QUESTIONS UNANSWERED: THE RIDDLES OF *GENESIS B*

By

JOHN BENJAMIN BRIDGES

(Under the Direction of Jonathan Evans)

ABSTRACT

This thesis will explore the extra-biblical elements of the Old English poem *Genesis B*. Particular interest will be paid to the depiction of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the treatment of Adam and Eve's guilt, and the depiction of Satan. The research for this paper included a thorough study of medieval Christian orthodox teaching, as well as Germanic mythology and culture. In many cases the *Genesis B* poet seems to have been influenced by the Germanic world in which he was immersed, and this is the reason for some of the problematic elements in the poem. There are also instances where the poet deviates from the Bible in ways that cannot be linked to Germanic culture, and possible inspirations for these deviations are explored.

INDEX WORDS: *Genesis B*, Satan, Adam and Eve, Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Saint Augustine, Germanic Mythology, Norse Mythology, Loki, Balder, Odin, Woden

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JOHN BENJAMIN BRIDGES

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By

JOHN BENJAMIN BRIDGES

Major Professor: Jonathan Evans

Committee: Alexander Sager
Cynthia Camp

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2013

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Genesis B, also known as *The Later Genesis*, and *The Saxon Genesis*, is something of an anomaly in the corpus of Old English religious poetry. The poem, which has been compared to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, provides a quite elaborate, and at times highly unorthodox, treatment of the Fall of Angels and Men. The issues that have received the most scholarly attention are: (1) the description of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, (2) the question of whether Adam and Eve sinned through pride or fell victim to an intellectual deception, and (3) the presence of pre-Christian Germanic ideas in the poem as a whole. But most of the scholarly attention has been paid to a fourth element, the depiction of Satan and his relationship to God. Many have tried to identify sources from which the *Genesis B* poet may have drawn, and a wide variety of texts have been offered as possible inspirations for the poem's stranger elements. It has also been postulated that there is a single, long-lost text upon which *Genesis B* is based, although no such text has ever been identified. Many scholars touch upon more than one of these interesting questions, but no single answer has been found to solve the riddle of *Genesis B.* The lack of a single answer, a particular moral lesson, or a single philosophical doctrine is indicative of the poet's brilliance. His mission seems to have been to tell the story of the Fall in a way that would have been familiar to a Germanic audience. The poet also highlights the ambiguity of the biblical Genesis by drawing from a variety of sources that sometimes contradict each other. He forces the reader to question the meaning of the various episodes in depicted in his poem, and come to their own conclusions about the nature/Fall of Satan, the reasons for the Fall of Man, the existence of evil, and a number of other issues that biblical exegetes have spent many years exploring.

The scholarship of *Genesis B* is rather expansive, but broadly speaking the scholars fall into three camps: those who explore the Germanic elements, those who point to the poem's unorthodoxy, and those who argue that the poem is not unorthodox. This thesis will draw from all three camps in an attempt to show that the variety of opinions about the various issues raised by *Genesis B* is, in fact, evidence in support of the idea that the poet is adapting the story in a Germanic way as part of an attempt to make the reader ponder the mysteries of the Genesis story. A chronological survey of *Genesis* B criticism should suffice to show where the discussion of the poem has been, where it's going, and how it will be incorporated into this thesis.

Alan McKillop's "Illustrative Notes on *Genesis B*," written in 1921, addresses many of the issues mentioned above. McKillop makes the claim that, at the time of his writing, "The presumption is now in favor of some apocryphal source for the highly unusual account of the temptation given in this document" (28). However, McKillop makes it clear that he does not endeavor to uncover this apocryphal source but to "cite from the commentators some bits of material which are more or less parallel to the striking differences appearing in the B fragment, and to hazard some suggestions about the method and purpose of the Old Saxon poet" (28). After laying out his intentions, McKillop mentions that, in *Genesis B*, Satan is bound in Hell following the Fall of the Angels, whereas typically Satan is believed to have been bound following the Harrowing of Hell. McKillop agrees with Abbetmeyer that this transference of the binding of Satan comes "from the descensus literature" (30). Because he is bound, and therefore incapable of escaping Hell, Satan sends a messenger to tempt Adam and Eve, an action that seems to be at odds with the Bible and traditional exegesis. McKillop suggests the Book of Enoch as the possible source for this.

McKillop's article serves as a summary of *Genesis B* scholarship up to 1921, and throughout the rest of the article he mentions more of the oddities presented in *Genesis B* along with possible sources for them suggested by previous critics. One of the more interesting among these discusses the idea that *The Apocalypse of Moses* may have been an inspiration for the very unorthodox description of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Rosemary Woolf's "The Devil in Old English Poetry"[1] focuses its attention, as the title indicates, on the Devil. Woolf's article provides both an in-depth study of the Devil in *Genesis B* and a thorough discussion of depictions of the Devil elsewhere throughout the Old English corpus. Woolf's main argument pertains to the Germanic nature of Satan in *Genesis B*. She points out that, along with his disciples and saints, Christ did not really fit into the conventions of Germanic heroic poetry, but that in Satan, Germanic poets found someone who fit into their pre-Christian ideals (1). The parallels Woolf draws between the Old English Satan and the Norse god Loki are particularly interesting and serve as a starting point for a discussion of links between *Genesis B* and Norse Mythology. One of her most compelling points is that the invisibility helmet and *feðerhama* [feather-covering] worn by Satan in *Genesis B* are both "pieces of mythological property…which seem to have no origin in Christian history or legend" (3). But they do find parallels in Germanic mythology which Woolf suggests provides evidence that the poem was, perhaps, more influenced by pre-Christian Germanic beliefs than other Old English religious poetry.

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[1] All citations from Rosemary Woolf come from *Arts and Doctrine: Essays in Medieval Literature,* ed. Heather O'Donoghue. 1986

The *Genesis B* poet also draws a parallel between the relationships that the first parents and Satan have with God and the relationship that Germanic thanes have to their lords. Woolf provides an in-depth analysis of the language of the poem to demonstrate that these relationships are yet another example of the influence of the Germanic heroic code on *Genesis B* an influence that occasionally supplants Christian interpretations. Woolf's exploration of the Germanic elements in the Anglo-Saxon corpus is foundational to understanding *Genesis B*, and "The Devil in Old English Poetry" is one of the most important pieces of scholarship to date regarding this poem.

William Chaney's "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England" begins by discussing Pope Gregory the Great's letter to the Abbot Mellitus instructing him to convert the pagan temples to places of Christian worship and to use the sacrificial animals of paganism in Christian festivals (197). Chaney demonstrates how the archeological record can be used to gain an understanding of the beliefs of the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons. It is suggested that the Anglo-Saxons would have believed in gods similar to Thor and Odin, and Chaney uses place-names as evidence in support of this suggestion. He takes Woolf's comparison of Satan to the Norse god Loki a step farther, claiming that the bound Satan of *Genesis B* has more in common with Loki, who is likewise bound, than with anything in the patristic tradition about Satan.

Though no single source for *Genesis B* has yet been found, many scholars have tried to identify sources either for the poem as a whole or for the unorthodox elements to be found in it. J.M. Evans's two-part article "*Genesis B* and its Background" offers a number of possible sources for *Genesis B* while at the same time conceding that the poet does not really concern himself with following any established tradition and therefore does not completely adhere to any possible sources upon which he might have drawn. Evans claims that *Genesis B;*

> … owes little or nothing to the commentaries of the accepted authorities, and it reveals a very striking independence of outlook. We are forced, therefore, to conclude either (a) that the author of *Genesis B* did not know the standard interpretation of *Genesis*, or (b) that he knew it and for reasons of his own deliberately chose to ignore it, or (c) that he relied on rather more esoteric writings on the subject. (1)

Working from the conclusion that the poet used little-known writings as a source for parts of his poem, Evans cites the Latin poet Avitus who could have been the inspiration for the passages presenting both the boasting of the Tempter after the Fall and Satan's complaint about the creation of man (14). He concludes that, in the end,

> with the exception of one or two minor details, however, the Saxon and Latin poems have nothing in common so far as the temptation of Adam and Eve is concerned. But after the Fall there occurs at least one very striking correspondence. According to Ativus Adam blamed God for creating Eve as a companion for him. (Background 1)

Evans's conclusions about the similarities and differences between Avitus's poem and *Genesis B* highlight one of the chief problems associated with *quellenforschungen* in the case of this poem. This is also a problem with the philosophers who, some have argued, influenced the *Genesis B* poet. For example, at one point the poet may seem to be drawing from a particular philosopher – Eriugena for instance – but he never stays true to the doctrine of any of the sources given for a particular passage, and presents the audience with the occasional paradox. The difficulty in locating a single source for *Genesis B* makes a strong case in favor of the argument that, rather than drawing on any particular source or limiting himself to one particular doctrine, the poet drew upon a wide variety of sources and adapted them as he saw fit. The poet may not have been consciously employing any of the sources scholars have suggested, but in a prototypical exercise in intertextuality the poet unconsciously drew upon many texts he encountered in the course of his life as a cleric.

Evans also suggests that much of the poem derives from pagan Germanic beliefs, pointing to the poet's use of the Germanic heroic code as a particularly striking example of this (119). The idea that the *Genesis B* poet drew upon concepts of heroism that would have been familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience is enhanced by several scholars, but Evans suggests what may be the most likely explanation of the Germanic elements in the poem: "His [the poet's] first concern seems to have been to write a poem which would be acceptable to an audience familiar with secular Germanic literature. *Genesis B* is not a piece of versified theology; it is a complex and often beautiful poem in its own right" (123). If Evans's claim is given due credence, then *Genesis B* clearly stands out from the other Christian poems in the Anglo-Saxon corpus. *Juliana,* which features a disguised messenger of Satan, also incorporates the Germanic theme of the exile bemoaning his fate; but *Juliana* is much more orthodox in its treatment of the idea of temptation and of the true nature of the Devil than is *Genesis B.* The similarities and differences between *Genesis B* and *Juliana* are discussed at greater length in the chapters that follow.

It could be argued that the *Genesis B* poet imaginatively attempts to absolve Adam and Eve of their guilt for the Fall. The poet portrays the First Parents as victims of an intellectual deception rather than as sinners who fall due to their pride. This is clearly in contrast with the biblical account of the Fall, in which Adam and Eve are presented as knowingly violating God's command when the Tempter tells them they can be like God. In *Genesis B*, by contrast, rather than telling Adam and Eve that they will be powerful if they eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Satan's messenger says God has changed His command and that Adam and Eve will be punished if they do not eat. The messenger gives Eve a vision of God on His throne that causes her to believe the Serpent truly is a messenger of God. On a related note in "The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*," John Vickery argues that Eve's vision is actually a vision of God's judgment, and that Adam, as well as the Anglo-Saxon audience, would have recognized it as such (91). While his condemnation of Adam is slightly flawed, Vickery is one of the first critics to suggest that Adam can be seen as representing Reason (masculine) versus Sense (feminine), a comparison that he says is critical to understanding of the Fall of Man.

Michael Cherniss's "Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B*" once again moves the discussion to the Germanic heroic ideals evident in the poem. While a number of scholars have noted that that concept of loyalty, particularly the loyalty a vassal owes to his lord, is central to *Genesis B*, Cherniss makes the claim that all the characters in the poem are linked by the bonds of vassalage or lordship and that this is the driving force of the plot (483). Satan in particular is described as a "secondary Germanic lord," and Cherniss makes the point that an Anglo-Saxon audience would have discerned the hypocrisy in Satan's speech to his vassals in Hell (486). The figure of Satan presented in *Genesis B* has been compared to the Old Norse god Loki, a figure that may well have been known in some form to an Anglo-Saxon audience, but

Cherniss's discussion of Satan as a disloyal vassal provides a somewhat different example of the influence Germanic culture might have had on the poem.

While Germanic ideals concerning heroism and vassalage are to be found in a number of Old English poems, it is the fact that these ideals, arguably, displace Christian ideals, or at least the orthodox tradition, that makes the Germanic elements in *Genesis B* so striking and problematic. In *The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English*, John Gardner's discussion of *Genesis B* touches upon the non-traditional account of the Temptation and claims that the poet's focus is not on the sin of Adam and Eve, but rather on the trickery of the Tempter (32). Gardner's focus on the methods the Serpent employs in the Temptation scene argues in favor of the idea that Adam and Eve fell victim to a trick and not on account of their pride or sinfulness. In fact, keeping with the Germanic flavor of the poem, the Temptation scene in *Genesis B* may be better understood as a trick rather than a temptation.

Susan Burchmore's "Traditional Exegesis and the Question of Guilt in the Old English *Genesis B*" compares the elements of the poem that seem non-traditional with the exegetical tradition prevalent at the time of the poem's composition. For the most part, Burchmore's discussion is limited to the question of guilt, and whether or not the poet mitigates the guilt of Adam and Eve is important for an understanding of the poem. Butchmore also mentions the visual nature of the temptation scene and expands upon Vickery's discussion in the article discussed here earlier. Most significantly, Burchmore suggests that Eriugena, "a strikingly original philosopher of the mid-ninth century," may have been a source for the visual treatment of the temptation (127). Eriugena wrote a great deal about how the senses can be deceived and even mentions this as a possible reason for the Fall. This concept goes beyond the Church Fathers' discussion of the fallibility of the corporeal senses, and it is possible, in some measure, the *Genesis B* poet was indebted to Eriugena or ideas compatible with Eriugena for his portrayal of the temptation scene. Burchmore provides a solid basis for an understanding of the exegetical tradition concerning the story of the Fall of Man and shows how many elements of *Genesis B* stand in contrast with orthodox interpretations.

In his lengthy discussion of the relationship between the Germanic heroic code and the ethos of *Genesis B* A.N. Doane says the poet clearly portrays Satan as a vassal who is in direct violation of the Carolingian code of *comitatus* (123). Two pieces of mythological equipment used by the Tempter – the invisibility helmet and the *feðerhama* – are crucial to Doane's suggestion that pagan mythology influenced the poem.

Building upon Burchmore's discussion of theology and doctrine in Old English poetry, Judith Garde's *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* frames the Junius manuscript as a series of poems exploring a number of "redemptive assumptions" and demonstrates how the poems in that manuscript complement Scripture. Her work on the other poems in the corpus, particularly on the *Christ* poems, shows how *Genesis B* stands apart from the rest of the corpus of Old English religious poetry.

In "Jewish Apocrypha and Christian Epistemologies of the Fall: The *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great and the Old Saxon Genesis," Andrew Cole says there is some debate as to whether or not Adam and Eve were able to see God and His angels prior to the Fall. The idea that the First Parents had such visions does not seem to be supported by the Bible, and it is not mentioned by many early exegetes. Cole claims this belief could have come from the works of Pope Gregory the Great. Cole points to both the *Dialogi* and the *Moralia in Iob* to make the case that Adam's visions of and conversations with God could have come from Gregory:

> Gregory himself, however, made the connection between speaking with God and seeing him and his angels, when in the *Dialogi* and the *Moralia in Iob*, he expounded upon *Genesis* and upon related postlaparian visions. And like Gregory, the Saxon poet takes Adam's words with God to be concomitant with the protoplast seeing God. (Cole 174)

While the visions of Eve have been discussed at length, Cole is unique looking into Adam's prelapsarian visions.

P.S. Langeslag's "Doctrine and Paradigm: Two Functions of the Innovations in *Genesis B*" moves the discussion back to the vision of Eve. Langeslag discusses Burchmore's claims that Eve is representative of the Senses and therefore she easily falls prey to a visual deception. However his primary aim is not to inquire into the guilt of Adam and Eve. Langeslag instead discusses why the poet has Adam and Eve perform penance for their sin:

> …the medieval Western Christian tradition had strong ideas about the respective natures of the sexes. In *Genesis B,* however, the importance of this view is subordinated to the poet's aim of rendering the first parents compliant with Christian values. More specifically, Adam and Eve are made to participate in the penitential tradition. (117)

While penitence for sin is in keeping with Christian values, Adam and Eve's penitence does not appear in the Bible and is an odd feature of *Genesis B* that has not been explored before.

No single solution has yet been proposed to all of the questions raised by *Genesis B*. The poem unquestionably offers a Christian account of the Judeo-Christian story of the Fall of Man, but it does so in a rather strange way. The first chapter of this thesis will use the Bible, and the exegetical tradition to highlight the peculiar and often distinctly Germanic nature of *Genesis B*. In particular the question of Adam and Eve's guilt will be discussed, along with the poet's depiction of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The poet's depiction of Satan is one of the most discussed parts of the poem, and it raises a number of theological questions about the nature/history of the Devil and his relationship to God. Chapter two of this thesis compares the traditional orthodox understanding of the Devil with the heterodox version found in *Genesis B*. The final chapter looks at the influence the lost indigenous Anglo-Saxon mythology may have had on the character of Satan as he appears in the poem. Little is known of the Anglo-Saxons' pre-Christian beliefs, and what is known is known is derived through comparisons with Norse mythology, leading to difficulties owing to the fact that most of what is known of Norse mythology comes, in turn, from sources written well after the Scandinavian conversion to Christianity. This is complicated further by the fact that even when we can reconstruct a particular Norse myth, it is difficult to know in what form the Anglo-Saxons would have known it, if they knew it at all. An analysis of the elements of a pre-Christian mythology in the Christian poem is valuable for the contribution it may make to a modern understanding of *Genesis B*.

CHAPTER 2

GUILT, THE TREE, AND THE HEROIC CODE

Genesis B pushes the boundaries of orthodoxy in several ways; sometimes the poem is at variance with orthodox doctrine or tradition, at other times biblical stories are elaborated upon in a way that is at odds with medieval scriptural exegesis, and sometimes things that do not appear at all in either the Bible or in exegetical writings are incorporated into the *Genesis* story by the poet. This does not necessarily mean the *Genesis B* poet was a heretic seeking to pervert the Church's teachings, nor does it necessarily mean that he was ignorant and departed unwittingly from the accepted teachings about the Fall of Angels and Men. It is also unlikely that the poet was working from a long-lost source or an apocryphal text. J.M. Evans, in the conclusion to his article "*Genesis B* and its Background," provides a likely explanation for the oddities found in the poem, "His [the poet's] first concern seems to have been to write a poem which would be acceptable to an audience familiar with secular Germanic literature. *Genesis B* is not a piece of versified theology; it is a complex and often beautiful poem in its own right" (123). While Evans makes an excellent point, a slight reworking of his idea might come closer to the truth; the poet's main objective seems to have been to write a "beautiful and complex poem," but to do so he had to take in to account his audience. In the case of the Old Saxon poet, the poet whose poem the Anglo-Saxon poet was working from, the Saxon audience would have been more recently converted than the Anglo-Saxons, and some among them may have still held pagan beliefs. The Anglo-Saxon audience was further removed from their conversion than the Saxons, but the memories of pagan beliefs were strong enough that Anglo-Saxon churchmen frequently warned against the worship of pagan deities in their sermons. Therefore, it seems that a combination of artistry, audience awareness, and either a staggering, encyclopedic cross-cultural intellect or a brilliant imagination is responsible for the difficulties presented by the text of *Genesis B*.

Genesis B stands out from the other Christian poems in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus because, while Germanic themes occasionally appear throughout the corpus, most Anglo-Saxon religious poetry was orthodox. A full survey of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry is beyond the scope of this paper, and some of the differences between *Genesis B* and the other Christian poems in Old English will be explored in the next chapter; but for now a brief account of how Old English poetry presents Christian material will suffice. In "Poetry and the Bible: The *Junius Manuscript,*" T.A. Shippey points out the difference between *Genesis B* and *Genesis A*, the longer poem into which it was incorporated:

> The two 'layers' of *Genesis* are an odd contrast. The earlier, longer, Old English sections stick fairly close to the Bible text, omitting a few passages…and adding others…but by and large following the original almost verse by verse. In contrast, the translation from Old Saxon deals with the Fall of the Angels and the Fall of Man, stories in great part *created* by commentators enlarging on a part of the Bible notoriously difficult to reconcile with a Christian scheme. As a result this poet is guided by orthodoxy and menaced by heresy at almost all points. (147)

The differences between *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* are illustrative of the differences that are to be found between *Genesis B* and other Old English religious poetry. While Cynewulf and others did occasionally include Germanic elements in their poetry or elaborate upon Biblical stories, they typically stayed closer to orthodox interpretations than the *Genesis B* poet. Rosemary Woolf suggests a possible reason for the orthodox orientation of much of Old English poetry,

> But whilst the fact that the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics of the period come of a people only comparatively recently converted, and without any tradition of philosophical thinking, no doubt led to their accepting western orthodoxy unquestioningly, it did not necessarily mean that they accepted it ignorantly. (*Rood* 33)

Woolf goes on to explain that the Church made sure that the Anglo-Saxons were aware of heresies so that they might avoid them, but the more telling point is that they accepted western orthodoxy "unquestioningly." This places the Anglo-Saxons in contrast to both the Greeks and the people of the East, as those people had longstanding philosophical traditions which led them to challenge orthodox interpretations and occasionally venture into heresy. The orthodox nature of Anglo-Saxon doctrine and the lack of a philosophical or exegetical tradition among the Anglo-Saxons makes the parts of *Genesis B* that are not strictly orthodox all the more surprising.

Woolf's statement about the orthodoxy of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics appears in the course of her discussion of *The Dream of the Rood*, a discussion in which she claims that the Christology presented in the poem is very much in keeping with orthodoxy. While Christology is not touched upon in *Genesis B*, Woolf's analysis of the orthodoxy of *The Dream of the Rood* provides a contrast for the stranger elements of *Genesis B.* Woolf says that *The Dream of the Rood* effects a balance between Christ's humanity and divinity, and this balance was very important at a time when heretical groups were denying one or the other of these qualities. She goes on to point out that the poet of *The Dream of the Rood* must have been an educated man because,

> [the poet could not] remain unaware at the very least that the greatest theological care and precision was required in any statements about Christ's life, and in particular about His Crucifixion, and that an equal

> stress must be laid on Christ's divinity (against Nestorius) and Christ's humanity (against Eutyches). (35)

According to Woolf, in presenting Christ as both human and divine, *The Dream of the Rood* poet is making a conscious effort to remain within the confines of orthodoxy. This is not the case with the *Genesis B* poet, who is more than willing to stray from orthodox tradition, as his depiction of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil clearly demonstrates.

That *The Dream of the Rood* presents a highly orthodox view of Christ's nature is not surprising, as many other Old English Christian poems are similarly orthodox. In *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective*, with regard to Old English Christian poetry, Judith Garde says,

> Its view of Christ and his redeeming acts is consistently orthodox, and its intention was evidently to teach. It does not seem appropriate, therefore, to indiscriminately impose on such verse the learned exposition of Eastern and Western Christian Fathers, regardless of context. (3)

While Garde warns against assuming that the Old English poets were drawing upon the Church Fathers, she does admit that Old English religious poetry is "consistently orthodox," and that *Christ I* is "an uncompromisingly orthodox poem, celebrating the mystery of the incarnate redeemer (not the birth of the Child), and medieval familiarity with relevant liturgical material must be assumed" (78).

During his discussion of the *Christ* poems, John Gardner points out that

the evidence favoring a view of *Christ I* as twelve short poems is conclusive: all twelve have separate Latin sources –advent lyrics – and have their own obvious unity…*Christ III*, stylistically inferior to both *I* and *II*, is obviously the work of another hand [not Cynewulf's]. It is heavy with hypermetric lines and aside from moments of imagistic brilliance, is little more than a collection of ornamented writings from Gregory, Augustine, Caesarius of Arles, and other writers on the Last Judgment theme (107).

If, as Gardner says, the *Christ* poems are drawn from Latin sources, and in the case of *Christ III* based upon orthodox exegesis that indicates these poems are in keeping with orthodox tradition. If this is the case then there is a clear contrast between these poems and *Genesis B,* which occasionally reflects orthodox belief, but frequently pushes the boundaries of orthodoxy. The orthodox nature of other Old English poems that deal with Satan is discussed in the next chapter. Here, however, it is sufficient to show that most Old English religious poetry did not stray far, if at all, from the Church's accepted teachings on the topic of Satan. *Genesis B*, however, does not always follow orthodox traditions.

One of the stranger elements of the *Genesis B* poet's work is his depiction of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Bible describes the tree as beautiful and does not indicate that the tree is an evil creation: "And… the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3.6). The description of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil given by the *Genesis B* poet is drastically different from the Biblical account:

> Þonne wæs se oðer   eallenga sweart,
> dim and þystre;   þæt wæs deaðes beam,
> se bær bitres fela.   Sceolde bu witan
> ylda æghwilc   yfles and godes
> gewand on þisse worulde.   Sceolde on wite a
> mid swate and mid sorgum   siððan libban,
> swa hwa swa gebyrgde   þæs on þam beame geweox. (477-483)[2][3]

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[2] Then the other was entirely dark, / black and swarthy; that was the Tree of Death, / bore much bitterness. Every age must know / of both good and evil / intertwined in this world. Whosoever tastes / what grows on the tree / as punishment must live afterwards in sweat and sorrow.

[3] All translations are my own, but I used Bradley, S.A.J. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry.* Phoenix. Kindle, as a guide.

By using terms like *sweart*, *dim*, and *þystre* to describe the Tree, and even going so far as to say that it was *deaðes* tree, the *Genesis B* poet clearly departs from the text of the Bible. This is quite a contrast from the beautiful tree described in the Bible. According to Biblical tradition, when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, sin and death entered the world, but nowhere does it indicate that the tree was ugly or dark.

In “Illustrative Notes on *Genesis B*,” Alan McKillop addresses the contrast the *Genesis B* poet draws between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

> The poet first tells of the Tree of Life, beautiful and excellent; he who ate of this tree would never experience evil, and would live forever, enjoying the favor of God. But there was also the Tree of Death, black and gloomy…We see here that the Tree of Life is brought into direct contrast with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This antithesis is not biblical. (32-33)

Not only is that antithesis not biblical, but by describing the tree in the way that he does the poet raises the possibility that the tree itself is evil. It is important to note that the poet never actually calls the tree evil, but comes quite close to doing so. This idea borders on heresy, as indicated by T.A. Shippey; “As if to compound his dangerous fluctuations, the Saxon poet also denies the authority of Genesis iii,6 – ‘that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes’ – and with it the Augustinian thesis that God created nothing intrinsically evil” (151). There are several points where the *Genesis B* poet departs from the text of the Bible, but this is one point where he actually changes what is said in the Bible in a way that, as Shippey correctly points out, is “dangerous.”

In *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis,* Saint Augustine writes that

> If this tree from which man was forbidden by God to eat were an evil thing, it would seem that it was from the very nature of this evil thing that he received a deadly poison. But all the trees in Paradise were good, having been planted by God, who made all things very good, and there was no evil substance there, because there is no evil substance anywhere. (52; vol.2, bk.8, ch.13)

The belief that God could never make anything that is evil in and of itself is very important to Augustine, as is the concept that before the Fall nothing that existed was evil. In describing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as an evil creation, the *Genesis B* poet rejects both the Bible and Augustine, and thus ventures into potentially heretical territory. The question of whether or not God is the creator of evil is one of the more difficult issues Christian thinkers have been forced to grapple with. Augustine addressed this issue by insisting that evil does not exist, that it has no substance; for Augustine, evil is simply the absence of good: it is a turning away from the good.

The Gnostics, however, held a dualist doctrine: they believed that God did in fact create evil, or at least the demiurge did. For the Gnostics, there were two gods, one that had nothing to do with creation, and an evil god that created and rules over the world. This belief is clearly at odds with the Church's belief that all of God's creations were good and more importantly that there is only one God. The *Genesis B* poet's depiction of the tree, perhaps unconsciously, aligns itself with one of the Gnostic heresies. Gnostic elements are not found elsewhere in the poem, and there is little evidence to support the idea that Gnosticism existed in Anglo-Saxon England, so it is highly unlikely that the poet was a member of a Gnostic group, and it is for this reason that it seems likely that the poet's reversal of the biblical description of the tree is intended to show the consequences of eating the tree, and render the tree in a way that would have been familiar to a Germanic audience. By departing from the Genesis account of the Tree of

Knowledge of Good and Evil the poet forces the audience to wonder how a good tree could be the bringer of evil, and why a good God would allow a tree capable of bringing evil into the world to exist. None of these questions are answered by the poet, but a close reading of the text certainly brings them to mind.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil as presented by the *Genesis B* poet is, in part, another example of his using concepts familiar to his Germanic audience. That the tree is presented in an unorthodox way is clear, and this unorthodoxy is the result of the poet's desire to tell a story that his audience could identify with. In "Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B*," Michael Cherniss describes how a Germanic audience may have viewed the poet's description of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Cherniss says, "The tree of life offers Man all that a Germanic warrior could desire: a healthy, joyous life with his lord's favor in this world as well as the next (467-76). The tree of death offers a life of 'sweat' and 'sorrow' (482), the loss through old age of those things which Germanic heroes hold dear, 'deeds of valor, joys, and lordship' (484-85), and after death, perpetual service in 'the darkest of lands'" (487). Cherniss's statement suggests that the tree of *Genesis B* is intended to represent what would have happened if Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit. This explanation is far more satisfactory than the idea that the poet was a part of a Gnostic cult. The poet might not have been aware of any such heresy and simply departed from the traditional understanding of the tree to adapt the Biblical story to his culture. It is not the case that the change in the description of the tree is simply an attempt to adapt the story to his audience. The poet's reason for the change cannot be discerned with any degree of certainly, but it is likely that he was highlighting the theological paradox of a good tree bringing evil into the world.

There is another possible source for the evil tree depicted in *Genesis B*, and this source has been suggested as the inspiration for other parts of the poem. Joannes Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon,* written in the mid-ninth century, is a very unusual philosophical tract that discusses the Fall of Man. The Fall is not treated as a historical event, but as an allegory for the way in which the corporeal senses are able to deceive reason. After an explanation that is important in the ensuing discussion concerning the guilt of Adam and Eve, Eriugena concludes that "the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is pernicious and deadly wickedness masquerading under the form of good, and this tree is planted, as it were, in a woman, that is, in the carnal sense, which it deceives" (482; bk.4, 827A). Obviously the tree is not described as being ugly and dark, as in *Genesis B*, but, in a roundabout way, Eriugena does indicate that the tree was evil in its substance. There is no way to confirm that the poet was aware of Eriugena, but, at the very least, Eriugena's writing establishes the concept of an evil tree prior to the writing of *Genesis B*. However, while the *Genesis B* poet comes very close to saying that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is evil, thus agreeing with Eriugena, he also contradicts Eriguena's claim that the tree is "wickedness masquerading under the form of good." The *Genesis B* poet never says that the tree is good or evil, and it would be difficult to argue that he intended it to function as evil masquerading as good.

The identity of the *Genesis B* poet is not known; therefore it is not possible to know if he was a learned monk pulling from myriad sources to create a very inventive story that, at times, wanders from orthodoxy and the Bible or if he was perhaps ignorant of Biblical exegesis, making the search for sources and inspirations for various parts of

Genesis B an exercise in futility. If the poet was learned, he was certainly willing to adapt his source material in a way that suited him best. Working from this hypothesis, it could be said that the description of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is an amalgamation of the poet's Germanic influences and knowledge of exegetes like Eriugena all processed through the poet's imagination. The poet may have been more concerned with artistry than orthodoxy, biblical accounts, or any philosophical ideas, and as a result some elements of his poem display affinities with all those things, but without strictly adhering to any of them.

Along with the rather odd and certainly non-biblical account of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, *Genesis* B seemingly absolves Adam and Eve of their guilt for the Fall. In his essay "The Micel Wundor of *Genesis B*," John Vickery says that "it is almost a common place of Old English literary criticism that the poem *Genesis B* is distinctly unorthodox in its view of the Fall, in that it represents Adam and Eve as intellectually at fault, but not morally" (245). Saying that Adam and Eve were intellectually at fault is tricky. What this means, essentially, is that they were not intelligent enough to see through the tempter's tricks, and if that is the case, then they were not at fault at all: they were simply tricked. Vickery disagrees with claims that the poet intended to exonerate Adam and Eve, and in his articles "The Micel Wundor of *Genesis B*" and "The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*" he makes compelling, though flawed, arguments expanding upon this view. In fact, The *Genesis B* poet presents the Fall in way that seems to exonerate the First Parents. In the Bible, pride causes the Fall of Adam and Eve, both of whom knowingly disobey God's command. In *Genesis B*, Adam – but especially Eve – falls victim to an intellectual deception and is not at fault. From a storytelling standpoint, it makes sense that the guilt would be removed from both Adam and Eve, as this would make them more sympathetic protagonists, whereas, in the biblical account, they are not quite sympathetic. But from an orthodox point of view it is extremely problematic to make Adam and Eve blameless or to indicate that they fell as the result of deception rather than a moral failing or pride. Vickery argues that

> To the credulous and fallen Eve the false vision of God and His angels only proves the truth of the messenger's words. To the audience the vision, described during the temptation of Adam, is a reminder of the momentous and awful consequences of his Fall, a reminder of that day which must conclude human history as, in a sense, Eve's temptation of Adam begins it. (*Vision* 91)

Vickery makes an interesting distinction: he does not say that Eve is to blame for the Fall, but that Adam should have recognized her vision as a vision of God's Final Judgment. Vickery argues that a vision of God's throne:

> may suffice to imply judgment even if it is not explicitly spoken of but if the context allows the implication. In Old English poetry the motif is found in the *Christ III,* in *The Phoenix,* in *Elene, Juliana, The Dream of the Rood, Judgment Day II, Exodus, Christ and Satan, The Lord's Prayer II, A Summons to Prayer,* and in *Andreas.* (88)

God's throne may indeed be a symbol for the Final Judgment in Old English literature, but in this particular case Vickery's argument is unconvincing. Possibly the poem's audience would have been familiar with the God's throne equals Judgment motif, but to say that Adam would have interpreted Eve's vision in the same way assumes that Adam would have been aware of the Final Judgment at all, and that he would interpret the scene in the same way as an audience several thousand years removed from the Fall. In "Pilate's Visionary Wife and the Innocence of Eve: An Old Saxon Source for the Old English *Genesis B*," Thomas Hill further challenges Vickery's assumption about the meaning of Eve's vision, "I would cautiously disagree with the emphasis Vickery places on the poet's Augustinian orthodoxy, and it must be noted that the image of God in His Glory is not restricted to the context of Judgment" (172).

If Eve's vision is not a vision of the Final Judgment, then Adam would have no reason to interpret it as such, thus calling into question whether Adam is to be blamed for the Fall. The text of the poem indicates that the Fall is caused by Adam and Eve's desire to be loyal to God, and their inability to see through the tempter's tricks.

In the Bible, Eve is told that if she eats of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, "[she] shall surely not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3.4-5). This passage, spoken by the Serpent, does not suggest that God has changed his mind. The Serpent is tempting Eve, saying that she and Adam will "be as gods" if they disobey God's command; thus it is clear that Eve knowingly sins when she eats from the Tree. It is at this point that sin and death enter the world, and it is this sin that causes Adam and Eve to be expelled from Paradise. But the account of the temptation is far different in *Genesis B*: there, the Serpent, posing as a messenger from God, says God has changed his command:

> Ongan hine þa frinán   forman worde
> se laða mid ligeum: 'Langað þe awuht,
> Adam, up to god?   Ic eom on his ærende hider
> feorran gefered,   ne þæt nu fym ne wæs
> bæt ic wið hine sylfne sæt.   Þa het he me on þysne sið faran,
> het þæt þu þisses ofætes æte   cwæð þæt þin abal and cræft
> and þin modsefa   mara wurde,
> and þin lichoma   leohtra micle,
> þin gesceapu scenran,   cwæð þæt þe æniges sceattes ðearf
> ne wurde on worulde.   Nu þu willan hæfst
> hyldo geworhte   heofoncyninges
> to þance geþenod   þinum hearran

hæfst þe wið drihten dyrne geworhtne. (496-506)[4]

This account of the temptation differs from the biblical account in a couple of ways. First and most obviously, in Genesis, Adam is never approached by the Serpent, and secondly while in the poem the Serpent clearly tells Adam that God has commanded him to eat the forbidden fruit, nowhere in the Bible is it indicated that either Adam or Eve are told that God has changed his command.

By making the Fall of Man the result of an intellectual deception rather than of pride or a willingness to sin, the *Genesis B* poet places his work in stark contrast with orthodox biblical exegesis. The whole tone of the Fall is changed if Adam and Eve are punished for failing to realize that they are being tricked. While Vickery and others may believe that the poet does not remove the blame for the Fall from Adam and Eve, the text of the poem suggests otherwise:

> Lædde hie swa mid ligenum   and mid listum speon
> idese on þæt unriht,   oðþæt hire on innan ongan
> weallan wyrmes geþeaht   (hæfde hire wacran hige
> metod gemearcod),   þæt heo hire mod ongan
> lætan æfter þam larum;   forþon heo æt þam laðan onfeng
> ofer drihtnes word   deaðes beames
> weorcsume wæstm.   Ne wearð wyrse dæd
> monnum gemearcod!   Þæt is micel wundor
> þæt hit ece god   æfre wolde
> þeoden þolian,   þæt wurde þegn swa monig
> forlædd be þam lygemum   þe for þam larum com. (588-598)[5]

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[4] The hateful one with flames approached him first / then began to inquire by words “do thee long for anything, / Adam, from God above? I have journeyed hither / from afar on his errand, it was not long ago that / I sat by Him Himself. Then He commanded me to go on this journey / He commanded that you should eat of this fruit saying that thine strength and wit / and thine spirit would become greater / and thine body much more beautiful / and your limbs more splendid, His decree said that you would not lack any / of the treasures of this world. Now if wish to have / the favor of Heaven’s King / work to satisfactorily serve thine Lord and / you will have made yourself dear to God.”

[5] Thus with lies and skill he seduced her / led the woman into the wrong until she began to be inwardly moved / by the serpent’s suggestion (The lord had / designated a weaker mind to her), that she began to allow her mind / to follow the counsel; Therefore, because of the demon she took / from Death’s Tree the calamitous fruit against God’s word / Never was there a worse deed done / by humankind! It is much wonder / that the Eternal God, the Lord ever would / suffer that so many a servant / become seduced by the falsehoods which come from the tempters.

The poet indicates that Eve begins to believe the serpent because of her *wacran hige*, and he even goes so far as to say her weak mind was *metod gemearcod*. In *Genesis B*, Eve does not seem to be prideful, and she does not knowingly sin; rather, she falls because she is not intelligent enough to know that she is being tricked. Susan Burchmore makes this point explicit in her analysis of the question of guilt in the poem, "*Genesis B*, with its emphasis on Eve's good intentions and her loyalty to her husband and God, does not seem to me to portray her as vainglorious or power-hungry" (121). In not portraying Eve in this way the *Genesis B* poet undercuts one of the most important lessons in the story of the Fall. The desire to be like gods is the traditional explanation of what compelled Adam and Eve to eat from the forbidden tree, and the story could be seen as a warning against pride and the desire for power. But in removing these elements from his account of the Fall, the *Genesis B* poet changes the meaning behind the story entirely.

In *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, Saint Augustine writes a great deal about the Fall, and for Augustine, pride is the cause of Adam and Eve's sin. When addressing the question of why God allowed man to fall, Augustine says

> we must not imagine that the tempter would have caused the man to fall unless there had arisen in the man's soul a proud spirit that needed to be checked, so that the humiliation of his sin would teach him how wrong he was in relying on himself. (138; Vol.2, Bk.11, Ch.5)

If the point of the fall was to teach man a lesson about relying on himself rather than God, the *Genesis B* poet clearly departs from this idea. If the Fall was caused by a trick, and pride is not a part of the story at all, then the question of why God would have allowed the Fall to happen gets much more complicated theologically and philosophically. The poet himself addresses this confusing issue when he expresses wonder about why God would have allowed the Fall to happen.

In portraying Eve as weak-minded and indicating that the Serpent approaches her because he knows that she will be easier to deceive than Adam, at one and the same time, the *Genesis B* removes Eve's guilt and makes a statement that is quite anti-feminist. There is, in fact, a misogynistic philosophical precept hinted at by Augustine, and more fully elaborated by Eriugena, that seems to echo the reasoning behind the poet's portrayal of the Fall. Eriugena writes:

> For no part of human nature is the recipient of error except exterior sense, and that is the means through which the interior sense, the Reason, and even the Mind is often led astray. Therefore it is in this place of falsehood and vain phantasies, namely in the corporeal sense which the Greeks call αΐϭθηϭις and symbolize by the woman [that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is established]. (482; bk.4, 827A)

Traditionally it was thought that Reason should be able to overrule the corporeal senses, but both Eriugena and – possibly – the *Genesis B* poet seem to disagree. The *Genesis B* poet does not indicate that Eve should have perceived that the Serpent was tricking her; rather he indicates that, because Eve was a woman, she was not capable of seeing through the Serpent's trick. Eriugena makes the same point, saying that the tree is planted specifically in the woman, who is a representative of the corporeal senses where "falsehood and vain phantasies" reside. For Eriugena, Eve is representative of the corporeal senses, and the corporeal senses are capable of deceiving Reason; therefore, according to this line of reasoning, Eve's senses overruled her own reasoning capabilities, as well as those of Adam. This also seems to be the case in *Genesis B,* as the poet does not say that Eve should have seen through the Serpent's lies, but portrays her temptation as a trick.

The conflict between the corporeal senses and reason is discussed by Augustine in *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis.* Augustine concedes that the senses are fallible but believes that reason should be able to detect when the senses are being tempted:

> Hence, in all cases of corporeal vision, recourse is had to the testimony of other senses, and above all to that of the mind and reason, so that we may discover the truth in these matters as far as it can be discovered. (215; Vol.2, Bk12, Ch.25)

Augustine is not discussing the temptation of Adam and Eve in this passage, but nevertheless, on the authority of this statement, Adam (representing Reason) should have seen through Eve (representing the senses). The *Genesis B* poet never indicates that Adam should have seen through Eve's vision and says that it is *micel wundor* [much wonder] that God has allowed this Fall to happen.

Susan Burchmore makes the case that the portrayal of the Fall in *Genesis B,* and in Eriugena, is unorthodox not just in terms of the narrative, but in the treatment of Senses and Reason; "In the *Genesis* commentaries, while the Fathers warn that the senses are unable to perceive spiritual realities, they do not go so far as to say that the senses cannot perceive even material reality correctly" (124). Both Eriugena and the *Genesis B* poet indicate that the senses are unable to misconstrue material reality, both when Eve has a vision of God on His throne and when she sees an angel of light rather than a serpent. This distinction between Augustinian theology and Eriugena is very important in the context of the Fall, because if the senses are able to deceive reason, then Adam and Eve are not at fault, for how can they be blamed for something over which they have no control?

P.S. Langeslag builds upon Burchmore's discussion of Eve as representative of the senses and holds that Eve is not blameless because she should have known that the Serpent was lying to her. He also suggests a possible reason the *Genesis B* poet chose to portray the Fall in the way he did: “The medieval Western Christian tradition had strong ideas about the respective natures of the sexes. In *Genesis B*, however, the importance of this view is subordinated to the poet’s aim of rendering the first parents compliant with Christian values” (117). There are several parts of *Genesis B* that seem to have been altered to make them more palatable to a Germanic audience, and Langeslag posits that the treatment of Adam and Eve’s guilt may be further evidence of this:

> While the poem’s audience may have had difficulty identifying with Eve when she yielded to an offer that had never been granted to them in their own lives, namely to become like a god, all will have understood the call of loyalty as expressed in *Genesis B* and sympathized to some extent with her dutiful response. (115)

Here Langleslag is referring to the fact that Eve is told by the Serpent that she must convince Adam to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, because Adam will be punished if he does not follow God’s command: *Gif þu þæt angin fremest, idesa seo betste, / forhele ic incrum herran þæt me hearmes swa fela / Adam gespræc, eargra worda*[6] (578-580). The Serpent’s suggestion that he will not tell God about Adam rejecting him, along with the visual deception, is what eventually convinces Eve to eat the fruit herself and then to convince Adam to eat. Essentially this whole exchange makes the Fall about deception and disloyalty, rather than pride and sin.

Loyalty to one’s lord was one of the most important concepts in the Germanic heroic code, and Adam and Eve’s loyalty with God and toward each other is a central idea in *Genesis B.* In fact the relationship both between Adam and Eve and God, and between one another is set up in a way that would have been very familiar to a Germanic audience. Essentially, Adam and Eve are God's *þegnas*; they owe him loyalty. Ironically, their failure to be loyal occurs when they are trying to be loyal, and this causes the Fall. According to Cherniss:

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[6] If you the best of women, perform that endeavor / I will hide from your lord that Adam / spoke many angry words of harm to me.

> The unity of the plot is reinforced by the poet's use of heroic ideals to give the story its thematic structure. The theme of the poem is loyalty, and recurring motifs that center about the heroic attitude toward loyalty and the related attitudes toward vengeance, treasure, and exile serve to link the episodes in the poem securely to one another. Just as in Germanic heroic poetry, the ideal of loyalty, of the duty of a retainer to serve his lord, is at the core of the ethical system by which the behavior of the characters in this Christian story is judged. God and his angels, Satan and his devils, and God and Adam are all related as Germanic lords and their retainers. (483)

Indeed, it seems to be the case that the poet intentionally depicts the relationships of all the characters in terms similar to that between a lord and his vassal. There are a number of possible reasons for this decision; it could be that the poet was intentionally trying to present the story of the Fall in a way that his Germanic audience would have understood; it is possible too that the poet was unconsciously influenced by his own Germanic background, and this, combined with his willingness to depart from Biblical/exegetical, tradition resulted in the heroic code being grafted onto the Christian story.

In keeping with the Germanic rendering of the story of the Fall, the *Genesis* B poet even goes so far as to depict Heaven as a kind of mead-hall, an image familiar to his Germanic audience. In "The Devil in Old English Poetry," Rosemary Woolf writes that some of the language used to describe Heaven in Old English poetry is not at variance with Biblical tradition; though at first glance it may seem more Germanic than Biblical. She does mention one exception though, saying that the use of "such a phrase as *wloncra winsele* [wine-hall of the proud] seems rather to suggest a Germanic hall, or even *Valhall*, where the *Einherjar*, the chosen heroes of the dead, feasted until the time of their last fight in support of Odin," is more insistently Germanic, and not in keeping with the Biblical understanding of Heaven (9-10). It is fitting that Heaven would be described as a mead hall, because the nature of the relationships between all of the central characters in *Genesis B* reflects the relationship that Germanic vassals have to their lord. Certainly loyalty to the Lord is an important idea in Christianity, and the command to love and serve the Lord is central to Christian practice; but in *Genesis B* the depiction of loyalty and service are more indicative of the relationship vassals have to their lord than the relationship worshippers have to their God. In the conclusion to "*Genesis B* and its Background," J.M. Evans further establishes the connection between the Heaven of *Genesis B* and a Germanic wine-hall, "Heaven became an idealized wine-hall presided over by a warrior God and inhabited by angelic thanes" (116). Michael Cherniss also points out that Adam and Eve's relationship to God is similar to the relationship vassals have to their lord: "like all good Germanic retainers, Adam and Eve will remain *leof* [dear] to their lord and prosperous as long as they *læstan* [serve] him properly" (484).

In the temptation scene, the Serpent appeals to Eve's loyalty to God and Adam in an effort to convince her to eat from the forbidden tree. The Serpent tells Eve that she must eat the apple and convince Adam to eat it because to not do so would violate their Lord's command. When presented in this way, Eve's temptation of Adam is not a temptation at all; rather she is trying to protect her lord and husband. In "Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B,*" Cherniss points out first that theology is not central to *Genesis B* and second that, "in heroic terms Eve's duty, like that of any queen in Germanic heroic poetry, is to serve and advise her husband and to protect him, if possible, from the dangers which might beset him as the result of a wrong decision" (491). In *Genesis B*, Eve is clearly trying to protect Adam from God's vengeance when she begs him to eat the apple:

> His hyldo is unc betere
> to gewinnanne   þonne his wiðermedo.
> Gif þu him heodæg wuht   hearmes gespræce
> he forgifð hit þeah,   gif wit him geongordom
> læstan willað.   Hwæt scal þe swa liðlic strið
> wið þines hearran bodan? (659b-664a)[7]

Eve goes on to say that the Tempter must be God's messenger because of his apparel, a further indication that Eve succumbs to a visual deception. But more importantly, Eve is telling Adam that he must eat the apple in an effort to protect him from the vengeance that will come if he does not do as a good *þegn* should and follow his Lord's command.

Susan Burchmore points out that that the *Genesis B* poet's portrayal of Eve's temptation of Adam is different from the Biblical scene and more in keeping with the Germanic heroic code. She says, "Eve's attempt to persuade Adam, for example, depends not upon pride, gluttony, or lust, or upon any of the temptations connected with the senses, but entirely upon the idea that the tempter is God's messenger and that Adam should not disobey his lord" (136). The idea that Adam and Eve's Fall is not the result of any of the sins mentioned but the result of an intellectual deception and a misguided attempt to please God makes their eventual punishment rather seem confusing, again drawing attention back to the poet's comment that it is *micel wundor* that God allowed the Fall to happen. This idea is extremely problematic: how could a just God punish people for doing what they thought was right? Cherniss attempts to provide an answer for this perplexing question, and mentions that the mitigation of the First Parents' guilt is in keeping with the Germanic heroic themes of *Genesis B*:

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[7] It is better for us / to gain his favor than his hostility. / If you spoke anything harmful to him today / he will forgive it yet, if we will do him service / for what shall thee have hateful contention / with our Lord's messenger.

> The crime of Adam and Eve is, in heroic terms, still a crime, but their pure motives make their conduct understandable and acceptable to a secular Germanic audience. It is not moral depravity but their zeal to be loyal to their lord which ultimately causes them to be disloyal. Though they are theologically culpable, they remain, from a heroic point of view, respectable human beings. (496)

The distinction Cherniss makes is a bit puzzling: the *Genesis B* poet does not seem particularly interested in theological accuracy, and if Adam and Eve fall as a result of a "zeal to be loyal to their lord," it is hard to discern exactly how that makes them theologically culpable. By removing the guilt from Adam and Eve the poet changes the meaning of the Fall and instead presents the story as something of a tragedy in which Adam and Eve lose Paradise because they are tricked by a servant of Satan. Furthermore, if Adam and Eve are punished for falling victim to a trick and are not at fault for the Fall, and if it really is *micel wundor* that God allowed this to happen, then this challenges assumptions about the goodness of God, and it must be admitted that, at least in this case, the God of *Genesis B* bears some resemblance to the capricious and flawed gods of paganism. The poet's discussion of the Fall challenges the audience to question how evil entered the world. Instead of providing a clear answer to this question the poet highlights the ambiguity of this part of the Bible, and leaves the audience to wonder how a good tree can bring evil, why Adam and Eve chose to violate the only command they had been given by God, and how the serpent successfully tempted Eve.

Both the depiction of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the mitigation of Adam and Eve's guilt are at odds with the Biblical and exegetical traditions regarding these same things. Where the *Genesis B* poet departs from exegetical, he substitutes either Germanic ideals or his own inventions. The philosophical ideas similar to those of Eriugena also come into the poem, and while it cannot be known if the *Genesis B* poet read Eriugena's work, he does seem to have been influenced by the idea that the senses can deceive reason, and he agrees that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was itself evil. It is likely the case that the poet was not greatly concerned with traditional exegesis or orthodox theology, and the heresies of *Genesis B* stand in contrast to the rest of Old English Christian poetry. If this is the case, then, the *Genesis B* poet's desire may have been simply to write a beautiful and complex poem that highlighted and did not resolve the ambiguity of the Bible. In order to do so, he often felt free to depart from orthodox doctrines. Furthermore, he appears to have been willing to substitute the Germanic heroic ideals that his audience would have been familiar with for more traditional, non-Germanic understandings of the Fall that existed in Semitic and Greco-Roman, Mediterranean cultures, and thus was willing to dispense with orthodox doctrine for the sake of writing an engaging narrative.

CHAPTER 3

WHO IS SATAN ANYWAY?

Satan, or Lucifer, or the Devil, is one of the most enigmatic figures in the Bible. The true nature of Satan, of his fall, and of his mission on earth, are all matters that exegetes have been trying to iron out for millennia. The Bible offers little insight into Satan, and just as his nature changes between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the gospels are also not uniform in their presentation of him. In the Book of Genesis, Satan is not presented as a celestial being, and there is no reference to a war in Heaven. Satan is merely "the serpent [who] was more subtle than any beast of the field" (Gen. 3:1). In the New Testament Gospel of John, "Satan only appears in the forms of his human agents. Satan, then, can be seen as an incarnate adversary… Understood this way, Satan again fulfills his role as cosmic adversary and perennial obstacle" (Wray, Mobley 128). This Satan is a far cry from the Satan depicted in the Book of Revelation:

> And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil ,and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels cast out with him. (Rev. 12:7-9)

According to Wray and Mobley, Satan is now "the archvillain in command of an army of monsters and demons, pitted in battle against God, the Lamb, the angels, and the saints" (147). Satan "the archivillain" is the version presented in *Genesis B*, and the poet depicts him in a way that an Anglo-Saxon audience no doubt would have found repellant. This chapter explores the ways the Satan of *Genesis B* contradicts the Bible and orthodox exegesis, and the final chapter will address the presence of Anglo-Saxon mythology in the poet's characterization of the Devil.

There is no single source upon which the poet's peculiar characterization is based, and in keeping with the overall theme of *Genesis B,* there are a number of disparate sources and traditions reflected. The presence of the Germanic heroic code in other parts of the poem has already been discussed in the first chapter, but with Satan and the temptation of Adam and Eve, the Germanic elements become even more pronounced: the rebellion of Satan is depicted in a way that closely resembles a *þegn* rebelling against his *dryhten*, thus rendering the story of Satan's fall in a way that a Germanic audience could easily understand. Upon arriving in Hell, Satan appeals to the duty his *þegnas* owe to him. The Satan of *Genesis B* is not, however, a purely Germanic creation; in some ways the poet's depiction of Satan is rather orthodox, and sometimes it appears the unorthodox presentation does not stem from any Germanic influence, but from the poet's own mind.

Much like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Genesis B* elaborates on two stories – The Fall of Angels and The Fall of Men – that are rather short in the Bible. In one of its more orthodox moments, *Genesis B* follows centuries of Christian tradition in transposing the Satan of the New Testament into the Old Testament story of the Fall of Adam and Eve. In *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, Jeffery Burton Russell points out that this transposition dates all the way back to the time of Justin Martyr: "Justin confirmed that Satan is the tempter of Adam and Eve, the tempter of Jesus, the serpent, and the prince of demons" (67). While it has become a commonplace of Christian belief that the serpent in the Garden of Eden and Satan the lord of Hell are one and the same, this connection is not made clear in the Book of Genesis.

Between the writing of the various books of the Old Testament and the composition of Book of Revelation, the figure of Satan evolved. T.J Wray and Gregory Mobley trace this evolution in *The Birth of Satan*. First, the meaning of *satan* in the Hebrew Bible is given: “the word *satan* has been variously translated to mean *adversary, obstacle, opponent, stumbling block, accuser,* or *slanderer*. In the Hebrew Bible the name usually appears with an article – the satan [hassatan] – which describes a *function*, rather than being a proper name” (1). After giving the history of the word *satan*, Wray and Mobley provide several examples of the word describing an earthly adversary. The first example comes from the Book of Samuel, “David, for whom *realpolitik* always takes precedence over honor feuds, responds: ‘What have I to do with you…that you should become an adversary [*satan*] to me’” (54). Eventually *satan* ceases to be a word used to refer to an adversary and takes on a deeper meaning:

> Taken together with the description of *hassatan* in the book of Job, the portrait in Zechariah 3 confirms the image we had there: *Hassatan* [the adversary] is a member of the divining government with the thankless but essential job of examining the moral integrity of superficially pious mortals. (65-66)

The idea that Satan is part of a divining government, or the idea the he unwittingly works for God is an interesting one. If Satan is being used as an instrument of God then that provides an answer to the question of why God allows him to exist at all. Saint Augustine indirectly addresses this question when he explains that God allows evil because it creates order in the universe, “For the wills of individuals, even those that are bad, have definite and appropriate limits to their powers, and there is a balance of good and evil, with the result that the whole is beautiful when these parts are appropriately and justly ordered within it (153; Vol. 2, Bk. 11, Ch.21). Though this passage does not mention the devil, it comes during a discussion of the Devil in which Augustine claims that God did not create Satan in an evil state. The *Genesis B* poet does not say why God allows Satan to exist, what Satan's function in the universe is, or why God allows him to tempt Adam and Eve; but when he says that it is *micel wundor* that God allowed the Fall to happen, he forces the learned reader to ask the very questions Augustine sought to answer.

It is important to note that in identifying the Satan of the Old Testament with the Satan of the New Testament, the poet is following the thought of Saint Augustine who dedicates several chapters (Vol.2; chh, 12-27) of *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis* to a discussion of the nature of Lucifer and his fall. It is interesting that the poet would follow the Augustinian understanding of Satan given that other parts of his poem contradict Augustine. This shows, again, that the poet pulls from a number of sources, without staying true to any of them. Throughout the chapters dedicated to a discussion of Satan, Augustine says that: Satan fell from Heaven due to an envy that was brought about by pride, Satan was a creature created by God, Satan was not created as an evil being, and that Satan fell at the beginning of creation, before he says:

> God, who has supreme power over all that He has created and who uses the ministry of His holy angels to mock the Devil – for the Devil's evil will is used to serve the Church of God – did not permit him to tempt the woman except by the serpent, nor the man except by the woman. In the serpent it was the Devil who spoke, using that creature as an instrument. (159; Vol. 2, Bk.11, Ch. 28)

The serpent in the Garden of Eden is no longer a faceless adversary; it is now Satan, the leader of the fallen angels, the ruler of Hell, and the enemy of God. While the *Genesis B* poet follows the tradition of associating Satan with the serpent, there is an important distinction that must be made; the Satan of the Book of Revelation is certainly to be found in the Old Testament story told in *Genesis B*, but in the poem it is not Satan that goes to the Garden of Eden, it is one of his demonic ambassadors.

The concept of Satan's being in charge of an army is not exclusive to the Book of Revelation; the Bible occasionally refers to Satan's leading a rebellion in Heaven, and writers like Milton and the poets responsible for both *Genesis A* and *B* have tried to give a full account of the rebellion and subsequent Fall of the Angels. In *Genesis A,* the story of Satan's rebellion is rather short; Satan as the leader of the angels turns away from God, plots to overthrow him, is cast into Hell along with all of his followers, and then all is well once again (20-78). The *Genesis B* poet paints a picture of the conditions in Heaven prior to the Fall of the Angels before providing a more thorough description of their rebellion. The opening lines of *Genesis B* tell of God's creation of the ten orders of angels (246-251). After the angels' origin is explained, Satan is introduced in this way:

> Gesett hæfde he hie swa gesæliglice,   ænne hæfde he swa swiðe geworhtne,
> swa mihtigne on his modgeþohte,   he let hine swamicles wealdan
> hehstne to him on heofona rice,   hæfde he hine swa hwitne geworhtne,
> swa wynlic wæs his wæstm on heofonum   þæt him com from weroda drihtne,
> gelic wæs he þam leohtum steorrum. (252-256A)[8]

In saying that Satan was once the most powerful angel in Heaven, the poet seems to follow the diabology of Gregory the Great, who speaks of Satan's former glory in the *Moralia in Job* saying, "Summus ille angelicus spiritus, qui subjectus Deo in culmine stane potuisset" (458; Vol.143, BK.9, Ch.25)[9]. In a later chapter Gregory says, "Hunc primum condidit, quem reliquis angelis eminentiorem fecit" (1665; Vol. 143b, Bk. 32, Ch.

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[8] So blessedly had he established them, one he had wrought to strong / so mighty in his spirit that he allowed him to possess much. / He was next to Him in the kingdom of Heaven. He had been so splendidly wrought, / so great was his form that came from the Lord of Hosts that in the heavens / he shone like the light of the stars.

[9] "The highest angel could have stood at the top if he had remained subject to God" (94).

23)[10]. According to Jeffrey Burton Russell, Gregory the Great's diabology was "based on that of the fathers, and because of its great influence, fixed that view [the view that Satan was of the highest order of angels] in medieval thought." Therefore, in writing that Satan was the highest of God's angels the poet demonstrates a clear knowledge of orthodox teaching about Satan (94). That a poet who was likely a monk was aware of Gregory the Great's teachings is not at all surprising. What is surprising is the strikingly unorthodox direction the poem takes following this rather orthodox opening.

The biblical references to the Fall of Satan are rather scant, and at times it is not clear if the Bible is referring to Satan or a temporal ruler.[11] A passage in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is the closest the Bible comes to describing the fall of Satan

> How are thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of god: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most high. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isa. 14.12-15)

It is unclear whether this passage refers to the Satan of Revelation or to a temporal king, and it seems to lean more towards the latter than the former but, nevertheless, this speech is important because it provides some foundation for the idea that Lucifer was cast into hell as a result of his desire to "exalt his throne above the stars of God." This passage mirrors the aspirations of Satan as expressed in *Genesis B.* In "The Devil in Old English Poetry," Rosemary Woolf points out that the fall of Satan is a story that a Germanic audience would have easily understood because Satan's revolt bears

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[10] "He first created the angel whom he made greater than the other angels" (94). Both translations come from Jeffrey Burton Russell's *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages*

[11] References to fallen angels or the fall of Lucifer can be found in: Ezekiel 28:14-18, Isaiah 14:12-15, Job 4:18, Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4, Revelation 12:7-9.

> an intrinsic likeness to the revolt of a *þegn* from his lord, and his subsequent punishment [exile from heaven]…was a fate of which the exile of a *þegn* from his natural place in his lord's hall might well appear the earthly shadow. (1)

The poet's characterization of Satan, however, goes far beyond any "natural affinities" it may have with the biblical account of the Fall of Satan. The language used to depict Satan's rebellion is not just Germanic in origin, but the poet's focus on loyalty and the duty a *þegn* owes his dryhten makes is indicative of the influence the Germanic heroic code had upon him. In the conclusion to "Genesis B and its Background," J.M. Evans points out that

> the influence of Germanic epic [is not limited to] the style and stand-point of *Genesis B*. The whole design of the poem, the narrative technique as well as many of the actual episodes, derives, I believe, from its pagan predecessors. (117)

The evidence of the pagan predecessors to which Evans refers is to be found throughout the poem, and one of the earliest examples comes shortly after Satan's introduction. The poet writes that: *lof sceolde he drihtnes wyrcean / dyran sceolde he his dreamas on heofunum, and sceolde he his drihtne þancian / þæs leanes þe he him on þam leohte gescerede þonne læte he his hine lange wealdan* (256A-258).[12] While the idea of giving thanks to God and the idea that the angels should forever be praising God are universal in Christian doctrine, this passage sounds more like the relationship a *þegn* has to his lord: the poet writes that Satan should give thanks to his lord for the joys he has been given in much the same way that *þegn* should thank his lord for the joys he was given in the meadhall. The poet's depiction of Satan's duty to God is different from the way the angels relate to God in the Bible, as evidenced by

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[12] He should have secured his Lord's love / He should have praised his joys in Heaven and he should thank his Lord / for the gifts which He shared the gifts of light, the He would have let him wield it forever.

Isaiah 6:3 “and one cried unto another, and said Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.” It would be more fitting to say that the angel should have sung the praises of God, or followed his commands, especially in light of what is to follow; this passage displays the influence of Germanic narrative on the poet. After faulting Satan for failing to give thanks to God, the poet narrates a scene that sounds quite similar to the passage in Isaiah

> Ac he awende hit him to wyrsan þinge,   ongan him winn up ahebban
> wið þone hehstan heofnes waldend,   þe siteð on þam halgan stole.
> Deore wæs he drihtne urum;   ne mihte him bedyrned weorðan
> þæt his engyl ongan   ofermode wesan,
> ahof hine wið his hearran,   sohte hetespræce,
> gylpword ongean,   nolde gode þeowian
> cwæð þæt his lic wære   leoht and scene,
> hwit and hiowbeorht.   Ne meahte he æt his hige findan
> þæt he gode wolde   geongerdome,
> þeodne þeowian. (269-278A)[13]

In these lines, the seeds of Satan’s rebellion are sown. He has decided that he is as strong as God and will no longer do him service. These lines are clearly similar to Isaiah 14:12-45, but this scene is also indicative of the influence Germanic culture had over the poet. In the biblical passage Lucifer is planning to raise his throne above that of God, but the poet’s mention of Satan’s boastful words and desire to abandon his service to God, shows Satan subverting the heroic code with which the poet’s audience would have been familiar. A.N. Doane makes this point clear in *The Saxon Genesis*: “Satan is represented as wanting to replace the hierarchical system of governance by vassalage, what would have seemed natural and ‘modern’ to the ninth-century Carolingian poet and his audience, with the older idea of the ‘free’ comitatus (123). At this point in the poem, Satan has not spoken, but the poet has made his intentions clear. Satan is going to abandon his lord and rule in his own right. This is not completely at odds with the Christian tradition regarding the Fall of the Angels, but the poet’s focus on Satan’s desire to leave the service of his Lord is more in keeping with Germanic than with ancient Christian tradition.

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[13] But he turned it to a worse thing, he began to stir up strife / with the highest Heaven’s Lord, which sits on the holy seat. / He was dear to our Lord. It could not be hidden from Him / that His angel had become overly prideful, / He lifted himself up against his Lord sought hate-speech / He began to speak boastful words, that he would no longer serve God. / He said that his body was illuminated and beautiful / white and bright of hue. He was not able to find it in his sprit / that he would do service to God / Serve his Lord.

In his first speech Satan boasts that he is stronger than God. This motif of the boasting warrior is seen throughout Germanic heroic poetry. For instance in *Beowulf*, when the hero is challenged by Unferð he ends his defense by saying,

> Hwæþre me gesælde   þæt ic mid sweorde ofsloh
> niceras nigene.   No ic niht gefrægn
> under heofones hwealf   heardran feohtan,
> ne on egstreamum   earmran mannon;
> hwæþere ic fara feng   feore gedigde
> siþes werig. (574-579A)[14]

By making oaths and boasting about his powers, Satan is acting much like a boastful Germanic warrior while, at the same time, establishing himself as the worst kind of *þegn* because he is speaking these words against his lord. The impact of Satan’s speech is increased because he is not just boasting about how he is more powerful than any lord, he is boasting about how he is more powerful than the one Lord, the Almighty God. Satan’s boast is both impossible – no being can be more powerful than God – and blasphemous. The poet’s audience may well have been appalled that Satan was both acting as a bad retainer and speaking blasphemy, especially when he says things like

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[14] Nevertheless it befell that with my sword I slew / nine sea-monsters. I have never heard / of a harder fight under Heavens arch by night / nor a more distressed man on the waterways / Anyhow I took the hostile foe’s lives and endured / the trek’s weariness.

Hwy sceal ic æfter his hyldo ðeowian, / bugan him swilces geongordomes? Ic mæg wesan god swa he (282B-283)[15].

One problem that the Fall of Angels presented to the Christianized Anglo-Saxons was the fact that pride and boasting were not necessarily condemned in Germanic culture. In light of this difficulty, the poet had to make it clear that, according to the biblical and exegetical traditions, Satan's pride is wrong both from a Christian perspective and from a heroic one as well. In "Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B,*" Michael Cherniss makes it clear that the *Genesis B* poet succeeds in that task:

> From a purely heroic point of view, Satan's conduct is morally reprehensible, for he is a 'dear' retainer who boasts that he will abandon his lord, build his own hall…and serve no longer. Woolf rightly observes that the use of the lord-retainer relationship in *Genesis B* solves for the poet the problem of presenting pride as evil to an Anglo-Saxon audience: in the context of this poem, pride becomes a violation of the social hierarchy. (485)

It is not Satan's boasting in and of itself that is wrong, it is the fact that he is speaking against his Lord, a good Lord. Satan's speech is not just against the Lord, but his speech and actions are violations of the social structure of Germanic society. By adapting the story of Satan's rebellion in a way that makes the story familiar to a Germanic audience, the poet furthers his project of creating a poem that is appealing to his listeners. Here the poet does not stray far from orthodoxy in his attempt to make the poem more Germanic; but after Satan arrives in Hell, the poet begins drastically depart from the biblical account of the Fall.

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[15] Why must I serve at His grace / and submit such service to him, I am able to be a God just as he is.

After God learns of Satan’s plans for rebellion and hears the boastful words that his beloved *þegn* is speaking against him, He casts Satan and all of his followers, into Hell. There is no battle; God simply tosses the offending angels into the pit.

> Hete hæfde he æt his hearran gewunnen,   hyldo hæfde his ferlorene
> gram wearð him se gode in his mode   Forþon he sceolde grund gesecean
> heardes hellewites,   þæs þe he wann wið heofnes waldend.
> Acwæð hine þa fram his hyldo   and hine on helle wearp,
> on þa deopan dala,   þær he to deofle wearað
> se feond mid his geferum eallum. (301-306A)[16]

When Satan and his companions arrive in Hell, Satan says God has done wrong by sending him and his legions to Hell and, again, declares war on God:

> Næfð he þeah riht gedon
> þæt he us hæfð befælled   fyre to botme,
> helle þære hatan,   heofonrice benumen;
> hafað hit gemearcod   mod moncynne
> to gesettanne.   þæt me is sorga mæst,
> þæt Adam sceal,   þe wæs of eorðan geworht,
> minne stronglican   stol behealdan,
> wesan him on wynne,   and we þis wite þolien,
> hearme on þisse helle. (361A-368A)[17]

In this speech, Satan adopts the role of a faithless retainer. Just as Satan’s original rebellion was a sin in the Christian sense of the word, and a violation of the Germanic heroic code, his choice to continue his war against God also stands athwart both traditions. Satan’s speech also goes against the norms of Old English religious poetry. Typically, Satan and his fellow demons bemoan the sorry state of their existence and the loss of the joys of Heaven. Thus, at one and the same time, the poet is at odds with

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[16] He had gained hate from his Lord. He had lost His grace. / The good God had grown angry in his spirit. Therefore he must go to the abyss of Hell, / the terrible torments of Hell, because he fought against Heaven’s Lord. / He proclaimed that from His grace he must depart and in hell he became a demon, / the fiend along with all his comrades.

[17] Nevertheless He has not done right / that He has struck us down into the fire at the bottom, / the place called Hell, deprived of the Kingdom of Heaven; / He has designated it that it should be settled by mankind. / That is my greatest sorrow / that Adam shall, he who was made of the earth, / possess my strong seat / and we suffer this punishment, / pain in Hell.

Old English poetic traditions and in keeping with the Christian idea that Satan is the lord of Hell, fighting a constant battle against God. *Genesis B* is different from other Old English religious texts in a number of ways: it is not a saint's life, a sermon, or a translation of the Bible, nor is it like *Christ and Satan* and the *Christ* poems that function as sermons, and it is far less orthodox than other Old English religious poetry.[18] In this one instance, though, *Genesis B* presents orthodoxy in a very Germanic way.

Typically, when Satan or any of his demonic ambassadors appear in Old English poetry, they are miserable figures, as is the case in *Juliana* and *Christ and Satan*, but the Satan of *Genesis B* is different. According to Rosemary Woolf, "The devil in Old English poetry, with the exception of Satan in *Genesis B*, who is still flushed with the exhilaration of defiance, is always miserable, skulking wretchedly on the outskirts of the world" (9). Both the Satan of *Christ and Satan* as well as the demon sent by him in *Juliana* exemplify and illustrate Woolf's assertion. Towards the beginning of *Christ and Satan*, Satan is speaking about his misery

> Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu   dreamas hefdon,
> song on swelge   selrum tidum,
> þær nu ymb ðone æcan   æðele stondað,
> heleð ymb hehseld,   herigað drihten
> wordum and wercum,   and ic in wite sceal
> bidan in bendum,   and me bættran ham
> for oferhygdum   æfre ne wene. (44-50)[19]

Here Satan is both bemoaning the loss of the joys of heaven and expressing sorrow for his sin. He says he must remain in hell because of his *oferhygdum*. This is in stark contrast to the Satan of *Genesis B* and more in keeping with the Germanic theme of the exile wandering miserably through the earth. In *Juliana*, the demonic tempter combines the theme of exile with the idea of Satan warring against God during his lengthy confession to Juliana:

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[18] For further elaboration upon this point see the introduction, Judith Garde's *Old English poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective*, and Rosemary Woolf's essay "Doctrinal Influences in the *Dream of the Rood*."

[19] Listen, we once had joys before the Lord / and sang brightly in better times. / Now the illustrious and noble stand / around the everlasting throne praising God / in words and actions, and I in punishment must / be bound by chains and never hope for a better home / because of my excessive pride.

> Hwæt, mec min fæder   on þas fore to þe,
> hellwarena cyning,   hider onsende
> of þam engan ham,   se is yfla gehwæs
> in þam grornhofe   geornfulra þonne ic.
> þonne he usic sendeð   þæt we soðfæstra
> þurh misgedwield   mod oncyrren,
> ahwyrfen from halor,   we beoð hygegeomre,
> forhte on ferðþe. (321-328A)[20]

The *Genesis B* poet eschews the trope of the miserable exile. Soon after Satan arrives in his new abode he launches into a speech that is laden with Germanic elements. This speech further establishes Satan as the prototypical bad *þegn*. After Satan declares his intention to continue his war with God, he appeals to his fellow warriors' very Germanic sense of duty. Ironically, it is the height of hypocrisy for Satan to expect his fellow demons to uphold the very values that they were cast into Hell for breaking. In spite of all of this, Satan invokes the Germanic heroic code when he appeals to the other fallen angels for assistance:

> Gif ic ænegum þægne   þeodenmadmas
> geara forgeafe,   þenden we on þan godan rice
> gesælige sæton   and hæfdon ure setla geweald,
> þonne he me na on leofran tid   leanum ne meahte
> mine gife gyldan,   gif his gein wolde
> minra þegna hwilc   geþafa wurðan,
> þe he up heonon   ute mihte
> cuman þurh þas clustro,   and hæfde cræft mid him
> þæt he mid feðerhoman   fleogan meahte

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[20] Listen, My father the king of Hell's citizens / sent me hither on this journey to thee / out of that oppressive home, he in that sad home is / more desirous of evil than I. / Thus he sends us so that was may / through persuasion / turn the mind of the righteous / away from salvation. We are sad in mind / and cowardly in our souls.

> windan on wolcne, þær geworht stondað
> Adam and Eue on eorðrice
> mid welan bewunden, and we synd aworpene hider
> on þas deopan dalo. (409-421)[21]

Here Satan appeals to his *þegnas* to serve him in the way they should have served God by asking them to repay him for the gifts he gave them In Heaven. There are a number of important issues raised by this speech and what follows shortly after. At this point, the poet makes a serious break from both the Bible and the exegetical tradition. That Satan makes this request, or rather command, at all is quite striking. It is typically held that Satan is the tempter in the Garden of Eden, but here he is not the primary agent of the Fall himself, but he is asking a subordinate to bring about the Fall of Man. The idea that Satan sends a demonic ambassador to tempt Adam and Eve is not particularly Germanic, and certainly it is not biblical. The Bible itself is rather vague about the origin of the serpent, and it was up to exegetes to determine that the serpent was Satan himself. This is one of several parts of the poem that seem to come entirely from the imagination of the poet. The appeal to the demons' sense of loyalty serves to make the motives and hypocrisy of Satan obvious to the Anglo-Saxon audience, but sending a subordinate to the Garden of Eden does no such thing. It does not appear that the poet was following any apocryphal tradition which held that Satan sent a demon, rather than going himself. This is one of the parts of the poem that depart from biblical tradition for no discernible reason, and to discover why the poet made this decision would be impossible.

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[21] If I of yore gave any thane lordly treasure / whilst we in the goodly kingdom/ Sat blessed and had control of our throne, / then he who at that time I held dear must repay my gift / If yet he would as my thane agree to bring it about / that he may up from here / come through this barrier if he has his skill with him / then he may with a cloak of feathers escape / fly through the sky to where / Adam and Eve are established on earth / surrounded by prosperities while we are cast away, / sent hither to these deep depths.

The poet's depiction of Satan is in keeping with the overall treatment of theological matters in *Genesis B*. At times the poet seems to be following the orthodox tradition, as is indicated when he writes that Satan was the highest of God's angels. At other times he adds Germanic elements, as demonstrated by the emphasis he places on loyalty and boasting in his description of Satan's rebellion. There are also places where the poet eschews orthodoxy, and there is no obvious Germanic parallel for the change, as evidenced by the sending of an emissary to tempt Adam and Eve. The sources, inspirations, or lack thereof for the *Genesis B* poet's treatment of the Fall serve not as a key to unlock the meaning of the poem as a whole, but as a way of highlighting the poet's embracing of the ambiguity of the Bible. Satan is an especially ambiguous biblical figure, and the Bible's portrayal of him is rather inconsistent, as a study of the books of the Old and New Testaments would readily prove. By drawing attention to the ambiguity regarding the devil, and by being inconsistent in his portrayal of him, the poet is forcing the audience to question many things about Satan. For instance, why would God have created an angel who He knew would rebel against him? Also, after God expelled Satan, why would God allow him to live rather than completely destroying him? Finally, why would God allow Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, especially given that God knew the result of the temptation? The poet does not answer any of these questions, nor does he ask them directly, but it seems to be the case that when the poet expresses *micel wundor* that God allowed the Fall, he is expressing *micel wundor* about all these things as well.

CHAPTER 4

THE DEVIL AND HIS PAGAN COUNTERPARTS

Satan's sending of a subordinate to tempt Adam and Eve may not reflect an attempt on the poet's part to make the poem more Germanic, but the reason Satan needs to send a subordinate would have been identifiable to an audience familiar with Germanic mythology. Satan is not able to go to Earth himself because he is bound in Hell

> Ac licgað me ymbe   irenbenda,
> rideð racentan sal.   Ic eom rices leas;
> habbað me swa hearde   helle clommas
> fæste befangen. (371-374A)[22]

In "Illustrative Notes on *Genesis* B," Alan Mckillop says "the binding of Satan occurred in connection with the harrowing of hell, and was then, in this version, transferred to the fall of the angels" (30). By changing the binding of Satan to immediately after his expulsion from Heaven, the *Genesis B* poet renders the sending of an emissary necessary, and he also connects Satan's story with that of Loki who was likewise bound after causing strife in the heavens. As Rosemary Woolf points out, the connection between Loki and Satan is, in some cases, a natural one: "there was a counterpart to the devil, not only in Loki of northern mythology…but also in certain characters native to Germanic literature" (Devil 1). While in some cases the similarities between Satan and Loki are natural, the poet occasionally establishes links between the two that do not seem to arise naturally.

There are a couple of places where *Genesis B* shows the influence of Norse mythology, or, to state the case more accurately, *Genesis B* is influenced by a pre-Christian mythology with which either a Saxon or an Anglo-Saxon audience would have been familiar. Making connections between Norse and Anglo-Saxon mythology is difficult because little is known of Anglo-Saxon pre-Christian paganism, and what is known of Norse mythology comes, in large part, from sources written down after the Scandinavians converted to Christianity. In light of the lack of firm knowledge about either mythology, making connections between the two is a rather demanding but quite fascinating exercise. To establish any connection between these two mythological systems it is necessary to look at the archeological record, and suppose that all Germanic mythologies share natural similarities that come from a common Indo-European mythology.

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[22] Around me lie bonds of iron, / I am anchored by the chain's links. I am deprived of a kingdom; / the painful chains of hell / have me held fast.

In *The Younger Edda* after Loki causes the death of Balder, thus stirring up strife in the heavens (a story that in some ways mirrors the story of Satan's rebellion against God), he is bound: "the asas bound Loke [Loki] over three rocks. One stood under his shoulders, another under his loins, and the third under his hams, and the fetters became iron…there he will lie bound until Ragnarök" (Anderson 139). While at first glance the fact that both Satan and Loki are bound does not seem worthy of extensive comment, the number of other similarities between the two and the evidence that Anglo-Saxons and Norse mythology shared a common root, makes the potential for a Satan/Loki connection worthy of consideration. William Chaney makes this point in reference to the binding of Satan in "Paganism to Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England,"

> The bound Satan of the Cædmon manuscripts has more of a relationship with the bound Loki and bound gods of the pagan North than with any biblical source, in spite of the reference in Revelation (20,2) to the bound satan; Loki and the otter have been suggested as an interpretation of the Ramsey carving and, even more significantly, as the bound figure on the Gosforth Cross, both of the Viking age. (205)

By connecting the bound Satan of *Genesis B* to Loki and indicating that the idea of a bound Satan exists elsewhere, Chaney makes a strong case in favor of a Loki/Satan link in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons. Woolf also mentions that the connection is worthy of note in “The Devil in Old English Poetry,” suggesting, “now whilst there is no evidence that at any historical date the Anglo-Saxons knew of Loki, the similarities between him and the devil are undoubtedly sufficiently marked to deserve comment” (1). There is indeed no evidence that the Anglo-Saxons knew of Loki, but it seems likely that they were aware of a character similar to him; therefore, it is certainly possible that they were aware of some of the stories concerning him or a character like him. They may have known him under a different name, as is the case with Odin, whom the Anglo-Saxons knew as Woden. In *Myths of the Norsemen: From the Eddas and Sagas, H*.A. Gueber points out another difficulty in ascertaining exactly what the Anglo-Saxons, or for that matter the Norse, thought about Loki: “Loki was the embodiment of evil in the minds of the northern races, they entertained nothing but fear of him, built no temples to his honor, offered no sacrifices to him, and designated the most noxious weeds by his name” (218). Gueber may be correct in claiming that the northern races did not build temples or offer sacrifices to Loki, but taken as a whole this statement is a bit reductive. Reductive though it may be, it also begs the question, how did the *Genesis B* poet see Satan? After Ragnarök Loki would become the embodiment of evil, but he also helped the gods at various times. Therefore, the question must be asked, if Loki is not entirely bad, is Satan not entirely bad? Is it possible that Satan is doing God’s dirty work, but not actually the embodiment of evil? Going back to Eriugena’s discussion of evil masquerading as good, are both Loki (pre-Ragnarök) and Satan (prior to his Fall) evil in the guise of good? If God knew that Satan would fall, then He must have known that he was evil masquerading as good all along; therefore why would God create Satan in the first place? Establishing links between Satan and Loki emphasizes the ambiguity of the biblical Satan and raises a number of questions about the nature of him. Many exegetes have offered answers to these questions, but here the poet leaves them to the audience's imagination.

The knowledge that we do have of Loki comes from the Norse Eddas and Sagas, and this knowledge is a bit tainted, for the Eddas and Sagas were recorded after the conversion of Scandinavia, and as a result they are likely to differ from the original myths. Christopher Abrams identifies the source of this problem in *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen:*

> The gap between the date of the original poem – composed for oral performance and kept alive in people's memories – and the form in which it is written down makes it difficult to be sure that a skald's work is an authentic product of the Viking age, or that the version we now read has been reproduced faithfully enough to represent the poet's original composition. (12)

Given the difficulties involved in discovering what the Norse truly believed, it is extremely difficult, perhaps even more difficult, to uncover what the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon's believed, and in what way they believed it.

The language of both the Norse and the Anglo-Saxons springs from an earlier Indo-European language. This language, though lost, establishes an important connection between the ancient Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons. They were once part of the same group, but over time they scattered across Europe and their languages, beliefs, and customs began to diverge. While the language of the Indo-Europeans has been reconstructed, their belief system has not. Attempts have been made, but as of yet the pantheon of the Indo-Europeans has not been wholly explained. The lack of a total reconstruction does not mean that nothing is known of the Indo-European gods, in fact what is known, or at least believed, about them can be used to attempt to understand the belief system of the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons. Abrams provides support for this hypothesis by saying,

> The northern European tribes who spoke Germanic dialects [Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons among others] were linked by more than the similarities between their languages. At some stage, the same gods were known and worshipped across the whole region. The best evidence for this comes from the names of the week in various Germanic languages. (53)

The names of the days of the week are just one among many pieces of evidence that there was once an Indo-European set of gods and goddesses worshipped by the predecessors of the Anglo-Saxons and Norse. There are a number of other similarities between the beliefs of the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse that indicate that their respective mythologies retained vestiges of an Indo-European mythology.

As Woolf points out, there is no evidence that the Anglo-Saxons knew of Loki, but if the beliefs of the Anglo-Saxon pagans can be recreated, then it might be plausible to surmise that the Anglo-Saxons were likely aware of him. In order to establish this possibility it is necessary to turn to the archeological record and to place names, as place names often reflect the names of gods worshipped in a particular region. A comparison of archeology and onomastics to what is known of Norse mythology is one way to determine what the ancient Anglo-Saxons believed. Using Norse mythology to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon beliefs is fraught with difficulty, but, as Brian Branston points out in *The Lost Gods of England*,

> It is clear that orthodox opinion regards the sources of Scandinavian mythology as likely to mislead if they are used to fill in the gaps in the picture of an Old English heaven, earth and hell peopled by gods, men and giants. Orthodoxy, it seems to me, has swung so far from what may be false that it is also away off the truth. Where both Old English and Old Norse parallel sources remain there is (with some exceptions to be discussed later) a large measure of agreement. (46)

The parallels between Norse and Anglo-Saxon mythologies do not mean their belief systems were identical. There is likely to have been a good deal of difference between the two cultures on this point, and even when they believed in the same god, it is not necessarily the case that their beliefs matched up exactly, as is the case with Odin and Woden. According to Branston, Woden was "The most widely honoured of the heathen gods in English for we find him commemorated as the patron [or chief god] of settlements among the Angles of Northumbria, the East and West Saxons of Essex and Wessex…" (93). By uncovering evidence that Odin and Woden, who are essentially the same god, were worshipped in Scandinavia and England, Branston lends support to claims that the audience of *Genesis B* would have been familiar with the Norse pantheon. To further establish the connection between Odin and Woden, Branston notes that they were both held to be the chief of the gods, and both were credited with the discovery of runes (97). The evidence does not indicate that Odin and Woden were exactly the same, but that as the Germanic peoples migrated across Europe their beliefs began to diverge. For example, in Norse mythology, Odin and his Valkyries choose the greatest warriors to come to Valhalla and await the final battle. According to Branston the Old English had no similar concept pertaining to Woden (106-107).

Odin/Woden is not the only god shared by the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse, Thor was also known to both peoples, as is indicated by Christopher Abrams who, in *Myths of the Pagan North: Gods of the Norsemen* says*,*

> Overall, the clear correspondences between the pictures on the Altuna and Hørdum stones are convincing evidence that the myth of Thor and Miðgardsormr existed in the Viking age, and that it was known in both Sweden and Denmark. The Gosforth stone suggests the same myth was also known in a part of northern England that was under Scandinavian influence, although the scene it depicts is open to a variety of interpretations. (38)

By suggesting that the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons were aware of the myth of Thor and the Miðgardsormr, though the myth may have changed slightly over time, Abrams is pointing to another myth that these peoples shared.

If the Anglo-Saxons were aware of Thor and Odin (albeit under slightly different names), then they may have been aware of other Norse deities as well. There is also a good deal of evidence that there were a number of shared – or at least similar – gods worshipped, feared, or at least acknowledged, by both the Anglo-Saxons and the Norse. Given the similarities between the beliefs of the Norse and Anglo-Saxons, it is not surprising to find elements in Old English poems that at first glance seem to come from Norse Mythology, when in fact they come from a native Anglo-Saxon mythology that sprang from the same Indo-European roots. What it surprising, however, is to find pagan elements in a Christian poem to such an extent that it pushes the boundaries of orthodoxy. The similarity between the bound Loki and bound Satan is just one of many examples of the pagan resonances found in *Genesis B*. The inclusion of these pagan elements seems to be the result of the *Genesis B*'s poet aspiring to write a compelling poem for an audience familiar with pagan mythology and Germanic warrior ideals, as well as the poet’s lack of an inclination to stick to the story or to the traditional interpretation of the Bible.

While the bound Satan bears some resemblance to the bound Loki, the presence of mythological elements is most easily found when Satan asks his fellow demons to go to Earth, he mentions that whoever volunteers can escape from hell by flying with his *feðerhoman* [cloak of feathers]; then when the demon is preparing to go to earth, the poet writes that he is wearing a *hæleðhelm* [helmet of invisibility or deceit]. There is no biblical antecedent for these items; Satan’s (or in this case his messenger’s) departure from Hell is not mentioned in the Bible, and certainly no invisibility helmets or feather-capes are mentioned. The presence of feathers is not wholly unprecedented though. In the Book of Ezekiel, when the four angels appear along with the chariot, it is said “and every one had four faces, and every one had four wings” (Eze 2:6). However, the idea that a demon as opposed to an angel would have feathered wings does not come from the Biblical tradition, and the poet himself complicates matters by saying that, after being thrown from Heaven, *þær he to deofle wearð / se feond mid his geferum eallum*[23] (305B- 306A). If all of the angels were turned to demons, then although it is possible that they would have been thought to have kept their wings it is not necessary or even likely. The *feðerhoman* and *hæleðhelm* are more indicative of the influence of Germanic mythology, as Rosemary Woolf points out:

> The resemblance to Loki is in fact much more marked. Detachable wings or shoes were, of course, common features of both Germanic and classical myth…in the former [Germanic mythology] there was the *fjaðerhamr* of Freja lent, at ðorr’s request, to Loki in order that he might journey to Jǫtunheim to retrieve the hammer Mjollnir, and Loki also possessed the shoes which enabled him to fly through the air. The *hæleðhelm*, though clearly of mythological origin is not associated with

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[23] There he became a devil / the fiend with all his comrades.

> Loki…[but] In Germanic mythology [it is similar to] the *tarnkappe* worn by Sigfried…and of the head-covering used by the elves for the same purpose of rendering the wearer invisible. (4)

The wording of the poem makes the link between Loki's *fjaðerhamr* and Satan's *feðerhoman* quite clear. Also, the *hæleðhelm* not only bears a resemblance to the *tarnkappe* of Sigfried, but to the *heliðhelme* warn by Satan when he appears to Pilate's wife Procla in the Old-Saxon poem *The Heliand*. Thomas Hill points out that the terms *hæleðhelm* and *heliðhelme* are both "charged term[s] in Germanic heroic legend" (178). Given that *Genesis B* was originally in Old-Saxon, and that the Saxons were converted after the Anglo-Saxons, the mention of a *hæleðhelm* is strongly indicative of the influence that Germanic heroic poetry, or even mythology, had on the poet. Hill also points out that the *hæleðhelm*, if the term is translated as invisibility-helmet, was practically useless to the tempter in *Genesis B* (179). Hill offers an interesting alternative to the standard translation by saying, "perhaps we are meant to imagine the '*hæleðhelm'* as a device that permits the tempter to take on any appearance he wished" (179). This interpretation of the *hæleðhelm* is quite convincing, especially because, as Hill rightly points out the tempter transforms from a serpent to an angel of light over the course of the poem.

In arming Satan's demonic ambassador with items linked directly with Germanic mythology, the poet suggests a connection between Loki and Satan that is at least implicit and may be explicit. By linking Satan and Loki, the poet follows a tradition of associating the devil with pagan gods. An audience familiar with Germanic mythology would have recognized the similarities between Satan and Loki, and therefore we may guess that in this way the poet succeeds in making his story both recognizable and appealing to his audience.

After being equipped with his mythological armor, Satan's servant heads to Earth, where he finds Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. *Genesis B*'s treatment of the Fall of Man varies from the biblical account in a number of ways, and the poet's version of the temptation scene is likewise quite different than the description offered in the Bible or in the exegetical tradition. In the Bible, the temptation of Adam and Eve occupies a rather short scene. After Eve tells the serpent that she and Adam have been commanded not to eat the fruit "lest [they] die" he replies,

> Ye shall surely not die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Gen 3:4-6)

The *Genesis B* version of this scene is different in a number of ways. In the Bible there is no account of Eve's temptation of Adam, in *Genesis B* this scene goes on for quite a while; in the Bible, the serpent's temptation only takes a couple of lines, and in *Genesis B* the serpent first tempts Adam and, when he is rejected he goes to Eve, has a long conversation with her; when she finally eats the fruit, he grants her a vision of Heaven. The issues regarding the tree and Adam and Eve's guilt, have already been addressed; but the poet's treatment of the temptation has yet to be addressed. The most important aspect of the temptation is the vision that the tempter grants to Eve as it establishes yet another possible link between Germanic mythology and *Genesis B.*

After Adam rejects the serpent, the tempter approaches Eve. His appeal to her is different from the biblical account in that he appeals to Eve's sense of loyalty to both

Adam and God when he tells her God has changed his command and she and Adam must eat the fruit so they do not disobey their lord (551-564). The nature of the temptation is quite different in the Bible. In the Bible, Eve knows that she is not supposed to eat the fruit, but *Genesis B* indicates that Eve believes she is following God's command when she does so. After eating the forbidden fruit, the demon grants a vision to Eve:

> þa meahte heo wide geseon
> þurh þæs laðan læn   þe hie mid ligenum beswac,
> dearnenga bedrog,   þe hire for his dædum com,
> þæt hire þuhte hwitre   heofon and eorðe,
> and eall þeos woruld wlitigre,   and geweorc godes
> micel and mihtig,   þeah heo hit þurh monnes geþeaht
> ne sceawode;   ac se sceaða georne
> swicode ymb þa sawle   þe hire ær þa siene onlah,
> þæt heo swa wide   wlitan meahte
> ofer heofonrice. (600B-609A)[24]

Though this comes after Eve eats the fruit, it is still part of the temptation scene; in fact this vision convinces Eve that God really has changed his command. There is no biblical or exegetical precedent for this scene. The temptation in *Genesis B* is more a trick than a temptation, and the poet does not place a great deal of blame on Adam and Eve for the Fall. In changing the serpent from a tempter to a trickster the poet, once again, makes a change that betrays Germanic influence on the poem.

Loki is not the only Germanic character to make his way into *Genesis B.* In "The Devil in Old English Poetry," Rosemary Woolf mentions another possible inspiration for the trickster serpent. She says, "It is better therefore to make use of one of the most famous of all Germanic wicked counselors, Bikki, whose history was almost certainly known to the Anglo-Saxons" (5). In the temptation scene, the serpent certainly fills the role of the wicked counselor, not just in advising Eve to eat of the fruit, but in the way he convinces her to persuade Adam to eat as well. The serpent tells Eve that she must convince Adam to eat the fruit because,

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[24] Then she was able to see wide / through the demon's gift, he who deceived her with lies secretly seduced her / who came for his dark deed, / Heaven and earth and all this wide world / the great and mighty God's creation / seemed bright to her but she did not see through man's eyes / but the demon that had eagerly / deceived her soul granted her the power of vision / so that she may see widely / over the kingdom of Heaven.

> Gif þu þæt angin fremest,   idesa seo betste,
> forhele ic incrum heran   þæt me hermes swa fela
> Adam gespræc,   eargra worda.
> Tyhð me untryowða,   cwyð þæt seo teonum georn,
> gramum ambyhtsecg,   nales godes engel. (578-582)[25]

The serpent counsels Eve to eat the fruit and to convince Adam to do so as well so that they will not offend God. According to the serpent, Adam has offended one of God's messengers, and therefore she and Adam must follow God's command so that the serpent will not reveal Adam's trespass to God. It is important to note here that the poet says the serpent approaches Eve because she has a weaker mind than Adam. In this case it is Eve's lack of mental acuity that causes her to fail to see that there are two major flaws in the serpent's argument. The first flaw is that, if the serpent does not report Adam's *eargra worda* to God, then God's messenger is failing to serve his Lord. The second flaw is the more obvious one: God is all-knowing and all-seeing; therefore it is impossible for the truth to remain hidden from Him. The serpent could not deceive God even if he wanted to. In preying on Eve's weak mind and counseling her to do what is not in her best interest, the serpent fulfills the role of the wicked counselor identical – in the minds of a Germanic audience – to the likes of Bikki. Rosemary Woolf makes this connection clear. After recounting Bikki's attempt to convince Randver to take his father's bride, along with his attempt to convince Randver's father, Eormenric, to have his bride trampled to death by wild horses, Woolf states that "in the same way Satan is remembered for his disastrous advice to Eve, but is also portrayed in Old English poetry as the constant giver of bad advice" (5). Woolf is certainly correct that *Genesis B* is hardly the only example of Satan giving bad advice in Old English poetry, but there is a difference between *Genesis B* and other instances of Satan or his subordinate demons giving bad advice. In *Genesis B*, Satan is so cunning that his victim does not even know she is being tricked, thus making it hard to place any of the blame for the Fall on her shoulders. This raises a question that is not raised by the Bible. If Eve does not know she has sinned, how can she be punished? Certainly after the Fall she becomes aware of her sin, and she and Adam do penance, but at the time of the sin she thought she was following God's command.

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[25] If you will carry out the endeavor, the best of women / I will conceal from your Lord / that Adam spoke many eager, harmful words to me. / He accused me of lying, said that I am desirous of injury / a hostile servant, not at all God's angel.

Juliana provides another example of Satan sending a subordinate to tempt someone, but in this case the woman being tempted suspects that the messenger who claims to be a messenger from God is not telling the truth. *Juliana* tells the story of a Christian virgin who wishes to remain chaste in spite of her father's wishes to have her marry a wealthy man in their town. The man, like Juliana's father, is heathen, and in spite of her protestations, he refuses to accept Christianity. She is thrown in prison and tortured but remains steadfast even when a demon, disguised as a messenger from God, arrives and tells her that God has commanded her to renounce her faith and save her life. The demon tells Juliana:

Ic eom engel godes   uftan siþende
þegn geþungen   ond to þe sended,
halig of heah þu   þe sind heardlicu,
wundrum wælgrim,   witu geteohhad

to gringwræce. Het þe god beodan,
bearn waldendes, þæt þe burge þa. (261-266)[26]

Juliana quickly realizes she is not dealing with a real messenger of God and asks God who the messenger is. He responds *Forfoh þone frætgan ond fæste geheald, / oþþæt he his siðfæt secge mid ryhte, / ealne from orde, hwæt his æþelu syn* (284-286). [27] This scene almost mirrors Eve's temptation, because in both cases a servant of Satan claims to be a messenger from God coming to tell the woman that God has commanded her to do something, but in this case the tempted maiden easily recognizes the tempter's lies and God intervenes to prevent her from falling prey to them. The demon in this scene plays the role of the Bikki-like wicked counselor, but here the treatment of the scene is quite different. Eve's temptation is less like the temptation of Juliana or other figures tempted or wickedly counseled in Old English poetry. Her temptation seems more like the trick to which Frigg fells prey in the Balder myth. It cannot be said with any degree of certainty whether the *Genesis B* poet had Bikki in mind while writing the temptation scene, and for that matter it cannot be known in what way the poet understood Loki, but the resemblance between Satan and both of these Germanic characters makes it seem plausible that the poet was aware of some version of Loki and Bikki and that this knowledge – perhaps unconsciously – influenced the writing of the poem.

Like Bikki, Loki is known for being cunning and deceitful. According to *The Younger Edda* Loki is

> the originator is deceit, and the disgrace of all gods and men. His name is Loke [Loki]…Loke is fair and beautiful of face, but evil in disposition, and

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[26] I am God's angel, a servant / that took a journey from above and was sent to thee, / a holy one consider your harsh punishment / of bloody wonders, torments. / The Lord, the son of God / commanded that you save yourself from this.

[27] Seize the apostate and hold him fast, / until he says what his journey is about with truth, / all form the beginning, what his origin is.

> very fickle-minded. He surpasses other men in the craft called cunning, and cheats in all things, he has often brought the asas into great trouble, and often helped them out again with his cunning contrivances. (91)

One of Loki's "cunning contrivances" brings about a great deal of trouble, and results in his expulsion from the home of the gods. Loki's exile is similar to Satan's in that they are both responsible for stirring up trouble in the heavens, but Loki's crime is also similar to the deception of Eve in the Garden of Eden. In "The Death of Balder," Loki is upset that Balder cannot be harmed, so, "having taken on himself the likeness of a woman," he asks Frigg if anything can harm Balder (132). Loki's asking Frigg how to harm Balder is important because Frigg is held to be the wife of Odin, and also she is the Mother Earth deity. Eve is not considered to be deity, but, in the Christian tradition she is the mother of all mankind, so it requires not too great a leap to suggest that the roles of Frigg and Eve are comparable. The similarities between the roles of Frigg and Eve go beyond their roles as sacred mothers: they are both sacred mothers that accidentally bring about a great tragedy when they are tricked by a disguised troublemaker. When Loki, disguised as a woman, asks Frigg how Balder can be harmed, she replies that "West of Valhal there grows a little shrub that is called the mistletoe, that seemed to me too young to exact an oath from" (132). Balder is impervious to all things because Frigg has forced all but the mistletoe to swear an oath not to hurt him; in disclosing to Loki that no oath is exacted from the mistletoe, Frigg has just told Loki how to kill Balder. Loki does not kill Balder by himself: rather, he gives the blind Hoder a mistletoe wand to shoot at Balder, thus killing him (132). After it is discovered that Loki is responsible for this he is bound until Ragnarök as punishment.

The Balder myth is not the inspiration for the narrative accounts of Fall of the Angels, nor is it inspiration for the biblical Fall of Man. However, it is possible that this myth had some influence on the *Genesis B* poet's telling of these stories. The Balder myth does not really apply to the Fall of the Angels, save that both Loki and Satan cause a lot of trouble in Heaven. The relationship between the Balder myth and the poet's rendering of the Fall of Man functions on several levels. First, in both stories it is a sacred or first mother who causes the fall. Secondly, it is a visual deception that causes Frigg/Eve to succumb to the deceiver's trick. Frigg believes she is talking to a normal woman, and Eve believes she is talking to an angel of God. Finally, the visual deception of the blind man can be seen as being related in some fashion to Adam. When he first encounters the serpent, Adam refuses to follow his command, saying *þu gelic ne bist / ænegum his engla þe ic ær geseah*[28] (538-539). In spite of his refusal, when Eve tells Adam that the messenger is indeed an angel of God, saying to him *and þes boda sciene, / godes engel god, ic on his gearwan geseo þæt he is ærendsecg uncres hearran , / heofoncyninges*[29] (656B-659A), Adam eats the fruit. This is similar to Loki's deception of Hoder in that, in both cases, a man who is blind – literally in Hoder's case and figuratively/spiritually in Adam – is tricked into doing something that causes great distress.

The similarities between the Balder Myth and the *Genesis B* rendering of the temptation betray the poem's affinity for replacing biblical material with things a Germanic audience would be familiar with. A Bible story that strongly resonated with indigenous mythology and recently abandoned gods would have greatly appealed to the poet's audience, and the poet's willingness to eschew the Bible when other things would better suit his purposes adds to the poem's undertones of syncretism. The demon's last scene is yet another instance where the Bible is pushed aside and replaced with the language of the Germanic heroic poem. In this case the poet also departs from the typical depiction of the servants of Satan in Old English poetry. In *Juliana* and *Christ and Satan*, the devils are miserable. They fight against God, but they are forever unhappy. In *Genesis B*, Satan's servant rejoices after his victory

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[28] Your appearance is not like / any of his angels that I have seen before.

[29] And this beautiful messenger, / God's good angel, I can see by his appearance that he is our Lord / the King of Heaven's messenger.

> Nu hæbbe ic þine hyldo me
> witode geworhte, and þinne willan gelæst
> to ful monegum dæge. Men synt forlædde,
> Adam and Eue. Him is unhyldo
> waldendes witod, nu hie wordcwyde his,
> lare forleton. (726B-731A)[30]

The demon is thrilled that he has brought about the fall of Adam and Eve. He is happy to have served his lord well as a good *þegn* should. This is an interesting moment, given that the demon and the lord he serves were both exiled from Heaven for not serving their Lord. Nonetheless, the demon's victory makes him happy, and he cannot wait to tell his lord of his success.

The devil is one of the most enigmatic figures in the Christian tradition. He has been different things at different times, and the Satan of *Genesis B* is one of many iterations of the Prince of Darkness. In this case, Satan and his demonic subordinate are both influenced by the Germanic world from which the poet came. Whether or not the echoes of Norse mythology and Germanic heroic poetry suggest conscious decisions on the poet's part, those elements definitely seem to be part of the poem's background and structure. In telling the tale of the Fall of Angels and Men in that way he did, the poet created a poem that resonates with the earlier tradition. This is not to say that the entire poem is infused with specifically Germanic elements or that all of the oddities that have been identified in the poem arise from Germanic influence. Some of them seem to have arisen from the poet's imagination. By portraying Satan in a way that is similar to characters in Germanic mythology, the poet is taking the Judeo-Christian adversary and rendering him in a way that would have been familiar to his audience. However, linking Satan to characters like Loki and Bikki raises several interesting questions about the poet's beliefs about the Prince of Darkness. *Genesis B'*s portrayal of Satan leaves the audience wondering exactly what role he plays in a Christian scheme, and why God allows him to exist at all.

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[30] Now I have thy grace. / You know what I have wrought, I have carried out what you have / for many days wished for. Man is led astray, / Adam and Eve. He is destined to have / God's disfavor now that he has abandoned his command / and instruction.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The oddities of *Genesis B* begin as soon as the poem does. Heaven seems to be quite like a Germanic meadhall, and Satan stirs up a rebellion amongst the angels by convincing them to abandon their *þegnscipe*, thus representing the Fall of the Angels in a very Germanic way. The poem then moves to Hell, where Satan appeals to the Germanic heroic code when he presses one of his fellow demons to continue the fight against God. The reason Satan needs a stand-in also finds a Germanic parallel in the story of the bound Loki. The temptation of Adam and Eve also has ties to Germanic mythology and heroic poetry, and there are also parts of the poem – the description of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for instance – that are neither Germanic nor heterodox.

Overall the poet's aim must have been at least at one level simply to create a complex and brilliant poem, and he has done just that. The combination of the Germanic and Christian elements, complemented by things that seem to have come from nowhere at all make the poem equal parts fascinating and confusing. *Genesis B* raises a number of questions, and answers to these questions are few and far between. Perhaps the poet's aim was to force the audience to ask questions that are not easily answered. The poet does not write anything that is outright heretical, though it could be argued that he comes close, nor does he deny any of the truth of Christian beliefs regarding God, Adam and Eve, or Satan, but he does express *micel wundor* about all of them. In expressing *micel wundor* about the Genesis account, the poet is not asking the audience to abandon their beliefs, but as a priest once said to me "faith that is never questioned or challenged is not faith at all." The poet seems to be making such the same point, writing his poem in a way that it makes a learned reader ponder the mysteries and paradoxes of the biblical account of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

The name of the poet will likely never be known, and therefore any knowledge about what he actually believed will remain hidden. A complete understanding or explanation of the poem is far beyond the scope of this thesis. What I have endeavored to do is to examine the more striking elements of the poem, offer possible inspirations for them, and point out the difficult questions they raise. Sometimes the inspirations came from philosophers who may not have been well known to the poet's audience, sometimes from well-known exegetes, sometimes from the Germanic heroic code or mythology, and sometimes his own imagination. If in offering these possible explanations for the unorthodox parts of the poem, I have added something valuable to the scholarly conversation or shed light on something hitherto unilluminated, then I will feel this thesis to have been a success. As I said, there are no answers to the questions *Genesis B* raises, no certain answers at least, but examining the poem and trying to find things that could at least be suggested as answers is a fascinating exercise.

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