Medievalism in the Medieval: Gothic Elements in Old English Literature

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ABSTRACT

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic genre of literature is difficult to define. In reality, the genre is a set of tropes rather than a clearly articulated literary system. Interestingly, these Gothic elements are also apparent in several works in the Old English poetic tradition. Though these poems likely date some 800 years before the rise of the Gothic, a proto-Gothic impulse runs through *Beowulf*, *Guthlac A*, *Andreas*, and *Juliana*. This study intends to draws parallels between the classic Gothic elements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and these works of Old English literature. An examination of the elements common to both is centered in setting, villains, victims, and supernatural/superhuman rescuing agents. Extensive research has been done in Anglo-Saxon history and culture in order to understand the influences behind the early medieval literary works at hand. In addition, thorough research into ancient and medieval saints' lives, particularly the hermitic warrior tradition, has been carried out to trace the connection between the liminality and monstrous aspects of this tradition and the Gothic. Special attention has also been given to the female saints' lives tradition, linking patriarchal and sadistic oppressors to Gothic villains. Although definition is elusive, a definition of the Gothic has also been addressed. Through close readings of several key texts, this discussion attempts to reveal the connections between literature of vastly different times and cultural situations. The shared Gothic tropes suggest a connection, but the juxtapositions of radically different cultures both in the early medieval period and the Gothic/Romantic period may explain equally common impulses.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Ann Radcliffe, perhaps the most representative author of the late eighteenth-century Gothic novel, writes in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*:

> Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark-gray stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper as the thin vapor crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipt with splendor. From those, too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely, and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity; and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend. (216)

In this passage, Radcliffe provides a textbook example of how many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers associated the Gothic with widely recognized features of medieval literature and culture. Montoni's imposing castle and its "Gothic greatness,"

complete with the wear and tear of its dark stone appearance, the dark gloominess of the landscape, mountains, crags, battlements, and towers, elicit thoughts of the castles of Arthurian romances. The dark landscape and the forbidding, vaporous mountains in the distance call to mind the misty moors and mysterious nights in *Beowulf*. However, all of these identifiable medieval tropes were part of a bygone age by Radcliffe's time. The radical changes of the early modern period and the subsequent Age of Enlightenment had long swept away from European society many of the old medieval worldviews and superstitions, at least in educated or urbanized circles. Nevertheless, Radcliffe and other Gothic writers persisted in connecting their own genre to their romanticized notion of the medieval. Was Gothic medievalism an accurate portrayal of medieval cultural? For the most part, it was not. As Fred Botting points out, Gothic ideas of the medieval have either few or distorted connections to the actual Middle Ages (3).

Whatever degree of accuracy or inaccuracy existed in Gothic authors' attitudes toward the Middle Ages, however, medieval trappings are undoubtedly an identifying feature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature in England. Any responsible description of what makes a work "Gothic," indeed any list of defining characteristics of the genre, includes medievalisms, perhaps for more reasons than simple "window dressing." The Gothic is a movement in literature in which fear is the central impulse and emotion. Yet, the Gothic is much more complex than just "fear." The fear is centered in a certain environment and mental state. Such environments or states include the supernatural, uncanny, or mysterious. Dark places, both literal and figurative, form the backdrop of Gothic "environments." Gothic settings often include medieval castles or monastic ruins, or eerie places such as moors and fens. Such liminal spaces

enhance the dark and mysterious aura in the Gothic. A woman oppressed by a dominant male is a common element, and sometimes a supernatural or superhuman hero must rescue those in distress. At times, the Gothic includes villains or monsters who display deviant sexuality, mental illness, or anti-social behavior. Finally, the Gothic tends to critique a passing social order, demonizing a preceding ideology or worldview or calling for social change (e.g., Gothic Romanticism rejecting the Enlightenment, recently converted Anglo-Saxon society rejecting its pre-Christian past).

It is possible to see such elements of the Gothic in early medieval English literature. Because of the presence of such elements in Old English literature, Gothic writers of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries were perhaps not as far off in their imaginings of the Gothic connection to medievalisms as they may seem. While it is true that the Gothic writers were writing from their own idea of the Middle Ages and nothing based on "actuality," they nevertheless may have intentionally or unintentionally paralleled some elements of Anglo-Saxon culture. There is a definite impulse toward the Gothic in early medieval English literature, evident in *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, *Guthlac*, and *Juliana*.

Gothic Tropes

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic authors used several memorable themes, characters, and neo-medieval scenes: feudalism, knights, and a castle in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*; romantic heroines, malevolent villains, castles, and wild mountainous landscapes in Radcliffe's novels; the devil and an abbey in *The Monk*; a deadly, humanoid monster in *Frankenstein*; Heathcliff on the moors in *Wuthering Heights*; and the insane, spectral Bertha Mason haunting the ancient and gloomy

Thornfield Hall in *Jane Eyre*. Many of these same elements, such as monsters and their victims, oppression and escape, and dark stone structures and wild liminal spaces, exist in the Old English works named above.

While such Gothic tropes are recognizable and contribute to our concept of the "Gothic," the genre has lacked an exact definition more often than not. However, critics have been quick to comment on the features and implications of the Gothic, especially regarding its historical, social, and psychological meanings. Fred Botting writes that the defining characteristic of Gothic fiction is its social aspects. The violence and power of Gothic villains threatens the existence of social order (4-5). Villains, often monstrous or supernatural, are the driving force of the plot. Jerrold E. Hogle points out that ghosts and monsters often haunt an enclosed or antiquated space or invade a space from an unearthly domain. Therefore, the Gothic exists somewhere between physical reality and unexplained, terrifying phenomena. The boundaries between the two are blurred, either psychologically or physically (Hogle 2-3). In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic, this ambiguity is presented in a hybrid blend of the medieval and the historical, relying on certain types of settings, devices, and events (Botting 45).

The unresolved ambiguity between normal and paranormal in Gothic literature fits into the sort of juxtaposing common to the genre and to Old English literature. The Gothic sets the extremes of the physical and metaphysical and abnormal and normal psychology and leaves them unresolved (Hogle 13). The Gothic, like Anglo-Saxon culture, also juxtaposes the past and present. Clare A. Simmons suggests this juxtaposition is a hallmark of Gothic medievalism, which she defines as "the study and use of medieval culture in the post-medieval period" (1). As an example, she refers to the

alleged medieval practice of being buried alive that appears in Gothic novels and short stories (14). Gothic writers applied their understanding of the medieval to their own cultural situation and their purposes related to the uncanny, supernatural, or grotesque. In this sense, the Gothic's relationship to the medieval is "inverting and exploitative," providing a setting and milieu "for dark grotesque imagining" (Morgan 62).

In so doing, Gothic literature presented to its first audiences an era governed by barbarity and haunted by vice, violence, and sexual deviance (Botting 4). The Gothic casts the concrete rationalism of the Enlightenment into doubt, or at least ambiguity, in a "medieval" setting. In the shadowy Gothic world, metaphorical and literal darkness limit enlightened reason and deconstruct the neoclassical worldview. The unknown and unexplained threaten the ordered systems of scientific empiricism and rational thought. Botting describes this process as the night liberating the imagination's "unnatural and marvelous creatures" (32).

The Medieval Gothic

In interesting ways, the dark settings, fear, and monstrous creatures of the Gothic parallel Old English texts. Not many scholars have dealt directly with such a possibility. Anything written about the elements of Gothic or Neo-Medievalism of the Romantic Age being similar to the texts of early medieval England is indirect, or a very vague suggestive parallel at best. Jack Morgan, in *The Biology of Horror: Gothic Literature and Film*, makes perhaps the most direct statement on the issue. He links the dark components of *Beowulf* to the Gothic. Heorot, Hrothgar's mead-hall, has been a place of safety and social order. However, it is violated by Grendel, a hellish creature coming from the outer darkness and representing primordial fear. The situation in the hall is a

classic example of Gothic elements, such as decline and social disintegration. Hrothgar's *thegns* cannot protect the hall, and Grendel's invasion brings about an entity born in the forbidden spaces encroaching upon the social order. Much of Gothic literature and film similarly has to do with violation of a safe space: the home or the familiar turning into a place of terror and carnage (Morgan 183-84).

Morgan comments on more of *Beowulf*'s Gothic tropes, highlighting deteriorating places, "dissolution of architecture, infrastructure, and spatial ordering," which bring about a sense of disorientation. These are spaces that are "marginal, degenerated, and soulless" (184-85). In *Beowulf*, such disorienting, horrifying moments occur in "three archetypal sites of fear: the barricaded night-house, the infested underwater current, and the reptile haunted rocks of a wilderness" (Heaney xii). Northrop Frye also seems to consider *Beowulf* a Gothic work: "The list of Gothic revivalists stretches completely across its entire history, from the *Beowulf* poet to writers of our own day" (186). Morgan and Frye distinctly see the Gothic at work in Old English literature, and they trace Gothic elements of fear, darkness, decay, and alien evil within Anglo-Saxon culture.

As for themselves, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic writers likely considered themselves as accurately "channeling" the Middle Ages for a reason. For example, some nationalists in the Romantic period, amid revolutions breaking out in Europe and America, hearkened back to the Anglo-Saxons as progenitors of freedom and democracy. Many Gothic and Romantic writers and thinkers associated the Gothic with the Germanic nations who brought down the Roman Empire, considering the early Anglo-Saxons to be fiercely independent and democratic. As a result, some in the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries claimed their political heritage in the Germanic

tribes (Botting 5). Thomas Jefferson felt so indebted to the Anglo-Saxons that he wanted to put Hengist and Horsa, the first Anglo-Saxons to arrive in Britain, on the new national seal because he saw them as historic models of democracy (Freedman and Spiegel 680). At their core, however, Gothic works explore both being bound and victimized, and being freed. They share this central concern with *Beowulf*, *Guthlac*, *Andreas*, and *Juliana*.

I now turn to examine the Gothic impulses in these early medieval works. I accept from the outset that Gothic medievalism in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries was not necessarily an accurate picture of the Middle Ages and that the Gothic is a polymorphous genre and notoriously difficult to define, so a connection between these works of Old English literature to the later Gothic must be made thoughtfully and cautiously. The intent for this discussion is not to argue for historical lines of connection but to explore the heuristic power of reading certain texts as "Gothic" works. The central issue here is to assess certain Old English poems as "Gothic" or "proto-Gothic" works, by arguing that the same or similar Gothic tropes, cultural conflicts, and accompanying anxieties appear in the early medieval texts as they do in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century texts and their literary descendants.

Social factors were likely in play when *Beowulf*, *Guthlac A*, *Andreas*, and *Juliana* were penned. For *Beowulf*, the three monsters point to a threat to *comitatus* culture and the social imperative to preserve it. *Beowulf* also represents the transition in Anglo-Saxon culture from paganism to Christianity, and it features a mixture of elements from each. *Guthlac* and *Andreas* are rooted in Latin saints' lives, the one through copying hagiographical patterns and the other through direct storylines. These works demonize the godless and perhaps refashion pre-Christian Germanic monsters or villains into

demons or Satan. At the very least, they are works of Christian instruction designed to spur the converted Anglo-Saxon world to faithfulness. *Juliana* originates in the female saints' life tradition. In addition to serving as an inspiration to religious devotion, her story is perhaps intended to show Anglo-Saxon women an example of a strong female saint and martyr who, with God's help, overcomes the monstrous satanic villains attacking her. All four of these poems demonstrate the juxtaposition of the pre-Christian world to a converted Christian society. Consequently, like the social critique of a passing order taking place in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic, social upheaval in the Anglo-Saxon world elicited Gothic impulses, in many ways parallel to those of the Romantic period.

Chapter II

GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN *BEOWULF*

In chapter ten of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Gothic classic, *Frankenstein*, Dr. Frankenstein regrets his creation and verbally berates the monster who was supposed to be a man: "Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! You reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently bestowed" (115-16). The epithets Frankenstein uses sound similar to those used to label Grendel in *Beowulf*. Both Grendel and Frankenstein's monster are regarded as monstrous and demonic. To their opponents, their proper dwelling place is hell.

The Gothic elements in *Beowulf* are largely connected to the villainous monsters in the poem and the experiences of their victims. I will attempt to demonstrate the distinctly Gothic features in the work, from the classic Gothic devices to their application in the unique social and cultural situation of the Anglo-Saxons. Such an examination will address, in particular, the settings, villain, victims, and supernatural hero related to the episodes of both Grendel and his mother.

Monster or Demon?

Much has been written about the nature and identity of the monsters in *Beowulf*. The legendary J.R.R. Tolkien, one of the most important and earliest of critics to

comment on Grendel's origin and identity, suggests, "The monsters do not depart, whether the gods go or come…The monsters remained the enemies of mankind, the infantry of the old war, and became inevitably the enemies of the one God, *ece Dryhten*, the eternal Captain of the new" (22). Especially notable is Tolkien's analysis of the demonization of Grendel and his mother. Tolkien believes Grendel to be a blend of early Germanic elements, physical monsters, and Christian elements, spiritual demons. In his seminal *The Monsters and the Critics*, he argues that the complete medieval concept of Satan is not present in *Beowulf*, but the seeds of change in the blending of Satan as an evil force or spirit with physical, mythological monsters are apparent in Grendel. Tolkien draws a comparison between the parts of *Beowulf* when Grendel is more human or animalistic and when he is more demonic. He acknowledges that Grendel has devilish qualities, such as hatred of human joy, super-human strength, and love of the dark, but points out that he remains more or less a physical creature, because he destroys men's bodies, not their souls. Tolkien writes that the evidence remains on the side of Grendel being a physical creature first, and an evil demonic one second. Thus, Grendel is a demonized monster, rather than a monstrous demon (34-36). Andy Orchard seems to agree with Tolkien. In his book *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the* Beowulf-*Manuscript*, Orchard suggests that as Grendel draws closer to Heorot, he is more monster than demon as he is identified in increasingly concrete and corporeal terms. He is even human or human-shaped once he reaches Heorot. As he rips open the hall, he becomes "ever more physically real…a monstrous terror made flesh" (36-37).

Also commenting on Grendel's monstrous nature and the possibility of demonization, Michael Lapidge states that Grendel is more frightening because he is not

clearly defined. Lapidge proposes that the *Beowulf*-poet was deeply interested in the "nature and mechanism of fear" and the "representation of terror" (384). Lapidge writes that the poet is ultimately more interested in "the workings of the human mind and the mechanisms of fear" than the "narrative action of heroic poetry, where known heroes fight with known adversaries" (394). Lapidge's position elevates Grendel to what he feels is the most important role in the poem, the role of heightening fear. Lapidge thinks that creating a terrifying monster is more important than exalting Beowulf's heroism. Lapidge's theory opens an important critical avenue for understanding Grendel through the lens of the Gothic impulse. Others have weighed in on the discussion of Grendel's identity, nature, and function in *Beowulf*. John Niles agrees with Lapidge and suggests that the poet creates Grendel from a mixture of creaturely and demonic elements to make him more frightening because of the uncertainty of who or what he is. Niles believes this uncertain identity makes Grendel into an extraordinary synthesis of power, an enemy formidable enough to make Beowulf's heroism all the more impressive. Likewise, both the physical and spiritual sides of Grendel resonate with the feared enemy type of each aspect of the Anglo-Saxons' heritage: cultural (monstrous) and spiritual (demonic) (138). Because both elements are present, Fred Robinson emphasizes that in the evangelized Anglo-Saxon world, Grendel becomes increasingly demonic (83). Within Grendel, there is a duality of pre- and post-Christian components.

On the other hand, some scholars have highlighted the reverse, the demonic characteristics assigned to Grendel as monster, or his gradual demonization. William Whallon argues that the *Beowulf*-poet links Grendel to both Cain and Satan to show the Anglo-Saxons that the enemies of Christianity are akin to the monsters that they believe

haunt the English moors and other liminal spaces. Christian clerics, as the *Beowulf*-poet likely is, do not dismiss the monsters dwelling in such spaces as superstitions of pagan imagination, but rather Christianize them into a phenomenon more compatible with the new order. Hence, Grendel appears demonic (91). Though he does not discuss Grendel specifically, Peter Dendle offers particularly helpful research that explains the Christianization of the culture in which *Beowulf* was written and how it may relate to the demonization of pre-Christian monsters. In his study on the Anglo-Saxon views of Satan, Dendle states that the early medieval church had not yet systematized or wholly articulated a theology of Satan. This ambiguity allowed for latitude in portraying what the demonic might look like in the physical human realm (4), and not coincidentally, his offspring looks like a physical, demonized monster.

Noel Carroll, a leading philosopher of art and an expert on horror in literature and film, sheds light on the unidentifiable, mixed nature of the most terrifying monsters of fiction and legend:

> One structure for the composition of horrific beings is fusion. On the simplest physical level, this often entails the construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on…A fusion figure is a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in unambiguously one, spatio-temporally discrete entity. (43)

Carroll emphasizes that combining opposing elements to make an unusual being is necessary to making a horrifying monster. His description of "fusion" is very applicable

to Grendel, as Grendel's composite, ambiguous nature may be his most terrifying feature. Grendel transgresses the boundary between inside and outside by crossing from the outer limits of civilization (i.e., the moors) into the hall-society of the Danes, but more importantly, he transgresses the clear distinction between organic creature and demonic spirit. The *Beowulf*-poet takes the two oppositions and fuses them into an ambiguous, dangerous, terrifying, and rather Gothic nightmare.

Grendel and the Gothic

The settings, monstrous and demonic characteristics, and victims connected to Grendel, as well as the supernatural force required to destroy him, represent important Gothic tropes. The following discussion is organized according to trope, rather than the chronology of events within the poem.

First, the settings surrounding Grendel are liminal, supernatural, gloomy, and mysterious. The *Beowulf*-poet describes: *Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten, / mære mearc-stapa, se þe moras heold, / fen ond fæsten* (102-04) "The savage spirit was named Grendel, great boundary-haunter, he inhabited the moors, fen, and stronghold."[1] In classic Gothic style, on the outer edges of the world, a creepy spirit or creature roams the land. The Old English connotation of "boundary haunter" refers to a foreboding being who inhabits liminal spaces, such as graveyards, oceans, fens, moors, and other dark, generally uninhabited places. Grendel lurks about and terrorizes the mysterious and outer limits of civilization.

A little later, the poet describes Grendel's repeated attacks on Heorot, Hrothgar's mead-hall. There is a key phrase that describes the timings of his attacks and which

[1]All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

again creates a "Gothic" aura: *Sin-nihte heold / mistige moras* (161-62) "Perpetual night inhabited the misty moors." This line and the passage containing it convey Grendel's murderous rampages and the tyrannical domain he commands in the liminal space of night. In vivid imagery, the Old English captures the eerie, remote, and hopeless setting of Grendel's reign of terror. The darkness, both literally and figuratively, never ceases where Grendel lives, kills, and cannibalizes. This terrifying place is shrouded in fogginess and extends far from the reaches of the *comitatus*, the socio-cultural centerpiece of Germanic civilization.

Indeed, thanks to Grendel, the *comitatus* in this section of *Beowulf* is no longer a place of comfort and peace, but rather a place of horror and gore in additional ways. Grendel controls Heorot. The poet thus presents the classic Gothic element of a villain controlling and terrorizing victims within an enclosed space. Grendel is perfectly familiar with the hall (713-14). He enters it and murders its inhabitants every night for twelve years (146). Until Beowulf arrives, Hrothgar is a prisoner in his own enclosed fortress (149-52).

When Beowulf finally does arrive at Heorot to be the one warrior formidable enough to stop Grendel, the text still paints the villain with language reminiscent of the Gothic, and as Grendel approaches Heorot for his fatal battle, the poet reports: *Com on wanre niht / scriðan sceadu-genga* (702-03) "He came in the dark night, to glide, the shadow-walker." Here again are more references to darkness, shadow, and night. This time, a unique title emerges that characterizes Grendel's role and his dominion over a Gothic setting. The title *sceadu-genga* literally means "shadow-walker." However, with Grendel as one's companion in the dark, the title indicates a heinous perversion of the

comitatus. Grendel is an outcast. He is powerful and holds dominion, but he reigns over a liminal, chilling, and forbidden place. He is a companion, but one who rules the mysterious liminal spaces. Consequently, his villainous threat is all the more frightening.

In addition to his domain over the fens and remote places which embody Gothic tropes for setting, Grendel is an excellent example of a Gothic villain. He is monstrous and tyrannical. He indulges in forbidden actions, and he is driven by passion instead of reason. One of the most notable traits that parallels him to a Gothic villain is his demonization. He is a tormented, troubled spirit, perhaps suggesting his lack of reason and tendency toward mental instability that so often characterizes Gothic villains and monsters. In line eighty-six, the poet calls him an *ellen-gæst*, meaning a "powerful outcast," but one who must endure the joyful celebrations of Heorot *earfoðlice*, meaning "painfully," "sorrowfully," or "angrily." Prior to Grendel's clash with Beowulf, the poet describes his coming:

> *Raðe æfter þon*
> *on fagne flor feond treddode,*
> *eode yrre-mod; him of eagum stod*
> *ligge gelicost leoht unfæger* (724-27)
> "Immediately after that, the devil treaded on the shining floor, went wrathful-minded; from his eyes flashed a hideous light most like fire."

These fascinating lines reveal several of Grendel's disturbing traits, all placing him among the most monstrous of Gothic villains. The Old English word *feond* can be translated "devil," suggesting Grendel's hellish character and displaying the explicit demonization of Grendel in the story. Grendel is a Gothic monster, but also here a post-

Christian demon. Grendel is also "wrathful-minded." His twisted mind spills over with rage, but his eyes may be the most intriguing part of these lines. They are filled with a "double amount" of unsightly, blazing fire. They are hideous, brilliant, and deadly. In essence, Grendel has a crazed and deranged look in his eyes.

Shortly afterward, he indulges in what is perhaps the most taboo and gruesome murder in the entire poem. He enters the hall and snatches one of Beowulf's sleeping soldiers. The poet recounts the gory scene:

> *Ne þæt se aglæca yldan þohte,*
> *ac he gefeng hraðe forman siðe*
> *slæpendne rinc, slat unwearnum,*
> *bat ban-locan, blod edrum dranc,*
> *syn-snædum swealh; sona hæfde*
> *unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,*
> *fet ond folma* (739-45)
>
> "Nor did that monster hesitate in thought, but he immediately seized the first *thegn*, a sleeping warrior, he suddenly tore into him, bit into the body, drank blood from the veins, swallowed large chunks; he soon had devoured all the dead man, feet and hands."

In this horrific passage, demonization appears again, and the depth of Grendel's malice and bloodthirstiness is obvious. The word *þohte* can be translated as "reason." The insertion of this term reveals a great deal about Grendel's derangement. Like Homer's Cyclops, he is a wild beast, feral and devoid of social skills. He does not use reason; it is a concept foreign to his mind. Only passion, hate, and a ravenous appetite for human

flesh drive him. The poet meticulously lays out each gory detail and conveys how far Grendel indulges in forbidden and grotesque violence.

The unfortunate sleeping warrior and, to a lesser extent, his comrades, suffer torture in its most extreme form. Gothic fiction generally includes certain characteristics or circumstances surrounding a villain's victims. Elements of terror, torture, overwrought emotion, binding, death, or the threat of death define the experience of victims in the classic Gothic tradition. Such elements appear from the beginning of Grendel's attacks on Heorot, and the sheer helplessness of Grendel's victims places *Beowulf* squarely in a proto-Gothic tradition. The poet recounts the evening immediately before Grendel's first attack. Hrothgar's *thegns* have celebrated with a night of heavy beer drinking and have fallen asleep after a grand banquet. Then Grendel bursts onto the scene. The poet writes: *ond on ræste genam / þritig þegna* (122-23) "and in their rest, he seized thirty *thegns*." Thirty victims, killed and eaten without a fighting chance, are easy prey in their beds. They have no escape, and their doom is certain. This remains the situation for Heorot for the next twelve years. Powerless, Hrothgar and what is left of his dwindling *comitatus* are helpless prisoners in their own hall.

Though Beowulf does of course eventually rescue and vindicate Hrothgar, this desperate and tragic predicament may foreshadow Hrothgar's eventual doom. Hrothgar's ultimate victimization may even allude to the demise of whole pre-Christian Germanic world. Heorot, the symbol of ancient *comitatus* culture, is eventually destroyed. This elegiac but pessimistic mood in *Beowulf* reflects attitudes within the Anglo-Saxon period. A gloomy, pessimistic outlook on the afterlife is often considered a characteristic of pre-Christian Germanic culture, and by the time *Beowulf* as we know it is penned, non-

Christians and pagan culture are considered doomed by the Christianized Anglo-Saxon culture. Thus, not only do Hrothgar, his hall, thegns, and nation not survive, ultimately even Beowulf himself is destroyed, and doubt is cast over his eternal fate as a victim of a monstrous pagan age, symbolized by Grendel and his later counterpart, the dragon (2820). These suggestive parallels to Gothic elements of doom indicate the helplessness and hopelessness of the victims in *Beowulf*.

The despair in Heorot also demonstrates the high, overwrought emotion quintessential to Gothic literature and film. After Grendel is in the full throes of his nightly cannibalistic orgy of violence, the poet describes the emotional state of the hall: *Þæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga, / modes brecða* (170-71) "That was intense grief and sorrow of heart for the lord of the Scyldings." These words create a highly emotionally-charged mood just as much as any overwrought passage in Ann Radcliffe's novels, and the circumstances giving rise to such an intense reaction likely surpass the duress of those in most late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Gothic works. Hrothgar's people pour out heart-wrenching grief for their lord and for the loved ones they have lost in such a gruesome fashion. It is a pitiful and tragic scene of genuine but extreme emotion.

Beowulf arrives in Denmark to find Heorot in this horrendous and dejected state. In a Gothic work, only a supernatural or superhuman heroic force can suppress such extreme and evil tragedy and terror. Beowulf serves in this role, of course. A superhuman or divine force working for good is often a feature of heroic Old English literature or saints' lives, similar to the way a benevolent or heroic rescuer functions in the Gothic tradition. Beowulf acts in this role most notably and impressively in his

titanic battle with Grendel. The poet writes: *Heold hine fæste, / se þe manna wæs mægene strengest / on þæm dæge þysses lifes* (788-90) "He held him firmly, he who was the strongest of might of men on that day of this life." The connotation here is that Beowulf is the strongest man of his time. He is the only one capable of holding the monstrous, supernatural, and demonic Grendel; none of Hrothgar's men have proved capable of delivering their own *comitatus* from the clutches of the most sinister and deadliest enemy in their world. Only a man of mythological, and perhaps monstrous, strength is suitable for the vicious struggle. Beowulf is so strong that he is able to rip off Grendel's entire arm with his bare hands. The poet recounts:

> *Lic-sar gebad*
>
> *atol æglæca; him on eaxle wearð*
>
> *syn-dohl sweotol; seonowe onsprungon,*
>
> *burston ban-locan* (815-18)
>
> "The evil monster experienced a deadly wound; the incurable wound became apparent in his shoulder; the sinews burst asunder and the joints burst."

With unexplained superhuman power, Beowulf can shred bone and cartilage with sheer upper body strength, free of any weaponry. The vivid and grotesque language in lines 815-18 suggests the very popping of joints and excruciating tearing of tendons and muscles. The source of Beowulf's strength is unknown, but the term *æglæca* has two distinct meanings: "monster" or "superhuman hero." Therefore, one can argue that Beowulf's supernatural strength parallels that of Grendel. In a sense, one could conclude Beowulf's strength is "monstrous." However *æglæca* is understood, Beowulf fits the

Gothic mode of the superhuman good force required to save helpless victims, like Hrothgar and his nation.

Grendel's Mother and the Gothic

Beowulf once again comes to the rescue when Grendel's mother attacks Heorot. As with Grendel and his attacks, certain Gothic impulses appear in the story through the setting, villain, victims, and rescuing hero. The landscape and haunts of Grendel's mother are likewise liminal, supernatural, gloomy, and mysterious. An ominous atmosphere of mystery permeates Hrothgar's account of the sightings of Grendel and his mother on the moors. The poet states that they *moras healdan* (1348), literally meaning they "hold the moors." The outer limits of civilization belong to them, and they reign over a geographic and metaphoric realm of darkness, an environment perfectly Gothic. Even more detailed is a disturbing picture the poet paints of any living thing that would venture near this creepy region:

> *Ðeah þe hæð-stapa hundum geswenced,*
> *heorot hornum trum hold-wudu sece,*
> *feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,*
> *aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,*
> *hafelan hydan. Nis þæt heoru stow;*
> *þonon yð-geblond up astigeð*
> *won to wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ*
> *lað gewidru, oðþæt lyft ðrysmaþ,*
> *roderas reotað* (1368-76)

> "Although the dogs harassed the stag, the strong hart with horns longs for the pleasant wood, driven far, he gives up his spirit, his life on the edge, before he will ever hide his head in that water. That is not a safe place; when the dark surge rises up to the clouds, then the wind stirs the hateful storms, until the clouds oppress and the skies weep."

Several key words and phrases related to this eerie landscape make this passage thoroughly Gothic. Though a deer is in a desperate situation and is about to be torn apart by dogs, it would rather suffer a horrible death or bury its head than to go anywhere near the territory haunted by Grendel and his mother. Classic Gothic trappings such stormy skies make an explicit appearance, but these are not just gray clouds. The poet suggests this storm is in fact evil. The winds are so enormous and strong that the skies loudly weep. This is the environment Grendel and his mother inhabit, and indeed rule. The summary phrase in the passage, "That is not a safe place," conveys that this liminal space is the opposite of the mead-hall, the heart of the *comitatus* and the safest place in the pre-Christian Germanic world. The hall is where the lord and his *thegns* reside, and it is a place of warmth and kinship. It is home, as it were.

Grendel's mother's space is the exact contrast to Heorot. In fact, it is a perverted and horrific version of Heorot. Certain aspects of the hall inhabited and ruled by Grendel and his mother reach the very depths of eeriness. The parallels and contrasts to Hrothgar's hall and *comitatus* are striking. Glowing green replaces Heorot's warmth and beauty (1365-67). Deadly water monsters serve as the alternative to Hrothgar's loyal *thegns* (1425-30). Swords and weapons fill both halls. The home of Grendel and his mother is a "horror hall," and upon his arrival, a hell-bride awaits Beowulf (1497-1500).

It is a place of terror, chill, isolation, desperation, death, and foreboding. Naturally, an atmosphere of fear and doom permeates this dark, dreary, and remote territory. In essence, Grendel and his mother have tried to make like their hall like Hrothgar's hall, only comfort and cheer have been replaced by evil, gore, and the grotesque, making their home a horrifying parody of the otherwise joyful and secure Heorot. Their home could be compared to Frankenstein's or Dracula's castle, in that it becomes a place of terror rather than peace and comfort.

A descriptive passage reminiscent of scenery commonly found in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic novels occurs as the poet tells of Beowulf's journey to Grendel's mother's lair:

> *Ofereode þa æþelinga bearn*
> *steap stan-hliðo, stige nearwe,*
> *enge an-paðas, uncuð gelad,*
> *neowle næssas, nicor-husa fela* (1408-11)
> "Then the son of princes passed over the steep cliff, the narrow, lonely path, the close narrow path, an unknown way, deep headland dwelling of many a sea monster."

Beowulf must pass over the jagged cliffs and rocky crags to an area even more forbidden than the treacherous path itself. Not only is the road "strange" and nearly impassable, it leads to a lonely and remote region shrouded in an unusual and haunting landscape. At the end of the path are the murky waters outside of Grendel's mother's lair, guarded by the dreaded sea monsters, Grendel's *thegns*. The sharp rocks and narrow crags are again

reminiscent of scenes from Radcliffe's novels or the paths trodden by Frankenstein's monster.

However, the hazardous roads and gloomy regions pale in comparison to the hellish and horrifying monsters reigning over such terrors. Grendel's mother is just as threatening and monstrous a villain as her son. She is likewise demonic and tyrannical. She engages in forbidden impulses, and revenge and brutality govern her actions. The *Beowulf*-poet labels her a bloodthirsty, ancient, and powerful murderer, who reigns supreme over an expanse of doom.

The poet reports that Grendel's mother *yrmþe gemunde* (1259) "remembered misery." This phrase indicates that Grendel's mother harbors a deep bitterness against Hrothgar and his *comitatus*. She broods over Grendel's death in her lair after his return from the fight with Beowulf, and the injury done to her and the insult to her own perverted realm. Resentment over the murder of one's child may be an understandable emotion, but Grendel's mother's attitude and method of retaliation is ghastly, violent, and deadly. She cares nothing for the grief Grendel has brought to Hrothgar and Heorot, and she wants to add to it. In fact, shortly afterward, the poet describes the character of Grendel's mother in terms similar to Grendel's personality and crimes: *Hand-banan / wæl-gæst wæfre* (1330-31) "a murderer by her own hand, an unstable murderous stranger." Grendel's mother is a killer in her own right. In addition, the poet also calls her "unstable," suggesting mental illness. She is not rational. On the contrary, she is deranged, driven by passion, unable to be reasoned with, and not at all likely to be sympathetic or compassionate to the Danes. In these lines, she is also a deadly "stranger," again indicating that she and her son are liminal outcasts, residing beyond the

edge of civilization. Her mental insanity, emotional instability, eerie unfamiliarity, and murderous infamy make Grendel's mother fit the mold of a Gothic villain.

When Beowulf comes near her lair, we learn more about her:

> *Sona þæt onfunde, se ðe floda begong*
> *heoro-gifre beheold hund missera,*
> *grim ond grædig, þæt þær gumena sum*
> *æl-wihta eard ufan cunnode* (1497-1500)
> "Immediately, she who was greedy for slaughter who held the flood region a hundred years, dreadful and voracious, learned that one of the men there explored from above the estate of monsters."

It has already been established that Grendel's mother is bloodthirsty and voracious for human flesh, but this passage also indicates that she is very old. She has ruled this liminal region and her own horror-hall for at least a hundred years, and she has terrorized people for generations. Having controlled the fens and moors for so long, she is not used to any intruder "exploring" her "estate," particularly when he threatens to invade her own fortressed house. Her age and longstanding reign of demonic, monstrous terror link her to the ancient horrors common in Gothic literature and film, such as haunted houses, ancient villains, and revenants like Dracula.

However, it is the horrible, torturous, and macabre actions of such villains toward their victims that make them so wretched and frightening. Grendel's mother is like Grendel in that she also brings about terror, torture, bondage, death, or the threat of death. The victims in *Beowulf* experience terror in enclosed spaces, suffer grief from the horrendous homicidal ways of Grendel's mother, endure ghastly scenes of gore, and try

to escape bondage, as Grendel's mother and her associates threaten or kill their victims in various ways. Once Grendel's mother has plotted revenge, the poet states that the men are asleep as she approaches: *Com þa to Heorote, ðær Hring-Dene / geond þæt sæld swæfun* (1279-80) "She then came to Heorot, where the Ring-Danes slept throughout the hall." As so often happens in Gothic literature, victims are doomed to die trapped in an enclosed space. Hrothgar's *thegns* and Beowulf's Geatish soldiers lie asleep inside of Heorot, helpless victims defenseless against a powerful and deadly monster. Once Grendel's mother is inside the enclosure, her victims have little chance of escape.

In Beowulf's encounter with her, the water monsters that surround her hall and act as her *thegns* also present Gothic elements to the story. The danger of an enclosed space reappears later when Beowulf enters Grendel's hall:

> *Ða se eorl ongeat,*
> *þæt he in nið-sele nat-hwylcum wæs,*
> *þær him nænig wæter wihte ne sceþede,*
> *ne him for hrof-sele hrinan ne mehte*
> *fær-gripe flodes* (1512-16)
>
> "Then that earl realized that he was in the abysmal hall with someone or other, where no water nor creature injured him, nor had the sudden grip of the flood the power to touch him because of the roofed hall."

The residence of Grendel and his mother is so enclosed that all the water surrounding it does not enter the hall. However, this means that Beowulf must contend with a man-eating monster within a creepy, liminal, and enclosed space. Though Beowulf seeks a confrontation and not an escape, escape would not be an option even if Beowulf wanted

it. In essence, he would be an entrapped victim if he were anyone else of average human strength.

Once Beowulf and his comrades reach the watery residence of Grendel's mother, Beowulf jumps into the water to swim down to the hall. However, he encounters much difficulty because *hine wundra þæs fela / swencte on sunde* (1509-10) "many of the monsters oppressed him in swimming." The deadly and grotesque sea monsters, Grendel's and his mother's *thegns* as it were, constrict Beowulf as he attempts to swim. He is bound in the way that villains sometimes bind their victims in Gothic literature and film. The victims cannot escape, and they are helpless against their monstrous torturers. Grendel's mother also almost beats Beowulf, holding him to the floor and trying to stab him.

Grendel's mother's savagery, like her son's, leads to overwrought emotion in her victims, first after Æschere's murder, and second when Beowulf's men think he has fallen. After Æschere has fallen, Hrothgar and his people discover their grief: *Hrean wearð in Heorote; heo under heolfre genam / cuþe folme; cearu wæs geniwod, / geworden in wicun* (1302-04) "Lamentation was made in Heorot; she carried off the known hand under gore; grief was renewed and came about in that enclosure." Grendel's mother has fatally seized Æschere in a bloodthirsty rage of murder, and Hrothgar and his people predictably react with fear, sorrow, and shock. As Hrothgar's chief advisor, Æschere was a famous and beloved figure in the Danish *comitatus*. This scene is an excellent example of the high and overwrought emotion that characterizes the Gothic.

In retaliation for Æschere's assassination, Beowulf and his soldiers set out for Grendel's mother's hall. However, the gore, tragedy, and emotional upheaval only continue:

> *Denum eallum wæs,*
> *winum Scyldinga, weorce on mode*
> *to geþolianne, ðegne monegum,*
> *oncyð eorla gehwæm, syðþan Æscheres*
> *on þam holm-clife hafelan metton.*
> *Flod blode weol – folc to saegon –*
> *hatan heolfre* (1417-23)
>
> "For every Dane, for the Lord of the Scyldings, for many a *thegn* it was a pain in the heart to endure, a sorrow to each one of the earls, when they found Æschere's head upon that rocky shore. A flood of blood bubbled. The people also saw the hot gore."

The ghastly sight the *thegns* come upon understandably troubles them to the point of bitterness and emotional suffering. They cross paths with the head of a beloved comrade. Encountering a body torn apart or decapitated arouses a certain horror and disgust, magnified from when a corpse is intact. If seeing the decapitated and shredded body or the severed head of a loved one, a profound grief multiplies the atrocity all the more. The warriors witness the gruesome sight, remains of how Grendel's mother mercilessly devoured Æschere, and the blood bubbling up from the underwater hall likely makes them imagine that the rest of Æschere's body is being eaten at that particular moment or had been consumed shortly before. The "hot gore" inspires shock, terror, and disgust.

This disturbing and violent scene is a memorable example of Gothic terror and overwrought emotion.

Hrothgar and his *comitatus* are helpless victims in the classic Gothic tradition, in that they again require a heroic or righteous supernatural or superhuman force to be saved from villainous and demonic monsters. Beowulf is of course the victorious hero, but in the battle with Grendel's mother, the poet explicitly gives the credit to God:

> *Ond halig God*
> *geweold wig-sigor, witig Drihten,*
> *rodera Rædend, hit on ryht gesced*
> *yðelice, syþðan he eft astod* (1553-56)
> "And holy God brought about victory in battle, the wise Lord, the Governor of the heavens, easily adjudicated it in justice, so he then proceeded."

Ultimately, God is the supernatural force in this instance. Beowulf is the superhuman hero whom the narrator glorifies when Grendel is defeated, but when Grendel's mother is slain, God specifically receives more acknowledgment as the source of power necessary to destroy the villain and deliver Hrothgar, Heorot, and even Beowulf himself. Typical of much of Old English epic poetry and certainly of saints' lives, God serves as the heroic agent of deliverance, similar to the function of a rescuer in the Gothic tradition.

Several conclusions can perhaps be drawn from this study on the Gothic elements at work in the episodes of Grendel and his mother in *Beowulf*. In the encounters with both monsters, the unique settings, characteristics of the villains, plight of the victims, and the supernatural forces acting for good each have elements of the Gothic that

uniquely suggest that, though neither *Beowulf* nor any other Old English work is "officially" Gothic in the sense of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels, classic Gothic elements may nevertheless be more present than some have before considered.

It may seem amiss that the dragon episode has been omitted from this discussion. There may indeed be Gothic aspects to the dragon: he governs an enclosed space, guards ancient treasures within it, and lives in darkness. The cave as the setting is liminal, and a supernatural hero is required for defeating the dragon. However, in more ways perhaps, the dragon episode is not Gothic. He is a different kind of monster. Compared to Grendel and his mother, the dragon is a "worthy, old dinosaur." Dragons were often revered in Germanic culture, and the dragon's anger is a bit more rational and a little less demonic. The attention in this section of the poem is not on the victim, except Beowulf as a victim. However, Beowulf intentionally seeks out the dragon, which only attacks when his possessions have been disturbed. There is no torture. The dragon is not irrational in the sense that Grendel and his mother are. He fights fairly, as opposed to the tactics of Grendel and his mother. Therefore, the issues of the Gothic predominantly relate to Grendel and his mother.

Medieval Gothic Impulse and Fear

A look into the socio-historical background of the Anglo-Saxon period may help to illuminate the social environment and explain a medieval Gothic impulse in *Beowulf* and other texts. The English Church was confronted with the threat of paganism throughout the period. Such threats began to manifest very soon after Augustine of Canterbury converted the first English Christians in the late sixth- and early seventh-

centuries. The first generation of Anglo-Saxon Christian kings died off, and some of their successors were either still pagan, reverted back to the old religion, or adopted syncretism. The degree of success of the first missionaries was variable (Wood 121-22).

Pagan throwbacks were consistent across a century, demonstrating that the Christianization of England was not an overnight success story. Bede's account of St. Cuthbert reveals the need for continued evangelization during Cuthbert's time because missionary success in England had been inconsistent (Wood 122). Thus, Penda, the most powerful English king in the mid seventh-century, remained staunchly pagan, until he was overthrown in 654 (Stenton 177). In the south, Sussex did not convert until the late seventh-century (128). Twice in the last thirty years of the seventh-century, Archbishop Theodore had to allow penances for sacrificing to devils, future telling, and eating food sacrificed to idols (128). As for other pagan post-mortem practices that lingered, burial rites and grave goods represented at Sutton Hoo are clearly pre-Christian Germanic, but date from the seventh century, in the post-conversion period (Carver 433-35). Alongside pagan objects at Sutton Hoo are Christian baptismal spoons and bowls (Hawkes 48).

England had been thoroughly Christianized for only a few decades when the Vikings made their first attacks on the island. These attacks and subsequent settlements of non-Christian Scandinavian peoples brought an entirely new paganism to England, particularly to the north and east through the ninth- and tenth- centuries (Wood 122). East Anglia, eastern Mercia, and southern Northumbria were all overrun by pagan armies (Stenton 433). Appearances of and relapses into pre-Christian religious practices continued to be a problematic issue until the later part of the Anglo-Saxon period, perhaps as a result, particularly among the Viking settlers of the north. The Vikings were

perhaps more strongly rooted in their paganism than the Anglo-Saxons had been. Patrick Wormald comments, "Memories of pagan traditions died hard in Scandinavian England" (163). Abbo of Fleury reports that Kings Ælle of Northumbria and Edmund of East Anglia were sacrificed to Woden by the Vikings in an especially grotesque and violent manner: their lungs were cut out of their rib cages and draped over their shoulders to symbolize an eagle's wings (Wormald 148). Place names in the Danelaw indicate pre-Christian cultic sites, including a hill outside of Cleveland called Othenesberg, named for Odin/Woden (Stenton 434). Even after the new conquerors were converted, Viking sculpture in northern England assimilated Christianity into its pre-Christian past (Wormald 163). By the late ninth-century, roughly half of England had become thoroughly Anglo-Scandinavian. Alfred's victory over the Vikings halted their complete conquest of England, but to ensure that the Church would triumph and paganism would diminish, one of the conditions of Alfred's treaty with his defeated foe, Guthrum, was that Guthrum was to be baptized with Alfred as his godfather (Wood 122).

Thus, from the earliest days of Anglo-Saxon Christianization through the rise of the Danelaw, and later, through the reign of Cnut in 1016-35, the pre-Christian past existed alongside orthodox Christianity in early medieval English culture. Such a cultural milieu may have produced an ideal climate for literature that juxtaposes both of these worlds. Gothic impulses are perhaps rooted in this unique socio-historical situation and in the dark and monstrous elements attributed to the pre-Christian tradition. As argued by many scholars and historians, Grendel represents the juxtaposition, the Gothic-style fear of the dark ways of the pagan world returning to imprison the enlightened Christians.

Why does the *Beowulf*-poet render his most bloodthirsty villains terrifying, restraining, gloomy, and liminal? The demonization and rejection of the horrific and murderous outsider may also reflect the pushing away of forces that threaten the *comitatus*. Grendel and his mother can be read as social rebels who "play outside the rules" and threaten everyone as a result, or they can be seen as demonic forces of fate that are always waiting to destroy mortals and the *comitatus*. They perhaps represent the darkness of the old social order before the advent of Christianity. These two monsters reflect the "Gothic method" of writers demonizing the gloomy villain who restrains people from life and happiness. Anglo-Saxons were a *comitatus* people: they feared dark fate, and they saw the old order as fettered darkness. They represented an amalgamation of pre- and post-Christian cultures. Much more than its inclusion of the classic dark and eerie trappings of Gothic literature, what makes *Beowulf* decidedly Gothic is the interaction between social worldviews. The juxtaposing of two distinct cultures, with vastly differing values, places *Beowulf* squarely in the Gothic tradition because Gothic literature is ultimately social commentary between opposing forces of past and future.

Chapter III

GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN *GUTHLAC A* AND *ANDREAS*

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the eponymous character is an evil and demonic, undead monster. Yet, he is confounded and forced to retreat when confronted by Christian symbols:

> As we burst into the room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish passion; the great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge; and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood-dripping mouth, champed together like those of a wild beast. With a wrench, which threw his victim back upon the bed as though hurled from a height, he turned and sprang at us. But by this time the Professor had gained his feet, and was holding towards him the envelope which contained the Sacred Wafer. The Count suddenly stopped, just as poor Lucy had done outside the tomb, and cowered back. Further and further back he cowered, as we, lifting our crucifixes, advanced. (282)

Count Dracula's inability to overcome the advancing sacrament and crucifix is an example of a demonic creature trumped by the divine, or at least symbolism representing the divine. This type of confrontation and subsequent retreat of the demonic are at work in certain Anglo-Saxon saints' lives, which perhaps mirror the Gothic elements in

Dracula and other horrific tales. In this chapter, I will examine the Gothic elements in *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*. These poems come from the saints' lives tradition, different from the strictly heroic tradition of *Beowulf*. Certain *topoi* from the accounts of "warrior saints" appear through much of the history of the Christian hermitic tradition, and these mirror the Gothic impulse. We see that many of the same Gothic elements appear in the Old English saints' lives tradition and that they are especially evident in *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*.

The Christian Hermitic Tradition

The Christian hermitic tradition rose out of a movement of certain ascetics who embraced a form of Christianity that embodied a more extreme means to personal devotion. After the Roman Empire ended official, state-sanctioned persecution of the church, the ascetics felt the Christian life had become too easy and not demanding enough to meet Christ's call for sacrificial discipleship. Therefore, they withdrew into remote places, particularly and initially the Egyptian desert. Those to pioneer this movement, which would eventually give birth to the anchoritic and monastic traditions, became known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers. The burgeoning understanding in the church was that the hermit's life was superior to more ordinary ways to practice faith. As far as the honor and homage the church paid them, the hermits became the "new martyrs."

Hermits cut all ties with the world, even family (Chadwick 194). Their objective was to escape all earthly thoughts and focus them on Christ alone (284). They sought to fight against their own sins, particularly those of the mind (294). "The Conferences of Cassian" state that the hermitic life focused on contemplation, as opposed to the monastic

life that eventually grew out of it, which focused on daily cultivation of virtue (194). Hermits went into the desert to engage in deliberate, open warfare with the demonic, as opposed to contenting themselves to fight evil within human society (194).

The church traditionally views Saint Antony as the first Desert Father (Gonzalez 138). His experience sets in place specific hagiographical *topoi* directly relating to the hermitic warrior saints tradition, and it is these characteristics that relate to the Gothic. There are, of course, the typical generic hagiographical elements surrounding virtually all saints' lives. Some of these include a refusal of honor or high office because of humility followed by a popular outcry of support for the saint (Abou-El-Haj 182), the saint predicting his/her own death and giving burial instructions (184), angels escorting the saint's soul to heaven (186), the saint's corpse discovered incorrupt (188), and posthumous miracles associated with the saint (194). However, some hagiographical *topoi* connect the hermitic warrior and Gothic traditions. First, the saintly hermit enters a liminal place to fight the devil, as in a handful of specific episodes in Antony's life that are dark, terrifying, and connected to the demonic. Athanasius, Antony's biographer, reports how Antony lives among the tombs for a time. He enters one of the tombs and stays there alone in order to fight the devil. The devil and a horde of demons subsequently assault him (76-79). Antony also later goes to live on the margins in deserted barracks filled with reptiles (86-87), a move which seems like something straight out of both the Old English tradition and the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic tradition. Antony intentionally battles deadly monsters inhabiting the darkness of forgotten and abandoned places. He also confronts temptations and harassment there from grotesque manifestations of the demonic (80-83).

He encounters demons in the form of apparitions, stirring around in rooms, crashing things, and making ruckus like poltergeists (88-89). His chilling experience sounds remarkably akin to Gothic literature and film, from the late eighteenth-century to today. All of these features make up the *topoi* of the heroic warrior saint tradition, in which a hermit dwelling in the gloomy deserted places contends against ghosts, poltergeists, specters, demons, and monsters. We see them in Old English prose and poetic literature, and they reflect Gothic elements.

The Christian Hermitic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England

Antony's movement grew quite popular in the late patristic period, and hermits continued to thrive well into the Middle Ages almost to the early modern period. The tradition of anchorites and anchoresses was especially notable in the medieval era. Hrabanus Maurus of Fulda in ninth-century, Wulsi of Evesham in the eleventh-century, and Wulfric in twelfth-century Somerset are examples. Female hermits existed, as well. Christina of Markyate lived as an anchoress in the early twelfth-century (Leyser 13). Of course, perhaps the most famous example is Julian of Norwich in the fourteenth-century, whose writings continue to be popular.

Most pertinent to this discussion is the hermitic tradition in Anglo-Saxon England. Isolated islands, fens, caves, and other liminal spaces in England were often sought out as places of spiritual retreat for these hermits (Brady 673). Among the first hermits of the newly converted Anglo-Saxons was Saint Cuthbert. Cuthbert's story is significantly influenced by the Latin tradition of the Desert Fathers, but it is also rooted in the Celtic tradition of warrior saints, who themselves were heirs to the hermitic tradition of Antony. The account of Cuthbert's time on the island of Farne is especially notable,

particularly for the unique liminality of his experience and the elements in his story (written in the classic hermitic saints' life tradition) that bring to mind those of Gothic literature.

A memorable theme in the saints' life tradition relates to "colonizing" these liminal spaces in the name of Christ, making them distinctly holy and driving away the demonic. A specific example in Cuthbert's account is the description of the place he chooses to hide himself away, *Nullus hanc facile ante famulum Domini Cuthbertum solus valebat inhabitare colonus, propter videlicet demorantium ibi phantasias demonum* (*Two Lives* 214) "No one succeeded in easily inhabiting this place as a cultivator of the land, before Cuthbert, the servant of the Lord, no doubt because of apparitions and lingering demons there."[2] These lines clearly indicate the dark and frightening nature of Farne, the liminal setting Cuthbert chooses to battle evil spirits. *Demorantium* is rendered as "lingering." The demons "linger" because they haunt the space, and there is no one to exorcise them. The dread of this space is reminiscent of Grendel's fens. No creature cared to enter into the realm of Grendel, another evil spirit. So it is the same here. The word *colonus* refers to someone who cultivates the land of someone else, a sharecropper or a serf, as it were. Before Cuthbert, anyone who ventures to Farne seeking to sharecrop does not last, and no one has been able to truly reclaim this space. However, as in the hermitic saints' tradition, Cuthbert's supernatural power defeats the monstrous and ghostly enemies, and he becomes God's "tiller" of the land.

Another passage reports Cuthbert's spiritual authority over these demons, who afflict others, *Qui videlicet miles Christi ut deuicta tyrannorum acie monarcha terrae*

[2] Translation mine.

quam adierat factus est, condidit ciuitatem suo aptam imperio (*Two Lives* 214, 216) "For truly the soldier of Christ, who, once the forces of the tyrants had been conquered, was made ruler of the land which he had claimed and founded a worthy state under his own rule." In these lines, Cuthbert has defeated an entire battalion of demons that have tyrannically reigned over the island. God then makes him the reigning monarch of a space evidently less liminal than before, with the text remarking that he has founded an entirely new state. He has defeated demonic villains who would have held him captive and freed himself and the territory from being the victims of bondage to evil. With supernatural assistance from God, Cuthbert has thus invaded and colonized for Christ a territory formerly featuring physical and spiritual characteristics reminiscent of the dark settings of the Gothic. Some scholars have written about this notion of colonizing a geographic area terrorized by the demonic. Colonizing the liminal spaces in early medieval England also may have related to taking over and transforming pagan ceremonial sites (Wickham-Crowley 93). Early Anglo-Saxon saints and hermits may have gone into these places not only to face paganism but also to colonize their pre-Christian past in the name of Christ (94).

Guthlac and the Gothic

Those who lived further south than Cuthbert did not have rocky islands, and they certainly did not have a desert like Antony. They chose instead to be hermits in the fens and moors. Perhaps the most famous example of a fen-dweller is Saint Guthlac of Mercia. An otherwise unknown monk named Felix wrote a prose biography entitled the *Life of Saint Guthlac*, a work patterned after the hermitic saints' life tradition of Antony and Cuthbert (*Felix* 16-17). Guthlac's story sounds much like Antony's, as the desert

hermits' stories significantly influenced Anglo-Saxons' saints lives (Clayton 154-55). Felix's chief source for his biography on Guthlac, however, is the *Life of Saint Cuthbert* (Colgrave 52).

Many of Guthlac's battles, struggles, and victories strongly suggest a direct borrowing of material from Cuthbert's biography, especially those passages recounting paranormal battles with the demonic. Describing Guthlac's choice of hermitage, Felix writes: *Quam multi inhabitare temtantes propter incognita heremi monstra et diversarum formarum terrors reprobaverant* (*Felix* 88) "How many had attempted to inhabit there but had rejected the hermitage because of unknown monsters and the terrors of hostile forms." As in Cuthbert's story, no one up to Guthlac's time has been able to live in the dark setting Guthlac inhabits, a cave he digs out of a pagan barrow on an isolated island in the fens, a Gothic-style setting. Supernatural, ill-intentioned villains dwell there, ones Felix calls monsters, bringing Grendel and his mother to mind.

Felix goes on to give more detail about Guthlac's new place of retreat at Crowland, in the fens of Lincolnshire:

> *Nullus hanc ante famulum Christi Guthlacum solus habitare colonus valebat, propter videlicet illic demorantium phantasias demonum, in qua vir Dei Guthlac, contempto hoste, caelesti auxilio adiutus, inter umbrosa solitudinis nemora solus habitare coepit* (*Felix* 88)
>
> "No one alone succeeded in easily inhabiting this place as a cultivator of the land before Guthlac, clearly because of apparitions of lingering demons there. In which place, Guthlac, a man of God, who despised the

enemy contemptuously and helped by heavenly aid, began to inhabit alone the shadowy groves in solitude."

This passage sounds very similar to Cuthbert's experience. Guthlac invades this creepy region, inhabited only by monsters, ghosts, and demons, and rather than falling victim, he soon begins to expel all of the evil supernatural forces in the name of Christ. In the end, Guthlac alone reigns over a territory that has now been claimed for God's kingdom. What Guthlac first encounters is typical of the frightening and disturbing content often found in Old English literature and is remarkably reminiscent of the Gothic, especially the apparitions. He battles demons in the fens and marshlands, the places of monsters in the Germanic tradition, but they are likewise demonic. Felix calls the demon foes the "seeds of Cain," just like Grendel (Colgrave 55). It is easy to see how geography plays a very significant part in Guthlac's spiritual quest, particularly through his hermitage in the fens (Brady 674). It has been hypothesized that Crowland was a pre-Christian Germanic place of worship. If so, in rather Gothic ways, Guthlac claims pagan ritual sites to conquer demons, the land, the past, and the imagination (Wickham-Crowley 99).

The Gothic elements in *Guthlac A* from the Old English poetic tradition reflect Felix's Latin prose hagiographical account. The setting in the poem is remote, liminal, and eerily supernatural. In describing the goals and habits of a hermit, the *Guthlac*-poet states: *Sume þa wuniað on westennum, / secað ond gesittað sylfra willum / hamas on heolstrum* (81-83) "Some live in the wilderness, of their own will seek and settle homes in the dark places." In the grand hermitical saints' life tradition, as well as the Gothic tradition, the poet numbers Guthlac among those who have intentionally sought out the marginal and uncanny regions for habitation and religious devotion. The text also points

out that these places not only appear dark, but they are also socially or spiritually backward or disordered: *Idel ond æmen, eþelriehte feor, / bad bisæce betran hyrdes* (216-17) "Desolate and uninhabited, far from the right of the native land, it awaited the visit of a better guardian." In this case, Guthlac's adopted dwelling is remote and completely void of human contact. However, it also seems to be held by a negative force. Apparently, the inhabitant(s) prior to Guthlac has been negligent or ill-intentioned in caring for the pagan barrow. The latter phrase of this line suggests that a better resident will hopefully come to fight against whatever negative entity or creature presently controls it.

Soon enough, when Guthlac arrives, the ominous residents are revealed: *Wid is þes westen, wræcsetla fela, / eardas onhæle earmra gæsta. / Sindon wærlogan þe þa wic bugað* (296-98) "Wide is this wilderness, the many places of exile, hidden abodes of wretched spirits. They who dwell in the habitation are devils." The forces of hell control the fens where Guthlac has taken up residence. In fact, the place is described as being *æt heldore* (559) "at the door of hell," meaning, Guthlac makes his hermitage at a portal to hell. It is the sort of place like Grendel's home, where no creature, even if its life hangs in the balance, ventures to go. The setting is a place of pure terror, filled with demonic villains. Yet, Guthlac, like the desert hermits, seeks it out to test himself and claim it for Christ.

As indicated in the experiences of Antony and Cuthbert, annexing a pagan or demonic area to the kingdom of God is a key component to the hermitic tradition. Important passages in *Guthlac A* indicate this theme of transforming a liminal space to colonized territory for Christ. The poet reports: *Ac þæt lond gode / fægre gefreoþode,*

siþþan feond oferwon / Cristes cempa (151-53) "But the warrior of Christ defended well that good land, since he conquered the devil." Given the lines describing the territory's longing for a "better guardian," the land seems to be more than just an object here. Guthlac "intercedes" for the land long held captive by evil entities. The devil is dispossessed, and Christian forces have invaded a region formerly under demonic tyranny. Even more explicit are lines following Guthlac's long, victorious battle:

> *Guþlac moste*
> *eadig ond onmod eardes brucan.*
> *Stod se grena wong in godes wære;*
> *hæfde se heorde, se þe of heofonum cwom,*
> *feondas afyrde* (744-48)
> "Happy and resolute, Guthlac was able to enjoy the land. The green field stood in God's protection; that guardian, he who came from heaven, had driven away the devils."

The darkness over the moors has dissipated, and the verdant fields now stand liberated. What could be regarded as a classic Gothic setting has been transformed into the realm of Christ.

The villains Guthlac (and God) must overcome are, like Grendel, characterized by the same traits as Gothic villains. Guthlac's opponents are demonic, monstrous, tyrannical, given to forbidden actions and driven by passion: *Oft þær broga cwom / egeslic ond uncuð, ealdfeonda nið, / searocræftum swiþ* (140-42) "Often terror came there, terrible and strange, the warfare of old devils, strong with wiles." In addition, the poet describes the demonic hordes in *comitatus* language: *þrea wæron þearle, þegnas*

grimme, / ealle hy þam feore fyl gehehton (547-48) "The threats were severe, and the *thegns* savage. They all threatened death to that life." The demons are *thegns* of the devil, a close circle of warriors, empowered by a common enemy and mission, and united around Satan. They are a true threat to Guthlac. Guthlac's demonic foes are murderous, liminal, irrational, and relentless. Consequently, the ghosts and devils at Crowland fit the mold of Gothic villains.

Guthlac as the victim is continuously on the receiving end of Satan's assaults. As in *Beowulf*, the warrior saints' lives tradition, and the Gothic texts of the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries, as victim, Guthlac must endure terror, torture, binding, and the threat of death:

> *þonne hy him yrre hweopan,*
> *frecne fyres wylme. Stodan him on feðehwearfum,*
> *cwædon þæt he on þam beorge byrnan sceolde*
> *ond his lichoman lig forswelgan,*
> *þæt his earfeþu eal gelumpe*
> *modcearu mægum* (190-95)
>
> "Then they threatened him with anger, the danger of swelling fire. A band of foot soldiers stood against him, declared that he must burn on that hill and fire consume his body, that his tortures all take place, a sorrow to his kinsmen."

Later, Guthlac's bondage is put into even stronger terms: *wæron hy reowe to ræsanne / gifrum grapum* (406-07) "They were savage to assault with rapacious clutches."

The "helpless victim in chains" motif, common in Gothic literature, is certainly in play for Guthlac. "Rapacious" conveys the idea that these monsters are physically seizing or snatching Guthlac in the strong grasp of their dreaded and grotesque hands. They continue to bind him through much of the story:

> *Ongunnon gromheorte godes orettan*
> *in sefan swencan, swiþe geheton*
> *þæt he in þone grimman gryre gongan sceolde,*
> *hweorfan gehyned to helwarum,*
> *ond þær in bendum bryne þrowian* (569-73)
> "The hostile-minded began to torment the heart of the warrior of God. They strongly threatened that he had to go into that grim horror, to go condemned to the dwellers of hell, and there suffer in bonds in the fire."

Common to both the Gothic and hermitic traditions, the victim is here tortured. In a scene that not only takes place in a liminal space, Guthlac is threatened with a permanent residence in the most liminal place of all, hell, bound with chains.

Guthlac's seemingly impossible struggle is most certainly doomed without the benevolent supernatural force required to rescue him, often seen in the Gothic and *always* at work in the saints' lives tradition. This theme of divine help is the final Gothic attribute in *Guthlac A* that I would like to discuss. Many passages in the poem could serve as examples of divine intervention, but two will suffice. The first comes relatively early: *ac him god sealde / ellen wiþ þam egsan þæt þæs ealdfeondes / scyldigra scolu scome þrowedon* (202-04) "But God gave him courage against that monster, so that the ancient enemy's guiltier multitudes suffered shame." Guthlac is able to

withstand the horrifying and unsettling attacks of paranormal phenomena because of the courage God infuses into him. God's saving power is so overwhelming that the devil himself is humiliated. The second example of supernatural assistance is simple: *An is ælmihtig god, se mec mæg eaðe gescyldan; / he min feorg freoþað* (242-43) "Only God is almighty, he is able to easily shield me; he intercedes for my life." Through the poem, God repeatedly defends Guthlac and beats back the demons and ghosts afflicting him. *Guthlac A* is an interesting glimpse of the assimilation of the hermitic saints' life tradition and the heroic poem, and it is redolent with echoes of Gothic impulses.

The Gothic in *Andreas*

A similar set of patterns can be seen in the poem *Andreas* from *The Vercelli Book*. Like *Guthlac A*, the hermitic saint's life meets heroic poetic tradition meets the Gothic in *Andreas*. As with *Beowulf* and *Guthlac A*, the setting, villains, victims, and agent of rescue all indicate that *Andreas* can be considered a proto-Gothic work. The landscape, of course, is liminal, supernatural, gloomy, and mysterious. Lindy Brady has written extensively on the role of the dark setting in the poem. Mermedonia's landscape is based on the liminal spaces in the landscape of Anglo-Saxon England, such as snowbound fens and moors. The landscape and weather of Mermedonia certainly conjure up an inhospitable, Gothic scene:

> *Snaw eorðan band*
> *wintergeworpum. Weder coledon*
> *heardum hægelscurum, swylce hrim ond forst,*
> *hare hildstapan, hæleða eðel*
> *lucon, leoda gesetu* (1255-59)

"Snow bound the earth with winter storms. The weather grew cold with severe hail storms, as if rime and frost, gray warriors, locked the homeland of warriors, the dwelling of a nation."

As depicted in works of Gothic literature and paintings, snow and harsh wintry conditions provide eerie settings. This passage gives the impression that that the entire nation is locked and bound by the icy climate. It paralyzes their society and culture, and likely contributes to the remoteness of the region and the backward and twisted behavior of its citizens. The most specifically Gothic setting in the poem, however, is the cold, dark, dank, and foreboding *carcerne* (991) "prison." It is also called the *fæstenne* (1034) "fortress." By now, these words need little explanation as to how they connect to the Gothic. Though the prison is not a castle, it still evokes the sense of a dark and dreaded stronghold.

However, in spite of the land's woes and the people's sins, it is not beyond the reach of heavenly imperialism. Mermedonia moves from a horrifying and marginal nation to a full-fledged colony of Christ:

þa se modiga het,
cyninges cræftiga, ciricean getimbran,
gerwan godes tempel, þær sio geogoð aras
þurh fæder fulwiht ond se flod onsprang (1632-35)

"When the brave man commanded, the workman of the King, to build a church and to prepare God's temple, there the young people came forth, through the Father's baptism, and the flood burst forth."

Andreas, the missionary for God's kingdom, thus converts the erstwhile cannibals. They

are baptized and a church is erected on the spot.

Prior to their conversion, however, the Mermedonian villains in *Andreas* are monstrous, deranged, and cannibalistic. The *Andreas*-poet writes:

> *Swelc wæs þeaw hira*
>
> *þæt hie æghwylcne ellðeodigra*
>
> *dydan him to mose meteþearfendum,*
>
> *þara þe þæt ealand utan sohte* (25-28)
>
> "Such was their custom that they made each foreign person into food for the hungry when he visited that island from the outside."

There is a possible link between the Mermedonians and the Myrmidons in classical Greek literature (Alexander 163). The Myrmidons were fighters alongside Achilles. The term in antiquity came to mean merciless, mercenary brutes, indiscriminate killers for hire. The Mermedonians may also parallel the Celtic Britons, traditional rivals of the Anglo-Saxons. Anglo-Saxons associated the native Britons with liminal spaces near the Welsh fens, demonstrating that the Britons were both feared and "othered" (Brady 669, 676-77), and Brady links the Celts with the Mermedonians (680). The Anglo-Saxons, as well as classical authors, depicted the Britons as cannibals. It is thus possible that the Mermedonians in *Andreas* may have been modeled after the Britons as fearsome and monstrous inhabitants of liminal spaces (682). Whatever their identity, they are horrific villains, disturbing even by Gothic standards, engaging in ghastly acts and turning unsuspecting foreigners into food. Like other sinister Gothic villains, they prey on the helpless, only this time the victims are literal prey.

Andreas and his comrades clearly resemble Beowulf and his band of warriors (235-53). However, a powerful enemy circle of warriors is the opponent: *deofles þegnas* (43) "the devil's thegns." In this case, as in *Beowulf*, a perverted version of the *comitatus* commits heinous acts and serves as a dreaded monster. Satan himself appears later in the story:

> *þa for þære dugoðe deoful ætywde,*
> *wann ond wliteleas, hæfde weriges hiw.*
> *Ongan þa meldigan morþres brytta,*
> *hellehinca, þone halgan wer*
> *wiðerhycgende* (1168-72)
> "When the devil appeared before that force, dark and ugly, he had the appearance of a criminal outcast. Then the perverse prince of murder, the devil, began denouncing that saintly man."

This passage clearly indicates who is behind the ghastly cannibalism and torture of helpless victims, the ultimate demonic villain.

As in the hermitic and Gothic traditions, dreaded torture, binding, and imminent death plague the victims in *Andreas*. Victims suffer in *bendum fæstne* (184) "fast bonds" and *fetorwrasnum fæst* (1107) "with fetters fast" in prison. Later, the threat is made even clearer: *Nis seo stund latu / þæt þe wælreowe witum belecgaþ, / cealdan clommum* (1210-12) "The time is not far that the bloodthirsty men surround you with torments, with cold bonds." In all of these instances, bondage is combined with cannibalism, as in an early disturbingly explicit scene:

> *Woldon cunnian hwæðer cwice lifdon*

þa þe on carcerne clommum fæste

hleoleasan wic hwile wunedon,

hwylcne hie to æte ærest mihton

æfter fyrstmearce feores berædan (129-33)

"They wished to find out whether they remained alive who dwelt in prison fast in bonds, comfortless while in the fortress, which one first, they might, after an interval, deprive of life for food."

In this case, the Mermedonians plan to feast on a victim enclosed in a liminal, Gothic space, fettered in chains.

In such a grave predicament, a supernatural good force is once again required to save the innocent victims:

Wæs se leodhete

þrist ond þrohtheard. þrymman sceocan,

modige maguþegnas, morðres on luste,

woldon æninga, ellenrofe,

on þam hysebeorðre heafolan gescenan,

garum agetan. Hine god forstod,

halig of hehðo, hæðenum folce (1138-44)

"The people's hatred was determined and enduring. The multitude shook, headstrong warriors, in their lust for murder. They wished, at once, to break the boy's head, to kill him with spears. God, the holy one from heaven, defended him against the heathen people."

The bloodthirsty Mermedonian villains very nearly send this boy to a grisly and gory

death, but God himself intervenes to defend against the pagan cannibals. In just as dramatic fashion, God delivers those held captive and presumably doomed from the prison: *þa com dryhten god / in þæt hlinræced* (1462-63) "Then came the Lord God into that prison." God invades the enclosed Gothic fortress space and unfetters the helpless victims. He is the supernatural hero, without whom the victims would most certainly be killed by the demonically inspired villains. The final blow to the enemy comes in the end: *atol æglæca yfela gemyndig, / morðres manfrea myrce gescyrded, / deoful deaðreow duguðum bereafod* (1312-14) "the evil monster, mindful of evil, dark Lord of evil, he injured, he bereaved the murderous devil with his hosts." The phrase *atol æglæca* is also used to refer to Grendel. As Grendel is dealt a mortal defeat, so Satan, the evil monster, is here defeated. Satan's horrific traits as villain appear in the scene, but much more significant is the defeat dealt to him by God and his angelic forces. God and the angels are the Gothicized supernatural heroes of the saint's life. They seize the devil, render him powerless, and end his stranglehold on the minds and spirits of the Mermedonian people.

Guthlac A and *Andreas* each represent a fascinating blend of Germanic heroic epic, the Christian hermitic tradition, and Gothic elements. Why do these poets render their villains so terrifying, restraining, gloomy, and liminal? Perhaps it is because they are making the villains consistent with all three traditions, albeit unintentionally with the Gothic. The villains are monstrous and cannibalistic in the Germanic cultural milieu. They are apparitional and sinister according to the Christian hermitic tradition. Finally, they embody the Gothic aspects of tyranny and victimization of helpless, emotionally overwrought captives. In the instances in which the devil is supposed to surround

himself with *thegns*, such a portrayal may reveal the demonization and rejection of the "scary demonic" outsider that very likely reflects the pushing away of forces that threaten the *comitatus*. In *Andreas*, the poet, once again likely a monk, perhaps demonizes pagans who threaten Christians with imminent and grotesque destruction. In both works, the heroic Christians hold firm, and the saints' lives end triumphantly. Such victories would likely be reassuring to beleaguered Anglo-Saxons, who regularly faced threats to both their heroic and spiritual *comitatus* from pagan forces. Those facing this unique dilemma likely welcomed heroic tales in which a Christian warrior triumphs over monstrous evil.

Chapter IV

GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN *JULIANA*

Gothic author Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* is a disturbing story considered seminal in the Gothic tradition. Maniacal and monstrous male villains physically, emotionally, and sexually abuse helpless females. One such example comes from one of the most horrifying scenes of the novel, when Ambrosio rapes Antonia:

> Even his caresses terrified her from their fury, and created no other sentiment than fear. On the contrary, her alarm, her evident disgust, and incessant opposition, seemed only to inflame the Monk's desires, and supply his brutality with additional strength. Antonia's shrieks were unheard: Yet She continued them, nor abandoned her endeavours to escape, till exhausted and out of breath she sank from his arms upon her knees, and once more had recourse to prayers and supplications. (108)

Some parallels exist between the Gothic elements here and those in the Old English poem *Juliana*, especially those related to abuse of women at the hands of dominant, sadistic men. In addition to serving as an inspiration to religious devotion, Juliana's story is perhaps intended to show Anglo-Saxon women an example of a strong female saint and martyr who, with God's help, overcomes the monstrous, satanic villains attacking her. Certain *topoi* from the hermitic warrior tradition discussed in chapter three may apply to the female saints' lives *topoi*, such as contests with the devil, bondage,

torture, and liminality. However, female saints' lives also have features unique to the tradition, as seen in such examples as the accounts of Saint Margaret and *Juliana*.

Female Saints' Lives and Female Power

Certain saints' lives illustrate the similarities and differences among the usual female saints' lives *topoi*. The Greek, Latin, and Old English accounts of Saint Margaret, for example, all depict her sufferings at the hands of dominant pagan males. A prefect desires Margaret, but when he learns she is a Christian, he imprisons her and scourges her with canes. Yet, she refuses to renounce her faith and, instead, denounces the prefect. She then must battle the devil himself and escapes unharmed. After that, the prefect orders her to be burned with torches and then to be bound and immersed in water. She is set free by an earthquake. She is eventually martyred, confounding demons and bearing witness before potential converts (Clayton and Magennis 4-5). The story of Margaret is an obvious contrast between authoritarian, pagan, physical power and a physically weak woman. Indeed, when a demon is defeated by Margaret, the demon laments that he has been "beaten by a girl" (28). The *topoi* of female saints' lives thus include some elements of the Gothic, but there is an additional emphasis on authority figures versus a weak female, chastity, increasing level of torture to an extreme, and triumph of the woman in spite of her weakness. These features are true for Margaret and also for Juliana. The emphasis on women's power in female saints' lives may reflect the role of women in Anglo-Saxon society, where many argue that women had a great deal of power and were seen as guardians of religious faith (Scheck 13-14).

It is Juliana's skillful attempts to escape the male-dominated, pagan, and demonic oppression that make her similar in some ways to a Gothic heroine. The category of

Female Gothic has been repeatedly discussed since Ellen Moers first proposed it in 1976. Key components of "female" gothic include patriarchal oppressors and their innocent female victims. Moers argues that this recurring plot reflects women's fears (qtd. in Smith and Wallace 1). More recently, Diane Long Hoeveler has argued that many of these narratives of oppressors and victims suggest "gothic feminism," as persecuted heroines communicate to their readers an "ambivalent rejection of and outward complicity with the dominant sexual ideologies of their culture" (5). *Juliana* not only recounts the tale of a female victim and her sadistic, patriarchal oppressors, but it also presents her as triumphantly exercising power by resisting the will of her father and the man to whom she is betrothed. While Hoeveler's category provides an interesting perspective from which to analyze *Juliana*, the narrative elements of the poem are deeply rooted in the ancient narrative patterns that shaped saints' lives in late antiquity and beyond. In Margaret Anne Doody's study of ancient narratives, she argues that these texts employ many elements familiar to readers of Old English literature and Gothic literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth narratives alike. Two such tropes, highlighted in chapters entitled "Marshes, Shores, and Muddy Margins" (319-36) and "Tomb, Cave, and Labyrinth" (337-58), play a prominent role in Juliana's battle against male oppressors that make this female saint's life effectively "Gothic." In addition, as with *Beowulf, Guthlac A, and Andreas*, the Gothic elements related to setting, villains, victims, and rescuers are at work in *Juliana*.

The Gothic in *Juliana*

The settings in *Juliana* are gloomy, oppressive, dreadful, and liminal. Juliana is sentenced to prison, and as in *Andreas*, prisons in these stories may be compared to

Gothic fortress-like locations, characterized by liminality, darkness, death, and torture. The *Juliana*-poet describes when Juliana is enclosed: *ða wæs mid clustre carcernes duru / behliden, homra geweorc* (236-37) "Then, the door of the prison was shut with a bar, the work of hammers." Juliana is locked into a small chamber, completely confined with an iron bar. The text makes it clear that she has no means of escape because the bar shutting her in is a sturdy piece created in a forge and constructed by hammers. The poet goes on to comment that Juliana is *heolstre bihelmad* (241) "enclosed in darkness." Not only is she enclosed in a confined, oppressive chamber, but she is also enveloped in darkness, all classic Gothic features.

Perhaps even more Gothic is the forbidding place Juliana is taken at the end of her life: *ða wæs gelæded londmearce neah / ond to þære stowe þær hi stearcferþe / þurh cumbolhete cwellan þohtun* (635-37) "Then, she was led near the land frontier and to that place where they harshly thought to murder her because of their warlike hate." Her evil captors take Juliana not only to a place of execution, but also to the border of their country; Juliana's gruesome execution must take place at the edge of their civilization. Border regions and territorial limits are classic liminal spaces. The venue of Juliana's execution is doubly liminal because it is both a geographic boundary and a place of murderous terror.

The captors and executioners who inflict such suffering onto Juliana are evil and villainous to the core. It can be argued that their sins are more grievous than even those of the Mermedonians in *Andreas*. In the end, the Mermedonians change their cannibalistic ways and repent. On the contrary, Juliana's enemies, including her own father, are consistently malicious, consciously evil, deliberately torturous, and

disturbingly sadistic. These villains are monstrous and given to forbidden actions. Their tyranny may even surpass Grendel's, in that they are driven by male-dominated, patriarchal irrationality and cruel passion. The ruler of Juliana's people, along with her father, serves as primary antagonist of the poem. The poet relays some of the ruler's more severe actions against Juliana:

> *ða for þam folce frecne mode*
> *beotwordum spræc, bealg hine swiþe*
> *folcagende, ond þa fæmnan het*
> *þurh niðwræce nacode þennan,*
> *ond mid sweopum swingan synna lease.*
> *Ahlog þa se hererinc, hospwordum spræc* (184-89)
>
> Then, before that people, the ruler, in dangerous mind, spoke with threats, swelled with severe rage, and commanded them to stretch the woman naked for severe punishment and to beat the sinless one with whips. Then, the warrior laughed and spoke with abusive language.

In an extreme mental and emotional state, this ruler orders Juliana, in spite of her innocence, to be stripped naked and whipped, perhaps suggesting sado-sexual overtones to his torture. The text uses several different adjectives for conveying the ruler's anger: dangerous, threatening, severe, and enraged. He is a Gothicized villain, deranged, psychopathic, and tyrannical, and Juliana is reminiscent of classic Gothic females in distress. After the ruler's orders are carried out, Juliana must then endure the derision and abuse from him as he observes the punishment. The scene is a disturbing spectacle of physical and emotional abuse from a dominant, oppressive, and powerful male. He

takes sadistic pleasure in ordering, inflicting, and watching Juliana's torture. There is a horrifying willingness and enthusiasm to the whole ordeal.

We soon learn who the evil is that is orchestrating Juliana's sufferings and inspiring the evil men persecuting her. He is the *feond* (350) "devil" and the *wrœcca wærleas* (351) "faithless exile." As with *Guthlac A and Andreas*, and by association, *Beowulf*, the ultimate antagonist and villainous tyrant in *Juliana* is Satan himself. Notably, in the same sentence, he is called an exile. As is typical in Old English literature, the villains are the outcasts of society, the most famous example being Grendel. Satan is associated with those who live as exiles away from the *comitatus*. They are the mysterious, dangerous, and anti-social monsters who threaten all that the Anglo-Saxons hold dear. Typical of both Old English literature and the Bible, the devil is later also called *unclæne gæst* (418) "unclean spirit." More reminiscent of the Gothic, however, is that he is then immediately named *þystra stihtend* (419) "dark ruler." A few lines later, he is *werga* and *earm aglæca* (429-30) "wicked," a "wretched monster." As in the other works we have examined, the devil in *Juliana* acts as the dispenser of darkness. He is the monster behind all the human monsters who torture Juliana.

Obviously, Juliana is the heroine and victim in this horror story. In many of the same ways, she suffers like the other protagonists in the Old English poetic and saints' lives prose traditions, such as Guthlac, who are Satan's targets, enduring terror, torture, bondage, and death or the threat of death. Yet, Juliana's situation is different. She is a woman opposed by patriarchal and sadistic torturers, one of which is her own sinister and psychotic father. In addition, her afflictions are profoundly and perhaps uniquely excruciating, both physically and emotionally:

ða wæs ellenwod, yrre ond reþe,

frecne ond ferðgrim, fæder wið dehter.

Het hi þa swingan, susle þreagan,

witum wægan (140-43)

"Then the father was furious, angry and raging, dangerous and cruel-minded, father against daughter. He then commanded them to beat [her], to chastize with torment, to afflict with punishments."

Juliana is notable in that one of the devil's most effective instruments is someone who is supposed to be a loved one. Her father represents a perversion of the family and of the social order. Instead of loving, affirming, and protecting his daughter, Juliana's father makes her the victim of this perversion. Her own father, whom the text depicts as pagan, opposed to Juliana's Christianity, dangerous, livid, and cruel, commands Juliana to be beaten and tortured. Coming from her father, her abuse is likely both physical and emotional.

In even more disturbing detail, the poet recounts what is perhaps the ruler's most heinous torture:

He bi feaxe het

ahon ond ahebban on heanne beam,

þær seo sunsciene slege þrowade,

sace singrimme, siex tida dæges (227-30)

"He commanded [her] to be raised on a high beam and hanged by her hair, where shining like the sun, she suffered a beating, an exceedingly fierce affliction, six hours a day."

The scene could come straight from a modern horror movie because of its extremely graphic violence. Its terror goes far beyond that of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Gothic. The ways Juliana suffers as the victim in this passage are obvious and numerous as she helplessly suffers through the ghastly tortures of hanging by her hair for six grueling hours a day, while receiving more beatings. She thus fits the Gothic "woman in distress" motif to the extreme. Interestingly, this passage and most of the other excerpts quoted here include the word "command" again and again, at least in the passages in which a man speaks. Either Juliana's father or the ruler always seems to be ordering something to be done, virtually always an oppressive action to be taken against Juliana. Juliana is clearly the victim of an extremely oppressive, tyrannical, and outright monstrous patriarchy.

Juliana, however, remains resolute in her faith, and the poem never depicts her expressing any pain. On the contrary, she praises God and testifies that he is her guardian. God is the supernatural good force upon whom Juliana relies. She proclaims:

> *Hæbbe ic me to hyhte heofonrices weard,*
> *mildne mundboran, mægna waldend,*
> *se mec gescyldeð wið þinum scinlace*
> *of gromra gripe, þe þu to godum tiohhast* (212-15)
> "I have hope that the guardian of heaven, merciful protector, powerful Lord, will shield me against your sorcery, from your more hostile grip, that God will judge you."

Throughout the story, Juliana is constantly threatened and tortured, but she always hopes for deliverance from her rescuing God. Though she suffers a martyr's death in the end,

she is consistently rescued or preserved by God's guardianship prior to her execution. She even survives the horrendous and excruciating "hanging by her hair" ordeal. After she is indeed killed, God judges her persecutors.

One particular example of God's supernatural deliverance of Juliana as victim happens in the cauldron bonfire scene:

> *ða gen sio halge stod*
>
> *ungewemde wlite. Næs hyre wloh ne hrægl,*
>
> *ne feax ne fel fyre gemæled,*
>
> *ne lic ne leoþu. Heo in lige stod*
>
> *æghwæs onsund, sægde ealles þonc*
>
> *dryhtna dryhtne* (589-94)
>
> "Then, the saint still stood with a pure countenance. Neither her fringe nor her clothing, nor her hair nor her skin, nor her body nor her limbs were touched by the fire. She stood completely unhurt in her body, told the purpose of all for the Lord of Lords."

As in the story of the three young men rescued from the fire in the Old Testament book of Daniel, Juliana comes through the fire of the cauldron unsinged. No part of her clothing or body is touched. Though her faith, emotional stability, and evangelistic proclamation are unyielding, her body must still be rescued by a supernatural power. In this respect, she fits the Gothic as much as she does when she is the helpless victim of a tyrannical, monstrous villain. Juliana confirms she has escaped through the power of God when she preaches the "purpose of the Lord of Lords" to the crowd of pagan torturers.

Juliana, like *Beowulf*, *Guthlac A*, and *Andreas*, demonstrates the unique elements within Old English literature that point to Gothic features. As in other poems, the *Juliana*-poet combines Christian theological themes with Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the monstrous to produce, albeit inadvertently, a story with liminal and dark Gothic elements. As with the other works from the Old English poetic tradition that have been analyzed here, the *Juliana*-poet renders the villains in the account dark, menacing, oppressive, and tormenting, with a particularly appalling and cruel sadism that may be unique to the female saints' lives tradition. There is a particular victimization of women in this tradition that the male saints' lives do not feature. This victimization is rooted in the villains' sado-sexual attempts to violate chaste, devout females. As in the Gothic tradition, this motif highlights disturbing and voyeuristic elements, often prominent in the female saints' lives genre. Persecution from godless male villains and demonic attack focuses on the woman's sexuality, targeting her not only as the helpless Christian victim but also making her into a sex object. The saint's sexual exploitation at the hands of her oppressors parallels that of many Gothic female heroines, such as the females in Lewis's *The Monk*.

As in the other Old English poems, the demonization and rejection of the "scary demonic" outsider may reflect the pushing away of forces that threaten the *comitatus*. However, unique to *Juliana*, the villains perhaps specifically serve as demonized opponents to a female saint, in order to show the power, authority, and influence of a female saint and to set an example for female Christians to be faithful in the face of extreme male oppression. Undoubtedly, the poem demonizes the pagans who are threatening a devoutly Christian woman with imminent destruction. As in the other

poems, perhaps this demonization reflects a reaction to the lingering threat of paganism from insiders and outsiders common across the Anglo-Saxon period with the threat it posed to the faithful and to women in particular. In poems like *Juliana*, the heroic Christians hold firm, and in the end, God's providence trumps all evil, even if the saint's fate is martyrdom. To the Anglo-Saxon Christians, a harrowing, yet triumphant account like *Juliana* most certainly would have been inspiring.

When Christianity reached northern Europe, some women may have seen the hermitic tradition as a chance to escape domestic abuse and bondage. In this sense, women might redefine themselves. Women might also gain official positions of power, such as abbesses, preachers, and missionaries (Scheck 13-14). Perhaps this process may explain why female saints' lives became very popular, inspiring devout and powerful women to deeper Christian commitment. Heroic female martyrs and confessors were likely seen as exemplars of faithfulness and representative of female triumph over male evil.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

Horace Walpole is often credited with pioneering Gothic literature. When he wrote his 1764 novel *The Castle of Otranto*, he subtitled the work, "A Gothic Story." He was hearkening back to medieval settings, such as castles, and culture, such as feudalism and supernatural incidents. These elements work to give an air of "dark age" superstition (Botting 49). At the same time, it produced contemporary anxiety about the past and present that confronted social problems and class conflicts (49). Walpole's antiquarian interests also allowed him to reanimate a set of medieval tropes, such as oppressive darkness, supernatural evil, images of entrapment in enclosed spaces or binding, and scene of horror (44-45). Intended or not, Walpole and other Gothic writers who would follow him continued the medieval practice of connecting these tropes for ideological purposes, commenting on contemporary social, cultural, and religious issues, through the juxtaposition of two distinct worldviews: past and present. As the Gothic has always been linked with historical progress, Walpole believed in the possibilities of moving from dark "barbarity" to "light" (S.R. Smith 550). While Old English poets were a far cry from Walpole and other political theorists who agreed with him, they confronted history and socio-cultural problems in such a way that they were acutely aware of the threats of "dark barbarity" of paganism to Christian faith and culture. As they articulated these worries through their epic and saints' lives poems, they established a narrative impulse

that Walpole and later Gothic authors may have found resonant and pursued in their own fiction.

The elements analyzed throughout this discussion demonstrate that the Gothic impulse is at work in the Old English poetic tradition. The liminal settings, evil villains, helpless victims, and supernatural or superhuman rescuers reveal striking parallels between the traditions of the medieval and the Gothic. At the same time, the difficulty in defining the Gothic complicates the suggestion that they are similar for two reasons. The first reason is that there is the danger of anachronism. In spite of how many similarities exist between these Old English poems and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic literature, a degree of caution is in order. It would, of course, be anachronistic to place these early medieval works in the modern Gothic tradition. The Gothic writers' imaginings of the Middle Ages are romanticized and often inaccurate. However, the ideas they had about liminality, villains versus victims, supernatural deliverance, and cultural juxtapositions in connection to the Gothic are quite accurate depictions of medieval worldviews. While the parallels are only suggestive, considering the Gothic impulses in Old English literature may help to better understand the elements of the texts and their cultural and historical backgrounds.

The second reason is the definition itself. Because the Gothic is more a set of characteristics than a well-defined genre particular to a certain time period, the most one can articulate is that the Gothic is rooted in fear, accompanied by classic tropes such as an air of mystery, dark and gloomy places, sinister and mentally disturbed villains, ghosts, monsters, overwrought emotion, and helpless victims in distress. Perhaps the most important component of the Gothic, however, is its social commentary. It points to

the juxtaposition of cultures, suggesting that impulses of old cultures haunt the new. The Gothic often calls for social change, as in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries when Gothic and Romantic writers often distanced themselves from cold rationalism but also from religious or social orders of the past.

These aspects of the Gothic coincide notably with *Beowulf, Guthlac A, Andreas, and Juliana.* In *Beowulf*, it is Grendel's eerie and dark abode on the moors; the ominous threat of a brooding, murderous, and cannibalistic monster and his equally murderous hag mother; the helpless, enclosed, and emotionally overwrought victims of Heorot; and the superhuman deliverance by Beowulf. In *Guthlac A*, the elements from the hermitic warrior saints' tradition connect with the Gothic through the poem's setting on the fens and moors; the frightening presence of Satan, demons, and apparitions; the attacks sustained by their victim, Guthlac; and God's supernatural intervention. In *Andreas*, many of the same hermitic features are in play. A forbidding fortress is the setting; the villains are cannibalistic monsters; the victims are held in bonds within the prison; and, once again, God must intervene. *Juliana*, rooted in the female saints' lives tradition, is set in an atmosphere dominated by oppression, with the liminal boundaries of the land as the site of torture; the villains are malevolent, dominant males who sadistically prey on a young Christian woman; Juliana, the victim, must endure bondage, torture, and emotional abuse; and God, her heroic rescuer, vindicates her.

Amidst all these memorable tropes, the socio-cultural juxtaposition of past and present in each of these poems may be their most significant Gothic element. *Beowulf* presents the blending of pre- and post-Christian cultural traits and worldview. There is a definite tension between the old ways and the new. *Beowulf* and its "Gothic" impulses

reflect challenges to *comitatus* culture, challenges by outsiders to its way of life. Grendel, this horrifying blend of the monstrous (old world/pagan) and demonic (new world/Christian tradition), is the liminal threat that Beowulf fights. The same *comitatus* culture is reflected in the warrior saints' tradition. *Guthlac A* and *Andreas* face similar challenges, in this case to a "Christian" *comitatus*. The protagonists in these stories are threatened by liminal and pagan/demonic outsiders. They blend the hermitic warrior tradition with the Germanic *comitatus*, but these two works, like *Beowulf*, also blend the pre-Christian conceptualization of monsters on the moors with the demonic. Guthlac fights liminal threats to God's circle of "warriors." Andreas and his group of *thegns* must face their own threats. Andreas must bring his group back to God, and God as Lord of the *comitatus* comes to the rescue. The story of *Juliana* is similar in that the Lord's *comitatus* is once again threatened, but this time, it is not what it should be. It is a threat to itself. Such figures like Juliana's father and her betrothed should be faithful and protective *thegns*, but they fail Juliana by torturing her and rebelling against God. God's ultimate solution and redemption is to bring Juliana to heaven. She is saved, while the rest of the perverted *comitatus* is condemned. In addition, *Juliana*, while in some ways similar to the hermitic tradition and responding to the same pressures, is a female saint's life, employed perhaps to deepen religious devotion among Anglo-Saxons in similar ways.

Epic heroic poems, the hermitic warrior saints' tradition, and the similar but unique female saints' lives tradition all contain tropes of fear, liminality, and other classic Gothic features. Recognizing these tropes deepens our appreciation and knowledge of the literature and culture of Anglo-Saxon English as we gauge their reactions and

strategies for dealing with hostile forces they encountered. While it may never be known how much the literature or study of Anglo-Saxons influenced Gothic authors, the Gothic elements in the medieval texts perhaps suggest a connection and an avenue for future inquiry; there are many similarities and striking parallels. Entertaining the question of where precisely Gothic writers acquired their concepts of setting, villain, victim, and supernatural good force may shed light on a genre that has had a major influence on modern literature and film and continues to be popular in contemporary times. The Gothic elements in certain Old English works may help us recognize that they could be understood as part of a liminal and terrifying genre of horror. This understanding may influence or enhance our modern conception and appreciation of horror literature and film, past and present. Whether intended or not, the connection between the sometimes disturbing, yet socially analytical, literature in Old English and that of the Gothic is there, and it is striking.

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