THE TRADITION OF CHRISTIAN SEA SYMBOLISM

IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH POETRY AND MILTON

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After migrating to Britain from the Continent in the
fifth century, the Angle and Saxon tribes preserved their
former way of life. But, after the sixth century, their
religion and many of their customs were changed as they
moved ideologically from paganism to Latin Christianity.
And the Christian missionaries were men educated in the
Church's intellectual traditions. The Anglo-Saxon's
traditional, non-educated culture met and was gradually
changed by the intellectual, educated culture of Rome.

Literature supplies an opportunity for examining how
the Anglo-Saxons and their descendants adopted the ideas of
the new religion--Christianity--and applied them in their
daily lives. They often treated Biblical subjects with
pagan sentiment. The spirit of the Bible was sometimes
consonant with the attitudes of these pagan Germanic
tribesmen. Their attitude toward the sea is an example.
Thus I choose sea imagery and symbolism for this study
because the sea held a prominent place in both Anglo-Saxon
and Christian traditions. My focus is especially placed on
Christian sea symbolism. The Scripture is full of sea

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imagery and symbolism, and patristic literature frequently
refers to Biblical passages related to the sea. Because
this tradition pervades extant medieval English poems and
Milton's writings, this dissertation examines English poetry
ranging from <u>Beowulf</u> and <u>The Seafarer</u> through <u>The Canterbury</u>
<u>Tales</u> to Milton's works in the light of the Biblical and
patristic inclination to regard the sea in terms of
physical, moral and spiritual evil.

Besides exploring individual authors and works, the
second purpose of this study is to trace the continuing
vitality of Christian sea symbolism in English literature
after its beginnings in the Anglo-Saxon cultural fusion.
That is why this research extends its scope diachronically
to Chaucer and Milton. One possible explanation for this
ongoing liveliness of sea symbolism can be found in the fact
that England is an island. As an island nation, England may
always have a keener imaginative awareness of the sea than a
land-locked country would.

This study excludes medieval English prose because of
one major point: the prose in medieval English literature
has few references to the sea, except for the Anglo-Saxon
Chronicle which exhibits the beginnings of English naval
history, and the voyages of Ohthere which reveal glimpses of
contemporary seafaring, and are the earliest personal
records of sea-voyaging in English.[1]

Before discussing the individual poems, an overview of
the sea imagery and symbolism is necessary. In the rest of

this introductory chapter, I discuss the sea imagery and symbolism in the Bible and in the writings of the Church Fathers which were influenced by the Bible and which sometimes intensified or extended sea symbolism more than the Bible warrants. I also briefly sketch the sea imagery in Graeco-Roman literature and the pagan northern world just to compare and clarify the Biblical idea on this subject.

Sea Imagery and Symbolism in the Bible

In the Bible the sea is portrayed as evil for several reasons--while it is also a symbol of evil, it is not simply that. Its waters are, ominously, not a creation of the six days; they are derived from an antecedent creation that has apparently been destroyed. Waters are composed of primeval chaos before they are gathered together. The sea per se, which God did indeed create (Psalm 95: 5)(KJV numbering), is not pronounced to be "good," the word applied to each creation of the six days. In Genesis 1: 10 the pronouncement "good" refers to the separation of dry land and seas rather than to the seas themselves. The "waters" and "deep" of Genesis 1: 2 are not pronounced to be "good" either here or elsewhere in the Bible. Thus, employing the usual Biblical dichotomy of good and evil, the sea is evil. Second, the sea is the dwelling of the sea-monster Leviathan, who is "rex super universos filios superbiae"[2] ("king over all the children of pride")[3] (Job 41: 25). From

the Christian Fathers to the eighteenth or nineteenth
century, Leviathan has been thought of as a whale (rather
than a crocodile) and as an image of the devil in his
aspects of omnivorousness, malignity, voracity, and power.
The sea is, by this association with Leviathan, evil.
Third, the sea in the Bible repeatedly symbolizes tumultuous
peoples and kings who do not obey divine wisdom (e. g.,
James 1: 6; Jude 13). Fourth, the sea is of itself
uncontrollable and given to inundating the land. It must be
controlled by divine fiat. It is, however, worthy of noting
here that for His purpose God often uses evil (and the evil
sea, too); this is called a "scourge." It occurs from time
to time in Biblical history and in the Christian
interpretation of post-Biblical history. It also occurs in
the poems which I will discuss in the following chapters.
Sometimes, God even allows iniquity to overcome the good,
for reasons which may not be obvious from our perspective.
Moreover, good does come from evil occasionally: good is
extracted from evil under God's providential care. Hence,
Romans 8: 28 declares that "Scimus autem quoniam
diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum, iis, qui
secundum propositum vocati sunt sancti" ("And we know that
to them that love God, all things cooperate unto good, to
such as according to purpose are called to be saints").

The sea is first mentioned in Genesis 1: 2: "terra
autem erat inanis et vacua et tenebrae super faciem abyssi .
. ." ("and the earth was void and empty, and darkness was

upon the face of <u>the deep</u>") (emphasis mine). The Hebrew word for the Latin Vulgate <u>abyssus</u> is <u>tehom</u>, which "denotes the raging water of the dark chaotic deep" (Palmer, 5). <u>Tehom</u> is cognate with the Babylonian "Tiamat," the monstrous abyss of the salty water. Palmer argues that <u>tehom</u> stands not only for deep chaos, but also for the evils that came from chaos (29). A variation of the Creation story in Genesis appears in Psalm 104: 6-8: the waters cover the earth; the creation of the earth consists of God's rebuking the chaotic water. Another example of the enmity of <u>tehom</u> against God is seen in Proverbs 8: 29: "quando circumdabat mari terminum suum et legem ponebat aquis ne transirent fines suos . . ." ("when he compassed the sea with its bounds, and set a law to the waters that they should not pass their limits"). Further, the water of the deluge is in part the return of the dangerous primeval sea. Noah's Flood is the most horrible marine judgment in the Scripture: ". . . rupti sunt omnes fontes <u>abyssi</u> magnae et cataractae caeli apertae sunt" ("all the fountains of the great <u>deep</u> were broken up, and the flood gates of heaven were opened") (emphasis mine) (Genesis 7: 11). The waters, which was controlled by the Holy Spirit at the Creation, roars again with the Flood. Even though God promises not to destroy the earth by flood again, the malignancy of the sea still remains everywhere in the Bible.

Other examples of the malign import of the sea in Scripture are as follows: first, Job has a fear of the sea;

it appears baleful especially in Job 38: 8-11. In the Book
of Jonah, the sea is wrathful. Also, in Isaiah 23: 4 the
sea renders the city desolate. The sea in Isaiah 43: 16
represents great difficulties and serious obstacles in human
lives. God alone can open a path for His children (Wilson,
399). This topos is parallel to the crossing of the Red Sea
when God dries up the hostile Red Sea for the Israelites to
pass. Isaiah also compares wicked people to the sea, which
is wild and restless (57: 20). In the New Testament, the
image of the sea is the same as that of the Old Testament.
Jude 13 reads: ". . . fluctus feri maris despumantes suas
confusiones. . ." ("raging waves of the sea, foaming out
their own confusions").[4] Revelation 15: 2 manifests the
sea's vile character of concealing everything in its heart.
God's role is, however, the opposite: He unfolds all the
hidden sins and iniquities of human beings so that nothing
is hidden from His sight. Although the sea in the Bible has
a quasi-personal character as a malign being, it is not
Biblically a full deity counter to Jehovah: no one, not even
heathen like the prophets of Baal ranged against Elijah,
ever prays to the sea as Theseus does to Poseidon in
Euripides' Hippolytus and as contemporary Inuit in Northern
Canada still do. Scripture proclaims that there is no sea
in and near the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, in the new
heaven and the new earth there will be no more sea
(Revelation 21: 1); in other words there will be no evil in
the abode of the elect.

The sea in the Bible is also regarded as the realm of
death: it is the nether world, often described as the place
of darkness. "Hell" (Hades or Sheol) and _tehom_ are used as
parallel terms (Wensinck, 44). A good example for this
conception is furnished by the story of Jonah 2: 3-4: ". . .
de ventre inferni clamavi . . . et proiecisti me in
profundum in corde maris et flumen circumdedit me omnes
gurgites tui et fluctus tui super me transierunt" ("I cried
out of the belly of hell. . . . And thou hast cast me forth
into the deep in the heart of the sea, and a flood hath
compassed me: all thy billows, and thy waves have passed
over me"). Jonah is not only distressed at being in the
evil sea, but also at being swallowed by a great fish which
is thought of as a whale. Here, hell and _tehom_ are nearly
synonymous. Palmer states that "sheol, the dark abode of
the dead, was conceived by the Jews as lying at the bottom
of the deep" (53). _Tehom_ is distinctively used as a
designation of death in Psalm 71: 20 "In Salomonem": ". . .
conversus vivificabis nos et de _abyssis_ terrae rursum educes
nos" (Psalm 70: 20, "thou hast brought me to life, and hast
brought me back again from the _depths_ of the earth")
(emphasis mine). In the New Testament, the Greek word
abussos, which is a translation of _tehom_, is used to mean
the region of the dead, in particular the abode of evil
spirits. In Revelation 20: 13 the sea is coordinated with
Hades and death; it is a receptacle of the dead and delivers
them up at the Resurrection: "Et dedit mare mortuos qui in

eo erant: et mors et inferus dederunt mortuos suos, qui in
ipsis erant. . ." ("And the sea gave up the dead that were
in it, and death and hell gave their dead that were in
them"). The sea is connotative in that all men fear death
by drowning, which symbolizes damnation in the theological
sense. Consequently, the sea in the Bible is apparently
evil as well as a symbol of evil.

Sea and Ship Symbolism in the Writings of the Church Fathers

Interpretations of the Bible exerted a deep influence
on the ways in which the sea was portrayed among medieval
people and in their literature. Patristic literature had
long been devoted to sea and ship symbolism; a sermon by
Pseudo-Ambrose and St. Augustine's De Beata Vita can in this
aspect be considered as "foundation texts" (Corbin, 8).
Beginning no later than the time of Tertullian and Origen,
patristic writers elaborated symbolic meanings for the sea.
Hugo Rahner identifies sea symbolism as one of the
fundamental groups of symbols developed by the early Church
(Symbole, 388). Christian writers took the imagery from
the Bible (and sometimes from classical literature) and
interpreted it with methods developed by grammarians for
commentaries on the Odyssey and Aeneid (de Bruyne, 1-2). In
some aspects, pagan literature provided early Christians
with a tradition of myth, imagery, metaphor, and figurative

interpretation regarding the sea (or the ships). That
heritage was very limited, however, since Christians
considered the Bible as the only book worthy of devoted
study. Its sacred text eclipsed pagan stories, which strict
Christian intellectuals were willing to use only as
educational texts (Bolgar, 119). Studying the Bible,
explicating its passages, and examining the symbolic
meanings occupied the serious Christian thinkers. According
to Rahner, Hippolytus of Rome was the first writer to apply
the symbolism of the ship to the Church in consistent detail
(Symbole, 307-9), and by the end of the fourth century ship
symbolism had become very popular. The Church (or faith)
came to be considered as a ship, with the Holy Spirit at the
helm guiding it to the eternal haven which was the object of
Christian longing. The center aisle of the church is also
called "nave," which means a ship or vessel in its Latin
etymology. Thus shipwreck obviously represents a failure of
faith or of the institution of the Church. If a person
stops trusting in God, he is set adrift alone on the sea of
danger, after which he can only save himself by clutching
onto the debris, and that debris is penance (Tertullian, "De
Poenitentia" IV: 2,3). If one has no faith at all, he will
sink into hell. Paul also uses shipwreck imagery in I
Timothy 1: 19: "habens fidem, et bonam conscientiam quam
quidam repellentes, circa fidem naufragaverunt" ("having
faith and a good conscience, which certain repelling, have
made shipwreck about the faith"). Rahner explains it as

follows:

> . . .the Fathers, taking their cue from this
> phrase of St. Paul's and using all the vivid
> imagery which their own experience at sea had
> inspired, made shipwreck the subject of a
> profoundly meaningful system of symbolism.
>
> (<u>Greek Myths</u>, 347)

He who voyages the perilous sea with faith will reach the shore that is stable forever and where Christ awaits the elect. And the Church is a well manned vessel, even though storms, waves, monsters, and even shipwreck impede its voyage.

Certainly the sea is a fearful realm to men in small wooden craft who cannot rely on rescue and who do not have navigational devices to supplement their skill; the most common tone among Mediterranean authors presented the sea as an obstacle and a threat to be crossed. In <u>De Helia et ieiunio</u>, Ambrose concludes the passage with a comment that reveals an underlying attitude toward the sea: "Denique qui non navigat nescit timere naufragium" (finally, he who does not sail does not know how to fear shipwreck). One should fear the sea of life, the emblem of damnation, because fear tempers the soul and qualifies a person for salvation--that was the predominant attitude. In patristic writings the symbolic ship often runs perilously close to hidden dangers or storms; it is never becalmed. J. D. A. Ogilvy's <u>Books known to the English, 597-1066</u> lists works by most of the

early Christian writers and poets who dealt with sea

imagery: Ambrose, Augustine, Cassiodorus, Cyprian,

Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory the Great, Boethius, Caesarius

of Arles, Isidore, Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, and Sedulius

were all known, many from as early as Bede's time. Thus a

sufficient body of Christian literature existed to introduce

Anglo-Saxons to most, if not all, of the sea and ship

symbolism of the Church Fathers. The Bible gave the Fathers

sea stories with profound spiritual and moral implications,

since the great figures in the Old and New Testaments took

part in these stories. Very early, Christians took ship

imagery to heart. According to Clement of Alexandria,

people liked to wear rings with signets showing a ship

sailing to heaven, its sails filled with the Holy Spirit's

breath (Rahner, Greek Myths, 347).

Sea and Ships in Graeco-Roman Literature and the Pagan Northern World[5]

Sea descriptions appear in the great monuments of

Greco-Roman literature--The Odyssey and The Aeneid, for

example. A vessel could represent the state, as in Horace's

ode and De inventione, or it could be a ship of death, like

Charon's ratis, ferrying souls to Hades in Aeneid VI. It

could also be the ship of the present world, as Apuleius

writes in De mundo. Shipwreck signified the result of

incompetence in guiding the ship because of rashness, lack

of skill, or faithlessness. Rahner argues that many
Biblical stories involving ships and the sea often have
points in common with Greco-Roman literature (<u>Symbole</u>, 319).
There are many references to God's power over the sea in the
Bible,[6] and these correspond to pagan references to gods
like Neptune ruling the sea and Venus-the goddess of worldly
love and beauty in Roman mythology, which is parallel to
Greek goddess Aphrodite-originating from it. These gods'
association with the sea, however, indicates a more positive
view of the sea in classical myth. The sea has its dangers,
but also is sacred. Classical mythology lacks clear moral
dichotomies. Hence, the Bible's major nautical stories of
Noah, Jonah, Christ, and Paul show little affinity with
classical literature.

In the northern pagan tradition, conceptual patterns
and motifs pertaining to the sea and ships exist; they
reinforce the Christian ones. The pagan religions of the
North maintained beliefs about the sea and sea-monsters that
did not vary considerably from those of the Judeo-Christian
heritage. Like the apocalyptic conflict between the Lord
and Leviathan in the Biblical tradition, there was a similar
contest in the northern religion between a god of the sky
and a monster of the sea. Hilda Ellis Davidson clearly
explains this idea as follows:

> The chief enemy of Thor who protected mankind and
> the gods from chaos and anarchy, the ancient
> serpent who dwelt in the ocean depths . . . .

> Like Leviathan and the Kraken, the serpent was a
> monster of the ocean depths, the eternal enemy of
> the guardian of the sky. The serpent is linked
> with the giants, and with the snakes that inhabit
> the world of death and are its symbols. Beside
> him we must set the fiery dragon of northern
> mythology, emerging from the depths of the earth,
> from rocks, caves, or burial mounds of the dead.
>
> (138-39)

Although Thor (Anglo-Saxon "Thunor") "was thought of as the
principal adversary of Christ" at the close of the heathen
period (Davidson, 73), the above image of a benevolent god
who fights against the forces of death and destruction that
are embodied in this sea-monster, the World Serpent, does
not seem to be essentially contrary to Christian message.
As Fred C. Robinson indicates, a pagan god, depending upon
the specific attributes under consideration, had at times
the capacity to reflect aspects of the true God, and at
other times to represent the devil and the forces of
darkness:

> Evidently the early Christian view that pagan gods
> were simply disguises of the devil coexisted with
> conceptions of the pagan gods as imperfect
> realizations of the true Deity or as mistaken
> names for what would later be identified as God.
>
> (41)

In addition, the image of the ship came from the

artifact itself, for Northern Europeans, whether Germanic, Celtic, or non-European tribes, sailed the seaways long before recorded history. Folklorists believe that the motifs of the ship of the dead and the crewless ship derive from non-Christian lore dating from the Stone Age in Northern Europe (Beck xvii). Because of the antiquity of seafaring in the North, one can say very little about the ultimate origins of the imagery and its symbolic meanings.

Setting adrift also appears to have been a widely known, if seldom used, practice by the early medieval people. They used the sea to punish their members directly as well, and that was by far the sea-related practice that most affected literature. According to Karl von Amira in Die Germanischen Todesstrafen, exposure was a common type of capital punishment, and in its most ancient form among Germanic coastal tribes, judges placed the condemned person in a small ship, sometimes defective or rudderless, and launched it (144-6). In "Setting Adrift in Medieval Law and Literature," J. R. Reinhard shows that the tradition was known at least as early as Homeric times.[7] They formed part of the Northerners' essentially fatalistic view of the sea as a hostile force that they had to overcome through divine help. Survival depended on it (Beck, 63).

In fact, the pagan and Christian symbolism concerning ships and the sea reveal an identical use of imagination but divergent interpretations. James W. Marchand asserts that a ship sermon found in an early Old Norse manuscript

demonstrates the "strong influence of patristic exegesis on
Old Norse literature in its formative years" (245).   Both
traditions represented an article of faith in the form of a
man-made artifact--and extension of the human world--in a
non-human environment, the sea, which in turn represented
all that lies beyond human understanding but still obviously
exists and must be accounted for.   Christians and pagans
alike looked for a supernatural power that controlled the
world and promised an incorruptible existence after death;
the ship provided a familiar image to help early medieval
people think about the movement from the comprehensible fact
of life to the incomprehensible nature of death by the
simple analogy of a ship departing land for the destination.
This idea is well shown in the brief story of Scyld in
Beowulf.   To early medieval Christians the ship represented
faith in God's Church and Christ's guidance on the
imperiling and unfathomable sea of this corrupt age; it was
a ship of the voyage of life, and its destination was the
harbor of heaven, eternal rest.

In Chapter Two, I direct my attention to Beowulf, not
only because it is the most significant Old English poem in
scope and in quality, but also because this poem shows ample
evidences for the present study.   In Chapter Three, my focus
is on The Seafarer, the only long Old English poem to take
sea and seafaring as its direct narrative situation from the
Biblical viewpoint.   This poem can be best appreciated under
this perspective.   In Chapter Four, I go beyond the Old

English poems to explore sea symbolism in <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> as prominent representatives of Middle English poetry, in particular two tales which nicely fit the analysis of this dissertation. Chapter Five examines Christian sea symbolism in Milton's entire writings including his prose; he conveys this idea faithfully and sometimes even intensifies it. Finally, in Chapter Six, I present the conclusion of this study and further suggestions for extending it, with the hope that this research provides another new systematic approach for explications of English poetry.

Notes

1 For details, see Niels Lund, ed., _Two Voyagers at the Court of King Alfred: The Ventures of Ohthere and Wulfstan together with the Description of Northern Europe from the Old English Orosius_.

2 All quotations of the Bible are from _The Vulgate_ because this version was used in the Middle Ages.

3 All the translations of _The Vulgate_ are from the Douay Version, which is directly translated from St. Jerome.

4 According to Wilson, this verse symbolizes "the great power and energy put forth by the enemies of God who rise up out of the great mass of people [the sea] and . . . leaders in opposing the work of God and the people of God" (399).

5 Since these two traditions on sea and ship symbolism are not my main concern, I will only discuss them briefly.

6 For example, Psalm 88: 10 "Intellectus Aethan Ezraitae" reads "tu dominaris potestatis maris motum autem fluctuum eius tu mitigas" ("Thou rulest the power of the sea: and appeasest the motion of the waves thereof").

7 The Greeks believed the sea to be the arbiter of sin and innocence, so that anyone who voyaged unharmed was held to be virtuous and anyone who shipwrecked was presumed guilty of a sin that had angered the gods. The adventures

of Odysseus supply a literary example, according to

Reinhard. When Odysseus blinded the cyclops Polyphemus,

Poseidon's son, the sea god punished him with shipwreck (35-

6). Another good example is Seneca's controversia,

involving the father and his pirate son. The father had the

boy set adrift as a punishment for an alleged murder, but he

did not die at sea and afterward argued that his luck

exonerated him (15-8).

CHAPTER II

CHRISTIAN SEA SYMBOLISM IN <u>BEOWULF</u>:
"Gesāwon ðā æfter wætere wyrmcynnes fela,/
sellice sædracan sund cunnian"

Generally speaking, the nature of Old English poetry
demands copious synonyms for any subject. Of all the
subjects for which the Old English poets used synonyms, the
sea is expressed with perhaps the greatest variety. In her
article, "Terms and Phrases for the Sea in Old English
Poetry," Helen Buckhurst correctly argues this matter as
follows:

> In his pursuit of synonyms, two courses are open
> to the poet: he can either take a word of wider
> and more general meaning and narrow it down to the
> particular sense that he has to express; or, by an
> opposite process, he can take a word of
> comparatively limited significance and use it in a
> more general sense. By the first of these
> processes, a word originally meaning water of any
> kind may become a synonym for sea, while by the
> second the sea may be expressed by a word whose
> original meaning was only a channel or a wave. . .
> By a slight stretch of imagination the poet can

picture the sea as 'water,' 'a channel,' 'waves,'
or 'a current of water'; it is but a further step
in the same process when he visualizes it as 'the
ships' road,' or 'the seagulls' home' (104).

Buckhurst's assertion is absolutely true especially of
Beowulf. When the Beowulf-poet uses the synonyms, he
exactly applies these "two courses," possibly not only
because of the alliteration, but also because of the
context. Thus, when we are tracing the sea and its
symbolism in Old English poetry, especially in Beowulf, we
must not limit our study to single terms such as "sea,"
"wave," or "water." Instead, the context should be
considered whether or not it means ocean. From this
perspective, Beowulf is full of sea-related terms. In
Beowulf the sea is certainly not just an ornament as some
critics such as Robert Diamond, Francis P. Magoun, and Mack
Allen Perry maintain. Rather it is very significant in the
poem: the sea is both contextually and linguistically a key
element in Beowulf. Hence, the study of sea symbolism in
Beowulf is essentially required for a better understanding
of the poem. However much may have been written on Beowulf,
as far as I know, no critic, surprisingly, has ever
systematically studied the immediate issue of sea symbolism
with reference to this great literary achievement. Such
critics (including the above three scholars) as John Miles
Foley, John Gardner, David Crowne, Henry Cecil Wild, Roberta
Frank, Caroline Brady, Kinshiro Oshitari, Masako Isshiki,

Adrien Bonjour, and James Walter Rankin focus only on the synonyms, and/or the kennings for the sea, or the comparison of the sea voyage "type-scene." Although Robert Ashton Kissack Jr., Lee C. Ramsey, and Anne Treneer actually did research on sea imagery, they tended to concentrate on its linguistic aspects, the subject of the ship burial, or just its structural significance; they failed to perceive the sea symbolism in Beowulf whether Biblical or secular. In this chapter my specific explication will be placed on the Christian sea symbolism in Beowulf because the sea in this poem is evidently depicted as physical, moral, and spiritual evil in keeping with Biblical tradition. All the symbolic constituents of the poem-such as the Breca episode, Grendel, Grendel's mother, their abode, and the dragon-will manifestly show the malignant nature of the sea.

First, let us talk about the author of Beowulf briefly. By critical consensus, the Beowulf-poet was a Christian connected with a monastery, mainly because in eighth-century education, England was under the control of the monastic organizations. Frederick Klaeber's studies endorse this judgment.[1] W. W. Lawrence states that because of inconsistent Christian references in Beowulf the author must have been a convert, not a well-schooled cleric (Beowulf, 282-83). Kenneth Sisam also asserts that the Beowulf-poet was probably not a priest, since even the famous Christian scholar and teacher Alcuin seems not to have been a priest (he refers to himself as "deacon") (63-64). To Margaret E.

Goldsmith, the authoritative, even moralizing tone of the poem indicates a monkish author, not a professional entertainer (15). Although there are different opinions on the specific religious status of the poet, nobody would dispute whether or not the poet is a Christian or at least that the poet has knowledge of the Bible and Biblical sea imagery.

In addition, there are many arguments that the Beowulf poem neither mentions Christ, nor shows "signs of thoroughgoing indebtedness to Scripture and liturgy," (Whallon, 117). Moreover, the formulaic diction is basically Germanic. Nonetheless, not only because the poet is a Christian, but also because none of these references contains any name of the gods of the Germanic religion, there is no doubt that Beowulf is indeed a Christian epic.[2] Supporting this view, Zacharias P. Thundy aptly explains that "the poet observes the rules of the classical epic, but creates his own 'Christian' epic" (11). R. W. Chambers also puts it as follows: "The whole spirit of Beowulf is Christian. It looks as if some man, by no means convinced that there is nothing 'in common with Ingeld and Christ,' had set to work to write a poem which should bring in the great heroes of Germanic minstrelsy, Ingeld and Froda, Hrothgar and Hrothulf, Sigemond and Heremod, Offa and Scyld. But the poet is careful to avoid anything incompatible with the Christian faith and morals" (xxii).

Beowulf is one of the fullest expressions of the sea

spirit in Old English poetry. The story is everywhere
replete with sea-related imagery. Roger Smith holds that
the passages depicting the sea, seafaring, and the ships
reveal that the poet knows the vessels and the sailing of
his times (99). Showing a heroic society closely resembling
Tacitus' Germania, the poem opens with the passing of
Scyld,[3] founder of the house of the Scyldings, and ancestor
to Hrothgar. Scyld came from the sea as a little child and
returned to the sea mysteriously in death. According to
George Clark, weapons are most vividly connected with Scyld
Scyfing's funeral ship where "they represent royal power,
victorious war, material prosperity, and death" ("Beowulf,"
415). And the poem ends with a funeral by the sea. By his
own order Beowulf's ashes are buried on the edge of a high
cape overlooking the ocean; he wants his barrow placed there
so that afterwards, those who sail from far away, will call
it Beowulf's Barrow. Hence, from the beginning to the end
of the poem, the sea appears almost everywhere: this poem
shows vividly conceived pictures of tumultuous seas. The
crossing of the sea is a characteristic challenge to the
hero. The tumult of the crossing is frequently invoked in
formulaic and semi-formulaic phrases: "ofer ȳða gewealc" (l.
464a), "ofer wæteres hrycg" (l. 471b), and "under ȳða gewin"
(l. 1469a).[4] Beowulf's first sea voyage is from Geatland to
Denmark; the second is from Denmark back to Geatland. These
two voyages occupy pivotal positions in the action of the
poem. Moreover, Beowulf's fighting at sea is represented by

the swimming match with Breca and the descent into Grendel's mere.

Let us examine first the swimming contest at sea between Beowulf and Breca. This episode shows us a similar pattern which appears again in his battle with Grendel's mother: a descent into dark and turbulent waters, a reversal of the expectations of bottom-dwelling sea-beasts, and eventually the illumination of their defeat by a beacon from heaven. As with Beowulf's encounter with the creatures of the mere, the poet presents the hero's battle with beasts at sea as one between forces of darkness and forces of light, exemplified through physical contrasts in nature: clear and stormy weather, and day and night. Beowulf and Breca both are prepared to protect themselves against "whale-fishes" ("wit unc wið hronfixas / werian þōhton," ll. 540b-41a), and they keep equal pace with each other for five days in the sea until a storm drives them apart:

> Đā wit ætsomne   on sǣ wǣron
>
> fīf nihta fyrst,   oþ þæt unc flōd tōdrāf,
>
> wado weallende,   wedera cealdost,
>
> nīpende niht,   ond norþanwind
>
> heaðogrim ondhwearf; hrēo wǣron ȳþa.
>
> (544-48)

With the onset of the darkening night, the stormy wind from the north, and the perilous waves, the sea monsters become ferocious. Then, in an encounter with a malicious foe that

foreshadows Beowulf's later plunge and confrontation with Grendel's mother at the mere, Beowulf is seized and brought down to the bottom of the churning salty waters. Protected by his coat of mail, he survives the monster's attack and slays the enemy with his sword:

> Wæs merefixa   mōd onhrēred;
>
> þær mē wið lāðum   līcsyrce mīn
>
> heard hondlocen   helpe gefremede,
>
> beadohrægl brōden,   on brēostum læg
>
> golde gegyrwed.   Mē tō grunde tēah
>
> fāh fēondscaða,   fæste hæfde
>
> grim on grāpe;   hwæþre mē gyfēþe wearð,
>
> þæt ic āglæcan   orde geræhte,
>
> hildebille;   heaþoræs fornam
>
> mihtig meredēor   þurh mīne hand.
>
> (549-58)

When all is said and done, Beowulf winds up killing nine sea monsters ("niceras nigene," l. 575a) who, contrary to their expectations of feasting on his body at a sea-bottom banquet, are themselves washed lifeless to the shore as "God's bright beacon" shines from the east, and the seas subside:

> Næs hīe ðære fylle   gefēan hæfdon,
>
> mānfordædlan,   þæt hīe mē þēgon,
>
> symbel ymbsæton   sægrunde nēah;
>
> ac on mergenne   mēcum wunde
>
> be ȳðlāfe   uppe lægon,

                    sweo[r]dum āswefede,   þæt syð̄þan nā

                    ymb brontne ford   brimlīðende

                    lāde ne letton.   Lēoht ēastan cōm,

                    beorht bēacen Godes,   brimu swaþredon,

                                    (562-70)

Here Beowulf's actions are those of a "lidmanna helm," for

he has eliminated for seafarers ("brimlīðende") the threat

to navigation posed by these sea-monsters. In their

hostility toward seafarers, we are reminded of the whale's

nature in the Physiologus. (See the next chapter.) The

whale in Old English poetry, moreover, often seems to

presage storms at sea in much the same manner as the "beasts

of battle" portend battle on land. Further, Allan Metcalf

correctly demonstrates how, through exaggeration and

excitability on Beowulf's part, the fury of the storm even

permeates his own narration, as he increasingly emphasizes

the demonic qualities of the sea-beasts encountered in the

episode:

            Beowulf, however, explains that he and Breca armed

            to fight whales . . . . But a storm arose, and

            Beowulf next refers to the fish in general adding

            that they became furious (549). As such they are

            "fēondscað̄a" (554), dire foes, which attack him,

            and "āglǣcan" (556), recalling the dispositions of

            Grendel and the dragon (Klaeber, Beowulf. p. 298).

            Beowulf calls the beast he fights "mihtig

            meredēor" (558), a mighty sea animal. The beings

of the sea become "laðgetēonan," evildoers, in
line 559; such a term again indicates their state
of mind. Describing the banquet which they had
hoped to enjoy, Beowulf pictures their malice in
human terms.   (388-89)

The terrors of the deep are omnipresent in the poem.
Through the use of "hron-" compounds,[5] the poet highlights
the perils of the dark and chaotic depths. He uses them
sometimes because of the alliteration, but also for the
context. For example, at line 10, the poet uses the
formulaic expression "ofer hronrade" in his narration of
Scyld Scyfing's conquest and subjugation of people overseas.
Here when we view it in the light of the whale's treacherous
nature, the poet's use of "ofer hronrade" is more than a
mere reference to the sea. Rather, it is peculiarly suited
to the dangerous and deceptive nature of the briny ocean.
It is also true when it refers to Beowulf's final resting
place, "Hronesnæsse," (ll. 2805; 3136) because Beowulf
wishes his barrow to be visible as a protection for sailors
far out to sea.

In addition, the advent and departure of the storm have
a directional significance, where the contrasts are clear
physically and symbolically: light/dark, good/evil, and
heaven/hell. This symbolic conflict appears at the very
outset of the storm, where, with "darkening night," a
"battle-grim" wind has come from the north, bringing about
the "coldest of weathers." As such, this rough wind is

baleful in its symbolic essence, for it originates from the secondary direction of Hell or evil in a Christian sense. It carries with it coldness and darkness which have in Christianity significant symbolic meanings. These characteristics are also evident in the landscape of Grendel's mere, which will be examined later. After the downward pull exerted by the forces of darkness throughout the night, an "edwenden" occurs as the new day dawns ("ac on mergenne," l. 565a). And victory comes to the power of light: with an upward shift in movement from "sǣgrund nēah" (l. 564b) to the surface, the malice beasts of the night now "uppe lǣgon" (l. 566b) beside the "leaving of waves" (i.e., on the beach). Here "up" and "down" are Christian directional symbols, too. Accompanying the triumph is a directional shift, which is distinctly described in the poem; it is God's light that shines propitiously from the east[6] upon the scene of Beowulf's winning. Thus the battle of the night comes to rest in the light of day. Moreover, another directional shift, which intensifies the symbolic victory of heaven over hell, occurs at the end of Beowulf's speech. Anticipating the outcome of his encounter with Grendel, Beowulf predicts a new dawn--a radiant sun--with a light shining from the south:

> siþþan morgenlēoht
>
> ofer ylda bearn ōþres dōgores,
>
> sunne sweglwered sūþan scīneð!'

(604b-6)

In a Christian sense, the south is the secondary direction

of goodness. Hence, the awful and hellish spirit of the

north with which the storm began is effectively contrasted

both physically and symbolically. Howell D. Chickering

aptly comments that "the curious sūþan 'from the south'

further associates God's favor with the sun shining on

Beowulf's deed, since it is the antithesis of frozen Hell

located in the far north" (303). After Beowulf narrates his

battles with the sea monsters during the perilous nights, he

mentions his first glimpse of land:

Lēoht ēastan cōm,

beorht bēacen Godes,   brimu swaþredon,

þæt ic sǣnæssas   gesēon mihte,

windige weallas.

(569b-72a)

This passage shows Beowulf's hope, joy, and thanksgiving for

his deliverance from the dark, cold, and stormy sea (Clark,

"Traveler," 653).

Grendel's mere should also be considered because the

evil nature of the sea, its coldness,[7] its fearful

appearance, the "brimwulf," the "nicras," and the "orcneas"-

-which inhabit the sea--make the sea a place malignant

enough. Indeed the description of the mere is a strong and

manifest suggestion of evil. It also bears striking

similarity to the vision of hell in the seventeenth

Blickling Homily. Commenting on this resemblance,

Chickering explains: ". . . such details show that the landscape of the mere symbolizes Hell. It is a Garden of Evil, in which one of the race of Cain dwells, freezing in sin. The stag that avoids these dark waters is probably based on Psalm 42 [41 Vulgate] . . . . The hart would rather die than hide his head in the mere, just as any rational soul would prefer death to eternal damnation" (335). After likening the hart to "the faithful Christian who seeks his Lord in the Living Waters," D. W. Robertson, Jr. maintains: "But the hart in <u>Beowulf</u> carefully avoids Grendel's waters, which he knows will not assuage his thirst. . . . He prefers death to the eternal damnation which results from hiding under the wrong trees" (185-86). Moreover, "wolf-slopes" appear as a prominent feature of the hidden land guarded by Grendel and his mother which is called the "sea-wulf." This characteristic adds to the haunting atmosphere of the place:

> Hie dȳgel lond
>
> warigeað wulfhleoþu,   windige næssas,
>
> frēcne fengelād,   ðær fyrgenstrēam
>
> under næssa genipu   niþer gewīteð,
>
> frōd under foldan.

(1357b-61a)

These chilling depictions show that a "dangerous fen-path" leads along "windy ground"; and the water's movement is directed ever downward, under the ground, into deeper darkness. Further description of the wood-shaded mere

standing not far hence (ll. 1361b-66a) and additional details revealed during the warriors' later approach to the mere (ll. 1408-17a) intensify the malign nature of the mere. All these items together closely resemble the landscape of St. Paul's vision of hell in the seventeenth Blickling Homily:

> Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, & he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne hārne stān; & wæron norð of ðæm stāne awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, & ðær wæron þystrogenipo, & under þæm stāne wæs niccra eardung & wearga. & he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm isigean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne; & þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa swa grædig wulf; & þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan; & betuh ðæm clife on þæm wætre wæron swylce twelf mila, & ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras.
>
> (209-11)[8]

Appearing in this homily are many of the features that mark the hidden land in <u>Beowulf</u>.

Indeed, the evil nature of Grendel's haunt is emphasized in Hrothgar's reference to it as a "terrible place." Richard Butts holds that "the description of Grendel's mere in Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf (1345a-1379b)

is an extended metaphor for terror. The poet gives us
Hrothgar's description not so much to present a natural
landscape but to point to the realm of the supernatural"
(113). Stanley also remarks that "factually the scenery
could hardly exist," that it is a "gallimaufry of devices,
each of which is horrific in its associations" (441). This
is the abode of a demon, an enemy of God and man--"Godes
andsacan" (l. 786b), "mancynnes fēond" (l. 1276)--and an
inhabitant of hell--"helle hæfton" (l. 788a), "helle gāst"
(l. 1274a), "fēond on helle" (l. 101b). To a Christian
listener or reader of the poem, the function of this realm
of darkness seems clear enough. It effectively obliterates
the brightness of heaven from view, affording to those who
have come under the shadows, a dismal view similar to that
which Satan deplores in the hell of Old English Genesis B.
Through an interplay of light and shadow, Beowulf's approach
and dive into the mere stir up a hellish commotion among the
sea monsters. First they become bitter and enraged as they
perceive the "bearhtm" associated with the war-horn (ll.
1430b-32a). Then they harass him severely as, wearing his
"hwita helm," he makes his way through the saline waters to
the dwelling of the "grundwyrgenne," whom he defeats with
the help of God (ll. 1553b-56). Afterwards, a heavenly
light shines forth within the chamber (ll.1570-72a) to
expose the bodies of his enemies as well as the foes of God.

Obviously, the mere is contextually the sea in the
poem: the element--salt water--is the same; and similar

creatures inhabit each place and exhibit similar behavior.
Indeed, the poet even states that the mere-monsters are of
the same kind as those who often attend a perilous journey
upon the sea: "Ðā on undernmǣl oft bewitigað / sorhfulne
sīð on seglrāde," (ll. 1428-29). In this regard they are
like old Fastitocalon of The Whale, the floater of ocean
streams ("fyrnstreama geflotan") who threatens the well-
being of seafarers. In achieving his mission at the
mere, moreover, Beowulf is regarded as a protector of
seafarers ("lidmanna helm," l. 1623b)--a reference that
affords us insight into both literal and symbolic aspects
of his role and the nature of the mere. Through his
cleansing of the mere, Beowulf's redemptive accomplishment
in the "nīðsele" against the forces of evil is analogous to
that of the "heofona helm" in The Descent into Hell. On the
literal level, the "lidmanna helm" reference at this point
establishes more solidly the mere's link to the sea, for
Beowulf at the mere has performed his action to benefit
people and seafarers. Physical features such as the
"nǣssas" and "fyrnstreama" (cf. the use in The Whale of
"fyrnstreama" to denote that sea-monster's habitat) likewise
attest to the mere's association with the sea. Kemp Malone
convincingly points out this aspect:

>"Fyrgenstream" has two well established meanings,
>viz., 'mountain stream' and 'ocean' (see B. T. and
>Grein), but it would be odd to find a mountain
>stream in the fens, and the context gives further

indication that 'ocean' was the meaning which the poet had in mind: "fyrgenstream" varies with "flod" (1. 1361), and the næssaa 'headlands' of 1. 1360 are presumably to be sought on the seashore, of which the næs was a characteristic feature. . . . When the poet tells us that the great stream (fyrgenstream) 'goes down under the shadows of the headlands, goes down under the ground" (11. 1360 f.), he is referring to the great stream of Ocean (i.e. the sea pure and simple), which by subterranean channels penetrates to the mere and so to the cave (1. 2128) where lurk Grendel and his dam, and where Beowulf is destined to fight for his life. That the poet thinks of the mere as connected with the sea can hardly be disputed, since he represents it as infested with sea-monsters (11. 1425 ff.), and it seems obvious that the connexion was made by means of an underground passage, since 11. 1360 f. tell us of such a passage. (review, 191-92)

Besides Malone, other critics such as Stopford Brooke, W. S. Mackie, E. B. Irving, Jr., J. D. A. Ogilvy and Donald Baker, Anne Treneer, and Richard J. Schrader[9] strongly assert that Grendel's lair is undoubtedly the sea which has all the evil attributes.

Moreover, the <u>Beowulf</u>-poet vividly describes Grendel's abode in many horrifying ways. At night fire gleams on the

flood. In time of storm, surging water rises up to the clouds. The waters seem to be angry. They mercilessly seize on Beowulf as he, fully armed, and carrying the famous sword "Hrunting," descends in search of Grendel's mother. For a whole day he travels through the sea until he meets his enemy and comes to the strange dry cave. The sword lent by Unferth fails Beowulf, and he has to trust first to his hand-grip, and then to an ancient treasure-sword which he gets in the cave of the sea-wolf. With this mysterious sword he conquers his foe. The hilt of the sword is engraved with the story of the great Flood and the death of giants from the rising of the sea (ll. 1688-93) and is decorated with serpentine figures: all these matters are also highly symbolic beyond their literal portrayals. The scene in the cave is emphatically made horrible by the gleam of supernatural fire and the terror of the sea. Thus Robert E. Finnegan concludes that "the mere is a type of hell" (47). In effect, the place and its surroundings are characterized as a hellish environment, the habitation of monsters and devils:

> Gesāwon ðā æfter wætere   wyrmcynnes fela,
>
> sellice sǣdracan   sund cunnian,
>
> swylce on næshleoðum   nicras licgean
>
> ðā on undernmǣl   oft bewitigað
>
> sorhfulne sīð   on seglrāde,
>
> wyrmas ond wildēor.
>
>   (1425-30)

The cave itself is characterized as a "niðsele" (1. 1513,

"hostile hall"). Alvin A. Lee sharply comments on the

demonic nature of the cave and the mere as follows:

> . . . Grendel's mere is a complex fusion of images
>
> from the conventional fallen world described
>
> throughout the canon, a fusion which involves the
>
> motifs of both the wasteland and the chaotic sea
>
> as these are brought into intimate association
>
> with traditional hell images
>
> (215).

Even though color-terms in Old English can be deceptive, it

is worthwhile to note here that the epithet used to

denote the sea in Beowulf is "fealu." Wyld discusses this

adjective as follows:

> The word "fealu" is given in OE glossaries as
>
> equivalent to Latin "gilvus," "flavus," "fulvus,"
>
> and even to "rubicundus." It is applied in OE to
>
> things as different as withered leaves and
>
> blossoms, fire, horses, and the horn of an ox.
>
> The word apparently expresses various shades of
>
> yellow, from pale to ruddy, and may probably be
>
> best translated 'dun' or 'tawny' when applied to
>
> the sea (50).

The word "won (wan)" is also used to picture the surge in

Grendel's mere. The same epithet is applied to describe

night. It is a suitable adjective for the depth of the sea.

The Oxford English Dictionary states that this word is used "in conventional application in poetry to the sea (waves, etc.) or other waters." Moreover, James W. Earl aptly argues that the "association of 'wan' with evil is borne out throughout Beowulf: Grendel represents the 'wonsceaft wera' and is also described as 'wonsǣlī' (l. 105), and he is characterized by 'wonhȳdum' (l.434); the night of his attack is 'wan under wolcnum' (l. 651), he creeps about in the 'wanre niht' (l.702); the tossing waves of his mere are 'wan' (l. 1374); after Beowulf's death the "wonna hrefn" is 'fūs ofer fǣgum' (ll. 3024-25), and the destroying flames of Beowulf's pyre are also 'wonna' (l. 3115)" ("Necessity," 98).

Furthermore, the entire place is usually dark: the Beowulf-poet stresses that Grendel's abode is entirely dark and gloomy without any light. Grendel is consistently characterized as a creature of the darkness. Stanley demonstrates that the Anglo-Saxons were "familiar with the interpretation of darkness as an aspect of evil, gloom and terror" (436). Also, in the Christian literature regarding the subject of evil, darkness is clearly the most common analogy for the nature of evil, possibly because darkness is naturally evoked as a reminiscence of Gen. 1: 2. The first reference to Grendel describes him as "sē þe in þȳstrum bād" (l. 87b). Grendel is the "deorc dēaþscua"(l. 160a) who lives in the world of darkness:

sinnihte hēold

> mistige mōras;   men ne cunnon,
>
> hwyder helrūnan hwyrftum scrīþað.
>
> (161b-163)

W. Mead makes the interesting remark that Old English poetry
is a literature of light (or day) and dark (or night).
Beowulf is a poem of bright day and darkest night, light
hall and gloomy wasteland. As Nigel F. Barley argues,
evidently "this has a symbolic load" (17). Moreover, F.
Gummere holds that in common Germanic times, light and dark
were associated with joy and sadness only. Christianity
immeasurably intensifies this opposition by adding the moral
dimensions of good to light and evil to darkness. Christ,
angels, and the Heavenly City are always depicted with
light-related terms; hell, devils, and the sea are
invariably described with dark-related terms. Thus not only
because of its relationship with darkness, but also because
of its symbolic meanings, the sea is apparently evil.

It is undeniable that Grendel and his dam[10] are often
characterized in the poem as monsters and hellish creatures.
The Beowulf-poet uses a plethora of vocabulary with which to
describe Grendel and his mother as monsters and demons.
Grendel in particular is referred to as "fēond on helle" (l.
101), "grimma gæst" (l. 102), and "wergan gāstes" (l.
133).[11] Moreover, Jacqueline Vaught makes an interesting
suggestion that the "mother" epithet is a reference to the
Grendel's mother's symbolic function as the source of chaos
and evil (133). These and other similar epithets have often

led scholars to understand Grendel and his mother as a symbol of the devil[12] and "the embodiment of radical evil" (Bandy, 241) in general. They possess all the attributes of Satan as they were perceived by Christians in the early Middle Ages. Grendel is said to belong to an evil race of monsters sprung from Cain:

> þanon untȳdras   ealle onwōcon,
>
> eotenas ond ylfe   ond orcneas,
>
> swylce gīgantas   þā wiðGode wunnon
>
> lange þrāge.

(111-14a)

The word "eoten"[13] (l. 761) and his peculiar ability to devour thirty of Hrothgar's thanes at one sitting characterize Grendel both as a malignant giant and a monstrous cannibal.[14] The name "Grendel" itself has been related to Old English "grindan" ("to grind," "to rub," "to scratch," "to crunch," "to gnash")[15] and hence interpreted as "destroyer."[16] The prominently destructive character of Grendel seems well supported both by his behavior and his name. His destructive force is also solidly related to the concept of evil in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Klaeber remarks that Grendel is

> conceived of as an impersonation of evil and
>
> darkness, even an incarnation of the Christian
>
> devil. Many of his appellations are
>
> unquestionably epithets of Satan (e. g., feond
>
> mancynnes, Godes andsaca, feond on helle, helle

> haefta . . .), he belongs to the wicked progeny of
> Cain, the first murderer, his actions are
> represented in a manner suggesting the conduct of
> the evil one . . ., and he dwells with his demon
> mother in a place which calls up visions of hell.
>
> (1)

The references to Grendel as a descendant of Cain (11. 107,
1261) have especially attracted the attention of scholars.
Various studies claim that the Beowulf-poet was influenced
in his characterization of Grendel by an ancient Noachic
tradition that cannibalistic giants were related to Cain's
stock.[17] Oliver F. Emerson notes that it was customary in
patristic exegesis to consider the Biblical giants as
descendants of Cain. However, Mellinkoff argues that
Grendel's kinship to Cain must be understood in the
spiritual sense ("Part II," 196). Also, Marie P. Hamilton
holds that the poet does not literally make Grendel Cain's
descendent. Instead, "he is merely employing a metaphor for
the society of reprobates" (313). I think that Grendel can
be said to be a descendant of Cain in the sense that he is
someone, motivated by envy[18] and resentment, who kills and
destroys human beings.

Further, Grendel's eyes shine forth with gruesome beams
of light (11. 726-27), making him a mock light-bearer, a
kind of Lucifer who in the Bible was one of the chief angels
serving God nearby, but later became Satan as a result of
his rebellion against God. In addition, as Lee notes,

Grendel and his dam are linked linguistically to the dragon via several epithets: "bona," "feond," "lad," "mansceada," "aglaeca," "grim," "atol," and "freca" (218); thus, in one sense they are different incarnations of a similar principle. Each of the monsters represents something supernatural and malignant to human beings. In the poem Beowulf alone stands between the monsters and their victims. His role in this aspect is almost the same as that of Christ because Jesus stands between Satan and humanity. Also, Revelation offers a parallel for Grendel's mother, too, as it does for Grendel. In Chapter 13 a sea monster arises from the sea to hold power over the world. A second beast then arises from the earth. Niles notes that

> Whereas Grendel is associated chiefly with the
> surface of the earth over which we see him
> striding, his mother normally keeps to the depths
> of the mere, and the epithets by which she is
> named evoke her aquatic nature (10).

Grendel's mother--chronologically the first beast--arises from the sea, and her son--the second monster (though Grendel appears first in the poem)--is chiefly associated with land. This analogy is not exact, yet the appearance in Beowulf of the two beasts may be more than coincidence. It might be possible that the Beowulf-poet knows this Biblical story and applies it to his poem.

The examination of the dragon in Beowulf[19] should also be made because the dragon is indeed one of the "Christian

representations of evil" (Earl, "Transformation," 183) and "the spiritual adversary" (Alank Brown, 439).[20] The origin of the concept of the flying firedrake of the Beowulf--an animal whose elemental nature is a combination of earth ("eorðdraca," l. 2712, 2825), air ("ūhtflogan," l. 2760), and fire ("fȳrdraca," l. 2689; "līgdraca," l. 2333; and "lēgdraca" l. 3040)--is difficult to determine. Although there are precedents for the Beowulf dragon in Northern secular literature, this dragon has apparent affinities to the Biblical dragon. Goldsmith argues as follows:

> From his reading of the Bible and its glosses, the Beowulf-poet would know a good deal about dragons--including fiery serpents--as plagues and dreadful visitations. (130)

She goes on to conclude that as physical beings the various dragons in Beowulf are "descendants of the cursed Serpent" and that the "habits of the great dragon were compounded by the hostility of the serpent kinds to man, and the traditional (perhaps Roman) association of the creature with hoarded treasure. In the allegory of the individual man, the monsters are the embodiment of evil forces which beset a man . . . . Beowulf's dragon is compounded of Leviathan and Mammon, the powers which govern the proud and the cupidinous" (144). Nicolas K. Kiessling in his dissertation observes that the dragon was a "widespread symbol . . . known by priests, writers, artists and presumably everyone who heard the Bible read in early medieval times," and any

audience with any Christian education would readily associate a dragon with Revelation and with Satan (perhaps "almost exclusively") (199). He also notes that the dragon of the Apocalypse "was becoming very popular in iconography and commentary by the eighth century" (35), nor did the Anglo-Saxon literate Christian "have to be widely traveled to see these very creatures depicted in ecclesiastical arts" (36). However, the Beowulf dragon is not merely the dragon of the Bible. One finds him a flesh-and-blood monster suited to his description in the Cotton Tiberius B i Maxims II, where the dragon is described as one who seeks a barrow and hoards its gold (11. 21-27). These are found in classical antiquity, most notably in the fables of Phaedrus.[21] Willem Helder correctly maintains that "the reference to Noah in Matthew 24 confirms that it is quite reasonable to connect the dragon with the specific form of evil which Beowulf overcomes in his struggle against Grendel and his dam. Noah was considered to have conquered the race of giants which sprang from the fratricide of Cain (cf. 110-14, 1687-93): Beowulf encounters fratricidal forces which, in imitation of Cain, seek to destroy a harmonious society" (319). Like Grendel and his mother, the dragon embodies the spirit of Cain. Schrader asserts that the dragon is "the successor of Grendel" (Schrader, "Succession," 502). The dragon rules "deorcum nihtum;" like Grendel he is a nocturnal counterpart of Beowulf (Atkinson, 2). They are depicted in the same way--"oð ðat ān ongan,"

ll. 100, 2210--and rule with the same power--"rixode /
rics[i]an," ll. 144, 2211. The dragon, too, stands for the
kind of wickedness which the Flood once cleansed. The
identification of the dragon with the Grendel kin and,
hence, with the symbolism of the Deluge suggests the
underlying unity of the poem (Helder, 321). It is therefore
a suitable occasion for pushing the dragon over the cliff
into the sea, in anticipation of the fate of the ancient
dragon of the Revelation, who after the thousand years is to
be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (20:10).

Symbolically, Beowulf's link to sea and seafarers
establishes him as a protector of the faithful pilgrims
whose quest for salvation is often expressed in Old English
poems in terms of seafaring. Echoes of this theme occur
throughout the poem, bringing to mind both the symbolic and
physical aspects of seafaring. Beowulf cleansed the sea (l.
1620) as well as Heorot (l. 2352). To Beowulf's pagan
admirers in the poem, he displays the heroic and beneficent
qualities that they have come to respect and require of a
protector of a community--qualities that are even godly in
nature. To the poet's audience, however, the message of
Christian deliverance is equally apparent. Not only did
Beowulf trust in his strength, but also in the help of God
(ll. 669-70). As Charles Donahue speculates, it seems
likely "that the poet conceived of his hero as a _figura
Christi_ and that he was presenting him as such to an
audience where there were some--perhaps many--who could

understand what he was doing" (115). Hence, as the outwardly pagan funeral rites take place, a double meaning unfolds. Even the blazing pyre--ostensibly heathen and contrary to normal Christian practice--seems to have a positive Christian significance, for the funeral and barrow site at "Hronesnæsse" is meant to be a source of light--a sort of beacon for seafarers. For even in death Beowulf has triumphed. On Whale's Ness he has himself assumed the role played by "God's bright beacon" in the Breca episode: that of a guiding light and protector of men who sail over the dark and perilous sea. The monument on "Hronesnæsse" (1. 3136) will remind them of their lord's achievements even after his death. Beowulf himself confidently expects that as a result of his exemplary Christian heroism, "Hronesnæss," named after a hellish monster, will instead become known as the location of "Bīowulfes biorh" (1. 2807a). According to Helder, there is every indication that the Geats are to endure a season of storm and darkness in which they will have Beowulf's barrow to inspire them to perseverance (324). As I have discussed so far, this poem has many symbolic constituents which convey Christian meanings explicitly and sometimes implicitly. In particular, the wicked monsters' association with the sea reinforces the malign nature of the sea. All these elements in Beowulf work together to portray the sea as a priori evil.

Notes

1 See one section of the Klaeber's introduction, "The
Christian Coloring," in Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg.
3rd ed.

2 For the concept that Beowulf is essentially a
Christian epic about the pagan past written by a Christian
poet, see J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the
Critics";and Kemp Malone, "Beowulf."

3 Malone explains that the name "'Scyld' may have the
abstract sense 'protection' and the personalized sense
'protector'" ("Royal Names," 182).

4 All citations from Beowulf are from Klaeber's
Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg. 3rd ed.

5 Besides this sea compound and others--"brimlāde" (1.
1051), "ganotes bæð" (1. 1861), "lagustrǣte" (1. 239),
"brontne ford" (1. 568), "flōdyþum" (1. 542), "meresræta"
(1. 514), "wæteres hrycg" (1. 471), "seglrāde" (1. 1429),
"ȳþlāde" (228), etc.-- there is a famous sea kenning,
"swanrāde" (1. 200), which has been extensively debated on
whether or not it is suitable for the sea context. For this
argument, I believe that Isshiki gives us a clear
explanation. I do not think that I can explain it better
than she does, so I quote here her explication: "Swans live

in the water, but not in the sea; therefore some people
insist that "swanrāde" should be interpreted as "river."
However, in this place, there is no suggestion of the
element of narrowness: Hygelac's valiant thane sets out
seeking the king in another country across the ocean.
Besides, in poetry, we do not need to stick to reason all
the time. Moreover, a swan is the symbol of purity, beauty,
and excellence; it is supposed to be associated with a royal
family. Therefore, the warrior was to visit the king and
"crossing the swan-road," that is, " sea," perfectly suits
the context" (271).

6 Bernard E. Huppé holds that Anglo-Saxons believed the
sun began its journey from the glory of God at the beginning
of time and took it as a symbol of Christ (48-50). Actually
the Bible refers prophetically to Christ as "the Sun of
righteousness" (Malachi 4: 2).

7 Medievalists have long realized that the word "cald"
must have evil connotations. For this matter, see E. G.
Stanley's "Old English Poetic Diction and the
Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The
Penitent's Prayer;" E. V. Gordon's The Battle of Maldon;
Alan J. Fletcher's "CALD WÆTER , SCIR WÆTER;" and especially
Vivian Salmon's detailed examples and explication in her
article, "Some Connotations of 'Cold' in Old and Middle
English."

8 See Klaeber, pp.182-83, n. 1357 ff., for a discussion
of the features of Grendel's abode as they relate to

Christian conceptions of hell, as well as to descriptive passages occurring in such diverse works as the Old Icelandic Grettis saga and Vergil's Aeneid. See also John D. Niles, Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition, pp.13-19, especially 18-19, where, after pointing out similarities to the descriptions of Grendel and the hellish mere in both Blickling Homily 17 and the eleventh-century illustrations to the Marvels of the East in BL, Cotton Tiberius B.v., he demonstrates the close interrelationship of verbal and visual concepts that occur in the three works. Although Niles, like Carleton Brown and Antonette di Paolo Healey, takes the Blickling homilist to be the later author, others--notably Kevin S. Kiernan--believe that Blickling Homily 17 "in all probability gave the poet his description of Grendel's 'mere'" (62).

9 See his article "Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters, and Grendel's Abode."

10 Walter Farina points out one interesting fact that sex "does not enter into the biblical or Christian concept of the devil; and giants, when mentioned, always appear as men" (23).

11 Rankin explains that of "the many names given to Grendel and the other monsters in Beowulf, the following are identical with or similar to terms applied to the devil, many of which, as has just been shown, have Christian Latin equivalents: Feond, Beo. 143, 985, 279, 726, 749, 963, 970, 438, 1273; feond mancynnes, 164, 1275; synscaþa, 708, 802;

manscaþa, 713, 738 <u>gastbona</u>, 177; <u>leodsceaþa</u>, 2093; <u>se laþa</u>, 132, 842, 440, 1257; <u>godes andsaca</u>, 787, 1683; <u>hellegaest</u>, 1275; <u>bana</u>, 2082; <u>ealdorgewinna</u>, 2903; <u>wyrm</u> (often); <u>draca</u>, 2402 et al.; <u>fyrena hyde</u>, 751; <u>dolscaþa</u>, 479; <u>ealdgewinna</u>, 1777; <u>hearmsceaþa</u>, 767; <u>feorhgeniþla</u> 970; <u>hellehaefta</u>, 789; <u>se ellor gaest</u>, 1349, 807, <u>waelgaest</u>, 1995; <u>se grimma gaest</u>, 102; <u>yrre gaest</u>, 2073; <u>fylwerig feond</u>, 962: <u>yrremod feond</u>, 726; <u>feond on helle</u>, 101; <u>þeodsceaþa</u>, 2279, 2689; <u>se werga gaest</u>, 133; <u>aglaeca</u>, 425, 433, 647, 740; 990, 1001, 1270; <u>atol aglaeca</u>, 159, 593, 733, 817" (59). I point out here that Rankin's line numbering and spellings are somewhat different from Klaeber's 3rd edition.

12 For this matter, see Lars Malmberg, "Grendel and the Devil"; James Smith, "<u>Beowulf</u> II."

13 John Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of <u>Beowulf</u>" (11); and Thalia P. Feldman, "Grendel and Cain's Descendants" (76). They interpret "eoten" as "eater."

14 Kenneth Florey states that "the number thirty here may be like the number forty in the Bible, simply a means of expressing a large, indeterminate quantity" (91). Additionally, in the Scriptural numerology "fourty" is symbolic number: it is a number of testing and temptation.

15 See Ferdinand Holthausen, <u>Altenglisches Etymologisches Worterbuch</u>, pp. 137-38.

16 For this point, see Ludwig Ettmuller, <u>Beowulf</u>, (20). See also Klaeber's <u>Beowulf</u>, p. xxviii for additional references.

17 Ruth Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf: Part I, Noachic Tradition;" Niilo Peltoia, "Grendel's Descent from Cain Reconsidered;" Robert E. Kaske, "Beowulf and the Book of Enoch;" and S. J. Crawford, "Grendel's Descent from Cain."

18 For a discussion of envy as Grendel's motivation, see Emerson's "Grendel's Motive in Attacking Heorot."

19 Lawrence collects the physical characteristics of the dragon in Beowulf as follows: "This dragon was fifty feet long (3042); he was propelled by his own fires, 'fȳre gefȳsed' (2309); he spewed out coals, 'glēdum,' as he flew through the air (2312), burning the dwelling-places of men, and even the royal hall in which Beowulf dwelt (2325). He was not, however, proof against his own fires in death (3041), any more than the dragon slain by Sigemund (897). His breath was poisonous (2523), he blew out steam (2557, 2661); a burning stream issued from his lair (2545, cf. p. 570, note). . . . Elsewhere we are told that the dragon had brooded over the treasure for three hundred years (2278)" ("Dragon," 549-50).

20 See Goldsmith, pp. 126-27 and Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens, s.v. "Drache," sections 1, 3, and 5.

21 In De universo, Rabanus says that "the hart primarily represents holy men desiring god, while the dragon represents the devil, his servants, abominable men or333 persecutors of the Church" (quoted from Schichler, 159).

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIAN SEA SYMBOLISM IN <u>THE SEAFARER</u>[1]:
"stormas þær stanclifu beotan";
"sealtyþa gelac"

Although some early criticism maintains that the Old
English poem <u>The Seafarer</u>[2] is an essentially pagan work
colored by clerical interpolations, recent critical
consensus holds that it is a thoroughly Christian poem.
Many scholars now accept that <u>The Seafarer</u> is a unified
whole and the explicitly Christian elements are its integral
parts.[3] Further agreement exists that the first part of the
poem illustrates the meaning of the second section (Leslie,
96). The first half of the poem reflects a strong elegiac
mood; yet the second part conveys a didactic Christian
message. The whole framework of <u>The Seafarer</u> is undoubtedly
Christian. Also, the pervasive image in much of the poem,
especially in the first portion, is seafaring. Thus, my
explication of the sea and the seafaring imagery in <u>The
Seafarer</u> will show <u>The Seafarer</u>-poet's Christian beliefs
concerning the sea. In her article, "The Interpretation of
<u>The Seafarer</u>," Dorothy Whitelock tries to apply a literal
analysis to this poem. Some scholars, such as O. S.
Anderson, G. V. Smithers, and Stanley Greenfield and Daniel

G. Calder analyze the poem as an allegory.[4]   And, while

Frederick S. Holton, Lee C. Ramsey, and Alvin A. Lee discuss

the symbolic aspect of the sea, they mainly relate this

symbology to the sea of death and ship-burial: they are not

interested in the evil nature of the sea itself.   I should

like to argue that The Seafarer clearly shows the malign

signification of the sea and the sea voyage, which follows

the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The poem opens with the speaker's statement that he

tells his true experiences, and then lists miseries which

occurred to him during his solitary winter[5] voyage.   The

speaker is hungry, weary, lonely, and cold; the word cald or

ceald is used five times.   Five is a Biblical symbol of

evil and incompleteness, and it is another Biblical deposit

in The Seafarer.   The poet also makes repeated references

to frost, ice, icicles, snow, fearful waves, storm, and

hail.   Moreover, the poem considers the sea as hwæles eþel

(l. 60a), which means the home of the whale, regarded among

Christian Fathers as the incarnation of wicked Leviathan.

Hence, the sea and seafaring are entirely hostile in this

poem.

To give more background on the nature of the whale, it

is worthwhile to discuss Old English The Whale briefly here.

This poem conveys the Christian idea that the Biblical

Leviathan has been thought of as a whale.   Lines 1 through

31 of the poem[6] describe the whale as a threat to navigation

and an enemy of seafarers.   The whale is regarded as a

conscious practitioner of treachery and deceit with diabolical cunning: he intentionally waits until the unsuspecting sailors, rejoicing in the weather, feel safe and secure in their harborage before he plunges with them to the depths. This animal is then likened in custom and manner to evil spirits and devils. (Certain parallels to the description of the whale's sinister nature, its habitat, and its symbolic meaning likewise occur in Beowulf.) Moreover, the whale's hunger does set the stage for another treatment of the theme of hell. The whale's mouth gives way to a medieval vision of Hell's Mouth. Images such as the devouring whale or the open jaws of hell are commonplace in Judeo-Christian tradition. Hell-mouths frequently appear in iconographical representations of such subjects as the fall of the rebel angels and evil men, Christ's harrowing of hell, and the Last Judgment.

Further, the seafaring scene of the poem is quite unusual. No Anglo-Saxon would have voyaged at sea during the winter season without an apt reason. Orton observes that winter was no time to be thinking of seafaring in the Middle Ages (40, 43). The speaker in The Seafarer gives no clear reason for his awful winter voyage. Although we are not clearly told one way or another, I think that he may not be bereaved of a lord. (In this poem, this fact is not an emphasized concern as it is in The Wanderer.) And he did not have to stay in exile, especially on the stormy winter sea. Morgan remarks that exile or homelessness was the

worst imaginable fate in Anglo-Saxon society, for it
deprived the individual of his sense of self (17). This
poet's exile was voluntary, which was different from the
imposed exile of The Wanderer. It was not necessary for
him to endure any of his hardships--he simply chose to
endure them in his boat. He was in the boat alone by his
own choice. Colin A. Ireland supports this view that "the
Old English Seafarer, like the wandering Irish hermits and
pilgrims, has chosen voluntary exile" (8). The fact that
this exile is voluntary does not necessarily diminish the
pain it entails, although the everlasting life with God may
provide ample compensation. Therefore, it is highly
possible that his voyage is not real; instead this seafaring
has symbolic signification along with the sea. The fact
that the seafarer's voyage is realistically pointless
imports its symbolic quality as spiritual navigation; that
is, the voyage is intended as symbolism.[7] L. Whitbread
stands with me, arguing that "I find no case remaining for
the older view that the experiences of the 'seafarer,'
realistically though they read in places, represent the
actual experiences of an Anglo-Saxon sailor" (174). I
might add here that the poem also speaks of the pleasures of
life on land. However, they are transitory, not permanent.
They are neither real nor eternal in the Christian sense.
The Seafarer-poet like The Wanderer-poet places emphasis on
the mutability of the earthly life. For the speaker,
Christianity is both the cause and the consolation for his

self-imposed exile.

The exile in The Seafarer includes all the miseries,
such as loneliness, darkness, coldness, sea-weariness,
tempests, and hunger. According to Stanley, the
Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to "the interpretation of
darkness as an aspect of evil, gloom and terror. The OE.
poets treated cold similarly. As was 'morning,' so cold,
frost and winter misery" (436). He goes on to say that the
effect of misery appears to be primary in the speaker's mind
(438). In this poem, all the miseries are especially
related to the sea and seafaring. It is well known that
among the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons, such voluntary exiles
might take the form of a sea voyage without any particular
destination in mind (Vickrey, 74). This was one of the
extreme practices--setting oneself adrift to sea with no
goal other than to depend entirely on God. While it was
sometimes practiced realistically, it was mostly exercised
symbolically, and it was especially not common in Anglo-
Saxon England (Earl, "Transformation," 171). People who
took these voyages were known as peregrini pro amore Dei,
pilgrims for the love of God. A seafarer as an exile,
voyaging on the sea of life, frequently appears in the
patristic writings. The speaker in The Seafarer refers
specifically to his being in a boat: ceole (1. 5a) nacan (1.
7a).[8] Some implications of the ship of the Church, sailing
on the sea of the world, can be recognized. The sea of the
world is ruled over by Satan who is constantly trying to

sink the ship of the Church. Storms and the turbulence of the sea are thus the work of the devil (Holton, 211). Sarah Lynn Higley makes an interesting connection between the storm and spiritual temptation or trial (25). In addition, Earl maintains that the winter storm specially stands for the forces of chaos. In northern mythology, "this chaos is symbolized by the worlds of giants and other dark forces that surround this middle-earth and will finally destroy it" ("Transformation," 167). Thus, Biblical and Germanic views of chaos merge in this poem. Line 23a reads that stormas þær stanclifu beotan, which means there storms beat upon the stone cliffs. Here the rocky cliffs are given their portentousness by the force of the sea beating ships against them. Moreover, line 35a, sealtyþa gelac highlights the evil nature of the saline sea. In lines 2b through 12a, the seafarer specifies his experiences, the spiritual and physical sufferings that he endures in a boat. Here the scene is detailed--the terrible waves, the seaweariness, the nightwatch by the cliffs, the frostbound feet, the miserable cold, the inner cares, and the hunger are so vividly depicted. I. L. Gordon correctly suggests that hungor "may imply more than its literal meaning here and include figuratively the pangs of loneliness and suffering that gnaw at the Seafarer's heart" (11). Leslie remarks that the seafarer's bitre breostceare in line 4 is the only typical exile formula in this passage; everything else is adapted to his particular situation (98). A cold

and bitter winter scene would be expected to reflect the
speaker's condition.   This relation is especially true,
according to Stanley, who says that in Old English poetic
diction, descriptions of natural phenomena convey a temper
or mood of mind (434).   The stormy winter scene is the
proper image for the seafarer's inner condition of mind
which is consistently portrayed as exhausted and cold.[9]
The seafarer's physical, mental, and spiritual state is
aptly pictured by imagery of the malign cold sea and
dreadful sæfore (1. 42), sea journey.

   Besides the cold and stormy sea imagery, darkness[10]
plays an important role in illustrating the seafarer's
malignant situation.   Darkness is a significant recurrent
theme in the poem.   In the Bible and the patristic
tradition, darkness, or night, is almost always associated
with Hell and Satan, and it is opposite to the brightest
lumination of the Heaven.   Moreover, Holton holds that it
is contrasted to "the light of Christian truth" (210).   The
Bible proclaims that in the Heavenly Kingdom the only source
of light is God Himself, not the sun, the moon, stars, or
any other agents; and there is no darkness at all.[11]
Accordingly, darkness or Satan cannot stand with light,
which signifies God and God's glory, realistically as well
as symbolically.   Augustine explains that darkness is the
absence of light (City, XII, vii).   Also, it snows from the
north, and the Church Fathers frequently associate the north
with the devil.[12]   Biblically, west is the primary

direction for evil (thus God faces east); and north is secondary (although in the northern mythology, north is the principal direction for the malicious forces). Morgan also notes that hailstorms and the darkness of winter come from the north, the traditional home of the ice giants and the location of the Scandinavian hell (22).

Furthermore, the relationship between deadly coldness on the outside and the bitter heat within the poet's heart makes the contrast much more effective. The comparison of external afflictions and internal spiritual reality is described very vividly. The speaker's inner cares are emphasized, especially when they are said to beat <u>hat</u> <u>ymb</u> <u>heortan</u> (l. 11). This remarkable image develops further the <u>bitre breostceare</u> (l. 4) and <u>cearselda fela</u> (l. 5). Both descriptions are closely related to the heavenly joys in lines 64 through 66 which are <u>hatran</u> (l. 64b) than anything connected to his earthly life. The seafarer's sea and sea voyage have an especially symbolic significance for him; and later in the poem the signification becomes quite clear that the seafarer's ultimate purpose is everlasting life in heaven.

Consequently, although <u>The Seafarer</u> has a realistic account of a sea voyage as the poet says in the first line of the poem, the story is not told for itself, but for its Christian didactic message. In this poem the speaker's experience is told for its symbolic value, rather than for itself. A voluntary exile undertaken as a perilous sea

journey afflicted by fatal coldness, darkness, extreme
hunger, loneliness, barrenness, pointlessness, and solitary
nightwatches is a highly symbolic description especially in
a Christian context. These elements are figurative
constituents of the sea of the world in the Christian sense.
The Christian mandate at the poem's end renders a strictly
realistic view of the sea and its features meaningless. In
the Middle Ages, the Christian symbolism of the sea was
known widely enough to function as an implicit and
frequently explicit symbol in medieval English literature.
Of course, The Seafarer is no exception to this Christian
sea symbology: in this poem the evil nature of the sea is
pointedly and amply portrayed.

Notes

A version of this chapter was read at the 1994 Mid-America Medieval Association annual meeting (MAMA XVIII) in Norman, Oklahoma, "Old English Literature Session."

1 Here I provide the text of the first part of The Seafarer which is directly related to my explication in this chapter:

Mæg ic be sylfum   soþgied wrecan,

siþas secgan,   hu ic geswincdagum

earfoðhwile   oft þrowade,

bitre breostceare   gebiden hæbbe,

gecunnad in ceole   cearselda fela,

atol yþa gewealc,   þær mec oft bigeat

nearo nihtwaco   æt nacan stefnan,

þonne he be clifum cnossað.   Calde geþrungen

wæron mine fet,   forste gebunden,

caldum clommum,   þær þa ceare seofedun

hat ymb heortan;   hungor innan slat

merewerges mod.   Þæt se mon ne wat

þe him on foldan   fægrost limpeð,

hu ic earmcearig   iscealdne sæ

winter wunade   wræccan lastum,

winemægum bidroren,

bihongen hrimgicelum;   hægl scurum fleag.

Þær ic ne gehyrde   butan hlimman sæ,

iscaldne wæg.   Hwilum ylfete song

dyde ic me to gomene,   ganetes hleoþor

ond huilpan sweg   fore hleahtor wera,

mæw singende   fore medodrince.

Stormas þær stanclifu beotan,   þær him stearn

oncwæð

isigfeþera;   ful oft þæt earn bigeal,

urigfeþra;   ne ænig hleomæga

feasceaftig ferð   frefran meahte.

Forþon him gelyfeð lyt,   se þe ah lifes wyn

gebiden in burgum,   bealosiþa hwon,

wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft

in brimlade   bidan sceolde.

Nap nihtscua,   norþan sniwde,

hrim hrusan bond,   hægl feol on eorþan,

corna caldast.   Forþon cnyssað nu

heortan geþohtas,   þæt ic hean streamas,

sealtyþa gelac   sylf cunnige;

monað modes lust   mæla gehwylce

ferð to feran,   þæt ic feor heonan

elþeodigra   eard gesece.

Forþon nis þæs modwlonc   mon ofer eorþan,

ne his gifena þæs god,   ne in geoguþe to þæs

hwæt,

ne in his dædum to þæs deor,   ne him his

dryhten to þæs hold,

þæt he a his sæfore   sorge næbbe,

to hwon hine dryhten   gedon wille.

(ll. 1-43)

(All quotations of The Seafarer and The Whale are from The Exeter Book, eds. George Philip Krapp and Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie.)

2 The Seafarer is one of the poems in the Exeter Book, a manuscript written by a single scribe during the second half of the tenth century and now kept in the library of Exeter Cathedral. As a Christian poem, it cannot be earlier than the seventh century, during which time the Anglo-Saxons were converted (Orton, 37).

3 See Gwendolyn Morgan, "Essential Loss: Christianity and Alienation in the Anglo-Saxon Elegies." Also in his famous and influential article, "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of The Wanderer, The Seafarer and The Penitent's Prayer," E. G. Stanley convincingly asserts that The Seafarer "is a Christian Poem" (450).

4 They argue that the misery of exile is life on earth, and the eagerness to embark upon a new voyage is that of the Christian man seeking his eternal home with God.

5 Whereas in The Wanderer winter is the only season referred to, in The Seafarer winter is contrasted with summer. Janet Bately states that summer "begins at Easter

according to the binary system, on 9 May according to the division into four seasons" (5).

6 For the sake of convenience, I furnish the lines 1 through 31 of The Whale which is closely discussed here:

Nu ic fitte gen ymb fisca cynn

wille woðcræfte wordum cyþan

þurh modgemynd bi þam miclan hwale.

Se bið unwillum oft gemeted,

frecne ond ferðgrim, fareðlacendum,

niþþa gehwylcum; þam is noma cenned,

fyrnstreama geflotan, Fastitocalon.

Is þæs hiw gelic hreofum stane,

swylce worie bi wædes ofre,

sondbeorgum ymbseald, særyrica mæst,

swa þæt wenaþ wægliþende

þæt hy on ealond sum eagum wliten,

ond þonne gehydað heahstefn scipu

to þam unlonde oncyrrapum,

setlaþ sæmearas sundes æt ende,

ond þonne in þæt eglond up gewitað

collenferþe; ceolas stondað

bi staþe fæste, streame biwunden.

Ðonne gewiciað werigferðe,

faroðlacende, frecnes ne wenað,

on þam ealonde æled weccað,

heahfyr ælað; hæleþ beoþ on wynnum,

reonigmode, ræste geliste.

> Þonne gefeleð facnes cræftig
>
> þæt him þa ferend on fæste wuniaþ,
>
> wic weardiað wedres on luste,
>
> ðonne semninga on sealtne wæg
>
> mid þa noþe niþer gewiteþ
>
> garsecges gæst, grund geseceð,
>
> ond þonne in deaðsele drence bifæsteð
>
> scipu mid scealcum.

7 If a realistic reading is insisted upon, as Whitelock argues, one might suggest that the speaker is voyaging into far northern waters where they are always cold. I think that Old English Orosius could be an example for this. However, the circumstances of The Seafarer are quite different from those of the Orosius. One may easily notice the differences between the two.

8 In his informative article, " The Sea A Desert: Early English Spirituality and The Seafarer," Clair McPherson makes an interesting suggestion that "the sea became his [one's] desert; a boat became his [one's] cell; navigation, a spiritual discipline" (116). Needless to say, anyone with so clear a vision of heaven, he observes, will seek the shortest way to God he can find, and for the early English monastic, that route was often traced through the sea (122).

9 Thomas P. Campbell properly mentions that the seafarer's sæfore (l. 42) is "symbolic of his state of mind and that his longing to leave this land is symbolic of his mistrust of the transitory joys of men" (51).

10 Despite the fact that realistic analysis is not my main concern in this paper, I think that it is worth pointing out one aspect from this viewpoint just in order for some readers to avoid an incorrect appreciation of this poem. Realistically speaking, in the far north, winter days are very short, so darkness and winter are associated. Above the Arctic Circle, there could be twenty-four hours of darkness in the winter season. All these could fit together with the idea of an arctic voyage. However, one must keep in mind Stanley's cogent warning that "A literal interpretation of these [The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Penitent's Prayer] poems must fail, for they are not exercises in realism" (452).

11 Revelation 21: 23, 25 reads "Et civitas non eget sole neque luna, ut luceant in ea: nam claritas Dei illuminavit eam, et lucerna ejus est Agnus. . . . Et portæ ejus non claudentur per diem: nox enim non erit illic" ("And the city needeth not sun nor moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God hath illuminated it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof. . . . And the gates thereof shall not be shut by day: for there shall be no night there"). Another example is that "Et nox ultra non erit: et non egebunt lumine lucernæ, neque lumine solis, quoniam Dominus Deus illuminabit illos, et regnabunt in sæcula sæculorum" ("And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of lamp, nor the light of the sun, because our Lord God doth illuminate them, and they shall reign for ever and ever")

(Revelation 22: 5).

12 For details, see Paul Salmon, "The Site of Lucifer's Throne," and Thomas D. Hill, "Some Remarks on 'The Site of Lucifer's Throne.'"

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIAN SEA SYMBOLISM IN THE CANTERBURY TALES:
"in the salte see / Was put allone
and dampned for to dye"

It is well known that throughout the Middle Ages the

Bible was most widely read and taught. For all the

students, in school and the monastery, the Scripture was the

primary educational text.[1] Interest in the Bible was

ongoing and its discussion was especially very active after

the twelfth century. Needless to say, Chaucer is acquainted

with the Bible and Biblical exegesis, not only because he is

much more learned than any other ordinary person of his time

(although one does not necessarily regard him as a profound

scholar), but also because the Vulgate Bible, which was

translated into Latin by St. Jerome in A.D. 405, is popular

enough to reach Chaucer in the Middle Ages. Grace W.

Landrum argues in passing that certainly one of Chaucer's

characters has a copy of the Vulgate Bible: the clerk of

Oxenford in the Wyf of Bath's Prologue (76).

As a creative writer, Chaucer may also have an impulse

to reinterpret or to change his sources. In her

dissertation "'Auctours' and 'Rehercers': Chaucer, Wyclif,

and The Language of Authority," Maria Michalczyk discusses

that Chaucer indicates this desire "in speakers to assert
themselves 'auctoritatively'" (51). Her discussion can be
easily proved throughout Chaucer's entire writings.
However, Chaucer never intends to change the Biblical
imagery of the sea. Even though he does not directly
mention anything about his choice of the sea in his works,
it seems to be obvious that he actually intends his writings
to carry Christian sea symbolism because an intensifying
aspect of Chaucer's description of fearful and evil elements
appears in his use of the sea, which follows Biblical
tradition. In The Canterbury Tales, the sea is revealed as
an apparent evil: it is a moral and spiritual as well as a
physical evil. Chaucer's view of the sea is the traditional
Christian demonized sea of the Bible and the Fathers.
Robert Ashton Kissack, Jr. and V. A. Kolve studied the
meaning of the sea in The Canterbury Tales. Kissack
briefly surveyed some of Chaucer's sea symbols, but he was
not interested in the Biblical symbology of the sea.
Likewise, Kolve related the sea symbols in "The Man of Law's
Tale" to Boethius with regard to fortune, which is
capricious, and the world, which is unstable and turbulent.
In this chapter I will expound the Biblical resonances of
the sea in The Canterbury Tales, which is intensified by
perception of the deep layer of symbology. This thought
pattern has no connection with Boethian sea-fortune
analogies, although obviously the sea is symbolic of the
world in both the Bible and Boethius.

In <u>The Canterbury Tales</u>, Chaucer uses the words "water" and "sea" quite differently. In most cases, water has positive connotations such as washing, healing, and sacrament. When Chaucer signifies the four elements of the universe, he simply uses the word "water" as in "The Knight's Tale" (l. 1246; l. 2992),[2] "The Pardoner's Tale" (l. 519), and "The Merchant's Tale" (l. 1558). Chaucer also uses the word "water" with its literal meaning, without any symbolic purport in many tales.[3] For practical reasons, washing is closely related to fresh water. Only the word "water" is used for washing or cleaning. For example, in "The Knight's Tale" gentle Emelye washes her body with water: "Hir [Emylye's] body wessh with water of a welle" (l. 2283). Moreover, in "The Pardoner's Tale" the image of magically healing power of water is reinforced by the holy bone washed in it: "Taak water of that welle and wassh his [poisoned animal's] tonge, / And it is hool anon" (ll. 356-7). Here, fresh water, instead of salt water, is used for the purpose of healing. This image corresponds to the story of John 5:2-4: when an angel troubles the water, whoever first steps into the water is said to be healed. This water is also fresh; there is no healing force in salt water. Furthermore, the water for a sacramental intention is especially called "hooly water," which is a common expression for this purpose. It appears three times in <u>The Canterbury Tales</u>: l. 1829 and l. 1830 in "The Prioress's Tale"; and l. 385 in "The Parson's Tale." Actually, in

Christian history, salt water has never been used for baptism except in extreme circumstances. Hence, it is clear that Chaucer distinguishes between fresh water and salt water, especially a large body of salt water, when he is writing.

However, <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> has two exceptions to this rule. First, in "The Nun's Priest's Tale," the word "water" is once used as a synonym for the sea: the sea swallows the ship and men. Here its vile gluttony appears. But Chaucer uses the word "water" rather than "the sea": "But casuelly the shippes botme rente, / And ship and man under the water wente" (ll. 3101-2). Another example presents itself in "The Miller's Tale." One of the central images in this tale is the deluge (Kolve, 198), which reminds us of Noah's Flood. (Biblically, the Flood is directly related to the sea.) Nevertheless, the word "sea" appears only once: "Noees flood come walwynge as the see" (l. 3616). Rather Chaucer makes use of the word "water" several times, presumably not only because he changes the original meaning of the Flood, but also because the word "water"-instead of the word "sea"-is necessary for the comic clamax of the story. The self-serving clerk, Nicholas, hypocritically promises that the flood will arrive on April 17; John foolishly believes him. M. F. Vaughan argues that despite the Bible's promise never again to destroy mankind by flood, in the Middle Ages a popular belief was held that there would be a reversal of that vow (119). In the tale,

there is no real flood at all, and nobody is a victim of the
false deluge except John, the husband. The story leads us
to associate it not with a disastrous event but with a comic
occurence. In the story the water is apparently the sea.
It is manifestly malicious to the carpenter John. Because
of this malign deceptive deluge, John provides an
opportunity for Nicholas to lie with his wife, Alison. It
is worth noting that while the story of the flood is used in
"The Miller's Tale," the true meaning of it is explained in
"The Parson's Tale": "by the synne of lecherie God dreynte
al the world at the diluge" (1. 839). The Flood was sent to
punish sexual sin. David L. Jeffrey states that medievals
thought of the flood as "having been sent to punish the very
sin that is so rampant in 'The Miller's Tale'" (42). In
addition, the husband's innocence is cynically compared to
that of the Biblical Noah. Whereas Noah is a winner over
the sea, literally and symbolically, John becomes a victim
of the imaginary flood.

From the beginning of The Canterbury Tales, the
malignancy of the sea can be detected. In The Knight's
Tale, Saturne, who is Venus' father remarks that "Myn is
the drenchying in the see so wan" (1. 2456). He especially
emphasizes two main features of the sea: swallowing and
darkness, which are naturally associated with tehom. The
similar image occurs in 11. 3030-1: "He moot be deed, the
king as shal a page; / Sam in his bed, sam in the deep see."
Many people are drowned in the sea, indicating the sea's

evil nature. Though the above images do not play an important role in "The Knight's Tale," they expressly manifest the evil import of the sea.

Another good example of the sea from Biblical provenance is "The Franklin's Tale." Dorigen's castle stands "faste by the see" (l. 847). From time to time, she takes a walk on the beach with her friends in order to relieve her sorrow. But, because of the location of her castle, her grief deepens more and more. While strolling, she sees many ships sailing on the sea; they repeatedly remind her of her absent husband:

> Is ther no ship, of so manye as I se,
>
> Wol bryngen hom my lord? Thanne were myn herte
>
> Al warisshed of his bittre peynes smerte.
>
> (854-6)

There is no ship to carry her to Arveragus, her husband. In fact, her bitter woe comes not from the ship or even the rocks but from the tumultuous sea. If there were no sea near her house, her bitterness would be reduced. The sea deepens her pain: whenever she takes a look at the sea, she becomes even more gloomy: "And pitously into the see bihold" (l. 863). The presence of large bodies of salt water near her gradually encroaches upon her mind and body. At last, her friends realize that the sea is inimical to her; it makes her uncomfortable: "Hire freendes sawe that it was no disport / To romen by the see, but disconfort" (ll. 895-6). Thus, they finally decide to guide her to rivers and wells,

whose water is not brackish: "They leden hire by ryveres and by welles" (1. 898). They believe that it may reduce her distress.

Moreover, rocks, which cause her a serious problem later, are on the shore. In Dorigen's mind, rocks play the role of a vicious obstacle which separates her from her husband. She sees them as "grisly feendly rokkes blake" (1. 868). Usually, the shape of the rock may not be grisly or fiendish, and its color may not be black either (although in some area coastal rocks can be black). This description may not be real; it reflects the state of her mind. The representation gives an impressionistic effect rather than a photographic image. Rocks symbolize a wicked force. Her depiction of the rocks may also be a portrayal of the sea in her mind. The rocks are given their portentousness by the force of the sea beating ships against them: "An hundred thousand bodyes of mankynde, / Han rokkes slayn, al be they nat in mynde" (11. 877-8). So Dorigen prays to God: "But wolde God that alle thise rokkes blake / Were sonken into helle for his sake" (11. 891-2). Here the grisly and black features of the rocks are similar to those of the fearfulness and darkness of tehom, a case of transferred epithets. In addition, according to Palmer, the ancient people generally considered the sea as separating the visible world from the kingdom of the dead or Hades (50). Dorigen might be influenced by this idea: rock, as a sort of metonymy of the sea, separates her from her love as the sea

parts the land of the living from that of the dead.
Therefore, the image of the sea in "The Franklin's Tale" is
apparently evil.

Perhaps the best evidence of Chaucer's use of Christian
sea symbolism can be found in "The Man of Law's Tale." In
this tale of the Roman emperor's daughter, Custance, the
central image is Custance in a rudderless ship going adrift
on the seas (Kolve, 302). The story moves from Rome to
Syria, Syria to Northumbria, Northumbria to the coast of a
heathen land, a heathen land to Rome, Rome to England, and
finally, England to Rome. Every journey moves over the sea:
the whole story is a series of voyages. Thus, sea symbolism
in this tale appears to be evident. The word "sea" does not
appear in Custance's first voyage to Syria, possibly because
this sea trip is not dangerous to Custance. The actual
purpose of the first voyage is to spread the Gospel. For
this aim, the marriage between Custance and the Syrian
Sultan has been arranged by the church members: "the Popes
mediacioun, / And al the chirche, and al the chivalris" (ll.
234-5). In order to marry beautiful and virtuous Custance,
the sultan willingly converts. But his conversion is not
based upon spiritual love for God but on physical love for
Custance. The Syrians also accept Christianity on the
sultan's order. However, the sultana--the sultan's mother--
conspires against her son, and slays the sultan and the
converted people; Custance is put out to sea alone. The
Sultana is baneful not only from a Biblical point of view,

but also from a psychological standpoint (Johnson, 208). In spite of her faultlessness, Custance experiences total despair for the first time in her life. She is set adrift in the rudderless ship on the perilous sea. She has nothing to safely control her boat. Here, the words "salt sea," instead of "sea," is used certainly in order to highlight the evil nature of the sea: "And forth she sailleth in the salte see" (1. 445). She has suffered, almost to the point of death, for many years on the sea. The sea is malignant to her:

> Yeres and dayes fleet this creature
>
> Thurghout the See of Grece unto the Strayte
>
> Of Marrok, as it was hire aventure.
>
> (463-5)

The sea of Greece, which is the eastern Mediterranean, is particularly related to the demonized sea of the Bible and Christian tradition. For the Israelites, the Mediterranean represents <u>tehom</u> with its pernicious properties (Wensinck, 26). Custance's invocation to Jesus Christ reinforces the image of the Sea of Greece as <u>tehom</u>: "Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe, / That day that I shal drenchen in <u>the depe</u>" (emphasis mine) (11. 454-5). Moreover, "the wilde wawes" (1. 468) make her pain much deeper. To Custance "the See of Grece" is much more painful than any other sea. However, she does not complain to God at all. Thanks to her constancy and faithfulness, God leads her to Northumbria without any harm. In this tale, Chaucer wishes to present

the idea of Christian courage and fidelity. Joseph E.
Grennen calls Custance as "an examplar [sic] of Christian
fortitude" (512).

In addition, the story of Custance can be compared to
that of Jonah and of the crossing of the Red Sea by the
Israelites. In these three events, the sea appears vicious.
But with the help of God, Custance, Jonah, and the
Israelites are free from the sea because the sea is under
the control of God. Custance and Jonah are also similar in
that they visit foreign countries to convert the people:
Custance goes to pagan Northumbria, which is an old kingdom
of England; and Jonah to Nineveh, which is the capital of
Assyria. At first, they do not want to follow God's will,
but later they obey. Throughout the Bible, one of the most
important words is "obedience" to God; Custance is the
epitome of that word. At last, "Fer in Northhumberlond the
wawe hire caste"
(l. 508) because the "wyl of Crist was that she sholde
abyde" (l. 511).

In Northumbria, Custance tries to reestablish
Christianity. A kind of underground Christianity still
survives from the earlier Celtic mission, but Christians are
driven by heathen conquest and take refuge in Wales. Three
Christians secretly live near the castle (ll. 548-50).
Custance preaches the Gospel cautiously but courageously:
she practices Christian charity.[4] So God calls her the
"doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence" (l. 675). At

length, King Alla of Northumbria is moved to conversion; and
he is baptized. Thereafter, he loves Custance; and he
marries her with God's blessing:

> Jhesus, of his mercy,
>
> Made Alla wedden ful solempnely
>
> This hooly mayden, that is so bright and sheen.
>
> (690-02)

However, this happy marriage does not last long. While the
king is abroad for a battle, Donegild--the king's mother--
makes a scheme to separate Custance from her husband.
Because of this contrivance, Custance is put out to sea
again with her baby. Whatever circumstances, her constancy
toward God has not been shaken. She prays that "Lord, ay
welcome be thy sonde!" (l. 826) There is lamentation in
Custance's address to her child, in which she asks why the
innocent must suffer. But her willingness to obey God is
apparent:

> He that me kepte fro the false blame
>
> While I was on the lond amonges yow,
>
> He kan me kepe from harm and eek fro shame
>
> In salte see, althogh I se noght how.
>
> (827-30)

Chaucer's use of the words "salt sea" is here seen again.
It is certain that this voyage is more harassing than her
previous drifting on the sea, since she now has her son,
Maurice with her. The above scene nicely contrasts the evil
of the salt sea with the innocent and pure faith of

Custance. The briny sea also symbolizes the worst condition that she has ever met. Although she is on the salt sea, she is not much worried about her future safety. In everything, including the welfare of her baby, she depends upon God: she just believes in God. Therefore, the salt sea cannot harm Custance, though she has drifted more than five years. (The evil number five appears in this tale, too.)

In spite of her rudderless boat, God as the helmsman safely guides her and Maurice to the shore of a heathen land. At night, an apostate attempts to rape her. But she struggles "wel and myghtily" (1. 921). Her strength comes from God. Suddenly the apostate is drowned in the sea; it is God who takes vengeance. God uses the sea as a scourge by showing his omnipotence against a wicked man. Moreover, Custance's courage is comparable to that of Judith, who is a Jewish heroine in the Book of Judith. Judith slays Olofernus and delivers the Israelites. Custance's valor is also parallel to that of Esther, who is the queen of the King Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. Despite violating the king's law, not being called, Esther goes to the king with the resolution that "tradensque me morti et periculo"[5] ("I expose myself to death and to danger")[6] (Esther, 4: 16). Thanks to her courage, the Israelites are saved from Haman's vile plot to kill the whole Jewish people.

On her voyage, Custance meets a helpful Roman senator, who is returning to Rome with a victory against the Syrians. Disguising her identity, she easily arrives in Rome; and she

lives in the senator's house for a while. Later, when she sees her father--the Roman emperor--in the street, she reveals her identity: "Fader . . . youre yonge child Custance" (l. 1105). She is crying to her father not to send her again on the salt sea:

> It am I, fader, that in the salte see
>
> Was put allone and dampned for to dye.
>
> Now, goode fader, mercy I yow crye!
>
> Sende me namoore unto noon hethenesse.
>
> (1109-12)

This scene shows that her experiences on the sea were the most fearful and intensely evil to her not only physically but, more importantly, in their attempt to make her forsake her faith in God. Thus, she calls the sea "the salt sea" in order to reinforce the idea that sea is not fresh, and it is physically, morally, and spiritually evil. Her attitude toward the sea is absolutely negative. Even though she tries to avoid going to pagan countries, she does not forget to give thanks to God: "But thonketh my lord heere of his kyndenesse" (l. 1113). Chaucer in "The Man of Law's Tale" adumbrates the Protestant icon of each Christian floating over the sea to the port of Heaven.

In addition, Custance appears to be a female Christ. Along with her other characteristics, her behavior is quite similar to that of Christ. While praying, Jesus cries that ". . . . Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste: verumtamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu" (My

Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me,
nevertheless not as I will, but as thou) (Matt. 26: 39).
Both of them, at first, do not want to follow their fathers'
will, but later they willingly accept that. In other words,
they voluntarily obey their fathers: Custance, her earthly
father (and God); Christ, his heavenly father. Accordingly,
Custance like Jesus Christ is a paradigm of every Christian.
At the end of the tale, Custance returns to her earthly
father; so she is to go to her eternal home, heaven, at the
end (Bloomfield, 388). God's grace conquers all--but only
for those who can trust in him throughout all suffering.

Finally, King Alla also notices the evil significance
of the sea. After returning to his country from the battle
against Scotland, he discerns his mother's venomous scheme.
With great wrath, he slays his mother and travels to Rome in
order to repent of killing his wife: "in the salte see my
wyf is deed" (1. 1039). He is sure that his wife is drowned
in the salt sea. His remark of the salt sea accentuates the
malicious nature of the sea and his own supposed wickedness
because his wife's drowning is to him the most bitter grief.

In The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer differentiates the
meaning of water, holy water, sea, and salt sea. In
particular, the signification of "water" and "sea" is quite
different in his writings. Whenever he wants to emphasize
the evil purport of the sea, Chaucer emphatically calls the
sea "salt sea," a significant phrase used repeatedly in its
superlative form (e. g., "mare salsissimum," Num. 34: 3) for

the Dead Sea in the Vulgate Bible.[7] The "salt" seems to be
Chaucer's code-word for the demonized and deadening sea of
the Bible and Hebraic and Christian tradition.

Besides The Canterbury Tales, the sea works in the same
manner in Chaucer's other works. For example, in Troilus
and Criseyde, Troilus says that "Al sterelees withinne a
boot am I / Amydde the see, bitwixen wyndes two" (1, ll.
416-7). This image is similar to that of Custance. Also,
in the prologue of Book II, the image of the sea which
troubles the ship is almost a repetition of tehom: "Owt of
thise blake wawes for to saylle, / . . . / For in this see
the boot hath swych travaylle" (2, ll. 1, 3) (emphasis
mine). Troilus calls the sea "the tempestous matere" (2, l.
5). Another good example is The Legend of Good Women. The
word salt sea appears three times with its malign meaning:
"So longe he saylede in the salte se" (l. 958; l. 1462);
"That they han suffered in the salte se" (l. 1510).

To expect in Chaucer a Romantic feeling as in
Arnold's "the sea of faith" in "Dover Beach" and Masefield's
"I must go down to the seas again" in "Sea-Fever" would be
anachronistic. The malignant significance of the sea
highlights the meanings which are already present in verbal
statements and plots. This reading notably enhances
Chaucer's sea-settings; this symbolic import of the sea
leads us to enjoy The Canterbury Tales more deeply and
resourcefully.

Notes

A version of this chapter was read at the 1993 Mid-America
Medieval Association annual meeting (MAMA XVII) in Kansas
City, Missouri, "Late Medieval Poetry Session."

1 For details, see Beryl Smalley, <u>The Study of the
Bible in the Middle Ages</u>. It was particularly required for
students to read the Psalms (MacGregor, 19). The rise of
universities in the twelfth century marked the shift of the
center of Biblical learning from the monasteries to the
universities of Paris, and later Oxford and Cambridge
(Fowler, 43). These universities contributed to the spread
of the Bible and its studies all over the Europe.

2 All quotations from Chaucer are from Larry D. Benson,
<u>The Riverside Chaucer</u>.

3 The following examples reveal that the word "water"
in <u>The Canterbury Tales</u> means fresh water: 1. 1422 in "The
Knight's Tale"; 1. 3815 and 1. 3817 in "The Miller's Tale";
1. 3964 in "The Reeve's Tale"; 1. 352 and 1. 357 in "The Man
of Law's Tale"; 1. 356 and 1. 368 in "The Pardoner's Tale";
1. 372, 1. 973, and 1. 974 in "The Wife of Bath's Tale"; 1.
276 and 1. 290 in "The Clerk's Tale"; 1. 1211, 1. 1234, 1.

1316, l. 1322, l. 1459, and l. 1462 in "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale"; and finally l. 220, l. 340, l. 345, l. 360, l. 385, l. 600, l. 815, and l. 915 in "The Parson's Tale."

4 St. Augustine holds that charity is "the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the sake of God" ("On Christian," 88).

5 All quotations of the Bible in this chapter are from The Vulgate, the Bible of Chaucer.

6 All the translations of The Vulgate are from the Douay Version, which is directly translated from St. Jerome.

7 The Dead Sea is regarded as the paradigm of the "salt sea." Other examples are as follows: Gen. 14:3, Deut. 3:17, Jos. 3:16, Jos. 12:3, Jos. 15:2, Jos. 15:5, and Jos. 18:19.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIAN SEA SYMBOLISM IN MILTON'S WRITINGS:
"the remorseless deep"; "O dreadful and
monstrous sea"

Since Christian sea symbolism appears from time to

time in Christian literature, one would expect that a

Christian writer such as John Milton would employ the sea

from the Biblical perspective. With his increasing years,

Milton developed a much fuller use of his consciousness of

the evil nature of the sea than in his earlier years.[1] His

Grand Tour of the Continent in 1638-1639, which necessarily

involved a sea voyage across the Channel and also one from

Nice to Genoa, and his nautical knowledge[2] make his hostile

sea imagery more portentous in his works. The sea in Milton

is ostensibly revealed as a moral and spiritual as well as a

physical evil.[3] Milton's view of the sea is an

intensification of the traditional Christian demonized sea

of the Bible and the Church Fathers. The significance and

meaning of sea symbolism in Milton have been studied mostly

without Biblical reference by several critics: Richard P.

Adams, Wayne Shumaker, Paul Surgi Speck, Barbara Lewalski,

David S. Berkeley, Emerson R. Marks, G. Stanley Koehler, A.

B. Chambers, John Carey, and J. J. M. Tobin. Specifically,

outside of <u>Lycidas</u>, most of the critical attention has not been focused on Biblical sea symbolism. Moreover, none of the above studies is by any means comprehensive. Clearly, more critical commentary is called for in these areas to gain a better understanding of Milton's sea symbolism. In this chapter I will explore the Biblical resonances of the sea in Milton's writings.

Milton's interest in water is evident throughout his works. Koehler maintains that water is "the key to Milton's landscapes" (20). Milton frequently uses water and water-related imagery in his writings: cloud, mist, vapor, damp, rain, rivers, ooze, streams, wells, springs, fountains, lakes, rills, floods, dew, showers, nectar, tears, seas, oceans, and so on. Fresh water usually connotes the generation and sustenance of life (e. g. Sabrina in <u>Comus</u>) as well as spiritual purification and regeneration. These meanings, however, are applied only to fresh water. Everywhere in his works, Milton expressly differentiates between the purport of fresh water and a large body of salt water. Milton has a positive view toward fresh water; but he has a seriously negative attitude toward large bodies of salt water. In his "Milton's <u>Lycidas</u>," Marks makes a distinction between fresh water, which is good, and salt water, which is baleful. Yet his very brief argument is restricted simply to <u>Lycidas</u>. Moreover, according to his classification, tears are classified as salt water, which is true scientifically, but Milton uses the tear sometimes with

a good connotation and sometimes with a bad connotation. For example, in _Paradise Lost_, the tears with which Adam and Eve water the ground help to give them access to the means of redemption (_PL_, X, 11. 1100-04).[4] This event would be their repentant attitude and the tears are a sign. Milton implies this pivotal behavior in Book V when Adam's attempt to console his spouse does not prevent her from weeping (11. 129-35). The function of tears in _Lycidas_ is also good: line 14 reads "some melodious tear," a figure for a poetic lament. Conversely, in _Samson Agonistes_, Dalila cunningly sheds tears to soften the will of Samson. Though seemingly a sign of weakness, her tears threaten to overwhelm an imprudent man. In his opening soliloquy, Samson scolds himself for having been "O'ercome with importunity and tears" (1. 51). For these reasons, in Milton only a large quantity of salt water is consistently maleficent.[5]

In _Paradise Lost_, when describing the realm of chaos, Milton repeatedly employs the image of the sea, possibly not only because chaos is undoubtedly malign, but it is also the Greek analogue of the waters of "the deep" (Gen. 1: 2), colored by Lucretius' notion of free atoms.[6] William H. Boyd aptly says that chaos is "more than just an ontological curiosity in the poem; it is a key ingredient in Milton's moral universe" (83). In Book II, Satan's first glimpse of chaos reveals the "secrets of the hoarie deep, a dark / Illimitable Ocean without bound" (891-2). Through this realm, he makes a "Voyage" (919) carried on metaphorically

by means of "Oare and Saile" (942). Christ, coming forth
from heaven to create the world, is similarly faced with
"the vast immeasurable Abyss / Outrageous as a Sea, dark,
wasteful, wilde" (VII, 211-2). (It is worthy of note
that Milton did not believe in the hexaemeral creation ex
nihilo.)[7] In Book X, Sin and Death confront a "raging Sea"
(286). A. B. Chambers correctly points out that in Milton
"the image of the sea is not casually or coincidentally
introduced" (693). However, he fails to notice Milton's
Biblical adaptation of the sea imagery; instead his
conclusion is that the sea in Milton is the sea of fortune.
Some critics, such as Jackson I. Cope, stand with Chambers,
observing that Miltonic chaos and/or sea is the sea of
fortune, which is capricious. However, Milton's Chaos (or
the deep) is almost the same as that of Genesis 1: 2, in
that they are both evil, even though Milton separates Hell
from Chaos: Hell has a door which Satan is trying to enter;
Hell is the bottom of Chaos. There is no such thing as
"fortune" especially in Milton's later writings. Roy
Daniels also calls Chaos "a wild amoral ocean" (92). His
argument is correct, in that Chaos is the sea, but he errs
in his statement that Chaos or the sea is "amoral"--
actually the sea is not "amoral" but hostile to morals.
Moreover, the imagery of navigation is ample in the account
of Satan's journey through Chaos.[8]

In addition, Chaos is an abyss, dark, hollow, desolate,
noisy, and infinite. It is an old, rough, deep, and

unbounded sea. Chaos is a region without any points of
geographic reference, completely immeasurable from a human
point of view: a place where all spatial and temporal
perceptions are meaningless. Chaos is a vicious sphere of
ever increasing disorder which is not merely static, but
turbulent and violent:

> For hot, cold, moist, and dry, four Champions
> fierce
> Strive here [chaos] for Maistrie, and to Battel
> bring
> Thir embryon Atoms; they around the flag
> Of each his Faction, in thir several Clanns
> Light-arm'd or heavy, sharp, smooth, swift or
> slow,
> Swarm populous, unnumber'd as the Sands
> Of Barca or Cyrene's torrid soil,
> Levied to side with warring Winds, and poise
> Thir lighter wings.
>
> (II, 898-906)

Although Chaos is the vast "Illimitable Ocean," it is
ironically composed not of water but of "pregnant causes" in
confusion mixed:[9]

> Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
> But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
> Confus'dly . . . .
>
> (II, 912-14)

At the bottom of Chaos, Hell, which is "bottomless

perdition," is located. In Milton, Hell seems to be the tehom of chaos. Hell is also described as the "Gulf of Tartarus" of Chaos, the place of eternal punishment for Satan and his fallen angels:

> A Universe of death, which God by curse
>
> Created evil, for evil only good,
>
> Where all life dies, death lives, and Nature
>
> > breeds,
>
> Perverse, all monstrous, all prodigious things,
>
> Abominable, inutterable, and worse
>
> Than Fables yet have feign'd, or fear conceiv'd,
>
> Gorgons and Hydra's, and Chimera's dire.
>
> > (II, 622-28)

Satan's trip towards the gates of Hell is similarly depicted as that of a ship sailing the ocean:

> As when far off at Sea a Fleet descri'd
>
> Hangs in the Clouds, by Aequinoctial Winds
>
> Close sailing from Bengala, or the Isles
>
> Of Ternate and Tidore, whence Merchants bring
>
> Thir spicie Drugs: they on the Trading Flood
>
> Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape
>
> Ply stemming nightly toward the Pole.
>
> > (II, 636-42)

To attain his goal, Satan needs to undertake a voyage through Chaos, a voyage for which he is metaphorically a ship. While Milton introduces the voyage as "flight" (II, 632), the imagery used to describe it is almost without

exception nautical.

In addition, the presence of Hell affects Chaos. The personified anarch says to Satan:

> I saw and heard, for such a numerous Host
>
> Fled not in silence through the frighted deep
>
> With ruin upon ruin, rout on rout,
>
> Confusion worse confounded . . . .
>
> (II, 993-96)

The host of Hell adds to the noise and confusion. Hell not only encroaches on the realm of Chaos, but also aggravates the turmoil. Hell disturbs Chaos, but to disturb Chaos is to make it all the more chaotic. In his poems Milton employs the word "deep"[10] as many as thirty-five times[11] in alluding to Hell.[12] Hell and Chaos are also allied in the common purpose of havoc, spoil, and ruin. Regina Schwartz observes that such words as the Deep, Void, Gulf, Pit, Waste, and Wild are synonyms for chaos, and are used interchangeably for Hell as well (353). Chaos not only threatens life, but is Satanic in its insurgence, threatening to storm heaven itself:

> Up from the bottom turn'd by furious windes
>
> And surging waves, as Mountains to assault
>
> Heav'ns highth, and with the Center mix the Pole.
>
> (VII, 213-15)

Throughout Milton's writings, there are many references to the destructive force of the sea. For example, Book I of Paradise Lost shows a definitive act of destruction, the

expulsion of Satan and his followers from the empyreal
realm. They fall into the "fiery Deluge" (68), otherwise
referred to as the "fiery Surge" (173), "Stygian
flood"(239), or "inflamed Sea" (300). The surface of the
sea implies darkness and unboundedness (Crunelle, 43). The
Irish Sea in Lycidas is also pernicious enough to drown
Lycidas (e. g. "the remorseless deep" in line 50), although
the sea was calm and no wind blew at the time of his
drowning (e. g. "The Air was calm, and on the level brine"
in line 98); the sea suddenly swallowed up the body of the
poet and shepherd.[13] This event for various reasons, two of
which are mentioned here, devastates Milton or the persona:
Edward King was a friend; and death by drowning in the sea
symbolically means damnation in the theological sense (even
though Lycidas is of course not damned). The sea in Lycidas
is described as "weltering," "whelming," and "remorseless."
Schmaker observes that lines 50-51 in Lycidas show the
tranquillity of the sea (137). Yet obviously this sea is
not tranquil but perilous not only because it is "the
remorseless deep," but also because "the mild Ocean" (as in
the Nativity Ode) is simply deceptive and an oxymoron. The
Irish Sea in the poem similarly functions like any other
sea. Throughout the poem, the sea reveals its repulsive and
fierce nature.

As with the drowning, the experience of a flood also
shows the deadly power of the sea. The Deluge wipes away
everything into the ocean. "Cataract" which is an alternate

word that Milton uses for the deluge, is, of course, one of
the most clear examples for the evil nature of the sea in
Paradise Lost. When Satan first calls to rouse his fallen
troops, they resemble

> scattered sedge
> Afloat, when with fierce Winds Orion arm'd
> Hath vext the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
> Busiris and his Memphian Chivalry,
> While with perfidious hatred they pursu'd
> The Sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
> From the safe shore thir floating Carkases
> And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
> Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood.
>
> (I, 304-12)

This passage sharpens the image of Satan's troops. John M.
Steadman notes that "the comparisons between Pharaoh's
chivalry and the devil's angels, between the Red Sea and the
fiery floods, were traditional" (200). This apt comparison
serves to underscore the destiny of Satan as an evil being;
his followers are encompassed by the power of the sea.[14]
Just as the Red Sea destroyed the forces of Paraoh in
pursuit of the Israelites, God uses the malignant sea as his
instrument to destroy the Satanic cohorts. The devastation
inflicted through the Red Sea was one of Milton's favorite
themes from the time of his first poems, the Greek
paraphrases of Psalms 114 and 136.[15] Milton shows intense
repulsion from the sea even in his earliest writings.

Epecially his Greek paraphrase of Psalm 114 shows this topos
clearly:

$$\ldots \mathrm{T}\,\acute{\iota}\,\pi\,\tau\,\epsilon\quad\sigma\,\acute{\upsilon}\quad\gamma'\quad\alpha\,\acute{\iota}\,\nu\,\grave{\alpha}\quad\theta\,\acute{\alpha}\,\lambda\,\alpha\,\sigma\,\sigma\,\alpha$$

$$\pi\,\acute{\epsilon}\,\lambda\,\omega\,\rho\quad\phi\,\upsilon\,\gamma\,\acute{\alpha}\,\delta'\quad\acute{\epsilon}\,\rho\,\rho\,\acute{\omega}\,\eta\,\sigma\,\alpha\,\varsigma;$$

$$\mathrm{K}\,\acute{\upsilon}\,\mu\,\alpha\,\tau\,\iota\quad\epsilon\,\acute{\iota}\,\lambda\,\upsilon\,\mu\,\acute{\epsilon}\,\nu\,\eta\quad\dot{\rho}\,o\,\theta\,\acute{\iota}\,\omega\,\ldots$$

(12-3)

("Why, O <u>dreadful and monstrous sea</u>, didst thou give comfort
to the fugitive, <u>rolling back thy roaring waves</u>," Hughes,
114) (emphasis mine). As Hughes correctly remarks, this
Greek rendering "preserves most of the freedoms with the
Original Hebrew text" (114). The comparison of Milton's
rendering and that of the King James Version, which is the
literal translation from the Septuagint--the Greek
translation of the Old Testament--obviously manifests
Milton's fundamental attitude toward the sea.

Even after the horror of the Flood has been described,
Milton reiterates the theme for a full-fledged narration of
the Exodus in Book XII, including the watery rout in which
"the Sea / Swallows him with his Host" (XII, 195-96). This
short reference reveals the partial return of the chaotic
and primitive sea unleashed as a result of God's punishment.
In the Noachian Flood, the malign sea destroys human evil.
Again here God uses evil as His agent in order to destroy
evil. In <u>Paradise Lost</u>, Milton describes the Flood twice,
while the Bible does this once in the full sense. This fact
indicates that the author tries to intensify the malignant
nature of the sea more than the Bible does, as seen in the

Greek translation of Psalm 114. No explication can do justice to the force of Milton's own words describing the Deluge:

> Meanwhile the Southwind rose, and with black wings
>
> Wide hovering, all the Clouds together drove
>
> From under Heav'n; the Hills to their supplie
>
> Vapour, and Exhalation dusk and moist,
>
> Sent up amain; and now the thick'nd Skie
>
> Like a dark Ceeling stood; down rush'd the Rain
>
> Impetuous, and continu'd till the Earth
>
> No more was seen; the floating Vessel swum
>
> Uplifted; and secure with beaked prow
>
> Rode tilting o're the Waves, all dwellings else
>
> Flood overwhelmd, and them with all thir pomp
>
> Deep under water rould; Sea cover'd Sea,
>
> Sea without shoar; and in thir Palaces
>
> Where luxurie late reign'd, Sea-monsters whelp'd
>
> And stabl'd; of Mankind, so numerous late,
>
> All left, in one small bottom swum imbark't.
>
> (XI, 738-53)

This long description emphatically discloses Milton's position toward the sea and its characteristics.

Scenes of destruction by the Flood are also prevalent in Michael's account of future time. He shows Adam the sons of Seth, who, after marrying the daughters of Cain, "swim in joy, / (Erelong to swim at large) and laugh; for which / The world erelong a world of tears must weepe" (XI, 625-27).

This depiction is, of course, a presentiment of the great flood to come not long afterwards. In addition, the Biblical Deluge is presaged by a reference to its mythological counterpart:

> Deucalion and chaste Pyrrha to restore
>
> The Race of Mankind drownd, before the Shrine
>
> Of Themis stood devout.
>
> (XI, 12-14)

The disastrous cataclysm of Noah's story is pictured in a horrifyingly eloquent manner:

> all the Cataracts
>
> Of Heav'n set open on the Earth shall powre
>
> Raine day and night, all fountains of the Deep
>
> Broke up, shall heave the Ocean to usurp
>
> Beyond all bounds, till inundation rise
>
> Above the highest Hills: then shall this Mount
>
> Of Paradise by might of Waves be moovd
>
> Out of his place, pushd by the horned floud,
>
> With all his verdure spoil'd, and Trees adrift
>
> Down the great River to the op'ning Gulf,
>
> And there take root an Iland salt and bare,
>
> The haunt of Seales and Orcs, and Sea-mews clang.
>
> (XI, 824-35)

This passage is Milton's version of the Biblical Flood. Here Milton clearly writes of the opening of tehom ("all fountains of the Deep / Broke up"). The expressions such as "all his verdure spoil'd" and "an Iland salt and bare"

aptly show that Milton emphasizes the sea as anti-life, which is the reflection of the Biblical idea.[16] Another interesting thing is that Milton describes the Flood with a diabolic image of "the horned floud," which shows the demonic nature of the sea. In addition, Milton (like Dante and others) puts Paradise atop a mountain: so it is conspicuous. (By the way, Milton is not the first one who uses this idea: a long tradition exists for this.[17]) However, as Michael informs Adam, universal destruction shall not exempt the beauteous Garden of Eden. Incidentally, this paragraph also reveals that the author is in the tradition of Edmund Spenser's floating islands (The Faerie Queene, II).

Another characteristic of the sea is its tendency towards tempests. Milton seldom describes a peaceful sea: to him the sea is usually menacing and tempestuous, and always potentially so.[18] For example, in response to Mammon's speech at the council meeting, his listeners take on the features of a recently storm-tossed sea:

> He scarce had finisht, when such murmur filld
> Th' Assembly, as when hollow Rocks retain
> The sound of blustring winds, which all night long
> Had rous'd the Sea.
>
> (PL, II, 284-87)

Images of the Satanic host appear as a watery menace for others. Belial advocates caution to his cohorts lest they

> Caught in a fierie Tempest shall be hurl'd

> Each on his rock transfixt, the sport and prey
>
> Of racking whirlwinds, or for ever sunk
>
> Under yon boyling Ocean, wrapt in Chains.
>
> (PL, II, 180-83)

Here besides the wrath of the sea such as the horrible tempest and whirlwinds, "boyling Ocean" is closely related to a scene of Hell and the Lake of Fire.

In Samson Agonistes, Dalila finds Samson more unappeasable than the sea itself. The "stately Ship of Tarsus" which was "courted" by the winds, cannot calm the tempest into which Samson is now transformed. The woman whose chief god (Dagon) is a sea-monster uses the intense Biblical antagonism to the sea:

> I see thou art implacable, more deaf
>
> To prayers, then winds and seas, yet winds to seas
>
> Are reconcil'd at length, and Sea to Shore:
>
> Thy anger, unappeasable, still rages,
>
> Eternal tempest never to be calm'd.
>
> (960-64)

Dalila has seen Samson, in his anger, as a "tempest." Here the image of him is depicted as a "Gloriously rigg'd"[19] vessel and she is likened to a ship with its "tackle trim" and "streamers waving." Thus this tempest-image of Samson aligns him, unexpectedly, with Harapha, whose blustering entrance as a "tempest" (1063) is next announced in their temple. Samson is still acting like a tempest when he destroys the Philistines. Just before the noise of the

calamity is heard, Manoa speaks of his son's locks "waving
down" (1493) and, as the messenger relates, it is "with the
force of winds and waters" (1647) and "with burst of
thunder" (1651) that the pillars are tugged down. The
destructive and hostile power of the sea which, at the
opening of the drama, was specifically associated with the
Philistines, has now been transferred to Samson. Moreover,
the threat which the sea metaphorically poses to Samson is
epitomized by the Philistine god, Dagon,[20] which is
significantly a "Sea-Idol" (13). In Paradise Lost, Dagon is
a member of that catalog of fallen angels who become pagan
gods:

> Dagon, his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man
>
> And downward Fish: yet had his Temple high
>
> Rear'd in Azotus, dreaded through the Coast
>
> Of Palestine.
>
> (PL, I, 462-65)

Because of the typological significance of sea monsters in
general and Leviathan in particular, Dagon is more than one
of the rout; he may be the Adversary.

Another example of the tempest appears in Paradise
Regain'd. After Christ repulsed one effort, Satan continues
to tempt him, as

> surging waves against a solid rock,
>
> Though all to shivers dash't, the assault renew,
>
> Vain battry, and in froth or bubbles end.
>
> (IV, 18-20)

It is clear that here Milton describes Satan as sea and Christ as rock.[21] The sea, which expressly represents Satan, attacks Jesus; thus the sea is an opponent of Christ.

Shipwreck is also one of the threats of the sea to humanity; this danger is obviously shown in Milton's writings. Moreover, shipwreck is a Biblical symbol (e. g. I Tim. 1: 19).[22] Prior to his Continental Tour, Milton had presented this theme in his pastoral elegy, Lycidas, as a memorial to Edward King, shipwrecked on the Irish Sea. In Samson Agonistes, the storm and shipwreck metaphorically govern the tragedy's structure. Samson's opening soliloquy lays the foundation for the dominant complex of the sea imagery in the work. In addressing the Chorus, Samson compares himself to both pilot and ship, the metaphor applied to Satan:

> Who like a foolish Pilot have shipwrack't,
>
> My Vessel trusted to me from above,
>
> Gloriously rigg'd.

> (198-200)

Dalila comes to finish the moral wreck of her man (714-18). Dalila has wrecked Samson's vessel as well as that of their marriage. Part of her destructiveness resides in forces inimical to all ships--storms and the waves the storms bring. Also, Satan, in Paradise Regain'd, hopes to erect rocks upon which Christ will be wrecked. Satan seeks to wreck the ship of salvation upon the rocks

> Of worth, of honour, glory, and popular praise;
>
> Rocks whereon greatest men have oftest wreck'd.
>
> (II, 227-28)

Satan's vessel assumes the great mission of wrecking all mankind. However, the combined threat of the sea and Satan is quite thoroughly repulsed by its protagonist, the Christ of the desert. Christ cannot be seduced by the sea;[23] rather He is harvesting good things out of the sea, as human souls are reclaimed from the devil.

In addition to his poetry, Milton's preoccupation with ships and shipwrecks appears in many of his prose works. In The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Milton expresses the hope that a bad marriage relationship be charitably dissolved "lest an over-tost faith endanger to shipwrack" (400). The poet later would use similar imagery in describing the union of Samson and Dalila. An unhappy marriage left without remedy is "tost and tempested in a most unquiet sea of afflictions and temptations" (Colasterion, 256). His experience with Mary Powell taught Milton first-hand the hazards of a permanent relationship whose "fair skie" may change to "such a scene of cloud and tempest, as turns all to shipwrack without havn or shoar" (Tetrachordon, 90). Milton also uses the ship imagery to treat religious and political themes. In The Reason of Church-government urg'd against Prelaty, religious sects are "but winds and flaws to try the floting vessell of our faith whether it be stanch and sayl well, whether our ballast be

just, our anchorage and cable strong" (222). In order to
write this treatise, Milton had to "leave a calme and
pleasing solitarynes fed with cherful and confident
thoughts, to imbark in a troubl'd sea of noises and hoars
disputes" (241). In this work Milton describes the
ecclesiastical hierarchy as a "mighty saile-wing'd monster"
(275), a metaphor strikingly similar to the "Sail-broad
Vannes" (II, 927) of Satan in <u>Paradise Lost</u>. The most
common application of ship imagery in the tracts occurs in
reference to the Commonwealth. In <u>Eikonoklastes</u>, Milton
berates the King for having abandoned Parliament "and in a
most tempestuous season forsook the Helme, and steerage of
the Common-wealth" (127). Other pilots are to take the
King's place in guiding the ship of state.[24] The Civil
Magistrate will have to "steare the tall and goodly <u>Vessell</u>
of the Common-wealth through all the gusts and tides of the
Worlds mutability" (<u>Of Reformation</u>, 65). In <u>The Readie &
Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonweath</u>, written on the
very eve of the Restoration, Milton advocated government by
a Council elected for life, saying "if they stear well, what
need is ther to change them" (126). But whichever governors
remain at the helm, they are warned "least thir hard measure
to libertie of conscience be found the rock whereon they
shipwrack themselves as others have now don before them in
the cours wherin God was directing thir stearage to a free
Commonwealth" (143).

Finally, the nefariousness of the sea presents itself

in that it is the abode of the sea-monster, Leviathan. In
<u>Paradise Lost</u>, deception is the fitting emphasis for the
simile likening Leviathan's prone, stationary, and floating
body to an island. Mariners, mistaking Leviathan for an
island, anchor on him and thence, the monster sounding, meet
their watery doom:

>   that Sea-beast
>
> <u>Leviathan</u>, which God of all his works
>
> Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream:
>
> Him haply Slumbring on the <u>Norway</u> foam
>
> The Pilot of some small night-founder'd Skiff,
>
> Deeming some Island, oft, as Sea-men tell,
>
> With fixed Anchor in his skaly rind
>
> Moors by his side under the Lee, while Night
>
> Invests the Sea, and wished Morn delayes:
>
> So stretcht out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay
>
> Chain'd on the burning lake.
>
>   (<u>PL</u>, I, 200-10)

The warning against becoming "hooked" on Satan is clear; man
deceived is likely to be drawn in over his head. Milton
implies that Leviathan is a whale because a whale is
considered the greatest animal in the sea. This idea
obviously goes back to old medieval bestiary and patristic
tradition which Milton must have known. Night is also aptly
related to Leviathan because this sea-monster is especially
active during the night time. As Milton describes Dagon as
a sea-monster (<u>PL</u>, I, 462), the goal of Dagon and Leviathan

is the same. Both Leviathan and Dagon swim into man's life
to destroy it.

In his writings, Milton differentiates the meanings of
water and the sea. The evil nature of the sea is aptly
described and frequently stressed throughout Milton's entire
works, both in his poetry and prose; it is perhaps his major
symbol.   Milton absolutely follows the Biblical heritage of
viewing the sea as malignant. This idea is especially more
expressly shown in his later works than in his earlier
writings. Milton's use of Christian sea symbolism is in
alignment with the writings of the Beowulf-poet, the
Seafarer-poet, and Chaucer, as I have shown in previous
chapters, all of whom are also overt in describing the sea
as a quasi-monster hostile to God. The Biblical background
intensifies the evil: Milton shows, by drawing upon and
emphasizing the Biblical tradition, that the sea is a
monster-like, malignant, voracious, powerful, and insatiable
demon. If the Bible is regarded as the word of God to man,
this intensity, although the symbol has long been known, is
piercing. If it is not, much of the force is drained out of
the symbol, and the sea symbolism is dismissed as a tiresome
cliché, especially by those who were never at marine risk.

Notes

1 When we compare Milton's two translations of Psalm
CXIV (one was translated into Greek from Hebrew in 1624;
another one was done in 1634), we can easily notice the
obvious difference between them: "the ocean" of 1624;
"dredful and monstrous sea" in 1634. Another example is
that in Lycidas, Milton originally wrote "humming tide" in
line 157, but later he changed that to "whelming tide."
According to Susan Snyder, the word "whelming" shows more
violence as well as destruction (328).

2 Theodore Banks explains Milton's broad knowledge of
nautical matters in detail: we "find significant figures:
from the sea itself including both the shallows of the coast
and the stormy deeps; from coastal navigation and commerce,
the arrival of a ship in port, and the unloading of its
freight; from the methods of keeping a ship afloat and of
sailing it on the high sea; from naval warfare; and from sea
life in general" (119).

3 John C. Ulreich, Jr. argues that Milton's "images are
often difficult to apprehend immediately, because their
effect depends largely on a conscious awareness" (67). In
general, this argument may be true; however, the sea imagery
is not a case in point.

4 All quotations and citations of Milton's works in this paper are from <u>The Works of John Milton</u>, 18 vols., ed. Frank A. Patterson.

5 In addition, Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy tried to establish the different meaning of fresh and salt water, but their conclusion is as follows: nature, including water and sea, "is neutral: it is not positively malignant, but neither is it beneficent" (149). Evidently, they both have overlooked the Biblical symbolism of the sea in Milton's writings.

6 Waters of "the deep" (Gen. 1: 2) translates to chaos in the Greek idea. Here Milton is hellenizing the Hebrew text.

7 For Milton's own view on this matter, see <u>PL</u> II and <u>Christian Doctrine</u>.

8 See <u>PL</u>, I, ll. 1010-44.

9 It seems to be made of free atoms as in Lucretius' <u>De Rerum Natura</u>, the probable source.

10 Christine Mohanty sharply explains that this word "has marvelous 'undertones,' denoting, on the one hand, the depths of water as it does in <u>Lycidas</u> and, on the other, connoting a bottomless pit of depravity . . . . However, the waters of Milton's Hell, instead of quenching fires, paradoxically ignite them (122)."

11 The references in <u>PL</u> are I, 152, 177, 314; II, 12, 79, 87, 131, 167, 344, 392, 634, 773, 829, 891, 961, 994; IV, 76, 574; VI, 716, 862; VII, 103, 134, 166, 168, 216,

245; X, 245, 471; XI, 826, 848; and XII, 578. The
appearances are also found in Paradise Regain'd I, 90 and
361. Another example is in Lycidas, 50. One more instance
appears in On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, 156.

12 "Deep" or "abyss" is an English translation
of tehom, but there is no closed door between Chaos and
Hell.

13 Historically, the drowning of Edward King is true.
Milton pastoralizes the college scene; he makes Edward King
a shepherd, which means a college student at the University
College of Cambridge.

14 The crossing of the Red Sea is God's victory over
the Egyptians. Jean Daniélou sharply explains it: in "the
Beast we recognize Pharaoh, figure of the demon, who is
destroyed by the water of judgement, while the servants of
God, victorious, find themselves on the other shore, having
crossed without harm the sea of death" (88).

15 William Riley Parker refers to the Psalm paraphrases
composed at the age of fifteen in 1624 as among Milton's
"earliest extant poems" (18).

16 Isaias 23: 4 reads: ". . . for the sea hath spoken,
even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor
bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor
bring up virgins." (All quotations of the Bible in this
chapter are from the King James Version, the Bible of
Milton.)

17 A. Bartlett Giamatti studied this idea in his The

Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic.

18 Sound imagery of the sea is also important in Milton's poetry. (Incidentally, it is a Homeric echo.) In Paradise Lost, it is used for applause offered by the heavenly host to encourage destruction of the fallen angels (V, 812; VI, 829-30; and X, 642) as well as for the discordant clamor that "drownd" Orpheus (VII, 36).

19 Here "Gloriously rigg'd" refers to Samson's hair.

20 Carey assumes that the name Dagon may be derived from the Hebrew Dag, "fish" (395). There is, however, no Philistine writing extant according to archaeologists. In addition, Satan willingly assumes the shape of a sea-creature, Dagon, and Pharaoh, the latter figuratively a river-dragon (PL, XII).

21 I Corinthians 10: 4 reads that "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

22 I Timothy 1: 19 reads that "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."

23 I might add here that the empire is approached through its waterways. Italy itself is "Wash'd by the Southern Sea" (PR, IV, 28). Rome's vastness is emphasized through the image of governors who travel far and wide to the "Black-moor Sea" (PR, IV, 72). But neither the empire's wide domain nor its wealth, manners, arts, or arms hold any interest for the Son of God.

24 It is worthy of note that the ship of state as a metaphor is conventional, not Milton's original; it is like the Ship of the Church. This metaphor appears in classical writings, too. For more details, see the Introduction Chapter of this dissertation.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have attempted to show that the sea is
portrayed as evil in the Bible, Church Fathers' writings,
Graeco-Roman literature, and the pagan northern world.
This idea not only affects medieval English writers but also
Milton; their writings clearly manifest this view almost
without exception.   In this dissertation, I am not viewing
the sea objectively, but through the eyes of the Bible, the
Beowulf-poet, The Seafarer-poet, Chaucer, and Milton: the
sea is filtered through them rather than through my own eyes
or those of many other people today.   In this diachronic
study, I have tried to show the ongoing vitality of
Christian sea symbolism from Anglo-Saxon poetry through
Chaucer to the seventeenth-century poet Milton.

Christianity dominates the symbolic use of the sea in
Anglo-Saxon English poetry, but the tone is Germanic. Thus
the meeting of two cultures evident in the poetry tends to
show a merging of Christian spirit with a Germanic attitude.
It is, however, wrong to say that Christianity simply took
over Anglo-Saxon literature.   The Old English poetic
descriptions and epic virtues give to Christian characters

such as Elene and Andrew the aura of forthright courage, commanding energy, and loyalty that are the qualities of a secular hero. The sea voyage passages portray such characters on the sea perfectly.

The role of Christian influence on Anglo-Saxon English poets and on Chaucer and Milton is crucial. The medieval English writers and Milton contribute greatly to Christian sea symbolism, even though they do not create new symbols from the sea or use symbols in new ways. The Anglo-Saxons, Chaucer, and Milton incorporate Christian tropes without altering them. Anglo-Saxon audiences, some of whom had generations of Christian ancestors by the time the extant poetry was composed, may well have taken for granted that Noah's Ark, for instance, is a type of the Church; we can reasonably expect that a ship carrying a saint, such as Andrew or Elene, would remind them of the ship of the Church as well. This fact does not mean that every Anglo-Saxon necessarily thought "Church" when he heard "ship" in any poem.

It is also true that after the Norman Conquest, there occurred a decline in the quality and length of sea voyage passages in poetry, and after the eleventh century the characteristic Old English descriptions and variations disappeared almost completely. Sea and ships were described less vividly, and seafaring episodes were skimmed over. However, the Christian idea of the sea symbology survived actively enough to continue to function in its role

throughout the Middle Ages and even in the seventeenth
century as I demonstrated with Chaucer and Milton.

In C. S. Lewis' inaugural lecture as Professor of
Medieval and Renaissance English Literature at Cambridge
University, he discusses cultural changes that screen the
medieval world from the modern. In his conclusion of that
lecture entitled "De Descriptione Temporum," he strongly
asserts that "It is my settled conviction that in order to
read Old Western literature aright you must suspend most of
the responses and unlearn most of the habits you have
acquired in reading modern literature"(Essays, 13). His
observations are well worth keeping in mind when reading
sea- or sea voyage-related literature. People who seldom
travel at sea and know ships as just machines must use their
imagination to appreciate how medieval people and Milton
viewed the sea and ships; otherwise they may miss the apt
interpretation of the works. The literary treatment of the
sea could express a wide range of abstract ideas and
qualities, but I am strongly convinced that the sea could
never have appealed to medieval and seventeenth-century
English people purely as a rhetorical figure or only as a
descriptive trope. They lived too much in contact with the
ocean and their writings express too much fear of it for
them to be unmoved. It is the same with Milton: he seems
to be afraid of crossing the Channel, although it is only
about forty miles in distance. By the way, it is
worthwhile to note here the horrors of seasickness,

described as early as the Middle Ages by pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. It comes at no surprise that seasickness was such a terrible sea experience among medievals (Durand, 266, 289).

Moreover, Christian sea symbology seems to be common beyond English literature and the Germanic world. For example, this theme appears in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish and Portuguese literature. Because of the demonic nature of the angry sea, sixteenth-century Portuguese and Spanish sailors occasionally immersed relics in the waves. These sailors were convinced that storms would not abate by themselves, but that the intervention of the Holy Virgin or St Nicholas was required (Corbin, 7). Further, according to Francoise Joukovsky, the images of the Satanic sea become more evocative in France at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries (114).

Of the fifteen traditional Biblical signs of the Apocalypse listed by Bede in De quindecim signis, five are sea- or sea monster-related: 1) the sea rises; 2) the sea and land are even; 3) sea monsters groan: 4) sea monsters burn; 5) the sea and sea-monster will be angry again at the time of the Doomsday. Thus someday in the future the sea might again become chaotic and monstrous as in Gen. 1: 2 and the Noachian Flood. Modern readers unimpressed by the drama of sea symbolism discussed in this dissertation, have only to think of the hundred-foot waves of tsunamis,[1] the

sinking of <u>The Titanic</u> in the twentieth century, and the disappearances without any explanation of ships at sea even in our own time.

What I have done here marks but a beginning. If it brings us just a little closer to these poets and their worlds, towards realizing what their past has to do with our present, then this study will be fruitful. Much remains to be studied about sea symbolism in English literature. Undoubtedly, sea imagery and symbolism other than what has been discussed already might include the following works and authors: William Cowper's "The Castaway," T. S. Eliot's <u>The Waste Land</u>, C. S. Lewis' <u>The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader</u>," William Shakespeare's <u>The Tempest</u>, Alfred Lord Tennyson's "The Kraken," Herman Melville's <u>Moby-Dick</u>, Gerard Manley Hopkins' <u>The Wreck of the Deutschland</u>, and many other writings, hymns, paintings, and objets d'art that treat the sea in the ambience of Judeo-Christianity. It will remain the task of other studies to investigate them.

Notes

1 According to Scott McCredie, so-called "tsunamis" are "the largest and rarest waves in all the seven seas. . . . The waves move with phenomenal efficiency and speed in open seas-typically traveling close to 500 miles per hour through the 14000 foot depth of the Pacific, fast enough to tail a Boeing 747" (68). These kinds of tsunamis can happen anytime anywhere.

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