

WISDOM AND PROPHECY: THE  
DISSENTING VOICE IN THE  
GAWAIN POET'S PATIENCE AND  
CLEANNESS.

by

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this university or any other university.

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Patience and Cleanness do not have to be seen as examples of the Gawain poet's use of biblical examples for simple homiletic purposes. The same strangeness which pervades his more famous poems is seen here undermining the surface morals of patience and purity with expressions of outrage and rebellion.

The Gawain poet rejects the usual medieval typology of Jonah as Christ, instead positing Jonah as Job and as Adam. Linking Jonah with Job allows the question of suffering to be raised and introducing Adam and the Eden tradition attributes the blame for suffering to God. The Jonah story as told by the Gawain poet undermines the Beatitudes which precede it, raising questions about the nature and desirability of the Kingdom of God.

Patience contains anti-Church rhetoric linking the narrator's Rome with Jonah's Nineveh.

In Cleanness the nature of the Kingdom of God is again brought into question by an exploration of the treatment of the ill clad guest in the parable of the wedding feast. The lack of proportion and justice in God's wrath is exemplified by the Gawain poet's questioning of the rationale behind the parade of catastrophes drawn from the Old Testament and suggestions that the Beatific vision to be claimed by living a pure life cannot refer to such a terrifying God, only making sense when referring to the vision of the Christ child. A surprise in Cleanness is the multiple antifraternal references buried within the tales.

The dissenting voice found in these poems of the Gawain poet places him in the same intellectual milieu as early Lollardy. He uses the traditions of prophecy and Wisdom found in his source material to challenge the orthodoxy of his time.

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