Word, Image, and Vision: Cardiosensory Sight and Cognition in the Work of the *Pearl*-poet

by

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Dedicated to the memory of Bonnie Marlene Hutka.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines vision and visuality in the poems of MS. British Library Cotton Nero A.x art. 3 (*Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). These Middle English poems of the late fourteenth century, commonly attributed to a single unknown author (the *Pearl*-poet), have long been admired for their evocative visual elements. The present study argues that visuality and vision are essential to earthly contemplation of God and that the *Pearl*-poet's representation of visual perception ultimately endorses the utility of material signs and the material body itself.

The argument incorporates the medieval discourses of optical science, faculty psychology, and mystical theology to argue that the *Pearl*-poet employs vision as a mode of spiritual communion. Imagining the heart as the essential organ of sense perception, the poet represents the human body as a medium for recognizing and an index for understanding the signs of spirit suffusing the material world.

The first two chapters introduce the discourse of medieval optical theory known as *perspectiva* as it relates to acts of vision in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Within the purview of *perspectival* theory, these chapters evaluate the poet's understanding of vision as a liminal perceptual medium by which the conscious mind interacts with the external world of sensory images through the intromission of sensible forms and the extramission of the sensitive soul. Imagined as extensions of the soul, the gazes projected and exchanged in this poem may be read as significant markers of identity that reveal the hidden affections of ocular desire.

In chapter three the thesis investigates *Cleanness* and *Patience* in order to elucidate the poet's preoccupation with the most sublime form of ocular desire expressed in the poems of Cotton Nero A.x: the theophanic vision of God promised in the sixth Beatitude (Matthew 5:8). The *Pearl*-poet's representation of such vision in the homiletic *exempla* of *Cleanness* and *Patience* emphasizes the perfectible nature of human identity and expresses a confidence in the capacity for visible, material signs to convey spiritual experience.

Chapter four turns attention back to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and explains how Gawain's shortcomings may be attributed to a failure of perception. Essentially, Gawain fails to fulfill the requirements of his socially-determined identity because his gaze is improperly directed. By beholding only the material markers of human frailty and weakness, Gawain conforms himself to an irrational conception of human life that denies spiritual vision and leads to misrecognition of self.

The final chapters of this thesis discuss *Pearl* and argue that the spiritual vision beheld by the Dreamer is apprehended through the familiar apparatuses of bodily gazing and that this apparent mismatch of physical perception and metaphysical sensation illustrates the potential for spiritual enlightenment through the operations of the bodily eye and material imagination. The poet's privileging of imaginative contemplation in *Pearl* reflects an outlook on vision that is common to all the poems of Cotton Nero A.x. In every instance, the *Pearl*-poet represents bodily vision with an expectancy that invites the human subject to uncover the numinous spiritual presence underlying quotidian material reality through the agency of the eye.

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CHAPTER I — Introduction

The following thesis is a study of vision and visuality in the poems of the fourteenth-century British Library MS. Cotton Nero A.x Art. 3. Cotton Nero A.x contains the only known copies of four poems: *Pearl*, *Cleanness*, *Patience*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[1] Though there is no definitive proof of shared authorship, scholarly consensus has accepted the view that all four poems are the work of a single author, and the present study treats these poems as the work of one poet, whom I shall refer to as the *Pearl*-poet.[2] This thesis engages with the scientific and psychological theories underlying the poet's understanding of vision and visuality and identifies the *Pearl*-poet's use of visual motifs as a significant mode of poetic expression. More than this, however, I argue that the *Pearl*-poet uses medieval theories of visual perception as a model for his own poetic acts of descriptive image-making and that he ultimately draws upon ideas contemporary in the scientific and theological thought of his time to imagine and express textual images that imitate the function of real sensory phenomena. These phenomena notably include supernormal or metaphysical sensory

[1] MS. Cotton Nero A.x Art. 3 is a unique manuscript and all four of the poems contained therein are of unique provenance. The British Library catalogue broadly indicates that the manuscript was created between 1250 and 1475; however, textual details (styles of dress, references to political institutions) strongly indicate that the manuscript was created in the late fourteenth century (Horrall 193). The MS. is written in a single hand and contains twelve illustrations of unexceptional quality. The poems vary in form, but they all share alliterative characteristics and exemplify the Middle English dialect of the north-west midlands.

[2] The case for common authorship has been convincingly argued by A.C. Spearing ("*Patience* and the *Gawain*-poet"), William Vantuono ("*Patience*, *Cleanness*, *Pearl*, and *Gawain*: The Case for Common Authorship."), and Marie Borroff ("Narrative Artistry in *St. Erkenwald*"). While offering a convincing critical template for reckoning common authorship, Spearing concedes that the similarities that indicate a single author are "persuasive rather than conclusive"; however, by negating the alternative possibility of multiple authors, he makes his most convincing case in favour of common authorship: "when we have four such impressive poems from the same dialectal area, and no specific reason for assigning them to different authors, there is no point in multiplying hypothetical great poets to account for their existence" (305-6).

experiences such as spiritual theophany, and the poet's attempts to express super-sensory reality incorporate the mechanisms of physical vision in a manner that valorizes the material world as a medium in which spiritual truth can be identified and expressed.[3] This mimesis of sense perception expresses the poet's abiding interest in the inter-liminal exchanges of body and soul and constitutes knowledge as a visual object that can be transmitted and received through textual signs. In spite of the inevitable sensory and cognitive limitations of fallen humanity and the postlapsarian world, the work of the *Pearl*-poet expresses a desire for sublime vision that is not merely a deferred anticipation of bliss in the afterlife, but rather an experience for which the human soul can and must be prepared through the quotidian experience of bodily life and sensation. This desire for vision posits the human observer as a perfectible agent of sensation and will and further recognizes the physical realm as a world of signs, material and textual, in and through which spiritual meaning can be conveyed and received.[4]

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[3] Readers have long discussed and disputed the *Pearl*-poet's attitude towards material human life and the sensual pleasures that often attend such life. A.C. Spearing claims of the *Pearl*-poet that: "the central figures of his poems do not, in the last resort, really *feel* that there are values beyond those of this world that may make some demand on them. And in each of the four poems, human beings living in this state are confronted with some intervention from a world beyond the human, an intervention which acts as a challenging reminder of non-human values and their power" (*The* Gawain-*poet* 29). Spearing suggests a tension between the worldly and the spiritual, a tension that must resolve itself in human action. Theodore Bogdanos claims that the poet's use of figures to represent metaphysical referents posits metaphorical vehicles that "incarnationally" represent the presence of spiritual tenors (55). According to Bogdanos, the *Pearl*-poet's uses of metaphor indicate spiritual ideas behaving as or reflecting the nature of the physical vehicles used to signify them (46). In her own observation of this binary tension between the worldly and the spiritual, Marie Borroff refers to the numerical aspects of the poet's design and remarks that "The invisible presence of numbers governing the length of a verse-narrative can thus be thought of as bringing the perfection of eternity to bear on the temporal realm of mortality, sinfulness, and death" ("Narrative Artistry" 72).

[4] My argument is indebted to the work of Heather Webb, who has explored scientific and philosophical attitudes regarding the human heart and cardiosensory perception in the Middle Ages. Her introduction to the idea of the heart as an organ of sensory perception touches upon the metaphysical interests of my own thesis: "For both poets and theologians, sense perceptions that were routed to the heart indicated experiences of a privileged order, mediations of God's divine power to meld with the vital spirit filling the

My initial purpose in the first chapter of this study is to introduce the philosophical ground of medieval visual theory. Of particular interest here are theories associated with optical *perspectiva*, a field of study inaugurated in the medieval west by Robert Grosseteste in the thirteenth century and further developed by Grosseteste's pupil Roger Bacon (Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 36). Through an analysis of optical tropes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I shall introduce the *Pearl*-poet's familiarity with Baconian *perspectival* optics and further demonstrate the way in which the poet uses vision as a mode of epistemological enquiry. After introducing the essentials of *perspectival* thought, in the following chapter I shall proceed to examine the poet's use of visual motifs in instances of *descriptio*. These instances reveal a familiarity with medieval optical theory that further informs the aesthetic and spiritual aims of the poet's work and can in turn enlighten our own understanding of this literature.

In the context of *perspectival* optics, the processing of visual images may be broadly understood in terms of extramission and intromission. Proponents of the extramitted optical mode theorize a visual ray, projected from the eye, that lights upon external objects and senses them visually in the same manner one might reach out a hand to feel external objects by the sense of touch. Intromission, on the other hand, involves the admission of external images through the eye and into the internal cognitive apparatus of the observing subject. Both of these models espouse a conception of vision that imagines the human subject as a porous agent in which and through which images may be displayed

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heart" ("Cardiosensory Impulses" 272). Considered in this manner, the heart emerges as a direct link between mundane and supernatural reality and the nexus of spiritual vision for the human subject.

and imprinted. This study pursues a greater understanding of what these visual transactions can tell us about medieval cognition and how medieval theories of vision can enlighten our understanding of poetics in the Middle Ages. In the case of the *Pearl*-poet, we can see the visually inflected imprint of imagery at work in his own descriptive acts. Moreover, through the use of visual tropes of extramission and intromission, the poet explores how his own inscribed images can be manipulated and received in ways that imitate acts of visual perception.

A wide gulf obtains between medieval and modern optics. The twenty-first-century scientific understanding of visual sensation runs thus: vision is the optical reception of light, radiated particles called photons that propagate through space. Our eyes receive photon signals and derive from these signals the specific characteristics of visual images: amplitude, wavelength, and angle of reflection. These properties are then interpreted as sensible, visual details such as brightness, colour, and polarization, respectively. After interpreting these signals, the eye transmits bio-electrical currents through the optical nerve to the brain. The brain contemplates these currents and coordinates optical information with the memory and the other senses to synthesize and understand visual stimuli. In this manner, visible photons are processed as sensory experience. The eye is essentially a lens that converts signals of light radiation into a kind of message suitable for the brain's contemplation. In this way, the human person experiences the external world as an approximation of experience. The indirect nature of visual stimulation aligns well with a post-Cartesian concept of mind and body, for which the active, perceiving consciousness is understood at a remove from the inert

apparatus of the body: the eyes of the body receive signals of light but the vital contemplating *cogito* itself is never shone upon by such visible rays. The brain, the nexus of intellectual processes that we call consciousness, perceives light through the translating mechanical prism of the eye's cones, rods, and chambers but has no direct contact with the sensible signs that it interprets. Patricia Waugh has recently drawn attention to Virginia Woolf's modernist construction of the post-Cartesian view. In her 1926 essay "On Being Ill," Woolf asserts that the body is not at all "a sheet of plain glass through which the soul looks straight and clear" (317). She, rather, refers to the soul or consciousness as a "creature within," enclosed by the mediating prison of the body (318). Waugh suggests that vision is useful for Woolf's construction of Cartesian alienation and that Woolf "uses the metaphor of seeing because vision is more suggestively bound up with the object, more externalized, the least embodied of the senses" (132). This sense of disembodiment relies for its theoretical underpinnings upon a modern view of the essentially isolated nature of human consciousness or identity: demarcated and circumscribed by the limitations of the body but nonetheless given to understand itself distinct from or even somehow disassociated from the body.[5]

[5] Maurice Merleau-Ponty confirms the self-alienating dimension of post-Cartesian epistemology. He refers to the content of Descartes's *Dioptrics* as "the breviary of a thought that wants no longer to abide in the visible" (*The Primacy of Perception* 169). This mode of extreme idealism runs contrary to a medieval realism that assumes the existence of an all-knowing divine mind that guarantees the intelligibility of objective reality. Eileen C. Sweeney's analysis of medieval semiotics (*Boethius, Abelard, and Alan of Lille: Words in the Absence of Things*) identifies a theoretical state of integrity inhering between word, thought, and thing in the Boethian tradition of medieval philosophy and art (12). Merleau-Ponty's visual aesthetic theorizes an artistic mode that resembles this medieval concept of mind: "Vision is not the metamorphosis of things themselves into the sight of them; it is not a matter of things belonging simultaneously to the huge, real world and the small, private world. It is a thinking that deciphers strictly the signs given within the body."

The medieval understanding of vision shares some characteristics with this modern contemporary view but operates from some significantly different premises and thus produces some rather different conclusions. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills identify the complex of ambiguities surrounding the body's relation to soul in the late-medieval reckoning of visual perception:

> Thirteenth-century theorists... certainly opened up a space for scientific scrutiny by abstracting vision from the flesh; ocular experience was also simultaneously deemed to effect a corporeal mingling of self and other, a process in which one is altered by the things at which one looks. (3-4)

What Campbell and Mills refer to here is the pseudo-material, almost tactile, interplay of visual power and perceived form in medieval optical theory, a discipline of knowledge that came to be known as *perspectiva* under the scholarly "leadership" of Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century (Lindberg, *Roger Bacon* xxxii).[6] As I have already indicated, this interplay is characterized by two overlapping theoretical models of *perspectival* science: extramission and intromission. Both of these theoretical models employ the body as well as the soul in an engagement with the external world of images and ideas that bespeaks the quotidian presence of the human subject in the material world. Images enter and exit the body of the human subject in a process that involves the body as a direct conduit in the transmission of visual information both to and from the

[6] David Lindberg characterizes Bacon as a compiler and synthesizer of received scholarly tradition. My argument accepts Lindberg's view and posits Bacon's corpus as a repository of popular circulating theories in *perspectiva* thought. It is primarily to Bacon's optics that I turn for the popular current in fourteenth-century optics and Lindberg's own history of optic science has been indispensable for the present study (*Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*). For valuable treatments of *perspectiva* principles in medieval literature, Suzannah Biernoff (*Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*) and Suzanne Akbari (*Seeing Through the Veil*) provide much enlightening analysis.

sensitive soul.[7] In her discussion of medieval attitudes regarding the body and spiritual contemplation, Corinne Saunders acknowledges the potentially enthusiastic valuation of bodily experience: "Although the body could be seen as the prison-house of the soul, it could also function to reflect and cultivate the soul's beauty. The fallen body might through affective experience open the way to a deeper understanding of the self and the divine" (87). Participation in the world thus yields understanding and communion for the enlightened observer. In this formulation of "affective experience," the sensory experiences perceived within and through the material limits of the human body mingle with the will of the human agent in the expression of selfhood.[8]

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight demonstrates just such an interplay of body and soul in the processes of sense perception. Providing a further

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[7] The "sensitive soul" refers to a capacity for perceptual awareness that is possessed by all conscious animal life. The concept originates with Aristotle's tri-partite division of the soul into three hierarchically-ordered parts or powers: the vegetative [or nutritive] soul, responsible for the nourishment and growth of living matter; the sensitive soul, responsible for perceptual awareness in conscious animals; the rational soul, the seat of reason in humans and angels that share the rational soul as a portion of God's divinity. The lesser souls are incorporated into the higher, but things that possess only a lower-order soul do not have access to the functions of higher souls. For example, plants possess vegetative souls and are therefore capable of living and growing. Because plants lack a sensitive soul, however, they are not capable of perception and have no external or internal wits.

[8] Regarding distinctions between the being and functions of body and soul, the *perspectiva* of Bacon is greatly influenced by the philosophy of Avicenna (c. 980-1037). E. Ruth Harvey provides a brief summary of Avicenna's teachings on this matter: "The spirit is the border between body and soul, the middle term linking the two extremes of immaterial and material. It mediates between animal perception and angelic reason, as man himself is the middle term between the beasts and the angels" (28 n76). Avicenna's influence is also evident in Albertus Magnus's philosophy of the mind and soul. Like Avicenna, Albertus postulates "spirit" as a medium through which the soul fulfills its actions in the body. In his discussion of the cardiosensory nature of the visual power, Albertus explains the generation of vital and animal spirits in the respective loci of heart and brain:

> Now, the vital spirits are generated in the heart and flow through the arteries to the brain, and there, owing to the brain's coldness and the narrowness of the veins and the opposition to their motion, these become animal spirits. And then they are sent to the particular senses, and this is why the animal spirits immediately proceed from the brain only to three senses: namely, hearing, smell, and sight. For this reason, it is said that
> the brain is the principle of the senses, although in a formal sense sensation is not in it. (XII.17, 381)

explication of *perspectival* vision, the second chapter of this thesis will investigate instances of visual perception in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that depict the medieval subject not only struggling to understand the sensible, external world but also contemplating his own participation as a seeing and acting agent within that world. In this poem the eye is the perceptual gateway of sensation, and all of Sir Gawain's actions may be explained in terms of visual experience. More specifically, Gawain's shortcomings are rooted in a failure of vision that proceeds from a division of self that separates Gawain's soul from his selfhood expressed in bodily gestures and signifiers. I intend this chapter to serve as an introduction to *perspectival* theory that also provides readers with a sense of how *perspectival* thought circulates in late-medieval literature. Of particular note is the use of *perspectival* tropes to express the action of the contemplative mind. In such instances, the perceptual apparatus of the eye comes to describe the cognitive function of a conceptualized inner eye that thinks by seeing. The trope of visual epistemology remains current in our own contemporary culture. Colloquial phrases indicate the perception of likeness that endures between idea and visual image: "I see what you are saying"; or "I can see the value of this proposition." Underlying this observation is an emerging recognition that medieval vision, as theorized by influential medieval thinkers and referenced in medieval art, is instructive for understanding medieval ways of thinking about the world as well as understanding the place of the medieval subject in the world. By adopting symbols and protocols that conceal rather than reveal his true self, Gawain begins his journey with an inordinate confidence in his own perfection. His failure to

adequately recognize and articulate the self leads to the misapprehension of others (their identities, their motives, their intentions). True vision is therefore linked to correct moral action, because both require the uninhibited apprehension and expression of the human soul, which is the necessary reagent in all perceptual and cognitive acts. Gawain's narrative bespeaks the frustration of flawed vision marred by a distorted moral perspective that fails to adequately recognize the moral and rational potential of human life.

Before concluding my discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, however, I shall first provide an account of what true seeing would entail for the *Pearl*-poet. Seeing and understanding are closely aligned in the poems of Cotton Nero A.x., and an analysis of Sir Gawain's flawed vision cannot be effectively undertaken without reference to the *Pearl*-poet's other works, for in those works the poet presents us with more instances of vision that can at various times parallel or even contrast the flawed sight of Gawain.[9] In the third chapter, therefore, I shall examine the implications of vision in the poet's homiletic poems. *Cleanness* and *Patience* both retell biblical stories with a particular emphasis upon the promise of beatific vision. The vision of God promised in the Beatitudes being the highest object of ocular desire imaginable for a medieval Christian, the spiritual rigours required for attaining beatific vision in these poems would seem instructive for attaining true sight (or true knowledge) of various kinds. This

[9] The present study relies upon the assumption that the poems of the Cotton Nero A.x are not only written by a single author but that the poems can be read together in an intertextual way. This assumption guides the work of Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman in their book *From* Pearl *to* Gawain : *Forme to Fynisment*, which approaches the Cotton Nero poems with the critical expectation "not only that the works share a common author but that they are connected and intersect in fundamental ways that work against discussion in isolation" (2). I am not suggesting that the poems constitute a kind of grand unity; however, these poems nonetheless reveal persistent patterns of thought as well as recursive images and forms that can be read within a broader analytical framework.

chapter will expand upon the motifs of cardiosensory sight already introduced in the previous chapter and reveal the disposition or preparation of the seeing subject that is a prerequisite for higher contemplations. Specifically, my analysis of the homiletic poems will investigate the poet's examples of those who are capable of higher sight and those who are not, and the comparison of these various states of ocular perception will provide a more suitable context within which to evaluate Gawain's perceptual shortcomings. In *Patience*, for example, the fear of death compels Jonah to defy God, and in his fear he subsequently misreads the prophetic signs laid before him. Sir Gawain's own fear of death and preoccupation with worldly goods render him similarly incapable of using his reason or truly understanding the nature of the challenge laid before him. Jonah's gaze is only corrected when he receives true insight as a gift of grace in the form of God's own extramitted ray of light, a light that literally burns away impediments to sight and purifies the gaze of those who behold it. Subsequently, Jonah turns his gaze upon God with sincerity and patient obedience. This manner of understanding is also figured in *Cleanness* through the character of the prophet Daniel, whose ability to correctly interpret dreams as well as the enigmatic warnings of God contrasts with the carnal ignorance of the Israelites destroyed by flood as well as the hapless citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. Mired in his own worldly interests and pursuits, Gawain would appear to less resemble Daniel than King Balthazar, whose worldly pride prizes his own vain self-worth as greater than God's and ultimately closes his heart to the prophetic warnings inscribed upon the walls of his very own hall.

In chapter four I shall return to Gawain and consider his vital failures at Hautdesert as well as at the Green Chapel. In both cases Gawain's heart is closed to the truth, and, by making false judgements without the aid of reason, he allows himself to fall into error. Emphasis here must be placed upon Gawain's acceptance and concealing of the green girdle, an act that is symbolically tethered to the temptations he faces at Hautdesert. Even though Gawain defies the sexual temptations of Hautdesert's Lady, he, by claiming the supposed protection of the girdle, nonetheless succumbs to frailty of the flesh. This shortcoming undercuts Gawain's pretences of worldly perfection and reveals a prideful misapprehension of self not unlike that of Balthazar in *Cleanness*. This failure is further figured by grotesque images of uncrowning that highlight the manner in which Gawain can never untether himself from the carnal world of sensation that crowds his vision and renders him incapable of perceiving truth. By coming to an understanding of Gawain's failure to apprehend his own human nature, this chapter will reveal misapprehension of self as the underlying fault that skews Gawain's vision and rational understanding throughout the poem.

In chapter five I shall turn from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to *Pearl*. My reading of the poet's dream vision draws the final focus of this thesis deliberately towards the themes of beatific vision established in chapter three. This analysis turns from the overt exemplarity of Gawain, a heroic figure familiar to us in the literary tradition of medieval romance, to the humble experience of the *Pearl*-poet's mundane but intimately-figured Dreamer. Unlike Gawain, the Dreamer makes no claims to moral exemplarity, but he too is hampered in his

understanding by erroneous judgement. His need for correction and guidance is made all the more pressing by the explicitly visionary nature of his experience. For the Dreamer in *Pearl* the prospect of divine vision seems to be not just a deferred beatific reward but an imminent event. The Dreamer's insistent desire to be reunited with his deceased daughter mirrors his eventual wish to behold the celestial Jerusalem. Both of these desires surface in the Dreamer's consciousness as desire for vision as not only imminent but immanent, actualized in the sensory experience of the Dreamer. In terms of medieval vision theory, the Dreamer's desire for theophany would seem to posit the "ghostly sight" of heavenly things in the material register of "bodily sight." The Dreamer's pursuit of epiphanic ecstasy thus draws the sensory faculty of imagination, so insufficient in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to bear against the weighty contemplative matters reserved for the higher cognitive faculties such as reason and understanding. The Dreamer's abortive attempt to realize higher contemplation through the lesser cognitive mode proves insufficient, but the attempt reaffirms the inescapable materiality of conventional vision as a medium of both perception and contemplation. Moreover, the poem reveals the poet's own preoccupation with vision as a preoccupation with the possibilities of poetic imagery. His art thus reveals a desire not unlike the sublime wish of the Dreamer in *Pearl*: a desire to represent and perceive in words what cannot be seen with the bodily eyes, to envision in text what cannot be seen in conventional form.

CHAPTER II — *Perspectival* Vision in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Among the works of the *Pearl*-poet, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* has perhaps attracted the most attention from critics concerned with uses of visual space and expression.[10] Most notable among early scholars of visuality in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is certainly Alan Renoir, whose work in the 1950s seized upon the quasi-cinematic quality of the *Pearl*-poet's visual poetics. For Renoir, the *Pearl*-poet never merely provides descriptions of static objects, but instead composes dynamic treatments of space and movement that evince the same aesthetic principles as those espoused by the cinematograph ("Descriptive Technique" 126). Renoir's interest in the poem follows the observations of earlier scholars such as Émile Pons, who praised the poem as "not only the most beautiful Arthurian poem in English but one of the most vivid works of Arthurian literature of all countries and of all times" (Pons 15). Renoir also refers to Francis Berry's fascination with the vividness of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which "experience is actualized in the muscular images and rhythm, in the grasp of concrete particulars" (Berry 149). This notion of vividness proves to be the

[10] In the introduction to his verse translations of the works of the *Pearl*-poet, Casey Finch offers an effusive introduction to the poet's use of visual images:

> [T]here is nothing, I think, in English literature quite like the *Pearl* poet's sense of the potentially miraculous nature of the *visual*. There is no blood quite so red as the blood that drops from Gawain's neck onto the white expanse of snow at the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There are few images at once so sharp and so disorientingly strange as the first vision of the Pearl Maiden on the opposite riverbank in *Pearl*. Indeed, everywhere in the *Pearl* poet we are confronted with arresting, almost overwhelming, visual effects. Consider the eerie, floating hand of God as it scratches the mysterious letters on the wall at Belshazzar's feast in *Cleanness*; the bright, flowing wound of Christ that is the source of the river in *Pearl*'s New Jerusalem; the talking head of the Green Knight at Arthur's court in *Sir Gawain*; or the detailed and vividly imagined belly of the whale in *Patience*. (6-7)

touchstone of Renoir's thoughts on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, since all of his critical commentary drives towards interrogating and explaining the uncanny visual accomplishment of a work that is a poem of images constructed in words. Renoir's own synthesis of critical consensus regarding the visual power of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* hinges upon what he perceives as the "author's psychological insight into the nature of the experiences he describes and upon his flair for significant details" ("Descriptive Technique" 126). In a more recent study, Jeremy Lowe revisits Renoir's impression of the poet's pseudo-cinematographic technique and explores the implications of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s complicating "contingencies, transitions, and constant renegotiations," exigencies apparently unaccounted for in Renoir's application of classical film theory (68). By turning away from what he calls "visual aspects of point of view" (157), Michael Flint takes a different approach to description in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For Flint, point of view has further connotations beyond the visual: his approach incorporates "cognitive, emotive, and ideological aspects" of perspective modality (157). This methodology parallels my own approach to the study of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. My intent in this thesis is to confront the preponderance of optical tropes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the other poems of the *Pearl*-manuscript, and my analysis will show that the poet's figural uses of vision have implications for understanding the limits of human understanding as well as the consolatory means by which vision may facilitate spiritual experience. This argument employs a multi-disciplinary

approach to visual sensation as not only a matter of geometry and physics but of the psychology of bodily perception as well.

Among these notable contributions to our understanding of vision and visuality in the poems of Cotton Nero A.x, the work of Sarah Stanbury must be recognized. Her research has revealed the *Pearl*-poet's significant interplay of description and visual reception. My own research is indebted to her observations concerning the primacy of vision as a mode of knowledge that goes beyond the apprehension of sensible detail. Through Stanbury's analysis of vision as a mode of thought and interpretation, our understanding of vision in these poems turns from passive reception to active exploration and even expression (*Seeing* 6-7). Stanbury's compelling case for reading the poet's homiletic poems as aids for spiritual sight is particularly relevant for the present argument ("Vision and Sacred History" 113), which contends that the *Pearl*-poet not only indicates vision as a mode of spiritual meditation but that his representation of vision even articulates the phenomenology of sensory cognition associated with mystical contemplation.

All of the studies that I have indicated open up fascinating possibilities for interrogating the *Pearl*-poet's work. Renoir's analysis of the cinematographic aspects of the *Pearl*-poet's *descriptio* remains particularly compelling, and yet the value of such inquiry achieves its true potential only when the actual craft of the poet emerges in its own historicized particularity rather than as an analogue of the anachronistic contemporary language and praxis of cinematic arts. While I concur with the position of James J. Paxson, who asserts in his treatment of

medieval allegory that a real correspondence obtains between the visual properties of medieval text and modern film technique, the value of such a similarity ought not to be overstated. Paxson takes his position to an unreasonable extreme when he claims that medieval "thematic, iconographic and semiotic systems... [prefigure] cinematic consciousness" (291). Such a position can perhaps tell us something of the modern art of cinematography, but it cannot illumine our understanding of vision and visuality in a medieval poem such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. If it would seem that the narrative perspective, the observant and illustrative narrative eye of the *Pearl*-poet, exhibits functions and habits that parallel those of a modern film camera we would also do well to identify how that poetic eye operates on its own terms, according to the knowledge and understanding of its own cultural moment. Historicizing the poet's psychological insight may have the effect of violating the poem's seemingly universal appeal, an appeal that stretches so easily into modernity that critics such as Renoir and Lowe speak of contemporary cinematography and medieval poesis in nearly coequal terms, but it must be done if the visual poetics of the *Pearl*-poet are to teach us anything of vision and visuality in the context of fourteenth-century medieval poetry. This work of historicizing includes exploring the poem's engagement with the optical theory of its own historical milieu and evaluating the manner in which the poet's uses of vision and visuality can be understood against the backdrop of medieval thought. In the case of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *perspectival* tropes reveal an acute anxiety regarding the capacity for unrestricted human perception. At the outset of the text, the poet imagines Gawain as a kind

of paragon of unfettered human perfection, and his excellence supposedly must extend to all fields of conduct, including the capacity to perceive and recognize truth. To account for the hero's use of sight and how it informs our understanding of his perceptive acuity, we shall require an understanding of how sight itself is contemplated by the *Pearl*-poet and how he deploys it in his descriptive acts.

The key element of visual apprehension in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the cognitive faculty of the imagination, the image-making faculty of the medieval mind. For a medieval perspective on the imagination, I turn attention to the *Donet* of Reginald Pecock, mid-fifteenth-century bishop of St. Asaph and Chichester. Synthesizing matter derived from the medieval tradition of faculty psychology,[11] Pecock acknowledges that the faculty of imagination is a repository and mirror of knowledge "forto kepe in store alle þe same now seid knowinges wiþ her fundamentis, whiche ben callid 'similitudis,' 'liknessis,' or 'ymagis' of þingis þat þei falle not soon aweie" (*Pecock's Donet* 10). The word-choice used here for the images beheld through imagination is replete with synonyms for the "species" beheld in *perspectival* vision, and examination of the medieval imagination may be understood as a corollary for the better understanding of

[11] "Faculty psychology" refers to a kind of system of mind that theorizes the various functions and capacities of the human mind to be individually divided into discrete, cooperating faculties. During the Middle Ages, the most basic accounts of such a system of faculty division often postulated that human cognition functioned through a combination of faculties (most writers identify between three and five faculties: imagination, reason, and memory being the most commonly identified faculties). The three-fold division of these faculties is the influential model that Murray Bundy (184) ascribes to Honorius (1090-1120), whose system is subsequently modified or even expanded by later thinkers such as John of Salisbury (1115-1180), Albertus Magnus (1206-1280), and of course Roger Bacon (1214-1292), who postulated a five-fold division of internal senses. More recent studies of medieval faculty psychology include E. Ruth Harvey's *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* and Mary Carruthers's *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory and Culture in Medieval Culture*. The five-fold division of the faculties will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

perspectival optics.[12] As we explore the imagination as means to acquire knowledge of the world through visual sensation, it will be important to distinguish the knowledge of imagination from that of reason. John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomæus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum* provides commentary on the inner faculties of perception and contemplation that help us make this distinction. Tellingly, *On the Properties of Things* divides the faculty of the imagination into two constituents, "bodily wit" and the imagination proper: "bodiliche wit, þerby he knowiþ while þey beþ present bodiliche þinges þat beþ iknowe by þe bodiliche wittis, as by siȝt and oþer bodilich wittis... [and] ymaginacioun, þerby þe soule biholdiþ þe liknes of bodiliche þinges þat beþ absent" (III.6, 95).[13] According to Trevisa, both imagination and reason are "myȝtes or vertues" of the soul, but whereas imagination contemplates the images of things whether absent or present before the senses, reason operates in the formation of opinions or judgements. Trevisa refers to "*racio*" or "resoun" as a mental faculty "þat demeþ betwene gode and euel and soþ and fals" (III.6, 95).[14] The virtues of soul are counterparts of the five bodily senses, and Trevisa's own

[12] See pages 31-32 for Bacon's litany of terms for visible species.

[13] Trevisa's translation (c. 1398/9) and *Pecok's Donet* (c. 1440) both demonstrate a familiarity with the *perspectiva* principles discussed and synthesized by Roger Bacon. I cite them here in order to illustrate the influences of *perspectiva* optics and related terms of faculty psychology that endured in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. There is a common heritage of ideas at work here, and the *Pearl*-poet demonstrates a familiarity with the currents of thought contemporary during his era.

[14] Trevisa's rather basic account of reason will suffice at this stage of the present argument. In the chapters that follow, I shall discuss reason within the context of mystical contemplation. In his *Distinctiones dictionum theologicalium* Alain de Lille (c. 1128-1202/1203) acknowledges reason as a "power of the soul (*potentia animæ*) that comprehends things," but he further indicates that "reason is the power of the soul by which the soul moves to the contemplation of things heavenly ('*vis animæ qua anima movetur ad contemplationem coelestium*')" (quoted in John V. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover* 31). Alain's opinion accords with that expressed in Trevisa's *De proprietatibus rerum*, which purposes to investigate "þinges þat beþ ifelid and material" in order to advance the human heart to the knowledge of "þe spiritual þinges þat ben aboue oure wittis" (III.19, 117). For further discussion of reason in relation to the inner wits, see page 42 n27.

prose indicates how redundant it is to speak of "bodily wit" as an internal faculty of the mind, since he uses the exact same term to denote all of the instruments of external sense perception that send signals to the same inner bodily wit. This conflation of the bodily wit of imagination with the bodily wits of the external senses demonstrates the function of the imagination as a kind of internal eye that functions in much the same manner as the bodily eye itself.

Bacon, along with most other medieval thinkers, posits the imagination as the locus of the beheld image regardless of whether that image is present before the eye or only recollected from memory in the imagination. Note, however, that in the case of neither the bodily wit nor the imagination is there any mention of evaluation or appraisal of any kind. Imagination must be understood as a typically uncritical faculty. For a more critical mode of inner wit, we must turn to the reasoning power. Pecock's definition of reason accords with Trevisa's, but provides a more detailed understanding of reason and its functions:

> resoune is a power, with whiche power mowe be knowe vnbodili þingis, goostli or spiritual þingis... what is fals, what is good, and what is bad, and what is more good, and what is more bad, and what is cheseable, and what is refuseable, and which ben meenys to haue þe good and fle þe yuel. (*Pecock's Donet* 12)

Contrasting with the uncritical apprehension of the imagination, reason is primarily a faculty of judgement, for it deems the qualities of things and recognizes differences between things.

I wish to posit that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a text replete with images, but the poem offers neither us nor its titular hero much guidance in the way of reason to make sense of the image-laden world of the poem. The abundance of images to be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* reflects above all the office of the imagination in *perspectival* optics, and Gawain himself responds to the many varied visual stimuli of the poem as a man who contemplates reality not by the higher cognitive faculties such as reason but through the sensual prism of the mind's image-making faculty.[15]

The *Pearl*-poet, writing in fourteenth-century England, inherits a significant scholastic tradition of optic theory from thirteenth-century English proponents of the natural sciences such as Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon. Interpreting *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* through the perspective offered by that tradition expands our understanding of the visual experience of the poem and reveals epistemological concerns that seek to address the limits of sensory human

[15] Late medieval faculty psychologies such as these examples taken from Pecock and Trevisa derive significant elements from the Boethian tradition. For Boethius, the faculties of the mind constituted a hierarchy of knowing that posits the faculties in an ascending order: sense, imagination, reason, and intelligence. By theorizing the mind's operations as an amalgam of these distinct faculties operating in their own discrete manners, Boethius accounts for the apparent limitations of human cognition, limitations that undermine his model of divinely guaranteed linguistic and sensory understanding. Interestingly, Boethius uses the metaphor of sight as an analogy for thought in his explanation of faculty psychology. The least of these faculties, sense, falls short of attaining true knowledge in that it perceives only "figure clothed in material substance." Imagination provides a different albeit still limited view, that of "figure alone without matter." Only the highest of these faculties, what Boethius calls divine intelligence, may see rightly for

> intelligence, that lookith [as] aboven, whanne it hath comprehended the forme, it knowith and demyth alle the thinges that ben undir that foorme; but sche knoweth hem in thilke manere in the whiche it comprehendith thilke same symple forme that ne may nevere ben knowen to noon of that othere (that is to seyn, to none of tho thre forseyde strengthis of the soule [reason, imagination, sense]). For it knoweth the universite of resoun, and the figure of ymaginacioun, and the sensible material conceyved by wit; ne it ne useth nat nor of resoun ne of ymaginacioun ne of wit withoute-forth; but it byholdeth alle thingis, so as I schal seie, by [o] strook of thought formely (*withoute discours or collacioun*). (*Boece* [*Consolation of Philosophy*] V. pr. 4, 463-64)

Thus the capacity to "see" rightly is tethered to the capacity to perceive in the higher manner of the Divine Mind itself. Boethius's opinion on the topic is influential in the Middle Ages and I shall return to it in its various manifestations, including the theology of the Victorines as well as the philosophy of Roger Bacon.

knowledge. In the present stage of this argument, I am less interested in the perspectives of seeing agents than in the mechanical processes of vision itself as a mode of knowledge. The limits of knowledge and the absence of affirming measurements of value in the poem are directly related to the limitations of the visual faculty to produce absolute recognition of truth.[16] This is significant for our understanding of the poem because of the way in which Gawain's character is embodied, for Gawain's final test brings about a visual apprehension of that embodiment that expresses the desire of the subject to escape the seemingly contingent, limited perspective of the bodily frame and to attain complete knowledge of self and other.

In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the capacity of vision to produce knowledge is introduced by the poet's descriptive narration. Thus it is not surprising that when Renoir and Pons make their respective cases to articulate *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s artful uses of vision they both appeal to the authentic psychology of vision represented in the speaker's florid descriptions. According to Renoir, the visual aesthetic of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s descriptive passages navigates between the distinct poles of Homeric and biblical (also known as Elohist) styles as defined by Erich Auerbach. These styles differ in their alternate approaches to illumination and obscurity; whereas the Homeric style evinces a tendency for universal illumination and disclosure in which all elements in composition receive uniform levels of exposure, the biblical style

[16] Suzanne Akbari discusses this flaw of medieval sensory experience, which is necessarily limited by the conditions of fallen human nature. Identifying the impediments of sensation as a kind of veil, Akbari further implicates language within the same epistemological limits. For Akbari, both vision and language serve a "mediating function" for the human subject, and this function is frustrated in both cases by limitations that proscribe what can be expressed as well as what can be seen (6).

eschews such blanket illumination and foregrounding of detail in favour of more selective exposure of specific details:

> The two styles, in their opposition, represent basic types: on the one hand fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective; on the other hand, certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, "background" quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation… (Auerbach 23)

Whereas the Homeric mode places all elements firmly in the foreground of the narration and actually interrupts ongoing narrative action in order to indulge the explication of new details as they emerge incidentally in the text, the biblical mode is characterized by an economy of disclosure and a hesitation to render all but the most essential details explicit (Renoir, "Descriptive Technique" 127). Renoir interprets *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a hybrid work in Auerbach's dyadic model. By designating Homeric descriptive technique as a cinematographer's wide angle shot and the Elohist technique as a filmic close-up, he goes on to characterize the *Pearl*-poet's use of these descriptive modes in cinematographic terms: "the camera may at will focus upon either the whole scene or upon a single detail, while illumination may be used so as to keep the audience aware of the background against which the action takes place" ("Descriptive Technique" 127). What the application of this theoretical model

suggests is a poet conscious of the uses of narrative perspective and actively manipulating the visual aspects of this perspective in order to alter the text's representation of reality. For the *Pearl*-poet, how things are seen determines how things are known, and our own experience of the text is conditioned by this principle as well.

By lavishing expository detail upon a myriad of objects in the Homeric fashion, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* employs a universally illuminated canvas. The banquet scenes of the first and second fitts of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, noted for their insistent and perhaps monotonous foregrounding of the minute mores and artefacts of courtly life, offer a typical example of this kind of narrative at work. Immediately prior to the entrance of the Green Knight in the first fitt, the poet treats his audience to a comprehensive exposition of every detail of Arthur's Christmas celebrations. Guests enter and are seated according to status; games are played, and Arthur's table is set. The eye of the poet renders all with a panoramic gaze and in turn draws the eye of the reader to every individual detail in the composition. The poet's description of the service provided in the hall of Arthur's court furnishes an apt example of this Homeric manner of description:

> Thus þer stondes in stale þe stif kyng hisseluen,
> Talkkande bifore þe hyȝe table of trifles ful hende.
> There gode Gawan watz grayþed Gwenore bisyde,
> And Agrauayn a la Dure Mayn on þat oþer syde sittes—
> Boþe þe kynges sister-sunes and ful siker kniȝtes;

Bischop Bawdewyn abof biginez þe table,
And Ywan, Vryn son, ette with hymseluen.
Þise were diȝt on þe des and derworþly serued,
And siþen mony siker segge at þe sidbordez.
Þen þe first cors come with crakkyng of trumpes
Wyth mony baner ful bryȝt, þat þerbi henged;
Nwe nakryn noyse with þe noble pipes,
Wylde werbles and wyȝt wakned lote,
Þat mony hert ful hiȝe hef at her towches.
Dayntés dryuen þerwyth of ful dere metes,
Foysoun of þe fresche, and on so fele disches
Þat pine to fynde þe place þe peple biforne
For to sette þe sylueren þat sere sewes halden
On clothe. (107-25)

The description in this stanza is obviously densely detailed, but more than that it is comprehensive in its attention to every specific detail within the composition. Derek Pearsall's analysis of description in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, description based upon "enumeration of detail," provides an account that acknowledges the comprehensive nature of the poem's descriptive narration but differs significantly from Renoir's identification of the Homeric mode. According to Pearsall: "the close and careful detail gives no impression of sensuous vividness, nor was this in general the medieval intention. Sensuous vividness, as seen, for example, in Keats, depends upon the selection of

significant detail: medieval descriptive convention depends upon the accumulation of all available detail" ("Rhetorical *Descriptio*" 130). Whereas Renoir, Pons, and Berry all identify vividness as an identifiable characteristic of the *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Pearsall insists that conventional *descriptio* is bereft of such visual richness. Such is perhaps the case in some passages that exemplify the Homeric style. However, in the passage cited above, though the poet certainly does provide a comprehensive account of decorative details, these details are not merely compiled and catalogued. The poet is listing a series of images, but images unfold and even expand as details accumulate in the alliterating line. The narrative speaker of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* passes from one object or person to another, and he seems to get caught up in distraction wherever his narrative eye takes him. This tendency undercuts Pearsall's expectations of conventional *descriptio* and invests even the most potentially inert gestures of the poem with narrative life. For example, Agravayn and Gawain sit on either side of the queen, and the narrative speaker provides this information as a dutiful eyewitness on the scene; however, the way in which the speaker goes on to identify the familial relation of Agravayn and Gawain is a truly Homeric touch. Indeed, were this an actual epic by Homer, we might expect the introduction of Agravayn to be immediately accompanied by a further digression to tell the back story of Agravayn and the details of his relationships with Gawain and Arthur. This kind of synchronic digression is of course not unfamiliar in medieval romance, and the *Pearl*-poet makes modest use of it here to provide detail that is perhaps accurate and comprehensive but bears little relevance to the

larger plot of the narrative; however, it bears as much in common with medieval French historiography and romance narrative as it does with Homeric epic (Kelly 157).[17] In these generic contexts, details, however ancillary to the plot or even theme of the text, crowd into the immediate foreground of representation and insist upon staking claim to their respective place in relation to the other elements of the text.

The hitherto orderly visual composition of the poem's descriptive details is subsequently disrupted with the arrival of the Green Knight. This disruption is indicated by Renoir as well as Stanbury, who refers to the emergence of the Green Knight as an event that spurs "a series of subtle narrative shifts" (*Seeing* 96). Stanbury attributes this shift to a confrontation of contending gazes, and for Renoir the disruption of narrative corresponds with the emergence of an intensely particularizing visual agent:

> Now wyl I of hor seruise say yow no more,
> For vch wyȝe may wel wit no wont þat þer were.
> Anoþer noyse ful newe neȝed biliue,
> Þat þe lude myȝt haf leue liflode to cach;
> For vneþe watz þe noyce not a whyle sesed,
> And þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,
> Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster. (130-36)

As the narrative diverts from its summary description of Arthur's "seruise," the sharpening focus of the scene fixes upon the Green Knight himself in a manner

[17] Hans Robert Jauss provides a useful treatment of the synchronic and diachronic elements of literary genre (76-109).

that does indeed tighten the focus of the scene's visual prospect. By allowing the specific details of the Green Knight to do more than simply meld into the thoroughly established setting, the poet instead enables those details to become the entirety of the setting if only for a moment. In particular, the strange blast of "noyse," utterly unexplained in the text, demarcates a break in this stanza between the emergence of the Green Knight and all that has come before. Tony Hunt points out that the attendant "noyse" preceding the Green Knight's arrival contrasts the fanfare "noyse" that declares the arrival of more food at Arthur's table at lines 118 and 134 (4 n8). The presence of the Green Knight thus constitutes an absolute break with the pattern of expectation and anticipation already established in this scene of feasting. There is no frame of reference, no digressive aside that can adequately situate the Green Knight within the world of Arthur's court as it is hitherto described. This is precisely the psychological intensity of Auerbach's biblical mode of vision at work, as the Green Knight's entrance, with its emphasis upon the preternatural size of the Knight, literally amplifies the physical presence of his imposing figure while the rest of the court is momentarily eclipsed, and the Knight and his visual presence assume totality in the emotional moment of his entrance.

The Green Knight is certainly ready for his close-up here but on the level of medieval optical theory much more must be said about this entrance. We do away with the theoretical model of the gazing camera lens in favour of the intromitting and extramitting human eye itself as the instrument of vision. After the momentary narrative break signalled by the Green Knight's arrival, the

speaker attempts to provide a Homeric inventory of the Green Knight's physical presence and begins an exhaustive, descriptive listing of features:

> Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,
> On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
> Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,
> And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
> Half-etayn in erde I hope þat he were,
> Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene. (136-41)

There is a tension underlying the speaker's attempts to describe the Green Knight. Even as the narrative ascribes detail after detail in a seemingly endless series of descriptive notes, there remains an unshakeable ambivalence in the speaker's capacity to explain what the Green Knight actually is. He is "aghlich," therefore he is monstrous, a half-giant ("Half-etayn"). On the other hand, the speaker concludes the sequence with an affirmation that this being must indeed be identified as a "man" ("mon"). The Homeric litany of details continues by directing attention from the entirety of the Green Knight's presence, a descriptive mode that sees the speaker overwhelmed by the alterity of the Knight's imposing presence, to a more focussed impression of his individual features: "For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne, / Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale, / And alle his fetures folȝande in forme, þat he hade" (143-45). If he is a half-giant then certainly he is half-man as well, for the narrative goes from absolutely verifying the Green Knight's monstrosity to noting the apparent physical beauty of the Knight's body. Critics have long acknowledged the

"paradoxical qualities" ascribed to the Green Knight (Besserman 220). In particular, C.S. Lewis offers an eloquent account of such contradiction: "a living *coincidentia oppositorum*; half giant, yet wholly a 'lovely knight'; as full of demoniac energy as old Karamazov, yet, in his own house, as jolly as a Dickensian Christmas host" (63). For Gawain as well as the narrative speaker, the Green Knight presents a mixture of images, many of them seemingly at cross purposes, and it would appear that description, either Homeric or Elohist, can little aid our efforts to understand the Green Knight through conventional modes of perception. The description of the Green Knight certainly provides the imagination with images for perception, but the rational means to determine what these images mean (or what the Green Knight actually is) is lacking. This state of confusion is not merely a characterization of Arthur's court; it is an attribute of the poet's descriptive narrative.

Explaining the *Pearl*-poet's descriptive style should not be regarded as a matter of selecting one attribute or approach and eschewing all others. The poet rather synthesizes and adapts the modes appropriate to his task. As I have indicated, such is the approach taken to illustrate the feasting scene of fitt one. The same principle of hybridity obtains in the *Pearl*-poet's use of *perspectival* optics.[18] Bacon's late medieval iteration of *perspectiva* is similarly hybrid in nature and draws from proponents of both intromission and extramission theories.

[18] The *Pearl*-poet is not unique in this approach. Suzannah Biernoff demonstrates a knowledge of both intromission and extramission principles in the work of Jean de Meun as well as Dante. According to Biernoff, both of these poets were apt to employ whatever mode of *perspectiva* optics best served their poetic purposes (*Sight and Embodiment* 67, 115). Closer to the *Pearl*-poet's own fourteenth-century milieu, Chaucer demonstrates a significant knowledge of *perspectiva* science and does so in a manner that incorporates the tropes of both intromission and extramission (see Carolyn Collette's *Species, Phantasms, and Images*).

The entrance of the Green Knight in fitt one of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* evinces elements of both inletting and outgoing optical tropes, and the ensuing description of the knight after his sudden entrance is certainly emblematic of the narrative styles for which the poet is acknowledged. In the case of the Green Knight, however, the *Pearl*-poet makes explicit references to vision and visuality that conjure the terms of form, intromission, and extramission. As we have observed, emphasis inevitably falls upon the knight's specifically bodily presence, but the court's ocular experience of that preternatural physicality is specifically couched in the language of form: "For of bak and of brest al were his bodi sturne, / Both his wombe and his wast were worthily smale, / And alle his fetures folȝande in forme, þat he hade, / Ful clene" (143-46). The description of the knight invokes the terms of superlatively gross materiality, but, as the stanza approaches its wheel, the poet diverts emphasis away from monstrous physicality towards a more genteel description. Finally, as the narrative nears the bob of the wheel, the poet explicitly employs the word "forme" in referring to the perfect symmetry of the knight's features. For medieval scholars of optical theory, "form" is a word employed in a very Aristotelian sense.[19] The relationship

[19] Aristotle refers to the transparent medium of the air as the locus through which visible forms are transmitted:

> Vision occurs when the sensitive faculty is acted upon; as it cannot be acted upon by the actual colour which is seen, there only remains the medium to act on it, so that some medium must exist; in fact, if the intervening space were void, not merely would accurate vision be impossible, but nothing would be seen at all (*On the Soul* [*De anima*] 2.7.419).

The physics underlying this emanation of form is further delineated by Plotinus:

> All existences, as long as they retain their character, produce—about themselves, from their essence, in virtue of the power which must be in them—some necessary, outward-facing hypostasis continuously attached to them and representing in image the engendering archetypes: fire thus gives out its heat; snow its cold not merely to itself; fragrant substances are a notable instance; for, as long as they last, something is diffused from them and perceived wherever they are present. (*The Enneads* 373-74)

between matter and form in optics is complicated by the manner in which matter can be animated by the intercession of forms, which render definition, particularity, and even vivifying energy to matter which is otherwise lifeless, inert, and undifferentiated.[20] What the *Pearl*-poet describes at this point in the text is in fact the visual experience of form itself rather than that form's assumed material object. He further underscores this distinction in the wheel of the stanza when referring to the peculiar colour of the Green Knight as a feature "Set in his semblaunt sene" (148). These lines indicate a preoccupation with visual information as it is outwardly projected by external matter and received by the observing eye. When paired with the phrase "fetures folȝande in forme," the "semblaunt" of the various images of the Green Knight may be rightly understood as multiplied visual species, "features following in form" and proceeding from the Knight's body to the eye of Gawain and, indeed, to the eye of the narrator, who reports the ocular action of the scene to us in a further iteration of transmitted form.[21]

The poet's representation of visible form is certainly consistent with the account of emanation of forms offered in Bacon's *Opus majus*. His studies chiefly pertain to the visual species, and he refers to these visual species by various terms: "'similitude'... 'image'... 'idol,' 'simulacrum,' 'phantasm,' 'form,'

[20] David Lindberg traces the historical development of image theory in his introduction to the philosophical origins of *perspectiva* thought (*Theories of Vision* 27). Lindberg's discussion of medieval Arabic sources and their influence on Baconian *perspectiva* identifies al-Kindi (c. 801 - c. 873) as a particularly notable proponent of sensible forms as dynamic sources of animating energy (*Bacon's Philosophy of Nature* xliv). According to Lindberg, Bacon's account of forms in *Opus majus* and *De multiplicatione specierum* is "deeply influenced" by al-Kindi.

[21] The multiplication of forms or species through the medium of the air is the favoured model for the propagation of visual images in *perspectiva* theory. I am suggesting that the transmission of visual information through the medium of language may be considered to follow similar conventions.

'intention,' 'passion,' 'impression...' 'shadow of the philosophers'" (*De multiplicatione specierum* 3). Bacon, in his synthesis of classical and medieval Islamic philosophy on the matter of optical theory, postulated that the eye of an observing subject received the images of external objects and conveyed those images for reception by the intellectual faculties of common sense and imagination. In this process, no transformation of the sensible species itself occurs, as such visual images are intromitted by the pupil of the eye: the crystalline humor (Bacon, *Opus majus* 435). After passing through this transparent membrane, impressions of objects are passed on by the visual power into the sensitive imagination and reasoning faculties without modification or translation of the intromitted species (Bacon, *De multiplicatione specierum* 47). The mind receives sensory information as a tactile transaction in which sensible form, having been received by the eye and conveyed by the optical nerve, is imprinted upon the matter of the various cognitive faculties. Modifying the classic tri-partite faculty psychology, Bacon (in accord with one of the models discussed by Trevisa) divides traditional imagination into two subcategories and postulates five such faculties: common sense, imagination, estimation, cognition, and memory.[22]

In this model, the sensible impressions of external objects are passed from medium to medium through the emanation of forms in matter. Bacon developed his own *perspectival* doctrine on the emanation of forms through the mediation of

[22] Bacon ascribes to the "common sense" the role of distinguishing the different varieties of sensory experience encountered by the human subject. After the common sense organizes sensory images for contemplation, those images are then advanced to the imagination where they are actually beheld by the subject (*Opus majus* 425).

Arabic philosophers, including al-Kindi, whose work includes translations of the works of Aristotle and of Neoplatonists such as Plotinus. Al-Kindi's important treatise on astrology, known in Latin translation as *De radiis*, takes the radiating light of stars, shining within the firmament of the "world machine," as an exemplary model in order to argue that "chaque chose de ce monde, qu'elle soit substance ou accident, émet à sa manière des rayons comme le font les astres" ["everything in this world, whether substance or accident, produces in its manner rays as do stars"] (23, my translation into English of Didier Ottaviani's translation into French). Al-Kindi's conception of the multiplication of species is broad ranging and includes not only visible forms but all sensible phenomena, including the sounds of words. His theory even incorporates conventionally insensible forms, such as thoughts and the healing properties of medicines. According to al-Kindi, all of these things share the properties of form, and, as such, these forms must radiate their emanating forces through their respective mediums of transmission in order to effect changes in matter as well as in other forms.[23]

A similar example of the multiplication and perception of species occurs in fitt two prior to Gawain's discovery of Castle Hautdesert. Renoir draws attention to the *Pearl*-poet's use of "progressive magnification" in this scene: Gawain's desperation is marked by his own diminution in the text, as the external,

[23] Suzannah Biernoff cites the same understanding of propagated form in the writings of Bacon, who asserts that the multiplication of species accounts for "every action in the world, for it [form or species] acts on sense, on the intellect, and on all matter of the world for the generation of things," things ranging from the processes of vision to the regenerative reproduction of human beings (*Sight and Embodiment* 93). In this instance, we see a case for Lindberg's claim that al-Kindi is a significant source for Bacon's own theory of species multiplication.

natural world around him seems to dwarf the knight by comparison within the *mise en scène* of the forest setting ("Progressive Magnification" 245-46). This comparative magnification of the external world serves to highlight the desperation that overtakes Gawain, for he begins to feel failure overwhelm him and his quest. He prays for a refuge so that he might hear mass, and this prayer is subsequently met with a response that one might easily mistake for a fantastic vision. Through the darkness of a forest, the castle "schemered and schon þurȝ þe schyre okez" (772). The castle is projected to Gawain's visual sense through a medium of light that seems almost to emerge from nothingness. The effect on Gawain is shared by the reader, for whom the poet elaborates the scene with the most minute of details. Stanbury speaks of the castle's illusory qualities, but nonetheless emphasizes its fundamental solidity ("Space" 486): the castle is indeed a real, physical place, regardless of the incredulity inspired by its improbable, shimmering facade. It retains the inflection of illusion, however, through the poet's explicit references to artifice in relating the voluminous detail of the scene. As Gawain reflects upon the spectacle of the castle, the poet offers a comparative frame of reference that likens it to a paper model of the kind used to decorate feast tables: "þe castel carnelez, clambred so þik, / Þat pared out of papure purely hit semed" (801-02). This comparative description conjures up image instead of substance, idea instead of object. Gawain apprehends the castle at the cognitive level of imagination, in which the bodily senses impress the mind with images of form, but the imagination does not evaluate those images in any thoroughgoing way. Contemplated in this manner, a castle encountered in the

middle of a forest attains the disconnected quality of an unreal object, a pure image. The castle is indeed real, however; it does provide shelter, and it does serve as the physical setting of a great deal of the action of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but a closer reading perceives the very palpable sense that Hautdesert, the seemingly phantasmatic paper castle in the middle of an isolated wilderness, is a realm of illusory seemings that mislead and disorient Gawain even unto the hero's final realization that Bertilak, the master of Hautdesert, is indeed the Green Knight Gawain has sought all along.

Appearances tend to be deceiving in this poem, and Hautdesert and its master are surely indicative of this tendency. Paul Battles rightly asserts "that Hautdesert is in reality anything but the 'bone hostel' desired by Gawain" (776) (23), and John M. Ganim argues the dichotomous nature of the castle's illusory meanings: "The description of the castle in *Sir Gawain*, 'pared out of papure purely hit semed,' emphasizes this paradox, which is part of the paradox of the plot, the seeking for purity, spirituality, abstraction in a world earthbound and material" (377). The paper castle motif also abstracts the otherwise solid structure of the castle by investing it with an unreal presence that is, like the Green Knight in Arthur's hall, disassociated from its actual surroundings. Like the Green Knight himself, Castle Hautdesert emerges in the text as a confluence of ambiguities that are only accentuated by the visual close-up it is afforded here. The nature of the castle's confusing presence parallels the concerns of medieval optical theory in which the substance of emanated forms comes into question. Intromission *perspectiva* may afford the observing subject the theoretical

possibility of direct and unmediated gazing; however, interpretation of sense perception occurs within the consciousness of the subject but can never truly lay claim to direct experience of the external world unless the integrity of form can be somehow vouchsafed and confidently declared real. Illusions and deceptions present the possibility of error. Perhaps this is part of the reason why extramission, in spite of its seemingly demonstrable unlikelihood, held sway in some form even for the later scholastic thinkers of the thirteenth century such as Bacon and Grosseteste. The notion that the human subject could go beyond its contingent confines and perceive the external world through direct contact challenges the possibility of deception or counterfeiting in the transmission of form. In reference to optical illusions, Bacon notes the power of "strong" eyes, through the extramission of their own species, to more effectively penetrate the transmission medium and thus compensate for error (*Opus majus* 509). This extramission of the eye's own species is of course an extension of the soul of the gazing subject.[24] Gawain effects such an extension of soul during his sincere prayer expressing a wish not only for shelter but for a proper place to pray:

[24] What we are considering here is the mingling of the observing subject's soul in his or her extramitted visual ray. This commonplace of medieval *perspectiva* has its origins in Plato's *Timaeus* and in the work of earlier Greek thinkers such as Alcmaeon of Croton and Empedocles (Stratton 89; Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 4). Saint Augustine adapted the notion of soul extramission for his own theological purposes, and Augustine appears to be one of Bacon's sources for belief in the extramission of the soul via the optic ray. Bacon's theory maintained, in spite of Avicenna's doubts, that the reception of visible species at the surface of the eye had to be supplemented by an internal mechanism capable of conveying the received images of such external species through the byways of the optic nerve. He called this mechanism the "animal spirit," a term used by Bacon's German contemporary Albertus Magnus to describe the extended function of the soul in assisting the perceptual functions of the human subject (see page 7 n8). These spirits were thought to emanate from the soul in order to engender (among other processes) sense perception within the cognitive chambers of the brain. Bacon's understanding of extramission *perspectiva* led him to theorize that the animal spirit extended beyond the membranes of the brain and actually projected outward from the eyes of the human subject in the form of extramitted rays. For Bacon, the purpose of these rays was to refine the visual species prior to intromission of those species, for

...I beseche Þe, Lorde,

And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,

Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse

And Þy matynez tomorne, mekely I ask,

And þerto prestly I pray my Pater and Aue

And Crede. (753-58)

In light of this earnest desire for communion through the Mass, the knight's search for shelter takes on the aspect of a spiritual quest, as Gawain's sensitive soul ranges abroad in search of a home with God, however temporary that might be. The subsequent filmic tightening of focus upon the emergent Castle Hautdesert indicates a shift from intromissive sight to extramissive, as the longing of Gawain prompts his gaze to narrow and ultimately locate its desired end. Thus the Homeric and Elohist modes of narrative description, theorized by Auerbach and applied to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by Renoir, find analogous functions within the respective theoretical models of intromission and extramission. The principle of intromission suits the Homeric style, for the stream of intromitted forms makes no notable discernment to differentiate between the myriad forms received by the optical system. All forms visible within the visual prospect of the gazing subject pass into the eye at once. The extramitted visual power, on the other hand, is selective in its operations. It

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> the species of the things of the world are not fitted by nature to effect the complete act of vision at once because of its nobleness. Hence these must be aided and excited by the species of the eye which travels in the locality of the visual pyramid, and changes the medium and ennobles it, and renders it analogous to vision, and so prepares the passage of the species itself of the visible object, and, moreover, ennobles it, so that it is quite similar and analogous to the nobility of the animate body, which is the eye. (*Opus majus* 471)

favours those forms with which it makes contact in the medium of vision and omits incidental forms.[25]

This effect is not exclusive to the *Pearl*-poet, however. According to J.A. Burrow, in his discussion of fourteenth-century poetic form and practice, *Ricardian Poetry*, the *Pearl*-poet's method of focussed descriptive narrative is emblematic of a practice identified in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as "pointing" (69). To point in this way literally means "to describe in detail"; it is a technique of descriptive *amplificatio* that applies "superlative" or "intensive" attention to fine details. In order to demonstrate this narrative practice of pointing, Burrow actually compares it to film close-up in his reading of Gower's tale of Albinus and Rosemund in the first book of *Confessio Amantis*. In that text, Gower punctuates a seemingly ambiguous description of Albinus' drinking cup with a jarringly abrupt moment of pointing (77). Burrow draws his example from the following passage describing the cup:

> Which mad was of Gurmondes hed,
>
> As ye have herd, whan he was ded,
>
> And was with gold and riche stones
>
> Beset and bounde for the nones,

[25] Augustine explains the selective nature of extramitted vision in the following way: "We see bodies through our bodily eyes because the rays of our mind [*radii mentis*] which shoot out of them touch whatever they observe" (*De trinitate* IX. Ii. 3, emphasis added). Eugene Vance's account of the development of Augustinian visual theory identifies the soul as the ultimate receptor of perceptions in Augustine's thought. The soul, vivifying the corporeal apparatus of the body, animates the bodily senses through the spiritual extension of the "passive soul" diffused throughout the body of an observing subject (Vance 18). This "passive soul" serves an analogous function to that of Albertus Magnus's aforementioned "sensitive soul." Both of these theoretical faculties serve as an extension of the soul in the body, and both may be directed by the will or passion of the soul to either embrace or reject whatever the observing subject wishes to behold.

And stod upon a fot on heihte

Of burned gold, and with gret sleihte

Of werkmanschipe it was begrave

Of such werk as it scholde have,

And was policed ek so clene

That no signe of the skulle is sene,

But as it were a gripes ey. (I. 2535-45)

Gower's casual, almost disinterested attitude toward fine detail gives way instantaneously to the chilling acknowledgement that this cup is indeed made from the skull of Rosemund's father, Gurmounde, a fact made absolutely certain by our momentary glimpse at an exposed patch of bone "the size of a griffin's egg" (Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry* 77). Gower's speaker allows the pointed details of the *mise en scène* to signify in isolation; he makes no attempt to overtly foreground the way in which this skull relates to other elements of the text. In this way, the narrative omits ancillary details and permits the vitally important textual detail of identity to fill the frame of vision and reveal the truly horrible significance of the skull/cup in relation to the actual plot of the story. The manner in which this narrative technique purposefully directs the imaginative eye of the reader bears comparison with uses of ocular gestures as emblems of signification. Burrow's discussion of ocular gestures in *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Literature* identifies the power of the gaze to communicate meaning through expression as well as gestured indication: "Gaze has the special capacity to single out a particular object, and those who find themselves the object of another's gaze

commonly wonder what it may mean. Speaking looks of this kind get recorded quite frequently in medieval texts" (91). According to Burrow, the eye itself is capable of pointing, of directing attention. When we see the gaze of another fixed upon an object, our own gaze is tempted to follow and observe whatever is indicated by the pointing ocular gesture we have witnessed.[26] Narrative pointing thus shares characteristics with the *Pearl*-poet's Elohist mode of description. This kind of pointing sustains ambiguity even as it narrows focus, because details become amplified while they simultaneously lose part of their particular context within the larger composition.

This kind of paradoxical uncertainty through the extreme focus of narrative pointing is evident in the *Pearl*-poet's introduction of Guinevere in fitt one. In this passage, the poet sustains his engagement with *perspectival* doctrine and further highlights the threat of ambiguity in sense perception. The narrative speaker praises the queen's singular beauty: "A semloker þat euer he syȝe / Soth moȝt no mon say" (83-84). At a glance, the narrator's superlative praise of Guinevere makes a definite and flattering assessment. We are told she is the most beautiful woman on earth, and the narrator supports this assertion by declaring that no man could honestly claim that he had ever seen a more attractive lady. The intensive tone of this superlative praise certainly signals that the poet is still operating within the context of narrative pointing. In this seemingly innocuous instance of praise, the speaker, by introducing an element of contingency and

[26] Burrow attributes this commonplace of medieval ocular gestures directly to the *perspectiva* tradition. He suggests that, in spite of the growing popularity of introspection models among *perspectiva* theorists during the late Middle Ages, the status of the eye as an "active communicator" must owe in some part to extramission theory which "still held the field" as late as the sixteenth century (*Gestures and Looks* 92).

indeterminacy to the simple fact of Guinevere's surpassing beauty, undercuts the objectivity of visual experience: "he sy3e / Soth mo3t no mon say." A simple statement of praise attains the quality of a truth claim which calls into question the power of vision to rightly discern what is and what is not real, authentic, genuine. The narrator assumes the veracity of his claim, a hyperbolic claim that decries any note of doubt, denies any attempt at gainsaying outright. It would appear that the narrator assumes an omniscient pose with this attitude of absolute certainty, yet, in fitt three, Bertilak's Lady intrudes upon Gawain's chamber and is described in the following manner: "Hit watz þe ladi, loflyest to beholde" (1187). The act of beholding referenced here couches the narrator's new judgement firmly within the same visual register as his earlier praise of Guinevere. What we are left with is a contradiction between two superlative claims, not uncommon in the literary realm of medieval romance but nonetheless curious to note in a text preoccupied with the possibility, indeed the necessity, of accurate sensory judgement. The strength of the eye, which originates of course in the soul, is a curiously subjective quality, and it must accurately employ the reasoning faculty to evaluate what is seen in relation to what is known in order to formulate a reliable understanding of reality. If these judgements prove unreliable in spite of assurances of certainty, doubt must necessarily enter the thematic frame of perception. Part of the problem here may be the Elohist narrative aesthetic, for the narrator's superlative endorsements of these characters demonstrates in both cases the extreme particularizing tendency that Auerbach hails as the hallmark of the Elohist mode. When all other elements have been forced from the narrative frame, the object that remains in

view, be it a Green Knight or a beautiful woman, can become invested with inordinate significance, as the object of poetic description (a visual object) no longer retains the full complex of interrelation with other elements of the text, and this organization of images as discrete particles of thought is antithetical to the appraising and evaluating objectives of reason.[27]

In these moments of Elohist description, Gawain's powers of judgement appear to flag. Just as the Elohist aesthetic denudes its descriptive objects of proper contextual frame, Gawain appears unable to adequately judge his surroundings or the characters around him. The tightening of the narrator's descriptive focus thus mirrors Gawain's own focus, which omits details that may be pertinent in favour of simply apprehending the images of beauty and wonder he has found. This is true of his discovery of Hautdesert, certainly, and it is true

[27] As stated earlier, deeming what is good and what is bad, right and wrong, these are the central preoccupations of the reasoning faculty as it is applied to those material things that become known to the observing subject through the sense perception of the outward or bodily wits. Reason is often generically conflated with "wit" in Middle English texts and sometimes even referred to as one of the five "inner wits." As I mentioned earlier, for example, Trevisa's translation of *De proprietatibus rerum* identifies reason as one of the five "powers of the soul," but Trevisa's text, rife with internal inconsistencies and contradictions (Long 9), also identifies *logica* as one of the internal wits and ascribes the functions of the reasoning faculty to it by further conflating the estimative power with reason (III.10, 98). This particular fault originates in Bartholomaeus's original text of *De proprietatibus rerum* and serves to illustrate a sample of the variety of psychological models circulating during the Middle Ages. The latter categorization conflating the estimative and rational powers, however, is uncommon in writings of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, which tend to characterize the inner wits as "bodily" in nature and thus at a remove from the more refined faculty of reason. For example, "An orysoun for sauynge of the fyue wyttes" (c. 1390-1400) contrasts the wits with both "wille and þouȝte" (2). Such is also the case in Reginald Pecock's *Donet* and *Folewer*, which both exclude reason from what are called "inward bodili wittis" in the *Donet* (9). These are also called "inward sensitiif wittis" in the *Folewer*, an alternative appellation that stresses the primacy of sensation in bodily experience (33). On the other hand, Pecok elsewhere uses "wit" to refer to reason, so potential for confusion abounds (*Repressor* 52). Lesser animals, possessing sense but lacking reason, make do without true rational thought through the use of the inferior "estimative" faculty. Roger Bacon is in accord with Bartholomaeus and calls this inner wit the "*vis aestimativa*" and uses it to describe the instinctual responses of animals that do not possess reason but nonetheless demonstrate a kind of judgement. This instinctive estimative faculty differs from reason, because the estimative power can only consider the objects of sense perception. However, Bacon's description of the estimative accords with that of Avicenna, who theorized it as a quasi-reasoning faculty that can also perceive "the insensible forms connected with sensible matter" (*Opus majus* 425). This emphasis on what cannot be truly seen in a conventional manner sets the highest functions of the actual reasoning faculty apart from the purely sensory functions of the inner and external wits or senses.

of his dalliance with the Lady. What this loss of reasoning power through loss of context indicates is a visual power utterly bent upon the reception of external images in the imagination. As I have already indicated, imagination plays an integral role in the reception of sensory images within medieval theories of vision. It should be quite clear that imagination is certainly necessary in the apprehension of visual images; however, Gawain's enchantment with objects themselves leads him to neglect the necessary application of reason in the full consideration of his visual world. As we have already observed in John Trevisa's translation of *De proprietatibus rerum*, reason is accorded an essential role in the process of judging external sense perceptions:

> what the vertu ymaginatif schapiþ and ymagineþ he sendiþ hit to þe doom of resoun. What resoun fongiþ of þe ymaginatiue, resoun demeþ hit as a iuge and sendiþ hit to the vertu of mynde. Þe vertu of mynde fongiþ what is [demed in] vndirstondinge and kepiþ it and saueþ it stedefastliche forto he bringe it forþ in acte and in dede. (III.16, 107)

This chain of reckonings and verifications is broken in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, because Gawain's thoughts remain fixed in the contemplation of imagination, a faculty that allows him to take pleasure and wonder in the things of beauty around him, but nonetheless fails to equip the knight with certain comprehension of exactly where he is and who these people really are.

In spite of this deficiency—perhaps because of it—Gawain derives great delight from the world of Hautdesert. In the knight's naive dalliance with Bertilak's wife, the language of visual experience that the *Pearl*-poet appends to

the clause, "Hit watz þe ladi, loflyest to beholde," explicitly associates the narrative act of pointing with the visual act of pleasurable gazing. She is beautiful and the act of looking upon that beauty is a pleasurable one. The poet similarly highlights the act of gazing when the Lady is first introduced:

> Þenne lyst þe lady to loke on þe knyȝt;
>
> Þenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez.
>
> Ho watz þe fayrest in felle, of flesche and of lyre
>
> And of compas and colour and costes, of alle oþer. (941-44)

This passage, which directly contradicts the narrator's assertion of Guinevere's beauty, presents the Lady in the act of visual perception and also as the object of vision. The poet's reference to her as "fairest in felle" may very well be an alliterative tag, but it is highly suggestive of the bodily nature of the Lady's presence as well as the carnal aspects of the gaze itself.[28] Once again, Burrow's explication of pointing is instructive for reading the *Pearl*-poet's visual cues, for Burrow's most compelling instances of pointing are all joined by a conscious

[28] Recent investigations of medieval optics have demonstrated the porousness of sensory cognition in the medieval context. Suzannah Biernoff has argued that visual perception in the Middle Ages may be understood as an inter-liminal exchange between the inner wits of the visual subject and the external images that he or she perceives. Significantly, Biernoff's analysis of Roger Bacon's *perspectiva* interprets Baconian extramission as "akin to the libidinal extrusions of flesh" (89). For Biernoff, these extrusions suggest the possibility of a kind of "sublimation of ocular desire" in which the seeing agent may reach beyond his or her own contingent bodily existence through the power of vision. Sarah Stanbury draws attention to this same aspect of medieval vision and further indicates the metaphysical implications of such porous visual contiguity:

> Yet even when visual desire takes as its goal a purely mystical sight beyond the material world, the mechanics of vision link it with sensory experience and even material objects. As recent work on medieval visuality has shown, writings about vision and on optics in the Middle Ages often understand sight to be a property of physical contiguity. In looking we are connected physically to the object we see by the agency of species, or visual rays. Images, through their species, literally touch us, linking us physically with them in ways that underwrite the dramatic physicality of late medieval affective piety. (*The Visual Object* 6)

Instances of visual perception in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* participate in this inter-liminal dynamic. For the *Pearl*-poet, a gaze can assume dynamic properties and even take on an almost material presence as it passes between the subject of vision and its object.

pairing of narrative detail and the image of the gazing eye. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* furnishes one of two direct uses of the term *pointing* in the corpus of Ricardian literature and Chaucer presents the word "poynte" with visual cues:

> But now, paraunter, som man wayten wolde
> That every word, or soonde, or look, or cheere
> Of Troilus that I rehercen sholde,
> In al this while unto his lady deere—
> I trowe it were a long thyng for to here—
> Or of what wight that stant in swich disjoynte,
> His wordes alle, or every look, to poynte. (III. 491-7)

Looks, glances, such visual gestures are important details, and, according to Chaucer's narrator they are precisely the kind of details it would be painstaking to enumerate in an amplified narrative description.[29]

But these are precisely the details that the *Pearl*-poet chooses to accentuate. In fact, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* visual gestures are perpetuated through the tendency of the pointed gaze to elicit the very reciprocal gazes or "looks" the narrator intends to report, such as the way in which

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[29] This same preoccupation with visual gesture obtains in book two of *Troilus and Criseyde* when Pandarus encounters Criseyde during Antigone's telling of the siege of Thebes. Pandarus approaches Criseyde and contemplates the task he has undertaken as narrative go-between in the service of Troilus in his advances on Criseyde:

> "What sholde I peynte or drawen it on lengthe
> To yow, that ben my frend so feythfully?"
> And with that word he gan right inwardly
> Byholden hire and loken on hire face,
> And seyde, "On swich a mirour goode grace!" (II. 262-6)

The narrative mode of pointing that Pandarus is here contemplating animates his thoughts in such a way that his own gaze is at once drawn towards the image of Criseyde in an "inward beholding" that gives way to a literal beholding as he comes upon the Lady and she realizes that he is actually gazing upon her: "And loked on hire in a bysi wyse, / And she was war that he byheld hire so, / And seyde, 'Lorde! So faste ye m'avise!" (II. 274-6). Contemplation of narrative pointing gives way to contemplation of visual spectacle which further gives way, finally, to the definite act of gazing itself.

Bertilak's Lady, seeking to satisfy her own ocular desire, is eventually observed or beheld by Gawain as well as by the poetic speaker. The same manner of reciprocity obtains in the pointed visual gestures so common in the first fitt of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Queen Guinevere is a notable object of visual spectacle during Arthur's Christmas banquet, and her status as object of the narrator's visual prospect affords further opportunities to introduce the *Pearl*-poet's reception and transmission of medieval optical theory. As Stanbury demonstrates, the poet's descriptive approach towards establishing the physical setting of fitt one develops Guinevere not only as an object of visual sensation but as an ocular subject in her own right that reciprocates visual gestures:

> Whene Guenore ful gay grayþed in þe myddes,
> Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:
> Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer
> Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe
> Þat were enbrawded and beten wyth þe best gemmes
> Þat myȝt be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye
> In daye.
> Þe comlokest to discryve
> Þer glent with yȝen gray;
> A semloker þat euer he syȝe
> Soth moȝt no mon say. (74-84)

Stanbury draws attention to the changeable ground of value upon which the spectator's subjective gaze shifts, but more critical for my analysis is the self-

reflexivity of the spectator's gaze, for it interacts with Guinevere's own emergent visual power (*Seeing* 101). The first seven lines quoted above evince the poet's characteristically pointed mode of amplified description and vary our focus between minute details and Guinevere's opulent surroundings. In these lines, she is an object of the gaze, a passive image under the insistent interrogation of the *Pearl*-poet's pointing narrative eye. This dynamic changes, however, at line 81, the turning of the stanza's wheel, when Guinevere's own gaze emerges to reciprocate the extramitting narrative perspective. Thus the stylistic shift of the bob and wheel coincides with a perceptual shift. The word "glent," used here to describe the ocular action of Guinevere's own "yȝen gray," does more than simply identify Guinevere as herself an active, gazing subject in the visual world of the poem; it also generates a certain amount of ambiguity through the alternate interpretation of the word "glent," which may also be taken to simply mean glint or gleam.[30] These senses of the verb's meaning, "glance" and "gleam," reinforce each other in the visual logic of medieval optical theory, which posits the gazing eye as a portal through which extramitted rays emanate from the viewing subject and make pseudo-physical contact through the diaphanous medium of the air in order to perceive external objects. The poetic image of the queen's gaze emanating like a flash of brightness is more than poetic fancy; with theoretical origins in medieval optical theory, it is a manifestation of real medieval thinking on the mechanical processes of the human eye.

[30] The *Middle English Dictionary* supplies the following definitions for (to) *glenten* (v.): 3. (a) To look askance; look, glance; (b) to direct (one's) glance. 4. To shine, gleam; flash, glitter; glisten, glint.

In the case of Guinivere, the narrator is not only defying others to contradict the supremacy of her beauty; he is directing his audience to look at her through the narrative act of pointing to her. Gawain's attention is similarly directed in her presence. While pointing of a more exacting and contemplative variety is certainly possible, the immature and inexperienced Gawain evinces a gaze of the imagination that revels in material images yet gleans no insight and certainly no understanding through such visual apprehension. So long as he has the reciprocal gaze of the lovely Lady, his thoughts never coalesce in the reason to yield true judgement.

The theoretical models of intromission and extramission need not be considered mutually exclusive, however, and a more detailed treatment of *perspectival* theory is needed in order to demonstrate their complementary functions. It is worth noting here that Roger Bacon was not at all the first theorist to propose a hybrid model of vision; Plato's own writings on vision borrowed elements of both intromission and extramission. In Plato's account given in the *Timaeus*, he described a theory of intraocular fire in which daylight, ocular emanations, and emanated forms combined to produce vision:

> whenever there is daylight round about, the visual current issues forth, like to like, and coalesces with it and is formed into a single homogeneous body in a direct line with the eyes, in whatever quarter the stream issuing from within strikes upon any object it encounters outside. So the whole, because of its homogeneity, is similarly affected and passes on the motions of anything it comes in contact with or that comes in contact with

it, throughout the whole body, to the soul, and thus causes the sensation we call seeing. (I. 45C-D, 153)

This is a model to explain visual sensation that sits at a great remove from the modern scientific understanding of optics as well as the mathematically informed science of medieval scholastics, but it at least provides a hypothetical framework for the latter. What Plato articulates here is the almost tactile nature of sight prior to the full understanding of the role of light in vision. We may also perceive in Plato's treatment of light something to explain Hautdesert's apparently glowing stone walls. Yet this model describes an experience that is more than tactile, since Plato employs the life of the soul itself to explain the mechanical operation of visual processes. In his classical formulation of optical theory, light is understood as a catalyst in vision but not necessarily as a vehicle of it. For Plato, light enables a state of homogeneity to obtain between the outreaching visual sense of the observer and the objects of his or her vision. Through reference to the adjustment of body and soul to external sense perceptions, Plato raises the implications of a visual apparatus that allows the observer to internalize external stimuli in an intimate manner. After the visual sense reaches outward, the subsequent action of receiving the "motions" of the external world renders what is external to the human subject as internal as the human soul, because visual experience of external objects merges with the understanding of the soul itself.[31]

[31] This idea originating with Plato exerts great influence upon classical and medieval theories of perception. As indicated in the first chapter, Heather Webb demonstrates that the most authoritative medieval iteration of this theory is a cardiosensory model of sense perception. In this model (recognizable in the work of Dante and Chaucer) the soul receives the impression of sensible forms from the bodily wits and absorbs the impress of these forms in the precise location of the heart, which serves as a material tether between the corporeal body and the immaterial soul (Webb, *The Medieval Heart* 28-30). Identifying the heart as the locus of the sensitive soul is a potentially confusing gesture, because the present study has already

This process, as we have observed, describes Gawain in search of a refuge prior to his discovery of Hautdesert: his act of prayer signifies the outgoing of the soul in search of its desired objects in the world. For the gazing Guinevere, as we have already noted, a similar extramission occurs during the feast in Arthur's hall when her glinting eyes sparkle and cast her gaze freely around the hall.

Bacon's account of extramission is quite similar to Plato's and describes a process of ennobling that is roughly equivalent to Plato's notion of homogenization:

> just as an inanimate object produces its own inanimate species, so does an animate thing produce a species that has in a measure the force of the soul [*anima*]. For just as an inanimate thing has a relationship to its species, which is similar to it, so is an animate thing related to a species similar to it. A medium, however, which is inanimate will not because of this fact be animate, but will be made like an animate one through its likeness now received. (*Opus majus* 468-69)

In the theories of both Plato and Bacon, we perceive a combination of intromission and extramission processes at work in various capacities. Bacon differs primarily in his insistence that the extramitted force emanating from the

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acknowledged the preponderance of medieval opinion implicating the brain as the locus of sensory and cognitive faculties. To overcome this confusion, we must recall the instrumentality of the animal spirits (see page 7 n8), which animate the cranial cells of the inner senses and convey the powers of the soul to and from the discrete faculties of human perception and cognition. In this way, the powers of the sensitive soul originate in the heart and operate through the faculties like an internal eye observing images reflected in the various mirrors of common sense, imagination, memory, etc. This essentially Aristotelian scheme for the functioning of the sensitive soul persisted throughout the Middle Ages and waned during the Renaissance with the discovery of the "*rete mirabile*" (brain stem) and concurrent popular speculation that the brain and not the heart must be the seat of the soul. This revision of thought is related to the emergent early-modern notion that "soul" and "mind" are identical (See Smith, "Picturing the Mind" and Lianne Habinek, "Untying the 'Subtle Knot'").

eye is not at all a physical manifestation but instead a projection of the soul operating within the body. He calls this projection the "animal spirit." The extramitted species may not be physical, but its properties convey the likeness of animate form within the medium of transmission. By explaining why the imperceptible and apparently unlikely existence of an extramitted visual ray is so crucial, James McEvoy's commentary on Grosseteste's position highlights the manner in which Grosseteste's work prefigures Bacon's later synthesis of intromission and extramission models:

> In the *De operationibus solis* he [Grosseteste] affirms that the visible spirit of the eye is of the same nature as the sun's light, because the sun is the unifying root of all light and heat in the universe, wherefore anything in the lower world that shares light and heat is connatural with it and dependent on it, as the ultimate source of all material energy. It is through the spirit that the soul acts in sight, for the spirit emits rays through the eyes. (McEvoy 288)

In this analysis McEvoy hits upon the critical break Grosseteste makes with the scientific empiricism of Avicenna and Alhazen (965-1040) in favour of the earlier, optical Platonism of Augustine. In response to Alhazen's scepticism, Grosseteste recovers Augustine's position (McEvoy 288-89). By asserting the purely immaterial nature of the extramitted ray, Bacon's own retention of Augustine's extramission of the soul model sought common ground with Avicenna and Alhazen. Bacon conceded that the visual ray certainly could not be perceived, but he insisted that such a ray nonetheless carried forth the species of

the animated sensitive soul of the observer and that, importantly, these species assumed the corporeality of their transmission medium (Biernoff 91). Thus the body itself does not actually extend outward, but the soul does and in doing so inhabits the medium in which it is transmitted and becomes embodied in the medium itself. Within this theoretical model in which the soul freely mingles with external natures, we begin to perceive the real ocular delight that persists in the world of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. It is a world of wonders, and vision is a conduit through which one may participate in those wonders, not merely as an observer but as a vital participant. The problem for Gawain, however, remains his shortfall of reason, which leaves him able to enjoy the delights of vision but incapable of gleaning wisdom through the outgoing spirit of bodily gazing.

The function of the Green Knight's own gaze demonstrates how such gazes of the material eye may be said to demonstrate aspects of embodiment. In her astute reading of the gaze in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Stanbury delineates the contrasting subjectivities evidenced by the juxtaposition of gazes in the first fitt. By referencing the monstrous visitor's unusual ocular gestures, she explores the Green Knight's status as an outsider to Arthur's court:

> Þe renk on his rouncé hym ruched in his sadel
> And runischly his rede yȝen he reled aboute,
> Bende his bresed broȝez, blycande grene,
> Wayued his berde for to wayte quoso wolde ryse. (303-06)

For Stanbury, this moment in the Green Knight's initial challenge to Arthur amounts to a mutual sizing up in which both parties, the Green Knight and the Court, study each other, contemplate one another in a way that removes the pretence of the preceding visual landscape of the poem. Specifically, Stanbury asserts that the Green Knight's act of gazing has a destabilizing effect, because it deprivileges the extensive discourse of well-ordered and organized hierarchy that preoccupies so much of the poet's description of Camelot: "Since the Green Knight is unable to identify Arthur among his knights, his challenge also addresses the poem's festal hierarchies: Camelot is perhaps not as ordered, its structure not as coherent and apparent as we are led to believe in the opening stanzas of the poem" (*Seeing* 97).

The Green Knight's wide-ranging, rolling gaze does indeed denote a literal failure to recognize Arthur among his knights and courtiers, but it may also denote a failure of courtesy on the part of the Knight: "runischly his rede yȝen he reled aboute" (304). In fact, his glaring and unruly gaze may actually be part of an elaborate performance of misrule (Wright 158-59). Here we also see the Green Knight, with his larger than life presence, movements, and ocular gestures, first introduce grotesque realism to the imagery of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[32]

[32] Mikhail Bakhtin describes the grotesque aesthetic in his book *Rabelais and his World*. The grotesque refers to bodily functions and impulses that transgress bodily limits: "It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines" (316). Indeed, aside from representations of vision itself, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is replete with an abundance of carnivalesque images of the grotesque, of bodies in various states of excrescence and extrusion: "the artistic logic of the grotesque image ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body's limited space" (Bakhtin 317). The parallel between this logic of the grotesque and Biernoff's reading of inter-liminal exchanges in Bacon's optics is clear; however, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the grotesque does not emerge as a system of bodily signs to verify the sublimation of optical desire, but rather frustrates and parodies that desire through the uncrowning reality of degradation that undergirds the grotesque aesthetic.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "The gaping mouth, the protruding eyes, sweat, trembling, suffocation, the swollen face—all these are typical symptoms of the grotesque life of the body" (308). The very gaze of the Green Knight, with its droll, irreverent mien, has a grotesque inflection, for it bears the physical inflection of grotesque realism: its mocking orientation to Arthur's court further destabilizes the young king's extant social hierarchy in an act of carnivalesque uncrowning.

The marvel of the scene, the uncanny nature of the Green Knight's grotesque presence, confronts Arthur's court with an epistemological challenge that cannot be easily met by the inexperienced, perhaps immature, onlookers of Camelot:

> Such a fole vpon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes,
> Watz neuer sene in þat sale wyth syȝt er þat tyme
> With yȝe.
> He loked as layt so lyȝt—
> So sayd al þat hym syȝe.
> Hit semed as no mon myȝt
> Vnder his dynttez dryȝe. (196-202)

This is an interesting passage: the focus turns from discussing the unusual presence of the horse and rider, both unlike anything ever seen before by any of the young courtiers in Arthur's circle, to a brief mention of the Green Knight's vision, which is compared to a flash of lightning for its swiftness. I have already noted the grotesque rudeness of the Green Knight's rolling eyes—an important

element of the Green Knight's characterization to be sure—, but the alacrity of his vision also suggests the agency of the extramitted gaze. At the very least, the Green Knight's faculty of vision is being prioritized here in a way that emphasizes the superiority of his visual power over that of Arthur's court, which can barely process the sight with which they are confronted. There is an intimidating force in the Green Knight's gaze that assaults as it apprehends Arthur's party, for it literally transgresses the boundaries of courtesy and *gentilesse* with its penetrating intensity. His inability to identify Arthur without asking for the king by name says less about the Green Knight's visual powers than it does about the apparently indecorous presence of the beardless young king.

By contrast, the "berdlez chylder" who encounter the Green Knight here are ill-equipped to truly understand what it is that they see. The preponderance of the intromission trope betrays their passive perceptual stance, a stance which lacks the reasoning power to accurately process their visual encounter with the Green Knight. The medieval reason relies upon the imagination working in tandem with the active external senses as well as the memorative faculty to provide it with sensory experience adequate to formulate comparative analysis of such an encounter. With insufficient experience at hand, the onlookers are helpless to judge by reason and apprehend what they now see. Unable to accommodate receptive soul to intromitted visual form, the courtiers are left amazed by spectacles they cannot understand, experiences without meaning. Vincent of Beauvais (1190-1264) speaks of the nature of visual information in his *Speculum naturale* and comments on the indeterminacy of knowledge conveyed

as form. Such information is merely potential in the intervening medium between observer and observed but becomes actual when form is received by the eye and processed by the mind (Lindberg, *Theories of Vision* 40). What such a process describes, however, is a break between what is observed, the object of vision, and the observer's cognition of that object. Objective reality is therefore substituted with images that emanate from actual objects, and, in the mediating processes of sense perception, such images may or may not accurately represent their true referents. This epistemological shortfall has as much to do with the deficiency of the observer as any defect in the medium of vision. In fact, according to Augustine, the quality of all human vision is necessarily impaired by the conditions of sin in which human life is lived. He uses the term *refracted* to describe vision in a fallen state of man and contrasts this with the higher spiritual vision that may be attained through the perfection of spiritual life. Among early Christian thinkers, it was Augustine who, long before Bacon, imitated Plato's adherence to a hybrid model of optical extramission and intromission and adapted it for a Christian worldview. Augustine postulated, as Plato did, that the theoretical ray projected from the eye was in fact the species of the soul itself, which rendered external species or forms visible for the observer insofar as the soul could be made commensurate with the forms of external objects. As we have already observed in the present study, it is precisely Augustine's hybrid concept of Platonic intromission/extramission that Bacon revises in the late thirteenth century to reconcile the theories of classical philosophers and theologians with the thinking of more contemporary medieval Muslim thinkers of optical theory.

Moreover, the Green Knight's own visual faculty emerges here in stark contrast to the groping and failing vision of Arthur's court. While they are marvelling at a new sight that is unlike anything they have seen before and utterly incomprehensible to them, the Green Knight's vision is aggressively projected outward. The way in which the poet compares the knight's vision to a flash of lightning ("He loked as layt so lyȝt") is instructive, because it not only highlights the apparent rudeness of the knight but at the same time identifies the knight's gaze as an extramitted force that transgresses the boundaries of the court and its protocols in an interrogative gesture revealing the unreflective passivity of this court before the active, energetic mind and gaze of the Knight.

The sensory medium of vision thus helps to articulate the duality of the Green Knight's presence, for he remains ever a figure torn between the abandon of wild monstrosity and the refinement of knightly decorum. One way in which we might posit this ocular opposition is in terms of multiple perspectives rather than in reference to the monism of auteur theorists such as Renoir. It is on these terms that Jeremy Lowe, by insisting that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a text that resists closure, challenges the hitherto uncomplicated comparison between the *Pearl*-poet's *descriptio* and contemporary film theory. According to Lowe, the early twentieth-century film theory espoused by Renoir emphasizes "structure and rigid composition" (68). This auteur-style of rigid form and expression is incompatible with Lowe's insistence upon *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight's* narrative indeterminacy. In response to the auteur theory, Lowe identifies a fragmented cinematic consciousness in *Sir Gawain and the Green*

Knight, a mode of visual narrative that eschews linearity of image and time in favour of "a complex system of interconnected perspectives" (69). The crux of this position lies in a distinction between the traditional auteur theory of film and what Stanbury has identified as a broadening of available visual perspectives in the work of the *Pearl*-poet, a broadening that employs the reader's own perspective as a kind of lens through which the descriptions of the text may be understood:

> Description in the Cotton Nero poems is in fact at the center of a complex interpretive process that engages both the pilgrim in the poem and the reader of the text. On the one hand, characters choose to act according to what they know, their choices constrained in part by those sensory fields detailed through description. On the other hand, the audience, which sees through the focalized gaze of the fictional witness, also brings to the text a broader view, one that can visualize a wider panorama than the pilgrim can see and, on a thematic level, one that can guess at consequences and at the moral or spiritual ramifications of a character's choices. (*Seeing* 5)

The reader is able at once to both observe the perspectives of the characters and apply his or her own particular view in a way that can bridge gaps of understanding or expose inconsistencies. Gawain may not bring rational judgement to bear upon the optical set-pieces of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but that does not mean that readers of the poem have to share his perspective. This latter point has particular significance for Stanbury, as she enlists perspectivism to explain the *Pearl*-poet's recurring preoccupation with

what is knowable and unknowable: "shifting lines of sight generate an extraordinarily complex mimesis of vision as uncertain ground of knowing" (*Seeing* 105). Having asserted the agency of the reader in supplementing the views of characters observed in the fiction of the poem, Stanbury nonetheless stresses the contingency and insufficiency of human knowledge gleaned by the eye alone and calls into question the "dominance of the active gaze." Stanbury's suggestion is intriguing when considering the narrator's vacillating superlative praise for both Guinevere and the unnamed Lady. It may be that the narrator's primacy as the visual arbiter of the text has been abdicated in favour of the reader's own rational powers. As the narrator negates his own textual authority through blatant self-contradiction, a space may emerge for the reader to assume a prospect within the text from which to accurately see and judge conflicting truth claims and finally close the narrative's gaps of inconsistency. Before privileging the space of reader too much, we may be well-advised to take the advice of John Halverson, who warns readers of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* against the follies of "template criticism": "a ready-made pattern [is] superimposed on the text that allows only the design you wish to see appear and screens out the rest" (138). Certainly this programme of unintended misreading is not what Stanbury has in mind when she suggests readers are urged to bring their own perspectives to bear upon the poem, nor is it my own intent to impose such a reading upon the text. Rather, I accept Stanbury's appraisal of what she calls the poet's "complex mimesis of vision" and find value in a critical approach that reconstructs this mimesis through recourse to *perspectival* tropes.

CHAPTER III — The Heart's Eye: Beatific Desire in *Cleanness* and *Patience*

Near the end of fit three of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Gawain goes to the chapel at Hautdesert and offers a confession. We are told that Gawain confesses all of his "mysdedez... þe more and þe mynne" (1880-81). This would appear to be a fitting purification ritual for a hero embarked on a dangerous quest.[33] During this scene of confession, in which Gawain shrives himself of his sins in anticipation of his appointed meeting with the Green Knight, Gawain's ignorance is given full expression. In spite of the narrator's report that Gawain has offered a full confession, we know that this is not true. By withholding the *luf-lace* gift as well as his intent to retain it in spite of the exchange of winnings agreement, Gawain indulges his penchant for concealment and deception. The narrator refrains from commenting on this lapse of *trawþe* and instead informs us that Gawain "asoyled hym surely and sette hym so clene / As domezday schulde haf ben diȝt on þe morn" (1883-84). Gawain has neglected to mention the girdle he owes to Bertilak, the girdle he will not relinquish during the final exchange of winnings and instead intends to secretly wear to the Green Chapel as a ward against death. Literary criticism has been divided on the matter of Gawain's sincerity during confession and the efficacy of that confession. Sir Israel Gollancz called Gawain's

[33] The Lady's attempts to seduce Gawain and his eventual acceptance of the green girdle are matters I shall return to in greater detail in the following chapter. For now, however, it will suffice to attribute Gawain's acceptance and concealment of the girdle as an example of what Joseph Campbell has identified as an archetypal "refusal of the call" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 54). Keeping the girdle is an act that symbolizes his unwillingness to relinquish his own life in the face of duty and the ideals of his public identity: "The myths and folk tales of the whole world make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest. The future is regarded not in terms of an unremitting series of deaths and births, but as though one's present system of ideals, virtues, goals, and advantages were to be fixed and made secure" (55). It would appear that Gawain's private interests constitute a set of ideals quite contrary to the ideals promulgated by the pentangle emblem, and Gawain's pursuit of purification (cleanness) as prelude to the conclusion of the narrative appears to be an attempt to elide the difference that has emerged between Gawain's conflicting subjectivities.

omission of the girdle sacrilegious and questioned the moral integrity of the poet for overlooking the fault (123). Similarly, George J. Engelhardt and John Burrow reject the notion that Gawain has in any way given a truly sincere or complete confession after his third day of temptation (Engelhardt 65; Burrow, "Two Confessions" 74). Later critics such as Michael Foley and Gerald Morgan call this view into question and distinguish Gawain's fault from real spiritual lapse. Foley calls it a failure of courtesy and thus only a secular lapse (Foley 78), and Morgan claims that Gawain is ignorant of his fault and thus incapable of being found guilty of withholding a sin of which he has no knowledge (Morgan, "Validity" 13). Gregory W. Gross correctly identifies multiple instances of confession in fitts three and four of the poem and identifies in Gawain's behaviour a move from secrecy to confession as his subjective relationship to truth develops within the narrative (168-69).

The moment during which Gawain supposedly confesses all of his sins to a priest he is in the process of denying truth. For a better understanding of how this sin may be understood in the context of confession, consider the following commentary on sins of coveting and theft taken from a late fourteenth-century penitential handbook, *The Clensyng of Manes Sowle*:

> I haue synned in coueitise aȝeins þe reule of profession of my degre or of my religion. For ofte siþes I haue had god or catell or iewell and ȝet haue or I haue ȝeue take and lent or borowed bouȝt or solde and marchandise unleefully aȝeins þe knowynge or witt of my souereynes and prively kept such things in full will þat thei schulde not knowe hit which was aȝeins my degre or pouerte and aȝeins my profession. (*Clensyng of Manes Sowle*, MS. Bodley 923 f. 92r)

This manual provides textual models for confessional discourse intended to be recited before one's confessor during the act of confession itself and so certain instances of polysyndeton ("I haue hade god catell or iewell... or I haue ȝeue take and lent or borrowed") are to be read as a menu from which to choose relevant misdeeds to be recited while disregarding the rest.[34] The explicit mention of "prively" keeping such goods that are understood to belong to one's sovereign calls to mind the sin of Gawain in withholding the girdle owed to Bertilak. Gawain's misstep is a wilful deception and, as it turns out, is in fact a violation of *trawþe*, the essential virtue represented by the interlocking pentads of Gawain's pentangle symbol. In this instance, Gawain's failure of *trawþe* through withholding the girdle is indeed a violation "aȝeins" degree, for it undermines his status as the pentangle knight. This is not merely an oversight on Gawain's part. Immediately prior to his confession, Gawain purposefully "Lays vp þe luf-lace þe lady hym raȝt, / Hid hit ful holdely þer he hit eft fonde" (1874-75). This mention of hiding demonstrates a purposive, wilful act of deception on the part of Gawain, and, by pairing this act in direct juxtaposition with Gawain's confession, the poet invites us to doubt the apparent cleanness of Gawain (1883) even as we certainly may question his adherence to the pentangle virtues he has hitherto struggled to sustain. Gawain clearly has no understanding that what he has done is wrong, however, otherwise there would be no point to confessing at all, yet Gawain's failure to see fault is hardly

[34] The *Summary Catalogue of Western MSS. in the Bodleian Library* (entry for MS Bodley 923, summary catalogue number 27701) refers to *The Clensyng of Mannes Sowle* as "a devotional treatise or Penitential in three parts… 'of Contricion'… 'of Confession'… and 'of Satisfaction.'" The preface of the treatise asserts the writer's intention "to write a few wordes of the sacrament of penaunce… Beth wasch and beth clene. A gracious medicine and conseil." The language of cleansing and penance is consistent with the *Pearl*-poet's own manner of referring to the purity of confession in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as well as the homiletic poems of Cotton Nero A.x. I adopt this pentitential treatise as a contemporary analogue that reflects the *Pearl*-poet's own statements upon similar spiritual concerns. *The Clensyng of Mannes Sowle* merely provides a contemporary cultural reference and need not be asserted as a direct or literal influence upon the *Pearl*-poet's works.

proof that there is no fault to be found. In the next two chapters I shall investigate why it is that Gawain is so blind as to fail to perceive his own deficiencies. The means for understanding this failure of perception rests in the nature of purity or cleanness in relation to correct perception. For the *Pearl*-poet, purity empowers perception, and moral cleanness particularly enables the human subject to perceive the metaphysical objects of spiritual sight. In order to illuminate this interplay of vision and purity, I turn attention in the present chapter to the *Pearl*-poet's homiletic poems, *Cleanness* and *Patience*. My analysis of vision in these texts is intended to support a reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* not insofar as Gawain is a seeker of profound visual theophany (such as the prophets Daniel and Jonah or even John the Evangelist in *Pearl*). Rather the true relevance of the homiletic poems' visual revelations lies in the *Pearl*-poet's realization that spiritual sight is linked to self-knowledge, a kind of authentic self-perception. I contend that Gawain's failure to rightly perceive truth in the external world is similarly linked to a misapprehension of self, and it is precisely this misapprehension that permits Gawain to omit his concealment of the green love lace and mistake himself as "so clene" that he is prepared for "domezday" (1883, 1884).[35]

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[35] It is not Gawain's own opinion but the narrator's assessment that Gawain is confessed so cleanly that his soul is prepared for judgement day; however, considering the narrator's refusal thus far to highlight Gawain's missteps, errors that will eventually come to the fore only after Gawain perceives them for himself at the Green Chapel, it would appear that the *Pearl*-poet is affecting a narrative tone quite similar to that which E.T. Donaldson once notably ascribed to the narrative persona employed by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*:

> It was left to Chaucer to turn the ancient stock satirical characters into real people assembled for a pilgrimage, and to have them described, with all their traditional faults upon them, by another pilgrim who records faithfully each fault without, for the most part, recognizing that it is a fault and frequently felicitating its possessor for possessing it. One result--though not the only result--is a moral realism much more significant than the literary realism which is a part of it and for which it is sometimes mistaken; this moral realism discloses a world in which humanity is prevented by its own myopia, the myopia of the describer, from seeing what the dazzlingly attractive externals of life really represent. ("Chaucer the Pilgrim" 934-35)

Chaucer's narrator shows us these characters perhaps as they would prefer to see themselves, however flawed their perceptions of self may be. So it must be with the *Pearl*-poet's narrator: he reports Gawain's

It is precisely this requisite cleanness of soul that the *Pearl*-poet finds so very fascinating in the homiletic poems. After describing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Cleanness*, for example, the poet comments upon the rewards of purity: "þaȝ þou be man fenny, / And al tomarred in myre whyle þou on molde lyuyes; / Þou may schyne þurȝ schryfte, þaȝ þou haf schome serued, / And pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worþe" (1113-16). In fact, the poet's excursus on purity is sustained from lines 1049-1148, and in these lines the poet mentions pearls three times (1068, 1116, 1132). Noting the poet's foregrounding of the polished pearl as a metaphor for the penitent soul, I observe here a confluence of images constituting a significant thematic convergence among the poems of Cotton Nero A.x. The metaphorical figure of the pearl itself notably culminates in the poem *Pearl*. Beyond his sustained association of purity with pearls, the poet describes the purification of confession and penance in much the same manner used in his narrator's account of Gawain's assumed purification after his confession in fit three: "Bot war þe wel, if þou be waschen with water of schryfte, / And polysed als playn as parchmen schauen, / Sulp no more þenne in synne þy saule þerafter" (*Cleanness* 1133-35).[36] The convergence of penance, purity, and pearl imagery in *Cleanness* provides an introduction to the notion of visual clarity in the homiletic poems, and I ground my analysis of these poems in the assumption that these parallels indicate an

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faults as innocently as Gawain commits them. The myopic self-regard of Chaucer's pilgrims is matched by that of Sir Gawain and just as surely modeled by the *Pearl*-poet's own narrative speaker.

[36] *Cleanness*'s account of penance actually employs two metaphorical comparisons: that of physical washing as well as the physical scraping necessary in the preparation of vellum for scribal use. Andrew and Waldron note that this simile recalls a twelfth-century sermon directed at manuscript illuminators. The sermon instructs "scribes of the Lord" to symbolically write for God upon the parchment of "pure conscience, whereon all our good works are noted by the pen of memory" and scraped by the "fear of God" (n1134). Let us be clear that the "plain" parchment mentioned here is not a true blank, because the tools employed to prepare it are loaded with symbolic significance that is anything but void of meaning. The scribal component of this simile bears notice considering the significant scribal image of the hand of God with stylus that appears during the Balthazar episode of *Cleanness*.

interplay of ideas that may allow the poems of Cotton Nero A.x to be read as a kind of intertext.[37]

Reading within the intertext of Cotton Nero A.x, critics seeking to interpret the nature of Gawain's own purity and confession would do well to examine what the *Pearl*-poet himself has to say about purity, literally "clanness." To this end the poet's homiletic poems, *Cleanness* and *Patience*, are obvious texts in which to further investigate the dynamics of sin and sight in the explication of spiritual purity. The specific rewards that the narrator implies await Gawain after his going hence ("seye heþen") (1879) are most clearly articulated in the poet's accounts of the eight Beatitudes, which figure prominently at the beginning of both the poet's homiletic works. The Beatitudes serve as a kind of doctrinal support for the *Pearl*-poet's homiletic poems, and they also inform our understanding of the reverence for visual theophany that figures in all of the poems of MS. Cotton Nero A.x. For Gawain, one must confess in order to be clean, for only the clean may truly see. This tenet is sustained throughout *Cleanness* and *Patience* and expresses the essential value of purity as a spiritual good within the poetry of the *Pearl*-poet. With reference to medieval theories of vision and visual theophany, these poems can explain for us exactly how the spiritual cleanness of Gawain pertains to vision—how vision depends upon purity. Moreover, *Cleanness* and *Patience* each evince a unique attitude towards visual experience of God as a phenomenon to be experienced through the medium of visible signs. As poems operating in the mode of exempla, both

[37] I employ this term as defined by Julia Kristeva in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel": "an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several meanings" (36). This theoretical perspective is clearly indebted to the *heteroglossia* of dialogism postulated by Mikhail Bakhtin. According to María Jesús Martínez Alfaro's reading of Kristeva, "There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires… that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical… shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures" (268).

demonstrate how signs may be used to gesture towards metaphysical things or ideas. In the case of *Cleanness*, the poet focuses upon how God may be beheld through the faculties of imagination and reason in the images of material things: bodies, vessels, even in words inscribed upon a palace wall.[38] *Patience*, on the other hand, presents the vision of God as an experience that must transcend the material things of the sublunary world. Rather than seeing God through the visible things of the created world, Jonah must eventually come to apprehend God in the guise of incorporeal Light, a sublime form of spiritual immanence that transcends the imagination and reason and instead relies solely upon the higher contemplative powers of human understanding.[39] Through this analysis, the contrasting contemplative powers of Daniel and Jonah will serve to demonstrate the cognitive apparatus underlying ocular desire in the *Pearl*-poet's homiletic works. Both of these poems conclude, however, that the true apprehension of beatific vision relies upon

[38] The previous chapter dealt primarily with visual perception as an external sense. While my argument has thus far introduced the concept of faculty psychology and with it categories of mental faculties such as imagination and reason, the present chapter will deal with the faculties or inner senses in a much more comprehensive way. A. Mark Smith's excellent essay on the functioning of the inner senses in medieval and Renaissance psychological theory describes the process by which physical objects are perceived by the external senses and then contemplated by the inner senses as an induction of species in which the particular form or likeness of physical species is transmitted through a series of phases (149-70). From the quiddity of species apparent in their material medium, to the visible species scrutinized within the external senses, to the insensible species of thoughts that contemplate the concepts of form rather than the forms of matter, Smith parses the many theoretical permutations of faculty psychology and identifies *sensus communis* (common sense), *vis imaginativa* (imagination), *fanatasia* (creative or speculative imagination), *vis cogitativa* (cogitation) and *vis memorativa* (memory) as common elements of the system. This kind of a five-part division of the inner senses is sometimes referred to as five "inner wits," echoing the five senses that constitute the "outer wits." This five-fold organization of the inner wits is very similar to the system propounded by Bacon. As I mentioned in the previous chapter (see page 17 n11), Roger Bacon posits five faculties of the inner senses: common sense, imagination, estimation, memory, and cogitation (*Opus majus* 425).

[39] The word "understanding" is not merely a generic term for cognitive recognition and in this case refers to a particular mode of contemplation. Along with the aforementioned "inner wits" and "reason," let us add the faculty of *intellectus* or "understanding." The understanding is referred to in the context of mystic contemplation and is used to describe the very highest capacity of cognition, that which contemplates the invisible truths of spiritual belief. This category of insensible reality includes doctrinal truths that defy the capacity of conventional cogitation or reason as well as the invisible forms of immaterial beings such as angels or even, as is the case for Jonah, the face of God. The theological origins and implications of this terminology will be explained in greater detail later in the present chapter (see discussion of Augustine's three manners of vision beginning on page 69 n42).

the capacity to perceive the image of God imparted in one's own soul. In this way beatific vision and all lesser forms of apprehension ultimately rely upon the self-reflexive atonement of the perceiving subject.

In the first hundred lines of *Cleanness*, the *Pearl*-poet portrays purity as a quality that determines the relationship between God and humanity and does so in spatial terms. The speaker emphatically charges that it is an axiomatic certainty that God cannot permit it to occur that "þe freke þat [is] in fylþe folȝes Hym after" (6). A man mired in sin simply cannot follow behind God "And aprochen to Hys presens... / ...teen vnto His temmple and temen to Hymseluen" (8-9). The poet's choice to follow this spatial and tactile representation of proximity to God and grace precedes the poet's invocation of the sixth Beatitude. This Beatitude is really the main locus of the text and should be read as a touchstone to which all readings of the poem may refer to verify the poet's representations of cleanness and its doctrinal implications.[40] In Aristotelian terms, the final cause or thematic purpose of *Cleanness*, of course, is to define and express the importance of cleanness or purity. As I have already intimated, the benefits of cleanness and drawbacks of uncleanness come to characterize states of either communion or isolation from God, and the poet, by explicitly associating a state of unmediated communion with God with the sacred vision of God promised in the sixth Beatitude, transitions from spatiality to visuality: "Þe haþel clene of his hert hapenez ful fayre, / For he schal loke on oure Lorde with a leue chere" (27-28). The distance between the heart

[40] This is certainly the case during the poet's aforementioned excursus on purity in *Cleanness*, in which the poet twice calls his readers back to the central importance of the sixth Beatitude: "And if He louyes clene layk þat is oure Lorde ryche, / And to be couþe in His courte þou coueytes þenne, / To se þat Semly in sete and His swete face, / Clerrer counsayl con I non, bot þat þou clene worþe" (1053-56). The poet's second allusion to the sixth Beatitude in this passage has a particularly urgent quality, for it presents the reader with a rhetorical question: "How schulde we se, þen may we say, þat Syre vpon throne?" (1112). We may add beatific vision to the list of converging elements identified in this significant passage of *Cleanness.*

of a praying supplicant and the heart of an unrepentant sinner frames the poet's meditations: his reimagining of biblical text envisions the condition of the soul as a state of presence or absence, intimacy or estrangement, and the poem's subsequent dramatization of these contrary states highlights the soul's capacity to see God as the direct consequence of the individual's adherence to the virtues of cleanness. We may recall the dynamism of the extramitted sensitive soul already well-established in *perspectival* optical theory. By combining the act of seeing with verbs indicating motion and prepositions expressing proximity, the *Pearl*-poet's phrasing unifies the spatial and visual modalities of experience: "As so saytz, to þat syȝt seche schal he neuer / Þat any vnclannesse hatz on, auwhere abowte; / For He þat flemus vch fylþe fer fro His hert / May not byde þat burre þat hit His body neȝe" (29-32). The visual prospect of seeing God is here identified as an act analogous to the physical act of moving the observer's body towards God. According to *perspectival* optics, it is of course the pseudo-material sensitive soul that traverses intervening space to approach the Godhead. Just as Sir Gawain demonstrates this extramission of spirit during his forest journey, the beatific vision imagined by the *Pearl*-poet here partakes in the same dynamic trope of the visual ray projecting from observer to observed.

It will be useful here to explain more fully what is meant by beatific vision, and for this instruction I first turn to Augustine's explication of three manners of sight in his *De genesi ad litteram* (*A Literal Translation of Genesis*).[41] Augustine identifies three

[41] I turn also to Jay Schleusener's "*Patience*, lines 35-50," which demonstrates the recursive circularity of the poet's presentation of the Beatitudes in *Patience*. Not only is this recursion typical of the poet's style, but it also seems to be plausible to suggest that the poet may have been in some way influenced by Augustine's *De sermone domini in monte* (quoted in this paragraph) in which Augustine "argues that each of the Beatitudes is a maxim (*sententia*), and that together they comprise a seven-stage ladder to perfection" (Schleusener 65). According to Augustine, the seventh rung of this ladder is the last rung of ascent, whereas the eighth returns to the beginning "and approves something consummate and perfect"

kinds of sight: corporeal or bodily, which governs our sensory apprehension of visible things in the material world; spiritual, which governs our conceptual apprehension of mental concepts that do not actually exist visibly in the material world such as virtues and super-sensible attributes of mind, logic, and reason; and intellectual, which governs our highest understanding of divine or super-mundane things, things such as the spiritual substance of angelic beings or even the literal face of God.[42] In his homily on the Sermon on the Mount, Augustine expounds upon the sixth Beatitude and his line of thinking is preoccupied with the precise manner of seeing with which the beatific vision is to be beheld:

(*Patrologiae Latinae* vol. 34, cols. 1234-35; for English translation see *Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels*, trans. William Findlay 3:10, 22-23).

[42] This three-fold division of kinds of visions and kinds of sight is significant and I shall refer to it frequently in the following chapters. With this scheme, Augustine establishes a framework for categorizing contemplative thought and this framework remains influential throughout the Middle Ages. In a discussion of how to distinguish divinely-inspired visions from false illusions, *The Chastising of God's Children* (anonymous Middle English religious guide, 1380s or 90s) explains Augustine's three classifications of visions:

> Aftir þe writeng and opynyons of doctours þer bien þre principal kyndes of visions. Þe firste is clepid a corporal vision wiþ bodili iȝe, whanne any bodili þing bi þe ȝift of god is shewid to a mans bodili siȝt whiche oþer men seen nat, ne mowen nat see, as heliseus [Elijah] saw brennyng charis, as þei hadden bien al fier, whanne helias was taken vp into þe eir; also balthasar the kyng sai an hand writyng on þe wal: Mane techel phares.
>
> The secunde kynde of visions is clepid a spiritual vision or imagynatif, whan a man is in his sleepe, or whanne a man is rauysshed fulli in spirit in tyme of preier, or in oþer tyme, seeþ ymages and figures of diuerse þinges, but no bodies, bi shewyng or reuelacion of god, as seint ion þe euangelist, whanne he was rauyshed in spirit, say many figuris and imagis, as we rede in þe apocalips; also seint petir in suche a rauyshynge say a disshe ful of diuerse bestis, and herde a voice seie to hym: Sle and
> ete.
>
> Þe þridde principal kynde of vision is clepid an intellectual vision, whanne no bodi ne image ne figure is seen, but whanne in suche a rauysshyng þe insiȝt of þe soule bi a wonderful myȝt of god is clierli fastned in vnbodili substaunce wiþ a sooþfast knowing: to þis visioun seint poule was rauysshed, as doctors seyn, þat he say wiþout ony figure or ymage god in hymsilf, þat is to say in his godhede. Þis þridde kynde of visions is most excellent, and more worþi þan corporal or spiritual or any oþer. (170)

The Middle English author acknowledges the hierarchical nature of this classification system but omits an explicit account of the the requisite faculties necessary for the apprehension of these various visions. Bodily, spiritual, and intellectual visions are respectively apprehended by the imagination, reason, and understanding.

> "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." How foolish, therefore, are those who seek God with these outward eyes, since He is seen with the heart! as it is written elsewhere, "And in singleness of heart seek Him." For that is a pure heart which is a single heart: and just as this light cannot be seen, except with pure eyes; so neither is God seen, unless that is pure by which He can be seen. (2.8, 20)

This statement makes Augustine's position on visual theophany seem far less complicated than a broader reading of his corpus would indicate.[43] For now, however, it is sufficient to acknowledge that Augustine does not view the beatific vision as a bodily or corporeal vision. Therefore it must be either spiritual or intellectual. Proceeding from this step, let us examine Augustine's further likening of the eight beatitudes to the sevenfold operation of the Holy Spirit introduced by Isaiah (11: 2-3). In his alignment of these operations with the Beatitudes, the Beatitude of the pure-hearted comes to be associated with "understanding": "Understanding corresponds to the pure in heart, the eye being as it were purged, by which that may be beheld which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and what hath not entered into the heart of man: and of them it is here said,

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[43] In his earlier works, Augustine invites the possibility of beatific theophany in this life. For example, when he speaks of intellectual visions in *De genesi ad litteram*, Augustine speaks of the experiences of saints and prophets and seems to imply that experiences of this nature are still possible for men and women living in the world (Book XII.11-12). In *De civitate dei*, however, Augustine offers his mature thoughts on the topic, and his explication of Luke 3:6 ("And all flesh shall see the salvation of God") presents his most definitive opinion which serves to disappoint desires of a mystical bent:

> Wherefore it may very well be, and it is thoroughly credible, that we shall in the future world see the material forms of the new heavens and the new earth in such a way that we shall most distinctly recognize God everywhere present and governing all things, material as well as spiritual, and shall see Him, not as now we understand the invisible things of God, by the things which are made [Romans 1:20], and see Him darkly, as in a mirror, and in part, and rather by faith than by bodily vision of material appearances, but by means of the bodies we shall wear and which we shall see wherever we turn our eyes. (Ch. 29)

Note that Augustine does not actually pronounce that theophany is impossible prior to the resurrection. He merely admits that the glorified body of the resurrection might make it possible for the human subject to see God in the manner of bodily sight. Thus the "face-to-face" theophany referred to by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 13:12) will be fulfilled but certainly not in a manner that we can anticipate with our current corporeal senses.

'Blessed are the pure in heart'" (*Sermon on the Mount* 4:11, 24). The beatific vision is unlike any sensory experience the human subject will have ever encountered. More than this, such vision is unlike anything that has ever "entered into the heart of man." Thus, the beatific vision must transcend thought itself, for, according to popular medieval belief, thoughts are beheld in the heart even as sensory images are. From this we must conclude that the beatific vision is of the intellectual variety.

The transcendent properties of the beatific vision may be beyond rational thought, but they are not beyond the contemplation of the soul, and the *Pearl*-poet, like Augustine in his homily on the Sermon on the Mount, is eager to tether the sublime aims of the Beatitude to the specific locus of the heart, the vital receptor of the soul within the body of man. Acknowledging the poet's broader integration of the heart as a significant recurring motif in his Middle English translation of the Beatitudes, Sandra Pierson Prior has drawn attention to the *Pearl*-poet's quite specific reformulation of some of these Beatitudes. The poet's Middle English translation of the Vulgate source, otherwise quite conformed to the letter of the Latin text, deviates by incorporating the image of the heart in not only the sixth Beatitude, the only Beatitude to mention the heart in the Vulgate, but in his rendering of the first, fifth, and eighth beatitudes as well. Prior suggests this repetition of *hert* serves to emphasize the internal nature of the Kingdom of God rather than the expectation of the Kingdom to come at the end of history (341). There is certainly some validity to this notion; however, considering the great rhetorical weight granted to sight as a medium of spiritual perception in both *Patience* and *Cleanness*, the priority that the poet gives to the internal nature of redemption should not be overstated. Rather, the poet's emphasis upon the heart as a conduit of grace in the present moment

ought to suggest for us the preparation required of the beatified soul in anticipation of the promised vision of God expected at the end of history. Moreover, the use of personification to represent the Beatitudes in *Patience* serves to highlight the poet's compulsion to use corporeal signs as tokens for what cannot otherwise be conventionally seen. I would further suggest that the poet's inclusion of "hert" in his rendering of additional Beatitudes beyond the sixth indicates an inclination to read the other Beatitudes with reference to the all-important sixth. At the very least, the poet's emphasis upon the heart in these passages signals his interest in cardiosensory perception as a model for spiritual seeing, a preoccupation that evinces the poet's exploration of visionary experience as a phenomenon perceived through the interplay of body and soul working in concert. His representation of the heart and soul nexus of cognition emphasizes the way in which the corporeal and spiritual natures are comingled in his work and expresses for us the poet's intense interest in how bodily vision can actually imitate, model, or anticipate higher modes of cognition. This interplay of the spiritual and corporeal in the homiletic poems resonates in the mundane perceptual experiences of Gawain.

The particular context of these Middle English additions to the poet's biblical source inserts the figure of the heart in relation to the virtues poverty and pity in the first and fifth Beatitudes respectively. In both cases, the virtue in question incorporates the figure of the heart by positing the heart as the locus in which virtue resides. Thus far, these inclusions appear to be quite consistent with the tenets of cardiosensory sight, which requires that the soul, spatially located in the physical heart, must render the visual medium and sensible species analogous to vision before perception can occur. The poet's

third inclusion of the heart in the Beatitudes provides the most dramatic instance of rewriting the Beatitudes, for it goes so far as to obscure the literal sense of the Vulgate source. The *Pearl*-poet takes the phrase, *Beati, qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam*: *quoniam ipsorum est regnum cælorum* ("Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 5:10), a blessing in praise of pious martyrdom, and alters it in translation to read thus: "Þay ar happen also þat con her hert stere, / Fore hores is þe heuen-ryche" (27-8). The *Pearl*-poet's rewrite of Matthew is clearly a significant departure from the poet's source. He has in fact eschewed the original Beatitude in praise of righteous suffering and replaced it with an injunction extolling the virtue of patient self-control. Indeed, the poet is calling upon his readers to literally "control their hearts," a reference that imbues the other cardio-centric Beatitudes (original and revised) with a volitional aspect and suggests the agency of the human subject in rendering the heart pure or clean, in embracing pity, and even in understanding poverty (or being "poor in spirit" as the Vulgate would have it). The spiritual work of humankind is correctly understood as the work of the soul, but what the poet has given us in his treatment of the Beatitudes is a reminder that the work of the soul consists of labours that must be performed and sufferings that must be endured through the faculties of the body. The heart is clearly the conduit through which the body accesses the virtues of spirit by which spiritual vision may be attained.

This reading is consistent with Prior's analysis of the grammatical tenses used in the Vulgate text as well in the *Pearl*-poet's translation of the Beatitudes in *Patience*. Of the eight Beatitudes, six express the expectation of grace as a reward to be enjoyed in the future: "þay schal welde þis worlde... / ...þay schal comfort encroche... / ...þay schal frely

be refete ful of alle gode" (16, 18, 20). Only two of them, the first and last, refer to the "mede" of grace as a boon to be enjoyed in the present:

> Thay arn happen þat han in hert pouerté,
>
> For hores is þe heuen-ryche to holde for euer; (13-14)
>
> ...
>
> Þay ar happen also þat con her hert stere,
>
> For hores is þe heuen-ryche, as I er sayde. (27-28)

Observing the circular recursion already identified in Augustine's interpretation of the Beatitudes, the poet retains the exact same tense constructions as his source and further intensifies the present reward of grace through identification of the agency of the heart in human endurance of poverty and persecution. The *Pearl*-poet does not pass over this grammatical distinction of verb tenses in silence. In fact, he refers explicitly to the difference in a particularly notable deviation from the Vulgate: "I schal me poruay pacyence and play me with boþe, / For in þe tyxte þere þyse two arn in teme layde, / Hit arn fettled in on forme, þe forme and þe laste, / And by quest of her quoyntyse enquylen on mede" (36-39). The reference to "on forme" governing both poverty and patience, the "forme and þe laste" of the Beatitudes, refers specifically to the present tense shared by the first and eighth Beatitudes. This use of present tense verb forms deviates from the future tense employed in all of the other six Beatitudes, and the poet's emphasis upon this "on forme" draws attention to the ambiguity that lies between the human subject residing in the present and the promised rewards of heaven. The rhetorical force of most of the Beatitudes gestures towards the future and posits those rewards as graces to be warranted and later acquired. The present tense employed by the "forme and the laste" Beatitudes,

however, constitutes a significant deviation from what is otherwise a rather straightforward formula, and by using the shared formal properties of the first and last Beatitudes to draw out a further thematic link between poverty and patience the poet responds to this deviation in his Vulgate source.

The specific nature of that link is imbued with the immediacy of the present tense, a point which suggests that the heavenly rewards ascribed to both poverty and patience are in fact intrinsic to the virtues themselves and demand no deferral of enjoyment or reward. In other words, poverty and patience appear to be rewards in and of themselves that promote the idea that humankind is not necessarily distant from God and that the eventual estrangement of Jonah from God is a kind of illusion, an illusion that may be obviated by the recuperation of unity by way of language and restoration of sight. When I say, "by way of language," I more properly refer to the way language is used to deploy images and symbols in the *Pearl*-poet's homiletic exempla. Just as the poet's attention to grammatical tense subverts the expectation of Beatitude as a deferred ecstasy and posits instead a kind of immanent Beatitude ready to be enjoyed in the here and now, the poet's manipulation of bodily and spiritual signs bespeaks a willingness to raise cognition of mundane bodily and spiritual vision towards the higher apprehension of the understanding faculty.[44] The parallel of grammatical tense that signals the distinction between these and the other Beatitudes goes unnoticed by John T. Irwin and T.D. Kelly,

[44] Beatific vision in *Cleanness* has been explored in a useful study by Theresa Tinkle. According to Monica Brzezinski Potkay, the *Pearl*-poet depicts how the "pure of heart... see an immaterial God through material means, through images beheld by the physical eye" (181). I shall discuss precisely this concept in my final chapter, which analyses the way in which the dream vision of *Pearl* addresses the contemplative potential of the imagination to raise human consciousness towards higher spiritual contemplation through the beholding of corporeal similitudes. A.J. Minnis has convincingly argued that William Langland identifies this very potential with his representation of Ymaginatif in Passus XII of *Piers Plowman* (B-Text). Citing comments on John of La Rochelle found in Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum naturale*, Minnis recognizes that according to Vincent "figurative similitudes can be imprinted on the *virtus imaginativa*, and by this means the soul may be raised to knowledge of mysteries" ("Langland's Ymaginatif" 92).

who actually identify a further parallel linking these elements and contrasting them with the other six. Their study of images of contemplative life in *Patience* draws attention to the fact that both of these beatitudes, the first and the last, promise the same reward: "þe heuen-ryche" (14 and 28). Irwin and Kelly propose that because of this correspondence of rewards the poet appears to have determined that the virtuous action or quality that wins the reward of God's Kingdom must in some way be the same in both cases as well (36). Thus poverty and patience must be alike in some way. Their explanation of this similitude combines the terms into a single concept, "poverty of spirit," which denotes the surrender of the individual will to the will of God (36-7). Furthermore, Irwin and Kelly acknowledge the primacy of the sixth Beatitude in the work of the *Pearl*-poet and concede that the first and eighth Beatitudes must be "related to the contemplative act" (44).

I submit that Gawain violates the requirements of these last-named two Beatitudes identified in *Patience*, the first and the last, and both violations stem from a single fault. I adopt Irwin and Kelly's reading of "hert pouerté" as meaning "poverty of spirit,"[45] for their reading posits among Gawain's faults a definite lack of humility, a character flaw he

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[45] The fourteenth-century Middle English translation of the *Benjamin minor* (originally *The Twelve Patriarchs*) of Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) explains how "poverty of spirit" (or humble control of the will) pertains to vision. As Richard's allegory of the twelve Hebrew patriarchs (the twelve sons of Judah) indicates, Joseph, signifying discretion, is born before Benjamin, signifying wisdom or contemplation:

> And þan at þe first bryng we forþe Joseph in oure reson, when al þat we ben sterid to do, we do it wiþ counseyl. Þis Joseph schal not only knowe what synne we ben moste sterid to, bot also he schal knowe þe weyknes of oure kynde... also by þis ilke Joseph he is not only lernyd to eschewe þe deceyte of his enemyes, bot also oft a man is led by hym to þe parfite knowyng of hymself. And al after þat a man knoweþ hymself, þerafter he profiteþ in þe knowyng of God, of whom he is þe ymage & þe liknes. And þerfore it is þat after Joseph is Beniamyn borne; for as by Joseph discrecyon, so by Beniamyn we vnderstonde contemplacioun. (*A Tretyse of þe Stodye of Wysdome þat Men Clepen Beniamyn* 41-2)

These children of Judah are born to Rachel, who signifies reason, and thus we begin to perceive how perfection of contemplation is achieved incrementally by the graduated perfection or cleanness of the soul. The *Benjamin minor* and its source (*The Twelve Patriarchs*) will be consulted more extensively in the fifth chapter of this thesis (see page 225).

shares with the *Pearl*-poet's Jonah as well as Balthazar and Nebuchadnezzar. For Gawain, as for these biblical figures denoting vice, self-control is an essential moral quality. The *Pearl*-poet's conflation of the first and eighth Beatitudes confirms the idea that obedience to God and patient self-control are in a significant sense the same thing. It is therefore notable that prior to his supposed cleansing confession Gawain's reaction to the offer of the girdle echoes within the heart of the knight: "hit come to his hert / Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were" (1855-56). Gawain demonstrates an inability to control his heart in this scene, and in fact his heart is actually subverted by the influence of the love lace and its seductive promise. By positing Gawain's effusive giving of thanks for the gift within the frame of the heart as seat of cognition, the poet reinforces the notion of Gawain's subverted heart: "He þonkked hir oft ful swyþe, / Ful þro with hert and þoȝt; / Bi þat on þrynne syþe / Ho hatz kyst þe knyȝt so toȝt" (1866-69). The wheel of the stanza confirms that Gawain's self-control has been circumvented; he is unable to steer his own heart and this fault will eventually reveal his lack of patient obedience.

Cleanness and *Patience* present the theme of obedience to God in the narrative context of the sacred history of the prophets, and thus the homiletic poems speak in a more direct manner to the spiritual consequences that attend prideful failures of self control. The *Pearl*-poet confronts this idea in the very first line of *Patience*: "Pacience is a poynt, þaȝ hit displese oft" (1). This first line of the poem informs us that patience is a "poynt," a "virtue" (MED *pointe* [n.{1}] 10 [c]), but the poet further acknowledges for us the attendant pains of patience. As the example of Jonah, panicking at the prospect of being murdered by apostate Ninevites, demonstrates, this "poynt" of patience does indeed

"displese oft." The injunction has a matter of fact, axiomatic quality in its earnest directness of address and economy of delivery. The virtue of patience, the attention of the reader, and the pain of discomfort associated with patience are fused into a singular expression that has the weight of a truth claim as well as the emotional charge of transgression and resistance to law: patience would not hurt us if we did not yearn, as Jonah does, to be impatient, to disobey, and to give vent to anger and frustration. There is no mistaking that, on this displeasing though essential "poynt," the poet is establishing a starting position from which to develop his thoughts. Moreover, the poet's signature penchant for circular concatenation and looping patterns draws the point of *Patience* into the final line of the poem as well and creates a symmetrical frame that duplicates the same alliterating axiom as the first line virtually word for word: "Forþy penaunce and payne topreue hit in syȝt / Þat pacience is a nobel poynt, þaȝ hit displease ofte" (530-31). The closing gesture of the poem thus reifies its thematic assertion in a manner that perfectly reinscribes its earlier statement including its notably displeasing caveat. Wherever the meanderings of the poem may lead, the virtue of patience remains an anchor of the text. This virtue of patience provides a rhetorical point which the poem may propound, from which it may stray, and to which it, finally, will return. Moreover, according to the poet, he has proved his point by way of signs but the truth of his claims is evident to the eye ("in syȝt"). In other words, there is a strong sense here that the poet explicitly wants readers to "see" the veracity of his claims, in other words, to see his point even as they literally read his poem.

This positing of rhetorical emphasis directs the interest of a reader in a manner that recalls the explicit act of pointing observed in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in

which the narrator pledges to describe the mirth and solace of the court at Hautdesert as best he can: "to poynte hit ȝet I pyned me parauenture" (1009). In both cases, the presence of pain figures prominently in relation to the speaker's locus of attention. The possibility that a virtuous "poynt" may be related to the descriptive act of pointing, calls to mind Mary Carruthers's comments referring to the medieval book as a mnemonic device:

> Patterns, whether of words (text) or of decoration (including punctuation of all sorts), become incised permanently in the brain like the ruts that kept wheels on the route of medieval roads. Distraction leads to "error," wandering from "the way" or mnemotechnical cognitive schemata. ("Reading with Attitude" 12)

She likens the act of memory in medieval contexts, the literal preservation of ideas in the mind for later recall, to the visible figures inscribed upon a manuscript page. Quoting Peter of Celle's "On Affliction and Reading," Carruthers further identifies the agency of pain in the inscription of meaning for the medieval subject. Memory and the cognitive acts associated with it are thus analogous to the act of writing in a book, and pain serves as the overarching mode of affect by and through which the cognitive act is marked. The memorative faculty is pricked by pain to recall the experience of the human subject; the manuscript page is pricked by the stylus to produce the legible text by which knowledge may be recognized and understood by the reader. Further commentary from Carruthers illustrates this particular point by way of reference to the instrumentality of the body in medieval conceptions of memory, which incorporate instances of bodily mortification and physical pain as mnemonic aids. She closely aligns the punctuation of an inscribed page with the *compunctio cordis* identified as the effective inscription of idea in memory:

> We have here a chain (*catena*), mnemonically associated through the key syllable *punct-* [from the root latin verb *pungo*, *pungare*: pierce, puncture, wound], which attaches physical puncture-wounding, with (page) punctuation, with affective "compunction" of heart, and so from "heart" to "memory." ("Reading with Attitude" 2)

It is worth noting here that first among the definitions for the noun "pointe" offered in the Middle English Dictionary is the sense of "a small dot marked upon a surface" (MED def. 1). I contend that the poet of *Patience* activates this very trope of the pricking "pointe" to rouse the minds of readers to attention and recognition in both the introduction and conclusion of his poem and indeed sustains this image of puncturing and penetrating throughout the poem as a sign for a wide variety of significations.

Indeed, there is evidence that the poet adopts this trope elsewhere in his body of work. For example, the use of "poyntel" for "stylus" in *Cleanness* to describe the manner with which the hand of God inscribes mysterious letters upon the wall of Balthazar's palace hall underscores the potent scribal metaphor in the transmission and reception of meaning and suggests that the "poynte" or virtue invoked in the opening and closing lines of *Patience* is a lexical sign deliberately "pointed" at the reader and intended to impress upon that reader in a manner that invokes the metaphor of textual inscription. Moreover, in *Cleanness* the *Pearl*-poet adds the use of a "poyntel" in a text that does not otherwise refer to a stylus at all: the Vulgate source for the poet's treatment of the Book of Daniel describes the hand of God scratching Balthazar's palace wall with bare fingers (Daniel 5:5).[46]

[46] Recent research by Murray McGillivray and Kenna Olsen affiliated with the Cotton Nero A.x project has noted manicules drawn in the margins of the MS. folia. While the purpose of these manicules remains

Balthazar sees the hand and is instantly overcome by a stupefying fear that explicitly strikes him in the heart. In his description of the effect this has on the king, the poet elaborates the writing action of the hand scratching letters in the plaster of the castle walls in a most tactile manner: "scraped wyth a scrof penne, / As a coltour in clay cerues þe forȝes" (1546-47). The somatic effect this writing has upon the person of the king, "al falewed his face and fayled þe chere," recalls the poet's Middle English rendering of the sixth Beatitude (1539). It is as though the words have been inscribed upon the figurative clay of Balthazar's body, indeed, scrawled upon his very heart. When he comes to his senses and calls for scholars to determine the meaning of the writing, Balthazar emphasizes the bodily terror that has possessed him, "For al hit frayes my flesche, þe fyngres so grymme" (1553). Indeed, the prophet Daniel speaks to Balthazar and explicitly refers to the writing hand as "Þe fyste with þe fyngeres þat flayed þi hert," a charge that confirms the association of inscribed text with heart and body—in this case, in the manner of wounding (1723).[47] Most important, however, is the manner in which

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unknown, the pointing hands do indeed direct attention to the text, and these illustrated hands appear to resemble the hands drawn in the twelve illustrated pages of the manuscript. In fact, the most prominent representation of hands in the MS. illustrations occurs in the sixth illustration (f. 56v), which depicts the hall scene from *Cleanness* in which Balthazar witnesses the writing on the wall as well as its metaphysical source. The image depicts multiple hands, which gesture and direct visual attention throughout the space of the depicted scene. The most prominent of these hands is the hand of God, holding the stylus and drawing attention to the phrase "Mane techel phares," which is inscribed vertically on the edge of the scene.

[47] The motif of words inscribed upon a page likened to a wound inflicted upon the body appears in a short poem called "An A B C Poem on the Passion of Christ" (MS. Harley 3954, f. 87; second quarter, fifteenth century). This poem depicts the passion in a series of six-line stanzas. A brief prologue introduces the text as an instructional exercise meant to teach grammar to young students:

> Wrout in on þe bok with-oute,
> .V. paraffys grete & stoute
> Bolyd in rose red; [Embossed]
> Þat is set with-outyn doute,
> In tokenyng of cristis ded.
> Red letter in parchemyn
> Makyth a chyld good & fyn
> Lettrys to loke & se. (7-14)

the terrifying chastisement of Balthazar assaults his heart. As the poet's figurative exemplar of spiritual impurity, Balthazar presents us with an example of an unclean heart. In this role, he cannot possibly expect to receive the promised vision of the sixth Beatitude let alone understand the signs written upon the palace wall.

Earlier in *Cleanness*, the poet expounds in great detail what it is that he means when he refers to uncleanness. During his exemplum of Noah's flood, the poet freely translates Genesis from the Vulgate and recounts God's pledge to never again destroy the human race as a punishment for sin. He attributes the thoughts of sinners to their "herttez," and thus localizes the act of cognition within the seat of the soul with the aforementioned perceptive faculty: "For I se wel þat hit is sothe þat alle seggez wyttez / To vnþryfte arn alle þrawen with þoȝt of her herttez, / And ay hatz ben, and wyl be ȝet" (515-17). The "wyttez" or "senses" as well as the very thoughts of human beings are thus conceived by and through the heart. Clearly the *Pearl*-poet is operating in a cardiosensory mode when speaking of these concepts; that is to say, he articulates the human heart as the vital seat of both thought and sensation. Moreover, in the poem's later treatment of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the poet further articulates the link between heart and soul in his explanation of the rationale behind the destruction of those cities: "al watz for þis ilk euel, þat vnhappen glette, / Þe venym and þe vylanye and þe vycios fylþe / Þat bysulpez mannez saule in vnsounde hert" (573-75). Here the filth of flesh, particularly the sins of sexual deviance, defile the soul and humankind and do so

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The A B C text is contrived as a mnemonic for meditation upon the Passion. By attracting the reader's eye to the attractive red letters, the five paragraphs on the wounds of Christ, indicated in red ink for decorative embossing, serve to accentuate the point of the text. The analogy between the red letters and the bleeding wounds signified by these letters designates the act of inscription as an act of figurative wounding, as the text which receives the red marks depicts Christ's bodily wounds upon the "parchemyn" skin of its own textual body.

specifically through the byways of the heart, a heart characterized as "vnsounde." Contrary to the *vnsounde hertes* of the hapless peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah, the terms of the beatific vision promise that those who are clean of heart shall see God face to face ("with a leue chere") (1 Corinthians 13:12). The virtue of cleanness thus serves as the recuperative force by which the body and soul are mutually raised to the highest spiritual reward imaginable.

These spiritual heights are denied Balthazar, whose mortal terror derives from his ignorance before the inscribed symbols, sacred images he is utterly incapable of parsing, and this ignorance owes in no small part to his spiritual disobedience. We are told that Balthazar looks upon the scribal hand as it writes, but all that registers in his heart is fear: "When þat bolde Baltazar blusched to þat neue, / Such a dasande drede dusched to his hert" (1537-38). The description of the scene emphasizes Balthazar's position as a gazing subject, who looks upon the hand and written characters and registers his perception, however insufficient, in the heart. By advancing the narrative immediately to Balthazar's call for scholars to serve as interpreters, the poet further highlights the king's lack of perception: "Sone so þe kynge for his care carping myȝt wynne, / He bede his burnes boȝ to þat were bok-lered, / To wayte þe wryt þat hit wolde, and wyter hym to say" (1550-52). Balthazar's failure of cardiosensory perception is presaged, however, by his careless use of the stolen relics of the Jewish temple as tableware.[48] Prior to the writing on the wall, Balthazar's senses are addled by strong wine that

[48] The poet describes Nebuchadnezzar's victory over the Jewish king Zedechiah and subsequent taking of the temple relics elsewhere in *Cleanness* (1175-1332). This part of the narrative has been regarded as a pointless digression, but later in this chapter I will integrate the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Balthazar, father and son, into my own interpretation. Notable studies on what has been erroneously regarded as *Cleanness*'s poor or confusing structure include: Michael Means, "The Homiletic Structure of *Cleanness*"; William Vantuono, "A Triple-Three Structure for *Cleanness*"; and Arthur Bahr, "Finding the Forms of *Cleanness*".

warmed his hert

And breyþed vppe into his brayn and blemyst his mynde,

And al waykned his wyt, and welneȝe he foles;

…

Þenne a dotage ful depe drof to his hert,

And a caytif counsayl he caȝt bi hymseluen. (1420-26)

This description of the wicked plan stirring in Balthazar's thoughts confirms the cardiosensory nature of thought, sensation, and sin in the poet's understanding of faculty psychology. The plotting of the king merely reflects the depravity outlined in the poet's earlier account of the Babylonian court:

Þus in pryde and olipraunce his empyre he haldes,

In lust and in lecherye and loþelych werkkes,

And hade a wyf for to welde, a worþelych quene,

And mony a lemman, neuer þe later, þat ladis wer called.

In þe clernes of his concubines and curious wedez,

In notyng of nwe metes and of nice gettes,

Al watz þe mynde of þat man on misschapen þinges. (1349-55)

The qualities of lust and lechery surely reflect the reported sexual deviance of those destroyed in the Flood, a biblical event narrated earlier in *Cleanness*. Interesting here, however, is the poet's open nod to that which is potentially clean or pure in the court of Balthazar. The wife of Balthazar is a worthy queen and his concubines are noted for their "clernes." Elsewhere the speaker praises the impressive architecture of Babylon and even refers to the "koynt carneles aboue, coruen ful clene" (1382). These details

reinforce an emerging understanding that the uncleanness of Balthazar should be attributed to his "werkkes" rather than assumed as an indictment of all material goods. With this in mind, we can verify that it is not the sacred relics themselves that are unclean, but they are made unclean by the way in which Balthazar uses them.

His mind set upon "misschappen þinges,"[49] Balthazar "vncloses" (1438) the treasuries and serves his table guests with the Jewish relics, objects whose sacred meanings were inscribed in the days of Solomon and consecrated through generations of sacrifice and service within the tabernacle of the Holy of Holies and in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. Balthazar "vncloses" the holy things in a misreading of sacred figures that amounts to more than a misuse of mere objects, but constitutes, rather, a misapprehension of sacred symbols, symbols described in the language of figure and form that recalls the *Pearl*-poet's opening declaration of purpose (1-4):

"fyled out of figures of ferlylé schappes" (1460),

"fetysely formed" (1462),

"...in þo forms of flaumbeande gemmes" (1468).

[49] This notion that some things may be misshapen permits the understanding that not all things are necessarily aberrant and that some things, even material things, may be clean, pure, or even beautiful. Michael Calabrese and Eric Eliason have persuasively argued that the poet's discourse on sexuality actually celebrates certain kinds of sanctioned sexual conduct (273). The poet's description of Babylon and Balthazar's corrupted desire certainly seem to indicate a distinction between positive and negative bodily conduct, a distinction that recalls Suzannah Biernoff's description of "the fleshless body of the resurrection" in *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (21). In her account of the medieval body, Biernoff, by differentiating body from flesh, problematizes the traditional split between body and spirit. The medieval understanding of flesh here represents all the lower functions of bodily necessity and libidinal desire; the flesh seems somewhat analogous even to the grotesque body identified in medieval tradition by Bakhtin. Biernoff's argument in some ways turns upon the imminent threat of flesh in Christian medieval culture. A distinction begins to emerge here in the evaluation of the medieval body, a distinction that Biernoff has articulated thus: "if flesh enslaves or corrupts, the implication is that there is something there to be enslaved and corrupted… some part of the self that is not flesh" (23). Citing Augustine's commentary on the "inner man," Biernoff further maintains that the refusal of the flesh "does not require the renunciation of the body, or of sensation, but their subjugation—or perhaps sublimation—to intellectual and spiritual goals" (24).

The flaming qualities of gems that transmit shining forms or species recall the projected images of divine presence that cleave to Abraham and even Lot in *Patience*. As Charlotte C. Morse has suggested, the sacred vessels symbolize much, including the presence of the Holy Spirit (203). This is the kind of immanent presence of higher intellectual vision that strikes Balthazar's heart and leaves his body numb and ill-composed when he observes the handwriting on the wall. By contrast, Daniel correctly interprets the writing and predicts the death of Balthazar, but before Daniel does this he condemns Balthazar's ignorance, for he has "Seȝ þese syngnes with syȝt and set hem at lyttel, / Bot ay hatz hofen [his] hert agaynes þe hyȝe Dryȝtyn" (1710-11). This orientation of heart against God is critical for understanding where Balthazar fails and Daniel succeeds. Balthazar's own assessment of Daniel's prophetic credentials makes this clear: "þou hatz in þy hert holy connyng, / Of sapyence þi sawle ful, soþes to schawe; / Goddes gost is þe geuen þat gyes alle þynges, / And þou vnhyles vch hidde þat Heuen-Kyng myntes" (1625-28). Balthazar's praise focuses upon the powers of contemplative wisdom cultivated within Daniel's soul. Such wisdom, we are told, grants him the capacity to see as well as "schawe" the hidden truths revealed in understanding.

As a prophetic biblical figure, Jonah contrasts well with the clarity of vision that Daniel represents in *Cleanness*. Whereas Daniel proves capable of interpreting the missives of God (literally the scribal point that God directs),[50] Jonah evinces a defiant

[50] Notably, the *Pearl*-poet invokes the worde "poynt" at the moment that God responds to Balthazar's depraved excesses: "So þe Worcher of þis worlde wlates þerwyth / Þat in þe poynt of her play He poruayes a mynde" (*Cleanness* 1501-02). "Poynt of her play" must here be read to mean something like "the height" (as Andrew and Waldron would have it) or "the climax of their play." This reading seems to be based upon the Middle English Dictionary entry for "pointe" (n.[1]) definition 5 (a): "A critical or decisive moment or situation, a crisis; the point of action or decision; the brink of disaster." This is the sense that the Dictionary attributes to Gawain's utterance of "poynt" (2284) when he refers to the moment he is to receive the return blow from the Green Knight and the resolving moment of their beheading game. The *Pearl*-poet's use of "poynt" presages the inscribing "poyntel" that is to come. This association is particularly

unwillingness to obey and for this reason fails to receive the point of God's messages. Note that this failure occurs in spite of God's efforts to communicate directly with Jonah, for His missives appear to move directly to him in the form of extramitted species:

> Goddes glam to hym glod þat hym vnglad made,
>
> With a roghlych rurd rowned in his ere:
>
> 'Rys radly,' He says, 'and rake forth euen;
>
> Nym þe way to Nynyue wythouten oþer speche,
>
> And in þat ceté My saȝes soghe alle aboute,
>
> Þat in þat place, at þe poynt, I put in þi hert. (63-68).

In this case it is the voice of God that glides to Jonah. In a manner quite similar to that which is anticipated in the Daniel episodes of *Cleanness*, Jonah is represented as one who must receive as well as share the word of God. The "poynt" referred to here might be understood to mean "time" or "moment" (MED def. 4), but its use here contains a powerful gesturing inflection as well. God is pointing at Jonah in a specific manner and directing his point at the heart of Jonah, indeed, to the very soul of Jonah. This latter interpretation of "poynt," as a denotation of a particular point in space (MED def. 3)— in this case the heart—is persuasive, as the very tactile nexus of the heart's point, operative in the workings of exemplary contemplatives such as Daniel, is precisely the point where God would try to communicate with Jonah if only Jonah could lift his heart to receive the

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salient considering the poet's alliterating juxtaposition of the phrase "poruayes a mynde" ("sends an intention.") This unusual usage of "mynde" reminds us that thoughts exist in these texts as images of various types. These images may be directed or pointed in the form of lexical signs (as on the palace wall) or in the form of mental images (as is the case in *Patience*).

showing of divine light.[51] This manner of direct congress between God and the heart of humankind is the literal goal imagined in the attainment of unimpeded communication with God. It would appear that vision, by informing the pointed transmission of thought, word, and visual sense information in this text, stands forth as a sensory model for communication between man and God in *Patience*.[52]

Inspired, quite literally in fact, to speak on behalf of God, to preach and share the words of sacred wisdom and law, Jonah, like Daniel, is a figurative type for the very idea of the prophet-preacher. His reticence, even refusal, to speak what he has heard and knows to be true bespeaks a kind of poetic anxiety regarding the fitness of the human subject to serve as conduit for the voice of God. Jonah is to inform the Ninevites that they have displeased God and that they are to receive divine punishment. The prophet

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[51] Julian of Norwich makes explicit reference to the heart as the seat of the soul as well as the locus of bodily, spiritual, and intellectual vision. As she gazes upon the vision of her own heart and the soul nested within, Julian is treated to a vision, which she receives by the continued act of gazing upon her soul:

> And then oure good lorde opened my gostely eye and shewde me my soule in the middes of my harte. I saw the soule so large as it were an endlesse warde, and also as it were a blisseful kingdom, and by the conditions that I saw therein I understode that it is a wurshipfulle citte. In middes of that citte sitteth oure lorde Jhesu, very God and very man: a fair person and of large stature, highest bishoppe, solempnest kinge, wurshipfullest lorde. And I saw him clothed solemply in wurshippes. He sitteth in the soule even righte in peas and rest, and he ruleth and yemeth heven and erth and all that is. (*A Revelation of Love* LXVIII. 335)

Surely this reference to communication targeted at the human heart in both the words of Julian as well as the *Pearl*-poet accords with what Carruthers identifies as the compunction of the heart necessitated by earnest understanding of memorized, learned data.

[52] Expounding upon one of her own more significant revelations of love, Julian of Norwich actually uses the term "poynte" to refer to the seat of understanding, the faculty necessary for the perception of immaterial, intellectual visions:

> And after this, I saw God in a pointe—that is to say, in my understanding—by which sight I saw that he is in al thing. I beheld with avisement, seeing and knowing in that sight that he doth alle that is done... Thus I understonde in this shewing of love, for wel I wot in the sight of our Lorde God is no happe ne aventure... For in this time the working of creatures was not shewde, but of our Lord God in the creature. For he is in the mid point of all thinges. (*A Revelation of Love* XI. 163)

Julian's contemplation is well past the faculty of imaginative sight, for she sees not the particular workings of humankind but rather the universal working of God in all things. This revelation is tellingly impressed upon the precise "poynt" of Julian's heart, which she identifies for us as the locus of the highest contemplative faculty, the understanding. This usage of "point" informs my understanding of the *Pearl*-poet's use of the term in the contemplative scenes of *Cleanness* and *Patience*.

demurs, however, because he believes the Ninevites will kill him should he consent to be the bearer of such bad news:

> If I bowe to His bode and bryng hem þis tale,
> And I be nummen in Nuniue, my nyes begynes:
> He telles me þose traytoures arn typped schrewes;
> I com wyth þose tyþynges, þay ta me bylyue,
> Pynez me in a prysoun, put me in stokkes,
> Wryþe me in a warlok, wrast out myn yȝen. (75-80)

In this monologue, which the poet has added to his translation of the Vulgate text, Jonah enumerates the sufferings that the Ninevites will inflict upon him should he obey God's command and preach their doom. Whereas the Vulgate simply indicates that Jonah flees "into Tharsis from the face of the Lord" (Jonah 1:1), *Patience*, by having the prophet lament a list of imagined torments that would actually seem to presage the eventual trials he will endure in the belly of the whale, preempts Jonah's flight. Imprisonment, torment, humiliation, and the eventual loss of sight: Jonah actually endures all of these sufferings, though not because he obeys the "bode" or "command" of God but precisely because he does not obey God's will. The violent image of Jonah blinded is particularly arresting, because it contrasts for us the understandable desire for physical sight with Jonah's unfortunate rejection of spiritual sight—a rejection signaled in the Vulgate source by reference to Jonah driven "from the face of the Lord."

This manner of spiritual estrangement is a significant departure from the *Pearl*-poet's representations of prophets in communion with God, including Jonah's own initial capacity for direct spiritual congress. In *Cleanness*, it is Abraham's own cleanness or

purity that marks him fit to receive an angelic vision. The angels find him lying in the shade and concealed by leaves and brush in a manner that recalls Jonah's hiding place in the arbour in *Patience*. Rather than remaining concealed, however, Abraham eagerly approaches the angels: "For þe lede þat þer laye þe leuez anvnder, / When he hade of Hem syȝt he hyȝez bylyue, / And as to God þe goodmon gos Hem agaynez" (609-11). The emphasis here lies upon Abraham's goodness, which marks him fit to receive the audience of the angels. Unsurprisingly, the particular quality of goodness that is apparently essential here revolves around the disposition of Abraham's heart, a point that the poet reiterates just prior to the meeting: "And þere He fyndez al fayre a freke wythinne, / With hert honest and hol, þat haþel He honourez, / Sendez hym a sad syȝt: to se His auen face" (593-95). There is a reciprocal exchange of extramitted and intromitted species here, as God transmits images outward even as the eager recipient, in this case Abraham, likewise gestures outward in the hope of receiving such images. By contrast, those who are unworthy of divine vision are in fact struck absolutely blind, as is the case in *Cleanness* for the people of Sodom when the angels defend Lot from the city mob: "Þay blwe a buffet inblande þat banned peple, / Þat þay blustered, as blynde as Bayard watz euer; / Þay lest of Lotez logging any lysoun to fynde, / Bot nyteled þer alle þe nyȝt for noȝt at þe last" (885-88). It is an irony that Jonah seeks to avoid physical blindness through actions that will eventually leave him mired in a darkness figuring spiritual blindness. He voluntarily plucks out the eyes of spiritual vision for fear of having his bodily eyes taken from him.

In a misguided attempt to avoid this fate, Jonah willingly cuts himself off from God and resolves to board a ship that will take him to Tarsus rather than Ninevah. The

poet's subsequent reference to Jonah's efforts to explain himself to the crewmembers who find him stowed aboard the ship reveal him to be a master of signs: "He ossed hym by vnnynges þat þay undernomen / Þat he watz flawen fro þe face of frelych Dryȝtyn" (213-14). The passage, echoing the Vulgate, is a curious one, because it in one stroke combines Jonah's position as a manipulator of signs with his estranged status as an unruly apostate, banished from the sight, from the very face of God. The fact is that these characteristics are intimately associated through the medium of vision, which functions in *Patience* as a mode of both mundane earthly experience as well as a token of spiritual presence. Moreover, this passage of discovery, in which Jonah has been exposed to the crew after concealing himself within the bowels of the ship, prefigures the later swallowing of Jonah within the maw of the whale. More than this, however, the passage establishes the creative power of God within explicitly linguistic terms. When Jonah introduces himself as a Hebrew, he draws attention to his God as a universal creator, and the medium of that creation is explicitly referred to in linguistic terms: "Þat Wyȝe I worchyp, iwysse, þat wroȝt alle þynges, / Alle þe worlde with þe welkyn, þe wynde and þe sternes, / And alle þat wonez þer withinne, at a worde one" (206-08). This notion of the world's creation owing to the verbal utterances of God is a commonplace that should not be unfamiliar to us. What ought to be of note here is the contrast laid between God's universal creative powers of speech with Jonah's explicit refusal to speak, a refusal, in fact, to transmit the Word communicated to him by God. Thus Jonah assumes a nullifying position within the established divine order of God and the creative power represented by God. Jonah even contemplates that he can escape beyond the limits of God's sensory powers: "Hit watz a wenyng vnwar þat welt in his mynde, / Þaȝ he were

so3t fro Samarye, þat God se3 no fyrre" (115-16). The notion raises the spectre of humanity as the anti-Boethian saboteur within the perfect plans of a deity incapable of fault. If language, rightly understood, is characterized as a species of sound radiated outward by a process of endless multiplication and concatenation of signals, Jonah constitutes a break in that chain and a subversion of the kind of earnest use of language theorized by Bacon[53] and modelled in *Patience* through the ostensibly unerring, pointed speech of God.

The poet appears rather to challenge Jonah's desire for isolation from God and does so by drawing more biblical sources into his own text in an effort that accentuates the all-seeing, all hearing, all-knowing nature of God:

> O folez in folk, felez oþerwhyle
>
> And vnderstondes vmbestounde, þa3 3e be stapen in folé:
>
> Hope 3e þat He heres not þat eres alle made?
>
> Hit may no be þat He is blynde þat bigged vche y3e. (121-24)

[53]Stephen G. Nichols draws a connection between Roger Bacon's *perspectiva* and his conceptualization of cognitive thought including language:

> Understanding vision, in short, yields insights into the arcane folds of our inner life. Ultimately, on Bacon's view, the mechanics of vision permits us to understand how we apprehend mentally or spiritually. It is but a step to postulate physical vision as akin to mental or spiritual vision—in essence of equating the eye and the soul—and Bacon does not shrink from taking that step. (290)

Setting this cavalier attitude regarding spiritual vision aside, I am indebted to Nichols's observations regarding Bacon's "hermeneutics of vision," which integrate Bacon's confidence in the integrity of visual species with the supposed authenticity of lexical signs (301). By setting his will against God (and orienting his heart against God) Jonah suffers a spiritual blindness as well as a kind of aporia that limits his capacity for communication. Seeing and communicating through language are parallel activities in the experience of Jonah, and his common deficiency in both of these fields of action reflects the parallel between degraded species multiplication and the flawed transmission of language that Akbari identifies in the thought of Bacon (243). This is to say that the process of abstraction by which sensible forms communicate their intelligible meanings is fraught by potential degradation through the incapacity of the sensory and cognitive systems that carry out these abstractions. As a medium for the word of God, Jonah's heart is clouded and thus it fails to transmit the word to its intended hearers.

This text is translated from Psalm 93, and serves as a reminder that even if Jonah has turned away from the face of God, a disposition that is decidedly contrary to the goals of Beatitude, he can never escape the gaze of God. The poet invokes a similar sentiment in *Cleanness* just prior to his introduction of Abraham:

> Bot sauyour, mon, in þyself, þaȝ þou a sotte lyuie,
> Þaȝ þou bere þyself babel, byþenk þe sumtyme
> Wheþer He þat stykked vche a stare in vche steppe yȝe—
> Ȝif Hymself be bore blynde hit is a brod wonder;
> And He þat fetly in face fettled alle eres,
> If He hatz losed þe lysten hit lyftez meruayle:
> Trave þou neuer þat tale—vntrwe þou hit fyndez.
> Þer is no dede so derne þat dittez His yȝen. (581-88)

Underlying the fear-inducing prospect that humankind may be severed from the sight of God is the poet's earnest insistence that no one is ever beyond the knowledge of God. Thus whatever sense of spiritual estrangement the Christian subject may experience is entirely contingent upon the lassitude of sinners, like Jonah, who effectively estrange themselves by turning away from the omniscient gaze of God. In respect to this attitude of spiritual estrangement, we can draw a parallel between Jonah and the pagans with whom he has stowed aboard the ship bound for Tarsus. The *Pearl*-poet identifies a veritable pantheon of pagan gods among those worshipped on this voyage, and the sailors' devotion to their own gods is characterized as a disposition of their hearts, "vche lede as he loued and layde had his hert" (168). This association of faith with how one has "laid his heart" characterizes Jonah's failure of faith in similar terms. His own

disobedience before God—and thus lack of "poverty of spirit"—indicates that he has somehow laid his own heart amiss. This misalignment of the heart, one might even say inability to control Jonah's heart, may lead him astray and unable to rightly perceive God, but it certainly does not take him beyond the view of God.

Nowhere is this failure of Jonah's sight more plainly expressed than during his time trapped inside the whale, a condition that we may well associate with the fallen state of man characterized in *Cleanness* by figures such as Balthazar. In fact, Balthazar provides an apt model for comparison, because the *Pearl*-poet describes the degrading material conditions of the whale's insides in language that echoes his moral disapproval of the physical conduct or works of Balthazar. Biblical exegetes have long acknowledged the correspondence between Jonah's three days in the belly of the whale and the three days of death preceding Christ's rise from the grave.[54] Certainly, the abject filth that the *Pearl*-poet describes as Jonah enters the belly of the whale calls to mind the chthonic rot of the grave and rivals the uncleanness of anything else to be found in *Patience* or even *Cleanness* itself:

> He glydes in by þe giles þurȝ glaym ande glette,
> Relande in by a rop, a rode þat hym þoȝt,
> Ay hele ouer hed hourlande aboute,
> Til he blunt in a blok as brod as a halle;
> And þer he festnes þe fete and fathmez aboute,
> And stod vp in his stomak þat stank as þe deuel.

[54] For a discussion of this exegetical tradition, see Dominic Rudman's "The Sign of Jonah" (325-28). This interpretation of Jonah's time within the whale is a tropological reading based upon Matthew 12:40, which compares Jonah's ordeal with that of Jesus prior to the Resurrection: "For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights."

Þer in saym and in sorȝe þat sauoured as helle,

Þer watz bylded his bour þat wyl no bale suffer.

And þenne he lurkkes and laytes where watz le best

In vche a nok of his nauel, bot nowhere he fyndez

No rest ne recouerer, bot ramel ande myre. (269-79)

This state of being, ensconced within the hideous guts of the whale, is a state like unto death. Moreover, viewed in parallel with the scene of Jonah's second, seemingly more pleasing "bour" (276), explicitly called to mind by the poet's own allusion, we may see the whale that becomes Jonah's bower and the worm that destroys his bower each as figures for the fallible mortality of the human body. In the latter case, the apparently beautiful woodbine is devoured by a worm; in the former, Jonah himself is devoured, and both images are suffused with a sense of rot and decay that centers upon the very "nauel" of the human body, which seeks to please itself with bodily delights and is ultimately consumed by such desires in a most grotesque manner.[55]

To get a better understanding of what the grotesque environs of the whale's body signify, we can consider the condemnation of worldly pleasures described as the impetus for the flood in *Cleanness*. The poet refers to Adam receiving from God "Alle þe blysse

[55] According to the anonymous poet of *Prik of Conscience*, anyone who engages in honest self evaluation ought to find something akin to the horrors of Jonah's whale within himself:

Therfore he that have skil and mynde
The wrechednesse thinketh of oure kynde
That is foule and ful wlathsoome.
For mon seeth of his body come
Fro above and fro bynethe
Miche fylthe and stynkyng brethe.
More stynke is noon harde ny nessh
Then the filthe of monnes flesshe
That may a mon both se and fele
Yif he beholde hymselven wele.
How foule he is to monnes syght. (I. 235-45)

In this passage, the *Conscience*-poet confronts his readers with nothing else but the very image of bodily uncleanness; this is the condition of bodily life that is signified by Jonah's corporeal experiences.

boute blame þat bodi myȝt haue" (260). The use of the word "bodi" for "person" implies an emphasis upon the terrestrial joys of "blysse" in Eden. After the time of Adam, however,

> þose lykkest to þe lede [Adam], þat lyued next after;
> Forþy so semly to see syþen wern none.
> Þer watz no law to hem layd bot loke to kynde,
> And kepe to hit, and alle hit cors clanly fulfylle.
> And þenne founden þay fylþe in fleschlych dedez,
> And controeued agayn kynde contraré werkez,
> And vsed hem vnþryftyly vchon on oþer,
> And als with oþer, wylsfully, upon a wrang wyse. (261-68)

Although the poet has acknowledged that the body is vulnerable to the flesh, the flesh is ultimately a word referring to a very specific register of sinful bodily works. When the speaker of *Cleanness* reflects upon the causes of the flood, this notion is confirmed:

> And al watz for þis ilk euel, þat vnhappen glette,
> Þe venym and þe vylanye and þe vycios fylþe
> Þat bysulpez mannez saule in vnsounde hert,
> Þat he his Saueour ne see with syȝt of his yȝen.
> Alle illez He hates as helle þat stynkkez. (573-77)

The poet invokes the same tactile and olfactory sensations in his description of the condition of fleshly sinfulness as he does in describing the innards of the whale. Notably, the "glette" or slime found therein is echoed at least once more in another passage in which the *Pearl*-poet gives God space to directly voice a reaction to sinful human flesh:

in His wylle greued:

‘Þe ende of alle kynez flesch þat on vrþe meuez

Is fallen forþwyth My face, and forþer hit I þenk.

With her vnworþelych werk Me wlatez withinne;

Þe gore þerof Me hatz greued and þe glette nwyed. (302-06)

Here we have a combination of motifs that occur throughout the homiletic poems. Among these we may perceive an echo of the “fleshly deeds” of Balthazar. Specifically, it is the fallen “werkez” of these characters that represent the soiling “glette” that has so offended God as to require a general cleansing flood. The poet takes the opportunity to reiterate the distant prospect of beatific vision for those enveloped in sin as the victims of the flood are: these people will not see God. It is as though the venom and slime of filthy sin has obscured their hearts so much that no such sight can be possible.

As I have indicated, the language of spiritual cleanness or purity already familiar in the present study and in the work of the *Pearl*-poet comes to the fore, as Jonah’s symbolic exile transposes into a metaphor of bodily exile. Indeed, his own literal body becomes engulfed, consumed within the body of the whale. And a grotesque body it is: all burgeoning mass and shaded enormity, the whale’s gargantuan form swells up from the abyss of the world. In his representation of the whale’s gross materiality the poet has harnessed the terrifying image of the world’s flesh: mired in muck and filth, inextricably linked to the material dross of human life on earth. There is something of the desperation of life imbued in the image of the whale. The particular image of it roiling up from the world’s depths introduces the whale as a massive body in which the imprint of the world’s material weight has been indelibly marked. In this manner, the whale provides a

grotesque, monstrous parody of Jonah's own spiritual struggle with the mortal weakness of the human animal, who fears for his life, who hesitates to act, and subsequently finds himself concealed from God both literally and figuratively. Within this symbolic system, the body of the whale itself is a kind of garment or even skin for Jonah.[56] The particular attributes of that skin, in all its grotesqueness and monstrosity, point up the morbid weakness of the human flesh, grotesque and monstrous in its own inescapable manner. What we are confronted with here then is the image of flesh, of the body itself, as a kind of barrier interposed between man and God. This barrier, following the poet's alignment of visual and spatial modalities in his rendering of the Beatitudes, is as much an obstruction to sight as it is to physical motion.

Accordingly, during Jonah's time within the whale we are told that the depths of the whale's body are entirely dark. Even when Jonah finds a space relatively free of defiling slime, the narrator reminds us that Jonah's refuge is mired in "merk one" (291).[57]

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[56] The image of Jonah's body shrouded in the filth of the whale's body bears comparison with the man in dirty clothes that grievously offends the lord in *Cleanness*'s telling of the wedding guest parable (Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24). The man is "vnþryuandely cloþed, / Ne no festiual frok, bot fyled with werkkez" (135-36). The poet stresses the fact that it is the "werkkez" (literally "labours" in this context) of the man that have rendered him so unclean. This detail indicates the metaphorical significance of the unclean garments and reinforces the notion that impurity is not an inescapable condition of human life but a symptom of spiritual lassitude expressed in unclean "werkkez." This phrasing is later echoed in the Balthazar episode of *Cleanness* when the speaker refers to the "loþelych werkkez" of the wicked king (1350). T.D. Kelley and J.T. Irvin call Balthazar's feast an "antithesis of the heavenly marriage banquet that begins the poem" and claim that "The body as a sacred vessel is the "controlling image" of the poem's final section (247). For Kelley and Irvin, "the defilement of the vessels of the temple is symbolic of the defilement of the sacred vessel of the body that takes place in the feast through lust and gluttony" (247). For the dirty wedding guest the lord metes out a requisite punishment, and he explains that the penalty for such lassitude is imprisonment "Depe in my doungoun þer doel euer dwellez" (158). Incidentally, the humbled Dreamer of *Pearl* refers to the condition of earthly existence as imprisonment within a "doel-doungoun" (1187). It is unsurprising therefore that Jonah meets such a fate in his own figurative prison, the whale's grotesque belly.

[57] The late fourteenth-century Middle English *Saint Erkenwald* similarly represents damnation as an "inability to see" (Bugbee 211). His body miraculously preserved, the long-dead pagan judge speaks about his soul in hell: "þer sittes my soule þat se may no fyrre, / Dwynande in þe derke dethe þat dyȝt vs oure fader" (293-4). This poem has occasionally been attributed to the *Pearl*-poet, but there is no evidence conclusively demonstrating common authorship. Though we cannot claim certain knowledge that *Saint Erkenwald* was written by the same poet responsible for the poems of Cotton Nero A.x, the poem

Not only is God beyond the perception of Jonah, but everything else has been rendered dim also. The symbolic representation of cosmic distance signified by Jonah's self-directed exile from God is surely emblematic of a more quotidian, less fantastical spiritual reality exemplified by the fleshly existence of fallen humanity. Moreover, Jonah eventually complains of his spiritual exile as dismissal from the sight of God: "Careful am I, kest out fro Þy cler yȝen / And deseuered fro Þy syȝt; ȝet surely I hope / Efte to trede on Þy temple and teme to Þyseluen" (314-316). In explicit terms, Jonah identifies his estrangement from God as an estrangement from the gaze of God. Considering, however, the property of the extramitted species, Jonah's alienation is really just a product of his own refusal to follow the path set for him and instead to turn his own gaze, his own extramitted soul, away from the divine face. Jonah's decision to abandon his mission to Nineveh is motivated precisely by the desire to escape the gaze of God: "Hit watz a wenyng vnwar þat welt in his mynde, / Þaȝ he were soȝt fro Samarye, þat God seȝ no fyrre" (115-16). The poet's use of "soȝt" to express Jonah's intent to leave Samaria and not travel to Nineveh as he has been commanded may, on the one hand, simply express the idea of travelling, but the word primarily connotes the act of looking for something (MED [to] *sechen* 1[a]), which suggests the movement of Jonah's own gaze as it literally "soȝt" forth to turn away his eyes. The punning here identifies Jonah's rebellion as a visual act that asserts Jonah's bodily integrity, his desire to live and not to be literally torn to pieces, against the demand to meet God's gaze and obey heavenly will. This troping of visual references is not derived from the poet's Vulgate source and denotes a purposive poetic choice on his part to render biblical matter with his own

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nonetheless indicates a significant preoccupation with visual theophany as a figure for divine communion and expands our understanding of the intellectual millieu in which the *Pearl*-poet and his contemporaries lived.

particular emphasis, in this case a visually inflected one. Furthermore, the poet has implicated the will in the function of vision and constructed patience as a virtue of volition and conscious self-determination (which is certainly required if one is to exemplify "poverty of spirit"). Vision also assumes the moral pose of self-determined volition in this telling of the Jonah tale, and the prospect of vision as an expression of will becomes a powerful sign for the self-directed will of the soul in both patient and decidedly impatient modes.

According to the terms of the Beatitudes, the divine face Jonah turns away from ought to be the most essential goal of the gazing subject. His resistance is ostensibly counter-intuitive within the logic of Christian eschatology. The poem itself sets up a conventional attitude towards *parousia* with its invocation of Beatific experience and the promise of spiritual communion through the sublimating act of bodily gazing.[58] Jonah realizes this when mired in the belly of the whale. As he expresses in his lament for visual isolation, Jonah's desired reunion with the divine gaze is a desire imagined in physical terms; to be once more seen by God is to walk in His temple. This displacement of the visual act with physical action is grotesquely paralleled in Jonah's wayward attempts to find his way in the slimy guts of the whale's flesh: Jonah "festnes þe fete and fathmez aboute" (273). This is a searching, inquisitive gesture, thoroughly enmeshed in the language of the flesh. Jonah's wayward searching is therefore "enfleshed." While the scene certainly borders on abjection, the "wombe" or belly of the whale also activates for us the symbols of the Bakhtinian grotesque, grounded as it is in the lower functions of body including the digestive organs. As an ensuing alliterating line illustrates, "he lurkkes

[58] *Parousia* is a Greek concept used in the Hellenistic era of early Christianity. It refers to the beatific vision of God, and the specific meaning of the term connotes the the revealed eschatological theophany of divine vision with the sense of "arrival" (Luke 226).

and laytes," "[Jonah] crawls and searches" (277). In the utter darkness of the whale's murk, he is feeling his way around by touch and trying to perceive a means through the whale in a messy parody of the physical processes of *perspectiva*. In doing so he mingles with the flesh of the whale in a manner recalling the impolitic subtleties of the grotesque body.

The visual associations mount for Jonah even after his dramatic reemergence into the world of light.[59] The phrase Jonah uses to describe the favourable gaze of God is "cler yȝen." Said of eyes, this adjective "cler" signifies "clear" or "keen" (MED "cler" def. 5[a]). The broader meaning of the word, however, signifies brightness and the property of giving light (MED "cler" def. 1[a]). Considering the direct association of the divine gaze with the sun in the second episode of Jonah's disobedience, the "cler yȝen" of God appear to manifest the same kind of extramitting visual species as that which Augustine and later Bacon described as a fiery beam. The second act of disobedience, Jonah's retreat within the woodbine, repeats the action of ocular estrangement already figured in the whale episode. The bower is built "For to schylde fro þe schene oþer any schade keste. / He bowed vnder his lyttel boþe, his bak to þe sunne" (440-41). Concealing himself from the sun, Jonah is figuratively shielding himself from the gaze of God; he conceals himself from the penetrating rays of God's golden gaze, while his own gaze, tellingly, is fixated upon the perceived delights of his worldly bower and thus turned inward upon his own pleasures: "Þe gome glyȝt on þe grene graciouse leues" (453), "þe gome so glad of his gay logge, / Lys loltrande þerinne lokande to toune; / So blyþe of his wodbynde he balteres þervunder" (457-59). In this second instance of

[59] Viewed anagogically, as an event prefiguring Christ's eventual resurrection, Jonah's freedom from the whale in *Patience* functions as a kind of metaphor for spiritual awakening and enlightenment, as the human subject is finally freed from the material tethers of mere earthly existence.

transgression he is yet again not so much forcibly exiled from light and vision as he is voluntarily sequestered. The images of present and absent things crowd the mind of Jonah in both dreams and waking life, for we are told that the arbor grows around him while he sleeps a slothful "sloumbe-slep" (466). Notably, the same phrasing is used to describe the sleeping Jonah when he is found stowed away in the initial stages of his flight from the face of God ("Slypped vpon a sloumbe-selepe, and sloberande he routes") (186). The worm sent by God to work upon the arbour and rot it from within infects the image of fecund life and pleasure with mortality. The "worme þat wrot vpe þe rote, / And wyddered... þe wodbynde" (467-68) may be likened to a grave worm that devours a human body in death: the image is one of death, decay, and transience of worldly goods.[60]

The earthly trajectory of Jonah's disobedient gaze is verified by his subsequent physical orientation within the woodbine. He is lounging around, literally sprawling in his green hideaway. I compare this wanton behaviour with Jonah's prior experience crawling and groping within the belly of the whale. Moreover, the emergence of the

[60] It may be that the worm that destroys the woodbine is a figurative representation for grave worms. Medieval body/soul debate poetry can often conflate grave worms with sins of the flesh. This is true of *A disputacioun betwyx þe body and wormes*, compiled in the early fifteenth-century British Library MS. Additional 37049 f. 33. The body of a deceased lady appeals to past lovers and admirers for relief from an invasion of worms:

> To do me seruys, cum & defende nowe me
> Fro þies gret horribil wormes vgly to se,
> Here gnawyng my flesche þus with gret cruelte,
> Devowryng & etyng nowe as ȝe may se,
> Þat sumtyme ȝe lufed so interly—
> Now socour & defende here my body! (80-85)

The poet identifies the corruption of the grave with the vanity of human sexuality. Here there is no analogue to be found with the *Pearl*-poet's effusive praise of sexual relations in *Cleanness*. Nonetheless, even in the confines of the grave, the body finds vindication. The final solace of the decayed lady is that her body will be recovered, indeed perfected, in the miracle of resurrection: "Let vs kys & dwell to-geyder euermore, / To þat God wil þat I sal agayn vpryse / At þe day of dome before þe hye justyse, / With þe body glorified to be" (195-98). Body and worms are finally reconciled in the final purification of the body's own glorification.

worm that climbs and rots the woodbine reactivates for us the filth and revulsion of the whale episode and finally withers the enclosing bower. Within the image of the crawling worm, the massive bodily frame of the whale is pictured in miniature and comes into view not as an engulfing maw but as an infectious mote within the concealing frame of Jonah's wordly refuge. The worm is not the only agent of degradation in this scene, however: God also applies the heat of the sun's rays to further winnow the vine. We are told that the leaves of the withered bower have been finally spoiled by the heat of the newly-risen sun and that this action of the sun's rays has occurred before Jonah wakes up (475-76). Thus by burning away the outer trappings of the bower the light of the sun finally penetrates Jonah's earthly refuge and exposes the man hidden within. As the whale had once engulfed Jonah's body, now the divine gaze, figured as sunlight, embraces Jonah in a manner that recalls Jonah's own desire to not only walk in God's temple through such a gaze but belong to Him.

Considered within *Cleanness*'s binary logic of clean and unclean bodies, it may be that the visual and kinaesthetic image of Jonah expelled from the whale signifies a body purified of the material waste that our poet condemns as "loþelych werkkes" and "misschapen þinges" (*Cleanness* 1350, 1355). At the climax of *Patience*, when Jonah is met with the ray of light, God commands that "þer quikken no cloude bifore þe cler sunne, / And ho schal busch vp ful brode and brenne as a candel" (471-2). After His light has penetrated the concealing bower, God, just as He had done before earlier in the poem, engages Jonah in direct discourse, precisely the kind of contact with invisible, unknown spiritual substance denoted by intellectual sights such as the beatific vision. Jonah persists in his peevish attitude and insists that it is unjust for God to take away his earthly

comforts. God notes the "ronk noyse" (490) or "proud speech" of his prophet and counsels him on the topic of those who sin in ignorance and do not obey divine will:

> Fyrst I made hem Myself of materes Myn one,
>
> And syþen I loked hem ful longe and hem on lode hade.
>
> …
>
> So mony malicious mon as mournez þerinne.
>
> And of þat soumme ȝet arn summe, such sottez formadde,
>
> Bitwene þe stele and þe stayre disserne noȝt cunen,
>
> What rule renes in roun bitwene þe ryȝt hande
>
> And his lyfte, þaȝ his lyf schulde lost be þerfor;
>
> As lyttel barnez on barme þat neuer bale wroȝt,
>
> And wymmen vnwytté þat wale ne couþe
>
> Þat on hande fro þat oþer, for alle þis hyȝe worlde. (503-15)

The *Pearl*-poet elaborates upon the sparse text of the Vulgate and adds lines in which God attributes the ignorance of the sinful to foolishness or even lack of sense or reason ("unwytté"). The poet's repetition of the Vulgate's figurative use of hands as a kind of metaphor for human action serves to reiterate the agency of the body in human action. This calls us back to the judgement of deeds and works in these poems and how the poet associates sinful action with unclean or unsound hearts. This implicates both body and soul in the achievement or loss of beatific vision. Curious, however, is the mention of humankind being created from the same matter as God. When paired with other

comments on the creation of humanity, the *Pearl*-poet appears to be reminding his audience of the originary likeness of God to man in the earliest sacred history.[61]

The impress of the soul within the human person is echoed by the writing on Balthazar's wall, since before Daniel reads the imprinted text that text is first figuratively scratched upon Balthazar's heart, scratched upon his body, effectively, even as it is scrawled upon the wall, a fact that characterizes the body of the king as a recipient of a divine message that is, for all intents and purposes, visual in nature. Indeed, when he first calls for Daniel to come forth and interpret the text, the king reinforces the distinctly tactile, even bodily nature of the inscribed message: "þaȝ þe mater be merk þat merked is ȝender, / He schal declar hit also cler as hit on clay stande" (1617-8). It would appear, however, that the particular application of true understanding demonstrated by Daniel in this instance has the potential to enlarge the lesser forms of sight and thus render a divine message sent by God as though it were truly no more than a bodily sign etched in clay. Reference to clarity of vision here melds with the cleanness of body in interpreting a message scratched into the clay of the wall even as it is scrawled upon the figurative clay of the human heart. The poem's

[61] At line 290 of *Cleanness* God refers to humankind as those "Þat euer I sette saule inne," a detail that reminds us that the sensitive soul, so instrumental in medieval theories of cognition, is a faculty imparted by God just as surely as the "materes" mentioned in *Patience* (503). In his discussion of the trinity, Augustine explains the origin of the human soul and identifies traces of the divine creator in the intellect of created beings (particularly human beings imbued with rational souls):

> We have reasoned also from the creature which God made, and, as far as we could, have warned those who demand a reason on such subjects to behold and understand His invisible things, so far as they could, by those things which are made and especially by the rational or intellectual creature which is made after the image of God; through which glass, so to say, they might discern as far as they could, if they could, the Trinity which is God, in our own memory, understanding, will. Which three things, if any one intelligently regards as by nature divinely appointed in his own mind, and remembers by memory, contemplates by understanding, embraces by love, how great a thing that is in the mind, whereby even the eternal and unchangeable nature can be recollected, beheld, desired, doubtless that man finds an image of that highest Trinity. And he ought to refer the whole of his life to the remembering, seeing, loving that highest Trinity, in order that he may recollect, contemplate, be delighted by it. (*De trinitate* XV 20.38).

unrelenting correspondence between vision, body, and text is significant, because it indicates that the poet's own activity as a compiler and embellisher of sacred text is analogous to the act of seeing and therefore the poet's craft may be interpreted by the same framework as visual experience. Indeed, the prophet Daniel, who performs the function of compiler and embellisher within the poem itself by virtue of his position as interpreter and communicator of sacred meaning, occupies a position in the medieval learned mind as an exemplar of literary *auctoritee* and poetic invention.[62]

In his own representation of Daniel, the *Pearl*-poet embraces exegetical tradition and draws explicit attention precisely to Daniel's critical role as an interpreter of sacred mystery:

> When Nabugodenozar watz nyed in stoundes,
>
> He [Daniel] devysed his dremes to þe dere trawþe;
>
> He keuered hym with his counsayl of caytyf wyrdes;
>
> Alle þat he spured hym, in space he expowned clene,
>
> Þurȝ þe sped of þe spyryt, þat sprad hym withinne,
>
> Of þe godliest goddez þat gayness aywhere. (1603-8)

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[62] A.J. Minnis in fact names Daniel as a specific model for the authorial role adopted by John Gower in the *Vox Clamantis*, a text that evinces a mode of "self-commentary" indicative of an emerging authorial consciousness in late-medieval English literature (*Authorship* 177). Similarly, in his treatise in praise of Dante, Giovanni Boccaccio articulates the appeal of Daniel as an exemplary medieval auctor in a defence of poetry itself, in which he counters the traditional Platonist critique of poets as mendacious peddlers of fable:

> Consider the visions of Daniel, those of Isaiah, those of Ezekiel, and those of other Old Testament visions; traced by a divine pen, these were revealed by Him for whom there was no beginning, nor will there be an end. Let them further consider the visions of the evangelist in the New Testament; these are full of wonderful truths for those who understand them. (497)

Boccaccio's effusive praise for Daniel and other biblical prophets (including John the Evangelist) explicitly heralds these prophet-preachers for their role as mediators of divine visions. In other words, in an argument suggesting that poetry can consist of more than mere pretty falsehoods, Boccaccio elevates the poet as a figure capable not only of writing the truth but of recognizing the truth as well.

Daniel is not only a prophet, blessed with divinely inspired "connyng." He functions in the text as a paragon of earthly understanding and interpretive prowess. Central to this skill is, of course, the "spyryt," the indwelling sensitive soul of humankind. Balthazar reifies the cardiosensory nature of Daniel's power a few lines later when the desperate king hails the prophet's aptitude and claims: "þou hatz in þy hert holy connyng, / Of sapyence þi sawle ful, soþes to schawe; / Goddes gost is þe geuen þat gyes alle þynges, / And þou vnhyles vch hidde þat Heuen-Kyng myntes" (1625-28). Like the poet of *Cleanness*, Daniel "vnhyles" or unfolds sacred truth, and the *Pearl*-poet's emphasis upon the spirit as an internalized faculty reminds us of the fact that Daniel's body is itself the vessel of "þe spyryt, þat sprad hym withinne" (1607). In other words, in order to imagine Daniel as an inspired prophet-preacher unfolding the content of his heart, the *Pearl*-poet must also imagine the exterior body that contains that heart, contains that soul, as a vessel capable of pouring forth its contents.[63] Turning momentarily to Boccaccio's treatise in praise of Dante, I wish to highlight that Boccaccio's reference to "the visions of the evangelist" is a reference to John the Evangelist of the Book of Apocalypse or Revelation, a text that carries Boccaccio's interest in visionary experience as a precursor or prerequisite for poetic invention into a thoroughly Christian context. It should not be surprising to note that the *Pearl*-poet's own interest in sacred vision and literary invention leads him to write of visual experience within the context of a dream vision,

[63] In his contemplative treatise *The Mystical Ark*, Richard of St. Victor describes the construction of the Ark of the Covenant as a similitude for the cultivation of mystical contemplation. Daniel has certainly succeeded in fashioning the gold of the mystical ark, which signifies the highest contemplative understanding (III.1, 220). It is within this ark, within his soul, that he has cultivated the highest understanding of intellectual things, a faculty which is referred to in *Cleanness* as "holy connyng."

Pearl, that actually incorporates the apocalyptic visions of Revelation into its very structure.[64]

Leaving the implications of medieval dream vision for our understanding of the *Pearl*-poet's visual imagination aside for the present moment, however, let us finally observe how the poet confronts vision in C*leanness* and *Patience* as a phenomenon in which even the most sacred of visual spectacles manifests itself as bodily sensation. The poet's preoccupation in *Cleanness* with the body as a vessel of the soul, a sentiment amplified by his mention of the purified shroud or "gere" (1811) imagined to enclose a worthy recipient of grace, recalls the imagery of the temple vessels, which are themselves material enclosures of spiritual signification and meaning. As mentioned earlier, the temple relics are, like the human body, material enclosures for signs of spirit in this poem, but they are also artefacts of human craft and artistry. They honour God in their service as relics, but, as the poem highlights for us, they are also instruments of devotion wrought by the hands of men: "Houen vpon þis auter watz aþel vessel / Þat wyth so curious a crafte coruen watz wyly" (1451-2). In spite of the seemingly transcendent spiritual significance of the temple vessels, the poet continually refers our attention to the real human labour invested in their making. The relics are not a product of spontaneous inspiration and design but a genuine investment of human time and effort: "Salamon sete him seuen ȝere and a syþe more, / With alle þe syence þat hym sende þe souerayn Lorde, / For to compas and kest to haf hem clene wroȝt" (1453-5). The reference to cleanness here in the making of the vessels recalls the fine architecture of Babylon itself and specifically pairs with the image of human labour to comment upon the virtues of good

[64] As we shall see in the last two chapters of this thesis, John is, like Daniel, a model for textual auctoritee, and their visionary experiences serve as the practical and cognitive models for the poet's own literary art.

works. Cleanness is therefore not simply a state of being but a mode of conduct as well. The later reference to the vessels as "cowpes foul clene" finally closes the circle by linking the purity of labouring craftsmanship with the purity of the labourer's finished product (1458). Even the poet's commentary on the consecration of the reliquary altar broaches the matter of blessing with reference to the physicality of human work: "Þe aþel auter of brasse watz hade into place, / Þe gay coroun of golde gered on lofte. / Þat hade ben blessed bifore wyth bischopes hondes" (1443-45). Thus the vessels are products of human hands, inspired in their labours by divine inspiration. What is wrought through cleanness will be an instrument of cleanness. The same should be found true of the human heart wrought by God as well, for only the clean of heart can experience the theophany of beatific vision.

Of course, in a poem such as this, so preoccupied with vision as a motif of perceptual clarity and sacred communion, the contemplative component of Solomon's translation of divinely inspired "syence" (1454) compels us to recognize the optical implications of the reliquary vessels. The obvious fault committed by Balthazar is the misuse of the vessels to serve his feast, yet the mistake appears more grave when we consider the attention the poet sets upon the nature of communion. Not made to serve a feast, the temple vessels "watz not wonte in þat wone to wast no serges, / Bot in temple of þe trauþe trwly to stonde / Bifore þe *sancta sanctorum*, þer soþefast Dryȝtyn / Expouned His speche spiritually to special prophetes" (1489-92). Prior to their capture by Nebuchadnezzar, the vessels had been set before the holiest of the holies, and, relative to the divinely inspired prophets, placed in a state of direct congress with God, a state not unlike the *parousia* vision promised to the clean of heart in the sixth Beatitude. Even the

reference to illuminating candles sounds a note of vanity: taken from their proper place of service, the candles burning in Balthazar's hall are wasted. As material vessels figuring the human body in a state of purity and grace, the temple relics are objects of intense spiritual meditation that properly serve in rituals of divine offering at the sacred altar.[65] In these ways, both inletting and outpouring, the vessels function as a material link between humankind and God in the same manner that the bodily heart serves as a perceptual medium between the sensitive soul and God. At Balthazar's table, however, the glittering stones stored within the cups are cast aside, and the vessels are instead employed to serve wine to the sundry guests arrayed at the king's celebration. We need only recall the heart-struck confusion that besets Balthazar when he imbibes the intoxicating wine to recognize in the outpouring of wine a perverse parody of the inspired visual prospect ascribed to the enlightened beatific gazer. By being employed to dull the senses of the king and his guests, these man-made objects of veneration are put at cross-purposes with their intended aim. By corrupting those to whom they are served, they in fact hinder perception and understanding, a key flaw leading into the inscription of God's message of warning and Balthazar's subsequent failure to interpret it.

The creation, use, and misuse of the relics illustrates the similar potential and utility of the human body. Thus in spite of the homiletic poems' often vitriolic warnings against the dangers of worldly concupiscence, *Patience* and expecially *Cleanness* evince a view of human life that dignifies bodily existence. In a passage of *Cleanness*

[65] Charlotte Morse makes this case in "The Image of the Vessel in *Cleanness*." She convincingly argues that "The poet likens men to vessels in that both may be dedicated to God; he makes this analogy to point to the formal similarity of men and vessels as potential containers of God" (205). This claim is supported by the *Pearl*-poet's own transition from discussing the uncleanness of men to the apparently related subject of the desecration of the holy vessels (Andrew and Waldron n1143-48). A similar argument is made by S.E. Clark and Julian N. Wasserman, who claim that the *Pearl*-poet represents the human heart itself as "an enclosure, changeable over time, and, like the communal chalice, capable of being emptied only to be filled again" (51).

highlighting the human body as the medium by which spiritual grace is transmitted through sacred history, the poet anagogically establishes the parameters of the relationship between God and humanity. His description of biblical humanity after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise is a passage that mingles the idealized form and matter of human bodies quite freely in a rhetorical pairing that emphasizes the nearness of Adam and his early progeny to the state of grace from which they had fallen. The fair forms of cleanness resonate in the enumeration of virtues accorded to the direct descendents of Adam:

> Hit wern þe fayrest of forme and of face als,
> Þe most and þe myriest þat maked wern euer,
> Þe styfest, þe stalworþest þat stod euer on fete,
> And lengest lyf in hem lent of ledez alle oþer.
> For hit was þe forme foster þat þe folde bred,
> Þe aþel aunceterez sunez þat Adam watz called,
> To wham God hade geuen alle þat gayn were,
> Alle þe blysse boute blame þat bodi myȝt haue. (253-60)

The progeny of Adam are thus rendered as the material fact of the human race through which Adam transmits the originary forms of human existence. As we have already observed, the poet reiterates this kind of thinking at the end of *Patience* when God speaks of having created humankind from His own matter (503). All the mythic trappings of the early biblical history of humanity, the extended life spans, the beauty and strength accorded to Adam as the creature created in the image of God to live in Paradise, "þer in lykyng þe lenþe of a terme" (239), the proceeding generations of the human race translate

these idealized forms from the fountainhead of Adam through the medium of the human body.[66] The propagation of human generations so fair of "forme" transmits the form or image of God imprinted at the time of humankind's creation. This is the same divine image that the *Pearl*-poet cleaves to as the supreme satisfaction of human life. The body is thus an agent by which divine grace may be communicated to human kind, and it is through patient obedience to God's will that the human subject keeps his or her heart clean and sustains the image of God within his or her own soul.

The homiletic poems of the *Pearl*-poet both express the desire to obtain unhindered perception of God, literally a glimpse of God in the form of intellectual vision, and both confront the impediments that prevent such theophany from occurring. This beatific desire draws its inspiration directly from biblical origins, because the idea of seeing God notably stands as a figure for attaining direct, unmediated communion with God. Paul the Apostle's oft-referenced comments in the first book of Corinthians about now seeing God "through a glass in a dark manner" (or "in a mirror obscurely") but eventually "face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12) certainly evince just such a position, and this tradition may be traced back as early as the Book of Job, in which Job defies the privations of fleshly decay in order to proclaim, "I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I will see my God. Whom I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another: this my hope is laid up in my bosom" (Job 19:26-27). This tradition insists upon the inevitability of beatific vision and further links the destiny of the human body with that of the soul. The body must not merely cease to be an impediment to

[66] Suzanne Akbari identifies an analogy between the multiplication of sensible species and the reproductive propagation of the human race (see also the Baconian parallel between the propagation of visual species and the transmission of language on page 92 n53 of this chapter). Suggesting that the multiplication of forms entails a cumulative degradation of transmitted form, Akbari associates the decline of humanity from Edenic joys with the decline of language as a mode of transmitting meaning (111).

contemplative vision; it must become an instrument of vision. This understanding of medieval Christian theophany informs the *Pearl*-poet's representation of cardiosensory vision in theophanic experience and helps us to understand the intersection of bodily vision and divine communion in these poems.

Ultimately, the *Pearl*-poet affirms a belief in the perfectibility of the human person, and this perfectibility is predicated upon the likeness of God to created humanity. The uncleanness of sin and the disobedience of pride subvert the human heart and render it temporarily incapable of spiritual seeing, but *Cleanness* and *Patience* demonstrate that this is only a temporary condition of embodied human life. Through the "holy connyng" of Daniel's recognition of material signs and through the withering of Jonah's carnal bower, the poet represents how spiritual vision occurs through the refinement and mastery of bodily life. Addressing God, Saint Anselm of Canterbury speaks emphatically in his *Proslogium* of the significance of sight in realizing the spiritual destiny of the human soul: "I was created to see thee, and I have not yet done that for which I was made. Oh wretched lot of man, when he hath lost that for which I was made!" (*Proslogium* I. 4). This notion of achieving communion with God exemplified by the vision of God is, of course, the essence of *parousia*. Furthermore, Anselm's ardent privileging of the sight of God as the primary object of human life recalls Boethius's comments, for example, on atonement through oneness with God. Boethius claimed in *The Consolation of Philosophy* that the driving purpose of humankind is the desire to participate completely in the good, which, for him, meant complete participation in God:

> Forwhy, for as moche as by the getynge of blisfulnesse men ben makid blisful, and blisfulnesse is dyvinite, than is it manifest and opene that by the getynge of

> dyvinite men ben makid blisful. Right as by the getynge of justise [men ben maked just], and be the getynge of sapience thei ben maked wise, ryght so nedes by the semblable resoun, whan they han geten dyvinite thei ben maked goddes. Thanne is every blisful man God. But certes by nature ther nys but o God; but by the participacioun of dyvinite ther ne let ne distourbeth nothyng that ther ne ben many goddis. (*Boece* III. pr. 10, 433)

Underlying this belief in the perfection of humanity through participation in divinity there is an important assumption about human identity: that the movement towards God is actually a return to origins, because the soul's desire to perceive God is really a desire to reunite with its original source.[67] Bacon echoes Boethius's opinion in the *Opus majus* and asserts that vision is the chief means of participating in the pursuit of knowledge by which delight enters the soul (654). If the good inheres in all elements of creation, all interaction with the created world, including visual perception of that world, furnishes a new opportunity to participate in the good and in the God whose hand lies behind that goodness.

Caroline Walker Bynum comments on this tradition in relation to medieval optical theory and acknowledges that "Some… find in late medieval religion a piety of becoming by seeing, based on classical assumptions that 'like' is known by 'like' and an optical theory according to which the eye literally became the object viewed" ("Seeing"

[67] In canto twenty-five of Dante's Purgatorio (37-78, 307-09), Statius likens the formation of the embryonic heart of a human being to the physical growth of the soul in the human person. The soul spreads its powers through the human body in an organic manner as the physically grounded powers of the heart mature and develop. According to Statius's spirit, this outgrowth and welling up of the soul's powers within the body culminates in the soul assuming motive force and moving to revolve around the Prime Mover. Heart and soul are thus bound to join the order of the cosmos in lock-step with God. This, of course, reiterates Boethius's comments in *The Consolation of Philosoph*y regarding the pursuit of goodness and God as the essential purpose of human life. For Dante's Statius, the desire for participation in God is seeded from birth within the very embryonic heart and soul of the human subject.

208). Bynum is referring to theories such as Bacon's that indicate that the observer and the thing observed must be made analogous or commensurate through the ennobling effect of the extramitted visual ray. Therefore, by recovering the incipient likeness of God that inheres in all rational souls, the purifying and patient preparation of the soul, figured in the withering of Jonah's bower or the proper usage of the holy relics in *Cleanness*, prepares the human subject to see God. Jonathan A. Glenn identifies a "terrible paradox" underlying the beatific desire, for "man must conform to God (be clean) in order to see God, yet man must see God in order to conform to Him" (78). Glenn employs this apparent paradox to highlight the apparent distance between humankind and God in the *Pearl*-poet's work; however, by acknowledging the likeness of God within the created human soul, the poet rather reveals the similitude between Creator and human creation. For Glenn, "the Image of God, man's original *kynde*" resolves the paradox of divine alterity (89). In a sense, the external vision of God can only be achieved once the yearned for vision has been revealed within the human heart, precisely where it has resided all along.[68] In this way, the pursuit of spiritual vision is as

[68] This theological perspective is commonplace in works contemporary with the *Pearl*-poet. For example, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* speculates upon how the imagination or "kindely witte" could experience a genuine theophanic experience: "I sey þat it is a scharp & a clere beholding of þi kindely witte, preentid in þi reson wiþ-inne in þi soule. & where þou askist me þerof wheþer it be good or iuel: I sey þat it behoueþ algates be good in his kynde, for whi it is a beme of þe licnes of God" (VIII. 30). The likeness of God is therefore immanent in the created human soul. Commenting upon the doctrine of God's immanence in the world in the Book of Genesis, Augustine references John 1:1 (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God) in his assertion that Christ "is the Man who is Mediator between man and God, the Word with God and flesh with us, the Word made flesh between God and us" (*De genesi ad litteram* VIII. 14. 55). Thus the image of God, with which the bodily substance of all humankind has been imprinted (Genesis 1:26), is a spiritual likeness of God's Word. In his *De trinitate*, Augustine refers to the manner in which such divine forms, textual or visual, are apprehended by the soul within the heart, and he specifically subordinates "word itself to the imagery of sight and light which reaches into the trinitary speculation of the Verbum. The 'verbum cordis' is not heard, but can be seen as inner light" (Warning 107):

> [T]he word which sounds without is a sign of the word that shines within, to which the name "word" more properly belongs. For that which is produced by the mouth of the flesh is the sound of the word, and it is also called "word," because that inner word assumed it in order that it might appear outwardly. For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in

much a pursuit of self-knowledge as it is a pursuit of extra-personal, metaphysical mystery.

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which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes a sound and is not changed into a sound, so the Word of God indeed becomes flesh. (*De trinitate* XV. ch. 11. cap. 20. 187)

CHAPTER IV — The Bodily Image of Pride in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

In the previous chapter, I argued that the cleanness of heart required for spiritual sight requires an authentic perception of self in relation to God. In this chapter, I shall attribute Gawain's failures in fitts three and four of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to a lack of perception that ultimately stems from Gawain's flawed perception of self. Though Gawain does not explicitly pursue or experience spiritual vision as the prophetic figures of the *Pearl*-poet's homiletic poems do, I submit that Gawain's failure to correctly steer his heart according to the dictates of reason (and as articulated in *Patience* and *Cleanness*) has the effect of limiting his capacity for understanding himself and this shortcoming anticipates failures of perception that may be understood as failures of the reasoning faculties of the soul.[69]

My reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* identifies a significant parallel between the *Pearl*-poet's representation of Gawain and the representation of Nebuchadnezzar in *Cleanness*. These characters are examples of human excess, for they both exhibit qualities of covetousness and pride. Ultimately, pride has a blinding influence upon both of these characters. In their pride, they both adopt a false perception of self and thus become blind to their true natures. In fact, the *Pearl*-poet presents Nebuchadnezzar as a model of pride so excessive that he eventually becomes a kind of

[69] The instrumentality of the reason as a mode of spiritual sight has been established in the previous chapter; however, through figures such as Jonah and Gawain we may observe the real limitations of reason and the subsequent errors of apprehension that attend such limitations. In the case of Jonah in *Patience*, reason is actually bypassed by the understanding, for his theophany is ultimately a gift of grace. In *Managing Language in* Piers Plowman, Gillian Rudd cites John Trevisa and Richard of St. Victor to forward an argument that reason is linked "incontrovertibly with temporal affairs" to such an extent that it must inevitably be superseded "if wisdom as *sapientia* is to be achieved" (59). It may very well be the case that reason, the cognitive faculty that judges good and bad, right and wrong, fails both Jonah and Gawain for the very same reason: the fear of death is quite a compelling motivation, and the desire to live is a temporal drive that supersedes most other rational impulses.

beast and literally fails to even recognize himself. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar "is outkast to contré vnknawen, / Fer into a fyr fryth þere frekes neuer comen. / His hert heldet vnhole; he hoped non oþer / Bot a best þat he be, a bol oþer an oxe" (1679-82). It is useful to note here that in the medieval exegetical tradition Nebuchadnezzar serves as a notable (if unlikely) model for the possibilities of penance and the liberality of God's mercy (Anderson, *Genesis of Perfection* 141-43). We recall from the *Pearl*-poet's account of the Book of Daniel in *Cleanness* that Nebuchadnezzar conquers the Israelites and takes the sacred relics from the Jewish temple. In spite of his hostility against the Israelites, Nebuchadnezzar pledges to honour the relics and, through them, do proper obeisance to the God for whom they were made to do service (1313-14). He does this under the direction of the prophet Daniel, "al þurȝ dome of Daniel, fro he deuised hade / Þat alle goudes com of God, and gef hit hym be samples, / Þat he ful clanly bicnv his carp bi þe laste" (1325-27). The narrative speaker attests that this obedience to God becomes the source of Nebuchadnezzar's short-lived worldly prosperity:

> So watz noted þe note of Nabugodenozar,
> Styfly stabled þe rengne bi þe stronge Dryȝtyn,
> For of þe Hyȝest he hade a hope in his hert,
> Þat vche pouer past out of þat Prynce euen.
> And whyle þat counsayl watz cleȝt clos in his hert
> Þere watz no mon vpon molde of myȝt as hymseluen. (1651-56)

In this instance we see the humility of wise rule associated with Nebuchadnezzar's obedience to God. Furthermore, the *Pearl*-poet associates this obedience with the specific counsel of Daniel, whose words the king must hold fast "clos in his hert" (1655).

So long as Nebuchadnezzar can govern his own heart, he can govern his kingdom. This integrity of the heart is challenged when Nebuchadnezzar's human wits are overcome, and he is reduced to an animal existence, "His hert heldet vnhole" (1681).

The wholeness of the king's heart is ultimately undone by pride, and through this pride Nebuchadnezzar loses sight of the imperatives put upon him by Daniel's wise counsel. The *Pearl*-poet explicitly constructs the blasphemous deviance of Nebuchadnezzar in visual terms:

> Til hit bitide on a tyme towched hym pryde
> For his lordeschyp so large and his lyf ryche;
> He hade so huge an insyȝt to his aune dedes
> Þat þe power of þe hyȝe Prynce he purely forȝetes.
> Þenne blynnes he not of blasfemy on to blame þe Dryȝtyn. (1657-61)

Considering the common usage of the word "insyȝt," which is frequently used in specific reference to spiritual or "gostli" understanding (MED 1. [a], [b]), the poet's use of "insyȝt" to refer to the king's reckoning of his own worthiness and capacities as a ruler creates a curious visual correspondence.[70] Nebuchadnezzar subsequently misapprehends

[70] The poet's usage here in an instance of Nebuchadnezzar's self-assessing judgement sounds a similar tone to the *Prik of Conscience*, which cites Bernard of Clairvaux's identification of four vices that cause a person to forget his or her proper self (popular favour, beauty, splendour of youth, and riches). The *Prik of Conscience*'s cautions against lost "in syght" help explain Nebuchadnezzar's eventual curse of lost identity:

> Thes foure reven hym in syght
> That he knoweth hymself not ryght
> And maken his herte ful hauteyne
> And froward as to his sovereyn.
> These foure norysshen pompe and pryde
> And othur vyces that men shul hyde.
> In whom any of thes foure es
> Ful seldom is founden any mekenes
> They letten mon that he not sees
> Worldes pereles and vanytees
> Ny thinketh not that tyme shal coom
> Of dredeful deth and day of doom. (253-64)

his own greatness and esteems himself above God. For this betrayal, Nebuchadnezzar is cursed to live as a beast of the field with no capacity to think or exist as a human person. Indeed, his very identity is stripped away from him the moment he fails to apprehend, through the visual spectacle of the temple relics, the proper identity of God. As a result of this mental curse, Nebuchadnezzar no longer has the capacity even to know himself. In *On Repentance* Tertullian designates the curse of Nebuchadnezzar as a case illustrating the power of penance, because it shows the necessity of humility.[71] Ultimately, by seeing his own flaws and imperfections and thus realizing that he himself is not a god, Nebuchadnezzar earns God's forgiveness, and thereafter he is able to see himself for what he really is. This is a critical point for understanding how spiritual sight is processed by *perspectival* tropes, because the extramitted process that renders external species analogous to vision and thus visible to the gazing subject does not simply make the observer identical to the observed object. In the case of spiritual sight, one does not become identical with God to see Him. Rather, spiritual seeing operates by the likeness of similitudes. The likeness of God represented in the human soul is the primary model for this mode of seeing, and the failure to recognize God stems from the inability to access this likeness of divinity. For this reason, the example of Nebuchadnezzar illustrates that true-seeing begins with an authentic understanding of self, a selfhood that

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"Insyȝt" or things perceived "in syght" can be taken to refer to the inward gazing of a person's own faculties of judgement. This is an image of sensory perception that identifies cognition as a kind of perception. In these cases, the poets are ascribing qualities of visual perception to the discriminating functions of human reason. In both instances the poets find the sight of reason to be marred. If sight is a mode of understanding, blindness becomes a metaphor for ignorance or misunderstanding.

[71] According to Tertullian, those in need of exmologesis (the Catholic ritual of confessional penance) ought to emulate Nebuchadnezzar's penance:

> Shall the sinner, knowing that exomologesis has been instituted by the Lord for his restoration, pass that by which restored the Babylonian king to his realms? Long time had he offered to the Lord his repentance, working out his exomologesis by a seven years' squalor, with his nails wildly growing after the eagle's fashion, and his unkempt hair wearing the shagginess of a lion. Hard handling! Him whom men were shuddering at, God was receiving back. (*On Repentance* 12.7)

is unmarred by what the *Pearl*-poet might call the filth of fleshly sin, notably pride in this case. Ultimately, recognizing the self and recognizing God are analogous acts for Nebuchadnezzar, who is restored through the intercession of Daniel.

As the *Pearl*-poet intimates, it is thanks to the wise "carp" of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar is able to recover from his mindless fugue. The dreams that Daniel interprets are Nebuchadnezzar's. Among the hidden things that Daniel reveals (he "vnhyles vch hidde þat Heuen-Kyng myntes" [1628]) is the very identity of the cursed king: "He wayned hym his wyt, þat hade wo soffered, / Þat he com to knawlach and kenned hymseluen; / Þenne he loued þat Lorde and leued in trawþe / Hit watz non oþer þen He þat hade al in honde" (1701-4). The critical catalyst for this restoration of the king's identity is the repair of Nebuchadnezzar's "wyt." This use of "wyt" certainly does not refer to any of the five outward wits or senses (though the restoration of his "wyt" surely repairs the outward wits also). "Wyt" must either refer to reason or one of the inner wits of the sensitive soul, including common sense, imagination, memory, cogitation (creative memory), and estimation (these last two being closely associated with the reasoning power of the rational soul). As I have already stated, whereas some cognitive models classified "reason" as a higher faculty associated with the lower wits of the sensitive soul (like Bacon, *The Cloud of Unknowing* categorizes reason in this fashion), "reason" could also be identified among the inner wits. I have already indicated *De proprietatibus rerum*'s comments on the function of reason evaluating the images produced by the inner wits (see page 42 n27). Trevisa's translation of *De proprietatibus rerum* identifies reason or "racio" as one of the five higher faculties of the soul that operates through the sensory powers of the three (rather than five) inner wits:

> The innere witte is departed aþre by þre regiouns of þe brayn, for in þe brayn beþ þre smalle celles. Þe formest hatte ymaginatiua, þerin þingis þat þe vttir witte apprehendiþ withoute beþ i-ordeyned and iput togedres withinne, vt dicitur Iohannicio I. Þe middil chamber hatte logica þerin þe very estimatiue is maister. Þe þridde and þe laste is memoratiua, þe vertu of mynde. Þat vertu holdiþ and kepiþ in þe tresour of mynde þingis þat beþ apprehended and iknowe by þe ymaginatif and racio. (Trevisa, *Properties of Things* III.10, 98)

In this model, reason is considered a faculty beyond but nonetheless functioning through the inner wits. Considering the emphasis upon the judgment of *insyȝt* in the *Pearl*-poet's treatment of the Book of Daniel, reason, either chief among the inner wits or operative in the executive function of the inner wits, must certainly be the wit lacking in Nebuchadnezzar. As if to parody the irrational pride of the Babylonian king, he is compelled by God to live as an irrational beast. The poet further reminds his readers that all of this cognitive weakness must ultimately be traced back to the vital human heart: "His hert heldet vnhole; he hoped non oþer / Bot a best þat he be, a bol oþer an oxe" (1681-82). Contrary to the dictates of the eighth Beatitude ("Þay ar happen also þat con her hert stere" as the *Pearl*-poet would have it in *Patience*) Nebuchadnezzar bears a heart "vnhole" or "spiritually imperfect" (MED "vnhole" [b]). The rational soul, that essential reasoning component of the human person that empowers individual human will, is lacking in animals and it is lacking in Nebuchadnezzar when he faces his curse and exile.

After the return of reason, Nebuchadnezzar is able to assume his humanity and his throne once again. Another critical component of this recovery is Nebuchadnezzar's humbled acknowledgement that he is below the stature of God, "He þat hade al in

honde." The *Pearl*-poet's conspicuous use of *trawþe* (1703) in this scene confirms that, in discussing Nebuchadnezzar, we have moved into the thematic territory of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For Nebuchadnezzar, belief in *trawþe* means having faith in God, and according to *Cleanness* the king's loss of faith and belief ultimately stems from a heart rendered "vnhole" by his failed "insyȝt."

"Insyȝt" in this case happens to refer to inward-looking self-reflection, but the term must be further understood to signify rational judgment. As we have observed, *perspectival* optics incorporates an understanding of the reasoning faculty that accords with conventional late-medieval models of faculty psychology. For Bacon, the rational or cogitative soul is linked with the sensory functions of the sensitive soul through the operations of the estimative faculty, which operates by a cognitive model of species multiplication that transfers sensible forms between the discrete faculties of the soul (imagination, reason, and memory):

> the forms or species that are in the imagination multiply themselves into the cogitative faculty, although they exist in the imagination according to their nature primarily because of phantasia, which uses those forms; but the cogitative faculty holds those forms in a nobler way, and the forms of the estimative and memorative faculties exist in the cogitative faculty in accordance with a nature nobler than that existing in those faculties, and therefore the cogitative faculty uses all the other faculties as its instruments. In man there is in addition from without and from creation the rational soul, which is united with the cogitative faculty primarily and immediately, and uses this faculty chiefly as its own special instrument. Species are formed in the rational soul by

> this faculty. Wherefore when this faculty is impaired the judgment of reason is especially perverted, and when it is in a healthy condition the intellect functions in a sound and healthy way. (*Opus majus* 426-27)

Following an Aristotelian tradition inherited through the writings of Avicenna, Bacon is describing the role of reason in the evaluation of visible forms. Through a process of species multiplication, the imagination transmits received images to the cogitative and estimative faculties for contemplation. These forms are then multiplied further to the reason itself, which is capable of cooperating with the phantasia (creative imagination) in order to form its own species and to conceptualize abstract or speculative ideas. For this reason Bacon speaks of the rational soul, the mind, and the memory as making use of the imagination in the various processes of human cognition. His discussion of phantasia, moreover, confirms the image-making role of the imagination, which produces thoughts as images for the contemplation of the human subject. Within this cognitive model, thought itself assumes a visual nature, and the human reason operates through the use of an internal eye capable of surveying the things made visible in the phantasia of imagination.[72] The "insyȝt" that the *Pearl*-poet invokes is a function of the rational soul, which makes use of the faculties associated with the sensible soul in the processes of human thought.

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[72] See Rega Wood (28), and Deborah L. Black (60). Central here is the epistemological step one takes in *perspectiva* optics when moving from contemplating the simple reception of external images to contemplating the further apprehension of what received images actually mean. The example of the predatory animal is most instructive. All creatures with working eyes can see a wolf, and even non-rational creatures can deduce the potential threat a predatory wolf might present. According to Avicenna (and Bacon) it is the pseudo-rational estimative faculty that goes beyond the mere apprehension of sensible species and further contemplates the "intentions" of what is perceived. Thus the instinct to flee a predatory animal is explained in animals incapable of higher order cognition. Even base animals possess the faculties of the sensitive soul, including the estimative faculty, but the capacity for more complex thought belongs only to the rational soul, which operates by harnessing the compositive functions of imagination (what Bacon calls "phantasia").

Nebuchadnezzar's loss of humanity through the failure of reason neatly parallels Gawain's loss. Both men suffer a failure of reason.[73] As a consequence, one becomes less than a man; the other certainly becomes less than he was. The difference is one of mere degree.[74] The important contrast is to be noted in their recoveries. Through the guidance of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's mind is healed. Struggling to make sense of his predicament, Gawain has only the Green Knight for spiritual mentor, a counselor whose eagerness to excuse Gawain's failings seems more to complicate rather than resolve the poem's confusing ending. Similar to Gawain's solipsistic gaze, a self-regarding gaze that initially sees excellence but later only finds shame, Nebuchadnezzar's mistaken "insyȝt" elevates the self, "his aune dedes," but is later reduced to the "Holȝe" eyes of mere animal existence (1695). The human subject can create its idea of self in this manner and this idea may then further be demonstrated to the world through various gestures, the performance of identity or even the demonstration of signs such as the pentangle, which is an abstraction of perfection intended to signify above all else the perfection of fidelity signified by the pentangle of *trawþe*.

In spite of (and perhaps because of) Gawain's pretense to perfection, Gawain shares the prideful nature of Nebuchadnezzar, and this element of Gawain's character has

[73] The failure of reason to apprehend intellectual visions parallels the deficiency of the poet's unreasonable characters such as Jonah, Gawain, and Nebuchadnezzar. The contrast between the reasoning power of Daniel and Jonah is introduced in chapter three, pages 65-66.

[74] It is commonly observed that Gawain follows a standard of conduct that makes the degree of his faults irrelevant. Kathleen M. Ashley articulates this view within the context of the pentangle's geometry: "the perfection of the endless knot unfailingly symbolizes the perfections of the virtuous Gawain. Just as the pentangle's lines and points are eternally locked, so Gawain's virtues are fastened to him" (216). Ashley draws attention to the Green Knight's insistence that Gawain's fault is but slight, that "his other virtues remain intact; but even this little failure severs the naturalness and inevitability of connections ("uchone *halched* in other"). Bonds are not invulnerable" (216).

long been noted by scholars.[75] In his essay "Gawain and the Image of the Wound," Paul F. Reichardt singles out martial valour as a particularly significant source of pride for Gawain, and after he receives the green girdle Gawain himself makes mention of this sort of pride: "And þus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes, / Þe loke to þis luf-lace schal leþe me hert" (2437-38). Gawain indicates that looking upon the green girdle will serve for him as a warning against such pride. If "prowes of armes" (2437) is a kind of enticement that compels Gawain to experience pride, the ideals of chivalry itself are implicated in the subversion of Gawain's belief in "trawþe." Nebuchadnezzar's pride is likewise founded upon a solipsistic self-regard for his own deeds and worldly achievements. The building of Babylon is chief among these feats and an accomplishment that the king likens to the creative power of God: "If He hatz formed þe folde and folk þervpone, / I haf bigged Babiloyne, burȝ alþer-rychest, / Stabled þerinne vche a ston in strenkþe of myn armes; / Moȝt neuer myȝt bot myn make such anoþer" (*Cleanness* 1665-68). Nebuchadnezzar compares the very creation of the world with the city he has wrought, apparently a notable undertaking. Within the romance world of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, this task of building and sustaining cities is the very act that frames the *Pearl*-poet's narrative. The *translatio imperii* tradition of the matter of Troy flanks the beginning and end of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and thus invokes the matter of Troy in its cultural function as a foundational mythology of medieval European civilization.[76] Gerald Morgan notes that "It is the purpose of the first stanza of

[75] See James Sims, "Gawayne's Fortunate Fall in *Sir Gawayne and the Grene Knight*"; Martin Puhvel, "Pride and Fall in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"; and Paul F. Reichardt "Gawain and the Image of the Wound."

[76] Geoffrey of Monmouth is central to the establishing of this cultural myth in his *History of the Kings of Britain*. In Geoffrey's text, the British leader Cassivelaunus asserts the mythic origins of British nobility as a pretext for rejecting the supremacy of Roman authority: "common inheritance of noble blood comes

Sir Gawain to show us that the nobility of Camelot is to be explained in part by its origins" and that "the life of Aeneas is taken as establishing the true pattern of nobility" (780).[77] Sir Frederic Madden, in his edition of the poem published in 1839, acknowledges that the "tulk" of line three is Aeneas, and Alfred David is one of the earliest scholars to point out that the crime of treason applied to a hero also identified as the "trewest on erthe" ought to signal a note of paradox in the text (David 402). This line therefore implicates Aeneas as Antenor's accomplice in the theft of the Palladium, an act that precedes the eventual fall of Troy itself. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* thus heralds a royal lineage that extends from fallen Troy to medieval Britain and yet acknowledges the treachery of Aeneas lying at the mythic source of Britain's noble blood. "Ennias" may be a man of "highe kynde," but he is also "Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt… tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe" (3-4). This paradox of treason and treachery proceeding from a man esteemed as "þe trewest on erthe" echoes in the body of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* through Gawain's own sin of pride.[78]

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down from Aeneas to Briton and to Roman alike, and our two races should be joined in close amity by this link of glorious kinship"(89).

[77] It must be acknowledged, however, that I read Aeneas as an ambiguous moral figure in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Morgan does not. Morgan cleaves to the Virgilian tradition of Troy, in which Aeneas can be nothing else than a heroic figure. This perspective overlooks the view far more widely circulated in the late Middle Ages, a view identifying Aeneas as one bearing responsibility for the destruction of Troy (Baswell 78). See Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* (early thirteenth century) for an influential narrative told in this tradition, a tradition derived from Benoît de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c. 1155-1160), a text purported to have been compiled based upon the certainly fabulous eyewitness accounts of Dares and Dictys. Guido's version of events clearly influenced late-medieval Troy poems such as the anonymous, alliterative *Destruction of Troy* (c. 1385), the anonymous *Laud Troy Book* (c. 1400), and Lydgate's *Troy Book* (1420).

[78] It would go too far to suggest that through the humbling of Gawain the *Pearl*-poet has humbled the entire ideological underpinnings of the second estate. Nebuchadnezzar and Gawain are both figures of the second estate and the poet consciously foregrounds the trappings of aristocratic leisure and privilege in his representation of these characters; however, though these characters are similar in their pride, their pride cannot simply be adduced to their aristocratic privilege. My reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is informed by the opinion held by scholars such as David Aers, who affirms that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* presents us with a secular world that co-opts sacred motifs within its own value system: "At both Camelot and Hautdesert Christianity is thoroughly assimilated to the celebration of forms of life aspired to

Gawain is the champion of Arthur's court and by extension the exemplar of all human conduct, and the knight's eventual failure indicates that if human excellence is to be achieved it must not be thought of as the exclusive property of aristocratic privilege.

As the emblem of Gawain's identity, the pentangle symbol lies at the center of Gawain's prideful impulses. Insofar as Gawain is, like Nebuchadnezzar, misled in his self-apprehension by pride, the pentangle is a false image that Gawain substitutes for an authentic understanding of self. As an emblem of Gawain's identity, the pentangle is a representation of the man, and if the image of Gawain conveyed by the pentangle is somehow false we can further conclude that Gawain's perception of self is false as well. The pentangle is a symbol "harder happed on þat haþel þen on any oþer," a detail that indicates a degree of expectation that Gawain feels within his world of aristocratic duty and privilege (655). The meanings of the virtuous pentads are in a sense put upon Gawain as a kind of burden "fastened" upon him, yet he bears the symbol as his own self-

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by contemporary gentry and nobles. The pentangle itself, far from being an emblem of unworldly transcendentalism, enshrines exclusively upper class virtues" (80-81). Aers is correct in his assertion that the pentangle assimilates Christian values within the context of secular knighthood, but this assertion actually undermines his further claim that the pentangle virtues are "exclusively upper class virtues." If this latter point were true, there would be no need to assimilate Christian motifs in the first place. By highlighting the response of Arthur's court, Andrew James Johnston makes a more defensible claim about *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s juxtaposition of secular and religious values. He suggests that "the poem zigzags its way from its ostensibly secular surface to a deeper layer of penitential problems, only to entirely engulf that level by the language and poetics of courtly love. Camelot's laughing courtiers at the end of the poem would thus signal the ultimate triumph of an aristocratic aesthetic over Christianity's moral complexities" (51). For Derek Pearsall, this critical debate over the Christian rectitude of the poem's content is misguided. He rather insists that "Gawain is an inhabitant of the world of Malory's Arthur" ("Courtesy and Chivalry" 358), a statement referring to the public transactions of identity necessary for chivalric self-representation in secular culture. Like Malory, the *Pearl*-poet challenges the notion that the values of chivalric culture are consistent with Christian values. The locus of this challenge is chivalric identity itself, as signified by Gawain's pentangle symbol, that bastion of "upper class virtues" that seeks to literally entwine secular and spiritual values. The opinion adopted in the present study insists upon the positive potential of material life in the *Pearl*-poet's works. This assessment must apply to representations of bodily experience in all its iterations (including the courtly). Jill Mann offers a tempering influence in this debate, for she asserts that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*'s representation of aristocratic privilege and splendor signifies "a truly imaginative spiritualization of courtly splendor, an attempt to read it as a material manifestation of the ethical qualities embodied in the courtly life and as itself constituting a challenge to be lived up to" ("Courtly Ethics" 259).

signifying standard. Burrow expresses the signification of the pentangle in the form of a syllogism (*A Reading of* Sir Gawain 42, 44):

1. The pentangle is a symbol of trawpe (625-26)

2. Gawain is *faythful*, that is, *trwe* (632)

3. Therefore the pentangle befits Gawain (631)

The arming scene and the *ekphrasis* of Gawain's shield surely constitute the content of whatever script of social performance that Gawain carries out in this text, and the mere act of wearing the pentangle symbol is in itself an essential part of the performance of Gawain's conscious self-representation. The "prowess of arms" that so comes to trouble Gawain in the later portion of the text is traced directly to the pentangle itself, which "acordez to þis kny3t and to his cler armez" (631). The "armez" are an outward expression of the man who wears them.[79]

Gawain undergoes an arming sequence before his departure from Hautdesert as well. Though more compressed and focused upon different elements of the knight's raiment, this second sequence matches the first as a demonstration of Gawain's public identity as it is asserted through the outward show of potent symbols.[80] One of the critical distinctions between the two arming sequences, however, is the omission of Gawain's shield in the second instance. The shield with gold upon red gules, so essential in the self-signifying ritual of Gawain's first arming, appears nowhere in the second

[79] For further scholarship on the nature of virtue signified by the pentangle, see J.A. Burrow (*A Reading* 50) and Gerald Morgan ("The Significance of the Pentangle" 769-90). Burrow and Morgan both grapple with the semantic latitude of *trawþe*, and they both permit the understanding that *trawþe* retains multiple senses in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (including a general sense of "righteousness"); however, both conclude that *trawþe* "suggests the special significance of fidelity in the moral world" of the poem" (Morgan 772).

[80] Guillemette Bolens speaks of the public "face" of Gawain. This "Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (124).

sequence. Even the pentangle symbol itself, central to the description of Gawain and his shield in fitt two, is enumerated among the visual features of Gawain in only an indirect manner and referenced as a symbol borne upon the knight's surcoat rather than his shield:

> Whyle þe wlonkest wedes he warp on hymseluen—
> His cote wyth þe conysaunce of þe clere werkez
> Ennurned vpon veluet, vertuus stonez
> Aboute beten and bounden, enbrauded semez,
> And fayre furred withinne wyth fayre pelures. (2025-29)

The mention of the pentangle is so indirect that it might be hard to identify for a reader who is not looking for it. The word "conysaunce" may be obscure to us, but it is used here to refer to a recognizable heraldic device, in this case the pentangle. The further description perhaps serves as the best indicator that the pentangle is being referenced, as the phrase "clere werkez" echoes the introduction of the pentangle in fitt two, at which point the narrator refers to the symbol as rightfully appended to Gawain's "cler armez" (631). The parallel phrasing suggests a shift in the disposition of the pentangle as a symbol for Gawain's noble identity. Whereas earlier emphasis lay upon the "cler" properties of Gawain's burnished armour and opulent clothing, both visual markers of Gawain's apparent dignity and worthiness to wear the pentangle and adopt its myriad and interlocking virtues as his own, the later reference to "clere werkez" calls us to reconsider the man who bears the emblem rather than the mere trappings of his array. The poet draws our attention away from the symbol and calls us to account for Gawain's conduct. In this way, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* invites its audience to evaluate the correspondence between the sign and what it represents and in the process test the verity

of Burrow's syllogistic understanding of the poem's initial construction of Gawain as a model for perfected human conduct.

Gawain's failure to fulfill the significant expectations "halched" or fastened upon him by the pentangle symbol provides readers with the opportunity to observe how the vanity of presumed perfection leads to a kind of blindness in Gawain.[81] Just as the virtues of the various pentads are woven together in the pentangle symbol, the capacity for right reason or insight is enmeshed among those virtues as well. David N. Beauregard identifies the pentangle's interlocking pentads of virtue with the "perfection" of virtue anticipated by theologians such as Thomas Aquinas, who sought to articulate how the various virtues could be fruitfully linked (146). An intriguing possibility is the association of the pentangle symbol with the higher cognitive functions of the rational soul.[82] Aristotle's theory regarding the division of the soul suggests that these three parts of the soul correspond to geometric shapes, the triangle, the quadrangle, and the pentangle, respectively. The greater the number of sides represented by the

[81] Note that this argument challenges Gawain's presumption of perfection rather than the pursuit of perfection. Concluding a discourse on the requirements of the eight Beatitudes, Christ's Sermon on the Mount punctuates the urgency of what the Beatitudes demand of human life by enjoining humankind to be "perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). The *Pearl*-poet, no casual reader of the Beatitudes, surely does not mean to disparage the pursuit of perfection. Through the example of Gawain, who wears the pentangle of perfection as an emblem of public identity, however, the poet nonetheless demonstrates the error of presuming one has actually attained perfection.

[82] My thesis has already spoken extensively about the sensitive soul, and in this chapter my discussion of reason has introduced consideration of the rational soul (see pages 7 n7, 38 n25, and 68). Gerald Morgan ("The Significance of the Pentangle" 772-73), Kevin Marti (152), Paul F. Reichardt (155-56), and Peter Whiteford (231) all observe that the pentangle symbol that appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* corresponds with the scholastic thought underlying Dante's representation of the Aristotelian division of soul into the familiar hierarchy of three discrete parts, each performing its own function (the vegetative [or nutritive], the sensitive, and the rational). Aristotle's discussion of this topic may be found in *De partibus animalium* book two, and Dante explores Aristotle's division of the soul in *Il Convivio* (see pages 161-62 of this chapter) as well as *Vita Nuova* (cap. 20 and 27). I do not contend that the *Pearl*-poet must have necessarily read Dante, only that Dante and the *Pearl*-poet are both influenced by Aristotelian ideas that had clearly attained prominence in scholastic thought. For example, as I have indicated in previous chapters, scholastic philosophers such as Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus were notable advocates of the theory.

corresponding shape, the higher the order of functions attributed to the part of soul signified. According to Morgan,

> The Aristotelian (and hence the Scholastic) conception of being is hierarchical; among living organisms we can observe a hierarchy of vegetative, sensitive, and rational powers. Each has its corresponding geometrical symbolism: the triangle, the quadrangle, and the pentangle. The pentangle is therefore established as a symbol of human excellence or perfection. The general term that the *Gawain* poet uses to describe such perfection is (as we have seen) *trawpe*. ("The Significance of the Pentangle" 773)

The pentangle, as a symbol of *trawþe*, is also a symbol for the rational soul, which subsumes the functions of the lesser parts of soul, including the sensitive, a point the *Pearl*-poet confirms by naming Gawain's perfection of sensory perception in the first of the pentangle's pentads, "Fyrst he watz funden fautlez in his fyue wyttez" (640). According to the interlocking aspect of the pentangle, the failure of any of the individual pentads would threaten to unravel the whole knot of the symbol. Since Gawain's deeds or "werkez" ultimately fail to fulfill the virtuous ideals "happed" upon him through the signification of the pentangle symbol, the knight is caught in a misapprehension of self that puts him in the same position as Nebuchadnezzar in *Cleanness*: misled by pride and subsequently turned away from reason by his own misperceptions.

The comparison of Gawain and Nebuchadnezzar should be qualified with the acknowledgement that their circumstances are quite different. Whereas the Babylonian king is overcome by the pride of conquest, Gawain's pride is steeped in a meretricious self-regard. James H. Sims identifies the pentangle as a symbol of "assumed perfection"

and recognizes the shift in Gawain's character as one marked symbolically in the transference of Gawain's personal identification from the pentangle symbol to the green girdle symbol: "the metamorphosis is graphically symbolized in the poem by the shift from the red and gold pentangle on his shield to the green and gold girdle across his chest" (28). Moreover, this shift involves "the transmutation of a symbol of pride and secret sin into a symbol of self-knowledge and open confession" (28). In its emphasis upon the correction of pride with the fulfillment of self-knowledge, Sims's reading accords with my own. Though less grand than the *hubris* of Nebuchadnezzar, Gawain's pride is surely evident in his conduct (his works), and the pentangle is a sign of that pride. As Sims indicates, however, the signification of the pentangle changes by the end of the poem when Gawain's pride is exposed. By this point in the text the pentangle comes to represent the flaws of mere human flesh that Gawain had hitherto denied, and much of Gawain's inordinate dissatisfaction at the conclusion stems from his failure to recognize the great value the pentangle still bears as an emblem of true self-recognition. Before this so-called transmutation of the symbol can occur, however, Gawain's pride must be revealed.

During the seduction scenes of fitt three Gawain's conduct begins to unravel the pentangle and expose its prideful nature. Gawain's pride emerges in notable ways even though the knight presents an admirable performance of humble simplicity. Just as he had done in Arthur's hall, Gawain treats his social superior, in this case Bertilak's Lady, with self-deprecating deference. Her initial greetings to him are complimentary, and she praises the reputation of the pentangle knight in a manner that indicates she has some understanding of the public standing of the man she is dealing with. She acknowledges,

I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen ȝe are,

Þat alle þe worlde worchipez; quereso ȝe ride,

Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praysed

With lordez, wyth ladyes, with alle þat lyf bere. (1226-29)

Gawain's response is so very humble as to seemingly deny his very identity. He insists, "I be not now he þat ȝe of speken— / To reche to such reuerence as ȝe reherce here / I am wyȝe vnworþy, I wot wel myseluen" (1242-44).[83] In spite of his apparent courtesy, however, the Lady's generous praise of Gawain invites his prideful impulses to rise to the fore. His polite response acknowledges the honour she bestows upon him: "'Iwysse, worþy,' quoþ þe wyȝe, 'ȝe haf waled wel better; / Bot I am proude of þe prys þat ȝe put on me / And, soberly your seruaunt, my souerayn I holde yow" (1276-78). The pattern of Gawain's courteous speech is now clear: he acknowledges his quality while subordinating himself to his superiors. Even before Arthur's court in fitt one, Gawain acknowledges that the value within him is a function of his closeness to Arthur's family

[83] The topic of Gawain's ambiguous identity has been the subject of significant study (Taylor 195; Heng, "A Woman Wants" 101; Batt 117-18). These critics have contemplated the Lady's noteworthy suggestions that challenge the authenticity of Gawain's identity. For example, when Gawain attempts to take his leave of the Lady without a kiss, she responds with astonishment: "as ho stod ho stonyed hym wyth ful stor wordez: / 'Now He þat spedez vche spech þis disport ȝelde yow, / Bot þat ȝe be Gawan hit gotz in mynde!'" (1291-93). According to the Lady, "courtaysye" requires the exchange of a kiss (1300). On the second day, the Lady reminds Gawain of this courtly axiom yet again:

'Sir, ȝif ȝe be Wawen, wonder me þynkkez,
Wyȝe þat is so wel wrast alway to god
And connez not of compaynye þe costez vndertake,
And if mon kennes yow hom to knowe, ȝe kest hom of your mynde:
Þou hatz forȝeten ȝederly þat ȝisterday I taȝt te
Bi alder-truest token of talk þat I cowþe.' (1481-86)

In both of these passages, the Lady indicates a contradiction between Gawain's conduct and the socially understood expectations placed upon him. Geraldine Heng convincingly argues that these exchanges constitute a significant crisis of identity for Gawain: "In each of the first two instances, the kiss she wins from Gawain is engineered within a drama of identity-in-crisis. It immediately follows a moment when the Lady points to the noncoincidence between Gawain, the subject physically present, and the name of Gawain, the signifier and title of identity. The kiss is specially performed, that is, under the threat of an imminent disjunction of the man from the symbolic system that recognizes his access to, and serves totemically to index, a personal identity" ("A Woman Wants" 116). This analysis serves to reify the contingent nature of Gawain's identity, which is not at all secured by stable signifiers.

blood, no small marker of quality when the matter is fully considered. Reposing beside the Lady, Gawain adopts a similar pattern. He speaks of the honour she has bestowed upon him with her kind words. In fact, he acknowledges that he is proud of the *prys* or value she has "put on" him. It is as though he is suggesting that he has no value unless she acknowledges it, and yet this humble statement is belied by the pride he cannot help but admit. Her praise adds value to him; it makes him "proude." Furthermore, the phrasing recalls that of the speaker referring to the manner in which the pentangle and its virtues are appended to the identity of Gawain: "þyse pure fyue / Were harder happed on þat haþel þen on any oþer" (654-55). The Lady teases Gawain and says she will "happe" him in the bedsheets. In a similar manner she embarrasses him with praise that recalls the "happed" encomiums of the pentangle. "Happed" upon Gawain, the virtues of the pentangle are put upon him by external forces. His guileless response, pride, is a predictable reaction in one for whom praise has outstripped merit.

This pride is exposed when Gawain is left to fend for himself against the seductive advances of Bertilak's Lady. On the first day, her physical advance on him is direct: "ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde, / Kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne / And set hir ful softly on þe bed-syde" (1191-93). As the Lady's own gestures and words make clear, the object of her approach is the body of Gawain, for she proceeds to refer to her dominance of him in this scene in terms of physical confinement. She tells him "Now ar ȝe tan astyt! Bot true vus may schape, / I schal bynde yow in your bedde—þat be ȝe trayst" (1210-11). Her playful further explanation that he must be confined to his bed as a prisoner in order that she might "karp wyth" (1225) her knight plays along with Gawain's expressed willingness to talk with the Lady, but her insistence that she will

actually "happe" him into bed by tucking in the bed sheets adds a note of physical domination as well. He is like a prisoner taken in battle, while she is the conqueror ascendant, who will dispose of her prisoner as she sees fit. The specific locus of this battle is the body of Gawain, and, although the pentangle symbol is in a significant way a kind of abstract signification of the knight, the role of the Lady in this text is really to pin Gawain down and locate the authentic subject that is otherwise "happed" or covered by the abstraction of symbol.

The Lady's verbal exchanges articulate the meaning signified by her physical seductions (her beauty, the way she makes herself available to Gawain). The discourse with which she constructs this seduction is in keeping with the measured decorum of courtly speech, and the way in which Gawain responds to this complex assault upon his stated ideals is similarly couched in the terms of courteous speech. He must remain true to his host and commit no act of infidelity with this Lady, and yet, as the Lady insists, he must satisfy the demands of "courtaysye" as well (1300). In spite of the necessity for chaste resistance to sexual temptation, the public expectation of Gawain's courtly manners must be satisfied. Her praise of Gawain's noble bearing depends upon the knight's reputation, which she freely mingles with her own observations of his conduct. She tells him,

> þe costes þat I haf knowen vpon þe, knyȝt, here
> Of bewté and debonerté and blyþe semblaunt—
> And þat I haf er herkkened and halde hit here trwee—
> Þer schulde no freke vpon folde bifore yow be chosen. (1272-75)

The Lady's emphasis is upon Gawain's noted reputation, a reputation that supersedes that of all other knights. His "costes" or cultivated manners are apparently consistent with the reputation that precedes him, and this note of praise is precisely the cue to provoke Gawain to acknowledge his feelings of pride (1277). In this moment he feels he has successfully fulfilled the performance of virtues required of the pentangle knight. He has fulfilled the demands of his chivalric reputation and maintained his fidelity, the most essential quality of a knight dedicated to *trawþe*.

The need for self control in the cardiosensory sense demands that Gawain control his heart and resist the Lady's invitation to commit adultery. At this level of the test, he certainly succeeds. Let it not be said that there is no note of desire on the part of Gawain, however. Were there no trace of desire to be found in Gawain, there would be no grounds to say he has resisted seduction, for there can be no resistance without temptation. The ambiguous emotional inflection of Gawain's desire is nonetheless confusing. The night before the final day of hunt and seduction, Gawain feasts with Bertilak and his wife. During this very public scene, the Lady, by sending flirtatious glances in Gawain's direction, continues her habit of seductive play: "euer oure luflych knyȝt þe lady bisyde; / Such semblaunt to þat segge semly ho made, / Wyth stille stollen countenance, þat stalworth to plese" (1657-59). These telling looks are the same kinds of gestures she makes in the bedroom scenes when she is speaking to Gawain—"wyth a luflych loke ho layde hym þyse wordez" (1480), and, according to the Lady, courtesy requires that these ocular gestures must be responded to with permissive license whenever possible. She says that "Quereso countenaunce is couþe, quikly to clayme; / Þat bicumes vche a knyȝt þat cortaysy vses" (1490-91). It is as though the glance of

affection itself ought to be enough to incite the courteous companion to reciprocate the tokens of affection. In the context of the public scene, however, Gawain's courtesy is restrained by the need for deference to his host. In response to the Lady's furtive looks of love, Gawain is compelled to withhold what courtesy demands, and this situation compels anger in him: "al forwondered watz þe wyȝe and wroth with hymseluen" (1660). This anger, inwardly directed, is not the anger of a man grown impatient with the vain advances of an unwanted lover. On the other hand, Gawain, experiencing a rather sincere blush of affection, later receives a kiss from the Lady:

> Þe lady luflych com, laȝande swete,
> Felle ouer his fayre face and fetly hym kyssed.
> He welcumez hir worþily with a wale chere;
> He seȝ hir so glorious and gayly atyred,
> So fautles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes,
> Wiȝt wallande joye warmed his hert. (1757-62)

The pleasure Gawain experiences is sensual, visual in nature, and this pleasure registers at the cardiosensory level. Swelling forth from his heart, Gawain's joy in this scene can barely be contained. His courtly exchanges with the Lady serve to sublimate this pleasure through "smoþe smylyng and smolt" (1763). This mode of private sublimation proves embarrassing to Gawain during the dinner scene, when Gawain rather experiences frustration at his own desire, a desire that must be suppressed because it cannot be reciprocated in the public field of action. This field of action is the realm in which the pentangle symbol circulates and imposes its restrictions upon Gawain's conduct. These restrictions suppress the authentic energy of Gawain's life, his desires, and compel him to

substitute the satisfaction of fulfilled pleasure, "wynne" (1765), with repressive self-condemnation, "wroth" (1660). Unlike fitt two, in which Gawain boldly exchanges glances with the Lady, Gawain here suppresses his gaze but nonetheless manages to satisfy the polite manners required of his "nurture" and "dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-euer þe dede turned" (1661, 1662). Gawain's actions must be deliberately regulated in order to accord with the conduct required of a knight wearing the pentangle sign. Those brief moments of licit behavior in which Gawain's desire can be acknowledged or expressed reveal a subversion of the pentangle's restrictions, and the joy that fills Gawain's heart at these moments is the earliest indicator that Gawain is not in total control of his faculties.

Gawain's self-directed anger during the dinner scene betrays the true tension at play in his attempt to navigate the line between courtesy and fidelity. The exchange of glances reveals the inner conflict with which Gawain struggles. In spite of the impulse to joy, obedience to the pentangle's values demands the suppression of desire, a denial that ultimately amounts to a denial of self. The desire he feels swelling at heart finds its only expression through the portals of the eyes. No matter how gracious Gawain acts in his accommodation of the Lady's requests, he must necessarily withhold what she is truly asking for, which is more than a kiss or a love token. The narrator acknowledges this during the third seduction scene: "For þat prynces of pris depresed hym so þikke, / Nurned hym so neȝe þe þred, þat need hym bihoued / Oþer lach þer hir luf oþer lodly refuse" (1770-72). The narrator explains to us that Gawain is now at his limit and that he can do no more to satisfy the demands of the Lady. He must refuse to give her what she demands in the name of courtesy. In a sense this withholding of what is due prefigures

Gawain's failure to hand over the green girdle during the third day of the exchange of winnings game. In the case of the Lady's seductions, Gawain must limit his behavior and withhold what the Lady demands. In the case of the girdle, however, Gawain encounters a limit of quite another variety. In spite of the perfection promised by the pentangle symbol, human action has limits ("þe þred"); multiple obligations lead to conflicted duties; and, if perfection is the model for conduct, the performance of duty can never fulfill such grand expectations.

Gawain's acts of sublimating sexual desire through the courtly protocols of courteous love-talking and modest kisses are really substitutions that allow him to express an approximation of desire without surrendering to bodily desire. This is a self-effacing gesture, but it does appear to constitute the all-important element of patient self-control required of the righteous who seek to control their hearts. In *Cleanness*, the *Pearl*-poet's discussion of Jean de Meun's *Le roman de la rose* appropriates the literary commonplaces of courtly love imagery in the service of his spiritual theme:

> Clerrer counseyl con I non, bot þat þou clene worþe.
> For Clopyngnel in þe compas of his clene *Rose*,
> Þer he expounez a speche to hym þat spede wolde
> Of a lady to be loued: 'Loke to hir sone
> Of wich beryng þat ho be, and wych ho best louyes,
> And be ryȝt such in vch a borȝe of body and of dedes,
> And folȝ þe fet of þat fere þat þou fre haldes;
> And if þou wyrkkes on þis wyse, þaȝ ho wyk were,
> Hir schal lyke þat layk þat lyknes hir tylle.'

If þou wyl dele drwrye wyth Dryȝtyn þenne,

And lelly louy þy Lorde and His leef worþe,

Þenne confourme þe to Kryst, and þe clene make,

Þat euer is polyced als playn as þe perle seluen. (1056-68)

This passage is remarkable for the way in which it draws together the thematic concerns and recurring motif images of the *Pearl*-poet's work. Purity, courtly pleasure, and the all-important image of the pearl itself are joined here within the context of visual sensation. For the present discussion, the poet's conscious linking of courtly love gazing and the spiritual aims of salvation are of critical importance. The poet's explication of lines 7689-7764 of *Le Roman de la rose* displaces the protocols of this kind of loving gaze into the realm of spiritual desire and substitutes the earthly lover for the divine object of spiritual contemplation. In the case of Gawain in fitt three, the Lady's example must be followed, for if it is not followed the rites of courtesy cannot be fulfilled and the favour of the courtly lover cannot be won. In the *Pearl*-poet's analogy from the *Roman*, the example of Christ must be followed, otherwise the gazing subject cannot share a likeness with its desired object and thus cannot become His beloved ("His leef worþe"). The reference to movement and attraction in this passage posits vision in an extramissive mode. The subject of vision must inevitably follow the vector of the gaze whether it be worldly or heavenly. This detail illustrates the way in which body follows vision, for whatever the sensitive soul reaches forth to embrace must necessarily compel the gazing subject to follow. This model for spiritual mimesis inverts Bacon's comment that the extramitted soul of the observer must enter the medium of vision in order to render visible species commensurate with the soul that seeks to behold them. In the example

that the *Pearl*-poet adopts from Jean de Meun, the soul, by mingling with the image of what it desires, becomes more like its object and the newly-minted likeness of subject and object is figured in their metaphorical embrace. For the *Pearl*-poet, the act of seeking out the sight of God is an ocular expression of the desire to "confourme" to the image of Christ (1067).[84] The beholding of worldly images constitutes conformity of quite another variety, and Gawain's visual interaction with the Lady, though sublimated, presages quite a different transformation than the spiritual apotheosis the poet associates with beatific vision.

The cleanness or purity that the poet associates with spiritual vision in *Cleanness* runs quite contrary to Gawain's pessimistic appraisal of himself in fitt four of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Referring to the green girdle, Gawain vows,

> in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
> When I ride in renoun remorde to myseluen
> Þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed,
> How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe.
> And þus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
> Þe loke to þis luf-lace schal leþe my hert. (2433-38)

Unlike the fortunate penitent imagined by the *Pearl*-poet in *Cleanness*, Gawain's gaze has not followed the figure of Christ. Rather than the purity of the clean of heart, Gawain

[84] This avenue of enquiry has already been considered in the previous chapter, but Theresa Tinkle's "The Heart's Eye: Beatific Vision in *Purity*" resituates the terms of beatific discourse for the present discussion of Gawain's mimetic vision: "Medieval commentators interpreted the sight of God as a figure for spiritual understanding: since man cannot view an incorporeal God with bodily sense of sight, one 'sees' God through intellectual sight empowered by grace. It is the 'oculus cordis,' heart's eye, that sees God. The vision begins temporally 'in aenigmate' and will be perfected after death. The Matthean beatitude, we should note, makes the blessing conditional on moral state, and the *Purity*-poet takes full advantage of this condition " (452). If the heart is misled, if the heart is impure, the vision will be skewed. In the case of Gawain, whose gaze is set upon other things besides God, his heart is misled and the beatific vision, unsought, is a most unlikely prospect indeed.

considers himself mired in the staining blotches of sin.[85] The reason for this shortfall of virtue lies in the manner in which Gawain is directed by the dictates of the "flesche crabbed" (2435), and although he has suppressed the stirrings of his heart Gawain nonetheless remains thrall to the material urgings of bodily necessity. Despairing, Gawain does not attribute his failings to infidelity in the sexual sense. The Green Knight also confirms that Gawain has passed that particular test, yet Gawain's vision remains fixed upon the green lace, a gift given to him by the Lady and later offered again by the Green Knight himself. This item reflects the supreme frailty of flesh: the principle of self-preservation that compels the human person to covet mortal life.

With promises that the girdle will allow him to overcome death itself, the Lady convinces Gawain to accept her gift. Only after he accepts it does she further enjoin him to keep the girdle concealed. Specifically, he must conceal it from her husband:[86]

> And ho bere on hym þe belt and bede hit hym swyþe
>
> (And he granted and hym gafe with a goud wylle)
>
> And biso3t hym for hir sake disceuer hit neuer

[85] In fitt three of the text, the Lady praises Gawain's courtesy and the phrasing of this encomium is couched in the terms of cleanness in a manner that presages the question of Gawain's own purity. She says his "cortaysye is closed so clene in hymseluen" (1298). The phrasing suggests rather ironically that courtesy, rather than a performed marker of identity, is a virtue somehow intrinsic to Gawain's character and figures Gawain as a kind of vessel in which virtues may be enclosed. This image of Gawain as a vessel is consistent with Charlotte C. Morse's reading of human vessels in *Cleanness* (see page 110 n65). According to Morse, the *Pearl*-poet's use of the vessel image as a figure for human virtue is comprehensive: "the vessel is a utensil for holding food or water, and it is also man who contains within himself the history of his good and evil deeds, his soul and perhaps the Holy Ghost" (203). The Lady's reference to courtesy as being "closed so clene" within Gawain marks a verbal parallel between the assumed moral rectitude of Gawain and the material perfection of the temple vessels described in *Cleanness*. Gawain's eventual outburst concerning the filth of flesh is thus anticipated in the text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

[86] The severity of Gawain's moral failure in complying with this request has been thoroughly debated (Tony Hunt, "Irony and Ambiguity"; J.A. Burrow, *A Reading of* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; P.J.C. Field, "A Rereading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*"). I am not concerned about whether or not Gawain's concealment of the girdle is a mortal or venial sin. I am concerned only with the commission of a fault, however blameless it may be, for the perfection assumed by the pentangle permits a very low threshold of fault indeed.

Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; þe leude hym acordez

Þat neuer wyȝe schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne,

For noȝte. (1860-1865)

This latter promise forces Gawain to willfully defy the terms of the exchange of winnings, which really means the violation of Gawain's promise to Bertilak. The Green Knight attributes this fault to a lack of "lewté" (2366). Gawain himself refers to his fault as "untrawþe," a word that directly contradicts the very idea of *trawþe* as it refers to Gawain. Gawain is indeed hard on himself, but he also uses the word "lewté" to identify his wanting virtues (2381). He explains his errors to the Green Knight:

For care of þy knokke, cowardyse me taȝt

To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake:

Þat is larges and lewté, þat longez to knyȝtez.

Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer

Of trecherye and vntrawþe. (2379-83)

In this passage we see that Gawain's lack of honorableness, honesty, or loyalty signified by *lewté* is conflated with the idea of *vntrawþe*. In his failure of loyalty, Gawain perceives not only a momentary lapse of judgment but a complete undermining of his own public identity. He calls his error a forsaking of his nature; however, Gawain's fault is better understood as an insufficient ability to fulfill his publicly identified role as the pentangle knight.

In *Cleanness* the lack of *lewté* is similarly associated with a failure of truth. We can use the *Pearl*-poet's example of Zedechiah's failed reign in Judah to contextualize Gawain's feelings of shame. The poet articulates the failure and punishment of

Zedechiah and his people in a tidy chiasmus: "He fylsened þe faythful in þe falce lawe / To forfare þe falce in þe faythe trwe" (1167-68). God empowers the followers of Nebuchadnezzar, "faithful in the false law," to overcome the Judeans, those "false in the faith true." The speaker's further description of Zedechiah's fault explains that "He sete on Salomones solie on solemne wyse, / Bot of leauté he watz lat to his Lorde hende" (1171-72). Lack of loyalty, faithless service, falseness, all of these errors are attributed to Zedechiah and his people, and they are "disstryed wyth distres, and drawen to þe erþe. / For þat folke in her fayth watz founden vntrwe" (1160-61). The poverty of spirit or humility that is so critical for those who "con her hert stere" in *Patience* is wanting in Zedechiah, who is perfectly capable of affecting the solemnity of rulership upon the throne of Solomon but falls short of offering the humble obedience he is required to show before his God. According to the *Pearl*-poet, poverty of spirit, the humility demanded by the eighth Beatitude, is precisely the virtue lacking in those who falter in their obedience to truth. This includes Zedechiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and Gawain.

By concealing the girdle, Gawain sacrifices his *lewté* and privileges his life over his word. In light of Gawain's initial refusal of the love lace, his later acceptance of the girdle can only be attributed to its newly-revealed magical properties. Gawain rebuffs the Lady's offer of the girdle just as he had turned down her offer of a precious ring. After the Lady explains the girdle's alleged powers, however, he is overcome by powerful feeling: "Þen kest þe knyȝt, and hit come to his hert / Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were" (1855-56). The heart, that essential organ of medieval sense perception, is preoccupied with the prospect of the girdle's power to triumph over death. He will later claim that this desire for life is an error of covetousness, but in this moment

Gawain is so overcome with relief at the prospect of living that he is willing to overlook the fact that he must subsequently refuse to surrender this "juel" to Bertilak, an act he is obligated to perform according to the terms of his verbal agreement. The Green Knight sums things up quite well when he excuses Gawain's withholding of the girdle as an act committed because he "lufed… lyf" (2368).

This withholding of the belt is therefore a renunciation of Gawain's duty to the abstract ideals of the pentangle, but it is also an affirmation of his material life, a life he values and wishes to preserve. Gawain's life-affirming acceptance of the girdle is accompanied by the image of the kiss, for the poet uses the wheel of the stanza to remind us that Gawain has by this point received three kisses:

> He þonkked hir oft ful swyþe,
>
> Ful þro with hert and þoȝt;
>
> Bi þat on þrynne syþe
>
> Ho hatz kyst þe knyȝt so toȝt. (1866-69)

The *Pearl*-poet is reminding us with a tally of how many kisses will be owed to Bertilak, a detail that carries with it some irony, for we well know it is not the kisses that are to be withheld but the newly acquired girdle. By framing the acceptance of the girdle within the image of the kiss, however, the poet acknowledges the nexus of sex and death that lies at the heart of fitt three's parallel of hunt and seduction. Gawain's urgent desire to live, acknowledged amidst the offer of a kiss, reveals the powerful compulsion of sexual desire in the affirmation of the forces of life. The hunt scenes demonstrate the binary counterpart of life, death, which further identifies sexual desire itself as an urge that affirms the inevitability of death even in the act of asserting life. The sexual urge to

reproduce may further the aims of living things to endure, but it also acknowledges that life is otherwise a very temporary matter indeed. In this wheel the poet also reminds us of Gawain's pensive heart, which perceives and contemplates the newfound value of the girdle. The desire to live, now placed above the need to fulfill his *lewté,* wins out for Gawain in what is essentially a value judgment. The girdle, at first identified as "vnworþi," proves to be as valuable as a precious gem in Gawain's opinion. This is a conscious judgment and at the very least a use of Gawain's estimative faculty if not reason itself. The framing functions of the thinking heart in the act of contemplation (1867) confirm that this scene is one of cognitive decision for Gawain, and the Lady's repetition of the motif of value verifies this reading as well. After presenting him with the "vnworþi" girdle, she interprets his initial refusal:

> 'Now forsake ȝe þis silke,' sayde þe burde þenne,
> For hit is simple in hitself? And so hit wel semez:
> Lo! So hit is littel and lasse hit is worþy.
> Bot whoso knew þe costs þat knit ar þerinne,
> He wolde hit prayse at more prys, parauenture. (1846-50)

Gawain's disregard of the girdle is a judgment based upon what it seems to be a finely wrought but otherwise worthless piece of cloth. For Gawain, it seems to have no value. When she reveals its supposed magical properties, Gawain alters his assessment and makes the decision to use it to try to save his own life. The conscious decision to withhold the girdle requires not only an assessment of the girdle's value, however. This decision requires Gawain to set a value upon himself, his own life. This decision is what Gawain condemns in himself as covetousness, for it permits him to elevate the value of

his own life in a way that contradicts the humble courtesies that have characterized Gawain's self-regard up until this point. In fitt one Gawain tells Arthur's court that little value could be set upon his own life. In the third fitt he tells the Lady that he is unfit to receive a gift from her. These gestures are integral to the courtesy that Gawain has maintained throughout the first three fitts of the poem, but his turn toward covetousness reveals that these are little more than gestures. Given the seeming choice to affirm the value of his own life, Gawain accepts a chance to live.

This fact helps us understand the way in which the seductions of fitt three are interlaced with scenes of Bertilak's hunt. Gawain is certainly the hunted prey in these scenes, and, while the Lady pursues him under the auspices of sexual seduction, the parallel images of the actual hunt affirm the nexus of sex and death in this poem. If we take seriously Gawain's conceit of identity, the resolution that he can live the virtues of the five pentads within the limits of bodily existence, the breaching of the pentangle's virtues neatly parallels the transgressing of Gawain's bodily limits by the Lady's embracing vision, a gaze that so entices Gawain upon his initial arrival at Hautdesert and later confounds him with anger after the seduction begins. Considered in this light, Gawain's congress with the Lady, in its tendency to exceed licit boundaries of conduct and bodily propriety, is a sexualized parody of conventional romance commonplace. According to Danielle Régnier-Bohler, "If the theme of individual versus collectivity forms the heart of the romantic adventure tale, it is often coupled with another theme: that of crossing boundaries, particularly boundaries that only a chosen few can step across" (317). The figurative breaking of the pentangle is of course further

paralleled in the scenes of hunt, in which the bodies of Bertilak's hunted prey are attacked, pierced, and eventually broken apart. The thoroughly descriptive hunting episodes of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have garnered attention for the realism of their depictions of medieval customs: Bertilak even observes customary rules of the hunting season (Stevens 74). This realism contributes to a complete image of the hunts, a holistic impression of a very real, quotidian moment in the text.

During the first day of the hunt the speaker describes the initial assault upon the bodies of the retreating deer with flights of arrows. The poet establishes this action as a visual spectacle, at once activating for us the language of vision within the context of violent, penetrative engagement: "Þer myȝt mon se, as þay slypte, slentyng of arwes; / At vche wende vnder wande wapped a flone, / Þat bigly bote on þe broun with ful brode hedez" (1160-62). In a similar vein, the hunting of the boar on the second day counterpoints the boar's desire for safety in the concealment of his den with the intrusion of an attack that drives him into the exposure of the open air: "Þer he bode in his bay, tel bawemen hit breken / And madee hym maugref his hed for to mwe vtter, / So felle flonez þer flete when þe folk gedered" (1564-66). The final scene of hunt eschews the use of arrows to draw prey out from hiding, but the fox sustains a strategy of concealment that depends upon remaining unseen by the pursuing hunters. After he is detected by his pursuers, the fox's troubles truly begin: "quen þay seghe hym with syȝt þay sued hym fast" (1705). For the fox, as for Gawain, true danger lies in where and how one is seen by others.

The penetrating shafts of arrows and the desperation of the hunted prey to seek shelter in concealment all serve to highlight the tactility of the penetrating gaze in these scenes. Moreover, the subsequent breaking of the animals' bodies represents a grotesque transgression of bodily limit that results in the absolute dissolution of the body's integrity in a manner that corresponds with Gawain's own faltering personal integrity:

> Syþen þay slyt þe slot, sesed þe erber,
> Schaued wyth a scharp knyf, and þe schyre knitten.
> Syþen rytte þay þe foure lymmes and rent of þe hyde;
> Þen brek þay þe balé, þe bowelez out token,
> Lystily for laucyng þe lere of þe knot. (1330-34)

Flesh and bones come unravelled in this unflinchingly grotesque passage, which painstakingly evokes a genuine scene of hunt and slaughter. In tracing a parallel between the seduction of Gawain and the bodily disintegration of the hunters' prey, the poet's reference to the delicate handling of the "ligature of the knot" provides an uncanny analogue with the breaking up of Gawain's public identity as the pentangle knight, for Gawain's fitt two shield ekphrasis, of course, explicitly refers to the pentangle as "þe endeles knot" (630). The careful handling of the intestinal "knot" thus contrasts with the failure and symbolic rupture of Gawain's self-signifying pentangle. It is useful to note here that Bakhtin's description of the material body lower stratum, certainly the locus of body invoked in this scene, acknowledges that "the anatomy of the lower parts (le bas)" constitutes a literal "grotesque knot" (225).[87] Beyond the symbolic rupture of the

[87] Robert Levine's treatment of the Bakhtinian grotesque in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* emphasizes the debasing or uncrowning aspects of the grotesque aesthetic. He describes the tendency of grotesque

pentangle, however, the hunt scenes further parallel the cardiosensory transformation of Gawain in the destruction of the boar, whose "hert schyndered" under the thrust of Bertilak's sword (1594). The correspondence between these elements is grotesque in its details as well as in its aesthetic resonance, as the uncrowning aspect of the hunt's none too subtle details figures the boundary-exceeding extramissions of medieval optical exchange with the extra-bodily extrusions of truly grotesque realism.[88]

The source of the Lady's desire in approaching Gawain for the three morning trysts originates in her own heart, projecting outward from the eyes in search of Gawain. She is of course playing the role of seductress at the behest of Bertilak, but she plays the role convincingly in every respect.[89] On the third morning she rises from bed spurred on by a feeling "pyȝt in hir hert" (1734). Gawain's reciprocated feelings of joy spring from seeing the Lady and, of course, take root in the knight's heart: "He welcumez hir worþily with a wale chere; / He seȝ hir so glorious and gayly atyred, / So fautles of hir fetures and of so fyne hewes, / Wiȝt wallande joye warmed his hert" (1759-62). So there is a line of communication from heart to heart between the Lady and Gawain that traverses

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realism "to debase aristocratic or courtly ideals (Bédier's 'élégance superficielle')" and further compares Bakhtin's "material body lower stratum" with Bédier's "grossièreté foncière" and with what Muscatine calls the "animal facts of life" (66-67). These comparisons invoke the carnivalesque irreverence of the grotesque mode, which is used in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to undermine artificial courtly signifiers.

[88] The grotesque realism of the poem's hunt scenes bears comparison with the grotesqueries uncovered in *Patience* during Jonah's trial in the belly of the whale. The uncrowning aspect of Bertilak's hunt (the poet depicts both a deer [1353] and the boar [1607] actually decapitated during these scenes) activates the same image of the mortal human body represented by the whale's body, a slimy material prison for the human subject.

[89] In spite of Bertilak's eventual revelation that the Lady has merely been play-acting in this secret game of seduction, there are notable instances in the text that indicate that the Lady is invested quite sincerely in the emotional commitment of her role. Heng has considered the enigmatic nature of this desire, a desire that never explains itself but is never called upon to explain itself, a desire that is marginalized by the interests of male desire but nonetheless serves as the impetus that gives rise to Gawain's own anxious desire and with that gesture serves to complicate the conflict of the narrative ("A Woman Wants" 123-24).

the distance between souls by means of visual species that both carry forth and draw in the impressions of sensitive souls through the portals of the eyes. Gawain's response to receiving the image of the Lady is difficult to evaluate on the face of his failure. I have already referred to the potential for error that Gawain endures as a consequence of his exchanges with the Lady. The abject destruction of the prey animals witnessed in the hunt scenes would seem to bode ill in an extended comparison with Gawain at this point. At first Gawain vehemently refuses to accept any gift from the Lady, but he quickly relents when she claims the girdle can save his life. As I have already acknowledged, Gawain takes the green girdle after considering the consequences of adopting a potent defence against the Green Knight: "Þen kest þe knyȝt, and hit come to his hert / Hit were a juel for þe jopardé þat hym jugged were" (1855-56). These lines are crucial, for they implicate the heart as the center of cognitive action and further indicate the very real fear that is guiding Gawain's own judgment at this moment.

Let us first note the context of judgment here, as Gawain seems to be attempting to reason his way through this moral impasse. True to type, however, the knight, beset by the cardiosensory pleasures of imaginative gazing, fails in his reasoning. The gift of the girdle awakens Gawain's desire to live, and his emotional response to this seemingly salvific prospect derives from the "hert" of the confused knight, whose heart is by now subverted by the pleasures of the Lady and the promise of the girdle: "the wording... indicates that the idea of saving himself with the girdle is not strictly his but comes to him from somewhere outside himself and plants itself in his heart" (Anderson, *Language and*

Imagination 200). Anderson's claim has validity considering the external influence of the Lady, whose impulses to tempt Gawain originate within the heart and subsequently register delight within Gawain's own heart by way of their shared gaze. I am also convinced by the argument of David Aers, who suggests that this reference to Gawain's "heart" denotes conduct in an intensely private field of action, a milieu that Gawain's very public dealings with Bertilak can never broach, which leads to a split in Gawain's identity between public and private action (165). In this case, public action refers to the behaviours condoned by the public symbol of the pentangle; private refers to Gawain's impulse for self-preservation at any cost even if the values of the pentangle must be sacrificed (however unconscious that sacrifice is). The fact that this impulse is centered upon the heart of Gawain calls to mind the discipline of humility required in the *Pearl*-poet's rendering of the eighth Beatitude in *Patience*: "Þay arn happen also þat con her hert stere, / For hores is þe heuen-ryche, as I er sayde" (27-28).[90] The poet's linking of humility and patience bears relevance here, because the need for fortitude in this moment of temptation requires Gawain to precisely control his heart. The yearning for survival that has entered Gawain's heart at the urging of the Lady indicates that this control is wavering. The knight's subsequent offering of thanks to the Lady further emphasizes the cognitive implications of Gawain's

[90] I include the Vulgate line in order to illustrate the significant change the poet has made in his treatment of this source: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). It is also useful at this point to remember the poet's deliberate linking of the eighth (and last) Beatitude with the first: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). For the *Pearl*-poet, humility (poverty of spirit) is a virtue expressly linked with the qualities of patient self-control. This understanding of the Beatitudes in the poems of MS. Cotton Nero A.x is consistent with Corey Owen's reading of patient fortitude in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Owen describes Gawain's fault as a failure of fortitude overcome by passions such as fear (184-85).

subversion of heart, for he thanks her "Ful þro with hert and þoȝt" (1867). Led into misperception, Gawain's "þoȝt" fails to recognize that he is about to make an error of judgment.[91]

This failure of judgement parallels the fallen reason of Nebuchadnezzar and to a lesser extent Balthazar. In comparing these characters, my emphasis lies upon the shared blindness of pride that characterizes all of these figures in the poems of the *Pearl*-poet. Within the wide-ranging debate concerning the nature of Gawain's error, however, I perceive a common tendency to acknowledge the myopia of Gawain's moral foresight. Even critics who wish to excuse or mitigate the severity of Gawain's missteps tend to acknowledge that Gawain is ignorant of the fact that an error has been committed. Adopting the language of sight to articulate this point, Gordon M. Shedd claims that Gawain is "blind to the moral implications of his action at the moment of accepting the lace with its condition of silence" (8). Hunt similarly excuses Gawain's behaviour: "There is no calculation here or will to transgress. The hero's anxiety and *cortaysye* blind him to the

[91] According to Peter Whiteford, Gawain "accepts and retains the girdle without having properly attended to the implications of his action, without, that is, having properly estimated the threat that the girdle poses, as the *vis aestimativa* should have permitted him to do. In simple terms, he was looking the wrong way" (232). Whiteford is putting too much credit in the properties of the estimative faculty, which in the western medieval context pertains more to instinctive responses rather than reasoned cogitation; however, his broader point that Gawain is making an error that reflects a deficit of judgement is sound. Rather than *vis aestimativa*, reason itself ought to be implicated in assessing Gawain's failure of wit. Deborah L. Black argues that the medieval western tendency to treat the *vis aestimativa* or *aestimatio* as a faculty of animal instinct is excessively reductive compared to Avicenna's more nuanced discourse on the nature of intentions perceived by estimation (65-66). Read within the context of Avicenna's broader treatment of estimation as a faculty concerned with the intentions associated with sensible forms, the *Pearl*-poet's representation of flawed "wyt" in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* might seem more amenable to Whiteford's naming of the estimative power as the faculty at work in Gawain's flawed judgement than I am willing to concede, but the *Pearl*-poet operates within the western milieu in which the understanding of *vis aestimativa* is constrained by an easy reliance upon Avicenna's tendency to explain estimation through examples of motion and appetition found in the behaviour of animals, and this way of thinking about estimation is not consistent with the higher order judgement at work in Gawain's claiming of the green girdle.

consequences of his actions" (5). These arguments may excuse Gawain's will, but the present argument is concerned not with affection but with reason, and if the power of the will to make moral choices can be subverted by flawed reason, it is well worthwhile to examine the causes of Gawain's rational failings.

Gawain is now consumed by a blindness of spirit that obscures his rational faculty and with it his capacity to appraise the true jeopardy of his condition. This point is demonstrated by Gawain's subsequent omission of the girdle during confession, when he neglects to mention his intention to withhold the Lady's gift from Bertilak:

> Bot wered not þis ilk wyȝe for wele þis gordel,
> For pryde of þe pendauntez, þaȝ polyst þay were,
> And þaȝ þe glyterande golde glent vpon endez,
> Bot for to sauen hymself.... (2037-40)

Critical here is the confirmation that Gawain wears this girdle in the interest of self-preservation. The poet's phrasing makes certain to discount the idea that Gawain is motivated by any kind of covetous desire to possess the girdle. The "pryde of þe pendauntez" is not to be valued in and of itself; rather pride of quite a different kind is the true problem for Gawain. After the second beheading game, Gawain identifies covetousness as a significant catalyst in his downfall:

> Corsed worth cowarddyse and couetyse boþe!
> In yow is vylany and vyse, þat vertue disstryez…
> Lo! þer þe falssyng—foule mot hit falle!
> For care of þy knokke, cowardyse me taȝt

To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake:

Þat is larges and lewté, þat longez to knyȝtez.

Now I am fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer

Of trecherye and vntrawþe. (2374-83)

The speaker's explicit mention that Gawain is not tempted by feelings of covetousness for the beauty of the pentangle and Gawain's subsequent claim that his cowardice has in some sense been spurred by covetousness insist that the object of Gawain's coveting be identified. Gawain is angry with himself because he has realized that, by trying to claim the girdle for protection, he has coveted his own life. For this reason he laments a neglect of his "kynde," but by trying to survive he has revealed a tendency to share the same animal nature that compels Bertilak's prey to flee their pursuing hunters.

The very frailty of human mortality leads Gawain to value his life before the ideals of the pentangle. According to David Farley Hills, this fault of Gawain's may be articulated in Augustinian terms as "*cupiditas*… a state of inordinate love for oneself, and it is just such a disposition that Gawain has shown in accepting the girdle to save his life" (129). This love of self, though different in degree, is the same fault that inspires Nebuchadnezzar to raise himself to the status of divinity. This would be the extreme example of inordinate self-love, a fault that Gawain identifies with the weakness of the flesh and even pride itself. After his trials have concluded and Gawain's frailty has been exposed, Gawain says that he will gaze upon the green girdle as a token of fault: "And þus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes, / Þe loke to þis luf-lace schal leþe my hert" (2437-38). I return to this particular passage one final time in order to indicate the ocular nature of Gawain's response to shame. Seeking correction for his fault, he will

look upon the lace as a visual reminder. The green girdle, accepted through the fault of self-love, proves hereafter a reminder of the fault. Gawain acknowledges this fault as a defect of the weak flesh, and the tone of his self-condemnation is so very severe it might seem more apt to apply this opprobrium to figures such as Balthazar and Nebuchadnezzar, whose "fayntyse of the flesche" and "teches of fylþe" would seem to warrant such rhetoric. In Gawain's speech there are indeed audible echoes of the *Pearl*-poet's own editorializing critique familiar in the homiletic poems. Amongst this excessive self-loathing, Gawain explicitly identifies pride as a notable flaw in need of correction, and this flaw is certainly consistent with Gawain's character in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Gawain, burdened by the symbolic weight of the pentangle, is like a vessel containing the hopes and desires of Arthur's court. The particular locus of Gawain's conduct is the world of material action and time, and the mode of action is bodily; thus the pentangle would seem to put upon the body of Gawain these notable expectations. It is certainly the interest of material desires that compels Gawain to take the green girdle and seek the preservation of his own life, but at the conclusion of the poem Gawain has dismissed the pentangle as personal emblem. Gawain's mind is instead fully fixed upon the girdle strapped across his body. The mark of shame is an image he cannot turn away from. This image, so very different from the pentangle symbol and indeed a modification of the pentangle symbol, is inextricably linked to Gawain's bodily life. Removed from the body of Bertilak's Lady, the girdle is initially wound about Gawain's waist, described as "balȝe haunchez" or "swelling hips" (2032).[92] At the conclusion of the poem, the

[92] Heng argues that although the pentangle is "an abstract, bodiless sign, the girdle is a sign that is also a fully material object, one that carries… the impress… of the body itself" ("Feminine Knots" 505). Citing

girdle is tied at Gawain's side with a knot located at waist level. This positioning of the girdle corresponds to the material body lower stratum and thus tethers Gawain's expression and recognition of self to the material conditions of the body. The fact that the girdle is specifically laid across the newly formed scar on Gawain's neck further confirms the bodily inflection of girdle as sign. It is a sign, but it is also a body and thus lays emphasis upon the embodied nature of the man who wears it. Wearing the girdle, Gawain adopts a symbolic posture of what Marie Borroff identifies as "the mortal perspective" of reality: "the mutable, transient condition of the embodied psyche" ("The Passing of Judgment" 107). The girdle sign recognizes the frailty of human flesh, and Gawain's gesture in wearing it amounts to a resignation on the part of the knight.

The "loke" to the love-lace is an ocular gesture that verifies for us that the trials of Hautdesert and the Green Chapel have altered Gawain's perceptions and specifically set his contemplations upon what he understands as the flawed materiality of human existence. This gazing serves to "leþe" or "humble" Gawain's heart, a cardiosensory detail indicating that Gawain's pride has in some sense been corrected. The fact that his vision is directed at the lace, the sign of the frail flesh itself, serves to explain Gawain's pessimistic tone; however, the details of this chastened gaze also enable us to understand

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the moment that Gawain dons the girdle, Claire R. Kinney indicates that the wearing of the lace makes Gawain's own body more "visible" (53). Kinney further observes that the swelling hips of Gawain mark a moment of feminization for the hero; however, I concur with the opinion of Guillemette Bolens, who suggests that the emphasis upon Gawain's "balȝe haunchez" produces a conscious parallel for Gawain's body not with the female body but with the bodies of the hunted animals in fitt three (144). Bolens's interpretation is based upon the verbal parallels of bodily descriptors in fitts three and four, for the word "haunch" occurs during the splitting of deer carcasses, a moment described as an unlacing of the bodily membranes: "Alle þe rymez by þe rybbez radly þay lauce; / So ryde þay of by resoun bi þe rygge bonez / Euenden to þe haunche, þat henged alle samen, / And heuen hit vp al hole and hwen hit of þere" (1343-46). This understanding of correspondence is consistent with Marie Borroff's observation that the phrase "schyre grece" used in fitt four to describe the flesh of Gawain as it is severed by the Green Knight's third swing also occurs in fitt one when the Green Knight receives his own blow (425) as well as in fitt three when Bertilak presents his first catch of the day for exchange and shows Gawain "þe schyree grece schorne vpon rybbes" (1378) ("*Sir Gawain*" 109-10).

that Gawain is mistaken in his excessive self-condemnation. The Green Knight's test for Gawain had only been intended to correct the pride of Arthur's court, a pride that Gawain in particular had unwittingly embraced. Bertilak informs Gawain that Morgan la Faye "wayned me vpon þis wyse to your wynne halle / For to assay þe surquidré, ȝif hit soth were / Þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table" (2456-58). After all of the Green Knight's deceptions (and setting aside the Green Knight's secondary aim to scare the life out of Guinivere) surely this is a sincere statement of his intent. All of the game-playing artifice revealing the "vnleuté" or "faithlessness" of Gawain was the praxis by which Gawain's (and Camelot's) excessive pride could be exposed; however, Gawain's "vnleuté" must be recognized as an accident of his character rather than an essential property of it. Bertilak recognizes this distinction when he graciously invites Gawain to join his aunt Morgan back at the castle for some seasonal merry-making. Moreover, the Green Knight declares that he loves Gawain precisely for the sake of his "grete trauþe" (2470). This statement affirms Bertilak's understanding that Gawain, now humbled, may go on living secure in the knowledge that even though he made a mistake he is not therefore obliged to regard himself as hopelessly damned by an innately sinful condition of soul. In spite of his austere sense of shame, Gawain remains, in Bertilak's judgement, a man of great virtue. The situation, however, invites differences of opinion, and Gawain sees the matter quite differently than the Green Knight does.

The problem, as ever, lies in Gawain's self-perception. Whereas prior to Bertilak's tests Gawain had mistakenly overstated his own perfection, Gawain now errs by conflating his commission of fault with his very identity. His gaze fixed upon the emblem of his own fault, Gawain misapprehends the true nature of that fault. He falsely

regards possession of the girdle, which is an accident resulting from his actions, as a sign for his essential nature. Moreover he considers this fallen nature to be intractably tethered to his material existence as an embodied human being, "Þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed" (2435). This evaluation would seem consistent with the *Pearl*-poet's own statements regarding the purity of human conduct and the frailty of embodied human nature, but Gawain takes his self-critique to irrational extremes. Exactly how far his self-assessment has missed the mark is revealed when Gawain explains the meaning of the girdle to Arthur and his court. Referring to the girdle, Gawain declares that

> Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere in my nek.
>
> Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I laȝt haue
>
> Of couardise and couetyse, þat I haf caȝt þare;
>
> Þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne.
>
> And I mot nedez hit were wyle I may last;
>
> For mon may hyden his harme bot vnhap ne may hit,
>
> For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer. (2506-12)

Gawain inflates the enormity of his fault and replaces the interlocking notion of the pentangle virtues with an inescapable web of iniquity, in which the cowardice of mortality binds the covetousness of life and thus weaves the conduct of "vntrawþe," a concept antithetical to the system of ideas upon which Gawain has staked his very identity.[93]

[93] It is also worth mentioning that the second section of *Cleanness*, the poet's adaptation of the Genesis narrative of Lot, ends with the curse of Lot's wife, who, after looking back to behold the forbidden sight of Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed, is transformed into a pillar of salt. The speaker comments on the fate of Lot's wife and attributes her curse to "two fautes þat þe fol watz founde in mistrauþe: / On, ho serued at þe soper salt bifore Dryȝtyn, / And syþen, ho blusched hir bihynde, þaȝ hir forboden were" (996-98). In this case, "mistrauþe" involves impropriety of conduct and subsequently looking upon what is not to be seen. Gawain's "vntrawþe" follows a similar pattern. The second portion of Gawain's misdeed lies in his

Gawain's pessimistic conflation of self and the fallen flesh of the body indicates a remarkable shift from his previous failure of self-perception, but this shift is not really an improvement. Gawain certainly comes to knowledge of his all-too-human limitations, but this knowledge is imperfect, for it lacks any sense of how one ought to respond to the apparent flaws of the human condition. The *Pearl*-poet's repetition of the phrase "schyre grece" during the hunt and beheading scenes juxtaposes Gawain's body with the bodies of the hunted deer, and this juxtaposition is instructive because it reveals that Gawain, rather than being elevated to a greater mastery of self, is reduced to a less rational state by the Green Knight's ludic trials. Arthur Lindley discusses the precisely described manner with which the girdle is worn across the chest of Gawain. Worn as a baldric, the girdle constitutes a diagonal line intersecting the endless knot pattern already emblazoned upon Gawain's clothing. The girdle traces a line across Gawain's chest from the right shoulder downward to the left thigh in the manner of a heraldic bend sinister (85). Unlike "the monosemous, unambiguous character of the pentangle as a sign... Gawain's new sign, in contrast, is polysemous, complex, an acknowledgement of a new sense of himself" (Plummer 206). As the body of Gawain has been cut by the slicing edge of the blade, the green girdle, retained as a sign of shame, cuts through the vestigial form of the pentangle in a perpetual act of discursive pointing. According to Paul F. Reichardt's interpretation of Gawain's wound, the symbolic severing of the pentangle denotes a rupture between Gawain's will and the rational soul (158). For evidence illuminating the modifications of soul at work in Gawain's transformation in fitt four, Reichardt refers to Dante's citation of Aristotle's philosophy of the soul in *Il Convivio*:

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lingering gaze upon the emblem of sin, the sign of his own chastisement, a sign that fails to turn his thoughts to spiritual renewal and instead subverts his heart with excessive despair.

> For, as the Philosopher says in the second book of *On the Soul*, the powers of the soul stand one above another as the figure of the quadrangle stands above that of the triangle, and the pentagon (that is, a figure having five sides) stands above the quadrangle: so the sensitive power stands above the vegetative power, and the intellectual power stands above the sensitive power. Therefore if what is left by removing the last side of a pentagon is a quadrangle, and no longer a pentagon, then what is left when the last power of the soul is removed is no longer a man but something possessing only a sensitive soul, which is to say, a brute. (IV. 7)

Through the common wound of the "schyre grece," Gawain shares more in common with Bertilak's prey than just their state of vulnerability. When Gawain's wound is understood through the parallel breaking of his pentangle, Gawain's failure of perception is revealed to be a decline of his cognitive capacity from the powers of the rational human soul to the sensitive but irrational conception of mere beasts. In this way, Gawain's loss of rational cognition parallels that of *Cleanness*'s Nebuchadnezzar, who misapprehends himself through pride and is subsequently cursed with a debased animal existence as punishment for his sins. Nebuchadnezzar's mind is later restored through the power of penance, but Gawain asserts that there can be no correction of sin: "For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer" (2512).

Referring to the green girdle garment as the visible emblem of sin, this section of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* imagines sin through the figure of soiled vestments that can never be removed. The most startling component of this declaration is Gawain's rejection of penitential theology. In fitt three Gawain's actions had indicated his belief in the power of confession, an essential component of penitential doctrine, but his speech

about the girdle offered in the final stanza of the poem flatly denies the possibility of penance. Gawain's attitude is unequivocal: wherever sin is to be found it can never be erased. His cowardice and covetousness may not be concealed nor can they be removed. This is a radical opinion, and, even though Gawain's self-condemnation contains some verbal echoes familiar in the other poems of the *Pearl*-poet, Gawain's belief that his material sins are beyond the possibility of spiritual reconciliation is quite obviously mistaken from a doctrinal standpoint. The motif also appears in the wedding guest section of *Cleanness* (49-160),[94] after which the poet affirms that the defiling "wedez" of sin are indeed impediments to salvation:

> Bot war þe wel, if þou wylt, þy wedez ben clene
> And honest for þe halyday, lest þou harme lache,
> For aproch þou to þat Prynce of parage noble,
> He hates helle no more þen hem þat ar sowlé.
> Wich arn þenne þy wedez þou wrappez þe inne,
> Þat schal schewe hem so schene schrowde of þe best? (165-70)

By Gawain's own account, the wearing of the girdle indicates that he is not wearing the best of garments. His body is rather wrapped in sin, and according to Gawain this garment can never be removed. This final detail is problematic, for it suggests that the condition of sin is immutable and that the state of damnation is therefore utterly fixed. This is perhaps the most disturbing of Gawain's misperceptions. His self-regard, hitherto

[94] Soiled clothing as an impediment to salvation is a familiar trope. A notable late fourteenth-century English example may be observed in *Piers Plowman*'s Haukyn the Active Man and his dirty coat (Passus XIII, 271-421). Langland identifies the pursuit of spiritual purity with Haukyn's attempts to clean his fouled clothing. Contrary to this, Gawain renounces the very possibility of attaining purity. The cloth that marks his fault cannot be purified. For Gawain, the embodied condition that the girdle represents is without hope of salvation.

misled by excessive pride, has by this point yielded to the shame of public exposure of his misdeeds, and he now adopts a humbled though still erroneous perspective. In his newfound pessimism, Gawain has given up his pride, but at the same time he has also surrendered his belief in the possibility of salvation. To be certain, Gawain's actions at the end of fitt three implicitly indicate that Gawain had believed in the efficacy of penance. Gawain's confession may have been flawed, but the fact that he sought the ritual of confession at all indicates that he believed his sins could be absolved. The Green Knight actually refers to Gawain's final test as a kind of chivalric confession and instructs Gawain that he has in fact received penance "apert of þe poynt of myn egge" (2392). Furthermore, Bertilak insists that this penitential trial has rendered Gawain "polysed of þat ply3t and pured as clene / As þou hadez neuer forfeted syþen þou watz fy rst borne" (2393-94). Gawain's subsequent refusal of the very possibility of penance is a refusal of the Green Knight's consolations and an affirmation of his new way of apprehending himself: as a fallen creature of flawed flesh.

Gawain's refusal of penance is contrary to the poet's own effusive recommendation of penance in *Cleanness*. Immediately prior to the third and final discernible section of *Cleanness*, the Babylon section, the speaker offers what may appear to be an extended excursus on penance; however, this passage is not a digression, for it demonstrates practical advice related to achieving the didactic objective of the poem: obtaining vision through purity of heart. The speaker asks the rhetorical question, "How schulde we se, þen may we say, þat Syre vpon throne?" (1112). To this question, the speaker offers the following answer:

þat Mayster is mercyable, þa3 þou be man fenny,

And al tomarred in myre whyle þou on molde lyuyes;

Þou may schyne þurȝ schryfte, þaȝ þou haf schome serued,

And pure þe with penaunce tyl þou a perle worþe. (1113-16)

The mercy of God is a notable detail, for it comes amidst a discussion replete with divine condemnation of human wickedness figured in abject images of filth and uncleanness. In spite of all that is wicked or flawed in human life, *Cleanness* insists that human nature is not fallen beyond hope of salvation, that sin can be cleansed, and that this cleansing is obtained through the mercy of Christ. Drawing emphasis away from the material dross of fleshly sin, *Cleanness* dismisses the metaphorical imperfection of the spiritual pearl motif as a temporary condition that can and should be corrected:

And if hit cheue þe chaunce vncheryst ho worþe,

Þat ho blyndes of ble in bour þer ho lygges,

Nobot wasch hir wyth wourchyp in wyn as ho askes,

Ho by kynde schal becom clerer þen are.

So if folk be defowled by vnfre chaunce,

Þat he be sulped in sawle, seche to schryfte,

And he may polyce hym at þe prest, by penaunce taken,

Wel bryȝter þen þe beryl oþer browden perles. (1125-32)

The poet's corrective for the soiled pearl is a process of cleansing in wine that invokes penitential and Eucharistic imagery and proffers a glimpse at what Gawain fails to perceive at the close of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.[95] The Green Knight's simile

[95] In the *Parson's Tale*, Chaucer refers to excessive despair as "wanhope," "that is despeir of the mercy of God, that comth somtyme of to muche outrageous sorwe, and somtyme of to muche drede, ymaginynge that he hath doon so muche synne that it wol nat availlen hym, though he wolde repenten hym and forsake synne" (X. 692). When Jonah lies in the grip of the whale, the *Pearl*-poet describes Jonah as "wanlez of

comparing Gawain to a "perle bi þe quite pese" reminds us that Gawain is still an exceptional knight, and within the context of *Cleanness*'s commentary on purification it also reminds us that Gawain's soul can yet be perfected through further penance (2364).

Gawain's misapprehension of self, both at the outset of his quest and at the end, stems from the failure of reason. Gawain's pentangle, signifying as it does a kind of earthly ideal of human conduct, serves as an emblem of the natural powers of the human soul but also represents the hero's pride. According to Reichardt, "The pentangle, though a sign of a kind of perfection, is also an emblem of *homo se relictus*, the individual operating without the aid of divine grace" (159). The pursuit of moral perfection is a noble aim, but in the context of Christian belief this aim cannot be accomplished without the intercession of grace. The cut on Gawain's neck may wound his pride, but this prick of pain fails to steer Gawain on a more meaningful spiritual path. On the contrary, the Green Knight's intercession has the consequence of exacerbating Gawain's spiritual crisis, because whereas Bertilak had sought to confuse Arthur's court on behalf of Morgan, "Ho wayned me þis wonder your wyttez to reue" (2459),[96] the actual effect of the Green Knight's tests is to baffle Gawain's wits, primarily his reason. Surely the

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wele," "without hope of joy" (262). Sister Mary Madeleva's study of *Pearl* identifies this attitude as one of "spiritual dryness," and she describes what a person experiencing this state of spiritual desolation must endure: "he is bewildered, desolate, downcast, and discouraged... He casts about for the causes of his apparent desertion and usually locates it in his own unworthiness... He fears that he is failing in his pursuit of perfection and is more disturbed in heart and soul than he would be over any loss or sorrow whatever" (27). In her discussion of medieval and early modern attitudes regarding despair, Susan Snyder cites the distinction between sinful sorrow and "fruitful sorrow." She cites John Cassian's (c. 360-435 AD) opinion that correct sorrow "is humble, obedient, patient, forebearing; the other is impatient, full of rancor, ineffective, irrational" (21). Snyder further links the despair of inordinate sorrow with the sin of pride (32). She traces this link through the writings of St. Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux, whose discussion of despairing ignorance seems appropriate to quote in the context of Gawain's faults: "ignorance of self produces pride, while ignorance of God produces despair" (47).

[96] Most readers of this line have interpreted "wyttez" to mean the five external senses. I acknowledge the influence of Alice Blackwell (10) and Peter Whiteford (228), who both forward the view that the *Pearl*-poet also uses the word "wyttez" to refer to the inner wits or cognitive faculties.

Green Knight, who claims he has granted Gawain the blessings of penance, cannot mean to fool Gawain and leave him bereft of wit. The ludic mien of Green Knight forecloses the possibility of true malice entering into his intention. However, judging by the Green Knight's attempts to encourage Gawain in the aftermath of the beheading game, it seems very possible that while the Green Knight's unusual disguise serves to "reue" or "rob" the outward wits or senses of Arthur's court (MED "reven" [v.]. [1] "to rob"), the elaborate series of trials set for Gawain also serve to "reue" or "grieve" the hero's inner wits or cognitive faculties (MED "reuen" [v.1]. [1.d] "to grieve"). Gawain's vexation draws him to an understanding of the worldly folly of his prideful vanity but fails to turn his gaze away from the worldly flesh itself.[97] Judging from the conclusion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, one gets the sense that thinking overmuch on the world and flesh, either in pleasure or in pain, amounts to a self-destructive exercise in vanity. According to Gerald Morgan, if we were to judge Gawain as harshly as he judges himself we would mistake the significance of the pentangle:

> There is a danger of treating the pentangle symbolism with the wrong kind of rigour, and thus of supposing that Gawain's behaviour is subjected to a more critical scrutiny than the poet intends. It is necessary to clarify the nature of the

[97] *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, a penitential guide based on Archbishop of York John Thoresby's 1357 edicts for lay religious knowledge, depicts the five inner wits as consisting of will, reason, mind, imagination, and thought and describes how the Christian soul must turn from worldly vanities:

> These ben also þy fyue Inwyttys.
> Wyl./ Resoun./ Mynd./ ymaginacioun. and thogth.
> lok þat þy wyl. be good and holy.
> and loke þat þy Resoun rewle þe. and nat þy fleschly lust/
> and loke þat þy Mynde. be good and honest.
> And lok þyn ymagynacioun be spedynge in louyng of god.
> and not be set to harm or schame.
> And loke þy thowȝt be groundyd in þe ioy of heuyn.
> and drede þe peyne of helle.
> and þynk not ouer mekyl in þe vanite of þe world.
> But þynk deuowtly on þe passion of crist in wo / and in wele.
> and he schal helpe þe in al þy nede. (349-60)

> claim that the poet makes on behalf of his hero. Dante has shown us the truth when he says that nobility is the perfection of each thing in accordance with the peculiarity of its nature. Here we need to recognize that the pentangle is not by definition a perfect unity; it possesses greater unity than a quadrangle but less than a circle. ("Pentangle Symbolism" 780)

Gawain cannot set his gaze upon a different object, but, as we have seen, the *Pearl*-poet's broader discourse on vision imagines a far greater visual object than the fallible embodied nature of man. The homiletic poems pursue beatific vision, a prospect that is far removed from Gawain's enfleshed, worldly gazing. The rational mind that Gawain loses in the carnal gazing of worldly flesh must be recovered by the perfectible spiritual nature of man, promised by the incarnation of Christ and figured in the Eucharist as the body of Christ.[98]

[98] The figure of the circle introduced by Morgan in the above passage serves as a fitting image to join my discussion of frustrated vision in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* with my concluding chapter on *Pearl*. The *Pearl*-poet employs the recursive nature of the geometric circle as a vital similitude for divinity, and this divine circularity is most intensely evoked in *Pearl*. As we shall see, the reasoning faculty that Gawain abandons through bodily gazing is precisely what the Pearl Dreamer recovers through bodily gazing of quite a different kind.

CHAPTER V — Seeing the "Gostly Drem": *Pearl*'s Contemplative Imagination

The conclusion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* illustrates the folly of a man fixated upon the flaws of fallen human nature. Gawain's gaze, turned upon the materiality of his wound, demonstrates how an irrational preoccupation with material flaws can limit a person's ability to form a meaningful understanding of the world and his or her place in it. Rather than derive a meaningful sense of self through rational reflection, Gawain observes his own flawed conduct and rejects the capacity for redemptive change through contrition and penance. Gawain is rather left with only the pain of failure, materially figured by his wound and the green girdle sash. At the beginning of *Pearl*, the Pearl Dreamer makes a similar comment about the human tendency to fixate upon the potential meaninglessness of worldly frustration. Standing before the grave of his departed daughter and overwhelmed by debilitating grief, the Dreamer reflects upon his inconsolable sadness and expresses an insuperable sorrow:

> Bifore þat spot my honde I spennd
> For care ful colde þat to me caȝt;
> A deuely dele in my hert denned,
> Þaȝ resoun sette myseluen saȝt.
> I playned my perle þat þer watz penned,
> Wyth fyrce skyllez þat faste faȝt.
> Þaȝ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
> My wreched wylle in wo ay wraȝte.
> I felle vpon þat floury flaȝt,
> Suche odour to my hernez schot;

I slode vpon a slepyng-slaȝte

On þat precios perle withouten spot. (49-60)

This stanza must be examined at length, because it represents a counter stroke against cardiosensory perception, against spiritual understanding, indeed, against the capacity to formulate and discern meaning of any kind at all. We must once more reiterate that though the cerebral architecture of common sense, imagination, and memory is localized in the brain, all of these faculties are nonetheless animated by spiritual powers that emanate from the soul. Thus, the images beheld by the imagination may be processed in the brain's cell of imagination, but they are finally received by the all-important soul within the locus of the heart. The Dreamer's pain at this earthly "spot" appears to linger in the heart like a destructive presence. The "deuely dele," "debilitating" or "desolating pain," literally lurks within his heart and spurs him not to reflection but to sophistic debate and pointless complaint. Only the intercession of reason seems capable of drawing the Dreamer out of his hopeless irrational struggle, but even this prospect is denied by the Dreamer's defeated admission that his very will is turned hopelessly against the "kynde of Christ." This rejection of the "kynde of Christ" amounts to a denial of the "nature of Christ," and, in the context of human mortality and the Dreamer's grief over the death of his Pearl, the Dreamer's rejection of this nature is a rejection of the promised resurrection, a miracle that denies the finality of death and overcomes death as a cause for sorrow.[99]

[99] In his discussion of the theological structure of *Pearl*, Louis Blenkner identifies the "kynde of Christ" as an allusion to the miracle of the Resurrection. According to Blenkner, Christ's nature is summed up in the words of St. Bonaventure, who commends Christ as "'the virtue and wisdom of God, the Word incarnate'—whose resurrection is figured by the *nudum granum* of I Corinthians" (Blenkner 55, citing Bonaventure *Itinerarium mentis* 10; *Opera Omnia* 5, 298)

The Dreamer's conscious rejection of Christ's nature is notable in itself, but the particular circumstances of his rejection are what make this moment in the text particularly worthy of attention. The Dreamer acknowledges that in spite of the "deuely dele"[100] he feels at heart he knows that "resoun sette myseluen saȝte," "reason [should] put me at peace." He knows what Christian doctrine teaches about loss and worldly grief, and he has learned the comfort that the Church has to offer as a response to such grief, but this knowledge is ineffectual for the Dreamer, for his will refuses to be calmed even by doctrines he professes to believe, and this is what makes the Dreamer's position so very worthy of analysis. His traumatic paradox of the mind amounts to a failure of reason, and the cause of this failure must be attributed to the transcendent properties of Christ's "nature." The very idea of Christian resurrection defies the rational human experience of reality. The promise, however much one wishes to believe it, that a miraculous event can somehow overcome the apparent mortal limitations of human existence strains credulity. The Dreamer is put in the position of being unable to credit what he professes to believe, because the teachings of Christian doctrine confront reason with a concept beyond what reason can reckon. The reason is equipped to make distinctions (good/bad, right/wrong) based upon what it can glean from the imagination through external sensory experience and/or from past experiences compiled as images retrieved from the memory. The operations of the reason (*discretio*) are thus contingent

[100] In her discussion of the potential meanings for *deuely*, Mary Vincent Hillman identifies misguided will as the catalyst that perpetuates the Dreamer's sorrow: "the nature of Christ gave him grounds for comfort, but his self-will made him suffer in the pain of his sorrow" (49). Deborah L. Black's discussion of imagination and estimation sheds some light on the psychology at work in the Dreamer's rejection of reason. She claims that the inner sense of estimation presents the mind with the intentions directly associated with sensible forms (things that are apparent to the five external senses), whereas the reason often contends with the forms of abstract principles that have no material referent in the sensible world. She concludes that this conflict of estimation and higher reason can often explain akratic behaviour (submitting the will to short-term considerations of pleasure or pain while defying apparently held moral values) (61).

upon observed reality, and because of this the often supernatural assumptions and claims of Christian belief supersede the capacities of rational thought. One who has not witnessed a person raised from the dead can certainly want to believe that such a thing could happen and may even decide that such a thing in fact is possible, but this belief depends not upon reason but upon a distinct mental process that medieval writers usually identify as "*intellectus*" or "understanding."

I submit that the Dreamer's crisis of will and reason is a problem solved through recourse to imagination: the cognitive faculty responsible for explaining sensory information to human reason. The Dreamer admits that reason is no comfort, not yet. The point of existential stasis in which the Dreamer finds himself gripped gives over to a swooning that recalls Jonah's slumber within the hull of the ship prior to the whale episode; both instances present the human soul at odds with God and incapable of processing the signs of spirit that it would otherwise be made fit to receive.[101] In *Patience,* of course, the solution to this impasse is the virtue patience itself. For the Dreamer of *Pearl*, patience is likewise a rare virtue to come by; however, in the Dreamer's wilful intransigence before the finality of death (an unwillingness to accept loss), he imagines a more proactive human response to rescue reason from pathos, and the medium through which reason emerges to restore the Dreamer is that of the dream itself, which takes the site of grief, so negating in its excess pain, and sublimates it into the site from which a vision can emerge and perhaps counteract such grief. Imagination

[101] The Dreamer's "slepyng-slaȝte" verbally echoes the moment in *Patience* when Jonah is chastised for falling asleep in the ship's hold. An angry sailor grabs Jonah and "Arayned hym ful runyschly what raysoun he hade / In such slaȝtes of sorȝe to slepe so faste" (191-92). The line indicates that the deathly slaughter-state or "blow" of Jonah's slumber is associated with the prophet's depressed mood. This is certainly true of the Pearl Dreamer as well, for his transition to sleep is immediately preceded by reference to his subverted will in refusal of rational comfort.

achieves this through its transformative processes of image-making. This analysis will again lay emphasis upon the specific failure of reason, a crisis that is more explicitly presented in the figure of the Pearl Dreamer, who is seized by a "deuely dele" in his heart, a debilitating sorrow that suppresses the capacity of reason to assuage his suffering. As is the case with Gawain, the Dreamer's ability to use rational thought is suppressed. Unlike the case in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, however, the Dreamer speaking in *Pearl* acknowledges that reason should be able to overcome this impasse. *Pearl* is about the rehabilitation of reason through the intercession of images in the form of the dream vision itself.

The problem for the Pearl Dreamer is that the understanding relies upon an inner eye of contemplation that is inaccessible to the great mass of humanity.[102] This argument relies upon Augustine's tri-partite categorization of perception and thought promulgated in *De genesi ad litteram*. Let us recall Augustine's three discrete categories of vision: bodily, spiritual, and intellectual. Bodily sights are all of those perceptions imprinted upon our imaginations that we receive through our material senses. Spiritual sights are the mental cogitations that we contemplate in the reason through the aid of imagination but without recourse to external species. Reason is the precise locus of these perceptions and cogitations, which are either contemplations of material things that are absent or contemplations of ideas constituted as visible representations of abstract concepts. There are things, however, that are not visible to the external eye of the body or the inner eye of

[102] Ineke van't Spijker suggests that the dividing line in sacred history between pre and post-lapsarian humanity marks a decline in the human capacity for understanding of the divine: "After the Fall the divine has become out of reach for human knowledge – the eye of contemplation has been lost. Access, via reason, to either spiritual *invisibilia* or to what lies beneath the visible surface of corporeal things, has become difficult: the eye of reason has become clouded. And although the eye of the body remains, it is subject to all sorts of limitations" (19).

reason. Certain concepts cannot be observed with bodily sight, nor can they be clothed in visible form and revealed to the reason. These higher cogitations are those transcendent spectacles such as the presence of angels and the face of God, things Augustine classifies as intellectual visions that cannot be seen or even satisfactorily described in terms of visible species.

Augustine's tri-partite theory of vision serves as a significant conceptual foundation for later medieval theories of cognition. For instance, the negative or apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite draws upon Augustine's categorical distinctions and posits a heavenly realm of divine beings that see and contemplate God directly through cogitative processes that duplicate the transcendent understanding of God Himself:

> [T]he holy ranks of the Celestial Beings are present with and participate in the Divine Principle in a degree far surpassing all those things which merely exist, and irrational living creatures, and rational human beings. For moulding themselves intelligibly to the imitation of God, and looking in a supermundane way to the Likeness of the Supreme Deity, and longing to form the intellectual appearance of It, they naturally have more abundant communion with Him, and with unremitting activity they tend eternally up the steep, as far as is permitted, through the ardour of their unwearying divine love, and they receive the Primal Radiance in a pure and immaterial manner, adapting themselves to this in a life wholly intellectual. (*The Celestial Hierarchies* IV. 32-33)

Only those divine beings (angels) whose natures are like the nature of God can experience an unalloyed vision of God or contemplate God in an unmediated manner. In

the case of the *Pearl*-poet's work, the vision of a prophet such as Daniel would be not an intellectual vision but a spiritual vision, for the image of God revealed in Balthazar's hall is that of a hand, a material representation of an immaterial reality. The sight of a hand writing on the wall would be of course observed with the bodily eyes, but the realization that this material vision has hidden significance or meaning depends upon the discretion of reason. Many of the metaphorical or symbolic representations of God attributed to the Hebrew prophets are spiritual visions or contemplations of this kind. Denys Turner describes the process in Pseudo-Dionysius's theology by which rational contemplations of God approach the fullest contemplative understanding of God that is possible for sublunary man:

> The progress of the mind toward God ascends from complexity of image to simplicity, from many names in potential conflict to abstract and increasingly interchangeable names, from "dissimilar" to "similar" similarities, from prolixity to terseness and, ultimately, to silence. As the mind ascends through the hierarchy of language, it moves, therefore, from that which is obviously most distinct from God to that which is progressively less obviously so, from the more "unlike" to the more "like." For God is more obviously not a rock than he is not a spirit, more obviously not a shape than he is not a mind, more obviously not a mind than he is not a being, more obviously not a being than he is not a divinity, ascending the scale until everything that God can be compared with, however "like," is negated. (*The Darkness of God* 44)

This apophatic line of thought operates by a process of remotion which identifies the nature of God through the extreme alienating difference separating God and humankind.

Within this measure of difference there are similitudes and degrees of sameness, but the comparative ways of seeing and contemplating the divine are always ever mere approximations that can only approach (and never fully grasp) the highest understanding of the divine.

This theology chiefly pertains to the prospect of seeing or contemplating God, but the principles of Pseudo-Dionysius's apophatic theory also apply to the articles of doctrinal belief that overwhelm rational thought. Following in this tradition Richard of St. Victor identifies various doctrinal matters, including the nature of God and the concept of the Trinity, as contemplations that in various ways exceed the limits of reason.[103] In *The Mystical Ark*, Richard of St. Victor considers the kinds of thoughts that are, like visions of God, inaccessible to rational thought.[104] Referring to these last and highest intellectual visions, Grover A. Zinn clarifies Richard's position and explains that

> The objects of these contemplations cannot be discovered by human reason. They are given by the faculty that Richard calls understanding. In the fifth kind are these things which are above (*supra*) reason's power, but when known are not beyond (*praeter*) the ability of reason to comprehend. These are especially

[103] Edmund G. Gardner hails the signal importance of Richard of St. Victor in the shaping of English mysticism: "St. Bernard, Richard of St. Victor, and St. Bonaventura—all three very familiar figures to students of Dante's *Paradiso*—are the chief influences in the story of English mysticism. And through the writings of his latter-day followers, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and the anonymous author of the *Divine Cloud of Unknowing*, Richard of St. Victor is, perhaps, the most important of the three" ("Introduction," *The Cell of Self-Knowledge* xii).

[104] The highest of these mysteries known only to the understanding are theophanies such as the beatific vision. Such immaterial things as the faces of angels or God cannot be seen with the bodily eyes of imagination or the spiritual eyes of reason. In a meditation on the contemplation of doctrinal mysteries, Richard asserts that even significant creedal doctrines of the Church are often contrary to rational thought and thus visible only to the understanding:

> [W]e believe with certainty many things with respect to the divine nature concerning which, if we consult reason, all our understanding resists and all human reason protests. For what human reason holds the Son to be coeternal with the Father and equal in all things to Him from whom He has being, life and understanding? Therefore in these things that are above reason, many things like this can be discovered which seem to be completely against reason if they are considered by human judgement. (*The Mystical Ark* IV.3, 261-62)

> things having to do with the divine substance and its unity. In the sixth kind are those things which are not only above the power of reason to discover; they are beyond (*praeter*) comprehension by the reason and even seem to be contrary to (*contra*) all reason. ("Introduction," *Richard of St. Victor* 31-32)

Zinn is referring to the six-fold categorization of contemplative experience developed in Richard of St. Victor's *The Mystical Ark*. This system of classification is a development of Augustine's three-fold model of vision. Richard's approach simply divides each of Augustine's three kinds of vision (bodily, spiritual, and intellectual) into two more precise categories, and these categories add further complexity to the system by indicating the ways in which the imagination, reason, and understanding must necessarily interact in order to apprehend various kinds of contemplative experiences from the most mundane earthly perceptions to the consideration of supernormal mystical experiences. Richard's six-fold division of contemplations must not be confused with his four ways of seeing, a system promulgated in his Apocalypse commentary *In Apocalypsim Joannis*. Unlike Richard's six-fold classification of contemplations, his four modes of seeing are concerned less with the nature of visions than with the way in which visions are seen.[105] Richard of St. Victor's notion that certain higher order contemplations are somehow above but not beyond the power of reason helps explain the unusual paradox of the Pearl Dreamer's failure of reason. The Dreamer has access to knowledge that should bring consolation for his grief, and this knowledge is known to his rational faculty, but the

[105] Richard of St. Victor's works are difficult to date, but *The Mystical Ark* (also known as *Benjamin major*, written between 1160 and 1170), as a treatise on mystical experience, seems to be a product of Richard's most refined thoughts on contemplative life. Insofar as it deals with mysticism, *In Apocalypsim Joannis*, a text principally devoted to scriptural exegesis, represents Richard's mystical theory in a less developed manner. In any case, the two texts employ vision in the service of different purposes. Whereas the six-fold system tends to discuss visions as they might be experienced through the optimal uses of the inner wits, the four-fold division of the modes of seeing considers how inferior faculties may contemplate higher order visions and, inversely, how lesser order visions can be contemplated by superior faculties.

consolation of this knowledge is nonetheless inaccessible to him. In the Dreamer's case, the "kynde of Christ" that should provide the means towards emotional comfort is known to reason but still above the capacity of reason's contemplative power (above but not beyond).

The crisis of reason confronting the Dreamer at the outset of *Pearl* is comparable to that which afflicts Sir Gawain at the close of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In the case of Gawain, his lingering gaze upon the material evidence of his fault, the scar and girdle, indicates a preoccupation with the first and lowest of the contemplative modes of seeing. Gawain sees himself through eyes of flesh and subsequently fixates upon the carnality of his being in such a manner that prevents him from embracing divine grace through penance. In this way Gawain refuses to engage the eye of reason at all, and he is diminished as a result of this refusal. On the other hand, the Pearl Dreamer does not fail to use reason so much as he is failed by reason.

Let us be clear, however, that reason is certainly a superior faculty to imagination in any medieval understanding of cognition. Medieval psychology rather considers the imagination as a necessary subordinate for reason:

> An active imagination allows the memory to work to its full capacity, since ideas are more easily remembered if they are attached to images. *Imagines* may even be exploited by the Holy Spirit, in revelations received in dreams. The imagination, then, performs many functions in respect of many faculties; it enables its 'superiors' to function properly. (Minnis "Theories of Imagination" 74)

Minnis reminds us that the medieval concept of mind is faculty-based, consisting of individual operations that can function independently and also cooperate and function together.[106] Reason itself may be technically superior to imagination, but part of reason's comparative strength lies in its capacity to marshal the powers of imagination for its own ends. Providing images for the discretion of reason's higher judgmental power, imagination is a supplement for reason. In his *Benjamin minor* (also known as *The Book of Twelve Patriarchs*), Richard of St. Victor explains the adjunct support role of imagination in the following manner:

> Bot who is þat þat wote not how hard it is & niȝhond inpossible to a flesc[h]ly soule, þe whiche is ȝit ruyde in goostly studies, for to rise in knowyng of vnseable þinges, & for to set þe iȝe of contemplacioun in goostly þinges? For whi a soule þat is ȝit ruyde & fleschly knowiþ nouȝt bot bodely þinges, and noþing comeþ ȝit to þe mynde bot only seable þinges. And neuerþeles ȝit it lokiþ inward as it may, and þat it may not se ȝit cleerly by goostly knowyng, it þinkiþ by ymagynacioun. (*Beniamyn minor* 23)[107]

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[106] This operation of imagination recalls the function of Langland's Ymaginatif in *Piers Plowman*. The sophistic arguments of Dame Studie are lamented by Holy Letterure in Passus X, and these arguments challenge the Dreamer's faith through appeal to reason: "Of that ye clerkes us kenneth of Cryst by the Gospel: / Filius non portabit iniquitatem patris, etc. / Whi shulde we that now ben for the werkes of Adam / Roten and torende? Resoun wolde it nevere!" (X. 113-6). According to Holy Lettrure, Ymaginatif has the proper response: "Ymaginatyf herafterward shal answere to yowre purpos. / Augustyne to suche argueres he telleth hem this teme: / Non plus sapere quam oportet" (X. 116-9). In order to overcome the persuasive power of false argumentation on behalf of Christians unable to accept holy doctrine through assent by reason, Ymaginatif interjects by positing a solution that is ready at hand in the written sources of textual authorities.

[107] Though Richard of St. Victor's *Benjamin minor* was written in the twelfth century, extant manuscript evidence demonstrates that this text circulated in Middle English during the fourteenth century. Richard himself considered *Benjamin minor* to be a text concerning how the mind may be prepared for contemplation and this appears to have been the purpose for which it was consulted in the preparation of Middle English mystical treatises such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Book of Privy Counselling*. Both of these texts either identify Richard by name or make reference to *Benjamin minor* in matters related to sense perception and contemplation (Hodgson xxxv-xxxvi). Most of my quotations from *Benjamin minor* will be cited from Phyllis Hodgson's EETS edition of the fourteenth-century Middle English

Note the emphasis here upon the imaginative faculty as a mode of cognition that thinks by seeing. The higher concepts of "goostly studies" are not to be perceived in the images that are the imagination's implements of cognition. Until spiritual study yields greater intellectual acuity, the mind must process what concepts it can through images contemplated in the imagination as "seable þinges." The argument mirrors that of Aquinas, who claims that "it is not possible for our intellect to form a perfect judgement, while the senses are suspended, through which sensible things are known to us" (*Summa Theologica* Q. 84 Art. 8, 180). Drawing upon the Aristotelian epistemology of Avicenna, Aquinas extends this line of thought to the consideration of spiritual things that are insensible (invisible). Aquinas quotes Romans 1:20, "the invisible things of God are clearly seen… by the things that are made," in order to build an argument that acknowledges the participation of sensory apprehension in the human experience of the divine. He further makes the claim that human intellect "through such natures of visible things… rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible" (*Summa Theologica* Q. 84 Art. 7, 178). By means of this argument, Aquinas demonstrates how a body hindered by physical injury or fatigue can lack the higher operations of the immaterial intellect. A person striving to attain higher knowledge of spiritual things, the immaterial truths of Christian doctrine for example, may approach understanding through the imaginative perception of sensible species or phantasms:

> Incorporeal things, of which there are no phantasms, are known to us by comparison with sensible bodies of which there are phantasms. Thus we understand truth by considering a thing of which we possess the truth; and God, as

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translation of *Benjamin minor*, but some passages of *Benjamin minor* that are not adapted in the Middle English text will be cited from Zinn's Modern English translation of the Latin text (*The Twelve Patriarchs*).

> Dionysius says (*Div. Nom. i.*), we know as cause, by way of excess and by way of remotion. Other incorporeal substances we know, in the present state of life, only by way of remotion or by some comparison to corporeal things. And, therefore, when we understand something about these things, we need to turn to phantasms of bodies, although there are no phantasms of the things themselves. (*Summa Theologica* Q. 84. Art. 7, 179)

Sensory experiences, both observations of material bodies in the physical world as well as phantasms of material bodies formed in the imagination, can serve as a kind of instructional aid towards higher intellectual understanding.

The Pearl Dreamer shares the common lot of humankind, for he cannot learn by reason the intellectual truths of the Christian doctrine. As observed in his image-evoked entry into the dream vision, he must rather approach what Richard of St. Victor terms "goostly knowyng" through recourse to the cognitive work of imagination.[108] This is what overcomes the Dreamer's own sorrow, a grief that reason alone cannot assuage. By questioning the likelihood of a two-year-old child entering heaven, he recapitulates his failure of reason when he challenges the Maiden:

> That Cortayse is to fre of dede,
>
> ȝyf hyt be soth þat þou conez saye.
>
> Þou lyfed not two ȝer in oure þede;
>
> Þou cowþez neuer God nauþer plese ne pray,
>
> Ne neuer nawþer Pater ne Crede—

[108] Blenkner has effectively identified the correspondence between the mystical theology represented in *Pearl* and the Victorine contemplative tradition. Unlike my argument, Blenkner's draws a comparison between *Pearl* and the work of Hugh of St. Victor. I contend that Richard of St. Victor's close attention to the phenomenology of contemplative experience makes his oeuvre more helpful for understanding the psychology underlying the *Pearl*-poet's uses of vision.

And quen mad on þe fyrst day!

I may not traw, so God me spede. (481-87)

In response to the Dreamer's incredulous challenge, the Maiden offers a reading of the Parable of the Vineyard derived from Matthew 20:1-16. Her answer employs the same strategy as that employed by the *Pearl*-poet in *Patience*; she offers "a moral statement supported by scriptural illustration" (Andrew and Waldron 77 n493-8). The explication of the parable relies upon the presentation of scriptural truth in a story told through the use of poetic imagery. As the Maiden explains it, "As Mathew melez in your messe / In sothfol gospel of God almyȝt: / In sample He can ful grayþely gesse / And lyknez hit to heuen lyȝte" (497-500). The vineyard, which she "likens" to heaven, expresses a metaphor and constitutes a tropological use of language to manipulate a simple image in order to provide spiritual exegesis that is easy for a layman such as the Dreamer to understand. His eventual acquiescence before the figural arguments of the Maiden acknowledges the element of aesthetic delight he has found in her words: "'Neuer þe les let be my þonc,' / Quoþ I, 'my perle þaȝ I appose; / I schulde not tempte þy wyt so wlonc, / To Krystez chambre þat art ichose'" (901-4). He hails her wisdom as "beautiful," a seemingly strange compliment, but not so unusual when attributed to an argument based upon the imaginative manipulation of images. If he cannot be compelled by the verity of holy writ, as seemingly irrational and counterintuitive as the doctrine of the vineyard parable is, he can nonetheless still be brought to an appreciation of its impossible truth through the delight stimulated by the Maiden's beautiful wit. Considered in this light, the Maiden's status as a kind of pedagogical figure clothed in the material trappings of romance love-longing begins to make more sense as well. Further on he also attributes

the Maiden's persuasiveness to the "sympelnesse" that she encloses in her speech (909). This is surely the praise of an argument that communicates lofty spiritual principles through the lower faculty of cognition: imagination.

Prior to this acceptance of the argument, however, the Dreamer's skepticism turns upon his expectation that there must be hard and definite limits placed upon the grace of God, a notion reinforced through the concatenation of "date" in this stanza group (IX). In the next stanza group, the Dreamer makes his grounds for resisting the Maiden's wisdom explicit:

> Me þynk þy tale vnresounable;
> Goddez ryȝt is redy and euermore rert,
> Oþer holy wryt is bot a fable.
> In sauter is sayd a verce ouerte
> Þat spekez a poynt determynable:
> "Þou quytez vchon as hys desserte,
> Þou hyȝe Kyng ay pertermynable." (590-96)

The Parable of the Vineyard makes no rational sense; the workers who arrive at the end of day do no actual labour, yet they receive the very same reward as the rest of the labourers, including those who have worked all day. The Dreamer cannot make sense of this through appeal to reason, because rewards are not being apportioned on the basis of desert. The response to this challenge is a harsh one, for it turns the Dreamer's mind back upon the sense of loss that was otherwise sublimated to joy: "Where wystez þou euer any bourne abate / Euer so holy in hys prayere / Þat he ne forfeted by sumkyn gate" (617-9). The Maiden counters the Dreamer's claims about "desserte" with a hard dose of

truth and that truth is this: none are deserving of the reward of heaven. Only God's "merci" and "grace" make salvation possible (576, 612). The Dreamer's preoccupation with the "date" or limit of God's power reflects his earlier failure to understand the "kynde of Christ." The Dreamer's reaction to the vineyard parable best illustrates the nature of this failure. The ways of God are wrapped in mystery and compel believers to accept things that cannot be digested by ratiocinative thinking. Dispensing pay in the Parable of the Vineyard, the Lord allocates rewards in a manner that defies rational concepts of appraisal and deserving. More than this, the Lord's magnanimity exceeds the expectations of the Dreamer. He is once again presented with a concept that is above but not beyond his rational capacity: he knows that all will receive the same pay; he just does not understand the reason why, for his reason is contending with matters more suited to the understanding of intellectual vision, which pertains to such matters that have no rational analogue in human experience. He calls this "vnresounable," (590) and this reaction is appropriate but nonetheless misses the point. By turning the concatenating focus of the verse from "date" to the boundless superfluity of "more," the Maiden's discourse acknowledges the nature of the Dreamer's misconception and furthermore demonstrates how this misconception must be corrected.

The harsh limiting factor of "date" deployed in stanza group IX softens in the concatenation of the following group, in which the Maiden develops the vineyard parable and constructs her refrain upon the word "more": "Þe merci of God is much þe more" (576). This expression of surplus approaches a state of equilibrium in group XI, however, as the divine rewards of both "more and lasse" (601) approach satisfaction, "For þe grace of God is gret inoghe" (612). Jill Mann, in "Satisfaction and Payment in

the Middle Ages," comments on the concatenating use of "enough" in this section and determines that the predominant meaning derived from that word in *Pearl* is related to "endlessly sufficient abundance" (29). The Maiden's repeated use of the word "inoghe" serves to illustrate the endless largesse of grace promised by Christ's covenant. This excess or surplus quantity of grace offers precisely the kind of plenitude so yearned for by the Dreamer in his earliest moments of lack and assuages the attendant despair that lack engenders. Moreover, we might consider this in light of the satisfaction anticipated in the tradition of medieval theophany, in which the vision of God to be beheld in the afterlife is certainly the highest manifestation of grace imaginable.

It is hardly coincidence, therefore, that the Maiden proceeds to articulate the vision of God as chief among the rewards to be enjoyed by those "boro3t into þe vyne" by way of baptism (628). Indeed, her didactic response to the Dreamer's ignorance reifies the *Pearl*-poet's by now quite familiar Beatitude refrain:

> Þe ry3twys man schal se Hys face,
> Þe harmlez haþel schal com Hym tylle.
> Þe sauter hyt satz þus in a pace:[109]
> "Lorde, quo schal klymbe Þe hy3 hylle,
> Oþer rest withinne Þy holy place?"
> Hymself to onsware he is not dylle [slow]:
> "Hondelyngez harme þat dyt not ille,
> Þat is of hert boþe clene and ly3t,
> Þer schal hys step stable style [foot set/stand at rest]":

[109] Translation note: "þus in a pace" indicates that the words quoted here are to be found "in a single passage."

Þe innocent is ay saf by ryȝt. (675-684)

We may further suggest that the consequent vision experienced and subsequently reported by the Dreamer is itself an attempt to substitute absence with presence and articulate a locus of meaning that can be "inoghe" to fill the existential void of meaning left in the wake of the pearl's loss. Once again, the presence of desire in this text is based primarily upon lack: the lack of a pearl, the lack of a daughter, the lack of communion with God. Within the dichotomy of lack and plenitude, limit and excess, the poet interjects his own poem as an imaginative reflection of these contraries and the equilibrium they establish and violate. In stanza group XV, the Maiden casually indicates that the grace of God is indeed plenteous: for every one person to whom grace has been granted, she would wish that five could be so blessed (849). The poet plays upon this notion of excess in his very form, as stanza group XV is the only group that consists of six rather than five stanzas. By including six stanzas where only five were anticipated, the poet is playing upon the Maiden's statement and even doing five souls one better. This is surely not a coincidence or scribal error, either, as the inclusion of this stanza brings the total stanza count of the poem to 101 stanzas, a figure that matches the number of stanzas found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

All of this serves to illustrate how the poet has transferred meaning from the content of his poem to the form of its utterance. Even as the poem insists that the grace of God exceeds earthly limitations and can therefore be enough to satisfy the mind of the Dreamer, the poet is intent upon clothing the didactic content of his poem in forms that satisfy the sensual interests of not only the Dreamer character but the reader of the poem as well. As ever, this tendency finds notable expression in the sensory mode of vision.

Consistent with the visual nature of the anticipated reward of the "ryȝtwys man," the Pearl Maiden further articulates the none-too-subtle visual nature of her instruction. Anticipating the opinion of God when faced with the indignant field workers of the vineyard parable, she articulates the voice of God in the following argument: "More, weþer louyly is me my gyfte— / To do wyth myn quatso me lykez? / Oþer ellez þyn yȝe to lyþer is lyfte / For I am goude and non byswykez?" (565-8). The words of the Lord are intended to instruct the workers even as the Maiden tries to educate the Dreamer. Both act as teachers and they both make recourse to vision as the mode of understanding: God does this by suggesting that inclining towards what is good versus what is evil depends on what one chooses to behold as truth; the Maiden by using images in the form of a parable exemplum to divert the imagination to its own limited level of understanding.

The imaginative faculty is the principal medium of thought in *Pearl*, but the *Pearl*-poet is not raising imagination above reason in the hierarchy of cognitive faculties. Even after his dream vision, the Pearl Dreamer acknowledges that his visionary experience, however enlightening, only yields a limited degree of insight. Imagination accomplishes much in *Pearl*, but reason could accomplish more. This use of reason would require the discipline of a mystic trained in spiritual sight or else simply one fortunate to receive the higher gift of intellectual vision through divine grace. The remarkable thing about the Pearl Dreamer's eventual reconciliation is that it is not achieved through any miraculous raising of contemplation. The Dreamer does not suddenly begin to exercise a greater intellectual understanding than he had done before. Rather than having his consciousness turned to face the invisible truths above his rational capacity, the Dreamer is turned toward a visionary world of material sensation that moves

the soul not through the higher intelligence of the intellectual eye but through the creative power of the imaginative bodily eye. The essence of this triumph of the imagination lies in the power of joy. If rational thought cannot move the soul of the Dreamer, sensible images of delight offer the Dreamer the capacity to move his will through the pleasure of spiritual contemplation, the power of divine love that can work upon the affections through the window of the senses without the intercession of rational cognition. As *Pearl*'s notable example of the Parable of the Vineyard demonstrates, the *Pearl*-poet suggests that the untaught rational soul is particularly unfit to contemplate the highest divine knowledge, because the highest understanding of Christian doctrine must go beyond symbols and signs at the intellective level of unseen mystery. Therein lies the poet's consistent preoccupation with visual experience. Even though the most important matters of contemplation are beyond sensual experience, the poet finds the image-making powers of the imagination capable of accessing a kind of spiritual satisfaction that not only overcomes the limitations of mind but can approximate the anticipated beatific vision that will reveal the impossible: a spectacle beyond sight.

The visionary experience of the Pearl Dreamer is a spiritual vision, but he witnesses it with what would be called the second of Richard of St. Victor's four modes of seeing. This perceptual mode employs the imagination to see images in an allegorical manner. By this mode of perception, material forms can be interpreted as figures for other things, but this way of seeing cannot engage the powers of reason and thus cannot interpret signs of invisible, spiritual truths. Being associated with the imagination, the second way of seeing has the capacity to delight, and this capacity, operating through figures and similitudes, is more sophisticated than the satisfaction of mere animal

appetite (associated with the first and lowest mode of seeing). The second mode of seeing is metaphorical and is therefore an apt concept with which to discuss the multiplicity of transformative signs that adorn the Pearl Dreamer's vision. Commenting on Robert Grosseteste's attitude regarding the uses of imagination in theological understanding, Suzanne Lewis suggests that "the transformative process engaged the faculty of the imagination, which in its medieval context was primarily and properly concerned with the power of fixing the fluctuating impressions of the senses in a definitive and lasting form" (*Reading Images* 10). Expanding upon this conventional medieval understanding of imagination, Lewis goes on to suggest that an image beheld by the imagination "mediates the reader's transition from the physical-optical perception... to the intellectual realm of thought and idea, memory and association" (10). What imagination offers, therefore, is a means of acquiring and understanding knowledge that does not require rational discretion and provides a cognitive path that can supplement and eventually rehabilitate human reason.[110] The *Pearl* narrator's antipathy towards the "kynde of Kryst," which he expresses through "fyrce skillez" ("vehement arguments") in spite of his underlying belief that "resoun sette myseluen saȝt," indicates that he cannot be

[110] Avicenna elaborates upon this point in his contemplation of how imagination produces imitations:

> If imitation of a thing which is untrue moves the soul, then it is no surprise that the depiction of a true thing as such moves the soul too. The latter is even more necessary. But human beings are more amenable to imaginative representation than to conviction; and many of them, when hearing the demonstrable truths, respond with aversion and dissociation. Imitation has an element of wonder that truth lacks. The reason is that a recognized truth is evident and devoid of novelty, while an unknown truth is neglected. A truthful utterance, when deflected from the usual and when something that is congenial to the soul is imparted to it, may result in both conviction and imaginative assent; or the imaginative representation may be so engaging that conviction is neither recognized nor felt. (*Commentary on the Poetic*s I. 3. 62-63)

The Dreamer's pain operates in an emotional register that refuses the dictates of reason and mirrors the psychology of denial outlined by Avicenna in his *Commentary*. The narrator knows he should be comforted by Christian belief but nonetheless responds with "aversion and dissociation."

consoled by reason no matter how convincing. Imagination emerges as the alternative mode of seeing that can overcome this cognitive impasse.

The *Pearl*-poet signals the pre-eminence of imagination just as the Dreamer begins to swoon to the earth. The Dreamer's death-like transition to the state of sleep would seem at first glance to be the same kind of descent into the underworld as that exemplified by Jonah's time within the whale and prefigured in his anxious sleep aboard the ship. The poet's adaptation of these episodes from the Book of Jonah is an example of spiritual lassitude and figures the confrontation of death without salvation.[111] For the Dreamer, however, the repose of sleep is interrupted by a vision, and this vision is first signalled in the text by an overtly material sensory experience. The Dreamer remarks that the sleep-state is brought on by a sensual stimulus, "Suche odour to my hernez schot" (58). This olfactory sensation is not a sudden momentary surprise, for the Dreamer describes the source in some detail in the previous stanza. He refers to the earthly spot upon which the lost pearl has fallen to earth, an image that symbolizes the grave of the Dreamer's departed daughter. This spot is adorned with herbs and flowers,

> Gilofre, gyngure, and gromylyoun,
> And pyonys powdered ay bytwene.
> Ȝif hit watz semly on to sene,
> A fayrre flayr ȝet fro hit flot,
> Þer wonys þat worþyly, I wot and wene,
> My precious perle wythouten spot. (43-48)

The Dreamer's rhetoric compares visual and olfactory images, and the delightful fragrance intimated by the lines provides a further sensory dimension to a scene that is

[111] This exegetical tradition is referenced in chapter 3 (see page 94 n54).

already resplendent with visual delights. The Dreamer's material reception of these odours is dynamic, for we are told the scents "schot" to his "hernez" or "brains." The use of "hernez" is an interesting choice on the part of the poet, who frequently uses words such as "hert" or "mynde" when referring to the reception of sensory information. Unlike "mynde," which is used to refer to the thinking consciousness as an intellectual property of the rational soul, "hernez" refers to the physical substance of the brain, cranial matter. When the Dreamer tells us that the fragrance has shot to his brains he is referring to the impression of sensual images in the cranial cells of the common sense and imagination, which respectively differentiate and experience the physical impression of external stimuli.

Subsequent to the Dreamer's very bodily sensory experience, the *Pearl*-poet turns our attention to the cascade of images comprising the dream vision itself and diverts the focus of the imagination toward articulating the signs suffused within the dream and reconciling these images to reason through passive delight. In her introductory exploration of *Pearl*'s generic attributes of dream vision, Constance Hieatt acknowledges the intensely visual aesthetic that pervades the poem and refers to this characteristic as a quality consistent with the nature of dreams. She refers to the "sharply visual quality of the poem" and enumerates the various visible delights represented therein: "The marvellous countryside, the birds and the leaves, the Pearl herself, and the Holy City are all described in very vivid fashion, with loving attention to detail and color" (63). Hieatt's further observation, quoting Freud, on the "largely visual" nature of dreams is quite plausible in a medieval context (63). The language of Macrobian dream theory

classifications seems to suggest the inherent visuality of dreams as a sensory medium.[112] Furthermore, the *Pearl*-poet, through his conscious emphasis upon the visual nature of his Dreamer's experience, acknowledges such a pre-eminence of visuality in his own construction of dream vision. The stanza in which the Dreamer first swoons into his "slepyng-slaȝte" proceeds to describe the marvels of the dreamscape world in nearly exclusively visual terms (59), and the fine elements of supernatural wonder that tint the scene come as purely visual flourishes: "Where rych rokkez wer to dyscreuen. / Þe lyȝt of hem myȝt no mon leuen, / Þe glemende glory þat of hem glent" (68-70). The scene is suffused with gleaming surfaces, shining features, and all of this is revealed to the Dreamer at the moment he turns to "bere þe face" and thus direct his eyes towards the marvels of the forest dream-world (67). The Dreamer's description of the scene emphasizes the transmission of light, which emanates from a variety of surfaces, including the banks of the river and the river itself:

> The dubbemente of þo derworth depe
> Wern bonkez bene of beryl bryȝt.
> Swangeande swete þe water con swepe,
> Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryȝt;
> In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe,
> As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt—
> As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe,
> Staren in welkyn in winter nyȝt;
> For vche a pobbel in pole þer pyȝt

[112] Two of Cicero's five major classification categories recorded by Macrobius, *visio* and *visum*, the terms of classification denoting prophetic dreams and enigmatic dreams respectively, share a latinate etymology that indicates the primacy of vision in dream experience (I.iii. 87-88).

Watz emerad, saffer, oþer gemme gente,

Þat alle þe loȝe lemed of lyȝt. (109-19)

The gems gleaming in the riverbed are like a star field in which every individual stone projects its own light. The Dreamer's description continues to address the adornment of the scene in terms of sweetness and beauty.[113] Furthermore, like the material odours perceived before the dream, the visual images of the dream vision have a dynamic quality that indicates movement through the diaphanous medium. The light from the open sky "glydez" through the silver leaves of the "Holtewodez" (79, 75). The leaves, the rocks, the river, and the cliffs are all animated by a preternatural shining quality. Speaking of the cliffs in particular, the Dreamer refers to the "glemande glory þat of hem glent" (70). The verb "glenten" is a common word in *Pearl* and is used in all of the poems of Cotton Nero A.x art. 3. The simple sense of "shine" or "gleam" (MED "glenten" [4]) is redundant in a line that already acknowledges the "gleaming glory" of the rocks. In this case "glent" makes more sense as "moved" or "glided" (MED "glenten" [1a.] [1b.]). The dynamic motion of the visual species recalls the use of "glent" in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to describe the outward glance of the extramitted visual ray (82). In this case, "glent" refers to the visual images or species multiplying through diaphanous space. The Dreamer eventually describes the intromitted reception of these images in the material terms of bodily seeing:

The dubbement dere of doun and dalez,

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[113] These references to decorative precious stones anticipate the *Pearl*-poet's later representation of the celestial Jerusalem. In a discussion of how corporeal similitudes may be deployed to represent spiritual reality, Richard of St. Victor describes the conventional Apocalypse image of the heavenly city:

> Read the Apocalypse of John and you will find the adornment of heavenly Jerusalem described in various ways by the means of gold and silver, by means of pearls or other kinds of precious gems. In fact we know that none of these things exists there, where nevertheless nothing can be missing altogether. For indeed, no such thing exists there through appearance, where nevertheless everything exists through similitude. (*The Twelve Patriarchs* XV, 67)

Of wod and water and wlonk playnez,

Bylde in me blys, abated my balez,

Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez.

Doun after a strem þat dryȝly halez

I bowed in blys, bredful my braynez. (121-26)

Just as the fantastic scents of the earthly spot are impressed upon his material "hernez," the incredible images of *Pearl*'s dream world fill the Dreamer's "braynez." These references serve to bookend the Dreamer's sensory experience at the outset of the poem and demonstrate the operation of *perspectival* optics within the Dreamer's imagined experience. These visual cues remind us that the Dreamer's perceptions remain tethered to the bodily eye of the imagination even though he is not actually seeing with his physical eyes.

The point of all this deliberate referencing of the imaginative apparatus of the medieval mind is revealed in the poet's emphasis upon the emotional effect of the Dreamer's received visions. In spite of the Dreamer's depressed condition, the dream vision builds his bliss, abates his hurts, forbids his anxiety, and destroys his pains. This is a consistent motif in the poet's description of the Dreamer's initial experiences. The Dreamer also claims that "The adubbement of þo downez dere / Garten my goste al greffe forȝete" (85-86). The "adubbement" or "adornment," the beautiful splendour of the scene, fills the imagination of the Dreamer and more importantly fills his heart with a bliss that can conquer his pain. The second stanza group uses the concatenating idea of "adubbement" to introduce a world of sensual delights, and the subsequent stanza group uses the word "more" to perpetuate the poem's intense chain of delightful imagery.

The stanzas concatenating through the repetition of "more" go beyond the work of the previous stanza group, however, for stanza group III also serves to highlight the overflow of emotional response that these beautiful images inspire in the Dreamer:

I hoped þat mote merked wore.

Bot þe water watz depe, I dorst not wade,

And euer me longed ay more and more.

More and more, and ȝet wel mare,

Me lyste to se þe broke byȝonde,

For if hit watz fayr þer I con fare,

Wel loueloker watz þe fyrre londe. (142-48)

The poet is drawing our focus towards the emotional response of the Dreamer. Unlike the listless stasis that so characterizes his attitude prior to the beginning of the vision, the Dreamer is animated by the pleasing scene and roused to action. This sentiment further intensifies when the Dreamer catches sight of the *Pearl* Maiden:

Suche gladande glory con to me glace

As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte.

To calle hyr lyste con me enchace,

Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt.

I seȝ hyr in so strange a place—

Such a burre myȝt make myn herte blunt.

Þenne verez ho vp her fayre frount,

Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yuore:

Þat stonge myn hert ful stray astount,

And euer þe lenger, þe more and more. (171-80)

Most notable here are the cardiosensory touches, details that demonstrate the effect that all of this "gladande glory" has upon the Dreamer's demeanour. As the Dreamer's feeling of joy intensifies, the poet's description of that joy diverts from the material locus of imagination, the "hernez" or "braynez," and we begin to see how this joy affects the "hert" of the Dreamer. The Dreamer's "hert," hitherto wounded by a sorrow that reason cannot tame, is now moved to feel a happiness that has effectively bypassed the arguments of reason and diverted the visual desire of the Dreamer towards the Maiden and the heavenly realm that she embodies.

Just as the poet employs formal characteristics in order to figure the endless grace of God, the endless pleasure indicated by the concatenating "more" of stanza group III serves to parallel the plenitude of divine mercy represented by the concatenating "more" of stanza group X. In this way, the *Pearl*-poet's approach to representing the invisible world of intellectual vision becomes more clear. If he cannot demonstrate rational arguments capable of expressing knowledge of the divine, he will seek to impress upon his Dreamer and audience images that may move the soul not through reason but through emotion. The "brunt" and "burre" that "blunt" or "stonge" the heart of the Dreamer move him and inspire him to action not through thought but through feeling.

The model of earthly sense perception frames the Dreamer's experience, but he casts some confusion upon the matter when he considers the difficulty of describing the incredible visions laid out before him:

More of wele watz in þat wyse

Þen I cowþe telle þaȝ I tom hade,

For vrþely herte myȝt not suffyse

To þe tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade. (133-36)[114]

As I have demonstrated, the supernal images of gleaming gems and cliffs perceived in the Dreamer's vision act upon the Dreamer's imagination in much the same manner as the pleasing scents he perceives prior to the start of his dream. Both instances of sense perception rely upon the bodily instrument of the imagination, the faculty responsible for apprehending sensory experience from objective reality, from memory, and also the consideration of material things that have never been seen but can nonetheless be created in the imaginative eye through the combining of sensible properties. The Dreamer has probably never witnessed stones that glow with an internal light, but he has seen the glow of the sun or firelight. The medieval imagination has the creative power to combine the properties of things to create amalgam images.[115]

In this manner, the imagination proves capable of doing what pure reason cannot. Working with sensible images of material things, the imagination can create images of things that have been postulated or theorized but never actually perceived (even things

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[114] This admission of limitations of human expression corresponds with Richard of St. Victor's comments regarding John the Evangelist's Apocalypse. He suggests that the visions described in the Apocalypse or Revelations ought to be read as signs that lead the mind to understanding through emotional response:

> Therefore, since human intelligence does not suffice to comprehend the glory of his humanity, nor can the tongue describe it adequately, we ought not to be scrutinizers of majesty, lest we be overwhelmed by his glory. For now, with the assistance of grace, we ought to scrutinize and correct our own infirmity, so that we might finally merit to attain to the contemplation of his glory. Let us toil with all our strength to reach, by our merits, the brightness of that light which shines in every darkness and which no darkness can comprehend [John 1:15]. And let us, so far as we are able, hold fast in our minds to the glory of the revealed similitude of Christ, so that we might burn more fervently with desire for the glory that is figured thereby. (*Patrologia Latina* CXCVI 709, translation Kraebel 364)

[115] In order to explain the conceptualization of such imaginary or fantastic things, monstrous beasts or locales never before seen, Richard of St. Victor postulated an active function of imagination, which he called "rational imagination":

> The rational imagination operates when a human mind creates some imaginary thing from what is known through the bodily senses. For example, we see gold, and we see a house, but we have never seen a golden house; however, the imagination can create the mental image of a golden house. (Minnis, "Theories of Imagination" 76)

that have never existed, such as mythical animals). As I have already noted, the fantastic images of the terrestrial paradise stream toward the narrator as extramitted species gliding through diaphanous air before meeting the eyes and imaginative faculty of the Dreamer: the very schematic model of intromitted sense perception, or so it would seem. As Andrew and Waldron remark, *Pearl* is a poem of transformations (30), and even this establishing of setting, as the Dreamer wakes in the dreamscape, is really just a transformation of extant species (in this case visual imagery) already introduced in the text. Prior to his dream, the narrator already occupies an arbour or garden. His dreaming transition to the garden of terrestrial paradise is really a change of quality rather than kind, and the subsequent description of the paradisal dream setting ultimately signifies an exercise in poetic ornamentation in which the vision of paradise decorates rather than truly displaces the initial scene. The expectant nature of the Dreamer highlights the consciously constructed nature of his vision. Beset with visions of corporeal beauty in the forest landscape during his initial sense perceptions, the Dreamer's consciousness moves to anticipate such beauty, the aesthetic marker of divine order, in architectural features as well (Josephine Bloomfield 400). In this way, the poet's Dreamer-persona employs the faculty of imagination in a clearly perceivable manner. By observing matter and product in its initial and final state almost simultaneously, he visualizes species and reconstitutes those species as dream experience: the dream conceit of the poem casts the body of the poet in one frame of perception and the imagined dream-persona of the narrator in two cognitive spaces at once. He perceives and reflects distinct sensory impressions of the same stimuli in roughly the same space in time.

The creative nature of imagination articulates the ultimate limitation of that cognitive faculty as well.[116] The Dreamer's confused reaction when he contemplates the hierarchical rank of the celestial kingdom is a significant example of this limitation. Upon hearing that the Maiden is a queen in heaven, the Dreamer, thinking in limited terms of earthly hierarchy, imagines that the crown worn by the Maiden must be the crown of Mary, for surely a kingdom might accommodate but one queen. This is not the case, and the Maiden's subsequent lecture turns upon the notion that heaven's bounty defies commonplace assumptions about temporal power and authority. According to the Maiden, "Alle þat may þerinne aryue / Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng, / And neuer oþer ȝet schal depryue" (447-49). This is a simple mistake, but underlying the Dreamer's confusion is the failure of material symbol to successfully signify meaning to the Dreamer. He sees a crown and the image of that crown activates a particular cluster of thoughts and assumptions based upon the Dreamer's quotidian experience. These thoughts derived from the associated image of the Maiden's crown lead the Dreamer further away from rather than towards understanding.

Misunderstanding is a consistent element in the Dreamer's interaction with the Maiden. He is obviously very pleased to see her, and the joy he experiences when he first encounters her is consistent with his earlier responses to sensual delights:

> Pyȝt in Perle, þat precios pyse
>
> On wyþer half water com doun þe schore.
>
> No gladder gome heþen into Grece

[116] Thus far the Pearl Dreamer's sensitive soul has been stimulated by the imagination in its passive or *icastic* mode. In this mode his imagination receives external images as a receptor of sensible species. The active imagination operates in the *phantastic* mode, which produces images in order to represent ideas. This principle originates with Aristotle and was disseminated by Avicenna and later Bacon. *Phantastic* imagination is essentially what Richard of St. Victor refers to as "rational imagination."

Þen I quen ho on brymme wore;

Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece:

My joy forþy watz much þe more. (229-234)

The Dreamer encounters his Pearl, clad in pearls. She, like the surrounding visionary landscape, is adorned in material embellishment, and the Dreamer's response to her, couched as it is in the terms of joy and delight, compares closely with his sensual response to the other visual pleasures of the dream vision. He proceeds to consider the significance of this reunion and makes three false assumptions: he credits the Maiden's material presence based upon his sensory experience of her; he believes he will now dwell with her; and he believes he will cross the river in order to do so. In her rejoinder to the Dreamer's effusive response, the Maiden corrects these three errors. First of all she decries sensual experiences and chastens the Dreamer for failing to understand the deeper significance of the apparent reunion he has experienced:

Þou ne woste in worlde quat on [word you have spoken] dotz mene;

Þy worde byfore þy wytte con fle.

Þou says þou trawez me in þis dene

Bycawse þou may with yȝen me se. (293-96)

This passage serves as a reminder to the Dreamer that what he is experiencing is not a material or bodily vision but a spiritual vision.[117] This is clearly the case, for the Dreamer acknowledges it when he first sees the Maiden. "Wyth yȝen open," he "hoped

[117] See page 69 n42 for the description of Augustinian spiritual vision in *The Chastising of God's Children*. The *Chastising* author refers to this kind of vision as a "rauysshyng." Edward Wilson demonstrates that this sense of "rauysshyng" is consistent with the Dreamer's own assessment of his vision of the Celestial City (93). Describing the sensory experience of the vision, the Dreamer says he was "rauyste wyth glymme pure" (1088).

þat gostly watz þat porpose" (183, 185). The Dreamer's expectation is consistent with his earlier observation during the beginning of the dream that

> Fro spot my spyryt þer sprang in space;
>
> My body on balke þer bod in sweuen.
>
> My goste is gon in Godez grace,
>
> In auenture þer meruaylez meuen. (61-64)

Even in this passage, the Dreamer is not entirely accurate in his manner of responding to the vision. He rightly acknowledges that the images he is seeing are not the emanated species of material bodies, for his own body is not present; however, even as he anticipates the "gostly" nature of the Maiden (185), by employing phrases such as "bere þe face" and "Wyth eyen open," he still implies that his sensory experience is bodily in nature. In other words, even if he acknowledges that his vision is spiritual rather than bodily he still apprehends the images and responds to them as though they were corporeal. This is why he thinks that seeing the Maiden means that she is physically present and that he can cross the dividing river and be with her, and this is what she warns him against when she asserts,

> I halde þat jueler lyttel to prayse
>
> Þat leuez wel þat he sez wyth yȝe,
>
> And much to blame and vncortoyse,
>
> Þat leuez oure Lorde wolde make a lyȝe,
>
> Þat lelly hyȝte your lyf to rayse,
>
> Þaȝ Fortune dyd your flesch to dyȝe.
>
> Ȝe setten Hys wordez ful westernays

Þat leuez noþynk bot ȝe hit syȝe;

And þat is a poynt o sorquydryȝe. (301-09)[118]

The Maiden's critique not only serves to contextualize the Dreamer's erroneous reaction to the content of dream vision itself but also offers perspective on the Dreamer's earlier admission that he could not accept the nature of Christ as a consolation for his grief. If he cannot see it or feel it in some tangible, corporeal manner, the Dreamer is incapable of belief.

The Dreamer sees the vision and acknowledges that it is spiritual in nature but nonetheless responds to it as though he were seeing species of corporeal bodies. In his discussion of the "gostly" classification of the *Pearl* dream vision, Edward Wilson further explains the Dreamer's contradictory orientation to the content of his vision. He says that

> The narrator's vision is ghostly in a formal and classifying sense, but his way of looking is bodily, not in the sense in which theologians spoke of corporeal visions but in the way in which they spoke of bodily affections. His error is indicated in literary terms by his use of the language of the spiritual life, a language which, although accurate in its technical application, is potentially misleading as an index to his worldly, subjective state of mind. (96)

Wilson's reference to a "subjective state of mind" turns upon the orientation of the Dreamer's affections. In this context "affection" refers to the impulse of the will, and the

[118] Barbara Nolan stresses the significance of pride in her analysis of the Dreamer's failed vision, and she highlights the Maiden's later condemnation of "pride" at line 405. This reading is certainly consistent with the prideful covetousness of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain's prideful self-regard is a significant cause for his undue focus upon the material marks of his frailty, and he too suffers from a failure of reason. The *Pearl*-poet's association of pride with mistaken corporeal vision seems a fitting parallel.

poet establishes very early on in the poem that the will of the Dreamer is turned against his rational mind in a manner that prevents the stable operation of human reason. By enticing the will with sensual pleasures, the spiritual visions of the dream act upon the affections of the Dreamer to stir him from his depressive state; however, he continues to respond to these images as though they are corporeal in nature, and he subsequently misses the real implications of what he is seeing. The Maiden's response to this perceptual failure is rather revealing. Before he comes to a realization about the Maiden's identity, she tells him that his tale is "mysetente" (257). The Middle English Dictionary states that "misetente" means "Mistakenly fashioned; told wrongly"; however, Barbara Nolan asserts the opinion that that the word "mysetente" signifies the same meaning as Old French "mesentente" ("malentendu") and should be more properly read as "misunderstood" (Nolan 185). The word "mysetente" only occurs in *Pearl*; therefore it is difficult to be certain of its meaning. Providing the most illuminating understanding of the word, the Oxford English Dictionary entry for "mistend" identifies "myse tente" as a compound of *MIS- prefix*^{1} and *TEND v*^{1} and explains the combined meaning of these elements as: "to fail to give proper attention to." The entry for "tend *v*^{1}" offers the following definition: "to turn one's ear, give auditory attention, listen, hearken." Nolan's reading of "mysetente" as "misunderstood" is imprecise, but it does convey the correct sense: the Maiden's phrase indicates that the Dreamer is unable to accurately communicate what he has observed, because he has failed to observe it properly. He does not explain what he has seen correctly, because he has not paid the attention necessary to truly understand it. The precise thing that the Dreamer has misunderstood in this case is his preoccupation with the grave as the final resting place of his lost pearl.

His understanding is fixated upon the bodily grave, but the Maiden seeks to move his focus away from the grave with words of comfort toward the transformed nature of the Maiden herself raised to glory through the transformation of resurrection. The Dreamer's emotional response is effusive: "A juel to me þen watz þys geste, / And juelez wern hyr gentyl sawez" (277-78). This sentiment mirrors the Dreamer's later praise of the Maiden's beautiful wit, and I reiterate this point here to indicate both the advantage and disadvantage of the Dreamer's imaginative response to beauty in this poem. On the one hand it inspires his will to overcome pain, but on the other hand an excessive reliance upon the faculty of imagination draws the Dreamer into a carnal subjectivity that leads him to mistake a vision of his daughter in spirit as a vision in the flesh, and all of his subsequent misapprehensions follow from mistakenly processing with the bodily eye what the eye of the rational soul ought to perceive.[119]

The limitation that the Dreamer must overcome is precisely that limitation he identifies at line 135 when he declares that the "vrþely herte" cannot express a tenth of what he experiences in his dream vision. This limitation of the earthly heart is the shortfall of the sensitive soul associated with the imagination. The Maiden affirms that only those who dwell in heaven "þurȝoutly hauen cnawyng" or "have complete understanding" (859). The threshold that he mistakenly believes he can cross, the river separating the Dreamer from the Maiden, this threshold estranges the Dreamer from those who dwell in heaven and demarcates how he sees and what he is able to see. This is the reason why he has "mysetente" his tale, and this is the perceptual flaw that the Dreamer

[119] Reason is of course the faculty of mind that has already failed to begin with. The Dreamer's recourse to the lesser powers of imagination can only succeed insofar as the imagination can draw the Dreamer toward a restoration of the rational soul.

seeks to correct at the close of the poem when he, after finding contentment through his vision, speaks of gaining better understanding of God:

> To þat Pryncez paye hade I ay bente,
>
> And ȝerned no more þen watz me geuen,
>
> And halden me þer in trwe entent,
>
> As þe perle me prayed þat watz so þryuen,
>
> As helde, drawen to Goddez present,
>
> To mo of His mysterys I hade ben dryuen. (1189-94)

The Dreamer indicates that even though he has found spiritual satisfaction through the experience of his dream vision, he has not quite been brought in accord with the "Pryncez paye." He states that if he had "always bent" his will in conformity with the will of Christ that he could have obtained "trwe entent." "[T]rwe entent" refers to "true understanding," and the Dreamer is referring to Augustine's third and highest class of visions, those intellectual visions that can only be apprehended through the imageless sight of understanding. Acknowledging the limitations of his vision, the Dreamer nonetheless concludes his narrative by explaining how his vision has given him solace. The measure of "true understanding" that the Dreamer speaks of here contrasts with the "mysetente" tale that the Maiden chastises him for at the outset of their meeting (Nolan 201); however, despite the Dreamer's admitted contemplative imperfections, it remains to be explained exactly how the Dreamer comes to a better understanding than before and what exactly he has come to understand about God's "mysterys."

Other critics have noted that the Pearl Dreamer undertakes a formative visionary journey that leads to enlightenment only after a process of visionary instruction. Marie

Borroff suggests that the spiritual development of the Dreamer meets its ultimate purpose in the Dreamer's apocalyptic vision of the City of Heaven. According to Borroff, "Everything in the poem thus far has been preparing him to see it" ("Pearl's 'Maynful Mone'" 170). Concurring with this view, Rosalind Field calls the vision of New Jerusalem "the culmination of the poem, the peak of the Dreamer's experience for which the earlier landscapes and dialogue are preparatory" (7). Concluding his discussion of the poem, Wilson says of the Dreamer that "Only after the maiden's instruction is his dream spiritual in terms of his interior disposition, only then does he have the ghostly vision of Jerusalem" (101). This reading suggests the same notion of preparation mentioned by Borroff and Field. Sarah Stanbury specifically reflects upon the bodily aspects of the Dreamer's gaze that I have been discussing. She asserts that "the progress of the dreamer's spiritual eye is shown through the agency of his physical one" ("Visions of Space" 156). This understanding of the text recognizes the utility of the imagination in a process of developing the capacity for the spiritual sight of reason. Nolan articulates the precise power of imagination to bring about this kind of spiritual capacity. Explaining the sensual adornment of the Dreamer's arbour in transition from morbid grave to site of wonder, Nolan accords with my own reading of the transformative nature of the poem's corporeal setting:

> Well aware of the power of imagery to sway and shape the affections and convert the soul to a state of wonder, the poet lavished his persuasive art on this first "place" in his reader's ascent to high vision. At this point he did not choose the resplendent imagery of St. John's heavenly city for the soul must be prepared by degrees for such a vision… Just as the jeweller's affections are altered by his

> perceptions of the paradisal woods, plains and rivers and turned to joy and wonder—they 'garten my goste al greffe forȝete'—so in a fuller, more abstract and spiritual way could the reader's be. (178)

In support of this position, Nolan cites St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* regarding the power of sensory stimulation to compel human affection. Bonaventure's position is very much in line with the *Pearl*-poet's representation of the Dreamer's imaginative reception of both bodily and spiritual images:

> For it (contemplation) occurs in affective experience rather than in rational consideration. On this level, when the inner senses are renewed in order to perceive the highest beauty, to hear the highest harmony, smell the highest fragrance, taste the highest delicacy, apprehend the highest delights, the soul is disposed to mental elevation through devotion, wonder, and exultation… When this is accomplished, our spirit is made hierarchical to mount upward through its conformity to the heavenly Jerusalem, into which no one enters unless through grace it has descended into his heart, as John saw in his Apocalypse. (St. Bonaventure Cap. IV, 29-30)[120]

[120] These comments indicate the influence of Victorine contemplative thought, particularly the mystical writings of Richard of St. Victor, whose discourse *De trinitate* affirms that contemplation of the corporeal world provides a means to discover what is "unknown, invisible and incorporeal" (Spijker 22). According to Richard,

> we apprehend the knowledge of temporal things by the experience itself; but we rise to the knowledge of eternal things sometimes by reasoning and sometimes by believing. For some of the things which we are commanded to believe appear to be not only above reason, but also contrary to reason, unless they are discerned (*discutiantur*) by a deep and most subtle investigation or rather manifested by divine revelation. (*De trinitate* I.i, 1).

This passage recommends George Trone's assertion that Richard of St. Victor's "writings on contemplation most certainly influenced Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*" (744). Moreover, these comments regarding the utility and limitations of reason in contemplation are consistent with the Pearl Dreamer's perceptual struggles as well.

Bonaventure supplements our way of understanding how "affective experience" operates through the "inner senses" of imagination.[121] The real challenge for the Pearl Dreamer as he approaches the vision of the Celestial City is to escape from his corporeal subjectivity and learn to see his spiritual visions in a spiritual manner.

The *Pearl*-poet's choice to represent the climax of his Dreamer's visionary experience with an adaptation of the biblical text of St. John's Apocalypse provides us with a useful interpretive framework with which to evaluate not only the poet's use of the Book of Revelation but the entire text of *Pearl*. The poet acknowledges the affinity between John's Revelation and the Dreamer's own dream vision when the Dreamer identifies Apocalypse as a "gostly drem" (790). This designation recalls his earliest apprehension of the Pearl Maiden (185) and suggests that his prior failures to rightly apprehend spiritual vision will deter his capacity to fully understand the new vision. Muriel Whitaker makes note of the Dreamer's apprehension of beauty, an aesthetic experience that I have already been discussing in relation to the Dreamer's earlier experiences of sensual pleasure. She claims that

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[121] In his *Scale of Perfection*, Walter Hilton expresses an even more radical view. He claims that through affective experience God can enable the human soul to bypass the need for rational cognition altogether:

> He openeth the innere iye of the soule whanne He lightneth the reson thorugh touchynge and schynynge of His blyssid light, for to seen Hym and knowe Him; not al fulli at oones, but litil and litil bi dyverse tymes, as the soule mai suffre Hym. He seeth Hym not what He is, for that mai no creature doon
> in hevene ne in erthe; ne he seth Him not as He is, for that sight is oonli in the blisse of hevene. But he seth Him that He is: an unchaungeable beynge, a sovereyn myght, sovereyn soothfastnesse, and sovereyne goodnesse, a blissid lyf, and an eendelees blisse. This seeth the soule, and moche more that cometh withal; not blyndli and savourli, as dooth a clerk that seeth Him be clergie oonli thorugh myght of his naked resoun, but that othir seeth Hym in undirstondynge that is comforted and lightned by the gifte of the Hooli Goost with a wondirful reverence and a priveli brennande love, with goostli savour and heveneli delite, more cleerli and more fulli than mai be writen or seid. (II. Ch. 32, 2159-70)

Denigrating the bookish ways of clerks who see "blyndli" through rational means, Hilton is saying that affective experience can obviate the need for reason by leading the heart directly to understanding.

> The particular problem confronting the Dreamer, that of finding consolation for the loss of his precious pearl, is solved by means of a visionary otherworld journey which acquaints him with the beauty of celestial order. Through his apprehension of beauty come understanding and acceptance. Thus the adumbration of doctrine by means of imagery is an aesthetic response to a problem that is both psychological and theological. (194)[122]

According to Austin Farrer, the Apocalypse provides a suitable landscape for just such an exploration of images: "It is the one great poem which the first Christian age produced, it is a single living unity from end to end, and it contains a whole world of spiritual imagery to be entered into and possessed" (6).

Although the Pearl Dreamer identifies the Apocalypse as a "gostly drem" or spiritual vision, there was some debate among medieval theologians and exegetes regarding whether or not John's dream vision ought to be classified as "spiritual vision" or "intellectual vision" in Augustinian terms. The author of *The Chastising of God's Children* actually invokes St. John's vision in an explanation of Augustine's spiritual class of visions. The unknown author refers to this kind of vision as an

> imagynatif, whan a man is in his sleepe, or whanne a man is rauysshed fulli in spirit in tyme of preier, or in oþer tyme seeþ ymages and figures of diuerse þinges, but no bodies, bi shewyng or reuelacion of god, as seint ion þe euangelist, whanne

[122] Whitaker's argument makes the claim that the *Pearl*-poet's adaptation of Apocalypse demonstrates a familiarity with illuminated Apocalypse manuscripts. She argues that the way in which the poet frames the imagery of the vision indicates direct influence of common visual motifs. One of the most compelling cases in this argument is her observation that the image of the wounded Lamb, such a prominent part of the Pearl Dreamer's vision of the Celestial City, is nowhere to be found in the Book of Revelation. According to Whitaker, the image of the wound is a commonplace of illuminated Apocalypse manuscripts, and the poet's prominent use of this image is likely inspired by familiarity with such illustrations.

he was rauyshed in spirit, say many figuris and imagis, as we rede in þe apocalips. (169)

This interpretation is consistent with the prologue of the *English Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse*, which persistently refers to the Apocalypse vision as "sheweynges in gost" or "gostlich siȝttes" (2) and claims that John "seiȝ it in gost" (3). The *English Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse* nonetheless incorporates an exegetical commonplace of the period and claims that John the Divine experienced his dream as a spiritual vision (replete with similitudes and sensory representations) but further clarifies that he saw "nouȝth onlich þe figures ac he understood what it was to menen" (4). This interpretation invokes learned opinion on the matter that recognizes the vision itself as a spiritual vision but explains John's further understanding of the dream to be a case of intellectual vision conferred by divine grace. In this way, John sees divine mysteries in spiritual figures and then apprehends the true meaning of these figures through the figureless sight of understanding.[123]

According to Muriel Whitaker, there is good reason to believe that the *Pearl*-poet was familiar with medieval Apocalypse commentaries. The strongest evidence for this line of influence may be found in *Pearl*'s description of the Celestial City. The text refers to the dimensions of the city:

[123] Around the turn of the ninth century, Alcuin of York's *Commentariorum in apocalypsin* states that the Apocalypse represents "nothing historical" and that it is an "intellectual vision in which the truth of things is manifested directly to the intuition without the mediation of corporeal things or 'similitudes' for things" (Nolan 7). This opinion seems to wholly overlook the actual content of Apocalypse, which is nothing if not composed of representative imagery or similitudes. Invoking Augustine's tripartite schemata of visionary experience, the later Apocalypse commentaries revise Alcuin's opinion on intellectual vision in the Apocalypse. Notable among these latter day commentaries is that of Richard of St. Victor, who, following Hugh of St. Victor and Pseudo-Dionysius, rejects Alcuin's classification of the Apocalypse as an intellectual vision: "For him, it is rather, symbolic—an apparition in which… 'sometimes invisible things are shown forth through signs like things perceived by sense'" (Nolan 22-23, citing Richard's commentary on the Apocalypse, *In Apocalypsim Joannis* in *PL* CXCVI 687).

Þenne helde vch sware of þis manayre

Twelue forlonge space, er euer hit fon,

Of heȝt, of brede, of lenþe to cayre,

For meten hit syȝ þe apostel John. (1029-32).

Whitaker points out that "The measurement given in Rev. 21.16 is not twelve but twelve thousand" (192). This emendation originates in the Apocalypse commentaries of Bede and Berengaudus of Ferrières (840-892), who both conflate the description of twelve gates with the description of furlongs and deem the latter element a redundancy of the text. Whitaker attributes the *Pearl*-poet's unexplained adoption of this reading to an apparent familiarity with glossed Apocalypse manuscripts, particularly glosses that are either reproductions of the commentary of Berengaudus or that otherwise share Berengaudus's reading of the twelve rather than twelve thousand furlongs of Revelation 21:16.[124]

The poet's apparent knowledge of the commentary tradition of the Apocalypse suggests that he may have been influenced by such commentaries in his own adaptation and use of the Apocalypse in *Pearl*. The Pearl Dreamer's visionary experience is very much an exercise in reading the Apocalypse, for his experience of the spiritual vision is focalized through the very eyes of John the Divine, whose status as eyewitness is

[124] According to Karen Gross, "there are over 50 surviving English illustrated Apocalypses from the thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century, which contain some combination of Latin prose text, French prose text, French versified text, and Latin or French commentary" (342). Suzanne Lewis identifies fifteen thirteenth-century Apocalypse manuscripts that incorporate Berengaudus glosses ("Exegesis and Illustration" 274). Among these manuscripts, Trinity College MS. R. 16. 2 draws particular interest from Whitaker, who asserts that "Nothing is more likely than that the poet used a Trinity descendent that perpetuated this reading" (192). The Trinity Apocalypse (13th cen.) is an "Abridged apocalypse in Anglo-Norman (Version B) with an abbreviated Berengaudus commentary; Life of John in Anglo-Norman" (Emmerson and Lewis 376). Stanbury challenges the categorical specificity of Whitaker's claim and her identification of Berengaudus rather than Bede as the *Pearl*-poet's probable source, but the ubiquity of the Berengaudus gloss among extant MSS. is undeniable. It is quite likely that the poet was familiar with Berengaudus's commentary as well as other circulating glosses such as those of Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075/1080 – c. 1129) or Richard of St. Victor.

inscribed as a kind of substitution for the Dreamer's own contemplative experience. This manner of representing the Dreamer's vision has drawn criticism from readers such as John Finlayson, who identifies yet another marker of the Dreamer's obtuseness in his rote adherence to the words of St. John (333). Patricia Kean also highlights the apparent lack of inspiration that seems to characterize this section of the poem (210). Suggesting that the *Pearl*-poet is exercising modest restraint, Ad Putter offers a more even-handed assessment of the poet's approach, which Putter claims cleaves to meditation on biblical text rather than contemplation of heavenly visions (194). This latter view may be charitable, but it strikes me as inconsistent with the visionary bent of the poet's work. It seems, rather, that the *Pearl*-poet introduces the text of John's Apocalypse precisely because it presents readers with visionary possibilities both in its conception and in the ways it can be read.

In the context of the *Pearl*-poet's sustained attention to theophanic experiences, the Apocalypse commentary of Richard of St. Victor is of particular interest, because Richard's way of reading the Apocalypse informs the way in which the *Pearl*-poet reads and adapts the Apocalypse for his Dreamer's vision. Richard's introduction delineates his thoughts on exegetical theory, "especially theory proper to the exegesis of prophetic books" (Kraebel 330). Richard's approach in this introduction is relevant to *Pearl*, because Richard's way of reading the enigmatic imagery of John's dream vision parallels the Pearl Dreamer's own affective experience of dream vision.

The exegetical response to the Apocalypse favoured by Richard further develops the Augustinian three-fold theory of vision. From a contemplative perspective, previous commentators seem content to establish what kind of vision John experiences and leave

the matter at that. Richard approaches the contemplative scenario from the perspective of the observer and addresses not only what kind of vision is being revealed but also the way in which the observer sees it. According to Madeline Caviness, "Richard presented vision as four-fold, in a way that is analogous to the four levels of scriptural exegesis that were current by the latter part of the [twelfth] century" (115).[125] These four modes of vision are divided into two categories, bodily and spiritual, and ascend from the lowest corporeal vision to the highest spiritual vision. The fact that these modes correspond to categories of exegesis suggests the hierarchy of ways of seeing that maps onto medieval ways of reading. The first and lowest mode of seeing is carnal in nature. Those who see in the first mode see the forms of corporeal bodies and infer no other meaning from these images. This mode corresponds to literal reading of scripture. The second mode is also bodily, but those who see in this mode not only see the outward appearance of corporeal bodies but also perceive the mystical significance of those forms. This mode corresponds to the allegorical reading of scripture. The third mode is spiritual rather than bodily. The images perceived in this mode are internalized and perceived by the inner senses consisting in "the eyes of the heart." Even though the images perceived in this mode of seeing correlate to no existing corporeal body, the eyes of the heart investigate "similitudes of things" in order to uncover "the truth of hidden things" (*In Apocalypsim Joannis, Patrologia Latina* CXCVI 687-88). This mode corresponds to the moral or tropological interpretation of scripture.[126] The fourth and final mode of vision

[125] D.W. Robertson applied the four senses of scriptural interpretation to the image of the pearl itself (155-61). More recently, Jane Chance has suggested that the senses of scriptural interpretation actually explain the structure of *Pearl* ("Allegory and Structure in *Pearl*" 31-59).

[126] In her exposition of the four-fold exegetical tradition, Beryl Smalley quotes an exegetical commonplace attributed to Guibert of Nogent (1055-1124): "Historically, Jerusalem is an earthly city, allegorically she signifies the Church, tropologically, the faithful soul, anagogically the Celestial City. History relates to the

corresponds with the anagogical reading of scripture and is spiritual in nature but hardly visual in the usual sense. In this mode of seeing, the observer receives spiritual insight through imageless enlightenment.

According to Richard of St. Victor, when John the Evangelist is blessed with an intellectual understanding of the true meaning of his image-filled dream vision he perceives with the imageless fourth mode of seeing. Prior to this gift of divine insight, however, John's way of seeing operates in the third mode, because he sees images spiritually without a corporeal referent:

> It is therefore manifest that he has seen it in the third kind of seeing, especially because the book is full of formal likenesses of temporal things, namely the heavens, the sun, the moon, clouds, rains, hail, lightning, thunder, winds, birds, fish, beasts, animals, serpents, reptiles, trees, mountains, hills, air, sea, earth, and other things present to the senses. It was necessary for our weakness which is able to grasp the highest only through the lowest, the spiritual only through the corporeal, to learn the unknown not through the more unknown but through the known. (*Patrologia Latina* CXCVI 687, translation Kraebel 345-46)[127]

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course of events, allegory interprets one event as significant of another, tropology deals with morals, anagogy leads us to contemplation of things above" (60). The Pearl Dreamer, experiencing a dream vision representing spiritual truths through visible similitudes, should aspire to see his vision in the third mode in order to glean the tropological significance of St. John's apocalyptic vision. Because he lacks the spiritual discipline to direct the reason necessary to employ the third mode of seeing, he must make do with the second mode.

[127] In order to make this point, Richard appeals to the authority of Pseudo-Dionysius, from whom Richard derives the term "material guide" as a way to refer to the sensual similitudes of spiritual vision:

> Thus blessed Dionysius, in the foresaid book [*Celestial Hierarchies*], says, "It is impossible for our mind to ascend to the subject of the celestial hierarchies, either to the imitation or to the contemplation thereof, unless it makes use of some material guide (*manductione*)." He calls the images of bodily things "material guides," through which incorporeal and invisible things are figured in holy Scripture. (*Patrologiae Latina* CXCVI 687, translation Kraebel 346)

In spite of this apparent enthusiasm for the contemplative potential of bodily images in spiritual vision, Richard counsels caution lest the imagination lead the mind to mistake spiritual for corporeal vision:

> Every figure reveals the truth all the more clearly, the more it demonstrates through dissimilar similitudes that it is a figure and not the truth, and dissimilar similitudes lead our mind to the truth all the more when they do not allow the mind simply to remain with the similitude itself. For this reason, holy Scripture, with wondrous providence, stoops to the base qualities of base things: these base things, signifying what is immaterial and invisible, do not allow our mind to rest in them, but, in their deformity, they compel the mind to move on to what is immaterial, far removed from every similitude of material things… If the signifying similitudes of holy literature always made use of light, clear, and beautiful things, the human mind would quickly be seduced, especially the mind of those who understand nothing to be higher than visible goods, and… we would think that heaven contained certain gilded essences, radiant men clothed in beautiful garments, and all the other things under which holy theology veils mystical truths. (*Patrologia Latina* CXCVI 689, translation Kraebel 347)

This warning finds its justification in the Pearl Dreamer's tendency to mistake spiritual similitudes for corporeal bodies. Richard's note of caution in this regard is echoed in the Maiden's humbling lecture to the Dreamer about bodily seeing on lines 289-308.

Excess meditation on bodily images leads to a carnal subjectivity that fails to see beyond the two lowest modes of bodily sight. The *Pearl*-poet's adaptation of St. John's Apocalypse must overcome the fallen perceptions of carnal subjectivity and demonstrate

the appropriate response to spiritual visions of bodily similitudes in the third mode of vision. To this end, one of the most significant shifts that occurs at this point in the narrative is the sudden displacement of the Pearl Maiden. Presenting the Dreamer with images of beauty and delight, the Maiden hitherto functions as a kind of figure for the instructive imagination. She is his "material guide"; however, upon the introduction of St. John's Apocalypse to the text of *Pearl*, the narrative function of the Maiden is displaced by John himself. Even before the Dreamer requests that he be brought to the Heavenly Jerusalem (964), the Maiden makes reference to the Apocalypse text in a deferential manner: "'Lest les þou leue my talle farande, / In Appocalyppece is wryten in wro: / 'I seghe,' says John, 'þe Loumbe Hym stande / On þe mount of Syon ful þryuen and þro…'" (865-8). John becomes the subject of vision in this formulation of the mental image.[128] In reporting what John saw, the Maiden actually gives up narrating by letting him speak for himself in action and word: "'I seghe,' says John." At line 944 the Maiden again turns to the text of John to supplement her description of the celestial kingdom, but this note of deference to textual authority ought not to be taken as an utter supplanting of imagination in *Pearl*. Rather we ought to understand this shift as simply an indication that imagination has assumed a different function. Instead of processing mental images called forth from memory and recombined through the poetic synthesis of forms, the imagination pores over the textual images of the Book of Revelation and reproduces them

[128] The Dreamer transcribes the text of John into his own visual memory and thus sustains the visual immediacy of John's textually inscribed experience: "As John þe apostel hit sy3 with sy3t, / I sy3e þat cyty of gret renoun" (985-86). By positing himself in the same observer's position as John, the poet makes his Dreamer an eyewitness to the text and thus imitates a kind of direct apprehension of spiritual imagery derived directly from God. The mundane source of the vision for the Pearl Dreamer, however, is, of course, a book. Referring to Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, Foucault remarks that St. Anthony's visions arise from the act of reading rather than from any ascetic wandering in the wilderness: "The visionary experience arises from the black and white surface of printed signs, from the closed and dusty volume that opens with a flight of forgotten words" ("Fantasia of the Library" 90).

within the drama of the poem's dream-vision conceit as mental images shared by the Dreamer.

Most of what the Dreamer reveals in his shared vision is a Middle English paraphrase of John's lapidary inventory. The Apocalypse's images of gems and scriptural figures remain firmly ensconced in the theoretical realm of corporeal similitudes; however, these details are expressed through the textually inscribed authority of St. John's vision. This point renders the fantastic images of the Dreamer's apocalyptic vision as images in the spiritual sense, and because of this they ought to be contemplated through a mode of vision that can rise above the capacity of simple imagination, and yet the spectacle unfolds as a perceptual rather than contemplative experience, for the scene evinces the very same qualities of sensuous delight as those enjoyed by the Dreamer at the outset of the poem. First of all, in spite of the *Pearl*-poet's conscious adaptation of the Apocalypse, the Dreamer identifies himself as an observer: "I asspyed / And blusched on the burghe, as I forth dreued" (979-80). Just as he had done before, the Dreamer once again "bears the face" toward the objects of his gaze, and he proceeds to cast his gaze upon the scene: "As John þe apostel hit syȝ with syȝt, / I syȝe þat cyty of gret renoun" (985-86). John is the initial subject of vision, but the Dreamer is not saying that he read what John saw but that he in fact saw exactly what John reported seeing in his Apocalypse. In order to explain why the Dreamer can see what John saw but not understand it, we must recognize that all of what John saw was a spiritual similitude representing an invisible reality. God and the Celestial City are remote from such similitudes, though likenesses or similitudes provide a means of approaching intellectual understanding of invisible truth. In other words, they see the same vision but they do not

observe it with the same mode of seeing. Whereas John initially perceives his vision with the tropological contemplation of reason in the third mode and later is graced with an intellectual understanding of his vision in the fourth mode, the Dreamer perceives the vision only allegorically through the imaginative second mode of seeing.

Pearl may disappoint contemplative ambition through its resigned lack of true face-to-face theophany, but if we emphasize merely what the Dreamer sees (or fails to see) we risk overlooking the Dreamer's imaginative response to the scene. Any attempt to evaluate the Dreamer's development through his visionary experience must examine how he responds to what he sees as well.[129] As he witnesses the joy of the holy procession, he observes a variety of sensual pleasures, and all are attributed to the arrival of Christ the Lamb (1117). The "swete smelle" of incense (1122) and the music of the singers in procession (1124-25) inspire the Dreamer to feel the joy of those assembled in the Celestial City. In response to this scene, the Dreamer declares, "Iwysse I laȝt a gret delyt" (1128). The Dreamer's obvious joy suffuses every image in the scene and especially the visual images of the dream vision, which stir his emotions in much the same manner as the images he encounters at the beginning of the dream. The emotional climax of this experience draws near when he takes note of the city itself:

> Anvnder mone so gret merwayle
>
> No fleschly hert ne myȝt endeure
>
> As quen I blusched vpon þat baly,

[129] In her examination of marginal and miniature figurations of St. John within Apocalypse manuscript illumination, Muriel Whitaker highlights the expressive nature of these figures. Emphasizing "gesture, stance, and facial expression," Whitaker claims that these figures are emblematic of a "Gothic style" in which emotional responses may be expressed (184). She contrasts these gestural figures with the Vulgate St. John character, "a passive observer" that I similarly contrast with the expressive Dreamer of *Pearl*. The *Pearl*-poet has created an emotionally dynamic figure for the purpose of exploring the phenomenology of his Dreamer's limited contemplative experience.

So ferly þerof watz þe fasure.

I stod as stylle as dased quayle

For ferly of þat frech fygure. (1081-86)

The Dreamer speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem, descended from the sky and visible under the full moon. Yet again, his response to the vision does not elaborate the content of his Apocalypse-mediated experience but rather expresses the emotional affect of the scene through his heart-felt sensory experience. He speaks of the "fleschly heart," a reference that serves to remind us once again that the content of his spiritual vision exceeds the capacity of the sensitive soul to adequately contemplate it. It is as if his imaginative faculty has been filled to its capacity with images of delight and can contain no more, for more would require the intercession of reason's inner eye. Beyond this assertion of human limitation before the spectacle of beatific experience, the poet proceeds to explain the Dreamer's frail subjectivity. Liked a "dased quayle" is an arresting description because it serves to humble the Dreamer even as he stands before the prospect of greatest human dignity. While he is stunned into an insensible even animal-like stupor, the Maiden and her companions are walking and singing in orderly procession, all of them in full communion with Christ. Moreover, this moment recalls the Dreamer's initial response to the Maiden when he "stod as hende as hawk in halle" (184).[130] In her discussion of the influence of liturgical practice upon *Pearl*'s representation of individual Christian salvation, Jennifer Garrison suggests that this scene of maidens in procession is a deviation from the Vulgate source and that

[130] This parallel has been indicated by Rosalind Field as an example of how the Dreamer is personalized through "comic familiarity" (10). This echo resonates beyond the text of *Pearl*, however, for it further recalls the failed wit of Nebuchadnezzar, whose deficit of reason in *Cleanness* actually leaves him transformed into an unthinking animal.

> It is no coincidence that, at the moments when the dreamer relies on John's textual support the least, his reason and self-control also begin to fade. He describes these extratextual elements as such great wonders that "No fleschly hert ne myght endeure" (1082) and he becomes like a "dased quayle" (1085) upon seeing them. The heavenly Jerusalem thwarts direct human understanding; a human becomes like an animal in witnessing it. The poem implies that to perceive the heavenly and remain both human and rational is necessarily to perceive it through textual mediation. (314)

Garrison's observation suggests that, if he is to ever transcend the material tethers of bodily sight, the Dreamer must project his gaze with the power of conscious self-control. Garrison further observes that this kind of control is consonant with the model of restraint forwarded in *Patience* through the *Pearl*-poet's re-phrasing of the eighth Beatitude: "Þay ar happen also þat con her hert stere" (27). The Dreamer's admission that his earthly heart cannot endure the sight he now beholds suggests that he is unable to control his heart and thus unable to yoke the sensual perspective of the imagination to the rational powers of the soul. The poet's characterization of the Dreamer, revealed through the Dreamer's response to his visions, demonstrates a consistent mode of vision at work in his gaze and reminds us that he is still gazing with the bodily eye of the imagination.

It is as if the dream can enlighten the Dreamer's eyes but not his heart, but during the climactic vision of the poem the Dreamer achieves precisely this: the illumination of reason through the pleasure of imagination. At first, reason remains incapable of interpreting the dream, so imagination must attempt to make sense of the vision. The gems, the gates, the numerical properties ascribed to the architecture all portend a world

of meaning from which the Dreamer is exiled. All that he has is the pleasure of the imaginative bodily eye, which gazes upon the spiritual vision and derives sensory fulfillment without spiritual enlightenment. Nolan touches upon this element of the Dreamer's vision when she remarks that "the poet underscores the *pictorial* rather than the spiritual aspect of the vision, keeping both narrator and reader from the inner chamber of the kingdom" (199).[131] The Dreamer's most intimate glimpse within that inner chamber occurs when he sees the figure of the bleeding lamb. I have already indicated that the Vulgate Apocalypse depicts the lamb without a wound and that the *Pearl*-poet's deviation from scriptural authority may derive from illuminated Apocalypse manuscripts, some of which depict the lamb with a gash either on its throat or in its side. Following the Dreamer's declaration of joy before the sight of the holy procession, he acknowledges that he delights specifically in the contemplation of the Lamb: "Delit þe Lombe for to deuise / With much meruayle in mynde went" (1129-30). The way in which the Dreamer describes his response to the spectacle calls to mind the phenomenology of the contemplative mind. The joy that the Dreamer experiences "in mynde" proceeds from the characteristics that make the Lamb so perfectly complement its immediate environs. We are told that

> Best watz He, blyþest, and moste to pryse,
> Þat euer I herde of speche spent;
> So worþly whyt wern wedez Hys,
> His lokez symple, Hymself so gent. (1131-34)

[131] This observation is consistent with Muriel Whitaker's argument that the *Pearl*-poet's rendering of the Apocalypse vision is inspired by illuminations found in many Apocalypse manuscripts.

The Lamb's superlative beauty and purity express the continuity of the Dreamer's experience throughout the spiritual vision of his dream. The Lamb resembles the figure of the Maiden, a resemblance which reinforces the identification of both the Lamb and the Maiden with the image of the pearl itself This uniformity of material delight is interrupted by the Dreamer's further observation of the Lamb's piteous wound: "Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse / Anende Hys hert, þurȝ hyde torente. / Of His quyte syde His blod outsprent" (1135-37). The Dreamer's affective response turns from joy to pain, as he responds to the vision of the wounded Lamb with an outflow of compassion: "Alas, þoȝt I, who did þat spyt? / Ani breste for bale aȝt haf forbrent / Er he þerto hade had delyt" (1138-40). This experience disrupts the reverie of the Dreamer's imaginative experience, but it also recovers the significant meaning underlying not only the dream vision itself but also the sorrow that precedes the vision. The Dreamer wonders who could have inflicted the wound upon the Lamb, and the answer calls us back to the Maiden's most pointed moments of pedantic instruction in the text. In response to his evaluation of who is more or less deserving of heavenly rewards, the Maiden tells the Dreamer that none are truly deserving and that all are saved only through the power of divine grace. The wound of the Lamb is a wound representing the redemption of all human sin, and it is therefore a wound borne for the sake of and because of all humankind. In a very valid sense, the Dreamer himself is responsible for the Lamb's wound. The Dreamer sees the wound and his mind turns back from joy to pain, though in this case the pain is not for his own suffering but for the Lamb, who continues to delight in spite of His grievous wound: "Þaȝ He were hurt and wounde hade, / In His sembelaunt watz neuer sene, / So wern His glentez gloryous glade" (1142-44). In

spite of a wound that nearly cuts to its heart, the Lamb's irrepressible joy is shown forth through his own comforting gaze. The Lamb provides the *Pearl*-poet with a figurative example that combines joy and pain into a single image, and through this image the Dreamer is finally given to know the true "kynde of Kryst" that has evaded his rational mind. The bleeding wound emphasizes the human nature of Christ, and the Dreamer's realization of Christ's human suffering is the imaginative spur for his eventual reconciliation through the ritual demonstration of the Eucharist.

Even if he cannot fathom its inscrutable nature, he can feel pleasure in the Lamb's joys and sorrow in the Lamb's pains and thus come to an emotional recognition of his own life in relation to the spiritual prospect of his vision. As the Dreamer's response to the vision reaches its emotional crescendo, he determines to physically cross the border between the corporeal and spiritual:

> Delyt me drof in yȝe and ere,
> My manez mynde to maddyng malte;
> Quen I seȝ my frely, I wolde be þere,
> Byȝonde þe water þaȝ ho were walte.
> I þoȝt þat noþyng myȝt me dere
> To fech me bur and take me halte. (1153-58)

The pleasure of the Lamb, whose joy defies rational thought, serves as the model for emotional human response in the face of suffering. As he witnesses this figure of suffering negated through bliss, the Dreamer continues to experience the dream as a corporeal similitude, for the delight experienced here passes through the sensory portals of the eyes and ears. The result remains a spiritual vision that defies spiritual

understanding but nonetheless inspires the will to seek communion through whatever action seems possible. Richard of St. Victor explains this dynamic in *Benjamin minor.* In his discussion of the psychological mechanisms of contemplative preparation, Richard affirms that imagination, though inferior to reason, is nonetheless a spiritual aid for rational thought because "without imagination, reason would know nothing; without sensation, affection would have sense of nothing" (*Twelve Patriarchs* V, 57). These lines speak of contemplative understanding as a graduated scale of sensory and intellectual plateaus in which various lesser instruments of sense and thought work in concert with the greater faculties in the pursuit of spiritual knowing. This supreme happiness finally spurs the Dreamer to resolve the contradictions of Christian consolation and attempt a joining of the earthly and divine realms.

The Dreamer's attempt to wade across the dividing river of the scene may be a misguided act (he cannot bodily transport himself to the Celestial City), but the gesture of traversing the barrier is significant because it represents an act of will. The Dreamer's will had been in conflict at the outset of the poem. Paralyzed by a sorrow that defied consolation, the Dreamer found his will helpless to pursue the doctrinal consolations afforded to him by Christian faith. During the emotional climax of the dream vision, however, he finds renewed will through the affective emotional experience of joy. The Dreamer acknowledges this as he ponders the vision he has just beheld:

> If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
> Þat þou so strykez in garlande gay,
> So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun
> Þat þou art to þat Prynsez paye. (1185-88)

The Dreamer remains in a depressive mode, for he characterizes his worldly life as a kind of prison, which is perhaps an apt descriptor for a life lived in isolation from the celestial delights of the Dreamer's vision; however, the knowledge that the Maiden dwells in "garlande gay," knowledge that he has attained by way of sight, this knowledge is enough to assuage the mental torment of the Dreamer in spite of all the sorrows of this world. The Dreamer comes to accept the "Prynsez paye" and subsequently align his own will with the will of God. After this realignment of the will, the Dreamer proceeds to fix his bodily gaze upon the image of the Eucharistic Host of the mass, "Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn / Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye" (1209-10). In this way, his affective contemplation of the wounded Lamb continues, and the Dreamer's will continues to turn his gaze not to the material earth of the grave but upward to the raised wafer.

This is the process of spiritual conditioning that is described in Richard of St. Victor's *The Book of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Richard's text offers a phenomenology of contemplative preparation and describes the psychological processes that govern the capacity for various kinds of mystical contemplations. Unlike Richard's later text *The Mystical Ark*, a text that proffers an elaborate taxonomy of contemplative experience from the lowest meditations to the most transcendent theophanies, *The Book of the Twelve Patriarchs* is chiefly interested in the mental preparations of a novice or initiate to the contemplative life. *The Book of the Twelve Patriarchs* is presented as an extended tropological allegory of the birth of Benjamin, the last son of Jacob and the last of the twelve patriarchs. Tropologically, Richard associates the birth of the twelve patriarchs with the restoration or activation of spiritual knowledge and/or sensitivity to spiritual experience. With the birth of every successive patriarch, from Reuben to Benjamin,

Richard allegorizes the contemplative powers of the human subject awakening into ever greater precision and acuity, and the eventual birth of Benjamin himself ultimately represents the fulfillment of humankind's greatest contemplative potential.[132] Richard identifies this as perfection and claims that "it falleth to a perfect soul both to be inflamed with the fire of love in the affection, and illumined with the light of knowing in the reason" (*Benjamin minor* 11). For Richard, the fire of love must emerge before the light of reason can follow. Within his allegory of the patriarchs the affections must first be inflamed by the imagination before the illumination of the rational soul can occur:

> We said above that just as it pertains to Leah who is affection of the soul to love, so it is for Rachel who is reason to know. Indeed, from the former every ordered affection is born; from the latter, mental sense or pure intellect. But what do we understand by Judah, if not ordered love, love of celestial things, love of God, love of the highest good? And so, at the birth of Judah—that is when longing for invisible goods rises up and ferments—Rachel begins to burn with desire for children because she begins to want to know. Where there is love, there is seeing. We gladly look at one whom we greatly love… So the more Judah grows (that is,

[132] Richard's interpretation is inspired by Psalm 68: "There is Benjamin, a youth in ecstasy of mind" (68:27). The principal conceit of the allegory is Richard's representation of Jacob's wives and their handmaids as figures for the faculties of sensation and affection. The Middle English compiler of the *Benjamin minor* cites Richard's explanation of the allegory:

> By Jacob is understanden God, by Rachel is understanden reason, by Leah is understanden affection. Each of these wives, Rachel and Leah, took to them a maiden; Rachel took Bilhah, and Leah took Zilpah… By Bilhah is understanden imagination, the which is servant unto reason, as Bilhah was to Rachel; by Zilpah is understanden sensuality, the which is servant unto affection, as Zilpah was to Leah. (3-4)

Chapters 25-50 of the Book of Genesis describe Jacob's life and marriages and introduce the progeny of Jacob. Jacob's first wife Rachel fails to bear him children for many years, a point which Richard incorporates in his tropological allegory as the period of cognitive maturation prior to the full development of the rational faculty. Rachel (or reason) can only bear children after the necessary prior stages of development have been achieved, and these stages are symbolized by the birth of Jacob's other children.

the affection called loving), the greater there burns in Rachel the desire to give birth, which is the pursuit of knowing. (*The Twelve Patriarchs* XIII, 65-66)

"Where there is love, there is seeing": this phrase seems to characterize the very mode of seeing that we observe in the experience of the Pearl Dreamer. Before he sees his vision, he cannot begin to contemplate what he must know in order to cope with his "deuely dele." After he sees he begins to love, and once he loves he yearns to see more. What he has already seen in the dream vision he has witnessed by the bodily sight of imagination. What he longs to see hereafter and what he pursues in the contemplation of the raised Host is sight borne by the eyes of the heart: the sight of reason.[133]

After his fantastic vision, the Dreamer effectively wakes from his "slepyng-slaȝte" on both literal and symbolic levels. He is no longer sleeping, but more than this he has achieved a new perspective and renewed his verve for living. Edward Wilson demonstrates that the "slepyng-slaȝte," the death-like slumber that so characterizes the Dreamer's crippling initial state of emotional malaise, sounds a verbal echo with the late fourteenth-century mystical treatise *The Cloud of Unknowing* (98). The *Cloud* author claims that one's capability to receive God's grace depends upon

> a stronge & a deep goostly sorow. Bot in þis sorow nedeþ þee to haue discrecion on þis maner: þou schalt be ware in þe tyme of þis sorow þat þou neiþer to rudely streyne þi body ne þi spirit, bot sit ful stylle, as it were in a slepyng sleiȝt, al

[133] The example Richard of St. Victor offers to explicate the significance of Bilhah's (Imagination's) children turns upon the joys to be beheld upon glimpsing the Celestial City:

> Dan, where we work by imagination alone although we cannot deal with it in such labor without the ordering of reason. But when we read about a land flowing with milk and honey or heavenly Jerusalem having walls of precious stones, gates of pearl and streets of gold, what person of sane sense would wish to interpret these things according to the literal sense? Therefore immediately he has recourse to spiritual understanding, and seeks what is contained there mystically. (*The Twelve Patriarchs* XVIII, 70)

Dan, the child of Bilhah representing the joy anticipated through things to come, signifies the consolation of imagination as it considers the beatific promise of future delights.

forsobbid & for-sonken in sorow. Þis is trewe sorow; þis is parfite sorow; & wel were hym þat miȝt wynne to þis sorow. (XLIV. 83)

Wilson notes the contrast between the spiritual sorrow invoked by the *Cloud* author and the relative carnality of the *Pearl*-poet's Dreamer, who must eventually transcend his bodily mode of seeing and carnal subjectivity in favour of a more sublimated spiritual perspective (99). *Pearl*'s verbal echo with *The Cloud of Unknowing* further suggests the poet's familiarity with contemporary mystical writings, a not unexpected familiarity considering the poet's obvious interest in beatific vision. The poet's use of the phrase "slepyng-slaȝte" in the first stanza group of *Pearl* is an ironic gesture, because the Dreamer's carnal fixation upon mortal sadness hardly constitutes "parfite sorrow" in the spiritual sense; however, by the end of the dream vision the Dreamer awakens to a sober meditation on sadness that resembles not at all the plaintive despair that marks our introduction to the Dreamer. As his vision passes into memory, the Dreamer comments on his lingering sadness:

Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
So soddenly of þat fayre regioun,
Fro all þo syȝtez so quyke and queme.
A longeyng heuy me strok in swone,
And rewfully þenne I con to reme. (1177-81)

This passage detailing the nature of the Dreamer's sadness serves as a fitting means with which to conclude his vision. Along with the description of the Dreamer's sorrowful transition to sleep in stanza group I, these passages serve to frame the Dreamer's near-ecstatic dream vision within the context of material life and its attendant sorrows. Rather

than fixate upon the "doel-doungoun" of this earthly existence, however, the Dreamer resolves even in the grip of sadness that he will seek to bend his own will towards that of the heavenly Prince. In spite of lingering sorrow, the capacity for delight that so animated the Dreamer's affections and compelled his perceptions within the visionary landscape of the dream vision now operates in his waking life as well. The delight of the imaginative eye has taught him to feel a joy that he thought forlorn with the loss of his precious pearl. His potential for joy recovered, the Dreamer now seeks to align his heart with the will of God and gaze with a spiritual eye that seeks not only the "mysterys" of "gostly" dream vision but gazes "day and naȝte" in search of signs of spirit that are sensible to the restored inner eye of his rational soul (1203).

CHAPTER VI — Conclusion

The final image of *Pearl*, that of the consecrated Host, provides a corporeal object for the *Pearl*-poet's consistent thematic refrain: "blessed are the pure of heart for they will see God." The sight of the Eucharistic Host not only serves as a consolation for the suffering of the Dreamer, but it also serves as a consolation for the great desire that undergirds all of the poems of the Pearl Manuscript. The Dreamer's concluding meditations on the Eucharist emphasize the incarnational aspects of the sacrament and draw attention to the immanent nature of God that the Eucharist represents. This notion of immanence or closeness to the divine presence provides a consolation for the Dreamer, because it satisfies his particular sense of lack at the end of the dream vision itself. Isolated from the Celestial City by the dividing river, the Dreamer yearns for communion, and his attempt to cross the river signifies his desire for the presence of God to be revealed as immanent. The sight of the sanctified Host being raised during the Mass constitutes the earthly fulfillment of this mystical communion. The poet mentions the raising of the Host, which "Þe preste vus schewez vch a daye" (1210). This element of the Mass confirms the essentially visual nature of the sacramental mystery of the Eucharist and serves to explain the *Pearl*-poet's interest in the Eucharist. For the lay person of fourteenth-century England, the actual ingestion of the Eucharist would only occur once a year, which means that the lay experience of the sacrament would be essentially visual in nature. By resolving the beatific desire of the text in this image, the *Pearl*-poet advances a doctrinally endorsed practice that verifies the utility of bodily sight

in spiritual contemplation and satisfies the ocular desire underlying all of the poems of Cotton Nero A.x.[134]

The Dreamer's call for his audience to cast their corporeal gaze upon the consecrated Host specifically validates the imaginative eye of the body, and the poet's validation of bodily sight serves to explain a significant dichotomy that has persisted among readers of the *Pearl*-poet's work. Readers have been divided in many ways by what seem to be conflicting impulses in these poems. On the one hand the *Pearl*-poet is often read as an austere heaven-minded moralist, who embraces the conservative comforts of religious doctrine and eschews the temporal distraction of worldly pleasures. For such readers, the *Pearl*-poet explores the obvious sensuous vitality of his works merely for the sake of staging the renunciation of worldly pleasures. On the other hand, many readers highlight the poet's vivid uses of imagery and interpret these scenes not as warnings but as celebrations of human life precisely in the temporal sense.[135] By

[134] In *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Herbert L. Kessler discusses the link between Incarnation theology and contemplative vision: "having lost the capacity of spiritual vision when Adam and Eve were driven from Paradise, mankind can recover spiritual knowledge from visual things because Christ had entered the physical world" (122). Explaining this assertion, Kessler cites Pope Gregory the Great's *Homilies on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*. Gregory claims that Christ "was made flesh in effect to render us spiritual, he bowed down with good will to raise us up, he went out to bring us in, he appeared visible to show us the invisible" (*CCSL* CXLII. II.4.20, p. 272, translation Kessler's).

[135] The former view is exampled in Adam Brooke Davis's discussion of the *Pearl*-poet's didactic homiletics. Referring to the recursive narratives of both *Pearl* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Davis dismissively argues that "the literal sojourn is merely the objective correlative of a moral and intellectual quest" (269). Lawrence M. Clopper takes a similar position on the spiritual education of the Pearl Dreamer when he asserts that the intervention of the Pearl Maiden is intended "to wean him from emotive love-poetry and romance—both worldly constructs—to a literal meaning of Scripture as the best indicator of supernatural existence" (231). The latter more positive outlook is notably expressed in Jill Mann's "Courtly Aesthetics and Courtly Ethics." Commenting upon the poet's attitude towards the conspicuous material habits and pleasures of the court in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Mann declares her own "conviction that the courtly splendour represented by Arthur and his knights is not being satirized but celebrated" (243). In a similar vein, Alan J. Fletcher refers to *Pearl* as a "variegated hybrid" of the secular and sacred (160). John M. Bowers also refers to the hybrid nature of the poet's work and declares that "The *Pearl* Poet was not much bothered by the rift between the earthly and the transcendent, but admired in sensual detail the cultural materials assimilated into his celestial vision" (113). This position is most forcefully argued by Casey Finch, who declares that

resolving the intense spiritual desire of the beatific *parousia* through the quotidian "day and naȝte" (1203) experience of the Eucharist, the poet confirms the immanence of the sacred within the material world itself and furthermore confirms the efficacy of the imaginative eye as a material aid for the exploration of such immanence.

This perspective exposes the seemingly irreducible shame of Gawain as a needless fixation upon the faults of worldly flesh. His gaze looks upon bodily reality and sees only corporeal matter. This flawed perspective fails to recognize the immanence of spirit in corporeal life, and he thus overlooks the perfectibility of human identity. The distinction between the consoled Dreamer and Gawain could not be clearer. Gawain's eyes are fixed upon the frailty of the flesh in a manner that overlooks the capacity for redemption. He is actually quite like the Dreamer prior to his dream vision, for at the beginning of the vision the Dreamer is preoccupied with the "moul" of the grave (23), the mortal dust of human life, fragile and fleeting. The Dreamer expresses this same perspective later in the poem when he tells the Maiden, "I am bot mokke and mul among" (905). Gawain's gaze is likewise fixed among the material dross of worldly life. In this state of most carnal bodily vision, both the Dreamer and Gawain embrace misery as an immutable condition of worldly life. When the Dreamer experiences the transfigured material landscape of the earthly "doungoun" (1187) he begins to discover the transformative potential of human life through the visual mediation of likeness and similitude. He sees his departed daughter transformed. No longer a lost Pearl, through

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> the Pearl poet, despite his avowed transcendentalism, despite his fascination with the beyond, is above all fundamentally of this world. His allegiance to the here and now animates every line. He is entranced by the colorful variety of the things of the earth, deeply concerned with the natural world (the changing seasons and the minutiae of the countryside, gardens thick with grass and herbs, the sunlit farmlands at harvest, the snowy forests of Wales, the raging depths of the sea) and with the artificial (the details of hunting, painting, sailing, cooking, armor, falconry, and military strategy, architecture, clothing, harvestry, jewelry, horsemanship, music, tapestry making, bookbinding, stained glass). (8)

vision she is recovered, a Pearl remade in the glorious body of the resurrection. The poet's representation of the image of a Pearl set in gold presents us with a striking parallel. A beautiful woman, her face framed by yellow hair, finds metaphoric correspondence in the poem's terminating image of the round wafer of white bread displayed aloft within the sacramental monstrance (Phillips 481). All of these figures (pearls, maidens, wafers) are of course quite distinct, but the poet identifies their likeness at the level of image, and the personified figure of the Pearl unites all of these images. As ever, the poet's emphasis lies upon the transformational potential of human life, which does not linger "by stok oþer ston" (380), as the Dreamer initially characterizes his worldly interaction with the Maiden, but is rather translated through the mysteries of Christian faith.

The visual aesthetic of the *Pearl*-poet rejects the stasis of mundane worldly life. The Dreamer's reference to sticks and stones as the essential markers of fallen human existence recalls the ineffective paganism of Balthazar, who worships idols "Made of stokkes and stonez þat neuer styry moȝt" and stands dumbfounded before corporeal signs that actually stir with spiritual vitality such as the cryptic writing on the palace wall (*Cleanness* 1720). The poet's emphasis, as ever, lies upon the visual reception of symbolic meaning. When Balthazar witnesses the divine hand-writing upon the wall, he "Seȝ þese syngnes with syȝt and set hem at lyttel" (1710). Like Gawain's frustrated material gaze, the way in which Balthazar looks at the world leaves him unable to witness the spiritual life that animates that world. This is true also of his manipulation of the sacred vessels. When he uses the vessels to serve his feast, Balthazar fails to recognize the vital spiritual meaning that the vessels convey. In fact, as relics kept in the presence

of the Hebrew tabernacle, the sacred vessels are potent symbols of precisely the kind of communion witnessed and longed for by the Pearl Dreamer when he observes the holy procession within the Celestial City.[136] Balthazar's defiling banquet enacts a kind of perversion of the Christian Eucharist, because it inverts the ritual's sense of spiritual communion through the king's failure to recognize the spiritual significance of the corporeal vessels.

This same spirit of defilement through misapprehension inheres in *Patience* as well. Like Gawain, Jonah errs because he fears for his life. Mortal fear so subverts Jonah's life that he turns his back upon the word and the face of God. Jonah refuses to behold God and thus refuses the communion that the *Pearl*-poet associates with visual theophany. The figure of Jonah further resembles the initial state of the Pearl Dreamer, for Jonah is likewise fixated upon an image of self that is compelled not to rise to spiritual perception but to wallow in the defilement of the material world. By describing the depressive sleep-state of Jonah and the Pearl Dreamer in the same manner, the *Pearl*-poet actually draws attention to this perceptual parallel. Like the Dreamer, who descends downward to slumber upon the Pearl's material grave, Jonah, by succumbing to "slaȝtes of sorȝe to slepe so faste" (192), commences his initial descent into the hold of the ship, a movement that prefigures Jonah's eventual ordeal trapped within the body of a whale. Jonah's fugitive solitude is laced with sorrow phrased in much the same manner that the sorrowing Dreamer expresses grief at the Pearl's mortal fate. Even though Jonah purposefully evades God and refuses to go to Nineveh out of a desire to avoid death, the

[136] According to Marie Borroff, the terminating procession of *Pearl*'s dream vision represents souls "in a state of eternal communion with the divine presence," a presence truly embodied and symbolized in the consecrated communion wafer ("Pearl's 'Maynful Mone'"171). Adding to this, Borroff observes that "the celebration of communion on earth and the celebration within the Celestial City are related to each other as much as the vehicle and tenor of a metaphor are related: the latter is what the former means" (171).

subsequent isolation resulting from his willful evasions leads Jonah to feel the very same depressive sorrow afflicting the Dreamer. They share the same spiritual sickness, the lack of spiritual communion.

In the case of Jonah, however, there is no redemptive material guide to rouse him from the crippling sleep stroke of sorrow. Instead of an oracle or guide to bend his perspective back towards the prospect of divine communion, his gaze remains subverted by his mortal fear, and this gaze eventually leads him ever further from God and ultimately leaves him submerged within the chthonic guts of the whale. Groping in the darkness of this material prison, the figure of Jonah demonstrates a life so preoccupied with the perpetuation of material error that the capacity for spiritual life and meaning becomes lost to his limited human perspective. Rather than turning to "bear the face" towards the prospect of Beatitude, Jonah has sunk into a position of defilement akin to the worst connotations of the "doel-doungoun" of mortal life spoken of by the Pearl Dreamer (1187). Jonah's defilement is aptly signified by the slime-ridden stomach of the whale. In her discussion of sight and imagination in the works of the *Pearl*-poet, Linda Holley draws attention to the poet's use of simile to represent the visual image of Jonah swept into the whale's jaws, an image that she considers central to understanding *Patience* (125, 128). As he describes the swallowing of Jonah's body, the poet compares Jonah's vulnerable human body to a speck of dust: "As mote in at munster dor" (268). This image of the fundamental matter of the body, so infinitesimal before the sweeping jaws of the whale (and the portal of the church door), expresses the poet's intense preoccupation with the dichotomy of body and spirit and foregrounds the poet's evocative command of metaphor and image. As the jaws of the whale open, we see the

church doors swing wide, "so mukel wern his chawlez" (268). As readers, our prospect of vision is entirely subsumed by the spectacle. Our own visual focus narrows upon the figure of Jonah as a speck, a mote of earth within a grotesque bodily swirl of "glaym and glette," slime and filth (269). Holley draws attention to this textual moment as roughly the midway point of the poem. This fact surely emphasizes the centrality of the image to the poet's theme and figures by way of form the middle space occupied by Jonah's enfleshed body within the medieval cosmos. For Jonah, voluntarily isolated from the benison of spiritual communion, the image is a terrifying prospect, one of absolute estrangement in which embodied human identity is obliterated before the sublimity of an inscrutable divine presence that can never be recognized because it can never be truly seen.

The resolution of Jonah's predicament would serve as little comfort for the *Pearl*-poet, for Jonah remains opposed to the will of God throughout *Patience* and only recovers his sacred communion through the intervention of God's grace, which defies both whale and worm and overcomes the mortal weakness of the flesh in order to restore Jonah's sight and faith. The woodbine withering away under the heat of the sun's rays surely signifies the substitution of gross material delights in favour of the unobscured prospect of heavenly light, as the sun finally serves as a kind of visible similitude for the incorporeal light of God.[137]

[137] Iain M. Mackenzie's annotated presentation of Robert Grosseteste's *De luce* (trans. Julian Locke), a text that melds *perspectiva* theory with accepted doctrinal discourse on the nature of light, discusses visible light as a similitude of divine, incorporeal light. Light is valued by writers such as Grosseteste, for its peculiar constancy "lies in its qualitative nearness to the Uncreated Light which God is and as he is witnessed to in scripture" (55). According to Mackenzie, Grosseteste's theology of light is consistent with the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, and Mackenzie illustrates this through Grosseteste's comments on the constancy of sunlight: "the light of the sun is universal, and if anything fails to receive that light, the defect lies not with light but with that which should receive its pervasive and generous action" (55).

For the *Pearl*-poet, the prophetic figure of Daniel provides a far more compelling exemplar of spiritual sight, because unlike Jonah, who deals with God at the level of intellectual vision through direct missives, Daniel is an interpreter of sacred signs. He sees the material traces of divine meaning and gleans messages from them. He performs these feats of perception through the interpretation of inscribed textual images as well as through the interpretation of spiritual images encountered in dreams. In fact, this is the role he plays in the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar's wits. Through the interpretation of dreams, Daniel predicts the downfall of the king, and later his interpretive power restores Nebuchadnezzar's reason and even the king's very identity. Through his own efforts to overcome the rational impasse of earthly sorrow and understand his spiritual dream vision, the Pearl Dreamer is engaged in the same kind of perceptual activity as Daniel, and Daniel's status as a prominent auctor in the literary tradition of the Middle Ages serves to highlight the degree to which the contemplative ambitions of beatific desire inform the poet's literary practice of constructing and explicating figures and similitudes in the content and form of his own poetics.

Without access to the greater powers of rational sight, what Richard of St. Victor terms the third mode of seeing, the Dreamer cannot truly emulate the contemplative ability of Daniel, but, although the affective experience of his imaginative eye may fall short of attaining higher plateaus of contemplation, his sober resolution to think on the "kynde of Crist" through the image of the Eucharistic Host nonetheless reveals a meditative pathway towards greater knowledge and understanding. According to Pierre Pourrat, Hugh of St. Victor describes this methodology of meditation in contrast with contemplation:

> In meditation the mind makes an effort to discover the divine, though hidden beneath the veil of sensible images or the surface of holy writings. The truth is presented to us, imprisoned as it were, in the sensible and enveloped in darkness—we must free it and bring it fully to light. This results from the meditative effort of the soul… But before we reach contemplation it is necessary that we should conform our life to the teachings discovered in meditation. (118)

This meditative approach refers to precisely the manner of divine sight set forth by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face." Through his imaginative meditations upon text and image, the *Pearl*-poet accepts the proposition that in spite of the fallen nature of humanity our means of sensory perception are nonetheless able to reconstruct some semblance of the obscured divine visage.[138] Though Denise Despres is correct to infer from St. Paul's text that "We can never see God with our mind's eye, limited as we are by earthbound language and imagination" (104), the *Pearl*-poet nonetheless communicates to us a belief in the immanent presence of God within the created world and perhaps within the human soul itself. In figures such as the dust mote swept in at the church door, he evokes images of human beings marred by dirt, of human beings in states of uncleanness and figured as dirt itself and thus incapable of even beginning to imagine the Celestial City. But the poet also speaks of matchless, round pearls and of souls as pearls that can be recovered and

[138] This is the sentiment espoused in book three of Trevisa's *On the Properties of Things*, in which he explains the vital significance of the outer wits or senses:

> In þese and in oþir werkes and condiciouns of kynde me may wondre of þe wisdom of God, þat makeþ vs by þese and by oþir suche þinges knowe somdel and vnderstonde how, by þese þinges þat beþ ifelid and material, we schal excite þe inner doinge of oure herte to knowe litil and litil þe spiritual þinges þat ben aboue oure wittis. And in þis work þat is principalliche myn ende and myne entent. (III.19, 116-17)

made clean (*Cleanness* 553-56).[139] The transformative power of rational imagination, which sees in similitudes and considers what is not knowable by the likeness of what is known, allows the *Pearl*-poet to transform a mouldering grave into a matchless pearl. If this is possible through the poetic medium, the jaw-like church doors of *Patience*, signifying Jonah's whale and along with it all of the carnal impediments of worldly life, can be likewise transformed. In this manner, the *Pearl*-poet's visual aesthetic is not unlike that of Abbot Suger of St. Denis, who inscribed verses upon the doors of the renovated St. Denis abbey church exhorting those who would "extol the glory of these doors" not to marvel at the "gold and the expense," gaudy worldly ornaments, but to appreciate the "noble work" and allow it to "brighten" their minds, for "Christ is the true door" and the golden door of the cathedral merely defines how Christ "is inherent in this world" (47,49).[140] The *Pearl*-poet's imaginative vision concurs with Suger's pronouncement that "The dull mind rises to truth through that which is material, / And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion" (*On What Was Done* Ch. XXVII, "Of the Cast and Gilded Doors" 49). In the poems of the Pearl Manuscript, the divine light is not only a desired object of vision. It is a property reflected in the sensible world and reflected even in the subjects of vision. The vessels and pearls that signify

[139] Patricia Kean invokes the tradition of the Eucharist to point out references in medieval lapidaries to pearls cleaned when they are submersed in wine. This reference is alluded to in *Cleanness*, which claims that if a pearl is found dirty it may be cleansed: "Nobot wasch hir wyth wourchyp in wyn as ho askes, / Ho by kynde schal beco m clerer þen are" (1127-28).

[140] I cite Abbot Suger not as a direct influence upon the work of the *Pearl*-poet but as a notable witness to the birth of gothic architecture and art, for the tradition of this art still resonates in the late-medieval work of the *Pearl*-poet. Georges Duby (99) and Erwin Panofsky (20) have perhaps overstated the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius's mysticism in the writings of Suger, but read through an understanding of Pseudo-Dionysius's theology of light there is a discernible correspondance between Suger and the *Pearl*-poet's incarnational aesthetics. While Peter Kidson insists that there is no compelling evidence to demonstrate that Suger took his own inspiration directly from Pseudo-Dionysius (5), more recent scholarship by Felipe de Azevedo Ramos corroborates the opinion of Michael Bur, Dominique Poirel, and Conrad Rudolph, who all assert that Suger's familiarity with Pseudo-Dionysius was mediated through the writings of Hugh, Suger's contemporary at the abbey of St. Victor neighboring St. Denis (133-34).

communion and immanence in these poems are all in some manner figures for the gazing subject and the purified soul that seeks to gaze with rational or even intellectual sight.

The *Pearl*-poet writes of a world pregnant with "boþe blysse and blunder" (*Sir Gawain* 18), and the attendant joys and pains of life are ever grounded in worldly experience. Rather than recoiling from the sorrows of life and evacuating the mortal coil for purely spiritual satisfaction, the poet adopts a reforming eye that appreciates the promise of divine Beatitude in the human capacity for joy in this world, in this life. Though the ultimate satisfaction of *parousia* necessarily remains a deferred desire, his poems nonetheless figure the invisible light of God in the visible lights of corporeal images. To this end, the poet fashions images that imitate the lights of spiritual vision and seeks to communicate a worldly delight that poetically gestures towards the more evanescent joys of spirit. In this sense, his poetics resemble the discursive delights modelled by the Pearl Maiden, a Pearl who speaks in words that are like precious gems: "A juel to me þen watz þys geste, / And juelez wern hyr gentyl sawes" (277-78).

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