

TEXT AND MATTER

NEW CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
OF THE *PEARL*-POET


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PEARL AS DIPTYCH

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he most powerful structure in *Pearl* may be chiasmic. By that I mean that stanza-groups X and XI are interlocked, IX and XII, VIII and XIII, and so on.¹ When the poem is read back and forth in this way, it divides into two halves of ten groups each. Even on a first reading, *Pearl* appears to double back after the tenth group.² There, with the dreamer's verdict against the Parable of the Vineyard, his conflict with the maiden reaches its most intense point. Subsequently, it subsides. When he asks in section XIII, for instance, what kind of person the Lamb might be to marry her over everyone else, he seems genuinely puzzled.³

While there is surely development, movement, plot in *Pearl*,⁴ the poem also has a simultaneous structure, most obviously the case, perhaps, in the circle described when the last line leads back to the first line, making the poem's own rhythm an "endelez rounde"⁵ metaphoric for the pearl. This structure less resembles a solid sphere, as Ian Bishop points out, than a garland of linked units like a necklace or rosary; and as a possible source in the material culture he suggests the *corona candelabrum*, a gilded, jeweled circle that was taken to represent the heavenly Jerusalem.⁶ That the structure of *Pearl*—the *dispositio*, or the architectural aspect of form—is symmetrical as well as circular has been recognized for a long while also. W. H. Schofield found that a lengthy middle section, didactic in nature, was flanked by two chiefly descriptive parts of some twenty stanzas each. Louis Blenkner divides each of these descriptive sections into "erber" frame (sections I and XX) and *visiones* (sections II-IV and XVII-XIX), and Bishop separates two issues out of the debate: whether the maiden is a queen in heaven, then whether she is a bride of the Lamb.⁷

Yet it would not be surprising in this "most structurally complex of the great vernacular masterpieces of the later Middle Ages," this "most elaborately and successfully wrought of the Middle English poems which remain to us,"⁸ if the symmetry was somewhat further reaching and more detailed, or if the particularities of the chiasmus,⁹ inspired by a very common devotional object from the period, made the poem in its simultaneity a devotional object too.¹⁰

Chiasmus in *Pearl* takes the particular form of subjecting a stanza-group in the first half to critique by the correlated group in the second

half. To use very general terms already familiar in discussion of *Pearl*, the representations to the right (taking the text for the moment as an open book of two leaves) generally insist anagogically on the sense of things so far as they signify other things that lie ahead "in aeterna gloria."¹¹ Those to the left represent the historical. Further, the link-words of each group will be seen to have one meaning *in bono* and another *in malo*, as if they were objects that signified things of contrary value.¹² The *sensus bonus* of the link-words in sections IX and XII, for instance, will each signify something important in XII; the *sensus malus* of the same words will each signify something important in IX. Nevertheless, the experiences represented in the first ten groups do not become contemptible in light of the last ten just as Christian dogmatics does not evade time and history. The sides are related only as the inferior and the superior.

If there were an influence upon this structure, it may have come not from a verbal medium at all, but from diptychs. Since time out of mind, diptychs had been associated with the "boke with leue3 sware" that the enthroned Lamb is said by the "Apokalype3" to be reading (837).¹³ A visual medium like an ivory diptych likely accounts for the *Pearl*-Poet's linking the mercy of the Virgin and St. John the Evangelist to Christ's own mercy once he had the Judging Christ in mind (405-06): "Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon, / þise arn þe grounde of alle my blisse" (383-84). In sculpture and then in carved ivory, the iconography of the Crucifixion had been transferred to the scene of the Last Judgment.¹⁴

Any "yuore" (178) that the poet had seen,¹⁵ moreover, may well have been cut into diptychs. In the late thirteenth and the whole of the fourteenth centuries, these served as private devotional objects, typically with scenes from the Nativity, the Passion, and the life of the Virgin across their interior surfaces. When elephant tusks became available in good supply in western Europe in the middle of the thirteenth century for the first time since the fourth century, ivory carving became, in France at least, what one art historian has called "the most astounding and important example of trade work."¹⁶ And diptychs and tabernacles were the pieces commissioned most frequently.¹⁷ Raymond Koechlin catalogued five hundred eighty such Gothic tablets from France, many of them found in England. While at least one group of ivory diptychs of English provenance survives despite the "nearly total ruin" of English ivory in the Reformation,¹⁸ it was the products of the Parisian workshops that dominated sales throughout Europe for a century.¹⁹ Their iconography, choice of episodes, disposition of scenes, decor, and style of execution were decisively influential.

If the poet knew some of these carvings, there appear to have been two structural features that he may have borrowed. The most obvious

feature, of course, he did not. From their beginning, Gothic diptychs were divided into horizontal registers extending across both leaves. Typically, such a diptych is two or three registers high, with scenes running from left to right. The episode coming first chronologically usually appears in the lower left-hand corner, but the arrangement thereafter is subject to much variation. The Soissons diptych,²⁰ for example, is read from the lower left all the way across to the lower right, then up to the middle register and across from right to left, and finally, in the upper register, from left to right again.

Although art historians seem not to point this out, the designers of at least a significant minority of diptychs made use of the opportunity for tension between the two leaves. For instance, in a diptych which has simply an Adoration of the Magi scene on the left panel and a Crucifixion on the right, a small crowned figure, kneeling, is added to the latter, as if to give the Adoration an ironic outcome.²¹ In another carving with just the same two episodes, a king on the left panel points as usual towards the center, where the star is usually found. Here it has been omitted, however, and instead, Christ's right arm, running along the horizontal beam of the Cross, points back.²² In a French diptych three registers high from the end of the thirteenth century, the designer disturbs chronological order evidently to bring the gift of spices in the Adoration scene (lower register on the left) into ironic relation with Joseph of Arimathea's anointment of the body in the Entombment (same register on the right).²³

As against any notion, then, that the Gothic diptych is formed simply to lead the eye from one register to another in continuous fashion, the designers sometimes must have intended that the two panels be collated with each other. In a French piece from the later fourteenth century, in the Ascension scene in the upper band on the left leaf, the feet of the rising Christ occupy precisely the same position as the descending dove in the Pentecost on the right leaf. On the left, all the figures are looking up; on the right they all look down.²⁴ In another slightly later carving, in a Death of the Virgin at the extreme lower left, Mary's rising soul is perched, a miniature female figure, on the shoulder of Christ, who is present among the mourners; on the extreme lower right, in a scene of Gethsemane, Christ's own death is represented by the little cross that descends to him while he prays.²⁵ Another diptych plays off an Adoration against a Coronation of the Virgin. An identical treatment of Mary (carved in three-quarter face) on each side pulls earthly kings into tension with the King of Heaven.²⁶

This tension seems sometimes to have been genuinely chiasmic. The adoption of an unusual order of episodes in a fourteenth-century French carving²⁷ posits an opposition between the Crucifixion in the upper right (the upper register on the right leaf) with the Deposition from the Cross in the lower left. A *Noli me tangere* in the lower right,

meanwhile, appears in ironic opposition to the Flagellation at the upper left. (This is not the only time in the diptychs these two scenes are opposed.) A French carving with four registers from the third quarter of the century, now in the Louvre, places the unktion at the Entombment in the lower left and Christ's washing his apostles' feet in the upper right, the raising of Lazarus in the upper left, the Harrowing in the lower right.²⁸ An unusual *Maria lactans* appears at the upper right of one four-register diptych (following scenes of the Coronation and of the Trinity) to create a reference back to the Annunciation and the Nativity in the lower left.²⁹ A three-register carving from the third quarter of the century puts scenes with the Virgin (a Coronation and an Annunciation) in the upper right and lower left, scenes with Christ between two figures (a Resurrection and a Presentation) in the upper left and lower right.³⁰

The chiasmus is sometimes relatively simple: the Death of the Virgin and the Death of Christ are upper left and lower right; in the lower left the three kings and in the upper right the Coronation.³¹ Or Ecclesia and St. Peter will lie along one axis, Synagoga and St. Paul along the other.³² Sometimes the chiasmus is more complex. A two-register French diptych of the later 1300s adopts an unusual narrative order so that the Virgin's offering the baby her breast in the lower left may play off against Stephaton's extending the gall-soaked sponge in a Crucifixion at the upper right. The election of the Virgin in the Annunciation at the lower right is recalled in her Coronation at the upper left.³³ Another French carving from the second half of the century places the Annunciation/Nativity and the Resurrection along one axis; along the other are Christ's entry first into the Old Jerusalem and then (with the Ascension) into the New Jerusalem.³⁴ Early in the fifteenth century, a French diptych with three registers puts the Death of the Virgin and the Crucifixion along one axis of the chiasmus and then—presumably because a message from the Father was delivered or sought in each case—an Annunciation and a Gethsemane scene along the other axis. Perhaps to achieve this effect, the narrator disturbs narrative order.³⁵

Besides tension between the two leaves sometimes reaching to chiasmus, there is a second structural feature of the diptychs that seems to me paralleled in *Pearl*. While there are exceptions,³⁶ when there is a hierarchical distinction to be made between the subjects represented on a diptych, the superior of the two is depicted on the wing to the viewer's right. Even when the diptych was in liturgical use, the right wing appears to have been the privileged place: a Fulda diptych lists deceased kings on the left, deceased bishops on the right.³⁷ This is of course reversed in the case of triptychs, where the

the preferred position. The presence of Christ seems sometimes to have such a reorienting effect even when there are only two panels.

The beautiful Salting Diptych in the Victoria and Albert represents the convention: Virgin and Child are on the left wing, a standing Christ is to the right. In two other English diptychs, the designer disturbs chronological order so that scenes from the life of the Virgin might be grouped on the left, those from the life of Christ to the right.³⁸ The *Noli me tangere* episode, while coming later than the Crucifixion, typically appears on the left wing when the Crucifixion fills the right one.³⁹ Perhaps to situate weakness and dependency on the left, authority on the right, the designer of an ivory from the later fourteenth century places the Crucifixion and the Nativity in the upper and lower registers on the left panel, the Coronation and the Adoration in the comparable positions on the right.⁴⁰ In apparently every carved Madonna, the Christchild is to the viewer's right; in every Coronation of the Virgin, Christ is to the right.

In sum, what I wish to suggest, then, is that, if the *Pearl*-Poet actually had the opportunity to see ivory carvings like these, he would have found—in tension with the narrative order that usually moved with the register and tended to guide the eye in a continuous line over the whole surface of the diptych—a chiastic form emerging when the eye collated leaf with leaf. Moreover, such collation might have occurred with the expectation, also taught by the ivories, that the right-hand term of an opposition would stand in a superior relation to the left-hand one.

I would like to turn now to *Pearl* and briefly collate the two "panels" there, starting at what one might call the hinge.

II

Stanza-group X is part of the Parable of the Vineyard and includes the complaint by senior workers that late arrivals receive as much as they. In answering them in this section and the eleventh, the Lord of the Vineyard denies he has broken a covenant with anyone. Further, no one, the maiden goes on to say, *deserves* to be paid. Even in the unlikely event a person managed always to avoid mortal sin (579-80, 617-20), all were lost in Adam (637-44). Thus, the maiden does not suspend the notion of equity at this point but rather insists upon it. There is also, however, the fact of pardon, the gift that goes beyond what is due, infinitely costly in its purchase and inexhaustible. Our experience is only of finite quantities. When the complaining workers say, "Vus þynk vus oze to take more" (552), each of them means he has one such limit in mind and that it has not been reached. "Innoghe"

quantity that has been produced: through baptism the newborn has "innoghe of grace" (625) to enter the living body of Christ immediately. Nevertheless, "innoghe" also means "abundant" in a way that ignores a limit. "Innoghe þer wax out of þat welle, / Blod and water of brode wounde" (649-50). "More" has such a meaning too: "þe merci of God is much þe more," as that mercy overwhelms the humble efforts of those who arrive late (576). By how much, we do not know, but it is of course only through our experience of finite sums that the negative idea of limitlessness can be achieved.

Sections IX and XII are unified by the topic of degrees or stages. "Limit" is the *sensus malus* of "date," the link-work of IX, and anticipates one of the meanings of "more" and "innoghe." Limits can mark out a progression—over time, as in IX when the workers come into the vineyard at different hours, or through space, as in XII (literally, the stages of a journey up a hill [678, 692]). Section IX moves from old age backwards, with those entering the vineyard last being the youngest; XII is about two men moving up the holy hill, the "inoscente," who dies before he does "hondelyngeþ harme" (681), and the "ryztwys man" (675) who lives to obey the Law at point after point. However, because no one may be able to keep himself within the limits established by the Law (687-88), the odds against righteousness mount with the stages.

Each such "date" is also a point, however, when grace is available through penance (661-62). Penance like every sacrament presupposes a specific historical moment: the "sely stoude" (659) of the Passion, which is nevertheless perpetually accessible. Hence, "date" *in bono* is any given moment—any date. The *sensus bonus* of "ryzt," the link-word in XII, is this grace that is always at hand, the satisfaction of the Law available in the Atonement. *In malo*, it is the Law itself (708), the Old Covenant that becomes more straitening with every step of a person's life. Thus, the innocent is "saf by ryzt" (720) and "not by ryzte" (708): although the baptized infant has not lived long enough to be unrighteous, he is not for that reason saved without grace.⁴¹

Sections VIII and XIII both take up the question of whether the elevation of the maiden excludes or devalues anyone else. With position as one of the categories of what Kant called the *Verstand*, our experience is that only one substance can occupy any given position at one time. The revelation that a very large number of queens or brides somehow do not supplant each other (440, 785-86) can only frustrate the dreamer. Somehow, no queen or bride is "makelez," this being the member *in malo* of the *maskellez/makelez* link-word in XIII. Where the notion of matchlessness bulks larger in VIII than in XIII, spotlessness is more prominent in XIII. Cleanness is anticipated in VIII, however, with the maiden's warning that members of Christ's

body should take care not to affix any "hate" or "gawle" to "hys body" (460). While "cortaysye," the link-word in VIII, names the generosity⁴² of all who enter the kingdom (450), finally it is God's love for the world that is the pearl of great price: the spotlessness of XIII is provided at God's own cost ("In hys blod he wesch my wede . . ." [766]). The poor shadow of this—"cortaysye" *in malo*—is simply an absence of objection, as when an eldest son takes one of his father's titles during the latter's lifetime.⁴³ Hence, "kyng by cortayse" (480).

The link-word in VII comes as part of a phrase, "grounde of alle my blysse." Sections VII and XIV are both concerned with grounds, though of different kinds. Ground as metaphor has as its evil sense the maiden herself when the dreamer makes her earthly life the foundation of his happiness. Her death has made him voluble in grief (363, 374). In its good sense "grounde" figures the Lamb, on whom the maiden's happiness is built (407-08), whose injuries and crucifixion are displayed for a full stanza and a half on the right "panel" (799-816). In contrast to the rash "spelle" regretted in VII, the Lamb "closed . . . hys mouth fro vch query, / Quen Juez hym iugged . . ." (803-04), dying without "playnt" (815). The link-word of the later section, "Jerusalem," names ground of another sort, the kind that is the vehicle of the metaphor. There are two Jerusalems also: the one "in Judy londe" (937), the other—the referent anagogically—where the author of the *Apocalypse*, whom the poet calls the "apostel John" (named in VII for the only time on the left "leaf"), saw the Lamb throned in glory (835-86). The historical Jerusalem, although far away "in Judee" (922), is continuous with the "grounde" that swallowed up the historical child (10). She was the wrong ground of the dreamer's happiness exactly because she could lose her place in this way. ("Blysse" *in malo* can alternate with "bale" [373]).⁴⁴ As geography, then, Jerusalem harks back to the left side of the poem.

In section VI, the dreamer blames the maiden for his grief ("My precios perle dotþ me gret pyne" [330]). She responds that he is actually accusing God ("Deme Dryztyn, euer hym adyte" [349]), when it is not his place to argue: "Deme now þyself if þou con dayly / As man to God wordeþ schulde heue" (313-14). She claims he is braying (346), chiding (353), making a "dyne" (339). To argue—promote a judgment—is one sense of "demen," the link-word in VI. Judgment in one sense cannot get beyond experience: you believe nothing, says the maiden, "bot ze hit syze" (308). The correlated stanza-group, XV,⁴⁵ returns to the dreamer's ability to "remen for rauþe wythouten reste" (858). In contrast to him, however, the 144,000 brides never think "of mote," 'dispute' (855), because they do not depend upon experience; they "þurþoutly hauen cnawying" (859), and consequently they sing. The left "leaf" insists on historical

knowledge and the need to tame it, the right on anagogical. In XV, the "hue from heuen" (873), before it is followed by a "nwe songe" (882), recalls the dreamer's frenzied disapproval in VI. Such disagreement is captured by the link-word in XV, "neuerpeles," which in its *sensus malus* of "however" signals a retort. *In bono* it means the absence of diminution: "Lasse of blysse may non vus bryng . . .," "neuer onez honour [is] zet neuer peles" (853, 864). Because in the flesh no one can experience this stability, knowledge of it comes only at God's initiative (893). God's ordaining in this fashion, which combines judgment and will and has, in the eternal present, no need of inference, is the second meaning of "deme" back in VII. In this *sensus bonus*, "Al lys in hym to dyzt and deme" (360).⁴⁶

Stanza-groups V and XVI are unified by the topos of enclosures. To the fatherly worry in the later section that the child should have to sleep out of doors (925-34), the maiden responds that the Lamb has brought her to the New Jerusalem. *In bono*, "mote," the link-word, names this city. The brides are not "motelez" or "wythouten mote," then, in the sense of having no place to go. Home to "a pakke of joly juele" (929), this city is metaphorically a jewel box. In the earlier section, denying the dreamer's statement that she had simply vanished (his "out of dawez" [282] perhaps anticipating already the out-of-doors), the maiden refers repeatedly to jewel boxes. She tells him she is "in cofer . . . comly clente," a proper "forser" for the dreamer himself. The "kynde" of this "kyste" is the body of Christ (259, 263, 271). (The Lamb, that is, is a coffer within a coffer.) She takes her metaphor here from the "perle" her father called her (241), confessing himself "a joylez juele" (252). *Sub specie aeternitatis*, the father had set his heart upon something bound to "flower and fail" (270), and the child's metaphor construes this as cupidity. "It is to be noted," Pamela Gradon has written, "that the refrain of this section with its play on the word 'jueler' underlines the theme, for the jeweller possesses his jewel" (p. 208). Cupidity, the stain that makes the "ioyfol juele" inadmissible to the Kingdom (299), is "mote" *in malo*, the brides being "clene wythouten mote" (972).

"Jueler" has its *sensus bonus*, however. While the earthly jeweler is a collector, the good jeweler makes his gems to be what they are.⁴⁷ Through his own "kynde" Christ turns the failing rose into "a perle of prys" (272). In fact, he has made the jeweler himself (274). Where the earthly collector caters to his own satisfaction ("prynces paye" [1]), the Lamb suffers "for mane3 sake" (940). The maiden became a pearl, matching in her spotlessness the New Jerusalem ("mote wythouten moote" [948]), because the Lamb chose to suffer in the earthly Jerusalem, making "oure pes . . . at ene" (953).

Sections IV and XVII are both preoccupied with gems. In IV these are pearls, and, with the exception of the "wonder perle" (221) set in

the middle of the maiden's breast, they do not beggar the imagination. Although the maiden no longer exists as an object of experience, the description of the glowing, richly adorned child does not subvert itself as a representation. (It will be the maiden who declares that the dreamer's senses are deceiving him.) By contrast, the New Jerusalem is derealized. To describe a single diamond as big enough to support a city, for instance, is simultaneously to deny that the stone or the city exists in time.

While the vast jewels on the right wing principally uplift and sustain, the pearls in section IV bind the maiden's linen (198-99, 203-04, 217) and enclose her hair.⁴⁸ They suggest confinement—the father's unwillingness to let the daughter go—in a section studded with the imagery of openings, openings that have been closed up, waistbands, and hems. ("Hemme" occurs in IV and XVII, and nowhere else in the poem.) Because the dreamer is happy that he has now found the maiden (283), it is the child herself, rather than simply her kirtle, that the dreamer would have "al vmbepyzte," a "precios pyece in perlez pyzt." (192). Setting something within boundaries is the *sensus malus* carried by "pyzt." Yet when the dreamer, first spotting the maiden, says that "Perlez pyzte of ryal prys / þere mozt mon by grace haf sene" (193-94), "pyzte" very likely means "chosen" (rather than "set" or "adorned"); and the *sensus bonus* that turns *pyzt* into *pyked* (1036) means that the child, among the many who have been called, is one of the "fewe" who are "myke3" (572). "Apostel John," the link-word in XVII, has its opposing senses also. *In malo* it names the narrator himself,⁴⁹ whose "gostly drem" for the space of this section and the next coincides with John's; yet he will become again part of the church militant, still to struggle with his sins.

Sections III and XVIII are connected by rivers. For the first three stanzas of the earlier group, the dreamer follows the stream—in the direction of its source, as matters turn out. Although the bed of the stream is lit with jewels, the many-colored glow does not in itself confound human vision. The section ends with several lines reporting astonishment, but the paralysis comes with the dreamer's sight of the shining child. The source of this stream is given in XVIII, where the dreamer sees God enthroned: "A reuer of þe trone þer ran outryzte / Wat3 bryzter þen boþe þe sunne and mone." (1055-56). The river—not only the source but the anagogical meaning of the finite stream—swirls through the streets and out of the city, where its incomparable light illumines its banks (1057-60, 1072-76). Now it is the light itself, bright enough to destroy the bodily senses, that ravishes the dreamer (1081-92).⁵⁰

As section III began, pleasure was building in the dreamer as he followed the valley. He had the good "fortune" (129), he said, to be increasingly happy: "þe wy3 to wham her [that is, Fortune's] wylle ho

wayneȝ / Hytteȝ to haue ay more and more." (131-32). Fortune—change and chance ("Hyttēȝ to haue")—is the extent of human experience; and by the end of the section, the link-word "more and more" described increasing *pain* (brought on by the first sight of the child [179-80]). In *malo*, then, "more and more" signifies increase, but subject to time, space, history.⁵¹ This changeableness of fortune is part of the *sensus malus* of "mone," the link-word in the later group. "Anvnder mone" (1068, 1081, 1092) are found decay and generation. The "maynful mone" (1093), executrix of fortune, nonetheless loses its power in eternity (1069-70).⁵² There, "mone" in its good sense is metaphoric for a kind of periodicity without birth or death: the twelve trees of life on the brim of the glorious river "renowleȝ nwe in vche a mone" (1080). In the New Jerusalem, change—articulation between one thing and another—may amount to merely the logical condition for meaning.

Section II represents the suspension of the will, section XIX the satisfaction of it. The arrest of appetite occurs occasionally for perhaps everyone, but the fulfillment of it is not a possibility in this life. The *sensus malus* of "delyt" (the link-word in XIX) is the "wely wyse" (101) in which the dreamer wanders through the landscape in the earlier section. Contemplating any object with detachment from desire (if this is possible) makes of it an art object, in one sense. And so section II attributes an interruption of the dreamer's mourning ("The adubement of þo downȝ dere / Garten my goste al greffe forȝete" [85-86])⁵³ to an artificial landscape. He not only makes metaphors of tapestry (71-72) and music (91-92); he puts blue trunks and silver leaves on trees, pearls for gravel, crystal for granite. Thus, he represents the natural as reproduced.⁵⁴

Section XIX, on the other hand, describes "delyt" in *bono*, the life with which the company of the Lamb is fed: "How þay wyth lyf wern laste and lade." (1146). This joy expresses itself in praise of the Lamb (1117-26), for it has been bought at the his own cost: "Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende hys hert, þurȝ hyde torente." (1135-36). And I suggest that "adubement," the link-word in II that means in *malo* simply the spender that distracts the dreamer, has as its good sense this wounded side of the Lamb. The marks of slaughter, drawn from Chapter 5 of the *Apocalypse*, have been attributed by the poet to the Lamb in triumph, based on Chapter 14.⁵⁵ While readers of *Pearl* have been warned against taking "adubement" to mean *dub* or *dubbing*,⁵⁶ "adubben" in Middle English clearly means "to confer knighthood upon";⁵⁷ and Godefroy defines "adubement" as "action d'armer chevalier," "armure de chevalier." The poet's insistence on *adubement* as "splendor" or "adornment" in II can merely suppress, not extinguish, its relevance to knighthood. It seems that he only

defers this. The knight's equipment in *Pearl* is the highly vulnerable hide of the Lamb, the human nature of Christ, as in *Piers Plowman* Jesus will joust in "pers armes, In his helm and in his haberion, *humana natura*."⁵⁸ On the other hand, all the hardness that would make such equipment conventionally serviceable seems to have been displaced backwards to the largely inorganic garden in section II.

Sections I and XX correlate, of course, as the entrance into the dream and the exit from it. The narrator enters by virtue of "a slepyng-slaȝte" (59). His own sudden movement (1169-70) terminates the vision. Where stanza-groups II and XIX focus on either the suspension of the will or the enjoyment in eternity of the object finally adequate to it, the groups at the extremities of the two "panels" take up a will that is not only active but limited in its objects to those of daily experience. The narrator's "wylle" is thus "wreched" (56). The first group lacks a moral context; the last, however, describes the essential question of whether the narrator will prefer another's good to his own. At the end it is enough for him that his child is "to þat Prynseȝ paye" (1188); and he tries, with less difficulty over the course of time, or so he reports (1201-04), to conform his own will to the divine will.

As his vision ends, the narrator's own "paye" is, for the moment at least, disappointed: "Me payed ful ille to be outfleme ..." (1177). This dissatisfaction metonymic for a human appetite unconformed to "þat Prynseȝ paye" is "paye" in *malo*. Such is the narrator's restlessness as the poem begins: hopeless brooding, he laments, "dotȝ bot pryeh my hert prange, / My breste in bale bot bolne and bele" (17-18). "Prynseȝ paye" (1) is here metaphoric for his own. Through likening his daughter to a pearl and himself to a royal collector, he tries to diffuse the knowledge that this satisfaction has evaporated. He would like to make a virtue of necessity, understand the death of one lovely living thing as the condition for the birth of other ones (25-26); but behind the strategic metaphors there was a person, and he has a terribly hard time withdrawing his love. Moreover, to teach him of the comfort "of Kryst" (55), nature appears to be all he has. (By XX he will have had the divine assistance of his dream, no matter that he interrupted it.) In the earlier section, his precious pearl is now "wythouten spotte" only in *malo*: her "color" (22) had been flawless, and now it is nowhere.

Where the poem opens with the wheat harvest and the feast that celebrates the bodily assumption of the Virgin into heaven, it closes with bread and the consecration of it into the body of Christ. The dreamer's accusation of another ("O moul ... " [23]) comes to be balanced by self-accusation, criticism that he takes into himself when he identifies himself with the welfare of the pearl (1189-200). If his self-criticism does not clear itself of resentment altogether,⁵⁹ that is because

he remains, as he must, the "homly hyne" (1210), not yet "wythouten spot" in the Church Triumphant. And the end for him may hardly be in sight (585-88). For the time being, he must make do with a knowledge far short of vision. Where the poem begins with a bauble from the East, it ends with a certain flatness, like the wafer itself, that appears "Oute of oryent" for the congregation in a much homelier sense, as the priest raises it above the altar.

The round wafer has long been recognized in *Pearl's* own concatenated form. The poem in its simultaneity, that is, becomes something to be seen. This one sort of architecture may not exclude another—a form nearly as significant thematically, for it offers a sort of figure for the opposition between time and eternity. As diptych, *Pearl* uses form to reorganize its content and thus at points, perhaps, to reilluminate it. And in the tensions between its "panels," the poem may have served as something concrete in its own way, on which an uncertain faith might fix and that devotion might surround.

Notes

1. Certain indications of a chiasmic structure have already been noticed. James Milroy points out "the recurrence of certain imagery motifs at points roughly equidistant from beginning and end" ("*Pearl*: The Verbal Texture and the Linguistic Theme," *Neophilologus* 55 [1971]: 203). Cf. C. O. Chapman, "Numerical Symbolism in Dante and the *Pearl*," *Modern Language Notes* 54 (1939): 257.
2. Cf. W. A. Davenport: "Reference backwards is made both by the recurrence of central ideas...and by the simpler echoing of earlier phrases and images...." [*The Art of the Gawain-Poet* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), p. 49].
3. Cf. Davenport, *Art*, p. 21.
4. For some description of the unfolding of the poem, see Lynn Staley Johnson, *The Voice of the Gawain-Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 162-77; Piero Boitani, *English Medieval Narrative in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, tr. J. K. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 107; Pamela Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 207-11; Louis Blenkner, "The Theological Structure of *Pearl*," rpt. *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays*, ed. John Conley (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970) esp. pp. 225, 229-30, 248; A. R. Heiserman, "The Plot of *Pearl*," *PMLA* 80 (1965): 164-71; and Chapman, "Numerical Symbolism," pp. 257-58.
5. *Pearl* will be quoted throughout from the edition of E. V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).
6. See Ian Bishop, *Pearl in its Setting* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), pp. 29-30.
7. See W. H. Schofield, "The Nature and Fabric of *The Pearl*," *PMLA* 19 (1904): 162; Blenkner, "The Pattern of Traditional Images in *Pearl*," *Studies in Philology* 68 (1971): 26-27; Bishop, *Setting*, pp. 33-34.
8. John V. Fleming, "The Centuple Structure of *The Pearl*," in *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Bernard S. Levy and Paul E. Szarmach (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1981), p. 82; P. M. Kean, "Numerical Composition in *Pearl*," *Notes and Queries* ns 12 (1965): 51.
9. Work on chiasmic structure (ring composition or *emboîtement*) in classical epic and medieval literature has been conveniently reviewed by Lee Patterson, "For the Wyves love of Bathe': Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*," *Speculum* 58 (1983): 670-71.
10. Cf. P. M. Kean: "In *Pearl*, with its wide theme of the meaning of mortality, its place in the divine scheme, and the moral problems it sets the individual who experiences its sorrows, [the author] comes nearest to qualifying as a devotional poet" [*The Pearl: An Interpretation* (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1967), p. 242].

Eyre and Spottiswood, 1964), p. 38]. The anagogical sense raises the mind to invisible things, from the terrestrial to the heavenly Jerusalem, from history to that which limits it, teaching that part of Christian dogmatics which is called "eschatological" [Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture* (Paris: Aubier, 1959), pp. 1.621-33. For discussion of the poet's various means of achieving an anagogical sense, see, for example, H. V. Hendrix, "Reasonable Failure: *Pearl* Considered as Self-Consuming Artifact of 'Gostly Porpose'," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 86 (1985): 462-65; Anne Schotter, "Vernacular Style and the Word of God: The Incarnational Art of *Pearl*," in *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and A. H. Schotter (New York: AMS, 1984), pp. 25-26, 29-30; Theodore Bogdanos, *Pearl: Image of the Ineffable* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), pp. 11-12, 54-55; A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 156; Bishop, *Setting*, pp. 51-61; W. S. Johnson, "The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*: Toward an Interpretation," *ELH* 20 (1953): 161-80; and D. W. Robertson, Jr., "The Pearl as a Symbol," *Modern Language Notes* 65 (1950): 160.

12. The *locus classicus* within Christian tradition of the exegetical device of the two senses is Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 3.25 [ed. Joseph Martin, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1962), p. 98]. Readers of *Pearl* have noticed that at least some of the link-words embody sharply different senses. See, e.g., Edward Wilson, "Word Play and the Interpretation of *Pearl*," *Medium Ævum* 40 (1971): 126, 132; and J. C. McGalliard, "Links, Language, and Style in *The Pearl*," in *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. Bagby Atwood and Archibald A. Hill (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 283.

13. Diptychs—hinged pieces of wood covered with wax on the inner surfaces—were familiar in the later Middle Ages as the piece of equipment on which authors often composed first drafts: See Wilhelm Wattenbach, *Das Schriftwesen im Mittelalter*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1896), pp. 51-89. From at least the third century, an intercessory prayer, a form of litany, occupied part of the mass. Who precisely was included, where and how the prayer was spoken and by whom, differed from one rite to another and from the Western Church to the Eastern. The diptych, the material object widely connected with this prayer, lent itself to litany because of its earlier use as a notebook, perhaps, or because of the custom, in the case of consular diptychs, of listing on the inner surface in chronological order the names of all the consuls of Rome. Since it followed the recitation of names from diptychs, the prayer that survives to this day was called the *super nomina* or the *super diptichia*. And even after Charlemagne suppressed the Gallican practice of reading aloud from the diptychs the names of those living and dead in the faith, the diptychs survived in closely related, if not always liturgical, forms: as lists now referred to in memory by a priest, as altarpieces for the edification of the faithful (with the carvings, most frequently in ivory, that had decorated the exteriors now transferred to the inner surfaces of the panels), as devotional objects imitating such altarpieces for private use, or as monastic necrologies and obituaries. On the liturgical use of diptychs, see Fernand Cabrol, "Diptyques (Liturgie)," *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie* (Paris: Letourzey et Ané, 1907-), 4.1046-94. While liturgical use of the diptychs apparently ended ca. 1100 in the West, their connection with the *liber vitae* of the Apocalypse was remembered until at least the seventeenth century in England (see the *OED*, s.v.).

14. See, e.g., Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français* (Paris: Picard, 1924) for French diptychs from the end of the 13th century (Koechlin No. 37) and the first quarter of the 14th (Koechlin No. 234).

15. The dreamer describes the maiden's "vysayge" as "whyt as playn yuore." "Playn" here, as in *Cleanness* 1531, where the detached hand comes to write "vpon pe playn wowe" [ed. J. J. Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977)], evidently means "unembellished" [*Middle English Dictionary* s.v., 3(a)]. In fact, carved ivory was usually painted rather than left plain.

16. Georg Swarzenski, "A Gothic Ivory Diptych," *Bulletin of the Fogg Museum of Art* 10 (1947): 183.

17. See *Transformations of the Court Style: Gothic Art in Europe, 1270 to 1330* (Providence: Department of Art, Brown University, 1977): 48.

18. Koechlin, *Les ivoires*, 1:162. On ivory diptychs, see also O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Ivory Carvings of the Christian Era...in the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography in the British Museum* (London: British Museum and Longmans, 1909); Margaret H. Longhurst, *Catalogue of Carvings in Ivory*, 2 pts. (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1927-29); and J. O. Westwood, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Fictile Ivories in the South Kensington Museum* (London, 1876).

19. Koechlin, *Les ivoires*, 1.309.

20. French, end of the 13th century [Victoria and Albert (V & A) 211-1865].

21. French, 14th century [British Library (BL) M&LA 56, 6-23, 86]. In a diptych from Cologne (1330-40), Mary holds a small cross in a Madonna scene on the left panel as if in anticipation of the Crucifixion on the right (V&A A.555-1910).

22. Cologne, ca. 1340 (V&A 235-1867). In a French diptych from the end of the 14th century (Koechlin No. 823), an Entry into Jerusalem occupies the lower register on the left panel. The usual gates of the city have been omitted. These seem to be supplied by the prominent hellgate in the Harrowing that fills the lower register on the right. As the eye moves from left to right, one entry by Christ is evidently to be understood retrospectively as the type of another one.

23. Koechlin No. 37. The sequence runs from the top down on the left panel, then from the top down on the right. But within this sequence, the Adoration is placed after the Flight into Egypt.

24. BL M&LA 55, 12-1, 34. Instances of mere balance are very numerous. For example, in this same diptych, the Virgin is made the center of both the Ascension on the left and the Pentecost on the right. In another carving, a kneeling Longinus in a Crucifixion balances the kneeling king in an Adoration (French 14th century; Dalton No. 298). In an English (?) carving from the first half of the 14th century, the pole used in the Flagellation on the left panel occupies the same position as the vertical beam of the Cross on the right (V&A, 300-1866). In a French piece from midcentury, two angels in the recesses of the arcading on the left panel bring a crown to the Madonna; two angels symmetrically placed on the right in a Crucifixion carry discs representing the sun and the moon (BL M&LA 56, 6-23, 67; cf. Dalton No. 269 and V&A 234-1867—both fourteenth century French). Elsewhere, a disc with the Agnus Dei held by John the Baptist is the mirror image of the wheel held on the opposite leaf by St. Catherine (French, 14th century, V&A A.39-1923). In a Northern Italian ivory from late in the 14th or early in the 15th century (V&A A.566-1910), the great crush of people present in a Death of the Virgin scene on the left panel is

balanced on the right by no fewer than ten angels playing instruments crowded into the top of a Coronation of the Virgin.

25. V&A A.553-1910. Similar tensions appear to run up and down all the registers of this carving. In the middle band, for example, an Escape into Egypt just to the left of center plays off against a Resurrection (Christ's stepping out of the tomb) carved just to the right of center.

26. Cologne, about 1310-20 (V&A 6824-1858). In another diptych (French, first half of the 14th century, V&A 237 C-1867), the posture of the Christ child facing the three kings at the extreme lower left is symmetrical with his posture as he is turned towards Simeon in a Presentation on the right panel. This may bring secular power into tension with spiritual.

27. BL 56 6-23 58. The upper register carries the Flagellation, Christ's carrying the cross, and the Crucifixion. The middle register, also from left to right, carries four scenes with Judas and then the Arrest. The lower register includes the Deposition, the Entombment, and the *Noli*.

28. Koechlin No. 819

29. The Cloisters 1970.324.8a,b.

30. Koechlin No. 250.

31. Second third of the 14th century (Koechlin No. 295).

32. Fourteenth century (Koechlin No. 52).

33. Koechlin No. 338. Cf. Koechlin No. 453.

34. Koechlin No. 370.

35. V&A A553-1910. From left to right, the upper register includes the Annunciation, Nativity, Christ's carrying his cross, and the Crucifixion. The middle register comprises the Presentation, Flight into Egypt, and the appearance to the Marys. The lower register includes the Death of the Virgin, Coronation, Flagellation, and Agony in the Garden.

36. Among the exceptions are a mid-14th-century French diptych with a Madonna and child on the left, St. Catherine trampling on the Emperor Maxentius on the right (V&A 4-1872), another from earlier in the century with a Coronation on the left and a scene of St. Lawrence being blessed by a bishop on the right (Koechlin No. 526), another of about the same period with a Crucifixion on the left, St. Margaret issuing from the back of a monster on the right (Dalton No. 279), and another with the Virgin, the Magdalene, and St. Catherine on the left, and St. Barbara (?), St. Agnes, and St. Margaret on the right (BL 56 6-23 83). Perhaps the chronological disparity between the subjects, drawn from different Christian ages, overwhelmed the convention of the superiority of the right-hand panel. However, in the Wilton Diptych (not ivory, of course), Madonna and Child are on the right panel, Richard II is on the left.

37. See Cabrol, "Diptyques," col. 1090.

38. See Margaret H. Longhurst, *English Ivories* (London: Putnam's, 1926),: Plates 49, 50. Longhurst assigns both to the middle of the 15th century. The latter carving does include an Adoration among the scenes on the left leaf and an Annunciation among the scenes on the right.

39. See, e.g., BL 56, 6-23 84, and BL 56, 6-23 82.

40. V&A A554-1910. On the other hand, leaving the question of the selection of episodes out of account, the order here is simply chronological.

41. But see O.D. Macrae-Gibson, "Pearl: The Link-Words and the Thematic Structure," *Neophilologus* 52 (1968): 59-60.

42. Cf. Kean, *The Pearl: An Interpretation*, p. 189; and W. O. Evans, "'Cortaysye' in Middle English," *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967): 143, 154-55.

43. See T. A. Reisner, "The 'Cortaysye' Sequence in *Pearl*: A Legal Interpretation," *Modern Philology* 72 (1978): 401.

44. "Blysse" appears to be univocal. Its sense, good or evil, depends upon the object of happiness.

45. Section XV, of course, includes one stanza more than the usual five. For recent discussion, see Fleming, "Centuple Structure," pp. 81-89, and D. M. Finkstein, "The *Pearl*-Poet As Bezalel," *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973): 427-32.

46. Gradon, *Form and Style*, describes the poet's use of *deme* as "a play on the ideas of man's judgement and God's ordaining" (p. 209).

47. Outside the correlated sections, there is another and probably closer *sensus bonus* for "jueler"—the merchant who is ready to sell everything to buy the Pearl of Great Price (729-32).

48. Mabel Day, however, took line 210 to mean, 'Her hair floated loosely round her': "Two Notes on *Pearl*," *Medium Ævum* 3 (1934): 242. Schofield (p. 183) compared lines 210-14 with several lines in the *Roman de la Rose*. Yet there is evidently nothing comparable in the earlier description to the imagery of binding or confinement.

49. "... Being merely human, ... [the dreamer] cannot be anything but inadequate to the role he is called on to play. He is no John the Divine ...": Spearing, *Gawain-Poet*, p. 105. An opposition between two Johns—John the Baptist announcing the historical Christ, John the Divine envisioning Christ in glory—is common in the diptychs: see, e.g., Dalton No. 246 (English, mid-14th-century) and V&A A555-1910 (French, same period). Cf. *Pearl* 817-40.

50. The dreamer's metaphor for this is his standing "as styll as dased quayle" (1085). There is a comparable figure back on the left "panel," with the dreamer's stillness (182) making him "as hende as hawk in halle" (184). But this phrase occurs a few lines into section IV.

51. *In bono* "more and more" names ever increasing fruition, an impossibility on earth. The maiden refers in XVI to bliss that "schal euer ences" (959).

52. In the same lines the poet also makes the moon metaphoric for moral filth, perhaps the more important part of its *sensus malus*. For further discussion of the two senses of "mone," see Marie Borroff, "Pearl's 'Maynful Mone': Crux, Simile, and Structure," in *Acts of Interpretation: The Text in Its Context 700-1600: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature in Honor of E. Talbot Donaldson*, ed. Mary J. Carruthers and Elizabeth D. Kirk (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1982), p. 169. See also Macrae-Gibson, "Link Words," for a sensitive discussion of the poet's use of "mone" to hint that the vision is approaching its close (p. 62).

53. Blenkner rightly remarks that it is only after this section that there is a "revival of will" ("Theological Structure," p. 245).

54. "Human art supplants nature as comforter...": Bogdanos, "Ineffable," p. 48. Cf. Elizabeth Petroff, "Landscape in *Pearl*: The Transformation of Nature," *Chaucer Review* 16 (1981): 187; and Nikki Stiller, "The Transformation of the Physical in the Middle English *Pearl*," *English Studies* 63 (1982): 405. Gradon adduces earlier literature to make it clear that "the jeweled streams do not necessarily indicate the supernatural.... Nor is it necessarily a Christian paradise" (p. 204). Cf. R. J. Blanch, "Color Symbolism and Mystical Contemplation in *Pearl*," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 17 (1973): 62-63.

55. See Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*," *Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 13.

56. McGalliard, "Links, Language," p. 283.

57. *Middle English Dictionary*, s.v.

58. C.20.21-22; ed. Derek Pearsall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 320. The *Middle English Dictionary* records a figurative use of "dubben" from the *Northern Passion* that means Christ's clothing himself in human likeness.

59. For some recent discussion of the narrator's state at the close of the poem, see A. C. Watt, "Pearl, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99 (1984): 34; Bogdanos, "Ineffable," pp. 143-45; L. M. Sklute, "Expectation and Fulfillment in *Pearl*," *Philological Quarterly* 52 (1973): 676-79; and J. P. Oakden, "The Liturgical Influence in *Pearl*," in *Chaucer und seine Zeit: Symposion für Walter F. Schirmer*, ed. Arno Esch (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), p. 337.