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## The Sleepy Hero: Romantic & Spiritual Sleep in the Gawain-Poet

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**THE SLEEPY HERO: ROMANTIC & SPIRITUAL SLEEP IN THE  
GAWAIN-POET**

by

**Erin Kathleen Turner Hepner**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**HONORS IN UNIVERSITY STUDIES  
WITH DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

in

**English  
in the Department of English**

**Approved:**

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## Thesis Abstract

This thesis examines two accepted styles of writing in the Middle Ages, the romance and religious genres, and what purpose they perform in the *Gawain*-poet's religious poem, *Patience*, and his romance poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*). One recently popular line of research among medieval scholars is examining the way medieval authors, such as the *Gawain*-poet, combine elements of romance and spiritual writings. By funneling the *Gawain*-poet's intermingling of the medieval romance and religious genres through the specific lens of sleep, which is represented differently in medieval romance texts than in medieval religious texts, it becomes possible to trace the spiritual and romance genres through each of his poems. The *Gawain*-poet uses sleep in conventional ways throughout each of his poems; yet by combining the conventions of sleep from both the romance and religious genres, sleep becomes one among several literary tools the *Gawain*-poet uses to convey a spiritual lesson. By examining the sleep scenes in *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, it becomes clear that the *Gawain*-poet uses elements of the romance genre as an allegory for the deeper spiritual meaning to be uncovered in each of his poems. Additional research into medieval perceptions on sleep, and how sleep is used in fourteenth-century romance and religious literature written by the *Gawain*-poet's contemporaries, serves as further support for this argument.

## **Acknowledgements**

I will confess that this thesis has been the bane of my existence during my final semester of school when I have been juggling it along with student teaching and other issues that arise in life. But now that it is finished, I can honestly say I'm glad I did it. However, without the help of a handful of wonderful people, I never would have made it. Many thanks to Dr. Phebe Jensen and Dr. Michael Sowder for helping me clarify my ideas and improve my writing style. To my husband, Devin, who put up with me through all of my grinchiness over the past several months, and who read and revised several of my terrible early editions. Most of all, thanks to my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Christine Cooper Rompato. Without her dedicated mentoring and friendship, I would not be completing my Honors Degree. I wish I could do more to express my gratitude for your help.

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## The Sleepy Hero: Romance and Spiritual Sleep in the *Gawain*-poet

By Erin Hepner

Little is known about the person who has come to be identified as the *Gawain*-poet, presumed author of *Pearl*, *Purity* (or *Cleanness*), *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*). Located in a single manuscript, Cotton Nero A. x, these four texts are attributed to one author because of “similarities in vocabulary, syntax, style, versification, imagery, and themes,” according to medievalist Michael W. Twomey.<sup>1</sup> Adding to this mystery is the fact that, while these texts were most likely written near the end of the fourteenth century among contemporaries such as Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*, William Langland, presumed author of *Piers Plowman*, and John Gower, author of *Confessio Amantis*, it is impossible to pin down a specific decade of creation or even the order in which the texts were written.<sup>2</sup> There has also been much speculation about the life of the *Gawain*-poet, inferred from the dialect of the manuscript, as well as the geographical descriptions within the poems. Because of the complex themes of the *Gawain*-poet’s works, scholars agree that he was well-educated in both the romance and the secular styles of writing, possibly the “chaplain in an aristocratic household.”<sup>3</sup> Or he could be a “clerical member of Richard II’s Cheshire retinue.”<sup>4</sup> Regardless of who the *Gawain*-poet may or may not have been, it is the texts themselves that provide insight into both how the *Gawain*-poet combines the medieval romance and religious genres, and for what purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Twomey, Michael W. “The Gawain-Poet.” *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*. Ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. 273. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew, Malcolm. “Theories of Authorship.” *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*. Ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson. D.S. Brewer: Oxford, 1997. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Twomey, Michael W. “The Gawain-Poet.” *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*. Ed. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. 273. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

In the Middle Ages, the romance and religious genres were two accepted styles of writing. The medieval romance genre is characterized by its use of courtly language and the heralding of chivalric concepts and values, such as strength, honor, courage, and loyalty. Alternately, writings in the religious genre center upon teaching Christian values to medieval readers. Among medieval scholars, one recently popular line of research is examining the way medieval authors combine elements of romance and spiritual writings. For example, medievalists have studied how Chaucer uses the combination of genres in several of his works, such as “The Miller’s Tale,” and “Parliament of Fowls,” to poke fun at both the genres themselves and the values they herald.<sup>5</sup>

There has also been a good deal of interest in the *Gawain*-poet’s intermingling of genres, particularly in relation to his more well-known poems, *Pearl*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*). Articles such as Charlotte Gross’ “Courtly Language in *Pearl*,” and Barbara Kowalik’s “Traces of Romance Textual Poetics in the Non-Romance Works Ascribed to the ‘Gawain’-Poet,” both linger on the topic of genre-combination. Gross asserts that, among other purposes, the *Gawain*-poet “uses courtly language to convey [...] religious concepts” in *Pearl*,<sup>6</sup> while Kowalik argues that the mingling of genres is how the *Gawain*-poet links his poems together into one collective manuscript.<sup>7</sup> Both arguments make valid contributions to the available literary criticism on the *Gawain*-poet. While Gross focuses only on *Pearl*, her idea that the *Gawain*-poet uses elements of the romance genre “to convey religious concepts” could be

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<sup>5</sup> Lisa J. Kiser is one example of the several medieval scholars who are currently studying the mingling of genres in Chaucer’s work in particular. For more information, see her article:

Kiser, Lisa J. “Sleep, dreams and poetry in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” *Papers on Language and Literature*. 19.1 (1983): 4. *International Medieval Bibliography*. QBrepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 7 Sept 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Gross, Charlotte. “Courtly Language in *Pearl*.” *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on The Pearl-poet*. Ed. Robert J. Blanch, Julian N. Wasserman, and Miriam Youngerman Miller. Troy, NY: Whitson, 1991. 79. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Kowalik, Barbara. “Traces of Romance Textual Poetics in the Non-Romance Works Ascribed to the *Gawain*-Poet.” *From Medieval to Medievalism*. Pp. ix, 161. Ed. John Simons. New York: St. Martin’s, 1992. 43. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

extended to include all of the *Gawain*-poet's poetry. Similarly, Kowalik's search for unifying themes is necessary because of how the *Gawain*-poet's work is categorized. In the midst of three religious poems, *Pearl*, *Purity*, and *Patience*, the *Gawain*-poet includes the poem *SGGK*, which is categorized by modern scholars as a romance.

To further focus the analyses of medieval scholars such as Gross and Kowalik, I would like to funnel the *Gawain*-poet's intermingling of the medieval romance and religious genres through a specific lens: sleep. An examination of the *Gawain*-poet's use of sleep is one means of tracing the spiritual and romance genres throughout each of his poems. In religious texts, sleep is usually associated with the sins of sloth, adultery, or dream visions. Romance texts represent sleep differently, often depicting it as a test, a period of preparation, or a period of healing. The *Gawain*-poet uses sleep in conventional ways throughout each of his poems; yet by combining the conventions of sleep from both the romance and religious genres, sleep becomes one among several literary tools the *Gawain*-poet uses to convey a spiritual lesson. By examining the sleep scenes in each text, it becomes clear that the *Gawain*-poet uses elements of the romance genre as an allegory for the deeper spiritual meaning to be uncovered in each of his poems.

### Medieval Theory on Sleep and Dreams

Although research based on the medieval romance and religious genres is readily available, the study of medieval sleep is a relatively un-mined area. As a result, French medievalist Jean Verdon's article, "Dormir au Moyen Age," is not only the most current source on the subject of medieval sleep, it is one of the *only* sources. Verdon examines medieval sleep from a social perspective, providing an interesting history of the medieval perception of sleep. According to Verdon, both the amount of time people spent sleeping during the Middle Ages and the actual time they went to sleep were directly dependent upon their wealth. For the most part,

the poorer classes tended to go to sleep with the setting of the sun and rise again at dawn, which meant they usually got about eight hours of sleep. It was only the wealthier classes who could afford the candle-power required to stay up late into the night.<sup>8</sup>

While wealth dictated *when* people went to sleep, Verdon argues that the tenets and teachings of the Catholic Church played a large part in where and how people slept. According to the Church, men and women were not supposed to sleep in the same bed, regardless of whether or not they were married. The act of literally sleeping together was considered sinful. To get around this proclamation, wealthy men with active sex lives would strategically place beds in different parts of their living quarters so that they could have relations with their woman of choice and then return to their own bed in a separate room, thus technically never “sleeping” with the woman and avoiding sin.<sup>9</sup>

To counterbalance the idea of sleep as sin, there were also more elevated perceptions of sleep during the Middle Ages, with the state of a person’s mind or spiritual character making the act of sleeping either base or moral. For those with a clean conscience, sleep was often associated with dream visions. Verdon quotes Job 33:14-16, in which Job states that “God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. / In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; / Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.”<sup>10</sup> Verdon acknowledges both Saint Victor’s teachings and the

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<sup>8</sup> Verdon, Jean. “Dormir au Moyen Age.” *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire: / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*. 72.4 (1994): 749-759. International Medieval Bibliography. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Oct 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Job 33:14-16. “The Old Testament” *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 705.

medieval poet, Guillaume de Lorris's work, *Le Roman de la Rose* (*The Romance of the Rose*), as heralding the idea that God visits man in dreams.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, God was not the only one who had access to people while they slept. Many people during the Middle Ages believed that Satan or other devils could take over one's mind and body while one slept. Verdon provides the example of religious illustrations from the Middle Ages in which sleeping people are depicted in strange, unnatural positions, representing Satan moving in to take over their bodies. Supposedly, the Devil was capable of providing a taste of the hell to come, and could make one speak and say things in one's sleep. When a person awoke after a night in the hands of the Devil, he/she would remember nothing, but feel as tired as if he/she had not slept at all. Whether a person received visions from God or was taken over by Satan was dependent largely upon status as a sinner or non-sinner.<sup>12</sup> Sleep, with its dual function as means of visitation from both God and Satan, was clearly of moral significance in a medieval person's life, serving as a moment in which the person's mindset dictated who would visit them in their dreams.

### Sleep in Fourteenth-Century Romance and Religious Literature

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<sup>11</sup> The *Gawain*-poet uses the dream-vision himself in his poem, *Pearl*. In this poem, the narrator loses a pearl (often interpreted as his two-year-old daughter), and while searching for the pearl in a garden along the edge of a wood, in his despair, falls asleep rather violently upon a mound of dirt. While sleeping, the narrator has a dream-vision in which his pearl, in the form of a beautiful young woman, calls him to repentance so that he may return to Christ. While the narrator misinterprets a good deal of the spiritual information his "pearl" provides, seeing her words instead in more earthly, romance terms, it is still through sleep that the narrator is able to find access to things of the spirit, access that would be impossible were he awake.

Source: "Pearl." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 197-280.

<sup>12</sup>Verdon, Jean. "Dormir au Moyen Age." *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire: / Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*. 72.4 (1994): 749-759. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Oct 2007.

The literature of the fourteenth-century portrays sleep in various and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways. In his own transformation of romantic fables into Christian parables, the *Gawain*-poet draws upon both romantic and religious representations of sleep that were common in the literature. A review of some of the more common depictions of sleep in the literature, romantic and religious, will help illuminate the *Gawain*-poet's fusion of these elements into his own Christian moral lessons.

Romantic representations of sleep vary widely from text to text, depending upon the theme of the work and intentions of the writer. Some romantic texts touch upon the religious connotations of sleep as a form of sloth or sin. Others diverge from religious interpretations, choosing instead to relate sleep to sex or cuckolding, an important test (usually part of a longer quest), a period of preparation, or a period of rest and healing. Two such examples appear in Sir Thomas Malory's chapters on "Sir Lancelot du Lake" in *Le Morte Darthur*, and Marie de France's, "Guigemar," from *The Lais of Marie de France*.

In "Sir Lancelot du Lake," there are several episodes in which Lancelot falls into a deep sleep either prior to an intense trial or immediately following one. The most extended example of this takes place at the beginning of the tales of Sir Lancelot, when Lancelot and his nephew, Sir Lionel, leave to "seek adventures."<sup>13</sup> By noon of the first day of adventure-seeking, the weather grows hot and Lancelot has "a great desire to sleep."<sup>14</sup> So he and Sir Lionel find an apple tree under which to rest, and before drifting off, Lancelot states that "for this seven years I was not so sleepy as I am now."<sup>15</sup> While Lancelot sleeps, Lionel is captured by the great knight Sir Tarquine and held hostage in a cave. Soon after, four queens, including Morgan le Fay, come upon the sleeping Lancelot and put him under an enchantment so that he will remain asleep until they can

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<sup>13</sup> Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Collier MacMillan, 1982. 141.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

cart him to le Fay's castle, where he will be forced to choose one of the women for his "paramour."<sup>16</sup> When Lancelot awakes, he feels compelled to resolve the afore-mentioned conflicts.

While one could argue that Lancelot's sleep was a form of sloth which resulted in more trouble for him and Sir Lionel, both the glory of Lancelot's triumph over Sir Tarquine after fighting "steadily for two hours and more" without rest, and the "three score and four" knights he saves as a result of this event makes his sleep an unusually long, but most definitely heroic, period of preparation.<sup>17</sup>

The use of sleep in Marie de France's, "Guigemar" follows a path that differs from that of Lancelot, as Guigemar's sleep is not really a period of preparation so much as it is part of a larger test and a period of healing. It is, nonetheless, a prime example of how sleep is used in the medieval romance genre. Guigemar is depicted as the perfect son and knight – his only flaw lies in the fact that he has not "the slightest desire" to love,<sup>18</sup> despite the many women who trail him. One day while hunting, Guigemar comes upon a magical white hind (with the horns of a stag) and attempts to shoot her. The arrow rebounds, piercing through Guigemar's leg and into his horse. Before dying, the hind speaks to wounded Guigemar, cursing him to be healed only by a woman for whom he will suffer, out of love, and she for him. Seeking relief from his wound, Guigemar comes upon an unearthly ship in the harbor and boards out of curiosity, finding a glorious bed where he lays down and falls asleep. When Guigemar awakes, the wife of the jealous king of the land finds him and hides Guigemar in her room until he is healed.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 143-44

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>18</sup> "Guigemar." *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1978. 31.

The symbolism of sleep throughout Guigemar's travels is multi-faceted: his time on the ship is one segment of a much longer quest to find a cure for the hind's curse, but it could also be viewed as a period of healing, as he rests in an ornate bed healing from his wounds. Directly related to sleep is the sleeplessness that both Guigemar and the wife of the king experience when, upon becoming aware of their love for one another, both "lay awake all night, / sighing and in distress," unable to find peace in sleep because of their intense lovesickness.<sup>19</sup> This also raises associations of sleep with sexual tension, as both parties share the same chamber.

Never one to skirt around matters of lust, Chaucer's romantic parody, "The Miller's Tale," does more than just imply sexual tension, as in Guigemar; instead, Chaucer makes a direct connection between sleep and sex or cuckholding, as well as slothfulness and being unheeding or unaware. In "The Miller's Tale," Chaucer uses sleep to highlight an instance of adultery in which the young wife, Alisoun, and her lover, Nicholas, set into motion a plan to beguile her husband, John, into believing that a flood is coming so that Alisoun "sholde slepen in [Nicholas'] arm al nyght" [should sleep in his arms all night].<sup>20</sup> Once Alisoun and Nicholas are certain their trick has been a success, and that John will not be bothering them for quite some time, "Withouten wordes mo they goon to bedde" [without any more words they go to bed].<sup>21</sup> In this instance, sleep is obviously referring to sex, or the cuckolding of John, which would most definitely be considered sin.

"The Miller's Tale" also provides an interesting example of sleep as sloth, as Nicholas, while carrying out part of the plan to trick John, "stille in his chambre lay, / And eet and sleep, or

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Miller's Tale." *The Canterbury Tales*. 3rd ed. Ed. L.D. Benson. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 53, ll.3406-07.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 56, l.3650.

dide what hym leste” [lay still in his chamber, / And ate and slept and did what he liked].<sup>22</sup> John criticizes Nicholas for wasting the day away, which emphasizes the slothfulness of his behavior. Finally, Chaucer uses John to characterize one more interpretation of sleep as the sin of being “unheeding” or “unaware” when, after falling for Alisoun’s and Nicholas’ trick, he works so hard to prepare for an imaginary flood that he falls asleep “for wery bisynesse” [wearied by this work] and ultimately is humiliated in front of the town.<sup>23</sup>

Though Chaucer associates sleep with the three different themes of adultery, sloth, and being unheeding or unaware, all three share a commonality in that each is used as an example of sleep as sin. Contrary to the more common use of sleep as sin in serious medieval religious texts, Chaucer uses these references to sin in a coarse, jocular way. These differences highlight the fact that, despite several common themes relating to sleep in medieval texts, it was ultimately the author who chose the intent and meaning behind the use of the common symbol of sleep.

While the romance genre includes many varied interpretations of sleep, the medieval religious genre’s use of sleep can be organized into two main categories: sleep as sin or sloth, and sleep as the means by which one could receive a dream vision. Many religious texts touch upon both simultaneously. Religious texts that deal with sin, sloth, and/or dream visions include the Anglo-Saxon poem, “The Dream of the Rood,” William Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, and Chaucer’s “Parliament of Fowls” and *Book of the Duchess*.

In most dream visions, the dreamer is in a state of sin, the purpose of dream vision being to teach the sinner. According to medievalist Jo Goyne, “the dream vision was employed [...] not only to provide a framework for events the author wished to relate, but to present dreams in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 53, ll.3420-21.

<sup>23</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Miller’s Tale.” *The Canterbury Tales*. 3rd ed. Ed. L.D. Benson. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 56, ll.3643.

such a way as to instruct readers in meaning.”<sup>24</sup> The Anglo-Saxon poem, “The Dream of the Rood,” for example, features a dreamer “stained with sin” who sees a vision of the cross and, as a result, is compelled to repentance. In *A Guide to Old English*, authors Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson call this “the earliest dream-vision poem in the English language.”<sup>25</sup> Later examples of the medieval dream vision include the *Gawain-poet’s Pearl*, in which the dreamer is in a state of despair, which was seen as a form of sloth, over the loss of his pearl. The ultimate purpose of the dream, then, is to help the dreamer overcome his feelings of despair by coming unto Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Similar in purpose to “The Dream of the Rood,” William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* is the story of Will, a sinner who has several dreams within dreams. In this very complex dream vision, he sees a castle on top of a mountain, a dungeon in the valley, and a multitude of people performing all sorts of wickedness in between the two. When he “awakes,” a young woman, the embodiment of the “Holy Church” arrives from the castle to instruct him on the spiritual meaning of his dream. Over the course of the very long poem, Will encounters and is instructed by a number of allegorical figures on his path to “Do-Best.” Again, the purpose of the dream is to teach Will, standing for the “human will” in a state of sin and error, about coming unto Christ.<sup>27</sup>

Chaucer mocks the teaching element of the dream vision in his “Parliament of Fowls,” in which the dreamer falls asleep while reading a book about a dream vision.<sup>28</sup> Rather than receiving a spiritual vision, he enters the garden of love and observes birds choosing their mates.

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<sup>24</sup> Goyné, Jo. “Arthurian Dreams and Medieval Dream Theory.” *Medieval Perspectives*. 12 (1997): 78-89. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 7 Sept 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson “The Dream of the Rood or A Vision of the Cross.” *A Guide to Old English*. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Blackwell Publishing. 256.

<sup>26</sup> “Pearl.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 197-280.

<sup>27</sup> Langland, William. *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. London: J.M. Dent ; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978.

<sup>28</sup> Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* was a very popular text about dream interpretation in the Middle Ages. Divided into three parts, this book discusses all of the things that can create dream, from bad food to reading or seeing something during the day. Chaucer plays off some of these ideas in his “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” and the “Parliament of Fowls.”

The dreamer could have recognized a larger purpose in the dream, which instructed him in choosing “the common good” through an example in which the falcon can’t decide which mate to choose, and so decides to step aside so that other birds can choose their mates. Instead, when he awakes, the dreamer immediately begins looking for another book to read to have another vision, “That I shal mete som thing for to fare / The bet...” [That I shall dream something in order to fare the better],<sup>29</sup> rather than pondering the vision and reflecting on what he learned from it.

A close examination of yet another of Chaucer’s parodies on dream vision found in *Book of the Duchess* (*BoD*) highlights Chaucer’s awareness of the religious link between sleep and sloth. In *BoD*, Chaucer purposely veers away from the common perception of sleep by imagining a puppy as his spiritual guide, making it evident that there is nothing religious about the poem. He then further separates his use of sleep by looking at sleeplessness as well. In her article, “Sleep, Dreams and Poetry in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*,” Lisa J. Kiser argues that, in writing the *BoD*, Chaucer is aware of the common assumption that “the non-poets among [his] peers...would naturally link sleep with sloth.”<sup>30</sup> Kiser considers the topic of sleep in the introduction to *BoD* as representative of the narrator’s poetic ability, suggesting that his bout with sleeplessness destroys the poetic muse. She also suggests that readers “too often tend to ignore these lines about insomnia, or fail to relate them to the poem as a whole. Yet the narrator’s sleeplessness is of great thematic importance.”<sup>31</sup> Combined with the use of sleep as a symbolic tool in numerous medieval texts, Kiser’s argument serves as proof of the “thematic

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<sup>29</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Parliament of Fowls.” *The Complete Works of Chaucer*. Ed. W.W. Skeat. Oxford, 1990. *The Parliament of Fowls by Geoffrey Chaucer: Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #3*. 23 Nov 2007. <<http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~bump/E388M/Cathryn/parliament.html>>. 1.698.

<sup>30</sup> Kiser, Lisa J. “Sleep, dreams and poetry in Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*.” *Papers on Language and Literature*. 19.1 (1983): 4. *International Medieval Bibliography*. QBrepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 7 Sept 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

importance” of sleep in medieval writing, despite the fact that little research has been completed on sleep prior to this point.

A review of some of the depictions of sleep in both spiritual and romance literature, in combination with historical background on common medieval perceptions of sleep, sets the stage for analysis of the *Gawain-poet*'s skilled intermingling of genres. In order to hypothesize with any level of authority on the *Gawain-poet*'s purpose in combining elements of the romance and religious genres, an understanding of the belief in the dual nature of sleep as both godly and sinful in the Middle Ages is necessary. Knowledge of the spiritual representation of sleep as sloth, adultery, or dream visions calling a sinner unto God, and of the romance representation of sleep as a test, a period of preparation, or a period of healing is also fundamental in order to understand which genre the *Gawain-poet* pulls from in his own interpretations of sleep. With this background in mind, this *Gawain-poet*'s use of sleep is unique in that it follows neither genre's pattern explicitly. Rather, the *Gawain-poet*, in conjunction with his intermingling of the spiritual and romance genres, uses a combination of the two genre's ideas about sleep in order to highlight the Christian “moral of the story” through romance parable.

### *Patience*

The *Gawain-poet*'s poem *Patience*, a retelling of the biblical story of Jonah, is a prime example of the poet's intermingling of elements of the religious and romance genres and their differing representations of sleep. Throughout *Patience*, the *Gawain-poet* uses religious depictions of sleep as sinful to reveal Jonah as a cowardly servant of God, slothful, neither patient nor long-suffering. However, the *Gawain-poet* also includes romance depictions of sleep

as part of a larger test or journey, suggesting that Jonah is more than just an erring servant of God; he can also be seen as an errant knight on a quest designed to shape him into the courageous, willing knight he should be. The *Gawain*-poet's use of romance elements in a primarily religious text serves to further highlight the spiritual moral of the story. In *Patience*, the *Gawain*-poet is trying to teach that, while it is of vital importance that one strives to be like Christ, it is not something one will achieve in this life; rather it is an on-going process that even the "best" of Christ's followers, such as Jonah, must struggle with while on earth.

With no romantic inclusions to create thematic complexity, The biblical version of Jonah's struggle is relatively simple: Jonah, a prophet of God, is called to preach repentance unto the people of Nineveh. Jonah rejects his calling, instead boarding a ship to Tarshish in order to flee from the Lord. Not one to be deceived, God sends a tempest and Jonah's shipmates, upon discovering Jonah asleep in the bottom of the ship, promptly toss him overboard, where he is swallowed by a great whale. For "three days and three nights,"<sup>32</sup> Jonah repents profusely, so the Lord prompts the whale to vomit Jonah onto dry ground. Sufficiently rebuked, Jonah preaches repentance unto the people of Ninevah, who, surprisingly enough, listen to his words and change their ways. Upset at the Lord for having mercy on the people of Ninevah, Jonah prays unto God, who chastises Jonah for his lack of compassion.<sup>33</sup>

When contrasting *Patience* with the biblical tale of Jonah, it is evident that the *Gawain*-poet deviates from the original in order to emphasize the spiritual foundation of the story by depicting it as a romance genre quest. The romantic portrayal of Jonah as an errant knight on a quest, then, is both religiously and romantically significant for a number of reasons. First, the

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<sup>32</sup> Jonah 1:17. "The Old Testament" *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1148.

<sup>33</sup> Jonah 1-4. "The Old Testament" *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1147-1150.

romantic, knightly depiction of Jonah is actually in keeping with the more common idea of Jonah as a Christ figure. During the Middle Ages, there were several representations in art and literature of Christ as a knight jousting with the devil. One example of this takes place in the dream vision of *Piers Plowman*, in which the narrator, Will, falls asleep and dreams that he is in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, where he sees Jesus enter the city, “depicted as a knight on his way to joust with the devil...”<sup>34</sup> This image of the “Christ Knight” reappears later in the story when Will sees Jesus again after “the battle of the cross.”<sup>35</sup> Second, this double-image of Jonah as a wayward servant/knight errant highlights the *Gawain*-poet’s skillful intermingling of the religious and romance genres. Finally, it proves the *Gawain*-poet’s skill as a sermonizer. Similar to Christ, who taught important spiritual concepts through simple parables, such as the parable of the talents, the prodigal son, and the wheat and the tares, the *Gawain*-poet’s use of romance elements throughout *Patience* becomes a parable designed to teach his audience a more significant spiritual lesson. In so doing, he uses sleep to create an association in his reader’s minds between Jonah and Christ. He also uses the common religious depiction of sleep as a form of sin or sloth in order to portray Jonah’s process of sin and repentance.

Taking Jonah’s similarities to an errant knight into consideration, the romance aspects of *Patience* first appear in the *Gawain*-poet’s description of the ship Jonah boards to Tarshish. In the Bible, all that is said about the ship is that it is “a ship going to Tarshish.”<sup>36</sup> Compare this to *Patience*, in which the *Gawain*-poet spends twelve lines describing the ship, with special emphasis on the ship’s preparation for flight. As in the beginning of a journey or quest in the

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<sup>34</sup> Alford, John. A. *A Companion to Piers Plowman*. U of California P: Berkeley, 1988. 54.

For more information on Christ as a knight, see: Gaffney, Wilbur. “The Allegory of the Christ-Knight in *Piers Plowman*.” *PMLA*, 46.1 (Mar 1931): 155-168.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Jonah 1:3. “The Old Testament” *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1148.

romance works of the Gawain-poet's contemporaries, the Gawain-poet describes the great swing of the cloth sails as "Þe blyþe breþe at her bak þe bosom he fyndes."<sup>37</sup> [The cheerful breeze at their back fills the sail]. Here the Gawain-poet gives the impression that Jonah has momentarily escaped from his problems. In fact, the entire passage adds a sense of adventure to Jonah's escape that exists neither in the Bible's version of Jonah, nor in most medieval religious texts when describing the sins of the protagonist, suggesting this is a romantic inclusion designed to heighten the feeling that Jonah is on a quest.

This description of the ship in *Patience* compares more closely to the *romance* of Marie de France's "Guigemar," than with more spiritual texts. There, Guigemar comes upon a ship of supernatural make. As in *Patience*, the author spends an unusual amount of time describing the ship itself as "fit and ready to go, [...] no one could discover a seam in its hull. [...] Every deck rail and peg / was solid ebony; [...] The sail was pure silk; / it would look beautiful when unfurled."<sup>38</sup> While Marie de France spends a good deal of time describing the mystical beauty of the ship Guigemar boards, and while there is nothing particularly remarkable about the ship Jonah boards, the extended descriptions in both poems give the ship symbolic importance as a fundamental element of the quests upon which both Guigemar and Jonah are about to embark.

There are also several other romance elements that appear briefly throughout *Patience*. One example is the *Gawain*-poet's focus on appearance, which is non-existent in the biblical story of Jonah. This focus is evident in his description of Jonah washing onto the beach after spending three days in the belly of a whale: "Þenne he swepe to þe sonde in sluchched cloþes / Hit may wel be þat mester were his matyle to wasche." [Then he was swept onto the sand in

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<sup>37</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 76, l.107.

<sup>38</sup> "Guigemar." *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1978. 34, ll.153-160.

muddy clothes / It may well be that his mantle needed washing].<sup>39</sup> This description is almost humorous in that the state of one's clothing is highly unlikely to be a pressing concern after spending three days in the belly of a whale. This romance focus on clothing and appearance is highlighted again near the end of the poem when the people of Ninevah "Heter hayrez þay hent þæt asperly bited / & þose þay bounden to her bak & to her bare sydez." [Dawn rough hair shirts that bit sharply / and bound them to their back and to their bare sides].<sup>40</sup> Here, the focus on bare sides calls attention to the medieval romance tendency to take special notice of a woman's sides, as in Marie de France's "Lanval," in which Lanval's lover is dressed in "a precious cloak of white ermine, / covered with purple alexandrine, / but her whole side was uncovered, /her face her neck and her bosom,"<sup>41</sup>

Other romance elements include the *Gawain*-poet's emphasis on wealth and social status in the line in which he addresses "Vch prynce vche prest & prelates alle" [Each prince, each priest, and prelates all] while calling the people of Ninevah to repentance.<sup>42</sup> This is obviously a romance device, because in the biblical story, Jonah does not bother to address the people's social status while humbling them. There is also a strong emphasis on chivalry, and chivalric language in *Patience*, which can be seen in the line "þæt is hende in þe hyzt of his gentryse," [He who is courteous in the height of his nobility],<sup>43</sup> in which Jonah applauds those who show kindness despite their high social standing.

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<sup>39</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 90, ll.341-42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 93, ll.373-74

<sup>41</sup> "Lanval." *The Lais of Marie de France*. Trans. Robert Hanning and Joan Ferrante. Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1978. 108, ll.102-105.

<sup>42</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 94, l.389.

<sup>43</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 94, l.398.

The *Gawain*-poet's inclusion of romance themes, such as using the ship as a symbol for a quest, as well as an emphasis on clothing, appearance, wealth, and social status, all generate the setting for Jonah, knight-errant, to fulfill his quest. Yet hidden within the shell of a romance are religious phrases and connotations concerning sleep that point to the *Gawain*-poet's purpose: to teach a spiritual lesson.

There are three episodes in which the *Gawain*-poet's emphasis on sleep (or sleeplessness) includes both romance and religious themes that come together to highlight the spiritual. It is important to note that each episode of sleep is found at a pivotal point in the plotline of the story, as well as in the development of Jonah's character. The first takes place when Jonah, fearful of the raging storm, hides in the bottom of the ship and falls fast asleep:

Bot hym fayled no freke þat he fynde myzt  
Saf Jonas þe Jwe þat jowked in derne  
He watz flowen for ferde of þe flode lotes  
Into þe boþen of þe bot & on a brede lyggede  
Onhelde by þe hurrok for þe heuen wrach  
Slypped vpon a sloumbe slepe & slomberande he routes<sup>44</sup>

The *Gawain*-poet's choice of words in reference to sleep says much about his intended meaning. His use of the word, "jowked,"<sup>45</sup> for example, which Margaret Williams translates as "dozing,"<sup>46</sup> also has more sinister associations. In some medieval literature, snakes "jowk," as do crocodiles.<sup>47</sup> Such an association is found in a contemporary text, the *Wars of Alexander*, which gives the example of crocodiles, scorpions, and adders sleeping on the beach.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 80-81, ll.181-186. Translation: "He did not fail to find any man / Save Jonah the Jew sleeping in secret / He had fled for fear of the roaring waves / Into the bottom of the boat & on a board lies / Huddled on a piece of the ship, away from heaven's wrath / Slipped into a deep sleep, and slumbering he snores."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 80, l.182.

<sup>46</sup> *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works*. Trans. Margaret Williams. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 108, l.182.

<sup>47</sup> *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

*Gawain*-poet's inclusion of the word "Onhelde"<sup>49</sup> translates to mean either "huddled," "prostrate," or "stooping"<sup>50</sup> From the romance perspective, these words could be used to describe a cowardly knight who, fearing for his own life, shirks from his responsibilities. In medieval literature, to be called "cowardly" was one of the greatest insults a knight could receive, as it was for Lancelot when Gawain called him a coward and a traitor after learning that Lancelot had accidentally slain Gawain's brothers, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, in battle.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, while it is nearly impossible to positively identify *which* precise meaning the *Gawain*-poet intended, all of these definitions could be spiritual in nature, as to be huddled, prostrate, or stooping hints at Jonah's fear of God, his lowly position now that he has offended God, and the biblical association of the serpent with Satan. Therefore, the implied image of Jonah as a cowardly knight serves as a parable to teach people not to shirk from their god-given responsibilities.

Yet the image of a cowardly Jonah is not completely in keeping with the medieval religious perception of Jonah. As Lynn Staley Johnson acknowledges in her "Examination of the Middle English *Patience*," the medieval Jonah was often looked at as a Christ-figure.<sup>52</sup> The *Gawain*-poet's spiritual use of sleep brings up some interesting parallels between Jonah and Christ. One example that seems particularly relevant when paired with Jonah's sleeping in the belly of the ship is the story of Christ calming the angry sea. Having boarded a ship with his disciples, Christ lays down to rest: "And behold there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch

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<sup>49</sup> "Patience." *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works*. Trans. Margaret Williams. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 108, l.185.

<sup>50</sup> *MED*.

<sup>51</sup> Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Collier MacMillan, 1982. 728.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, Lynn Staley. "An Examination of the Middle English *Patience*." *American Benedictine Review*. 32.4 (1981): 344. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 21 Aug 2007.

that the ship was covered with the waves: but [Jesus] was asleep.”<sup>53</sup> Fearing for their lives, the disciples cry out to Christ, begging him to save them from imminent death. Rising from his sleep, Christ asks, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.”<sup>54</sup> While this excerpt can be interpreted literally as an instance in which Christ calmed the seas, it also possesses figurative spiritual meaning in which, to be saved the life’s “tempests,” one must possess faith in Christ.

To compare Jonah to Christ obviously complicates things, because the *Gawain*-poet’s version of the biblical story does not portray Jonah as a particularly godlike person. On one hand then is Jonah the sinner or errant knight, and on the other then is Jonah the servant of God, a form of the Savior himself. In an attempt to make sense of this complex dichotomy seen in *Patience*, Johnson examines these two opposing ideologies:

Because [Jonah] is human, he is unruly; but Jonah points toward a metamorphosis through terror into grace. His story is applicable to the process of individual salvation. The combined attributes of Jonah demonstrate human failure, divine power and Christ-like perfection. If Jonah is viewed morally, he becomes emblematic of any man’s education in justice and mercy: he can typify salvation. One part of the mind can see Jonah as typological of the Savior, the other as an object lesson in salvation.<sup>55</sup>

This two-sided Jonah further complicates the *Gawain*-poet intended “moral of the story.” By masking a complex idea such as the dual nature, imperfection, and ultimate salvation of a prophet beneath a romance exterior, the *Gawain*-poet utilizes another biblical teaching tool taught in *Isaiah*: “For precept must be upon precept, [...] line upon line,

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<sup>53</sup> Matthew 8:24. “The New Testament” *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1200.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 8:24-26. “The New Testament” *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1200.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, Lynn. “An Examination of the Middle English *Patience*.” *American Benedictine Review*. 32.4 (1981): 334. *International Medieval Bibliography*. Brepolis. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 21 Aug 2007.

[...] here a little, *and* there a little.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the *Gawain*-poet, in writing *Patience*, created a story with multiple layers of meaning. On the surface is the concept of Jonah as the errant knight, a romance idea that would appeal to most medieval people, who would have been aware of the *New Testament* and many stories from the *Old Testament*), and who would also possess a general knowledge of more popular, common stories of knights and quests. Beneath the romance is the spiritual plane, upon which Jonah is seen as a figure of Christ. Finally, the *Gawain*-poet complicates things further by depicting Jonah's *human* side, for whoever portrays qualities of the natural man cannot be seen as a figure of Christ.

These multi-faceted teachings carry over into the *Gawain*-poet's remaining descriptions of sleep as well. One line of particular importance describes how Jonah, still in the bottom of the ship, "Slypped ypon a sloumbe slepe & slomberande he routes" [Slipped into a deep sleep and dozing he snores].<sup>57</sup> In this sentence alone, there are four words or phrases that specifically refer to sleep and leave Jonah looking like less of a Christ-figure and more like a natural man. The term "routes," for example, meant to "snore," "grunt," "slumber," or "sleep."<sup>58</sup> Jonah's sleep was not that of a dream-vision, in which he is reminded of his duties; rather Jonah's sleep is the sleep of the unheeding, the unaware, the slobbering, grunting, snoring, deep sleep of one with nothing weighing on his conscience. Translating the remainder of the line further clarifies the image of Jonah as an unheeding or unaware sleeper. In the footnotes of his translation of *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*, medievalist Charles Moorman translates the phrase, "sloumbe slepe,"

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<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 26:14. "The Old Testament" *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 892.

<sup>57</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 81, l.186.

<sup>58</sup> *MED*.

as dull, sluggish, or deep sleep.<sup>59</sup> The *Middle English Dictionary (MED)*, on the other hand, suggests that this phrase can also mean to “be spiritually unheeding or unaware,” or as “the slumbering soul.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the term “slobberande” can, among other definitions, mean “to continue in sin.”<sup>61</sup>

The fact that the *Gawain*-poet includes several sleep-related words with sinful connotations strengthens the likelihood that he truly intended to portray Jonah in the worst light possible at this point in the story. And, like the wayward servant or thoughtless knight, to be unheeding or unaware is a telltale signal in both religious and romance texts that a great trial is in the near future. Just as Lancelot dozes, unaware, while his companion in adventure is kidnapped by Sir Tarquine and he himself is stolen by a quartet of lusting women, so Jonah’s obliviousness, in the world of medieval romance, is a sure sign that trouble lies ahead.

True to form, Jonah *does* encounter a trial soon after his thoughtless dozing, and finds himself in the belly of a whale, where it is his *sleeplessness* that defines him as he prays vehemently for forgiveness and deliverance. The fact that Jonah does not sleep for the entire three days and nights that he is in the whale would be unextraordinary were it not for the *Gawain*-poet’s reference to sleep in the midst of describing Jonah’s settling into the darkness of the belly of the whale. Referring to the familiar darkness, the *Gawain*-poet explains that the gloom was “As in þe bulk of þe bote þer he byfore sleped” [as in the bulk of the boat where he

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<sup>59</sup> “Patience.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 81, l.186 footnote.

<sup>60</sup> *MED*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*. Chaucer mockingly uses a form of the word in “Troilus and Criseyde”: “Awake! [...] What! slombrestow as in a litargie?” (Taken from *MED*). Here Chaucer mockingly refers to those who doze during Christian services, a use which lends itself to the definition to “be spiritually unheeding or unaware,” as we saw with John in “The Miller’s Tale.”

before had slept].<sup>62</sup> By recalling the last time that Jonah was asleep, the *Gawain*-poet is purposely drawing attention to Jonah's inability to sleep in the present situation.

The *Gawain*-poet's reference to sleep in an earlier portion of the poem serves to introduce the stark differences between the two situations. First, in the bottom of the ship, Jonah sought darkness in order to ignore God. Compare this to the belly of the whale, in which Jonah is forcibly placed into darkness of God's choosing, where Jonah must plead with God *not* to ignore him. The tables are turned as the darkness of the whale is designed to allow Jonah to reconcile with God, whereas the darkness of the ship was designed to lull Jonah into a false sense of security. Finally, Jonah's "slumbering soul," in the ship is awakened, both literally and figuratively, in the belly of the whale, thus explaining his inability to sleep.

Not to be ignored in this religious occurrence of sleeplessness are two more instances that mirror events in the life of Christ. The first instance of Jonah as Christ-figure is the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the whale for exactly three days and three nights, just as Christ was in the tomb for three days and three nights before his resurrection. The parallel here is obvious, as Jonah's return to dry land symbolizes a rebirth of sorts, a fresh start after his sincere repentance in the belly of the whale. The second instance of Jonah as a Christ-figure is in his inability to sleep. This brings to mind Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, who, entering with three of his disciples, asked them to "tarry ye here, and watch with me."<sup>63</sup> Being human, the disciples fall asleep, and Christ is left to remain awake and alone, pleading with the Father: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."<sup>64</sup> Here arises a fundamental difference between Jonah and Christ, for while both remained awake in communion

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<sup>62</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 87, l.292.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 26:38. "The New Testament" *The Holy Bible*. King James Edition. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints: SLC, 1979. 1235.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Matthew 26:39.

with God, Christ accepts the will of God faithfully, despite the difficulty of the task ahead, while Jonah runs from God's command and is practically forced into compliance. Once again, the *Gawain*-poet creates multiple layers of spiritual meaning for his readers to interpret.

The inclusion of the third and final sleep scene leaves Jonah in the midst of another error, suggesting that to sin and repent is not merely a one-time event, but a constant process that must be repeated frequently. The final sleep-scene in *Patience* portrays Jonah, who, having successfully spread God's warning to Ninevah, builds himself a bower and falls asleep. The setting of this final instance of sleep is symbolic in that, unlike the bottom of the ship or the belly of the whale, where he was neither welcome nor took part in ownership, Jonah builds the bower with his own hands, which could be seen as a sign of his desire rebuild his relationship with God. In the more literal sense, the biblical story of Jonah emphasizes the heat of the sun, so the bower could simply be a shelter to protect Jonah from the elements.

While the Bible implies that Jonah rests under the bower, it makes no mention of his actually sleeping. It is the *Pearl*-poet, then, who incorporates this final act of sleep into the poem to emphasize Jonah's final turning point, once again leaving him at odds with the will of God. Here the *Gawain*-poet's description of Jonah's sleep is simple. After building up his bower and turning his back to the sun, Jonah "swowed & slept sadly al nyzt" [swooned and slept soundly all night].<sup>65</sup> The term "swowed" brings up a final reminder of the romance involved in *Patience* as, among its other meanings ("to sigh," "to collapse," "to be unconscious"), it can also mean "to swoon."<sup>66</sup> Many knights, at the end of an intense battle, would swoon because of the loss of blood, such as Tristan who collapses from his many wounds after fighting almost to the death

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<sup>65</sup> "Patience." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 96, 1.442.

<sup>66</sup> *MED*.

against Sir Marhaus (and winning) for the honor of his uncle's kingdom.<sup>67</sup> Yet others would swoon over a great loss, such as Sir Gawain, who, upon hearing of the death of beloved Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, "fell down a swooned, and long he lay there as if he had been dead."<sup>68</sup> Still others would swoon because of their love for a beautiful woman. In Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, for example, the knight's lady dies, and he swoons as he relates his story to the narrator. Chaucer also makes fun of swooning knights in "Troilus and Criseyde" by having Troilus swooning practically non-stop when he falls in love with Criseyde. To the same effect, the *Gawain*-poet's use of the term "sadly" implies that Jonah was sleeping "seriously, soundly [or] deeply."<sup>69</sup>

Part of the word choice in this final example of sleep was most likely chosen to emphasize Jonah's pure exhaustion at the conclusion of the "quest" he has just completed. So it is in his exhaustion that Jonah awakens to find God has sent him one final trial – the plants God had graciously allowed to grow up over the bower in the night to help shade Jonah from the sun have withered and died. The poem concludes, bringing Jonah full circle as he becomes angry with God for sparing the people of Ninevah and the God chastises him yet again, showing the circular pattern of sin and repentance.

Sleep plays an important role in *Patience* in cementing the differing ideas associated with the romance and religious genres together into one cohesive poem. At the poem's conclusion, the *Gawain*-poet has successfully introduced the romance elements of the quest, clothing and appearance, wealth and social status, and chivalric language into a religious text in order to further highlight his spiritual message: that people must strive to become like Christ, despite the

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<sup>67</sup> Malory, Sir Thomas. "Sir Tristram of Lyonesse." *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Collier MacMillan, 1982. 232.

<sup>68</sup> Malory, Sir Thomas. "Sir Gawain the Vengeful." *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Collier MacMillan, 1982. 707.

<sup>69</sup> *MED*.

fact that human nature makes it impossible to achieve perfect faith in this life. By combining genres, the *Gawain*-poet also succeeds in combining Jonah's dual roles as Jonah the knight errant or sinner, and Jonah the Christ figure or servant of God, though he leaves his audience to decide exactly *how* these two perceptions fit together. By incorporating the medieval religious view of sleep as sin, the *Gawain*-poet reveals Jonah's human side as he too must practice the process of sin and repentance. Yet the use of sleep also allows readers to associate Jonah's sleep with episodes of Christ's sleep in the Bible, ultimately leaving the readers with a multi-dimensional understanding of Jonah and the lessons they ought to take from his experiences.

Many of the themes depicted in *Patience* make their way in one form or another to the *Gawain*-poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*). Similar to *Patience*, which depicts Jonah as knight errant, in *SGGK*, Sir Gawain is portrayed in his youth as a knight-yet-to-be-proved. While both poems incorporate the religious and romance genres in order to guide readers beyond the romance parable towards a spiritual moral, the *Gawain*-poet takes the religious concept of sleep as sin, which he uses to great effect in *Patience*, and complicates it further in *SGGK*, so that sleep becomes more than the mere outward sign of sin; sleep becomes the means by which Gawain's faith in Christ is tested.

### ***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight***

Arguably the most analyzed of the *Gawain*-poet's works among medievalists, and the most popular of his works among contemporary audiences, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (*SGGK*) is a complex tale of adventure, chivalry, and temptation. Similar to the *Gawain*-poet's *Patience*, a religious text with romance interlacings, *SGGK* is a romance which emphasizes

religious elements.<sup>70</sup> The intermingling of genres in *SGGK* results in a multi-faceted text that raises questions not only about Sir Gawain's qualities as a chivalric knight of nobility, honor, and loyalty, but about his spiritual qualities as well. The *Gawain*-poet, then, incorporates religious elements into *SGGK* in order to guide his audience to look beyond the superficial romance parable to find a religious "moral" to the story.

Sleep plays a vital role in *SGGK*, not only in its traditional religious sense as a symbol of sin or sloth, but as the means by which Gawain is to be tested, for Gawain's most severe temptations all occur surrounding instances of sleep. While Gawain faces the actual moral sin of succumbing to Lady Bercilak and committing adultery, he also faces what the *Gawain*-poet considers the greater sin, that of Gawain betraying Mary, the mother of Christ, through his lack of faith in her protection.

Gawain's test begins in young King Arthur's court during a great holiday feast.

Demanding to witness a sport of marvel before the commencement of the feast, Arthur's wishes are granted by the appearance of an enormous man of a green hue, holding a bundle of holly in

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<sup>70</sup> There has been much argument in the world of literary criticism over whether the *Gawain*-poet intended his audience to mine the text for any religious significance or whether it was simply a romance written in a thoroughly Christianized society. M. Mills' article, "Christian Significance and the Romance Tradition in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'," suggests that the trend towards mining religious meaning from medieval texts, *SGGK* in particular, is not without merit, but that "there is little to suggest that the author intended the reader to extract any *senefiance* more abstruse than a recognition of the value of Christian morality."

On the opposite side of the spectrum, medievalist Leo Carruther's article, "Religion, Magic and Symbol in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" does not even take the time to acknowledge the opinions of those like Mills. Rather, his article dissects key religious symbols in *SGGK*, such as putting "on the armour of God," and the pentangle, and argues that "certain aspects of religion, magic and myth" are important "for a proper understanding of medieval literature in general and of this romance in particular." When compared to works by the *Gawain*-poet's contemporaries, *SGGK* is more symbolically complex than other Arthurian romances. Thus, *SGGK* speaks for itself against critics such as Mills who refuse to recognize the religious significance underlying the more basic romance plotline.

For more information, see:

Carruthers, Leo. "Religion, Magic and Symbol in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *QWERTY: Arts, Literatures & Civilisations du Monde Anglophone*. 4 (Oct 1994): 5-6, 12-13. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

Mills, M. "Christian Significance and the Romance Tradition in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'." *Modern Language Review*. 60 (1965): 491. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

one hand and an intricately designed axe in the other. The Green Knight proposes a game in which Arthur will be allowed one stroke with the axe upon the Green Knight's unprotected neck. As repayment, the Green Knight will return the blow in one year's time. Gawain implores his uncle, King Arthur, to allow him to take his part in the game. The king agrees, and Gawain promptly beheads the Green Knight. To everyone's surprise, the Green Knight, unperturbed, reattaches his head, reminding Sir Gawain of his promise to seek out the Green Knight at the Green Chapel in one year's time to finish out the game.

The year passes and Gawain eventually sets out on his journey, which includes many trials and difficulties, until finally, on Christmas Eve, he pleads with Mary to provide him respite from the elements. Within moments, he comes upon a castle untouched by winter, where he is immediately welcomed by the master of the castle, Bercilak de Hautdesert and his beautiful wife, Lady Bercilak. Here Gawain is offered a place to rest and rebuild his reserves of strength in preparation for what he considers to be his ultimate test: receiving a blow from the Green Knight. Ironically, it is in the castle that Gawain is to face the real test, for he is to be tried three times by Lady Bercilak, trials that are parallel to her husband's three hunts. On Lady Bercilak's third attempt to seduce Gawain, he succumbs to her offer of an (allegedly) magical girdle which will offer him protection. While the girdle does protect him from the blow of the Green Knight, and while Gawain never commits the sin of adultery, he does sin in the fact that he chooses to accept the supernatural protection, ultimately betraying Mary by his lack of faith. This betrayal is recognized by the Green Knight, who is revealed to be Master Bercilak, leaving Sir Gawain returning to the Arthurian court, much grieved at the disgrace he has brought upon himself. Here the story ends ambiguously, leaving the reader to question what course Gawain could have taken that would leave him guiltless.

The source of this ambiguity lies in Sir Gawain's relationship with Mary. As touched upon earlier in Marie de France's lay "Guigemar," in which Guigemar's only flaw is his lack of interest in women, medieval romance rests upon the idea that the man (or the knight), without the woman, is somehow lacking or incomplete. Therefore, as the primary woman in Gawain's life at the beginning of the poem, both in a religious and romantic sense, the relationship between Gawain and Mary is what allows him to face his test as a complete, virtuous knight. This relationship is established early on as Gawain makes preparations for his quest to seek the Green Knight. Here the *Gawain*-poet takes great care to describe Gawain's many virtues, acknowledging that "alle his forsnes he fong at þe fyue joyez / þat þe hende heuen queen had of hir chylde" [all his fortitude he gained from the Five Joys / That the courteous queen of heaven had of her child]<sup>71</sup> In other words, all of the virtue attributed to Gawain is said to have come from his faith in Mary and her child. During his journey, Gawain keeps an image of Mary on the back of his shield (presumably so he can see her when he holds the shield), and calls for her help during times of great trial. The *Gawain*-poet acknowledges that, had Gawain not been steadfast in God, "Douteles he hade bend ded & dreped ful ofte" [Doubtless he would have met death or been killed often].<sup>72</sup> It is also to Mary whom Gawain prays when he is seeking reprieve from the elements on Christmas Eve: "I beseche þe lorde / & Mary þat is mildest moder so dere / Of sum herber þer hezly I myzt here masse" [I beseech thee Lord / and Mary that is mildest mother so dear / Of some lodging where devoutly I might hear Mass].<sup>73</sup> As oft as Gawain calls to Mary, his prayers are answered. So it is indeed a great transgression for Gawain to put his faith in

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<sup>71</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 327, l.646-47.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 332, ll.725.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 334, ll.753-55.

something other than Mary. Much like Jonah, whose lack of faith brought on great repercussions, so Gawain's lack of faith in Mary will ultimately result in sin.

In order for Gawain to commit the sin of faithlessness, he must first be tested. For this purpose the *Gawain*-poet uses sleep to test Gawain's faith. The majority of the sleep that takes place in *SGGK* involves Gawain's preparation for what he considers to be his final test: finding the Green Knight and accepting a blow from the Green Knight's axe. The amount of time Gawain spends sleeping in this poem could easily be construed as slothful; yet it is not in the setting of battle, but the setting of sleep where Gawain faces his most difficult test. While resting in preparation for his meeting with the Green Knight, he is tempted three times<sup>74</sup> by the seductive mistress of the household, Lady Bercilak. Yet even the temptations of the flesh are not Gawain's most important test. In his article, "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Sins of the Flesh," V.J. Scattergood emphasizes the Sir Gawain's "most crucial moment occurs in the early morning quiet of the hero's bed chamber when Gawain accepts the green girdle" from Lady Bercilak.<sup>75</sup> The most pivotal points in the text all involve the concept of sleep, whether it be sleep, sleeplessness, or feigned sleep. Here, the *Gawain*-poet's emphasis on Gawain's sleeplessness could suggest that it is his lack of sleep (his tossing and turning and fretting) that drive him to fail his final test.

The first description of sleep, and the first test of Gawain's faith and virtue, takes place when Master Bercilak leaves on his first day's hunt, leaving Gawain behind to rest. As "Gawayn

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<sup>74</sup> Coordinating with the theme of threes and linking *Patience* and *SGGK* together yet again is the fact that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, which parallels the three hunts and three episodes of sleep in *SGGK*.

<sup>75</sup> Scattergood, p.347; Scattergood, V. J. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the *Sins of the Flesh*." *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion*. 37 (1981): 347-71. *MLA International Bibliography*. EBSCO. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. 9 Aug 2007.

þe god mon in gay be lygez,”<sup>76</sup> under “couertour ful clere cortyned aboute” [As Gawain the virtuous in good bed lies under magnificent coverlet surrounded by curtains],<sup>77</sup> he is awakened by the sound of someone sneaking into his room. Peeking his head out from beneath the curtain, he recognizes Lady Bercilak. Unsure of what to do, he feigns sleep as she approaches. When Gawain realizes that he cannot pretend to sleep forever, he “awakens” and a conversation between he and Lady Bercilak ensues. As in *Patience*, the language of sleep in this segment says much about both Gawain’s character and his intentions in the situation. First, Gawain is described as a “god” man, which, translated can mean “good,” or “virtuous,”<sup>78</sup> among other definitions. While Tolkien translates it to mean “Gawain the bold,”<sup>79</sup> and Williams translates it simply to mean “good man,”<sup>80</sup> it is obvious that this particular word has positive connotations and is placed to emphasize Gawain’s strength, virtue, and goodness before describing the upcoming test of said virtue.

Ironically, the next line, “Lurkkez quyl þe daylyzt lemed on þe woves” [lazing while the daylight shone on the walls],<sup>81</sup> brings Gawain’s “goodness” or “boldness” into question through the use of the term “Lurkkez,” which other translations of *SGGK* have identified as “lazing” and “lingering.”<sup>82</sup> The *MED*’s definition of the more common form of the verb, “lurken,” includes “to hide,” “to cower, skulk, keep out of site,” and “to lie comfortably.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, while “Lurkkez,” may simply suggest that Gawain is lounging in a state of comfort, there are also

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<sup>76</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 359, l.1179.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 360, l.1181.

<sup>78</sup> *MED*.

<sup>79</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Miller’s Tale.” *The Canterbury Tales*. 3rd ed. Ed. L.D. Benson. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 56, ll.3643.

<sup>80</sup> *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works*. Trans. Margaret Williams. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 225, l.1179.

<sup>81</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 360, l.1180.

<sup>82</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*. Trans. J.R.R. Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. 54, stanza 48.

<sup>83</sup> *MED*.

connotations which suggest cowardice, or fear of what is to come, both in terms of Lady Bercilak, and his rapidly approaching meeting with the Green Knight.

In keeping with the concept of Gawain as “hiding,” it is interesting to note that he is buried beneath bedding and surrounded by curtains, literally creating a barrier between himself and Lady Bercilak. While these barriers may be in place to suggest the protection of his virtue, they may also hint at the fact that Gawain is a young, untested knight who still has much to fear. This image of a chaste and fearful Gawain is also somewhat humorous because later stories of Sir Gawain feature him as a womanizer who gladly embraces sex. Lady Bercilak seems to have advance knowledge of these stories. She is aware of his future reputation and his future weaknesses. Gawain’s love of women is particularly evident in several instances throughout *Le Morte Darthur*, in one of which he comments on Sir Marhaus’ lack of interest in women, revealing his own obsession: “I marvel that so valiant a man of prowess as ye be loves no ladies or damosels.”<sup>84</sup>

Analyzing the sleep language in *SGGK* from a more spiritual perspective, the next line, which describes Sir Gawain “as in slomeryng he slode,”<sup>85</sup> has some interesting religious connotations. While “slomeryng” does translate to mean “dozing, sleepy,” and “drowsy,” it also can be defined as to “be spiritually unheeding or unaware.”<sup>86</sup> This may suggest that, while Gawain has been good up to this point, he is spiritually ill-prepared to face this task. Likewise, the term “slode” can mean “to fall asleep,” but it can also mean “to fall into sin or evil.” Master of double-meanings of both the romance and religious nature, the Gawain-poet is setting Gawain up to fail. Key to the concept of Gawain’s spiritual failure is his spiritual relationship with Mary,

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<sup>84</sup> Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte Darthur*. Ed. R.M. Lumiansky. New York: Collier MacMillan, 1982. 102.

<sup>85</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 360, l.1182.

<sup>86</sup> *MED*.

to whom he is bound more than to any mortal woman. Therefore, if Gawain succumbs to the temptations of the flesh, he will be disloyal to Mary, and if he succumbs to his own fear and accepts the girdle, he will have chosen earthly protection over the protection given by Mary which only requires his faith.

It is with this relationship in mind that the Gawain-poet moves on from foreshadowing Gawain's preparation for and response to the upcoming test to come to the event itself. After peeking through the curtain, Gawain "layde him doun lystyly & let as he slepte" [Laid him down swiftly and pretended to sleep].<sup>87</sup> Other translations identify the term "lystyly" to mean "swiftly,"<sup>88</sup> or "slyly."<sup>89</sup> The *MED* extends these definitions to include "cautiously, carefully, cunningly," and "craftily."<sup>90</sup> No matter which of these terms was intended by the Gawain-poet, it is obvious that Sir Gawain took great care and thought into his decision to feign sleep. Similar to Jonah, who hides in the bottom of a ship and falls asleep in order to avoid God, Sir Gawain may be feigning sleep to avoid facing the test at hand. This pretense is somewhat humorous when paired with Lady Bercilak's description of Gawain as "a sleeper vnslyze,"<sup>91</sup> or as a "careless"<sup>92</sup> or "unwary sleeper,"<sup>93</sup> as she is so obviously off her mark. However, her remarks can be associated with his careless or unwary judgment of the situation as what it truly is: a test to determine both Gawain's spiritual strength and knightly prowess.

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<sup>87</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 360, l.1190.

<sup>88</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*. Trans. J.R.R. Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. 54, stanza 48.

<sup>89</sup> *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works*. Trans. Margaret Williams. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 225, l.1190.

<sup>90</sup> *MED*: "listili".

<sup>91</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 361, l.1209..

<sup>92</sup> *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and Sir Orfeo*. Trans. J.R.R. Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975. 54, stanza 49.

<sup>93</sup> *The Pearl Poet: His Complete Works*. Trans. Margaret Williams. New York: Vintage Books, 1970. 226, l.1209.

The conversation that ensues between Gawain and Lady Bercilak is odd for several reasons. The language they use, for instance, is not dissimilar to the language used to describe the hunts that parallel each of the three encounters. For example, Lady Bercilak tells Gawain that “Now ar ze tan astyt bot true vs may schape / I schal bynde yow in your bedde pat be ze trayst” [Now are you caught in but a moment! But a truce you may shape. If not, I shall bind you in your bed].<sup>94</sup> Here she places herself in the position of the hunter and Gawain as the hunted. While Gawain is placed in the traditional role of the female pursued in her bed, Lady Bercilak takes on the role of the masculine pursuer. Returning to the description of Gawain “pe god mon in gay bed lygez” [the virtuous in good bed lies].<sup>95</sup> The term “gay,” which in this case does much to describe what type of bed Gawain is lying in, can mean “joyous, merry, gay, lighthearted,” and “carefree;” but it some contexts can also mean “wanton, lewd,” and “lascivious.”<sup>96</sup> Here the context surrounding the term “gay” gives it a lewd connotation.<sup>97</sup> Yet the dichotomous nature of the term suggests that it is up to Gawain to determine whether the bed he lies in retains the positive connotations or the negative. At the conclusion of the first meeting between Sir Gawain and Lady Bercilak, the bed (and Sir Gawain) retains its virtue, for Gawain does not give in, despite Lady Bercilak’s advances.

The second episode of sleep raises similar questions as the first, yet there is a twist to the nature of their interaction, for unlike in their first encounter, here Gawain is anticipating the

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<sup>94</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 361, l.1210-11.

<sup>95</sup> Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Miller’s Tale.” *The Canterbury Tales*. 3rd ed. Ed. L.D. Benson. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 56, ll.3643.

<sup>96</sup> *MED*.

<sup>97</sup> The latter set of definitions are implied in Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” when, describing her relationship with her fifth husband, the Wife of Bath explains that “in oure bed he was so fresh and gay, / [...] Whan that he wolde han my bele chose” [in our bed he was sexually vigorous and attractive / When that he would have my sexual favors].

Chaucer, Geoffrey. “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale.” *The Canterbury Tales*. 3rd ed. Ed. L.D. Benson. Boston: Houghton, 2000. 94, ll.508,510.

return of Lady Bercilak. As Lady Bercilak enters Gawain's room on the second morning, peeking behind his curtain, Gawain is awake, just as in *Patience*, the second episode of sleep centers on Jonah's *sleeplessness*. In some ways this may suggest that he is prepared and lying in wait for her appearance, no longer pretending that the test is not staring him in the face. Once again, "oure luflych lede lys in his bedde / Gawayn grayþely at home in gerez ful ryche of hue" [our noble man lies in his bed / Gawain properly at home in attire rich of hue].<sup>98</sup> Once again, Gawain is hidden beneath a coverlet, creating a protective barrier between himself and Lady Bercilak. Here, however, Gawain and Lady Bercilak exchange three kisses, one step closer to succumbing to temptation. This may also suggest that Gawain is gaining too much pride in his ability to resist and is therefore becoming comfortable and complacent in his dealings with Lady Bercilak.

Despite his ability to resist Lady Bercilak's advances for a second time, Gawain must face her again the next day. This time, the third and final use of sleep in the *SGGK* text, Gawain is in a sleep-like state when his lady arrives, dreaming of meeting the Green Knight at Green Chapel: "In drez droupyng of dreme drauled þat noble," [in deep and uneasy sleep muttered that noble],<sup>99</sup> the *Gawain*-poet describes Gawain's sleep-like state. His use of the word "droupyng," suggests that Gawain is in a state of "grief, anxiety" or "uneasy sleep," or that he is "cowering or hiding for fear."<sup>100</sup> Yet while Gawain is cowering in fear of his meeting with the Green Knight, an even greater test, of which he is oblivious, stares him in the face in the form of the topless Lady Bercilak.

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<sup>98</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 379, ll.1469-70.

<sup>99</sup> "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 396, l. 1751.

<sup>100</sup> *MED*: "droupyng".

The fact that Gawain “drauled” or was muttering in his sleep brings to mind the medieval belief that there were “dream visions” that came not from God, but from Satan, as Satan could make a person say things in their sleep. Yet this is not the typical dream vision, and it is not the Devil who steers Gawain’s dreams, but Lady Bercilak. The typical dream vision usually includes a spiritual vision of someone who guides the dreamer, like the Pearl Maiden in *Pearl*, whose purity allows her to serve as a spiritual guide to the narrator. In *SGGK*, Lady Bercilak, the complete opposite of purity, serves as an anti-Pearl Maiden, whose suggestions and promptings steer Gawain not closer to God, but further from him. If placed in the context of a religious text, such as *Piers Plowman*, in which several allegorical figures lead him down his path, Lady Bercilak would represent Confusion and Distraction, a false guide sent from the Devil to confuse Will and lead him astray. On the other hand, in a romance dream vision, like *Romance of the Rose*, in which the dreamer meets several allegorical figures, such as Idleness and Beauty, Lady Bercilak might stand as the figures of Lust and Temptation. Regardless of which term is used to define Lady Bercilak’s influence upon Sir Gawain, it is undeniably a negative influence.

At least partially aware of the danger surrounding Lady Bercilak, when Gawain becomes aware of her entrance, he “Swenges out of pe sweuenes & swarez with hast” [Hastens out of his dreams and quickly answers her].<sup>101</sup> The fact that Gawain is sleeping deeply when Lady Bercilak enters for the third morning in a row, while he was wide awake for his second visit, suggests that he may have been distracted by his upcoming meeting with the Green Knight. Or it could suggest that having lain in the face of temptation for two mornings in a row without giving in, Gawain is too certain of his ability to resist her, and thus his pride leads to his downfall. Like Delilah, who hid deceit beneath words of love in order to steal the secret of sleeping Sampson’s

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<sup>101</sup> “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Moorman, Charles. *The Works of the Gawain-Poet*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977. 396, l. 1756.

strength, so Lady Bercilak distracts Gawain with lusty temptation so that her true purpose – to steal his strength based on his faith – will go unnoticed. And so Gawain takes the girdle, and betrays Mary.

With Gawain's betrayal of Mary comes the conclusion of the poem, in which Gawain confesses his guilt to the Green Knight, much like one would confess sins to a priest. Similar to Jonah, who is repeatedly brought unto repentance by God, Gawain only comes to an awareness of the nature of his sin after being forced to do so by the Green Knight. Though Gawain was able to withstand Lady Bercilak's sexual advances, his betrayal of Mary means he is no longer a knight-yet-to-be-proved, but a knight proved, and found lacking in faith. Tales of Gawain that depict him as a womanizer later in his life make it appear as though this single betrayal of Mary is the turning point which determines the course of Gawain's life. Thus the *Gawain*-poet uses the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to teach his audience a seemingly simple religious lesson on what it means to have faith. Yet the *Gawain*-poet's pitting of Lady Bercilak against Mary as competing for Gawain's faith and trust, combined with his dual use of sleep as both a symbol of sin and as the means by which Gawain is tested, creates moral complexity that forces his reader to take time to consider which path Gawain *should* have taken.

In *Patience* and *SGGK*, thus one finds similarities in both theme and structure. Both play with varying combinations of the religious and romance genres in order to use romance as parable to teach religious lessons. The main characters, Jonah and Sir Gawain, also share some unfortunate common traits, in that each man's actions portray cowardice and a lack of faith in God. Finally, both texts base their use of sleep upon common medieval representations of sleep, using these representations to portray the duality of Jonah as a both a Christ figure and an errant knight in *Patience*, and to test Gawain's faith in *SGGK*.

The use of sleep as a method of tracing the religious and romance genres throughout the works of the *Gawain*-poet is effective in that it provides a glimpse at one aspect of a much larger technique of intermingling genres which the *Gawain*-poet applies throughout his entire manuscript. The result is a symbolically rich, layered text that uses elements of the romance genre to teach Christian principles. While the *Gawain*-poet may have written in predictable genres, his ability to mold the standard conventions of the Middle English language and medieval cultural belief to his own purposes makes his work stand out as different in purpose and form from his contemporaries.

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### **Author's Biography**

Erin Kathleen Turner Hepner, born and raised in Alpine, Utah, graduated in 2003 from Lone Peak High School. Entering Utah State University in the autumn of 2003 with a Dean's scholarship, Erin knew she wanted to teach, but was still unsure of what subject interested her most: English or History? She eventually settled on a major in English with an emphasis in teaching, and a minor in History Teaching, and will graduate in these areas in December, 2007.

During her time at Utah State, Erin was involved as a peer writing tutor in the Rhetoric Associate Program, and also worked as a student advisor for the Honors Program.

After four-and-a-half years of school, Erin is both relieved and heartbroken to end her time at Utah State. In the near future, Erin will be traveling out-of-state with her husband while he attends law school, and will most likely teach English and History at the secondary level while getting her Masters degree in a field yet to be determined.