1621). They walk *wræc-lāst*, "an exile track"

(1352). They are figures who do not belong in the human realm.[40] When they leave their

appointed place and violate the rules of nature, crossing the barrier into the human world,

the threat of their ability to cross borders is realized and chaos ensues. Unlike Beowulf

who reenters society and conforms to the rules, Grendel refuses to follow custom when

he fails to pay the *wergild*. Civilization breaks down as the magnificent hall Heorot

becomes uninhabitable and Hrothgar's thanes are forced to sleep elsewhere.

In *Beowulf*, though, liminality is not just a social condition, but also a state

intimately bound up with physical location within the natural world, much as creation is

dependent upon order and boundary. Just as the Grendelkin cross borders to create chaos,

Beowulf crosses into the mere of the Grendelkin to restore order. According to Buell, the

first model of "place-connectedness" is a series of concentric circles beginning with the

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[40] I am interpreting the Grendelkin strictly as monsters, but it is possible to see them as human figures who
have been exiled.

self, moving outward, growing greater but at the same time decreasing in intimacy.[41] This model explains Beowulf's relationship with the environment. As he moves farther and farther from his center, crossing boundary after boundary, the poet describes the world as more and more unfamiliar and dangerous. The innermost circle is always the self. The next circle is the home, which for Beowulf is the royal court in Geatland, which Beowulf displays by introducing himself as Hygelac's thane, holding land in Geatland, and by eventually taking the throne.[42] Beowulf leaves his home and ventures into the next circle of place-connectedness when he journeys to Denmark, a place that is both familiar, as part of Germanic civilization, and unfamiliar to him, as he is now a Geatish outsider. The series of challenges that he faces, from the coastguard, Wulfgar and Unferth, both justify Beowulf's presence in Denmark while also highlighting his movement away from his home. He is still within the domain of humans and certain activities make Heorot recognizable: drinking, storytelling and gift-giving. Beowulf's fight with Grendel is his first encounter with the outermost ring of place-connectedness. By the end of his time in Denmark, though, he not only interacts with the figures associated with the world outside human control, but he also enters that world himself. Grendel's presence in Heorot is always viewed as the invasion of a foreign entity and likewise, Beowulf treats the world outside of human civilization as strange and hostile. Unlike an Anglo-Saxon saint who travels into the wilderness willingly, Beowulf only journeys into the mere because, as an epic hero, he must preserve the people. The place is always presented as an alien threat to the civilization. While killing the monsters may temporarily alter the landscape, it is an

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[41] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 64.

[42] Tolkien's assertion that Beowulf's retelling of his adventure upon his return to Geatland helps to place Beowulf back among his own people rather than as an itinerant adventurer fits nicely within Buell's model. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*," 36.

act designed to eliminate the threat, not to reform the place for Christian use. Beowulf accordingly leaves the wilderness when he defeats the monster, unlike Guthlac.

The Pagan Wilderness

To further illuminate *Beowulf*'s attitude towards the environment beyond the hall, the religious perspective of the text and the possibility of some residual pagan influences upon the poet's descriptions of the natural world must be considered in order to define the essence of the wilderness in this particular epic. Christianity traditionally represents nature as a manifestation of God and a living representation of the creation. While many Christian depictions of the natural world illustrate a belief in God's love for humanity, even traditions related to the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, such as the need to work the land and the appearance of thorns, still present the natural world as an expression of God. Pre-conversion Anglo-Saxons, however, seem to have had a very different view of the natural world. The pagan religions of Britain before the Augustinian mission are something of a mystery as before Christianization these cultures were based in an oral tradition and recorded very little written information. Early Christian writers, such as Bede, mention the fight against paganism, but, as they felt that it needed to be eradicated and not preserved, they gave as little information as possible regarding its practices.[43] Some clues, however, are found in archaeology and the surviving later literature that preserves vestiges of the earlier culture.[44] The pagans of the British Isles saw their gods in the mysteries of nature and believed that every manifestation of the

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[43] Menzies, *Saint Columba of Iona*, 101.
[44] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 178.

natural world held a deity.[45] They likewise felt that the pleasure or displeasure of these

deities was expressed in natural phenomena, in sunshine or rain, success or failure of

crops, and therefore believed it was imperative that they appease these gods.[46] They

worshipped in natural places, outside of any formal structures,[47] especially preferring

places such as the ocean, islands, wells, springs, lakes and groves because they felt that

such areas presented a permeable boundary between the human and the spiritual worlds,[48]

somewhat contrary to the Anglo-Saxon desire for structure and order in the creation.

Animals, as well, were very important aspects of this pagan culture and archaeological

evidence documents the use of animal motifs including horses, wolves, bulls, boars and

stags upon metalwork surviving from this time period, as well as ritual animal sacrifice[49]

and even some human sacrifice.[50] Such motifs and sacrifices appear designed to transfer

the strength of the animal to humans.[51] Animals could be friendly helpers, but they could

also be "manifestations" of a hostile universe.[52] Paganism, therefore, reflected a belief in

man's "hard-won supremacy over the animal kingdom" that had been effected by a

difficult and continuing struggle between man and beast.[53] From what is known of

Anglo-Saxon paganism, it appears that it enlisted a variety of entities to cover the needs

of humans from the warrior to the ruler to the farmer to the mother.[54] The specific form

of paganism practiced by the Anglo-Saxons, as opposed to the more-studied Celts, had

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[45] Menzies, *Saint Columba*, 84.
[46] Menzies, *Saint Columba*, 84.
[47] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 166.
[48] Brown, *How Christianity Came*, 17. As with most religions, there was some variety in practice. Some of Bede's few statements on paganism, including his quotations of Gregory the Great's letters, imply that there were pagan temples. See also Meaney, "Bede and Anglo-Saxon Paganism."
[49] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 192.
[50] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 244.
[51] Cramp, "Background," 10.
[52] Cramp, "Background," 10.
[53] Cramp, "Background," 10.
[54] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, 29.

one additional element that has no equivalent in Celtic paganism: "All-powerful *wyrd* or destiny, which shapes the whole world and is greater than the deities themselves."[55] It is not difficult to believe, then, that the later Anglo-Saxons would have inherited a view of nature that had been shaped by their pagan heritage, similar to the manner in which Celtic paganism influenced Celtic Christianity's view of the natural world. According to John D. Niles, the Anglo-Saxon pagan background produced a rather sophisticated conception of the natural world, one that was much more intricate than any standard Christian interpretation.[56] In hagiography, this viewpoint often manifests in a respectful relationship between man and animal and in a desire to do the Lord's work in the wilderness. *Beowulf*, however, as an epic seeks to represent the ideal of the Anglo-Saxon society and, therefore, prioritizes the community, resulting in an image of the natural world where nature stands in opposition to civilization, much like an Anglo-Saxon pagan might have viewed the natural world as a threat to the stability of the group. For the purposes of this study, a pagan landscape is one which embodies theAnglo-Saxon pagan belief in an eternal struggle against the unrelenting forces of nature that can only be temporarily appeased but never defeated and that continually threaten to decimate the tenuous civilization.

The Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* presents a syncretic view of the natural world, which is not surprising as surviving evidence displays the cultural blending that did occur in Anglo-Saxon England. Bede reports frequent reversions to paganism among the kingdoms, especially after the death of a converting monarch or in times of distress, which would show a desire to avert disaster by appeasing the spirits of nature, such as

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[55] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 265.
[56] Niles, "Pagan Survivals," 132.

during the outbreak of the plague mentioned in III.xxx of the *Ecclesiastical History*. The

Sutton Hoo ship burial and the Franks Casket both contain pagan and Christian elements

in a single location or artifact. The history of *Beowulf* scholarship displays the difficulties

of untangling Christian and pagan elements in this specific text. Early scholars believed

that it was essentially a pagan poem that had been given a Christian overlay, and despite

that interpretation having fallen out of favor with Anglo-Saxonists, the *Encyclopedia of

Folklore and Literature* still sees *Beowulf* as a conflation of folktale and heroic poetry

rooted in early nature myth.[57] While some archetypal elements of *Beowulf* may be very

old indeed, it is not the point of this study to contend that *Beowulf* has a pagan origin, but

rather to show that the wilderness dwellings of the monsters of the poem are designed, by

a Christian poet, in such a way as to reflect the paganism[58] of the Anglo-Saxon ancestors,

thus heightening the terror and re-contextualizing the past for a Christian audience.

While the date of the *Beowulf* poem is much debated with little scholarly

consensus, one general agreement is that the poem as it survives today in the Nowell

Codex was composed after Christianization, and therefore, possesses an essentially

Christian character,[59] despite its setting in the pagan past of the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic

ancestors of Scandinavia, which allows it to serve a mediating function between the

present of the poet and the audience and the past as depicted in the poem. Various

elements such as cremation, grave goods, the reading of omens, totemic animals and the

emphasis upon fame after death all attest to the pagan outlook of the characters.[60] Fulk,

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[57] Mandel, "*Beowulf*," 53-55.
[58] Schrader, "Sacred Groves," also examines pagan elements of the landscape of *Beowulf*, but he does so as a method of uncovering classical influences upon the *Beowulf* poet, such as Virgil, Ovid and Lucan. The paganism he discusses, therefore, is Mediterranean and a result of classical source material rather than the poet's own heritage.
[59] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* lxviii.
[60] Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 10-11.

Bjork and Niles term this the "Pagan Past and Christian Present" which accounts for various elements of the poem that sometimes seem contrary.[61] While the poet does not portray the pagan past accurately,[62] he represents the pagan ancestors as noble figures, "virtuous in their conduct, heroic in their deeds, [and] philosophical in their thinking."[63] They uphold Christian values even without the benefit of Christian instruction, which ultimately creates a tone of "combined admiration and regret."[64] The poet creates moments of ignorance for these characters, such as their inability to know of Grendel's origin or Scyld's mysterious arrival and departure, mirroring the ignorant state of the pagan.[65] The mood of *Beowulf* displays an anxiety regarding the damnation of the characters. Although there are elements of joy and rejoicing, these moments are always followed by some disaster or foreshadowing of disaster. The initial joy of Heorot is destroyed by Grendel's attack and reign of terror. Beowulf's defeat of Grendel and the cleansing of the hall are followed by the attack of Grendel's mother. Hrothgar's farewell to Beowulf is overshadowed by his forebodings. Beowulf's peaceful reign, which the poet quickly glosses over, ends in his death at the hands of the dragon and in the prophesy of the destruction of his people. The Christianized Anglo-Saxons would have understood that theologically, however noble these ancestors were, they were eternally doomed. While the poet does state that when Beowulf's soul departs his body it seeks "Soð-fæstra dom" (2820; righteous glory), this is an ambiguous phrase meant to recall the idea of heaven in the audience, but falls short of actually sending a pagan hero into

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[61] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* lxviii.

[62] North feels that the *Beowulf* poet probably had greater knowledge of Scandinavian paganism than he is generally credited with, *Heathen Gods*, 172-203.

[63] Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* lxix.

[64] Robinson, *"Beowulf" and the Appositive Style*, 11.

[65] From a Christianized perspective, at least, Bede's sparrow metaphor (*Ecclesiastical History*, II.xiii) illustrates a desire for knowledge in an uncertain world and the importance of the answers provided by the new religion.

eternal salvation and will be discussed in greater detail below. Similarly, when in the midst of their troubles the Danes turn to idols, the poet laments their ignorance, but still asserts that their judgment will result in eternal fire (175-88). The poem filters its pagan elements through a Christian viewpoint, resulting in a fatalistic world in which the pagan is eternally doomed within the context of the Christian ideology of the contemporary audience. Through this perspective, the great epic of the Anglo-Saxons serves a mediating function between the heroic, but pagan, continental past of the ancestors and the Christian present of the poet and audience.

A key part of the fatalistic tone of the poem is the presentation of the natural world and the landscape in such a way that it recalls a pagan attitude.[66] Grendel and his mother and later the dragon function as the relentless forces of nature that batter humankind, threatening to destroy the tenuous civilization. They are elements of a natural world that refuse to remain in their appointed place and wreak havoc by repeatedly crossing the barriers of God's Christian creation. The representation of nature as a pagan entity is not an authentic paganism. Although it has enough in common with Anglo-Saxon animism to show that the poet had knowledge of pagan beliefs, it is a recreated attitude used as a poetic device to heighten the fatalistic tone of the poem, to help make the monsters of the narrative even more terrifying and to create a liminal place within which to address the pagan past.

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[66] Babb's examination of *Beowulf* in "*Beowulf*: Myth and Meaning"shows the influence of creation myths upon the narrative, including elements of chaos demons in the monsters. Whether creation myths directly influenced the poet or not, the construction of the natural world would lead an Anglo-Saxon Christian audience to view the monsters of the poem as agents of chaos due to their refusal to remain in their "appointed" places as ordained in the creation, and therefore, as representational of a pagan struggle against the unrelenting forces of nature. Another option may be to view the antagonistic forces from the wilderness as representing the natural world in a postlapsarian manner, which still requires the audience to interpret the pre-Christian world of the poem through a Christian perspective.

The Mere of the Grendelkin

The *scop*'s song of creation and its anthropocentric view of the natural world in which the Earth was created specifically for the benefit of humankind creates the tension between pagan and Christian views of the natural world and sets off the fatal chain of events in the poem:

> Sæ̇gde sē þe cūþe
>
> frumsceaft fīra   feorran reċċan,
>
> cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga   eorðan worhte,
>
> wlitebeorhtne wang,   swā wæter bebūgeð,
>
> ġesette siġehrēþiġ   sunnan ond mōnan,
>
> lēoman tō lēohte   landbūendum
>
> ond ġefrætwade   foldan scēatas
>
> leomum ond lēafum,   līf ēac ġesceōp
>
> cynna ġehwylcum   þāra ðe cwice hwyrfaþ. (90B-98)
>
> (He who knew how to narrate from far back told the creation of mankind, he said that the Almighty made the earth, the beautiful land, which water surrounds; the Triumphant One set the sun and the moon, luminaries as light for land-dwellers, and he adorned the surfaces of the earth with branches and leaves; he also created life for every living species which moves.)

While the *scop*'s song, positioned near the opening of the poem, offers a traditionally Christian view of the natural world, this view is never realized in the depiction of the landscape of the poem. Instead, this song functions not only to call down Grendel upon the Danes, but also to set the forces of a mysterious and pagan natural world into

opposition with anthropocentrism. The characters in the epic, of course, are not aware of this opposition; all overtly Christian elements and interpretations within the poem derive from the narrator. The characters themselves, as representatives of the pagan past, remain ignorant even when faced with Biblical elements that are obvious to the audience, such as the story of the flood inscribed on the sword hilt recovered from Grendel's mother's den.[67] Like the forces of nature that the pagan interpreted as a relentless threat, Grendel is merciless in his continued attacks upon Heorot, threatening not only the lives of the people, but also their tenuous civilization. Even the hope offered by Beowulf's journey to Denmark and defeat of Grendel is short-lived. Just as a pagan view of nature requires continual endurance of the, at best indifferent and at worst hostile, spirits inhabiting the natural world, the wrath of Grendel's mother assures that the Danes cannot rest and must remain vigilant.

The poet creates the most comprehensive landscape descriptions in *Beowulf*[68] in the aftermath of Grendel's mother's attack and the resulting journey to the mere. These depictions locate the Grendelkin as a force emanating from the wilderness of the natural world as opposed to human civilization, as well as providing a liminal boundary between the two that Beowulf crosses, thereby creating a place to confront the paganism of the Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Interestingly, it is not until the mother's attack that Hrothgar volunteers any information regarding either former sightings of the pair or the lair of the Grendelkin or even the existence of another monster. When Beowulf had arrived at Heorot, his expectation was only to battle Grendel within the hall in order to halt the

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[67] Following the narrator's explication of the sword, Hrothgar's speech on the dangers of power does include two references to *mihtig God* (1716, 1725; almighty God), but these are vague reference to monotheism void of any specifics of Christianity, designed, once again, to appeal to the Christian audience without being inconsistent in the portrayal of the pagan ancestors.

[68] Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*, 145-59, argues for direct Virgilian influence on the landscape of the mere and the sea voyage earlier in the poem.

invasion of outside forces into the domain of humans. Information regarding the world

beyond was neither relevant to Beowulf nor even capable of conveying the same meaning

as it does after the mother's attack. The morning after Grendel's defeat, the mere appears

bloody, but no other threatening or dangerous elements are mentioned. Indeed, the blood

appears to be a reassurance that Grendel is dead and the attacks are at an end. The attack

of Grendel's mother, however, re-contextualizes the mere as a continuing threat from

beyond human civilization and as a place relevant to Beowulf's mission to protect the

community. Only when the threat becomes tied to the mere can Hrothgar deliver the

necessary information regarding the nature of that specific location. The landscape only

holds meaning for Beowulf when he faces the need to cross another boundary and

journey into the realm of monsters.[69]

Despite its Scandinavian setting, a variety of elements influenced the poet's

description of the mere. Many have located Heorot at the village of Gammel Lejre in

Denmark,[70] and the poet's imagery of steep cliffs and windy headlands may suit that

location. Such features, however, are visible in many places in Northern Europe and

would have been familiar to the sea-faring Anglo-Saxons. Also important to the creation

of this landscape are medieval conceptions of hell as well as some very real aspects of the

English environment, especially the Fenland of East Anglia. Within the half millennium

preceding the Anglo-Saxon invasion, the area had undergone extensive environmental

alteration from Roman drainage and building to abandonment and disrepair after

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[69] Another example of perspective impacting landscape would be in the case of Beowulf's swimming contest with Brecca. It is not until the two are separated and Beowulf is alone that the sea monsters attack. During Beowulf's voyage to Denmark, the hero remains safely within the communal group of warriors and within the ship, a representation of the advanced society of the Anglo-Saxons; therefore, there is no danger.

[70] Medieval writers identified the Skjǫldung dynasty, whose legendary kings are the subject of the opening of *Beowulf*, with Lejre near Roskilde, Zealand. Two great halls have been uncovered there, which has created speculation that the site was a historical counterpart to Heorot, Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* clxxx. See also Niles, *"Beowulf" and Lejre*.

withdrawal to extensive flooding due to the marine surge of the fifth century, which extended the wetlands and covered the Roman works in peat and brackish water. I believe that the realities of such an environment must have served as a reminder of the futility of human achievement in the face of natural forces and the very real power of the natural world to destroy man's efforts and reclaim man's hard-won victories over nature, making it a powerful influence upon the wetland setting of Beowulf's struggle with Grendel's mother.

Any attempts to locate Grendel's mere in a specific place are futile, however, as it is designed not to represent a real location, but as a composite of elements familiar to the audience, seascape and fenland, uncannily juxtaposed and enhanced by the fabulous in order to create confusion, terror and, ultimately, a new landscape. Hrothgar tells Beowulf of reports of two figures, *ellorgæstas*, "alien spirits," who haunt the moors:

> Hīe dýġel lond
>
> wariġeað, wulfhleoþu,   windiġe næssas,
>
> frēcne fenġelād,   ðǣr fyrġenstrēam
>
> under næssa ġenipu   niþer ġewīteð,
>
> flōd under foldan.   Nis þæt feor heonon
>
> mīlġemearces   þæt se mere stan*de*ð;[71]
>
> ofer þǣm hongiað   hrinde bearwas,
>
> wudu wyrtum fæst   wæter oferhelmað.
>
> Þǣr mæġ nihta ġehwǣm   nīðwundor sēon,
>
> fýr on flōde.   Nō þæs frōd leofað
>
> gumena bearna   þæt þone grund wite.

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[71] As per Klaeber's edition, italics indicate the alteration of a word by emendation.

> Ðēah þe hæðstapa   hundum ġeswenċed,
>
> heorot hornum trum   holtwudu sēċe,
>
> feorran ġeflýmed,   ǣr hē feorh seleð,
>
> aldor on ōfre,   ǣr hē in wille,
>
> hafelan [beorgan];   nis þæt hēoru stōw. (1357B-1372)
>
> (They guarded the secret land, the wolf-ridden slopes, the windy headlands, the dread path through the fen where the mountain stream under the misty bluffs goes downward, the flood under the earth. It is not far hence, marked by miles, that the mere stands; over it hangs a frosted grove, a tree fixed by roots overshadows the water. There a terrible marvel can be seen each night, fire on water. No wise one of the children of men lives that might know the bottom. Though the stag, the hart strong in antlers, pressed by the hounds, might seek the forest, pursued from afar, rather he will surrender life, life on the bank, before he might wish to save the head; that is not a pleasant place.)

Many scholars have discussed the power of this description,[72] which does not present any possible realistic location. It appears to describe an inland location with a mountain stream and overhanging trees, an odd site for peat fens, clearly a feature of the place with the inclusion of the *fenġelād*, "fen-path," and underground water, which conveys the uncertainty of solid land in the peat bogs. The real, though unexplainable, natural phenomenon of bog fire also places the location within the wetlands, while adding the folkloric image of the elusive will-o'-the-wisp. *Mere*, however, can be a very general

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[72] For an overview of the scholarship see Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 200-201. The vividness of the passage has led to analysis and interpretation ranging from a possible representation of hell to a vestige of a primeval chaos myth. Analogues include *Grettir's Saga* and medieval hell visions. A few, though by no means all, who have discussed the inconsistencies in the descriptions include: Lawrence, "The Haunted Mere in *Beowulf*," and "Grendel's Lair"; Gelling, "The Landscape of *Beowulf*"; and Fulk, "Some Lexical Problems."

term, denoting "sea, lake, artificial pool, a natural pool," which may suit either a mountain stream, fen or even a rocky coast as implied by *næssas*, "ness, land running out into water, headland, promontory," which is generally used in coastal descriptions of craggy areas. The later details of the sea serpents (1425-30) add to this implication of open sea. Richard Butts declares that these inconsistencies are purposeful and are designed to carefully cultivate a sense of terror in the face of the unknown[73] and that "each cluster of imagery undermines the signifying power of the other," creating an emotional response of uncertainty in the audience.[74] More than just an inconsistency, though, I would add that these elements are also very real aspects of the terrain of England, familiar to the audience, yet made uncanny in their combination, much like the descriptions of the Grendelkin show them to be both human and inhuman. In their introduction to *Landscape of Desire: Partial Stories of the Medieval Scandinavian World*, Gillian R. Overing and Marijane Osborn assert the importance of place as an experience, "a process rather than stasis" that requires the audience to actively negotiate their own conceptions of place with the author's description, a practice that results in a new literary space.[75] I assert that in the natural settings of *Beowulf*, the poet uses familiar details in an unfamiliar construction, pushing the audience into a frightening world and creating a new space in which fears regarding the Anglo-Saxon pagan past are addressed through a fictional text.

In general the *Beowulf* poet's terminology only sparingly denotes the wilderness, but instead, relies upon descriptions that exhibit the Otherness of the location. Twice within the poem the poet uses *wēsten(n)*, "desert, wilderness," but not in the description

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[73] Butts, "The Analogic Mere," 113.
[74] Butts, "The Analogic Mere," 116.
[75] Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*, xvii.

of the mere.[76] As already discussed, the modern word *wilderness* derives from the Anglo-Saxon *wild(d)ēornes* which sets places outside of human control within the domain of wild animals, but this term is not used at all in *Beowulf*. Instead, the poet employs the base form of *wild(d)ēor* (1430), "a wild animal, wild beast" in the passage where Beowulf arrives at the mere (1420-30) in order to describe the inhabitants of the watery depths, along with a variety of terms related to sea monsters including *wyrm-cyn(n)* (1425), "a species of reptile or serpent," *sǣ-draca* (1426), "sea dragon, sea serpent," *nicor* (1427), "water monster," and *wyrm* (1430), "a reptile or serpent." The poet's use of *wild(d)ēor* here invokes *wild(d)ēornes*, signaling the mere's location beyond the human world and the danger of Beowulf's mission.

While he uses terms to denote the wilderness sparingly, the poet does create an imaginative play upon the Anglo-Saxon concept in Hrothgar's description quoted above, which removes the mere further from any recognizable location, thus heightening the terror for the audience. The image of the deer that would rather die than enter the mere is much discussed by scholars, though not in direct relation to the wilderness. In line 1369, the poet uses *heorot*, "hart, stag, male deer" to play upon the name of Hrothgar's hall, but the phrasing also recalls the sense of *wild(d)ēornes*, "of the wild animals," in that the second part of the compound, *dēor*, also often denotes a deer. Metonymically, the poet's concept of the wilderness emphasizes the mere as a place beyond human control. The poet extends the terror of the description when not even the hart, one of the wild animals who should hold the place, is willing to enter the mere. This location, it appears, is beyond the control of both humankind and animal, and is instead held by something even

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[76] *Wēsten(n)* is used when the poet reviews the genesis of the Grendelkin before the mother's attack (1265) and to describe the location of the dragon's lair (2298). See Dailey, "Questions of Dwelling,"190-92, for a discussion of *wēsten(n)* in *Beowulf*.

more fearful. This clever play on words furthers the inconsistency of the description of the mere, emphasizing its unnaturalness and the threat of its border-crossing inhabitants, neither of which fit within the Anglo-Saxon conception of the natural world.

At the mere, Beowulf enters the outermost point of his journey beyond his home, where he becomes the alien in the foreign environment; he encounters a place that lies outside the limits of human understanding, a world within which he loses all orientation. The depth of the water is incomprehensible, taking nearly a day to reach the bottom and once there, the audience is told, and Beowulf learns, that this place is ruled not by humans or even by wild beasts, but by terrible monsters. As long as he is in the water, Beowulf finds himself unable to fight against Grendel's mother who easily carries him to her lair, probably in a humiliating position, under her arm or over her shoulder, one that he has never experienced before. Unlike Guthlac who travels into the wetlands to create a new home, Beowulf has no intention of modifying the natural world; the mere appears as a foreign place and he only seems to desire to complete the task at hand in order to save the community and return home as quickly as possible to receive his adulation, like a true epic hero; he behaves accordingly.[77]

Like the landscape, the mysterious, underwater hall that Grendel's mother inhabits creates terror and represents the unrelenting forces of nature by blurring the distinctions between the human and natural worlds. The first term that the poet uses for the lair is *hof* (1507), "a house, hall, dwelling, building" or "a temple." The related Old

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[77] The descriptions of Guthlac's Crowland and Grendel's mere are strikingly similar, as has been noted by scholars including Newton, *Origins of Beowulf*, 142-43, and Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion," 14-15. As Felix's description of the Fenland is based in reality, the similarities bolster the connection of *Beowulf*'s landscape to East Anglia.

Norse meaning of *hof*, however, is "heathen temple,"[78] which intensifies the

fearsomeness of the Grendelkin as a pre-Christian representation of man's contentious

relationship with the natural world. Other terms that the poet uses for the lair are *nīð-sele*

(1513), "a hall where one is exposed to the hatred of a foe" and *hrōf-sele* (1515), "a hall

having a roof." When combined with the statement that the water does not inhibit

Beowulf's movements once he is inside, these images all project the impression of a

fantastical building at the bottom of the mere. As discussed above, some aspects of the

description of the mere are consistent with the East Anglian Fenland, which had been the

site of Roman improvements, including some stone buildings and temples, that had been

flooded after Roman withdrawal and before Anglo-Saxon invasion. I believe that such a

real location inspired a curiosity regarding what ancient, decaying structures might be

beneath the water level in the fens, resulting in the description of the lair of the

Grendelkin. The underwater den functions in several ways. It blurs the distinction

between man-made and natural, creating a liminal space where the hero completes his rite

of passage that enables him to reenter society and take his rightful place. Like the

description of the mere that combines the realistic with the fantastical, this site of battle

also helps to heighten the terror for the audience, as man-made and natural, familiar and

strange elements create a psychological disjunction. The underwater lair finally serves as

a reminder of the ability of the natural world to reverse human achievement,

reemphasizing paganism's belief in humanity's struggle against the unrelenting forces of

nature.

Similar to the water environments important to the hagiographies of Anglo-Saxon

saints, and even like the pagan preference for worship in a natural location, the water

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[78] All Old Norse definitions are from Zoëga.

environment of *Beowulf* denotes a permeable boundary between the human and the

supernatural. The poet frequently uses the term *gāst*, *gǣst* alone and in compounds.

Gāst/*gǣst* on its own is a difficult term denoting, in the *Dictionary of Old English*,

"breath, spirit, vital spirit, living soul; incorporeal being; evil spirit, demon" with

Bosworth and Toller adding "ghost." It especially shades towards the more sinister side

in its compounds where it is often translated as the modern equivalent of "demon."

Tolkien asserts that the closest modern translation is "creature."[79] The term is made more

difficult in that *gǣst* (without the macron) is an alternative of *gyst*, "guest, visitor,

stranger, outsider, visitant." It is important to note that the manuscript itself does not

contain accent marks, which are modern additions to aid scholarly study. It can be

difficult to determine which word is being used, a problem that is further heightened by

the indeterminacy of their meanings. According to Klaeber's glossing, *gāst*/*gǣst*, "ghost"

alone or in compounds is applied to the Grendelkin thirteen times.[80] *Gist*, "guest," and its

alternative form *gǣst* are applied once to Grendel (2073), but twice to Beowulf when he

is in Grendel's mother's hall (1522, 1800). This is Klaeber's glossing, however, and not

necessarily the manuscript's meaning. The slipperiness of "ghost" versus "guest" attests

to the confusion created by the crossing of barriers between human locations and the

forces at work in the natural world.[81] Grendel could be an ironic guest in Heorot or he

could be a mysterious ghost, likewise for Beowulf in the underwater hall. Both the

Grendelkin and Beowulf are liminal figures who refuse to stay within the boundaries of

their worlds. Like the landscapes of *Beowulf*, "guest" or "ghost" is in many ways a matter

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[79] Tolkien, "*Beowulf*," 42.
[80] Lines 86, 102, 133, 807, 1266, 1274, 1331, 1349, 1357, 1617, 1621, 1995, 2073.
[81] The poet describes another border-crosser, fire, as a *gǣst* in connection with the funeral fire of the Finn digression.

of perspective, which in turn mirrors the uncertainty and mutability of the watery environment of the Grendelkin.

Beowulf's defeat of Grendel's mother and return to the surface with a magnificent sword hilt and Grendel's head[82] seemingly ends the mere's threat to humanity, but the poet creates an ambiguous, if bloody, end to the scene. When he returns to the surface, it appears that Beowulf has purged the fen of all evil:

> Wæron ýðġebland   eal ġefælsod,
>
> ēacne eardas,   þā se ellorgāst
>
> oflēt līfdagas   ond þās lænan ġesceaft. (1620-22)
>
> (The surging waves were all purged, the whole expanse, when the alien spirit left
>
> the days of life and this transitory world.)

The death of Grendel and his mother, who had ruled the fens, appears to create a cleansing of the mere and the removal of the sea serpents and creatures previously there. Few, if any, scholars have questioned, however, that ten lines later, as Beowulf and his men leave the water's edge, the poet states, "Lagu drūsade, / wæter under wolcnum, wældreore fāg" (1630B-1631; The lake stagnated, the water under the clouds, stained by the blood of slaughter), believing this statement to be an affirmation of the end of the Grendelkin. Significantly, though, the poet describes the mere as bloody four other times in the text. The first instance is the morning after Grendel's defeat when the court follows the tracks to the fen. At this point in the tale, the existence of Grendel's mother is not known and the mere does not seem threatening; the blood appears to testify to Grendel's

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[82] The taking of the head is reminiscent of ritual pagan practices, which symbolize the transfer of strength from animal to human, Cramp, "Background," 10, as well as the Celtic pagan Cult of the Head in which "severed heads were venerated trophies and memorials," Brown, *How Christianity Came*, 25-26. A reversal of this practice, of course, occurs earlier when Grendel's mother leaves Æschere's head upon the bank of the mere, perhaps to frighten or scare away the Geats and Danes.

death. Although Grendel is dead, the security of the Danes is unfounded as that night the mother comes to Heorot. The poet next describes the mere as bloody when the Geats and Danes arrive at the shoreline the morning after Æschere is taken, although it is not stated whether the blood is still from Grendel or from Æschere, or a combination of the two. Twice during Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, watchers on the shore see blood welling up through the lake and take it as a sign of Beowulf's death, and yet he survives, returning from the mere. Within the poem, then, a bloody lake offers little assurance of either safety from attack or destruction of a particular figure. The poet purposefully creates a symbol that is indeterminate. Beowulf wins a hard-earned victory against the Grendelkin but, while there are no more reports of attack from the fens, the poet's image of a bloody lake does not offer lasting reassurance as Beowulf and his men return to the world of humans. Unlike Guthlac's clear transformation of Crowland from a dismal swamp of demons to a beautiful lake where fishes swim and birds play, the poet leaves the audience with a sense of foreboding in this final image of the lake.

Water and blood are both fluids that are vital for life and both present inconsistent and permeable boundaries. Reminiscent of Oswald's blood soaking into the dirt at Maserfelth and imbuing it with holiness, here, monster blood combines with the water of the mere, altering its properties, thickening it. Once combined, blood and water cannot be separated again. The defeat of the Grendelkin is a victory for the Anglo-Saxon heroic ancestors, but the thickening of the mere is a return to a jumble of chaos, a further collapse of boundaries, implying that victories against the dark forces of nature that lie beyond the boundaries of human civilization are short-lived in a pagan world in which

nature is an opposing force instead of a representation of the creation and of God's love and concern for humankind.

Beowulf, as a great hero, may be able to defeat the demonic forces temporarily, but, as part of the pagan past, unlike Guthlac, he is unable to permanently alter the essence of the landscape. Indeed, the thought never even enters his mind. As a true epic hero, Beowulf's sole focus is on saving the community. Following Buell's concentric circles of place connectedness, the mere is the most alien and foreign location thus far in the poem; therefore, once the threat to the community is eliminated, Beowulf leaves the wilderness and returns to his own world, sailing to Geatland the next day. As Goldsmith has noted,[83] Beowulf may eliminate the threat of the Grendelkin, but he is not able to truly save the Danes. The burning of Heorot in the feud with the Heathobards is clearly predicted twice in the poem: after the initial building of Heorot (82-85) and in Beowulf's discussion of Freawaru's upcoming marriage to Ingeld (2063-69). In addition, the poet foreshadows Hrothulf's ursurpation of the throne of Denmark and the future demise of the Scylding line in kin-murder.

While Part I of the poem concludes with the defeat of the Grendelkin and the triumphant return of Beowulf to Geatland, the image of the bloody mere undermines any joy at these events. Its thickening with blood subverts the cleansing of the monsters from the lake as well as any indication of a transformation of the wilderness. Even though Beowulf has eliminated the present threat, in the world of the poem, other threats wait just around the corner: feuds, treachery and even dragons.

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[83] Goldsmith, "Christian Perspective," 89.

The Dragon's Barrow

The episode of the dragon in Part II of *Beowulf* bears great similarity to the events of Part I. Again, a monster from an unknown lair threatens humanity, forcing Beowulf to travel beyond the human domain to save the community. A dragon in Geatland may not appear to have narrative consistency with the Grendelkin of Denmark, but, as Andy Orchard has noted, various structural and thematic elements link the episodes.[84] I would add that these connections extend to the use of similar vocabulary and plot points that demonstrate a singular vision in the representation of the landscape and wilderness within the poem as a whole. As the narrative moves towards its apocalyptic conclusion, liminal figures again create a collapse of the boundaries between civilization and wilderness. A frightened slave, a socially marginal character, crosses into the dragon's lair, breaking the boundary between the two worlds and stealing a cup. This robbery, an act which, by its very nature, crosses personal boundaries, sets off the fateful course of events, which results in the dragon's abandoning his appropriate place,[85] a barrow full of treasure, and wreaking havoc in the human world. A royal hall is again attacked, this time through fire, itself a barrier-crosser and elemental force capable of altering the form and composition of all it touches.[86] As before, Beowulf leaves his inner circle and journeys into an unknown space. His position as a liminal figure in Part II, however, is markedly different than his journey to Denmark in Part I when he was a young warrior proving his worth and his right to hold a position in society. In Part II, as an experienced fighter and king, his worth is clear. His liminality derives from his state as a figure in transition. Since the

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[84] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 28-29.

[85] The poet's assertion that the dragon "ġesēċean sceall / (hea)r(h on) hrūsan" (2275B-2276A; was obliged to seek the heathen temple in the earth) implies that a barrow full of treasure is the natural location for a dragon.

[86] Grendel's attacks on Heorot do not involve fire, but the poet so clearly foreshadows Heorot's destruction through fire that the burning of Beowulf's hall additionally links the two episodes.

poet informs the audience that Beowulf will die in this battle, Part II illustrates an ideal warrior's death and movement into the collective memory of his people, while also illuminating the ways in which the collapse of boundaries signals destruction and the breakdown of human society. Again, the poet designs the landscape not only to create terror but also to heighten the pervasive sense of doom inevitable in a Christian representation of not only paganism, but also the death of a pagan. Ironically, Beowulf's passing results in an alteration in the landscape, such as he was unable to permanently effect in Denmark, when he instructs the building of his own barrow, which creates a re-contextualization of the pagan past and provides the contemporary audience of the poem with a model for relating to that past through an honorable symbol.

The antinarrativity of Part II,[87] where digressions not only inhibit the movement of the plot but are also given in fragmented and nonlinear passages, is mirrored in the poet's descriptions of the dragon's lair. Unlike the mere of Part I, which receives two sustained accounts,[88] the dragon's lair is described in numerous short phrases, usually one to two lines, of which the longest, four lines, occurs after the fight with the dragon and just before Beowulf's death. Also, while the description of the mere is withheld until needed, enhancing terror at the prospect of Beowulf's immersion in it, the scattering of the short phrases and single-word descriptors throughout the text in Part II creates a threatening tone as words associated with the dragon pervade the text more thoroughly than a contained description. This technique enhances the feeling of doom, especially when added to the knowledge that Beowulf will die, and foreshadows the destruction of

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[87] Georgianna, "King Hrethel's Sorrow," 834. Georgianna applies a postmodern term, "antinarrativity," to the non-linear movement of the narrative in Part II.

[88] Lines 1357B-1372, as quoted above, are Hrothgar's description. Lines 1408-30 detail the trip to the mere after Grendel's mother's attack and describe the surrounding area as well as the sea serpents in the water.

the Geatish people. *Beorg/beorh* (also *biorg/biorh*), "barrow, tumulus, burial mound," appears seventeen times.[89] *Hlǣw/hlāw*, "a funeral mound, the interior of a mound or cave," is employed six times.[90] The poet uses *eorð,* "ground," six times as a metonymic device for death and grave/barrow when it appears in connection with the dragon's lair, Beowulf's pyre or either's death.[91] *Eorð* becomes even more descriptive in the compounds, *eorð-reċed*, "earth-house" (2719), *eorð-scrǣf*, which is "earth-cavern" in Bosworth and Toller and "grave, sepulcher" in the *Dictionary of Old English* (3046), *eorð-sele*, "earth-hall" (2232, 2410, 2515), and *eorð-weal(l)*, "earth-wall, earth-rampart, earth-work" (3090). Other words found more than once that emphasize death and grave are *hrūse*, "earth, ground" (2247, 2411, 2558, 2831) and *den(n)*, "den, lair of an animal" and "grave" (2759, 3045). The extended repetition of words that both describe the place associated with the dragon and reference death, occurring across nearly a thousand lines, extends the fatalistic tone of the poem, preparing the audience for the apocalyptic conclusion and emphasizing the hopelessness of the pagan in eternity.[92]

As with the historical digressions in *Beowulf*, the audience can piece together the bits of information regarding the dragon's lair to create a more thorough, if not clear, description of the place. It has walls, *weal(l)*[93] and *eorðweal(l)*, "earth-wall" (3090). It is made of stone, *stān* (2288, 2557) and *hār-stān*, "gray-stone" (2553, 2744) and is a *stān-beorh*, "stone-barrow" (2213). It contains other features made of stone: *stān-boga*, "stone-bow" or "arch" (2545, 2718) and *stapol*, "post, pillar, upright stone" (2718). It has

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[89] Lines 2241, 2272, 2299, 2304, 2322, 2524, 2529, 2546, 2559, 2580, 2755, 2807, 2824, 3066, 3097, 3143, 3163.
[90] Lines 2411, 2296, 2773, 2802, 3157, 3169.
[91] Lines 2415, 2822, 2834, 3049, 3138, 3166.
[92] Within the world of the poem, Beowulf's only hope for an afterlife is to be remembered. This, of course, represents a later Christian understanding of an earlier pagan belief.
[93] Lines 2323, 2307, 2526, 2542, 2716, 2759, 3060, 3103.

a floor, *grund-wong* (2770), a roof, *hrōf* (2755, 3123), and is *deop*, "deep" (2549). Much like the description of the mere and the mother's underwater lair, these features create an ambiguous image. While wall, arch, pillar, roof and floor appear to be man-made elements, further consideration shows that these terms could apply to natural formations. Bosworth and Toller include "side of a cave, a natural wall" in the definition of *weal(l)* and *eorð-weal(l)* could also apply to a man-made structure or a natural one. Along these same lines, the "arch" of *stān-boga* and the "pillar" of *stapol* can be either natural or artificial formations, especially when added to the fact that *hlǣw/hlāw* can be defined as "the interior of a mound [man-made], a cave [natural]." Even *beorh/beorg* can apply to a "hill," "mountain," "promontory" or "heap of stones." The ambiguous language describing the dragon's lair, therefore, extends the tension between the human world and the natural world begun in Part I to a state where the distinctions between man-made and natural become blurred, again creating a threatening liminal space, as well as a new space within which to confront Anglo-Saxon anxiety concerning the past, to follow Overing and Osborn,[94] as encapsulated in the barrow.

Linda Georgianna asserts that the poet designs the antinarrativity of Part II to represent the limits of heroic action, creating a text critical of the heroic world of the Anglo-Saxon past.[95] In connection with these assertions, I assert that the representation of the natural world also functions as part of this critical statement of the past. In Part I, the unrelenting attacks as well as the fatalistic tone implied in the bloody mere create a sense of man's futility in the face of the ever-threatening forces of nature within a pagan world view. In Part II, the dragon's reign of terror is short-lived, so the poet uses the symbolic

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[94] Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*, xvii.
[95] Georgianna, "King Hrethel's Sorrow," 841.

essence of the barrow to link the threat to the civilization of the poem to a pagan representation of the natural world. Again, as with the details of the mere, the poet employs factual elements found within the countryside of Anglo-Saxon England to connect the tale realistically to the pagan past of Anglo-Saxon ancestry. Through the Lay of the Last Survivor (2247-66), a digression that reveals the provenance of the buried hoard as the remnants of an ancient people, the poet provides the audience with important information regarding the dragon's barrow. While the characters of the poem are ignorant of this information, these details provide an opportunity for the re-contextualization of the past for the contemporary audience.

Several elements regarding the dragon's lair link the dragon and his location with the pagan past of the poem, beginning with the poet's first mention of the lair, which occurs just after the poet tells of Beowulf's successful fifty-year reign:

Oð ðæt (ā)n ongan

deorcum nihtum   draca rīcs[i]an,

sē ðe on hēa(um) [96] h(of)e   hord beweotode,

stānbeorh stēar(c)ne;   stīġ under læġ

eldum uncūð. (2210B-2214A)

(Until a certain one, a dragon, began to rule in the dark night, he who attended to

the treasure of an exalted house in a tall stone barrow; the path lay beneath it

unknown to men.)

The first phrase to name the lair is *hēa(um) h(of)e*, translated here as "exalted house" in keeping with the idea of the treasure and barrow as the remains of a noble people. As

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[96] As per Klaeber's edition, round brackets (parentheses) indicate emendations due to the damaged nature of the manuscript and which cannot be clarified by the Thorkelin transcript.

discussed previously, the poet also applies *hof* to the lair of the Grendelkin, linking these two dwellings. While *hof* commonly denotes "a house, hall, dwelling, building" or "a temple," the Old Norse meaning of *hof*, "heathen temple," is implied a few lines later when the contents of the *hof* are described as a *hǣðnum horde* (2216; heathen horde). Such terminology immediately sets the place of Beowulf's final battle into the context of the pagan past represented in the poem. A few lines later the poet extends that past to an even more ancient people who lived and died *on ġeārdagum* (2233; in days of yore), in some unknown time before the action of the poem. Finally, through the Lay of the Last Survivor and the surrounding explanatory materials, the poet takes the audience to the time when the barrow was constructed:

> Beorh eall ġearo
>
> wunode on wonge   wæterȳðum nēah,
>
> nīwe be næsse,   nearocræftum fæst. (2241B-2243)
>
> (The barrow, fully prepared, was situated on a plain near the waves of the sea, not
>
> yet used beside the headland, secured by the art of rendering difficult of access.)

The barrow was *nīwe*, "not yet used" or, more simply, "new" when it was filled by the Last Survivor. Logically, then, he was the one who constructed it as a final resting place for the treasure. Through this passage, the audience of the poem receives clarification regarding the nature of the barrow as a man-made structure, while at the same time, the poet also extends the history of the barrow into a pagan past even more distant than the setting of the poem. The Last Survivor's eternal fate appears even more dismal than Beowulf's as he does not even have the hope of fame after death.

Despite the clarification provided by the Lay of the Last Survivor, the language remains ambiguous and the barrow becomes a complicated place employed for a multiplicity of meanings, real and symbolic. Like the mere, it reflects a physical aspect of the English countryside and displays the influence of that terrain upon the Anglo-Saxon imagination, ultimately serving to create a frightening and fatalistic tone by placing Beowulf in a familiar and yet otherworldly environment, similar to the techniques the poet employs in Part I. Stone monuments and barrows, often sited near other monuments upon grasslands to make them visible, were among the first attempts of prehistoric humans to alter the landscape. When the Anglo-Saxons arrived in the mid-fifth century, Britain had already been subject to thousands of years of such modifications, beginning in the Neolithic period.[97] These sorts of formations are not unique to Britain and occur in some form almost the world over, including Germany and Scandinavia. For some unknown reason, however, the formations that the Anglo-Saxons encountered in Britain seem to have made a strong impact upon their imagination. Anglo-Saxon graves in England from the fifth century are exclusively flat, but by the early seventh century, Anglo-Saxons regularly used burial mounds either by appropriating already existing ones

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[97] Barrows first appear in the Neolithic era and were often used over long periods of time for multiple inhumations. Neolithic long barrows were wood-and-earth structures sometimes comprised of multiple chambers. In the west and north of Britain, Neolithic people also used megalithic tombs. As the name suggests, these are characterized by the use of massive stone slabs both to create the chambers and to cap them. Megalithic tombs fall into two categories: passage graves with one large round burial chamber approached by a narrower stone passage, or gallery graves in which the passage is the same size as the burial chamber or sometimes even absent. After being capped, both were covered with mounds of stone or earth. Passage graves are found in Ireland and Scotland while gallery graves are more common in western England and Wales, though there is a small group of them in Kent. The third millennium B.C.E. saw a shift to individual rather than communal burial and a movement towards round barrows as Britain entered the Bronze Age. These formations are also made of stone or earth and are circular around a central grave which is sometimes a stone coffin-like chamber called a cist, such as the barrow described on Crowland, or a grave dug into the earth. These formations could house either a cremation or an inhumation. Romans in Britain also used round barrows, though these generally have a steeper profile and use wooden coffins. See Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 44-51, 84.

for their own purposes or by constructing new structures.[98] Either way, such monuments were always reserved for the elite few; especially rich are the ones the Anglo-Saxons erected themselves for their important figures.[99] Della Hooke has noted that the Anglo-Saxons developed specialized vocabulary for charters mentioning such features. In practice, according to Hooke, *beorh*/*beorg* is almost always used to denote a tumulus that was considered ancient by the Anglo-Saxons and *hlāw*/*hlǣw* is specifically associated with pagan Anglo-Saxon burial sites, either of their own creation or of repurposed monuments.[100] Such specialization argues for an Anglo-Saxon fascination with these physical features of the environment.

When Beowulf approaches the dragon's barrow and leaves behind the companionship of his men, he once again moves past the inner circle of place-connectedness and familiarity and into an unknown world on several levels. The barriers between man-made and natural, human and spirit, present and past become indistinct in the symbolic nature of the barrow.[101] As noted previously, although the Lay of the Last Survivor directs the audience to consider the barrow as a man-made formation, the language of the poem is ambiguous regarding the nature of the dragon's lair and the characters of the poem are themselves unaware of the clarification. Having stood for an unknown amount of time, the *beorh*, in effect, has become part of the terrain, deceptively appearing to the untrained eye as a hill, just as many remaining barrows do today. Another other-worldly element displayed in the barrow is the connection to a spirit world

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[98] Hutton, *Pagan Religions*, 276-77.
[99] Hutton, *Ragan Religions*, 277.
[100] Hooke, *Landscape*, 99.
[101] One might add earthly and celestial to the list of blurred distinctions as many surviving monuments serve both funerary purposes as well as a mediating function between humankind and astronomical observations, such as at Stonehenge and Newgrange. Although this does not appear to be the case with the dragon's barrow, the audience might still have applied this additional expectation to the barrow.

and a belief, as evidenced by surviving folk tales and sagas, that these monuments were a permeable boundary and portal to the otherworld. Additionally, the poet's depiction of the barrow also functions to move Beowulf into an unknown past. The description of the lair, with its frequent use of *stān* alone and in compounds and other features such as the *stapol* and the *hrōf*, argues for a megalithic tomb. *Deop* might suggest the narrow approach of a passage grave, but these are generally found outside of Anglo-Saxon England. A gallery grave seems more likely. Either way, the result is an Other-worldly setting that both resonates with the audience in a tangible way through real elements of the Anglo-Saxon topography and also calls upon former pagan practices and beliefs. As with the mere of the Grendelkin, the realistic elements of the landscape make the action of the poem even more terrifying as it appears local rather than distant. Although poetry and charters are separate genres, the poet's use of both *beorh/beorg* and *hlāw/hlǣw* underscores the atmosphere by representing the barrow as both an ancient monument (*beorh/beorg*) and a pagan burial site (*hlāw/hlǣw*), perhaps even an ancient one that has been possessed for a new purpose by the dragon much as the pagan Anglo-Saxons repurposed megalithic tombs for their own burials.[102] These details regarding provenance,

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[102] Any specific age of the barrow is uncertain. The poet states that the treasure appears "swā hīe wið eorðan fæðm / þūsend wintra   þǣr eardodon" (3049A-3050; as if it had dwelled there a thousand winters in the embrace of the earth), but he also tells the audience that the dragon has guarded the treasure for three hundred years (2278). Scholars have discussed this discrepancy, including whether it even is a discrepancy, but, as Andrew has noted, these two time periods are meant to represent "a very long time" without meaning a specific number of years, *Postscript on "Beowulf,"* 139. Even if the audience is not meant to take the numbers at face value, there is still a discrepancy in the two time periods given. Clearly, the Last Survivor prepared the barrow a long time in the past. The treasure then lay in the ground for a number of years. At some point, in the more recent but still long-ago past, the dragon found the treasure and took possession of it. This scenario fits with the terminology of *hlāw/hlǣw* as used in charters to denote a repurposed burial site. Although the dragon is not an Anglo-Saxon, he has taken an ancient site and used it for his own reasons. Throughout time, such tombs have been plundered in the hope of buried treasure. That treasure would be a reward for one willing to brave a barrow is another realistic feature of the poem. The dragon may even represent a projection of the fear of plundering such sites as a curse upon the hoard is mentioned in lines 3069-73.

spirit and time serve to blur the lines between the otherworldly atmosphere in the barrow location and the realistic features of the world of the Anglo-Saxons.

Like the mere, the liminal nature of this setting is again emphasized by the terminology of *gāst/gǣst*, "spirit, soul, ghost, incorporeal being," and *gist*, "guest." While the poet does not use either term for Beowulf in Part II, perhaps due to the differences in his liminal nature, the poet does apply *gist* to the slave who crosses into the dragon's barrow (2227), thus setting off the fateful course of events. Also, the poet uses these terms alone or in compounds three times for the dragon (2312, 2670, 2699). As with Grendel, it is often unclear whether the meaning "ghost" or "guest" is implied. Either is an odd term to apply to a fire-breathing dragon, but as earlier with Beowulf and the Grendelkin, the poet applies the terminology in order to emphasize that the threat posed by the dragon lies in its ability to cross established borders between civilization and wilderness.

Although he is presented as a noble role model who sacrifices himself to protect the Geats, the fate of Beowulf's soul is at best ambiguous. At the moment of his death, the poet informs the audience that "Him of h*r*æðre ġewāt / sāwol sēċean   sōðfæstra dōm" (2819B-2820; the soul departed from his breast to seek righteous judgment). The amount of discussion among scholars regarding the meaning of these lines attests to the calculated ambiguity of the phrasing. Writing from the Christian present of the poet's world, the narrative voice recognizes the departure of an eternal soul at the moment of death and the inevitable judgment of that soul. *Sōðfæstra dōm*, "righteous judgment" or "righteous justice," though, is unclear. Some scholars have tried to reconcile the noble portrayal of Beowulf with the Christian perspective of the poet, theorizing that this phrase

indicates heavenly glory.[103] On the one hand, Beowulf has conducted himself honorably, which the poet articulates through the digressions and commentary of Part II, but on the other, he is still a pagan in a pagan time and the best a pagan soul can hope to obtain in eternity is purgatory, according to Christian doctrine. Georgianna asserts that the narrative structure of the poem undermines the heroic ethos presented through Beowulf and helps to explain these seeming contradictions:

> The poet is able to lead his audience first to embrace the efforts of the poem's pre-Christian heroes, then slowly and regretfully to recognize that the hope of the heathens—*hæthenra hyht*—is no hope at all. The brave hero kills the monster, but the monsters keep on coming, and more and more the outsiders come to resemble the kin and folk whom the hero would protect.[104]

Beowulf's final judgment mirrors the fatalistic tone of the poem as a whole as well as the apocalyptic predictions of the conclusion and the relentlessness of the forces that seek to destroy human accomplishment. Hanning's assertion that the poem re-creates the continental past in order to "pass judgment upon it from a point of view it never knew,"[105] seems rather harsh, however. While the text asserts that as honorable as the Anglo-Saxons' ancestors were, they were still lost without Christianity, the tone is more regretful than judgmental.

Tolkien believed that the poet wrote from a "pregnant moment," looking back with regret and yet reassured in his own salvation.[106] Knowing that the Anglo-Saxons would be Christianized, the poet designs Beowulf's own burial mound as an artifact of

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[103] See Greenfield, "Beowulf and the Judgment," and Cavill, "Christianity and Theology."
[104] Georgianna, "King Hrethel's Sorrow," 847-48.
[105] Hanning, "*Beowulf* as Heroic History," 88.
[106] Tolkien, "*Beowulf*," 28.

the pagan past, one recognizable in the contemporary countryside of Anglo-Saxon England, that encapsulates the heroic ethos of the Anglo-Saxon ancestors while simultaneously recognizing their lost state and looking toward the time of the audience, serving as a beacon of hope in the otherwise dismal conclusion of the epic. Beowulf presents it as a matter of course that the Geats will honor him with a funeral pyre and only mentions that aspect of his remembrance in passing. Beowulf focuses, instead, on giving directions for a monument to be built for him. Since he makes the request and gives specific instructions for its construction, Beowulf's barrow becomes imbued with additional meaning. He tells Wiglaf:

> Hātað heaðomǣre   hlǣw ġewyrċean
>
> beorhtne æfter bǣle   æt brimes nōsan;
>
> sē scel tō ġemyndum   mīnum lēodum
>
> hēah hlīfian   on Hrones Næsse,
>
> þæt hit sǣlīðend   syððan hātan
>
> Bīowulfes Biorh,   ðā ðe brentingas
>
> ofer flōda ġenipu   feorran drīfað. (2802-2808)
>
> (After the pyre, order battle-renowned men to make a splendid barrow near the promontory of the sea; it shall be made as a remembrance to my people, standing high on Hrones Ness, so that afterwards seafarers will call it the Barrow of Beowulf, when ships drive through the mist of the sea from afar.)

As he makes this request, Beowulf knows that the dragon is dead, its reign over the barrow at Earna Ness at an end and the hoard plundered; therefore, his barrow functions within the text as a replacement of the dragon's barrow. His final resting place on Hrones

Ness, as requested by Beowulf, parallels the location of the dragon's barrow on Earna Ness, as both sites are situated on promontories near the sea. As with the dragon's lair, the poet employs the terms *beorg/beorh* and *hlǣw/hlāw* to carry the multiplicity of meanings as discussed above. Beowulf predicts that his monument will one day be called "the Barrow of Beowulf," melding the man-made structure with the landscape as *beorg* can mean a "barrow" or "hill," "mountain" or "promontory." "The Barrow of Beowulf," then, refers just as easily to the natural feature of the rising promontory as to the man-made burial mound, similar to the unknown dragon's lair appearing as a natural feature of the terrain. Another parallel between the dragon's and Beowulf's barrows is that both are constructed by the last members of a society and hold the final remnants of a glorious civilization. Both have some connection to fire, either in the dragon's breath or in Beowulf's funeral pyre.[107] The most obvious connection is that all of the treasure of the dragon's hoard is placed within Beowulf's Barrow. The importance here of Beowulf's funeral and burial is not whether these aspects might represent any real pagan practice, but that they create a parallel between the two barrows.[108] The construction of the monument, therefore, constitutes a replacement of the dragon's lair.

In death, Beowulf accomplishes an alteration of the wilderness landscape, a feat that he was unable to do in life. He does not change during the course of the narrative, is not Christianized or revered as a saint and neither has he saved the community, as only destruction is prophesied in the wake of his death, so it appears odd that at this moment he should permanently change the wilderness. Harris's belief that Beowulf's barrow

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[107] Goldsmith has noted that the fire of Beowulf's pyre, which effectively marks the end of the Geats, mirrors the fire that destroys Heorot, "The Christian Perspective," 89.

[108] For an overview of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian funerary practices see Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 269-70.

"does seem to bury a past in anticipation of something new"[109] only hints at the significance of the hero's tomb. While the death of Beowulf does represent an ending of sorts for the Anglo-Saxon heroic past, the barrow survives the end of the Geats, existing as a monument, even if only within the world of the epic. With all of the parallels between the two barrows, it is highly significant that the greatest single difference between the structures is knowledge, or lack thereof, of their existence. The dragon's lair had lain undiscovered by humans for an unknown period of time and had only been found accidentally. Beowulf, on the other hand, gives orders that his barrow will be *heah*, translated above as "high," but also "tall" or "lofty" (2805, 3097, 3157). The Geats follow Beowulf's instructions and the barrow is both a *bēacen*, "beacon" or "monument" (3160), and *ġesȳne*, "visible, seen, evident" (3158). Beowulf predicts that his resting place will serve as a guide to *sǣliðend*, "sailors" (2806), but literally "sea-travellers," which also functions synecdochically to signify all seafaring people, including the Anglo-Saxons as a whole who had migrated from the Continent. Whereas the thickening of the lake with the blood of the slain after the killing of the Grendelkin served both as a reminder of the futility of humankind's efforts against the natural world within a pagan ideology and as a foreshadowing of the episode with the dragon, Part II results in a permanent transformation of the landscape in the building of Beowulf's Barrow. The background of the dragon's lair, as well as Anglo-Saxon experience, proves the longevity of a stone barrow structure and Beowulf envisions its future usefulness. In replacing the dragon's barrow, Beowulf's Barrow also symbolically places Beowulf as an example from the heroic past for the contemporary Anglo-Saxons, one that re-contextualizes that

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[109] Harris, "*Beowulf* as Epic," 161.

past within the knowledge of migration and Christianization, literally burying the past, but not forgetting it.

James Earl asserts that epics document times of struggle and transition and that *Beowulf* displays an Anglo-Saxon obsession with cultural origins,[110] while Roberta Frank believes that *Beowulf* expresses a desire to create an "ideological basis for national unity."[111] Along these same lines, *Beowulf* represents a need to contextualize the Anglo-Saxon pagan past within the Christian present of the poet and the audience. The fatalistic tone of the poem constantly reminds the audience of the doomed past of paganism, and although Beowulf's Barrow cannot change that past, it symbolizes the future, concluding the poem with hope for the coming sea-travelers, the contemporary audience of the poem, who can still be guided by his example. In Part II, the poet uses the combination of the two barrows to move through time from the unknown past of the Last Survivor, to the time of the dragon's discovery of the hoard, to Beowulf's final battle and death and, finally, into the poet's own time when Beowulf stands as an example for the Anglo-Saxons.[112] After all, Beowulf states of his barrow, "sē scel tō ġemyndum   mīnum lēodum" (2804; It shall be made as a remembrance to my people). He does not have the barrow constructed for himself, but for those who follow him. In doing so, the poem re-contextualizes the past within a new Christian framework for the audience of the poet, but also rehabilitates that past, in the figure of Beowulf, so that it survives as an important part of Anglo-Saxon history rather than a reminder of a condemned, pre-Christian

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[110] Earl, "*Beowulf* and the Origins of Civilization," 72.

[111] Frank, "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History," 63.

[112] The barrow is just one example of a physical object that creates a narrative movement through time. The digression concerning the *heals-beaga mǣst*, "the greatest of necklaces," connects the past of Germanic legend, the present of the poem when Wealhtheow presents it to Beowulf and the future of the poem when Hygelac loses it in the raid on the Hetware (1192-1214A). Other examples are the sword hilt that Beowulf brings from the lair of the Grendelkin and, of course, the dragon's treasure.

existence. Beowulf's Barrow looks towards the time when humanity is no longer in a

constant struggle with the natural world, but instead, views nature as a representation of

god's providence, resolving the constant struggles that had plagued the people of

Beowulf's time.

Chapter 3: Landscapes of Resistance:

English Histories in the Anglo-Norman Period

The Anglo-Saxon texts discussed thus far in this study construct the wilderness within a context of migration and Christianity, creating a space for conversion and for England's addition to the Christian world as well as a space within which to contextualize the pre-conversion, pagan past of the Anglo-Saxons' continental ancestors, illustrating the intimate connection between Anglo-Saxon identity and the wilderness. With the Norman Invasion of 1066, however, came a radical shift in the relationship of the English to England both as a physical place and as a political entity. The coopting of established systems of government combined with the importation of new practices in land-management, as well as shows of force such as the Harrying of the North, alienated the English from the land which had symbolized their place within the Christian world. Castle-building altered the landscape and oppressed the Anglo-Saxons forced to serve as labor for the construction, Norman Forest Laws protected large tracts of land from any use save the king's and the compilation of the *Domesday Book* became a psychological reminder of Norman control and the Anglo-Saxons' loss of the land. Histories and quasi-histories by English authors from the Anglo-Norman period, written in either English or Latin, however, seek to reverse this process, displaying a desire to resist Norman dominance and to reclaim the land. Within this context, authors increasingly create the wilderness as a location of English resistance to Norman rule rather than a site of religious struggle and conversion. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Gesta Herewardi* and

Laȝamon's *Brut* represent three different forms of historiography, but they all construct a landscape that counters the master narrative of their Norman overlords.

The Norman Invasion of 1066 had a profound impact upon the relationship of the English to the natural world. Any group of people will physically modify the countryside for use. British environmental history is a tale of successive groups using the land for their own purposes, beginning over ten thousand years ago with the retreat of the last Ice Age. The Norman importation of continental practices, however, carried a subtext not of migration, as the Indo-Europeans, Celts and even the Anglo-Saxons had, but of a small power group seeking conquest and subjugation.[1] The phrase "ecological imperialism" originates in the title of Alfred Crosby's 1986 book, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe 900-1900*, which articulates Crosby's belief that Western imperialism and colonial expansion were unintentionally furthered, perhaps even successful, through ecological imperialism in the form of European crops, domesticated animals, weeds, pests and germs. This argument, although somewhat problematic in its Darwinian implications, has inspired scholars to consider the ecological aspects of imperialism, creating new images of colonial expansion and oppression. Since its original articulation, the phrase "ecological imperialism" has grown to include "any change in the ecology of a territory as a result of the takeover and/or penetration of one group by another," including "conscious policies that can be traced to the purposeful imposition of new economic, political and social arrangements" as well as the "tools" of empire, according to Michael Williams.[2] While the ecological imperialism of the Normans did involve some introduction of new species of hunting animals and trees, these only

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[1] Darby, "Domesday England," 39.
[2] Williams, "Ecology, Imperialism and Deforestation," 169.

minimally impacted the English; instead the policies and tools of empire related to land

management practices enacted by the Normans were the primary source of alteration to

both the English countryside and the relationship of the English to the natural world.

Although the Norman Invasion did not involve the same model of colonialism as western

imperialism does in later centuries, it did involve granting land to a new set of nobility as

well as economic exploitation and a progressivism that imported certain continental

practices designed to subjugate the English, viewing them as rough and backward,

alienating them from the countryside that had been a vital aspect of their collective

identity as a migrant, chosen people in a Promised Land.

Norman rule established a new master narrative that displaced the Anglo-Saxons

as the rightful rulers of England and the favored of God. Norman historians such as

Orderic Vitalis,[3] William of Malmesbury[4] and Henry of Huntingdon,[5] as well as artistic

works like the Bayeux Tapestry and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* by Guy of

Amiens, asserted William's right to rule England according to a suspicious oath sworn by

Harold, the last Anglo-Saxon king, made in 1064 during the reign of Edward the

Confessor when Harold was shipwrecked in Normandy and under William's control.[6]

Not only did Norman historians disseminate this version of the events leading to invasion

in the fall of 1066, they also found divine providence in William's success in general and

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[3] The son of a Norman priest and an English woman, Orderic was educated in Normandy and, while his work does display his attachment to England, he portrays the Norman Conquest as divine providence.
[4] Likewise a product of a relationship between a Norman man and an English woman, William portrays the Norman army on the eve of the Battle of Hastings, praying, giving confession and taking communion while the English army drinks and carouses.
[5] The son of an English woman and a Norman clerk, Henry was educated at the court of Robert Bloet, a member of one of the leading Norman families in England. He contextualizes the Norman Invasion as the last of a series of divine interventions visited upon England.
[6] Without directly challenging the Norman narrative of these events, Eadmer argues on the side of common sense, that William, as Harold's captor, held undue sway in the matter and that Harold had no choice but to agree with William's demands in order to save himself. Eadmer, *Recent History*, 6-8.

at Hastings in particular. This interpretation of William's accomplishments removed the Anglo-Saxons from the position of the chosen people in a chosen land, replacing them with the Normans, providing the Normans with a right to the land. Several other historical works of the Anglo-Norman period, however, seek to resist and subvert Norman rule by challenging the prevailing historical narrative, replacing it with a counter-narrative that fights for the inclusion of the defeated, English voice. These works were either written in English, associated with earlier English texts or written by English authors. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the *Gesta Herewardi* and Laȝamon's *Brut* all subvert Norman dominance through their depiction of the landscape of England.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The least literary and most factual of the texts studied here is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which details many of the imperialist methods of the Normans, especially the ones that impacted the common people who made their livings in the countryside of England. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which covers English history from 54 BCE to 1154, is the earliest continuous history in the West written in a vernacular language, surviving today in seven distinct manuscripts and two fragments. It is a collection of annals, the simplest form of history, in which a short description of events is recorded for each year. As the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* progressed, however, the annalists became more detailed in their depictions of events and the genre veered closer to a chronicle, which includes more information and commentary as well as a literary style. It was begun during the reign of Alfred the Great (r. 871-899), although it is not clear who commissioned the *Chronicle*. Alfred is well known as a proponent of the English

language, having ordered the translation of several important works from Latin to English

in order to aid education in a kingdom that had been wracked by Viking incursions, even

performing several of the translations himself, including Gregory the Great's *Pastoral

Care*,[7] in which he explains his concern for learning in Anglo-Saxon England,

specifically in his preface. Kathleen Davis, among others, has noted the budding

nationalism in this text and its connection to the use of the English language.[8] The

creation of a continuous history in the vernacular, then, is tied to both the culture of the

royal court in Wessex and the budding national character of the English, making this

particular text an important representative of English identity. It was, therefore, officially

updated several times after its initial distribution, though each manuscript contains

variations of local interest.

A history kept in English was no longer a priority after the Norman Invasion,

though. French became the prevailing vernacular of the nobility and with Latin as the

language of the Church and learning, English fell out of favor. One by one, the chronicle

manuscripts conclude with the *Peterborough Chronicle*, also known as the E version,

continuing long after the others, using the standard Old English literary language until

1131 and, after a hiatus in active chronicling, continuing in one of the earliest forms of

Middle English, concluding in 1154.[9] A thirteenth-century French chronicle follows it in

the manuscript, displaying the ascendancy of the French language in the historical genre.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is an important text for any historian of England, but

in particular, it displays a desire to preserve history in a format that is accessible in

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[7] Other works translated as part of Alfred's program are as follows: Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Orosius's *Histories Against the Pagans* and the first fifty psalms.
[8] Davis, "National Writing."
[9] Swanton, Introduction to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, xxvi-xxvii.

arrangement and language to a wide range of people, underscoring its importance to the idea of Englishness. Its use of the English language, rather than Latin, is a self-affirming act that displays the connection between vernacular language and national identity, confirming, in turn, the importance of its subject, English history. Its continuance at Peterborough for eighty-eight years following the Conquest, seventy-five years after the next longest version, the *Worcester Chronicle*, or D version, asserts a resistance against not only Norman rule, but also the Norman account of the conquest and its subsequent effects on England. In addition, the *Peterborough Chronicle* records the events of the Norman Invasion and consequent occupation of England contemporaneously until 1121.[10] The only other surviving histories written during this time period are Eadmer's works, *Vita Anselmi* and *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, which are primarily concerned with church affairs. The *Chronicle*, however, offers a more comprehensive view of life in England during the Anglo-Norman period, exhibiting both a "contemporary record of English reaction to the Norman Conquest" and "passionate sympathy with the peasantry in all their griefs and injustices."[11] In addition, Cecily Clark labels the *Peterborough Chronicle* a "purely English record,"[12] not influenced by writers with Norman blood or sympathy. She includes the Final Continuation, which was composed in 1155 and covers 1131-1154, in this assessment, although it was not written contemporaneously with events. While the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains sections of prose that exhibit literary qualities as well as several poems, such as the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, its importance here lies not so much in a literary description of any English terrain, but in its record of not only the policies employed by the Normans in

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[10] Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, xxii.
[11] Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, xxv.
[12] Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, xxv.

their ecological imperialism in England, but also the reaction of the English to these perceived injustices, setting the stage for the two literary works discussed in this chapter.

One of the first acts of Norman dominance over the English was the building of castles, a continental innovation that grew out of the fall of the Carolingian empire. Much lamented in the *Chronicle*, in England they were built to serve as bases to preserve military progress and dominion.[13] Although designed for political and social dominance, these fortresses permanently altered the landscape of England and, nearly a thousand years later, many remain popular sites for both historians and tourists. The first wave of castle building occurred soon after the Battle of Hastings and was ordered by William who oversaw the construction of at least thirty-six castles, most of which were situated near an already existing an urban center.[14] The second and third waves came when William granted lordships to his top men, and when these lords enfeoffed their own tenants,[15] who were the most responsible for the expansion of the castle into the English countryside.[16] The *Worcester Chronicle* annal for 1066 states that when William returned to Normandy at the end of the year: "7 Oda biscop 7 Wyllem eorl belifen her æfter 7 worhton castelas wide geond þas þeode, 7 earm folc swencte, 7 a syððan hit yflade swiðe"[17] (And Bishop Odo and Earl William remained here afterwards, and they built castles far and wide throughout this nation, and oppressed the helpless people, and ever afterwards it grew exceedingly bad). This entry gives voice to the hopelessness that the English felt in not only their defeat, but also the imposing structures altering their land. William's successors continued building castles and estimates place the number erected

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[13] The Normans also built or rebuilt cathedrals and monasteries, but the English viewed these projects in a different light than they did the militaristic castles.

[14] Liddiard, *Castles in Context*, 18.

[15] Liddiard, *Castles in Context*, 18.

[16] Liddiard, *Castles in Context*, 18.

[17] Quotations of the *Worcester Chronicle* are from G. P. Cubbin's edition.

in England and Wales between 1066 and 1200 at one thousand.[18] These structures were designed as "a statement of power and stark brutality,"[19] a sentiment reflected not just in their commanding presence in the landscape, but also in their construction. Existing structures were forced to make way for these fortifications and many common people lost their homes,[20] with the conquered English serving as forced labor.[21] The *Peterborough Chronicle* entry for 1086 (1087),[22] the year of William the Conqueror's death, opens a memorial verse to the departed monarch with, "Castelas he let wyrccean / 7 earme men swiðe swencean"[23] (He had castles constructed / and exceedingly distressed the wretched men), linking the castles directly with the oppression of the people. William, however, was not the only perpetrator of these methods of subjugation. The same chronicle says, even more explicitly, of 1137, regarding Stephen's tumultuous reign:

> Æuric rice man his castles makede 7 agænes hi*m* heolden; 7 fylden þe land ful of castle's'.[24] Hi suencten suyðe þe uurecce men of þe land mid castleweorces; þa þe castles uuaren maked, þa fylden hi mid deoules 7 yuele men.[25]
>
> (Every powerful man made and held his own castles against him [Stephen], and they filled the land full of castles. They greatly afflicted the wretched men of the land with castle-works; then when the castles were made, they filled them with devils and evil men.)

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[18] Liddiard, *Castles in Context*, 18. The first castles were built quickly and were of the motte and bailey variety. These consist of a motte, a large earthen mound, which is topped by a wooden structure, and a bailey, a fortified and enclosed courtyard. Additionally, there was often a ditch, possibly the result of the motte, around the enclosure adding extra protection.

[19] Reed, *The Landscape of Britain*, 144.

[20] Reed, *The Landscape of Britain*, 144.

[21] Reed, *The Landscape of Britain*, 144.

[22] Due to a scribal error, the *Peterborough Chronicle* contains two entries for 1085, putting the manuscript dates one year behind for the three succeeding entries.

[23] Clark, *Peterborough Chronicle*, 13. All quotations from the *Peterborough Chronicle* are from Clark.

[24] As per Clark's edition, expanded manuscript abbreviations are indicated by italics; words and letters that appear above the line or in the margin in the manuscript are enclosed in straight quotes.

[25] Clark, *Peterborough Chronicle*, 55.

Long after the initial conquest, the English continued to perceive of castles as a source of oppression as well as a visible reminder of subjugation. These structures, located permanently within the landscape, both altered the view of the countryside and the English people's relationship with the land.

Another major factor that impacted the landscape and its use in medieval England that is bemoaned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the enacting of Forest Laws imported from the Continent. Today the word forest is used to designate any wooded area, but the term originated as a legal designation for the land set aside as a game preserve for the use of the king; William himself afforested a quarter of England.[26] While there is some evidence that in late Anglo-Saxon England hunting parks were used, they were on private lands and an Anglo-Saxon king, the "first among equals," would hunt as any other nobleman.[27] Unlike Merovingian France, William encountered an England in which there were no lands not legally owned by someone, so he was forced to modify the continental system. The Normans felt that the kingdom and all within it belonged to the king, so William asserted his supremacy, in essence, by keeping his deer on other people's lands and by setting up his own system of officials and laws to protect his deer's interests.[28] Deer were the most commonly protected animals, including the red and roe deer and the fallow deer, which was imported from the Continent in the twelfth century. Also protected were swine and hare.[29] A small army of foresters managed the Forests and offenders were prosecuted under special Forest Laws in special Forest Courts. Alleged

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[26] Saunders, *Forest of Medieval Romance*, 8. For the purposes of this study, Forest (with a capital "F") designates the king's recreational land in general or in relation to a specific area, such as the New Forest; forest (with a lower-case "f") designates a wooded area.
[27] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 141.
[28] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 141.
[29] Rackham, *Ancient Woodlands*, 177.

wrongdoers had no recourse under English Common Law.[30] Penalties could be severe

including blinding, castration and death, but it may actually have been in the crown's best

interest to impose fines rather than mutilate offenders.[31] Despite scholarly debate

regarding the application of the severest penalties, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* clearly

displays resentment towards the creation of Forests as well as fear of the consequences.

William's memorial verse in the *Peterborough Chronicle* entry for 1086 (1087),

mentioned above, also says of him:

> He sætte mycel deorfrið,
>
> 7 he lægde laga þærwið
>
> þ*et* swa hwa swa sloge heort oððe hinde,
>
> þ*et* hine man sceolde blendian.
>
> He forbead þa heortas,
>
> swylce eac þa baras.
>
> Swa swiðe 'he' lufode þa headeor
>
> swilce he wære heora fæder.
>
> Eac he sætte be þa*m* haran
>
> þ*et* hi mosten freo faran.[32]
>
> (He set up many game preserves and he imposed laws therewith that whosoever
>
> slew hart or hind, that very man was to be blinded. He forbade [hunting] the harts
>
> and also the boars. In this way, he exceedingly loved the deer as if he were their
>
> father. In addition, he ordained that the hares might be allowed to live free.)

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[30] Keen, *Outlaws*, 26.
[31] Saunders, *Forests of Medieval Romance*, 8-9.
[32] Clark, 13.

This entry, which earlier declares itself an attempt to be fair to William at his death, displays English resentment towards both the Forest Laws and their enforcement. These laws were not just applied to wooded areas though, but to any area the king chose and only about one-half of the forests in medieval England were actually wooded lands.[33] The rest included waste areas as well as pasture, cultivated areas already in use and even whole villages. Except for wolves, animals and plants within the boundaries of the forest were protected and penalties applied both to killing animals and to harming vegetation.[34] Many common people, however, depended upon the forest for their livelihood and Oliver Rackham asserts that illicit woodcutting, grazing and farming took place, which exposed the perpetrators to both fines and the confiscation of goods and cart animals, declaring that many were willing to risk being caught in order to continue supporting their families.[35] Like the castles, Forests affected the relationship of the English to the land and served as a physical reminder of the power of their Norman overlords.

The Domesday inquest and its resulting book, completed in 1086, was another tool of empire designed to facilitate taxation, which was viewed as a severe and unjust form of oppression. Although it was not a physical sign like castles and forest boundaries, its compilation reminded the English of their loss of sovereignty as well as asserting William's dominion over the land. The *Peterborough Chronicle* records for 1085:

> Æfter þisu*m* hæfde se cyng mycel geþeaht 7 swiðe de'o'pe spæce wið his witan ymbe þis land, hu hit wære gesette oððe mid hwylcon mannon. Sende þa ofer eall Englaland into ælcere scire his men 7 lett agan ut hu fela hundred hyda wæron innon þære scire, oððe hwet se cyng himsylf hæfde landes 7 orfes innan þa*m*

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[33] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 142.
[34] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 122-23.
[35] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 159.

lande, oððe hwilce gerihtæ he ahte to habbanne to xii monþum of ðære scire. Eac

he lett gewritan hu mycel landes his arceb*iscopas* hæfdon 7 his leodb*iscopas* 7 his

abb*odas* 7 his eorlas, 7, þeah ic hit lengre telle, hwæt oððe hu mycel ælc mann

hæfde þe landsittende wæs innan Englalande, on lande oððe on orfe, 7 hu mycel

feos hit wære wurð. Swa swyðe nearwelice he hit lett ut aspyrian þ*et* næs an ælpig

hide ne an gyrde landes, ne furðon—hit is sceame to tellanne, ac hit ne þuhte hi*m*

nan sceame to donne—an oxe ne an cu ne an swin næs belyfon þ*et* næs gesæt on

his gewrite. 7 ealle þa gewrita wæron gebroht to him syððan.[36]

(After this the king had great thought and very deep speech with his council about

this land, how it was occupied and with what kind of men. Then he dispatched his

men throughout the whole of England into each shire and he had them discover

how many hundreds of hides there were in the shire, and what land and livestock

the king himself had in that land, and what dues he should expect in twelve

months from the shire. In addition, he had it documented how much lands his

archbishops had and his diocesan bishops and his abbots and his ealdormen, and,

although I state my case at great length, what and how much each man had who

was occupying land in England, in land and livestock, and how much money it

was worth. He ordered it examined so very closely that not a single hide nor a part

of a hide of land, nor even—it is shameful to recount, but appeared not shameful

to him to do it—one ox, not one cow, not one pig did not remain that was not set

down in his document. And all the documents were brought to him afterwards.)

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[36] Clark, 8-9.

While scholars have debated its original purpose,[37] contemporary Englishmen felt the Domesday Inquest was invasive, oppressive and a shameful undertaking for a just ruler. A century after its completion it was known by the moniker it possesses today, a reference to the final judgment and an implication that the Domesday Book had the final say in matters of land dispute[38] and was perceived as a method to control the vanquished.[39] It served as a reminder that the very land of Anglo-Saxon England had been forcefully taken by the Normans and that the ultimate possessor of all property in England was the foreign king.

While not a source of literary landscape descriptions, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* displays a violent rift between the land and the people forced upon the Anglo-Saxons who had previously viewed England as a type of Promised Land destined for them by God, a physical emblem of their nature as a chosen people. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* positioned the Anglo-Saxon conversion as the fulfillment of Acts and, with the various hagiographies already discussed, constructed a wilderness that participated in the conversion to Christianity. While *Beowulf* utilized the wilderness to contextualize the continental past, its poet also wrote from a post-migration perspective, secure in the knowledge of a Christian identity for the tribes in the new kingdom. Perhaps the heroic poem, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, itself the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 937, best displays the Anglo-Saxon attitude towards the land of England. Written to commemorate the battle within which Æthelstan repelled all foreign invaders and united the disparate kingdoms into the geographical unit today known as England, the poem concludes with

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[37] Roffe summarizes modern scholarship, which has labeled the Domesday Book as a number of things from tax assessment to a record of Norman order, *Domesday*, 10-16.
[38] Roffe, *Domesday*, 5.
[39] Roffe, *Domesday*, 9.

> Ne wearþ wæl māre
>
> on þȳs īġ-lande   æfre ġīeta
>
> folces ġefielled   beforan þissum
>
> sweordes ecgum,   þaes-þe ūs secgaþ bēċ,
>
> eald ūðwitan,   siþþan ēastan hider
>
> Engle and Seaxe   upp becōmon,
>
> ofer brād brimu   Britene sōhton,
>
> wlance wīġ-smiðas,   Wēalas ofercōmon,
>
> eorlas ār-hwaete   eard beġēaton. (65B-73)[40]
>
> (There never was greater slaughter in this island of people felled by the edges of swords before this, according to that which the books, old philosophers, tell us, since from the east the Angles and the Saxons came up to this place, they sought Britain over the broad sea, valiant war-smiths, they overcame the British, the glorious noblemen conquered the land.)

This conclusion to the poem that can be described as a paean to the birth of England links the migration of the tribes to the possession of the new land in a way similar to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny in the United States. It presents the physical possession of England as a right of the Anglo-Saxons and its inclusion in the great Anglo-Saxon historical record emphasizes the importance of the battle to the Anglo-Saxon sense of national identity. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, therefore, in recording both this high point of history as well as the later oppression of the Anglo-Saxons acted out upon the land, provides a wide-ranging view of the Anglo-Saxon relationship with the physical entity of England.

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[40] *The Battle of Brunanburh* is quoted from Pope, *Eight Old English Poems*, 3rd ed., revised by Fulk.

The Gesta Herewardi

As with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, other writers of history who identified with the English sought to resist Norman control in their texts. The *Gesta Herewardi* is especially vivid in its employment of the landscape in order to subvert the Norman assertion of military superiority. Freed of the annal form of the *Chronicle*, this work makes greater use of the wilderness of England. The *Gesta Herewardi* tells the deeds of the English hero Hereward, distinguished in common legend by the cognomens "the Wake" and "the Last Englishman," and his guerrilla-like exploits in his resistance to William the Conqueror in the backfens of East Anglia. Hereward is a documented historical figure who appears in both the Worcester and the Peterborough versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* during the years 1070-71 and as a pre-Conquest Lincolnshire landholder in the Domesday Book. [41] In 1070 the Danish King Swein Estrithson entered the Humber River, wishing to add the English throne to his holdings. His forces under Jarl Asbjorn and Bishop Christian of Aarhus occupied the Isle of Ely, discussed previously as the home of the monastery established by the Anglo-Saxon queen Æthelthryth in the seventh century. Many men dissatisfied with Norman rule, and perhaps themselves of Scandinavian ancestry, joined the Danish forces, including Hereward and his band of freedom fighters. When the Anglo-Saxon Brand, Abbot of Peterborough on the western edge of the Fenland, died and was to be replaced with the Norman Turold, the group decided to remove the valuables from the monastery in

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[41] Anglo-Norman historians who mention Hereward include John of Worcester, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, Geffrei Gaimar and Hugh Candidus, who all wrote in Latin. Unlike the authors of the *Chronicle*, whom these historians all drew upon, they did not write contemporaneously with the events of Hereward's life. In addition, they wrote much later than Richard of Ely, the probable writer of the *Gesta Herewardi*.

Peterborough before Norman control could be established. The mission, however, degenerated into looting and burning. Depending upon the source, this act is presented variously as an outlaw raid or a deed of English loyalty.[42] When the Danes left in 1071, Hereward and his band of the resistance remained on the island as the final holdouts against the Normans.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the monastery of Ely, founded by St. Æthelthryth in the seventh century, was situated upon a bedrock island within the treacherous Fenland of East Anglia, south of Guthlac's Crowland. It presented an excellent position of defense as it could be supplied from the east through the Wash and the River Ouse, but from the west, it could only be approached through the dangerous peat bogs, whose inland tracks and canals were unfamiliar to outsiders. Unwilling to allow any further resistance, William mounted a force to root out the insurgents, stationing a blockade along the eastern shore and building a crude pontoon bridge through the marshes which sank under the weight of the army. The monks of Ely, however, grew tired of strife and wishing for peace, surrendered to William. Hereward would have none of this and he and a small band escaped through the fens, never to be mentioned again in the *Chronicle*, although various sources do attempt to create closure to the story by eventually reconciling him with the king, as in the *Gesta Herewardi*, though such a conclusion appears to be speculative at best.[43]

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[42] The Peterborough tradition, represented by the *Peterborough Chronicle* and Hugh Candidus, is much less favorable to Hereward than the Ely tradition, which is presented in the *Gesta Herewardi* and the *Liber Eliensis*, the Lincolnshire tradition, from Geoffrey Gaimar, or the Crowland tradition, represented in the fourteenth-century *Historia Croylandensis* by Pseudo-Ingulf.

[43] Geoffrey of Gaimar reconciles Hereward with William and has him leading a contingent of warriors in the expedition in Maine where he is murdered by jealous Norman knights. The *Gesta Herewardi* has Hereward's peace with William negotiated by a beautiful lady who becomes his second wife after his first wife, Turfida, agrees to enter the convent at Crowland.

The figure of Hereward and tales of his resistance to the Invasion must have fascinated the local inhabitants. According to the preface to the *Gesta Herewardi*, in the first quarter of the twelfth century, an unknown person wished to know more about this local hero and requested information on Hereward from the monastery at Ely. An anonymous monk decided to record the exploits of Hereward in honor of this request and created the *Gesta Herewardi*. Although the author does not name himself within the text, the later twelfth-century author of the *Liber Eliensis* (completed 1169-1174) lists among his sources a *Gesta Herewardi* written by a monk of Ely named Richard. Although not exact, the Hereward sections of the *Liber Eliensis* (ii. 102-110) are similar enough to the *Gesta Herewardi* that a close connection between the two can be assumed, even if through an unknown exemplar, and it is generally accepted that that this otherwise unknown Richard was most likely the author of the text that survives today.[44] The *Gesta Herewardi* has been studied for information regarding the early years after the Conquest and as a primary form of what would become the outlaw tale, which will be discussed in the next chapter. To my knowledge, only two scholars, Hugh M. Thomas and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., have written on the *Gesta Herewardi* as a work of literature. Neither is concerned with the *Gesta*'s literary techniques, however, but instead both scholars are invested in the hybrid nature of the text and what they identify as its advocating of equality for the English in the Norman-controlled society. I agree that Richard is interested in illustrating English skill and intelligence, but I also believe that Richard's construction of the wilderness location of Ely not only displays English superiority, but also characterizes the Normans as foreign invaders who have no business in England.

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[44] Knight and Ohlgren, Introduction, 636.

The *Gesta Herewardi* was clearly intended for an English audience. It contains episodes that extol English virtues as well as details of Norman abuses in the Fenland and adventures designed to portray the Normans as foolish buffoons. Hereward fights and kills a Scottish warrior who insults the English (IV), avenges his brother's murder at the hands of Norman usurpers (XIV) and requires his men to be knighted according to English customs (XVI) in addition to his acts in holding out against the Normans at Ely. Hereward's importance to the monks of Ely is testified to in the inclusion of information from the *Gesta Herewardi* in their own longer history, the *Liber Eliensis*, which records the founding and history of the monastery, including gifts and property, as well as land donations, important in establishing and defending the rights of the monastery in cases of dispute or conflict. The *Liber Eliensis* appears to have been motivated, at least in part, by a need to create a stabilizing document in a time of upheaval and the *Gesta*'s depiction of Hereward's defense of Ely must have added to the sense of their autonomy.

Certain events at the abbey in the early part of the twelfth century, when Richard was writing, may have made the monks especially interested in the local hero. The *Liber Eliensis* records that in 1109, when the abbey became a bishopric under Hervey le Breton, whose time as Bishop at Bangor had been contentious to say the least, there was conflict regarding the division of property, which the brothers felt was unfair. While much of the early part of Book iii of the *Liber Eliensis* is complimentary to Hervey, Chapters 25-26 are especially harsh regarding his provisions for the monastery, displaying lingering resentment regarding events of the time period during which the *Gesta Herewardi* was being composed. The difficult relationship between the new Norman Bishop and the monks would have found expression in the tale of resistance

against Norman control, of which a central part is Hereward's objection to the appointment of a Norman bishop at Peterborough.[45]

In addition to the monks at Ely, the *Gesta Herewardi* was probably designed to appeal to a larger Fenland audience in general. The person who requested the information is not named,[46] but it seems quite plausible that it could have been a prominent figure in the greater Fenland area, not just one from Ely. Other versions of Hereward's life were written in Lincolnshire, Crowland and Peterborough in addition to Ely,[47] which demonstrates his appeal to the area in general, beyond just the site of his resistance. The lone surviving manuscript of the *Gesta* is in the Register of Robert of Swaffham (died 1271), who was the pittancer and cellarer of Peterborough Abbey in the mid thirteenth century and who also wrote a continuation of a history of the Abbey.[48] The *Gesta Herewardi* appears in Robert's collection of charters and other legal documents. By the mid-thirteenth century, therefore, the monks at Peterborough, even though their predecessors had been the victims of Hereward's attack, had come to consider his history of resistance in the local area important to them as well as to Ely. A regional audience of churchmen who chaffed against royal and Norman control of the area in general and of the Church in particular seems likely.

Unlike the other works discussed in this chapter, the *Gesta Herewardi* is written in a difficult Latin, rather than English. The preface states that early curiosity at Ely

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[45] Thomas additionally points out that the villains of Richard's text were the ancestors of the current regime that the English continued to identify with their persecution, "The *Gesta Herewardi*," 218-19.

[46] Bremmer believes that it was Hervey who requested the information, "*Gesta Herewardi*," 34. Hervey was certainly concerned with the history of Ely as he commissioned a Latin translation of an Old English history of the monastery, which later became part of the *Liber Eliensis*. The preface to the *Gesta Herewardi* also references the translation of its material from Old English to Latin, appearing to offer a nice parallel, though perhaps just coincidental. The treatment of the subject matter, decidedly pro-English, argues for an author and audience with English sympathies, though.

[47] See Chapter 3, note 42.

[48] King, "Swaffham," 370.

regarding Hereward was satisfied by a brief text in Latin, translated from an Old English text based upon common report. When the request for more thorough information was received, Richard apparently consulted another Old English book held by the monastery, which had been written by Hereward's priest Leofric and which, unfortunately, was found rotting away, prompting Richard to write the deeds of Hereward himself using this book and the eye-witness accounts of Hereward's former men, now elderly. This detail dates the text to the first quarter of the twelfth century.[49] There are a few key points to be made from this information. First, that Hereward's tale was originally written in English attests, not surprisingly, to an original audience of Anglo-Saxons. That there were apparently two texts in English produced on Hereward after the Conquest argues for a growing desire to preserve English culture and heroism in the face of Norman domination. Even if this narration of the recovery of the narrative is an artistic trope, it still displays Richard's awareness that Hereward was a hero for the English.[50] This subtext, however, must next be reconciled with the conversion of Hereward's tale into Latin by a monk, the aforementioned Richard, who possessed a French name. Translation always implies a power dynamic, especially in a colonial situation, and Richard's narrative appears to view the English as an inferior medium. While the original is often held in higher esteem than the translation, here the translation takes precedence over the native language, implying something inferior about the English language. Certainly, Richard represents the Latin as an elevation of the narrative of Hereward beyond that of a

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[49] Thomas, however, believes that the consultation of Hereward's men is a literary trope and dates the *Gesta Herewardi* any time between 1109, the date of the appointment of Hervey le Breton, and 1174, the date of the completion of the *Liber Eliensis*, "The *Gesta Herewardi*," 217. The realistic and detailed descriptions of battles and military organization seem to me to argue for the veracity of Richard's statement.

[50] While I see little reason to doubt Richard's narrative of events, the trope of a lost source is common in medieval texts. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *Historia Regum Brittanniae*, references an unknown Welsh source, the existence of which scholars regard with great skepticism.

legendary outlaw tale in addition to appealing to a monastic audience, but Richard's

further discussion and use of language complicates the choice even more. While he does

say that the original language of English is unfamiliar to him, Richard was apparently

familiar enough with English to use the decaying book as source material. He even states

that it is his sole source for the first part of Hereward's life before the return to England

and resistance in the Fenland. In addition, he also states that he gathered information

from a few of Hereward's men who, it can be assumed, were most fluent in English, if

not monolingual. Also, Richard's Latin is notoriously poor. Knight and Ohlgren state that

"his Latin is not of the clearest and scarcely fits the description *doctissimus*," as applied

to him in the *Liber Eliensis*.[51] His nineteenth-century translator, W. D. Sweeting,

repeatedly footnotes the Latin as corrupt, difficult, uncertain and even "hopeless."[52] It

appears, then, that Richard may not have been any more familiar with Latin than he says

he was with Old English. While Richard's name might argue for French as his native

language, however, as French is a Romance language, one might then expect Richard to

have a better grasp of Latin. Considering the date of composition, it is possible that

Richard was the son of a French nobleman and an English woman and was far more

familiar with English than he wished to acknowledge in his preface.[53] While Richard's

preface appears both to distance him from the oppressed English and to align him with

the power structure in his choice of a language that would appeal to a larger group of

readers, it may actually be an an act of resistance and empowerment, resulting from the

contact between the Normans and English on Ely. In the preface, Hereward's tale appears

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[51] Knight and Ohlgren, Introduction, 636.
[52] *De Gestis Herewardi*, XI, XVI, XVII, XVIII, XXII, XXVI, XXVII, XXXI, XXXII.
[53] See Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, for more on the relationships between Norman men and English women, especially 56-69 and 138-160.

as a moldy book, an object of discussion and curiosity, an artifact in a library, but

Richard translates this book into a subject, an English warrior who maintains control of

his life and destiny. Unlike the *Chronicle* record, Hereward of the *Gesta* does not

disappear into the fens when defeated, but continues fighting, and, though ultimately

reconciled to William, living out his life on his own terms. Much as post-colonial authors

today choose to write in English in order to appeal to an international audience, despite

the problematic nature of employing not only the language of the colonizer but also a

language that their own characters would not speak, by writing in Latin, Richard both

elevated his material as a subject worthy of a Latin narrative and made his text more

accessible to the monastic audience in the Fenland who themselves had had difficulties

with a Norman bishop and probably felt some pride in the famous hero of Ely. In doing

so, Richard created a hybrid work that imitates the literary output of the ruling classes

while, at the same time, subverting their authority in its subject matter.

The *Gesta Herewardi* is an interesting text written at a transitional time that

contains many elements of various genres.[54] Elements of the epic survive in the tale of a

hero who represents English values. Hereward's status as an exile who wanders the north

gaining fame and glory mirrors many sagas. The resolution of the tale through a

mysterious and beautiful lady looks towards the coming popularity of the romance.

Hereward's fight against what he sees as an unjust authority creates an archetype of the

English outlaw that has much in common with the later rhymes of Robin Hood. In the

preface, however, Richard calls his text "in morem historiae libellulum"[55] (I; "a little

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[54] Bremmer believes that in translating the text from Old English to Latin, Richard of Ely performed a mediating function between the two cultures, helping to develop a new one following the Conquest, "*Gesta Herewardi*," 42.

[55] All Latin quotations of the *Gesta Herewardi* are from Hardy and Martin.

book in the style of a history").[56] While annals and chronicles generally relayed facts in a brief manner, medieval histories were more literary in style, seeking to create scenes of action and drama around historical events, thus the expected incorporation of elements of a variety of genres. While details and speeches intended to create an interesting narrative were the creation of the author, their presentation lent an air of authenticity. This same ethos allows the author to construct landscape settings that suit the purpose of the text. The audience understood that aspects of the narrative were literary creations, but the text still functioned to create a community by sharing in a glorious past.

Despite a few fantastical episodes in the *Gesta Herewardi*, such as Hereward's entering the enemy camp disguised as a potter or his being led through the swamp by a wolf, episodes which serve to make the Normans look foolish and to bolster the cleverness and bravery of the English, the text is generally realistic as a whole, which extends to its topographical depictions. Perhaps due to its English source material in both the decaying book and the personal interviews used to complete it, much of the work also involves vivid and detailed descriptions of military tactics and strategy that could only have come from those familiar with such procedures. In addition, the text displays an intimate awareness of the topography of the Fenland, either from Richard's own knowledge serving at a monastery there or the knowledge of his sources or, most likely, a combination of both. In the *Gesta Herewardi*, therefore, the landscape and natural features of the Fenland environment become one of the central aspects of Hereward's resistance against William and the Normans. Hereward and his men, natives of the area, use their superior understanding of the land both to thwart the Normans and to fortify and provide for themselves in their stronghold, while also making the Normans appear inept

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[56] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 639.

and foolish, thus resisting the Norman program of ecological imperialism. The landscape of East Anglia, as presented in the *Gesta Herewardi*, is a landscape of resistance to Norman dominion.

In a land occupied by invasion, settling becomes key to permanent investment beyond just commercial and political gain. In England, the Anglo-Saxon Invasion had involved a gradual migration of a large number of people who took possession of the land, farming it and living on it, making it Anglo-Saxon. The Normans, who did not migrate as a people, nevertheless, still settled the land when William parceled out the new territory to his noblemen who then took control of the estates, many marrying English women. In cases of empire and invasion, frontiers, borderlands and wilderness areas become contested spaces that simultaneously contain the hopes and dreams of the imperial mission of conquest and settlement while also serving as nightmarish obstacles of resistance that challenge the master narrative by becoming pockets of resistance that threaten the power structures militarily, politically and ideologically. The Romans dealt with such a threat in England by building Hadrian's Wall to isolate the Picts, and Bede records the Anglo-Saxon difficulties with the native British pushed into the western area of the island, most notably under the leadership of Cadwallon. For William, the situation was no less difficult. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records areas of resistance in Scotland, in the north of England, in Wales and, of course, in the Fenland.[57] The biographical entry of 1086 (1087), discussed above, records William's subjugation of these areas as one of his greatest accomplishments. Invasion and empire, therefore, are predicated upon the control of the land and the *Gesta Herewardi*, which, despite its literary reconciliation in

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[57] Eadric the Wild is another figure who conducted a guerrilla-like resistance against William. His exploits occurred in the West Midlands and are recorded in the *Worcester Chronicle* and by John of Worcester and Orderic Vitalis. Unlike Hereward, however, no stand-alone narrative survives of Eadric.

the conclusion, is a narrative of resistance, recognizes the importance of the wilderness as an area of struggle and constructs the Fenland as a nightmare for the Normans, but a paradisiacal place for the English, which only falls through treachery.

According to the *Gesta*, Hereward's youthful adventures were colorful and exciting, but his time in the Fenland is the most interesting in terms of Richard's construction of the wilderness.[58] When Hereward is summoned to join the holdouts against William on the Isle of Ely, his nemesis the Earl of Warenne attempts to ambush him, but Hereward discovers the plan. When one of the Earl's men yells across one of the Fenland rivers, trying to persuade the Englishmen to surrender their leader, the Norman taunts the English by stating that he is certain of the Earl's eventual victory but would rather avoid spending time in "invisa ista palude" (XX; "this detestable swamp")[59] and chasing Hereward through a "luteam paludem" (XX; "muddy marsh")[60] that is filled with "aquarum gurgites et arundinum asperitates" (XX; "swirling water and sharp reeds"). This description of the area, at the beginning of Hereward's time at Ely, provides an accurate depiction of the backfens of East Anglia while displaying a Norman aversion to the place. One of Hereward's men concludes the verbal exchange with, "Et domino tuo ipsum esse citra aquam quem interrogat refer" (XX; And tell your lord that the man he's asking for is here on this side of the water").[61] At this taunt, the Earl arrives at the scene and orders his men to swim across and engage Hereward, but they declare it impossible to get to the outlaw through the mud and peat. This brief exchange upon Hereward's first

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[58] The opening of the narrative provides information on Hereward's heritage as an Anglo-Saxon nobleman, his status as an outlaw due to many brushes with the law in his youth, his adventures as a wandering warrior in Northumbria, Cornwall, Ireland and Flanders and his return home after the Conquest to find his brother dead and his estates confiscated.

[59] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 648.

[60] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 648.

[61] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 648.

entering the Fenland establishes both Norman ineptitude in the wetlands as well as the superiority of English knowledge and use of the area, displaying the Norman status as foreign invaders in the land.

The many other episodes in the Ely section further highlight the incompetence of the Normans. At one point, the Normans bring a witch into the fens to defeat the English through magic, but Hereward's men set fire to the Norman camp, while staying safe due to their own ability to read the direction of the winds:

> Unde obstupefacti et nimis territi fugam inierunt unusquisque viam suam, et per inculta paludis in illa via aquosa non diu gradientes, nec callem quientes [sic] tenere. Pro quo enim plurimi repente absorpti sunt, aliique in aquis eisdem dimersi et sagittis oppressi, dum manus eorum qui de insula caute ad rebellandum, licet clam egressi sunt in igne et fuga et jaculis ferre non possent. (XXV) ("As a result, stupefied and greatly alarmed, the king's men fled, each man for himself. But they could not go far along those watery paths through the wastes of the swamp, and they could not keep to the track easily. In consequence, very many of them were suddenly swallowed up, and others, overwhelmed with arrows, drowned in the same waters, for in the fire and in their flight they were unable to use their lances against the bands of those who came cautiously and secretly out from the Isle to repel them.")[62]

In addition to continuing to display the ineptitude of the Normans and the superior English knowledge of the area, this episode reinforces the depiction of the Normans as foreigners who do not know the tracks of the Fenland, extending that image to their inability to use their *jaculis* or javelins, here translated as "lances" by Swanton. While the

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[62] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 657.

Bayeux Tapestry depicts the Normans successfully using such weapons, here Richard conveys an image of invaders who understand neither the lay of the Fenland, nor the tactics necessary to succeed militarily in a wetland environment.

Perhaps the most vivid symbol of Norman incompetence, as depicted in the *Gesta Herewardi*, is the causeway built by William at Alrehede in an attempt to reach Ely. Although buoyed by skins filled with air, the causeway sinks under the weight of the army with only a few men in the rear surviving:

> Sic ergo, nemine vix persequente illos, in palude et aquis innumerabiles perierunt, ex quibusisti [sic] usque in hodiernum diem multi adhuc de profundis illarum aquarum in armis putrefactis abstrahuntur. Quod enim nonnunquam ipsi vidimus. (XXI)
>
> ("Thus in this way, with hardly anybody pursuing them, great numbers perished in the swamp and waters. And to this day many of them are dragged out of the depths of those waters in rotting armor. I've sometimes seen this myself.")[63]

Again, the wilderness setting along the fringe of the empire resists the invaders so thoroughly that the English just sit back and watch the attack fail. Richard, of course, writes from a time when not just Ely, but all of England, is under Norman control, but his description of the bodies recovered in his own time, lasting reminders of this defeat of the Normans, is a realistic depiction of the preservative conditions in the peat bogs, and maintains the memory of the spectacular defeat, allowing the present members of the Ely community to share in the past.

Another connection for the contemporary Fenland audience is the long and detailed account of the location that Richard provides through the eyes of Deda, the one

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[63] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 649.

Norman who had made it across the causeway and whom Hereward allows to live so that he might inform William of the security of the insurgents' position (XXII). Richard crafts this report in part as a response to many of the anti-English claims of the Normans. At the opening of the chapter, Deda expresses surprise regarding the valor of Hereward's men: "Nam ut saepe coram eis professus est, in bello minus eos esse profectos seu in militia peritos prae aliis gentibus multotiens audierat" (XXII;"For, as he often declared in their presence, he had heard many times that they [the Anglo-Saxons] were less proficient in war and less skilled in military affairs than other races").[64] This chapter, therefore, provides Hereward's band with the opportunity of refuting the Norman master-narrative that the English were inferior militarily and spiritually and had deserved to lose at Hastings. In having Deda report what he sees on Ely to William, Deda becomes Richard's messenger in refuting the Norman claims against the English.[65] In fact, Deda's time on Ely is only told through this report. The whole passage becomes, in effect, a response to the claims against the Anglo-Saxons rather than a narration of events.

Coming just after the failure of the causeway, the defensive superiority of the position is clear and Deda reports on the valor and preparedness of the warriors, including the monks who also take their turns in raiding and defense. Additionally, Deda declares that now that he has spent time among the Anglo-Saxons, they are as valorous as any soldier in France, Germany or Byzantium. In depicting the manner of life on the Isle, however, Deda's speech creates an image of a civilized place within the midst of the wilderness location, similar to Guthlac's creation of a conquered wilderness on Crowland. While Felix portrays the transformation of Crowland as an act of conversion,

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[64] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 650.
[65] Thomas, "The *Gesta Herewardi*," 232, believes that redeeming the Anglo-Saxon reputation is the goal of the *Gesta Herewardi*.

Hereward's Ely experiences a different transformation. It is already a monastery, a Christianized site in the wilderness, but Hereward's arrival makes it a military position where even the monks bear arms, something Deda has never heard of, transforming the religious place into a site of political resistance, and making the Promised Land of the Anglo-Saxon migration myth into a symbol not of salvation, but of military and social power, an idea more fully realized in Laȝamon's *Brut*, to be discussed below, and of resistance to conquest. Moreover, Deda enumerates the resources of the place, again quite accurately. There is an abundance of waterfowl and fish as well as animals for hunting and arable patches of land. Deda declares that the inhabitants of the island are so secure that the activities of farming and hunting continue without any interruption, echoing the paradaisical elements of Guthlac's Crowland, but within a context of military support. The combination of defensive position and bountiful provisions lead Deda to conclude that Ely is "omnique castello muris circumdato fortiorem" (XXII; "much stronger than any castle surrounded by walls").[66] This statement turns the tables on the Norman practice of castle building as a show of military force by providing a natural position usable through native knowledge of the land that is better than anything the foreign invaders can construct. This whole episode, as related through the eyes of a Norman, creates a situation in which a Norman is forced to admit the strategically superior quality of the Anglo-Saxons in both skills and military position, undermining not just Norman rule in England, but also the master narrative of Norman exceptionalism.

Richard constructs William as an invader and agent of empire who is not only aware of the danger to order presented by the resistance, but also anxious regarding the location of Hereward's band along the fringe of his holdings. In ecological terminology,

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[66] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 652.

the Fenland was a marginal area, meaning that it was unlikely to be highly settled due to

its seemingly inhospitable conditions,[67] but this area was also marginal in its location in

the wetlands of the East Midlands, at the edge of Britain, leading into the North Sea,

placing it along the fringe of the Norman empire, difficult to control, and, therefore, a

threat to the master narrative of Norman superiority. William considers negotiating peace

with Hereward's band, "asserens nimis grave esse tales viros in medio terrae suae a tergo

relinquere" (XXIII; "declaring that it would be very serious to leave such men in the

middle of the land at his rear"),[68] but also concedes that "non se posse expugnare

insulam, nec locum ex virtute Dei naturaliter munitum" (XXIII; "he could not take the

Isle or any place so naturally fortified by the power of God").[69] This statement, in some

measure, reclaims the land as the possession of the chosen Anglo-Saxons. Throughout

this section of the text, Richard repeatedly has William and his men acknowledge the

valor of the Anglo-Saxons and William's inability to take Ely. By now connecting these

elements to the "power of God," the text reasserts the migration myth that bound the

Anglo-Saxons and the land to their conversion to Christianity that had been co-opted by

the Normans in their histories of the invasion. This discussion proves to William the

hopelessness of defeating Hereward in his own setting and he gives up invading the

Fenland, instead attempting to contain the insurgents through a blockade, walling them

off and, in effect, creating a new border for his empire that contains not only the threat to

military stability but also the threat to Norman exceptionalism.

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[67] Rippon, *Transformation*, 4.

[68] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 653. Here, *medio*, "middle," refers to the location in the Midlands, but *tergum*, "back," clearly refers to Ely's position along the fringe of Britain. Today, Ely is well inland, but at the time, before the drainage projects of later centuries, it was an island with easy acess to the North Sea.

[69] *Gesta Herewardi*, trans. by Swanton, 653.

Of course, Ely was eventually taken by the Normans and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that it was due to the success of the causeway built by William, but the *Gesta Herewardi* frames the surrender differently. Frustrated by his inability to take the island, William blockades it and distributes the land held by the monastery outside the wetlands to his followers (XXVI). At this turn of events, however, the Abbot of Ely has a change of heart and secretly sues for peace on the condition that the lands are returned to the monastery. Hearing of this treachery, Hereward threatens to burn Ely, but instead escapes with his men. By having the monastery fall through the Abbot's negotiations, Richard preserves Hereward's heroism and the integrity of the backfen fortress, allowing the wilderness, although held by Normans in Richard's day, to remain a symbol of resistance. Although Hereward disappears from the *Chronicle* at this point, Richard crafts a conclusion, possibly influenced by romance, in which Hereward takes a Norman wife, is reconciled to the king and regains his family lands. Thomas believes that Richard's ending is an attempt to foster understanding between the English and the Normans in his own time.[70] There is no historical evidence for such reconciliation, however, and even Thomas admits that it may be a trope designed to end the story neatly. It is just as probable that this ending is another result of the hybrid nature of Richard's text. Using an ending typical of romance, a genre that made its way to England through French literature, again employs a form that both mimics and undermines the conquerors. Whatever the reason for this addition, by recording Hereward's greatest acts of resistance, Richard preserves Hereward's position as an English hero whose deeds are intimately bound to the terrain of England.

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[70] Thomas, "The *Gesta Herewardi*," 229.

Laȝamon's "Brut"

Towards the end of the Anglo-Norman period, a priest at Areley Kings in Worcestershire, known only as Laȝamon, "Lawman," produced the first post-Conquest history in English, the *Brut*. This work expands upon the concept of the landscape as a form of resistance to imperialism, as illustrated by the *Gesta Herewardi*, by creating a narrative in which the geographical entity of England—the land itself—becomes the hero of history while also crafting a mysterious, unconquerable landscape that stands outside the world of human civilization. These techniques together offer an image of England existing apart from the temporary state of Norman control.

The *Brut* was a translation of the French-language *Roman de Brut* of Wace (1155), which itself was a translation of the Latin *Historia Regum Britanniae* (1136) of the probably Welsh monk Geoffrey of Monmouth. Textual evidence indicates that Laȝamon's *Brut* was completed between 1185 and 1216 with Kenneth J. Tiller arguing for a midpoint of 1200.[71] All three works follow the same general outline, established by Geoffrey, which focuses on the native Celtic British inhabitants of the island and concludes with the completion of the Anglo-Saxon Invasion, examining an earlier time of imperialism in Britain. The most famous sections of the narrative focus on the legendary British kings Leir, Kinbelin and Arthur.[72] Geoffrey's purpose in writing his Latin history is somewhat unclear, but it may have grown from a desire to counter those Norman histories that represented the Norman Invasion as a providential occurrence, offering a past before Norman and Anglo-Saxon conflict and creating a model of political unity in

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[71] The use of the preterite *wæs* in relation to Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine is generally used to narrow the date of composition. Tiller, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 22-23.

[72] Leir's and Kinbelin's stories are later adapted by Shakespeare in *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, respectively. Shakespeare would have been familiar with their tales through Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

King Arthur.[73] Wace's French translation of Geoffrey, the *Roman de Brut* (1155), was intended for a courtly audience and, along with his *Roman de Rou* (1160), created a "master narrative of insular history—with English history elided between the two [British and Norman]"[74] for his Norman audience. Some of Laȝamon's specific choices as a writer resisting imperial control will be discussed below, but in general, he is an imaginative author who expands upon Wace's dramatic situations by adding dialogue, scenes, descriptions and sometimes lengthy digressions that serve to comment upon the action of the poem or upon the relationship between the text and his own time. The details that Laȝamon adds illustrate a stronger emotional engagement with the material and expand his text to roughly twice that of Wace.

Although he follows Geoffrey and Wace in subject matter, Laȝamon succeeds in creating a text that is original and unique and functions for its own purpose of challenging the power structures inherent in its literary ancestors by providing a history for the English in English rather than one for an elite class of rulers or the formally-educated, while also expanding attention to the Anglo-Saxons, thereby providing a more thorough history for his readers. As a conquered people, the English would have found themselves in the position of strangers in their own land, outsiders of the new political and cultural system. Laȝamon's text seeks both to reassert the English perspective and to challenge the terms of life in Anglo-Norman England.

While tensions between language, culture and audience intersect within this series of translations from Latin to French to English, this final move into the Middle English

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[73] Tiller, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 64-76. Tiller specifically identifies Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon as misappropriating Anglo-Saxon history and Bede's theme of divine providence to justify Norman rule, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 51.
[74] Tiller, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 76.

language signifies a desire to return control of the history of Britain to the vanquished. As already mentioned, translation always implies a hierarchy, and Laȝamon's preference for English is a form of resistance that both targets an English audience and challenges the Norman master narrative. Working without access to Geoffrey, Laȝamon first counters Wace's French text in his choice of language, not just English, but a conscious use of Old English and Norse forms, lending his history an air of authenticity in its connection to the past and rejecting the linguistic hybridity characteristic of later writers in English. Laȝamon's interest in language goes beyond his targeting of a particular audience. In passages original to him, language becomes an integral aspect of the action such as the meeting at Stonehenge between the British and the Saxons when Hengest orders his men to draw their knives in a language that the British cannot understand, resulting in a bloodbath (7678), or when the British Walwain slays the Roman Marcel, declaring "þus we eou scullen techen   ure Bruttisce speche!"[75] (13,248; In this manner, we shall teach you our British speech!). For Laȝamon, language is a battleground for cultural dominance and his choice of English champions his culture.[76] In addition, while his versification is inconsistent and somewhat difficult to identify with precision, it is clearly alliterative and based upon the half-line metrical unit, which ties the *Brut* to the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition, distancing it from both Wace's French language and his octosyllabic couplets.[77] Language and verse both set Laȝamon's work apart from his predecessors and help to provide the English, outsiders in their own land, with a source of historical pride.

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[75] All quotations from Laȝamon's *Brut* are from Barron and Weinberg.
[76] See Bailey, "Conquest by Word," for more on language in Laȝamon's *Brut*.
[77] Barron and Weinberg, Introduction to *Laȝamon's "Arthur,"* xxxvii-xliii, provide a nice overview of the influences on Laȝamon's versification.

Through these choices, Laȝamon locates his historical text outside the confines of both the Church and the court, providing it with a location beyond the elitist power structure.[78] In the third line of the poem, Laȝamon places himself and his endeavors at Areley Kings along the Severn. Such a rural location positions Laȝamon at the fringes of Norman control, a dangerous setting as demonstrated, literally, by Hereward, if more figuratively by Laȝamon. In addition, Laȝamon goes against literary tradition and does not name a patron for his work, instead giving himself agency and sole responsibility for the text: "Hit com him on mode   and on his mern þonke / þet he wolde of Engle   þa æðelæn tellen" (6-7; It came into his [Laȝamon's] mind, a glorious thought of his, that he would tell of the native land of the English).[79] Combined with his choices of language and versification as well as his own location, Laȝamon's agency demonstrates his intention to resist the Norman narrative of history.[80]

Laȝamon's *Brut* is a long text (16,095 lines), the study of which has been generally focused upon the Arthurian section.[81] The poem, however, deserves consideration as a complete text and as a history of the Britons, for it is, at heart, a history designed to connect with the contemporary audience through the past. As inherited from Geoffrey and Wace, Laȝamon's *Brut* is arranged as a chronicle, following events across a large period of time in chronological order. Unlike modern historians, most chroniclers felt free to include legendary material and to expand upon their sources freely, similar to the methods of historians like Richard of Ely, discussed above. These forms of history

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[78] Sheppard, "Love Rewritten," 107.

[79] Laȝamon contrasts the genesis of his narrative with Wace's presentation of his work to Queen Eleanor (22-23).

[80] In relation to this marriage of language and agenda, Bryan identifies the *Brut* as an important text in the rise of vernacular literature not just in England, but in Europe as a whole, "Laȝamon's *Brut*," 665.

[81] Laȝamon's additions to the Arthurian section increase its percentage of the text from roughly twenty in Geoffrey to fifty in Laȝamon, if the Uther section is included. In addition, its position in the second half of the text makes it the climax and high point of British history for Laȝamon.

ultimately led to the medieval romance. While a text of such length and breadth

necessarily contains aspects of other genres, which leads some critics to label the *Brut* as

an epic,[82] Laȝamon is direct in his opening proem regarding the nature of his work. He

names his sources as Bede, probably in the Old English translation, Wace and an

unknown book by St. Alban and St. Augustine,[83] expressing his desire to ". . . þa soþere

word   sette togadere, / and þa þre boc   þrumde to are" (27-28; join together the

truthful words and combine the three books into one)[84] in order to ". . . of Engle   þa

æþelæn tellen" (7; tell the noble origins of the English).[85] By including at least one great

historical work in his source material, Laȝamon both references an earlier historical

tradition in England and positions himself within that practice as a historian.[86] In

addition, Laȝamon's inclusion of specific and descriptive details throughout his work,

especially regarding the physical aspects of places such as towns, walls, rivers, lakes and

roads, allows his current audience to identify the past of his text in elements of their

contemporary world. This, in turn, provides a context for their own identity beyond that

of a conquered people in a conquered land, standing opposed to Wace's text, which

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[82] Barron and Weinberg, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* xx.

[83] This book has not been identified. Barron and Weinberg theorize that Laȝamon may be referring to a Latin text of Bede, mistaking the Albinus of Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, named in Bede's preface, for the author, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 840. Stanley, however, feels that Laȝamon may be referring to an unknown book containing material by both Augustine of Hippo and Alcuin, "Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentimets," 32. Galloway suggests that it may be an unknown text on St. Alban, "Laȝamon's Gift," 721.

[84] All quotations of Laȝamon's *Brut* are taken from Barron and Weinberg. Middle English definitions are from the Middle English Dictionary housed in the online Middle English Compendium. Due to the time of the *Brut*'s composition, and Laȝamon's intentional use of archaic language, the Old English dictionaries of Bosworth and Toller and the *Dictionary of Old English: A to G* have also been used in the study and translation of this text.

[85] Laȝamon asserts in his prologue that he "gon liðen   wide ȝond þas leode, / and biwon þa æðela boc" (14-15A; journeyed far and wide throughout this land and obtained these noble books), adding to his agency as author, historian and challenger of the power structure.

[86] Galloway sees the presentation of these sources as a complex negotiation between past and present, including the role of translation in the transmission of history, "Laȝamon's Gift," 719-22.

offered a context for the Norman conquerors within their new land.[87] Although only two

manuscripts survive of the *Brut*, compared to two hundred of Geoffrey and thirty of

Wace, James I. McNelis, III has traced its direct influence in several fourteenth-century

chronicles as well as the *Alliterative Morte Darthur* and *King Horn* and possibly even

Chaucer and the Gawain Poet, demonstrating that Laȝamon became an important

resource for chroniclers, specifically, and fourteenth-century vernacular texts in England

in general.[88]

    The appropriation of land is the most basic of colonial powers. Land means

power, security and control. The discussion of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* above

illustrates clearly the ecological imperialism imposed by the Normans on the

dispossessed English. While Wace produced a text that promoted a common past for the

land, one that Normans in England could accept as part of their collective history,

Laȝamon's text interprets that history within the context of a once-mighty people, now

overthrown, refugees in their own land. Like the *Gesta Herewardi*, the *Brut* subverts the

power of the ruling class, while asserting an English perspective through the landscape.

Laȝamon's text implies that "þis lond" (this land) is the one, true constant, or hero as

Rosamund Allen terms it,[89] of the past. While the action of Laȝamon's text suggests that

the wilderness exists primarily to be claimed by a series of conquerors, the land itself

actually becomes the one constant that outlives any empire. Despite the series of military

and social conquests that play the key role in transforming the natural world of the *Brut*, a

few, key episodes construct a British wilderness of mystery and awe beyond any human

understanding. While these sections contain elements of early romance, they also resist

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[87] See Allen, "Did Lawman Nod," for more on the appeal of Laȝamon's *Brut* for a contemporary audience.
[88] McNelis, "Laȝamon as Auctor," 352-69.
[89] Allen, "The Implied Audience," 126.

Norman rule by representing a natural world that stands eternally opposed to the Norman

agenda of conquest, constructing the island itself as the timeless hero in the history of

Britain.

Due to its language and material, it is widely believed that the text appealed to

English speakers who felt displaced by the new Norman overlords, but beyond that

general assertion, identifying a more specific audience becomes a complicated issue.

Allen points to the wide array of genres contained within the *Brut*: epic, romance,

hagiography, state correspondence, prophesy, sermon, prayer, lament, etc., illustrating the

"literary sophistication" needed to negotiate the complex scope of the text.[90] She also

acknowledges that Laȝamon's *Brut* could appeal to a "multiform potential readership,"

noting that the same genre shifts that require versatility, also supply the text with an

enticing appeal to a wide range of people, including clergy and commoners.[91] Allen also

points to domestic scenes, the importance of familial relations and the role of midlevel

merchants and estate managers in the *Brut*, as well as certain subtleties of the text that she

sees as representative of a public reading before a small group,[92] asserting that Laȝamon

wrote for an audience of mixed age, sex and social class such as might be found in the

manor house of a "prosperous but not courtly" family.[93] While Laȝamon may have

written with just such a specific patron in mind, all of the elements of the *Brut* that Allen

asserts would appeal to a small household could also appeal to a wider array of people

who were not included in the Norman power structure. McNelis's tracing of the *Brut*'s

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[90] Allen, "The Implied Audience," 128.
[91] Allen, "The Implied Audience," 129.
[92] Allen, "The Implied Audience," 133.
[93] Allen, "The Implied Audience," 135-6. Alternately, Bryan believes that Cotton Caligula A.ix, the preferred of the two manuscripts that contain Laȝamon's *Brut*, the other being Cotton Otho C.xiii, may have been produced for Richard Earl of Cornwall (1209-1272) or his son Edmund (1249-1300), two of the few nobles in England who could speak English at that time, *"Laȝamon's Brut,"* 677.

influences, as discussed above, demonstrates its wider appeal, which is also grounded in "þis lond," allowing those removed from the ruling class to identify with the geography of the narrative and to alternately place themselves within the larger context of history.[94]

In asserting the starring role of the land, Laȝamon's *Brut* adapts the familiar migration myth of the Anglo-Saxons, in which the movement of a chosen people to Britain is bound together with the conversion to Christianity, as examined earlier in the chapters on Anglo-Saxon hagiography and *Beowulf*. Because this myth of a chosen people occupying Britain had already been co-opted by the Normans in their histories, Laȝamon's re-appropriation of the myth in his text acts to reclaim the land and the myth from the Normans. While the Christianization of the British is an important event in the *Brut*, the myth is broadly reworked to make the British the chosen people and to relate their founding of Britain to a series of political moves rather than the Christian conversion.[95] Reminiscent of Bede's Geographical Introduction, Laȝamon creates an early description of Britain that is more idealistic than the one found in Wace. In a dream the goddess Diana speaks to Brutus and tells him:

Biȝende France, i þet west,   þu scalt finden a wunsum lond.

Þat lond is biurnan mid þære sæ;   þaron þu scalt wrþan sæl.

Þar is fuȝel, þar is fisc,   þer wuniað feire deor;

þar is wode, þar is water,   þar is wilderne muchel.

Þet lond is swiþe wunsum;   weallen þer beoð feire.

Wuniað in þon londe   eotantes swiðe stronge.

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[94] See also Allen, "The Implied Audience," 137.

[95] In this adaptation, Laȝamon may have been unknowingly influenced by Geoffrey through Wace. Ingledew points to Geoffrey's work as creating an alternative to the English providential interpretation of history by providing a more secular sense of continuity through genealogy. Ingledew, "The Book of Troy," 680.

Albion hatte þat lond,   ah leode ne beoð þar nane.

Þerto þu scalt teman   and ane neowe Troye þar makian.

Þer scal of þine cunne   kinebearn arisen,

and scal þin mære kun   wælden þas londes,

ȝeond þa weorld beon ihæȝed;   and þu beo hæl and isund. (618-28)

(Beyond France, in the west, you shall find a pleasing land. That land is bounded

by the sea; you shall be prosperous there. There are fowls, there are fish, there

dwell fine deer; there is woods, there is water, there is much wilderness. That land

is very pleasing; there are fine springs. In that land very strong giants live. That

land is called Albion, but no people live there. Thereto you shall go and make a

new Troy. There royal offspring of your race shall rise, and your illustrious

people shall rule that land, you will be honored throughout the world; and you

will be prosperous and sound.)

This description and injunction to Brutus not only describes Albion as a wondrous

Promised Land, but also as a wilderness ripe for the taking, but not a wilderness that

needs to be converted for a Christian purpose, though, as in the hagiographies, or one that

must be subdued for the protection of the community, as in *Beowulf*, but a wilderness

waiting to be claimed, constructed as a benefit, not a deterrent, to settlement. The giants

already occupying the land present a necessary challenge in achieving Britain, but their

defeat is not the main goal of this section of the narrative.[96] They are a non-human Other

who must be vanquished, and they are different enough that they do not count as the first

inhabitants of Britain. That honor goes to Brutus and his people who do not simply

occupy the land in a military sense, but civilize it through a series of political, social and

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[96] For more on Laȝamon's giants, see Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog."

cultural foundations, at times mimicking the Normans' own methods of imperialism. This initial description of Britain, the first of many foundational episodes, counters the Norman master narrative that places the Normans as the chosen rulers of Britain by establishing the native British as the original possessors of the land, the ones who took it from the giants and filled the vast wilderness with people, settlements and cities.

The arrangement of the material, although inherited from Wace, creates a series of foundational narratives where the British reclaim the land over and over through a variety of methods. Following Brutus's initial settlement, the text moves through time in a chronological fashion naming each successive ruler and giving details regarding their reign, sometimes a short line or two and sometimes, as with Leir and Arthur, devoting large sections to their lives and accomplishments. Major foundational episodes belong to Brutus, Ebrauc, Ruhhudibras, Belin, Ambrosius, Uther and Arthur. There is even an un-foundational narrative in which Cadwalader fails as the last British king and retreats, first to Brittany and later to Rome, where he dies. This final episode is paralleled by the ascendancy of the Anglo-Saxons in the person of Æthelstan,[97] who conquers and rules over the area that came to be known as England. The text does not close dismally for the British, however, as they are afforded a final foundational scene in which Yuni and Ivor, relatives of Cadwalader, settle in Wales, preserving that land and all the British who flock to them, creating another area of resistance along the fringe of the empire, though not specifically addressed as such in the text. A promised future foundation is even predicted

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[97] This is the same Æthelstan of the *Battle of Brunanburh* above.

in the closing of Laȝamon's text in a reference to Merlin's prophecy of Arthur's eventual return to save Britain.[98]

This series of foundational narratives, which are comprised of more sophisticated acts than just military conquest, reinforce British claims upon the land, thereby undermining Norman control. Brutus's initial naming of the island after himself is the ultimate act of foundation, which echoes throughout the narrative, providing an identity for the land much older than the Norman overlords. Cultivation, the establishment of law codes, the building of monuments and places of worship and the eventual Christianization of the British all alter the land or the way the people relate to the land as part of the British community.

One of the most pervasive acts of foundation and claiming is the naming of sites such as rivers and cities.[99] In the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey provides detailed, etymological information regarding place names, which generally survives through Wace and into Laȝamon intact. What Laȝamon adds is a tone of regret and at times anger at the changing of these names by subsequent occupiers of the land. After telling how Brutus founded the city of New Troy in honor of his Trojan heritage, Laȝamon's digression in the narrative explains that this city later came to be known as Trinovant, and still later Kaer Lud, after another great king of the British, Lud, a descendant of Brutus. Finally, the Romans called the city Lundin. These name changes all appear acceptable to Laȝamon, presumably because they were made either by the British themselves or during a time

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[98] For more on Laȝamon's transformation of Wace's vague statement into a strong prediction for the future of the British see Stanley, "The Date of Laȝamon's *Brut*," 87.
[99] For specifics on place names in Laȝamon see Blenner-Hassett, *A Study of the Place-Names*.

when the British were generally autonomous or at least presented as such.[100] Later name

changes are not viewed so favorably by Laȝamon:

> Seoððen comen Englisce men and cleopeden heo Lundene.
>
> Seððen comen þa Frensca þa mid fehte heo biwonnen,
>
> mid heora leod-ðeawe and Lundres heo hehten.
>
> Þus is þas burh iuaren seððen heo ærest wes areræd;
>
> þus is þis eitlond igon from honde to hond
>
> þet alle þa burhȝes þe Brutus iwrohte
>
> and heora noma gode þa on Brutus dæi stode
>
> beoð swiðe afelled þurh warf of þon folke.
>
> (1029-36; Afterward came Englishmen and they called it Lundene. Then came the
>
> French who acquired it through war and after their custom, they called it Lundres.
>
> Thus this city has fared since it was first established; thus is this island gone from
>
> hand to hand so that all the cities which Brutus built and their good names which
>
> in Brutus's day stood are exceedingly overthrown through changes of the people.)

Laȝamon repeats this complaint in similar language later in the text when he discusses

King Lud's contributions to Britain. This time, however, he heightens the emotion by

stating of the current possessors of the city: "Seoððen comen Normans mid heore nið-

craften / and nemneden heo Lundres — þeos leodes heo amærden!" (3547-48;

Afterwards the Normans came with their evil cunning / and named it Lundres— they

destroyed this nation!). Twice within this second passage, Laȝamon calls the Normans

"vncuð folc" (3543) and "uncuðe leoden" (3549), which are both translated as "unknown

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[100] The text presents the Roman presence in Britain as a series of disputes and owed tributes rather than a wholesale occupation.

people" or more simply "foreigners." These passages, focused on the central city of England, illustrate the complaint of the oppressed under the Normans as well as reassert the British claim to the land. Whereas Geoffrey and Wace view these name changes as part of the progress of time,[101] Laȝamon views these changes as creating a rupture between the present and the past imposed upon the people by the Normans and a destruction of the history that was imbedded within the land,[102] a history that Laȝamon seeks to recover. As a chronicle, the *Brut*'s march of successive rulers binds the people to the land through genealogy, rather than salvation as in the Anglo-Saxon migration myth.[103] While the Normans are absent from Laȝamon's narrative, their appearance in such authorial outbursts as this one, emphasizes the disruption wrought upon Laȝamon and his audience by the Norman Invasion.[104] The sympathies of Laȝamon's text lie with the British, but by saving most of his venom for the conquering Normans, he allows the displaced English to identify with the British against the latest occupiers of England.

While Laȝamon crafts his narrative so that it asserts an earlier, British claim upon the land, based in military and political foundation rather than the often religious claim of the Anglo-Saxons, there are a few short episodes that expand upon his resistance to Norman control by constructing a wilderness that is beyond all human control. This study has already discussed the Christianization of the landscape by Anglo-Saxon saints through their battles with demons and their occupation of wild spaces, such as Guthlac's

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[101] Compare Wace's discussion of the name changes of London, which presents a more neutral version of events: "Next the Normans and the French came, who did not know how to speak English nor how to say 'Londene,' but spoke it as best they could. They called 'Londene' 'Londres', thus keeping it in their language. Through alterations and changes by the languages of foreigners, who have often conquered, lost and seized the land, the names of towns have changed, or become longer or shorter. Very few can be found, as I hear and understand, which have completely kept the name they first had," *Wace's "Roman de Brut": A History of the British*, trans. by Weiss, 97.

[102] Bellis, "Mapping the National Narrative," 333-36.

[103] Stein, "Making History English," 106-107.

[104] Stein, "Making History English," 109.

Fenland hermitage, which transformed a dismal swamp into a place where the saint communes with nature and dispenses advice and wisdom. Likewise, this study has examined how Beowulf fought against the threatening aspects of the natural world in order to protect the community and the ways in which the conclusion of *Beowulf* creates a permanent alteration of the landscape in the construction of Beowulf's Barrow, looking to the future Christianization to settle humanity's antagonistic relationship with the natural world. The *Gesta Herewardi* presented a landscape that resisted conquest due to the insurgents' abilities to utilize the land against an enemy unfamiliar with the terrain. Laȝamon's *Brut*, in which nature generally takes a passive role by being possessed through specific activities of foundation, however, resists Norman control not only by asserting a previous claim upon the land, but also by constructing a wilderness that, unlike in the previous texts discussed, cannot be claimed, converted, exploited or controlled. It is an attitude of mystery and reverence that looks towards the coming ascendancy of the romance in which the wilderness serves as a mysterious location of trials for the knight. While rejecting linguistic hybridity, Laȝamon embraces a generic hybridity that allows him to employ a romance landscape that serves to undermine the Norman power structure, much like Richard's neat ending to the *Gesta Herewardi*.

The tale of Morpidus, which occurs relatively early in the text and has received almost no attention, lays the groundwork for later comments upon the wilderness in Laȝamon's *Brut*. This episode bears striking similarities with *Beowulf,* if only through heroic tropes, and illustrates this changing attitude towards the wilderness. Morpidus, a bastard of King Damus, becomes king due to his courage and skill in battle. Laȝamon portrays him as a good ruler, but with one major flaw: a bad temper that sometimes

causes him to lose his self-control. During his reign, a sea monster from Ireland, itself representative of the dangerous fringe beyond the borderlands, attacks the coast of England. A product of a mysterious and ever-changing watery environment, this monster comes onto the land and kills large numbers of people, one hundred in each attack, over and over again, similar to Grendel. Morpidus rashly insists upon taking on the monster alone and in the fight the monster mortally wounds Morpidus, but not before he strikes a fatal blow, even though his sword breaks in the process, much like Beowulf's battle with the dragon. Geoffrey's version of Morpidus's fight with the monster is two sentences. Wace expands upon Geoffrey to heighten the ferocity of the beast and to offer a brief comment on Morpidus's folly in fighting the creature alone. Laȝamon further expands upon his source material by adding details that heighten the ferocity of the monster, arm the hero and provide a blow-by-blow account of the battle. Laȝamon also comments more extensively upon the king's foolhardy, one-man attack:

> Þus ferde þe king   for he wes to kene;
>
> for þe mon is muchel sot   þe nimeð to himseoluen
>
> mare þonne he maȝen walden   —he sæl halden þe raðer.
>
> For vnræd is swiðe ræh;   his laured he let reosen,
>
> and auer vnbe stunde   felleð hine to þe grunde. (3246-50)
>
> (Thus fared the king for he was too fearless; for the man who takes upon himself more than he might manage is very foolish—he shall fall more quickly. For folly is exceedingly rash, he sends his owner to ruin and drops him to the ground again and again.)

The episode and commentary are clearly designed as a reflection of Morpidus's rashness and are, perhaps, meant as a lesson to rulers to remain level-headed. Although Morpidus dies, his final act is to save his people from the terrifying beast and stability in the kingdom continues without interruption with his sons, in general, ruling wisely after him; yet he is memorialized in the text as hot-headed and foolish. While Beowulf also saves his people from a monster, his death is destined to bring ruin upon the Geats, but he is remembered as a great hero and king and his barrow places him as a symbol for the future. While this difference may represent a changing attitude towards the role of the hero from the epic warrior, who exists in relation to the community, to the romance knight, who grows as an individual throughout his journey, it also displays a changing attitude towards the natural world. As already discussed, earlier texts show the wilderness as a place that can be transformed and used by humans, but here, Morpidus is chastised for even believing that he has the ability to grapple with or change an element of the natural world, even though he is successful. The cost is deemed too great, not to the community, which does not face destruction like the Geats, but to the individual.

La3amon develops this attitude towards the wilderness further in the Arthurian section of the *Brut* when Arthur describes the wonders of several mysterious lakes to his kinsman, Howel, an episode which has only been discussed in detail previously by E. G. Stanley. Although these lakes are also described by Geoffrey and Wace, as usual, La3amon adds details to increase the interest and the mystery of the descriptions, which provides these lakes with the ability to emphasize La3amon's resistance to Norman domination. La3amon also delivers almost all of the information regarding the lakes through direct speech, creating an air of authenticity in both depiction and in local belief

in the folk-tale-like aspects of the lakes. While this episode is fashioned after the marvels of Britain trope from Nennius, Laȝamon's treatment of these wonders not only connects it to the previous passage regarding Morpidus, but also exhibits an attitude towards the natural world that resists the Norman agenda of subjugation.

In using water landscapes for his image of an unconquerable wilderness, Laȝamon evokes the sense of such locations as liminal spaces between the physical and spiritual worlds, lying beyond the reach of civilization. After his battle in Moray, Arthur describes these three mysterious bodies of water: Loch Lomond, the mythical Fount of Gorheli and the Severn basin.[105] None of these lakes are named in the *Brut*, but they have been identified by J. S. P. Tatlock[106] and, for the sake of clarity, Tatlock's identifications are used here. Again, a watery environment highlights a wilderness location. The ever-changing boundary between water and land as well as the unpredictable and destructive capabilities of water create a sense of uncertainty and danger. In addition, Laȝamon relocates these three bodies to Moray from their physical locations in west central Scotland, Wales and the Severn estuary, respectively. Barron and Weinberg express surprise at Laȝamon's missed opportunity to include what would be a local feature for him, the Severn basin, when Geoffrey and Wace have already placed it in the proper location,[107] but by moving these marvels to the fringes of Britain, Laȝamon places them at the edge of civilization, where threats are most dangerous and where the wilderness lies. This location in combination with his refusal to name the sites increases their mystery.

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[105] These lakes all derive from Nennius's "Wonders of Britain" in the *Historia Brittonum* (67-74).
[106] Tatlock, *Legendary History of Britain*, 45.
[107] Barron and Weinberg, *Laȝamon's "Brut,"* 877-8.

All three lakes are marvelous and strange. The Font of Gorheli is not named in
Geoffrey, Wace or Laȝamon, but appears to come from Geoffrey's source, Nennius. It is
a square lake that holds four types of fish who all stay in their appointed corners (10,970-
10,984). While in Wace, Arthur states that he does not know whether this lake was
created by God or man, Laȝamon has Arthur explain that "alfene hine dulfen!" (10,977;
elves dug it!), adding not just mystery, but also a sense of the unnatural Other in its
creation. Arthur next describes the Severn basin in Wales and the awe-inspiring Severn
bore (10,985-11,002). A bore is a natural phenomenon in which the edge of the incoming
tide forms a wave as it travels into a bay or tidal river, followed by a rise in water level.
The Severn estuary possesses one of the largest tidal ranges in the world, and therefore,
produces a bore large enough for modern thrill seeker to surf upon. This real
phenomenon is properly located by Geoffrey and Wace, but is neither named nor
properly located in Wales by Laȝamon. While all three authors describe the Severn bore
as a marvel, only Laȝamon terms it *unfæle*, "evil" (10,987), again connecting the place
with something non-human, providing a realistic natural feature with an otherworldly
disposition.

By far, the most extensive landscape description in the *Brut* is the final lake
described in this section, Loch Lomond along the Highland Boundary Fault (10,842-
10,870; 10,957-10,968). Created by glacial moraine, debris dumped by melting glaciers,
from the Loch Lomond Re-advance glaciation about 10,800 years ago,[108] Loch Lomond
is the largest freshwater lake in Britain by surface area.[109] It is dotted with thirty-some
islands, with some appearing to be man-made crannogs from prehistoric times, while

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[108] Reed, *Landscape*, 18-23.
[109] Loch Ness is larger by volume.

others display the characteristics of the glaciation in their rough peaks. It is an impressive

natural site and has unsurprisingly given rise to many local legends such as the horse-like

Kelpie that lures children to their deaths and the creation of Pulpit Rock through the clash

of two mythic bulls. Like so many other landscapes discussed in this study, the lake

described is an amalgamation of the realistic and the fantastical. The Loch Lomond of the

Brut has, as the real Loch Lomond does, marshy sections, reeds, fish and waterfowl and

many islands, although the sixty attributed to it are an exaggeration for effect. Despite its

many tributaries, there is only one outflow, the River Leven, a fact that Laʒamon

provides as further proof of the lake's marvelous nature. When the lake first enters the

narrative as the refuge of the Scottish fleeing from Arthur, the realistic elements of the

lake are supplemented with fantastical details. The narrator calls it "þan watere   þer

wunderes beoð inoʒe" (10,847; those waters where wonders abound) and is amazed that

such a place is even "iset a middel-ærde" (10,848; set into middle-earth). I have

translated *middel-ærde* as "middle-earth," meaning the human world, but this term carries

with it the sense of a world located between heaven and hell, in the middle, enhancing the

narrator's feeling that the loch is an eerie intermediary between the human world and the

supernatural, made more clear in the realistic descriptors previously discussed being

modified by the assertion that "nikeres þer badieð inne; / þer is æluene ploʒe   in

atteliche pole" (10,851-2; water monsters abide there; there is elvin sport in that hideous

pool). This detail is an original addition of Laʒamon's and several scholars have already

noted that it is reminiscent of Grendel's mere in *Beowulf*, enhanced by the same term,

nicor, being used in both texts to identify the water monsters.[110] Whether or not there is

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[110] Barron and Weinberg, *Laʒamon's "Brut*,*"* 877, attribute the similarities to the *Apocalypse of Paul* as a
possible influence upon both works. Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature*, 23-24 and 36, and

any direct connection to *Beowulf*, this inclusion also reminds the reader of Morpidus's fatal encounter with the Irish sea monster earlier in the text. Laȝamon certainly creates a parallel between Morpidus, who was foolish in his attack of the creature, to Arthur's development as a young king who becomes a wiser, more level-headed ruler than his predecessor.[111]

Unlike Morpidus, or even Beowulf, Arthur has no cause to fight the sea monsters. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon saints, he also has no desire to alter or transform these marvelous wilderness locations. Also, unlike the other rulers of the *Brut*, he has no desire to claim these sites; in Laȝamon, all are left nameless and untouched. Instead, a sense of the natural wonders that lie beyond the civilized world is conveyed. These places are to be appreciated as a representation of a mysterious something that exists beyond the domain of mankind. Howel hears the descriptions of these places and states:

Seoððen ich wes mon iboren   of mire moder bosme

no isah ich a none londe   þus seolcuðe þinges

swa ich here biuoren me   mid æȝenen bihælde. (10,965-67)

(Since I was born a man from my mother's womb, I have never seen in any land

such manner of miraculous things as I behold here before me with my eyes.)

And later he adds: "Nu ic ihere tellen   seolcuðe spellen, / and seollic is þe lauerd   þat al hit isette!" (1104-1105; I now hear tell marvelous tales, and marvelous is the Lord who arranged all of it). As a native of Brittany, Howel occupies a privileged position in his kinship with Arthur that also places him as an outsider in Britain and therefore able to

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Loomis, "Laȝamon's *Brut*," 110, see the similarities with Grendel's mere as evidence of continuity between Old English and early Middle English literature.

[111] Correspondingly, Veldhoen, "Towards National Identity," 23, sees the lakes as a political allegory of Britain.

express not just awe at these marvels, but also contextualize them as sites located in the physical world, but representative of a mystical force.

While these marvels serve a variety of purposes, in a text that is consciously dedicated to resisting the Norman representation of history in England, they also serve a role subversive to the Norman master narrative. The *Peterborough Chronicle* entry for 1086 (1087), already discussed, eulogizes William the Conqueror by listing the good and the bad of the Norman king. In addition to recording and lamenting many of the changes to the countryside instituted by Norman ecological imperialism, among William's accomplishments the annalist includes his subjugation of England, Wales, Scotland and Maine as well as his possession of Normandy and asserts that if William had lived two more years, he would have gained Ireland. Clearly, conquest for the Normans included possession and control of the physical terrain, not just the political apparatus of government. Land, after all, represents power for an empire. Laȝamon's *Brut*, therefore, while generally depicting land as a site of civilization in its foundational narratives, also reserves a spot along the fringes of that civilization for a mysterious wilderness that cannot, and should not, be conquered by any human, a concept that the exemplary Arthur understands. Laȝamon's mysterious lakes, unnamed and unexplainable, assert that there are places along the fringe that can never be ruled by the Normans.

Other sites in the *Brut* continue the association between uncontrolled supernatural mystery and wild, marginal places. After all, the mysterious, half-incubus Merlin is found either in the *wilderne* (9379), "wilderness," "desert," or "uninhabited land" or in the *wælden* (8480), a word that has many meanings from "wooded region" to "open country" to "waste place" and "desert"; in essence, any wilderness location outside human

civilization. He spends time at the well of St. Alban—wells were first associated with pagan gods and later with Christian saints—another permeable water location. In addition, Merlin's presence in the text is intermittent: he appears and disappears and is found only when he wants to be. Like the lakes, he cannot be controlled. His location within the wilderness parallels the mysterious lakes, giving him a sense of independence that can be neither harnessed nor fully understood.[112]

While there is no description of Avalon in Laȝamon's *Brut*, as Arthur dies, the barge that will ferry him to the island appears from the open water, recalling the mysterious lakes and their wondrous position in Middle-Earth, yet set between two supernatural realms, heaven and hell, while also predicting a more just future for the defeated people of England. Arthur's final journey takes him through the permeable boundary between land and water, life and afterlife. For Arthur and, by extension, the British, this fluid boundary represents their defeat as a temporary state, since Arthur tells the other two survivors of his battle against Modred, one of whom is Constantin who will rule after him, that he will one day return from Avalon. Arthur sails away, crossing the boundary between worlds. This moment returns at the close of the *Brut*, when Cadwalader, the last of the British kings dies in Rome and the narrator states:

> His ban beoð iloken faste   i guldene cheste,
>
> and þer heo scullen wunie   þat þa daȝes beon icumene
>
> þa Merlin ine iuuren-daȝen   vastnede mid worden. (16,066-68)

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[112] Joseph Parry asserts that, as a historian, Laȝamon identifies with the messengers in his text, most notably Merlin, who is the beneficiary of many of Laȝamon's additions. Merlin's authority as a seer, whose knowledge extends beyond that of others, is a reflection of Laȝamon's own authority as a translator of history, especially one who uses a wider array of materials and traditions than his sources. As a seer, Laȝamon's vision extends beyond the narrative within the book to include the larger context of British history, including the Norman Invasion and the events of his own time, just as Merlin's predictions extend beyond Uther's and Arthur's reigns, "Narrators," 47-59.

(His [Cadwalader's] bones are securely locked in a golden chest, and there he

shall dwell in this world until that day is come which Merlin in days of yore

promised with his words.)

By adding one final reference to Merlin's prophecy that Arthur will one day return from

the mysterious world beyond the waters, Laȝamon creates a final statement of hope for an

end to Norman control.

Following the Norman Conquest, the ideological battle for England continued in

its histories. Histories written by and for Normans sought to justify and legitimatize

Norman rule in England, while the English found their past erased or elided over. The

texts discussed here all in some way seek to subvert the Norman master narrative by

either giving voice to the English complaints regarding the ecological imperialism of the

conquerors, constructing a wilderness resistance against William or asserting the inherent

mystery and beauty of a land that cannot be controlled by humans, resisting Norman

possession of England and elevating the land of England itself to the position of hero in

the resistance to Norman imperialism.

Chapter 4: Class Subversion in the Forest of the

Middle English Rhymes of Robin Hood

The social and cultural rupture created by the Norman Conquest that found

expression in the histories written for an English audience shortly after the invasion

eventually healed as Normans were assimilated into the English through a variety of

common interactions including intermarriage, religion, trade, labor relations and politics.

This process was accelerated by the loss of Normandy in 1204, and, according to Hugh

Thomas, at the time of the conclusion of the First Barons' War in 1217, members of the

elite classes in England identified, as a whole, as English,[1] but culture in England was

forever changed due to the influences from French language and literature as well as

continental social practices. The ruling class in England continued to employ methods of

economic imperialism that exploited the land while retaining its use for the elite. The

importation of continental literature and its patronage at high levels, notably by Eleanor

of Aquitaine, fostered a chivalric ideal in the courts of medieval England that found

expression in the romances of the High Middle Ages first in Latin and French and later in

Middle English. In the presentation of the wilderness, now increasingly associated with

the forest, these works sought to uphold the feudal structure and to affirm the superiority

of the now-assimilated ruling elite in England. The peasant and "middling" classes,

however, had not been subjected to the same post-Conquest program as the nobility and,

therefore, had suffered only a "limited impact on culture and identity."[2] Consequently,

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[1]Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 79-80.
[2] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 164-65. Thomas estimates that at most six percent of the lower classes of England were of Norman descent and were easily absorbed into the English race.

popular literature from the later Middle Ages, most notably the Rhymes of Robin Hood,[3] constructs unknown, wild, outside spaces as a haven for the commoner, shifting the long-established image of the wilderness as a dangerous place outside the civilized human world into a safe home for the oppressed peasant class of the fifteenth century and a location of social commentary.

As a gentleman bandit from the lower classes in medieval England, Robin Hood gives voice to the complaints of the commoner. In general, the current debate regarding the role of the bandit figure in society and culture began with Eric Hobsbawm's *Bandits* in 1969. His articulation of social banditry as a form of political resistance intimately tied to peasant societies and political oppression was soon met with opposition from historians who asserted that many such figures actually supported the existing power structures of their time. In his 2000 revision of *Bandits*, Hobsbawm included a postscript, addressing such arguments as reductivist. More recently, folklorist Graham Seal, in his study of one hundred international figures of banditry, real and mythic, has not only articulated a common model for these figures, which he terms "The Robin Hood Principle," but also expanded Hobsbawm's thesis by asserting a sort of social predestination involved in the celebration of such figures: "Wherever and whenever significant numbers of people believe that they are the victims of inequality, injustice, and oppression, historical and/or fictional outlaw heroes will appear and continue to be celebrated after their deaths."[4] He further asserts that these tales serve a performative function, modeling the proper method for "resisting, sympathizing, supporting, living,

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[3] The four earliest poems on Robin Hood, to be discussed in detail below, are known collectively as the Rhymes of Robin Hood.
[4] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 83.

and dying in circumstances deemed oppressive and unjust."[5] This implies that the figure of Robin Hood must have served a cultural function for the people of medieval England. While scholars such as Maurice Keen and J. C. Holt have focused on the Robin Hood legend, attempting to define the nature of the most famous English outlaw, none have resorted to more than a mere surface examination of Robin Hood's wilderness location in explicating his role in medieval culture and in the resistance to an oppressive government as discussed by Hobsbawm and Seal. I believe, however that the earliest surviving Robin Hood poems express a desire to subvert the ruling class of medieval England by reclaiming a natural world that had continued to be controlled by the ruling classes through the elements of Norman ecological imperialism discussed in the previous chapter.

The Changing English Wilderness

As England progressed into the High Middle Ages, the relationship between the people and the land changed and evolved, creating new relationships with the wilderness. In the centuries between the Norman Conquest and the Black Death in 1348, England experienced a population boom that outgrew the available farmland, making previously underdeveloped areas important resources.[6] All serviceable land not designated as royal Forest was put to use either as farmland, meadow or pasture.[7] While wetlands had been profitable due to their natural resources of peat, waterfowl, fish, salt and reeds, they were now needed for food production and, therefore, drained to produce pasture and arable

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[5] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 83.
[6] Dyer, "Documentary Evidence," 23.
[7] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 126.

land.[8] From the mid-twelfth to the mid-fourteenth centuries, a series of massive efforts

conducted by the dwellers of the English wetlands, including many monastic

communities, reclaimed land for agricultural use.[9] In the Fenland, banks, sluices and a

new seawall, all overseen by official Dyke Reeves, added sixteen square miles of land in

the saltmarshes and ninety square miles in the backfens.[10] New communities sprang up in

the area, including Cowbit, Molton Chapel, Whaplode Drove, Holbeach Drove, Gedney

Hill and Sutton St. Edmund. This systematic reclamation of land for agricultural use was

carried out throughout wetland areas of England, not just in the Fenland. Massive earth

banks protected land north of Spalding and in the Somerset levels, the River Bruce was

relocated to its present situation through a series of diversions and new channels at the

direction of Glastonbury Abbey.[11] Canterbury Cathedral, Battle Abbey and Meaux Abbey

were all involved in large reclamation projects.[12] The marine surge that had occurred

concurrently with Roman withdrawal does not seem to have lessened, but rather, these

efforts were accomplished and maintained through difficult, back-breaking work. The

communities must have believed that the additional farmland was worth the trouble.[13]

While such efforts slowed after the outbreak of the Black Death, the program of the

previous centuries had been so successful that, according to Christopher Dyer, "'Waste,'

in the modern sense of wild land, seems to have ceased to exist by the thirteenth

century"[14] in England, linking these efforts in the wetlands to the final loss of any

unmodified English terrain.

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[8] Dyer, "Documentary Evidence," 23.
[9] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 119-20.
[10] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 119.
[11] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 120.
[12] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 120.
[13] Rippon, *Transformation*, 259.
[14] Dyer, "Documentary Evidence," 24.

Wild wetland areas that had captivated the imaginations of authors in England from the beginning of Anglo-Saxon literacy were transformed, widely settled and incorporated into the agricultural system.[15] As a result, the English literary imagination redirected its efforts in constructing a wilderness from the wetlands so prominent in the previous chapters of this study to an area becoming increasingly foreign and strange for medieval authors, the English forest. As previously discussed, at the time of Roman withdrawal in England, very little woodland remained, especially in the south of Britain.[16] Although what remained was valuable and very carefully managed, the growing population placed immense pressure on this natural resource and the clearing of woodland for cultivation and the loss of wood pasture to over-grazing continued. Methods of measuring woodlands in the Middle Ages can be difficult to translate into modern equivalents,[17] but, according to Oliver Rackham, in the seventh century, England was approximately twenty to twenty-five percent woodland.[18] Estimates based upon the Domesday Book of 1086 have eleventh-century England at fifteen percent.[19] By 1350, at the time of the plague, English woodland had dropped to about seven percent.[20] Some thick areas of woodland may have remained, but they were not extensive, nor were they "untamed wilderness."[21] In England of the High Middle Ages, the remaining forest was extremely valuable and became more extensively controlled and managed in order to

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[15] Water environments, of course, did not disappear from the literature, but were modified, losing the realism of Guthlac's Crowland or the various elements of Grendel's mere, even if combined in an intimidating manner. The water settings that appear in the romances of the later Middle Ages become more fanciful and mystical, more along the lines of the mysterious lakes in Laȝamon's *Brut*.

[16] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 122.

[17] One popular medieval measurement is the number of swine an area of woodland can support.

[18] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 64-5.

[19] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 114.

[20] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 65. As a point of comparison, the Department of Agriculture estimates the US in 1997 as about thirty-three percent woodland and the Forestry Commission places England at about ten percent with Britain as a whole at thirteen percent in 2011.

[21] Reed, *Landscape of Britain*, 122.

supply wood to support industries, such as iron working and salt-making and for most housing.[22] Timber, though, was in short supply and eventually had to be imported.[23] Despite their dwindling size, or possibly because of the scarcity of ancient forest, woodlands caught the imagination of English writers who constructed them as a deep, dark wilderness within which their heroes faced trials and tribulations. While the reclamation of the wetlands associated with figures such as Guthlac and Beowulf may have necessitated a change of location for writers who insisted upon portraying a wilderness landscape consistent with the English countryside, other factors contributed to the prominence of the forest as the location of the Other, and therefore, as a site for confronting social anxieties and injustices, even though very little woodland actually survived to this time period.

On a social level, the previously discussed Forest Laws enacted by the Normans alienated people from the forests, making these areas a source of tension between the common people and the nobility. While the Charter of the Forest (1217), issued in conjunction with the Magna Carta, seems to ameliorate some of the abuses of the Forest system in medieval England, according to Daniel Barstow Magraw, Andrea Martinez and Roy E. Brownell II, over a century passed before the crown came to accept it as a binding document.[24] During this time, the Statute of Merton (1236) gave express control of "lands, wastes, woods and pastures" not deemed necessary for the needs of the tenant to

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[22] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 117.

[23] Rackham, *Woodlands*, 66. Timber occurs when a tree is allowed to grow with a single trunk to a large size. Wood is smaller in diameter and can be a natural feature of a species or the result of coppicing and pollarding. Each has its own uses.

[24] Barstow, Martinez and Brownell, *Magna Carta*, 312. Despite being eclipsed by its companion piece, the Magna Carta, the Charter of the Forest is an important document in environmental history. It is one of the earliest surviving forms of environmental legislation and continued to regulate English policy regarding these spaces until its repeal in 1971, by which time its various provisions had become deeply ingrained in English law through other separate acts. Its legacy, however, continues to impact not just the English countryside, but also much of the rest of the Earth.

the control of the lord, leading to a wave of private imparkation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[25] Despite the attempted reforms of the Charter of the Forest, the damage was done and Forests and parks, therefore, became symbols of privilege, power and aristocratic oppression, much like the castle.[26] The injustices continued and the control of these places created resentment so powerful that Knighton records the abolition of the Forest Laws as one of the demands of the peasants in the Revolt of 1381.[27] Because of the separation created by these programs, Forests became more foreign, and therefore, an important aspect of the imagination, bolstered by the fact that increasingly after the twelfth century, with the expansion of cultivation and the growth of towns, woodland became more and more alien to people and was perceived as intimidating, dangerous and even "monstrous."[28] Forests represented the unknown and, according to Corinne Saunders, "A densely wooded landscape must have possessed a quality of menace and encroachment, standing in firm opposition to the values of the city or castle."[29] Through the consolidation of people in centers of cultivation and commerce, the town and court became the symbol of the familiar and ordered society and the forest became the wilderness that lay beyond the reaches of civilization.

The Romance Forest

The outlaw tales of Robin Hood that represent the discontent of the lower classes create a wilderness location that stands in direct opposition to both the reality of the English countryside and the wilderness depicted in the romances of the aristocracy.

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[25] Dyer, "Documentary Evidence," 24.
[26] Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear*, 36.
[27] Knighton, *Chronicon*, Vol. II, 137.
[28] Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear*, 127.
[29] Saunders, *Forests of Medieval Romance*, 3.

Before discussing the Rhymes of Robin Hood, it is necessary to briefly illustrate the ruling-class ideology depicted in the forest settings of chivalric romance. The literary form of the romance thrived during this time and, along with its construction of the wilderness, it served the cultural function of justifying the position of the aristocratic ruling class in medieval England. Romance is a broad term that, in general, indicates a particular mode, rather than a specific genre, in the depiction of the human experience that emphasizes the cycles of life and death and that transports the hero through a state of integration, disintegration and reintegration. While it can be difficult to define, its motifs are so universal that they are easily recognized: exile and return, quest and adventure, family, name, identity, and love to state a few.[30] The romance came to England through the French, especially that famous patroness of the arts, Henry II's wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine. Unlike the epic that expresses heroic virtue as a representation of the values held by the group/tribe/nation, the romance belongs to the era of chivalry and courtly love, focusing upon the hero's own inner journey rather than the community.[31] The romances that were originally read in the court of the king and the halls of the nobles were written in French, a Romance language and thus the term, and drew upon continental traditions, including the reign of Charlemagne. With English being excluded from courtly circles until the fourteenth century, these texts display a cultivation of an aristocratic audience. Wace's *Roman de Brut*, itself dedicated to Eleanor, was one such text. Designed for the aristocracy, the knight and the lady form the basis of these narratives of feudal exceptionalism. English romances begin to appear in the early

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[30] Saunders, Introduction to *A Companion to Romance*, 2.
[31] Murfin and Ray, "Romance," 414.

thirteenth century—Barron distinguishes Laȝamon's *Brut* as the earliest[32]—with the early-to-mid-fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript possibly displaying a widening audience for these narratives in the English-speaking upper middle classes. The appearance of romances in English does not diminish the association of the genre with upper-class privilege, however. While one might term the contents of the Auchinleck Manuscript "popular," they still imply the education necessary to read and the finances to purchase and the values expressed are still those of the courtly world. After all, the newly-moneyed middle class aspired to the tastes and culture of the court[33] and the court itself was increasingly composed of English speakers; soon English would become the *de facto* language of the aristocracy.

The natural world created in these texts functions to support the ideology of the ruling class of feudalism. The depiction of these places, most specifically the forests of England, ultimately served to uphold the dominance of feudalism that began with the Norman Invasion, and is integral to understanding the subversive nature of the outlaw tales and common ballads of Robin Hood. The romance focus upon the journey of the individual impacts the depiction of the landscape and the construction of the wilderness as an Other world. As already seen, a literary natural world tied to religious anxieties and conversion had begun to fade after the Norman Conquest and politics and dominion took up the leading role in humankind's relationship with the wilderness in the literature of Anglo-Norman England. As English literature moved from the epic mode, in which the supernatural is a characteristic of the divine, to the romance, the depiction of supernatural

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[32] Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, 238.
[33] Barron, *English Medieval Romance*, 54.

events, such as magic and enchantments, became linked to the physical world.[34] In

Barron's placement of Laȝamon's *Brut* at the cusp of English romance, the episodes of

Morpidus and Arthur's mysterious lakes taken together represent a hybrid of epic

heroism modified with realistic practicality and supernatural mystery. Although Howel

declares the lakes a divine wonder, Arthur attributes them to supernatural forces, such as

elves. In addition, the *Brut*'s depiction of the lakes as beyond human domain, although

discussed as a form of resistance to the Norman goal of absolute domination in the

previous chapter, looks towards the romantic depiction of the supernatural elements of

the natural world as a result of unnatural forces. Out of this hybrid depiction grows the

romantic interpretation of the forest as the location of the trials necessary for the

development of knighthood and, by association, feudalism.

The image of the forest as strange, foreign and, therefore, dangerous dominates

medieval English romance.[35] Centered in the castle or court as the location of aristocratic

values, the romance views the world beyond as its antithesis, an Other world that

provides a contrast to the civilized world.[36] Typically a romance begins in the elegant

society of the court and involves a knight leaving alone, entering upon a quest in the

forest, which lies beyond the perimeter of the society. The romance ends when the knight

returns to the court to enjoy the glory he gains from facing the dangers outside. This

structure corresponds quite nicely to Buell's first dimension of place-connectedness in

which the central point, here the courtly world of the castle, is the place that one most

identifies with. The castle is the home of the knight and he imbues it with meaning as

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[34] Abrams and Harpham, "Chivalric Romance," 48.
[35] Much has been written on the forest in medieval romance, including Corinne Saunders's thorough study, *The Forest of Medieval Romance*. Comments here are designed to summarize this information as a valuable foil to the depiction of the wilderness in the outlaw tales.
[36] Rider, "Other Worlds of Romance," 15-16.

such. Its values and rituals make sense to him. Outside of the castle is the forest, the Other world where the knight must face what is foreign and strange. The further the knight moves from the center, the more strange and unsettling the setting and its occupants become, similar to Beowulf's movement into the lair of the Grendelkin, which places him at the farthest point from his home in Geatland. Although knights do not express fear of the forest, there is certainly a sense of danger inherent in venturing into these wild areas. Tournaments at court can show a knight's prowess, but adventure outside the court is the only way for a knight to prove his true worth, since the forest is full of uncalculated risks: fairies, dishonorable knights, magic and wild and strange beasts.[37] In *Le Morte Darthur*, despite having proven himself in many tournaments at court, Lancelot sees these as mere games until he tests himself away from civilization: "Thus Sir Launcelot rested hym longe with play and game, and than he thought hymself to preve in straunge adventures . . . and rode into a depe foreste" (90).[38] Only in the world that is alien can Lancelot truly test himself, not necessarily because of the physical risks, but because the threat to the knight signifies a threat to the values and structure of feudal society. As the representative of feudalism, the knight must defeat the threat to order, thereby upholding the social structure.

The fourteenth-century romance *Sir Orfeo* illustrates clearly this process. The narrative opens in a happy world presided over by a wise harper king, Sir Orfeo, but is soon thrown into chaos when a mysterious Fairy King abducts the queen and spirits her away. Orfeo spends ten years in the forest, during which time he undergoes a

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[37] Although the outlaw, to be discussed below, is an element of risk in the medieval forest, he, or occasionally she, rarely manifests in any substantial way in romance, which prefers to test the knight through either supernatural trials or other knights, which implies the class equality necessary for the challenge.

[38] Malory quotations are from P. J. C. Field's edition of *Le Morte Darthur*.

transformation into a wild man, as described by Richard Bernheimer,[39] and develops the ability to see and then to follow the fairies into their magical world. Robert Pogue Harrison asserts that the knights of chivalric romance journey into the forest in order to face not only the wildness that lies beyond the boundary of civilization, but also the darkness within themselves, allowing the knight to connect with the martial aspects of himself that uphold feudal civilization.[40] Through this process in the forest and his journey into the mysterious world of the fairies, Orfeo finally wins back his wife through his harping. The two exit the fairy world and return to the human realm, restoring order when Orfeo resumes his throne. The forest of the romance is, therefore, designed to uphold feudal values in its provision of the appropriate trials for the knight, which lead to a restoration of order within the feudal system. As Erich Auerbach states, "A self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals is the fundamental purpose of the courtly romance."[41] A landscape constructed to suit the ideological needs of the aristocracy reflects the reality of aristocratic control of the actual land of England. For the ruling class, total dominion of the English countryside, in reality and in literature, reinforced their aristocratic position in society. While the woodlands depicted in these texts are not realistic, the need for such a literary space must have outweighed any desire for realism.

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[39] Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*.

[40] Harrison, *Forests*, 66-68. Harrison also connects this process to frequent instances of madness in romance, including Ywain's in *Ywain and Gawain* as well as the madness of Lancelot and Tristan in various texts.

[41] Auerbach, "The Knight Sets Forth," 418.

The Rhymes of Robin Hood

In contrast to the aristocratic ideals upheld in the romances, the earliest ballads of Robin Hood, which do not appear in written form until late in the fifteenth century, but probably originate much earlier, seek to subvert the authority of the ruling classes of medieval England. These poems, in a manner similar to the techniques employed in the histories already discussed, mimic many of the elements of romance while withdrawing not only the aristocratic stance of the genre, but also reversing the long-established dichotomy of civilization vs. wilderness, offering the forest as a home and alternative refuge from the corruption of society. As inseparable as Robin Hood and the forest are in popular imagination, little work has been done on this topic and its implications as a literary construct. Some Robin Hood scholars, such as A. J. Pollard, Helen Phillips, Lesley Coote and Maurice Keen make a cursory nod towards the greenwood topos before moving on to other topics, while others, such as J. C. Holt, examine the realism of the geography of the early rhymes, but none, to my knowledge have attempted to link the environmental inaccuracies of the poems to the conscious construction of a wilderness setting designed to undermine the economic power structure of medieval England.

As the only subject of this study securely grounded in a popular tradition, the origin of the Rhymes of Robin Hood, the name by which the four earliest ballads of the outlaw are collectively known, is obscured by the oral genesis of the poems as well as their popularity among the lower classes of medieval England. While the Robin Hood of the Middle Ages is recognizable today in depictions of the medieval bandit of the forest who wages a sort of war against the tyranny of the Sheriff of Nottingham, many other elements of the earliest texts are vastly different from modern conceptions of the outlaw,

the most notable of which is his social status as an outlaw yeoman in the early fourteenth century and not a displaced nobleman from the reigns of Richard I and John in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Although the earliest written forms of the legend do not appear until the turn of the sixteenth century, there is ample evidence that the Robin Hood legend was in circulation long before, an important aspect in my location of these rhymes within the culture and ideology of the English commons. Hood, apparently, was a common surname in Medieval England and the given name Robert, and its nickname Robin, also common enough that the combinations Robert Hood and Robin Hood were not of themselves remarkable.[42] What is remarkable is the appearance of the surname Robinhood, which seems to be a conflation of the two names into one in homage to the hero of English outlaws. Holt argues that the combination of a given name and a surname to form a new surname is so unusual as to be impossible to dissociate from the bandit.[43] Holt discovered seven examples of this surname occurring between 1261 and 1296, all in the Southeast of England.[44] He cites these occurrences as proof that not only was Robin Hood known far beyond his northern haunts of Barnsdale and Nottingham, but also that he was, by the end of the thirteenth century, a national legend.[45] Subsequently, David Crook discovered a William, son of Robert le Fevere, convicted of unnamed petty larcenies and of harboring fugitives in 1262 at the Berkshire Eyre, but by 1263, when the case is recorded on a cross complaint in the Memoranda Roll of the King's Remembrancer, the name William, son

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[42] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 52.
[43] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 52.
[44] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 52.
[45] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 187.

of Robert le Fevere had been changed to William Robehod.[46] The purposeful changing of

a surname to suit criminal behavior provides, for most scholars, strong evidence of the

legend's popularity as early as the second half of the thirteenth century. The earliest

literary reference to Robin Hood as a hero celebrated in popular song, however, is much

later and appears in the B version of William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1377). Sloth

confesses: "I kan noȝt parfitly my *Paternoster* as þe preest it syngeþ, / But I kan rymes of

Robyn Hood . . ." (Passus V, 395-96).[47] This casual reference to rhymes of Robin Hood

shows that within the century since the earliest name evidence, popular songs about the

outlaw hero were circulating, if not before 1263. In addition, the derogatory tone of the

comparison between religious material and Robin Hood tales displays a decidedly

negative view of these ballads as a form of entertainment for the uneducated and lower

classes. Finally, the earliest surviving written forms of the legend, the Rhymes of Robin

Hood, were produced at the turn of the sixteenth century.[48] The earliest is *Robin Hood*

and the Monk, written between 1461 and 1500,[49] in which Robin, while attending mass in

Nottingham, finds the sanctuary of the church betrayed when a monk informs the Sheriff

of Robin's presence, setting up an exciting rescue. *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*

survives in a seventeenth-century manuscript, but evidence places it much earlier, c.

1475.[50] It is a brutal tale that involves Robin turning the tables on an assassin sent by the

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[46] Crook, "Some Further Evidence," 258-59.

[47] Quotations from *Piers Plowman* are taken from Schmidt's parallel edition. This line provides the Rhymes of Robin Hood title applied to the earliest surviving tales.

[48] Knight and Ohlgren's edition of the poems, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*, provides the information on dating that is used here with some variation noted in the corresponding footnotes.

[49] Ohlgren dates *Robin Hood and the Monk* to 1465 based upon his identification of the scribe as Gilbert Pilkington, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems*, 39-40.

[50] Inclusion of *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* in the group of the earliest rhymes is due to its resemblance to a Robin Hood play fragment from 1475, but is somewhat speculative. Scholars have variously included and excluded this poem in studies of the early rhymes. I have chosen to include it, but employ it generally for additional support of elements of the other poems.

Sheriff of Nottingham. *Robin Hood and the Potter*, c. 1500,[51] is a comic tale in which

Robin, disguised as a potter, is invited to dinner by the Sheriff's wife and subsequently

promises to lead his host into the forest in search of the elusive Robin Hood.

What may be the earliest surviving Robin Hood tale, however, is something of an

anomaly at this stage in the development of the legend and has created considerable

difficulty for scholars. *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, which survives only in printed form from

the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries,[52] was probably first composed around

1450, according to linguistic evidence as compiled by Masa Ikegami.[53] Unlike the other

early rhymes of Robin Hood, which only detail one adventure, the *Gest* is a semi-

biographical attempt to create a complete narrative of the life of the bandit, the likes of

which appear to not have been attempted again until 1601 when Robert Munday

composed his two plays on Robin Hood for the Admirals Men.[54] It narrates several

loosely related adventures, including a knight and the Sheriff of Nottingham, a short-

lived reconciliation with the king and Robin's death through treachery. It is nearly eight

times longer than *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* and more than five times longer than

Robin Hood and the Potter and *Robin Hood and the Monk*.[55] Such a departure from the

other early works has been the subject of much debate. Generally, scholars believe that

the *Gest* manifests a desire to form a unified whole out of the legend by weaving together

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[51] Ohlgren dates *Robin Hood and the Potter* to 1468 based upon the merchant's mark of Richard Coll on the final page, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems*, 74-75.
[52] Ohlgren provides a good overview of the early printed versions of the *Gest*, but he does not speculate on a possible date of original composition, *Robin Hood: The Early Poems,* 97-134.
[53] Ikegami, "Language and Date."
[54] *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*. Munday is credited with elevating Robin Hood from the yeoman hero of the earlier ballads to the more familiar nobleman loyal to King Richard despite persecution from Richard's brother John.
[55] *Robin Hood and the Monk* is 358 lines. *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* is 234 lines. *Robin Hood and the Potter* is 323 lines. *A Gest of Robin Hood* is 1824 lines, roughly the length of an average romance.

several other early ballads, now lost.[56] Stephen Knight adds that by including elements of

romance and tragedy, and by downplaying the trickster aspect of Robin Hood's character,

the author of the *Gest* attempts to elevate his material and create an encyclopedic

narrative, somewhat like Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.[57] Knight continues, however, by

asserting that the attempted elevation of the material in the *Gest* is a failure, due not so

much to the lack of skill on the part of the poet, but to the nature of the material.

Ultimately, the character of the *Gest* is the same as the other early poems; they are all

narratives of deeds of derring-do that make fools of the officers of medieval society. The

essence of the medieval Robin Hood legend resists the gentrification imposed upon it by

the author of the *Gest*.[58] While the *Gest* is more comprehensive in scope than the other

three texts, it is still, at heart, a series of ballads and, therefore, represents the audience

targeted by this genre, the commoner.

Audience

While historical evidence shows that the Robin Hood legend and popular tales of

his deeds were circulating in England long before these four poems were recorded in the

fifteenth century, they are the earliest surviving forms of the legend and as a whole

represent all that can be known of the genesis of the Robin Hood mythos, presenting

challenging questions regarding the original audience, which in turn impacts the

interpretation of the landscapes of these poems. These four texts include broad comedy,

elements of tragedy, grisly killings, heroic rescues and fights. Hilton sees the rhymes as

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[56] Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 4.
[57] Knight, *Robin Hood*, 28.
[58] Knight, *Robin Hood*, 31.

the authentic voice of the English peasant,[59] but Holt, arguing mainly on the attempted elevation of the *Gest*, feels that they were developed as entertainments in the baronial halls of the thirteenth century.[60] Dobson and Taylor, on the other hand, assert that the poems represent emerging middle-class aspirations during a time of social upheaval.[61]

I agree with Hilton that the Rhymes of Robin Hood represent, at their basic level, the viewpoint of the English peasant, but with the qualifier that the term peasant is defined in broad terminology, meaning the common worker and including both farm laborers and the emerging tradespeople of the time. While Robin Hood does evolve over the centuries into the aristocratic hero fighting for the common man that we know today, that elevation in status, and therefore in audience, did not occur until Munday's plays at the turn of the seventeenth century.[62] The Robin Hood of the early poems is quite distant from this later incarnation and designed to appeal to the disenfranchised peasant rather than the magnanimous gentleman. Even if the *Gest* represents an attempt to target an audience beyond the lower classes, it fails to transform the material, as Munday does later, because the main character remains an image of the peasant class and the inherent nature of the Rhymes as both common ballad and Middle English outlaw tale stands in direct opposition to the aristocratic romance. In addition, the *Gest* is an anomaly within the surviving corpus. The fact that the *Gest* is the earliest of the texts shows that the shorter ballads continued to be popular even after the longer work was available. It may be, as Holt has suggested, that the *Gest* itself was intended for a baronial hall,[63] but it is also clear that it did not replace the other works available. The composite form of the

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[59] Hilton, "The Origins of Robin Hood."
[60] Holt, *Robin Hood*.
[61] Dobson and Taylor, Introduction to *Rymes of Robyn Hood*, 36.
[62] Additionally, Munday is the first to provide Robin with a romantic interest and to locate him in the reign of Richard I.
[63] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 110.

Gest does not change the basic identification of the original ballads, which had supplied the longer work with material, in regards to the commoners who had been unjustly served by the political system in medieval England.

The Robin Hood of the Rhymes is a yeoman who defies the officers of a corrupt state, including the Sheriff of Nottingham, as well as various church officials. The Rhymes leave no question as to Robin's social status. The third line of the *Gest* names Robin as "a gode yeman"[64] and the Knight, Sir Richard atte Lee, a rare example of a noble figure in the aristocracy, says of Robin Hood, "He is gode yoman" (103). The meaning of yeoman is a difficult matter to work out today, but Holt boils the definition down to two meanings. One is a middling freeholder, probably of a broad emerging class in the changing English countryside.[65] The other is a household officer or retainer below the rank of knight in the service of a nobleman or even the king himself, which would be the highest aspiration for a yeoman retainer.[66] This second option appears the more likely of the two in Robin's case. Another piece of evidence for Robin's yeoman status is his choice of weaponry. While he often uses a sword when the battles are hot and heavy, which is not inconsistent with close combat, Robin is especially skilled with a longbow, a weapon connected to the lower classes due to the lack of a need for special training.[67] While Holt believes that Robin Hood's status represents a middle-class figure that would appeal to the aristocracy,[68] Lundgren asserts that as a yeoman, Robin becomes an

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[64] All quotations from the four Rhymes of Robin Hood are from Knight and Ohlgren's comprehensive *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales*.
[65] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 117-19.
[66] Holt, *Robin Hood*, 119-20, 127.
[67] Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 138.
[68] Other aspects of Holt's belief in a noble audience for the Rhymes include Robin's skill with the sword and his chivalrous behavior as well as the trope of the leader who will not eat until he has seen some marvel. All of these pieces of evidence, though, are explained by the conscious mimicking of romance tropes in order to subvert the ruling class ideology.

Everyman character who tests any challenger, whatever his position in society.[69] Robin's

position as a yeoman places him clearly outside the ruling elite, but in a respected

location that allows him to voice common discontent against the political system of the

time.

Social Banditry

Much, if not all, of the violence of the Rhymes of Robin Hood is acted out along

class lines. Robin Hood, therefore, belongs to Hobsbawm's "social bandit" classification.

He defines social bandits as:

> Peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain
>
> within peasant society and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions,
>
> avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case
>
> as men to be admired, helped and supported. In the cases where a traditional
>
> society resists the encroachments and historical advance of central governments
>
> and states, native or foreign, they may be helped and supported even by the local
>
> lords.[70]

While admitting that not all banditry rises to this level—certainly medieval court records

document many bandits who, as far as we know, never warranted ballads of their

exploits[71]—Hobsbawm's scholarship is deeply rooted in the paradox of the bandit who

serves the common good. The corruption of Church and State pervades the Rhymes of

Robin Hood, illustrating the necessity of social banditry in medieval English society. In

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[69] Lundgren, "The Robin Hood Ballads," 245.
[70] Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.
[71] Barbara Hanawalt, who has conducted a comparison of the Robin Hood tales with the jail delivery rolls of fourteenth-century circuit justices, states that bands of outlaws and robbers commonly roamed about the English countryside in the late Middle Ages and were generally feared by the locals, "Ballads and Banditry," 155.

Robin Hood and the Monk, Robin attends mass in Nottingham and, while, "Alle that ever were the church within / Beheld Robyn Hode" (73-74), only "a gret-hedid munke" (75) rushes from the building in order to summon the Sheriff, who betrays the sanctuary of the church, entering the building and attacking Robin during services. In the *Gest*, the kindness and courtesy that Sir Richard atte Lee receives from Robin and his men in the forest highlights the corruption of the Church and governmental officials who savor the chance to take Richard's lands. Even though Robin has given him the money to cover his debt to the abbey, Richard asks for mercy, testing the officials:

> "Now, good syr justyce, be my frende,
>
> And fende me of my fone!"
>
> "I am holde with the abbot," sayd the justyce,
>
> "Bothe with cloth and fee."
>
> "Now, good syr sheryf, be my frende!"
>
> "Nay, for God," sayd he.
>
> "Now, good syr abbot, be my frende,
>
> For thy curteysé,
>
> And holde my londes in thy hande
>
> Tyll I have made the gree!" . . .
>
> The abbot sware a full grete othe,
>
> "By God that dyed on a tree,
>
> Get the londe where thou may,
>
> For thou getest none of me." (423-432, 437-440)

This one exchange highlights the absence of mercy in the Church and the collusion of the justice system with the greedy officials of the abbey as well as the failure of the government, represented by the Sheriff, to do anything that would alleviate the problem. It is clear why Robin's instructions to his men are as follows:

> But loke ye do no husbonde harme,
>
> That tilleth with his ploughe.
>
> No more ye shall no gode yeman
>
> That walketh by grene wode shawe,
>
> Ne no knyght ne no squyer
>
> That wol be a gode felawe.
>
> These bisshoppes and these archebishoppes,
>
> Ye shall them bete and bynde;
>
> The hye sherif of Notyingham,
>
> Hym holde ye in your mynde. (51-60)

The men are by no means to harass the hard-working lower classes and neither are they to bother the lowest level of nobility, knights and squires, if they are not treacherous. The main intended victims of the band are the representatives of the Church and of the local government in the Sheriff of Nottingham. In articulating what he terms the "Robin Hood Principle," Seal identifies the "power differentials" that are an essential element of outlaw tales and the resulting threat to the identity of the oppressed group.[72] While later versions of the Robin Hood legend have the bandit warring against an evil monarch, in the early texts Robin and his men respect the king as a representative of lawful government and are not revolutionaries in a modern sense. Instead, their main points of

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[72] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 70.

attack are the sources of daily friction for the peasant, the more local representatives that a contemporary commoner would have encountered and felt resentment towards. The action of the Rhymes, therefore, carries out Robin's instructions to his men. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, the monk who betrays Robin Hood is killed along with his attendant, a young boy, as well as the Sheriff's jailer. In *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, "Sir Guy," the Sheriff of Nottingham's assassin, is not only killed by Robin, but also decapitated and his face brutally disfigured so as to make the identity of the body indiscernible. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*, Robin, in disguise, leads the Sheriff into the forest where he is robbed. In the *Gest*, a monk is robbed and the Sheriff is robbed and later killed along with many of his men in a wholesale battle that breaks out at an archery contest. Consequently, Sir Richard and King Edward[73] are not abused by the outlaws because they are honest and, therefore, deemed *gode felawes*. The brutality of these episodes illustrates the class conflict that underlies these poems and places sympathy with the oppressed peasants.

Genre

The class perspective of the Rhymes is also evident in the genre, which, in turn, affects the representation of the wilderness in these texts and illuminates the cultural work that these four poems collectively perform. The wide evidence of the early dispersal and popularity of the legend as examined by Holt and the two hundred or more year gap between the earliest evidence of the legend and the earliest written texts argues for a

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[73] The only king mentioned in the Rhymes is an Edward, which would place the time of the Rhymes between 1272 and 1377, during the reigns of Edward I, Edward II and Edward III. The plot of the *Gest* includes the king's northern circuit through Nottingham, which may correspond to a similar circuit of Edward II in 1323. Of course, this information does not declare a time for the origin of the Robin Hood legend, but rather for the setting of these specific texts.

primarily oral and popular mode of transmission early in the dissemination of the legend as opposed to a written method that would have been more aristocratic.[74] This particular mode was the ballad. The four Rhymes all display elements of the oral ballad form, even on the written page, including the longer, more developed *Gest*. At their most basic level, ballads are songs that are spread orally and tell a story. They are a form of folk song and are popular among the illiterate or minimally literate people, exhibiting the following qualities: intense dialogue, simple stanzaic form, an impersonal narrator, stock descriptive phrases, refrains and incremental repetition.[75] It is the rare scholar who does not agree that *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* and *Robin Hood and the Potter* originated as ballads or that *A Gest of Robyn Hode* is comprised of several ballads woven together, even if their present forms display modification in the transition from oral to written, sung to recited.[76] This genre classification is important as it provides information regarding the audience and cultural purpose of the legend. Flemming G. Anderson develops the definition of ballad further in his conclusion that ballads represent a true story for both the audience and the performer, in essence a "living tradition" that performs a practical, didactic function within the culture.[77] That the Rhymes of Robin Hood were included in Francis James Child's important *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* is significant. Thomas Pettitt interprets Child's use of the term "popular" as "traditional cultural practices formerly vital and significant for society as a whole, but of late confined to its more backward (provincial, rustic, uneducated)

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[74] Loomis, in her studies of the Auchinleck Manuscript, has demonstrated the workings of a London bookshop of the early fourteenth century related to the production of Middle English romances, showing that even romances in English were being recorded in written form far earlier than Middle English outlaw tales.

[75] Abrams and Harpham, "Ballad," 23.

[76] Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion," 68.

[77] Andersen, "Technique, Text and Context," 37.

segments."[78] Ballads, therefore, were not just musical forms of entertainment for the people who wrote, performed and listened to them. Instead they functioned culturally by providing a voice for the lower class. For example, P. R. Coss relates the Rhymes of Robin Hood to the social protests of the fourteenth century.[79]

This ballad form works in conjunction with the more dominating outlaw tale genre, itself rooted in the wilderness of England. Outlaw tales have a very real historical basis in the legal and social systems of the Middle Ages and are a more realistic representation of the political and economic realities of the time than the aristocratic romance. Outlawry was originally a legal judgment, similar to banishment. An outlaw, as the term suggests, was literally outside the protection of the law and held no rights of legal defense under the judicial system. Additionally, an outlaw forfeited all privileges and property. He could be killed on site and the killer would be paid a bounty equal to that paid for a wolf.[80] It is little wonder that such a judgment would force the convicted to flee into marginal areas of the countryside and the very forests created as game preserves for the king became refuges for outlaws of his judgment.[81] The practice of paying bounties for dead outlaws became less common in the later Middle Ages, but other penalties still applied and outlaws were still considered fugitives with royal pardon as their only hope.[82]

In general, outlaws were reviled as a threat to the order of society, but those who stood against injustice rose above this common opinion to achieve important cultural

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[78] Pettitt, "The Late-Medieval Ballad," 429.
[79] Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion," 36.
[80] Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 9-10.
[81] Harrison, *Forests*, 77.
[82] Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 10.

status as symbols of resistance, from Song Jiang[83] to William Wallace to Ned Kelly to John Dillinger. The exploits of the previously discussed Hereward were so admired in medieval England that he became an archetype for succeeding outlaw tales in Britain,[84] including those concerning the Bolognese pirate of the English Channel, Eustace the Monk, and the early thirteenth-century rebel Fouke le Fitz Waryn. While tales of these figures influenced elements of the Robin Hood corpus, these men belonged to the aristocracy and their tales were written in Latin or French. Robin Hood, as a yeoman, is an outsider to the power structure, though, and ideologically represents a very different cultural perspective, one more in line with the ideology of the ballad as a cultural expression, discussed above. As such, Robin does not fight for control of the land, as aristocratic rebels do, but to highlight the injustices of the system. Tim Lundgren's further explication of Robin Hood's existence outside any specific, historic conflict not only indicates the differences from Robin's predecessors in outlawry, but also designates him as an outlaw for any time. Knight believes that these early ballads[85] represent the formation of a new genre that is a hybrid of the male-centered narrative of the romance and the nature setting of the Middle English lyric, seeing this new genre as a parody that creates a less lofty, more comic and more brutal representation of the world.[86] He defines parody "not as comedy, but innovative refashioning."[87] Genres are slippery classifications and to attempt to delineate the line between imitation and the creation of a new form seems particularly difficult, but Knight's point that the social upheaval of the

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[83] Song Jian was the leader of an outlaw band that roamed the present-day Chinese provinces of Shandong and Henan in the early twelfth century.
[84] Lundgren classifies the *Gesta Herewardi* as the first written life of an English outlaw, "The Robin Hood Ballads," 231.
[85] Knight does not include *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* in his discussion in "Alterity, Parody, Habitus," for reasons discussed above. See Chapter 4, note 50.
[86] Knight, "Alterity, Parody, Habitus," 14-15.
[87] Knight, "Alterity, Parody, Habitus," 8.

fourteenth century and the emergence of a more complex social structure open the way

for a new genre that has the ability to voice the anxieties of the time is well taken.[88]

Graham Seal's further identification of what he terms the "Robin Hood Principle," with

times of change that threaten the identity of an oppressed group, supports Knight's

hypothesis.[89] The Rhymes have such a great deal of subject matter in common with the

Gesta Herewardi—the episodes of disguise, the bountiful hideout, the corrupt Church

officials—that I am not inclined to consider them a new genre, but rather an evolution of

the form that shifts perspective from the landed aristocracy to the marginalized peasant,

prompted by the social change that Knight identifies. Freed from the feudal concerns of

land control that plagued Robin's outlaw predecessors,[90] the Rhymes of Robin Hood are

not so much a parody of romance that creates a new genre, but a conscious appropriation

that reverses the ideological structure of the romance, making the outlaw the upholder of

justice and the forest the location of truth.[91]

In conjunction with the class violence discussed above, many episodes of the

Rhymes employ elements of romance and chivalry designed either to make the ruling

classes look foolish or to undermine their credibility. In *Robin Hood and the Potter*,

Robin, at first in disguise, "cowed of corteysey" (159) and is chivalrous to the Sheriff's

wife, sending her gifts after robbing her husband, undermining the Sheriff in his own

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[88] Knight, "Alterity, Parody, Habitus," 16-17.

[89] Seal, "The Robin Hood Principle," 70.

[90] Famous outlaws preceding the emergence of the Rhymes were aristocratic: Hereward, Eustace the Monk, Fouke le Fitz Waryn, and Gamelyn, who seems closest in matter to Robin Hood. The survival of the ballad *Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough, and William of Cloudesley*, which, like the Rhymes of Robin Hood, sports outlaw heroes from the commons, attests to the cultural need for such figures. The earliest surviving text of Adam Bell and his companions, though, is mid-sixteenth-century, some time after the Rhymes of Robin Hood, so it will not be discussed here.

[91] As Coss, "Aspects of Cultural Diffusion," 75, has already hinted at, much of Holt's evidence for an aristocratic audience for the Rhymes—chivalric characterization, the tale of the knight in the *Gest*, and Robin's skill with a sword—can now be explained by this appropriation.

family through a rough version of courtly love. Even when Robin is kind to Sir Richard in the *Gest* and helps him with his debts because Richard is a "gode felawe," it is an act that undermines the class structure. According to the dictates of medieval society, a yeoman should not be in the position to help a knight. The fact that the money used is probably from a robbery against the upper class only increases the level of subversion. When Robin additionally clothes Richard in his livery of green and scarlet and provides him with a horse and saddle, a palfrey, boots and spurs, Robin effectively makes the knight his retainer, reversing the social structure. Later in the *Gest* this pattern is repeated with higher stakes when King Edward, disguised as a rich monk, is willingly captured by the outlaws. Though Edward wants to meet Robin and is impressed enough by him to grant a pardon to the whole band, his power is still subverted when he agrees to dress in Robin's livery of green and to play a game of "pluck buffet" in which a missing shot results in a punch to the shooter. The absurdity of the situation is highlighted when the band rides into town and the people flee for fear that the king is slain and the outlaws are attacking. This world-turned-upside-down event, in which the king becomes a member of the outlaw band, not only makes Edward look foolish, but also reverses the feudal structure. According to Barbara Hanawalt, who compares the Robin Hood tales to criminal cases of medieval banditry, bandits of the Middle Ages almost always targeted the middle and lower classes because they were easy prey, generally stealing everyday necessities.[92] While she declares that the reason Robin Hood became a hero is that he targets the social elite, I would reverse her thought process to follow Hobsbawm and Seal and state that the reason Robin Hood targets the elite is that he is a social bandit who rises

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[92] Hanawalt, "Ballads and Bandits," 165-68.

above the reality of medieval banditry in order to act out the desires of the repressed

peasant.

The coopting and reversal of romance motifs extends to the physical structure of

the Rhymes as well. Hobsbawm securely locates his social bandit within the rural

countryside, in opposition to the ruling structures of the town, city and court. The

Rhymes of Robin Hood are constructed in such a way as to reverse the court-wilderness-

court structure of the chivalric romance, as well as the view of the wilderness as the

Other expressed in the previous literature discussed in this study.[93] Instead of beginning

in the court and facing trials in the wilderness to then return to the court, the outlaw tale

begins with peace in the forest, locates the area of trials in the town and court and

concludes with reaffirmation in the return to the woodlands. This structure still

corresponds to Buell's first dimension of place-connectedness, but reverses the structure

of the romance, creating a new location in the forest designed to challenge the injustice in

the social and political systems of the time. The center of a romance is the court; the

center of an outlaw tale is the forest. Such a reversal highlights the fundamental

opposition of the ideology expressed in the Rhymes to that of the romance. In *Robin*

Hood and the Monk, Robin proposes going to mass in Nottingham, but Much warns him:

> Take twelve of thi wyght yemen
>
> Well weppynd, be thi side.
>
> Such on wolde thi selfe slon,
>
> That twelve dar not abyde. (31-4)

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[93] In general, the preservation of popular literature was of little importance and much did not survive;
therefore, the Rhymes of Robin Hood must serve as the exemplar of the wilderness in the popular
imagination. Although not discussed in this study, some surviving Middle English lyrics may also represent
a common attitude towards the natural world.

Much does not mention any specific enemy and the implication is that for Robin, any trip

to the town presents such a danger that Robin needs to take many men with him. These

sentiments are borne out when Robin goes alone and the monk betrays the sanctuary of

the church to inform the sheriff of Robin's presence at mass. Safety for the outlaws is

then found in the forest. It is their home and their natural environment. The movement of

the wilderness location of the Other from water-based environments to the woodlands,

while literally grounded in land reclamation projects of the later Middle Ages, is reversed

in these tales in which a space legally reserved for the ruling elite becomes a location for

both social outcasts and the confrontation of social issues. As discussed in the chapter on

Beowulf, Gillian R. Overing and Marijane Osborn articulate the literary negotiation

necessary between the reader's conception of place and the text's representation of that

same place that creates a new space.[94] In *Beowulf*, that space is used to recontextualize

the Anglo-Saxon past. In the Rhymes of Robin Hood, it is used to subvert the dominant

ideology. No longer placed along the fringe like Arthur's mysterious lakes or Hereward's

hideout in East Anglia, the location of the Rhymes in Barnsdale Forest, Sherwood Forest

and Nottingham places the outlaws in the midst of the kingdom, even if in the backward

north, where the texts can comment upon the society from within, using its own social

and literary structures to highlight its corruption.

The Idealized Forest in the Rhymes of Robin Hood

The importance of this wooded setting, then, is integral to the ideology of the

poems. Robin is introduced in *A Gest of Robyn Hode* with the lines: "Robyn stode in

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[94] Overing and Osborn, *Landscape of Desire*, xvii.

Bernesdale, / And lenyd hym to a tre" (9-10).[95] These lines literally place Robin firmly in the forest. The poem provides no explanation for his outlawry or any reference to a former life in town and never does Robin or any of the other outlaws display a desire to return to a position in the civilized world.[96] They do not even express any negative sentiment regarding their status. They belong to the forest and as such they never encounter any true danger there. In both *Robin Hood and the Potter* and *A Gest of Robyn Hode* the Sheriff travels into the forest, but in both instances he is robbed and sent away humiliated. In *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, the sheriff sends Guy into the forest as an assassin, but Robin instead kills Guy. As part of the outlaws' forest nature, they know the forest better than anyone else and as long as they remain in it, they are safe. Even the king, who legally maintains the forest as his game preserve, is less competent in the woods than Robin and his men. In the *Gest*, the king travels north to find Robin Hood, but once there, hunting in his own forest, "He coud unneth fynde one dere" (1431), but during the same time, Robin "always slewe the kynges dere, / And welt them at his wyll" (1463-64). The forest of the Rhymes is the center of Robin's domain and he is the most adept at commanding his kingdom.

While the saints discussed earlier make the wilderness their home, their relationship with the environment is starkly different and more heavy-handed than that of Robin Hood. Cuthbert and Guthlac both modify their hermitage locations by planting crops and building structures as a way to convert their landscapes into a representation of the Garden of Eden. The swamp surrounding Guthlac on Crowland begins as dark and threatening, but after his defeat of the demons, it becomes paradisiacal with fishes

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[95] In the Middle English tales of Robin Hood, the famous outlaw is based in Barnsdale, not Sherwood.
[96] Robin's royal service at the end of the *Gest* will be discussed below, but in general, it is an expression of his loyalty to the king, rather than a goal of the outlaws and, in any case, is short-lived.

swimming towards the sound of Guthlac's voice and leaping out of the water and charming birds causing mischief. The wilderness hermitage of the saint becomes the location of wisdom; important guests are frequently entertained and some of the structures built there are designed for the purpose of receiving visitors. The tropes of the English wilderness saint, therefore, involve the transformation of the land and are related to the Christian conversion.

While the woodland wilderness of the Rhymes also becomes the home of Robin Hood and his men, unlike the saint, the outlaws do not transform the wilderness, instead becoming a natural part of it. The woodland setting of the Rhymes is an idealized place, the further implications of which will be discussed below, but the key element here is that these texts open with a description of a natural setting and close in the same setting, without transforming it from a wilderness location into either a civilized place or an expression of God's providence. In addition, in contrast to the romance, the forest of the outlaws is rather realistic. No fairies, witches, dwarves or magical beasts wait to provide the outlaw with an adventure. Instead, adventure is in the town, while life in the forest is orderly and peaceful, although Robin's victims may not view it that way. In *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, Robin simply tells the assassin, "My dwelling is in the wood" (139). Like the romance in which the main adventure is bookended by scenes of court life that uphold aristocratic values, Robin's adventures begin and end in a landscape that requires no modification, but still underscores the justness of the outlaw's location in the forest. *Robin Hood and the Potter* opens:

> In schomer, when the leves spryng,
>
> The bloschoms on every bowe,

So merey doyt the berdys syng

Yn wodys merey now. (1-4)

It subsequently concludes with Robin's return from town and his celebration with his

men, "Ondernethe the grene wod tre" (321). All of the Rhymes follow this pattern,

underscoring the naturalness of the outlaws' place in the wilderness, displaying the ease

with which the outlaw belongs to an environment that others find trying and dangerous.

Unlike the saint, whose time in the wilderness transforms the location through

several modifications, the outlaws of the Rhymes not only do not modify their forest

home, but, instead, design their lives around the outdoors. They dress in green. Meetings

always take place "under this trusty tree" (*Guy of Gisborne* 32), a version of which

appears in each of the Rhymes. The decisions made under the meeting tree are binding

and sacred to the men. In *Robin Hood and the Monk*, Little John tells his fellow outlaws,

"Loke that ye kepe wel owre tristil-tre, / Under the levys smale" (143-44), emphasizing

both the natural location and the vows made. In addition, social gatherings, such as feasts

and entertainments, like shooting matches, also take place in the open. The only

modification mentioned in the four texts is the "lodge" (113) in the *Gest*, which the

Middle English Dictionary defines as "A small building or hut for either permanent or

temporary use; a rude shelter" and is most likely the sort of temporary housing used by

hunters during hunting season. This crude structure and its accurate reflection of forest

usage at the time contrasts with the jarring habit of chivalric romances to randomly

produce castles and other buildings, appearing out of nowhere in the forest, in a desire to

provide knightly adventures for the hero. The life of Robin Hood and his men in the

forest, however, highlights their natural position within the wilderness and implies the artificiality of the romance.

While, like the saint's hermitage, Robin's wilderness becomes the location of wisdom as well as truth and justice, people do not seek him out for advice. Where Cuthbert and Guthlac's visitors come to them willingly and with specific needs, Robin Hood waylays his guests, forcing them to dine with his men in the forest, where he can judge whether or not they are *gode felawes* and mete out the appropriate sentence. Even when King Edward breaks with the pattern and seeks Robin Hood in the forest in the *Gest*, it is not to pursue wisdom or to ask for advice, but to bring Robin and Sir Richard under control:

> The kynge came to Notynghame,
>
> With knyghtes in grete araye,
>
> For to take that gentyll knyght
>
> And Robyn Hode, and yf he may. (1413-16)

Once in the greenwood, however, the King finds Robin an admirable leader and says to himself:

> Here is a wonder semely syght
>
> Me thynketh, by Goddes pyne,
>
> His men are more at his byddynge
>
> Then my men be at myn. (1561-64)

Edward also praises Robin's "goodnesse" and "grace" (1647), acknowledging Robin's inherent nobility despite his social position, which leads Edward to pardon the whole outlaw band. Whereas Edward had expected to mete out justice to these rogue figures, the

tables are turned and he finds himself the recipient of a lesson in courtesy, grace and leadership. Figures who journey into the forest in these tales do not seek the wisdom of Robin Hood, but in the end they either receive just punishment, like the Sheriff, find justice when they have been wronged, like Sir Richard, or learn important lessons, like Edward.

For the audience of the Rhymes, the forest, therefore, becomes an idealized place where the possessors of true nobleness and honor judge the abuses of society and right wrongs, somewhat like Buell's fifth dimension of place-connectedness: the imagined place, often an unreal location that represents some ideal. All of these ballads contain an ode to the forest in springtime. *Robin Hood and the Monk*, perhaps, contains the most lyric opening:

> In somer, when the shawes be sheyne,
>
> And leves be large and long
>
> Hit is full mery in feyre forests
>
> To here the foulys song,
>
> To se the dere draw to the dale,
>
> And leve the hilles hee,
>
> And shadow hem in the leves grene,
>
> Under the grene wode tre. (1-8)

In all of the poems, it is eternally summer with all of its attending bounty, ease and mild weather. Openings, such as this one, set the stage of an idyllic forest setting as the home of the outlaws who challenge the corruption of the social structures of medieval society. As cited above, little actual woodland survived by the later Middle Ages and what did

survive after the Anglo-Saxon period was generally wood pasture in which the tree canopies do not touch,[97] but the Rhymes of Robin Hood create a woodland thick and deep enough to house an alternative, idealized society, one that is based upon merit and not breeding.[98] While the truth of an outlaw's forest life must have been one of hardship and deprivations, the constructed forest of the Rhymes becomes an idealized version of both the physical world and the political, yet, according to Pollard, undercut by a realization that no such utopia exists.[99] The poems may create situations and spaces that subvert the ruling class, but the failure of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 proved that while the peasants may have the ability to shout loud enough to be heard, in the end their voices will be ruthlessly repressed. This brutal knowledge underlies the image of the woodland utopia, creating a more bittersweet edge in its comment upon the medieval social order.

Perhaps the most subversive of Robin's acts occurs at the end of the *Gest*. After Edward's time with the outlaws in the forest, he pardons Robin and his men and they enter royal service. The typical resolution of an outlaw tale is the reconciliation between the outlaw and the crown as in Richard's constructed conclusion to the *Gesta Herewardi*. Even the tales of Robin Hood popular today conclude with the arrival of King Richard and the reestablishment of proper order. In the *Gest*, however, Robin eventually realizes that he is losing his skills as a forester, which he values more than a position in the civilized world. He is no longer an exile who is banned from society, but he is now an exile from his real home, the forest.[100] To stay true to himself he must abandon the king

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[97] Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England*, 113.
[98] *Robin Hood and the Potter*, the *Gest* and *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* all contain arguments between Robin Hood and Little John regarding the leadership of the band. These arguments are all resolved by Robin's ability as a leader, rather than his skill with a bow or sword. The implication is that leadership of the band is always open to any member who can prove his superior abilities in dealing with the group.
[99] Pollard, *Imagining Robin Hood*, 81.
[100] Bessinger, "The *Gest of Robin Hood*," 45.

and court. Instead of asking permission, Robin leaves the aristocratic establishment under false pretenses, and returns to the forest where he reclaims his home and his position by slaying a "Full grete harte" (1785), an act that not only places him firmly back in the wilderness at the conclusion of the text rather than in the court, but also undermines the false resolution preceding it. In its inversion of the romance structure, the *Gest* removes Robin from his natural location, forcing him to experience the disintegration that the romance hero feels in the forest, but in the very place where the chivalric knight receives affirmation, the court. The *Gest* concludes with Robin relocated in the forest, literally outside the architectural structures of the aristocratic court. In slaying the hart upon his return, Robin performs the activities of the outlaw, and thereby, both reclaims his former position and asserts his desire to live free outside the system rather than to live in luxury within it. He reassembles his men and lives the rest of his life in the forest.

Robin's desire to remain in the forest displays his rejection of the aristocracy, its values and its view of the wilderness. He chooses, instead, a life in a natural setting in which he can be his own master. William Cronon declares that the wilderness is a constructed space; the perception and meaning applied to it is a human creation: "We too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own imagined longings and desires."[101] The balladeers of the Rhymes of Robin Hood created a forest that reveals a need to subvert and highlight the injustices of the social order and, in doing so, constructed the wilderness as a home that fulfilled those longings. The romances of the ruling class, though, reflect a desire to uphold the social structure and, accordingly, project onto the forest a wish for adventure and affirmation. The resolution of *Robin Hood and the Potter* undermines the aristocracy even more by clearly

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[101] Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 69-70.

indicating what can happen when the ruling class is thwarted in their mission in the wilderness. Much of the action of this rhyme takes place in the town with Robin in disguise. Then the action shifts to the forest where the outlaw has secretly led the Sheriff with promises of delivering Robin Hood, but really in order to rob him. When Robin reveals himself, the Sheriff wishes he had not followed the fake potter, declaring:

> "Had I west that [that the Potter was Robin] befforen,
>
> At Notynggam when we were,
>
> Thow scholde not com yn feyre forest
>
> Of all thes thowsande eyre."
>
> "That wot Y well," seyde Roben,
>
> "Y thanke God that ye be here;
>
> Thereffore schall ye leffe yowre hors with hos,
>
> And all yowre hother gere." (272-79)

The Sheriff had expected an adventure that would bring him great renown, but instead, his power is only valid within the town, where he returns humiliated. Robin, likewise, realizes that his power is only valid in the forest, outside the boundaries of human law. At the close of the poem, the Sheriff and Robin, representatives of the ruling class and the commons, return to their appropriate locations, the town and the forest, respectively. It appears, then, that when it comes to wilderness adventures, class is key in determining the results.

Conclusion

Ne com ic naþer mid anre byrðene ham þe me ne lyste ealne þane wude ham

bregan, gif ic hyne ealne aberan meihte; on ælcurn treowo ic geseah hwæthwugu

þæs þe ic æt ham beþorfte. Forþam ic lære ælcne ðara þe maga si and manigne

wæn hæbbe, þæt he menige to þam ilcan wuda þar ic ðas stuansceaftas cearf,

fetige hym þar ma, and gefeðrige hys wænas mid fegrurn gerdum, þat he mage

windan manigne smicerne wah, and manig ænlic hus settan, and fegerne tun

timbrian, and þær murge and softe mid mæge on-eardian ægðer ge wintras ge

sumeras, swa swa ic nu gyt ne dyde.[1]

(I did not return home with a single load without desiring to bring the whole

forest home with me, if I had been able to carry it all; in every tree I saw

something that I needed at home. Therefore I advise each of those who is able and

has many wagons, that he proceed to the same forest where I cut down these

posts, let him obtain more there for himself, and load his wagons with fair

branches so that he might weave many an elegant wall, and build many an

excellent house, and construct a fair town, and live there happily and comfortably

both winter and summer, as I have not yet done.)

Alfred the Great's Preface to his translation of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies* opens with this

extended metaphor in which he likens his late ninth-century program of educational

reform and rejuvenation to the gathering of materials from the forest for the construction

of buildings, and hence, civilization. He exhorts those who would follow him to go

themselves into the woods and choose the materials necessary for the acquisition and

presentation of wisdom. Likewise, the authors discussed in "The Wilderness in Medieval

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[1] Quotations of Alfred the Great's translation of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies* are from Carnicelli's edition.

English Literature: Genre, Audience and Society" searched the countryside of England, picking and choosing the elements that best contributed to their own constructions of wilderness landscapes, creating not towns of wisdom, but dynamic, natural settings designed to convey a multitude of beliefs and emotions. Alfred's encouragement to seekers of knowledge that they both follow their predecessors and choose for themselves mirrors the changes I have discussed in the depiction of the wilderness in medieval English literature across time as each subsequent text both reflects a complicated relationship with the past as well as looks to present social complexities in order to create its own unique visions of the English wilderness. In focusing upon true environmental conditions as well as the accuracies and inaccuracies of the representation of the wilderness in medieval English literature, this project has demonstrated that medieval English authors constructed wilderness landscapes as a sophisticated amalgamation of true environmental conditions and cultural ideology that is intimately bound with time and place.

Today, when we imagine "The Wilderness," we think of an untouched natural setting, removed from not just human corruption, but also the cares and problems of daily life. Environmental history shows, however, that by the time of Roman withdrawal from England, little, if any, space remained that had not been utilized in some way for the Empire. Masters of engineering, the Romans built roads, managed farmland, established cities and drained wetlands. Although their withdrawal, combined with the marine resurgence that began in the fourth century, resulted in some regeneration of woodlands and wetlands, developmental progress did not halt and the countryside of England has continued to be managed and utilized up to this day. All of this is not meant to imply that

the people living in England in the Middle Ages did not have a relationship with the natural world; indeed, this study has shown that the natural world is a vital aspect of the medieval literature of England. Clearly, despite the absence of a virgin land, many English authors were drawn to the image of the wilderness, desiring to utilize natural places in order to address contemporary social matters. There were, however, places in England that presented ecologically marginal settings, areas less settled due to difficult environmental conditions, such as the wetlands of East Anglia or the glacial moraine of the North, which, if not completely deserted, did not quite seem to be under the control of human civilization. Places such as these, ones that were viewed as less inhabited or even less environmentally predictable in their features, became fertile ground for authors seeking a wilderness setting. Following the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon term *wild(d)eornes*, therefore, I have defined the wilderness not according to the modern sense of the term, but as natural space that lies beyond human control, not necessarily an uninhabited or untouched land.

The wilderness locations constructed in the texts discussed here present an interesting arrangement of images. Due to the absence of any modern sense of an English wilderness, authors were free to imagine the wilderness in the vein of their sources, such as Felix's use of the desert from the *Life of Anthony* in his own *Life of Guthlac*, or the *Beowulf* poet's possible use of *Grettir's Saga* for the mere and cave of the Grendelkin. At other times, however, they often sought to portray the landscape of England realistically as in Bede's and the Anonymous Monk's images of Cuthbert sharing a shepherd's hut with his horse or Hereward's military tactics around the Isle of Ely. Just as likely, though, authors chose to interject the impossible into the environment of their tales as in the odd

mixture of landscape features in the journey to the mere in *Beowulf* or the three

mysterious lakes in Laȝamon's *Brut*, or even an unobtainable utopian forest in the

Rhymes of Robin Hood. In short, the authors discussed here felt free to draw upon

whatever was at hand, much like Alfred in his Preface above, combining the raw

materials available in the English landscape with their own agendas to construct the

wilderness necessary to suit a myriad of purposes.

Uncovering the purpose of a text is necessarily a tricky business and somewhat

akin to detective work. The tools I have employed here involve genre, audience and

social and political climate. Though often difficult to pin down—most works rarely

conform to a generic archetype—my use of genre has provided a window into the choices

made by a writer, as well as the desired effects of those choices. In following generic

conventions and in deviating from them, an author creates a relationship with the

audience in which he elicits the desired response, if the work is successful. The

conventional epic opening of *Beowulf* that includes the first person plural pronoun *wē*

helps to create the collective audience of the Anglo-Saxon people and the ballad form of

the Rhymes of Robin Hood emphasizes the cultural importance of these tales for a

marginalized class of people. These two examples both point towards the connection

between genre and audience, which has further provided me with a method of teasing out

each author's desired effect. Laȝamon's conscious choice of English combined with his

flaunting of convention in his proem in refusing to give another credit for the genesis of

his work appeals to a group of people struggling under Norman control. Again, my

example points to another aspect of my study. Finally, social and political conditions

provide the necessary information to determine the needs and expectations of the target

group. Clearly, the *Gesta Herewardi* required a Norman Invasion, but the Rhymes of Robin Hood would not have been possible without the social upheaval of the fourteenth century and my reading of *Beowulf* would be greatly altered if not for the sense of the anxiety that the Christianized Anglo-Saxons felt regarding their pagan ancestors. In working through these elements of genre, audience and social context, I have been able to posit the ideology behind the construction of the wilderness in these works. Working across a large period of time, I have also been able to identify particular social conditions that have impacted the relationship of the people with the natural world and the ways in which that relationship becomes depicted in the literature, illuminating the intimate connection between these landscapes and their places and times of production.

Bombarded by the complexities of modern life, viewing the natural world as an antidote to human civilization today, we wish to believe that the lives of pre-industrial people possessed a less complicated relationship with the natural world. The belief that the wilderness is a constructed space is not a shocking idea in environmentalism today. We struggle with what it means or does not mean to provide certain areas with official government designations and the accompanying borders drawn upon maps, as well as the inherent privileging of not just these places at the expense of other natural locations, but also the romanticizing of the experiences of those who have the resources to visit and revere such locations over those whose lives are more contained within cities. Although medieval people had not lived through industrialization, and its accompanying problematizing of the relationship between humans and nature, the authors discussed here still exhibit a complex connection with the natural world. Through the literature, they, too, produced and designated wildernesses in their texts. Although the closest thing to a

national park would be the royal forests, when these authors incorporated actual

topographical details into their works, they created metaphorical boundaries that

designated specific areas as revered places within the natural world of England. Guthlac's

Crowland later became an important Fenland monastery. Hereward's resistance at Ely

became a source of immense pride for the monks there. Even today, Robin Hood cannot

be divorced from the forests of northern England. Beowulf's final resting place, *Hrones*

Næss, while not an identifiable location, still evokes the sense of a seaside cliff easily

recognizable in many locations in England. In addition, the choice of genre and the

targeting of certain audiences created privileged groups within these texts: the newly

converted Anglo-Saxons, the later Anglo-Saxons secure in their status as a chosen people

who migrated to England, the oppressed English resisting the Norman master narrative

and the common person chaffing against class oppression. Within medieval English

literature, therefore, there is not a single English wilderness. My work demonstrates,

rather, that like a palimpsest, the countryside depicted in the literature is a sophisticated

layering of environment, history and culture, with each successive group making their

own mark and each writer continuing the journey into Alfred's forest over and over,

choosing the pieces that best address the complicated ideology of the material.

  This study has demonstrated the connection between the representation of the

wilderness in medieval literature and literary elements such as genre and audience as well

the political and cultural ideology across time. I have organized this study both by genre

and by chronological order and have, therefore, established the interaction between social

changes and the environment that has often spilled over into literary output. To further

complete the picture that I have drawn here will require a discussion of medieval genres

not already examined. While the tidal landscape of the minor heroic poem *The Battle of Maldon* may offer some additional insight for my discussion of *Beowulf* and later Anglo-Saxon hagiographies may provide a different perspective of Christianity's relationship with the natural world, the Old English elegies are perhaps the most fertile genre for addition to my study. These six poems, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *The Husband's Lament* and *The Ruin*, are perhaps the most personal texts in the Old English corpus. They portray the state of mind of individuals dealing with loss, separation, abandonment and exile. As opposed to the other Anglo-Saxon texts discussed in this study, their more personal tone leads to the construction of a landscape that mirrors the dismal state of the speaker's emotions. While scholars have long noted the connection between the setting and mood of these poems, generally they have viewed it as an allegorical literary device rather than as a representation of the realities of a life removed from civilization and lived in the wilderness, whether by choice or exile. *The Seafarer*, and to some extent *The Wanderer*, express the concern and fear inherent in the difficult life of the sea, contrasting the seascape with the meadows and birds of the countryside of England. I have discussed the importance of water locations in medieval English literature, but these two poems set a significant portion of the text upon the sea itself, which succeeds in removing the speaker from any solid land in their wilderness locations. Identifying themselves as a seafaring people, the Anglo-Saxons would have recognized the realistic elements of such imagery. The wide ocean as a vehicle for loss and separation continues in *The Husband's Message* and the speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer* languishes upon a Fenland island while the beloved Wulf is blockaded upon another. *The Wife's Lament* offers a wilderness

perspective removed from water and, therefore, one that occurs less often in Anglo-Saxon literature. In this poem the speaker is a wilderness exile confined to a thicket of trees, living in a dugout under a large oak. This particular elegy recalls a mysterious pagan grove and the myth of slaughtered gods encased in bark awaiting new lives, a belief that was later coopted by Christianity and adapted in the association between certain saints and trees. *The Ruin*, though, presents an attitude markedly more fatalistic than any of the other elegies or the texts discussed in this study. The speaker gazes upon the decaying buildings of past giants, probably the Roman ruins found in Britain, and expounds upon the futility of human accomplishments. His descriptions of the fallen stone structures become a lament on the power of the wilderness to reclaim control over former civilized places and to undo what humanity has accomplished, an idea also present in *The Wanderer*. The wilderness landscapes of these elegies are certainly allegorical as they reflect the state of mind of each speaker, but they are also quite realistic in their depiction of an English setting in the descriptions of Anglo-Saxon seafaring, the Fenland, oak groves and even crumbling Roman ruins. The authors of these texts create dynamic landscapes that not only extend the mood of the elegies, but also offer a realistic representation of the life of an exile in Anglo-Saxon England.

My ideas on further developing the section of my study concerned with literature in the Middle English period are less advanced, but I see promise in several Middle English lyrics as representative of the commoner's more earthy relationship with the natural world. In addition, some texts of the Alliterative Revival of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries offer what appears to be a more provincial, if still landholding and aristocratic, attitude within the romance form. In the present study, I chose to only

minimally discuss Middle English romance as it relates to the outlaw tales of Robin Hood because the archetypal role of the forest in medieval romance has already been extensively discussed. Two particular texts of the Alliterative Revival, however, although classified as romance, offer an image of the wilderness that diverges from the conventional romance forest that serves to uphold the feudal system. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* constructs a more detailed and dynamic landscape than other romances of the time, as does *The Awntyrs of Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne*, both of which provide realistic elements of the landscape of the west of England and may offer an alternative view of the forest in romance than that already discussed.

Modern environmentalism began with the Industrial Revolution and the realization, perhaps for the first time, that humanity could overcome and destroy the natural world. Combined with the movement of the United States across North America and the attending goal of civilizing the wilderness, events and practices of the modern world have injected fear into the environmental unconscious of humanity. While British and American writers and artists such as William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, John Constable and William Henry Jackson documented and extolled the virtues of the wilderness, the fear of its loss resulted in the emergence of the conservation movement and the modern National Parks system, but the fear was not alleviated and is still a large aspect of the relationship between people and the natural world. The 1960s and '70s saw the growth of an apocalyptic version of environmentalism spurred by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Paul R. Ehrlich's *Population Bomb*. Today, a popular theme of science fiction films is the worn-out Earth, such as in the children's animated tale, *Wall-E*, or in the violent action film, *Snowpiercer*. Indeed, warnings of the demise of

humanity are a daily aspect of modern life through news, social media and entertainment.

In focusing on an earlier, if not less complicated time, my study seeks to remove some of

this apocalypse fatigue from modern life, focusing instead on the ways in which people

related to the natural world before every interaction was tinged with a fear of loss.

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