2 Imagining the Sea in Secular and Religious Poetry*

Introduction

The sea figures as a major element in several Anglo-Saxon poems across different genres, including the secular epic *Beowulf*, the biblically based *Exodus*, and the saints' lives *Andreas* and *Elene*, as well as the elegiac *Seafarer* and *Wanderer*. In these poems, the sea has often been read as a setting for human or divine actions, reflecting human interests and concerns. Val Plumwood has pointed to the problems that arise from reading 'nature' (i.e. the non-human) as instrumental; such interpretations inscribe and reinforce dualistic conceptions of humans as distinct from nature (142-60). The sea of Anglo-Saxon literary and documentary texts is not simply a static stage for human actions, but a very strong presence, interacting with, influencing, and affecting the human characters. To what extent an Anglo-Saxon auditor might have imagined the sea possessing its own agency is a question worth considering.

Seascape is different from landscape because humans can travel on it, swim or dive through it, consume fish and shellfish and plant life from it, but cannot live in it. Stacy Alaimo points out that 'the open seas have long been considered empty space… the construction of the ocean in industrial capitalism has been that of a "vast void", an "empty transportation surface, beyond the space of social relations"' (Alaimo 2013: 234). But even though the sea is uninhabitable, it was of crucial importance to the Anglo-Saxons, who relied on it for food and transportation. Lawrence Buell's distinctions between 'space' and 'place' are useful for thinking about the landscapes and seascapes of *Beowulf* (2005: 63-71). 'Place' is marked with human habitation, layered with human memories, textured with information about its features and about the humans who have lived in it, and might include homes, graves, and agricultural locations. 'Space,' on the other hand, is abstract, largely unknown, lacking in personal memories, and unmarked by human activity. Wilderness is often envisioned as 'space,' devoid of human habitation, though William Cronon has pointed out that wildernesses are often ideological constructs created by 'discoverers' or other invaders who slaughter the prior inhabitants or define them as sub-human (e.g., 'savages,' 'cannibals') in order to construct a location as uninhabited (1995 passim). The sea may be space: it is more or less uninhabitable for

humans, impervious (at least on the surface) to marking by human activity. Indeed, a ship may create a wake, but the water soon returns to its 'natural' status, with only the surface ruffled by wind and tide, and unplumbed depths hidden below. The same location could be simultaneously space and place, depending on who is seeing or occupying it. The sea, like a lake or marsh, might be considered a 'place' by a person intimately familiar with its geography, its contours and tides as well as the creatures that live in, on, and near it, and able to navigate safely around shoals and through strong currents. For those who have never traveled a particular part of the sea, it would be a 'space,' an abstraction unknown and undefined, and imaginable as distinct from its utility to humans.

Within literary studies of Old English texts, the sea has been seen as a lexical problem, or read either as a setting in which the action takes place or as an allegorical formulation that allows access to religious idea(l)s. Marijane Osborne reads the sea as a setting; Susana Fidalgo Monge investigates the Old English lexicon for 'sea' in *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Seafarer*; Phyllis Portnoy compares verbal and pictorial seas in biblical iconography; and Nicholas Howe (1989) and Ziegelmaier read the sea allegorically. Reading ecocritically interacts with and extends such interpretations, enabling a different view of the ideals, unarticulated assumptions, and preoccupations of Anglo-Saxon literary culture.

Sea Crossings: *Elene*, *Andreas*, *Exodus*

Three very different sea-crossings in Old English poems point to the wide range of literal and figurative interpretive possibilities. Elene and the Roman soldiers who accompany her enjoy an exuberant journey across the sea from Rome to Jerusalem in search of the cross on which Jesus was said to be buried. Andreas and his companions, in contrast, endure terrifying winds and waves on their sea-voyage to Mermedonia, where they are to rescue Matthew. In *Exodus*, conversely, the Israelites walk across the sea floor ahead of Egyptian warriors, who are trapped and killed by the waves crashing back over them. *Beowulf* narrates several sea-voyages as well; these will be considered separately later in the chapter. In all of these poems, including *Beowulf*, the sea functions instrumentally, serving as an index of human concerns, a metaphor for human emotions, and/or an allegorical indicator of human spirituality. In contrast to aspects of the natural word described in the *Exeter Book* riddles in chapters five and six, the sea is solely a stage for human concerns.

Numerous references across the corpus of Old English poetry to ships as 'wægflota' ('wave-floater,' *Andreas*, l. 487, *Beowulf*, l. 1907) 'sæflota' ('sea-floater,' *Andreas*, l. 381) and 'sæhengeste' ('sea-steed,' *Andreas*, l. 488) or 'sæmearh' ('sea-steed,' *Andreas*, l. 267; *Elene*, ll. 228, 245) function to normalize the sea's functionality for human transportation. A similarly utilitarian view of the sea comes across in the terms 'faroðstræt' and 'merestræt' ('sea-street,' *Andreas*, ll. 311, 898; *Elene*, l. 242). These terms conceptualize the sea as unremarkable, a surface for transportation comparable to any street passing through towns and between fields. They ignore the sea's depths and the animals and plants that dwell on or in it when they treat it as useful to humans insofar as it provides a means of transport. But references to the sea as the domain of the animals that live in it complicate this identification: The sea is also 'fisces bæð,' 'seolpæð,' and 'hranrad' ('fishes' bath,' 'seal-path,' and 'whale's road,' *Andreas*, ll. 294, 1714, and 266), as well as 'swanrad' and 'ganotes bæð' ('swan's road' and 'gannet's bath,' *Beowulf*, ll. 200, 1861). Animals living in and on the water could be used for food and skins, but these compounds also suggest that the sea, as 'stræt,' was shared with other creatures, and not simply the domain of humans. The use of 'hwales eðel' ('whale's homeland,' *Andreas*, l. 274) raises the possibility that the Anglo-Saxons recognized that they passed across it and not through it, as visitors rather than inhabitants, and viewed the sea as the rightful domain of whales, and not of humans. The idea that animals, as well as plants and even stones, could claim space in or on the earth and regard humans as enemies competing for it, is explored in detail in chapters five and six, on the *Exeter Book* riddles. The idea that humans shared the ocean with its creatures, and even that whales and other animals were its legitimate inhabitants, gains credence in juxtaposition with the ideas expressed in the *Exeter Book* riddles.

Depictions of the sea in *Beowulf* and *Elene* articulate pleasure in the environment. In *Elene*, the narrator describes the slap of sea on the hull of a ship as an unthreatening event: 'Bord oft onfeng / ofer earhgeblond yða swengas; / sæ swinsade' ('A plank often received, over the waves' surges, the blows of the waves; the sea sang out,' ll. 238b-40a). The sound of waves striking the ship's planks in the passage is an occasion not for fear of the power of the sea to harm, but for confidence in the strength of the ship and delight in traveling over the water. The ship plays in the sea and subdues the power of the waves: 'þær meahte gesion, se ðone sið beheold, / brecan ofer bæðweg, brimwudu snyrgan / under swellingum, sæmearh plegean, / wadan wægflotan' ('He who beheld that journey might see there the sea-wood hurrying, taming the water-way under the swellings, the sea-horse playing,

wave-floater wading,' ll. 243-46a). The poetic play of language, the ship conceptualized as a horse prancing on the sea, evokes the joy of traveling on a ship that, in the hands of a competent captain and crew, plies waves large enough for aesthetic, possibly awed appreciation, but not so large as to threaten the ship. (All translations are my own, except as noted.)

The Latin analogues have none of this celebration of the sea; the source for *Elene*, the *Acta Quiriaci*, states only briefly: 'When Constantine had learned from them [his teachers] where the Lord had been crucified, he sent Helena, his mother, to seek the holy wood of the Lord's Cross and to build a church in the same place' (*Sources and Analogues* 61). In *Beowulf*, a similar, apparently aesthetic observation of seafaring appears in the comment that, as Beowulf and his men board their ship, 'streamas wundon, / sund wið sande' ('sea-streams twisted, water with sand,' ll. 212b-13a; all references to the text of *Beowulf* follow Klaeber's edition). Beowulf's ship is also compared to a bird: 'Gewat þa ofer wægholm, winde gefysed, / flota famiheals fugle gelicost' ('Then, speeded by the wind, the foamy-throated floater went over the sea, most like a bird,' ll. 217-18). In *Elene*, the ship cavorts in the water like a horse crossing a shallow ford; in *Beowulf*, it flies over it.

From an ecocritical point of view, such articulation of pleasure in the movement of a ship on the sea is complex. It may be viewed as obfuscating human exploitation of the sea's resources, though the fishing industry and the transportation methods used in the Anglo-Saxon period did not have impacts as severely destructive as such activities when they are employed today alongside other appropriations of natural resources from the oceans. The expression of joy in journeying on the sea, however, might be read as celebrating, on its own terms, a landscape in which humans cannot build or live, and unstructured by human intervention. Unlike a pastoral idyll, such a view of the sea does not depend for its idealized force upon opposition to a squalid urban or otherwise problematic earthbound dwelling, though it still contrasts with and presupposes landed human habitation. Such celebration of the sea remains anthropocentric, in that it does not afford to the sea any ethical imperative on its own terms.

In contrast to these celebrations of joyous sea-travel in *Beowulf* and *Elene*, poems as different as *The Seafarer* and *Andreas* depict the sea, and travel across it, as cold, miserable, and terrifying. When God instructs Andreas to rescue Matthew before he is to be killed three days hence, Andrew demurs, asking how he can travel from Achaia to Mermedonia in just three days. He refers specifically to the difficulties of ocean travel, calling the sea 'deop' ('deep,' l. 190) and 'wæterbroga' ('frightful flood,' l. 197) and adding, 'ne me herestræta / ofer cald wæter cuðe sindon' ('nor are the highways over cold

water known to me,' ll. 200b-01). Once he is underway, 'hornfisc plegode, / glad geond garsecg' ('the garfish played gladly throughout the sea,' ll. 370b-71a), but the gathering storm troubles Andrew and his companions because they do not know that they are being ferried by Jesus in the company of two angels:

> windas weoxon, Wedercandel swearc,
> streamas styredon, wægas grundon,
> wædo gewætte. strengas gurron,
> þreata þryðum. Wæteregsa stod
> The sun darkened, winds grew powerful, waves gnashed, streams stirred, ropes grated, sails grew wet. Water-terror arose despite the might of the troop. (ll. 372b-75a)

This storm is suggested by the Latin analogue for *Andreas*, according to which 'ita enim insurrexerat illis validissima tempestate maris, et fluctuum' ('a great tempest of sea and surge had risen against them,' *Acta Andreae* 47; *Sources and Analogues* 198), but is greatly embellished in the Old English text.

The contrast between cavorting fish and frightened men is interesting in that it provides a momentarily altered perspective, a brief acknowledgment of animal agency, in a poem otherwise rather relentlessly about humans – or rather, it must be acknowledged, about men. The slippage in the instrumental view of the sea provides a momentary recognition that perspectives other than the human exist, and matter. Perhaps an Anglo-Saxon view of nature in contrast with that of the Latin source has intruded, only to be superseded immediately by the primacy of the human point of view. The joyous sea-crossing of *Elene* could be interpreted as a figuration for baptism or read as a journey enabled by divine favor and therefore experienced as delightful. Such readings do not supplant, but must be read alongside, the more directly celebratory tone of the passage. In the case of *Andreas*, however, this storm is heavily metaphorical, a direct consequence of Andrew's lack of faith in God's power to facilitate his mission to the Mermedonians, indicated also by his failure to recognize Jesus.

God suggests that Andrew's frightened thanes leave him behind, but they refuse to do so, setting a better example than Andrew, who had initially said he could not rescue his fellow apostle from being consumed by cannibals. In rejecting the possibility of making the journey, Andreas also mentions the wide lands he would have to cross in order to arrive in Mermedonia

within three days, but the subsequent narration of his journey does not include any description of travel on land. The focus is on the difficulty of the stormy, frightful, and strange sea journey, in sharp contrast to the solid ground where Andreas and his men arrive, to their relief.

The island is also beset by watery storms: Andreas's imprisonment is made harsher by a night of severe winter weather, with frozen water in various forms:

> Snaw eorðan band
> wintergeworpum. Weder coledon
> heardum hægelscurum, swylce hrim ond forst,
> hare hildstapan, hæleða eðel
> lucon, leoda gesetu. Land wæron freorig
> cealdum cylegicelum, clang wæteres þrym
> ofer eastreamas, is brycgade
> blæce brimrade.
>
> Snow bound the earth in winter storms. The weather grew cold with hard hail-showers and with rime and frost, hard warriors; locked up noble fighters and people's homes. The lands were frozen with cold icicles, water's force shrank over streams of water, ice bridged black sea-roads. (ll. 1255a-62a)

This storm seems not to be a feature of the earthly environment, but something external to it. Karin Olsen argues that in *Andreas* the sea is described as a weapon threatening the human band: 'The presentation of Andreas's and his comrades' past struggles on a stormy sea contains all the commotion of an attack by a personified relentless aggressor upon the defenseless, terrified sailors' (387). Lindy Brady finds that the sea voyage possesses a 'characteristically Anglo-Saxon tenor … with its similarity to a Viking raid' (671). The first three riddles of the *Exeter Book* similarly describe storms as attacking land and its human occupants as earthly phenomena, not divine punishment, as discussed in greater detail in chapter 6. The weather is treated as a warrior, an 'avenger' causing buildings to burn and men to die. The storm, as narrator of Riddle 3, describes itself in opposition to 'my lord' and attacks buildings and ships as well as the sea. In the riddles, the storms destroy humans and human dwellings as well as attacking land and water, in contrast to *Andreas*, where the force of the sea is directed specifically at Andreas's ship, and at Andreas and his men.

The sea of *Elene* and *Beowulf* is benign. The contrasting presentation of sea as distinctive from land in *Andreas* gives it a quality of alterity, what

Lawrence Buell defines as 'space' as distinct from 'place' (2005: 63-71). 'Place,' in Buell's definition, drawn from Yi-Fu Tuan's work on cultural geography, is that with which humans have connection, whether because it is personally known or because there is an ancestral or emotional connection. 'Space,' by contrast, is unknown, foreign terrain. The island of the Mermedonians is 'place' to its inhabitants and would seem to require non-recognition as 'space' for Andrew and his companions, yet in its presentation in contrast to the sea it seems even to them to be more like 'place.' Lindy Brady has, moreover, argued that the description of Mermedonia has been given familiar details drawn from the actual fenlands of England. On water, Andrew was at the mercy of God, ferried by Jesus across a stormy sea with the capacity to kill. On land, Andrew will ultimately exercise control over the demons that plague him: he will wield speech, resist torture, rescue Matthew, and slaughter numerous Mermedonians by causing water to gush violently forth from an old stone made by giants.

Importantly, from an ecocritical point of view, both land and sea are for the poem simply setting, functioning instrumentally and metaphorically subordinated to human concerns. The description of the violent sea-crossing is interrupted so that Andrew can recite material from the gospels, prompted by Jesus himself, who turns out to be the ship's navigator. The descriptions of the landscape are distantly secondary to the actions that occur on its surfaces. For the poet, the sea is utilitarian in terms of its metaphorical relationship to Andrew's state of mind as he addresses Jesus in his uncertainty about undertaking the voyage to rescue Matthew, and is then calmed by the recitation of the gospel narrative. From the point of view of Andrew as a character, the sea is utilitarian in terms of being available for transit. In addition, land is utilitarian in being noticeable for its distinction from sea – it can be crossed without the need of a ship or other conveyance – and in terms of providing, just at the right moment, an age-old stone, 'eald enta geweorc' ('the ancient work of giants,' l. 1495), from which Andrew is able to command water to gush forth and kill. The poet takes for granted that land and its non-human inhabitants exist only for the sake of humans. This is not a Christianity of stewardship, of taking responsibility for the earth and its creatures and managing them, but a world-view instead that takes humanity in opposition to nature and controls it (sometimes explicitly through God) for human purposes. The movement across the sea also functions in utilitarian fashion to provide a physical analogue for Andrew's transition from reluctance to journey to Matthew, to understanding that he must do so, and finally undertaking the project despite being tortured by the Mermedonians.

In *The Seafarer*, the wretched potential of sea-travel functions metaphorically for exile from human company rather than for lack of faith. In the poem, 'bitre breostceare' ('bitter breast-cares,' l. 4) are paralleled by the miseries of winter sea-travel: 'Calde geþrungen / wæron mine fet, forste gebunden, / caldum clommum' ('Pinched with cold were my feet, bound with frost, with cold fetters,' ll. 13b-15a). The sea is also place of exile in *The Wanderer* and, as in *The Seafarer*, it is full of wintry torments. The 'hrimcealde sæ' ('rime-cold sea,' l. 4) beset by 'hrim ond snaw, hagle gemenged' ('frost and snow, mixed with hail,' l. 48) reminds the Wanderer of the absence of 'freomægum' ('free kinsmen,' l. 21) and other company 'in meoduhealle' ('in the mead hall,' l. 27). Likewise, the 'cald wæter' ('cold water,' l. 201a) of *Andreas* or the 'sincalda sæ' ('perpetually cold sea,' l. 473a) of *Exodus* reflect an Anglo-Saxon reality that the oceans around the British Isles are very cold. The poet of *Exodus* apparently did not know about the Red Sea's warm temperatures. The fictional island of Mermedonia is also located in a perpetually cold sea.

The sea-crossing in the Old English *Exodus* contrasts markedly with those in *Elene* and *Andreas*. Like the *Andreas* sea-crossing, that in *Exodus* is characterized by divine intervention, but the similarity ends there. Andrew and his companions cross the sea in a boat piloted by Jesus, frightened and threatened but ultimately unharmed by the storm. In *Exodus*, the Israelites cross the Red Sea by walking across the bottom, and God then causes the water to rush back, slaughtering the pursuing Egyptians.

The biblical Exodus includes the detail that 'the waters were indeed just like a wall' ('erat enim aqua quasi murus,' Exod. 14: 22). When the Israelites have crossed the sea and the Egyptians remain behind them, 'reversaeque sunt aquae' ('the waters returned,' Exod. 14: 28). The Old English poem expands on this description, depicting the water as a fortification, referring to it as 'wealfæsten' ('fortress,' l. 283), 'staðolas' ('firmaments,' l. 285), 'randgebeorh' ('shield-wall,' l. 296). As the water crashes down on the Egyptians in pursuit similar language is used: 'weallfæsten,' (l. 484) and 'randbyrig' (l. 464) are repeated, and 'meretorras' ('sea-towers,' l. 485) added. (This passage is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, 'Ruined Landscapes.')

In the context of such varied depictions of the sea in *Elene* and *Andreas*, these lines provide a further example of the natural world being depicted in instrumental terms in a narrative about human concerns, rather than with any sense of the importance of the sea for its own sake. The sea becomes an instrument of divine intervention in human history. Rather than the celebration of the sea in *Elene*, the sea of *Exodus* is imagined as a tool of God put to the service of humans as savior of the Israelites (and typologically, of

future Christians) and subsequently as killer of Egyptians. Lynn White has argued that a Christian conception of the earth and its creatures as given to humans to support their lives opened a door to the abuse and exploitation of natural resources, in opposition to European paganism as well as the religions of Native Americans, in which humans have the responsibility to tend to the earth for the sake of future generations (3-14). Whether the context in which such ideas are expressed in these Anglo-Saxon poems is unique to Christianity or also a survival of Anglo-Saxon paganism is probably impossible to ascertain, though it is interesting that they appear not only in texts transmitted into Anglo-Saxon England through literate Christianity, but also in an oral-formulaic epic of pagan, Germanic origins. Christianity has also been credited with developing a notion of stewardship for the earth, but these scenes in which the sea is imaged as a divine tool and commentary upon human affairs point more to the idea of the earth as placed at the service of humans rather than of humans as guardians for the earth and its resources. Such ideologies are not post-medieval inventions. They are not symptoms of the empirical expansion or Industrial Revolution that occurred hundreds of years later, but rather underlying social attitudes that helped to enable both to occur.

Beowulf and the Sea-Creatures

As noted above, the sea in *Beowulf* is established early on as space: it is 'hron-rad' ('whale-road,' l. 10) and 'swan-rad' ('swan's path,' l. 200), a space to cross in a ship most like a bird ('fugle gelicost,' l. 218). Beowulf and his men travel across a sea-space in order to arrive at Heorot, and they travel the same sea-space to get back home, but there is no sense that the journey is enabled by a specialized knowledge of navigating that particular sea. Building, as does Buell, on the work of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, Gillian Overing and Marijane Osborne note that landscapes are created by the imagination: 'The terrain of place is then substantially internal, the picture made within the frame of individual perception' (xxi). The sea depicted here is the imagined sea of the author and/or scribe of *Beowulf* rather than the observed sea of any actual traveler.

The sea through which Beowulf has travelled in his contest with/against Breca is another space, undifferentiated for either of the swimmers by local knowledge of its particular characteristics. The importance of this episode is signaled by the fact that it is narrated twice, first by the mocking Unferth, and then in a revised version accepted by the Danish audience, in

which Beowulf claims that he was the stronger swimmer. Beowulf tells the company he had stayed by Breca's side until they were separated by wind and waves as they struggled against 'wado weallende, wedera cealdost / nipende niht, ond norþan wind' ('rolling waves, the coldest of weather, the falling of night and wind from the north,' ll. 546-47).

The status of this sea as space is further suggested by the battles between Beowulf and its 'native' or 'natural' inhabitants. These are not, however, referred to as fish or birds, but rather 'niceras' ('sea monsters,' ll. 422, 575). The term appears elsewhere only in *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*, where Andy Orchard translates it as 'water-monsters [hippopotami],' in a nod to the Latin text of the *Letter*, which has 'hippopotami' at this point (209, 234-35). For the Anglo-Saxon author, scribe, and audience, then, these creatures are generically monstrous, rather than known animals of any kind. They are named with the same word used for the creatures that inhabit Grendel's mother's mere until the moment of her death (l. 845), creatures that are also called 'wyrmas ond wildeor' ('serpents and wild animals,' l. 1430) as well as 'sellice sædracan' ('unusual sea-dragons,' l. 1426). The latter term links them with the dragon or 'wyrm' (e.g. l. 2567) that Beowulf later kills, yet it also suggests perhaps eels – toothy, aggressive fish that could be terrifying indeed to fight while swimming in the water with them. The presence of eels in the rivers and marshes of England is attested by the name of the island town of Ely in East Anglia, surrounded during the Anglo-Saxon period by marshland and so named, Bede tells us, because the marshes were populated with 'copia anguillarum' ('large quantities of eels,' 4.19: 199, translated in the Old English version as 'genihtsumnesse ælo,' 'huge quantities of eels,' 324, l. 8).

The use of the generic term 'niceras' to name the creatures Beowulf and Breca encounter during their swimming-match, rather than a term for any specific type of animal, makes the sea strange, and this estrangement likewise renders the sea 'space' rather than 'place.' Ultimately, Beowulf kills nine sea-monsters so that, he says, the sea will thereafter be safe for travelers: 'syðþan na / ymb brontne ford brimliðende / lade ne letton' ('afterwards never in the steep seas would they hinder the passage of sea-voyagers,' ll. 567b-69a). Whether or not they have voices, and whether such voices could be heard or understood by humans, the creatures Beowulf slaughters in his sea-journey are sentient beings. They experience his entry into the sea, bearing arms and wearing armor, as an intrusion into their home, which they inhabit as 'place.' Beowulf, conversely, enters it as an intruder; he nevertheless formulates their dwelling in this 'space' as illegitimate and in need of correction. Beowulf re-inscribes this seascape as a different kind

of 'space,' one that is safe for his fellow humans to travel on because he has slaughtered its original and legitimate inhabitants.

Beowulf provides justification for the slaughter of these sea-creatures, much as he feels the need to justify his other conquests. In his negative account of the events, Unferth does not do so; this distinction suggests that in order for Beowulf to present himself positively he needs to volunteer just cause for the killing of the creatures. It is perhaps the fact that Beowulf kills the sea-creatures where they live, much as Grendel kills the Danes in their dwelling-place, that requires explanation. The ecological theorist Christa Grewe-Volpp points to the problematic nature of speaking 'for' the natural world. Beowulf's justification of the death of the creatures from the sea suggests they possess agency, yet Beowulf appropriates any such agency by speaking for them and creating a narrative of their illegitimacy.

Beowulf states that he has never heard of another man surviving such an ordeal (though, in fact, Breca did). This journey through watery depths, from which Beowulf is lifted by the waves onto the shore of Finland, could be interpreted as a metaphorical (re)birth into manhood. This journey begins, it appears, with a childish dare from a youthful friend, but ends with Beowulf having provided his community a service in a feat of daring sufficiently courageous to be known among the Danes across the sea before his arrival. Moreover, he has made an impact on the sea itself. It is not turned into a habitation or agricultural land, but into a safer road – still apparently a 'space' to be traversed rather than a 'place' to be occupied, yet subject to human intervention that characterizes as monstrous the 'natural' or original occupants to help justify their slaughter, for human convenience.

Marsh in *Beowulf*

The sea is generally a space that humans travel on top of, using it as a 'road,' rather than swimming in or through; Beowulf is quite unusual in his ability to spend inordinate amounts of time in the water, both during his boyhood swim with Breca and later, when he will swim at length to reach Grendel's mother's underwater cavern. Kelley Wickham-Crowley observes that water 'was an integral part of the Anglo-Saxon perception of "landscape"' (85). Much of that watery landscape, however, took the form of marshes and fens, much like the terrain inhabited by Grendel and his mother (86-87). While his earlier sea encounter is undertaken in the company of Breca, Beowulf travels alone into Grendel's mother's swampy mere. The fact that Beowulf is able to survive in the mere – which is neither wholly water nor

wholly land – emphasizes his status as different from other humans in the poem. This incident is described by the poem's narrator; when Beowulf later retells the episode to Hygelac, the swim through the water is nearly elided; Beowulf reduces the description of his passage through the water to a word or two (ll. 2135-36). The sea-creatures, whose deaths Beowulf felt needed justification when he argued with Unferth over the swimming-contest with Breca, are in this retelling ignored altogether. Beowulf's status, along with the monsters of the poem, as 'aglæca' ('fighter, monster,' ll. 1512, 2592) – something uncannily superhuman – is suggested by the fact that he makes two major journeys into and through water, rather than on it in a boat, and lives. The first use of this word to refer to Beowulf occurs when he is swimming down through the lake/swamp in search of Grendel's mother's lair (l. 1512).

Scholars typically call the place where Grendel's mother lives 'Grendel's mere,' but it would be more accurate (albeit more cumbersome) to call it 'Grendel's mother's mere.' Grendel attacks on land. He is said to bring his dead victims back to the lair; Beowulf says that if he loses the fight with Grendel, the monster will bring Beowulf's dead body back home to his lair to feast on. But the poem places Grendel in the cave only after Beowulf has torn off his arm and he has retreated there to die, and at second hand, as narrated by Beowulf to Hygelac (l. 2099). It is only after Grendel's death that the audience learns, along with Beowulf, that Grendel and his mother have been seen to haunt the marches, the edges of Hrothgar's kingdom, the boundaries between dwelling and wilderness, between place and space. The monsters' dwelling-place, moreover, is a swamp: a space/place that is, much like the mere, neither wholly land nor wholly water. It is bounded by forest, accessed via paths created perhaps by wild animals, perhaps by humans, perhaps by the Grendelkin themselves. Traversing swampland is possible, but difficult and potentially dangerous, requiring a level of familiarity with the specific terrain, as demonstrated by the fact that Guthlac needs a guide to show him the place where he will locate his hermitage (see Chapter 4).

In *Postmodern Wetlands*, Rod Giblett argues that swamps have been identified across cultures and times with danger, death, disease, and sin, an association born out in *Beowulf*. In various Anglo-Saxon texts, 'interpenetrations of water and land' (Wickham-Crowley 87) are occupied by demons, like Guthlac's hermitage on a fen-surrounded island, or by water-monsters such as those infesting (or living in, depending on perspective) Grendel's mere, and water needs frequently to be '"disinfected" of spirits' (Dendle 192). Grendel and his mother are twice identified as descendants of Cain (*Beowulf* ll. 107, 1261), doomed to wander for generations in sin. The horrors of the mere

are described at two different points in the poem. When Hrothgar describes Grendel's mother's mere to Beowulf, he tells him: 'No þæs frod leofað / gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite' ('No one old enough lives among the sons of men who has known the bottom [of that mere],' ll. 1366a-67). Hrothgar goes on to tell Beowulf that the swamp is so frightening to animals as well as humans that a deer driven by hunters will stop, turn, and face death rather than enter its swampy ground: 'nis þæt heoru stow' ('that is not a pleasant place,' l. 1372b). Later, Beowulf approaches the place, accompanied by his own men, as well as by a retinue of Hrothgar's fighters. The men find Aeschere's head, which Grendel's mother has left to mark the entrance to her home, an act that parallels the display of Grendel's arm in Heorot.

The waters surrounding Grendel's mother's cave are riddled with swimming monsters. One of Beowulf's men idly looses an arrow at one of these monsters as it breaks the surface, and, as it flounders, several of the warriors stab it to death. The poem calls the beast a 'wæg-bora,' which Seamus Heaney translates as 'lake-birth' (l. 1440), following a definition proposed by Friedrich Klaeber (glossary, *s.v.*). The compound is a difficult one; with 'bora' derived possibly from 'borian' (bore, drill), and possibly from 'beran' (to carry, to be borne, to give birth to, to beget). The first part of the compound, 'wæg,' can be translated more straight-forwardly as 'wave, water, sea, billow.' The compound could refer to the sea-creature as that which bores into or through the waves, or perhaps that which is carried by the waves. Heaney's suggestion that the sea-beast is birthed by the water is supported by the strong link between Grendel's mother and the sea-creatures.

Meanwhile, Beowulf arms himself beside the water, already boiling with blood – perhaps Aeschere's, perhaps that of the dying animal. Following Kristeva's discussion of menstrual blood as pollution, this appears as a metaphorically polluting blood, associating the mere with the feminine, with menstruation and birth (71). Beowulf plunges into the water; it takes 'hwil dæges' ('the space of a day,' l. 1495b) before he reaches the bottom. The long, bloody, watery space through which Beowulf passes might be read as a kind of *vagina dentata*, monstrously fearsome in its geographical formulation, the toothy animals reaching out to grab Beowulf as he descends. It might, however, be argued that Beowulf in fact is able to reach the bottom of the mere only because Grendel's mother grabs him and carries him down with her to the bottom (ll. 1506-07).

Jane Chance reads the ensuing fight in sexual terms, with Beowulf and Grendel's mother alternately sitting astride one another, before Beowulf succeeds in penetrating his opponent. His own sword fails, so he must use

one he has found in the mere to cut off her head so that blood drips from the blade (253-54). Beowulf investigates the cavern and finds the corpse of Grendel, and beheads it too, at which point the blade melts post-coitally away, leaving only the gem-encrusted hilt. The men waiting next to the water see blood; Hrothgar's thegns assume it must be Beowulf's and return to Heorot, but the members of Beowulf's own retinue refuse to give up hope. As soon as Grendel's mother is dead, the sea-creatures mysteriously vanish from the water, and Beowulf is able to swim unimpeded to the surface, carrying as his two tokens of the battle Grendel's head and the engraved, gilded hilt of the ancient sword.

While Beowulf's slaughter of the sea-beasts during his earlier contest with Breca was justified by the need for the Geats to journey over the waters safely, no rationale is given for the killing of one of the animals before Beowulf entered the water of Grendel's mother's mere. Their disappearance on the death of Grendel's mother suggests that the very existence of these beasts is allegorical: they are 'real' within the terms of the narrative as long as Grendel's mother lives, but as soon as she dies, they cease to have an existence separate from hers. Nevertheless, Alfred Siewers suggests that the killing of such creatures, as well as of Grendel and his mother, is problematic: 'Guthlac's exorcism of the Fens parallels readings of Beowulf's foray into the Grendelcyn's mere as the exorcism of an earlier indigenous culture' (2003: 9). As he did for the earlier seascape by killing nine 'niceras,' Beowulf re-inscribes the space in which Grendel and his mother lived: once womb/dwelling, it is now tomb.

This detail further establishes the inextricability of Grendel's mother's identity from the marsh through which Beowulf must travel to reach her cavern. The bloody passage through which Beowulf travels – from cave, through waters, and back to land – might be read as a second re-birth for Beowulf, an emergence from an earthly tomb/womb back into life, with his final release from the bloody depths enabled and aided by his waiting retainers. In a review of the history of *Beowulf* scholarship, Irving notes that previous generations of scholars have seen Beowulf as a Jesus figure; in such readings, Beowulf's emergence from what might have become his own tomb is interpreted as a kind of divine rebirth (175-92 passim). Yet the association of Grendel's mother with the mere suggests instead, or simultaneously, a re-birth from a feminized, liminal marsh, neither land nor sea, into a masculine social order, in which Beowulf's position will now be far different from what it was before his initial encounter with Grendel. Haruko Momma reads the first half of *Beowulf* as 'an evolutionary *Bildungsroman*' in which the hero seeks 'guidance

to make the transition from a monster-fighting saviour to a warrior in the leisure class' (169). After the battle with Grendel, Hrothgar wished (though Wealhtheow vetoed it) to make Beowulf his heir; after this battle, however, Hrothgar issues to Beowulf a warning about the abuse of his clearly considerable powers. Beowulf has become superhuman, and perhaps rather frightening.

Ecofeminism and the Other

Ecofeminist philosophers such as Val Plumwood and Judith Chelius Stark have traced to ancient Greek culture, and thence forward into our own, a dualistic way of thinking that opposes humans to nature. Like many ecocritics, Plumwood and Stark leap from the ancients to the Renaissance without any discussion of the Middle Ages. Plumwood (2003) points out that in the *Timaeus*, Plato associates 'nature' with the human body (as distinct from reason or soul) and the emotions with the senses, with animals, landscape, and wilderness, with the feminine and with reproduction, and with chaos and the world as a place of change (80). Lanfranc, the eleventh-century archbishop of Canterbury, wrote comments on translations of Plato's *Timaeus* indicating that the text was (at that late date) known in Anglo-Saxon England, but Gneuss's *Handlist* suggests that no copy survives in Latin or Old English (50). However, as Stark argues, Augustine 'is one of the major architects who forged the synthesis of Platonism and Western Christianity in late Antiquity' (22). The works and ideas of Augustine were well-known in Anglo-Saxon England. Stark argues that Augustine accepted the Platonic division between soul and body, and she contends further that 'just as he accepted this dualistic view of human beings, he also accepted the ordering and hierarchy that gave prominence to the soul over the body and, in general, the superiority of the spiritual over the material' (22-23). Furthermore, 'Augustine relied heavily on the language of hierarchy, control, and subordination of women to men' (28-29).

The notion that humans are opposed to and elevated above 'nature' – meaning the non-human natural world – made its way to Anglo-Saxon England by way of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, which was well known in Anglo-Saxon England, surviving, according to Gneuss (151, 158), Ker (519) and Lapidge (293-94) in several Latin manuscripts as well as three copies of the Old English translation attributed to King Alfred. According to the Old English *Boethius*:

> For þi ic cwæð þæt sio sawul wære þriofeald forþam þe uðwitan secgað þæt hio hæbbe þrio gecynd. An ðara gecynda is þæt heo bið wilnigende, oðer þæt hio bið irsiende, þridde þæt hio bið gesceadwis. Twa þara gecyndu habbað netenu swa same swa men; oðer þara is willnung, oðer is irsung. Ac se mon ana hæfð gesceadwisnesse, nalles nan oðru gesceaft; forði he hæfð oferþungen ealle þa eorðlican gesceafta mid geðeahte and mid andgite.
> I said that the soul was threefold, because philosophers say that it has three natures. One of those natures is concupiscible, the second irascible, the third rational. Animals have two of these natures, like men: one of those is concupiscence, the other is anger. But man alone has reason, not the other creatures, and so he has surpassed all the earthly creatures with thought and understanding (I. 317, ll. 217-33, trans. Godden and Irvine 2:53.)

The term 'gecynd,' translated here as 'nature,' does not refer to the natural world, which is rendered instead by 'ealle þa eorðlican gesceafta' ('all of earth's creations'), which are set collectively against 'se mon ana' ('man alone'). From Boethius, the idea of humans as separate and distinct from nature, and the justification for human dominion over the earth and its creatures, makes its way into Ælfric's sermon on the Nativity of Jesus (Godden n.p.). Ælfric draws fairly closely on the language of the Old English Boethius:

> Uþwytan sæcgað þæt þære sawle gecynd is ðryfeald. An dæl is on hire gewylnigend-lic, oðer yrsigendlic, þrydde gesceadwislic. Twægen þissera dæla habbað deor and nytenu mid us, þæt is gewylnunge and yrre. Se man ana hæfð gescead and ræd and andgit.... Ðuruh þæt gescead ana we synd sælran þonne þa unge-sceadwysan nytenu.
> Philosophers say that the soul's nature is threefold. One part in it is capable of desire, the second capable of emotion, the third capable of reason. Two of these parts, animals and beast have along with us; those are desire and anger. Man alone has reason and speech and understanding... Through reason alone are we better than the irrational beasts. (Skeat I.16, I. 18, ll. 96-100 and 148-49.)

Precisely where Grendel and his mother might fall within this paradigm that would distinguish human beings from all other aspects of creation, and whether or not they possess any capacity for reason, are difficult problems. As noted above, the Grendelkin belong to the race of monsters descended

from Cain (*Beowulf*, l. 107). Grendel fights without weapons, bursting in on Heorot and feasting on warriors. His mother, on the other hand, is stealthy, taking Hrothgar's favorite thegn in exchange for her son with an apparent understanding of human codes of vengeance. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe suggests that Grendel and Beowulf both approach 'the limits of the human' in their battle, with Grendel entering human territory and Beowulf discarding human armor (1981: 484-94 passim). Grendel's mother seems more human than her son: she wears armor and wields weapons. However, both Grendel and his mother are also described as 'ellorgæstas' ('alien spirits,' l. 1349a).

Of the two, Grendel is better known to the people of Heorot; he actually enters the hall to slaughter Danes, year after year. Conversely, until Beowulf seeks her out, Grendel's mother has only been seen from a distance; she is described as a 'mearcstapa' ('boundary-walker,' l. 1348). When Grendel's mother approaches the hall for the first time, the narrator states: 'Wæs se gryre læssa / efne swa micle swa bið mægþa cræft, / wiggryre wifes, be wæpnedmen' ('The terror was less, by just so much as is the strength of a maiden, the martial terror of a woman, in comparison to that of a weaponed man,' ll. 1282b-84). She is identified only as 'Grendel's mother,' and is given no name of her own. This detail links her with many other female figures throughout the Old English corpus, both literary and documentary, who are also nameless, identified only as someone's wife or daughter. When Hrothgar tells his coast guard that he knows Beowulf, he names Beowulf's father, but identifies his mother only as the daughter of Hrethel: 'wæs his ealdfæder Ecgþeo haten, / ðæm to ham forgeaf Hreþel Geata / angan dohtor' ('his father was called Ecgtheow, to whose home Hrethel the Geat gave his own daughter' (ll. 373-75a). Near the end of the poem, a nameless woman mourns Beowulf at his funeral: 'swylce giomorgyd (Ge)at(isc) meowle / (æfter Biowulfe b)undenheorde / (sang) sorgcearig' ('also, a Geatish woman with hair bound up sang a mournful lament for Beowulf, a sorrowful song,' ll. 3150-52a). (The passage is damaged and difficult to translate, and has been reconstructed differently by different editors, but the absence of any name or other identification is at least clear. This version is from *Klaeber's Beowulf* 270 n. 3150).

The mother is, for Kristeva, both subject and object, that which must be rejected in order to enter language (32, 40-41). Paul Acker draws on Kristeva in identifying the maternal, in the case of Grendel's mother, with horror. Grendel's mother is the abject, neither subject nor object, 'the jettisoned object [which] is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses' (Acker 2). Kristeva refers to the acquisition of speech as 'devouring

language' (Kristeva 40); the speaking person becomes a 'fortified castle' (46). Grendel and his mother enter the fortified castle of Heorot and instead of devouring language, they consume humans. The idea of 'wiggryre wifes' ('the war-terror of a woman,' l. 1285), a female monster who has killed and apparently eaten a human male, is almost too much for Hrothgar to articulate, what Kristeva calls 'a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me' (2).

Kristeva's use of the phrase 'murky waters' (59) in a section heading in her discussion of the nature of femininity and the abject provides an uncanny echo of the association of Grendel's mother with the swamp. Grendel's mother and the water she occupies bear some similarity to the description of the storm in the *Exeter Book*, Riddle 2. The riddling speaker/narrator called the sea 'hwælmere' ('whale-mere,' l. 5), a term which evokes the references to Grendel's mother's dwelling as 'mere' (ll. 845, 855, 1362, 1603) and of Grendel's mother as 'merewif' ('water-woman,' l. 1518). Interestingly in terms of the history of scholarship about Grendel's mother, Bosworth-Toller provide semantically neutral translations for a number of 'mere' compounds, translating 'mere-fara' as 'sea-farer,' and 'mere-liðende' as 'sea-faring person.' However, they render 'merewif' as 'water-witch,' a translation followed by Klaeber and retained by Fulk, Bjork, and Niles in their revision of Klaeber's edition. In Heaney's translation, Grendel's mother becomes 'that swamp-thing from hell' (l. 1518).

Associating the sea with whales via the compound 'hwælmere' suggests enormity, even monstrosity analogous to the 'wyrm-cynn' ('worm-kind,' l. 1425b) and 'sæ-draca' ('sea-dragon,' l. 1426a) that appear alongside Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*. In both poems, the water has the feel of something that is not only occupied by living beings but also alive in its own right. In Grendel's mother's mere, 'wæter under stod / dreorig ond gedrefed' ('water rose up below, / dreary and disturbed,' ll. 1416b-17a). Similarly, in the *Exeter Book*, Riddle 2:

hwælmere hlimmeð, hlude grimmeð,
streamas staþu beatað, stundum weorpaþ
on stealc hleoþa stane ond sonde,
ware ond wæge, þonne ic winnende,
holmmægne biþeaht, hrusan styrge,
side sægrundas.

The sea [whale-mere] roars, rages loudly, currents beat against the shore, fiercely flings stone and water, seaweed and waves, against the steep cliff, when I, raging, hidden under the force of the waves, extensively stir up the earth of the sea-bottom. (ll. 5-10a)

Grendel's mother is not simply an inhabitant of the mere that she occupies; she is also a part of it. She and Grendel walk the marches; he is 'in weres wæstmum' ('in the form of a man,' l. 1352) and she is 'idese onlicnæs' ('in the likeness of a [noble] woman,' l. 1351). Both Grendel and his mother live in a kind of exile from Heorot and its inhabitants. As Stacy Klein has observed, depictions of exile in Old English poetry operate differently according to gender: 'As men and women reflect on the miseries of exilic life, their laments reveal profoundly different senses of what it might mean to inhabit the geographic and social margins of the world' (115). During the years in which the Grendelkin harass Hrothgar's people, Grendel alone crosses the boundary into Heorot: only after he has been killed does Grendel's mother follow. Unlike Grendel, however, who stays in the hall to kill and eat his prey, Grendel's mother grabs one man and flees. Moreover, unlike the female exiles of Klein's analysis, Grendel's mother has power, not only over the place she inhabits but also over the other creatures that live there. She is opposed to Beowulf and to Grendel, but at the same time to normative femininity, thus destabilizing those oppositions. The dwelling she occupies appears to have been a naturally occurring cave, in opposition to the built environment of Heorot, the construction of which had been a collaborative effort among 'manigre mægþe geond þisne middangeard' ('many people throughout this middle-earth,' l. 75). Yet the cave is also opposed to the forest around it, for it is a place where water burns and animals refuse to enter.

The instabilities in how to read Grendel's mother's mere are underscored by the fact that the mere also bears resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon idea of hell, as observed by Carleton Brown in 1938 and affirmed by numerous other readers since then. In Ælfric's rendering of hell, St. Julian tells his tormenters that they will sink 'on ðone sweartan grund' ('into that gloomy abyss,' l. 383) filled with 'undeadlice wyrm / þe eowre lichaman cywð' ('a deathless serpent that will gnaw your body,' *Lives of Saints* 112, ll. 385-86). Such affinities, along with the familial relationship with Cain, suggest that Grendel's mother and Grendel are demonic rather than having any part in the natural world: they are unambiguously neither animal nor human, and perhaps neither. For the Anglo-Saxons, 'the sea both separates and connects,' as Alfred Siewers observes of archipelagic cultures (39). The sea, like Grendel's mother and her dwelling, is unstable, as suggested by the Old English 'Storm' riddle: subject to being flung into the sky and tossed into waves that threaten humans, whether living at its side or attempting to travel over its surface. Through both waves and sea-creatures, the sea and Grendel's mere both pose a direct threat to Beowulf as he attempts to travel through them.

The possibility of multiple readings for the Grendelkin – human, animal, monster, or demon – destabilizes dualistic interpretations that assign either

Grendel's mother or Grendel to any single category, whether affiliated with or opposed to humanity. Ecofeminists reject such dualistic categories and the hierarchies that order them. Patrick Murphy calls instead for a mode of thinking he calls (after Bakhtin) 'dialogics' which 'reveals that the most fundamental relationships are not resolvable through dialectical synthesis' (1995: 3). Karla Armbruster warns against the problems ecofeminists face of, on the one hand, identifying women as having a special bond with nature or, on the other hand, emphasizing too strenuously the distinctions between humans and nature, as well as distinctions among different humans based on characteristics such as race or gender: 'The path between continuity and difference that ecofeminist theorists must walk is so narrow and difficult not because of inadequacies in the theorists or the theories, but because of the complexity of their task' (98). The task of engaging effectively with variously intersecting theories is also, comparably, complex. Armbruster suggests the need for a theory of human subjectivity that acknowledges the multiplicity and constantly shifting quality of the positions that individuals occupy in society, and the ways in which they challenge social orders but are also shaped by them, so that 'we can acknowledge the ways that each person's socially constructed subjectivity is different from that of others without inevitably isolating us from each other' (105). The varying subjectivities and the irresolvable problem of the identity of the monsters in *Beowulf* may help contemporary humans to understand and challenge the ways in which our own shifting identities are constructed.

Menstrual Blood and Amniotic Flood: *Andreas*

Whereas in *Beowulf* the feminine becomes monstrous and is pushed to the margins of both social and natural worlds, in *Andreas* blood and water appear at both center and margins as stand-ins for the fully abjected maternal in the absence of any explicit feminine. While 'wif and wer' ('woman and man,' l. 1597) are referenced collectively, all of the characters given any individuation – guards, cannibals, prisoners, Andreas' torturers, along with Matthew and Andrew and Andreas' retinue – are all male. The youths who return from drowning death to become Christians are likewise all male. The idea that women have any place or function in this social world is thoroughly repressed. As P. H. Cullum and Katherine Lewis point out in their 'Introduction' to *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, 'clerical masculinity was generally formed in relation to other masculinities, not in relation to women, and for many clergy women were irrelevant' (4). Women's positions were defined in terms of men, as the presumed norm, rather than the reverse.

For Kristeva, blood is linked inextricably with the maternal, and both are abjected: defined as impure and made taboo. Kristeva notes that in the Hebrew Bible, the taboos connected with women who have recently given birth are discussed in close conjunction with dietary issues involving the avoidance of eating blood. 'Dietary abomination thus has a parallel – unless it be a foundation – in the abomination provoked by the fertilizable or fertile female body (menses, childbirth)' (100). Jewish dietary law specifically prohibits consumption of blood; Christianity reverses this in the ritual consumption of wine and bread symbolizing Jesus' blood and body. In consuming the blood of their victims, the Mermedonian diet becomes a multivalent symbol within the poem, simultaneously an inversion of Jewish law and a profanation of Christian practice.

After Andreas arrives in Mermedonia, the focus on blood shifts from its consumption to its presence as evidence of bodily injury; simultaneously, the location of blood shifts from the social center of the built city to the wilderness surrounding it. As he is dragged through the wilderness, Andreas' blood flows from wounds all over his body: 'Blod yðum weoll, / hatan heolfre' ('blood surged out in waves, hot gore,' ll. 1240b-41a). The wounds heal themselves each night because of the miraculous intervention of the angel who visits Andreas to lift his spirits, but the ebbing and flowing of blood also suggests menstruation, which recurs and ceases at regular intervals through the middle years of a woman's lifetime.

The multivalent blood also suggests childbirth, an association strengthened by the presence of uncanny water that appears later in the poem. The women who would give birth to and nourish the Mermedonians in the poem, all men – guards, executioners, the youths who are reborn at the end of the poem – are absent. Women, from whose bodies blood flows as a regular, 'natural' part of life, are suppressed from the narrative.

Andrew's body is dragged through caves and across rocks as far as the roads can take them:

Drogon deormodne ymb stanhleoðo, efne swa wide enta ærgeweorc, stræte stanfage. ǽfter dunscrǽfum, stærcedferþne, swa wegas to lagon, innan burgum,

They dragged the courageous one, stout of heart, through hill-caves, around rocky cliffs, even as far as their paths extended, old work of giants, streets paved with stone, inside their cities. (ll. 1232-36a)

The fact that Andreas is dragged through caves, along with the reference to the old work of giants, recall the location of Grendel's mother's lair in a cave beneath a marsh, as well as Beowulf's recourse to a sword described as the ancient work of giants, as the only weapon that will kill Grendel's mother and behead Grendel. The uncanny provides a link here between Andreas and Beowulf – as poems, and as heroes. As Alexandra Bolintineanu has noted, there are numerous parallels in the descriptions of the landscapes in *Andreas* and *Beowulf*. As noted above, Lindy Brady persuasively links the landscape of Mermedonia to the English fenlands, borderlands inhabited by Britons and the Grendelkin. The similar references to caves found beyond the limits of human habitation and the references to 'eald enta geweorc' strengthen the association of blood with the absent feminine in *Andreas* in a parallel to the monstrous feminine in *Beowulf*.

The demons return Andreas to his prison, described specifically with reference to frozen water: the night brings 'snaw' ('snow,' l. 1255), 'hægelscurum swylce hrim ond forst' ('hail-showers and also rime and frost,' l. 1257), and 'cylegicelum' ('icicles,' l. 1260). The passage concludes with the detail that 'is brycgade / blæce brimrade' ('ice bridged the dark sea-road,' ll. 1261b-62a). It requires a truly 'wintercealdan niht' ('a cold winter night,' l. 1265a) indeed, for the sea itself to freeze over. Ice can bridge rivers, making it possible to cross over rather than ford by wading through them. Here, the language suggests a sea frozen solid, rendered impassable by ship and thus cut off from other civilizations through normal navigational processes. In Riddle 69, ice is a miracle; here, it is a further instrument of Andreas' isolation from his community. This frozen water cannot kill Andreas any more than can the injuries inflicted upon him by Mermedonians and night-time demons, nor can it affect his soul. In contrast, the rushing water that Andreas will call forth will kill Mermedonians and then lead, for some of them, to a rebirth of both body and soul: bodies returned to life, souls baptized and converted to Christian faith.

The miracle Andreas performs by causing water to gush forth from a stone occurs, like his torture and bleeding and like Beowulf's slaughter of Grendel's mother, at the margins of the social world:

> He be wealle geseah wundrum fæste
> under sælwage sweras unlytle,
> stapulas standan, storme bedrifene,
> eald enta geweorc …
> He saw by the wall, wondrously fixed under the castle wall, pillars, not small, columns standing, storm-beaten, old work of giants. (ll. 1492-95a)

In an echo of the perverse feast of blood that opens the poem, the water that Andreas sends forth from the ground is characterized as 'biter beorþegu' ('bitter beer-drinking,' l. 1533), an excessive feast of beer and ale that overwhelms the people of Mermedonia. Water is not just water, blood is not just blood; both carry metaphorical and symbolic freight. Riddle 84, conventionally solved as 'water,' identifies its solution also as 'mother.' Riddle 33, solved as 'ice' or 'iceberg,' also uses feminine pronouns to refer to water and to ice, and calls them monstrous and fearsome (see Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of these two riddles). In *Andreas*, monstrosity is masculine. However, the feminine associations of monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon culture as expressed in the examples Grendel's mother and the Ice riddle, combined with the uncanny freezing of the sea in the cold night of Andreas's captivity, suggest the repressed feminine in the poem.

In Anglo-Saxon biblical lore, the earth is Adam's womb (Estes 643). The water that gushes forth from the earth of Mermedonia spews forth literally from an ancient wall, the work of giants, and metaphorically from the earthly womb. Much as, in *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother's lair functions simultaneously as a tomb for Grendel and as a womb from which Beowulf is reborn into a new social status, the flooding earth of Andreas into which the Mermedonians are swept provides for some a tomb, an 'eorðscræf egeslic' ('horrible cavern/sepulcher,' l. 1588), and for others a womb-like rebirth when they are swept back out of the depths by a reversal of the previously deadly, now life-giving, amniotic water.

While blood is abundantly present in *Andreas*, the maternal and indeed the feminine is entirely absent, suppressed and/or repressed, yet the feminine and the maternal reappear in the water that gushes forth from the earth at the margin of the Mermedonian city, analogous to the marshy borderland lair of Grendel's mother in its simultaneity of death and (re)birth, its evocation of gushing amniotic fluid and its transformation into a baptismal flood as the young people, their youth emphasized and repeated, are brought back to life and simultaneously converted to Christianity. The idea that baptism is a kind of re-birth is not stated explicitly in *Andreas*, but the metaphorical association was known in Anglo-Saxon England: the terms 'eftboren' and 'eftacenned' (both meaning 'born again') gloss Latin 'renatus' ('reborn'), with specific reference to baptism in the late ninth/early tenth century *Durham Ritual* as well as with reference to water and the Holy Spirit in the tenth-century *Rushworth Gospel*.

Conclusion

Water, earth, femininity, monstrosity and death are linked, implicitly and explicitly, across *Exodus*, *Andreas*, *Elene*, and *Beowulf*. While clerical masculinity is constructed without reference to women, the masculinities of Beowulf, Andreas, and the Hebrew warriors of *Exodus* are established against the assumed, essentializing feminine monstrosity of earth and water. As Andreas strides through the flood, it disappears wherever he walks, in an echo of the Red Sea crossing, where God separates the water so that the Israelites can cross and then causes it to flood back, drowning the pursuing Egyptians. The process in *Andreas* is reversed, with fiery water crashing down on Mermedonians followed by its retreat and their baptismal and literal rebirth. Reading these poems from an ecofeminist perspective, which foregrounds both gender relationships and attention to the poems' physical environments, rewards concentration on the figuration of Grendel's mother, as well as the space in which she lives, and on the figuration of water and earth as symbolic of the abjected feminine and maternal. Grendel's mother and her swampy home, the flooding waters and seas of *Exodus* and *Andreas*, and the flowing blood in *Andreas* pose challenges to culturally entrenched dualities between male and female, human and non-human, and land and water. The water that flows out of an age-old stone in *Andreas* and the stone-like sea-ramparts that crash in waves over the Egyptians likewise pose challenges to culturally entrenched dualities between human and nature, because these waters are called forth by humans with the assistance of God, but are not human, and while emanating from or returning to the earth, do not behave in ways that are 'natural.' They therefore suggest an implicit challenge to the distinction between human and nature as well as between male and female, insisting on those boundaries to the point of fracture. Reading these texts ecocritically can also assist in re-thinking floods brought on by climate change today, floods that have human causes at their root and are thus not precisely 'natural,' yet also not precisely 'human.' Insisting on a sharp delineation between masculine and feminine enables and coincides with the attempt to draw a clear line between human and nature; yet, as the Old English poems discussed in this chapter demonstrate, such lines are fuzzy at best, always subject to question and challenge.

The chapter that follows moves from seascapes to ruins. *Andreas* demonstrates the potential for overlap, as the flooding seas literally ruin the city of Mermedonia as well as the bodies of many of its people. The Old English *Exodus*, as noted in brief here, uses figurations of ruined fortresses in its

narrative of sea-crossing; these are examined in greater detail. I continue and extend my reading of *Beowulf*, discussing Heorot and the dragon's lair as (future and past) ruins. Analogously, the Tower of Babel in *Genesis A* is depicted as a future ruin even as its construction is narrated, in a scene expanded dramatically from the biblical text. Latin literary inheritances exist alongside remnants of England's Roman occupation, as described in *The Ruin*.

The Old English adaptation of *Exodus* likewise represses the feminine, eliminating references to the biblical Tziporah and Miriam. Similarly, the *Guthlac* narratives include no reference to women, except as objects of rape. *Exodus* is examined in greater detail in the next chapter, on ruins, and *Guthlac* in chapter 4 on wilderness, though neither chapter addresses gender issues. Chapter 6, the second of two on the *Exeter Book* riddles, returns to a discussion of how gender and environmental issues are embedded with one another in Anglo-Saxon literary remains, using Timothy Morton's 'hyberobject' as a way of thinking about cultural formulations like gender, religion, and race.

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