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Patience and the Unity of the Cotton Nero A.x Manuscript

Diane Halsted Jefferson

_College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences_

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PATIENCE AND THE UNITY OF THE COTTON NERO A.X. MANUSCRIPT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Diane Jefferson
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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Diane Halsted Jefferson

Author

Approved, May 1971

John W. Conlee

Charles E. Davidson

C. Freeman
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The poems of the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript, Cleanness, Patience, Pearl, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, share common characteristics at the same time that each maintains a distinctive quality. The concern of this paper rests with Patience as it exemplifies the similarities of the group and as it retains its individuality. My purpose is to suggest the overall relationships of the Cotton Nero A.x. poems and to establish Patience as the poet's prelude to the greater poems, Pearl and Sir Gawain.

The unity of the poems by the Gawain-poet is supported by two types of evidence: common characteristics of style and form, and the expression of similar themes and attitudes. Whereas the technical similarities shared by the poems often reflect adherence to medieval convention, the common themes and attitudes expressed by the Gawain-poet are distinctive in Middle English literature. Among the shared formal characteristics of the poems are the use of alliteration, the employment of such techniques as a framing device and the storytelling convention of requesting the audience's attention, and the use of common descriptions and images. A more noteworthy unity of the four poems is evident in the underlying attitude toward life that pervades them. In each of the poems a selfish, passionate desire of a human being is met and controlled by someone more than human.

Turning exclusively to Patience I seek to demonstrate that, in spite of being considered inferior to Pearl and to Sir Gawain with regards to its aesthetic merits and its general literary significance, it is, nonetheless, a distinctive work deserving of consideration in its own right. This assertion is supported by a discussion of three noteworthy aspects of the poet's achievement: the development of the narrator, the concept of courtly traditions, and the nature of the poem's protagonist.
PATIENCE AND THE UNITY OF THE COTTON NERO A.X. MANUSCRIPT
I
Introduction

The Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript containing Cleanness, Patience, Pearl, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight was not discovered until the nineteenth century, and, consequently, unlike the works of Chaucer, its influence has not been felt on subsequent English literature. Even though nearly one hundred years have elapsed since the manuscript was found, it is still surrounded by many uncertainties. The author of the poems is unknown; the date and place of composition are still subject to speculation; and the poems are written in a Northwest Midlands dialect, a difficult dialect of Middle English which contrasts sharply with the London dialect of the fourteenth century. Not only does the relatively recent discovery of the manuscript remove it from influence on later literature, but it is doubtful that the Gawain-poet's work was known to many of his contemporaries, Chaucer or Gower for example. Despite the numerous unanswered questions, however, there is virtually complete agreement that the four poems, Patience, Cleanness, Pearl, and Sir Gawain, are the work of a single poet. Patience is considered inferior to the poet's acknowledged masterpieces, Pearl and Sir Gawain, but superior to Cleanness,
which is probably the poet's earliest work. ¹ The poems in the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript share common characteristics at the same time that each maintains a distinctive quality. The concern of this paper rests with Patience as it exemplifies the similarities of the group and as it retains its individuality. My purpose is to suggest the overall relationships of the Cotton Nero A.x. poems and to establish Patience in its proper perspective as the poet's prelude to his greater poems.
II
Unity

It is generally assumed that Cleanness, Patience, Pearl, and Sir Gawain were written by the same poet, the anonymous Pearl-poet or Gawain-poet. In general, two types of evidence are used to support this assumption: shared characteristics of style and form, and themes or attitudes which seem to be common to the four poems. The arguments for single authorship of the poems in the Cotton MS which are based upon similarity of stylistic and poetic techniques are less convincing than those that depend upon common themes and attitudes because, for the most part, the poet's style and technique reflect adherence to medieval convention.

Because he wrote at the time of the so-called Middle English alliterative revival (c. 1350-1400), the poet's choice of alliterative verse demonstrates this adherence. The poems are written in alliterative long lines (except for Pearl which alliterates less frequently and less regularly), each normal line containing four chief stresses, two in each half line, although this is frequently varied. The usual alliterative pattern is aa/ax or aaa/ax as demonstrated by the first two lines of Patience:
Pacience is a poynt, hit displese ofte. (l. 1)
When heuy herttes ben hurt wyth kefyng of er elles. (l. 2)

As J.J. Anderson comments in the introduction to his edition of Patience: "On the whole, the poet's approach to versification is conservative but far from rigid; the metre is his servant, not his master." And indeed, the Gawain-poet briefly alludes to his use of alliterative verse in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:

I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde, 
with tonge, 
As hit is stad and stoken 
In stori stif and stronge, 
With lel letteres loken, 
In londe so hatz ben longe. (ll. 31-36)

(I will tell it straight off, as I heard it in town by tongue, 
as it is set, well-stocked, 
in a story brave and strong, 
with true letters interlocked, 
told in this land for long..) (ll. 31-36)

Whereas all four poems alliterate, only Pearl and Sir Gawain employ both alliteration and rhyme, reflecting on the one hand the native poetic (or Germanic) tradition and on the other the French influences on English poetry that survived in the later English Middle Ages. In Sir Gawain the native English alliterative tradition contained in the body of each stanza and the French rhyme employed in the
bob and wheel contrast sharply. In Pearl the combination of alliteration and rhyme is subtle, lacking the clear-cut separation of Sir Gawain. The elaborate structure of Pearl with its intricate rhyme scheme, and twelve-line stanzas clearly grouped into units of five by a word-linking device represent the most sophisticated form of the four poems. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight reflects the same alliterative structure as that seen in Patience and Cleanness; however, the aforementioned combination of rhyme and alliteration and the parallelism of the hunt in the bedroom and the hunt in the fields indicate a degree of poetic achievement not evident in the two earlier poems. Both Patience and Cleanness are written in four line stanzas, and their structure is derived, at least in part, from medieval rhetorical conventions.

The Gawain-poet's consistency of poetic technique is further demonstrated by certain structural features common to the four poems of the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript. One of several structural devices common to the poems is the use of a framing device consisting of the same phraseology at the beginning and at the end of the poems. In Sir Gawain the frame recalls the legendary founding of England by Brutus:
Sit ten pe sege and pe assaut watz sesed at Troye (l. 1)

And fer ouer pe French flod Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez (ll. 13-14)

Syfen Brutus, pe bolde burne, bo3ed hider fyrt,
After pe segge and pe asaute watz sesed at Troye,
(11. 2523-24)

(When the siege and the assault on Troy had ceased (1.1)
while far over the French sea Felix Brutus
Settles Britain on its many broad banksi, (ll. 13-14)

Since the bold Brutus first abode here
after the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy.)
(ll. 2523-24)

The first and last lines of Patience also mirror each other,
as the poet recognizes the difficulty of achieving patience:

Pacience is a poynt, pa3 hit displese ofte. (l. 1)
Pat pacience is a nobel poynt, pa3 hit displese ofte. (l. 531)

(Patience is a princely thing, though displeasing often.
That Patience is a princely thing, though displeasing often.)
(l. 531)

The circular structure of Pearl is indicated by the use of
a framework device which groups, by the repetition of the
same word or sound, the stanzas into sets of five (with the
exception of one group of six stanzas, stanzas: 71-76).
Stanzas one through five, for example, all contain the word
"spot," or "spote" in their initial lines, and the words
"perle wythouten spot" ("pearl without a stain") in the final lines. Like Patience and Sir Gawain, Pearl begins and ends with the same idea:

Perle plesaunte to prynces paye (l. 1)
Ande precious perle^ vnto his pay. Amen. Amen. (l. 1212)

(Pearl, the precious prize of a king. (l. 1)
Us, precious pearls unto the King. Amen. Amen. (l. 1212)

Cleanness has no similar phraseology at the beginning and the end, but the theme of the poem, the wrath of God which is provoked by man's impurity, is restated, suggestive of the framing device apparent in the other three poems. However, this lack of framing device may be considered evidence for the earlier composition of Cleanness.

Another structural technique evident in three of the poems (the exception is Pearl) is the Gawain-poet's use of the storytelling convention of calling his audience's attention to his tale. Although it is a somewhat commonplace device, it may be significant that three out of the four poems do use it. In Patience this attention-gaining technique occurs in the final two lines of the prologue:

Wyl 3 e tary a lyttel tyne and tent me a whyle,
I schal wysse yow per-wyth as holy wryt telles. (11. 59-60)
(Tarry a little time, attend to me awhile: 
I shall utter it all as the Holy Book tells. (ll. 59-60))

In Cleanness it precedes the first minor exemplum:

If se wolde tyȝt me a tom, telle hit I wolde, (l. 1153)
(If you give me time I will tell about this. (l. 1153))

Twice in Sir Gawain the audience is bidden to pay attention:

If ye wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile,
I schal telle hit as-tit, as I in toun herde, (ll. 30-31)

(If you will listen to this lay but a little while,
I will tell it straight off, as I heard it in town. (ll. 30-31)

And se wyl a whyle be stylle
I schal telle yow how þay wroȝt, (ll. 1996-97)

(If you, for a while keep still,
I shall tell you what day brought. (ll. 1995-96))

Although the techniques of Patience are not so
sophisticated and skillful as those of Pearl and Sir Gawain,
they clearly reveal a close relationship to the more
polished poems and seem to establish an intermediary level
of development between the early Cleanness and the acknow­
ledgad great poems of the Gawain-poet.

Many common descriptions evident in two or more of
the poems further contribute to the unity of the Cotton MS.
Pearl imagery, for example, not only dominates Pearl, but
occurs in important passages in both Cleaness and Sir Gawain as well. The pearl becomes the epitome of perfection in these lines from Cleaness:

\[
\text{Thou may schyne pur}^3 \text{ schryfte, } \text{pa}^3 \text{ thou haf schome served, And pure } \text{pe with penaunce tyl } \text{pe ou a perle wor}^3 \text{e. (ll. 1115-6)}
\]

(Thou canst shine through confession, after serving shame And be pure through penance until made a pearl. (ll. 1114-16)

The lines which immediately follow this passage (ll. 1117-32) attribute the pricelessness of a pearl to "its clean color" (l. 1119). What the poet is suggesting, obviously, is that just as a dimmed pearl may be brightened by being washed in wine, a man stained by sin may seek confession and "the may polyece him a pe prest, by penaunec\text{tak}^6 \text{en, } \text{We}^1 \text{ beryl o}^6 \text{er browden perles" (ll. 1131-32) ([Let him] "be promptly polished by doing penance, brighter than beryls or embellished pearls" [ll. 1131-32]). And in Sir Gawain, Gawain himself is metaphorically described as a pearl by the Green Knight:

\[
\text{As perle bi } \text{pe quite pese is of prys more, So is Gawayn, in god fayth, bi } \text{oper gay kny}^3 \text{t ez. (ll. 2364-65)}
\]

(As a pearl is more precious than a white pea, So is Gawain, in good faith, than other fine knights. (ll. 2363-64))
Among other images shared by the poems in the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript is the garden in Pearl and Jonah's bower in Patience, two "gardens" that mirror the conventional medieval garden, the sanctuary from the world, found also for example, in Chaucer's The Book of the Duchess and The Romaunt of the Rose. The feast scenes in Sir Gawain and Belshazzar's feast in Cleanness likewise bear remarkable similarities. A third image, that of the pursued and the pursuer, as seen in both the bedroom and the hunt scenes in Part III of Sir Gawain, is also present in Patience, as Jonah is portrayed as a crafty prophet bent upon eluding God, the Divine Hunter. He hides from God to avoid preaching to the Ninevites, but is punished by being swallowed by the whale. And later in the poem, again shirking his duty, this time in his bower, Jonah is ferreted out by God and his sanctuary is destroyed.

As I suggested earlier, the unity of Patience, Cleanness, Pearl, and Sir Gawain may be established more certainly on the basis of an underlying attitude toward life that pervades them rather than on the basis of stylistic evidence. For, whereas the poet's stylistic qualities reflect adherence to medieval convention, his attitude toward life is distinctive in medieval literature.

A strikingly similar basic pattern of events occurs in each of the poems in the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript,
a pattern in which a selfish, passionate desire of a
human being is met and controlled by someone more than
human. In Pearl the dreamer's rash attempt to cross the
stream into the New Jerusalem is repelled by God. In
Cleanness the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah perish, the
flood destroys all but those on Noah's ark, and Belshazzar's
kingdom comes to ruin as God punished man's vanities. In
Sir Gawain, the hero's excessive pride is forever marked
by the green girdle and the scar inflicted by the Green
Knight. And in Patience Jonah's desire to save himself
from the forecasted wrath of the Ninevites is met and
controlled by an omnipotent God. The storm which Jonah
endures epitomizes, symbolically and climactically, the
harshness of his situation. This pervading harshness
of life is accepted with wisdom and philosophical resigna-
tion and is softened with gentle humor, and the same can be
said of Pearl and Sir Gawain. The poet recognizes that
life is not always as we would wish it, but that it is fruitless
to oppose God's will. Patience may be often displeasing, but
the way that the poet tells of its virtue and teaches it
by the example of Jonah reflects a belief in an omnipresent,
loving God. This God stands by Jonah despite his blatant
disobedience, and seeks not to punish, but to assert his will
and to demonstrate his power. The poet's awareness of this
loving quality of God gives to all his poems a joyous

attitude that affirms life rather than negates it. Life is not negated on the grounds that much of it may not conform to our desires, but rather affirmed by positive, active participation. Overseeing it all is the omnipotent God of love who guards and guides. I believe that it may be this joyous attitude, this affirmation, more than any other single characteristic that unifies the poems in the manuscript.

In addition to this common attitude, however, the poems are also unified by other important shared features, one of the most basic of which is a common didactic intent. There can be little doubt that the Gawain-poet is centrally concerned with instructing man in his relationship to God. Patience, Cleanness, and Pearl indicate the crucial steps on the Christian road to salvation. Fear of God, which Jonah finally comes to represent, and the cleanness of heart that Penance brings are essential for the spiritual perfection that qualifies the soul for heaven. In this respect Patience and Cleanness complement each other. Pearl, however, presents a more general comment on Christianity by showing that the ways of God are justifiable and irreversible and are always for the best. Even Sir Gawain, which stands apart from the others by the very fact that it is a romance, still evokes a spiritual experience. It demonstrates the same values that Patience and Cleanness do, and at the same time carries an indictment against the sin
of covetousness and an admonition to trust in God.

Whereas the didactic intent of the four poems is obvious, the audience at which the didacticism was directed is still the subject of considerable speculation. The earliest editors of *Patience*, Harley Bateson and Israel Gollancz, treated it as an unsophisticated poem intended for a simple audience. A.C. Spearing points out, however, that there is no external reason for supposing that *Patience* was written for a popular audience rather than the aristocratic audience clearly implied by *Sir Gawain*. Other critics have suggested that *Patience* and *Cleanness* were directed specifically at the clergy, or that they were associated with the movement for Christian education that followed the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils (late 13th and early 14th centuries). *Pearl* has likewise been considered a homily in which the audience is presented with a "message of salvation and of its attainment through God's gracious cortaysye and men's childlike acceptance of his bounty." *Sir Gawain* too exemplifies many of the same values as the more obviously homiletic poems, *Patience* and *Cleanness*. Mother Margaret Williams has suggested that "in one sense the whole poem [*Sir Gawain*] is a homiletic exemplum of cortaysye, a complex word that ranged from good manners to reverence before the divine Majesty."
The poems of the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript, then, are unified by common style and technique, reflecting the influence of medieval convention, and by common attitudes and themes expressing the unusual view of life held by the Gawain-poet.
III

Patience

Turning exclusively to Patience, I should like to demonstrate that, in spite of being considered inferior to Pearl and Sir Gawain with regards to its aesthetic merits and its general literary significance, it is, nonetheless, a distinctive work which, for several reasons, ought to be considered an important poem in its own right. This assertion is supported by a discussion of three noteworthy aspects of the poet's achievement: the development of the narrator, the concept of courtly traditions, and the nature of the poem's protagonist. The narrator of Patience, unlike the narrator of the other poems in the manuscript, emerges as a strong-minded commentator. He becomes an editor of the events and emotions that fill the poem, telling the story from a sort of omniscient first person point of view, and sharing the narrative with Jonah. Secondly, as Patience represents a departure from the narrative technique of the other three poems, it likewise demonstrates a modification of the courtly traditions that characterize all of the poems in the Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript. Although the courtly attitudes expressed in Patience are not concerned with the relationship of lord
and liegeman, the metaphor of that tradition is here applied to the relationship of God and man. And finally, a distinctive quality of Patience is that Jonah becomes a more fully developed character than any other figure in all of the poems in the manuscript, including Sir Gawain. I believe that these three aspects of the poem elevate Patience to a status above its commonly accorded one as the least important member of the group.

The ease with which the Gawain-poet manipulates the narrative point of view in Patience is one of his outstanding achievements. Throughout the poem the perspective shifts back and forth between the first person narrator who narrates the entire story and the hero both of whom maintain a highly restricted view of the action of the poem as they tell the story. The all-encompassing narrator depends upon Jonah's account of the tale for the main line of the story, and embellishes it with figurative language and lengthy description. Jonah's story is told in his own words directly quoted in the text of the poem by the narrator. One of many situations in which Jonah's matter-of-fact account of the events is intensified by the narrator's additions occurs in Part II of the poem where Jonah comes to rest in the whale's stomach. Here the narrator's descriptive and emotion-filled account (ll. 245-80, 289-302) contrasts to Jonah's simple statement of seven lines (ll. 281-88) where
he admits that he sinned in deceiving God and asks his mercy.

Through the poet's manipulation of perspective the narrator foreshadows for us the truth that Jonah has yet to learn. While Jonah escapes to Tarshish to flee the assignment given him by God, the narrator tells us:

For pe welder of wyt pat wot alle pynges,  
Pat ay wakes and waytes, at wylle hat3 he sly3 tes.  
(11. 129-30)

(For the Wielder of Wisdom, wise in all things,  
Ever wakeful and waiting, works things at will.  
(11. 129-30))

Jonah supposedly comes away with this knowledge at the end of his ordeals, and the audience remains constantly aware that this is the poet's intent. But through the good graces of the narrator we are treated to a foreshadowing of this eventual knowledge. The poet, however, is careful to have Jonah's step-by-step movement toward understanding contained in the speeches of Jonah rather than in the observations of the narrator:

'I am an ebru,' quop he, 'of Israyl borne;  
Pate wy3e I worchyp, iwyysse, pat wro3t alle pynges,  
Alle pe worlde with pe welkyn, pe wynde and pe sternes,  
And alle pat won3 pe r with-inne, at a worde one.  
Alle pis meschef for me is made at pys tyme,  
For I haf greued my God and gulty am founded:  
(11. 205-10)
('I am a Hebrew,' said he, 'in Israel born. 
The high god I honour made everything there is, 
And all the world and the welkin, the winds and the stars, 
And all dwellers therein, with one great word. 

'Destruction is raging now by reason of me, 
For I have grieved my god and my guilt is clear. 

(11. 205-10))

The shifting of the narrative perspective is valuable to the poet in yet another way, for it allows for commentary to be made on the action outside of the exemplum itself. In some cases this technique permits a sort of "second" exemplum that comments ironically on the first. God's request that the east and west winds, personified as Eurus and Aquilon, blow on the ocean is illustrative of this "second" exemplum. The narrator observes that Eurus and Aquilon are quick to respond to God's command:

\[\text{Penne wai no tome per bytwene his tale and her dede,} \\
\text{So bayn were pay bope two his bone for-to wyrk. (ll. 135-36)}\]

(There was no time between his telling and their doing, 
So prompt were the pair to prosecute his command. (ll.135-36)

In contrast to the negative exemplum presented by Jonah, they demonstrate a positive example of obedience to the will of God. However, if we were hearing this story solely from the point of view of Jonah we could be sure this ironical contrast would not be brought to our attention. There can be no doubt that the Gawain-poet's manipulation of perspective serves him well, permitting foreshadowing
and observation where without it there would be only narrative.

The role of the narrator in *Patience* has been the subject for a recent dispute between Charles Moorman and J.J. Anderson. Moorman states that the narrator is actively present in the poem and that the reader recognizes that this narrator is a man of firm opinion. The narrator also serves as the vehicle whereby the poet is able to reiterate at every opportunity the point of the prologue, the uselessness of attempting to circumvent divine will, and seeks to apply the *exemplum* to experience. Anderson, however, arguing to the contrary, suggests that the "I" of the narrator reflects not the autobiographical poverty of the poet (he refers to this line: "Bot syn I am put to a poynt *Pat pouerte hatte*," "Yet though Poverty is the pith of my present problem" l. 35), but the function of ingratiating the homilist with his audience. The "I" could, says Anderson, as well be written and read "you." In making such an assertion Anderson overlooks the obvious intensity and emotional involvement that result from the first person implication of the poem. He seeks to make the narrator of *Patience* just another storyteller; but, as Moorman states, he is an active participant, a second character, in the poem, and cannot be dismissed so handily. Furthermore, the additional perspective derived from the movement of the story between Jonah and the
narrator, and the foreshadowing and irony derived therefrom could not be attained by the employment for the conventional omniscient narrator. Most probably the intention of the poet was not the narrow "I" application that Anderson opposed, but a wider, yet still first person "we." The impatience with which he concerns himself is not only his own ("my impatience") but, by very virtue of the exemplum convention, "our impatience." The remedial effects of patience that he offers, that it soothes injuries and pain, and subdues evil and malice, plus the fact that the man impatience of misfortune suffers more, are most certainly not there for the narrator's instruction, but for our own.

The narrator also serves as the vehicle of much humor and irony in the poem. One of the first instances of humor occurs in the narrator's comments on the false security Jonah experiences when he believes that he has fled successfully from God's sight:

Wat neuer so joyful a jue as Jonas wat3 penne, 
Pat pe daunger of dryjtyn so derfly escaped; 
He wende wel Pat pat wy3 Pat al pe world planted. 
Hade no ma3t in Pat mere no man for-to greue. (11. 109-12)

(Then was Jonah the most joyful Jew that ever was, 
To have passed so promptly from the peril of God; 
Holding that he who created all earth 
Was powerless to pain a passenger on the sea! (11. 109-12))

But the narrator offers a simple comment on Jonah's unfounded
happiness, pointing out Jonah's foolishness and the absurdity of his accepted premises:

Lo, pe wytles wrechche, for he wolde noȝt suffer,
Now hatȝ he put hym in plyt of peril wel more.
Hit watȝ a wenyng vn-war pat welt in his mynde,
Payȝ he were soȝt fro Samarye, Pat God seȝ no fyrre.  
(ll. 113-16)

(Ah, foolish fellow to refuse to suffer,
Now put in peril of a plight much worse!
A hapless hope had he that God,
Who sought him in Samaria, could see no farther;  
(ll. 113-16))

The narrator notes in a passage harsher than the previous the rough treatment accorded Jonah by the ship's mates, and in burlesque style reduces the prophet to beast:

On-helde by pe hurrok, for pe heuen wrache,
Slypped vpon a sloumbe-selepe, and sloberande he routes.
Pe freke hym frunt with his fot and bede hym ferk vp;
Per Ragnel in his rakentes hym rere of his dremes!

Bi pe haspede he hentes hym penne,
And broȝt hym vp by pe brest and vpon borde sette,  
(ll. 185-90)

(Huddled by the hurrock from the anger of heaven In sluggish sleep, slobbering and snoring. The man ordered him up with a hearty kick: 'May Raguel the fettered fiend rouse you from dreams!' Seizing hold of his hair, he haled him out, Dragged him on deck, dumped him down (ll. 185-90))

Irony is the chief means by which the poet instructs. He illustrates patience with impatience, obedience with
disobedience, and loyalty with disloyalty. The contrast of contraries, pervading the poem, represents irony in its superlative form well-suited to the Gawain-poet's purpose and effectively personalized by his style. In addition to this basic irony there is a more subtle irony that provides a background tone. It is the narrator's task to point out such subtleties. For example, the narrator alerts us to the ironic situation aboard the ship sailing to Tarshish. Jonah's shipmates are pagans who quickly turn to their respective gods for aid during the tempest. These pagan mates promptly accept the storm as evidence sufficient to establish the omnipotence of Jonah's God, but Jonah himself is not so easily convinced. A second observation of the narrator has the effect of sarcastic understatement. After Jonah has been vomited from the whale's stomach, the narrator says:

Hit may wel be Pat mester were his mantyle to wasche
(1. 342)
(Well might he demand that his mantle be washed!)

In addition to altering the role of the narrator in Patience from its function in the other poems, the Gawain-poet also modifies his adherence to courtly traditions to suit the theme of Patience. There is considerable evidence that may be drawn from all the Cotton Nero A.x.
poems to indicate that the Gawain-poet is deeply committed to the order inherent in the courtly traditions. The courtly conventions, particularly courtesy, are the corrective force to man's natural selfish desires. In Pearl, for example, courtesy prevails among those in heaven: Mary is described as the Queen of Courtesy (1. 444), and out of courtesy, no one would consider usurping her place (1. 427, 1. 441). Cleanliness demonstrates the prevalence of courtesy at all levels of society: there is the courtesy of the Lord to his liegemen, and of the secular lord to those dependent upon him for their well-being. In Sir Gawain courtesy takes precedence over courtly love for Gawain repels the approaches of Bercilak's lady to be courteous to Bercilak. In Patience the poet indicates by negative example how courtesy coupled with the laws of love and devotion to duty superimpose order on what is naturally disorderly.

That courtesy takes on a modified meaning in Patience, necessary to its application to the relationship of God and man, becomes evident in the only occurrence of the word "cortaysye" in the poem. In this passage Jonah declares that he is aware of God's many virtues, the first of which is his courtesy:

Wel knew I pi cortaysye, py quoynt soffraunce,
py bounte of debonerte and py bene grace,
py longe abydyng wyth lur, py late vengaunce,
And ay py percy is mete, be mysse neuer so huge. (11. 417-20)
(I knew well Thy courtesy, Thy wise long-suffering, 
Thy bountiful goodness, Thy benign grace, 
Thy long patience with failure, Thy delayed vengeance. 
Thy mercy is meted out, though we miss the mark widely. 
(11. 417-20))

As D.S. Brewer points out, the words that accompany "cortaysye" in this passage are partly synonyms and partly members of the associative field. Surely "quoynt soffraunce," "bene grace," "longe abydyng wyth lur," and "late vengaunce" are aspects of patience and attributes of God. Brewer goes on to say that "bounte of debonerte," although frequently applied to God in the fourteenth century, has courtly associations; the ladies are asked for "bounte" and have "debonerte" attributed to them. Both God and courtly ladies are asked for mercy.

The right order of the secular world depends upon the feudal relationship of the master and his liegeman. The liegeman owes his master loyalty and responsibility, and, above all, courtesy. Courtesy is the means by which balance is maintained in the world. If the liegeman fails in his obligation to his master, denies him courtesy, the result is disorder, a topsy-turvy world. In Patience Jonah is the liegeman of God. He must demonstrate loyalty and fulfill his obligations to his lord; in short, he must act with courtesy. However, his failure to accept the feudal relationship and to carry it out with courtesy
creates disorder. In Jonah's case this disorder is symbolized by the storm and reaches its climax as he finds himself in the whale's stomach. This perversion of nature—for man does not belong in a whale's stomach!—indicates the imbalanced state to which Jonah's world has fallen. Courtesy, the balancing factor of the world, is exhibited by God. God is "hende in ϒe hyȝt of his gentryse" ("Great in his goodness and forgiving grace") (1. 398). D.S. Brewer attaches the meaning "courteous" to hende in this passage, for indeed, in the height of his nobility and great power to hurt, God maintains self-control. God gallantly provides the whale to save Jonah from the storm, and in a demonstration of courtesy suggestive of patience, God allows Jonah two opportunities for repentance. The superlative example of God's courtesy is his forgiving Jonah's human weakness, his excessive pride.

But Jonah accepts neither the feudalistic order, the subordination of man to master, nor the divine order of the laws of love and devotion to duty (as contrasted with the laws of power and obedience out of fear). If Jonah gains intelligence at the end of Patience, it is Dread, fear of God, twice asserted that has taught him, and not love. He who cannot accept the secular order can no more accept the divine order, even with the assistance of God.
Where Jonah fails in his relationship to God according to the convention of courtly tradition, he concurrently fails in demonstrating the acceptance of divine order which should be natural to an ecclesiastic. In short, Jonah lives a life devoid of courtesy.

Jonah stands in direct contrast to Sir Gawain who strenuously attempts to adhere to courtesy and divine order. Gawain, in his failure appears much less blameable than Jonah, and although Gawain is comic in attaching such import to his deeds, he is still a hero in the tradition of heroic alliterative poetry. A.C. Spearing notes that heroic poetry pictures man "as a hero—to be admired and taken seriously even and especially when fighting against odds and when eventually defeated." This Old English "heroic Ethic" has been modified by the Gawain-poet. He changes the hero to a would-be hero, for in his poetry man is forever struggling in vain against a force more powerful than he. Both Sir Gawain and Jonah are heroes of this type. Man's heroic aspirations are thwarted at every turn, becoming absurd and ironic. Nevertheless, the Gawain-poet presents his "hero" (or better, protagonist) with insight and sympathy. His exposure of man's weakness reveals a tragi-comic hero, if he can be termed a hero at all.

To consider Jonah a hero of any sort seems folly.
Jonah's failure, like Sir Gawain's, is avoidable. Had he merely followed God's request and heeded his warning, Jonah would be subscribing to the courtesy, the divine order, that marks the relationship of liegeman to master, man to God. But even then he would not be a potential hero. He would be fulfilling the tenets of a feudal relationship as should be expected of him, and doing nothing special beyond that obligation to qualify him as a hero. He does not distinguish himself either in battle or in defeat. He represents no trait, save his repentance in the whale's stomach, that is worthy of praise or emulation. Unlike Sir Gawain, he does not sincerely regret his action.

Jonah as prophet might seem to be superior in social status to Sir Gawain as knight; however, his actions quickly reveal the opposite, for Sir Gawain is a great knight who more than fulfills his obligations to Arthur. He not only demonstrates courtesy in all his acts (except concealing the green girdle), but leaps to redeem the reputation of Arthur jeopardized by the Green Knight. But whereas Sir Gawain is a faithful knight, Jonah is a faithless prophet. He fails not only once, but twice, to accept God's commands. He refuses to carry out the duty ascribed to his position in the world; he will not preach to the Ninevites.
Despite, or perhaps because of, Jonah's complete failure as a hero, he is nevertheless a very realistic and credible character regardless of his incredible experience. Glimpses into Jonah's thoughts reveal an ordinary man considering his fate. Jonah does not irrationally flee to Tarshish, but considers the consequences of his not fleeing; how the word he was to preach would not be well-received, and, if the Ninevites are as wicked as God says they are, he will be the victim of their wrath. Perhaps if he is lost, God will leave him alone; he vows to go to Tarshish. Here Jonah is rebellious, deceptive, and disobedient, but he is also, in his fear, like everyman and, therefore, very like the members of the poet's audience.

Whereas Jonah is often rational and his errors of judgment are regarded sympathetically, the reader ceases to empathize with his recurring, indeed prevailing, lack of humility. That he refuses to accept God's command to go to Nineveh is, perhaps, excusable given the rationale for his decision. Apparently unaffected by the power of God that called forth the tempest and then saved him from it, Jonah wrathfully chides God for accepting the repentance of the Ninevites. He is not only cocky and self-assured, but he is unattractively self-righteous. Rather than recognize the penance the Ninevites have done, Jonah asks for death, indicating his impatience with life and
his self-important view of himself. The incident of the woodbine epitomizes Jonah's child-like impatience with God. The plant is grown by God in order to shelter Jonah, but subsequently it is wilted by God in a final attempt to demonstrate his power. Jonah's fascination with the home he has crafted from the woodbine borders upon obsession. He does not eat, but instead prefers to play and laugh in it, all the while wishing he might have it for his home forever. After the bower is wilted Jonah is scorched by sun and wind, and once again he requests death as a respite from his pain.

But God is dedicated to showing Jonah that fearing God is a step toward loving God, and ultimately, toward salvation. God's courtesy is not limited to one person, but rather can encompass all men if they are willing to accept it. This generosity of God, indeed, his very lack of discrimination in the extension of courtesy, is Jonah's basis for protest, for it includes the sinful Ninevites as well as the servant Jonah. But what Jonah overlooks is that God's courtesy, his patience, applies equally to Jonah and the Ninevites, and only Jonah exploits God. When the Ninevites are warned of their impending doom, they repent, and through God's courtesy they are granted grace. Jonah, on the other hand, knows of God's courtesy (ll. 417-20) and for that reason does not respond to his call.
D.S. Brewer has summarized the Gawain-poet's concept of courtesy as "loving God and one's neighbor as oneself." The general concept is realized in Patience through the beneficence of God and the negative exemplum of Jonah. The virtue of patience is the most effective means of accepting what life brings, specifically poverty, as the narrator tells us at the outset. But to none of the Cotton Nero A.x. poems is the framework more suitable than to Patience where it reminds us of the necessity of man's acceptance of divine will and his demonstration of patience in all situations:

Patience is a poynt pay hit displese ofte: (1. 1)
(Patience is a princely thing, though displeasing often.)

However, the poet has been successful in accomplishing his purpose and the narrator and the audience come away with a new understanding and the ability to accept.

Although Patience shares many characteristics of style, technique, and theme with the other poems, it is more significant for its differences. As I have discussed, the poet's dependence upon the narrator to serve as an editor of events and emotions as well as a character represents a departure from the storytellers of the other poems. Another noteworthy change is the Gawain-poet's
modification of the courtly convention of "cortaysye"
as a definition of a relationship between lord and liege­
man to apply to the relationship between God and man. A
third distinctive characteristic which is unique to
Patience is the extraordinary development of Jonah as a
character. Upon these grounds Patience must be recognized
not only as a possible prelude to the Gawain-poet's
masterpieces, Pearl and Sir Gawain, but as a poem of
unusual qualities, and as a significant achievement in
its own right.
NOTES
(Notes to pages 3-8)

1 Despite the narrative simplicity of Patience, which is drawn from a single story rather than the several that compose Cleanness, its more polished style and sophisticated tone suggest that its composition succeeded that of Cleanness. A different opinion is held by John Gardner, The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 69-70, who suggests that the simplicity of Patience, unusual for the Gawain-poet, may indicate that it is the earliest work.

2 J.J. Anderson, Patience (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969). All lines from Patience in Middle English are from this edition of the poem. Line references are cited in the text.

3 Ibid., p. 20.


6 Brian Stone, Medieval English Verse (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965). All lines of this poem in modern English are given as they appear in this translation except where indicated otherwise. Line references are cited in the text.

7 Sara deFord et. al., The Pearl (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1967). All lines of this poem in Middle and modern English are given as they appear in this edition. Line references are cited in the text.


10 Williams, *The Pearl-Poet: His Complete Works*. All lines of *Cleanness* in modern English translation are given as they appear in this edition. Line references are cited in the text.


12 My opinion coincides on this point with a similar suggestion made by A.C. Spearing in "Patience and the Gawain-poet," *Anglia*, 84 (1966), 305.


14 Spearing, 316. Paraphrases of their introductions cited in this article.

15 Ibid., 316-17.


17 Zavadil, 4346.


19 Williams, p. 55.


24 The modern English translation of these lines is quoted here as it is given in Williams, The Pearl-Poet: His Complete Works. Brian Stone's rendering of line 417 is as follows: "'Well was I aware of your wise sufferance." He neglects the very important phrase concerning "cortaysye." For this reason Mother Williams' translation is preferred.


26 Brewer demonstrates the poet's selectivity of language in discriminating between "hende" and "cortaysye." "The word (hende) is the English equivalent of the French-derived 'corteous.' In this poem the poet seems to use the English word hende for the more concrete adjective, and the French word cortaysye for the more abstract noun—a situation that is still not unfamiliar." Ibid.


29 Ibid., 316.


VITA

Diane Halsted Jefferson

Born in Oakland, California June 7, 1946. Graduated from Encina High School, Sacramento, California in June 1964. Received B.A. degree March 1968 from the University of California, Davis campus. Pursued one year of graduate study in the Department of Education, University of California, Davis campus, and received California teaching credentials in March 1969.