ABSTRACT

Jesus Christ Warrior-King: Analysis of the Old English Poem *Christ and Satan*

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The Old English poem *Christ and Satan* is an interesting and important work of literature, but various circumstances have left it without the widespread scholarly attention or fame of other Old English poems. This thesis begins by demonstrating the ways in which *Christ and Satan* makes use of traditional, Germanic-heroic literary practices to tell its distinctly Christian story and how this intermingling of traditions casts Christ into several distinctly heroic roles within the poem, including that of the warrior-king. Subsequent chapters compare specific scenes from the narrative of the poem, those of Christ's descent into hell and his temptation by Satan in the desert, to similar scenes from other poems in the Old English and Old Saxon poetic canons. These comparisons are made in search of increased understanding of both the poetic inner-workings of *Christ and Satan* and how and why it was composed within its unique historical, literary, and religious context.

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JESUS CHRIST WARRIOR-KING: ANALYSIS OF THE OLD ENGLISH *CHRIST AND SATAN*

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

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Waco, Texas

May 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the most significant academic accomplishment to emerge from some of the most formative years of my life. I would not have been able to complete such a task were it not for the support of several important people. First, I am grateful to my mentor, Dr. Ginger Hanchey. Her encouragement and guidance have been vitally important to my academic and personal growth, and my time at Baylor would not have been the same if I hadn't known her. I am also want to express my thanks to my friends at First Baptist Church Waco and from the Baylor Union Board who have been sources of strength and joy. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to my family– my parents, Greg and Shelly, and my sisters, Sarah and Micah—who have always given me unwavering love and support. I am also grateful to my dear friends Cynthia Liu and Joseph Lloyd for their companionship and commiseration throughout this process. Above all, I am thankful for my best friend and soon-to-be husband William King. Words can't convey the gratitude I feel towards him for always sharing with me his love, his energy, and his support. I dedicate this thesis to him.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It seems fitting to begin a discussion of Old English religious verse with a nod to Bede's account of the original beginnings of religious poetry in the English language. According to the Venerable Bede, the tradition of English religious poetry got its start in A.D. 680 in a stable. As he slept in that stable, a man called Cædmon was granted in a divine dream the ability to compose religious poetry "as a free gift from God" (Bede 24). Thenceforth he could compose beautiful verses on Christian themes. There are, of course, questions as to the literal veracity of Bede's story, but his message is clear. In the figure of Cædmon, the ancient, Germanic tradition of oral poetry was united with Christian themes and, thus, English religious verse was born. "Christian mythology… appears to have inspired and shaped a large and central portion of extant Old English poetry—to have provided, in fact, an imaginative context that altered fundamentally the uses of the traditional 'word-hoard' inherited from a Germanic past" (Lee 59).

Christ and Satan is based in this tradition of English religious poetry which, according to the Venerable Bede, was established by Cædmon. In fact, the manuscript in which *Christ and Satan* is found was traditionally attributed to Cædmon himself, though that claim has long been debunked.[1] *Christ and Satan* is found in only one source, the

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[1] Such works as the ones listed below, among others, refute Cædmonian authorship.

Bradley, S. A. J., editor. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. Everyman, 1995.

Junius XI manuscript, housed in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Junius XI also contains the religious poems *Genesis, Exodus* and *Daniel*. The manuscript was copied from an older book, now lost, by three different scribes whose distinct handwriting is visible in the manuscript. Interestingly, "the manuscript contains the earliest biblically inspired poetry now extant in any vernacular language," and the poems recorded in the manuscript were composed orally much earlier than the manuscript itself was written (Lee 11). It is also important to note that the name "Christ and Satan" does not appear anywhere in the manuscript and that it was assigned to the poem by later editors.

There has been much scholarly debate about *Christ and Satan*'s original authorship, time period, and region of composition. Scholars can use various clues to attempt to date Old English poetry—literary content and linguistic features being two of the most prevalent and helpful. Among scholars who have attempted to date *Christ and Satan* based on literary content since the mid-1920s, "there seems to have existed … something like a consensus that the work was composed probably not far from Cynewulf's time" (around the 9th century) (Sleeth 29). Based on his review of the body of scholarship on the poem as well as his own linguistic catalog of the text, Sleeth suggests that *Christ and Satan* was originally composed around 850 C.E. in a West Mercian dialect. (9th century west Mercia was the area near the present day border between

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Clubb, Merrel Dare, editor. *Christ and Satan an Old English Poem*. Yale University Press, 1925.

Finnegan, Robert Emmett. *Christ and Satan A Critical Edition.* Wilfrid University Press, 1997.

Sleeth, Charles R. *Studies in Christ and Satan*. Univeristy of Toronto Press, 1982.

England and Wales). Interested readers should consult Sleeth for his extensive review of the extant scholarship on dating *Christ and Satan*. It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide such a thorough review or make new assertions on specifics surrounding the poem's composition. This thesis will, therefore, rely on Sleeth's assertions and so join him in affirming a mid-9th century composition date for *Christ and Satan* as this claim seems to be both moderate and representative of much of modern scholarship.

Translations

The majority of quotations from the text of *Christ and Satan* in this thesis project are taken from S.A.J. Bradley's translation of the poem, which is found in his anthology, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (Bradley 87-105). This anthology contains reliable translations of a great many Old English poems. Bradley does not format his translation of *Christ and Satan* into lines based on the Anglo-Saxon alliterative lines found in the manuscript. Instead, he renders the text into sentence and paragraph format, leaving out the section divisions present in the manuscript. This thesis' citations of Bradley's translation will use the format (section.line). For example, (I.1) refers to the Bradley's first line in the poem's first section, and (VI.30) refers to the thirtieth line in the sixth section of Bradley's translation.

This thesis also uses Bradley's translations of several other Old English poems. Citations from these poems are only referenced by page number. This method was chosen because it was felt that the greater specificity afforded by the method of reference outlined above was only necessary when referencing the poem that is the main focus of this project. Also, the other poems are not split into sections as is *Christ and Satan*.

Another translation of *Christ and Satan* besides Bradley's is referenced when relevant and helpful, the Rutgers University Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project's translation. This particular translation is referenced occasionally where its more exuberant word choices are useful or interesting to consider. Additionally, Bradley chooses to omit section seven, lines 315-364, from his translation for the sake of avoiding redundancy—these lines do, in many ways, just restate the sentiments expressed elsewhere in the poem. However, this project must take them into account in some places. References to these lines were taken from the Rutgers University Anglo-Saxon Poetry Project translation.

Overview of the Narrative

Christ and Satan is quite a long poem—over 700 lines in total. While the author of this thesis would encourage any lover of Old English poetry to read the poem in its entirety, it is reasonable to expect that not everyone will have the desire to do so. In order to facilitate easier understanding of this thesis project, a brief synopsis of the action that takes place in each of the poem's sections is provided here.

I. Creation is described, then Satan speaks and the devils curse him.

II. Satan tells his story.

III. Satan wails and bemoans his situation at great length.

IV. The speaker of the poet speaks directly to the reader and advises them to follow God so that they don't end up like Satan.

V. The fiends speak again. Satan expounds upon his story some more.

VI. The current lot of the devils in their home in hell is enumerated.

VII. The hopelessness of the devils is contrasted with the hope of the good, faithful men. (This section is omitted from Bradley's translation).

VIII. Jesus descends into hell and breaks down the gates. The souls in hell are released, but Eve must speak and apologize before she ascends.

IX. Christ brings the souls up from hell and tells his story.

X. Easter takes place. Jesus has risen.

XI. Jesus spends time on earth following his resurrection. He then ascends into heaven.

XII. Judgement Day and Temptation

   a. ll. 597-663 Judgement day is described.

   b. ll. 663-end Satan tempts Jesus in the desert following his 40 day fast. Jesus resists the temptations, casts Satan into hell, and orders him to measure it with his hands.

Additional Notes

Throughout this thesis project I refer to the authors and poets of medieval texts as "he" despite the fact that the identity of most Old English poets is unknown. I make this choice for a few reasons. Most importantly, the writers of the texts used in this project were all likely monks or some other learned members of the clergy, who were all male. While it may indeed be possible that a few extant Old English texts were written by women, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, for example, the nature of the poems used in this thesis

suggests strongly that they were all composed by men. Thus, the “he” pronoun is used for simplicity.

The following four chapters will examine *Christ and Satan* through several critical lenses. First, it will be shown that the poem contains the mixture of heroic and religious elements that permeates Old English religious verse. Second, the heroic elements of the poem will be shown to inform three ways in which Christ is characterized in the poem, all of which point to an overarching theme of his might. Third, the scene in the poem that depicts Christ’s descent into hell scene is compared to similar scenes in other Old English poems. Finally, the poem’s temptation of Christ in the wilderness is compared to the same scene in the Old Saxon *Heliand* gospel. The following chapters aim to provide additional insight into the themes, literary elements, and inner-working of the *Christ and Satan* poem. Though there has been some scholarship devoted to the poem, this thesis project hopes to offer a fresh perspective on a poem that, in large part, has not received the same scholarly attention or celebrity as other, more famous Old English poems.

CHAPTER TWO

Germanic, Heroic, Christian: a confluence of cultures

Christ and Satan contains an interesting mixture of traditional heroic elements, themes, and diction within an overtly Christian story. Indeed, confluence of these two traditions, the heroic and the Christian, is found throughout the Old English poetic canon. Heroic and elegiac poems, like *The Wanderer* or *Beowulf*, contain striking examples of Christian themes and beliefs. Poems which focus on Christian themes or stories, such as *The Dream of the Rood* or *Exodus*, employ various heroic and Germanic traditional elements. *Christ and Satan* is no exception to the widespread mixing of the heroic with the Christian that pervades Old English poetry. *Christ and Satan* employs such traditional Anglo-Saxon elements as the Anglo-Saxon alliterative line structure and heroic themes, diction, and imagery in order to convey its Christian message. An analysis of the multitude of Germanic elements present throughout *Christ and Satan* confirms the fact that the poem fits into the overall trend among Old English poetry of mixing Christian and heroic elements. Further, the presence of both the Christian and the heroic elements in the poem adds to its overall richness as an artistic work.

Scholars have long noted the presence of traditional Germanic features in Old English religious verse. A few scholars caution the modern reader against attributing all instances of warfare and heroic language in Old English religious verse to the Anglo-Saxons' warrior culture. Because modern readers are "often more aware of the heroic traditions of Old English poetry than of the highly developed Christian imagery of

spiritual warfare," they may misrepresent certain aspects of Old English poetry (Hill 62). However, there is a strong scholarly tradition that relies on the heroic traditions of the Anglo-Saxons as a useful way to interpret and understand references to warfare and other Germanic features in Old English religious verse. As previously mentioned, in his book, *The Guest-Hall of Eden*, Alvin A. Lee writes that "Christian mythology… appears to have inspired and shaped a large and central portion of extant Old English poetry—to have provided, in fact, an imaginative context that altered fundamentally the uses of the traditional "word-hoard" inherited from a Germanic past" (59). It is not the case that Christian elements were artificially added to heroic stories, or vice versa. In Anglo-Saxon society, both Christian and traditional heroic thoughts, ideas, practices, and beliefs existed together. The use of Christian stories in Old English poetry provided poets with a new and creative way to artfully craft their traditional, Germanic poetic practices, the "word-hoard," as Lee calls it. The *Christ and Satan* poet draws extensively from both traditions to which he had access—the Germanic and the Christian.

It is clear that Christian elements and heroic elements are comingled throughout Old English poetry. This is particularly evident in *Christ and Satan*, a poem in which the heroic might of Christ is on full display. In his book *Studies in Christ and Satan*, Charles R. Sleeth contends that "heroic diction and imagery have a certain prominence" in *Christ and Satan,* and he also includes extensive explanations of how specific words in the Old English text of the poem are examples of heroic and Christian uses coming together (76). *Christ and Satan* uses the traditional Anglo-Saxon poetic structure to tell an overtly Christian story, and it is unafraid to incorporate heroic diction, imagery, and ideals in order to more forcefully communicate its message about the might of Christ.

Spiritual Battle

One of the most immediately striking heroic elements of *Christ and Satan* is the battle imagery and language that the poet employs to describe the conflict between Christ and Satan. Examples of this battle language are found throughout the poem. Christ's victory over Satan is described in epic style when it is said that "the Lord himself had conquered death then and put the fiend to flight" (IX.16-17). Christ is the powerful victor, having crushed his enemy, and Satan retreats, utterly defeated. The lines stating that "he [Satan] was forced to sink down to hell, and his following with him, to slide into humiliation" reinforce this sense of Satan's shame, defeat, and complete humiliation (VIII.7-8). After defeating Satan, "the everlasting Lord … gloriously imposed the bonds of punishment upon the fiends and thrust them, forcibly crushed, deeper into the abysmal darkness where now Satan, wretched monster, and the hideous creatures with him, cursed with punishments, gloomily converse" (IX.1-5). The language here is particularly strong and battle-like. Bradley omits part VII from his translation due to its redundancy, but another translation done by the Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project at Rutgers University even calls Satan's fellow devils "foot soldiers." Such heroic, battle-type language is interesting to find in a spiritual poem.

These overt uses of battle language employed to describe the spiritual fight between Christ and Satan are interesting because they describe this spiritual, metaphysical fight in much the same way as other, actual battles are described elsewhere in Old English literature. In *The Battle at Brunanburh*, the Northmen retreat after being defeated, "ashamed in their spirits," a phrase which calls to mind the utterly humiliated state of Satan and the other devils after Christ has defeated them in *Christ and Satan*.

(Liuzza 260)[2]. *The Fight at Finnsburh* and *The Battle of Maldon* describe heated battle and crushing defeat of one army by a more powerful force, just as in *Christ and Satan*. The sounds of battle are described in *The Fight at Finnsburh* when the poet says, “in the hall was the sound of slaughter: the hollow shield, the body’s guard, was to shatter in the hands of the brave; the rafters rattled…” (Liuzza 264). *Christ and Satan* also uses auditory imagery to describe its ‘battle.’ Christ’s attack on hell is described as “a terrifying thing [which] befell them [the devils], the din caused by the Judge when he broke asunder and crushed the gates in hell” (VIII.10-11). Later is the poem, the poet similarly tells “that the thunderous noise occurred, loud from the heavens, when he broke down and crushed the gates of hell…” (VIII.84-86).

The similarities between the *Christ and Satan*’s battle descriptions and the descriptions of battle in other poems are important to note. They point to the fact that the *Christ and Satan* poet was using some of the traditional, heroic features of Old English poetry when he composed his work. However, he does not use these techniques and heroic elements in exactly the traditional manner, as will be shown in later chapters of this project.

Heavenly Homeland

Another way in which *Christ and Satan* integrates heroic literary traditions into its Christian story is through its use of the heavenly homeland theme. Throughout the poem, heaven is set up as the ultimate, glorious homeland of Jesus and the eventual home of all

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[2] All quotations of Old English poems in this chapter, besides *Christ and Satan*, are taken from R. M. Liuzza’s 2014 “Old English Poetry: An Anthology,” in which can be found high-quality translations of many important Old English poems.

good men. Heaven is called “an abode in glory with the King of all kings, who is called Christ” and “a land more lovely than this earth” (IV.12-13, IV.20). The heavenly homeland theme is used to convey spiritual meaning in the poem because the idea of the homeland was central to Anglo-Saxon culture.

The heavenly homeland is held up as the ultimate reward for a virtuous and faithful life on earth. It is that towards which God’s people strive. If someone “is ever willing to despise wickedness, to please the Lord and to stifle sin…the Creator himself, the Father of mankind, will enfold them in his protection and graciously exalt them into the heavenly existence where they will be allowed to dwell with the King of glory ever to eternity, and to possess the joy of joys with god the Lord for ever and ever, world without end” (VI.37…41-45). Even more explicitly, “it behoves [sic] the man who lives pleasantly here in the world that his brightness shines forth when he seeks back to the other life… There it is bright and pleasant, and radiant figures shine forth throughout its cities. It is a spacious land there, a home in the heaven-kingdom for men of hope, for those found acceptable to Christ” (IV.17-19…19-23).

An invocation of the heavenly homeland features in many poems in the Old English canon, even several poems that are not overtly spiritual in other aspects. In fact, eighteen of the fourty-three total extant Old English poems end with a reference to the heavenly homeland (Hanchey 1-2). Some examples of the heavenly homeland theme are found in *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Order of the World*. *The Dream of the Rood* ends with Christ returning to his “rightful home” along with the souls he has saved (Liuzza 168). The final lines of *The Seafarer* challenge the reader to “consider where we could have our home, and then think how we might come there, and let us also

strive to reach that place of eternal peace, unending blessedness, where life is found in the love of the Lord, hope in heaven" (Liuzza 36). In *The Order of the World*, the final thought is of "that better realm" (Liuzza 66). *Christ and Satan*'s inclusion of such a seminal Old English theme shows that it is squarely situated within the overall tradition of Old English poetry, drawing from the same traditional themes, practices, and images as did other Anglo-Saxon poetry. Further, this theme functions in *Christ and Satan* much as it does in other Old English poems.

Exile

As a natural counter to its use of the homeland theme, the poem also relies on the idea of exile for much of its emotional impact. Satan is punished for his rebellion against God by being exiled from the heavenly homeland. During his lament, Satan says that he must "dejected and miserable … wander the paths of exile, deprived of heaven and segregated from its blessings, not to have any joy on high with the angels…" (II.37-40). He calls his place in hell a "hideous home," a "woeful home," and a "loathsome home," distinctly contrasting his new home in hell with the descriptions of the home of heaven (II.17-18 II.20, III.30). Satan is tortured in his home in hell. When he laments his position and his punishment, he says that "this shackle of punishment is bound tight. The fiends are furious, dismal and dark" (II.23-24). Later in his lament, he continues by saying, "now I am besmirched by my deeds, wounded by evils; now I have to bear this shackle of torment burning upon my back, heat in hell, dispossessed of hopes and wants" (III.22-25). However, more so than the physical tortures he must endure, Satan laments the loss of his position with God in heaven.

Satan seems more tortured by his exile than by his actual torture, a sentiment not inconsistent with Anglo-Saxon ways of thinking. Speaking to the other devils (formerly angels) he caused to be exiled to hell, he says, "I have obtained you all a new home now—as captives away from your settled abode. Here this is no glorification of the blessed not wine-halls of the doughty nor pleasure of the world nor throng of angels, nor may we have heaven. This hideous home is ablaze with fire. I am guilty towards God" (II.14-18). Satan claims that "it is now worse for [him] that [he] ever knew celestial light on high amidst the angels, and singing in heaven where all his own children surround the Son of the Lord with song" (III.11-13).

Satan ends one of his speeches by wondering, "Will the eternal Lord ever grant us a home in the heaven-kingdom, a patrimony to possess, as he did before?" (VI.17-19). In a particularly impassioned section, Satan cries "Alas! the majesty of the Lord. Alas! the Protector of the heavenly hosts. Alas! the might of the ordaining God. Alas! … Alas! heaven on high. Alas! that I am utterly dispossessed of everlasting joy, that I may not reach up my hands to heaven nor may I look upwards with my eyes, nor indeed shall I ever hear with my ears the sound of the clearest trumpet…" (III.28-29…30-35). When he contrasts the pleasures of heaven with the horrors of hell, Satan can only cry out in lament because he is exiled from his heavenly home and his holy father.

While modern readers may indeed understand the significance of being exiled from God, this punishment would have been particularly poignant to Anglo-Saxon audiences because the idea of exile was engrained in their culture as something universally feared and detested. There are numerous examples of the exile theme in Old English literature, especially among the elegies. The Wanderer "has long been forced to

stir with his hands the frost-cold sea, and walk in exile's path" (Liuzza 28). The Seafarer "dwelt all winter on the ice-cold sea in the paths of exile, deprived of kinsmen…" (Liuzza 32). The wife in *The Wife's Lament* must "suffer the torment of exile" (Liuzza 41). In all of these, and other, Old English poems, exile is the ultimate trial, the ultimate form of suffering. Satan's exile from heaven and his pitiful, lamenting response to it is an example of a traditional Anglo-Saxon poetic theme being repurposed to serve the *Christ and Satan* poet's Christian message.

Conclusions

Another important aspect of the poem that involves heroic elements is the ways in which the poet portrays Christ. Chapter 3 will discuss in detail how Christ is depicted like an Anglo-Saxon warrior-chieftain throughout the poem, as well as a few other interesting angles through which the poet characterizes Christ. The success of all of these descriptions of Christ relies heavily on the poem's use of the traditional, Germanic features explored in this chapter.

Heroic themes such as exile and the homeland are paired with battle-diction and heroic names to tell this story of Christ and Satan. The presence of Germanic elements in this Christian poem shows it to be firmly rooted in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Further, the sometimes surprising heroic elements of *Christ and Satan* are necessary to its success as an artistic work. They contribute to its artistry, its beauty, and its complexity. Understanding the heroic, Germanic sources of these elements allows for a better and more nuanced interpretation and appreciation of the work and opens the door for further

exploration of the poem's themes and the ways in which it fits into the literary context of Old English poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

"Warden of Heaven:" Christ's Might

There exists in Old English poetry a strong tradition of depicting Christ, and he is characterized in surprising and interesting ways throughout Old English poetry. In the poem *Christ and Satan*, the poet's use of language and imagery casts Christ into three distinct yet complimentary roles: the creator, the victor and punisher, and the warrior-king. This chapter will describe and analyze these three primary ways that Christ is characterized in *Christ and Satan* and argue that these depictions serve to establish and underscore a key theme of the poem, the might of Christ.

Christ the Creator

One role into which Christ is cast throughout this poem is that of creator. The primary focus of the first section of the poem is on how Christ was the almighty creator of earth.[3] From the beginning, the poet makes it clear that he is talking about Jesus as the creator and that Jesus was utterly mighty and powerful in his act of creation. The poet says that Christ "was possessed of power and strength when he consolidated the plains of the world" (I.2-3). He established the days "with his authentic power," and through his power can embrace even the whole ocean (I.10-11). In the Rutgers University Anglo-

[3] It may seem odd to the modern reader to see God the Son portrayed as the creator rather than God the father, but this poem doesn't seem to be as concerned with keeping the actions and characteristics of the three members of the trinity strictly separated as Christians now do.

Saxon Narrative Poetry Project translation of *Christ and Satan*, the word "might" is used four times just in this opening section about Jesus' creation of the world (*Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project*). There can be no question of the message of this opening scene: Christ is almighty.

In his book, Bernard Huppé agrees, saying that "the theme of the poem, which is clearly stated at the beginning … is the incommensurate might of God" (Huppé 227). In the first section of the poem, Christ is portrayed as creator, and his creation of earth is primarily a display of his mighty power. Through this section's display of power, Christ's might is set up as a theme which will carry through the entirety of the poem and give the work a sense of poetic unity.

Furthermore, the poem's portrayal of Christ as mighty creator is particularly interesting because it shows Christ doing something wholly biblical, creating the earth in seven days, but, since that creation is framed a feat of strength, he does this biblical action in a heroic manner. In this way, the Germanic tradition of heroics intermingles with the Christian narrative to produce a Christ who is equal parts biblical creator and mighty Anglo-Saxon hero.

Christ the Victor

In addition to his role as all-powerful creator, a second way that Christ is depicted in *Christ and Satan* is as the heroic victor and, consequently, the punisher of his vanquished enemy. When Christ defeats the rebel angels and their leader Satan, he is shown to be a truly heroic victor over the ultimate enemy, and he uses his victory as an opportunity to punish Satan severely. The references to and descriptions of Christ's

punishment of Satan focus on Christ's power and strength in the same way as do the descriptions of his creation actions. The poet says, "He made it known that he had strength and great powers when he drove out that myriad, prisoners, from the high mansion" (IV.8-10). Later, the poet makes it even clearer that Christ's punishment of Satan is meant to make the reader realize God's immense power. After stating that "God the Saviour had become enraged against them for the blasphemies" and sent them to burn in hell, the poet speaks directly to his audience and exhorts them by saying, "let us constantly remember in our mind the strength of the ordaining Lord" (VI.19-22, VI.23-24). The message in this section could not be more explicit; Christ's punishment of Satan is a poignant display of his almighty power. This message serves to reinforce the poem's overall theme of Christ's might.

The final lines of the poem in which Christ specifically lays out Satan's punishment for rebelling are a striking statement of Christ's power over Satan. The instructions for the punishment are explicit and humiliating. Christ commands Satan,

> Be off with you, cursed being, Satan himself, into the pit of punishment. Certain torment is ready for your reception, not the kingdom of God. But I promise you, by the highest power, that you shall not offer hope to the inhabitants of hell, but rather you may tell them of the greatest of disappointments—that you have encountered the ordaining Lord of all creatures, the King of mankind. Turn tail and realize, you cursed creature, how wide and broad is the dreary vault of hell, and measure it out with your hands. Grope towards the bottom and then go about so until you know the whole circumference; and first measure from above to the bottom, and how broad is the murky air. Then you will realize the more readily

that you strove with God, when you have measured with your hands how high and deep hell is inside, that grim cavernous abode.

(XII.76-92)

Several particular lines of this speech by Christ demonstrate his power and the ways in which he exercises it to punish Satan. Christ chooses to point out that Satan is bound for hell, "not the kingdom of God." This barbed comment calls to mind the exilic nature of Satan's punishment which, as explained in the previous chapter, was a particularly loathsome fate in the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Christ is mighty and ruthless when he doles out this most awful of punishments, and he instructs Satan to tell the other inhabitants of hell that he's encountered God and that, as a result of Christ's victory in this encounter, they can have no hope.

Further, Christ's specific instructions that Satan should measure hell with his hands are a strong demonstration of his power and, according to Constance Harsh, this method of measurement is an ironically fitting punishment for Satan. Christ sets Satan an impossible task that he would only be able to accomplish if he were truly God's equal, as he had claimed to be. From the beginning of the poem, Christ established himself as mighty and godly by using his hands to make and measure earth. In the Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project translation, Christ is actually called "Measurer," (I.2). Since Satan claimed to be God, "it is therefore appropriate to show him his own limitations by forcing him to attempt to take Christ's role" as his punishment" (Harsh 252). Thus, Christ's role as victor and punisher is established and, through the establishment of the role, the poet continues to advance his overall theme of Christ's ultimate power.

Christ the Warrior-King

The portrayals of Christ as creator and punisher contribute to the third way in which Christ is depicted in the poem, as an Anglo-Saxon warrior-king or chieftain. Throughout the poem, kingly attributes are applied to Christ, and all of these warrior-chief depictions serve to portray Christ as supremely powerful, the pinnacle of the mighty warrior-king. Rather strikingly in some instances, Christ is called by heroic, chieftain-like names many times throughout the entirety of the poem. A few examples of this are when Christ is called "the King [in] his citadel," "Heaven's Guardian," and "the Ruler's Son" (VI.2, XII.51, II.35). In the Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project translation, the warrior language is even stronger. Christ is called "Sovereign of Armies," "Guardian of Heaven's Realm," "Eternal First-Chief of all creation," "Warden of Glory," and "Wielder of Hosts," among various other heroic names (III.54, VIII.40, VIII.55, X.1, XI.50). All of these names focus on Christ's power and might as the warrior king. Even in moments when the narrative isn't focused on Christ's heroic actions, these heroic names recall the notion that Christ is powerful and mighty.

In addition to overtly naming him as a warrior-king, the *Christ and Satan* poet shows Christ to be a chieftain by establishing him as the center of a band of loyal thanes. In fact, several scholars have made the point that the poet establishes the concept of the 'dryht of Christ' in opposition to the 'dryht of Satan' (Harsh; Sleeth; Lee). A dryht, according to Lee, is "the group consisting of a lord and his thanes … held together and rendered formidable in battle by a sacred bond of loyalty between lord and thane" (Sleeth 73). In *Christ and Satan*, the idea of a dryht is extended to refer to the community in heaven. The blessed in heaven are referred to as "thanes around their lord" and "kinfolk"

of Christ, (Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project). Several times, heaven is referred to as their homeland. This image of the heavenly homeland where the dryht of heaven resides, which is brought up several times in the poem, is an overt example of the mixing of Christian and heroic cultures. This cultural mixing allows for the poet to make a stronger statement about the mastery and power of Christ. The warrior-king was the most important and powerful person in an Anglo-Saxon community. Casting Christ as a warrior-king, and not just an ordinary a warrior-king, but the warrior-king of heaven, drives home the point that Christ is the ultimate powerful being in the universe.

Christ's Might

The poet carries his overarching theme of Christ's might through all the various ways in which he portrays Christ. Just as the descriptions of Christ as the creator and the victor and punisher were crafted to exhibit Christ's strength, so too is the description of Christ as a warrior-king. As Harsh puts it, "the poet of *Christ and Satan* manages to develop his ideas and express his devotion so that his work clearly delineates the transcendent power he saw in the Christ whose servant he felt himself to be" (253). This is not just a narrative of the conflict between Christ and Satan. *Christ and Satan*, and other Old English literature on New Testament stories, are "meditations on salvation history, designed to show the significance of the gospel events to those who read or hear them" (Raw 242). Certainly, *Christ and Satan* tells a compelling story about the cosmic-scale conflict between Christ and Satan, two warring chieftains, but it does more than that. It blends traditional Germanic, heroic elements, style and images together with Christian narratives and images. The two traditions do not exist in tension within the

poem. Rather, they are in poetic concert, working together to make the poem stronger by presenting more interesting, compelling images of Christ. The three images of Christ that this chapter outlines are necessary to the success of the poet's work, and the comingling of heroic and Christian elements is necessary to the effectiveness of these portrayals. Because of the depictions of Christ as the all-powerful creator and measurer, the victor and punisher, and the warrior-king of the dryht of heaven, the poet achieves his purpose and communicates effectively his conviction that, above all else on earth and in heaven, Christ is mighty.

CHAPTER FOUR

Unlocking the Gates: Comparison of the Harrowing of Hell in Three Old English Poems

It has been shown in previous chapters that *Christ and Satan* uses elements drawn from the heroic literary tradition, and it has been asserted that the might of Christ is one central thematic focus of the poem. These are two important dimensions of *Christ and Satan*, and they contribute significantly to the overall message and poetic success of the poem. But it is important to remember that these features are not unique to *Christ and Satan*. The mixture of heroic and Christian traditions is found throughout Old English literature, and, where Christ is depicted in the Old English poetic canon, his mightiness is on display. However, the *Christ and Satan* poet uses these and other strategies to present his retelling of Christ's life in a manner that is artistically unique.

It would be possible to explore the ways in which *Christ and Satan* both fits into and breaks from the wider tradition of Anglo-Saxon poetry by examining it alongside any one of many Old English poems. Because the narrative scope of *Christ and* Satan is so wide, this chapter turns its focus to comparing one scene–that of Christ's descent into hell—to examples of the same scene found in other Old English poems.

Christ's triumphant descent into and harrowing of hell is referenced in many places across the Old English poetic canon. These instances vary in terms of how directly they evoke the descent theme and how much time and attention they devote to depicting this particular part of Christ's story. One poem (in addition to *Christ and Satan*) which draws on the descent of Christ into hell in order to make up a substantial part of its

subject matter is the *Descent into Hell*, found in the Exeter book. Additionally, each the first three poems in the Exeter book, *Christ I* or the *Advent Lyrics*, *Christ II*, and *Christ III*, include a few noteworthy mentions of Christ's harrowing of hell. The use of this theme in *Christ I* is examined here, specifically in poem VI. This chapter will focus on the descent into hell theme and the ways it is used in these three Old English religious poems; it will analyze the interesting similarities and differences that arise between *Christ and Satan* and both the *Christ I* and the *Descent into Hell* poems.

Historical Background of the Theme of Christ's Descent into Hell

The story of Christ descending into hell, defeating Satan, and rescuing the souls trapped there does not appear anywhere in the biblical scriptures. However, this story is pervasive throughout Old English poetry. It is a central part of the narrative of *Christ and Satan* and it is mentioned or told in many other Old English poetic sources. The scholar W. D. White provides an even more broad perspective of this story's wide use. He says, "…the story of the despoiling of hell was part of the corpus of Christian tradition; familiar throughout Christendom in medieval times" (White 145). A question, then, naturally arises: from where did this widespread knowledge and acceptance among Anglo-Saxon Christian writers of Christ's descent into hell come?

W. D. White offers a historical account of the development of this idea, which he calls the Descensus theme, among Christians. He begins by saying that "The tradition of the descent of Christ into hell has been one of the most highly imaginative and controversial secondary doctrines of the Christian church" (22). White acknowledges that the Descsensus theme must have been influenced by pagan conceptions of journeying to

the otherworld, "But the germ of the original idea lies in the fact that Jesus died, as all men die, and his soul went to hades, as the souls of all men do" according to Jewish traditional beliefs (27). The conception of Jesus preaching to or saving the souls of the patriarchs and others in hades grew out of this original view that Jesus's death must have sent his soul to the otherworld where all the dead resided.

White goes on to explain that the main source for Anglo-Saxons to learn about the Descensus narrative was the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. This anonymous apocryphal work was "the first attempt to set forth a complete and unified account of the descent" and it "was to be the chief source of the tradition for centuries to come," including the time during which the three poems examined in this chapter were written (58). The *Gospel of Nicodemus* must have been one important source for the descent scenes in *Christ and Satan*, the *Advent Lyrics*, and the *Descent of Christ into Hell*, but White and other scholars have shown that it was not the sole source and it was used creatively by the authors of each poem.

Historical Background of the Descent into Hell and the Advent Lyrics

The poem called the *Descent into Hell* in S. A. J. Bradley's collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry translations is studied by W. D. White (along with several other descent-themed Old English poems) in the dissertation titled *The Descent of Christ into Hell: a study in Old English Literature*. According to White, the *Descent of Christ into Hell* poem is found in the Exeter book manuscript and is notable for "its intrinsic poetic value and the fascination of its theme" (140). The usual questions of authorship and textual integrity have long plagued scholars who turn their focus to the *Descent of Christ into*

Hell. White sums up the "considerable discussion concerning date, authorship, and unity of the poem"[4] when he says "the consensus of opinion favors the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century" for date of composition and that, although this time frame has lead early scholars to suggest Cynewulf wrote the poem, later scholarship "has strongly opposed the idea of Cynewulfian authorship, and the poem must be said to be anonymous" (143).

Another scholar who has focused on the *Descent of Christ into Hell* in his study of Old English descent of Christ poems is Gary Lawrence Aho. His *Comparison of Old English and Old Norse Treatments of Christ's Harrowing of Hell* discusses in depth another source of scholarly controversy surrounding the poem: the poem's source material. Aho and White, along with other scholars, show the many parallels that exist between *Descent into Hell* and *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, but they also point out several key differences between the two works' treatment of the descent scenes. Despite much investigation and textual analysis, "no one source for the whole poem has been found … The poet quite freely uses Christian ideas rooted in legend, in the gospels, and in the Descensus half of Nicodemus" (25). The poet drew from a variety of the sources available to him to make this poem, which is a creatively unique work. It integrates parts

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[4] Some of this "considerable discussion" can be found in:
Kirkland, J. H. *A Study of the Anglo-Saxon Poem, The Harrowing of Hell*. Halle, 1885
Cramer, J. "Quelle, Verfasser und Text des altenglischen Gedichtes 'Christi Höllenfahrt". *Anglia*, xix, 1896-1897, pp. 137-174.
More recent discussion on the same subject is presented in such sources as:
Rambaran-Olm, M. R. John the Baptist's Prayer ["The Descent into Hell"] from the Exeter Book: Text, Translation and Critical Study. Vol. 21, Boydell and Brewer, 2014.
Stanley, E. G. "The Descent Into Hell, a Poem in the Exeter Book." Notes and Queries, vol. 62, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 6–12.
Raw, Barbara. "Why Does the River Jordan Stand Still? ('The Descent into Hell', 103-06)." Leeds Studies in English, vol. 23, Jan. 1992, pp. 29–47.

of both Christian and Anglo-Saxon traditions and sources to tell the story of Christ's descent into and harrowing of hell in a way that it had not been previously told.

The other Old English poem used in this chapter as a comparison point for *Christ and Satan*'s descent scene is the *Advent Lyrics*, also called *Christ I*. It is part of a set of three poems which are the first three poems in the Exeter book. Older scholarship has often seen these poems as part of one, unified work. Hence, the names *Christ I*, *Christ II*, and *Christ III* were assigned to the poems. In his 2016 work on the first of these poems, Philip Jacobs explains that "for years scholars imagined this set of poems [the *Advent Lyrics*] … to represent the first part of an extensive three-part poem named *Christ* by Cynewulf. However, more recent scholars have come to see the *Advent Lyrics* as 'an independent poem, or group of poems' that warrant separate analysis, apart from the other poems in the *Christ*" (Jacobs 143 and Campbell qtd. in Jacobs). Aho chooses to "discuss each poem separately, not only because the extent and importance of the use of the harrowing motif varies considerably in each poem, but also because modern studies have indicated that it is pointless to regard these three poems as part of a unified whole" (82). There is ample evidence within scholarship to disregard the old way of classifying the *Advent Lyrics* as part of a larger work of literature and to, instead, study it as an independent poetic work in its own right. Further, as with the *Descent into Hell*, there is little evidence to support older claims of Cynewulfian authorship.

The poem is divided up into twelve smaller poems, or lyrics. As Aho points out, "a common structural pattern within each poem serves to unify the series of twelve. It is a

pattern based on the structure of the liturgical Advent antiphons" (Aho 83).[5] Each of the twelve poems begins with one of these liturgical refrains after which the poet expands upon the themes and characters present in the antiphon. The basis for these poems are the O antiphons, specifically, which are described by Jackson Campbell as "The O's of Advent, so-called simply because they all begin with the exclamation O, are one group of antiphons which the church at least from the time of Gregory has given especial attention" (Campbell 6). Jacobs surveys foundational scholarship on the *Christ* poems to conclude "that these poems were most likely written in the ninth or tenth century and probably …composed by a [monk] for a monastic body" (143).[6]

Now, with both poems to be used as grounds for comparison with *Christ and Satan* situated within their own historical contexts, the comparisons of the descent scenes will follow.

Crying Out for Christ

When creatures find themselves in hell, their natural response seems to be to cry out to Christ. In the sixth poem of the *Advent Lyrics*, the human souls in hell cry out piteously for Christ to save them from their torment. The devils and their leader, Satan,

[5] For anyone who, like the author of this thesis, does not know what an antiphon is, the Encyclopedia Britannica offers an illuminating explanation. The sense relevant to this chapter is the one which refers to a "chant melody and text sung before and after a psalm verse" (*Antiphon | Music | Britannica.com*). For the full explanation, see: Antiphon | Music | Britannica.com. https://www.britannica.com/art/antiphon-music. Accessed 26 Mar. 2018.

[6] He bases these conclusions primarily on the work of Katherine O'Brien O'Keefee in Visible Song: Translational Literacy in Old English Verse. Cambridge University Press, 1990. and Jackson J. Campbell, editor. The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book. Princeton University Press, 1959.

give similarly piteous laments throughout *Christ and Satan*. By contrast, the speeches given by those in hell in the *Descent of Christ into Hell* poem are joyful and celebratory. In the case of the devils and the souls in the *Advent Lyrics* poem, Christ does not respond immediately to alleviate the misery of those crying out and they are left to continue their crying. In the other situation—that of the mortal souls in hell in the *Descent of Christ into Hell*—Christ's rescuing descent is immediate. Comparisons between these different instances of crying out to Christ from hell will be useful to further illuminate the purposes for and attitudes from which these poems were written.

The descent narrative is described directly in only poem six of the *Advent Lyrics*, though some of the other poems make more indirect, passing usage of the theme. The poet describes how Christ would "by the power of his spirit also make a journey to the depths." Next, the souls in hell cry out to Christ to hasten to save them in this way. They ask him to "Bring salvation, life, to us weary thralls to torment, overcome by weeping, by bitter salt tears." They tell of their "excessive hardships" as "melancholy captives" and plead for Christ to "not let accursed devils have dominion over" them (Bradley 209). However, Christ does not appear in this poem to save them. The poem ends with the souls waiting for Christ to come to them, the sound of their cries still lingering in the air. But the souls are not without hope and their cries are always expectant of their coming salvation. Because these lyrics are intended is to celebrate Christ's Advent and not yet his passion, they leave the souls in a state of waiting.

The tone of the cries of the souls from the *Advent Lyrics* poem is similar to the tone used by the devils and Satan throughout *Christ and Satan* as they tell of their woes in hell. "Burning in hell, God's adversaries lamented…" that "fire envelope[d] each one"

(VI.18, 8). Satan cries out “Alas! … Alas! … Alas! …” when he recalls that he must “endure this punishment, the misery, torment, and pain, deprived of blessings” (III.29-31, 44-45). The devils are “sorrow-stricken” at their current situation, and they heave their cries up to Christ, who sent them to hell (III.47). Christ does not descend into hell to rescue the devils who betrayed him, no matter how bitterly they cry. Rather, he descends to save the mortal souls trapped in the exilic torture of hell.

John the Baptist’s invocation of Christ in hell in the *Descent of Christ into Hell* is of a strikingly different tone than the cries in either of the other two poems. The poet says “The man John explained to hell’s inhabitants; dauntless, he spoke rejoicing to the multitude about his kinsman’s coming…” (Bradley 392). Though John’s speech is more of a promise of hope to his fellow hell-dwellers than a cry to Christ, it does invoke the name and power of Christ in hopes that he will descend to save them. In this scenario, Christ does descend. After John finishes his speech, “Then the lord of mankind hastened to his journey; the heavens’ protector would demolish and lay low the walls of hell…” (393). This poem’s call to Christ is effective and has the desired outcome right away. This poem is set during Easter time, when Christ’s salvation of the earth and the souls in hell was in progress.

It is clear why the cries of devils of *Christ and Satan* don’t work. They are the devils; they betrayed Christ in heaven and are not capable of re-attaining the salvation they cast off for pride. What is less obvious is why the poet makes their cries so utterly pitiful and, in some instances, pitiable. Indeed, this is one of the more confusing and compelling elements of the poem. The devils cry out in much the same way as the mortal souls in hell do in poem six of *The Advent Lyrics*. Having noticed the ways in which the

cries found in *Advent Lyrics* poem six and *Christ and Satan* are similar, some clarity can be found on this point. The *Christ and Satan* poet seems to be setting up a comparison between the situations of the two parties. The devils' ultimate hopelessness seems all the more hopeless if it is compared to the hope of salvation that exists always under the surface in more typical poems about creatures in hell such as the liturgically-based *Advent Lyrics* and the joyful *Descent of Christ into Hell*. One of *Christ and Satan*'s messages is clear here. The devils are pitiful because they do not have any hope. Men should not betray Christ so that they may share in the hope of salvation rather than the bitter fate of the devils. The *Christ and Satan* poet employs contrasts with tradition to deepen the impact of this part of his message, as he does in many other spots in the poem.

A Battle at the Gates?

The idea of gates separating the different realms of heaven, hell, and earth seems to have been an important cultural metaphor for the Anglo-Saxon Christians because it is employed in each of the three poems of focus in this chapter. The *Advent Lyrics* poem 8 asks Christ to "Mercifully gladden this world though your advent, Saviour Christ, and bid those golden gates be opened which in days of old once stood a very long time locked …" (Bradley 212). This is a reference to the gates of heaven. *Christ and Satan* and the *Descent of Christ into Hell* both describe the gates of hell being knocked down. The destruction of the gates of hell is the climactic scene of Christ's confrontation and defeat of Satan, but, in both poems, Satan does not seem to put up much of a fight. One must wonder if there was really a battle at all. The lines which focus on the gates of hell in

these two poems contain important similarities which will provide insight into the nature of Christ and Satan's battle.

Christ and Satan devotes one whole section, section eight, to describing Christ's descent into and harrowing of hell. The action is summed up in the following lines

> "The ordaining Lord, then, by means of his might, went to hell to the sons of men; he meant to lead forth the full complement of mortals, many thousands, up to their fatherland. At that time there came the voices of angels, a thunderous sound in the dawning day: the Lord himself had outfought the fiend. His vengeance was made manifest even then in the early morning when that terrifying event took place. Then he let the blessed souls, Adam's kin, ascend …"
>
> (VIII.29-37).

This narrative skips directly from Christ intending to go to rescue the souls in hell to him having already defeated Satan. Diction that suggests a fight is present in these lines, but the fight itself is missing.

A similar structure is found in the *Descent of Christ into Hell*. The intent is stated when "the Lord of mankind hastened to his journey … [to] demolish and lay low the walls of hell and … carry off the stronghold's populace" (Bradley 393). The poems make no direct reference to a skirmish between Satan and Christ. It only says that "the locks and bars fell from those fortifications and the King entered in" (Bradley 393). This poem takes the no battle situation further by stating "For that battle he [Christ] gave no thought to helmet-wearing warriors, nor was his will to lead armoured fighting men to the

stronghold gates" (Bradley 393). However, this statement itself uses the word battle to describe the coming interaction.

Though they do not seem to contain explicit battle scenes, both these poems focus in their descriptions of the harrowing of hell on the violent destruction of hell's gates. *Christ and Satan* describes this destruction twice, first by stating that Christ "broke asunder and crushed the gates in hell" and then by describing how "the thunderous noise occurred, loud from the heavens, when he broke down and crushed the gates of hell—their frames grew feeble when they saw that light so brilliant" (VIII 11-12, 84-87). *The Descent of Christ into Hell* describes three changes which the gates of hell undergo. First, "the heavens' Protector would demolish and lay low the walls of hell and, most righteous of kings, carry off the stronghold's populace" (Bradley 393). Second, "the locks and bars fell from those fortifications and the King entered in" (Bradley 393). Finally, "the doors of hell [are] brilliantly gleaming which long since had been locked and shrouded in darkness" (Bradley 393). It is interesting that both of these poems give such attention to the effects that Christ's presence has on hell's gates.

As Sleeth notes, the Christ of *Christ and Satan* is not the mighty warrior found in *The Dream of the Rood*, for example.[7] The *Rood* Christ is much more active than the one found in this poem. *Christ and Satan*'s "parsimony in the use of words directly expressive of combat, to a degree that is conspicuous" is, to Sleeth, a part of what make this poem and this Christ weak (106). He does point out that "the strongest verbs of this

[7] See Johnson, David F. "Christ and Satan and the Dream of the Rood." *Companion to Poetry* VU University Press, 1994. for an in depth comparison of these two poems.

[battle] kind refer to the Harrowing of hell," specifically breaking down the gates (106). Another view of this scene might suggest that the poet of *Christ and Satan* chose to omit overt battle language from Christ's interaction with Satan in the harrowing in order to achieve a specific purpose.

Both poems examined here use strong, violent language to talk about how Christ broke down and entered through the gates of hell. It is possible that they opted to bring in Christ's might in this way, rather than through an overt battle with Satan, in order to characterize Christ as mighty and warrior-like but not deviate unforgivably far from the established tradition of the Descensus story. This conclusion fits well with conclusions that will be reached in the final chapter that the *Christ and Satan* poet paid close attention to his cultural and religious surrounding when composing a poem which mixes heroic and Christian elements.

Conclusions

These poems show that the theme of Christ's descent into hell is one that captivated Anglo-Saxon writers, and it continues to have cultural relevance to this day. Across the world, modern Christians recite the phrase "he descended into hell" as part of their creed; however, the theological questions surrounding this theme are far from solved. In fact, the United Methodist church removed the phrase "he descended into hell" from its Apostle's Creed altogether (Hahn, *The United Methodist Church*).[8] The poems

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[8] This is of particular interest to the author of this thesis, who was raised in the Methodist church and, thus, never had a conception of Christ actually descending into hell after his death until encountering the theme in Old English poetry.

examined in this chapter are all agreed upon the narrative fact of Christ's descent into hell, and they contain important similarities.

The three poems examined in this chapter serve to "indicate the widespread use of the Descensus theme by Anglo-Saxon men of letters" (White 212). Specific parts of the descent narrative such as the cries from the souls in hell and the destruction of hell's gates are present in multiple places across the Old English poetic canon. Comparisons of their appearances in these poems has afforded increased understanding of the way the poems themselves operate and how they use the Descensus theme. Additionally, their differences point to the controversy that surrounded this part of Christ's story throughout history and that continues to surround it today.

CHAPTER FIVE

Christ among the Saxons and Anglo-Saxons: Examination of the Temptation Scenes in the *Heliand* and *Christ and Satan*

Jesus' temptation in the wilderness is a compelling and interesting scene in the biblical story of Christ's life, which plays an important role in the overall story and message of *Christ and Satan*. The Old Saxon *Heliand*, another 9th century retelling of the story of Christ, differs sharply from *Christ and Satan* in terms of its place of origin, its anecdotes and structure, among other differences, but both include extended descriptions of Jesus' temptation by Satan during his forty day fast in the wilderness. This scene is found in the final section of *Christ and Satan*, and it is found in the 13th song of the Old Saxon *Heliand*.

While there has been a fair amount of scholarly research on these two works individually, they have yet to be examined side-by-side. Because both of these works were written in 9th century Germanic cultures, a comparison of the two seems potentially fertile soil for gaining new, interesting and useful understanding of each work and the cultures that produced them. This chapter will analyze each of these two works through the lens of the other, using their respective temptation scenes as the ground for such comparisons.

Compared with the *Heliand*, *Christ and Satan*'s use of Germanic elements and its emphasis on the might of Christ seem relatively light-handed and sparing, a mere smattering. Though *Christ and Satan* and the *Heliand* tell the same basic temptation

narrative and both include instances of the mixing of Germanic and Christian elements, their details diverge in ways that provide insight into the differences between 9th century Anglo-Saxon and Saxon Christianity. Both authors sought to integrate the temptation story with their culture's Germanic past; however, the *Heliand*'s poet used a more overtly Germanic approach than *Christ and Satan*'s poet.

Historical Background

A brief interlude of historical background is necessary to this chapter's comparisons between a Saxon work of literature and an Anglo-Saxon one, if only to answer the inevitable question: what's the difference between the Saxons and Anglo-Saxons?

The Venerable Bede provides in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* an account of how the Anglo-Saxons came to exist. The original, prehistoric inhabitants of Britain were the Britons "from whom the island takes its name" (Bede 44). They were occupied by the Romans for some time, but then the Romans withdrew which left the inhabitants of Britain vulnerable to attack by neighboring peoples such as the Picts, the Scots and the Irish. As Bede describes, "in the year of our Lord 449 … the Angles [, Jutes, and] Saxons came to Britain at the invitation of the King Vortigern in three longships were granted lands in the eastern parts of the country" on the condition that they would protect the land from the neighboring tribes (Bede 62). The mercenaries came and did their job, but then decided to stay in Britain, sending word back home that more settlers should join them in this new land. According to Bede, the "real intention [of the Germanic tribes] was to subdue" Britain with their "invincible army" (62). However, it is more likely that a

gradual process of migration, settlement, and intermarrying took place over the course of some generations. Eventually, a new people was born, the Anglo-Saxons.

Meanwhile, the Saxons who hadn't invaded Britain continued to inhabit their ancestral homeland on the other side of the North Sea from the isle of Britain in areas of modern day Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands. They remained culturally a traditional Germanic tribe, strongly connected to their Germanic history and legends, while their descendants, the Anglo-Saxons formed a new people group with unique, though still distinctly Germanic-influenced culture.

Having established the historical and geographical contexts of these two people groups, there remains the question of why traditionally pagan, Germanic peoples such as the Saxons and Anglo-Saxons might have produced these Christian inspired works of literature. For a brief and reliable enough story of the Anglo-Saxons' conversion, Bede can again be trusted. As Bede recounts in his Historia Ecclesiastica, Pope Gregory decided in 596 to send Augustine on a mission to Britain with the stated goal of converting the Anglo-Saxons. Bede says that several months into his mission, Augustine performed mass baptisms on a great many pagan converts—potentially as many as 10,000, including king Æthelberht —because "great numbers gathered each day to hear the word of God, forsaking their heathen rites and entering the unity of Christ's holy Church as believers" (Bede 77). Considering the difficulties he must have encountered preaching to a people who did not even speak the same language as him and who were so culturally different from him, it is surprising that Augustine's mission was successful so quickly and on such a large scale. His great success can be explained when one considers Anglo-Saxon culture and, specifically, the high regard in which they held bonds of fealty

between thanes and their lords. Carole Cusack argues that "the most likely explanation of the mass baptism is that Æthelberht [Anglo-Saxon king] was baptized at the time and that the ten thousand accepted baptism because of their ties of loyalty to him" which would have necessitated all his loyal people to follow his example in converting to Christianity. So, despite many difficulties and setbacks, the Roman mission to Britain was largely successful in converting the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. The proliferation of monasteries, among other things, is proof of Christianity's success in Britain. Christianity was "indigenized" into Anglo-Saxon culture to a large degree, eradicating and replacing while simultaneously being morphed by the old pagan religion. Christianity was the dominant religious force in Britain by the mid-9th century when *Christ and Satan* was composed.

Having been suitably converted themselves, the Anglo-Saxons began the missionary task of converting the continental Germanics. Some of the Germanic tribes of continental Europe were converted peacefully, as the Anglo-Saxons had been converted. The Saxons, however, were converted by force, though not by the Anglo-Saxons directly.

In 772, the powerful Frankish king Charlemagne began a military campaign against the Saxons. Eventually, the Saxons were defeated in what Murphy calls "the tragic warfare that constituted the conditioning circumstances under which the Saxons received their Christian faith" (The Saxon Savior, 17). The terms of their surrender dictated that they must all be baptized and convert to Christianity, on pain of death. In 785 their chieftain, Widukinnd, was baptized, and so the Saxons—who held similar beliefs to the Anglo-Saxons about loyalty to lords and kings— became Christians, at least in name. However, the Saxons did not accept Christianity and its practices as readily as

did the Anglo-Saxons. According to Cusack, "in the case of the Saxons, conversion by force, rather than by a process of negotiation involving indigenous leaders, often produced no more than a shallow Christian overlay." The Saxon people were likely not deeply Christianized despite the fact that they had been, for the most part, made Christians. Therefore, even though he wrote after the time of the Saxons' conversion, the author of the *Heliand* may have been writing for an audience not well-acquainted with or open to Christianity.

The differences between the conversion of the Saxons and the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons are striking. To begin with, the Anglo-Saxons were converted centuries earlier. In fact, as stated above, before the Saxons were converted the Anglo-Saxons had already sent out missionaries to the general area the Saxons inhabited, though not specifically to the Saxons. Certainly both areas had been converted to the Christian faith by the 9th century when the *Heliand* and *Christ and Satan* were composed; however, Christianity was more deeply rooted into Anglo-Saxon culture than it was into Saxon culture.

More striking than time period differences are the differences between the methods of conversion employed on these two peoples. Both were converted in mass after the baptism of their leader. The Anglo-Saxon leaders were converted through a lengthy process of civil negotiation. The Saxons leaders were converted as a demand after being violently defeated by a conquering army. The methods of conversion must surely have contributed to differing perceptions of Christianity between the two groups.

The Heliand's History

Out of this atmosphere of forced Christianity came the *Heliand*. The *Heliand* has sometimes been thought of as a mere translation of the gospels from Latin into the Old Saxon language, but this understanding of the *Heliand* fails to recognize its uniqueness in terms of composition and content as well as the fact that it is a masterful work of poetry. In the introduction to his 1992 translation of the *Heliand*, G. Ronald Murphy asks readers to remember that "the *Heliand* is not a translation in the literal sense, it is a reimagining of the gospel" into the context, culture, and language of the Old Saxon people. As Murphy remarks in The Saxon Savior, his companion volume to his translation, "the *Heliand* can be accurately interpreted as both a saxonization and a northernization of the Gospel" (4). This means that a translation of the *Heliand* into English will not "simply read like the King James Version" (Murphy, The *Heliand* xiii). Rather, it is full of rich and surprising images, stories, and vocabulary that are born out of the poet's efforts to integrate the Mediterranean story of Christ's life into the Germanic reality of his, the poet's, life and community.

The *Heliand* was written during the latter half of the 9th century, likely by a Saxon monk. Another of the *Heliand*'s translators into English, Mariana Scott, cautions that "it [is] important … to remember that the *Heliand* was originally intended for recitation" (viii). In terms of structure, the poem is divided up into 71 songs with music notations still visible in the margins of the manuscript (Murphy xvii). Murphy believes that the *Heliand* was likely written with two distinct audiences in mind, the Saxon nobility and the monks tasked with converting them to Christianity, and that the *Heliand* most probably was not written to be used in the church as any type of liturgy, but rather

as after dinner entertainment to be sung or recited in the mead hall or the monastery (xvi). The 13th song of the *Heliand* tells the story that occupies the attention of this chapter—that of Christ's temptation by Satan in the wilderness following his forty day fast.

According to Murphy, "It [the *Heliand*] is a cousin of Anglo-Saxon biblical literature and its author seems to have been familiar with the poetic tradition of the British Isles in which Christianity express itself so felicitously in northern terms" (*The Saxon Savior* 12). Despite these and other similarities such as the fact that both poems include the same basic temptation story and both were composed in the 9th century, there exist differences between *Christ and Satan* and the *Heliand* that are striking. Most obviously, they are written in different languages. *Christ and Satan* is in Old English, and the *Heliand* is in Old Saxon. The *Heliand* is a poetic 'Life of Christ' which tells the entire story of his life, much like the gospels in the Bible. *Christ and Satan* focuses on specific instances of conflict between God and Satan; it does not attempt to trace the entire Gospel narrative but rather focuses on dramatizing and reflecting on the cosmic arc of the conflict between Satan and Christ.

Comparison of the Temptation Scenes

Both *Christ and Satan* and the *Heliand* contain vivid portrayals of Jesus' character, abilities, and personality. Further, the Christs described in both poems bear noticeable resemblances to the archetype of the traditional, Germanic warrior-hero who is mighty in battle against monsters. In both poems' temptation scenes Christ goes to battle with Satan and wins valiantly; however, differences in the way that Christ's demeanor and power are described during the two temptations mark scenes as unique.

Both poems present a mighty and victorious warrior-like Christ. (This aspect of *Christ and Satan* has been discussed extensively in earlier chapters). In the *Heliand*, many Germanic, heroic traits and descriptions are applied to Christ, and the poem is rife with Germanic warrior diction. Within just the brief song 13, Christ is referred to as "the Chieftain of Earls," "Chieftain of Mankind," and "God of the Clan" (Murphy 36, 37, 39). Such overt heroic language is hard to miss. Murphy adds that "studies in the vocabulary of the *Heliand* have found an abundance of terms from Germanic law and religion" (Murphy, The Saxon Savior, 7). A further example is when the poet says that Satan "misled the couple, Adam and Eve, with lies, into disloyalty …" (Murphy 37). In his notes on this line, Murphy makes the interesting observation that "the original sin in the book of Genesis is reinterpreted in the *Heliand* not so much as an act of disobedience to a command but as an act of disloyalty to one's sovereign lord," an especially egregious sin within the Saxon culture that valued loyalty to one's lord over all else (37).

To begin to understand the reasoning behind these instances of heroic language in the *Heliand*, it is necessary to consider the historical context discussed earlier in this chapter. Both the Saxons and the Anglo-Saxons came from the same Germanic heritage. Both had been converted to Christianity, but, especially for the Saxons, their traditional heroic values and beliefs were still relevant. Their old ways and religion was not far back in the collective, cultural memory of the society. It seems only logical that the poet would have included these heroic elements despite his Christian subject.

Both poems present a strong, warrior-like Christ who is reminiscent of a Germanic hero. A comparison of the temptation scenes will show that, during the

temptation, the *Heliand*'s Christ is somewhat stronger and more warrior-like than *Christ and Satan*'s. [9]

One surprising way that the *Heliand* poet reveals the might of Christ during his fasting and temptation is when the poem says that Christ fasted alone for forty days because Satan was too afraid to approach him until he was weakened by hunger; "for that entire time the evil creatures did not dare approach Him—the evil minded enemy—nor speak to Him face to face!" (Murphy 37). Satan dares approach only after Christ allows himself to feel the human feeling of hunger. *Christ and Satan* does not mention Satan's mental state when considering approaching and tempting Christ. This is one of the most direct examples of Christ and Satan's cosmic conflict with the two meeting for a head to head battle of sorts. The Christ of the *Heliand* is made to appear more fearsome and powerful with the knowledge that, in the *Heliand*, Satan has fear leading up to this clash. *Christ and Satan* matter-of-factly states that "in that time, it befell the evil one … that he should tempt the King of all created things" (XII.54-56). Because this poem leaves out mention of any fear that Satan might feel, its Christ does not come off as fearsome or strong in comparison to the other's.

[9] A difference between the two versions of the scene that must be addressed is that *Christ and Satan*'s temptation section seems incomplete because the part of the temptation in which Satan challenges Christ to throw himself from the mountain to test God is completely absent. According to Bradley, "though there is no break in the MS, sense and syntax seem incomplete in this passage" (103). There are several possible explanations for this missing section, none of them that the poet originally intended for this part to be missing. However, the *Heliand* has Christ forcefully resist Satan's temptations three times while *Christ and Satan* only has him resist twice. One must admit that this contributes at least in small part to the strength of the *Heliand*'s Christ when compared to *Christ and Satan*'s.

Another noteworthy example is the way the poets describe the temptation incident that involves Christ going up to the top of the mountain. In *Christ and Satan*, Christ is thrown forcefully over Satan's shoulder and carried up a mountain. The poem says, "then in his [Satan's] insolence the hideous creature seized him with his hands and mounted him upon his shoulder, the malignant spirit of evil, and climbed up into a mountain and set the Lord and Savior down in a high place" (XII.62-65). The same moment of the story in the *Heliand* says that Christ "let the people-injurer take Him on a …journey up onto a high mountain" (38). The end result is the same–Christ goes up the mountain—but the power of Christ is demonstrated differently between the two poems. The *Christ and Satan* Christ is thrown around like a doll and seems powerless to avoid Satan's temptation plan while the *Heliand* Christ has to consciously "let" Satan lead him up the mountain to be tempted.

Of course, it is not possible to say whether or not the *Christ and Satan* poet imagined his Christ as purposefully letting Satan overpower him, too, or if Christ was meant to seem actually overpowered by Satan. Conclusions can only be drawn from the text of the poems. The *Heliand* poet specifically makes a note that Christ chose to let himself be overpowered. The *Christ and Satan* poet did not feel this necessary to his characterization of Christ, and he even goes to some length to demonstrate Satan's ability to overpower and manhandle Christ in this moment. Again, this is a significant place where comparison between poems allows the reader to note that The *Heliand*'s Christ is portrayed as stronger and more in control than *Christ and Satan*'s.

When the poem is taken as a whole, *Christ and Satan*'s Satan is almost pitiable. His cries and complaints paint him as a helpless, miserable and pathetic creature. Only in

the temptation scene does Satan have any sort of power. Satan's power and agency in that scene is surprising, especially when compared with Christ's weakness. The idea to tempt Christ seems to come from Satan himself. Christ is not made to appear as more than a passive participator in the genesis of his temptation. This contrasts sharply with Christ's role in his temptation as depicted in the *Heliand*. The *Heliand* poet says, "He [Christ] wanted to let powerful creatures test Him, even Satan, who is always spurring men to malicious deeds" because "He [Christ] wanted to win the heaven-kingdom for people" (36, 37). Christ wishes for and brings about his temptation in the *Heliand* while, in *Christ and Satan*, it is an idea from Satan. Christ is stronger and more agentive in this portion of the *Heliand* temptation scene than in *Christ and Satan*, especially when compared to the apparent power of their respective Satans.

Another of the noteworthy differences between the poems' temptation scenes comes from the beginning of the 13th song of the *Heliand* when the setting of the song is laid out. The poem reads, "The good Chieftain Himself, the Son of the Ruler, after the immersion went out to the wild country. The Chieftain of earls was there in the desert for a long time. He did not have any people with Him, no men as companions, this was as He chose it to be. He wanted to let powerful creatures test Him, even Satan …" (Murphy 36). These lines strongly emphasize the fact that Christ is alone—no fellow warriors join him on his fasting journey into the wilderness or when he wants to let himself be tested. The scenery is much the same in *Christ and Satan*. Christ is in the wilderness, and the poem makes no mention of any other characters present during the confrontation between *Christ and Satan*. The *Heliand*'s insistence on Christ's state of being alone serves a purpose, according to Murphy. He asserts that "the author is gradually remaking the

scene of the temptations of Christ into a Germanic challenge to trail by single combat" and "the contest in depicted as single-man combat, with Satan as the champion of the evil creatures, and Christ as the champion of the human beings" (36). The only differences between the setting and characters in the two scenes of Christ's temptations lies in the *Heliand* author's over-insistence on Christ's being alone. If, as Murphy says, this rhetorical technique is used to make the confrontation seem even more like a Germanic duel, then this difference is an important one to note. It is yet another example which demonstrates the relative power difference between the two poems' Christs during their temptations.

There is a greater emphasis on Christ's humanity and weakness in *Christ and Satan's* temptation in the wilderness scene than on his godly, or kingly might while the *Heliand*'s telling of the same piece of Christ's story shows him as powerful beyond measure. Both poems certainly give Christ Germanic warrior-hero attributes, but they are more fully and forcefully on display in the *Heliand*'s temptation scene than in *Christ and Satan*'s.

Conclusions

While it is impossible to make unilateral claims about the general beliefs of the masses based on a single piece of writing, examining the writing that grew out of a particular place and period in history can provide useful hints at the social and religious reality in which the author was living and writing. Upon consideration of the literary features of both the *Heliand* and *Christ and Satan*, specifically their respective temptation of Christ in the wilderness scenes, as well as the context in which they were written,

some conjectures about the nature of and differences between culture and Christianity in Saxony and Britain in the 9th century can be made.

Both poets appear to make an effort to integrate Germanic elements in their Christian poems, or at least to not try to purge their poems of Germanic influence. Based on that alone, it is clear that ancestral, Germanic beliefs were still in some ways relevant and important in both 9th century Saxony and Britain. However, the *Heliand* is saturated with references to Germanic myths, Germanic character archetypes, and Germanic motifs. *Christ and Satan*'s Germanic elements in the temptation scene are comparatively subtle. In the wilderness temptation section, the *Heliand*'s Christ is much stronger and more representative of the quintessential Germanic warrior-hero than the Christ of *Christ and Satan*, who displays hints of warrior qualities.

There are many possible explanations for this discrepancy in relative amount of Germanic influence. One conceivable explanation has to do with the relative difference in the status of Christianity between Saxony and Britain. For 9th century Anglo-Saxons, Christianity was the long-established standard religion. Presumably, Anglo-Saxon audiences would not have wanted or needed a heavy-handed addition of heroic features in their religious poetry. The Saxons, on the other hand, were not such seasoned Christians as the Anglo-Saxons. They had been forcefully converted only a few generations prior to the writing of the *Heliand*. Christianity was likely still a new, foreign concept for some, if not many, Saxons at the time. If the *Heliand* poet sought to unite the familiar tradition of Germanic poetry and culture with foreign Christian stories and themes in order to make the gospel more accessible to 9th century Saxons, then this

stands as a plausible explanation for his heavy reliance on Germanic, heroic poetic elements in his poetic gospel.

Another possible explanation for the *Heliand*'s heavy usage of heroic images, language, themes, and other elements when compared with *Christ and Satan*'s relatively light usage might be the intended purpose for which scholars believe the *Heliand* was written. Murphy asserts that the *Heliand* was intended to be recited or sung to Saxon nobility as after dinner entertainment intended to "bring the gospel home to the Saxons in a poetic environment in order to help the Saxons cease their vacillation between their warrior-loyalty to the old gods and to the 'mighty Christ.'" The *Heliand* was, it seems, an evangelical text. It was aimed at both converting the Saxons and at helping them stick to their conversion. In order to achieve this goal, the author of the *Heliand* may have seen it as beneficial to make his text as non-foreign to the Saxons as was feasible. The *Christ and Satan* poet, even if he had similar goals and audiences in mind, would have had to have done comparatively less leg-work in order to make the Christian story of Christ's temptation non-foreign to his Anglo-Saxon audiences which were, for the most part, comfortably Christianized.

A third interpretation of the disparity in heroic elements between the two poems grows also out of the knowledge that the two cultures—Saxon and Anglo-Saxon—had different levels of experience and familiarity with Christianity. This difference may have led to the poets themselves having different understandings of the gospel and, though it would not be correct to say one or the other had a more 'accurate' view or to assign any sort of value judgement to the works in this way, it would seem likely that the Anglo-Saxon poet had a more structured, prescribed view of the gospel which would have allow

for less obvious deviation from the standard Christian beliefs of his time than would the Saxon poet. And a fourth explanation which, though simple, cannot be ignored, is that these two works of art were produced by two people who came out of different circumstances and who certainly had different artistic and religious goals in mind when composing their works. The fact that both of these are works of literature, and thus works of art, means that there will necessarily be some discrepancies between them that would not be permissible in the context of mere translations or transcriptions. In fact, it would be more surprising if the two works told the story of Christ's temptation in the same way with the same level of reliance on heroic features. Even still, it remains of interest that both poets included Germanic elements in their works.

The literary features that this chapter observes in the *Heliand* and in *Christ and Satan* suggest things about the status of Christianity in their areas of origin which agree with the historical record. From the Anglo-Saxons, whose Christianity was longer established, came *Christ and Satan* with its relatively light amount of heroic elements. Christianity was not as established among the Saxons, so the *Heliand* poet employed extensive cultural synthesis on the Christ narrative in order to make the story more immediate and accessible to the Saxons and to make the work a more effective evangelical tool.

Though it is not possible to determine which, if any, of the explanations this chapter explores for the differences between these works is correct, it remains important to continue pondering the influences of culture and religion on these poems. Indeed, no definitive explanation is necessary; it is sufficiently interesting to note the ways in which these works treat the scene of Christ's temptation both similarly and differently. The side-

by-side exploration offered in the chapter of these two works, arising from distinct, though similar, cultures, allows for a better appreciation of the poets' work. Reading *Christ and Satan* in comparison to the *Heliand* allows *Christ and Satan*'s distinctness as an Anglo-Saxon work of art to shine though, and it reinforces the poem's status as a unique and valuable work of literature.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Christ and Satan is a unique and important text, but it is also solidly within the Old English poetic canon. As chapter two of this study demonstrates, the poem fits into the Old English religious verse tradition of mixing Germanic, heroic literary elements with distinctly Christian ones. Chapter three of this thesis makes use of chapter one's assertions to explore how Christ is characterized in the poem—as creator and measurer, as victor and punisher, and as warrior-king. Chapter four moves to comparing *Christ and Satan* with other Old English religious poems. The comparisons are based on the poems' treatments of the descent of Christ into hell, and they provide insight into how *Christ and Satan* fits into and deviates from some of the traditions of Old English poetry. The fifth chapter looks outside of Anglo-Saxon poetry to the Old Saxon *Heliand* gospel for its comparisons of scenes of Christ's temptation by Satan in the desert (the narrative point on which *Christ and Satan* concludes). The fifth chapter finds that comparisons of the two poems' temptation scenes point to facts about the religious and cultural contexts in which they were written.

This project has aimed to provide additional insight into the inner-working of *Christ and Satan*, especially by comparing it to other similar works both inside and outside of the Old English poetic canon. Further work in this vein would include comparing *Christ and Satan* to additional poems in search of insights. Some poems which seem ripe for fruitful comparison are *The Dream of the Rood*, *Andreas*, and the other two *Christ* poems not covered by chapter three of this project. In the *Dream of the*

Rood and *Andreas*, Christ is portrayed in interesting ways. Especially in the *Dream of the Rood*, Christ is characterized as and Anglo-Saxon warrior-king. A study that compared Christ's characterization in *Christ and Satan* with that of the *Dream of the Rood* would be interesting and useful.[10]

Another area where further scholarship could focus would be on the pitiable laments of the devils. There has been no definitive source or inspiration found for this compelling section of the poem which seems somewhat unique in Old English poetry. Further studies could search for such a source; however, it is likely that the poet was creative in his descriptions of Satan and the devils. More fruitful than a search for sources might be comparisons between this poem's characterization of Satan and how he is portrayed elsewhere within and outside of the Old English poetic canon. A study of this type would be likely to elucidate more of the poet's motives and goals.

Finally, it would be useful for scholars to return to the less literary, more linguistic questions surrounding the poem. There is much room for the conclusions that have been drawn in decades past to be revisited and refreshed in light of modern trends and notions in Old English poetry.

Christ and Satan is certainly a poem worthy of more scholarly attention than it has ever or presently does receive. Its creative refashionings of tradition are both literately interesting and poetically captivating. The scholarship on *Christ and Satan* is in

[10] Sleeth (1982) makes some comparisons between these two poems, but further study in this area would be beneficial to scholarship on *Christ and Satan*.

need of an update. Further, there remains fascinating, important work to be done on the poem that has not yet been attempted.

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