

**THE UNTOLD VOYAGE OF SAINT CORMAC: A STUDY OF VOYAGE  
LITERATURE THROUGHOUT HISTORY IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
THE PRACTICE OF *PEREGRINATIO* IN 6TH CENTURY IRELAND**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Untold Voyage of Saint Cormac: A Study of Voyage Literature throughout History in Conjunction with the Practice of *Peregrinatio* in 6th Century Ireland

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Through the narrative of this creative thesis, I will explore the sixth century monastic practice of *peregrinatio* and the nautical motifs found throughout the literary canon of voyage literature. The power of narrative, as seen in this thesis, immerses the reader into a story, allowing them to delve into the consciousness of characters to better understand the themes behind their inner-conflict. A character's actions and thoughts become clear to the reader through narration, inspiring a deeper identification and perceived-empathy with the characters that a history of the event could not achieve. This chronicle juxtaposes the ideas of sanctity and insanity, a subjective distinction, as the Irish monk, St. Cormac, experiences trials that test his faith in the midst of a desperate journey that plants doubt into the minds of both the ship's captain and the reader. The line of St. Cormac's actions being saintly or insane becomes muddled the further into the unforeseen pilgrimage the crew and the reader gets. I propose to create a fictional account of St. Cormac's undocumented journey into the far, perilous, and trying northern sea, collecting themes from voyage literature and monastic practices to develop a story that questions the faith of the character as well as the reader.

## DEDICATION

To Nana (Shirley McCray),

When you passed away, you gave Avery and I the lock and key to Yonderland, our made-up world. I never understood the significance of those objects until now. It wasn't just you giving us the lock and key to the imaginary world that you created throughout our childhood, they were an encouragement to continue the imagination and wonder that it took to create Yonderland. It was your way of telling us to keep the story alive. Even though you are not physically here, I know that you were with me as I composed this story. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue my imagination and for inspiring me to become a writer. I would not be the writer I am today without you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Nandra Perry for the continuous support of my study and related research over the last two years, for her patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Her guidance helped me in all the time of research and writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my undergraduate thesis.

My sincere thanks also goes to Reese Wright for the illustrations that can be seen throughout my story. Her outstanding artistic ability helped me provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the reconstruction of St. Cormac's voyage.

I also thank my parents for their unceasing encouragement, support and attention, as well as to my fiancé who supported me throughout this venture.

## NOMENCLATURE

### Character List:

Cormac – 6<sup>th</sup> century monk, main character

Ronan – Irish sailor, captain of the Curragh, secondary character

Senan – Irish monk, Cormac's friend

Eanna – A young boy who was training in the monastery

Colum – Ronan's apprentice

Ainmire – Monk from the Abbot of Hy, Cormac's friend

Tirechan – Old monk from the Abbot of Hy, a mentor of Cormac's

Kevin – a member of Ronan's crew

### Terminology:

*Peregrinatio* – Leaving of one's homeland and wandering for the love of God.

*Curragh* - a type of Irish boat with a wooden frame, over which animal skins or hides were once stretched, though now canvas is more usual.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Voyage Literature has been a major part of the literary canon throughout history. The sea is seen as a mysterious being that seems to have a mind of itself when it comes to letting travelers pass or calling creatures out of the deep. It is dangerous, exciting, and unknown, so naturally we have a fascination with it. From as early as Homer's *The Odyssey* to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* all the way to our modern day in Martel's *Life of Pi*, the sea has taken a primary role in literature, exploring the idea of finding oneself. Monks' practice of *peregrinatio*, the same journey to self-identity that is seen throughout voyage literature, demonstrated their devotion to God, something that was increasingly important in the monastic and catholic life in Ireland.

*Peregrinatio* is the exiling of one's self to demonstrate one's love and faith in God. Sixth century Irish monks frequently went on pilgrimages out to sea in search for a divine intervention, and sign, a moment where they find clarity in their faith and bring visions from their Lord, often marking them as saints. In some cases, the desire for this exile has been to such a degree that monks would cast themselves out to sea with nothing but a boat and their faith—no food, no water, not even oars to help bring him to safety should he encounter a storm, just him in a thin, empty boat. There are not many written accounts of this practice, and even fewer are told in detail. The subject of my story—St. Cormac—is one of these monks that went on a pilgrimage out to sea, however his tale is strange in that it is specific and ominously vague. The single account that we have from him is offhand as it is told through a tale about St. Columba. All that is said is that a terrible southern wind blew Cormac and his crew far north into the frozen sea for

fourteen days and fourteen nights, during which they encountered insects that struck the side of the boat so violently that it almost penetrated through the hide of the raft. These creature also had an extraordinarily painful sting and gathered in hoards on the oars. The account, found in the “Life of St. Columba or Columkille,” states that “after [they] had seen these and other monsters, which it is not [their] province to describe,” they fell into prayer and a great northern wind carried them home, though with considerably less men than before (Adamnan).

Through the characterization of two of the men present on the boat, Cormac and Ronan (a fictional character for the sake of the story, he serves as the captain and cook of the boat), I have created a fictional account of St. Cormac’s untold voyage that questions the piety and sanctity that he is known for with flashes of perceived insanity through Ronan’s perspective. Cormac is portrayed as deeply pious and saintly, having visions from God that keep his men alive. This is what the reader sees from a third person limited omniscient perspective as we settle into Cormac’s amazing, miraculous story. However, brief interludes from Ronan’s journal—told through first person—give the reader pause as we see Cormac through new eyes, causing us to question Cormac and the crew’s sanctity. The setting moves with the story, literally and figuratively. The tone of ominous, daunting peril and immediate fear can be seen through the rogue wave and storm; the still, terrifying calm before the first trial; the mirrored surface and eventual ripples of the second; the choppy, sunset-tinged waters of the third; and finally, the glassy, luminous sea in the isolated, frozen canyon of the fourth and final trial. Each setting lends to set the tone of the scene, reflecting the emotions and thoughts of crew, Ronan, and most importantly, Cormac. By the end of the following tale, I hope the reader finds that I have been



successful in accurately producing an account of the pilgrimage of St. Cormac as he is cast out to sea with his crew and thrown into a journey of survival and faith.

## CHAPTER II

### ST. CORMAC'S VOYAGE

#### Prologue

*St. Columba, the Abbott of Hy, Iona Island*

*As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.*

*—Proverbs 10:25*

The soft chanting of afternoon prayer could be heard from the Ministry as St. Columba began his daily meditation. He prayed to God for good health and wisdom, and then prayed for guidance on something that had been troubling him; nearly a fortnight before, Cormac and his crew had set out on another voyage, but St. Columba had recently been feeling uneasy whenever he thought about the gyrovagues. He closed his eyes and relaxed every fiber of his being, giving himself over to God's will.

“Lend me guidance, my Lord. Show me what has become of my Brethren.” He could feel himself leaving his corporeal body, something that he had become accustomed to when the Lord would send him visions. He stood on a Curragh in the middle of a grey and ice-ridden sea. He turned and saw Cormac. His face was worn and weary, raw and rough from a strong gale. St. Columba looked around; many of the men who had set out from the monastery stood before him. Tears welled in the eyes of some and terror seized the bodies of others. St. Columba could tell that there was something in the distance that frightened them, something that he could not see in his limited vision

Just then he felt the boat lurch, causing a fresh round of hysterics to break out and several choruses of the Lord's Prayer to be taken up. The saint looked back to Cormac for his reaction. Tears had begun to gather in his gray eyes before he sank to his knees and began to pray aloud, calling his Brethren to do the same so that God might come to their aid and show mercy.

St. Columba opened his eyes to the meditation room. He thanked the Lord for his guidance and said a closing prayer before getting up to ponder on what he had seen. Cormac seemed to have endured much in the twelve days since they had left, that was evident. A few things troubled St. Columba though; the Curragh had been covered in snow and ice had surrounded them. He recalled that Cormac had been planning on going west or even south-west of the monastery. The icy surface of the water indicated that they were near the northern end of the world, an uncharted territory. The terror-stricken faces of the men had made him uneasy too. What creature would he have seen in the water if he had dared to look over? St. Columba knew what had to be done. He called the community to the Oratory to recant what he had seen of their Brothers:

“Brethren, the Lord has shared with me news of Cormac and his men. He and his sailors are in imminent danger and face unspeakable creatures of Lucifer of which I cannot speak. I have seen them and they shed many tears and fall to their knees in desperate prayer. Let us assist them with our own prayers and ask Him to have compassion for Cormac to deliver him back to the isle safely and swiftly. Let us pray that the north wind grow strong and, with God's will, bring them to the monastery and out of danger.” He said this and bowed his head with the rest of his Brethren, entering into a silent prayer to the Lord for Cormac's return. His uneasiness changed

then, he became certain that Cormac would soon be delivered out of peril and into the warmer waters surrounding their Scottish-Irish monastery. With that, he led the men in reciting Psalms 46.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” The words of the liturgy resounded throughout the stone walls of the Oratory. Filling their ears and souls as their hearts reached out to Cormac and his men. St. Columba raised his head and looked at the cross as the monastery finished with a sigh.

“The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.” St. Columba sent a silent prayer to the lost monk as he knelt to continue his meditation.

*And let Him be a fortress for you, Cormac.*

## **Part I: The Journey Begins**

*Cormac, North of Iona in the Ocean*

*And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.*  
—Acts 27:15

They had been on the ocean for two full days when a strong wind had blown up from the south. Cormac's crew had dropped the sails of the Curragh, but the wind had gained strength and still pushed them north. Now it was the fifth day of their voyage and they were growing cold and tired of the constant gale. One of the crew mates called for supper and all twelve of them—including Cormac—gathered in or around the main shelter in the middle of the craft.

“And the Lord said, ‘Call upon me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.’” Cormac began the verse after the Scottish sailor, Ronan, had passed out steaming bowls of seaweed and brine water stew. As he continued the liturgy he thought about how far north they had strayed since they had left. With no wind to take them back to Hy, they prepared themselves to manually traverse the seas against the gale; however they had grown cold and hungry as the great wind battered their sails and leathered their skin.

“Amen.” Cormac opened his eyes and stared at the men as they murmured praise to God and began to ladle the soup passed their cracked lips and into their dry mouths. It had been five days since they had sailed from the monastery, and they were two days away from the Sabbath. They would hold communion then, and take the body and drink the blood of Christ from a gilded cup—the only thing of value they had brought on their voyage. Cormac's concern for the crew's

health grew as he looked into their worn faces, how had they gotten here? How far away from the Isle of Iona were they? Would the wind continue to drive them far into the uncharted north?

The wind answered with a strong gust that pushed the Curragh onward into the grey waters of the north with even more persistence. Cormac didn't know how to help his men. He had prayed every night for their safety, and his prayers had been answered, although their endurance came at a price; their lips were split and bloody from the brine and wind, their muscles cramped from their first attempts to row against the wind, and their bones were weak and sore from the confined space of the hide-boat. Cormac had asked Ronan to put some herbs in the stew to soothe and warm the men, but it would only be temporary.

"Looks like a storm is coming," Cormac looked to his right. Senan looked at his friend and pointed to the south. Cormac followed his finger and saw a dark mass spanning the southern horizon with the occasional flash of bright light. Thundered travelled across the deepening waves and to the boat; the men looked up and groaned. Some dropped back into a silent prayer, others just stared in dismay as they returned to their benches, bowls as dry as the mouths they had fed.

Cormac dipped his head in a quick and silent prayer and moved to help the men prepare for the storm.

...

March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 580

*We have been lost at sea for five days now. On the second day of the voyage, a strong wind came from the south and blew us off course. We are heading north now. We have passed the islands, I believe, and are heading towards the end of the world. The men are growing weak from hunger and stiff from the constant wind. The air grows colder every day and ice crystals are beginning to form on the oars during the night. Cormac has prayed over us morning and night, and has asked me to add herbs to the stews that I prepare to warm and calm the men. I added more today, which gave the broth a better flavor. It also almost immediately soothed them, allowing them to forget their worries about their travels as they hastily drank from their steaming bowls. It was the warmest that we had been the entire voyage; it was rapidly replaced, however, with the coldest and most frightened that we have been thus far as we heard the thunder from across the waves. Some men cried out and dropped to their knees in fear, but the rest of us emptied the last bit of stew from our bowls and set to work securing the sails. The waves were already deepening as we went through the routine that we had discussed for storms like these. Colum—a young sailing apprentice—was affected by the pitching and proceeded to bend over the side of the boat, emptying his stomach. I felt sympathetic for the lad; this was his first extended voyage out at sea, and a sore one at that.*

*The rain has started. Now all there is to do is tie ourselves to the seats and follow the rolling waves. They are up to three fathoms high now—nowhere near, I suspect, the height that they will reach in the night. I can see larger ones in the distance that confirm it. I am not certain that we will all make it through the storm, it looks like a violent one sent by Lucifer himself. Cormac is assuring us though. He says that he has prayed for peace and safety to come quickly. I do not believe that this storm will pass quickly, but I will put my faith in God that He will deliver*

*us. It frightens me to think how much further north this storm will take us though; the water supply is already icy at the edges, and the winds have exceeded any that I have ever encountered in my years as a sailor. We shall see in the morning.*

*—Ronan O'Harral*

...



March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 580

*The storm has passed. The men could not sleep through the night as the waves reached ten fathoms and then some. The boat plunged down each one as it carried us farther and farther north. We were busy all night bucketing out rain and wave water from the Curragh so that the hides would stay stiff. The night was long and unending. There was a wave – a twelve fathom wave – that went rogue from the others. It came diagonally at us. The boat began spinning after it hit us wrong and then we— weak and drenched in freezing water—had to use the last of our strength to row back into a straighter manner. Our dive was nearly straight down to the water, there was hardly a slant to the wave at all. It was then, too late, that I saw it. Eanna, a young boy from the village who was training to become a monk in the abbey, had not had the strength or skill to tie the proper knot for storms such as these, and his fastenings began to come loose on the plunge. I looked directly into his eyes, usually filled with as much faith and hope as Cormac himself, and saw the fear. I tried to call his name, but thunder boomed as a lightning bolt hit the water not far off, blinding me. When the flash had cleared, I looked back at his seat. He was gone. The little boy who had trusted his God so much was gone. Fallen into the water during the plunge, lost forever in the icy sea.*

*Now, the sea is calmer and the air is colder. The pain of losing Eanna is still fresh, and I do not believe that anyone has noticed the boy's absence yet. He was so quiet, only talking to four of us about his faith (Ainmire—a wise and highly respected monk from the monastery—, Senan, Cormac, and myself) and only to me about his fears. I will have to ask Cormac to hold a small memorial for him. He is the first of us to die. I fear that we have gone so far into the north that we will run out of supplies before we can make it back home. Even if the wind were to cease,*

*it would be weeks before we could get back to Iona, and we have barely enough provisions for twelve men—now only eleven—for the next two days.*

*The dawn is dim, but it is here, and it is time to repair that which was damaged in last night's storm. Both the boat and the spirits of us all will need a miracle to mend the tear that the storm has made in our faith. If He is really there, why did Eanna die? And why has the wind not stopped?*

*I—I just heard it again, distant, but definitely there, to the north. We were at the bottom of a trough when I heard it the first time: the sign of a sailor's end. It was a story passed down through generations of sailors in Iona; A long, deep sound that only a sailor's ear can catch, but once one hears it, they will never forget it. It means that doom lies ahead, and whether you live or die, this is your last voyage.*

*I believe it's waiting for us. Whether it be good or evil, it found us in the storm and it waits for us in the north. All night I looked for whatever creature made the noise. I thought I had glimpsed it in the wave ahead of us at one point, but the image vanished as quickly as it had appeared.*

*—Ronan O'Harral*

...

The night was slow and treacherous as the storm passed over the small boat. Cormac prayed throughout the night, assuring those who wept that the Lord would deliver them from the evil that seethed within the storm. The waves pitched the Curragh up and down; they had reached a terrifying height at one point. Now, they began to settle as the storm subsided. The crew immediately went to work around Cormac. Unfastening themselves from their benches, they threw the contents of the waste buckets overboard. Ronan, Cormac saw, was thinking hard and staring at the water as he started the small fire to prepare breakfast. Cormac approached him.

“How far did the storm take us?” Cormac asked the sailor, fearing the answer.

“Too far. One hundred leagues maybe. The water has grown a stone grey and a sheet of ice covers the water barrels now. This is as severe of weather as I have encountered in my sailing, but I do not think that we have seen the worst. The wind has not died, though the storm has passed, and now the waves are larger and carry us further still.” Ronan seemed to pause for a moment. “And sir, I—” he paused looking unsure. Cormac laid his hand gently on the sailor’s shoulder.

“Yes? What is it son?” Cormac looked at the young man expectantly. Something was troubling Ronan. Cormac saw grief in his eyes, but there was something more, something deeper. Fear.

“It’s Eanna. Cormac, he fell during the storm. His knots were not tight enough, I should have checked them! He was only a boy! Will you hold a memorial for him before breakfast this morning?” Cormac could tell that that was not all that was on Ronan’s mind, but it explained the

anguished look he had had. Cormac himself had noticed the boy's absence, but had assumed that he was at the front of the boat in the storage area helping to gather breakfast materials as well as mending materials as he was the only one small enough to crawl into the storage space. Now he felt the boy's absence.

"Of course Ronan. We will take communion early to honor his death." Cormac did not press him on the reason for his terror, but made a note to come back to it later that day. If Ronan was afraid of something, then evil things were ahead.

"My Brethren, we have lost one of our company in the storm." The crew stopped at Cormac's voice and turned to hear the solemn news. "The boy—Eanna—fell from his straps. He was a good boy with a strong faith in the Lord. Let us all take a moment to remember him in silence." A dead silence shrouded the Curragh as the men bowed their heads in silent prayer. Cormac brought out the small amount of unleavened bread and wine from their stores and gave it to each of the men. He whispered a piece of the Eucharist prayer to each of them as they took the bread wine, eating and drinking in remembrance of Him and of Eanna. Some men cried, most of whom were some of the men who had sat near Eanna on the boat when they rowed. Others stared at the hide and wood that was drying at the bottom of the boat. When he had taken communion himself, Eanna closed the prayer. The men joined in as he whispered, "Amen."

"Thank you. We encountered a great evil last night. A storm sent by Lucifer to deter us further from our purpose. To find new hope and to gather faith in the Lord is what this voyage was meant for. We have faced many trials together and have stayed strong, but I feel that many more

are to come. Join me in our morning prayer as we ask for renewed strength going forward and give thanks for delivering us through the storm.” Cormac looked around and waited for everyone to settle into their prayer postures; some were bent over, some sitting, and some standing. All were different, but all were here to worship the Lord in a time of need. When everyone had seemed to settle, Cormac began the Office of Readings, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.” He continued to recite the liturgy for a funeral from the book of Psalms. As Cormac finished the first round of prayers for the day, Ronan began to spoon that morning’s oats into the bowls of the frail and hungry crew.

Cormac waited to talk with Ronan alone again to ask about what had frightened him, but he did not get the chance.

“Even with the extra rations, we don’t have enough to last us. We would maybe be able to stretch it if the wind ceased in the next hour and if the men were strong enough to row for hundreds of leagues.” Ronan told him. If Ronan had been right about it only getting worse, he didn’t know how they would live through the coming days, but something told him that there would be something or someone that was going to watch over their journey and get them back alive.

## Part II: The First Trial

*Cormac and Ronan, Somewhere in the Northern Ocean*

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.  
—2 Timothy 4:7*

Cormac woke to a dim morning light. There was a freezing mist in the air as he sat up and peered out into the fog. Wrapping his cloak tighter, he stood up and stretched his aching limbs. It had been three days since the storm had hit and taken Eanna's life. With the morning of the Sabbath and communion came the first signs of fever. Since then, three of the men had fallen ill and now burned with fever while two others showed early signs of it. Water would have provided them with the necessary relief, but the barrels had long since frozen solid.

“Guide me Lord, my men are ill, we are cold, and we are thirsty.” At this, Cormac licked his shriveled, brine-encrusted lips, trying to moisten them enough so they wouldn't burn. Ice floated around the Curragh as the wind continued to blow them northward. “Let your will be done,” Cormac finished.

He raised his head at a noise. It was faint, but it was there. Cormac heard a woman's voice calling out for help from somewhere in the ice and fog. He squinted into the dim light trying to make out a shape up ahead. The boat neared the ice block where a woman sat stranded, as it did, the wind began to die down. *Alas! My Lord has sent an angel to guide us home and has slowed the wind so that we may row against it!* He thought. The Curragh seemed to come to a stop in front of the girl.

“My lady! What are you doing so far north in the middle of the ocean? Is there a ship or an unfortunate boat nearby? Pray, tell me, what is your name?” Cormac stared at the woman in front of him as he said this. She was beautiful, a golden haze surrounded her as she spoke.

“Cormac,” the woman spoke his name with tenderness, how she knew it, Cormac did not know, and he did not get a chance to ask before she continued, “Our Father has sent me to warn you of the grave dangers that are ahead. You will be tested, and your crew will doubt, but you must guide their faith and encourage them to be strong through all of the horrifying trials to come. I cannot speak of what you will encounter, but know that there will be four; and some will be tempting, while others will be terrifying. The Lord has heard your prayers Cormac, now go and lead your brothers in this journey of faith.” Cormac looked back at his men; they were all sleeping, but fretfully. Some were alarmingly still while others shivered from the cold as it sunk deep into their bones. Cormac opened his mouth to ask what to say to his men about how long they must endure the cold and evils to come, but when he looked back, the woman was gone.

Cormac went to the edge of the boat to look into the waters and think about what the spirit had said. What would he tell his men? They were all selected to accompany him on this voyage for their faith, but would it hold if the troubles that they encountered were really as bad as the woman had implied? Would his?

As he stared into the water, he saw his reflection. He looked older, worn and wary. His lips were cracked and crusted with frozen blood. Frost lay in patches throughout his hair, and his eyes had sunk deep into his pale face. What could be worse than the hunger, thirst and cold that they had

already endured? What could be worse than losing Eanna to the torrential storm that had carried them so far north? Cormac asked himself these things in silence, contemplating the next several days. It was then that he noticed it. The sky had changed. In the minutes since he had seen the spirit, the clear sky had clouded over with a sickly green hue. The wind had stilled entirely so that sea was a black mirror save for the occasional ripple from the boat. A noise echoed from out of the deep waters below them. A noise that struck Cormac's heart with fear and anticipation.

...



March 5<sup>th</sup>, 580

*I heard it. Just now, the noise. It came from underneath the boat. The creature from the storm's call has echoed in the deep water surrounding us and has shook the Curragh. Cormac is silent by the edge. I told him about the noise from the storm, but I have not heard it again since; until now that is. It appears that either he did not hear the noise, or he is unaffected by the foreboding sound that chills my bones even more than the growing cold of the air around us, if that is possible.*

*Today marks the third day since the storm ended and Eanna's soul was lost into the sea. I have mourned the boy and have resumed my duties after a day of rest on the Sabbath. I worry for Cormac though. He has been affected, more so than I expected. His cheeks are flushed now that I look closer. He may be catching the fever that has spread throughout the boat. He has been murmuring his prayers more to himself lately.*

*Cormac has seen that I am awake, he beckons me. The wind has stilled, perhaps today would be an opportunity for rowing if the ice is not too dense. We must make our way south before the boat is frozen to the ice and our men to the boat. I will report today's progress later on.*

—Ronan O'Harral

...

The sound echoed in Cormac's ears for a few moments. He thought that it must have been the noise that Ronan heard in the storm. He beckoned Ronan when he noticed that the sailor was stirring. He wanted to share the news from the spirit with him to discuss how they should relay it to the men. Ronan carefully crossed the Curragh to him as Cormac continued to stare into the black surface of the ocean. The noise had created small ripples that spread out and disappeared under the nearest sheets of ice.

"Did you hear it, Cormac?" Ronan had reached him and was staring into the water as Cormac was. Like the monk, he was wary, but he had retained the most strength out of anyone on the boat. His concerned eyes probed Cormac's and glanced over his cheeks.

"Yes," Cormac stated, "but first I must speak with you. I have had a vision sent from our Father and we must decide to tell the men." Cormac then told Ronan about the woman and the four evils that they would encounter. When he had finished, Ronan stared into the water in contemplation.

"What are we to do when we encounter these... terrors, Cormac? Just allow them to torment us and kill the others?" Ronan's frosted eyebrows furrowed as he concentrated harder on the water. The ripples had died and the surface was a glossy black mirror again.

Cormac thought on his response for a good time. What were they to do? They were being tested on their faith, and some would fail. How would their faith save them from these horrible trials

that they were to encounter? Cormac saw it then. A flash of something that swam under the boat as they stared in. He felt Ronan stiffen beside him.

“We pray, and we wait.” Cormac replied. And the noise sounded again from under their boat.

...

Cormac instructed Ronan to gather the men into the center of the Curragh. They were awake now. Save for one who had passed away from the fever in the night. It was Tirechan, the renowned writer who had accompanied their voyage to record the happenings of the pilgrimage. Cormac lead the crew in a quick farewell prayer as they gathered, violently shaking from a combination of the freezing air and the sheer terror of the sound.

“It is a test of faith, do not cower and do not fight. Trust in our Lord that He will protect you. If all of your faith is in Him, no harm will come to you.” Cormac looked into the fearful eyes of the men around him. He could tell that his words had not registered with some, and others closed their eyes as if it would block out the sound that came from just under the water. Many sat with their hands together, praying while they waited for their fate. Cormac relaxed his shoulders and looked directly at the surface of the water on the west side of the boat. The air around them had become a lethal silence as the men held their breath in waiting. Then he heard it. It was quiet, but in the silence, Cormac could hear something disrupt the surface of the water as it emerged.

The crew whimpered as something touched the boat and began to climb aboard stealthily. It was behind Cormac, but he didn't turn. His faith was too powerful to allow fear to make him look at the creature that was his doom. The men caught their breath as they saw it. An immense terror

filled the eyes of all those around him. The thing moved closer, to the left, and one of the boys, Colum, cried out in fear. Cormac heard the creature's head whip towards the boy as Colum scrambled backwards trying to put distance between him and the creature. A spear-like limb whipped around to catch Colum. Everyone was still as, gurgling for air, but still alive, the boy was lifted over the group and gutted. His body fell into the center, empty eyes seeming to stare accusingly into Cormac's soul. The creature picked him up and dove back into the freezing water with the boy's body.

"Do not look at it, your fear feeds it. Faith in the Lord will save you. Pray with me!" Cormac exclaimed to the crew as they began to cry out in terror. And look for something to fight the sea monster with. "Do not fight it! Use your faith in God my Brethren! He will deliver us!" The men continued to scramble for something to fight with. Ronan looked at Cormac with incredulity as he dropped the kitchen knife he had scavenged.

"Cormac, it *killed* Colum. It will not spare us because we are praying. It is a creature from the depths of hell, here to torment us in a time of weakness! We must fight!" Cormac stared into the eyes of Ronan. He was losing his faith.

"No!" Cormac exclaimed, standing. Everyone went silent and stared at him. "I have had a vision from a messenger of the Lord. We must fight this creature with faith, nothing else. It is the only option." They heard something reach the surface suddenly. Cormac turned. It was Colum's body, or what was left of it. His limbs had been torn from his body and his heart had been burrowed out of his chest. His skull was crushed and deformed, but his eyes, his sightless eyes still stared

into Colum's soul. "Pray with me!" Everyone reluctantly dropped their weapons, frozen with terror.

"Our Father," Cormac began. The surface rippled as something approached it. "Who art in Heaven," the beast emerged from the water. Its body stretched over head, dripping with water and the remnants of Colum's blood. "Hallowed be thy name," the men cried out and cowered as it climbed onto the boat. Its mouth was lined with lengthy sharp teeth that would shear straight through anything it came in contact with. "Thy Kingdome come," the serpent rose up, revealing the ice covered scales that gleamed with evil. Its eyes looked directly into Cormac's as its tail lashed out and wrapped itself around Kevin. Cormac heard him cry out as spine-covered tentacles spurted from hidden holes in the creature's tail and into the orifices of his body. "Thy will be done," He heard the other men cry out as Kevin twitched and grew lifeless. They yelled for him to stop and picked up their swords. "Have faith that He will end this! Join me!" Cormac called. Thunder boomed overhead. They joined him, "on earth as it is in heaven." The creature screeched. Out of the water it was shrill and angered as Cormac continued with the crew. "Give us this day our daily bread," It brought the body of Kevin in front of Cormac so that he stared into the gouged eyes as he continued, "and forgive us of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The serpent threw Kevin into the sea and slithered closer to Cormac. "And lead us not unto temptation," the creature's tail rose above the monks and sailors as they prayed. "But deliver us from evil," its tail began to descend among the men who began to cower. "For Thine is the Kingdom," it wrapped itself around Cormac. "And the Power," the beast's grip tightened around him. "And the Glory forever," he could feel his bones cracking as the serpent's

tail coiled too tightly and lifted Cormac to his head. Cormac saw the malice in its eyes as he whispered the end of the prayer.

“Amen.”

...

March 6<sup>th</sup>, 580

*I saw it. We all did. A serpent twenty feet long rose from under the boat. It was the source of the noise I had heard in the storm and again this morning before it attacked. The thing slithered aboard and flicked its eyes between each of us. Those piercing black beads tore at my soul, I could almost feel it. I believe that it was too much for Colum, he could not endure the malicious gaze of the beast. His cry broke the silence in the air, deciding the serpent's first victim for him. The beast speared him through the chest, a fatal injury that kept him alive in an agonizing manner. Colum gurgled, still alive as the serpent threw him down in the middle of the circle that we had created. He stared at Cormac, begging for aid. I could not take my eyes off of the dying figure in front of me. It no longer resembled the boy that lost his dinner before the coming storm a few days before. It was crumpled and bloody, cowering under the pain that he endured. I believe, though no one else saw it, but I believe that as the serpent wrapped its jaws around his body, I saw him mouth "Help Me". I shudder now thinking of it. Then the creature picked up its prey and dove back into the ocean with the body of the boy who had once been my apprentice.*

*When the watered had stilled, the men and I burst into action finding anything that we may use as a weapon. I discovered a long knife used for gutting large fish should we come across one. I held it in my hand and began to take up a battle position that I remembered from sword fights with my brother as a child. He had always told me to keep my shoulders back, knees bent, and chin high. Before I could, Cormac yelled for peace, asking us to drop our weapons. I tried to reason with him, reminding him of the tortured body that had lain in front of us mere moments before. But I saw it then, and still see it now: the fever has begun to take hold in Cormac. He was acting without his wits, but we lay down our weapons at his command.*

*It was then that we heard what was left of Colum's body rise to the surface. His heart was missing, and in its place was a gaping hole with ice already forming on the torn skin, freezing the blood before it flowed out of his lifeless body. Cormac told us to pray, so we did. As soon as we began the Lord's Prayer, the serpent rose from the water and slithered in front of Cormac. I cannot bear to think of what happened next. Its tail whipped around the men, tentacles spurting from it and caressing each sailor until they buried themselves into the eyes, nose, ears and mouth of Kevin, my first mate. My cry was drowned out by his scream before that too was cut off. His body was instantly lifeless.*

*Cormac was next. The sea serpent wrapped its body around him, bringing him to its mouth as Cormac recited the end of the Lord's Prayer. I picked up the gutting knife from where I had laid it down and struck at the underbelly of the beast. Black blood surged from it as it shrieked and fell back into the water, his grip loosening on Cormac so that he fell back into the boat.*

*Cormac hit his head on a plank and has not woken from the injury yet. When he does, we will hold a vigil for those who died: Colum and Kevin from the sea monster, and Tirechan from the cold. But for now, the crew must sleep. I have appointed Senan to watch over his friend to make sure the fever hasn't progressed and to watch the water for more beasts. As for me, I will prepare a meal of a half leaf of Kale and a scoop of oats for each of the remaining men. This is more than we should be able to afford, but we have the rations of three men now, and the crew's strength and morale is low. After tonight, we will only have a few wafers for Sabbath and five strips of seaweed to spread throughout the remaining eight men; what will happen after that, I fear to think of.*



*The gurgled moan and cry for help of Colum and the agonizing screams of Kevin will haunt my dreams tonight. May God have mercy on their souls if He will not have it on our bodies.*

*—Ronan O'Harral*



Figure 1. The Serpent.

### **Part III: The Second Trial**

*Cormac and Ronan, Somewhere in the Northern Ocean*

*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.*  
—Hebrews 2:18

Cormac slept through the next day and night without waking up. He had hit his head too hard on the edge of the benches, rendering him unconscious. In the last hours of sleep, the woman had reappeared in a dream. She was concerned for him, but carried an urgent message as well.

“He has sent me to warn you, Cormac.” She looked at the water and at the rising light in the gray sky. She had not seemed this hurried before. “Do not eat or drink from this sea. It is tainted by Lucifer as Eve’s apple was. Do not allow your men to do this. They will doubt you, but you must hold your faith and not allow temptation to overcome you. Remember this, Cormac.” She began to fade again as he stirred.

“Wait! What are we to eat? Before the attack we were nearly out of food!” Cormac frantically tried to reach out to her through the fog that had settled around the boat.

“Keep your faith, Cormac. Wake up and lead the others. Keep your faith.” The voice faded as Cormac’s eyes opened to a weary Ainmire.

“What day is it, Brother?” Cormac asked the monk as he attempted to sit up. He was sweating and chilled all at once. His head felt foggy and he strained his eyes to look at the crew. They

were shivering under what little furs they had brought with them. Ronan was melting a block of ice with a few pieces from a strip of seaweed.

“It is the ninth of March, Brother. Our twelfth day at sea.” Ainmire dabbed a damp cloth that had once been warm, but was beginning to freeze over, on Cormac’s forehead. “You have been asleep for a day and two nights.”

Cormac stared at him in amazement. So much time had passed. “Have we...lost anyone else?”  
Cormac looked around the boat again, trying to count bodies.

“Senan. He had shown signs of illness on the Sabbath. He took his last breath last night.”  
Ainmire’s eyes lowered as he relayed the news. Senan had been in line to become an abbot. He was a highly respected monk. Cormac felt the anguish and grief tear through his body. How had he let this happen? How had *He* let this happen? He remembered the words of the spirit and closed his eyes.

Ronan came up then. “Cormac, we have lost four more men from the crew. Are you able to lead us in a service to send their souls to the Lord?” He looked at Cormac expectantly and reluctantly. Cormac agreed and was assisted to a bench in the shelter at the middle of the boat by Ronan and Ainmire. The crew gathered around him, solemnly bowed their heads in prayer.

Cormac began to recite the Office of Prayer for the second time in the last week. Too many had died. How were they expected to continue without food? What were they to use for broth or food?

“It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” Cormac finished the final hour compline by mid-day. He thought again of what the spirit had told him, and added a verse from the book of Psalms: “Your God has commanded your strength – your might in His service and impenetrable hardness to temptation; O God, display Your might and strengthen what You have wrought for us!” Cormac raised his head to the worn, dirty, and shivering faces that were gathered around him. “Amen.” They were starving, he could tell. They needed food, food which would not come unless they travelled south again.

They all looked up at a sound in the water. Ronan grabbed for a blood-crusted knife that lay near the small fire he had managed to build and went to the south end of the Curragh. Many of the men followed, and peered into the water. No one made a sound as they searched for what they assumed was the sea serpent. Another noise filled the still air,

“A fish!” Ronan yelled as he scrambled down to the other end of the boat to get a net from the storage area. Another fish flopped on the water, and then another. A whole slew of them splashed through the surface of the water surrounding the boat as Ronan brought the net back to the end of the Curragh and threw part of it into the water. Almost as soon as he put the net in the water, he had to pull it back into the boat, for it had already been filled with a dozen or so

flopping fish. Ronan brought the fish over to a pot as the last of the school swam by and pulled out a knife to fillet the fish for a stew. Cormac's hunger from not eating the past two days was great, but he knew that this is what the spirit had come to warn him of. Lucifer had sent these fish to tempt them.

Cormac quickly crawled across the benches and grabbed the pale of fish as Ronan cleaned his knife. He hauled it to the edge and tipped it, allowing all the fish to dive back into the sea to join their school. He watched with tears in his eyes as a potential meal escaped under the boat, but he had been warned about eating and drinking from the sea, and he had to hold his faith in the darkest of times.

...

March 7<sup>th</sup>, 580

*Cormac woke this morning. I asked him to lead us in a farewell prayer for Tirechan, Colum, Kevin, and Senan. Senan had caught the fever and it had grown to its worst yesterday. He is the first to be lost to the illness, but I suspect that more will closely follow unless we get some real water and food to nurse them with.*

*We heard a noise today that struck fear into all of our hearts until we discovered what it was, then it only brought joy. We heard a splash in the water at the south end of the boat. I grabbed the gutting knife and brought it to the edge to look into the depths, ready for the serpent to emerge to meet its demise. Then it happened again, the splash, but it was not the sea beast, it was a fish! I couldn't believe it, but it was! I went to retrieve the net and came back to dozens of them diving through the water. I didn't think that it was possible for there to be fish this far north, but here they were, in the last hour. Cormac had just prayed for strength and aid with their hunger, and here it was! It was truly a miracle! Almost as soon as I put the net into the water, I had to pull it back out, for it was already full with fish. I carried them to a pale and emptied them into it to keep them contained while I cleaned the knife to begin cutting the fish for a stew. It was then, while my back was turned, that Cormac showed how much the fever had affected him. He stole the pale of fish—our only source of food save for the few seaweed strips I had left—and he threw them back into the water! I could see what had come over him when he turned though. His eyes had become glassy and his cheeks flushed. The fever is altering his rationality. We must now conserve what little we have left. Perhaps now that he has thrown aside our only hope of food, Cormac will let us ration the wafers meant for Sabbath.*

*He must. We continue to starve and freeze from the cold. The men freeze in their sleep, the only way to stay mildly warm is to perform the duties and tasks that come with the boat. The*

*wind has not picked up in two days, perhaps we will try to row after high noon. The south is blocked by Ice, so we must row east, but we will find a southern passage eventually.*

*—Ronan O'Harral*



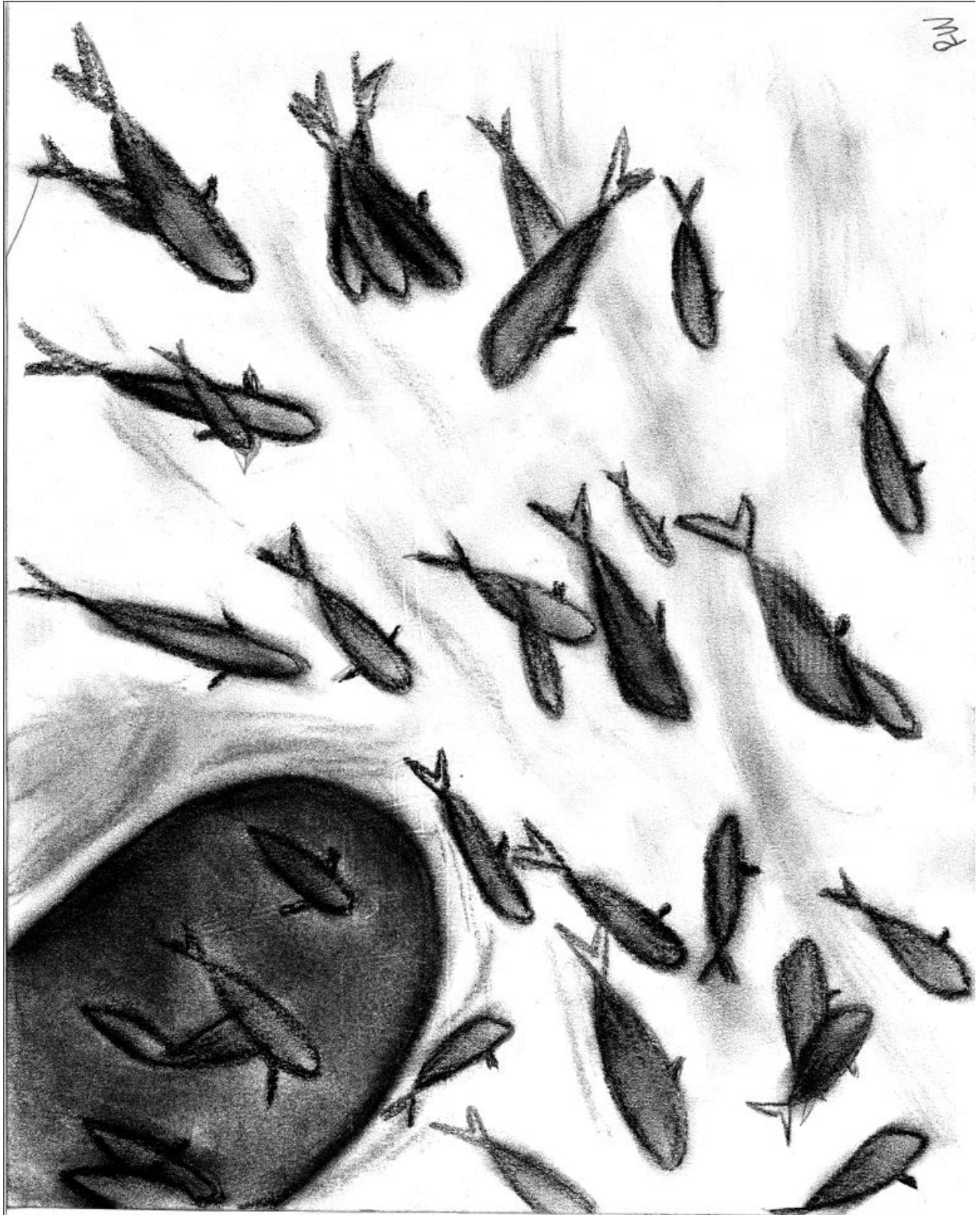


Figure 2. A Thousand Fish

## **Part IV: The Third Trial**

*Cormac and Ronan, Somewhere in the Northern Ocean*

*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

*—John 6:53-54*

Cormac looked into the shadowy water as dusk fell. The looks of despair and pain on the men's faces after he threw the tainted fish overboard that morning haunted his mind as he prayed for guidance. He had turned to the Bible, pouring through it in hopes that he would find clarity in what to tell his men. He found grim solace in Psalm 22. He raised his eyes to the sky and began to quietly recite pieces of the words that he had learned, but never needed. Tears flowed down his cheeks as he whispered, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest."

He dropped his head as he continued, "do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help."

Anger and helplessness swelled in his throat as he croaked out "my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death." His body shook as he suppressed a cry.

"All my bones are on display; you are my strength; come quickly to help me." He wept then. He wept for his men. For Eanna and Senan and the others who had passed; for the ones, like Ronan,

who still lived, but barely; for the empty stomachs that wailed for more like a babe stolen from his mother's breast. He had listened to Him. He had kept the faith and discarded the fish. He had emaciated sin and his men all in the same swift motion as he tossed their only hope of food overboard. Cormac had done this for God. He had obeyed and resisted temptation, but now his men were weak and trembled in the frigid air of these desolate waters.

"Tell me." His words were barely heard as he raised his eyes back to the stars.

"Show me." He closed his eyes and opened them to the reflection of the water. *She* was there. The angel, God's messenger. She faintly smiled up at him as a tear disrupted the water's surface. "Be not afraid, dear Cormac. He is with you. He hears you. Arise, now, and eat, else the journey will be too great for you." She stared at him as he looked at her in familiar wonder. Cormac watched her lips move as her voice echoed in his mind, "Look to the scripture. Look, Cormac, and you will see His will."

He turned to the book that had given guidance in his most helpless times and found nothing that helped him find God's will. Cormac stood in the dusk and stepped into the center of the boat. Ripples fled from the *Curragh's* sides at the shift in movement and unbalancing in the weight of the boat and the air.

"Friends, brothers, we are starving. We are weak. We are dying. We must survive." Cormac emphasized the last three words as he looked at the mix of helpless and hopeful faces around him. Some looked towards him expectantly while others looked away in defiance, the possibility

of the meal their leader had thrown over lingered in their minds. His eyes wandered to an icy corner of the boat where frost obscured the white and gray faces of the men that had passed from the sickness or that had stopped moving in the unbearable, freezing nights. His throat swelled, constricting his airway as a tears brimmed and poured out of his eyes silently, freezing on his cheeks in perpetual sorrow.

“We must take communion. We must ask for His guidance.” Cormac’s eyes moved between each of the men as they agreed, finally resting on Ronan.

“And how, O’ Brother Cormac, do you propose we do this? We’ve no food. We’ve no unleavened bread since the vigil for Eanna. How do we partake of the body of Christ if there is nothing to partake from?” Ronan’s eyes challenged Cormac as he spat out the reminders. The men looked between the captain and the monk expectantly. Waiting for Cormac’s answer or Ronan’s demand.

“We have what we need. We will take the Eucharist and be enlightened. We will take from the body and blood of Christ and He will give us strength to continue.” Cormac’s sallow, tired, and frost-bitten face fell as he realized what he must do. He was weak from the trials they had faced and wanted nothing more than to give his men the food that they were picturing at that moment: warm, seasoned potato and lamb stew with a steaming heel of bread to sop up the left over juices. He looked over their mixed faces of excitement, expectation, and skepticism before landing on one of absence and loss. He felt Ronan followed his gaze to where they had rested: the mound of snow that covered unmoving bodies in the corner of the *Curragh*, obscuring the

remnants and memories of their fallen comrades and brothers. Cormac met Ronan's eyes as realization crept over the captain's face. His head slowly rocked back and forth.

"Cormac." Ronan whispered, dismayed. The men looked at Ronan and then at Cormac, who had stepped towards the makeshift cemetery. He stopped and looked at Ronan before turning to the rest of the crew.

"Brothers." He acknowledged each of them as they stared with confusion. "God has spoken. We *must* take communion to make it through the night and what is to come." He concealed his hands as they trembled. "When Jesus ate with his disciples, he broke his body and gave them his flesh, saying 'take, eat, and do this in remembrance of me.'" His stomach flipped as the implications of his words donned on some of the faces. "We are all one under Him. We must keep the strength to continue in this journey. We must remember ourselves, the Savior, and our brothers." He looked away from them. Staring at the clear sky, he commanded Ronan and Ainmire to prepare the Passover.

"With what, Cormac?" Ronan's voice quivered as he challenged Cormac, refusing to believe the implication of the monk's will. "Say it. With what will we take communion?"

"With the body of Christ, it is God's will." Cormac let tears fall and freeze on his face. He felt blood rush to his cheeks in shame as he thought of what he was suggesting.

“And where is that body?” The silence roared in Cormac’s ears as the men looked at him, fearing the truth.

Raising his head, he met their eyes and replied, “Ronan – our men are starved. We have fasted and now is the time to take communion; to experience the Eucharist and find enlightenment. We must break the body of Christ as our Lord commands it.” He stepped again towards the mound of snow and knelt to the gray and frosted face of Senan. Placing his hands on the monk’s frozen cheeks, he recited the liturgy to bless the Eucharist.

"Let us stand well. Let us stand in awe. Let us be attentive, that we may present the holy offering in peace."

His invocation was meant with a screaming, horrific silence. He waited for their response; they knew what to say. Seconds turned into minutes as Cormac looked into the icy eyes of Senan. He thought back to the storm, to Eanna, the serpent, the fish, the conversation with the messenger: everything they had been through needed to be absolved from their minds. They needed the Spirit, the Eucharist.

“A Mercy of Peace, a sacrifice of praise,” Cormac raised his head at the soft sound of Ainmire’s voice as he responded.

Cormac weakly nodded, continuing: “The grace of our LORD Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

Others reluctantly joined in as the dialogue continued, “And with thy spirit.”

Cormac turned to the shivering, group of men. He raised his hand and commanded, “Let us lift up our hearts.”

Their voices were firmer, submitting to their need for food, strength, and spiritual guidance as they said, “we lift them up unto the LORD.”

Cormac turned to look at Ronan. The captain stared in horror at him. Cormac turned to the mound of limbs and ice.

“Let us give thanks to the LORD.”

He could hear the shutter that ran through the men as they said the final words. Ronan’s voice was barely heard as he whispered the same line.

“It is proper and right.”

...

March 8<sup>th</sup>, 580

*It is dusk now. I fear that the fever has taken a turn for the worse in Cormac.*

*He—he asked us to take communion for clarity. We ran out of unleavened bread after Eanna's death. What he suggested... I cannot even begin to—what have I done, Lord? He led us in preparing the table, in reciting the holy sacrament and prayers of the Eucharist. To allow myself and my men to be influenced by a madman? I should have called out the beaded sweat on his face when he turned to deliver "God's will" to us. What he wanted... it was—is—barbaric. Ainmire helped him pass out "the Eucharist" among the men. I can't get the image of Cormac and the others huddled at the edges of the boat...gnawing...shivering. I cannot write of this. I hope that this is never known to anyone but God and these men, and that God will forgive us for falling to Cormac's lapse in rational and for defiling... I cannot.*

*When will this voyage end? I would rather freeze to death than be subject to Cormac's delusions. Of course, if I froze, I would be like Senan.*

*This frozen hell has made monsters of us all. I pray that it will end soon.*

—Ronan O'Harral





Figure 3. The Eucharist.

## Part V: The Fourth Trial

*Cormac and Ronan, Somewhere in the Northern Ocean*

*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*  
—Isaiah 41:10

...

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 580

*We have been rowing for a few hours now and have made some headway. I think that I can see a break in the ice to the south several miles from here. We should reach it in a few hours.*

*Cormac has gotten worse. His fever has peaked above those of all the others that are aboard the ship. His eyes have a sickly glaze and his face is sallow. He murmurs about a woman as if he has spoken to one in the recent past, which is not possible in the barren, frozen wasteland that we are imprisoned in. I worry for him.*

*I have inventoried the food that we have left. We only have two strips of seaweed, a small handful of oats, and a few of dried and frozen berries that I managed to find strewn across the bottom of the Curragh from wasteful eating. Even with the berries though, there is not enough for all eight of us to make it home. There is maybe enough for two full days, which will only get us out of the glaciers and ice sheets, if that. Alas, if only Cormac hadn't thrown away those fish! We would be able to make it home and have more than enough strength to row with five missing. I will admit that, while our bodies are stronger since the... meat we consumed earlier tonight, our spirits are all the weaker. To do what we had done, to think of how we could have avoided the "communion" if Cormac's sickness hadn't made him throw the fish over and commit the unthinkable... But now we only row a few miles at a time for, though it warms our bodies, they are too weak from dehydration and lack of food. We will see how the night goes and whether or*

*not the south will be surmountable by morning. I fear for Cormac this night, he is worse off than Senan was when he passed. I do not believe that he will make it through—something just hit the boat.*

*—Ronan O'Harral*

...

Cormac woke to the Curragh lurching. He sat up and looked around at the other men. They had taken a break for dinner and had begun to fall asleep when it had started. Something was hitting the side of the boat at an increasing frequency. The men cried out in terror, thinking that surely the serpent was back, as Ronan went to peer over the edge. The boat lurched again. Cormac's hand flashed out to catch Ronan before he fell into the icy water.

“Thank you,” Ronan smiled softly at Cormac. “Oars up! To the center of the boat! Quickly!” Ronan called to the rest of the crew. Once the oars were up, the men gathered into the center of the boat and sat down, some lashing themselves to the benches in preparation for what was to come. “Alright,” Ronan looked into the eyes of each man as he said, “we have been battered by a gale, tossed by a storm, diminished by a beast, and weakened by hunger.” Cormac caught the glances that shot his way when Ronan mentioned hunger. They hadn't understood that God's will was for us to eat nothing that came out of this sea. The temptation had already taken them, their faith was already failing. Ronan continued, “now, men, we are faced with an even greater evil on the cusp of escaping from this frozen realm. A creature has attacked the side of our boat, we must row through the night to escape and travel down the southern passage. Now is the time to muster your strength for the deed ahead, now is the time to gather your warmth for the cold of the night, now is the time to build your courage for horrors to come. We are men of God, we will make it through the night, as we have made it through the last eleven days. Let us take up the oars and row!” The crew took up cries of courage and determination as Ronan finished his captain's speech. Everyone took up their benches and simultaneously dipped the oar into the gray water. Then the rhythm of rowing began as they travelled through the icy sea toward the passage that would take them home.

...

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 580

*It is just past midnight, we have been rowing for a few hours and have not yet been attacked by the creature again. I caught a glimpse of it earlier before I almost fell in. It is unlike any creature I have ever seen before. It is shaped like an insect, but has a tail the length of a grown man's arm span. It haunts my thoughts in the cold, quiet night.*

*The water around us has taken up a luminescent hue. It shines in patches as we float by. Sometimes I think that I see a piece of luminescence break off and come towards us before turning to join another patch. The other men are entranced by the glowing water as well; it is the only piece of beauty and wonder in this frozen hell.*

*I am going to give each man an extra piece of a wafer tonight for strength and comfort. We shall see where our numbers and strengths are in the morning. For now, we will continue to row.*

—Ronan O'Harral

...

Cormac stared out at the luminescence that covered the surface of the water around them. It was so beautiful and entrancing, but something made Cormac uneasy and dutiful to prayer. He had been praying ever since the fish were lost earlier that day. He could see bits of the luminescence break off from one another and go to other patches as if they were messengers. It was beautifully eerie.

Ronan wrote in a travel journal in the corner as Cormac stood to stretch his cramped body. The captain glanced up at him warily before returning to his work. The Curragh was headed for a patch of the luminescent sea. The men sat up in excitement, preparing themselves to touch the light in the water. As they passed, Cormac stared at the water closely. It seemed to part for them as they floated by. Then he heard it. Something scratched along the bottom of the boat, faint but distinct. One of the men went to the edge to put his hand in before Cormac grabbed his cloak and hastily pulled him back into the boat, making the sailor thud on the bottom. Everyone paused and stared at Cormac as if he had broken. There was pity, outrage, and fear in their eyes as they looked from the sailor to the monk. Ronan stood up to say something when the creature returned.

It attacked the side of the boat so violently that they thought it would break through the leather hides of the Curragh. Ronan's eyes travelled out across the water to the distant luminescent patches that they had passed. He was dismayed at whatever he had seen, and as Cormac looked too, he understood why. The water was in turmoil as the luminescence seemed to rapidly swim towards them. Some grotesque creature had climbed onto the floating ice so that it was visible to the men. It looked like an arachnid with webbing between its legs and a lengthy tail with barbs

on the end. It settled into a crouch, which was enough for Cormac and the crew to see the glowing shell on its back.

“Oh, God. It’s...it’s...they’re everywhere. The light, it’s that *thing*. There are *hundreds* of them!” Ronan’s voice broke the stunned silence. It was then that the crew realized they were in the center of a patch of these arachnids. “Row!” Ronan shouted to the men. The crouching spider launched itself from the ice and towards the boat, legs extended and tail spines pointed at Cormac. Ronan quickly slashed through the arachnid’s body with his knife. Black blood steamed as it hit the frozen floor of the boat. Immediately the crew frantically and reluctantly returned to their rowing benches, closer to the water than any of them cared to be. In unison the men started the backwards-forwards motion that would deliver them to the passage they were nearing up ahead. The Curragh lurched forward as they spent the last of their strength to get out of the danger, but it was no use. The creatures latched onto the oars as they dipped into the water. Cormac was frozen not from the cold, but from fear as they began to climb up the long oars towards the men. Their tails whipped around and stung men in the shoulders, back and neck. Screams tore the air as the pain ripped through their bodies. Cormac stared in horror and pity as the men dropped the oars to slide into the grey sea and held the welts that had formed on their wounds. From somewhere behind him, what felt like a hundred spines drove through Cormac’s hands before a hot pain coursed through his body. The men stared in awe at him, falling to their knees and ignoring the monsters that had left burning welts on their bodies. Cormac looked to Ainmire as one of his feet was pierced by the creature, and then to Ronan. The captain looked at the monk in awe, tears falling from his eyes as he mouthed *forgive me*.

It felt like the flames of Hell licked at Cormac's wounds, burning them until darkness fell over his eyes.

...

What seemed like hours passed by as the men whimpered in their places on the Curragh. The luminescence had faded, which either meant that the arachnids had gone, or waited for their next opportunity. Cormac stood and looked at the men. They cowered into themselves, rocking or shivering from the pain that racked their bodies still. Cormac could feel Hell-flames course through his veins as the poison continued to spread. Ronan sat attending to Ainmire in the corner, ignoring his own welt on his ribs. Cormac looked to the southern end of the boat and gasped. They idled in front of an ice canyon that seemed to head directly south. Cormac caught Ronan's gaze and directed it towards the opening. Ronan's body slumped in relief and fatigue. They were going home.

As if they had felt his relief, something struck the side of the boat again, harder than before. This caused a fresh round of hysterics from the men. Tears slid silently down Cormac's cheeks. He was wary and in pain from the stings. Again, the boat shuddered from a blow to its side. Men began to recite the Lord's Prayer as other called out for loved ones that they would never see again, or for God to save them. Cormac dropped to his knees and began to pray.

"Hear our cries and our prayers. Save us or take us in our time of need, Father. Let your will be done, and our faith be strong." Arachnids began to rapidly hit the sides of the boat; each one causing a fresh round of hysterics from the men. Cormac began to recite the Lord's Prayer as the



boat rocked from side to side. Each time getting closer and closer to the water's surface and the creatures' mercy. Cormac finished his prayer with "Amen," but that single word felt like it had the strength of a hundred monks behind it.

Then the wind started.

...



*Figure 4. The Crucifixion.*

## Epilogue

*Columba, the Abbott of Hy, Iona Island*

*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

— *1 Thessalonians 4:13*

Columba let a tear fall onto his dark robes as the funeral prayers were spoken. His friend had come home to him all those years ago, bringing with him a tale of unspeakable horrors. They were not to be discussed again once he had recounted the events, but alas they must. Cormac had died the night before, scarred and perpetually weary from the voyage. The last moments of the monk's life were engraved in Columba's thought; He held his hand as took his last gasps.

Columba sat with him as he claimed that he saw her again: the angel that had brought him God's word and guided him in his faith. The light left his eyes as his soul went to the Lord.

Now, Columba prayed with his brethren. None of the original crew had come to the preparations. They had not spoken to Cormac since the ship beached on the northern end of the island, no one would. Ainmire had reportedly died of the creatures' stings that he had seen in his vision and all of the other men were members of a man named Ronan's crew. The captain had stayed near the boat until help had come, but then he left without looking at or speaking to Cormac. When Columba had arrived, the crew—or what was left of them—sat huddled on the beach, far away from the Curragh. He remembered the boat well, when he had gone to inspect the boat, Columba had shuddered. The floor was covered in filth and bodily fluids. Blood smeared the walls and bottom, a corner (the one closest to him) reeked from the excrement and urine that lay under the closest bench. A thawing heap with rusty streaks lay in the far corner, but he thought that he saw bones peeking out of the side of the mound.

Cormac's death warranted the discussion of veneration, beatification, and canonization, he had become the Abbot of Durrow. The congregation will meet the next day to vote, but there have already been whispers. In the corners of the abbey that are silenced when Columba walks by. The disease that overtook him on the voyage, and the events that followed, were too much for some members of the Congregation to look past. Columba could hear two of the younger men who were training to join the monastery behind him as they discussed Cormac's possible canonization.

"What do you think will come of tomorrow's assembly?" One of them asked as the congregation broke from prayers for rest and self-contemplation.

"The old man was delusional. You've heard the stories—he was sick, insane. What they say he admitted to... no saint would do that. No servant of God. His perverse use of faith scarred his men for life if they have not already met the Lord."

Columba bowed his head in silent prayer as he contemplated the accusations. He knew that the miracles Cormac had performed or incited were of Godly intentions, but there were many who doubted. He had questioned it, too, when Cormac had told him of the different trials that God had put him through. But Columba saw the belief in Cormac's eyes and the grief that wracked him when he recounted the story of throwing away the fish and the need for guidance through the Eucharist. The pain was sincere, Cormac had performed miracles of great faith to bring his crew back from the horrors that had encountered. He would make a case for Cormac's

canonization, but whether or not the Congregation would accept it was unknown even to Columba.

...

## **A Note from the Author**

*We know from history that Cormac was canonized and given the Feastday of September 14<sup>th</sup>, however in medieval times, there was a constant struggle of doubt versus belief—sanctity versus insanity—that plagued the canonization of monks. Many people came forward claiming to have performed miracles and to have received beatific visions from God, however there was no true way to know whether or not these acts were actually worthy of sainthood, or if they were insane delusions or hallucinations that those around them claimed to be true. As the author, I give no resolution to the story. I leave it open for you to interpret as a reader. I have attempted to immerse you into this struggle by giving you two accounts of a horrific voyage. Whether or not Cormac was actually worthy of his title can never be proved, so it is up to you to decide: is he a saint that believed in his faith and in God to carry his crew to safety no matter the consequences? Or is he a delusional old man who hallucinates a woman and uses it as an excuse to perform the unthinkable? If you were a member of the voting Congregation, would you vote to canonize him? Which do you believe?*

## CHAPTER III

### CRITICAL APARATUS

#### **Voyage Literature**

Voyage Literature has been around for thousands of years, dating back to stories as early as Homer's *The Odyssey* and stretching through time to Melville's *Moby Dick* and Martel's modern *Life of Pi*. I found that each of these works of literature have common threads that make it appealing and immersive to the reader. Through my study of over sixty scholarly and creative sources, I found the patterns that connected nautical literature over thousands of years: Man vs. Nature, Isolation and Self-Awareness, Finding Oneself in the Unknown. From these motifs, I was able to create a unique story that juxtaposes the ideas sanctity and insanity in an Irish monk's voyage and explores the idea of *peregrinatio*.

Passion, reflective settings, and isolation each add to the unpredictability that is nautical literature. This sense of "the unknown" lends a tone of mystique to a story of the sea that most land narratives cannot achieve. We are relatively inexperienced at handling or controlling the sea compared to that of the land. We are so unfamiliar with this setting, that some would say it is near-impossible to do so. However, a writer has complete control over what their narrative's ocean does, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we can tame it. In order to understand the implications behind the patterns found throughout voyage literature, I had to study various literary depictions as well as the body of water itself in order to achieve an accurate representation of its movement and hidden dangers. It was as I was studying the patterns of the ocean's waves and climate that I began to notice the major themes of passion, revelation,

transformation, and isolation that extended over thousands of years of voyage literature (Amsted, Beaufort).

## **Methods and Literature Review**

### *Primary influences*

I studied over sixty primary and secondary sources to enhance my understanding of voyage literature, however Homer's *The Odyssey* and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* were my primary influences in helping me to create a voyage story that captured the importance of religion and faith in a pilgrimage (Homer, Martel). Throughout these sources, and many of the other novels, short stories, and poems that I read, I was able to pick up on patterns that varied in nature, but were common throughout all voyage literature.

One of the major motifs was Man vs. Nature; often times in literature, nature will reflect a character's emotions or situation (Donne). I first noticed this in *Life of Pi*. In the beginning of the novel, after the shipwrecks, Pi is extraordinarily distressed and he is faced with the terrifying danger of being stranded at sea; the sea reflects both his emotions and conflict as a storm rages and the waves becoming massive, dangerous walls of water. Conversely, later in the novel Pi accepts his situation, becoming at peace with the fact that he may not survive, but he was going to try. The ocean's surface reflects this serenity as it becomes mirror-like and calm (Martel). In a more direct context, in Homer's *The Odyssey*, the sea reflects Poseidon's anger at Odysseus for blinding the Cyclops, Poseidon's son (Homer).



In many of Shakespeare's works, the state of the sea is used to manipulate the audience in order to convey the tone of a scene. Storms of the sea and the dead calm of weather alike were viewed as being a "metaphoric catalyst for whenever violent emotions were being conveyed" (Bachrach). This means that when Shakespeare wanted to show the rage or hysterics of a character or scene, he would use a storm to help create it; Similarly, if he wanted to convey the seriousness of a situation or add suspense or even a brief lapse in the intensity of a scene, he could insert a dead calm of the weather to help do this.

Isolation was the primary cause for the motifs of self-awareness and finding oneself. Voyage literature has the power to place a character in a setting where isolation is nearly guaranteed, opening the door for to self-reflection, a key literary device in nautical narratives. Both Odysseus and Pi are alone (save for Pi's Richard Parker) on their vessels. Through this, Odysseus is able to reflect on what he had done and who he had been up until the point that he is alone on his makeshift raft. He was an adulterer and cared for himself and his own gain rather than others. The sea, and the events that take place on it, inspire a sort of transformation of character, making him humble and faithful to his wife (Homer).

Pi's isolation takes on a religious sense of self-realization as he calls into question his piety, losing and then regaining his faith in the many religions and pieties that he practices (Martel). Sarah McFarland argues the effects that being on the open sea has on Pi in *Life of Pi* as muddling his identity in that his pieties are transformed in a way that makes him feel lost and uncertain. McFarland exemplifies this idea through the parallels of some of the pieties and factors that he identifies himself with. His previous piety of being a vegetarian is thrown out the door in many

ways: he eats fish and meerkat in his animal account, and he is cannibalistic in his human account (McFarland). Other pieties such as the line between pacifist and murderer as well as the joint belief in three different religions are used by McFarland to prove that the sea serves as a terrain that can break down one's pieties and identity until everything that you have ever identified yourself with is proved false.

Once I had a basic understanding of the patterns and themes present across thousands of years of voyage literature, I had to focus my studies to find a specific genre or event that I could use as a starting point for my short story. Medievalism is a fascinating genre of literature and an even more fascinating collection of voyage tales. As I read through medieval stories and poems, I fell in love with the portrayal of the sea: it was seen as a monster in and of itself. Unpredictable and full with more unknown creatures that would cast a ship into peril at any given moment. As I narrowed my study even further, I came across a term that became the origins for my story: *peregrinatio*.

### *Monastic life*

*Peregrinatio* is a Latin term meaning "one who wanders", however it also represented an ancient monastic practice in sixth and sixth century Ireland. Monks practiced the idea of casting adrift out at sea for the "opportunity to enter into the spiritual life for *peregrinatio pro amore dei* (pilgrimage for the love of God)" (Mulcahy). After I found this monastic practice, I began to look at the different tales and accounts associated with the idea. That is when I came across the tale of St. Cormac. Not much is said about this particular voyage; in fact, there is only a

secondary account of the voyage through *Saint Columba a Turbulent Life* (Adamnan). The following is all that we know:

“About 580 Columba’s friend, Cormac-of-the-Sea, afterwards Bishop of Durrow, had a dreadful experience. It was probably after visiting the Orkney and Shetland Islands which he evangelized, that he sailed away from land for fourteen summer days and nights, till his voyage seemed to go beyond the limit of human experience, and return seemed impossible. Then awful terrors arose on every side, “for certain loathsome and dangerous creatures . . . came into sight, covering the sea, and with a terrible rush they smote the keel and sides, the stern and prow, so heavily that it seemed as though they would break through the leather sheathing of the boat. These creatures were about the size of frogs, with very terrible stings, and more like swimming than flying creatures, and they swarmed over the blades of the oars.” It was in this strait that Columba, in his cell at Iona, became aware that Cormac was in danger and summoned the monks to the church to pray for him. When they were assembled he addressed them, “Brethren” said he, pray with all your usual fervor for Cormac, who by sailing too far hath passed the bounds of human enterprise and is exposed at this moment to dreadful alarm and fright. . . . Let us assist by our prayers that God may take compassion on us and cause the wind, which for the past fourteen days has blown from the south, to blow from the north, and this north wind will deliver Cormac’s vessel out of all danger” Having said this he knelt before the altar, and in a plaintive voice poured forth his prayers to the Almighty power of God who governed the winds and all things. After

having prayed he rose quickly, and wiping away his tears, joyfully gave thanks to God, saying, "Now, brethren, let us congratulate our dear friends . . . for God will now change the south into a north wind which will free our associates from their perils and bring them to us here again" As he spoke, the south wind ceased and a north wind blew for many days after, so that Cormac's ship was enabled to gain the land. And Cormac hastened to visit Columba, and in God's bounty they looked upon each other face to face, to the extreme joy and wonder of all."

(Adamnan)

The unmentionable monsters intrigued me and became the basis for my thesis. To ensure historical accuracy, I delved into the beliefs and practices of Irish monks and looked in to other details that would play a major role in my story as well (Beall). Further research provided the basic structure (both physical and hierarchical) as well as ideologies and beliefs of each of the different branches of monasticism that occupied Ireland during Bede's lifetime and after (5<sup>th</sup> century to around 9<sup>th</sup> century). This gave me insight as to what the sleeping arrangements were and why they were set up like that along with who was in charge of a monastery and whether or not a journey (such as the one be taken in my story) needs to be approved by an abbot or bishop. Additionally, I looked at what robes my characters would be wearing, what kind of food the Irish would have packed for any sort of journey, what the structure and make-up of the common boat at the time was, and even what the popular names were in sixth century Ireland ("What the Irish Ate", "Ireland (Hibernia)", Hornell, "Medieval Monks' Clothing"). I also studied typical prayers and scriptures that would be recited for various situations, focusing on the Eucharist and prayers of faith.

Through my in-depth study of monasticism, I also found that sainthood in the medieval times was widely doubted as men and women alike began to claim they were having beatific visions that were likely just hallucinations or delusional behavior. Unfortunately, there was no way to prove these one way or another, allowing the question of sanctity versus insanity to come into play. Some “saints” performed actual miracles and received true visions from God. Others were insane men and women who would rather claim they are a self-proclaimed servant of God than be shunned from society. This doubt became the over-arching theme for my story: sanctity versus insanity.

### **Reconstructing St. Cormac’s Voyage**

#### *Point of view*

Through the characterization of Cormac and Ronan, I have created a fictional account of St. Cormac’s untold voyage that questions the piety and sanctity that he is known for with instances of perceived insanity through Ronan’s perspective. Cormac is portrayed as deeply pious and saintly, having visions from God that instruct him to keep his faith in order to survive this perilous journey. This happens through a third person limited omniscient perspective, making the reader feel as though we have the whole picture when reading Cormac’s amazing, miraculous story. However, brief interludes of Ronan’s journal—told through first person—give the reader pause as we see Cormac through new eyes, causing us to question Cormac and the crew’s sanity.

I chose to write Cormac’s story from third person to give a sense of truth to his side. Third person makes a reader an objective outsider, allowing them to gather the facts rather than be swayed by exaggerations or emotions. This gives a little more power to the “sanctity” argument

of the story. On the other hand, I wanted to give a conflicting account that was charged with the emotion and horror that the tone of this story calls for. First person is one of the more powerful point of views as it uses reflexive pronouns to draw the reader in, making them feel as if they are the “I” rather than the character. This made the case for Cormac’s insanity compelling as the reader follows his growing dismay towards Cormac’s actions.

### *The setting and the tone*

The setting moves with the story, literally and figuratively. The tone of ominous, daunting peril and immediate fear can be seen through the rogue wave and storm; the still, terrifying calm before the first trial builds the suspense and terror for both the crew and the reader as they await the serpent; the mirrored surface and ripples from the fish in the second generate the joy and remorse of catching and then losing the fish; the choppy, sunset-tinged waters of the day of the Eucharist give a bloody, eerie feel to a situation in which the reader suspects what is happening, but can never truly confirm; and finally, the glassy, luminous sea in the isolated, frozen canyon of the fourth and final trial creates a false serenity, foreboding, terror, and helplessness that the reader is left with.. Each setting lends to set the tone of the scene, reflecting the emotions and thoughts of crew, Ronan, and most importantly, Cormac.

### *Biblical references*

Throughout the story, there are a number of biblical references that lend to the understanding or tone of the piece. At the beginning of every section, there is a verse or two that relates to the events of that part. I use these to convey the spiritual tone of these scenes rather than the actual tone. Most of them are hopeful, leading up to the idea that no matter what, faith will carry you

through in a situation of dire circumstances, staying true to the ideals of *peregrinatio*. Each trial also alludes to a bible story or ideal that the crew must overcome in order to face the trial and pass. Though it is not made known except for in subtle remarks, there are twelve men other than Cormac on the boat signifying the twelve disciples. This makes Cormac a Christ figure as seen in the fourth trial.

The first trial, the serpent, is indicative of the sea monsters seen in ancient voyage texts such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, but it also alludes to the first threat of the bible: the snake in the Garden of Eden. This trial provides an immediate, physical threat that the crew must face with faith, something that Adam and Eve lacked in the Garden. This is to allude to the fact that Cormac is representative of true faith and what should have happened at the Garden of Eden while Ronan is representative of the doubt and rationale that comes with being the sinners that came after Adam and Eve. The reader begins to question Cormac's sanctity as he decides to recite the Lord's Prayer rather than fight.

The second trial takes place on a more psychological level. It is an allusion to the biblical story of Jonah and the Whale and an inverse of the story of Jesus feeding a thousand people with a single fish. This trial also marks the point at which we begin to decide on Cormac's sanity. In the heart-braking moment that Cormac dumps the fish over the side of the Curragh, we see that he weeps from the act. He is pained over the fact that he took away their chance at food, but he had had instructions from God. When he turns around, however, what the reader know is only the aftermath of tears looks to be a glossy sheen from the fever that is taking the boat. Even though the reader knows that Cormac had been crying only moments before, Ronan's horror and fear

begins to sway the reader, planting a seed of doubt that will not go away for the remainder of the story.

The last two trials are accelerated and tie into one another as the war between sanctity and insanity continues. The third trial alludes to the Eucharist and to the secondary story of *Life of Pi*. This is the horrifying moment when the reader decides whether or not Cormac is a saint or insane. The blasphemous act of cannibalism as the Eucharist will either speak to how pious he is—resorting to cannibalism in a moment of need for guidance—or to how sacrilegious he is as a man, hallucinating the visions and suggesting a profane deed to stay alive under the guise of communion. The fourth trial is allusion of the crucifixion. In this moment, Cormac is like Jesus. No one in the Bible believed him when he said that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. Similarly, no one believes Cormac when he explains the visions or suggests that he know what God wants of them in a particular moment. To strengthen the Jesus allusion, Cormac is pierced through the hands and feet and passes out from the pain of the sting.

### *The ending*

Yann Martel gives two accounts of his story: one is the magnificent tiger story that we follow throughout the entirety of the novel, and one is a practical story of cannibalism. In the end of his novel, Martel doesn't allow Pi to reveal which story was indicative of the true nature of the voyage, he leaves it up to the belief and faith of the audience. I modified this to give a modern twist to the patterns of voyage literature that are found throughout thousands of years. The canonization of a monk can only take place after a monk's death, which is the point in time to which I bring the reader next (Bealle). It is years after the voyage, and Cormac has become both



Abbot and Bishop of Durrow. He dies on September 14<sup>th</sup> and an assembly is called for to discuss his veneration, beatification, and canonization. In order for a man to be canonized, they must have performed two miracles, and have had one beatific vision. Depending on your view on the story, Cormac has already done these things, however there is also doubt over whether or not he is worthy of sainthood based on the known series of events. I never give the reader the outcome of the congregation's vote, for I leave it up to them to decide based on their own faith and interpretation of the story.

Allowing a reader's creativity to finish a story is one of the most powerful literary techniques that one can employ. It invites the reader to take part in the story at a more intimate level: investigation and judgement. Obviously we know that Cormac is canonized due to his assigned Feastday and "Saint" title, but that doesn't mean that there weren't compelling arguments against that. By allowing the reader to make their own decision through their view and understanding of the two different points of views, I have modernized and individualized my own nautical tale based on the patterns, styles, and motifs found over thousands of years of voyage literature.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Through the narrative of this creative thesis, I explore the sixth century monastic practice of *peregrinatio* and the nautical motifs found throughout the literary canon of voyage literature. I have created a fictional account of St. Cormac's undocumented journey into the far, perilous, and trying northern sea, collecting themes from voyage literature and monastic practices to develop a story that questions the faith of the character as well as the reader. Through this historical fiction, I have found that I was able draw on the various writing styles, techniques, and common patterns found through my research to generate my own piece of voyage literature. I use each of these patterns to enhance the passion of my story, bringing the absolute faith or drive from the medieval era forward and fleshing it out with nautical motifs found throughout this genre of literature. My story combines centuries of themes to create a reflection narrative that invites the reader to decide the ending—a modern twist on voyage literature that Yann Martel employs with his “which do you believe?” question in *Life of Pi*.

We can see a continuity throughout the surviving literature that give us insight into the elements that make up successful nautical stories as well as the importance and connection between Man vs. Nature, the most significant motif found in voyage literature. My thesis provides a unique instance in which we are able to see influences and techniques of thousands of years of voyage literature brought together to illustrate an untold story of *peregrinatio*.

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