THE OLD ENGLISH *GENESIS B* AND IRENAEUS OF LYON

The Old English poem *Genesis B* presents a highly idiosyncratic account of the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the poem, as in its mostly lost Old Saxon source, the lapse in Eden is inseparable from the account of the fall of the angels, which precedes the temptation of Adam and Eve, and in fact becomes the motivation for it. The fall of the angels is not biblical, but rather a diverse and popular apocryphal tradition that coalesces in the story of the expulsion of Lucifer and his followers from heaven, and their lament in hell.¹ In *Genesis B*, the fallen Satan sends one of his followers to tempt and undo the first couple, so that they might share in the devils’ misery, and that God’s intentions in creation might be thwarted. One of the striking innovations of this temptation scene is that the tempting devil appears to the pair as an angel. This represents a direct contradiction of the ultimate biblical source, where not even a devil, let alone an angel, appears; in the Book of Genesis, Eve is tempted by a serpent. In the most recent critical edition of both *Genesis B* and the Old Saxon *Genesis* fragments, and writing against the received critical reading of the poem, A. N. Doane casts some doubt on the likelihood that the devil does in fact appear as an angel, pointing out that at *Genesis B* line 491, the devil is described as appearing initially ‘on wyrmes lic’ (‘in the likeness of a serpent’; see also line 590).² I, however, will argue that the characterization of the devil in angelic disguise is a sustained and deliberate part of his representation in the temptation scene in the Old English poem, and implicitly therefore also in its direct Old Saxon source. This characterization is not only to be found in the text of *Genesis B*, but also in the artistic representations of the tempting devil illustrating the poem in its unique copy in manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library,
Junius 11. There the tempter appears successively as a demon, a serpent, and an angel, before reverting to a demonic aspect. For more than a century critics have searched without success for an apocryphal account of the fall of Adam and Eve that might be the source of the poet’s highly idiosyncratic treatment of the story, and especially for the innovation represented by the angelic tempter. I will argue that a passage from Irenaeus of Lyon’s Adversus haereses is the likely direct source of the continental Saxon poet’s inspiration to cast the tempting devil in angelic guise, and furthermore that Irenaeus’ theology of the fall has left its impression on another unusual element of the poet’s treatment of humanity’s lapse in Eden, namely the surprise expressed by the poet as to how God could allow such a thing as the fall to happen.

Genesis B (embedded within Genesis A) makes up lines 235–851 of the Old English Genesis in Junius 11, and is a close translation of an Old Saxon Genesis poem, of which only short fragments survive. However, as Eduard Sievers demonstrated in 1875, before even the existence of such a poem was proved by the discovery of the Vatican Genesis fragments, the Old Saxon poem had originally been much longer, was known in Anglo-Saxon England, and is the source of Genesis B; Genesis B is the fullest surviving witness of the mostly lost and much longer Old Saxon poem. The dating of the composition of the Old Saxon Genesis is tied to the dating of the Heliand, the Old Saxon epic on the life of Jesus. Both were written in an artificial literary dialect not identifiable with any historical continental Saxon dialect. Scholarly consensus dates the composition of the Heliand no earlier than 819, and usually no later than 840. It is generally agreed that the Genesis is later than the Heliand, but not much later, and that the Genesis poet was familiar with the Heliand. The two are probably not far removed geographically in provenance either, and may be the products of the same centre, and even designed to be complementary. Arguments in favour of composition at one of the great monastic centres at Corvey, Werden, or Fulda are persuasive, but not conclusive, though there is little doubt that the poems are the product of a centre (or centres) of learning. The account of the temptation and fall of the first couple is elaborated at length, with psychological insight and a developed interest not only in Eve’s personality and psychology, but also the structure of the relationship between the couple. The poem behind Genesis B does not share the evangelical motivation of the earlier Heliand, written at a different moment in Saxon religious history, and the casting of events in Genesis may be inflected by the fall of the Carolingian ideal in the division and strife between the sons of Louis the Pious in the early 840s. Just as the division of the empire led to political chaos, so Satan’s attempted usurpation of the Kingdom of Heaven (Genesis B lines 278–300) leads inexorably to the destruction of human society in Eden. Genesis B is a translation of part of the Old Saxon Genesis into Early West Saxon, a linguistic feature which helps to date the Old English poem
to the late ninth or early tenth century. It is not known why the translation was made, but it is possible it was designed to make up for text lost in a damaged exemplar of Genesis A, or the translation could have been made for insertion into the longer poem because of the Old Saxon poem’s perceived inherent merits.

The temptation and lapse of Adam and Eve in paradise is told very briefly and economically in the third chapter of Genesis. There is no suggestion that their tempter is a disguised devil, but rather he is simply called a serpent (Gen. iii.1–7, 13–14):

* sed et serpens erat callidior cunctis animantibus terrae quae fecerat Dominus Deus qui dixit ad mulierem cur praecipit vobis Deus ut non comederetis de omni ligno paradisi. cui respondit mulier de fructu lignorum quae sunt in paradiso vescemur. de fructu vero ligni quod est in medio paradisi praecipit nobis Deus ne comederemus et ne tangeremus illud ne forte moriamur. dixit autem serpens ad mulierem nequaquam morte morti moriemini. scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo aperientur oculi vestri et eritis sicut dixit scientes bonum et malum. vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectu delectabile et tulit de fructu illius et comedit deditque viro suo qui comedit. et aperi sunt oculi amborum cumque cognovissent esse se nudos consuerunt folia ficus et fecerunt sibi perizomata. … et dixit Dominus Deus ad mulierem quare hoc fecisti quae respondit serpens deceptis me et comedite. et ait Dominus Deus ad serpentem quia fecisti hoc maledictus es inter omnia animantia et bestias terrae super pectus tuum gradieris et terram comedes cunctis diebus vitae tuae.

(Now the serpent was more cunning than any of the beasts of the earth which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman: Why has God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of paradise? And the woman answered him, saying: Of the fruit of the trees that are in paradise we do eat: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God has commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die. And the serpent said to the woman: No, you shall not die the death. For God knows that on whatever day you shall eat of it, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit of it, and ate, and gave to her husband, who ate. And the eyes of both of them were opened: and when they perceived themselves to be naked, they sewed together fig leaves, and made themselves aprons. … And the Lord God said to the woman: Why have you done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I ate. And the Lord God said to the serpent: Because you have done this thing, you are cursed among all cattle, and beasts of the earth: upon your breast you shall go, and you shall eat earth all the days of your life.)

The biblical narrative is straightforward and clear in its description of the tempter in the garden – the serpent approaches Eve, and it is the serpent that is later
cursed by God for the role it plays in the disobedience of Adam and Eve in eating the forbidden fruit. The devil has no role in this story, though centuries of tradition associated Satan (generally identified with the fallen angel Lucifer) with the lapse of the first humans into sin.\textsuperscript{17}

The Old English poem \textit{Genesis B}, though ultimately and loosely based on the biblical narrative via the Old Saxon \textit{Genesis}, tells a different story.\textsuperscript{18} In the poem, which also includes a full account of the fall of the angels, Satan, bound in the pit of hell, laments his fate and plots how he might undo God’s plans for Adam and the human race (lines 389–408). To this end he offers a reward to any of his disgraced followers if they should bring about Adam’s fall (lines 409–41). At line 441 there is a lacuna in the text, and what we can only presume was the account of a fallen angel volunteering for the task has been lost. The narrative resumes with the scene of ‘Godes ansaca’ (‘God’s enemy’, line 442) preparing himself (lines 442–52):\textsuperscript{19}

(Then God’s enemy began to prepare himself, eager for his trappings – he had an evil intention – he put a disguising helmet on his head and fastened it very firmly, fixed it with clasps; he knew many a fine speech – of bad words. From there he wound his way up, turned through the gates of hell – he had a firm intention – swooped in the air with a mind turned to evil, whipped the fire aside with a fiend’s skill: he wished to deceive the Lord’s underlings by stealth, with sinful deeds, to mislead and to misguide, so that they would become hateful to God.)\textsuperscript{20}

The demon is defined in terms of his ability to disguise himself with his ‘hæleðhelm’, and there is more than a hint of a serpentine character in his winding movement up from hell. The demon travels ‘þurh feondes cræft’ (‘by a devil’s skill’, line 453), to where he finds Adam and Eve standing between two trees, one bright with light and life, the other dark and deathly (lines 453–94). The narrative has already diverged markedly from the biblical story, integrated as it now is with a narrative of the fall of the angels. This devil is able to shift shape or appearance, it seems, and initially the ‘dyrne boda deofles’ (‘devil’s secret messenger’, line 490) casts himself as a snake: ‘wearp hine þa on wyrmes
lic’ (‘he cast himself then in the likeness of a serpent’, line 491). How stable this appearance is, is far from certain. The first indication that the devil may be shifting from the appearance of a serpent to that of an angel comes in his opening temptation speech to Adam, who is offered the forbidden fruit to eat first (a move that also departs from the biblical text, where Adam has no direct encounter with the tempter).

The devil’s speech to Adam (lines 496–521) offers a strong suggestion about the demon’s deceptive appearance. He offers Adam a capacious mind and good looks, if the man should eat the fruit and fulfil ‘God’s command’ (lines 509–21):

‘Swa þu læstan scealt þæt on þis land hider
his bodan bringað. Brade synd on worulde
grene geardas, and god siteð
on þam hehstan heofna rice,
ufan alwald. Nele þa earfðu
sylfa habban þæt he on þysne sið fare,
gumena drihten, ac he his gingran sent
to þinre spræce. Nu he þe mid spellum het
listas læran. Læste þu georne
his ambyhto, nim þe þis ofæt on hand,
bit his and byrige. Þe weorð on þinum breostum rum,
wæstm þy witegra. Þe sende waldend god,
þin hearra þas helpe of heofonrice.’

(‘So you must fulfil in this land here what his messengers deliver. The green regions are wide in the world, and God the Ruler of all sits above in the highest kingdom of heaven. He does not wish to have the trouble himself that he, the Lord of men, would travel on this journey, but he sent his underling to speak with you. Now he commands me to teach you skills with instructions. Eagerly carry out his service, take this fruit in hand, bite it and taste! You will become more capacious in mind, and the more beautiful. The Ruler God, your Master, has sent you this help from the kingdom of heaven.’)

The devil’s clear reference to himself as a ‘boda’ (‘messenger’) of God (not of the devil, as at line 490) is a faithful rendering of the Greek ἄγγελος, and implies that he is presenting himself to Adam in angelic aspect. The claim that he has come directly from ‘the kingdom of heaven’ would seem to confirm that it is to be understood that he is now appearing to Adam as an angel. Adam rejects his temptation and his claim to have come from God, not because of his appearance, but because of the fact that the ‘messenger’s’ advice directly contradicts God’s commands, and finally because God has previously dealt with Adam directly, and not through such messengers (lines 545f.). It is only after Adam’s refusal that the devil, enraged, turns to tempt Eve, converging with the moment at which the temptation in Genesis iii begins.
In his tempting speech to Eve, the devil warns her of God’s anger when it is reported to him that Adam has refused his ‘command’, and again refers to himself as God’s ‘boda’ (line \(558\); see also 656, 664, 680, 686, 763). He promises Eve enlightenment if she will eat the fruit, and persuade Adam to do the same (lines 562–75). The devil tells her that he will keep from God Adam’s refusal; this ironic promise to deceive is a sustained element in the tempter’s character, even here where the unwitting Eve (see line 649, ‘wifes wac géþoht’, ‘the woman’s weak intellect’) should perhaps perceive the contradiction inherent in attempting to keep the truth from God (lines 579f.). In this speech the tempter gives the clearest indication that he is appearing to Adam and Eve in the guise of an angel, which of course he once was (lines 581–7; see lines 740–50):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{`Tyhð me untryowða, cwyð þæt ic seo teonum georn,} \\
gramum ambyhtsecg, nales godes engel. \\
Ac ic cann calle swa geare engla gebyrdo, \\
heah heofona gehliðu; wæs seo hwil þæs lang} \\
þæt ic geornlice gode þegnode \\
þurh holdne hyge, herran minum, \\
drihtne selfum; ne eom ic deiðe gelic.’
\end{align*}\]

(‘He accuses me of untruths, says that I am eager for mischief, a messenger of malice, not God’s angel at all. But I know entirely well the species of angels, the high roofs of the heavens; the time was very long in which I eagerly served God with a loyal mind, my master, the Lord himself; I am not like a devil.’)

The tempter’s mode of speech is laced with irony, in a discourse that mixes truth with lies – Adam’s accusations of falsehood are of course true, but the tempter does indeed also know the orders of angels. Eve becomes lost in the maze of contradictions, led by her emotion and love for Adam, which the tempter evinces – he also promises her knowledge and deceptively gives her ‘superior’ sight, in an imaginative expansion of the same promises of sight and knowledge in the biblical source. The apparent truth of the devil’s claim to a place in heaven would seem to be confirmed for Eve by the vision that she is tricked into seeing after eating the fruit (lines 599–616). This ‘vision’ ‘ofer heofonrice’ (‘across the kingdom of heaven’, line 609) is reported by Eve to Adam in her attempt to persuade him to obey the messenger, whom she now directly declares appears to her as an angel sent from God (lines 655–83):

\[\begin{align*}
\text{`Adam, frea min, þis ofet is swa swete,} \\
bliðe on breostum, and þes boda sciene, \\
godes engel god, ic on his gearwan geseo} \\
þæt he is ærendsecg uncres hearran, \\
hefoncyninges. His hyldo is unc betere} \\
to gewinnanne þonne his wiðermedo. \\
Gif þu him heodæg wuht hearmes gespræcæ,
\end{align*}\]
he forgifð hit þeah, gif wit him geongordom
læstan willað. Hwæt scal þe swa ladlic strið
wið þines hearran bodan? Unc is his hyldo þearf;
he mæg unc ærendian to þam alwaldan,
heofoncyninge. Ic mæg heonon geseon
hwær he sylf sited, þæt is suð and east,
welan bewunden, se ðas woruld gesceop;
gseo ic him his englas ymbe hwerofan
mid feðerhaman, eala folca mæst,
ereda wynsumast. Hwa meahte me swelc gewit gisan,
gif hit gegnunga god ne onsende,
heofones waldend? Gehyran mæg ic rume
and swa wide geseon on woruld ealle
ofer þas sidan gesceaf, ic mæg swegles gamen
gehyran on heofnum. Weard me on hige leohte
utan and innan, siðhan ic þæs ofætes onbat.
Nu hæbbe ic his her on handa, herra se goda;
gife ic hit þe georne. Ic gelyfe þæt hit from gode come,
broht from his bysene, þæs me þes boda sæged
warum wordum. Hit nis wuhte gelic
elles on eordan, buton swa þes ar sæged,
þæt hit gegnunga from gode come.'

(‘Adam, my Lord, this fruit is so sweet, pleasant in the breast, and this messenger is so radiant, God’s good angel, I see by his raiment that he is the ambassador of our Master, of the King of heaven. It is better for us to win his faithfulness than his enmity. If you spoke anything at all hurtful to him this day, he will forgive it nevertheless, if we two follow his obedience. What will it do for you, this hateful quarrel with the messenger of our Master? We need his support; he is able to intercede for us to the Ruler of all, the King of heaven. From here I can see where he himself sits – that is south and east – wrapped in goodness, he who created the world; I see his angels turning about him in feather-garments, the greatest of all races, most joyful of hosts. Who could give me such an insight, if God, the Ruler of heaven, had not sent it directly? I am able to hear fully and see so widely across the whole world, across this broad creation, I am able to hear celestial rejoicing in the heavens. I became enlightened inside and outside my intellect, after I bit into that fruit. Now I have some of it here in my hand, good master; I give it to you eagerly. I believe that it comes from God, brought by his command, as his messenger explained to me in trustworthy words. It is not at all like anything else on earth, but as this messenger says, it has come directly from God.’)

Eve’s insistence that their visitor appears as an angel shows her acceptance of the tempter’s declaration to her that he is ‘not like a devil’ (line 587), but may also point to some earlier uncertainty about his appearance and its meaning. It is the false vision of God in heaven that has confirmed for her the devil’s own likeness to an angel, and that he is God’s ‘boda’ (Old Saxon bodo), a noun used
three times in this speech (lines 656, 664, 680; see also ‘ærendsecg’ line 658, ‘ar’ line 682), and a title which is the lexical equivalent of Old English engel (Old Saxon angul), indicating the poet’s knowledge and exploitation of the word’s etymology.25

Given the overwhelming evidence that the devil is appearing certainly to Eve, and implicitly also to Adam, as an angel, the two references to the devil as a ‘wyrm’ (‘serpent’) would seem anomalous at best, contradictory at worst. Doane’s comment in his edition on the first reference to the devil (line 491), where the poet clearly describes the devil as having taken on the appearance of a serpent, is salutary: ‘Most commentators on [Genesis B], supposing that the devil appears to Adam and Eve in the form of an angel, regard the mention of a snake here and at 590 as either an irrelevant traditional element or some confusion in the text.’26 Doane argues that while Adam sees a snake throughout, Eve’s faulty vision tricks her into seeing the snake as an angel, and that the idea that ‘visions of angels must be resisted’ is an important theme of the poem.27

But we cannot overlook the fact that in the poem’s version of the fall, the snake is already a disguised fallen angel in the first place, and layers of deception are being practised on the couple, both verbally and visually. Whether or not Adam sees the demon as a serpent or an angel is beside the point: in Genesis B Eve is certainly deceived by an ‘angel’. The references to the angelic appearance of the devil in Genesis B are as clear as those to the serpent. However, it should be noted that the second reference to the ‘wyrm’ does not refer to the devil’s external features (‘gelic’) at all, but makes another point entirely, focusing on his thought (lines 588–92):

Lædde hie swa mid ligenum and mid listum
speon idese on þæt unriht, oðþæt hire on innan ongan
weallan wyrmes geþeaht, hæfde hire wacran hige
metod gemearcord, þæt heo hire mod ongan
lætan æfter þam larum.

(He led her on with such lies and with skill urged the lady in that error, until the serpent’s thought began to surge up inside her – the Creator had marked out for her a weaker mind – so that she began to surrender her mind to those instructions.)

This passage follows immediately on from the devil’s insistence to Eve that he is not ‘deofle gelic’ (‘like a devil’, line 587), and the poet’s focus on the devil’s inner self harmonizes with the focus on Eve’s own interior self and the workings of her ‘weaker mind’. The serpent, the Book of Genesis states, was more cunning than any of God’s creatures, Eve included (Gen. iii.1, ‘et serpens erat callidior cunctis animantibus terrae quae fecerat Dominus Deus’); the reference here to the ‘weaker mind’ given by the creator to Eve is a comparison with the wily serpent, not necessarily with Adam’s intellect, as is generally assumed.28 The
sequence of the demon’s appearances in the poem progresses, then, as follows: the devil first appears as a serpent; then transforms himself to seem like an angel; he is apparently a demon again when he laughs and claps at the moment of Adam and Eve’s demise (line 724; his return to a demonic appearance is not described in the poem). Even during the time that the demon is appearing as an angel, the poet insists that he retains the qualities of the biblical serpent, most cunning of all creatures.

This reading of the poem’s representation of the devil’s transformations is confirmed and amplified by the illustrations that accompany Genesis B in manuscript Junius 11. Junius 11 dates from the later part of the tenth century and contains an anthology of Old English biblical poetry, partly illustrated, and arranged according to the chronology of the Old Testament. The collection opens with the Old English Genesis (A and B), followed by Exodus and Daniel. To this collection the poem Christ and Satan (in fact at least three poems) was added, probably in the early eleventh century. The Old Testament poems were originally to be illustrated, as the images in Genesis (as far as the beginning of the Abraham story, p. 88) and the remaining blank spaces show. The origin of Junius 11 is not certain. Barbara Raw demonstrated forty years ago that the likely source for most of the illustrations of the Genesis illustrations in Junius 11 is in fact an illustrated Old Saxon Genesis, which probably came to England some time in the ninth century; the exemplar for these illustrations, she suggests, might not be very far removed in time from the composition of the Old Saxon poem. The main decoration of Junius 11 is the work of two artists, with the first providing the illustrations on pp. 1–68, with which we are concerned. Raw divides the illustrations into three groups. The first consists of three pictures of creation (pp. 6 and 7), which she suggests might derive from a triptych. The second minor group comprises throned figures and scenes of births, framed by architectural features (pp. 53–9, 62f.), for which exact sources could not easily be found. The third, major group illustrates the creation and fall of the angels, the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah (frontispiece, pp. 2f., 9–51, 60f., 65–88). Raw shows that they must all derive from a single source because of their use and confused reproduction of an unusual iconographic detail by the first two Junius 11 artists – what was in the source a sealed scroll in God’s hand, a stylistic feature of Carolingian iconography. Raw argues that the illustrations of the fall of Adam and Eve in Junius 11 closely resemble those in illustrated Carolingian bibles, though one feature is strikingly different. While traditional representations of Eve’s temptation show a serpent, those in Junius 11 also show an angel tempting both her and Adam. There are four illustrations showing the tempter in the garden. The first (p. 20) shows Eve addressed by the serpent. Raw suggests this is at odds with the text of the poem, in which Adam is approached first; the image conforms rather to the letter of the biblical text.
The serpent seen addressing Eve on page 20 is clearly to be identified with the winged demon emerging from the door of hell at the top left of the panel below, on the same page, who has transmogrified into serpent form in the garden. The disagreement with the text of *Genesis B* is not absolute, however, and both the illustration and the poem suggest the demon first appears as a serpent; Adam and Eve are both in the panel, Eve on the left (with the serpent on her right) and Adam on the right. In the next three images (pp. 24, 28, 31) the tempter is clearly represented as an angel, confirming that in the Old Saxon *Genesis*, as in the Old English *Genesis B*, the illustrators understood the text to mean that the tempting of Adam and Eve to eat the fruit was carried out under this guise.

The devil’s ability to shift shape is evident in the illustration in the lower panel on p. 31, where the prostrate and repentant Adam and Eve pray, while he has resumed a demonic appearance. The reverses from the upper to the lower panel on page 31 match the text very effectively. The angel on the upper left becomes the devil on the lower right, as Adam and Eve fall from the upper right to the lower left. The devil’s loss of angelic likeness parallels their own loss of the divine likeness in their fall into sin – Adam and Eve have shifted posture, while he has shifted shape.36

It is entirely possible that the decision to contradict biblical authority and introduce an angelic tempter emerged from the Old Saxon poet’s own inspiration, though this is perhaps unlikely. The ultimate source of the poet’s conception is probably II Corinthians xi.13f.: ‘nam eiusmodi pseudoapostoli operarii subdoli transfigurantes se in apostolos Christi. et non mirum ipse enim Satanas transfigurat se in angelum lucis’ (‘For such false apostles are deceitful workmen, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder: for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light’).37 This isolated reference, however, is far removed from the context of the fall of Adam and Eve, and in the *Genesis* poem at least, this is not even carried out by Satan himself. It was long ago noted by Charles Abbetmeyer in relation to a more proximate origin for this innovation that ‘the source, though much looked for, has not been found’.38 Not long after Abbetmeyer despaired of finding a source, F. N. Robinson suggested the inspiration for the motif of the tempting angel might be the Latin *Vita Adae et Evae*, a text in the tradition of the Apocalypse of Moses.39 In a scene in this apocryphon, after the expulsion from paradise, Adam and Eve are bathing themselves in repentance in the waters of the River Tigris. Satan, disguised as an angel, induces Eve to abandon her penance, telling her that God has forgiven her and Adam their sin; Adam recognizes him and rebukes her.40 There are a number of problems with attributing the creation of the Old Saxon angel-tempter to this source. Firstly, the scene and setting are quite different; secondly, Adam sees through the disguise, which he does not do in the poem, where it is most effective indeed; thirdly, it is difficult to see how the ninth-century poet could
have known the apocryphon. As Vickrey has noted, ‘Robinson’s arguments have not met with widespread scholarly acceptance.’

One text which hitherto has not been discussed in relation to the representation of the tempter in *Genesis B* as an angel is the *Adversus haereses* of Irenaeus of Lyon (d. 202). Irenaeus is one of the most significant early writers of the Western Church (though he wrote in Greek), and was probably originally from Smyrna in Asia Minor before travelling to Lyon, where he became bishop. His writings are important in the development of Christian demonology, and especially the construction of the personality of Satan. The *Adversus haereses* is written in five books, the first three of which specifically refute heresies, while the last two focus on the sayings of Christ and the unity of scripture (though there is much overlap). Irenaeus was the first Christian writer to recognize only the four canonical Gospels, rejecting all others. The *Adversus haereses* was translated into Latin early in the third century; no full Greek text of the work survives, while the Latin does. In a letter to Bishop Aetherius of Lyon, in 601, Pope Gregory the Great asserts that no copies of Irenaeus’ works were to be found in Rome – apparently Aetherius had been citing Irenaeus’ authority in his attempts to establish Lyon’s status as the primal see of Gaul. If Irenaeus’ works could not be found in Rome, it would seem they were difficult to obtain generally in the West by the end of the sixth century. The *Adversus haereses* was, however, known a couple of centuries later to the Carolingians, and both early manuscript family groups have strong Carolingian provenance and affiliation. The *Adversus haereses* was represented by the Clermont, Vossius, and Stockholm manuscripts; the second family by the Arundel and other manuscripts. The Clermont (or Claromontanus) manuscript, which was discovered in the Jesuit college of Clermont, is now Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Phillips 1669, Berol. Lat. 43. The more ancient provenance of the Claromontanus is the monastery of Corbie in what is now northern France, where it was copied in the earlier part of the ninth century; Corbie was also the motherhouse of the monastery of Corvey (with all the close affiliations this implies), which has been suggested as one of the possible locations for the creation of the *Heliand*, and perhaps also therefore of the Saxon *Genesis*. The Claromontanus manuscript contains all five books of the *Adversus haereses*, but ends at chapter 26 of Book 5. The Arundel manuscript (British Library, Arundel MS 87) was copied in 1166 from an exemplar at La Grande Chartreuse, and contains a unique prologue written by Florus of Lyon (d. 860). This evidence in two manuscripts – one with Carolingian provenance, the other with a close Carolingian connection – of interest in and knowledge of an important and authoritative Christian writer of the second century, who was also one of the founding figures of the Church in Gaul, is perhaps unsurprising, given the breadth and depth of Carolingian church renewal.

In Book 5 of his *Adversus haereses*, Irenaeus explores the unity of scripture via
the theological method of *recapitulatio*, a technique used by St Paul in his epistles to show the ways in which Old Testament events foreshadow those of the New.50 In his discussion of the Annunciation (Luke i.26–38) Irenaeus makes a unique assertion concerning the temptation of Eve, whose disobedience foreshadows Mary’s obedience (Book 5, 19.1):51

Manifeste itaque in sua propria veniente Domino, et sua propria eum bajulante conditione quae bajulatur ab ipso, et recapitulationem ejus quae in ligno fuit inobaudientiae per eam quae in ligno est obaudientiam faciente, et seductione illa soluta qua seducta est male illa quae jam viro destinata erat virgo Eva per veritatem qua evangelizata est bene ab angelo jam sub viro Virgo Maria – *quemadmodum enim illa per angelicum sermonem seducta est ut effugeret Deum praevicata verbum ejus, ita et haec per angelicum sermonem evangelizata est ut portaret Deum obaudiens ejus verbo; et sicut illa seducta est ut non obaudiret Deo, sic et haec suasa est obaudiire Deo, uti virginis Evae virgo Maria fieret advocata; et quemadmodum adstrictum est morti genus humanum per virginem, solutum est per virginem, aequa lance disposita virginali inobaudientia per virginalem obauditiam – adhuc etiam protoplasti peccato per corruptionem primogeniti emendationem accipiente, et serpentis prudentia devicta in columbae simplicitate, vinculis autem illis resolutis per quae alligati eramus morti.

(That the Lord then manifestly came to his own, and his own creation sustained him, that creation which he himself sustains, and made a recapitulation of that disobedience which had occurred in connection with a tree, through obedience upon a tree. Also that deception was done away with, by which that virgin Eve, who was already destined for a man, was unhappily misled – was happily announced, through means of the truth spoken by the angel to the Virgin Mary, who was already married. For just as the former was led astray by the word [or arguments] of an angel, so that she fled from God when she had transgressed his word; so did the latter, by an angelic communication, receive the glad tidings that she should carry God, being obedient to his word. And if the former was led astray so that she disobeyed God, yet the latter was persuaded to be obedient to God, in order that the Virgin Mary might become the advocate of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin, so it is rescued by a virgin; virginal disobedience having been balanced in the opposite scale by virginal obedience. For in the same way the sin of the first created man receives amendment by the correction of the first-begotten, and the cleverness of the serpent is conquered in the guilelessness of the dove, those bonds being unloosed by which we had been fast bound to death.) (Italics added.)52

Irenaeus’ assertion in the *Adversus haereses*, a text known, copied, and read during the Carolingian ninth century in the milieu which produced the Old Saxon *Genesis*, would seem to be the strongest candidate noted to date for the source of *Genesis B*’s otherwise unattested notion that Eve was seduced and led astray by the arguments of an angel (‘*per angelicum sermonem seducta est*’).53 It is also
important to note that the poem implicitly evokes the typological association between Mary and Eve, an idea championed by Irenaeus (following Justin Martyr), by the simple fact that the text introduces an angel as Eve’s tempter. Such a radical alteration to the authoritative biblical account, in a way that enhances parallels with the Annunciation to Mary by the angel Gabriel (Luke i.26–38), would surely have drawn a reader’s attention.54

Irenaeus is an important figure in the development of ante-Nicene Christian thought, especially as this pertained to the doctrine of the fall and redemption, and the place of the fallen angels in Creation. Much of this thought is developed in his arguments against the extreme dualism of his Gnostic contemporaries, who saw Satan as a rival deity, even as an evil creator who had made the world. Irenaeus asserted in this context that the devil is an angel, and was created good.55 His defence of this position alienated the Gnostics who were then still a part of the Christian Church, defining them as heretics. Satan apostasized and fell, and Irenaeus follows Justin Martyr’s false etymology of ‘Satan’ as ‘apostate serpent’, an important element in his various discussions of the lapse in Eden.56 The devil’s role in human sin is one of deceiving and persuading, but he is unable to force people to sin, as some heretics had asserted.57 In Irenaeus’ scheme, Satan resented the creation of Adam and the subjection of all creation to him, and the devil’s resentment and revenge in Eden compelled Irenaeus to think about the relative chronology of the fall of the angels and the creation of the first humans. For Irenaeus, there is no idea that human beings were created to replace the fallen order of angels (such as in the doctrine of Gregory the Great, popular across the Middle Ages), as Adam must have been created before Satan’s fall, and the devil entered Eden already corrupted by sin. A number of these notions underpin both the motives for and the chronology of the fall of the angels and of humanity in Genesis B.

Another aspect of Irenaeus’ thought which has a bearing on the presentation of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis B is found in the way he understood the role of human weakness in a theological reading of Eden which pre-dates Augustinian conceptions by two centuries.58 The poet intrudes into his narrative at the moment Eve succumbs and takes the fruit from the disguised devil, wondering that God should have let such a failure come about (lines 588–98):

Lædde hie swa mid ligenum and mid listum speon
idese on þæt unriht, oðþæt hire on innan ongan
weallan wyrmes geþeaht, (hæfde hire wacran hige
metod gemearcod), þæt heo hire mod ongan
lætan æfter þam larum; forþon heo æt þam ladan onfeng
of er drihtnes word deaðes beames
weorcsumme wæstm. Ne wearð wyrse dæd
monnum gemearcod! Þæt is micel wundor
þæt hit ece god ðæfre wolde
þeoden þolian, þæt wurdæ þegn swa monig
forlædd be þam lygenum þæ for þam larum com.

(He led her on with such lies and with skill urged the lady in that error, until the serpent’s thought began to surge up inside her – the Creator had marked out for her a weaker mind – so that she began to surrender her mind to those instructions; therefore contrary to God’s word she accepted the painful fruit of the tree of death from the hateful one. No worse deed was marked out for human beings! It is a great wonder that the eternal God, the Prince, would ever suffer that so many a servant should happen to be led astray by the lies which came before those instructions.)

As has been suggested above, the poet is more likely here to be comparing Eve’s intelligence with the tempter’s, and not Adam’s, as it is the devil (disguised as an angel) that she is listening to. Attention to this human (rather than feminine) inferiority to the fallen angel, the weakness which, rather than any moral failing, is in fact the human attribute that in Genesis B makes the fall possible, is followed by the poet’s lament that God should have allowed this to take place. Jeffrey Burton Russell notes that Irenaeus was ‘less concerned with the mythology of demons than with the alienation of humanity from God, a concern that led him to tie the sin of the Devil closely to the sin of Adam and Eve’. It was this interest that led Irenaeus to elaborate the first developed theology of original sin. God made Adam and Eve and put them in Eden so that they could live in a close relationship with him. Satan, aware of their weakness, entered the garden and tempted them, but he could not have succeeded if they had no freedom to choose between good and evil, and he could not compel them to sin. However, in Irenaeus’ thought, God had not only made them free, but he had also made them weak:

Si hic dicat aliquis: Quid enim! non poterat ab initio Deus perfectum fecisse hominem? sciat quoniam Deus quidem cum semper sit idem et innatus, quantum ad ipsum est, omnia possibilia ei; quae autem facta sunt ab eo, secundum quod postea facturae initium habuerunt, secundum hoc et minora esse oportuit eo qui se fecerit. Nec enim poterant infecta esse quae nuper facta sunt; propter quod autem non sunt infecta, propter hoc et deficiunt a perfecto; secundum enim quod sunt posteriora, secundum hoc et infantilia, et secundum quod infantilia, secundum hoc et insueta et inexercitata ad perfectam disciplinam. Quemadmodum enim mater potest quidem praestare perfectam escam infantii, ille autem adhuc non potest robustiorem se percipere escam, sic et Deus ipse quidem potens fuit homini praestare ab initio perfectionem, homo autem impotens percipere illam: infans enim fuit.

(If, however, anyone should say, ‘What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from beginning?’ let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects himself, all things are possible to him. But created things must be inferior to him who created them, from the very fact of
their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect. Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.)

In this way, ‘Irenaeus attributed a degree of responsibility for original sin to God himself, who could have made Adam and Eve stronger.’ In Irenaeus’ thought, the redemption of the human race includes a growth to spiritual maturity in Christ, the new Adam, away from the infancy represented by Adam and Eve. In another important work, the Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, Irenaeus states the case more clearly in relation to the lapse in Eden: ‘But the man was a little one, and his discretion still undeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.’ The created weakness of Adam and Eve, as argued by Irenaeus as a reason for the fall, is certainly a feature of their character (and explicitly of Eve’s) in Genesis B. In the poem this intellect, weaker than that of the angels in Irenaeus’ thought, is the prompt for the poetic narrator’s intervention and comment, asking how God could have let this situation come to pass. If Irenaeus is not the direct source for these ideas and sentiments, then his theology certainly provides the context within which such a discourse could find expression and meaning.

We should reasonably expect from the author of the Old Saxon poem lying behind Genesis B a degree of reflection on the theological questions at stake in the accounts of the falls of the angels and of humanity that he interweaves in his poem. There can be little doubt that early readers of the poem – personified in the illustrator of an Old Saxon Genesis and his Anglo-Saxon follower illustrating Genesis B in Junius 11 – understood the text to say that the tempting demon in the Garden of Eden successively appeared as a serpent, then more successfully as an angel with overpowering arguments. The evidence suggests that the composition of the poem was informed by the works and thought of Irenaeus of Lyon, who not only asserted that Eve was tempted by an angel, but that her mind (a human mind), had been made weak by God, making her vulnerable to the devil’s ‘more cunning’ (‘callidior’) words. To date no satisfactory source has been found that might account for this poetic innovation. If it is agreed that the poet was closely familiar with Irenaeus’ works, which are also very informative about Satan and his undoing of humanity, then it is also likely that the sentiment underlying the poet’s expression of surprise that God should have allowed the lapse of Adam and Eve in Eden to take place should probably also be attributed to the impact on the poet’s imagination of Irenaeus’ reading of
the fall. Irenaeus’ historical importance as a Greek Father of the Church and also one of the founders of the Gallic Church may account for the fact that his works were copied and studied in the Carolingian ninth century. The originality of the poet’s presentation of the role of human psychology and its weakness in the fall points to a debt to Irenaeus. The *Genesis* poem’s full treatment of Adam and Eve and their society also reveals a poet at ease with his task of recasting the biblical narrative in humane terms, with an eye to theological orthodoxy, but not a slave to it. In all these ways, the anonymous poet reflects the intellectual milieu of the Carolingian mid-ninth century.⁶⁴

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NOTES


4 Both are edited in Doane, *Saxon Genesis*.

5 Eduard Sievers, *Der Heliand und die angelsächsische Genesis* (Halle, 1875).


7 On the six manuscripts and fragments, five of which date from the ninth century, see Timothy Blaine Price, ‘The Old Saxon Leipzig *Heliand* manuscript fragment (MS L): new evidence concerning Luther, the poet, and Ottonian’ (unpublished thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2010), p. 11.


9 Ibid., p. 46f.

Both poems are interested in the final apocalyptic battle to come with the Antichrist; see J. Knight, *Bostock, A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, 2nd edn revised by K. C. King and D. R. McLintock (Oxford, 1976), p. 184.


The translation is modified from the revised Douay Rheims text, *The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate*, ed. Richard Challoner (Baltimore, Md, 1899).


See Alain Renoir, ‘Eve’s I.Q. rating: two sexist views of Genesis B’, in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind., 1990), pp. 262–72, who argues that the poet’s presentation of Eve should not necessarily be read as antifeminist.


Gen iii.5f., ‘scit enim Deus quod in quocumque die comederitis ex eo aperientur oculi vestri et eritis sicut dii scientes bonum et malum. vidit igitur mulier quod bonum esset lignum ad vescendum et pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile’.

The etymology would have been familiar from a variety of sources, including Isidore: *Vnde et angelus nuntius interpretatur. Seu Isidori Hispalensis episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), VI.2.43.

27 Ibid., pp. 149, 152.
28 At line 649, ‘wifes wac geþoht’, the reference to Eve as ‘wif’ may suggest a gendered reading of her intellect, but the comparison there is also with the devil’s intelligence, and ‘wif’ is carrying the alliteration. Reading comments on her intellect as comparisons as comparisons with Adam, who soon also succumbs, are not necessarily mandated by the text; the demon’s arguments to Eve are longer and more persuasive than those presented to Adam. For an alternative view, see Belanoff, ‘Old English female poetic image’, p. 824.
30 Christ and Satan does not have the same blank spaces, though the bottom of p. 225 is decorated with a geometric pattern.
32 Ibid., pp. 136f.; see also Karkov, Text and Image, pp. 26–32.
34 Ibid., pp. 139f.
35 Ibid., p. 141.
36 See Karkov, Text and Picture, p. 73.
38 Charles Abbetmeyer, Old English Poetical Motives Derived from the Doctrine of Sin (Minneapolis, Minn., 1903), p. 20.
40 Robinson, ‘On the sources’, pp. 391f. St Paul’s suggestion that the devil might appear in angel’s form was taken up in early hagiography, though none of these sources contradict the Book of Genesis and suggest that Eve was tempted by an angel. In some versions of the ‘Life of St Juliana’ the devil appears to the saint in the guise of an angel, to tempt her to offer to idols, as witnessed in the thirteenth-century Middle English Liflade, which forms part of the Katherine-Group. See Pe Liflade of St. Juliana: From Two Old English Manuscripts of 1230 A.D., ed. Oswald Cockayne and Edmund Brock, Early English Text Society, Original Series 51 (London, 1872), p. 34: ‘com a kempe of helle in englene heowe’. The motif is not found in Cynewulf’s Old English poem Juliana; see Woolf, ‘Fall of man’, p. 20. In the Ancrene Wisse, the reader is warned against the disguises of the devil, which include appearing as an angel; the author cites II Cor. xi.14, though the story he alludes to is from the Vitae Patrum; The English Text of the Ancrene Riwle: Ancrene Wisse: Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 402, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien, Early English Text Society, Original Series 249 (London, 1962), p. 116; see Hugh White, Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses (Harmondsworth, 1993), p. 223 n. 36. The Ancrene Wisse and the Liflade of St. Juliana are very closely related, and may share the same author; see Medieval English


45 See Against the Heresies, trans. Unger and Dillon, pp. 11f.


47 Against the Heresies, trans. Unger and Dillon, p. 12. There is also a lacuna in the manuscript from Book 5, ch. 13.4 to ch. 14.1.

48 Florus’ Prologue is printed in Patrologia Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66), VII, cols 431f.; Florus introduces Irenaeus as Bishop of Lyon, a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Apostle, but does not mention his Asian birth; he argues Irenaeus should be known because of the ongoing need to fight heresy. The library at Lyon seems to have been well provided with ancient Christian works from an early stage; see Louis Holtz, ‘De l’antiquité à l’époque carolingienne: la Bibliothèque de Florus de Lyon’, in Manuscrits médiévaux: de l’usage au trésor (Lyon, 2002), pp. 17–27. Earlier in the ninth century, under Agobard, Lyon had taken a leading role in combating the heresy of Adoptionism; see Agobard of Lyon, Adversum dognam Felicis, ed. L. Van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 52 (Turnhout, 1981), pp. 73–111; David Ganz, ‘Theology and the organisation of thought’, in The New Cambridge Medieval History, ed. Rosamund McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 765f.

49 See D. A. Bullough, Carolingian Renewal: Sources and Heritage (Manchester and New York, 1991); Rosamond McKitterick, The Frankish Church and the Carolingian Reforms, 789–895 (London, 1977). There is no persuasive evidence that Adversus haereses was known


51 Irénée de Lyon; Contre les hérésies; livre V, ed. Adelin Rousseau, Louis Doutreleau, and Charles Mercier, 2 vols, Sources chrétiennes, Textes grecs 152–3 (Paris, 1969), II, 248–51; see also Book 3, 23, where Irenaeus discusses Satan’s possession of Adam after the fall.


53 The Migne: PG, VII, col. 1175, edition reads angeli for angelicum, perhaps offering a reading available to early Humanist scholars and editors. The manuscripts used by Erasmus for his 1526 Basel editio princeps of the Adversus haereses have been lost; see Against the Heresies, trans. Unger and Dillon, pp. 13–15. Both readings agree that Eve is deceived by an angel.

54 Woolf, ‘Fall of man’, p. 15, suggests there is no appeal to the theological typology that associated Eve and Mary by the poet in Genesis B. It is also noteworthy, given the possible shared provenance of the Old Saxon Genesis and the Heliand, and the possibility that the Old Saxon Genesis and the Heliand were originally conceived of as complementary texts, that Eve is called ‘idesa sceonost, wifa wlitigost’ in Genesis B (‘most radiant of ladies, most beautiful of women’, lines 626f.), and by the same formula in the account of the Annunciation in the Heliand, when the Archangel Gabriel addresses Mary, the ‘idiso sconiost allaro uuibo uulitigost’ (lines 270f.) (see Belanoff, ‘Old English female poetic image’, p. 824). The Old English poem has undoubtedly translated the same formula from the Old Saxon Genesis, and it is possible the Old Saxon Genesis poet chose a formula he knew already to have been used of Mary in the typologically related context in the Heliand, for a circle of readers who would know both poems. On the typology of Eve and Mary in Anglo-Saxon literature, see Mary Clayton, The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 2 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 12, 15, 186f., 203, 223, 230, 256f., and p. 5 on the important role played by Irenaeus of Lyon in the development of Marian theology. See also Joannès Garçon, La Mariologie de S. Irénée (Lyon, 1932).

55 Russell, Satan, pp. 80f.; Adversus haereses, Book 3, 8; Book 4, 41; Book 5, 24.

56 Adversus haereses, Book 4, 37, 41; Book 5, 21, 24.

57 Ibid., Book 4, 41; Book 5, 24.

58 Augustine of Hippo, De natura et gratia, ed. Karl F. Urba and Joseph Zycha, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 60 (Vienna, 1913), III.1: ‘Natura quippe hominis primitus inculpata et sine ullo vitio creata est’ (’Man’s nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin’). For Augustine, the fall in Eden was the result of the exercise of free will in the face of temptation, and does not imply any prior fallibility in a perfect human nature.
Russell, *Satan*, p. 82.

Ibid., p. 82; *Adversus haereses*, Book 3, 23; Book 4, Pref.; Book 5, 22f.


*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. Joseph P. Smith, Ancient Christian Writers 16 (London, 1952), ch. 12; the work exists now only in an Armenian translation; no Greek or Latin version survives.