

The Passions of Sir Gawain:
Patience and the Idiom of Medieval Romance in England

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the intersection between classical and medieval concepts of patience and romance heroism in twelfth to fourteenth century England, focussing particularly on the influence of the virtue on the depiction of Gawain and his adventure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the first chapter, I establish the range and currency of the learned tradition of patience in medieval England. The second chapter considers the early characterisation of patient heroism in twelfth-century vernacular literature, demonstrating through Marie de France's works how patience became encoded into the romance hero near the beginning of the genre's inception. In the third chapter, I argue that aggressive, martial heroism dominates the horizon of expectations in Middle English romance during the first half of the fourteenth century, even though protagonists such as Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton, Isumbras, and Florent in *Octavian* all manifest aspects of patience to varying degrees. The fourth and fifth chapters demonstrate the popularity of patience as a literary theme in the latter half of the fourteenth century; in the fourth chapter, I discuss patience in Chaucer and Langland, and in the fifth, I consider the degree of the *Gawain*-poet's awareness of the discourse concerned with the virtue. Finally, I conclude the thesis by asserting that the understanding of patience that I have been examining throughout the thesis is essential for understanding the characterisation of Gawain and his quest in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The *Gawain*-poet's use of the conventions of the virtue *patientia* have not been addressed sufficiently, and such an investigation can illumine our understanding of his materials and how he transforms them into this wonderful, yet perplexing, narrative.

List of Abbreviations Used

<i>Espurgatoire</i>	<i>Espurgatoire Saint Patriz</i>
<i>Navigatio</i>	<i>Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis</i>
<i>OM1</i>	<i>Owain Miles</i> (Auchinleck MS)
<i>pa</i>	<i>Saint Patrick's Purgatory</i> (South English Legendary)
<i>SEL</i>	<i>South English Legendary</i>
<i>SGGK</i>	<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>
<i>Summa virtutum</i>	<i>Summa virtutum de remediis anime</i>
<i>Tractatus</i>	<i>Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii</i>
<i>Voyage</i>	<i>Voyage de Saint Brendan</i>

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Chapter I: Introduction

Medieval romances commonly depict the martial achievements of a knight, and one can reasonably expect to find such an emphasis in romance written in England during the High and Late Middle Ages. While acts of great martial courage are closely associated with the romance hero, one can discern romances, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or episodes in romances, such as *Sir Isumbras*, in which aggression is either ineffective or altogether irrelevant. Deeds of great prowess have become so closely associated with the romance hero that some critics have gone as far as to doubt the presence of heroism in the Late Middle Ages. For instance, Morton W. Bloomfield writes, "The absence of a true charismatic hero who is valiant and noble is a characteristic of the literature of the later Middle Ages in Western Europe" (33). In *Ricardian Poetry*, J. A. Burrow directs this comment specifically towards Ricardian England: "The poems of the Ricardian period project an unheroic image of man" (94). Yet such an appraisal of the state of heroes in the late medieval England suggests either that the heroes themselves are radically flawed or that the authors of this period were unable to depict heroism convincingly.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a late fourteenth-century Middle English romance originating in the Northwest Midlands, the question of heroism is a central one; as Bloomfield notes: "The drastic ambiguity of the hero in the Middle Ages is perfectly revealed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where the problem of the hero becomes acute" (33). The hero steps forth to the Green Knight's challenge only when faced with the necessity of saving the king from an adventure that portends his death. He beheads an

unarmed man, becomes lost in a forest, is led around Hautdesert by his lively host, remains in bed and is pursued by his host's wife while the other men hunt, and, finally, accepts a magic girdle, which the Lady regards as a love token, in order to save his life. The pinnacle of his heroic behaviour does not occur within the context of battle, as one might naturally expect; rather, Gawain's heroism must be manifested through submitting to decapitation. When he arrives at the Green Chapel, he flinches from the first blow of the Green Knight's axe. After receiving a small cut from the blade, he discovers that he has been the victim of an elaborate plot to humiliate Camelot and comes to realise that his acceptance of the girdle is an act of cowardice. In spite of these factors that would seem to mitigate his heroism, the Green Knight refers to Gawain as "On þe fautlest freke þat euer on fote 3ede" (2363). Larry Benson, W. A. Davenport, and, most recently, David Boyd all regard Gawain as passive in ways that compromise his heroic status and, consequently, diminish the importance of Gawain's will. According to Benson, during Gawain's stay at Hautdesert, "the poet takes care that his audience will not miss the significance of [Bercilak's] ceaseless activity, for he repeatedly stresses the contrast between the inactive, passive courtier and his churlishly energetic opponent" (88). Davenport questions Gawain's heroism altogether: "although Gawain fulfils a hero's role, the hero himself is continually being diminished. He is shown repeatedly as subordinate, and therefore being obliged to be deferential, and as passive" (182). Boyd takes these arguments a step further, and suggests that Gawain's passivity feminises him, not only during the wooing scenes, but also during the beheading: "The detailed description of the two men, taking on dominant/submissive or active/passive positions as they take turns exchanging blows on Circumcision Day symbolically places the receiver, though denoted

as hypermasculine, in a feminized position” (86). While these critics rightly note that the circumstances of the narrative continually inhibit Gawain’s capacity for external self-directed action, the word *passive* is misleading, because, in its modern sense, it suggests a loss of agency, a fundamental potency of the will.

Jill Mann offers a qualification to the notion of Gawain’s passivity. In “Sir Gawain and the Romance Hero” she uses the phrase “passive heroism” to capture the contradictory nature of his so-called passivity.¹ She emphasises that this sort of heroism is voluntary, and claims that “action is always the easier option” because of the “effort that is necessary to relinquish attempts at control” (116). While Mann refers to the romance hero as somehow passive by nature, she aptly qualifies his passivity by suggesting that it “requires just as much energy as activity” (111); what makes the protagonist’s behaviour heroic is the volitional effort that he must expend in order to maintain his virtue. Mann points to the anxious way in which Gawain becomes active after sustained periods of passivity, such as after the lady leaves his room on the first day of the attempted seduction or after the Green Knight strikes his third blow with the axe (111). Thus, the concept of passivity that Mann discusses is not exactly a state of inaction that the hero adopts in order to wait for the threat to resolve itself, neither is it a simple submission to apparent necessity; rather, it consists of the willed effort to act in the

¹ See also T. McAlindon (1965), who, using scare quotes, acknowledges the danger of using the concept of passivity to describe Gawain’s virtues:

What brings [Gawain] safely through his encounters with the world of magic are the ‘passive’ but (in the circumstances) very exacting virtues of patient fortitude, truth, piety, and chastity: virtues which are frequently annexed in part by the typical Arthurian hero but, when viewed in the context of medieval narrative and idealism as a whole, are much more characteristic of the saint, the perennial Christian hero. (9)

See also David Aers (1988) who refers to Gawain’s extending his neck for the axe as “voluntary passivity” (167).

manner most appropriate to the situation in which the hero finds himself. As Mann suggests, the protagonist's struggle moves from the external to the internal cosmos:

The only motivation that [Gawain] has comes not from without but from within—his own 'trawþe', which is to be preserved, paradoxically, only by his commitment to his own destruction. The knight's field of action, one could say, is not the outside world, over which he claims to exercise no control, but himself; the outside world is the means of testing and revealing his selfhood. (109)

There is still a struggle, that is, an activity, but it consists primarily of a *psychomachia*, either implied or manifested, instead of a demonstration of martial prowess; the field of struggle is psycho-spiritual instead of physical. The external world is that which provides the dramatic situation for the emergence of the protagonist's selfhood, the heroic will that accepts endurance even in the apparent absence of choice. Nevertheless, the virtues that he manifests have an intimate relationship with the ordeals of the external world; the actions and passions that he experiences both determine the types of virtues that he has and cause them to be displayed; thus, the knight's self is defined both privately, that is, internally, and publicly, that is, externally.

While Mann's account of the nature of Gawain's heroism sounds much like her description of the virtue patience as it appears in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer,² she refrains from ascribing the word *patient* to Gawain, perhaps because of its conspicuous absence in the text. In this thesis, I shall investigate the relationship between patience discussions that circulate in England during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries and the characterisation of protagonists who occupy romances and their environs, and I shall

² See Mann (1991) *passim*.

focus particularly on the impact of patience on *SGGK*. I shall argue that the literary atmosphere of the latter half of the fourteenth century, the larger context of the manuscript Cotton Nero A.x.iii, and the pervasiveness of themes of patience in *SGGK* all point to the necessity of reading *SGGK* in the context of medieval patience discussions. While Mann does identify the internal nature of the testing of passive heroes such as Gawain, by not reading this heroism within the context of the medieval patience discussions that I shall examine throughout this thesis, Mann's approach fails to identify and account for the greater difficulty of endurance and the relationship between patience and the passions; as we shall see, an understanding of these aspects of the virtue is essential for explaining both why Gawain fails—a question that the narrative invites us to consider—and what Gawain's decision to wear the girdle as a constant reminder of his failure means. By looking at these questions within the context of patience, one can perceive the importance of such heroism: for the knight, it provides the fullness of fortitude that, as I shall argue in the context of earlier fourteenth-century Middle English romances, is often eclipsed by an emphasis on and favouring of martial prowess alone, even, and especially, when such romances evoke expectations associated with patient heroism. *SGGK* depicts the expansion of knightly fortitude from courage in battle, which is rather mundane for a martial protagonist, to death in circumstances of ambiguous seriousness, a test of enduring fortitude that reveals the power of the will in the face of powerlessness and suffering, and one that provides much potential for dramatic struggle and character development.

The first chapter of this thesis identifies some widely-circulating definitions of patience and accounts for their transmission to a learned lay audience. In order to

establish the traditional understanding of patience before the rise of the virtues and vices tradition in the late twelfth century, the first part of this chapter consists of a discussion of the influence of Cicero's *De officiis* and *De inventione*, Augustine's *De patientia*, and Gregory the Great's *Homelias in Evangelia* and *Moralia in Iob*, and John Cassian's *Institutes*. The second part of this chapter examines the transmission of the concept of patience through the medieval tradition of virtues and vices. Here, I consider the discussions of the virtue in the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* of (pseudo-)William of Conches (twelfth century), the *Summa de virtutibus* of William Peraldus (<1250), and Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* (1267-73). The classifications outlined in these texts enter the vernacular through the educational efforts of the friars. One popular example of such a work is Lorens of Orléans's *Somme le Roi* (1279), which survives in over 100 French manuscripts, and which is found in English in the *Ayenbite of Inwyt* (c. 1340) and the *Book of Virtues and Vices* (c. 1375). Finally, I shall discuss the close association of patience with the enduring part of *fortitudo*, a virtue that is commonly divided into aggressive and enduring parts. Lorens of Orléans transmits this division of fortitude through his popular *Somme le roi* and its subsequent translations. In summary, this chapter answers the question, "which definitions of patience circulated most broadly in England from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and which ones can reasonably be expected to have been known by the authors discussed in this thesis?"

In the second chapter, I examine patient heroes at the beginning of the development of romance in England. Specifically, I consider the exemplification of patience in Benedeit's *Voyage de Saint Brendan* and Marie de France's *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz*, *Guigemar*, and *Eliduc*, all of which either inform or partake in the

development of the patient endurance motif that is common in twelfth-century romance. This chapter consists of a close reading of patient heroism as it is manifested by Brendan and Owein, and considers briefly the implications of this type of heroism in the two lays by Marie de France. I do not provide a close examination of the development of the patient endurance motif, but instead seek to prove that the incipient romance idiom incorporated the exemplification of enduring fortitude in the mid- to late- twelfth century and that this patient heroism contributed to a horizon of expectations for the audiences of the new genre of romance in its first language. Finally, I examine the transformation of the Brendan and Owein narratives in the fourteenth century by considering the ways in which the Middle English versions attempt to incorporate aggressive fortitude into the protagonists.

In the third chapter, I investigate the dominant tradition of martial prowess in heroic literature, and how this tradition informs Middle English romances that invoke themes associated with patient heroism. Specifically, I consider the four romances that William of Nassington dismisses in the *Speculum Vitae*, a text that reveals the influence of the *Somme le Roi*: *Octavian*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Bevis of Hampton*, and *Guy of Warwick*. Nassington's referring to this list both reveals a clerical objection to the contents of these romances and attests to their currency. Even when these romances reveal a distinct interest in the patience of their protagonists, the authors of these works emphasise the aggressive part of fortitude. In this category of romance, I argue, the narrative emphasises the way in which the hero is able to manifest his will through the expression of the aggressive aspect of fortitude; even when these romances depict the voluntary suffering of the hero, martial prowess tends to eclipse patient endurance. The act of reading

Gawain against this literary context of aggressive heroism that is established in Middle English romances translated during the first half of the fourteenth century renders the *Gawain*-poet's emphasis on endurance even more conspicuous and remarkable.

In the fourth and fifth chapters, I examine the presence of the traditions of enduring fortitude among the *Gawain*-poet and his contemporaries, in whose works one can discern an alternative examination of heroism to that which appears in the romances considered in chapter three. The primary intent of chapters four and five is to support my reading of patience in *SGGK* by revealing the extensive currency of the virtue not only in *Patience*, but also in the works of Chaucer and Langland. Chapter four consists of close readings of relevant passages from the *Parson's Tale*, the *Tale of Melibee*, the *Knight's Tale*, the *Franklin's Tale*, the *Man of Law's Tale*, the *Clerk's Tale*, and Langland's *Piers Plowman* according to the traditions of enduring fortitude and, specifically, patience. The goal of these chapters is not to resolve current critical cruxes in Chaucer's and Langland's work, but, rather, to emphasise the broad concern with the virtue of patience at the end of the fourteenth century while providing a more specific reading of the virtue in the thought of the *Gawain*-poet. Chapter five focusses on the *Gawain*-poet's knowledge of the virtue in *Patience*; specifically, it considers his engagement with the tradition of patience that I explore in chapter one, and thereby provides an intellectual context for examining the role of patience in *SGGK*. The poet does not simply represent the tradition; he dramatises it by depicting its advantages, difficulties, and limitations.

In the final chapter, I discuss the ways in which the *Gawain*-poet engages the conventions of patience in *SGGK*. The *Gawain*-poet does not name patience in his list of Gawain's virtues, yet the emphasis that the poet places on endurance aligns *SGGK* more

closely with the narratives about Brendan and Owein than with those concerning Isumbras, Octavian, Guy of Warwick, and Bevis of Hampton; the exemplary patience that is encoded in Brendan and Owein is also found in Sir Gawain. I argue that it is necessary to examine *SGGK* in the context of the tradition of patience because of his own, and his contemporaries', great interest in the virtue patience and, especially, because the tradition of patience provides insight into the poet's emphasis on Gawain's emotional states and the signification that the protagonist ascribes to the girdle at the end of the poem. The protagonist displays exemplary martial courage. However, the *Gawain*-poet radically reverses the tendency of other Middle English romances by emphasising the patient endurance that Gawain requires to complete his quest. I shall conclude that Gawain's failure originates in an incomplete understanding of fortitude to which Morgan's ruse draws attention. Enduring fortitude is the concern of the *Gawain*-poet, and it is ultimately more complicated and difficult than the aggressive fortitude that the earlier Middle English romances explore.

Chapter II: Patience and Enduring Fortitude: Some Scholastic Commonplaces and their Transmission to the Learned Laity

The attempt to find exact sources for the *Gawain*-poet's understanding of patience is impossible given the current state of scholarship on the tradition of virtues and vices. Bloomfield et al. list 6553 treatises of virtues and vices that were produced in Western Europe between 1100 and 1500;¹ inevitably, the vast majority of these manuscripts remains unedited, including such important and influential works as William Peraldus's *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus*. Nevertheless, one can identify certain topics associated with patience that appear consistently in the major works that discuss the virtue. In this chapter we will follow the topics as they develop in western thought, particularly in England, from the eleventh century to the time of the *Gawain*-poet. The definitions of patience available to clerics and learned laity in fourteenth-century England are not particularly unique, yet we can perceive a rediscovery and reevaluation of the classical sources for the virtue. Because of the rise of scholasticism during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there is an increased concern with categorising the virtue. On the one hand, as we will see, this reinvigorated tradition points to the common classification of patience as a part of the cardinal virtue fortitude;² it has roots in the ethical system of Aristotle and his reception by subsequent pagan and Christian authors. On the other hand, patience is still treated as a remedial virtue, opposed either to *ira* or to *acedia*, just as it had been in the monastic tradition. While its close association with fortitude in Saint Gregory the Great (c. 540-604) and John Cassian (c. 360-c. 435) reveals the tenacity of the classical

¹ See Bloomfield et al. (1979).

² On the significance of the different parts, or species, of the virtues, see Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery* 69-70.

tradition, its description is often negative, inasmuch as it exists primarily to oppose a spiritual vice. The early medieval reception of patience continues to minimise the classical taxonomies, since the primary occupation of monks was the purification of the passions, a task that was guided largely by the monastic psychology of John Cassian. However, during the renewed interest in classical texts during the twelfth century, works such as Cicero's *De inventione* (c. 91-87 BC) and *De officiis* (c. 46-43 BC), Macrobius's *Commentarium in somnium Scipionis* (c. 395-410), Seneca's *Epistolae Morales* (c. AD 63-65), and, eventually, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (mid fourth century BC) contribute to the incipient genre of virtues and vices.³ The classical taxonomies that these works present eventually enter the penitential tradition and thereby, perhaps directly, perhaps indirectly, become part of the education of every Christian soul. Also, both the classical and early medieval traditions of patience continued to circulate widely and, often, together, having been harmonised by schoolmen during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. These two richly attested traditions collectively establish the popular understanding of patience that informs the works of the *Gawain*-poet.

Ralph Hanna III provides the three most common definitions of patience known in the Middle Ages; one is the popular Ciceronian one, which describes patience as a "voluntary and sustained endurance, for the sake of what is honourable or advantageous,

³ On the tradition of virtues and vices as a genre, see Richard Newhauser 55-96. On the distinction between the remedial and the cardinal virtues, see Siegfried Wenzel (1984) 7-11. The remedial qualities of patience appear in Benedeit's *Voyage* and Marie de France's *Espurgatoire*. The *Gawain*-poet, on the other hand, considers both the remedial quality of patience and its definition and classification. See chapters two, five, and six. On the dating of *De inventione*, see H.M. Hubbell's edition, page xii, on that of *De officiis*, see Walter Miller's edition, page xi. The dating of Macrobius's text is discussed by William Harris Stahl on pages 5-6 of his translation. On the dating of Seneca's epistles, see Richard M. Gummere's edition, page ix.

of difficult and painful labours.”⁴ The other two definitions, provided by Christian theologians, remark on the relationship between patience and the passions:

Augustine says that patience is “*aequo animo mala tolerare*” (“to endure evils with an even mind”). And Gregory the Great defines the virtue as “*aliena mala aequanimiter perpeti*” (“to endure external evils with equanimity”). These three statements are universally known: nearly every patience discussion I have seen utilizes one of them; a majority include at least two of the three. Their ubiquity as platitudes can be gauged by the widespread use of the nearly identical Gregorian and Augustinian versions in ordinary Sunday sermons. (68)

Hanna confirms that this connection between patience and the control of the passions, which Augustine (354-430) and Gregory the Great describe, was well known among all the strata of medieval society, mainly because of its presence in regular Sunday preaching. The brevity of these treatments inspires greater investigations concerning the nature of the virtue. Authors continually ask and, of course, provide answers to, various questions, the answers to which these definitions merely hint at or neglect completely: how does patience relate to the emotions? How does it relate to the other virtues? Can patience be used unrighteously? Chronologically and hierarchically speaking, the first and most important question that the western Middle Ages inherits concerns the relationship between patience and the passions; John Cassian and Gregory the Great deal with this problem in some detail, since it concerns the immediate, practical matter of teaching both monks and lay people how to behave. The classification of the virtues becomes a greater concern in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when it is inspired by

⁴ ...honestatis aut utilitatis causa, rerum arduarum ac difficilium voluntaria ac diuturna perpassio.

the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (early-mid twelfth century) and the rise of the schoolmen and their response to Cicero and Macrobius. The scholastic treatment of the virtue culminates in the *Secunda secundae* of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* (early 1270s), in which he surveys different notions of patience and conducts a thoroughly scholastic examination of the virtue. He provides a Ciceronian definition of patience, investigates its relationship to grace in Augustinian fashion, and concludes that patience is a species of fortitude and is only a virtue when it is exercised for the sake of the good, which he defines as God. The *Moralium dogma philosophorum* and the *Summae* of the scholastic authors also contribute significantly to the tradition of virtues and vices that the penitential tradition disseminates. Through this tradition, various answers to the questions that the schoolmen ask eventually reach the laity. Taking their cue from Classical predecessors such as Cicero (106-43 BC), medieval authors who write for both schoolmen and uneducated laity regard patience as a species of fortitude, one of the four cardinal virtues that reach back as far as Plato. Authors such as Cicero, Thomas of Chobham (c. 1160-c. 1236), Aquinas (1225-74), and Lorens d'Orléans (c. 1220-c. 1300) divide fortitude into aggressive and enduring qualities. For Aquinas in particular, the enduring aspect is more difficult, and thus more heroic, than the aggressive one, since acts of endurance must be conducted without the assistance of the passions; the essence of *fortitudo* is found in patience and perseverance, and its essential act is martyrdom.

The early medieval inheritance of the tradition of the virtues and vices focusses on the latter to such a degree that the former are nearly forgotten. The two great Christian moralists of late antiquity, John Cassian and Gregory the Great, are known not for transmitting knowledge of the virtues to the medieval Europe, even though these virtues

clearly inform their writings; rather, they are celebrated for systematising the Desert Fathers' psycho-spiritual system that aimed to control the passions of the soul. Wenzel (1984) writes,

This relative neglect (of the virtues) is not as astonishing as it may appear if one considers that ethical literature until the twelfth-century (and in fact far beyond) had an eminently practical, ascetic orientation. ... The primary object of moral theology ... was sinful man who must struggle against his innate evil inclinations. ... "First we must uproot the vices, and afterwards plant the virtues," said Othlo of St. Emmeran in the twelfth century, reflecting the commonplace practical thought of Gregory and Cassian. (7)

This emphasis on the vices pervades Cassian's *De institutes coenobitarum* and *Collationes Patrum*, both of which were standard monastic reading throughout the Middle Ages.⁵ In *Collationes* 5, throughout which the elder Serapion discusses the eight principal vices, Cassian includes a list of the virtues near the end of the book, and there, only in passing:

Once the vices have been overcome by the people of Israel—that is, by the virtues struggling against them—chastity will thenceforth seize for itself the place in our heart which the spirit of lust and fornication used to have; patience will lay claim to what wrath had laid hold of ... Fortitude will begin to cultivate what acedia was laying waste ... And so, when all these

⁵ See Benedict of Nursia's endorsement of the writings of John Cassian in chapter 73 of the *Rule*. Sharpe et al. list fifteen occurrences of the *Collationes* and ten of the *Institutes* in catalogues of manuscripts in Benedictine monasteries in England from the twelfth to the fourteenth century (857); for the sake of extrapolating the larger circulation, one can compare that there are only nineteen copies of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* and ten of *Confessiones* listed. Bell lists five copies of the *Collationes* and one of the *Institutes* in Cistercian monasteries (301); compare four copies of *Confessiones* and two of *De civitate Dei*.

vices have been expelled, their places in the dispositions will be occupied by the opposing virtues.⁶ (5.23)

In *Collationes* 21, in a discourse on fasting given by the elder Theonas, Cassian lists the four cardinal virtues, justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance, but the discourse is given not to elucidate the nature of the virtues, but, rather, to reveal the one exception—the virtues—to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, that there is a right time and place for all things (21.12-13). Cassian concerns himself exclusively with the remedial qualities of the virtues and associates each virtue with a vice that it is to attack. He does not directly mention the classical association of patience with fortitude,⁷ nor does he seem to show any interest in it whatsoever; on the other hand, his pairing of patience with anger is already a conventional one.⁸

Evagrius's (345-399) eight passionate thoughts provide the structure of Cassian's *Institutes*, and the virtues are invoked, along with other *praxeis*, such as prayer and fasting, primarily as *remedia* for the vices. Although Cassian would not deny that the virtues are supported by Grace, he is concerned primarily with what actions humans can initiate in order to rid themselves of the vices. Patience, which he discusses in the context of anger, is a result of purgation; the desire for solitude, a characteristic desire of an early monk, sometimes comes from the tendency to blame others for our own lack of virtue,

⁶ ...cum ab Israelis populo, id est, virtutibus contra se dimicantibus fuerint vitia superata, locum quem sibi in corde nostro concupiscentiae vel fornicationis spiritus retinebat, deinceps castitas obtinebit; quem furor ceperat, patientia vindicabit; ... quem acedia uastabat, incipiet excolere fortitudo ...: et ita singulis vitiis expulsis, eorum loca, id est, affectus, virtutes contrariae possidebunt. (ed. Pichery)

⁷ Nevertheless, he is clearly aware of it. See *Collationes* 18.13, in which, after representing an elder's discourse on the necessity of patience's being tested, he writes, "As we have said, the fortitude of the righteous man would not be praiseworthy if he were victorious without having been tried, when in fact there can be no place for victory without the adversity of a struggle." Although the elder here cites fortitude as a remedy for *acedia*, in the *Institutes*, the remedy for *acedia* is manual labour, the eagerness for which reveals a monk's progress in patience and humility (10.22).

⁸ See, for instance, Seneca's *De ira*. The reemergence of the association of patience with fortitude enables the medieval tradition of patience as a remedy for *acedia*.

and thus does not necessarily educate one in patience. The language of this argument brings Cassian close to the thought of the Pelagians, inasmuch as it regards virtue as subject to our will:⁹

The sum total of our improvement and tranquillity, then, must not be made to depend on someone else's willing, which will never be subject to our sway. It comes, rather, under our own power. And so our not getting angry must derive not from someone else's perfection but from our own virtue, which is achieved not by another person's patience but by our own forbearance.¹⁰ (8.17)

Disturbances are the surest test of one's detachment from the passions, as Cassian notes in words reminiscent of the image of the soul in Plato's *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC): "...vices that have lain hidden emerge at once there, and like unbridled horses nourished by a long period of quiescence they break out of their restraints, all the more violently and savagely endangering the charioteer"¹¹ (8.18). Patience is manifest not by one's detachment from

⁹ Still, Cassian warns his readers against attributing virtue to their own power. See *Institutes* 12.17, in which he writes,

Seeing ... that our heart is strengthened by the fear of the Lord and by patience, let us say: "The Lord has become my stronghold, and he has led me out into a broad place." ... Then, feeling that we have ourselves sought for the strength of endurance and that we are proceeding along the paths of virtue more easily and without effort, let us add: "It is God who has girded me with strength and who has laid out for me a perfect way. It is he who has made my feet like those of a deer and has set me upon the heights, who trains my hands for battle."

[Videntes ... cor nostrum in timore Domini et patientia roborari, dicamus: *Et factus est Dominus firmamentum meum, et eduxit me in latitudine* Dein sentientes etiam nosmetipsos fortitudinem tolerantiae conquisisse, et in semita virtutum facilius ac sine labore dirigi, dicamus: *Deus qui praecingis me virtute, et posuisti immaculatam viam meam: Qui perficis pedes meos tamquam cervi, et super excelsa statuens me: Qui doces manus meas ad pr[o]telium.*]

¹⁰ Summa igitur emendationis ac tranquillitatis nostrae, non est in alterius arbitrio collocanda; quod nequaquam nostrae subjaceat potestati: sed in nostra potius conditione consistat. Itaque ut non irascamur, non debet ex alterius perfectione, sed ex nostra virtute descendere, quae non aliena patientia, sed propria longanimitate conquiratur. (XVI)

¹¹ ...emergunt quippe ex eo confestim vitia, quae latebant, et velut equi infrenes certatim e suis repagulis otio longiore nutriti acrius ad perniciem aurigae proprii, ferociusque prorumpunt.

suffering, but is closely linked to its presence. In keeping with this idea, he commands that we continue to interact with those whom we offend or who have offended us, because “perfection of heart is attained not by separation from human beings but by the virtue of patience,” which “can keep us at peace even with those who hate peace”¹² (9.7). He comes closest to offering a definition of patience in *Collationes* 18.13:

Everyone knows that patience takes its name from suffering and endurance, and therefore it is clear that no one can be called patient but the person who puts up with everything that is inflicted upon him without indignation.¹³ (18.13)

Patience consists of suffering evils without suffering the reaction of one’s own passions.

Also in his *Collationes*, Cassian quotes Abba Joseph on false patience in a discourse concerning friendship and anger. In this dialogue, Joseph discusses the way in which false patience can in fact be a provocation to violence, rather than that which aims at promoting peace. He claims that some people think that they are fulfilling the command to turn the other cheek by doing so literally, and thereby inciting the aggressor to further violence. However, they are simply fighting wrath with wrath:

...they are completely ignorant of the meaning and intention of the Scripture, for they think that they are practicing gospel patience by way of the sin of wrath, for the utter eradication of which not only are mutual

¹² ...perfectionem cordis, non tam separatione hominum quam patientiae virute conquiri; ...potest nos etiam cum his qui oderunt pacem pacificos conservare.

¹³ A passionibus enim et sustentatione patientiam dici nullus ignorat, ideoque constat patientem pronuntiari neminem posse, nisi eum qui universa quae sibi fuerint irrogata absque indignatione toleraverit.

retaliation and wrangling forbidden, but we are even commanded to calm the rage of the striker by putting up with redoubled mistreatment.¹⁴ (16.20)

Thus, false patience can be found even in the exact execution of Biblical commandments, if these commandments are not fulfilled with the proper intentionality. Here again, patience is known by its fruits. Again, Cassian communicates the nature of patience anecdotally, through specific situations that evoke the virtue, and only inasmuch as it relates to the eradication of a specific vice.

Gregory the Great also uses this *ad hoc* approach to defining patience in his massively influential, and just plain massive, *Moralia in Iob* (c. 370 BC);¹⁵ however, his intention to elucidate the allegorical meaning of the *Book of Job* occasionally inspires him to identify the virtues and their connections with each other. For instance, Gregory associates Job's seven sons and three daughters with the seven virtues of the Holy Spirit (1.27). Elsewhere, while interpreting the destruction of Job's house, Gregory discusses the virtues on which the well-founded house is built: "... this house stands by four corners for this reason, that the firm fabric of our mind is upheld by Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, Justice. This house is grounded on four corners, in that the whole structure of good practice is raised in these four virtues"¹⁶ (2.49). The purpose here is not to provide a systematic rendering of the virtues but, rather, to allude to other systematic renderings in the interest of fitting the allegory.

¹⁴ Scripturae vim ac propositum penitus ignor[ant]; evangelicam namque patientiam per iracundiae vitium exercere se putant. Ob quod radicitus excidendum, non solum vicissitudo talionis et concertandi irritatio prohibetur, sed etiam furorem verberantis geminatae jubemur injuriae tolerantia mitigare.

¹⁵ Sharpe et al. list twenty three instances of *Moralia in Iob* in Benedictine monasteries in Medieval England (846); Bell lists eight copies mentioned among the holdings of the Cistercians and Premonstratensians (294), and Humphreys lists three appearing in catalogues of the friars' libraries (259).

¹⁶ ... quatuor vero angulis domus ista consistit, quia nimirum solidum mentis nostrae aedificium, prudentia, temperantia, fortitudo, justitia sustinet. In quatuor angulis domus ista subsistit, quia in his quatuor virtutibus tota boni operis structura consurgit. (English translations of Gregory the Great's work are taken from John Henry Parker's translation.)

Whereas fortitude has a rather tenuous connection to patience in the writings of John Cassian, Gregory asserts the association of the two virtues more directly. In his discussion of Eliphaz's first speech, Gregory writes,

For strength (Fortitude) is never shewn saving in adversity, and hence *patience* is immediately made to succeed to *strength*. For every man proves himself in a much truer sense to have advanced in "strength," in proportion as he bears with the bolder heart the wrongs of other men. For he was little strong in himself, who is brought to the ground by the wickedness of another. He, in that he cannot bear to face opposition, lies pierced with the sword of his cowardice.¹⁷ (5.16)

As in John Cassian, patience is a virtue that manifests itself in adversity, and it relates particularly to enduring wrongs dispassionately that one experiences from others. However, Gregory associates it more specifically with fortitude and opposes it with cowardice.¹⁸

While the classical formulations of patience are still intact in the works of John Cassian and Gregory the Great, they are barely discernible beneath the great bulk of writing about the vices that oppress the human soul. Later writers who bear the legacy of John Cassian and Gregory the Great do reveal a marked interest in cataloguing the virtues, but these authors have little bearing on the period spanning the twelfth to

¹⁷ Fortitudo autem nonnisi in adversitate ostenditur, unde et mox post fortitudinem patientia subrogatur. Tanto enim se unusquisque ad fortitudinem profecisse verius demonstrat, quanto aliena mala robustius tolerat. Nam minus in se convaluit, quem aliena iniquitas sternit. Qui in eo quod ferre contrarietatem non valet, pusillanimitatis suae gladio confossus jacet.

¹⁸ In the preface, while discussing the problem of theodicy, Gregory suggests that a "mighty fortitude may be engendered by [the] patience" that one manifests in response to suffering inflicted by God (magna de patientia fortitudo generetur [English translation mine]) (12).

fourteenth centuries.¹⁹ Renewed interest in classical texts in the twelfth century introduces a reconsideration of the nature of the virtues. Thus, whereas the Benedictine author of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* and the Cistercian author of the *Tractatus de purgatorio Sancti Patricii* would most likely have learned about patience, directly and indirectly, through the writings of John Cassian and Gregory the Great and their elaborators, authors and translators of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries would have had access to a more developed tradition of virtues and vices, a genre that gains popularity in the twelfth century, and that is intimately associated with the rise of the *Summa* in the thirteenth century.²⁰

Among the major Classical sources for the renewed interest in the virtues during the twelfth century are Cicero's *De inventione* and *De officiis* and Macrobius's *Commentarium in somnium Scipionis*.²¹ All of these texts discuss fortitude as one of four virtues, yet the identification of the aspects of fortitude in *De inventione* and Macrobius's *Commentarium* differs significantly and, as a result, medieval authors could freely choose aspects from the lists of each. Concerning Cicero's influence during the Middle Ages, Rosemond Tuve writes,

¹⁹ Martin of Braga's *Formula vitae honestae*, composed between 570 and 579, was mistakenly associated with Seneca and thus enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. *De octo vitiis principalibus*, written in Ireland in the late sixth or early seventh century and attributed to Columbanus reveals the influence of John Cassian's ethical thought. The *Libri Carolini*, composed by Theodulf of Orléans in 793, provide a synthesis of John Cassian's and Gregory the Great's lists of vices. Alcuin's *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis* (c. 800) uses the writings of Isidore of Seville, John Cassian, and Gregory the Great in order to provide ethical instruction for the aristocratic laity. Hugh of Saint Victor's *De quinque septenis* and Bernard of Clairvaux's *Liber de gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* also manifest the influence of John Cassian's and Gregory the Great's treatment of the vices. See Bloomfield (1952) 70-121 and Newhauser 110-21. For a brief discussion of the *Speculum Gy de Warwick*, which is influenced by Alcuin's *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis*, see chapter four, pages 98-9.

²⁰ See Newhauser 124-35.

²¹ On the presence of manuscripts of Cicero's works among the English Benedictines, see Sharpe et al., who list four instances of *De inventione* and three of *De officiis* (838). On the survival of Macrobius in England, see Bell, who lists one copy held by the Cistercians (305), Humphreys, who lists three held by the friars (266), and Sharpe, who cites two held by Benedictine monasteries (866).

The Ciceronian treatment which was so steadily recalled was not the longer and less schematic one in the *De officiis* but the brief summary in the *De inventione* (ii.53-4). What the *De officiis* has to say about the cardinal virtues was widely used, of course in both the Middle Ages and Renaissance. (62)

De inventione is a textbook on rhetoric, but contains standard definitions of the virtues that reappear throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. At the end of the document, Cicero provides an example of a deliberative speech, in which he lists and defines the four virtues of prudence (*prudentia*), justice (*iustitia*), courage (*fortitudo*), and temperance (*temperantia*). He subdivides courage into four parts: magnificence (*magnificentia*), which is “the consideration and management of important and sublime matters with a certain wide seeing and splendid determination of mind,”²² confidence (*fiducia*), which consists of “that feeling by which the mind embarks in great and honourable courses with a sure hope and trust in itself,”²³ patience (*patientia*), and perseverance, “a steady and lasting persistence in a well-considered principle.”²⁴ Cicero’s list appears in various forms during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. In the late fourth or early fifth century, Macrobius composes his famous neoplatonic treatise, *Commentarium in somnium Scipionis*, in which he also contributes a list of the aspects of fortitude, one that reveals the influence of Plotinus and Porphyry:²⁵ “Courage endows one with magnanimity (*magnanimitas*), confidence (*fiducia*), composure (*securitas*), nobleness (*magnificentia*), constancy (*constantia*), endurance (*tolerantia*), and

²² ...rerum magnarum et excelsarum cum animi ampla quadam et splendida propositione cogitatio atque administratio.

²³ ...per quam, magnis et honestis in rebus, multum ipse animus in se fiducia certa cum spe conlocavit.

²⁴ ...in ratione bene considerata stabilis et perpetua permansio.

²⁵ See Stahl’s translation, 121 n5.

steadfastness (*firmitas*)” (8.6).²⁶ Since these texts circulated widely during the rise and flourishing of the treatises on virtues and vices, the aspects of fortitude do not crystallise into a solid tradition but, rather, could be adjusted according to the needs and tastes of individual authors and compilers.

An early and influential example of the reinvigoration of classical learning and its impact on the tradition of virtues and vices in the twelfth century is the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, the influence of which can be detected both in the works of scholastic authors such as Albertus Magnus and Aquinas, and in those who wished to educate the laity about the virtues and vices.²⁷ In this early text, one discovers a description of fortitude that reveals the influence of Macrobius and Cicero:

Fortitude is a virtue that weakens the attacks of adversity. But there are certain parts of this [virtue] that accomplish this, and they are magnanimity, confidence, assurance, magnificence, constancy, patience.

Magnanimity is a voluntary and rational approach of difficulties.

Confidence is the soul’s certain hope of leading through to the end a matter once begun. Assurance is not to fear the inconveniences that menace and are associated with an uncompleted act. Magnificence is the completion of difficult and glorious things. Constancy is a strong firmness of soul and persevering in one’s purpose. Patience is a virtue that bears the attacks of affronts and every adversity with equanimity.²⁸ (Trans. mine)

²⁶ This passage from Macrobius is also transmitted through Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum doctrinale* iv.ix.

²⁷ Six copies of the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* appear in Cistercian and Premonstratensian catalogues (Bell 295); five copies appear in catalogues from the friars’ libraries (Humphreys 267), and three in Benedictine catalogues (Sharpe et al. 889)

²⁸ Fortitudo est uirtus retundens impetus aduersitatis. Huius autem partes sunt quecumque hoc efficiunt; he autem sunt magnanimitas, fiducia, securitas, magnificentia, constancia, paciencia. Magnanimitas (est) difficilium spontanea et rationabilis aggressio. Fiducia est certa spes animi perducendi ad finem rem

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two levels of discourse concerning the virtues are established. On the one hand, the schoolmen, using the categories provided by Cicero and Macrobius, debate the nature and parts of the virtues. For instance, in *Dialogus inter philosophum, iudaeum et christianum*, Abelard divides *fortitudo* into two parts: *magnanimitas* and *tolerantia*. The *Ysagoge in theologiam*, which originates in the school of Abelard, adopts Macrobius's parts of the virtue, but drops *tolerantia* and divides *firmitas* into *humilitas* and *patientia*. Thomas of Chobham uses a similar classification in the *Summa de commendatione virtutum* (1220s). Alain de Lille, perhaps elaborating on the list in the *Ysagoge*,²⁹ adds three parts to the virtue of *fortitudo* beyond the seven that occur in the tradition following Macrobius: *patientia*, *longanimitas*, and *humilitas*. Philip the Chancellor claims to list Cicero's parts, but in actuality lists those found in the Macrobius/*Moralium dogma philosophorum* tradition. Finally, Simon of Tournai, William of Auxerre, Albertus Magnus, and Thomas Aquinas all adopt Cicero's fourfold definition.³⁰

The tradition of virtues and vices and the sermon tradition coalesce in preachers' handbooks designed for educating the laity. The twenty-first decree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) stated that all Christians must partake of the sacraments of confession and communion at least once annually and thereby inspired the increased production and circulation of penitential manuals, and the result of this decree was reaffirmed in England at the Council in Lambeth in October of 1281. John Peckham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, instructed that all priests educate the laity quarterly concerning the fourteen

incoatam. Securitas est incomoditates imminentes et rei incoate affines non formidare. Magnificencia est difficilium et praecla(ri)orum consummatio. Constancia est stabilitas animi firma et in proposito perseuerans. Paciencia est uirtus contumeliarum et omnis aduersitatis impetus equanimiter portans. (30)

²⁹ See Lottin 188.

³⁰ On the treatment of the virtues by these schoolmen, see Lottin 186-91.

articles of the faith, the Ten Commandments, the two commandments of the Gospel, the seven works of mercy, the seven capital sins and their offspring, and the seven sacraments.³¹ Although, as Francis notes, “it is probable that these requirements were not very strictly enforced” (x), they undoubtedly contributed to the circulation of the tradition of virtues and vices in England during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, as the exemplar for the tradition of virtues and vices, influences, either directly or indirectly, William Peraldus’s *Summa de virtutibus* (c. 1248), the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* (1240s), *Le Miroir du Monde* (1270s), and Lorens d’Orléans’ *Somme le roi* (c. 1279) and its fourteenth-century Middle English translations, the *A3enbite of Inwit* (c. 1340), and the *Book of Vices and Virtues* (c.1375).

Medieval writers in the tradition of virtues and vices tend to see patience as a part or species of fortitude and even those who treat patience as a remedial virtue that heals anger tend to list a synonym for patience among the parts of fortitude. In the thought of Thomas of Chobham, William Peraldus, and Thomas Aquinas, following that of Cicero, fortitude is also divided into two aspects, attacking and enduring; however, these later writers advance the division that Cicero relates by associating specific species with the different aspects of fortitude. This juxtaposition between doing and suffering, the *agere et pati* topos that Georgia Ronan Crampton describes in *The Condition of Creatures*, is a commonplace in ancient and medieval rhetoric, and, at least from the time of Cicero, it is used as a method of classifying the various aspects of the virtue *fortitudo*. Cicero discerns two aspects of fortitude: first, the soul must be able to *suffer* the vicissitudes of external circumstances in order to avoid being subject to them and, second, having achieved this

³¹ ...quatuordecim fidei articulos; decem mandata decalogi; duo praecepta evangelii, geminae caritatis; septem operae misericordiae; septem peccata capitalia, cum sua progenie; septem virtutes principales; ac septem gratiae sacramenta (Francis ix).

level of detachment, it must endeavour *to act* heroically (I.xx.66). For Cicero, these two attributes of courage are not simply juxtaposed; they are causally related: “All the glory and greatness and, I may add, all the usefulness of these two characteristics of courage are centred in the latter; the rational cause that makes men great, in the former”³²

(I.xx.67). Furthermore, he qualifies these two traits by asserting that only what is moral is good, and that one must act with equanimity (I.69). Thus, the courageous man seeks to control the emotions in the face of the trials that tend to intensify certain passions such as fear and greed. Because the passions urge the individual to act, they must always be kept under the control of reason, especially because of the direct relationship between self-control and public benefit; contemplation without practical action is incomplete (I.153). Because pleasure and right action cannot be yoked together (III.116), equanimity is a natural concomitant of right action and even positive emotions defile the goodness of a deed. When suffering accompanies right action, patience and perseverance are the virtues that allow one to endure in one’s pursuit of the good.

The description of patience as a species of fortitude, of which there are aggressive and enduring aspects, appears most clearly in three important medieval works; the first two of which, Thomas of Chobham’s *Summa de commendatione virtutum* (1220s) and William Peraldus’s *Summa de virtutibus* (c. 1248), are essentially preachers’ manuals and the third, Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* (1265-74), represents the pinnacle of scholastic inquiry. In Chobham’s *Summa*, the distinction between aggressive and enduring fortitude

³² Harum rerum duarum splendor omnis, amplitudo, addo etiam utilitatem, in posteriore est, causa autem et ratio efficiens magnos viros in priore; in eo est enim illud, quod excellentes animos et humana contemnentes facit.

is particularly marked, and patience is metonymical for endurance in general.³³ His system of classification is closest to that of Peter Abelard, who taught in Paris just a few decades before he studied there. Thomas lists only three species of fortitude in total:

For we have distinguished three special species of fortitude, that is to say patience, boldness, humility. And patience is a species of fortitude insofar as adverse things are endured with manly vigour when they occur.

Boldness is the same as magnanimity, and is a species of fortitude insofar as adverse things are not only expected until they arrive, but it also hastens to them and they are attacked before they are able to grow stronger.

Humility is indeed a species of fortitude, insofar as one submits oneself to the superiors and prelates whom one ought to obey.³⁴ (Trans. mine)

Here, Thomas divides the virtue into patience, which corresponds to the enduring aspect, and audacity, which corresponds to aggressive fortitude. Humility is a quality that can accompany either aspect, and here is synonymous with obedience. Thomas continues with an explanation of the apparent contradiction in Proverbs 16:32, in which patience is lauded over bravery, even though the definition of fortitude suggest that both concepts are the same virtue in essence: "Since therefore patience is a species of fortitude and is not otherwise in essence, how is it said that a patient man is better than a brave one, since

³³ Sharpe et al. list thirteen copies of Chobham's *Summa confessorum* reported at the Abbey of B. V. M. in York, and Bell lists one instance at the Premonstratensian Abbey of B. V. M. in Barlings, Lincolnshire.

³⁴ *Distinximus enim ... tres precipuas species fortitudinis, scilicet patientiam, audaciam, humilitatem. Et est patientia species fortitudinis qua uiriliter tollerantur aduersa cum acciderint. Audacia est eadem que et magnanimitas, et est species fortitudinis qua non solum expectantur aduersa donec ueniant, set occurritur eis et impugnantur antequam possint inualescere. ... Humilitas autem est species fortitudinis qua homo subicit se maioribus et prelatiis suis quibus obedire debet.* (198)

it is the same thing to be patient and to be brave?"³⁵ (Trans. mine). He points out that one is *fortis* when one acts violently *and* unjustly. If fortitude lacks judgement, it is temerity or presumption: "Nisi enim fortitudo per consilium regatur, temeritas potest dici uel presumptio" (199). Thus fortitude is a virtue of suffering and struggling according to certain measure and a purpose determined by *ratio*.

In the popular and influential *Summa de virtutibus*,³⁶ Peraldus discusses the parts of the virtue listed in Cicero's *De inventione*, Macrobius's *Commentarium*, and the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*. He ultimately chooses a six-part definition of *fortitudo*, one that consists of a synthesis of the available traditions that he surveys: *securitas*, *patientia*, *constantia*, *perseverantia*, *magnanimitas*, and *fiducia*. He justifies his decision according to an interesting modification of the division of fortitude according to aggressive and enduring aspects (the doing/suffering topos) (143[v].). *Securitas*, *patientia*, and *constantia*, he argues, oppose three infirmities of the soul: *timiditas* (fear), *teneritudo* (weakness), and *instabilitas* (inconstancy). While these three species relate to spiritual suffering, the remaining three concern the execution of an action; *magnanimitas* is a *rationabilis aggressio* (rational aggression), *fiducia* is a certain hope of completing something unfinished ("certa spes perducendi ad finem rem que inchoata est"), and *magnificentia* concerns the happy completion (*felix consummatio*) of things. Patience is the remedy for *teneritudo*, which consists of the inability to suffer a present evil: "The second is an excessive capacity for suffering from a present evil that is like a kind of tenderness or softness, the sign of which is a tendency towards grieving that is a

³⁵ Cum igitur patientia sit species fortitudinis et <non> aliud in essentia, quomodo dicitur *melior est patiens uir uiro forti*, cum idem sit esse patientem et esse fortem? (199).

³⁶ Sharpe et al. list two copies of the *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* appearing in Benedictine catalogues (891). Humphreys lists five copies of the *Summa de virtutibus* and five of *De vitiis et virtutibus* in catalogues from the friars' libraries (278).

weakness in certain people who complain when they are treated harshly or harsh words are spoken to them”³⁷ (143 [v] trans. mine; clarified by Richard Newhauser). Of all the species of fortitude, patience receives the longest and most thorough treatment, most of which consists of scriptural quotations that recommend or describe the virtue (146[r]-162[r]).³⁸

By examining the contents and circulation of late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts in England, one discovers that the *Secunda secundae* (II.II), Thomas Aquinas’s treatise on the theological and cardinal virtues in the *Summa theologiae*, enjoyed some popularity.³⁹ Aquinas’s work provides a convenient compendium of scholastic questions regarding virtue, many of which find their inspiration in the work of Cicero and Augustine.⁴⁰ While Aquinas’s inquiry may seem far removed from the world of the *Gawain*-poet, evidence of a common concern with the questions that he and the other schoolmen ask can be found in the less elite *summa* that preachers used to educate their parishioners. Aquinas begins his examination of *fortitudo* by dividing the action of the virtue into two parts: to attack (*aggredi*) and to endure (*sustinere*); he adopts Cicero’s parts of the virtue and elucidates the thought of the latter by associating *magnificentia* and *fiducia* with the attacking aspect of courage, and *patientia* and *perseverantia* with the enduring. He provides a Ciceronian definition of patience, which he quotes from *De*

³⁷ *Secunda est nimia passibilitas a malo presenti que est quasi quedam teneritudo vel molicies: cuius signum est facilitas dolendi que infirmitas est in quibusdam qui conqueruntur secum dure agi vel sibi dura verba dici.*

³⁸ The *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, a work that Wenzel has identified as a source for Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale*, bears some relation to Peraldus. On the relationship between Peraldus’s works and the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, see Wenzel (1984) 9-11. I return to the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* in greater detail in chapter five.

³⁹ Aquinas’s *Secunda secundae* appears eight times in Benedictine catalogues (Sharpe et al. 886) and once in the friars’ catalogues (Humphreys 275).

⁴⁰ The *Speculum morale*, wrongly attributed to Vincent of Beauvais, also presents Aquinas’s thought on *fortitudo*.

inventione II.163: “patience is the voluntary and prolonged endurance of difficult and laborious situations for honour and advantage.”⁴¹ For Cicero, and Aquinas, patience must be voluntary. Also, he quotes Augustine who states that patience is a virtue that protects us from the loss of virtue that occurs through dejection during hardships (II.II. 136, 1); Aquinas therefore places patience in the concupiscible faculty, rather than the irascible, because it was in his time more closely related to dejection than to anger. Thus, for Aquinas, patience is an essential part of courage, a virtue that opposes *acedia*, and, as such, its functioning is essential for Christian ethics.

The voluntary nature of patience that Aquinas invokes originates not only in his quotation from Cicero, but is confirmed in Augustine’s *De Patientia*, which he also discusses. In his treatise, Augustine also examines the connection between patience and the passions and impatience and the inevitable increasing of one’s suffering:

The patience of man, which is right and laudable and worthy of the name of virtue, is understood to be that by which we tolerate evil things with an even mind, that we may not with a mind uneven desert good things, through which we may arrive at better. Wherefore the impatient, while they will not suffer ills, effect not a deliverance from ills, but only the suffering of heavier ills. Whereas the patient who choose rather by not committing to bear, than by not bearing to commit, evil, both make lighter what through patience they suffer, and also escape worse ills in which through impatience they would be sunk.⁴² (ch 2 trans. H Browne)

⁴¹ “Patientia est honestatis aut utilitatis causa rerum arduarum ac difficilium voluntaria ac diuturna perpassio” (II.II.128, 1.7 trans. Anthony Ross O.P. and P. G. Walsh). Hanna refers to Cicero’s definition of patience as being “the most venerable [and] the most honored” in the Middle Ages (68).

⁴² Patientia hominis, quae recta est atque laudabilis et vocabulo digna virtutis, ea perhibetur

Augustine outlines two motions of patience. The first consists of choice, and the second, of simply enduring. Thus, patience is not properly a passive quality, as Hauck suggests;⁴³ since it requires an act of will, it exists beyond the discourse of active and passive. Even though Aquinas, and Augustine, regard patience as grace bestowed by God, it still requires an act of will on the part of the individual.

Aquinas begins his discussion of patience by confronting some of the difficulties that Patristic thinkers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine confront when trying to explain Christian patience; these potential points of confusion relate to the impossibility of patience existing in heaven and the question of whether, if patience is a virtue, an evil man can ever be properly said to possess it. In confronting the philosophical problems with the proper relationship between patience and virtue, Aquinas wonders whether it can even be called a virtue, since virtues are perfected in heaven; because patience is intimately associated with suffering and there is no suffering in heaven, how can there be patience where there is no suffering? Here, Aquinas makes an important distinction between virtues as they function here and as they do in heaven: “the act of patience in heaven will not be endurance of hardships, but the enjoyment of blessings which we sought to reach by patience” (II.II 136, 1).⁴⁴ This idea of heavenly patience relates to the

qua aequo animo mala toleramus, ne animo iniquo bona deseramus, per quae ad meliora perveniamus. Quapropter impatientes dum mala pati nolunt, non efficiunt ut a malis eruantur, sed ut mala graviora patiantur. Patientes autem qui mala malunt non committendo ferre, quam non ferendo committere, et leviora faciunt quae per patientiam patiuntur, et peiora evadunt quibus per impatientiam mergerentur.

⁴³ See Hauck’s article on the history of *hypomone*, in which he writes, “in the first instance *hypomenein* is ethically neutral. It simply means ‘to hold out.’ But as *hypomone* later came to hold a prominent place in the list of Greek virtues, so there predominates in *hypomenein* the concept of the courageous endurance that manfully defies evil. *Unlike patience, it has an active content*” (581-2 italics mine).

⁴⁴ See also Augustine’s discussion of God’s patience. Both Tertullian in *De patientia* 195, and Cyprian, in *De bono patientiae* 3-7, regard God as the exemplar of patience. Augustine wonders how God, who cannot be subject to any passions, can be patient. He concludes that God’s experiences of emotions are acts of will, and not passions as we understand them; God wills his emotional states perfectly; he does not suffer them (1).

question of the patience of God, a question that does not frequently appear as such in the medieval discussions which I examine, but that influences the author of *Patience*.

The patience of God is, theologically speaking, a contentious issue, like that of patience in heaven, because suffering implies imperfection and weakness, neither of which is ascribable to God or heaven. Around A.D. 200, Tertullian composed the first major known Christian treatise on patience, *De patientia*, in which he aimed to differentiate between the patience of the philosophers in the Greek tradition, and that which Christians are to manifest. With respect to God's patience, Tertullian's description is reminiscent of Paul's reference to God's magnanimity (*makrothumia*); God sees all the blasphemy and depravity of the world, yet "by His patience He hopes to draw all to Himself"⁴⁵ (ch 1, trans. R. Arebesmann et al). He remarks that God's endurance of human evil causes many pagans not to believe in Him, since He does not reveal His existence in wrath. Thus, patience is no "human product fashioned on the dullness of Cynic indifference, but the divine ordinance of a life-giving and heavenly way of life which points out as an exemplar of patience God Himself"⁴⁶ (ch 2). Tertullian differentiates between divine patience and that which "exists openly among men on earth, which is, as it were, within our reach"⁴⁷ (ch 3). Whereas the former is associated with the Pauline idea of God's magnanimity, the latter, in being exemplified in Christ's life, combines elements of Jewish and Greek *hypomonē*. St Augustine also notes this theological difficulty in his *De patientia*, in which he writes:

⁴⁵ ...ut sua sibi patientia detrahat.

⁴⁶ Nobis exercendae patientiae auctoritatem non adfectatio humana caninae aequanimitatis stupore formata, sed uiuae ac caelestis disciplinae diuina dispositio delegat, Deum ipsum ostendens patientiae exemplum.

⁴⁷ ...inter homines palam in terris quodammodo manu adprehensa est.

So, although God cannot suffer anything, and “patience” receives its name *a patiando* [from suffering], yet a patient God we not only faithfully believe, but also wholesomely confess. But who can explain with words the patience of God, of what kind and how great it is, of him who suffers nothing, yet is not impatient, but is even, as we say, the most patient?⁴⁸ (ch 1, trans. mine)

This qualitatively different experience of patience by God is analogous to Aquinas’s question about the possibility of patience in heaven; both authors recognise a disjunction between perfection and the need to endure imperfection, and seek to reconcile this disjunction at the level of the perfected will.

Aquinas responds to the question of the possibility of patience being exercised with evil intentions by quoting Augustine, who has already solved the problem by redefining patience as preferring “to endure evils rather than inflict them,” a sentiment that finds its expression already with Cicero. For Cicero, all virtues must be directed toward the good, and not for mere concupiscence; thus one can safely qualify Cicero’s use of the word “advantageous” (*utilit[as]*) in his famous definition that Aquinas quotes.⁴⁹ The moral necessity of Cicero’s definition of patience and courage is more clearly developed in *De officiis*, in which he presents a treatise for his son who is studying in Athens on how one is to combine Greek philosophy and Roman civic duties; this text, during the course of its long afterlife, “came to be regarded virtually as a handbook of secular conduct” (Edinger xxviii). In *De officiis*, Cicero discusses the relationship of the

⁴⁸ Ita quamvis Deus nihil pati possit, patientia vero a patiando nomen acceperit, patientem tamen Deum non modo fideliter credimus, verum etiam salubriter confitemur. Sed Dei patientia qualis et quanta sit, quem nihil patientem, nec tamen impatientem, imo etiam patientissimum dicimus, verbis explicare quis possit?

⁴⁹ See *De inventione*, in which Cicero argues that only right action is advantageous (III.110).

four virtues, and defines bravery as “courage going to battle for justice” (I.62). By suggesting that patience is rooted in God, Christian writers, including Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and, much later, Aquinas, suggest that patience is only a virtue when it is manifested for the sake of God; although they perceive this Christian patience as being distinct from a pagan one, it is an extension of Cicero’s thought. In article 3, Aquinas introduces the related question of the possibility of patience without grace, a point that Augustine used to distinguish Christian patience.⁵⁰ Although people in an apparent state of grace seem to endure evils for the sake of good things, this is in fact a result of concupiscence. Postlapsarian reason causes us to seek pleasures in the here and now rather than to suffer evils for the sake of future goods; the latter is true patience. Aquinas’s approach is Augustinian, in that it requires that patience be rooted in supernatural love; the ultimate source for and example of patience is God.

Aquinas investigates whether patient endurance requires the restraint of aggression. He concludes that, although patience has a passive quality inasmuch as it accepts suffering, it does not preclude the possibility of violence. In the treatises of Tertullian and Cyprian, both of which were composed for the encouragement of persecuted Christians in northern Africa during the third century, one finds a definite argument for the necessity of non-violence⁵¹; however, Aquinas, taking his cue from Augustine, advocates aggression when God is offended or the state is threatened:

...it is no negation of patience to attack an evil-doer when necessary. For as Chrysostom says on the words in *Matthew*, *Begone Satan. It is*

⁵⁰ See Cyprian’s *De bono patientiae* 2, and Augustine’s *De patientia* 3, in which the latter writes, “Patience is companion of wisdom, not handmaid of concupiscence: patience is the friend of good conscience, not the foe of innocence.”

⁵¹ See Tertullian’s *De patientia* 208 and Cyprian’s *De bono patientiae* 4-9.

meritorious to be patient in our own injustices, but it is irreverent to endure too patiently offences against God. And Augustine says that the precepts of patience do not oppose the state's good, for the preservation of which we war against enemies. (II.II, 136.4)

Aggression is not patient endurance, but it is still a virtue that one must occasionally exercise. Thus, Aquinas allows for the existence of patience in war, since it is ultimately an endurance of the evils associated with death that are suffered for the sake of the greater good. Ultimately, Aquinas's idea of patience owes little to Aristotle; it is a combination of Ciceronian and Augustinian notions of the virtue as a species of fortitude through which we suffer present evils for the sake of a future good.

Although endurance does not negate aggression, endurance is the more difficult aspect of fortitude. As Rebecca Konyndyk De Young points out, Aquinas, unlike Aristotle, uses martyrdom, which employs the enduring aspect of fortitude, instead of military heroism, which consists of attacking, as the exemplary act of the virtue (150). The function of fortitude is to "remove obstacles in our passions (or emotions) that withdraw us from what reason commands" (De Young 152), to which end it mediates between *timor* (fear), which requires "endurance," and *audacia* (daring), which inspires "aggression" (De Young 155). For Aquinas, "endurance," that is, the enduring aspect of fortitude, of which *patientia* is a part, is superior to the aggressive or attacking aspects for three reasons. First, endurance implies an attack by someone stronger than oneself; second, whereas aggression addresses a future opponent, endurance must suffer present evils; and third, endurance implies a longer period of suffering than that of aggression, which usually implies a quick battle (De Young 156). Martyrdom is the essence of the

enduring aspect of fortitude because “a martyr is by definition one who *relinquishes his or her life* for the sake of the truth (of faith)” (De Young 158-9). Although one could object that one can fight against a stronger opponent, and that fighting can, by necessity, last a long period of time, Aquinas ultimately finds the superiority of endurance in its relationship to the passions. As De Young writes,

In acts of aggression (military heroism), there is a sense in which the agent still has some control over the situation: he acts because he believes he has sufficient power to establish or protect the good; to that extent, the agent still trusts his power to overcome the threat. ...In an act of endurance (martyrdom), the agent faces death upon pain of renouncing or betraying the truth, and, *given the end*, she is powerless to evade the threat: there is no way to escape or minimize the danger short of renouncing her end altogether, given that the power imbalance is tilted against her. Her fear signals that her control over the safeguarding or protecting of her own life is gone. The only means of resisting the evil is to stand fast and not give way while undergoing it. (163)

Whereas one who acts aggressively receives assistance from the passion daring (*audacia*, *temeritas*), one who manifests endurance receives no help from the passions, and must rely on the power of *ratio* alone. Nevertheless, this endurance, like aggression, is assisted also by love and desire.

The notion of patience as a species of fortitude is popularised in vernacular theology with the introduction of the *Somme le roi* in the late thirteenth century and its subsequent translations into Middle English. The author, Lorens d’Orléans, was a

Dominican friar, like Aquinas, and the date of the work's commission appears in thirty-eight manuscripts as 1279, less than twenty years after Aquinas's commencement of the *Summa*. As W. Nelson Francis notes, the educational text was something of a medieval bestseller, appearing in whole or in part in seventy-nine surviving manuscripts across Europe (xi). The survival of nine different English versions attests to the work's insular popularity. While most versions only survive in one witness, the fourteenth-century Midland version, entitled *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, appears in three surviving manuscripts, two of which Francis traces to the East Midlands and one to the Southwest Midlands; Francis notes that this "suggests that it attained a wider circulation than any of the others before the Caxton print" (ix). The text presents a sevenfold definition of *proweſſe/dou3tineſſe*, which contains *magnanimite, affiaunce* ("good hope"), *surete/sikernesſe* ("confidence"), *pacience/suffraunce*, *conſtaunce/continuance* ("constancy"), *magnificence/gretnesſe* ("perseverance"), and *hunger and þriſt of ri3tfulhede* (164). The translator's introduction to the "ferþe degre of dou3tineſſe" suggests that patience is associated with the enduring aspect of prowess: "As þe Holy Gost makeþ his kny3t hardy to a-bide þe turmentes and þe ſorwes þat beþ to come, ri3t also he makeþ hym strong and ſuffryng to ſuffre hem whan þei comen; and þat is þe ferþe degre, þat þet clepen pacience, þat is ſuffraunce" (167). In the discussion of virtue, the text differentiates between the life of a young burgess and that of a new knight in order to illustrate the difference between the active and contemplative life:

Be burgeis hopeþ to wyne and to gadre and chaffaren, and þe ende of his entencion is al to be riche and noble in his lif holden and moche honoured. Be newe kny3t goþ al a-noper weye, for he ſchapeþ to be curteis and 3eue

largeliche and lerne kny3hode and pursue þe armes and suffre moche woo
to schewen dou3tynesse. (161)

The burgesses wish to “wel kepe hem from grete synnes, do penaunce, 3eue almesse, holde þe comaundementes of God and holy chirche, and wel it likeþ hem 3if þei mowe at þe laste be saued” (162). The other group, which corresponds to the new knights, loves God above all earthly pleasures, and because of this zeal God gives them the strength to pursue him (162). The contemplative life itself is infused with activity, and, in the chivalric analogy that the author develops, the knight’s determination is proven through his actions:

Pis shewynge may not be wiþ-out vertue and prowesse, for bi tales ne bi witnesses proueþ men not whiche is a good kny3t, but bi moche doynge wiþ his honde in armes and bi moche woo suffrynge and endurynge, and þat is þe ferþ vertue þat þe Holy Gost 3eueþ to a man or a womman, for to be dou3ty and ri3tful ouer al. (163)

Although Lorens d’Orléans’ list of specific virtues varies from those of other discussions of the virtue, one can still discern Cicero’s division of courage into attacking and enduring aspects.

As we have seen in this brief account of the shifting emphasis of the concept of patience across the centuries of the Middle Ages in England, the primary understanding of patience, both chronologically and thematically, relates the virtue to the control of the emotions during suffering. This relationship not only characterises the practical concerns of John Cassian in his treatises for monks and Gregory the Great in his writings for a larger lay audience, but it also leads Aquinas to conclude that patient endurance is the

primary action of fortitude, and that aggression is less difficult because of its being assisted by the anger and/or daring. This distinction between the aggressive and enduring aspects of *fortitude* recalls the *agere et pati topos* of Classical literature, a rhetorical device that contrasts a hero's deeds with his sufferings. The parts of fortitude that the scholastic tradition contributes to the virtues and vices tradition often consist of collations of the lists of Cicero and Macrobius. As we have seen, writers of scholastic texts, which were composed for consumption by an educated elite, and penitential manuals, which were designed for the education of the laity, both reveal an awareness of the traditions of Cicero, Macrobius, and the synthesis that is found in the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*. All of these texts circulated widely in England, and many of them would have been readily available to a learned lay clerk. Furthermore, the tradition trickles down to the popular level through the sermon tradition that texts like the *Somme le roi* and its legacy intended to fertilise. Thus, before the rise of the schools in the twelfth century, the knowledge about patience treats it primarily as a remedy for anger, and the associated virtue, fortitude, is specifically associated with *acedia*. The earlier authors focus on the remedial quality of the virtues, particularly with respect to the passions, and do not concern themselves with providing a systematic account of virtue; they associate patience and fortitude, but do not provide a carefully articulated schema. The schoolmen, whose thought trickles down to the general population through the penitential tradition, associate patience and fortitude more directly and consistently. This association culminates in Aquinas's *Secunda secundae*, in which the author contends that patient endurance, and not martial aggression, is the essence of fortitude, a conclusion that would have surprised not only Aristotle and Cicero, but also some of the poets, whom I will

discuss in the third chapter, who celebrated the martial acts of their protagonists. In the next chapter I shall consider several texts from the twelfth century, an early period of vernacular poetry in England, that depict patient endurance as the essential act of fortitude.

Chapter III: Exemplifying Patient Endurance in the Development of Romance

Whereas the previous chapter briefly traces the tradition of virtues and vices and discusses the taxonomies of patience that begin to appear in the twelfth century, I now wish to consider the ways in which patience contributes to certain motifs that become prominent in early courtly romance. In other words, I shall consider patience as a heroic virtue that characterises certain twelfth-century vernacular works in England and contributes significantly to the development of courtly romance. The author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which text I shall consider in chapter six, invokes the generic expectations associated with courtly romance. I shall here argue that at least one stream of the genre of courtly romance, from the time of the genre's inception, is infused with the patient ethos found in works that partake of the conventions of both hagiography and secular adventure narratives. I shall examine the *Voyage de Saint Brendan (Voyage)*, an early twelfth-century translation of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis (Navigatio)* (early tenth century), and the *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz (Espurgatoire)*, a late twelfth-century translation of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii (Tractatus)* (1180s), as texts that, by virtue of their combined emphases on adventure and suffering, contribute significantly to the formation of the romance mode that characterises Marie de France's *Lais*. In all of these works, a marker of patient heroism is a concept that I have decided to call an "impasse." An impasse is a situation in which a protagonist cannot resolve the plot through his or her own physical potency, but must engage in a symbolic act of renunciation through which she or he embraces the will of a transcendent agent who resolves the plot usually through the medium of the natural world or another character.

Thus, the patient heroism that I shall investigate here consists of a protagonist's allowing another to resolve a seemingly irresolvable plot.

Twelfth-century vernacular literature in England popularises a type of heroism that explores the psychological experiences of a protagonist, particularly with respect to a form of suffering. The early *chanson de geste*, on the one hand, celebrates the great martial achievements, and failures, of a militant figure such as Charlemagne or Roland or Guillaume d'Orange. Hagiography, on the other hand, often describes martyrdom, which Aquinas would later describe as the essential act of endurance, or feats of asceticism and renunciation. By emphasising the patient suffering of their protagonists, Benedeit's *Voyage de Saint Brendan* and Marie de France's *Espurgatoire Seint Patriz* function as antitheses to *chansons de geste*. Although hagiography is the usual domain of patient heroism, neither text is a saint's life; while St. Brendan is the subject of the *Voyage*, the narrative focusses not on the protagonist's heroic self-renunciation or martyrdom but, rather, on the spiritual development of his monks, a process that occurs within the context of a patristic psychological model, and the marvels that the monks experience, all of which inspire internal transformation.¹ Also, Saint Patrick is mentioned only briefly in *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, and the adventure explores Owein's experiences in purgatory. Instead, these narratives emphasise the quest motif; they imbue physical landscapes with psychological implications and depict the protagonists' journey, during which they develop faith through endurance, as consisting of both physical and psycho-spiritual significances.

¹ Helen Cooper argues that "the legend reads almost as much like romance as hagiography" (124). With the exception of the monastic hero who happens to be a saint, however, the story does not read much like hagiography at all; there is no *vita* of the protagonist, but, instead, the narrative recounts the rather audacious exploration of a spiritual geography, a concept that is an oxymoron in our era, but was by no means so to a culture that conceptualised metaphysical worlds as physical spaces.

Marie de France populates her *Lais* with knights, but, instead of depicting their martial valour, she develops their interiority by exploring their engagement with suffering, particularly with respect to love. In “Guigemar,” the supernatural realm conspires to bring the knight to wholeness by mysteriously conveying him to a land in which he falls in love with a woman who is imprisoned by her cruel husband. In “Eliduc,” a knight is so powerfully overcome by feelings of adulterous love that he deceives both his wife and a maiden. While such a betrayal ought to bring the plot to disaster, the wife’s magnanimity and compassion for her suffering husband eventually result in the monastic retreat of all three of them. In all of these texts, patient endurance, not martial aggression, is the virtue that facilitates the successful completion of the quest motif. While Marie’s *Lais* are thought to have preceded her *Espurgatoire* (c. 1190),² the analogous concerns that the works manifest suggest her intellectual immersion in the motif of patient heroism that informs the *Navigatio/Voyage* and the *Tractatus*. While the *Lais* depict knights who must learn to negotiate emotional suffering, the *Espurgatoire* fully manifests the ideal of the knight who is patient in a religious sense, that is, a knight whose virtue is expressed not through any form of physical combat, but through the audacity required for radical inaction. The *Lais* and the *Espurgatoire* provide an alternative to the warring knights of *chanson de geste*, one in which the knight’s martial energies are redirected towards psycho-spiritual transformation, much like those of Brendan and his monks. I shall conclude this chapter by briefly considering the Middle English versions of Brendan and Owein, both of which amplify the dramatic potential of the narratives, even if the former diminishes the theme of spiritual struggle by emphasising the voyage through the wonders of the otherworld.

² On the dating of the *Espurgatoire*, see Michael J. Curley 3-11.

i.) Brendan's Voyage and Patience

In the *Voyage*, and in the *Espurgatoire*, there is a vision of both external and internal impotence, and it consists of the experience of death. The goal of the journey is to become physically powerless in order to discover and establish one's true potency, which consists of a synergetic relationship between one's own will and that of God. While Brendan and his monks seem to become physically more and more receptive to providence, the receptivity that they manifest is accomplished only through the action of their wills. The entry of the monks into paradise, which symbolically represents death, renders them completely powerless physically, yet the powerlessness that they experience is neither good nor bad in itself; it derives its content only from the previous actions that the monks have undertaken. In other words, powerlessness is an inevitable human experience, and the momentum of the individual's behaviour is what determines the nature of the experience. Nevertheless, such impotence is by no means absolute, even after one's fate has been crystallised by one's former actions; Judas is still able to pray and receive mercy. Faith, which consists of a trust in and acceptance of providence, requires the maintenance of equanimity in the face of danger; despair could jeopardise their quest by inspiring them to act inappropriately. However, in the Anglo-Norman version of the *Navigatio*, Benedeit depicts the saint as somewhat fearful. Although he is the voice of reason when admonishing his despairing monks, he seems to suffer from the impulses of fear. Thus, the range of affectivity that the narrative allows the hero begins to widen in the early vernacular translation.³ In the *Voyage*, the characteristic heroic action

³ The depiction of the emotional suffering of the protagonists becomes a sign of their patience, rather than a diminishing factor of their heroism; when heroes act contrary to the impulses of fear, patient heroism is

is patient endurance, through which the monks learn to embrace God's will whenever they face death and destruction. The major threat that they face is despair, a sin that suggests the opposing virtues fortitude and patience, and that consists of a complete loss of hope in the grace of God. In the vernacular version, the sin of despair is more carefully distinguished from the natural impulses of fear, which the author emphasises in order to dramatise the suffering that Brendan and his monks endure.

The *Voyage* describes a journey, experienced by Saint Brendan and a small group of fellow monks, from Ireland to the terrestrial paradise. A psycho-spiritual transformation complements the physical action of the narrative, and the monks' response to the marvels that they encounter manifests their interiority. The problem of despair is a major concern of the *Voyage*; thus, emotional training comprises a significant proportion of the narrative. Brendan himself is a model of perfect equanimity, and it is this calmness that characterises the ideal of patience in early Christian thought. Although he does experience fear in the face of great trials and during the initial approach to hell, it is arguable that he manifests only a pre-passion, the natural, instinctive reaction towards an adverse situation, which still requires the consent of the will before becoming a sinful passion, such as despair in this case. Early Patristic writers, such as Origen, Evagrius Ponticus, and Augustine, adopt the concept of the pre-passion from the later Stoics. Although later Stoics uphold the ideal of *apatheia*, that is, the extinction of the passions, they also tend to allow for the possibility of pre-passions, which happen before the will is able to consent to the passion-inducing stimulus. Origen imports this model into Christian

augmented, not mitigated, as an apparent lack of equanimity in the face of danger might suggest. This association of pathos and patient fortitude anticipates emotional suffering of the hero in *SGGK*. Also, the vernacular version attempts more straightforward didacticism than the Latin exemplar, and this practical aim governs the nature of the Middle English version as well.

thought, particularly when describing the passion of Christ. If Christ suffers agony at Gethsemane, and if the hellenistic wise man allegedly suffers no passions, how can Christ be said to be superior to the Stoic wise man and how can he be the incarnation of God, whose being is impassive? Origen responds to this problem by suggesting that Christ manifests a pre-passion, and thus he does not fall into the sinful passion of despair.⁴ Furthermore, he claims that this pre-passion comes from Christ's human nature, and thus manages to explain how Christ's divine nature remains impassive.⁵

The discourse of pre-passions complements the Platonic notion of the tripartite soul, a psychic model that was adopted wholeheartedly by early Christian writers. John Cassian,⁶ among others, transmits this conception of the soul to monks throughout the Middle Ages in his conference with Abba Abraham:

⁴ For a discussion of Origen's understanding of Christ's pre-passions, see Knuuttila 123. Essentially, a pre-passion occurs when consciousness apprehends an object of thought or sense. Reason responds to the object and the will either consents to the development of a passion, or rejects the pre-passion outright. The term pre-passion presupposes a Stoic approach that regards the passions as sinful in themselves. In Platonic thought, the passions are an essential part of the soul, and thus must be controlled by reason. Although Augustine argued that these two approaches really differ only in their terminology (*De civitate dei* 9.4), Patristic and Scholastic authors regularly employed Stoic terminology, even if they perceived the passions not as sinful in themselves, but as sinful if their goals contradicted those of reason. I have decided to use the term pre-passion not because I am absolutely convinced that the *Gawain*-poet was familiar with the term itself, but because I do believe in the wide currency of the concept that it describes, that is, that the distinction between an impulse and a sin was a common one. For the Scholastic debate about the pre-passions, see Simo Knuuttila, chapter 3, in which he examines various twelfth- and thirteenth-century discussions of the pre-passions, specifically in the works of Anselm of Laon, Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Gilbert of Poitiers, Allan of Lille, Simon of Tournai, Peter of Capua, William of Auxerre, et al. With respect to the two major approaches to the pre-passions in the Middle Ages, Knuuttila writes,

One widely discussed theme was whether a deviant emotion becomes a sin immediately or not. Even though Peter Lombard made Augustine the spokesman for the former position, which he considered right, it was not Augustine's view, but rather, Gregory the Great's view. Before Peter Lombard, many authors followed historical Augustine. (173)

According to Augustine, "a misguided emotional reaction becomes a sin when it is voluntarily controllable" (Knuuttila 173). This position allows for our sympathy with Jonah's emotions, except when they drive him to an inappropriate action, such as trying to escape from God or demanding God to take his life.

⁵ For a useful collection of standard quotations on Christ's experiencing only pre-passions and on his absolute agency in the midst of his suffering, see Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*, especially the commentaries on Matthew 26: 36, Matthew 26: 39-44, Matthew 27 45-50, Mark 15: 34, John 11: 33-41, and John 12: 27-32.

⁶ For the circulation of John Cassian's works in England, see chapter two, page 14 note 5.

Since some very wise persons understand [the soul] as having a threefold power, it must be that either the *logikon*—that is, the reasonable—or the *thymikon*—that is, the irascible—or the *epithymēton*—that is, the concupiscible—will be damaged by some assault. ... If the plague of vice infects the reasonable part, it will beget the vices of vainglory, arrogance, envy, pride, presumption, contention, and heresy. If it wounds the irascible disposition, it will bring forth rage, impatience, sadness, acedia, faintheartedness, and cruelty. If it corrupts the concupiscible portion, it will generate gluttony, fornication, avarice, covetousness, and harmful and earthly desires. (24.15.3-4)⁷

All of the vices that are associated with the irascible soul are treated by fortitude and patience.⁸ Since the human soul is tripartite, pre-passions are an inevitable element of life; while the rational soul can choose either to assent to or reject pre-passions, it cannot extinguish them completely. The *Voyage* dramatises the emotional education of the monks by depicting their training in faith, which consists of subjecting the irascible and concupiscible aspects of the soul to the rational one. Since much of their emotional training concerns despair, the narrative focusses on the virtues fortitude and patience.

Benedeit significantly alters the *Navigatio* in his depiction of the protagonist; in the early vernacular version, Brendan appears as a monastic nobleman who undertakes a gnostic quest that is represented geographically, as a search for our lost homeland; the

⁷ Quam cum sapientissimi quique tripartitae definiant esse virtutis, necesse est ut aut λογικόν, id est, rationabile, aut θυμικόν, id est, irascibile, aut ἐπιθυμητικόν, id est, concupiscibile ejus, aliquo corruptatur incursu. ... si rationabilem ejus partem vitiorum pestis infecerit, cenodoxiae, elationis, invidiae, superbiae, praesumptionis, contentionis, haereseos vitia procreabit. Si irascibilem vulneraverit sensum, furorem, impatientiam, tristitiam, acediam, pusillanimitatem, crudelitatem parturiet. Si concupiscibilem corruperit portionem, gastrimargiam, fornicationem, phylargyriam, avaritiam et desideria noxia terrenaque germinabit.

⁸ It is for this reason that Plato refers to the irascible soul as the seat of courage.

quest and exile motifs anticipate major thematic issues in early romances. Brendan and his monks undergo a process of transformation during their journey, yet, curiously, this spiritual training takes place not merely within a life of asceticism, as it does in conventional hagiographic narratives, but in the context of a quest for knowledge.⁹ According to Benedeit, who offers many more details about Brendan's lineage and character, the saint is of noble descent, and thus "it [is] fitting that he should devote himself to a noble cause"¹⁰ (74). Like his lineage, Brendan's quest for knowledge and spiritual training is noble. He becomes a monk and is eventually elected abbot; although Benedeit describes these two stock hagiographic events in stock hagiographic phrases, the words that he uses resonate thematically throughout the narrative, and both bear distinct implications for patience: "To show humility, and to live in the world yet be exiled from it, he donned monk's clothing, adopting both the habit and the discipline; later, he was elected abbot against his will"¹¹ (74). As a monk, Brendan chooses to live in exile with respect to a world that is not his true home, and he conceives of a quest to visit our real home, the terrestrial paradise and, in the process, he and his monks undergo a spiritual transformation.

The themes of exile and the renunciation of one's will relate to the sorts of humility and obedience that one conventionally associates with monastic life; however,

⁹ See Glyn S. Burgess's "*Savoir and Faire in the Anglo-Norman Voyage of Saint Brendan*," *passim*.

¹⁰ "...Puroc entent a noble fin" (22). All translations taken from Burgess (2002).

¹¹ Dras de moine, pur estre vil
En cest secle cum en eisil,
Prist e l'ordre e les habiz,
Puis fus abes par force esliz. (29-32)

Brendan eventually develops a rather lofty desire to know the mysteries of paradise through experience,¹² and he prays to God to guide him to its fulfillment:

But he had one particular desire, concerning which he began to pray to God repeatedly, asking him to show him the Paradise where Adam was lodged in the beginning, that place which is our rightful heritage and of which we have been deprived.¹³ (74)

Rather than seeking an experience of unity with God within the walls of his own monastery, an approach that is increasingly encouraged in the twelfth century,¹⁴ Brendan goes on an actual, physical journey to the unknown places of the world, in search of his homeland, which he has lost.¹⁵ On an allegorical level, the narrative describes the journey of the soul through the various temptations of the world, on its search for its heavenly homeland. Yet, at the same time, Benedeit hints at feudal land tenure when he refers to “our heritage” (*nostre herité*), and thus suggests that Brendan’s quest is to recover a land that is already his, and ours, because of his, and our, being a descendant of Adam, to whom the land was given by God. The quest to regain one’s rightful heritage becomes a common one in romance. Thus, Benedeit literally and metaphorically links the ancient motif of the Soul Drama with the child-of-hidden-parentage motif of later works such as

¹² Although the motif of exile is a common one in Christian thought, it is rarely tied so concretely to literal experience, except perhaps in such Anglo-Saxon elegies as the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*.

¹³ Mais de une rien li prist talent
Dunt Deu prier prent plus suvent
Que lui muistrast cel paraïs
U Adam fud primes asis,
Icel qui est nostre herité
Dun nus fumes deserité. (47-52)

¹⁴ See Carol Zaleski (1987) 41, in which she points to a monastic ideology behind the allegorical treatment of travel.

¹⁵ On the possible relationship between the *Navigatio, Voyage*, and the Irish tradition of the *immram*, in which monks undertake a *peregrinatio pro amore dei*, see, for instance, Teresa Carp (1984), Dorothy Ann Bray (1995), and Sebastian Sobiecki (2003).

Marie de France's *Le Fresne* (c. 1170), Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Conte du Graal* (c. 1180s) and the *Lai de Havelok* (c. 1200).¹⁶

The voyage itself functions as a sort of emotional conditioning, through which the monks are taught to use faith in order to transform despair and faintheartedness into patient fortitude. Brendan instructs the monks in the standard monastic fashion of rejecting troubling impressions; they are to pray and thereby allow grace to establish the domination of reason within their souls. During the course of the journey, this instruction takes the form of the encouragement that Brendan offers whenever they find themselves in peril. When the monks follow the orders of the stranger to celebrate Easter on a small island, Brendan waits on the boat in order to help the monks survive the fear that he knows they will experience when they discover that the island is a whale. Later, they are subjected to various terrors of sea travel, including a storm and a large sea beast. While the Latin version says little about their fear,¹⁷ the Anglo-Norman emphasises the anxiety of the monks:

After they had voyaged for forty-five days, a chill ran through their veins;
an immense fear gripped them because their ship began to pitch
dangerously and the swell was such that the ship nearly turned over on
them. Then something else occurred which terrified them more than any

¹⁶ For the concept of the Soul Drama, which Morton Bloomfield (1952) describes as "as specific manifestation of ... the universal Otherworld Journey" (16), see Bloomfield (1952) 16-26. In essence, it consists of the journey of the soul through the planetary spheres; in some manifestations, the planets by which the soul passes are surrounded by demons representing different passions. The ascent is both punitive and salutary, inasmuch as it cleanses the soul of the passions that have not been purged before death.

¹⁷ When the brothers saw [the beast] they called upon the Lord, saying: 'Deliver us, Lord, so that the beast does not devour us.' Saint Brendan comforted them, saying: 'Do not be afraid. You have little faith. God, who always defends us, will deliver us from the mouth of this beast and from other dangers' (XVI); Cum [beluam] fratres vidissent ad Dominum clamabant dicentes: 'Libera nos Domine ne nos devoret ista belua'. Sanctus vero Brendanus confortabat illos dicens: 'Nolite expavescere minime fidei Deus qui est semper noster defensor ipse nos liberabit de ore istius bestiae et de ceteris periculis.'

other peril they had experienced; a sea serpent came towards them,
pursuing them more swiftly than the wind.¹⁸ (88)

Here, the poet intensifies the re-creation of the emotional experience by providing ten lines of detailed and horrific description of the beast that threatens them. Brendan's cool response to the threat that the poet so vividly depicts resembles the sort of stoic *apatheia* that was adopted by various Christian theorists on the passions, and that occurs in the writings of John Cassian as *tranquillitas mentis* or *puritas mentis*: "...Brendan the true divine said, 'My lords, do not give way to fear; God will avenge you. Take care that foolish fear does not make you desert God or lose your chance for success. For no one under God's protection should be afraid of a roaring beast'"¹⁹ (89). As Burgess notes,²⁰ this passage reveals the necessity of overcoming fear in order to achieve their goal. It is not simply a question of their own psychological comfort; the fear that they must overcome is the despair of God's providence that potentially frustrates the very process of salvation that their journey symbolises.

¹⁸ Puis q'unt curut .iii. quinzeines,
Freidur lur curt par les veines:
Poür lur surt forment grande
Que lur nef est tut en brande.
E poi en falt pur turmente
La nef od eals que n'adente.
Puis lur veint el dun s'esmaient
Plus que pur nul mal qu'il traient:
Vers eals veint uns marins serpenz
Chi enchaced plus tost que venz. (897-906)

¹⁹ ...dist Brandan li veirs divins:
'Seignurs, n'entrez en dutance:
Deus vus ferat la venjance.
Gardez que pur fole poür
Deu ne perdez ne bon oür,
Quar que Deus prent en sun conduit
Ne deit cremer beste qui muit.' (918-24)

²⁰ See Burgess (1998) 270-1.

Ultimately, the growth in fortitude is not a simple passive acceptance of providence but, rather, like the journey itself, it is synergetic, inasmuch as it requires an individual act of submission, and the faith that it engenders must be maintained through the action of the will. Immediately after Brendan prays to God for deliverance, another beast comes and brutally tears the first beast into three pieces. The narrator reiterates the lesson of this section: "No one should ever despair, rather one's faith should grow stronger when one sees that God so readily provides food and clothing, as well as aid in times of grave danger and succour from the jaws of death"²¹ (89). After Brendan remarks, "Let us ignore all else, for one should serve such a lord,"²² the monks reveal that they have learned their lesson, stating, "We know how much he cherishes us"²³ (89). The proof of their extinction of the passion of despair is revealed in their response to the next storm that they experience: "...a gale had got up and their provisions were running low. Nevertheless, despite the danger they faced, they were undaunted"²⁴ (89). Because of their faith, God promptly brings them to an island where one-third of the sea beast washes up; as Brendan notes, "what once was your enemy has now become, thanks to God, an aid to your relief"²⁵ (89). This transformation of threat to assistance by their acceptance of providence is proven by their third encounter with a sea beast. Rather than

²¹ Ne deit hom mais desesperer,
Ainz deit sa fait plus averer
Quant veit que Deus si prestement
Vivere trovet e vestement,
E tanz succurs en perils forz
E estorses de tantes morz. (953-8)

²² ... Laisum tut el:
Seignur servir bien deit l'um tel (959-60).

²³ Quar bien savum qu'il nus ad chers (962).

²⁴ Li venz lur ert cuntresailiz,
E li cunreiz lur ert failiz;
Mais cil puroc ne s'esmaient,
Quelque peril que il traient. (973-6)

²⁵ ...Ki enemis ainz vos ere
Or nus succurt par Deu grace (988-9).

responding with fear, as they had previously, "...the confidence they had in God and his protection meant that they were not afraid"²⁶ (89). The poet again describes the events vividly, thereby portraying the intensity of the danger, yet undermines the threat with the introduction of the griffin. The apparently threatening event simply confirms their growth in divine wisdom: "The monks gave thanks to God in his glory and continued on their way; through the spirit of God they were full of knowledge"²⁷ (90). By trusting Brendan's admonitions and embracing providence in action, the monks overcome the despair that threatens both their immediate voyage and their journey into eternity.

While Brendan and his crew must develop patient fortitude in order to complete the adventure that guides them, God meets their effort with the grace to withstand the sufferings to which they are subjected. In "La Souffrance et le Repos dans le Voyage de Saint Brendan," Burgess refers to the *bon oïr*, the "good fortune," that the monks require in order to experience the joy that they seek in the paradise that awaits them at the completion of their quest. After pointing to two instances where the phrase occurs with relation to God's providence, line 362, which he translates elsewhere, "God will grant you good fortune,"²⁸ and lines 921-22, which he renders, "Take care that foolish fear does not make you desert God or lose your chance of success,"²⁹ Burgess writes:

Le *bon oïr* est un élément d'une importance capitale à l'intérieur de la
quête, quelque chose d'essentiel pour quiconque veut s'approcher de Dieu
et profiter de son appui. Car le *bon oïr* vient de Dieu lui-même et il faut

²⁶ Mais ne crement pur le purpens
Qu'il unt de Deu, e le defens (1005-6).

²⁷ Cil [moine] en rendent Deu la glorie.
Vunt s'en icil d'iloec avant;

Par l'espirit Deu mult sunt savant (1028-30).

²⁸ Deus vus durat mult bon oïr.

²⁹ Gardez que pur fole potïr / Deu ne perdez ne bon oïr.

qu'il soit mérité. Perdre le *bon oïr*, c'est perdre la possibilité de connaître la joie et de mener la quête à bonne fin. (268)

According to Burgess, the *bon oïr* that God grants them is related to their capacity for suffering. While the goal of the quest is freedom from suffering, the nature of the quest itself is suffering, and it is the sort of suffering in which the monk must completely subject himself to the trials without losing faith in his deliverance. As Burgess notes, "L'absence de la peur est une des conditions à remplir si l'on veut jouir du *bon oïr* de Dieu" (270). This successful struggle against undesirable emotions is the necessary condition for grace, and grace is the necessary condition for reaching their goal.³⁰

While fear is a constant danger to the monks' journey in both the Latin and Anglo-Norman versions, the latter further expands the acceptable affectivity of the protagonist by depicting his emotional response to the suffering of Judas. In the vernacular version, Brendan shows fear and grief, both of which nuance the protagonist's equanimity. When the monks approach Judas, he is sitting naked and battered on a rock over which the sea washes; Brendan hears him glorifying Jesus and anxiously praying for release, by which the saint is moved: "When Brendan heard him lamenting in this way, he felt more grief than he had ever known"³¹ (93). After asking about Judas's suffering, "Brendan was prevented by his tears from saying more, so he fell silent..."³² (93).

³⁰ The proper action of the soul, in platonic, and patristic, thought, is to subject the concupiscible and the irascible faculties to the guiding power of the rational faculty. During the journey, the monks suffer not only from fear and other undesirable emotions, which originate in the irascible faculty, but also from hunger and thirst, which relate to the concupiscible faculty. Augustine's use of the platonic tripartite soul in the *Confessions* helps establish the longevity of this psychic model. On the presence of the concepts of the irascible and concupiscible aspects of the soul in twelfth-century thought, see Knuuttila 197 and 222-3.

³¹ Quant le oit Brandans issi plaindre,
Unches d'olur nen out graindre (1248-9).

³² Pur le plurer Brandans ne pout
Avant parler, mais dunc se tout (1261-2).

Unlike the author of the Latin version, Benedeit describes this scene in graphic detail and thereby justifies the intensity of Brendan's response. Like the loss of the first supernumerary monk, over which Brendan is described as "weeping profusely" (79) (*forment plurant*) (333),³³ Brendan reveals his emotional vulnerability in the face of suffering by the grief that he experiences over Judas's lot. This Anglo-Norman revision transforms the essential qualities of the hagiographic hero. In the monastic Latin text, the hero displays only three emotions, which, curiously, correspond to the Stoic *eupatheiai*; he desires knowledge, experiences joy, and displays a rational sense of caution when approaching hell.³⁴ Whether or not the type of affectivity described in the *Navigatio* betrays the influence of a Christianised form of Stoicism, Brendan's display of grief in Benedeit's text expands the emotional register of the Latin original and brings the protagonist closer to secular heroes such as Roland and Charlemagne in the *Chanson de Roland*; the former weeps while surveying his fallen comrades (2215-21) and the latter grieves bitterly when he discovers his dead nephew (2870-2950, especially 2943-44).³⁵ What this development of *pathos* in the Saint's life reveals is a sanctification of grief, a process that contributes to the emotional development of hagiographic romance heroes,

³³ The two supernumerary monks are those who join after the initial gathering of the monks; St. Brendan prophesies an unfortunate end for both of them.

³⁴ For more on *eupatheia*, see Nussbaum (1994) 398-401 and Sorabji (2000) 47-51; on the Latin Christian reception of stoicism, see Sorabji (2000) and Colish (1985).

³⁵ One can compare two versions of the *Vie de Saint Alexis* to find a similar increase of *pathos* in the hagiographic hero. In the Latin, Alexis betrays no sadness in the bedchamber scene about leaving his newly married bride; he simply enters the room and begins to lecture her on the nature of salvation. In the earliest French translation, however, the beginnings of *pathos* are found in Alexis' grief over the temptations that he faces: "Ah my God," he said, "What heavy sin oppresses me! / If now I do not flee, I greatly fear that I shall lose you"; "'E Deus,' dist il, 'cum fort pecet m'apreset! / Se or ne m'en fui, mult criem que ne t'em perde'" (59-60). As Maureen Gillespie notes, "Twelfth- and thirteenth-century versions of *Alexis* rework the story significantly Alexis cries more before, during, and after his running away" (48). The intensity of the compassion that Brendan feels for Judas in the *Voyage* contrasts not only his greater detachment that he displays in the *Navigatio*, but also the level of *apatheia* that Origen admires in children who are able to play contentedly around their parents' deathbed; see Knuuttila 121-22.

who encounter great suffering while subjecting themselves or being subjected to the path of *aventure*.

What trains the monks externally for their adventure is a complete loss of physical potency and the experience of the infusion of grace in the natural world. The physical cosmos that Brendan and his monks inhabit manifests the will of God, to which they must learn to respond appropriately. At first, they exert themselves physically, but the temporary loss of grace teaches them that physical exertion is not the primary requirement for this quest. They begin their voyage with favourable winds from the east. All of the distractions of the world fade from view, but, nevertheless, the monks exercise anxious self-will in order to achieve their desire:

They raised the mast and spread the sail; the faithful servants of God

departed forthwith and the wind, coming from the east, drove them

westwards. Everything, save sea and cloud, disappeared from their view.

Although the wind was favourable, the monks were not idle; they rowed as

hard as they could, wanting to make their bodies suffer to ensure that they

saw what they had set out to see.³⁶ (77)

Although it is good for monks to keep from idleness, which is a cause of *acedia*, Brendan realises that in their efforts, they have taken the grace-infused wind that has been moving them for granted, and he advises them to become more aware of, and receptive to, grace;

³⁶ Drechent le mast, tendent le veil,
Vunt s'en a plain li Deu fetheil.
Le orrez lur veint de l'orient
Quis en meinert vers occident.
Tutes perdent les veüthes
Fors de la mer e des nües.
Pur le bon vent ne s'en feignent,
Mais de nager mult se peinent;
E desirent pener lur cors
A ço vetheir pur quei vunt fors. (209-18)

they are to advance consciously by it when it is present and labour when it is not:³⁷ “Put yourselves under God’s protection and let none of you be afraid. When the wind is blowing, sail along with it; when there is no wind you must row!”³⁸ (77). Instead of succumbing to the anxiety that accompanies one with a limited view of grace, the monks are to entrust all to grace while still labouring in an appropriate manner.

While the winds teach the monks about the synergy required for their voyage, the sea itself is the training ground for patience, what Aquinas would later define as the enduring aspect of courage through which the soul becomes receptive to God’s providence.³⁹ On the one hand, the sea is a place of great uncertainty, a sort of purgatory to which they have willingly subjected themselves in the hope of finding paradise.⁴⁰ However, as Jean Larmat notes, although the ocean seems primordial, it is in fact infused with the grace of God, and thus the tests that they endure prepare them for their encounter with paradise:

D’un bout à l’autre de l’oeuvre, l’eau occupe une telle place qu’elle serait
primordiale si elle n’était dominée par l’action souveraine de Dieu; par
l’intermédiaire de ses envoyés et de ses prophètes, il conduit sûrement

³⁷ See Burgess, “*Savoir and Faire in the Anglo-Norman Voyage of Saint Brendan*,” in which he describes this event as the first lesson that the monks learn at sea, and he refers to it as a “nautical” lesson (261). However, given the close association between providence and the behaviour of the elements, one can regard this episode as a lesson in maintaining one’s faith in the unclear and seemingly inconsistent behaviour of providence. In “*La Souffrance et le Repos dans le Voyage de Saint Brendan par Benedeit*,” Burgess argues that the monks’ rowing in the wind relates to the cycle of *repos* and *souffrance* that the monks endure in their quest for equilibrium (269).

³⁸ Metez vus en Deu maneie,
E n’i ait nul qui s’esmaie!
Quant averez vent, siglez sulunc;
Cum venez n’i ert, nagez idunc! (219-28)

³⁹ For a brief discussion of the monks’ journey as an exercise in patience, see Larmat (1976) 178.

⁴⁰ Jean Larmat writes, “...la mer—*le grant mer* (157)—sera leur lieu de travail, très souvent leur cadre de vie, leur fréquent souci, car elle est incertaine, mobile, mouvante, pleine de monstres et de mystères, soumise aux caprices de l’air” (237).

saint Brendan et ses moines au Paradis des pieux en faisant participer la mer, les fleuves et les fontaines à ses desseins providentiels. (243)

Although Sebastian Sobiecki (201-5) astutely notes that there is a greater feeling of the presence of chance in the *Voyage*, particularly in the way in which Benedeit makes the sea seem more threatening and chaotic than his predecessor does, this sense of external threat is provided for the sake of dramatic intensity, and thus conforms to Benedeit's transformation of the poem to suit a courtly audience. As Brendan continually reassures his audience, God's providence will protect the monks; they need only have faith, and it is this battle against natural and understandable fear that constitutes the action of the poem. The ocean, although threatening in its function as a force of nature, becomes an agent of providence through grace, and this role is extended to all types of water, and to all the elements in general.⁴¹

In the narratives that I examine, an impasse is a state in which the individual will becomes aware of its inability to attain its ends without external intervention. By submitting to the will of God, one manifests enduring fortitude. Thus, the presence of an impasse in an adventure narrative suggests the virtue of patience. Through the progressive abandonment of physical activities, through which the volition of the self is traditionally made manifest, the monks receive an experience of physical impotence and

⁴¹ See "Les fonctions des Quatre Éléments dans le *Voyage de Saint Brendan* par Benedeit," in which Burgess notes that earth, water, air, and fire all partake of this apparent ambiguity that Larmat ascribes to the ocean. The water of fountains is usually salutary, except when they are forbidden to drink it. The wind sometimes carries them swiftly to their destination, but at other times it is completely still, forcing them to row. The islands provide oases on their journey, and their final destination is a land, yet their cliffs and rocks can be menacing to the boat. The fire that the sea beasts exhale and that the demon throws threatens to destroy the monks, yet the flame on the isle of Ailbe and the sun in paradise are completely beneficent symbols of illumination. In the face of all these ambiguities that the elements represent, the task of the monks is to discover the grace that animates them all and thereby overcome their lack of faith. As Larmat (238) and Burgess ("Les fonctions" 12-13) note, the closer the monks get to paradise, the purer are the elements that they encounter. Thus, while grace operates through nature throughout the quest, as they approach paradise, with the exception of hell, the elements, while initially ambiguous, become more closely associated with sustenance, and, eventually, pleasure.

this vision confirms that the self expresses volition synergistically, even in hell, where the expression of volition is drastically limited. Having experienced God's providence in the face of all danger, the monks are prepared for their journey to hell and their encounter with Judas, who, because of his suicide after his realisation that he has betrayed Christ, represents a complete rejection of providence. This action results in his condemnation to hell, which appears to be a state with little possibility for further agency, a place in which he is perpetually tormented by the momentum of his previous acts. Hell represents the greatest of all possible impasses, and the monks experience a grace-led journey through a land that appears bereft of grace, a space in which the human will is subject completely to the divine will through the intermediary will of the demons.

The human impotence that hell causes affects the monks just as it does Judas, inasmuch as providence manifests itself in the wind and drives them there against their will:

The pilgrims had travelled a long way, but still they did not know when their journey would end. Nevertheless, they did not become faint-hearted for the farther they travelled, the more they toiled; yet toil alone would never have caused them to give up until they had seen what they sought. An island appeared before them indistinctly, shrouded in dark fog and mist; putrid smoke arose from it, stinking worse than rotting flesh. ...They tried very hard to steer clear of it, but could not avoid heading that way, for the wind drove them there.⁴² (91).

⁴² Granz curs unt fait li pelerin,
 Mais uncore ne sevent fin.
 E ne purtant ne s'en feignent:
 Mais cum plus vunt, plus se peinent,

The monks' training in enduring fortitude has prepared them for this encounter with hell; just when they become confident in their resolve and have learned to entrust everything to providence, they face the greatest source of temptation yet and are unable to avoid it. Brendan interprets the situation, offering a subtle reminder to the monks to hold fast to that which they have experienced during the voyage: "You must realize that you are being driven towards Hell; never have you been in such great need of God's protection as now"⁴³ (91). Since fear threatens to interfere with the reception of grace, Brendan reminds the monks that they are in need of grace and that they must therefore maintain their equanimity in order to be appropriately receptive. Thus, the danger of their visit to hell does not in any way relate to the physical threats of the demons, since they are all under God's power, but rather to the psychological threat of the passions that can result in a loss of faith. While they are externally subject to the workings of providence, they must direct their wills against the human weaknesses that threaten them.

Instead of driving the monks to despair, the vision of hell actually increases their faith. Because they have yielded themselves entirely to the workings of providence, the

Ne de peiner ne recerrunt
 De ci que lur desir verrunt.
 Apparut lur terre truble
 De neir calin e de nuble:
 De flaistre fum ert fumante,
 De caruine plus puante;
 De grant nerçun ert enclose.
 ...Mult s'esforcent de ailurs tendre,
 Mais ça estout lur curs prendre
 Quar li venz la les em meinet. (1097-1113)
⁴³ ...Bien sachez
 Que a enfernt estes cachez.
 N'oustes mester unc mais si grant
 Cum or avez de Deu guarant. (1115-18)

Interestingly, in the Latin version, Brendan himself articulates the natural fear of hell: "I am troubled about this island. I do not want to go on it or even come near it. But the wind is bringing us directly there" (O'Meara (2002) XXIII). Although he encourages them to try to row away from hell, when he realises that they must go there, his words resonate with the fundamentally active nature of heroic passivity: "Soldiers of Christ, be strengthened in faith unfeigned and in spiritual weapons, for we are in the confines of Hell. So, be on the watch and be brave" (O'Meara (2002) XXIII).

wilful acceptance of suffering, both their own and that of others, makes them more aware of the grace that they have received:

They could see many thousands of demons and hear the laments and weeping of the damned; from the smoke which spread high into the air a dreadful stench reached them. They bore this all as best they could and avoided it as well as they were able. When a pious man suffers many hardships, hunger, thirst, cold and heat, anxiety, sadness and great fear, the good fortune he receives from God becomes all the greater. So it was with them, once they had seen where the damned were lodged; their belief in God intensified and they were not inclined to lose faith. They went forward fearlessly, for they knew that what they were doing was right.⁴⁴

(92)

That they “bore this all as best they could” (*Endurerent cum melz pourent*) reveals the action of their will in the face of such great suffering. The narrator points out that while the monks do in fact suffer greatly, their suffering still allows them to advance without

⁴⁴ Malsfeiz veient millers plusurs;
 Criz de dampnez oënt e plurs.
 Pür lur vent forment grant
 Del fum chi luign par l’air s’espant.
 Endurerent cum melz pourent;
 Eschiverent cum plus sourent.
 Sainz hoem cum ad plusurs travailz
 De faim, de seif, de freiz, de calz,
 Ainxe, tristur e granz pöirs,
 De tant vers Deu creist sis ötrs.
 Eisi est d’els puis q’unt void
 U li dampnez sunt reçoïd :
 En Deu ferment lur fiance,
 N’i aturnent mescreance.
 Vunt s’en avant, n’i dutent rien;
 Par ço sevent que espleitent bien. (1168-82)

fear, because of the knowledge that it is God's will for them to see, and to a certain degree, experience, these torments.

The loss of the ability to act in the external world continues during the journey to the terrestrial paradise, the goal of their patient quest. Burgess writes, "The journey is now completely outside the control of Brendan and the monks" (*Savoir and Faire* 272). As they approach paradise, their senses become completely useless, and they enter something like what a later mystical writer would call a "cloud of unknowing." They have only the wind, which signifies the grace of God, to drive them, and their host, who represents Christ in his ability to guide them through this symbolic journey through death, this "night of the senses": "They put their trust in their host because of the cloud that surrounded them; amassed on both sides, it was dark and thick"⁴⁵ (100). The length of their journey through the fog is three days, and it thus signifies the period of time during which Christ died and descended into the underworld. Furthermore, that the three days of fog follows forty days of sailing during which they could only see the sea and sky above them signifies the forty years during which the Israelites wandered in the desert and the forty days of Lent. Thus, the day on which they arrive at the terrestrial paradise is, fittingly, the day of the resurrection. The patience that they have been learning throughout the voyage culminates in this last journey to the terrestrial paradise. Because they have oriented their minds in such a manner that allows them to accept the action of grace, the monks again experience physical powerlessness, through which they are brought to a place of fullness and pleasure. Providence renders both Judas and the monks

⁴⁵ Mult se fient en lur hoste
 Pur la nue q'unt en coste:
 Grant est forment e serree,
 De ambes parz est amasee. (1659-62)

externally impotent; however, whereas Judas's loss of external agency consists of suffering because of his rejection of grace and suffering, that of the monks brings them to great joy because of their active struggle to avoid despair.

Brendan's obedience is an act of will; it is chosen consciously and it must be pursued in the face of temptation. Yet it results in his being re-created by a higher force. In the *Navigatio*, as Ian Short and Brian Merilees suggest in their edition of the *Voyage*, the narrative unfolds because of Brendan's "quest for adventure undertaken explicitly out of curiosity" (20). The steward of paradise, at the end of the *Navigatio*, tells Brendan why God prolonged his journey: "There before you lies the land which you have sought for a long time. You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you the varied secrets in the great ocean"⁴⁶ (XXXVII). Thus, at the end of the quest, God reveals that the knowledge that He wished to impart to Brendan is greater than that which the saint was seeking. As Short and Merilees claim, the *Voyage* is more about a "trial of faith" (20); even if the theme of knowledge is still central to the motivation and movement of the narrative, the specific lessons that the monks, and presumably, the audience, are to learn move to the foreground. While learning of the wonders of God, the monks experience the necessity of developing enduring fortitude through faith and thereby avoiding despair. This proper relationship with the emotions allows them to accept the grace of God without frustrating it by falling into despair, as Judas has. Ultimately, this negotiation of physical powerlessness is a preparation for death, in which the ability to choose and act completely disappears, and one is completely surrendered to God's will. Although the

⁴⁶ "Ecce terra quam quesisti per multum tempus. Ideo statim non potuisti invenire quia Deus voluit tibi ostendere diversa sua secreta in oceano magno." See Burgess's introduction to his translation, p 72. Dorothy Ann Bray sees these words as containing an allegorical reference to the monastic life (10).

Anglo-Norman text still teaches the proper control of the passions to which the Christian must aspire, Benedeit's vernacular version manifests a certain *pathos* that the Latin original avoids. This emphasis on sentimentality contributes to the depiction of the patient hero by broadening the parameters of affectivity that the protagonist can manifest while still exemplifying patience.

ii.) Owein's Patient Purgation

In the next part of this chapter, I shall discuss how, like Saint Brendan's voyage, Owein's journey through purgatory dramatises the reduction of the self to its only essential potency: the ability to entreat God's mercy. As both the *Voyage* and the *Espurgatoire* show, this capacity is an act of courage that the self must manifest in the face of horrifying annihilation, and it requires the certain restraint of the passions. Thus, I shall argue, the purgatory through which Owein travels is a realm in which people are reduced to total powerlessness, much like the vision of hell that Brendan and his monks receive. On the one hand, those being purged suffer diverse torments, and on the other, they display no potential ability to mitigate their sufferings. Rather, they are completely at the mercy of God, their previous acts, and the prayers of the living. Whereas those suffering in purgatory are dramatically characterised as subject to the consequences of the passions that they have indulged while living, Owein, as one who is at least technically still alive during his tour of the otherworld, is given a talisman that allows him to exercise volition in the realm of absolute impotence. Purgatory is a realm that both requires and teaches patience, and the greatest acts of patience, those that consist of choosing to endure purgatorial suffering while the agent is still alive, ultimately mitigate the

experience of purgation. Owein's choosing of this suffering while still alive is what qualifies him for this special potential for activity while he is among those enduring the flames of purgatory, and it allows him a preview of the terrestrial paradise, which is characterised by much volitional ability. As the visionary genre requires, the traveller is eventually forced to return to the mundane world, in spite of his attempt to exercise his own will and stay in paradise.

Owein's success in his journey relies upon his following the instructions of the mysterious figures in white robes, and his ability to do so relies upon the tempering of destructive emotions, such as despair. In this sense, I shall argue, fortitude is the major action of the hero, and the fortitude that the protagonist manifests is not the characteristic aggressive fortitude that one expects of a knight, but, rather, it consists of the patient endurance that an adventuring monk such as Brendan manifests. Marie de France's *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz* (c. 1190) is a translation of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* (1180s).⁴⁷ While Marie de France's *Lais*, composed somewhere between 1160 and 1190,⁴⁸ most likely precede the *Espurgatoire* and the *Tractatus*, I shall then show how "Guigemar" and "Eliduc" explore the theme of chivalric voluntary suffering and thereby contribute to the motif of patient heroism in courtly romance. Collectively, these works suggest a horizon of expectations⁴⁹ in late twelfth-century courtly literature in England that is as much concerned with knights as *patients* as *chansons de geste* are with knights as martial *agents*.

In Marie de France's translation of the *Tractatus*, Owein becomes a more pronounced protagonist, and thereby articulates and represents the concerns of a secular

⁴⁷ On the dating of these two works, see Curley 3-11.

⁴⁸ See Curley 3-7.

⁴⁹ On the concept of the "horizon of expectations," see Hans Robert Jauss 22-5.

audience. By translating the *Tractatus* for a courtly audience, Marie draws attention to the analogous relationship, and tension, between the courtly life and that of the religious, between *aventure* and grace, and between poetic fiction and God's truth.⁵⁰ While this relationship already exists to some degree in the *Tractatus*, Marie emphasises the two worlds through the metre in which her translation is composed, the emphasis on the knight Owein, and the assumed audience of her work. Unlike Benedeit, who significantly revises the *Navigatio* in order to make it palatable to a secular audience, Marie has to do remarkably little in order to recast the *Tractatus*.⁵¹ As Michael J. Curley notes, most of Marie's innovations consist of toning down the admonitions against taking pleasure in carnal sensations and favouring the experience of Owein above the Patristic authority that is required to validate the content of Owein's journey. Instead, Curley notes, Marie sees the experience as validating the claims of various Patristic writers (25). With respect to the form of Marie's translation, whereas Henry composes the original in sober Latin prose, Marie, like Benedeit, uses her octosyllabic couplets, a metre that she and Chrétien de Troyes make the standard one for the composition of romances in the twelfth century. Although octosyllabic couplets also become standard for twelfth-century hagiographic texts, Owein does not appear as a saint, but instead as a knight who has had a remarkable adventure.⁵²

⁵⁰ For a discussion of the tensions between truth and fiction, and the courtly life and the religious one, see David L. Pike *passim*.

⁵¹ In fact, critics such as Lucien Foulet (622), Karl Warnke (xlix), D. D. R. Owen (*Vision* 65), and Emanuel J. Mickel (47) have all remarked on the absence of Marie's personality in her translation of *Tractatus*. Nevertheless, Kurt Ringger, Curley, Bonnie H. Leonard, David L. Pike, and Rupert T. Pickens have shown that although Marie's changes are subtle, they do reveal the consequences, concerns, and anxieties of vernacular writing.

⁵² The author of the Middle English version found in the fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript does indeed refer to him as a saint (198.4); for my discussion of this version, see pages 89-92 below.

One significant change that Marie makes to the *Tractatus* is her focus on Owein as the hero of the narrative:

In keeping with her desire to stress Owen's role as protagonist of the *Espurgatoire*, Marie tends to downplay the many passages that emphasize the Cistercian part in transmitting Owen's story. Having introduced Owen by name at the outset of his narration, for instance, Henry thereafter refers to him throughout the *Tractatus* not by his personal name, but rather as a *miles* or *vir*, that is to say, by his office or station in life, whereas Marie supplies the knight's name, Owen, seven times in the course of her poem.

(Curley 24)

Thus, Owein becomes something of a protagonist, a hero, and is no longer simply a knight on the boundaries of the author's personal knowledge who has had a noteworthy adventure. While Henry⁵³ gives much detail about the lives of Gervaise of Louth and Gilbert of Louth, the men who are responsible for transmitting the story and who thus attest to its historical authenticity, Marie, Curley notes, "downplays all of this" (24).

Although there were intimate connections between the courtly and monastic domains in the twelfth century, Marie's translation suggests a courtly audience. The focus on Owein contributes to what D. D. R. Owen (66) describes as Marie's favouring of the knightly over the monastic. While Owen argues that Marie has a greater goal in mind for the *Espurgatoire* than simply being courtly entertainment (66), David L. Pike observes that "The affiliation of chivalric life with the act of translation is characteristic of the poetics of the *Espurgatoire*: the *chevalier* is vehicle for the translation from Latin into the

⁵³ Although there is no clear evidence that "'H' of Saltrey" is called Henry, I yield to the tradition, initiated by Matthew Paris in the thirteenth century, that refers to the author of the text as Henry.

layperson's vernacular, for the translation of a sacred vision into a Romance adventure"⁵⁴ (48). Bonnie Leonard draws further attention to these subtle markers of Marie's courtly aesthetic in "The Inscription of a New Audience: Marie de France's *Espurgatoire Saint Patriz*," in which she argues that Marie inscribes a courtly audience into her translation in order to have them included in the economy of salvation. Leonard notes that she addresses the *beau pere*, which seems to be a translation of Henry's *pater venerande*, but, unlike Henry, she "expands her textual audience to the *Seignurs* whom she directly addresses in line 49..., line 189..., and line 421..." (58). Thus, Leonard concludes,

These courtly gentlemen are nowhere to be found in the Latin text, and their introduction into the text by Marie reflects the general trend in the *Espurgatoire* toward greater inclusion in a salvific literary legacy of those to whom the text had been inaccessible. (58)

This is, of course, not to argue that the *Espurgatoire* is a courtly romance, but that it partakes of certain commonplaces of the genre that have already been established by the end of the twelfth century, and that make its hero as much of a potentially courtly one, as he is already a monastic hero who happens to be, and remains, a knight. While the *Tractatus* perhaps emphasises the content of the adventure rather than the hero himself, it still draws attention, like the *Espurgatoire*, to the exemplary nature of his courage and perseverance, that is, his heroism. In essence, Marie's version translates a monastic form of enduring fortitude, identical to that found in Saint Brendan, for an audience accustomed to knights as primarily warriors, as in *chansons de geste*, or exemplars of courtly manners and victims of passions, as in courtly romances.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, lines 499-500, which describe what happens after someone returns from a night in St. Patrick's Purgatory: "Puis contereit de s'aventure, / ki serreit mise en escripture" (Then he told of his adventure, / which was taken down in writing).

Leonard and Pike refer back to Jacques Le Goff's *The History of Purgatory* to show how the *Tractatus*, and of course, Marie's subsequent translation, contribute to the nascent twelfth-century conception of purgatory as a geographical location.⁵⁵ Whereas earlier visions of the otherworld, such as the vision of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12: 1-4, the fourth book of Gregory the Great's *Dialogues*, and the Vision of Drythelm from the twelfth chapter of book five of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, tend to appear to the soul either after the soul's leaving the body or through a mysterious teleportation of the soul and the body,⁵⁶ the Purgatory of Saint Patrick "marks the beginning of a significant new phase in the rise of purgatory and the development of a dual geography: a geography of this world coupled with a geography of the next" (Le Goff 177). In order to emphasise the literal, corporeal nature of Owein's journey, the narrator of the original Latin version relates Gilbert's response to an alleged sceptic:⁵⁷

There are people who say that when they enter the hall at the beginning they fall into ecstasy and they see all these things in their minds. But the knight denied adamantly that this had happened in his case; on the contrary, he testified very consistently that he had seen these things with his own bodily eyes and that he had endured the torments in the flesh.⁵⁸

(73)

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Leonard 59 and Pike 45.

⁵⁶ See Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* 88-95 and 112-16, and Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* 26-42. Saint Paul admits his uncertainty about whether he experienced visions in the body or out of the body. Since death consists of the rupture of the soul and body, visions around or after death are likely *ex corpore*.

⁵⁷ Compare Marie de France's relation of Gilbert's attestation, in which she has him say that such sceptics "were not at all firm believers" (*...n'erent mie bien creant*) (2004). Whereas Henry's Gilbert is somewhat sympathetic toward the sceptic, Marie's chastises him for his failure to direct his belief properly.

⁵⁸ "Sunt quidam," inquit, "qui dicunt quod aulam intrantes primo fiunt in extasi et hec omnia in spiritu uidere. Quod omnino sibi miles ita contigisse miles contradicit, sed corporeis oculis se uidisse et corporaliter pertulisse constantissime testatur." (XXII.2)

Purgatory is thus imagined as a physical place, to which one might travel, and thereby becomes a fitting destination for a knight who is errant in both senses of the verb *errare*. It is simultaneously a physical landscape that beckons to an adventuring knight and a place of extreme penitential experience, that is, a landscape of patience.

By shifting visionary experience from the metaphysical to the physical world, from beyond the heavens to a landmark in Ireland, twelfth-century writers create the possibility for the overlapping of the capacities of the knight who is a warrior, and, at least in romances, a wanderer in the physical cosmos, and the monk, who functions in the metaphysical one. Although the typically noble status of monks and their continuing feudal obligations already associate the monk with the knight, the rhetoric of the Crusades, to which St. Bernard himself was a great contributor, and the spatialisation of the metaphysical world in places such as Mount Etna in Sicily and Lough Derg in Ireland, and, of course, Jerusalem, and the hell and terrestrial paradise that Brendan visits in the north Atlantic, created the possibility that a worldly travelling knight could have experiences of the otherworld in the same manner as a cloistered monk who experiences visions. The otherworld was no longer revealed merely through the visions of the nearly-dead, but through travel narratives with pagan roots, a realisation that likely contributed to the church's tendency to cast doubt on the veracity of physical otherworld journeys.

The otherworld is a physical space in which psycho-spiritual conflicts can be represented; in other words, it is a landscape in which the physical cosmos is idealised

All Latin quotations come from Warnke's edition of the more complete β tradition of the *Tractatus*. Although Warnke and others argue that Marie translates a version that evolves from the α recension, I have opted to stick with the β text because certain scholars, including Easting and Pontfarcy, have concluded that it represents the most complete version of Henry's story, and does not simply consist of later additions. Even Pickens, who favours the β text when discussing Marie de France's translations, suggests that the passages in *Espurgatoire* that are only found in the β recension could have come from a more complete α text, to which Marie had access. For a brief description of the debate over Marie's exemplar, see Pickens 7-9. English translations taken from Picard and Pontfarcy.

and recreated as a reflection of an internal experience, and it consists of an attempt to give concrete expression to different states of consciousness. We have already seen Brendan, the intrepid traveller, journey *in corpore* to hell and the terrestrial paradise, but Owein, at least in Marie's translation, is a *chevalier*, and his *aventure* is motivated by the need to do penance rather than the desire for knowledge. Marie, and ultimately Henry, present us with a familiar function of *aventure*: the facilitation of some sort of salvation through the balancing of cosmic debts, exercised externally through the circumstances of an adventure and internally through the hero's response to that adventure. While patient endurance is manifested primarily through an internal struggle, a *psychomachia*, it is evoked and dramatised through the voluntary suffering of the circumstances of an arduous journey. Marie contributes to later medieval romance not only through the Ovidian love-idiom that animates many of her lays, but also by rendering for the same audience a tale that depicts the patient wandering monk as a knight.⁵⁹ Here, the *aventure* requires only patience, and it is experienced in a realm that is characterised by the conventions of the virtue.

The revelation of the entrance to purgatory is an act of providence; but Owein's decision to endure purgatory while he is still alive is an act of individual volition. God shows Saint Patrick the entrance to purgatory, a place in which the dead are purged of their sins and that the living may enter in order to receive a gentler cleansing; thus, the source of Owein's *aventure* is unambiguously providential. Henry later points out that there are two criteria that must be met if one wishes to enter the pit: "There is a custom set by saint Patrick as well as by his successors that no one should enter the Purgatory

⁵⁹ The ambiguity of a knight whose fortitude is completely of the enduring sort is later picked up by Middle English translators, who emphasise either Owein's chivalric or saintly aspects.

unless he obtains permission from the bishop in whose diocese it lies and unless he chooses of his own free will to enter it for his sins”⁶⁰ (49). This emphasis on choice is what separates the experience of purgatory for the living from that of the dead. On the one hand, the experiences of the dead, in visions of the afterlife that are found in the tradition of Gregory the Great, and to which Henry alludes earlier, are determined by three things: the weight of their transgressions during life, the prayers and masses uttered by the living, and, ultimately, the mercy of God that can mitigate either of the first two.⁶¹ The living, on the other hand, can choose to endure this suffering without experiencing the state of necessity caused by death. Thus, with the blessing of the church, which is bestowed reluctantly in order to test the strength of the penitent’s will, the adventure of St. Patrick’s Purgatory allows one to choose to endure divine cleansing of one’s sins, and, because the suffering is chosen while one still has agency, one can thereby mitigate the ultimate intensity and duration of the purging.

Owein’s decision to subject himself to the suffering of purgatory is an act of audacity that borders on disobedience, and his behaviour reveals the freedom with which

⁶⁰ “Est autem consuetudo, tam a sancto Patricio quam ab eius successoribus constituta, ut purgatorium illud nullus introeat nisi qui ab episcopo, in cuius est episcopio, licentiam habeat et qui propria uoluntate illud intrare pro peccatis suis eligat” (III.2). Curiously, this emphasis on the necessity of choice is absent in Marie’s translation. Although she takes for granted the use of the will by referring to “those who wished to enter” (ki enz voleient entrer), she does translate this passage as if there is only one criterion: confession to a bishop (433-440).

⁶¹ Le Goff points out that great scholastics, such as Alexander of Hales, writing shortly after the composition of the *Tractatus*, argue that “free will [is] immobilized after death and merit [becomes] impossible to acquire” (251). He provides a quotation from Alexander of Hales’ *Quaestiones disputatae* “antequam esset frater,” written between 1216 and 1236, in which Alexander compares the souls in purgatory to passengers on a ship: “[they are] like passengers on a ship: they acquire no merit but pay for their transportation; similarly, the dead in Purgatory pay the penalty they owe, not like the captain, who can acquire merits on the boat, but merely as cargo” (Le Goff 250). Unlike the captain, who is able to exercise some volition through the sailing of the ship, the cargo is simply carried without any potential for activity. Nevertheless, as Le Goff suggests, both Aquinas and Bonaventure claim that purgatorial suffering is in some sense voluntary, though, as Bonaventure would have it, “only to a minimal degree” (251). Thus, purgatory is properly a realm of patience, and not one of simple necessity, since, in some sense, it respects the inviolability of the will. Nevertheless, a will that chooses to experience purgatory outside of any necessity most effectively mitigates the experience.

he chooses an acute experience in patience. After he confesses his sins to a bishop and states his desire to undergo purgation, the bishop tries to dissuade him in the customary manner. The goal of the bishop's response is not necessarily to discourage Owein but, rather, to see if his courage is such that he will not fall into despair, and thus perdition, while being subjected to the power of the demons. In the *Espurgatoire*, Marie renders Owein's reply to the bishop, "Yet no fear of suffering / Was able to shake his resolve"⁶² (546-47). The bishop advises him to take the monastic habit in order to ensure his salvation, but Owein somewhat defiantly responds that "He would take no habit / Besides the one he had, / Until he had seen purgatory"⁶³ (556-58). The bishop sends him to the prior of the monastery at Lough Derg, who further tests Owein's desire and courage by trying to frighten him about the possible consequences of entering purgatory. After preparing Owein through fasting, prayers, and vigils for fifteen days, the prior accompanies him, followed by a procession, and attempts one last time to dissuade him:

Many have entered there and gone to perdition;
 No one ever found out what became of them.
 Since they had neither strong belief,
 Good faith nor firm hope,
 They were unable to endure its torments,
 And hence they remained there.
 Through the great torments which they witnessed,
 They forgot God and perished.⁶⁴ (599-606)

⁶² "Nule potîrs de peine aveir / ne puet sun corage moveir." All English translations are taken from Michael Curley's translation.

⁶³ Ja altre habit n'en recevra, / fors tel cum il aveit eîl, / de ci qu'il ait cel liu veîl.

⁶⁴ Mult i sunt entré e perdu;

This speech begins by asserting that the fate of those who have not returned is unknown, but it continues by describing exactly what happened to them: because of their lack of faith and subsequent inability to endure the suffering of purgatory, they were condemned. Whereas during the previous two attempts by the bishop and the prior to dissuade Owein, the narrative does not represent the knight's words in direct speech, in Marie's translation, she relates Owein's third assertion of his desire in the first person: "I will go into purgatory trusting in God, / To be able to expiate my sins, / And to please God"⁶⁵ (612-14). This simple, direct receptiveness to the providential nature of the *aventure* becomes conventional in later representations of passive romance heroes.⁶⁶

The penitent knight must choose to be physically receptive to the purifying action of providential *aventure* in order to be cleansed of his sins. Because culpability is already assumed, the experience of purgatory is not a trial by ordeal. Rather, it functions to prepare the soul for the return to the terrestrial paradise that it lost in the Fall, and is thereby analogous to the *aventure* of romances that prepares the knight for marriage and/or the inheritance of a kingdom. The degree of Owein's activity is highly unusual for visionary literature.⁶⁷ Unlike other spiritual visionaries, who simply receive visions of the

ne sout hum qu'il sunt devenu.
 Kar n'orent pas ferme creance,
 bone fei, de dreite esperance;
 ne porent souffrir les turmenz:
 pur ço remestrent il dedenz;
 pur les granz turmenz que il virent
 Deu oblièrent e perdirent.

⁶⁵ J'i enterrai, en Deu m'alfi, / pur mes pechiez espeneir / e que jo puisse a Deu plaisir.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, Mann (1981) *passim* for a discussion of this receptivity in Malory's presentation of the story of Balin.

⁶⁷ In the Latin version, Henry draws attention to the lack of volition often exhibited by otherworld visionaries. While discussing the stories of the afterlife that Gregory the Great relates in his *Dialogues*, he describes two major experiences of passivity: visions and death: "But [Gregory] also states that the souls themselves while still in the body before their departure sometimes have a foreboding of much that is going to happen to them, either through disclosure of the inner conscience or revelations made from outside" (44); "Sed et [Gregorius] ipsas animas, adhuc in corpore positas, ante exitum multa aliquando de his, que

otherworld, Owein, like Brendan, pursues a direct experience. The final stage of his search requires him to walk through the cavern until he finds a great hall in a field. Marie faithfully translates Henry's description of Owein's descent into the cavern and emphasises the chivalry that, along with Owein's remorse for his sins, inspires his journey:

The knight had no fear
As he took his way through the pit;
Indeed, have no doubt that he sought out
New and strenuous knightly deeds.⁶⁸ (671-4)

Here, the narrative again emphasises the fundamentally volitional nature of Owein's quest, which requires him to seek and embrace suffering.⁶⁹ In effect, Owein pursues the ultimate conclusion of the motif of knightly penitence: the attainment of an eternal kingdom through the exercising of chivalry, albeit in a new and more extreme form.

As in the Brendan narrative, the only real threat to Owein's succeeding in his quest is despair, and this battle with despair characterises his quest as one of enduring fortitude. After entering purgatory and arriving at a building that resembles a cloister,

uentura sunt super eas, siue ex responsione conscientie interiori siue per reuelationes exterius factas prescisse fatetur" (II.4). Here, the souls at or near death have no volition of their own; they can simply receive what is given to them. After describing the rivers, houses, fields, flowers, and black and white figures, and other such earthly things that the disembodied soul perceives, Henry, through Gregory the Great's authority, presents a clear image of the complete impotence of the soul that is brought to purgatory: "These souls tell that, after the separation from the body, they themselves have been pulled by the hands, dragged by the feet, hanged by the neck, scourged, thrown down and subjected to many more ordeals of this kind" (44); "[Animas] se quoque, solutas corporibus, manibus trahi, pedibus duci, collo suspendi, flagellari, precipitari et multa huiusmodi [Gregorius dicit narrare]" (II.5).

⁶⁸ Li chevalier pas n'esfreie,
Par me la fosse tient sa veie;
Or hantera, n'en dutez mie,
Novele e fort chevalerie.

⁶⁹ One might say that Owein exemplifies the patience of the mercenary, who suffers for a reward, while the dead display the patience of an ass, who suffers because it is inevitable. On the patience of an ass, see chapter five, page 132.

Brendan meets fifteen monks, and their abbot explains the nature of the adventure to which Owein has subjected himself. Owein will meet a crowd of demons who will show him horrifying sights and threaten him with terrible sufferings. In order to tempt him from his goal, they will promise equivocally to conduct him safely to the entrance of the cave. However, the prior says,

If you believe their false words,
 You will suffer perdition;
 If through threats or suffering,
 Or through wicked cajolery,
 You become frightened or overwhelmed,
 You will be lost forever.⁷⁰ (745-50)

As in the *Navigatio* tradition, the stakes are high. If Owein succumbs to fear, not only will he fail to perceive the terrestrial paradise that is the conclusion of his journey, but, presumably, he will be cast into hell for his lack of faith. Having warned Owein about the consequences of fear, the Prior teaches him the one action with which he can protect himself from the assaults of the demons; he must remember to call upon Jesus Christ (773-6). While Owein must subject himself to the demons' power in order to see the sufferings of purgatory and thereby be cleansed of his sins, in order to keep himself from falling completely into the realm of the demons, he must remember God and thereby

⁷⁰ Se vus creez lur fals sermun,
 si irrez en perdicitiñ;
 se par menace u par turment
 u par malvais blandissement
 estes esmaiez ne vencuz,
 finablement estes perduz.

allow grace to save him; the memory of Jesus is meant both to contribute to and serve as an indication of his equanimity.

Owein's first encounter with the demons consists of his waiting for the demons to approach him and enduring their temptations, which aim to arouse fear of suffering (and thus focus on the irascible soul) and desire for pleasure (and thus appeal to the concupiscible), and it is here that he achieves his first patient victory. Having finally come to the locus of *aventure*, that is, the realm in which corporeal struggle is meaningless, and having prepared himself with faith, the knight ceases all external activity and thereby adopts an enduring stance, clothed in the power of God, the great other: "Placing his good faith in God, / He waited for them to come forward"⁷¹ (795-96). Some twenty lines later, the narrative again refers to the knight waiting alone ("suls atendi" (818)) for the onslaught of the demons. The deceit of the demons consists of their trying to convince him that he is completely in their power, when in fact he is not, but that he will be treated well because, unlike the dead, who have come there because of the necessity imposed by death, Owein has come there "while still alive" (*en vie*) (854). Unlike the otherworldly monks, who are tonsured and ordered beneath a prior who speaks to Owein, the grotesque devils come gnashing their teeth and reviling him, and they speak to him as if they were one muddled entity, thereby representing the disordered passions that he must overcome in his descent through the otherworld. Their words aim both to frighten and flatter him simultaneously by suggesting that although he will only suffer if he continues in his quest for redemption, they will kindly lead him back to the world, where he can act as he wishes. The narrator concludes Owein's introduction to the demons by remarking on his absolute equanimity:

⁷¹ Bonement en Deu esperant, / atent li quel vendrunt avant.

But Christ's knight
 Neither feared nor trembled; ...
 He remained peacefully with no fear of them,
 Nor did he speak a word to them.⁷² (879-84)

Owein maintains a peaceful mind in his first encounter with the demons and does not respond to the temptations that the demons present before him. It is through the illusion of spiritual powerlessness that they wish to make Owein vulnerable to despair. Thus, Owein must at all times remember the one potency that he has been given in his physical powerlessness in order to keep their deceit from becoming reality.

The sufferings that Owein beholds and experiences in purgatory convey both senses of the family of words that derives from *pati*: physical suffering and the absence of action; however, Owein maintains a potency, an agency, of which the demons hope to deprive him through the passions. Eventually, Owein experiences the sort of powerlessness that characterises the narratives found in Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and that Henry supplies in the *Tractatus*: the demons bind him and throw him in a fire. He responds by exercising the only action granted to him: "In his suffering, the knight / Called on the name of his Lord"⁷³ (893-93). He finds release from suffering through the sobriety that he maintains in his suffering. After he is saved by God, his faith, like that of Brendan's monks, increases, "and [he] awaited more securely / The torments he had to endure"⁷⁴ (910-11). During Owein's tour of purgatory, the demons drag him from torture

⁷² Mais li chevaliers Ihesucrist
 n'out poür ne ne se fremist; ...
 En pais se sist, n'out poür d'els;
 ne volt un mot parler a els.

⁷³ Li chevaliers en sa dolur / apela le nun sun seignur.

⁷⁴ ...e atent plus seürement / les turmenz, u il deit entrer....

to torture, not only subjecting him to various physical sufferings, but also forcing him to see the suffering of others.

As Owein progresses through the various fields of purgatory, the intensity of his sufferings increases, and he is brought closer and closer to the loss of his equanimity and the impasse that would result, but each time he is whisked away by his ability to remember to call upon Jesus. Eventually, the demons bring him to a place that they refer to as hell, which consists of a pit with a black flame rising from it and men and women continually being lifted by the flame and then falling back into the fire. After rejecting the demons' offer to carry him safely out of purgatory, Owein is dragged into the pit, and the suffering almost causes him to fail to act: "So quickly did hell's torment overtake him, / That he nearly forgot to utter the name of his Lord"⁷⁵ (1297-99). Having nearly suffered perdition through experiencing the extreme pain that these souls endure, Owein barely remembers to act; his will is nearly lost to the intensity of his suffering.

Owein's crossing of a perilous bridge allows him to manifest only the most basic degree of physical activity. The demons tell Owein that he must cross the bridge while the demons attempt to knock him into a fetid river. If he falls into the river, the demons will bear him to hell. The bridge itself has three difficulties: it is slippery, narrow, and terribly high up.⁷⁶ Unlike the previous fields of purgatory, in which Owein simply had to remember to call on Christ for help, his final test consists of an act of faith about which the monks did not warn him. Even though the bridge appears impossible to cross, the knight must both trust in prayer and act according to his belief. Thus, the climax of the

⁷⁵ Tant fu de cel torment hastez, / pur poi qu'il ne s'ert obliëz / de nomer le nun sun seignur.

⁷⁶ For a comparison of this bridge with the Sword Bridge in Chrétien de Troyes' *Le Chevalier de la Charrete*, see Emanuel J. Mickel 48. On the pervasiveness in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of the motif of the narrow bridge, see Bloch 214-15.

Espurgatoire consists of the physical manifestation of the internal act of faith; Owein is no longer conveyed to his destination while he struggles to maintain his equanimity; instead, he must undergo an ordeal that requires no physical skill except the ability to walk. Since Owein is a knight, his identity is rooted in his ability to act martially; however, the expression of his courage in purgatory cannot happen through martial violence, but occurs ironically through the quotidian act of traversing a bridge, an act that is rendered heroic by the hostile environment that recontextualises it.

Unlike purgatory, which is characterised by limited or lost volitionality and subsequent physical expression, the terrestrial paradise is a place of great activity. Owein's first experiences of the terrestrial paradise consist of sights and smells. After beholding the brightness of the jewels mounted on the gate, Owein smells a healing odour: "The effect of the fragrance was that / He, though there but a moment, lost all the pain / Which remained from his tortures"⁷⁷ (1516-18). Having been healed by a salvific scent, Owein is "seized with a great desire" (*Mult a coveita*) (1523) to enter the gate, and, when inside, he beholds throngs of people in celebration. Whereas many of the inhabitants of purgatory are fixed to the ground with nails, those of the earthly paradise walk in procession (1536). While those in purgatory are oblivious to everything except their own suffering, the people in paradise receive the knight with singing (1557-60). The archbishop who explains the significance of paradise contrasts the powerlessness of those in purgatory with the volitionality manifested by the inhabitants of paradise:

None of those who are yet in a state of pain
Know how long they will remain in it,
Or how long they have been in it.

⁷⁷ Del torment qu'il aveit eü, / a vis li fu, par cele odor, / que tute perdi la dolor.

This all depends on the will of God.
 When we pray for them,
 Or offer masses, donations, and gifts,
 Their suffering is diminished.⁷⁸ (1755-61)

While those in the terrestrial paradise are also ignorant of the duration of their stay before ascending to greater glory in the heavenly paradise, they at least have the power to pray for those in purgatory and thereby help to alleviate their suffering.

iii.) Patient Endurance in the *Lais* of Marie de France

Although the *Lais* were probably written before the *Espurgatoire*, analogous thematic issues between the two texts can account for Marie's interest in the *Tractatus*. In many of Marie de France's *Lais*, the emotional education of the protagonist comprises the main action of the narrative, and, as I have been arguing, the *Voyage* and the *Espurgatoire* likewise attempt to depict such emotional transformations in landscapes that reflect the psycho-spiritual experiences of the protagonists. Although martial prowess is a component of the knight's worth in the *Lais*, Marie focusses rather on the way in which the protagonist responds to the wound of love, which often functions as a type of necessity, an overwhelming external force that demands a reaction from the sufferer. All of the *Lais* depict love in this manner, and the reaction of each protagonist to the sting of love, that is, the manner in which each one suffers, determines her or his virtue. Although

⁷⁸ Nul de cels ki en peine sunt
 ne se vent cumbien i serrunt
 ne cumbien il i unt esté;
 c'est tut en la Deu volenté.
 Quant hum fait pur els oreisuns,
 messes, e almosnes, e duns,
 lur torment sunt amenuisié.

there are several variations on this theme in the collection of stories, I shall limit my examination to two of the longer ones, “Guigemar” and “Eliduc.”⁷⁹

Guigemar initially seems to have no experience of necessity. As a young man, he was “wise, brave and loved by everyone”⁸⁰ (43). Upon his reaching maturity, “the king dubbed him nobly and gave him whatever armour he desired”⁸¹ (43). Finally, he wanders freely, defeating knights wherever he goes. Here, one finds the potential for the great warrior of a *chanson de geste*: Guigemar is a fine candidate for restoring lost kingdoms and defending Christendom against Saracens. Guigemar’s invulnerability extends from the field of tournament to the bedroom, and the narrator points to this latter imperviousness as a defect:

But nature had done him such a grievous wrong that he never displayed the slightest interest in love. ... Women frequently made advances to him, but he was indifferent to them. He showed no visible interest in love and was thus considered a lost cause by stranger and friend alike.⁸² (44)

⁷⁹ I have chosen two narratives in which the heroes undergo a form of conversion through suffering and ultimately respond appropriately to love. Two examples of the opposite situation are found in “Equitan,” in which the lovers’ decision to kill the betrayed husband/friend lands them in hot water, both figuratively and literally, and “Les Deus Amanz,” in which the young lover becomes so distracted by his task of carrying his beloved up the mountain that he forgets to care for his body; as a result, he collapses from exhaustion and she dies of despair.

⁸⁰ ... sages e pruz; / mult se faiseit amer de tuz (43-4).

⁸¹ ... li reis l’adube richement; / armes li dune a sun talent (47-8).

⁸² De tant i out mespris nature
que unc de nule amur n’out cure.
... Plusurs l’en requistrent suvent,
Mais il n’aveit de ceo talent;
nuls ne se pout aparceveir
que il volsist amur avoir.
Pur ceo le tienent a peri
e li estrange e si ami. (57-68)

According to the ethical system of the story, Guigemar's failure to love is one for which he must atone, even if it is a vice that he has inherited from nature.⁸³

In order to be properly habituated to love, Guigemar must experience a loss of agency that is analogous to that found in Owein's experience of purgatory. In Saint Brendan's case, the inspiration for exploring is found in his desire for knowledge; for Guigemar, as for Owein, the quest originates in a desire for healing. Whereas Owein desires and seeks spiritual healing, the healing that Guigemar requires seeks him. The emotional disease that he suffers is symbolised by the wound that he receives while hunting a white hind; his arrow rebounds off of the hind's forehead and pierces his thigh, a wound that suggests sexual impotence. The animal prophesies Guigemar's physical and emotional healing in the form of a curse:

May you never find a cure, nor may any herb, root, doctor or potion ever
heal the wound you have in your thigh until you are cured by a woman
who will suffer for your love more pain and anguish than any other
woman has ever known, and you will suffer likewise for her, so much so
that all those who are in love, who have known love or are yet to
experience it, will marvel at it.⁸⁴ (44)

⁸³ The revenge of Aphrodite/Venus is an ancient motif.

⁸⁴ ... ja mais n'aies tu medecine!

Ne par herbe ne par racine,
ne par mire ne par poisun
n'avras tu ja mes guarisun
de la plaie qu'as en la quisse,
de si qu cele te guarisse,
ki sufferra pur tue amur
si grant peine e si grant dolor,
qu'unkes referas tant pur li,
dunt tuit cil s'esmerveillerunt,
ki aiment e amé avrunt
u ki puis amerunt après. (109-21)

Through suffering, Guigemar and his beloved become examples for other lovers; however, it is not suffering itself that determines the outcome of the narrative, but the way in which they respond to it.

Like the wound that he receives, Guigemar's voyage to the mysterious, yet simultaneously mundane, place in which the hind's prophecy is fulfilled occurs outside of the protagonist's volition, and it is here that the knight learns of love through endurance. When Guigemar rests on a bed found on a mysterious ship, he suddenly becomes aware of the loss of his agency, since the ship is already at sea. The protagonist is externally subject to the will of a mysterious other, and, like Owein and Brendan, he engages in prayerful acceptance, which is the only action available to him: "... But he had to accept his fate and he prayed to God to take care of him, to bring him, if at all possible, to a safe harbour and protect him from death"⁸⁵ (45-6). This acceptance of fate is central to the patient element in Guigemar's adventure. After submitting his will to God, he commits an act of physical submission: "he lay down on the bed and slept"⁸⁶ (46). He is conveyed to a woman who has been locked in a tower by her jealous husband. She heals his wounds and they become lovers, but are discovered by her husband, who commends him to the judgment of the sea;⁸⁷ eventually, Guigemar is miraculously conveyed back to his homeland. His wounding, forced travelling, and falling in love are depicted as necessities that he must endure, and immediately when he returns to his homeland, he is given a knight's charger, an event that suggests his return to the potential for martial prowess.

⁸⁵ Sufrir li estuet l'aventure.
A Deu prie qu'en prenge cure,
qu'a sun poeir l'ameint a port
e sil defende de la mort. (199-203)

⁸⁶ El lit se colche, si s'endort (203).

⁸⁷ On the motif of the sea as a way of judging and punishing criminals, see Reinhard *passim*.

While the final resolution of the plot occurs only through his victory over Meriaduc, the suffering that Guigemar experiences and accepts through much of the narrative suggests the educative function of suffering in the development of the knight, a theme that the *Espurgatoire* exemplifies most perfectly.

A similar association of learning of love and the loss of agency occurs in “Eliduc,” in which the protagonist becomes so entirely consumed by love that he fails to be faithful to his wife, Guildelüec, and honest with his lover, Guilliadun. Like Guigemar, he has great martial prowess. Although he does not lack love, his greatness inspires the wrath of other knights, whose gossip has him banished from the kingdom. He promises his wife that he will remain loyal to her, an act that provides the story’s dramatic tension. Eliduc pledges his service to a new lord, and helps him save his kingdom. However, the protagonist’s prowess falls to the background, as the powerful love that he experiences for the lord’s daughter moves to the foreground. He tries to leave, but finds himself unable to bear the effect his leaving has on her. As a result, he submits to her desire to return to England with him: “I consulted you because of the pledge between us, but of necessity I must go to my country. I have taken leave of your father, but I shall do what you wish, whatever may befall me”⁸⁸ (119). Even though he has ostensibly renounced his will for hers, Eliduc is dishonest and causes terrible suffering for both the maiden and himself. He goes to his former lord, then returns on an appointed day to meet the maiden and take her to England. However, as they are sailing with his men, they encounter a

⁸⁸ ... pur ceo preng jeo conseil de vus,
que fiances a entre nus.
Pur busuin vois en mun païs,
a vostre pere ai cungié pris;
mes jeo ferai vostre plaisir,
que que me deië avenir. (673-8)

storm that bears providential implications. All of the passengers aboard the boat⁸⁹ pray to God, St. Nicholas, St. Clement, and the Virgin Mary to deliver them, but they are still unable to reach the shore. Finally, a despairing sailor complains that they are being punished for Eliduc's unfaithfulness to his wife. Guilliadun falls into a swoon: "she fell face down, quite pale and wan, in a swoon in which she remained, for she did not come round or breathe"⁹⁰ (122). The maiden's swoon is a direct result of the knight's failure to act appropriately.

The love and guilt that Eliduc consequently suffers for Guilliadun's sake are purgative, and her apparent death functions analogously to the impasse that Owein experiences in purgatory. Eliduc will not allow her burial until he speaks to wise men about how he can "glorify the place either as an abbey or a church"⁹¹ (123), yet the narrative suggests that he does not do this, but instead returns frequently to the hermitage where he has left her body in order to pray and lament. The loss of external agency that characterises the experience of impasse is experienced literally by the beloved, and figuratively by Eliduc, who is unable to advance the plot, and whose experience now consists of his daily visit to the hermitage and profuse weeping. He is unable to bury her or awaken her from her deathlike trance, and the narrative progresses only through the compassionate intervention of Guildelüec, who discovers how to awaken the maiden. Overcome by pity and love, Eliduc's wife tells the maiden that she will set her husband free and become a nun. The ultimate result of this great act of humility, compassion, and,

⁸⁹ The subject of *recliment* (821) is ambiguous; I take it to refer to everyone on board the boat.

⁹⁰ Desur sun vis cheï pasmee,
tute pale, desculuree.

En la pasmeisun demura,
qu'el ne revint ne suspira. (853-6)

⁹¹ ... le liu eshalcier / u d'abeïe u de mustier (927-8).

of course, patience, is that all three characters enter monasteries and devote their lives to praying for each other:

[Eliduc] placed his dear wife together with his first one and the latter received her as her sister and showed her great honour, urging her to serve God and teaching her the order. They prayed that God might show their beloved His sweet mercy and Eliduc in turn prayed for them, sending his messenger to see how they fared and how their spirits were.⁹² (126)

The transformation of the characters occurs through the experience of suffering, and the martial element of Eliduc's experience, which characterises his earlier importance as a retainer, fades completely from the narrative, replaced instead by a desire that, although initially adulterous, eventually becomes divinised.⁹³

iv.) Brendan and Owein in Fourteenth-Century England

The narratives concerning Brendan and Owein occupy a liminal space between hagiography and heroism, and the Middle English versions are no exception. The fluidity of the generic associations of these works and their enduring popularity enable them to function as potential mediators between spiritual and secular writing. By leafing through

⁹² Ensemble od sa femme premiere
mist sa femme que tant ot chiere.
El la receut cum sa seur
e mult li porta grant honur;
de Deu servir l'amonesta
e sun ordre li enseigna.
Deu preiouent pur lur ami
qu'il li feïst bone merci,
e il pur eles repreiot.
Ses messages lur enveiot
pur saveir cument lur estait
e cum chescune cunfort ait. (1165-76).

⁹³ This transformation from knight to hermit also happens to Guy of Warwick; however, as I argue in chapter three, the bulk of the narrative energy in Guy's case is directed towards the celebration of him as a warrior. See chapter three, pages 108-9 and 115-22.

the EETS edition of MS Laud 108, a late thirteenth-century manuscript that contains the *Early South English Legendary* (*SEL*), one notices the uniqueness of the plots of Saint Brendan and Owein among the other hagiographic narratives. The collection comprises a *Liber Festivalis*, that is, a book that contains information for composing sermons for religious feasts. Much of the *SEL* consists of narratives of saints' lives. The saints in the collection tend to be apostles, or martyrs, such as Saint Agatha, Saint Cecilia, Saint Christopher, Saint Eustace, Saint Hippolytus, Saint Edmund the King, and Saint Thomas of Canterbury, or monastic confessors such as Saint Scholastica, Saint Vincent, Saint Brigid, and Saint Cuthbert, or Patristic confessors such as Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory; however, the *Purgatorium sancti Patricii abbatis*, as the narrative concerning Owein appears in the *SEL*, mentions Saint Patrick only briefly, and the *Vita sancti Brendani, Abbatis de Hybernia* neither describes martyrdom nor emphasises asceticism or dogmatic instruction; instead, it presents a terrestrial journey beyond the known horizon; in other words, unlike the other figures in the *SEL*, Brendan and Owein are known for undertaking audacious journeys into the otherworld.

The immense popularity of the *Navigatio* helped ensure its translation into Middle English, even though Middle English translators tended to reduce the narrative to its most essential elements,⁹⁴ and what remains is a description of a fantastical voyage. Although there are two subsequent Middle English translations, it is generally accepted that they derive from one found in the *South English Legendary*.⁹⁵ Like Benedeit's *Voyage*, the Middle English translation of Brendan's journey tends to omit liturgical references while

⁹⁴ One hundred and twenty-five surviving copies of the Latin version can be found throughout Europe, along with numerous witnesses of the various translations of the text into Anglo-Norman, Middle Dutch, Middle High German, various Italian dialects, Occitan, Catalan, Old Norse, and Middle English.

⁹⁵ See Lavery 22.

diminishing the amount of narrative repetition. However, while *Voyage* compensates for the liturgical omissions with lengthy descriptions, the *SEL* version also reduces the amount of description significantly; while the former contains 1834 lines, the latter has only 736. Although despair is still the major emotional obstacle to the monks' success, the fear-inspiring sections, and the subsequent descriptions of the monks' dread, due to the brevity of the version, are stated without much emphasis.⁹⁶ As in the earlier versions, the journey in the Middle English one consists of a decision to travel followed by much wandering guided by providence; however, the latter version emphasises the monks' roles as observers of God's wonders instead of agents seeking their own salvation, and underscoring that intensifies the theme of patient endurance. The monks are assured through prophecies that they will reach their intended destinations; however, they do not arrive through self-directed navigation, but through God's intervention. Without the extended exegetical passages of the Latin version, the story becomes primarily an opportunity for a visionary tour, both for the monks and for the audience, and loses some of its didactic impact. Brendan and his monks are rendered enduring observers, with their spiritual struggle becoming secondary to the wonders they behold.

Like the vernacular versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, those of *Saint Patrick's Purgatory* reveal a progressive tightening of the narrative structure and such pruning ultimately accentuates the dramatic potential of the theme of patient endurance. By the fourteenth century, the Middle English versions of the *Tractatus* consist of only two of the various loosely-related tales that comprise the original work: the description of St. Patrick's discovery of the entrance to purgatory and, of course, the story of Owein's

⁹⁶ For descriptions of the monks' fear in the *SEL* version, see 162, 170-74, 177-78, 251-54, 407-20, 449-63, and 472-77.

journey and return. The earliest known English translation appears under the entry of St. Patrick (*pa*⁹⁷) in the *SEL* and, like the corresponding translation of the *Navigatio*, has much greater narrative efficiency than the earlier known Latin and Anglo-Norman versions.⁹⁸ The second known English translation appears as *Owain Miles* (*OM1*) in the Auchinleck Manuscript.⁹⁹ While *OM1* is similar to *pa* in the manner in which it omits the homiletic and anecdotal elements of the *Tractatus* and emphasises the suffering and courage of the knight, it does reveal a marked influence of a Middle English translation of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*, from which it attempts to match specific types of sins with specific types of punishments.¹⁰⁰ For instance, the pit that the demons in the *Tractatus* falsely identify as hell is where people are punished for their pride, the vice that is counteracted by humility, a virtue closely associated with patience in the virtues and vices tradition,¹⁰¹ and it is here that Owein suffers most keenly in both the Latin version and *OM1*.

The types of omissions that one finds in the Middle English versions suggest that the translators wished to intensify the dramatic potential of their source and thereby to engage their audiences emotionally, yet the sorts of additions that the poet includes reminds the audience of the work's didactic purpose. While considering the omissions, Easting (1990) concludes that

⁹⁷ I have adopted Easting's abbreviations for the various texts and manuscripts.

⁹⁸ Eight translations that circulated in England during the Middle Ages survive, five of which are Anglo-Norman and three of which are Middle English.

⁹⁹ Two romances that I discuss in the next chapter, *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*, also appear in the Auchinleck Manuscript.

¹⁰⁰ The latest known version (*OM2*), which I do not intend to discuss, survives in two incomplete, yet complementary, witnesses: British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A ii (mid-fifteenth century) and Yale University Library, MS 365 (1475-1500). Like its two Middle English predecessors, it is marked by omissions that enhance the flow of the narrative and amplifications that enhance its dramatic quality. Furthermore, it emphasises the heroic nature of Owein through the frequent repetition of his name in formulas often applied to romance heroes.

¹⁰¹ See chapter five, page 159 note 34.

the author of *pa* pruned spiritual matters in the interests of romantic adventure; aimed to avoid undue repetition of incident; increased the drama of Owein's lonely and dangerous quest; and strove for a rapid succession of action and dialogue. Such intentions can also be traced in the additions made to the text. (125)

Owein here emerges more clearly as a protagonist undergoing a spiritual struggle than a mere participant in an episode that is meant simply to warn listeners of the veracity of purgatory. The translator's omissions certainly do suggest the romance mode inherent in the *Tractatus*, yet some of the additions use typological connections that the Latin version misses, or at least further develop those that are latent in the original, and some of the additions intensify Owein's role as an example of patient endurance. In spite of his many omissions, the *pa* poet expands and amplifies much of the material of the *Tractatus*.¹⁰² Many of the additions highlight the story's function as an inspiration to do penance in this life;¹⁰³ such an emphasis accentuates the theme of voluntary endurance.

Frequent descriptions of Owein's affective states further amplify the theme of endurance. Whereas in the *Tractatus*, and in Marie's *Espurgatoire*, Owein's emotions are not described, both *pa* and *OM1* provide many references to Owein's fear and inner turmoil, much like Benedeit's translation of the *Navigatio*. As Easting (1991) notes while discussing *OM1*,

...the repeated emphasis in *T[ractatus]* on the spiritual valour of Owein as Christ's knight, armed with the armour of God, *ferro durior, fide, spe, et*

¹⁰² Easting writes, "[he] added a significant amount of new matter: speeches, narrative detail and narratorial comment. Of L[aud]'s 673 lines some 155 full lines and over 50 half-lines, or altogether over a quarter of the poem, have no verbal equivalent in *T[ractatus]*" (125).

¹⁰³ For specific examples of such additions and expansions, see Easting (1990) 125-129.

iusticia (L249-50), is omitted from *OM1* Instead, the fear and dread suffered by Owein the *douhti man* show the true horror of the situation.¹⁰⁴

(lvi)

Like those experienced by Benedeit's Brendan, the fear and dread that Owein experiences do not bring his heroism into question; rather, they emphasise the internal nature of his struggle. In the *Tractatus*, Owein awaits the demons in a state of perfect self-recollection; having been equipped as a *miles Christi*, "he piously invokes the Lord Jesus Christ to protect him with his royal battlements and prevent him from being overcome by his relentless enemies"¹⁰⁵ (55). Just before the demons arrive with their awful noises, Owein is "sitting alone in the hall, anticipating with an intrepid heart the fight with the demons"¹⁰⁶ (55). Even in the *Espurgatoire*, the knight calmly awaits his enemies: "Placing his good faith in God, / He awaited for them to come forward"¹⁰⁷ (795-96). In *OM1*, however, the poet focusses on Owein's fear, not his faith-inspired confidence, and he contrasts the peaceful departing of the supernatural monks to Owein's anxious abiding:

He and alle his fellowered
 Bitau3t him God, and forþ þai 3ede
 Wiþ ful mild chere.
 Owein bileft þer in drede,
 To God he gan to clepi and grede,

¹⁰⁴ Easting elsewhere notes that the spiritual arming borrowed from Ephesians 6: 11-17 is also omitted from *pa*, and that the *pa* poet includes "new exclamations of ... woe and affective distress." See (1990) 124, 126-27.

¹⁰⁵ ...devote ... inuoca[t] Dominicum Ihesum Christum, ut eum regio munimine tueatur, ne ab aduersariis infestantibus superetur (β 6.2.15-19).

¹⁰⁶ ...sede[t] in domo solus, animo impauido demonum pugnam expectans (β 6.2.25-7).

¹⁰⁷ Bonement en Deu esperant, / atent li quel vendrunt avant.

And maked his preier. (51)

Whereas the Latin version of Owein's journey into purgatory focusses on the equanimity with which he undertakes his quest, the emotional descriptions that the Middle English versions provide dramatise the heroic struggle that enduring fortitude requires. Thus, the Middle English translators of the *Navigatio* and the *Tractatus* drastically shorten their sources in the interest of narrative economy. While the translation of the *Navigatio* slightly mitigates Brendan's heroism by focussing on his role as an observer, both versions of the *Tractatus* that I address here emphasise the patient heroism of Owein.

In the *Lais*, as in the *Espurgatoire*, a new and unfamiliar realm of experience beckons to the knight, and the external events of the narrative become representative of an internal experience. The suffering of love functions much like purgatory in the *Espugatoire*; the proper response to love can result in a sort of secular paradise, such as one finds in the reunification of Guigemar and his lover, or in something decidedly more spiritual, as is the case in Guildelüec's, and, later, Eliduc's and Guilliadun's decision to adopt monasticism and live in spiritual love and friendship. In these narratives, the knights' martial role either fades into the background or is eclipsed completely by the theme of suffering. In the *Espurgatoire*, Marie translates the penitential suffering of a knight for an audience accustomed to chivalric heroes. Owein demonstrates his patience through his choosing to endure the penance of suffering in purgatory and through his subsequent struggle to maintain his equanimity while faced with both his own torment and that of others. His acceptance of purgatorial suffering is heroic, and because of his daring desire to undergo purgation while living, God grants him an act by which he can keep himself from being rendered completely powerless, like the numerous dead people

whom he sees along the way. Although the *Voyage* depicts the adventures not of a knight, but of a monk, the theme of a quest that proceeds through great suffering is common to both narratives. The enemy that confronts Brendan and his monks and Owein is not a physical one, but is instead the despair that threatens to overcome their trust in God's ability to overcome the impasses that they face. Benedeit's depiction of the emotions of Brendan further augments the monk's heroism, because they point to the protagonist's great suffering. Patient heroism therefore involves an extreme testing of the boundaries of providence, to which Brendan and Owein struggle to entrust themselves. In these stories, God does not simply empower his hero to battle against Saracens or monsters; rather, he manifests his transcendent will more subtly, yet more potently, by the providential overcoming of obstacles against which the hero is powerless to act. The landscape of heroism thereby becomes an internal one, in which the hero must battle against despair, and, while it contrasts the external, physical heroism that dominates fourteenth-century Middle English romances, it does contribute significantly to a horizon of expectations that informs *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Chapter IV: Enduring Fortitude and Martial Prowess in Middle English Romance

In the previous chapter, I have argued that the *Navigatio* and the *Tractatus* provide points of contact between external adventure and psycho-spiritual transformation, between the quests of errant knights and the monastic exploration of the internal cosmos. Marie de France's translation of the *Tractatus*, the *Espurgatoire*, further develops the interest in endurance that she establishes earlier in the *Lais*. Collectively, these works contribute to the development of the patient hero, a protagonist who is conventionally known for great martial ability, yet who pursues a quest that requires the patient endurance of circumstances beyond his control. The motifs of patience that the *Navigatio* and *Tractatus* manifest, I shall argue, do indeed influence Middle English romance; the conventions of patient heroism appear in the Middle English versions of *Guy of Warwick* (c. 1300), *Bevis of Hampton* (c. 1300), *Octavian* (c. 1350), and *Isumbras* (early fourteenth century), all of which were well-known in fourteenth-century England.¹ Certainly the religious didacticism of these texts can be defended by examining them through the lens of the crusading spirit,² yet they do receive clerical condemnations that question their spiritual value.

If it is true that these texts manifest patient heroism, then how does one account for their dismissal by William of Nassington in his *Speculum vitae* (composed after 1375

¹ On the dating of these texts, see W. R. J. Barron (1987) 238-9.

² For instance, on the religious didacticism of *Guy of Warwick*, see Dieter Mehl 223-24 and 227, David Klausner *passim*, Andrea Hopkins 70-118, and Roger Dalrymple 120-37, all of whom defend the romance, and Susan Crane 104-15, and Paul Price *passim*, both of whom question the depth and sincerity of the author's spiritual concerns. On spiritual interiority in *Bevis of Hampton*, see Corinne Saunders *passim*.

and before 1384),³ a work that originates in the virtues and vices tradition of the *Somme le Roi*? William writes,

I warne 3ow ferst at þe begynnyng,
 I wil make no veyn spekyng
 Of dedes of armes ne of amours,
 Os don mynstreles and oþer gestours,
 Þat make spekyng in many a place
 Of Octouian and Isanbrace
 And of many oþer gestes,
 And namely whan þei come to festes,
 Ne of Beus of Hamptoun,
 Þat was a knyht of gret renoun,
 Ne of sir Gy of Warewyk,
 Al þow it mowe som men like,
 I thenke my spekeng schal not be;
 For I holde þat nowht bot vanyte. (Quoted in Furrow 246)

One might assume that patient heroism is a useful way of redirecting the martial energies of knights if not towards spiritual ends, then at least away from feuds and campaigns, yet William does not regard the potentially devotional elements of these romances—such as the grace that the protagonists experience, the frequent prayers that they make, and the battles they wage in the name of Christendom—as being pronounced enough to offset their vain qualities, such as the knightly “amours” and, more importantly for this discussion, the “dedes of armes.” In order to understand one aspect of William’s

³ On the dating of the *Speculum vitae*, see Robert R. Raymo (2261).

dismissal of these romances, I shall reveal the continuing prevalence of patient heroism in the Middle English versions of the Brendan and Owein narratives, and then examine the ways in which the conventions of patient endurance animate these specific romances. I shall continue by considering the ways in which Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton, Octavian's son Florent, and Isumbras manifest aggressive fortitude and, especially, the manner in which conventions of patience are transformed in the service of an aesthetic that celebrates martial violence as the essence of fortitude. Finally, I shall conclude that William of Nassington regards these texts as, at best, spiritually useless partially because their consistent delight in the martial aspects of knighthood continually eclipses their depictions of patient heroism; even when these romances depict a protagonist undergoing penance, the narrative energy focusses on and amplifies the dramatic potential of violence.⁴ Thus, while the motif of patient heroism that the Brendan and Owein stories exemplify is active to varying degrees in these romances, the knights' martial prowess ultimately dominates these narratives, and, in spite of their allusions to the conventions of patience, the heroism manifested in these texts differs radically from that found in *SGGK*, since the authors of these earlier romances continually transform the potential for patient suffering into a celebration of aggressive fortitude. In Jaussian terms, this emphasis on aggression establishes the horizon of expectations, and completely eclipses the earlier romance convention of patient heroism, for Middle English romance during the first half of the fourteenth century.⁵

⁴ Of course, William regards these romances as fraught with other sorts of vanities as well; nevertheless, I am here most interested in why exactly he disregards the potentially devotional virtue of patience that the heroes of these romances allegedly manifest.

⁵ On the concept of the "horizon of expectations," See Hans Robert Jauss 22-5.

For the purpose of this thesis, the question I wish to examine is not whether these narratives can be salvaged as exemplary ones; rather, I am concerned with whether the conventions of patient heroism that these authors invoke receive any significant emphases in the narratives, or are they rapidly dismissed, like the conventions of aggression in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, so that these narrators might joyfully describe the violence of combat? If both fighting and suffering are essential to chivalric behaviour, if fortitude consists of both attacking *and* enduring, what happens to the latter, in which monastic and chivalric experience meet, when it is simultaneously invoked through conventions of patient heroism and silenced through the emphasised celebrations of aggression, which can only represent the Christian struggle metaphorically?⁶

The Middle English version of *Guy of Warwick* contains many opportunities for the representation of enduring heroism, even though it is a story about the great martial acts of a knight.⁷ The protagonist experiences life as an errant knight, a role that emphasises the aggressive aspect of fortitude in the doing of knightly deeds, and as a semi-anonymous pilgrim and a hermit, both of which, ideally, require submission to the will of God, and thus celebrate virtues associated with endurance. The late thirteenth- and fourteenth-century depictions of Guy of Warwick by composers of romances and authors of religious texts suggest Guy's status as both an aggressive, martial hero and an enduring, spiritual hero. On the martial side, the narrator of *Richard Coeur de Lion*, for

⁶ The crusades were an exception here, since they attempted to render literal the metaphorical violence of the Christian life.

⁷ *Guy of Warwick* is one of the most popular romances of the English Middle Ages. The earliest Middle English version was probably written around 1300, although the earliest complete manuscript witness is found in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330-1340). I have chosen to focus my discussion of *Guy of Warwick* on the version found in the Auchinleck Manuscript because the manuscript includes versions of three works that I discuss in this chapter, two of which, *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*, emphasise the martial aggression of their protagonists, and one of which, *Owain Miles*, depicts a purely enduring heroism.

instance, draws attention to Guy's great martial prowess by including Guy among other illustrious heroes such as King Arthur, Lancelot, Bevis of Hampton, Charlemagne, and Aeneas (6727-34), and in the *Laud Troy Book*, he appears among such knights as Bevis, Horn, Havelok, Tristan, Perceval, and Roland (15-21). Chaucer also mentions Guy in his *Sir Thopas*, along with, among others, Bevis, Horn and Libeaus Desconus (898-900). In all of these contexts, the narrators celebrate the doughty deeds of their protagonists by associating them with other overachieving martial agents. Guy appears also in the less flattering lists of William of Nassington and the author of *The Mirrur*, in which the authors regard the *gestes* of Octavian, Isumbras, Bevis, and Guy as vanity (35-48).⁸

According to Susan Crane, "the church's condemnation of the exemplary romances [among which one finds *Guy of Warwick*] along with the others indicates that contemporary observers recognized the subordination of religious to worldly impulses in romance" (94). While this may have been true for some representatives of the church, it certainly was not the case for all of them. While William of Nassington and the author of the *Mirrur* considered Guy spiritually irrelevant at best, a couple of writers concerned with religious instruction regarded him as useful for the teaching of virtues and vices. A brief poem of 1031 lines in the Auchinleck Manuscript, entitled the *Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, and a later version of the *Gesta Romanorum* both provide different possibilities for interpreting Guy's heroism. The former appears among the legendary, penitential, and general devotional materials that tend towards lay piety; these works comprise the first third of the manuscript and include *Owain Miles*. As Velma Bourgeois

⁸ See William of Nassington's *Speculum vitae* 35-48. For Guy's appearance in *The Mirrur*, see Furrow 254-5 and Kathleen Blumreich, *The Middle English 'Mirror': An Edition Based on Bodleian Library MS Holkham misc. 40*. I thank Melissa Furrow who, in 2002, allowed me to read the manuscript of her forthcoming book and thereby drew my attention to the romance lists in *Richard Coer de Lyon*, the *Laud Troy Book*, the *Speculum vitae* and *Sir Thopas*.

Richmond observes, “no details of Guy’s life are given; Guy provides a context for Alcuin’s moral teaching” (60). Guy seeks the sermon after the conversion experience that he has after he adjusts to domestic life:

... on a time [Guy] stod in pouht:
 Þe worldes blisse him pouhte noht.
 Þe world anon he þer forsok
 And to Ihesu Crist him tok,
 And louede God and his lore
 And in his seruise was euere more. (29-36)

That Guy was chosen by the anonymous author as a facilitator for an adaptation of Alcuin’s *Liber de virtutibus et vitiis* suggests a traditional respect for the hero as a pious knight. The story of Guy also appears in later versions of the *Gesta romanorum*, a collection of allegorised exempla that evolved and grew during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁹ The story of “Guido et Tyrius” (Oesterley 563-70) focusses on three episodes during Guy’s repentance and pilgrimage, which are ordained directly by Christ himself: his and Terry’s discovery of treasure, Guy’s being tossed into the sea on his bed while sleeping and the subsequent battle, and his return to England, where, incognito, he is served by his wife who has grievously lamented his departure. Guido is an allegorical representation of Christ and Tyrius represents man; thus, Guido’s deeds and sufferings represent the acts and experiences of Christ. While it may not be surprising that Guy

⁹ See Richmond’s detailed discussion of the depiction of Guy in the *Gesta romanorum*, 61-5. Although the story “Guido et Tyrius” does not seem to have circulated widely in the Anglo-Latin and Middle English versions, its presence in England is attested by British Museum MS Harley 2270, a fifteenth-century manuscript that Sir Frederic Madden describes as “the most complete and accurate copy [he] has seen” (Herrtage xvi). For the contents of Harley 2270, see Hermann Oesterley’s edition of the *Gesta romanorum*, pages 187-92.

should appear as an allegorical hero, it is interesting that the commentator regards him primarily as an example of *constantia*, a virtue more closely associated with patient endurance than with martial aggression. Still, as Richmond notes, “The tale of Guido emphasises not privation but active service with the succor of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, appealing especially to lay piety” (65). The focus is not on constancy in tribulation but, rather, on constancy in martial aggression.

Although the commentator in the *Gesta romanorum* regards Guy as an example of endurance, the author of *Guy of Warwick* permits us only once to see his protagonist in a situation of vulnerability. Instead, he consistently portrays Guy as a force of liberation for other characters. For example, when his friend Tirri is imprisoned by the villainous duke Otoun, Guy uses guile to gain Otoun’s trust and thereby be appointed to oversee his dungeon. Guy enters the dungeon voluntarily, in disguise, and frees his friend. As I have argued in chapter two, the suffering hero experiences an impasse that can only be overcome through his submission to a higher will. According to Roger Dalrymple, Guy becomes a suffering hero when the duke Berard, who has been oppressing his old friend Tirri, has Guy’s bed thrown into the sea while the knight is resting between days of combat against the wicked duke.¹⁰ Dalrymple writes,

...the role of Providence in the subsequent preservation of Guy is emphasised by the Auchinleck text. Whatever his ability to control his own situation elsewhere in the poem, in this episode at least Guy is the passive protagonist awaiting deliverance. The hero’s ‘power of action’, considered a crucial factor in establishing the generic border between romance and legend, is here much diminished. (128)

¹⁰ See also Andrea Hopkins 112-13.

Here, the poet uses an image of the “rudderless boat,” which is a convention of patient heroism, in order to reveal Guy’s vulnerability to providence. When Guy becomes aware of his predicament, he invokes God’s power over the elements: “‘Lord,’ seyð Gij, ‘God almi3t, / þat winde, & water, & al þing di3t, / On me haue now pite!’” (197.1-3). After Guy justifies himself to God by claiming that he fights for “Noiþer gold no fe, / For no cite no castel” (197.6-7) but for his friend whom he loves, we hear “Hou [Iesu] saued þe pilgrims liif” (198.2). Nevertheless, before the fisherman whom Christ sends saves Guy, the knight must first invoke his martial identity in order to be saved. The fisherman, puzzled by the appearance of a man floating on a bed, asks, “What artow say me son?” (198.9). Guy identifies himself as “þe pilgrim / þat fou3t wiþ þe douke Berardin / For Tirri þe hendi kni3t” (200.1-3). Guy is a pilgrim, a penitent, but he is particularly a wandering soldier who fights for friendship and justice, and, presumably, he must use this identity to assure the fisherman that he is neither a ghost nor a villain. In the whole of *Guy of Warwick*, this very brief episode, the sole appearance of the impasse, is soon forgotten after the amplified violence that follows it.

Like that of *Guy of Warwick*, the author of *Bevis of Hampton* depicts an episode in which he uses a convention associated with patient heroism. The Middle English *Bevis of Hampton*, like *Guy of Warwick*, derives from an Anglo-Norman original. The romance appears in Middle English c. 1300, and the earliest surviving witness is the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330-1340).¹¹ During the narrative, Bevis experiences imprisonment in a deep dungeon, an episode that functions in a manner similar to Brendan’s passing of the island of hell or Owein’s journey through purgatory; however, whereas the two former

¹¹ On the dating of the earliest Middle English version of *Bevis of Hampton*, see W. R. J. Barron (1987) 238.

protagonists cannot possibly resolve their crises through aggression, Bevis can,¹² and it is in this episode that the author radically transforms a conventional image of patient heroism and replaces it with aggression. In the lists of romance heroes found in William of Nassington's *Speculum vitae* (43-5), *Richard Coer de Lyon* (6730), Chaucer's *Tale of Sir Thopas* (899), and the *Laud Troy Book* (15), Bevis and Guy consistently appear in succession. Unlike *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton* pretends to be about nothing other than martial prowess.¹³ In the former, the protagonist suffers and is motivated by lovesickness and thus one can discern a greater influence of *roman courtois*. Furthermore, the hero seems to act within the idiom of hagiography by going on a pilgrimage and ending his life as a hermit, even if the particular events of his pilgrimage are marked by a crusading spirit. In spite of these differences, Bevis comes just as close as Guy does to the patient heroism of Brendan and Owein, inasmuch as the narrative allows him to become vulnerable.

Octavian and *Isumbras* manifest more potential for patient heroism than *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* do. *Octavian* depicts both heroic endurance and aggression.¹⁴ Indeed, the first section of the narrative emphasises suffering through the

¹² For my discussion of Bevis's aggressive escape from prison and for more on its relationship to the concept of the impasse, see pages 122-5 below.

¹³ While Saunders convincingly argues that one must understand the successes of Bevis's martial prowess as reflections of his internal dispositions, that is, of his proper desire, will, and intention (see Saunders *passim*), my concern here is not to investigate whether *Bevis of Hampton* can be read spiritually, but to establish whether the conventions of patient endurance that it invokes significantly influence the overall characterisation of the protagonist and the narrative. The crusading spirit that influences the Middle English *Bevis of Hampton* has been identified by Susan Crane, who notes that "Christian faith remains a subsidiary aspect of a knighthood whose goals are aggressively secular and political" (105). Whether its concerns are sacred or secular, Bevis is a purely martial hero, and, as I shall argue, the narrator asserts this aggressive heroism even when he introduces the potential for patient endurance.

¹⁴ The two Middle English versions of the story of Octavian, the so-called northern and southern one, are composed around the middle of the fourteenth-century, but the earliest surviving text is the northern version, which appears in Lincoln Cathedral Library Thornton MS 91 (c. 1420s-1453). For this reason, I have decided to discuss the northern version. On the dating of the earliest Middle English version of

theme of exile, a particularly potent motif for depicting the virtue of patience under extreme circumstances. In *Octavian*, the empress becomes a calumniated queen;¹⁵ after the emperor condemns her to death, she reveals her patience through her humble acceptance of her sentence:

Scho sayde, "My lorde, for Jhesu sake,
Graunt me ane orysoune to make
Till Hym that all sall welde,
And then of me ye do youre wyll,
The dede that I am ordeynede till
Thereto I will me yelde." (247-52)

In this clever speech, the empress asks the emperor's permission to speak to God, who, she reminds him, is the absolute ruler of the cosmos. She then returns to the emperor's will, which she has subtly distinguished from that of God, and patiently submits. Thus, she gently reminds him of the cosmic order, in which his will is not absolute, and then subjects herself to providence, which, she subtly suggests, may or may not be connected to her husband's will. After an ape and a lioness abduct her two children, the empress complains, "This lyfe may I noghte dowre!" Nevertheless, the next stanza begins with yet another prayer that further characterises her patience: "This sorowe, Lorde, that I am in / Full wele I wote, es for my syn; / Welcome be alle Thi sande" (400-2).¹⁶ A particularly

Octavian, see and *Octavian*, see W. R. J. Barron (1987) 239. On the dating of Lincoln MS 91, see Frances McSparran's edition of *Octavian*, page 3.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this motif, see Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: Gordian Press, 1927).

¹⁶ The exact nature of the empress's sin is unclear; she is referring most likely to a general state of sin that characterises the Christian understanding of the human condition.

potent image of patience occurs when Octavian's wife enters the lioness's den in order to retrieve her son. After she hastens to the lioness's den,

The lyones thurgh Goddis grace,
 When scho sawe the lady face,
 Full debonorly up sche stode.
 Thugh the myghte of Mary mylde
 Scho sufferd that lady to take hir childe
 And scho forthe with hir yode. (463-8)

The empress's act is not daring in a martial sense, since she does not intend to fight the lion; instead, it manifests the degree of her enduring fortitude, since, without any potential for aggression, she subjects herself to destruction in order to rescue her child.

The strength of the Virgin Mary restrains the lion from action, and the empress's fortitude inspires such intervention.

In several respects, the plot of *Sir Isumbras* is analogous to that of *Octavian*. First, a family is divided; second, the children are abducted by wild animals; and, third, the family is reunited through battle. However, the dramatic situation of the former arises through the penitential suffering of the protagonist, and the overall plot thereby provides a potentially greater emphasis on endurance.¹⁷ *Isumbras* is a great sufferer and a fierce warrior. The narrator provides much more emphasis on the endurance of the protagonist than narrators of *Sir Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton* do, and, thus, Diana T.

¹⁷ *Sir Isumbras* was composed in Middle English around the same time as *Octavian* (c. 1350). The earliest witness is a fragment in Gray's Inn MS 20 (1350); Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 175 (c. 1425-50), the version that I discuss in this chapter, corresponds most closely to the early version, according to Harriet Hudson (11). On the dating of the Middle English version of *Isumbras*, see W. R. J. Barron (1987) 239.

Childress classifies *Sir Isumbras* as “secular hagiography.”¹⁸ She compares Isumbras to other heroes: “Another trait shared by Sir Gowther, Robert of Sicily, and Sir Isumbras is their passivity. The romance hero pursues his goals energetically, even aggressively, but the protagonist of secular legend must patiently endure humiliation, deprivation, and suffering” (317). *Sir Isumbras* does indeed explore a knight’s penitential suffering. We learn, in common Middle English romance fashion, that Isumbras is a “doughty man of dede” (9), and that he is a “... mekil man and long / With armes grete and body strong” (13-14). After providing such physical evidence of the hero’s prowess, the narrative conventionally shifts to his courtly manners, paying particular attention to his largesse: “Off curtesye he was kyng / And of his mete never nothyng / In worlde was non so free” (22-4). Thus, in the two traditionally important spheres of knightly conduct, Isumbras excels; however, he lacks the general Christian virtue of humility: “Swyche pryde in his herte was broughte, / On Jhesu Cryst thoghte he nought / Ne on His names sevene” (31-3). Pride is the vice through which one attributes one’s success to oneself, instead of God. Isumbras does not recognise Jesus as the source of his being, and so the latter intervenes: “So longe he levede in that pryde / That Jhesu wolde no lenger abyde; / To hym he sente a stevenne” (34-6). Jesus, who, as God, is traditionally patient with sinners, chooses no longer to “abyde,” and resolves to send suffering to Isumbras in order that he might learn humility through patient endurance. Jesus, using the voice of a bird, allows Isumbras to decide whether he wishes to suffer in youth or old age, and the latter considers the matter carefully and prudently chooses youth, since he will be better able to endure poverty as a healthy young man.

¹⁸ On *Sir Isumbras* as a text that negotiates the generic expectations of both secular romance and spiritual didacticism, see Dieter Mehl’s discussion of “Homiletic Romances” (120-2) and Hanspeter Schelp 61.

Isumbras's great suffering inspires much pathos, and the sense of Isumbras's loss is intensified by his inability to express himself martially. He manifests Job-like patience after the loss of his steed, hawks, hounds, livestock, and home: "...God bothe geveth and taketh / And at His wyll ryches maketh / And pore men also" (95-6). The pathos that the now-impooverished family inspires occupies seven stanzas (97-162). Although Isumbras advises them that they are suffering for their sins ("All the sorow that we ben inne, / Hit is for owre wykked synne; / Worthy we be well more" (112-14)) and thus should not express grief, the "dolfull syghte" (97) of his family, naked from their quick escape from their burning home, the lamentations that their friends make at the sight of their recent impoverishment, and their crying for hunger after six days without food or drink all heighten the emotional intensity of the scene and thereby emphasise the theme of suffering. Furthermore, the abduction of Isumbras's children and wife suggests his inability to assert his will martially; the narrative strips him of any evidence of his knightly prowess, and leaves him and his family completely at the mercy of forces beyond his control.

The climax of his embracing patience occurs after the loss of his youngest child, and it is through this event that Jesus temporarily facilitates Isumbras's return to acts of prowess. Although he has not reached a physical impasse, he does not know how to proceed at this point, and implores Jesus to take action for him:

Offte was hym wele and woo,
 But never so sory as he was thoo;
 He sette on a ston.
 He sayde: "Lord, ful woo is me,

I have lost wyff and my children three.

Now am I lefte alone.

Jesu that weredest in hevene coroun

Wysse me the way to sum toun,

Al amis am I gone. (364-72)

After he prays for deliverance from his being lost in the wilderness, Isumbras discovers a town, in which he finds work at a smithy. Although the opportunity for his reentry into the possibility for warfare is given to him by grace, he does not simply find arms mysteriously awaiting him or take them from another less worthy knight; instead, he spends over seven years labouring at the smithy, and his arms are a product of his own hard work: “By that he hadde hym armes dyght, / Al that fel for a knyght / To batayle whenne he wolde goo” (397-9). Such a period of fruitful activity prepares him for his battle with the sultan. Having learned patience and humility, Isumbras is now again able to act martially. At this point, as I argue below, aggressive fortitude begins to eclipse the enduring sort that characterises much of the first half of the narrative.

As I have been arguing, the ideal of patient heroism appears at least potentially, if not overtly, in *Guy of Warwick*, *Sir Bevis of Hampton*, *Octavian*, and *Isumbras*. If patient heroism were properly actualised in these narratives, William of Nassington’s severe criticism of these works might seem less justified, since they could be easily salvaged as exemplary narratives, even if they are fictional. Nevertheless, the celebration of aggression and the consistent emphasis on martial prowess that these works manifest undermine their potential for redirecting martial energies to patient ends. I shall now investigate how these narratives continually celebrate the audacious aggressive acts that

the protagonists commit when such heroes are establishing their worth as knights, and I shall conclude by revisiting the four romances one last time in order to show how aggressive fortitude finally eclipses the potential for endurance.

Guy's rashness is an essential element of his fortitude. According to Andrea Hopkins, "...in each successive adventure greed for fame or desire for revenge lead Guy to undertake increasingly reckless feats alone, much to the anxiety of his friends" (98). While commenting on the violence of the first half of the romance, Paul Price points to the narrator's celebration of Guy's violent nature: "The more sensational features of battle have been related with a seemingly inexhaustible narratorial enthusiasm; indeed, authorial commendation frequently goes hand-in-hand with acts of brutal violence" (102). If heroic narratives describe the martial deeds and sufferings of a protagonist, the narrator of *Guy of Warwick* celebrates the former at the expense of the latter. Guy impulsively strikes his enemy Otoun during the reconciliation between the duke Segyn, whom Guy has been assisting, and the Emperor of Germany, an aggressive act that requires the intervention of the barons in order to avoid a further escalation of violence (2743-54).¹⁹ After a sultan commands his men to seize Guy, the latter, during his escape, pauses to behead the sultan and then to pick up the head, after which, "Wel hastiliche he went hym, y-wis, / Of þe Sarra3ins adrede he is" (3969-70). Although God saves Guy through a dream that he sends to his accomplice, Herhaud (4017-24), the narrative accentuates Guy's audacity and Herhaud's heroic routing of the sultan's pursuing forces instead of God's grace. The sultan's head becomes a trophy and a warning, and the emperor thanks

¹⁹ In Aristotelian thought, virtue is found in the middle of two extremes. Fortitude, for instance, exists between rashness and cowardice. However, this standard of virtue does not apply in these romances, in which the authors celebrate rash behaviour.

Guy profusely for the present (4091). Thus, the narrator celebrates extreme boldness and occasional rashness as admirable elements of heroism.

The narrator of *Bevis of Hampton* also celebrates his protagonist's audacity. Bevis first appears in the story as a child, around the age of seven, whose mother has arranged his father's death, and a similar fate for him. Saber, his teacher, is unwilling to kill Bevis, and instead arranges for him to be a shepherd and, eventually, to live with an earl on the continent until he is old enough to return to England and regain his proper inheritance. Although Bevis is grateful for Saber's help, he cannot endure his temporary humiliation:

Beues was herde vpon þe doun
 He lokede homward to þe toun,
 Þat scholde ben his;
 ... "Lord," a seide, "on me þow mone!
 Ne was ich ones an erles sone
 And now am herde?" (379-87)

While Saber has arranged the future possibility for Bevis to take revenge on his mother and her lover, the Emperor of Germany, his youthful impatience drives him to reject his brief loss of status and assert his right recklessly. In a state of rage, he fiercely attacks the emperor:

Beues was ni3 wod for grame,
 For a clepede him foul be name,
 And to him a wond;
 For al þat weren in þe place,
 Þries a smot him wiþ is mace

And wiþ is honde. (439-44)

Bevis attacks the emperor with such force and aggression that none of the knights dares to seize him as he escapes. The attack itself foreshadows his great prowess as an adult. The narrative suggests, through Saber's response, that the attack is a rash one: "'Beues!' queþ Saber, 'þow ert to blame: / Þe leuedi wile now do me schame / For þine sake!'" (469-71); still, it simultaneously celebrates the attack's cheekiness as originating in the still untamed virtue of an aggressive hero.

Bevis's heroic audacity is confirmed during his first battle, which occurs on Christmas day during his sixteenth year. The episode begins with a note of playfulness; the Saracens tease Bevis for his ignorance concerning his religious tradition, and the Christian knight responds to their mocking with a challenge (613-18). Bevis does not easily defeat his enemies. At first, the narrative tells how he suffered many "depe wondes and sore" before finally arousing his courage and slaying fifty Saracens. This act is rash not only because of the terrible odds that the hero faces, but also because of the anger that it arouses in the Saracen king, Ermin. His daughter Josian placates his wrath by entreating him to allow Bevis to report his side of the story. She sends messengers to him, but he again responds violently:

3if 3e ner masegers,

Ich wolde 3ow sle, losengers!

I nele rise o fot fro þe grounde,

For speke with an heþene hounde. (689-92)

Even though Bevis faces the likelihood of death, he responds to the possibility of survival with anger and aggression, and is calmed only by Josian's direct care for his wounds.

As an adult, Bevis's fortitude continues to border on recklessness. After his arrival in Damascus, where he has been sent ostensibly to deliver a message to Brademond, whom he had defeated for King Ermin, he proceeds to champion his God in the manner of a crusader. When he sees a group of worshippers leave a mosque,

Beues of is palfrei ali3te

And ran to her mameri ful ri3te

And slou3 here prest, þat þer was in,

And þrew here godes in þe fen

And lou3 hem alle þere to scorn. (1353-6)

This event contributes significantly to the image of Bevis as a defender of the faith. By the standard of heroic behaviour that the narrative presents, it is a forgivably rash act, much like his first battle. However, in this case, the act is one of pure aggression. Because Bevis seems to encounter no resistance in his despoiling of the mosque, there is no implied complementary act of endurance to balance his aggression; he attacks unarmed worshippers. His determination to maintain his status as a knight of marvellous prowess becomes comical (one hopes!) when Josian, fearing that Bevis will be killed by a lion, attempts to assist him:

Beues bad hire go sitte adoun,

And swor be God in Trinite,

Boute 3he lete þat lioun be,

A wolde hire sle in þat destresse

Ase fain ase þe liounesse. (2474-8)

Finally, the narrative's celebration of Bevis's martial aggression appears clearly during his battle in London near the end of the romance. When the knights that are pursuing Bevis point out that he cannot defeat them and that he should yield, he responds,

... Ich 3elde me

To God, þat sit in Trinite!

To non oþer man I nel me 3elde,

While þat ich mai me wepne welde! (4429-32)

Here, Bevis recognises that, by necessity, he must submit to God. However, he manifests his heroism not by his capacity for suffering, but by his great martial ability, and he refuses to be subject to anyone as long as he bears arms.

While the narrator of *Bevis of Hampton* elsewhere emphasises the endurance of battle more than that of *Guy of Warwick* does, he still does not provide any episodes that further develop the conventions of patient heroism that are invoked in the narrative. During Bevis's first confrontation, in which he kills fifty knights, his enemies "3af him wondes mani on / Þour3 þe flesch in to þe bon" (627-8); after he defeats the Saracens, "Beues hom be-gan to ride, / His wondes bledde be ech side" (645-6). The patience that aggression requires is present in the narrative, as is aggression without patience. However, what is lacking in *Bevis of Hampton* is patience without aggression.

Like that of *Bevis of Hampton*, the narrator of *Octavian* celebrates his youthful protagonist's audacity. Although the first section of *Octavian* presents the enduring fortitude of the empress, the narrative shifts its focus after five hundred lines, and instead turns to the story of Octavian's son Florent, who is to become the martial hero of the romance. Most of the remaining fourteen-hundred lines portray the youthful exploits of

Florent, as he ascends from an unknown orphan, to an ill-suited apprentice, to a courageous knight. Only the last two-hundred lines are left for the reentry of the young Octavian and the empress and their reunion with the emperor and Florent. The first action that characterises Florent is his rash courage. After he is abducted by a band of outlaws, the baby Florent responds mirthfully to his potentially perilous situation: "Those outlawes sett tham on a grene, / The child thay laide tham bytwene, / And it fast on tham loghe" (556-8). Florent's behaviour continually draws attention to his martial birthright. First, he trades the oxen belonging to his foster father Clement for a fine falcon; second, he spends Clement's money on a war horse, and exhibits largesse by paying more than the asking price. Finally, he resolves to assert his knightly prowess by fighting Arageous, a giant whom the sultan has brought to assist him in his campaign to sack Paris.

Florent's initial battle is characterised by his absolute confidence in his own martial prowess; he becomes so intoxicated by his victory that he risks his life further in another act of bravado that is intended to woo Marsabelle, the sultan's daughter. Because he must attend the battle armed with his foster father's tarnished chain mail and sword that has rusted into its scabbard, Florent's appearance does not inspire any confidence in his ability; nevertheless, this arousal of the doubts of his fictional audience proclaims his prowess with even greater force when he succeeds in defeating Arageous. After almost effortlessly killing the giant, Florent, "the childe" (1044), beheads him and immediately brings the head to Marsabelle, whom he woos through the great prowess that she perceives in him. He attempts to abduct her, but the sultan's men stop him, and he wounds many of them while escaping. Because of Florent's great martial exploits, "The hethyn men were so adrede, / To Cleremont with the may thay flede, / There the

Sowdanne laye" (1097-99). The young knight's behaviour borders on reckless when he fabricates a warning to the sultan in order to approach Marsabelle. After she asks about the status of the person who tried to abduct her, Florent reveals his identity in front of the sultan and his knights: "'Lady,' he sayse, 'he es nother lesse ne more, / Than it my selfe wore'" (1364-5). This act results in yet another display of his remarkable prowess; the battle reaches ridiculous proportions, yet Florent manages to justify his reckless aggression through his great prowess. He decapitates some of his enemies as if he was hitting "foteballe[s]" (1387). After his sword breaks, he levels more than two hundred enemies with a bench. Also, during the battle the next day, he proudly displays Marsabelle's sleeve on his spear in order to draw attention to his identity. Thus, Florent delights in drawing the collective force of the Saracens' anger towards himself, a tendency through which the narrative celebrates his youthful confidence and magnificent prowess.

Although the narrator does refer occasionally to Florent's courtly manners, it is his potential for combat that characterises his heroism. When Florent returns to Paris after defeating Arageous, the entire city celebrates his great courtesy and prowess: "He was so curtayse and so bolde / That alle hym lovede, yonge and olde, / For his doghety dede" (1193-5). Because of his knightly ability, the emperor invites Florent and Clement to dinner, "and ever [the emperor] thoghte in his mode / The childe was comen of gentill blode" (1241-2). Although Florent's courtly manners, which the narrative contrasts starkly with those of Clement, partially facilitate his recognition, the primary inspiration for the emperor's rediscovery of his son is the latter's great martial prowess. Finally, the battle in which the emperor is taken prisoner suggests martial failure, yet it further

emphasises Florent's prowess. In this case, Florent's rashness results from his love for Marsabelle instead of his desire to prove himself as a knight. The Parisians march bravely towards the Saracens, yet "Florent thoghte on the feyre maye, / To the batelle wente he not that day" (1633-4). Florent's absence has terrible consequences for the emperor: "And for that Florent was not there / The heythen folke the bettur were; / The batelle thay venquyscht thore" (1645-7). Because the emperor and kings are taken prisoner, Florent, when he returns to fight, is unable to defeat the Saracens; still, the only way they are able to capture him is by slaying his horse: "Thore was no Sarazene of myghte ne mayne / That myght with strengthe stande hym agayne, / Whills that he hade his stede" (1654-6).

According to the moralists, rashness is an undesirable extreme of aggressive fortitude, yet these romances, with the exception of *Isumbras*, celebrate it as a youthful extravagance. Ultimately, aggressive fortitude eclipses the potential for patient heroism that is inherent in these narratives, a trend that is confirmed by their requiring a resolution of the plot through external violence and not an internal act of faith or repentance. That the authors of the *Speculum Gy de Warewyke* and the *Gesta romanorum* place Guy in the context of either listening to a sermon or functioning as an exemplum for one suggests a potentiality in the romance that is not satisfactorily actualised without clerical interpretation. While Guy may indeed renounce the pleasures of this life, go on a pilgrimage, and eventually live his final days as a hermit devoted completely to penance, the brave endurance that these voluntary privations imply is not the major concern of the narrative; rather, the plot focusses decidedly on the protagonist's great martial accomplishments. This is not to suggest that suffering and its acceptance are not elements of Guy's heroism. Indeed, endurance is suggested by Guy's extensive travels, both as a

knight and as a pilgrim, by his receiving wounds in battle, by his negotiation of the powerful emotions of romantic love, friendship, regret, and fear, and by his ascetic life; however, these causes of suffering and their effect on Guy tend either to be abbreviated or merely implied.

The majority of Guy's adventures consist of his assisting the unjustly besieged, the initial inspiration for which is his desire to demonstrate his martial prowess and thereby acquire the love of Felice. He subscribes to the chivalric code of assisting the weaker party in a dispute, yet this code begins to appear formulaic when Guy rescues a lion from an attacking dragon. Although the lion and the dragon have religious connotations of Christ and Satan,²⁰ the narrative does not pause to reflect on any moral implication of this battle, even if one is latent; it states simply that Guy helped the lion because it was the disadvantaged combatant.²¹ His method of resolving such battles is almost always martial, with the notable exception of his diplomatic resolution of the disagreement between Segyn and the emperor (2449-794). Nevertheless, he places the emperor in a position of political necessity by delivering Segyn's surrender while the emperor is out hunting with a few men and is therefore in a position of vulnerability.

Both Guy and Felice recognise that the source of his great fortitude is his erotic love for Felice. After Guy returns to England after having earned great renown at a tournament, he again asks Felice to reciprocate his love; however, she refuses to marry him because of the potential threat of married life to his prowess; if they were to marry,

²⁰ See, for instance, the lion and the dragon as they appear in the tradition of the Bestiaries.

²¹ Compare Chrétien de Troyes' "Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion," in which the protagonist helps the lion "qu'a venimeus ne a felon / ne doit an feire se mal non" (3361-2); "for a venomous and wicked creature deserves only harm" (trans. William W. Kibler). See also Perceval's decision in the *Queste del Saint Graal* to help a lion defeat a serpent: "...[il] pense que il aidera au lyon por ce que plus est naturelx beste et de plus gentil ordre que li serpenz" (94); "...he decided to help the lion, as being the more natural animal and of a nobler order than the serpent" (114-15, trans. Matarasso).

she warns, "Sleuþe þe schuld ouercome" (1139).²² Although Guy's desire continually to prove his prowess continues until his marriage to Felice, it is complicated, and ultimately defeated, by a peculiar awareness of the cost of such love:

Now haþ Gij miche sorwe made,
 For his felawes he is vnglade.
 'Allas,' quod Gij, 'felawes dere!
 So wele doand kni3tes 3e were.
 Al to iuel it fel to me,
 Felice, þo y was sent to serue þe;
 For þi loue, Felice, the feir may,
 Þe flour of kni3tes is slain þis day.' (1553-60)

Here, Guy reveals an awareness of the consequences of chivalric prowess based on erotic desire, and this realization comes to fruition shortly after his marriage. While it creates the possibility for an exploration of Guy as a suffering hero, the narrative continues to emphasise his martial prowess, both before and after his conversion. In other words, while the intentionality of, that is, the motivation for, Guy's heroism changes, its mode of expression does not.

Guy's conversion scene further suggests the possibility that he will become a suffering hero. However, even if voluntary suffering is an aspect of his subsequent pilgrimage, the narrative continues to emphasise his martial prowess. After he succeeds in his quest to marry Felice, he has a moment of revelation while gazing at the stars:

On Iesu omnipotent,

²² For a sources and analogues of this sentiment, see Chrétien de Troyes' "Erec et Enide," in which Enide reveals her concerns regarding Erec's prowess after their marriage; see also the *Queste del Saint Graal*, in which Lancelot attributes his prowess to his love for Guinevere, whom he cannot marry.

Pat all his honour hadde him lent,
 He pou3t wiþ dreri mode;
 Hou he hadde euer been strong werroure,
 For Iesu loue, our saueour,
 Neuer dede he gode.
 Mani man he hadde slayn wiþ wrong. (21.4-10)

Guy's realisation here relates directly to his prowess; Jesus is the source of his virtue, yet he has not dedicated his virtue to the service of God:

For neuer in al mi liif biforn
 For him þat bar þe croun of þorn
 Gode dede dede y nare;
 Bot wer & wo ichaue wrou3t,
 & mani a man to grounde y-brou3t. (22.4-9)

He recognises what the momentum of the narrative to this point already suggests, that is, that his heroism is based entirely on his exceptional, yet misdirected, martial prowess. Even though he has been a source of retribution for his men who were slain by Otoun and has continually come to the assistance of the wrongfully besieged and dispossessed, his previous deeds do not qualify as good ones performed for the love of God. Furthermore, as Price notes, Guy's acts of violence have been celebrated by the narrator: "the more sensational features of battle have been related with a seemingly inexhaustible narratorial enthusiasm; indeed, authorial commendation frequently goes hand-in-hand with brutal acts of violence" (102).²³ In order to atone for these heretofore celebrated violent deeds,

²³ Hopkins contends that Guy unfairly kills Florentine's son (98-100), and Fewster contends that Guy's killing of Florentine's son provides context for his later conversion (91); nevertheless, Guy does act in self-

Guy resolves to suffer as an impoverished pilgrim for the rest of his life: "For his loue ichil now wende / Barfot to mi liues ende, / Mine sinnes for to bete" (264-6). He thinks of his penitential acts of voluntary suffering as *dedes*: "Of alle þe dedes y may do wel / God graunt þe, lef, þat haluendel" (26.9-10). He offers his beloved Felice half of the merit of his penance, a promise that he regards as appropriate, given that he considers his acts of aggression as having been committed in order to attain her love.

Although the penance that Guy undertakes is characterised by endurance, the narrative continually emphasises the martial experiences that he continues to have. Before he departs, he suggests that he will imprison himself in asceticism in order to free himself from the destruction he has caused: "Þat ich haue wiþ my bodi wrou3t / Wiþ my bodi it schal be bou3t, / To bote me of þat bale" (29.10-12). His self-imposed penance will consist of his wandering barefoot, and he does not imagine himself waging war on infidels for the love of God, as he implies by his leaving his sword behind: "'Leman,' he seyð, 'haue here mi brond, / & take mi sone it in his hond, / Astow art hende & fre" (32.1-3). In other words, his penance is to consist of endurance, and not further feats of prowess committed with a different intention. However, after he leaves, the narrative focusses briefly on the grief of Felice and her father and Herhaud's unsuccessful search (34-43), and then returns directly to a scene in which Guy is required to pledge his martial prowess. It says nothing about his suffering as a pilgrim, but simply, and economically, states that he visited many places, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem: "He walke about wiþ glad chere / Þurch mani londes fer & nere, / Þer god him walde

defence, even if the force he uses perhaps exceeds that which is required by the situation. Furthermore, the act of braining the knight with his horn contributes further to the spectacle of violence that the poem celebrates.

spede" (44.4-7).²⁴ This passage functions as the inverse of the passage in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in which Gawain battles giants and monsters in the forest (720-25); both authors nod toward the expected conventions and then return to their respective emphases. While the passing reference to providence points to Guy's role as a pilgrim who has submitted his will to that of God, he continues to seek more sources of holiness "To winne him heuen mede" (44.12), a search that brings him to Jonas, whose suffering he relieves through battle.

The episode of Guy and the giant, Amoraunt, in which Guy's anger assists his martial victory, is a rather long one; it occupies 93 full stanzas, including Jonas's narrative of the events that preceded his search for Guy and arrival in Antioch. Guy suffers terrible blows from the giant, yet his suffering serves to increase his anger, the result of which is an increase in his prowess. After the giant slays his steed, Guy stands up, "as man þat was agremed in hert" (102.2). He begins with a prayer to god to preserve him from the giant; however, his prayer turns into an epic boast, "...Pat dint ... was iuel sett. / Wele schal y com out of þi dett / 3if þat I libbe may" (102.10-12), after which he reciprocates by killing Amoraunt's steed. Amoraunt surprises Guy with his strength a second time, and Guy prays again; however, this second prayer functions more as an exclamation:

... lord ful of grace,

Neuer dint of kni3t non

No mi3t me are knele don

In no stede þer y was. (106.6-9)

²⁴ This passage functions as the inverse of the passage in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in which Gawain battles giants and monsters in the forest (720-25); the authors nod toward the expected conventions and then return to their respective emphases.

Although Guy suffers from the blows of Amoraunt, there is no indication that he relies on grace more than he has in any of his previous battles. Guy's great endurance and the intervention of grace are perhaps implied aspects of the battle but, still, the narrator focusses on the aggression of the battle itself, and not on the endurance that it requires.²⁵ It is a great deed, a *geste*, and the source of Guy's great endurance is not the virtue patience but, rather, it is anger: "...when Gij feld him so smite / He was wroþ, 3e mow wite: To Amoraunt he gan reken" (119.1-3). Here, one can discern a clear example of Aquinas's notion of how the passions assist aggressive fortitude.²⁶ Unlike patience, which requires the rational control of the passions, aggressive fortitude uses the anger in order to achieve a martial victory.

With the exception of the few stanzas dedicated to Guy's brief life and death as a hermit, his battles with the villainous Berard and Colbrond occupy the remainder of the romance, and that these extended battles occur during Guy's spiritual wandering further emphasises the narrative's predominant interest in the hero's martial prowess.²⁷ When Guy definitively concludes the martial episodes of his life by retiring to the forest, he lives for only nine months before he receives notice from the angel Michael that he will die in eighteen days. That Guy dies so soon after his retreat to the hermitage suggests that travelling and fighting are essential to his identity. Guy's life in the hermitage signifies a type of domesticity that contrasts his previous adventures as an errant knight and a

²⁵ Providence does indeed sustain Guy throughout the romance; however, the narrative tends to refer to its action in passing remarks, such as the description of how Jesus saved Guy through a fisherman (198.2-5). The action of God is certainly mentioned in the narrative, but is nearly completely overshadowed by depictions of Guy's great prowess.

²⁶ See chapter two, pages 34-5. For the difficulty of Gawain's quest that does not allow anger, see chapter seven, page 221 ff.

²⁷ Although, as Fewster observes, the "Colbrond fight ... is given more nationalistic and pietistic weight [than the Dragon fight]" (85), it does not advance Guy's potential as a suffering hero, a possibility that is introduced through the theme of the penitential journey.

pilgrim; Guy overcomes the threat to his prowess that marriage portends by becoming a pilgrim and thereby discovering more opportunities for battle. The domesticity that the hermitage offers signifies the end of his martial adventures: “Pan þu3t sir Gij anon / Pat he wald neuer þennes gon / Per whiles he war oliue” (283.1-3). Thus, the end of Guy’s journeys, the end of his martial adventures, and the end of his life all coincide. Guy dies as a saint, as both the ecclesiastical and angelic authorities suggest; however, the qualities that suggest his holiness, such as his great capacity for endurance and election by God, are overshadowed by the narrative’s tendency to celebrate Guy as an example of perfect martial prowess. His primary virtue is not his ability to suffer willingly but, rather, to fight valiantly and thereby correct injustice.

The impasse is a plot device through which patient heroism is manifested, and it is the presence of an impasse that potentially separates Guy’s heroism from that of Bevis. Such a motif is at work when the protagonist can do nothing, either literally or metaphorically, except rely on supernatural intervention for deliverance. In the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* and *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory*, impasses appear frequently, and the characters learn faith by remembering that they are subject to providence. A symbolic act of trust in the protection of providence, which usually occurs in the form of a prayer, is that which ensures their deliverance. Although the narrator of *Guy of Warwick* occasionally reminds the audience that God protects Guy and helps him fight, and although Guy himself undertakes a pilgrimage, a type of journey that, under normal circumstances, ought to provide many narrative opportunities for miraculous deliverances, the romance makes little use of the impasse. With the brief and unremarkable exception of Guy’s experience on the floating bed, Guy is always able to

struggle physically, and his prayers originate less in necessity and more in the requirements of form. The impasse ostensibly appears in *Bevis of Hampton* in his adventure in Brademond's dungeon, a deep pit, twenty fathoms deep, into which Bevis is cast, having been bound to a large stone. The depth of the dungeon, as well as the snakes that occupy it, suggests a symbolic underworld journey, a motif through which a protagonist's patience is tested by his being conveyed through a threatening landscape. While Bevis's descent is not a visionary one, it is still meant to signify a loss of agency, and the interlaced narrative heightens this loss of the ability to enact one's will through Josian's unwilling marriage to Yvor and the latter's capturing of Arondel.²⁸

While the prison itself should inhibit Bevis's ability to express himself aggressively, the fall that he endures while being bound to a stone ought to render him completely incapacitated and in need of a miraculous intervention. Nevertheless, when he enters the prison, the first thing he discovers is a makeshift weapon: "At þe prisoun dore Beues fond / A tronsoun, þat he tok in his hond" (1427-8). The emphasis thus shifts from the hero's suffering to his fighting, and the dungeon becomes yet another battlefield on which Bevis is able to display his extraordinary martial prowess:

Snakes and euetes and oades fale,
 How mani, can I nou3t telle in tale,
 Þat in the prisoun were wiþ him,
 Þat prouede euer wiþ her uenim
 To sle Beues, þat gentil kni3t,
 Oc, þrou3 þe grace of god Almi3t,

²⁸ While Josian and Arondel still manage to resist being subjected completely to their husband/captor, their sojourn with Yvor complements Bevis's more extreme captivity in the pit.

Wiþ þe tronsoun, þat he to prisoun tok,

A slou3 hem alle, so saiþ þe bok. (1539-46)

The first part of Bevis's experience in the prison consists of much fighting, but he eventually destroys all his foes and sits quietly in near-famine for seven years. The description of Bevis's battles occupies over thirty lines (1539-66), while his subsequent suffering and prayer collectively consist of less than twenty-five (1567-90). As is customary in patient heroism, he responds to the impasse with prayer, but the initial intervention does not appear to be miraculous. He appeals to God to free him from the impasse either by freeing him or killing him: "Me rou3te neuer, what deþ to me come, / Wiþ þat ich were hennes nome!" (1589-90). It appears, at first, that the guards, instead of God, hear Bevis's prayer, and one of them descends on a rope in order to answer the hero's prayer for death. By descending into the dungeon to slay Bevis, the first guard provides the means for Bevis's escape, and he kills the guard with his bare hands.

Although most of the episode in the dungeon consists of graphic descriptions of Bevis's various battles, he eventually arrives again at an impasse that seems to require direct supernatural intervention. Bevis's battles with, and deception of, the guard occupy twenty lines (1615-34), and his subsequent suffering and prayer are described collectively in fifteen (1635-49).²⁹ After he has dispatched his guards, he finds himself without anyone to feed him, and thus experiences an involuntary three-day fast before his miraculous deliverance from the depths:³⁰

And, for is meisters wer bope ded,

²⁹ Nevertheless, this is an expansion of the Anglo-Norman version, which presents the suffering and prayer in a mere six lines (1082-7)

³⁰ It is difficult not to see this aspect of the episode as partaking of the pervasive medieval theme of Christ's three-day descent into Hell.

Þre daies after he ne et no bred.
 To Iesu Crist he bed a bone,
 And He him grauntede wel sone;
 So 3erne he gan to Iesu speke,
 Þat his vetres gone breke
 And of his medel þe grete ston. (1643-9)

Here, Bevis seems to typify the suffering hero, inasmuch as he must rely upon divine deliverance in order to overcome the impasse that he faces. Nevertheless, in spite of his powerlessness, the narrative describes the prayer almost as an aggressive act through which he effects his own freedom ("So 3erne he gan to Iesu speke, / Þat his vetres gone breke..."). In other words, he prays with such vigour that the fetters break as if through his own great effort.³¹

Like Bevis, Octavian transforms the conventions of heroic suffering into martial victory. The temporary defeat of Florent ultimately reunites the family through the resulting news that resounds throughout Christendom. The younger Octavian, along with his mother and her lioness, leads an army into France and defeats the sultan. Although the original division of the family occurs through the deception of the emperor's mother, the resolution of this injustice occurs through the potential for battle that the sultan's campaign in France provides, and Florent's and Octavian's great feats of prowess are the modes of heroism that effect the desired end. While the narrative begins with the potential for exploring the theme of voluntary suffering, by the empress, who patiently endures her wrongful accusation, and the emperor, who comes to repent the loss of his

³¹ Bevis's horse's ability to swim across a sea is another instance of divine intervention at a moment of impasse, but he drives the horse into the water directly after a prayer, with little indication of suffering or uncertain waiting on action of providence.

family, the story instead focusses on the resolution of the plot through the great strength of Florent and, to a much lesser extent, the younger Octavian.

A great battle also resolves the plot of *Isumbras*, which, among these four romances, contains the greatest exploration of patient heroism. The weapons with which the protagonist fights the Saracens, and thereby avenges the captivity of his wife, are the result of his own labour, and his capacity for such a self-directed result of his labour complements the narrative's turn to celebrating his martial prowess. Although the sultan has been attacking Christian lands during the entire duration of Isumbras's employment at the smithy, the latter's primary inspiration to fight is the desire for revenge:

To Jhesu he besoughte
 To sende hym grace in the feelde,
 The hethene houndes that he myghte yeld
 The woo they hadde hym wroughte. (420-23)

The episode that describes Isumbras's preparation of his arms, his entry into battle with the Saracens, and the celebration of his prowess occupies seven stanzas (388-471), a length that approximates the initial depiction of the suffering that he and his family endure. Through Isumbras's strength, the Christians are able to defeat the Saracens, and the king offers Isumbras the opportunity to reenter courtly society. However, when the king and his court wish to learn Isumbras's name, he replies, "Sere, a smethis man. / What wole ye doo with me?" (458-9); the protagonist thereby signifies his desire to return to his penitential suffering.

Because he realises that his penance is not yet complete, Isumbras resumes his suffering for seven more years, a period that the narrative describes in less than three

stanzas (484-513). Nevertheless, after he receives a message of forgiveness for his sins, he gradually regains his knightly prowess through the help of his wife, whom he does not yet recognise. When he regains his strength, the queen and the Saracen knights dedicate a tournament to him, during which Isumbras provides a rather graphic display of his martial ability:

Sum knyght he gaff swyche a clout
 That bothe hys eyen styrten out
 And manye he made to blede.
 He caste the Sareynnys in dyke and slak
 And barst hem bothe nekke and bak,
 And many fledde for drede. (604-12)

The narrator celebrates Isumbras's great martial skill through the response of the queen:

“The ryche qwene sat and lowgh / And sayde, “My palmere is good inowgh, / He is wurthy to fede” (613-15). Isumbras's great display of prowess here, through which he kills many Saracens, functions as a prelude to the crusade that he initiates after his accession to power.

Although roughly the first half of the narrative concerns Isumbras's penitential suffering, much of the second half depicts his return to his status as a militant knight, and the romance ends by celebrating the great martial victory by his entire family. Isumbras's revelation of his own Christianity and his ordering the conversion of the Saracens inspires a great battle. His wife also resolves to fight, and the two of them prepare for battle against thirty-thousand Saracens, but his three children arrive just in time to assist their parents. According to Childress, “military leadership is provided in answer to prayer.

...An angel helps Isumbras, his wife, and his sons conquer more than thirty thousand Saracens" (316). This supernatural intervention, she argues, indicates "secular hagiography," and suggests that the protagonists are simply passive vessels of God's miraculous intervention. While angels do lead them into battle in the version found in Lincoln Cathedral MS 91 (the Thornton MS, c. 1440), in the version found in Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College MS 175 (1425-50), which closely resembles the much earlier fragment found in Gray's Inn MS 20 (1350), there is no mention of the angels. While the sudden appearance of the children is indeed owed to God's will, as the children suggest in lines 746 ("The grace off God us hedyr sende"), there is no further indication of the activity of God's grace; even if their prowess itself is miraculous, the narrative does not emphasise God's intervention, but, instead, focusses on their own actions:

The chyldryn ferdyn as they were wode,
 They slowen al that befor hem stode,
 Gret joye it was to see.
 The slowen hethene kyngys twoo
 And othere Sarayynys manye moo,
 Twenty thousand and three. (736-41)

Through this final great battle, the narrative changes completely from one that emphasises great endurance to one that celebrates aggressive fortitude. Whereas the legend of Saint Eustace, on which *Sir Isumbras* is based, culminates in Eustace's martyrdom, which, according to Aquinas, is the essential act of enduring fortitude, *Sir Isumbras* radically transforms this ending into a celebration of the crusading spirit.³²

³² Since the defence of the Christian state presupposes the need for aggressive heroism and, by this time, has thoroughly rationalised the necessity for wealthy martial lords, there is nothing necessarily unchristian

Even though the romances that William of Nassington censures do attempt to depict spiritually-laudable patient heroism, the cleric's condemnation is understandable given the ways in which the "dedes of armes" associated with aggressive heroism eclipse the potentially devotional aspects of the romances. Even the crusading piety that these texts manifest does not redeem them for William, and one is left to conclude that William simply regards such exclusively aggressive expressions of Christian heroism as vanities. As I have argued at the end of the previous chapter, the Middle English narratives of Brendan and Owein, like their sources, provide perfect examples of patient heroism. The quests that these protagonists undertake test not their martial skill, but their capacity for the patient endurance of circumstances beyond their control. The motif of patient heroism requires suffering for an appropriate cause, and transforms the common external form of heroism into an internal one that consists of a struggle with emotions such as despair and anger. The presence of this type of heroism can certainly be detected in the popular Middle English romances that William of Nassington condemns. Guy of Warwick becomes a pilgrim and an ascetic; Bevis of Hampton spends many years trapped in a prison; Octavian's wife endures exile and the loss of her children; and Isumbras likewise experiences a Job-like loss of his property and family. Nevertheless, these romances celebrate extreme prowess in their heroes, who often exhibit even rashness, an excessive youthful audacity that foreshadows their later martial greatness, particularly in Guy, Bevis, and Octavian. Furthermore, the motif of endurance does not resolve the plot of any of these narratives. Guy's chivalric exploits continue to occur after he has retired his

about Isumbras's regaining wealth and power; after all, such a pattern was already established in the book of Job, the Old Testament figure who is the traditional exemplar of patience. What is curious about *Sir Isumbras* is that the protagonist regains his stature through his own martial ability, and not through a simple act of miraculous restoration as in Job. Thus, I do agree with Crane's point that the ending of *Sir Isumbras* is significantly different from that of a hagiographic text (115-17).

sword and ventured forth as a pilgrim, and shortly after he finally resolves to stop travelling and fighting, he dies. His experience on the floating bed does not receive any amplification within the narrative; it consists simply of a brief episode of endurance within a multitude of martial adventures. The situations that Bevis encounters that call for heroic endurance instead glorify his great aggressive prowess; a guard, not God, responds to his prayer to be delivered from his prison. After he kills both of his guards, he eventually prays so fervently that his chains break, an occurrence that seems to happen through his own power. In *Octavian*, the need to overcome the sultan who has captured the emperor and his son reunites the family in a great battle, and a similar resolution occurs in *Isumbras*, in which the protagonist's three children suddenly reappear and help him and his wife defeat the huge army of Saracens that threatens them. William of Nassington could have celebrated these romances for their crusading spirit, but he simply equates their "dedes of armes" with the vanity of knightly "amours." While the romances that William lists do provide glimpses of the sort of patient heroism that Brendan and Owein manifest, they instead suggest a horizon of expectations that emphasises the protagonists' martial potential and, thus, differ significantly from the expectations that govern *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. While this aggressive heroism dominates the horizon of expectations in Middle English romance in the first half of the fourteenth century, there is a distinct change in the latter half of the century, during which William Langland, Geoffrey Chaucer, and, of course, the *Gawain*-poet all explore the combined conventions of patient heroism and romance.

Chapter V: Fictional Patience in Middle English at the End of the Fourteenth Century

In the latter half of the fourteenth century, patient heroes appeared more frequently, and Middle English authors began to make serious attempts to explore the ramifications of patience through literary exemplification. On the one hand, the earlier understandings of the virtue continued to be transmitted through the surviving philosophical and patristic texts, scholastic treatises, penitentials, and exemplum books discussed in chapter one; however, patience also arose frequently as a fictional theme, especially among those authors from the Ricardian era who have received the most contemporary critical attention.¹ Whereas the former literary types aim primarily to define and recommend the virtue, the fictionalised examples dramatise the interaction of the virtue with the circumstances of the world, either allegorically, literally, or both. Like exempla, which provide vignettes that elucidate the action of the virtue in a specific context, the extended allegory of Langland, *Piers Plowman*, and the romances and didactic narratives of the *Gawain*-poet and Chaucer, including especially the former's *Patience*, which I shall discuss in chapter five, and the latter's *Parson's Tale*, *Tale of Melibee*, *Knight's Tale*, *Franklin's Tale*, *Man of Law's Tale*, and *Clerk's Tale*, all provide sustained considerations of the advantages and difficulties of patient endurance. In these works, the themes associated with patience that I discuss in chapter one recur consistently and thereby attest to the wide dissemination of these ideas: patience is the virtue that conquers aggression, is a remedy for anger, is often associated with fortitude, is a

¹ For the concept of Ricardian literature, see Burrow (1971) 1-10 and *passim*.

response to necessity,² and is exemplified perfectly by God or Christ. The three former concepts are functions of the virtue, and the latter two are degrees of volitionality through which patience is manifested.

I shall begin this chapter, in which I consider Chaucer's and Langland's awareness of the conventional functions of patience, by considering the presence of these commonplaces in Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and *Tale of Melibee* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*. I shall then proceed by arguing that Chaucer's characters can be situated within a threefold hierarchy of the degrees of patience found in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* (c. 1250s-1260s), a text in the tradition of William Peraldus's *Summa de virtutibus* (c. 1248) that Siegfried Wenzel has identified as a source for Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*. According to the author of the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, there are three kinds of patience:

The first is that of a donkey, who suffers because it is necessary The second is that of a mercenary, who suffers because it is gainful The third kind of patience is that of free will, who suffers because it pleases, and which after the example of Christ "endures the cross with joy."³
(4.985-1005)

These degrees of patience describe varying degrees of volitionality. The first type of endurance consists simply of the will to endure necessity. Those who manifest the second type, mercenary patience, do not suffer because they are compelled to do so, but, instead,

² The philosophical concept of necessity is one that recurs frequently in this thesis. Kaske provides a concise definition while commenting on Theseus's speech on love in the *Knight's Tale*: "*Necessitee* I understand as the sum total of what is sent to man, or inflicted upon him, by the whole Boethian hierarchy—the "givens" of human life that it is impossible to avoid and against which it is meaningless to rebel" (14-15).

³ *Prima est asinaria, que patitur quia oportet Secunda est mercenaria, que patitur quia expedit Tercia paciencia est uoluntaria, que patitur quia placet, que exemplo Christi "cum gaudio sustinet crucem."*

they manifest the virtue for a temporal or eternal reward. The ideal example of voluntary suffering is Christ or God, who suffers completely voluntarily, without any respect to necessity; in other words, the perfect acceptance of suffering relates not to rewards or punishment, but is for the sake of the transcendent love by which free will is established.⁴ Perfect patience is perfect freedom inasmuch as it accepts suffering not because the suffering is necessary, even though it may be so, but because the suffering is desired by the ultimately-free divine will with which the sufferer identifies herself or himself. Using this approach to categorising the will of the patient sufferer, I shall investigate the different ways in which the characters in the *Knight's Tale*, the *Tale of Melibee*, the *Franklin's Tale*, the *Man of Law's Tale*, and the *Clerk's Tale* evoke the various conventions associated with the virtue. In order to establish the wider contemporary currency of these ideas about patience, I shall use these categories to situate the virtue as it appears in Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Although much could be said about the use of patience in each of the narratives that I discuss in this chapter, my concern here is to establish the characteristics of patience that were of most interest to two of the *Gawain*-poet's contemporaries and thereby discern a horizon of expectations with which to frame my reading of patience in *Patience* and, especially, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the present chapter, I am less interested in undertaking a reading of patience in these works than in establishing the widespread literary influence of the conventions of the virtue.⁵

⁴ For instance, Dame Prudence points out that Jesus Christ "hath suffred for us and yeven ensample to every man to folwe and sewe hym" (1499).

⁵ A proper reading of patience in Chaucer, for instance, would require much more space than is available here.

i.) Commonplaces and Taxonomies of Patience in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*

a.) Patience Conquers

The proverbial notion that patience conquers suggests the superiority of patient endurance over aggression, martial or otherwise, and this idea was well-known to both Chaucer and Langland. The theme of patience as a virtue by which one overcomes one's enemies recurs throughout Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*. Chaucer's Parson states, "This vertu disconfiteth thyn enemy. And therefore seith the wise man, "If thou wolt venquysse thyn enemy, lerne to suffre" (660); the Franklin also affirms this sentiment: "Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn, / For it venquysseth, as thise clerkes seyn, / Thynges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne" (773-5). In the *Tale of Melibee*, Dame Prudence illustrates the superiority of patient endurance over aggression by offering a paraphrase of Proverbs 16:32:

[Salomon] seith also, "It is moore worth to be pacient than for to be right strong;/ and he that may have the lordshipe of his owene herte is moore to preyse than he that by his force taketh grete citees." And therefore seith Seint Jame in his Epistle that "pacience is a greet vertu of perfeccioun."
(1514-16)⁶

Melibee, following her advice that patience and forgiveness are preferable to revenge, agrees to forgive his enemies, and Dame Prudence arranges a conciliatory meeting between them. Thus, the peaceful resolution of the narrative occurs only through the acceptance of suffering and the act of forgiveness, an act that the narrator identifies as superior to, and more difficult than, martial retribution.

⁶ See chapter two, pages 25-7 for my discussion of this passage from Proverbs as it appears in Thomas of Chobham.

Langland repeats the phrase *pacientes vincunt* thrice in Passus 13 and 14 (13.136, 173, and 14.53). In *Piers Plowman*, allegorical figures assist the Dreamer in his quest to discover the proper manner of living. Before Patience appears as an actual character, the allegorical figure Reason presents the virtue itself in a discussion about his permitting irrational human behaviour. Dreamer wonders why Reason seems to govern all of nature, but at times appears to neglect governing humans. Reason rebukes him for his impertinent inquiry:

...Recche thee nevere

Why I suffre or noght suffre—thiself hast noght to doone.

Amende thow it if thow myght, for my tyme is to abide.

Suffraunce is a soverayn vertue, and a swift vengeaunce. (11.375-8)

Here, patience conquers through abiding; it is simultaneously a virtue and a form of revenge. When Patience appears in Passus 13, he is as a beggar dressed in “pilgrymes clothes” (13.29) at Conscience’s feast, at which the latter also hosts Clergy and the dreamer. Conscience welcomes him in, but seats a “maister,” a doctor of theology whom the Dreamer does not know, in the position of honour, followed by Clergy and Conscience; he sets Patience and the Dreamer at a sideboard (13.33-6). Whereas Clergy feasts sumptuously, Patience and the Dreamer are fed sour bread that instructs them to do penance and persevere. While the Dreamer wishes to chastise Clergy for his hypocrisy, Patience tells him to refrain from action and allow the master’s gluttony to be its own punishment (13.88-90). Conscience questions the doctor of theology and Clergy about Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, but, dissatisfied by their responses, turns to Patience, since the latter has more experience and, after all, *Pacientes vincunt* (13.131-6).

b.) Patience and Anger

Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and *Tale of Melibee* both manifest the tradition of virtues and vices and thereby represent the presence of scholastic taxonomic discourse in the *Canterbury Tales*. While the definitions and distinctions they provide may not be authoritative for understanding the entire work, they do suggest the presence of conventional thematic issues associated with patience that recur throughout the *Canterbury Tales*. Thus, such references situate Chaucer and his fictional narrators as authorities who are learned in the traditions of patience, and the conventions that appear coincide with those that I outline in chapter one. The primary understanding of patience treats the virtue as a remedy for anger, and the choice to endure evil things, rather than to commit them,⁷ requires one to mitigate anger with patience. Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, a product of the penitential tradition, has much to say about patience as a remedial virtue. As Richard Hazelton and Siegfried Wenzel have shown, the *Parson's Tale* reveals the specific influence of some of the most popular examples of the penitential tradition: the *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (12th C.), Raymund of Pennaforte's *Summa de poenitentia* or *Summa casuum poenitentiae* (1222/29), William Peraldus's *Summa vitiorum* (c. 1236) and *Summa virtutum* (c. 1248), the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* (c. 1250s-1260s).⁸ Following the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, Chaucer's Parson does not identify patience as a species of fortitude, and instead, like the tradition that John Cassian transmits, treats patience as a remedy for anger; however, as in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, patience is not the only remedy for anger, but appears along

⁷ See Augustine's famous definition of patience in *De patientia*, chapter 2.

⁸ See Hazelton (1960) *passim* and Wenzel (1984) 12-30.

with humility/meekness: “The remedie agayns Ire is a vertu that men clepen mansuetude, that is debonairetee; and eek another vertu, that men callen pacience or suffrance” (653). The Parson provides both *pacience* and *suffrance* as synonyms for *patientia*. He defines the virtue thus:

Pacience, that is another remedie agayns Ire, is a vertu that suffreth swetely every mannes goodnesse (*sic*), and is nat wrooth for noon harm that is doon to hym./ The Philosophe seith that pacience is thilke vertu that suffreth debonairely alle the outrages of adversitee and every wikked word. (658-9)

Patience requires a meek and gentle response towards adversity and the aggressive behaviour of others.

Chaucer’s Parson, like the author of the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, identifies four “manere of paciencis” (661) that respond to four causes of anger. The first relates to the bearing of verbal insults without responding in anger, just as Christ did when he was reproached by the “Jewes” (662). The second cause of anger is the loss of property, which Christ also experienced (664). Christ revealed the way in which one is to endure bodily torment, the third cause of anger, by the manner in which he patiently accepted his crucifixion (665). Finally, “the fourthe grevance is in outrageous labour in werkes” (666), an excessive labour that one is compelled to do.⁹ The Parson does not differentiate Christian patience from a pagan variety, nor does he suggest that patience is something unique to Christianity; rather, he treats it as a universal injunction from heaven: “Heere may men lerne to be pacient, for certes noht oonly Cristen men been

⁹ This cause of anger is closely associated with that with which the narrator of *Patience* struggles. See chapter five, pages 171-2.

patient for love of Jhesu Crist and for guerdoun of the blisful lyf that is perdurable, but certes, the olde payens that nevere were Cristene commended and useden the vertue of pacience” (668). Patience is not only a religious virtue, inspired and exemplified by Christ, but is one that is commended outside of the Christian revelation, a potentially civic virtue that relates as much to one’s relationship with other humans as it does to one’s relationship with God. Finally, the Parson states that patience relates to obedience, that is, the act of doing what one ought to without resistance or grumbling: “Of pacience comth obedience, thurgh which a man is obedient to Crist and to alle hem to which he oghte to been obedient in Crist. And to understond wel that obedience is parfit whan that a man dooth gladly and hastily ... al that he sholde do” (673-4). If patience involves an internal restraining of anger and, consequently, the sorts of behaviours that it inspires, obedience consists of an external act that reveals one’s patience.

Chaucer presents the tradition of the moderation of anger and grief through patience in the *Tale of Melibee*, a narrative that further reveals his awareness of the theme of patient endurance in the genre of moral literature. After Melibee’s family has been injured by his three old foes, Dame Prudence invokes Classical authority in her advice that he moderate his emotional response: “Senek saith: ‘The wise man shal nat take to greet discomfort for the deeth of his children,/ but, certes, he sholde suffren it in pacience as wel as he abideth the deeth of his owene propre persone’” (983-4). She associates the loss of children with the loss of temporal goods, one of the four causes of anger that the Parson transmits from the penitential tradition: “... us oghte, as wel in the deeth of oure children as in the los of our othere goodes temporels, have pacience” (997). Finally, she invokes the example of Job, who, after having lost his family, wealth, and health, said,

“Oure Lord hath yeve it me; oure Lord hath biraft it me; right as oure Lord hath wold, right so it is doon; blessed be the name of oure Lord!” (999). Ultimately, her argument evolves into an insistence that he refrain from revenge, an act of anger that some of his poorly-chosen counselors recommend. Thus, a fundamental theme of the narrative is the problem of patience, and what follows is a dramatic rendering of a debate in favour of the moderation of grief and anger and the patient endurance of wrongs.

In the *Knight's Tale*, the resolution of grief, which, according to Dame Prudence, is a form of anger that responds to the loss of goods, ultimately completes the narrative, and the absence of complaining marks the presence of this salvific patience. Although the theme of patient endurance is largely eclipsed by the related themes of fate and providence, Theseus resolves the grief that Arcite's unexpected death has caused through a speech in which he discusses the relationship between patience, anger, grief, and necessity. He concludes that patient obedience to the demands of necessity requires that one refrain from complaining: “And whoso gruccheth ought, he dooth folye, / And rebel is to hym that al may gye” (3045-6); according to J. D. Burnley, “the only virtue in this world is patience, and this is what Theseus recommends” (79). Theseus states three times that one ought not to complain (3045, 3058, and 3062), the absence of which behaviour during suffering also marks the virtue of patience for Walter in the *Clerk's Tale* and, as I shall argue in the next chapter, the narrator of *Patience*.

c.) Patience and Fortitude

While Chaucer's Parson does not describe patience as a species of fortitude, vestiges of that tradition can be found in the narrative, and this association of the two virtues informs Chaucer's understanding of patience throughout the *Canterbury Tales*.

According to the Parson, following a tradition transmitted by John Cassian, *fortitudo* is a remedy for *acedia*. Although he does not list patience among the species of fortitude because he is following the remedial tradition exemplified by his source, the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, he still perceives fortitude as consisting of aggressive and enduring aspects: "This vertu is so myghty and so vigerous that it dar withstonde myghtily and wisely kepen hymself fro perils that been wikked, and wrastle agayn the assautes of the devel. ...For this *fortitudo* may endure by long suffraunce¹⁰ the travaillies that been covenable" (728-9). With respect to the "speces" of fortitude, the *Parson's Tale* simply reproduces those found in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*:

"magnanimittee" (*magnanimitas*), "feith and hope" (*fiducia*), "seuertee or sikernessee" (*securitas*), "magnificence" (*magnificentia*), and "constaunce" (*constantia*) (730-6).

Although these species do not tidily conform to the format of division into two aggressive and two enduring types that Thomas of Chobham, Peraldus, and Aquinas envision, one can still detect the notions of attacking and enduring within the descriptions of the species themselves. For instance, while discussing "magnanimittee," the Parson states, "This vertu maketh folk to undertake hard thynges and grevouse thynges, by hir owene wil, wisely and resonably" (732). Also, he describes "magnificence" as "whan a man dooth and parfourneth grete works of goodnesse" (735). On the other hand, "seueretee," which the Parson describes as "...whan a man ne douteth no travaille in tyme comynge of the good werkes that a man hath begonne" (734), and "constaunce," which he defines as the "stableness of corage" that "sholde been in herte by stedefast feith, and in mouth, and in berynge, and in chiere, and in dede" (736) both conform loosely to the enduring species that Aquinas describes, with the latter particularly resembling Aquinas's *perseverantia*.

¹⁰ The Parson has already described *suffraunce* as a synonym for *pacience* (653).

Thus, through his reproduction of the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, Chaucer reveals his awareness that patience is a remedy for anger and that fortitude heals *acedia* and consists of aggressive and enduring qualities, the presence of which can be loosely associated with the five species of the virtue that he lists.

ii.) Degrees of Patience in the *Canterbury Tales* and *Piers Plowman*

a.) The Patience of a Donkey

I shall now investigate the ways in which Chaucer and Langland represent the various degrees of volitionality through which patience is manifested. The lowest degree of patience, according to the *Summa virtutum*, is that of a donkey, which endures only because suffering is necessary. This degree of suffering characterises the sentiment of the proverb that the Franklin expresses at the beginning of his tale: "... Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon, / Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or noon" (777-8). One can either learn to suffer willingly, and thus ideally come to the patience of Christ that the author of the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* describes, or one must learn to suffer as an ass, that is, through the force of necessity. The latter variety of patience also characterises the way in which Custance, the initially unwilling heroine of the *Man of Law's Tale*, accepts the marriage that her father and the church hierarchy arrange for her. As I argue below, this degree of patience is transcended in this tale.¹¹ Even Dame Prudence in the *Tale of Melibee* attempts to inspire Melibee, at the very least, to suffer as a donkey by reminding him that his enemies are more powerful than he is; he simply cannot achieve the revenge he seeks (1476-89). In the *Knight's Tale*, however, the suffering of necessity is the central

¹¹ See below, pages 154-6.

concern of the narrative, and the patience that the tale depicts can scarcely rise above that of the simple endurance of necessity.

The *Knight's Tale* provides a sustained meditation on the endurance of necessity and the discovery of patience in the acceptance of providence. As Georgia Ronan Crampton notes, critics tend to see all of the characters as "patients" except Theseus, who succeeds in asserting himself martially (45-7). Ypolita and Emelye are captured and brought back to Athens, and the latter is compelled to marry against her wishes. Palamon and Arcite are imprisoned. Furthermore, the narrator frequently depicts the condition of humanity as one that is completely subject to the caprices of fortune. When Palamon is first overcome by feelings of love for Emelye, Arcite, not yet comprehending the nature of his kinsman's suffering, advises patience:

... Cosyn myn, what eyleth thee,
 That art so pale and deedly on to see?
 Why cridestow? Who hath thee doon offence?
 For Goddes love, taak al in pacience
 Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be.
 Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.
 We moste endure it; this is the short and playn. (1081-91)

As Lumiansky notes, "Here Arcite shows full awareness of, and compliance with, an established order, an order which "for Goddes love" should be accepted patiently" (41). The emphasis on necessity in lines 1089-91 undermines any anachronistic Christian implications of Arcite's statement, which could otherwise be read as his urging Palamon to embrace a higher form of patience, one that originates in the love of God. Rather, the

sort of patience that engages with necessity is the only virtue in a world in which “things happen to people, in which people do not move events but events befall people”

(Crampton 46). While Arcite initially functions as a sort of Dame Philosophy who consoles “impatient Palamon,” he soon succumbs to the same wound and enters a debate with his kinsman concerning which of them might rightfully pursue Emelye. Neither Palamon nor Arcite is able to control his passions, one of the fundamental activities of patience, and so both fall into despair.¹² They do not endure necessity patiently; instead they argue, complain, and, eventually, fight.

The characters in the *Knight's Tale* are unable to effect their individual desires, and, in Boethian terms, they experience providence as necessity. Thus, one can detect a particularly apt pathos in Palamon's complaint, even if its sentiment characterises only the experience of those living at a lower level of the cosmic hierarchy: “What governance is in this prescience, / That giltelees tormenteth innocence?” (1313-14). Events happen without respect to the actions of the characters, yet, as Crampton argues, “this does not come about because the characters are passive psychologically, or because they are mere convenient labels for moods or emotions. They struggle” (46). Still, even when Palamon and Arcite seem to succeed in actualising their desires, a higher order frustrates them at the last moment. Palamon nearly escapes from Athens, but his anger at Arcite results in his being caught by Theseus. Arcite wins Emelye, yet is killed in what appears, at least from the human perspective, to be an arbitrary event. Theseus, on the other hand, does manage to accomplish some of his desired objectives: he conquers the Amazons, avenges the widows, has Palamon and Arcite imprisoned, grants Arcite's release, arranges a

¹² Theseus's ability to subject his anger to “pitee” contrasts Palamon and Arcite's tendency to fall headlong into concupiscence and wrath. For perceptive readings of Theseus's emotional self-control, see Georgia Ronan Crampton 58-9, J. D. Burnley 26-7, and Jill Mann (1991) 171-6; see also Derek Pearsall 135.

tournament, and attempts to save the combatants from death.¹³ Yet, Theseus's power is not absolute; he is deceived by Arcite and Palamon is able to escape. Most significantly, Theseus's desire that none die in the tournament is unfulfilled, and his attempt to protect the knights is ultimately impotent. Thus, for all of the human characters in the tale, necessity is a force that overrides their plans and demands patient endurance.

While the discourse of patience that characterises much of the *Knight's Tale* consists simply of the endurance of necessity, that is, of the lowest form of patience, a higher form of patience appears in Theseus's attempts to derive gain, both for himself and for others, through suffering, that is, by his attempt to heal the grief that has resulted from Arcite's unanticipated death.¹⁴ While necessity overrides the individual desires of the characters in the *Knight's Tale*, its power is not absolute, since it is unable to determine the intentionality of the individual. After discussing the way in which Jupiter has ordained the transience of earthly life and how it is futile to resist his will, Theseus states,

Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,
To maken vertu of necessitee,
And take it weel that we may nat eschue,
And namely that to us alle is due. (3041-4)

According to Theseus's speech, patient endurance is the best response to necessity's demands, which originate in providence and thus function ultimately for the good of

¹³ Crampton writes, "If Theseus does not quite manage to tip thematic emphasis from the necessities and constrictions of suffering to the possibilities of virtuosity in action, still he is not only free and responsible but also often effectual. He is actor, not patient, an example not only of human possibility but also of human achievement" (49).

¹⁴ V. A. Kolve suggests that this speech "ends in a metaphor of despair" (148), which consists of Theseus's depicting Arcite as having escaped "this foule prisoun of this lyf" (3061), an argument that points to the underlying necessity that governs the conditions of life in the world; nevertheless, Theseus's patience consists not simply of enduring with equanimity, but of attempting to transform suffering, as much as possible, into something positive.

those living in the world, because one can still potentially transform suffering into something beneficial.¹⁵ Ultimately, Theseus's attitude consists of an act of will that contradicts the tendency to despair that is the natural response to the experiencing of no effectual volitionality. The force of necessity that proves the patient animates the *Knight's Tale*, yet, Theseus's response invokes the tradition that one has the freedom to determine one's response to such necessity; one can choose to be patient, or one must suffer unwillingly, and, according to Theseus's "epilogue,"¹⁶ one can transform the experience of suffering into a virtue. Theseus's patience is not exactly mercenary, since it endures not for a reward, but simply because suffering is necessary; nevertheless, it does enable him to enact his will and arrange a positive outcome, and thereby transcends the simple endurance of necessity.

b.) Mercenary Patience

The second degree of patience that the *Summa virtutum* describes is mercenary patience. There are two types of mercenary patience; the first seeks some form of "vile gain" ("uile [emolumentum]") and the second suffers "for the sake of eternal reward" ("pro mercede eterna") (4.996-7). This type of patience is characterised by a greater emphasis on the volitionality of the subject: one does not suffer because it is necessary, but because one chooses to pursue a desired objective or mode of being. Although the

¹⁵ See Mann (1991) who argues that "Theseus's patient acceptance of [Arcite's] death leads him to the possibility of making 'vertu of necessitee' (3042) – that is, of shaping the scattered fragments created by the blow of chance into a new and positive form" (179).

¹⁶ Pearsall (137) appropriately sees Theseus's final speech as less of a resolution of the plot and more of an epilogue, since Arcite has already suggested the marriage of Palamon and Emelye during his death speech (2783-97). Still, Theseus's speech is an act that permits the action of the narrative to progress from tragic death and grieving to marriage, political union, and, finally, joy. While the subsequent joy might not be sufficient to offset the disconcertingly tragic momentum of the narrative, it is a best-case scenario, considering the circumstances of the plot, and thus returns us to a sort of patience that can bring one a small measure of peace in spite of the seemingly chaotic forces to which one is subject.

superior strength of Melibee's enemies renders his revenge impossible, Dame Prudence convinces him to refrain from revenge by assuring him that if he repents, an act that presupposes patient endurance instead of aggressive revenge, "God wol sende youre adversaries unto yow / and maken hem fallen at youre feet, / redy to do youre wyl and youre comandementz" (1717-19). In other words, Melibee's patience will be rewarded by his being granted that which he would not be able to achieve through force: the subjection of his enemies.

While Chaucer's Franklin expresses the distinction between patient endurance and the suffering of necessity, "... Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon, / Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or noon" (777-8), and depicts this proverb through Dorigen's inability to suffer her husband's extended absence and the potentially disastrous consequences that ensue from her promise to Aurelius, the *Franklin's Tale* depicts increasingly volitional expressions of patience. Dorigen initially endures her husband's absence reluctantly, and her fear for his life results in a rash promise.¹⁷ The narrator does not depict her failure of patience as a grave moral fault, but as "an aberration which she gives way to under the stress of emotion, a failure of self-discipline, a proud impulsiveness, which makes her momentarily forget the order of things ... which man must live by" (Pearsall 153). Because of her unwillingness to suffer, she flippantly agrees to be Aurelius's lover if he removes all the rocks from the shore; as a result, she now faces the potential for another form of suffering: both she and Arveragus face the shame of a potential adultery.

¹⁷ As Harry Berger Jr. observes, "The unruly sea and rocks both cause and express Dorigen's lack of *patience*; she converts the normal hazards of life and love into a purely negative vision" (139).

Arveragus's decision to send Dorigen into adultery does not originate in necessity; rather, it consists of the negotiation of vying value systems, and it is characterised by mercenary patience inasmuch as it consists of endurance not of necessity, but for the sake of gain, or in this case, the prevention of the loss of honour. This is not to suggest that Arveragus's choice is virtuous; after all, mercenary patience can be used for "vile gain." In this instance, the term "mercenary" helps us see the greater volitionality that Arveragus enjoys and that which he hopes to gain, or, in this case, the honour that he hopes to maintain. After he learns of Dorigen's rash promise, he instructs her to keep her "trouthe" because

"Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe"—

But with that word he brast anon to wepe,

And seyde, "I yow forbede, up peyne of deeth,

That nevere, whil thee lasteth lyf ne breeth,

To no wight telle thou of this aventure—

As I may best, I wol my wo endure—

Ne make no contenance of hevynesse,

That folk of yow may demen harm or gesse." (1479-86)

Arveragus's issuing of a morally-compromised order and a threat certainly compromises the knight's integrity,¹⁸ yet, this passage intends to reveal the degree of Arveragus's patience, even though that which he is choosing to suffer is morally objectionable. The

¹⁸ The nature of Arveragus's order might not be the main concern of the story. As Helen Cooper (1989) writes, "The tale flies in the face of conventional morality, to assert something different and rather more difficult. The story is set up precisely as a test case: what if—? ... The question is not ... whether it was sensible or right of Dorigen to make her vow, or of Arveragus to send her to fulfil it" (237-8). See also Pearsall, who, concerning Arveragus's decision to send his wife into adultery, writes, "...we appreciate clearly that Arviragus's act is not that of a sensible man, not even that of a sensible pagan, and we understand that the world in which such acts are admired is not the world of ordinary reality" (152). At any rate, I shall leave these discussions for a future project.

threat of violence that he issues against his wife reveals the intensity of the emotions that he struggles to endure patiently.¹⁹ While Chaucer may wish us to understand Arveragus's behaviour differently, the knight perceives his own behaviour as consisting of the endurance of the suffering that adultery causes for the sake of the higher idealism of "trouthe." His ability to choose, and that he does so for some sort of gain, qualify this act as a mercenary one.

c.) Christlike Patience: Langland's Patience and Chaucer's Custance and Griselda

Langland closely associates patience with the voluntary suffering of Christ, and Chaucer depicts this ideal manifestation of the virtue through his characterisations of Custance and Griselda. According to the *Summa virtutum*, the highest degree of patience is "that of free will, which suffers because it pleases, and which after the example of Christ 'endures the cross with joy'"²⁰ (4.1005). In the *Tale of Melibee*, Dame Prudence refers to the tradition that identifies Christ as the exemplar of Christian patience: "...ye owen to enclyne and bowe youre herte to take the pacience of oure Lord Jhesu Crist [who, seith Seint Peter] 'hath suffred for us and yeven ensample to every man to folwe and sewe hym, for he dide nevere synne, ne nevere cam ther a vileyns word out of his mouth'" (1500-02). For Langland, this Christ-like patience begins with an absolute acceptance of God's will. In Passus 13 of *Piers Plowman*, the allegorical figures Conscience and Patience travel together as pilgrims; they eventually encounter Hawkin, the "actif Man" (273) who is, as A. V. C. Schmidt notes in his edition, "the type of the

¹⁹ With respect to Arveragus's question, "Is ther oght elles...?" (1469), Mann perceptively observes, "It is in this question, with its quiet relinquishing of interrogation and of anger, that we can feel Arveragus's 'patience' and its absorption of the crisis" (117); nevertheless, his subsequent threat suggests that he must struggle to manifest his patience.

²⁰ ...uoluntaria, que patitur quia placet, que exemplo Christi "cum gaudio sustinet crucem."

uneducated layman” (Schmidt xli), and this meeting enables Patience to expound on the virtue of voluntary suffering. After discovering that Hawkin’s coat is soiled with sin, Conscience and Patience attempt to reform him. Hawkin doubts Patience’s promise to provide him with dough for his wafers even when there is no flour, but Patience responds with a speech about the providence of God; whatever is created is created with the means to sustain it (14.39-47). Patience links the virtue of patience with the acceptance of God’s will in all circumstances:

But I lokede what liflode it was that Pacience so preisede;
 And thanne was it a piece of the *Paternoster*—*Fiat voluntas tua*.
 “Have, Haukyn,” quod Pacience, “and et this whan the hungreth,
 Or whan thou clomsest for cold or clyngest for droughte;
 And shul nevere gyves thee greve ne gret lordes wrathe,
 Prison ne peyne—for *pacientes vincunt*. (14.48-53)

Because the providence of God is not limited to the living and, thus, does not necessarily assure physical survival in life-threatening situations, patience requires that one trust God in life and death; as long as one has not lived profligately, one need not fear death, because one’s death will be according to His will: “Tharstow nevere care for corn ne lynnyn cloth ne wollen, / Ne for drynke, ne deeth drede, but deye as God liketh, / Or thorough hunger or thorough hete—at his wille be it” (56-8). “Fiat voluntas tua” refers not only to the Lord’s Prayer, but also points to Christ’s acceptance of God’s will at Gethsemane.²¹ Elizabeth Kirk writes, “‘Thy will be done’ is the phrase that links man’s daily acceptance of God’s will with Christ’s acceptance of the Passion in the Garden of Gethsemane. Clearly, for Langland ... any positive definition of patience must be seen as

²¹ See Matthew 26.39: “verumtamen non sicut ego volo sed sicut tu.”

an *imitatio christi*" (100). Christ's acceptance of God's will is traditionally read as an act of perfect patience, inasmuch as it exemplifies the most complete expression of the free will of a human to embrace the providential will of the transcendent.²²

While Christ's acceptance of God's will manifests the ideal form of human patience, God's suffering occurs in the absence of any possibility for a passion, and thus is an act of pure will and love. The ideal form of patience is that which God or Christ manifests, and is characterised by choosing suffering without any fear of further punishment or hope for a reward; it is a pure and spontaneous act of love. Chaucer's Parson notes that patience "maketh a man lyk to God, and maketh hym Goddes owene deere child, as seith Crist" (660). While God has the power to correct the world, he suffers the imperfection that the presence of evil perpetuates:

"Who suffreth moore than God?" quod he; "no gome, as I leeve.

He myghte amende in a minute while al that mysstandeth,

Ac he suffreth for som mannes goode, and so is oure bettre.

"Holy writ," quod that wye, "wisseth men to suffre:

Propter Deum subiecti estote omni creature." (11.379-82)

²² The emotions that Christ manifested at Gethsemane did not impair his reason, according to Patristic tradition. See Simo Knuuttila 194:

...it was assumed that pre-passions occurred in Jesus' soul when he 'began to be sad and troubled (Matt. 26-37). These movements had to be (sinless) pre-passions and not passions, because the latter would have implied consent to the judgement that something evil was going to happen to him contrary to his will. The idea that Jesus' fear and sorrow were pre-passions was well known from Jerome's commentary on Matthew 26:37.

For the medieval currency of Jerome's view, see, for instance, the entry for Matthew 26:37 in Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*. While the quotation from St. John Damascene that Aquinas cites emphasises the superiority of Christ's will to his suffering, and thus, the voluntary nature of his passion(s), St. Jerome, following Origen, insists that Christ experienced only pre-passions, and not actual passions. For Origen, following stoic psychology, a passion proper requires the consent of the will. The discussion of pre-passions became a popular topic among twelfth-century schoolmen, many of whom responded to the discussion found in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* III.15.2.

In this speech, the allegorical figure Reason is defending his noninterference as imitating that of God, who suffers evil acts for the good of all. Thus, patience is a divine virtue, and one that avoids expressing anger in word or countenance. Anima, the figure of the soul, later describes more directly how God is the exemplar of patience:

Amonges Cristene men this myldnesse sholde laste,
 In alle manere angres have this at herte—
 That theigh thei suffrede al this, God suffrede for us moore
 In ensample we sholde do so, and take no vengeaunce
 Of oure foes that dooth us falsnesse—that is our fadres wille.
 For wel may every man wite, if God hadde wold hymselfe,
 Sholde nevere Judas ne Jew have Jesu doon on roode,
 Ne han martired Peter ne Poul, ne in prison holden.
 Ac he suffrede in ensample that we sholde suffren also,
 And seide to swiche that suffre wolde that *Pacientes vincunt*. (15.158-67)

The suffering of Christ, the apostles, and the martyrs is willed by God, and his willingness that they should suffer for his sake implies that we should also be willing to suffer, since voluntary suffering is the example that he provides in Christ's sacrifice.²³ All of this suffering is rooted in the spontaneous patience that God manifests in his love for humanity.

Although Custance, in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, is initially a victim of necessity, the dynamic patience that she comes to manifest invokes the concept of ideal, Christ-like patience. Unlike Griselda who, as we shall see, consents to endure the

²³ On the suffering of the martyrs, see also the *Tale of Melibee* 1504-5: "Also the grete pacience which the seintes that been in Paradys han had in tribulaciouns that they han ysuffred, withouten hir desert or gilt, / oghte muchel stiren yow to pacience."

suffering that her prospective husband, Walter, imposes, Custance makes no agreement to endure without grumbling, and her lamentations evoke a pathos that is strangely absent from the *Clerk's Tale*. Also, while Custance is emblematic of endurance, the nature of her experience is more precisely associated with the virtue constancy²⁴ than with patience, as her name in Chaucer's exemplar suggests. Still, the presence of constancy suggests Chaucer's pronounced concern with endurance instead of aggression, and the aspects of constancy depicted in this tale suggest a direct thematic connection with the motif of patient endurance that I have been discussing throughout this thesis.

After the representatives of the political order of Rome decree that Custance is to marry a sultan, she draws attention to the necessity that she endures:

Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun
 I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille;
 But Crist, that starf for our redempcioun
 So yeve me grace his heestes to fulfille!
 I, wrecche womman, no fors though I spille!
 Wommen are born to thraldom and penance,
 And to be under mannes governance. (281-7)

²⁴ Chaucer's parson describes *constaunce* as "stableness in corage ...[that] sholde been in herte by stedefast feith, and in mouth, and in berynge, and in chiere, and in dede" (736). See also the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime* 241. Nevertheless, Chaucer's decision to name his heroine *Custance* enables one to associate her more generally with endurance, and not necessarily regard her simply as emblematic of constancy.

As Robert Dawson notes, there is a slightly egocentric tinge to line 285-7.²⁵ At the very least, it is a clear expression of her discontent with her forced role in her father's political agenda. Lines 281-2 identify her father's will, which she must obey; lines 283-4 point to the commandment that one honour one's parents, and she asks for the grace to obey her father and thereby obey the commandment of God.²⁶ Line 285 points to a martyr's detachment from life and death that Custance clearly does not feel, and, finally, the last two lines concisely articulate the common theme of the previous five, that is, the type of necessity that faced Custance as a medieval Christian woman. Specifically, they point to an idea that St. Paul, presumably speaking for Christ, articulates in 1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."²⁷ In this hierarchical formulation, God is mediated to woman through Christ and man, just as Custance identifies her obedience to Christ and to her father as connected. She is justifiably not happy about this conflation of obedience, as the text itself suggests by the "pitee" (292) that her plight inspires.²⁸ In

²⁵ Dawson provides an insightful response to all who see Chaucer's Custance as simply passive and meek. With respect to lines 274-87, he argues that "[w]hat is particularly noteworthy about this speech ... is not the pathos of Custance's situation, but, rather, the power with which Custance subtly yet insistently portrays herself as pathetic" (296). She does not recognise, he notes, that her leaving will cause suffering to those who love her but, rather, she simply concerns herself with her own endurance (297). This does not mean that she does not act heroically during the narrative; rather, it simply draws further attention to the humanity of Custance, which both complements and contrasts the sanctity that she manifests through her divine election.

²⁶ Compare similar instances in the lives of saints such as St. Cecilia, whose life Chaucer relates in the *Second Nun's Tale*, and St. Alexis of Rome, whose popularity in the Middle Ages is attested by the *Vie de Saint Alexis*; both of saints reluctantly obey their fathers' order to marry, but through their prayers bring about a state of marriage that does not ultimately conform to the expectations of the fathers.

²⁷ *Volo autem vos scire quod omnis viri caput Christus est caput autem mulieris vir caput vero Christi Deus.*

²⁸ Her plight would be the same if she were a male child, as Mann (1991) 129 suggests; however, her identification of herself as a woman, and not a child, draws attention to the pathos inherent in the hierarchy that places women under the dominance of men, and not that which places children under their parents' control. Through this pathos, Chaucer investigates the power of powerlessness.

this passage, the will of the men is associated with the will of Christ, and Custance points out that her role consists of necessary obedience.

While the narrative suggests one hierarchy in which the relationship between women and God is mediated by men, it also presents a direct and intimate relationship between Custance and God that transcends the divine will that is allegedly expressed through the politico-religious institutions that govern Rome, and it is the experience of providence that enables Custance to suffer without merely enduring necessity. While necessity and providence are ultimately the same force, they are distinguishable in the narrative as the cruelty of people, which God permits, and the action of God, through which he saves Custance from their plots. When Custance is cast out to sea by her first husband's mother, the narrator reflects on God's care for her. After twenty lines that present various Old Testament examples of God's providence, the narrator unambiguously states that God's providence cares for Custance as well:

Who bad the foure spirites of tempest
That power han t'anoyen lond and see,
Bothe north and south, and also west and est,
"Anoyeth neither see, ne land, ne tree"?
Soothly, the comandour of that was he
That fro the tempest ay this womman kepte
As wel whan she wook as whan she slepte. (491-97)

The narrator contrasts the powerful vigilance of God to the vulnerability of Custance. Whereas the elements themselves have the power to destroy her, this passage presents them as being under the direct authority of God. Because of God's regulation of the

natural world, Custance is able to sleep on the boat without fearing for her life. This passage presents a clear image of the Boethian cosmos, in which the apparently chaotic forces of nature function according to providential design. Her experience of this order that protects her in spite of the forces that aim to destroy her allows her suffering to be transformed from that which is governed simply by necessity to that which consists of a voluntary expression of her trust in God's providence.

Custance's Christ-like patience is manifested through her embracing the will of God without the expectation of a reward. In her first speech, before she travels to marry the Sultan, Custance asks for grace to endure the will of God, inasmuch as it is mediated by the will of the church and her father (280-4). Her second speech, which she gives as she is being exiled from Syria, asks God's protection, so that she might live to amend her life (451-62). Finally, when she is exiled from England, Custance later answers the constable's understandable anxiety about theodicy with an expression of absolute trust in providence:

But nathelees she taketh in good entente
 The wyl of Crist, and knelynge on the stronde,
 She seyde, "Lord, ay welcome be thy sonde!

He that me kepte fro the false blame
 While I was on the lond amonges yow,
 He kan me kepe from harm and eek fro shame
 In salte see, although I se noght how.
 As strong as evere he was, he is yet now.

In hym triste I, and in his mooder deere,
That is to me my seyl and eek my steere.” (824-33)

As Eugene Clasby notes, one can discern the evolution of Custance’s character in her prayers, each of which becomes increasingly confident of her deliverance through providence. In this last instance, Custance’s prayer manifests a faith in providence that does not appear in her earlier prayers for deliverance.²⁹ Although one could argue that Custance’s patience is still mercenary, she does not choose suffering so that she will live; rather, she expresses that she will live because she has realised, because of God’s continued providence, that He wills her to live. She is no longer simply enduring necessity and pleading with God to protect her; instead she now welcomes God’s *sonde*, knowing that He wills her well-being, in both an immediate sense and an ultimate one, and that He, unlike her father and her husbands, has the power to protect her.³⁰ Thus, Custance’s voluntary patient endurance evolves from the acceptance of necessity to the affirmation of her faith in providence.

While the *Man of Law’s Tale* explores the transformation of the mere suffering of necessity into Christ-like suffering, the *Clerk’s Tale* depicts the victory of patience through Griselda’s voluntary, Christ-like suffering. Griselda’s patience is willed,

²⁹ Clasby writes,

Chaucer has enhanced these leave-takings with added material in such a way as to display the spiritual growth of a woman who has been gradually strengthened by her experience, who is, in the end, not inclined to demean herself for personal safety. Her acceptance of what she cannot change is not to be construed as submission to the rule of those who have contrived her situation. Her womanhood is not a sign of human bondage, but an image of human freedom. It is an image of independence from circumstances and worldly authority, of the human capacity to live and to give life, even in the most desperate of situations. (225-6)

See also Clark and Wasserman (1978), who discern a process of “spiritual maturation” (13) in the heroine.

³⁰ Custance draws attention to her father’s role in her suffering, as well as his inability to protect her, when they are finally reunited: “Now, goode fader, mercy I yow crye! / Sende me namoore unto noon hethenesse, / But thonketh my lord heere of his kyndenesse” (1111-13). Custance’s hesitance to reveal herself to her father thus becomes part of a gentle, yet dramatic, chastisement of him and, consequently, a reminder that his will does not directly represent that of God.

confronts anger, relates to the virtue fortitude, and finds its perfection in its triumph over Walter's cruelty. Walter introduces the theme of patience through his condition that Griselda never respond to his demands with anger:

I seye this: be ye redy with good herte
 To al my lust, and that I frely may,
 As me best thynketh, do yow laughe or smerte,
 And nevere ye to grucche it, nyght ne day? (351-3)

Griselda understandably responds to the ominous tone of this proposal, "[w]ondrynge upon this word, quakyng for drede" (358). Her response is not rash or flippant, like Dorigen's, in the *Franklin's Tale*, who agrees to become Aurelius's lover if he removes all the rocks from the shore; rather, she responds with complete awareness of the potential suffering that such a contract forebodes.³¹ While Walter presents himself as a tempter through this agreement, Griselda reveals herself as an embodiment of patience through her ability to reconcile angry people: "Ther nas discord, rancour, ne hevynesse / In al that land that she ne koude apese, / And wisely bryng hem alle in reste and ese" (432-4). Where there is anger, Griselda's patience, like that of Dame Prudence, is an antidote, and it establishes concord through the wisdom that she imparts.

³¹ On the importance of Griselda's volitionality in her submission, see Mann (1991): "...Griselda's unquestioning obedience to her husband is not the simple result of her marriage vow, but something that she takes upon herself with the unique promise that is the special condition of her marriage" (146). See also Pearsall, who writes, "[Griselda's] voluntary embrace of the will to which she has vowed obedience is a form of heroism: it creates a place for hope..., and may even have the power to win over that will" (271). Pearsall convincingly argues that Griselda's "awareness" of the "unjustness" of her situation, which she reveals by occasionally reproving Walter for his cruelty (lines 852-4 and 880-2), "as well as the necessity of embracing it willingly, makes her submission the more meaningful and, paradoxically, the more an expression of power" (272). He concludes that "the voluntariness of Griselda's actions appears all the more striking a demonstration of patience and fortitude and faith if they are performed in the fullness of knowledge of the unjustness of the circumstances in which they are required" (276).

The power of Griselda's patience as a remedy for anger reveals itself through her apparent emotional detachment from the loss of her children. Griselda's suffering originates in Walter's desire "[t]o tempte his wyf, hir sadnesse for to knowe" (452).³² As in the Book of Job, in which Satan tempts Job because of the latter's apparent virtue, Griselda's latent patience inspires Walter to test her. After he tells her that he must "doon with [her] doghter for the beste, / Nat as [he] wolde, but as [his] peple leste" (489-90), he says, "Shewe now youre pacience in youre werkyng, / That ye me highte and swore in youre village / That day that maked was oure mariage" (495-7). Griselda reveals this patience through her emotional restraint:

Whan she had herd al this, she noght amevede

Neither in word, or chiere, or contenance,

For, as it semed, she was nat agreved.

She seyde, "Lord, al lyth in your plesaunce." (498-501)

Here, Griselda responds with perfect equanimity to the suffering that her husband causes. When the sergeant arrives to take the child, Griselda offers no resistance and continues to betray no emotional disturbance. Walter arranges an identical trial after she bears a son, commanding her, "Beth pacient" (644). She responds with such continued detachment that he nearly questions the virtuous nature of her behaviour:

This markys wondred, evere lenger the moore,

Upon hir pacience, and if that he

Ne hadde soothly knowen therbifoore

³² As the translator of the *Somme le roi* notes in *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, patience is found only in those who have been tempted: "Þis vertue hap no wi3t but þilke þat han be tempted, for tribulacion forgeþ & shapeþ suffraunce; and, as Seynt Poule seiþ, ri3t as þe fier makeþ þe tile hard, for wiþ-oute þis vertue non is assaied, no more þan þe gold may be fyned wiþ-oute fier" (167).

That parfitly hir children loved she,
 He wolde have wend that of som subtiltee,
 And of malice, or for crueel corage,
 That she hadde suffered this with sad visage. (687-93)

Griselda is so oddly unmoved by the apparent murder of her children that either a medieval or a modern reader might understandably suspect her of having some sort of pathological hardness of heart or psychological derangement, yet the narrator uses Walter's marvelling to assure the audience that Griselda does in fact love her children. As in the *Franklin's Tale*, Chaucer uses an unrealistic situation to explore virtue in its most extreme manifestations.³³

The narrator of the *Clerk's Tale* connects Griselda's patience to the fortitude that she develops from her life of poverty and hard labour. The initial description of Griselda suggests humility, fortitude, and obedience.³⁴ We learn of Griselda's humility through the narrator's description of the beauty of her virtue; her poverty engenders her humility, and her modest circumstances protect her from luxury and its consequent vices (211-14).

Furthermore, she must labour diligently:

... She knew wel labour but noon ydel ese.
 But thogh this mayde tendre were of age,
 Yet in the brest of hire virginitee

³³ See, for instance, Barbara Nolan, who argues, with respect to Griselda's "prayerful vow" when she learns of her husband's intent to marry another woman (lines 971-73), that Griselda's behaviour conforms perfectly to the medieval tradition of patience: "We know that [Griselda] feels the pain of Walter's cruelty Yet, any number of later medieval treatises on the virtues—and specifically on Christian patience—would explain her surprising behaviour even as they would support Chaucer's 'in-eched' comparisons between Griselda and Christ" (31).

³⁴ For the connection between humility and patience, see the chapter on patience and meekness (*mansuetudo*) in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, a source for Chaucer's *Parson's Tale*, 152-217, especially 152. For the association of patience and obedience, see the *Parson's Tale* 673-5.

Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage;
 ... A fewe sheep, spynnyng, on feeld she kepte;
 She wolde noght been ydel til she slepte. (217-24)

Griselda's "sad corage" keeps her from idleness, a major cause and symptom of *acedia*. The Clerk also points to her obedience, a virtue that the Parson connects directly to patience: "...And ay she kepte hir fadres lyf on-lofte / With everich obeisaunce and diligence / That child may doon to fadres reverence" (229-31). While the Clerk does not describe Griselda's patience directly at this stage of the narrative, he does foreshadow its eventual emergence through this cluster of associated virtues. Although patience is not a species of fortitude in the Parson's taxonomy, the vestiges of the tradition that associates the two virtues remain in Chaucer's work.

Like that of the *Franklin's Tale*, the action of the *Clerk's Tale* consists of a demonstration of patience as a conqueror.³⁵ During his testing of Griselda, Walter eventually tells her that he is to marry another, to which she responds with absolute meekness. Eventually, the victory of patience emerges:

And whan this Walter saugh hire pacience,
 Hir glade chiere, and no malice at al,
 And he so ofte had doon to hire offence,
 And she ay sad and constant as a wal,
 Continuyng evere hire innocence overal,
 This sturdy markys gan his herte dresse
 To rewen upon hire wyfly stedfastnesse. (1044-50)

³⁵ See Mann (1991): "As in the *Franklin's Tale*, the story does not simply illustrate the virtue of patience; it shows that patience *conquers*" (152-3).

The association of Griselda's patience with a wall suggests her invulnerability to temptation, and it is against this image of stability that Walter's anxious testing collapses in failure. As Helen Cooper (1989) notes, "[Griselda] is, ultimately, the rock on which Walter breaks" (195), and it is through her adamant stability that she eventually causes Walter to repent his increasingly brutal testing of her.³⁶ However, as Mann suggests, the exemplary nature of the narrative causes the representation of God to shift from Walter to Griselda: "In Griselda, human suffering and divine patience are united in one person, as Christ united manhood and Godhead" (160). Thus, Griselda's patience makes her Christ-like, particularly through the extreme humility that she expresses in her voluntary suffering.

The Clerk concludes his tale by translating it into a universal vision of the proper relationship between humans and God. Griselda is not emblematic of ideal *feminine* patience; she has, after all, problematically remained quiet while her children were taken away to be murdered. Rather, the Clerk attempts to guide the interpretation of Griselda's behaviour by regarding her patience as exemplary for everyone (1145-7). For the Clerk, patience is the virtue through which we, with equanimity, receive the providence of God, through which act we manifest Christ-like patience. Although God does not tempt humanity, he does test it, even if his motivation for doing so is not entirely clear. At this point, the Clerk concludes that God's providence is good, even if we cannot understand its intentions: "...for oure beste is al his governaunce. / Lat us thanne lyve in vertuous suffraunce" (1161-2). Patience thus consists of trust in the ultimate goodness of

³⁶ For a similar depiction of Griselda's victory, see Pearsall, who writes, "the willing embrace of undeserved suffering as part of the determination of the accord of the will to a higher will in the end reforms the higher will in its own image" (276). See also Mann, who argues, "The 'variance' [Walter] looks for in Griselda he realises in himself. ...human nature resists sameness, seeks the relief of change. It is the pressure of Griselda's sameness that eventually issues in Walter's change" (153).

providence, in spite of the immediate suffering that it can cause, and it is exemplified here by Griselda's emotional restraint and complete submission to the will to which she has promised obedience.

The works of Chaucer and Langland suggest the existence of a well-established discourse that identifies patient endurance as both heroic and mundane. Chaucer reveals his broad awareness of the conventions of patient endurance in the context of a taxonomic treatise (the *Parson's Tale*), a dramatised dialectic (the *Tale of Melibee*), a romance (the *Knight's Tale*), a Breton lai in which patience is required by all of the characters (the *Franklin's Tale*), and in the adventures of two suffering heroines, Custance and Griselda. Furthermore, Langland manifests a similar awareness in *Piers Plowman*, in which he animates the virtue as an allegorical figure. These works reveal the influence of the traditional themes associated with patience that the virtues and vices tradition transmits: patient endurance ultimately defeats aggressive behaviour and is thus superior to aggression, patience is the antidote for anger, and, because of the virtue's frequent association with the cardinal virtue fortitude, it is also a remedy for *acedia*.

In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the volitionality through which the virtue is manifested becomes a central concern. In the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, a major source for the *Parson's Tale*, there are three types of patience. This first, the patience of a donkey, is that which simply responds to the demands of necessity. This sort of patience characterises that which must be manifested in the *Knight's Tale*, in which the characters, to varying degrees, are subject to the caprices of higher powers, and must struggle to negotiate their desires with these powerful cosmic forces. The need to accept necessity also characterises Dorigen's impatience in the *Franklin's Tale* and Custance's patience at

the beginning of the *Man of Law's Tale*. The second type of patience is that of the mercenary, and it is performed for the sake of gain. In the *Knight's Tale*, Theseus tries to derive a positive outcome from the suffering of Palamon and Emelye. Theseus's patience is not mercenary, inasmuch as he does not choose suffering in order to gain something, but it does try to derive good from necessary suffering, and thus does manage to transcend the mere acceptance of necessity. In the *Tale of Melibee*, however, Melibee's patience is indeed mercenary, because it is inspired ultimately by the possibility of having his enemies subjected to him. Arveragus's patience in the *Franklin's Tale* is also of the mercenary sort, since he chooses to suffer the shame of adultery in order to maintain the virtue of *trouthe*. Arveragus's act is motivated by a negotiation of external virtues, both of which relate to honour, and its classification as "mercenary" points to the level of volitionality and the desire for a certain gain that motivate his decision. According to the *Summa virtutum*, the spontaneous patience of Christ is the third degree of the virtue; this is the sort that Langland's *Patience* discusses and is that which Chaucer's *Man of Law's* Custance and the Clerk's *Griselda* ultimately depict. While Custance is initially bound by necessity, she eventually perceives the power of providence that governs her adventures, and submits herself entirely to that transcendent will. *Griselda*, on the other hand, acts freely from her initial encounter with Walter, during which she agrees to subject herself entirely to his will. The power of her patience is so great that Walter tempts her more and more until he finally breaks because of her invulnerability.

Having now established the prominence of these ideas in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, as well as their brief, yet significant, appearances in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, I shall now examine the presence of these aspects of the virtue in *Patience* in order to

determine to what extent the *Gawain*-poet was influenced by this common concern with patience to which these others attest, and, thus, whether these concepts of patience can be applied to our understanding of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Chapter VI: The *Gawain*-Poet's Understanding of Patience in *Patience*

The vice of anger, the virtue of fortitude, the victory over necessity through the recognition and acceptance of providence, and the exemplary suffering of God, the presence of which themes suggests the broad circulation of scholastic and penitential understandings of patience, recur frequently in Chaucer and Langland, and thereby attest to the virtue's popularity with at least two major vernacular authors in England at the end of the fourteenth century. While there is no clear evidence of direct influence among these writers,¹ one can discern a definite trend that has implications for the nature of late fourteenth-century heroism, at least in the London area. But to what extent are aspects of patience operative in the *Gawain*-poet who, unlike Chaucer and Langland, did not live in the near vicinity of the major centres of learning and culture? Did he have access to the same learned tradition of patience that informs the work of his contemporaries?

In this chapter, I shall argue that, in *Patience*, the *Gawain*-poet does indeed reveal a broad knowledge of the various implications of patience as it was understood by Classical and Patristic writers and the Scholastic and Penitential traditions that transmitted their definitions and, like Chaucer, he reveals a particular concern with questions concerning the relationship between patience and volitionality.² I shall begin by exploring the poet's treatment of the primary definition of patience that the narrator presents: the rational control of one's emotional responses. As we shall see, Jonah initially does not manifest the sort of equanimity that is required for right action. Because

¹ However, there has been some indication that *Patience* influenced Langland. See Kirk 89 and 103 n2.

² See chapter two, in which I trace the development of the penitential tradition of patience and chapter five, in which I discuss patience and volitionality in Chaucer.

of his refusal of grace, his pre-passion,³ which is the natural first response to the threat of death and suffering, develops into anger at God and fear that prohibits him from pursuing right action, that is, from preaching to the citizens of Nineveh. He questions God's concern for the world, and thus tests God's power in the world by trying to evade the divine command. Also, I shall argue that the opposition between patience and anger, on the one hand, recalls the traditional function of patience as a remedy for the vice; on the other hand, the fear, sadness, and despair that Jonah experiences here and elsewhere in the exemplum suggest *acedia*, the remedy for which is fortitude, of which patience is a part.

I shall continue by contending that Jonah in *Patience*, as does Custance in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, begins to manifest patience as he experiences necessity as providence. The victory of patience is over the passions that inspire Jonah to distrust providence, and it is only after God displays his perfect control of all the cosmic elements that Jonah abandons himself to providence and carries out the divine decree that he preach in Nineveh. Nevertheless, I shall conclude, the patience of God contrasts human impatience, and God's sufferance of human disobedience disproves Jonah's supposition that God is comfortably detached from the suffering of his creation. Thus, I shall argue, while the basic definition of patience, as the virtue through which one conquers anger and *acedia*, remains static throughout the text, the narrator depicts a familiar hierarchy of the virtue's essential activity, similar to the one found in the *Summa virtutum*, in which patience varies from a basic response to poverty and the fear of death, both of which suggest some form of necessity, to divine *caritas*, which suggests God's spontaneous self-definition. Although Jonah is never absolutely free from this necessity, he does

³ For more on this concept, see chapter three, pages 44-5.

approach divine patience through the embracing of providence. God's absolutely volitional patience contrasts the necessity that governs all humans, yet the spark of divinity enables the existence of free will, and, thus, patience, in spite of all of the varying degrees of necessity.

Patience is an activity that consists of the proper submission of the emotional energies, particularly anger, to the guidance of reason, and this process is different for humans, who are subject to passions and necessity, than it is for God, who is subject to neither. The narrator begins by drawing attention to the tradition of patience as a remedial virtue:

Pacience is a poynt, þa3 hit displesse ofte.

When hevy herttes ben hurt wyth hepyng oþer elles,

Suffraunce may aswagen hem and þe swelme leþe,

For ho quelles vche a qued and quenches malyce. (1-4)

The *MED* describes *poynt*, which has a broad semantic field, in the above passage as denoting "a good quality, virtue" (*MED pointe* n.(1) def. 10c) and presents this denotation as being related to a "state of being, condition, situation, disposition" (def. 10a). Nevertheless, patience, like all virtues, would be better classified as an "activity, action, operation" (def. 9a), another denotation that appears earlier among the definitions of *poynt*. The compilers' decision to associate virtues with dispositions is just the sort of modern approach to patience, and virtues in general, that this thesis, in part, seeks to confront. In *Patience*, Patience is an *activity* of the soul that soothes the anger that is a natural consequence of being offended. It must be manifested in circumstances that, at least initially, contradict one's will, and, thus, is displeasing. The narrator refines his

exploration of the virtue by locating it in the Beatitudes,⁴ which he renders fairly literally, with the notable exception of the eighth Beatitude: "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"⁵ (Mt. 5:10, Douay-Rheims translation), which the poet renders, "Þar happen also þat con her hert stere, For hores is þe heuen-ryche, as I er sayde" (27-28).⁶ In the context of patience, such a steering of the heart implies the control of one's emotions.⁷ The proper control of the passions is a major theme of Cotton Nero A.x.iii; the expulsion of the narrator of *Pearl* from his dream, the destruction of Belshazzar and his court in *Cleanness*, Jonah's suffering and humiliation, and Gawain's nearness to death in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* all suggest the consequences of various inappropriate emotional responses.

Although the goal of patience is the ultimate cessation of suffering, it requires the acceptance of suffering as a means to that end. Thus, the virtue requires the element of choice, which consists of an activity of the will. Patience lessens suffering by granting one the capacity to endure; impatience, as the poet envisions it, consists of an agent's

⁴ For David Williams (1970), the Beatitudes stand for the "new law of the patient and merciful God" (132), and without them, "the message of *Patience* might seem only a rather baffled stoicism" (132). Nevertheless, he notes, the narrator turns away from the idealism of the Beatitudes, which to some degree suggest voluntary heroism, and moves instead into a discourse on necessity: "[The Beatitudes] are not set out as the goal of a heroic struggle. Having drawn attention to them and shown reverence for their authority, the homilist retreats to a less idealistic, although ... hardly less profound, basis for a rational life in God's universe" (132). Thus, the Beatitudes serve to ground the virtue in a Christian idealism that confronts present suffering with the possibility of future transcendence. While the Beatitudes suggest the parameters of patience, the poet's emphasis on the role of necessity seems to undermine its status as a virtue. For Jonah there is no other path. Nevertheless, as these latter examples reveal, the receptivity to patience enables virtue even in the absence of external choice; spiritual free will exists always as a potentiality in the soul, even if one is unable to act physically.

⁵ *Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iustitiam quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.*

⁶ As Attila Fáj suggests, the eighth Beatitude is most often associated with martyrs (20). Such a connection between patience and martyrdom asserts the heroism of the virtue, even when the narrator explores patience in more mundane examples of suffering, such as poverty and necessity.

⁷ The steering of the heart also points to Proverbs 16:32, in which the superiority of patient endurance is extolled above aggression: "Melior est patiens viro forte et qui dominatur animo suo expugnatore urbium"; "The patient man is better than the valiant: and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities" (Douay-Rheims trans.).

attempt to escape from suffering, an act that has an effect contrary to the desired one.

Lines 5-8 describe this action of patience, which consists of the ability to suffer:

For quoso suffer cowþe syt, sele wolde fol3e,

And quo for þro may no3t þole, þe þikker he sufferes.

þen is better to abyde þe bur umbestoundes

þen ay þrow forth my þro, þagh me þynk ylle.

The narrator envisions two different responses to suffering: one, an act of will, consists of enduring anger, and the other, which paradoxically appears to consist of action, actually consists of submission to an irrational impulse of the soul. The reward of endurance is happiness or good fortune (*sele*)⁸ and the consequence of submitting to the passion is even more suffering; to “abyde” is the activity through which one suffers less than to “þro” “þole.” Thus, the narrator does not suggest that patience is just suffering itself; rather, he regards it as a willed response to suffering that consists of a proper relationship with the emotions. It is not simply permitting oneself to be acted upon, but doing so with a certain intentionality.

The narrator of *Patience* continues this examination of the connection between patience and the passions by introducing the theme of necessity. The temptation that the narrator examines in the prologue is that which is caused by poverty. Whether or not he is speaking about material or spiritual poverty, such as that which is rooted in the perpetual awareness of God as the ultimate source of all human potency, is irrelevant;⁹ instead, he

⁸ Compare the opposite of *sele*, which Jonah experiences in the whale: “Now he knawez Hym in care þat couþe not in sele” (296).

⁹ Whereas Charles Moorman (1963) suggests that the poverty that the poet discusses in lines 35-48 is spiritual, J. J. Anderson (1966) claims that it is literal. While the former’s opinion seems more likely, given that the inspiration of the discussion of poverty is the first Beatitude, Anderson’s argument does capture the sense of necessity with which the narrator must reconcile himself. However, in lines 31-32 and 45-46, the narrator suggests that *pacyence* and *pouerté* are both virtues, and since the necessity of poverty is not in

is interested in how poverty, as a form of suffering, is a state of necessity that provokes a certain response from the one whom it afflicts; for this reason, and because of the association that he discerns in the Beatitudes of spiritual poverty, patience, and the kingdom of heaven, he suggests that poverty and patience “arn of on kynde” (40):

For þeras pouert hir proferes ho nyl be put vtter,
 Bot lenge wheresoeuer hir lyst, lyke other greme;
 And þereas pouert enpresses, þa3 mon pyne þynk,
 Much, maugré his mun, he mot nede suffer. (41-4)

Poverty originates in some sort of necessity, and it is best for one to respond to such necessity without the influence of passions such as despair or anger. One will still experience the suffering, of course, but without being further oppressed by the action of the passions, which can only exacerbate one's misfortune; thus, patience allows the pre-passions, because in medieval thought they are an inescapable part of the soul, yet it blocks the complete development of the passion.

The narrator provides another example of the relationship between patience and the passions by citing an example that would have been familiar to both monastics and those who had sworn fealty to a feudal lord:

3if me be dy3t a destyné due to haue,
 What dowes me þe dedayn, oþer dispit make?
 Oþer 3if my lege lorde lyst on lyue me to bidde
 Oþer ryde oþer to renne to Rome in his ernde,
 What grayþed me þe grychchyng bot grame more seche?

itself a virtue, the narrator must be suggesting that *pouerté*, like *pacyence*, is a certain response to necessity, rather than necessity itself.

Much 3if he me ne made, maugref my chekes,
 And þenne prat moste I þole and vnþonk to mede,
 Þe had bowed to his bode, bongré my hyure. (49-56)

This example provides a useful transition to the exemplum of Jonah's disobedience and alludes to a classical commonplace that defines patience as sufferance without complaining. The narrator's references to "dedayn," "dispit," and "grychchyng" do not refer to passions, but rather to their expression, as he reveals in his argument that by addressing these concerns to his master, he may incur the latter's displeasure, and thus still be forced to go after having fallen from favour and broken his bond. Jonah is to be the example of the servant who does not perform his lord's command and thereby incurs greater misfortune. Although "bongré my hyure" suggests that the sufferer in this example has entered into an agreement with his lord, similar to the obedience to which a monk agrees or the fealty that a feudal tenant swears, the focus of this passage is on the necessity of suffering by which the individual is constrained. The proper response to necessity is patient endurance and, as the exemplum of Jonah is meant to show, the result of trying to deny necessity is an increase of suffering: "Did not Jonas in Judé suche jape sumwhyle? / To sette hym to sewrté, vnsounde he hym feches" (57-58).¹⁰ As far as the narrator is concerned, Jonah's suffering is the result of his attempt to avoid necessity, and thus he is an appropriate example of the importance of patience.¹¹

¹⁰ As Myra Stokes notes, "[Jonah] refuses God's command to go to Nineveh; the result of this is that he is transported to Nineveh in a rather more uncomfortable and uncereemonious manner than he might have otherwise been. We are to see the story, we are told, chiefly as showing the inevitability of conformity to God's will" (359). For her, suffering is not a virtue; it is simply the only choice.

¹¹ Edward Wilson (1976) notes the uniqueness of the poet's choice of Jonah as the subject of his exemplum, since Job is the obvious choice for a sermon on patience (56n), and Jonah's disobedience is not usually associated with his being afraid. However, as Ordelle G. Hill (1967, 1968) notes, there are several precedents for this disparaging view of the prophet, including St. Gregory's *Moralium in Job* and Marbodius of Rennes' *Naufragium Jonae prophetae*. Diekstra (1994) divides his discussion of Jonah into

The progression of the exemplum is thematically similar to that of the introduction. First, the narrator presents the relationship between patience and the passions, which in this case consists of Jonah's inability to "stere" his "hert"; next, he depicts Jonah willfully rejecting the suffering that God's order portends; and finally, God manifests his will as necessity, an act that inspires Jonah to reconsider his disobedience. The narrator alludes to the tradition that associates patience with the control of the emotions and courage through his description of Jonah's actions at the beginning of the exemplum, in which he consciously contrasts the prophet's behaviour to that of the Christian martyrs and Christ. The voice of God announces to Jonah that he is to be a prophet to the Ninevites. In a manner analogous to the way in which *aventure* often manifests the identity of the romance hero, Jonah's identity is to be defined by a transcendent source: the voice of God mysteriously appears to Jonah and reveals his new role as a prophet to the gentiles. However, Jonah does not react like a romance hero; instead, he responds to the call with anger, and reflects on the suffering that he believes he would endure because of such a mission:

He telles me þose traytoures arn trypped schrewes;
 I com wyth þose tyþynges, þay ta me bylyue,
 Pynez me in a prysoun, put me in stokkes,
 Wryþe me in a warlok, wrast out myn y3en. (77-80)

the medieval typological classifications of *in bono* and *in malo*, which permit certain figures to represent a virtue or a vice, depending on the needs of the sermon (188-89). Since biblical typology sees the Old Testament as mysteriously prefiguring the events of the New, such an ambiguity of exemplary figures is perfectly appropriate. See also John T. Irwin and T. D. Kelly, who note, "Commentators on the Book of Jonah point out that Jonah is a type both of rebellious man and of Christ who redeems man. Such dual typology is common wherever the figure of Christ is involved, for the very essence of Christ as redeemer is that he functions simultaneously as man and God" (47). For a sustained discussion of Christ and Jonah, see Friedman *passim*. C. David Benson, on the other hand, argues that "Jonah is an extreme example of the Ricardian anti-hero described by Burrow" (149).

Jonah's audience would likely recognise in this speech an allusion to the sufferings of the prophets or martyrs. Because of the reality of the potential suffering that he faces, Jonah's response is quite understandable. Kirk notes that his plight is comedic from the divine perspective, because he is always under God's protection;¹² however, as the fate of Christ and the prophets and martyrs reveals, God's concern is not necessarily with preserving his servants from pain and death, and, as Jonah reveals by his attempt to escape, he does not yet regard God's providence as absolute. From his limited perspective, the threat that he faces is a real one and his response, although decidedly non-heroic, is at least justifiable and natural.¹³ Furthermore, the narrator does not revile him for his anger and fear but, rather, for his unwillingness to suffer and his foolish belief that he can escape the will of God.

This dramatic representation of Jonah's response to God's order significantly alters the representation of Jonah in the Vulgate, as well as in the Christian and Jewish commentary tradition, inasmuch as it depicts him as being overcome by impatience. In the Vulgate, Jonah simply tries to get away from God, and the text, at this point at least, offers no explanation: "...and Jonah rose up to flee into Tharsis from the face of the Lord"¹⁴ (Jonas 1:3). Although one could infer from the fact that Jonah fled that his response is a fearful one, the majority of the Patristic writers in the exegetical tradition supports Jonah's later explanation, in which he claims that he fled because he knew that

¹² See Kirk (1978) 92.

¹³ See, for instance, Jim Rhodes, who argues that Jonah's impression of God's remoteness is perfectly justifiable in fourteenth-century theology: "Jonah's impression of God's remoteness is hardly a projection of his febrile imagination but had common currency in theological circles in the fourteenth century, given the notion of a hidden God whose primary qualities were omnipotence and unknowability" (115). With respect to the acceptability of fear, Aquinas states a truism: "[f]ear, as a passion of our *sensitive* appetite and thus part of our *animal* nature, is a natural response to death, which is a threat to us precisely as *embodied* rational animals" (De Young 153).

¹⁴ "...et surrexit Iona et fugeret in Tharsis a facie Domini."

God would change his mind. Nevertheless, as Ordelle G. Hill (1968) notes, “in the later medieval period, more emphasis was given to Jonah as a human being, a man who did sin and whose shortcomings could be found in many people” (106).¹⁵ Regardless of the source, Jonah’s behaviour at this point is characterised by impatience, and thus the narrator explicitly associates patience with the sort of emotional control that one finds in narratives about martyrs and, implicitly, with the acceptance of adventure by romance heroes.

Jonah’s response to the pre-passion that he experiences associates him ironically with Christ. While Jonah’s first reflection on God’s instruction contrasts his behaviour to that of the martyrs, the second invites a comparison between him and Christ. Jonah’s sojourn in the whale is associated with Christ’s death and resurrection as early as the composition of the Gospels. In *Matthew*, for instance, when the Scribes and Pharisees ask for a sign, Jesus responds,

An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, and no sign shall be given it but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For even as Jonas was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Mt 12.39-40 Douay-Rheims translation).¹⁶

This association continues in medieval typology: Jonah is a type of Christ. Andrew and Johnson comment on Jonah’s association with Christ that both the poem and his typology

¹⁵ He identifies Marbodius of Rennes’ *Naufragium Jonae prophetae*, in which Jonah is afraid to prophesy to the Ninevites, as a possible source for this tropological understanding of Jonah (106).

¹⁶ “Generatio mala et adultera signum quaerit et signum non dabitur ei nisi signum Ioniae prophetae sicut enim fuit Ionas in ventre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus sic erit Filius hominis in corde terrae tribus diebus et tribus noctibus.” See also Luke 11:29-32.

suggest; as a type of Christ, Jonah is necessarily imperfect.¹⁷ While possessed with fear about his mission, he imagines himself being crucified in Nineveh:

Benne he ryses radly and raykes bilyue,
 Jonas toward port Japh, ay janglande for tene
 Þat he nolde þole for nobyng non of pose pynes,
 Þa3 þe Fader þat hym formed were fale of his hele.
 ‘Our Syre syttes,’ he says, ‘on sege so hy3e
 In His glowande glorye, and gloumbes ful lyttel
 Þa3 I be nummen in Nunniue and naked dispoyled,
 On rode rwly torent with rybaudes mony.’ (89-96)

This episode sharply contrasts Jonah with Christ at the Garden of Gethsemane, although it fills a similar function. While Christ goes to the Garden and, after telling his disciples to wait, falls down and prays, Jonah quickly runs to the port of Jaffa,¹⁸ complaining along the way about God’s impassivity, that is, the problem of God’s suffering and, by extension, the problem of the existence of suffering, in the sense of experiencing passions and pain, in heaven.

Whereas the depictions of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46 aim to reveal both the humanity of Christ, in his fear and sorrow, and the heroism of Christ, in his ability to obey God’s will in spite of his powerful emotions, this episode, in which Jonah tries to escape from God’s will, suggests the prophet’s humanity without offering any redeeming sense of heroism. Both Jonah and Christ experience the fear of death, yet the emotion evokes different responses from each; Christ, on the one

¹⁷ See Andrew (1973) *passim* and Lynn Staley Johnson (1984) 344, 353, and 358-9.

¹⁸ F. N. M. Diekstra (1974) notes the irony of Jonah’s using a sea voyage to escape from potential tribulation (215-16).

hand, prays and accepts God's will, while Jonah, on the other hand, complains about God's impassibility, that is, his imperviousness to passion and pain, and attempts to escape. In the terms of patristic psychology, Christ experiences fear as a pre-passion that he overcomes by prayer; Jonah, however, subjects his reason to the suggestion of the pre-passion, and thereby develops a full-blown passion.¹⁹ The narrator consequently chastises the protagonist:

Lo, þe wytles wrechche! For he wolde no3t suffer,
 Now hatz he put hym in plyt of peril wel more.
 Hit watz a wenying vnwar þat welt in his mynde,
 Þa3 he were so3t fro Samarye, þat God se3 no fyrre. (113-16)

While Jonah's emotions are understandable, especially since it is not uncharacteristic of God to allow his servants to suffer, his decision to try to avoid the necessity of God's will, to attempt to escape from the difficult narrative in which he finds himself, makes Jonah seem somewhat ridiculous. The narrator points to the extent of his irrationality by mocking his implied belief that he can escape from God's sight.

Although Jonah does indeed discover patience during the narrative, his victory is not permanent. His formerly passionate nature reappears as anger and *acedia*; the latter vice suggests the traditional remedy, fortitude. Whereas the relationship between God and

¹⁹ See Knuuttila 194:

...it was assumed that pre-passions occurred in Jesus' soul when he 'began to be sad and troubled' (Matt. 26-37). These movements had to be (sinless) pre-passions and not passions, because the latter would have implied consent to the judgement that something evil was going to happen to him contrary to his will. The idea that Jesus' fear and sorrow were pre-passions was well known from Jerome's commentary on Matthew 26:37.

For the medieval currency of Jerome's view, see, for instance, the entry for Matthew 26:37 in Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*. While the quotation from St. John Damascene emphasises the superiority of Christ's will to his suffering, and thus, the voluntary nature of his passion(s), St. Jerome, following Origen, insists that Christ experienced only pre-passions, and not actual passions. For the latter, like Augustine, following stoic psychology, a passion proper requires an act of will: the act of consent. The discussion of pre-passions becomes a popular topic among twelfth-century schoolmen, many of whom respond to the discussion found in Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* III.15.2.

the Ninevites becomes peaceful after Jonah finally preaches to them, Jonah again becomes hostile towards God's actions, and God's response to his hostility teaches the prophet about another aspect of patience: the divine suffering of wrongs for the sake of love. Jonah begins his angry speech by telling God that he knew that God would forgive the Ninevites. Although Jonah says nothing about this earlier in either the Vulgate version or *Patience*, various Patristic and Midrashic commentators suggest that this is the real reason why Jonah tries to escape to Tarshish. He is angry with God not because he wants Him to destroy the Ninevites but, rather, because God's forgiveness of them has made Jonah's prophecy seem false:

‘Now, Lorde, lach out my lyf, hit lastes to longe.
 Bed me bilyue my bale-stour and bryng me on ende,
 For me were swetter to swelt as swyþe, as me þynk,
 þen lede longer þi lore þat þus me les makez.’ (425-28)

While Jonah's anger might be interpreted as a form of pettiness that consists of his wanting God to destroy the Ninevites, Jim Rhodes (2001) remarks that “Certainly, Jonah places a high premium on his word, as well he should, but Jonah's quarrel is exclusively with God and he wishes no ill fortune to the Ninevites” (119). Lorraine K. Stock notes that Jonah at this point reveals the despair of *acedia*, the treatment for which is patience.²⁰ God chastens Jonah for his anger, and then teaches the prophet, through the destruction of the prophet's beloved woodbine, that his apparently paradoxical nature, which seems to waver between justice and mercy, is rooted in his absolute *caritas* for all creation. Like that of Brendan's monks and Owein, Jonah's most typical passion is fear; as Hill (1968) notes, “Before the storm, Jonah fears that if he obeys God the Ninevites will imprison and

²⁰ See Stock (1991) 170.

torture ... and finally crucify him on the cross.... At the height of the storm, he becomes afraid of the waves and flees to the bottom of the ship, where he falls asleep. And later in the whale, he is afraid, “malskred in drede” (l. 255)” (108). Diekstra (1974) shows particular interest in Jonah’s emotions and comments on how Jonah’s initial passion of *tristitia* becomes full-blown *acedia*, which is ultimately manifested in his desire to die when God forgives the Ninevites and again when God destroys his woodbine (208-10). Such a diagnosis is particularly apt, since, whereas in the Patristic era, *patientia* is most closely associated with *ira*, in the Middle Ages, patience, because of the reemergence of the Classical concept of fortitude, is considered the proper antidote for *acedia*.²¹

Jonah develops patience through his discovery of the relationship between necessity and providence. In the *Navigatio*, the winds and the sea obey the ordinance of God, even when they are providing a storm that seems to threaten the well-being of the crew, in order to teach the monks faith and longsuffering. In *Patience*, the elements, obedient to the will of God, do not aim to teach Jonah about faith and longsuffering but, rather, to assert God’s dominion over the natural world, and thereby emphasise the prophet’s irrational impatience and reveal his inability to elude providence. Whereas Jonah quickly attempts to escape from God’s ordination, the winds immediately obey that which God commands them:

‘Ewrus and Aquiloun þat on est sittes,

Blowes boþe at My bode vpon blo watteres.’

Penne watz no tom þer bytwene His tale and her dede,

²¹ For more on Jonah and *acedia*, see Stock (1991). Johnson (1981) notes that fear turns into patience through the grace of God, whether by being transformed into the fear of God or by turning into anger and then being extinguished by patience, just as *Ira* is in Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*. At any rate, the experience of fear is an essential component of patience.

So bayn wer þay boþe two His bone for to wyrk. (132-35)

As Diekstra (1974) notes, the obedience of the elements contrasts the disobedience of Jonah (208). He boards the boat feeling jubilant and fearless: “Bot he dredes no dynt þat dotes for elde, / For he watz fer in þe flod foundande to Tarce” (125-26). The courage originating in the foolishness that the narrator here associates with Jonah’s old age later gives way to fear, and the next image of Jonah consists of him curled up in the bottom of the boat, “for ferde of þe flode lotes” (183), sleeping soundly by the *hurrok*. While the precise meaning of *hurrok* is unknown, if, as Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron suggest, it “denotes a rudder-band encircling the rudder to keep it in position” (193n), then Sarah Stanbury’s argument that Jonah’s sleeping beside it “could denote Jonah’s forfeiture of will” (75) is convincing. His failure to steer his heart is figured both as impatience and disobedience, and both are associated with a failure of will.

The beginning of Jonah’s temporary transformation consists of his self sacrifice when the sailors discover that he is the cause of the storm. Wilson and C. David Benson argue that Jonah’s impatience makes him an anti-hero, but the nature of his willing sacrifice complicates such a reading.²² After the sailors find Jonah sleeping peacefully beneath the boat’s deck, they draw lots, and God reveals his will through the ancient divination ritual. The sailors ask Jonah who he is and what he has done to anger God, and he identifies himself as a Hebrew who worships the God who has dominion over the entire cosmic order. Although he neither reveals nor embraces his divine mission at this point, his disclosing of himself as a Hebrew who worships and has offended the God who

²² On Jonah as an anti-hero, see Wilson (1976) 65 and C. David Benson (1991) 149. See also A. C. Spearing (1970), who argues, “...there is no escaping from the power of God the creator—it is present everywhere within the world of the poem—and this very power is the source of God’s mercy, his ‘patience’. ...Towards such a God, an *unheroic patience* is the only viable attitude” (95) (*italics mine*).

is troubling them is the first step in Jonah's gradual embracing of his divinely-appointed identity, and, in order to avoid endangering the crew further, he asks them to throw him overboard immediately:

'Alle þis meschef for me is made at þys tyme,
For I haf greued my God and gulty am founden;
Forþy berez me to þe borde and bapes me þeroute,
Er gete 3e no happe, I hope forsoþe.' (209-12)

Jonah recognises that his rejection of the task that God has ordained for him is the cause of mishap not only for himself, but also for those who have the misfortune of being in his presence. His solution is to reveal the truth to the sailors and thereby sacrifice himself for salvation of his shipmates. As Johnson (1981) notes, "Jonah's request to be thrown overboard is analogous to the voluntary passion of Christ" (348).²³ His choosing to offer himself to the apparent force of chance that the sea embodies lacks the spontaneity of Owein's decision to redeem himself in purgatory, since Jonah simply realises that he is constrained by cosmic necessity; however, it is more closely connected with Christ's experience at Gethsemane, in which he submits to a higher will in spite of his fear.²⁴

Whereas Owein's decision to endure purgatory exemplifies what the author of the *Summa virtutum* defines as mercenary patience, since the knight is motivated by the fear of his own punishment and the desire for a reward for himself, Jonah's decision to have

²³ See also Vantuono (1972), who writes, "In the dramatic development of *Patience*, the poet shows that, under the proper stimuli, Jonas overcomes his fear in order to serve the Lord and preach to the Ninevites" (418). Schmidt (1991) notes that "though he is not aware of the whale's presence when he is tossed overboard, Jonah enters the sea as a willing sacrifice, recognizing his own sin. In so doing, he embraces a form of poverty far beyond that which he had anticipated at Nineveh" (185).

²⁴ It may have been unthinkable to regard Christ as a victim of necessity, yet it surely would have been orthodox to suggest that his human nature was obedient to the demands of the divine nature. While Christ's human nature, like Jonah, may simply have done what was required, it did so willingly, just as Jonah willingly suggests that he be thrown into the sea.

himself thrown from the ship is somewhat Christ-like, inasmuch as he risks his own destruction in order to save the crew. Although the sailors initially recoil in fear at Jonah's proclamation and continue to row in an attempt to save the ship, they eventually see the nature of the inevitability that constrains them, and decide to agree to Jonah's suggestion and throw him into the sea: "Penne hade þay no3t in her honde þat hem help my3t; / Penne nas no coumfort to keuer, ne counsel non oþer, / Bot Jonas into his juis jugge bylyue" (221-23). Here, the narrator amplifies the necessity that the sailors face. They are afraid to throw Jonah into the water because he is a servant of the God whose wrath they are experiencing; they pray and commit the sacrifice only after they have done everything they could to save the ship. This patient response to necessity coincides with Jonah's recognition of the inevitability of his mission to Nineveh. Having tested the boundaries of providence by seeking to escape the tasks that God has ordained for them, both the sailors and Jonah seek to alleviate their suffering without obeying the apparent yet fearful will of God. However, when the inevitability of providence manifests itself, they act patiently, that is, in spite of their fear; Jonah, by telling the sailors that they must throw him from the ship, and the sailors by obeying Jonah's, and ultimately God's, demand.

For the sailors, the uncertain consignment of Jonah to the sea is rewarded by a further demonstration of the power of providence. In the Vulgate text, the sea simply stops raging when the sailors commit Jonah to its waves: "...tulerunt Ionam et miserunt in mare et stetit mare a fervore suo et timuerunt viri timore magno Dominum" (Jon 1:15-16); however, the narrator of *Patience* considerably amplifies this action of providence that the sailor's obedience inspires:

Penne þa3 her takel were torne þat totered on yþes,
 Styffe stremes and stre3t hem strayed a whyle,
 Þat drof hem dr3lych adoun þe depe to serue,
 Tyl a swetter ful swyþe hem swe3ed to bonk. (233-36)

Here, the narrator alludes to the tradition of the rudderless boat that is guided by a supernatural force. Traditionally, this motif is used to indicate the chosen nature of the passengers, and in this case, it both indicates the appropriateness of their sacrifice and the providential care that God has for the obedient. The sailors have entrusted their welfare to the uncertainty of providence²⁵ by ridding themselves of a servant of God, and the reward for their patient obedience is an experience of providence that reveals to them the power of the Hebrew God.

In the whale, which consists of a harsh environment of necessity and providence, the poet dramatises the victory of patience. Jonah's entry into the beast signifies his powerlessness in the light of God's providence and his acknowledgment of his impotence, yet it also facilitates his discovery and experience of patience through voluntary suffering. This experience of powerlessness is essential to Aquinas's notion of the enduring aspect of patience, through which one acts rightly by overcoming one's fear of death and accepting the suffering that a greater power inflicts. After depicting the providential treatment of the sailors, the narrator turns to Jonah, who is swallowed by the "fish" while the sailors still hold his feet. The action of providence, which the narrator describes here as *wyrde*, that is, the fate/necessity that governs and determines the cosmos and the lives of those in it, is immediate, and Jonah is swiftly saved from being "jugged

²⁵ Providence is uncertain for humans, at least, to whom it appears as chance or fortune, according to Boethius.

to drowne" (245): "Þe folk 3et haldande his fete, þe fysch hym tyd hentes; / Withouten towche of any tothe, he tult in his prote" (251-52). Jonah is protected both from the threatening of the waves and the danger of the whale's teeth. The whale descends quickly into the depths, yet in spite of the inhospitable environment into which Jonah's fear and disobedience have led him, the action of providence miraculously sustains him:

Bot he watz sokored by þat Syre þat syttes so hi3e,
 þa3 were wanlez of wele in wombe of þat fische,
 And also dryuen þur3 þe depe and derk walterez.
 Lord, colde watz his cumfort, and his care huge. (261-64)

Whereas previously, Jonah ran to the port at Jaffa and boarded a ship bound for Tarshish, he is now handed by the sailors to the whale, in whom he is "driven through the deep waters" while being sustained directly by the will of God.

The narrator's description of Jonah's journey through the whale's throat imitates the descent to hell motif of visionary texts,²⁶ and, like Owein in purgatory, Jonah is here purged of his fear. Like Owein, Jonah enters a small tunnel that opens up into a vast cavern, and in this space he is to undergo the drama of his purgatorial suffering:

He glydes in by þe giles þur3 glaym ande glette,
 Relande in by a rop, a rode þat hym þo3t,
 Ay hele ouer had hourlande aboute,
 Til he blunt in a blok as brod as a halle;
 And þer he festnes þe fete and fathmez aboute,
 And stop vp in his stomak þat stank as þe deuel.
 Per in saym and in sor3e þat sauoured as helle,

²⁶ See Gary D. Schmidt (1991) 181-87.

Per watz bylded his bour þat wyl no bale suffer. (269-77)

Whereas Owein walks through the tunnel that leads to purgatory, Jonah tumbles down the whale's esophagus, until he reaches the stomach, where he is given the limited volitional expression of physical motion. Here the narrator amplifies the irony of the suffering of the impatient. Gary D. Schmidt observes that the infernal nature that the whale suggests is emphasised here by the smell, as well as by the whale's belly as a place of imprisonment and the suffering that Jonah must endure as a consequence of his unwillingness to suffer the will of God;²⁷ however, as Stanbury notes in her discussion of the enclosed spaces in *Patience*, the whale's belly is also essentially a place of revelation.²⁸

Jonah's experience in the whale is one of self-awareness, since he discovers the true source of his being and identity, and he allows his own will to accord with that of God. As Sandra Pierson Prior argues, "Jonah's experience in the whale's belly represents the personal eschaton every human must face. This aspect of Jonah's story ... provides the initial impetus of the narrative's movement toward interiorization and individuation" (345). Jonah has tested the boundaries of reality, and has found the course of action that his identity necessitates; he realises not only that his mission is inevitable, but also that God's providence will protect him in all possible, and even seemingly impossible, situations. He is a prophet of God, and he has been given a mission, and providence will both force him to enter the places that he fears and save him from their potential consequences. Because his being and identity are constituted by an omnipotent external

²⁷ See Schmidt (1991) *passim*.

²⁸ Stanbury writes, "Jonah, encased in the whale's belly very much as he is earlier enclosed in the hold of the ship, resides in spaces that contain dual allegories of hell and temple, allegories that repeatedly place this human drama within a larger Christian cycle of repentance and salvation" (81).

source, there is no real possibility of defining himself outside of the will of the transcendent that defines him. Thus, since he can choose only between obedience and disobedience, patience is a willingness to accept a transcendently imposed identity, even when the demands of such an identity conflict with the concern for self-preservation, to which, in Thomistic terms, the animal nature of the incarnated soul is prone.

Like the state of Brendan and his monks while passing by hell, and that of Owein while being conveyed through purgatory, Jonah is reduced to a state of complete powerlessness; however, it is in this powerlessness that he finds the basis of his freedom. His impotence, like Owein's, consists of his being acted upon by a hostile environment in which he can find no rest, and his only possible action is prayer:

And þenne he lurkkes and laytes where watz le best,
 In vche a nok of his nauel, bot nowhere he fyndez
 No rest ne recouerer, bot ramel ande myre,
 In wych gut so euer he gotz, bot euer is God swete;
 And þer he lenged at þe last, and to þe Lede called. (277-81)

Jonah has some range of movement, but this potential for motion is blocked in every direction, and, like Owein in Purgatory, he can find no possibility for repose.

Jonah's prayer emerges from his hope for deliverance, and thereby reveals that he has not succumbed to the passion of despair. It consists of a reminder of his role as God's prophet, a confession of his guilt, an acknowledgement of God's omnipotence, and an entreaty that God act mercifully towards him:

'Now, Prynce, of Þy prophete pité Þou haue.
 Þa3 I be fol and fykel and falce of my hert,

Dewoyde now þy vengauce, þur3 vertu of rauthe;
 Tha3 I be gulty of gyle, as gaule of prophetes,
 Pou art God, and alle gowdez ar graybely þyn owen.
 Haf thow mercy of þy man and his mysdedes,
 And preue þe ly3tly a Lorde in londe and in water.' (282-88)

Although this prayer is rhetorically more developed than that of Owein while the latter is undergoing the various torments of purgatory, it serves a similar function.²⁹ Like Owein's remembrance of Jesus, Jonah's prayer acknowledges the omnipotence of God's providence and its power to mitigate his suffering. The result of Jonah's prayer is comfort and peace in the midst of great suffering.³⁰

With þat he hitte to a hyrne and helde hym þerinne,
 Þer no defoule of no fylþe watz fest hym abute;
 Þer he sete also sounde, saf for merk one,
 As in þe bulk of þe bote þer he byfore sleped. (289-92)

Although Stock (1991), citing a variety of Patristic authorities, notes that Jonah's sleep in the boat signifies his sloth and sin, and that the boat signifies the world, the narrator here reveals either an ignorance of that symbol, which seems rather unlikely, or a lack of consistency on the symbolic level. Whereas Jonah's rest in the boat is implicitly associated earlier with a fool's paradise, the current comfort that Jonah now experiences is compared to his repose on the boat, and the narrator suggests that both signify places of secure rest. This apparent inconsistency retrospectively suggests that his current state of grace is, in terms of comfort, no different from that which he experiences while trying to

²⁹ The monks in purgatory instruct Owein simply to call on the name of Jesus. See chapter two, pages 74-5.

³⁰ See Schmidt (1991), who notes, "Having confessed, Jonah is able to find a place of relative safety" (188).

escape from the fearful will of God. He is at peace in suffering, and this tranquility that he experiences is the patience that God bestows through grace.

The result of Jonah's prayer within the whale is an experience of equanimity:

So in a bouel of þat best he bidez on lyue,
 Pre dayes and þre ny3t, ay þenkande on Dry3tyn,
 His my3t and His merci, His mesure þenne.

Now he knawez Hym in care þat coupe not in sele. (293-96)

Jonah's state of perpetual prayer suggests the equanimity of grace. Although the narrator, as he tells us in the prologue, intends to use Jonah to reveal the folly of impatience (57-60), Jonah's state of thanksgiving in the midst of potentially terrible suffering is a powerful image of patience. While the Vulgate simply tells us that "...Jonas prayed to the Lord his God out of the belly of the fish"³¹ (Jon 2.2), the narrator of *Patience* depicts Jonah's prayer in the whale as consisting of an ecstatic state, inasmuch as he endures his purgatorial environment through the constant remembrance of God and the grace that both inspires and responds to this continuous state of prayer. Jonah's patience is not victorious over physical enemies, but it does conquer the anger and fear that result from God's desire that he preach to the Ninevites; by voluntarily embracing the will of God, Jonah has transcended necessity.

Jonah's victory over his passions is temporary, and their reemergence functions as a device through which the poet examines divine patience. God's forgiveness of the Ninevites reveals perfect voluntary suffering and simultaneously reveals the contradictory nature of the virtue. His patience, which acts without necessity or suffering, is absolutely distinct from human patience, which consists of suffering and responds to necessity.

³¹ ...oravit Iona ad Dominum Deum suum de utero piscis.

After God chastens him for his anger, Jonah “al jangles and janglande upryses” (433) and builds a shelter on a hill. While he is sleeping peacefully, God causes a woodbine to grow around him and provide him shelter. Jonah rejoices excessively in the woodbine, and thus is completely devastated when God sends a worm to kill it during the next night. Jonah spends the next day unprotected from the burning sun and, again, is possessed by extreme despair and wishes to die; however, God uses the opportunity that he has orchestrated to reveal to Jonah the nature of divine *caritas*.³²

Penne bypenk þe, mon, if þe forþynk sore,
 If I wolde help My hondewerk, haf þou no wonder.
 Pou art waxen so wroth for þy wodbynde,
 And trauayledez neuer to tent hit þe tyme of an howre,
 Bot at a wap hit here wax and away at anoþer,
 And 3et lykez þe so luper, þi lyf woldez þou tyne.
 Penne wyte not Me for þe werk, þat I hit wolde help,
 And rwe on þo redles þat remen for synne. (495-502)

Here, God reveals that his love for humanity is universal, and that he forgives the erring Ninevites because of this concern for all of creation. The effect of God’s speech is ultimately to contrast his longsuffering with Jonah’s impatience, which in this case consists of his unwillingness to suffer infamy; also, he arouses Jonah’s passions in order

³² As Rhodes (2001) notes, Jonah is somewhat justified in his anger towards God for the destruction of the woodbine:

[Jonah] rebukes this God who, he claims, arbitrarily creates “meschef” for those creatures he professes to love. The fact that the narrator again remains silent and then greatly expands the biblical text in the place where God seeks to defend his actions indicates that what goes beyond Jonah’s ken has created a problem for the narrator and the reader as well. (122)

Still, such justification only amplifies the message of patience. If God suffers the disobedience of humanity, humanity ought to suffer the mystery of God’s providence. Thus, Jonah’s anger is justifiable, and the absence of the narrator’s earlier condescending tone suggests his interest in God’s self justification as well.

to educate them. God concludes his speech by emphasising the fundamental difference between human severity and divine mercy:

‘Wer I as hastif as þou heere, were harne lumpen;

Couþe I not þole bot as þou, þer þryved ful fewe.

I may not be so malicious and mylde be halden,

For malyse is no3t to mayntyne boute mercy withinne.’ (520-3)

God contrasts his equanimity and ability to endure wrongs to that of Jonah and thereby teaches the prophet about the necessity of controlling the passions for the manifesting of *caritas*. Essentially, *caritas* is rooted in patience, through which God suffers the wrongs of humanity because of his parental love for it. Although God’s love is the cause of his patience, the act of patience still consists of the controlling of one’s emotional states. Because God cannot suffer passions, patience for him does not require struggle or effort but, rather, is a simple, pure act through which he manifests his *caritas*. While for humans, the need to control their emotions is imposed by the will of God, for God, there can be no necessity. Rather, as God reveals in his speech, patience is simply a part of his essential nature.³³ This image of God’s impassivity is reminiscent of that of the Stoic gods or the Neoplatonic One, all of which enjoy the serenity of incorporeality; however, the ascribing of patience to God suggests that he does in fact suffer, albeit entirely voluntarily. Thus, the representation of the affective states in which patience can be manifested ranges from the fear of the narrator to obey his lord’s order, a fear that is still

³³ Compare *Contemplations on the Dread and Love of God*, a fourteenth-century ME penitential treatise in which the author begins his discussion of patience by noting the relationship between charity and patience: “Charite, wiche is moder and keper of vertuis, is lost ful ofte by inpacience” (36). Both Kirk and Rebecca Konyndyk De Young find this same sentiment in Aquinas, who traces it to St. Paul; see Kirk (1978) 95 and De Young (2003) 150-2.

present even though he obeys, to God's passionless patience, which consists of his choice to suffer the wrongs of humans because of his love for them.

As Rhodes notes, the last words of the poem suggest that the speaker has indeed learned something about the wider application of the idea of patience.³⁴ Instead of seeing patience simply as enduring the necessity that God ordains in the life of the individual, he comes to see it as an essential attribute of God, inasmuch as it is rooted in his *caritas*. Essentially, Rhodes argues, "patience, as the Jonah story has defined it, is the experience of, rather than the relief from, pain" (123). However, what must be added to this definition is that patience is always voluntary, even when one is constrained by external necessity. With respect to human patience, the will to progress in spite of one's inability to comprehend the goal is coupled with the pain that patience implies: "Patience is more than submission to God's will; it is the will to continue in the face of human suffering and discomfort, and in the full knowledge that God is and will remain incomprehensible to human understanding" (124). The motivation for patience moves from that which is inspired by unfortunate circumstances that one experiences in life, such as poverty, to the experience of Jonah, who is given a fearful mission by God and whose response to God's will is characterised by fear and anger, with occasional moments of lucid patience, to the patience of God, which is the natural yet spontaneous consequence of his divine mercy. When the narrator returns to his theme, as Rhodes notes, his words to describe the virtue have changed slightly. While he still perceives patience as a desired response to the constraint of necessity, he now recognises the nobility of the virtue, presumably because he has seen how it is rooted in God:

³⁴ See Rhodes (2001), who argues that the inclusion of *nobel* in the last line of the poem suggests that the narrator's understanding of patience has evolved (109).

Forþy when pouerté me enprecez and paynez inno3e

Ful softly with suffraunce sa3ttel me bihovez;

Forþy penaunce and payne topreue hit in si3t

þat pacience is a nobel poynt, þa3 hit displese ofte. (528-31)

Thus the poem spirals, inasmuch as the first line repeats the last, yet it is linear, since the addition of the adjective reflects how the preceding narrative has developed and altered the speaker's understanding of the virtue that he has been discussing.

In *Patience*, the ideal manifestation of the virtue is found in God, who exercises patience as a spontaneous act of will. At the other extreme is the simple acceptance of necessity that the narrator discusses in the prologue. Both of these examples characterise patience as the voluntary and rational control of the passions. Jonah, however, functions twice as an example of impatience; initially, he succumbs to his anger at God and his fear of death and thus tries to escape from God's will, and, after the conversion of the Ninevites, he becomes angry at God's inconsistency and wishes to die. Jonah's conversion occurs when he experiences the necessity by which God constrains him. His first act consists of his voluntary self sacrifice in order to save the sailors; his second consists of his embracing of God's providence while he is in the belly of the whale, and it is here, ironically, that he most nearly approaches the spontaneous patience of divinity; instead of lamenting his unfortunate situation and thereby succumbing to its gravity, he celebrates the power and goodness of God. One can discern in these episodes the *Gawain*-poet's awareness of the traditions of patience that the penitential tradition transmits: patience is a remedy for anger and/or *acedia*, it conquers that which aggression cannot, and it is most perfectly manifested by God. Brendan and Owein, whom I discuss

in chapter two, reveal the greatest degree of volitional freedom, because they choose their adventures in the absence of all necessity, even though their adventures consist of subjecting themselves to necessity. Jonah is at the opposite end of the spectrum of volitional endurance; however, the patience that he does eventually manifest is nonetheless genuine, inasmuch as it consists of a willed act of submission to the higher will. Having now explored the ways in which the *Gawain*-poet treats these themes associated with patience in *Patience*, I shall now turn to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a romance that is informed both by the poet's awareness of the tradition of virtues and vices and by the conventions of patient heroism that contribute to the formation and enduring popularity of such heroes as Brendan and Owein.

Chapter VII: Patient Endurance in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

While *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Bevis of Hampton*, *Octavian*, and *Isumbras* are all commonly regarded as romances, the type of heroism that Gawain requires is, for the most part, different from that of the other protagonists. Even when the other narratives have the opportunity to explore the endurance of their heroes, they continually revert to celebrating their combative potential instead. In *SGGK*, the protagonist also displays great martial courage. He accepts the Green Knight's challenge, battles his way through a perilous forest, and jumps to fight the Green Knight as soon as he realises that the latter has not beheaded him. However, the social order that compels him to accept the challenge, the brief and dismissive way in which the narrative passes over his martial accomplishments in the forest, and the Green Knight's amused response to Gawain's aggressive stance all point to the operation of a different horizon of expectations. The *Gawain*-poet radically reverses the tendency of other Middle English romances by emphasising the patient endurance that Gawain requires to complete his quest. The uniqueness of *SGGK* in this respect has been observed frequently. Many critics have commented on the alleged passivity of Gawain; his test, they suggest, does not consist of martial acts, but of his response to suffering.¹ This type of heroism thus aligns Sir Gawain more closely with Brendan and Owein than it does with Guy, Bevis, Florent, and even Isumbras. However, the concept of passivity is one that, in its modern

¹ See Larry Benson (1965) 89, Hark (1974) *passim*, Davenport (1978) 167, 182, 200, Nicholls (1985) 130, Plummer (1991), who claims that "what in fact is required is restraint from action. Indeed, the Green Knight tests whether Arthur and Gawain can refrain from acting on their reputations, can sublimate action into symbol" (200), Mann (1994) *passim*, and Putter (1996) 76.

sense, suggests a loss of self determination; as the opposite of “active,” “passive” implies a failure of agency, a concept that is fundamental to our ideas of virtue and heroism.

Because of the medieval conventions of the literary representation of patience that occur in the various versions of the *Voyage of Saint Brendan* and *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*, and because the *Gawain*-poet displays in *Patience* an awareness of both the tradition of patience in the virtues and vices tradition and the potential for depicting it in the form of an adventure narrative, Gawain's quest can be perceived more accurately not as a passive one, but as a patient one, inasmuch as it is characterised by an exploration of themes specifically associated with the virtue *patientia*. The narrator does not include patience in the list of Gawain's virtues; even the virtue *forsnes* (646), that is, his “courage” or “fortitude,” seems to suggest only martial fortitude, yet it is my contention that a medieval understanding of patience, such as that which is found in *Patience*, is the unnamed virtue that renders the characterisation of Gawain and his adventure intelligible. While Jill Mann (1994) correctly identifies what she regards as Gawain's passivity as an act of will,² she contextualises her reading of the poem only within the boundaries of other much earlier Arthurian romances, and she uses the “active” heroism of Beowulf as an example of the opposite of the passive sort manifested by Gawain. However, as I have been arguing throughout this thesis, *SGGK* originates in and responds to an intellectual and literary context that includes the virtues and vices tradition, religious adventures, and romances; an examining of the aspects of patience in the poem, particularly with respect to the passions and the enduring part of fortitude, can help us perceive why Gawain fails and how his failure transforms him. As we shall see, the tradition of patience, particularly

² For my discussion of Mann, see pages 3-5.

with respect to the passions, animates the plot of *SGGK*, and an understanding of this tradition is essential to perceiving both the nature of Gawain's test and that of his failure.

This reading aims to address several tendencies in critical reception. The first is the regarding of Gawain as passive. The second, which I shall consider only briefly, consists of the tendency to reduce the narrative to either its religious or secular aspects. Joseph A. Longo and Lynn Staley Johnson (1984), for instance, who focus on the presence of "religious" romance in the text, tend to read the courtly aspects of the text, that is, the feasting, games, and flirtation, as somehow condemned by the author, and thereby incorrectly perceive him as a rigid moralist; David Aers (1988) and J. J. Anderson (1990), however, who assert the predominance of the "courtly" romance over "religious," fail to account satisfactorily for the close relationship between courtly and religious values, and regard the poet as a secularist. I shall argue that although the virtues have ultimately spiritual significances, the secular context of *SGGK* enables the poet to explore the great difficulty of enduring fortitude, of patience, while maintaining the heroism of his protagonist. Finally, my argument that enduring fortitude is the central virtue that the narrative tests implies that the pentangle virtues are secondary and rely on a foundational virtue that is not included among them, but one whose absence is made clear by the conclusion of the narrative. As we shall see, Gawain fails by succumbing to the fear of death because his passions are upset by the *hope* of survival; hope is here not the theological virtue, but a passion that Aquinas discusses in the context of enduring fortitude, and the girdle becomes an emblem of the failure of patience. Thus, I shall argue that the *Gawain*-poet dramatises the belief that patience is more difficult than aggression, an opinion that Aquinas articulates in great detail, and one that surpasses the idea that

endurance in *SGGK* requires *just as much* energy as aggression.³ As with the plot of Morgan le Fay, the centrality of patient endurance only becomes fully apparent near the end of the narrative.

The virtue patience is not mentioned explicitly in the poem's presentation of Gawain's virtues. The symbol of the pentangle points to the interconnectedness of the virtues, a truth that is reflected in Gawain's accusing himself of cowardice and covetousness and his subsequent fall into anger and discourtesy in his rant against women. Gawain is faultless in his five senses, has never failed in the works of his hands,⁴ puts his trust, his *afyaunce*, in the five wounds of Christ, and derives his *forsnes* from the five joys of the Virgin Mary (640-7). Furthermore, he practices *fraunchyse*, *felawschyp*, *clannes*, *cortaysye*, and *pit  * (651-4), all of which are tested to varying degrees during the narrative. His *afyaunce* and *forsnes* are inspired by religious symbols; while J. J. Anderson suggests that these religious elements are reduced to talismans, at best, in this secular martial context,⁵ a medieval reader whose narrative expectations were informed by the same religious sources as those that inform the other works by the *Gawain*-poet would have presumed that Gawain's faith and courage would bring him success only insofar as the hero acted according to the will of God.⁶ Gawain's relationship to the

³ A. C. Spearing, for instance, expresses this oddly apologetic approach to explaining the courage that Gawain requires to complete his adventure: "...the action demanded of [Gawain] in confronting the monstrous Green Knight is approximately the same as that demanded of Beowulf in facing his monsters, or of Arthur in facing the Giant of St Michael's Mount" (184). My contention is that Gawain fails because he is asked for *more* than that which is required of Beowulf or Arthur.

⁴ I understand this virtue as referring to his consistent success in martial combat.

⁵ Anderson argues, "[Mary's] image is painted on the inside of [Gawain's] shield, but this is for practical reasons rather than religious ones" (349).

⁶ See for instance, line 724-5, which suggest this sentiment: "Nade he ben du3ty and dry3e and Dry3ten had serued, / Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte." The combination of courage, endurance, and proper religious intention are essential to Gawain's survival in the forest. "Dry3e" here prepares the audience for the following description of Gawain's sufferings; neither it nor any equivalent adjective is found in the context of the pentangle virtues.

divine is mediated by the ideal virtues that he manifests, and it is the testing of this relationship that occurs through Gawain's encounter with the ambiguous figure of the Green Knight at the Green Chapel.

Inasmuch as fortitude appears among Gawain's virtues, it refers to the aggressive sort. The fifth group of five virtues represented by the pentangle suggests the intimate relationship between chivalric and spiritual virtues, and it is here that Theodore Silverstein (1977) detects the influence, either direct or indirect, of Cicero's *De officiis*, a work that has important implications for the relationship between fortitude and patience.⁷ While Silverstein discusses the presence of the Ciceronian tradition in *SGGK* primarily through the poem's presentation of *trawthe*, which is, as he argues, identical to Cicero's idea of *fides*, he claims that Cicero's other moral virtues, including fortitude, are conspicuously absent from the list of Gawain's virtues: "[Gawain's] adventure will exemplify or test, not only the parts of justice symbolized on the shield, but also his other moral virtues as well—prudence, temperance, fortitude—though they are never specified, either on the shield or in the course of the narrative itself..." (8). Contrary to Silverstein's opinion, the concept of fortitude does indeed appear among his virtues, but it points not to endurance, but to aggression: "his *forsnes* he fong at þe fyue joye3 / Þat þe hende Heuen Quene had of hir Chylde" (646-7). Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, and J. J. Anderson all gloss *forsnes* "fortitude" (Andrew and Waldron 319 and Anderson 194n.); the *Middle English Dictionary* provides two primary definitions; the first is "bravery" or "courage," and the second includes "severity," "harshness," "cruelty," "ferocity," "violence," "impetuosity," and "force." While *forsnes* does indeed suggest fortitude, the

⁷ As Silverstein notes, *De officiis* was immensely popular in the Middle Ages, "appearing as it does everywhere in the West among *florilegia* and compends from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries and after" (2). See also my discussion of Cicero in chapter two pages 20-2 and 32-3.

secondary meanings give the word a particularly aggressive sense, as does the fact that he has an image of the Virgin Mary painted inside his shield in order to give him courage when he fights. The enduring aspects of fortitude, such as patience, perseverance, and constancy, are notably missing from his list of virtues, yet his capacity for patient endurance is that which the quest tests most rigorously, and it is this virtue that he regards himself as lacking when he later accuses himself of *cowardyse* (2379).⁸

Patience in the form of patient endurance is the unnamed virtue that is tested throughout the narrative, and Gawain's failure to manifest perfect patience results in further lapses of virtue. *Forsnes* may refer to the attacking aspect of fortitude, yet Gawain's accusing himself of cowardice at the end of the story does not suggest a failure of martial fortitude, since, as the poet notes in 724-5, he has fought valiantly in the forest: "Nade he ben du3ty and dry3e and Dry3ten had serued, / Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte."⁹ Also, he has just leapt to defend himself against another blow from the Green Knight (2322-30). Instead, his self-accusation originates in the recognition of a failure of endurance, which results from his inability to fortify himself against the fear of death that inspires him to accept the girdle. Gawain's perception of his failure draws conclusive attention to the centrality of patient fortitude. Although Gawain displays much fortitude throughout the narrative, when the Lady offers him the opportunity to survive the Green Knight's blow, he accepts it at the cost of breaking his exchange of winnings agreement with Bercilak. When the Green Knight debriefs Gawain on his performance

⁸ Cf. Silverstein 8.

⁹ *Dry3e* suggests long-suffering, and thus points both to the sort of endurance that is required in battle and that which enables him to survive the elements (726-35); for my discussion of the latter sort of endurance, see pages 209-10 below.

during the adventure, he points out that this failure is a relatively small one and thereby confirms Gawain's heroism:

As perle bi þe quite pese is of prys more,
 So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi oþer gay kny3tez.
 Bot here yow lakked a lyttel, sir, and lewté yow wonted;
 Bot þat watz for no wylyde werke, ne wowyng nauþer,
 Bot for 3e lufed your lyf—þe lasse I yow blame. (2364-8)

In line 2338, when he beholds Gawain ready to fight him, the Green Knight refers to the knight as "bolde burne," and, here, he suggests that Gawain failed merely because of his desire to live. Also, the Green Knight does not chastise Gawain for breaking the agreement to submit to a blow from his axe; after all, Gawain intends to keep the meeting throughout the narrative, and never once wavers from his intention, even though he experiences much fear.¹⁰ Rather, it is for his failure to maintain his honour in the exchange of winnings game that the Green Knight slightly wounds Gawain, and this happens because of the protagonist's fear of death.

Gawain, as the pentangle knight, perceives the interconnection of the virtues. The failure of enduring fortitude, he sees, has inevitably led to other faults; in the first words he speaks after the Green Knight absolves him, he accuses himself of cowardice and covetousness: "'Corsed worth cowarddyse and couetyse boþe! / In yow is vylany and vyse, þat vertue disstryez'" (2374-5). Although Gawain's and the Green Knight's responses to the nature of Gawain's fortitude differ, both confirm that fortitude is primary with respect to the other virtues, and that Gawain's adventure was intended to test this virtue in particular. Gawain again points to the primacy of fortitude: "'For care of þy

¹⁰ I shall return to this argument below, in my discussion of Gawain's passions. See pages 211 ff.

knokke, cowardyse me ta3t / To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake” (2379-80). Although he has been unable to perceive it, Gawain’s patient fortitude is constantly tested, even, and especially, in the apparent safety of Hautdesert. While *couetyse* suggests a failure of *fraunchyse* and, possibly, *felawschyp*, *cowardyse* is the opposite of *forsnes*, which, at the beginning, appears to be the aggressive aspect of fortitude. As I discuss below, Gawain’s subsequent anger and discourteous speech about women result from the shame he experiences because of his cowardice. Nevertheless, Gawain’s initial and primary failure is clearly one of endurance, despite the tradition of romances, exemplified by *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*, in which themes associated with patience appear but are quickly dismissed in favour of aggression. The virtue that Gawain fails to list in his symbol, the one that is not posited as belonging to the ideal knight, is the one on which Gawain’s other virtues rely.

The enduring nature of the quest and its resolution, the emphasis on Gawain’s suffering instead of his martial exploits, and frequent emphases on Gawain’s fear, anger, and despondency all suggest the operation of patience as a structuring principle of the narrative, even if its role is not mentioned until the end. The marvel that initiates Gawain’s quest is the two-part challenge that the Green Knight brings. The first part consists of beheading him, and it requires a simple act of martial aggression in its purest form; at this point, at least for the protagonist, there is no defending or suffering involved. The second part, however, involves an act of absolute endurance. In lines 417-29, Gawain effortlessly beheads the knight, after which the narrative turns to Gawain’s endurance as he seeks the Green Knight and prepares to receive a blow like the one he has given. The type of death that Gawain faces approximates the description of martyrdom that Aquinas

describes as the ultimate exemplar of fortitude. Although Gawain is not facing death in order to uphold his belief in God, Gawain's decision to accept the Green Knight's challenge is necessary in order to uphold the legitimacy of Camelot as an agent of political stability. The Green Knight's challenge, aimed, as we learn at the end of the romance, at the entire court, potentially destabilises the courtly and martial idealism that Camelot represents.¹¹ Furthermore, if the plot were recast within the context of a purely religious test, and if Gawain were to fail, our respect for him after his failing to bear witness to God with his death would be much less than it is after he rashly attempts to protect his life in the context of a game. In other words, such an examination of the difficulty of enduring fortitude could not be depicted within the context of hagiography, in which the failure to die for God automatically excludes the protagonist from receiving any compassion from the audience.¹² Nevertheless, from a clerical position, which is the perspective that characterises most of the material in Cotton Nero A.x.iii, Gawain faces the ultimate challenge to his virtue: the willingness to die for it without the possibility of retaliation, an act that helps one overcome fear through the use of anger.

In the other narratives of patience that I examine, the loss of physical power reveals the strength of the protagonist's will; ultimately, a descent into physical constriction reveals the fundamental and essential potency of the self; necessity and impasse are plot devices that manifest that which is not constrained by their apparent power. The *Gawain*-poet also uses the convention of necessity to depict Gawain's patient acceptance of the Green Knight's challenge. While Gawain is not physically constrained

¹¹ This is contrary to Mann's contention that Gawain's submission to the axe is motivated solely by his promise to submit (109). In order to justify her reading of Gawain as a passive hero, Mann disregards the testing of Camelot's worth as a motivation for Gawain's acceptance of the adventure.

¹² Cf. Jonah, who must be redeemed after his refusal to preach to the Ninevites.

at any point of the narrative, he must abide by a specific code of conduct, even when it is clear that he would rather not, and this expected behaviour functions analogously to necessity in the Brendan and Owein narratives. According to Mann, Gawain is first subjected to this order when he interferes with Arthur's acceptance of the Green Knight's challenge:

It may seem that Gawain is 'active' at least to the extent that he chooses to take up the Green Knight's challenge, judging himself fit to meet it. But a close attention to the poem will show that this is not really the case.

...What makes it clear is the seating-plan for dinner, which the poet has carefully outlined in the course of describing the feast. ...Gawain has the highest place of honour after Bishop Baldwin. The Bishop, being a cleric cannot accept a knightly challenge, which means that it falls to Gawain to give the lead in extricating the king and the court from the difficult situation which has arisen. (109-10)

Mann notes an element of necessity in his position as the recipient of the adventure.

Gawain's acceptance of the challenge does not involve the sort of audacity that inspires Brendan or Owein;¹³ rather he is chosen in much the same way as Jonah, whom God commands to travel to Nineveh; the implications of the secular order at Camelot have a subtly analogous effect on Gawain.

Unlike Jonah, who refuses to accept the mission that he has been given, Gawain overcomes his fear and embraces it; that he waits until after Arthur prepares to strike the Green Knight aligns his hesitancy slightly with that of Jonah, as does his acceptance of

¹³ Both Brendan and Owein display a frontiersman's approach to the mysteries which beckon them; they act without necessity. See chapter three pages 47-8 and 71-2.

the adventure only when the inescapability of the situation is made clear. The situation that Gawain faces is seemingly less absolute than the transcendent necessity that inspires Jonah's behaviour; the order that compels Gawain to respond to the Green Knight's challenge may not threaten to drag him physically to the Green Chapel, yet if Gawain allows the king to risk death by the Green Knight's axe, the stability of the entire kingdom is threatened, much like the ship that carries Jonah. The pentangle binds the religious and the secular, thus giving transcendental signification to primarily social, and in this case, chivalric, virtues. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the secular context of the test allows Gawain to protect his life without completely compromising his heroic status. Thus, it is inaccurate to read the story as either secular or religious;¹⁴ instead, the secularity of the story permits it to focus on the difficulty of patience instead of the power of God's grace and the self-renunciation of a martyr. In effect, Gawain, like Jonah who allows himself to be cast into the sea, sacrifices himself in order to maintain the king, whose well being is emblematic of the realm over which he rules.

Gawain's hesitance to embrace the challenge aligns him with the rest of the knights at Camelot; fundamentally, it consists of his waiting to hear the call of necessity before embracing the adventure that confronts him, an act that risks associating his patience with that of an ass, at least according to the schema found in the *Summa virtutum*; nevertheless, like that of Jonah when he offers to allow the sailors to throw him overboard during the storm, the *manner* in which Gawain embraces the adventure allows him to transcend necessity. The narrator politely, and optimistically, offers a couple of

¹⁴ For religious readings of *SGGK*, see, for instance, Longo and Johnson (1984), for secular interpretations, see Aers (1988) and Anderson (1990).

reasons for the court's silence when the Green Knight arrives; the knights did not react entirely according to fear, he estimates, but also according to courtly deference:

In a swoghe sylence þur3 þe sale riche,
 As al were slypped vpon slepe, so slaked hor lote3 in hy3e.
 I deme hit not al for doute,
 Bot sum for cortaysye;
 Bot let hym þat al schulde loue
 Cast vnto þat wy3e. (243-9)

Here, the narrator points to the propriety that, perhaps combined with fear, result in Arthur's having to respond first to the marvel. However, their silence, and not the demands of propriety, is exactly what forces Arthur to respond. The Green Knight, after all, addresses his challenge to all of the knights present. When Arthur asks him if he seeks combat, the Green Knight's response clearly implies that he considers any and all of them potential opponents: "Nay, frayst I no fy3t, in fayth I þe telle; / Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdlez chylder" (279-280). When he challenges them to the beheading game, he speaks to all of the knights and awaits a response from any of them:

"...runischly his rede y3en he reled aboute, / Bende his bresed bro3e3, blycande grene, / Wayued his berde, for to wayte quoso wolde ryse" (304-6). At this point, all that the Green Knight requires from an opponent is a blow from an axe. That the former tries to arouse the anger of Arthur and his court (lines 309-15) draws further attention to the apparent distance of the return blow; anger is useful for attacking, but not for enduring, and by arousing Arthur's anger, the Green Knight hopes to overcome Arthur's fear of death. When the Green Knight insults the knights of Camelot by accusing them of

cowardice, and none of them responds to the audacious speech, it falls to Arthur to defend the honour of his kingdom. Because Arthur is too important to die in such a manner, Gawain must intervene.

Gawain's response to the situation that requires his intervention is a patient one, and such patience points to the principle of fortitude that animates the narrative. Through the enduring aspect of fortitude, a subject maintains, or develops, its essential identity internally against external forces that seek to redefine it. In *SGGK*, this maintaining consists of Arthur's and Gawain's attempt to defend the reputation of Camelot against the accusations of the Green Knight. The Green Knight's speech challenges the very identity of Arthur's house, and it is this identity that Arthur must maintain:

‘What! Is þis Arþures hous,’ quoth þe habel þenne,
 ‘Pat al þe rous rennes of þur3 ryalmes so mony?
 Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
 Your gryndellayk, and your greme, and your grete wordes?
 Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
 Ouerwalt wyth a worde of on wy3es speche,
 For al dares for drede wythoute dynt schewed!’ (309-15)

Here, the Green Knight associates the failure to receive the adventure that he brings with a lack of fortitude. Courage unto death is what he demands, and the failure to manifest such virtue will result in the shaming of the entire court. The knights have good reason to suspect that the Green Knight is not proposing a fair challenge. Indeed, they suspect the action of magic when they first behold the Green Knight: “..fele sellye3 had þay sen, bot such neuer are. / Forþi, for fantoum and fayry3e þe folk þere hit demed” (239-40); also,

the challenge itself implies that he will somehow still be alive in a year and a day in order to give the return blow. One can imagine their thoughts being similar to those of Jonah when God asks him to go to Nineveh:

‘Oure syrre syttes,’ he says, ‘on sege so hy3e,
In his glowande glorye, and gloumbes ful lyttel,
þa3 I be nummen in Nunniue and naked dispoyled,
On rode rwly torent wyth rybaudes mony.’ (93-6)

The sense of self sacrifice that would accompany the acceptance of either the Lord’s command or the Green Knight’s challenge inspires fear in those who are called. Although protocol compels Gawain to act in the situation, his response is still voluntary. The alacrity with which Gawain accepts his role suggests that he does not manifest the patience of an ass, an awareness of which type the poet reveals in *Patience*,¹⁵ and his courteous defence of Camelot’s reputation reveals the extent of his patient self mastery at this point, particularly since his hesitation to accept the challenge suggests his fear, which he shares with the rest of the court.¹⁶

Gawain arrives at his destination not through his discovering it based on an informed search, but through the intervention of grace in response to his ignorant wandering and sincere prayer; thus, he is guided ultimately by the same force that brings Brendan over the sea and Owein through purgatory. Gawain’s effort is manifested fundamentally through the controlling of his will and prayer, just as it is by these other protagonists. Gawain’s wandering seems to be aimless, since he has not been told exactly where he is to go. Similarly, Brendan and his monks travel an erratic and unclear path

¹⁵ While he does not provide the same titles as the author of the *Summa virtutum de remediis*, he does reveal an understanding of similar categories of patience. See chapter six pages 170-1.

¹⁶ Again, I discuss Gawain’s emotions in greater detail below; see pages 210 ff.

across the ocean, and are never quite sure where they are going. Nevertheless, a transcendent power guides their boat, just as one directs the boat in *Guigemar* and the whale in *Patience*.¹⁷ Although Gawain does not set out to sea, his initial search for the Green Chapel imitates this type of journey, inasmuch as it consists of undirected wandering that is ultimately resolved by the intervention of a transcendent will. After he beheads the Green Knight, the latter assures Gawain that he will be able to find him in order to keep his appointment at the Green Chapel:

Loke, Gawan, þou be grayþe to go as þou hettez

And layte as lelly til þou me, lude, fynde

As þou hatz hette in þis halle, herande þise kny3tes.

...þe Kny3t of þe Grene Chapel men knowen me mony;

Forþi me for to fynde, if þou fraystez, faylez þou neuer. (448-55)

Here, the Green Knight issues Gawain another challenge; not only must he come to the Green Chapel and receive a return blow, but he must search for the Green Knight.

Nevertheless, his opponent assures him that he will be successful in his quest if he makes an effort. While searching for the Green Chapel, Gawain eventually becomes lost in the *terra incognita* in which he encounters *meruayl*, among which is his arrival at Hautdesert.

Thus, one can discern the same forces leading the protagonist in *SGGK* as those that guide Brendan and Owein, and this type of adventure points to the commonplace of patient endurance that informs Gawain's quest.

¹⁷ Mann regards a sea journey that lacks self-directed navigation as indicative of passive heroism: "In romance, when the hero (or heroine) puts out to sea, he is characteristically at its mercy, set adrift in a rudderless boat, allowing its winds and currents to set its course, challenged and thwarted by storms" (107). I regard such journeys as another marker of endurance.

The martial aspects of Gawain's journey to Hautdesert are understated, and instead, his suffering occupies the foreground.¹⁸ Gawain's battles are summarised quickly in nine lines, and they function to remind us that the protagonist is a knight and does indeed engage in martial combat (715-23). In these lines, Gawain displays the aggressive or attacking part of fortitude by fighting some of the traditional enemies of knights. The poet concludes this description of Gawain's martial fortitude, and introduces his endurance, by pointing to the combination of virtue and grace that enables his success: "Nade he ben du3ty and dry3e and Dry3tyn had serued, / Douteles he hade ben ded and dreped ful ofte" (724-25). The next nine lines emphasise what Thomas of Chobham, William Peraldus, and Thomas Aquinas call the enduring aspects of fortitude:¹⁹

For werre wrathed hym not so much þat wynter nas wors,
 When þe colde cler water fro þe cloudez schadde
 And fres er hit falle my3t to þe fale erþe.
 Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnas
 Mo ny3tez þen innoghe, in naked rokkez
 Peras claterande from þe crest þe colde borne rennez.
 And henged he3e ouer his hede in hard iisseikkles.
 Þus in peryl and payne and plytes ful harde
 Bi contray caryez þis kny3t tyl Krystmasses Euen,

Alone. (726-35)

¹⁸ Prior, for instance, perceptively writes,

In one respect, [Gawain's journey through the wilderness] simply evokes the tradition of the knight alone on his quest. However, Gawain's actual armed conflicts are the least perilous of his adventures; for the rapid list given of these typical fairytale and romance foes amounts to an anticlimactic dismissal Hardest of all his trials is Gawain's loneliness, and his lack of refuge or shelter, even more his need for a place to attend Mass and the other holy offices of Christmas. (112-13)

¹⁹ See chapter two, pages 24 ff.

Because he is a valiant knight, war does not provide great difficulties for him. Instead, his greater enemies are the elements, which, like Gawain's fear, cannot be fought directly. Sleet nearly slays him; even though he sleeps in his armour, which provides barely adequate protection, he is vulnerable. The icicles that form from the mountain stream seem to threaten him from above. Finally, the poet emphasises Gawain's isolation in line 735, a situation that highlights and intensifies the suffering that he must endure.

Eventually, Gawain approaches an impasse, which is resolved supernaturally. He has been wandering without direction for nearly two months, and, as his deadline approaches, he still has no idea where to find the Green Chapel; furthermore, it is Christmas Eve, and Gawain desires a place to attend the Christmas mass. Like all of the protagonists that I examine, Gawain prays in order to overcome the impasse, and prayer characterises his activity in a situation in which he seems to be unable to advance the plot through his own direct action. He is lost and weary and, fearing that he will miss the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity, prays to Christ and Mary for help (748-55). The poet takes special care to make clear the connection between Gawain's prayer and the appearance of the castle: "Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot pryē / Er he wat³ war in þe wod of a won in a mote..." (763-64). Even if we discover later that Hautdesert, inasmuch as it is represented by Morgan, is compromised by its opposition to Camelot, Gawain's arrival there is still providential, since it is there that he both discovers the location of his challenge and is able to celebrate the Nativity while receiving gracious hospitality. The Green Knight's earlier instruction to ask people about him and the location of the Green Chapel actually fails to bring him to his destination; instead, he arrives there by the action

of grace in the midst of symbolic powerlessness, in a mysterious manner similar to that which brings the rudderless boat to shore.

In essence, the concept of impasse defines the goal of Gawain's quest. Because of the nature of his agreement with the Green Knight, the quest consists primarily of Gawain's preparation for death. Since Gawain is the hero of *SGGK*, Gawain's death would signify quite literally the end of his adventures. According to the rules of conduct to which he subscribes, he must honour his promise to find the Green Knight and allow himself to be beheaded. His desire to manifest virtue thus makes his death necessary. Thus, his appointment at the Green Chapel functions in a manner similar to the impasses that Brendan and Owein endure. Yet, the *Gawain*-poet emphasises the volition involved in Gawain's endurance through the nature of his submission. Whereas Brendan and his monks must remember to have faith in God when they pass by hell, and Owein must remember to call upon Jesus in order to avoid losing his soul permanently, Gawain must patiently submit his bare neck to the Green Knight's axe. First, he promises not to be angry with his executioner: "... I shal gruch þe no grwe, for grem þat fallez; / Bot sty3tel þe vpon on strok and I schal stonde styлле..." (2251-2). He willfully resolves neither to show fear nor be afraid "... And lette as he no3t dutte; / For drede he wolde not dare" (2257-8). Whereas Owein is constrained from action by his environment, Gawain must restrain himself; he must use his knightly courage not to defend himself, but to accept death without physical combat.

As in patience discussions that appear in the tradition of virtues and vices, the relationship between the emotions and equanimity is a central concern in *SGGK*. The initial encounter with the Green Knight introduces the major emotions that are most

closely connected to patient fortitude: fear and anger. The movement from fear to anger happens twice in the narrative; first, in the opening scene, in which Arthur's fear becomes anger, and at the Green Chapel, when Gawain's fear becomes anger at having been duped. When the Green Knight challenges Arthur's court, the knights are initially too frightened to act; however, the Green Knight's insult transforms the knights' fear into anger, and it is from this sense of outrage that Arthur acts. After the challenger finishes his speech, Arthur and his knights respond involuntarily at first:

Pe blod schot for scham into his schyre face

and lere.

He wex as wroth as wynde;

So did alle þat þer were. (317-20)

Since none of his knights responds to the Green Knight's request, Arthur must defend the honour of Camelot. Nicholls draws attention to Arthur's rashness in accepting the challenge; however, the king seems to have no other choice.²⁰ The Green Knight has brought into question the very legitimacy of Camelot as a stronghold of chivalry and a protector of the realm. Arthur responds with the righteous indignation of the insulted, yet while he must respond to the challenge, an angry response is not necessary; although all the knights become angry with Arthur, Gawain afterwards responds to the challenge calmly and rationally. Arthur's rashness recalls that of Guy, Bevis, and Florent, all of whom attempt deeds that appear to be beyond their ability. However, whereas the latter romance heroes are ennobled through their recklessness, Arthur appears ridiculous in this scene.

²⁰ Nicholls writes, "Arthur's anger, however natural as the reaction of a man whose manhood has been doubted, is impotent in the face of the Green Knight's impassivity...(lines 336-8), and Camelot loses its focal point of order when the king steps off the dais" (120).

Although, according to the conventions of romance heroism, Arthur's anger is justified, there is still something absurd about it as it appears in *SGGK*, particularly when it is compared to the impassive stance of the Green Knight. After Arthur accepts the challenge, he approaches the Green Knight in order to receive the axe. While Arthur has a few practice swings, the Green Knight betrays no emotional response to the prospect of being beheaded:

Now hat3 Arthure his axe, and þe halme grype3,
 And sturnely sture3 hit aboute, þat stryke wyth hit þo3t.
 Þe stif mon hym bifore stod vpon hy3t,
 Herre þen ani in þe hous by þe hede and more.
 Wyth sturne schere þer he stod; he stroked his berde,
 And wyth a countenaunce dry3e he dro3 doun his cote,
 No more mate ne dismayd for hys mayn dinte3
 Þen any burne vpon bench hade bro3t hym to drynk of wyne. (330-37)

The Green Knight's peaceful submission contrasts Arthur's frenzied activity. His stroking of his beard suggests a sort of thoughtful regarding of the court, and the final comparison suggests the contrast between the hospitality that he ought to have received, and that which he sought; for him, there is no difference, and his lack of emotional involvement would be the same in either situation. Although it can be argued that his tranquility before the axe originates in his knowledge of the fact that he is a magical being and thus faces no real threat, it also serves the function of contrasting the futility of the emotional response of Arthur. While the Green Knight brings the knights' fear into the public space, Arthur's duty is to overcome its shameful influence and return it to the private space, as a

pre-passion that does not direct the behaviour of the subject. However, the challenge is not exactly a martial one, and, thus, anger is not necessary, even if Arthur requires it in order to overcome his fear. Instead, the Green Knight's complacency mocks Arthur's passionate response, and draws acute attention to the inappropriateness of anger in this situation.

The manifestation of patience requires emotional restraint, and the poet depicts Gawain responding to the situation with equanimity, in spite of the fear that the knight's hesitancy suggests, and thereby suggests that Gawain has greater control of his passions. Many critics notice the contrast between Gawain's response to the insult and that of Arthur.²¹ While the Green Knight is indifferent, and perhaps even a little bored, Gawain is both calm and deferential, and the behaviour of both contrasts that of Arthur, which, at this point, is rather haughty.²² Gawain does not respond directly to the insult; instead, he responds to the possibility of Arthur's decapitation. The narrator leaves the tension between Arthur's wrath and the Green Knight's equanimity at the bob in line 338; the wheel immediately following initiates the change of focus from Arthur and the Green Knight to Gawain who, we are reminded, is sitting beside the queen, in a seat of honour:

Gawan, þat sate bi þe quene,

To þe kyng he can enclyne.

'I beseche now, wyth sa3e3 sene,

Þis melly mot be myne.' (339-42)

²¹ See Spearing (1970) 183, Nicholls (1985) 121-4, Clein (1987) 83-4, and Walker (1997) *passim*.

²² The spirit of Gawain's intervention varies significantly from that which is found in the Caradoc episode of the *First Continuation* of Chrétien's *Perceval*, a text which Larry Benson (1965) identifies as a possible source for *SGGK* (16-38). Whereas Gawain is proud and aggressive in the putative source, he is cautious and deferential in *SGGK*; also, there is a sense of equanimity in the latter text which is not found in the former, in which he also displays a form of heroic rashness. For a more recent comparison between *SGGK* and the Caradoc episode from the *First Continuation* of Chrétien's *Perceval*, see Putter (1996) 41 ff.

Gawain's request begins with the proper courtly protocol, even though the king, and the rest of the court, are gripped with simultaneous fear and anger. His speech reveals the idealised self-control of the servant described in the prologue of *Patience*, who does not gripe when his lord commands him to travel to Rome. Not only does he willingly and consciously subject himself to almost certain death, he delivers a carefully composed speech in which he maintains proper protocol and respect in his request to receive the quest (343-53). In his speech, Gawain asserts the king's authority over him while helping the king excuse himself from a potentially disastrous situation.²³ He shows particular rhetorical skill by pointing to the potential breach of courtly propriety first by personalising the sentiment, "For me þink hit not semly," then by suggesting its universal nature: "as hit is soþ knawen" (348); the effect of this is to remind the court, humbly, yet unmistakably, about the necessity of courtly behaviour, which requires courage in the face of adversity. Gawain's self-control emphasises his patience. While necessity elects Gawain for the adventure, he voluntarily embraces it with decorum and finesse.

Although Gawain departs for his meeting expressing resignation, his fear becomes apparent as he draws nearer, both geographically and temporally, to the Green Chapel, and the poet uses this fear to foreshadow the limits of Gawain's patience, which are later revealed in his accepting the girdle. In Fitt I, he is conventionally heroic; although he hesitates with the rest of the court when the Green Knight issues his challenge, he does accept the challenge with perfect self-control. As the time for his departure approaches, the court mourns him as one about to die; Gawain, on the other hand, manifests an air of Boethian resignation:

Be kny3t mad ay god chere

²³ For more on the decorum of Gawain's intervention, see Walker (1997) 117.

And sayde, 'Quat schuld I wonde?

Of Destinés derf and dere

What may mon do bot fonde?' (562-65)

He reveals an emotional indifference to fate characteristic of the romance hero who must do what he is able, and not hesitate on account of his fear of what destiny has in store.

However, as his appointment at the Green Chapel approaches, the self-abandonment that he expresses at the beginning is put to the test, and he progressively experiences more and more apprehension. At first, he is simply anxious about arriving on time, but when his host at Hautdesert reassures him that the Green Chapel is nearby, his attention shifts to the possible outcome of the appointment, and he begins to fear death.

Gawain's fear of death is perfectly natural, yet the poet uses it to suggest the weakness that will result in his failure. What makes his prospective death heroic is the fact that he must endure the stroke of the Green Knight's axe without recourse to any sort of retaliation. Because he willingly goes to his death in order to uphold an ideal, one can view his death as analogous to martyrdom.²⁴ He is choosing a nearly-certain death in order to uphold the legitimacy of Camelot and the courtly and religious values that it represents. He could, like Jonah, attempt to escape the transcendent demands of his calling, but instead embraces the prospect of his death anxiously, yet determinedly. As Clein appropriately notes,

²⁴ Aers (1988) rightly suggests that Gawain is tested for his dedication to the heroic ethos, which he reveals during his stillness for the second stroke of the Green Knight's axe: "As he stands absolutely still, rock-like, under the second stroke he shows total mastery over the fear of death, won in and through his total identification with the heroic ethos" (168). Not only does this dedication disclose a "common culture" between Gawain and the Green Knight, as Aers suggests (168), but it also asserts the legitimacy of Camelot, of which Gawain is the representative.

...for the well-prepared Christian death signifies peace and new life; for the unprepared soul, it is cause for terror. For the warrior who falls in battle, death brings the consolation of fame and glory; for the knight who must face his end passively, chivalric courage is likely to falter.²⁵ (83)

What Clein does not address is the reason for this failure of nerve that knights experience when they face death outside of battle. As I discuss in chapter one, Aquinas regards martyrdom as the superior example of fortitude because of the absence of a contrary passion with which to balance fear.²⁶ In battle, a knight uses anger in order to overcome fear; however, when one faces death in a situation in which anger cannot be aroused, one must simply endure fear. Gawain's fear not only is natural, but also highlights his fortitude in his submission to the Green Knight's axe.

The poet subtly introduces Gawain's fear regarding the blow that he is to receive from the Green Knight, and he uses the emotional arousal during the episodes with Bercilak's lady to depict *how* the protagonist's enduring fortitude falters. Regardless of whether Gawain's anxiety about his approaching death is observed by the lady or the narrator, in either case it is made manifest in the narrative, and it gently prepares the audience for Gawain's decision to accept the girdle.²⁷

²⁵ Clein proves this point by commenting on wills of fourteenth-century knights and the antichivalric tradition:

Chronicles reporting fourteenth-century battles describe many instances of heroic defiance of mortality. Nonetheless, the wills of fourteenth-century knights and the antichivalric knightly productions discussed in chapter 3 demonstrate that in an unheroic context, the warrior ethos fails to offer support. When passively considering their inevitable deaths, knights adopt the moralistic contempt for the things of this world. The rejections of military trappings and chivalric values indicate a flaw in the fourteenth-century synthesis of chivalry. When meeting death passively, knights have to abandon their defiance and acquiesce as meekly as the humblest Christian. (71)

²⁶ See chapter two, pages 34-5.

²⁷ Nevertheless, I adopt the emendation of 1283 according to Andrew and Waldron, which ascribes this thought to the narrator, rather than that chosen by Sanderlin, which suggests that the lady is aware of the nature of his appointment at the Green Chapel; such a reflection seems uncharacteristic of the lady at this

þa3 ho were burde bry3test þe burne in mynde hade,
 þe lasse luf in his lode for lur þat he so3t

Boute hone—

þe dunte þat schulde hym dreue,

And nede3 hit most be done. (1283-87)

Here, the narrator suggests Gawain's preoccupation about the trial he faces at the Green Chapel. On the day before New Year's Eve, Gawain tells Bercilak that he must leave the next day; his host again assures him that he need not worry, since he will arrive at the Green Chapel in time. Nevertheless, the narrator again points to Gawain's anxiety, but this time in even greater detail:

In dre3 droupyng of dreme draueled þat noble,

As mon þat watz in mornyng of mony þro þo3tes,

How þat Destin e schulde þat day dele hym his wyrde

At þe Grene Chapel when he þe gome metes

And bihoues his buffet abide withoute debate more. (1750-54)

Gawain's dream betrays his inner struggle, which the narrative only hints at occasionally. His fear consists of the certainty of his destruction at the Green Chapel. Like Jonah, he perceives his death as transcendently ordained; however, unlike the prophet in *Patience*, Gawain at first embraces his calling, and wrestles with fear only when the threat of death draws near. Whereas Jonah's fear is overcome by God's manifestation of his power and grace, Lady Bercilak's beauty transforms Gawain's fear through eros:

Bot quen þat comly com he keuered his wyttes,

point since it breaks the suspense which the poet creates by concealing Bercilak's knowledge of the exact nature of Gawain's agreement with the Green Knight.

Swenges out of þe sweuenes and swarez with hast.

...He se3 hir so glorious and gayly atyred,

So fautles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes,

Wi3t wallande joye warmed his hert. (1755-62)

Here, we see one passion being transformed by another. While his anxiety becomes more conspicuous each day, the pleasure of the beautiful woman's company provides a temporary and transformative relief from the more mortal fear that he faces. Gawain's emotional states cause him both suffering and pleasure, yet, until this point, they do not cause him to act inappropriately or to reveal his fear to others; his equanimity remains intact, even if his wavering between fear and desire prepares him for a failure of virtue.

When Gawain accepts the girdle from Lady Bercilak, it is not fear that upsets his reason, but the passion of hope.²⁸ Or, one might say that the hope of survival increases Gawain's fear and causes his failure of patient endurance, which, as the narrative eventually discloses, provides unperceived support for the pentangle virtues. Aquinas states that if one cannot prevent a possible evil from occurring, "hope is shattered and consequently so is fear" (I.II.42.6). Since Gawain might survive, hope and fear have greater strength. Thus, the knight manifests exemplary patience until he is tempted by the possibility of survival. In *Trawthe and Treason: The Sin of Gawain Reconsidered*, W. R. J. Barron, using Aquinas's observations on the power of the passions to overcome reason and thereby cause one to mistake an evil for an apparent good, hypothesises about Gawain's acceptance of the girdle: "...oppressed by the fear of death, he was so overwhelmed by the prospect of escape offered by the girdle that he was momentarily

²⁸ "Hope" here is not the theological virtue, but one of the four primary passions. See, for example, Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* I.vii.27 and Aquinas's *Summa* I.II.42.6.

incapable of appreciating the significance of accepting it, unable to weigh its value against that of the pentangle" (127).²⁹ However, if Gawain were only "momentarily" unable to appreciate the ethical implications of accepting the girdle, then why does he wear it to his meeting with the Green Knight? In fact, the acceptance of the girdle does not contradict any of the virtues that appear in the pentangle. As I have argued above, it violates Gawain's patient endurance, a virtue that is not listed among the pentangle virtues, but is one on which Gawain's other virtues depend. Until this point, Gawain has done nothing that he will later regret; however, he compromises his integrity when he accepts the girdle, and he later vows to bear this guilt until he dies; nevertheless, Gawain's failure is not simply a result of his fear of death or dishonour. His equanimity is not lost by lust or fear exactly, but it is set off balance by the hope of survival.

The poet's presentation of the scene in which Gawain accepts the girdle suggests that he is not simply receiving a gift that is intended to save his life, but one that compromises his identity as a virtuous knight. As the narrator notes, Gawain is greatly tempted by the lady's presence: "Gret perile bitwene hem stod, / Nif Maré of hir kny3t mynne" (1768-69). Still, in spite of the passion that he experiences, he does not lose his sobriety, and consistently refuses to accept a gift that might function as a symbol of their love. When she offers Gawain the girdle, he refuses it at first, just as he has already refused the ring: "And he nay þat he nolde neghe in no wyse / Nauþer golde ne garysoun, er God hym grace sende / To acheue to þe chaunce þat he hade chosen þere" (1836-38). However, when the lady reveals the girdle's magical property, Gawain considers accepting it:

²⁹ Clein notes that the exchange of winnings game does not seem nearly as serious as the beheading game (114); however, the ending suggests simultaneously that virtue is found in details, and that the details are not as important as major possible failures such as flight or adultery.

þen kest þe kny3t, and hit come to his hert

Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were:

My3t he haf slypped to be vnslayn þe sle3t were noble.

þenne he þulged with hir þrepe and þoled hir to speke. (1855-58)

Gawain's change of mind is not immediate; he does not simply recognise that the girdle is meant to save his life. Rather, he gradually yields to her desire and allows her to give him the girdle. Although the word *þole* is necessary for the alliterative quality of the line, it also reminds the audience of Gawain's relationship to suffering; his suffering her to speak is an appropriate form of suffering for a courtly knight, yet his motivation for doing so is not wholly pure. While he can most certainly justify his agreeing to receive the gift because it will save his life, Gawain's acceptance of it is clearly motivated by the hope of survival that intensifies his fear of death; as a result, his virtue is compromised.

The poet continues to prepare the audience for the theme of enduring fortitude by depicting Gawain's growing anxiety. While the possibility of survival perhaps provides Gawain with a small measure of relief, it does not ultimately mitigate his fear.³⁰ Instead, his fear accentuates the determination with which he undertakes his task and draws attention to the great difficulty of enduring fortitude, which, unlike aggression, cannot be strengthened by the passions. Gawain's first act after receiving the girdle is not to go immediately and rejoice that he now has a good chance of surviving his ordeal. Instead, he prepares for death by going to confession, and the narrative suggests emphatically that his confession is complete:

....[He] preuély aproched to a prest and prayed hym þere

³⁰ Cf. Clein 119: "the magic girdle does little to diminish Gawain's terror. ...Gawain's fear brings him into the sphere of ordinary men, but his resolve distinguishes him."

Pat he wolde lyste his lyf and lern hym better
 How his sawle schulde be saued when he schuld seye heþen.
 Pere he schrof hym schyrly and schewed his mysdedez,
 Of þe more and þe mynne, and merci besechez,
 And of absolucioun he on þe segge calles;
 And he asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene
 As domezday schulde haf ben di3t on þe morn. (1877-84)

The poet depicts Gawain as preparing for his own death. The knight's confession is clearly complete, at least according to his conscience at this time, and the reference to *domezday* in line 1884 reminds the audience of the impending judgement that Gawain faces. His subsequent celebration among the court could thus be interpreted as the simple joy of having received absolution for one's sins, and does not necessarily result from his receiving a talisman (1885-92). As Andrew and Waldron convincingly state in their edition of the poem, "the most satisfactory solution [to the question of the validity of Gawain's confession] is that it is only in retrospect, when he sees its full significance, that the concealment becomes a grave moral fault for him" (275n.). Gawain is still not entirely convinced that he is going to survive his encounter with the Green Knight, and he prepares himself accordingly.

The poet uses Gawain's fear during the night and during his journey to the Green Chapel in order to emphasise further the protagonist's incomplete trust in the girdle and the great difficulty of his adventure. The poet suggests that, even though Gawain has received the talisman, the knight has an anxious night; at first, the poet refuses to

comment on how Gawain sleeps, but when he returns to Gawain in the morning, he states that the knight slept little:

3if he ne slepe soundly say ne dar I,
For he hade mucche on þe morn to mynne, 3if he wolde,
in þo3t.

...Þe leude lystened ful wel, þat le3 in his bedde;

þa3 he lowke3 his lidde3, ful lyttel he slepes. (1991-92; 2006-7)

In spite of his anxiety, Gawain proceeds to his appointment at the Green Chapel, and his fear becomes more palpable as he draws nearer to the chapel. As the knight and his guide journey across the mournful landscape, the latter attempts to intensify Gawain's fear by describing the cruelty of the Green Knight; Gawain's response betrays the guide's success: "'Grant merci,' quop Gawayn, and gruchyng he sayde: / 'Wel worth þe, wy3e, þat wolde3 my gode, / And þat lelly me layne I leue wel þou wolde3...' (2126-28).

Gawain's indignant reply may simply result from the inappropriateness of the suggestion that the guide makes; however, he reveals that fear, to a certain extent, influences his behaviour during the journey, by his reminding himself after the guide has left of his obedience to God:

'Bi Goddez Self,' quop Gawayn,
'I wyl nauþer grete ne grone;
To Goddez wylle I am ful bayn
And to Hym I haf me tone.' (2156-59)

One of the classical notions of patience suggests that the virtue consists of the enduring of adverse fortune without complaining;³¹ by refusing to express the extent of his mental suffering, Gawain reveals, on the one hand, that he is plagued by difficult emotions, such as fear, and, on the other hand, that virtue requires one to remain silent about one's suffering; patience here consists not only of enduring painful emotions, but of refusing to allow oneself even the comfort of manifesting, of expressing, of enacting, that is, of allowing one's behaviour to be influenced in any conspicuous way by the passion that afflicts one's soul. Nevertheless, the representation of patience requires that suffering be expressed somehow in order to reveal the difficulty of manifesting the virtue. Thus, Gawain's emotional suffering points to his belief that he might yet die at the Green Chapel.

Gawain still experiences great fear in spite of the talisman, yet he does not succumb to the sort of hope of survival that the guide offers, the result of which would unambiguously jeopardise his integrity. While Gawain does not necessarily violate his agreement with the Green Knight by accepting a talisman to preserve his life, the knight would break his *trawthe* by failing to honour his appointment at the Green Chapel. Before the guide leaves, Gawain gives him a speech about the heroic indifference of the knight, and his receptivity to both good and adverse fortune. This selfless devotion to an ideal perfectly describes the sort of patience that Jonah fails to manifest when God first calls him. After stating that he would trust the guide to keep his secret if he were to flee from his meeting with the Green Knight, Gawain continues,

Bot helde þou hit neuer so holde, and I here passed,

Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme þat þou tellez,

³¹ See Hanna 73-4.

I were a kny3t kowarde, I my3t not be excused.
 Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle,
 And talk wyth þat ilk tulk þe tale þat me lyste,
 Worþe hit wele oþer wo, as þe Wyrde lykez
 Hit hafe.

þa3 he be a sturn knape
 To sti3el, and stad with staue,
 Ful wel con Dry3tyn schape
 His seruauntez for to saue. (2129-39)

To act without patience, that is, to allow fear to determine his behaviour, would result in an identity crisis for Gawain. In order not to be a coward, he must endure courageously that which is ordained for him, and trust that the grace of God will preserve him. Barron and Larry Benson rightly see Gawain's courage at this point as being compromised by his possession of the girdle,³² and Clein suggests that Gawain is afraid because he does not really believe in the girdle's power. Certainly he is mindful of the girdle at this point; however, there is no reason to suspect that his courage would have been otherwise if he had not received it. After all, his intention to keep his appointment at the Green Chapel never changes. His possession of the girdle does not provide him with the necessary fortitude to attend his appointment at the Green Chapel. Instead the possession of the girdle points to the power of the fear that he tries to keep hidden. He takes it to mitigate

³² Benson writes,

Arthur had not recognized that courtesy as well as bravery is involved in the test. Gawain does not understand that anything but courtesy, and continence, of course, is involved. More gentlemanly than warlike, he forgets that bravery too is expected of the knight and, when he thinks he has successfully defended both his courtesy and his continence, he accepts the lace and thereby becomes guilty of cowardice. (224)

his fear, but it does not succeed according to his desire. He experiences fear, both before and after receiving the girdle, and while the girdle may perhaps have diminished the fear briefly, it is not fair to say that it determines his behaviour. Nevertheless, his acceptance of the girdle is, as he will later suggest, an act of cowardice, inasmuch as he has compromised his integrity by failing to fulfil his agreement in the exchange of winnings game in order to save his life. While one can assume that Gawain's fear would not have prevented him from entering the Green Chapel, he is willing to sacrifice his integrity in a smaller matter to preserve his life, an act that draws together his accusing himself of "cowarddyse and couetyse bope" (2374).

The emotional tension that Gawain has been experiencing during his stay at Hautdesert uncoils rapidly during the scene in the Green Chapel. Gawain's flinching after the first feint points to the difficulty of his trial, and his stillness during the second feint, as the Green Knight remarks (2296-98), points to his great fortitude. Furthermore, that Gawain rises quickly to defend himself after the third feint reveals the great courage he has been exercising through the regulation of his emotions:

And quen þe burne se3 þe blode blenk on þe snawe,
 He sprit forth spenne-fote more þen a spere lenþe,
 Hent heterly his helme and on his hed cast,
 Schot with his schulderez his fayre shelde vnder,
 Braydez out a bry3t sworde and bremely he spekez—
 Neuer syn þat he watz barne borne of his moder
 Watz he neuer in þis worlde wy3e half so blyþe.... (2315-21)

According to Mann (1994), this scene reveals that Gawain's passivity requires just as much energy as activity (111). To be sure, Gawain unleashes a great deal of emotional energy after a long period of rigid self-control. He is willing to fight the Green Knight, and his joy because of his surviving the ordeal mobilises his aggressive posture. He is free from any fear, and the transformation of his emotional state draws even more attention to the intense difficulty of the internal struggle that he has experienced.

Gawain's slight transgression of courage is judged gently by the Green Knight, whose self-disclosure signifies the end of the test. We need not presume that Gawain would have eventually confessed his keeping of the girdle had the Green Knight not drawn attention to it. Gawain does not confess his sin, but has it revealed to him, and it is only after its revelation that he suffers pangs of conscience because of his desire to protect his life. The Green Knight's forgiveness of Gawain's transgression originates in an awareness of the difficulty of endurance. He refers to Gawain as a "Bolde burne" and tells him not to be so "gryndel" (2338), a word that recalls God's chastising Jonah for his impatience (524); also, he describes the knight as "on þe faultlest freke þat euer on fote 3ede" (2363); finally, he points out that Gawain accepted the girdle because he "lufed [his] lyf" (2368), and, thus, the Green Knight blames him less. As Barron perceptively argues, the Green Knight's and Gawain's responses to the infraction present the audience with two different perspectives on the protagonist's desire to protect his life:³³

Gawain's sin is a 'sin of passion' (as against a 'sin of ignorance' or a 'sin of malice'): that is to say it was 'caused' by fear, one of the passions of the soul. ...Now such sins may or may not be serious; but the fact that they are caused by passions rather than malice is admitted by the theologians as an

³³ The court of Camelot, of course, offers another response, not completely unlike that of the Green Knight.

alleviating consideration—more or less so according to the strength of the passion. For passion diminishes sin, according to Aquinas, insofar as it diminishes the voluntary character of an action ... (STI-II Q77, art 6 See also I-II Qq41-44, and II-II Q125). So Bercilak is right: the fact that Gawain's sin was caused by his fear of death rather than by some weaker passion (the love of a lady, perhaps) or by malice does diminish his sin Yet Gawain is right too when he accuses himself of cowardice, and identifies this as the source of his sin For passions, insofar as they are governable by reason and the will, are themselves good or evil—evil where they run counter to the order of reason. So fear, insofar as it is not 'involuntary', and where, in Aquinas' words, it 'flees things which reason says should be borne', is morally blameworthy—'cowardice' in fact. The term is applicable to Gawain's case because his fear of death led him to incur spiritual evils in order to escape bodily ones—and so to prefer the greater evil to the less, which is against reason. Thus the single passion, fear, gives valid occasion both for extenuation ('love of life') and for blame ('cowardice'). (135)

It is hard not to sympathise more strongly with the opinion of the Green Knight and the court than with that of Gawain. Although the Green Knight's associations with Morgan and magic potentially draw his judgment into question, the text offers no clear implication that his gentle treatment of Gawain's failure is to be discounted. His disclosure of his identity and the nature of Morgan's plot, which consisted of testing the renown of the Round Table and perhaps causing Guinevere to die of shock in the process

(2444-62), suggests that the test is now over. Gawain and Guinevere have survived the test and, for now at least, Gawain can return to Hautdesert and, having proved his mettle, he can celebrate with Bercilak and his court. The text offers no implication that Bercilak intends to test Gawain any further. The acts of deception by both knights have been revealed, and the knights are now able to speak to one another as peers.³⁴

While Bercilak has ended the testing of Gawain by revealing himself and Morgan's plot, Gawain responds to his humiliation not with patience and humility, but with anger; nevertheless, when he regains control of his passions, he resolves to identify the girdle as a symbol of his imperfect fortitude, and thereby reveals his determination to assimilate his experience. After receiving the slight touch of the Green Knight's axe, Gawain stands exultantly, and his readiness for martial retaliation suggests that he perceives the test as being finished; he has survived, and thus seems victorious. However, the revelation of his failure, although slight, transforms his passionate bravado to shame. His anger moves from *cowarddyse* and *couetyse*, the vices that caused him to fail, to the girdle, which he throws angrily at the Green Knight ("Þenne he ka3t to þe knot and þe kest lawsez, / Brayde broþely þe belt to þe burne seluen" (2376-7)). After he seems to have regained control of his anger, he blames the alleged power of women to beguile men (2414-28) in a speech that sounds more like an attempt to rationalise his failure than to provide a conclusive analysis of the cause of his failure. Finally, Gawain invests the girdle with an appropriate signification: it is to remind him of the incompleteness of his fortitude: "...quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes, / Þe loke of þis luf-lace shal leþe my hert" (2437-8). Gawain perceives himself as having mastered the passions, the

³⁴ In order to account for the Green Knight's unclear ethics, Jill Mann convincingly points to lines 2354-5: "Trwe mon trwe restore / Þenne þar mon drede no wape"; the Green Knight's sense of *trawþe* "[is] a response to Gawain's" (116).

proof of which is to be found in his patient suffering of the endurance of death without choosing to retaliate. Yet, as the Green Knight clarifies for him, Gawain has failed, and the anger and despondency he suffers after his humiliation confirm the power of his passionate nature. In the future, when he is about to act aggressively, he will look at the girdle and be reminded of his failure to endure perfectly. He assimilates his experience by returning to court ashamed and wearing the girdle as a mark of his guilt that, he suggests, he will bear until death (2511-12).

The response of Arthur and his court to Gawain's failure seems ambiguous, but intends to acknowledge the collective failure of Camelot. While recounting his adventure, Gawain relives the shame that he experienced when he became aware of his failure. He states that his act can never be forgotten, and that his choosing to wear the girdle points to the irrevocability of his failure. The immediate jocular response of Arthur and the other knights seems to belittle Gawain's failure, yet they agree to honour Gawain and the girdle, and their decision to do so cannot be reduced to simple playfulness. Instead, the poet uses this episode to point to the collective integration of Gawain's experience. The poet tells us that the intention of the king is to "comfort" the knight (2513). By collectively deciding to wear girdles, Arthur and his knights symbolically acknowledge their shared responsibility in the shortcoming that Gawain manifests. Except for Arthur, who angrily accepted the Green Knight's challenge because of the necessity of redressing an insult, none of the other knights has displayed any enduring fortitude. Thus, the poet suggests that Gawain's failure is not just his own, but is that of the Round Table and the idealism that it represents.

SGGK examines and explores the boundaries of heroic patience. The Green Knight's challenge provides an exploration of patience through the protagonist's capacity for suffering and determination to complete his quest in spite of fear. The centrality of patient endurance emerges gradually during the narrative; the initial description of Gawain's virtues does not include a reference to enduring fortitude, yet the poet reveals the conventions of the virtue in Gawain's acceptance of the adventure, in his journey to and arrival at Hautdesert, and, most importantly, in the challenge itself, which, for Gawain, ultimately requires him to render himself absolutely vulnerable to the Green Knight's axe. Gawain's repeated condemnation of his own cowardice particularly draws attention to the failure of enduring fortitude, since he has not failed with respect to aggression, but with respect to endurance. While Gawain does manifest an impressive degree of patient fortitude in his determination to fulfil the terms of his agreement with the Green Knight, the poet depicts the power of the passions to overcome patient fortitude, particularly since the virtue cannot fortify itself with a passion, as aggressive fortitude can with anger. When the Green Knight visits Camelot, Gawain's rational self-control, in spite of the fear that possesses the entire court, contrasts the anger with which Arthur responds to the knight's challenge and insults. Because of his great equanimity, Gawain is a good candidate for the Green Knight's challenge, and he departs Camelot expressing his knightly control of the passions. However, during his journey to and stay at Hautdesert, the narrative dramatises the limits of Gawain's courage; he begins to experience fear, and, in accepting the girdle, yields to the power of the emotion. Whereas the Green Knight admires Gawain's great courage in spite of his small failure, Gawain becomes despondent, and wears the girdle as a symbol of his failure; nevertheless,

Gawain resolves to regard the girdle as a symbol of his imperfect fortitude; he has prided himself on his ability to manifest martial courage, but his capacity for endurance is imperfect, and its failure reveals the inadequacy of the pentangle as a symbol for Gawain. Nevertheless, by framing Gawain's failure within the context of secular romance, the poet salvages the knight's heroism; such a failure in the context of religious narrative could only result in the loss of heroic status. The narrative focusses thus on the difficulty of the virtue instead of the failure of the knight, a focus that would be lost in a religious context. Jonah, for instance, must redeem his fearful attempt to elude God's call by jumping overboard.

While Larry Benson, Davenport, and Putter are right to suggest that Gawain's adventure does not require the attacking aspect of his martial skill, their use of the word "passive" to describe Gawain's behaviour is misleading. Mann also discusses Gawain's behaviour as fundamentally passive, yet she observes the amount of effort that he requires to maintain his passivity, and thus recognises the contradictory nature of the application of the active/passive binary to this sort of heroism, yet she does not account for the importance of this type of heroism or the intellectual context that produces it. By considering the poet's portrayal of Gawain and his adventure within the context of the medieval patience discussions, one can discern the tradition of patience that unifies the poem's focus on fear, anger, suffering, and endurance. For both Aquinas and the Gawain-poet, endurance is the essence of the virtue fortitude and, as such, it is more difficult than aggression. Endurance does not require just as much energy as attacking, as Mann suggests, but it requires even more in its battle to control the passions. In the larger context of Cotton Nero A.x.iii, both a knight, Gawain, and a prophet, Jonah, fail to

manifest perfect enduring fortitude, which is the domain of martyrs. Like Jonah, Gawain is constrained to act according to his identity, and he manifests patience through submitting to an agreement that ultimately threatens his life. While he at first hesitates to embrace the adventure, he does consent eventually and faces the threat of death with greater heroic poise than Jonah does when the prophet first receives the call to preach in Nineveh; nevertheless, like that of the prophet, the knight's courage does indeed fail him. Still, Gawain manifests enduring fortitude in his determination to achieve the challenge that he receives from the Green Knight, and although he does not complete his quest in an ideal fashion by approaching the possibility of death without altering his behaviour because of fear, his determination to endure the blow of the Green Knight's axe earns him the respect of his adversary. Gawain's failure inspires him to regard the girdle as a symbol of the necessity, and difficulty, of endurance, and this symbol is later shared by all of the knights of Camelot.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion

The classical, patristic, and medieval conventions of the virtue patience provide an essential and previously undervalued context for understanding *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Although the *Gawain*-poet does not name the virtue in *SGGK*, he does reveal his intimate familiarity with various understandings of the virtue in *Patience*, a work that reflects the later fourteenth-century interest in patient heroism that one can discern also in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*. These narratives collectively manifest important commonplaces about patience found in philosophical and patristic texts, scholastic treatises, penitentials, and exemplum books that circulated widely in England during the twelfth to fourteenth century. The medieval understanding of the virtue patience is a largely neglected area of study, partially because of the general inaccessibility of many important works from the penitential tradition. Nevertheless, by examining the contents of medieval discussions that appear to have been known widely, such as manuals composed by Thomas of Chobham, Thomas Aquinas, and Lorens d'Orléans, one can determine thematic clusters that dominate discourses on patience: as a remedial virtue, patience opposes anger, yet as a part of the cardinal virtue fortitude, it heals *acedia*; it therefore has a particularly close association with such passions as anger, fear, and despair. Furthermore, it consists not simply of suffering, but of doing so with a specific intentionality. The degree of volitionality that Chaucer's protagonists manifest can be measured according to a threefold hierarchy of patience found in the *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, a putative source for the *Parson's Tale*.

The action of the will is an essential element of patience, and distinguishes it radically from the notion of passivity that some critics ascribe to it.

When critics regard Gawain as passive, they do so with respect to a convention of romance heroism that characterises Middle English romance protagonists from the earlier half of the fourteenth century. Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton, Isumbras, and Florent all indeed display, to varying degrees, elements of patient heroism, but their patience is largely eclipsed by their aggression; they tend to resolve the complications of the narratives they inhabit not through suffering, but through combat and, even when the conventions of patient heroism appear in the narratives, they are frequently dismissed or transformed by aggressive behaviour. Because of the inability to fight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the protagonist must complete his quest through suffering voluntarily, through enduring fortitude instead of the aggressive sort. His failure results not from a lost physical battle, but from his inability to commit himself to suffering death in a Christlike fashion, by not accepting a morally-compromised possibility of escape. This focus of the plot on patient endurance associates Gawain more closely with protagonists such as Brendan, Owein, and the suffering knights found in Marie de France's *Lais*. In these narratives, the protagonists progress beyond an impasse through patient endurance, through voluntary suffering, and not through aggressive physical action.

While Jill Mann has commented on the intensity of the internal activity that is required of protagonists such as Gawain, she has not, in the case of *SGGK*, considered Gawain's heroism within the context of the classical, patristic, and medieval traditions of patience, nor has she accounted adequately for the greater difficulty of endurance. By doing so, one can discern the degree to which the *Gawain*-poet's ideas of patience have

informed his characterisation of Gawain. Most importantly, the context of medieval patience discussions helps us understand and contextualise the *difficulty* of manifesting patience. According to Aquinas, endurance is more difficult than aggression because the former does not receive any help from the passions. This appears in *SGGK* through the manner in which the possibility of facing the ordeal at the Green Chapel *and* surviving inspires Gawain to break the terms of his exchange of winnings game with Bercilak. Instead of helping him, his passions, which culminate in the hope for survival that he experiences when he learns about the girdle, work against his patience, inspiring him eventually to accept the girdle, and to feel both angry and ashamed when the Green Knight reveals his fault. As a result, the girdle becomes a symbol of his inability to manifest enduring fortitude, a failure that he intends to remember for the rest of his life.

The challenges that the romance hero faces are analogous to those experienced by God's prophet in *Patience*. In both works, the author manifests a particular concern with the volitionality that accompanies patience, with the passions that threaten patience, and with the ways in which patience functions as a virtue through which one can overcome an impasse. Both protagonists face necessity, either through the conditions of providence or those of social ritual. In both works, patience is the virtue that negotiates the inevitable; it is a way for the will to perfect itself in the absence of external freedom. However, in its more ideal forms, it is not by any means a self-deluding response to necessity; rather, it is the fundamental expression of volitionality that manifests itself in a variety of ways, from simply refraining from grumbling when one is inconvenienced, to the sublime expression of Christ's self-sacrifice, which asserts the victory of the will even over the apparent finality of death.

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