

# *Discretio spirituum* and *The Whale*

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## ABSTRACT

This piece identifies an extension to the lesson of the Exeter Book poem *The Whale*. The work not only admonishes its audience to guard against temptation masquerading as virtue, but also indicates how one may go about doing so. The selection of the whale as a subject places the poem within an extensive biblical and patristic tradition concerning sea creatures that was well represented in Anglo-Saxon England. Specifically, the allusions present in *The Whale* identify *discretio spirituum* as the essential skill needed to avoid disguised temptation, and point to Pride as the weakness most capable of leading Christians astray.

The Exeter Book poem *The Whale* is plainly a didactic work, as is the tradition from which it is drawn, that of the Latin *Physiologus*, a handbook of animal behaviour that connects the actions of God's creatures to lessons for Christian living.<sup>1</sup> The poem describes two notable acts of the whale: its tendency to be mistaken for an island by sailors and to drown them when it dives, and its stratagem of emitting a pleasant odour so as to lure prey into its waiting jaws. In each case, the whale's behaviour is treated as an allegory for the lures of the Devil.<sup>2</sup> Yet the straightforward message conveyed by the poem's text – that Christians must be vigilant lest the deceits of the Devil fool them into doing wrong – is complicated by its position in the manuscript. Taken alone, the whale's trick of releasing a pleasant odour to lure prey serves well as an allegory for the often attractive and innocuous initial impression proffered by temptation; however, when juxtaposed as it is with its preceding fellow *Physiologus* poem *The Panther*, this imagery becomes extremely problematic. The panther, too, emits an irresistible scent from its mouth, yet in this case the practice signifies the attractions of Christ rather than the blandishments of the Devil.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exeter, Cathedral Library, 3501, 96v–97r. The early scholarship connecting *The Whale* (and the two pieces which flank it) to the *Physiologus* includes A. Ebert, 'Der angelsächsische Physiologus', *Anglia* 6 (1883), 241–7; and R. J. Peebles, 'The Anglo-Saxon "Physiologus"', *MP* 8 (1911), 571–9, at 571–2.

<sup>2</sup> *The Whale, The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 27–47a and 62b–81.

<sup>3</sup> *The Panther, The Exeter Book*, 64b–74.

The reader, in effect, faces the same dilemma confronted by the beings of the two poems: how to distinguish between behaviours and sensations that in appearance and description appear entirely analogous. The creatures attracted to the whale are drowned and devoured; yet, just as they would have likely avoided this fate had they been able to perceive the monster offering its bait, the audience of *The Whale* can more capably evaluate the distinction between good and evil if they are aware of the theological background that undergirds the sea creature's depiction. The poem addresses this issue by dramatizing the Christian theology concerning the dilemma of sin's appeal, and moreover identifies the stumbling-block in this endeavour in its choice of animal subject. The beast in *The Whale* is indebted to a tradition of exegetical interpretations of travelling and its hazards; this tradition, in turn, is derived from theological considerations of the concept of *discretio spirituum*, the precepts of which serve to aid one in recognizing the poem's lessons.

Both *The Panther* and *The Whale* speak of their subjects' powers in the same terms; in each case, the creature possesses a *stenc* which *cymed* out of its *muð*. This in itself is not remarkable, but both are characterized as *wynsum* ('delightful' or 'pleasant'), creating an equivalency, in sensory terms at least, between both odours.<sup>4</sup> The similarities are likely not accidental. When one compares the poems to their likely source, the Latin prose *Physiologus* preserved in Bern, Burgerbibliothek, lat. 233,<sup>5</sup> it appears that the poet of the two pieces edited his source to focus on the significations of scent in both. Gone is the comparison of the colours on the panther's coat to the myriad facets of God's wisdom (though a reference to Joseph's tunic in the Old Testament is kept); also excised are the connections made of the beast's meal before sleep to the torments of the Crucifixion, as well as of its voice to the trumpets that will announce the Second Coming.<sup>6</sup> By clearing away all of these other significations, the poet narrows the focus to the one quality which the panther and whale share – their scent. Yet it also makes their salient features virtually indistinguishable, despite the completely opposite lessons they are meant to convey.

Scholars have attempted to explain this discrepancy by examining the depictions of both creatures, despite their strong parallels. Outlining yet another difference between the Bern manuscript and the Old English *Physiologus*,<sup>7</sup> Thomas

<sup>4</sup> *The Panther* 43b–48; and *The Whale* 53–4.

<sup>5</sup> For the text, see *Physiologus latinus*, ed. F. J. Carmody (Paris, 1939), pp. 40–6.

<sup>6</sup> T. P. Campbell, 'Thematic Unity in the Old English *Physiologus*', *ASNSL* 215 (1978), 73–9, at 74.

<sup>7</sup> This term refers to both *The Panther* and *The Whale*, along with a following, incomplete piece of only sixteen lines usually identified as *The Partridge*. The loss of a folio or more means that only the beginning and conclusion of the poem remain, and the identification of its subject and the exact amount of material missing have been a matter of some debate. For a

Campbell notes that a malevolent nature is ascribed to the whale in the Exeter Book, whereas in the Latin text its actions are solely the response to various stimuli.<sup>8</sup> Michelle C. Hoek makes a number of important points concerning the significations of various senses in both *The Panther* and *The Whale*. The scent of the whale, she reasons, comes specifically from its innards (*innop*), emphasizing its fetid origin.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the description of the panther, which concentrates on the visual, contrasts with the tactile portrayal of the *breof* whale,<sup>10</sup> which represents the sensual pleasures of lust. The smell of the panther is accompanied by its cry, whereas the whale is not heard.<sup>11</sup> These are all important distinctions, but they only operate well in the literal reading of the poem. In the allegory, as a practical matter, it is difficult to determine how such distinctions could aid one in obeying the will of God but avoiding the snares of the Devil. In both poems the commentaries make no explicit mention of the differences Campbell and Hoek raise. The innards seem not to mean anything, nor the feel of the whale's skin. The interpretation of the panther's conduct avoids expounding upon its voice – twice it equates the glory of God's Creation to the smell and nothing else.<sup>12</sup> Taken at their face value, the sensory distinctions made would be useless. After all, God's glories may be silent, and temptation need not be tangible to lead one into sin. Conversely, while both poems point the reader to the correct answer in their conclusions, no indication is given as to how one is to know to trust one such as the panther or to avoid being deceived by the likes of the whale. That the whale's pleasing odour masks an evil intent places it out-of-step with most Anglo-Saxon literature, where sweet

description of the manuscript at this point and the reason for the loss of most of the third poem, see G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, Introduction to *The Exeter Book*, p. xii; and P. W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: a Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Rochester, NY, 1992), p. 104. Arguments for and against the identification of the animal of the third poem as the partridge can be found in Ebert, 'Der angelsächsische Physiologus', pp. 241–7; R. Wülcker, *Grundriss zur Geschichte der Angelsächsische Litteratur* (Leipzig, 1885), pp. 202–4; E. Sokoll, *Zum Angelsächsischen Physiologus*, Jahresbericht der k. k. Staats-Oberrealschule in Marburg 27 (Marburg, 1896–7), 4–10; M. F. Mann, Review of *Zum Angelsächsischen Physiologus* by E. Sokoll, *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 11 (1900), 332–6; Peebles, 'The Anglo-Saxon "Physiologus"', pp. 571–9; and F. Cordasco, 'The Old English *Physiologus*: its Problems', *Mod. Lang. Quarterly* 10 (1949), 351–5. Conner, working later, also does not believe that the later lines of *The Partridge* belong to the ones before the interruption, but for entirely different reasons than earlier scholars; B. J. Muir concurs. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 110–47; Muir, 'A Preliminary Report on a New Edition of the Exeter Book', *Scriptorium* 43 (1989), 276; and Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, vol. 2 (Exeter, 1994), p. 554.

<sup>8</sup> Campbell, 'Thematic Unity in the Old English *Physiologus*', pp. 76–7.

<sup>9</sup> *The Whale* 55a; and M. C. Hoek, 'Anglo-Saxon Innovation and Use of the Senses in the Old English *Physiologus* Poems', *SN* 69 (1997), 1–10, at 7.

<sup>10</sup> 'rough'. *The Whale* 8b. All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>11</sup> *The Panther* 44; and Hoek, 'Anglo-Saxon Innovation and Use of the Senses', pp. 8–9.

<sup>12</sup> *The Panther* 64b and 74b.

scent normally denotes great sanctity.<sup>13</sup> Yet this discrepancy is the point of the poem. It informs its audience that it is ‘deofla wise, þæt hi drohtende/ þurh dyrne meaft duguðe beswicað/ ond on teosu tyhtaþ tilra dæda’.<sup>14</sup> One of their tools for doing so, it specifies later, is ‘þurh swetne stenc’.<sup>15</sup> As Ann Squires says of the smell in both passages: ‘Within the complete poems there seems a deliberate attempt to create parallel structures which serve to highlight the similarities and differences that relate directly to the theme of human choice and perception, the need to distinguish true from false.’<sup>16</sup> If this is the case, however, then what is to be made of the ‘deliberate attempt’ not to differentiate the panther from the whale, which makes it all the more difficult to identify the differences to which she alludes? *The Whale*, in its context beside *The Panther*, is purposely asking a more specific and troubling question: how is a Christian, in everyday experience, meant to utilize the allegorical lessons of the poems and discern between holy attractions and their evil imitators when it is beyond human ability to do so?

The dilemma presented by the poems is one that had been raised many times before in Christian theology, and its solution expounded. Known as *discretio spirituum*, ‘the Discernment of Spirits’, from Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, it is one of the many gifts, or *charismata*, that the apostle identifies as coming from the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> One of the first Christian theological

<sup>13</sup> B. McFadden, ‘Sweet Odors and Interpretive Authority in the Exeter Book *Physiologus* and *Phoenix*’, *Papers on Lang. and Lit.* 42 (2006), 181–209, at 187. Such is the case elsewhere in the Exeter Book, where Guthlac’s hermitage gives off a sanctified odour after his death (*Guthlac B*, *The Exeter Book*, 1317–1325a). *The Phoenix*, too, frequently mentions a *stenc* that is *ahela* and *balga*, among other positive descriptors (*The Phoenix*, *The Exeter Book*, 8b, 82b, 206b, 586b, and 659b). Sweet smell also denotes sanctity in Ælfric’s homily *Dominica in Sexagesima*, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, the Second Series*, ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (New York, 1979), 59; and Vercelli Homilies VIII and IX, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. D. G. Scragg, EETS os 300 (New York, 1992), 147–8 and 178.

<sup>14</sup> ‘the habit of devils, who divert the virtuous through such conduct by concealed power and draw them away from the salvation of better deeds [and] into error’. *The Whale* 32–4. This is a difficult passage, discussed at length by A. Squires in her edition of the poem. She notes that a more accurate translation of *drohtende* would be not simply ‘existing’ but ‘existing in a particular way’, and it is for this reason that I use ‘conduct’ here to gloss it, and take ‘duguðe’ as the object of the clause. *The Old English Physiologus* (Durham, 1988), pp. 82–3.

<sup>15</sup> ‘by means of a sweet odour’. *The Whale* 65b.

<sup>16</sup> Squires, Introduction to *The Old English Physiologus*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Cor. XII.4–11, with *discretio spirituum* appearing at XII.10. The concept has also been tied to 3 Kings III.9 and Heb V.14. Unless noted, all biblical quotations come from *Biblia sacra, iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. B. Fischer, I. Gribomont, H. F. D. Sparks, W. Thiele, and Robert Weber (Stuttgart, 1994). For historical accounts of the development of the idea in the first few centuries of Christianity, see J. T. Lienhard, ‘“Discernment of Spirits” in the Early Church’, *Studia patristica* 17 (1982): 519–22; and E. Scholl, ‘The Mother of Virtues: *Discretio*’, *Cistercian Stud. Quarterly* 36 (2001), 389–401, at 389–93.

concepts to be developed, *discretio spirituum* addresses a necessity of living ethically, the ability to correctly assess the moral value of one's urges. This is, quite literally, the origin of the devil-on-one-shoulder/angel-on-the-other motif, first outlined in *The Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>18</sup> These early mentions are relatively fleeting, but the concept received an extended exposition in Athanasius' *Vita* of St Anthony, wherein the desert hermit teaches his monks how to overcome temptation by delineating between good and evil impulses.<sup>19</sup> Anthony's ideas were passed on to the Latin West through Evagrius' translation of Athanasius' work, as well as through John Cassian's *Collationes* (today better known as the *Conferences*), a compendium of the wisdom of the Desert Fathers. Cassian's treatise gives pride of place to an explanation of *discretio* and its proper practice,<sup>20</sup> and both it and Anthony's *Vita* serve as stepping stones between the initial conception of *discretio spirituum* and its further development in such influential Western writings as Gregory's *Moralia in Iob* and *Regula pastoralis*, and Benedict's *Regula*.<sup>21</sup>

These early works depict the challenge posed in proper *discretio* in terms that parallel the circumstances of *The Whale*. Cassian, in agreement with the poet of *The Whale*, warns his audience that 'diabolus decipit cum fuerit colore sanctitatis obtectus'.<sup>22</sup> Gregory, in his own consideration of proper *discretio*, uses the ability to discriminate among sweet scents as a metaphor for avoiding immoderate behaviour. Expounding upon Leviticus XXI.18, wherein a deformed nose – one too small or too large – precludes a man from offering sacrifice, Gregory writes in his *Regula pastoralis*, 'Parvo. . .naso est, qui ad tendendam mensuram discretionis idoneus non est. Naso quippe odores fetoresque discernimus'.<sup>23</sup> This portion is repeated in King Alfred's translation, where the

<sup>18</sup> *The Shepherd of Hermas, The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. B. D. Ehrman (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 262–7. For another early mention, see Origen, *In Exodum homilia III*, ed. J. P. Migne, *PG* 12 (Turnhout, 1857), pp. 310–1.

<sup>19</sup> Athanasius, *Vita di Antonio*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink (Milan, 1974), pp. 40–94.

<sup>20</sup> The majority of the first two conferences concern *discretio*, but some scholars have seen the whole of the work as a treatise on the topic. See John Cassian, *Collationes*, ed. M. Petschenig and G. Kruez, CSEL 13 (Vienna, 2004), 6–65; and Scholl, 'The Mother of Virtues', p. 392.

<sup>21</sup> A. Raabe, 'Discernment of Spirits in the Prologue to the Rule of Benedict', *Amer. Benedictine Rev.* 23 (1972), 397–423; and Scholl, 'The Mother of Virtues', pp. 393–6. All of these works mentioned are known to have been present in Anglo-Saxon England, as seen in H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Tempe, 2001), pp. 153, 156, 159 and 166. See also S. Lake, 'Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 32 (2003), 27–41; and M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 281, 292–3, 295 and 305–7.

<sup>22</sup> 'the Devil beguiles by adopting an obscuring veneer of sanctity'. Cassian, *Collationes*, p. 32.

<sup>23</sup> 'The small nose is one who is not proficient in discernment to the proper degree. For it is by the nose that we distinguish fragrances from stench'. Gregory, *Regula pastoralis*, ed. J. P. Migne, PL 77 (Turnhout, 1849), p. 24.

connection between a discriminating palate and *discretio* is made more apparent, perhaps due to the unfamiliarity of the foreign concept<sup>24</sup>:

Ðonne is sio lytle nosu ðæt mon ne sie gesceadwis; forðæm mid ðære nose we tosceadeð ða steanceas, forðæm is sio nosu gereaht to sceadwisnesse. Ðurh ða gesceadwisnesse we tocnawað good & yfel, & geceosað ðæt good, & aweorpað ðæt yfel.<sup>25</sup>

To be able to determine the true nature of a scent, therefore – and by extension, the true nature of an impulse – would be expected of a rectitudinous Christian in an Anglo-Saxon context, a consideration which applies to an interpretation of *The Whale*.

Both versions of *Regula pastoralis* go on to identify the oversized nose as a mark of *discretio* carried to the unacceptable extreme of making the perfect the enemy of the good.<sup>26</sup> This moment is but one of many exhortations in the sources to moderation, which is consistently touted as the key to proper *discretio*. Unlike Gregory's discussion of the nose, however, the imagery most often invoked when urging moderation is that of travel. Cassian, for his part, turns to the image of the *regia via* ('royal way') from Numbers XXI.22 in his construction, and encourages his audience:

'rationem discretionis adipisci, quae praetermittens utramque nimietatem, uia regia monachum docet semper incedere et nec dextra uirtutum permittit extolli, id est, feruoris excessu iustae continentiae modum inepta praesumptione transcendere, nec oblectatum remissione deflectere ad uitia sinistra concedit, hoc est sub praetextu gubernandi corporis contrario spiritus tepore lentescere'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> An additional attempt to transfer the Latin concept into an Anglo-Saxon context can be found in the Old English gloss of the *Liber Scintillarum*, where 'Bonorum discretio est non odisse personas sed culpas et recta pro falsis non spernere sed probare' is rendered 'goddra todal ys na hatian hadas ac gyltas & rihte for leasum na forhogian ac afandian' ('Discernment of the good is to not hate people but rather sins, and not to reject what is right in the face of what is false but rather to determine it'). *Defensor's Liber Scintillarum with an Interlinear Anglo-Saxon Version*, ed. E. W. Rhodes, EETS os 93 (London, 1889), 17. In the Harley Glosses, *discretio* is translated adverbially as *gesceadwislic* and its practice as *toscead* (*The Harley Latin–Old English Glossary*, ed. R. T. Oliphant [Paris, 1966], pp. 137 and 139).

<sup>25</sup> 'Therefore, the small nose is one who is not discerning. Because it is with the nose that we distinguish smells, and therefore the nose denotes discernment. Through discernment we distinguish good and evil, and choose the good and reject the evil.' *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. and trans. H. Sweet, vol. 1, EETS 45 (New York, 1978), 64.

<sup>26</sup> Gregory, *Regula pastoralis*, p. 24; and *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version*, pp. 64–7.

<sup>27</sup> 'to understand the logic of discernment, which avoids both excesses and teaches a monk to always walk the royal way, and neither allows [him] to be overly praised by virtues on the right (that is, to surpass through an excess of passion the practice of proper self-control due to unwise presumption), nor permits [him] to drift towards the vicissitudes of the left through an allowance for pleasures (that is, to increase in lassitude under the pretext of mastering the body, due to a self-defeating tepidity of spirit)'. Cassian, *Collationes*, p. 41. For another early

## Discretio spirituum *and* The Whale

Elsewhere, Cassian quotes Proverbs XVI.25 – ‘Sunt uiae quae uidentur rectae esse uiro, nouissima autem earum uenient in profundum inferi’<sup>28</sup> – in support of this same point. The image presented is that of a journey which must be continually assessed to avoid disaster, since one cannot trust their instincts unless they discern well. Anthony, too, says as much in his *Vita*. Repeating John the Baptist, he exhorts his followers ‘rectas facite semitas ipsius’.<sup>29</sup> One who does not ‘declinaverit. . .et eversa fuerit a proprietate’.<sup>30</sup> He also warns of demons who ‘satagunt iuxta semitam ponere scandalum’.<sup>31</sup>

The whale is one such snare on the journey, as both the sailors and the fish characterize a failure of *discretio* through their carelessness in travelling. In accordance with the warnings of Cassian and Anthony, they are not seeking evil, but they are easily diverted from their original paths. The fish and the souls they represent who are drawn into the mouth of the whale are *unwære* and *unwærlice* (‘unwary’) respectively, while the sailors, for their part, are *unwille* (‘unintentional’) and *collenferþe* (‘lacking reservation’) in their actions.<sup>32</sup> It is only until they have been led astray by the whale’s blandishments that their intentions are perverted so that they perform *on willan* (‘willingly’):

Swa bið scinna þeaw,	
deofla wise,	þæt hi drohtende
þurh dyrne meah	duguðe beswicad,
ond on teosu tyhtaþ	tilra dæda,
wemað on willan,	þæt hy wraþe secen,
frofre to feondum,	oþþæt hy fæste ðær
æt þam wærlogan	wic gecceosað. <sup>33</sup>

interpretation of this portion of Numbers, see Origen, *In Numeros homilia XII*, ed. J. P. Migne, PG 12 (Turnhout, 1857) pp. 656–66. An account of the metaphor’s early use can be found in J. Leclercq, *L’Amour des Lettres et le Désir de Dieu: Initiation aux Auteurs Monastiques du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1957), pp. 102–5.

<sup>28</sup> ‘There are paths which are perceived by man to be correct; however, the ends of them come to the depths of Hell.’ Cassian, *Collationes*, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup> ‘make [God’s] paths straight’. Matt. III.3; Mark I.3; Luke III.4; and John I.23. These are all echoes of Is. XL.3.

<sup>30</sup> ‘will have deviated and have been diverted towards perversion’. Athanasius, *Vita di Antonio*, p. 48.

<sup>31</sup> ‘busy themselves in placing temptation along the path [of Christians]’. *Ibid.* p. 52.

<sup>32</sup> *The Whale* 4a, 17a, 59a and 63b. The other meaning of *unwill*, ‘unwilling’, cannot work here because the sailors are not forced to encounter the whale. As for *collenferþe*, it is often translated as ‘bold’, though its more literal translation (‘swollen-minded’) is perhaps less positive. In any case, given the context of the poem, this may be a case of audacity shading into recklessness. J. Bosworth, ‘collenferhþ’, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1898), p. 165; and ‘collen-ferhþ’, *The Dictionary of Old English*, ed. A. Cameron, A. Crandell Amos, and A. diPaolo Healey (Toronto, 2003), CD-ROM.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Such is the practice of deceitful spirits, the habit of devils, who divert the masses through such conduct and draw them away from the salvation of better deeds [and] into error

As can be seen, allegory derives from the exotic specificity of the poem a universal lesson on living an exemplary ordinary life. The point is repeated further on in the piece. After it is described how the fish are seduced and destroyed by the allure of the whale's scent, their plight is applied to that of the whole of humanity:

Swa bið gumena gehwam,  
se þe oftost his unwærlice  
on þas lænen tid lif bisceawað,  
læteð hine beswican þurh swetne stenc,  
leasne willan, þæt he biþ leahtrum fah  
wið wuldorcýning.<sup>34</sup>

A few lines later the doomed are also described as 'þa þe him on cleofað,/ gyltum gehrodene, ond ær georne his/ in hira lifdagum larum hyrdon'.<sup>35</sup> In this way do those lacking *discretio* fall into the Devil's clutches, not through any intention of the will but through the incautious blundering that comes from its absence (*leas willan*). It is just how an unwary traveller falls into a trap unintentionally.

In *The Whale*, the metaphor of travel initiated in the earlier treatises on *discretio* is elaborated to emphasize the need for vigilance. Both the sailors and the fish are *faraðlacende* ('sea-travelling'), and the fish are *sundhwæt* ('vigorous swimmers'), designations which call attention not only to their motion but to their suitability to their environment.<sup>36</sup> The whale is not catching them at a natural disadvantage; indeed, the problem once again is lack of care. Equating its practice with the modern nautical terms 'to plumb' or 'to fathom', Kees Waaijman characterizes *discretio spirituum* as the ability 'to look through the surface and see the actual state of affairs below', and it is this quality that the sailors in the poem quite literally lack.<sup>37</sup> Yet experienced seafarers with a set route and destination would not likely run into an unknown island, nor would they need to stop if they had made the necessary preparations for their journey. The poem moreover asserts that sailors know of the whale, and they know its name,<sup>38</sup> so

through concealed power, allure them willingly so that they grievously seek joy from fiends, until they choose a place there firmly beside the Oath-Breaker'. *The Whale* 31b–7.

<sup>34</sup> 'So it is with every man who most often carelessly considers his life in this transitory time – he allows himself to be seduced by the attractive scent due to a lack of will, so that he may become guilty of sins against the king of glories.' *Ibid.* 62b–67a.

<sup>35</sup> 'those who cling to him, covered in [their] crimes, and heeded his suasions eagerly earlier in the days of their lives.' *Ibid.* 73b–75.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 5b, 20a, 57a and 80b.

<sup>37</sup> K. Waaijman, 'Discernment: its History and Meaning', *Stud. in Spirituality* 7 (1997), 5–41, at 20.

<sup>38</sup> *The Whale* 6b–7.



a crew armed with the knowledge it needs should not fall prey to its wiles. Yet the seafarers in the poem, like the fish, fail to exercise adequate caution and suffer as a result. This failure is accompanied by a change in the quality of the travellers' motion as well, as what was once willed loses all agency. The sailors, like the fish and the souls they represent, were initially able to fare widely across the world. Only after they settle on the whale's back – that is, once they accept the ruse – is it that the whale *bifæsted*<sup>39</sup> ('holds fast') to them. Similarly, the fish are able to *hweorfan* ('swerve') when under their own wills,<sup>40</sup> and the damned souls, too, were once free-ranging. Both, however, find themselves where 'nagon hwyrf ne swice,/ utsip æfre', due to their heedlessness.<sup>41</sup> Freedom of motion, just as with freedom of will, must be accompanied by a caution fostered by the *discretio spirituum*. Without it, those seeking to destroy the traveller (or the believer) will revoke that freedom.

*The Whale*, then, depicts in vivid metaphor the necessity of *discretio spirituum* for proper Christian living. However, there remains much to be said about this particular metaphor and why it is chosen to dramatize the dilemma, since the selection of the *Physiologus* entry on the whale places the piece within a tradition of biblical sea creatures with a consistent and specific set of associations. In *The Whale*, these associations dovetail with its portrayal of failed *discretio* to identify its ultimate cause.

As one of the *charismata*, *discretio spirituum* is an ability granted only to certain individuals, one of many blessings the Holy Spirit bestows upon various members of the Christian community.<sup>42</sup> As such, it does not come naturally to most, just as those with *discretio* are without any number of other useful skills. The expectation, then, is that the practice of *discretio* involves reliance on others to hone one's own ability, to confirm one's interpretations, or to consult the greater experience of elders. On this Cassian was especially insistent. He identifies 'seniorum verbis ac monitione' as the source of the power of *discretio*, and elsewhere expounds upon the centrality of counsel to the practice of proper *discretio*.<sup>43</sup> He asserts:

Vera. . .discretio non nisi uera humilitate conquiritur. Cuius humilitatis haec erit prima probatio, si uniuersa non solum quae agenda sunt, sed etiam quae cogitantur, seniorum reseruentur examini, ut nihil suo quis iudicio credens illorum per omnia definitionibus acquiescat et quid bonum uel malum debeat iudicare eorum traditione cognoscat. Quae institutio non solum per ueram discretionis uiam iuuenem recto tramite

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 30b.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 81b.

<sup>41</sup> 'they may have no return nor escape, no departure ever'. *Ibid.* 78b–79a.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor. XII.4–11; and J. R. Bouchet, 'The Discernment of Spirits', *Conflicts about the Holy Spirit*, ed. H. Küng and J. Moltmann (New York, 1979), p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> 'the words and cautions of elders'. Cassian, *Collationes*, pp. 32–3 and 43–6.

docebit incedere, uerum etiam a cunctis fraudibus et insidiis inimici seruabit inlaesum. Nullatenus enim decipi poterit, quisque non suo iudicio, sed maiorum uiuit exemplo, nec ualebit ignorationi eius callidus hostis inludere, qui uniuersas cogitationes in corde nascentes perniciose uerecundia nescit obtegere, sed eas maturo examine seniorum uel reprobatur uel admittit.<sup>44</sup>

Cassian cites as an example of poor *discretio* the hermit Heron, who despite his years of prayer and abstinence was tricked one day into throwing himself down a well by a demon in angel's guise. Cassian says he was led into mortal error because 'suis definitionibus regi quam consiliis uel conlationibus fratrum atque institutis maiorum maluit obedire'.<sup>45</sup> As Cassian himself warned, and like those led astray in *The Whale*, Heron is depicted as losing his agency at the moment of deception. 'Praeceptis prono obediens famulatu', he quite literally falls into a trap.<sup>46</sup>

The principles Cassian espouses, utilizing the same principles of movement, can be seen operating in the Irish *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, another work likely present in Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>47</sup> The story, a travel narrative, prominently features three monks who pursue a course of action contrary to the wishes of their community. When Brendan is about to embark upon his adventure with the companions he selected, the three appear and insist, over their abbot's objec-

<sup>44</sup> 'True discernment is not accrued without true humility. This will be the first indication of humility, if not only all that is done but also what is thought is saved for examination by the elders, so that, trusting nothing to one's own judgement, one acquiesces to them in all decisions and knows why one should judge good and bad according to their tradition. This arrangement will teach a young man not only to proceed along the straight path by the true way of discernment, but also keep him unharmed from all errors and the snares of the enemy. For not anyone will be able to be trapped by any means if one lives by the example of one's betters and not by one's own judgement. Nor will the sly adversary be able to play upon the ignorance of one who does not know how to conceal all the nascent thoughts in one's heart out of a pernicious shame but either spurns them or allows them according to the mature consideration of the elders.' *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> 'he preferred to follow his own standards than to be guided by the advice or consultation of the brothers, or the precepts of his predecessors'. *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>46</sup> 'In stooped, obedient slavery to [Satan's] commands'. *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> There is no textual evidence for the presence of the *Navigatio* in Anglo-Saxon England, or, indeed, Ireland, at the time of its first writing, as its earliest manuscripts are of continental provenance, clustered about the Rhineland. Nevertheless, the text reveals a thorough knowledge of Irish geography and culture, and represents a culmination of a long and complicated tradition of the story of Brendan that definitively ties it to Ireland. Given the strong Irish presence in the area at the time of this development, familiarity with Brendan's voyage in Anglo-Saxon England is generally assumed. For background see H. Zimmer, 'Keltische Beiträge II: Brendans Meerfahrt', *ZDA* 33 (1889), 129–220 and 257–338; C. Plummer, 'Some New Light on the Brendan Legend', *Zeitschrift für celtische Philol.* 5 (1905), 124–41; C. Selmer, Introduction to *Navigatio sancti Brendani Abbatís*, ed. C. Selmer (Notre Dame, 1959), pp. xv–l; J. Carney, Review of *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, *MÆ* 32 (1963), 37–44; and H. P. A. Oskamp, *The Voyage of Máel Dúin: a Study of Early Irish Voyage Literature* (Groningen, 1970), pp. 20–38.

tions, on accompanying the expedition.<sup>48</sup> The latecomers are representative of a literary trope in which those who push their way onto a departing vessel meet an ignominious fate,<sup>49</sup> and, accordingly, the three are the only travellers to be lost on Brendan's voyage. As Dorothy Ann Bray has noted, despite the extraordinary environment in which they find themselves, Brendan and his monks are expected to adhere to the customary strictures of Benedictine monasticism.<sup>50</sup> For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that the disobedient monks' fortunes are similar those who in Cassian fail to adhere to the *regia via* – they stray, and are doomed.<sup>51</sup> The strongest parallel can be seen in the death of the last brother, who as in Cassian and *The Whale* loses his free will once he succumbs to sin. His body being controlled by an unseen power, he is forced to throw himself into an active volcano,<sup>52</sup> and through his movement he demonstrates a dramatic reversal of fortune: previously wilful, he now loses all agency, compelled despite his resistance to a deadly action that he does not want.

Elsewhere in the *Navigatio*, an object lesson is given in deferring to authority that makes use of a large sea beast as the instrument of instruction. Like the sailors in *The Whale*, the monks come across something they assume is an island but is in fact a creature, in this case the giant fish Jasconius. Oblivious to the danger, they clamber out of the boat and busy themselves in setting up camp. Brendan, however, remains onboard, 'sciebat enim qualis erat illa insula, sed tamen noluit eis indicare, ne perterrentur'.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, when the creature dives he is in a position to save his companions, and only then does he share that God revealed to him the island's true identity in a dream. If the episode of the sailors in *The Whale*, then, emphasizes the difficulties in human perception that make *discretio* essential, the same motif in the *Navigatio* focuses on another aspect of the concept – the need for reliance upon others of greater wisdom to identify illusions and mitigate their damage. The same lesson applies to another contemporary work, the *Vita* of St. Columba, wherein a travelling monk disobeys his abbot's directive and encounters a whale as a result.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, pp. 11–12.

<sup>49</sup> T. Carp, 'The Three Late-Coming Monks: Tradition and Invention in the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani?*, *Medievalia et Humanistica* 12 (1984), 127–42, at 129–31.

<sup>50</sup> D. A. Bray, 'Allegory in the *Navigatio sancti Brendani?*, *Viator* 26 (1995), 1–10, at 4–7.

<sup>51</sup> *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, pp. 12–6 and 64–7. Though all are lost, one of the brothers who ultimately accepts the authority of Brendan is spared an unenviable fate, leaving the expedition at Brendan's insistence to join a community of ascetics. As Brendan makes clear, to be accepted as he is here is to be considered a great honour. *Ibid.* pp. 49–53.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> 'for he knew what kind of island it was, but did not wish to tell them so they would not fear'. *Ibid.* p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Adamnán, *Vita sancti Columbae*, ed. and trans. J. T. Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), pp. 31–2.

Why sea creatures such as the whale and Jasconius should prove popular for lessons on *discretio* in the British Isles at this time is related to their symbolic associations, the implications of which are in turn related to the proper practice of *discretio spirituum*. In line 50b of *The Whale*, the creature is described as a *wæterþisa wlonc*. *Wæterþisa* is a hapax legomenon – according to Bosworth and Toller it translates most literally to ‘water-rusher’;<sup>55</sup> *wlonc*, of course, is the adjective ‘proud’. An acceptable translation for the epithet would perhaps be ‘prideful sea-beast’; S. A. J. Bradley renders it as ‘proud roamer of the waters’.<sup>56</sup> This is not the only Anglo-Saxon piece to associate whales with Pride. In *De virginitate*, Aldhelm warns his audience of the *superbiae balenus* (‘whale of Pride’) who must be tamed with the ring of humility.<sup>57</sup> Though alike, these two pieces are more likely linked through their shared metaphor and theme rather than through this single similar turn of phrase (especially since *wlonc* in *The Whale* is not a singular genitive form like *superbiae*), but their correspondence strengthens the association. What is more, the phrase also points further back, to patristic traditions which tie creatures of the sea closely with Pride.

Michael Lapidge and Michael W. Herren, in their translation of *De virginitate*, identify Aldhelm’s *superbiae balenus* with Job XL.20–1<sup>58</sup> – ‘an extrahere poteris Leviathan hamo et fune ligabis linguam eius? Numquid pones circulum in naribus eius et armilla perforabis maxillam eius?’<sup>59</sup> Later, in the same chapter, Leviathan is declared the ‘rex super universos filios superbiae’.<sup>60</sup> In addition to its appearance in Job, Leviathan is named in certain versions of the Vulgate Psalms LXXIII and CIII<sup>61</sup> and is identified explicitly as an enemy of God in

<sup>55</sup> J. Bosworth, ‘wæterþisa’, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 1162.

<sup>56</sup> *The Whale, Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. and trans. S. A. J. Bradley (London, 1995), p. 356.

<sup>57</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate, Aldhelmi opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, MGH Auct. antiq. 15 (Berlin, 1919), p. 239.

<sup>58</sup> M. Lapidge and M. W. Herren, *Aldhelm: the Prose Works* (Ipswich, 1979) p. 67.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Are you capable of drawing Leviathan out with a hook and will you bind its tongue with a line? Could you possibly place a ring in its nose or puncture its jaw with a hoop?’

<sup>60</sup> ‘the king over all the children of Pride’. Job XLI.25. It is also named earlier in Job III.8.

<sup>61</sup> Three different versions of the psalter were in circulation in England at various points in the Anglo-Saxon period; given the uncertainty as to the date of works such as *The Whale*, all three must be accounted for. The original, derived from the pre-Jerome *Vetus Latina* translation of the Old Testament, is commonly known as the *Psalterium Romanum*. Jerome’s initial effort at revising the psalms came to be known as the *Psalterium Gallicanum*, and while it does not seem to have come into wide use in England until the tenth century, there is evidence of its presence there well before. Moreover, the *Gallicanum* was the preferred text of the Irish church. Also present was a third translation of the psalter, the *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* or *Hebraicum*, a second attempt by Jerome that utilized their original Hebrew text of the psalms. Leviathan’s appearance in both Psalm LXXIII and CIII varies depending on the edition used. In the *Romanum* and *Gallicanum*, ‘capita draconum’ (‘the heads of dragons’) are said to be crushed by God in Ps. LXXIII.13–14; in Ps. CIII.26 in both texts a *draco* cavorts

Isaiah XXVII.1. The sporadic and largely allusive mentions of the creature (along with, in Job, its landbound counterpart and nemesis, Behemoth) derive from an extensive extrabiblical background most fully developed in Jewish Second Temple and rabbinical tradition.<sup>62</sup> The presence of any of this material in Anglo-Saxon England is a tantalizing but largely unproven prospect,<sup>63</sup> and instead it is more likely that imagery and interpretation of Leviathan reached England through Christian commentaries on the Book of Job. Helmut Gneuss' *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* identifies two such texts preserved in Anglo-Saxon libraries.<sup>64</sup> One is Phillippus Presbyter's edition of Jerome's commentary on the book<sup>65</sup>, but far more significant is Gregory's *Moralia in Job*, a popular work in Anglo-Saxon England which also was instrumental in expounding the principles of *discretio spirituum* in the Latin West.

If the behaviour of the creature in *The Whale* is to identify it with Leviathan, this would mark an early instance of an association that would in later ages be seen expressly.<sup>66</sup> And, indeed, when the subject of the poem is compared to the monster from Job, there are a number of parallels between the whale and

in the sea God made. In the *Hebraicum*, however, the creatures in both cases are specified as Leviathan. Nevertheless, it is likely that the creature of Psalm CIII, at least, was commonly accepted as Leviathan no matter which version of the psalter was consulted. Most of the exegeses present in England which use the *Gallicanum* text, including Jerome's, identify the *draco* as Leviathan or else connect it to the description of the beast in Job, suggesting a general understanding of their equivalence in Anglo-Saxon England. See Jerome, *Tractatus in librum Psalmos*, ed. D. G. Morin, CCSL 78 (Turnhout, 1958), 187; and Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, 2 vols., ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 97–8 (Turnhout, 1958), II, 937. For the distinction between these various translations of the psalter and their prevalence in Anglo-Saxon England, see M. Gretsich, 'The Roman Psalter, its Old English Glosses and the English Benedictine Reform', *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. H. Gittos and M. B. Bedingfield (Rochester, NY, 2005), pp. 13–28, at 15–18. Both the *Gallicanum* and *Hebraicum* texts can be found in the *Biblia sacra, iuxta vulgatam versionem*, while the *Romanum* is in *Le Psautier Romain et les Autres Anciens Psautiers Latins*, ed. R. Weber, Collectanea Biblica Latina 5 (Rome, 1953).

<sup>62</sup> L. Drewer, 'Leviathan, Behemoth, and Ziz: a Christian Adaptation,' *Jnl. of the Warburg and Courtauld Insts.* 44 (1981), 148–56, at 151; and K. W. Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Winona Lake, IN, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> A fragment of one of the pseudepigraphical works that references Leviathan, 1 Enoch, has been preserved from the Anglo-Saxon period, though it is not the relevant section (H. Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts* (Tempe, 2001), p. 80). Whether any larger portions were in circulation is an open question. In any case, the Second Temple literature is not concerned with allegorizing its topics the way the Christian exegeses are, and there seems to be no overt influence of Jewish religious scholarship upon *The Whale*.

<sup>64</sup> Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 166 and 177.

<sup>65</sup> Jerome's *Commentaria in librum Job* can be found in J. P. Migne's PL 26 (Turnhout, 1845), pp. 786–96; with an explanation of Phillippus' relationship to the work in PL 53 (Turnhout, 1847), pp. 1011–14. Also available is Phillippus Presbyter, *In historiam Job committariorum*, ed. J. Sicardus (Basel, 1527).

<sup>66</sup> The connection is made directly by John Milton in his evocation of Leviathan when

Gregory's treatment of Leviathan. The first is their shared terminology. In the Exeter Book, it is called a *hwæl*, a whale, and when describing Leviathan Gregory uses the Latin *cetus*, a term which designated all large sea creatures, but whales especially.<sup>67</sup> Aldhelm, too, uses another Latin term for whale, *balenus*. This is in contrast to other descriptions of Leviathan, which in Job has clear serpentine features. Indeed, Gregory refers to it as a *serpens* or *draco* more often than a *cetus*. However, Gregory sees Leviathan and Behemoth as the same creature – that is, the Devil – and as such emphasizes the indeterminate nature of the beast; he also describes Leviathan as a bird.<sup>68</sup> Aldhelm's reference is too passing to suggest a multiplicity of forms for his *balenus*, but it should be noted that in the *Physiologus* tradition the whale is not necessarily a whale in the modern, scientific sense. This is no doubt in part due to ignorance of the taxonomical difference between whales and other sea creatures – in *The Whale*, for instance, the whale is identified as one of the *fisca cynn*, 'of the race of fish'.<sup>69</sup> Yet the Bern manuscript gives two different names to this creature – *aspidochelone* in Greek and *aspido testudo* in Latin, both of which translate roughly to 'asp-turtle'. The Anglo-Saxon version repeats this moniker, slightly garbled, as *fastitocalon*.<sup>70</sup> The whale, then, was seen as somehow vaguely reptilian, which makes sense given its scales in the Bern manuscript, changed slightly to skin like *breof stan* ('rough stone') in the Exeter Book.<sup>71</sup> This makes the whale even more akin to

describing Satan immediately after his defeat in heaven, a circumstance caused by his overweening pride:

. . .that sea-beast  
Leviathan which God of all His works  
Created hugest that swim th' ocean stream.  
Him haply slumb'ring on the Norway foam  
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff  
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind  
Moors by his side, under the lee, while Night  
Invests the sea and wished morn delays.

Milton's treatment here preserves several details from its Anglo-Saxon antecedent, such as the texture of the animal's back, that we shall see are shared with the biblical description of Leviathan. J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. G. Teskey (New York, 2005) I, 200–8.

<sup>67</sup> *The Whale* 3b (*hwæl*); and Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, 3 vols., ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 143 (Turnhout, 1985) III, 1688. Cf. Jerome's blunt assertion, in reliance upon Is. XXVII.1, that 'Leviathan draconem typicum' ('the Leviathan [is] a kind of dragon'). Jerome, *Commentaria in librum Job*, pp. 786–7. There is also its identification with the 'draco' of Ps. CIII in Jerome, *Tractatus in librum Psalmos*, p. 187. Additional mention of Leviathan in the *Moralia* is found in Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, I, 172–4 and 188–9.

<sup>68</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, III, 1699.

<sup>69</sup> *The Whale* 1b.

<sup>70</sup> *Physiologus latinus*, p. 44; and *The Whale* 7b.

<sup>71</sup> *Physiologus latinus*, p. 44; and *The Whale* 8b.

Leviathan, which is distinguished by its ‘corpus. . . quasi scuta fusilia et compactum squamis se prementibus’.<sup>72</sup>

Yet a more direct and sustained similarity is to be seen in Gregory’s interpretation of the description of Leviathan in Job and the actions of the whale in both the Anglo-Saxon poem and the Bern *Physiologus*. Gregory’s exegesis on Leviathan shares much with the account of the fish lured over and destroyed by the pleasant scent of the creature. Taking as his inspiration Job XLI.22 – ‘ferescere faciet quasi ollam profundum mare ponet quasi cum unguenta bulliunt’<sup>73</sup> – Gregory credits Leviathan with the ability to produce a sweet odour, which, as in *Physiologus* tradition, masks the true vile nature of its works.<sup>74</sup> Even closer is his commentary on XLI.10-1: ‘de ore eius lampades procedunt sicut taedae ignis accensae, de naribus eius procedit fumus sicut ollae succensae atque ferventis’<sup>75</sup>. Describing the smoke as ‘fumo pestiferæ exhalationis’, Gregory here associates Leviathan’s mouth specifically with an attractive odour, since, as he says, the smell of a torch is pleasant, though the light is weak.<sup>76</sup> The greatest parallel, however, is one that only the *Moralia* and *The Whale* share, the depiction of the Gates of Hell. In *The Whale*, the sea creature’s gullet is described as the entrance to Hell:

Þonne he þa grimman	goman bihlemmeð
æfter feorhwale	fæste togædre,
helle hlinduru;	nagon hwyrft ne swice,
utsiþ æfre,	þa þær in cumað,
þon ma þe þa fiscas	faraðlacende
of þæs hwæles fenge	hweorfan motan. <sup>77</sup>

This detail is not present in the Bern manuscript, but is present in *Moralia in Job*. In Job itself, the mouth of Leviathan is called ‘portus vultus’.<sup>78</sup> Gregory, for his part, tells his readers that those who sin are trapped in Leviathan’s jaws; it is only through gaps therein – that is, the grace of God – that some manage to escape.<sup>79</sup> In *The Whale*, the animal’s jaws are specifically a *blinduru*, a prison

<sup>72</sup> ‘body. . . like shields, molten and girding it with interlocking scales’. Job XLI.6.

<sup>73</sup> ‘it will cause the deep to boil like a pot, make the sea as when ointments bubble’.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, 3:1756–7; and *Physiologus latinus*, 44–5.

<sup>75</sup> ‘from its mouth issue flames just like torches kindled by fire; from its nostrils comes forth smoke just as from a hot burning pot’.

<sup>76</sup> ‘vapour of its pestilent exhalation’. Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, III, 1724–7.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Then he swiftly gnashes together in slaughter his ghastly jaws, the Gates of Hell; those who come in there have no return nor escape, no departure ever, any more than the fish travelling the sea are able to swerve from the whale’s grasp.’ *The Whale* 76–81.

<sup>78</sup> ‘the gates of its face’. Job XLI.5.

<sup>79</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Job*, III, 1692–7.

gate. As Squires notes, this suggests a barred or grated doorway, which itself has gaps as in Gregory's metaphor.<sup>80</sup>

The image of the Hellmouth has long been associated with the Christianity of the North Atlantic,<sup>81</sup> even if the inspiration for the image lies somewhere else. Another likely influence was that other oceanic monster from the Bible, Jonah's *piscis grandis*.<sup>82</sup> This creature is connected to Leviathan in rabbinical literature,<sup>83</sup> and in Anglo-Saxon England it was similarly equated with such through Jerome's exegesis on the Book of Jonah. While describing the beast, he utilizes the allusion to Leviathan in Psalm CIII, verse 26: 'Draco iste quem formasti ad illudendum ei'.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Jerome's commentary is the first work to describe Jonah's attacker as a *cetus*, though Jerome bases this identification on the Gospel of Matthew, which says 'et erat Ionas in uentre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus'<sup>85</sup> – yet since Jerome is working from the Vulgate, the version of the Bible he compiled, he may very well be responsible for that reading as well. As for the relationship of Jerome's exegesis on Jonah with the tradition of Leviathan outlined in commentary on Job, there is little evidence that one informs the other. Jerome cites earlier passages in Job for

<sup>80</sup> Squires, *The Old English Physiologus*, pp. 93–4.

<sup>81</sup> P. Seingorn, "'Who can open the doors of his face?' The Iconography of Hell Mouth', *The Iconography of Hell*, ed. C. Davidson and T. H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, 1992), pp. 1–19; and G. D. Schmidt, *The Iconography of the Mouth of Hell: Eighth-Century Britain to the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1995), pp. 13–83; and C. Neuman de Vegvar, 'The Doors of His Face: Early Hell-Mouth Iconography in Ireland', *Aedificia nova: Studies in Honor of Rosemary Cramp*, ed. C. E. Karkov and H. Damico (Kalamazoo, 2008), pp. 176–97. Another example of the motif in Anglo-Saxon letters occurs in *Vercelli Homily IV, The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, p. 92. Despite the focus on Anglo-Saxon England as the locus of the motif, scholars are quick to see contributions from other North Atlantic cultures in its development, as in Schmidt, pp. 24–31; and Neuman de Vegvar, *passim*.

<sup>82</sup> 'great fish'. Jon. I–II.

<sup>83</sup> In the early medieval *Pirqé* traditionally ascribed to Rabbi Eliczer ben Hyrkanos, Jonah gains the trust of his devourer by saving him from suffering the same fate at the jaws of Leviathan. G. Friedlander, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliczer* (New York, 1981), pp. 65–73. For dating, see Friedlander, Introduction to *Pirke de Rabbi Eliczer*, pp. liii–liv; and Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts*, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> 'this dragon which you made to cavort [in the sea]'. This is the verse as given in Jerome, *Commentarii in prophetas minores*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 76 (Turnhout, 1969), 393. As stated in n. 67, Jerome equated this *draco* with Leviathan, changing the verse to name the creature explicitly in his translation of the Psalms from the Hebrew and identifying the *draco* as such in his *Tractatus in librum Psalmos*, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> 'and Jonah was in the stomach of the whale for three days and three nights'. Mt. XII.40, although the direct quote is from Jerome, *Commentarii*, p. 393. It is worth noting that Jonah's attacker is called a *hwæl* (*hwæll*) in the Anglo-Saxon retelling of the tale in *Vercelli Homily XIX*, p. 322; and in Ælfric's homily *In letania maiore, Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (Oxford, 1997), p. 318. For an examination of the incidences of Jonah's story in Anglo-Saxon literature, see P. Szarmach, 'Three Versions of the Jonah Story: an Investigation of Narrative Technique in Old English Homilies', *ASE* 1 (1972), 183–92.



other purposes,<sup>86</sup> and it is only until the moment that the fish vomits Jonah back onto the beach that Jerome turns to a reference to the creature in Job, and even then it is a minor one.<sup>87</sup> Gregory, in contrast, does not turn to Jonah to illuminate Leviathan's symbolism at all. This is likely because Jonah's three nights in the belly of the whale was, based on the interpretation offered in Matthew XII.40, associated not with the entrance of sinners to Hell but rather the three days after the Crucifixion that Jesus was surrendered to Death. Yet here too the whale's mouth is allegorized as the entrance to Hell – for sinners in one instance and for Christ on the other.

Figures such as Leviathan, Jonah's *piscis grandis*, and Aldhelm's *balenus* create a consistent symbolism which in turn informed readers' responses to *The Whale*; this interpretation in turn affects the work's understanding of *discretio spirituum*. The result is a greater emphasis on Pride as the downfall of those who go astray. It has already been seen how Aldhelm's creature is a *superbiae balenus* just as the whale is a *waterpisa wlonc*, designations which tie them to Leviathan, the *rex super universos filios superbiae* of Job XLI.25. Their association with Pride is exploited in the commentaries.<sup>88</sup> Aldhelm, for his part, eventually reveals the *superbiae balenum* to be Leviathan, who lies in wait to consume those led astray by their arrogance.<sup>89</sup> In works concerned with *discretio spirituum*, allusions to Pride and its symbols are well represented. In Cassian, those that stray do so on account of their *obstinatio* and *praesumptio* – obstinacy and presumption (or stubbornness) – and his cure, *humilitate* ('humility'), is the same as Aldhelm's and Gregory's solution to taming the whale of Pride.<sup>90</sup> In his long speech on *discretio*, Anthony reaches for Job's description of Leviathan with his fragrant breath to characterize the demons against which he and his disciples must remain ever-vigilant.<sup>91</sup> And in the *Navigatio*, the volcano in which the final disobedient monk is damned is identified as Leviathan's realm.<sup>92</sup> In all of these works, Pride or its avatar are present as the cause and consequence of failed *discretio*.

<sup>86</sup> Jerome, *Commentarii*, pp. 397 and 406; and Job VII.1 and XIV.5.

<sup>87</sup> Jerome, *Commentarii*, p. 403; and Job III.8.

<sup>88</sup> The *dracones* in Ps. LXXIII.13–14, which in the *Hebraicum* translation of the psalter are designated Leviathan, are also associated with Pride in Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 3 vols., ed. D. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, CCL 38–40 (Turnhout, 1956) II, 1014; and Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum*, II, 679.

<sup>89</sup> Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, pp. 239–40.

<sup>90</sup> Cassian, *Collationes*, pp. 41, 45 and 46; for humility, see p. 537; Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, p. 239; and Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, III, 1636. Aldhelm's work is one that makes its debts to previous literature more obvious than most. Both Cassian's text and Gregory's *Moralia* were consulted by him, and cited during his consideration of Pride. See Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, p. 242; and Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 179 and 181.

<sup>91</sup> Athanasius, *Vita di Antonio*, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup> *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, p. 67.

Moreover, it is through their movement, through their deviation from set paths and subsequent capture, that the victims of such creatures exhibit their capitulation to Pride. Jonah, obviously, is a prime example of one who reveals his disobedience in choosing a journey contrary to God's wishes, to the extent that he is identified as an archetype for the latecoming traveller motif to which Brendan's three insubordinate monks are heir.<sup>93</sup> As such, he is also one who deviates from Cassian's *regia via*. Jerome has this to say about the prophet's flight: 'Non igitur propheta ad certum fugere cupiebat locum, sed mare ingrediens, quocumque pergere festinabat, et magis hoc conuenit fugituo et timido, non locum fugae otiosae eligere, sed primam occasionem arripere nauigandi.'<sup>94</sup> In Jerome's interpretation, Jonah has no plan and no goal but to escape God's intentions for him, and chooses his own desires – his own path – since the correct one frightens him so. His deviation from God's set itinerary is what lands him in the jaws of the whale. Gregory, whose *Moralia* contains both a discussion of *discretio* and a consideration of Leviathan, draws the connection explicitly. He precedes his characterization of Leviathan as creating pleasant odours to fool the unwary with a discussion of the *angustum iter*, the 'narrow way' or 'difficult journey' akin to Cassian's *regia via*.<sup>95</sup> Those who undertake it inspire others to the same, he argues, but there are those who instead try and make the easier path appear to be the one of righteousness. Of these Gregory says: 'Quando ergo bene agere uidentur reprobi, quasi planum iter electis sequentibus monstrant; quando uero in lapsum nequitiae corruunt, electis post se pergentibus quasi cauendam superbiae foueam ostendunt. Eat ergo Leviathan iste.'<sup>96</sup> If in exegetical tradition Leviathan and other sea creatures signify Pride, then that pride is manifested in the wilful deviation from difficult journeys deemed necessary by God. Doing so leads an individual into sin, a consequence depicted graphically in the material by transgressors being swallowed by monsters of the deep.

This is the implied message of *The Whale* as well, a complement to its more

<sup>93</sup> Carp, 'The Three Late-Coming Monks', pp. 129–31.

<sup>94</sup> 'Therefore the prophet was not wishing to flee to any particular place, but in taking to the sea he was rushing to go anywhere. This better suits a fugitive and a coward, to select no destination in his vain flight, but to grab the first that occasions itself in his journey.' Jerome, *Commentarii*, pp. 381–2. This lesson is touched upon briefly in *Verelli Homily XLIX*, p. 322, when Jonah realizes that 'he nahwar God forfleon meachte' ('nowhere could he flee God').

<sup>95</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, III, 1755. This is an allusion to the 'angusta porta' ('narrow gate') of Matt. VII.13–14.

<sup>96</sup> 'Therefore when the false are seen doing good, they present for the accompanying Elect something like a journey upon level ground; when they fall into the error of sin, truly, they demonstrate for the Elect coming after them a hazard for the proud to be avoided, as it were. This Leviathan may operate as such.' Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, III, 1756. See also *ibid.* 1638–9.

## Discretio spirituum and The Whale

apparent engagement with the *discretio spirituum*. Through its utilization of the *wæterþisa wlonc*, it borrows from an established Christian tradition of whales and other sea creatures that operate as instruments of punishment or instruction to those who lose their ability to discern the proper path on account of their pride. This message is conveyed through metaphors of travel that depict failures of *discretio* as disastrous journeys interrupted by the likes of Leviathan, Jasconius, Jonah's whale and others who arrest or alter the movements of transgressors. These pieces put forth a consistent argument for avoiding the pitfalls of Pride by practising proper *discretio*. Yet its theme only becomes clear if the audience itself is similarly aware of the poems' allusions to the theological concepts and metaphors that underpin them. It is through the interplay of these works in Anglo-Saxon England that *The Whale* is shown to be inheritor of a tradition in which sea monsters appear as markers of Pride who serve to punish those who stray from Cassian's *regia via*. *The Whale*, when viewed as a product of this influence, serves as a sure guide to its readership as to how to avoid, through *discretio spirituum*, the gaping maw of the monster despite the allure of its scent.