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CONVENTION AND ORIGINALITY IN TWO MEDIEVAL POEMS:
THE DREAM OF THE ROOD AND THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

by
Sister Patricia^{Mary} Noone

A dissertation submitted to the
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I. CRITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

Modern criticism of medieval literature has not always been immune from the modern dichotomy between the shaping forces of convention and originality. Early vernacular literature, especially, might seem by its choice of language to bespeak a pioneering spirit in its author; sometimes, as a result, it has evoked spirited and impressionistic praise for its newness, to the neglect of clear preceding traditions. More recent scholarship has made us acutely aware of the Latin backgrounds of many vernacular works; the increase in information, however, has not always been accompanied by the ability to interpret it in a meaningful way. The knowledge of sources and conventions serves little purpose if it is not integrated into a broader vision of the work itself, and may indeed lead to distortion if it is applied rigidly as the determining factor of the meaning of the work.

Somewhere in between the extremes, there is need for a differential criticism, sensitive to the interior and exterior resources of the medieval poet, aware of his debt to and his improvement upon preceding traditions, but always within the context of the poem itself. This critical discernment in adjusting the claims of convention and originality might best be exercised at those vulnerable points of transition between Latin and vernacular work where the rival claims have been put forth most strongly. Such a point of departure forces the critic not only to confront the relationship

of the work to pre-existing models and patterns, but also to refine the categories of "learned" and "popular" literature usually invoked in discussing transmission from Latin to the vernacular, and to search more keenly for the real threads¹ of continuity, if any, underlying the shift in language.

Two medieval poems in particular seem to invite this kind of critical test: the eighth-century Dream of the Rood and the twelfth-century Owl and the Nightingale. Each of these works appears at the peak of a clear Latin literary tradition to which it is deeply indebted, yet each has been hailed by critics as an original and brilliant vernacular composition.

The dating of the two poems is, of course, tentative. In addition, the survival of so little of the poetry of either period makes a completely clear picture of their place in the developing English literary tradition impossible. But the intrinsic merit of both pieces is evident, and available information suggests that they are landmarks in the passage of particular Latin conventions into the English vernacular: in the case of The Dream of the Rood, the thematic and structural conventions of homilies and hymns on the cross; in The Owl and the Nightingale, the thematic and structural conventions of the Latin conflictus or debate poem. Further, the two poems witness to a basic continuity in the tradition of Latin rhetoric, the old "bene dicendi scientia." Given the shaping influence of rhetoric on the homilies, hymns, and conflicti, the ap-

pearance of rhetorical devices and techniques in the two vernacular works might well be taken for granted. But above and beyond their debt to specific areas of Latin literature, the two vernacular authors seem to have been directly grounded in the principles of rhetoric still taught in the schools of their time. In no way is either poem a simple imitation of a pre-existing model; a true sense of rhetoric governs each author's arrangement and amplification of his material. Figures of rhetoric such as simile, metaphor, paradox, and antithesis color the language of both poets. Most notably, each uses the familiar rhetorical device of prosopopoeia as a means of dramatizing his theme; and each frames the prosopopoeia in a narrative context which reflects and expands its human implications.

Through the comparisons prompted by the use of prosopopoeia, human speech, the original domain of rhetoric, becomes in a subtle way a center of each poem. Focusing attention on the invented speech of beings other than human, prosopopoeia invites the reader to reflect on the "emotions" and "motivations" of these beings at the same time; quietly but simultaneously, it invites him to consider the uses of rhetoric on a human level.

In The Dream of the Rood, the speech of a human and a non-human being reveal similar motivations, and offer a positive view of rhetoric as appropriate communication. A cyclic relationship between inner reality and external verbalization is acted out in the poem: the Cross undergoes a

a spiritual transformation, and then proclaims it; the dreamer while listening undergoes a similar transformation, which he proclaims in turn. By organizing and representing inner reality, true rhetoric effectively conveys the meaning of experience and becomes capable of moving others. The homily of the Cross inspires the homily of the poet-dreamer; the written proclamation of the poem reaches out to move the reader to share its vision.

The tone of The Owl and the Nightingale is, obviously, quite different. Yet in this poem again, the speech of the prosopopoeia leads the reader to an imaginative perception of human discourse--only this time, human discourse at its most absurd and least fruitful point. The two birds use almost every device of rhetoric known to man. Their verbal exchange is "stif and starc and strong" (l. 5), in truth "a debate about nothing in particular which gets nowhere at a furious rate."² The speeches of the owl and the nightingale inspire laughter at their overwhelming self-centeredness and rhetorical opportunism, and end, predictably, in an impasse. Implicit in the birds' argument is a gently satiric vision of the human talent for illogical and unremitting self-justification; the poem reaches out artfully to show the reader the humor of rhetoric indulged in for its own sake, and trusts him to keep his distance from the "vision" of either bird.

The strong influence of Latin rhetoric on The Dream of the Rood and The Owl and the Nightingale does not rule out

other influences at the same time. Both poems preserve³ native as well as continental traditions; both are directed to vernacular audiences. If anything, however, critical comment on the two pieces has been overweighted toward their native aspects; and this orientation has left unresolved a number of problems of interpretation within each poem. A careful study of the role of rhetoric in each case should provide more balanced critical treatment, and make more comprehensible the poet's aims and purposes.

When one is familiar enough with the structural patterns of patristic homilies to perceive the double homily incorporated into The Dream of the Rood, for example, the problem of repetitiousness at the end of the poem ceases to exist, and the integrity of the existing text no longer needs to be defended. Similarly, the question of the seriousness of the plea for ecclesiastical preferment for Nicholas of Guildford at the end of The Owl and the Nightingale becomes less acute when one is aware of the tradition of parody surrounding the conflictus: surely a medieval poet would choose another genre, not to mention a learned language, if he were actually concerned with Nicholas' advancement. The whole question of the meaning of the debate, the sides represented by the two participants, and the outcome of their disagreement, is clarified by an understanding of the conflictus genre.

While helping to resolve individual matters of interpretation, a study of the role of rhetoric in the two poems

can also increase understanding of the development of literary convention. Separated from each other by four centuries, and by an additional eight centuries from the golden age of Latin rhetoric, the two works nonetheless prove the continuing influence of the second of the liberal arts. To affirm continuity, of course, is not to affirm a uniformly high level of quality in the way the tradition was transmitted--this may vary from impoverishment, degeneration, or misunderstanding, to school-boyish copying, skillful formal imitation, or assimilation of cultural values.⁴ But the existence of the tradition, however it is understood by the poet who is trained in it, necessarily affects the nature of his achievement. And the presence of a tradition so definite and transferable as that of Latin rhetoric puts into the hands of an imaginative artist a useful tool with which to work--that is to say, a context with which or against which he can define himself, audience expectations which he can purposefully meet or disappoint, tangible material awaiting his transforming touch. With The Dream of the Rood and The Owl and the Nightingale, we confront two such imaginative handlers of the tradition.

That the tradition was so influential on English poets should occasion no surprise. The old stereotype of vernacular achievement as an insular phenomenon flaming up by some sort of literary "spontaneous combustion" no longer flourishes. The very briefest survey can show that geographical isolation did not cut English writers off from European and even Oriental influence; in both the Old and Middle English periods,

powerful forces were operating in the preservation and transmission of continental traditions of learning.

As far as the earlier period is concerned, there were in fact two separate, determined attempts to penetrate the barbarian structure of Old English society: by the Irish monks, and by the Roman missionaries sent by Pope Gregory the Great in 597 A.D. While both missions were basically religious in purpose, they bore far-reaching consequences for the whole of Anglo-Saxon civilization.⁵

In the fifth and sixth centuries, Irish monasteries were in close contact with their neighbors in Gaul.⁶ Thus Margaret Schlauch suggests, they were affected by the strong influence exercised on the latter by Eastern Christianity.⁷ Teachers from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine came to Marseilles and other monastic centers; Gallican monks studied Greek, Hebrew, and Syrian, as well as Latin texts; evidence exists of the teaching of Syrian practices and the Syrian language at the monastery of Lerins.⁸ These connections make unsurprising the marked resemblance between Irish and Oriental monasticism, with their common emphasis on ascetic and anchoritic practices.⁹ Coptic Christianity also affected early Irish sculpture, monastic architecture, and manuscript decoration.¹⁰ Motifs of birds and animals and geometric designs in the Irish manuscripts, seem to come from either Egypt or Syria.¹¹ Moreover, the Irish interest in the theme of souls facing judgment after death can be related to a similar Egyptian theme.¹²

In evangelizing Britain, the Irish monks of the sixth century concentrated their efforts in the north; as a result, Augustine found heathenism a living religion in England upon his arrival.¹³ But the missionary impetus of Irish scholars such as Columba and Columban¹⁴ was extended southward in the following century by varied representatives of Celtic learning, including Fursa, Aidan, Cedd, and Cuthbert of Lindisfarne.¹⁵

In the meantime, the Roman missionaries who came to England in 597¹⁶ carried with them no less a foundation than that of Latin thought and letters, and much that the Roman Empire had assumed from other cultures. Hence Theodore of Tarsus, a successor of Augustine in the see of Canterbury and founder of the influential school of learning there,¹⁷ was a Greek scholar from Asia Minor, trained in Athens.

The interaction of cultures continued after the initial missionary journeys. Collecting of foreign books, an essential stage in the development of a literate civilization, proceeded rapidly during the second half of the seventh century.¹⁸ A leader in the acquisition of continental writings was the much-travelled Benedict Biscop, who returned from Rome with precious books for the Old English libraries, according to Bede.¹⁹ For his contributions to the monastic libraries at Wearmouth and Jarrow, Benedict has been called the "greatest library-builder before the Norman Conquest."²⁰ Bede himself is perhaps the best evidence of the capacity and eagerness with which the Old English ecclesiastics as-

simulated the heritage of classical and patristic learning.

Judging from study of the contents of the English monastic libraries, there was enough available material to make the process of assimilation a challenging one. Among the chief sources of information employed by seventh and eighth century writers can be named Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Ambrose, Cassiodorus, Boethius, Isidore, Priscian, and Donatus.²¹ Cicero (the De Inventione) and Julius Victor, and to a lesser extent Cassiodorus and Isidore, all helped to shape Alcuin's De Rhetorica.²² No one, Margaret Schlauch observes convincingly, can claim to understand Old English verse without knowledge of the dual inheritance with which the native poetics was called upon to unite: patristic theology and Roman rhetoric.²³

Awareness of previous relationships among these disciplines might also add to an understanding of Old English poetry. For patristic theology and Roman rhetoric do not encounter one another for the first time in eighth-century England, nor is this their earliest influence upon Christian verse. The blurring of boundaries which marks treatment of grammar, rhetoric, and poetic causes difficulty to systematizers as early as Quintilian in the first century A.D.²⁴ Rhetoric had been transferred to poetry by Ovid, and had entered the domain of school exercises based on fictitious legal cases after the fall of the Roman republic; losing its original meaning and purpose, it ultimately penetrated into all literary genres.²⁵ Thus, whether stylistic exer-

cises such as fable, chria, panegyric, prosopopoeia, etc., should be assigned to the grammatical or the rhetorical curriculum was a question for debate as far back as Antiquity.²⁶ But whatever the answer, the writings of Donatus, Priscian, and Macrobius are all widely circulated in the Middle Ages, are readily available in Old English libraries, and offer significant encouragement for the use of standard rhetorical devices in the poetry of the time.²⁷

As for patristic theology, the Fathers of the Church are no strangers to Roman rhetoric. The locus classicus of the patristic rapprochement with pagan eloquence is in Chapter IV of the De Doctrina Christiana of St. Augustine, where the use of academic rhetoric in sermons is taken for granted:

Since persuasion both to truths and falsehoods is urged by means of the art of rhetoric, who would venture to say that truth, in the person of its defenders, ought to stand its ground, unarmed, against falsehood, so that those who are trying to convince us of falsehoods should know how to induce their listeners to be favorably inclined, attentive, and docile, by means of their preface, while the defenders of truth do not know how to do this? Should the former proclaim their falsehoods briefly, explicitly, and plausibly, while the latter tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, difficult to understand, and, finally, disagreeable to believe? . . . The power of eloquence . . . lies open to all.²⁸

Always at the service of the Christian vision,²⁹ gradually shaped into a new, anti-classical sermo humilis, the rhetorical principles of Augustine's early training in the schools remain an intrinsic part of every one of his written works and homilies. In confident justification of his ap-

proach, he points to the Bible as using all the figures of
³⁰speech known to the grammarians. Numerous other patristic
 writers echo the idea. Cassiodorus teaches that secular
 teachers actually took the artes from the Scriptures and
³¹reduced them to a system. A century later, Bede finds the
 Bible superior to all other writings in rhetorical art; his
De schematis et tropibus lists seventeen schemata and thir-
³²teen tropi from it. Moreover, Origen, Basil, Lactantius,
 Ambrose, Jerome, Isidore--all recommend the study of ancient
 pagan literature and show the fruits of such study in their
 own writings. Aldhelm, in fact, wishes to make Latin the
³³literary language of the Old English people.

One cannot pretend that the advice of the Fathers re-
 sulted in an uninterrupted transmission of learning through-
 out the medieval period in England. The Danish invasions of
 the ninth and tenth centuries destroyed most of the older
 book stock, and the interval between Alfred the Great and
 William the Conqueror is marked as a time of replacement and
³⁴copying of manuscripts acquired with much difficulty.

Nevertheless, the rebuilding process went forward, under the
 guidance of leaders alert to its value, such as Alfred him-
³⁵self in the late ninth century, and Lanfranc in the ele-
 venth. The number of works in Continental Roman script in
 the library of Christ Church, Canterbury, suggests that
 Lanfranc was responsible for its collection of the four
 doctors, standard commentaries, Isidore, Bede, and Boethius,
³⁶among others. By the time of Becket, the library cata-

logue listed more than two hundred books, and a remarkably
³⁷ large number of Latin classics. The range of learning
 of John of Salisbury in the middle of the twelfth century
 amply indicates the extent of cultural recovery that had
 taken place: among the sources of his Metalogicon are Plato,
 Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, Martianus Capella, Terence,
 Catullus, Vergil, Horace, Ovid, Isidore, Bede, and Boethius,
³⁸ to name just a few. Though John's erudition was certainly
 unique, the recovery was not confined to individual scholars;
 the Sacerdos ad altare accessurus, a list of textbooks com-
 piled late in the twelfth century, includes a good variety of
³⁹ standard authors.

Many factors entered into this revival of learning.
 The Anglo-Saxon monasteries had developed their libraries
 and scriptoria under the intellectual stimulus of the Nor-
 man regime; the rapid growth of towns had increased the need
 for school education; and scholars from the new cathedral
 schools on the continent had made their influence felt
⁴⁰ throughout England. Again, as in the eighth century, con-
 tact with those who could teach, and access to books which
 could be read and copied, prepared the way for the creation
⁴¹ of original works. The culture which resulted has justi-
 fiably earned the title of the twelfth-century Renaissance,
 and the wide reading of Latin authors and active study and
 practice of grammar and rhetoric which ensued could not
⁴² help but affect the literature of the time.

Thus even a brief review of learning in England between

the fifth and the twelfth centuries suggests a basic resilience in the traditional heritage of Western culture--a heritage which could hibernate in artificial, trivial displays of pedantry and naive, rigid adherence to formulas, but which could, and did from time to time, emerge again into life. In the hands of gifted authors, conventions obey their own logic and the logic of the new work simultaneously; the result is genuinely new, discernibly different from previous efforts to use the same conventions.

In this sense, the traditions, whether thematic or formal, present themselves as raw material for the shaping imagination of the artist; originality then locates itself in the creative act by which the artist arranges and transforms the material in his work. This notion of originality is more subtle than that which emphasizes sheer novelty of subject, form, or language.⁴³ It is certainly more applicable to the study of Old English literature, where a native formulaic tradition is joined to continental conventions. It is also better equipped to illuminate literary periods such as the twelfth century, where a new richness of feeling and expression appeared in Latin as well as in the vernacular, and indeed, somewhat earlier in Latin than in the developing new languages.⁴⁴ The originality of the Latin works presupposes a long history of classical themes and forms; the originality of the vernacular, often, presupposes connection with a pre-existing Latin tradition. By and large, "popular" works in medieval literature, whatever their language, do not come into being entirely inde-

pendent of "learned" influence.

At the same time, when a medieval poet chooses to shift into the medium of the vernacular, he shifts either the audience to whom he speaks or the tone in which he speaks to them. His choice of language makes accessible to him the cultural patterns and themes which the language was developed to express, as well as an audience familiar with these patterns and themes. Inevitably, there is a new context with which the older Latin conventions must interact; there is also, perhaps, greater incentive to exploit these conventions in imaginative ways. Here more than anywhere else, careful discrimination of old and new, and sensitivity to the total work which has integrated them, must go hand in hand.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER ONE

¹These questions seem more central than those of methods of composition, such as are being raised in the application of the oral-formulaic theories of Milman Parry and A.B. Lord to the corpus of Anglo-Saxon verse. Despite the value of these discussions, Old English scholars have not always avoided the fallacy of an absolute identification of oral with formulaic, and the resulting false dichotomy between this and a lettered tradition. A good summary of the modifications appearing necessary in oral-formulaic research can be found in Michael Curschmann's "Oral Poetry in Mediaeval English, French, and German Literature: Some Notes on Recent Research," Speculum, XLII (1967), 36-52. Curschmann points out (p. 51, n. 53), a significant comment by Lord himself in The Singer of Tales (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 220: "Yet after all that has been said about oral composition as a technique of line and song construction, it seems that the term of greater significance is traditional. Oral tells us 'how,' but traditional tells us 'what,' and even more, 'of what kind' and 'of what force.'" The complexity of the mingled oral and lettered traditions in Old English poetry is well stated by Jackson J. Campbell in "Oral Poetry in The Seafarer," Speculum, XXXV (1960), 87-88, although his attempt to sort out varying strata in The Seafarer is questionable.

²Constance Hieatt, "The Subject of the Mock-Debate Between the Owl and the Nightingale," SN, XL (1968), 159.

³The Dream of the Rood, for example, preserves in the speech of the Rood recognizable remnants of the Old English riddle tradition: the personification; the first-person speaker; the account of the origins of the speaking object and the uses to which it has been put by men. The Rood poem may well be the expansion of a riddle; the context of the poem, however, removes from the material the enigmatic quality which is so basic to the riddle form, as A. S. Cook noted some time ago in his edition. See The Dream of the Rood (Oxford, 1905), pp. 1-11.

⁴Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953) p. 19.

⁵Frank Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1947), pp. 96-128.

⁶Olivier Loyer, Les Chrétientés Celtiques (Paris, 1965), pp. 87-90.

⁷Margaret Schlauch, English Medieval Literature and Its Social Foundations (Warsaw, 1956), pp. 24-26.

⁸George T. Stokes, Ireland and the Celtic Church (London, 1899), pp. 166-88.

⁹Loyer, pp. 92-94.

¹⁰Arthur Kingsley Porter, The Crosses and Cultures of Ireland (New Haven, 1931), p. 18 ff.

¹¹Loyer, p. 94

¹²Margaret Schlauch, "On Conall Corc and the Relations of Old Ireland with the Orient," Journal of Celtic Studies, I (1950), 158-60.

¹³Stenton, pp. 102-3.

¹⁴W.F. Bolton, A History of Anglo-Latin Literature, 597-740 (Princeton, N.J., 1967) pp. 37-46.

¹⁵Stenton, pp. 117-28.

¹⁶See Bede, Ecclesiastical History of England I, 23-25, trans. and ed. J.A. Giles (London, 1849), 34-38. Augustine and his companions came before King Ethelbert of Kent bearing a silver cross and a painted image of Christ. It is also recorded (Giles, p. 38) that Augustine brought from Rome the beginnings of the libraries of the English church: a Bible, Psalter, book of the Gospels, Martyrology, some apocryphal lives of the Apostles, and expositions of certain Epistles and Gospels.

¹⁷Bede, Ecclesiastical History, pp. 171-73. Theodore and his assistant Hadrian, an African abbot skilled in Greek and Latin, arrived in Britain in 669 A.D. Both were well-versed in sacred and secular literature, and immediately began to share their knowledge; when Bede wrote in approximately 731, some of their scholar-pupils still lived, as fluent in Greek and Latin as in their native tongue (Giles, p. 173). It is quite probable, according to Donald Lemen Clark, that Theodore brought with him to England not only the elementary rhetorical exercises of Priscian, but also the less widely disseminated Greek version by Hermogenes of Tarsus as well. See "Rhetoric and the Literature of the English Middle Ages," QJS, XLV (1959), 24.

¹⁸Peter Hunter Blair, An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 311-14.

¹⁹Wilhelm Levison, England and the Continent in the Eighth Century (Oxford, 1946), pp. 33, 38. Cf. Stenton, pp. 184-85.

²⁰James Westfall Thompson, The Medieval Library (New York, 1965), p. 109.

²¹J.D. Ogilvy, Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin, 670-804 (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), pp. 91-92.

²²Wilbur Samuel Howell, ed. and trans. The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne (Princeton, N.J., 1941), pp. 22-23.

²³Schlauch, English Medieval Literature, p. 57.

²⁴Curtius, p. 42 ff. The degree to which Quintilian himself influenced medieval writers is questionable. The ninth century witnessed a revival of interest in him (cf. Paul Lehmann, "Die Institutio oratoria des Quintilianus im Mittelalter," Philologus, LXXXIX [1934], 354-60), but many of the manuscripts were incomplete, as the search of Lupus of Ferrieres for a complete text indicates: see Priscilla S. Boskoff, "Quintilian in the Late Middle Ages," Speculum, XXVII (1952), 71. The truly learned were certainly familiar with the Institutes: John of Salisbury quotes extensively from them in the twelfth century in his Metalogicon, trans. Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley, 1962), pp. xxiii-xxiv. Whatever the possibilities of direct contact, in any case, the indirect influence of Quintilian through the rhetorics of Isidore, Cassiodorus, and others cannot be ignored.

²⁵Curtius, pp. 66, 70.

²⁶Ibid., p. 442.

²⁷As scholars are beginning to discover in increasing numbers: cf. J.E. Cross, Latin Themes in Old English Poetry (Lund, 1962); C.V. Smithers, "The Meaning of The Seafarer and The Wanderer," MAE, XXVI (1957), 137-53; XXVIII (1959), 1-22 and 99-106; J.J. Campbell, "Learned Rhetoric in Old English Poetry," MP, LXIII (1966), 189-201, and "Knowledge of Rhetorical Figures in Anglo-Saxon England," JEGP, LXVI (1967), 1-20; B.K. Martin, "Aspects of Winter in Latin and Old English Poetry," JEGP, LXVIII (1969), 375-90.

²⁸Trans. John J. Gavigan, The Writings of St. Augustine, IV (New York, 1965), 169.

²⁹Erich Auerbach, Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York, 1965), pp. 27-66.

³⁰Writings of St. Augustine, IV, 148-49.

³¹Curtius, p. 41.

³²Ibid., p. 47.

³³Ibid., pp. 446-57.

³⁴Thompson, p. 125.

³⁵Stenton, pp. 266-73.

³⁶Thompson, p. 270.

³⁷Ibid., p. 271.

³⁸McGarry, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

³⁹Charles H. Haskins, "A List of Text-Books from the Close of the Twelfth Century," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, XX (1909), 75-94.

⁴⁰Austin Lane Poole, Medieval England, II (Oxford, 1958), 518-23.

⁴¹Blair, p. 311.

⁴²Charles H. Haskins, The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 99 ff.

⁴³The distinction is discussed by Anna Balakian, "L'originel et l'original: nuance linguistique, distance poetique," in Proceedings of the IVth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association (The Hague, 1966), II, 1265-69.

⁴⁴Auerbach, pp. 275-76.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 284.

II. THE DREAM OF THE ROOD AND LATIN CRUCIFIXION LITERATURE

One of the best examples of the continuity of Western culture is The Dream of the Rood, an eighth-century poem of Northumbrian origin.¹ Quite orthodox in theme and recognizably traditional in structure, diction, and rhetoric, The Dream of the Rood has nonetheless been singled out by critics as one of the most distinguished works of Old English literature. But to realize the art with which the unknown author turned highly conventional material into his unique poem, it is first necessary to reconstruct the conventions of literary treatment of the Crucifixion which had accumulated up to this time in patristic writings, Christian Latin poetry and hymnology, and legend, and then to examine the Rood poet's use of the conventions which were at his disposal.

That they would not have been unknown to him is clear from the brief preceding investigation of Old English cultural backgrounds. An especially relevant proof, which strongly militates against the conception of the insularity of English art, is its part in the cult of the veneration of the cross. Carved and painted monumental crosses seem to have originated in sixth-century Syria; whatever the method of transmission, Old English stone crosses soon arose in numbers unparalleled in the rest of Europe, and apparently at an earlier date.² From 633 A.D., when King Oswald of Northumbria erected a wooden cross at Heavenfield

in gratitude for a military victory,³ through all the succeeding manifestations of devotion to the cross in ritual, poetry and art, England was second to no country in its response. It is most appropriate, as an indication of the scope of this response, that portions of The Dream of the Rood should be found inscribed on the eighteen-foot high cross now preserved in the church of Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire.⁴

Still more important, as far as literature is concerned, is the availability of patristic writings in England at this time, which has already been demonstrated. For several reasons, the patristic homilies on the Crucifixion offer a logical starting point for any examination of the conventions behind The Dream of the Rood: not least because of the importance of the homilies in ecclesiastical training and their probable familiarity to the Rood poet; the widespread appeal of the Passion as a homiletic subject; and finally, as will be shown, the abundance of homiletic elements in the poem.

There are numerous homilies on the Crucifixion of Christ in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church from the second century on through the eighth. While the approach of each author is dictated by his own unique personality and the needs of his audience, certain themes and rhetorical devices tend to become conventional. The early Christian writers are most concerned not with describing the Passion, but with analyzing its significance

as one of the pivotal events of the Christian religion and ultimately of Christian history. Their treatment, however, is far from barren intellectualizing; it is basically concrete, in a prose style which is frequently quite sophisticated. The rhetorical training of many of the patristic authors is very evident: clearly, patristic homilies not only constitute a tradition in themselves, but convey a still earlier one to their readers, becoming, in fact, one of the few channels in which the traditions of deliberative and forensic oratory survived after the decline of the Roman Republic.⁵

In their homilies on the Crucifixion, the Christian authors are personally involved with their subject, and keenly aware that it is a mystery; although they draw endlessly on its meaning, they never pretend to have exhausted it. They often express in long exclamatory passages their wonder at the inherent paradoxes. There is first the strange injustice dealt to one who is all-powerful and all-good:

They suspended Him on the tree, who stretched out the earth; they transfixed Him with nails who laid firm the foundations of the world; they circumscribed Him who circumscribed the heavens; they bound Him who absolved sinners; they gave Him vinegar to drink who hath made them to drink of righteousness; they fed Him with gall who hath offered to them the Bread of Life; they caused corruption to come upon His hands and feet who healed their hands and feet; they violently closed His eyes who restored sight to them; they gave Him over to the tomb, who raised their dead to life both in the time before His Passion and also whilst he was hanging on the tree.⁶

There is also, as the last part of the passage indicates, the strange, beneficent result of the injustice; those who truly perceive will see divine love working toward the redemption of sinful humanity, and achieving it, paradoxically, by defeat: "O death, by which the dead come to life again! What clearer than this blood! What than this wound more healing!"⁷

The homilies in the Coptic dialect discovered in 1896 among the ruins of an ancient Coptic monastery in upper Egypt present a remarkable poetic sensitivity to these antinomies. One, delivered by Proklos on becoming Archbishop of Constantinople in 434 A.D., meditates in language which is sometimes mystical, on the unprecedented Crucifixion:

Never before was there one who was hung upon the tree to draw everyone to him, and to give life unto them. Never before did the tomb receive into it a dead body which had plundered death. Never before did the heavens become dark as night at mid-day, (as they did) through Him, in order that they might not see the tragedy which they dared to act in respect of God . . . Never before was the earth made beautiful by a sepulchre, but rather a bridal bed. He whom they buried therein did not suffer corruption; on the contrary, He Who went down into it became a bridegroom.⁸

Everything connected with the Crucifixion partakes of its apparently contradictory nature, and therefore of a two-fold interpretation inviting balanced oppositions. All the forms of ancient rhetoric--anaphora, isocola, antithesis--are most useful weapons for setting forth enormously difficult Christian paradoxes as though they were self-evident and not to be doubted.⁹ Christ in himself recon-

ciles mutually exclusive concepts. He is both human and divine. Although some theologians emphasize one of the two Christological natures, in reaction to heresies which had denied it, many meet squarely what they see as a two-fold reality. The only possible literary result is a paradox: "He was Man apparent, Who was God latent; He was suffering all these things as He was apparent, and the Same was disposing all these things as He was latent."¹⁰

In isolating the two poles of this remark by Augustine, we can locate two themes which run consistently through patristic homilies on the Passion: 1) that Christ really suffered; and 2) that he willed his sufferings. The first becomes literally a matter of legal proof, with the prose writers bringing to bear all possible arguments and questioning all available witnesses for support. The testimony of the Apostles as given in the four Gospels is considered the most valuable evidence, since to Christians it is divinely inspired by the Spirit of truth. But there are also natural reasons for believing the Gospel reports to be genuine--and especially, the honesty and humility of the Evangelists in describing the disgrace and their own cowardly part in it. Says Chrysostom: "They relate with all truthfulness the things that seem to be opprobrious, disguising nothing, nor being ashamed thereof, but rather accounting it very great glory, as indeed it was, that the Lord of the universe should endure to suffer such things for us."¹¹

Through the Gospel narrative, moreover, we know of other witnesses, both animate and inanimate; the writers call on these too, sometimes in directly legal terms. St. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem in the fourth century, warns with the urgency of a forensic orator:

Deny not the Crucified; for, if thou deny Him, thou hast many to arraign thee. Judas the traitor will arraign thee first; for he who betrayed Him, knew that He was condemned to death by the chief-priests and elders. The thirty pieces of silver bear witness; Gethsemane bears witness, where the betrayal happened; I speak not yet of the Mount of Olives, on which they were that night, praying. The moon in the night bears witness; the day bears witness, and the darkened sun; for it endured not to look on the crime of the conspirators. The fire remonstrates with thee, by which Peter stood and warmed himself . . .¹²

Here, in essence, is the classical literary device of prosopoeia, the attributing of human powers of speech and emotion to lifeless objects, on which a central part of The Dream of the Rood rests. Cyril comes even closer to the subject of the poem as he continues:

There will cry out upon thee, among the stars, the darkened Sun; among the things upon earth, the Wine mingled with myrrh; among reeds, the Reed; among herbs, the Hyssop; among the things of the sea, the Sponge; among trees, the Wood of the Cross.¹³

The use of personification in connection with the Crucifixion is not unique with Cyril, although he is one of the few who see the witness-bearing speech and deeds of inanimate nature both as an historical event occurring on the day of the Crucifixion, and as a continuing action which will address itself to the contemporary believer, as happens in The Dream of the Rood.

A similar figure appears in the Coptic homily of Proklos. He uses the form of a legal dialogue or diatribe, with the natural elements answering one who has refused to believe.¹⁴ If the Law, the Prophets, the Evangelists and Apostles cannot convince him, says Proklos, let us inquire of the elements. He calls four witnesses, the sun, heavens, earth, and temple, using the same pattern of rhetorical question four times in succession:

Let us enquire of the sun. Tell us, O Sun: For what reason didst thou withdraw to thyself thy rays when the Lord was crucified? Why was it? Was it because He whom they crucified was an ordinary man? If this be so, thou shouldst have done the same when they slew Abel, the righteous man.¹⁵

He asks the heavens why they clothed themselves in darkness, the earth why it quaked, the temple why it rent its veil in two. In each case the key sentence follows with the dull thud of the rhetorical repetition: was it because He was an ordinary man? If so, why did you not react in the same way to the murder of other "ordinary men"? At the end of his interrogation, all of the speechless creation answers:

Did we not proclaim our grief for the Creator,
Who was not a fellow-servant with us, Who had
been condemned to death? Nay, but we were
sorely moved, and we trembled with fear at
the dishonour.

Each one cries out in turn that the natural hierarchy has been upset, that the Crucified was not their equal, but one infinitely above them. He was God, says Heaven; "this I know of a certainty, for I am the Heaven which He bowed, and He came down."¹⁶ "It is my Lord," cries the Sun. The

Sea affirms it: "He . . . is not my fellow-servant. The footsteps of my fellow-servant (Peter) did indeed press upon my back, but the feet of my Lord made pure (or, sanctified) my nature." As will be observed again and again, here in the references to the Psalms and the incident of the walking on the waves, the homilists are leaning on a tradition of the harmony and subjection of natural creation to the Creator which is basic to both Old and New Testaments.

Even Amente, the Coptic equivalent of hell, exclaims that Christ was no ordinary man, for "I know what suffering I received. He Whom I took in as captive I found to be one Who was stronger than everything else."¹⁷ This brief allusion to the Harrowing of Hell is expanded into the historical present in another Coptic discourse, that of Athanasius concerning the Soul and the Body.¹⁸ Together, the two homilies suggest the existence of numerous cognates to the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, with its vivid portrayal of the surprise and dismay of Death at losing not only Christ, but also most of its other captives.¹⁹

Also using the device of prosopopoeia, other Christian prose writers confine themselves to the historical scene of the Crucifixion, to the earthquakes and eclipses related in the Gospels,²⁰ but still suggest the intense horror of creation at the death of its God. Athanasius' Coptic homily contrasts this horror sharply with the blindness and indifference of the human beings at the scene who mocked,

laughed, and derided Christ because they did not understand the mystery.²¹

A variant version of the same homily exists in a Syriac manuscript which attributes it to Alexander, Athanasius' predecessor as Archbishop of Alexandria from 313 to 326 A.D.

The Syriac variant observes:

The elements trembled, every creature was shaken whilst they looked on this new mystery, and the terrible spectacle which was being enacted in the universe. . . . The lights of heaven were afraid, the sun fled away, the moon disappeared, the stars withdrew their shining, the day came to an end.

Nature felt itself to have taken part in the betrayal, the homily continues, and the earth

could not long hold the body of our Lord that in it was buried; but it exclaimed, O my Lord, pardon mine iniquities, save me from Thy wrath, absolve me from the curse, for I have received the blood of the righteous.

In its upheaval, the earth is superior to the people, who are unconscious of their crime, and are actually exulting in it.²²

The contrast between the reactions of the human and the inanimate onlookers is repeated in the homilies of Pope Gregory the Great, which were well-known in Anglo-Saxon England. (One has been recognized as a major source for the Old English Ascension, usually published as ll. 440-866 of the Christ of Cynewulf.)²³ In the first of his homilies on the Gospels, Gregory condenses the preceding traditions of witnessing nature:

For all the elements bore witness that their author had come. For (to speak of them in human terms) the heavens acknowledged Him to be God, because straightway they sent a star. The sea acknowledged it, because when He died it trembled. The sun acknowledged it, because it hid the rays of its light. Rocks and walls acknowledged it, because at the time of His death they were split. Hell acknowledged it, because it yielded up dead those whom it held. And nevertheless Him, in whom all insensible elements perceived the Lord, still the hearts of the unbelieving Jews least recognized to be God.²⁴

The pattern of earthquakes and heavenly upheavals is a common apocalyptic one in the Bible, used by many of the Old Testament prophets as a metaphor for the fall of kingdoms or dynasties,²⁵ and by Christ himself in describing the end of the world (Matt. 24:30). At that time, he tells his apostles, the sun is to be darkened, the moon will refuse her light, the stars fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven rock; also, the "sign of the Son of Man" will appear in the heavens at the same time.

In commenting on his mysterious words, the early Christian writers often interpreted the "sign of the Son of Man" as the Cross. To Cyril of Jerusalem, the identification is beyond doubt:

But what is the sign of his coming? Is it one that the opposing power might dare to counterfeit? Listen. "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven." Now the true and authentic sign of Christ is the cross. The sign that precedes the King is a cross of light, announcing him who aforesaid was crucified. So, when . . . they see it, who of old pierced him and conspired against him, let them . . . say, "This is he who was buffeted. This is he in whose face they spat. This is he whom they bound with chains. This is he whom they set at

naught upon the cross." "Where will we flee from the face of thine anger?" they will cry. But they will not be able to flee anywhere, for the angel-hosts will encompass them round. So the sign of the cross will be terror to our enemies, but joy to the friends who put their faith in him, preached him, or suffered for his name.²⁶

The cross thus shares in the testimony of creation to its God, and in its reproach to sinful mankind; the proclamation of the cross, however, seems to be simply its silent presence. That prosopopoeia is so freely used on the whole in patristic writing connected with the Crucifixion does not detract from the originality of the Rood poet. As is evident, the early Christian writers do not as a rule endow the cross with human feelings or capacities.²⁷ Moreover, they do not often think of the cross as a witness to Christ's divinity in the way that the sun or the earth testify to it. More commonly, the cross is the instrument of the enemy, a punishment of the utmost humiliation reserved for slaves and unworthy of a free man, let alone of the deity. "What shall we say," asks Lactantius, "about the indignity of this cross on which God was fastened and hung by worshipers of God?" The cross is an instrument meant for criminals, and in this instance an instrument being used by criminals. It is not part of nature, but separated from it, performing an unnatural act. To Lactantius, it shares the guilt: "What speech is there . . . rightly to deplore that cross which the world itself and all the elements of the world mourned?"²⁸ It remains for other writers to relate the

the means of torture to the rest of sensitive, obedient creation.

Thus Margaret Schlauch seems correct in singling out the use of prosopopoeia by the Rood poet as an innovation made with the originality of genius, and also in reminding the reader that Latin models for the device were near at hand and well-loved.²⁹ Her evidence, moreover (the Ovidian poem De Nuce, and the school exercises in prosopopoeia recommended by Hermogenes and Priscian), is more relevant than the few epigrams from the Greek Anthology hitherto cited in studies of The Dream of the Rood.

However, whether she has chosen the most direct areas of inspiration for the Old English poet is open to debate. A good reason for doubt lies in the conclusion of her analysis. Here Miss Schlauch notices another type of Latin discourse embodied in the poem--purgatio, or literary defense from a charge; parts of the speech of the cross, she suggests, sound like a purgatio using the technical plea of necessitudo, for the cross stresses its involuntary participation in the tragedy of Calvary.³⁰ Cassiodorus is cited; almost any author concerned with rhetoric from Cicero³¹ to Alcuin³² might have served for illustration. Miss Schlauch's consideration of the purgatio element in the poem is well-documented, although unconnected with her earlier remarks on prosopopoeia--necessarily so, since she treats the latter as an isolated school exercise.

Prosopopoeia was not always an isolated device, however;

it had only become so in the declining period of the second sophistic, during which the Progymnasmata of Hermogenes appeared. When with the fall of the Republic deliberative and forensic oratory became virtually defunct, rhetorical devices were taken out of their original context as oratorical tools and turned to the artificial milieu of contrived assignments in the schools.³³ And while the Rood poet could certainly have found source material in these assignments,³⁴ his juxtaposition of prosopopoeia with purgatio, an element of forensic or legal orations, strongly invites a search of earlier rhetorical treatises, and of the one area in which deliberative and forensic oratory survived in the medieval period--precisely the area of patristic homilies which have just been examined. The homilies on the Crucifixion are deliberative or exhortatory, in the sense that they attempt to persuade to action; frequently, as has been seen, they turn into a forensic or legal proceeding to determine the guilt for the crime of deicide. When in the course of their investigations, the inanimate objects at the scene on Calvary come to life and speak, dissociating themselves from any voluntary connection with the act, the parallel is almost complete. The patristic homilies, therefore, seem a far more persuasive explanation of the elements of prosopopoeia and purgatio in The Dream of the Rood than any Ovidian nut-trees, no matter how long the latter may discourse.³⁵

The second major theme of the Christian prose writers

--that Christ willed his suffering--makes the event even more mysterious, once these sufferings have been defined and the attitude of onlookers toward them established. It is a theme which the Fathers do not tire of repeating; it is sounded as early as Cyril, who says that Christ "came to His passion, not unwillingly, but willingly,"³⁶ and as late as Gregory the Great: "He wished not to be a king, yet of his own free will he came to the cross."³⁷

Christ's actions are cited in proof of the voluntary nature of his death: he ordered Judas to complete the betrayal quickly;³⁸ he did not flee, but allowed himself to be taken prisoner; at the moment of his death he cried out with a loud voice, so physically unusual a phenomenon that the Centurion "for this cause above all believed, because He died with power."³⁹ "By all means He taught them," St. John Chrysostom concludes, "that the matter was not of necessity, but of some secret dispensation."⁴⁰

For the homilists, the Crucifixion is a supreme exercise of free will, possible only to divine power, at the moment when that power seems most in abeyance. The Church Fathers see the freedom of the act as a key concept, and do everything in their power to dramatize it as such. Augustine phrases it in a rhetorical comparison marked by heavy symplece (initial and terminal repetition):

Who so sleeps when he will, as Jesus died when
He would? Who so lays aside his clothing when
he will, as He put off the flesh when He would?
Who so departs from a place when he will, as
He departed this life when He would?⁴¹

A 1958 article finds the Rood poet's picture of Christ as the young hero, strong and firm in spirit, striding to his death, an inappropriate remnant of Old English heroic poetry which contradicts the gospel story and does violence to the spirit of Christianity.⁴² But it is a picture which has been stylized by the Christian theological concept of victory in defeat. In reality, the Rood Poet follows a long tradition of artists and theologians who have projected the effects of Christ's triumph back into the scene of their cause, justifying themselves by his complete foreknowledge of the Redemption. Cyril characterizes his attitude almost as one of gaiety:

He came therefore of His own set purpose to His passion, rejoicing in His noble deed, smiling at the crown, cheered by the salvation of men; not ashamed of the Cross, for it saved the world.⁴³

Athanasius also marks his eagerness:

the Saviour made haste to work out the salvation of His creation on the Cross, according to the wish and commandment of His Father. Thou wilt not find that He put out of the way, or was careless about that for which He had come, or that He was afraid of death; but He made manifest His readiness for the Cross like a valiant martyr, and like God Who is without fear.⁴⁴

The concept of victory in defeat is, in addition, the basis of numerous comparisons of the Saviour to a military hero, a warrior who has conquered in battle. In the course of time, moreover, the military metaphor is extended to the cross. The martial overtones of Crucifixion imagery were no doubt greatly stimulated by accounts of the Emperor Constantine's vision of the cross before the battle of the

the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D. The story is reported by the fourth-century historian Eusebius, and retold in Lactantius, Rufinus, and Sozomen.⁴⁵

In his Life of Constantine, Eusebius relates how the beleaguered Emperor prayed for help before the battle and then,

about midday, when the sun was beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, "Conquer by this." At this sight, he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also . . .

The pagan leader pondered its meaning that night, until in his sleep Christ appeared with the same sign, commanding him to make a standard in its likeness as a safeguard against all enemies. The cross in the vision was apparently quite elaborate, for the next day Constantine ordered his workers to represent it in gold and precious stones. Eusebius carefully describes the result:

A long spear, overlaid with gold, formed the figure of the cross, by means of a piece laid transversely over it. On the top of the whole was fixed a crown, formed by the intertexture of gold and precious stones. . . . From the transverse piece which crossed the spear was suspended a kind of streamer of purple cloth, covered with a profuse embroidery of most brilliant precious stones; and which, being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder. . . . The emperor constantly made use of this salutary sign as a safeguard against every adverse and hostile power, and commanded that others similar to it should be carried at the head of all his armies.⁴⁶

Even before this vision, however, the Saviour is en-

throned as a military conqueror, while the cross becomes his trophy or symbol of victory. It is a logical extension of the metaphor: originally the trophaeum was the trunk of a tree, hung with arms, shields, helmets, or other spoils which had been taken from the enemy. Later it took the form of a monument of stone or metal, erected on the battlefield or in the victor's native city.⁴⁷ The aptness of its application to the cross was quickly realized: in the place where death had reigned, Christ set up his trophy; "He went forth," Chrysostom notes "bearing His cross as a trophy in opposition to the tyranny of death, and, as is customary with conquerors, He also carried on His shoulders the symbol of His victory."⁴⁸ To Methodius, the cross is "the confirmation of the victory, . . . the trophy against material spirits." Further, he adds, seeing that the figure of the cross can dissipate every evil, the kings have made vexillae.⁴⁹ The vexillum was the Roman cavalry standard, which since the victory of Constantine at the Milvian Bridge, was surmounted by a cross instead of by the Roman eagle. Yet even before the impetus of the change, Methodius and other early apologists delighted in pointing out to their pagan audience that the battle standard took the natural shape of the hated cross.

In fact, the shape of the cross was a fertile source of both cosmological speculation and moral application in the writings of the Fathers, as Eleanor Greenhill has observed.⁵⁰ It was often seen as signifying the universality

of the Redemption, as a world-embracing, cosmic symbol in itself, not to mention its innumerable analogues in everyday life, from ploughs and ship masts to the form of the human body.

The cruciform shape was a happy and readily assimilable concept for those Fathers who lived and wrote in the milieu of early Greek thought. Being familiar with ancient Greek philosophy, they were able to draw upon the pre-Christian background of Platonic and Pythagorean cosmological concepts, and specifically on the Chi symbol envisioned in the Timaeus as upholding the universe.⁵¹ On becoming Christians, they did not cease to meditate on the structure of the universe, and on the relation of the Godhead to that structure. Men like St. Justin Martyr and St. Irenaeus filled the Platonic forms with Christian meaning.

Mrs. Greenhill singles out several dominant characteristics of early Greek patristic thought, including the habit of identifying the dimensions of the cross with the dimensions of the cosmos, and further, identifying the Logos or Christ with the cross.⁵² Thus St. Irenaeus says, as early as the second century:

because He is Himself the Word of God Almighty, who in His invisible form pervades us universally in the whole world, and encompasses both its length and breadth and height and depth--for by God's word everything is disposed and administered --the son of God was also crucified in these, imprinted in the form of a cross on the universe; . . . it is He who makes bright the height, that is, what is in heaven, and holds the deep, which is in the bowels of the earth, and stretches forth

and extends the length from East to West, navigating also the Northern parts and the breadth of all the South, and calling in all the dispersed from all sides to the knowledge of the Father.⁵³

The idea of Christ as the Logos or Word, and the cross as the pervasive Chi, had a peculiar attraction for the Greek mode of thought. When transferred into Latin culture, it became a more concrete symbol, while the dominant idea of universality was maintained, as in Lactantius. The figure of the crucified Christ gives the cross its unifying power in the Divine Institutes, and the unity is immediately translated as a unity of diverse peoples, not simply of geographical points on the compass:

He extended His arms in the Passion and embraced the world, so as to show them that from the rising to the setting of the sun a great people gathered from every tribe and tongue would come, and would take up that greatest symbol of all and bear it high on their foreheads.⁵⁴

Where Irenaeus had written against a backdrop of philosophical speculation, Lactantius writes out of the political environment of the Roman Empire; his view of unity is built on the transcendence of social and national barriers. But in both writers, the cross is at the center, holding the universe together.

It is important to note that Greek philosophy was not the only basis of cosmological tradition concerning the cross. Another separate stream of thought made its contribution, and eventually mixed with the Greek speculation: the Semitic and Biblical idea of the cosmological,

fruit-bearing tree.⁵⁵ Hippolytus of Rome joined the two concepts in an Easter homily at the beginning of the third century:

This tree, wide as the heavens itself, has grown up into heaven from the earth. It is an immortal growth and towers twixt heaven and earth. It is the fulcrum of all things and the place where they are at rest. It is the foundation of the round world, the centre of the cosmos. . . . It touches the highest summits of heaven and makes the earth firm beneath its foot, and it grasps the middle regions between them with its immeasurable arms.⁵⁶

A cosmic sign, an earth-spanning tree--the cross literally dominates the universe. In the same way, it dominates the scene in the vision of the Rood poet; the dreamer describes it as "on lyft laedan," springing high aloft, reaching "aet foldan sceatum," the corners of the earth (ll. 5-8), "þrymfaest nu / hlifiȝe under heofenum," towering glorious under the heavens (ll. 84-85).

St. Augustine was also aware of the tradition, and amplified it in several places in his homilies by the application of the Scriptural text which St. Paul had related to the charity of Christ in his Epistle to the Ephesians: "what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth" (Ephesians 3:18-19). Augustine interprets the text allegorically, as referring to the dimensions of the cross and then signifying Christian virtues--a pre-eminently moral interpretation, which indicates to Mrs. Greenhill his dissatisfaction with the speculative nature of the Greek approach.⁵⁷

In general, Augustine's homilies link latitudo with good works, longitudo with perseverance or longanimity, altitudo with hope of a heavenly reward, and profundo variously with the inscrutable judgments of God or with his grace. A typical passage occurs in his homily on the Crucifixion as related in the Gospel of St. John. Though the cross was fashioned by the enemies of Christ, he says, we can understand its meaning through the words of St. Paul:

It is broad, namely, in the cross beam, on which the hands of the suspended are stretched forth, and signifies good works in the breadth of charity; it is long, from the cross beam to the ground, where the back and feet are fixed, and signifies perseverance in length of time even unto the end; it is high in the top part, which rises upward from the cross beam, and signifies the supernal end to which all works are referred; because all that in breadth and length are well and perseveringly done, are to be done with a regard to the height of the Divine rewards: it is deep in that part which is fixed in the earth; for there it is hidden and cannot be seen, howbeit all of it that is apparent and eminent arises thence, just as our good things do one and all proceed from the depth of the grace of God, which cannot be comprehended and judged.⁵⁸

This passage is part of the moral exhortation which concludes Augustine's homily, and should be understood in this context, as a device for drawing together the moral implications which he wished to impress upon his listeners. In most of his work, Augustine usually steers a middle course between literal and allegorical exposition, according to literal facts a dignity in keeping with a philosophy of history based on the Incarnation.⁵⁹ At the same time, the homiletic purpose presumes that literal facts are not simply to be related

for their own sake, and allegorical schemata may well be used, as happens here, to organize the lessons that are to be learned.

One more theme plays an important role in the writings of early Christianity on the Crucifixion: the relation of the events on Calvary to the events of the Old Testament, which are seen as "types" or prefigurings. Christ is the second Adam, the new head of the human race who has come to redeem it by his obedience from the disastrous effects of Adam's rebellion. The stories of Eden and Calvary balance one another. "In Paradise was the Fall, and in a garden was our salvation. From the tree came sin, and until the tree sin lasted,"⁶⁰ St. Cyril works out the typology, conservatively adumbrating a concept which was at the same time being unrestrainedly transformed by the popular imagination in the legends of the Holy Rood tree.⁶¹

Biblical typology also found foreshadowing of the cross in the redemptive wood of the Old Testament, for example, in the wood carried by Isaac for Abraham's sacrifice, in Noah's ark, the brazen serpent held up by Moses on a wooden pole, and the rod of Aaron. Cyril summarizes: "Throughout, life comes by means of wood."⁶²

The frequency with which these relationships are made has tempted some critics to call allegory the main literary method of patristic writing. In reality, typology has little to do with Greek allegorizing, but rather stems from a traditional Hebraic concern for concrete reality and his-

torical event--it is essentially the establishing of a parallel between two concrete things, without denying the actuality of either one.⁶³ Allegory, on the other hand, employs visibilia only to express an immaterial fact,⁶⁴ and should not be confused with typology per se.

A certain limited ground for comparison between them does exist, in the fact that as typological interpretations became more complicated, the reader was forced to turn his attention away from the concrete occurrence, toward its meaning. Erich Auerbach illustrates this appropriately in Mimesis with a common patristic figure: the birth of Eve, mankind's primordial mother, from the side of the sleeping Adam, paralleled with the birth of the Church, mankind's spiritual mother, from the side of the "sleeping" Christ on the cross, when the sacramental symbols of blood and water flowed from his pierced body. Two visually dramatic occurrences are involved, Auerbach notes, but when they are thus interrelated, the concrete event pales before the power of the figural meaning. Its existence is never as tenuous as in true allegory, however.⁶⁵

If by "allegorizing" the critics refer to the frequency with which moral conclusions are drawn in patristic homilies, they are on different ground. Allegorical homilies were written, notably by those under the influence of Alexandrian theology; Greek allegory was a very useful tool to the homilist, because it allowed him to draw moral lessons no

matter what the literal meaning, simply by dismissing it in favor of another, "real" meaning. The great Western Fathers, nevertheless, disdained to use this tool, or used it with considerable modification.⁶⁶ With the subject of the Crucifixion in particular, both the Latin and the Greek homilists show an ingrained tendency to draw their moral lessons directly from the literal text.

Structurally, as would be expected, the homilies usually shift toward the close from descriptive narrative to a moral application, whether allegorical or direct.⁶⁷ Specifically, the homilies concerned with the Crucifixion turn from the sufferings of Christ to the sufferings of the Christian soul, and from the nobility of Christ's response to a plea for a similar response on the part of the listener. They drop the language of metaphor for that of direct argument, and paradox for logic; they cease to express wonder at the paradoxical situation, accept it, and use it as the first term in a syllogism. In rhetorical terms, the movement is that from narratio (statement of facts) and inartificial probatio (the evidence of witnesses, testimony of the Scriptures, common report), to artificial probatio (arguments devised by reason).⁶⁸ The Christian, they argue, cannot stand as a detached observer at the event, since his sins are the reason that it happened. "The Sinless, for thee was crucified; and wilt not thou be crucified for Him who was crucified for thee?" asks

St. Cyril.⁶⁹

The cross of the individual soul may be any difficulty, physical, spiritual, social, or psychological; they can all be identified in the original cross, from whence will come the strength to bear them. St. John Chrysostom selects the provocation to anger in particular:

He that hath exercised self-control . . . hath erected a glorious trophy over anger both in himself and in his neighbor, through his honorable defeat.⁷⁰

The thought of Christ's patience under the original cross will be the source of the necessary moral strength, Chrysostom assures his listeners:

Shouldst thou perceive thy heart swelling, seal thy breast setting upon it the cross. Call to mind some one of the things that then took place, and thou wilt cast out as dust all rage by the recollection of the things that were done.⁷¹

"Cross" is often used ambiguously in the homilies, as it is here by Chrysostom, both for an external physical sign and for the whole complex of events on Calvary, existing now in the mind and heart--the "breast"--of the believer.

If the speech of the cross to the dreamer in The Dream of the Rood may be considered as a homily--and it definitely follows the broad structural outlines in its shift from descriptive narrative to moral explication--its manner of expression also concurs with the tradition. For "cross" is also used in an ambiguous manner at the end of the Rood's homily, as a decisive factor on the day of judgment:

No need then for anyone to be afraid
Who formerly in his breast bore the best of signs.⁷²

Although in breostum can be translated "on his breast," and so mean an actual cross, the metaphorical "in his breast" is more likely, according to the Dickins and Ross edition.⁷³ The metaphorical reading has even more support than the other Old English poems which they quote and the homilies thus far examined in this paper.⁷⁴ Evidence may also be found in the long exegetical tradition surrounding the Canticle of Canticles, and specifically in patristic interpretation of Canticles 1:12--"Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur" ("A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie betwixt my breasts"). The "bundle of myrrh," in the light of its later mention in the New Testament in connection with the Crucifixion, was often taken as a symbol of the crucified body, or of the bitter but salutary Passion as a whole; that it should lie forever between the breasts of the beloved became a recommendation that the Church, the bride of the Canticles, should keep it in her heart--that is, should meditate unremittingly on the Passion.⁷⁵

Auerbach uses the theme as it appears in St. Bernard, in his analysis of Cistercian mysticism, which perceived a new closeness between the two meanings of the word "passion," as both "suffering" and "creative, ecstatic love." But the connection had been made much earlier, for example, in Bede's commentary on the Canticles, In Cantica Canticorum allegorica expositio 2:1.4.⁷⁶

Whichever meaning is dominant in the Old English poem, the cross must be ratified by the actions of the person's life, or else it will be a sign empty of meaning and power, as is suggested by the continuation of the last sentence of the Rood:

And any soul who thinks to dwell with the Ruler
Shall attain the kingdom from the paths of life
through the cross.⁷⁷

In addition to advising patience, the Fathers also draw the moral lesson of fortitude in their homiletic conclusions on the Passion. Natural fear may understandably be felt in anticipation of suffering, but it can be conquered--a good parallel to the emotional crisis of the Rood itself. Chrysostom points to Christ's own fear in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prayed that the chalice of his Passion might be taken from him, and then to his calmness and courage once the suffering had actually begun:

He was giving us instruction in both cases: even if we are greatly perturbed in anticipation of keen sufferings, not on that account to refuse to accept suffering, but when we actually enter upon our trial, then everything will be thought very easy and not hard to bear. Let us not, then, tremble at the thought of death. . . . since we know these truths, we must carefully keep to the middle course: neither going to meet death by our own hand, even if we are enduring trials without limit, nor, on the other hand, drawing back and shrinking away when drawn to sufferings willed by God, but courageously making ready for the fray, setting greater store by the life to come than by the present one.⁷⁸

The verbal echoes here are suggestive of the Rood's homily, and especially of lines 39 and 40: "onȝyrede hine þa

geon} Haeleð . . . / stran} ond stiðmod," "He stripped Himself, the young Hero . . . strong and stouthearted." The ideas are even more so, running counter as they do to a strong popular tradition of Christ as passive victim, being stripped of his garments by the enemy soldiers.

"Setting greater store by the life to come" sums up perfectly the attitude of the dreamer at the end of the Old English poem, as well as the message which the Rood brings to him, a message which the Rood has learned by its own experience. Chrysostom's distinction of motive is likewise important: death or suffering are not to be sought for their own sakes, as anything good in themselves; it is when dragged to them--as the Rood was dragged--that the Christian is to prepare boldly to embrace them, for the sake of what is pleasing to God--or, as the Rood says, "for Dryhtnes naman," for the sake of the name of the Lord (l. 113).

The Dream of the Rood is, then, a highly orthodox Christian poem, which admits of many of the traditional homiletic themes, homiletic structure, diction, and rhetoric. Yet it does so in an original and creative way, selecting, for example, out of the many available conceptions of the mourning of nature a single, hitherto neglected witness, the cross itself, and then using the cross's point of view as a main principle of organization in the poem. The rest of creation, so articulate in the homilies, is given but two alliterative half-lines for its

testimony, while the enemies responsible for the Crucifixion are but vague shadows in the background. The real battleground is in the "soul" of the Rood, and then in the soul of the dreamer. Although the exploiting of the crisis within the Rood is unique--the essence, indeed, of the poem's genius⁷⁹--it is not the only principle of organization: there is also the unification achieved by the dreamer. Herein lies the second major distinction of the poem from the homilies. The homilists can only present their appeals; the poem shows an actual homily at work in the soul of a listener, shows a person being transformed by an exhortation and meditation on a spiritual symbol--it is, in other words, the dramatization of a spiritual experience.

That a poem should represent a dramatic advance over a homily may seem as only something to be expected; however, this condition did not always exist. The poetry of early Christianity begins at a later date than its prose, and is strongly influenced by the ideas and attitudes already elaborated by the prose writers. The delay, and the derivative nature of the poetry which finally emerged, are explained partly by the need for a more precise formulation of doctrinal concepts--a task demanding enough in prose without the additional discipline of poetic form--and by the juncture with the decaying tradition of classical poetry, under the stigma of its pagan origin. When Christian poets at last mustered the courage to launch out into new waters, most of them used well-worn vessels. Their only possible

literary influence was that of the classical poets; their only literary training was in the public schools of rhetoric.⁸⁰ The majority of them kept the antique genres and filled them with Christian matter, producing spiritual eclogues and Christian epics.⁸¹

The figure of the cosmic cross, we have seen, sustained lengthy allegorical interpretations in the homilies.⁸² In Christian Latin poetry the idea reappeared. The fourth-century Latin poem De Pascha or De Cruce, of disputed authorship, joins the cosmic or universal cross to the Biblical Tree of Life, to form an allegorical world-tree. Although its wood was cut from a barren tree, its fruit has sprung up in another tree, whose branches cover the whole world; under it all nations find life and food.⁸³ The poem was proposed as an actual source for The Dream of the Rood by Adolf Ebert in the nineteenth century, although as Margaret Schlauch points out, it differs widely in technique, being an allegorical exposition with only a small amount of narrative, and that in the third person.⁸⁴

De Pascha is definitely indebted to the homilies for the cosmological dimensions of its tree.⁸⁵ The allegorical correspondence of the fortunes of the tree with the mysteries of the Redemption--the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension--gives a very simple outline to the poem: the wood (the cross) is cut from a tree, planted, and bears a fruit (Christ), which then ripens and falls to the ground (the Burial). It is finally resurrected in the form of a world-

embracing tree (the Church). At the base of this tree is a fountain (Baptism); around it come innumerable throngs of every class and condition of people:

Around this assembled innumerable tribes and peoples,
So greatly varied in birth, sex, age, honor,
Virgins and married alike, and widows and matrons,
Infants and children, men young and old.⁸⁶

The idea of the correspondence of the tree to Christ is roughly parallel to the Rood poem, but it is the second tree, not the cross, which is equivalent to Christ in the allegory. The cross actually bears Christ, who then grows from a fruit into another tree. Nowhere is the cross humanized; Christ is dehumanized. Completely lacking is the Rood poet's finely-drawn comparison, based on the sequence of suffering-death-resurrection-glorification, between Christ, the Rood, and (potentially) the dreamer, in whose case the sequence is only half-way complete, but can be anticipated through faith. De Pascha hardly deserves the name "source." It is a first, comparatively clumsy groping toward the art of the Old English poem.

Allegorical playing on the figure or shape of the cross obviously led further and further away from the actual scene and details of the Crucifixion as related in the Gospels. However, as we have seen in the writings of the Church Fathers, it was by no means the only way of approaching the subject. If there was a definite stream of allegorical exegesis, there was also a typological or symbolical one, flowing from the instinctive Hebraic readiness to perceive

continuity between concrete realities.⁸⁷ It was a continuity sorely needed by early Christian poetry; no matter how dependent they were upon classical forms, the Christian Latin poets found it awkward to employ the classical mythology of the pagans.⁸⁸ When Christian poetry learned how to make use of the mythology and symbols of Scripture, it made a significant advance.

But it did not do this quickly. Only one Christian Latin poet stands out with true originality in the period from the third to the sixth centuries: Prudentius, the fourth-century Spanish administrator and man of letters. Prudentius is steeped in the work of the classical poets, like all his contemporaries, and has no qualms about his love for them; he regards pagan literature and art as part of the inheritance into which Christian Rome enters.⁸⁹ But he is not enslaved by classical conventions.⁹⁰ He has the poise of a true artist, able to admit, use and master diverse influences.

His Cathemerinon or Daily Round amply illustrates his mastery by its free blend of traditional classical and Judaeo-Christian elements in an entirely new verse form--what has been called the literary hymn, or Christian ode.⁹¹ Although the "hymns" of Prudentius owe much to St. Ambrose, founder of Latin hymnody,⁹² they are much too long ever to have been intended for singing. They are unquestionably of a literary nature, containing much word-play, alliteration,

assonance, and rhyme. They are written not in iambic pentameter, as are most of the early hymns, but in trochaic tetrameter. Finally, their author exhibits an unusual concern for language. He is an innovator in the matter of vocabulary, generously coining new words as they are needed. Nouns ending in -amen, adjectives ending in -alis and -ilis, and diminutives of all kinds are frequent.⁹³

The designation of the sections of the Cathemerinon as Christian odes is perhaps the most satisfactory, insofar as it underlines the substitution of Christian myth for pagan subject matter and symbol, one of Prudentius' main contributions to the poetry of his time. Mythology and symbolism go hand in hand in the Cathemerinon, even as they do in Scripture.⁹⁴

The freshness of the approach can be seen not only by comparison with contemporary literature, but with Prudentius' other work as well. He also wrote two long, conventional didactic poems, the Apotheosis and Hamartigenia, which do not rely at all upon symbolic presentation, but lean heavily on the doctrinal exposition of the Fathers, aiming at a simple statement in verse of Christian truth. His passage on the Crucifixion in the Apotheosis makes his indebtedness clear. It is primarily concerned with distinguishing between the divine and human natures of the suffering Christ:

This [the divinity] therefore no scourges cut nor
spitting defiles, nor hand hurts with buffeting,
nor nail-pierced wounds fasten upon a cross. It
was the flesh of man that felt these things. . . .
He it is that fears the shape of death and trem-
bles at the pain.⁹⁵

There is polish in this verse, but little originality, and no symbolism.

On the other hand, Prudentius' handling of the Crucifixion in the "Hymnus omnis Horae" or "Hymn for Every Hour" (Cathemerinon IX) ⁹⁶ is a suggestive example of Crucifixion poetry in the symbolic vein. It is indebted to the homilies not so much for their doctrinal exposition, although this is orthodox, as for their structure. Still more, it benefits from his effort to manipulate more imaginatively those elements which were already basically concrete in the prose commentaries, for example, the interplay of light and darkness as related to the emotions of the natural elements:

while God with golden light was illumining the vaults of death, giving bright day to the astounded night, the sky was darkened and the stars dimmed in sadness; the sun fled, clad in the gloom of mourning, from the fiery heavens, and in sorrow hid himself away.⁹⁷

The earth then gives a human gesture in its fright: "fertur horruisse mundus noctis aeternae chaos," "'Tis said the world shuddered in fear of the darkness of eternal night" (l. 81). The earthquake and eclipse understood in terms of human emotion come from Scripture through patristic writing, although they are also to be found in classical tragedy; "noctis aeternae chaos" is taken directly from Seneca's Hercules Furens.⁹⁸ Very few of the homilies that have thus far been examined make the connection between the disappearance of light on earth and the sudden illumining of the dark places of the other world.⁹⁹ None of them

borrow with such ease at the same time from classical literature.

Scriptural myth, as has been said, plays a major role in the Cathemerinon. While there is no explicit reference to the tree in the Garden of Eden, Prudentius avails himself of the connotations of the story by using the image of the serpent. The result is a vivid passage: the serpent, watching the scene on Calvary, is stricken with distress, and "colla fractus sibila," "his hissing throat shattered" (l. 90). There is no elaborated typological or doctrinal analysis of the Fall; it is contained in one direct question, charged even on a stylistic level with contempt. What good has the temptation of Adam gained him after all, Prudentius demands:

quod tibi, profane serpens, profuit rebus novis
 plasma primum perculisse versipelli hortamine?
 (ll. 91-92)

What has it booted thee, thou wicked serpent, when
 the world was new, to have brought the first-created
 man to ruin with thy crafty incitement?

His feelings toward the serpent become clear by the very language in which they are expressed, with its strongly sibilant s's.

The new note of emotional spontaneity betrays the non-classical direction which Christian poetry was beginning to take. Prudentius addresses himself to song: "Solve vocem, mens sonora, solve linguam mobilem," (l. 82), uses direct questions and exclamations, and the same martial metaphors as the prose writers to express the sense of relief and

and triumph following a victorious battle. In two lines he quickly sketches in the progressive levels of the homilies' treatment of the cross: the cross as object (first a trophy or wooden structure on the battlefield, and then a glorified "crucem triumphalem"), and the cross as moral symbol, its meaning evolving in the everyday life of the Christian who is marked with its sign on the forehead in the baptismal ceremony:

Tell of the victory of the passion, tell of the
triumphal cross, sing of the glittering ensign
marked upon our brows.¹⁰⁰

After considering the historical events of the Crucifixion, Prudentius follows the traditional pattern of the Christian creed and homilies, of Christ's descent into hell, his resurrection, his victorious ascension with the redeemed souls into heaven, and the affirmation that he will return on the last day as "judge of the dead and king of the living," "macte iudex mortuorum, macte rex viventium" (l. 106). Like the homilies too, the hymn ends with a prayer of praise, a rich crescendo from the whole of creation which seems to echo Psalm 148:

Thee let old men and young, Thee the choir of
little children, the company of mothers and
maidens and artless girls praise with loud,
harmonious voice in pure strains together.
Let the gliding waters of the rivers, the
shores of the seas, rain, heat, snow, frost,
woodland and wind, night and day unite to ex-
tol Thee for ever and ever.¹⁰¹

As for the rest of early Christian Latin poetry, there is an interesting early attempt to use the Crucifixion story

among the writings attributed to Lactantius. De passione Domini, however, can be dated as almost certainly later than Lactantius, by reason of its passing reference to the ceremony of the veneration of the cross.¹⁰² This could still place it at a fairly early date, for the ceremony existed as early as 385 A.D., when the Spanish pilgrim Etheria remarked in her journal on the throngs crowded into the Holy Cross Basilica in Jerusalem to participate in the celebration.¹⁰³

Whatever its date, the poem bears comparison with The Dream of the Rood in that it projects the events of the Passion through a first-person monologue by an objet d'art. It is unique among the non-epigrammatic Latin poetry in the use of the first-person narrator. Christ speaks it as he hangs on the cross--but the cross, as in The Dream of the Rood, is no longer on Calvary. It has been removed, not to a dream vision but to a shrine in the temple, where the figure of the Saviour addresses those who pass by:

Whoever you are who come here and advance upon
the threshold of the inner temple, stop but a
little, and look upon Me, an innocent sufferer
for your offense. Lay Me up in your mind; keep
Me in your heart.¹⁰⁴

This is not prosopopoeia, as in the Rood poem, but ethopoeia, fictional dramatic speech by a human being. It is a frequent and characteristic form of the Middle English Crucifixion lyric, closely related to the "goût de la pathétique" of Passion iconography in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Appealing as both an artistic and a literary taste, it played upon the emotions by stressing the physical sufferings of Christ in a naturalistic way.¹⁰⁵ Although it flourished in the later centuries, its directions were clearly anticipated in this poem; Christ asks his listeners directly to arouse their pity and grief as he describes his own sufferings in unrestrained and copious detail.

If they wish to appreciate his pain more fully and to go through all his groans and griefs with him, he tells them, they must picture in their minds what he will narrate. Nor does he leave much to their imagination. The passage abounds in repetitious adjectives: the deadly torments of a bloody death on the terrible cross, the malice of his enemies, his pain and weariness, his hair "matted with blood," his "innumerable pains" of body and soul. There is little similarity between this passive, bruised Christ and the bold young hero of the Rood poem. There is, however, some ground for comparison between this Christ and the Rood itself. The fact that they are both first person speakers is only one similarity. In addition, they are both, at the time of the poem, objects of religious art seeking to increase the beholder's appreciation of a truth of faith; they both accomplish it by means of a short homily which begins with a narrative report of the early part of their lives and continues through the events of the Crucifixion to a moral application.

The conclusions of both poems are remarkably similar and conventional in content. The Latin poem asks the reader to bend in adoration of the venerable wood of the cross, and "bear Me and My counsels always in a devoted heart." The Old English Rood adds that no one who does this, who bears in his breast the best of beacons, need be afraid of judgment. Christ will then ask:

. . . where is the man
 Who for the Lord's name would suffer bitter death,
 Even as he once did on this cross.¹⁰⁶

but it will be too late; the present life is the time for choice, which the Christ of the Latin poem also urges on the listener: the memorials of the Passion, "whenever you shall be pleased to dwell upon them (if by any chance the faith that is genuine, if the piety and grace worthy of My labors should arise in your mind), will be stimuli of real virtue . . . "107

The Latin and the Old English poems both continue along the same line of thought, clearly reminiscent of the patristic homilies, with one important structural difference: in the Latin, the speaking Saviour simply goes on with his homily; in the Old English, the Rood stops and the dreamer takes up, bringing the general principles which have been enunciated down to his own highly personal, particular situation. The Latin continues to be a spiritual exhortation; the Old English becomes an elegiac lyric, and a dramatic enactment of the effects of meditation on the cross in an

individual soul who was previously full of fear and conscious of guilt. He has realized what the Latin poem simply stated. The Latin Christ warns the listener not "to confide in the perishable things of unstable fortune, or to hope in the passing years of this life." As a result of his devotion to the cross, the English dreamer knows better: each day, he says,

. . . I await each day
When the Lord's cross
Which I here on earth formerly beheld
Shall fetch me away from this fleeting life.¹⁰⁸

The Latin promises that through "love of a better fatherland" and "hope of a blessed life" he will be able to endure severe hardships. The Old English dreamer particularizes them: he is alone, friendless, stained with sin, but now joyful in his expectation of the day when the cross will bring him

. . . where there is great joy,
Delight in heaven, where the Lord's people
Are seated at the banquet, where there is eternal joy

and set him where he may

. . . thereafter
Dwell in glory, taste fully of joy with the saints.¹⁰⁹

There is the same thought and much the same expression, in the Latin poem; when "the great grace of God calls your shining soul back to regions above," Christ promises, then "freed from all labor, then happy in beholding the angelic choirs, and the happy ranks of the saints, then in the delightful court of eternal peace your soul will reign with Me, happy forever."¹¹⁰ But there is none of the drama of the next moment, when the

lonely, friendless dreamer falls into an earnest prayer:

May the Lord be my friend,
Who formerly here on earth
Suffered on that gallows tree for the sins of men.
He redeemed us and restored us life,
A heavenly home.¹¹¹

Perhaps the greatest advantage to be derived from placing the Latin and Old English poems side by side is the contrast which is revealed between conventional thought and phrase incorporated flatly into a poetic structure, and the same thought and phrase used to bind and resolve a conflict set up by the poem. The closing section of The Dream of the Rood has been severely criticized for its lack of originality and its anticlimactic nature;¹¹² when it is set against a similar closing which is truly no more than a versified sermon, its own superiority emerges.

Another genre allied to Christian Latin poetry, yet distinct in its independence of the classical tradition, is the Christian hymn. The origins of hymnology are uncertain. The existence of hymns in the earliest Christian communities is referred to in first and second century writings.¹¹³ The first extant Latin hymns, however, belong to St. Ambrose (340-397 A.D.).¹¹⁴

Although written for specialized spiritual use, the hymns were not devoid of literary merit, nor of literary influence. Probably the most important of all continental Latin poetry as far as The Dream of the Rood is concerned are the processional hymns of Venantius Fortunatus (530-609 A.D.). Fortunatus' three best-known hymns, written to

celebrate the reception of a relic of the true cross into the convent of Queen Radegunde in Poitiers in 569 A.D., were quickly incorporated into the liturgy and the Divine Office of the Church.¹¹⁵ Two of them, the Vexilla Regis and the Pange Lingua, are still sung today during Roman Catholic services on Good Friday, and as Vespers and Matins hymns in the Office during Holy Week. They were also sung on the feasts of the Finding (May 3) and of the Exaltation (September 14) of the Holy Cross. Unquestionably, they were known to the Rood poet, along with many other Crucifixion hymns whose content and phraseology can be conjectured from the more extensive collections of later hymns which are available.¹¹⁶

The hymns of Fortunatus form an imaginative peak to all preceding poetry of the cross, and their survival is understandable in the light of their skill and lyric beauty. That echoes of them should have been in the mind of the Rood poet is not surprising.

The Vexilla Regis is written in short four-line strophes of iambic dimeter, the simplest lyric meter, used by St. Ambrose and by most of his imitators down to the eleventh century.¹¹⁷ Fortunatus does not use words carelessly within his metric limits. The very first stanza contains the most condensed form of the paradox of the cross in the five centuries in which writers had been playing with the idea:

Qua vita mortem pertulit,
Et morte vitam protulit. (ll. 3-4)

Upon it Life did death endure,
And yet by death did life procure.

The cross to Fortunatus is once more, as in the homilies, a vexillum or battle standard of the King. After a passing reference to the metaphor in the first line, however, he drops it and turns directly to the image of the tree of the cross. It is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies of David, he says, with the Lord reigning a ligno--from the wood, or from a tree.¹¹⁸ The cross as the tree of Calvary is the heart of his hymn:

O lovely and refulgent Tree,
Adorned with purpled majesty;
Culled from a worthy stock, to bear
Those limbs which sanctified were.¹¹⁹

The idea evidently appealed to Fortunatus, for he expanded it in the Pange Lingua, a longer hymn in trochaic tetrameter. Here again in the first verse is a conventional figure--the glorious battle, with the cross as the victor's trophy (ll. 1-3); again, after a simple acknowledgment of the convention, the military metaphor is dropped. In the next verses this hymn also moves by way of the Old Testament into the figure of the cross as chosen tree; Fortunatus specifically refers to the sin of Adam, and to the traditional antithesis between the evil-bearing Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the fruitful Tree of Life. The passage indicates his acquaintance with the Fathers, and the "lignum vitae" or "arbor vitae" figure is common in other Crucifixion hymns.¹²⁰ The narrative form in which Fortunatus relates God's choice of the cross at the time of

Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden also hints at the old legends surrounding the origin of the cross.¹²¹

God, His Maker, sorely grieving
That the first-made Adam fell,
When he ate the fruit of sorrow,
Whose reward was death and hell,
Noted then this Wood, the ruin
Of the ancient wood to quell.¹²²

But it only touches the opening section of the legends, and totally ignores their detailed accounts of the strange adventures of the fated wood prior to the Crucifixion.

Instead, the hymn relates the life of Christ, up to and including his Passion. The events on Calvary are packed into a single verse by the characteristic late Latin mannerism of verse-filling asyndeton.¹²³ This well-known stylistic device, recommended by medieval rhetoricians, meant the piling up of words in a series without the use of a connective. Fortunatus abridges the story of the Redemption without resorting to abstract statement, by his use of the asyndeton; the effect is somewhat lost in translation:

Felle potus ecce languet:
Spina, clavi, lancea
Mite corpus perforarunt:
Unda manat, et cruor:
Terra, pontus, astra, mundus,
Quo lavantur flumine!

He endured the nails, the spitting,
Vinegar, and spear, and reed;
From that holy Body broken
Blood and water forth proceed:
Earth and stars and sky and ocean,
By that flood from stain are freed. (ll. 37-42)

At this point Fortunatus breaks off, as in the fourth verse of the Vexilla Regis, to address the cross directly. It is the high point of the hymn, both in emotion and in original phrasing:

Faithful Cross! above all other,
One and only noble Tree!
None in foliage, none in blossom,
None in fruit thy peers may be;
Sweetest Wood and sweetest Iron!
Sweetest Weight is hung on thee.¹²⁴

The cross has been faithful, in being the instrument of the infidelity of others; it has cooperated with Christ, whose own attitude is one of eager desire, expressed in the sixth verse:

Born for this, He meets His Passion, 125
For that this He freely willed . . .

The cross stands firm, as in The Dream of the Rood, because it is obedient to its Creator's wish. It maintains its steadfastness in the Rood poem despite its own feelings of dismay, and here despite Fortunatus' sad pleading that it relax the native rigor with which birth endowed it:

Bend thy boughs, O Tree of Glory!
Thy relaxing sinews bend;
For awhile the ancient rigor
That thy birth bestowed, suspend;
And the King of heavenly beauty
On thy bosom gently tend.¹²⁶

Both cross and Christ have seemingly been born for this purpose, however; it is not in the nature of either to give way at this moment, and the author's pleading goes unheeded.

The next verse returns to the theme of divine election, the singling out of the cross from the beginning because it

"alone was counted worthy"--"sola digna tu fuisti" (l. 55). In the Vexilla Regis it had been "culled from a worthy stock" (l. 15). Here Fortunatus has just called it the only noble tree, above all others (ll. 43-44). The idea was quite possibly transferred from these lines into The Dream of the Rood, for the Old English cross is also aware of its distinction.¹²⁷ It remarks in its homily to the dreamer that

Lo, he honored me, the Prince of glory, then
Over all the trees, Guardian of heaven,
Even as his mother, Mary herself,
Before all mankind, almighty God,
He honored above all women.¹²⁸

To indicate this divine plan which singled out the cross, Fortunatus employs the wooden figures of the Old Testament in a manner similar to that in patristic writing, that is, not as actually being the same wood as the cross, but as types or prefigurings insofar as they gave the Israelites protection. The cross, says Fortunatus, is a harbor for a shipwrecked race, like the Old Testament Ark during the flood (ll. 57-58). The image of the flood itself was introduced earlier, during the narrative of the Crucifixion: the blood and water which flowed from Christ's side on the cross are a new flood, which cleanses the sinful world even as did the first flood in Genesis 6-8.

Fortunatus does not confine his allusions to the Old Testament alone. The New Testament is responsible for the striking closing lines of his third Crucifixion hymn, Crux Benedicta Nitet.¹²⁹ This hymn turns once more on praise of the cross as tree--

powerful in fruitfulness, o sweet and noble wood,
when on your branches such new fruit you bear!¹³⁰

The climax of the hymn is a tight fusion of the tree imagery with the metaphor of Christ as the Vine, put forth first by Christ himself in John 15: 1-6. Fortunatus sees the vine as actually growing on the tree of the cross:

strung out is the vine among your branches,
from which the sweet blood-wine flows red.¹³¹

The first line of this hymn--"radiant is the blessed cross"--repeats the picture of the first verse of the Vexilla Regis, where "fulget Crucis mysterium," "the Cross's mystery shines." This is a common figure of description. All through Latin literature from the time of Constantine's dream vision, and later throughout Old English literature, the cross appears in brightness.¹³² It is adorned with gold and jewels, or at least surrounded by a halo of light, suggesting either an objet d'art, of which there were many, or the vision of the cross on the last day, foreseen as shining "beyond the very sunbeam."¹³³ In either case, it refers to an object established in glory, from which its past sufferings are far removed, which can only stand as an historical lesson to those who suffer.

The cross also gives an historical lesson in The Dream of the Rood, instructing the dreamer by the story of its life, but the peculiar genius of the Rood poet gave the lesson a new and dramatic frame of reference by placing it in the strange synthetic vision of a dream world. The Rood is a "changeable beacon," and through its gold he sees

wounds which once bled; even as he watches it, it changes before him:

. . . first it was streaming with wet,
Drenched with blood; then it was covered with jewels.¹³⁴

But it is the same cross, and the relation between the humiliation and the triumph is as close as it could possibly be made, although the dreamer must use an insight superior to the normal processes of perception. It is a new and original use of the device of the dream vision, without parallel in medieval vision literature.¹³⁵ Nor is it paralleled, as Patch suggested,¹³⁶ by the Old English custom of changing the type of cross used in liturgical ceremonies during Lent and Easter, from a silver one on Palm Sunday to one of red wood in Holy Week, and one of crystal on Easter Sunday.¹³⁷ This custom may have been an inspiration, and certainly the prayer for the blessing of a cross in Egbert's Pontifical is suggestive:

Let the splendour of the divinity of thine only-
begotten Son shine forth in the gold, the glory
of his passion in the wood, our redemption from
death glow in the crimson and the purification
of our life in the brightness of the crystal.¹³⁸

But the Rood poet alone fused the manifold external expressions and symbols into a single object in the world of dreams, and let this object speak for itself.

The hymns of Fortunatus are significant not only for their own beauty and testimony to the depth of contemporary devotion to the cross, and suggestions for inspiration for The Dream of the Rood, but also for what the Rood poet al-

tered or left unused. The uniqueness of his approach by way of the dream vision has already been considered. The shift in point of view from the onlooker to the cross itself is probably the most effective touch in the entire poem. There are also meaningful differences of emphasis in thought. The Rood poet has no use at all for the conventional metaphors of the vexillum and trophaeum, which Fortunatus does employ, however briefly. Nor is he interested in Old Testament typology or theological analysis as such. Adam is barely mentioned in passing, when the Rood commissions the dreamer to tell man of his vision, and of

. . . a glorious tree
On which almighty God suffered for mankind's many sins,
And for Adam's ancient works.¹³⁹

If the tree of the cross is the Biblical Tree of Life, it is the reader who must make the connection; the Rood poet nowhere mentions it. In fact, the origin of the cross, as the Rood relates it, is a very ordinary one, reminiscent of nothing so much as the Old English riddles.¹⁴⁰ It was found in a forest, not in a garden, and only honored after being used in the Crucifixion. True, like Fortunatus' cross, it is a special tree, and the object of many epithets of praise--

Fortunatus:

arbor decora et fulgida
(lovely and refulgent tree)

arbor una nobilis
(only noble tree)

arbor alta
(tree of glory)

The Dream of the Rood:

syllicre treow
(most wonderful tree)

wudu selesta
(noblest of trees)

wuldres beam
(tree of glory)

Yet the reason for its praise in the Rood poem is not its distinguished ancestry, but its cooperation in the work which the Lord asked it to do. The Rood holds itself up as an example to the dreamer and to all men; its lesson is that sorrow and scorn, when borne in patience and humility, may be turned into glory. Its own humble origin and unfortunate history allow men like the dreamer to see an analogy in their own lives.

Indeed, Burrow suggests,¹⁴¹ the poet himself has already made the analogy verbally between the cross and the dreamer. The Rood reacts in a very human way to the ordeal of the Crucifixion; it is afraid, like the dreamer at the beginning of the vision, and its fear is expressed in exactly the same words, "mid sorȝum ȝedrefed," or sadly troubled (ll. 20, 59). Yet it bows to the hands of men as the dreamer later bows to it, "elne mycle," with great zeal (ll. 60, 122).

In contrast, there is nothing human in Fortunatus' cross; it is a tree by nature, with a birthright of hard wood for sinews. It always remains an object, a tree which is observed and addressed by a human spectator. The wish that it would bend is expressed by the author, not in any way felt by the cross within the context of the hymn. If the Rood poet did work with Fortunatus in mind, he made considerable alteration in his material.

Fortunatus' request to the cross to bend its frame is actually not original with him. It has the frequency of a

legendary motif in the apocryphal gospels and acts which flourished in Europe and Asia Minor from the middle of the second century on into the High Middle Ages. These popular accounts are purely fictitious embellishments of the New Testament narrative. Where the canonical Scriptures are least informative--as in the events of the early life of Christ, or the later history of the apostles--the apocryphal imagination is most free. While the religious value of the apocrypha is virtually non-existent, according to M.R. James, as folk-lore and romance they are a precious source to students of medieval literature.¹⁴² And as such, no study dealing with conventions connected with the cross can afford to ignore them.

As far as the motif of the bending cross is concerned, in the widely disseminated Gospel of Nicodemus, which dates back in part to the second century,¹⁴³ the Virgin Mary pleads with the cross on behalf of her son:

Bend down, O cross, that I may embrace and kiss my son, whom I suckled at these breasts . . . Bend down, O cross; I wish to throw my arms round my son. Bend down, O cross, that I may bid farewell to my son like a mother.¹⁴⁴

Very often, in other circumstances, trees or wooden objects do bend in reverence or obedience to their Creator. In the Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew, the Holy Family rests under a palm tree during their flight into Egypt. The young Christ commands the tree to bend its branches and refresh his mother with its fruit; it immediately does so, and remains bent over until Christ bids it raise itself.¹⁴⁵ The earliest

part of the Gospel of Nicodemus contains another example of the sensitivity of inanimate wood to the Saviour. When Christ is summoned before Pontius Pilate during his trial, Pilate's standard-bearers are unable to prevent the tops of their wooden standards from bowing down and adoring their Lord. Other standard-bearers are called in, but the same phenomenon occurs once more.¹⁴⁶

On the specific subject of the cross itself, apocryphal legends proliferated rapidly, though just when, and in what form, the legends reached England is dubious. Francis Lee Utley groups them into four types: the Inventio Crucis, or finding of the true cross by St. Helena, mother of Constantine; the Exaltatio Crucis, telling of the seizure of the true cross by the pagan Chosroes and its return to Jerusalem by the Emperor Heraclius in the seventh century; the story of Moses and the cross; and the story of Seth and the tree.¹⁴⁷ The first two types are based on historical events, and were clearly known in England at the time of the writing of The Dream of the Rood--indeed, Cynewulf's Elene is a retelling of the Inventio story, and the Rood itself refers to it in passing, although not for its own sake, but for its part in the cycle of death-resurrection-glorification which the Rood is trying to impress upon the dreamer:

They buried us in a deep pit; nevertheless friends,
 Thanes of the Lord found me there by inquiring;
 They covered me with gold and silver.¹⁴⁸

The other stories, which identified the wood of the cross with that of the Tree of Life, and constructed imaginative

adventures with Old Testament figures to fill the gap in the life history of the wood, were later in development. Legends of the origin of the Holy Rood-Tree did not appear in Latin or Western European languages until the eleventh and twelfth centuries, although they multiplied rapidly after that time.¹⁴⁹ The apocryphal Gospels and Acts of the New Testament, however, were available to Old English writers. Recensions of the Gospel of Nicodemus were particularly common.

This Gospel is most important for its contribution to the legend of the Harrowing of Hell. That Christ descended into hell to free the souls who had been waiting for redemption was an article of the Christian creed; but popular imagination was not content with an unadorned theological statement. Instead, it re-created the entire scene in elaborate detail and even with dialogue. M.R. James suggests that the embellishments entered with the development of Christian pulpit oratory, citing the fourth-century homilies of Eusebius of Emesa.¹⁵⁰ Other fourth-century homilies quoted above testify to a rapid spreading of the legend.¹⁵¹ But the Gospel of Nicodemus must be credited as the main source for the reappearance of the Harrowing in later literature, most notably in the Old English poem Christ and Satan.¹⁵²

The appearance of the radiant King of Glory at the dark gates of Hell is a dramatic scene in the Gospel. Anticipation of his coming has been carefully built up in the speeches of the waiting souls of the Old Testament. Hell and Death

are stricken with fear at the sight of so great a light in their dark abode, and cry out:

Who art thou that without all damage of corruption and with the signs of thy majesty unblemished, dost in wrath condemn our powers? Who art thou that art so great and so small, both humble and exalted, both soldier and commander, a marvellous warrior in the shape of a bondsman, and a King of Glory dead and living, whom the cross bare slain upon it? Thou that didst lie dead in the sepulchre hast come down unto us living . . . ¹⁵³

Even more dramatic is Hell's angry rebuke of Satan as a fool:

O prince Satan, holder of the keys of hell, those thy riches which thou hadst gained by the tree of transgression and the losing of paradise, thou hast lost by the tree of the cross, and all thy gladness hath perished. When thou didst hang up Christ Jesus the King of Glory thou wroughtest against thyself and against me. ¹⁵⁴

But the Lord, taking Adam by the hand, delivers him to Michael the archangel, and "all the saints followed Michael the archangel, and he brought them all into the glory and beauty of paradise." ¹⁵⁵

The Harrowing of Hell as it occurs in The Dream of the Rood is an excellent example of the selectivity of the Rood poet in using legendary material. Turned into a brief exemplum of the redemptive power of Christ, it is no more than a summary, without dialogue or detailed description. Its function in the poem controls every other element. But knowledge of the dramatic effects which the legend had achieved elsewhere was not wanting to its audience.

Very few critics have been willing to admit that the

lines concerning the Harrowing of Hell do have a function in the poem.¹⁵⁶ They follow a passage which is also non-dramatic and didactic in nature, and repeat its ideas in the same conventional language; a change in tense is the chief differentiation between the two sections. It seems crucial at this point to understand the use of convention in Old English religious poetry, so much of which ends on the quiet note of a sermon.¹⁵⁷ As has been shown above, the conclusion of The Dream of the Rood owes a large debt to previous Christian literature both in language and in structure. The promise of heavenly bliss and the glory of the saints was the climax of the Christian vision, the anticipated end of the Christian life. It naturally assumed the same position in Christian poems and homilies as it did in the Christian creed. The homily generally ended in a brief prayer, together with a doxology made up of stereotyped phrases, which were combined in varying but recurring formulas.¹⁵⁸ Almost always the formula served to broaden the scope of the sermon; the speaker united with his audience in the first person plural to praise God and beg his blessing. Often, as in Prudentius,¹⁵⁹ the Christian "we" was expanded to include universal nature.

The stereotyped quality of the ending of the Rood poem has never been questioned by modern critics. Many have recognized and condemned it. The recent attempt of J.A. Burrow to defend its inclusion in the poem rests on the argument of

a "simple emotional sequence" from fear and sorrow to hope within the heart of the dreamer. The last lines are not vivid, Burrow admits, and therefore do not appeal to modern taste as the dramatic vision of the cross and the Crucifixion do. But they are convincing within the general economy of the poem as he sees it, with the essential principle of development lying in the dreamer's personal story related in snatches of elegiac autobiography throughout the poem and finally in his soliloquy (ll. 122-56). Lines 122 to 148^a offer no resistance at all to this interpretation; the account of the Harrowing of hell (ll. 148^b-156), however, requires some stretching of the point. The Rood poet, Burrow conjectures, may have felt the poem was becoming too abstract, and so tried to dramatize the personal religious themes by an exemplum. Doctrinally, the Harrowing was a natural amplification of Christ's "releasing" power. Grammatically the transition from the personal present to the historical past is managed skillfully in the dreamer's prayer:

May the Lord be my friend,
 Who formerly here on earth
Suffered on that gallows tree for the sins of men.
 He redeemed us and restored us life,
 A heavenly home.¹⁶⁰

(italics mine)

Present and past are thus welded in hope for the future. And the specific relevance of the last lines, Burrow concludes, lies not in the traditional doctrinal association between the Harrowing and the Crucifixion, but in their

immediate significance to the hopeful dreamer.¹⁶¹

Burrow's article is a carefully-argued study of the text. Nevertheless, it suffers from a lack of depth, insofar as he deals with the poem apart from any consideration of other Old English religious poetry, or any of the underlying tradition of Christian sermon literature.

To say that the final lines are simply an amplification of the dreamer's hope is to overlook the long tradition of Christian literary and homiletic use of an eschatological conclusion, i.e., one looking forward to the eternal reward. Moreover, the last lines do not follow an emotionally logical sequence.¹⁶² If the dreamer's soliloquy had been intended as the reproduction of a natural spiritual and emotional progression, it would have followed a more direct line from the redemptive activity of Christ in Hell to the power of Christ to effect the same redemption in the life of the dreamer, instead of the reverse. As it is, the dreamer thinks first of his old friends:

They have all gone away from the joys of the world,
They have sought the King of Glory,
Live now in heaven with the Father,
Dwell in glory . . . ¹⁶³

Next, he moves to his own situation:

. . . I await each day
When the Lord's cross
Which I here on earth formerly beheld
Shall fetch me away from this fleeting life,
And then bring me where there is great joy,
Delight in heaven, where the Lord's people
Are seated at the banquet, where there is eternal joy;
And he shall then place me where I may thereafter,
Dwell in glory, taste fully of joy with the saints.¹⁶⁴

Then he prays, as quoted above:

May the Lord be my friend,
Who formerly here on earth
Suffered on that gallows tree for the sins of men.
He redeemed us and restored us life,
A heavenly home.

Thus far the progression has been entirely natural, and acceptable even to the poem's critics; Alfred S. Cook would have it end here.¹⁶⁵ But as it exists in the Vercelli Manuscript, the poem continues with a shift in thought and in tense:

. . . Hope was renewed
With blessing and joy to them that endured burning.
The son was victorious, mighty and victorious
On that far journey. Then he came with a multitude
A host of souls to the Kingdom of God
The Monarch almighty, to the joy of the angels
And of all the holy ones who previously in heaven
Dwelt in glory, when their Savior
Almighty God, came back to his home.¹⁶⁶

This passage is not explicable in terms of elegiac autobiography, however it is interpreted. It does not involve self-revelation, nor is it precisely a prayer as are the lines before it. It is a formal statement, a recapitulation of part of the Christian creed, perhaps a liturgical antiphon, but not a personal supplication. The lines are didactic, in the same way in which the Rood itself turns at the end of its homily from personal narrative to supra-personal proclamation of its message (ll. 101-121). The Rood poet turns to a similar proclamation, in obedience to the Rood's command:

Now, I command you, my dear man,
That you relate this vision to men . . . 167

Thus the passage becomes comprehensible, and the unity of the poem appears, when its last lines are viewed for what they are: a homiletic message, which it is the life mission of the Rood poet to deliver to mankind--a didactic sermon in a dramatic context.

The Dream of the Rood, then, clearly treats traditional material which had frequently been the subject of patristic homily, Latin poetry and hymns, and apocryphal legend. The seminal ideas of the Old English poem--the cosmic cross, worshipped by all creation; the triumphant Crucified One; the Crucifixion narrative itself accompanied by the universal lament of nature; above all, the life process of suffering, death, rebirth and glory undergone by Christ, the cross, the dreamer, and potentially by every Christian--were formulated long before the poem was written. They had been put forth by Christian preachers from the earliest apostolic times; one has only to read the sermons delivered in the Acts of the Apostles. In the patristic homilies, they were general challenges to imitation, emerging from meditation on the Gospel accounts, and delivered with a good deal of rhetorical sophistication. With the hymns came a new note of concern for the artistic expression of the emotions stimulated by the story. The apocryphal legends permitted a freer play of the imagination on the surrounding events, the story of the tree before its trial on Calvary and the actions of Christ after his death in releasing the souls of the just.

Midway in the development of the legends, but well after the most significant homilies and hymns had appeared, an unknown Old English cleric wrote of the same story in the Rood poem, but with a much more sophisticated shaping of the material he had received.

He incorporated a meditative homily on the meaning of the Crucifixion into the frame of a dream vision, and further incorporated the vision itself into the frame of a dramatic elegy. The vision of the cross is thus associated with a strongly didactic purpose and with an emotional crisis. As was observed earlier, the homily's message penetrates the sorrowful soul of the dreamer and changes him. The change is carefully anticipated in the experience of the cross itself on Calvary. More than verbal echoes link the cross with the dreamer. Most significantly, more than verbal echoes link the cross with Christ: it is a highly complex form of life which this inanimate object has assumed in the prosopopoeia. In its account of the events on Calvary, it is both contrasted with the bold young hero by its anguish, and identified with him by its obedient suffering. Christ and the cross undergo the torment together; because Christ is courageous, the cross decides that it must also be so. It can speak of the wounds of Christ as inflicted on it:

They drove me through with dark nails; those wounds
are visible,
Open malicious hackings . . . 168

It is one with Christ in its suffering: "Bysmeredon hie
unc butu aetȝaedere" (l. 48), "They reviled us both together."
From this almost completely unprecedented attribution of
human life to the cross has evolved the utterly new and
poignant paradox at the heart of the poem: the cross as
the first Christian.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER TWO

¹The Old English text used in this study is that of Bruce Dickins and Alan S.C. Ross, ed. The Dream of the Rood (London, 1954). The translation is by Sister Anna Mercedes Courtney, "The Dream of the Rood: A Doctrinal Commentary," Diss. Fordham University 1963, pp. 131-38.

²Peter H. Brieger, "England's Contribution to the Origin and Development of the Triumphal Cross," Mediaeval Studies, IV (1942), 85-87; see also, on p. 92, the description of the seventh-century fresco in St. Maria Antiqua in Rome, where the crucifix has been raised into the heavens and is surrounded by a throng of worshippers. This is only one of many possible examples. Constantine had erected a richly jeweled silver cross in the Holy Cross Basilica in Jerusalem, known to the Anglo-Saxons from Adamnan's description in De Locis Sanctis (PL, LXXXVIII, 784). The same cross towered in the background of a late fourth-century mosaic in the Church of Saint Pudenziana in Rome; see Louis Brehier, L'Art Chretien (Paris, 1918), p. 73.

³Bede, pp. 109-111.

⁴The Cross is described by Dickins and Ross, pp. 1-13. Cf. their bibliography on pp. 38-39, and also two later studies: Meyer Schapiro, "The Religious Meaning of the Ruthwell Cross," Art Bulletin, XXVI (1944), 230-45, and P.G. Medd, "Rood and Stow--The Cross and the Holy Place as Factors in Anglo-Saxon Parochial Evangelization," Church Quarterly Review, CLXIII (1962), 151-65.

⁵Charles Sears Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (New York, 1928), pp. 23 ff.

⁶Alexander of Alexandria, "On the Soul and Body and the Passion of the Lord," The Writings of Methodius, Alexander of Lycopolis, Peter of Alexandria, and Several Fragments, Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh, 1870), XIV, 360.

⁷St. Augustine, Homilies on the Gospel According to St. John and His First Epistle (London, 1849), II, 1047.

⁸Proklos, Coptic Homilies in the Dialect of Upper Egypt, ed. E.A. Wallis Budge (London, 1910), p. 236.

⁹Auerbach, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰Augustine, Homilies, p. 1043.

¹¹St. John Chrysostom, The Homilies of St. John Chrysostom on the Gospel of St. Matthew, trans. George Prevost (Oxford, 1851), p. 1115.

¹²St. Cyril of Jerusalem, The Catechetical Lectures of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem (Oxford, 1838), pp. 162-63.

¹³St. Cyril, p. 163.

¹⁴Auerbach, p. 31.

¹⁵Proklos, pp. 239-40.

¹⁶See Psalm 18: 9-10.

¹⁷Proklos, p. 240.

¹⁸St. Athanasius, "Discourse Concerning the Soul and Body," Coptic Homilies, pp. 270-73.

¹⁹See below, pp. 69-70.

²⁰Matthew 27: 45-54; Mark 15: 33-39; Luke 23: 44-48.

²¹St. Athanasius, p. 270.

²²Alexander of Alexandria, The Writings of Methodius, pp. 360-61. See Budge, Coptic Homilies, p. xlv, concerning this manuscript.

²³Albert S. Cook, The Christ of Cynewulf (Boston, 1900), p. 115. Cf. Stanley B. Greenfield, A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York, 1965), pp. 129-30.

²⁴Gregory the Great, "Homilia in Evangelium I," quoted in Cook, p. 195.

²⁵See Ronald Knox's translation of the Gospel of Matthew in The Holy Bible (New York, 1944), p. 26, n. 3.

²⁶St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lecture XV, Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesis of Emesa, ed. William Telfer (Philadelphia, 1955), p. 163.

²⁷In her detailed study of doctrinal influences on the poem, Rosemary Woolf can point out only one Pseudo-Augustinian sermon (PL, XLVII, 1155) in which the cross does speak; see "Doctrinal Influences on The Dream of the Rood," MAE, XXVII (1958), 149.

²⁸Lactantius, The Divine Institutes: Books I-VII, trans. Sister Mary Francis McDonald (Washington D.C., 1964), p. 292.

²⁹Margaret Schlauch, "The 'Dream of the Rood' as Prosopopoeia," Essays and Studies in Honor of Carleton Brown (New York, 1940), p. 23.

³⁰Schlauch, Essays and Studies, pp. 32-34.

³¹Cicero, De Inventione, 2:31.94-98.

³²The Rhetoric of Alcuin, pp. 88-91.

³³Baldwin, pp. 23 ff. See also Curtius, pp. 69, 159.

³⁴"Source" is used with the broadest possible connotations. Miss Schlauch does not pretend to be offering anything but general areas of inspiration; neither does this dissertation.

³⁵De Nuce actually seems to spring from the Aesopic fables of Babrius, a hellenized Italian living in Syria or Asia Minor in the first century A.D. A prose form of the fable is printed in the edition of O. Crusius, Leipzig, 1897. See summary translated by Ben E. Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp. 471-72.

³⁶St. Cyril, Catechetical Lectures, p. 144.

³⁷Gregory the Great, King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care, ed. with English trans. by Henry Sweet, EETS, XLV (London, 1871), 33.

³⁸St. Athanasius, Coptic Homilies, p. 231.

³⁹St. John Chrysostom, Homilies, p. 1098.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 1147.

⁴¹Augustine, Homilies, p. 1044.

⁴²Robert E. Diamond, "Heroic Diction in The Dream of the Rood," Studies in Honor of John Wilcox, ed. A. Dayle Wallace and Woodburn O. Ross (Detroit, 1958), p. 3.

⁴³St. Cyril, Catechetical Lectures, p. 145.

⁴⁴St. Athanasius, Coptic Homilies, p. 231. See also Auerbach, pp. 67-81, on the new Christian concept of the "gloria passionis."

⁴⁵See William O. Stevens, The Cross in the Life and Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, Yale Studies in English (New Haven, 1904), pp. 12-13. Stevens concludes rather broadly that Eusebius' version was not accessible to the Anglo-Saxons, since it is the only one specifying midday as the time of the vision while the three others and the Old English literature place it in the night or early morning. He overlooks the second vision in Eusebius.

⁴⁶Cook, pp. 190-91.

⁴⁷Matthew Britt, ed. The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal (New York, 1936), p. 128.

⁴⁸St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, Homilies 48-88, trans. Sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin (New York, 1960), p. 428.

⁴⁹St. Methodius, pp. 222-23. See also Britt, p. 124.

⁵⁰Eleanor Simmons Greenhill, "The Child in the Tree: A Study of the Cosmological Tree in Christian Tradition," Traditio, X (1954), 323-71.

⁵¹Plato, "Timaeus," Plato with an English Translation, trans. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), p. 71.

⁵²Greenhill, pp. 332-33.

⁵³St. Irenaeus, "Epideixis," Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, trans. Father Joseph P. Smith (Westminster, Md., 1952), pp. 69-70.

⁵⁴Lactantius, p. 313.

⁵⁵Greenhill, p. 331.

⁵⁶Hippolytus of Rome, "In Pascha," PG, LIX, 743-45, trans. Hugo Rahner, Greek Myths and Christian Mystery (New York, 1963), p. 67.

⁵⁷Greenhill, p. 359.

⁵⁸Augustine, Homilies, pp. 1038-39.

⁶⁰St. Cyril, Catechetical Lectures, p. 152.

⁶¹See below, pp. 70-71.

⁶²Catechetical Lectures, p. 153.

⁶³Charles Donahue, "Patristic Exegesis: Summation," Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1958-1959, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York, 1960), pp. 64-67.

⁶⁴C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford, 1936), pp. 44-45.

⁶⁵Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard Trask (New York, 1953), pp. 42-43. From this particular example of typology,

it will also be obvious that the idea of Christ's death as a sleep, contained in the Rood poem (ll. 64^a-65^b), is definitely not original with the poet; Stanley B. Greenfield observes that it probably is not so, in his Critical History, p. 139. The same idea is implied above in the Coptic homily by Proklos quoted on p. 22.

⁶⁶Donahue, p. 67.

⁶⁷In general, the gospel homilies begin with the quotation of a specific text, followed by a commentary making frequent use of paraphrase and repetition, and often digressing from the main text. Next comes a moral exhortation, drawing practical lessons from the text for the every-day life of the Christian, and finally a brief prayer, ending in a doxology. See St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Saint John, trans. Goggin, pp. ix-x.

⁶⁸See The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, trans. H.E. Butler, II (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), pp. 191 ff. The structure of the homily in The Dream of the Rood has been related to the principles outlined in De Catechizandis Rudibus, St. Augustine's manual of catechetical instruction: a brilliant story, the narratio, followed by an individual appeal to virtue, the exhortatio; see Sister Anna Mercedes Courtney, "The Dream of the Rood: A Doctrinal Commentary," pp. 37-38, 83-87.

⁶⁹St. Cyril, Catechetical Lectures, p. 155.

⁷⁰Homilies on . . . St. Matthew, p. 1112.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 1140.

⁷²Ne þearf ðær þonne aeniꝥ anforht ƿesan
þe him aer in breostum bereð beacna selest.
(ll. 117-18)

⁷³Dickins and Ross, p. 33, n. 118.

⁷⁴See above, p. 43.

⁷⁵Auerbach, Literary Language, pp. 73-74.

⁷⁶PL, XCI, 1097. Compare also the ancient debate over whether the mind was situated in the breast or in the brain, referred to by Lactantius in De opificio Dei, trans. Sister Mary Francis McDonald, Lactantius: the Minor Works (Washington, D.C., 1965), pp. 46-48. In general, until the thirteenth century, medieval thinkers accepted the Platonic location of the soul in the brain, rather than Aristotle's opinion that it was found in the heart; see Boyd H. Hill, Jr., "The Grain and the Spirit in Mediaeval Anatomy," Speculum, XL (1965), 69, for a useful survey, although it does not touch upon devotional works in which the Aristotelian notion seems to survive.

77Ac ðurh ða rode sceal rice 7esecan
 of eorðpeƿe aezhpƿylc saƿl,
 seo þe mid ƿealdende ƿunian þenceð.
 (ll. 119-21)

78Commentary on St. John, pp. 432-33.

79Schlauch, Essays and Studies, p. 23.

80F.J. Raby, A History of Christian Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1953), p. 4.

81Curtius, p. 459.

82See above, pp. 35-40.

83Raby, p. 16. Text is in Cyprianus, Opera, ed. W. Hartel, 3.3.305-308.

84Schlauch, Essays and Studies, p. 25; Adolf Ebert, Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande (Leipzig, 1887), III, 70-72.

85Greenhill, pp. 338-42.

86Hunc circum innumerae gentes populiue coibant.
 Quam varu generis, sexus, aetatis, honoris,
 Innuptae, nuptasque simul, viduaeque, nurusque,
 Infantes, puerique, viri, juvenesque, senesque.
 (Greenhill, p. 341)

87See above, pp. 40-41.

88Raby, p. 48.

89H.J. Thomas, trans. Prudentius (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. viii.

90His attitude closely resembles that of his contemporary, St. Jerome, humanist, philologist, and Father of the Church. Born only eight years earlier than Prudentius, St. Jerome was rooted by taste and education in the classical tradition. In language, however, just like Prudentius, he was an innovator. Between 390 and 405 A.D. appeared his Vulgate translation of the Bible, a turning point in the history of Latin literature which stimulated new rhythms, more romantic imagery, flexibility, and emotional and symbolical qualities (see Raby, pp. 10-11).

91Thomas, pp. xii-xiii.

92Raby, p. 49.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 68, 71.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁹⁵Thomas, pp. 127-29:

hanc igitur non flagra secant, non sputa salivis
aspergunt, alapis non vexat palma relisis,
nec perfossa cruci clavorum vulnera figunt.
his adfecta caro est hominis, . . .

il·le pavet mortis faciem, tremit ille dolorem.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 81-85.

⁹⁷ sed Deus dum luce fulva mortis antra inluminat,
dum stupentibus tenebris candidum praestat diem,
tristia squalentis aethrae palluerunt sidera.
sol refugit et lugubri sordidus ferrugine
igneum reliquit axem seque maerens abdidit . . .
(Cathemerinon IX, 76-79)

⁹⁸Hercules Furens, 1.610, in Three Tragedies of Seneca,
ed. Hugh Macmaster Kingery (New York, 1908), p. 46.

⁹⁹The Coptic homily of St. Athanasius is one exception;
see above, p. 26.

¹⁰⁰Dic tropaeum passionis, dic triumphalem crucem,
Pange vexillum notatis quod refulget frontibus.
(11. 83-84)

¹⁰¹ te senes et te iuventus, parvulorum te chorus,
turba matrum virginumque, simplices puellulae,
voce concordēs pudicis perstrepat concentibus.
fluminum lapsus et undae, litorum crepidines,
imber, aestus, nix, pruina, silva et aura, nox, dies
omnibus te concelebrent saeculorum saeculis.
(11. 109-114)

¹⁰²See Lactantius: The Minor Works, pp. 224-28, and also
"Poem by an Uncertain Author on the Passion of the Lord,"
The Writings of Lactantius, II, trans. William Fletcher,
Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh, 1871), 220-22.
The poem has been placed chronologically anywhere between
the fourth and the fifteenth centuries by scholars; Mani-
tius holds for an early date of composition in his Geschichte
der Christliche-Lateinische Poesie (Munich, 1911), p. 50.

¹⁰³Trans. Hélène Petre, Journal de Voyage, Sources Chrétiennes
(Paris, 1948), XXI, 233-35.

¹⁰⁴Lactantius: The Minor Works, p. 225.

¹⁰⁵Emile Mâle, L'art Religieux de la fin du Moyen Age en
France (Paris, 1925), p. 86. See J.A. Burrow, "An Approach

to The Dream of the Rood," Neophilologus, XLIII (1959), 123-33, for the contrast between Old and Middle English poetry of the Crucifixion.

106 . . . hƿaer se man sie,
se ðe for Dryhtnes naman deaðes ƿolde
biteres onbyriȝan, sƿa he aer on ðam beame dyde.
(ll. 112-14)

107 Lactantius: The Minor Works, p. 227.

108 . . . ic ƿene me
daga ȝehƿylce hƿaenne me Dryhtnes rod,
ƿe ic her on eorðan aer sceaƿode
on ƿysson laenan life ȝefetiȝe . . .
(ll. 135-38)

109 . . . ƿaer is blis mycel,
dream on heofonum, ƿaer is Dryhtnes folc
ȝeseted to symle, ƿaer is sinȝal blis;
.
.
.
ƿunian on ƿuldre, ƿell mid ƿam halȝum
dreames brucan.
(ll. 139-44)

110 Lactantius: The Minor Works, pp. 227-28.

111 . . . Si me Dryhten freond,
se ðe her on eorðan aer ƿropode
on ƿam ȝealȝtreope for ȝuman synnum:
he us onlȝsde, ond us lif forȝeaf,
heofonlicne ham.
(ll. 144-48)

112 Albert S. Cook considered the conclusion either an interpolation or an inartistic addition by the poet, seriously marring the unity of impression. He would have ended the poem himself at line 148^a, or better, at line 146; see his introduction to The Dream of the Rood (Oxford, 1905), pp. xlii, lv. Bruce Dickins and Alan Ross concur in their edition (p. 18). They point to a stylistic change at line 78, and call the entire last half of the poem inferior and probably of a later date. When the case for the integrity and unity of the ending was finally put forth, it had a distinct air of novelty--see Burrow, pp. 130-32. In a later article, John V. Fleming accounts for the absence of hpermetric lines in the last half of the poem as a natural rhetorical difference mirroring the tonal differences between the narratio and the explanatio; see "'The Dream of the Rood' and Anglo-Saxon Monasticism," Traditio, XXII (1966), p. 55.

113 G. Currie Martin, The Church and the Hymn Writers (London, 1928), pp. 34, 52. Both Philo in the first and Pliny in the second century mention the singing of hymns by the Christian sect.

¹¹⁴Britt, pp. 21-22.

¹¹⁵Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, IX, 40, trans. and ed. O.M. Dalton (Oxford, 1927), II, 413. For a brief but thorough study of Fortunatus' hymns as the first stage of a developing tradition, see Joseph Szövérfy, "'Crux Fidelis . . ." Prolegomena to a History of the Holy Cross Hymns," Traditio, XXII (1966), 6-12.

¹¹⁶This is done by Howard R. Patch, "Liturgical Influence in The Dream of the Rood," PMLA, XXXIV (1919), 233-57.

¹¹⁷Britt, p. 22. The Vexilla Regis and Pange Lingua are printed by Britt in Latin with an English translation on pp. 123-27.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 125.

¹¹⁹Arbor decora et fulgida,
Ornata regis purpura,
Electa digno stipite
Tam sancta membra tangere. (ll. 13-16)

¹²⁰Patch, p. 255.

¹²¹See below, pp. 69-70.

¹²²De parentis protoplasti
Fraude Factor condolens,
Quando pomi noxialis
In necem morsu ruit:
Ipse lignum tunc notavit,
Damna ligni ut solveret. (ll. 7-12)

¹²³Curtius, pp. 285-86. The Dream of the Rood, on the other hand, shows a marked tendency toward syndesis, although its frequent "ac" and "hwæðere" organize the same adversative concepts that are intrinsic to the story of the Passion no matter what the form in which it is recounted--degradation and glory, or earthly impulse and spiritual duty, as they are categorized by W.F. Bolton, "Connectives in The Seafarer and The Dream of the Rood," MP, LVII (1960), 260-62. See also Claes Schaar, Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group, Lund Studies in English, XVII (Lund, 1949), 119-84.

¹²⁴Crux fideles, inter omnes
Arbor una nobilis:
Silva talem nulla profert
Fronde, flore, germine:
Dulce ferrum, dulce lignum,
Dulce pondus sustinent. (ll. 43-48)

¹²⁵Sponte libera Redemptor
Passioni deditus . . . (ll. 33-34)

- 126 Flecte ramos arbor alta,
Tensa laxa viscera,
Et rigor lentescat ille,
Quem dedit nativitas;
Et superni membra regis
Tende miti stipite. (11. 49-54)
- 127 Patch, p. 252.
- 128 . . . meþa ʒeþeorðode puldres Ealdor
ofer holtþudu, heofonrices þeard,
sþylce sþa he his modor eac, Marian sylfe,
aelmihtiz ʒod, for ealle menn
ʒeþeorðode ofer eall þifa cynn. (11. 90-94)
- 129 For text, see Raby, p. 89; translation is mine.
- 130 fertilitate potens, o dulce et nobile lignum,
quando tuis ramis tam nova poma geris!
(11. 9-10)
- 131 appensa est vitis inter tua brachia, de qua
dulcia sanguineo vina rubore fluunt.
(11. 17-18)
- 132 Stevens, pp. 73-74.
- 133 St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on . . . St. Matthew,
p. 1013.
- 134 . . . hþilum hit þaes mid þaetan bestemed,
besþyled mid sþates ʒanze, Hþilum mid since ʒeþyrped.
(11. 22-23)
- 135 Cook, The Dream of the Rood, p. lv.
- 136 Patch, p. 249.
- 137 Francis Gasquet, Parish Life in Medieval England, 6th
ed. (London, 1929), pp. 172-73, 183.
- 138 Translated by Margaret Deansley, The Pre-Conquest Church
in England (Oxford, 1961), p. 172.
- 139 . . . puldres beam,
se ðe aelmihtiz ʒod on þropode
for mancynnes maneþum synnum
ond Adomes ealdþeþyrhtum. (11. 97-100)
- 140 The mode of description in the riddles, with its quasi-
personification and first person account, offers a basis for
comparison, although there is nothing enigmatic in the Rood's

- 166 hiht paes zenipad
mid bledum ond mid blisse, þam þe þær bryne þolodan.
Se Sunu paes siȝorfaest on þam siȝfate,
mihtiȝ ond spedȝ. Þa he mid maniȝeo com,
ȝasta peorode on ȝodes rice,
Anpealda aelmihtiȝ, enȝlum to blisse,
ond eallum ðam halȝum þam þe on heofonum aer
ƿunedon on ƿuldre, þa heora ƿealdend cƿom,
aelmihtiȝ ȝod, þær his eðel paes.
 (11. 148^b-156)
- 167 Nu ic þe hate, haeleð min se leofa,
 þæt ðu þas ȝesyhðe secȝe mannum . . .
 (11. 95-96)
- 168 Þurhdrifan hi me mid deorcan naeȝlum; on me syndon
 þa dolȝ ȝesiene,
opene inƿidhlenmas. (11. 46-47^a)

III. THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE AND LATIN DEBATE POETRY

Thus, with The Dream of the Rood, an understanding of traditional material brings the poem into better focus, and deepens our insight into the poet's purposes. For the Rood poet, rhetoric with its sense of the drama of language reinforces his sense of the moral drama of life. Rhetorical devices express the inner paradoxes of Christianity, and also move the poem from the area of private vision to public proclamation. Language and structure, in short, reveal an alert, sophisticated mind, seriously considering its beliefs and inviting the reader to do likewise.

When we turn to The Owl and the Nightingale, the methods which seem so helpful in approaching the Rood poem become perhaps even more necessary, in view of the widespread critical confusion about this late twelfth-century debate. For virtually the only area of critical agreement with regard to the Middle English work is the acknowledgment of its high literary value. Authorship, date, and possible allegorical meanings remain disputed; the poem has been interpreted in almost every possible way, from a light-hearted jeu d'esprit without extrinsic significance,¹ through various dialectical confrontations between pleasure and asceticism, art and philosophy, love poetry and didactic verse, nobility and clergy, to a serious plea for religious preferment or a serious satire on a plea for religious preferment.²

The poem itself, however, is generally assessed as the work of a master poet, who has shaped many familiar themes into a unified and quickly-moving piece of entertainment. Each bird knows and uses with delightful doggedness, all the fables, proverbs, and common assumptions of natural history concerning the life and bad habits of the other. While pointedly human in their emotions and reasoning, the owl and the nightingale never cease to be birds, each as Baugh notes, revealing the characteristics which are associated with its species in the popular mind.³ The resulting clash has earned a high place in the ranks of medieval debate poetry.⁴ For its apparent late twelfth-century date, the poem is a work of an "astonishingly accomplished and original nature," M. Dominica Legge comments, forcing scholars to qualify their observations on the state of vernacular literature at the time.⁵ It has been suggested, though without evidence, that the poem is a translation of a Latin or French original, so polished does it seem.⁶

Behind the scenes of the debate stands an author who has concealed himself almost as well as he has revealed the two birds--four centuries of literary scholarship have been unable to decide whether he is Master Nicholas or John of Guildford or neither, whether he is the traditionally modest and anonymous medieval artist or a rather blatant although whimsical advocate of his own advancement in the poem, even whether he was a keen observer of nature or simply took his facts from the many literary sources then

in circulation.⁷ One fact we can be certain of from the poem itself, however, is that like the Rood poet four centuries earlier, he was steeped in the practice of the ancient school exercises in rhetoric, the progymnasmata, and quite probably familiar with other literary works in the same rhetorical vein as his--in this case, to be specific, with the numerous Latin conflicti which flourished in the twelfth century and which depend for much of their humorous or satiric effect upon prior knowledge of the rhetorical conventions being parodied.

Again, as with The Dream of the Rood, awareness of the role of rhetoric in The Owl and the Nightingale can clarify our sense of the mastery of convention and the structural unity of the poem. In addition to formal elements, it may also dispel some of the critical confusion surrounding the poet's meaning and purpose in writing. For while critics have not ignored the presence of rhetorical influences in the poem,⁸ they do not seem to have employed their knowledge to full advantage in interpreting the text.

This failure may be due at least partly to the role played by folklore in the debate, a role which to many commentators seems the dominant one. Their position is not without basis; a major part of the humor of The Owl and the Nightingale lies in the dexterity with which each bird wields the weapons provided against his opponent by popular lore. Fables and proverbs form a substantial part of their evidence, while the underlying antithesis between the owl and the

nightingale is itself proverbial.⁹ Nor does the debate form lack popular antecedents: the fliting, or satiric war of words, is an ancient Germanic genre, as Kemp Malone has pointed out;¹⁰ in view of its appearance in cultures as distant as those of Scandinavia and Greece, the assumption that it was imported into medieval English poetry from French or Latin cannot be made with absolute certainty.¹¹

Folklore obviously plays a far wider role in The Owl and the Nightingale than it does in The Dream of the Rood. (In the Rood poem, it will be remembered, the poet makes one brief allusion to popular legend, tightly controlled by his overall structure and radically different from the usual use of apocryphal material; he does not indulge the apocryphal taste for lively embroidery of narrative incidents to any extent.) The Owl and the Nightingale makes much greater use of popular material. Nevertheless, it may be argued that the role of folklore in the Middle English debate is still a subordinate one. The possibility of a peaceful co-existence between fable and rhetoric must be recognized, and further, the ease with which the fable could be used as a weapon in rhetorical strategy. Antecedent to the handbooks of rhetoric, the fable might be seen as a factor in their formulation--for it was precisely the rhetoricians' knowledge of popular psychology which prompted them so frequently to recommend the inclusion of dramatized tales, impersonations, and exempla in rhetorical orations.¹² In practice, the fable was often used

as a subordinate weapon in broader contexts.¹³ The very history of the fable, as well as the observations of the rhetoricians, points to a continuing relationship with rhetorical practice.

Whether or not they specifically mention the fable, moreover, all the masters of rhetoric are emphatic on the need for concrete illustrations of the ideas of the oration, for "examples" to drive the point home. Citing something said or done in the past, according to the rhetorical treatise Ad Herennium, renders a thought more brilliant, clearer, more plausible, more vivid.¹⁴ Quintilian adds:

Nay, even common sayings and popular beliefs may be found to be useful. For they form a sort of testimony, which is rendered all the more impressive by the fact that it was not given to suit special cases, but was the utterance or action of minds swayed neither by prejudice or influence, simply because it seemed the most honourable or honest thing to say or do.¹⁵

Through suggestions such as these the road was paved for the introduction of concrete popular material into rhetorical compositions. The medieval conflicti as a rule did not avail themselves of the advice in the same way as does The Owl and the Nightingale; as a result, there is a deceptive difference between them--a difference which belies their common starting point, and gives The Owl and the Nightingale its surface texture as "popular" poetry.¹⁶ But while the Latin conflictus draws from "learned" sources such as Scripture and the classics, and the Middle English debate relies more upon "popular" traditions for its exem-

pla, this should not blind the reader to a fundamental likeness in method, nor to the common mock purpose behind their employment of rhetorical advice.¹⁷

Because of the surface differences, it seems advisable to examine first the ultimate source of likeness--the school exercises and handbooks of rhetoric--as they seem to have influenced the Owl and the Nightingale poet.

As part of the traditional training of the young student, the progymnasmata, or graded series of exercises in writing and speaking themes, would have been the earliest influence upon the poet. The assignments in the usual set of exercises progressed from easy to more difficult work, building upon previous assignments without repeating them. Almost all the progymnasmata exercises can be traced in The Owl and the Nightingale.

The very first exercise, myth or fable, plays an obvious role in the twelfth-century debate. As has been seen, the use of the fable was highly recommended by Quintilian in the education of future rhetoricians. His advice was followed in the Praeexercitamina of the sixth-century schoolmaster Priscian of Caesarea, who defines fable as a fictional composition told with verisimilitude, exhibiting an image of truth.¹⁸ Priscian emphasizes the practical orientation of the fable: "pertinet ad vitae utilitatem." Also, it requires an epimythion, the "oratio qua utilitas fabulae detegitur," which is logically placed at the end, although some put it first. He stresses still more the need of a pleasant, sim-

ple style, whether the fable is told concisely or is expanded by actual dialogue and details of description. The narrative is to avoid circumlocution; hence its usefulness in the training of the young.¹⁹ The undiminished popularity of fables in the medieval period needs little documentation. In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville devotes an entire separate section of his Etymologiae to the exercise, and the Latin Aesop and Avianus are standard recommendations on most medieval lists of auctores.²⁰

The simplicity and practicality of the fable are carried over into The Owl and the Nightingale by two separate examples: the fable of the fouled nest and the fable of the cat and the fox (ll. 99-138; 809-36), both of which are told by the nightingale to illustrate her case against the owl, and both of which lead to terse, practical epimythia. In retaliation, the owl narrates the story of the hapless nightingale (ll. 1049-66), which is also found in Marie de France's "Lai de Laostic"--such a tale as was recommended in the second exercise in the progymnasmata.²¹

In addition, both birds make frequent use of the proverb, still another of the recommended exercises. According to Priscian, the proverb or sententia was a saying having a general application, exhorting, dissuading, or simply showing the nature of things.²² The usefulness of sententiae in the pleading of cases was strongly underscored by the author of the Rhetorica Ad Herennium, who saw the strength of its practical origins.²³ The twelfth and thirteenth

century arts of poetry also devote considerable attention to the exercise, particularly as a way of beginning a poem.²⁴ In Priscian's Praeexercitamina, the proverb was developed with extensive support; the exercise proceeded by way of 1) brief encomium of the sayer; 2) direct exposition or paraphrase of the proverb; 3) citation of a cause; 4) contrast; 5) comparison; 6) example; 7) quoting of an authority; and 8) a hortatory conclusion.²⁵

Proverbs are hurled fast and furiously by both participants in the owl and the nightingale debate.²⁶ By far the greater number are attributed to "King Alfred," and accompanied by a brief encomium of his wisdom. Most are also followed by a direct exposition or paraphrase as the progymnasmata suggest. Outside of this, the manner of their development varies. A few come as climaxes to a series of charges, providing an emphatic and succinct ending; those attached to the fable of the owl and the falcon, of course, echo the familiar fable apparatus of the promythium and epimythium.²⁷ Several others, however, are couched in a framework of proof, contrast, and illustration which strongly suggests the school exercises. The nightingale's first set speech is a particularly careful arrangement of her proverbial evidence, calculated to prove that the owl is unnatural in its habits of singing and flying by night. Her theme is a Scriptural one: "Everyone that doeth evil, hateth the light" (John 3:20). The nightingale states the saying (ll. 229-30), paraphrases (ll. 231-32), supports with an enthymene

(ll. 233-38) whose first term is another proverb ("A man shuns that which knows him to be foul"), considers in contrast the owl's alleged incapacity in the daytime (ll. 239-43), and quotes an illustrative "parable" (ll. 244-50).²⁸

Similar following of school formulas marks her first rebuttal after the owl has taken the offensive in ll. 549-658. The nightingale rises to the occasion with the cunning which the narrator has predicted (ll. 659-707)--in fact, with an argument in praise of her own cunning, based on another proverb ascribed to Alfred, "Mere strength can do nothing against skill" (l. 762). The proverb is immediately paraphrased (ll. 763-64); the strategy which captures castles and cities is cited in proof (ll. 765-68); in contrast to this human skill is the subservient state of the brute horse, despite its great prowess (ll. 773-782); by a somewhat questionable enthymeme the nightingale then identifies her cunning with the superior rationality of human beings (ll. 783-92), and closes her argument with two invented examples, first the parallel of the wrestling match (ll. 795-804), and then the fable of the fox and the cat (ll. 809-836).

Among the other exercises of the progymnasmata, The Owl and the Nightingale owes a substantial debt to the epideictic tasks of encomium and comparison. Encomium and its counterpart, censure or vituperation, were considered among the most important exercises; on none did the writers of the progymnasmata lavish more detailed and elaborate directions.²⁹

Quintilian speaks highly of encomium as one of the more

important and profitable themes for the young student, for

The mind is exercised by the variety and multiplicity of the subject matter, while the character is moulded by the contemplation of virtue and vice. Further wide knowledge of facts is thus acquired, from which examples may be drawn if circumstances so demand, such illustrations being of the utmost value in every kind of case.³⁰

Priscian defines the encomium or laus as the setting forth of the good qualities which belong to a person, either in general or in particular, and adds that censure or vituperatio may be classified with it, since both are developed by the same commonplaces.³¹ The object of encomium may be a general class or a particular member of that class, whether a person, thing, time, place or dumb animal, or even a tree, mountain, or river: a person such as Socrates, a thing such as justice, a dumb animal such as a horse.³²

The encomium of a person or a race proceeds by developing the following topics, according to Priscian: a man's race (e.g. Latin or Greek); his native city (Rome, Athens); his birth, with any marvelous things that befell at the time (dreams, signs); nurture and education; qualities of body (beauty, stature, speed, strength) and soul (justice, temperance, wisdom, manliness); his profession (philosopher, rhetorician, soldier) and deeds; external resources such as relatives, friends, possessions, household, fortune, etc.; length of life and manner of death, including anything extraordinary in the latter; and things done after his death, such as honors, oracles, or the praise won by his descendants.³³ Comparisons may be distributed throughout, to em-

phasize the merits of the person being praised. The procedure for encomia of living things without speech or for plants is similar, with topics drawn from the habitat, the god to whom the subject is dedicated (Hermogenes gives the example of the owl, dedicated to Athena; Priscian substitutes the dove, sacred to Venus); its nurture; nature of soul and body; deeds and usefulness, and length of life. In the case of plants, Priscian directs, the encomiast must dwell most upon the topic of usefulness: "utile habeat, in quo maxime morandum." Once again, comparisons are recommended for emphasis.³⁴

The exercise of encomium found enduring popularity in the later medieval period. Just as "l'objet principal du genre oratoire que les anciens ont appelé démonstratif est l'eloge et le blâme, et le moyen par lequel on y atteint est la description," Faral observes, so in the Middle Ages "la description ne vise que très rarement à peindre objectivement les personnes et les choses et qu'elle soit toujours dominée par une intention affective qui oscille entre la louange et la critique."³⁵

Very closely related to encomium is the exercise of comparison--so closely, in fact, that Priscian only reluctantly treats the latter as a separate exercise.³⁶ All the rules put forth for praise, rhetoricians note, may be applied to the comparison as well.³⁷ Quintilian also marks the closeness of the two, distinguishing comparison only by its double subject: it proceeds by the same topics, but

duplicates the subject matter and deals with the degree as well as the nature of virtues and vices.³⁸ Anything that can be the object of encomium may also be treated in comparison: two cities may be compared, or two plants. The purpose of the exercise may be to praise one and blame the other (e.g. justice over riches) or to praise one more than the other (Ulysses more than Hercules).³⁹ The fourth-century rhetorician Chirius Fortunatianus distinguishes comparisons of persons and of actions, and points out that an argument may touch on both at once; as an example, he offers the case of the relative merits of the orator who persuades the senate to harmony at a time of civil insurrection, and the philosopher who does the same among the people.⁴⁰ But whatever the purpose of the comparison, according to Priscian, the primary requirement for the orator is that he be agile and swift in speech, since he must make frequent transitions in thought.⁴¹

Such school assignments as that of Priscian must have spawned countless numbers of comparative encomia of animals and plants, not to mention human beings or other suggested subjects, throughout late antiquity and well into the medieval period. Their relevance to The Owl and the Nightingale is obvious. Both the owl and the nightingale engage in energetic self-encomia, while heaping vituperation upon one another. Almost all the encomiastic topics are touched upon in the course of the debate: habitat, nurture, upbringing, qualities of body and soul, friends, fortune and (in the case

of the owl), manner of death and deeds done after death.

There is a rough following of encomiastic order in the give and take. The owl's first real address begins (ll. 269-76) with her qualities of body (strong beak, good claws, natural and therefore praiseworthy fierceness), followed in lines 277-308 by qualities of soul (wisdom and self-control in ignoring the spiteful chatter of the little birds), and finally deeds, emphasizing the usefulness of her song to men (ll. 323-330). Her stress throughout the middle of the debate is on the usefulness of her deeds, precisely as the progymnasmata had recommended.⁴² Toward the end of her final speech, she proceeds to the final topics of encomium, manner of death and deeds done after death. Whereas the progymnasmata envisioned these deeds as performed in honor of the deceased by others, however, the owl finds still greater reason for praise in the usefulness of her dead body to man as a scarecrow or decoy (ll. 1615-30).

The pattern for the owl's self-encomium is set early in the poem by the nightingale's censure; this likewise proceeds from physical and spiritual qualities (ugliness of body, viciousness of soul, ll. 35-36, 61-82); nurture (snails, mice, and other foul creatures, ll. 85-88); and habitat (the fouled nest, ll. 91-97); through extensive consideration of the uselessness of the owl, to the disgrace of her death (ll. 1121-44). The owl's censure of the nightingale, with the nightingale's corresponding self-encomium, on the other hand, centers mainly on the nightingale's

service to man, though the owl works in the earlier topics in her first formal charge: the nightingale is frail, tiny, ugly, unclean in habitat and nurture (ll. 575-602). Again, the speeches of both birds are virtually point-by-point comparisons, with the clear purpose of proving superiority.

Still another school exercise which has left its traces in The Owl and the Nightingale is the thesis or positio, the first of the strictly argumentative exercises. Priscian defines thesis as the deliberation of some thing in general, differing from an hypothesis by prescinding from particular circumstances and debating only in general terms. His illustration treats of the simple question of whether one should marry. However, the question may also be two-fold, for example, whether it is better to contend in games than to farm; the speaker must then dissuade from the one and persuade to the other.⁴³

Quintilian views theses chiefly as comparisons, involving such questions as "Which is preferable, town or country life?" or "Which deserves the greatest praise, the lawyer or the soldier?" He recommends the exercise unequivocally:

These provide the most attractive and copious practice in the art of speaking, and are most useful whether we have an eye to the duties of deliberative oratory or the arguments of the courts.⁴⁴

Whereas the ending of the previous school exercises was a foregone conclusion, in the thesis much may be said on both sides, increasing the difficulty and value of the exer-

cise.⁴⁵ But the good orator will proceed convincingly through the topics of the lawful, the just, the rational, and the possible, refute all contrary arguments to his thesis, and end with a hortatory peroration, appealing to the common customs of all men.⁴⁶

Quintilian's proposal of a thesis regarding the praiseworthiness of the lawyer or the soldier suggests the debt of the exercise to encomium as well as to comparison. Fortunatianus similarly opposes the professions of orator and philosopher.⁴⁷ Priscian recommends the professions of the philosopher, rhetorician and soldier as subjects for encomia, and further suggests the comparison of professions under comparatio.⁴⁸ Thus the exercise of thesis, gathering up in itself the elements of the previous exercises, prepares the way for the many medieval debates between members of opposed professions.⁴⁹ Whatever the professions, the basis for their opposition in literature is a rhetorical one.⁵⁰

In a very real sense, the owl and the nightingale are carrying on a discussion of a thesis in the Middle English poem, with, of course, the added factor of the prosopopoeia, being themselves members of the classes they are upholding. The "ich" and "þu" hurled back and forth in the debate are generic pronouns, as has long been recognized.⁵¹ Arguments are plentiful on both sides, and so are rebuttals; the common moral habits of mankind are invoked, along with the values of justice, law, and rationality. The conclusion is certainly not a foregone one: critics have differed

widely in their estimation of which bird, if either, wins the debate. Atkins thought the nightingale had the better of the argument,⁵² while more recent commentators have leaned toward the owl.⁵³ A good number of critics, however, refuse to make a decision.⁵⁴

That two birds should be debating a thesis brings us to the school exercise at the very heart of the poem--the exercise of prosopopoeia or characterization, which played such a striking role in The Dream of the Rood. In the progymnasmata, the exercise was broadly viewed as the imitation of the speech of a person assigned,⁵⁵ and called for the composition of an imaginary monologue which might have been spoken by an historical, legendary, or fictitious person under certain circumstances. Priscian, as did his predecessors, breaks the exercise down into three subdivisions: ethopoeia, which invents speech for a known person; idolopoeia, which invents speech for one who is deceased and supposedly prevented from speaking; and prosopopoeia in the strict sense, which attributes speech to a thing normally incapable of it. The characterization can be either single or double, depending on the presence of an interlocutor. Whatever the subject and situation, the speech must be suited to them.⁵⁶

The exercise was thus a valuable one for students, since it introduced them to the doctrine of decorum, requiring style to be appropriate to the character of the speaker, the audience, and the situation. Such an exercise, Donald L. Clark

notes, could nourish poetical theory and practice quite as deeply as it did rhetoric.⁵⁷ Quintilian, in fact, fully recognized its usefulness to future poets and historians, while calling it absolutely necessary for orators.⁵⁸ While he is referring to prosopopoeia in its most general sense, including all three subdivisions, later rhetoricians seem to have been more fascinated with the possibilities of prosopopoeia in the strict sense of the word, the attributing of speech to inanimate objects; although they discuss the other areas of the exercise, they give examples and extended treatment to this last area alone. The same preference is obvious as late as the twelfth and thirteenth-century arts of poetry.⁵⁹

The esteem in which this rhetorical device was held from antiquity on through the Middle Ages, the abundant examples of it in both learned and popular literature,⁶⁰ and the universal exhortation to practice of it contained in the progymnasmata, make the use of it in The Owl and the Nightingale unsurprising. What should be noted is the skill with which it is executed. The poet has followed well the advice of Priscian on decorum:

Always keep the distinctive traits proper to the assigned persons and occasions; for the speech of youth is not that of age, nor the speech of joy that of grief.⁶¹

As the content of the debate reveals, he has a firm grasp on the distinct personalities of the two birds, as accumulated through centuries of natural history, proverb and

fable, and patristic comment.⁶² While they are distinctly portrayed, moreover, through the prosopopoeia the owl and the nightingale also emerge as markedly similar, pugnacious, egotistical beings, who enjoy argument for its own sake. Herein lies the triumph of the humor of the poem: the differences which are so important to the two birds shrink to nothingness in comparison with the qualities of stubbornness and contentiousness which unite them. Their speeches dramatize this characterization quite vividly; the synopsis of the prosopopoeia inserted at the beginning of the poem is accurate:

An aiper azen oþer sval
 And let þat vvole mod ut al;
 And eiper seide of oþeres custe
 Þat alre worste þat hi wuste.

(ll. 7-10)

Not only the actual speeches, but the narrative comments, pace, and dynamic of the debate all advance this basic characterization. Each bird will acknowledge only the virtues of its species, a suspicious enough rhetorical position. And since the prosopopoeia is double, the claims of each speaker are flatly contradicted by the opponent, and just as flatly reasserted in return, multiplying the impression of two fixed, irreconcilable, and highly questionable points of view. Given the speakers and the situation, the prosopopoeia is very much in character. It is not, of course, an especially good model of rational argument, and the humorous decorum of the debate lies in its overt violations of the

accepted decorum for disputations which it pretends all the while to be following.

There is, then, ample precedent for the idea of the owl-and-nightingale debate in the traditional rhetorical exercises used in the schools. The connection is also supported by the later history of these elementary exercises and those which followed them in the rhetorical curriculum. After the elementary training of the progymnasmata, the future orator proceeded to practise declamation in the school of rhetoric, first in the form of suasoriae, deliberative themes using historical or quasi-historical material; then controversiae, which allowed the student to speak in fictitious legal cases.⁶³ All these exercises were designed to prepare the student for actual oratorical tasks, whether forensic, deliberative, or epideictic. Their increasing artificiality, however, has been noted above;⁶⁴ already in the first century A.D., Quintilian complains of the divorce of declamatio from real-life situations, through the ingenious and fantastic subject matter which it adopted, and particularly through its perversions of prosopopoeia, even though he admits the impossibility of eliminating the abuses.⁶⁵ Judging by later works, his admonitions seem to have been virtually ignored.⁶⁶ As a result, the combination of highly conventional, seriously formulated procedures and trivial, often whimsical subject matter continued as a part of an education in rhetoric from antiquity down into the medieval

period. The influence of rhetoric on medieval debate poetry, Walther concludes, cannot be underestimated:

In den Progymnasmata der Rhetorik spielte die Synkrisis als Schulübung eine grosse Rolle. Die feste Organisation des Unterrichts an den römischen Rhetorenschulen, die sich später allmählich christianisierten, ging zum Teil auf die Klosterschulen über, deren Bedeutung für die Entwicklung unserer Gattung sehr gross ist.⁶⁷

This is not to say that The Owl and the Nightingale is a school exercise itself, although some critics have suggested as much.⁶⁸ The difference between the Middle English debate and poems which do take their origins directly from such exercises is a substantial one, not to be accounted for simply on the ground that the Middle English poet was more gifted. The sum of rhetorical sophistication present in the owl and the nightingale's dispute presupposes a writer of more advanced rhetorical experience. Whether or not he was actually an itinerant justice, as Kathryn Huguinir conjectures,⁶⁹ or an assistant to an ecclesiastical legal official,⁷⁰ had been trained as a lawyer at all, or simply influenced by the style of the Latin debate poems which resulted from such training,⁷¹ seems unimportant. What must be recognized is the mock-serious employment of rhetorical strategy in the disputation.

The generally legalistic flavor of the poem (especially ll. 541-55 and 1087-1101), and occasionally of its vocabulary, has been carefully annotated by critics⁷²--perhaps too carefully, in view of the poet's free and not always consistent use of variant traditions. Determined forcing of speci-

fic legal parallels would seem to cast comparatively little light on the art of the poem; the less specialized advice on disputation contained in standard medieval textbooks of rhetoric and taught in the schools appears to be more pertinent.

That the author is familiar with such standard rhetorical advice, and that he wished us to view the debate in this context, is strongly indicated by the narrative comments which interrupt the speeches of the birds. The voice of rhetorical authority almost seems to be coaching the owl and the nightingale from the sidelines. For example, the nightingale speaks out boldly after the owl's first long speech, despite her fear and annoyance at the owl's wise answer,

Vor he is wis þat hardeliche
 Wiþ is uo berþ grete ilete,
 Þat he uor areþe hit ne forlete:
 Vor suich worþ bold 3if þu fli3st
 Þat wle flo 3if þu [n] isvicst; (ll. 402-406)

The necessity of maintaining composure, especially when under pressure, is a familiar rhetorical axiom; Quintilian stipulates that "fiduciam igitur orator prae se ferat semperque ita dicat, tanquam de causa optime sentiat," and "contra turbantes audendum et impudentiae fortiter resistendum."⁷³ In his elaborate commentary on Cicero's De Inventione, the later rhetorician Q. Fabius Laurentius reiterates the point, which Cicero himself had also made (in De Inventione I. xvii. 25); according to Laurentius, it is advisable to respond quickly and confidently when the

opposing side seems to be winning favor with the judge, for those who are prepared with their answers will undercut the impression made by their opponents.⁷⁴

Again, after the owl states her case against the nightingale, the latter is "almost at her wits' end" in devising an answer, and very conscious of the precariousness of her position:

An hit is suþe strong to fiȝte
 Aȝen soþ & aȝen riȝte.
 He mot gon to al mid ginne,
 Wan þe horte boþ on winne;
 An þe man mot on oþer segge:
 He mot bihemmen & bilegge,
 ȝif muþ wiþute mai biwro
 Pat me þe horte noȝt niso.
 An sone mai a word misreke
 Par muþ shal aȝen horte speke,
 An sone mai a word misstorte
 Par muþ shal speken aȝen horte. (ll. 667-78)

The difficulty of lying well is another rhetorical axiom.

As Quintilian observes, it calls for verbal agility, and a good memory of the fictions one has employed:

Above all we must see that we do not contradict ourselves, a slip which is far from rare on the part of spinners of fiction . . . the orator should bear clearly in mind throughout his whole speech what the fiction is to which he has committed himself, since we are apt to forget our falsehoods, and there is no doubt about the truth of the proverb that a liar should have a good memory.⁷⁵

The owl's next speech rouses the nightingale to anger and shame; she remains silent and thoughtful for a time, consequently,

An wiste wel on hire þohte
 Þe wrappe binimes monnes red.
 For hit seide þe King Alfred:
 'Sel[d]e e[re]ndeð wel þe loþe,

An selde plaideð wel þe wrope;
 For wrappe meinþ þe horte blod
 Ðat hit floweþ so wilde flod
 An al þe heorte ouergeþ,
 Ðat heo haueþ no þing bute breþ,
 An so forleost al hire liht
 Ðat heo ne siþ soð ne riht.
 Þe Niztingale hi understod,
 An ouergan lette hire mod.
 He mihte bet speken a sele
 Ðan mid wrappe wordes deale. (ll. 940-54)

Handbooks of rhetoric frequently warned the orator of the detrimental effects of anger. Quintilian underlines the danger emphatically:

the skilled debater must be able to control his tendency to anger; there is no passion that is a greater enemy to reason, while it often leads an advocate right away from the point and forces him both to use gross and insulting language and to receive it in return; occasionally it will even excite him to such an extent as to attack the judges. Moderation, and sometimes even long-suffering, is the better policy . . . ⁷⁶

In one of the most popular rhetorical texts of the Middle Ages, Cassiodorus repeats the remarks of Quintilian almost verbatim.⁷⁷

Still further on in the poem, by introducing the tale of the lady and the knight, the owl provokes the nightingale to such a point that "mid sworde an mid speres orde, / 3if ho mon were, wolde fiȝte" (ll. 1068-69). In her present condition, however,

Ac þo ho bet do ne miȝte
 Ho uayt mid hire wise tunge.
 'Wel fiȝt þat wel specþ,' seiþ in þe songe.
 Of hire tunge ho nom red . . . (ll. 1070-73)

The effectiveness of prudent speech, or of prudence in general as a weapon, is a fundamental doctrine of the masters of rhetoric:

there is nothing not merely in oratory, but in all the tasks of life that is more important than sagacity . . . without it all formal instruction is given in vain, while prudence unsupported by learning will accomplish more than learning unsupported by prudence.⁷⁸

Prudence should in fact govern every aspect of the good orator's presentation, down to his very last gesture, according to Martianus Capella.⁷⁹ And eloquence is often advanced in rhetorical treatises as a weapon equal or superior to a sword or spear; the author of the Ad Herennium uses the analogy quite naturally to illustrate his discussion of figures of speech:

Accordingly in the first figure it seems that the arm draws back and the hand whirls about to bring the sword to the adversary's body, while in the second his body is as it were pierced with quick and repeated thrusts.⁸⁰

So too, advising the pleader of cases not to waste his energy on proving superfluous points in his argument, the late fourth-century rhetorician C. Julius Victor stresses the importance of strong proof of the crucial point: "indeed, a sure hand can be content with one spear, but an unsure one must hurl many."⁸¹ In much the same way does the nightingale boast of her one sure skill in lines 793-804 of the Middle English poem:

Telstu bi me þe wurs forþan
 þat ich bute anne craft ne kan?
 3if tueie men goþ to wraslinge
 An eifer oþer faste þringe,
 An þe on can swenges suþe fele,
 An kan his wrenches wel forhele,
 An þe oþer ne can sweng but anne,
 Anne is god wiþ eche manne,
 An mid þon one leiþ to grunde
 Anne after oþer a lutle stunde,
 Wat þarf he recche of a mo swenge
 Þone þe on him is swo genge?

Further, the example of the skillful wrestler which the nightingale uses to illustrate the superiority of artfulness over brute strength is the very example by which Quintilian attacks those who believe that strength is all the greater if it lacks art:

Even a gladiator who plunges into the fight with no skill at arms to help him, and a wrestler who puts forth the whole strength of his body the moment he has got a hold, is acclaimed by them for his outstanding vigour, although it is of frequent occurrence in such cases for the latter to be overthrown by his own strength and for the former to find the fury of his onslaught parried⁸² by his adversary with a supple turn of the wrist.

It will be noted that most of the rhetorical generalizations introduced into the narrative by the poet are either specifically mentioned as well-known to the nightingale, or immediately shown to be exemplified by her in the following speech. There is indeed good evidence in the poem for the distinction which Douglas L. Peterson makes between the nightingale as a skilled sophistical rhetorician and the owl as a logician defending Christian doctrine in scholastic fashion.⁸³ The nightingale may involve herself in open contradiction and faulty syllogisms, as Peterson points out; she is still extremely cunning, and it takes all the wisdom of the owl to keep up with her. The owl is rightly afraid of "plaites wrenche," such as the one by which the nightingale claims victory at the end of the debate, having maneuvered the owl into admitting an argument she had earlier proposed: that the owl's death is a source of profit for mankind (ll. 1121-38; 1638-52).

Such a debate between a rhetorician and a logician would not have been foreign to the twelfth century mind.⁸⁴ The century was in fact flooded with poetry of this type, and the debt of The Owl and the Nightingale to the mock-rhetorical arguments of the Latin conflictus seems clear; above and beyond his knowledge of elementary rhetorical exercises, the Middle English poet has too firm and sophisticated a grasp of their comic possibilities for one to believe otherwise. For the element of parody which makes itself felt in the Latin debate poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is based on a similar sense of the humor of serious rhetorical procedures governing unexpected and often trivial arguments. Therefore an examination of the medieval conflictus should also prove helpful to an understanding of the Middle English poem.

The Owl and the Nightingale has occasionally been viewed against the background of the conflictus, but hardly ever with real thoroughness, and seldom to the effect of genuinely illuminating the poem. J.E. Wells provided a schematized summary of the relationship in the introduction to his 1907 edition of the poem, which has perhaps discouraged later scholars from further investigation. Through his comparative study of extant contention poems earlier than the fourteenth century in Latin, Provençal, and Old French, Wells concluded that neither the Provençal partimen, tenson, or feigned tenson, nor the French tenson or jeu-parti had any direct influence on The Owl, while the Latin conten-

tions or French narrative poems derived from them were closest in character; moreover, he minimized the importance of similarities even among these last two groups:

Many of the characteristics are such as would easily occur to a clever man who sat down to compose a debate between the two birds . . . What have been noted as similarities of characteristics between the French or Latin or Provençal poems and The Owl are usually similarities in bare fact of the characteristic . . . in most of the cases the embodiment or use of the characteristic is in no way similar to the embodiment or use in The Owl; and very commonly the prominence or extent of influence of the characteristic is quite unlike the prominence or extent in The Owl.⁸⁵

Wells' caution is an understandable attempt to forestall speculation over a possible direct source for the Middle English debate among contention poems in other languages--speculation which clearly has little basis and almost no promise of fruitfulness. However, a search for a direct source is quite different from an attempt to understand the literary tradition out of which the author is writing; this attempt seems to call for a shift in critical methodology. Wells, on the other hand, approaches the poem through fairly undifferentiated statistical analysis, listing seventeen of its characteristics without regard to their order of importance and then tabulating the number of these characteristics which are also to be found in debate poems of another language. Several characteristics which he attributes to The Owl and the Nightingale have been challenged by later commentators, and he himself raises reservations about the importance of similarities of bare

fact.⁸⁶ Even so, if he were looking for a specific source, such a method could be a valuable means of narrowing the ground of the search. But for a general understanding of a literary tradition, some differentiation of major and minor characteristics seems indispensable; and an author's freedom to alter and transform traditional elements while remaining heavily indebted to the tradition makes a mathematical checklist, a "true or false" set of categories, a very cumbersome instrument of analysis. Thus, while Wells acknowledges that The Owl and the Nightingale belongs in the tradition of the conflictus, "a verbal contest for supremacy, between two or more persons or personifications, capable or regarded as capable, of originating and carrying on a dialogue,"⁸⁷ he does not actually explore the Middle English poem in the light of the tradition.

J.W.H. Atkins, in his edition in 1922, surveys the medieval conflictus in greater detail, drawing useful distinctions between the Latin and vernacular types. He too chooses to stress the difference between The Owl and the Nightingale and the Latin debate poems; although the framework is similar, "the treatment is modified in various particulars, and the ultimate form is something quite different."⁸⁸ Atkins admits that his account of the development of the conflictus is brief and incomplete; whether he fully penetrates the nature of the form in its twelfth-century manifestations will be discussed further on.⁸⁹

Henry B. Hinckley treats a possible relationship between

The Owl and the Nightingale and the conflictus somewhat ambiguously, claiming that "the Latin contention-poems of the twelfth century must have been known to Master Nicholas, though it is difficult to trace their influence upon him unless it be in the matter of meter." At the same time he does not hesitate to affirm, on very tenuous evidence, that the eleventh-century Conflictus Ovis et Lini was an influence on the Middle English poet, and that echoes of Virgilian Eclogues are also possible.⁹⁰

Mrs. Hugarir leans closely upon Wells' examination of the contention poems, and concludes far more emphatically than he that the Latin debate is "the model which it is practically certain the poet used":

It may, indeed, be stated with emphasis that, with due allowance for the poet's independence and originality (involving, however, nothing that contradicts the assumption), the poem in every way conforms to the pattern set by the Latin debate as practised by grave cleric, Goliardic satirist, wandering scholar, on widely contrasted themes weighty or trivial, in intention serious or merely amusing, varying in literary quality from a pedestrian or elegant use of traditional rhetoric to a high degree of intellectual cleverness or now and then to the grace and charm of true poetry mastering the constraints of a mode intrinsically artificial.⁹¹

Having made this affirmation, she virtually ignores the conflictus for the remainder of her book-length investigation of the poem.

A later attempt to place The Owl and the Nightingale within a literary tradition is found in Haessler's study. Besides a detailed consideration of figures of rhetoric,

he briefly notes similarities between The Owl and the winter-summer debates, and acknowledges that the Latin conflictus in general may have had some influence on the Middle English poet, but reserves his most definitive statements for the continental debates. Disagreeing with Huguier and, ultimately, with Wells, Haessler discusses the tenson and partimen as direct influences on The Owl; he shows almost no hesitation over the inconsistency in dating required by this view:

Und zwar liess sich für die Art der Konzeption
und den Eingang des Gedichts die altfranzösische
Tenzon, für Einzelheiten der Streiführung und
vor allem für den Schluss das Jeu-parti heran-
ziehen.⁹²

Finally, the influence of Latin debate poetry is reiterated in the introduction to Eric G. Stanley's edition of 1960. Stanley places the poem directly in the genre of the debate between creatures, and briefly sketches similarities in theme, structure, and purpose, giving a summary of the Latin dialogue between Summer and Winter in his appendix.⁹³

It is perhaps significant of critical neglect of the traditional background of The Owl and the Nightingale that of the many commentaries on the poem only six make any real reference to the genre, and that three of the six should be introductions to editions, working under the necessity of providing a brief general survey. Given the enormous popularity of the debate form at the time in which the poem was written; the undisputed fact that the poet was working, however loosely, within this form; and the numerous critical clashes over the meaning and purpose of the poem, the neglect

seems both unreasonable and unwise. To hypothesize concerning a poet's meaning without consideration of known facts of his form is hardly critical efficiency. And so a comparative study of The Owl and the Nightingale and the twelfth-century conflictus is in order.

First, however, it should be noted that the form sinks roots deeply into earlier literary history, going back through the Carolingian period to the classical eclogues of Vergil and Theocritus. Debate elements are inherent in the pastoral theme of the contest between shepherds, where the question of who is the better singer naturally resolves itself into who can give the better reasons, as the shepherds begin to match their own persons, qualities, possessions, etc. Among the characteristics of the "debate" in its early Latin stage are 1) narrative introduction; 2) song contest; 3) narrative conclusion; 4) presence of official judge; 5) quick, sharp alternation of subtle arguments, often in single stanzas.⁹⁴

The classical eclogues exercise a clearly discernible influence on the debate poems of the Carolingian period, in particular the Conflictus Veris et Hiemis attributed to Alcuin or one of his pupils, and the De Rosae Liliique Certamine of Sedulius Scottus, where pastoral imagery persists and becomes itself the object of the debate.⁹⁵ Too much should not be made of the Carolingian poems, however, in relation to the later medieval allegorical debates; in themselves they are rather stilted and lifeless examples of the

form. Allen calls them limping, dull, schooltask imitations of Vergil's highly artificial imitations of the idylls of Theocritus.⁹⁶ Hedburg stresses the conflation of types resulting from the double influence of the pastoral and the contentio as accounting for the inconsistencies and clumsiness of the extant Carolingian poems.⁹⁷ The Conflictus Veris et Hiemis may be the earliest example in medieval literature of a formal dispute in verse between allegorical figures who are themselves the embodiments of the principles at issue,⁹⁸ but this eminence is probably only an accident of the choice of time, preserving one from a number of exercises of a similar type. Nor can it be credited with initiating the allegorical impulse in debate; one has only to think of Boethius and his Lady Philosophy.⁹⁹

It is some time later, in the twelfth century, that the medieval debate comes into its own, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways.¹⁰⁰ In a very earnest fashion, Atkins stresses the influence of Abelard's dialectic on the intellectual life of the time,¹⁰¹ and fails to distinguish the element in twelfth-century debate that differentiates it most sharply from its predecessors, its spirit of satiric parody--a critical weakness which may explain his later, dogmatically allegorical interpretation of The Owl and the Nightingale. Hanford takes a broader view and adds to his list of causes of the sudden popularity of the conflictus in the twelfth century not only the dialectic of the schools, but also the vein of satire, the character of jou d'esprit,

and entertainment value of the contest, going so far as to say that most twelfth-century debates

represent a reaction from, often the parody of, the sober pursuits of the school room, and are the work of monks and pedagogues on a crabbed literary holiday or of wild goliardi, the primates and archpoets who amused and scandalized the more learned audiences of their time with their Latin rhymes.¹⁰²

The problem of the Goliards themselves is beyond the scope of the present investigation.¹⁰³ Here it is sufficient to note that genuine dialectic may be mocked, as may all things which take themselves seriously, and especially as may academic procedures; judging from the abundance of trivial and light-hearted contests which found their way into the twelfth-century conflictus, whether with or without a decision, it is quite possible that The Owl and the Nightingale has no specific and serious allegorical meaning.

In addition to the marked increase in the humorous aspect of the Latin literary debate during the twelfth century, the form also begins to exhibit a freer style and the fresh liveliness of rhythmical verse. Otherwise, the conventions are similar to the older versions: the introductory narrative, the tendency to limit each argument to a single stanza, the calling in of a judge to decide the contest.¹⁰⁴

But the immediate purpose of this investigation is not so much to study the predecessors of the twelfth-century conflictus as it is to examine the relation of the extant

twelfth-century versions to The Owl and the Nightingale, written somewhere between 1189 and 1216.¹⁰⁵ The question remains: how does the Middle English vernacular poem compare with the Latin conflicti that its author most assuredly knew?

The answer cannot be oversimplified. Transmission from Latin to vernacular is never automatically a reworking of Latin themes, nor is it an equally automatic infusion of fresh life into stale and pedantic Latin sources--though Atkins seems to view it as such, the fact remains that vernacular debates are not always superior to their Latin predecessors. If all the twelfth-century Latin conflicti are grouped helter-skelter together, it may be legitimate to say that as a whole, their vernacular counterparts are more elaborate and picturesque, less stiff and conventional, less filled with classical allusions and references, more developed as far as narrative and dramatic elements are concerned, containing more local color and a more independent style.¹⁰⁶ But in at least one major example of Latin-vernacular transmission, the earlier Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae is in many ways superior to its vernacular successors.¹⁰⁷ As a debate, it rests upon more reasonable grounds (the victory is not dependent on chance, but on the strength of the argument), has a sharper sense of reality, more vivid and picturesque details, and a distinct portrait of each of its participants, while its vernacular

derivative, De Florance et de Blanche flor, offers vague, common formulas and allegorical description, and the later Geste de Blanche flour e de Florence contents itself with pedantic enumerations of plants, birds, musical instruments, precious stones, etc.¹⁰⁸ Again, although the Middle English Desputisoun bitwen the Bodi and the Souȝ is justly praised for its spirited and skilled rendering of the old debate, it is largely a development of patterns and images already present in its Latin predecessors, not a totally new accomplishment.¹⁰⁹

Rather than treat the Latin conflicti in one amorphous group, then, let us examine them more closely. In tone and purpose, most of them seem to partake thoroughly of the character of a jeu d'esprit. The fact is evident frequently from the very triviality of the topic--is the violet or the rose more beautiful, the clerk or the knight a better lover, wine or water more beneficial to man? Often, the tone is confirmed by the way the debate is carried out; the Council of Remiremont¹¹⁰ is an elaborate parody of ecclesiastical proceedings, while the Goliae Dialogus inter Aquam et Vinum¹¹¹ mocks the conventions of monkish dream visions. Usually, the ending of the debate also points to the playful nature of the whole proceeding and the lack of any particular purpose on the part of the poet. There may be no decision offered, as in the Altercatio Yemis et Estatis, De Mauro et Zoilo, or De Clarevallensibus et Cluniacensibus.¹¹² At the end of the first-mentioned debate, summer and winter are declared to be

equal in power, though different in function; the second concludes that the orders to which Maurus and Zoilus belong are equally worthy; the third reaches no rational conclusion whatsoever. Other conflicti offer a tongue-in-cheek victory achieved by a clever trick on the part of one of the debaters. Thus the priest conquers the logician in De Presbitero et logico,¹¹³ with an ending which puzzled such an erudite observer as F.J. Raby;¹¹⁴ this is almost certainly a case where internal clerical humor has to be recognized, as the priest maneuvers the logician into having to speak the last verse of the Benedictus psalm at Sunday Vespers and thus admit defeat. So too the figure of Lyaeus at the end of the Goliae Dialogus uses liturgical ritual to put an end to the debate; when refreshed by wine, he says, man sings out "Gloria in excelsis Deo," to which voice, the poet continues, "behold the excited birds as if agreeing with the arguments of wine exclaim in loud, exalted voices: 'In terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis'," and the poet awakes and praises God.¹¹⁵ The nightingale tries much the same kind of strategy at the end of The Owl and the Nightingale; although she is not successful, she momentarily at least misleads many of the birds, both great and small, with her song (ll. 1653-66).

The one area of the twelfth-century form where the jeu d'esprit does not prevail is, of course, those debates where serious moral implications are involved, especially the debates between the body and the soul. This subject

has long been recognized as essentially different in its derivation from the other conflicti, having behind it a long history of theological comment on the dialectic between man's lower and higher natures, in addition to the poetic tradition of the psychomachia.¹¹⁶ In one sense, the decisions in these debates are as unimportant as in the other conflicti, not because the situation is not taken seriously, but because it is irremediable--the person has usually been damned, and flesh and spirit are engaging in a post facto attempt to fix the blame on one another. But the didactic overtones of their strife are unmistakable, as is pointed up by the usual frame device of the dream vision: those still in life must profit from beholding it, and amend their ways accordingly. However, this is a single and clearly marked-out area among the conflicti; for the rest, neither Scriptural origin nor ecclesiastical or theological reference is any guarantee of seriousness, but only of the probable learning and clerical background of the author.

To group the debates according to subject matter serves little purpose, once we are past the classical transition from pastoral to contention. Most of the participants in twelfth-century debates are individuals, whether animate or inanimate, representing or defending a species. Whether they belong to the species or not seems of no great importance; Phyllis and Flora may be defending the merits of the absent species of clerks and knights, but the actual argument is no less quick, heated, ingenious, and dramatic.

Whether they are allegorical incarnations or not is likewise insignificant; figures such as wine and water, or winter and summer, are well able to present their own case in humorous and energetic self-encomia.

The setting of the debate is varied, but not usually described at any great length; the impression is given that the argument itself is the main focus of interest, and the more quickly the preliminary matters can be settled, the better. The dream vision framework is a well-known device for plunging rapidly into discussion of this type without much explanation (perhaps ten lines in the body-soul debates on an average); occasionally it can be made to serve the purpose of mockery at the same time and in the same short space, as in the Goliae Dialogus, where the poet, overcome with wine and sleep, is swept up into heaven in a parody of apocalyptic visions.¹¹⁷ The narrative introduction can even be dispensed with entirely, as in Denudata Veritate or the Disputatio inter Cor et Oculum, where the poet states the idea and then lets it come suddenly to life.¹¹⁸ Otherwise, the pastoral convention is retained briefly: a spring morning, a beautiful country scene, and the contest begins. One exception to this brevity is the early twelfth-century Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae, which betrays the classical learning of its author in many ways, not least by its leisurely 44-line opening description of the spring scene of the debate and an equally leisurely closing description of the court of Amor, complete with music, birds, and beauti-

ful flowers. Two further exceptions are the Altercatio Yemis et Estatus, which Raby places under the definite influence of the Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae,¹¹⁹ and De Clarevallensibus et Cluniacensibus, which seems also to be under the same influence.¹²⁰

The substance of the arguments in the conflicti, of course, varies with the particular topic under discussion. The verbal sparring is quick and ingenious, very often packed into single alternating stanzas as in the older debates.¹²¹ Themes in the argument also vary; the conventional conflictus may reflect its learned origin by abundant quotation from Scripture and the classics with very ingenious applications, while other debates are shaped by more specifically contemporary influences: compare the Goliardic drinking song motifs in Denudata Veritate with its pedantic counterpart,¹²² and also the influence of Ovid and courtly love in such debates as the Council of Remiremont.¹²³

However, in every case of a debate between creatures, the criterion which the participants aim to prove is their usefulness to man, as in The Owl and the Nightingale.¹²⁴ And for all the variation, an interesting alignment does tend to become a pattern in the arguments--the pattern so evident in The Owl and the Nightingale between sobriety and joy¹²⁵ can be worked out in the debates between wine and water, winter and summer, clerk and knight, body and soul,

and the various monastic orders. Winter is cold, stormy, and difficult, but also a God-praising, purging, and civilizing influence; summer is warm, pleasant, refreshing, but also abandoned, fostering evil and sloth. Water is sober, healing, purifying, a help to the harvest, but can also be muddy, unsocial, even poisoned; wine is expensive, precious, cheering and convivial, but it also discriminates among social classes and leads to immodesty, recklessness, confusion, and crime. The poor, ill-clad, hard-toiling and brave knight is placed opposite the ease-loving, slothful, rich, epicurean clerk. The fickle, pleasure-loving, greedy flesh disputes with the noble, responsible, God-fearing soul--or the innocent, docile and obedient flesh with the proud, corrupt, imprudent soul, depending on the point of view. Within monastic life, the same polarities are brought forth. The Cistercian monks espouse poverty and manual labor, wear rough garments and live in seclusion from society and worldly corruption--but they are also bray-voiced, corpulent, dirty and ill-smelling, their Cluniac rivals point out. The Cluniacs, on the other hand, devote themselves to chanting the liturgical services, wear smooth clothing, live in the towns in richly ornamented buildings, entertain rich guests, and over-indulge in piety until it is impious.

Perhaps the similarity is only the natural result of the need of antithesis, and yet the accusations hurled by the owl and the nightingale have a very familiar sound to one versed in the conflicti. The representative of sobri-

ety in almost all cases seems to attract charges of ugliness, uncouthness, dirty and evil-smelling habits, harsh song, association with foul creatures such as frogs, snails, and mice, and foul places such as swamps. The joyful party, on the contrary, is vulnerable to criticism for excessive indulgence in pleasure and song, fickleness, and luxury, frequenting equally dirty dwelling places near the buildings of men, leading others into temptation and wanton behavior, and helping only the noble and rich, while disdaining the poor.

The categories in which the antitheses are noted are as significantly consistent as the overall pattern of sobriety and joy itself. Habitat, nurture, upbringing, associates, usefulness of deeds, attractiveness of soul and body: in debate after debate, the same categories are discussed, indicating, surely, that basic principles are at stake. The categories are in fact the ones suggested by the ancient rules for *encomia*¹²⁶ which have been developed into systematic two-sided disagreements.

It is to a common training in rhetorical principles, then, that such similarities in the conflicti must be attributed, rather than to direct influence of one debate upon another in most cases. For the comparisons which Haessler makes between The Owl and the Nightingale and the summer-winter dialogues, he might just as easily have chosen to quote the monastic debates, or those between wine and water.¹²⁷

Just as the Owl and the figure of Winter argue the greater usefulness of a quiet, contemplative life,¹²⁸ so water emphasizes her sobriety and association with wisdom,¹²⁹ the nuns of Remiremont favor the silent discretion and wisdom of clerks,¹³⁰ and the relative values of the active versus contemplative orders play a major role in the monastic debates:

We are led by the spirit, you fulfill the letter;
Rachel surpasses Leah, believe in the prophets;
Sufficiently justified is the rule of our silence ¹³¹

Your sanctuary stands in the midst of the city,
So that city affairs feed your minds and eyes;
But we cultivate the secrets of a hidden grove
So that from our eyes we turn away empty things.¹³²

The encomiastic topic of usefulness to mankind is often crossed with that of qualities of soul, in discussing attitudes toward poverty. Just as the Owl and Winter charge their opponents with living in luxury, pride, and immorality,¹³³ water names wine as the "root of vice,"¹³⁴ and quotes St. Paul as forbidding luxury.¹³⁵ In like manner, a Cistercian monk accuses the Cluniac order of wearing fine linen;¹³⁶ the usual answer to this accusation is equally traditional: the habit does not make the monk, and true poverty is a matter of spiritual motivation rather than external manifestation (cf. De Mauro et Zoilo, ll. 25-32, and the Conflictus Ovis et Lini, ll. 142 ff.; in a more ironic vein is the debate between the Monk and Gloria inanis summarized by Walter, where Vainglory points out that God did not prefer Diogenes to David, despite the poor clothing of the former

and the rich vestments of the latter.¹³⁷) Again, the Cistercian says that the Cluniacs cater to the service of the rich while neglecting the poor;¹³⁸ the defense of the Cluniac monk (ll. 89-92) is reminiscent of the Nightingale's refusal to sing in poor and barbarous regions when she can render more useful service to cultivated and gentle-mannered listeners (ll. 995-1042), and also bears comparison with De Mauro et Zoilo, ll. 111-12, where the town monk grants "braying like an ass" to be sufficiently edifying liturgical song for a remote country cloister, but not for his congregation. This last-mentioned debate also hints at immorality as underlying the custom of wearing cassocks or robes instead of breeches.¹³⁹ The logician hurls similar accusations at the priest in De Presbytero et logico: greed, gluttony, and lust mark the ecclesiastical way of life, while the suffering of the poor continues.¹⁴⁰

Habitat, another traditional topic of encomium, also finds its way into the conflicti. Haessler observes the attempt of both the Owl and Winter to associate their rivals with mean, contemptible homes and surroundings, and adds a corresponding passage in Denudata Veritate.¹⁴¹ Similarly, the rude dwellings of the Cistercians come under scrutiny in De Clarevallensibus (ll. 141-44).

Thus, many similarities between The Owl and the Nightingale and the debates of summer and winter are only part of the larger similarity between the Middle English poem and the whole conflictus tradition, traceable to a common back-

ground of training in rhetoric. Other similarities may indicate more direct influence. As Haessler points out, both owl and nightingale explicitly identify themselves with the appropriate season and reject the opposite one, almost directly carrying on the Altercatio Yemis et Estate, in lines 430-540.¹⁴² In a less overt way, they seem to be continuing the knight-clerk debate as well. It will be remembered that the germ of the idea of the birds as participants in this debate is contained in the Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae, where Phyllis carries a hawk and Flora a sparrowhawk, and both are touched by the nightingale's song as they approach the bower of love; this is developed to a much greater degree in the vernacular versions, where at first the large birds champion the knight and the nightingale leads the smaller birds in championing the victorious clerk. (When the debate enters England, the role of the nightingale is suppressed, since the clerk's actions are seen as scandalous and dishonorable, and victory is handed to the knight, championed by the parrot and the other large birds.¹⁴³) Obviously, no victory is handed to anyone in The Owl and the Nightingale, though the troop of small birds who proclaim what they believe to be the nightingale's triumph is an understandable remnant of this tradition.¹⁴⁴ Nor is the clerk vs. knight issue present in itself; but the owl does tend to identify herself with military activity as a large bird should (ll. 383-90), and the nightingale boasts of helping clerks in their song (ll. 729-42).¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, the discussion of the relative degree of guilt incurred by the flesh and the spirit in lines 1395-1416 of the Middle English poem points clearly to the conflicti of the body and the soul. The view of sin expressed by the nightingale (and apparently shared by the owl, who thinks her opponent's argument begins well; cf. ll. 1511-14) is a familiar one during this period--in fact, a commonplace of the schools as Huguinir notes.¹⁴⁶ Bodily sins, the nightingale argues, are less culpable, since carnal lust is persistent and hard to crush, but the sins of the spirit are more vicious and multiple in their implications; the inner state of the heart is decisive, and "moni man is of his flesche clene, / Pat is mid mode deouel imene" (ll. 1411-12). So the body customarily attacks the soul in the conflicti:

O unhappy soul
 how greedy you have been,
 Haughty and envious
 and swollen by pride . . .¹⁴⁷

and attaches to it the ultimate responsibility for sin:

the spirit gives life, the body can do little;
 if the soul held its God dear,
 never would the body overcome the powers of the soul.¹⁴⁸

Corruption takes place in the deepest areas of man's nature, his intellect and will:

no evil can injure you
 unless you consent:
 from the heart bad things come forth . . .¹⁴⁹

To underline this truth, the body-soul debates frequently make use of the image of a horse and its rider. The sinful soul has abdicated its responsibility of controlling and direct-

ing, and allowed the body to usurp the reins:

I was hard pressed
to place any bridle on you
and to divert you
headlong from evil.¹⁵⁰

So too, the horse image recurs in The Owl and the Nightingale.

In keeping with the view of the superior powers and obligations of man's spiritual and rational nature is the owl's use of the image to suggest indulgent lust:

Vor none dor no leng nabideþ,
Ac eurich upon oþer rideþ.
þe sulue stottes ine þe stode
Boþ boþe wilde & merewode . . . (ll. 493-96)

This wantonness is the result of her opponent's song, the owl charges. The nightingale, however, adroitly develops the image in such a way as to separate herself from it:

An hors is strengur þan a mon,
Ac, for hit non iwit ne kon,
Hit berþ on rugge grete semes,
An drayþ biuore grete temes,
An þoleþ boþe 3erd & spure,
An stont iteid at mulne dure:
An hit dep þat mon hit hot,
An, forþan þat hit no wit not,
Ne mai his strenþe hit ishilde
þat hit nabuþþ þe lutle childe. (ll. 773-82)

Man's cunning makes him superior to the horse, the nightingale adds pointedly--cunning like that of the nightingale herself (ll. 783-90). As for men who live in a bestial way, she disdains them:

Ne sunge ich hom neuer so longe
Mi song were ispild ech del;
For hom ne mai halter ne bridel
Bringe vrom hore wode wise,
Ne mon mid stele ne mid ire. (ll. 1026-30)

The owl, nevertheless, continues to link her opponent with

unrestrained and illicit lust, citing the incident of the adulterous lady: for her role in this affair, the owl reminds the nightingale, she was sentenced to be torn asunder by wild horses (ll. 1061-62). This rather fantastic decree seems more fitting and acceptable when one remembers the medieval penchant for fitting the punishment to the crime.¹⁵¹ This factor also seems to have dictated the use of the horse as an instrument for the torture of the soul of the sinner at the end of the body-soul debate of the late thirteenth century.¹⁵²

The identity and role of the judge in the conflicti vary. The use of the poet as judge can be found, although it is not particularly frequent. In both De Clarevallensibus and the debate between the Violet and the Rose¹⁵³ the poet is passing by the pastoral scene of the conflict, and is invited to act as judge. His identity and function, however, are explicit. Thus in no case is there precedent for the humor that would be involved in The Owl and the Nightingale if the poet actually were Nicholas of Guildford.

More often in the conflicti, an appropriate allegorical figure appears as judge; Amor or one of his representatives, for instance, usually decides the love debates, with Nature as a common assistant.¹⁵⁴ That the judge should be an explicitly named contemporary figure, as in The Owl and the Nightingale, is rare; Wells found it only in the partimen, and rather than conclude any literary influence, suggested that the Middle English poet might more easily have invented

the detail himself.¹⁵⁵ Haessler affirmed an actual relationship between the partimen and The Owl and the Nightingale because of the named judge,¹⁵⁶ though the disparity in dating and the very nature of the partimen make this unlikely. In the partimen, feminine judges are in the majority, the participants frequently each name a different person, and recourse to an absent judge is rare, with the judgment usually being pronounced immediately.¹⁵⁷ When one considers the number of contradictions needed to conclude the influence of the partimen, it seems simpler to agree with Wells that the Owl poet himself invented the detail of the specifically contemporary judge.

The expanded narrative framework of The Owl, in which Nicholas plays such a prominent part, goes beyond the scope of the traditional conflicti--to such an extent that some critics would call the poem primarily a plea for preferment, and only secondarily a bird debate.¹⁵⁸ While they are undoubtedly right in emphasizing the uniqueness and importance of the narrative framework, and rejecting the influence of the partimen,¹⁵⁹ their view of the poem as a serious plea for preferment is still open to question. As Anne W. Baldwin pointed out, the poem's irony seems to touch Nicholas too; he has been prejudiced and "somewhat wild" in the past, and to ask a grant of multiple benefices for his future enjoyment could be a satirical invitation to further law-breaking¹⁶⁰--though it could also be light-hearted self-exaggeration, which her article does not consider. Why a

serious plea for preferment at this time should be written in the vernacular also has to be explained.¹⁶¹ Finally, the poem's clever and close association of the plea with the conflictus genre makes this view unlikely. The expansion of narrative apparatus in other vernacular offspring of Latin conflicti suggests a general urge for amplification on the part of vernacular writers, rather than a radical change in purpose.¹⁶² Nor are topical allusions and detailed attention to the choosing of a judge unknown in the Latin debates, though they are not often so explicitly combined--the eleventh-century Conflictus Ovis et Lini contains a heated discussion between the Sheep and the Flax as to whether a secular or an ecclesiastical judge would be more competent to decide their argument, and ends in mutual agreement to appeal to the Pope after asking the metropolitan bishop for advice.¹⁶³

The lack of a judgment, and general diffusion of action at the end of The Owl and the Nightingale cannot really be used as conclusive evidence that the preferment issue and the judge are uppermost in the author's mind, while the debate is a trivial although entertaining interlude. Many medieval conflicti show a tendency to throw legal procedure to the winds at the close: winter tries an unsuccessful trick in the Altercatio Yemis et Estate; wine becomes increasingly verbose and vague in the Goliae Dialogus, and the excited birds join in the emotional proclamation; the ecclesiastical debates end up in low burlesque,

with the poor logician of De Presbitero et Logico getting a good lashing from the congregation, and the monks of De Clarevallensibus et Cluniacensibus in a brawl. Such denouements serve to illustrate the basically comic function of legal procedure in the conflicti. A general impression of ordered, rational argument is set up, contrasting humorously with the trivial topic and earnest, emotionally involved debaters; legal vocabulary and the finer points of procedure seldom appear, with the exception of the Discussio super hereditate Lazari et Marie Magdalene.¹⁶⁴ In The Owl and the Nightingale, too, the legal terms which are used add to the comic impression of human activity, without really dominating the poem,¹⁶⁵ and the denouement underlines the emotional commitment of each debater to his own cause as the only "rational" one.

Finally, in view of the blunt comments on the usual ecclesiastical manner of distributing benefices at the time of the poem (ll. 1770-78), it is hard to see how The Owl and the Nightingale could have been expected to induce Church authorities to look favorably on its author, or a friend of its author, whichever is the case. If the debate had been intended to exemplify the qualities for which Nicholas is praised at the outset, and so win his advancement,¹⁶⁶ lines 1770-78 certainly do not show him as "wis an war of worde" (l. 192). Rather, they place him in the satiric vein of the ecclesiastical conflicti--though in view of the absence of ecclesiastical criticism elsewhere in the poem, the tone

here would seem comparatively mild.

What The Owl and the Nightingale owes to the twelfth-century conflictus, it has been seen, is a variety of conventions and a body of traditional themes which it proceeds to use in its own unique way. The overall debate structure, the essential elements of setting, narrative, and argument are present, but the setting is quickly and realistically sketched, the narrative is developed in far greater detail during the debate, the fable has brought new life to the creature participants, and the argument is much more wide-ranging, embracing as it does an unprecedented number of areas of contention and making a strict allegorical interpretation of the poem foolhardy. Consciously or unconsciously, the author seems to have constructed a many-layered tissue of themes from contemporary conflicti: he must surely have been aware of their familiarity, and of the associations they would arouse in his audience. In its rich and apparently indefinite system of references, his poem will no doubt continue to invite varying interpretations. But in view of the tradition of parody surrounding the debate at this time, it seems more logical to see the unknown poet as building his elaborate and wittily contrived version for the fun of it, and in the absence of any clear-cut moral or theological bias,¹⁶⁷ it seems unlikely that he would have chosen the conflictus form during this period to deliver any message of earnestness or importance to his literary audience.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER III

¹Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 154-57.

²See Anne W. Baldwin, "Henry II and The Owl and the Nightingale," JEGP, LXVI (1967), 207-29, for an interpretation which takes the last-mentioned position, speculating that the poem bears directly on the controversy between Henry II and Thomas a Becket. J.C. Russell, on the other hand, sees allusions to Geoffrey and Richard, the sons of Henry; see "The Patrons of The Owl and the Nightingale," PQ, XLVIII (1969), 178-85. See also Eric Gerald Stanley's edition of The Owl and the Nightingale (London, 1960), pp. 22-25, as representative of an anti-specific interpretation, with the Owl standing in general for a solemn, and the Nightingale for a joyous way of life; and R.M. Lumiansky, "Concerning The Owl and the Nightingale," PQ, XXXII (1953), 414-15, for a summary of previous interpretations.

³Baugh, p. 157.

⁴J.W. Atkins, ed. The Owl and the Nightingale (Cambridge, 1922), p. xlvii.

⁵M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background (Oxford, 1963), p. 370.

⁶G.G. Coulton, "The Owl and the Nightingale," MLR, XVII (1922), 71.

⁷See the introductions to the Atkins and Stanley editions.

⁸Direct study of this aspect of the poem has been limited, however, in comparison with the flood of scholarly efforts to locate the author, date, and topical allusions. H. Haessler has provided analysis of the poet's use of figures of rhetoric in "The Owl and the Nightingale" und die literarischen Bestrebungen des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts (Frankfurt, 1942); Atkins and Stanley touch on it briefly in their introductions; M. Angela Carson treats the poem broadly, as containing elements of epideictic, deliberative, and forensic oratory, in "Rhetorical Structure in The Owl and the Nightingale," Speculum, XLII (1967), 92-103.

⁹Henry Barrett Hinckley, in "The Date of The Owl and the Nightingale," MP, XVII (1919), 73, quotes the Low German proverb, "One man's owl is another man's nightingale," as well as Walter Map's De Nugis Curialium, ed. James (Oxford 1914), p. 143. In the Aesopic tradition, the nightingale is

opposed to the hawk; see Leopold Hervieux, Les Fabulistes latins depuis le siècle d'August jusqu'à la fin du moyen âge (Paris, 1884), II, 349, 376, 406, 458, 536, etc.; and Karl Warnke, Die Fabeln der Marie de France (Halle, 1898), pp. 215-16. The hawk, again, is traditionally an ally of the owl; see Pliny, Naturalis Historiae, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, Mass., 1940), p. 316, cited by Hinckley in "Science and Folklore in The Owl and the Nightingale," PMLA, XLVII (1932), 305-306. More recent efforts have been made to locate the antagonism in "learned sources"; Kathryn Hukanir, The Owl and the Nightingale (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 20, cites Isidore of Seville, and Mortimer J. Donovan, "The Owl as Religious Altruist in The Owl and the Nightingale," MS, XVIII (1956), 212, adds the Hexaemeron of St. Ambrose. Hukanir also stresses the bookishness of the fable literature of the twelfth century, which was "learned and courtly, and not popular at all" (p. 154). The large doses of popular tradition which found their way into "learned" sources such as Isidore make the usefulness of the distinction between popular and learned open to question.

¹⁰Kemp Malone, review of Graydon Eggers' edition of The Owl and the Nightingale, MLN, LXXI (1956), 213.

¹¹John Speirs, Medieval English Poetry: the non-Chaucerian Tradition (London, 1957), pp. 269-71, questions this assumption sharply, and Hans Walther in his wide-ranging study Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters (Munich, 1920), p. 2 ff., sees no reason to assume an absolute continuity in the transmission of the form.

¹²Aristotle classifies fable and proverb in his Rhetoric as means of persuasion common to all branches of speaking and particularly suited to speeches in a popular assembly (The Rhetoric of Aristotle, trans. Lane Cooper [New York, 1932], pp. 147-54). Quintilian also leaves an opening for the fable, though less than enthusiastic about its intrinsic merits; even Horace, he points out, saw fit to use it in his poetry. Under the same classification, he includes the proverb; see the Institutio, II, 282-83. In addition, he recommends the use of Aesopic fables in the education of young children, before they are old enough to study rhetoric (*ibid.*, I, 156). Cicero suggests the fable as a way of provoking interest and introducing humor in the exordium of actual orations, especially if the hearers have been fatigued by listening; see De Inventione, ed. and trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), pp. 50-51. See also the Rhetorica ad Herennium, ed. and trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 18-21.

¹³Aesop himself is reported by Aristotle to have introduced his fables into the defensive oratory of a legal case in Samos, pleading for a politician accused of embezzlement (The Rhetoric of Aristotle, pp. 148-49). The tradition may or may not be true, since invented framework situations were often applied to Aesopic fables; see B.E. Perry, ed. and trans. Babrius and Phaedrus (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. xxxv. But clearly the fable in earliest times was not a literary form in its own right, but a rhetorical device at the service of other literary forms, whether in poetry, as in Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes, or in prose, as in Herodotus, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle (Perry, pp. xii-xiii). Fable collections, therefore, were basically compiled as reference material for writers or speakers, who could then choose individual fables for illustration in orations, histories, or philosophical essays; the practice is confirmed by the frequency of the promythium, a brief statement of the moral preceding the fable and serving as an index for the collection. This aspect is discussed by Perry in a separate article, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fables," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, XCIII (1962), 340-42.

¹⁴Rhetorica ad Herennium, pp. 383-85. Dating from the first century B.C. and long attributed to Cicero, the Ad Herennium was one of the most popular rhetorical texts of the Middle Ages; cf. pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

¹⁵Institutio, II, 293.

¹⁶Where the greater humor of incongruity lies is open to discussion--whether in faithful "learned" rhetorical argument over a patently trivial question (such as the respective merits of wine and water) or in debate which "betrays" classical practice not only by a trivial subject but by consistently burlesquing the learned exempla which were part of classical rhetorical method.

¹⁷Exceptions should be noted in the source of exempla in the debates: De Clarevallensibus et Cluniacensibus, for one, relies heavily on a background of fable (see below, pp. 127-28).

¹⁸Praeexercitamina Prisciani grammatici ex Hermogene versa, ed. K. Halm, Rhetores latini minores (Leipzig, 1863), p. 551. Priscian's exercises, themselves a translation of the Progymnasmata of the second-century Greek rhetorician Hermogenes, became widely popular in the Latin-speaking West, traditionally appearing as the final treatise in Priscian's Opera. See Clark, QJS, p. 24, and Douglas Kelly, "The Scope of the Treatment of Composition in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century Arts of Poetry," Speculum, XLI (1966), 277-78. A direct transla-

tion of Hermogenes can be found in Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric, pp. 23-38.

¹⁹Halm, pp. 551-52.

²⁰Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum, I, xl, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911). Cf. Ernst Curtius, pp. 465-66.

²¹For narratio, see Helm, p. 552. Cf. also the Institutio Oratoria, I, 225-33; Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric, pp. 25-36; and Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York, 1957), p. 183.

²²Halm, p. 553.

²³"Et necesse est animi conprobet eam tacitus auditor cum ad causam videat adcommodari rem certam ex vita et moribus sumptam," Rhetorica ad Herennium, pp. 290-92.

²⁴Cf. Matthew of Vendôme, Ars versificatoria, 16-29, ed. Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle (Paris, 1924), pp. 113-16, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, 126-41 (Faral, p. 201).

²⁵Halm, p. 554.

²⁶The comic superfluity of sententiae supplied by the two over-eager debaters would hardly have gained approval from the Ad Herennium author, who cautioned against too frequent use of the device: "Sententias interponi raro convenit, ut rei actores, non vivendi praeceptores videamur esse" (p. 290).

²⁷Ben E. Perry, "The Origin of the Epimythium" TAPhA, LXXI (1940), 391-419.

²⁸Quotations in modern English from The Owl and the Nightingale are taken from the prose translation in Atkins' edition, pp. 152-81. Quotations in the original Middle English will be taken from the C text as printed in Stanley's edition.

²⁹Clark, Rhetoric, p. 196.

³⁰Institutio Oratoria, I, 235.

³¹Halm, p. 556.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., pp. 556-57. Cf. Hermogenes in Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric, pp. 31-32.

³⁴Halm, p. 557. Brief comparisons made in passing are of course different from the extended exercise of comparatio treated next by Priscian, in so far as for the sake of illustration they invite the momentary crossing of generic boundaries, and a deliberate search for metaphorical similarities; cf. the Ad Herennium: "Sed inventio similium facilis erit si quis sibi omnes res, animantes et inanimas, mutas et eloquentes, feras et mansuetas, terrestres, caelestes, maritimas, artificio, casu, natura comparatas, usitatas atque inusitatas . . ." (p. 382). This type of rhetorical comparison is also of importance in The Owl and the Nightingale, given the penchant of both birds for aligning themselves with human behavior and virtue. In fact, the example given by the Ad Herennium author, who compares summertime birds to false friends, driven away by the first frost, finds an echo in the owl's defense in lines 473-542 of the Middle English debate.

³⁵Faral, p. 76. For ample evidence of the continuity of the tradition in medieval poetry, see the references by Margaret Schlauch in "An Old English Encomium Urbis," JEGP, XL (1941), 14-28.

³⁶Halm, p. 557.

³⁷"Servemus per omnia laudis praecepta, quae in simplici laude praecepimus," according to the anonymous Excerpta Rhetorica printed in Halm, p. 588.

³⁸Institutio Oratoria, I, 234-35. Quintilian analyzes the topics of the panegyric on pp. 464-79.

³⁹Halm, p. 557.

⁴⁰Libri III Artis Rhetoricae, Halm, pp. 87, 97. Fortunatianus' treatise, a late fourth-century text based on Cicero and Quintilian, was widely used in the schools, according to Paul Abelson, The Seven Liberal Arts (New York, 1965), pp. 55-56.

⁴¹Halm, p. 557.

⁴²In all debates between creatures, Haessler points out, this is the criterion by which the participants are judged. (p. 25). See Curtius, pp. 158-59, on progymnasmata as the explanation of the frequency of poems on the swallow and the nightingale during the medieval period, and The Oxford Book of Medieval Latin Verse, ed. Stephen Gaselee (London, 1928), pp. 82, 115, 137, 176, for actual examples of such poetry.

⁴³Halm, p. 559.

⁴⁴Institutio Oratoria, I. 237.

⁴⁵Clark, Rhetoric, pp. 204-205.

⁴⁶Halm, p. 559.

⁴⁷See above, p. 104.

⁴⁸Halm, pp. 556-57.

⁴⁹Vespa's Iudicium Coci et Pistoris is an early example: see F.J.E. Raby, A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages, II, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1957), 282. Walther cites a later debate between a sailor and a farmer (p. 153)--a subject which could have been suggested by Priscian, who offers as a suitable assignment under adlocutio the words a "rusticus" might use "cum primum aspexerit navem" (Halm, p. 558). The professions specifically mentioned by Priscian under encomia, however, were more common participants in the later debates, perhaps because of his influence. See Walther, pp. 153 ff., for "Gegensatz der Stände"; the famous knight-clerk debates, which Walther groups under "Streitfragen aus dem Liebesleben" (pp. 145-49), might also be mentioned here. As the social structures of the medieval Church replace the classical structures, the clerk supplants the lawyer in importance in civic life (cf. R.S. Haller, "The Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae as an Ovidian Satire," MS, XXX [1968], 128, and becomes the logical representative of learning in opposition to the physical strength of the soldier or knight. Similarly, the clerk also becomes the standard opponent of the farmer or unlearned "rusticus" in medieval Latin poetry (cf. Walther, p. 154).

⁵⁰Cf. Haller, p. 128, n. 15, for references to the art of notatio, including the manner of defining a person ab officio, in the twelfth and thirteenth-century arts of poetry.

⁵¹Cf. Huguier, p. 18 ff. Only as generic birds can the owl and the nightingale speak of their respective deaths. Anne Baldwin points out correctly that the nightingale's death is never actually shown to have taken place, but to assume that one bird is generic and the other an individual would leave the debate in a rather awkward position (JEGP, p. 219).

⁵²Atkins, p. lviii.

⁵³Cf. Douglas Peterson, "The Owl and the Nightingale and Christian Dialectic," JEGP, LV (1956), 13-26, and A.C. Cawley, "Astrology in 'The Owl and the Nightingale'," MLR, XLVI (1951), 161-74.

⁵⁴Cf. Stanley, p. 3

⁵⁵Priscian calls it adlocutio (Halm, pp. 557-58); the Ad Herennium and the later arts of poetry call it conformatio. See also Clark, Rhetoric, pp. 199-200.

⁵⁶Halm, p. 558.

⁵⁷Clark, Rhetoric, p. 201.

⁵⁸Institutio Oratoria, I, 502-503.

⁵⁹Faral, pp. 72-73. Geoffrey of Vinsauf offers such examples as the laments of Rome at the death of Caesar and of the Holy Cross at the death of Christ, and in a lighter vein, "l'adieu d'une vieille nappe à la table" (Poetria Nova, 461-514, Faral, pp. 211-12). The tenth-century encomium of the swallow cited by Curtius, pp. 158-59, is also an example of prosopopoeia or conformatio, with the swallow speaking on its own behalf.

⁶⁰It is true, as J.E. Wells points out in his edition of The Owl and the Nightingale (Boston and London, 1907), p. lxi, that The Owl is the first extant twelfth-century debate or contention poem to oppose two animals in a strict double prosopopoeia, but the impulse can hardly be called original. Although alien by nature to the conventional Aesopic fable, the literary debate employing prosopopoeia between non-human rivals had been interspersed with Aesopic fable in literary texts from Sumerian times onward in the East, as well as in Greek and Latin fable books (cf. Perry, Babrius and Phaedrus, pp. xxvi-xxvii). Wells, Huguier (pp. 25-27 and *passim*), and Hinckley (PMLA, pp. 347-51) all point to the vogue of the fable in late twelfth-century England; they do not always, however, distinguish the rhetorical extensions of the initial inspiration in the longer "debate fables" or in The Owl.

⁶¹Halm, p. 558.

⁶²Cf. Stanley, pp. 32-33.

⁶³Cf. Clark, Rhetoric, p. 213.

⁶⁴See the previous chapter, pp. 30-31.

⁶⁵Institutio Oratoria, I, 272-75.

⁶⁶Charles Sears Baldwin, Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic (New York, 1924), pp. 87-101.

⁶⁷Walther, p. 7.

⁶⁸Huganir, pp. 13-14. For poems issuing directly from the impetus of the schools, see the debates of the Carolingian period, discussed below on pp. 123-34.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 155 ff.

⁷⁰Cf. Atkins, pp. xlv-xlvi.

⁷¹Stanley, pp. 27-30, raises the alternatives but does not attempt to decide between them, except to comment that both Haessler and Atkins have overemphasized the legal element in the poem. To Stanley, it seems incidental; none of the legal terms employed would have been unfamiliar to a layman.

⁷²Ibid., pp. 28-29; Atkins, pp. lii-lv; Huganir, pp. 155-60, points out inconsistencies, finding Atkins' interpretation somewhat forced.

⁷³Institutio Oratoria, II, 342, 506.

⁷⁴Q. Fabii Laurentii Victorini Explanatum in Rhetoricam M. Tullii Ciceronis, Halm, p. 199. Cf. ll. 19-21 of Fortunatianus' treatise on p. 121.

⁷⁵Institutio Oratoria, II, 99-101.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 507.

⁷⁷Cassiodorus, De Arte Rhetorica, Halm, p. 503. Cassiodorus' treatment of rhetoric, contained in his De Institutionis Liberalium Literarum, is a brief abstract of the rhetorical treatise of Fortunatianus. The abstract was brief, handy, and popular; its six pages, says Abelson, were "probably all that the average medieval student of rhetoric memorized" (p. 57).

⁷⁸Institutio Oratoria, II, 521.

⁷⁹Liber de Arte Rhetorica, Halm, p. 485. This fifth-century treatise formed part of Capella's encyclopedia on the seven liberal arts, one of the main channels through which ancient rhetorical teaching reached the Middle Ages, according to J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: the Medieval Phase (New York, 1943), pp. 10; 23.

⁸⁰Rhetorica ad Herennium, p. 297.

⁸¹C. Julius Victor, Ars Rhetorica, Halm, p. 418: "ut certa manus uno telo potest esse contenta, incerta plura spargenda sunt . . ."

⁸²Institutio Oratoria, I, 283-85.

⁸³Peterson, JEGP, pp. 13-26.

⁸⁴Auerbach (Literary Language, pp. 273-75) shows the conflict between rhetoric and logic as an actual fact of the High Middle Ages. Charles Haskins develops it in terms of the opposition of the schools of Paris and Orleans, in The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), pp. 93-104, and Haessler relates the opposition of these two schools directly to The Owl (p. 17). The conflict comes to life more explicitly in the conflictus De Presbytero et logico, published by Thomas Wright, The Latin Poems Commonly Attributed to Walter Mapes (London, 1941), pp. 251-57. See below, p. 128.

⁸⁵Wells, p. lxii.

⁸⁶The relation of Nicholas of Guildford to the author of the poem, for example, continues to be discussed; not all the critics agree with Wells that Nicholas's name was introduced for the purpose of complimenting a friend. Nor is there general agreement on the didactic purpose of the poem (Wells, pp. lv-lvi).

⁸⁷Wells, p. liii.

⁸⁸Atkins, p. lii.

⁸⁹See below, p. 125.

⁹⁰Hinckley, PMLA, pp. 352-56.

⁹¹Huganir, p. 10.

⁹²Haessler, p. 163. Scholars are almost unanimous in assigning The Owl and the Nightingale to the second half of the twelfth century, on the basis of the various topical allusions in the poem; see, for example, Henry Barrett Hinckley, "The Date of The Owl and the Nightingale: Vivian's Legation," PQ, xii (1933), 339-49; Kathryn Huganir, "Further Notes on the Date of The Owl and the Nightingale," Anglia, LXIII (1939), 113-34; and Cawley, MLR, pp. 161-74. This dating seems to place the poem beyond the possibility of influence by the partimen, which flourished in the thirteenth century, according to Alfred Jeanroy, La Poesie lyrique des Troubadours, II (Toulouse, 1934), pp. 259-62. The influence of the feigned tenson also seems problematical; Haessler mentions the similarities in framework in the debate poetry of Rutebeuf (late thirteenth century), but can only assume, without evidence, that twelfth-century examples existed (pp. 28-29).

⁹³Stanley, pp. 25-31; 167-68.

⁹⁴James Holly Hanford, "Classical Eclogue and Medieval Debate," Romanic Review, II (1911), pp. 19-20. That a real connection exists between the debate form and the eclogue has been denied by Betty Nye Hedburg, "The Bucolics and the Medieval Poetical Debate," TAPhA, LXXV (1944), 47. She points out that the pastoral singing contest was marked by strict amoebean verse, demonstration of singing skill rather than logical argument, and continuous dialogue uninterrupted by stage directions, unlike the medieval conflictus. However, these objections are not entirely consistent; a number of the twelfth and thirteenth century conflicti cited are in amoebean verse; the Carolingian debates are admitted to be a mixed genre, with qualities of both the pastoral and the classical contentio; and Mrs. Hedburg admits that the classical contentiones which she finds strikingly similar to the twelfth and thirteenth century debates may have been known in the Carolingian era, but probably not in the later Middle Ages. She fails to draw out the logical conclusion of her diverse evidence: that the underlying continuity of the form lies not in direct influence of one group of literary works upon another, but in the training in rhetoric which writers in classical, Carolingian, and later medieval periods all received. See also Walther, pp. 1-20, and Philip Schuyler Allen, "The Medieval Mimus," MP, VIII (1910), 17-60. After his thorough study of the conflictus, Walther concluded that there was no reason why the form could not continually be originated under conditions similar to those which had produced it at an earlier time and place.

⁹⁵For the text and translation of the Conflictus, see Helen Waddell, Medieval Latin Lyrics, 5th ed. (Baltimore, 1963), pp. 82-87; the poem by Sedulius is published in the Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Poetarum Latinorum Medii Aevi (Berlin, 1896), III, 230-31.

⁹⁶His evaluation is no doubt slanted to the larger critical point which he is trying to make: the denial of any connection between dialogue verse and medieval mime, in "Medieval Latin Lyrics," MP, V (1907), 441.

⁹⁷Hedburg, pp. 61-65.

⁹⁸Hanford, p. 33.

⁹⁹Greek sources are even earlier; cf. M.C. Waites, "Some Features of the Allegorical Debate in Greek Literature," HSCP, XXIII (1912), 1-46.

¹⁰⁰See Walther, pp. 1-20; Hanford, pp. 137-38; and Raby, History of Secular Latin Poetry, II, pp. 282 ff.

¹⁰¹Atkins, The Owl, pp. xlviii-xlix.

¹⁰²Hanford, pp. 137-38.

¹⁰³In view of the confusion surrounding the term "goliardic verse" and the actual identity of the goliards, it seems useless here to attempt to go beyond the tone of the verse to define the author's state in life. Father Quain's reminder that not all goliardic verse is earthly and secular in its appeal, and simultaneously that there is a kind of clerical humor within the Church which specializes in incongruous juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane without intending serious irreverence, revolt, or blasphemy, is useful in opening up alternatives and sweeping away some hasty stereotypes; but it provides no answers. See his review of The Goliard Poets by George Whicher in Thought, XXVII (1952), 152-56; and also "The Goliards," an unpublished paper by E.A. Quain, read before the Mediaeval Club of New York in January, 1949. The question of how to identify the tone and purpose of the criticism remains--is it lighthearted and self-mocking, or directed in earnest toward its ecclesiastical target, whether from within or without, from an ecclesiastic in good standing or a renegade monk?

¹⁰⁴Hanford, pp. 138 ff.

¹⁰⁵See Stanley, p. 19.

¹⁰⁶Atkins, The Owl, pp. 1-1ii.

¹⁰⁷Text published by Alfons Hilka and Otto Schumann, Carmina Burana, I, 2 (Heidelberg, 1941), 94-103. The vernacular derivatives include the French De Florance et de Blanche flor, published by Barbazan and Meon, Fabliaux et Contes des Poètes françaises (Paris, 1808), IV, 354-65, and the Anglo-Norman Geste de Blanche flour e de Florence, published by Paul Meyer, "Notice du Ms. 25970 de la Bibliothèque Phillipps," Romania, XXXVII (1908), 224-34, and again by Charles Oulmont, Les Débats du Clerc et du Chevalier dans la littérature poétique du moyen-âge (Paris, 1911), pp. 167-83. Oulmont dates the French poem as late as twelfth century or early thirteenth century, and the Anglo-Norman one as thirteenth century (op. cit., p. 60); he takes issue (p. 87) with those who would date the French De Florance somewhat earlier because of its use of the parallelism that was fashionable in the 1170's. The Anglo-Norman debate presents further complications, because of the author's apparent claim in the last stanza to be translating from an English original, which no one has been able to locate. However, all scholars seem agreed upon a thirteenth-century date; Meyer (op. cit., p. 223) would place it toward the end of the reign of Henry III.

¹⁰⁸Edmond Faral, "Les Débats du Clerc et du Chevalier dans la littérature des XII^e et XIII^e siècles," Romania, XLI

(1912), 501-10. M. Dominica Legge suggests that Blancheflour e Florence was intended to be a vocabulary exercise, teaching French and morality at the same time (op. cit., p. 335). The subtle wit of the Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae, on the other hand, has been compared to the satirical rhetoric of Ovid's amatory verse; see Haller, op. cit., pp. 119-33.

¹⁰⁹Robert W. Ackerman can find in the Desputisoun "a series of images and formulations of a distinctly popular, vernacular cast that are alien to the Latin poems," only by ignoring much evidence of the same images and formulations in the Latin versions; see "The Debate of the Body and the Soul," Speculum, XXXVII (1962), 551. Part of Ackerman's problem results from his failure to consider in any detail the Altercatio Animae et Corporis (Royal Ms. 7A III), an early twelfth-century Latin poem published by Eleanor Kellogg Heningham, An Early Latin Debate of the Body and the Soul (New York, 1939). Most of his comparisons are limited to the Dialogus inter Corpus et Animam, sometimes known as the Visio Philiberti, published by Wright, pp. 95-106. But the Desputisoun's heavy emphasis on the knight-on-horseback image, its vivid sensory impressions and "charnel-house" passages, can all be found in the earlier Altercatio.

¹¹⁰Text published by Oulmont, pp. 93-100.

¹¹¹Text published by Wright, pp. 87-92.

¹¹²For the text of the Altercatio Yemis et Estatus, see Walther, pp. 191-203; the other two can be found in Wright, pp. 237-50.

¹¹³Text published by Wright, pp. 251-57.

¹¹⁴See Raby, Secular Latin Poetry, p. 306.

¹¹⁵Wright, p. 92.

¹¹⁶Hedburg, p. 66.

¹¹⁷Wright, pp. 87-92.

¹¹⁸George Whicher, trans. The Goliard Poets: Medieval Latin Songs and Satires (New York, 1949), pp. 238 ff.

¹¹⁹Raby, Secular Latin Poetry, p. 282.

¹²⁰Despite its apparently radical difference in subject matter, De Clarevallensibus also has an extended opening description of a vale in springtime, and also repeats the mocking comparison of hemlocks and lilies (P. et F., l. 84; De C. et C., l. 75). While the comparison is a single one in the

earlier conflictus, Phyllidis et Florae, in De Clarevallensibus it appears as one of a series of adynata, emphasizing even more the debt to classical rhetoric. See Curtius, p. 95, on the device; other twelfth-century examples can be found in Alan of Lille's Complaint of Nature, trans. Douglas M. Moffat (New York, 1908), pp. 58-59, where Nature mourns the decay of the world from the Golden Age: "The nettle, indeed, does cloak its poverty with roses, sea-weed with hyacinths, dross with silver, rougepaint with a true glow . . ." and also in Alan's Anticlaudian, trans. William Hafner Cornog (Philadelphia, 1935), pp. 64-65, 120: "Thus myrtles are placed above laurels, the oleaster over the olive, the wild nard over roses; the lowly seaweed is preferred over hyacinths, clay to precious stones and hemlock to violets," and Reason marvels at the Incarnation: "that the ruler of flaming Olympus inhabits our abodes, that the blossom of the rose hides under the sea-weed, that clay clothes the precious stone, the violet is concealed by the hemlock, and life dies, the sun darkens . . ." An interesting early use of the adynaton occurs in the Sixth Eclogue of Calpurnius Siculus, where Lycidas will believe that Alcon won the song contest only "si vincat acanthida cornix, vocalem superet si dirus aedona bubo"--"if the crow can excel the goldfinch or the eerie owl surpass the tuneful nightingale" (ll. 7-8), trans by J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, Minor Latin Poets (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 270-71. See also Hans Walther, "Quot-tot, mittelalterliche liebesgrüsse und verwandtes," Zeitschrift für das deutsche Alterthum, LXV (1928), 257-89, for a comprehensive survey of classical and medieval use of such rhetorical formulas.

¹²¹Two exceptions here are the debates of the body and the soul, where the rebukes are longer and uneven in length, and again, the Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae. Although Mrs. Hedburg takes amoebean verse and its quick, sharp alternations of speech to signify classical influence, while extended argument of irregular length reflects the dialectic of the schools (p. 63), this is not an absolute necessity. The Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae is clearly shaped by classical forces, though its speeches are uneven, and the irregularity persists in the vernacular versions of the knight-clerk conflict. The uneven rebukes of the body-soul debates are a reminder not of school dialectic, but of the homiletic monologues out of which this debate developed.

¹²²James Holly Hanford, "The Medieval Debate Between Wine and Water," PMLA, XXVIII (1913), 315-67.

¹²³F.M. Warren, "The Council of Remiremont," MLN, XXII (1907), 137-40. It should be added that even in the conflicti using classical exempla, comparatively few make classical material the direct subject of the debate; cf. Walther, Das Streitgedicht, p. 88. Also, many conflicti employ allusions to popular fable and folklore (Walther, pp. 13-16, 34-63).

¹²⁴Haessler, p. 25.

¹²⁵Stanley, pp. 22-26.

¹²⁶See above, pp. 101-103.

¹²⁷Haessler does note the accusation of a disgusting habitat in Denudata veritate (p. 24), and elsewhere touches briefly on the debt of description in The Owl and the Nightingale to rhetorical principles: "Elevatio und Detractio mit dem Zweck, den Hörer oder Leser zu überzeugen und so zu gewinnen, bilden die gemeinsame Grundlage der antiken und mittelalterlichen juristischen wie rhetorisch-didaktischen Stillehre. Die Erkenntnis dieser ursprünglichen Absicht der antiken Vorlagen leitete die Rhetorik des Kanzleistils über in die Dichtung" (p. 53).

¹²⁸Cf. Haessler, pp. 20-21, and, ultimately, Hermogenes, trans. by Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric, p. 34.

¹²⁹Goliae Dialogus, ll. 107-110.

¹³⁰Council of Remiremont, ll. 186-91.

¹³¹De Mauro et Zoilo, ll. 89-91:

Spiritu nos ducimur, litteram impletis;
Rachel Lyae praeminet, credite prophetis;
excusata satis est nostrae lex quietis . . .

Rachel and Leah were traditionally interpreted as the Old Testament types of the contemplative and active life (cf. Dante, Purgatorio, XXVII, 97-108), and occur as such in other conflicti as well, e.g. the Altercatio Yemis et Estatis, st. 110.

¹³²De Clarevallensibus et Cluniacensibus, ll. 105-108:

Urbis vestra medio statuuntur fana,
ut mentes et oculos nutriant urbana;
sed arcani nemoris colimus arcana,
ut a nostris oculis avertamus vana.

¹³³Cf. Haessler, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁴Denudata veritate, ll. 44-45.

¹³⁵Goliae Dialogus, ll. 96-100.

¹³⁶De Clarevallensibus, ll. 137-40. Cf. The Owl and the Nightingale, l. 1174, and G.G. Coulton's interpretation in MLR, pp. 69-70.

¹³⁷Walther, Das Streitgedicht, pp. 106-107.

¹³⁸De Clarevallensibus, ll. 81-88 and passim.

¹³⁹ De Mauro et Zoilo, ll. 49-64. The argument was a common satirical theme in disputes between Cîteaux and Cluny at this time; see Curtius, pp. 124, 434.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. ll. 84-91. Discrimination against a logician as representative of the poorer classes of society is also mentioned in De Clarevallensibus, ll. 125-28. That the priest should "win" the debate with the logician by means of a rhetorical trick seems in keeping with the pattern of logic vs. rhetoric noted in The Owl and the Nightingale; see above, p. 118.

¹⁴¹ Haessler, p. 24.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 19-27.

¹⁴³ Faral, Romania, pp. 497-510.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. the Goliae Dialogus, ll. 160-64.

¹⁴⁵ On the possible debt to other Latin conflicti grouped by Walther as "Streitfragen aus dem Liebesleben," judgment must be even more tentative. As Haessler points out (pp. 35-36), the preference for the married or the unmarried woman raised in The Owl and the Nightingale, ll. 1417-1602, is reminiscent of the fragment from Ms. Avignon 302 cited by Walther on pp. 144-45. But the preference is in no way a central or even consistent point of disagreement between the two Middle English birds: the owl, in her determination to polarize the views of her opponent, at first condemns the adulterous wife (ll. 1045-66), along with the nightingale who has led her astray, and later transfers her sympathies to the side of the wife (ll. 1515-70). While it is true, in Kathryn Huganir's words, that the theme of love and the social institution of marriage is the one argued at greatest length in the poem, it is less easy to see it as the leading theme, or the most carefully argued one (pp. 131-36). Francis Lee Utley notes the presence of the controversy, but does not claim a dominant role for it, in The Crooked Rib: An Analytical Index to the Argument about Women (Columbus, Ohio, 1944), pp. 41-42, 155.

Utley also offers the possibility of a relation between The Owl and the Nightingale and the medieval contention between Holly and Ivy, although the earliest extant manuscripts for this traditional debate belong to the fifteenth century; see Richard Leighton Greene, ed. A Selection of Christmas Carols (Oxford, 1962), pp. 92-95. In both debates, as in popular tradition, the owl is associated with ivy, and is opposed toward the end by a group of other birds as well as by the nightingale. But the basic analogy is a tenuous one--nowhere in The Owl and the Nightingale is the nightingale's association with holly ever mentioned, and her sympathy for women is pervasive, whereas in the carols holly is the masculine, and ivy the feminine advocate. That details of setting in The Owl do not have to take on the erotic coloring of their folkloristic counterparts is shown again in the case of the "lime-tree" from which the wren speaks at the end of

the debate (l. 1750); see A.T. Hatto, "The Lime-Tree and Early German, Goliard and English Lyric Poetry," MLR, XLIX (1954), pp. 196 ff.

¹⁴⁶Huganir, The Owl p. 138. She then speculates that the Owl poet may have known the incomplete Latin Altercatio inter virum et mulierem summarized in Walther, Das Streitgedicht, pp. 137-39, remarking that the two poems have "much in common." But the central issue which the nightingale raises does not invite a generic judgment between the sexes. The speech in question is primarily concerned with evaluating sins of lust and sins of pride; and men as well as women are prone to the former (cf. ll. 1399-1400). It seems more likely that the poet would be familiar with the widespread treatment of the theme in the debates of the body and the soul.

¹⁴⁷Altercatio Animae et Corporis, ll. 1673-76, ed. Kellogg, An Early Latin Debate:

O infelix anima
 quam fuisti cupida
Contumax et invida
 tumensque superbia . . .

¹⁴⁸Visio Fulberti, ll. 210-12, ed. E. du Ménil, Poésies populaires latines antérieures au douzième siècle (Paris, 1843):

spiritus vivificat, caro potest parum;
si haberet anima Deum suum carum,
nunquam caro vinceret vires animarum.

¹⁴⁹Disputatio inter Cor et Oculum, ll. 35-37:
nullum malum te laedere
potest, nisi consenseris:
de corde mala prodeunt . . .

¹⁵⁰Altercatio Animae et Corporis, ll. 451-54:
Sategi ut aliquem
 tibi frenum ponerem
et ut te precipitem
 a malo auerterem.

Cf. Sister Mary Ursula Vogel, Some Aspects of the Horse and Rider Analogy in the Debate between the Body and the Soul (Washington, D.C., 1948) and Beryl Rowland, "The Horse and Rider Figure in Chaucer's Works," UTQ, XXXV (1966), 246-59. The latter article contains a good brief summary of the tradition, although the author seems unaware of the existence of the earlier monograph.

¹⁵¹Vogel, p. 21. Whatever symbolic connotations there are in The Owl and the Nightingale, it should be added, rest on the realistic basis of twelfth-century life, which the birds so blithely take to themselves during the debate.

The fantastic nature of the punishment results largely from the discrepancies of animals pretending to a human existence, the device which is the root of so much of the humor of the poem. In actual fact, as Kathryn Hukanir has observed, equine quartering was a known custom in the twelfth century, though apparently, in the romance literature which supplies most of her evidence, a prerogative reserved for the punishment of lese majesty; see her article, "Equine Quartering in The Owl and the Nightingale," PMLA, LII (1937), 935-45.

¹⁵²Vogel, p. 24.

¹⁵³Cf. Walther, Das Streitgedicht, pp. 54-55. Further, only in the vernacular Geste de Blancheflour e Florence, written in England in the thirteenth century, does the poet place himself as a spectator at the scene of the debate and remain there while the participants go off to seek a decision elsewhere. Unlike The Owl and the Nightingale, however, the poet reports the outcome of the dispute anyway. Edmond Faral comments that the logic of narration in Melior et Ydoine, the other Anglo-Norman version of the knight-clerk debate, seems more artistic; here the entire adventure takes place in the garden, where the poet is present (Romania, pp. 507-10).

¹⁵⁴Cf. the Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae and De Ganymede et Helena, and the brief treatment of this aspect of the twelfth-century concept of Nature by Edgar C. Knowlton, "The Goddess Nature in Early Periods," JEGP, XIX (1920), 224-53. Kathryn Hukanir (The Owl, p. 60) suggests Alan of Lille as the influence behind the Owl poet's frequent references to Nature, her laws, and imperative impulses arising from her.

¹⁵⁵Wells, pp. lx-lxi.

¹⁵⁶Haessler, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷Jeanroy, La Poésie lyrique des Troubadours, pp. 270-71. Since Haessler insists that The Owl and the Nightingale must be considered more than a game, he refuses to mention the playful spirit of the partimen in his argument. Even if one finds a similar spirit in The Owl, this is hardly strong evidence of influence. A more likely explanation is the common influence of school dialectic upon both forms; Jeanroy finds it significant that the jeu parti flourished in northern France, "que devait le plus facilement s'acclimater ce genre si voisin des exercices dialectiques de l'école" (La Tenson Provençale, Annales du Midi, II [1890], 302).

¹⁵⁸Cf. Hukanir, The Owl, pp. 145-52, and R.M. Lumiansky, p. 413.

¹⁵⁹Huganir, The Owl, p. 146.

¹⁶⁰Baldwin, JEGP, pp. 224-26.

¹⁶¹Cf. Jane Gottschalk, "The Owl and the Nightingale: Lay Preachers to a Lay Audience," PQ, XLV (1966), 658.

¹⁶²Cf. Hanford, PMLA, p. 331.

¹⁶³Walther, Das Streitgedicht, p. 58.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 234-48. Walther also mentions the Altercatio de Johanne Baptista et Evangelista (p. 129), and Haessler uses both conflicti in support of his idea of juridical procedure as the shaping influence on The Owl (pp. 9 ff.). But chronologically, neither can be considered a direct factor: the Altercatio may be as late as 1330, and Walther dates the Discussio as post-1226, because of its reference to Frederick II (p. 128).

¹⁶⁵See above, p. 112; Stanley, pp. 28-30; Gottschalk, pp. 663-66.

¹⁶⁶Lumiansky, pp. 414-17.

¹⁶⁷Such as exists, for example, in the debates of the body and the soul, or the dialogues between Christian and Jew.

CHAPTER IV--CONCLUSION

Thus two medieval poems give witness to the complex interplay between what the medieval poet knew and what he could imagine. Literature of any period, of course, can entail a relationship between old material and new treatment, but the formal and thematic conventions existing in the Middle Ages offer a magnified opportunity to study the relationship. Medieval poets did not cultivate novelty for its own sake; they cultivated conventions, and in so doing, achieved novelty.

Rhetoric, as has been seen, plays a major role in both The Dream of the Rood and The Owl and the Nightingale. The authors of both poems had been drilled in the exercises of the schools of rhetoric, and were both familiar with previous literary treatments of their subjects. A knowledge of this background is most helpful to understanding of the two poems.

The Dream of the Rood preserves many conscious thematic and formal links with previous Christian literature; the Rood poet selected skillfully from Latin homilies, poems, and hymns on the Crucifixion. Basic to his conception of the event are the themes of victory in defeat, the reality of Christ's sufferings and his willing acceptance of them, the lament of nature for its creator, and the ideas of the cross as tree, metaphor for life's difficulties, and cosmic symbol of ultimate redemption for all who suffer with patience and

fortitude. In expressing these familiar themes, the poet used rhetorical devices such as paradox, balance, and antithesis, which were traditionally employed in Christian literature on the Crucifixion. By personalizing the Cross, moreover, he wrought a new and more intense perception of its meaning; conventional Christian ideas about the Crucifixion come alive in a new way through the conventional rhetorical device of the prosopopoeia. The Rood poet also shows his awareness of the traditional homiletic structure, with its progression from descriptive narrative to moral challenge and personal exhortation. Again, however, he reinforces the traditional pattern by dramatizing it: the homily is incorporated into the frame of a dream vision, and the dream vision itself is placed in the frame of a dramatic elegy.

The attitude of the author of The Dream of the Rood toward rhetoric is a most positive one. Even as did Quintilian, he sees an integral relationship between moral uprightness and verbal expression of moral values; to "speak well" is to give evidence of the virtues of courage, justice, and self-control, as well as to display facility in language,¹ and thus to move one's audience toward the good which one has already perceived. Speech in The Dream of the Rood is simultaneously a sign of personal illumination, and an instrument for the illumination of others. The once-silent Cross has seen into the meaning of its sufferings with Christ on Calvary; faithful even when most afraid and

and sorrowful, exposed to a scene it could not totally comprehend, it has since come to realize the mystery of its redemption. Through communication with the followers of Christ, who have expressed their reverence for the Cross, it has understood the meaning of its experience; its prosopoeia comes, then, as its own expression of a tested and confirmed faith. Only through this speech, further, is the visual tableau of the jeweled Cross at the beginning of the poem made comprehensible to the dreamer. Striking as the vision is, his dominant emotions are also sorrow and fear, until "orȝan þa þord sprecaþ" (l. 27). And one homily begets another, since the Cross bids the dreamer to declare its revelation unto men (ll. 95-96). Thus the poem contains within itself its history and its *raison d'être*. Though the dreamer is alone and virtually friendless, his poem is a dramatic soliloquy in the truest sense, its rhetoric carefully shaped for the listening audience which is presumed. Its words are an artful human attempt to embody the Word which will confront men at the last judgment (ll. 112-14), so that other men in turn may carefully consider and be converted before such time as their language loses its power to affect their redemption (ll. 115-16).

In this way, rhetoric in the poem has moral overtones which go far beyond the aspect of mere verbal ornamentation. The thoughtful organization of speech to coincide with and convey the message of Christianity is presented as a central

obligation of the redeemed soul. The prosopopoeia of the Cross, an imaginative way of re-creating the familiar events of the Crucifixion narrative, emphasizes this obligation by highlighting the phenomenon of speech itself. The words of the Cross are dramatically prepared for by the suspense of the descriptive narrative which precedes them; they are reinforced by the Cross's concern that its message be spread to men; above all, the simple fact that an inanimate object is exhibiting this sign of life calls attention to it. That the inanimate object is the Cross and that it is speaking the Word of the Lord, binds technique to theme, form to content, in an especially close way: the transforming power of the Gospel message enables its hearers to transcend their natural capacities and situations, and to speak with conviction of a higher level of life. Rhetorical conventions in The Dream of the Rood, clearly, make it possible for the poet to express his Christian theme precisely and imaginatively, in a way that seems unique and new.

The Owl and the Nightingale, as has been show, also preserves thematic and formal links with a previous literary tradition, that of the medieval conflictus, and its author too manages to join old and new in an imaginative way. The poem adopts the overall structure of the medieval debates, the opening narrative and description of a pastoral setting, the alternating arguments of two representative participants, the closing appeal to a judge to settle the issue.

As do the conflicti, it conveys the tone of a jeu d'esprit, with its trivial topic, its mock-solemn adherence to legal process, and the generally inconclusive diffusion of action at the end. The arguments, moreover, follow the classic pattern of encomiastic topics such as appearance, habitat, moral character, and usefulness to mankind, as do most of the conflicti. Traditional rhetorical devices are plentiful: rhetorical questions, similes, anaphora, and alliteration, among others, decorate the speeches of both birds. The double prosopopoeia, as we have seen, has a long literary ancestry.

Here again, however, familiar devices and patterns enter a new context, under the direction of the poet's fertile powers of invention. The narrative transitions in the debate are expanded, both by the inclusion of standard rhetorical axioms and by description of the debaters' inner feelings and reactions. Fable and folklore amplify our sense of the two birds' identities and backgrounds. The length and variety of their arguments make the debate much longer than the ordinary conflictus, and give the reader the impression that this is indeed a "personality conflict" rather than a real discussion of issues. All of these alterations of the traditional conflictus, as a matter of fact, serve to make the prosopopoeia a convincing, if comically exaggerated, rendition of a human argument.

The attitude of the author of The Owl and the Nightingale toward rhetoric, unlike The Dream of the Rood, is skept-

tical: verbal facility is no guarantee of the motivations of the speaker. Far from assuring us of these motivations, the torrent of words on either side in the debate, together with the advice on rhetorical strategy which accompanies it, succeeds only in focusing attention on the manipulation of language; the abundance of rhetorical devices and shifting logic in the debaters' speeches makes it evident that they will say and do anything to further their own causes. Both birds make rhetorical appeals to standards of natural law, justice, and morality, but their contradictory claims are undercut both by their opponent's charges and by the comic sight of two birds taking themselves and their reputations so very seriously. Rhetoric in this poem, then, has moral overtones by virtue of the fact that it is mere verbal ornamentation. But the moral is lightened by the comic incongruity of the animal prosopopoeia: as so often in twelfth century fables and exempla, the animal world uncovers quickly and entertainingly the pettiness at the heart of human pride and self-importance.

The human implications are heightened by the poet's final variation on the traditional conflictus, the linking of the debate to the apparent plea for ecclesiastical preferment for Master Nicholas of Guildford. Master Nicholas may or may not be the poet himself; if he is, as Constance Hieatt observes, the author's comic use of himself as a character in his own work parallels that of Chaucer.² But whoever he is, praise out of the mouths of two such birds

as the owl and the nightingale cannot be too serious in its intent. In fact, the plea for preferment is a logical, lightly satiric extension of the rhetoric of the debate: an expansion of opportunities for Nicholas to dispense verbal wisdom to as large an audience as he can persuade to listen. The two birds' penchant for self-aggrandizement through rhetoric unites here in open support of the ecclesiastical abuse of multiple benefices, where service could be rendered, often, in name only. On the part of the poet, it is a clever and witty way of rounding off a debate whose true judgment could only be against both debaters--one more rhetorical ploy for advancement through flattery. And if the poet is Nicholas, the conclusion is doubly clever, for the birds, despite the earnestness of their protestations, have not persisted very far in the search for their chosen judge.

It becomes clear, in conclusion, that insight into both the poems under consideration in this study is sharpened by knowledge of their traditional bases, and that criticism which neglects these bases all too easily misses the central thrust of each poem. For the most part, critics of The Dream of the Rood have approached it innocently, ignoring its backgrounds in homiletic literature; their conclusions have been impressionistic, admiring its flashes of brilliance without seeing its real structural unity. On the other hand, critics of The Owl and the Nightingale have devoted much time

to fruitless speculation on unknown factors of date and author, with vague suspicions that the poem means something more than its surface; they do not fully trust its wit, because they do not see it against its conflictus background as a parody.³

And further, in the light of these two vernacular works, widely separated in time as they are, it seems necessary to recognize the basic continuity of the tradition of Latin rhetoric, and to revise, although not to eliminate, the notion of originality as the mark of poetic greatness. For both The Dream of the Rood and The Owl and the Nightingale achieve their stature through an original handling of deeply conventional elements.

FOOTNOTES--CHAPTER IV

¹Institutio Oratoria, I, 8-10.

²Hieatt, Studia Neophilologica, pp. 159-60.

³The most balanced presentations to date of the humor of the poem have been those of Constance Hieatt and John Gardner, "The Owl and the Nightingale: A Burlesque," Papers on Language and Literature, II (1966), 3-12.

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