

III

PEARL, FITT III (“MORE AND MORE”)

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The third concatenated stanza set in *Pearl* marks a departure from the noun-centered concatenation of the previous ten stanzas. The third fitt is organized around the words “more and more.” Unlike “spot” or “adubement,” this raises an immediate question: more and more of what? The answer is going to come more from within the Dreamer than from without. The focal point here is no longer a physically defined spot, a sense of longing for something external to the narrator, or the beauty of the surrounding landscape but the maddening stream of thoughts and emotions that propel the Dreamer forward across the dreamscape in a frantic dash towards something he cannot quite identify. Forgetting the vertically aligned fall of the pearl down to the ground and the flowers that reach for the sun upwards along the same vertical axis, the narrator and his innermost desires now take on a distinctly horizontal orientation. Dashing across the otherworld, the Dreamer can perhaps hope for some kind of conclusive and comforting suspension of his frantic march onwards, yet cannot suspect what exactly will eventually arrest his movement and bring his spirit to a halt, both in the literal and metaphorical sense. The fitt is not only properly oneiric but altogether nightmarish in the way it approaches the quasi-resolution of the Dreamer’s yearning for more and more effected by the appearance of the Maiden. Teasing him by providing apparent closure to his desire, the Maiden actually forecloses the possibility of satisfying it. As the ever-increasing expansion of the dreamscape predicated on the movement of the Dreamer clashes with the intensifying enclosure of his psyche around the more and more dangerously obsessive longing for both experience and joy, her initial appearance marks an important structural caesura in the poem, since it forces the narrator to stop, his immobility being a necessary prerequisite for the debate between the two characters

that is to follow. It is the dynamics of movement that reveals the nightmarish face of the dream vision in stanzas 11-15.

Stanza 11

The fitt begins in a relaxed way, with a seemingly careless enumeration “of doun and dalez, / of wod and water and wlonk playnez” (ll. 121-122) that surround the Dreamer in this otherworldly landscape, qualifying all of them with the word “dubbement,” the concatenated word of the previous fitt. These lovely downs and dales, the woodlands, the river, and the meadows, all soothe the aching heart of the narrator, which he explains in a number of paraphrases; they not only build up joy in him, but also ease his pain, suppress his anxiety and dispel his pains: they “bylde in me blys, abated me balez / forbidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez” (ll. 123-124). This sort of enumeration brings to mind Gawain’s winter journey in another poem of the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the text lists in a curiously emotionless fashion all the manifold enemies of the knight, all the “wormez,” “wolves,” “wodwos,” “bullez and berez, and borez,” “and etayne” (ll. 720-723) that he defeats on the way to his destination. In the Pearl-Poet’s romance, this sort of enumeration serves to dismiss the threat posed by all these creatures and to stress the fact that winter itself takes on apocalyptic proportions, an enemy far less tangible but much more deadly. Here, in *Pearl*, a similar strategy is at work. The stanza opens with a clear reference to the previous fitt, which was all about the dazzling crystalline opulence of the landscape and its “adubbement,” but immediately indicates that the focus will now lie elsewhere, acknowledging all the listed elements of the landscape but discounting them in order to point to something else that is going to preoccupy the narrator just as much as the beauty of the dreamscape, yet constitute real danger at the same time: his desire fuelled by the ocular splendor of his surroundings.

It is also interesting that the way the “doun and dalez” are mentioned here does not follow the regular pattern of description the poet likes to engage in. Speaking of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Marie Borroff observed that there

the narrator tends to see a given object or agent in relation to other objects or agents within a limited space. The resultant effect is one of fullness or crowding, with, at

times, a stereoscopic projection and depth in the imagined scene. (Borroff 1970, 134-135)

Her observation holds equally well for *Pearl*. However, unlike the description of the garden in fitt one, where the location of the various flowers is defined in relative terms (ll. 43-44), and unlike the relative positioning of the hills, cliffs, woods and the sky as outlined to the reader in fitt two, here the sentence proceeds step by step forwards in a simple line, without digressing even for a moment to comment on where the water meets the meadows or which direction to follow with one's eyes in order to spot the woods or the dales. The enumeration proceeds horizontally, and so does the passage that follows, outlining the effect of the sights on the Dreamer. There is absolutely no time to stop and reflect on what is going on here, and in this respect the opening of stanza 11 moves beyond merely recapitulating the thematic preoccupation of the previous fitt and ushers in the idea of a continuous motion forwards and ever forwards that predominates in *Pearl*'s third stanza set. This brings the readers a bit closer to understanding the phrase "more and more" when they finally get to it by the end of the stanza. Just like the lists of terrain features or their effects on the narrator, the whole fitt is going to provide them with more and more of the same.

From the lines that come next, we learn that the Dreamer followed in bliss "the strem þat dryȝly haleȝ" (l. 125), his brains brimful with joy. At this point it is slowly becoming clear that this fitt is indeed more about his reaction to the experience of finding himself in the dreamscape than the otherworld itself. And the next two lines reinforce that impression, since we learn that the further the narrator traveled on, the more the strength of joy constrained his heart (l. 128: "his herte straynez"). No additional detail of the topography of the surrounding area is given here, and none is going to feature in the stanza's final four lines either, for there the narrator launches himself into a reflective meta-remark about the human condition, moving beyond his ocular obsessions for a moment. It becomes apparent, despite the detailed topographical description of the otherworld in fitt two, that what the initial phase of the dream vision in *Pearl* is ultimately about is the inner soulscape of the narrator and not the visual opulence of the lovely downs and dales, even if the latter serves to highlight the former. This accounts for the lack of descriptive detail with regard to the lands opening before the

Dreamer's eyes in stanzas 11-15, especially in comparison with stanzas 6-10.

The move from seeing to reflecting upon what is seen signifies an inward spiritual journey on the part of the narrator and indicates that his movement across this land of visual wonder is fraught with latent meaning, that "the dreamer who sees should also interpret" (Stanbury 1991, 21). With the numbing of his sensory faculties effected at the point of entry into the dream still in place, the narrator finds it difficult, however, to make sense of what he sees. Rather than attempting at an interpretation of the particulars of the scene, he only remarks that "fortune, as it tests a person, regardless of whether she sends him weal or woe, tends to provide him more and more of the same" (ll. 129-132). Andrew and Waldron argue that "the passage seems to be referring to the common human experience that strokes of both good and bad fortune 'come not in single spies / But in battalions' (*Hamlet* 4.1.78-9)" (Andrew and Waldron 2007, 60). This is a feasible explanation of the lines in question, but they strike one as somewhat out of place in this context and invite the main question that the fitt poses: more and more of what? Is it that the dreamer, transported to this miraculous land, has found there even more sorrow than before? This is certainly not the case, what with the numerous reminders about how joyful he is. The only alternative is that he is referring precisely to the joy and elation of finding himself in such a beautiful place and being nourished ("refete" – l. 88) by its exquisite radiance. There is something ominous, nevertheless, about calling this flood of joy a test. The rationale behind it may be that this general comment on the workings of fortune comes from without the vision proper, that it is expressed with hindsight, from a position of knowledge achieved only by the very end of the poem. That this is a test, may, nonetheless, be inferred from the general outlook on the Dreamer's predicament already provided by stanza 11. Leaving the frame of the garden and moving into an open space with no clear boundaries, the Dreamer can no longer hope for any comforting enclosure that would enable him to process his experience. Instead, he has to open himself to the unknown and interact with the unearthly environment of the otherworld. The stakes are high because, whatever happens to him, he knows he is going to face more and more of the same, whatever that might be. And, as the remaining part of the fitt will show, too much bliss can easily turn into a nightmare.

Stanza 12

The second stanza of this fitt provides an excellent example of the Pearl-Poet's mastery in effecting smooth transitions – not just between fitts, but also on a smaller scale, between individual stanzas. Having just learned that fortune tends to give us more and more of the same, we now find out that the amount of what we are experientially given by providence may sometimes be too much to bear. The Dreamer confesses that there was so much joy in him that even if he had the time to express it, he would not be able to. This innocuous remark, despite its honest candor and sense of rapture, brings us a step closer to the nightmarish section of the fitt, for it could just as well be a complaint about the overabundance of sensual and emotional stimuli. While it is hard to see anything truly frightening in it at this stage, once the reader reaches the next stanza these words are going to strike a somewhat ominous note.

It is worth returning to the word “constrains” (“strayneþ”) here, as used in the previous stanza, for the narrator mentions his heart again. Earlier, he spoke of how the joy his “herte strayneþ,” and now he explains that “vrþely herte myȝt not suffyse / to þe tenþe dole of þo gladnez glade” (ll. 135-136). This has traditionally been understood to mean that an earthly heart will not suffice to convey even a tenth part (dole) of the experience. “Dole,” however, could also mean sorrow or grief, and thus we get yet another hint that there is something about this joy that could easily turn into a feeling that is much less pleasant. The same could be said of the word “strayneþ,” for while constraining the sorrow-stricken thoughts of the Dreamer certainly serves him well and helps him forget about the pearl he had lost, it does imply some kind of violence done to his emotions. The same word also appears in the manuscript in the text of *Patience* (l. 234), where we see how the wild currents of the storm “strayned” the body of the prophet Jonah, and it is quite obvious there that the process was anything but pleasant.

The text only begins to elaborate fully on the negative side of the dream experience in the next stanza. Here, in stanza 12, what follows the statement about the inadequacies of the narrator's earthly heart is something far less sinister and more comically ironic. It is here that the Dreamer tries to interpret his surroundings and fails utterly in his attempts for the first time. As is the case throughout the poem, his guesses as to the nature of what he sees prove to be inordinately earth-bound and almost absurd in their triteness. A reader of *Pearl* who has gone through the whole poem will know that

the river is something that is not to be crossed, a kind of a boundary between the world of mortals who can see things with their physical eyes only and the realm of heaven, where living mortals clearly do not belong and truth is communicated through spiritual sight. The river thus constitutes something of an ontological caesura that structures the entire dreamscape and communicates the sense of disjunction between the realms of heaven and earth. How pathetically trite then is the narrator's remark (ll. 139-140) that the river is most likely an artificial waterway ("a deuysel") constructed to join pleasure-gardens ("myrþes") located by the side of pools ("by merez"). Naturally, the reader unfamiliar with the rest of the poem may at this point actually share this assumption, but this only serves to prove that readers actually share all of the Dreamer's ocular and conceptual handicaps predicated upon his mortality, and that his lesson is also ours. This passage is the first in a series of fragments scattered throughout the poem in which the narrator time and again makes wildly inaccurate guesses or puts forward questions that are comically out of place, as when he asks the Maiden about her lodgings on the other bank (ll. 929-932); there, with no constructions in sight, he seems genuinely alarmed that she should be at the mercy of the elements. It is here, however, in stanza 12, that we find the first germs of this kind of thinking: the Dreamer's thoughts are clearly bound with notions of human artifice, and looking for canals or pleasure-gardens will get him nowhere, try as he might to understand the nature of the otherworldly lands with his limited earthly logic.

What is worth noting is that the poem puts the critics in the exact same position in which it puts the Dreamer. Many have tried to make sense of the topography of the otherworld, which produced readings such as Sandra Pierson Prior's. Prior argues that

[a]lthough it is usual to read this river [the one running through the dream landscape] as one and the same with the river that flows from the Throne envisioned at the end of the poem, such an identification is never made in the poem and is, I believe, totally wrong. (Prior 1996, 61)

In an analogous manner, Wendell Stacy Johnson inquires about the exact location of the trees mentioned in stanza 90, trying to make sense of the phrase "aboute þat water" (l. 1077). Do they stand on the stream's edge or are they part of the heavenly city (Johnson 1970,

45)? What both Prior and Johnson are doing is not much different from the Dreamer's interpretive efforts in stanza 12. The fact is that finding himself in this otherworldly landscape the Dreamer has to construct its meaning from scratch, and the quality of his guesses and assumptions serves to illustrate a major point: as a mortal he is nowhere near grasping the true essence of reality. And—by the same token—critics are bound to make similar mistakes by engaging in the same kind of necessary, natural yet often limited readings of the otherworld's topography, focusing on the superficial layers of the textual material.

The following two lines (ll. 139-140) once again strike a note of irony if one is already familiar with the remainder of the poem. "I thought there was a walled city on the other side" are the narrator's words, and he is both right and wrong. Not knowing what is to come next, the reader may envision finding a medieval city on the other bank and thus share in the Dreamer's expectations, but the city to be revealed is neither medieval nor walled in the traditional sense, for it is the New Jerusalem, with its walls made of gemstones. Nor is it literally *there* on the other bank, for the Dreamer only manages to see it later in a spiritual vision and never actually spots it in the distance. This part of stanza 12 is crucial for understanding the later events in the poem, for it contains the first indication that the Dreamer will find it particularly difficult to think of a *city* in anything other than earthly terms; this will come to the surface when at some point he is going to refuse to accept that he can actually see the New Jerusalem, arguing that the city of Jerusalem is in Judea and simply cannot be anywhere else (ll. 921-922).

The transition from merely observing the dreamscape to interpreting it is crucial for the progression of the narrative, for it prepares ground for the later debate between the Maiden and the Dreamer. Still, the final two lines of stanza 12 (ll. 143-144) take us beyond the mood of speculation and the interpretative endeavors of the Dreamer aimed at making sense of what he sees: "Bot þe water watz depe, I dorst not wade, / and euer me longed ay more and more." This expression of visceral fear and its conflux with an increase in desire is already an ominous introduction to the terrors that the Dreamer confronts in the next stanza.

Stanza 13

John Gardner once noticed that the text of *Pearl* "incorporate[s] to an unusual degree elements of realistic dream psychology"

(Gardner 1975, 10). Stanza 13 serves well to illustrate this point. It is also unique when it comes to the way it opens. What the reader finds here is more and more of “more” itself. Unlike in the other stanzas of fitt three, the entire phrase “more and more”—and not just one “more”—appears here, and it follows directly the final “more and more” of stanza 12. This fourfold repetition of “more” may be seen as drawing our attention to something important just about to happen, something that the Dreamer will hardly be able to bear given his earthly heart.

What “more” qualifies here is the Dreamer’s desire, for he explains that his longing to see the other bank grew with every moment, so beautiful was it to behold from his vantage point. When at some point he wishes to wade across, however, problems arise. With no suitable ford in sight, he wanders on, and the further he goes by the bank the more dangerous the prospect of reaching the other side turns out to be: “Bot woþes mo iwysse þer ware / þe fyrre I stalked by þe stronde” (ll. 151-152). Although it could be read as an expression of social anxiety, suggestive of the Dreamer’s unease in the face of meeting the lord of the supposed pleasure-gardens (see Andrew and Waldron 2007, 61), “mo woþes” (more dangers) also suggests that with the narrator’s every step the current is getting wilder, and the passage more risky. This part of the poem makes use of dream mechanics in a number of ways. First of all, it presents the Dreamer as prompted to move towards a certain destination that appears to be unattainable. The further he gets, the closer he ought to find himself to whatever it is he is after, but the distance he covers only reduces his chances of reaching the other bank. Moreover, the realization of this frustrates him; when he says that it seemed to him that he should not hesitate for fear of harm and finally make the attempt to wade across (ll. 153-154: “and euer me þoʒt I schulde not wonde / for wo”) and fails to deliver on his words, this sounds as if he was being systematically denied something by his dream experience. He is tempted into longing for the other side and its splendor and stopped short of ever getting there, and thus the intensity of its beauty and the resulting intensity of his desire prove to be a curse rather than a blessing. Being so close and yet so distant from the object of one’s desire is very close to actual dream mechanics, and so is the fact that for some reason turning back never seems to be a feasible option for the Dreamer. What is a nightmare if not an experience of attempting either to reach something, or to escape from someone, and being locked up in a timeless stasis in

which we are one small step away from attaining our goal, or only a hair's width away from the monster pursuing us, never quite able to achieve satisfaction or reach safety? What the vision has in store for the Dreamer is more than beautiful vistas or fascinating colors – it is also a mechanism for fuelling his desire with no option provided ever for satisfying it.

At this point it might be useful to try to define what exactly constitutes the nature of the narrator's desire. Naturally, it could be identified with a sense of possessiveness towards his pearl, the object of his desire, but in the context of fitt three and the exploration of the dreamscape in general, there is an additional–cognitive, or rather epistemological–level to it. As Barbara Kowalik puts it, the Dreamer has a “curious and searching spirit” (Kowalik 1994, 18), and he desires to know just as much as he craves to possess. The latter aspect of his longing to reach the other bank is at this stage in the poem still more prominent than the former. With the Maiden not yet in sight, he wishes to cross the stream not to hold her in his arms but simply to verify the various hypotheses he has just formulated in his mind. That this is the main stimulus driving him across the otherworld makes an important point about human nature and man's epistemological capacity, the Dreamer becoming something of an Everyman in this respect. Always struggling to provide answers to manifold questions yet failing to capture the essence of reality on the other side of the great divide between man and God, human reason is both a powerful epistemological tool and a source of inevitable fallacies, which the narrator's mistaken theory of canals and pleasure-gardens epitomizes, for despite what the narrator surmises, the flow of this particular river and the essence of divine nature can never be circumscribed by an earthly, mortal agent.

This desire to know, to explore and to domesticate the unfamiliar also emerges from the linearity of the narrator's movement. He keeps heading on along the bank of the stream, traversing an open space without any recognizable landmarks or limits to its vast expanse, possibly unable, and certainly unwilling to turn back. In this, *Pearl* is much different from the famous French allegorical poem *Roman de la Rose*, for its dream comes not within the confines of a *hortus conclusus*, but precisely upon leaving the garden and moving out into the open. While the *Roman* is a major source for the poem, the dominant inspiration in this section of the vision comes neither from its secular allegory, nor from the

eschatological visions of the Book of the Apocalypse, but from down-to-earth dream mechanics. One need not even refer to Macrobius, the medieval authority on dreams and their classification and meaning, to make sense of the Dreamer's experience, for it is founded on the visceral fear of being suspended in a life-or-death situation rather than the magisterial exposition of different types of dreams that Macrobius offers in his *Commentary on the "Dream of Scipio."* After all, whether the Dreamer makes his move or not is a matter of life and death, and with every second he carries he finds himself contemplating a more and more daunting task. What makes this experience so literally nightmarish is that, unable to decide either way, he simply carries on, torn apart—more and more—by his desire and fear for his own life.

This apparent enclosure of the Dreamer within the dynamics of his forward movement, so static despite all the vigor of his drive across the dreamscape, may also be seen as symbolic of his later position in the debate with the Pearl Maiden. He will often seemingly accept her arguments, follow her guidance and listen with great care and attentiveness, yet time and again he will utter words that will immediately prove he has moved nowhere. The best example of this is perhaps his question about the wound of the Lamb, which he is quite surprised at (l. 1138), or his questions about the lodgings of the Maiden. Although he keeps marching on, he is, after all, not getting closer to anything, and the linearity of his progression may, from this perspective, be seen as quite circular, leading nowhere but into the same dark alleys and corners of his mortal mind. A major change that will help him break out of this deadlock, arrest his movement and present him with something more is, however, just about to happen. Whether it will offer the Dreamer more of the same, or even more than that, is not yet clear when, with much suspense, he tells us that "a new matter came to [his] notice, which moved [his] mind ever more and more" (ll. 155-156).

Stanza 14

Stanza 14 is founded upon suspense. We learn that there is a young maiden on the other bank who is familiar to the Dreamer, but what she really is and how the Dreamer knows her is, and will remain, a mystery. This requires some commentary on the construction of the poem in general. The fact is that although numerous hints are scattered throughout the text that identify the

Maiden as the Dreamer's daughter, practically to the point of certainty, the nature of their relation is never defined explicitly, and the words "my father" or "my daughter" are never uttered. In this respect, the epistemological perspective of the reader mirrors that of the narrator, for just like the Dreamer, who can only get closer and closer to the truth about his vision without ever grasping it fully, the reader of the poem is bound never to acquire certainty as to the true nature of the Dreamer-Maiden relationship. This strategy, consisting in having both the poem's protagonist and readers face similar epistemological limitations, may account for the rather curious fact that this key detail of the story is in the end never overtly clarified.

The actual connection between the girl and the narrator remains therefore somewhat vague. Visually precise, the words of the text tell us much about what the girl looked like but little as to what that might mean – either for the Dreamer, or for us, the readers. The Maiden is found sitting under a crystal cliff, her mantle shining with a radiance not unlike that of the crystalline background that, rather than silhouetting her, seems to merge with her body. This communicates very well the idea that there is something uniquely special about the girl, and the lack of clear division between the Dreamer's perception of the Maiden and that of the landscape points to her being not only more than earthly words could express but ontologically more than one could ever make sense of. The image of the girl is then followed by the line "I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere" (l. 164), which seems to lead somewhere, promising a solution to this puzzle, but is cut short by another visual observation – that the girl shone like glistened gold that has been cut. Once again the Dreamer introduces the element of artifice into his interpretation of the otherworld. Right after he says that he could recognize her, he begins to describe her not in terms of the landscape, or as part of it, but as the work of a goldsmith. He puts special emphasis here not on the fact that she shone like gold, but that the gold she made him think of was worked on by a human hand. This serves as an introduction to the metaphor used extensively in the later debate of the Dreamer and the Maiden – that of the jeweler. Indeed, what the Dreamer is already beginning to do here is to see his daughter as his own creation, the product of his own metalworking, which by right belongs to him, for he is her originator. What he fails to notice is that the Maiden is truly one with the landscape (which *fitt* four will reinforce in its imagery), being something of its extension, which the imagery of radiance that she shares with it strongly suggests. Above

all, however, this comparison with cut gold and the metaphorical self-identification of the Dreamer with a goldsmith or a jeweler makes little sense when juxtaposed with the image of a pearl. Pearls are not worked on but simply recovered from nature, made directly by God's hand. Stanza 14 bears witness to this confused and contradictory clash of metaphors communicating the inner struggle of the narrator's mind regarding the identity of the girl's true maker; while he may see her metaphorically as a product of metalworking, she is in fact a *pearl*, the creation of the ultimate Maker of all. It is quite ironic that this mistaken observation is ushered in by the words "I knew her well."

The stanza also engages the problematic of spiritual (mis-)recognition, an important issue both in the poem at large and the *Pearl* manuscript as such. Acts of recognition are for the Pearl-Poet distinctly visual, yet it takes more than good eyesight to make them epistemologically valid. As the Maiden says later in fitt six, she thinks little of a jeweler who believes everything he sees with his eyes (ll. 301-302). Seeing is not the same as knowing, and ocular inspection does not automatically lead to mastery over the perceived object. This emerges very clearly from an episode in *Pearl's* manuscript companion, *Cleanness*, where Christ's regal divinity is immediately recognized by the animals in the stable (l. 1087), even if the image of a poor baby they see does not visually suggest that in any way. The Dreamer's problem is that, conditioned by his mortality and possessiveness, he is guided by physical rather than spiritual sight and takes the girl for a product of a human, and not divine hand. This also connects with the altogether misguided attempts of the Dreamer to make sense of the dreamscape in the previous stanzas. And the final two lines once again bring us back to the desire to possess more and more and present it as intertwined with the Dreamer's visual efforts aimed at epistemological mastery over the perceived scene: "On lenghe I loked to hyr þere; / þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more" (ll. 167-168). The longer he looks, the more he believes he knows the Maiden. As the remainder of the poem will show, this belief is nothing but self-illusion. The only things the Dreamer can know are the things he already knows from his mortal life, and the Pearl Maiden is not really the same mortal person that he had lost, for she now belongs to the crystalline otherworld and not the garden-world of death and decay.

Stanza 15

The fitt's final stanza is again focused on the act of looking, this time in terms of an actual exchange of gazes. So far the Dreamer was the only agentive force in the otherworld, and the sole source of action in the poem. It is only here that we witness the first reaction of the dream landscape to his presence, channeled through the Pearl Maiden. Her gaze only comes late in the stanza, however. At first it is still all about the narrator's act of looking, and despite all the earlier excitement and joy at finding himself in the dream world, he now says that he was swept away by such a feeling of "gladande glory [...] / As lyttel byfore þerto watz wonte" (ll. 171-172). The gradual intensification of his feelings has evidently not ceased, and his desire to cross the river and reach the other bank is now stronger than ever before. His joy must therefore be qualified by a sense of irony, for as the dangers increased with his every step, finally precluding him from safely wading across the river, his decision not to run the risk and make the attempt is now something he will certainly regret. On the other hand, such a static conclusion of his spirit's journey along the bank is a necessary prerequisite for the debate to follow, for it allows the Dreamer and the Maiden to maintain the distance necessary to effect it. It must be noted, however, that although the Dreamer is not going to move until the very end of the poem, this does not imply emotional immobility, for his desire to be reunited with the Maiden will only grow ever more and more.

The confusion which the narrator feels at this particular moment is, as he says, partly due to the fact that he sees the girl in "so strange a place" (l. 175). This is a perfect example of looking without truly seeing. Not only is she radiant with an unnatural beauty that characterizes the whole of the mysterious landscape he traverses, but she is also separated from him by a river he cannot find the courage to cross – and these are signs he fails to interpret, blindly assuming that nothing has changed since the day he saw her last in the earthly world. In other words, he acknowledges the oddity of seeing her there yet does not see the significance of the peculiar circumstances of this encounter. His desire makes him blind to the overwhelming sense of difference between the girl he once knew and the maiden he now sees.

The climactic moment of the fitt comes when the Maiden finally returns the Dreamer's gaze. Yet instead of a recognition parallel to his, subtended by desire and possessive love, her cold

gaze only pierces the narrator, and the word “stonge” communicates an experience that involves real pain, one that “stonge myn hert ful stray atount” (l. 179), which Andrew and Waldron translate as stinging “into bewildered excitement.” Once again we witness in the Dreamer a mixture of joy and pain, but what is of crucial importance here is that his gaze is not really reciprocated. It is obviously returned physically, but the cold eyes of the Maiden “speak” for the landscape and the realm of heaven rather than the girl that once loved him in the earthly world. In other words, what we see here is the first reaction of the dreamscape to the Dreamer, the first mutual interaction between the two and the formational stage of the debate which will be organized around this very principle: that of the Dreamer desperately trying to reach the girl, not just in the physical but also in the emotional sense, yet never moving a jot towards reclaiming his pearl.

The imagery of stanza 15 includes more references to painful intrusions upon the Dreamer’s heart. Not only is his heart stung, but when his desire almost pushes him to action, “baysment get myn hert a brunt” (l. 174). In the words of Andrew and Waldron’s translation, “desire urged me to call her, but confusion dealt my heart a blow.” And then the act of seeing her there “myzt make myn herte blunt” (l. 176). His heart is here first delivered a blow, then stunned and finally stung. These violent actions done to the narrator’s heart are mentioned in almost every other line, as if with every beat of his heart his suffering increased. Quite obviously “heart” could be read here metaphorically, and we may speculate about the word’s exact meaning, but it seems that its most literal meaning, suiting the nightmarish aesthetics of the vision, is also at work here.

Fitt three in general, and its final stanza in particular, points to the rather problematic understanding of spiritual vision addressed by the narrative of *Pearl*. Although fitt two opens with the narrator saying that from the spot in the garden “my spyryt þer sprang in space” (l. 61) and that “my goste is gon in Godez grace” (l. 63), in fitt three this spirit evidently functions as embodied. The Dreamer considers the physical dangers of wading across the river, interacts with the environment and finally elicits its response in the form of the Maiden’s cold, stinging gaze. His heart is first constrained by the strength of joy in stanza 11, only to receive a whole barrage of blows in stanza 15. The heart is here to be identified with his earthly, mortal desire, and that is why it could barely suffice to tell the tenth

of the story. Its leanings and motions are incompatible with the cold, crystalline and deathly otherworld of the vision. This contrast only reinforces the impression that the Dreamer can never fully belong in the dreamscape. Being mortal, all he can do is to face the unknown and to try to withstand the gaze of the Maiden, whom he knows yet cannot really recognize the way he should. The Maiden's voice, which will speak with the wisdom of the elect and of the Lamb, is a go-between in his exposure to the divine realm of existence. Likewise, the Maiden's gaze stands in for the gaze of the Lord, which the Dreamer could never bear in this life even for a moment. As his heart is stung more and more the longer he looks at her, which the final two lines of the fitt finally tell us, we realize more and more than ever before that *Pearl* is above all about the incommensurable duality of the two planes of reality and bears witness to the great gulf between heaven and earth.

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