

Towards A Poetics of Marvellous Spaces  
in Old and Middle English Narrative

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy  
Centre for Medieval Studies  
University of Toronto

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2012

## Abstract

From the eighth to the fourteenth century, places of wonder and dread appear in a wide variety of genres in Old and Middle English: epics, lays, romances, saints' lives, travel narratives, marvel collections, visions of the afterlife. These places appear in narratives of the other world, a term which in Old and Middle English texts refers to the Christian afterlife: Hell, Purgatory, even Paradise can be fraught with wonder, danger, and the possibility of harm. But in addition to the other world, there are places that are not theologically separate from the human world, but that are nevertheless both marvellous and horrifying: the monster-mere in *Beowulf*, the Faerie kingdom of Sir Orfeo, the demon-ridden Vale Perilous in *Mandeville's Travels*, or the fearful landscape of the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Fraught with horror or the possibility of harm, these places are profoundly different from the presented or implied home world of the text.

My dissertation investigates how Old and Middle English narratives create places of wonder and dread; how they situate these places metaphysically between the world of living mortals and the world of the afterlife; how they furnish these places with dangerous topography and monstrous inhabitants, as well as with motifs, with tropes, and with thematic concerns that signal their marvellous and fearful nature.

I argue that the heart of this poetics of marvellous spaces is displacement. Their wonder and dread comes from boundaries that these places blur and cross, from the resistance of these places to being known or mapped, and from the deliberate distancing between these places and the home of their texts. This overarching concern with displacement encourages the migration of iconographic motifs, tropes, and themes across genre boundaries and theological categories.

## Acknowledgements

It is such a pleasure to acknowledge the guidance and help that I have received from so many exceptional people during the course of this project. My thanks, first of all, to Andy Orchard, my advisor, for his astonishing erudition, unstinting support, and high expectations. I was sure, in the beginning of this project, that my impression of his omniscience about Old English was youthful naiveté and that eventually I would bring him a question he could not answer; so far, I have not found that question. I am also grateful to my dissertation committee, Antonette diPaolo Healey and Suzanne Conklin Akbari. I can never thank them enough for their cheerful encouragement, their generous engagement with my work, their insights and helpful advice. I am also extremely grateful to Ian McDougall for reading the dissertation and offering such interesting questions and comments, and to my external examiner, Mark C. Amodio, whose insights, generous comments, and searching questions made my dissertation defence so much more fruitful and enjoyable a process than I could have ever hoped for.

My debt of gratitude to Professor Healey goes much farther back, for she introduced me to the study of Old English words and Anglo-Saxon culture when I was still a high school student. Before I even began my university studies, she opened a new world of learning and embodied, through unfailing kindness, curiosity, imagination, and relentless logical rigour, the ideal of a scholar. I am so grateful for her support throughout my dissertation, in times of doubt and anxious floundering, in times of happy researching and writing, and in the time just before my daughter's birth, when she ordered me to stop dissertating and start stocking up on sleep.

My warm thanks go out to Judith Deitch, who taught me how to read Old English, introduced me to the awesomeness of Old English poetry, and gave me encouragement and excellent advice throughout my studies; to Will Robins, for an enthralling Chaucer course that

accelerated my slide into medieval scholarship; to Carroll Balot, for her kind mentorship and teaching advice; to Sabine Süssstrunk, for so hospitably offering me excellent writing advice, encouragement, adoptive supervisorship, and a “study home” during my year in Switzerland; to Fabienne Michelet, for generously reading and commenting on portions of this dissertation.

I am enormously grateful to Alice Cooley, for her staunch support, good advice, mind-clearing questions, nonsense-eradication capabilities, and amazing friendship; to David Clark, for so many midnight-oil-burning discussions that inspired this project; to Bronwen Moore, Leslie Carscadden, and James Carscadden, for needful sanity checks along the way.

I am grateful to my parents, who raised me with so much love in a house full of books, who filled my childhood with fantastic stories, and who first set my feet on the path of learning; and to my brother, who shared first the childhood stories, and then the trials and tribulations of an academic career. And I am grateful beyond words to my husband, Francisco, for his generous support and patience, his faith in this project, his love that sustains me in this and in all other endeavours; and to my daughter Sofia, simply for herself.

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## Introduction: A Map of Wonder

Medieval world maps place marvels and monsters at the round world's imagined edges. Take, for instance, the famous Hereford map of the world, created in the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The Hereford map unfolds the earth's geography and history on twelve square metres of vellum. Jerusalem is at the centre; marvels and monsters crowd into the margins. The Earthly Paradise sits at the very top of the map, in the uttermost East. The monstrous nations, from blemyae to sciopods, march along the southernmost edge. Amazons, griffins, and the cannibal nations of Gog and Magog populate the extreme North. In the words of a fourteenth-century historian, Ranulph Higden, "At the farthest reaches of the world often occur new marvels and wonders, as though Nature plays with greater freedom secretly at the edges of the world than she does openly and nearer us in the middle of it."<sup>2</sup> To judge by the world maps, the centre is the place of normality, of civilized humankind; the edges are the place of marvels and monsters, of the supernatural and the uncanny.

Yet as soon as we enter the world of medieval English narrative, this neat partition dissolves. In the Old English *Beowulf*, the monsters' home is not at the world's edge; on the contrary, it is "not far from here by the count of miles"--not far removed, in physical terms, from the home of humankind, Heorot. In the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*, the perilous realm of Faerie lies both far and near the human world. Orfeo himself reaches Faerie by a long, weary road

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map* 1-11. For an overview of medieval *mappae mundi*, their structure, and their uses, see Woodward, "Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps," 510-52. For the traditional representation of marvelous and monstrous races, see also Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. For the theological and cartographic place of the Earthly Paradise in the Middle Ages, see Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: Heaven on Earth in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>2</sup> Ranulph Higden, cited in Daston and Clarke, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 25.

through the wilderness; yet his wife Heurodys is first taken to Faerie in a dream. In the Ebstorf world map, we see Paradise, the lost Eden, at the top of the map in the easternmost corner of the world. In the mid-fourteenth century, the narrator of Mandeville's Travels assures his readers that "no lyvyng man may go to Paradys," to the lost Eden in the uttermost East of the world, because of all the obstacles, physical and supernatural, that bar the way.<sup>3</sup> Yet in the legend of Saint Patrick's Purgatory, current and widely popular across Europe since the twelfth century, the way to the Earthly Paradise lies not through India, Prester John's Kingdom, and the dark lands beyond them, but through a cave in Lough Dergh, Ireland, and after that through the regions of punishment where the dead endure torment for their sins.<sup>4</sup> In yet other visions, the way to the regions of the afterlife transcends earthly geography altogether. Pilgrims such as Drythelm or Tundale reach the regions of the afterlife neither by traversing the lands of the East nor by descending underground in Ireland, but by leaving their physical bodies behind, in sickness or in a trance.<sup>5</sup> To these visionaries, the other world of the afterlife is neither at the world's easternmost edges nor under the earth. It is merely an interrupted breath away. In the realm of narrative, the neat map of a world with the mundane, well-lit life of humankind at the centre, and the wonders or monsters in the margins, is useful ideologically or conceptually, but

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<sup>3</sup> Mandeville, *The Defective Version* p. 131, ll. 22-6. *The Book of John Mandeville* was originally composed in the 1350s in French by an author claiming to be an English knight. The so-called "Defective Version" is the most widespread Middle English version of *The Book of John Mandeville* to circulate in medieval England (Higgins, *The Book of John Mandeville* 199). Accordingly, *The Defective Version of Mandeville's Travels* is the version of the text cited in the present study.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief account of the legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory in the British Isles, see Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* 42-5. For the Middle English texts associated with the legend, see Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory: Two Texts of Owayne Miles and The Vision of William of Stranton*.

<sup>5</sup> For the vision of Drythelm, see Colgrave and Mynors, eds. and transl., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, V.xiii. For the vision of Tundale, see Picard and Pontfarcy, transl., *The Vision of Tnugdal* (for a twelfth-century Latin version) and Foster, ed., *Three Purgatory Poems* (for the late-fourteenth-century Middle English version).

not geographically; medieval English narratives follow no coherent geography of the marvelous, no locating principle that can be translated into a clear and reliable map.

In early English narratives, landscapes of horror appear in a wide variety of literary genres: heroic poems, chivalric romances, saints' lives, riddles, travel narratives, *mirabilia*, allegorical dream visions, and religious visions of life after death. Fraught with horror or the possibility of harm, these landscapes are profoundly different from the presented or implied home world of the text. Some of these places of horror are wild yet entirely earthly regions at the margins of the world, like the Indian river teeming with monsters where Alexander the Great's soldiers are torn apart by hippopotami.<sup>6</sup> The episode appears in every narrative of the English Alexander tradition, though the Old English translator of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* invests it with particular horror. Other landscapes of horror are places where "the other world," the world of Christian eschatology, touches on the mortal world. In the Old English poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, surviving in a tenth-century manuscript, Saint Guthlac sets up his hermitage in a wilderness too fearful for human habitation, a wilderness full of demons who try to drive him out from what they see as their own territory. In their last and worst attack on the saint, the demons even carry him northwards through the air, until they reach the mouth of hell and show him the frightful spectacle of the damned in torment.<sup>7</sup> Guthlac's hermitage is thus a liminal space between the human world and the world of the afterlife. Centuries later,

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<sup>6</sup> Orchard, ed., *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, in *Pride and Prodigies*, §15, pp. 209 (Latin), 232-5 (Old English and modern English translation). Throughout this dissertation, *Pride and Prodigies* is used for its editions of the *Letter*. For a more recent edition of the *Letter* and the other texts of the *Beowulf* manuscript, see R. D. Fulk, *The Beowulf Manuscript* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Four of the five Anglo-Saxon texts dealing with the life of St. Guthlac narrate this episode: the Latin *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* by Felix (Colgrave, ed. and transl., *Life of St. Guthlac*, chapters XXXI-XXXIII), the Old English prose life of Guthlac (pp. 36-41), the poem *Guthlac A* (Roberts, ed., *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* ll. 557-733), and Vercelli Homily XXIII (Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies* ll. 119-43). *Guthlac B*, the only text not to show Guthlac's vision of hell, narrates the saint's death. By this point the demons have been vanquished, and the saint's soul ascends to heaven.

Mandeville the pilgrim passes through a wilderness even more explicitly contiguous with the infernal regions: the Vale Perilous.<sup>8</sup> Haunted by demons, violent storms, and multitudes of illusory corpses, the valley is rumoured among the locals to be “a pure entre to helle.” Again, the other world and the earthly world intersect in mortal time and space. Finally, yet another category of otherworldly landscapes is linked to the afterlife more subtly and indirectly. The monster mere in the Old English *Beowulf*, for example, is an earthly locale, the home of Grendel and his monstrous kin. It is a wild place, hidden in a dark wood, in the mist and moors; the way there is hard, narrow, winding among steep crags. However, this earthly locale displays unearthly phenomena that recall the waters of the Christian underworld: fearful flames appear on the very surface of the mere, and a multitude of hostile monsters lives below the waves.<sup>9</sup> Centuries later, another such metaphysically ambiguous landscape appears in the late-fourteenth-century romance, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; it is the Green Chapel, the place where Gawain must meet his monstrous adversary again and receive an axe-blow from him. The landscape bears some resemblance to that of the monster-mere in *Beowulf*. The way there is long and lonely, across the misty moor, along wooded banks and craggy cliffs.<sup>10</sup> The Green Chapel itself, a cave in the hillside, is hidden in a snowy wood, besides a brook so loud that it seems to be boiling.<sup>11</sup> Despite its ecclesiastical name, the Green Chapel has a distinct whiff of sulphur. Gawain sees it as a place of supernatural evil: a suitable spot for the devil to tell his matins, it suggests that Gawain’s adversary is also a demonic creature.<sup>12</sup> Near-sacrilegious oxymorons, accentuated by alliteration, call attention to the monstrous nature of the place: it is

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<sup>8</sup> Seymour, ed., *The Defective Version of Mandeville’s Travels*, p. 120, ll. 14, 20

<sup>9</sup> Hrothgar describes Grendel’s mere and its inhabitants in *Beowulf* ll. 1345-1379. See Chapter 4 for an extensive discussion of the relationship between the monster mere and the landscape of the afterlife.

<sup>10</sup> Tolkien and Gordon, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (from now on *SGGK*) ll. 2077-85; 2161-68.

<sup>11</sup> *SGGK* ll. 2170-6.

<sup>12</sup> *SGGK* ll. 2187-8; ll. 2191-2.

the “cursedest kirk,” the “chapel of meschaunce,” the place of “deuocioun on þe deueles wyse.”<sup>13</sup> It is an earthly place, but Gawain suspects that it possesses an affinity with hell. The monster mere in *Beowulf* and the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are earthly places, habitats of monstrous and very dangerous adversaries. But the fear that they inspire is not simply intense prudential fear of physical danger. In *Beowulf*, a hunted deer would rather lose its life to pursuing hounds than to dive into the lake and save its life; in *Gawain*, the knight dwells much longer on the Chapel’s mystery, ugliness, demonic and portentous nature than on the danger to life and limb that awaits him. On the contrary, the horror that these waste places inspire is, in the *Beowulf*-poet’s word, *niðwundor*, fearful wonder: a recognition, insistently cultivated by both poets, of mystery and supernatural peril. Set within this world, these places carry an insistent otherworldly resonance.

As these few examples suggest, dangerous otherworldly landscapes are widely scattered. They are scattered in terms of physical geography, for neither their location nor their topography conform to a single paradigm; they appear both in the margins of the world and near its civilized centre. The landscapes are also scattered in terms of metaphysics; fearful wonder and monstrous inhabitants appear in the regions of the afterlife, in the regions of the earth, and in the uncanny regions in-between. Finally, the landscapes of wonder and danger are also scattered in terms of literary genre and textual traditions: throughout Early English narrative, genres such as religious visions, romances, and travel narratives influence and modify one another. None of these categories—geography, metaphysical status, literary genre, textual tradition—encompasses all the dangerous otherworldly landscapes. None of these categories provides a reliable way to pin

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<sup>13</sup> *SGGK* ll. 2192, 2195-6.

down the radical separation between these landscapes and the “normal” reality of the texts where they appear.

This diversity of marvelous landscapes is reflected in the modern scholarship that attempts to map them: these studies must either paint with the broad brush, surveying vast tracts of literary territory with unavoidable inaccuracies, or concentrate on a small province of the marvelous and survey it in detail. The most wide-ranging study of marvelous landscapes in medieval narrative is that of H. R. Patch, *The Other World According To Descriptions In Medieval Literature*. Patch’s study is about desirable rather than horrifying landscapes, but it too searches for places that are strange, remote, radically different from ordinary life. The study examines the origins of “the other world” in Persian, Hebrew, classical, Celtic, and Germanic myth, and then looks for descriptions of “the other world” in later medieval narratives. It encompasses a variety of literary genres (dream vision, religious vision, allegory, romance) and a variety of vernacular languages (French, German, English, Italian, and Norse). Throughout, Patch summarizes each text’s description of “the other world” and identifies recurrent topographical motifs. The study summarizes a prodigious quantity of material but provides little analysis of it. In the words of Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “we are left with little idea of the intersections and connections between exegesis and vision, homily and poem, and of the ideological and political reasons promoting certain words, certain images, and even certain genres over others.”<sup>14</sup>

There is an even more serious methodological problem. Patch defines “the Other World” simply as “a mysterious country to which [man] longs to go.”<sup>15</sup> He identifies topographical

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<sup>14</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* 7.

<sup>15</sup> Patch, *The Other World* 2.

motifs that turn up in some medieval descriptions of such places--the island, the mountain, the garden, the dangerous river, the bridge, the magnificent castle--and then identifies further places as representations of the Other World when their descriptions contain these motifs.<sup>16</sup> The approach reduces the otherworldly to a match between a text and a topographical checklist: if a landscape description contains a sufficient number of certain topographical motifs (a water barrier, a mountain, a garden, a magnificent castle), then it is a description of “the other world.” Patch clearly identifies possible objections to this approach:

Skeptics may still maintain that some examples of the Other World here referred to represent nothing more significant than coincidence with the well known features of familiar descriptions of the scene. A castle surrounded by a moat on a hill... may involve uncanny adventure, and yet reflect nothing more remarkable than medieval castles in general.<sup>17</sup>

Despite such objections, his study synthesizes the landscapes found in medieval accounts—landscapes found in vision literature, allegories, and romances--into a single paradigmatic realm, “the other world.” But this paradigmatic “other world” does not exist in medieval narrative. In Old and Middle English, the expression “the other world” refers only to the afterlife.<sup>18</sup> Places like the marvel-filled India of travel literature or romance, though placed near the margins of medieval maps, nevertheless lie on the mortal, this-worldly side of the metaphysical divide.<sup>19</sup> This divide remains clear even when there are topographical resemblances. For example, in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Chevalier de la Charrette*, Lancelot enters the land of Gorre by crossing, on his bare hands and feet, a bridge made out of a huge sword. The crossing recalls the nail-

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid 320-326.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 2.

<sup>18</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines “other world” primarily as “A world inhabited by spirits, esp. of the dead; ‘the next world’, ‘the world to come’; heaven and hell. Hence, more generally: the world of the supernatural” (sense 1). In all quotations for this definition, the “other world” designates the afterlife. The secondary meaning, “a different, strange, or unfamiliar world; esp. an imaginary or fantastic world,” is first attested as late as 1804 (sense 2). (“Other world,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., September 2004; online version June 2011. <http://www.oed.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/view/Entry/133248>)

<sup>19</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 25-34.

studded bridges in some visions of the Christian afterlife, but this does not mean that the land of Gorre is Purgatory or Hell. Jeff Rider clearly articulates the difference, arguing that

Chrétien did not borrow a motif from traditions concerning the ‘real’ other world in order to say anything about that world, but in order to designate Gorre as an other fictive world, an other world than Logres.”<sup>20</sup>

Rider’s observation sets up a very valuable distinction between the “real” other world and the “other fictive world, an other world than Logres”; between, on one hand, the afterlife, and on the other, a place that is simply very different from the normal reality of the story. This has the effect of adding both nuance and wider literary implications to Patch’s approach, for Rider argues that the topographical motifs which Patch identifies have “given us a more precise idea of the resonances their authors were seeking to create when they incorporated this motif or that element in their fictive other worlds.”<sup>21</sup> But just what are these resonances? Rider’s observation on Chrétien draws a useful distinction, but it is reductive: it infers otherworldliness from Chrétien’s use of a specific topographical motif, but it leaves Chrétien’s choice of that *particular* “otherworldly motif” unexplained. This once again reduces the definition of otherworldliness to a match between a place and a topographical check-list; it mutes literary resonance to mere recognition of landmarks.

Later studies of literary landscapes examine the literary and cultural resonances of otherworldly landscapes in more focused ways: not surveying the whole heterogeneous terrain of marvellous landscapes, but instead treating subsets of these marvellous places as they fit into wider themes and traditions. The portrayal of the afterlife is the most-studied among these sub-traditions of the marvellous. The underworld, as it appears in classical texts and in Christian

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<sup>20</sup>Rider, “The other worlds of romance” 116.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 115.

vision narratives, is mapped out in studies of Charles D. Wright, Daniel Anlezark, and Alison Morgan. Charles D. Wright traces continuities between Old English poetry and the Christian vision tradition up to the tenth century, especially as exemplified in Irish depictions of hell and Doomsday.<sup>22</sup> Daniel Anlezark, by contrast, examines portrayals of the underworld and of its likenesses, namely marvellous and poisoned places, in classical authors from Virgil to Pliny; he too traces the influence of these landscapes in Old English poetry.<sup>23</sup> Alison Morgan's study spans a longer period: she surveys Christian visions of the afterlife, from the sixth-century redactions of the *Visio Sancti Pauli* to the twelfth-century visions of Tundale and Owain, inventorying common landmarks and figures in the afterlife's regions of punishment.<sup>24</sup> Most influential is Jacques LeGoff's seminal study of the emergence of Purgatory amidst the afterlife's regions of punishment.<sup>25</sup> Charting the emergence of an intermediate place of punishment, catering neither to the hopelessly wicked nor the flawlessly good, in theological controversies and visionary texts, LeGoff argues for the rise of Purgatory in the twelfth century as a formative influence on the landscape of the afterlife.

If the regions of punishment in the afterlife have drawn most scholarly attention, the regions of bliss are not without their cartographers. For example, Ananya Jahanara Kabir investigates the interim paradise (a temporary abode for good souls between death and Doomsday) in Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>26</sup> Examining the interaction of theology, ecclesiastical policy, and aesthetics, Kabir draws her evidence from Latin apocrypha, patristic exegesis, visions

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<sup>22</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*; see esp. "The *Visio S. Pauli* and the Insular Vision of Hell," pp. 106-175. See also Healey, *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* pp. 52-4 for the *Visio S. Pauli*'s presence and influence on Anglo-Saxon culture and Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the afterlife.

<sup>23</sup> Anlezark, "Poisoned places: the Avernian tradition in Old English poetry" 103-126.

<sup>24</sup> Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World*; see especially "Topographical motifs of the other world," 11-51.

<sup>25</sup> Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*.

<sup>26</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*.

of the afterlife, liturgy and private monastic prayers, and Old English prose and poetry. She describes the uneasy theological and literary fortunes of the four-fold division of the afterlife (consisting of heaven, hell, a “paradisal” place of rest for the righteous but imperfect, and a purgatorial place of torment for the sinful but not damned). By the thirteenth century, Kabir shows, this scheme was replaced by the three-fold division of the afterlife (heaven, hell, and purgatory) together with an earthly paradise. Suzanne Conklin Akbari analyzes later medieval conceptualizations of Paradise, comparing Islamic with western Christian conceptualizations of Paradise.<sup>27</sup> Akbari observes that medieval Christians, who conceived of Paradise both as the earthly locale of Eden and as the Heavenly Jerusalem, were fascinated, disturbed, and influenced by Islamic conceptions of Paradise, present to the Western imagination “in earthly, fleshly terms, with pleasures experienced in the present moment rather than in the fullness of apocalyptic time.” Akbari traces the influence of the *Kitab al-mi’raj*, the Islamic narrative of the Prophet Muhammad’s ascent into the heavens, on Western otherworldly places: the land of Cockaigne, the various forms of Paradise in the *Book of John Mandeville*, and the depiction of heaven in Dante’s *Paradiso*.

The fearful and marvellous landscapes of the afterlife have their reflections on earth; accordingly, marvellous landscapes are considered in contrast to other loci, namely the natural world or the human world. For example, Jennifer Neville examines the landscape of the monster mere in *Beowulf* in the context of Old English poetry and its depiction of the natural world. Neville argues that the monster mere, far from being unnatural, is in fact hyper-natural, as it epitomizes nature’s adversarial role in Old English poetry: “Grendel is a special case, but the problem he poses exemplifies the threat facing a human society attempting to survive in a hostile

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<sup>27</sup> Akbari, “The Form of Heaven,” in *Idols in the East* 248-279.

environment – and, in Old English poetry, given the essentially antagonistic character of the natural world posited from its creation, the hostility of the environment appears almost inevitable.”<sup>28</sup> Hugh Magennis, by contrast, examines the monster mere in *Beowulf* from the opposite point of view—in the context of the social world’s depiction in Old English poetry. He points out the apocalyptic and classical resonances of the sinister monster mere, arguing that the monster mere “is sinister indeed to the point of seeming to contradict the normal patterns of nature.” Though Magennis firmly classifies the landscape as unnatural, he comes to the same conclusion as Neville: the landscape is an epitome of that which is outside human society, and *Beowulf*, on entering this landscape, “moves as far from the civilized stronghold of human society as it is possible to go.”<sup>29</sup>

The distance between otherworldly places and human normality is analyzed in studies with a wider concern with marvels, miracles, monsters, and the passion of wonder itself. Wonder and the marvellous are the focus of Carolyn Walker Bynum’s *Metamorphosis and Identity*, as well as Daston and Clarke’s *Wonders and the Order of Nature*. Bynum explores medieval wonder discourses with a focus on twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts. Her sources range from Bernard de Clairvaux’s sermons to the werewolf stories of Gerald of Wales and to Dante’s *Inferno*, as she maps out the medieval passion of wonder with its period-specific stimuli, its linguistic markers, and its textual manifestations.<sup>30</sup> Daston and Clarke extend this exploration

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<sup>28</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 72.

<sup>29</sup> Magennis, *Images of Community* 141.

<sup>30</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*; see especially the section “Wonder” (37-76) that encapsulates the main themes of medieval wonder and of her own study.

of wonder and wonders over a wider period: their study ranges from the twelfth century to the nineteenth, tracing not only the textual but also the material and political culture of wonder.<sup>31</sup>

Other historians of the monstrous and marvellous concentrate on individual texts, manuscripts, and genres. Mary B. Campbell surveys the history of early European travel literature, from the pilgrimage of the fourth-century nun Egeria to the Holy Land, to Sir Walter Raleigh's sixteenth-century account of his search for El Dorado. Analyzing the literary landscapes of these travel narratives, Campbell traces the interplay between notions of "Home" and "Other World" as created, nourished, and examined by these narratives.<sup>32</sup> In a more closely focused study that also explores the *mirabilia*-genre, Andy Orchard, focusing on the marvels and monsters of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, explores the fascination of Anglo-Saxon culture with prodigies. Orchard traces the closely interwoven classical and Christian traditions that underlie Anglo-Saxon marvels, monsters, and otherworldly places. Orchard's study underscores the cultural ambivalence with which Anglo-Saxons approached not only monsters, but also marvels and heroes of the pagan past.<sup>33</sup>

More recent monster scholarship embraces a postcolonial perspective. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen highlights marvellous landscapes in medieval texts, arguing that the otherworldly landscapes function as a kind of postcolonial collective unconscious, manifestations of the colonized culture and its concerns that emerge in disturbing disguises reflective of its

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<sup>31</sup> For chapters that focus on medieval wonder and wonders, see especially "The Topography of Wonder" (21-66), "The Properties of Things" (67-108), and "Wonder among the Philosophers" (109-134) in Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*. For medieval travel narratives, see especially Part 1, "The East," 15-162.

<sup>33</sup> For a focused examination of the most striking fearful landscape in *Beowulf*, namely Grendel's monster-mere, and its parallels in a variety of genres—visions of the afterlife, Old English biblical poetry, and *mirabilia* texts—see especially Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 37-47.

marginality.<sup>34</sup> Fabienne Michelet and Brian McFadden bring this perspective to Old English literature, analyzing the conflicted relationship between centre and margin, between the normal and the marvelous, as an indicator of cultural and political tensions and anxieties within Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>35</sup> Drawing on a longer historical period, Asa Mittman analyzes how geography and monstrosity interact in texts that range from the Old English *Beowulf* to the twelfth-century writings of Gerald of Wales.<sup>36</sup>

Monster scholarship provides unifying theoretical concepts that can be usefully applied to dangerous marvelous landscapes as well. However, this scholarship focuses on the cultural and political agendas that underlie the separation between the normal and the marvelous, rather than on the very nature of that separation. The marvelous is seen as an extended metaphor for historical and political circumstances. By contrast, the present study maps literary landscapes of wonder and danger not according to where they belong (metaphysically, geographically, textually, politically) but according to the response they invoke, by tracing the experience of fearful wonder as a literary artefact.

The twinning of wonder with dread, as historians of wonder have noted, is legitimately native to medieval texts.<sup>37</sup> The *Beowulf*-poet refers to the “niðwundor” (fearful wonder) of the monster mere. The compiler of the eighth-century *Liber monstrorum* insists in emphatic terms on the horror provoked by the monstrous creatures of his treatise, which “maximum formidinis

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<sup>34</sup> Cohen, “Green Children from Another World, or The Archipelago in England,” in Cohen, ed., *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages*, 75-94; “The Solitude of Guthlac,” in Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* 116-153. For a similar approach to the Anglo-Saxon Guthlac texts and to *Beowulf*, see also Siewers, “Landscapes of conversion: Guthlac’s mound and Grendel’s mere as expressions of Anglo-Saxon nation-building” 1-39.

<sup>35</sup> Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature*; McFadden, *Narrative, the Miraculous, and the Marvelous in Anglo-Saxon Prose*.

<sup>36</sup> Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England*.

<sup>37</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 57-69.

terrorem humano generi incutiunt” (“strike the greatest terror of fear in humankind”).<sup>38</sup> A few lines later he refers to these creatures as “mirabilia”; they are things whose nature stirs wonder as well as horror.<sup>39</sup> Later compilers of *mirabilia* reflect this combination. Writing in the late twelfth century, Gerald of Wales portrays Ireland as a place rich both in beneficent marvels and in horrors; especially in his werewolf stories, he insistently equates wonder with reactions of horror.<sup>40</sup> In the fourteenth century, Robert de Bassevorn draws on Gerald and others for fearful *exempla*; he teaches preachers that marvels may be rhetorically deployed to elicit not only wonder but salutary fear and trembling, even downright horror.<sup>41</sup> As Caroline Walker Bynum observes, wonder is sometimes also dread.<sup>42</sup>

The work of historians of wonder such as Caroline Walker Bynum, Lorraine Daston, and Katharine Park is foundational to my study, not only in their definitions of medieval wonder, but also in their inductive, text-centred methodology, as articulated by Daston and Park.

We have adopted one fundamental principle: to attend as precisely as possible to what our sources meant by the passion of wonder and by wonders as objects. We here diverge from most recent students of the pre-modern marvelous, who have tended to define their subject in terms of “what we *now* call marvels,” in the words of Jacques Le Goff. This corresponds to a loose category coextensive with what might in English be called the fictional or fantastic... Accounts of the subject based on this anachronistic definition are evocative for modern readers, but they lack historical coherence and precision.<sup>43</sup>

Accordingly, as these historians of wonder trace the medieval conception of wonder, its literary shapes become sign-posts of its presence and indications of its nature. Early marvel-texts draw on the classical tradition of paradoxography, not just for content, but for structure; they present

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<sup>38</sup> Orchard, *Liber monstrorum* p. 255, Prologue. See also Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 26.

<sup>39</sup> Orchard, *Liber monstrorum* p. 256, Prologue.

<sup>40</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 27; Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 58.

<sup>41</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 57-8.

<sup>42</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 57.

<sup>43</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 15

their marvels in catalogues. Brian McFadden observes that the prose *mirabilia* texts of Anglo-Saxon England—*Wonders of the East*, *Liber monstrorum*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*—are made up of “fragmented micro-narratives” that fail to coalesce into narrative wholes.<sup>44</sup> Mary Campbell makes a wider claim. She notes the “stark anti-rhetoric” of the ninth-century Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*, its bare and context-free presentation of each marvel, and argues that

[w]riters of geography and travel books would continue to employ for centuries this bare rhetorical simplicity in the description of marvels, with eerily charming results.<sup>45</sup>

Daston and Park argue that a more ornate rhetoric of wonder arises in twelfth- and thirteenth-century romances; subsequently, writers of travel accounts and of *mirabilia* adopt it with glee. This rhetoric consists in elaborate descriptions of exotic locales and their luxuries, a fascination with magical natural objects, above all a “constant invocation of wonder and wonders, described in terms of diversity, and its association of those marvels with wealth and power.”<sup>46</sup> To Daston and Park, this new rhetoric suggests that marvels acquire a higher status in the later Middle Ages. They are no longer bare givens or incomprehensible others; they become objects of delight and markers of high social status. A rhetoric of wonder emerges even more emphatically from literary narratives. As this study will show, fearful and marvellous literary landscapes show striking continuities, both of theme and of rhetoric, across a wide variety of literary genres.

Thus, the literary landscapes of Early English narratives invite another perspective to the current approach to wonders as “things to think about and things to think with.”<sup>47</sup> They invite, namely, the view of wonders as literary artifacts, things to be crafted out of words, things to tell stories with. For texts are not just a medium where the wonder reaction can be observed, but a

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<sup>44</sup> McFadden, *Narrative, the Miraculous, and the Marvelous in Anglo-Saxon Prose* 52-67, 243-330.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World* 86.

<sup>46</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 33.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

means of producing it; wonder is not only a cognitive passion, a reaction to inherently marvellous objects, but a literary artifact. Accordingly, this dissertation examines the poetics of fearful wonder—the rhetoric and the thematics of horrifying literary landscapes in Early English narratives. I investigate how Old and Middle English narratives give wonder and dread “a local habitation and a name”: how, in other words, they create these places; how they situate these places metaphysically between the world of living mortals and the world of the afterlife; how they furnish these places with dangerous topography and monstrous inhabitants, as well as with motifs, with tropes, and with thematic concerns that signal their marvellous and fearful nature.

In this study, dangerous and otherworldly places are selected primarily according to the testimony of the texts where they occur: they are literary landscapes described by the texts themselves as marvelous, as inspiring wonder, awe or dread, and as containing the possibility of threat or harm to human beings that visit them. Given the number and variety of Early English texts that feature dangerous and otherworldly places, I have chosen to focus on specific texts rather than to provide general surveys of entire textual traditions. In other words, this study is not a bird’s-eye sweep over the changing landscape of Early English literature; it is, instead, a series of high-resolution snapshots of representative landmarks in their surroundings. Central to the approach of my project is the idea of traditional poetics as described so persuasively by John Foley and Mark Amodio: the idea that within traditional poetry, themes, stock expressions, and narrative scenarios function metonymically, bringing to current contexts not just themselves, but also their longstanding associations and resonances that have collected around them throughout the tradition.<sup>48</sup> Foley and Amodio study this aesthetic effect of traditional elements primarily

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<sup>48</sup> See especially John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art*, for a general discussion of the aesthetics of oral and oral-derived poetry; John Miles Foley, “How Genres Leak,” for a study of specific motifs that migrate across genre boundaries and out of their traditional contexts in Old English poetry; and Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, for a

within oral and oral-derived poetry. However, the present study shows how this effect also unfolds within traditions that are predominantly literate, text-based, or even iconography-based, such as the medieval visions of the afterlife. In the context of wonder, the metonymic effect of traditional elements is two-fold. First, traditionally used, certain elements that are associated with the supernatural can evoke it implicitly rather than explicitly. Second, used counter-traditionally, elements that are displaced from their traditional context and transplanted to a marvellous context not only enrich the marvellous context with their initial, traditional associations, but contribute to the “startle” or “dissonance” component of the wonder effect.

My dissertation investigates the motifs, tropes, and themes associated with marvelous places in selected Early English narratives, with the aim of identifying a poetic tradition of marvelous spaces, an enduring collection of literary devices that locate the experience of wonder within landscapes. I argue that the heart of this poetics of marvellous spaces is displacement. These spaces inspire wonder and dread because they have blurry and unstable boundaries, because they resist knowledge and understanding, because they resist mapping and reliable knowledge, and because they are deliberately distanced—geographically, culturally, emotionally—from the home world of their texts. This dynamic of displacement encourages the migration of iconographic and verbal motifs, tropes, and themes across genre boundaries and theological categories.

The first chapter of the dissertation explores the migration of iconographic and verbal motifs, arguing that the fourteenth-century Middle English lay of *Sir Orfeo* draws on iconographic motifs well-established in visions of the afterlife to portray the Faerie realm as a

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theoretical discussion of orality, literacy, and the aesthetic consequences of their interaction in Old and Middle English poetry, as well as for a diachronic study of certain traditional elements and their changing significance in Old and Middle English texts.

disturbing hybrid of heaven and hell. Faerie's wonder and dread are in part the effect of this displacement across genre boundaries: unmoored from their theological framework, the motifs of the vision tradition endow the Faerie realm with their numinous associations, but at the same time alienate it from human mortality and immortality alike.

The Faerie realm's blurring of genre boundaries exemplifies a larger phenomenon in the portrayal of these marvellous places: the unstable boundaries that characterize places of wonder and danger. The geographical, theological, or epistemological boundaries of these places are permeable or unstable, their geography mysterious, their location persistently secret and difficult to find. I call this phenomenon spatial indeterminacy: the inherent spatial mysteriousness and instability of marvelous places, an abiding trope in Old and Middle English narratives alike. The second chapter of this dissertation investigates how this trope of spatial indeterminacy emerges in Old English poetry through declarations of unknowing, quasi-formulaic assertions that marvellous spaces and their monstrous denizens are mysteries unfathomable by humankind. The declarations of unknowing, like the iconography of *Sir Orfeo's* Faerie, are a trope rooted in religious discourse. In Old English, declarations of unknowing appear chiefly in homilies and religious poetry, with reference to God, heaven and hell, death, and the afterlife. These declarations bring their traditional otherworldly associations into the habitats of monsters, to Grendel's mere in *Beowulf* or the Indian river of the hippopotami in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. In so doing, the declarations emphasize the sheer magnitude of the gap between these places of wonder and dread and the human community.

The third chapter traces the trope of spatial indeterminacy in Middle English narrative. The declarations of unknowing form a continuity between Old and Middle English narratives, persisting in twelfth-century accounts of pygmy kingdoms and faerie encounters, and in

fourteenth-century lays and romances. The trope reaches its height in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the characters themselves take over the poetic technique: to heighten the wonder and dread felt by King Arthur's courtiers, the Green Knight and his household deliberately intensify the cognitive instability that surrounds his nature, his identity, and his true home.

Though marvellous places resist mapping and reliable knowledge, there is one pervasive way in which they are situated: away from the "home" of their texts. Both in Old and in Middle English, this home is not only a this-worldly homeland, but once again the other world: places of wonder and dread are haunted, with varying intensity, by the supernatural homelands of humankind—the first, lost home, Paradise, or the last, yet-to-be-won, eternal homeland, Heaven. The fourth chapter of the dissertation traces this haunting effect in Old English narratives, where the distance of these places of wonder and danger from "home" manifests through a sense of exile. For example, in *Christ and Satan*, the newly fallen rebel angels apprehend their new home in hell chiefly by contrast to their former home in heaven. The otherworldly place of danger they inhabit stands in carefully cultivated antithesis to their lost homeland. In *Andreas*, the land of Mermedonia is a place of danger and dread; it is also a place of exile, not only to the apostles who cross great distances, geographic and cultural, to reach it, but even to the Mermedonians themselves, whose wickedness, while it lasts, deprives them of the comforts and joys of a human home. The chapter explores how the theme of exile adds emotional weight to the cultural, geographical, and theological distance between home world and the otherworldly places.

In Old English poetry, places of wonder and danger are places of exile. By contrast, the Middle English poetic corpus is formally and thematically far more heterogeneous. Middle English poetry is not as haunted by the theme of exile as Old English poetry. Accordingly, the dangerous otherworldly landscapes of Middle English narrative are often not landscapes of exile;

their otherness receives emotional weight in a variety of ways. Since a full exploration of the thematics of dangerous otherworldly places in Middle English narrative would be a dissertation all on its own, the concluding chapter of this dissertation is a glance forward and a glance back rather than a full survey. The chapter traces the tropes and themes uncovered by this study in what is perhaps the most influential late medieval text about marvels: *Mandeville's Travels*. The examination of this text and its Middle English parallels reveals both changes and continuities in the poetics of marvelous spaces between the Old English and the Middle English periods. The geography of Mandeville's imagined and constructed marvelous East is haunted with glimpses of the Earthly Paradise, the lost home of humankind. Among these glimpses there emerge, as in the Faerie realm of Sir Orfeo, displaced motifs from the traditional iconography of the afterlife. Yet this Paradise itself, like the marvelous spaces surveyed in Old and Middle English, is defined by spatial indeterminacy; it is determinedly unreachable and shrouded in mystery, even as its fluid boundaries both separate and connect it to the human world. Finally, just as in Old English poetry, the distance between the world and the Earthly Paradise is that of exile; the false images of Paradise that surface in Mandeville's narrative serve only to underscore this exilic distance. In this way the tropes identified in this study—displaced iconography, spatial indeterminacy, the theme of exile—surface in this latest and perhaps most wide-spread and influential among the literary landscapes of wonder and danger touched upon in this study.

This handful of tropes is not a map of the marvelous, not a coherent and unified picture of its heterogeneous territory. On the contrary, the central argument of this study is that the most rhetorically wrought of marvelous spaces elude mapping by the very art that creates them. Such marvelous spaces are neither utopias nor dystopias; they are, if the coinage might be permitted, atopias: places known by displaced signposts, lands defined by the loss of homeland, spaces

where the properties of space break down. What this study provides, then, is not akin to a map but to another medieval traveller's aid: the itinerary, an enumeration of textual clues, signposts, and landmarks so that travelers in search of marvels might find them.

## Chapter 1: The Prisoners of Faerie and the Inmates of Hell

In the Middle English lay that has come to bear his name, Sir Orfeo, harper and self-exiled king, goes to the Faerie kingdom in search for his wife.<sup>49</sup> There he sees a glorious royal castle, made with great artistry out of gold and precious stones. But amidst this splendour he encounters a grisly sight:

Pan he gan bihold about al,  
& seiȝe liggeand wiȝin þe wal  
Of folk þat were þider y-brouȝt  
& þouȝt dede, & nare nouȝt. 390  
Sum stode wiȝouten hade,  
& sum non armes nade,  
& sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,  
& sum lay wode, y-bounde, 395  
& sum armed on hors sete,  
& sum astrangled as þai ete;  
& sum were in water adreynt,  
& sum wiȝ fire al forschreynt.  
Wives þer lay on childe bedde,  
Sum ded & sum awedde, 400  
& wonder fele þer lay bisides:  
Riȝt as þai slepe her undertides,  
Eche was þus in þis world y-nome,  
Wiȝ fairi þider y-come.  
Þer he seiȝe his owen wiif, 405  
Dame Heurodis, his lef liif,  
Slepe vnder an ympe-tre:  
Bi her cloþes he knewe þat it was he.  
& when he hadde bihold þis meruails alle  
He went in-to þe kinges halle (ll. 387-410).<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> A condensed version of this chapter was originally published as “The Prisoners of Faerie and the Inmates of Hell: Anaphoric Catalogues in *Sir Orfeo* and in *Visions of the Afterlife*,” *La formule dans la littérature et la civilisation de l'Angleterre médiévale*, ed. Stévanovitch et al., Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 2011, 155-172.

<sup>50</sup> I cite Bliss's edition of *Sir Orfeo* (1954; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1966) throughout. All subsequent line references appear parenthetically in the text.

The people abstracted from this world by magic are the “taken,” the human captives of the Faerie kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Their presence in Faerie is not without parallel; several medieval accounts of the faeries, cited as analogues and parallels to *Sir Orfeo*, recount the misadventures of mortals in the Faerie kingdom. Writing in the late twelfth century, Gerald of Wales tells the story of a Welsh boy who finds his way through a hollow river bank and a subterranean passage to the land of the pygmies, a land of great beauty, where there is neither sun nor moon nor stars, where the inhabitants are honourable beyond human nature, and where fabulous wealth abounds. The boy stays there happily for some time, but he is banished back into the upper regions for attempting to steal a golden cup.<sup>52</sup> Walter Map, a contemporary and friend of Gerald’s,<sup>53</sup> also tells several stories about mortals in the realms of supernatural creatures. The first is about a widower who sees his dead wife dancing in a vast solitude, in the company of fairy women (*fates*). He seizes her from the dance and brings her back home. They live out their lives happily together, and their numerous descendants are known afterwards as the “filii mortuae” (children of the dead woman).<sup>54</sup> Map’s other story is less reassuring. A pygmy-sized king with goat feet invites himself to the wedding of King Herla, a king of the ancient Britons. The pygmy king and his retinue are magnificent caterers: they wear shining clothes and jewels, and they serve the food in vessels of gold and precious stones. After a year, the pygmy summons King Herla to return the favour at the pygmy king’s own wedding. He leads King Herla and his retinue through a cave in a cliff to a magnificent palace, illuminated neither by the sun nor the moon, but by a great many lamps. After the wedding, the pygmy king warns Herla and his retinue not to get off their horses

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<sup>51</sup> Allen, “Orpheus and Orfeo: The Dead and the Taken,” 102-11.

<sup>52</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae* I.viii, 75-8 (transl. Lewis Thorpe, *A Journey through Wales* 133-5).

<sup>53</sup> James, ed., *De Nugis Curialium* xv.

<sup>54</sup> James, ed., *De Nugis Curialium: Courtiers’ Trifles*, dist. iv, cap. 8, 344-5. Roger Sherman Loomis (“Sir Orfeo and Walter Map’s *De Nugis*,” 28–30) and Constance Davies (“Notes on the Sources of ‘Sir Orfeo,’” 354–57) first pointed out this story as an analogue to *Sir Orfeo*.

until a little dog he has given them should jump down. When King Herla returns to the sunlit world of his own kingdom, he learns that two hundred years have passed since he left. Amazed, some of his companions leap off their horses and crumble into dust. Remembering the pygmy king's warning, King Herla and his company ride on, eternal wanderers, until the little dog will one day alight.<sup>55</sup> These stories share with *Sir Orfeo* the interaction between human beings and supernatural others; they share "other worlds" of magnificent wealth and splendour, which are nevertheless radically separate from ordinary reality—separate from human lands and customs, from the sun and stars of humankind, sometimes even from human time and mortality.<sup>56</sup> What appears in neither of these stories, not even the unsettling tale of King Herla, is the grisly gallery of human prisoners encountered by Sir Orfeo just past the Faerie King's gate.

The human inmates of Faerie appear in all three manuscript versions of *Sir Orfeo*. The full anaphoric catalogue, cited above, appears only in the famous Auchinleck MS. (National Library of Scotland Advocates' MS 19.2.1), produced in London in the 1330s.<sup>57</sup> This is the earliest of the three versions; Bliss argues it "is not far removed from the original and represents it with reasonable accuracy."<sup>58</sup> The next manuscript, British Library MS. Harley 3810, dating back to the beginning of the fifteenth century, mentions the human inhabitants of Faerie far more laconically:

Orpheo loked about ouer-all;  
 He sawe folk sit vnder þe wal,  
 Sum þat wer þyder y-brouȝt  
 --Al dede were þey nouȝt (ll. 371-4).

<sup>55</sup>James, ed., *De Nugis Curialium*, dist. i., cap. xi, 26–31, repeated 370–373.

<sup>56</sup>For a detailed discussion of otherworldly places in medieval English narratives and how these places differ from the human world in the passage or the nature of time, see Roseanna Cross, "'Heterochronia' in Thomas of Erceldoune, Guingamor, 'The Tale of King Herla', and The Story of Meriadoc, King of Cambria" 163–175.

<sup>57</sup> Bliss, *Sir Orfeo* ix-x.

<sup>58</sup> Bliss, *Sir Orfeo* xv.

This version simply mentions the presence of human beings brought to the Faerie kingdom *although they are not dead*. The concessional clause makes no sense in the absence of their injuries, seeing as the only human visitors to Faerie before this are Orfeo and his queen, both of them clearly alive, if not entirely well.

This inconsistency is not present in the last of the three versions of *Orfeo*, which appears in Bodleian Library MS. Ashmole 61, compiled in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Here, the description of the human denizens of Faerie is far more detailed:

Than lokyd he a-boute þe walle	
And saw it stond ouer-alle,	
Wyth men þat wer thyder brouȝt,	380
And semyd dede, & wer nouȝt.	
Som þer stod wyth-outyn hede,	
And some armys non hade,	
And som, þer bodys had wounde,	
And som onne hors þer armys sette,	385
And som wer strangyld at þer mete,	
And men þat wer nomen wyth þem ete;	
So he saw þem standing þer.	
Than saw he men & women in fere:	
As þei slepyd þer vndryn-tyde	390
He þem saw on euery syde (ll. 378-391).	

Though the catalogues of the human prisoners in the Auchinleck *Orfeo* and the Ashmole *Orfeo* closely resemble one another, there are nevertheless some differences. In the Ashmole *Orfeo*, several categories of victims from the Auchinleck *Orfeo* are absent, namely the drowned, the burned, the women dead or driven mad in childbirth.<sup>59</sup> However, the mutilated prisoners of Faerie are here, as in the Auchinleck *Orfeo*: from head to saddle, the anaphoric catalogue enumerates them in anatomical order, by their missing or wounded body parts (ll. 382-5),

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<sup>59</sup> Bruce Mitchell, who challenges this passage on aesthetic grounds as an interpolation, finds these female victims of Faerie far more offensive than the headless or otherwise maimed (Mitchell, "The Faery World of Sir Orfeo" 157); in his view, the presence of the latter is less objectionably inconsistent with the view of the Faerie world as a place of aristocratic grace and loveliness.

followed within the same anaphora by the choking victims and their commensals (l. 385-6).

Like the Auchinleck *Orfeo*, the Ashmole version of the poem presents the human inhabitants of Faerie as a gallery of grisly images, contained within a fairly formulaic anaphoric catalogue.

This catalogue of the human prisoners of Faerie is a controversial passage, both in terms of its pertinence to the poem and in terms of its emotional impact on the audience or readership of the poem. Bruce Mitchell calls it “an interpolation by some scribe or minstrel” and “an insensitive artistic blemish,” arguing that without the enumeration of these prisoners “we have a perfectly smooth progression, as in the Harley MS. (which omits them all), and their absence eliminates certain inconsistencies.”<sup>60</sup> However, as Bliss notes in reply to this argument, the relationship of the three manuscripts suggests that these lines, if interpolated, were interpolated very early indeed.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the progression of the narrative in the Harley MS. is not entirely smooth, for if the absence of these lines eliminates some inconsistencies, it introduces others; as I noted earlier, the assurance that the humans in Faerie are not dead seems unnecessary without the description of their injuries.

The emotional impact of the scene is likewise controversial. In his analysis of the Faerie kingdom, Seth Lerer disagrees with Bruce Mitchell’s dismissal, calling the passage “a tour de force of narrative skill” in which “anaphora, variation, and a potentially endless catenulate structure” impose rhetorical bounds on boundless horror.<sup>62</sup> But other critics contend that the horror of the experience is a modern readers’ artifact. Felicity Riddy argues that any sinister quality in the description “is an effect that works against the ostensible drift of the narrator’s

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<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, “The Faery World of *Sir Orfeo*” 157.

<sup>61</sup> Bliss, ed., *Sir Orfeo* lvi-lvii. However, Bliss suggests that “the authenticity of lines 397-400, attested only by A[uchinleck], must be considered very doubtful in view of the probability that lines 49-50 and 481-2 were added by the scribe of A[uchinleck] or one of his immediate predecessors.” (lvii).

<sup>62</sup> Lerer, “Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*” 107.

approbation” of the splendid Faerie court.<sup>63</sup> Anne D’Arcy, too, notes that “the narrator does not register horror on the part of Orfeo ... but rather a sense of detached wonder.”<sup>64</sup> D’Arcy, however, argues that the *Orfeo*-poet does mean the realm of Faerie to disturb the reader, though it does not disturb the hero. Ingeniously, she argues that the captives in the courtyard resemble statues in the round. In patristic writings and popular medieval culture alike, statues in the round have sinister associations: idolatry, demonic possession, potentially sinister uses of imperial power. Accordingly, the captive mortals in *Sir Orfeo* mark out the King of Faerie as a demonic artificer and a tyrannical usurper of human sovereignty.

But there is, as I shall argue in this chapter, another source for the uneasiness this passage inspires: namely, the similarities between the Faerie realm and the Christian afterlife described by the visionary tradition. The visionary tradition is much closer to the Auchinleck *Sir Orfeo* than the sculptural context; it is, literally, centimetres away. Along with *Sir Orfeo* itself, the Auchinleck manuscript contains a version of a very popular vision of the afterlife: a vision of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, in Middle English verse.<sup>65</sup> The Faerie kingdom of *Sir Orfeo* recalls the visionary tradition in disturbingly conflicting ways. On the one hand, as the narrator says, it looks like “the proude court of Paradys”; with its artistry, its palace of crystal and jewels, and its continual light, the Faerie kingdom resembles the Paradise of the Christian tradition.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, the Faerie kingdom also recalls the regions of punishment: its catalogue of captive mortals bears a striking resemblance to the anaphoric catalogues of the tormented dead from

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<sup>63</sup> Riddy, “The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*” 6.

<sup>64</sup> D’Arcy, “The Faerie King’s Kunstkammer: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in *Sir Orfeo*,” 11.

<sup>65</sup> In their edition of *Sir Orfeo*, Laskaya and Salisbury note that the list of Faerie captives resembles the “formulaic listings of people in purgatory and in heaven” in the Auchinleck Middle English narrative of St. Patrick’s Purgatory (Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* 55-6). I owe my idea for this chapter to their footnote.

<sup>66</sup> See also Longworth, “Sir Orfeo, The Minstrel, and the Minstrel’s Art” 9-10; Lerer, “Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*,” 94-102; D’Arcy, “The Faerie King’s Kunstkammer” 12. For further discussion of the Faerie kingdom’s resemblance to Paradise, see Chapter 5 of this study.

descriptions of Hell or Purgatory. Constance Davies first describes the mutilated prisoners of Faerie as a translation of the classical underworld and its tormented dead into the imagery of “the Christian otherworld of punishment.”<sup>67</sup> Davies considers that the inconsistency between the grisly prisoners and the splendours of Faerie “show[s] up the seams in the joining of Celtic and classical tales”;<sup>68</sup> I will argue, on the contrary, that the inconsistency is a deliberate poetic effect, which emphasizes the metaphysical displacement of the faeries’ human prisoners and the alterity of the kingdom of Faerie itself.<sup>69</sup>

The anaphoric catalogue of the tormented dead is a wide-spread *topos* of the vision tradition in the British Isles. It turns up in the Anglo-Saxon visionary tradition as early as the eighth century, in Boniface’s Latin narrative of the vision of the monk of Wenlock. For the following six hundred years, until the fourteenth century—the period of *Sir Orfeo*—the catalogue of the tormented dead appears in the three most important streams of the vision

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<sup>67</sup> Davies, “Classical Threads,” 164-5.

<sup>68</sup> Davies, “Classical Threads,” 164.

<sup>69</sup> Enumerations whose clauses are headed by the indefinite pronoun “some” are not confined to visions of the afterlife. They appear frequently in Old and Middle English poetry and prose. For example, in Old English verse, such anaphoric enumerations often describe two poetic motifs, “the gifts of men” (a list of possible human talents) and “the fortunes of men” (a list of possible human fates, often a collection of violent deaths) (Rissanen, “Sum in Old English Poetry” 204-8). Both of these motifs also surface in Old English homilies. Ælfric, for example, uses “sume... sume” catalogues to enumerate the variety of gifts granted by God to human beings (*Catholic Homilies I*, 22, ll. 179-82), the variety of deaths suffered by the martyrs (*Catholic Homilies I*, 36, All Saints’, ll. 73-77), and the variety of lives led by the confessors (*Catholic Homilies I*, 36, All Saints’, ll. 115-118). Sources and analogues for these catalogues are frequent in the Latin tradition; indeed, some of Ælfric’s own “sume... sume” catalogues draw on similar anaphoric catalogues in Gregory the Great’s sermons or in Carolingian sermons (Cross, “The Old English Poetic Theme of ‘The Gifts of Men’” 66-70), while enumerations of gifts and fortunes in Old English poetry may be modelled on “the device of the catalogue which was, like many other conventions of Classical poets, also practised by the Carolingian poets” (Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* 154). Alternatively, “some...some” poetic catalogues also feature in Norse sagas and skaldic poetry, where they enumerate “endowments regarded as marks of aristocratic distinction” (Russom, “A Germanic Concept of Nobility in *The Gifts of Men* and *Beowulf*” 2). In Middle English poetry, the “fortunes of men” theme is recalled by “some...some” lists that enumerate causes of human sorrow (ll. 5-8) or a variety of battle deaths (ll. 935-8) in *Kyng Alisaunder*, another Auchinleck romance (Smithers, ed., *Kyng Alisaunder*). Likewise, a “some...some” anaphorical catalogue enumerates possible subjects of Breton lays in the editorial reconstruction of the prologue to the Auchinleck *Sir Orfeo*. However, the resemblance between the catalogue of human prisoners in Faerie in *Sir Orfeo* and the catalogues of tormented sinners in the vision tradition goes considerably beyond this common anaphoric organization; both in *Sir Orfeo* and in the visions, the anaphoric catalogues encompass neither gifts nor fortunes, but a series of grisly images of captivity, torment, and mutilation.

tradition in Old and Middle English, namely the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, the vision of Tundale, and the legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory. The transmission and development of this motif reveal not only its importance, but its traditional emotional tenor: between the eighth and the fourteenth century, as it is transmitted from one stream of the vision tradition to the next, and as it is translated from the Latin to the vernacular, the formulaic catalogue grows more and more elaborate: the lists of tormented sinners increase and multiply, and their torments become more varied and more grotesque. But while the scene itself, and the anaphoric catalogue that describes it, are considerably heightened and expanded, the narratorial commentary on the scene and the visionary's reaction to it remain either spare or nonexistent, suggesting that the horror of the scene resides in the gruesome sensory details more than in narratorial cues or in the reactions of an intradiegetic audience. These structural characteristics link the catalogue of the human prisoners of Faerie with the anaphoric catalogues of the vision tradition, and with the wonder, dread, and pity that these catalogues traditionally inspire. As a result, the catalogue of the human prisoners of Faerie disturbs, not only because the prisoners are frozen into gruesome states, but because, amidst the paradisaical splendour of Faerie, the catalogue provides—unmoored from its traditional theological significance—a vivid, unreasonable, unmotivated hint of the infernal regions.

The vector of transmission for these anaphoric catalogues of the tormented dead in the Western vision tradition is the *Visio Sancti Pauli* (hereafter *VSP*), the strongest apocryphal influence on the medieval conception of the afterlife.<sup>70</sup> Written in Greek in the third century, the

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<sup>70</sup> Noting the variety of vernacular languages and the wide span of time in which the *Visio Sancti Pauli* appears in Europe, Silverstein describes the vision as “a complete Baedeker to the other-world” (*Visio S. Pauli* 4-5). Peter Dinzelbacher traces its spread in the medieval vernacular, surveying versions of the *Visio* in Old English, Middle High German, Old Norse, Anglo-Norman and Old French, Middle English, Provençal, Spanish, Catalan, and Dutch (“Die Verbreitung der apokryphen ‘Visio Pauli’ im mittelalterlichen Europa,” 80-83).

*VSP* circulated in the medieval West in Long Latin versions, in shorter Latin Redactions, and in translations into most Western European languages.<sup>71</sup> The anaphoric catalogues of the tormented dead exemplify one of the important motifs that the *VSP* contributed to homiletic literature: “the wide-spread theory of the appropriateness of punishment to sin, and of the torment of like sinners with like.”<sup>72</sup> The first of these catalogues appears in the earliest Latin texts of the *VSP*.<sup>73</sup> It describes sinners immersed in an infernal river to various degrees—some to their knees, others to their bellybutton, others to their lips, others to their eyebrows—that depend upon the nature of the sinners’ transgression.<sup>74</sup> The second of these anaphoric catalogues is a later interpolation, first appearing in the shorter Latin Redactions and passing from there into the vernacular. It describes sinners hanging from fiery trees at the gates of Hell, suspended from a variety of body parts: some by their hair, others by their feet, others by their hands, others by their tongues.<sup>75</sup> Both anaphoric catalogues appear in Redaction IV, the most popular and influential form of the *VSP*, both in general<sup>76</sup> and especially in England.<sup>77</sup> The suspended sinners appear near the gate of hell:

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<sup>71</sup> Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* 3-5, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* 12. See also Healey, *The Vision of St. Paul in Old English* 51-54.

<sup>73</sup> Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* 12, 28.

<sup>74</sup> Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* 12.

<sup>75</sup> Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli* 69-71.

<sup>76</sup> As Silverstein notes, not only is Redaction IV the version appearing in by far the most manuscript copies, but “it is also the version which was most frequently translated into the vernaculars and through which the *Visio S. Pauli* chiefly left its mark on the general body of vision literature of the later Middle Ages.” (52)

<sup>77</sup> The date of this Redaction is controversial. Silverstein dates it between the tenth and twelfth centuries (*Visio Sancti Pauli* 12, 97-8); but see also Wright’s argument that a predecessor of Redaction IV “circulated in England in some form in the tenth century” (*The Irish Tradition* 107). In her examination of the eighth-century vision of the Monk of Wenlock, discussed below, Antonette diPaolo Healey concludes that “the dating of Redaction 4 should be left open” (*The Old English Vision of St. Paul* 53).

Vidit vero Paulus ante portas inferni arbores igneas et peccatores cruciatos et suspensos in eis. Alii pendebat pedibus, alii manibus, alii capillis, alii auribus, alii linguis, alii brachiis (p. 75, ll. 6-9).<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, Paul saw before the gates of hell fiery trees and sinners tormented and hanged in them. Some hung by their feet, some by their hands, some by their hair, some by their ears, some by their tongues, some by their arms.

The immersed sinners appear in an infernal, beast-filled river:

Postea vidit flumen orribile, in quo multe bestie dyabolice erant quasi pisces in medio maris, que animas peccatrices devorant sine ulla misericordia quasi lupi devorant obes ... Ibi vidit Paulus multas animas dimersas, alii usque ad genna, alii usque ad umbilicum, alii usque ad labia, alii usque ad supercilia, et perhenniter cruciantur (p. 76, ll. 5-8, 16-19).<sup>79</sup>

After that he sees a horrible river, in which there were many diabolical beasts like fish in the middle of the sea, which devour sinful souls without any mercy, as wolves devour sheep. There Paul sees many souls immersed, some up to their knees, others to their belly-button, others up to the lips, others up to their eyebrows, and they are perpetually tormented.

In both catalogues, the formula consists of a specific theme and imagery contained within a repetitive verbal structure. The lists of anatomical landmarks vary in order and in contents,<sup>80</sup> but the overall verbal structure and the general idea of its imagery remain the same: the “alii...alii” anaphora maps gradations and varieties of suffering onto the bodily forms of imprisoned souls. From Redaction IV of the *Visio S. Pauli*, the anaphoric catalogues spread to other accounts of the afterlife. Tracking the second catalogue, that of the immersed, Dinzelbacher notes that it appears in visions written in Latin between the eighth century and the thirteenth century: the vision of the Monk of Wenlock (early eighth century); the vision of Alberich of Settefrati (early twelfth century); the visions of Ailsi and his sons (early twelfth century); the vision of St. Patrick’s

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<sup>78</sup> Brandes, “Über die Quellen der mittenglischen Versionen der Paulus-Vision” 75.

<sup>79</sup> Brandes, “Über die Quellen der mittenglischen Versionen der Paulus-Vision” 76.

<sup>80</sup> Silverstein, *Visio S. Pauli* 113, note 43 (variations of the suspended sinners) and note 49 (variations of the immersed sinners).

Purgatory (early twelfth century); and the Vision of Thurkill (early thirteenth century).<sup>81</sup> In all these visions, the catalogue of the immersed appears in anaphoric form: each degree of immersion named by a clause that begins with a demonstrative pronoun (“alii” or “quaedam”). However the lists of body parts vary, the anaphoric structure itself remains, framing sinners sunk to various degrees in infernal waters.

The anaphoric catalogues survive in English versions and echoes of the *VSP* from the eighth to the fourteenth century. The earliest of these occurrences is a text that arguably draws on the *VSP*’s motifs:<sup>82</sup> the vision of the monk of Wenlock. The vision occurred in 715 or 716 AD, and Boniface (then still named Wynfrith) describes it in a Latin letter written to his correspondent Eadburga (or Eadburg) between 717 and 718.<sup>83</sup> Boniface’s Latin narrative was translated into Old English sometime between the late tenth and eleventh century.<sup>84</sup> The Latin narrative presents an anaphoric catalogue of immersed sinners in a setting of wonder and horror:

Nec non et igneum piceumque flumen, bulliens et ardens, mirae formidinis et teterrimae visionis cernebat. Super quod lignum pontis vice positum erat. Ad quod sanctae gloriosaeque animae ab illo secedentes conventu properabant, desiderio alterius ripae transire cupientes. Et quaedam non titubantes constanter transiebant. Quaedam vero labefactae de ligno cadebant in Tartareum flumen; et aliae tinguebantur pene, quasi toto corpore mersae; aliae autem ex parte quadam, veluti quedam usque ad genua, quaedam usque ad medium, quaedam vero usque ad ascellas. Et tamen unaquaeque cadentium multo clarior speciosiorque de flumine in alteram ascendebat ripam, quam prius in piceum bulliens cecidisset flumen. Et unus ex beatis angelis de illis cadentibus animabus dixit: “Hae sunt animae, quae post exitum mortalis vitae, quibusdam levibus vitiis non omnino ad purum abolitis, aliqua pia miserentis Dei castigatione ingebant, ut Deo dignae offerantur.”<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Dinzelbacher, “Die Verbreitung der apokryphen ‘Visio S. Pauli’ im mittelalterlichen Europa” 86-8.

<sup>82</sup> Healey, *The Vision of St. Paul* 51-3.

<sup>83</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature* 243-4. For a discussion of the letter’s transmission and Eadburg’s identity, see Sims-Williams, “A Recension of Boniface’s Letter to Eadburg about the Monk of Wenlock’s Vision” 194-8.

<sup>84</sup> Sisam, “An Old English Translation of a Letter from Wynfrith to Eadburga (A.D. 716 – 7) in Cotton MS. Otho C 1” 199-224.

<sup>85</sup> Sisam, “An Old English Translation of a Letter from Wynfrith to Eadburga (A.D. 716 – 7) in Cotton MS. Otho C 1” 218-19, quoting the text from the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, vol. iii, p. 252-3.

He beheld also a river of fiery pitch, boiling and blazing, wonderful and terrible to behold. Across it a beam was set for a bridge, to which the holy and glorious souls hastened as they left the assembly, eager to cross to the other bank. And some crossed with certain step. But others slipped from the beam and fell into the hellish stream. Of these some were entirely immersed, while others were only partially covered, it might be to the knees, or to the waist, or even to the armpits (*uero usque ad ascellas*). And yet each one of those who fell climbed from the river upon the other bank brighter and more beautiful than [it] was before [it] had fallen into the river of pitch. And one of the blessed angels said of the souls who fell: ‘These are the souls who, after the end of their mortal lives, had a few trivial faults not entirely washed away, and needed bountiful castigation from a merciful God, that they might be worthily offered unto him.’ (Sims-Williams, 262, who quotes the translation by Kylie, *English Correspondence*, pp. 78-89, with silent changes.)

As Antonette diPaolo Healey and Patrick Sims-Williams point out, this slippery bridge recalls descriptions of the afterlife in two influential narratives: the *VSP* and an afterlife vision in Gregory the Great’s *Dialogues*. This vision related by Gregory, dated around 590 AD, describes a bridge of trial over an infernal water, a bridge that virtuous souls were able to traverse to reach Paradise, while sinful souls fell off it into the waters below.<sup>86</sup> As Sims-Williams notes, Gregory’s work was “certainly known to Boniface.”<sup>87</sup> However, the vision related by Gregory the Great did not contain sinners immersed in the infernal river to various degrees; instead, these sinners—enumerated in the above-mentioned anaphoric catalogues—are a characteristic motif of the *VSP*, even though in this vision the list of anatomical landmarks differs from those usually found in the *VSP* and its redactions.<sup>88</sup> It is possible that the vision of the monk of Wenlock draws on both of these traditions, and that the motif of the “some...some” anaphoric catalogue was already well established in the landscape of the afterlife by the early eighth century.

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<sup>86</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi* IV.37 (ed. de Vogüé III, 130-2)

<sup>87</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature* 266.

<sup>88</sup> Healey, *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* 53.

Around the late tenth or early eleventh century, the Latin vision of the monk of Wenlock was translated into Old English.<sup>89</sup> This translation describes the same fiery water with sinners immersed in it to various degrees:

And he þær geseah fyren ea, sio wæs gefylled mid weallende wite, and hio wæs eall inneward byrnende, and hio wæs on wunderlicre fyrhtu; and þær wæs an treow ofer þa ea on brycge onlicnyse. Þonne efstan þa halgan sawla to þære bricge fram þam gemote þe hig æt wæron, and hig gyrndon þæt hig oferforen þa ea. Þonne ferdon hig sume swiðe anrædlice ofer þa bricge. And sume hig wurdon aslidene of þam triowe, þæt hig befeollan in þa tingregan ea: sume hig befiollan in fotes deopnesse; sume mid ealne lichaman; sume oð ða cneowu; sume oð ðone middel; sume oð ða helan: þonne symble wæs þara sawla æghwylc biorhtre þonne hio ær wæs, syððan hio eft coman up of þære picanan ea. Þa cwæð an engel to him bi þam feallendum sawlum: “þis syndon þa sawla þe æfter hinsiðe sumere arfæstre clænsunge bihofiað, and Godes miltsunge, þæt hig syn him wyrðe to bringenne.”<sup>90</sup>

And he saw there a fiery water, which was filled with boiling torment, and it was all burning inside, and it was of a wonderful fearfulness; and there was a tree over the water in the likeness of a bridge. Then the holy souls hurried to that bridge from the gathering that they were in, and they desired that they cross the river. Then some of them went very resolutely over the bridge. And some of them slipped off from that tree, so that they fell into the tormenting river; some of them fell to the depth of a foot; some with the whole body; some up to the knees; some up to the middle; some up to the heels; then every one of the souls was always brighter than it had been before, as soon as they came up from that pitch-filled water. Then an angel said to him concerning the falling souls: “These are the souls that were in need of a more virtuous cleansing, and of God’s mercy, that they should be worthy to be brought to Him.”<sup>91</sup>

The Old English translation preserves both the theological explanation and the emotional tenor of the Latin passage, although the two are slightly at odds with one another. In terms of theological function, the monk of Wenlock’s visionary bridge has a purgatorial, beneficent function, quite unlike the punitive bridges in the *VSP* or in the vision related by Gregory the

<sup>89</sup> Healey, *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* 68.

<sup>90</sup> Sisam, “An Old English Translation of a Letter from Wynfrith to Eadburga (A.D. 716 – 7) in Cotton MS. Otho C 1” 218-19.

<sup>91</sup> Unless I indicate otherwise, translations are my own.

Great. It is presented by both texts as an instrument of God's mercy rather than God's justice. Nevertheless, both in Latin and Old English, the emotional tenor of the scene is one of emphatic wonder and dread: in Latin, the river is "*mirae formidinis et teterrimae visionis*" ("wonderful and terrible to behold"), while in Old English, it is "*on wunderlicre fyrhtu*" ("of a wonderful fearfulness"). However, though the theology that informs the two passages remains the same, the structure of the immersed sinners' catalogue changes in interesting ways. In Old English, as in Latin, there are four gradations of immersion in the fiery water. However, the Latin narrative presents these gradations in a fairly logical arrangement: complete immersion, followed by degrees of partial immersion in ascending anatomical order. In contrast, the Old English narrative presents the gradations more randomly: immersion to the depth of a foot, immersion of the whole body, immersion to the knees, immersion to the middle, immersion to the heels. The logical arrangement of the catalogue falls by the wayside in the process of translation. What survives is the anaphora, which is actually more marked in Old English than in Latin. The Old English clauses listing the sinners who fall off the bridge all begin with the same demonstrative pronoun, "*sume*," rather than alternating between "*aliae*" and "*quaedam*," the two different pronouns of the Latin version. As well, the anatomical landmarks in Old English are enumerated in brief, formulaic clauses, whose verbs are elided, and whose structure consists of the subject, "*sume*," the preposition "*oð*" ("up to"), and the appropriate body part. As a result, the catalogue of the Old English version is considerably more streamlined, the anaphora more pronounced. While logical arrangement and anatomical details may fall by the wayside in the process of translation, the anaphoric catalogue, listing bodily landmarks for various degrees of immersion, appears in its usual context of wonder and horror.

In the vision of the monk of Wenlock, the anaphoric catalogue of the tormented dead appears within a fully developed vision narrative. In contrast, the other occurrence of this catalogue in Old English has a much sparser context. It appears in an eleventh-century Ascension Day homily extant in Cambridge College Corpus Christi MS. 162 along with an extensive collection of vernacular sermons.<sup>92</sup> The homily, characterized by non-canonical and eschatological themes,<sup>93</sup> describes the wonders of Ascension Day as seen by the apostles, including their visions of Jesus rising to heaven on a shining cloud; of a ladder between heaven and earth, with angels climbing up and down it; of Jesus in heaven, praising God the Father; and of the souls of sinners in torment. The homilist concludes that these revelations are meant to teach us to desire the heavenly places and to avoid the hellish ones. The anaphoric catalogue is part of a clarification of the latter:

And uton na forgytan þæt we symle sceolon gewilnian þa heofonlican and uton us warnian wið ða hellican stowa þæt we ne gan on ða. On þam is dæghwamlice ece sargung and unrotnys buton blisse and teara genihtsumnyss buton frofre þær beoð cwylmede dæghwamlice þa synfullan. Sume þær hangiað be þam fotum þæs þe us halige gewritu onwrigen habbað and sume þær hangiað be þam handum and sume þær hangiað be þam sweorum. And sum þær beoð besenced oð ða cneow on þam hatan pice and on ðam fyre and sum þær bið besenced oð ðæne nafelan and sum þær bið besenced oð ðone muð and sume þær hangiað be heora feaxe on þam þuruhhatan fyre.<sup>94</sup> (ll. 149-159)

And we should not forget that we should always desire the heavenly and we should be warned against the hellish places, that we should not go there. There is every day eternal sorrow and sadness without bliss and plenty of tears without comfort; there the sinful are tormented every day. Some hang by the feet, as the Holy Scriptures have revealed to us, and some hang by the hands, and some hang by the face. And some are sunk to the knees in hot pitch and in the fire, and some are sunk to the navel, and some are sunk to the mouth, and some hang by their hair in the very hot fire.

<sup>92</sup> Tristram, *Vier altenglische Predigten* 90-1.

<sup>93</sup> Tristram, *Vier altenglische Predigten* 90-1.

<sup>94</sup> Tristram, *Vier altenglische Predigten* 90-1.

As Tristram points out, the anaphoric catalogue in this passage draws on the anaphoric catalogues of the *VSP*; it has not only the same syntactic structure and collection of anatomical landmarks, but also the same order of punishments, listing first the hanging sinners, then the immersed.<sup>95</sup> Unlike the *VSP*, this homily offers “no motivation for the different degrees of immersion or suspension,” “no narrative expansions,” “[n]o elaborate descriptions meet[ing] the demand for the sensational,” “no allusion to St. Paul as the visionary, no discussion between him and the angel,” and no specification of “the different categories of sinners.”<sup>96</sup> However, not only does the homily set up the image of sinners suffering in hell as a deterrent from sin, but it also aligns this image with the awe-inspiring glimpses of the other world whose wonder the homilist so insistently points out (as, for example, in ll. 124-6). As a result, despite the absence of its original narrative context, and despite the scenic details that anchor this episode in the *VSP* or in the monk of Wenlock’s vision, the anaphoric catalogue retains the same emotional tenor of wonder and fear.

There are considerable differences between the Old English examples of the anaphoric catalogues: setting, scenery, even theological rationale vary strongly from one catalogue to the other. In contrast, the Middle English renditions of the *VSP* present the anaphoric catalogues more faithfully and more frequently. There are six Middle English translations of the *VSP*, two in prose and four in verse, ranging from the twelfth to the mid-fifteenth century. All of these versions draw on Redaction IV of the *VSP*, and all contain at least one instance of the anaphoric catalogue; most contain two instances, the hanging sinners as well as the immersed; a few also

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<sup>95</sup> Tristram, “Stock Descriptions” 109.

<sup>96</sup> Tristram, “Stock Descriptions” 110.

contain a third anaphoric catalogue, enumerating the doleful noises made by sinners in torment.<sup>97</sup> The form of the anaphora remains constant from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century: each clause consists of the demonstrative pronoun (“summe”) followed by the relevant preposition (“bi” for the hanging sinners, “to” for the immersed) and then by a body part. However, there are variations in and around the catalogues. This variation occurs not only in the kind and order of body parts by which sinners hang or up to which they are immersed, but also in the explanations of the torments and in the ways that their emotional impact is established. As in the Latin Redaction IV, the suspended sinners appear with little context, either emotional or theological; the visionary does not usually react to their plight, and the visionary’s guide does not usually explain the rationale for their punishment. The immersed sinners, by contrast (just as in Redaction IV), usually elicit a much stronger response: often, the narrator expresses horror, the visionary weeps, and the guide explains what sins caused the punishment. An example of each of these catalogues will illustrate the contrast.

The anaphoric catalogue of the sinners hanging from burning trees at the gate of hell appears in four of the five visions surveyed; the fifth briefly mentions the burning trees festooned with the souls of negligent church-goers, but does not describe what body parts they hang by. In the four versions that do contain the catalogue, the sinners hang by a random assortment of body parts; with one exception, they are not connected to any specific sinful behaviour, and they are not accompanied by any description of the visionary’s emotional response to the sight. The earliest appearance of this catalogue is in a twelfth-century homily on the sanctity of Sunday (London, Lambeth Palace Library 487).<sup>98</sup> The homily relates St. Paul’s tour of hell because the

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<sup>97</sup> See Table 1, attached, for a comprehensive collection of these catalogues in chronological order.

<sup>98</sup> Easting, *Visions of the Other World* 40; Hall, ed., *Selections from Early Middle English 1130-1250*, volume 1. For Hall’s discussion of the language and date of the text, see volume 2: 407-13.

saint, moved by the horrific torments he sees there, intercedes on behalf of the damned and secures them a Sunday rest from their suffering. St. Paul's first sight of hell consists of the fiery trees full of sinners:

Mihhal eode bi-foren and paul com efter and þa scawede mihhal to sancte paul þa wrecche sunfulle þe þer were wuniende þer-efter he him sceawede he 3e treon eislice beorninde et-foren helle 3ete. And uppon þan treon he him sceawede þe wrecche saulen a-honge. Summe bi þa fet. Summe bi þa honden. Summe bi þe tunge. Summe bi þe e3en. Summe bi þe hefede. Summe bi þer heorte.<sup>99</sup>

Michael went before, and Paul came after, and then Michael showed to St. Paul the wretched sinners who dwelled there. Afterwards, he showed him high trees burning horribly before the gate of hell. And on those trees he showed him the wretched souls hanging. Some by the feet, some by the hands, some by the tongue, some by the eyes, some by the head, some by their heart.

The body parts that the sinners hang by—feet, hands, tongue, eyes, head, heart—are not in anatomical order. Nor are they followed by any explanation from the guide; St. Michael simply passes on to the next torment. In fact, though the organizing principle of the anaphoric catalogues in the visions may be the correspondence of punishment to sin, the sinners hanging from fiery trees appear without explanation in all but one version of the *VSP*, the fifteenth-century poem of John Audelay, which notes that the sinners hang “be þe membirs of here body,/Þat þai han sunnyd with-in herthe leuand” (the members of their body that they had sinned with in life, ll. 15-21). Moreover, as in the other Middle English translations of the *VSP*, the catalogue of the hanging sinners does not have a very substantial emotional context. Brief emotional cues for horror and compassion are embedded within the description: the fiery trees burn “eislice,” horribly; the sinners themselves, twice in so short a passage, are “wrecche

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<sup>99</sup> Richard Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* (Sawles Warde, and *Pe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd: Ureisuns of Ure Louerd and of Ure Lefdi, &C.*) of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries 41.

sunfulle” and “wrecche saulen.” However, there is no description whatsoever of the visionary’s emotional reaction to the sight. He simply follows Michael to the next hellish attraction.

In contrast, the catalogue of the immersed provides far more data for interpretation: the list of bodily landmarks, though different from one version to the next, is always in ascending order, suggesting an ascending gravity of punishment; the visionary’s guide always explains the rationale behind the torment; and the sight is often an occasion of horror and grief to the visionary. The same twelfth-century homily cited just above provides a good example:

Efter þon he him sceawede þe sea of helle and innan þan sea weren .vii. bittere upe. Þe forme wes swnan [snow?]. þat oðer is. Þet þridde fur. þet feorðe blod. Þe fifte neddren. Þe siste smorðer. Þe seofeþe ful stunch. Heo wes wurse to þolien þenne efreni of alle þa oðre pine. Innan þan ilke sea weren un-aneomned deor summe feþer fotet. Summe al bute fet. And heore eʒen weren al swilc swa fur. And heore eþem scean swa deð þe leit a-monge þunre. Þas ilke nefre ne swiken ne dei ne niht to brekene þa erming licome of þa ilca men þe on þisse liue her hare scrift enden nalden. Summe of þan monne sare wepeð. Summe swa deor lude remeð. Summe þer graninde sikeð. Summe þer reowliche gneʒeð his aʒene tunge. Summe þer wepeð. And alle heore teres beð berninde gleden glidende ouer heore aʒene nebbe. And swiðe reowliche ilome ʒeiʒeð and ʒeorne bisecheð þat me ham ibureʒe from þam uuele pinan of þas pinan speked dauid þe halie witeʒe. and þus seið. *Miserere nostri domine quia penas inferni sustinere non possumus*. Lauerd haue merci of us forðon þa pinen of helle we ham ne maʒen iðolien.<sup>100</sup>

After that he showed him the sea of hell; and in that sea were seven bitter waves. The first was snow, the second ice, the third fire, the fourth blood, the fifth adders, the sixth smother (smoke), the seventh foul stink. It was worse to endure than ever any of all the other torments. In that sea were innumerable animals, some feather-footed, others entirely without feet, and their eyes were all like fire, and their breath shone as doth the lightning among thunder. These never cease, night nor day, to break the wretched bodies of those men who in this life here would not complete their shrift. Some of the men sorely weep, others cry aloud. Some there groaningly sigh, others there piteously gnaw their own tongues. Some there weep, and all their tears are burning embers gliding over their own features, and very mournfully at all times they cry and earnestly entreat that some one would

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<sup>100</sup> Morris, ed.. *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* (Sawles Warde, and *Þe Wohunge of Ure Lauerd: Ureisuns of Ure Louerd and of Ure Lefdi, &C.*) of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries 43.

release them from the cruel tortures. Of these torments speaketh David, the holy prophet, and thus saith, *Miserere nostri Domine quia pœnas inferni sustinere non possumus*. Lord have mercy upon us, for we are not able to endure the torments of hell.

Unlike other renditions of the *VSP*, this one does not enumerate the body parts that mark out degrees of immersion; instead, it enumerates the various ways in which sinners enact their suffering. The anaphora imposes a sense of structure and order on the sheer variety of emotional responses and the occasional striking imagery--such as the idea that even the tears of pain are transfigured into another aspect of unnatural torment in the fiery sea of hell. The narrator explains the reason for this site of torment, though not the rationale for its varieties: the lake imprisons those who did not complete their shrift. Though there is no description of the visionary's response, the passage does not lack an emotional context, for the description of the site calls attention to suffering throughout: in the detailed description of the infernal eco-system and its mechanism for inflicting pain; in the list of the souls' lamentations, lamentations that themselves are transformed into fresh torments; in the biblical quotation that underscores the intolerability of infernal torment.

Later Middle English versions of the *VSP*, both in prose and in verse, are even closer to the catalogue of the immersed in Redaction IV. A late prose version, found in a fourteenth-century manuscript (London, British Library, Add. 10036),<sup>101</sup> enumerates the sinners immersed in a "horrible flode," the degrees of their punishment indicated by body parts in ascending anatomical order:

And ferþer more he saw an horrible flode wiþ many deueles þer inne, for to  
turment soules, & þer aponn a brigge, bi þe whiche schulle passe riȝtful soules &  
euel soules, þus to ben pynsched after here trespas; and þer ben duellinge places

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<sup>101</sup> Kölbing, Eugen, ed., "Eine bisher unbekannte ME. Version von Pauli Höllenfahrt" 134-9.

of synful soules. And þer Poul sawe soules ifalle, somme to þe knees, somme to þe nauyl, somme to þe lippes, somme to þe top of þe hede; and þer fore Poul sore gan wepe... (p. 135 ll. 22-8)

The catalogue of sinners is followed by Michael's landmark-by-landmark explanation: those immersed up to the knees are hypocrites; those immersed up to the navel are adulterers and fornicators; those immersed up to the lips are chatterers in church; those immersed to the top of the head are guilty of *Schadenfreude*. The emotional context of the catalogue is one of horror and pity, the former expressed by the narrator in the introduction of the passage, the latter expressed by the visionary, who weeps sorrowfully both before and after the angel's explanation. The Middle English verse renditions of the VSP depict the immersed through the same configuration of anaphoric catalogue, explanation, and emotional context. The horror and pity implicit in the descriptions of suspended sinners become explicit in the descriptions of the immersed.

As these examples indicate, the anaphoric catalogues of the suspended sinners and the immersed sinners are present throughout the vernacular echoes and renditions of the *VSP* in England, from the tenth century to the fifteenth. Their content and context varies: the specific body parts that sinners hang by or that the waters of hell come up to differ from text to text; the rationale behind their punishment, the narrator's expression of horror, or the visionary's tears of compassion may or may not accompany the catalogues. But the verbal formula of the "some...some" anaphora remains, and continues to frame the gruesome images of sinners who hang from trees or soak in infernal waters.

From the tradition of the *Visio S. Pauli*, the anaphoric catalogues spread to other accounts of the afterlife; as noted earlier, they make their way into a vast array of visions written in Latin

between the eighth and the thirteenth century.<sup>102</sup> In England and elsewhere, the most popular visions are those of Tundale and of St. Patrick's Purgatory.<sup>103</sup> First written down in Latin in the twelfth century, these visions are redacted, condensed, included in compilations of saints' lives, encyclopedias, and histories, put into verse, and translated into the vernacular languages of all Europe.<sup>104</sup> Both of these traditions present a very different geography of the afterlife from that of the *Visio S. Pauli*, but by the time they are translated into English, both will have picked up the anaphoric catalogues of the tormented dead.

The legend of St. Patrick's Purgatory is connected to "the most renowned and continually frequented pilgrimage site in Ireland," a sacred site found in Lough Derg, Co. Donegal.<sup>105</sup> This place was believed from the late twelfth century on to allow the living access to the other world.<sup>106</sup> One of the earliest and most influential narratives connected to the site of St. Patrick's Purgatory is the late-twelfth-century *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*, written down in Latin by the Cistercian monk H. of Sawtry, Huntingdonshire, sometime between 1180 and 1184.<sup>107</sup> The *Tractatus* recounts the journey of Owain, a sinful knight, who passes through the pains of Purgatory, traverses a bridge over hell, and reaches at last the Earthly Paradise. Overall, the punitive landscape of the afterlife is very different from that of the *Visio S. Pauli* (most obviously, it is mostly the landscape of Purgatory rather than hell); but the anaphoric catalogues persist, and are even expanded, even though they are associated with other topographical

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<sup>102</sup> As noted earlier, see Dinzelbacher 86-8 for a survey of these visions.

<sup>103</sup> Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* 43.

<sup>104</sup> Easting, *Visions of the Other World* 43-4 and 70-1.

<sup>105</sup> Easting, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* xvii.

<sup>106</sup> For the history of the site as a place of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages, see Haren and Pontfarcy, eds., *The Medieval Pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Purgatory*.

<sup>107</sup> Easting, ed., *St. Patrick's Purgatory. Two Versions of Owayne Miles and the Vision of William of Stranton Together with The Long Text of the Tractatus De Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* lxxxiv-v.

elements. For example, the catalogue of suspended sinners is set, not in a fiery grove, but in a fiery field:

Hinc ergo militem trahentes, peruenerunt in quartum campum multis ignibus plenum, in quo omnia genera inuenta sunt tormentorum. Alii suspendebantur cathenis igneis per pedes, alii per manus, alii per capillos, alii per brachia, alii per tibias, capitibus ad ima uersis et sulphureis flammis inmersis. Alii in ignibus pendebant, uncis ferreis in oculis fixis, uel auribus, uel naribus, uel faucibus, uel mamillis, aut genitalibus. Alii fornacibus sulphureis cremabantur; alii quasi super sartagines urebantur. Alii uerubus igneis transfixi ad ignem assabantur, quos demonum alii uertunt, alii diuersis metallis liquescentibus deguttauerunt, quos tamen omnes discurrentes demones flagris ciciderunt. Omnia genera tormentorum que excogitari possunt ibidem uisa sunt. (ll. 429-441, p. 132)<sup>108</sup>

Therefore, taking the knight away from there, they arrived in the fourth field, full of many fires, in which can be found all kinds of torments. Some were hanging in burning chains by their feet, some by the hands, some by their hair, some by their arms, some by their shins, with their heads downwards, immersed in sulphurous flames. Some were hanging in fires, with iron nails fixed in their eyes, or their ears, or their jaws, or their breasts, or their genitals. Some were burned in sulphurous ovens; some burned as if over pans. Some, transfixed by iron spits, fried on the fire, while some demons turned them and others basted them with various molten metals, while demons ran around striking them all with fiery whips. All kinds of torments that can be thought of could be seen in that very place.

There are no fiery trees here; to make up for it, there are fiery chains, fiery nails, sulphurous flames, sulphurous ovens, hot pans, a skewer, and molten metals. As in the *Visio S. Pauli*, the catalogue begins with sinners hanging from various body parts: feet, hands, hair, arms, legs, heads. The brief clauses in this part of the catalogue are structured just like those of the *VSP*'s catalogues, with the demonstrative pronoun ("alii") immediately followed by the preposition and its body part. However, within the frame of the same anaphora, the catalogue grows to include a series of new torments. The anaphora expands accordingly: its clauses become longer, more

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. All citations of the Latin and Middle English narratives about St. Patrick's Purgatory are from Easting's edition.

complex, enlivened by a variety of action verbs and an abundance of hellish kitchen gear. The anaphoric structure accommodates expansion and variation. As is the case for the hanging sinners of the *VSP*, the torments encompassed by this anaphoric catalogue are not connected to any specific sins. Nor are these torments bewailed by the visionary, though he recognizes some of their victims: “Ibi etiam uidit quosdam de suis quondam sociis et eos bene cognouit” (“there, too, he saw some of his erstwhile companions, and knew them well,” ll. 441-2). The recognition is explicit, but Owain’s emotional reaction to the horrific scene is left to the reader to infer.

A little later, the pilgrim Owain encounters the second instance of an anaphoric catalogue: the immersed. He sees a large house where souls are sunk in pits of boiling metal:

Erant autem fosse singule metallis diuersis ac liquoribus feruentibus plene, in quibus utriusque sexus et diuerse etatis mergebatur hominum multitudo non minima. Quorum alii omnino erant inmersi, alii usque ad supercilia, alii ad oculos, alii ad labia, alii ad colla, alii ad pectus, alii ad umbilicum, alii ad femora, alii ad genua, alii ad tibias; alii uno pede tantum tenebantur, alii utraque manu uel una tantummodo. (ll. 476-483, pp. 133-4)

There were indeed pits full of various metals and boiling liquids, in which a great multitude of people of both sexes and various ages were immersed. Of whom some were entirely immersed, some up to the eyebrows, some up to the eyes, some up to the lips, some up to the neck, some up to the chest, some up to the bellybutton, some up to the thighs, some up to the knees, some up to the shins; some had one leg in, others both hands or one.

The *VSP*’s sea of hell is replaced by a kind of infernal spa. As in the previous example, the basic structure of the catalogue remains: the anaphora still measures the degrees of immersion against the sinners’ anatomy. However, its content changes: there are more anatomical landmarks, with the extra gradations of suffering undergone by sinners boiling one hand, one foot, or both. As well, the body parts are no longer listed in ascending anatomical order, but from head to toe, marking out the punishment in decreasing order of severity. As is the case for the immersed sinners of the *VSP*, the emotional context of this catalogue is pity and fear, the former evoked by

the sinners' weeping, the latter by the demons' sardonic threat to Owain: “ ‘Ecce,’ inquit demones, ‘cum istis balneabis.’ ” (‘Look,’ said the demons, ‘you’ll be bathing with these,’ ll. 484-5). Though the visionary’s fear or sorrow are not explicitly named, horror frames the catalogue of the immersed sinners, whether that horror is explicit, as in the narratorial description of the bath house smoking “horribiliter” (horribly, l. 466) or implicit, as in the demons’ threat.

Anaphoric catalogues appear in each of the three Middle English translations of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*: from the South English Legendary’s narrative of St. Patrick (late thirteenth century), to the Auchinleck narrative of Owayne Miles (fourteenth century) and to the Cotton and Yale narratives of Owayne Miles (early fifteenth century).<sup>109</sup> Usually the catalogues list suspended or immersed sinners; sometimes the catalogues are condensed in comparison to the sources of the Middle English texts, but at other times they actually spread to other scenes of bondage and dismemberment. In the *South English Legendary*, for example, anaphoric catalogues list three groups of sinners. Two are the usual suspects (the suspended and the guests of the infernal spa); but there is also a third anaphora, describing a field where sinners are spread-eagled on the ground and attacked by snakes (“al fuyrie naddrene”) and toads (“foule crapoude”):

Some of þe naddrene bi-cluften heom: so faste al a-boute  
 Þat heom þou3te heo scholden to-berste: so streite heo gурden heom with-outе;  
 Some seten ope heom : and heore flesch al-to-gnowe  
 And with kene tieth al fuyrie : wombe and breoste to-drowe,

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<sup>109</sup> The earliest version, dating from the late thirteenth century, is the section about “St. Patrick” in the *South English Legendary* (henceforth SEL). It appears in the earliest surviving manuscript of the *South English Legendary*, namely MS. Laud 108 (dating between 1285 and 1295), and is present in each of the major manuscripts of the *South English Legendary* (D’Evelyn, *The South English Legendary*: Introduction and Glossary, 3). The version that is nearest in time and space to *Sir Orfeo*, dating from the fourteenth century and appearing in the Auchinleck manuscript, is *Owayne Miles* (henceforth OMI). The third and latest version of the legend, dating from the early fifteenth-century, appears in two fifteenth-century manuscripts: British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A ii and Yale University Library, MS 365. For a more detailed discussion of these three versions and their relationship to the *Tractatus* and one another, see Easting, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* xxi-xxxix and Easting, “Middle English Translations.”

Some with hore scharpe tounes : þoru3 þe heorte sore heom smite;  
Some heo gnowen, and some heo stounge : and some with scharpe tieth heom  
bite. (ll. 225-30, p. 232)

This anaphoric catalogue is much livelier than those of the *VSP* or even of the *Tractatus*, much richer in visual and tactile detail. Every clause of the anaphora bristles with vivid action verbs and descriptive instrumental phrases. The picture becomes far more dramatic than those of the suspended or immersed; but the frenetic action that enlivens it belongs entirely to the tangle of infernal reptiles, whose every trait is monstrously adapted to give pain. The passively suffering sinners are torn apart rhetorically as well as physically. They are not even present in the tableau as pronominal subjects, only as a series of tormented body parts (flesch, wombe, breoste, heorte).

The SEL's other two anaphoric catalogues are similarly detailed, rendering every torment of the *Tractatus*. Half a century later than the SEL, the Auchinleck Owayne Miles (henceforth *OMI*) has far briefer catalogues. This text, as Easting argues, is not directly translated from the *Tractatus*, but is instead based on an Anglo-Norman version of the *Tractatus*.<sup>110</sup> Compared to this Anglo-Norman source, the catalogues in *OMI* are sparse. For example, in the Anglo-Norman text, the catalogue of the sinners dangling and roasting in the fourth field of torment takes over thirty lines of body parts and torments, most of them contained within a "loose, baggy monster" of an anaphora (ll. 751-85).<sup>111</sup> By contrast, in the Auchinleck *Owayne Miles* (*OMI*), this enormous catalogue of sinners is condensed to eighteen lines:

Sum bi þe fet wer honging,  
Wiþ iren hokes al brening,  
And sum bi þe swere,

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<sup>110</sup> Easting argues that *OMI* "is not a direct translation from T[*ractatus*], but is based on one of the five extant, mutually independent, Anglo-Norman versions" ("Middle English Translations" 161). See also Easting, *St. Patrick's Purgatory*, xlv-xlvi for a very detailed analysis of these textual relationships.

<sup>111</sup> Zanden, *Étude sur le Purgatoire de saint Patrice accompagnée du texte latin d'Utrecht et du texte anglo-normand de Cambridge* ll. 751-85.

And sum bi wombe and sum bi rigge,  
Al oþerwise þan y can sigge,  
In diuers manere.

And sum in forneise wern ydon,  
Wiþ molten ledde and quic brunston  
Boiland aboue þe fer,  
And sum bi þe tong hing,  
"Allas!" was ever her brocking,  
And no noþer preiere.

And sum on grediris layen þere,  
Al glowand oþains þe fer [...] (stanzas 77-9).

This catalogue is followed by an explanation of the sins being punished: thieves are suspended by their feet; backbiters, swearers of blasphemous oaths, and false witnesses are suspended by the tongue (stanzas 80-82). This rendition of the passage reflects the general strategy of the author of *OMI*, which is to condense the source material while at the same time offering “didactic clarity and moral exhortation, visual specificity and dramatic liveliness.”<sup>112</sup> One particularly dramatic and lively moment is significant for the comparison with *Sir Orfeo*. As Owain watches the sinners roasting on gridirons, he recognizes some of them.

And sum on grediris layen þere,  
Al glowand ogains þe fer,  
Þat Owain wele yknewe,  
Þat whilom were of his queyntaunce,  
Þat suffred þer her penaunce:  
Po chaunged al his hewe! (stanza 79)

Owain’s reaction is both explicit and vivid: in a grim reflection of the victims “glowing against the fire,” he himself changes colour, as soon as he recognizes some of the sinners as his former acquaintances. Though *OMI* abridges the ubiquitous catalogue, it does not reduce the customary horror of the scene, but instead gives it an alternative expression.

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<sup>112</sup> Easting, “Middle English Translations of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*” 165.

Owain's change of hue is a unique moment in the English tradition of St. Patrick's Purgatory. While Owain recognizes the tormented sinners in other texts, his reaction is never described—neither in the *Tractatus*, nor in the Anglo-Norman text.<sup>113</sup> Other Middle English versions of the legend mention the moment of recognition, but they neither comment on it nor expand on the visionary's reaction. In the *South English Legendary* (*SEL*) narrative, Owain recognizes some of the tormented sinners in the fiery field; however, the narrative does not dwell on the moment of recognition, nor does it describe its emotional impact on the visionary (l. 274). Quite the opposite: instead of lingering sorrowfully over the gruesome view, in the very next line Owain is snatched up by demons and tossed into the field of torment, and he only escapes by calling on Christ. Something similar happens to the moment of recognition in the fifteenth-century *Owayne Miles* (*OM2*), when Owain recognizes some of the suspended sinners (Yale ll. 361-71). As in the *SEL*, the moment of recognition receives no elaboration or further commentary; instead, it is parenthetically interjected in the anaphoric catalogue, and on the very next line it is superseded by another tormented body part. Owain's feelings about the torment in Purgatory become explicit only once the demons make him partake of it: he becomes "so sore aferde" that he almost forgets God (ll. 387). Horror becomes manifest not when he is watching his former acquaintances suffer, but when he is forced to join their ranks. It is interesting to set these renditions of the moment of recognition next to Sir Orfeo's sight of his wife among the Faerie King's prisoners:

Per he seiȝe his owen wiif,  
 Dame Heurodis, his lef lif,  
 Slepe vnder an ympe-tre:  
 Bi her cloþes he knewe þat it was he.  
 & when he hadde bihold þis meruails alle

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<sup>113</sup> Easting, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* 177.

He went in-to þe kinges halle (ll. 405-10).

D'Arcy, who argues that the horror of the episode is a modern readers' projection onto the text, cites this moment in support of her argument: "the narrator does not register horror on the part of Orfeo, even after he sees 'his owen wiif,/Dame Heurodis, his lef liif ' (ll. 405-6), but rather a sense of strangely detached wonder," a detachment in strong contrast with his earlier reaction to the sight of his wife among the fairies.<sup>114</sup> But in the context of the visionary catalogues, Orfeo's lack of reaction need not indicate detachment; after all, in the vision tradition, the omission of the visionary's response to the anaphoric catalogue of sinners is not unusual. Version after version of the *VSP* describes St. Paul's weeping over the immersed, but not over the suspended, and all but one version of Owain's story mention the moment of recognition, but not the knight's reaction to it. Only in some of the anaphoric catalogues is their emotional context made explicit. Owain's explicit and unique reaction, in the Auchinleck narrative, does not suggest that all the other elaborate catalogues of sinners in hell were meant to elicit only coolness and detachment in the audience; on the contrary, Owain's reaction only renders explicit what had been implicit all along, in these growing lists of grisly imagery: that the anaphoric catalogues of suspended and immersed sinners are concatenations of horror upon lurid horror, transmitted from one visionary stream to another, and from one version of a narrative to the next, because they are such powerful and suggestive descriptions of infernal punishment.

Just how strongly associated these catalogues are with scenes of infernal dismemberment, captivity, and torment becomes evident when the catalogues not only persist and expand within the tradition of specific narratives, but insert themselves into traditions where they are not present originally. Though the anaphoric catalogues are so ubiquitous a motif in Early English

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<sup>114</sup> D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's Kunstkammer" 11.

and indeed European vision texts, they do not initially appear in the early Latin texts of the vision of Tundale. Like the narratives of St. Patrick's Purgatory, this vision was originally written down in the mid-twelfth century. The earliest text is the Latin prose *Visio Tnugdali*. It was written in Latin by Marcus, an Irish monk living in Germany, who dedicated it to the abbess Gisela of the convent of St. Paul's in Regensburg (1149).<sup>115</sup> Its visionary is a nobleman and an accomplished sinner; he falls into a deathlike state and receives a vision of the punitive regions of the afterlife and of the regions of the blessed. Tundale sees and endures a great many torments, some resembling those of the *VSP*; indeed, Edward E. Foster describes its composition in a memorable metaphor:

It is, metaphorically, as if *The Vision of Drythelm*, Bede's influential story of a vision in his *Ecclesiastical History* (731)... were exploded and Marcus put it back together again, without the instructions, and with many extra pieces ... from works such as the *Apocalypse of St. Paul*...and from many other [popular] visions.<sup>116</sup>

Despite its debt to the *VSP*, the anaphoric catalogues that describe the suspended and the immersed are absent from the Latin vision of Tundale. They infiltrate one scene, however, by the time the visionary narrative makes its way into Middle English. The twelfth-century Latin *Visio Tnugdali* describes the house of torment for gluttons and fornicators by simply enumerating torture instruments and torments:

Et cum propius accederent, viderunt carnifices cum securibus et cultris et sarmentis et bisacutis cum dolabris et terebris et falcibus acutissimis, cum wangiis et fossoriis et cum ceteris instrumentis, quibus animas excoriare vel decollare vel findere vel truncare poterant... (p. 23, ll. 17-22).

And as they drew closer, they saw executioners with axes [and] knives [and] pruning hooks [and] twibills, with adzes, augers, and very sharp scythes, with

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<sup>115</sup> Easting, *Visions of the Other World* 70.

<sup>116</sup> Foster, *Three Purgatory Poems*.

hoes, spades, and all the other instruments useful to flay, behead, split or  
mutilate [the souls].<sup>117</sup>

This scene does not appear in what we have left of the probable source of the fourteenth-century Middle English poem, namely a fragmentary Anglo-Norman translation of the *Visio Tnugdali*.<sup>118</sup>

However, the scene does appear in the Middle English poem of the Vision of Tundale, which dates back to the late fourteenth century and survives in five fifteenth-century manuscripts.<sup>119</sup>

The Middle English poem renders the torments of gluttons and thieves by arranging the demons' equipment and their division of labour into an anaphoric catalogue:

Summe hade syculus, knyvus, and saws,  
Summe had twybyll, brodax, and nawgeres,  
Cultorus, sythus, kene wytall,  
Spytyll forkus the sowlys to fall.  
Thei wer full lodly on to loke.  
Summe had swerdys and summe hoke,  
Summe gret axes in here hond  
That semyd full scharpe bytond.  
Of that syght had he gret wondur,  
How thei smyton the sowlus insondur.  
Summe stroke of the hed, somme the thyes,  
Summe armus, summe leggus by the kneys,  
Summe the bodyes in gobedys small,  
Yette kevered the sowlys togedur all.  
And ever thei smoton hem to gobbetus ageyn.  
This thought Tundale a full grette peyn. (ll. 729-50)

The punishment here is not immersion or suspension, but a continuous dismemberment. Yet the description recalls the anaphoric catalogues of the other visions, especially in the last section, which introduces clauses with demonstrative pronouns, elides verbs, and enumerates bits of human anatomy. Elsewhere, the bodies of sinners are split up rhetorically, to indicate degrees of suffering corresponding to their crimes; here, within the same framework of the anaphoric

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<sup>117</sup> Picard and de Pontfarcy, ed. and transl., *The Vision of Tnugdali* 126.

<sup>118</sup> Gardiner, Eileen. "A Solution to the Problem of Dating the Vision of Tundale" 86-91.

<sup>119</sup> Easting, *Visions of the Other World* 73.

catalogue, their “splitting up” is gruesomely literal. The anaphoric catalogue comes to organize the severed limbs of the sinners and the activities of their demonic persecutors, just as in other visions it organizes the anatomical landmarks that delimit the sinners’ torments.

The anaphoric catalogues show remarkable persistence in the English vernacular tradition of visions of the afterlife. From their beginnings in the *VSP*, the anaphoric catalogues are theologically charged motif, introducing the correlation between sin and its corresponding punishment in the afterlife.<sup>120</sup> However, many of the anaphoric catalogues are not accompanied by any explanations for the various degrees of punishment. Instead, what persists from scene to scene is not the theological or moral basis of the catalogues, but their emotional context: sometimes made explicit by the narrator, who loads the description with epithets of wonder or fear; sometimes provided by the response of the visionary, who weeps in horror or pity; sometimes revealed by the deterrent thrust of the entire text, which describes the horrors of hell in order to motivate its audience to avoid them. Often, however, the emotional tenor of these scenes is not made explicit; all there is to go by is its grisly imagery, which the narrators dwell upon more and more and more insistently with the passage of time. In translations of the *VSP* or in early homilies that draw on it, the catalogues list sinners in hell, suspended by various body parts from fiery trees, or immersed to the depth of various anatomical landmarks in infernal waters. By the time the catalogues are adopted by twelfth-century Latin narratives of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, they increase and multiply. Anaphoric catalogues branch out to add scenes with ferocious fiery reptiles, suspension from burning chains, piercing with fiery implements, and pits full of molten metal to the scenery of the afterlife. What is more, the catalogues also encompass a wider array of body parts, not only increasing the number of positions in which

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<sup>120</sup> Silverstein, *Visio S. Pauli* 12-14, 69-79; Healey, *The Vision of St. Paul in Old English* 51-54.

sinner's are immersed in pits of molten metal, but also adding (for instance) pierced eyes, nostrils, and genitals to the repertoire of the afterlife. Middle English narratives of St. Patrick's Purgatory, drawing on Latin or Anglo-Norman sources, pick up this lurid imagery and amplify its impact—either through vivid, exuberant renderings of the torments themselves, as in the SEL, or through a rendering of the visionary's emotional response to the sight, as in the Auchinleck narrative. As this development of the anaphoric catalogues in these two visionary traditions demonstrates, these catalogues become an important motif of the vision tradition, so much so that, even as the geography of the other world changes, this formula abides, and abides in similar contexts: that of degrees and varieties of infernal torment mapped out onto human anatomy. I am deliberately using "anatomy" rather than "body," because the body does not appear as a unity in these passages: at best, it is pulled apart verbally, turned into a collection of physical landmarks; at worst, it is pulled apart literally, in a variety of torments not limited by the mortality of the human frame. One "exception" confirms this "rule" of the catalogues' traditional use in the description of anatomically-organized torments. In contrast to most contemporary vision narratives, the best-known twelfth-century Latin narrative of the vision of Tundale contains no anaphoric catalogue at all. However, by the time this narrative is translated into Middle English verse towards the end of the fourteenth century, the "exception" comes to confirm the "rule": the *Tundale*-poet uses just such an anaphoric catalogue to organize the torture instruments and severed body parts of a group of sinners undergoing continual dismemberment. As elsewhere, the anaphoric catalogue turns up in its traditional setting of supernatural mutilation and suffering, of torments beyond the limits of time and of the mortal human body.

The anaphoric catalogues of the tormented dead are one of many motifs common to visions of the afterlife; these motifs include not only topographical features, such as the bridge of trial that the souls of the dead must cross, but also narrative episodes, such as the tug of war between angels and devils over a recently dead person's soul.<sup>121</sup> Indeed, some of these motifs often appear in pictorial renderings of the afterlife throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>122</sup> The ubiquity of these conventional elements does not detract from the "authenticity" of visionary accounts, or the reality of the individual experience that underlies them. Medieval visionaries, as Gurevic argues, drew on these conventional motifs not to falsify their religious experience but to give it shape, conveying the sheer alterity of their experience through "the only language accessible to [them]: that of the traditional images and symbols which gave deep meaning to visions."<sup>123</sup> In this respect the motifs of the vision tradition function like the formulaic elements of oral narrative, which summon to the narratives in which they occur traditional resonances larger than what they simply denote. Far from functioning as mere mechanical building blocks, metrically convenient phrases to fill up half a line or bare incidents to pad out a narrative, the stock expressions, motifs, and scenes that recur so frequently in oral poetry summon their traditional associations, emotional and cognitive, to the narrative moment where they occur. John Miles Foley offers the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* as one example. The hymn uses the traditional phrase "mighty slayer of Argos" to refer to the god Hermes well before the god has done the deed which earns him the attribute. Foley refers to the metonymical dynamics of the oral tradition to explain the appearance of the phrase in such an incongruous narrative context:

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<sup>121</sup> For further discussion of these popular motifs, as well as pictorial representations of these motifs from medieval European frescoes and manuscripts, see Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* 11-50.

<sup>122</sup> Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* 13-50.

<sup>123</sup> Gurevic, "Au Moyen Âge: conscience individuelle et image de l'au-délà" 255-75. See also Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* 11-13; Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* 85.

Indeed, how else can we explain the poet of the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* identifying the messenger-god as the "mighty slayer of Argos" only a few minutes after he's born? Argos-slaying lies in Hermes's future, to be sure, but even such a prodigious and mischievous talent as he is can't (and doesn't) manage the feat as an infant. Once again, the special name—the 'word'—refers to his traditional history, to his fuller identity outside this or any other moment. How does the phrase mean? It means timelessly, nonsituationally, and *traditionally*: not just "Hermes," but "Hermes [in his larger mythic presence]". The modest, concrete part stands for the complex, implied whole.<sup>124</sup>

Drawing on evidence from numerous oral and oral-derived literary corpora, Foley and Amodio discuss how formulaic phrases, themes, and story patterns "function metonymically to summon traditional meanings to given narrative moments."<sup>125</sup>

The motifs of the vision tradition function in similar ways: within the tradition, they accumulate associations—they come to have a certain theological function and a certain emotional freight. These motifs form a common pool of images, fed and drawn upon by a variety of tributaries: the visionaries' initial, oral accounts;<sup>126</sup> the learned, literate, Latin narratives into which redactors of the visions shape the visionary experiences; the versified legends of the *South English Legendary*, widely circulated in manuscript form, and written for oral delivery to a lay audience;<sup>127</sup> the later, vernacular reworkings of the visions into religious romances.<sup>128</sup> Disseminated and drawn upon through such a variety of channels, these motifs provide not just their content, but their connotations, both to those who experience visions and to

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<sup>124</sup> Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* 114.

<sup>125</sup> Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 5.

<sup>126</sup> Many vision narratives include a discussion of the process by which the original visionary's oral account has reached the current redactor. See Carozzi, *Voyage de l'âme* 495-529 (and especially the table on page 521) for an analysis of the relationship between narrators and redactors in twelfth-century visions.

<sup>127</sup> D'Evelyn and Mill, *The South English Legendary* vol 3, pp. 16, 24. On the audience of the legends, see also Sherry L. Reames and Deborah VanderBilt, "Hagiography," *Medieval England: An Encyclopedia*, 335.

<sup>128</sup> Easting, "Middle English Translations of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*." 151-74.

those who shape them into narratives: they are images that can give culturally familiar shapes to an experience that transcends the bounds of the familiar.

Like the visionaries and their redactors, the poet of *Sir Orfeo* is depicting a place radically different from the mundane human world; unlike them, he is not depicting any part of the Christian afterlife, but the kingdom of Faerie. The catalogue of its human prisoners, however, strongly recalls, in its structure and imagery, the visionary catalogues of the tormented dead. As in many of the visions, the narrator does not explain the import or the emotional impact of the scene; however, the description of human captives, especially in the Auchinleck version of *Sir Orfeo*, mostly falls into a “some...some” anaphora very like the catalogues of the vision tradition, an anaphora that details the wide variety of the prisoners’ grisly fates:

Sum stode wiþouten hade,  
& sum non armes nade,  
& sum þurth þe bodi hadde wounde,  
& sum lay wode, y-bounde,  
& sum armed on hors sete,                      395  
& sum astrangled as þai ete;  
& sum were in water adreynt,  
& sum wiþ fire al forschreynt.  
Wives þer lay on childe bedde,  
Sum ded & sum awedde... (ll. 391-400)

The anaphoric catalogue of *Sir Orfeo* shares with the visionary catalogues the preoccupation with mutilation and dismemberment, the elements of human anatomy enumerated only to describe their wounds and torments. True, the captives of Faerie are neither suspended, nor immersed to various degrees; instead, their “poses” reflect a variety of human activities through which they may have met either their deaths or their abduction by the fairies. But the aspect of bondage, of confinement, that is common to the infernal or purgatorial catalogues emerges here through the choice of verbs: every single verb in the passage is either passive

(“were...adreynt”) or static (“stode,” “lay ybounde,” “sete,” “lay”). The captives of Faerie are not affixed to burning hooks or confined in pits of boiling metal: they are trapped in a grim instance of their past. The grisly variety of their predicaments and the shape of the list that contains them recall the anaphoric catalogues of the vision tradition, especially those found in the vernacular renditions of the legends of St. Patrick’s Purgatory. The traditional associations of the anaphoric catalogues—with supernatural horror and suffering, with torments beyond the limits of time and of the mortal human body—form the burden of association that the catalogue of captives carries into *Sir Orfeo*. When the catalogue appears in *Sir Orfeo*, its traditional association is supernatural horror. The narrator describes the hero’s reaction only as “merveyl”: but the horror is immanent in the imagery and the structure of the formula.

This counter-traditional use of a traditional motif is in keeping with the aesthetic of the poem as a whole. As Felicity Riddy notes, the *Orfeo*-poet “conveys feelings—often very powerfully”—without explicitly describing what the characters feel.<sup>129</sup> Orfeo’s exile in the wilderness is an example of this. Its description is a series of formulaic contrasts between his happy, courtly past and the deprivations of the present:

He þat hadde y-werd þe fowe and griis,  
 & on bed þe purper biis  
 — Now on hard heþe he liþ,  
 Wiþ leves and gresse he him wriþ.  
 He þat hadde had castels and tours,                      245  
 River, forest, friþ wiþ flours  
 — Now, þei it comenci to snewe and frese,  
 Þis king mot make his bed in mese.  
 He þat had y-had knightes of priis  
 Bifor him kneland, and levedis                      250  
 — Now seþ he noþing þat him likeþ,  
 Bot wilde wormes bi him strikeþ.  
 He þat had y-had plenté

<sup>129</sup> Riddy, “The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*” 10.

Of mete and drink, of ich deynté  
— Now may he al day digge and wrote      255  
Er he finde his fille of rote (ll. 241-56).

The description of Orfeo's feelings is sensory rather than emotional: he is said to suffer an absence of "ays" (l. 239), as well as "great malais" (l. 240), "missays" (l. 262), and "sore" (l. 263). Along with the details of the natural world that appear in the passage, these words denote bodily discomfort rather than sorrow; as far as explicit description goes, what Orfeo experiences in the wilderness is only physical hardship. Nevertheless, the passage becomes a powerful evocation of grief and loss, in part because of traditional resonances it sets off. As Felicity Riddy notes, the passage uses a set of images not only emblematic of "a whole world of courtly luxury and power," but also associated, in religious lyrics, with the loss of that world through death. The description of Orfeo's loss of courtly pleasures and luxuries metonymically evokes his greater loss—that of his wife—as well as the loss and mutability inherent in human life as a whole.<sup>130</sup> In the same way, the enumeration of mortal captives in the Faerie King's courtyard recalls a rhetorical structure and a set of imagery that have been associated in the visionary tradition with torment that is supernaturally horrible, torment that suspends the natural limitations imposed on suffering by human mortality. This is the association that the "some... some" passage carries into *Sir Orfeo*. Amidst the paradisaal beauty of the Faerie realm, the anaphoric catalogue opens a window into sheer hell.

The dissonance originating from this passage is what makes the Faerie kingdom so otherworldly—so remote, that is, from the human world, the human experience as it appears in the poem. The background of the visionary tradition, invoked so strongly, yet in such a disorienting, expectation-thwarting way, at once crystallizes the sheer alien-ness of the Faerie

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<sup>130</sup> Riddy, "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*" 11-13.

world, suggested throughout the poem, into a single striking image. The Faerie King's sudden, motiveless irruption into Heurodys's life; his cruel threats of violence; his mysterious abduction of Heurodys; the lovely but strangely pointless fairy activities in the woods: all these are focused here into one image of human suffering, grotesquely framed amidst marvelous splendour. In this particular moment, the Faerie world is at once like heaven and like hell. It exists, like them, at a remove from human time. It displays, like them, extremes beyond earthly life—extremes both of beauty and of horror. It suggests, like them, a metaphysical separation from the human world. But it lacks the moral rationale of the divisions of the afterlife; it lacks, too, the focus on human life, on human sin and virtue, that these divisions imply. That Faerie resembles both heaven and hell is the clearest proof it is neither. As a result, the affinities of the Faerie realm with both Paradise and the penal regions turn the Faerie realm into a place of two-fold exile from the human world: a place separate from human mortality and human immortality alike.

This deployment of motifs from the visionary tradition is typical of the *Orfeo*-poet's approach to the story of Orpheus. Jeff Rider describes it as "re-mythification": in response to the predominantly allegorical readings of the poem that flourished between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the *Orfeo*-poet sets out to recuperate the story as myth, as a narrative full of latent meaning that is not reducible to, or explicable by, any systematic philosophical paradigm. To this end, Rider argues, the *Orfeo*-poet retells "an allegorized (and increasingly Christianized) myth as a Breton lay."<sup>131</sup> To this end, too, the *Orfeo*-poet draws on various paradigms and their affective resonances, including the classical story of "unconsolable human loss"; the Christian story of loss and redemption, with which the Orpheus-myth became increasingly aligned in medieval retellings; the Celtic story of a successful Otherworld-journey; the Fulgentian tradition

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<sup>131</sup> Rider, "Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages: Allegorization, Remythification and *Sir Orfeo*" 355.

of the Orpheus-story as an allegory of art; the Boethian tradition of Orpheus's self-exile in the wilderness. As a result, Rider argues, "the various paradigms interfere with one another and effectively eliminate the possibility of a comprehensive allegorization of the poem in any one context."<sup>132</sup>

The *Orfeo*-poet's use of motifs and images conventional to religious genres fits into this strategy. As noted earlier, Felicity Riddy describes how the poet draws on religious lyric motifs. In their native habitat, these motifs and images evoke courtly life to lament its vainglory and its transience, and by extension the vainglory and transience of human life as a whole. However, the *Orfeo*-poet "is drawing on the same conventions of expression as the authors of these lyrics, but with a quite different emphasis and different effects: he shares their feeling for the transience of things but not their contempt of the world." That is, the poet uses the traditional emotional resonances of this imagery and thematics, but not their traditional religious or moral teachings.<sup>133</sup> This is what happens with the catalogue of the Faerie prisoners: the catalogue deploys the traditional emotional associations of the formula in the vision tradition, but deliberately eschews its traditional moral and theological teaching about sin and its commensurate punishment in hell and purgatory. *Sir Orfeo* uses the motifs traditional to religious contexts in counter-traditional ways, in episodes that separate these motifs from their traditional moral and theological rationales while nevertheless exploiting their traditional affective resonance, their customary emotional associations. Unmoored from the theological underpinnings of the vision tradition,

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<sup>132</sup> Rider, "Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages: Allegorization, Remythification and *Sir Orfeo*" 357.

<sup>133</sup> For further discussion of this phenomenon, see John Miles Foley, "How Genres Leak." Foley shows how Old English religious poems appropriate secular poetic phraseology and its traditional resonances in the service of theological mysteries. The *Orfeo*-poet does the opposite, appropriating religious motifs and their traditional resonances in the service of a secular story.

the poem nevertheless draws on that tradition's burden of supernatural fear and wonder, and in so doing acquires the numinous weight of myth.

## Chapter 2: Declarations of Unknowing in Old English

As the previous chapter shows, *Sir Orfeo* draws on verbal formulas and iconographic motifs well-established in visions of the afterlife, portraying the Faerie realm as a disturbing hybrid of heaven and hell. The wonder and dread of Faerie are in part the effect of this migration across genre boundaries and across metaphysical boundaries: displaced from their home in the afterlife, the motifs of the vision tradition endow the Faerie realm with their numinous associations, but at the same time alienate it from the worlds of humankind—the living world and the other world alike. This boundary-crossing, generic and metaphysical, exemplifies a larger phenomenon in the portrayal of marvellous places: in general, the boundaries of such places are unstable, their geography mysterious, their location persistently secret and difficult to find. An early example is Felix's eighth-century Latin *vita* of St. Guthlac of Crowland. The saint's hermitage lies in a swamp full of hostile demons. From its first appearance, the topography of the swamp suggests secrecy and concealment: the waters are dark, tortuous, covered by fog and forests. Only a little later, this suggestion of secrecy is made explicit: Guthlac's hermitage lies in "abditis remotioris [...] partibus" ("in the hidden and more remote parts") of the marsh; it is troubled by "incognita heremi monstra" ("the unknown portents of the desert"); it lies in "invia lustra" (trackless bogs); and it is "ante paucis... nota" (known to a few).<sup>134</sup> These markers of secrecy persist in Old English treatments of St. Guthlac's life that narrate his arrival at the hermitage. Though it does not go into nearly as much specific detail as the Latin *vita*, the Old English poem *Guthlac A* describes hermitages in general as "hamas on heolstrum" (homes in darkness, l. 83), and it repeatedly refers to Guthlac's own

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<sup>134</sup> Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* 88-9.

hermitage as a hidden place: before God reveals it to Guthlac, it is “bimiþen fore monnum” (“hidden from men,” l. 146b-49); later, as the saint inhabits it, it remains a “dygle stow[e]” (“a secret place,” l. 195, 216).<sup>135</sup> The motif reappears in the tenth-century Old English translation of Felix’s *vita*.<sup>136</sup> Though the Old English translator abbreviates Felix’s description and eliminates some of the geographical detail, he or she maintains the insistence on the remoteness and secrecy of Guthlac’s hermitage. The saint’s local guide first describes the potential hermitage as “sum ealand synderlice digle” (“an island especially hidden”), and in the sentence, he associates this secret place with the “menigfealdum brogum and egsum” (“manifold horrors and fears”) of the wilderness.<sup>137</sup> When Guthlac and his guide do reach Crowland, the narrator reaffirms the essential secrecy of the place:

Wæs þæt land [...] swiðe digle, and hit swyðe feawa men wiston buton þam anum þe  
hyt him tæhte; swylc þær næfre nænig man ær eardian ne mihte ær se eadiga wer  
Guðlac to-com for þære eardunga þara awerigendra gasta.<sup>138</sup>

That land was very hidden, and very few men knew of it except for the one who  
showed it to him, so that no man was ever able to inhabit it before the blessed man  
Guthlac came there, because of the dwelling of the accursed spirits.

The secrecy of Guthlac’s hermitage is mentioned in the same breath as its demonic inhabitants, who make the fen so inhospitable to less than heroic human beings. This secrecy separates Crowland from the ordinary human community and marks it out as an otherworldly space, a place of supernatural fearfulness, a habitat fit only for demons or saints.

Recent works examine such boundaries between the ordinary human world and places of wonder or dread as ideological tools used to create national, cultural, or religious identities in

<sup>135</sup> For the relationship between the Latin *vita* and the Old English Guthlac poems, see Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems* 1-12, 19-29 (for *Guthlac A*) and 36-43 (for *Guthlac B*).

<sup>136</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the relationship between the Old English translation and the Latin *vita*, see Downey, *Intertextuality in the Lives of St. Guthlac* 106-45.

<sup>137</sup> Wycliffe, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac, Hermit of Crowland* 20.

<sup>138</sup> Wycliffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac* 22.

Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>139</sup> But these uneasy boundaries are also poetic tools used to make literary landscapes marvellous, uncanny, even fearful. They are a part of an abiding *topos* in the wonder discourse of narratives: the *topos* of spatial indeterminacy, which accompanies marvellous spaces and separates them from the human world. From the demon-ridden swamp of St. Guthlac to the monster mere in *Beowulf*, from Gerald of Wales's subterranean pygmy utopia to the Faerie kingdom of *Sir Orfeo* and the fearful Green Chapel of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, spatial indeterminacy is wide-spread and polymorphous. It appears in the geography of marvellous places, in a topography shaped for concealment, and in the shifting or fluid boundaries that enclose that topography. Spatial indeterminacy appears, too, in the intradiegetic perception of these places: narrators or characters explicitly describe these places as secret and hidden, difficult or impossible to explore; or else these places prove elusive to those who search for them in the course of the narrative. Though spatial indeterminacy is an attribute of otherworldly spaces in such a wide variety of narratives, it is especially striking in three texts that punctuate the chronological range of this study: *Beowulf*, *Sir Orfeo*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These are the texts where this *topos* appears at its most polymorphous. Not only does it shape the geography of otherworldly spaces, and not only does it appear in intradiegetic perceptions of remoteness and secrecy, but it even co-opts motifs and strategies from religious discourses and contexts, using their traditional resonances to amplify the alterity of these spaces that it sets apart even as it so artfully refuses to pin them down.

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<sup>139</sup> A brief list of recent contributions includes Alfred Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building" (2003); Kelley M. Wickham-Crowley, "Living on the *Ecg*: The Mutable Boundaries of Land and Water in Anglo-Saxon Contexts" (2006); Fabienne Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest: Imaginary Geography and Sense of Space in Old English Literature* (2006); Nicholas Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (2007).

In *Beowulf*, mystery extends farther than the habitats of monsters; it is an aspect of the monstrous itself. Throughout the poem, the very term “uncup” (strange, unknown) appears chiefly in association with Grendel and his kin.<sup>140</sup> The very first concrete detail of Grendel’s physique appears only at his last attack on Heorot: as he comes into the hall, his eyes glow with a “leoht unfaeget” (an un-lovely light, ll. 726-7). While he is alive and well, Grendel is a nebulous presence; only after his defeat does the poet reveal such concrete physical details as the tough, scaly skin and the iron-hard nails of his severed arm. As Jennifer Neville observes,

[i]t is not until Beowulf begins the process of subduing him that any concept of his form emerges, and then, in quick succession, his hand, fingers, body, shoulder, sinews and joints appear.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, Grendel is as hard to pin down ontologically as physically: he has been classified,<sup>142</sup> among other things, as a demon,<sup>143</sup> a *draugr* (an Old Norse revenant),<sup>144</sup> a descendant of Cain and the wicked antediluvian giants,<sup>145</sup> or even a human being.<sup>146</sup> The mystery that so insistently surrounds Grendel heightens the monster’s horror.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 110.

<sup>141</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World* 80.

<sup>142</sup> For a more in-depth survey of the taxonomy of Grendel, see Neville, *Representations of the Natural World* 78-80.

<sup>143</sup> The poet connects Grendel with devils and hell on the very line where the monster enters the poem: the inhabitants of Heorot live happily “...” (until one began/to perform crimes, a fiend in hell, ll. 100-1). For discussions of Grendel’s demonic associations, see Malmberg, “Grendel and the Devil” 241-3 and Ball “*Beowulf* 99-101” 163.

<sup>144</sup> See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 152-68, for the parallels between Beowulf’s fight against Grendel and Grettir’s fight against the *draugr* Glámr, as well as for a survey of the scholarship linking Grendel and the Norse revenants, the *draugr*.

<sup>145</sup> Bandy, “Cain, Grendel, and the Giants of Beowulf” 235-49; Melinkoff, “Cain’s Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*: Part I, Noachic Tradition” 143-62; Melinkoff, “Cain’s Monstrous Progeny in *Beowulf*: Part II, Post-Diluvian Survival” 183-97; Williams, *Cain and Beowulf*; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 58-85.

<sup>146</sup> The human aspects of Grendel receive particular attention in Baird, “Grendel the Exile” 375-81. For a discussion of Grendel’s liminal humanity in the context of Old Norse parallels, see Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 152-68.

<sup>147</sup> Alain Renoir describes the dynamics of terror and mystery in *Beowulf*, particularly in the famous scene of Grendel’s approach to Heorot; he memorably calls Grendel “a hair-raising description of death on the march” (“Design for Terror,” 88-106). Michael Lapidge examines the role of mystery in the horrifying effects of Grendel himself (“Grendel and the Psychology of Terror” 373-402).

Like Grendel and his mother themselves, their habitat is mysterious in shape and in nature. The first descriptions of the monster reinforce the link between the monster and his habitat: the poet calls Grendel “*mearcstapa*” and “*sceadugenga*” (“border-stalker,” l. 103, and “shadow-walker,” l. 703), including in his appellation the territory of mist, darkness, and liminal spaces that Grendel inhabits. This domain of monsters is in fierce opposition with the world of humankind, of the radiant hall Heorot.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, the border between the two worlds is shifting and unreliable. Occasionally, topographical marking and ceremonial behaviour appear to delimit one world from the other. Swisher and Cooke identify the “*harne stan*” (l. 887), the hoary stone right by the monster mere, as a formulaic boundary marker between the human world and the realm of monsters. Such a hoar stone marks not only the mere inhabited by Grendel and his monstrous kindred, but also the dragon’s barrow. Outside *Beowulf*, a hoar stone appears in the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, just above the hellish place of punishment, and in *Andreas*, just before the entrance into the city of the cannibalistic, devil-ridden Mermedonians.<sup>149</sup> In *Beowulf*, this separation between the realm of humankind and the realm of monsters is reinforced by ceremonial behaviour: as they pass the “*harne stan*,” the Danish and Geatish warriors blow the war-horn as if announcing their entry onto another’s property, according to Anglo-Saxon law.<sup>150</sup> But the poem shows that the boundary between the realms is not precisely drawn: even before the hoary stone, the warriors cross a wild, frightening landscape

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<sup>148</sup> For a summary of the scholarship that delineates this contrast between the world of monsters and the world of humankind, see Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 76. Michelet, however, disagrees with the prevailing view; instead, she argues: “Because of the numerous parallels, reversals, and correspondences that exist between all the places constitutive of the poem’s geography, the world of *Beowulf* cannot be schematized as a sphere of human glory and order threatened by dark, destructive forces to be kept at bay. On the contrary, the various domains are intimately connected and the only clear distinction established between chaos and order is that made by the characters themselves” (91). This current study dwells, like Michelet’s, on the porous boundary between realms, but does not de-emphasize the essential and powerful contrast between them.

<sup>149</sup> Swisher, “Beyond the hoar stone” 133-6.

<sup>150</sup> Cooke, “Two notes on *Beowulf*” 298-99.

inhabited by monsters.<sup>151</sup> This landscape is very similar to that haunted by Grendel and his relatives; indeed, in the monster's approach to Heorot, the eerie, inhuman landscape seems to encroach upon human space, extending all the way up to the door of the hall;<sup>152</sup> and on several occasions the monsters' footprints outside the hall are a visual reminder that any boundaries that exist between the two worlds are porous and permeable.<sup>153</sup>

Along with this poetic negotiation of boundaries, the *Beowulf*-poet explicitly asserts the mystery of the monsters' domain. Perhaps the most evocative such assertions are the declarations of unknowing: enigmatic cousins of maxims or gnomes, these declarations affirm not communal wisdom but longstanding communal nescience. The first of them concludes Scyld Scefing's funeral. As his people give their dead king into the sea's keeping, the poet reflects on the uncertainty of Scyld's destination:

Men ne cunnon  
 Secgan to soðe,      selerædende,  
 Hæleð under heofenum,      hwa þæm hlæste onfeng. (ll. 47-52)

Men cannot truly say, hall-counsellors, heroes under heaven, who received that cargo.

The second declaration concerns the whereabouts of Grendel:

Men ne cunnon  
 hwyder helrunan      hwyrftum scriþað (ll. 159-164).

Men do not know where those skilled in the mysteries of hell direct their footsteps.

The third and fourth declarations appear in Hrothgar's description of the monster-mere. One disclaims knowledge of the identity of Grendel's father:

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<sup>151</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 1408-1411.

<sup>152</sup> *Beowulf* ll. 702b-716a; see especially Renoir, "Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*" 154-67, for an analysis of the affective dynamics of this celebrated passage.

<sup>153</sup> Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 80-1.

No hie fæder cunnon,  
Hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned  
Dyrnra gasta (ll. 1355-7)

They [land-dwellers] do not know whether any father had ever been conceived for him among the secret spirits.

The last declaration asserts general ignorance of the depths of the monster-mere:

No þæs frod leofað  
Gumena bearna        þæt þone grund wite (ll. 1366-7).

No one lives among the children of men so wise as to know its bottom.

The first two declarations are introduced by a half-line formula, “men ne cunnon,” followed by an object clause that explains the subject of their ignorance. The third is a variation of this formula: it still inhabits half a line; the negative verb is still the same (“no... cunnon”); the subject is still the generality of humankind (the pronoun ‘hie’ refers to the “foldbuende,” the land-dwellers of the previous half-line); however, the monosyllable “men” is replaced by a similarly monosyllabic pronoun, and a direct object (“fæder”) appears between the subject and the verb, gesturing forward towards the subsequent clause, which explains that object. The fourth declaration uses a different verb (“witan”), and generalizes the lack of knowledge through a slightly different formulation: instead of simply asserting that no one knows the subject, as in the other declarations, it denies the existence of any potential knowers among humankind. These declarations suggest the epistemological limits of *Beowulf*’s Danes and their culture: their knowledge about the afterlife is imperfect, their defences against monstrous threats unavailing.<sup>154</sup> But the resonances of these declarations are even wider.

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<sup>154</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 238-40.

In a variety of Old English literary contexts, declarations of unknowing refer to gulfs between human understanding and the marvellous, miraculous, diabolical, or divine. These declarations are a subset of the *Unsagbarkeitstopos*, the “inexpressibility topos,” which Curtius defines as a writer’s insistence on the inability of speech or eloquence to do justice to the magnitude of the subject.<sup>155</sup> Curtius draws his examples of this topos chiefly from eulogies: rulers are praised in declarations that the poet’s own eloquence falls short of the excellence of his subject, or that even Homer, Orpheus, or a bevy of other famous poets would hardly find it within their power to produce sufficiently spectacular praise. In contrast, in Old English poetry, the *Unsagbarkeitstopos* (and its close cousin discussed here, the unknowability topos) more often than not describe supernatural realities. The joys of Heaven and the pains of Hell, being radically beyond human experience, are also beyond human expression or human reason; homilists and vision narrators often state this, in spare assertions or in vivid, elaborate imagery.<sup>156</sup> Even when instances of the *Unsagbarkeitstopos* describe this-worldly things, such as earthly events or the natural world, they point to supernatural aspects of their subjects. When these manifestations of the *Unsagbarkeitstopos* most closely resemble those in *Beowulf*—when, that is, they proclaim that a certain subject is unknown to the generality of humankind—they suggest that what they declare to be unknown is mysterious not only by chance or cultural shortcoming, but by the very nature of its being. Across a wide variety of genres, the function of such declarations is to signal a metaphysical gap. This gap is most evident when homilists and poets describe the mysteries of the Christian faith, mysteries that transcend the scale of human experience as they transcend human speech or reason. In homilies, declarations of inexpressibility or unknowing accompany

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<sup>155</sup> Curtius, *European Literature in the Latin Middle Ages* 159.

<sup>156</sup> This study focuses on the outright declarations rather than the vivid imagery. However, the latter is traditional and wide-spread in Old English homiletics. For discussions of the motif of the Men with Tongues of Iron in Old English, see Tristram, “Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell” 107-8, and Wright, *The Irish Tradition* 145-152.

the supernatural: God, Heaven and Hell, the Last Judgment. From the numerous homiletic examples of such declarations,<sup>157</sup> three particularly illustrate the polymorphism of the *topos*: Wulfstan's Homilies VI and VII, and Vercelli Homily IX.

In Wulfstan's *Homily VI* ("An Outline of History"), which traces Biblical history from Creation and the Fall to the Last Judgment, Wulfstan uses a declaration of unknowing in the context of Christ's birth, in a discussion of the hypostatic union.<sup>158</sup> The entire discussion emphasizes the paradoxical nature, the fundamental strangeness of the hypostatic union—a strangeness not only ontological (in that the Incarnation unites divinity to humankind), but also temporal (in that the Incarnation roots eternal divinity in a specific moment in time):

Nu is mænig ungelæred man þe wile þencan hu þæt beon mæg þæt se ðe gescop on fruman ealle gesceafta, þæt he wearð þus late geboren, swa ic eow nu areht hæbbe. Ac ic wylle eow gyt cuðlicor secgan, þæt ge hit magon þe swutellicor ongytan. [l. 137] He wæs æfre soð Godd 7 is 7 aa bið, 7 he gescop þurh his godcundan mihte ealle gesceafta lange ær he sylf geboren mann wurde, forðam he næs na ær mann ær he for ealles middaneardes [l. 140] alysednesse sylfwilles menniscnesse underfeng þurh þæt clæne mæden, Sancta Marian. Seo menniscnes is wundorlic ymbe to smeagenne. Full mycel wundor hit wæs þæt þæt mæden gebær cild þe næfre nahte þurh hæmedþing weres gemanan; ac se ðe hæfð rihtne geleafan 7 understent Godes [l. 145] mihta, he mæg ful georne witan þæt hit wæs Godes yðdæde þa he hit swa gedon habban wolde. Ær he wæs soð Godd on godcundnesse & næs na mann, ac nu he is ægðer ge soð Godd ge soð mann. And nis æfre æniges mannes mæð þæt he þa godcundnesse [l. 150] asmeagan cunne; ac us is þeah mycel

<sup>157</sup> Two searches of the DOE web corpus, illustrative rather than exhaustive in their scope, have turned up over ten distinct examples of such declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility. A Boolean search for "man" + "gemet" (both as beginnings of words) yields five such declarations; a Boolean search for "nis" + "nænig" (again, both as beginnings of words) yields another five such declarations. These searches leave out declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility that do not contain the target words or that contain the words in variant spellings.

<sup>158</sup> For interesting parallels to this passage, which similarly stress the contrast with respect to time between the divine and the human natures of Christ ("godcundnesse" vs. "menniscnyse"), see *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 17 (Homily I, 2 (p. 190, ll. 1-7); and *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*, EETS s.s. 5 (Homily I, "Christmas," p. 3, ll. 2-5; p. 4, ll. 29-47). Neither of these contains a declaration of unknowing or inexpressibility. The comparison reveals to what degree Wulfstan's use of the declaration of unknowing is a stylistic choice rather than just a doctrinal statement—decorative, rather than inevitable. For Wulfstan's use of declarations of inexpressibility in highly-wrought descriptions of hell rather than heaven, see Orchard, "Oral tradition" 109.

þearf þæt we aa habban rihtne geleafan on God ælmihtigne þe us ealle gescop  
& geworhte (ll. 134-52).<sup>159</sup>

Now there is many an unlearned man who wants to think how that can be, that he who first made all creation was born so late, as I have now narrated to you. But I want to tell it to you even more openly, that you may understand it the more clearly. He was always true God, and is, and always will be, and he created through his divine might all created things, long before he himself was born as a man, because earlier he was not a man before he, for the redemption of all middle-earth, of his own will received humanity through the pure maiden, Saint Mary. The humanity [of Christ] is wonderful to examine. It was a very great wonder that the maiden bore a child, [she] who had never known a man through sexual intercourse; but whoever has right belief and understands God's might, he may very well know that it was easy to do for God, as he desired to have done it so. Before [the Incarnation], He [Christ] was true God in divine nature and was not a man, but now He is both true God and true man. And it is never within the measure of any man that he should be able to fathom the divine nature; but there is, nevertheless, great need for us that we should always have true belief in God Almighty, who made and created us all.

The declaration of unknowing is only one of several strategies within this paragraph that emphasize the wonder and strangeness of the Incarnation. The passage opens with an evocation of a conveniently confused audience (those “mænig ungelæred man,” “many an unlearned man,” l. 134); Wulfstan uses the perspective of this audience to articulate the paradox of eternal divinity's entrance in time (ll. 134-7). As Wulfstan unpacks the paradox, he first rearticulates it in slow motion (ll. 138-42): distinguishing between God's divinity and God's humanity, he addresses each nature separately, and in each case emphasizes wonder. For the latter, he emphasizes wonder explicitly and repeatedly: Christ's human nature is “wundorlic” (“wonderful”) to consider, and the virgin birth is likewise “full mycel wundor” (“a very great wonder”). For the former, wonder and strangeness are implied rather than explicit; the declaration of unknowing is what positions “godcundnesse” (“the divine nature”) beyond the reach of human understanding and asserts, instead, the need of “rihtne geleafan” (“true faith”) to

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<sup>159</sup> Bethurum, Homily VI, in *The Homilies of Wulfstan* 151-2.

bridge the gap between created and Creator. Wulfstan's declaration of unknowing is more decisive and categorical than the declarations of unknowing in *Beowulf*. Taken literally, the declarations in *Beowulf* assert that "men do not know," or that "no one lives so wise as to know." They are assertions whose subjects are general, but whose predicates are more circumscribed: being in the present tense, they do not exclude the possibility that the state of unknowing will be dispelled in the future. By contrast, Wulfstan's declaration of unknowing emphatically extends to all humanity and all time: "nis æfre æniges mannes mæð þæt he þa godcundnesse asmeagan cunne" ("it is never within the measure of any man that he should be able to fathom the divine nature," ll. 149-50). The alliterating succession of "æfre" and "ænig" emphasizes that, for all time and all possible subjects, the divine nature is beyond the reach of human understanding. The narrative that undergirds the entire sermon situates God's actions within human history, circumscribing theological mystery within earthly time; but the declaration of unknowing sets the divine nature apart from earthly reality by indicating its inaccessibility to human reason.

In his sermon on the Creed, Wulfstan uses a similar declaration of unknowing—not, this time, to refer to the divine nature, but to the magnitude of heavenly bliss, of which the blessed will partake after Doomsday:

Ðær is mærd & myrhð & ece blis. Nis æfre ænig man þe sylf gepencan cunne oðþon oðrum areccan mæge hwylce þa mærdða & ða myrhðða syn þe God on heofonum gegearwod hæfð þam ðe his willan gewyrcð her on life. And se ðe to þam gesælig bið þæt he to ðam mærdðum & to þam myrhððum cymð, ne ateoriað hy him æfre, ac he hy symle hæfð mid Gode sylfum & mid his englum (ll. 150-8).<sup>160</sup>

There is glory and delight and eternal bliss. There is not ever any man who is able to think himself, or relate to others, how great the glories and the delights are that God has created in heaven for those who do his will here in life. And he who is so blessed that he comes to those glories and those delights, never

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<sup>160</sup> *Homily VII* ("On the Creed"), in Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* 157-165.

wearies of them, but he possesses them always with God himself and with his angels.

Even more than the previous passage, Wulfstan's description of heaven is thick with rhetorical ornamentation. An initial polysyndeton accentuates the nearly pleonastic pile-up of positive descriptors ("mærd & myrhð & ece blis"). Parallel participles ("gegearwod"/"gewyrcð") underscore the cause-effect connection between good deeds performed on earth and God's blessings prepared in heaven. Perhaps the strongest rhetorical insistence is on heaven's twin attributes, the related concepts of "mærd" and "myrhð" (glory and joy), joined and underlined by paronomasia, and repeated three times in the passage (ll. 152, 154-5, 156). This alliterating doublet is a characteristic Wulfstanian flourish.<sup>161</sup> A proximity search of the Dictionary of Old English Corpus reveals that, besides the three occurrences in *Homily VII* ("On the Creed"), the doublet appears in eleven passages in Wulfstan's homilies, marking the joy and glory bestowed on Adam in Eden;<sup>162</sup> the joy and glory granted to those present at Solomon's dedication of the Temple;<sup>163</sup> and, most often, the joy and glory of Heaven, that the blessed enter into after the Last Judgment, and that all are exhorted to strive for in this life.<sup>164</sup> In all these examples, the joy and glory are explicitly marked out as the gifts of God; and in all but one case, they belong not to the earthly world, but either to the beginning of human history or to the end—to the lost Paradise before the Fall, or—in most of the passages—to the home in which God welcomes the blessed, after the Last Judgment. The aural flourish of the alliterative doublet is consistently associated

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<sup>161</sup> Orchard, "Crying Wolf" 248-9. For further discussion of Wulfstan's oral-derived habits of composition, see Orchard, "Crying Wolf" and "Oral tradition."

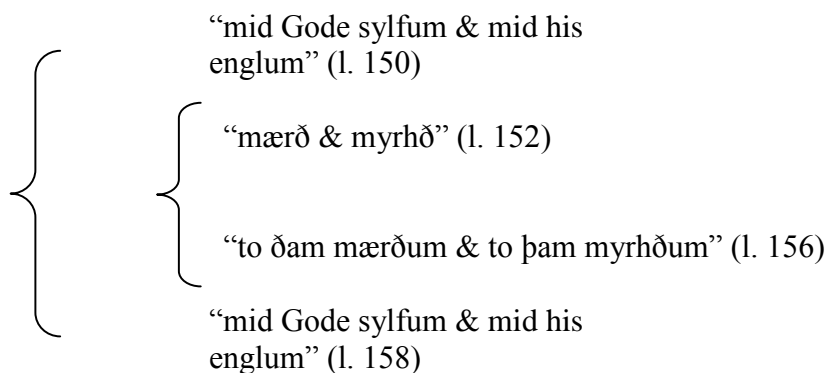
<sup>162</sup> *Homily XV* ("Cena Domini—The Reconciliation of Penitents"), ll. 108-11, in Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan* 236-8.

<sup>163</sup> *Homily XVIII* ("The Dedication of a Church"), ll. 123-30, in Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan* 246-50.

<sup>164</sup> *Homily XX*, "Sermo ad Anglos," in three versions: MSS BH, ll. 123-30; MS C, ll. 171-6; and MSS EI, ll. 195-201 (Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan* 255-260; 261-266; 267-275, respectively).

with supernatural contexts. Examining such flourishes, Ananya Jahanara Kabir observes that descriptions of heavenly bliss often rely not on visual imagery but on “dense aural ornamentation, achieved through variations of rhythm, alliteration, rhyme and assonance, [conveying] the transcendent beauty of heaven.” In *Wulfstan*, this is a characteristic not only of descriptions of heaven, but of descriptions of hell.<sup>165</sup> Like declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility, the density of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration is not just a marker of transcendent beauty, but of transcendent pain and horror; the heightened rhetoric corresponds to the heightened states of being, both of the blessed in Heaven and of the damned in Hell.

The declaration of unknowing in this passage is not only a rhetorical ornament that contributes to this heightened effect, but is indeed, as the structure of the passage suggests, of central importance. Structurally, the passage is framed by two nested envelope patterns: the opening reference to the blessed dwelling “mid Gode sylfum & mid his englum” (l. 150) is echoed by the closing repetition of the exact same phrase (l. 158). Within this envelope pattern, the initial reference to the “mærd & myrhð” that characterize Heaven (l. 152) is echoed in the last reference to “ðam mærdum & to þam myrhðum” in which the blessed partake (l. 156). A schema of the passage from this point of view yields the following structure:



<sup>165</sup> See Orchard, “Oral tradition” for a list of “highly rhythmical and formulaic” descriptions of Hell examples—some even containing declarations of inexpressibility (109).

The declaration of unknowing is at the very centre of these two nested envelopes, and encloses in its own midst the third instance of the “mærd & myrhð” doublet. It denies the existence of anyone who either “sylf geþencan cunne” (is able himself to think) or “oðrum areccan mæge” (is able to describe to others) the joys of Heaven. As in Wulfstan’s declaration of unknowing analyzed earlier, the typical alliterative sequence of “æfre ænig” extends the assertion across all time and across all possible subjects. Moreover, the phrases that refer to the cognitive abilities transcended by the supernatural (“sylf geþencan cunne” and “oðrum areccan mæge”) use perfectly parallel syntax (object + infinitive of a cognition verb + modal verb) to balance self-directed with other-directed acts of the intellect and thus, extending the assertion across opposite categories, convey a sense of the completeness of human unknowing before the divine. Forceful in itself, the declaration of unknowing forms an integral part of Wulfstan’s depiction of heaven’s bliss, a depiction that relies not on specific details, but on aural ornamentation and an abstract evocation of transcendence.

In neither of these examples are the declarations of unknowing throwaway lines or empty formulas; on the contrary, they work in concert with other stylistic strategies to heighten wonder, to evoke an otherworldly reality. Such declarations—be they of unknowing or of inexpressibility—appear throughout the Old English homiletic corpus, emphasizing a metaphysical gap by placing the supernatural beyond the reach of human reason or discourse. Vercelli Homily IX, for example, evokes the joys of heaven through a declaration of inexpressibility:

For þan þe we habbað micle nyðþearfe, þa hwile þe we her syndon on þys lænan life 7 on þyssum gewitendlicum, þæt we þonne on þære toweardnan woruld[e] mægen 7 moton becuman to life þæs heofoncundan rices 7 to þam wu[l]dre þære ecean eadignesse, þær we moton siððan onsorglice lybban 7 rixian butan ælcra onwendednesse mid him, emne swa ure dryhten hælende Crist, 7 mid eallum his halgum, gif we hit gearnian willað mid urum godum dædum. Nis þonne næniges mannes gemet þæt he mæge asecgan þara goda & þara yðnessa þe God hafað gearwod eallum þam þe hine lufiað & his <bebodu> healdan willað & gelæstan (ll. 8-18).<sup>166</sup>

Therefore we have great need, now while we are here in this transitory and departing life, that then, in that impending world, we may be able to and allowed to come to the life of the heavenly kingdom and to the glory of the eternal blessedness, where we can afterwards live free from care and reign without any change with Him, even our Lord Saviour Christ, and with all His saints, if we desire to win it with our good deeds. It is then within no man's measure that he should be able to declare the good and the pleasant things that God has prepared [in Heaven] for all those that love Him and desire to obey His commandments and carry them out.

The declaration of inexpressibility in this passage is as absolute as Wulfstan's declarations of unknowing, making an absolute denial that it is within the measure of anyone to describe heaven's joys. To refer to the human capacity so transcended by the supernatural, the declaration uses the term *gemet*. As a noun, *gemet* signifies "measure." When it refers to the properties of the physical world, *gemet* denotes an amount of space or distance, or else a unit or standard of measuring space, distance, or weight.<sup>167</sup> But when the term is used more abstractly, referring to the human condition in general, *gemet* emphasizes the limits or boundaries of humankind in the relationship with the divine.<sup>168</sup> The term appears in contexts where this proper measure has been infringed upon. For example, the the *Genesis* A-poet uses the phrase "ofer monna gemet" (l. 1677) to describe the construction of the tower of Babel:

[...] for wlence            and for wonhygdum  
cyðdon cræft heora,        ceastre worhton

<sup>166</sup> Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies* 158-60.

<sup>167</sup> Bosworth-Toller, "gemet" (senses I and II).

<sup>168</sup> Bosworth-Toller, "gemet" (senses III and IV).

and to heofnum up      hlædræ rædon,  
 strengum stepton      stænenne weall  
 ofer monna gemet,      mærdā georne,  
 hæleð mid honda (*Genesis A*, ll. 1671-8).

For pride and for vainglory, they showed their skill, made a city and raised up to heaven a ladder, in their strength built a stone wall beyond the measure of men, eager for glory, warriors with their hands.

Here, the expression “ofer monna gemet” describes not only the exceptional scale of the project compared to the norm of human achievement, but also its prideful transgressiveness against the boundaries of humankind. God punishes this transgressiveness almost immediately with the confusion of tongues, with the result that the tower of Babel remains an unfinished ruin, a grimly ironic monument to discord and failure.<sup>169</sup> No sooner is the boundary of the “monna gemet” transgressed than it is reinforced.

In the homilies, on the contrary, the boundary is firmly in place: in declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility, the *gemet* of humankind represents the limits of human speech and human understanding confronted with the miraculous, the eschatological, or the divine. This is the case in Vercelli IX, cited above:

Nis þonne næniges mannes gemet þæt he mæge asecgan þara goda & þara  
 yðnessa þe God hafað gearwod eallum þam þe hine lufiað & his b[eb]odu  
 healdan willað & gelæstan (ll. 16-18).<sup>170</sup>

With similar phraseology, Vercelli IV refers not to the beneficent supernatural, but to the evil. Describing the process of temptation, the homilist creates a striking allegorical image of pride as

<sup>169</sup> For discussions of this passage and its place in the wider context of *Genesis A* in particular and Old English poetry in general, see also R M Liuzza, “The Tower of Babel: The Wanderer and the Ruins of History” 1-35; Manish Sharma, “Nebuchadnezzar and the Defiance of Measure in the Old English Daniel” 103-26; and Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England*, 151-61 (esp. 152-3).

<sup>170</sup> Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies* 160.

the devil's bow and a variety of sins as the devil's arrows (ll. 308-10). He concludes a detailed enumeration of these arrow-sins with a declaration of inexpressibility:

Swa manige stræla syndon swa nis æniges mannes gemet þæt hit asecgan  
mæge (l. 315).<sup>171</sup>

There are so many arrows there [i. e. allegorical arrows of temptation in the devil's quiver] that it is not within the measure of any man to be able to describe it.

The phrasing is the same as in Vercelli IX: describing this subject “nis æniges mannes gemet” (is not within the measure of any man). Though the homilist observes that these arrows are a part of daily spiritual life on earth, they are also pieces of an eschatological reality; as Dendle underlines, the arrows of temptation are shot against humankind by the devils from their residence in hell (l. 319-21). The declaration of inexpressibility emphasizes this metaphysical gap, using *gemet* to punctuate the limits of human speech. Such declarations of inexpressibility or unknowing that pivot around the term *gemet* appear throughout the homiletic corpus, as the following examples—by no means an exhaustive list—illustrate:

- (1) þær he hæfþ weallendene leg, & hwilum cyle þone grimmestan, eal sar & sace,  
hungor & þurst, wop & hream, & weana **ma þonne æniges mannes gemet sy þæt  
hie ariman mæge.**

There [in hell] he [a generic sinner] has boiling fire, and sometimes the grimmest cold, all grief and strife, hunger and thirst, weeping and wailing and miseries **more than be within any man's measure to narrate** (Blickling Homily V, ll. 136-8)<sup>172</sup>

- (2) Ahsodan þa forþon hweðer he wolde þæt rice sona her on eorþan gesettan þe þonne  
þisse worlde ende on domes dæge; frunan **maran þinges þonne ænges mannes  
gemet wære her on eorðan, þæt hit witan mihte** (Blickling XI, ll. 24-8)<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies* 102-3. For further analysis of this passage, and a discussion of parallels to this imagery in Old English homiletics, see Dendle, *Satan Unbound* 33-5.

<sup>172</sup> Morris, *The Blickling Homilies* 60-2.

<sup>173</sup> Morris, *The Blickling Homilies* 117.

Therefore they [Christ's disciples] asked Him then [after the Resurrection] whether He would establish that kingdom soon here on earth, or at the end of this world, on Judgment Day; they asked **concerning a greater thing than it could be in any man's measure here on earth to be able to know.**

- (3) Wa la wa biþ þam mannum, þe mid deoflum scealan habban heora eardungstowe, þær biþ sar butan frofre and ærmpo butan are and **wæana ma, þonne hit eniges mannes gemet sie, þæt hit asecgan mege** (ll. 345-8, Homily XLIV (37), in Napier, *Wulfstan* 215-26).

Alas for the men, who must have their dwelling place with devils, where there is sorrow without comfort and suffering without mercy, and **more grief, than it is within any man's measure, that they should be able to describe it.**

The use of *gemet* in these declarations amounts to a formula; the assertion that it is not within the *gemet* of any human being to know or describe a certain thing is a sign of that thing's metaphysical alterity (be it Hell, Doomsday, or Heaven). Though the declaration of inexpressibility in Vercelli IX, cited above, is not as ornate as Wulfstan's analogous evocation of heaven's joys, the formulaic use of *gemet* metonymically summons these traditional numinous resonances to the declaration and reinforces its evocation of heaven.

This initial declaration of inexpressibility in Vercelli IX sets the rhetorical programme of the homily as a whole. Inexpressibility is "the dominant rhetorical mode of Vercelli IX."<sup>174</sup> The initial declaration of the inexpressibility of heaven's joys is followed by another, similarly introduced by an exhortation to earn these joys in this life:

For ðan we sculon ure sawle georne tilian 7 hy geornlice Gode gegearwian.  
Ne mæg þonne eall manna cyn mid hyra wordum ariman þa god þe God hafað  
soðfæstum sawlum gearwod togeanes for hyra gastlicum worcum (Vercelli IX, ll. 59-62).<sup>175</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* 145.

<sup>175</sup> Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies* 164.

Therefore we ought to cultivate our soul zealously and eagerly prepare it for God. Then no one of all humankind can narrate with their words the good that God has prepared for the faithful (lit. truth-fast) souls for their spiritual works.

Even more than the previous declaration, this passage plays up the causal relationship between good deeds on earth and heavenly bliss in the world to come. It does so not only by juxtaposing exhortation and declaration, but by repeating key words and connecting them through alliteration. “Gegearwian,” to order or prepare, describes both what the faithful must do to their souls to ready them for God, and what God does in creating the joys of the afterlife. The repetition of “georne,” “geornlice,” intensifies the focus on this spiritual preparation, both semantically (in that it denotes the emotional intensity necessary to this act of preparation) and aurally (in that it creates an alliterative bridge between the two instances of “gegearwian”). The declaration of inexpressibility, while pointing to a numinous reality, is also firmly connected to the necessities of an earthly existence in harmony with that reality.

After its evocation of heaven, the inexpressibility topos is both subtly and explicitly perpetuated in the homily’s subsequent enumeration of the likenesses of hell. The first four likenesses—exile, old age, death, burial, and torment—are all phenomena shown to annihilate aspect after aspect of the earthly human person: exile wipes out the social person, taking away wealth, social position, and happiness (ll. 85-89); then old age diminishes the physical person sense by sense and faculty by faculty, taking away, among others, the capacity for “gerade spræce” ( speech, l. 93); then death further deprives a person of their physical surroundings, as it “swyrceð him fram þæs huses hrof ðe he inne bið” (“the roof of the building in which he lies is obscured to him,” l. 99);<sup>176</sup> then burial draws that figurative roof in even closer, and abandons

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<sup>176</sup> For this translation, see Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies* 187, note to l. 99.

the body to worms and putrefaction (l. 102). Used as a figurative representation of hell, the gradual diminishing and eventual annihilation of the earthly human person perpetuates the initial declarations of inexpressibility. Both tropes rely on a comparative diminution of the human condition. The declarations depict the magnitude of eschatological reality by asserting that the human intellect, or the human capacity for speech, or, more generally, the human condition on earth falls short of the joys or horrors of the eschatological or the divine. In a similar way, the enumeration depicts the horrors of hell by showing how, through the world's hardships and the passage of time, the human person is diminished or annihilated, gradually falling shorter of his or her earlier state.

The crescendo of suffering evoked by the enumeration of hell's likenesses culminates in the fifth likeness, torment. At this rhetorical climax, another declaration of inexpressibility appears:

Ponne is þære fiftan helle onlicnes tintrega genemned, for ðan þænne nis nænig man þæt mæge mid his wordum asecgan hu mycel þære fiftan helle sar is. 7 þeah .vii. men sien, 7 þara hæbbe æghwylc twa 7 hundsiofontig gereorda, swa feala swa ealles þysses middangeardes gereorda syndon, and þonne sy þara seofon manna æghwylc to alife gesceapen, 7 hyra hæbbe æghwylc siofon heafdu, 7 þara heafdu ælc hæbbe siofon tungan, 7 þara tungena ælc hæbbe isene stemne, 7 þonne hwæðre ne magon þa ealle ariman helle witu (Vercelli IX, ll. 106-113).

Then the likeness of the fifth hell is called torment, because then there is no man who is able to declare with his words how great the fifth hell's pain is. And even if there were seven men, and each of them had seventy-two languages, as many as all the languages in this middle earth, and then if each of those seven men were created to eternal life, and each of them had seven heads, and each of the heads had seven tongues, and each of the tongues had an iron voice, and then nevertheless they would not be able to describe the torment of hell.

As Samantha Zacher observes of a later passage, the declaration casts an ironic light on the extended simile that precedes it; the enumeration of earthly hardships as likenesses of hell “ironically draw[s] upon human experiences of suffering in order to explain what is beyond the scope of human understanding.”<sup>177</sup> The impact of the assertion of inexpressibility is deepened by the elaborate conceit that follows it (ll. 107-113). The conceit is a form of the Men with Tongues of Iron motif. Descended from Virgil’s description of the infernal regions and their torments (*Aeneid* VI.625-7), the motif enters the tradition of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, and comes to influence Old English homiletics, as well as Irish texts “from the eighth through the sixteenth century.”<sup>178</sup> The hyperbolic imagery renders concrete the assertion of inexpressibility that introduces it: the hell whose likenesses in the earlier enumeration annihilate one human capacity after another, here explicitly annihilates human speech—even human speech hyperbolically raised to monstrous proportions—by the sheer magnitude of its torments. As in the earlier evocations of heaven, the declaration of inexpressibility signals hell’s overwhelming metaphysical otherness.

Whether the Old English homilists declare the supernatural realities they deal with to be inexpressible or unknowable, they deploy a similar trope with similar phraseology: they assert that “no one exists” who can express these things, measuring the magnitude of eschatological realities against the overwhelmed capacities of the human condition. In their role as markers of a metaphysical gap, the declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility are not incidental or offhand remarks; on the contrary, as the analysis of the Wulfstan and Vercelli passages demonstrates, the

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<sup>177</sup> Zacher, *Style and Rhetoric* 173.

<sup>178</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* 146-56. For further discussion of traditional motifs in Vercelli IX’s description of hell’s pains, and the development of these motifs in Old English and Irish literature, see Wright, *The Irish Tradition* 106-75. For a more detailed stylistic analysis of these motifs and the extended metaphors that bring them to life in Vercelli IX, see also Zacher, *Style and Rhetoric* 173-9.

declarations are integrated in wider-reaching stylistic strategies and thematic concerns.

Wulfstan's declarations of unknowing are embedded in passages rich in aural effects relying on "repetition or near-repetition of sounds and words"—aural effects that also appear and play an important role in Old English verse.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, the Vercelli IX declarations of inexpressibility draw on phraseology that occurs both in prose and in verse; what is more, they occur in a homily which, in its overall preoccupation with eschatological themes, draws on motifs wide-spread both in prose and poetry.<sup>180</sup> Occurring in the company of such migratory motifs and techniques, the declarations of unknowing and inexpressibility likewise cross the permeable boundary between Old English poetry and prose.

In Old English poetry, the declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility that most closely mirror the phrasing of the homiletic declarations accompany the same motif: the inability of human beings to understand or express such mysteries as the nature of God, the joys of heaven, the sorrows of hell, or the soul's destination after death. Emphasizing the alterity of eschatological realities against the overwhelmed capacities of the human mind, the motif evokes wonder or dread, working in concert with local rhetorical ornamentation as well as wider thematic concerns. As in the homilies, the motif of unknowing spans a continuum of otherworldliness: from *Christ and Satan*'s descriptions of Heaven and Hell, to the intersection between divinity and human history that is dramatized in the *Advent Lyrics*, to the ends of individual human lives and their destinations in the other world, and to the natural phenomenon of the setting sun. Throughout, the declarations of unknowing accentuate the wondrous, the eschatological, the divine: even when the subjects of these declarations are natural or human, the

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<sup>179</sup> Orchard, "Oral tradition" 102-3, 121 n. 4.

<sup>180</sup> Zacher, *Style and Rhetoric* 102-139.

declarations press them farther away from the mundane, mortal, intelligible world of humankind, and nearer to the other world inhabited by God, by angels and devils, and the souls of the unfathomable dead.

Of the Old English poems that contain declarations of unknowing, *Christ and Satan* is the most distant from the human world: agency belongs to God and the devils rather than to human beings (with the exception of Christ), and much of the narrative plays out between the opposite realms of Heaven and Hell. The poem problematizes knowledge of both these realms: knowledge of Heaven, in a declaration that no human being, however wise, is able to describe Heaven's glory; knowledge of Hell, in the episode where Christ condemns Satan to measure out hell's floor with his hands. Human knowers and speakers figure in only one of these poetic moments, but both moments have the effect of emphasizing the metaphysical gap between the realms of the afterlife and the mortal audience of the poem.

The declaration of inexpressibility opens one of *Christ and Satan*'s descriptions of Heaven, asserting that no one exists able to describe the various aspects of Heaven's glory:

Nis nænig swa snotor        ne swa cræftig,  
ne þæs swa gleaw,        nymþe god seolfa,  
þæt asecgan mæge        swegles leoman,  
hu scima þær        scineð ymbutan  
meotodes mihte,        geond þæt mære cynn,  
þær habbað englas        eadigne dream,  
sanctas singað        (þæt is se seolfa) for god (ll. 348-54).

No one is so wise or so cunning, or so intelligent, except for God himself, that he may describe the light of heaven, how brightness shines there, through the might of God, throughout that famous kindred, where angels have blessed joy, and saints sing before God Himself.

This is one of the poem's several descriptions of Heaven, woven throughout Satan's lament over his lost homeland.<sup>181</sup> The descriptions of Heaven appear either in Satan's lament, in *ubi sunt* catalogues of glories conspicuously missing from his present abode in Hell, or in the narrator's repeated exhortations that the poem's audience aspire to Heaven through devout words and works. As Kabir observes, the poet of *Christ and Satan* depicts Heaven through sensory imagery—imagery that evokes both a green, fertile natural space and a shining, treasure-filled hall or city, combining “elements from the ideal landscape and the ideal indoors.”<sup>182</sup> In so doing, the poet operates in contrast to the homilists, who tend to evoke Heaven not through sensory details, but through what Kabir terms “aural abstractions”—namely, catalogues of the abstract joys present in Heaven or the hardships absent from it, decorated with sound effects and patterned syntax.<sup>183</sup> Almost paradoxically, the passage containing the *Christ and Satan* poet's declaration of inexpressibility is no exception from his general strategy of detailed, sensory description. The declaration itself is even more emphatic than those of the homilies: the enumeration of virtual synonyms for ‘wise’ (snotor, cræftig, gleaw) emphasizes, through repetition and variation, the human intellect that falls short of the theological mystery before it. But what follows the declaration is not the homiletic evocation of Heaven's abstract joys; instead, it is the sensory imagery of light and music.<sup>184</sup> The poet declares that Heaven is indescribable, and then proceeds to describe it; preceding Heaven's attributes, the declaration of

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<sup>181</sup> For further discussion of *Christ and Satan*'s juxtaposition between heaven and hell, homeland and exilic prison, see Chapter 5, pp. . For some examples of *Christ and Satan*'s descriptions of hell, see ll. 28–9, 42b–50, 92b–95a, 163–71, 209–223, 231–236b, 285–314, 348–364.

<sup>182</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* 152.

<sup>183</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* 154.

<sup>184</sup> See *Phoenix* l. 103b, where “swegles leoma” refers to the sun, rising over the Phoenix's paradisaic homeland; and see also Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday* 160–7, for an interpretation of the Phoenix's homeland as a literary and theological landscape.

inexpressibility functions as an unspoken superlative, raising the evocative value of each concrete detail. Even more than in the homilies, the declaration that Heaven is beyond the range of human discourse, however wise the speakers, is not only a theological statement of the relationship between human language and the supernatural, but also rhetorical ornament that at once signals the presence of wonder-the-object and demands from the audience wonder-the-response.

The declaration of inexpressibility that evokes the otherworldliness of Heaven has no analogues in *Christ and Satan*'s descriptions of Hell, even though such declarations evoke the miseries of Hell as well as the joys of Heaven in the homilies, and even though the poet of *Christ and Satan* cultivates ongoing parallels between the two otherworldly locales.<sup>185</sup> Indeed, the shape of *Christ and Satan*'s narrative dictates that Heaven be more elusive than Hell: for most of the poem, Hell is the (literal, spatial) point of view from which Satan mourns the Heaven now lost to him; from this point of view, Heaven is eternally out of reach, while Hell is only too accessible. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Hell is problematized even more dramatically than that of Heaven: Heaven is out of the reach of human knowledge or speech, as the declaration of inexpressibility asserts; in contrast, the process of getting to know Hell, of exploring it thoroughly, is Satan's eventual punishment.

The episode occurs at the very end of the poem. Christ, having rejected Satan's temptations in the wilderness, reveals His identity to the devil and compels him to measure Hell with his hands:

“Ah ic þe hate      þurh þa hehstan miht      693  
þæt ðu hellwarum      hyht ne abeode,

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<sup>185</sup> See Chapter 4 for further discussion of the relationship between Heaven and Hell in *Christ and Satan*.

ah þu him secgan miht      sorga mæste,      695  
 þæt ðu gemettes      meotod alwihta,  
 cyning moncynnes.      Cer ðe on bæcling!  
 Wite þu eac, awyrgda,      hu wid and sid  
 helheoðo dreorig,      and mid hondum amet.  
 Grip wið þæs grundes;      gang þonne swa      700  
 oððæt þu þone ymbhwyrft      alne cunne,  
 and ærest amet      ufan to grunde,  
 and hu sid seo      se swarta eðm.  
 Wast þu þonne þe geornor      þæt þu wið god wunne,  
 seoððan þu þonne hafast      handum ametene      705  
 hu heh and deop      hell inneward seo,  
 grim græfhus.      Gong ricene to,  
 ær twa seondon      tida agongene,  
 þæt ðu merced hus      ameten hæbbe (ll. 693-709).

But by the highest might I command that you may not bring hope to hell-dwellers, but that you are able to tell them the greatest of sorrows, that you have met the Measurer of all creation, the king of humankind. Turn back! Know also, accursed one, how wide and vast is the dreary hall of hell, and measure [it] with hands. Grip towards the floor; go, then, like that, until you know its compass entirely; and first measure it from above to the bottom, and how vast the dark vapour is. Then will you know the more zealously that you fight against God, after you then have measured with your hands how high and deep hell is within, the grim grave-house. Go there quickly, so that you may have measured, before two hours have passed, [your] allotted house.

Having received Christ's command, Satan flees to hell and sets to work. After he confronts hell's torments and reaches the floor of hell, "þa him þuhte þæt þanon wære/to helleduru hund þusenda/mila gemearcodes" ("it seemed to him that there were, from there to the door of hell, a hundred thousand in the count of miles," ll. 719-21). Thomas D. Hill observes the insistence, in Christ's command, on "forms of the verbs *metan* or *ametan*" (ll. 699, 702, 705, 709), and their wordplay against God's designation as *Meotod*, literally "measurer." Hill argues that the rationale for this emphasis—and indeed, for the entire episode—is one grounded in paronomasic poetic justice:

Satan wished to usurp the place of the *Meotod*, the measurer, of all creation; Christ cast him down and in order to show him his true role, forced him to act as the measurer of the only realm that is truly his. The reversal of roles involves a kind of grim comedy; in Hell frantically measuring with his hands, Satan parodies the role of God, who as *Meotod* serenely measures space, time, and history.<sup>186</sup>

But Christ insists not only on the measuring of hell; He also insists on its immensity. Three times in only eight lines, He dwells on “hu wid and sid/ helheoðo dreorig” (“how wide and vast the dreary hell-hall,” ll. 698b-699a), on “hu sid seo se swarta eðm” (“how wide the dark vapour [is],” l. 703), and on “hu heh and deop hell inneweard seo” (“how high and deep hell [is] within,” l. 706). The idea of hell’s vastness is emphasized by the repetition of sounds, words, and syntactic structures: the in-rhyme of “wid and sid,” the recurrence of “sid,” and most of all the parallel structure of these phrases, which all begin with the adverb *hu* and proceed with one or more closely related monosyllabic adjectives of dimension. This receives further confirmation from the number that Satan eventually reaches (“hund þusenda mila gemearcodes,” “a hundred thousand miles in the count of miles,” ll. 720-1). As Michelet points out, “*hund þusenda* may well be a general term indicating a great distance rather than denoting precisely a hundred thousand miles” (that the number is introduced by the tentative “him þuhte,” “it seemed to him,” supports this suggestion).<sup>187</sup> This insistence on the vastness of hell forms an implicit corollary to Satan’s measuring of hell: that the place itself is so huge, and consequently the task so enormous, of such mythical proportions, that only a supernatural being could have accomplished

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<sup>186</sup> Hill, “The Measure of Hell: *Christ and Satan* 695-722” 412. For complementary interpretations of this act of measurement, see also Ruth Wehlau, “The power of knowledge and the location of the reader in *Christ and Satan*,” who argues that Satan, by this act of measurement, establishes his own identity: “Satan’s measuring of hell [...] functions as a graphic figuring of self-knowledge. Although hell is, in one sense, a fief given by Christ, it is Satan’s own construction since it is what he has earned through his own behaviour” (5). Alternatively, Fabienne Michelet views Satan’s act of measurement as a vivid representation of his confinement: he measures out his prison from the inside, in contrast to God, who encompasses and measures out the cosmos from the outside (*Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 59).

<sup>187</sup> Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 59.

the task—and even then, the task is a superlative punishment, fit for the worst sinner of all, the arch-fiend himself. In other words, that it is Satan who measures hell as punishment has the unspoken corollary that *only* Satan could do such a thing, and *only* by dint of considerable suffering—that the task’s proportions exceed the reach of human mortality. The measuring episode points out hell’s vastness just as much as a declaration of unknowing or inexpressibility asserting hell to be measureless. Like the earlier declaration of inexpressibility that introduces a description of Heaven, the episode of Hell’s measuring problematizes the relationship of this supernatural space with knowledge in order to render more intensely Hell’s essential nature, and so underline its metaphysical distance from the human world.

In *Christ and Satan*, these two narrative moments—the declaration of Heaven’s inexpressibility and the episode of Satan’s measuring of Hell—both present these realms of the afterlife as knowledge-proof, or at least knowledge-resistant. That they elude being mapped in words or by hand is a sign of their otherworldliness. The two episodes crystallize how the concern with knowledge is a persistent aspect of the poem’s representation of the supernatural. In *The Advent Lyrics*, the concern with knowledge—or rather, with the impossibility of knowledge in the face of the divine—is even closer to the heart of the poem.<sup>188</sup> Throughout, the Advent-poet insists on the divine mysteries of Christ’s nature and entrance into the world, mysteries unfathomable by any human intellect, and mysteries in whose development the *Advent*-poet co-opts multiple perspectives, multiple narrative techniques, and the phraseology of multiple genres.

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<sup>188</sup> This argument cites the *Advent Lyrics* as they appear in Campbell, ed., *The Advent Lyrics*.

The mystery that the *Advent*-poet<sup>189</sup> returns to time and again is that of Christ's origin, both in His human nature and in His divine nature. Of the human birth of Christ, the narrator explicitly declares, "þæt degol wæs, dryhtnes geryne" ("that was hidden, the Lord's mystery," II.24). Later sections of the poem develop this declaration dramatically, in conversations between the Virgin Mary and several interlocutors that exemplify human perplexity before the divine mystery of Christ's origin.<sup>190</sup> As Clayton observes, summarizing the sequence of Marian episodes,

This [human perplexity before the divine mystery] progresses from the incomprehension of the dwellers of Jerusalem in IV to Joseph's doubts and Mary's resolution of them in VII to the accomplished Advent of IX, with its image of the Child at Mary's breast.<sup>191</sup>

Section IV, the first of these episodes centred on the Virgin Mary, is based on a Marian antiphon, a question-and-answer exchange between Mary and the daughters of Jerusalem that emphasizes the mystery of Christ's birth. Mirroring the antiphon, the lyric opens with Jerusalem's citizens (both male and female, as it emerges later) asking Mary to explain to them Christ's virgin birth. In their address to Mary, the speakers' stance towards the miraculous birth is emphatically one of unknowing, from the initial invitation that Mary "arece [...] þæt geryne þæt þe of roderum

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<sup>189</sup> *The Advent Lyrics* are followed in the Exeter Book by two poems also focusing on Christ's role in salvation history. The three poems are known as Christ I, II, and III (or Christ A, B, and C; or Advent, Ascension, and Judgment Day); the second of these concludes with Cynewulf's runic signature. Thomas D. Hill has argued that the three poems are quite distinct in genre and contents ("Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of Christ I, II, and III," in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Szarmach and Oggins, pp. 3-22), and as a result probably quite distinct in origin, as well; the *Advent Lyrics* function as an independent poem, divisible into twelve sections on the basis of their antiphonal sources. For further discussion of the antiphons and their relationship to the Old English poetic text, see *The Christ of Cynewulf*, ed. Cook, pp. xxxv-xliii; Burlin, *Old English Advent*; Rankin, "Liturgical Background"; and, for an overview of the discussion, Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* 180-1.

<sup>190</sup> Campbell, *The Advent Lyrics* 10.

<sup>191</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* 182. For a typological reading of this pattern, see Burlin, *The Old English Advent* 174-89; for its alignment with the poem's liturgical structure, see Rankin, "Liturgical Background" 333.

cwom” (“explain [...] that mystery that came to you from the skies”), to the declaration that the event is unheard-of, unprecedented, unexpected:

Ne we soðlice        swylc ne gefrignan  
in ærdagum        æfre gelimpan,  
þæt ðu in sundurgiefe        swylce befenge, 10  
ne we þære wyrde        wenan þurfon  
toward in tide.        Huru treow in þe  
weorðlicu wunade,        nu þu wuldres þrym  
bosme gebære,        ond no gebrosmad wearð  
mægðhad se micla (IV.8-15a).

We truly have not heard of such a thing ever happening in former times, that you received in such special grace, nor did we need to expect that event in time to come. Indeed truth in you dwelled worthily, now that you bore the glory of Heaven in your womb, and your great virginity was not corrupted.

A series of negative knowledge-verbs traverses the passage, emphasizing that the miracle lies beyond the compass of collective knowledge and wisdom: “ne [...] cuðes” (“you never knew,” l. 77), “ne we soðlice swylc ne gefrignan” (“we truly have not heard of such a thing,” l. 78), “ne we [...] wenan þurfon” (“we did not need to expect,” l. 81). In answer to her interlocutors, Mary explicitly reads their stance of unknowing as a response of wonder, even sorrow or anxiety (“gehþu”):

Hwæt is þeos wundrung        þe ge wafiað,  
ond geomrende        gehþum mænað,  
sunu Solimæ        somod his dohtor? (IV.19-21)

What is this wondering by which you marvel and, sorrowing, lament in sadness/anxiety, son of Salem and his daughter?

Despite her interlocutors’ request, Mary’s reply does not explain the mystery of Christ’s birth, but, on the contrary, reasserts it in yet another declaration of unknowing, continuing the earlier series with yet another negation of knowledge:

Forþan þæt monnum nis  
 cuð geryne,        ac Crist onwrah        25  
 in Dauides        dyre mægan  
 þæt is Euan scyld        eal forpynded,  
 wærgða aworpen,        ond gewuldrad is  
 se heanra had (IV.24-29a)

However, that mystery is not known to men, but Christ revealed in the dear kinswoman of David that the sin of Eve is all removed, the curse thrown off, and the humbler sex is glorified.

The declaration of unknowing resembles those in *Beowulf* rather than those in the homilies: it denies that human beings possess this knowledge, rather than denying, in more absolute terms, that any such human knower could possibly exist. However, though the present tense of Mary's declaration of unknowing does not explicitly disallow any future knowledge, and though, indeed, the term "onwrah" ("revealed") seemingly promises just such knowledge, the explanation that follows leaves the mystery intact: what Mary reveals is not the explanation of Christ's miraculous birth, but its salvific significance. Turning, at the close of the lyric, to the hope of eternal life with God, Mary's meditation on the mystery of Christ's origin emphasizes the divine nature of her child, of Whom the mystery is a mark—both in that He is its origin and in that He is what it points towards.

A similar cognitive dynamic unfolds in Section VII of *Advent*. As before, Mary's interlocutor asks Mary to explain the mystery of the Incarnation; and, as before, she reasserts the essential paradox of her simultaneous motherhood and virginity, and refers the mystery to its divine origin. But in this lyric, Mary's audience are not the people of Jerusalem, but her own

husband, Joseph.<sup>192</sup> His declaration of the mystery—namely, his betrothed’s unexplained transformation from virgin to pregnant woman—is encapsulated in an envelope pattern of references to knowledge: the wide knowledge of Mary’s virginity (“is þæt wide cuð,” “it is widely known,” VII.22b) and his own state of unknowing as to her current pregnancy (“nu gehwyrfed is/ þurh nathwylces,” “now it is changed through I-don’t-know-what” VII.26a). Unlike the previous lyric, here the mystery of Mary’s pregnancy is not problematic because it is an unprecedented event, for which communal wisdom has no pre-existing categories, no epistemological pigeon-holes. Here, the pregnancy is problematic in a far more personal way: it places the love between Mary and Joseph in danger (VII.3-4); it gives rise to hateful and insulting gossip in the community (VII.20-22); if Joseph reveals the pregnancy, Mary must die by stoning (VII.28-29a); but if he conceals it, he must live on as a perjurer, “lað leoda gehwam” (“hateful to all people, VII.31a). The community features here not as a body of human knowers overwhelmed by the miraculous, but the social body that regulates behaviour and imposes punishments on transgressors. Joseph questions the mystery of Mary’s pregnancy not “ðurh fyrwet” (“out of curiosity,” IV.22), like the citizens of Jerusalem, but because it affects him personally and profoundly. In this lyric, the state of unknowing that surrounds the divine presence in the world is restricted to one person, but the stakes of the situation are considerably higher; as a result, the mystery receives as much, or even more, affective emphasis than in *Section IV*. Mary’s revelation further crystallizes the mystery instead of resolving it. Her response (VII.32b-50) is a narrative of the Annunciation rather than an explanation of her

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<sup>192</sup> The dialogue between Mary and Joseph has long been the subject of debate in terms of which of the speeches belong to Mary and which to Joseph. For a detailed overview and cogent evaluation of the debate, see Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* 190-7. For the purposes of my present argument, however, the speech boundaries are less important; though it does matter to the poem as a whole who articulates the various social and legal consequences of Mary’s pregnancy, these consequences remain the same regardless of the speaker, and lend the same gravity to the mystery under discussion.

miraculous pregnancy; like her answer in Section IV, it connects the mystery to the divine origin, but at the same time reasserts the central paradox: “ic his modor gewearð,/fæmne forð sepeah ” (“I have become [Christ’s] mother, yet a virgin henceforth”). The mystery remains intact; its “explanation” is to make explicit that it is a miracle as well as a secret by connecting it to its divine source, of which it is both a deed and a sign.

The two encounters between Mary and her interlocutors dramatize the confrontation between perplexed humankind and the mystery of the Incarnation. After these dramatic episodes, the poem continues its preoccupation with the mystery of Christ’s origin, but it shifts from the temporal to the eternal, from the origin of Christ’s human nature to the origin of His divine nature. In Section VIII, declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility—very like *Christ and Satan*’s in their repetitive insistence on the human intellect—emphasize the unfathomable mystery of Christ’s origin as a divine being. In the first such declaration, the poet emphasizes the mystery of Christ’s origin and its resistance to human eloquence:

Nis ænig nu        eorl under lyfte,  
 secg searoþoncol,        to þæs swiðe gleaw  
 þe þæt asecgan mæge        sundbuendum,  
 areccan mid ryhte,        hu þe rodera weard  
 æt frymðe genom        him to freobearne (VIII.6-10).

There is not now any warrior under the sky, any man cunning and so very clever, who can explain to sea-dwellers, rightly tell them, how the Guardian of the skies first took you as his noble son.

Twenty lines later, a very similar declaration restates the same point:

þu eart seo snyttro        þe þas sidan gesceaft  
 mid þi waldende        worhtes ealle.  
 Forþon nis ænig þæs horsc,        ne þæs hygecræftig,

þe þin fromcyn mæge      fira bearnum  
sweotule geseþan (VIII.26-30).

You are the Wisdom who, with the Ruler, formed all this wide creation.  
Therefore there is not anyone so wise, nor so skilled in mind, who can clearly  
show your origin to the children of men.

Both of these declarations, like that in *Christ and Satan*, use repetition to emphasize the overwhelmed capacities of even a superlative human intellect when faced with the mystery in question: that of the origin of Christ's divine nature. In the first declaration, the nearly-synonymous terms are "searopnocol" ("cunning," l. 7) and "to þæs swiðe gleaw" ("so very clever," l. 7), whose superlative degree is emphasized by the fact that the intensifying adverb "swiðe" receives the alliteration; in the second declaration, the nearly synonymous terms are the epithets "horsc" ("wise," l. 28) and "hygecræftig" ("skilled in mind," l. 28), again bound together by sense and alliteration alike. The declarations assert not so much that people cannot *know* Christ's origin, but that people cannot *narrate* it; nevertheless, the emphasis on the human intellect suggest that the unspeakable is also unthinkable or unknowable.

The two declarations echo Wulfstan's homiletic declaration, discussed above, that it is not within the measure of any human being to figure out Christ's divine nature--as opposed to His humanity, which has a beginning within earthly, historical time. The *Advent*-poet, unlike Wulfstan, insists not that Christ's humanity is time-bounded, but that His divinity is eternal. Indeed, the *Advent*-poet emphasizes the divinity of Christ and His coexistence with God the Father throughout the poem, in passages that range from near-credal articulations of Christ's eternal divinity (V.6-8), to allusions to Christ's role as creator of humankind (VI.32-4), and to simple mentions of Christ's eternal dwelling with the Father in Heaven (VI.33b-4, X.1-3). In

Section VIII, the declarations of unknowing give this doctrine a narrative shape, as they envelop an account of Creation's beginning and of Christ's agency in Creation:

þæt wæs þara þinga      þe her þeoda cynn  
 gefrugen mid folcum      æt fruman ærest  
 geworden under wolcnum,      þæt witig god,  
 lifes ordfruma,      leoht ond þystro  
 gedælde dryhtlice,      ond him wæs domes geweald,      15  
 ond þa wisan abead      weoroda ealdor:  
 “Nu sie geworden forþ      a to widan feore  
 leoht, lixende gefea,      lifgendra gehwam  
 þe in cneorissum      cende weorðen.”  
 Ond þa sona gelomp,      þa hit swa sceolde,      20  
 leoma leohtade      leoda mægþum,  
 torht mid tunglum,      æfter þon tida bigong.  
 Sylfa sette      þæt þu sunu wære  
 efeneardigende      mid þinne engan frean  
 ærþon oht þisses      æfre gewurde.      25  
 þu eart seo snyttro      þe þas sidan gesceaft  
 mid þi waldende      worhtes ealle. (VIII.11-27)

Of the things which here humankind has heard among people, it first came into being under the clouds that wise God, the Creator of life, divided light and darkness masterfully, and the power over destiny was His, and then the Lord of Hosts uttered His decree: “Now let there be always light, a gleaming joy to the distant souls, for every living thing that will be born in their generations.” And then soon it came to be, just as it should, that light, bright with stars, shone on the kindreds of people, through the passage of time. He Himself established that You, the Son, were co-existent with your sole Lord, before any of this had ever come to be. You are the wisdom who made all this wide creation with Yourself as Ruler.

The poet introduces this as a narrative that “þeoda cynn/gefrugen mid folcum” (“humankind has heard among the people,” ll. 11b-12a); the narrative emphatically belongs to communal wisdom, as emphasized by the double reference to the human community as both active audience, “þeoda cynn,” as well as social context for the narrative, “mid folcum”—that very communal wisdom that the declarations of unknowing represent as overwhelmed before the mystery of Christ's origin. A comparison of the *Advent*-poet's creation narrative with the

biblical Genesis reveals that the *Advent*-narrative is moving backwards in time. In the biblical account, God first speaks light into being and *then* divides light from darkness:

In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram. Terra autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi et spiritus Dei ferebatur super aquas. Dixitque Deus fiat lux et facta est lux. Et vidit Deus lucem quod esset bona et divisit lucem ac tenebras appellavitque lucem diem et tenebras noctem factumque est vespere et mane dies unus (*Vulgate*, Genesis 1.1-5).

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said: Let there be made light. And light was made. And God saw the light, that it was good; and he divided the light from the darkness. And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night; and there was evening and morning one day.

By contrast, the narrative of *Advent* proceeds from the separation of light and darkness (ll. 12b-15) to the creation of light (16-22), and, last, to Christ's presence and agency in Creation (ll. 23-7).<sup>193</sup> At this point narrative and communal wisdom alike reach their limit: as the second declaration of unknowing asserts, "there is no one so wise nor so intelligent" as to narrate the origin of Christ to the community of human knowers. Thus, even as the declarations of unknowing frame the narrative of the world's origin, they emphasize the point at which origin-narrative inevitably falls short: at the origin of Christ Himself, present and active in the making of the world.

As John Miles Foley observes, in the act of signalling a metaphysical boundary, the declarations of unknowing cross a genre-boundary. In their emphasis on the hypothetical human mind faced with the theological mystery, the declarations echo the challenges of the Old English

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<sup>193</sup> However, Jennifer Neville argues that Old English poets tend to present God as ordering the elements of Creation rather than producing them *ex nihilo* in the first place. This suggests that the *Advent*-poet is not so much deliberately "rewinding" *Genesis* as describing Creation according to an established poetic model rather than a biblical one (*Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 143).

riddles. The *Advent*-declarations contain the same alliterative word combination (“horsc” and “hygecræftig”) that describe a superlative mind in *Riddle 1* of the Exeter Book:

Hwylc is hæleþa þæs horsc      ond þæs hygecræftig  
 þæt þæt mæge asecgan,      hwa mec on sið wræce,  
 þonne ic astige strong,      stundum reþe,  
 þrymful þunie,      þragum wræce  
 fere geond foldan,      folcsalo bærne,  
 ræced reafige? (ll. 1-6)<sup>194</sup>

Who of warriors is so wise and so skilled in mind that is able to say this, who drove me on a journey, when I rise up strong, sometimes fiercely, thunder gloriously; sometimes [I] travel throughout the earth in exile, burn people’s houses, plunder homes?

In the riddle, the insistence on human intellectual capacities “amounts to keying the listener’s performance”: it flatters and challenges knowers to join the guessing game.<sup>195</sup> Accordingly, the question in *Riddle 1* has elicited numerous solutions.<sup>196</sup> By contrast, the *Advent*-poet deploys riddle-like cues only to subvert them:

By echoing the phraseology associated with the riddle genre, the poet adds an implied layer to his contention that this is a *ryne* so great that no human being can ever hope to comprehend it [...]. The mystery of God’s entry into the world is [...] construed as a riddle, portrayed as a puzzle beyond solving.<sup>197</sup>

<sup>194</sup> The Exeter Riddles are cited from Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, ASPR 3.

<sup>195</sup> Foley, “How Genres Leak” 92.

<sup>196</sup> Most editors of the Exeter Book Riddles print ll. 1-15 of the riddles as Riddle 1, ll. 16-30 as Riddle 2, and ll. 31-104 as Riddle 3. Most editors also solve the three riddles as “storm” or “wind” in their various manifestations (Williamson, *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* 125-9). Drawing on medieval and classical writings about meteorology, Williamson argues convincingly that all these three riddles form a conceptual and poetic unity, and can be presented as a single riddle with the solution of “wind.” In this conclusion Williamson is supported by the arguments of Erlemann, “Zu den altenglischen Rätseln” (*Archiv cxi* (1903): 49-63), and of Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), 364-8. For an alternate reading, see also Michael Lapidge, in “Stoic Cosmology and the Source of the First Old English Riddle” 6-11, who suggests that a possible solution for the riddle is *pneuma*, “cosmic breath/spirit.” In an interpretation of the riddle’s cultural resonances rather than its outright answer, Brian McFadden argues that the martial imagery of the riddle and the allusions to burning houses and plundering homes also function as grim suggestions of Viking activity (“Raiding, Reform, and Reaction” 340).

<sup>197</sup> Foley, “How Genres Leak” 93-4.

Riddlic expectations are raised only to be undercut: the phraseology that, in the riddles, flatters and challenges knowers to join the guessing game here denies the very existence of such knowers.<sup>198</sup> The conventions and expectations of the riddle genre heighten the expressivity of the *Unsagbarkeitstopos*; they underscore its traditional strategy of representing wonder and the divine by means of the human mind's inability to encompass these through knowledge or through narrative. Like the homilists, the *Advent*-poet emphasizes the depth of the metaphysical gap between God and human beings by asserting that this gap cannot be bridged by the human mind. But the *Advent*-poet reinforces the homilists' assertion of mystery by borrowing riddlic phraseology, whose genre-based associations with mystery-solving all the more emphatically show *this* mystery to be insoluble. In concert with the earlier Marian episodes, which highlight human perplexity about Christ's *temporal* origin, the declarations of unknowing highlight human perplexity about Christ's *eternal* origin. In so doing, the declarations crystallize the poem's insistence that mystery signals the profound gap, the metaphysical distance between the human condition and the divine.

Like *Christ and Satan*, *The Advent Lyrics* engage with the other world on a cosmic scale: the former narrates the conflict between God and the rebellious angels, while the latter contemplates that pivotal moment in Christian salvation history that is Christ's entrance into the human world. *Maxims II*, by contrast, tends to concentrate on the mundane rather than the mythical, observing the patterns of human lives as they intertwine with those of the natural world. The poem uses declarations of unknowing, heightened and emphasized through rhetorical ornamentation, to evoke the other world, but at the same time it integrates the state of unknowing within the patterns of mortal human lives in this world.

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<sup>198</sup> Foley, "How Genres Leak" 92–3.

The structure of *Maxims II* places particular emphasis on the declarations of unknowing.<sup>199</sup> The declarations appear at the very end of the poem. After a meditation on the pervasive nature of “worulde gewinn” (“the world’s strife,” l. 55a), and an assertion that a criminal must always hang for his crimes (55b-57a), the poet turns, in the very next half-line, to the soul’s destination in the afterlife:

	Meotod ana wat	
Hwyder seo sawul sceal	syððan hweorfan,	
And ealle þa gastas	þe for gode hweorfað	
Æfter deaðdæge,	domes bidað	60
On fæder fæðme.	Is seo forðgesceaft	
Digol and dyrne;	drihten ana wat	
Nergende fæder.	Næni eft cymeð	
Hider under hrofas,	þe þæt her for soð	
Mannum secge	hwylc sy meotodes gesceaft,	65
Sigefolca gesetu,	þær he sylfa wunað ( <i>Maxims II</i> , ll. 57-66).	

God alone knows where that soul must afterwards travel to, and all the spirits that go to God, after the death-day, await judgment in the Father’s protection. The future condition is secret and hidden; the Lord alone knows, the saving Father. No one returns again this way under roofs, who can here truly tell people what the Ruler’s creation is like, the abodes of the victorious people, where He Himself dwells.

*Maxims II*’s declarations of unknowing take a different shape from those in *Christ and Satan*, in the *Advent Lyrics*, or in the homilies. Instead of declaring that no one exists among humankind who can understand or express the mystery of the afterlife, *Maxims II* simply states that God alone understands the “hidden and secret” afterlife. It is not as explicit and absolute as Wulfstan’s assertion that it could never be within the measure of any human being to understand

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<sup>199</sup> For arguments that *Maxims II* demonstrates a coherent progression of meaning, see especially Bollard, “The Cotton Maxims” 179-87; Greenfield and Evert, “*Maxims II*: Gnome and Poem” 337-54; and Kessler, *Reading Gnostic Phenomena in Old English Literature* 153-7.



3.                                      God ana wat  
     Hwæt him weaxendum        winter bringað! (*Fortunes of Men*, ll. 8b-9)  
     God alone knows what the years will bring to the growing child.
  
4.                                      Meotud ana wat  
     Hwær se cwealm cymeþ,      þe heonan of cyþþe gewiteþ. (*Maxims I*, ll. 29b-30)  
     The Creator alone knows where the plague goes when it leaves our land.
  
5.                                      God ana wat  
     Hwa þære wælstowe        wealdan mote. (*Maldon*, ll. 94b-95)  
     God alone knows who will control the battlefield.

The specific subjects of God's exclusive knowledge are diverse: in addition to the afterlife, so designated in *Maxims II*, they include hell (in *Christ* ll. 32b-33), asexual reproduction (in *Phoenix* ll. 355b-60), the plague's course (*Maxims I*, ll. 29b-30), and the outcome of the battlefield (*Maldon*, ll. 94b-95). Cavill argues that these declarations form a set with the overall theme of "God's exclusive knowledge of why, when and how death will come, and what will happen afterwards."<sup>203</sup> In *Christ and Satan*, what God alone knows is the punishment of the rebel angels (ll. 32b-33)--namely, their banishment to the grim regions of hell. In *The Phoenix*, it is the bird's mysterious process of asexual reproduction; Cavill relates this instance of the maxim to the overarching theme of death by noting that "for the Phoenix, birth and death are closely related."<sup>204</sup> In the *Fortunes of Men*, the formula's connection to death is not explicit, but it is strongly suggested by the context: the poet follows the affirmation that God alone knows a child's future fate (ll. 8b-9) with a varied menu of the grisly ends available to human beings: being eaten by a wolf, starved, destroyed by storm or war or falling from a tree, hanged, burned to death, afflicted by blindness or disease, and so forth (ll. 10-56). In this context, it is hard to imagine that the coming winters will *not* bring the growing child death and suffering. The next

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<sup>203</sup> Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* 52-6.

<sup>204</sup> Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry* 55.

two “God ana wat” declarations are even more explicitly ominous: that in *Maxims I* refers to the plague’s trajectory (ll. 29b-30), while that in *Maldon* refers to the outcome of battle (ll. 94b-95).

What all these things that are known to God alone have in common is their alterity: the phoenix’s asexual reproduction is radically different from the ordinary course of nature; the realms of hell and the afterlife belong to the other world; disease, fortune, and fate are grim shapers of the human world, but are nonetheless forces beyond its power. The “God ana wat” formula generates a sense of wonder, a sense that these things all transcend ordinary human experience or human control. Even if these things are not all unambiguously otherworldly in nature, nevertheless the otherworldly suggests a scale against which the gap between them and the human world may be measured.

In *Maxims II*, the traditional resonances of this “God ana wat” formula are reinforced by the rhetorical construction of the passage. The initial formulaic assertion that “Meotod ana wat” (“God alone knows,” l. 57b) the soul’s destination forms an envelope pattern with the twin assertion, half a dozen lines later, that “drihten ana wat” (“the Lord alone knows,” l. 62b) the future condition. Within the envelope, the pair of synonyms that signify the secrecy of the afterlife (“digol and dyrne,” l. 62) alliterate not only with one another, but with “drihten,” the source and foundation of this reality inaccessible to the living. The envelope pattern separates the two possible human perspectives on the mystery. On one side is the perspective of the souls awaiting judgment in the Father’s embrace (which suggests that they do not know their final destination right away, either, l. 59-61).<sup>205</sup> On the other side, there is the perspective of the living, who have no access, no eye-witnesses to the state of the dead. The separation of these

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<sup>205</sup> See Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday* 1-14, for an overview of the early medieval theological controversy about the state of the soul between death and Doomsday.

two perspectives is reinforced by the implicit contrast between their habitations: the homes of the living, metonymically invoked by a concrete noun (“hrofas”), and the unknowable dwellings of the blessed dead (“sigefolca gesetu”), described, as befits their nature, in terminology more abstract, less closely bound to a specific physical reality. Inhabited by God Himself, these dwellings remain secret.

The poetic context of this elaborate declaration of unknowing deepens its impact. As a genre, Old English gnomic poems articulate the order of the world. Much of *Maxims II* describes and prescribes the typical properties of things with particular attention to their habitats: the gem must dwell in the ring, the dragon in a barrow, the fish in the water, the king in the hall, the bear on the heath, God in heaven, the thief in darkness, the monster alone in the fen.<sup>206</sup> In a poem so concerned with establishing the places of things, the final, emphatic refusal to “place” the dead is all the more striking. As Kessler notes, the passage is “the persistent problem for interpretation of *Maxims II*,” because it is a departure in syntax and theme from the rest of the poem:

The individual lines in this passage do not adhere to established expectations of gnomic syntax. Moreover, the message that humanity can never have access to the underlying knowledge of the world also seems to contradict previous statements within the poem. If God ultimately holds all knowledge, what does the reader gain by knowing the proper place for fish or fowl?<sup>207</sup>

Loren Gruber goes so far as to argue that the gnomes do not actually codify such an underlying knowledge of the world to begin with; on the contrary, they suggest rather that such knowledge is not available to human beings at all:

[The gnomes of *Maxims II*] neither offer a basis for the decisions of the rule of God nor do they reveal the answers at which the wise man arrives. The seal

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<sup>206</sup> Examples may be multiplied. More than three quarters of *Maxims II* enumerates the proper dwelling places of a wide variety of things.

<sup>207</sup> Kessler, *Reading Gnomic Phenomena* 155.

gnomes thus seem to signal a separation between men and nature as well as a disjunction between the world and God; the poem as a whole fails to offer solutions to the problems of human existence.<sup>208</sup>

Kessler proposes a less agnostic stance than Gruber's. She turns from the end of *Maxims II* to its beginning: a passage that is similar to the end in terms of prosody (both are hypermetric passages) and that juxtaposes the duty of kings to hold a kingdom with the prominence of ancient cities, the might of natural phenomena, the glories of Christ, and the power of fate (ll. 1-5).<sup>209</sup>

Reading the end of *Maxims II* in the light of its beginning, Kessler suggests that

perhaps the return to hypermetric lines at the conclusion allows the reader's attention to return to this opening image. Just as the king must persist in duty against the elements, so the individual creature (including the individual human) must do as is appointed even in the face of uncertainty. Against the background of this opening image the Cotton *Maxims* perhaps end on a highly pragmatic, realistic point. God may possess all transcendent knowledge, but the individual can observe enough from natural phenomena to understand his or her societal and moral duties.<sup>210</sup>

In other words, the order of the world, proclaimed by most of the poem, must obtain despite the enigmatic end. But it is equally possible to read the final passage in continuity rather than in contrast with the order of the world proclaimed by the poem. As I have argued thus far, declarations of unknowing or inexpressibility, occurring in homilies and poems alike, mark out the numinous, the divine, the eschatological—in short, the elements of the other world—as secrets indecipherable or ineffable for human beings. The declarations establish the mystery of the other world as a truth universally acknowledged—as much so as the royal obligation of holding kingdoms or the draconic habit of residing in barrows. In this light, the final passage is

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<sup>208</sup> Gruber, "The Agnostic Anglo-Saxon Gnomes" 40.

<sup>209</sup> The last line of this passage in particular has given rise to considerable debate about the religious nature of the poem: some scholars argue that the passage indicates the predominance of pagan elements, while others argue that it reflects a predominantly Christian worldview. For a cogent summary and evaluation of the debate, see Kessler, *Reading Gnostic Phenomena* 121-2.

<sup>210</sup> Kessler, *Reading Gnostic Phenomena* 156.

as much an encapsulation of traditional wisdom as the rest of the poem: just as the place of courage is in a warrior, and the place of a gem is in a ring, so the place of the dead is beyond the world charted by human discourse and communal human wisdom.

Thus the poetic declarations of inexpressibility or unknowing discussed so far mark out what clearly belongs to the “other world.” In *Christ and Satan*, unknowing marks the eschatological spaces of Heaven and Hell, as they feature in the conflict between God and the devil. In *Advent*, the declarations that assert the mystery of Christ’s origin, human and divine, accentuate the cognitive and ontological gulf between God and the human world, in order to emphasize the magnitude of the miracle by which God bridges that gulf—namely, the miracle of Advent, of Christ’s entrance into the world. Even when the declarations of unknowing are not set in the vast framework of biblical narrative, but in the narrower frame of individual human lives and deaths, as in *Maxims II*, these declarations still evoke the eschatological: the unknown, and to the living unknowable, dwelling-places of the dead. In *The Order of the World*, however, declarations of unknowing refer not to God or the afterlife, but to aspects of the natural world.

The *Order*-poet sets out to praise God by describing the wonders of creation (ll. 38-81). At the heart of this praise is a description of the sun’s course, from its rising out of the waves “morgna gehwam ofer misthleopu” (“every morning over the misty cliffs,” l. 60) to its setting “in þæt wonne genip under wætra geþring” (“in that dark shadow under the tumult of waters,” l. 79).<sup>211</sup> As the sun sets and vanishes away from human sight, the poet asserts the unknowability of its further course:

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<sup>211</sup> For two complementary discussions of the *Order*-poet’s preoccupation with the craft of poetry and its spiritual significance, see Wehlau, “Rumination and Re-Creation: Poetic Instruction in *The Order of the World*” 65-77; and Robert DiNapoli, “The Heart of the Visionary Experience: *The Order of the World* and its Place in the Old English Canon,” 97-108. Both discussions foreground the description of the sun’s course. Wehlau interprets it as a poetic reconstruction of Psalm 18, provided by the *Order*-poet as “a sample or model of good poetry” seamlessly integrated into “a poem about poetry, a kind of Old English poetic manual in brief” (65). DiNapoli presents the passage as the intersection of the poet’s devotional and poetic concerns, at once “a physical recapitulation or

Heofontorht swegl

scir gescyndeð      in gesceaft godes  
under foldan fæþm,      farende tungol.      75  
Forþon nænig fira      þæs frod leofað  
þæt his mæge æspringe      þurh his ægne sped [witan],      MS wite  
hu geond grund færeð      goldtorht sunne  
in þæt wonne genip      under wætra geþring,  
opþe hwa þæs leohtes      londbuende      80  
brucan mote,      sibþan heo ofer brim hweorfeð (ll. 73-81).

The heaven-bright radiance advances, shining, in God's creation, under the earth's surface, the wandering star. Because no one lives among human beings so wise that he would be able to know, through his own capacity, its (the sun's) setting, how the gold-bright sun travels around the earth, into that dark mist under the tumult of waters, or who among land-dwellers might enjoy its light, after it moves over the sea.

The declaration of unknowing is structured like the homiletic rather than the gnomic declarations, affirming that "no one exists who knows," rather than asserting that "God alone knows," or that "human beings do not know." There are conspicuous parallels between this passage and the declarations of unknowing in *Beowulf*. Presumably because the sun, like Scyld's funeral ship, vanishes out of the sight of the living into the ocean's expanse, Shippey remarks that the entire passage is "strongly reminiscent of Scyld's funeral in *Beowulf*."<sup>212</sup> Verbal parallels, however, link the passage even more strongly to the declaration of unknowing embedded in the description of the monster-mere. First, the formulations of denial are similar in structure and diction. They have the same introductory formula ("no [nænig fira] þæs frod leofað"), and, once the manuscript reading of line 77 in *Order* is restored, they have the same knowledge-verb in the present subjunctive ("witan"):

Forþon nænig fira      þæs frod leofað  
þæt his mæge æspringe      þurh his ægne sped wite

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emanation of [the] metaphysical reality" of the divine presence, "a convenient symbol for God's omnipresence and for the universal accessibility of the divine vision" and a reminder that this vision is here bodied forth through the craft of poetry (104-6).

<sup>212</sup> Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* 3.

hu geond grund færeð      goldtorht sunne (*Order* ll 76-78)

   No þæs frod leofað  
gumena bearna,      þæt þone grund wite [...] (*Beowulf* ll. 1366-67).

Landscape imagery, too, adds to the similarity. In *Order*, the sun rises “ofer misthleopu” (over the misty cliffs), a compound that has only one other occurrence in the extant Old English corpus: in *Beowulf*, in a reference to Grendel’s habitat, marking his menacing path towards Heorot (l. 710). The sun’s setting even more strikingly recalls Grendel’s habitat. In *Order*, the sun descends “under foldan fæpm [...] / in þæt wonne genip under wætra geþring,” (“under the earth’s surface, [...] into that dark mist under the tumult of waters”). The elements of the landscape—underground water, mist, darkness—recall the monster-mere in *Beowulf* and its surroundings, where the water “under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð” (goes down under the dark mist of the cliffs, l. 1360). The passage in *Order* imagines the sun’s mysterious destination in the same landscape elements that form Hrothgar’s description of the monster-mere: downward movement, mist and darkness, and the tumult of unfathomed waters. The words and phrases that the two passages share are not rare, nor do they fall into shared combinations that would indicate some degree of textual affiliation. What the two poems share, instead, is an affective dynamic, a correlation between the shape of their landscapes and the state of human unknowing that the poems evoke. In other words, both the *Order*-poet and the *Beowulf*-poet fashion their landscapes to support the declarations of unknowing: in *Beowulf*, the mystery of the monster-mere is underscored by the secret monster-territories that surround it and the dark currents of underground waters that lead towards it, just as, in *Order*, the

mystery of the sun's course is underscored by progressive movement towards darkness and concealment.<sup>213</sup>

But although the *Order*-poet presents the sun's course as an unfathomable mystery, that course was thought to be fairly well-fathomed in Anglo-Saxon England. There *did* live people wise enough to chart the sun's course—"a whole crowd" of them, in the words of Ceolfrith, abbot of Wearmouth-Jarrow.<sup>214</sup> From Bede and Aldhelm, in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, to Beorhtferth and Abbo of Fleury, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, astronomers and masters of the *computus* in Anglo-Saxon England used sophisticated theoretical models and accumulated tables of measurements to track planetary courses and to describe "how the sun and moon move relative to the stars, the celestial poles, and the terrestrial horizons."<sup>215</sup> Jennifer Neville's survey of astronomical material<sup>216</sup> demonstrates that a sustained interest in the subject matter existed in Anglo-Saxon England: in the seventh century, Theodore and Hadrian brought to England descriptions of classical Greek cosmology;<sup>217</sup> in the eighth century, Bede described the courses of the planets, envisioning, in Neville's words, "an image of the earth beneath a busy sky, full of planets circling the earth regularly";<sup>218</sup> before the end of the ninth century, Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, which includes the basics of classical astronomy, arrived in England as well;<sup>219</sup> and in the early eleventh century, in his *Enchiridion*, Byrhtferth describes the course of the sun, including the time it spends in each sign of the zodiac, as well as noting the lengths of the planets' courses.<sup>220</sup> The sun's course, in the scientific literature of Anglo-Saxon England, is anything but hidden and

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<sup>213</sup> For further discussion of how the concrete details of the monster-mere's landscape embody the notion of secrecy, see below.

<sup>214</sup> Stevens, "Astronomy" (*Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*) 50.

<sup>215</sup> Stevens, "Astronomy" (*Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*) 50.

<sup>216</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 153-6.

<sup>217</sup> Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries* 63.

<sup>218</sup> Bede, *De natura rerum* xi, xii-xvii, xxv.

<sup>219</sup> Gneuss, "Preliminary List" 8.

<sup>220</sup> Baker and Lapidge, eds. and trans., *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion* 10-12, 116-18.

obscure.<sup>221</sup> Accordingly, the *Order*-poet's presentation of the sun's course as a profound mystery is not the scientific state of the question in Anglo-Saxon England, nor is it (like the homiletic or poetic assertions of theological mysteries) a culturally-accepted verity; it is a poetic evocation of wonder, a suggestion of the divine presence within creation. As Neville observes, it is part of the *Order*-poet's representation of divine power.<sup>222</sup> The opening of the poem invites the audience to contemplate the wonders of creation, revealed by the poet's verbal art and wisdom. However, the poet qualifies his praises of human wisdom with a declaration of unknowing:

Ic þe lungre sceal  
 meotudes mægensped      maran gesecgan,  
 þonne þu hygecræftig      in hreþre mæge  
 mode gegripan.      Is sin meaht forswiþ.  
 Nis þæt monnes gemet      moldhrerendra,  
 þæt he mæge in hreþre      his heah geweorc  
 furþor aspyrgan      þonne him frea sylle  
 to ongietanne      godes agen bibod (ll. 23-30).

I will quickly tell you of the famous power of the Creator, greater than you, strong in thought, are able to grasp in [your] mind. His power is very great. It is not within the measure of a man, of those who move upon the earth, that he might discover/explore/ explain in [his] mind His high work further than the Lord gives him to perceive God's own command.

Unlike the description of the sun's setting, discussed above (ll. 73-81), this passage is far more typical as a declaration of unknowing. Using the term "gemet" (measure) in its homiletic sense, discussed earlier, it presents the human mind overwhelmed by the created natural world—insofar as that natural world is a work of God. Like the declarations of unknowing in homilies and in most poems, human unknowing becomes both a sign and a result of the divine presence, of God

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<sup>221</sup> Neville argues that, although astronomical material was available in Anglo-Saxon England, few were interested in synthesizing it into a coherent image of the cosmos, and even fewer in giving such an image poetic form (*Representations of the Natural World*, 155-6); but she also observes that specific details of astronomical learning do make it into poetry and even homiletics (155-7).

<sup>222</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 161.

at work. In the *Order of the World*, the poet “measures” God not just against nature, which Neville observes as a common trope,<sup>223</sup> but against the human mind. In this context, the declaration of unknowing about the course of the sun is there not for what it denotes, but for what it connotes; the mystery of the sun’s course emphasizes God’s agency in creation.<sup>224</sup>

In all these examples, drawn from a wide variety of genres and contexts, the declarations of unknowing are not statements of merely circumstantial or temporary ignorance. Instead, some of them articulate theological mysteries, such as Christ’s divinity, or the transcendent joys of the afterlife; others, though tied to historical circumstances or aspects of the natural world, place even these earthly objects beyond human reason or understanding, and in so doing, align them with God, heaven, hell, or death’s secretive domain, realities radically outside the human world. In this traditional association with the eschatological or the numinous, the declarations of unknowing call for wonder, awe, even dread. In contrast to most of the Old English poetic corpus, *Beowulf* and the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* apply declarations of unknowing not just to the divine or the eschatological, but to monsters. The *Letter* narrates Alexander the Great’s encounter with the marvels of India during his journeys of conquest in the distant East. When Alexander and his men reach a certain large river, a troop of soldiers try to swim across and are snatched away by hippopotami. The Latin *Letter* renders the scene as follows:

Iamque .IIII.tam partem fluminis pernataverant, cum horrida res uisu subito nobis  
 conspecta est. Maiores elefantorum corporibus hipotami inter profundos aquarum emersi  
 apparuerunt gurgites raptosque in uorticem crudeli poena uiros flentibus nobis  
 adumpserunt. Iratus tum ego ducibus qui nos in insidias deducebant, iubeo ex his .CL.  
 in flumen mitti.<sup>225</sup>

No sooner had they swum the fourth part of the river, that something horrible to look at suddenly happened. Greater in bodies than elephants, hippopotami that had been

<sup>223</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 140.

<sup>224</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* 140–1.

<sup>225</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*. For the Latin translation, see Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 32.

immersed in the waters' depths snatched the men in their mouths (or, into the whirlpool),<sup>226</sup> and took them away, in a cruel punishment, while we were weeping. Then, furious with the guides who led us into traps, I ordered 150 of them put into the river.

In the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the episode receives an “expansive and gory treatment”:<sup>227</sup>

Pa hie ða hæfdon feorðan dæl þære ea geswummen, ða becwom sum ongrislic wise on hie. Pæt wæs þonne nicra mengeo on onsione maran 7 unhyrlicran þonne ða elpendas in ðone grund þære ea 7 betweoh ða yða þæs wæteres þa men besencte 7 mid heora muðe hie sliton 7 blodgodon 7 hie ealle swa fornamon, pæt ure nænig wiste hwær hiora æni cwom. Ða wæs ic swiðe yre þæm minum ladþeowum, þa us on swylce frecennissa gelæddon.

When they had swum the fourth part of that water, then something horrible happened to them. There appeared a multitude of water-monsters [hippopotami], larger and more terrible in appearance than the elephants, who dragged the men through the watery waves down to the river bottom, and tore them to bloody pieces with their mouths, and snatched them all away so that none of us knew where any of them had gone. Then I was very angry with my guides, who had led us into such danger.<sup>228</sup>

In contrast to the Latin text, here the “nicras” appear in a multitude. They are not only bigger than elephants, as in the Latin texts, but also “unhyrlicran,” more terrifying to look at. The Latin text uses moral and emotional descriptors to convey the Greeks’ reaction to the spectacle (“crudeli poena,” cruel punishment; “flentibus nobis,” while we were weeping); in contrast, the Old English text relies on visual and kinesthetic imagery, the blood of the victims and the frenzy of monstrous movement. The parallel verbs emphasize every step of the grisly action-sequence: the monsters “besencte,” dragged down the men; “sliton,” tore them apart; “blodgodon,” spilled their blood; “fornamon,” snatched them away. As Orchard observes, the translator of the *Letter*

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<sup>226</sup> As Orchard observes, “other manuscripts have the variant *in uorticem* (‘into the surging water’) for the problematic phrase *in uertice* (literally ‘in the top’, and so perhaps ‘in their mouths’), and such a reading may well lie behind the Old English version” (*A Critical Companion* 32).

<sup>227</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 31.

<sup>228</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 234–5.

elaborates this episode in ways that recall Beowulf's adventures. Earlier, the translator adds scenic detail reminiscent of the monster-mere (namely, a wooded cliff-edge by the river-bank).<sup>229</sup>

In this passage, the translator depicts in graphic detail the men's being dragged down to the depths. Beowulf suffers a similar fate twice, though he is none the worse for it: during his swimming contest against Breca, sea-beasts try to drag him to the bottom; later, during his venture into the monster-mere, Grendel's mother similarly drags him down to her underwater lair.<sup>230</sup>

There is one more parallel between the two locales: a declaration of unknowing. Just as no one knows Grendel's whereabouts, or his lineage, or the depth of his habitat, so Alexander declares that none of the witnesses of the horrific spectacle know where any of the swimmers had gone. The declaration seems illogical after such a step-by-step description of the grisly scene; clearly, the unfortunate swimmers' final destination is the collective stomach of the hippopotamus herd. However, just as in earlier passages, here the declaration of unknowing appears for connotative rather than denotative reasons: namely, in order to heighten the horror of the monstrous spectacle. Unlike earlier examples of such declarations, this passage makes no mention of God, heaven, hell, or the afterlife; its declaration of unknowing refers to a "natural" rather than a "supernatural" object. But as Jennifer Neville observes, the boundaries of the "natural" would have been drawn differently in Old English literature.

Old English poets did not describe the natural world that threatened them as natural (in the sense of normal and wholesome) but rather as *unnatural* to human tastes—unfamiliar, uncanny and unfriendly. As a result natural

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<sup>229</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 31.

<sup>230</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 31-5. In this and other encounters with water-monsters in the Old English *Letter*, "[t]he tissue of echoes and parallels, both verbal and thematic, that links the *Letter* and *Beowulf* is perhaps best explained by the notion that the author of the *Letter* knew the poem at first hand, and consciously developed hints in his original text in a way which deliberately drew on aspects of *Beowulf*" (35).

phenomena and monsters existed side by side in a tradition that characterised them both as fundamentally hostile to the human race.<sup>231</sup>

In this respect, Grendel and his monstrous relatives “belong to the same antagonistic natural world that sends wind, wolves, and monsters against the human race”—and, on occasion, hungry hippopotami. In the *Letter*, the declaration of unknowing aligns the water-monsters with the other great unknowns, the “metaphysically other”: God, heaven and hell, death itself. Indeed, Brian McFadden argues that the marvels of India function as a negative image of divinity. They manifest their essential alterity, their alignment with the divine, as they resist being known, conquered, and fitted into Alexander’s narrative:

[Alexander] attempts to describe the wondrous beings and races which he encounters with his army, and his narrative of conquest functions as a metaphor for containing the encountered world in thought, description and mental order. However, he is resisted at every turn by natives, monsters and classical divinities; he is forced to realize that his reason and his force are incapable of containing divine power as manifested in the natural world of India.<sup>232</sup>

In the hippopotamus episode, there is no explicit link between nature and its Creator, as there is, for example, in *The Order of the World*—or, indeed, in the *Letter*’s own account of the rain of fire, which Alexander’s soldiers suspect to be a manifestation of divine anger.<sup>233</sup> Instead, in the hippopotamus episode, the link between divinity and the monsters is affective rather than representational. The *Letter*-translator, heightening the horror of the episode throughout, exploits the conventional resonances of the declaration of unknowing in order to surround the monsters with awe, wonder, even numinous dread.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Neville, *Representations of the Natural World* 71.

<sup>232</sup> McFadden, “The social context of narrative disruption in *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*” 91.

<sup>233</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 216-7 (in the Latin *Letter*) and 244-5 (in the Old English *Letter*).

<sup>234</sup> The converse of this relationship between mystery and monstrosity also holds: just as mystery becomes a rhetorical ornament of monsters, so monstrosity becomes a rhetorical ornament of mystery. Riddles re-imagine everyday objects as strange and wondrous creatures, engaged in bizarre behaviours, committing violent acts, or

In *Beowulf*, the declarations of unknowing encompass the eschatological as well as the monstrous: as noted earlier, Scyld's final destination, Grendel's whereabouts and lineage, and the depths of the monster-mere are all mysterious to humankind. The declarations fit into the poet's presentation of the Danes: as the poet repeatedly observes,<sup>235</sup> their knowledge of God and of the monsters alike is "sadly delimited."<sup>236</sup> But the declarations of unknowing have wider application than these assertions of cultural shortcomings. Grammatically speaking, their subjects are humankind at large, not only the Danish court; their verbs are in the present tense, not in the distancing past of the old days, in *illo tempore* ("in geardagum") when the Spear-Danes' princes did deeds of glory. As in Maxims II, and in gnomic statements generally, the present tense here indicates not the fleeting, current moment, but "perpetual truths which are, and will continue to be, relevant."<sup>237</sup> Like the declarations of unknowing discussed above, these declarations state not only that certain things are mysteries under specific historical circumstances, but that they have been mysterious for a long time and are so still, with the implication that this is because their nature places them beyond the range of human understanding.

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enduring grisly violence at the hands of human beings. As Orchard observes, "riddle-objects, like monsters, are defined in terms of hybridity, liminality, exaggeration, minimization, distortion, or some combination of the above" (Orchard, "Twist and Shout: Riddles of Monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon England"). Accordingly, riddles use their invocation of monstrosity and wonder, the riddles disguise and distance what are often everyday objects from the mundane world—much in the way *Beowulf* and the *Letter* invoke mystery to emphasize the distance of their monsters from the mundane world.

<sup>235</sup> See especially *Beowulf* ll. 180-8, l. 1233.

<sup>236</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 238-40.

<sup>237</sup> Kessler, *Reading Gnomic Phenomena* 22-3.

Scyld Scefing's destination is the most thoroughly mysterious. After his death, his ship is set adrift in the sea. As it leaves the Danish shore, it slips away from human territory, from human control, and so from human knowledge:<sup>238</sup>

Men ne cunnon  
 Secgan to soðe,                    selerædende,  
 Hæleð under heofenum,            hwa þæm hlæste onfeng. (ll. 47-52)

Men cannot truly say, hall-counsellors, heroes under heaven, who received that cargo.

But Scyld's physical journey is not the only one with an uncertain destination. The ship journey also functions as a metaphor of human life, of the soul's passage towards God; the uncertainty of Scyld's geographical destination accordingly suggests the pagan hero's unknown fate after death.<sup>239</sup> This unknowing may be a function of the observers: that is, Scyld's eschatological destination is unknown because the hall councillors who ponder the matter are pagan; just as their

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<sup>238</sup> On the sea as a space resistant to memory and narration in Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose, see Fabienne Michelet, "Lost at Sea: Nautical Travels in *Andreas*, *Exodus*, and Old English Accounts of the *Adventus Saxonum*."

<sup>239</sup> See, for example, Cynewulf's description of a hazardous ship-journey as the nearest likeness for human life:

Nu is þon gelicost	swa we on laguflode	850
ofer cald wæter	ceolum liðan	
geond sidne sæ,	sundhengestum,	
flodwudu fergen.	Is þæt frecne stream	
yða ofer mæta	þe we her on lacað	
geond þas wacan woruld,	windge holmas	855
ofer deop gelad.	Wæs se drohtað strong	
ær þon we to londe	geliden hæfdon	
ofer hreone hrycg.	þa us help bicwom,	
þæt us to hælo	hyge gelædde,	
godes gæstsunu,	ond us giefte sealde	860
þæt we oncnawan magun	ofer ceoles bord	
hwær we sælan sceolon	sundhengestas,	
ealde yðmearas,	ancrum fæste ( <i>Christ II</i> , ll. 850-63).	

Now [human life] is most similar to this: as if on ocean-floods, over cold water, we travel in ships over the wide sea, on our sea-horses, sail in our flood-wood. That stream is fearful, those immense waves on which we toss throughout this changeful world, windy waves over the deep path. [Our] predicament was hard before we sailed to land over the stormy ridge. Then help came to us, that led us to salvation's harbour, God's Spirit-son, and granted us grace, that we might know, over the ship's side, where we ought to fetter our sea-horses, our old wave-steeds, fast at anchor.

descendants, in Grendel's time, do not know God, so they do not know what happens to the soul after death.<sup>240</sup> In this interpretation, Scyld's Danes are in the same predicament as the councillor of King Edwin in Bede's famous sparrow-story. The councillor advises King Edwin to adopt Christianity on epistemological grounds, because it offers a more satisfactory metaphysics than their present faith:

'Talis,' inquit, 'mihi uidetur, rex, uita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius, quod nobis incertum est, temporis, quale cum te residente ad caenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumali, accenso quidem foco in medio, et calido effecto caenaculo, furentibus autem foris per omnia turbinibus hiemalium pluuiarum uel niuium, adueniens unus passerum domum citissime peruolauerit; qui cum per unum ostium ingrediens, mox per aliud exierit. Ipso quidem tempore, quo intus est, hiemis tempestate non tangitur, sed tamen paruissimo spatio serenitatis ad momentum excurso, mox de hieme in hiemem regrediens, tuis oculis elabitur. Ita haec uita hominum ad modicum apparet; quid autem sequatur, quidue praecesserit, prorsus ignoramus. Unde si haec noua doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda uidetur.' His similia et ceteri maiores natu ac regis consilarii diuinitus admoniti prosequabantur.

"The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant. If, therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed." The other elders and king's councillors, by Divine inspiration, spoke to the same effect. (HE II.xiii)

The paganism of King Edwin's court, Bede suggests, provides no frame of reference, no guidance for the hereafter; the archetypal pagan stance on "what went before, or what is to follow" is accordingly one of emphatic unknowing, much like the stance of the Spear-Danes on Scyld's mysterious origin and equally mysterious destination. James W. Earl pushes the analogy further, describing the Scyld episode as "a poetic variation on Bede's parable of the sparrow" and arguing

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<sup>240</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 238-40; Stanley, "The Narrative Art of *Beowulf*" 72.

that “[t]he world of the parable is the world of the poem [...]”. The transcendent is simply unknown, everywhere bordering the world of the known as the ocean surrounds the earth.”<sup>241</sup> The sea, in Earl’s analogy, fulfills the same function as the wintry world that surrounds the lit, fire-warmed hall in Bede’s parable: it symbolizes what is beyond the ken of communal wisdom, or at least communal wisdom (in Bede’s view) without the benefit of Christian doctrine.

But Scyld’s mystery is not just a result of the limited communal knowledge of his own society; his eschatological destination is unknown not only because of his people’s theological limitations, but because Scyld himself is an ambiguous figure, both a pagan and an instrument of providential mercy. The *Beowulf*-poet describes Scyld’s funeral as a pagan ceremony,<sup>242</sup> and says nothing to suggest that Scyld is any less pagan than his people; Scyld’s life itself is a model of heroic pagan kingship. At the same time, Scyld is also an instrument of God’s providence: he founds a strong royal dynasty for the hitherto lordless Spear-Danes, and his son, as the poet notes, is sent by God “folces to frofre” (“as a comfort to the people,” l. 12b).<sup>243</sup> In the light of Scyld’s double role (pagan/agent of Providence), his destination after death is similarly ambiguous, at worst dire,<sup>244</sup> at

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<sup>241</sup> Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf*, 71-3. What Earl’s analogy glosses over is that both Bede and *Beowulf* problematize this unknowing. Bede presents this unknowing not as a simple given, but as a deficiency to be corrected by the adoption of Christian theology. The *Beowulf*-poet similarly “often seems to circumscribe and undercut his creations”; the Spear-Danes’ ignorance of what Earl terms “the transcendental” is later linked to their panicked fit of devil-worship, a practice strongly suggested, a few lines later, to be a prelude to damnation (Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 238; *Beowulf* ll. 180b-88).

<sup>242</sup> See, for example, Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals* 27-42 and 116-133, for archaeological parallels to the funerals in *Beowulf*. Owen-Crocker notes, however, that the ceremonies in *Beowulf* have been to some extent de-paganized, “‘laundered’ of those aspects which would be distasteful to a Christian audience” (123). In addition to pagan parallels, there is also a striking Christian one: in the Latin life of St. Gildas, dated between the ninth and eleventh centuries, the dying saint orders his followers to set his dead body in a boat and let it float out to sea. [Cameron, “Saint Gildas and Scyld Scefing” *[Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969): 240-46]

<sup>243</sup> See also King, “Launching the Hero” 460-4, for a more in-depth discussion of how the *Beowulf*-poet depicts the role of pagans (righteous or not) in the divine plan, and how the *Beowulf*-poet’s depiction is aligned with St. Augustine of Hippo’s views of history.

<sup>244</sup> Stanley, “Hæpenra hyht”; King, “Launching the hero” 458-9; however, Daniel Anlezark emphasizes that Scyld journeys “on Frean wære” (into the Lord’s keeping, 27b); though the Danes “cannot truly say” who receives Scyld, the poet can, and does (Anlezark, *Water and Fire* 285-6).

best doubtful.<sup>245</sup> Eric Stanley argues for a grim, or at best doubtful view of the afterlife of *Beowulf*'s pagan characters:

nothing in the whole poem suggests that the utter hopelessness of pagans, even of virtuous pagans, was ever forgotten by the poet. The poet does not say that all pagans shall be damned; he says that they are without the consolation of hope because they have no knowledge of the true God.<sup>246</sup>

Reading *Beowulf* against Alcuin's famous condemnation of pagan beliefs and cultural practices, Stanley concludes that nothing in *Beowulf* directly contradicts Alcuin's consignment of the pagan kings of old to eternal lamentation in hell.<sup>247</sup> Stanley's reading focuses on the figure of Beowulf, in refutation of the more optimistic arguments of earlier scholars, who "sought to save Beowulf's soul from the wreck of the Geatish nation,"<sup>248</sup> however, his grim conclusion embraces Scyld Scefing's fate as well. In a slightly more optimistic reading, Judy King attempts to rehabilitate Beowulf in antithesis to Scyld Scefing: she argues that Beowulf does obtain salvation, but the eschatological destination of Scyld Scefing, "a pagan who lives according to the old heroic ethos," remains obscure.<sup>249</sup> Daniel Anlezark, in turn, observes that despite the declaration of unknowing that renders Scyld's final destination a mystery to his own people, the poet nevertheless describes Scyld as journeying "on Frean wære" ("into the Lord's keeping," l. 27).<sup>250</sup> The positive meaning of the expression is at once supported and complicated by the later occurrence in the poem of a very similar phrase, "to fæder fæþmum" ("in the Father's embrace," l. 188a). In its context, the phrase clearly

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<sup>245</sup> King, "Launching the hero" 464.

<sup>246</sup> Stanley, "Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*" 141.

<sup>247</sup> Stanley, "Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*" 150. See, however, Roberta Frank, "The *Beowulf*-Poet's Sense of History," which highlights a disjunction between Alcuin's rigour and the *Beowulf*-poet's sympathetic, lovingly detailed depiction of the culture of his pagan characters.

<sup>248</sup> Stanley, "Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*" 142. For earlier, more optimistic readings, see Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* 216; Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* 465; and Phillpotts, "Wyrd and Providence in Anglo-Saxon Thought" 7-27. For an earlier approach that, like Stanley's, emphasizes the ambiguities of Beowulf's destination in the afterlife, see Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in *Beowulf*" 309-31.

<sup>249</sup> King, "Launching the Hero" 465. Her argument with respect to Beowulf's salvation is criticized by Clark, "Relaunching the Hero" 621-2.

<sup>250</sup> Anlezark, *Water and Fire* 285-6.

denotes the state of the blessed, in sharp contrast to the state of the damned whose souls are caught eternally “in fyres fæþm” (“in the fire’s embrace,” l. 185a). The similarity is a comforting suggestion with reference to Scyld, until we consider that the immediate context of the “to fæder fæþmum” phrase is the sharp condemnation of the unavailing “hæþenra hyht” (“hope of heathens,” l. 179a), the idolatrous practices of the Spear-Danes, practices that the poet sources in their emphatic ignorance of God. The cumulative weight of scholarship leaves Scyld’s destination in the afterlife obscure; the last word on the matter is surely Eric Stanley’s observation that “[d]oubts of Beowulf’s [and, by extension, Scyld’s] salvation come with each rereading of the poem: the poet meant them to come.”<sup>251</sup>

But an even simpler interpretation of the passage is possible: that Scyld’s destination is unknown because Scyld is a human soul setting out towards a world whose precise arrangements remain obscure to the living, Christian and pagan alike.<sup>252</sup> This, after all, is the epistemological stance of *Maxims II*, which proclaims that God alone can know the destination of the soul’s journey after death, even when that soul awaits judgment “on fæder fæðme” (in the Father’s embrace), just as Scyld Scefing travels “on Frean wære” (in the Lord’s keeping). In other words, even a sense of the dead soul’s theological orientation does not preclude unknowing on the part of the living. As the declarations of unknowing in homilies or religious poems suggest, unknowing marks the border between the world of living human beings and the “other world,” the world of God, of heaven and hell and their inhabitants, of the dead in the afterlife. Accordingly, Scyld’s last destination remains unknown, beyond the ken of his people’s communal wisdom, because of the inherent mystery of the other world.

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<sup>251</sup> Stanley, “Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*” 136.

<sup>252</sup> This attitude appears not only in *Maxims II*, discussed above, but also in *Juliana*, where Cynewulf expresses a similar uncertainty about the journey of his own soul after death (ll. 699a-700) (King, “Launching the Hero” 471, n. 45).

All of these interpretations place Scyld's last sea-journey within the tradition of the declarations of unknowing described thus far: declarations that use mystery to mark something that belongs to the "other world," to an eschatological reality that transcends the human world and the capacities of human knowers. The Scyld passage uses the geography of the sea to give the mystery of the afterlife a "local habitation and a name," and in so doing it asserts the perplexity of communal human wisdom before the mystery of the afterlife. The declarations of unknowing that describe the monsters deploy the same language of mystery, of communal unknowing: not in reference to the eschatological, not in reference to God or the joys of heaven or the torments of hell, but in reference to creatures whose threat against the human world is so violent and frightening that only the eschatological can suggest the sheer magnitude of wonder and dread that these creatures evoke.

Like the declaration of unknowing that surrounds Scyld's departure into the sea's keeping, the declarations of unknowing that describe the monsters are similarly embedded in the poem's geography. All three declarations refer to the monsters' resistance to human understanding, and all three are surrounded by descriptions of the monsters' habitat. One appears shortly after the initial account of Grendel's depredations. Though earlier the poet describes the Danes inspecting Grendel's tracks, he reflects that

(ac se) æglæca      ehtende wæs,  
 deorc deapscua,      dugupe ond geogope,  
 seomade ond syrede;      sinnihte heold,  
 mistige moras;      men ne cunnon  
 hwyder helrunan      hwyrftum scripað (ll. 159-164).

But the formidable one, the dark death-shadow, was persecuting warriors and youths, hovered and ensnared [them]; he held the endless night (or: the sinful night), the misty moors; people do not know which way those privy to hell's secrets glide in their courses.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Thomas D. Hill argues that the phrase "hwyrftum scripað" means "move on in circles," both here, where it refers to Grendel, and in *Christ and Satan*, where it refers to the damned in hell. Hill traces the phrase to Psalm XI.9, which asserts that "impii in circuitu ambulanti" ("the impious walk around in circles"). Patristic exegesis of the

The declaration follows a description of Grendel's domain that defines that domain not so much geographically as atmospherically: it is the domain of darkness, night, mist on the moors. The declaration makes explicit what the imagery suggests: that the defining characteristic of monster-space is not any topographical marker or any physical boundary, but darkness, concealment, resistance to human knowing.

The remaining two declarations are similarly bound up with the home of monsters. Both of them are embedded in Hrothgar's vivid and detailed description of the monster-mere.<sup>254</sup> The first disclaims human knowledge of Grendel's paternity; the second denies human knowledge of the geography of the monsters' home. The description that surrounds them amplifies the force of these declarations, as narratorial stance, repetition, and imagery reinforce the sense of secrecy:

Ic þæt londbuend,	leode mine,	1345
selerædende	secgan hyrde	
þæt hie gesawon	swylce twegen	
micle mearcstapan	moras healdan,	
ellorgæstas.	Dæra oðer wæs,	
þæs þe hie gewislicost	gewitan meahton,	1350
idese onlicnæs;	oðer earmsceapen	
on weres wæstmum	wræclastas træd,	
næfne he wæs mara	þonne ænig man oðer;	
þone on geardagum	Grendel nemdon	
foldbuende;	no hie fæder cunnon,	1355
hwæper him ænig wæs	ær acenned	
dyrnra gasta.	Hie dygel lond	

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passage stresses the futility of this mode of motion and uses it as a symbol of the futility of evil. Hill argues that the Old English phrase carries the same connotations of the futility of wickedness (Hill, "*Hwyrftum scripað: Beowulf*, line 163" 379-81). Stanley Greenfield sharply criticizes Hill's argument, and argues that the following is a more accurate translation for ll. 162b-163: "men do not know whither such hellish, mysterious ones dart swiftly and imperceptibly in their courses" (Greenfield, "Old English Words and Patristic Exegesis – *hwyrftum scripað: a Caveat*," 44-8). Hill in turn mounts a convincing defense of his argument (Hill, "The Return of the Broken Butterfly: *Beowulf* Line 163, Again" 271-81). My translation attempts to combine the nuances suggested by the debate as a whole.

<sup>254</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this landscape and the scholarship that surrounds it, see Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

warigeað, wulfhleopu,      windige næssas,  
 frecne fengelad,      ðær fyrgenstream  
 under næssa genipu      niþer gewiteð,      1360  
 flod under foldan.      Nis þæt feor heonon  
 milgearnas      þæt se mere standeð;  
 ofer þæm hongiað      hrinde bearwas,  
 wudu wyrtum fæst      wæter oferhelmað.  
 þær mæg nihta gehwæm      niðwundor seon,      1365  
 fyr on flode.      No þæs frod leofað  
 gumena bearna,      þæt þone grund wite;  
 ðeah þe hæðstapa      hundum geswenced,  
 heorot hornum trum,      holtwudu sece,  
 feorran geflymed,      ær he feorh seleð,      1370  
 aldor on ofre,      ær he in wille  
 hafelan [beorgan];      nis þæt heoru stow!      MS missing word (*Beowulf* ll. 1345-72).

I heard land-dwellers, my people, hall-counsellors, say this, that they saw such two such mighty border-walkers hold the moors, alien spirits. Of them one was, as far as they were able to tell most certainly, in the likeness of a woman; the other wretched one trod the tracks of exile in the form of a man, except that he was greater than any other man. Him the land-dwellers called Grendel in days gone by; they do not know of a father, whether any was ever begotten before him among the hidden spirits. They inhabit the secret land, wolf-cliffs, windy headlands, fearful fen-path, where the mountain-stream goes down under the darkness of the headlands, water under the ground. It is not far from here, by the count of miles, that the mere stands; over it hang frosty trees, woods fast of root cover the water. There may be seen, each night, a fearful wonder (or: a harm-wonder), fire on the water. No one lives among the children of men so wise as to know its bottom. Though the heath-stepper, the hart strong in horns, hunted by dogs, should seek the forest, having fled far, he would rather give up his life on the bank, than go in to save his head. That is not a pleasant place!

Especially at the beginning of the speech, Hrothgar maintains a distance between himself and the subject of his description. He declares that his knowledge is hearsay, and the word order of his announcement reinforces this: the “ic” of the narrator is separated from the verbs that indicate his contact with the subject (“secgan hyrde”) by the threefold reference to his source (“londbuende, leode mine, selerædende”). Even these reported sightings of the monsters are tentative and qualified: Grendel’s mother is not a woman, she is “idese onlicnæs” (“the likeness of a woman”), and even that is only “þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton” (“as far as they could most certainly tell”). Grendel himself, likewise, walks “on weres wæstmum” (“in the form of a man”), and again that is

qualified by an exception—“næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer” (“except he was bigger than any other man”). Hrothgar’s initial uncertainty shades into downright mystery. Grendel’s father, or potential elder siblings, are unknown.<sup>255</sup> The monsters’ kindred are “dynra gasta” (“hidden spirits”), just as the land where the monsters live is “dygel” (“secret”); alliteration emphasizes and pairs the two near-synonyms, accentuating the insistence on secrecy. Even the shape of the topography suggests concealment. Every element of the landscape—darkness, cliffs and earth, the frost-covered forests—is shaped to descend towards and cover the central element of water. Even the image of the hunted stag, not willing to hide its head in the uncanny lake, suggests the potential for concealment even as it so vehemently rejects it.<sup>256</sup> Subsequent landscape description maintains the sense of secrecy, and later, so does another monster-habitat, the dragon’s barrow: just as the path to the Grendel-mere is “uncuð gelad” (a strange path),<sup>257</sup> so the way to the dragon’s lair is “eldum uncuð,” unknown to men, and its dormant denizen skulks underground, hidden with its treasure.<sup>258</sup> The poet presents the domains of monsters as “enigmatic and uncertain locations.”<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> See Klaeber’s *Beowulf*, *Commentary* 200. Lines 1355b-57a can be paraphrased either as “they [the Danes] knew of no father, whether any [father] was engendered before him [Grendel] among the hidden spirits” or, alternatively, as “they [the Danes] knew of no father, [nor] whether any [siblings] were engendered before him [Grendel] among the hidden spirits.” In both cases l. 1356 is a declaration of unknowing, either reinforcing the mystery of Grendel’s father, or referring to additional mysterious siblings.

<sup>256</sup> The missing word in line 1372b has been variously emended as “helan,” “hydan,” and “beorgan”; see Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 47-8 for a summary of the scholarship. While Klaeber’s edition supplies “beorgan,” I have selected “helan,” as suggested by Johan Gerritsen (“Emending *Beowulf* 2253 – Some Matters of Principle,” 451-2) and Alfred Bammesberger (“Five *Beowulf* Notes,” 250-2); their emendation fits what is paleographically likely, fits into the sound-play patterns of the passage, and also fits into this theme of secrecy.

<sup>257</sup> The description of the way to the monster-mere as “enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad” is a striking parallel between *Beowulf* and *Exodus*: in the latter poem, the path through the Red Sea that God opens up to the Israelites is likewise described as “enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad” (*Exodus* l. 58). For early discussions of the relationship between the two poems, see Klaeber, “Concerning the Relation between *Exodus* and *Beowulf*” 218-24 (in which Klaeber argues that *Exodus* precedes and has influenced *Beowulf*); as well as his later article, “Noch einmal *Exodus* 56-58 und *Beowulf* 1408-10,” 71-2 (in which he argues for the opposite). For a recent discussion of the matter, and for a comprehensive list of parallels between *Beowulf* and *Exodus*, see Lynch, “Enigmatic Diction in the Old English *Exodus*” 171-256, 262-4, 272 (cited in Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 166-7).

<sup>258</sup> For further analysis of the dragon’s lair and its fluctuation between being known and being hidden, see Michelet, *Creation* 82.

<sup>259</sup> Michelet, *Creation* 82.

This presentation is artful and emphatic, but it is not consistent.<sup>260</sup> When Beowulf and warriors follow the bloody track of Grendel’s mother, the way to the monster-mere is hard and strange (ll. 1409-12); yet earlier in the poem, after Grendel’s defeat, the warriors who likewise follow the bloody track of Grendel to the lake experience a “gomenwape” (joyful journey, 854) along paths that are, at least at times, “fægere” and “cystum cuðe” (“lovely” and “known to be good,” ll. 866-7). This inconsistency illustrates “the essentially expressionistic nature of landscape in the poem.”<sup>261</sup> Warriors undertake the first trip in a celebratory mood. The bloody track they follow is proof and reminder of Grendel’s defeat, and so the landscape they traverse is accordingly pleasant, hospitable to such civilized human activities as horse-racing and story-telling. In contrast, the second journey follows a track limned in human blood, a reminder of past loss and future menace:

Ofereode þa	æþelinga bearn	
steap stanhliðo,	stige nearwe,	
enge anpaðas,	uncuð gelad,	1410
neowle næssas,	nicorhusa fela.	
He feara sum	beforan gengde	
wisra monna	wong sceawian,	
oppæt he færinga	fyrgebeamas	
ofer harne stan	hleonian funde,	1415
wynleasne wudu;	wæter under stod	
dreorig ond gedrefed (ll. 1408-17).		

Then the son of princes went over the steep rocky slopes, narrow trails, narrow paths where only one could go at a time, an unknown way, steep crags, many homes of water-monsters. He went before with a few wise men to examine the territory, until he suddenly found mountain trees leaning over a hoary stone, a joyless wood; water stood below, bloody and disturbed.

Reflecting the travellers’ state of mind, the landscape of their journey and of their destination is wild, frightening, and infested with monsters; in Hrothgar’s earlier description, the landscape is rendered in a wealth of scenic details—hardly any of which appear on the first journey—recalling the Avernian

<sup>260</sup> Magennis, *Images of Community* 142.

<sup>261</sup> Magennis, *Images of Community* 142.

landscapes of classical tradition or the hellish landscapes of Christian eschatology.<sup>262</sup> As with the physical details of the landscape, so with the secrecy of the monsters' habitat. Once Beowulf has killed the last of the lake-monsters, the secrecy built up earlier lifts as well:

Ferdon forð þonon      feþelastum  
ferhþum fægne,      foldweg mæton,  
cuþe stræte (ll. 1630-4).

They went forth from there on the walking-paths, glad in spirits, traversed the land-way, the known path.

In mood, vocabulary, and alliteration, the passage echoes the earlier homecoming from the mere, after Grendel's defeat. In both passages, the path of joyous return is denoted by the poetic compound *foldweg* (path or road), a word that does not appear elsewhere in *Beowulf*; this path, too, is described in both passages as known, familiar, and reliable.

Hwilum heaþorofe      hleapan leton,  
on geflit faran      fealwe mearas  
ðær him foldwegas      fægere þuhton,  
cystum cuðe (ll. 864-7).

At times the battle-brave let their bay steeds leap, go in a race, where they thought the land-ways fair, known to be good.

The parallels in phrasing between the two passages underscore the parallels in narrative context.

After Beowulf kills each of the monsters, their habitat transitions from the unknown to the familiar: not because the Danes finally learn the way there—after all, they had known the way already on the earlier journey—but because mystery is no longer needed to suggest the presence of fearful monsters.<sup>263</sup> Beowulf's successful foray against Grendel's mother contradicts even the declarations of unknowing. No one lives wise enough to know the lake's depths, yet Beowulf plumbs them all

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<sup>262</sup> For further discussion of the parallels between hell and the monster-mere, see Chapter Y.

<sup>263</sup> See also Mark Amodio, who describes a different episode in *Beowulf* whose details are governed not by the requirements of narrative logic, but by the traditional associations that these details metonymically "import" into their narrative context (*Writing the Oral Tradition* 67).

the way to the monsters' lair. Grendel's lineage is mysterious to dwellers in the land, yet Beowulf returns from the lake with a sword hilt that testifies to the fate of Grendel's ancestors in the Flood. Grendel's movements and whereabouts are unknown or unknowable to humankind, yet Beowulf finds the place he died, the last place he moved to under his own power; what is more, the hero then carries Grendel's head to the surface, shifting Grendel's last whereabouts into familiar communal space. Mystery surrounds the monsters while they threaten humankind, a mystery evoked through geographical detail and declarations of unknowing. This mystery vanishes from their habitat with their death.

The treatment of mystery sets the *Beowulf*-poet's declarations of unknowing apart from their conventional usage in Old English literature. In Old English homilies, where most declarations of unknowing occur, they describe the eschatological, and the sheer magnitude of its difference from mortal human experience. In poetry, the usage of these declarations is wider, but still connected to the numinous: in addition to describing the eschatological, declarations of unknowing also signal divine agency in moments of human history or in aspects of the natural world. In contrast, in *Beowulf* and in the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, declarations of unknowing apply to monsters. These declarations do not necessarily mark out a metaphysical gap, or even (in *Beowulf*) satisfy narrative logic. Instead, in concert with other poetic strategies, they make an affective statement rather than a theological one. They signal the utter alterity of the monsters, the profound gap between them and human normality. Exploiting the conventional resonances of the *topos*, the declarations of unknowing align the monsters with God, death, and the afterlife, with eschatological realities beyond the limits of mortal human reason and experience, not in order to suggest that Grendel or the hippopotami are divine, or denizens of the afterlife, but to suggest that the monsters are as far away from normal human experience as heaven or hell, and that

consequently the emotional response to them ought to be similar: wonder, awe, dread. Though the places where monsters live are deliberately obscure and secret, the declarations of unknowing firmly place these creatures outside that metaphorical warm, bright hall of mortal human life, traversed so briefly by Bede's sparrow as it flies from darkness into darkness.

## Chapter 3: Spatial Indeterminacy in Middle English

Declarations of unknowing in Old English literature, as the previous chapter argues, express wonder and fear before the divine and the numinous. These declarations assert that human beings do not and cannot know or express the mysteries of God, of the Incarnation, of God's agency in history and nature, or of the otherworldly realms of heaven and hell. The sense of unknowing that marks out the divine and numinous, the metaphysically other, also accompanies monsters. Most famous of all Old English monsters, Grendel haunts the hills around Heorot, shrouded in mist and mystery. No one knows, says the poet, where Grendel's paths lie as he attacks the human world; no one knows the depths of his lake or his monstrous ancestry; no one, in short, knows Grendel's origin or place. Hundreds of years after *Beowulf*, in an English poem of the late fourteenth century, another monstrous invader challenges the human world. A knight rides into King Arthur's hall. He is shaped like a handsome man and equipped like a splendid knight, but his size and colouring are those of a monster: he is gigantic in size, and his complexion is bright green. Once the first round of the Green Knight's challenge is over, the Green Knight rides away from Arthur's hall, his own severed head in his hand. The astonishment of Arthur's courtiers echoes the unknowing of Hrothgar's Spear-Danes:

To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,  
Neuer more þen þay wyste from queþen he watz wonnen (*SGGK* ll. 460-1).

To what native land he went, no-one there knew, never more than they knew from  
wherever he had come.

Though Arthur and Gawain laugh after the Green Knight's departure, the narrator emphasizes the importance and magnitude of the Green Knight's marvel (ll. 465-6). As in *Beowulf*, the marvel of the monstrous invader is accompanied by mystery.

There is no demonstrable line of influence between *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Instead, *Gawain* so strikingly echoes *Beowulf* because both poems use the same *topos*: the proclamation of mystery (spatial mystery, no less) as a signpost of wonder. But the *Gawain*-poet uses the *topos* more deviously, more deceptively than the *Beowulf*-poet. The Green Knight, despite his near-monstrous appearance, is no Grendel-like ogre; his gigantic stature, his ferocity, and his green hue are mere props in the elaborate practical joke that he and Morgan le Fay are playing on Arthur's court. As the *Gawain*-poet deploys the long-established *topos* of spatial indeterminacy, he or she acts as the Green Knight's accomplice: the rhetorical ploy supports the Green Knight's marvellous persona as artfully as Morgan's magic does.

The *Gawain*-poet is able to raise expectations of wonder and otherworldliness through declarations of unknowing because of the long-established associations between wonder and the spatial indeterminacy *topos*. Indeed, in Middle English as much as in Old English literature, the *topos* of spatial indeterminacy persists, even flourishes, in marvellous contexts. In Middle English texts, the locations of marvellous places are persistently secret, their topography is shaped for concealment, their boundaries are shifting or fluid. Indeed, spatial indeterminacy is in and by itself a stimulus of wonder, so much so that a literary emphasis on moving boundaries creates otherworldly landscapes within a natural, well-studied, mundane phenomenon, namely the tide. Tides were systematically observed and studied in England during the Middle Ages. As early as 703 AD, Bede not only disseminates classical theories that correlate tides with the rising and setting of the moon, but also draws on empirical data to correct these theories. Based

on local accounts from the coasts of Britain, Bede observes that tides do not rise all at once all over the world, as classical writers argue, but at different times in different places.<sup>264</sup> Tidal data, terminology, and explanations also appear in Carolingian works for calculating the date of Easter.<sup>265</sup> In later centuries, tidal lore appears in the works of Gerald of Wales and Robert Grosseteste, while tide-tables from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries record empirical observation of local “high water” times.<sup>266</sup> But despite this body of meticulous scientific knowledge about tidal activity, literary texts that emphasize the shifting boundaries between land and sea, the unstable territories alternatively revealed and concealed by the tide, infuse their descriptions of this natural phenomenon with “a recurrent sense of the marvellous, [...] the ‘uncanny’.”<sup>267</sup> This is evident in a late twelfth-century text, Lucian’s *In Praise of Chester*, a text that celebrates the urban features and the natural topography of Chester. Lucian offers a vivid description of tidal activity in the Dee estuary:

Preterea reumate cotidiano non cessat eam revisere maris patentissima plenitudo, quam apertis et opertis latissimis harenarum campis, indesinenter grate vel ingrate aliquid mittere vel mutuare consuevit, et suo accessu vel recessu afferre quippiam vel auferre. Unde nuper piscium copiam provincialibus attulit et piscatoribus vitam ademit. Qui avidi preter modum, aquam biberunt ultra modum et dum fretum exhaurire volunt, fluctibus absorpti sunt. Adhuc etiam nostros serenat obtutus speciosissimum maris litus, mirabilis Creatoris potencia, nunc existens aqua, nunc arida, ubi parente pelago Potentis imperio, quantumlibet consuetis, tamen ampla sensatis datur ammiratio, quod eodem die, eodem loco, et aptissimum iter facit Deus viatoribus ad gradiendum, et altissimum gurgitem aquatilibus ad natandum. Quod aliquis delicatus aut durus, nesciens naturam maris, credere fortasse contempneret, si non orbis astrueret, oculus comprobaret.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>264</sup> Cartwright, *Tides: A Scientific History* 13-15.

<sup>265</sup> Hughes, “Implicit Carolingian Tidal Data” 1-24.

<sup>266</sup> Cartwright, *Tides: A Scientific History* 15-17.

<sup>267</sup> Clarke, “Edges and Otherworlds: Imagining Sea Tides in Early Medieval Britain.”

<sup>268</sup> Taylor, ed., *Liber Luciani de laude Cestrie*. Cited in Clarke, “Edges and Otherworlds,” and in Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England* 100.

Furthermore, with its daily tide, the most patent plenty of the sea continues to visit the city which has the broadest fields of sand open and waiting. It is accustomed, pleasingly or otherwise, incessantly to lend or borrow something, and with its approach or retreat to bring something or take it away. Whereby it recently brought stocks of fish to the inhabitants, and took away the lives of fishermen. Those who were greedy beyond measure drank water beyond measure and although they wanted to exhaust the sea, they have been engulfed by waves. Yet still the most beautiful seashore brightens our eyes, at the power of the wondrous Creator: now water exists, now it is dry. Where the power of the Lord causes the sea to appear, the wise, however accustomed they are to it, give plentiful admiration, because on that day, in that place, God made both a most appropriate route for travellers to walk on, and the deepest swell for sea-creatures to swim in. Anyone, whether frail or hardy, who didn't know the nature of the sea, might perhaps scorn to believe it, if the world did not demonstrate it, the eye would prove it.

Lucian makes this daily occurrence wonderful by playing up the duality of a landscape that belongs both to the human world of the city, and to the the alien world of the sea. As Clarke observes, syntax, word-play, and imagery emphasize the two-in-one-ness of the landscape. Paronomasia and syntactic parallelism suggest the ambivalence of the landscape, its capacity for beauty and fertility on the one hand, for destruction and death on the other. Lucian's imagery, too, clusters around the duality of this literary landscape "by transposing familiar terms of topography and architecture into this world which is usually submerged."<sup>269</sup> Finally, Lucian loads his passage with outright terms of wonder: "*mirabilis Creatoris potencia*" ("the power of the wondrous Creator"), "*ampla sensatis datur ammiratio*" ("plentiful admiration is given by the wise"). Even the very mundaneness of this daily miracle is incorporated in Lucian's rhetoric of

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<sup>269</sup>Clarke, *ibid.*

wonder: this phenomenon is so wonderful, he suggests, that its recurrence becomes a needful proof for an invented audience of imaginary skeptics.<sup>270</sup>

If spatial indeterminacy turns even a daily natural phenomenon into a marvellous landscape, it is all the more often to be found in the wonderful and fearful literary landscapes inhabited by fairies, monsters, demons, or other creatures alien to humankind. For example, Gerald of Wales's *Itinerarium Kambriae*, a late twelfth-century prose account of his journey through Wales, includes the story of a mortal's sojourn in the land of the pygmies. The way to this land seems at first clearly indicated by topographical landmarks: a little boy encounters the pygmies "under the hollow bank of a river" and follows them "through a path, at first subterraneous and dark, into a most beautiful country, adorned with rivers and meadows, woods and plains, but obscure, and not illuminated with the full light of the sun." But later, despite these landmarks, the path proves ephemeral. After offending the pygmies, the boy tries to return to their land, but the way is lost to him: "he returned by the usual track to the subterraneous road, but found no appearance of any passage, though he searched for it on the banks of the river for nearly the space of a year." The known path vanishes, and the realm of the pygmies, once open to human visitation, returns to secrecy. For Gerald himself, the episode is hearsay; in the absence of stronger evidence about the pygmies and their land, he leaves it in an epistemological limbo.<sup>271</sup>

Like Gerald, a later traveller also infuses his description of an inaccessible otherworldly place with unknowing: this is the narrator of the mid-fourteenth-century *Book of John*

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<sup>270</sup>For a more detailed analysis of the "otherworldliness" of this and other literary tidal spaces, see Clarke's analysis, cited above.

<sup>271</sup>Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Kambriae* I.viii, 75-8 (transl. Thorpe, *A Journey through Wales* 133-5). For a discussion of the otherworldly qualities of the pygmies' kingdom, and for the connection of this story to *Sir Orfeo*, see also Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

*Mandeville*, who so elaborately places the Earthly Paradise not just out of mortal reach, but beyond human knowledge:

Bi3onde þe yles and þe lond of þrestre loon [and his lordesshippe of wildernesse] to go ri3t eest, men schal not fynde but hilles and grete rochis and þe derk lond whare no man may se þe day noþer þe ni3t, as men of þe cuntre seiþ. And [þis wildernese and] þat derk lond lastiþ to paradys terrestre... And paradyse is enclosed al aboute hit wiþ a wal. Men woot not wharof þe wal is. And þe wal is al keuered wiþ moss [as hyt semeþ] þat men may yse noon stoon noþer nor ellis wharof hit is. (*Defective Version of Mandeville's Travels* 130, ll. 12-31)

As I noted earlier, the geography is emphatically shaped to separate and conceal the Earthly Paradise from the world of humankind; wilderness, rough terrain, darkness, and the mysterious wall prevent not only human access, but even human knowledge.<sup>272</sup> More ambiguously, the Earthly Paradise is surrounded by the four rivers that flow from it. These at once enforce and blur the separation: on the one hand, the rivers form fluid boundaries around Paradise that render it inaccessible to mortal travellers, yet on the other hand, they also connect Paradise to the geography of the post-lapsarian world.

The tidal space of the Dee estuary becomes uncanny because its nature is amphibious, its borders unstable. More marvellous still, the pygmy utopia in Gerald of Wales's account can be reached through a river bank until human transgression makes the known path mysterious, puts the accessible marvellous country out of human reach. The Earthly Paradise, most marvellous of all, is at once sundered from the human world and connected to it by fluid boundaries. In all these examples, the geography of marvellous places is secretive or deceptive, their boundaries shifting and unreliable, the way there dark, wild, concealed, and dangerous. But the secrecy and elusiveness of these places are not only qualities of their geography, but matters of human

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<sup>272</sup> See also Chapter 5 for further discussion of the separation of the Earthly Paradise from the rest of the world.

perception. These places are resistant to human knowledge or slippery in its grasp; human knowledge does not encompass them at all, or else it encompasses them only partially, unreliably, for a little while. From pygmy land to Paradise, spatial indeterminacy pervades a wide variety of places of wonder. But nowhere is this topos as well established, nowhere does it so organically assume “a local habitation and a name,” as in the forests of medieval romance.

The forests of medieval romance function as places remote from the mundane human world, places of wonder, danger, and mystery. Studies of medieval literary forests consistently emphasize the peril and secrecy of these landscapes. As early as 1946, Erich Auerbach points out the role of the romance forest as a mythical space of trial and adventure, a world apart—in space and time—from the human world of the Arthurian court.<sup>273</sup> E. R. Curtius traces the roots of the medieval literary forest to classical antiquity, linking the mysterious forest of romance to the Virgilian forest, the forest of the golden bough, that functions as a passage to the other world.<sup>274</sup> Derek Pearsall and Elizabeth Salter describe the forest of medieval thought and literature as “a place of mystery, a place of testing, and always potentially evil.”<sup>275</sup> Jacques Le Goff treats the motif of the literary forest in a more nuanced way. The forest, he argues, is not just a place of danger and darkness; at times, as in the Tristan romances, it is a more forgiving world than that of the human court. But even Le Goff emphasizes the otherness of the forest, its radical difference from the human world:

In the Middle Ages the great contrast was not, as it had been in antiquity, between the city and the country (*urbs* and *rus*, as the Romans put it) but between nature and culture, expressed in terms of the opposition between what was built, cultivated, and inhabited (city, castle, village) and what was essentially wild (the

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<sup>273</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, 128-30.

<sup>274</sup> Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* 192.

<sup>275</sup> Pearsall and Salter, *Landscape and the Seasons of the Medieval World* 52-3.

ocean and forest, the western equivalents of the eastern desert), that is, between men who lived in groups and those who lived in solitude.<sup>276</sup>

Corinne Saunders explores this distinction between the inhabited human world and the world of the forest from a literary rather than an anthropological perspective. The medieval literary forest, she argues, has deep roots in philosophical and religious traditions. In neo-Platonic thought, both in classical antiquity and at the school of Chartres, forests are associated with primeval chaos and disorder.<sup>277</sup> In Biblical and eremitic traditions, the wilderness, imagined specifically as a forest during the Middle Ages, is a place of peril and transformation, a place of solitude, testing, combat against demons, and illumination. In medieval romances, the multivalency of the forests reflects these traditions. As Saunders argues, the forests of medieval romance are

specialized worlds of marvel, peril and delight, characterized by speaking stags, exotic pavilions, idyllic glades and boiling springs [...] The world of these forests is characterized by the universal romance themes of love, adventure, quest, enchantment and vision, and by their darker counterparts, rape, death, madness, imprisonment, penance, rendering the forest a specialized landscape [...] lingering somewhere between nightmare and wish-fulfillment.<sup>278</sup>

What all these approaches underscore is that forests, under both aspects, lovely and fearful, are “other worlds,” radically different from the home worlds of their texts. They are not necessarily “other worlds” in metaphysical terms, though many are habitats of marvels and some are an entrance to the afterlife. However, they are “other worlds” in functional terms, standing in contrast to the “home worlds” of the texts: where the court is an oasis of luxury and civilization, the forest functions as the place of adventure, marvels, dangers, and hardship, as in Chrétien’s *Yvain*; where the court is a place of injustice and disapproval, as in the Tristan romances, the

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<sup>276</sup> Le Goff, “The Wilderness in the Medieval West” 58.

<sup>277</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* 18-22.

<sup>278</sup> Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* 205.

forest becomes a place of refuge.<sup>279</sup> Mystery often accompanies the cultural distance between the world of the forest and the home world of the text. As Joep Leerssen notes, somewhat tongue-in-cheek,

Typically, many chivalric romances of the Middle Ages begin with a transition from court to forest: a knight's quest takes him away from the banqueting hall and towards that somber, shady haunt of dragons and damsels in distress. The forest is a labyrinth without charted roads, and knights invariably start their adventures by getting lost there.<sup>280</sup>

The topos of spatial indeterminacy, in other words, is thoroughly established in the marvel-filled forests of romance.

The relationship between spatial indeterminacy and wonder in literary forests emerges with particular vividness in three fourteenth-century poems: *Sir Orfeo*, *Sir Degaré*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In these poems, the habitats of marvellous beings are hidden and surrounded by forests. In *Sir Orfeo*, the self-exiled king must spend seven years in the forest before he can observe the faeries and find the way to their mysterious home. In *Sir Degaré*, the human princess loses her way in the forest before she encounters the faerie knight who fathers her son. And in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain must travel through a wintry wilderness before he comes at last to the fearful Green to meet his marvellous antagonist for a rematch of their grisly game. However, *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degaré* are examples of the traditional manifestation of the topos. In both poems, the encounters between human beings and the Faeries are marked by wilderness and uncharted spaces, by mystery, by spatial indeterminacy: in *Sir Degaré*, the Faerie knight appears only once the princess has lost her way in the wilderness, separated first from her father's retinue, then even from her own. The Faerie knight's

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<sup>279</sup> Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* 56-57.

<sup>280</sup> Leerssen, "Wildness, Wilderness, and Ireland: Medieval and Early-Modern Patterns in the Demarcation of Civility" 30.

appearance is preceded by human perplexity. In *Sir Orfeo*, on the other hand, human perplexity is what each Faerie incursion into the human world leaves behind. The first invasion of the King of Faerie leaves Heurodys stark raving mad and the human court in disarray. As soon as Orfeo rallies his wife out of madness and his court to her defence, the King of Faerie's second invasion steals the queen away, drives the king into exile, and leaves the human community in grief and unknowing. In both poems, mystery—particularly mystery about space—frames the disturbing encounters between faeries and humankind. As in Old English poetry, spatial indeterminacy signals the marvellous and sets it off from the human world that the marvellous invades; this is the traditional affective dynamics of the topos. By contrast, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, on the other hand, the *topos* takes on a metafictional cast. In this poem, the long-established literary topos becomes a tool to further the plot of the characters. Deliberately and deceptively, with the help of his household, the Green Knight surrounds himself and his habitation with mystery in order to heighten the Arthurian courtiers' wonder and fear over the marvel in their midst.

Both *Sir Orfeo* and *Sir Degaré* describe encounters with marvellous Others who are at once alluring and predatory. In *Sir Orfeo*, the King of Faerie first invades Heurodys's dream, shows her his splendid realm, and issues his threat; then he abducts the queen by magic. In *Sir Degaré*, a faerie knight meets a king's daughter in the wilderness. The Faerie knight is lovely in appearance and courteous in manner, and at first reassures the frightened princess; but he concludes his speech by declaring both his love and his intention to rape her, and then carries out his purpose despite her weeping and her attempts to get away. In both poems, these human encounters with the Faeries are marked not just by that mixture of splendour and cruelty that the Faeries exhibit, but by emphatic mystery.

In *Sir Degaré*, mystery—in particular, spatial mystery—defines the place where the human princess encounters the Faerie knight. This place is the traditional forest of romance: a space of marvel and mystery, a space where human beings lose their way, have adventures, and encounter supernatural Others.<sup>281</sup> In *Sir Degaré*, the person who encounters a Faerie creature is not an adventuring knight, but a princess. On a journey with her father's court, the princess and her attendants separate from the royal retinue.<sup>282</sup> No sooner do they enter the forest than they lose their way:

Thai wolden up and after wolde,  
 And couthen nowt here way holde.  
 The wode was rough and thikke, iwis,  
 And thai token the wai amys (ll. 59-62).

Their disorientation is asserted explicitly, twice (ll. 59, 62), as well as suggested in the one line with sensory landscape detail ("the wode was rough and thikke"). It is emphasized further when the characters, seeking the way back, get even more thoroughly lost:

Thai moste souht and riden west  
 Into the thikke of the forest.  
 Into a launde hii ben icome,  
 And habbeth wel undernome  
 That thai were amis igon.

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<sup>281</sup>Corinne J. Saunders surveys the role of the forest in medieval romance, describing literary forests such as that of *Sir Orfeo* as "linked not with the underworld but with the otherworld, with *aventure*, and with the workings of a destiny which may as easily prove effected by the faery as by the divine. They are specialized worlds of marvel, peril and delight." (*The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* 205). For a survey of scholarly conceptualizations of the forest of romance, see Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* ix-xiii. See also Jacques Le Goff, "The Wilderness in the Medieval West" 47-59 for the role of the literary forest in counterpoint to the role of the court in medieval romances.

<sup>282</sup>For a discussion of the incestuous undertones present in the king's hostility towards his daughter's suitors, see Cheryl Colopy, "Sir Degaré: A Fairy Tale Oedipus" 31-39. Colopy points the unsavoury parallel between two parent-child relationships: the widowed king is so fiercely protective of his daughter that he fights off all her suitors; the king's daughter, in turn, unknowingly marries her own son, whom she abandoned as a baby. Colopy notes that these "incestuous possibilities are never realized, but they are central to the first half of the tale, which culminates in the hero's marriage to his mother" (31).

Thai light adoun everichon  
And cleped and criede al ifere,  
Ac no man ariht hem ihere (61-70).

The poet seems to translate their state of disorientation into an actual place—a “launde” of being thoroughly lost, out of reach and out of earshot and generally out of the human community. At their wits’ end, the attendants decide to have a noontime nap,<sup>283</sup> while the princess herself wanders off to pick flowers, loses her bearings, and is separated from her retinue.

So fer in the launde she goht, iwis,  
That she ne wot nevere whare se is.                      80  
To hire maidenen she wolde anon.  
Ac hi ne wiste never wat wei to gon.  
Whenne hi wende best to hem terne,  
Aweiward than hi goth wel yerne.  
“Allas!” hi seide, “that I was boren!                      85  
Nou ich wot ich am forloren!  
Wilde bestes me willeth togrinde  
Or ani man me sschulle finde!” (ll. 79-88).

This is the third and most emphatic in a series of movements that lead the princess progressively farther away from human community and farther into the wilderness, a place of isolation and disorientation. Indeed, every couplet in this passage articulates a different aspect of the state of being lost: not knowing where one is (ll. 79-80); not knowing how to get back to a known place (ll. 81-2); taking erroneous paths (ll. 83-4); lamenting and fearing the dangers of a wild environment (ll. 85-8). After the princess’s threefold loss of way (away, together with her attendants, from the royal company; away, together with her attendants, from the known path; and away, all alone, from her sleeping attendants), at the height of her fear of the natural

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<sup>283</sup>For similarities between this episode and the faerie incursion in *Sir Orfeo*, see Friedman, “Eurydice, Heurodis and the Noon-Day Demon” 22-29, as well as Saunders, *The Forest in Medieval Romance* 135-6.

environment, the princess sees the faerie knight. His appearance right after her lament looks like nasty irony: almost in answer to her despairing cry, he turns up—a handsome, courtly man, who finds her before “wilde bestes” tear her apart as she had feared. But the princess is right to fear violence, though wrong to fear it from the beasts. Despite his beauty and his semblance of courtliness, and despite her own pleas for mercy, the faerie knight declares his love in one line and his intention to rape her in the next:

“Ich have iloved the mani a yer,      105  
And now we beth us selve her,  
Thou best mi lemman ar thou go,  
Wether the liketh wel or wo.”  
Tho nothing ne coude do she  
But wep and criede and wolde fle;      110  
And he anon gan hire at holde,  
And dide his wille, what he wolde (ll. 105-112).

His cruelty is particularly striking because it is in such sharp contrast with his initial courtliness, with the expectation of rescue raised by his appearance and his declaration of love.<sup>284</sup> Despite the faerie knight’s courtly and alluring appearance, his cruelty makes him wilder and more threatening than the landscape where he appears.

It is notable that the faerie knight of *Sir Degaré* makes no kind of claim about the place where he and the princess meet, nor does the narrator ascribe any marvellous properties to the landscape itself. It is a wilderness in the mortal world, not the realm of Faerie itself. But the meeting between a human being and a predatory creature of Faerie occurs in a setting emphatically defined by isolation from human community, by the loss of way, by spatial indeterminacy. In *Sir Orfeo*, too, the meetings between human beings and faeries are marked by the faeries’ loveliness, cruelty, and mystery. The mystery is explicitly spatial: the emphatic

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<sup>284</sup> Saunders observes how the text emphasizes the cruelty of the faerie attacker (*The Forest of Medieval Romance* 135-6); for an opposite view, suggesting that the knight’s initial courtliness and the happy ending of the lay mitigate the horror of the encounter, see Colopy, “*Sir Degaré: A Fairy Tale Oedipus*” 32-33.

question that goes unanswered about the faeries is “where.” This spatial indeterminacy that surrounds the faeries and their place of habitation is most intense in the episode of Heurodis’s abduction. Here, the poet deploys narrative and metrical structure, as well as traditional phraseology, to deepen the impact of the declaration of unknowing that concludes the episode. After the Faerie King visits Heurodis in her dreams and threatens to steal her away, Orfeo makes ready to defend her. But despite all warlike preparations, the faeries steal the queen away from amidst the mortal army:

Amorwe þe vnder-tide is come  
 & Orfeo haþ his armes y-nome,  
 & wele ten hundred kniȝtes wiþ him,  
 Ich y-armed, stout & grim;  
 & wiþ þe quen wenten he 185  
 Riȝt vnto þat ympe-tre.  
 þai made scheltrom in ich a side,  
 & sayd þai wold þere abide  
 & dye ther everichon,  
 Er the quen schuld fram hem gon; 190  
 Ac ȝete amiddes hem ful riȝt  
 þe quen was oway y-twiȝt,  
 Wiþ fairi forth y-nome  
 —Men wist neuer wher sche was bicomme (ll. 181-94).

The preparation of human defences is impressive, emphatically so. The arming, the gathering of knights, the formation of the tightly knit phalanx, the oaths of devotion: these show Orfeo’s court bracing for imminent battle. Formally, the abduction of Heurodis stands in stark contrast to these preparations. Her abduction is sudden, spanning a brief four lines, in contrast to the account of the defences, which is three times as long. The abduction is also deliberately enigmatic, with the agency of the deed obscured through the passive voice of its verbs (“was oway y-twiȝt,” was snatched away; “[was] y-nome,” was taken) and the destination of the victim unknown, unknowable (“Men wist neuer wher sche was bicomme”). The metrics of the

passage further highlight the declaration of unknowing; it is a ten-syllable line, audibly longer than the group of seven- or eight-syllable lines that precede it.

Traditional phraseology likewise highlights the declaration of unknowing. Just as Orfeo's court prepares for imminent battle, the diction of the passage suggests that the audience do the same. Not just the military term "scheltrom" (shield wall)<sup>285</sup>, but also the stock phrases—Orfeo's gathering of the "ten hundred knightes," and their description in the coupled epithets, "stif and strong"—have strong traditional associations with imminent battle. The traditional associations of the first phrase, "ten hundred knightes," emerge from Alfred C. Baugh's study of formulaic phraseology in Middle English romance. Baugh lists numerous examples where stock rhymes link such large round numbers of knights with brief laudatory descriptions of their military strength.<sup>286</sup> In their respective narrative contexts, these formulations (round numbers of knights, followed by a description of their martial prowess) are often harbingers of battle. For example, in the Auchinleck *Guy of Warwick*,<sup>287</sup> the hero travels to the city of Arascoun with his retinue:

& wiþ him oþer fifti kniȝt  
In feld þe best þat mit fiȝt. (ll. 1919-20).

As soon as they arrive, they find out that the city is besieged by the emperor's steward with a large company of equally capable fighters:

An hundred kniȝtes gode of ker,  
Her better no may wepen ber.  
Þe cite þai han bisett (ll. 1941-3)

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<sup>285</sup>For the historical development of this term's semantic field, see Oren Falk, "The Son of Orfeo: Kingship and Compromise in a Middle English Romance," note 65.

<sup>286</sup>Albert C. Baugh, "Improvisation in the Middle English Romance" 418-454 (see especially pp. 429 and 451).

<sup>287</sup>Zupitza, ed., *The Romance of Guy of Warwick. Edited From the Auchinleck MS. in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh and from MS. 107 in Caius College, Cambridge.*

Before twenty lines have passed, Guy has fought the steward, taken him captive, and dispersed the siege. Later in the romance, the emperor prepares to attack the city of Arascoun. Like Sir Orfeo, he orders his men to arm, arranges his “scheltromes” (l. 2317), and sends his son out with a vanguard composed of “fif hundred armed kniȝtes,/Hardi & wele doand in fiȝtes” (ll. 2323-4). In response, Guy advises the city’s duke to sally out against the attackers with a similarly described military force: “Anon þai nomen an hundred kniȝtes,/Hardi & of most mihtes” (ll. 2347-8). The two companies of knights join in combat; again, the round number of knights, followed by a pair of martial descriptors, introduces a battle. The formulaic structure recurs even later in the romance, as Guy marches to Constantinople: “Sir Gij toke an hundred of his kniȝtes,/Strongest and best in fiȝtes” (ll. 2861-2). With this company, Guy sets out to fight the “soudan” and his armies, who are besieging the Eastern emperor. As before, the purpose of this assembled company is battle. Similar narrative contexts accompany other examples of this formulation in fourteenth-century romances.<sup>288</sup>

Like the gathering of knights, the paired descriptors that appear in *Sir Orfeo*, “stout and grim,” are similarly associated with imminent combat. A quotation search of the electronic *Middle English Dictionary* turns up several occurrences of pairings identical or nearly synonymous to this one--“stout and grim,” “stout and fers,” “stout and bold”--in fourteenth-century Middle English texts.<sup>289</sup> The pairs describe fighting or foreshadow it. For example, the romance of *The Seege or Batayle of Troye*, composed in the first quarter of the fourteenth

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<sup>288</sup>Baugh lists numerous examples from other fourteenth-century Middle English romances where the round number of knights, followed by a description of their martial prowess, is a sign of impending battle (see especially pp. 429, 451).

<sup>289</sup>Middle English Dictionary quotation search for “stout,” run May 28, 2009 ([http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/med\\_quot\\_search.html](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/med_quot_search.html)).

century, deploys the paired epithets in the vicinity of fighting.<sup>290</sup> In a verbal exchange that seeks to incite combat, several Greek knights review the insult done them by the Trojans, and suggest to the other Greeks that, unless they avenge it, “men of Troye, þat beon stowt & fers” (l. 107) will hold them in contempt. Elsewhere in the romance, the paired epithets describe the king of Troy in battle against the Greeks (“þe king of Troye, stout and grym,” l. 13), as well as the invading Greek armies preparing for the siege (“mukil folk stout and grym,” l. 139). Similarly, composed in the second half of the fourteenth century, the romance of *Octovian Imperator* describes both a battle involving “ten dousand knyȝtes stout and fers” (l. 1598), as well as a fight between a lioness and some sailors, who defend their ship against her and prove “stoute & grymme” (l. 593) in the process.<sup>291</sup> Similar examples appear in numerous other Middle English texts, supporting the association of these epithets with imminent fighting or violence.<sup>292</sup> Accordingly, in *Sir Orfeo*, the traditional associations of these formulaic phrases conjure up in their turn the world of warfare, the expectation of battle. They summon up the same expectations in the audience as in the characters: like Orfeo, like his knights, the audience braces for combat. But the *Orfeo*-poet deploys the traditional associations of these phrases and moments only to suddenly undercut them. As Heurodys is stolen away, it becomes evident that Orfeo and the audience alike have mistaken the terms of the encounter: Heurodys cannot be defended through military force, not because the Faerie King’s military force is superior, but because the Faerie King does not use military force at all. Heurodys’s disappearance is so mysterious, so destabilizing, precisely because the build-up that precedes it creates strong

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<sup>290</sup> Barnicle, ed., *The Seege or Batayle of Troye. A Middle English Metrical Romance, edited from MSS. Lincoln’s Inn 150, Egerton 2862, Arundel XXII with Harley 525 Included in the Appendix*. I refer to the date of composition proposed by Barnicle.

<sup>291</sup> McSparran, ed., *Octovian Imperator, edited from MS. BL. Cotton Caligula A II*. I refer to the date of composition proposed by McSparran.

<sup>292</sup> For further such examples, see Baugh, “Improvisation in the Middle English Romance” 451.

expectations of a straightforward battle. With these expectations so thoroughly baffled, the audience is manoeuvred into the very position of confusion and of unknowing in which Orfeo's court finds itself: "men wist never where sche was bicomē."

Later, refrain-like, similar declarations of unknowing recur, once again accompanying faerie apparitions—this time in the forest to which Orfeo has exiled himself after the loss of his wife:

He miȝt se him bisides,  
 (Oft in hot vnder-tides)  
 þe king o fairy wiþ his rout  
 Com to hunt him al about  
 Wiþ dim cri & bloweing, 285  
 & houndes also wiþ him berking;  
 Ac no best þai no nome,  
 No neuer he nist whider þai bicomē  
 And other while he miȝt him se  
 As a gret ost bi him te, 290  
 Wele atourned, ten hundred kniȝtes,  
 Ich y-armed to his riȝtes,  
 Of cuntenaunce stout and fers,  
 Wiþ mani desplaid baners,  
 & ich his swerd y-drawe hold 295  
 —Ac neuer he nist whider þai wold (ll. 281-96).

Roy Liuzza observes that the faeries in the wood have "an unreal quality, a shadowy existence that only mimics that of their counterparts in the earthly realm—their actions have no effect, no completion."<sup>293</sup> But what the *Orfeo*-poet explicitly declares to be mysterious is not the purpose or the outcome of these actions; it is their spatial destination. The spatial indeterminacy that these declarations proclaim is doubly reinforced in the passage. First, the descriptions of the faerie pastimes have a structure similar to the abduction of Heurodys: traditional imagery and phraseology set up audience expectations that the narrative then undercuts, with the resulting

<sup>293</sup> Liuzza, "Sir Orfeo: Sources, Traditions, and the Poetics of Performance" 279.

uncertainty of the audience paralleling the uncertainty of the faeries' destination. In Orfeo's wilderness, the faerie hunters and the faerie host mimic the traditional activities of human nobility. Yet as before, these activities elude their traditional outcome: the hunters take no prey, the massed host fights no battle, and the faerie apparitions dissolve into unknowing.

Only once in the wilderness, the faeries carry out a human activity completely, to the typical end appointed by human tradition: a party of ladies come hawking, and each falcon slays its prey. Orfeo observes this with satisfaction, recalling that this was the kind of pastime to which he was accustomed (ll. 314-17). His subsequent recognition of Heurodys marks the end of his "bewilderment," spatial and cognitive. Following the faerie company, he finds the way to the Faerie kingdom and enters the Faerie king's castle to claim back his wife. His foray into the Faerie kingdom reveals the clear topographical boundary between that realm and the human world, the "roche" through which the hunters and then Orfeo himself must pass to enter the "fair cuntray." Having passed through the rock, Orfeo finds himself in a land in stark contrast to the landscapes he inhabited before: utterly unlike the land of "stub [and] ston" that Orfeo traversed in pursuit of the faerie hunters, or the comfortless forest that the faeries so mysteriously passed through, the Faerie kingdom is a place without any asperities, indeed without any landforms at all--a near-paradisaal landscape, "smothe and plain and al grene," with a royal castle of preternatural artistry and magnificence.<sup>294</sup> The faeries, so elusive in the human world, are motionless in the splendour of their own. In his turn now the intruder, Orfeo enchants them with his music and outwits the faerie king so impervious, earlier, to human might. As in *Beowulf*, spatial indeterminacy surrounds the faeries while their power is greatest. Once their mysterious home becomes known, once Orfeo finds out "whider they bicombe," the faeries and their power are no longer irresistible.

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<sup>294</sup> For further discussion of this passage, and the Faerie kingdom's resemblance to Paradise, see Chapter 1.

A quarter of a century and half of England separate *Sir Orfeo* from the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,<sup>295</sup> but in the romance as in the lay, spatial indeterminacy accompanies the irruption of the marvellous into the “normal world” of the narrative. As in *Sir Orfeo*, a marvellous challenger invades the world of the court—this time, the court of King Arthur himself. As in *Sir Orfeo*, this challenger’s own home is hidden, mysterious; no one at court knows “fram queþen he wat3 wonnen” (l. 62),<sup>296</sup> and the Green Knight himself is very coy about it. This mystery of the Green Knight’s place of habitation is carefully cultivated throughout the poem. Nearly until the end of the poem, the spatial indeterminacy that surrounds him seems an aspect of his mysterious and marvellous nature: just as his apparition eludes the expectations, the experiences, and the ontological categories familiar to Arthur’s courtiers, so his habitation eludes, time after time, the efforts of the searching Gawain. But at the end of the poem, the Green Knight’s explanation to Gawain places his spatial indeterminacy in a very different light. The Green Knight reveals that the central wonder of the poem is artificial and deceptive, the product of Morgan’s magical arts and of Bercilak’s own performance. Accordingly, the spatial indeterminacy that surrounds the Green Knight becomes not an aspect of his essential mystery, but the deliberate deployment of a long-established wonder-motif, co-opted into Bercilak’s artful performance.

The habitat of the Green Knight, so zealously sought out by Gawain, so tantalizingly obscured by the poet, has drawn concerted attention from scholars, who try to map it in a variety of ways with a zeal akin to Gawain’s. Some scholars have been so struck by the vivid detail, the eerie landscape features and the expressive regionalisms, that they have tried to map the poem onto the real-world geography of Britain—they have sought out real locations in the North-

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<sup>295</sup> Tolkien and Gordon cautiously date the poem to the late fourteenth century and place it in the North-West Midlands (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, xxv-xxvii).

<sup>296</sup> All citations from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (from here on *SGGK*) are drawn from the Tolkien and Gordon (rev. Davis) edition. The translations are my own.

Western Midlands that may have served as Hautdesert's and the Green Chapel's real-life counterparts. Following first the named landmarks and then the idiosyncratic regionalisms and landscape features, Mabel Day, R. E. Kaske, and Michael Twomey have proposed the cave of Wetton Mill as the Green Chapel's counterpart;<sup>297</sup> Ralph Elliott, on the contrary, argues that the cave of Ludchurch makes a more convincing model.<sup>298</sup> In more recent years, yet other scholars have read the spatial arrangements of the poem not against the geology of the region, but against its historical circumstances, aligning the relationship between the political "centre" of the story (Arthur's court) and its "periphery" (Bercilak's court) with the relationships and the anxieties of fourteenth-century politics. Christine Chism aligns the challenge from the Green Knight to Arthur's court—from the periphery to the centre, in other words—with the tensions between an increasingly discontented provincial nobility and Richard II's royal court.<sup>299</sup> Alternatively, Patricia Clare Ingham and Lynn Arner examine the relationship between Arthur's court and the Green Knight's in the context of the uneasy colonial relationship between England and Wales. Their approach emphasizes the poetically cultivated wildness that Gawain traverses in search of the Green Chapel—a wildness that enhances the "otherness" of the Green Knight's domain. Ingham and Arner both argue that the "otherness" of the Green Knight's domain is a product of postcolonial rhetoric; that the difference and wildness of this domain is a distortion, a by-product of the colonial gaze.<sup>300</sup> My approach, too, examines the cultivated "otherworldliness" of the landscape, and on the way this plays up the Green Knight's marvelous

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<sup>297</sup> Day, Mabel. "Introduction" xx; Kaske, "Gawain's Green Chapel and the Cave at Wetton Mill" 11-21; Twomey, "Morgan le Fay at Hautdesert" 103-19.

<sup>298</sup> Elliott, "Landscape and Geography." 105-117. See also Elliott, *The Gawain Country*.

<sup>299</sup> Chism, "Heady Diversions: Court and Province in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," in *Alliterative Revivals*, 66-154.

<sup>300</sup> Ingham, "In Contrayez Straunge" 107-136; Arner, "The Ends of Enchantment: Colonialism and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" 79-101.

persona. However, this argument focuses not on the political resonances of the landscape, but on its deliberate deployment of the rhetoric of wonder.

The Green Knight rides into Arthur's hall and into the poem enveloped in mystery. This surfaces not through declarations of unknowing, as in *Sir Orfeo*—not, that is, as a vacuum of knowledge—but through an embarrassment of riches, a welter of contradictory hypotheses. The narrator introduces him as a conundrum, a source of uncertainty. The Green Knight enters the hall just after the first course:

For vneþe wat3 þe noyce not a whyle sesed,  
And þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,  
þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,  
On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe; 140  
Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so pik,  
And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,  
Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were,  
Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,  
And þat þe myriest in his muckel þat my3t ride; 145  
For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne,  
Both is wombe and his wast were worthily smale,  
And alle his fetures fol3ande, in forme þat he hade,  
And oueral enker grene (ll. 136-149).

For the noise had only just ceased for a while, and the first course [was] served properly in the court, [when] a fearsome lord advanced through the door of the hall, one of the largest on earth in stature; from the neck to the waist so squarely built and so thick, and his loins and limbs so long and so great, that I expect he was half a giant on earth; but at any rate I declare him to be the biggest of men, and the finest in his size that might ride; for, although his body was imposing in the back and the breast, both his belly and his waist were fittingly slim, and all the features in his form likewise, quite elegant; for men wondered at his hue, in his noble appearance; he carried himself as a bold warrior, and entirely bright green.

This very first stanza that describes the Green Knight proposes two conflicting alternatives for his identity: that of a monstrous giant and that of a handsome man. The “monstrous giant”

hypothesis is developed over the first five lines of the stanza, from the initial denomination of the guest as an “aghlich mayster.” The word “aghlich,” translated by the MED as “inspiring awe or respect; dreadful,”<sup>301</sup> may carry an association with the monstrous, the fearful, and the numinous, an association that can be traced back to the Old English poetic tradition.<sup>302</sup> In Old English, the term *aglæca* occurs approximately thirty-five times, mostly in poetry. The Dictionary of Old English defines the word as “awesome opponent, ferocious fighter.”<sup>303</sup> However, “aglæca” rarely refers to mundane opponents; rather, it is associated chiefly with monstrous enemies of humankind: Satan (*Christ and Satan*, 446a); demons (*Juliana*, 268b; *Andreas*, 1312a); Mermedonian cannibals (*Andreas*, 1131b), Grendel and his kindred (*Beowulf*, 159a, 556a, 1259a); the dragon (*Beowulf*, 2520a).<sup>304</sup> Other uses of the term, however, suggest that it has a wider continuum of meaning, encompassing “fear-inspiring monstrosity” at one end, but “awe” at another. For instance, in *Beowulf*, the term “aglæca” is associated not only with the monsters, but also with the monster-slayers, Beowulf himself (2592a) and the other dragon-killer, Sigemund (893a). Even the Venerable Bede, in Byrhtferth of Ramsey’s *Manual*, is described as “Beda, se aglæca lareow” (“Bede, the formidable teacher”).<sup>305</sup> Though Sigemund and Beowulf may be morally ambiguous characters, monster-slayers with monstrous qualities of their own,<sup>306</sup> the Bede of Byrhtferth’s account is a positive figure rather than a terrifying one; he is not monstrous, but rather monstrously or awe-inspiringly learned. Based on these instances, the Old English epithet “aglæca” suggests a semantic field that ranges from terror and dread to awe,

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<sup>301</sup> Middle English Dictionary, “ael.”

<sup>302</sup> For this argument, see Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 135-43, where Amodio traces the evolution of the monstrous, fearful, or violent connotations of this word and its cognates.

<sup>303</sup> Dictionary of Old English, “aglæca.”

<sup>304</sup> Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 141.

<sup>305</sup> Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 33.

<sup>306</sup> See Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, especially 139, 168.

wonder, and respect. Most of the instances of the word, however, suggest that the word possesses “unsettling and often deeply terrifying associations” and invokes the monstrous or supernatural.<sup>307</sup>

In Middle English, the term appears less often, and its monstrous resonances are less pronounced. According to the Middle English Dictionary, “*auel*” (with the variations *aȝelich*, *ahelich*, *aȝly*) simply means “inspiring awe and respect; dreadfully.”<sup>308</sup> However, Amodio argues that the word’s associations with monstrosity and otherworldliness are nevertheless persistent and surface in their full traditional force in *SGGK*. As Amodio notes, the Green Knight is “an unusually powerful, threatening, liminal human figure [...] immediately set apart from most men by his physicality.”<sup>309</sup> In the Green Knight’s description, the term and its powerful associations work in concert with the metrics of the passage and with the sensory details that follow it, in order to heighten the Knight’s aura of monstrosity.

The monstrous connotations of the epithet “*aghlich*” are reinforced, one line later, by alliteration: the emphasis falls on the words that refer to the knight’s superlative size (“*most, molde, mesure*”). These general statements of the knight’s fearful aura and superlative size are right away reinforced by particulars: the imposing length and bulk of his upper body, the length and strength of his limbs. This perception of the knight leads to the tentative hypothesis that he is “*half etayn*,” half giant—a term fraught with negative, inimical connotations, as suggested by the poet’s later reference to the hostile giants that haunt cliffs in the wilderness (l. 723).

Comparing the Green Knight to monstrous giants in Germanic tradition, Randi Eldevik argues

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<sup>307</sup> Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 141.

<sup>308</sup> Middle English Dictionary, “*auel*.”

<sup>309</sup> Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 142.

that the “aghlich mayster”<sup>310</sup> does not truly fit the profile. Eldevik argues that the *Gawain*-poet, after having suggested that the Green Knight is “half etayn,” quickly withdraws that suggestion:

[the poet] then hastens to add ‘Bot mon most I algate mynn him to bene’ and goes on to dispel any hint of gigantic monstrosity by stressing the shapeliness and well-proportioned physique of the tall green figure.<sup>311</sup>

But the logical structure of the passage suggests that the hint of monstrosity is allowed, indeed encouraged, to linger. The narrator first introduces the one hypothesis, then the other, in both cases through verbs that limit the authority of the pronouncements that follow: the first-person “hope,” “myne.” The first body of evidence, as it were, culminates in the “monster” hypothesis. No sooner is it voiced than it is supplanted by the alternate hypothesis, that the Green Knight is a handsome man, followed by its own evidence. And that, in turn is undercut by the clearest revelation of the Knight’s strangeness, a revelation delayed till the very last line of the stanza, for a metrical impact that mimics its visual shock: the revelation that the knight is “oueral enker grene” (“overall bright green,” l. 150).<sup>312</sup>

Epistemic doubt surrounds the Green Knight for the rest of his appearance in Arthur’s court; indeed, it is at the heart of the courtiers’ wonder response, surrounded by nuances of curiosity, dread, even awe:

Ther watȝ lokyng on lenȝe þe lude to beholde,  
For vch mon had meruayle quat hit mene myȝt,  
Þat a habel and a horse myȝt such a hwe lach,  
As growe grene as þe gres and grener hit semed,  
Pen grene aumayl on golde glowande bryȝter.  
Al studied þat þer stod, and stalked hym nerre  
Wyth al þe wonder of þe worlde what he worth schulde.  
For fele sellyeȝ had þay sen, but such never are;

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<sup>310</sup> For the traditional monstrous and violent connotations of this epithet in *SGGK*, see Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 141-3.

<sup>311</sup> Eldevik, “Less than Kind” 109.

<sup>312</sup> The Middle English Dictionary translates “enker-grene” as “very green, vivid green.”

Forþi for fantoum and fayryȝe þe folk þere hit demed (ll. 232-240)

There was gazing at length to look at the man, for each man marvelled what it might mean, that a warrior and a horse might take such a colour, grown as green as the grass, and it seemed even greener, glowing brighter than green enamel on gold. All studied who stood there and drew near him, with all the wonder of the world at what he should do; for many wonders they had seen, but never before one like that, so that they thought it illusion (or a spectre) or enchantment. And all were amazed by his voice and sat stockstill, in dead silence throughout the rich hall.

Throughout the passage, the *Gawain*-poet accumulates a variety of wonder terms, describing the courtiers' reaction and its magnitude ("meruayle," l. 232; "al þe wonder of þe worlde," l. 238); their past wonder-experiences that nevertheless fall short of this one ("felle sellyeȝ ..." l. 239); and the alliterating categories ("fantoum and fayryȝe," l. 240) used to interpret this particular apparition. Of these wonder terms, "fantoum" and "fayryȝe" are the closest to a label for the Green Knight. The uses of these words in Middle English reveal complex and suggestive semantic fields that invite further exploration. As the dissertation will show, they are an exquisitely accurate label, because they mark out the boundaries not only between the natural and the supernatural, but also between truth and falsehood.

The terms "fantoum"<sup>313</sup> and "fayryȝe"<sup>314</sup> can indicate the supernatural, though they do not inevitably do so. "Fantoum" can refer to a ghost, a spectre, or a supernatural apparition. In a late-fourteenth-century translation of the New Testament, the disciples see Jesus walking on the

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<sup>313</sup> *The Middle English Dictionary* defines "fantom" (appearing in such variations as fantom, fantasme, fantesme, fantosme, fanton, fantain, fautom, fainton) as follows: (1) That which has only a seeming reality, permanence, or value; vanity (of the world, its riches, joys, etc.); also, any of the world's vanities; (2) (a) That which deludes the senses or imagination; illusion (as of dream or hallucination); (b) an illusory experience or object; an apparition, a specter. (3) That which cannot be credited as truth or fact; error; lying, a falsehood; withouten fantome, truly, indeed. (4) The practice of deception; deceiving contrivance; also, a deceit, guile. (5) The morbid experience of hallucinations or bad dreams; delirium. (*The Middle English Dictionary*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED15268>, August 2011)

<sup>314</sup> *The Middle English Dictionary* defines "fairie" (appearing in such variations as faierie, feiri(e), farie) as follows: (1) (a) The country or home of supernatural or legendary creatures; also, a land of such creatures; (b) coll. such creatures; (c) such a creature.; (2) (a) Supernatural contrivance; enchantment, magic, illusion; also, something supernatural or illusory, a phantom; (b) something incredible or fictitious, a figment.

water and “gessiden [Him] to be a fantum” (Mark 6.49).<sup>315</sup> A term with an even stronger and more specific supernatural meaning, “fayryȝe” denotes the realm, the nature, or the magical power of the fairies. *Sir Orfeo*, for example, refers to the “lond of fairy” (l. 562), as well as the power of “fairy” through which Queen Heurodys is stolen away (“mid fairy forth ynome,” l. 193). However, in addition to these supernatural meanings, the two terms also denote the false, the deceptive, the illusory. “Fantoum” refers not only to ghosts and spectres, but also to the world’s vanity, to delusions of the senses, and even to medically treatable hallucinations.<sup>316</sup> Likewise, “fayryȝe” denotes not only fairy things, but also illusion, misapprehension, fiction, or deceit. For example, the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* translates the “vanitas” of Psalm 118.37 as “þe worlds dweole & hire fantesme” (“the world’s delusion and its vanity,” l. 62).<sup>317</sup> Along similar lines, a late-fourteenth-century religious lyric even couples the two alliterating terms, “fantum” and “feiri,” to decry the goods of this world as illusory and deceptive: “Þis world [...] nis but fantum and feiri” (“this world is nothing but vanity and delusion”).<sup>318</sup> Gower, too, pairs the terms and uses them to denote delusion with a hint of the marvellous or uncanny. Gower uses the terms in his tale of Adrian and Bardus. Adrian, a rich man, falls into a pit in the wilderness; Bardus, a poor man gathering wood, hears Adrian’s cries, gets half of Adam’s wealth promised to him as a reward, and so attempts to rescue Adrian. But along with Adrian, two beasts have also fallen into the pit: an ape and a serpent. When Bardus casts a rope into the pit, what emerges initially is not Adrian, but first the ape, and then the serpent.

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<sup>315</sup> *The Middle English Dictionary* (“fantoum”), citing J. Forshall and F. Madden, eds., *Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English Versions Made from the Latin Vulgate, by John Wycliffe and His Followers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850. .

<sup>316</sup> *The Middle English Dictionary*, “fantom.”

<sup>317</sup> This line appears in the Nero manuscript of the *Ancrene Wisse* (*The English Text of the Ancrene Riwe: BM MS Cotton Nero A.14*, ed. M. Day, *EETS* 225 (1952; reprint 1957).

<sup>318</sup> *The Middle English Dictionary*, “fantom,” citing “Whon Men beop,” in *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, ed. C. Brown (1924), 143-48.

Bot whan he sih it was an ape,                    5001  
 He wende al hadde ben a jape  
 Of faerie, and sore him dradde:  
 And Adrian eftsone gradde  
 For help, and cride and preide faste, 5005  
 And he eftsone his corde caste;  
 Bot whan it cam unto the grounde,  
 A gret serpent it hath bewounde,  
 The which Bardus anon up drouh.  
 And thanne him thoghte wel ynouh 5010  
 It was fantosme, bot yit he herde  
 The vois, and he therto ansuerde,  
 “What wiht art thou in Goddes name?” (*Confessio Amantis*, Book 5, ll. 5001-5013)

Bardus’s reaction is not just confusion over the divergence between the human voice he hears and the non-human shapes he sees; Bardus’s reaction is one of dread. Like Arthur’s courtiers confronted with the Green Knight, Bardus is frightened by the unknown creature in the wilderness, the creature that he is temporarily unable to label or classify, and he invokes the categories of “faerie” and “fantosme,” categories that comprise the illusory and the supernatural alike.

Judging by their semantic fields, then, “fantoum” and “fayryȝe” are slippery categories, their semantic fields founded on uncertainty. Applied to the Green Knight, the terms do not define or elucidate the apparition, but instead indicate his alterity, his distance from essential, trustworthy human reality. They do not pin down the Green Knight but rather mark him out as un-pin-downable. In the absence of any reliable conclusion, the courtiers’ attempt at interpreting the marvel ends in dead silence.

Critics of the poem have fared rather like the courtiers, trying to “read” the Green Knight, to fit him into category after category, with limited success. Early scholarship attempts to fix the

Green Knight's identity: he is an allegorical representation of Christ, the Word of God;<sup>319</sup> he is an allegorical representation of Satan<sup>320</sup>; he is Merlin;<sup>321</sup> he is a fiend on earth<sup>322</sup>; he is a dying and rising vegetation god;<sup>323</sup> he is Death;<sup>324</sup> he is the horrifically decapitated Green Squire, Ralph Holmes, a fourteenth-century nobleman;<sup>325</sup> he is the magnificent Green Count, Amadeus VI, Count of Savoy.<sup>326</sup> But in the wake of such readings, "the poem often seems diminished and trivialized, as the shimmering complexity of the surface of the text is replaced by schematic patterns that are not only less complex but also far less interesting."<sup>327</sup> Instead, as C. S. Lewis shows with customary panache, a wild diversity of literary models describes the Green Knight better than the assertion of a single analogue:

[The Green Knight is] a living *coincidentia oppositorum*; half giant, yet wholly a "lovely knight"; as full of demoniac energy as old Karamazov, yet, in his own house, as jolly as a Dickensian Christmas host; now exhibiting a ferocity so gleeful that it is almost genial, and now a geniality so outrageous that it borders on the ferocious; half boy or buffoon in his shouts and laughter and jumpings; yet at the end judging Gawain with the tranquil superiority of an angelic being.<sup>328</sup>

Drawing on the work of Larry Benson and J. A. Burrows,<sup>329</sup> Lawrence Besserman sheds further light on the Green Knight's resistance to categorization. He observes that "the Green Knight accomodates a cluster of antithetical attributes [...] that are in constant dynamic play."

Besserman likens the Green Knight's dual character to the double-image drawings that represent,

<sup>319</sup> Schnyder, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: An Essay in Interpretation*.

<sup>320</sup> Levy, "Gawain's Spiritual Journey: *Imitatio Christi* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*." 65-106.

<sup>321</sup> Long, "Was the Green Knight Really Merlin?" 1-7.

<sup>322</sup> Randall, "Was the Green Knight Really A Fiend?" 479-91.

<sup>323</sup> Speirs, "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" 274-300.

<sup>324</sup> Krappe, "Who Was the Green Knight?" 206-15.

<sup>325</sup> Braddy, "Sir Gawain and Ralph Holmes the Green Knight" 240-242.

<sup>326</sup> D'Ardenne, "'The Green Count' and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" 113-126.

<sup>327</sup> Arthur, *Medieval Sign Theory* 5. John Halverston also surveys these studies and questions their underlying assumptions with considerable scorn (Halverston, "Template Criticism: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" 133-139.) More recently, Manish Sharma provides a survey of the scholarship about "the polyvalence of signs and the processes of interpretation and reinterpretation in *SGGK*" (172).

<sup>328</sup> Lewis, "The Anthropological Approach" 304.

<sup>329</sup> Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; Benson, *Art and Tradition in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

for example, simultaneously a duck and a rabbit: “we can switch from one reading to another with increasing rapidity; we will also ‘remember’ the rabbit while we see the duck, but the more closely we watch ourselves, the more certainly we will discover that we cannot experience alternative readings at the same time.”<sup>330</sup>

Cautiously acknowledging that the Green Knight “is *not* a figurative representative of Christ,” Besserman nevertheless draws a parallel between the Knight’s double nature and the hypostatic union, the doctrine that Christ is one Person but two natures, the human and the divine. Besserman cites the formulation of the Athanasian creed as an intellectual model, arguing that the hypostatic union “offer[s] the sharpest conceptual analogue to the double-image duality of the Green Knight.” The Person of Christ, that is, offers a paradigm for thinking about a union of disparate natures: humanity and divinity united in Christ; earthly matter and divine substance united in the Eucharist. But the Person of Christ—especially as present in the Eucharist—also provides an *affective* analogue to the Green Knight: a model for the contemporary experience of wonder. On the Vigil of the Nativity, Bernard of Clairvaux contemplates the person of the new-born Christ as a source of superlative wonder because of this union of disparate natures:

As Bernard [of Clairvaux] explained...we wonder at what we cannot in any sense incorporate, or consume, or encompass in our mental categories; we wonder at mystery, at paradox, at *admirabiles mixturae*. The ecstasy and stupor Bernard calls *admiratio* is triggered above all, he says, by three hybrids beyond nature and comprehension: the mixture of God and man, of woman and virgin, of belief with falsity in our hearts.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>330</sup>Besserman, “The Idea of the Green Knight” 228, citing E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* 5.

<sup>331</sup>Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 69, citing Bernard of Clairvaux, Third Sermon for the Vigil of the Nativity, *Opera*, 4:211-19, esp. 216-17.

Wonder is the response to the “mixture of God and man” in the hypostatic union; likewise, it is the response to the Eucharist, with its miraculous transsubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. This profound wonder at the double nature of God is not unmixed with dread, not even when it comes to the beneficent and familiar manifestation of the Eucharist. As Bynum observes, Roger Bacon “writes in heightened language of the horror and wonder of the Eucharist.”<sup>332</sup> A substantial body of preaching *exempla* encourages reverence towards the Eucharist, sometimes through horrific cautionary details.<sup>333</sup> In quite a few of these *exempla*, the wonder and horror of the episode rely on the double nature of the Eucharist: the *exempla* describe the transformation of the mistreated Host into bleeding flesh or even the Christ Child,<sup>334</sup> sometimes with fatal consequences to its attackers.

Nor is Christ, in Person or in the Eucharist, the sole recipient of such fearful wonder—only the most illustrious:

But marveling and astonishment as reactions seem to be triggered most frequently and violently by what Bernard of Clairvaux called *admirabiles mixturae*: events or phenomena in which ontological and moral boundaries are crossed, confused, or erased.<sup>335</sup>

These *admirabiles mixturae*, these hybrid objects of wonder and horror, range from revenants to animate crucifixes and dying werewolves.<sup>336</sup> Like them, the Green Knight unites disparate aspects in his person: he is at once monster and knight, at once “luflich hed” and “ugli bodi that bledde,” at once beheaded and fiercely alive—a collection of disparate aspects whose

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<sup>332</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 21.

<sup>333</sup> Tubach, *Index exemplorum* 207-212.

<sup>334</sup> Tubach, *Index exemplorum* 211-2 (see especially item 2689, *Host transformed*). Tubach lists approximately nine *exempla* featuring the Host’s transformation into blood, and sixteen *exempla* featuring the Host’s transformation into a child.

<sup>335</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 21.

<sup>336</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 42-70.

disparateness is, again and again, poetically reinforced. His mystery, his elusiveness, his dramatized escape from category after category, is what makes him—even among Arthur’s courtiers, who are after all connoisseurs of such things—so powerful and frightening a wonder.

The Green Knight’s mystery soon acquires a spatial dimension. “Where” is the first word out of his mouth:

þe fyrst word þat he warp, “Wher is,” he sayd,  
“þe gouvernour of þis gyng?” (ll. 224-5)

The first word that he uttered, “Where is,” he said, “the ruler of this company?” As the episode unfolds, the question “where”—the concern with the Green Knight’s place of dwelling or origin—comes to preoccupy Arthur’s court more and more intensely. The Green Knight exacts the promise that Gawain will seek him out, but his direction is anything but helpful: he invites Gawain “where-so þou hopes/I may be funde vpon folde” (“wherever you hope I may be found on the earth,” ll. 395-6). Gawain, in his turn, emphasizes the concern with locale even more strongly, trying to learn the Green Knight’s dwelling-place:

“Where schulde I wale þe,” quoth Gauan, “where is þy place?  
I wot neuer where þou wonyes, bi hym þat me wro3t,  
Ne I know not þe, kny3t, þy cort ne þi name.  
Bot teche me truly þerto, and telle me how þou hattes [...]” (ll. 398-401).

“Where should I seek you,” said Gawain, “where is your place? I do not know at all where you live, by him who made me, nor do I know you, knight, [neither] your court nor your name. But teach me truly the way there, and tell me what you are called.”

It is an insistent request, full of repetition; five times in four lines Gawain asks to know the Green Knight’s place, and the mystery of the Green Knight’s dwelling precedes even that of his identity (398-99, 400). But the Green Knight puts off the answer till after the blow. When he eventually reveals his place, the answer is only partial (rather like the Green Knight himself at that point), deepening the mystery instead of resolving it: Gawain must seek a place called the

Green Chapel, whose fame is known to all (ll. 406-411). With these parting words, the Green Knight and his head leave Arthur's court. Amidst the "doute" (l. 442) and "merveyl" (l. 466), the fear and wonder of this spectacle—fear and wonder meant to be intense enough to kill, as the Green Knight himself reveals much later (ll. 2456-62)—the *Gawain*-poet reaffirms the spatial indeterminacy of the wonder-bearer:

To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,  
 Neuer more þen þay wyste fram queþen he wat3 wonnen. (ll. 457-62)

What native land he got to, no one there knew, any more than they knew from where he had come.

As noted earlier, this echoes the declarations of unknowing in *Beowulf*: just as Grendel's movements, lineage, and habitat are mysterious to Hrothgar's Danes, so the Green Knight's place of origin and destination are unknown to Arthur's court. The declaration of unknowing in *SGGK* is more limited in scope, more restricted to its specific situation than the declarations in *Beowulf*. In the *SGGK* declaration, the knowledge verbs are in the past tense, not in the perpetual, maxim-like present; the subject of the verbs is Arthur's courtiers, rather than humankind at large. But as in *Beowulf*, spatial indeterminacy accompanies the marvellous intruder in his grisly exit from Arthur's court.

This motif persistently surrounds the marvellous, and especially the elusive Green Chapel, throughout Gawain's quest. But at first this does not seem to be the case. Gawain's itinerary follows a sequence of named landmarks:

Now ridez þis renk þur3 þe ryalme of Logres,  
 Sir Gauan, on Godez halue, þa3 hym no gomen þo3t.  
 Oft leudlez alone he lengez on ny3tez  
 Þer he fonde no3t hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked.  
 Hade he no fere bot his fole bi frythez and dounez, 695  
 Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp,  
 Til þat he ne3ed ful neghe into þe Norþe Wale3.

Alle þe iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez,  
 And farez ouer þe fordez by þe forlondez,  
 Ouer at þe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk 700  
 In þe wyldrenesse of Wyrle... (ll. 691-701)

Now this warrior rides through the realm of Logres, Sir Gawain, on God's behalf, though he did not think this [errand] a game. Often companionless, alone, he lingers at nights, when he does not find before him the path that he wished for. He had no companion except his horse, by woodlands and hills, nor any person except for God with whom to speak along the way, until he drew very near to North Wales. He holds all the isles of Anglesey on the left side, and travels over the fords by the promontories, over at the Holy Head, until he again took the shore in the wilderness of Wirral...<sup>337</sup>

But as Gawain rides on, he leaves familiar names and lands behind. The detailed, mappable itinerary dissolves into the archetypal landscape of the "gaste forest," the archetypal unknown landscape of medieval romance,<sup>338</sup> where marvels and dangers proliferate:

Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contraye3 straunge,  
 Fer floten fro his frende3 fremedly he ryde3.  
 At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wy3e passed 715  
 He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,  
 And þat so foule and so felle þat fe3t hym byhode.  
 So mony meruayl bi mount þer þe mon fynde3,  
 Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.  
 Sumwhyle wyth wormez he werre3, and with wolues als, 720  
 Sumwhyle wyth wodwos, þat woned in þe knarre3,  
 Boþe wyth bullez and bere3, and bore3 oþerquyle,  
 And etayne3, þat hym anelede of þe he3e felle... (ll. 713-23).

He climbed over many cliffs in strange lands; far separated from his friends, he rides friendless. At each ford or water where the man passed, it was a marvel if he did not find an enemy before him, and that [enemy] so foul and so fierce that he had to fight. The man finds so many marvels in the mountains that it would be too boring to tell the tenth

<sup>337</sup> Andy Orchard suggests that this route slyly points across the water, towards Ireland, the home of the Green Knight's most convincing analogues (for these, see Elizabeth Brewer, *From Cuchulainn to Gawain: Sources and Analogues of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; see also Elizabeth Brewer, "Sources I: The Sources of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," in *A Companion to the Gawain-poet*, eds. Brewer and Gibson, 243-56). Insofar as Ireland is the Green Knight's *literary* origin, it is that mysterious place from where he comes—and which the poet here plays such an elaborate game of concealing. If this is the case, a metafictional dimension is added to the game of literary hide-and-seek.

<sup>338</sup> Putter, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and French Arthurian Romance* 14-16.

part. Sometimes he fights with serpents, and with wolves also, sometimes with forest-trolls that lived in the crags; both with bulls and bears, and at other times with boars, and with giants that pursued him from the high fells.

This landscape is rendered not so much through specific sensory details as through abstract descriptors of strangeness and hostility: Gawain's new landmarks become "gates straunge," "mony a bonk unbene," and "contrayez straunge" ("strange roads," l. 709; "inhospitable shores," l. 710; "strange lands," l. 713). When concrete topographical features appear at all, they are paired with the strange or the monstrous: cliffs with foreignness, fords with foes, mountains with marvels, crags with "wodwos," and high rocks with pursuing giants (ll. 715-23). The strangeness of this place is such that the very notion of wonder is turned upside down: a "ferly" is the absence of enemies (l. 715-6), while the overabundance of monsters becomes routine (718-9), their pitiless accumulation emphasized by the two-line anaphora ("sumwhyle...sumwhyle") and the subsequent paratactic enumeration. This territory, "undifferentiated and unmarked by known boundaries,"<sup>339</sup> is thick with monsters. Spatial indeterminacy reappears, once again in the company of wonder.<sup>340</sup>

This companionship is all the more marked when, in the space of the same stanza, the marvellous and the indeterminate vanish together: the description shifts from the archetypal landscape of giants, woodwoses, and "contrayez straunge" to the vivid, concrete reality of Gawain's predicament in the wintry wood (ll. 726-32). Marvels and monsters give way to sleet

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<sup>339</sup> Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* 106.

<sup>340</sup> Ralph Elliott notes that, throughout Gawain's journey, topographical details are described through idiosyncratic dialect terms, themselves rooted in a very specific geography: that of the West Midlands. According to Elliott, these dialectal and topographical details are so striking that this landscape can be mapped with precision onto the geography of the West Midlands (Elliott, *The Gawain Country* 2-4, 34-72). But as Sobecki points out, familiar toponyms may well punctuate the landscape of Gawain's quest--and so do belligerent monsters. The archetypal and mythical are more persuasive models than local geography (Sobecki, "Nature's farthest verge or landscapes beyond allegory and rhetorical convention? The Case of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Petrarch's Ascent of Mount Ventoux" 464-75).

and icicles; as Sarah Stanbury observes, this “dramatic change in the rendition of space” corresponds to “a shift in the subject matter from the mythical to the physical,” and “a matter of fact recognition of damp and cold replaces what is initially a mythical framework.”<sup>341</sup>

But even this shift in scenery does not do away with the spatial indeterminacy that surrounds the Green Knight’s place of habitation. Throughout Gawain’s quest, the location of the Green Chapel remains a carefully cultivated mystery; each promise to reveal it is disappointed or delayed. In Arthur’s hall, the Green Knight had claimed wide-spread fame for his dwelling-place: “þe knyȝt of þe grene chapel men knowen me mony” (“many know me as the knight of the Green Chapel,” l. 454). But as Gawain on his quest asks the locals about him, they profess utter ignorance:

And ay he frayned, as he ferde, at frekeȝ þat he met,  
If þay hade herde any karp of a knyȝt grene,  
In any grounde þerabout, of þe grene chapel;  
And al nykked hym wyth nay, þat neuer in her lyue  
Þay seȝe neuer no segge þat watȝ of suche hweȝ  
of grene. (ll. 703-7)

And as he travelled, he always asked people that he met whether they had heard any talk of a green knight of the green chapel, in any place around there; and all answered him with ‘no’; they said that they had never in their lives seen such a man that was of such a colour.

When Gawain reaches the castle of Hautdesert, its inhabitants promise him guidance to his destination. But once again, the revelation is delayed until the end of the Christmas festivities (ll. 1050-78). On New Year’s morning, Gawain sets out for the Green Chapel with a servant for a guide. But even that designated guide stops short of the destination, seemingly too fearful to do more than give Gawain hair-raising hints and reluctant directions (ll. 2149-55). At each step, the Gawain-poet raises the possibility of revelation, only to undercut it; he flirts with “narrative

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<sup>341</sup> Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* 106.

foreclosure,”<sup>342</sup> only to evade it as skilfully as Gawain evades the Lady’s amorous advances. The mystery so carefully cultivated persists even beyond the appearance of the Green Chapel. When Gawain finally reaches the place of the tryst, his first response is perplexity about its nature: he walks about “debatande with hymself what it be myght” (“debating with himself what it might be,” ll. 2169-88), until he comes to suspect the diabolical nature of the place, and his perplexity gives way to horror.<sup>343</sup>

As it turns out, Gawain’s horror is not justified. The reports of the Green Knight’s cruelty are greatly exaggerated, for he is neither a fiend, nor the indiscriminately blood-thirsty monster of his servant’s gossip. Unlike Grendel, he is not essentially monstrous; he is a handsome nobleman who turns into an enormous Green Knight part-time, through Morgan le Fay’s magic. Between the two of them, Morgan and Bercilak deliberately and artificially create a marvel in order to evoke a specific response—that of wonder and horror intense enough to kill:

Ho wayned me this wonder your wyttez to reve,  
 For to haf graved Gaynour and gart hir to dyghe  
 With glopnyng of that ilke gome that gostlych speked  
 With his hede in his hond before the hyghe table (ll. 2456-62).

She (Morgan) sent me this wonder to take away your wits, in order to have  
 grieved Guinevere and caused her to die with horror of that same man who  
 spoke like a ghost with his head in his hand before the high table.

Manish Sharma flags this as “a peculiar *ad hoc* revisionism on the part of the poet when, near the end of his poem, he attempts to link Morgan to Guinevere.” He notes that throughout the poem narrator and characters alike tend to revise and “tame” intrusions of the marvellous, so

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<sup>342</sup> Sharma coins this evocative phrase in relation to other episodes, including the flirtation instigated by Bercilak’s wife (“Hiding the Harm” 186).

<sup>343</sup> Indeed, the landscape of the Green Chapel recalls demon-haunted, torment-ridden landscapes that provide an entrance into the afterlife; Takami Matsuda remarks on the resemblance between the “deserted cave” of the Green Chapel and Gerald of Wales’s description of St Patrick’s Purgatory in *Topographia Hibernica* (Matsuda, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and St Patrick’s Purgatory” 500-1).

as to make them fit into Arthurian normality and into historical continuity: “in this marvellous narrative, paradoxically, the marvel is systematically domesticated so as to control its disruptive potential.”<sup>344</sup> Bertilak’s explanation to Gawain revises the episode of the Green Knight’s apparition. First, it disambiguates the Green Knight’s challenge to Gawain. Its initial wording suggested simply an exchange of blows--possibly with the axe, but possibly also with the Green Knight’s other accessory, the holly branch. Bertilak’s explanation, however, erases the “merciful” option of the holly branch, making it clear instead that Gawain was meant to strike such a blow as would sever the Green Knight’s head. Second, Bertilak’s explanation places the strange episode of the Green Knight’s visit within the web of Arthurian narrative by supplying a motivation: Morgan, the “mastermind” of the murderous prank, has reasons rooted in French romance for her enmity towards Guinevere.<sup>345</sup> But Bertilak’s explanation revises not just the episode of the Green Knight’s first apparition; it revises the image of the Green Knight himself. He becomes, in Christine Chism’s incisive phrasing, “occasionally despicable: a duplicitous gamester and a sorceress’s catspaw.”<sup>346</sup> It alters him, too, at an ontological level: his explanation reveals that “his very identity as an incarnation of mythical authority is the result of a trick.”<sup>347</sup> The Green Knight who rides into Arthur’s hall, the fearsome apparition that astonishes Arthur’s court and terrifies even the brave Gawain, turns out to be a disguise, a

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<sup>344</sup> Sharma, “Hiding the Harm” 181. Helen Cooper proposes an even more skeptical view of this revelation: “The poet does not necessarily endorse Bertilak’s statement: the last view he allows us of him is in his shape as Green Knight, not as Bertilak, riding off to an unknown destination... The poet never commits himself in his own voice as to whether the Green Knight ‘really’ is Sir Bertilak under enchantment, or whether he really is primarily the Green Knight (as the guide suggests, with his account of the grisly inhabitant of the Green Chapel) who is merely playing the host as a means of waylaying Gawain” (“The Supernatural,” 288-9). In this analysis I take the view that the guide is perpetuating Bertilak’s fiction; he claims that the Green Knight is famous for the cruelty he perpetrates in that particular place—a sort of reverse local attraction; however, during his quest Gawain never encounters anyone who has heard of this fame.

<sup>345</sup> Sharma, “Hiding the Harm” 168-183.

<sup>346</sup> Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* 81.

<sup>347</sup> Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* 66.

deception--not intrinsically a wonder, but a wonder created through magical artistry and through the Green Knight's deliberate performance.

At this point it becomes evident that the Green Knight, earlier thought to be "fantoum and faierie" (l. 150), inhabits the entire semantic field of these terms. He is a "fantoum"—that is, he enacts the part of a spectre—when he addresses Arthur's court with his severed head in his hand, speaking, in his own words, "gostlich" (like a ghost, l. 2458). He is a "faierie" both because he assumes the guise of a supernatural, legendary creature, a "fairy," and because his appearance is the result of "faierie" in the sense of enchantment. And he is both "fantoum and faierie" because his marvellous apparition is a deviously crafted deception.

His "artificiality" does not diminish the Green Knight's status as a marvel; from the twelfth century onwards, artificial marvels enjoy considerable vogue in courtly culture. Twelfth century French romances fill their portrayal of classical antiquity with magnificent collections of marvellous automata: a metal archer guards the tomb of the Amazon Camilla from intruders;<sup>348</sup> four gold and silver automata in Hector's sick-chamber hold mirrors to encourage courtly dress and demeanour, play music, perfume the chamber with flowers and incense, and perform acrobatics to entertain visitors.<sup>349</sup> As Penny Sullivan observes,

The descriptions of the automata in the "Chambre de Beautés" are not isolated phenomena in medieval literature. Many other works of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries contain similar descriptions of highly complex and technically sophisticated works of art which waver to and fro across the ill-defined boundary between mechanical curiosities and supernatural phenomena.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> *Le Roman d'Eneas*, ed. Salverda da Grave, cited by Sullivan, "Medieval Automata: The 'Chambre De Beautés' In Benoît's *Roman De Troie*" 1-20.

<sup>349</sup> Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. Constans, ll. 14656-936. Quoted with an English translation and commentary in Sullivan, "Medieval Automata: The 'Chambre de Beautés' In Benoît's *Roman De Troie*" 1-20.

<sup>350</sup> Sullivan, "Medieval Automata" 8.

For instance, automata feature in the A Version of *Floire et Blancheflor*, a twelfth-century romance contemporary with the *romans d'antiquité*. In this romance, a pagan ruler sustains an elaborate deception by building a tomb decorated by two life-sized golden lovers who embrace and converse with one another through the twinned powers of steam and magic.<sup>351</sup> Similarly, the thirteenth-century *chanson de geste* of *Aymeri de Narbonne* places ingenious mechanisms in a courtly context: the poet decorates the former Saracen stronghold of Narbonne with “a musical ‘marvel’, in this case a gold-plated copper tree with singing birds of every conceivable variety.”<sup>352</sup>

Between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, artificial marvels engage the imaginations of romancers, historians, encyclopedists, and travel writers. The historian William of Malmesbury, for instance, describes the fierce automata that guard the Emperor Octavian’s treasure under a mountain, and the elaborate mechanical marvels created by the ingenious and wicked Pope Gerbert.<sup>353</sup> Gervase of Tilbury, another English encyclopedist of the late twelfth century, counts the inventions of Virgil among the world’s marvels: the meat market whose contents never rot; the bronze fly that keeps away other insects; the trumpeting automaton who repels the south wind; the troupe of mannequins that monitors rebellions in the Roman empire.<sup>354</sup> If these encyclopedists situate the artificial marvels chiefly in the past, other writers envision them in the future; yet others see them realized in the present. In the thirteenth century, for

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<sup>351</sup> Pelan, ed., *Floire et Blancheflor*, ll. 584-7. Cited by Sullivan, “Medieval Automata” 5.

<sup>352</sup> Sullivan, “Medieval Automata” 6.

<sup>353</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* (*The History of the English Kings*), ii.169-172 (pp. 285-295).

<sup>354</sup> Gervase of Tilbury. *Otia imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor* III.10, III.12, III.13, III.15 (pp. 576-87). On others of Virgil’s marvels, see also Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum libri duo* 2.172 (pp. 281-82). For further discussion of these marvels in medieval encyclopedic works, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 92-6.

instance, Roger Bacon imagines a programme of studies that would in time yield flying ships, in imitation of Alexander the Great's exploits.<sup>355</sup>

If the technology of Roger Bacon's own time is not quite up to flying ships, nevertheless it produces marvels of its own. William of Rubruck, a Franciscan friar who undertook a mission to the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century, describes an automaton at the court of the Great Khan: a silver tree, topped by a trumpeting angel and ornamented with beasts that spewed a variety of beverages on command.<sup>356</sup> The marvel is as distant from William's home in spatial terms as Virgil's marvels are distant in temporal terms from the encyclopedists who so eagerly describe them; nevertheless, William draws the marvel closer to his homeland in terms of origin: he attributes this automaton to European technology, specifically to a French goldsmith taken captive by the Khan.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, Western European craftsmen of William of Rubruck's time produce their own artificial marvels. Though "[t]he hydraulic clocks and cups of thirteenth-century Europe were pale reflections of their splendid Muslim counterparts," these works of artifice nevertheless reflect the aristocratic passion for artificial marvels. Perhaps nowhere is this passion as evident as in the park of Hesdin, the Burgundian dukes' castle of Artois, where between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries several generations of the family developed elaborate artificial marvels. Some of these marvels are mechanical pranks: windows where those who try to open them get soaked with water, lecterns where those who try to read off them get covered with ink, mirrors where those who look in them get covered with flowers, galleries

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<sup>355</sup> Roger Bacon, *Epistola fratris Rogerii Baconis de secretis operibus artis et naturae, et de nullitate magiae*, 6, in R. Bacon, *Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, 3 vol., ed. J. S. Brewer (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859), vol. 1, p. 533-6. Cited in Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 94-5.

<sup>356</sup> William of Rubruck, *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55 [Itinerarium ad partes orientales]* 208. Cited in Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 92-3.

<sup>357</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 388.

where those who pass are deceived by hidden voices and beaten by personages in disguise.<sup>358</sup>

Yet others of these marvels, however, are statues of men and animals, simulacra of living beings, like the automata of the romances.<sup>359</sup>

As Daston and Park note, the purpose of these artificial marvels that flourish in the aristocratic world is not only astonishment and delight. They are made or imagined not only to provoke awe, delight, and wonder, to adorn courtly culture, but also to assert its values and to demonstrate the power and splendour of these marvels' possessors.<sup>360</sup> Nor is the wonder-response to the marvels entirely free from suspicion: in the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury insistently associates Gerbert and the mechanical marvels he encounters with the demonic;<sup>361</sup> in the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon insists anxiously that his own inventions are free from demonic taint;<sup>362</sup> in the fourteenth century, Odoric of Pordenone and Mandeville tinge their descriptions of the Great Khan's artificial marvels with hints about demons and dark magic.<sup>363</sup>

The range of the wonder-response to artificial marvels becomes apparent in Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, where a strange knight offers King Cambyuskan several marvellous gifts, including a brass horse that can transport its rider within twenty-four hours to any place on earth. The horse elicits much the same complex wonder-reaction as the Green Knight, as Cambyuskan

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<sup>358</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 95-6.

<sup>359</sup> Anne Hagopian van Buren, "Reality and Literary Romance in the Park of Hesdin" 115-134.

<sup>360</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 95-108.

<sup>361</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum* (*The History of the English Kings*), ii.169-172 (pp. 285-86).

<sup>362</sup> Roger Bacon, *Epistola fratris Rogerii Baconis de secretis operibus artis et naturae, et de nullitate magiae* 6, cited in Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 94-5, 389.

<sup>363</sup> On the demonic associations of the Great Khan's courtly marvels, see Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*, 26, p. 473; and *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. Seymour, p. 166. For a more detailed account of artificial marvels, as well as a description of the modern scholarly discussion surrounding medieval marvels, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, particularly the section on "Artificial Marvels" (88-108).

and his courtiers cluster around it, filled with equal parts delight, suspicion, curiosity, and learned speculation.

Greet was the prees that swarmeth to and fro  
 To gauren on this hors that stondeth so, 190  
 For it so heigh was, and so brood and long,  
 so wel proporcioned for to been strong,  
 Right as it were a steede of Lumbardye;  
 Therwith so horsly, and so quyk of ye,  
 As it a gentlil Poilleys courser were. 195  
 For certes, fro his tayl unto his ere  
 Nature ne art ne koude hym nat amende  
 In no degree, as al the people wende.  
 But everemoore hir mooste wonder was  
 How that it koude gon, and was of bras; 200  
 It was a fairye, as the peple semed.  
 Diverse folk diversely they demed;  
 As many heddes, as manye wittes ther been.  
 They murmureden as dooth a swarm of been,  
 And maden skiles after hir fantasies, 205  
 Rehersynge of thise olde poetries,  
 And seyden it was lyk the Pegasee,  
 The hors that hadde wynges for to flee;  
 Or elles it was the Grekes hors Synon,  
 That broghte Troie to destruccion, 210  
 As men in thise olde geestes rede.  
 "Myn herte," quod oon, "is everemoore in drede;  
 I trowe som men of armes been therinne,  
 That shapen hem this citee for to wyne.  
 It were right good that al swich thyng were knowe." 215  
 Another rownded to his felawe lowe,  
 And seyde, "He lyeth, for it is rather lyk  
 An apparence ymaad by som magyk,  
 As jogelours pleyen at thise feestes grete." (*SqT* ll. 189-219)<sup>364</sup>

Like the Green Knight, the horse of brass attracts the concentrated gaze of the court.<sup>365</sup> Like the Green Knight, the mechanical apparition is a perfect balance of great size and force with harmony of proportions (ll. 190, 197-8). Like the Green Knight, too, the mechanical horse

<sup>364</sup> The Riverside Chaucer

<sup>365</sup> For an analysis of moments of gazing and of visual perception in SGGK, see Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 96-115.

evokes conflicting categories of the otherworldly: as Arthur's courtiers thought the knight "fantoum or fairye," so some of Cambyskan's courtiers think the horse a "fairye," others an ancient Greek myth, yet others "an apparence ymaad by som magyk," an illusion or a fiction produced for entertainment. Finally, like the Green Knight, the brass horse also elicits a note of dread: to some of the watchers, the automaton recalls "the Grekes hors Synon,/That broghte Troie to destruccion" and elicits dread and suspicion. Though the narrator rebukes the fearful watchers as "lewed peple," the ominous note lingers. In a later scene, the court again wonders at the horse, in a passage almost pleonastically stuffed with wonder-cognates, much like the description of the wonder-reaction of Arthur's courtiers:

Swich wondryng was ther on this hors of bras  
That syn the grete sege of Troie was,  
Theras men wondreden on an hors also,  
Ne was ther swich a wondryng as was tho (*SqT* ll. 305-9).

But amidst the exuberant polyptoton, the note of suspicion sounds again: the narrator measures the wonder-reaction at this horse of brass against the wonder-reaction of the Trojans over the wooden horse that carried their doom. This threat never materializes in the Squire's Tale. Nevertheless, the mechanical marvel of the horse of brass evokes as complex and intense a wonder-reaction as the living green challenger who rides into Arthur's hall. The Green Knight inspires a similar blend of emotions: curiosity, doubt, unknowing, and downright dread.

But if Bercilak's revelation of his deceptive marvelous persona does not diminish the marvel of the Green Knight, it nevertheless invites a different perception of him: he is not a marvel by virtue of his own intrinsic nature, but a marvel that is artfully created (by Morgan) and deliberately performed (by himself). In his performance, the Green Knight deploys a collection of tropes well-established in the literary discourse of wonder in order to heighten the wonder-

response of his audience. This sets up a curious parallel between the Green Knight and the poem's narrator: each of them is in possession of a marvel from an ancient source, and each of them must make the best of it through an array of rhetorical strategies.

From the very beginning of the poem, the narrator emphasizes the ancient source of the story. The narrator opens the poem with a prologue that promises a superlative marvel, a marvel firmly rooted in ancient history and ancient tradition. As Larry Benson notes, the prologue frames the marvel within "the history of Britain that extends from Camelot to Troy"; the end of the poem returns to this beginning, referencing "þe best boke of romaunce," the poem's putative source. Benson argues that this framing of the marvel within history is a convention of the romance genre:

[A] romance [...] always seems twice-told, even when it is being told for the first time, and the poet's assertion of an exact source is a necessary part of the establishment of that tone, because, as the word "romance" implies, this is a genre that conventionally depends upon the records of tradition rather than the new and original, the "novel."<sup>366</sup>

Benson goes on to contrast the textuality of the romance genre with the orality of the epic. He argues that, in both genres, the invocation of history and tradition is conventional; however, in romances, narrators tend to refer to written sources for their stories, while in epics, narrators tend to refer to a pre-existing oral tradition.<sup>367</sup> So sharp a division between the orality and literacy of the romance genre is problematic,<sup>368</sup> especially with respect to *SGGK*'s prologue, in which the narrator presents a double lineage for the marvel: first, an oral tradition, alive in the community ("as I in toun herde"); second, as a long-standing written tradition ("as hit is stad and stoken/In stori stif and stronge,/With lel lettres loken").

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<sup>366</sup> Benson, *Art and Tradition* 4.

<sup>367</sup> Benson, *Art and Tradition* 5-9.

<sup>368</sup> For a brief overview of the issue of orality within medieval English literature, see Amodio, "Medieval English Oral Tradition" 211-213.

Forþi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe,  
 Pat a selly in siȝt summe men hit holden,  
 And an outrage aventure of Arthurez wonderez.  
 If ȝe wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile,  
 I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,  
 with tonge,  
     As hit is stad and stoken  
     In stori stif and stronge,  
     With lel letteres loken,  
     In londe so hatz ben longe (ll. 27-36)

Therefore I mean to show an adventure in the world, which some people consider a wonder in sight, and an extraordinary adventure among Arthur's wonders. If you will listen to this lay only a little while, I will tell it, just as I heard it in town, with tongue; as it is set down and established in a sturdy and strong story, locked in with loyal letters, as it has long been in the land.

However, though this double lineage renders problematic Benson's insistence on the textuality of romance, it also reinforces his point about the "twice-told tale," the authority and the glamour of the past that the romance writer invokes. But there is more than authority and glamour to this past. The poem opens "with the slamming shut of a volume of history: the history of a distant era that ended in disaster, with Troy 'brittened and brent to brondes and askes.'" <sup>369</sup> It begins with a look back towards not just an illustrious past, but a dark one, a "halting march of violence, treachery, and ancient glory." <sup>370</sup> Against this ominous background, the marvel gains not just in glamour and authority, but in significance: as Caroline Walker Bynum notes, in medieval narratives, wonders are all the more striking and powerful, all the more inspiring of awe and dread, when they "are recounted in conjunction with troubled and human events such as war, crime, or corruption." <sup>371</sup> What makes for a powerful wonder is the connection between it and the patterns of the human world around it.

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<sup>369</sup> Bishop, "Time and Tempo in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," 611.

<sup>370</sup> Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* 68.

<sup>371</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 71.

If, to theologians, chroniclers, and preachers, the wonderful was indeed often the strange, the rare, and the inexplicable, it was never the *merely* strange or the *simply* inexplicable. It was a strange that mattered, that pointed beyond itself to meaning.<sup>372</sup>

Rooted in Britain's legendary past, and endowed with a past of its own, an oral and textual lineage, the wonder of the Green Knight looms all the larger in authority, glamour, and significance. And if wonders point to greater patterns, foreshadowing troubles and disasters, then the Green Knight's challenge to the Arthurian world, and Gawain's subsequent failure, may foreshadow the eventual downfall of the Arthurian world as a whole.<sup>373</sup> Thus the wonder of the Green Knight takes not only its existence from the past, but its significance from the even older past that surrounds it; and the narrator's task is not to create the wonder, but to perform the wonder before a contemporary audience:

If 3e wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile,  
I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde,  
with tonge... (SGGK ll. 30-32)

It is, in other words, much the same task as Bercilak's: to bring a pre-existing wonder alive through performance.

Like the *Gawain*-poet, Bercilak starts out in possession of a ready-made marvel from the legendary past: his own gigantic green self, courtesy of Morgan, the ancient magician and "goddess." Morgan is so deeply rooted in Arthurian tradition that she functions at once as its

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<sup>372</sup> Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* 71-2.

<sup>373</sup> Ian Bishop views the wonder through a succession of temporal perspectives: the historical timeline, magnificent and disastrous in equal measures, riddled with treason as it is with glory, with which the poem begins and ends; the cyclical timeline of the church's feasts and the natural world's seasons; and in glimpses of the perspective of eternity, from which the drama of sin and salvation plays out, and with which the poet closes the poem. Christine Chism brings yet another temporal dimension to this reading: the dimension of contemporary history. She argues that the *Gawain*-poet "carefully locates his poem at a historical moment that resonates with contemporary tensions" (*Alliterative Revivals*, 66). In other words, the tension in the poem between Arthur's court and the Green Knight mirrors the tension in fourteenth-century England between Richard's court and provincial nobility.

representative and its representation.<sup>374</sup> Most strikingly, this is because of her magical power and status: at the end of the poem, she is “revealed not simply as Gawain’s aunt and Arthur’s half-sister, but towers abruptly over the narrative as ‘Morgan the Goddess.’”<sup>375</sup> But it is not just her identification with an ancient British deity that makes her so fit an emblem of the past. It is also her dependence on the earlier Arthurian tradition. Apart from Arthurian tradition, Morgan’s machinations make no sense. Indeed, critics have objected to the sudden “*deus ex machina*” revelation of her power and agency at the end of the poem.<sup>376</sup> Morgan’s motivation emerges only from the Arthurian canon. The Vulgate *Lancelot* reveals the back-story for the grudge that Morgan bears Guinevere.<sup>377</sup> In sum, Morgan is the one figure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* whose appearance in the poem is too slight to carry the power and agency bestowed on her by the final revelation; the one figure, in other words, who *needs* the weight of the Arthurian tradition to lend her substance. With her dependence on the wider Arthurian tradition, it is fitting that she is the source of Bercilak’s marvel--the marvel of his identity as the Green Knight. Just as the *Gawain*-poet connects the poem’s central marvel to the historical and legendary past, so Bercilak connects *his* marvel to the figure most emblematic of, and most dependent on, the historical and legendary past.

Like the poet, too, Bercilak must make the best of his marvel, heightening its fearful wonder through his performance in Arthur’s hall. With the aid of Morgan’s magic, the Green Knight sets out to elicit the same wonder-response from the intradiegetic audience that the

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<sup>374</sup>Chism evokes the “mythical resonances of the provincial characters” (the Green Knight and Morgan), arguing that they “work as avatars both of historic tradition and contemporary adaptiveness;” her sensitive reading illuminates their mythical dimension, their deep roots in the legendary past, but also their striking affinities with the socio-political reality of courtliness in Ricardian England (*Alliterative Revivals*, 106).

<sup>375</sup>Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* 67.

<sup>376</sup>For such æsthetic objections, see, for example, George L. Kittredge, *A Study of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 136.

<sup>377</sup>Twomey, “*Morgain La Fee* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: From Troy to Camelot*” 91-115. See also Sharma, “Hiding the Harm” 171.

*Gawain*-poet promises to the extra-diegetic audience. From this perspective, the Green Knight's carefully cultivated spatial indeterminacy is a rhetorical "special effect," a deliberate deployment on his part of the poetics of wonder. Until at last Gawain reaches the Green Chapel, every bit of information about the Green Chapel comes from the Green Knight or his staff. And every bit of information is deliberate misdirection or deliberate delay. When the Green Knight first appears at Arthur's court, he refuses to reveal his place until after Gawain strikes the blow. When the Green Knight tells Gawain to seek him at the widely famed Green Chapel, he is being disingenuous; as Gawain finds out, nobody knows where the Green Knight or his Green Chapel can be found. When Gawain reaches Hautdesert, the Green Knight (in his true form as Bercilak) promises to show Gawain the way to the Green Chapel—but not until the New Year. On New Year's morning, when Bercilak's servant leads Gawain to the Green Chapel, he first offers Gawain some rumours about the ogre-like Green Knight, and then offers Gawain an out, a way not to go to the Green Chapel after all—he suggests that Gawain flee and promises discretion. And then he further delays the revelation by stopping short of the Green Chapel and cowering in the woods. Gawain must go on towards the meeting place all by himself to face his adversary. The revelation of the Green Chapel is delayed at each step, and delayed by human agents, by the Green Knight himself and by his household. While the Green Knight's spatial indeterminacy is not as striking as his live severed head, this aspect of his apparition is nevertheless persistent, even after the final revelation of his identity and his role in Morgan's murderous prank. In Gawain's final glimpse of him, the Green Knight is going off "whiderward he will," mysterious and unmappable to the last.

Spatial indeterminacy accompanies the Green Knight from his intrusion into the human world until his final confrontation with Gawain. The mystery of his geographical and

ontological place in the world is an essential component of his marvellous nature, so much so that he and his retinue deliberately and deceitfully enhance the cognitive instability that surrounds him in order to intensify the wonder and horror of his apparition. By contrast, in *Sir Orfeo* and in *Beowulf*, the characters do not participate in the creation of spatial indeterminacy; on the contrary, the heroes dispel it in the process of defeating their monstrous or marvellous enemies. But whether spatial indeterminacy increases the power of these supernatural others, or whether its dissolution accompanies their defeat, it is a portent and a measure of their radical alterity. Places of wonder and dread—the Earthly Paradise, the haunts of demons, the habitations of monsters, of faeries, and of enchanted knights—are also places of mystery, their topography secretive, their location unreachable or unstable or unknown. Space makes manifest the ontological position of these places in relation to humankind. These places and their inhabitants are located beyond the bounds of human knowledge because they are—or wish to seem—beyond the bounds of the human condition.

## Chapter 4: The Shadow of Paradise

Marvellous places resist mapping and elude reliable knowledge. In theological terms, they move across impassable boundaries, as the Faerie realm of Sir Orfeo does, combining elements of Heaven with elements of Hell. In geographical terms, too, they dwell in mystery. Their physical location is unstable, unreliable, unreachable, or unknown, in Old and Middle English texts alike. The way to these places is secret and fraught with danger, like the way to the monster mere in *Beowulf*; or else the way is unreliable, like the subterranean path to Gerald of Wales's pygmy kingdom, a path that at first is open and known, but then vanishes along with the pygmies' goodwill. In other texts, the places themselves are fundamentally mysterious to humankind. In *Beowulf*, men do not know the paths of monsters and the depths of the monster mere; in *Sir Orfeo*, men do not know the destinations of the faeries; in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, men do not know where the Green Knight comes from and where he heads off to. Declarations of unknowing surround the supernatural, the numinous, the habitations of monsters. The places where mortals encounter marvellous Others—faeries, pygmies, or other magical creatures—are characterized by mystery, by confusion, by inaccessibility: in short, by spatial indeterminacy. But although marvellous places are map-resistant, there is one pervasive way in which they are located: away from the "home" of their texts. Both in Old and in Middle English, this home is not only a this-worldly homeland, but also an otherworldly one, for many places of wonder and dread are haunted by the supernatural homelands of humankind—the first, lost home, Paradise, or the last, yet-to-be-won, eternal homeland, Heaven.

In Old English narratives, the distance of these places of wonder from “home” manifests through a sense of exile. The territory of Grendel—the darkness, the borderlands, the bottomless lake—stand in contrast to the human community from which the monster is so emphatically exiled. Like the monster-mere in *Beowulf*, most dangerous otherworldly landscapes in Old English poetry are not just places of wonder or peril or hardship, but places of exile. The country of Mermedonia in *Andreas* is cut off from God and from the rest of humanity both by geographical distance and by monstrous customs; its foreignness is repeatedly emphasized, and it proves an inhospitable home even to its own inhabitants. The demon-infested mere where St. Guthlac establishes his hermitage is a place of deliberate and heroic exile from the pleasures of civilization. Hell—the ultimate landscape of dread—is also the ultimate exilic destination; in poem after poem, its demonic inhabitants, banished from heaven, spend eternity bitterly lamenting their loss.

On earth and in hell, this sense of exile and loss that pervades the otherworldly landscapes points the way home. Most of these otherworldly landscapes of Old English poetry are not just delimited in relation to an implicit or mundane homeland; they are also haunted, through contrasts and echoes, by the supernatural homelands of Paradise and Heaven. This haunting is most clearly perceptible in the narratives of the two wandering saints, Guthlac and Andreas, whose sojourns to otherworldly places will be discussed in detail. However, other poetic texts exhibit a similar dynamic: the dangerous otherworldly landscapes, imbued as they are with loss and homelessness, point to the heavenly homeland that is their antithesis.

This chapter begins with a brief examination of two texts, *Beowulf* and *Christ and Satan*, whose settings range from the earthly to the eschatological. In *Beowulf*, the Christian otherworld chiefly surfaces through allusions, through echoes of phrases and imagery; the story itself is set

in the earthly world. By contrast, in *Christ and Satan*, the story plays out in Heaven and Hell, with brief interludes on earth. In their relationship with the Christian afterlife, then, the two texts are polar opposites: one is confined to the earthly world, while the other ranges over the realms of the afterlife. Yet the dynamic that I described above operates in both texts. In *Christ and Satan*, the dynamic is obvious: exiled to Hell after the angelic rebellion, Satan spends his time lamenting the miseries of his present abode in contrast to the lost joys of his former abode. The dangerous otherworldly landscape of Hell is delimited through a persistent comparison with the lost homeland of Heaven. But even in *Beowulf*, the landscape of the secular world is haunted by the reflections of Heaven and Hell. Even as the geography of the Grendel-mere recalls the realm of Hell, it is also haunted by the Heaven from which its denizens are perpetual exiles.

In terms of their relationship with the eschatological, *Christ and Satan* and *Beowulf* are opposites: in one, Heaven and Hell are the actual settings of the story; in the other, not only does the story take place in the earthly world, but that earthly world is connected to Christian eschatology only in shadowy, indirect ways, through parallels and allusions. However, there are Old English texts that dwell between the earthly and the eschatological. In *Guthlac* and *Andreas*, the story takes place chiefly in the earthly world—but an earthly world bounded by and communicating with the realms of the afterlife. It is in these two texts that the dynamic surrounding otherworldly places becomes most evident. The saints travel to dangerous otherworldly landscapes, and these landscapes, imbued as they are with loss and homelessness, point to the heavenly homeland that is their antithesis.

*Christ and Satan* is the last of a sequence of religious poems in the Junius Book, poems that encompass the sweep of biblical history from Creation to Christ's Harrowing of Hell. J. R. Hall describes this sequence of biblical poems—*Genesis A* and *B*, *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ*

*and Satan*—as a “nonliturgical epic of redemption,” a poetic rendition of the chief episodes within the “Anglo-Saxon outline of salvation history” as that salvation history is propagated through the homiletic tradition.<sup>378</sup> One of the themes that emerge from this sequence of poems is the theme of place in its two forms of homeland and exile. As Nicholas Howe observes,

[a]s a sequence of movements, the expulsion from Eden, the exodus of the Israelites to Canaan, the forced deportation to Babylon, and the journey of Christ into hell and His victorious emergence all belong to history as it unfolds along a geographical rather than chronological dimension. Each event occurs, unavoidably, within place; more pointedly, each is about place in deep and haunting ways that register loss, exile, displacement, return.<sup>379</sup>

In other words, in this version of salvation history, place is deeply significant either as homeland or as place of exile. Place is not just background or setting; it is an emotionally significant axis against which moral outcomes are measured out, so that “home” defines the ultimate good, and “exile” defines rebellion against that good. What emerges from the poems, from the specific episodes of biblical history that they present, is the insistent notion of postlapsarian life as exile, with the realms of earth and hell alike haunted by the lost heavenly homeland—lost to one for a time, lost to the other forever. In *Christ and Satan*, as in the poems that precede it, the notion of place—place as home, place as exile—demonstrates the emotional outcomes of the moral stances of the protagonists. *Christ and Satan* begins with the fall of the rebel angels and with Satan’s lament over the horrors of his new abode. Throughout this lament, the realm of hell that Satan contemplates around him is haunted by the absent realm of Heaven; echoes and parallels between the two places emerge through formulaic phrases, imagery, and thematics, binding

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<sup>378</sup>Hall, “The Old English *Epic of Redemption*: The Theological Unity of MS Junius 11” 41.

<sup>379</sup> Howe, “Falling into Place: Dislocation in the Junius Book” 16-17. For an alternate analysis of the meaning and emotional weight of space in the *Genesis* poems and in *Christ and Satan*, see also Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest*. Michelet shows, for example, how the notion of enclosure is ambivalent: in *Christ and Satan*, hell as enclosed space is a place of punishment and confinement; in *Genesis B*, on the other hand, God’s enclosure of the earth is a “loving shelter” for humankind (Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 24). For the notion of place as a marker of moral and epistemological perspective, see Wehlau, “The Power of Knowledge and the Location of the Reader in *Christ and Satan*” 1-12.

together the realms of Heaven and Hell. In contrast to the lost homeland of Heaven, Hell is the new and otherworldly landscape, the place of danger and fear and exile, persistently haunted by Heaven, its antithesis.

This antithesis between the erstwhile “home world” and the dangerous otherworldly place in which the fiends find themselves begins at the level of individual words. The frequent mention of the same word, “ham,” to describe both Heaven and Hell functions ironically to evoke the gulf between the two. Unmodified, or accompanied by positive epithets, “ham” is always Heaven, lost forever to the demons who lament it: “bettran ham” (“better home,” l. 49), “hihtlicran ham” (“more hopeful home,” l. 137, 215), “deoran ham” (“precious home,” l. 218, 255), “trumlicne ham” (“firm home,” l. 293), “uplicne ham” (“celestial home,” l. 361), “haligne ham” (“holy home,” l. 413), “eadigan ham” (“blessed home,” l. 658). The same word used to describe Hell is frequently modified: hell is “ðeostræ ham” (“dark home,” l. 38), “atola ham” (“terrible home,” l. 95), “walica ham” (“woeful home,” l. 99), “dimman ham” (“dark home,” l. 110, 336), “laðan ham” (“hateful home,” l. 177). More complex formulaic diction, too, sets the two places in antithesis. The devils now possess a home in hell (“ða heo in helle ham staðeledon,” “when they established a home in hell,” l. 25); but they remember, in the same terms, the time when they had a home in heaven (“þonne ic on heofonum ham staðelode,” “when I established a home in heaven,” l. 275; “þa heo on heofonum ham staðelodon,” “when they established a home in heaven,” l. 344). The verbal parallelism only sharpens the contrast between the two. But it is not only a contrast that measures difference; it is a contrast that uses Hell to recall poignantly the absence of Heaven.

Hell is home only insofar as it is the divinely appointed dwelling-place of wicked spirits. To be at home there is to be, paradoxically, at once in tormented captivity (“in wite... bidan in

bendum,” ll. 48b-49a) and in wide-ranging exile (“sceal nu wreclastas/settan sorgcearig, siðas wide,” ll. 187b-88).<sup>380</sup> The horror and alterity of hell emerge as its residents acquaint themselves with their new habitat. The antithetical juxtaposition between heaven and hell appears not only in the usage of an individual key word, but as a structuring principle of the entire poem.

Descriptions of heaven and its lost joys alternate with descriptions of hell and its pains:

Nu ic eow hebbe to hæftum	ham gefærde	
alle of earde.	Nis her eadiges tir,	
wloncra winsele,	ne worulde dream,	
ne ængla ðreat,	ne we upheofon	95
agan moten.	Is ðes atola ham	
fyre onæled.	Ic eom fah wið god.	
æce æt helle duru	dracan eardigað,	
hate ond reðre;	heo us helpan ne magon.	
Is ðæs walica ham	wites afylled;	100
nagan we ðæs heolstres	þæt we us gehydan mægon	
in ðissum neowlan genipe.	Hær is nedran swæg,	
wyrmas gewunade.	Is ðis wites clom	
feste gebunden.	Feond seondon reðe,	
dimme and deorce.	Ne her dæg lyhteð	105
for scedes sciman,	sceppendes leoht.	(ll. 92-106)

Now I have led you all out of the homeland, to the house of captivity. Here there is no glory of the blessed, wine-hall of the proud, nor the world's joy, nor the angels' host, nor may we ever have high heaven. This terrible home is alight with fire. I am stained before God. Dragons live eternally at hell's door, hot and fierce; they may not help us. This woeful home is filled with torment; we do not have enough darkness that we may hide ourselves in this deep pit. Here is the adder's hiss, the dwelling of worms. The bonds of this torment are bound fast. Fiends are fierce, dim and dark. Day, the Creator's light, does not cast light here for the depth of shadows.

<sup>380</sup> See also Dendle's description of the paradoxical Satanic predicament: in Old English poetry and prose hagiography, the devil is represented at once as chained in hell and roaming the earth (*Satan Unbound*, 66-73). What these two states have in common is that in each, the devil's relationship with place is punitive. Whatever his current home—be it hell or the fenlands of Mercia—the place of the devil typifies his punishment, either in imprisonment or in exile.

Much of the sustained description resembles the techniques and motifs that Hildegard Tristram identifies in homiletic descriptions of Heaven and Hell.<sup>381</sup> According to Tristram, Heaven and Hell are described by formulaic enumerations of positive and negative attributes, anaphoric lists that state what “there is” and what “there is not” in both Heaven and Hell. Thus, Heaven is characterized by the absence of sufferings and the presence of abstract joys; Hell is characterized by the absence of joys and the presence of both abstract and physical torments.<sup>382</sup> Likewise, in *Christ and Satan*, Hell is evoked through lists of absent joys (ll. 92-95) and present torments (ll. 95b-105). In both catalogues, the poet introduces each item formulaically, by repeating the negative or positive copula verb: “nys...ne...ne” and “is...is...is.” This is precisely the traditional, formulaic syntax of the homilies. However, *Christ and Satan* adds a twist to the homiletic formula. In homilies, the joys and sufferings of the other world are simply earthly joys that are magnified by being projected onto eternity. By contrast, in *Christ and Satan*, the joys and sorrows are otherworldly at their core: the absent joys are the joys actually experienced by the fiends before their fall, in Heaven, while their present sorrows are the monstrous sorrows specific to their current abode. The traditional catalogue formula of the homilies is thus adapted to the fiends’ otherworldly predicament, emphasizing the sorrows of hell by contrasting them with the lost joys of heaven.

These infernal characteristics represent hell as a state; in contrast, others invite the reader to imagine hell as a space. The hell of *Christ and Satan* has both architectural and geographical elements. Architecturally, it is described as a “windsele” (“a windy hall,” l. 319, 384), with a floor both hot and poisonous (“þis is ðeostræ ham, ðearle gebunden/ fæstum fyrclommum; flor

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<sup>381</sup> However, see also Magennis, *Images of Community*, noting that the description exemplifies the “ironic images of the hall” that reverse the positive tropes traditionally associated with the hall in Old English poetry in order to portray hell (83-4).

<sup>382</sup> Tristram, “Stock Descriptions of Heaven and Hell in Old English Prose and Poetry” 102-7.

is on welme/attre onæled,” “this is the home of darkness, terribly bound with tight fetters of fire; the floor is on fire, kindled with poison,” ll. 38b-40a; “flor attre weol,/hat under hæftum,” “the floor flowed with poison, hot under bonds,” ll. 317b-18a). The features that make hell like a house no longer do the job they would do in a house—in fact, they do the exact opposite: a hall, which should provide shelter, becomes a receptacle for wind; the floor, which should provide stability and comfort, brims with hot poison. Like the references to hell as a “ham,” the architectural elements serve less to describe the infernal regions and more to suggest the magnitude of their estrangement from what a human being or even a spirit might call “home.”

The topography of hell contributes to this distancing effect. Three times hell’s location is described as “down under the headlands”: “niðær undær nessas in ðone neowlan grund” (“down under the headlands to that profound abyss,” l. 31, l. 90); “niðer under næssum” (“down under the headlands,” l. 134). Bosworth and Toller define “næss” as “land running out into water; headland; promontory; (in connection with *under*) ground (as in under-ground).”<sup>383</sup> The word connotes both the aquatic and the subterranean. In poetic texts, “næssas” often appears in connection with the dangerous or otherworldly. In *Guthlac* and in *Christ and Satan*, the expression “niðer under næssas” describes the location of hell. In *Elene* it describes the location of the buried Cross. In *Beowulf*, “næssas” are a topographical feature both of Grendel’s and of the dragon’s habitat.<sup>384</sup> Indeed, Donald Fry sees “næssas” as a defining part of an archetypal landscape of evil and danger, a landscape that has “four basic elements: cliffs, serpents, darkness, and deprivation, and occasionally wolves and wind.”<sup>385</sup> Fry notes that Grendel’s monster mere is an especially vivid and complex rendition of this archetype; however, so is the

<sup>383</sup> Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

<sup>384</sup> *Guthlac* A, l. 563; *Christ and Satan* especially ll. 24b-32a, 89-105, 132-36; *Elene* l. 831; *Judith* ll. 111b-121; *Christ and Satan* especially ll. 24b-32a, 89-105, 132-36; *Beowulf* especially ll. 1357b-75a, 1408b-75a, 2241b-43.

<sup>385</sup> Fry, “The Cliff of Death” 215.

hellscape of *Christ and Satan*, drawing together the abstract elements of concomitant exile and imprisonment with the concrete elements of threatening cliffs, serpents, fire, and darkness. The physical face of Hell is a landscape removed from civilized, human space; it is fit only for the habitation of evil supernatural beings. In contrast, when heaven appears in *Christ and Satan* in concrete terms at all, the poet describes it as a human, civilized space. Heaven is a high hall (“heofnum heahgetimbrad,” “high-timbered heaven,” l. 29; “hehseld,” “high hall,” l. 47), a city and a garden (“wæstmas scinað, beorhte ofer burgum,” “fruit shines, bright over the city,” l. 213-4).<sup>386</sup> The contrast enhances hell’s otherworldliness, its difference and separation from the heavenly home.

Even the shape of hell’s inhabitants emphasizes hell’s exilic nature in contrast to the heavenly home. The demons themselves lament that they have changed form in accord with their spiritual state:

Blace hworfon  
scinnan forscepene,      sceaðan hwearfedon,  
earme æglecan,      geond þæt atole scref,  
for ðam anmedlan      þe hie ær drugon. (ll. 72-74)

The marred evil spirits turned pale, the wretches, the miserable enemies, wandered throughout that terrible pit, because of the arrogance that they had practiced before.

The population of hell does not simply suffer hell’s torments; it becomes one of hell’s torments in its own right, *to itself*. Satan’s fellow-devils turn against him, taunting him for his new-found ugliness and blaming him for their downfall (ll. 53-64). Satan himself lists among hell’s torments not only the presence of serpents, worms, and dragons (ll. 97, 103, 135), but also the hostility and ugliness of his fellow fiends, who are “reðe,/ dimme and deorce” (“violent, dim,

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<sup>386</sup> For the potent resonances of this imagery within the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition, see Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* 147-50.

and dark,” ll. 103-4). In the post-lapsarian blurring of categories, the fallen angels have become indistinguishable from the fauna of hell; exiled from heaven, they are all monsters together.

In *Christ and Satan*, then, the dangerous otherworldly landscape is Hell. It is “otherworldly” in the ordinary sense of the word, a supernatural reality distinct from the mortal world. But it is also “otherworldly” in the contrast with Heaven, the lost home; it is another world compared to Heaven. This is what defines Hell throughout the poem; the exiled demons, with Satan as their mouthpiece, come to know their new place and experience its dismal characteristics as they lament the old place they have lost. The emotional charge of Hell is not only horror but loss. Loss and horror sharpen one another until together they come to define the very nature of Hell’s inhabitants: having lost their dwelling-place, morally as well as geographically, the devils lose their very identity, melting and transforming into the horrific new setting that is both prison and place of exile.

The devils of *Christ and Satan* become one of the horrors of their new exilic habitat. Having lost their home, they lose their angelic nature. Their very identity merges with their post-lapsarian abode. Similarly, in *Beowulf*, the identity of the monster Grendel could hardly be more closely bound up with the landscape he inhabits. From the moment Grendel prowls into the poem, the *Beowulf*-poet marks him out by his habitat. He is “se þe in þystrum bad,” the one who waits in darkness (l. 87); he is the “mære mearcstapa,” famed walker of the borderlands (l. 103); he is the one who “moras heold, /fen ond fæsten,” holds the moors, fen and fastness, as his territory (l. 103-4); he “fifelcynnes eard... weardode hwile,” inhabited for a time the home of monsters (l. 104-5). The *Beowulf*-poet does not introduce Grendel with a physical description or a history, but with the characteristics of the landscape he inhabits: darkness, marginality, wilderness, monstrosity.

Indeed, in *Beowulf* as in *Christ and Satan*, the sites of the poem give visible and imaginable form to the moral and ontological opposites at work in the poem: the world of humankind and the world of monsters. The two worlds are in hostile opposition and cultivated contrast; even when the boundary between them grows permeable or unstable, that only adds to the mystery, marvel, and fearfulness of the world of monsters, to its status as an otherworldly place, radically separate from the world of humankind.<sup>387</sup> The monster mere in particular, the wilderness haunted by Grendel and his kindred, though ostensibly a this-worldly landscape, is haunted by the supernatural. Apart from the carefully cultivated spatial indeterminacy that surrounds it, its geography recalls both the classical and the Christian underworld. Indeed, the landscape of the monster-mere in *Beowulf* is so rich in detail, both natural and unnatural, that it has attracted comparisons with a wide variety of materials, from classical epics to Christian apocrypha.

The Christian analogues come with the longest history and most heated debate: more than a hundred years ago, Richard Morris observed the striking resemblances between the landscape of the monster-mere and the landscape of hell described in Blickling Homily XVI.<sup>388</sup> Blickling Homily XVI belongs to a group of eighteen homilies collected in a late tenth-century manuscript. Dedicated to the Feast of St. Michael, Blickling XVI recounts the legend of the foundation of St. Michael's cave-church on a mountain in the wilderness. The homily closes with a prayer that the archangel defend the faithful against hell-fiends, a prayer followed by an evocative description of these hell-fiends' habitat:

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<sup>387</sup> For a discussion of the blurred or permeable boundaries between the two, and how the resulting spatial indeterminacy sets the world of monsters even more powerfully apart from the world of humankind, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>388</sup> Morris, *Blickling Homilies* vi-vii. In Morris's numbering system, Homily XVI appears as Homily XVII. Subsequent scholarship has since revised the division of the homilies and their numbering (Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* 117).

Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, & he þær geseah ofer þam wætere sumne harne stan; & wæron norð of ðam stane aweaxene swiðe hrimige bearwas, and ðær wæron þystro-genipo, and under þam stane wæs nicra eardung and wearga. & he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodon on ðam isigean bearwum manige swearte sawla be heora handum gebundne; & þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulf; & þæt wæter wæs sweart under þam clife neoðan, & betuh þæm clife on ðam wætere wæron swylce twelf mila, & ðonne ða twigu forburston þonne gewiton þa sawla niðer þa þe on ðam twigum hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras.

So Saint Paul was looking at the northern part of this Middle Earth, where all the waters go down, and there he saw over the water a certain hoar stone; and there had grown, north of the stone, very frosty woods, and there were dark mists, and under the stone there was the dwelling of water-monsters and wolves. And he saw that on that cliff there hung from the icy woods many dark souls bound by their hands; and the fiends in the likeness of water-monsters were grabbing them, just like a greedy wolf. And that water was dark under the cliff beneath, and between the cliff and the water there were twelve miles. And when the branches broke, then the souls went down, those who were hanging from the branches, and the water-monsters seized them.

Compared to other texts in the tradition of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*—the extant Long Latin versions, and even the more descriptive Redactions—the infernal waters depicted here are startlingly rich in detail. In addition to the dark water full of soul-devouring monsters, there are evocative details of geology (“harne stan,” “grey stone”), wintry vegetation (“hrimige bearwas,” “frosty woods”; “isige bearwas,” “icy woods”), even ominous weather (“þystro-genipo,” “dark mists”). In addition to all this topographical detail, directions create a sense of coherent space: the waters fall “on norðanweardne þisne middangeard” (in the north part of this world); the woods grow north of the stone, while the monsters live under it; the distance between water and cliff measures twelve miles. This sense of space is amplified by the insistent downward movement that pervades the passage: in the world’s north, the waters “niðergewitað” (fall down); the monsters live “under þam stane” (under the stone); the water is dark “under þam clife

neodān” (under the bottom of the cliff); the souls hang, and eventually fall down, prey to the monsters.

With their icy forest, their grey cliff, their dark mists over monster-infested waters, and their vertiginous sense of space, the infernal waters of *Blickling XVI* are rendered with a remarkable quantity of concrete detail--so remarkable, indeed, that Richard Morris, describes it as “out of place in a religious discourse, and ... evidently borrowed from an older source.” (vi).<sup>389</sup> That older source, Morris suggests, is *Beowulf*. The resemblances between the monster mere in *Beowulf* and the hell-mouth in *Blickling* are indeed striking. There are the threatening waters flowing down (*Beowulf* ll. 1359-60); the “harne stan,” the grey stone that in both works overhangs the waters and signals the entrance into a dangerous and uncanny space (*Beowulf* l. 1414); the icy branches (“hrimige bearwas” in *Blickling*, “hrinde bearwas” in *Beowulf* l. 1363); and, most strikingly, the monsters that dwell in the water under the cliff, denominated in *Blickling* as “nicras,” and invoked in *Beowulf* in connection to their habitations, the “nicorhusa fela” (“many dwellings of monsters,” l. 1411) that define the way to the monster-mere.

During the century of scholarship that followed, the literary resemblances between *Beowulf* and *Blickling XVI* have been variously interpreted. Some scholars suggested that the poem drew on the homily;<sup>390</sup> others, that the homily drew on the poem;<sup>391</sup> others, that the parallels are not close enough for influence to be inferred,<sup>392</sup> or that the evidence allows for no clear conclusion;<sup>393</sup> and yet others, that both texts drew on a common source—namely, the highly influential apocryphal *Visio S. Pauli*, whose Latin redactions already contain vivid

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<sup>389</sup> Morris, *The Blickling Homilies* vi.

<sup>390</sup> Morris, *The Blickling Homilies* vi.

<sup>391</sup> Collins, “Blickling Homily XVI and the Dating of *Beowulf*” 61-9.

<sup>392</sup> Brown, “*Beowulf* and *The Blickling Homilies*,” 908.

<sup>393</sup> Healey, *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* 52.

descriptions of the sometimes fiery, sometimes monster-filled waters of hell.<sup>394</sup> In addition to the literary relationship between the two texts, some scholars suggest a relationship between the two manuscripts in which the texts appear. Kevin Kiernan pointed out certain paleographical resemblances between the Blickling and *Beowulf* manuscripts and suggested that the two manuscripts originated from the same scriptorium.<sup>395</sup> Taking into account critiques to Kiernan's argument,<sup>396</sup> and adding a wider range of manuscripts with similar codicological profiles to the comparison, Matthew T. Hussey observes that "[t]he conjunction of late tenth- and early eleventh-century hands, variable numbers of sheets per gathering, mixed arrangement of hair and flesh sides, similar sizes and layouts remains peculiar to *Beowulf* and Blickling." Accordingly, Hussey concludes that the common aspects of these two manuscripts suggest "the possibility that they emerged from the same literarily odd and codicologically unconventional cultural centre."<sup>397</sup>

These literary and codicological links between Blickling XVI and *Beowulf* suggest a strong affinity between *Beowulf*'s portrayal of the monster mere and Blickling's portrayal of hell. Charles D. Wright, who argues that the *Beowulf*-poet as well as the redactor of Blickling XVI draw on an early version of the *Visio S. Pauli*, traces the literary outcome of these borrowings. While the Blickling homilist draws on the *Visio Sancti Pauli* for a portrayal of the religious afterlife, the *Beowulf*-poet does so for the more secular requirements of his narrative:

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<sup>394</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* 116-36. Wright argues that Blickling XVI draws on a version of the *VSP* that circulated in England earlier than the highly influential Redaction IV and that must have contained a description of the "infernal eco-system," the hellish water full of monsters, that Blickling XVI so vividly evokes. For helpful summaries of the debate, see Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 24-36, 155-158, and footnotes 135-41; and Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* 133-5.

<sup>395</sup> Kiernan, "The Legacy of Wiglaf: Saving a Wounded *Beowulf*" 27-44; See also Kiernan, "Re-Visions," in *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* xv-xxviii.

<sup>396</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 21-2.

<sup>397</sup> Hussey, "The Possible Relationship of the *Beowulf* and the Blickling Homilies Manuscripts" 1-4.

While retaining the essential configuration, he divests particular elements of their explicitly eschatological reference by literalising them: his “hell” is still in the north, because that is where the Danes live; his frosty trees, bereft of the souls that once were suspended from their branches, are left to “hang” over the water below; and his water-monsters have been exorcised of their demons.<sup>398</sup>

Wright justly notes that the *Beowulf*-poet has “naturalised [these elements] in their new setting.”<sup>399</sup> But at the same time, though eschatological associations are not explicit, they are nevertheless present through more than topographical similarities, latent within the dreadful landscape of the monster-mere. As Andy Orchard observes, the *Beowulf*-poet repeatedly associates Grendel with the devil, and his home with hell itself.<sup>400</sup> Particularly striking is the description of Grendel’s last descent into the lake:

Deaðfæge deog      siððan dreama leas  
in fenfreoðo      feorh alegde,  
hæþene sawle;      þær him hel onfeng (ll. 850b-852).

Doomed to death he hid when, bereft of joys, he laid down his life, his heathen soul, in the fen refuge; there hell received him.

The compound noun encapsulating the geography of Grendel’s home (“fenfreoðo,” “fen refuge”) cross-alliterates with the verb in the second half-line of the next line (“þær him hel onfeng”), underscoring the connection between the two hostile, threatening spaces. A comparison with other Old English poems also underscores the connection; some of the geographical and verbal motifs present in the description of the monster-mere appear elsewhere in Old English poetry, usually in descriptions of the infernal realm.<sup>401</sup> As a result, the infernal waters described in Blickling XVI and in the redactions of the *Visio S. Pauli* haunt the monster-mere, amplifying its fearful wonder, emphasizing its fundamental difference from the ordinary reality of the text.

<sup>398</sup> Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* 135.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion* 158.

<sup>401</sup> Fry, “The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry,” 213-34.

But the infernal waters of the Christian vision tradition are not the only supernatural scenery haunting the monster-mere. Indeed, beginning with Friedrich Klaeber in 1911, many scholars have traced the influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* on *Beowulf*.<sup>402</sup> Accordingly, they have argued, the monster mere in *Beowulf* owes as much to the classical underworld as Virgil imagines it as it does to Christian eschatology. One strand of scholarship focuses on a similarity of technique: the *Beowulf*-poet's presentation of the mere, these scholars argue, is Virgilian in technique, in its accumulation of scenic detail and its evocation of an ominous atmosphere.<sup>403</sup> Another strand of scholarship focuses on similarities of physical detail, noting that the scenic details in *Beowulf* have analogues in Virgil and in the wider classical tradition that carry into *Beowulf* the emotional charge of their original literary setting. For example, Richard Schrader notes similarities between the monster-mere on one hand and the "sacred groves and marvellous waters" that were pagan sites of worship, on the other. This account traces the numinous nature of the monster-mere to its etymological ancestor, the classical "numen"; the monster-mere is otherworldly because it is like the haunts of the classical gods. Schrader argues that the association with pagan worship and the absence of human cultivation would have filled a medieval monastic reader with horror. More recently, Daniel Anlezark draws on classical tradition for "poisoned places" as analogues of the monster-mere. He notes the similarity between the monster-mere in *Beowulf* and the serpent-field in another Old English poem, the

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<sup>402</sup> See Klaeber, 'Aeneis und Beowulf', ASNSL 126 (1911), 40–8 and 339–59; T. Burns Haber, A Comparative Study of *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid* 161–73; Renoir, "The Terror of the Dark Waters: a Note on Virgilian and Beowulfian Techniques" 147–60; Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery: Homer, Virgil, and the Medieval Legacy* 145–59; Schrader, "Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters, and Grendel's Abode" 76–84; Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* 134–143; Anlezark, "Poisoned Places: the *Avernian* Tradition in Old English Poetry" 103–126. For helpful summaries of this debate, see especially Magennis, *Images of Community* 134–8; Orchard, *A Companion to Beowulf* 132–6; and Anlezark, "Poisoned Places" 103–4.

<sup>403</sup> See Andersson, who dwells on the "scenic fullness" of the scenes around the monster-mere, the *Beowulf*-poet's rare accumulation of sheer physical detail about the scenery. An opposing viewpoint is provided by Renoir, "The Terror of the Dark Waters" 147–160, who contrasts how Virgil and the *Beowulf*-poet create atmospheres of menace in two similar marvellous waterscapes.

enigmatic *Solomon and Saturn II*: both of these locales are poisoned places full of monsters, landscapes inimical to all but monstrous life. Such poisoned places appear in a range of classical Latin texts that were well known in Anglo-Saxon England, such as the poetic works of Virgil, Lucretius, and Lucan, as well as in early medieval texts with wide circulation, such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*. Anlezark notes that in many of the classical Latin texts as well as in the two Old English texts where they occur, these "poisonous places" are not mere curiosities; they are "coupled with the evocation of myths about wars between heaven and the giants, generating a mythic context for heroic action." Anlezark's study identifies two kinds of otherworldliness, two kinds of difference between the monster-mere and the ordinary world of the text. The first is physical difference: the monster-mere's unnatural eco-system, its hostility to human and animal life, set it apart from the ordinary natural world of the text. The second is metaphysical difference: the evocation of mythical narrative lifts the monster mere out of ordinary narrative time and invests it with the *gravitas* of myth.

Though both the classical and the Christian analogues are intriguing, in over a century of scholarship, neither the classical nor the Christian tradition has produced a definitive source for the monster mere. Instead, scholars have uncovered a web of analogues, each strand of which reveals a different perspective on the numinous quality, the fear and wonder of the monster mere. Indeed, the monster mere may be all the more mythically potent because its supernatural quality cannot be explained by any one world view, any one cultural matrix. As in the Faerie kingdom of *Sir Orfeo*, the monster mere's sense of wonder is all the stronger because the monster mere seems a hybrid of mythical paradigms that are disparate except for their otherworldly nature. Irreducible to any one tradition, the monster-mere in *Beowulf* is haunted by a multiplicity of mythical landscapes, and haunted all the more effectively for the shifting faces of the ghost.

But the monster-mere's analogues, the fearful landscapes of classical epic and Christian eschatology, are not the only places that haunt it. Like the hell of Christ and Satan, the fearful otherworldly landscape of the monster-mere is a place of exile, haunted by the true home that its inhabitants have lost. Grendel enters the poem as an exile, a creature excluded from the joys of the human community in Heorot, excluded indeed from goodness and the Divine. Outside the hall, alone in the darkness, the envious monster hears the Creation story being told in Heorot, and decides to open hostilities on the hall:

Ða se ellengæst	earfoðlice	
þrage gepolode,	se þe in þystrum bad,	
þæt he dogora gehwam	dream gehyrde	
hludne in healle;	þær wæs hearpan sweg,	
swutol sang scopes.	Sægde se þe cuþe	90
frumsceaft fira	feorran reccan,	
cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga	eorðan worhte,	
wlitebeorhtne wang,	swa wæter bebugeð,	
gesette sigehrepig	sunnan ond monan	
leoman to leohte	landbuendum	95
ond gefræt Wade	foldan sceatas	
leomum ond leafum,	lif eac gesceop	
cynna gehwylcum	þara ðe cwide hwyrfaþ.	
Swa ða drihtguman	dreamum lifdon	
eadiglice,	oððæt an ongan	100
fyrene fremman	feond on helle.	
Wæs se grimma gæst	Grendel haten.... (ll. 86-102)	

Then the bold spirit painfully endured hardship for a time, he who dwelled in darkness, for every day he heard loud joy in the hall; there was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the poet. He said, who knew how to relate the origin of human beings far back, said that the Almighty made the earth, a plain bright in beauty, as water surrounds it, set up, victorious, the sun and moon, lights to give light to land-dwellers, and adorned the surface of the earth with branches and leaves, also created life for each of the kinds that move about alive. So those men lived in joy blessedly, until one began to do evil deeds, a fiend from hell. The grim spirit was called Grendel....

The *Beowulf*-poet obscures the boundaries between the inset Creation narrative and the main narrative. As C. J. Ball points out, it is not clear where the Creation story leaves off and the

Beowulf story begins; the “feond on helle” who disturbs bliss through evil deeds can belong either to the Creation story (as Satan) or to the Beowulf story (as Grendel).<sup>404</sup> This artful ambiguity aligns Grendel with that other exile, Satan. Subsequent biblical allusions connect Grendel and his family to Cain: God has cast the monster out “in Caines cynne” (as a member of the kin of Cain, l. 106-7), from whom monsters descend; Grendel’s mother has ruled her underwater habitat since Cain became the ancestor of monsters such as Grendel (ll. 1261-8). Another allusion—the description of the magic sword’s hilt—links the end of the Grendel family at Beowulf’s hands with the destruction of the wicked, monstrous ante-diluvians in the Flood (ll. 1687-1693). On the whole, the biblical episodes do not always associate Grendel with the demonic, but they do always associate him with the adversaries of God.<sup>405</sup>

Hrothgar’s haunting description of the two huge monsters “tread[ing] the tracks of exile” (“on weres wæstmum wræclastas træd,” ll. 1352) as they stalk across the moors not only reinforces the idea of Grendel as exile, but equates his wild habitat with the state of exile itself. For Grendel, as for Cain or the devils, to be at home is to be in exile. Indeed, his home is called a home only in circumstances and with epithets that cast it deeper into shadow. When the wounded Grendel flees home to die, his lair is a “winleas wic,” a joyless home. When Beowulf fights Grendel’s mother there, the cave is a “gupsele,” a hall of war. Kathryn Hume, presenting the hall Heorot as a centre and epitome of the human community, views the monster mere as an “anti-hall.” As Magennis notes, the very parallels and juxtapositions between the monsters’ place and Heorot emphasize the gulf between the two places,<sup>406</sup> just as in *Christ and Satan* the

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<sup>404</sup> Ball, “Beowulf 99-101,” cited in Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 138

<sup>405</sup> On Grendel as the enemy of God, see also Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*.

<sup>406</sup> Hume, “Concept of the Hall” 68; Magennis, *Images of Community* 130-2. For a different perspective on the relationship between Heorot and monster-mere, see Michelet, who argues that the monsters’ cave fulfills the functions of a home in ways reminiscent of Heorot: “The monsters’ cave offers protection against hostile natural

parallels between Heaven and Hell only emphasize how far the denizens of Hell have fallen from Heaven. The monsters' home is not only a place of numinous fear and of danger, but a place of bitter exile.

Though Grendel's destination in the afterlife is made quite explicit—his soul is received by hell (*Beowulf* ll. 850b-852)—references to the afterlife in the poem tend to be brief and non-spatial. The most explicit reference to the afterlife indicates hell as the destination of idolaters and God as the destination of those who seek Him after death:

Wa bið þæm ðe sceal  
 þurh sliðne nið      sawle bescufan  
 in fyres fæþm,      frofre ne wenan,  
 wihte gewendan;      wel bið þæm þe mot  
 æfter deaðdæge      drihten secean  
 ond to fæder fæþmum      freoðo wilnian (ll. 183b-8).

Woe is him who, through terrible trouble, must push his soul into the fire's embrace, hope for no comfort, expect nothing to change. Blessed is the one who after his death-day may seek the Lord and find peace in the Father's embrace.

The *Beowulf*-poet does not specify whether passing into the Father's embrace is a possibility for any characters in *Beowulf*.<sup>407</sup> The best form of existence available to Beowulf's characters is not Heaven, but Heorot. In the world of the poem, Heorot, while it endures, is the archetypal home of humankind, and the world of monsters echoes it only to echo with its loss.

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elements; it is a place of security and comfort. It is associated with light, just as Heorot is said to shine over many lands. [...] A close analysis of the Danish kingdom's main places demonstrates that Heorot and Grendel's mere, far from being opposite sites, are in fact mirrors of each other." (86) However, see also Magennis, who notes that "images of the wilderness are often juxtaposed with images of the good life in the hall," and that resemblances between the monster-mere and Heorot emphasize the essential difference between the two sites—one as the home of humankind, the other as the exile-place of monsters. Indeed, Magennis notes that the Beowulf-poet's description of the monster-mere can be considered a grotesque inversion of the conventional *locus amoenus* of classical poetry (138-41); from this point of view, too, the parallels of the monster-mere to a pleasant place function ironically to emphasize the harshness and hostility of the monsters' home.

<sup>407</sup> For an especially pessimistic take, see Stanley's "*Hæthenra hyht*," asserting that the pagan characters of the poem are doomed and without hope. For further discussion of the afterlife in *Beowulf*, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

The world of *Beowulf*, then, is delimited in moral and affective terms on the one side by the places that are home, however precarious, to human community and civilization, and on the other side by the places of loss and exile, the abodes of monsters. While the poem alludes to the divine and the demonic, Heaven and Hell, the spatial manifestations of these spiritual poles, are farther away from the world of the story. Hell gapes open to swallow up Grendel's departing spirit, and the Father's embrace enfolds the souls that seek God after their death-day. But the drama of home and exile plays out on earthly sites, between the halls of humankind and the wildernesses of monsters.

*Christ and Satan* and *Beowulf* present this spatial drama of home and exile from different metaphysical perspectives. In *Beowulf*, the interaction between "home world" and "other world" plays out on earth; the spaces of the Christian afterlife are largely uninvolved in the world of the story. In contrast, *Christ and Satan* unfolds in Heaven and Hell, with the earthly world a brief, unsubstantial presence. Yet both in *Beowulf* and in *Christ and Satan*, the same emotional dynamic is in place: dangerous otherworldly realms are set apart not just by their metaphysical nature, not just by their strange geography and monstrous inhabitants, but by their cultivated status as places of exile. Their distance from the home world of the text is not just about difference; it is the emotionally charged distance of exile from home. This same dynamic unfolds in *Guthlac* and *Andreas*, two Old English poems of heroic sainthood. In these poems, the dynamics that play out between home world and other world, home and exile, are most complex so far. Both narratives take place in the earthly world, which provides its own opposite poles of home world and dangerous, otherworldly place of exile. Yet each narrative also takes place against the setting of the Christian afterlife, with its own opposite poles of Heaven and Hell, eternal home and eternal exile.

In *Beowulf*, the civilized human communities that constitute the Danes' and the Geats' earthly homes are destroyed by violence. But what the warrior communities lose to the vicissitudes of war, the devout or saintly may give up for the love of God, and in search of a more lasting homeland in Heaven. In her influential reading of the *Seafarer* as a meditation on the pilgrim's predicament, Dorothy Whitelock lists numerous Anglo-Saxon references to the *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*, the practice of leaving one's homeland to visit shrines or to settle permanently in a strange country for the sake of faith. Whitelock finds references to most of her voluntary exiles in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*: Ecgberht, Willibrord, Wihtberht, and the two Hewalds, all Englishmen living in Ireland; Fursey, an Irish monk living in England; Hild, leading the life of a pilgrim in the monastery of Chelles; and many English people, "nobiles, ignobiles, laici, clerici, viri ac feminae" (nobles, commoners, lay persons, clerics, men, and women) living in Rome, far from their earthly home, in order to draw nearer to their heavenly home. Often, the Old English version of the *Historia ecclesiastica* refers to this choice as "on elpeodignesse lifian," "to live in the land of strangers."<sup>408</sup>

Like these *peregrini pro amore Dei*, Guthlac of Crowland (c. 674-714) chooses to leave his place as a powerful leader of warriors, his former companions, and eventually all human community behind in order to devote his life more completely to God.<sup>409</sup> The earliest extant narrative of his life, Felix's eighth-century *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, portrays Guthlac as a nobleman, a warrior, and a leader of warbands in his youth. At the apogee of his warrior's life, Guthlac becomes convinced of the futility of military heroism. He joins a monastic community, and eventually leaves even that behind in order to become a hermit in a fearful, demon-infested

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<sup>408</sup> Whitelock, "The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*" 447-8.

<sup>409</sup> For an overview of Guthlac's life, see Roberts, Introduction, in *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* 1-5. All quotations from the Guthlac poems are taken from *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, ed. Jane Roberts.

wilderness in Crowland. In doing so, the saint exchanges the “normal world,” his home within the human community, for a more lasting home in Heaven. His residence in this remote and otherworldly landscape becomes for him, as for other hermits, a transition to the everlasting heavenly home.<sup>410</sup> In the Old English poems especially, the otherworldliness of Guthlac’s hermitage emphasizes its eventual transformation: from a dangerous place of radical exile from humankind, it becomes a beloved home for the saint. The transformation gives visible shape and emotional weight to the spiritual ascension of the saint. In this section of the dissertation, I will explore the literary tropes and techniques through which the otherworldliness of the hermitage is created, both in the Latin and the Old English texts, by means of the landscape and its demonic population. Then I will examine how the affective dynamics that surround the concepts of home and exile in Old English poetry illuminate the spiritual state of Guthlac as he lives out sainthood in the wilderness.<sup>411</sup>

The landscape in which Guthlac establishes his hermitage is isolated, remote from human communities, and haunted by demons. All Anglo-Saxon Guthlac texts emphasize its radical difference from human-inhabited places; compared to the secular warrior community or even the monastic community that the saint left behind, the hermitage is indeed a dangerous “other world.” Yet there are considerable differences in how the Guthlac texts portray this place. The prose lives portray it with a wealth of concrete scenic detail. By contrast, the poems portray it in the most spare and general terms, relying on emotional descriptors instead of concrete details to convey the atmosphere of the place. Yet both approaches, as I shall demonstrate below,

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<sup>410</sup> In the Old English *Guthlac A*, the poet makes this exchange of dwelling places explicit, praising those who seek out “homes in darkness” on earth in exchange for a heavenly dwelling-place (*Guthlac A*, ll. 81-4).

<sup>411</sup> For a lucid illustration of how these traditional affective associations work in Old English poetry, see John Miles Foley, “How Genres Leak,” pp. 97-102. For an overview of the theme of exile and its discussion in scholarship on Old English poetry, see Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic* 331.

emphasize the otherworldly quality of the place: both its metaphysical otherness, as signalled by its demonic inhabitants, and its radical difference from the ordinary human world.

In the Latin *vita*, Felix renders the landscape of Guthlac's hermitage in remarkable geographic detail. First, Felix describes the fenlands themselves, dwelling on their immense size, their darkness, and their waterscapes:

Est in medietullaneis Britanniae partibus immensae 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. Igitur cum supradictus viir beatae memoriae Guthlac illius vastissimi heremi inculta loca conperisset, caelestibus auxiliis adiutus, rectissimo callis tramite tenus usque perrexit.<sup>412</sup>

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 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. So when this same man of blessed memory, Guthlac, had learned about the wild places of this vast desert, he made his way thither with divine assistance by the most direct route.

Felix loads the description with the language of wonder, from the collection of superlatives that render the fen's dimensions ("immensae magnitudinis," immense magnitude; "longissimo tracto," a very long tract; "vastissimi heremi," a very vast desert) to the constant insistence on the fen's secrecy. This language of wonder sets Crowland apart from the ordinary human community and marks it out as an otherworldly space, a place of supernatural fearfulness, a fit habitat only for demons or saints.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Colgrave, ed. and transl., *The Life of Saint Guthlac by Felix*, 86-7.

<sup>413</sup> For more detail on the rhetoric of spatial indeterminacy in Felix's *Life of Saint Guthlac*, see Chapter 2, pp. 1-2.

The numinous quality evoked by the immensity and secrecy of the region persists in the description of the waters themselves. Felix dwells on the waters of the fens through imagery both visual and kinaesthetic. He renders their various forms of stagnation (“nunc stagnis, nunc flactris,” now consisting of marshes, now of bogs). He renders their mist and darkness, the tortuous shape of their waters, the wooded islands that obscure and occlude the waters’ course. The geographical imagery is reminiscent of the classical underworld, the nebulous darkness of Avernus: “a scenery dominated by murkiness and silence [...]; a formless and unpleasing reality [...]; a chaotic and unorganized space [...] whose distinguishing features are inactivity and stillness.”<sup>414</sup> Indeed, as Colgrave observes, Felix’s phraseology at one point echoes Virgil’s. Felix refers to Guthlac’s course across the fens as a journey “per invia lustra inter atrae paludis margines” (through trackless bogs within the confines of the dismal marsh), paralleling the *Aeneid*’s description of Dido and Aeneas’ journey through the wilderness.<sup>415</sup> This specific echo recalls not the underworld, as the waters do, but the forest where Aeneas and Dido first become lovers—an earthly space, but a god-haunted one. Both the phraseology and the geography of the place are invested with numinous classical echoes. As a result of these echoes, Felix’s portrayal of Guthlac’s fen becomes even more of a space set apart, a place whose geography is not just distinct from the “normal world,” but distanced from it by echoes of pagan culture and the pagan afterlife.

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<sup>414</sup> Borca, “Per loca senta situ ire: An exploration of the chthonian landscape” 51. On the classical underworld and its analogues, see Schrader, “Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters, and Grendel’s Abode” 76–84; and Anlezark, “Poisoned Places: the *Avernian* Tradition in Old English Poetry” 103–126. Schrader and Anlezark describe “Avernian” landscapes as analogues for Beowulf; however, the similarities between these hostile watery landscapes are sufficient that the classical analogues are relevant to Felix’s portrayal of the Fenlands as well.

<sup>415</sup> For a discussion of this allusion and its effect of “invest[ing] Guthlac with the stature of an epic hero,” see Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England* 32.

In addition to the landscape of the fen, the saint's actual dwelling place may evoke its own numinous associations. The exact nature of Guthlac's abode, especially in the poems, has been a source of considerable debate. Felix describes the saint's dwelling place as a *tumulus*; the Old English prose *vita* translates this as a *hlæw mycel*; the Old English poems refer to the saint's habitat chiefly as a *beorg*. Lawrence K. Shook argues that both Felix's *tumulus* and the poems' *beorg* should be translated as "barrow" or "burial mound." Karl Wentersdorf supports this reading.<sup>416</sup> He argues that burial mounds that contain grave goods are pagan monuments, and he notes that Felix refers to grave robbers who had disturbed the mound in search for riches, while the Guthlac A-poet alludes to the mound treasure indirectly by noting that Guthlac's journey to the *beorg* was not driven by the desire for riches (ll. 150a-151a).<sup>417</sup> Wentersdorf extrapolates from this that the barrow, since it contains riches, must be a pagan monument, and as a result retains lingering associations with local pagan practices. He argues for its wider symbolic significance:

The battle for the tumulus represents not merely the faithful Christian's spiritual war against his personal demons but also the unrelenting campaign by the Church to suppress the lingering remnants of heathendom in England. Thus the barrow, originally heathen but now converted to Christian uses, becomes an image for the foundation on which the missionaries to the Anglo-Saxons set up and consolidated their church.<sup>418</sup>

In addition to these potential symbolic associations, however, there are also affective resonances that such associations with ancient paganism evoke. Like Felix's earlier allusive invocation of

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<sup>416</sup> See, however, Reichardt, "Guthlac A and the Landscape of Spiritual Perfection" 331-8; and Jane Roberts, ed., *The Guthlac Poems*, 21, 132. Reichardt argues that symbolically, the *beorg* ought to be a mountain; Roberts more convincingly argues that there is not enough evidence to support the highly specific reading of "barrow" or "grave mound" for *beorg*.

<sup>417</sup> Wentersdorf, "The Battle for the *beorg*" 136.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*

the classical pagan underworld, this connection to British paganism, if present, increases the site's numinous and threatening aura.

This deliberate, rhetorically cultivated distance between the hermitage and the human world persists throughout the Guthlac texts, prose and poems alike. If the Old English texts are less lavish in their description of the landscape than Felix, yet they maintain the rhetoric of wonder around the secret, demon-ridden swamp.<sup>419</sup> The mystery and horror of the hermitage set it apart as an otherworldly place that only a heroic saint would seek out. Indeed, in the Old English Guthlac poems, and especially in *Guthlac A*, on which this examination will concentrate, the otherworldly resonances of the place grow more intense, even though the landscape itself is less vividly particularized; the radical divide between the world of the hermitage and the world of humankind is emphasized by the complicated dynamics of exile, from the demonic and the human points of view, that run through both poems.

In *Guthlac A*, the landscape is as daunting, but not as specifically delineated as in Felix's account: the saint settles among green hills (l. 232), in a mound within a wood ("beorg on bearwe," ll. 148, 428). The *Guthlac*-poet eschews the detailed topography of the prose lives, opting instead for a more impressionistically depicted landscape, whose physical traits are fairly general ("mearc-lond," "beorg," "grene beorgas"), but whose standing with regard to human culture is emphasized instead: it is a secret place ("dygle stow," l. 214), a liminal place ("mearc-lond," l. 174), a place devoid of human habitation ("idel and æmen eþelrichte feor," "empty and desolate, far from all rights of inheritance," ll. 214-5).<sup>420</sup> The landscape terms in the two poems are common words, general in meaning; the poems do not offer a sustained description of the

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<sup>419</sup> For further detail on the rhetoric of spatial indeterminacy in the Guthlac texts, see Chapter 2, pp. 1-2.

<sup>420</sup> See above for a summary of the scholarly controversy surrounding Guthlac's *beorg*.

physical landscape, or a collection of striking physical features (in fact, the most concrete landscape term in *Guthlac B* is “westenne,” wilderness, l. 899a). Indeed, as Hugh Magennis observes, the landscape has none of the concrete ominous details of the *Beowulf* monster mere or even of Felix’s *vita*:

Neither part of the Old English *Guthlac* follows Felix in mentioning that Guthlac’s abode is in the fens. In secular Old English poetry, fens are associated with monsters and with murky impenetrability. In *Guthlac A*, despite the contrary picture in Felix, Guthlac’s retreat is presented as a pleasant place where the saint lives happily.<sup>421</sup>

Magennis justly observes that the topography of the hermitage does not mark it out as otherworldly; however, the hermitage is not actually presented as a pleasant place right from the beginning—quite to the contrary. The insistence on its isolation and secrecy is a menace in itself. Isolation and secrecy are traditionally associated with the numinous and fearful in Old English poetry.<sup>422</sup> Moreover, in the lives of hermits, the lonely, hidden place of the hermitage is an archetypal landscape: the *locus horribilis*, the place of “horror, vast solitude, and impassability, abounding in savage beasts and demons.”<sup>423</sup> In addition to these traditional resonances, the hermitage is also explicitly positioned as otherworldly, not through topographical features but through its relationship to other spaces, the human world and the afterlife. This is especially evident in *Guthlac A*, where the demons deliberately situate the hermitage between two worlds, that of humankind and that of hell, in order to drive the saint away from what they see as their territory.

First, the demons try to tempt the saint into returning to the “normal world” of human fellowship and human obligations (“sibbe ryht mid mon-cynne,” “the claims of kinship among

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<sup>421</sup> Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* 181.

<sup>422</sup> See Chapter ? of this dissertation for a discussion of this traditional connection between secrecy and fearful wonder in Old English.

<sup>423</sup> Howe, J., “Medieval Development of Sacred Space” 212.

humankind,” ll. 197-8). The demons maintain that, as a human being, Guthlac is dependent on other human beings for sustenance and for a true home:

“bi hwon scealt þu lifgan,      þeah þu lond age  
ne þec mon hider      mose fedeð  
beoð þe hungor ond þurst      hearde gewinnan,  
gif þu gewitest      swa wilde deor  
ana from eþele” (ll. 273-276)

By what will you live, although you possess the land? No man will bring you food here; hunger and thirst will be harsh enemies to you, if you retreat like wild beasts, alone, away from [your] homeland.

What is especially interesting is that the human community, the place of light and joy in Old English poetry, is here a temptation, a demonic construct to be rejected, not a home to be desired by the saint. As J. J. Cohen notes, “[f]iliation, kinship, and inheritance, the network of familial and social relations [...], are rejected for the isolating ascesis of [eremitism].”<sup>424</sup> The demons place the hermitage in opposition to the mundane human community, in order to demonstrate how far the saint’s hermitage is outside the ordinary course of human life; yet in setting up this contrast, all they accomplish is to demonstrate that the poem’s “home world” is not the true home, the heavenly home to which the saint aspires.

Having failed to tempt Guthlac with a desirable human home, the demons try to terrorize him with its opposite—the ultimate place of torment and exile, namely hell. Snatching up the saint, the demons fly him to hell’s door, “þæt atule hus/niþer under næssas neole grundas” (“the terrible house,/the deep abysses down under the cliffs,” ll. 562-3), and threaten to throw him in for his sins. The description of hell’s mouth is more vividly concrete and topographical than the hermitage; the phraseology recalls descriptions of dangerous and otherworldly places throughout

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<sup>424</sup> Cohen, “The Solitude of Guthlac” 122-3.

Old English poetry.<sup>425</sup> The demonic threat fails as before. Guthlac defies the demons and denies their authority over his soul; he refuses, as before, to move from his present position in the hermitage into the space they assign to him (*Guthlac A* ll. 590-620). Yet their offers, though they have no effect on the saint, do have a rhetorical effect on the space that the saint inhabits. The demons' offers of alternate worlds position the hermitage as a liminal space between two worlds, that of hell and that of human society. The demons come there to escape the torment of their spiritual condition; Guthlac comes there to live out his allegiance to God. The space of the hermitage is not "the other world," but it is near to the other world and far from the mundane world, both spatial relationships that the demons emphasize. This gives the hermitage the status of a liminal space, radically and profoundly different from the human world.

Of course, what gives the hermitage its clearest marker of supernatural danger is the crowd of demons that inhabit the land and seek to force Guthlac away from the barrow. All the Guthlac texts depict the saint's asceticism in the wilderness as a spiritual and physical battle against hordes of hostile, monstrous demons. The Latin and Old English prose *vitas* complement the demons' physical and metaphysical alterity with linguistic alterity. At one time, the demons that attack Guthlac approach his hermitage speaking the language of the "infesti hostis Saxonici generis" ("implacable enemies of the Saxon race), namely Welsh, a language that Guthlac is familiar with from his captivity days among these same enemies.<sup>426</sup>

The episode of the Welsh-speaking demons, though absent from the Guthlac poems, has led, in recent years, to readings of the narrative as an affirmation of the Anglo-Saxons' ethnic identity and colonial aspirations in the face of indigenous British populations. For instance,

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<sup>425</sup> Fry, "The Cliff of Death in Old English Poetry," 213-34.

<sup>426</sup> Colgrave, ed., *The Life of Saint Guthlac by Felix* XXXIV 108-111.

Alfred K. Siewers argues that Guthlac's battle against the demons mirrors the cultural conflict between Anglo-Saxons and Britons:

[...] Augustinian theological emphases on the corruption of nature, extended to natural landscape and its ancestral associations with indigenous culture, empowered the Anglo-Saxon ideological project of superimposing a new cultural landscape on Britain's most fertile areas, in narrative landscapes based on a sense of Anglo-Saxon culture as God-chosen and hegemonic that erased textually the presence of earlier inhabitants as thoroughly as Old English linguistically replaced Romano-Celtic languages in those areas. [...] The central historical conflict that can be seen as roiling the landscape of the different Guthlacian narratives relates to the tension between that new ecclesiastical-political order of the Anglo-Saxons and oppositionally framed indigenous ancestral connotations of the land.<sup>427</sup>

In other words, Siewers sees the conflict between Guthlac and the demons as a reflection of the conflict between Romano-Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Christianity in the kingdom of Mercia. The Guthlac narratives, according to Siewers, literally demonize the indigenous population, acting as propaganda for the Mercian side in the conflict between two ecclesiastical-political orders, that of the indigenous Celtic Christianity and that of the emerging Mercian kingdom and church.

Along similar lines of reasoning, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen aligns the Guthlac narratives with "the colonialist ambitions of the eighth century as the kingdom of Mercia strove to overcome its inner fragmentation to become a larger collective entity within which other peoples, territories, kingdoms could find their place."<sup>428</sup> Cohen's approach is considerably more nuanced. He recognizes that, while Felix's narrative dates back to eighth-century Mercia and can therefore be read in the light of Mercian political concerns, the date of the Guthlac poems is controversial, oscillating between the eighth and the tenth centuries.<sup>429</sup> As Cohen notes, the poems cannot be as easily aligned with Mercian politics, nor—given the primarily hagiographic focus of the

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<sup>427</sup> Siewers, "Landscapes of Conversion" 3, 14.

<sup>428</sup> Cohen, "The Solitude of Guthlac" 121.

<sup>429</sup> For a summary of the dating debate, see Cohen, "The Solitude of Guthlac" 121. Jane Roberts, the editor of the poems, dates them to the eighth century, whereas Patrick Conner, in an argument that remains controversial, dates them to the tenth century (Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems*; Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* 163).

texts—can they be read as “simply or even straightforwardly committed to Mercian greatness.”<sup>430</sup> Within these caveats, Cohen sees the demons as an embodiment, in monstrous form, of the native British population that the Mercians wished to assimilate into a unified national identity. From such a postcolonialist perspective, the “otherworldliness” of the landscape and its fiendish population is read—given the demons’ Welsh speech—as a reflection of ethnic difference. The metaphysical other is actually the ethnic other, in the service of an emerging myth of national or ethnic identity.<sup>431</sup>

Cohen’s reading in particular uncovers and brings into the foreground such details of Felix’s narrative that reflect the political circumstances of eighth-century Mercia rather than the conventions of hagiographic narrative. Yet, from another point of view, the argument can be turned inside out, and the ethnic alterity of the demons could also be read in the service of their metaphysical alterity. In other words, the fiends of the barrow can be read as disguises imposed by the cultural pressures of a colonialist power on the Britons, disguises that literally demonize the indigenous population in the service of a colonial agenda. But alternatively, the fiends’ British language is a trope—rooted in Guthlac’s personal past as well as the political realities of his day—that marks out the fiends even more emphatically as his own personal enemies. Given how the demons customize their temptations to Guthlac, referring to his past in their threats to haul him to hell, it is appropriate that they should seek out enemy shapes from his own past in order to terrorize him more effectively.

This reading of the demons’ ethnicity is also consistent with hagiographic models for the text. The *vita* of St. Anthony, who renounced the world and endured privations and demonic

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<sup>430</sup> Cohen, “The Solitude of Guthlac” 122.

<sup>431</sup> See also Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 163-97 for a similar perspective on the Guthlac and Andreas poems (see especially 163-6 for a summary of her argument).

assaults in his desert hermitage, is a recognized model for Felix's Life of Guthlac.<sup>432</sup> The relationship of the saints with their demonic tormentors can be profitably compared. As Cohen observes,

[St.] Anthony's demons also could condense in fleshly form the past that he had rejected. [...] The demons represent everything Guthlac once was in order to affirm the sanctity of what he has become as well as the impossibility of return.<sup>433</sup>

The Welsh speech of the demons is thus connected to Guthlac's turbulent warrior past, to the old enmities and conflicts that he has left behind. The linguistic otherness of the demons, while reflective of the historical circumstances of eighth-century Mercia, is also reflective of their deep, personal enmity for the saint himself.

Unlike Felix's *vita*, the Old English Guthlac poems do not give any linguistic details about the demons. Instead, *Guthlac A* in particular focuses on the demons' connection with the landscape; indeed, in this poem, the demons' otherness is far more rooted in their relationship with the place than in physical or linguistic alterity. Throughout both poems, Guthlac and the demons define spiritual extremes, with the land of the hermitage as a battleground. The land's trajectory between the opposite poles of demonic habitat and paradise on earth, dangerous place of exile and beloved home, gives the saint's spiritual progress a physical manifestation and weights it with the profound affective resonances of exile and home in Old English poetry.

In *Guthlac A*, the place where the saint settles is at first explicitly the territory of demons. To them, the place is a rare earthly home, a refuge from the torments inherent in their condition:

[...] þær hy bidinge,

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<sup>432</sup> See Woolf, "Saints' Lives" 53-55, for a comparison between the Life of St. Anthony and the Guthlac narratives. See also Clayton, "Hermits and the Contemplative Life in Anglo-Saxon England" 147-75 for an in-depth discussion of heremitic monasticism and its influence on monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England. For the gist of Clayton's analysis, see Sharma, "A Reconsideration of the Structure of Guthlac A," 195-6.

<sup>433</sup> Cohen, "The Solitude of Guthlac" 133.

earme andsacan,      æror mostun  
 æfter tintergum      tidum brucan,  
 ðonne hy of wapum      werge cwoman  
 restan ryneþragum,      rowe gefegon;  
 wæs him seo gelyfed      þurh lytel fæc. (ll. 209-214)

[...] There they [the devils] could formerly rest, the miserable enemies, could enjoy a resting-place after their torments, when they came, weary from their journeys, to rest for a time; they rejoiced in the rest that was allowed them for a little while.

The demons' response to Guthlac's presence emphasizes their claim to the land. They use the language of military conquest to describe the saint: Guthlac has stormed the mountains in their wasteland out of pride ("he for wlence on westenne/beorgas bræce," "he stormed the hills in the wasteland out of pride," ll. 211-12). Guthlac himself, even as he stakes his counterclaim to the land, describes it as the demons' habitat:

"Wid is þes westen,      wræcsetla fela,  
 eardas onhæle      earmra gæsta.  
 Sindon wærlogan      þe þa wic bugað." (ll. 296-8).

Wide is this wasteland, many are the exile-seats, the unhappy homes of wretched spirits. They are oath-breakers (or devils) who inhabit this home!

In *Guthlac B*, the demons appear not as the original inhabitants of the land but as an invading force, thronging to attack Guthlac's hermitage:

Oft to þam wicum      weorude cwomun  
 deofla deaðmægen      duguþa byscyrede  
 hloþum þringan,      þær se halga þeow  
 elnes anhydig      eard weardade.

Often a host came to that place, the death-might of devils thronged in a troop, bereft of nobility, where the holy servant, steadfast in courage, held his home. (ll. 894-915)

In this situation, the saint is a defender rather than a conqueror. Unlike the demons of *Guthlac A*, these demons do not claim the wasteland as their home. Nevertheless, their hostile presence is still a feature of Guthlac's hermitage.

The conflict dramatizes the hermitage's otherworldliness, its desolation and remoteness from human community, its hostile population of demons. Especially in *Guthlac A*, which focuses on the saint's conflict with the demons, their presence near his hermitage is emphatic: whenever they threaten the saint with violence, they invoke their great numbers (ll. 185-191, 232-38, 281-87), while he stands against them emphatically alone (ll. 244-251), one solitary human figure in the wilderness. But with divine support, he transforms his wilderness, after many struggles with its original inhabitants. Especially in *Guthlac A*, these struggles are all about territory, about the otherworldly space itself. As Jennifer Neville observes, "what they [the demons] want is not [Guthlac's] soul but his land. Their initial objection to Guthlac is not his goodness, but his squatting on the site of their homes."<sup>434</sup>

Not only the demons' hostility, but also Guthlac's own approach to the land is framed as territorial conquest. Initially, Guthlac's hermitage is the territory of devils. As soon as he arrives, Guthlac blesses the land and marks it with a cross. The poet describes the saint's heremitical enterprise in military terms:

Gyrede hine georne      mid gæstlicum wæpnum  
wong bletsade,  
him to ætstælle      ærest arærde  
Cristes rode,      þær se cempa oferwon  
frecnessa fela (ll. 174-81).

[Guthlac] prepared himself eagerly with spiritual weapons, blessed the place; as an aid to himself, he first raised the cross of Christ. There the champion overcame many dangers.

The devils, as I observed before, see Guthlac's renunciation of the world and settlement in the wilderness as an act of territorial aggression against them. The saint himself claims the place as his own, formally dispossessing the previous inhabitants:

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<sup>434</sup>Neville, *The Natural World in Old English Poetry* 127.

her sceal min wesan  
eorðlic eþel nales eower leng (ll. 260-2).

Here will be my earthly homeland. It is yours no longer.

The devils threaten him with literally military dangers, superior numbers and physical violence:

We þe beoð holde      gif ðu us hyran wilt,  
opþe þec ungearo      eft gesecað  
maran mægne,      þæt þe mon ne þearf  
hondum hrinan,      ne þin hra feallan  
wæpna wundum.      We þas wic magun  
fotum afyllan;      folc in ðriceð  
meara þreatum      ond monfarum.  
Beoð þa gebolgne,      þa þec breodwiað,  
tredað þec ond tergað,      ond hyra torn wrecað,  
toberað þec blodgum lastum ... (ll. 281-291).

We will be kind to you, if you will obey us; otherwise, we will seek you again, with a greater force, so that one will not need to touch you with hands, nor will your body need to fall by the wounds of weapons; we can demolish this dwelling with feet; people will press in, troops of horses and moving troops of people. Then they will be angry, then they will trample you, tread on and tear you and wreak their anger, carry you away with bloody tracks.

The threat that they will kill him not with weapons but with their feet underscores their monstrous savagery; like Grendel, they reject means of combat that belong to human civilization, because their fury and brute strength are virulent enough to kill.<sup>435</sup> The meter and the sound play emphasize their ferocity. As they describe the grisly potential effects of their violence on the saint, the verses overflow their metrical boundaries; the last and angriest part of the devils' speech consists of four hypermetric lines. Also, as Robert Bjork observes, the demons rhyme the

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<sup>435</sup> For the motif of the tracks and their significance in the negotiation of Old English imaginary spaces, see Michelet, *Creation, Migration, and Conquest* 109-113.

verbs that describe potential hostile actions against Guthlac (ll. 287-90), heightening the cumulative effect of these verbs.<sup>436</sup>

Guthlac's riposte to this speech deflates the military discourse. First, he reminds the demons that they are exiles. This casts doubt not just on their claim to the land, but on their status as warriors. Then, he informs them in measured tones that he will not participate in the violent and physical warfare for territory that they propose:

No ic eow sweord ongean  
mid gebolgne hond      oðberan þence,  
worulde wæpen,      ne sceal þes wong gode  
þurh blodgyte      gebuen weorðan,  
ac ic minum Criste      cweman þence  
leofran lace ( ll. 302b-307).

I do not intend to carry a sword against you with angry hand, a weapon of the world; nor will this place be inhabited for God through bloodshed, but I intend to please my Christ through a dearer gift.

This gift is his obedience to and reliance on God. As a result, he informs the demons, they are powerless against him. After Guthlac's speech ends, the narrator resumes the language of warfare: he praises Guthlac as a champion of glory ("wuldres cempa," l. 324), holding his ground against a multitude of enemies. Guthlac emerges victorious in this exchange, having taken over the language of his enemies and turned it to his own purposes: he maintains his presence in the land by spiritual virtues. Though the devils keep hoping that his attachment to the place might wane, he continues to love his hermitage (ll. 329, 352).

The initial transformation of the hermitage is subjective in nature: through his piety, the hostile otherworld becomes his home, and the *locus horribilis* becomes pleasant to him, the dearest home on earth ("to þam leofestan/ earde on eorðan," ll. 427-8), a phrase that later is also

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<sup>436</sup> Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives* 43.

applied to heaven (ll. 655-56).<sup>437</sup> But by and by he transforms its physical nature. When Guthlac returns to his home, victorious over the devils after his forced trip to the mouth of hell, the once desolate hermitage teems with life. Living things bless him; birds he had nurtured rejoice in his presence. After the defeat of the demons, the erstwhile *locus horribilis* is transformed into a *locus amœnus*, an ideal, paradisaal environment:

Swa þæt milde mod      wið moncynnes  
dreamum gedælde,      dryhtne þeowde,  
genom him to wildeorum wynne,      siþþan he þas woruld forhogde.  
Smolt wæs se sigewong      ond sele niwe,  
fæger fugla reord,      folde geblowen;  
geacas gear budon.      Guþlac moste  
eadig ond onmod      eardes brucan.  
Stod se grena wong      in godes wære (ll. 739-46).

So that gentle mind, separated from the joys of humankind, served God; he took delight in wild beasts after he had renounced this world. Bright was the plain of victory and new home, beautiful the birdsong, the land in blossom; cuckoos called in the year. Blessed and steadfast, Guthlac could enjoy his home. The green plain stood under God's protection.

The secret, menacing landscape had been imbued with the menace of its demonic inhabitants; after Guthlac sanctifies it through his presence, it becomes a reflection of the heavenly life that the saint is already living in an earthly place. Rosemary Woolf observes that "[g]entleness and holiness of disposition are most commonly indicated in the eastern saints' lives by this return to a paradisaal relationship between man and the animals."<sup>438</sup> However, Woolf dismisses the description's power and significance in the poem, arguing that it is "too short and too abruptly introduced for it to carry full weight."<sup>439</sup> But Woolf's dismissal does not take into account the poem's preoccupation with place, the poem's use of the hermitage space as the "stake" in the

<sup>437</sup> Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives* 143-4, n. 14.

<sup>438</sup> Woolf, "Saints' Lives" 37-66, 57.

<sup>439</sup> Woolf, "Saints' Lives" 57.

battle between good and evil. Indeed, as Robert Bjork observes, Guthlac's transformation of nature into a paradisaical place is a sign of his having achieved holiness.<sup>440</sup> The hermitage, initially "bimipen fore monnum" ("hidden before men," 147a) and "dygle stowe" ("secret place," 159a, 215a), becomes a "sigewong" (victory plain, 742a) after the demons' defeat. In the words of Sarah Downey, Guthlac "has died to the world and is already carrying out a heavenly life on earth."<sup>441</sup> Guthlac's renewal of the hermitage evokes an almost prelapsarian life, a recovery of lost Eden on earth.

The newly paradisaical nature of the hermitage is emphasized by echoes of Old English as well as classical tradition. Ananya Jahanahara Kabir observes that the now idyllic hermitage appears as a "vernacular equivalent of the *locus amoenus*," characterized by greenness, flat open space, and brightness—features associated in the vernacular tradition with representations of Paradise.<sup>442</sup> By contrast, Catherine Clarke examines the passage in the light of its Latin rather than vernacular sources. She notes that the idyllic description of Guthlac's hermitage "selects key pastoral features which call up a range of conventional hagiographic, monastic and panegyric associations," associations from classical pastoral poetry as well as Carolingian and Anglo-Latin representations of the *locus amoenus*.<sup>443</sup> The description of Guthlac's transformed hermitage is therefore powerful and significant, not only because it is the culmination of the poem's spatial dynamics, but because it is enriched by traditional resonances from vernacular and Latin poetry.

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<sup>440</sup> Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives* 34, 144 n. 15.

<sup>441</sup> Downey, *Guthlac* 16.

<sup>442</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, 144-5.

<sup>443</sup> Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England* 50. Clarke discusses the Carolingian and Anglo-Latin use of idyllic landscapes in general, and of Guthlac's landscape in particular, in the poetic praise of patronage and political authority.

The transformation of the hermitage into a paradisaal place marks the culmination of a spiritual progress that is throughout bound to the dangerous and numinous landscape of the hermitage. That landscape—initially remote, hidden, demon-haunted—at first seems radically and fearfully separate from the “normal world,” the ordinary life of human-kind, which is self-servingly suggested by the demons as Guthlac’s rightful home: the place of worldly pleasures (ll. 164-7), of human community (ll. 353-354), of familial obligations (ll. 197-99), of lax monks (ll. 412-20), and of the sins of youth (ll. 108-10, 495-500). This is what Guthlac gives up when he establishes his hermitage, seeking out a stricter way of life, a greater distance from earthly pleasures.

But although the “normal world” stands in antithesis to the otherworldly landscape that the saint inhabits, the “normal world” is not a true home for the saint, and the otherworldly place is no true exile. As Manish Sharma observes, the vocabulary of movement and spatiality in the poem “emphasizes the soul’s state outside of the heavenly ‘home’ as both needy and peripatetic.”<sup>444</sup> Accordingly, in *Guthlac A*, the denizens of hell, who are as much at home in the wilderness as they are anywhere on earth, are still in exile there, because they are damned; while the saint, who is as far away there from anything that constitutes a normal human homeland, is close to home, because he lives there to serve God. The demons’ homeland in the waste is precarious, a mere rest stop on their eternal wanderings, a temporary alleviation of their torments (204-214). Once Guthlac dispossesses them, they have no earthly resting place left (220-224). Throughout the poem they are called exiles (229-232, 262-3, 296-8, 508-9), which seems to refer most immediately to their expulsion from the wasteland. But during their final confrontation with the

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<sup>444</sup>Sharma, “A Reconsideration of the Structure of *Guthlac A*” 129.

saint at hell's door, Guthlac makes it clear that their exile consists in damnation, eternal separation from God and the joys of heaven:

Sindon ge wærlogan,        swa ge in wræcsiðe  
longe lifdon,        lege bisencte,  
swearte beswicene,        swegle benumene,  
dreame bidrorene,        deaðe bifolene,  
firenum bifongne,        feores orwenan,  
þæt ge blindnesse        bote fundon.  
Ge þa fægran gesceaft        in fyrndagum,  
gæstlicne goddream,        gearo forsegon,  
þa ge wiðhogdun        halgum dryhtne.  
Ne mostun ge a wunian        in wyndagum,  
ac mid scome scyldum        scofene wurdon  
fore oferhygdum        in ece fyr,  
ðær ge sceolon dreogan        deað ond þystro,  
wop to widan ealdre;        næfre ge þæs wyrpe gebidað (ll. 623-36).

You are troth-breakers, so you have lived in journeys of exile for a long time, sunk in fire, darkly deceived, deprived of joy, consigned to death, surrounded by sins, despairing of life, that you might find a remedy for your blindness. In days of old you readily despised the fairer creation, the spiritual heavenly joy, when you set yourselves against the holy Lord. You could not always live in joyful days, but you were pushed for your pride into eternal fire, with shame and guilt, where you must suffer death and darkness, weeping for a long time; never will you get relief from that.

They are exiles because their eternal home is hell's house, where a home is made for them ("helle hus þær eow is ham scapen," ll. 677-8). Guthlac, on the contrary, fights for God and relies on God. As an explicit consequence of this, the wasteland becomes his earthly home (ll. 260-1), while he is impelled towards a better home: "to þam bettran ham... to þam leofestan/ ecan earde þær is eþel-lond/fæger and gefealic in fæder wuldre" ("to that better home...to that dearest eternal home, where there is the homeland, beautiful and joyful in the Father's glory," 654-657). His sanctity transforms the harsh wilderness into a corner of Paradise, and he breaks the devils' power over the land. The dangerous otherworldly landscape of the hermitage, presented as a place of

exile, is the way to the true home. In Sharma's words, "it is by moving to the extremes demanded of him by his faith that he [Guthlac] separates himself from the rest of humankind and is assured of movement across the final threshold of existence separating him from God."<sup>445</sup>

Just as Guthlac lives out holiness in the demon-ridden wastes of Crowland, so St. Andrew, in the Old English *Andreas*, must travel to a dangerous and otherworldly place for the love of God. Unlike Guthlac, he does not pursue a vocation as a hermit in the wilderness; instead, he travels by divine command to the distant land of Mermedonia, to rescue his brother apostle, Matthew, from the clutches of the local population.<sup>446</sup> Mermedonia is not a pleasant place: its inhabitants, being fond of strangers only in a culinary sense, habitually capture, blind, poison, bewitch, and eventually devour any visitors to Mermedonian shores. Of the several Old English texts that narrate the life of St. Andrew, only three tell of his sojourn in the land or city of Mermedonia. One is the poem *Andreas*, which appears in the Vercelli Book.<sup>447</sup> The other two are versions of a homily; a complete version appears in Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS. 198<sup>448</sup> and a fragmentary version appears in the Blickling codex (*Blickling Homily XIX*).<sup>449</sup> All three Old English texts are descendants of the very popular apocryphal narrative of St. Andrew's sojourn among the Mermedonians, which appears in both Greek and Latin prose recensions. Though we do not have one incontrovertible source for the Old English texts, their

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<sup>445</sup> Sharma, "A Reconsideration of the Structure of *Guthlac A*" 200.

<sup>446</sup> The section of the chapter that follows was originally published as "The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*," *Neophilologus* 93.1 (2009), 149-164. The original publication is available at [www.springerlink.com](http://www.springerlink.com).

<sup>447</sup> Brooks, ed., *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*. Henceforth this will be cited as *And*, followed by line numbers of the Brooks edition.

<sup>448</sup> Cassidy and Ringler, eds., "The Acts of Matthew and Andrew in the City of the Cannibals." Henceforth this will be cited as LS 1.1, followed by line numbers of the Cassidy and Ringler edition.

<sup>449</sup> Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies* 228-249 (Blickling XIX).

closest analogues are the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Matheian eis ten polin ton anthropophagon* and the Latin Codex Casanatensis *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*.<sup>450</sup>

Although the Greek, Latin, and Old English prose analogues describe and decry the wicked customs of the Mermedonians, *Andreas* does this at much greater length and with much greater intensity. From the very beginning it emphasizes the Mermedonians' hostility to strangers, their monstrous eating habits, their alliance with the devil, even their geographical remoteness and isolation from the rest of the world. *Andreas* intensely and systematically represents the land of Mermedonia as a monstrous, otherworldly place, separated by custom and geography from the rest of the world. This carefully developed otherworldliness, this emphatic distance between Mermedonia and the rest of humankind, emerges through the *Andreas*-poet's use of repetition and of episodic parallelism. Not only does the otherworldliness of Mermedonia heighten the impact of the country's eventual conversion to Christianity; paradoxically, it also turns Mermedonia into a theological 'type' of the whole world, undergoing its own abbreviated history of salvation.

The most obvious monstrous characteristic of the Mermedonians is their cannibalism; both *Andreas* and its analogues introduce Mermedonia with reference to this cannibalism, but there are significant differences between its treatment. In *Casanatensis*, the Mermedonians are

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<sup>450</sup> Of the Greek and Latin recensions of the St. Andrew apocrypha, the closest in content to *Andreas* and to the Old English homily are the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Matheian eis ten Polin ton Anthropophagon* (henceforth abbreviated as *Praxeis*) and the Latin *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos* in the Codex Casanatensis (henceforth abbreviated as *Casanatensis*). As Alison Powell notes, scholars agree that neither of these two versions is the direct source of *Andreas*, but disagree as to which version is closest to the direct source (Powell, *Verbal Parallels in Andreas and its Relationship to Beowulf and Cynewulf* 7-13.) Accordingly, as Powell suggests, I will treat *Praxeis*, *Casanatensis*, and the Old English homily "as analogues of *Andreas*, regarding no particular version as a substitute for a source" (13). For the standard side-by-side edition of the Greek and Latin texts, see Blatt, "Die lateinischen Bearbeitungen der *Acta Andreae et Matthiae apud anthropophagos*" 1-197. For Modern English translations, see Boenig, ed. and transl., *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*. Henceforth I will refer to the Greek analogue as *Praxeis* and to the Latin analogue as *Casanatensis*. I will reference each of these by chapter, page, and line number in the Blatt edition.

very systematic about their monstrous diet. They have developed specialized technology to process their victims' blood and to cook their flesh:

Devenit namque beati mathei in sortem provincie que dicitur mermedonia, in qua conmorabantur iniqui et pessimi viri, nichil aliud preter hominis carnem edebant, eosque sanguinibus bibebant. Habebantque clibanum in medio civitatis edificatum, insuper et lacus iusta eodem clibani. In quo lacu[s] homines interficiebant, ut sanguis illud ibi colligerent. Alioque lacu iusta ipsum lacum, in quo sanguis illud que in ipso priore laco spargentur, ... [textual lacuna]... et quasi purgatus discurret, ... [textual lacuna]... bibendum.<sup>451</sup>

And the province which is called Mermedonia fell to the blessed Matthew in the casting of lots, in which lived wicked and very bad men, who did not eat anything other than human flesh, and drank their blood. And they had a baking oven built in the middle of the city, and a large tub above and next to that same oven. In this large tub they killed people, so that they would be able to collect that blood there. There was another large tub next to this large tub, in which which that blood which was poured into the first tub... would run about, purified... to be drunk.<sup>452</sup>

They also have a system for tracking their captives' best-before dates:

Et tenentes unusquisque tabula in manu sua, quas iniquissimi et crudeles carnifices, in eorum manibus dederant cum eos retrudebant, erat namque per singula tabula scriptum, numerum dierum triginta, et cotidie introiebant carnifices illi ad eos in eadem carcere, et tabulas illas scripturas contemplabantur. Ut quem per ipsam scripturam invenirent, iam expletis triginta diebus haberet reclusum, velut animalia ad saginandum, statim eiciebant eum qui triginta dies compleverant, et occidebant, atque iudicibus suis preparabant carnes eorum ad manducandum, et sanguis eorum ut potum ad bibendum.<sup>453</sup>

And each [of the prisoners] held a tablet in his hand, which the evil and cruel murderers gave them in their hands when they threw them in jail, and the number of thirty days was written on each tablet, and every day the those murderers came into that same prison to them, and looked at the inscribed tablets. Whomever they found by means of this writing to have completed the thirty days of being shut in, just like animals for slaughter, they threw out and killed straight away, and their judges prepared their flesh for eating and their blood as a potion for drinking.

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<sup>451</sup> *Casanatensis* cp. 1, p. 3, ll. 4-11.

<sup>452</sup> All translations from the Latin and Old English are my own. For the Greek *vita* of Andrew (*Praxeis*), I have consulted Boenig's translation of the *Praxeis*.

<sup>453</sup> *Casanatensis* cp. 3, p. 37., ll. 11-18.

*Praxeis* features a similar food-processing and prisoner-tracking system in its version of Mermedonia.<sup>454</sup> The Old English homily omits any grisly food-processing details, simply stating that the wicked Mermedonians “hlaf ne æton ne wæter ne druncon, ac æton manna lichaman and heora blod druncon” (neither ate bread nor drank water, but ate men’s bodies and drank their blood).<sup>455</sup>

In *Andreas*, the narrator also insists on Mermedonian cannibalism; but in the Old English poem, the Mermedonian eating practices are far more savage than in the three prose texts. They are described at first entirely in negative terms. Unlike the more sophisticated Mermedonians of *Praxeis* and *Casanatensis*, those in *Andreas* do not appear to process their food in any way; in fact, they even lack the most basic human foods, bread and water:

Næs þær hlafes wist  
werum on þam wonge,        ne wæteres drync  
to bruconne,        ah hie blod ond fel,  
fira flæschoman,        feorrancumenra,  
ðegon geond þa þeode.<sup>456</sup>

There was no bread for men in that place, nor a drink of water to enjoy; instead,  
that people consumed blood and skin, the flesh-covering of men, of those come  
from afar.

*Casanatensis* also mentions that the Mermedonians have neither bread nor wine; *Praxeis* implies that they are unwilling to consume them, preferring human flesh instead. Boenig observes that the Mermedonians’ diet in the Greek and Latin analogues is a figurative rejection of the Eucharist; in contrast, both the *Andreas*-poet and the homilist describe the Mermedonians as lacking bread and water rather than lacking bread and wine, a translation that reflects more

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<sup>454</sup> *Praxeis* cp. 3, p. 36, ll. 15-19. See Boenig, *Praxeis* 3, 15 for a description of the tablets and the food-processing facility.

<sup>455</sup> LS1.1 ll. 4-6.

<sup>456</sup> *And* ll. 21b-24.

closely the material culture of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>457</sup> This change turns the absence of bread and water into a comment on the literal abnormality of the Mermedonians' diet rather than a symbolic indictment of their spiritual state.

Underscoring this abnormal diet even further, the *Andreas*-poet makes his Mermedonians' grisly consumption of human beings vivid through an anatomical view of the process, a view that invites the reader to imagine the Mermedonians eating their victims layer by anatomical layer—first the blood, then the skin, and then the underlying flesh. This detailed description of the Mermedonians' eating habits would have been especially monstrous to a Christian Anglo-Saxon audience, whose great religious writers--Bede, Alfred, Ælfric, and Wulfstan--insistently echo “commonplace biblical injunctions against drinking blood.”<sup>458</sup> Later in the poem, the Mermedonians' cannibalism reduces them to beasts, as the epithet “wælwulfas” (slaughter wolves) and the vivid description of their table manners suggest:

[...] swa hit wælwulfas      awriten hæfdon  
þæt hie banhringas      abrecaþ þohton,  
lungre tolysan      lic ond sawle...  
(ll. 149-151)

[...] as the slaughter-wolves had arranged it, when they thought to break the bone-rings, quickly separate body and soul.

The dense alliteration on ‘b’ and ‘r’ in line 150 and on ‘l’ and ‘s’ in line 151 onomatopoeically evokes the cracking of bone and slurping of raw meat.

As their appetite makes the Mermedonians sever strangers' souls from their bodies, it makes them sever family ties amongst themselves. When Andrew rescues the foreign captives, the Mermedonians turn on their own people, casting lots for one of them who will become food

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<sup>457</sup> Boenig, *Praxeis* xxxiii, 1.

<sup>458</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 140-1.

for the rest. When the lot falls on an old warrior, he offers up his innocent young son to die in his stead, in a reversal of the natural order (*Praxeis* pp. 15-16; *Casanatensis* cp. 23, pp.77-9; *Andreas* ll. 1099-1111).<sup>459</sup> In *Praxeis*, the old warrior must involve the Mermedonian executioners' entire chain of command in the decision, and ends up offering both his son and his daughter as a snack for his fellow citizens. In *Casanatensis*, the scene is even more elaborate: the father offers up his son; the Mermedonians weigh the two; when the son proves lighter, the father offers up his daughter to make up the desired weight.<sup>460</sup> In contrast, the Old English poet simplifies and speeds up the scene: there is only one child, and instead of navigating the chain of command or calculatingly weighing the child, the Mermedonians hungrily rush upon him "metes modgeomre" ("sad for [lack of] food," l. 1113). As before, the *Andreas*-poet makes his Mermedonians fiercer, more savage, and less calculating than their counterparts in the Greek and Latin analogues; they resemble Grendel more than they resemble the sophisticated anthropophagi of *Praxeis* or *Casanatensis*.

Through grammatical parallelism and juxtaposition the poet equates the violent cannibalistic customs of the Mermedonians with their religious allegiance: "eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden,/ feondes facne" ("that entire marchland was encompassed by violence, by the fiend's guile," ll. 19-20). As John Casteen points out, the cannibalism of the Mermedonians is not just a monstrous practice, but a sign specifically of their separation from God; according to medieval exegetes, God punishes a people that forsakes Him by making it cannibalistic.<sup>461</sup> The Mermedonians' allegiance to the devil becomes apparent in other customs: they indulge in such idolatrous ("hæðengildum") and devilish ("hellcræftum") practices as

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<sup>459</sup> *Praxeis* and *Casanatensis* cp. 23, pp. 76-77; *And* ll. 1099-1111. The Old English homilies omit this episode.

<sup>460</sup> *Casanatensis* cp. 23, p.77, ll. 7-16.

<sup>461</sup> Casteen, "*Andreas*: Mermedonian cannibalism and figural narration" 4-8.

casting lots to determine their next victim (ll. 1099-1105).<sup>462</sup> The devil eventually appears as their advisor and liege-lord, both in *Andreas* and in the prose analogues; but the foreshadowing of this allegiance, which occurs only in the poem, delineates the spiritual conflict all the more sharply.

Geography demarcates Mermedonia from the rest of the world as sharply as its customs. The topographical terms that describe it— “igland” and “mearcland”—appear to contradict one another; one describes Mermedonia as an island, the other describes it as a border region. What they have in common, however, is the suggestion of otherworldliness. Oliver J. H. Grosz traces the operation of the first term: as he observes, the poem describes Mermedonia as an “igland” or “ealand” (ll. 15, 28), though this detail appears neither in the Greek, nor the Latin, nor the Old English homily. Considering the historical site of Mermedonia, which is a seacoast rather than an island, critics have suggested that “igland” and “ealand” mean “land bordering on water” or “land beyond the water.” As Grosz points out, however, *Andreas* is a poem, not a geographical tract; it might make more sense to look for “artistic motives for the poet’s use of “igland” in its ordinary sense.”<sup>463</sup> He then argues that the saints Matthew and Andrew are religious exiles, in the tradition described by Dorothy Whitelock. Accordingly, Mermedonia is an island

not because it is far across the sea, but more precisely because an island symbolizes the religious exile’s complete isolation from an outer world... The island symbolically parallels Matthew’s physical incarceration as well as his spiritual isolation from the sinful, heathen world.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> In his sermon “On Auguries,” Ælfric condemns magical practices, including pagan casting of lots. Whoever inquires into anything by magic, he states, “bið þam hæðenum gelic þe hleotað be him sylfum mid ðæs deofles cræfte þe hi fordeð on ecnyse” (“is like the heathen who cast lots concerning themselves through the devil’s art, which destroys them forever”) (Skeat, ed. *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* 364-82 (vol. 1), ll. 75-6).

<sup>463</sup> Grosz, “The island of exiles: a note on *Andreas* 15” 240.

<sup>464</sup> Grosz, “The island of exiles: a note on *Andreas* 15” 242.

But in the literal sense of the story, the saints are not isolated from the “sinful heathen world”; quite the opposite, they are immersed in an exceptionally sinful heathen world, which acts upon them and which they act upon. What they are isolated from is the implied normal world, its customs and its safety. The insularity of Mermedonia symbolically parallels the Mermedonians’ initial distance from the human norm and from God.

The second term, ‘mearclond’, works more subtly. It denotes “a borderland, waste land lying outside cultivated areas.” This fits the Mermedonians’ culinary savagery, their lack of a civilization that would produce more ethically acceptable food. “Mearclond” also connotes otherworldly menace, as the use of borderlands in other Old English poems suggests: in *Guthlac A*, “mearcland” describes the saint’s demon-ridden hermitage; in *Beowulf*, borderlands are the stalking ground of Grendel, the “mære mearcstapa” (“mighty wanderer of the borders,” ll. 103, 1348). As Manish Sharma points out, “[i]n their imagination, Old English poets seemed to assume a natural relation between evil, especially of the supernatural sort, and border-space.”<sup>465</sup>

The Mermedonians’ spiritual distance from the human norm is reinforced by the physical distance between Mermedonia and the rest of the world. The Andreas-poet frequently accentuates this impression of distance. Andrew initially objects to God’s command that he travel to Mermedonia, referring to the long journey twice in the same speech (“feorne weg,” l. 191; “wegas ofer widland,” l. 198). Later, God disguised as the ship’s captain tells Andrew that he has come a long way from Mermedonia (“we of Marmedonia maegðe syndon/feorran geferede,” ll. 264-5). Again, during the storm God warns the missionaries that the sea journey will be long and the land distant (ll. 420-424). Of all these references to distance, only one appears in one of the prose analogues: in the Old English homily, Andrew offers one brief,

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<sup>465</sup> Sharma, “A Reconsideration of *Guthlac A* 200.

objection to the length of the journey to Mermedonia: “se siþfæt is þyder to lang, and ic þone weg ne con” (“the journey there is too long, and I do not know the way,” LS1.1 ll. 45-6).

A description of the population also reinforces Mermedonia’s foreignness. Arrived in Mermedonia, Andrew warns his disciples that they are about to undergo martyrdom in the homeland of the “ælmýrcna” (l. 432). This *hapax legomenon* has been translated as either “Ethiopians” (literally, all-black people) or as “foreign borderers.” J. R. Hall points out the problems with both translations.<sup>466</sup> Geography speaks against the first meaning: Ethiopia cannot be identified with Mermedonia, since the apostle Matthew was martyred in the former and escaped martyrdom in the latter, and since the latter conspicuously lacks the torrid climate of the former. Linguistic evidence speaks against the second meaning:

there is no recorded instance of \**mearce* ‘borderers’ of which *myrce* might be a variant spelling, [and] \**myrc* does not occur as a spelling of *mearc* ‘border’.<sup>467</sup>

Instead of these two meanings, Hall proposes that “ælmýrcna” be read as “the wholly dark” in a spiritual sense, a reading supported by the use of “myrce” as an indicator of evil throughout the poem. However, whether it indicates spiritual standing, geographical position, or skin colour, the saint’s reference to the dangers of the land of the “ælmýrcna” is in agreement with the general strategy of distancing Mermedonia from the implied “normal world” of the text.

Unlike his Greek, Latin, and Old English prose analogues, the *Andreas*-poet fleshes out the physical geography of Mermedonia in evocative detail. Andreas’s first view of the Mermedonian coast is grim and imposing:

Onwoc þa wiges heard,      (wang sceawode),  
fore burggeatum.      Beorgas steape,  
hleoðu hlifodon,      ymbe harne stan

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<sup>466</sup> Hall, “Two dark Old English compounds: *ælmýrcan* (*Andreas* 432a ) and *guðmyrce* (*Exodus* 59a)” 38-47.

<sup>467</sup> Hall, “Two dark Old English compounds: *ælmýrcan* (*Andreas* 432a ) and *guðmyrce* (*Exodus* 59a)” 39.

tigelfagan trafu,        torras stodon,  
windige weallas (ll. 839-43).

Then the war-hardened man woke up, looked at the place before the city gates.  
Steep hills, hollow hills towered. Around the grey stone stood tile-adorned  
buildings, towers, windy walls.

While *Casanatensis* only mentions the city gate of Mermedonia, and while neither *Praxeis*, nor the Old English homilies refer to the setting at all,<sup>468</sup> the Old English poem describes an interesting juxtaposition of natural and urban features. Many of these topographical features seem to import literary connotations of danger, especially from *Beowulf*.<sup>469</sup> For instance, Margaret Gelling argues that “hlið” or “hleoðu,” usually translated as “slope,” actually has the specialized sense of “hill with a hollow,” a dangerous topographical feature:

A hill with a hollow provides dead ground, and this could be a lurking place for natural or supernatural enemies. In all instances in *Beowulf* the *-hlið*, *-hleoðu* compounds have a menacing context.<sup>470</sup>

Similarly, the noun phrases “beorgas steape” and “harne stan” both occur in *Beowulf* and are both in some way associated with danger. The “beorgas steape,” the steep cliffs, appear in the hero’s first view of the Spear-Danes’ coast, where he will face the Grendel family.<sup>471</sup> The third is the most interesting. Studying its occurrences in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, and other Old English texts (including charters), William Cooke and Michael Swisher agree that the “harne stan”

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<sup>468</sup> The parallel passages in the analogues are *Casanatensis* cp. 15, p. 63 ; *Praxeis* p. 62, cp. 15; LS1.1 ll. 96-7. Neither contains a comparable description of Andrew’s first view of the city.

<sup>469</sup> I operate on the assumption that the *Andreas*-poet borrowed directly from *Beowulf*. For an argument in support of this point, based on the number and the extensive nature of verbal parallels between the two poems, see Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 163-6.

<sup>470</sup> Gelling, “The landscape of *Beowulf*” 8.

<sup>471</sup> Along with the phrase “windige weallas,” “windy walls,” this phrase does not occur anywhere else in Old English poetry except for *Beowulf* and *Andreas*.

represents a traditional boundary marker.<sup>472</sup> However, in *Beowulf*, in *Andreas*, and in *Blickling* XVI, the “harne stan” marks specifically dangerous, otherworldly places—respectively the Grendel mere, various dragons’ lairs, the land of Mermedonia, and hell. Accordingly, Swisher argues that it is a formulaic expression that marks a passage to a dangerous otherworldly space.<sup>473</sup> Overall, the intertextual echoes “import” an atmosphere of strangeness and danger into *Andreas*’s (and the readers’) first impression of Mermedonia’s landscape.

A later description of the landscape of Mermedonia, the city streets and the countryside where Andrew suffers martyrdom (ll. 1229-1240), is also not paralleled in the prose analogues, and it also echoes *Beowulf*.<sup>474</sup> The streets of Mermedonia are “stanfage,” stone-adorned, like the path towards Heorot, and the buildings are “enta ærgeweorc,” the ancient work of giants, like the magical sword in the Grendel lair (*Beowulf* ll. 320a, 1679a). Here the ancient splendours of the city, like the poet’s use of heroic diction to describe the inhabitants, emphasize the violent savagery of the Mermedonians. They live in an artfully built city, but they have neither bread nor drinking water. They plan a great communal feast, to share their food as Hrothgar and his warriors might in Heorot, but there are people on the menu (ll. 152-3). They rush into battle, like a valiant war-band, but their adversary is a boy whom they want to devour (ll. 116-25). They possess a splendid ancient city, but they cannot enjoy the trappings of civilized life, treasure and gabled halls (ll. 1113-4, 1158-1162), because they have no people to eat. The familiar heroic language applied in such strange circumstances makes the monstrosity of the Mermedonians all the more evident.

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<sup>472</sup> Cooke, “Two notes on *Beowulf* (with glances at *Vafpruðnismál*, *Blickling Homily 16*, and *Andreas*, lines 839-846)” 297-301; Swisher, “Beyond the hoar stone” 133-6.

<sup>473</sup> Swisher, “Beyond the hoar stone” 133-6.

<sup>474</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 166.

In his discussion of imagined landscapes in Old English poetry, a discussion focused on the exilic landscapes of the *Wanderer* and of the *Wife's Lament*, and on the monster mere of *Beowulf*, Nicholas Howe claims that the imagined landscapes are

means of representing the interior, existential crisis that occurs within heroic culture: that of the figure isolated from other human beings, with little if any hope of successfully changing his or her lot in this transitory world.<sup>475</sup>

Andreas is certainly a “figure isolated from other human beings” in his otherworldly place. He goes into the Mermedonian prison unaccompanied by any other people; his only helper is the Holy Spirit, who opens the prison door. Later, before his capture and martyrdom, Andreas dismisses his disciples and the rescued prisoner. But in contrast to the elegiac landscapes, the otherworldly place where the saint find himself hosts not an interior crisis, but external conflicts between the saint and the local population. The saint's suffering and eventual victory transforms and sanctifies the otherworldly places.

Andreas twice comes into conflict with the Mermedonians' most monstrous cultural characteristic, their cannibalism: with divine help he deprives them of two potential meals, the foreign Christian prisoners and the sacrificial Mermedonian boy. After his second intervention, the devil leads a posse of warriors against him and orders his imprisonment and torture. As the Mermedonians imprison the saint, winter imprisons the land:

	Snaw eorðan band	1255
wintergeworpum.	Weder coledon	
heardum hægelscurum,	swylce hrim ond forst,	
hare hildstapan,	hæleða eðel	
lucon, leoda gesetu.	Land wæron freorig	
cealdum cylegicelum,	clang wæteres þrym	1260
ofer eastreamas,	is brycgade	
blæce brimrade (ll. 1255-62).		

<sup>475</sup> Howe, “The landscape of Anglo-Saxon England: inherited, invented, imagined” 109.

Snow bound the earth in winter storms. The weather grew cold with hard showers of hail. Likewise, rime and frost, grey warriors, locked up the homeland of men, the habitations of the people. The land was frozen with cold icicles, the strength of the water clung over the streams, the ice bridged the black sea-road.

But Andreas's martyrdom literally transforms the landscape. After his passion is accomplished, the woods miraculously bloom where his blood has fallen:

Geseh he geblowene      bearwas standan  
blædum gehrodene,      swa he ær his blod aget (ll. 1448-9).

He saw blossoming woods stand, adorned with leaves, where before he had shed his blood.

Alliteration on 'b', which encompasses the two verses, falls only on the words that describe either the reviving natural world or the saint's blood ('geblowene bearwas', 'blædum', 'blod').

In the prose analogues, the miracle is a visionary experience, which seems to centre not so much on the landscape itself as on Andreas's flesh and hair, torn away from him under torture. Its miraculous transformation into blooming trees is a literal fulfillment of God's promise to his loyal servants that not even a lock of their hair will perish. In all the prose analogues, God himself describes the vision as "what has become of Andrew's flesh and hair":

Hec cum intra se orasset beatus andreas, facta est vox domini sermo [sic] ebraico dicens ad eum. Amen dico tibi andreas, potest celum et terra transire, quam verbum meum sit vacuum. Nunc autem respice retrorsum, et vide caro tua, et capilli tui quid fiunt. Cum hoc respiceret beatus andreas, apparuerunt caro et capilli sui sicut arbores florentes et fructum afferentes. (Casanatensis p. 87, cp. 28)

When the blessed Andrew had prayed to himself, it happened that the voice of the Lord, speaking to him in Hebrew words, said: "Amen I say to you, Andrew, Heaven and earth can pass away before my word will be empty. Therefore look behind you now and see your flesh and hair, what they have become." When the blessed Andrew looked back, his flesh and hairs appeared as trees blossoming and bearing fruit. (Casanatensis 50)

The Old English homily is almost a word-for-word rendering of this Latin passage. There, too, God literally fulfills his promise, and St. Andrew, looking for his flesh and hair, sees “geblowen treow wæstm berende” (Bright pp. 216, ll. 251-6).

Conversely, the Old English poem focuses more on Andreas’s blood and the blossoming woods than on Andrew’s flesh and hair: God shows Andreas the miracle by telling him to look at the “blodige stige” (bloody path) left behind by his martyrdom (ll. 1441-2). To Ananya Jahanara Kabir, the image is “a glimpse of paradise,” of the temporary abode of good souls between death and Doomsday. She argues that the natural beauty of the blossoming woods suggests an ideal landscape in terms typical of Old English poetic technique for describing paradise, while its origin in Andreas’s blood recalls “Tertullian’s declaration that the doors of paradise can be unlocked only by the blood of martyrdom.”<sup>476</sup> However, the prose analogues and the context of the poem itself suggest that this is a literal transformation of the landscape rather than a momentary vision of paradise. The prose analogues describe the vision as the literal transformation of a physical object (the saint’s flesh and hair) rather than a glimpse of the afterlife. The poem itself also suggests that a momentary vision of paradise might be out of character at this point, for the following two reasons. First, as Kabir herself notes, where the *Andreas*-poet mentions the afterlife of the blessed, he does not make an explicit distinction between heaven and paradise; as well, he describes the afterlife of the blessed in abstract terms, not in terms of natural beauty (159). Second, the miracle happens after (and in contrast to) a vivid description of Mermedonia’s physical landscape locked in wintry captivity. Given this context, it makes more sense to read the miracle in *Andreas* as a physical transformation of the

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<sup>476</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature* 159.

natural landscape: rather than momentarily unlocking the gates of paradise, the martyr's blood returns life to the land.<sup>477</sup>

Of course, these two interpretations of the blossoming wood need not be mutually exclusive, for the transformed earthly landscape functions here as a type of the heavenly or paradisaal landscape, of that "leohte ham" towards which Andreas himself, functioning as a type of Christ, opens the way.<sup>478</sup> But the *Andreas*-poet has so consistently used the physical geography of Mermedonia as a sign of its alienation from God, that the miraculous transformation of this very geography is a poetically effective symbol of its inhabitants' spiritual redemption.

The flood which Andreas summons after his martyrdom effects an even profounder transformation. Typologically, the flood recalls both the biblical cataclysm and the sacrament of baptism.<sup>479</sup> As to the former, the Mermedonians are drowned, just like the monstrous antediluvians, with whom they share the monstrous practice of eating flesh with blood.<sup>480</sup> As to the latter, the Mermedonians literally enact the Pauline description of baptism:

consepulti ei in baptismo in quo et resurrexistis per fidem operationis Dei qui  
suscitavit illum a mortuis.

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<sup>477</sup> The impression of Andreas's blood bringing spring to the land is an impression strengthened as Andreas summons the miraculous flood. This is another correspondence with *Beowulf*, where the flood-motif is linked with the destruction of monsters. After Beowulf has killed Grendel's mother, the blade of the monstrous sword he used melts away like ice in the spring, "ðonne forstes bend fæder onlæteð/onwinded wælrapas" ("when the Father releases the bond of frost, unwinds the water-fetters, ll. 1609-10). Later, Hrothgar sees that the hilt of the monstrous sword is seen to be inscribed with "or... fyrngewinnes, syðþan flod ofslōh... giganta cyn" ("the origin ... of ancient struggle, when the flood...killed the race of giants," *Beowulf* ll. 1689-90). On both of these occasions, a flood (be it that of spring or that of Genesis) is linked to the divinely mandated destruction of monsters. Even more striking is the fact that both the Grendel family and the "giganta kyn" who are their ancestors are guilty of monstrous eating. Bede, for instance, points out that the wicked antediluvians "cum sanguine carnem comederent," ate flesh together with blood (Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 140-1)), just like the Mermedonians who are, in their turn, wiped out by a flood.

<sup>478</sup> For an extensive summary of these arguments, see Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives: A Study in Direct Discourse and the Iconography of Style* 110-11.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* 141.

Buried with him in baptism, in whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him up from the dead.<sup>481</sup>

Terrified by the flood, the Mermedonians convert to Christianity and confess the faith; as soon as they do this, Andreas banishes the flood waters and resurrects all but the most wicked of the dead. These are swallowed up by their own land, as they previously swallowed up other people.

After the Mermedonians and their land emerge from the receding flood, Andreas guides the transformation of their customs and their land: the Mermedonians build and consecrate a church, forsake their old idolatrous altars, and consecrate a bishop (*And* ll.1633, 1646; ll. 1641-2; l.1649.). As a result, the narrator's descriptive terms for their world are also transformed. Their land is no longer a remote and dangerous place; it becomes, instead, "beorhtan byrig" ("a bright city"), "goldburg" ("city of gold"), and a place of "secga seledream ond sincgestreon" ("hall-joy and treasure for men") (*And* l.1649; l. 1655; l. 1656).

Eventually, Andreas guides the erstwhile monstrous Mermedonians on the path of faith towards their true homeland:

Lærde þa þa leode	on geleafan weg,
trymede torhtlice,	tireadigra
wenede to wuldre	weorod unmæte,
to þam halgan ham	heofona rices,
þær fæder ond sunu	ond frofre gast
in þrinnesse	þrymme wealdeð
in woruld worulda	wuldorgestealda ( <i>And</i> ll. 1680-86).

Then he taught the people on the way of faith, strengthened them gloriously, guided an exceedingly great host of the blessed to blessedness, to the holy home of the kingdom of heaven, where Father and Son and Holy Spirit rule in the glory of the Trinity, for ever and ever, over the dwellings of glory.

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<sup>481</sup> Colossians 2.12 (Vulgate, Douay Rheims Version).

Anita R. Riedinger observes that the concept of “home” in Old English poetry appears “in a series of antitheses--as a part of reward and punishment, as a place of heaven and hell, of birth and death.” These antitheses or conceptual reversals, she argues, reveal the “bi-polarity” of Old English poetic structure, an aspect that prevails throughout the corpus.<sup>482</sup> The hostile otherworldly place that Andreas travels to suggests a fourfold conceptual reversal of this kind. Most obviously, the otherworldly place and its monstrous inhabitants imply their opposite, a “normal world” in the text. Since Andreas is in Achaia when he complains that the land of Mermedonia is foreign to him and very far away, Achaia serves as a reference point, an implied standard for normality. It is the familiar place that Andreas leaves behind in the service of God. But although the “normal world” stands in antithesis to the strange and dangerous lands where the saint travels, it is not a true home in either poem. In *Andreas*, for good or ill, no earthly home is safe or lasting. The apostles have no fixed homeland, travelling over all the earth, as God commands. Foreigners find no safety in Mermedonia. The wicked Mermedonians and their ancient civilization are not safe either; they are swept away or transformed by the flood and the new religion.

Inset narratives and allusions amplify the theme of homelessness on earth. On the journey towards Mermedonia, Andreas recounts the miracles of Christ to the ship’s captain. In the temple in Jerusalem, Christ calls on the statue of an angelic creature to declare His lineage to the Jews. The stone image immediately springs to life and testifies in His favour:

Ne dorste þa forhylman	hælendes bebod
wundor fore weorodum,	ac of wealle ahleop,
frod fyrngeweorc,	þæt he on foldan stod,
stan fram stane.	Stefn æfter cwom,
hlud þurh heardne,	hleoðor dynede,

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<sup>482</sup> Riedinger, “‘Home’ in Old English poetry” 55.

wordum wemde (*And* ll. 735-740).

It did not dare to neglect the Saviour's command--a wonder before the people--but it leapt from the wall, the wise work of distant days, so that it stood on the ground, stone [parted] from stone. A voice came after, loud through the hard thing; speech resounded, was heard in words.

The verses vividly depict the strangeness of the moment--the suddenness of the statue's movement, the unnatural separation of stone from stone, the flinty quality of the creature's voice, the surprising emergence of words. The miracle continues: not only does Christ command the statue away from its proper place, He sends it on a mission to call Abraham and his two sons out of their graves, as further witnesses. Just as the lifeless stone is not safe from God's call, neither are the dead in their graves; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob answer the divine summons in such a hurry that they leave their graves gaping open behind them: "[f]orlætan moldern wunigean/open eorðscræfu" ("they forsook dwelling in their sepulchres, open holes in the earth," *And* 802b).

Neither miracle convinces the High Priest in Jerusalem; he taunts Christ's followers that they are exiles, geographically and ideologically, obeying the teachings of a stranger instead of the customs of the land:

‘Hwæt, ge syndon earme      ofer ealle menn!  
Wadað widlastas,      weorn geferað  
earfoðsiða,      ellþeodiges nu  
butan leodrihte      larum hyrað... (*And* ll. 676-82)

Look, you are miserable above all men! You tread long roads, travel on many hard journeys, hear the teaching of a foreigner now, against the custom of the people...

The taunt of foreignness does not appear in either of the prose analogues: there, the high priest denies Jesus' divinity, and gets contradicted by the speaking statue.<sup>483</sup> Ironically, however, the

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<sup>483</sup> *Casanatensis* cp. 14, p. 59-61; *Praxeis* cp. 14, p. 58-60.

taunt of exile is quite true in the poem: Christ's followers--be they apostles, former anthropophagi, living statues or dead prophets--have no abiding home on earth.

Frequent appearances of the word "elpeodig" and its cognates underscore this essential human homelessness. In fact, the *Andreas*-poet uses "elpeodig" and its cognates twelve times, by far the highest number of this word's occurrences in any Old English prose or poetic text.<sup>484</sup> Used both as an adjective and as a noun, its primary meaning is "foreigner, alien."<sup>485</sup> It is part of the *Andreas*-poet's strategy of distancing Mermedonia from the implied normal world: most of the time, the word refers either to the apostles and other strangers to Mermedonia (six times), or to the Mermedonians themselves, foreign to the apostles (four times).<sup>486</sup> However, figuratively, "elpeodig" describes the condition of mortal human beings: in the earthly world, they are foreigners, resident aliens in search of an eternal homeland.<sup>487</sup> As the poem's insistence on the loss or the instability of homes suggests, the otherworldly land of Mermedonia becomes an expression of the transitory earthly world.

Home is elsewhere. Two other worlds—eternal ones—feature in the poem, in antithesis to one another. One is heaven, the holy and eternal home of God, of the patriarchs (ll. 807-810), of the good angels (829-30), and of faithful Christians (ll. 1680-6):

þær fæder ond sunu      ond frofre gast

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<sup>484</sup> The word "elpeodig" appears approximately 30 times in the Old English poetic corpus and approximately 159 times in the Old English prose corpus ("elpeodig," Dictionary of Old English A-G). Its frequency in *Andreas* accounts for almost half of the word's occurrences in the entire Old English poetic corpus: it appears thirteen times in *Andreas*, compared to 5 times in *Genesis A* and *B*, the poems which, together, have the next-highest frequency of this word (fragmentary searches on "-lpeod-," "-lðeod-," and "-lpyd-," Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus, accessed July 25, 2011).

<sup>485</sup> The Dictionary of Old English gives its primary definition of "elpeodig" as "foreign, alien" (sense 1). ("elpeodig," Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A – G (2007)).

<sup>486</sup> There are two exceptions: once, "elpeode" is used in the sense of "nations," when Christ tells Andrew that the Crucifixion will become known "on elpeode" (*And* 970); the other time, it is again used in the sense of foreigner, as the High Priest of Jerusalem disparages Jesus' teachings as those of a foreigner (*And* 677). The second instance will be discussed below.

<sup>487</sup> "elpeodig," sense 1.a.vi. Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form A – G (2007).

in þrinnesse      þrymme wealdeð  
in woruld worulda      wuldorgestealda. 1684-6.

where Father and Son and Holy Spirit rule in the glory of the Trinity, forever and ever, in dwellings of glory.

The other, opposite world is hell, the devil's habitation, the place of eternal captivity and exile.

Andreas, taunted by the fiend, describes his condition:

þær ðu syððan a,      susle gebunden,  
in wræc wunne,      wuldres blunne,  
syððan ðu forhogedes      heofoncyniges word.  
þær wæs yfles or,      ende næfre  
þines wræces weorðeð. (1379-1383)

There you have ever since [the Fall] been bound in torment, dwelt in exile, lost glory, since you despised the word of heaven's king. That was the beginning of evil; the end of your exile will never come.

The land of the Mermedonians is contested ground between these two extremes. At the beginning of the story Mermedonia, with its cannibalistic and idolatrous customs, explicitly belongs to the devil, being “morðre bewunden,/feondes facne” (“encompassed by violence [or sin], the deceit of the fiend,” ll. 19-20). By the end of the story, its inhabitants, led by Andrew, are on their way to heaven (1680-6). Mermedonia is poised between these two spiritual opposites. Granted its own abbreviated history of salvation (a Passion, a baptismal flood), the land functions as a miniature representation of the entire human world, encompassed by sin but capable of receiving salvation. Thus the concepts of home and exile are explored from two perspectives. At first, the contrast between home and exile is that between the “normal world” of the text, the expressed or implied human homeland, and the hostile otherworld of Mermedonia, defined by its monstrous and supernatural elements. But as the poem unfolds, a wider perspective emerges: that of eternal reality. In eternal terms, the true and permanent homeland

is heaven; the ultimate place of exile is hell. At the beginning of the poem, Andreas, leaving the normal human world and travelling to Mermedonia, appears to be going into exile; but as he comes into conflict with the monstrous inhabitants and prevails over them, Andreas sends the demonic elements into their proper exile, but redeems the human and natural aspects of Mermedonia and draws the land nearer towards the heavenly home. As Mermedonia emerges from its exilic state and draws nearer to Heaven, its monstrous, otherworldly aspects dissolve. Like Guthlac, Andreas transforms the monstrous space, the place of exile, into an earthly reflection of the heavenly homeland.

The radical difference between the dangerous otherworldly places and the “normal worlds” of their narratives is defined by physical distance, geographical and cultural particularities, even by metaphysical status. Old English narratives map the difference in an additional way, a way with very profound emotional resonances within that tradition: as the insurmountable difference between home and exile. When the shadow of Paradise--the true, lost home, unattainable on earth--falls on these places, it makes their exilic nature all the more evident. In *Beowulf* and *Christ and Satan*, alienation and loss define the condition of monsters and demons: the devils are haunted by the loss of their heavenly homeland; Grendel is exiled from the human community. In *Andreas* and *Guthlac*, the intense sense of alienation pervades the otherworldly places they travel to—a sense of alienation that highlights the magnitude of the saints’ redemptive miracles, their recreation, on inhospitable islands and demon-ridden wastelands, a reflection of lost Paradise on earth.

The shadow of the lost heavenly homeland is not confined to Old English poetry, with its traditional preoccupation with exile. The lost Paradise also haunts the dangerous otherworldly places of Middle English poetry. In visions of the afterlife, the Earthly Paradise borders on the

regions of punishment. In *Sir Orfeo*, the Faerie realm first appears to Orfeo as a vision of Paradise; only after does he see its human victims, hideously mutilated among Faerie's more than earthly splendours. And in *The Book of John Mandeville*, the Earthly Paradise quite insistently haunts the geography of the post-lapsarian world, yet remains unreachable and unattainable to living mortals. The haunting presence of Paradise reveals striking continuities of theme and narrative motifs between Old and Middle English narratives. Focusing on *The Book of John Mandeville*, the conclusion of this dissertation will sketch out these continuities and indicate directions for future research.

## Conclusion: Haunted by the Other World

In Old English poetry, places of wonder and danger are places of exile, not only from the mundane human world, the earthly home of humankind, but also from the true, heavenly home with God. This means that the otherness of these landscapes does not consist only in particularities of geography or customs; it consists in a persistent emotional distance from the very idea of home. This imbues the otherness of these places with resonances of alienation, loss, and longing, resonances especially powerful in a poetic tradition so deeply preoccupied with the theme of exile. The Middle English poetic corpus, however, is not as haunted by the theme of exile as Old English poetry.<sup>488</sup> Accordingly, the dangerous otherworldly landscapes of Middle English narrative are often not landscapes of exile; their otherness receives emotional weight in other ways. In *Sir Orfeo*, for example, the landscape of Faerie is a place of natural beauty and splendid artifice far superior to the human world. However, it is also a fearful place because of its gallery of mutilated human prisoners. Its threat is not exile but captivity. By contrast, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the landscape of the Green Chapel is not nearly as inviting as Faerie; it is a rugged wilderness haunted by its ferocious master, the Green Knight. It is fearful because of its monstrous inhabitant and because of its sinister resemblance to the other world.<sup>489</sup> Again, the threat of this landscape is not exile; it is, for Gawain, the threat of death and demonic presence.<sup>490</sup> Even the regions of punishment in visions of the afterlife are not primarily depicted

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<sup>488</sup> See Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 129-180, for an examination of how specific elements of traditional Old English poetics—lexemes, themes, motifs, and their traditional associations—were transformed as they survived (if they survived) in the Middle English poetic corpus.

<sup>489</sup> Matsuda, “*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and St Patrick’s Purgatory” 500-1; *SGGK* ll. 2187-8; ll. 2191-6.

<sup>490</sup> *SGGK* ll. 2191-6.

as places of exile. In Middle English visions, the demons in the regions of punishment are not the sorrowful, lamenting band of exiles of *Christ and Satan* or of other Old English poems that depict the Satanic predicament. On the contrary, the Middle English demons are a rapacious and gleeful crew, full of mischief and grim humour, eager to ensnare the mortal pilgrims to their realm through intimidation and deception.<sup>491</sup> Thus, the regions of punishment are not fearful because they threaten the loss of an earthly or heavenly home; they are fearful because they threaten eternal and flamboyant torment.

The dangerous otherworldly places of Middle English narrative are far more diverse in their threats, far less unified in their themes, than similar landscapes in Old English. However, significant continuities remain. Investigating these continuities, this chapter is by no means an exhaustive treatment of the thematics of dangerous otherworldly spaces in Middle English. Instead, it looks at a moment of culmination, a very significant literary landscape in a very wide-spread late medieval *mirabilia* text: the Earthly Paradise of *The Book of John Mandeville*.<sup>492</sup> The depiction of the Earthly Paradise in Mandeville reveals striking continuities between Old and Middle English in the poetics of marvelous spaces. The tropes and themes uncovered by this study all emerge from Mandeville's depiction of the Earthly Paradise and of its role in the geography of the East.<sup>493</sup>

The geography of Mandeville's imagined and constructed marvelous East is haunted by glimpses of the Earthly Paradise, the lost home of humankind. Among these glimpses there

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<sup>491</sup> McAlindon, "Comedy and Terror in Middle English Literature: The Diabolical Game" 323–32 (and especially 326–8).

<sup>492</sup> This dissertation uses the *Defective Version of Mandeville's Travels* rather than the original French text of *The Book of John Mandeville*. My use of this Middle English text is due to its wide dissemination; as the dissertation in general focuses on English texts, I am using the version of Mandeville that circulated most widely in England.

<sup>493</sup> This chapter looks at wonder in the *Book of John Mandeville* in connection to the Earthly Paradise. For an analysis of wonder in Mandeville as it stems from the encounter with the "monstrous races" of the East, see Akbari, "The diversity of mankind in *The Book of John Mandeville*" 156–76.

emerge, as in the Faerie realm of Sir Orfeo, motifs displaced from the traditional iconography of the afterlife. Yet this Paradise itself, like the marvelous spaces surveyed in Old and Middle English, is defined by spatial indeterminacy; it is determinedly unreachable and shrouded in mystery, even as its fluid boundaries both separate and connect it to the human world. Finally, as in Old English poetry, the distance between the world and the Earthly Paradise is that of exile; the false images of Paradise that surface in Mandeville's narrative serve only to underscore this exilic distance. Thus, Mandeville's Earthly Paradise and the landscape that surrounds it bring together all the marvel-tropes surveyed in this dissertation: the migration of motifs from other genres; the fluid boundaries and declarations of unknowing that mark out dangerous otherworldly places; the insistent sense of longing and exile that pervades the narrative. The long shadow of the Earthly Paradise, falling on the marvel-filled geography of Mandeville's East, demonstrates how radical displacement--rhetorical, theological, and affective--lies at the heart of dangerous otherworldly places.

The Paradise of John Mandeville lies in the world's uttermost East: the lost Eden, from which Adam and Eve were exiled after the Fall, the first home of humankind, now lost and inaccessible to living human beings. It is also the interim home of blessed souls between death and Doomsday, a foreshadowing of the eternal home of the blessed with God. As Suzanne Conklin Akbari summarizes,

[f]or the medieval Christian, paradise is always, of course, in two places at once. It is both the earthly paradise of Eden, inhabited by Adam and Eve until their transgression, Fall, and ultimate expulsion; and the heavenly paradise above, inhabited only by God, His angels, and those sufficiently blessed to taste the joys of the Beatific Vision even before the Last Judgement that would come at the end of time. While the first paradise was thought to be located on earth, the other in heaven, they shared the quality of inaccessibility: after the Fall, it was believed, no one could enter Eden, whose gates were perpetually guarded by an angel armed with a fiery sword. The divine heaven, of course, was equally remote,

barred to all but those most closely touched by God. It is no exaggeration to say that paradise was the single most important reference point for medieval westerners: it was both the omphalos or point of origin that marked mankind's place of birth, and the destination of all Christian souls.<sup>494</sup>

Paradise, then, has a double metaphysical location: in *mappae mundi* and travellers' itineraries, it is a place in this world; in visions of the afterlife, it is a region in the other world. In Mandeville, Paradise designates both a place on earth and a place in the afterlife. Yet even when Paradise refers to the earthly locale of the garden of Eden, its surroundings—especially the landscape of the Vale Perilous--recall iconographic details from visions of the afterlife. The resemblances align Mandeville's Paradise with the eschatological as well as the earthly, accentuating Paradise's double nature and its radical remoteness from ordinary human reality.

The Vale Perilous is perhaps the most vividly described place in Mandeville's pilgrimage. The source of Mandeville's Vale Perilous is the *Relatio* of Friar Odoric of Pordenone, dictated around 1330, an account of Odoric's travels through India and China.<sup>495</sup> However, the Mandeville-author expands and reworks Odoric's account, turning the Perilous Valley into a far more otherworldly place. The Mandeville-author accomplishes this task by importing the iconography of the infernal regions into an earthly landscape in order to incite dread and wonder, to increase the metaphysical distance between the Valley and the ordinary human world.<sup>496</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Akbari, *Idols in the East* 482.

<sup>495</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 9. Higgins indicates that Mandeville may have consulted both the Latin text of the *Relatio* and its translation into French by Jean de Vignay (mid-fourteenth century); however, Mandeville most often follows the French Vignay narrative. For that reason, when I compare Mandeville to his source, I will also refer to the French Vignay narrative rather than the Latin one.

<sup>496</sup> Higgins observes that the Mandeville-author's account is "at once more general and more specific than its source...more real and more symbolic" (208). Higgins traces the contributions of the Mandeville-texts to the landscape of the Perilous Valley in several Continental, English, Latin, and German versions. These changes can best be synthesized with reference to wonder: the Mandeville texts deploy the poetics of wonder, rendering the place more otherworldly, distancing it from the earthly and the mundane.

Odoric's account of the Valley has the disjointed and emphatic immediacy of lived experience. Briefly noting the valley's place by the River of Delights (the river Physon), he tells of numerous corpses he has seen in there; he mentions a loud sound like harp music; he notes that the valley is called "la Vallee au Deable" (the Valley of the Devil) and claims that no "mescroians" (unbelievers) enter there, because anyone who enters is killed by the devil, or dies soon after; he reminds the reader that he has seen an unbelievably large number of corpses; he describes, with no sensory detail but with great and repetitive emphasis on his own fear, the sight of a horrific human form seen in a rock ("vi ge une forme d'omme mout espoentable, qui estoit si tres espoentable que je cuidoie perdre l'esperit et morir de paor," "I saw the very horrifying form of a man, which was so horrifying that I thought I would lose my mind and die of fear"); he tells about finding a great quantity of silver, some of which he first takes and then discards, fearing that "pour cest argent Diex me empeecest issir de cele vatee" (for that silver, God would prevent me from getting out of that valley). Finally, all "Sarrazins" who hear of his escape from the valley honour him for it, because all who enter are usually killed and belong to the devil of hell.<sup>497</sup>

Mandeville's account contains much of the same information; but its organization, its narrator's evaluation of his experience, and its strategic deployment of iconographic details make the Vale Perilous a far more frightening and otherworldly place than Odoric's "Vatee au Deable." The Mandeville-author establishes the otherworldly nature of the valley from the very opening of his account: the valley is a place which some call "pe vatee enchaunted, somme pe vatee of deuelis, somme pe vatee perilous" (p. 120, ll. 15-16), and it is not only "a grete merueyil," but also reputed to be "an entre to helle" (p. 120, ll. 14, 20). The Mandeville-author

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<sup>497</sup> Jean de Vignay, *Les merveilles de la terre d'Outremer* XXXVII.5-28 (82-3).

then proceeds to expand every detail of Odoric's account with the motifs of the afterlife as imagined in the medieval visionary tradition.

To Odoric, as noted above, the most frightening thing in the Valley is the image of a human face in the rock: "une forme d'omme mout espoentable" ("a most terrifying form of a man," XXXVIII.14). In Mandeville, the human face turns into the head of a devil: "þe hed of a deuel bodeliche ri3t hidous and dredful to se" (p. 120, 24-5). Like Odoric, Mandeville repeatedly dwells on the fear that this sight inspires: it is "ri3t hidous and dredful to se"; it is an image that everyone "schulde haue grete drede to byholde hit"; its glances and changes are such that "no man dare come nere for alle þe worlde"; and its stench is so noxious "þat no man may suffre hit" (pp. 120-1, ll. 23-30, 1-3). But to this fear, Mandeville adds not only the assertion of the head's diabolical nature, but also a slew of vivid sensory detail, both visual and olfactory, describing the head's repertory of "special effects":

And in þe myddel of þat valey vpon a roche is a visage and þe hed of a deuel bodeliche ri3t hidous and dredful to se, and þer is noþing yseye but þe hed fro þe schuldris. And þer is no man in þe world, cristen ne oper, [so hardy] but he schulde haue grete drede to byholde hit. For he biholdeþ euery man so scharplych and so fellich, and his i3en beþ so fast stiring and sprenglyng as fire, and he chaungip so ofte his cuntenance [þat no man dare come nere for alle þe worlde] and out of his mouþ and nose comeþ grete plente of fuyr of dyuerse colours and | some [tyme] þe fuyre is so stynkyng þat no man may suffre hit (pp. 120-1, ll. 23-30, 1-3).

As Higgins notes, this is not the vague, impressionistic human image of Odoric's account; on the contrary, the Mandeville-author transforms this face into "a fully realized devil's head that owes something to iconographic tradition."<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 210.

Higgins does not pursue this association beyond noting that “devils were typically depicted with oversize heads, and Hell was often linked to fiery kitchen imagery.”<sup>499</sup> Yet the vision tradition’s depiction of the infernal regions furnishes significant analogues to the Mandeville-author’s account. In visions of the afterlife, the regions of punishment often feature fiery-eyed creatures, superlative stench, and hostile weather.<sup>500</sup> All these elements are aspects of Mandeville’s experience in the Perilous Valley: the fiery-eyed, terrifying demon’s face; the stench; the superlative horror; and the ferocious “wynd and þonder and tempestes” (p. 122, l. 1) that afflict the travellers through the valley. The vision of Tundale offers an even closer analogue to the devil’s visage in Mandeville.<sup>501</sup> Passing through the regions of punishment, the

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<sup>499</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 295, n. 9.

<sup>500</sup> For Middle English examples of fiery-eyed denizens of hell, see this late-twelfth-century homily on the sanctity of Sunday, narrating St. Paul’s vision of hell, describes beasts of hell with fiery eyes and fiery breath: “heore e3en weren al swilc swa fur. And heore eþem scean swa deð þe leit a-monge þunre” (“their eyes were all just like fire. And their breath shone as does the lightning among thunder,” “In Diebus Dominicis,” in Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* 43). The late-fourteenth-century Middle English Vision of Tundale likewise features demons whose “ynee wer brode and brannyng as fyr” (“eyes were wide and burning like fire,” l. 146). Superlative stench is an even more widespread feature. The aforementioned homily on the sanctity of Sunday refers to hell’s “ful stunch” (“foul stench”) and observes that “heo wes wurse to þolien þenne efre ni of alle þa oðre pine” (“it was worse to endure than any of the other torments,” “In Diebus Dominicis,” in Morris, Ed., *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises* 43). A late-thirteenth-century homily that likewise relates the vision of St. Paul refers to the corpse-like stench (“stynketh so for-holde lych,” “stinks just like a dead body,” l. 79) of the waters of hell (“The xi. Pains of Hell.” Morris, Richard, ed. *An Old English Miscellany* 147-55.) *The South English Legendary*, relating the legend of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, repeatedly mentions the foul stench of the regions of punishment (D’Evelyn and Mill, ed., “St. Patrick,” ll. 382, 399, 408, 409, 429, 456, in *South English Legendary* 85-109). The fourteenth-century Auchinleck narrative of the legend of St. Patrick’s Purgatory describes a “stinkand water” that “stank fouler than ani hounde” (stanza 116, ll. 2, 4). Examples could be multiplied. Finally, for the foul weather that threatens pilgrims through the afterlife’s regions of punishment, see especially the legend of St. Patrick’s Purgatory. For instance, in the Auchinleck version, the fiends threaten the pilgrim with a wind that will topple him down from the bridge over the pit of hell. In addition, the pilgrim himself notices that the water under the bridge has its own foul weather system: “the water that ther ran under/Brend o lighting and of thunder” (stanza 121, ll. 4, 5). Last but not least, the vision of Tundale describes the storms and fiery-eyed demonic creatures that reign over the waters of punishment. The twelfth-century Latin narrative of Marcus describes “a very large and stormy lake, the waves of which prevented those around it from seeing the sky.” This stormy lake is inhabited by demonic beasts: “In the lake there was a large multitude of bellowing and terrifying beasts which fed only on the souls they devoured. [...] The beasts themselves were so huge that they could most rightly be compared with big towers. Fire was coming from their mouths so that onlookers thought the lake itself was boiling.” (Picard and de Pontfarcy, ed. and transl., *The Vision of Tnugdál* 123).

<sup>501</sup> This is one of the most popular medieval representations of the afterlife; it narrates a sinful knight’s redemptive journey through the regions of punishment and bliss in the other world. First written down in the twelfth century,

pilgrim Tundale encounters a demonic figure, chiefly notable for its head, which is not only fiery-eyed and stinking, but which is at once a denizen of hell and a part of its topography and climate:<sup>502</sup>

They [the angel and the pilgrim] had been travelling with great effort along the dark path when he saw not far ahead a beast of incredible size and unbearable horror. By its enormous size it exceeded all the mountains he had ever seen. Its eyes were like hills on fire. Its mouth was wide open and gaping and looked as if it could hold nine thousand men in arms. [...] An unquenchable flame gushed forth [from the mouth] and came divided into three parts through the three gateways; the souls of the damned were forced to go inside through this flame and an incomparable stench came out of its mouth. He could hear the moaning and wailing of a multitude coming from its belly through the mouth, and no wonder, since inside there were many thousands of men and women suffering dreadful torments.<sup>503</sup>

This demonic beast, called Acheron, has several important traits in common with the devil's head in Mandeville: its fiery eyes; its fiery mouth; its stench; its enormity; the dual function as a creature and as a topographical feature; its liminal position, not indeed at the entry to the regions of punishment, but at the entry to regions of punishment that are "much greater" than the ones the pilgrim has seen so far. Even the sin associated with the beast Acheron aligns with Mandeville. The beast Acheron is a punishment for the sin of avarice; the Perilous Valley in Mandeville, with the riches that adorn its corpses, tempts travelers to the sin of avarice. The correspondences between the two images are not necessarily an indication of direct and specific influence. They do demonstrate, though, to what degree the Mandeville-author draws on the widespread iconography of the infernal regions in order to bring the earthly locale of the Vale Perilous nearer to the other world.

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the vision spread throughout medieval Europe, in hundreds of manuscripts, in Latin and vernacular renditions, from the twelfth century to the fifteenth. For further discussion of this text, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>502</sup> See also the iconography of the hellmouth, which depicts the entrance to hell as the gaping, fiery maw of a monstrous demon (Schmidt, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century*).

<sup>503</sup> Picard and de Pontfarcy, ed. and transl., *The Vision of Tnugdál* 120.

The Mandeville-narrator's use of the iconography of the afterlife recalls that of other poets surveyed in this study, who use the iconography of the afterlife to heighten the supernatural aura of marvelous landscapes. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *Orfeo*-poet's depiction of the Faerie realm draws, in form and image, on the afterlife motif of the suspended and immersed sinners in the regions of punishment. In so doing, the Orfeo-poet exploits the horrific traditional resonances of the motif in a counter-traditional setting, evoking hell amidst the near-paradisaal Faerie kingdom. This counter-traditional use of an afterlife motif signals the disturbing distance of the Faerie realm from human mortality and human immortality alike. By contrast, the *Beowulf*-poet's depiction of the monster mere uses the iconography of the afterlife and its resonances in a more traditional way, summoning a glimpse of hell in a setting already monstrous and fearful. As summarized in Chapter 4, the *Beowulf*-poet's depiction of the monster mere has been famously linked to both Christian and classical representations of the underworld. These Avernian echoes distance the monster mere from the human world and heighten its otherworldly aura of danger and dread. In Sir Orfeo, in *Beowulf*, and in Mandeville, the iconography of the afterlife, with its supernaturally fearful associations developed within the vision tradition, brings a cargo of numinous danger into the earthly locales that mimic it.

In Mandeville's Vale Perilous, the effect of the other world's iconography is amplified through other ways in which the Mandeville-author expands his source. As Moseley and Higgins both note, the Mandeville-author takes over the abundant corpses that Odoric perceives in the Valley. Even Odoric surrounds this aspect of the landscape with the language of wonder, with superlatives and incredulity: "je vi tant de cors d'ommes mors illuc que se aucun ne les eust veus, il fust estre veu aussi comme chose incredible" ("I saw so many bodies of dead men there that no one who had not seen them would have seen them as anything but unbelievable,"

XXXVII.82-3). Mandeville dwells on the riches and abundance of these bodies, but most of all on the doubtful nature of the sight:

And we went þur3 þe valey and we sau3 many meruelous þingis, gold siluer and precious stoonus, iewels grete plente on euery side as vs þou3t. And whider it were as it semyd I wote nou3t for Y touchid hem not, for deuelis beþ so [sotel and] queynte þat many tymes þei makip þingis to seme þat þei beþ no3t for to bigile men. And þerfore Y wolde touche noone for drede of deuels whiche Y sau3 in many likenes, what of deede bodyes þat Y sau3 in þat valey; but Y dar not seie þat þei were alle deede bodies, but þei semyd bodies, and many of hem semyd in cloþing of cristen men, and þei semid so many as ii. [grete] kynges hadde fou3te þer and þer men hadde be slawe (p. 121, ll. 19-29).

The narrator's anxiety about illusion is evident in the passage: the suggestion of demonic guile; the narrator's expressions of fear and doubt ("as vs þou3t," "I wote nou3t," "Y wolde touche noone for drede of deuels," "Y dar not seie"); most of all, the five occurrences of "semyd" and its cognates, especially in the parallel clauses of the last sentence.<sup>504</sup> As noted earlier, doubt and unknowing are rhetorical markers of the marvelous.<sup>505</sup> The Mandeville-narrator's repeated expressions of uncertainty and dread heighten the impression that the Valley is a different reality, where the literal truth of the world, perceived through the senses, may be a result of diabolical deceit.

Through this narratorial attitude of unknowing and dread and through the imported iconography of the afterlife, the Mandeville-author overlays the earthly landscape of the Valley with the eschatological landscapes of the other world, of Hell and Purgatory. This double nature of the Valley lends further symbolic resonance to its geographical relationship with the inaccessible Earthly Paradise. The Valley lies, as the Mandeville observes, "a litel fro þat place"

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<sup>504</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 211.

<sup>505</sup> See also Michelet, "Reading and Writing the East in 'Mandeville's Travels'" 298-9. Michelet analyzes how mystery and unknowing fuel the Valley's wonder and horror: "[t]he narrator acknowledges here his inability to make sense of what he sees: his reading skills fail him when he tries to apprehend 'otherness.' In the 'Travels,' alterity, when not assimilated, remains forever beyond comprehension [...]" (299)

(the garden of Catolonabes) and “on the left side nere toward þe ryuer of Physon” (p. 120, l. 13), one of the four rivers that flow from Paradise. In visions of the afterlife, too, a body of water—though an infernal one—lies between the regions of punishment and the Paradise of the blessed. Having passed through the regions of punishment, visionaries are permitted to cross the water and are vouchsafed a glimpse of Paradise.<sup>506</sup> To the Mandeville-pilgrim, the rivers of Paradise remain impassable. But the Perilous Valley with its echoes of hell emphasizes the eschatological aspects of Paradise itself. Through iconographical echoes and motifs borrowed from the vision tradition, the Mandeville-author draws the other world and the earthly world together at two points, the infernal and the paradisal. One of these points is all too accessible to living travelers: the pilgrim and his travelling companions have no trouble entering the Valley; the difficult part is emerging alive—and indeed, the Mandeville-narrator sounds a chilling note as he observes that fourteen travelers enter the Valley but only ten emerge, and “we wist not whider oure felawis were ylost þeire or þei were turned a3en, but we sau3 hem no more” (121.14-6). By contrast, Paradise, also a place of danger, is inaccessible to living travelers. Even the intrepid Mandeville-pilgrim confesses regretfully that “[o]f paradys can Y not speke properly for Y haue no3t ybe þare, and þat angryþ me” (p. 130, ll. 23-4). His account of the Earthly Paradise is not about the place itself, but about the boundaries that surround it.

As I briefly noted earlier, the boundaries of the Earthly Paradise sustain the spatial indeterminacy so characteristic of dangerous otherworldly places. The four rivers that flow from Paradise at once enforce its separation from the mortal world and blur it: on the one hand, the rivers render Paradise inaccessible to living travellers, yet on the other hand, they also connect Paradise to the geography of the post-lapsarian world. The otherworldly nature of the Earthly

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<sup>506</sup> Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* 33-7.

Paradise is emphasized by its spatial indeterminacy, its fluid boundaries and the declarations of unknowing that surround it. As noted in Chapter 2 and 3 of this dissertation, spatial indeterminacy is a property of marvelous spaces in Old and Middle English narratives alike; marvelous spaces are often mysterious, fluid in their boundaries, unreachable or unknowable. Declarations of unknowing—gnomic statements that the location, the borders, or the properties of marvelous landscapes are beyond human ken—appear both in Old and Middle English. In Old English, the declarations of unknowing occur chiefly in homilies, in connection with the divine or the demonic; but the *Beowulf*-poet and the translator of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* draw on the numinous resonance of these declarations of unknowing to describe monstrous creatures and monstrous spaces. In Middle English, the declarations of unknowing and the spatial indeterminacy of marvelous spaces appear in travel narratives, in lays, and in romances. Indeed, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, spatial indeterminacy is not just a strategy for the poet, but also a strategy for the characters of the romance: the Green Knight and his accomplices use the trope of spatial indeterminacy, complete with declarations of unknowing, in order to enhance the wonder effect that surrounds the Green Knight.

Unlike the mysterious landscapes of romance, the Earthly Paradise has a clear place on medieval world maps: bounded by its four rivers, situated in the world's uttermost East. However, in Mandeville's account, the wonder of the Earthly Paradise is expressed through the trope of spatial indeterminacy: Paradise is unknowable, fluid in its boundaries, unreachable by ordinary mortals. The Mandeville-narrator begins his account of Paradise with a personal declaration of unknowing: he confesses that he "can ... not speke properly" of Paradise because he does not have direct experience of it. Instead, he draws on the knowledge of "wise men." At first glance this is unlike other declarations of unknowing, which disclaim knowledge for

humankind at large. Yet what Mandeville reports of the knowledge of others is almost a declaration of unknowing in itself: the fund of human knowledge about Paradise amounts to an awareness of its physical and epistemological inaccessibility. In every geographical way imaginable, Paradise is situated *beyond*. Paradise lies beyond human civilization (“[b]i3onde þe yles and þe lond of Prestre Ioon and his lordesshippe of wildernesse,” p. 130, l. 12-13); beyond ordinary time (it is surrounded by a “derk lond whare no man may se þe day noþer þe ni3t, as men of þe cuntre seiþ,” p. 130, l. 14-15); beyond the reach of post-lapsarian biblical history (“for hit ys so hi3e þat Noes flood mi3t come not þerto, whiche keuered al þe erþe aboute hit,” p. 130, ll. 26-7); and almost beyond the mortal, sublunary world (“hit is so hi3e þat hit touchiþ nere to þe cercle of þe moone,” p. 130, ll. 26-7).

The rhetorical structure of the description of Paradise mimics this inaccessibility. “Mandeville” maps Paradise entirely in terms of “landmarks” that it transcends. He never describes what is inside it; instead he describes the multitude of its barriers, be these animal, aquatic, geological, topographical, or architectural. At the beginning of his account, as noted above, Mandeville situates Paradise firmly beyond human reach. Here is the description of Paradise in full:

Bi3onde þe yles and þe lond of þrestre Ioon [and his lordesshippe of wildernesse] to go ri3t eest, men schal not fynde but hilles and grete rochis and þe derk lond whare no man may se þe day noþer þe ni3t, as men of þe cuntre seiþ. And [þis wildernese and] þat derk lond lastiþ to paradys terrestre... Men seiþ þat paradys terrestre hit is þe hi3est lond of þe world, and hit is so hi3e þat hit touchiþ nere to þe cercle of þe moone, for hit ys so hi3e þat Noes flood mi3t come not þerto, whiche keuered al þe erþe aboute hit. And paradyse is enclosed al aboute hit wiþ a wal. Men woot not wharof þe wal is. And þe wal is al keuered wiþ moss [as hyt semeþ] þat men may yse noon stoon noþer nor ellis wharof hit is. (p. 130, ll. 12-31)

The wall is a particularly effective symbol of the inaccessibility of Paradise: it is impenetrable not just physically, but also visually and epistemologically, for it is itself enclosed in moss, and its material remains entirely mysterious. This inaccessibility of Paradise receives further emphasis at the end of the episode:

And 3e schal wel vndirston|de þat no man lyuynge may go to þat paradys,  
for by londe may no man go for wilde beestis whiche beþ in þe  
wildernesse and for hullis and roches whiche no man may pase. And by  
þese ryueris may no man passe for þei comeþ wiþ so grete cours and so  
grete wawis þat no schip may go noþer saile a3ends hem. (p. 131, ll. 22-  
6)

The Mandeville-author repeats formulaic declarations of inaccessibility no fewer than five times in the same passage: “no man lyuynge may go to þat paradys [...] by londe may no man go for wilde beestis whiche beþ in þe wildernesse and for hullis and roches whiche no man may pase. And by þese ryueris may no man passe for [...] no schip may go noþer saile a3ends hem.” The initial, general declaration of inaccessibility (no man... may go) is followed by two more specific declarations: one that denies access by land, the other that denies access by water. Their syntax is symmetrical and chiasmic. A declaration of inaccessibility in which the helping verb precedes the subject asserts the impossibility of a route (by londe may no man go/ by þese ryueris may no man passe). It is supported by yet another declaration of inaccessibility, in which the subject precedes the helping verb, and which describes the nature of the insurmountable obstacle (for wilde beestis ... and for hullis and roches whiche no man may pase / for [...] no schip may go noþer saile a3ends hem).

The formulaic declarations of inaccessibility resemble the declarations of unknowing that characterize marvelous spaces in other works. Just as the *Beowulf*-poet asserts that “men ne

cunnon” (people do not know) the ancestry of the monsters or their habitat, just as the Orfeo-poet asserts that “men wist never where” (people never knew where) the Faeries and their captives have gone, and just as the Gawain-poet asserts, of the Green Knight, that “to quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,/Neuer more þen þay wyste fram queþen he wat<sup>3</sup> wonnen” (“what native land he got to, no one there knew, any more than they knew from where he had come,” ll. 457-62), so the Mandeville-narrator asserts that Paradise is unreachable and unknowable by the generality of humankind.<sup>507</sup> The Mandeville-narrator does not resort to these formulas of unknowing. However, the insistence on inaccessibility becomes a formula of its own; the repetitive, structured syntax underscores the inevitability, the inexorable nature of the barriers to Paradise. The Mandeville-narrator does not deploy the formulaic declarations of unknowing that create spatial indeterminacy in other works, but his enumeration of the barriers to Paradise and his insistence on its unreachable nature invoke the same trope of spatial indeterminacy that characterizes marvelous spaces in Old and Middle English.

Mandeville’s enumerations of barriers frame the account of Paradise, so that the barriers enclose Paradise textually as they do geographically. As Higgins notes, the account of Paradise is “framed by two paragraphs that emphasize Paradise’s apartness.”<sup>508</sup> Between them, appropriately, is the Mandeville-author’s description of what he calls “þe myddel of hit,” namely the four rivers that issue forth from Paradise.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation for further discussion of these declarations of unknowing.

<sup>508</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 204.

<sup>509</sup> Higgins agrees with Christiane Deluz that the description of the Earthly Paradise’s interior is so spare because “the internal features of the traditional Edenic *locus amoenus* hav[e] already been described in the false Paradise” (Higgins, *Writing East* 204; Deluz, *Le livre de Jehan de Mandeville* 184). The sparseness of detail can also be explained by the Mandeville-author’s deliberate and insistent construction of Paradise as a mysterious and inaccessible place.

These rivers are the one thing that escapes the enclosure of Paradise, both as a geographical feature and as a piece of information. Though Paradise itself is remote and inaccessible, the four rivers themselves traverse the earth and are the origin of all fresh water in the world:

And in þe hi3est place of paradys, in þe myddel of hit, is a welle þat castiþ out iiij. flodis and renneþ þur3 dyuerse londys... And men seiþ þere þat alle þe [swete and] freisch wattris of þe world takiþ here springyng of hem. (p. 131, ll. 1-10)

The rivers' courses recapitulate the geography of the world. As Higgins observes, "the course of each [is] traced well into the world, so that the entire East is shown in its geographical connection with the source of Christian History."<sup>510</sup> Indeed, as Akbari notes, the rivers of Paradise fill the world with the beautiful and the sacred:

Eden is, in Mandeville's Book, the source one must look to in order to find a new sacred place to restore the vitality of a Jerusalem ravaged by time. [...] Only the Earthly Paradise stands outside time, its bounty endlessly renewed as its four rivers flow outward into the world bearing [precious stones, gold, and lignum aloes]. These jewels are relics whose beauty is not accidental but essential, because their source is divine.<sup>511</sup>

Yet at the same time the rivers replenish the world with water and with wonder, they serve as yet another implacable barrier, for their currents and waves are so strong that those who attempt to sail them come to bad ends:

Many grete lordys haueþ assayed many tymes to go by þese ryueris to paradys but þei mowe not spede in here way, for somme deied forwery of rowyng, somme wexed blynde, somme deef for noyse of þe wattris, so þat no man may passe þare but þur3 special grace of God. (p. 131, ll. 27-31)

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<sup>510</sup>Higgins, *Writing East* 204.

<sup>511</sup>Akbari, *Idols in the East*.

The anaphora (“somme...somme...somme”) shows the temporal power of the “many grete lordys” falling apart into wretched fragments; the enumeration of their disastrous fates leads inescapably into the narrator’s reiterated assertion that “no man may passe þare but þur3 special grace of God.” Paradise’s fluid boundaries may link it to the world, yet it remains emphatically remote, mysterious, inaccessible.

The spatial indeterminacy that surrounds the Earthly Paradise emphasizes its otherworldliness, its radical difference from the world that surrounds it. This radical difference is not only distance but loss, a sense of exile that haunts the entire landscape of the East. In his brief and indirect account of the Earthly Paradise, the Mandeville-narrator insists on this loss repeatedly: first with respect to the first human beings, who “were þere but a litel while” (p. 130, l. 17); then with respect to himself, who has “no3t ybe þare”; then, four times, with respect to humanity in general, in the declarations of Paradise’s inaccessibility mentioned above.

The loss of Paradise haunts the entire landscape of the imagined distant East. Paradise is a constant yet emphatically incomplete presence: the Mandeville-author evokes it through physical relics and remains, customs and legends, even fragmentary reflections and pseudo-Paradises. All these sustain the sense of loss that surrounds it, emphasizing Paradise’s nature as both true home and place of exile.

Physical relics and fragments of Paradise are scattered through the landscape of the East, borne along by the four rivers that connect Paradise to the world even as they bar all living men from Paradise. The rivers of Paradise, origin of all fresh water in the world, carry treasures from their source: gold, precious stones, *lignum aloes*. Yet their very beauty is a poignant reminder of loss, for they are mere crumbs and fragments of a once unbroken state of primeval bliss. Other waters, of less august an origin, are likewise reminders of Paradise and its loss. East of

Jerusalem, amid an archipelago of islands, Mandeville describes a dangerous lake in the island of Sylha. The land itself is a hostile landscape, full of places deserted by people because of an overabundance of “naddris and dragouns and cocadrilles.”<sup>512</sup> On a plateau at the top of a hill there is a lake formed by Adam and Eve, who “wepte upon þat hulle an hundrid 3ere aftir þat þey were put out of paradys, and [people say] þat watir is here teeris.” The size of the lake and the century of mourning, set amidst a hostile landscape that is the opposite of the lost Paradise, emphasize the magnitude of Adam and Eve’s loss and embody this loss in a topographical feature.

Just as the waters of Paradise and their distributaries traverse the physical landscape of the text, so narrative reminders of Paradise are scattered across Mandeville’s account. Perhaps the most poignant of these inset narratives is that of Adam’s death. It occurs quite early in the text, in the description of the Cross; the Mandeville-narrator claims that it is part of the Greek Scriptures:

A[ll]s Grecis and cristen men þat dwelliþ ouer þe see seye [þat] þe tree of þe croys þat we clepe cipresse was of | þe tree þat Adam eet þe appul, and so þei fynde ywrite. And þei seye also þat here scripture seiþ þat Adam was seeke and seyde to his sone Seth þat he schulde go to paradys and preie þe aungel þat kep iþ paradys þat he wolde sende hym of þe tree of mercy oyle for to anoynte [wiþ] his membris, þat he mi3t haue hele. And Seth wente, but þe aungel wolde not lete hym yn but seyde to hym þat he mi3t not haue of þe oile of mercy. But he toke to hym foure graynes of þat same tree þat his fader eet of þe appul, and bade hym, also soone as his fadir were deed, þat he schulde putte þilke graynes undir hys tunge and bury hym so. [And he did so.] And of þilke foure graynes sprang trees, as þe aungel seyde, þat schulde bere a fruyt þur3 which fruyt Adam schulde be saued. And whanne Seth come a3en he fond his fader ni3 deed, and he dide wiþ þe graynes as þe aungel bade him; of whiche [sprang iiij. treys of whilk] a croys was made þat bare good fruyt, Ihesu Crist, þur3 which Adam and al þat come of hym were ysaue and delyuered fro deep withouten ende, but it be here owne defaute (p. 8, ll. 16-30).

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<sup>512</sup> Mandeville, *Mandeville’s Travels: the Defective Version*, chapter 15, pp. 87-8.

The episode is a poignant representation of loss. The angel's refusal confirms that Adam's exile from Paradise is irremediable: Adam cannot return to his former home, cannot even receive the oil of mercy that is a part of it, but must suffer physical death, the final fulfillment of his Fall. That Seth reaches Paradise might be seen as a mitigation of that loss; indeed, Iain Higgins notes that Seth's journey to the Earthly Paradise is successful, unlike the disastrous journeys that the Mandeville-narrator mentions later in the text.<sup>513</sup> But this is a very qualified success. Seth's journey ends not in Paradise itself, but at the gate, for the angel will not let him in. Moreover, Adam's failure is more vivid and poignant than Seth's success. From his deathbed, he reaches for the "hele" of Paradise--"hele," a word loaded with both physical and spiritual significance, encompassing both the meaning of "healing" in the physical sense and of "salvation" in the spiritual sense.<sup>514</sup> The banished Adam asks for the "oil of mercy" that foreshadows the sacrament of extreme unction: what would be at once physical and spiritual restoration to his former state. But the banishment holds; the final consequence of Adam's sin, which is physical death, must at last overtake him. The way back into Paradise, both for him and for his descendants, is through that "good fruyt, Ihesu Crist, þur3 which Adam and al þat come of hym were ysaued and delyuered fro deep withouten ende."

The story establishes, as Iain Macleod Higgins notes, an organic connection between the two geographical and theological "poles" of Mandeville's itinerary, Jerusalem and the Earthly Paradise. The traditional typological connection between the Old Adam and the New is represented through a biological connection between the Tree that occasioned the fall of humankind and the Tree that occasioned its redemption. Thus the brief legend encompasses all

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<sup>513</sup> Higgins, *Writing East* 78-9.

<sup>514</sup> The Middle English Dictionary defines "hele" as physical health and healing (sense 1.a, 1.c) as well as spiritual health and salvation (sense 3.a and 3.c).

of salvation history, from the fall of humankind, to its redemption, to a foreshadowing (in that last word, “defaute”) of its future judgment. These typological resonances turn the brief legend into a telescoped version of salvation history. As a telescoped version of salvation history, the legend is not just a poignant account of Adam’s loss and Adam’s death; instead, it is a reminder that the exile from Paradise is at the root of human history, and that for Adam as for humankind at large, there is no this-worldly homecoming, no return to Paradise without Christ’s costly grace and a passage through death. Attempts to force such a return, to recover Paradise through this-worldly power, lead only to catastrophic ends. This is most obvious in the fates of those imprudent voyagers, “grete lordys” all, who try to sail the four rivers back to Paradise. The recovery of Paradise—in this world, by this-worldly means, and for the furtherance of a this-worldly agenda—is also the motivation at the heart of Catolonabes’ garden, the counterfeit Paradise. This enterprise, too, comes to a catastrophic end, demonstrating that Paradise, however desirable, is lost and unreachable in this world.

For his narrative of Catolonabes, the Mandeville-author draws once again on the account of Odoric of Pordenone. Both Odoric and the Mandeville-author narrate how Catolonabes builds a delightful enclosed garden, calls it Paradise, and uses it to lure young men to serve him as assassins. But while Odoric’s account focuses on the political machinations of Catolonabes and his adversaries, the Mandeville-author’s account focuses on the place itself, the delights and deceptive metaphysics of the false Paradise. Odoric’s account of the place itself is spare and repetitive; he conveys the attractiveness of this “Paradise” through a grocery list of its contents and a pile-up of superlatives:

En ceste contree est .i. homme qui estoit appelé Antien de la Montaigne, qui avoit fait .i. mur entre .ij. montaignes qui avironnent ceste montagne. Et dedenz cestui mur [...] il estoient les plus beles fontaines que l’en peust

trouber. Et en ces fontaines estoient mises les plus beles damoiseles vierges que l'en peust trouber. Et les plus biaux chevaus et toute cele chose qui pour aucune delectacion peust estre trouvee pour cors humain. Et pour ce appeloit il cel lieu "Paradis" (p. 79, ll. 6-10).

In that country there was a man who was called the Old Man of the Mountain, who had made a wall between two mountains that surrounded that mountain. And within this wall [...] there were the most beautiful fountains which could be found. And among those fountains were placed the most beautiful virgin damsels which could be found, and the most beautiful horses and every one of those things in which any delight is found by a human body. And because of this he called that place "Paradise."

Mandeville amplifies this account, adding evocative sensory detail that appeals to taste, smell, hearing, and most of all sight: trees and their fruit, herbs and their scents, chambers with wall-paintings, mechanical song-birds, youths and maidens dressed in cloth of gold and masquerading as angels, fountains decorated with gems and running with wine, milk, and honey. His is a far more detailed and vivid "Paradise," one that appeals to sight, smell, and taste, one that holds wonders of human artifice and sources of sensual pleasure:

In þat lond was a riche man [noght long sethyn] whiche was yclepid Catolonabes. He was ful riche and he hadde a fayre castel vpon an hille and a strong. And he hadde let make a wal aboute it ri3t strong, and withynne þe castel he hadde a fayre gardyn whare were many trees bering dyuerse fruytes þat he might fynde. And he lete plaunte þerynne al maner of herbes of good smel and hit bare feire flouris. And þer were many feire wellis [and by þeyme was made many faire halles and chambers] arrayed wiþ gold and azure, and he hadde ymade þer dyuerse stories and beestis and briddes þat songe and turned by engyn as orlagis as þei hadde be [alle] quyke. And he hadde in þat gardyn alle maner of briddis and bestys as þat mi3t fynde to make a man solace and disport.

And he hadde in his gardyn also maydouns wiþynne elde of xv. 3ere, þe fairest þat he mi3t fynde, and knaue children of þe same elde. And þei were alle cloþed in cloþis of gold, and he seide þat þese were aungels. And he hadde ymade iii. wellis faire and goode, al enclosed aboute wiþ precious stones of iasper and crestal and wel ybounde wiþ gold and perlys and oþer maner of stones. And he hadde made a condyt vnder þe erþe so þat whan he wolde one of þese wellis ronне of wyne, anoþer melk, anoþer hony. And þis place he clepid paradys. (pp. 118-119, ll. 22-28, 1-13).

The ornaments and wonders that the Mandeville-author lavishes on the false Paradise are at once wistful and suspicious. As a *locus amoenus*, a place that combines the beauties of nature and the splendours of art, it recalls visionary depictions of Paradise itself, which is described both as a beautiful green landscape and as a magnificent city in which gold and jewels are mere building materials.<sup>515</sup> However, as a human creation, Catolonabes' false Paradise is suspicious for its very artfulness and beauty. In and of itself, marvelous artifice evokes both wonder and unease in medieval texts.<sup>516</sup> Moreover, in the courtly romance tradition—one of the genres with which medieval readers aligned *The Book of John Mandeville*<sup>517</sup>—such artificial places of delight are also places of moral duplicity and danger. As Seth Lerer notes, referring to places of artifice in Old French and Middle English romance,

while [such places] may look like the landmarks of a *locus amoenus*, they signal the application of human craft to disguise potential danger. [...] [They are] world[s] of illusion, whose technical tricks and decorative richness fail to conceal the moral vacuity of [their] inhabitants.<sup>518</sup>

One artificial *locus amoenus* with which Catolonabes' garden may be productively compared is the Faerie realm of Sir Orfeo. The Faerie castle recalls the traditional iconography of the Earthly Paradise: an abundance of more than natural light; splendid and elaborate architecture; the profusion of gems and precious metals as building materials.<sup>519</sup> However, the resemblance to Paradise ends at the Faerie castle's outer wall, for its human captives are nothing

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<sup>515</sup> On Paradise-imagery being both natural and architectural, see Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday* 141-166. On Paradise's jeweled architecture, see Longworth, "'Sir Orfeo, The Minstrel, and the Minstrel's Art'" 9-10; Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," 94-102; D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's Kunstkammer" 12.

<sup>516</sup> See the discussion of automata in Chapter 3.

<sup>517</sup> Josephine Waters Bennett refers to the Mandeville narrative as a "travel romance"; Mary B. Campbell, arguing that Mandeville was "writing realistic prose fiction—for the first time since Petronius," adamantly disagrees (Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World* 122). However, Rosemary Tzanakis sets aside issues of authorial intention and looks at Mandeville's reception in the Middle Ages; she argues, on grounds of genre and manuscript association, that considerable portions of the narrative were widely read and enjoyed as romances (*Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*, 135-181).

<sup>518</sup> Lerer, "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," 101-2; Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* 105-38.

<sup>519</sup> Lerer, "Artistry and Artifice in *Sir Orfeo*" 99-102; D'Arcy, "The Faerie King's Kunstkammer" 12-13.

like the blessed souls: they are the grim gallery of the abducted, the mutilated, the mad, the seeming-dead, the people stolen away in their sleep. The anaphoric catalogue of these stolen people resembles, as argued earlier, visionary depictions of hell or purgatory.

Once Faerie's splendour is undermined by this grisly sight, disquieting nuances emerge even from the initial vision. The initial vision of Faerie is emphatically artificial, its vocabulary dense with the technical vocabulary of "the plastic and decorative arts."<sup>520</sup> Even Faerie's perpetual light is artificial:

Al that lond was ever light,  
For when it schuld be perk and night,  
The riche stones light gonne  
As bright as doth at none the sonne (ll. 369-72)

Shepherd argues that the perpetual light implies "that time in this place is—like those abducted into it—arrested in a perpetual noon."<sup>521</sup> However, the perpetual light shows not quite an exemption from time—for night still comes—but a circumvention of time; it is as incomplete an approximation of eternity as the castle is an incomplete approximation of Paradise. Falling so short of Paradise's bliss, at least for its human inhabitants, Faerie and its splendour become sinister, suggestive of deliberate deception. The shadow of Paradise, falling on this marvelous space, reveals "the hollowness of fairy artifice."<sup>522</sup> In *Sir Orfeo*, the parallels between Faerie and the Earthly Paradise indicate not only the marvelous nature of the Faerie realm, but also its moral distance from Paradise. That distance gains its emotional weight not from the sense of exile, as is the case in the Old English poems, but from the sense of illusion and deceit; Faerie is not primarily a prison or a place of exile, but a counterfeit. As Anne D'Arcy observes, the emphatic

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<sup>520</sup> Lerer, "Artistry and Artifice" 102.

<sup>521</sup> Shepherd, "Sir Orfeo" 184, n. 2.

<sup>522</sup> Lerer, "Artistry and Artifice" 104.

artificiality of the Faerie realm shows Faerie up as “a painted simulacrum of paradise designed to deceive by ornament.”<sup>523</sup>

Deceptive intent is a suspicion in *Sir Orfeo*’s Faerie realm; it is a certainty in Mandeville’s garden of Catolonabes. The Old Man of the Mountain has a sinister agenda in whose service he creates the artificial *locus amoenus*, the false Paradise of his garden. The Mandeville-narrator plays up both the artifice and the delight. The emphasis on the garden’s beauty in no way detracts from its sinister purpose; on the contrary, in light of the romance tradition, the vivid beauty and the ingenious artifice in the description of Catolonabes’ garden are not just markers of delight, but instruments of seduction. The seduction is not just erotic in nature, though sex is one of the delights offered in Catolonabes’ garden; it is a metaphysical seduction, a deception that makes its victims accept the false Paradise instead of the true.

This deception takes significantly different shapes in Odoric and in Mandeville. In Odoric, the creator of the false Paradise has a complicated plan for winning over assassins: a drug-fuelled parody of the Fall of Man. He causes young men of worth to be put into this “Paradise.” When he needs someone murdered, he looks for a young man particularly fond of his habitation. He then drugs this young man and removes him from “Paradise.” When the young man wakes up, the Old Man of the Mountain promises to restore him “en celui paradis ou il [the young man] estoit premierement” (to that paradise where he was at first) if he attempts the assassination (p. 80, l. 20-1).

Mandeville’s Catolonabes has a simpler routine and a stronger promise. He invites young men to a tour of his “Paradise,” drugs them to enhance the experience, and promises them

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<sup>523</sup> D’Arcy, “The Faerie King’s Kunstkammer” 12.

Paradise if they serve him. He promises quite explicitly that “þat was paradys þat God grauntid to þese þat he loued” (p. 119, ll. 19-20), and that “if þey wolde deiþe as for his sake, when þey were deede þey schulde come into his paradys, [...] and he schulde putte hem in a fairer paradys whare þei schulde se God in his ioiþe and his maieste” (p. 119, ll. 24-29). In short, Catolonabes does not just offer them the physical pleasures of his garden; he simultaneously demands their absolute loyalty and claims to offer them the supernatural bliss of the Beatific Vision.<sup>524</sup> In essence, he lays claim to a spurious sort of divinity. The young men’s brief experience of Catolonabes’s Paradise and the stronger claim that Catolonabes makes about its metaphysical status place the focus more starkly on their choice: will they accept that this is Paradise? Those who become Catolonabes’s victims (and assassins) take his paradise at face value, accepting its material beauty as proof of its spiritual nature. But the spuriousness of the false Paradise is soon revealed. It is open to living mortals, whereas the true Paradise is out of reach; it is vulnerable to the ravages of time and war, whereas the true Paradise is remote and inaccessible. Mandeville’s account concludes with the destruction of the false Paradise by Catolonabes’ adversaries:

And whenne lordis of þe cuntre and riche men perceyued þis malice and þe [cautele] of hym þis Catolonabes, þei gedrid hem togedir and asayed þis castel and slow hym and destruyd al his richesse and faire [places] þat were in his paradys. Þe place of þe wellis is 3it þare and somme oþer þingis but no richesse [and it is noght longe sethen he was destroyed] (p. 120, ll. 7-12).

For the master of the garden as for his deluded servants, the false promise of paradisaal bliss ends in death and ruin. The seductive beauty of this “malignant bower of bliss” is, retrospectively, an elegiac reminder of the lost wonders of the true Paradise; its falsehood is a measure of its distance from the truth; and by the end of Mandeville’s account, even this false reflection, even this counterfeit Paradise, is gone, inaccessible. Like the marvelous relics that flow from the true

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<sup>524</sup> See also Higgins, *Writing East* 197-8.

Paradise, like the stories scattered across the landscape of the East, the seductive, malignant counterfeit recalls the true Paradise only to emphasize its loss.

In Mandeville, the Earthly Paradise epitomizes dangerous otherworldly spaces, exhibiting all the literary tropes of displacement that set such spaces aside from the mundane world. Paradise, the true home, is an insistent reminder of humankind's fundamental homelessness. This contrast between the lost paradisaal homeland and the exilic state of earthly life is as pervasive in the medieval tradition as in its biblical and classical antecedents. Brian Stock traces the topos of the journey back to a lost Paradise through several traditions in Late Antiquity that converge on "the themes of exodus, exile, and alienation."<sup>525</sup> In biblical narrative, this thematic complex takes root in the book of Exodus, which narrates the Israelites' journey from their slavery in Egypt towards the homeland promised them by God. The ramifications of this journey spread throughout biblical thought. In the Old Testament, "[t]he journey of the people of God across the desert of Sinai becomes a real and symbolic search for the lost paradise."<sup>526</sup> Both Rabbinic and New Testament writings draw a typological connection between the exodus from Egypt and human salvation, while the Church fathers, in their turn, read the story of Exodus typologically, as a prefiguration of Christ, and anagogically, as the human soul's return to God. Greek and Roman philosophers also describe the search for Truth as a return home. In his *Republic*, Plato uses the topos of a journey, a flight upwards, to imagine the soul's philosophical progress towards divine Truth, the soul's origin and native land; Plotinus follows in his footsteps. Finally, Virgil's *Aeneid* is driven by the same dynamic—a journey that begins in exile, in homelessness, and has as its goal a true and lasting home, at once ancestral and newly

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<sup>525</sup> Stock, "Exodus and Exile." 1.

<sup>526</sup> Stock, "Exodus and Exile." 10-11.

discovered. Towards the end of the fourth century AD, Augustine of Hippo synthesizes these traditions in his *exemplum* of human beings as “wanderers in a strange country [who] could not live happily away from our fatherland,” and who must live their lives as a journey out of exile and towards home.<sup>527</sup> Brian Stock observes that the “combined notion of exodus and exile” which Augustine consolidates

is an example within European literary tradition of what Fernand Braudel calls *la longue durée*: a form of expression whose stylistic details change over time, as the notion is rethought in such different intellectual environments as those of Dante, Petrarch, Ficino, Thomas More, and Milton, but whose abstract configuration remains essentially unchanged.<sup>528</sup>

This is as true of medieval English narratives of otherworldly places as it is of the wider European tradition. By their very nature, otherworldly places belong to this archetypal narrative pattern of the journey out of exile towards the true home. Displacement is their very core: their literary motifs travel across genre boundaries; their borders and their locations are spatially indeterminate, mysterious, shifting, or unreliable; and they are defined as places of exile from the home worlds of their texts. In Old English, this situates the dangerous otherworldly places in an adversarial, hostile relationship to home. They are places of suffering, dangers to be avoided, obstacles to be overcome, at best wildernesses or monstrous spaces to be radically transformed through the actions of saints and heroes. The use of poetic formulas in Old English poetry encourages the migration of themes and motifs from one genre to another, in such a way that certain traditional motifs, themes, and narrative patterns carry along their own traditional resonances, “summoning to any given narrative present in which [they] occur a whole network

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<sup>527</sup> See also Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World* 1-11, for a discussion of travel as a fundamental, archetypal trope at the heart of literary endeavour.

<sup>528</sup> Stock, “Exodus and Exile” 4.

of interlaced and interdependent meaning(s).”<sup>529</sup> As a result, the poetics of marvelous spaces has an identifiable corpus of recurring motifs, including the iconographical (such as the catalogues of immersed and suspended sinners in the afterlife), the verbal (such as the declarations of unknowing that mark out the supernatural), and the thematic (such as the imagery and emotional resonance of exile). These motifs depict the marvelous and fearful across boundaries of subject matter, genre, even metaphysical status.

With the Norman Conquest, the political and linguistic landscape of England changed radically. The poetic landscape changed, too, with the introduction of new traditions, new models, new modes of poetic composition and reception. In contrast to Old English poetry, Derek Pearsall calls Middle English poetry “not the product of a coherent tradition with a systematic style and diction and a standardized language, but a series of fragmentary and imperfect responses to a multitude of European influences, in a language thrown open to the winds of change.”<sup>530</sup> While one might take exception to the designation of “fragmentary and imperfect,” Middle English poetry is certainly more diverse in genre and prosody than Old English poetry. Though some narrative genres abide, such as the visions of the afterlife, even they are influenced by Continental material. For example, Middle English visions of the afterlife belong to the same tradition as the Anglo-Saxon visions, but they draw on Old French renderings of material that originated in the British Isles, and they are strongly influenced by motifs and techniques of the flourishing romance genre.<sup>531</sup> In addition to these literary influences, the cultural landscape, especially with respect to the marvelous, is transformed by the new knowledge and lore about the East carried back to Europe by missionaries, merchants, pilgrims,

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<sup>529</sup> Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition* 156; see also Foley, “How Genres Leak.”

<sup>530</sup> Pearsall, *Middle English Poetry*

<sup>531</sup> Easting, “Middle English Translations of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii*” 167-9.

crusaders, missionaries, and merchants who travel to Jerusalem and beyond.<sup>532</sup> Literary places of wonder and dread undergo their own developments—usually best traced within individual genres, as has been shown earlier in this dissertation—but the essential poetics of fearful wonder abides. Places of wonder and dread remain attractive to boundary-crossing literary motifs, remain spatially indeterminate, remain haunted by a sense of fundamental dislocation. The most significant thematic difference, as seen in the study of Mandeville’s voyage towards Paradise, is that, in Old English, the distance between these places of wonder and the true homeland is manifested through a sense of exile; in Mandeville and in Middle English poems, the distance between places of wonder and the true home is manifested through concerns with authenticity, illusion, and deceit. Yet despite differences of theme, technique, and material, the poetics of marvelous spaces shows remarkable continuities between Old and Middle English.

Some of these continuities appear, and are due to, the development of one sub-tradition of the marvelous. As noted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, visions of the afterlife flourish in Old and Middle English between the seventh century and the fourteenth. These visions develop a rich, wide-spread, and fairly uniform iconography of the “other world,” an iconography that spreads not only through written accounts of visionary experiences but also through orally delivered sermons and through pictorial and sculptural representations of the Last Judgment and the afterlife. The recurring landmarks of this iconography are co-opted, both in Old and Middle English, by poetic texts that depict this-worldly landscapes of wonder and danger. So, for instance, the depiction of the Faerie realm in *Sir Orfeo* draws on the afterlife motif of the suspended and immersed sinners in the regions of punishment. This glimpse of hell amidst the near-paradisaal Faerie kingdom signals the disturbing distance of the Faerie realm from human

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<sup>532</sup> For an overview, see Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World* 1-11.

mortality and human immortality alike. Elsewhere, too, the vision tradition's motifs resurface with a numinous effect. As discussed in Chapter 4, the monster mere of Beowulf has been linked to both Christian and classical representations of the underworld. These Avernian echoes distance the monster mere from the human world and heighten its otherworldly aura of danger and dread. Last, as discussed above, the correspondence between the human world and the world of the afterlife is even more explicit in *The Book of John Mandeville*. The Vale Perilous is a dangerous otherworldly landscape on earth that is said to provide a physical connection to hell itself. Compared to his source, Odoric de Pordenone, the Mandeville-author goes out of his way to furnish the Vale Perilous with the iconography of hell from the vision tradition: the spectacular stormy weather and the demon's flaming head. In so doing, the Mandeville narrator draws what his sources depict as an earthly, albeit marvelous, landscape far closer to the infernal regions, heightening not only its horror and its danger, but its metaphysical alterity. Thus, a variety of dangerous otherworldly landscapes show the migration of motifs, literary and visual, from one specific genre; the *Beowulf*-poet, the Orfeo-poet, and the Mandeville-author all depict dangerous otherworldly landscapes that do not belong to the other world of the Christian afterlife, but that owe some of their horror to their parallels with iconography that is developed and disseminated through the wide-spread, influential vision tradition.

Other continuities in the poetics of marvelous spaces are not bound to a single, specific genre or tradition. This is the case with spatial indeterminacy, a concept delineated in Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation. Spatial indeterminacy is the tendency of places of wonder and danger to be mysterious and map-resistant. Their locations are persistently secret; their topography is shaped for concealment; their boundaries are shifting or fluid. Narrators or characters explicitly describe these places as secret and hidden, difficult or impossible to explore; or else these places

prove elusive to those who search for them in the course of the narrative. In Old English, spatial indeterminacy manifests chiefly through declarations of unknowing, gnomic statements that human beings do not know or cannot know the marvelous, the wonderful, or the supernatural. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, throughout the Old English corpus, declarations of unknowing signal a metaphysical gap: as they proclaim that a certain subject is unknown to the generality of humankind, they suggest that what they declare to be unknown is mysterious not only by chance or cultural shortcoming, but by the very nature of its being. In Old English homilies, declarations of unknowing describe the eschatological—God’s being, God’s blessings, the joys of heaven and the sorrows of hell. In Old English poetry, the usage of these declarations is wider, but still connected to the numinous; in addition to describing the eschatological, declarations of unknowing also signal divine agency in moments of human history or in aspects of the natural world. However, in *Beowulf* and in the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, declarations of unknowing apply to monsters and their habitats. These declarations of unknowing draw on the conventional resonances of the trope and align monsters and their habitats with God, death, and the afterlife, suggesting that the monsters are as far away from normal experience as heaven or hell, and that consequently the emotional response to them ought to fit in the same cultural matrix of wonder, awe, and dread.

Even though there is no evidence that the verbal formulas of the Old English declarations of unknowing are transmitted to Middle English poetry, the property of spatial indeterminacy persists. Chapter 3 of this dissertation examines how in Middle English, declarations of unknowing and episodes that demonstrate the mysterious nature of marvelous spaces appear in a variety of genres, from Breton lais such as *Sir Orfeo* to topographical narratives such as Gerald of Wales’s *Journey through Wales* and such as *The Book of John Mandeville*. So strong is the

association between wonder and spatial indeterminacy that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this motif is deliberately deployed by characters within the poem in order to strengthen the Green Knight's wonder effect and support his magical secret identity. Thus, spatial indeterminacy is an enduring, wide-spread, polymorphous motif in the marvelous landscapes of Early English narrative. Unlike the iconography of the afterlife, spatial indeterminacy is not bound to a single genre or a specific textual tradition; it is, rather, a space-specific manifestation of the medieval association between wonder with mystery. In other words, marvelous spaces are mysterious in their spatial properties—location, boundaries, dimensions—because marvels are mysterious in their nature.<sup>533</sup>

Like the association between wonder and mystery, and like the iconography of the afterlife, the theological topos of earthly life as a journey out of exile towards home underlies thematic continuities between otherworldly landscapes that are not textually related to one another. Chapter 4 of this dissertation argues that, in Old English poetry, places of wonder and danger are places of exile. This is true of a wide variety of landscapes: the monster mere in *Beowulf*; the landscape of hell in *Christ and Satan*; the places where saints go in *Andreas* and the *Guthlac* poems. Especially in the saints' lives, the interplay between normal world and otherworldly landscape, between home and exile, eventually casts the normal world itself as a place of exile in contrast to the heavenly home with God. The otherworldly landscapes, at first in contrast to, and alienated from, the human world, become a way to point out the deeper alienation of the human world from humankind's original home. The conclusion of this

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<sup>533</sup> For the relationship between wonder and mystery see Daston and Parke, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* 21-4, 109-130. Daston and Parke examine how the emotion of wonder is linked to the unfamiliar, the mysterious, and the unexplained; this link between marvel and mystery, praised as first step to learning or to divine contemplation by some writers, and scorned as a manifestation of ignorance by others, is an enduring part of the medieval understanding of wonder.

dissertation recognizes that the theme of exile is not as prevalent in Middle English poetry as it is in Old English; however, the theological topos of earthly life as a state of exile endures. When this topos resurfaces in a text such as *The Book of John Mandeville*, it supports a similar thematic dynamic to the Old English poems: the otherworldly landscape, itself so radically separate from the human world, marks out the human world's separation from the heavenly home.

The migrating iconography of the afterlife, the spatial indeterminacy of marvelous spaces, the theological topos of earthly life as a landscape of exile and alienation: what unites these literary strategies is displacement, be it across genre boundaries, across spatial boundaries, or across theological and emotional boundaries. Paradoxically, not the position of marvelous spaces but their poetics recalls the *mappa mundi* invoked at the beginning of this dissertation. In medieval maps, as noted earlier, marvellous spaces exist in the margins. In the margins, Nature indulges in free play; in the margins, the marvellous and the monstrous exist, in splendid or fearful counterpoint to the normal and normative centre. By contrast, the world of Early English narrative does not present so neat a picture. Marvellous spaces are map-resistant. They are difficult, if not impossible, to find and map; their boundaries are fluid, their location secret or shifting. They are defined through negation and contrast with other places, as the opposite of home or the absence of Paradise. This is the sense in which the position of marvels on medieval world maps is actually a good representation of the position of marvels in medieval narratives. Marvels on the map appear where the map ends; marvelous places in narratives appear where place itself dissolves.

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