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Borders

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To write about borders in Early England already indicates the creation of a metanarrative of confinement – an essay neatly limited by its topic. However, "borders" in Anglo-Saxon England and into the twelfth century are as complex and messy as any of our modern boundaries. "Borders" can refer to geographically, politically, and religiously defined areas, landmarks both natural and man-made, individual nations, races, regions, languages, demarcations of land ownership, entire chronological periods, the limits of knowledge and cultural influences, the defining of texts and genres, the acceptability and policing of the orthodox, and the censuring and punishment of the heterodox. "Borders" also intimate distance and distinction, or throw into sharp relief proximity and similarity – a blurring of boundaries. Thus, what appears to be a relatively straightforward term is immensely tricky, and particularly so within the bounded length of an essay like this. Here, then, Early English terminology for "borders" will be discussed, with a particular and recurring emphasis on *mearcian* ("to mark," "to mark out") and its various compounds and derivatives; and the way land was mapped and divided up will be briefly investigated through Anglo-Saxon charters. Most time will be spent on the in-between, though, in an effort to understand how the Anglo-Saxons might have conceived of the land between borders, those spaces which one might think of in postcolonial terms as "liminal," on the threshold of that which is on the other side, but which one might also think of as being neither one thing nor the other; or, indeed, paradoxically, looking both ways simultaneously. Since borders or boundaries invoke all these complexities, I shall be treating literal boundaries and border regions within a range of Old English works, to allow multiple readings to emerge while resisting oversimplistic definition or predetermined categorization.

Border Theory has as its champions scholars whose focus is principally modern, and often centered on contemporary America and its borders with Hispanic Central America. Gloria Anzaldua's seminal work, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, first published in 1987, describes the United States–Mexico border as a site "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25). This "border culture," a space of the in-between, is akin to the hybridity of postcolonial theory, where the hybrid is created as a destabilizing identity emerging from the contested space between colonizer and colonized. Some scholars imagine an assimilative impulse evolving from the hybrid; this implies that hybridity equates to syncretism or fusion, but this is to oversimplify the complex, processual, and separate state-of-being created in the contested space. In relation to the border, this is a space that cleaves, and thus emerges as "in-between" and mediating adjacent boundaries.[1] Ironically, of course, the present essay concerns itself with a period labeled the "medieval," the "middle ages," an often derogatory term that implies transition from one (good) thing to another; the "middle" is the "dark," the empty, the lacuna delimited by the edges of the defined. This fallacy of the boundary (whether chronological, political, or linguistic) is highlighted by Iain Chambers's sensitive work on the Mediterranean, in which he describes the border as "not a thing, but rather, the materialization of authority," reminding us that "the seeming solidity of the lands, languages, and lineages that border and extend outward from [the Mediterranean's] shores . . . become an accessory to its fluid centrality" (6, 27). It is this "fluid centrality," the "in-betweenness," that might prove most productive for the purposes of this examination of borders in the Anglo-Saxon world.

Translating Meaning

It is always best to begin with clarifying the labels that we use, themselves indicative of the way in which language potentially closes off interpretation, especially when we are required to translate an ancient form of a language into its modern approximation. For the Anglo-Saxons, the word "border" itself did not exist, since it is a French loan (though its semantic range might have been influenced by Old English *bord*); neither did the words "frontier," "limit," "territory," and "genre" exist in English prior to the fifteenth century and later. The Anglo-Saxons used instead a multitude of words to express the concept of the boundary or demarcation of land or nation. One such term is *bord* – itself a polysemic word – meaning "boundary," particularly when used with prepositions *innan* and *utan* denoting place ("within" and "outside" of boundaries). The most famous use of this concept of a boundary denoting a geographic and political unit is found in the late ninth-century work, King Alfred's Preface to Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, one of the best known and most widely taught texts from the period (Treharne 14–15). In his lament on the state of education in England following the Viking incursions

throughout the ninth century, Alfred looks back to a time when there were far greater numbers of learned men and successful leaders in the country. He comments on how previous kings in Anglo-Saxon England

> ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora siodu ge hiora onweald innanbordes gehioldon, ond eac ut hiora eðel rymdon; ond hu him ða speow ægðer ge mid wige ge mid wisdome; ond eac ða godcundan hadas, hu giorne hie wæron ægðer ge ymb lare ge ymb liornunga, ge ymb ealle ða ðiowotdomas ðe hie Gode don scoldon; ond hu man utanbordes wisdom ond lare hieder on lond sohte; ond hu we hie nu sceoldon ute begietan, gif we hie habban sceoldon. Swæ clæne hio wæs oðfeallenu on Angelcynne ðat swiðe feawa wæron behionan Humbre ðe hiora ðeninga cuðen understondan on Englisc oððe furðum an ærendgewrit of Lædene on Englisc areccean; ond Ic wene ðætte noht monige begiondan Humbre næren. Swæ feawa hiora wæron ðæt Ic furðum anne anlepne ne mæg geðencean be suðan Temese ða ða Ic to rice feng.

> (both maintained their peace and their morality and their authority within their borders, and also enlarged their territory outside; and how they prospered both in warfare and in wisdom; and also how zealous the sacred orders were both about teaching and about learning as well as all the services that they had to perform for God; and how people from outside the borders came here to this country in search of knowledge and instruction, and how we should now have to get them from outside, if we should acquire them. So complete was learning's decay among the English people that there were very few this side of the Humber who could understand their services in English, or even translate a letter from Latin into English; and I imagine that there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I cannot even remember a single one south of the Thames when I succeeded to the kingdom.)

This self-positioning of kingdom, nation and self by Alfred is very revealing for its understanding of discrete and permeable boundaries, political and intellectual roles. In his rhetorical pairings of morality, authority and wisdom within borders (that is, "at home") with expansionism and warfare outside borders (that is, "abroad"), he contrasts previous stable reigns with his own, where outsiders are now required to bring knowledge to the English that was once sought by foreigners within England's borders.

Moreover, even the situation among the English nation itself is not so straightforward, since natural boundaries – the Humber and Thames rivers in the north and south of eastern England – preclude the provision of an overarching statement, accurately reflecting the divisions of earlier kingdoms in the period preceding Alfred's reign. North of the Humber was the Northumbrian kingdom, and the Thames signaled the boundary between the kingdoms of Kent and Essex; these political borders clearly still meant something to Alfred and his audience, as did the chronology of reigns and the limits of remembrance. When Alfred tells us that he cannot remember a single learned man south of the Thames when he

ascended to the throne, he points to the edges of cultural understanding in this period of transitional literacy – the fraying of knowledge outside the bounds of time and memory. Here, then, the political and geographical boundaries are paralleled with the limits of learning, as if a river can signal the gulf between levels of intellectual prowess, in a way reminiscent of the current stereotypes common to the British (or, indeed, American) north–south divide. Even from this single text, then, the complexity of the border – a natural landmark, a politically authorized divide, an intellectual boundary, an intangible marker of difference – becomes clear.

Traces of the Past

Alfred's remembering of past glories illustrates the importance of memory in configuring history. To combat a reliance on the oral, a dependency on the memories of generations, written records became increasingly important as the Anglo-Saxon centuries from *c.*500 to *c.*1100 progressed and the Anglo-Saxon became transformed into the Anglo-Norman state. Although Alfred was not the first English king to recognize the significance of writing (the sixth-century king of Kent, Ine, initiated the recording of law), he was the first volitionally to determine a program of vernacular textualization: the committal of essential historical and pastoral works to a form intelligible to those with a degree of education. In this, he, and his advisors, sought to shore up the foundations of the English nation, to create a sense of continuity that razed the barriers imposed by time with its dissipation of cultural recollection. The recording of land ownership – its tenure, its bequest, and its inheritance – was thus of great importance in the long Anglo-Saxon era, as it is with any emerging nation, since land ownership and its public recognition determine any nation's future wealth and political direction. The ways in which land came to be parceled up publicly can be examined through the records of land conveyancing, a number of which precede Alfred's reign from 871 to 899. These records both reflected the development of Anglo-Saxon communities and contributed to the forging of those communal enterprises. They also permit an understanding of the fixity of the boundaries of land, and of how the Anglo-Saxons perceived their surroundings.

In two ninth-century charters, or grants of land or property, known as Sawyer 265 and 175, the king is witnessed granting land for ecclesiastical use – for the minster of St Peter's, Bath in the first case, and to the archbishop in the second (Sawyer). Charters or diplomas, issued in Latin, usually include boundary clauses outlining the precise demarcation of land granted; interestingly, these boundary clauses are often written in Old English, and sometimes made the more visible, the more separate, by the provision of increased space before and after them in the manuscript (see Thompson). It seems obvious enough that the details of the parcel of land confirmed by the charter should be in the language of the land and

local people, particularly since the landscape in medieval England is itself revealed through the names of particular topographical and visual features, such as Thorndon, which means "thorn-tree hill" or Bristol (*brycg + stow*), "meeting place by the bridge."[2]

In Sawyer 265, for example, dated to 808 CE, the Saxon king Cynewulf some fifty years earlier is recorded as the donor of five hides of land in North Stoke, Somerset to St Peter's in Bath. After laying out the conditions under which the land is to be held, and listing the eighteen witnesses, the extent of the donation is made explicit in Old English:

> *Et hæc sunt territoria.* Ærest of Swinforda upp andlang broces to ceolnes wyllan, andlang hege ræwe to luttes crundele, þanon to grafes owisce, andlang owisce to wege, andlang weges to ælesbeorge, nyþer on alercumb, andlang alercumbes ut on Afene, andlang Afene þæt eft on Swinford.

> (And these are the lands. First from Swineford up along the brook to Ceolnes wellspring; along the hedgerow to Luttes mound; from there to the edge of the grove; along the edge to the pathway; along the pathway to Æles hill; down to the alder valley; along alder valley to the Avon; along the Avon again to Swineford.) (Kelly)

The detail of this boundary clause allows historians and archaeologists to trace the landscape not simply notionally but in reality,[3] to trace the landmarks that create natural borders (valleys, escarpments, groves, and copses) and man-made dividers (hedgerows, pathways, barrows, and burial mounds). There are, however, no cardinal directions in this sequence of clauses, and one can only move "along," "up," and "down," illustrating a way in which the Anglo-Saxons orientated themselves and perceived their place in relation to the world around them contingent upon specific local landmarks.[4]

Boundary clauses provide us with a great deal of evidence for the vocabulary of continuity and division, expanse and containment in the physical world. In a charter of Cnut (S950) to Archbishop Ælfstan, made in 1018 at the request of Cnut's queen, the king grants a copse (Hæselersc or Hazelhurst) with the following boundary:

> Þis syndan ðæs dennes landgemæru to Hæselersc. Ærest andlang fearnleges burnan oð Runanleages mearce; of Runanleages mearce be Holanbeames mearce; of Holanbeames mearce swa on gerihte to Wiglege, bufan ðære smiþðan to þam geate; of þam geate innan þæne sihter; andland sihtres innan þæne bradan burnan; niðer andland bradan burnan be þæs arcebisceopes mearce eft innan fearnleages burnan.

> (These are the boundaries of the copse at Hazelhurst. First along the fern-wood brook to Rowley's boundary; from Rowley's boundary along Holbeam's boundary; from Holbeam's boundary direct to Whiligh, above the smithy to the gate; from the gate into the drain, along the drain into the broad brook; down along the broad brook by the archbishop's boundary back into the fern-wood brook.) (Brooks and Kelly)

In this sequence of clauses, it is clear that multiple ancient boundaries are already in place in the Sussex area to which the grant refers; the parceling of land is precisely measured by ownership borders that already exist, and the way one understands the delimited area is dependent on one's knowledge of the land. The copse that Cnut is granting in this charter is bounded by land already owned, but which set of boundaries came first? Was Cnut's copse the "in-between"? The leftovers? Or was the copse a royal possession, and other land was divided up against it? Either way, the obvious implication of these charters is the productivity, the potential usefulness of the land in-between the landmarks. Of interest here, too, though, are the terms used to denote the divisions and borders which seem rather less productive than prohibitive: *landgemǣre*, a compound of "land" and *gemǣre* meaning "limit," "end," "boundary," suggesting a point beyond which one cannot go forward. Such is the meaning of the term in the Old English translations of the Psalms and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, where *gemǣro* renders *terminos* and *on . . . gemǣre, in confinio* (Bosworth and Toller).[5]

Mark My Words

Denoting "boundary" or "border" for the Anglo-Saxons, and still in use today, is the noun *mearc*, used repetitively in the charter quotation above. *Mearc* exists as a simplex, but is also found in a multitude of compound words (Bosworth and Toller).[6] Interestingly, it is from the same root as the homonym *mearc* ("mark"), and more on this will be said below. Many of the uses of *mearc* occur in the specialist vocabulary describing the landscape for boundary clauses, though such words must surely have been in popular use to have meant anything related to delimitation of property within a legal context. Thus, for example, *mearchlinc* denotes a boundary ridge and is found in the modern place-name Marklinch (in Hampshire); similarly, a *mearcweg* is a boundary road.[7] These terms all suggest a marker on the periphery, a feature that is on the edge of something between the viewer and the border.[8] But *mearc* can also intimate a space that is more than the periphery of the unnamed center; *mearca* includes the "space marked out" – that is, the space in-between the marked. This is most obvious in the case of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia (a large part of which comprises the Midlands in present-day England), the name of which describes the *Mierce*, the "Marcher-people" or "borderers," that is surely *not* those living adjacent to the border, but rather those living between borders, those in the middle of others' edges (Yorke 19–20).[9] This seems to be reinforced by the cases of *mearcstapa*[10] ("border stepper"), *mearcweard* (literally, "a border warden," usually translated as "wolf"), and *mearcstede* ("border land," "desolate district"), where the initial noun in the compound takes on a somewhat sinister meaning.

Of these latter three terms, *mearcstapa* is the most familiar to scholars, since it is used to describe the character of Grendel, Hrothgar's foe, in *Beowulf*. This mythical, monstrous cannibalistic figure (still said to this day to haunt the fenlands of East Anglia) is described as having the strength of fifty men, as being flame-eyed, as

carrying God's anger, and as dwelling outside the boundaries of the community of Germanic warriors. The first introduction of Grendel reveals that

> Wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten,
> mære mearcstapa, se þe moras heold
> fen ond fæsten; (ll.102–104)

> (The grim spirit was called Grendel,
> a famous boundary-stepper, who held the moors
> the fen and the fastness;)[11]

Where the poet of *The Wanderer* introduces its exiled warrior as an *eardstapa* ("earth-" or "land-stepper") (Treharne 56–57), here Grendel wanders a different, unbelonging landscape, the "Marches": land that borders a border, and not simply the narrow line of the (often invisible) border itself. Grendel's demesne is intermediate – the waste of the damp moorland, the flat and treacherous fen, the fastness of land enclosed by water.[12] It is the ill-defined land in the middle of territory that is bordered, familiar, mapped. Grendel's watery world separates *eard* from *eard* ("earth" from "land"), making Grendel's border-haunt indistinct, unknown, and unknowable. The potential reading of Grendel as exile and outlaw – *utlaga*, *utanbordes* ("outlaw," "without the border") – has proven fruitful for critics, particularly since Grendel is described as "kin of Cain,"[13] exiled from salvation, outcast from the civilized.

It is surely no coincidence in the Anglo-Saxon literary world that other outcasts (both voluntarily and involuntarily exiled) similarly inhabit fenland. In the short dramatic narrative known as *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the female protagonist declares:

> Wulf is on iege,   Ic on oþerre.
> Fæst is þæt eglond,   fenne biworpen.
> Sindon wælreowe weras   þær on ige;
> willað hy hine aþecgan   gif he on þreat cymeð.[14]

> (Wulf's on one island, I'm on the other.
> Fast-bound is that island, surrounded by fen.
> Death-crazed men are there on the island;
> they'll consume him if he comes on that crowd.)

Here, the woman and her lover (?), Wulf, find themselves imprisoned in what should be the relative safety of the high land in the fen. However, Wulf's island is treacherous, inhabited by the death-crazed, arguably (perhaps metaphorically) cannibalistic enemy. Roaming over this landscape is the *mearcstapa* (the "in-between-dweller"), outcast by those who live within the community, within the law. Indeed, as is well known, "Wulf" itself is a term used of outlaws, those on the fringes of society, who are evicted both in secular law,[15] and, in the later

Anglo-Saxon period, in ecclesiastical law: an outlaw will always also be excommunicated, deprived of the salvation of the church and its communion of saints. It is noteworthy, too, that another term for a wolf is *mearcweard* ("boundary guardian"), further consolidating the relationship of the land in-between society's borders (and thus simultaneously outside, as well as in-between) with things considered dangerous to stability and civilization. In a sense, this landscape is a continuum of borders – the enclosure of the fortified dwelling bordering the enclosure of the fens and fastness bordering other fortified communities. It is the in-between that hosts the greatest danger and that is most often left alone, disrupting, as it does, the comfortable and familiar (see also Brady).

Outer Limits

An ironic reversal of the dangerous borderlands, the intermediate terrain between distinct borders, is the landscape of salvation for the chosen seen in the profound and moving Old English *Exodus*. The poem, the unique written version of which is dated to *c*.1000, is contained at pages 143–171 of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11, now fully available in digital form.[16] In many senses, this is a poem about borders, and the transformation of physical properties. Nicholas Howe writes evocatively about *Exodus* and its place in the Junius manuscript, seeing links between the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea, the Anglo-Saxons' crossing from Northern Europe to England, and Old English boundary clauses; he also emphasizes the journey motif in this poem and *Genesis*, which precedes it in Junius 11 (208–213). Of the initial journey toward the Red Sea in *Exodus*, Howe comments: "this perilous journey of the Israelites is figured heavily as the crossing of a marginal zone or liminal topography . . . " with the sea designating "the outer limits of a region" (210–211).[17] Rather than seeing the territory crossed by the Israelites as "marginal," though, we might rather think of the Israelites as akin to the *mearcstapa*, stepping across boundaries – both political and spiritual – and inhabiting, for forty years indeed, the in-betweenness. The relevant passage concerning the flight of the Israelites in *Exodus* is worth quoting in full, so central is it to our understanding of how the land beside and between borders (that is, borderland) functions. For comparison, the biblical verse Exodus 13:18 simply states: "But he [God] led them about by the way of the desert, which is by the Red Sea: and the children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt." The Old English reads:

> Fyrd wæs gefysed;   from se ðe lædde,
> modig magoræswa,   mægburh heora.
> Oferfor he mid þy folce   fæstena worn,
> land ond leodweard   laðra manna,
> enge anpaðas,   uncuð gelad,

oðþæt hie on guðmyrce   gearwe bæron.
Wæron land heora   lyfthelme beþeaht,
mearchofu morheald;   Moyses ofer þa
fela meoringa,   fyrde gelædde. (ll. 54–62)

(The army was prepared; valiant was he who led them,
a noble leader of their tribe.
With the people he passed through numerous remote fastnesses,
lands and main defences of hostile peoples,
narrow single-tracks, unmapped paths,
until they advanced, ready, upon warlike border-people.
Their lands were covered with cloud-shade,
their borderland-dwellings the mountain-keep; across those Moses
led the army, over the many natural obstacles.)[18]

As the Israelites make their way from the edge of the Nile Delta to the Red Sea, it is clear that they are crossing land that is between the known landmarks of the two bodies of water, and that these form, in reality, the borders. The barren and hostile territory that the Israelites traverse (like Grendel's *fen* and *fæsten*) is not, in and of itself, a border, but land that is in-between borders – borderland or marches; that is, not the edge or the limit itself. In this sense, it cannot be regarded as "liminal," as Nick Howe sees it, but central; not marginal, but, rather, in the middle. It is less this land's signification of the marginal that is important here, and more its unknown nature, its challenge, its *uncuð gelad* ("unmapped ways").[19] The trust that the Israelites place in Moses, and that Moses places in God, is thus paramount, and one could parallel this trust with that placed in Beowulf and Hrothgar when they lead their warriors to Grendel's mother's mere by "enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad" (l. 1410), a direct echo of *Exodus*, line 58. In this sense, while borders are important, particularly because they are known and defined, it is what happens through experience in the unknown center that matters. In the case of *Exodus*, and to an extent, *Beowulf*, the matter is that of salvation.

As the Israelites make their way from their camps at Rameses to Succoth to Etham and onward to the Red Sea, they are guided – as the biblical source reveals – by "a pillar of fire" at night, and "the pillar of cloud by day" (Exodus 13:21–22). These phenomena function as divinely ordained markers for the Israelites for, through the pillar of cloud

leode ongeton,
dugoð Israhela,   þæt þær Drihten cwom
weroda Drihten,   wicsteal metan (ll. 90–92)

(the people perceived,
the Israelite warriors, that their Lord had come,
the Lord of troops, to mark out the camping-place)

This same pillar of cloud becomes not just a boundary marker for their camp, but also a marker for their salvation:

> Forð gesawon
> lifes latþeow   lifweg metan (ll. 103–104)
>
> (In front they saw
> their life's guide mark out the way of life)

This marking or measuring of the delimited path of salvation illustrates how these lands between borders become salvific; territories filled with hostile enemies and physical dangers are made safe by God's miraculous intervention, until the Israelites come to the most insurmountable obstacle, the "sæfæsten/ landes æt ende leodmægne forstod" ("barrier of the sea/ at the end of the land [which] stood in the way of the people's army") (ll. 127–128).

Crossing into Life

Many borders are invisible unless marked by a sign or a man-made barrier. Thus, for example, while natural obstacles such as mountains or rivers are sometimes adopted as boundary markers (like the River Severn separating Wales and England, or the Alps separating Switzerland and Italy), political borders, separating peoples, are now enforced or reinforced in the landscape by signs and checkpoints. Indeed, Offa's Dyke and Hadrian's Wall, in-between England and Wales and, loosely speaking, the border of the Roman Empire and the land north of it (roughly approximating, then, to northernmost England and Scotland) respectively, are a visible attempt to make clear the separation demanded by the dominant political power. Before such border controls, how did anyone know they were crossing from one region, or demarcated area of land, into another? As with the Old English boundary clauses, these are real borders, literal edges, and yet, without knowing the landmarks, the limits become invisible, intangible.

   In contrast to the intangible border, the very real Red Sea presents itself to the Israelites as a dead end, a terminus. Hot on the Israelites' heels are the 2,000 warriors of the "har hæðbroga" (*Exodus*, l. 118a), the Egyptian Pharoah metamorphosed into the "grey heath-terror," the wolf that prowls its prey (the lost soul of the excommunicated outlaw, the unsaved). Sandwiched between two insurmountable obstacles, it is God's miraculous intervention that again saves his people, when the boundary of the sea becomes instead a path to Sinai, when "sæweall astah" ("the wall of seawater rose up") (l. 302b) and the Israelites crossed, pursued by the Egyptians. The fate of the Egyptians is emphatically described by the poet, as the sea crashes back on top of them: "Flod blod gewod" ("Blood saturated the flood") (l. 463b). And in this way, the complex of boundaries, between-spaces, and crossings become a pass to salvation for the Israelites and, simultaneously, a devastating tsunami for the Egyptians: the "sealt mersc" ("salty fen" or "marsh")

(l. 333a) to the saved is the "holmweall," "merestream modig" ("ocean-wall," "raging waters of the sea") (ll. 468b, 469a) to the damned. Perhaps more clearly here than anywhere else the shifting nature of a border becomes absolutely evident.

For patristic writers, this crossing of an ostensibly insurmountable watery border typologically indicates the potential salvation for Christians occasioned by baptism, and its signification of entry into the communion of saints.[20] The typological prefiguration of the New Testament by the Old demonstrates the irrelevance of chronology, the borders imposed by time. In salvation history, the crossing from a spiritual death into life through baptism is a precursor, of course, to the final crossing, the last divide, as it were, from life into death. Until such a time as the saved reach their final home with God, they are exiles, for

> Eðellease
> þysne gystsele   gihðum healdað. (ll. 534b–535)

> (Without a homeland,
> We occupy this hall of visitors with sorrows.)

Time and again in medieval literature, this image of journeying through the final boundary of death into eternal life is evident. The literal terminus of death becomes a metaphorical boundary in this case. The means of salvation is the way that life – the space between birth and death – is lived, just as, for the Israelites, it is the space in-between borders that is "lifweg" ("the way of life") (l. 104b, or, as Lucas suggests, "the road to safety," 102). Interestingly, too, the Old English term *mearcian* ("to mark") can be used to describe the measuring out of a boundary or space, as we have seen in relation to the Israelites' journey from Egypt, and it also intimates the making of the sign of the cross on the skin at baptism or making the sign of the cross as an apotropaic signifier.[21] Notably in relation to a partially or completely literate culture, *mearcian* is a term denoting the making of any sign on any surface, like the writing of a charter's vernacular boundary clauses themselves, written by the specialist *mearcere* ("a notary"). In these charters, the Old English is often separated visually from the Latin not only by language, but by script, literally marked out by difference.[22] The Old English script, with its runic characters, acts as a visible marker of the boundaries of the land for any viewers of the charter: even if the viewer could not read they would be able to see the differentiation between scripts. The complexity of *mearc* as a term meaning both a "mark" and "boundary" and "limit of time," as well as "space between or within boundaries," parallels the complexity of the border as an idea, a metaphor, and a thing in reality, its fluidity and polysemy made clear by the nexus of ideas of borderness and in-betweenness evinced in *Exodus*, as elsewhere in Old English literature and lexis.

In Medias Res

Our contemporary obsession with categories and labels and *seeing is believing*, where every interpretation can be theoretically classified, every word defined, and every

space mapped, colored, and viewed, leads to a forgetting that it was not ever thus. Until very recently, "knowing" might often have depended on remembering and recalling names of places and local landmarks in order to contextualize oneself; recognizing difference was partly about "not" knowing, about noticing the unfamiliar and being aware of oneself or of others "not" belonging. For the Anglo-Saxons, the fluidity of borders is discernible in their desire to fix them and make the space between them known, even if left unmapped. This space is most often interpreted as "borderland," implying a narrow strip of edge adjacent to the border; but it is often better defined as a center not a margin, an expanse of the in-between, rather than abutting the boundary. This in-between can seem ill-defined, but is a proven way to salvation (and might be thought of as life itself); it has seemed a wasteland, a fastness, but has proven a functional space for those in the middle of defined borders.

For Anzaldua, the borderlands give rise to something new – "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture" (25); for Bhabha, "to 'dwell in the beyond' is . . . to be part of a revisionary time" and "demands an encounter with 'newness'" (10). In this brief examination of Anglo-Saxon borders, marches, marks, edges, and space, however, it is not newness or a hybrid that emerges from border culture, but a remarked-upon declaration of the existence of unknowns that sharply contrast with that which can be defined. The paradox of the in-between is thus that it is about knowing the already unknown: that is, the unknown is not new to passers-through or bystanders; it has always been unknown, and the implication of these texts is that it will always remain such. Yet the poetic borderland is immensely productive for those who traverse and emerge from it, just as the borderland comprising the innards of the boundary clauses' named fringes is clearly meant to be for the grantee. So, Beowulf is victorious; the Israelites saved; the landholder more prosperous. This productive space and those who inhabit it, even if only temporarily, are complicated. Similarly, the language that is used to describe it in Anglo-Saxon England and still to this day is much more nuanced and multivalent than we have realized. To make a mark in this rich semantic field of the BORDER requires greater thought by scholars, and only then will we begin to unravel the border's complexity and significance in the early medieval world.

Notes

1   On hybridity, see especially Homi Bhabha, and Karkov's essay in this volume. Illustrating the desire to read assimilative positivism into conquest is Thomas, *The English and the Normans.*

2   See further the website of the University of Nottingham's Institute for Name-Studies at http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/~aezins//index.php (accessed Apr. 2012).

3   As, to some extent, anyone can by zooming in to a detailed, 3D view of Swinesford, Bristol on Google Earth. And while we can follow the clauses using the technology of the bird's-eye aerial view, it would be impossible to draw a map of the land parcel from the description given in the boundary clause without being in situ.

4 Of fundamental importance here is Nicholas Howe's thoughtful and erudite *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England*; see Part I, "Local Places" and especially "Writing the Boundaries," 29–46.

5 Bosworth and Toller, s.v. *gemære*. See also the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (*DOE*).

6 Bosworth and Toller, s.v. *mearc*; *DOE*, s.v. *mearc*, etc.

7 See also *mearcdic* ("boundary ditch"), *mearcford* ("boundary ford"), *mearcgræfa* ("boundary thicket"), etc.

8 See Howe 39 on this omission of the center space in boundary clauses.

9 Barbara Yorke, at pp. 19–20, demonstrates that by the seventh century, Mercia itself had regional boundaries, such as the River Trent.

10 Now the acronym of a scholarly group, MEARCSTAPA, that seeks to research outside traditional scholarly boundaries.

11 There is a vast bibliography on *Beowulf*, and Grendel in particular. Among others, see Magennis, *Images of Community*, esp. 121–132; and Lapidge, "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror." On the border space, see Sharma, "Metalepsis and Monstrosity," esp. 265–272.

12 The fens of East Anglia are large expanses of boggy land, now drained and heavily agriculturalized. Emerging out of the fens are higher points of land – the "islands." Other than these islands, the flat, tree-scarce and hedgeless vista presented by the fens appears endless and landmarkless.

13 See, among many other works, Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, esp. ch. 3.

14 My edition and translation. See also Treharne 74–77.

15 For an interpretation of the poem in the light of Old Norse mythology, and with particular reference to the werewolf, see Danielli, "*Wulf, Min Wulf*"; Terasawa, "Old English *Exodus* 118a."

16 See http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msjunius11 (accessed Apr. 2012); see also Muir and Kennedy, *MS. Junius 11*.

17 Howe reads this as prefiguring the Anglo-Saxons' crossing of the North Sea in the fifth century to their promised land of England.

18 These lines, 54–62, are adapted from my own edition and translation, Treharne 246–247. The fullest complete edition is Lucas, *Exodus*, rev. edn.

19 And here, again, the unknowability of the central space demarcated by Anglo-Saxon boundary clauses adds further interest, because it is the unmapped that is the focus, the core of the issue being skirted around.

20 For a lengthy discussion, see Lucas 61–69.

21 As St Margaret does before the destruction of the dragon in her prison cell: "on hire forhæfde rodetacna mærcode" ("on her forehead, she made the mark of the cross"). See Treharne 316–317, l. 158.

22 A brief discussion of this occurs in Thompson 40–42.

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