A STUDY OF "THE RHYMING POEM": TEXT, INTERPRETATION, AND CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

DISSERTATION

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The purpose of the research presented here is to discover the central concept of "The Rhyming Poem," an Old English Christian work known only from a 10th-century manuscript, and to establish the poem's natural place in the body of Old English poetry. Existing critical literature shows little agreement about the poem's origin, vocabulary, plot, or first-person narrator, and no single translation has satisfactorily captured a sense of the poem's unity or of the purposeful vision behind it.

The examination of text and context here shows that the Old English poet has created a unified vision in which religious teachings are artistically related through imagery and form. He worked in response to a particular set of conditions in early Church history, employing both pagan and Christian details to convey a message of the superiority of Christianity to idol-worship and, as well, of the validity of the Augustinian position on Original Sin over that of the heretical Pelagians.

My text is defined and provided with interlinear translation and vocabulary notes in Chapter One. Following this is a discussion of the poem's form and style in light of traditional Old English poetic practices. Chapter Three
examines the presence of rhyme in Old English poetry and its particular use in "The Rhyming Poem." Chapter Four provides a brief review of the Christianizing process in England to c. 800, focusing upon the hybrid nature of the early Church and its efforts to convert the Anglo-Saxons, details that influenced monastic literary production of Christian poetry. Chapter Five delineates the Christian content and purpose of "The Rhyming Poem," with its focus upon a central image of a dragon, heretofore unrecognized, which accounts for the alteration in tone and in the action of the narrative. In Chapter Six, a selective study looks at other Old English poems related to "The Rhyming Poem" by vocabulary characteristics, and conclusions about the content and context of the poem are summarized.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1980, when I first read "The Rhyming Poem" and became curious about its puzzling subject matter and its unusual use of rhymed short-line couplets, I turned to the critical literature for help in understanding the poem. There were many translations and discussions about "The Rhyming Poem," but the scholars disagreed about so many points that they often raised more questions than they answered. Linguistic considerations, for example, showed very little more than that the poem has broadly Anglian characteristics, comprising both Mercian and Northumbrian features, and that no persuasive arguments can be drawn to pinpoint a specific date or provenance (e.g. Wrenn 149; Mackie, "Notes" 93; Greenfield 214). Also, the many editions of the text, sometimes lavishly emended, produced a confusion of readings, with certain key words and phrases receiving widely differing translations.

Most of the text, however, was obvious enough to render, at least on the literal level, and the broad narrative movement was fairly clear. Critics were in basic agreement about the poem's main motifs, woe after weal and the transitoriness of life's pleasures (e.g. Baugh 83; Cross 12; Smithers 8), and those who went much beyond such pronouncements have been unconvincing. No single treatment
of the poem satisfactorily captured a sense of its unity or of a purposeful vision behind its production. In spite of all the critical effort that had been put forth over the years, the meaning of "The Rhyming Poem" had still escaped definitive interpretation. Therefore, when I learned that O. D. Macrae-Gibson, whose earlier discussion of the poem I had studied, was publishing a new critical edition, The Old English Riming Poem (Cambridge, 1983), I hoped it would resolve some of the problems which have made "The Rhyming Poem" such a difficult work. Upon examination, however, Macrae-Gibson's edition, in spite of its many excellences, falls short of recognizing the poem's central vision and its purpose. To be sure, his work is a valuable tool for studying the poem, since it brings together information on the variant texts and translations (often difficult to locate), as well as on linguistic features, alliterative meter, and, briefly, style and thematic concerns. In addition to his own text, translation, notes, and glossary, Macrae-Gibson also supplies an exhaustive and most helpful review of scholarship on the poem as well as a very limited discussion of rhyme in Old English poetry. Interested readers are referred to Macrae-Gibson's edition for a review of the scholarship and of variant readings, since these are not reiterated in my study.

What has not been revealed in Macrae-Gibson's work, I believe, is that the imagery in the poem creates a unified
vision of its meaning and production that comes from a sharp focus on detail and design strategy. Furthermore, Macrae-Gibson does not establish the poem's natural place in the body of Old English poetry, although he does note that the poem's usual association with "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" is an uneasy one (Poem 11), since its differences make the similarities seem superficial.

My purpose here, then, is to discover the heart of "The Rhyming Poem," the unifying concept that shaped it, and also to find the connection between the poem and the rest of Old English religious poetry. In the process, I shall try to clarify that connection through a study of the social and religious conditions which produced what remains of Old English literature.

Until "The Rhyming Poem" has been placed in relation to the circumstances of its production, in fact, its meaning cannot be fully discerned. As my examination of the poem will show, the poet has created his work in response to a particular set of conditions in early Church history, using its imagery to carry a religious message of the superiority of Christianity over paganism and of the validity of the Augustinian position on Original Sin. It is no longer enough to say that "The Rhyming Poem" is a didactic Christian lyric or elegy contrasting earthly and heavenly values, akin to "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer," for such evaluation still leaves the poem without a distinct central focus.
Part of my research, then, will show that a central image of a dragon, heretofore unrecognized, does in fact make the point of the poem and also accounts for the alteration in the course of the narrative. It has also become clear that the usual grouping of "The Rhyming Poem" with "Wanderer" and "Seafarer" is misleading, for "The Rhyming Poem" shows a greater similarity to a different group of poems, sharing vocabulary traits and thematic concerns. Upon examination, these religious works serve as a mirror to the times and give additional insight into the struggles of the early Christian Church in England.

One necessary task precedes the discussion of the poem's content and context, and that is to define my text and provide an interlinear translation, which is presented in Chapter One. Following this is a discussion of the poem's form and style, in light of traditional Old English poetic practices. The third chapter examines the presence of rhyme in Old English poetry and its particular use in "The Rhyming Poem." Chapter Four provides a brief review of the Christianizing process in England to c. 800 A.D., focusing upon the hybrid nature of the early Church and upon its efforts to convert the Anglo-Saxons, details that influenced monastic literary production of Old English Christian poetry. Chapter Five delineates the Christian content of "The Rhyming Poem" and the characteristics which mark it as one of a small group of poems that served the Church in a
similar particular manner. Finally, in Chapter Six, a selective study is made of the other Old English poems related to "The Rhyming Poem" by vocabulary characteristics, and the conclusions about the content and context of "The Rhyming Poem" are summarized.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


"The Rhyming Poem" is known from a single text contained in the Exeter Book, part of the collection of the Chapter Library of Exeter Cathedral. An accurate transcription of the manuscript, however, made in 1831-32 by Robert Chambers, is now catalogued as Additional MS. 9067 in the British Library, and the text is also available in the photographic facsimile published by the Dean and Chapter of Exeter Cathedral in 1933. Except for some damage at the beginning and end, the manuscript's 131 vellum leaves are well preserved. They contain no illustrations, and the only elaboration in design is the use of large capital letters at the beginnings of individual works. The scribe used no color other than the dark brown ink with which he wrote in a large, clear insular style, derived from the half-uncial script, that flourished in the tenth century.

The Exeter Book contains thirty-one poems and ninety-five riddles. The poems vary in genre, style, and literary merit, yet they may be grouped into three broad sets: heroic Christian narratives, as in "Christ" and "Guthlac"; didactic and homiletic works, such as "Precepts," "Judgment Day I," and the various riddles; and the unique group of lyrics and elegies, including "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," "The
Ruin," and "The Rhyming Poem." Some of the poems contain pagan material, as in "Widsib," but the general tone, as well as the explicitly Christian matter of most of the pieces, makes it clear that the Exeter Book served Christian purposes.

General critical agreement dates the manuscript to the tenth century, probably after 950 and certainly before 1072, the date of Bishop Leofric's death, for the book was his gift to the Cathedral (Lloyd 3). Common elements of its script and that of a dated charter from nearby Crediton (Chambers 89) help to confirm the late tenth-century date and also suggest that the manuscript was produced somewhere in the West Country, possibly at Crediton itself or at Glastonbury Abbey (Lloyd 3). The poetry is older, however, perhaps quite a bit older than the manuscript, and each piece requires individual consideration for evidence of its date of composition. "The Rhyming Poem" has been assigned to a variety of dates ranging from the early days of the Anglo-Saxon conversion up to c. 940 and Egil Skallagrímsson's visit to England. There is also disagreement about the poem's original dialect; although most critical opinion recognizes Anglian or Northumbrian forms beneath the present West Saxon, Sievers believes it may just as well derive from a West Saxon original (Chambers 67).

Certain scribal practices of punctuation and word division in the text of the poem complicate both the task of
transcription and that of translation. In the first place, punctuation is erratic and thus unclear in purpose. Aside from a special set of symbols used to denote the end of the poem, the point is the only form of punctuation supplied by the scribe, and there is no conclusive evidence to determine the metrical function of the point. It appears thirty-four times in "The Rhyming Poem," usually at the end of a half-line.

A second sense of uncertainty arises from the scribe's irregular word-division practices. Compounds are often, though not always, written separately when the second element receives substantial stress, as in reed mægne (line 10) and lagu streame (14), for instance, and sometimes even the syllables of a simplex are separated. In fact, prefixes, pronouns, prepositions, articles, particles, and conjunctions are often separated from their root words and may be attached to words with which they have no grammatical relation; see, for example, icealdor (23). Conversely, two separate yet consecutive words with weak stress may be written together, as in sebis (1).

Although the text below derives from a study of the original manuscript, in which verse divisions are not indicated, it is arranged here in half-line couplets and follows certain editorial practices. Original spelling and capitalization are preserved, except in emendations of flawed passages, marked in boldface type. Also, all textual
abbreviations are expanded, and the division of words is
regularized. Finally, modern capitalization and punctuation
are supplied in the translation. Brief comments on emenda-
tion and vocabulary follow the text and translation; for
notes on variant readings, see Macrae-Gibson's edition. All
discussion of form, style, theme, and religious content is
reserved for later chapters.

"The Rhyming Poem"

1 Me lifes onlah / se þis leoht onwrah
He loaned me life, he who made this light known

2 ond þæt torhte geteoh / tillice onwrah
and bestowed that radiance, kindly revealed it.

3 glæd wæs ic gliwum / glenged hiwum
I was glad in my glee, garbed in many hues,

4 blissa bleoum / blostma hiwum
in blissful colors, in blossoms' hues.

5 secgas mec segon / symbel ne alegon
Men visited me, did not refuse my feast,

6 feorhgiefe gefegon / frætwed waegon
rejoiced in life's gift. Bejeweled, they journeyed

7 wicg ofer wongum / wennan gongum
by horse over the plains to compete on the paths,

8 lisse mid longum / leoma getongum
delightful with long limbs striding.

9 bah wæs væstmum aweaht / world onspreht
Then the animated world was aroused to fruitfulness,
under roderum areaht / rædmægne oferpeah
widespread under heaven, protected by a wise power.
giestas gengdon / gerscype mengdon
Guests went forth, mingled on the ready ship,
lisse lengdon / lustum glengdon
lingered happily, delightfully adorned.
scrifen scrað glad / þurh gescad in brad
Well cared for, I went gladly, with distinction, on the
wide sea;
wæs on lagustreame lad / þær me leoþu ne biglad
my path was on the water where the people did not de-
part from me.
hæfde ic heanne had / ne wæs me in healle gad
I had a high position; in my hall nothing was lacking,
þæt þær rof weord rad / oft þær rinc gebad
so that a brave band rode there. Often there the
warrior abided
þæt he in sele sæge / sincgewæge
that he might see in the hall the hoard of treasure
þegnum gebyhte / þenden wæs ic minte
of good stead to thanes. While I was strong,
horsce mec heredon / hilde generedon
wise ones praised me, preserved me in war,
fægre feredon / feondon biweredon
fairly went forth, protected me from foes.
sва meč hyhtgiefu heold / hygedryht befeold
thus, hope's gift sustained me, a loyal group surrounded me;

stapól øæntum steald / stepegeongum weold
I kept my position with riches, I ruled over the high roads.

swylce eorpe ol / ahte ic ealdorstol
Also, I nourished the earth, I owned the ancestral seat,

galdorwordum gol / gomel sibbe ne ofoll
I sang in magic words, I did not forsake the old relations.

ac wæs gefest gear / gellende sner
Instead, it was a most generous year, the harpstring strumming loud,

wuniendo wær / wilbec bescær
the covenant continuing, cut off from treachery.

scealcas wæron scearpe / scyl wæs hearpe
The soldiers were sharp, the harp was shrill;

hlude hlynede / hleobor dynede
loudly it sounded, the song dinned forth.

sweglrad swinsade / swipe ne minsade
The music played melodiously, did not much diminish;

burgsele beofode / beorht hlifade
the castle hall trembled, towered brightly.

ellen eacnade / ead heacnade
My nobility flourished, my prosperity shone forth;

freum frodade / fromum godade
I was prudent with lords, I improved the bold ones.

Mod mægnade / mine fægnade
My spirit grew greater, my mind was glad;

treow telgade / tir welgade
my tree put forth branches, my glory abounded,

blæd blissade
my life was happy....

gold gearwade / gim hwearfade
I prepared gold, I passed out jewelry;

sinc searwade / sib nearwade
I was clever with silver, my kin drew near.

from ic wæs in frætwum / freolic in geatwum
I was rich in ornaments, noble in arms,

wæs min dream dryhtlic / drohtæd hyhtlic
my pleasure was lordly, my way of life pleasant;

foldan ic freoþode / folcum ic leobode
I secured the land, I sang to the folk.

lif wæs min longe / leodum in gemonge
My life among the people was long,

tirum getonge / tala gehonge
touched by glory, adorned with tales.

Nu min hreþer is hreoh / heowsipum sceoh
Now my breast is shaken, shy of the colorful ways,

nydbysgum neah / gewiteð nihtes in fleah
near to distress. The one departs by night in flight

45 se ær in dæge wæs dyrn / scriped nu deop se fyrm
who before by day was hidden. The old one moves now
depth within,

46 brondhord geblowen / breostum in forgrowen
a full-blown fire-hoard sprung up in the heart,

47 flyhtum toflowen / flah is geblowen
dispersed in flights. Insidiously has it flourished

48 miclum in gemynnde / modes gecynde
mightily in the mind, in the natural manner of the
heart.

49 greteð ungrynde / grorn efenpynde
Deeply it assails him, sadly surrounded;

50 bealofus byrneð / bittre toynned
eager for evil, it burns, bitterly runs wild.

51 werig winned / widsid onginned
It conquers the weary one, initiates his wide journey,

52 sar ne sinnip / sorgum cinnd
does not care for his pain, increases it in sorrows.

53 blæd his blinnide / blisse linnað
His abundance ceases, his bliss departs,

54 listum linned / lustum ne tinned
he loses his cunning, can't continue in his pleasures.

55 dreamas swa her gedreosað / dryhtscype gehreosað
Delights thus here fail, lordship falls away;

56 lif her men forleosað / leahtras oft geceosað
here men abandon life, often choose sins.

treowrag is to trag / seo untrume genag
The time of faith is too ill, that of infirmity nears;

steapum stapol mispa / ond eal stund genag
the high position fails, and the appointed hour draws near for all.

swa nu world wende / wyrde sende
Thus now the world fares, with fate impels

ond hetes hended / hælepe scynded
and catches up in hostilities, hastens the warriors.

wencyn gewited / wælgar slitid
Hope departs from the people, the deadly spear slits;

flahmah flited / flan mon hwited
deceitful evil strives, evil polishes the arrow;

borgsorg biteid / bald ald pwitep
debt-sorrow bites, the bold cuts off the old.

wræcfæc wrīpād / wræp ad smitep
The time of exile flourishes, anger defiles the oath;

singryn sida / searo-searo glidep
evil constantly spreads, goes on a cunning course;

gorn torn græfeb / græft haeft hafað
anger carves sadness, holds the engraved hilt.

searo hwit solæp / sumurhæt colæð
Treachery soils purity, summer heat subsides;

fold wela fealle / feondscipe wealle
the earth fails of its wealth, enmity wells up;
earth's power grows old, prowess turns cold.
Fate designed it thus and gave me this desert,
so that I must dig a grave, and that grim pit
flesh cannot flee on the arrow-fast day.
It grabs in its inevitable grasp when it comes near;
it seized me from my native land and makes me know a home here.
while the body lies low, the worm seeks out the limbs
and attacks them eagerly and eats of the feast,
until only the bone ... will be left
and, at the last, nothing but the necessary lot
in the graves appointed here, but glory will not fail.
Ere that, the blessed man thinks to mortify himself more often,
byrged him þa bitran synne / hogap to þære betran
buries his bitter sins, cares for the better joys.

gemon morpalisse / her sindon miltsa blisse
Remember forgiveness for deadly sin: there are mercy's delights.

hyhtlice in heofona rice / uton nu halgum gelice
Hopefully into the heavenly land let us now, like the saints,

scyldum biscoyrede / scyndan generede
shorn of sins, hasten saved,

womum biwerede / wuldre generede
protected from terrors, preserved in heaven.

þær moncyn mot / for meotude rot
There may mankind, before the noble Creator,

soðne god geseon / ond aa in sibbe gefean
perceive the true God and rejoice in peace eternally.

Line Commentary

The numbered notes that follow refer to lines in the text and are limited to comments on vocabulary and translation. In the course of working through the text, defining words and examining their use in other poetic contexts, I learned that much of "The Rhyming Poem" vocabulary stock has limited usage in other Old English poetry. Many of its words, in fact, occur exclusively (or predominantly) in
members of a small group of poems, numbering only 17 out of the 195 poems and fragments included in The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, which is the authority for all citations from other poems. This group comprises "Andreas" (AND), Beowulf (BWF), "Boethius" (BTH), "Christ" (CHR), "Christ and Satan" (XST), "Daniel" (DAN), "Elene" (ELN), "Exodus" (EXO), "The Fates of Men" (FTM), "Genesis" (GEN), "Guthlac (GLC), "Judgment Day I" (JDI), "Juliana" (JUL), "Metrical Psalms" (MPS), "The Phoenix" (PHX), "Riddles" (RDL), and "Solomon and Saturn" (SOL). Chapter Six will discuss the other characteristics shared by these poems, with the exception of "Metrical Psalms," "Boethius," and "Solomon and Saturn," all generally accepted as products of the Alfredian and Benedictine age and therefore belonging more properly to the study of that later phase of Church history. In the commentary below, certain words are designated as group vocabulary words (GV) and are followed by a list of the other group poems in which they appear. The use of these words in poems outside of the group is also noted.

In other questions of translation, original manuscript readings are given for each emendation indicated by boldface type in the text, and reasons are presented for the instances where my translation differs greatly from those of other editors.

Group vocabulary words: onlah (BWF, DAN, GEN) and
onwrah (CHR, GLC).

02 GV words: torhte (AND, BWF, CHR, XST, DAN, ELN, GEN, GLC, JDI, PHX, RDL, SOL) and geteoh (BWF, MPS). It should also be noted that torhte appears in "Fates of the Apostles" and "The Partridge," in addition to the group poems.

03 GV words: gliwum (PHX; also "Maxims I" and "The Order of the World"), glenged (PHX; also "Exhortation to Christian Living"), and hiwum (AND, CHR, GEN, GLC, JUL, PHX; also "The Whale" and "The Panther").

04 GV words: bleoum (CHR, ELN, FTM, GLC, JUL, MPS, SOL; also "Dream of the Rood" and "The Panther") and blostma (BTH, XST, MPS, PHX, RDL; also "Judgment Day II," "Mneologium," and "Seafarer").

06 GV words: feorhgiefe (CHR, GLC) and fraetwed (AND, BWF, CHR, DAN, ELN, GEN, GLC, JDI, JUL, PHX, RDL; also "Maxims II" and "The Panther"). Waegon: MS waegum; the emendation restores the rhyme and also provides the finite verb for the clause in 6b-8b.

07 Wicg: MS wic; although some early editors retained the manuscript reading and translated the passage as a reference to a "dwelling" or "mansion," such a reading makes little sense in conjunction with the following line. I read this entire passage as a reference to the old custom of celebratory horse-racing known from Tacitus and from Beowulf. Wennan, a hapax legomenon, is here read as a form of winnan, with the idea of striving or contending.
08 GV word: leoma ["limb"] (BWF, CHR, XST, ELN, PTM, GLC, PHX; also "Maxims I"). Getongum is a hapax legomenon and is often emended. The same word, however, occurs elsewhere in the poem (42a), where the context supports a reading of "touched," and the same definition works well here.

09 GV word: aweaht (BTH, ELN, GEN, MPS, PHX, RDL). On-spreht is a hapax legomenon. The syntax of this line makes for a difficult translation, but it works best if world is taken as the passive subject of the sentence in 9-10, a passage made even thornier by the presence of two more hapax legomena in 10.

10 GV words: areaht (AND, BTH, CHR, DAN, ELN, GLC, JUL, MPS; "Judgment Day II," "Maxims I," "Menelogium," and "The Panther") and beaht (ELN, PTM, GEN, PHX, RDL). Rædmægne and oferbeaht are hapax legomena; my translation of the b-line is based upon beccan, "to cover."

11 GV word: mengdon (BTH, MPS, SOL). Gerscype is a hapax legomenon and one of the most variously translated words in the poem, appearing as "chatter," "jokes," and "commerce" elsewhere. While these may be reasonable readings in the context, they are not conclusive, and the word's definition is still open to conjecture. Taking a different approach, I find no reason why this compound may not refer to a type of ship (e.g. CHR 1048), especially since 13-14 make a clear reference to the speaker traveling on lagustream.

12 GV word: lengdon (DAN; also "Widsith").
13  GV words: *scrifen* (BWF, BTH, CHR, PTM, JUL; also "Soul and Body I" and "Soul and Body II"), also *scrad* (EXO) and *gescad* (BWF). This line has been traditionally one of the most difficult in the poem to translate convincingly. *Scrad* has often been emended to *scrad*, but the manuscript shows that the final letter of the word is an eth with a slightly defaced cross-bar. In any case, most previous editors define the word as "ship" from the Icelandic cognate *skreid* and read *scrifen* as an adjectival form meaning "painted," again from an Icelandic cognate, *skrifa*. A better meaning, however, can be found without resorting to these choices. The fairly common word, *scridan*, "to go or take one's way," has *scrad* for the first- and third-person preterite forms. Using this definition, in conjunction with *scrifen* read as the past participle of *scrifan*, "to choose, care for," we get an entirely new reading for this troublesome line, one which clarifies the sense of the whole passage 11-14.

14  GV words: *lagustreame* (AND, BWF, BTH, DAN, ELN, EXO, GEN, MPS, PHX, RDL; also "The Battle of Maldon" and "The Order of the World") and *leobu* (AND, PTM, JUL).

17  The compound *sincgewæge* has a parallel in RDL 20.6, *sinc ge wege*.

18  *Mihte*: MS *mægen*; the emendation restores both the rhyme and the syntax. *Gebynte* is a hapax legomenon; my nebulous translation "of service to thanes" attempts to combine the best possibilities offered by other editors.
GV words: heredon (AND, BTH, CHR, DAN, ELN, EXO, GEN, GLC, JUL; also "Azarias") and generedon (AND, BWF, CHR, DAN, ELN, GEN, MPS; also "The Battle of Brunnanburgh").

GV words: feredon (AND, BWF, EXO, GEN, MPS; also "The Death of Edward") and biweredon (BWF, CHR, GLC).

GV word: hyhtgiefu (ELN).

GV word: stepe (GEN, JUL, RDL). Stepegonum, a unique compound, is not difficult to translate. The real problem in translation lies in the lack of a clearly indicated subject for the two clauses: who is doing the establishing and controlling? If the meaning of dryht in 21 is "God," then the clauses in 22 may be parallel to 21b. My translation, however, rejects the identification of dryht with "God" and takes ic for the intended subject: the speaker is the object of action in 21 and the subject of action in 23.

The ambiguous subject of the clause in 23a complicates the translation here. Most editors take eorp for the subject, but I read 23a as yet another clause with ic as the subject in a continuing list of the speaker's deeds and accomplishments. If we do not assume that ic is the subject in 22-24, as well as the subject of action in 19-21, these lines become a muddle of changing subjects and confused narrative.

GV words: galdor (AND, BWF, BTH, ELN, GLC, RDL; also "Metrical Charms" and "Fates of the Apostles") and gol (BTH, ELN).
25  GV word: **sner** (PTM).

26  GV words: **wær** (CHR; also "Precepts") and **bescær** (AND, CHR, XST, GEN, MPS, RDL; also "Vainglory"). The a-line is very similar to AND 1310, **wærfæst wunian**; see also GLC 1190.

27  GV word: **hearpe** (BWF, CHR, FTM, GEN, MPS, PHX; also "Gifts of Men," "Maxims I," "The Seafarer," and "Widsith"). An interesting note concerns **scyl**, a hapax legomenon: Bosworth and Toller offer a variant definition for the usual one of "shrill," noting that the word may refer to "shield." If the passage 24-31 is read with this definition in mind, a subtle, extended comparison appears between traditional battle and traditional feasting descriptions. A very similar formula phrase to the a-line is found in RDL 33.27, *ecge wær on scearpe.*

28  GV words: **hlynede** (AND; also "Judith") and **dynede** (AND, BWF, CHR, ELN, JDI; also "Judith" and "The Battle of Finnsburh"). The b-line phrase is identical to AND 739; see also "Widsith" 105, *hleopor swinsade.*

29  GV words: **swinsade** (CHR, ELN, GEN, PHX, RDL; also "Widsith") and **minsade** (DAN). A similar phrase to the a-line is found in GEN 1081, *swinsigende swege.*

30  GV words: **burgsele** (GLC, RDL; also "The Panther"), **beofode** (CHR, XST, GLC, JDI, MPS; also "The Descent into Hell"), and **hlifade** (BWF, DAN, EXO, GEN, PHX, RDL).

31  GV word: **beacnade** (PHX).
32 Beginning here and continuing to 37, there is a problem in translation caused by the lack of a clear subject for the eight parallel clauses. My translation assumes a single subject for the entire group, i.e., the understood subject of all action in this first section of the poem. The two verbs frodade and godade are hapax legomena. Although I have translated frodade as "increased wisdom," I believe the word may well have a more specific connotation of "educated."

33 GV word: fægnade (BTH, MPS).

34 GV word: telgade (GEN, MPS, PHX). A similar phrase to the a-line is found in GEN 892 and 1470, on treowes telgum.

35 GV word: blissade (AND, CHR, FTM, GLC, MPS; also "Precepts" and "The Lord's Prayer II").

36 GV word: gearwade (XST, ELN, FTM, GEN, GLC, JDI, MPS, PHX; also "Resignation" and "Soul and Body II").

37 GV word: nearwade (GEN, RDL). My translation of the passage 36-37 does not follow Macrae-Gibson's reading (9), which finds an ambiguity deliberately built into the passage by the poet's choice of words capable of opposite meanings. It is certainly possible, but such a reading is not necessary and in fact seems forced, in light of the relentlessly positive attitude of this section of the poem.

39 GV word: drohtad (AND, BTH, CHR, GEN, GLC, PHX, RDL, SOL).

40 GV word: freobode (ELN, GLC, RDL; also "The Gloria I").

42 Tala: MS teala. Gehonge, known also from PHX 38,
translates literally as "hung." My translation of 42b. differs from most other readings, where rather large liberties are taken with the possibilities of gehonge ("nobly supported," "well devoted to glory," "inclined to good") in order to keep the standard translation of "good" for teala. "Hung with good" is a strange phrase, however, even for this poet, and it does not seem like a strong enough statement or image to be an effective culmination for the first section of the poem. Therefore, my translation most closely agrees with that of only one other editor, Ettmuller, who gives "fabularum appetens" (xviii), treating teala as a form of talu, "tale, rumor, legend."

43 GV word: hreoh (AND, BWF, BTH, FTM, GEN, JUL, MPS, PHX, RDL; also "Judith" and "Judgment Day II").

45 Dyrn: MS dyre; se fyrn: MS fear. The broken rhyme and the obscure sense of the line indicates the need for emendation; see Macrae-Gibson's notes for a list of the various readings from other editions. My translation is unique in that it emends both rhyme words. I take se fyrn as a reference to the devil, paralleling se ealda (XST 34) and se ealdfeond, found in several poems. The emendation dyrn, "secret, hidden," is more suited than dyre to the context of the entire passage, as it is the nature of the dragon to hide by day (see Chapter Five).

46 GV word: brond (AND, BWF, CHR, FTK, GLC, JDI, JUL, PHX; also "The Order of the World"). Since brondhord is unique
to this poem, it has been subject to many interpretations. The various supportive arguments for these readings are often clever, but still the word has not been convincingly defined, at least in terms of a concrete image intended by the poet. My translation is less adventuresome than many, but the literal rendering allows the passage to be read smoothly and sensibly without restricting the image to a single conjectural meaning.

48 A similar phrase to this line is found in GEN 1085: *purh modes gemynnd.*

49 GV word: *grorn* (CHR, JUL). The correct adverbial form would be *gorne*, but in an oral presentation the final -e would be lost in elision with *efenpynde*.

52 GV word: *sinnip* (AND, GEN, GLC). The appearance of *sinnip* in each of these other poems occurs in a litotes, as it does here.

53 GV words: *blinnið* (ELN, MPS) and *linnab* (AND, BWF, FTM). The a-line is similar to ELN 825, *blæd buton blinne*.

57 GV word: *trag* (ELN). This line has been so variously translated that there is almost no consensus reading of any single phrase. The problem lies with *trowbrag*, a unique compound easily defined from its two parts but not from its syntactical relation to the rest of the sentence: to *trag* may be read as "too evil" or as a verb phrase with an understood "come," as in "has come to evil." Another problem occurs with the translation of *genag*, a hapax
legomenon. My reading is based upon the word's relation to geneagan, "to approach, assail."

58 GV word: stund (AND, GLC). Stapol: MS eatole; the emendation provides a noun for the clause in 58a.

60 Hended: MS hented; the emendation restores the rhyme.

62 GV word: flited (AND). The only way that the a-line can be read sensibly is if the adjectives flah and mah are taken as a substantive compound, supplying a subject for the clause.

63 Borgsorg: MS. burgsorg; it may not be necessary to emend burg to borg merely for rhyme purposes, but the sense of borg works better with bited.

64 GV word: wraped (BWF, ELN, GEN, RDL).

65 GV word: glideb (AND, BWF, BTH, MPS, PHX, RDL). Gryn: MS grynd; searo: MS sæcra. In the first half-line, I follow the usual emendation to restore rhyme, and in the second clause the emendation is an attempt to restore the sense of the half-line as well as the pattern of internal rhyme begun in 61a.

66 GV word: græfed (CHR). Grorn: MS grom; the emendation restores internal rhyme. In the second half-line I supply hæft to complete the phrase, as Ruth Lehmann has done in her edition of the poem (443), but my use of the word differs substantially from her reading of "the grave has bondage" (445). In the a-line I take grorn as nominative and torn as accusative forms, and in the b-line I translate
hæft as "hilt" or "handle."

67 GV word: colad (GLC; also "Precepts").

68 GV word: fealleb (PTM, JDI, MPS, PHX, RDL, SOL; also "The Wanderer").

69 GV word: ealdap (CHR, GEN, GLC, MPS; also "The Seafarer" and "The Coronation of Edgar"). Cealdað: MS colad; the emendation restores the rhyme.

70 GV word: gewyrht (AND, CHR, JDI). Gewyrht: MS gehwyrt; the emendation restores the alliteration and also allows the b-line to translate more readily than if an unknown noun gehwyrt, from gehwierfan, is proposed and then defined.

74 GV word: onfon(n) (AND, BWF, CHR, DAN, GEN, JDI, MPS, PHX; also "Soul and Body I," "Soul and Body II," and "Gifts of Men"). Bardes: MS heardes; the emendation restores the alliteration and also completes a contrast of homes between the a-line and b-line.

75 Friged: MS frited; the emendation restores the rhyme.

79 Hlawum: MS balawun; the emendation restores the alliteration and gives a more sensible reading within the context of the grave description. Abroten: MS adroren; the emendation restores the rhyme.

80 GV word: swenced (AND, BTH, GLC, JDI, JUL).

82 The compound morpalisse is unique; I agree with those editors who translate it as "immortality," since such a reading is in keeping with both the previous descriptive passage about the grave and the description now beginning,
the joys of *heofona rice*, with which the poem concludes. Yet the word also evokes another meaning, freedom from or forgiveness for Original Sin, which deprived man of his original immortality: the Church taught that in death man is released from Adam's curse, if he dies in Christ.

84 The a-line phrase is echoed in "Vainglory" 8: *scylcum bescyredne.*
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CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

In the past, critical study of "The Rhyming Poem" has most often linked it with "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer" on the basis of its elegiac mood and theme of transitory life, yet such treatment has not sufficiently sounded the depths of the poem, nor has it adequately measured it against the Old English poetic tradition. The attitude implicit in much of the critical work on the poem is that it is an inferior imitation of the two more successful elegies and does not, therefore, require the close examination afforded to them. As a result, early critical pronouncements have often gone unchallenged, and new insight into the poem's relation to other Old English poetry has not been forthcoming.

One of the basic tasks of this study, then, is to compare the meter, structure, style, and content of "The Rhyming Poem" to the general characteristics of the Old English poetic tradition. This tradition, however, deduced from the evidence of merely four randomly surviving monastic manuscripts, is imperfectly known. Certain qualities of the tradition can be described, but not all of the poetic practices of the period can be delimited, for monastic library collections may have excluded some poetic forms which were
not considered important or suitable. The following discussion of Old English poetic traits, therefore, should not be taken as inclusive but rather as descriptive of the qualities most often found in the surviving body of poetry from that age.

The most fundamental characteristics of Old English poetry are its use of accentual meter, based upon stress rather than syllable quantity, and the concomitant use of alliteration (front-rhyme) to link the two half-lines of the verse. Although end-rhyme is not unknown in Old English poetry, it is rare, usually occurring in no more than a few half-lines together and often found in a single long line. Notwithstanding its use throughout "The Rhyming Poem" and in a 15-line passage of "Elene," rhyme is a rarity in this poetic tradition; the alliterative couplet is the standard Old English measure.

As the tradition developed, certain techniques of phrasing and sentence structure became more common in the poetry than in Old English prose. For one thing, the substantival use of adjectives is noticeable in many poems (Cassidy 273), a practice which allows the poet to remain within literal description while increasing the audience's sense of figurative possibilities in the language. A second common practice in poetry is the syntactic disjunction of words in a phrase from their logical relationships (Cassidy 273-73), a practice which increases the alliterative
possibilities open to the poet. There is also a more common
tendency towards the omission of personal and possessive
pronouns in poetry than in prose (Klaeber xcii-xciii), re-
sulting in translation difficulties for the modern reader
who cannot rely upon the clarifying signals of an oral
presentation.

Structurally, the typical presentation of poetic con-
tent in Old English poetry is narrative and descriptive
rather than figurative. The narrator may relate external
action or the interior response of a character in the story,
often changing the pace of presentation to reflect different
moods of activity and meditation. Whatever the focus, how-
ever, the poet's presentation is far more likely to be in
literally descriptive terms, not imagistic, rarely using
metaphorical language even in the most allegorical works
(Klaeber lxiv).

The main exception to this general practice is the use
of certain descriptive appositives, the kent heiti and the
kenning. These descriptive phrases and epithets are part of
an inherited, presumably ancient, supply of formula phrases
available to the poet, of sufficient variety to assist him
in completing the alliterative pattern of the half-line
couplet. But perhaps the single most common phrasing tech-
nique in Old English poetry is variation (Klaeber lxiv;
Greenfield 76-77), the restatement of a single idea in
clauses or phrases that amplify a part of the idea without
changing the grammatical referent. It is the practice of variation that so often retards the progress of narration, giving Old English poetry its generally slow, rather decorous pace, and certainly contributing to its emphasis upon description.

Given this fondness for descriptive and synonymous phrasing, then, the richness of the Old English poetic vocabulary stock is not surprising. This vocabulary is a distinctive blend of archaisms, unique compounds, and both early and late linguistic forms, as well as of word forms belonging to more than one regional dialect. Using this varied word stock and manipulating the traditional formulae, the Old English poet could be original while working within the traditional limits of the alliterative meter.

These basic qualities of Old English poetry—a focus upon narration and description, the use of traditional poetic syntax and formula-phrases, the practice of variation and repetition, and a richly stocked vocabulary—provide the background for a descriptive examination of "The Rhyming Poem" by which its position in the poetic tradition can more readily be recognized. There is no need for a discussion of the poem's alliterative pattern, since Macrae-Gibson covers the subject thoroughly, and discussion of its unusual use of rhyme, requiring a larger literary context than that provided by the Old English poetic tradition, is reserved for a later chapter. The consideration here, then, focuses upon
the other stylistic qualities: structure, imagery, phrasing, and vocabulary.

For the first 79 lines, "The Rhyming Poem" is a dramatic monologue in which a first-person narrator recounts his life as a powerful, successful ruler. He follows chronological order, from his "gift" of life, at birth, to his inevitable descent at death into the grave. At the same time, however, the narrator and the audience are aware of a parallel between society's and the world's progress and that of the central character: early fertility and later loss of potency in the land; early cohesion and abundance in society, later disintegration into war, exile, and chaos. The narrator's story has no plot, exactly, no overt conflict propelling action, but it does have pattern and action, the universal pattern of temporal life moving through birth, growth, degeneration, and death.

From the opening to line 42, the narrator outlines the course of his life but not its details: he is happy, wealthy, powerful, the leader of a brave troop and a loyal people. In fact, the speaker is a paragon of heroic virtue, a type of the ideal king who embodies the strengths of his society: he is courageous, generous, wise, and loyal, and through the many years of his life, he has become the happy subject of heroic tales. But at 43, the narrator turns from the glories of his past to focus upon his present misery and that of the world around him. Not only does he shift tenses
at this point, he also changes from his first-person focus to a description of a third-person figure that continues to 54. Although there is much critical disagreement about the identity of this figure, I believe that it can be identified as the source of the present trouble, for the speaker and for the entire natural order, once the imagery in this passage is recognized. In the next lines, 55-69, the narrator's focus is entirely upon the universal disorder and decay that surround him, but at 70 he is abruptly brought back to an awareness of his own participation in this degeneration. From here to 79, he confronts his physical destruction in the grave, and his voice is finally silenced in death.

A new voice speaks in 80-87, dramatically warning those who would be "blessed" to act now before the same fate befalls them. This homiletic conclusion exhorts the audience to "remember the forgiveness of deadly sin" which the Church can offer them and closes with a view of the saved rejoicing eternally with God in heaven. At the same time, it provides a partial frame device for the dramatic monologue and breaks down the poem into narrative and commentary performed by two speakers before an audience for whom the tale holds a specific lesson.

The use of figurative language in "The Rhyming Poem" is quite within the Old English poetic tradition, but, curiously enough, it occurs more frequently and emphatically in the
second half of the poem. The narrator's account of his past glory is mainly in literal terms: his colorful clothes (4), bejeweled guests at his banquets (5-6), the traditional horse-racing contests (7-8), the loyal support of his troop (18-21), the noise of the soldiers' merriment (25-30). The imagery in 1-42 is minimal, contained in a few kennings that make little attempt to concretize their metaphorical content. The identification of these compounds as kennings, in fact, is open to question and may actually be based upon the misinterpretation of words: hyhtgiefu (21) translates literally as "gift of hope" or "gift of joy" and could as easily be a straight-forward abstract term as a metaphor; wilbec (26) perhaps translates into something like Mackie's "river of sorrow," a trite image; and sweglrad (29), if it is indeed a kenning for music, is a similarly weak effect.

With the turn of the narrator's fate at 43, however, the imagery becomes more pronounced and at the same time provides additional thematic support. In 44-50, there is a change in the narrator's technique: he seems to be describing something in literal terms, as he has been doing up to this point, but the thing he is describing acts strangely. It hides by day and flies by night (44), it disperses fire in its flights (46-47), it attacks the weary traveler and burns him eagerly (49-50). Literally, of course, the creature can only be a dragon, instantly recognizable to the audience, or the student of Old English. Like the dragon in
Beowulf, this creature emerges from its hidden cave of treasure, roused to fury at the unsuspecting race of men, and after its attack, the defeated man becomes an exile whose only possession is pain and whose pastime is suffering (52). Furthermore, the dragon's attack comes at the same point as it did in Beowulf, when the king is old and happy, and the results are similar: exile, war, and death.

But the literal image of the dragon does not remain literal, for the narrator converts it into a symbol. This dragon does not reside in a treasure cave, but in the heart; it has not entered the heart full grown, but it has "flourished mightily in the mind, in the natural manner of the heart" (47-48), not in the cold earth of the barrow. The significance of this dragon image is discussed in a later chapter; for now, it is enough to show that the narrator uses a symbol drawn from the heroic tradition and makes certain that his audience will recognize it as a metaphor from the very beginning.

The next noticeable use of figurative language occurs in 59-74, where the narrator personifies the world and fate (59), as well as hope and the spear (61). Evil itself is then personified, a self-motivated force acting as a warrior (65). Anger, too, does battle, wielding a sword (66), and fate becomes a conqueror (70-71). The earth is also personified in two separate aspects which have their parallel in the human condition: first with a loss of feminine fecundity
and then with a loss of strength (69), much as a weakening old man like the narrator himself.

Two final examples of metaphor occur in the figure of fate or death seizing the narrator's body in its grasping hands (73) and in the image of the dead body as a feast or banquet for the worms (76). These are not original metaphors, certainly, but they do have more visual effect than the similarly trite images employed in 1-43. The dramatic monologue, however, ends not with metaphor but with a starkly literal image of bare bones and grave barrows (77-79): both the narrator and the audience peer into the universal image of their own mortality. Throughout "The Rhyming Poem," then, imagery is for the most part inconsequential, carrying thematic weight only in the central passage concerned with the dragon in the human heart. The poet thus functions well within the Old English poetic system, which valued moral content over poetic effect, and still manages to create an original symbol from a traditional figure.

In his use of syntax, the poet is also quite traditional, following the typical syntactic and phrasing practices discussed earlier. There are several occurrences, for instance, of substantival adjectives, so common to the Old English poetic tradition: \textit{in brad} (13), "on the wide (sea)"; \textit{horsce} (19), "wise ones"; \textit{[se] fyrn}, (45), "the old one"; \textit{werg} (51), "the weary one"; \textit{flahmah} (62), "deceitful evil"; \textit{bald} and \textit{ald} (63), "the bold" and "the old"; and \textit{eadig} (80),
"the blessed one." Most of these instances of substantival use are unique, although eadig appears elsewhere as a substantive.

In "The Rhyming Poem," pronoun omission is exceedingly common for both personal and possessive pronouns. A few examples of personal pronoun omission may be mentioned by way of example. The first instance occurs in 6, fraetwed wægon, where the subject of wægon is an understood "they" in reference to seccgas (5). Similarly, in 19-20, the direct object mec in horsce mec heredon continues to serve as the direct object for the two clauses hilde generedon and feondon biweredon, but not for the intervening clause fægre feredon. The same thing happens in 21, with mec given in the a-line and implied in the b-line. In a slightly different example, the noun or pronoun referent is not given at all and must be inferred from context. This is the case in 36-37, where I have supplied the pronoun "I" as the subject of the first three clauses, since the focus in the preceding lines (31-35) is upon the narrator and makes him the logical subject for the ensuing lines as well.

Possessive pronouns are also sometimes omitted in phrases where modern English would call for them, as in seccgas mec segon / symbol ne alegon (5), "men visited me, did not refuse [my] feast." A similar omission occurs in wæs min dream dryhtlic / drohtad (39), "my pleasure was lordly, [my] way of life pleasant," as well as in blæd his
blinnid/ blisse linnad / listum linnen / lustum ne tinned
(53-54), "his abundance ceases, [his] bliss departs, he
loses [his] cunning, can't continue in [his] pleasures." In
all three of these instances, the omitted pronouns can be
borrowed from some previous noun or pronoun referent, but
this is not always possible to determine confidently in
other passages. The five lines following the description of
music and celebration, for instance, are unclear as to whom
the listed attributes belong, but I have supplied "my" for
ellen eacnade / ead beacnade, . . . mod mægnade / mine
fægnade / treow telgade / tir welgade / blæd blissade (31,
33-35), in keeping with the consistently first-person focus
of 1-42. All of these examples are typical of pronoun
omission throughout Old English poetry.

In one phrasing practice, however, the poet shows sub-
stantial difference from the poetic norm, in that he seems
deliberately to avoid the disjunction of logically connected
words in a phrase. Disjunctions usually occur because of
the alliterative requirements of a line and should be,
therefore, as common in "The Rhyming Poem" as in any other
alliterative work, but instead no noticeable or confusing
disjunctions occur in the entire poem. Only two passages,
in fact, have even minor disjunction: hælep (60), the
direct object of sendep (59) and hendep (60) as well as
scynded (60), comes only after the first two verbs occur;
and the verb scyndan (84) is separated from its subject "us"
(understood in uton from 83) by a participial phrase.
Neither of these passages is difficult to translate in spite of the slight separation between the parts of the phrases. The fact that the poet avoids the disjunctive tendency in alliteration may be explained by the differences stemming from the addition of the rhyme scheme to the alliterative line. That is, since rhyme can often be achieved by pairing two or more grammatically parallel clauses or phrases, the rhyming long line is frequently made of two short, complete units of thought. The verse paragraph resulting from the extension of rhyme in several phrases thus tends to be accretional rather than parenthentic. When a sentence continues for several half-lines, disjunction is far more likely to occur than in shorter sentences with less material to intervene between subject, verb, and object.

In addition to these traditional syntactic patterns, "The Rhyming Poem" also contains other typical phrasing techniques. For one thing, the poet makes use of standard formula phrases to occupy the entire half-line or to fill out the half-line with an additional alliterative phrase. Line 7, for example, alliterates on wicg in the a-line and wennan in the b-line, and the formula phrase ofer wongum supplies a third alliteration to complete the pattern of triple alliteration chosen by the poet. Other formula phrases serving the same purpose are found in 10 (under roderum) and 14 (on laqustreame).
Another frequent formula pattern in "The Rhyming Poem" is the use of a dative noun plus a past or present participle, as in glenged hiwum (3), leoma getongum (8), tirum getonge / tala gehonge (42), and wommum biwerede (84). The phrase scyldum biscyreded (84) is also found in "Vainglory" 8 and in "Christ" 1643, and several formula phrases describing battle and music have identical or closely similar counterparts in other poems. For example, scealcas wæron scæarpe (27) has the same pattern as "Riddle" 33.27, ecge wæron scæarpe. Another passage, hlude hlynede / hleobor dynede/ sweg/ swinsade (28-29), combines elements from similar phrases in "Widsip" 10, hleobor swinsade, and "Genesis" 1081, swinsigende sweg, and the first half-line is identical to 739 in "Andreas." Clearly, then, the poet drew freely from the inherited stock of formula phrases. It is therefore surprising to note that he does not use a single one of the many rhyming formula phrases found in other Old English poems, such as wide ond side, ordum ond bordum, healdan ond wealdan, and se feond ond se freond. His reasons for avoiding them are unclear, especially since he uses such internally rhyming half-lines as flahmah flitea (62) and sin gryn sidæ (64).

The poet does, however, avail himself of another typical phrasing technique, litotes, but he consistently avoids the strong emphasis and irony which litotes often produce. All seven examples in this poem, 5b, 14b, 15b, 24b, 29b,
52a, and 54b, are straightforward negative statements amplifying a previously stated idea, but not by means of ironic contrast. The first half of 5, for instance, says that men sought to visit the narrator, and the second half-line amplifies the idea of his social status by saying that those men did not refuse to feast with him, a negative affirmation of their desire to be his guests.

Two other common phrasing methods, variation and enumeration, are also employed in "The Rhyming Poem," and again the poet departs somewhat from the typical applications of these techniques. Variation, which Klaeber calls "the very soul of the Old English poetical style" (lxv), is generally the more commonly used device of the two. It is the synonymous restatement of an idea, the renaming of a term or phrase without changing the referent. Variation effectively retards narrative progress, allowing the audience to stop and consider more than one aspect of a momentarily static subject. This method does not readily accommodate additional action or information.

A typical example from Beowulf demonstrates the technique: in 16 reference is made to Lifjrea, "Lord of life," and that idea is then varied in the following half-line, wuldres Wealdend, "Ruler of heaven." In "The Rhyming Poem" there are no identical variations renaming or describing people and things, but there are several passages in which an action or condition is redescribed in a variation phrase.
One example occurs in the opening lines, where it is said that God *pis leohht onwraht* (1), and then the same idea or action is slightly restated in 2, *ond bæt torhte geteoh / tillice onwraht*. Similarly, in 19 the narrator says that his troop *hilde generedon*, "preserved me in war," and then echoes the same idea in the following line, *feondon biwere-don*, "protected me from foes." Thus, the poet makes use of the variation technique but includes in his varied phrases more information than the typical appositional variation phrase usually supplies.

Far more frequently, however, the poet employs the technique of enumeration, in which syntactically parallel phrases add new information to an original statement without being synonymous with it. Examples of enumeration are abundant in "The Rhyming Poem," and the device is the most common single phrasing method used in the poem. In 3, for instance, the a-line and b-line have parallel phrases, *glæd wæs ic gliwum* and *glenged hiwum*, both in reference to the subject *ic*. Further enumeration occurs in the two phrases of 4, maintaining the same grammatical structure, *blissa bleoum* and *blostma hiwum*. Again, in 5-6, the subject *secgas* (men) takes the verb *segon*, and then other parallel verb phrases increase the description of the men's actions: *sym-bel ne alegon/ feorhgiefe gefegon / frætved wægon* (5-6).

The poet uses this device throughout the poem to propel the narration and amplify the description, and the effects
he achieves are strikingly different from those of the more common variation technique. First, enumeration allows the poet to make efficient use of his space: he can quickly list, recount, and describe because he does not have to rename his subject for each new main clause. The sentence in 9-10, for instance, has one subject, world, given only once for the three clauses, and the same technique is used in 11-12, 13-14, and 18-20, among others. Another effect of enumeration is that it helps to define verse paragraphs with its syntactical parallelism and coincidence of subject. An example of this effect is found in 11-12: giestas gengdon / gerscype mengdon/ lisse longdon / lustum glengdon, with giestas serving as the subject of all the verbs. A third effect of this technique is speed: enumeration is linear in thrust, carrying the audience inexorably and swiftly to the final scene, the grave, and thus underscoring that sense of life's brevity and transience—me lifes onlah (1)—which informs the poem.

In "The Rhyming Poem," enumeration is clearly more common than variation, the more usual poetic technique, and marks the individuality of the poet's style. Yet this is surprising, since the most practical function of variation is in filling out the alliterative pattern in two half-lines; after all, "The Rhyming Poem" is certainly alliterative. The reason for this stylistic deviation may be that the use of rhyme inevitably changes the possibilities
in verse formation. Inflectional endings facilitate rhyme, so that it becomes just as easy to complete a long line by adding another parallel verb clause, for example, as to use an empty variation clause. The resulting poetry, at least in this case, has more content per line, less redundancy, and more action or movement than much of Old English poetry.

For the most part, the vocabulary of "The Rhyming Poem" shows the typical practices of the Old English poetic tradition. Both early and late linguistic forms appear in the text, as Macrae-Gibson has shown (2-4), and, although they are not numerous, there are several instances of poetic archaisms. Some of the peculiarly poetic terms for "men," for example, include seccgas (5), begn (18), and hæleb (60). Other words which are restricted to poetry include lagu-streame (14), widsip (51), dryhtscype (55), and wælgar (61). Surprisingly, however, none of the typical poetic terms familiar from battle descriptions is found in "The Rhyming Poem."

The poet does follow the example of other Old English writers in his frequent creation of new compounds. Of the twenty-nine noun compounds, in fact, twenty are unique to the poem, and five of these are internally rhymed. The list of original compounds includes the following words: ræd-mægne (10), gerscype (11), sincegewæge (17), hygedryht (21), stepegongum (22), ealdorstol (23), galdorwordum (24), wilbec (26), sweglrad (29), heowsipum (43), nydbysgum (44),
brondhord (46), treowprag (57), flahmah (62), borgsorg (63), wraecfæc (64), singryna (65), searofearo (65), nydgrapum (73), and morbalisse (82). Three compounds that are not nouns are also unique: efenpynde (49), bealofus (50), and flanhred (72).

Another common vocabulary practice in this poem is the frequent use of synonyms: symbel (5) and wist (76) for "feast"; glenged (3) and fraetwed (6) for "adorned"; hleobor (28) and svegirad (29) for "music"; leopus (14), folcum (40), and leodum (41) for "people"; flæsce (72) and lichoma (75) for "body"; græf (71) and hlawum (79) for "grave"; tir (42) and hlisa (79) for "glory"; hreber (43) and breostum (46) for "breast"; sar (52) and sorgum (52) for "sorrow"; hetes (60) and feondscipe (68) for "hate"; leahtras (56), synne (81), and scylldum (84) for "sins"; roderum (10), heofona (83), and wuldra (85) for "heaven"; world (9), eorbe (23), and foldan (40) for "earth"; and meotude (84) and god (85) for "God." There are also many generally interchangeable terms referring to joy and happiness, such as glæd (3), blisse (4, 53, 82), lisse (8, 12, 82), lustum (12, 54), blæd (35, 53), dream (39, 55), and wynne (81).

One of this poet's most noticeable stylistic vocabulary devices is his contrastive use of the same term in both a positive and a negative context. Scriban, for instance, is first employed to describe the narrator on his travels (13) and then later in reference to the dragon's travels (45).
Similarly, bliss appears in a positive (4) and a negative (53) context, as does stabol (positively in 22, negatively in 58), blæd (positively in 35, negatively in 53), dream (positively in 39, negatively in 55), and treow (positively in 34, negatively in 57).

Generally, then, the vocabulary of "The Rhyming Poem" reflects the usual poetic practices of the Old English tradition. What is most curious about the vocabulary of this poem is that many of its words, instead of occurring randomly throughout the poetic corpus, are limited to a small group of seventeen poems (see the line commentary in Chapter One). This group includes all four poems of the Junius manuscript: "Genesis," "Daniel," "Christ and Satan," and "Exodus." Seven are found in the Exeter manuscript: "Christ," "Guthlac," "The Phoenix," "Riddles," "Juliana," "The Fates of Men," and "Judgment Day I." Two poems appear in the Vercelli manuscript, "Andreas" and "Elene," and the remaining four, from various manuscripts, are Beowulf, "Metrical Psalms," "Metrical Boethius," and "Solomon and Saturn." Thus, the group includes both Caedmonic and Cynewulfian poems, as well as the three latter works generally understood to have been written later in the Alfredian era, and all of the poems treat Christian themes. Critics have assigned widely differing dates to these works, under the assumption that they were not composed by the same person, much less at the same time, yet the common vocabulary shows
that the poems may have a closer connection to one another than has been noticed in the past. In a later chapter, these works will be examined for evidence of any other shared qualities.
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CHAPTER III

RHYME IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

"The Rhyming Poem" is the only Old English poem commonly identified by its form rather than its content, for no other work of the period consistently employs rhyme. Indeed, the most noticeable difference between Old English and Middle English poetry concerns structure. In Old English poetry, as noted earlier, structure is based on half-line couplets joined by alliteration, while the significant structure of Middle English verse is the iambic tetrameter or, less commonly, pentameter marked by end-rhyme. The use of rhyme in "The Rhyming Poem," then, poses two main questions. First, from where did the poet learn to use rhyme instead of the standard alliterative form? And second, how does the use of rhyme in this poem compare with examples of rhymed verse found sporadically throughout other Old English poems?

Traditionally, there has been little question that the great change from the old to the new form resulted from the Norman invasion, since the new rulers of England brought with them a new language and many popular new literary forms, including those derived from the French romance (Welsing 44). Some poetry continued to be written in the old form, even after the invasion, but for the most part French
prosody came to dominate much of Middle English literature, and, except for a brief resurgent interest in archaic alliterative poetry in the thirteenth century, the new iambic, end-rhymed verse supplanted the old form and maintained its preeminence well into the modern era.

Before the coming of the Normans, however, instances of end-rhyme appear in Old English poetry and cannot be explained away by the influence of the French romance. In order to account for the existence of end-rhyme in a poetry dominated by alliteration, scholars have looked for outside influence from the literatures of other cultures in which end-rhyme was an older feature. Several theories of influence have been proposed, but none has as yet won universal acceptance.

The problem is an old one. In 1957 William Beare summarized the viewpoint of a noted earlier scholar, H. D. Sedgwick, who admitted that "the medievalist will find the origin of rhyme in Syriac, the Romance or Teutonic scholar in Latin, the Orientalist in some European vernacular, while perhaps the majority of students of European literature find it in Arabic" (Beare 254). Without falling into this circular, perhaps endless, trap of tracing down the ultimate source of rhyme, the more restricted question of rhyme in Old English can be examined by focusing on several cultures that had closer contact with Old English than did the Arabic or Chinese mentioned by Sedgwick. The speakers of Old
English, after all, were not isolated from their neighbors. Rather, they had recurrent contact with Celts, with Christian missionaries, and with the Scandinavians, all this from before the time of the Angles' and Saxons' arrival in Britain. Further, each of these groups knew and used some form of rhyme in its literature and so may have provided the influences which produced the sporadic occurrence of rhyme in Old English.

Before the possible influences of these groups are discussed, however, some explanation of the definition and types of rhyme will be helpful. In its broad meaning, the word "rhyme" comes from the Latin rhythmus and refers to "time" or "harmony." Thus, in early English usage, rhyme meant "number or harmony of speaking." In the more restricted modern usage, rhyme in prosody refers to an identity of final stressed vowels and all subsequent sounds in two or more words, preceded by different consonant sounds. This modern definition of rhyme may more precisely be called end-rhyme, to distinguish it from other possible rhyme patterns which fit into the broader, older meaning of the word.

The two other important rhyme patterns to be discussed are front-rhyme and in-rhyme, each of which is distinguished by a harmony of sounds. Front-rhyme, the structural principle of alliteration, occurs when the initial sounds of two or more words are harmonious: winter / weder and ana / æce are two typical examples in Old English. A second pattern,
in-rhyme, occurs when medial sounds in two or more words are harmonious, as in bonne / hogode and wearban / beorht. The use of in-rhyme in modern prosody is typically referred to as assonance or consonance.

Finally, it is important to define the difference between the modern use of end-rhyme and its use in earlier poetry, because the older use of the term depended upon a harmony of sounds, not necessarily an identity, and so included rhymes which today are referred to as near- or folk-rhymes. According to this older usage, then, getech / onwrah and heap / breat are legitimate rhymes and are, in fact, found as rhyming pairs in "The Rhyming Poem" and "Andreas." To summarize, the basic differences between the modern and the earlier definitions of rhyme involve differences in the positions of harmonious sounds and in the levels of similarity required of rhyming sounds.

A study of Old English poetry shows that all three types of rhyme are present. Thus, rhyme as broadly defined is no stranger to Old English, appearing in some form in all poetry known from that period. To ask when or whence rhyme entered into Old English poetry is therefore a deceptive question, for it exists in the earliest verses, usually as front-rhyme or alliteration. To make any progress in the search for influences on Old English poetic form, the study here focuses mainly on end-rhyme, always recognizing, however, that the other patterns cannot be ignored.
As noted in Chapter Two, the history of Old English literature really begins with the coming of Christianity to Britain, yet even after that date the literary records are incomplete, for the works which the Christian monks both recorded and composed do not reflect the whole body of literature in existence before their arrival. Furthermore, those who wrote down the literature which we now possess were editors as well as copiers. They felt free not only to change aspects of existing works—substituting Christian references for heathen ones, for example—but to make choices of which works to record or to ignore (Malone 21).

As J. W. Rankin noted in his study of "Rhythm and Rime Before the Norman Conquest,"

the whole body of Anglo-Saxon literature that has come down to us does not reflect or interpret the life of the whole people: from the poetry as from the prose—including the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede's History—we learn a good deal of priest, king, eorl, and warrior, but little indeed of the simple annals of the poor and humble.

(402)

In spite of this restriction in the literature, there is some evidence in the surviving works that end-rhyme was used in pre-Christian times. The evidence comes mainly from charms and spells which, evincing a pagan origin, are presumably earlier works than the Christian poetry dominating
Old English literature. In several charms, harmony of sounds is achieved simply by repetition of a single word or word part at the end of a series of lines, as shown in the following, "Charm 4: For a Sudden Stitch":

Hlude wæran hy, la hlude / þa hy ofer þone
hlæw ridan

wæran anmode / þa hy ofer land ridan.

(3-4)

Gif þu wære on fell scoten / opbe wære on
flæsce scoten

opbe wære on blod scoten. . . .

(20-21)

Here the repetition of identical words comes at the ends of 11. 1b, 2b, 3b, and 4b. Additional harmony is achieved by the use of end-rhyme in 11. 1a and 2a, where hlude and anmode correspond. Other charms contain instances of radical end-rhyme and thus prove that the use of rhyme was not limited to the less pure forms of simple repetition or folk-rhyme. The first line of a delightful charm "Against a Wen" is a good example:

Wenne, wenne, / wenchichenne.

Two more pure end-rhymes are found in "Charm 11: A Journey Charm":

Sygegealdor ic begale / sigegyrd ic me wege,
wordsige and worcsige. / Se me dege

(6-7)
and

\[ eal \ me \ gehealdon, / me \ gewealdon. \]

(22)

The riddles are another group of poems using end-rhyme, but, unlike the charms, their composition at a pre-Christian date is far more questionable. The rhyme in the riddles is typically between half-lines of the same long-line, rather than at the ends of long lines. The following lines from various riddles demonstrate such an arrangement of rhyme:

\[ hwælmar e \ hlimmep, / hlude \ grimme \]

(RDL 2.5)

\[ obbæt \ ic \ of \ enge / up \ apringe \]

(RDL 3.12)

\[ ypa \ hrycgum. / ðær \ bǐ \ egsa \ sum \]

(RDL 3.33)

\[ forhtmod \ fergan, / fleame \ nergan \]

(RDL 15.13)

\[ mid ðy \ heardes \stan / ond \ mid ðy \ scearpest \stan \]

(RDL 28.2)

\[ scire \ sceotan, / on gesceap ðeotan \]

(RDL 38.4)

\[ wrepstupum \ wealde \ / ond \ þas \ world \ healde \]

(RDL 40.2)

\[ þæs \ selestan, / þæs \ sweartestan \]

(RDL 41.3)

Thus, the two types of poems with the earliest or most
uncertain dates, the charms and the riddles, possess many instances of end-rhyme and show that such usage was at least sporadic in Old English literature.

Among the early known and datable authors in Anglo-Saxon Britain, Gildas (sixth century) and Aldhelm (seventh century) both used end-rhyme in their Christian hymns in Latin (Beare 264; Macrae-Gibson 24). By the time of Gildas, specific influences upon literary style certainly existed, for the Irish missionaries who came to Britain would have brought with them their rhymed Irish-Latin hymns. Although no Old English poems of these writers remain, the fact that they used rhyme in Latin compositions indicates that similar patterns may have been employed in English poems that have not survived, or in lost works of their contemporaries.

By the time of Cynewulf and his imitators (eighth and ninth centuries), rhyme was occurring more frequently, although not often enough to challenge the supremacy of alliteration. The most remarkable example from Cynewulf's identifiable works may be a passage near the end of "Elene" (1236-1250), in which each long line uses both alliteration and rhyme to bind the half-lines together. In Old English poems of the eighth to eleventh centuries, rhyming lines appear sporadically in "The Battle of Maldon," "Judith," "The Phoenix," and "Judgment Day II," among others, and are interspersed throughout The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Finally, during the twelfth century, the rhyming songs of St. Godric
show that at least for some poets rhyme had replaced alliteration as a structural poetic device (Malone 120).

This brief history of rhyme in Old English poetry shows that end-rhyme was known at least as early as the first records of the literature, but there is still no obvious answer to the question of rhyme's origin. If it was an independent product of the Germanic language family, it does not seem to have exerted a strong influence upon Germanic verse at any early period. Scholars have thus searched for the impetus of Old English rhyme in other languages and have offered three main theories to account for the end-rhymed lines scattered throughout the poetry before 1066. The traditional theory asserts that rhyme was originally introduced into Old English by the writers of Latin hymns, but this theory is challenged by evidence which indicates that the Latin hymns themselves were strongly influenced by the early Irish-Christian poets. If this is the case, then an argument can be made for the Celtic literary tradition, through Welsh and Irish poetry, providing the source for Old English end-rhyme. The third main theory says that Scandinavian poetic innovations in the tenth century were responsible for the introduction of end-rhyme into Old English literature, and although the evidence for this idea is not abundant, it is intriguing.

The controversy is perhaps strongest among scholars who have examined the influence of Irish-Latin hymns, and here
the main question is whether the Latin or the Irish influence is responsible for end-rhyme in the hymns. It seems certain that Gildas and Aldhelm learned of end-rhyme from the examples brought by Irish missionaries, but it is far less certain that the Irish took their use of end-rhyme directly from continental Latin models. The earliest examples of Latin end-rhymed verse come from the hymns of Augustine and Ambrose (fourth and fifth centuries), produced within the Milanese Church (Hyde 481). In fact, Latin hymnists after the time of Ambrose more and more frequently produced rhymed, albeit inflectional, verse (Rankin 414).

Given this evidence, as well as the obvious ease with which words in Latin can have end-syllable rhyme on the basis of their inflections, such scholars as C. L. Wrenn, E. E. Wardale, and Winfred Lehmann hold to the theory of Latin origin for Old English end-rhyme, though not without reservations. Wrenn, for instance, says that rhyme "seems to have come through a type of Latin hymn widely used in Western Europe," but he adds, "it is possible that the blend of alliteration and rhyme may owe something to an early Irish practice" (149).

Lehmann also limits the influence of Latin on the hymns: "While they [the Irish poets] adopted rime from the Latin hymns, there only end syllables rimed," so that the "bisyllabic rime" of the Irish-Latin compositions must be justified as an Irish adaptation of inflectional rhyme, "the
final end-syllable rime of the Latin hymns" (190, 191). But opponents of this theory deny that end-rhyme was a part of the Latin poetic tradition and assign its importance in Latin literature to prose compositions.

The Gaelic scholar Douglas Hyde says emphatically that "Rhyme . . . could not in any possible way have evolved itself from the natural progress of the Latin language. Among the Latins neither the thing nor the name existed" (481). While acknowledging the use of end-rhyme in the hymns of the Milanese Church, Hyde accounts for Ambrose's and Augustine's hymns by pointing out that they "are found on Celtic soil and amongst Celtic nations, in songs made by poets who are either of Celtic origin themselves or had long resided amongst Celtic races" (481). William Beare also denies that Latin poetry used structural end-rhyme, noting that in Latin and Greek, "rhyme was originally a feature of rhythmical prose rather than of verse" (257). He says further that "the classical poets evidently took pains to avoid rhyme" so that "not until Latin ceased to be a living vernacular" did accentual rhyme come to be a part of its poetic form" (258, 263).

The difference between end-rhyme in Latin and Irish-Latin hymns is the difference between syllabic/inflectional and accentual/radical rhyme, for, as Lehmann admits, in the earliest Latin hymns "only final inflectional syllables needed to rime, as suscipe:tempore." Lehmann believes that
"the different linguistic form" of the Irish language "brought about a different riming practice" once the Irish were introduced to the Latin hymns: "since [in Irish] root syllables could occupy the fourth stress of the line, rime was no longer confined to inflection. Root syllables were rime, both with one another and with inflected syllables" so that the Irish poets essentially changed the structure of end-rhyme itself (57). The result was that even later Latin poetic structures reflected the influence of changes brought about by Irish-Latin authors. "By the twelfth century the rimes in the Latin poems extended to the stem syllables," Lehmann notes (62), and Beare points out that only in the later Middle Ages was the rhyming Latin "Sequence" poetry "brought to perfection" in its rhyme patterning (263).

Whether the Irish-Latin writers merely adapted a concept of end-rhyme from the example of Latin inflectional rhyme, as Lehmann suggests, or whether they combined this Latin usage with native Irish poetic practices is the next question to be resolved in the search for end-rhyme's origin. The answer depends upon the evidence of pre-Christian Irish literature, of which, unfortunately, little record remains.

Enough poetry and historical comment on poetic practices does exist, however, to reveal an intricate set of rhyme patterns in early Irish verse. One important type of end-rhymed poetry is the "aird-rinn used in Deibhidh meter,"
which was "firmly established" in the earliest Irish verse, according to Hyde. This pattern "makes the rhyming word ending the second line contain a syllable more than the rhyming word which ends the first line" (483). A second characteristic of aird-rinn is the stress pattern: if the first line has stress on the last syllable, the second line will have it on the next-to-last syllable; if the first line has stress on the next-to-last syllable, then the stress will be on the third from final syllable. The aird-rinn structure is demonstrated, in English, in the following couplet:

The slender free palms of her
Than gull on sea are whiter.

(Hyde 483)

Such a rhyme pattern was used throughout the seventh-century poem, "The Voyage of Bran," and shows that intricate rhyme was a part of Irish literary tradition by that date (Hyde 485).

A second important characteristic of Irish verse was its understanding of rhyme as harmony rather than strict identity. Remarking on the use of this rhyme system in early Irish hymns, Beare notes that since certain sounds used in the harmonious system were not known to the Latins or Greeks, it is probable that the system developed among the Irish without outside influence. He also explains that not only end-rhyme but also "assonance within the line, and
marked alliteration" are part of the Irish poetic tradition (268). The details of this native system, "apparently invented by the Celts," according to Hyde,

assumed in Ireland a most extraordinary and artificial form of its own, the essence of which was they divided the consonants into groups, and any consonant belonging to a particular group was allowed to rhyme with any other consonant belonging to the same.

(539-540)

Thus, as Lehmann has pointed out, "under such rules seilgg and -cheirdd are good rimes" (57). The Irish divided consonants into the following groups:

sibilant: S (which rhymed only with itself)
unvoiced stops: P C T
voiced stops: B G H
fricatives: F CH TH
aspirates: Bh Dh Ch Mh
simplex liquid-nasals: L R N
complex liquid-nasals: LL M NN NG RR

(Hyde 540n)

This system, known as Irish rhyme, has been found in many hymns written in Latin by early Irish poets, including works of St. Secundinus, St. Columkille, St. Cucuimne, and St. Aengus, the last of whose hymn to St. Martin demonstrates how the Irish poetic practices were used to shape Latin
verse:

Martinus Mirus more
Ore laudavit deum,
Puro Corde Cantavit
Atque amavit eum.

(Graves 101-102)

In these four lines are examples of end-rhyme, internal rhyme, and front-rhyme (both assonance and consonance), all typical Irish poetic practices, as well as the group-rhyming pairs P and C in alliteration.

Beare's suggestion that Irish rhyme was indeed the work of native Irish tradition rather than a borrowing or adaptation of Latin inflectional rhyme has recently been strengthened by the work of Harvard professor Calvert Watkins, who, in his examination of "Indo-European poetics in Early Irish" literature (212), finds strong evidence that the use of rhyme in Irish poetry was not so much a case of adaptation from Latin as it was "another implementation or reinforcement of the principle of the free initial and the fixed cadence of a verse-line" (247) evolved from the native tradition. Although he admits the possibility of Latin influence in general, he believes the evidence shows that the Irish development of rhyme was "remarkably faithful to the older native forms" (248).

Additional support for the native Irish use of rhyme is found in the similarities it shares with another Celtic
poetic tradition, that of the early Welsh. Like the Irish, the Welsh bards developed a system of harmonious consonant groups which differs only slightly from the Irish system. Also like the Irish, the Welsh used both front-rhyme and end-rhyme, as well as internal rhymes within one line. All three characteristics are found in the following lines:

Ei amod a fu nod a gadwyd,
Gwell gwnæth, ei arfæth ni giliwyd.
Rhad byddin Ododdin odechwyd.
Hydr gymell are freithell Panawy.

(Parry 24)

Rhyme also exists in the correspondence of Gwell, Rhad, and Hydr because their final consonant sounds all belong to the same group in the Welsh system. This particular stanza also demonstrates the awdl or ode, "a number of lines of a particular length, each one keeping up a single rhyme" (Parry 49). Two Welsh poets of the sixth century, Aneirin and Taliesin, used the awdl meter and thus show that early Welsh poetry displayed intricacies indicative of a long development.

A second distinct meter of the Welsh is the englyn (or Englyn Meilwr), an end-rhymed triplet with seven syllables per line (Borrow 35). A typical englyn stanza, below, shows its contrast to the awdl stanza above:

Gorddýyar adar; gwlyb naint.
Llewychyd lloer; oer ðewaint.
Although similarities between Irish and Welsh poetry could be explained in terms of cultural transmission, according to at least one scholar, Thomas Parry, the use of consonant group rhyming "does not appear to be a borrowing in Welsh" (25). And the differences between the two systems have led a more recent scholar, Patrick Ford, to conclude that both are derived not from one or the other, but from "a common origin . . . their continental Celtic predecessors" (8).

Certain general qualities of Old English poetry are similar to those of Celtic verse. Both traditions, for example, use alliteration, and both also frequently have antithesis as a structural and thematic device. Further, in the lyric poetry there is a strong elegiac strain in the sadness, nostalgia, and deep sense of loss common to the dramatic monologues and songs of the Irish, Welsh, and Old English. Finally, similarities also exist between Celtic rhyming practices and those found in various rhymed Old English verses. In "Judgment Day II," for instance, word repetition like that of the awdl and englyn patterns is used to achieve rhyme, as in Eala se bip gesælig / and ofer sælig (247), and is also common in Old English charms and spells. The most telling similarity, however, is the use of radical rhyme in Old English poetry, not merely the inflectional rhyme of the Latin hymnists.
Other examples of rhymes quite similar to Irish rhyme are found in several Old English poems. In four rhyming lines of "The Phoenix," two different Irish practices are echoed: in 17, *hætu* and *-caldu* are rhymed pairs based on the harmony of *t* and *d*; while in 18 the accentual stress pattern of the rhymed pairs *weder* and *winterscur* is quite similar to the *aird-rinn* structure of the *deibhidh* meter. Also, in "The Phoenix," several rhyming pairs are folk-rhymes rather than perfect rhymes: *onsund* / *lond*, *gewin* / *onsyn*, and *wynsume* / *cyme*—and thus may indicate an acceptance of harmony as a legitimate basis for rhyme.

Even more striking are the similarities between many rhymes in "Elene" and the consonant-group system of Irish and Welsh verse. Of the fifteen lines of rhyme near the close of the poem, fully one-third rely on consonant harmony rather than identity of sound to achieve rhyme. One pair of words rhymes consonants which are not grouped together in either Irish or Welsh practice—*wef* / *læs*—but the other pairs are found grouped together in one or both systems: *gebunden* / *bebrungen*; *onlag* / *had*; and *ontynde* / *gerymde*. The similarities between Irish rhyme patterns and the patterns in "Elene" are remarkable and lend weight to Carlton Brown's theory that Cynewulf may have adapted his poem from an Irish rather than a Latin version of the saint's life (Malone 74). Further study of the relation between Celtic verse traditions and the use of end-rhyme in Old English is
called for before the question of influence can be more fully answered.

Another question is whether the use of rhyme received new impetus from Britain's contact with Scandinavian invaders from the eighth to the tenth centuries. Similarities between "The Rhyming Poem," with a manuscript date 950-1000, and the Icelandic poem "Hofuplausn," written by Egil Skallagrimsson in the tenth century, have given rise to this theory and may indeed indicate some sort of literary interaction during Egil's sojourn at York. In the views of A. C. Bouman and Icelandic scholar Stefan Einarsson, the form of the "Hofuplausn" was inspired by Egil's exposure to rhymed poetry being produced in Britain at the time. According to Einarsson, the Hofuplausn verse form, the runhent, is "the meter of the Old English Riming Poem," written "perhaps in imitation of lost English poetry of that kind" (History 59). The composition in end-rhyme verse is quite noteworthy, for, "except one brief snatch of verse ascribed to Skallagrim, Egil's father," it marks the first appearance in Scandinavian literature of use such a rhyme pattern (Einarsson, History 39).

One problem with the theory that Egil learned rhyme from Old English poetry is that he did not compose the "Hofuplausn" until eleven years after he had been in Britain (Bouman 39). Another problem, of course, lies in the fact that apart from "The Rhyming Poem," no other complete work
with this meter and rhyme scheme exists in Old English literature, so the theory must posit an entire group of "lost English poetry." Yet to include Egil's poem with the general body of Skaldic poetry which followed it, or with the Eddic poetry which preceded it, is unreasonable, because neither type of composition has a similar structure.

The earliest form of Skaldic poetry, in fact, the drottkvætt stanza, is found "in an almost fully developed state from the moment of its first appearance in mid-ninth-century Norway" (Frank 22). In its regularized form, drottkvætt poetry has "a fixed number of syllables as well as ... an intricate pattern of inrimes and assonances" (Einarsson, History 5), with a set variation of rhyme patterns for particular lines, for example, odd lines with assonance and even lines with inrime (Einarsson, History 50). Variations in the verse form include the addition of end-rhyme, but not to the extent that it is used in the "Hofuplausn." The rhymes in the drottkvætt differ from Latin end-syllable rhyme, according to Lehmann, who notes that "they occur in syllables with chief or secondary accent, not in final syllables" (44).

Such a practice parallels that of Irish poetry which also used accent as the basis for certain rhyme patterns, but Lehmann says that the evidence in favor of an Irish borrowing having been the basis for Skaldic verse form is "indecisive" (163). Yet the presence of such an intricate
internal rhyme in Skaldic poetry inevitably suggests a possibility of influence, for "internal rimes are widely used elsewhere only in poetry written by the Irish" (Lehmann 190). Einarsson also recognizes the similarities, but he does, however, find problems with the theory of Irish influence, mainly in dating the inception of Skaldic poetry and in the differences between the two poetic traditions (History 5).

The question does not seem likely to be resolved in the near future, although the study of Irish influence on other Germanic literatures may yet turn up new evidence. Several of Lehmann's findings in tracing the development of rhyme in Old High German, for instance, point to the conscious use of certain Irish poetic practices in the work of the earliest Old High German rhyming poet, Otfrid (ninth century). For one thing, Otfrid based his rhymed poem "Krist" on the pattern "of the Ambrosian hymn . . . as developed by the ninth century" (Lehmann 51), which, as has been suggested earlier, was itself the product of Irish shaping. Another clue to possible Irish influence on Otfrid is his particular use of rhyme, which follows the Irish practice of rhyming stem-syllables instead of end-syllables, and which also forms rhymes on the basis of consonant-group harmony rather than consonantual or vowel equivalence (Lehmann 57).

From this review of evidence supporting the three main theories of the origin of rhyme, it appears that there is a
greater basis for assuming a Celtic influence on Old English poetry than for either a direct Latin or Scandinavian influence. And there are some scholars who reject the idea of any outside influence, believing instead that rhyme was well-known and widely used in the vernacular Old English poetry—in songs and dances and pagan chants that simply were not recorded by the churchmen who were responsible for preserving the literature which survives from that time.

Derek Pearsall, for one, accounts for the scarcity of rhyme in surviving compositions by reasoning that "it was the normal concern of Anglo-Saxon poets to avoid rhyme, perhaps because they considered it popular, perhaps because they considered it rhythmically subversive," so that the gradual increase in rhyme by the tenth century was a result of a "relaxation of the rules of the traditional ars poetica" (72). This thinking closely parallels that of Rankin, who also believes that rhyming songs and chants in Old English did not have the prestige of alliterative "literary" compositions and thus would not have been considered worthy of recording for present use or for posterity (407).

These views may be reasonable, but they do not have the positive support which makes the Irish-influence theory more convincing. The evidence shows that of all the groups considered in the various theories, the Irish were the ones to develop most the possibilities of rhyme, expanding its use in the Christian-Latin poetry from the sixth to the
ninth centuries (Einarsson, "Origin" 56). And, given the intermixture of Anglian and Celtic populations in Britain and the strong Celtic formative influence on the monastic schools, one must agree with Carney's assumption that Irish literary material was an important part of the Old English Christian poet's "total literary experience" (84).

In "The Rhyming Poem," as in the Irish poetic tradition, rhyme is radical, occurring on stem-syllables, and not merely inflectional. Of the poem's eighty-six complete lines, sixty-eight have perfect end-rhyme, and if slight variations in final vowel sounds are allowed in fourteen other lines, the number increases to eighty-two. Three remaining lines (36, 58, 64) rely on assonance and parallel inflections to create harmony between paired final stress-syllables in the half-lines. Thus, the poet rhymes gearwade and hwearfade in 36, mispah and genag in 58, and wribad and smiteb in 64. It is worth noting that the final consonants of the stressed syllables in 36, w and f, are in the same rhyme group according to the Welsh poetic system, while in the other two lines the paired consonants are velars and alveolar-dentals (h and g, b and t). Overall, then, the purity of rhyme in "The Rhyming Poem" is high and consistent, especially in comparison to other rhymed passages in Old English poetry.

The minimal rhyme unit in "The Rhyming Poem" is the half-line couplet. In thirty-six lines, in fact, rhyme
extends only to a single a-line/b-line pair. Quite often, however, a single rhyme will occur in four consecutive half-lines, creating long-line couplets, as in 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12, or even in eight half-lines or long-line quatrains, as in 13-16. The poet also experiments with rhyme in other ways. In a six-line passage, 61-66, for instance, he uses two rhymes in each half-line couplet, as in 62: flahmah flited / flan mon hwited. Also, the poet in six different places rhymes a word with itself: onwrah in 1b and 2b; hiwum in 3b and 4b; geblowen in 46a and 47b; linnae (-eائد) in 53b and 54a; genag in 57b and 58b; and graef in 71a and 71b.

A look at rhyme in other Old English poetry makes for an interesting comparison. A most widespread use of rhyme occurs in the formula phrases found in many poems. In the formula phrase, rhyme occurs within a single half-line and therefore does not function as a method of binding half-lines together. The following examples from just four poems give an idea of both the repetition and variation in the use of formula phrases: from "Andreas," healdend ond wealdend (225b), ordum ond bordum (1205b), wide ond side (1637b); from "Elene," wordum ond bordum (24b), bordum ond ordum (235a), side ond wide (277b), sume hyder sume byder (548b), frodra ond godra (637a), hu se feond ond se freond (953a), berad bord ond ord (1186a); from "Exodus," widdra and siddra (428b); and from "Genesis," wide and side (10b), forlæran
and forlædan (692a), ferede and nerede (1397a), steapes and geapes (2558b). With so many rhyming formula phrases apparently available to the poet, it is surprising that he avoids them entirely in "The Rhyming Poem," although some non-rhyming formula phrases do appear in it. A few of the same morphemes, however, are echoed in paired words in the poem, as in the pairing of generedon and feredon in 19b-20a and that of frodade and godade in 32a-32b.

As noted above, other early examples of rhyme are found in the metrical charms, in which two kinds of rhyme occur most often: inflectional rhyme and same-word rhyme. Both are illustrated in "Charm 1: For Unfruitful Land":

æcera wexendra / and wridendra
eacniendra / and elniendra
sceafta hehra / scirra wæstma
and þæra bradan / berewæstma
and þæra hwitan / hwætewæstma
and ealra / eorþan wæstma

(53-58)

Such reliance on inflection and word repetition is the usual basis of rhyme in the charms, but radical rhyme does occasionally occur. "Charm 11: A Journey Charm," has eal me gehealdon / me gewealdon (22), and "Charm 12: Against a Wen," begins with Wenne, wenne / wenchichenne. The first example rhymes gehealdon and gewealdon, which brings to mind the formula phrase consisting of the two words and may
represent the use of that formula in an expanded statement; indeed, several rhymed lines in other poems also seem to emerge from common formula phrases, in addition to those in "The Rhyming Poem" mentioned above. The poem also, like the charms, uses same-word rhyme, although certainly not with anything approaching the same frequency. But "The Rhyming Poem" most differs from the charms in that it never relies solely upon inflection to fulfill the rhyme scheme. In the three lines lacking radical rhyme (36, 58, 64), inflectional rhyme combines with assonance and achieves such harmony that the differences in the stressed consonants are hardly felt to interfere with the rhyme.

The remaining few rhymed half-line couplets scattered through Old English poems show some similarities to lines in "The Rhyming Poem." The first line in the examples below shows the meter and rhyme pattern of "The Rhyming Poem," with alliteration of the first three stresses and radical rhyme ending each half-line; this pattern can be found repeatedly in the poetry, as in the following examples:

fægre feredon / feondon biweredon
(20)

fylle gefægon / fægere gepægon
(BWF 1014)

geaglas toginene / goman toslitene
(SBI 109)

scildburh scæron / sceotend wæron
(JUD 304)
Again, in these single lines, as in several from the charms, there is a sense of expansion from rhymed formula-phrases, as well as a strong, though brief, rhythmic beat.

Only a few Old English poems go beyond the occasional and isolated rhymed line to develop passages with sustained rhyme. The Caedmonic "Genesis" and "Exodus" have short rhyming passages, both of which differ significantly from the technique of "The Rhyming Poem." In "Genesis" 1396-98, the three long lines rhyme god, stod, and -flod on the b-lines, but without rhyme connecting the a-lines to each other or to the b-lines. This same pattern also appears in 1404-05, with god and flod rhyming on the b-lines. In "Exodus" 394a-395a, the three half-lines rhyme on their final syllables, -ost, without the support of preceding assonance:

heahst and haligost / hælebum gefrægost
mæst and mærost, / . . .

The aphoristic poem "Maxims I" also uses rhyme, in two consecutive half-line couplets with similar alliteration and rhyme pattern. Here, the long lines do not rhyme with each other and in fact bear a greater resemblance to the rhymed lines expanded from formula phrases than to the rhymed long-line couplets of "The Rhyming Poem." Several Cynewulfian works--"The Phoenix," "Christ," "Andreas," and "Elene"--also possess rhymed passages, some of which have qualities akin to those of "The Rhyming Poem."
In "The Phoenix" and "Christ," however, the effect of rhyme is strongly colored by the chant-like diction of the two passages, evocative of the incantatory charms. Still, in both poems the rhymed lines have the same alliterative and rhyme pattern as "The Rhyming Poem":

ne forstes fnæst / ne fyres blæst,
ne hægles hryre / ne hrimes dryre. . . .

(PHX 15-16)

swa hella hienþu / swa heofones mæþu,
swa þæt leohæt leocht / swa ða laþan niht,
swa þrymmed þræce / swa þystra wræce,
swa mid dryhten dream / swa mid deoflum hream,
swa wite mid wrapaþum / swa wuldor mid arum,
swa lif swa deap, / swa him leofre bþþ. . . .

(CHR 591-96)

In both examples, the first three stresses alliterate, and the half-lines are bound by end-rhyme. The "Christ" poet varies his use of rhyme in the same manner as the author of "The Rhyming Poem," with differences in stress-syllable vowels and with a combination of assonance and inflection to overcome differences in stress-syllable consonants.

The four-line rhymed passage in "Andreas" (867-870) has none of the charm-like qualities of the passages in "The Phoenix" and "Christ," but it does use the same alliterative scheme and rhyme pattern, as well as the same types of rhyme variation:
Of the Cynewulfian works, however, the most similar sustained rhyming passage is the beginning of Cynewulf's signatory epilogue to "Elene" (1236-50). Of these fifteen lines, six have perfect radical rhyme, and four more deviate from this with only slight vowel differences. One line rhymes merely upon the final unstressed \textit{e}, and the remaining four achieve harmony with the assonance-inflection combination of sounds:

\begin{verbatim}
\textit{fus ic frod ond fus / burh \textit{bæt fæcne hus wordcraeftum wæf / ond wundrum læs, pragum preodude / ond geðanc reodode nhteas nearwe. / Nysse ic gearwe be fære rode riht / ær me rumran geþaht wisdom onwreah. / Ic wæs weorcum fah, synnum asæled, / sorgum gewæled, bitrum gebunden, / bisgum bebrungen, ær me laire onlag / burh leohrne had gamelum to geoce, / gife unscynde mægencyning amæt / ond on gemynd bgeat, torht ontynde, / tidum gerynde, bancofan onband, / breostlocan onwand, leopucraeft onleac. / ßæs ic lustum breac. . . .}
\end{verbatim}
To summarize, then, in numerous passages ornamental rhyme does occur in Old English poetry: in half-line formula phrases, in inflectional and same-word rhymes, and in the odd half-line couplet. In "The Rhyming Poem," rhyme is more regular than in the other poetry, usually occurring on a radical rather than on an inflectional syllable, as it does in typical Irish rhyme, although occasionally, as elsewhere in Old English poetry, a word rhymes with itself.

But "The Rhyming Poem," in spite of some similarities, still differs from all other rhymed verses in Old English poetry. For one thing, in the few lines using inflectional rhyme, additional support is provided by assonance. More importantly, "The Rhyming Poem" alone has long-line couplets and quatrains with sustained rhythm and with a single rhyme extended to four or eight half-lines. In these passages, rhyme is no longer merely ornamental, for it binds together several consecutive half-lines and is therefore the structural support for the long-line couplets and quatrains which are unique to the poem.
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CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY ENGLISH CHURCH

"The Rhyming Poem" is a Christian work, the product of a Christian, undoubtedly monastic, environment and is thus part of the larger body of Old English Christian poetry produced for specifically religious purposes. In order to better understand the meaning and purpose of "The Rhyming Poem," as well as its kinship to other Old English Christian poetry, it is necessary to consider the historical context in which it was produced. Therefore, the following brief review of the genesis and growth of Christianity in England focuses upon the hybrid nature of the early Church and upon its struggle against hostile forces, for as will be seen in the final chapters of this study, these elements were important influences on the production of Christian poetry in the seventh and eighth centuries.

Legend says that Joseph of Arimathea brought Christianity to Britain in 60 A.D., but historical findings are less precise. Before the Roman Empire officially embraced Christianity in the reign of Constantine, the religion had been introduced into Britain, according to Tertullian and Origen, but it had not made a great impact on the populace (Godfrey 11). Christianity was in fact only one of several imported religious cults practiced in the Empire (Todd 226)
and apparently did not attract a large following in Britain during its first three centuries.

After Constantine, however, the Church did grow in strength, with adherents among the landowners and the intellectual community, but there is no evidence to show that Christianity was generally accepted by the populace, in spite of its official patronage by Rome. The Church's organization in Britain followed the episcopate system with its bases in the cities, for we know of bishoprics in York, London, and Lincoln by 314 (Franzen 127), yet Christianity seems to have had little success among the rural population.

When the Empire lost its hold upon Britain, the Church also lost its official support, and in the fifth century its character was essentially changed by subsequent events. The Romano-British Church, increasingly cut off from Roman influence by the growing Anglo-Saxon presence, apparently died down (Godfrey 65), and Christianity was reintroduced to the island by Celtic, mainly Irish, missionaries, at first primarily in Cornwall and Wales (Godfrey 43). In Ireland, which itself had probably received Christianity from Britain in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Franzen 122), Christianity quickly took hold, and the Church soon developed away from its original episcopate organization to a more autonomous monastic system.

The Irish monasteries flourished, with important educational centers attracting students from other countries,
especially from Britain (Chadwick 332), and preserved much of the great wealth of classical learning: the liberal arts, Latin, mathematics, astronomy, and possibly Greek (Godfrey 46). The Irish and Irish-trained missionaries such as Illtud and David who came to Britain and founded monasteries in the sixth century brought with them not only their interest in classical education but also a strong attachment to their pagan heritage. A traditionally conservative people, the Irish Christians tried to "reconcile their past and its heroes" (Wormald 49) with the new religion and thus kept alive their secular literature (Wilson 31) and the use of their native language (Huppe 68), practices which had an important influence on Old English literature, as will be seen later.

By the later sixth century, the Celtic missionary movement turned also toward Scotland, with Columba's conversion of the northern Picts, and soon thereafter reached into the Anglo-Saxon areas of Britain from the monastic center at Iona, founded in 563 (Blair 128). According to Bede (Giles 34), since the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, the Christianized Britons had made no effort to convert their pagan enemies, who continued to practice the old religion brought with them from the Continent. But with the arrival of Augustine in Kent in 597 and the conversions of Edwin (627) and Oswald (before 633), the Anglo-Saxons became the target of Christian missionary activity. So successful was this
two-fold effort that in less than ninety years every English kingdom had received the new religion.

Although Augustine's Roman-backed mission was the first on English soil, its success was only partial. The Celtic effort out of Northumbria, with its first successes a few decades later, proved to have the greatest influence in the next two centuries. In Kent, to be sure, under Augustine the Roman customs and organization were instituted after the conversion of Ethelbert. He was succeeded by his son Eadbald, who eventually abandoned his heathen religion and became a Christian in 616. The next king, Eorconbert, went so far as to order the demolition of idols in the pagan temples, sometime around 630 (Giles 121). The first episcopal seat, originally intended for London, was established instead in the more secure Canterbury, and a second see was situated in York.

In Northumbria, the first recorded missionary success was the conversion of Edwin in 627 by Paulinus, who had been sent from Canterbury. Heathenism, however, remained strong after Edwin's death in 632. The real growth of Christianity in the area did not begin until the rule of Oswald in 633, who while in exile had received the faith from the Irish Christians in Iona. Soon after he came to power, the monks of Iona were invited to establish a new monastic center on Lindisfarne, which was begun by Aidan in 634-35 (Blair 125). From this base the efforts of the monks reached out to
effect wide missionary contact throughout northern England and the Midlands.

In the south, Essex had soon followed the lead of Kent in embracing Christianity, with Mellitus working from 604 to promote the Roman form of the faith. In 610 there was a resurgence of heathenism, but by 650 Sigbert had been converted by Celtic Christian missionaries from Northumbria (Blair 125). Under the influence of Kent, the East Anglian ruler Raedwald was converted in 610, but the conversion was so superficial that Raedwald continued to sacrifice to pagan idols. Not surprisingly, heathenism then reasserted itself in 630, although only briefly, for by 631 Christianity was restored, in great part through the efforts of the Gallican missionary Felix, and the Irishman Fursa was teaching in the realm.

Meanwhile, Paulinus was carrying on his diligent missionary activities in Mercia around 630, but Mercian royalty for the most part resisted the new religion until the conversion of Peada in 653 (Savage 44). Shortly thereafter, Duima, an Irishman, was named the first bishop in Mercia, and the Church there developed along characteristically Celtic lines (Chadwick 337). In Wessex, Christianity had its first successes with the conversion of Cynegils by Birinus in 635, but paganism remained strong in the area (Giles 119). After the death of Cynegils, in fact, Wessex was not again Christian until approximately 650, and even
later than this West Saxon kings had to be persuaded to accept Christianity, as was Ine in 688 and Caedwalla in 689. Although Birinus had founded the Church upon Roman principles, it developed under the influence of the Irish Church, from the Irish monastery at Malmesbury and from its Irish-trained bishops (Godfrey 113). As for Sussex, it was here that heathenism was most resistant to the missionary effort. A small monastic settlement on the coast of Sussex was virtually ignored in the earlier part of the century (Godfrey 138), and it was left to Wilfrid to bring Christianity to the South Saxons in the 680's, completing the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (Giles 193).

In these seven realms, then, although the southern mission began early and had the full support of Rome, the Celtic Church exerted the widest influence. Even in Kent and East Anglia, nearest to the base of Roman authority and missionary work, Irish Christians made their presence felt, especially in the monastic school established at Canterbury (Blair 140). And in the other regions of England the practices and the philosophy of the Celtic Church so greatly affected the religious life of the day that in Northumbria, Wessex, Essex, and Mercia it was the dominant shaping force.

The differences between the Celtic and the Roman forms of the Church were actually few, and most of the beliefs and customs were essentially the same, with a common orthodoxy and loyalty to the Pope (Finberg 39). In the order of
canonical offices and in its version of the liturgy and mass, the Celtic Church had developed along slightly different lines from the Roman tradition, but not so much as to cause serious difficulties in compatibility. The controversial problems lay with two other differences, the method for calculating the correct date for Easter and the institution of the monastery as the basic Church unit, both of which gave rise to major conflicts within the Church. In their greater focus on prayer and fasting, in the practice of both private and public confession, and in the use of a rather harsh code of penances for transgressions, the Celtic Christians also differed from their Roman brethren, as they did in their strong veneration of the Cross, to which they assigned "quasi-miraculous powers" (Godfrey 53-56).

Instead of working together to resolve their differences, the Celtic and Roman factions remained sharply divided, so much so that finally the Northumbrian king Oswy called for a meeting at Whitby in 663 or 664 to have the matters debated and settled (Finberg 47). In the outcome, the Roman calculation of the correct date for Easter was insisted upon, as were other Roman practices, but the Celtic customs were so firmly entrenched that for the main part they were continued (Godfrey 120). Only in the north did the Synod's decisions have much effect, so that throughout England the Church was divided and disorganized (Chadwick 331). Even in his own day, Bede says that Christians in the
Celtic Church generally ignored the English Christians’ Roman ways (Godfrey 57) and still opposed the Roman dating of Easter (Giles 293). And, although the English Church had an episcopal organization, it was the Celtic monastic system that was most widely adopted (Godfrey 153), sometimes resulting in problems of conflicting ecclesiastical authority and obedience. Clearly, then, the Church was less than unified in its leadership and organization, frequently showing the strains of its hybrid nature.

The Church's missionary efforts suffered less from the Celtic-Roman divisions and were superficially successful in converting the English in a fairly short time. The primary approach to the conversion of a region was to first win over the ruler, who would then frequently bring his household into the Church and thereby set an example for his people. As Godfrey has pointed out, the success of the Church in Anglo-Saxon England was "closely bound up with the desires and convictions of the kings," and many fruitful missionary efforts began with the "commendation of Christ by one king to another" (110). This method had been used successfully in the conversion of the Continental barbarians, who often, as in the case of the Franks, became Christians merely "because of the example of the king and the pageantry of the Christian divine service" (Franzen 121-122).

In their efforts to persuade the English kings to embrace the new religion, the missionaries often stressed
the brevity of the pleasures and powers of earthly life, even those of the greatest rulers, as did Columbanus in his Verses to Hunaldus: "Do not let an empty, perishable pleasure deceive you; see how brief is the power of kings and princes. The deceitful glory of mortal life passes quickly" (Allen 135). And the Irish missionaries brought with them the custom of clericatus, the retirement of a king from the political to the religious life (Chadwick 332), which proved attractive to many rulers. Caedwalla, for example, upon his conversion gave up the kingship for a pilgrimage to Rome, as did the West Saxon king Ine, while others such as Coenred of Mercia, Offa of the East Saxons (Godfrey 254-55), and Ceolwulf and Eadbert, both of Northumbria (Giles 300), embraced the monastic life. In all, the number of Anglo-Saxon royalty to follow the clericatus custom reached thirty-three (Franzen 129).

Not all of the royal conversions, however, were permanent, if the examples of Raedwald and Ethelred are to be trusted. The "nominally Christian" king (Finberg 45) Ethelred nonetheless, according to Bede, fearlessly plundered the Christian churches and monasteries while fighting in Kent, although he later entered monastic life (Giles 332). The problem of weak faith among the newly converted was even greater in the general population than among the kings, who at least had received personal religious instruction. The initial conversion of the populace was instead "tribal
rather than individual," so that most new converts came into the Church only nominally, with "a superficial appreciation of the doctrinal and moral content of the new religion" (McBrien 616). This same situation had also existed among the Continental Germans, for whom, according to Franzen, "mass baptisms did not effect an inner change," and who did not receive the strengthening support of "pre- and post-baptismal care" (110). Indeed, Bede remarks upon the neglect of converts even in his time and the lack of preaching and baptism resulting from a poorly trained clergy (Godfrey 164).

By Bede's time, the initial zeal of the missionary movement had clearly waned, and even later, at the synod of Cloveshoe in 747, English bishops were being urged back into the field for yearly tours of the dioceses to preach the gospel and to eradicate persistent heathen practices (Godfrey 262). Although the entire country had experienced the conversion process, then, Christianity's roots were wide without being deep throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. During this time, instead of being able to build upon a solid foundation, the Church had to prolong its conversion efforts and often had to reclaim lost spiritual territory.

The greatest single obstacle to Christianity's growth in England may well have been the strength with which the old paganism was rooted in Anglo-Saxon society. Historical
records reveal few details about the actual practices of the traditional religion, and little more than the names of some of its gods and goddesses is certain. Yet there is no doubt that the old religion was an important part of Anglo-Saxon life, for Church documents show how often heathenism resisted and overcame the efforts of Christian missionary work.

Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, the persistence of heathen practices constantly plagued the early Church. The records tell, for example, of the reversion of the East Saxons to heathenism in 616 (Giles 78) and of strong heathen reactions to Christianity in Kent and Essex c. 616-620 (Godfrey 93). Similarly, after the initial conversion of Northumbria under Edwin, his successors, Osric in Deira and Eanfrid in Bernicia, reverted to the old religion (Giles 109), so that later, under Oswald, Christianity had to be introduced anew. In times of stress, as in the widespread plague of 665-70, the people frequently returned to their pagan practices. It was during this time, in fact, that the East Saxons abandoned the Church and restored their old temples in an attempt to gain succor from the ancestral gods (Godfrey 127).

In Theodore's *Penitentiale*, dating from the late seventh or early eighth century, penances are provided for a variety of pagan practices, showing, as Godfrey says, "that heathenism was still very much a power in the land" (142). And that power held well into the eighth century, as the
Church continued to battle against it. The Synod of Cloveshoe (747) directed English bishops to work at "suppressing heathen practices" (Godfrey 262), but paganism remained a problem; as late as 787, a mission from Rome remarked upon the current heathen practices still found among the English (Blair 162). Christianity had not yet taken a strong enough hold on the beliefs and the daily life of the people to offer them the assurance of its efficacy, and they were slow to abandon the security of tradition.

In this period, the Church struggled not only with problems of internal dissention and the battle against paganism, but also with the threat of heresy. In its first centuries, the Church evolved and refined its basic teachings on the nature of God, the nature of Christ, human nature, and the role of the Church in the relation of God and man. Differences of opinions led to factions within the Church leadership and, often, to charges of heresy by one faction against another. The entire Christian world was shaken again and again by these divisive controversies.

In the second and third centuries, heretical doctrines included Gnosticism, Adoptionism, Manichaeism, Montanism, Docetism, and Donatism (McBrien 611). Other heresies arose in the fourth and fifth centuries: Arianism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Origenism, Monophysitism, and, from a Celtic Christian, Pelagianism (McBrien 614-15). In spite of official pronouncements on these issues, several heresies
continued to cause trouble for the Church in the next three
centuries. Nestorianism, for instance, was suppressed in
the early fifth century, only to return later in 553
(McBrien 442). Monothelism was hotly debated through much
of the seventh century, and the controversy over the worship
of images, iconolatry, began around the same time and
continued for at least two more centuries. Origenism also
recurred, late in the sixth century, and Pelagianism once
again arose in the seventh.

Although little is known about the presence of many of
these heresies in the early English Church, Bede tells of
two great heretical controversies that divided Christians in
Britain. He says that in the fourth century the Arian
heresy, which denied supreme divinity to Jesus, "infected"
the population, who were "ever fond of something new, and
never holding firm to anything," and that this infection so
weakened the people's faith that "all the venom of every
heresy immediately rushed into the island" (Giles 16).

Bede places the arrival of a second, more tenacious,
heretical belief, Pelagianism, in approximately 425 and says
that it also "sadly corrupted the faith of the Britons"
(Giles 26). Pelagius was a British or Irish monk who, while
visiting Rome, had become outraged at the moral laxity pre-
valent among a great many Christians and tolerated by the
Church authorities (Godfrey 26). In response, he taught
that man should not rely upon the grace of God to obtain
salvation but should rather exercise his God-given free will and choose to work for his redemption. A passage from a letter Pelagius wrote to Augustine on the topic explains his view of human nature:

Everything good and everything evil, in respect of which we are either worthy of praise or of blame, is done by us, not born with us. We are not born in our full development, but with a capacity for good and evil; we are begotten as well without virtue as without vice, and before the activity of our own personal will there is nothing in man but what God has stored in him.

(Bettenson 65)

Pelagius's teachings involved him in a lengthy doctrinal debate with Augustine, also formulating his own ideas about divine grace, original sin, and predestination. Divine grace, according to Augustine, was necessary for the salvation of man, was not able to be earned, and was irresistible. His theory of predestination taught that only a few men would be chosen by God for redemption, in spite of their good or evil deeds, a teaching which denied an effective free will in man (Duckett 141). And he explained that the need for man's redemption results from the hereditary sinful condition, stemming from the fall of Adam, into which each person is born and which includes the punishments of "physical infirmity and death of the body" (Duckett 137).
Pelagius saw that such a belief could, and often apparently did, relieve man from the responsibility for his own salvation and thus led to moral weakness. He preached against the necessity of divine grace and maintained the freedom of the human will, thereby incurring the Church's wrath. The Sixteenth Council of Carthage condemned Pelagius and his teachings in 418, the same year in which Augustine published his work *On Original Sin* (McBrien 167). The subsequent persecution of the Pelagians sent many fleeing to Britain, where, as Bede recounts, the heresy took hold and periodically recurred to disrupt the Christian community.

The controversy continued intermittently from the fifth to the eighth century. From the evidence of Bede's account of a letter from Pope Honorius to the leaders of the Irish Church, it is clear that Pelagianism was a current problem in 634 and still had the strength to evoke a passionate pronouncement from the Church's highest authority:

> And we have also understood that the poison of the Pelagian heresy again springs up among you; we, therefore, exhort you, that you put away from your thoughts all such venomous and superstitious wickedness. For you cannot be ignorant how that execrable heresy has been condemned; for it has not only been abolished these two hundred years, but it is also daily anathematized for ever by
us; and we exhort you, now that the weapons of their controversy have been burnt, not to rake up the ashes.

(Giles 105)

And Bede himself, writing in the first third of the eighth century, is careful to show that his own beliefs concur with the Augustinian doctrine rather than with the condemned teachings of Pelagianism, concluding his refutation of the heresy by saying,

for all other men [than Jesus], being born in original sin, are known to bear the mark of Adam's prevarication, even whilst they are without actual sin, according to the saying of the prophet, 'For behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.'

(Giles 106)

The fact that Bede dwelt in such detail upon the Pelagian controversy is an indication that in the English Church the heresy was a contemporary concern. In fact, as will be seen in the following chapters, several Old English poems make anti-Pelagian statements in defense of the orthodox Augustinian position.

From this overview of the beginnings and growth of Christianity in Britain, we can see that the English Church experienced more formative influence from Celtic Christianity than from the Roman tradition. It is also clear that
the Christian movement in England faced two formidable obstacles, the persistence of paganism among the Anglo-Saxon population and the recurrence of the Pelagian heresy. These factors played an important role in the production of Christian literature that accompanied the missionary and monastic efforts of the early Church in England. Before turning in the next chapters to a study of specific ways in which these influences are revealed in "The Rhyming Poem" and other poems, however, it is important to review the purposes for which Christian poetry was produced.

Very early in the history of the Church, Romano-Christian authors had begun to write hymns, verse homilies, and hagiographic accounts of the saints and Church Fathers, so that a tradition of Christian literature grew with the Church. Augustine had advised preachers to present their teachings in a form which would be both "useful" and "enjoyable" to the pagan peoples (Wilson 22). Gregory's advice concurred, and he further proposed that missionaries should adapt as much of the local traditional materials and customs--even the pagan temples--to Christian purposes. This approach would not alienate the intended converts from all that was familiar to them, so that they should be more amenable to the new teachings, as Gregory explained in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*:

> For if one does not begrudge the people these external enjoyments, it is easier for them to find
the inner joy as well. It is, after all, not possible to take away everything at the same time from still unopened hearts.

(Franzen 128)

The Irish Church similarly used written religious and educational materials (Szarmach 3) and transmitted its literature and literary practices to England through its missionary and monastic activities. As has been noted, Irish Christians highly valued their pagan past and their secular literature, some of which was included in the libraries of the monasteries they established. Their example of using the vernacular as well as Latin was followed in the English monasteries and is thus greatly responsible for the production of literature in the Old English language (Huppe 68).

The monastic schools, libraries, and scriptoria provided important materials for the conversion and consolidation efforts of the missionary teachers. For one thing, the schools provided the education necessary to train the clergy and thereby ensure a supply of new teachers for work in the field. The libraries were also important to the educational process, supplying material for the monks working with potential and new converts, most of whom were illiterate and had no other access to religious instruction. Without providing basic biblical history and Church traditions, the missionaries could not hope to nurture the newly planted seeds of faith in those who had been initially
converted. And, finally, the scriptoria supplied essential and valuable copies of rare manuscripts for the establishment of new churches and monasteries. The Celtic Church was the main influence behind many, if not most, of the monastic foundations in England, and the surviving works from their scriptoria attest to how much the Celtic attitudes and themes affected the monastic literary products.

It is not surprising, then, to observe how many traits in addition to the use of the vernacular are common to Celtic and Old English literatures. For instance, they both contain several of the same literary types, such as heroic narrative, biblical history, riddles, charms, hymns, homilies, lyrics, and elegies (Carney 112-13). Common poetic techniques include variation, apposition, repetition, alliteration, and rhyme, although, as Travis has noted, Celtic poetry rhymes "systematically" while Germanic poetry does so "sporadically" (Travis 90). Both literatures also share an interest in several common themes, noticeable in those works which focus upon the transience of earthly life, power, and glory, and upon the miseries and rewards of exile (Murphy xvi). The two societies, in fact, valued many of the same qualities, such as bravery, loyalty, and heroism (Chadwick 327), and these are reflected in their poetry. There is much reason, then, to agree with Carney "that there is a sub-stratum of Irish thought in Anglo-Saxon literature" (113).
The surviving Old English poetic manuscripts contain, in addition to a few secular pieces, riddles, and charms, a large and varied body of Christian works. While the following description makes no effort to determine literary genres of the poems, the types of religious material within them can be identified. Biblical histories, some of which are assigned to the early Caedmonian tradition, include such works as "Genesis," "Judith," and "Christ and Satan." Another category comprises accounts of saints' lives, typified by "Andreas," "Elene," and "Guthlac." Homilies and didactic works make up a third group, with such diverse poems as "Homiletic Fragment I" and "Judgment Day I" and "II," as well as allegorical pieces such as "The Phoenix." And a final group of lyrics contains overtly Christian meditations such as "Vainglory" and "Resignation" as well as those elegies with religious undertones, including "The Wanderer" and "The Seafarer." Altogether, these works define the Old English poetic tradition which produced "The Rhyming Poem" and, if it is to be more thoroughly comprehended than it has heretofore, into which it must be integrated.

In conclusion, it has been seen that the Roman Church in its early years developed a tradition of religious literature for use in the conversion of the pagans. The Celtic Church also produced religious literature, in both Latin and the vernacular and, through its efforts in monastic schools and libraries, greatly influenced literary production in
England. In fact, the Old English poetry from this period shares many traits with Irish literature, in its genres, themes, and techniques. The surviving Old English poetry, while containing some secular material, is predominantly Christian, and the specific purposes served by these religious pieces will be discussed in the final chapters.
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER V

THE CHRISTIAN CONTENT OF "THE RHYMING POEM"

In order to understand the place of "The Rhyming Poem" in the Old English Christian poetic canon, its essentially Christian qualities must be recognized. Yet the lack of a critical consensus on the poem shows that neither its content nor its purpose has been satisfactorily described. Scholars disagree about the identity of the speaker, the reasons for the reversal of fortune that he suffers, and the use of pagan and Christian elements in the poem, all of which must be resolved before a comprehensive reading can be made.

Attempts to identify the first-person narrator of lines 1-79 have produced a variety of possible answers. One of the earliest editors, W. D. Conybeare, identifies the speaker "as a spirit tormented by the fires of purgatory" (xvii), and George Anderson agrees that the speaker is a "rich man . . . in Purgatory or Hell itself" (175). Another early editor, Edwin Guest, calls the speaker a "minstrel-king" (389), while Neil Isaacs identifies him as a scop (56-70). Ruth Lehmann argues that the speaker is not a person at all but is rather something "essentially static . . . something general, perhaps the will of God" (440). Alexandra Olsen, on the other hand, presents a strong case for
identifying the speaker as a "heroic pagan leader" rather than a "sinful Christian" (53).

A second debatable point of interpretation is the abrupt contrast between the prosperity of the poem's first section and the misery of the final section. Scholars have had no trouble recognizing this reversal-of-fortune motif, but they have not so easily found a clear explanation for it. In several other Old English poems, reasons for such reversals are given in the narrative or are implicit in the situation. In "The Wife's Lament," for example, the happiness and freondscip the husband and wife once knew have been destroyed by the treacherous plottings of the wife's in-laws. In "The Husband's Message," the messenger says that hine faepo adraf ("a feud drove him away") to explain the separation of husband and wife. And in "Deor," when the poet briefly refers to situations of reversed fortune, we must assume that his audience knew the various stories well enough to supply whatever explanation was called for beyond the poet's words.

Critics of "The Rhyming Poem," failing to find an obvious motive for the speaker's loss of happiness, have offered a variety of reasons to account for his decline into misery. Isaacs, for instance, says that the scop has suffered a loss of creative power and thus has fallen into his present miseries. W. S. Mackie, on the other hand, attributes the change to "old age, disease, and the fear of
death" (507), as does G. V. Smithers, who points out the pivotal contrast between "flourishing youth and its joys with decrepit age and its miseries" (9).

To some scholars, who see a primarily Christian focus in the poem, the causes of the speaker's loss of joy stem more from individual failings than from mere decrepitude. C. L. Wrenn says that the speaker "through sin was brought down in lonely humiliation" (149), while P. L. Henry identifies "riches, pride and treachery" as the "forerunners of [the speaker's] disaster" (83). Yet another group of critics, including most recently Macrae-Gibson, places the blame for the speaker's reversal of fortune upon his desire for or trust in his worldly wealth. Macrae-Gibson points to the speaker's "overweening pride" and "confidence" in "his prosperity" ("Structure" 72); J. E. Cross finds implications of "avaritie or cupiditas" in the turn of events (11); Claes Schaar translates brondhord as "avarice" (491); and Margaret Goldsmith similarly blames the speaker's "cowardliness and avarice" for his fall from happiness (171). Clearly, then, two essential questions about the central character and the turn of events he describes are still undecided.

There is also disagreement in the critical literature about the use of pagan and Christian elements in "The Rhyming Poem." While Stopford Brooke, for example, admits the possibility of a Christian message in the poem, he believes that it should be understood as "a secular" piece (254), but
more recent critics find in it a mixture of pagan and Christian details. A. C. Baugh does agree, however, that the poem makes scant reference "to God and the Faith" (83), as does Lehmann (440). J. L. Goodall sees a preponderance of "heroic furniture" (155) in the speaker's story and says that the poet, who "was charmed by" the pagan "heroic inheritance" (159), was unable to combine the pagan and the Christian elements "smoothly" (66). He insists, as well, that the poem contains "none of the didacticism which [in some other Old English poems] has taken elements of the heroic ethos and adapted them to a Christian purpose" (159).

Macrae-Gibson's reading of the poem differs on this point from Goodall's, for he finds in it a clearly "tropological intention" (Poem 7). And, while Olsen also recognizes a didactic theme, "the validity of the Christian experience" in contrast to the ephemeral values of "the heroic, pagan Germanic world" (51), she fails to grasp the thematic importance of the poem's central image of the dragon, as well as the Christian purpose behind it.

I believe that these questions can be resolved in favor of an identifiable speaker, a specific cause for his reversal of fortune, and a specifically Christian purpose. Close analysis of the poem's details reveals the poet's strategy of contrast between pagan and Christian values that emphasizes the inadequacies of the former and the superiority of the latter. This contrastive strategy balances the first
part of the poem, in which the speaker emerges as a type of
the pagan ideal king, against the final part, which concerns
the universal fate of man and the hope of salvation offered
by the Christian faith.

In the first half of the poem, the poet creates a por-
trait of an Anglo-Saxon archetype, the ideal king who holds
the heroic values of pagan society. Those admirable quali-
ties are described in several passages from Beowulf,
which in great part deals with the theme of kingship:

Swa sceal [geong g]uma / gode gewyrcean,
fromum feohgiftum / on fæder [bea]rme,
þæt hine on ylde / eft gewunigen
wilgesipas, / þonne wig cume,
leode gelæsten . . . .
[Thus ought a young man to do good with splendid
gifts from his father's possession, so that will-
ing companions thereafter will stay with him in
his old age, the people help him when war comes.]

(20-24)

Swa sceal man don,
þonne he æt guðe / gegan þencæd
longsumne lof, / na ymb his lif ceareæd.
[Thus must a man do when he thinks to gain en-
during praise in battle and takes no care for
his life.]

(1534-36)
The speaker in "The Rhyming Poem" is the embodiment of his society's values, and he thus possesses these virtues of "courage, loyalty, liberality, [and] wisdom" (Klaeber lx). Under his rule, the land has been secure (40) and the earth correspondingly fruitful (9, 23). He has been generous with his followers (15, 18), dispensing treasure to his kin and thus maintaining their loyalty (36, 37). His wisdom was reflected in his ability to fulfill the traditional role of priest-king (24, 40), to preserve peace in the land (26),
and to encourage and improve the lot of his people (32). Indeed, his kingly qualities made of his life the very stuff of heroic tales (41-42), and he can thus be seen as a type of the noble ruler exemplified in Beowulf.

The speaker, then, stands as a representative of the highest values of pagan society. The poet emphasizes the admirable nature of these values, dwelling at great length upon the beneficial results of the speaker's reign. At no point in the first part of the work does the poet point to any failings in the king. There is no display of greed, for the speaker rewards his thanes with treasure and contributes to the prosperity of the entire group. There is no cowardice in his actions, else he would not inspire praise and loyalty from his thanes (19-21). Under his rule the people are not plagued by war, for they enjoy the pleasures of continuous feasting (5-6) and celebration (6-8, 27-29) without fear of treachery (26). His court, in fact, symbolized by the brightly towering castle hall (30), stands as a beacon of power and prosperity shining over the land (31) and shows what the noblest pagan society could achieve.

The clear emphasis in 1-42 upon the speaker's positive and unimpeachable qualities, therefore, undermines the claims of such critics as Wrenn and Macrae-Gibson who place the blame for his reversal of fortune upon some sinful act. We must instead agree with Olsen that the poet has created a pagan, not a Christian, character in the speaker, and, to go
a step further, that the poet intends for us to admire and respect the speaker, who embodies pagan virtue, on his own grounds. The poet deliberately avoids any overtly Christian references in this section; thus, his audience does not find it necessary to judge the speaker from a Christian perspective. Their acceptance of the speaker as an ideal type is essential to the poet's ultimate purpose of persuading them that paganism is inferior to Christianity, a point which will be more fully explored in a moment.

In the second half of the poem, the focus turns from the pagan ideal to an account of the universal fate of man, again exemplified by the fate of the great king. He says that he is now in distress (44), attacked by some insidious evil thing whose burning assault (44-50) starts him on his journey (51) to the grave (71). This fate is not reserved just for him, however, but holds true as well for all men. In a lengthy passage (56-69), the speaker tells how his entire world is afflicted by various evils: hate (60, 68), war (61-62), debt (63), exile (64), anger (64, 66), and treachery (67). In this time of infirmity (57), of lost pleasure and power (56), it is the fate of the world to weaken and collapse under the power of evil (68-69). The great king, like all men, comes at last to the grave, which no man can escape (72), for it is the necessary lot appointed for man (78-79). No one listening to the poem would have argued that death is not the inevitable end for man, but the
poet does not leave this conclusion without explanation. In the central image of the evil dragon that attacks and destroys the speaker lies the cause for his loss of happiness: the universal, inescapable inheritance of the doom of death pronounced by God upon Adam and Eve after their fall from innocence.

The poet begins with a presentation of the dragon in traditional pagan terms: it lies hidden until night (44-45), when it flies forth in its burning attack (49-50). Such details about the dragon, widely found in Germanic mythology, are familiar from Beowulf, where the dragon that destroys the hero acts in the same manner:

eald uhtsceada . . .
se ðe byrnende / biorgas seced
nacod niðdraca, / nihtes fleogoð
fyre befangen . . . .
[. . . the old night warrior who, burning, seeks out barrows, the naked evil dragon who flies at night, encompassed in fire . . . .]

(2271-74)

hord eft gesceat,
dryhtsele dyrnne, / ær dæges hwile.
Hæfde landwara / lige befangen,
bæle ond bronde . . . .

[He darted back to the hoard, to the hidden hall, before it was day. He had encompassed those who
dwelled in the land with fire, with flames, and with burning . . . .]

(2319-22)

If the poet had left his description of the dragon at this point, however, the Christian implications would be lost, but he is careful to show that the dragon he has described is not merely the traditional creature of legend. The land that it attacks is within man, not outside of him but within the mind, in the very nature of man (48), sprung from something organic (forgrown, geblowen) encoded in the human heart. The identity of the dragon here changes from that of pagan legend to that of Christian tradition: the serpent Satan who brought about the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Surprisingly, this dragon imagery has not been noticed in previous studies of "The Rhyming Poem."

After all, the serpent, often wyrm in Old English poetic diction, was used as an allegorical figure in early Christian literature, as, for example, in the following excerpt from a sermon by Caesarius of Arles (d. 542):

Abandon the broad way on the left which leads you to death and take the narrow way on the right which leads you happily to life. Let not the breadth of the way on the left take hold of or please you; it is indeed wide, level and adorned with various flowers, but its flowers quickly wither and poisonous snakes frequently lurk
among them, so that when you chase after false joys, you will be struck with deadly poison.

(Allen 151)

Furthermore, the dragon-Satan analogy is familiar from its use in several other Old English poems. The traditional Germanic dragon is sometimes called a serpent, as in Beowulf 891 and 892, with the use of both wyrm and draca to refer to the same creature, so the analogy with the biblical devil was a logical one for Old English Christian poets. In "Judith," for instance, after Holofernes dies, he is sent to the fires of hell where he is surrounded by wyrmum (155-16). Dragons are an integral part of hell, according to the poet of "Christ and Satan," who says that dracan stand guard 
æt helle duru (97). Additional associations of the dragon and the devil are found in "Elene." In one passage, Satan tells how the devils in hell suffer in the dragon's embrace, in dracan faebme (36), and in another speech he alludes to himself in terms reminiscent of the dragon aroused to vengeance by the theft from its hoard in Beowulf:

Hwæt is þis, la, manna, / þe minne eft
purn fyrmgefilit / folgæþ wyrðeĩ,
ieceĩ ealdne nið, / æhta strudeĩ?

{Lo! what man is this who again destroys my followers because of an old quarrel, prolongs the old strife, plunders my possessions?}

(902-904)
A final example from "The Panther" demonstrates the virtual identity of the dragon and Satan. In this poem, the author says that God is merciful to all creatures but one, dracan anum (57), who is se eald feond (58) condemned to Hell after the war in Heaven. The allegorical use of the dragon-serpent figure in "The Rhyming Poem" is thus well within the Old English tradition and shows the poet's skill in combining pagan and Christian elements; the traditional pagan dragon familiar to the Anglo-Saxon audience here functions not literally or allegorically but symbolically, carrying a biblical message about the effects of Original Sin on human nature.

The poet's emphasis upon this theme is purely Augustinian in that it denies the possibility of escape from these effects by any man, even the noblest. The ideal king, like every man, stands condemned to destruction if he stands merely upon his own merits. In this poem, as well as in several others (see Chapter Six), the Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin is supported, and the presence of such emphasis may indicate a desire on the part of the poets to refute the heretical ideas of Pelagius which, as has been seen, recurrently divided the Church from the fifth to the eighth centuries, a period in which much of the Christian poetry was probably produced.

To summarize the Christian stance of "The Rhyming Poem," the orthodox explanation of death's universality lies
in the inheritance of mortality passed on to mankind from Adam's original sin. With his act of disobedience, evil and death entered into the world, henceforward precluding, as Augustine had argued against Pelagius, the possibility that man could merit salvation without God's grace.

For the Anglo-Saxon pagan, Germanic mythology provided no explanation for death's inevitability and no hope for escape, even, as the poet has shown us by the example of the speaker, for the greatest of its men. The speaker is left standing on the brink of the grave, with no hope of salvation. His virtues and earthly accomplishments avail him nothing.

Leaving the pagan speaker in his hopeless position, the poet then speaks through a second, evangelistic, voice to present the possibility of redemption offered by the Christian faith, the forgiveness of sin (82) which carries man's soul beyond the grave into heaven (83), and thus the poem, with its Christian message, ends.

In addition to the use of the dragon-Satan image and the homiletic conclusion, however, there are several other implicitly Christian elements in the poem. In the first, the unusual description of the speaker in 3-4 refers to his wearing the colors of blossoms, an allusion to the idea that, in the words of Columbanus, "all flesh is grass" (Allen 135), a familiar Old Testament allegorical image also found in Gregory's Moralia:
For just as the flower, man comes forth that he may shine in the flesh; but he wastes away that he may be returned as putrefaction. For what are men born on earth unless flowers in a field. Bend the eyes of our heart over the extent of this present world, and lo! it is full of flowers as of men. Life therefore in the flesh is flower in its withering.

(Huppe 84-85)

Another echo of Christian thought occurs in line 69, where the failing power of the earth is paralleled by man's own loss of strength. This analogy had been common in Christian writings ever since it was popularized by Cyprian in Ad Demetrianum (Wilson 61). And a third passage with Christian overtones is found in 56, where the speaker says that in this world men abandon life and often choose sins (leahtras oft geceosað). The very wording of this example, as well as its meaning, echoes the words of Caesarius in Sermon 151, "choose life in order to live," drawn from a verse in Deuteronomy (Allen 151). The emphasis here upon the individual's responsibility for his own path in life is found in other Old English poems as well. In "Genesis," for example, the poet says that moste on ceosan / godes and yfeles / gumena æghwilc (464-465), "each man must choose between good and evil." Satan is actively seeking to persuade men to decide in favor of evil, according to the
author of "The Whale," luring them by his deceptive power
\textit{oppæt by fæste dær / æt þam værlogan / wic geceosan} 
(36-37), "until they firmly choose to dwell there with the
treachery of the one." A positive decision is urged upon the
audience of "Christ and Satan": \textit{ceosan us eard in wuldre / mid ealra cyninga cyninge / se is Crist genemned} (203-204),
"let us choose a home in Heaven with the King of all kings,
who is called Christ."

Finally, the dominant theme of "The Rhyming Poem," the
transitory nature of earthly power and joy, is a frequent
motif in early Christian literature. Although some scholars
connect the use of this theme in "The Rhyming Poem" with its
presence in other Old English poems, notably "The Wanderer,"
"The Seafarer" (Goodall 6-8; Grubl 63) and \textit{Beowulf} (Smi-
thers 10), others have pointed out a variety of possible bibilical sources. The story of Job, for instance, has been
identified as a thematic influence on "The Rhyming Poem"
(Grubl 74), and other biblical sources cited in critical
literature include the twenty-fourth chapter of \textit{Matthew}
(Cross 12) and the first epistle of \textit{John} (McBrien 383).

Several early ecclesiastical works could also have
provided the poet's theme. Chrysostom, for instance, pro-
duced sermons on the dangers of putting one's faith in "the
transitoriness of wealth, glory, and possessions" (McBride
16). And G. V. Smithers has located two other possible
sources for the poem's theme, a Greek sermon, \textit{De Exitu}
Anima, and an elegy by Maximian (9-10). Perhaps the closest parallel between the theme in "The Rhyming Poem" and in early Christian writings, however, is found in a passage from Pseudo-Augustine's Sermon 58:

Go to the tombs of the dead and see paradigms for the living. The bones are lying there, but the man himself has perished. Nevertheless, his trial is reserved for the Judgment Day. At one time he was a man like us, a man living in vanity, studying the ways of the world. He increased his estates with his wealth; he planted vineyards; he filled the bins in his many granaries and rejoiced in his abundance. And suddenly, behold, all this was snatched away from his eyes. He used to congratulate himself on his many schemes; he dressed himself in silken garments; he provided himself with pomps and luxuries; he indulged in rich banquets; on drunken occasions he danced and joked; he prolonged his lunch to dinner, and scarcely saw an end to his happiness. And behold, all this was snatched away from his eyes. Where did it all go--the pomps, the schemes, the exquisite banquets? Where are they now--the throngs that pressed around him in a frenzy, the men who praised him at home and abroad? Where are the ornaments of his homes and the precious
luxuries of his clothes? Where is the display of his gems and the immense weight of his silver? And where, finally, is that desire which does exactly what it wants every day? Doesn't it know about the time when it must lose everything? . . . Where are the laudatory applause and the constant adulation of friends? . . . All this has passed from his eyes and no one will remember him anymore. He lies in his grave, reduced to dust. His flesh, which was nourished by delicacies, has dissolved; the nerves have fallen away from his joints. The bones alone remain and serve as examples for the living so they can recognize the relics of the dead.

(Allen 48-49)

All of these sources were available to Old English Christian authors in the monastic libraries, and, since the theme of the transitory nature of life was also part of both the Anglo-Saxon and the Irish traditional literature (Murphy xvi), it is not surprising that it frequently appeared in early Christian writings. Whatever sources served to motivate the author of "The Rhyming Poem," his application of this theme was clearly in keeping with the Christian homiletic tradition.

His approach to this "woe after weal" motif, however, is not merely traditional. By presenting an admirable pagan
Anglo-Saxon persona and by dramatically combining the two archetypal images of the dragon and the serpent of Eden into a statement of Christian dogma, the poet has adapted conventional material to the particular circumstances of the early English Church and its charges. The respectful, conciliatory tone of the poem is ideally suited to a pagan audience, especially if it were a royal household. As has been noted, in the early stages of missionary work, the main task was to first convert the king, and a work such as "The Rhyming Poem" would have been a diplomatic tool in that process. The figure of the ideal king could only have been complimentary to a royal audience accustomed to the panegyrics of traditional pagan poetry.

The noble status of the ideal king also helped to underscore the Christian theme of the poem by showing that no man, on his own merits, can escape the universal doom of death. But, once he has presented the Christian explanation of this human curse, the poet can offer in conclusion something that pagan mythology cannot, a means of salvation from death. The native "woe after weal" theme, therefore, is developed in a conventional manner at first, with many of the trappings of traditional heroic verse—bejeweled thanes feasting at the table of their gift-giving king, horse-racing, sea journeys, dragons, weapons of war, and suffering in exile—but then the theme ultimately is converted into a hopeful one, with eternal weal following the final earthly
woes. It is easy to see the appeal such a message would have for a pagan audience, who had hitherto known only the fatalistic Germanic mythology in which all forces, human and superhuman, face eventual cosmic defeat. Poems with more overtly Christian material would better serve a post-conversion audience in need of greater instruction in the faith, but the tone and theme of "The Rhyming Poem" are more conducive to the goals of the early missionary task.

To conclude, then, although it lacks overtly Christian details, "The Rhyming Poem" presents a Christian message on the universal condition of man and the possibility of redemption offered by the Church. The heretofore unrecognized image of the dragon, adapted from both pagan legend and ecclesiastical literature, becomes a symbol for the inherently corrupt nature of man resulting from Original Sin, and the fierceness of its attack on the speaker shows man's vulnerability without the aid of God's mercy and protection.

In this message of man's utter dependence upon God, the poet speaks to two possible audiences. To pagans, he offers an alternative, a hope of spiritual life beyond the inevitable annihilation from which no man may otherwise escape. To Christians whose faith may have been tainted by the Pelagian heresy of personal virtue and responsibility for one's salvation, his message is a refutation and a warning. The poet thus shows his support of the Augustinian position against the Pelagian belief in man's self-sufficiency to
obtain salvation. And, finally, the poet, with his respectful attitude toward pagan values and the heroic tradition, aims at familiarity with a non-Christian, pre-conversion audience and presents his Christian message of hope in a way that does not depend upon his audience's knowledge of the Bible or of Church doctrine.
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CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS: THE CHRISTIAN POETIC CONTEXT

With the Christian content and purpose of "The Rhyming Poem" thus established, it now remains to complete the analysis of its kinship with other Old English poetic works, beyond the level of metrics and general Christian influence, and to summarize the conclusions to which the textual, historical, and comparative studies here have led. In Chapter Three the study of rhyme in this poem and in several other Old English works identified certain shared traits, and similarities between the poem's vocabulary and a small number of other poems have been described in the line commentary of Chapter One and also in Chapter Two.

A selective examination of this group of poems makes it clear that many of these works share additional qualities with "The Rhyming Poem." For one thing, several poems in this group make much use of heroic elements, and, in their merging of the heroic concepts with the Christian, they, like "The Rhyming Poem," tend to redefine traditional Anglo-Saxon values in the light of the new religion. The poems also share another quality, in that they show evidence of the early Church's struggle to convert the Anglo-Saxons from paganism and to consolidate its authority in the face of divisive heresy.
Since the use of heroic elements in Old English Christian poetry has received much critical attention, it should suffice here merely to review the heroic content of a few poems in the vocabulary group. The presence of traditional "heroic furniture" in "The Rhyming Poem," remarked upon by Goodall (155), is readily apparent (see Chapter Two and Chapter Five). Similarly, in Beowulf the heroic element is fundamental, so much so that the Christian attitude of the poem was for a long time discounted as a later interpolation. The panoramic heroic background of Beowulf, in fact, has set something of a standard by which the heroic content of other Old English poems has been measured.

Heroic elements in the group poems are adapted to the Christian viewpoint. In "Christ and Satan," for example, Satan at length bewails his fate as an outcast from his lord's society. In traditional terms he describes the miseries of one who wanders on "the paths of exile" (wraec-lastas, 120) in hell, with gates guarded by the dracan (97) of Germanic legend. In Anglo-Saxon tradition, the exile is a figure to be pitied, for the loss of one's society was the worst fate that could befall a man. In "Christ and Satan," however, the exile's misery is meant not to elicit sympathy, but rather to warn the audience of the even more terrible fate of eternal exile in torment. This same idea is echoed in "Juliana," again in traditional terms; the author says that those in hell are deprived of all joy:
Satan is also an outcast in "Genesis," where he and his band of rebel angels make an ironic parallel to the tradition of the war king and his thanes. They proclaim their new kingdom in hell, and Satan boasts of the loyalty of his followers, yet they have all been guilty of treachery, a cardinal Anglo-Saxon sin and the obverse of the loyalty and obedience upon which the comitatus depends. The heroic tone pervades the other biblical stories recounted in "Genesis," especially in the passages of martial descriptions. The Elamites, for example, go to battle like proper Anglo-Saxon warriors, fighting with their javelins and spears, leaving the dead to the greedy raven. Even Abraham is transformed into a heroic war king, defended by spear-carrying earls in battle.

The poet of "Exodus" also makes of his main character, Moses, a noble warrior and leader of loyal shield-warriors
(randwigan, 126), their triumph over the Pharaoh's army providing a feast for the familiar animals of battle, here-fugolas (162) and wulfas (164). But the greatest warrior in Old English Christian poetry is Christ, and the most noble band of warriors is the group of apostles, bound to their Prince by the bonds of the Christian comitatus. In "Andreas," all the apostles are called "heroes" (tireadige hæled, 2) and are frequently described as bold warriors on the field of holy battle. Andrew responds to the disguised Pilot-Christ as to his protector and asks of him a boon, preferring knowledge of God to rings of gold (469-480).

Later figures of early Church history, the saints and martyrs, are also described as loyal thanes and brave warriors of God, again demonstrating the application of traditional Germanic social concepts to the spiritual realm. The hagiographical "Guthlac," for instance, portrays the eighth-century English saint as one of God's "proven champions" (gecostan compan, 91) whose trial of faith is met in battle with demons. His relationship with God is that of thane to prince: cast in the role of the heroic Anglo-Saxon warrior, Guthlac upholds the ethic of defending his lord to the death, trusting in the promise of eternal reward for loyal service (91-92). The author of "Elene" creates two typical heroic figures, the Emperor Constantine, a ring-bestowing war king (beorna beaggifa, 100, and heria hild-fruma, 101), and his mother Helen, who led a band of eorlas
æscrofe (275) to search for the Cross. The conversion of Constantine to Christianity makes a perfect example of the adaptation of the heroic ethic to the Christian faith, for while he remains the goldwine gumena (201), he himself becomes a follower and warrior in godes beowdom, / æscrof, unslaw (201-202): "in service to God, brave in battle, not at all slow."

The great prince at the center of this new comitatus is Christ, the Prince of princes. In the allegorical symbolism of "The Phoenix," Christ rules in Paradise like a noble leader and is accompanied by a faithful band of "God's warriors" (meotudes cempan, 471). And in "Christ," he is the greatest warrior, first in his defeat of the rebellious angels, and then in his plundering of Hell (helle bireafod, 558) to free those held in "tribute" (gafoles, 559) by Satan.

Clearly, then, there is an abundance of heroic detail in many of these poems. The authors have purposely employed many elements of Germanic tradition--horse-racing, vividly recounted sea journeys, beasts of battle, even the legendary dragon--to make their poems acceptable and familiar to the Anglo-Saxon audience. But their use of the comitatus relationship as a parallel of the bond between Christ and Christian is a more serious application of the heroic ethic, warning listeners of the miseries of exile from God and encouraging them to seek the spiritual protection of the
heavenly King. The concept of loyalty was fundamental to the pagan English, and the Christian poets tried to relate that loyalty to faith in God, through the examples of their Christian heroes.

A third similarity between "The Rhyming Poem" and the group poems is the evidence they bear of the struggles of the early Church. Some of the poems attack the endemic idolatry of the Anglo-Saxons, others support the orthodoxy of Augustine's position on Original Sin against the Pelagian heresy, and all of them, even Beowulf, deliver biblical and ecclesiastical material at a basic educational level suited to the conversion process.

The Christian missionaries approached this process from the stance of warriors waging battle against Satan, God's old enemy, hoping to wrest his followers from their idolatry. At least three of the vocabulary group poems make a primary attack upon paganism, motivated by "a vision," as Alvin Lee has seen in the narrative romances, "of some significant part of middle-earth . . . fallen into demonry or devil worship" (114). In these poems, the plots culminate in the turning of pagans to Christianity, so that the poems both recount and demonstrate the conversion process. The poem of "Daniel" is a good example. The miraculous preservation of Azariah, Hananiah, and Mishael in the fiery furnace led Nebuchadnezzar to faith in the Hebrew God and to the restoration of the Hebrew religion. This conversion was
necessary because, as the author tells us at the beginning of the poem, the Israelites had turned away from God to the practice of sins, wommas wyrcean (24) and to the arts of the devil: curon deafles craeft (32). The Christian point of view here is that any religion other than the worship of God is not merely a strange religion but is in fact the worship of Satan, God's great foe against whom all Christians, as loyal followers, must fight. "Daniel" does more than tell of the battle against idolatry, however, for by relating the Old Testament story of Daniel it helps to familiarize an illiterate audience with a part of biblical narrative.

Similarly, "Andreas" is both a conversion story and a presentation of biblical and ecclesiastical material. The biblical lesson is presented in the shipboard conversation between Andrew and the disguised figure of Christ. In this exchange, Christ questions Andrew to elicit from him an impressive declaration of God's supremacy, followed by an account of Christ's life, miracles, and teachings. Lee has described this scene between Christ and Andrew as something of an expression of the comitatus bond between king and thane, a moment of "union" of the two men's souls in which "each shares his 'treasure' with the other," the treasure in this case being knowledge of Christ's miracles (93). But it is actually the audience who receives this wealth of information, since neither Christ nor Andrew is in need of it. This long section of the poem thus functions as more than a
mere digression from the plot, for it presents essential background information about the new religion, especially profitable to an audience of potential or recent Christian converts.

The narrative speaks to such an audience about an earlier, similarly pagan people to whom Andrew preached in Mermedonia. The tale recounts the gospel message, the miraculous events that supported his message, and the ultimate conversion of the people and subsequent founding of their first Christian Church. But the plot itself centers upon the conflict between God's soldier, Andrew, and the devil. The author of "Andreas," whether Cynewulf or some other Christian poet, clearly identifies the devil with paganism and his worship as idolatry. It is from the *feondes cæfete* (49) that the pagans draw their power, for they have learned the teachings of the devil, *deofles larum* (141). Indeed, their priests are called *dryas* (34), druids, and they practice the black arts, *dwołcrafft* (34). The houses of pagan worship are designated as temples of hell, *helltrafum* (1691), and the devil himself, in his appearance to Andrew, leaves no doubt that the Christian missionaries who converted the pagans had been dealing with the devil's own people:

"Hwæt is wuldor þin,
þe þu oferhigðum / upp arærdest,
þa þu goða ussa / gild gehnægdest?"

["Where is your glory, which in pride you exalted,
when you brought down the worship of our gods?"

(1317-19)

In the story's conclusion, the poet describes the conversion of the Mermedonians, a scene which undoubtedly the Christian missionaries hoped to see repeated by the Anglo-Saxons:

\[ \begin{align*}
& \text{æ gesamnodon / secga þreate} \\
& \text{weras geond þæ winburg / wide ond side,} \\
& \text{eorlas anmode, / ond hira idesa mid,} \\
& \text{cwædon holdlice / hyran woldon,} \\
& \text{onfon fromlice / fullwihted bæp} \\
& \text{dryhtne to willan, / ond diofolgild,} \\
& \text{ealde eolhstedas, / anforlætan.}
\end{align*} \]

[Then far and wide throughout the festive city men gathered together with a crowd of people, earls of one mind, and with them their women; they said they would faithfully hear the will of the Lord, immediately take the bath of baptism, and abandon the worship of devils, the old temples.]

(1636-42)

In Cynewulf's "Juliana," a conversion also takes place, when Juliana's executioners come to recognize the truth of her faith, but it makes up a lesser part of the story than did the conversions in "Daniel" and "Andreas." The real focus here is upon the conflict between Juliana as God's champion and the devil, who is forced to speak for himself. The conflict occurs because Juliana will not succumb to the
pleas and threats of her father to accept Eleusius, an idol-worshipper, and his false gods, the *hæpengield* (22). As Daniel Calder has said, in this story "the worship of idols is as fiercely defended as the worship of the Christian God" (87), but Juliana refuses to bow to *dumbum ond deafum / deofolgieldum* (150) and is eventually confronted by the devil. When her faith overcomes him, Juliana forces the devil to recount his evil deeds, an account which, ironically, delivers much biblical material, including the deception of Adam and Eve, Herod's wickedness, Judas' betrayal of Jesus, and the deaths of various apostles. Juliana's victory is complete when, in 361, the devil at last admits the inferiority (*sæmran*) of the heathen gods (Calder 93).

From these three poems, then, the audience received details of the conversion process, some biblical material, and an attack upon the paganism which underlay Anglo-Saxon life. Several other poems in the vocabulary group also present biblical information and include as well statements of support for the orthodoxy of Augustine's position on Original Sin against the Pelagian heresy, as does "The Rhyming Poem." In "The Phoenix," "Guthlac," "Genesis," and "Christ," the Augustinian view is defended.

"The Phoenix" delivers in allegorical form a sermon on the nature of the Resurrection and on the promised glories of Paradise, man's original home and ultimate reward. The description of Paradise shows that it is free of all the
perils that men face on earth: "exile, feuding, war, storms, winter, sickness, death, and hell" (Lee 123). These are the very evils, the poet tells us, which now befall mankind as a result of Adam's sin:

Hæfdon godes yrre,
bittre bealosorge. / ðæs ða byre sippan
gyrne onguldon, / þe hi ðæt gyfl þegun
ofere eces word.
[They had from God's anger the bitter sorrow of death. Since that misfortune, their descendants have paid the penalty because, against the word of the immortal God, they ate that morsel.]

(408-411)

"Guthlac" also, in its tale of the saint's life, gives a brief account of the Fall. It, too, shows that the result was death, þone bitran drync (868), prepared by Eve for Adam and their descendants. Thus, both "The Phoenix" and "Guthlac" recognize the validity of Augustine's view that man is born a fallen creature, doomed to die and already in need of God's grace before any individual act of sin is committed:

ænig ne wæs
fyra cynnes / from fruman sippan
mon on moldan, / þætte meahte him
gebeorgan ond bibugan / þone bleatan drync,
deopan deadweges . . . .
[... none there was of the race of man, no man on earth, since the beginning, who was able to save himself and avoid the miserable drink, the deep cup of death.]

(GTE 987-91)

The orthodox view of Original Sin also has thematic importance in two other poems, "Genesis" and "Christ," where it is treated in greater detail. In "Genesis," which retells several episodes from the Old Testament book, the section commonly called "Genesis B" contains a lengthy, dramatic presentation of Satan's deception of Adam and Eve in which the poet comments on the results of their sin:

Sceolde bu witan
ylda æghwilc / yfles and godes
gewand on þisse worulde. / Sceolde on wite a
mid swate and mid sorgum / siddan libban,
swa hwa swa gebyrgde / þæs on þam beame geweox.
Sceolde hine yldo beniman / ellendaeda,
dreamas and drihtscipes, / ond him beon deað scyred.
[Every man must know both good and evil throughout this world. He must ever after live in misery with sweat and with sorrows, whosoever ate what grew on that tree. Old age must take from him his noble deeds, his joys, and his dignity, and death be decreed for him.]

(479-85)
We see in this statement an abbreviated version of the life and fate of the ideal king in "The Rhyming Poem" who learned the truth of this lesson at first hand.

In "Christ," the approach to Original Sin is not only from its origin in the Garden of Eden, but also from God's perspective at the day of final judgment. The poet first presents the decree of doom that God pronounced upon man after Satan's success in leading Adam and Eve into sin:

"Ic þec ofer eordan geworhte, / on þære
þu scealt yrmpum lifgan,
wunian in gewinne / ond wræce dreogan,
feondum to hroþor / fusleod galan,
ond to þære ilcan scealt / eft geweorpan,
wyrmum aweallen, / þonan wites fyr
of þære eordan scealt / eft gesecan."

["I made you from the earth, upon it you shall live in misery, dwell in strife, and endure exile, sing a song of death for the delight of fiends, and back into earth you must return, swarming with worms; thence from the earth you must afterwards seek the fire of punishment."]

(621-26)

Towards the poem's conclusion (1379-1523), God speaks again, this time to the host of the damned on Judgment Day, recounting the gift of life and Paradise which man had lost through his disobedience. The poet's introduction to God's
speech clearly supports the Augustinian position on man's inherited and shared guilt:

Onginneð sylf cwedan,
swa he to anum spreçe, / ond hwæþre ealle mæneð,
firesynnig folc, / frea ælmihtig
[The Almighty Lord himself shall begin to speak as if He spoke to one, and yet He shall mean all of them, the sinful people.]

(1376-78)

In these four poems, as in "The Rhyming Poem," the belief of the Pelagians in man's ability to save himself is rejected, and the orthodox view of man's fallen nature is affirmed. These works are thus evidence that for the early English Church, the Pelagian heresy was enough of a problem to merit literary attention.

The remaining poems in the vocabulary group, including the riddles, which were at least useful in training the imagination (Chambers 1), contain material which served to educate and instruct potential converts and new Christians. "Exodus," of course, presents a bible story, as does "Christ and Satan," which, in addition to the New Testament account of Christ's temptation, also relates traditional Christian legends of the fall of the angels and Christ's harrowing of Hell. The hagiographical "Elene" not only tells of the search for the Cross but also supplies biblical background material about the treachery of the Jews and the miracles of
Christ. In the dire consequences described for the damned in "Judgment Day I," the audience learns of what befalls those who refuse to accept God's word, and in "The Fates of Men" the main theme is the absolute control God exercises over humanity. Even in Beowulf the poet has included biblical material about God's creation of the world, as well as showing by example the lesson learned by the speaker in "The Rhyming Poem" that the greatest of men is still subject to death, the inherited consequence of the Fall.

Thus, all of these poems exhibit the same didactic attitude that Earl Anderson has recognized in the works of Cynewulf: "The subject matter of the poems is information that must be taught. The audience must learn" (177). These poems make simple presentations, for the most part, focusing on the basic facts of salvation and of Bible history. They have a tendency to redefine and re-evaluate pagan beliefs and values; they assume little or no sophistication in the audience concerning doctrinal intricacies and the Bible. They frequently, however, as we have seen, make supportive statements about the orthodox view of Original Sin that was challenged by the Pelagian heresy, and several of them also attack the practice of idolatry. In the conversion process, persuasion and instruction were vital to the success of the early English Church, and poems such as these demonstrate the themes and methods used by the Christian missionaries to teach the pagan Anglo-Saxons about the new religion.
"The Rhyming Poem" fits well into this historical context and, in spite of its regular use of rhyme, is clearly in the mainstream of Old English Christian literature. The author combines heroic and Christian elements, adapting the traditional material to serve his religious purpose. In the synthesis of the pagan dragon and the biblical devil, he has created an effective symbol to explain the basis of the "woe after weal" theme in terms of the doctrinal concept of Original Sin.

The structural use of regular accentual rhyme in "The Rhyming Poem" is a strong indication of the Celtic strain in Old English Christian literature and reflects the Celtic influence on the monastic environment in which Old English literature was produced and preserved. The strength of this influence resulted from the major role which the Irish Church played in the establishment of Christianity in England.

And, finally, "The Rhyming Poem" and the group of poems with which it shares vocabulary and thematic ties show the formative effects of the struggle of the early Church to convert the English, an indication which supports an early dating of their production, probably before the late eighth century. Examined from a historical and comparative perspective, "The Rhyming Poem" is the product of a skilled, innovative artist working within the confines of a strong Christian literary tradition and presenting to his audience
in his original use of the dragon-devil symbol a lesson on
the effects of Original Sin and on the superiority of the
Christian religion, which offers to its believers salvation
from death in the hope of Heaven.
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