John R. Stilgoe

ence of the woodlot wilderness and announced it to people still wary of unshaped space but already weary of urban manufacturing. Not for decades, however, was the transformation of wilderness complete; too many people remembered the wilderness as the objectification of chaotic evil.

WILDERNESS

Snow White, according to the old German folktale, so threatened the ugly queen that a huntsman was ordered to drag her into the forest, put her to death, and cut out her lungs and liver. In the folk imagination of the Middle Ages the forest is the logical setting for such atrocity. After all, it is a great chaos, the lair of wild beasts and wilder men, where order and shaping are not, where hapless peasants are first *be-wildered*, then seduced into all manner of sin. The very vastness of the disorder leaches away the peasant's reserve of reason and self-control; he confuses freedom with license and succumbs to the animal appetites latent in all men and restrained only by society. No one in the Middle Ages feared woodlots and copses, the discrete, knowable places within larger cultivated areas. They dreaded wilderness.[5]

The peasant attitude owed something to the Bible but far more to the Old Religion, to the substructure of belief that underlay the veneer of Christianity well into the early modern era. Missionaries described the wilderness in which the Israelites found every kind of demon, the *sair*, or hairy satyr, the howling dragon they called the *tan*, and *lilith*, the winged female monster of the night. In the spirit Azazel, Jews discovered a collective figure for all the furies of the wild, for the gods who contested with their own for control of their space and their souls. The biblical wilderness was indeed bewildering, a place where man strayed from the holy path and slid into temptation and blasphemy. But it was sometimes a place of punitive preparation for salvation, an area free from the temptations of cities and almost the favored ground of God. It was the scene of His covenant with Israel, of the visions of Jacob and Ezekiel, of John the Baptist's witness, and of Christ's triumph over the Devil. Church fathers introduced its dual nature to tribes well schooled in wilderness life, and compared the barren desert with the wild vastness of forest. But their sermons concerned salvation, not wilderness depiction, and for centuries pagan imaginings dominated their listeners' understanding of wild land.[6]

In western and northern Europe, where peasants worshiped trees and groves of trees, missionaries encountered the full force of the Old Religion. Across Scandinavia, tribespeople believed that trees had souls and

were human ancestors; in German lands they knew that elves lived under oaks and elders and that firs must not be uprooted lest the sprites beneath be disturbed; in Bohemia they understood that hawthorn branches frightened away the witches attracted to walnut trees. Tree veneration focused on conifers and such other evergreens as mistletoe and holly because their constant greenness reassured people that the coming of spring was certain. The Old Religion proved too strong to denounce and too potent to ignore; it drew strength from Christian attack and its endurance taxed the patience of missionaries everywhere. As late as 1386, when Grand Duke Jagello proclaimed Lithuania a Christian land and his more conservative subjects retreated into the forests to worship holly, Christians sometimes doubted the certainty of the church's victory over the powers of darkness. Even as the Age of Discovery began, that half-known power still overshadowed the power objectified in church buildings, crosses, and sacraments. It was in a dark wood that Dante lost his way and discovered the entrance to Hell. It was in a deep forest that Red Riding Hood strayed from the path to search for wildflowers and met the wolf. In the wilderness the medieval Christian—courtier and peasant—confronted the Old Religion.[7]

Medieval peasants understood wilderness in half-pagan, half-Christian terms. Few if any spoke of Pan, at least to any hearer educated enough—or brave enough—to enter their words in writing. Instead they confused Pan with Satan and related hoary tales like those of the "wild hunt." On moonless nights, and especially on Walpurgisnacht (May Day eve), Satan and his hounds coursed through the forest, pursuing with a terrible roaring and baying all the wild creatures and any humans unlucky enough to stumble in their way. Saint Paul's warning to "refuse profane and old wives' fables" did nothing to stop the continual retelling of such tales because the peasants saw in them the murky outlines of larger, perfectly Christian truth.[8] Satan lived, and it seemed only natural that he lived most comfortably in the wilderness, incarnate in disorder and terror.

Christianity destroyed the ancient oneness of man and nature. Whatever the Old Religion was, and it is known now almost entirely in descriptions composed by its enemies, its tenets derived from that oneness. Seasonal change, successful hunts, bountiful harvests, deaths in winter storms, even the continual collisions of man with beast explained man's niche in a larger order of things. Christianity, along with agriculture and artifice, wrenched man from his niche and made him sometime master of the earth. Agriculture and artifice made him ever less familiar with the wild, until he was no longer "at home" in it, until he recognized it as

wild, as a place other than his own. As his belief in Satan grew and his familiarity with the forest lessened, the medieval peasant peered about a world teeming with supranatural beings respected in years gone by. At dusk, by the chimney corner and in the shadows of his doorway, he recalled the former respect once accorded to beings he now scorned. He thought of spriggans, of *gwragedd annwn, sidhe, hyter, ghillie dhu, cluricaun, fir darrig, witchtlein, kobold, coblynau, daugars, fachan,* and selkies, and of hundreds more now-nameless minions of the old gods his priest called devils.[9] Away from the centers of Christendom, beyond the royal highway, creatures of the Old Religion tormented pious clerics and travelers who knew that husbandmen still honored the helpful spirits of ages past—and feared the malignancies of those turned demons by Christian scorn.

A great tree of life symbolized the chief tenets of the Old Religion. Rooted in the underworld of death, it soared to the heavenly home of powerful gods like Freyr and Freyja, linking the world of men with the worlds of shadow and of divinity. Odin and Thor were gods of war, courage, and strength, but Freyr and Freyja were brother and sister of fertility. To them peasants sacrificed in the hope of having healthy children, good harvests, and bountiful hunts and catches. Scores of land spirits served the two fertility gods, and it was they that survived longest into the Christian era, as agriculture became progressively more important than hunting and pillaging, and as men deserted forests for fields. Peasants across northern Europe learned more and more about the New Religion, the religion that substituted for the living, blossoming tree of life a cross of hewn wood. Christianity was clearly a religion of settled land, not chaotic wastes and forests, and when peasants and travelers entered the wilderness they knew all too clearly that they entered the last domain of scorned and perhaps still powerful gods and demigods. As long as such beings lived, Christians feared.

Lithuanian pagans threatened Christian travelers as late as 1547, when the Old Religion bloomed once again, terrifying rural Catholics and Protestants who were warring over biblical interpretation and ecclesiastical practice. The Reformation nurtured religious insecurity along with religious oddity, and everywhere on the fringes of civilized Christian Europe peasants succumbed to half-dormant respect for old gods, particularly those ensuring fertility. "Idolaters are still to be found in the forests," wrote Sigmund Herberstein in his 1557 *Description of Moscow and Muscovy,* "and Russian monks or hermits often go to them there and strive to turn them to the true faith, even unto this day."[10] Jesuits preaching later in the century in parts of the kingdom of Seville

found people who fed on acorns, lived in caves and huts, and "resembled Indians rather than Spaniards." Seventeenth-century Englishmen distrusted what they called "the dark corners" of the British Isles, the little-known vales of Cornwall where men spoke Gaelic, the mountains of Wales, the far highlands and islands of Scotland, "the utmost skirts of the north" in the words of one impassioned member of Parliament in 1628, "where the prayers of the common people are more like spells and charms than devotions." Satanism acquired spatial significance in the imagination of pious Christians. It suffused the wilderness that nourished it. John Dury, who traveled beyond the utmost northern skirts to Sweden in 1636, wrote home to England about the colonization of North America. "Is not there more hope to do good to Christianity in building up the waste places here and hereabout in Europe than in laying new foundations without settled ground?" he asked a New World-minded friend.[11] Dury had good reason to wonder. Well into the eighteenth century, people in the Scandinavian Alps worshiped the Norse god Thor and honored Thursday as a holy day—Thor's Day. Away from the world of pious Christians lay the wilderness that hid the shadowy power of Satan and the older gods from the penetrating scrutiny of the Christian clerics.

To Anglo-Saxons the words *wylder ness* identified the nest or lair of a wild beast, not the chaotic mountains or forest or rolling waste denoted by the early modern *wilderness.* In the sixteenth century, mountains like the Harz and Alps, forests like the Schwarzwald, steppes like the barrens of Hungary, swamps like the Rijnland of Holland, even heaths like the uplands of Scotland terrified peasants and nobles alike. They objectified a test of faith, a contest between the faith abandoned a short while before and a newer faith objectified in carefully shaped land. Bewilderment meant encountering the dragons and great worms of age-old tale, and it meant fighting off wolf packs, boars, and bears. It meant confronting the fragmented former oneness of man and nature, and it meant knowing the true fragility of civilized order. *Wilderness* identified those spaces beyond human control, the spaces of bewilderment, the spaces of *heathen.*[12]

On the Continent, wilderness often meant a rugged stretch of country untouched by agriculturalists and unpoliced by anyone; frequently it connoted a mountainous forest, like those that inspired so many late medieval and early modern painters. But wilderness varied according to time of day and season of the year; the half-known woodlot presented a different face on a clear July afternoon than at dusk in January at the beginning of a snowstorm. Even in England, where by the sixteenth

century many great forests had been almost destroyed by peasants seeking arable land, firewood, and timber, the implications of wilderness remained extremely powerful. The fens, for example, tormented travelers; even where no trees blocked the view across the bogs and swamps, people feared quicksand and mire, and the creatures commonly believed to writhe in them. Fen creatures had no precise name in England, but Scots classified them as kelpies or water horses. Folktales describing the habitats of such creatures make clear the early modern understanding of wilderness as that land or water beyond civilized, Christian control.

Scots believed in kelpies and water horses as firmly as the Irish believed in *pooka* and *piast* and Scandinavians believed in *soe-orm* and *skrimsl.* Water creatures took two forms; the smaller sort inhabited shallow streams and ponds, while the larger, perhaps the last surviving zeuglodons, claimed deep lakes and lochs. Peasants fishing, crossing fords, or gathering driftwood chanced encountering one sort or another. In 1527, one Scottish historian noted that "out of Garloch, a loch of Argyle, came a terrible beast as big as a greyhound, puted like a gander, and struck down great trees with the length of his tail; and slew three men quickly who were hunting." As late as 1645 a mapmaker identified Loch Lomond as having "fish without fin," but determined that "the fish which they speak of as having no fins are a kind of snake and therefore no wonder."[13] Local people failed to stop wondering, however, and in 1773, on the island of Rasay, one told Boswell and Johnson about a sea horse that devoured a man's daughter. "He did not laugh when he told us this story," Boswell recorded, nor did other inhabitants of the utmost skirts of the north laugh when they told Londoners about "Each Uisge," the water horse.[14] Such creatures of wilderness swallowed hapless boaters and slithered ashore to eat innocent peasants. Until saints or determined men eradicated them, no person felt wholly safe near the shore, let alone upon the water.

A fen, bog, or loch is not easily known. Although travelers may easily scan the surface of such open wilderness, the depths conceal terrors as frightful as the most loathesome creature of any imagination, the squat, squalid thing that personifies the beast still snuffling about in human unconsciousness, the thing that goes bump in the night. Watery wilderness shelters such creatures, and like all other wilderness, forever threatens to overwhelm the land ordered and shaped by man. Wilderness is the spatial correlative of unreason, or madness, of the unhuman anarchy that informs so many folktales emphasizing the ephemeral stability of Christianity, society, and agriculture. In the early modern imagination, wilderness is the sea cascading into polder, the heath fire

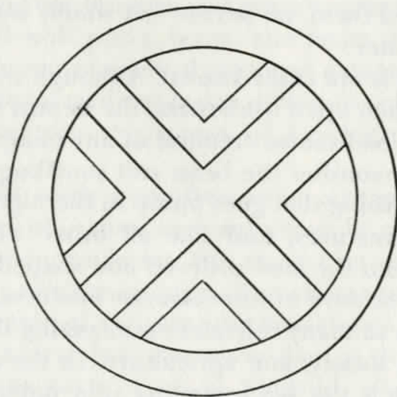
engulfing wheat fields, the earthquake swallowing houses, the forest or loch concealing the wolf, fish without fin, and the *loup-garou.*

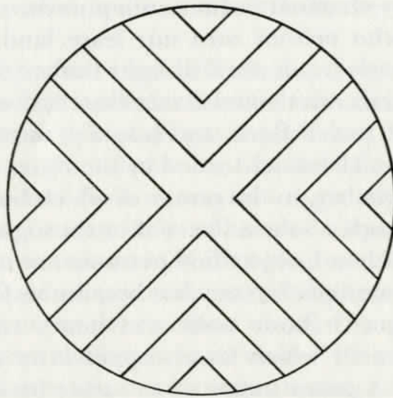
LANDSCHAFT

The antithesis of wilderness is landscape, the land shaped by men. Originally the word was German—*landschaft*—and meant something other than it does today. A landschaft was not a town exactly, or a manor or a village, but a collection of dwellings and other structures crowded together within a circle of pasture, meadow, and planting fields and surrounded by unimproved forest or marsh. Like the Anglo-Saxon *tithing* and the Old French *vill,* the word meant more than an organization of space; it connoted too the inhabitants of the place and their obligations to one another and to the land. The idea of a landschaft, of a traditional landscape, is very old. An Egyptian hieroglyph captures it in abstract form and distinguishes it from a town.[15]

The essence of a landschaft in ancient and medieval thought is the intimate relation of fields and clustered structures. In the landschaft, fields and structures share equal importance, but in the town no such equality exists. Indeed the fields are forgotten, and buildings and streets dominate the land. Traditionally, then, landschaft implied an agricultural community and a smallness of scale unknown in towns.[16]

Smallness was both absolute and subjective in the typical medieval landschaft. The twelve- to fifteen-square-mile area was home to perhaps 300 people, satisfying almost all their wants and recognizing every rod of ground as vitally important. Meadows, arable fields, and pastures produced more than food; they gave identity to each inhabitant. The





common fields, expanses of wheat, rye, or barley plowed at the same time, planted to the same crops, harvested at the same moment, and opened at the same time for stubble grazing objectified community purpose, strength, and traditional skill. Each spring the men yoked together all the landschaft oxen to pull the community plow across the land of all; the most respected husbandman was he who best kept the corporate tradition, who best husbanded the old wisdom of agriculture. The innovator with new seeds, equipment, and techniques was distrusted and forbidden any opportunity to experiment, even on those portions of the great fields to whose produce he was entitled. The strips, as husbandmen called the portions, existed as private property only in the sense that they belonged to a *seignior* or noble; otherwise they were almost public. Some landschaft councils assigned them each year by lottery, but in most they were allotted year after year to the same families. A householder might buy or lease another's right to a strip or strips, but he could not buy or sell any piece of a common field any more than he could fence off his strips. The fields objectified the corporate identity of the landschaft householders, and to cut up one or all was akin to destroying the social compact.[17] Small as the landschaft actually was, and tiny as it seemed when wilderness danger beset its inhabitants, its wholeness gave it strength.

Within the encircling ring of common fields stood the landschaft shelters, the houses and dwellings that announced and reinforced the status of their inhabitants. Early modern Europeans cherished houses and yards as stays against confusion and catastrophe; they understood the distinction between *house* and *dwelling*. By medieval and early modern legal and popular definition, a dwelling is a temporary habitation, a rude

shelter thrown up by charcoal burners, shepherds, peat diggers, or agricultural laborers who neither own nor lease land. A typical cottage existed only as a rough framework of light timber covered with a low-quality sheathing; reeds, wattle-and-daub, thatch, divot (turf or sods), or mud. It lacked a loft, paved floor, and (usually) interior partition walls; poultry and other small livestock owned by the cotter slept in one corner of the dank, dark chamber, in the center of which burned a tiny fire, its smoke escaping through a hole in the roof or through a door or *wind*ow. A house, on the other hand, objectified permanence not only in its larger size and stone fireplace and chimney but because its frame and covering endured much longer.[18] Stone walls and heavy rafters supported a thatch or tile roof, under which lay an upper-story sleeping loft above one or more rooms. A cotter expected to vacate his dwelling sooner or later, perhaps to carry its main structural components away with him to a new place of occupation; no householder expected to move. Although householders occasionally carted the frames of their houses from one landschaft to another, all expected to remain on what they called their *steads,* that complex of structure and space remembered now in English words like *homestead* and *farmstead.*

Steads varied in form across central and western Europe, but the essential pattern, a rough rectangle made by buildings and fences, extended from the Danube to the British Isles. The house comprised one edge of the enclosure; a small stable and cow-house formed another. Sometimes a granary and smaller structures like dovecotes completed the third side, and several tiny dwellings, the cottages of laborers engaged by the householder, completed the enclosure on prosperous holdings. Walls or fences usually closed any intervening openings. A stead might be imposing, carefully made of stone or heavy timber and including a number of cottages adjacent to its house, or it might be tiny. But within its walls lay the yard, the *hof,* the *cour,* the focus of agricultural activity other than planting, and just beyond lay the kitchen garden and perhaps several fruit trees.[19] Having a stead, a house and yard, meant having some fragment of outdoor space secured from chaos and made profitable; for all that the poor widow of Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" lives in a cottage, she contrives such a space: "A yeerd she hadde, enclosed al aboute/With stikkes, and a drye dych withoute,/In which she hadde a cok." Of course, even the virtuous widow understood that her yard, like her dwelling, might be swept away at the whim of her landlord, but her modest enclosure emphasizes her attachment to a particular locale, to the land near her husband's grave.[20] Holding a house and yard and fulfilling its responsibilities to the landschaft enabled a family to

hold its spatial and social position indefinitely, the dream of every cottager.

Acquiring a stead proved very difficult; for centuries, most European peasants expected to be landless. Families who did not inherit a stead might, through vast sacrifice and great good luck, accumulate enough capital to acquire the right to hold one, but such deeds became rarer with every passing generation. Such an acquisition greatly enhanced the family's social and political status; its head became a householder with voting rights, rights to common pasture, timber, and arable ground, and other rights *owned by the stead.* A particular stead might have the rights to cut six large trees each year in the common woodlot, or take two cartloads of stone each spring from the landschaft "waste." Householders frequently transferred such ancient customary rights among one another, but they did so temporarily; no householder could permanently alienate rights owned by his stead or escape the peculiar responsibilities belonging to his stead. Householders sometimes contracted with cottagers to fulfill the duty to work eight days each autumn in the lord's woodlot or give four days each spring to brush-cutting, but they could not evade the tasks unless their lord converted the duties into monetary payments. A householder consequently knew his social and political position in the landschaft as clearly as he knew his spatial location; as long as he carried out his duties, his future remained far more certain than that of cottagers.

If a householder committed some heinous crime, like heresy or returning a judicial verdict contrary to evidence, his neighbors and lord punished him. They deprived him of his franchise and other political privileges, and then often pulled down his house and plowed up his yard. Breaking down the house broke the man, and unless his neighbors imprisoned or executed him, he and his family wandered from landschaft to landschaft, becoming creatures of wilderness. Few broken men trudged across early modern Europe; householders cherished landschaft unity and knew the penalties of wickedness too well to transgress the law. Breaking down a cottage carried far less significance; courts punished the cottager's person, not the dwelling owned by his landlord, who was free to demolish it almost as he pleased. The distinction between house-breaking and cottage-breaking surfaced in criminal law. To unjustly break a house, to smash it to gain entry for robbery, carried heavy penalties largely because breaking the house attacked the political rights of its holder while simultaneously upsetting the body politic founded upon the rights and responsibilities owned by every stead. Even trespass threatened more than the spatial integrity of the yard; land

unjustly occupied or used by another person confused titles and political constructs almost as certainly as house-breaking.[21] In an age of chronic shortages, economic fluctuation, pestilence, and religious turmoil, holding a stead offered almost the only security. No wonder Europeans cherished their steads and revealed their love of them by naming them. Every stead had a unique identity worthy of a proper name and deserving the most valiant defense possible.

Supernatural evil assaulted steads, and especially houses, throughout the early modern era, and householders repelled it as effectively as possible. Across Britain, for example, householders protected doorways and fireplaces with carved figures or posts. Witches and other malignities entered a house most often by a door or by the chimney and gained power over its inhabitants by passing completely through the structure, from doorway to fireplace to chimney-top. Prudent householders erected a carved representation of some pre-Christian fertility spirit at one or both sides of the doorway, or else carved a "witch post" along one side of the hearth. Rowan wood, the wood that delighted the Old Religion god Thor, struck most householders as the best repellent of witches, and often they carved it with Saint Andrew's crosses and had the local priest set it in place. Carved figures represented a curious mix of pagan and Christian iconography and sometimes appeared in pairs, a male figure guarding one side of the doorway and a female one protecting the other. Respect for antique figures and posts endured well into the eighteenth century, especially in Wales, and householders building new houses in the 1730s chose to protect doorways and fireplaces by carving new posts.[22] Nighttime intrusion frightened householders trying to sleep, and their fear caused lawmakers to make breaking and entering a house *in the nighttime* a crime deserving harsher penalties than simple house-breaking.

House and stead defense concerned English householders in the late sixteenth century because nobles began enclosing the common fields for use as sheep pasture, and so terminating the long-term leases that made small-scale landschaft agriculture practical. Cottagers, of course, had little recourse. Whole groups of them left their tiny dwellings. But despite having secure houses and yards, householders learned the perils of depending on the system of common-land use and bitterly opposed enclosure. Parliament addressed enclosure cruelties early in 1589, in "An Act Againste Erecting and Maintaining of Cottages," by forbidding anyone to build or cause to be built a cottage without a four-acre yard, "to be continually occupied and manured therewith so long as the same cottage shall be inhabited," unless the occupants be miners or brick-

makers, or the dwelling sited in a town to shelter a craftsman. Parliament also excluded "any cottage to be made within a mile of the sea" or "in any forest, chase, warren, or park, and those sheltering shepherds or "a poor, lame, sick, aged, or impotent person."[23] No legal document more clearly indicates the extraordinary importance attached to the stead. As the colonization era matured, the traditional landschaft appeared more and more inviting, and the meaning of the house and yard attracted increased attention not only from the landless cottagers but also from the householders impoverished by enclosure.

The form of the landschaft, fields surrounding a cluster of houses, derived from spatial economics, but medieval and early modern inhabitants, like their less advanced counterparts today, failed to realize it. Across the present, unmechanized agricultural world, in back-country Africa, South America, and southwestern Asia, peasants know a landschaft form much like that of early modern Europe, a small nucleus of houses and other structures encompassed by the *täglich länder,* or daily lands (the garden plots, orchards, and fields requiring daily attention), a second ring of fields worked less intensively and usually planted to rye or other cereals, a third of meadow hayed once or twice a summer, and a fourth of pasture. Variations in soils and climate along with other local circumstances ensure that no landschaft had or has perfectly concentric zones of cultivation, and in warm climates the ring of meadow is often lacking because hay is unnecessary as winter fodder. The general pattern, determined chiefly by the walking time from housing cluster to fields, is similar, however, and in parts of Europe the medieval form survives almost intact, although fields are no longer commonly owned and worked. In isolated areas of Brittany, Portugal, Spain, and Sicily, farmers still live in grouped houses and walk out each day to fields. They understand that crops requiring frequent, time-consuming care—vegetables and fruits especially—must be near the houses, lest men lose hours every week trudging from houses to fields and home again.[24] Medieval and early modern *landschaften* were small in area because their inhabitants walked out from a central point. When the landschaft population grew so numerous that the outermost fields proved uneconomical because they were too distant, younger men and their families left to establish a new landschaft in the wilderness abutting the old, or else left for cities. The medieval and early modern landschaft, therefore, existed as a strictly pedestrian place.

Landschaften otherwise varied from region to region, partly as a function of agriculture, partly too as a result of cultural decisions. In parts of Scandinavia, for example, landschaften evidenced the importance of

sunlight. *Solstifte* fields angled away from the sun's orbit, so that each—and each dwelling too—received as much sunlight as possible. In Wales the clustered form was little known, at least away from the English border where military necessity was not so pressing. Like the Irish, the Welsh devoted themselves to stock raising and required acres of pasture about their dwellings. Elsewhere in the British Isles, especially in pastoral Scotland and in grain-raising Kent, husbandmen lived on freestanding holdings scattered along hillsides and valleys. In German forests some landschaften were closely nucleated while others straggled along narrow roads. The ideal and most common landschaft form, however, was the concentric type evident in central England, much of France and the northern German states, in Italy, Austria, and far into the east. At its fringe stood a windmill or water mill perhaps, sited on a promontory or waterfall, and beyond that bastion of artifice, only the wilderness of forest, mountain, or steppe, or the fringe fields of the neighboring landschaft.

At its center stood a roland, the objectified essence of landschaft. Rolands predated Christianity, but the new religion incorporated them and their significance; order mattered as much to missionary priests as it did to peasants enduring incursions of wildness. Pagans occasionally clustered their dwellings about great single trees, but more often they marked the focus of their settlements with simple staffs hewn from stone or tree trunks. Christianity replaced many of them with large crosses, but the older form and old notions of tree-of-life fertility survived. A hewn roland represented the pruning of the tree of life and objectified the artificiality of the fields made from wilderness. Miters, scepters, and maces—perhaps even the patrolman's nightstick—derive from the Christianized pagan symbol of imposed order that dominated the typical late medieval landschaft.

Trees and staffs suggested the once-potent efficacy of the Old Religion of unhewn trees, and pious Christians periodically sought to replace them with crosses less likely to inspire Satanic May-day frolics. Reforming clergymen despised the use of rolands as May-poles, but to no avail. The English, lamented one angry and determined cleric in 1660, cavorted about the beribboned shafts, "doting on old superstition, profane customs, returning with the dogs of the world to lick up that filth which seemingly they had long since vomited up." Old Religion ceremony (or filth) involved fertility rites, drunkenness, licentious procreation, general surrender to sexuality, and a variety of other "rogueries." Throughout the sixteenth century Christians confronted a resurgence of despicable celebrations, some of which revolved about the

roland. Calvinists in particular moved against "superstition"; in Scotland they mounted a vigorous attack on celebrations of Christmas and Midsummer, and on other festivals involving singing, dancing, plays, and bonfires. Catholics too sought to diminish their importance and like their Protestant enemies had only intermittent success. In an age of spiritual uncertainty the old fertility customs acquired enhanced meaning.[25]

On most days, however, the roland epitomized Christian order, for it marked the landschaft hierophany, the place where Christian Heaven touched the wilderness-slaying Christian place made by agriculture and artifice. It objectified the "peace of the market," the rule of holy law, and it objectified too a centripetal view of things. "They love only their own region," wrote a seventeenth-century landschaft priest about his parishioners. "They are not interested in the news or the fashions of other parts, but are quite detached from everything that happens in the rest of the world."[26] The roland was indeed an *axis mundi,* a shaft about which a small, almost self-sufficient world continuously revolved.

In the late Middle Ages every landschaft objectified far more than agricultural economics. Each was for its inhabitants a representation of the world because each was the world. Few men and fewer women left their native landschaft, for they could not desert their livestock. If they did travel they usually visited a contiguous landschaft much like their own but for them lacking the richness of association to which they were accustomed. At home every spot was invested with meaning—the meadow where someone saw the Devil at the edge of the forest, the houses of the well-off and the hovels of the poor, the hill struck twice by lightning long ago. Every landschaft mirrored a social, political, and economic order, the hierarchical structure of the universe, and the uneasy truce between the Old Religion and Christianity. Each was so uncritically accepted as the emblem of all order that each was thought natural. After all, only rare adventurers compared their landschaften with others very different. Wilderness dangers of this world and the other forestalled would-be explorers.

In the folk imagination a landschaft nurtures and reinforces character. Folktales detailing the wilderness adventures of landschaft inhabitants stress that the adventurers discover good or evil according to their natures. Helpful, obedient, self-sacrificing children, those who have internalized the group values that ensure landschaft order, discover piles of silver, magic herbs, or other treasure after triumphing over witches and dwarfs, and return home wiser and richer. Selfish, misbehaved children and beautiful but self-centered maidens—the figures of most

folktales concerning wilderness catastrophe—find ashes, dragons, and sex fiends and are punished or destroyed, or else converted by the evildoers of the wild.[27] Implicit in most tales is a clear understanding of the role of landschaft space and social order in moulding the character of every landschaft resident. Only the inhabitants most committed to corporate values proved strong enough to desert shaped land for wilderness, and then only for a day or two. Others did best to stay home.

Sometimes, of course, chaos intruded upon order. Any field left untilled grew up at once in weeds and brush, and wolves and wild boars foraged among sheepfolds and fields, occasionally slaying a husbandman trudging homeward after dusk. But it was the human evil of the forest and mountain that people feared too, eldritch hermits who honored goety, rape, and theft and who snatched children for unspeakable purposes. Gypsies with lurchers, crazed magicians, and countless vagabonds, especially those organized in bands, terrorized the whole of rural Europe. Bandits like the infamous Hulin, who roamed with his followers from Normandy to Franche Comté late in the eighteenth century, were the last in a long line of forest lurkers who delighted in surprise attacks launched from mysterious hideouts. Respectable people bolted their doors and windows at nightfall and prayed for deliverance from the supranatural creatures and human criminals they linked with impenetrable thickets, twilit ravines, and bewilderment.[28] Darkness was like forest gloom. It concealed and emboldened the sinister roamers who made landschaft life a torment of expectancy.

Peasants hesitated before chasing roving cattle or investigating eerie noises beyond the farthest fields. They feared the bewilderment that began with simple spatial disorientation and climaxed in spiritual death, but they feared encounters with wild folk too. Wild folk were popularly believed to be long-bewildered humans or manlike beasts; peasants cared little for distinctions. The descriptions recorded by clerics and other examiners suggest now that many wild folk were mentally retarded castoffs forced to subsist by hunting and robbing, sometimes in company but most often alone, or else were criminals exiled from landschaften. In an age without asylums and with few prisons, such unfortunates wandered freely in the wilderness. In the mountains of Central Europe and Wales they were particularly numerous and especially feared, but everywhere pious people thought them possessed or confused them with ogres and child-devouring ghouls or credited them with diabolical powers. Female wild folk counterfeited voluptuous maidens and entangled plowmen in erotic sin; males felled trees at will or led the Wild Hunt.[29] Shakespeare's Caliban is perhaps the most famous wild man in early modern literature, but there are many others, Spenser's Sir

Satyrane, for example, and Milton's Comus. The wild folk of drama and poetry are descended from the wild folk whom peasants knew and feared as Satan's bastards or victims of bewilderment beyond the landschaft fringe.

Until well into the seventeenth century, peasants peered at the wilderness through the prism of bewilderment and chaos. Every sort of experience beyond the farthest field was distorted by the certainties attendant upon losing one's way. Huntsmen and woodcutters who understood devious paths and trackless reaches of forest were never entirely trusted by their stay-at-home neighbors. No one knew when a woodcutter or charcoal burner might suddenly succumb to the temptations successfully resisted for years. In the landschaft of folktale such half-trusted characters live not in the dwelling cluster inhabited by husbandmen but at the edge of the landschaft, at the interface of field and wilderness. Their solitary huts, like the isolated windmill or water mill, stood in the shadowy interface of landschaft and wilderness chaos.

A typical landschaft consequently objectified order not only in its intricate arrangement of dwellings and fields and mills and pastures but in its juxtaposition with chaos. Wild folk only sharpened the peasant view of landschaft as comfortable order, and until the blossoming of *strassenromantik* ("the romance of the road") personified the uncertainties beyond the edge.

ROADS

Princes and kings intent on consolidating their rule by unifying their realms shattered the old integrity of landschaft space and social order. From the fifteenth century onward, at first hesitantly and then decisively, they made forests and other wastes safe for travel. Pacification through road-building proceeded unevenly, but by the close of sixteenth century rural people sensed new possibilities for adventure and profit. The concern for good roads—and overseas exploration—developed as slowly as political unity and long-distance overland commerce, but eventually it modified the popular distrust of the wilderness. Sixteenth-century Europeans saw the road not as good or evil but as enticingly mysterious.[30] Their fascination with it found expression in strassenromantik, in ballads about the joys of wandering, and most importantly, in wandering itself, for the roads that passed from landschaft into wilderness promised excitement and fortune. Folktale after folktale begins with a plowman or craftsman accosted by a traveler on the highway and lured into adventure.

Unlike the path between fields, garden plots, or dwellings, which be-