Thesis: Roots of Colonialism in Old English Poetry

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Thesis Abstract: Roots of Colonialism in Old English Poetry

The white nationalist ideologies that drove many colonialist efforts are often built off of a so-called Anglo-Saxon ideal, which involves appealing to Old English epics such as *Beowulf* as part of the foundation of national and racial origins. However, beyond the problematic associations with white supremacy, such postures towards Old English texts and Germanic culture of the era read race anachronistically into the past and ignore the actual cultural contexts these Old English texts are rooted in. Thus, the goal of this thesis project is to analyze Old English texts through a postcolonial lens, informed by Rambaran-Olm, Hsy, Miyashiro, Kim, and Ahmed. I also bring in the central concept of "Christendom" as defined by Harris and Mittman. Using close reading and comparative translation, I evaluate the Old English poems *Genesis A & B, Judith,* and *Andreas* through this postcolonial framework.

In Chapter One, I analyze *Genesis A & B,* which calls attention to the importance of land to the migratory Germanic tribes, to inherited righteousness or wickedness through family lines, and to Christendom's efforts to connect the promise of Abraham to the Christians of the day. Chapter Two covers *Judith,* which focuses on how leadership is an important factor in the classification of humankind as righteous or wicked and on how these distinctions factor into future destination. *Judith,* with its positive depictions of Jews and Christian additions, also points to the idea of supersessionism. In Chapter Three, I address *Andreas,* which complicates the dichotomy of righteousness and wickedness by showing the righteous as flawed and the wicked as capable of transformation. As a conversion story featuring the salvation of an "uncivilized" group (the Mermedonians), there are also protocolonialist ideas that justify mass converting Indigenous and other non-Christian people groups. Taken all together, the themes in these three poems support my initial thesis that protocolonialist ideas are present in these texts, which

provides deeper understanding of how nationalist and colonialist ideologies evolved over history and led to the rise of present-day white nationalism.

My research is part of a growing trend of medieval literary scholarship: applying a postcolonial approach to tracing the roots of white nationalism. Christendom's classification of humankind, as demonstrated in these three poems as a division of the righteous and the wicked, also gives a frame to apply to other Old English texts. Specifically, the other biblically-inspired texts of the Junius Manuscript, Old English hagiographies like *Elene*, and epics that follow the apostles such as *The Fate of the Apostles* would be natural opportunities to explore further consistencies or challenges to these ideas.

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Introduction

The study of Old English literature has, over the centuries, become saturated with anachronistic readings of national identity and conceptions of race in need of disentangling. As Shelley Haley puts it, "we must search out and analyze *their* construct of race… [and] not read our construct of race into ancient cultures" (30).[1] This is especially true of our present cultural moment, as we confront the persistent dangers of white supremacy, which has often used claims about Old English and medieval heritage to uphold white nationalist rhetoric in England, the United States, and elsewhere (Rambaran-Olm; Miyashiro). As Davies puts it, "Nationalism haunts medieval studies…and claims about medieval heritage are often claims about social and political status" (138), which he explores through how four different nations claim *Beowulf* as belonging to their respective culture and history. White nationalism's attempts to draw power from appeals to medieval heritage gestures to an assumed homogeneity in racial and national makeup that ignores the complex political shifting of the medieval European world. As Haley notes in her own analysis of antiquity, "In any society's value system, individuals are aggregates of multiple differences; judgments are then made according to the combination" (30); there are a variety of factors that make up "race," or cultural-ethnic divisions, that place groups within a hierarchy of power (Kim 7). Yet white supremacy did not begin with the Transatlantic slave trade or the European colonization of other nations; the seeds of colonialism start from the earliest days of England's society, and modern racism's roots go much further than expected, as Dorothy Kim argues (6). Kim goes on to argue that "The politics of white supremacy and whiteness are deeply embedded in any declaration of the upholding of the myth of the medieval preracial" (6). It is inaccurate to think of Old English literatures as defining whiteness; as Ahmed

[1] While Haley's focus is on the ancient Roman Empire, her call to action here applies equally to Old English literatures and cultures.

puts it, "Whiteness is an effect of what coheres rather than the origin of coherence" (159). Thus, the origins of whiteness are retroactively placed on Old English literature, rather than Old English literature serving as formational for whiteness. As a result of the baggage of white supremacy in medieval studies, a postcolonial approach, though counterintuitive, is useful to unearth these roots of colonialism and correct misconceptions of race in the medieval era.

As a first disclaimer, and one informed by my postcolonial approach, in my thesis project, I avoid using the term "Anglo-Saxon" unless used in quotes from scholars or otherwise necessary. As many prominent scholars have pointed out, appealing to "Anglo-Saxon" culture and texts has a long history as a part of white supremacist narratives and ideologies. Jonathan Hsy summarizes the arguments of several scholars well: "The phrase 'Anglo-Saxon,' problematically used inside and outside academia interchangeably with the term Old English, has deep historical associations with idealized notions of racial purity and discourses of white superiority throughout global Anglophone contexts" (100). Miyashiro also points out the problems of appealing to a so-called "Anglo-Saxon" heritage tied to colonial oppression in the United States and globally. Furthermore, as Mary Rambaran-Olm[2] points out, "Failures to recognize that the field and its content have been predominantly fashioned for and by white people has allowed white supremacists to latch onto a fictitious narrative of what they believe the 'Anglo-Saxon' period is" (389). Allfrey adds an important point on this mythologizing: "Emotional attachment is implicitly presented as a legitimate tool of analysis, which enables writers to present simplified mythologies as matters of fact" (81) when writing on early England's medieval history and legacy. Thus, in today's context, "Anglo-Saxon" seems a term better suited for describing the idealization of Middle Ages England in a way that advances

[2] I would like to acknowledge that this project and its theoretical context owes a great deal to Mary Rambaran-Olm's work, particularly the resources she has compiled on the subject of race, nationalism, and medieval studies.

white supremacist ideas, i.e. a fantasy version of medieval England. Allfrey, addressing arguments that "Anglo-Saxon" need not be used in racist or white supremacist ways, responds to objections by arguing that "Disentangling 'Anglo-Saxon' from ethnonationalist imaginaries is not as easy as insisting that people who use 'Anglo-Saxon' in this way are simply misappropriating, misinformed, or wrong" (80). Thus, due to the inability to fully remove the phrase from its connotations, I avoid using the term, as the goal of this analysis is not to perpetuate the harmful associations of so-called "Anglo-Saxon" culture and history. Instead, I refer broadly to the "Old English audience" or "Germanic tribes," to better associate the works with their true cultural contexts.

In the context of early Old English cultures, race was not typically defined by physical markers, national identity, or other modern constructions of race. As Abdelkarim explains, "Blood ties were neither pure nor unbreakable" (397), as tribes both exiled their own and warmly welcomed in strangers. Ethnic and tribal lines were not as firmly established and not used as the primary marker of discrimination. However, humanity still had a way of drawing dividing lines, ones that mattered more than tribal affiliation: religion. Harris and Mittman respectively address the concept of "Christendom," an attempt at unifying various tribes and people groups under the banner of Christianity. This was the closest idea to a reigning "national" identity of the era, though as Blair points out, some tribes maintained "pagan" practices, so the adoption of the Christian religion was not as absolute as one might assume. Harris defines "Christendom" as a "combined Germanic *imperium* with Roman Christianity" (86), understanding Christendom to be a merger of religious identity and somewhat ethnic identity tied to Germanic heritage and to biblical history through genealogies (Harris 87). Mittman adds to this conversation by pointing out that "The project of Christendom was, by necessity, a universalizing one, deeply ambitious

and correspondingly exclusionary" (26), as those who did not accept conversion were considered outsiders, if not enemies. It is Christendom, rather than a unified national, ethnic, or racial identity, that reigns supreme in terms of relevant cultural identity markers and communities.

It is difficult to parse out strictly "Germanic" traditions from "Christian" traditions, particularly in Old English biblical epics, which Angerer argues: "it is best to discard all notions of monolithic and exclusive cultural influences. Awareness of thematic overlap allows us to recognize the validity of multiple cultural resonances" (90). It is inaccurate to isolate Christian influences and Germanic influences as separate entities; as the notion of Christendom suggests, Christianity became an infused aspect of multiple cultural identities. The fusion of Christendom and Germanic influences provide the necessary cultural context for dissecting the meaning and interpretation of Christian themes in Old English literatures, as Battles argues through establishing that there are "Christian traditional themes [that] exist and that these can be distinguished from other intertextual relationships prevalent in Old English and Anglo-Latin texts" (578). Christianity affects how Germanic tropes operate and what new themes emerge in Old English Christian literatures.

These scholars formulate the foundation of how to approach Old English texts from a postcolonial perspective, removing the definitions and perceptions of modern race and national identity in order to read these texts within their truer cultural contexts. The focus on Christendom and its fusion of cultural and religious elements is especially important for dissecting how the selected poems understand divisions within humankind. As a whole, the Old English poem functions as an appeal to its cultural contexts and the exchange of Christian and Germanic tropes. Recognizing the fusion of these cultural and religious influences clarifies thematic significance that further sheds light on cultural and religious ideologies of the age.

With this frame of the cultural contexts in mind, this project analyzes the Old English Christian religious epics *Genesis A & B, Judith,* and *Andreas,* using close readings that apply the cultural context as well as the history of white nationalism, both how it evolved and how it distorted interpretations of these texts and their religious themes. Evaluating the poems *Genesis A & B, Judith,* and *Andreas* through a postcolonial lens reveals a pattern of understanding humankind as either "righteous" (Christian) or "wicked" (non-Christian) and justifying the righteous' violence against those considered wicked, thus setting up colonialist ideologies to come centuries later.

To accomplish these close readings, I also work with the texts in translation, using the original Old English at times to complicate translations. I use Aaron K. Hostetter's translations for consistency across all three texts, as well as because Hostetter shares my approach and understanding of the baggage of "Anglo-Saxonism" on Old English literatures. Hostetter accounts for accessibility, making these texts available to the modern English reader of the twenty-first century.

In Chapter One, I analyze *Genesis A & B,* which is based on the biblical text of Genesis and calls attention to the importance of land to the migratory Germanic tribes, a sense of inherited righteousness or wickedness through family lines, and how Christendom sought to connect the promise of Abraham to the Christians of the day. While these themes relate to the fused Germanic-Christendom culture, they also demonstrate signs pointing to the justification of taking land due to perceived superiority based on ancestry, i.e. colonialism justified by race and religious practice.

Chapter Two covers *Judith,* the Old English Nowell Codex epic, which continues these themes of sorting humankind based on designations of righteousness and wickedness, but

advances these themes to focus on how leadership is an important factor in this classification and how these distinctions factor into future destinations, i.e. heaven or hell. *Judith*, with its positive depictions of Jews and Christian additions, also points to the idea of supersessionism, that Christians replace Jews in right standing before God. These themes are a precursor to colonialist justification of conquering non-Christian peoples because of Christians' "righteousness" before God, which covers up even the wicked act of killing.

In Chapter Three, I address *Andreas*, the Old English verse version based off of the legend of St. Andrew, which again compliments the view of humankind as either righteous or wicked. However, *Andreas* complicates this dichotomy by showing the righteous as flawed and the wicked as capable of transformation. As a conversion story featuring the salvation of an uncivilized group (the Mermedonians), there are seeds of colonialist ideas that justify mass converting Indigenous and other non-Christian people groups simply on the basis of their difference in religion and culture.

Analyzing protocolonialist themes present in *Genesis A & B, Judith,* and *Andreas* serves to correct the narrative of medieval texts as emblems of white supremacy while also noting how such anachronistic interpretations came to exist. *Genesis A & B*, as an origin story, fits as the first text to address, since it covers the foundations of what *Judith* and *Andreas* build upon. *Andreas*, as a story of converting a people group to Christianity, most naturally points to clear colonialist justifications, making it a good footnote for the project. *Judith* comes second as a bridge between these two texts, building off of *Genesis A & B*'s foundation while providing insights that clarify the actions and themes of *Andreas*. Taken all together, the protocolonialist themes in these three poems provide deeper understanding of how nationalist and colonialist ideologies evolved over history and led to the rise of white nationalism.

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Chapter One: Righteous Inheritance in Old English *Genesis A & B*

As established in the introduction, white nationalism often attempts to draw power from appeals to medieval heritage (Davies 138), gesturing to an assumed homogeneity in racial and national makeup that ignores the complex political shifting of the medieval European world. Yet from a postcolonial position, it is difficult to engage with medieval texts without the shadow of nationalistic or racial ideologies that have impacted our societies. The Old English poem *Genesis A & B* is a prime example that highlights the strain between its contemporary culture and the colonial mindset, as its focus on the biblical book of Genesis attempts to link the Christian church to the created order ordained by God.

To provide context, Old English *Genesis A & B* is the opening work of the Junius Manuscript. Though fairly true to its source material, with portions that are incredibly close to the Latin Bibles of the day (Doane, *Genesis A* 77), they are not a direct translation of the biblical text[3] and, as Doane points out, their authors edit and add to the Genesis story in ways that appeal to the culture of the day. *Genesis A* was likely originally written in c. 750, with the Junius Manuscript compiled in c. 1000 (Doane, *Genesis A* 32-40). By the time of the Junius Manuscript, a translated version of the Old Saxon *Genesis B* was inserted into *Genesis A*, likely to make up for a crucial missing scene: the Fall of Man (Doane, *Genesis A* 10). *Genesis B* is also the portion of the text that takes the most poetic license compared to the canonical biblical material through its depiction of Lucifer and his motivation for tempting man to fall. While they could and often are analyzed as distinct pieces of literature, for the purposes of this analysis, they will be considered as the same text, as the placement of *Genesis B* fills in the gap of the missing pieces

[3] I am defining a "direct translation" to be a text attempting word-for-word translation from one language into another. Since the Old English *Genesis A & B* not only incorporates extra-biblical material into its story, but also bends the Latin source material into Old English meter, it would not be considered a direct or faithful translation of the biblical material.

of *Genesis A,* added intentionally to tell a cohesive, connected narrative about the origins of humankind.

Another important contextual note for *Genesis A & B* is the Old English audiences' contemporary culture of Christendom, which Harris defines as a "combined Germanic *imperium* with Roman Christianity" (86). In considering nationhood, race, and precursors to colonial ideologies in texts like *Genesis A & B,* the concept of Christendom and its impact on the early medieval world is critical. Mittman adds to this conversation by pointing out that "The project of Christendom was, by necessity, a universalizing one, deeply ambitious and correspondingly exclusionary" (26), as those who did not accept conversion were considered outsiders, if not enemies. It is Christendom, rather than a unified national, ethnic, or racial identity, that reigns supreme in terms of relevant cultural identity markers and communities. The high importance of religious homogeneity in determining acceptance or rejection of others impacts how *Genesis A & B* is read. Harris goes on to explain Christendom as a merger of religious identity and somewhat ethnic identity connected to Germanic heritage, tied to biblical history through genealogies (87). This linking of biblical history with Germanic tribes is a vital point in an analysis of *Genesis A & B,* as there are hints of this appeal to Christendom in the Old English poem. Angerer, similarly, views Old English biblical epics, like *Genesis A & B*, as "the products of cultures incorporating both Christian and Germanic traditions" (77), also pointing to a sense of merged religious and cultural identities. Despite the text's basis on the Christian scriptures, there are more than mere Christian influences at play in the poem, and it is in the merging of the multiple identities that insights of the era come to light.

Genesis A & B also reflects an appeal to Old English theological intellectualism in several ways. Fulk and Cain point out a common practice of making the Old Testament accounts

in Christian Scripture relevant to the Old English audience: "biblical exegesis was inseparable in the minds of the Anglo-Saxons from the biblical books themselves" (165) through typological aspects of the text. In other words, it was commonplace for those engaged with biblical texts to reveal how the Old Testament accounts, such as Genesis, actually pointed to Christ or the Christian church through symbolism. It is no different with the Old English *Genesis A & B*, as more than a few of its omissions or additions of the Genesis account speak to a specifically Christian audience (Doane, *Genesis A* 87-88). As an example, there are "numerous omissions of strictly Jewish ceremonial or tribalistic detail, matters of least interest to a Christian, Anglo-Saxon audience, monastic, clerical, or lay" (Doane, *Genesis A* 88-89). Whereas the biblical book of Genesis was written for the Jewish people, the Old English poem *Genesis A & B* is written for a Christian audience, particularly one belonging to early medieval Christendom. This matters because the Genesis story's moral heart and purpose is necessarily skewed by the poem from the original to fit into a Christian paradigm, which in turn opens the door for interpretations of Jewish or Christian theology not rooted in its original cultural context. While I do not want to dismiss potential merits of interpretations grounded in contemporary understandings and culture, I also point out that such skewed takes on Christian theology in particular led to the damages of colonialism.

So, this is why grounding an approach to *Genesis A & B* through its contemporary culture matters. The poem appeals to culture through its definition of moral order, its designation of specific lines of humankind as inherently righteous or wicked, and its attention to land and its allotment. All three of these aspects relate to the Christendom cultural norms of the day, yet they also bear the seeds of colonialist ideologies and justifications.

Genesis A & B, like other literary works of the period, engages in theological issues and defines right relationship to God. Doane and Anlezark respectively call attention to how the themes of the Old English *Genesis A & B* appeal to the contemporary theological debates of the time, effectively linking the poem's religious themes with an attempt of providing its audience with an answer to theological questions. Specific to *Genesis A & B,* much of this answer comes through its attention on the creation of the world. Michelet notes that this is a prevalent trope of Old English poetry, noting "Stories of origins, a desire to discover the beginnings of the world and of humankind are recurrent concerns to Anglo-Saxon poets" (37). As *Genesis A & B* begins with the creation account, it naturally fits into this pattern of identifying humankind's origins.

Another specific way Old English poetry functioned as a religious tool is through teaching moral lessons. As Doane notes, "Christian poetry gradually took over the function of the pagan classics as moral, rhetorical, and metrical manuals" (Doane, *Genesis A* 62), a generalization that applies even to the biblical epics such as *Genesis A & B*. Walton adds to this comment, noting that there are several layers to the purpose and intent of Old English biblical poetry, including the aforementioned typological application, as well as "the moral sense relate[d] to Christian conduct on earth in the present moment" (Walton 5). The instructional aspect for present life is just as important as the symbolism of the text. This thrust of moral instruction is related to "Bede's conviction that the ignorant should be taught by example" (Blair 166), as the moral characters of the tale demonstrated what this righteous behavior or action might look like. The notion of setting a moral example even through poetry is complicated by the Genesis story, as there is no one perfect character exemplifying righteous behavior, though, as will be elaborated on later, *Genesis A & B* does downplay or excuse the moral exemplars of the tale, such as Noah and Abraham, to emphasize their righteousness. The primary point made here

is that, as with other Old English poetry, *Genesis A & B* functions as a theological and moral text, emphasizing how humanity is to live.

With the text beginning with creation, the poem immediately establishes a hierarchy of creation with God at the top setting the rules for right behavior for all beings. Before the Fall of Man, the poem *Genesis A & B* depicts "representations of a desirable organization of the world, of order, and of fitness as the Anglo-Saxons conceived of it" (Michelet 38), befitting the purpose of creation narratives in Old English poetry. It is in the earliest lines of the poem that the "correct" way of existing in the world and relating to God is established. The poem opens with:

> Us is ribt micel đæt we rodera weard,
> wereda wuldorcining, wordum herigen,
> modum lufien! He is mægna sped,
> heafod ealra heahgesceafta,
> frea ælmihtig.
> [A great duty is ours that we wordfully praise
> the Heavens' Ward, the Glory-King of Armies,
> and love him in our hearts! He is the Strength's Success,
> the Head of all High-Creation, the Almighty Lord.] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1-5; Hostetter trans. lines 1-4)[4]

The opening lines of the poem evoke a sense of duty humankind must hold, as well as the purpose of God in upholding the order of the world. It is humankind's duty to pay homage to God, for God has allowed victory in battle, illustrated through his descriptions as the "wereda wuldorcining" ["Glory-King of Armies"] (line 2), "mægna sped" ["Strength's Success"] (line 3),

[4] Old English text is from the Krapp edition of the *Junius Manuscript*; modern English translation provided by Hostetter.

and the "ælmihtig" ["Almighty"] (line 5). While he is referred to as the "Almighty" in Christian Scripture, the former two depictions of God paint a mighty, clear image of a warrior God, a description of God that fits in with the warrior and vassalage culture of the Old English audience. Beyond God's connection to success and victory in battle, these earliest lines of the poem also point to God as the "heafod ealra heahgesceafta" ["head of all High-Creation"] (line 4), establishing God as the top of the hierarchal order. Indeed, the poem goes on to demonstrate how creation itself pays homage to God. Following the creation of Day and Night, the text states that once established, "siđđan aefre / drugon and dydon drihtnes willan, / ece ofer eorđan" ["they have ever since / accomplished and performed the desire of the Lord, / eternally over the earth"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 141b-143a; Hostetter trans. lines 140b-142a). Day and night are personified here as servants of God, obeying him and pointing to him as the center of the created order of the world. It emphasizes God's power and position as ruler over all of Creation. By establishing from the start that God is at the center and head of created order, the *Genesis A & B* poem encourages its audience to view him in the same way, establishing a theology of God's ultimate authority. This is the undercurrent of the rest of the poem as it goes on to explore humankind's own allegiance and responsibility toward their heavenly king, dictating how humanity should act in response to God's headship over creation.

One way the poem demonstrates this early on is through the example of the angels. Coming before humankind's creation, the angels' posture towards God demonstrates proper response, through those who remain faithful, as well as the consequences of improper response, through those who fall. The text describes the angels as "þegnas þrymfæste þeoden heredon, / sægdon lustum lof, heora liffrean" ["Glorious servants exalting their Prince, speaking / willingly his praises, celebrating the Lord of their Life"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 15-16; Hostetter

trans. lines 15-16), a worshipful posture that the poet celebrates. This is the right response of angels. In contrast, the angels who choose to rebel with Lucifer are described as "werlogan" ["pledge-breakers"] (*Genesis A & B* line 36; Hostetter trans. line 36) and "oferhidig cyn engla of heofnum, / wærleas werod" ["the over-proud tribe of angels from heaven, the pledge-lacking army"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 66-67a; Hostetter trans. line 66). These fallen angels forsake their duty to God by ceasing to serve him as they ought, and hence break their troth with God. Michelet ties this break of pledge to the greatest evil of the Old English-speaking society, explaining that "Pride was a laudable attribute of Germanic heroes and ranked high in the traditional Anglo-Saxon scale of values… Old English poets therefore resort to the heroic ethos upon which the relationship between the lord and the retainer is based to condemn the devil's rebellious thoughts" (64-65). Since Lucifer violates his relationship with his Lord, the Creator God, he is therefore condemned. As Creator, and as established earlier, God sets the rules for all of creation, including the angels, and these are the rules that Lucifer could not live under. What makes Lucifer's rebellion so curious in the text is that Lucifer knows the will of God cannot be challenged or undone, acknowledging his sovereignty post-fall and recognizing his own powerlessness to sway God's mind, remarking: "Ne magon we þæt on aldre gewinnan, / þæt we mihtiges godes mod onwæcen" ["'Nor can we ever make it that we may soften the mind of Mighty God'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 402b-403a; Hostetter trans. line 404). Even Satan, the enemy of God, must recognize God's centrality in the created order of the world. His inability to truly rebel against God and disrupt the order of creation merely reinforces God's headship, and provides a model for humanity to come. The angels foreshadow the expectations of humanity in regards to right response and behavior toward God.

Like the angels, humankind is also adopted into a vassalage-like relationship with God. Humankind as a general whole is referred to as God's "þegn" ["thanes"] (*Genesis A & B* line 597; Hostetter trans. line 597), even after the fall of Adam and Eve that tainted the world with sin. Despite the fall, humanity still owes God a certain measure of respect and allegiance, similar to that expected of the angels. God's relationship with humanity extends further, as he gives Adam and Eve specific instructions to obey and establishes them high up in the hierarchy of creation, telling them: "Inc is halig feoh / and wilde deor on geweald geseald, / and lifigende" ["'You are given dominion over the wild beasts / and the clean cattle and all things living'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 201b-203a; Hostetter trans. lines 201-202). These commands and this high honor further indebt Adam and Eve to God, making their bond of loyalty even more weighty. Yet there is no doubt that God is still the ruler of all creation, as God's control over Adam and Eve remains clear. Speaking of the Garden of Eden, the text notes that "He let heo paet land buan" ["God allowed them to dwell in that land"] (*Genesis A & B* line 239b; Hostetter trans. line 238b), and Adam and Eve "and moton him pone welan agan" ["and are allowed to possess the prosperity from [God]"] (*Genesis A & B* line 422; Hostetter trans. line 422). God, even though he generously promotes humankind in the created order, still demonstrates his ultimate position over them and creation as a whole. This becomes more apparent when Adam and Eve step outside of God's decrees for them, leading to God revoking the land of Eden from them: "þa hie þa habban ne moston / þe him ær forgeaf ælmihtig god" ["no longer permitted to possess what Almighty God / had once given them"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 843b-844; Hostetter trans. lines 843b-844). *Genesis A & B* establishes God as the ruler of all, leading to a vassalage-like relationship with his creation, where humankind owes him allegiance. Yet God's control over the

world does not strip humanity of agency; they are expected to remain in good standing of God's rules and regulations for his kingdom of creation.

In fact, the beginning segments of *Genesis A & B* reveals only one entity that can act outside of the created order: God himself. While angels and humankind, exalted as they might be within creation itself, cannot stray apart from God, God can bend his own rules, to a certain degree. Though he punishes Adam and Eve, he does not treat them to the same extent as Satan and the other fallen angels. After their exile from Eden, God shows compassion toward Adam and Eve:

> No hwæðre ælmihtig ealra wolde
> Adame and Euan arna ofteon,
> fæder æt frymðe, þeah þe hie him from swice,
> ac he him to frofre let hwæðere forð wesan
> hyrstedne hrof halgum tunglum
> and him grundwelan ginne sealde;
> [Not yet did the Almighty wish to withdraw all honor
> from Adam, our father at the beginning, and Eve,
> even though they had rebelled against him,
> but he allowed the heavenly roof to be decorated nonetheless
> with blessed stars as a comfort to them
> and he gave unto them the ample riches of the earth.] (*Genesis A & B* lines 952-957; Hostetter trans. lines 952-957)

Rather than casting them out so firmly and decisively as he does with Satan, God still provides Adam and Eve with blessings befitting of the righteous. While not as divinely wonderful as the

Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are nonetheless comforted by God's creation and provided with enough food to eat through agriculture. This could be interpreted as God bending his own rules about the treatment of the faithful versus the unfaithful, but another possible treatment of this moment emphasizes Adam and Eve's inherent righteousness that still allows them to be treated as favored by God. Both Adam and Eve were repentant and not entirely blamed for the fall, as the demon tempting Eve bears some responsibility. Plus, both go on to pursue God's favor through obedience, as the text notes that "Ongunnon hie þa be godes hæse / bearn astrienan, swa him metod bebead" ["They began then to beget children by the order of God / just as the Maker commanded them"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 965-966; Hostetter trans. lines 965-966a). Yet this clear and notable act of following God's commands does take place after God richly blesses and comforts them in their exiled state, which points either to God shifting his own rules as fitting with his role as head of creation, or to some sort of inherent righteousness within Adam and Eve that allows them to still experience God's blessings. The latter leads into an interesting split that starts to occur with their children, where righteousness and wickedness start to appear as inherited, inherent traits. This relates back to God's reason for creating humankind in the first place: angels fell, leaving empty spaces in heaven, that only the worthiest can fill. Michelet, in assessing various Old English creation accounts, notes the theme of *Genesis A* related to the angels' replacement that "the distribution of the population in space remains under God's control. He appoints an appropriate place to everyone and everything" (62), gesturing to God as the ultimate designator of worthiness, with the implication that some will be judged as unworthy by him.

Righteousness and morality become a complex component of *Genesis A & B,* as mentioned earlier. The moral figures of the Genesis story all have flaws, from Adam and Eve

causing the fall of man in the Garden of Eden to Abraham's dishonesty. Yet the *Genesis A & B* poem manages to minimize or excuse less-than-admirable behavior from the characters who are meant to be the moral, upright examples, such as Adam and Eve merely lacking the ability to resist the demon's temptation, glossing over Noah's own drunken shame, and never blaming Abraham for lying about the identity of his wife to foreign rulers (Doane, *Genesis A* 89). The mistakes of the moral are glossed over to better prop them up as exemplars. With the minimizing of their mistakes, it suggests that righteousness and morality are inherited traits, somewhat but not entirely separated from right action or behavior. God, as head of the created order and humankind, does punish some of the righteous, as with Adam and Eve, yet his continued favor and blessing on them establishes a precedence for God to choose some groups or individuals to be spared from punishment, and others receiving the full force of his punishment for somewhat arbitrary or unexplained reasons. This plays out in the poem through the clear inclusion of a line of inherited, inherent wickedness.

Despite all coming from the shared source of Adam and Eve, Cain's murder of his brother Abel causes a branch of humanity that possesses an inherent, inherited wickedness, put in contrast with a similar line of inherently righteous humans. As a result of his vile act of killing his own brother, Cain is cursed by God. After the ground swallows up the blood of Abel, the following occurs:

> Æfter wælswenge wea wæs aræred,
> tregena tuddor. Of đam twige siđđan
> ludon lađwende leng swa swiđor
> ređe wæstme. Ræhton wide
> geond werþeoda wrohtes telgan,

hrinon hearmtanas hearde and sare

drihta bearnum, (doð gieta swa),

[Woe was raised, the progeny of grief.

From that sprig has grown evil-minded

and terrible fruit ever since for such a long time.

They have extended broadly throughout the tribes of men,

the branches of crime, the sorrowing stems touching

harsh and sore the sons of the multitudes— and they still do—] (*Genesis A & B* lines 987-993; Hostetter trans. lines 987b-992)

This descriptor of what results due to Cain's sin provides a significant path of sinful attitudes and behaviors that plagues humankind. It is also interesting that it is Cain's murder of his brother that sparks a wave of embedded evil in the lives of men, rather than the first sin of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Because evil takes root in humankind through Cain's actions, the text here suggests that it is Cain's line who bears this growth of "reðe wæstme" ["terrible fruit"] (*Genesis A & B* line 990; Hostetter trans. line 989). This is the start of sin's real spread through humanity, and after this point, Cain's line is increasingly ascribed with wickedness, suggesting an implied inherited wickedness in all the descendants of Cain.

The notion that Cain is the forbearer of a wicked lineage is found elsewhere in medieval texts. While an older source, Emerson is valuable in tracing out medieval interpretations of Cain thoroughly, starting with the Old English period and into the later middle ages. Emerson draws attention to Cain as the forbearer of wicked beings from *Beowulf*, noting that "There are here [in *Beowulf*] noted two classes of beings which sprang from Cain. First are the monsters…and spirits of hell…Second are the giants who strove against God" (879). Furthermore, epithets for

Cain in *Beowulf* are similar to "those used for the devils in such poems as *Genesis*" (Emerson 881), linking some of the connected thought on Cain across Old English texts. However, outside of *Beowulf*, Emerson notes that most of the references to Cain as the father of monsters, devilish and abhorrent, are found in Middle English texts, not Old English (884-885). Even *Genesis A & B* does not tie Cain explicitly to monsters, just to wicked humans. Still, the *Beowulf* connection of Cain to monsters may have opened the door for future emphasis on this idea, and led to anachronistic readings of modern race into the text later on. Nelson, looking at how Cain typology impacted more contemporary works like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, lays out a typology of Cain that paints him as a generator of evil and pushed into the margins of society (468-469), which emphasizes the idea of Cain as an "Other" and his descendants as "Other." This is certainly the case in *Genesis A & B* as well, though again, any commentary on the line of Cain is tied back to wicked actions in the sight of God, emphasizing that as the delineating factor among humankind, rather than any physical markers of appearance or monstrousness.

One final note on Cain, and a helpful transition to talk about the line of righteousness that springs up in contrast to the line of wickedness: Wright notes that the blood of Abel as a seed for both Cain's line of evil and the future line of good was borrowed from Church tradition. The branches described in *Genesis A & B* in the above quote "clearly implies a more universal conception of Cain's fratricide as the spiritual root of malice and violence in human society" (Wright 9), a view that has been found throughout various Christian theologians' writings up to that point (Wright 9). There is hefty theological ideology wrapped up in Cain and understanding Cain as a true father of evil. Wright goes on to state that "the metaphor of spreading growth reflects the poem's emphasis on the theme of generation, especially the contrast between the evil

progeny of Cain and the holy patriarchs descended from Seth, Abel's 'seed bearing' brother who perpetuated the favoured line" (11). This further complements my own analysis of the text.

This contrast between the lines of inherited righteousness versus wickedness becomes more apparent in describing how the children of Seth, God's "favored" line of men, begin to intermarry with those of Cain:

> oðþæt beam godes bryda ongunnon
> on Caines cynne secan,
> wergum folce, and him þær wif curon
> ofer metodes est monna eaforan,
> scyldfulra mægð scyne and fægere.
> [Until the sons of God began to seek out wives
> among the kindred of Cain, an accursed folk,
> and they chose women there over the favor of the Maker,
> the sons of man, women more wicked yet beautiful and fair] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1248-1252; Hostetter trans. lines 1248-1251)

Here, Cain's line is described as "wergum" ["accursed"] (*Genesis A & B* line 1250; Hostetter trans. line 1249) and "monna" ["wicked"] (*Genesis A & B* line 1251; Hostetter trans. line 1251), as well as outside of "ofer metodes est" ["the favor of the Maker"] (*Genesis A & B* line 1251; Hostetter trans. line 1250). Yet no specific action or deed of individuals is cited here to justify it; they are painted as evil as a result of their lineage, and by marrying into that branch of humanity, Seth's descendants fall out of favor with God, who grows angry with them. The contrast of a wicked line and a pure line of humanity is significant because it is the first example of a classification of humankind that sets one in favor with God and his created order, and the other

outside of that favor. Yet there seems to be little agency in regards to who is of the worthy line and who is of the unworthy line. It is collective wickedness that categorizes the line of Cain.

Similarly, the line of Seth remains pure through a single family: that of Noah. God tells Noah, "Ic þe godne wat, / fæsthydigne; þu eart freoðo wyrðe, / ara mid eaforum" ["'I know you are good, fast-minded; / you are worthy of my protection, of favor with your sons"] (*Genesis A & B* 1346b-1348a; Hostetter trans. lines 1346b-1347). Noah is set apart from the wickedness of the children of Cain, though admittedly the text is vague about Noah's worthiness tied to his lineage versus his individual character. Noah as an individual is worthy, courageous, and good. However, while Noah's goodness is ambiguous in origin (individual versus by blood), his goodness and worthiness also protects his sons, imputing them with a kinship tie of worthiness before God. Noah's house is described as "hof seleste" ["the best of houses"] (*Genesis A & B* line 1393; Hostetter trans. line 1392), elevating his sons, individually worthy or no, to the same righteous status as their father. Purity and righteousness, then, is also tied somewhat to inherent lineage, much like wickedness.

Speaking of Noah and his sons, it is vital here to address the matter of the Curse of Ham and his lineage, used in more recent history to justify the enslavement of Africans in Europe and the United States. Keeping with the original biblical text, the curse of Ham is present in the Old English poem, reading "he wesan sceolde / hean under heofnum, hleomaga þeow, / Cham on eorþan; him þa cwyde syððan / and his fromcynne frecne scodon" ["that Ham must be miserable under the sky, / the servant of his own near-kin on earth. And this curse / has harmed him and his descendants terribly"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1594b-1597; Hostetter trans. lines 1595-1597). However, the poem does not elaborate on physical markers or geography like has been assumed and weaponized by racist thinking, nor does it really seem to bear any consequences for

Ham and his immediate sons in the poem. It is merely present as a placeholder, but does not comment on the nature of the curse further. This is consistent with Braude's historical tracing of the idea of the sons of Ham: "it is clear that the medieval understanding did not simply and consistently allot Africa to Ham, Asia to Shem, and Europe to Japhet" (114). Medieval thinking on this matter was much more complex, but it does not appear as if the roots of the racist ideology surrounding the curse of Ham and how it justifies slavery was present in the text at this time, beyond the basic information found in the biblical Genesis.

However, there is a precedent for linking Ham to Cain and the inherent wickedness of Cain's line. While *Genesis A & B* does not link Ham and Cain, Neidorf points out the possible conflation in *Beowulf*, as well as the active connections made in other medieval texts, noting that "medieval texts indicate that such conflation [of Cain and Ham] was tolerated and perhaps even considered theologically sophisticated" (Neidorf 609-610). The implication is the idea that Cain's wickedness lives on through Ham, though, again, this idea is not present in *Genesis A & B*, as Cain and his line are not mentioned again once Noah is brought into the tale.

These differences in humankind's lineages also point to the importance of land and justification of occupying the land. This is an expectation set up from the start of *Genesis A & B*, as the purpose for humanity's creation is meant to restore beings into physical spaces of power, left vacant from the fallen angels. Humankind is created as an answer for

> hu he þa mæran gesceaft,
> eðelstaðolas eft gesette,
> swegltorhtan seld, selran werode,
> þa hie gielpsceaþan ofgifen hæfdon,
> heah on heofenum.

[how he might re-establish his illustrious creation,
the homeland's foundations and the heaven-bright homes
for the better host, those that gave over the boast-workers,
high in the heavens] (*Genesis A & B* lines 93b-97a; Hostetter trans. lines 93-96a)

In other words, humanity was created to fill the vacancy left by the fallen angels. This ties into another cultural aspect of the Germanic tribal world. Haines comments that the *Genesis A & B* poet's version of the angelic replacement doctrine possesses "distinctly Anglo-Saxon origins" (154), an idea that Michelet builds off of by explaining that this interpretation of Augustine's replacement doctrine is a concern "to occupy a certain territory, and not to leave it empty. These accounts of the creation of humankind betray an urge not to leave empty places vacant, but to people them with worthy occupants" (Michelet 61-62) according to God's will. This press to occupy space appears throughout the poem, but is first introduced with the concern of filling up the physical space of heaven with souls worthier than the angels who rebelled. The fallen angels lose their right to the land, requiring righteous individuals' creation to fill the empty space. This is also the first instance of God punishing sinners by taking them from the land and rewarding those who are deemed worthy with the vacancy left behind. Based on this doctrine for the reason of humanity's creation, man has a purpose set by God: to live lives worthy of him and his kingdom to earn their place within it.

Land is a vital symbol for the Old English audience. Paul Battles explains the "migration myth," a concept that is embedded in the Old English *Genesis A & B.* Battles labels this motif as a unique potential typology in the poem, arguing that "*Genesis A* does not allude explicitly to the Germanic tribes' movement to England, but the poem's depiction of migrating biblical peoples owes much to the Anglo-Saxon migration myth" (44). In other words, the Old English *Genesis A*

& B gains significance through the cultural interests and mythos of the day, making all eight of *Genesis A & B*'s migration scenes saturated with meaning, as Battles goes on to demonstrate. Howe makes a similar but less extreme observation, commenting on the Junius Manuscript as a whole that the transitory life of the Old Testament characters reflected in *Genesis A & B, Exodus, Daniel,* and *Christ and Satan* "is a way of making sense of earthly history and experience within the narrative of the Bible. This redemptive geography offers a scripturally inflected sense of place that can be used to read texts" (197). Movement and migration were a part of the Germanic tribes' lives, making those portions of the source material reflected in the Old English poems even more vitally important to the people of the day.

Migration as a part of the Germanic tribes' existence also emphasizes the lack of singular origin point. In fact, even within the tribes, "Blood ties were neither pure nor unbreakable" (Abdelkarim 397) and exile occurred to family members as often as hospitality was extended to some strangers from far-off lands, as long as those strangers came peaceably, a sentiment found in both early Britain and Arabia (Abdelkarim 403). While some notion of tribal superiority may have existed in certain communities, loyalty was expected of all members, relatives or no. This matters because ethnic markers were not a significant factor of what bound nations together. As established in the introduction, Christendom was the unifying factor over any other identity designation and served as the dividing marker between those who were accepted and those who were not. In a similar fashion, the division between the righteous (those aligned with God) and the unrighteous (those against God) serves largely the same function in the Old English *Genesis A & B*.

Speaking further on land and its significance to the Germanic tribes, the Old English *Genesis A & B* also uses place as a part of its depiction of Germanic vassalage. The relationship

between a lord and his thanes saturates the relationships between God and angels and God and man in the Old English *Genesis A & B,* as established earlier in the evaluation of the angels' and humanity's responsibility of allegiance to their creator, God. Smith demonstrates how these relationships play out in relation to the allotment of land, noting that "the poetic rendering of biblical history in *Genesis A* might have resonated with the practices of land tenure that were active at the time of Junius 11's compilation, specifically that of kings rewarding loyal subjects with grants of property and punishing the disloyal through the forfeiture of estates" (594). Cultural practices influence how the text is understood. Indeed, this vassalage-type relationship and the allotment of land also point to one of the poem's intended moral lessons. As Smith argues, "The poem thus aligns three early episodes (the fall of the angels, the banishment of Adam and Eve, the exile of Cain) which all feature the forfeiture of land as a penalty for disobedience" (612) while "The gift of land in *Genesis A* is literally and figuratively the highest sign of God's favor" (Smith 614). Land is a reward, and its removal is punishment. Beyond the land practices, the commitment between God and His creation is also framed as a feudal lord and warrior relationship. In doing so, Doane notes a slight critique of older systems of governance in favor of newer forms, commenting that "Satan is represented as wanting to replace the hierarchical system of governance by vassalage, what would have seemed natural and 'modern' to the ninth-century carolingian poet and his audience, with the older idea of the 'free' comitatus" (*Saxon Genesis* 123). Doane goes even further by speculating that "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the poet equates obedience to God with obedience of a man within the contemporary secular order" (*Saxon Genesis* 126). Honor to the king, the lord, and to God is emphasized as a key moral part of the poem, which the granting and removal of land serves to complement as well. Land allotment is justified by righteousness, rather than kinship.

Abraham is the ultimate illustration in the Old English *Genesis A & B* of righteousness and reward. It is through Abraham that the poet connects the story of ancient history with the present Christians of the day. This is a natural story to adopt for this purpose, as the biblical text easily opens itself up to that possible interpretation for Christians. The poem reads the Abrahamic promise in the following way, with God as the speaker to Abraham:

> "þurh þe eorðbuende ealle onfoð,
> folcbearn freoðo and freondscipe,
> blisse minre and bletsunge
> on woruldrice. Wriðende sceal
> mægðe þinre monrim wesan
> swiðe under swegle sunum and dohtrum,
> oðþæt fromcyme folde weorðeð,
> þeodlond monig þine gefylled."
> ["Through you all the earth-dwellers shall accept the favor
> of the Child of Men and my friendship, my bliss and my blessing
> in the realm of this world. Your tribe, the count of your men,
> shall be increasing, strongly under the sky, to your sons and daughters,
> until the earth shall be filled by your progeny, many inhabited lands."] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1759-1766; Hostetter trans. lines 1759-1763)

It is not mere speculation that can be used to tie the significance of Abraham's blessed descendants to the Christians of the day. Doane explains in his commentary on *Genesis A* that the poet adapts the biblical version of the promise to specifically appeal to the Old English audience of the day, who already "would have seen Abraham as the faithful forerunner of

Christians" (356). Beyond that, Doane comments that the line "'þeodlond monig þine gefylled'" ["'until the earth shall be filled by your progeny, many inhabited lands'"] (*Genesis A & B* line 1766; Hostetter trans. line 1763) "specifically suggests, not Israel, but the gentile nations, as the ultimate heirs of Abraham" (*Genesis A* 356). As the poem goes into its final act, its goal by telling the history of Abraham is to bridge the gap between the world's origins and the Christians of the day. Applying God's promise to Abraham to the Christians marks them as inherently righteous, inheritors of God's favor through Abraham's line. This connection is later emphasized through God's repetition of the promise: "'Of þam leodfruman / brad folc cumað, bregowearda fela / rofe arisað, rices hyrdas, / woruldcyningas wide mære'" ["'From that start of peoples a broad folk will arise, / guardians of realms, kings of this world known widely'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 2334b-2337; Hostetter trans. lines 2336-2337). This line in particular might evoke images of Germanic heroes and warriors, and honored kings of various tribes and groups across pre-England and Europe. Regardless, the Abrahamic promise as presented in *Genesis A & B* emphasizes the wider world as the ultimate recipient of Abraham's blessed lineage.

This is further emphasized by how the poem ends abruptly after the story of Isaac's sacrifice. While this story takes place only halfway through the biblical Genesis, it is the likely intentional end of the Old English *Genesis A & B*. According to Doane, ending with the sacrifice of Isaac was the typical cut-off point for relating the Genesis history during this time, despite its placement only halfway through the biblical book (*Genesis A* 398-399). This event "carries Genesis through the culminating event in Abraham's career, when he establishes once and for all that he is the father of Christians" (Doane, *Genesis A* 398). It is another example of tying the Genesis story into the current Germanic culture of the day, and in a way that emphasizes the Christians' connection to the events of the poem. Similar to Adam and Eve and God's control

and allotment over the land, Abraham's story also emphasizes God's role as the head of all created order and the giver of land. He leads Abraham to an "'eorðe þe ic ælgrene / tudre þinum torhte wille / wæstmum gewlo on geweald don, / rume rice'" ["'all-greening / and splendid land which I wish to bestow upon your stock to rule, / a roomy realm, rich with blossoms'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1787-1790a; Hostetter trans. lines 1788-1790a). This beautiful land is a mark of the Lord's favor with Abraham and his intention to bless Abraham's descendants for years to come. There is also an acknowledgement of Abraham's responsibility to act in a righteous and honorable manner in response to God's provision and direction. He remarks, "'Se us þas lade sceop, / þæt we on Egiptum are sceolde / fremena friclan and us fremu secan'" ["'He made this path for us [to Egypt], so that we must seek the honor / of the bold and look for our own benefit'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 1841a-1843; Hostetter trans. lines 1842-1843). The Lord's provision must be met with a noble answer from his thanes like Abraham. God is also acknowledged as the ultimate victor in battle, with Abraham declaring: "'þæt is god selfa, / se ðe hettendra herga þrymmas / on geweald gebræc, and þe wæpnum læt / rancstræte forð rume wyrcan'" ["'That was God himself who shattered for you in your power / the majesty of those hated armies, who allowed you to work / forth a broad warrior's way with weapons'"] (*Genesis A & B* lines 2109b-2112; Hostetter trans. lines 2109-2111). In Abraham's ready admission of God as the one who holds the paths of the righteous and allows victory in battle, he essentially accomplishes the duty of humankind established in the opening lines of the poem: to honor God as King and ruler of the created world. Abraham proves his worth to father a great lineage through the honoring of his king, both in the physical and the spiritual sense. Abraham is the ultimate example of the poem's main thrust: those worthy in God's eyes will receive the reward

of land. This theme points to a future where the idea of supreme morality justifies the seizing of land, i.e. a sense of Christian nationalism and colonialism.

The ideology expressed in the Old English *Genesis A & B* suggests that land ownership, or general worthiness to take control of lands, is based on allegiance to God, expressed through moral action. Indeed, from the start, *Genesis A & B* sets up an expectation that any action made to honor God or serve God is justified and correct. Thus, an early Christian Germanic society who seeks to pay homage to God as unto a feudal lord might feel justified in claiming or conquering land in possession of so-called "less worthy" people, such as attempts to retake the Holy Land in possession of Islamic groups or as a justification for exiling Jewish people from England. While these events take place after the writing of *Genesis A & B*, the ideology it espouses may have been prevalent in certain church teachings, as, though the biblical Genesis and Old Testament as a whole does feature God giving land to Abraham and Israelite tribes and does take away said land for their disobedience, the Old English *Genesis A & B* emphasizes this relationship to a much greater degree and in a way that ties the story of Genesis to the current Christian people of the day. In the ideal created order, as *Genesis A & B* demonstrates, the righteous ones of God receive a seat of glory in heaven and the earthly reward of land. Such ideologies have the echoes and roots of colonialist thought, which from a postcolonial perspective, we are able to recognize as harmful and inaccurate framing of the Genesis account.

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Chapter Two: Leadership of a Nation in *Judith*

Nationalism, Christendom, and moral divisions of humankind continue their thematic relevance in the Old English *Judith*. Much like *Genesis A & B, Judith* similarly sorts humanity through moral standing before God, but differs by adding in another aspect of division: nations. The era's Christendom norms add in another complicating layer, as the historic setting of the poem does not allow for literal Christians, yet the poet effectively ties the Jewish people to Christianity. Old English *Judith* complements the themes of *Genesis A & B* well, but adds an extra layer about national identity and a clearer vision of Christian replacement theory, both of which point to colonialist justification to come.

Judith is a fascinating literary figure, having served as a trope of moral purity and as a symbol of sexuality and intrigue, both of which have their origins in Jewish religious writings. Ziolkowski offers a thorough examination of Judith's evolution, exploring in particular how Judith's religious implications have been edited out over time in favor of a more psychological reading of her character that attempts to make real or justify the religious elements of her tale. She is largely a symbol of feminine sexuality in the twenty-first century world on account of these modern interpretations, with many writers who take up her story no longer moved by the moral aspects of her story, but nonetheless intrigued by her seductive side. However, in between the modern interpretations of Judith's character and the original source material, many of the early and medieval Christians were inspired by Judith's religious significance, with particular attention on the moral lessons she exemplified and which her story could impart to the Christian audience. Ciletti and Lahnemann, tracing interpretations of Judith across history, note that in Middle Ages depictions, she has often been viewed as a symbol of the Christian Church or Mary, Mother of Christ (50-51). Though in her original story, she uses seduction as a tool in securing

victory for her people, medieval authors and theologians edited out many of the sexualized aspects of her character, taking a cue from Jerome's Vulgate (Ciletti and Lahnemann 53). It is this moralistic, slightly desexualized interpretation of Judith that we find in the Old English epic *Judith*.

The Old English *Judith* is one of the poems on the Nowell Codex alongside *Beowulf*. It retells the story of Judith from the Jewish Apocryphal Scriptures / Christian Vulgate[5] about the titular character. Judith, a Jewish widow, kills Holofernes, the leader of the Assyrian army besieging her city, then rallies her Hebrew countrymen to rout the rest of the army. The poem *Judith* focuses specifically on Judith's role in the story, cutting out much of the background from the biblical text, although it is worth noting that the beginning lines of the Old English *Judith* are missing. While there is still some debate around how much of this poem is missing, it seems likely that we have the vast majority of the poem based on the trends of omission of certain elements of the original biblical account in the poem (de Lacy 398-399; Fulk & Cain 169). Old English *Judith* revises its story from its biblical inspiration by drawing on certain Germanic-Christendom cultural norms. One way that it does this is through setting up Judith as a symbolic figure. De Lacy notes that "The mostly widely accepted interpretation is that Judith in some way represents the Church, and Holofernes Satan" (404), setting up a dichotomy of highly simplified good versus evil. Judith bears many tropes in her character, as she is "imbued…with both the qualities of military hero and chaste widow, and used [in] her narrative both as tropological message and allegorical type" (Cooper 170), thus functioning both as a highly moralistic figure as well as the typical Old English hero.

[5] The original Jewish version "is considered apocryphal" (Ciletti and Lahnemann 44) with shifting canonicity over time in Jewish communities. However, Ciletti and Lahnemann point out that though Judith's origins are in the Jewish Scriptures, Jerome's Vulgate is the likely source for the Old English *Judith* (42).

Although Judith, as a woman, is complicated in regards to her symbol as an epic hero, Herbison calls attention to the ways in which Judith subverts expectations of an Old English heroic figure by virtue of her gender, while at the same time partially reinforcing gendered stereotypes (13). Yet Cooper makes a compelling case for why Judith would be important as a hero figure to the poem's contemporary audience: "Judith could be used as a call to all in Anglo-Saxon society to do their part in the battle against the Vikings" (Cooper 172), as these Viking raids would have also left behind widows who would need to rise up in a position of leadership, like Judith explicitly does (Cooper 171-172). The poem also emphasizes certain pieces of the story relevant and compelling to the Old English audience, as the battle that takes place is in the style expected of Old English poetry (de Lacy 402), and the warrior elements seem to take precedence over the Jewish religious aspects (Cooper 177). Much attention is given to the way the feast is portrayed in the poem as well (de Lacy 400). Thus, *Judith* fully incorporates the Old English, Germanic cultures into its religious tale, making it a relevant vehicle to analyze the underlying themes and religious ideologies.

In the wider conversation about Old English texts and the seeds of white nationalism, the Old English *Judith* highlights similar patterns of in-group, out-group markers based on righteousness and a relationship to God. The idea of *Judith* containing seeds of white nationalism is somewhat ironic, given its placement as a part of the "*Beowulf* Manuscript," as *Beowulf* has certainly been coopted as a part of white nationalist identity. In an interview with the British Library, Maria Dahvana Headley points out that most people of today's society have anachronistic misconceptions of the early English era, commenting, "They think it's like homogenous White nationhood—no, it's not. It's full of people from everywhere all around the world and people who are, you know, not all White" (Headley et al. 16:00-16:06). In an

interview with Booksmith, Headley explains how this phenomenon came to be, noting how translations of *Beowulf* "were written to be like look at this noble history of white people and noble history of the English, you know, which is not true of what the poem is at all but it got taken… [by white] people who were wanting that reputation of the English language to be something that was pretty narrow and included mostly guys like them" (Headley & Newitz 0:17:11-0:17:45). Christie provides specific examples of this, tracing how 19th century to imperialist criticism of *Beowulf* elevated the hero Beowulf as the idea standard of "a specifically English concept of masculinity" (119). *Beowulf* has unfortunately been taken out of its original cultural context and propped up as a white nationalist symbol that celebrates ideal patriarchal masculinity. Yet *Judith* sits alongside it, an example of a woman achieving victory through slaying the enemy, telling a story that challenges the masculine and feminine ideals that recent history and the present day attempts to pull out of "older" English texts like *Beowulf*. Thus, caution is needed when dealing with supposed gender norms of heroism and virtue in texts like *Judith*. Judith as a heroine does not neatly fit into a white nationalist conception of womanhood, so some criticism on her feminine virtues or norms must be taken with a grain of salt and treated carefully, so as to not perpetuate anachronistic, retroactive readings of her as a woman based on cultural and historical misconceptions.

Judith is an interesting text to consider alongside the Old English *Genesis A & B*, as it builds on similar themes from *Genesis A & B* by emphasizing the role of leadership in said markers of inclusion-exclusion, as well as calling attention to how people will remain divided in the life to come, i.e. in heaven or in hell. Like *Genesis A & B*, the Old English *Judith* presents a similar dichotomy of humankind's division based on relationship to God. Indeed, the entirety of *Judith* is a poem of contrasts, a topic many scholars focus upon. Cooper traces several of the

dichotomous elements: "between Judith's murderous act and her piety; between the *eadig* (blessed) Judith and *haeđen hund* (heathen dog) Holofernes; between the watchful Bethulians and the drunken Assyrians; between the private sphere of Holofernes's tent and the public sphere of Judith's stirring speech before the battle" (178). It is in these contrasting elements that many salient points about the division of humankind are revealed. Primary among them is the moral division: "Whereas Judith displays holiness and wisdom, Holofernes is characterised by wickedness and folly" (Herbison 7). Cooper agrees with this summary, noting that "Judith is equated with the classical virtues: fortitude, temperance, prudence and justice, whereas Holofernes represents the four classical vices: folly, venality, cowardice and lust" (181). Much of the comparison of Judith and Holofernes relates back to the moral divide in some way. Arthur, analyzing the physical postures of both characters, notes that their positioning in the poem mirrors their moral standing—or lack thereof, in Holofernes' case (873).

Yet this moral contrast between Judith and Holofernes is not solely for the sake of presenting a tale for others to emulate or avoid, but also speaks to ideas about larger identity. Zacher notes that "early medieval cultures did not regard the Old Testament as a separate history of the Jews; rather, it was considered a vital part of their own historical past" (4), meaning that even Old English *Judith* illuminates the stories the Old English audience would claim as their own and reveals how these stories shape their own sense of identity in relation to the wider world.[6] Zacher makes explicit this connection between morality and identity as explored in the poem: "the story of Judith was adapted to reflect a distinctive political theology, which utilized the tropes of exceptionalism and exclusion to demarcate a boundary between 'us' and 'them,' the

[6] Minh-Ha's explanation of how identity is formed by defining and removing otherness or foreignness is useful here. In the context of the Old English world, Christendom is defined through distinguishing and removing other religions (pagan traditions, Jews, Muslims, etc.). This is the pattern of in-group and out-group markers in *Judith* and *Genesis A & B* through defining inherently righteous and inherently wicked peoples.

Anglo-Saxons and their opponents" (123). In other words, the Old English audience was meant to identify with the upright moral Hebrews, and look down upon the wicked and corrupt Assyrians. To complicate this conversation, though, Powell notes that "foreignness seems able to function in two very different ways in the works which make up this manuscript; it could put distance between the English reader and the foreign and pagan characters described in the texts, but it could also elicit the reader's sympathy for or identification with the characters or peoples who were depicted as suffering at the hands of foreigners" (7) through the Hebrews' dilemma. In other words, Powell wants to call attention to the poet's attempt to connect the Old English audience with the foreign Jews, pointing to an interesting phenomenon that draws attention away from racial distinction. Drawing away from racial or national distinction brings us back to looking at how humankind is sorted via moral markers, much like in *Genesis A & B*.

Judith, however, does bring in the idea of national identity and race by pitting the "Hebrews," or Jewish people, against the invading Assyrians. Yet the differences between the two groups of people are also mapped to righteousness in the case of the Hebrews and wickedness in the case of the Assyrians. As Zacher puts it, "the Hebrews of *Judith* are depicted as 'a people apart' in every sense of the term" (148). In other words, the Hebrew people of the poem are distinct for their righteousness, which puts them in right relationship with God. For this reason, the poem refers to them as "eðelweardas" ["The wardens of their homeland"] (*Judith* line 320; Hostetter trans. line 318)[7] and "mægða mærost" ["the greatest of nations"] (*Judith* line 324; Hostetter trans. line 324). They are protectors, and upheld as chief of all the peoples of the earth. While it may be surprising for the Jews to be painted in a positive light considering the medieval Christian stance that Jews were evil due to Christ's death, it actually is not out of the ordinary for

[7] Old English text of *Judith* is from the Old English Poetry in Facsimile Project, edited by Kyle Smith and Martin Foys. Modern English translation is again provided by Hostetter.

Old English texts to treat Jews with respect, unlike the Latin verse of the same era (Zacher 16-17).

Regardless of the positive portrayal of Jews, *Judith* is nonetheless an antisemitic text, as antisemitism is "an inherent part of Christianity after Paul" (Beller 2.1), firmly established in medieval ideologies, even if the more explicitly violent and hateful antisemitic portrayals are a late medieval trend (Beller 2.2; Felsenstein 15-17). Lavezzo notes that in later medieval texts, women often gained power in certain contexts through antisemitic acts, including Jewish women turning on their own people and converting to Christianity (290). While Judith as a character is loyal to her own people, she functions as a prefigure to Christians, and therein lies the latent antisemitic posture of the text. The ideology of the text is one of "Christian supersessionism, a fourth-century theory that became dominant in medieval Christendom…[and] helped transform early Jesus-followers from a Jewish sect into a separate people, Christians, chosen by God to supersede the Jews" (Tinkle 444).[8] The supersessionism in *Judith* is present through the ways the poem is meant to appeal to Christians as the inheritors of the favor the Jews and Judith specifically receive. Some instances of Jewishness are downplayed in the poem compared to the original text, and much of the language around Judith and her actions is slanted towards Christianity. The poem is honoring of Jews in order to maintain consistency with history, but its goal is not to praise or uplift Jews, but rather to serve as a model for faithful Christianity. This underlying antisemitism in the poem's ideology and thematic goal is foundational for the rise of more violent antisemitism in England and the rest of Europe in the middle ages and into the 20th century (Johnson & Caputo 272).

[8] This is a more accurate interpretation of what is occurring in the Old English *Judith* than the idea of a "Judeo-Christian tradition," which Nathan and Topolski thoroughly argue and dissect is a more modern phrase that ignores the tensions between Jews and Christians across history and dismisses antisemitism in early Christian thought and writing (2-4)

Judith is the exemplary archetypal Hebrew (and thus, model Christian), demonstrating in practical action what righteous action looks like and demonstrating her strong relationship with God. De Lacy articulates this well, noting that Judith "is obviously meant to be somewhat idealised – her name means 'Jewess,' and she is the Jewish paradigm for some traditional aspects of womanhood in her loyalty, piety, and beauty" (399). Her function as a positive Christian trope is emphasized in the Old English poem through her epithets, where she is called "ferhðgleawe" ["spirit-wise"] (*Judith* line 42; Hostetter trans. line 42) and "torhtan mægð" ["bright maiden"] (*Judith* line 44; Hostetter trans. line 44), among other depictions. Beyond the implications for Jewish excellence that she embodies, her character also falls in line with Christian typology typical of the Old English epic. Cooper explains the significance of Judith's actions in relation to her tropes: "Judith's own martial role, though described in gory detail, is actually diminished as she is presented as an allegorical type in a contest between good and evil and she is portrayed very much as the instrument of God" (Cooper 170). In other words, her symbol as the embodiment of goodness and Christian virtue matters more than her role as an epic hero. This is similarly emphasized through other epithets used for Judith throughout the poem, which refers to her as the "nergendes / þeowen þrymful" ["Savior's glorious servant"] (*Judith* line 73b-74a; Hostetter trans. line 73b) and "þeodnes mægð" ["the Lord's woman"][9] (*Judith* line 165; Hostetter trans. line 167), among others. The latter designation, emphasizing the Lord's possession of Judith, also reads as a potential allusion to heavenly marriage to Christ, a symbol that, in the Christian tradition, points to the union and relationship of Christ and His Church, further emphasizing Judith's position as a representative of the ultimate Christian. It is also worth noting here that connecting Judith as belonging to Christ is one of the ways *Judith* contributes to

[9] "Mægð" can also translate as "wife," which adds to the relevance of comparing Judith to the Church in the allusion of heavenly marriage to Christ.

Christian supersessionism. She is not merely a Jew and favored in God's eyes for that alone; she has some sort of spiritual relationship and right standing with Christ in particular, despite the pre-Christian era.

Since Judith is set up as the idealization of Christian virtue and ethics, and thus the representation of the righteous race, her actions demonstrate what right relationship to God is meant to look like. When she goes to kill Holofernes, she first reaches out to God by name: "ongan đa swegles weard / be naman nemnan, nergend ealra / woruldbuendra" ["Then she named the Guardian of the Skies / by name, the Savior of all / worldly dwellers"] (*Judith* lines 80b-82a; Hostetter trans. lines 80-82). The epithets of God here speak to the need for Judith's defense; she is in need of a Guardian and a Savior. Her subsequent prayer also highlights Judith's posture and relationship to God:

> "Ic đe, frymđa god ond frofre gæst
> bearn alwaldan, biddan wylle
> miltse þinre me þearfendre,
> đrynesse đrym.
> …
> Forgif me, swegles ealdor,
> sigor ond soðne geleafan, þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote
> geheawan þysne morđres bryttan; geunne me minra ge-
> þearlmod þeoden gumena. Nahte ic þinre næfre
> miltse þon maran þearfe. Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten,
> torhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode,
> hate on hređre minum."

["I wish to ask you, God of Origins
and Spirit of Comfort, Son of the All-Wielding,
Glorious Trinity for your mercy to a needy me.
…
Give me, Lord of the Skies, victory
and true belief so that I might cut down
this dispenser of crimes with this sword—
grant me my prosperity, Stern Prince of Men.
I have never had more need for your grace than now.
Avenge now, mighty Lord, illustrious Dispenser of Glory,
what is thus miserable in my mind, blazing in my heart."] (*Judith* lines 83-86a, 88-94a; Hostetter trans. lines 83-85, 88-94a)

What Judith's prayer reveals is her own admission of weakness and her need for grace and mercy. This is often interpreted as Judith simply admitting her need for God to act on her behalf, but an additional way of viewing this prayer is a prayer of pre-repentance. Judith's labeling her idea to kill Holofernes as "torne on mode, / hate on hreðre minum" ["miserable in my mind, blazing in my heart"] (*Judith* line 93b-94a; Hostetter trans. line 94a) seems to suggest the possibility of her own felt guilt at even thinking of killing another human being, despite Holofernes's wickedness. This notion of her felt guilt also relates to her comment that "Nahte ic þinre næfre / miltse þon maran þearfe" ["I have never had more need for your grace than now"] (*Judith* line 91b-92a; Hostetter trans. line 92), suggesting her awareness of murder as a wicked act.

Yet at the same time, there is certainly a war over what is the most righteous action for her to take in this moment. As much as she perhaps feels guilt for considering the slaying of Holofernes, she also clearly has a sense that killing him may in fact be the righteous course of action, thus leading her to request "sigor ond soðne geleafan" ["victory / and true belief"] (*Judith* line 89; Hostetter trans. lines 88b-89a). Her prayer here is seeking for guidance from God, designator of righteousness, as she faces a morally gray dilemma. And God answers Judith clearly and immediately:

> … Hi ða se hehsta dema
> ædre mid elne onbryrde, swa he deð anra gehwylcne
> herbuendra þe hyne him to helpe seceð
> mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan. Þa wearð hyre rume on mode,
> haligre hyht geniwod
> [Then the highest Deemer inspired her at once with courage,
> as he does for every single of the mortal dwellers
> who seek him out as help with good sense and right faith.
> Then abundantly in her mind hope was renewed for the holy woman]
> (*Judith* lines 94b-98a; Hostetter trans. lines 94b-97)

God answers Judith by casting aside any thought of guilt as she goes on to slay Holofernes and grant the Jews victory. Even in taking a life, Judith's righteousness is upheld and even celebrated, as she sought God, source of righteousness, in her endeavor.

Judith's reward is largely spiritual. The poem's opening lines, pointing to the events to come, note that for Judith's heart for God, "Hyre ðæs fæder on roderum / torhtmod tiðe gefremede, þe heo ahte trumne geleafan / a to ðam ælmihtigan" ["the glorious Father in

heaven / performed her boon, so that she always possessed strong faith / in the Almighty" (*Judith* lines 5b-7a; Hostetter trans. lines 6b-8a), pointing in essence to the cyclical nature of righteousness. Because of Judith's righteous, faithful acts, God rewards her with more faithfulness and righteousness through an increase and sustaining of faith. God as the source of righteousness, then, also means he is the designator of the righteous from the wicked, and is responsible for the sorting of humankind along moral lines.

The cyclical nature of moral designation is also on display in Holofernes and the Assyrians. As a contrast and foil to the idealized, righteous Judith and the army of Hebrews, the Assyrians, and especially their leader, Holofernes, are set up as a race of humanity saturated with wickedness. Race, in this context, is not marked by physical factors such as skin color, but rather is based on religious identification, per the medieval era's concept of Christendom (Harris 86). Since Holofernes and the Assyrians do not acknowledge the God of the Hebrews, they are established as a separate, completely opposite race. Everything about the Assyrians and Holofernes is placed in direct opposition with Judith and the Hebrews, starting with the tropes they embody. Just as Judith represents the pinnacle of Christian virtue, Holofernes adopts a similar function by equating him with Satan, setting him up as a negative symbol, as "The Assyrians are also collectively demonized and are described in terms commonly reserved for God's most ancient enemy, Satan himself" (Zacher 122). This practice "was fairly common [in Old English poetry:] to attribute demonic qualities to the enemy. Not only did this aid in doctrinal consistency, but it was a propaganda technique – a demonic enemy is easier to hate than a real individuated one" (de Lacy 405). Demonizing the enemy in this way also functions as a sorting mechanism, painting the Assyrians as an inherently wicked and irredeemable race. Yet just how wicked they really are is questionable; while they do take immoral action in a few

moments, most of their "wickedness" comes through the poet's labels and their standing before God.

Starting with the Assyrians as a whole, *Judith* refers to them as "laðum cynne" ["the hated race"] (*Judith* line 226; Hostetter trans. line 229) and similar epithets to emphasize how evil they are. The actions they take to support this designation are limited. The underlying assumption of the poem is they are evil because they oppose the Hebrews, God's favored people. The other possibility for wicked action comes in how they behave during the feast near the poem's beginning. During the feast, the line "oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene, / agotene goda gehwylces" ["all of [Holofernes's] troop fordrunken, like they had been struck by death, / drained of every good"] (*Judith* lines 31-32a; Hostetter trans. lines 31-32a) is the primary clear reference to their wrongdoing, apart from laying siege to the Hebrews. As Battles notes, the feast is an Old English motif, and one used in *Judith* to emphasize particular vices the author might have intended to denounce. Specifically, Battles argues that the poem "uses these fatal feast scenes to emphasize the evils of drunkenness, one of the poem's dominant themes… [and] bears a striking resemblance to the banquets of *Beowulf*. *Judith* not only parodies the Anglo-Saxon feast but also makes it central to Holofernes's destruction" (447). On the topic of drunkenness as a vice, there is an interesting tension between Christian Church tradition condemning drunkenness and the prevalence and importance of celebratory drink in the Old English feast hall, with feasts halls represented in various shades of positive (a reflection of the Germanic tradition) and demonic (reflective of the Christian tradition creeping in) (Brown 1).

Indeed, Brown points out these differing visions that appear in the Nowell Codex itself: *Beowulf* is largely a positive version of drinking as a sign of camaraderie (4-5), while *Judith*'s is clearly meant to be negative (9-10). Yet the view of drinking and drunkenness even in the Old

English tradition is not as simple as Germanic versus Christendom, as with all aspects of the culture in this era. Even from the Germanic perspective, drunkenness is not necessarily a positive, as "Drunkenness may contribute to violent tendencies already present in the hall-guests" (Brown 7). On the Christian Church side, there was doubtless condemnation of excessive drinking during the era of *Judith*'s writing. Alcuin, a contemporary of the poem and a well-known clergy in the church, insisted on the people avoiding drunkenness (Coates 539), and even claimed that "such incidents had been occurring at Lindisfarne, and…[their] sack [by the Vikings] was a sign of the chastisement of God" (Coates 539-540). From Alcuin's perspective alone, then, there is a connection between excessive drinking and judgment from God, much like what happens in *Judith*.[10] It is worth mentioning that there is a disconnect at times between cultural customs and what Church authority deems as acceptable (Rennie 63-66). Regardless, the implications are that the drunkenness in *Judith* is clearly meant to be seen as evil, perhaps as an attempt for Church leaders to convince the people to see drunkenness as a vice. Their drunkenness essentially deprives the Assyrians of all righteousness, almost like a confirmation bias, and serves to foreshadow the fate they deserve and receive. The poet explicitly says the Assyrians are "hie þæt fæge þegon" ["doomed to die"] (*Judith* line 19b; Hostetter trans. line 19b) to make their fate all the more clear. The reason for their impending deaths is that they are a wicked people through their drunkenness and their assault on the Hebrew people, the righteous race.

If the Assyrians are representative of evil, then their leader Holofernes is doubly so, with harsher descriptors assigned to him specifically. Certain Old English cultural elements also add

[10] Forsyth corroborates this story about Alcuin (101), and also mentions other Christian leaders of the time, like St. Benedict, who put rations on wine in order to avoid drunkenness in monasteries (99-101). So, while drinking itself was not condemned wholesale by Christians, it was seen as good to moderate drinking to avoid drunkenness.

to his evil characterization. Arthur, in dissecting the physical positions of Judith and Holofernes through the poem, notes that

> As man was created in the image and likeness of God and the head was positioned higher than other bodily members due to its intellectual capacity, Holofernes is shown to be an enemy of God by his inevitable position after decapitation; a reversal of anatomical order is shown as his head is level with his lower body. (876)

Attention to the placement of Holofernes throughout the poem highlights imagery of his own wickedness and separation from God. Holofernes also bears some "anti-peaceweaver" traits, as Cavell argues. Cavell looks at Old English literature as a whole, seeking to argue that the Old English peaceweaving is "not inherently gender specific, [and] is very much concerned with status, moral superiority, and good leadership" (372), also seen as a metaphor of bringing people in conflict together. Cavell goes on to highlight that though Holofernes is never referred to as a "peaceweaver," the textile used in reference to him might be a subtle metaphor of this trope, and thus "can be read as a parallel situation of a high-status leader who takes advantage of his position by instilling fear in his men" (Cavell 371) rather than rallying his men together as a good leader might do. Finally, in the Old English language used in the poem, Terasawa evaluates the use of the weak form of the word "man" in Old English, which is rarely used and even then only for metrical reasons. Interestingly, then, breaking that trend, *Judith* uses the weak form of "man" in reference to Holofernes for unmetrical reasons (Terasawa 24). While Terasawa does not focus on this exception at length, it does seem likely that the choice to use the weak form of "man" related to Holofernes is yet another subtle reference of his own character or weakened moral standing before God.

In the poem itself, Holofernes has many epithets that paint him as the embodiment of evil. He is described as the "stiðmoda" ["ferocious one"] (*Judith* line 25; Hostetter trans. line 25), the "inwidda" ["wicked one"] (*Judith* line 28; Hostetter trans. line 28), the "rica hyne" ["powerful one"] (*Judith* line 44; Hostetter trans. line 44), the "laðne leodhatan" ["abominable tyrant"] (*Judith* line 72; Hostetter trans. line 73), a "hu heo þone atolan eaðost mihte" ["monster…stained and impure"] (*Judith* line 75; Hostetter trans. line 75), a "hæðenan hund" ["heathen hound"] (*Judith* line 110; Hostetter trans. line 108), and the "hæðenes heaðorinces" ["'most hateful heathen warrior'"] (*Judith* line 179; Hostetter trans. line 179). In other words, among the wicked Assyrians, Holofernes is chief in evil and the epitome of wickedness. He is guilty of the same crimes as his men: besieging the Hebrews and drunkenness. He adds to their crimes with his desire to take Judith, God's chosen, righteous widow, to bed, which could be the reason for his extra harsh treatment in the poem.

As one note of complication, he is also labeled as the "goldwine gumena, on gytesalum" ["gold-friend of men"] (*Judith* line 22; Hostetter trans. line 22), a rare positive descriptor of a good leader who is generous with his people. This epithet compliments the earlier depiction of his hospitality: "Gefrægen ic ða Holofernus / winhatan wyrcean georne ond eallum wundrum þrymlic / girwan up swæsendo" ["eagerly made invitations to wine and prepared a magnificent banquet / with all sorts of wonders"] (*Judith* lines 7b-9a; Hostetter trans. lines 10-11a). There is nothing nefarious in his party, until his men get drunk. Even Holofernes is portrayed in neutral or positive terms until his drunkenness. Going back to Cavell's argument that Holofernes is an "anti-peaceweaver," his positive description as a good leader could mean that the peaceweaver metaphor in the poem could point to the opposite of Cavell's claim: Holofernes is actually a noble leader who does well for his men. Thus, his behavior alone cannot

justify labeling him as all-out wicked, as there are some characteristics of his leadership that the Germanic culture would have appreciated and acknowledged. However, his negative epithets far outnumber his positive traits, so it is clear that the poet is steering the reader to think of Holofernes as evil.

God's role as assigner of righteousness and wickedness seems to be the answer to Holofernes and the Assyrians' designation as the wicked race. The Assyrians and particularly Holofernes have a distanced relationship with God, or really a lack of any relationship or respect for God, which functions as a major reason why they are evil. As Zacher notes, "the chief crimes of the Assyrians that are deserving of serious punishment and even annihilation appear to be their very status as heathens and the condition of unbelief itself" (133). Holofernes's own dismal of God leads him to be "nergende lað" ["hateful to the Savior"] (*Judith* line 46b; Hostetter trans. line 46a), which is in relation to his intent to defile Judith: "Þa wearð se brema on mode / bliðe, burga ealdor, þohte ða beorhtan idese / mid widle ond mid womme besmitan" ["the notorious one / lord of cities, became happy in mind—he intended to defile / that bright lady with pollution and with stain"] (*Judith* lines 57b-59a; Hostetter trans. lines 57b-59a). He acts contrary to God's moral order, and God does intervene immediately after he considers his intentions: "Gewat ða se deofulcunda, / galferhð gumena ðreate / bealofull his beddes neosan, þær he sceolde his blæd forleosan / ædre binnan anre nihte" ["Then the devilish man, that wanton and evil warrior, departed / with a troop of men to seek his bed, where he must lose his life / at once, within that one night"] (*Judith* lines 61b-64a; Hostetter trans. lines 61b-63a). He falls asleep—forever. God's posture and view of Holofernes and the Assyrians is a primary factor in the punishment they receive (death) and the judgement on their character, though their actions of vice (drunkenness and, in the case of Holofernes, lust) do play a role in establishing them as a wicked

race. However, it does seem that the primary reason why they are labeled as evil relates to their opposition to God's chosen people, the Jews, and Judith, representation of the righteous.

Like *Genesis A & B*, *Judith* sets up a similar dichotomy of humankind based on morality: a righteous race that receives the favor of God, and a wicked race that receives the vengeance of God. Similar to *Genesis A & B*, these "races" are not marked by physical depictions, but marked by their moral depictions and their actions. Judith seeks out God for help, leading to his allowance for and assistance in the slaying of Holofernes. In contrast, the Assyrians get drunk and Holofernes intends to sleep with Judith, wicked actions that eventually lead to their deaths. Holofernes, as the leader of the Assyrians, functions in a role akin to Cain from *Genesis A & B*; he, in some respects, is the source of the Assyrians' wickedness. While not their forefather in the same sense that Cain is the ancestor of a line of wicked humans, as the leader of the Assyrian army, Holofernes's actions and standing do affect the character of his army. Unlike *Genesis A & B*, the Assyrians' actions do support the default assumption of their own wickedness, whereas some of Cain's wicked line seemed to merely have wickedness imputed on them for their forefathers' action alone. Judith also fits into this idea, though mirroring Seth, Noah, and Abraham from *Genesis A & B*: her righteousness is what leads to the Hebrews' victory and perpetuates God's show of favor upon them.

This parallel highlights one aspect of *Judith* that makes its presentation of moral divisions of humankind different from *Genesis A & B*: the designation of righteous or wicked hinges on their leaders. Explaining the political implications and rhetoric of the early Christendom state of the Germanic tribes, Harris notes that "the constant faith of a king determines the fate of his people" (103) as a dominant theme, and "The faithful king, these texts tell us, can bring victory to a kingdom, win out over a heathen enemy, and bring prosperity to the land" (Harris 103).

Leadership matters more than forefathers in *Judith*, with the leaders' moral positioning and relationship to God as key. For the Assyrians, this connection is incredibly clear. Holofernes is the one who makes his own men drink and get drunk with him through the feast he holds, and his own extra evil actions in attempting to take Judith open the gates for their devastation. For the Hebrews, it is striking that Judith is the only one who powerfully prays to God and exhorts her people to rise up and fight. No other Jewish warriors pray or acknowledge God before charging into battle. Her own words and prayer are enough to lead her people forward in righteous war.

In a second theme not present in *Genesis A & B*, *Judith* also pays greater attention to the afterlife and how its sorting of humankind also reflects earthly distinctions. In other words, the earthly division of races along moral lines is echoed in eternal fate, highlighted in the depiction of where Holofernes's soul goes and what awaits Judith at the end of her life. In the aftermath of Judith's victory, the text reads:

> … Ealles ðæs Iudith sægde
> wuldor weroda dryhtne, þe hyre weorðmynde geaf,
> mærðe on moldan rice, swylce eac mede on heofonum,
> sigorlean in swegles wuldre, þæs þe heo ahte soðne geleafan
> to ðam ælmihtigan
> [For all this, Judith spoke glory to the Lord of Hosts
> who had given her this honor, fame in the realm of earth,
> likewise reward in heaven, victorious recompense
> in the glory of the skies, because she had true belief
> always in the Almighty] (*Judith* lines 341b-345a; Hostetter trans. lines 341b-345a)

In other words, her righteous standing and action will grant her access to riches in heaven. She has much to look forward to when she dies. In contrast, Holofernes's eternal fate is much, much darker:

> … Ne ðearf he hopian no,
> þystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote
> of ðam wyrmsele, ac ðær wunian sceal
> awa to aldre butan ende forð
> in ðam heolstran ham, hyhtwynna leas
> [He had no need to hope at all, enveloped in shadows,
> that he might go thence from the hall of dragons,
> but instead must dwell there for ever and ever, forwards without end
> in that shaded home, deprived of hopeful joy]
> (*Judith* lines 117b-121; Hostetter trans. lines 118-121)

Holofernes descends into hell. Thus, action and moral standing do not solely impact divisions on earth, but bear greater significance in the afterlife. *Genesis A & B* touches on the intent for humanity to replace the heavenly seats left by fallen angels, but does not clearly connect righteousness to that heavenly reward in the way that *Judith* does. Furthermore, *Judith* brings in the fate of the wicked after death, another theme not addressed in *Genesis A & B*. In the next chapter, *Andreas* will continue to address the fate of the righteous and the wicked with its focus on Christian salvation and conversion.

Genesis A & B and *Judith* complement one another with their underlying ideologies on how to understand divisions of humanity, with *Judith* adding the extra layer of more attention on the afterlife and the significance of leaders. Like *Genesis A & B*, *Judith*'s underlying themes also

gesture ahead to colonialist justification. Judith, as a leader, seeks God and in the process is justified in killing wicked others by God's own allowance. This may mirror future colonialist pursuits: justifying the killing or ill-treatment of non-Christian peoples because they lack righteousness before God, all because their monarch is claiming to follow God's will. *Judith* adds a layer of explicit justification for killing in the name of God through Judith's role. In colonial pursuits, other people groups' ignorance of the Christian ethic could be categorized as "wicked," according to *Judith*'s paradigm, hence justifying killing or other typically "immoral" actions as righteous. In an ironic and cruel twist, it is this same ideology, coupled with Christian supersessionism, that factors into the ill-treatment of the Jews in England which would occur a few hundred years after the writing of *Judith.*

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Chapter Three: Transformation of the Wicked Into the Righteous in *Andreas*

In the conversation about protocolonial ideologies in Old English literature, the poem *Andreas* is a fascinating addition. It echoes many of the themes of *Genesis A & B* about God's authority, *Judith*'s attention to spiritual destination, and both poems' designation of Otherness based on righteousness or wickedness. What *Andreas* adds to the conversation is a solution, how one can escape the Otherness of wickedness and enter into the righteous race: conversion to Christianity. *Andreas*'s focus on evangelizing so-called "uncivilized" peoples is yet another seed in colonialist thought, but within the context of Old English culture, also speaks to hope for peace between people groups such as the Vikings.

Andreas is one of the poems included in the Vercelli Manuscript, and its story comes from the apocryphal tale of Matthew and Andrew, which had widespread distribution among Christendom by the time of the poem's writing, making the specific source unclear (Brooks xv-xvi). While dating the manuscript is uncertain, the language and penmanship of the poem place it within the tenth century (Brooks xii). The general plot of this tale is that Matthew is taken captive by the cannibal Mermedonians, Jesus sends Andrew to rescue Matthew, and Andrew accomplishes this, while also converting the Mermedonians to Christianity by illustrating the sacrifice of Christ. Reading argues that *Andreas* in particular exemplifies what appears to be a central focus of the Vercelli Manuscript: "the imagined relationship between the body and the soul to illustrate a fundamentally Christian way of being in the world" (2). *Andreas*, fitting with its Old English culture, might also be considered a spiritual heroic epic, especially with the debate surrounding the influence of *Beowulf* on the poem (Brooks xxiii-xxiv). Earl also argues in his foundational essay that *Andreas* might serve as a model of Old English hagiography (66-67).

As with the previous biblically-inspired poems, *Andreas* includes typology relevant to the Old English cultures, which shape the interpretation of the events within the poem. The long debate over how to classify *Andreas*'s genre brings to light the poem's heavy-handed typological and allegorical elements. Walsh defines typology as "the literary technique of borrowing details from Old Testament accounts to describe incidents which in some way are like the earlier ones" (137), a definition that calls attention to baptism in the poem, typologically represented by Old Testament events such as the poem's references to the flood of Noah, parting of the Red Sea, and parting of the Jordan (Walsh 140). Other scholars broaden this definition of typology to apply to New Testament allusions, as with Earl's conception of the poem as an example of Old English hagiography that tells the story of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection to bring about salvation (67-78). Others also agree with this reading of Andrew specifically as a Christ-figure, or typology of Christ (Bjork 110-111; Hieatt 52). Hieatt also calls attention to the extra references to other biblical Christ figures, who Andrew invokes "as typifying aspects of Christ's redeeming mission which he himself is now called upon to emulate" (50). Little recent scholarship seems to challenge this interpretation, as these arguments from the 1980s and 1990s continue to be cited as foundational for understanding *Andreas*. The poem is clearly allegorical of the Christian salvation narrative.

Yet that is not all the poem is. As Earl argues in conclusion to his definition of *Andreas* as Old English hagiography, "the Germanic culture of England was profoundly (if unusually) Christianized, and the Christianity of England was profoundly Germanized" (89), a theme also noted in discussions of *Genesis A & B* as well as *Judith*. There are other readings that differ from the hagiographical lens or complicate it through viewing *Andreas* as an Old English epic. This is where the larger debate lies. Earl begins his chapter by stating "The oldest and most persistent

critical approach to *Andreas* has been through its kinship with *Beowulf* and its adaptation of heroic poetics to a Christian subject" (66), gesturing to the tradition of *Andreas* seen as a Christianized *Beowulf* (Brooks xxiii-xxv). Despite Earl's confident assertion, the comparisons of *Andreas* to *Beowulf* have since had less weight, as Brooks gestures to in his review of the literature: "resemblances have given rise to the view that the poet of *Andreas* strove to make his hero a 'Christian Beowulf'. But Peters observes that every situation and incident common to both poems is also found in the Greek version [of the St. Andrew legend]" (xxiii). Still, while the connection to *Beowulf*[11] specifically may not be as valid as once thought, *Andreas* still possesses clear elements of epic Old English poetry: "The richness of his military and maritime vocabulary testifies to [the poet's] having been well acquainted with the terminology of the earlier epic poetry, if not with specific poems" (Brooks xxvi). Ultimately, "*Andreas* seems to fit only uneasily into any genre, heroic or hagiographic" (Bjork 112), making it a curious example of the fusion of Germanic culture and Christianization. *Andreas* is not one or the other, and even considering it as a fused epic hagiography may be too simplistic an approach as well.

That being said, there are specific tropes that also show this genre fusion. Olsen calls attention to how "the sea as a tract of land is a common feature in Old English poetry" (385), with *Andreas* as an exemplary example that "abounds in references to the sea as a path or territory" (Olsen 390). Battles, in addressing the conflation of *Beowulf* as a model for *Andreas*, traces how the trope of "Sleeping after the Feast" functions in the poem compared to other Old English works: "The two [feast] scenes in question have long confused scholars, who have chiefly read them as garbled borrowings from *Beowulf*. When they are viewed in the context of Sleeping after the Feast, however, it becomes clear that the *Andreas* poet is deliberately playing

[11] It is also worth noting that *Beowulf*'s long-standing tradition in the academy as the epitome of Old English poetry likely contributed to the insistence that *Andreas* was playing off of it specifically, despite the lack of evidence that the *Andreas*-poet and others had access to the *Beowulf* manuscript.

with the conventions of that theme" ("Dying" 450). The *Andreas* poet, then, is clearly building off of some cultural conventions. In a separate essay, Battles also articulates an artifact of the fused Christian-Germanic culture of the Old English world, which he labels as a Christian Traditional theme in Old English poetry: "'The Open Heavens'…core concept is that heaven stands open to admit the righteous" ("Traditional" 561). Battles argues that the Open Heavens theme in *Andreas* functions to encourage the disciples of the assurance of heaven as well as to emphasize the significance of the Mermedonians' conversion ("Traditional" 563), and that this theme can be traced across other Old English religious poems. Thus, there seems to be a savvy understanding of both a more secular tradition as well as the Christianized, which also speaks to the cultural state of the Old English world, as with *Genesis A & B*.

Thematically, *Andreas* also brings in elements found both in *Genesis A & B* and *Judith*. God's authority over Creation, a substantial element of the origin story in *Genesis A & B* and an implied aspect of *Judith*, returns in *Andreas.* As said previously in discussion of *Genesis A & B*, Michelet points out that creation narratives function in Old English literature to establish the right order of the world (38). While *Andreas* does not include a proper creation narrative as depicted in the *Genesis A & B*, it does reference creation as the reason for God's authority over all the world: "Se đe rodor ahof / ond gefæstnode folmum sinum, / worhte ond wreðede, wuldras fylde / beorhtne boldwelan" ["[God] must rule rightfully, he who heaved up / the heavens and affixed them with his own hands; / that shaped and supported the bright bounty-home / filled with glory"] (*Andreas* lines 521b-524a; Hostetter trans. lines 521-524a).[12] Moving beyond simply God as the source of authority as established in *Genesis A & B* and through the reference to God as creator here, *Andreas* also brings in the notion that Jesus Christ

[12] Old English text of *Andreas* is from the Old English Poetry in Facsimile Project, edited by Alex Fairbanks-Ukropen, Carsten Haas, Kyle Smith, Aaryn M. Smith, and Martin Foys. Modern English translation is again provided by Hostetter.

is equal to God in authority as well, fitting with Christian tradition of understanding Jesus as God within the Trinity. Andrew, preaching to the Mermedonians, ties Jesus's authority both to his miracles: "He þurh wundra feala on þam westenne / cræfta gecyðde þæt he wæs cyning on riht / ofer middangeard, mægene geswiðed" ["'Through many wonders in the desert / Jesus had made known that he was the king / by right over middle-earth, comforted with power'"] (*Andreas* lines 699-701; Hostetter trans. lines 699-701) as well as to Jesus's power over creation itself:

> "Ge mon cigað
> godes ece bearn, ond þone þe grund ond sund,
> heofon ond eorðan ond hreo wægas,
> salte sæstreamas ond swegl uppe
> amearcode mundum sinum."
> ["you call
> the child of God Eternal a man, when he has delineated
> with his own hands the ground and sea,
> the heaven and earth and the storm waves,
> the salty sea-currents and upper heaven."]
> (*Andreas* lines 746b-750; Hostetter trans. lines 745b-749).

In both of these references, Jesus is depicted as ruler over creation, and thus equal in authority to Creator God.

God / Jesus's authority over all the world is a repeated theme throughout *Andreas*. From the start of the poem, his authority plays an active part in directing the events that unfold. He is cited as the reason for the disciples' dispersion across the world: "Syððan hie gedældon, swa

him dryhten sylf, / heofona heahcyning, lyt getæhte" ["the Lord himself, / Heaven's High-King, had assigned their lot"] (*Andreas* lines 5-6; Hostetter trans. lines 5b-6) and "Þam halig god hlyt geteode" ["Holy God had decreed the portion for him [Matthew]"] (*Andreas* line 14; Hostetter trans. line 13). God also directly sends Andrew to Matthew in a time of need (*Andreas* lines 174-177), wielding his authority in an active, clear role. God is in constant communication, instructing Andrew throughout the poem, and continues to cite his authority to Andrew in his moments of distress. When Andrew first expresses doubt about being able to reach Matthew in time, God replies,

> "Eala, Andreas, þæt ðu a woldest
> þæs siðfætes sæne weorþan!
> Nis þæt uneaðe eallwealdan gode
> to gefremmanne on foldwege."
> ["Alas, Andrew, that you would ever wish to
> be sluggish to the journey's path!
> There is nothing difficult for the All-wielding God
> to effect upon the earth-ways"] (*Andreas* lines 203-206; Hostetter trans. lines 203-206)

This again returns to the theme of God's power over creation itself. Similarly, when Andrew goes through his suffering to mirror Christ's passion, God reminds him that: "'Me is miht ofer eall, / sigorsped geseald'" ["'Command and success is given to me over all things'"] (*Andreas* lines 1434-1435; Hostetter trans. line 1433), followed by a display of his power over creation: "heht his lichoman / hales brucan" ["He ordered Andrew's body / to regain its wholeness"] (*Andreas* lines 1466b-1467a; Hostetter trans. lines 1466b-1467a). Out of God's many epithets throughout the poem, God as King is repeated in various forms, such as: "heofoncyninges"

["Heaven-King"] (*Andreas* line 92; Hostetter trans. line 92), "cyninga wuldor" ["King of Glory"] (*Andreas* line 854; Hostetter trans. line 854), "cining cwicera gehwæs" ["King of All That Lives"] (*Andreas* line 912; Hostetter trans. line 912), and "eallra cyninga cining" ["King of All Kings"] (*Andreas* line 978; Hostetter trans. line 978), to name a few selected examples.

Acknowledgement of God's authority seems to be the major trait of determining who is righteous versus who is wicked. The disciples are marked as "righteous" because they acknowledge the authority of God and Christ. The poem opens with addressing the disciples as "þeodnes þegnas" ["the thanes of the Lord"] (*Andreas* line 3a; Hostetter trans. line 3a), inciting the Old English cultural allegiance between a thane and his liege lord. The two named disciples in the poem, Matthew and Andrew, both also acknowledge the authority of God, particularly in their moment of need. In prison, Matthew "herede in heortan heofonrices weard" ["honored in his heart the Guardian of Heaven's Realm"] (*Andreas* line 52; Hostetter trans. line 52), and kept "Cristes lof / on fyrhðlocan fæste bewunden" ["Christ's praise / …wound up tightly in his soul's box"] (*Andreas* lines 57b-58; Hostetter trans. lines 57b-58), both ties to his unwavering commitment to God as King and Liege Lord. In his prayer, Matthew also states, "'ic beo sona gearu / to adreoganne þæt ðu, drihten min, / engla eadgifa, eðelleasum, / dugeða dædfruma, deman wille'" ["'I am immediately prepared / in this exile to endure what you wish to ordain, my Lord, / Bliss-giver of Angels, Deed-origin of Hosts'"] (*Andreas* lines 72b-75; Hostetter trans. lines 73b-75), essentially giving up his own agency for the sake of God's will over the course of his life to play out under God's kingship. Andrew has a bit of a rockier position, as he has moments of doubt at different points of the poem, a theme important of its own discussion later on, but nonetheless, Andrew does fall back on homage to God as King. When questioned on why he is eager to set sail for Mermedonia, Andrew declares "'Selre bið

æghwam / þæt he eaðmedum ellorfusne / oncnawe cuðlice. Swa þæt Crist bebead, / þeoden þrymfæst'" ["'It is more proper for every man / that he recognizes, humbly and certainly, / the man eager to depart, as Christ commanded it, / the Glory-fast Prince'"] (*Andreas* lines 320b-323a; Hostetter trans. lines 320b-323a), citing that, in spite of his own misgivings, he will obey his Liege Lord. It is also noteworthy that God is the allotter of good: "weoruda wilgeofan" ["the Giver of the People's Good"] (*Andreas* line 62a; Hostetter trans. line 61), and thus the one who ordains the cycle of who is considered "righteous" or "wicked."

In contrast, the Mermedonians are marked as "wicked" because they reject God's authority. At the beginning of the poem, the Mermedonians "Rihtes ne gimdon, / meotudes mildse" ["heeded not the right nor mercy of the Measurer"] (*Andreas* lines 139b-140a; Hostetter trans. line 140), rejecting God's authority outright. Scholars agree that the Mermedonians are solidly depicted as "the strange and heathen Other" (Godlove 138), and much of their "Otherness" and heathenness stems from a lack of acknowledging God's kingship over creation, as well as from embracing the authority of the devil in place of God. The Mermedonians are described as "deofles þegn" ["the devil's thanes"] (*Andreas* line 43; Hostetter trans. line 43), in direct contrast with the disciples as Christ's thanes, as well as "hæleð hellfuse" ["those hell-hastening heroes"] (*Andreas* line 50a; Hostetter trans. line 51), "'heorugrædigra / laðra leodsceaðena'" ["'blood-greedy, these malign man-harmers'"] (*Andreas* lines 79b-80a; Hostetter trans. line 80), "wælwulfas" ["slaughter-wolves"] (*Andreas* line 149; Hostetter trans. 149)[13], and "wiðerhycgende" ["evil-thinkers"] (*Andreas* line 1072b; Hostetter trans. line 1072). They are also called "'wærlogan'" ["'the pledge-breakers'"] (*Andreas* line 71; Hostetter trans. line 70), the exact word used to describe Lucifer and the fallen angels in *Genesis A & B*, thus connecting them in another way to the devil. All of these epithets cast the Mermedonians in a negative light.

[13] An alternate translation of "wælwulfas" is "warrior cannibals."

These epithets also gesture towards another characterization of the Mermedonians: their allegiance to the devil. Beyond epithets, the poem explicitly demonstrates the Mermedonians' obedience to the devil: "Oft hira mod onwod / under dimscuan deofles larum, / þonne hie unlædra eaueðum gelyfdon" ["Often their thoughts were taken / by the devil's edicts in the dark shadows, / while they entrusted themselves to his miserable might"] (*Andreas* lines 140b-142; Hostetter trans. lines 140-142). Much as Christ appears and speaks to the disciples in their moments of need, when Andrew confronts the Mermedonians, the devil they obey appears to confront the Lord's thane himself, inciting the people to violence against Andrew:

> deoful ætywde,
> wann ond wliteleas. Hæfde weriges hiw.
> Ongan þa meldigan morþres brytta,
> hellehinca, þone halgan wer
> wiðerhycgende
> [a devil appeared,
> dark and uncomely, having an accursed shape.
> This dispenser of murder then began to inform
> against that holy man, the hell-hobbled designing malice]
> (*Andreas* lines 1168b-1172a; Hostetter trans. lines 1168b-1171).

This devil reappears throughout the sequence to continually goad the people into torturing Andrew, and the Mermedonians listen to and obey the devil (*Andreas* lines 1296-1387).

The Mermedonians' actions also speak to a contrast between obedience to God's authority and to the devil's, setting up the juxtaposition between the righteous disciples and the wicked Mermedonians. The most prevalent and famous aspect of the Mermedonians' wickedness

is their cannibalism, a way of life that marks the entire nation: “Eal wæs þæt mearcland morðre bewunden, / feondes facne” [“That whole march-land was wound in murder, / the enemy’s deceit”] (*Andreas* lines 19-20a; Hostetter trans. lines 19-20a). It is the first fact the poet shares with the audience about the Mermedonians: “Swelc wæs þeaw hira / þæt hie æghwylcne ellðeodigra / dydan him to mose meteþearfendum, / þara þe þæt ealand utan sohte” [“Such was their custom— / that they made all strangers seeking their island / from outside into meat for the meat-lacking”] (*Andreas* lines 25b-28; Hostetter trans. lines 26b-28). More than that, the Mermedonians show no remorse for resorting to cannibalism and killing men for their food:

> Feorh ne bemurndan,
> grædige guðrincas, hu þæs gastes sið
> æfter swyltcwale geseted wurde.
> …
> … wæs him neod micel
> þæt hie tobrugdon blodigum ceaflum
> fira flæschoman him to foddorþege.
> [These greedy warriors mourned not for life –
> how the soul’s journey is decreed after its death-throes
> …
> … There was much desire
> to swiftly break apart human flesh-homes
> with bloody jaws for their own sustenance]
> (*Andreas* lines 154b-156, 158b-160; Hostetter trans. lines 155-156, 158b-160).

While this detail about the Mermedonians is not unique to the Old English verse *Andreas*, Bolintineanu points out that the verse calls attention to and denounces the evils of their cannibalism "at much greater length and with much greater intensity. From the very beginning it emphasizes the Mermedonians' hostility to strangers, their monstrous eating habits, their alliance with the devil" (150). Bolintineanu goes on to further explain that the Old English religious views at the time especially emphasized blood-drinking as prohibited, making the Mermedonians even more vile in the eyes of the poem's audience (152). In other words, the Mermedonians' wicked Otherness is emphasized at a higher degree than other texts of the St. Andrew story.

The Mermedonians' actions go further than cannibalism and blood-drinking: "Hluton hellcræftum, hæðengildum / teledon betwinum" ["They cast lots by hell-craft, reckoned between them / with idolatry"] (*Andreas* lines 1102-1103a; Hostetter trans. lines 1103-1104a), another sign of disregard for God's authority. The peak of the Mermedonians' wickedness escalates with their treatment of a young boy, chosen for their sacrifice through this lot-casting even though he, too, is Mermedonian: "ða se geonga ongann geomran stefne, / gehæfted for herige, hearmleoð galan, / freonda feasceaft, friðes wilnian" ["The miserable boy could find no mercy, / no peace among his people, who wished his life / and spirit be given to them. The wretches had sought for strife"] (*Andreas* lines 1126-1128; Hostetter trans. lines 1124b-1126). This especially unsettles Andrew:

> Ne mihte earmsceapen are findan,
> freoðe æt þam folce, þe him feores wolde,
> ealdres geunnan. …
> …
> Ða þæt Andrea earmlic þuhte,

þeodbealo þearlic to geðolianne,

þæt he swa unscyldig ealdre sceolde

lungre linnan.

[The deed seemed miserable to Andrew

a people-staining crime impossible to abide –

that one so innocent must quickly lose his life.

That folk-hate was bold and trouble-hard—

the troops trembled, proud and daring man-servants,

in their desire for murder, they wished, by any means

to bruise the head of the boy-child.]

(*Andreas* lines 1129-1131a, 1135-1138a; Hostetter trans. lines 1129-1135)

It is not merely killing and delighting in killing that is seen as wicked, but the killing of an innocent child. As the impetus for the poem's climax—Andrew giving his own life for the child—this deed by the Mermedonians might be read as the peak of their wickedness. The climax of wickedness is also emphasized by Andrew enacting the typological role of Christ (Godlove 153), which could also be considered the epitome of righteousness, given Christ's centrality to created order and what is considered "righteous."

As stated earlier, part of the Mermedonians' portrayal in the poem appeals directly to an Old English Christian audience. The Mermedonians are established as the Other for this Christian people, which is further emphasized by other cultural markers of the Mermedonians that tie them to other Others for the Old English audience. Godlove and Reading respectively

connect the Mermedonians to negative Jewish stereotypes (Godlove 148-149; Reading 6-7),[14] but there are a couple other more immediate implications of the Mermedonians' depiction that would be especially relevant to Old English Christians. Godlove recognizes one such connection, noting that "when we consider that *Andreas* was probably composed in the ninth century, squarely in the midst of the Viking incursions. […] the assimilation and neutralization of a bloodthirsty heathen people might take on a special significance, encoding the religious and cultural anxieties of Christians living in Anglo-Saxon England in the ninth century" (139). In addition to the Vikings, the Mermedonians could be symbolic of other groups the Old English audience would label as "heathen." Brady points to the Briton remnant as another potential inspiration for the Mermedonians' portrayal: "Just as the Britons are recognisable as enemies to Guthlac not by any demonic appearance, but by their foreign speech, the Mermedonians are not ascribed with monstrosity of appearance, only monstrosity of actions…Both the Britons and the Mermedonians are aligned with the devil and positioned as enemies of God, as well as the race of Christian people" (680). Brady also points to the Celtic traditions of cannibalism and ritual sacrifice, which seem to function similarly to how the verse *Andreas* portrays the Mermedonians' own actions (683-684). The Mermedonians, then, might be symbolic of a number of different groups familiar to the Old English audience: Jews, Vikings, Celts, and/or Britons—i.e., anyone non-Christian who would be considered as the "Other" to the Christianized Germanic tribes united under Christendom.

The geography of Mermedonia also plays into their portrayal as a wicked, "Other" people. Brady is again useful in understanding cultural significance of the poem's specific depiction, as Mermedonia's descriptions "ultimately evok[e] the wilderness of the borderland

[14] Beller and Felsenstein respectively shed light on how antisemitism is embedded in Christian literatures, while also demonstrating that explicit and blatant antisemitic portrayals are a late medieval trend in English literatures. See Chapter 2 on *Judith* for additional commentary.

frontier zone that was Anglo-Saxon England's many islands within the fens. Islands in the fens were well known in Anglo-Saxon England as isolated locations beyond the boundaries of human society" (673). This landscape also "evoked a specific, and very real, type of danger for the Anglo-Saxon geographical imagination: that of the wild Briton concealed within and poised to attack" (Brady 675-676), again functioning as a symbol to a culturally-recognizable fear of "Otherness." Bolintineanu also points out that "The Mermedonians' spiritual distance from the human norm is reinforced by the physical distance between Mermedonia and the rest of the world" (154), as the "island" is described as far, far away. These cultural connections and possible basis for the Mermedonians' specific portrayal in the Old English verse *Andreas* only complement the close reading of the text itself; the Mermedonians' wicked actions coupled with their cultural allusions to Old English "enemies" establish them solidly as the "Other," and thus as the opposite of the righteous Christian race. Once again, the dichotomy of "righteous" and "wicked" between humankind is established.

However, *Andreas* complicates this delineation, both because the "Otherness" of the Mermedonians comes from a number of cultural references and because the Mermedonians' "classification" as wicked changes in the end. Thus, *Andreas* is more nuanced in its depictions of the righteous and the wicked, as the righteous can fail and falter, and the wicked can change their ways. This was not the case in *Genesis A & B*, where "righteousness" and "wickedness" were inherent traits and any so-called mistake of the righteous was downplayed or excused, or in *Judith*, where the heavenly reward could only be given to God's chosen righteous people and the wicked had no hope in redemption, only the suffering of hell to await them in death. *Andreas* is consistent with both of these themes to an extent, but brings into its story a compelling vision of redemption for the wicked and a clearer depiction of all humankind as "wicked" to some degree.

As referenced earlier, Andrew, though a disciple and in the "righteous" category of humankind, is not perfect, as he experiences moments of doubt even as he seeks to follow God's command. The first instance happens early on, as when God commands Andrew to go after Matthew, Andrew asks: "'Hu mæg ic, dryhten min, ofer deop gelad / fore gefremman on feorne weg ["'How can I, my Lord, across the deep waters accomplish this journey upon the far-flung wave'"] (*Andreas* lines 190-191; Hostetter trans. lines 190-191), calling attention to the physical distance he must cross. Still, despite his questioning of God, Andrew still goes:

> … ne wæs him bleað hyge,
> ah he wæs anræd ellenweorces,
> heard ond higerof, nalas hildlata,
> gearo, guðe fram, to godes campe
> [Andrew had no timorous mind,
> but was resolute for valiant deeds,
> firm and stout-hearted—not at all battle-tardy—
> but readied by war for the contest of God]
> (*Andreas* lines 231b-234; Hostetter trans. lines 231b-234)

Following that, Christ appears and gives Andrew the chance to again prove his allegiance, through an interrogation of Andrew's experience with God. Andrew responds in faith. Similarly, Andrew expresses doubt when suffering. This pattern of doubt, rebuke from God, and strengthening of faith is an anomaly of sorts when compared to *Genesis A & B* and *Judith*. In *Judith,* Judith never wavers in her reliance upon God. In *Genesis A & B,* even though the righteous do make mistakes—especially in the fall of man in the Garden of Eden—these

shortcomings tend to be glossed over.[15] Reading deals at length with Andrew's portrayal, noting that "The model Andrew provides…is consistently presented as one of an ongoing and perpetually incomplete spiritual process" (6). Reading also refers back to Andrew's intent as a typological figure of Christ, making the point that "Dissonant details like [Andrew's doubt in God] add up to suggest that Andrew is not a perfect type of Christ, but rather a weak one, full of promise but flawed" (20).[16] What *Andreas* demonstrates through Andrew's portrayal, then, is a nuanced depiction of righteousness or right standing in God's sight, calling attention to Andrew's imperfections. This makes righteousness a more attainable standard, in a way, as it hinges on continuing to come back to acknowledging God's authority, as Andrew continually does after his expressions of doubt and rebuke from God.

This nuanced depiction of righteousness also plays into the path of conversion of the wicked into the righteous race, which occurs in the poem's ultimate climax. Righteousness and wickedness are largely fixed inherent traits in both of the previous poems considered—*Judith* presents the two as unchanging, while *Genesis A & B* only demonstrates that the righteous can become wicked—but in *Andreas*, the wicked can become the righteous through conversion. This conversion requires a complete transformation of the people, starting with taking on the central trait of the righteous: the Mermedonians must acknowledge God as ruler and authority over them. This is what occurs in the poem. The Mermedonians' first post-conversion speech reads: "'Nu is gesyne ðæt þe soð meotud, / cyning eallwihta, cræftum wealdeð'" ["'Now it is plain that the True Creator, / the King of All-Created Things, governs skillfully'"] (*Andreas* lines

[15] See Chapter 1's discussion of *Genesis A & B*'s treatment of Adam's, Eve's, Noah's, and Abraham's mistakes or sins.

[16] Reading does mention that Andrew's words during his passion mirror that of Christ on the cross, thus reinforcing the Christ typology, but also points out the various ways Andrew falls short of his potential as an apostle, including a contrast with Matthew's eager faith when facing similar suffering (19-20). Thus, in Reading's view of the text, Andrew's doubt is a significant factor in undermining some of his typological connection to Christ.

1602-1603; Hostetter trans. lines 1602-1603). By acknowledging God's authority over the world, the Mermedonians take on the mark of the "righteous." This verbal acknowledgement is then followed up with action:

> Þa wæs mid þy folce fulwiht hæfen,
> æðele mid eorlum, ond æ godes
> riht aræred, ræd on lande
> mid þam ceasterwarum
> [Next, baptism was raised up among the people,
> nobly among nobles, and God's righteous law
> and decree exalted in the land, among the city-dwellers]
> (*Andreas* lines 1643-1646a; Hostetter trans. lines 1643-1645)

God's law is now their law, replacing their previous rule of cannibalism and other pagan acts, a complete transformation of their society and way of life. To emphasize the centrality of obedience to God and God's authority that runs through the poem as a sign of righteous living, the poem ends by declaring God: "þæt is æðele cyning!" ["'is a worthy king!'"] (*Andreas* line 1722b; Hostetter trans. line 1722).

The conversion of the Mermedonians illustrates underlying ideology that has implications for colonialist thought to come. In analyzing the conversion moment, when Andrew brings a flood among the people as a symbol of baptism, some scholars call attention to Andrew's actions as a fear tactic: "he converts the Mermedonians to Christianity through a forced baptism, leading them to redemption through a symbolic death and rebirth" (Godlove 156). Bolintineanu corroborates this reading: "Terrified by the flood, the Mermedonians convert to Christianity and confess the faith" (159). The use of fear in bringing about conversion and transformation of the

wicked to the righteous is telling, as it calls attention to God as judge and fear of hell, rather than hope in heaven or other positive implications of faith. However, though the Mermedonians initially respond in fear, Andrew does call them to

> "Ne beoð ge to forhte, þeh þe fell curen
> synnigra cynn. Swylt þrowode,
> witu be gewyrhtum. Eow is wuldres leoht
> torht ontyned, gif ge teala hycgað."
> ["Do not be too fearful, although ruin has chosen
> the kindred of sinners. They have suffered
> death and torments as they deserve –
> For you is the dazzling light of glory
> revealed if you think rightly."]
> (*Andreas* lines 1609-1612; Hostetter trans. 1608-1612).

In this statement, Andrew calls attention to acting out of fear of hell, but also points to the hope of glory to those who transform their lives to match the way of the righteous. Embracing righteous ideology is the way to find hope and avoid hell, providing an actual path to change from the group of the wicked into the group of the righteous.

Yet even *Andreas* continues the theme of unavoidable destiny, as some of the Mermedonians are not given a choice at redemption. There are some that are irredeemably wicked with no clear option to change their ways or thoughts. While some of the Mermedonians taken by the flood are resurrected and given a second chance to choose righteousness:

> … ða wyrrestan,
> faa folcsceaðan, feowertyne

gewiton mid þy wæge in forwyrd sceacan

under eorþan grund

[fourteen guilty folk-harmers,

the worse among their nation. They were sent shaking into destruction by the waves beneath the abyss of earth]

(*Andreas* lines 1592b-1595a; Hostetter trans. lines 1594b-1596a)

The worst of the wicked have apparently crossed a line that forbids them from getting that second chance. *Andreas*, then, presents the most complex look at righteousness and wickedness by presenting both traits as backed up by thought and action, as well as creating the potential for change, though that change is not available for all people, i.e. the worst of the wicked.

The poem's function as an allegory for the Christian salvation narrative as well as its more literal plot of converting a group of people make it a piece ripe for rich ideological implications. There is a sense of urgency in the poem's message. As Bolintineanu points out, the poem contains the theme of "essential human homelessness" (161), referring to the temporariness of earth as a pathway towards either heaven or hell. The undercurrent of the poem is that where humans stand with God is vitally important to the more lasting destination. This urgency is what drives Andrew's missionary efforts and gestures towards some of the colonialist ideology to rise in the future. Though Andrew is sent to free Matthew, Cardwell points out that "Andreas does not mention…his specific task of freeing Matthew, but rather affirms his greater and lifelong task of preaching the gospel. This greater mission is fulfilled at the end of the poem, after the apostle's passion, when the Mermedonians convert" (12). In other words, his missionary work is the center of the poem's purpose and ultimate storyline. This emphasis on mission overlaps with other trends of Old English views on Christian missionary work. Cardwell is again

useful to tracing this, as he finds compelling correlation between early Old English missionary activity and the poem's dating (24), and calls attention to how the *Andreas* poet uses the "Great Commission" passages of the Christian Bible with greater emphasis than previous versions of the story (3). Cardwell does conclude:

> [I]t is not clear whether *Andreas* was written with contemporary efforts at evangelization in mind. After all, that the commission of Matthew 28 and Mark 16 was applied to the apostles (as opposed to post-apostolic missionaries) was never in doubt. Nevertheless, it is striking that the poet stresses the apostle's missionary preaching so heavily, going far beyond the source text in doing so. (23)

Cardwell recognizes the ambiguity in whether or not *Andreas* was theologically groundbreaking in this regard. The verse *Andreas* specifically might be a part of a wider trend, as "there is evidence that the legend of St. Andrew was of great importance to another foundational aspect of Anglo-Saxon Christian identity: their earlier missions to the Continent" (Godlove 159), referring more broadly to the saint's tale adapted into verse.

There are, then, further parallels between the story of Andrew's conversion of the Mermedonians and colonization to come: seeking to transform a so-called "wicked" Other into the righteous Christian race through erasure of the Other's civilization. The fact that the most evil of the Mermedonians must die in order for this process to happen is also telling, as a precursor of a "convert or die" ideology. This seems to be a turn from some earlier thought, as "it was Gregory who insisted to his missionary to the English, Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604), that all things local which could safely be turned to the use of the Church be integrated into the character of Anglo-Saxon Christianity" (Friesen 225). This stance, from at least a few centuries before the verse *Andreas* was composed, does not advocate for complete erasure, but intentional

and potential blending of prior cultural elements into Christianized versions. While there certainly still is some amount of transformation and coopting of previous cultures, it seems a much less violent, sudden process than that of Andrew with the Mermedonians and than that of colonization efforts to come.

Andreas reveals in part the way the story of St. Andrew began to alter slightly to emphasize Christian missionary concerns and serve as a precursor for England's colonial Christianization. The poem echoes similar themes and patterns from *Genesis A & B* and *Judith* regarding righteousness and wickedness, God's authority over the world, and the focus on one's eternal destination. Unlike these two poems, *Andreas* provides a vision of what it looks like to change from wicked to righteous, to move out of hell's shadow toward heaven—though, in doing so, the text also plants seeds for justifying Christianizing other civilizations through colonialist efforts. *Andreas* provides a model for colonialism, lumping in a mix of cultural groups considered "Other" under a shared banner of heathen wickedness, in need of correction and civilizing through Christian conversion. *Andreas* itself reflects ideologies present within Christian circles of the era, and, while it is not the primary version of the St. Andrew myth, it is also reflective of the story's wider popularity and ways it may have been perceived or interpreted. Within the cultural context, *Andreas* may have been used as a story of hope for relief from raiding Vikings or other hostile groups, but over time, as England and other European countries solidify, it is easy to trace how this story may have been interpreted in light of conquering rulers looking to expand their borders and influence, as well as subjugate the new "Others" outside of the protection of Christendom's circle.

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Conclusion

In *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England,* Nicholas Howe reads early England as a postcolonial state: a land reeling from the effects of the Roman Empire's withdrawal from the island. Yet in the time of Christendom, the Old English audience "would come to think of their ancestors as having made an exodus across the North Sea to a promised land. Imagining Britain as Canaan is to place its landscape in Old Testament history, and that means to acknowledge the occupation of the island was also an act of dispossession" (Howe 143) as the Germanic tribes drove out the original inhabitants. Colonialism is in the very DNA of England's history and its people. The themes gesturing towards colonialist and nationalist ideologies in *Genesis A & B, Judith,* and *Andreas* are merely a small piece of insight into this long history.

As stated at the beginning of this project, while it is inaccurate to read Old English texts as part of a heritage of whiteness's greatness (Kim; Ahmed), there are nonetheless seeds of colonialist racism and white supremacy to come. These are especially poignant through how people groups are marked as "righteous," such as the line of Seth in *Genesis A & B,* the Christianized Jews under Judith in *Judith,* and the disciples of Jesus in *Andreas*; or "wicked," such as the line of Cain, the Assyrians, and the Mermedonians. This division leads into the dichotomy of "civilized" and "uncivilized," designations often given on the basis of religion, at least in part. Specifically, the label of "Christian" attaching itself to "righteous" and "civilized" and that of "non-Christian" or "pagan" as "wicked" and "uncivilized." The Mermedonians in *Andreas* are especially key to demonstrating this pattern, as they are only redeemed in the end by embracing Christianity, which lifts them into a more civilized state. While "whiteness" as we know it today is not embedded in these texts, it is easy to see how whiteness eventually coopts and congeals to Christendom's legacy of defining humanity in these ways. In other words,

whiteness latches onto the ideals of "the righteous" established by Christendom, and "Otherness" or non-whiteness to the designation of "the wicked."

The theme of God's favor towards those deemed righteous running through these three poems also goes hand-in-hand with this. *Genesis A & B* seems to suggest that land and provision of plenty is the reward and right of the righteous, as God provides for Adam and Eve, the line of Seth, Noah, and Abraham, even in spite of their mistakes. Because they are in right standing with God, they receive the gift of land and the right to possess it, a theme that gestures towards justifying the seizure of land from so-called "non-righteous" groups. That God's favor covers the mistakes or otherwise immoral actions of the righteous is also seen in *Judith*, as Judith is given permission by God to kill the "wicked" Holofernes. This theme is a slippery slope into justifying mass genocide or other evil deeds in the name of God, as long as one is righteous (i.e. Christian). Andrew also demonstrates this same notion in *Andreas*, as he sends a flood that kills the Mermedonians, and essentially scares them into conversion. It would be anachronistic to say that these texts had a direct influence on colonialism; however, they do reflect cultural ideas that would eventually grow into colonialist justification for seizing land, enslaving people, and erasing non-Christian cultures.

This research is part of combatting how Early English studies "continues to enforce a narrative centered on English nationalism that depends on a whitewashed history and appeals to a populace inherently taught to view whiteness as the default authority" (Rambaran-Olm 390) by untangling misconceptions about early England. Calling attention to protocolonialist themes present in the Old English *Genesis A & B*, *Judith*, and *Andreas* is a way to correct the narrative of medieval texts as emblems of white supremacy, yet also point out the ways such anachronistic interpretations came to be in the first place. The parallels between colonialist ideologies and

some of the themes of these texts are noteworthy, providing insight into how ideas are embedded in culture in ways that continue to evolve over time. Christendom's classification of humankind, as demonstrated in these three poems as a division of the "righteous" and the "wicked," is a framework that can be applied to other Old English texts. Specifically, ones I would like to focus on in the future include the other biblically-inspired texts of the Junius Manuscript, Saint's Lives tales like *Elene,* and epics that follow the apostles such as *The Fate of the Apostles.* It would also be beneficial to look to how these same ideas evolve in Middle English texts, tracing these themes across history. My present work and future research in this area is part of a wider trend in medieval literary scholarship: applying a postcolonial approach to tracing the roots of white nationalism to their sources.

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