

THE JERUSALEM LAMB OF *PEARL*

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Near the conclusion of part XIII of *Pearl*, the Dreamer asks the Pearl-Maiden, “Quat kyn þyng may be þat Lambe / Þat þe wolde wedde vnto hys vyf?” (ll. 771-72) [What kind of thing may be that Lamb / that he would wed you as his wife?]. The Dreamer follows this question with an objection to her claim, as he understands it, to be the only bride of Christ – over all other women, however beautiful or virtuous they may have been in life. The Pearl-Maiden answers by clarifying the communal inclusivity of her spiritual marriage to Christ, alluding to John’s spiritual vision of the New Jerusalem, and remembering the Crucifixion itself. Her answer, which makes up all of part XIV of *Pearl*, emphasizes the symbolic representation of Christ as Lamb and the theme of redemption made possible through Christ’s death. Although the Dreamer’s question appears to be motivated by an earthly jealousy, the Pearl-Maiden attempts to lift his understanding into a heavenly realm. Her words specifically foreshadow the vision the Dreamer will experience of the New Jerusalem and the bleeding Lamb later in the poem. Her explanation acts as both invitation and preparation, not only for the Dreamer, but also for the readers of *Pearl*.

The five stanzas of part XIV of *Pearl* can be read in relation to their literary and cultural contexts. To facilitate deeper understanding of the Pearl-Maiden’s speech in these stanzas, this essay considers the complex interweaving of such important Christian theological ideas as the Bride of Christ, the Lamb of God, and the Crucifixion of Jesus as well as the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Christ and the Revelation of John regarding the Lamb on the throne at the time of the Last Judgment. Although the Dreamer’s sorrow has complicated and challenged his prior understanding of his Catholic faith, the Pearl-Maiden’s reminders of heaven, which she further develops in part XV, awaken in him a desire to enter heavenly places. Admittedly, at this stage in his spiritual journey, the Dreamer’s primary desire is to go up in order

to be with her, the young woman he loved and lost,<sup>1</sup> but his heart is also slowly awakening to a desire to be with Christ.

### Bride of Christ

The Pearl-Maiden first revealed her spiritual marriage to Christ to the Dreamer at the end of part VII of *Pearl*: “I wat3 ful 3ong and tender of age / Bot my Lorde þe Lombe þur3 hys godhede, / He toke myself to hys maryage . . . I am holy hysse” (l. 412-14, 418) [I was very young and of tender age / But my Lord the Lamb through his divinity / took me to himself in marriage . . . I am wholly his]. She affirms this again in part XIII, when she declares: “My makele3 Lambe þat al may bete,” / Quod scho, “my dere destyné, / Me ches to hys make” (“My matchless Lamb who beats out all,” / said she, “my dear destiny, chose me as his mate”) (l. 757-59). She asserts her marriage for a third time in the first stanza of part XIV, this time explaining that she is not the Lamb’s only wife (rather, she is one part of the corporate bride of Christ). In so saying, she alludes to Revelation 21 directly, which describes the New Jerusalem as a bride:

“Maskelles,” quod þat myry quene,  
 “Vnblemyst I am, wythouten blot,  
 And þat may I wyth mensk menteene;  
 Bot ‘makele3 quene’ þenne sade I not.  
 Þe Lambes vyue3 in blysse we bene,  
 A hondred and forty [fowre] þowsande flot,  
 As in þe Apocalyppe3 hit is sene;  
 Sant John hem sy3 al in a knot.  
 On þe hyl of Syon, þat semly clot,  
 Þe apostel hem segh in gostly drem  
 Arayed to þe weddyng in þat hyl-coppe,  
 Þe nwe cyté o Jerusalem. (l. 781-92)

[“Flawless,” said that merry queen,  
 “unblemished am I, without spot,

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<sup>1</sup> On the nature of the relationship between the Pearl-Maiden and the Dreamer, see Jane Beal, “The Pearl-Maiden’s Two Lovers,” *Studies in Philology* 100:1 (Winter 2003): 1-21. Available at <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sip/summary/v100/100.1beal.html>.

and that may I in humility maintain.  
But 'matchless queen' I did not say.  
The Lamb's wives in bliss we are,  
14[4],000 in company,  
as is seen in the Apocalypse:  
St. John saw them all together.  
On the hill of Zion, that seemly group,  
the apostle saw in a spiritual dream,  
arrayed for the wedding on that hilltop,  
the new city of Jerusalem."]

As in part VII, so in part XIII and here: in each instance in which the Pearl-Maiden claims to be married to Christ, the Dreamer has difficulty understanding and accepting the reality of her new marital status. It is as if he does not know, cannot remember, or is actively denying, because of his grief over the Pearl-Maiden's loss, what contemporary medieval readers might expect him to know as a Christian about the Bride of Christ, the *sponsa Christi* of Christian theology, from the Bible, the exegesis of Church Fathers, and the tradition of Catholic contemplative spirituality.

The tradition of imagining spiritual marriage to Christ in the Middle Ages has its roots in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament.<sup>2</sup> It was developed within the early church, particularly by the example of Augustine and the theory of sexual hierarchy articulated by Jerome in *Against Jovinian*, which emphasized the chaste ideal in a sexually immoral world; it was further emphasized in medieval virgin martyr legends.<sup>3</sup> Allegorical

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<sup>2</sup> For direct Old Testament references to God as Bridegroom and Israel as Bride, see, for example, Isaiah 54 and 62, Ezekiel 16, and Hosea 1-3. For New Testament references to Christ as the Bridegroom, see how Jesus is depicted as referring to himself as such in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19, Luke 5:34), the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), John the Baptist's recognition of Jesus as the bridegroom (John 3:27-30), the apostle Paul's allegorical meditation on marriage, especially as it is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:21-32), and Revelation 21.

<sup>3</sup> In the tenth century, Hrotsvita of Gandersheim would write a number of plays celebrating the same plot: virgins resist attacks on their purity by vile men and are, miraculously, preserved in both life and chastity with the consequence that the men are frequently converted to Christianity (though often only after first being made to look ridiculous). As Karen A. Winstead

commentaries on the Song of Songs, beginning with Origen in the second century, infused Christian contemplation with a sensual and passionate language for imagining the soul's union with the divine.<sup>4</sup> By the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux could celebrate the spiritual marriage of the soul to Christ extravagantly in his sermons on the Song of Songs without objection from his monastic audience to any conflict between the literal and spiritual sense of his text.

Bernard of Clairvaux, in his second sermon on the Song of Songs, provides an allegorical exegesis of the kiss mentioned in the first verse of that great epithalamion, which shows a clear set of connections, a continuum of relation, between *lectio divina*,<sup>5</sup> meditation on the senses of scripture, experiences of contemplative prayer, and the desire to pass through the stages of purgation and illumination to unification with God:

All the prophets are empty to me. But he, he of whom they speak, let him speak to me. Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth . . . His living and effective word is a kiss; not a meeting of lips which can sometimes be deceptive about the state of the heart, but a full infusion of joys, a revelation of secrets, a wonderful and inseparable mingling of the light from above in the mind on which it is shed, which, when it is joined with God, is one spirit with him ... O happy kiss, and wonder of amazing self-

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has shown in her anthology, *Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), the stories of virgin martyrs had wide currency in England between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, with such famous saints as St. Lucy, St. Cecilia, St. Margaret, St. Agnes, and St. Katherine being just a few of those that were well-known. The Pearl-Maiden has been compared to at least one of these virgin martyrs, St. Margaret. See James Earl, "Saint Margaret and the Pearl Maiden," *Modern Philology* 70 (1972): 1-8.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) and Ann Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Divine reading is discussed in further detail in the section of this essay focused on the Revelation of John (below).

humbling which is not a mere meeting of lips, but the union of God with man!<sup>6</sup>

In these words, Bernard reveals his own extensive practice of *lectio divina*, his own meditation on Scripture, and through his allegorical exegesis of the Song of Songs, shows how it led to an understanding of intimate, contemplative prayer—in which he could hear the voice of God—and the “kiss” experienced in this state that leads to the union of God with man.

Similarly to Bernard of Clairvaux, many medieval Christian women left written records that show that their own contemplative prayer life led, in a striking number of cases, to distinctive visions of their souls being married to Christ. Contemplative women who recorded their experiences of spiritual marriage include Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, Birgitta of Sweden, Margery Kempe, and Teresa of Avila, among others.<sup>7</sup> While their spiritual visions met with a mixed reception by their contemporaries, rarely were they dismissed as heretical or unorthodox by the Church because of a clear tradition establishing precedent for their visions in scripture and church exegetical tradition.

Spiritual devotion to Jesus, and visionary experiences of spiritual marriage to him in prayer, can better be understood as part of the overall movement of affective piety in the Church in the later Middle Ages. Affective piety was the compassionate, co-identifying,

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<sup>6</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Works*, trans. and forward by G.R. Evans, introduction by Jean LeClercq, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 216-17.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of this phenomenon in cultural context, see Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism, 1250-1350* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), the third volume in his series on the Presence of God; R. N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c.1515* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1995, rprt. 1997), esp. chap. 5 “Devotion”; Monica Furlong, *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (Boston: Shambala, 1997); Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, ed., *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), and Steven Fanning, *Mystics of the Christian Tradition* (London: Routledge Press, 2001), esp. chap. 4 “The Western Church in the Middle Ages.” For a discussion of spiritual marriage in another late-medieval, West Midlands text, see Heather Reid, “Female Initiation Rites and Women Visionaries: Mystical Marriage in the Middle English Translation of ‘The Storie of Asneth,’” in *Women and the Divine in Literature Before 1700*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2009), 137-152.

emotional response of believing Christians to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross, which, through scripted (and unscripted) prayers, hymns and lyrics, as well as interpretations of Augustine's writings and applications of Franciscan theology, encouraged contemplatives to imagine themselves beside Mary, the weeping mother of Jesus, at the foot of the Cross.<sup>8</sup> As Sarah McNamer has argued, late medieval meditations on the Passion are "richly emotional, script-like texts that ask their readers to imagine themselves present at scenes of Christ's suffering and to perform compassion for that suffering victim in a private drama of the heart."<sup>9</sup> McNamer sees this as a specifically historical and gendered experience of believing women, devoted to the suffering humanity of Christ, one in which loving and being loved by God was experienced not as a theological concept, but a lived reality.

*Pearl* aligns with this understanding of the gendered experience affective piety, with the female Pearl-Maiden showing a greater ability to meditate on Christ's Passion as well as, ultimately, to enter into a spiritual marriage with Christ,<sup>10</sup> experiences which are denied the male Dreamer, at least temporarily. (Of course, it must be acknowledged that the Pearl-Maiden is represented in the poem not only as a real person, infinitely precious to the Dreamer's limited

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<sup>8</sup> See Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Jesus and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Sarah McNamer, *Affective Piety and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1. Two related studies relevant for consideration of *Pearl* in the context of late-medieval contemplative devotion are Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?: The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80 (2005): 1-43 and Seeta Chagnati, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), esp. chap. 4, "Enshrining Form: *Pearl* as Inscriptional Object and Devotional Event."

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that while most literary scholars see the Pearl-Maiden's loss as her death, one scholar has argued that her loss represents her enclosure in the religious life. See Lynn Staley, "*Pearl* and the Contingencies of Love and Piety," in *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall*, ed. David Aers (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 83-11. In this case, when the Dreamer sees the Pearl-Maiden and hears her description of spiritual marriage, it follows that her spiritual marriage could equally well be before death in visionary contemplation. However, most medieval Christians expected to enter into the wedding feast of the Lamb, promised in Revelation, after their death, not before.

perceptions, but also, simultaneously, as an allegorical figure of multivalent meaning appearing for the edification of readers.) More importantly, these studies (noted above) show that spiritual devotion to Jesus, the suffering Christ on the Cross, was closely related to the contemplative journey into God and unification with the divine imagined as spiritual marriage. Thus it should come as no surprise that the Pearl-Maiden's revelation of her spiritual marriage to Christ is intimately connected to her highly imagistic, even visionary meditations on his Passion.

### Lamb of God

In the second stanza of part XIV, the Pearl-Maiden reveals that she will meditate on Jerusalem. She has already spoken, in the first stanza, of the “nwe cyté o Jerusalem” (l. 792), the heavenly Jerusalem, an allusion to Revelation 21. Now she will speak of the historical Jerusalem. In so doing, she participates in a tradition of contemplative meditation on scripture and erudite Christian commentary on it, especially Augustine's well-known *De Civitate Dei* (*The City of God*), which contrasts Rome and Jerusalem, meditating on both the historical and the heavenly Jerusalem in the process.<sup>11</sup>

“Of Jerusalem I in speche spelle.  
If þou wyl know what kyn he be,  
My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle,  
My Ioy, my Blys, my Lemman fre,  
Pe profete Ysaye of hym con melle  
Pitously of hys debonerté:  
‘Þat gloryous gyltle3 þat mon con quelle  
Wythouten any sake of felonye,  
As a schep to þe sla3t þer lad wat3 he;  
And, as lombe þat clypper in hande nem,  
So closed he hys mouth fro vch query,  
Quen Jue3 hym iugged in Jerusalem.’ (l. 793-804)

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<sup>11</sup> Revelation 21 relates to Ezekiel 40:1-4 and 48:35, which similarly prophesies the coming of the New Jerusalem. In *De Civitate Dei* 20.19.17, Augustine gives commentary on the New Jerusalem, calling it the *visio pacis* (“vision of peace”) for all Christian pilgrims. For further detail, see the entry on the “New Jerusalem” in *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 546-48.

[“Of Jerusalem I will speak a while.  
If you will know what kind he is –  
my Lamb, my Lord, my dear Jewel,  
my Joy, my Bliss, my generous Love –  
the prophet Isaiah spoke of him,  
compassionately of his graciousness:  
“That glorious Guiltless One that men quelled  
without any justification of felony:  
like a sheep to the slaughter he was led there,  
and, as a lamb that is taken in hand to be shorn,  
so he closed his mouth to each question,”  
when the Jews judged him in Jerusalem.”]

Though the Pearl-Maiden says she will speak of Jerusalem (and indeed she does), her focus now is specifically on the death of the Messiah, which Isaiah predicted, that took place in this historical Jerusalem. But before she gives a paraphrase of Isaiah 53:7, she multiplies her love-names for her Bridegroom: “My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle, / My Ioy, my Blys, my Lemman fre.” Notably, the first is “My Lombe.”

The title *agnus Dei*, or Lamb of God, originates in John’s Gospel, which depicts the moment when John the Baptist sees his cousin Jesus coming down to the Jordan to be baptized and declares: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”<sup>12</sup> This title, “Lamb of God,” is used a second time in the gospel (John 1:36). Later, John’s Revelation expounds upon the evocatively imagistic connection between Christ and the Lamb, referring more than twenty-five times to the Lamb, though this Lamb of Revelation has lion-like qualities and sits enthroned at the Last Judgment.<sup>13</sup>

The identification of Jesus with the Lamb in the New Testament draws on the Jewish tradition of the Paschal Lamb. Jewish Law (*torah*) required that the lamb be a one-year old male lamb, without flaw, defect or blemish, offered as a sacrifice on Passover.

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<sup>12</sup> John 1:29. In the final stanza of part XIV, the Pearl-Maiden will directly allude to this moment.

<sup>13</sup> For discussion of Christ as Lamb, see Robert C. Neville, *Symbols of Jesus: A Christology of Symbolic Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), esp. Ch. 2 “Jesus the Lamb: Blood Sacrifice and Atonement,” 60-92. See also Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Lion and the Lamb: New Testament Essentials from the Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown* (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Academic, 2012).

Passover, the high holy day that commemorates the Exodus of the Jewish people under the leadership of Moses from slavery in Egypt;<sup>14</sup> it was the feast being celebrated in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion of Jesus. *Pearl*, which scholars have sometimes associated with the Advent or Christmas season, actually uses Paschal (Easter) imagery predominantly.<sup>15</sup>

The image of the Lamb is central to the Christian liturgy of Easter, but the association of it is linked to the Jewish prophecy of Isaiah from the Old Testament that the Pearl-Maiden paraphrases: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”<sup>16</sup> Christian tradition ties this passage to those moments in the Gospels during the trial of Jesus when he was silent in the face of accusation (Matt. 26:43, Mark 14:61, Luke 22:67).

The image of Jesus as the Lamb is present not only in biblical, literary, and liturgical traditions, but also in visual ones, for it was widely reproduced in medieval art in manuscripts, stained glass windows, and architectural carving as well as other media. Indeed, some literary scholars have argued that it is likely that the Pearl-Poet had seen and meditated deeply on the images of the *agnus Dei* and that these images, not scripture alone, directly influenced the imagery of *Pearl*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For further detail on Christian understanding and incorporation of Passover in the liturgy of the Church, see *Illuminating Moses: A History of Reception from Exodus to the Renaissance*, ed. Jane Beal (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. Ch. 5, “Moses and the Paschal Liturgy,” by Luciana Cuppo-Czaki. *Illuminating Moses* also expounds on the relationship between Moses and Jesus, who was regarded by Christians as a “second Moses.”

<sup>15</sup> For discussion of the Easter season in relation to the symbolism of the poem, see Jane Beal, “The Signifying Power of *Pearl*,” *Quidditas: The Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval Association* 33 (2012), 27-58.

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 53:7.

<sup>17</sup> See Rosalind Field, “The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*,” *Modern Language Review* 81 (1985): 7-17; Muriel Whitaker, “‘Pearl’ and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts,” *Viator* (1981): 183-96; and Nancy Ciccione, “*Pearl* and the Bleeding Lamb,” *Approaches to Teaching the Middle English Pearl*, ed. Jane Beal and Mark Bradshaw Busbee (New York: MLA, forthcoming). A particularly striking image from a related medium comes from a panel of the Ghent altarpiece (1432 AD). Whitaker and Ciccione both note that the manuscript illustrations depicting a bleeding *agnus Dei*, as the poem *Pearl* does (l. 1135-36), are comparatively rare.



### Crucifixion of Jesus

The Pearl-Maiden refers to Jesus as both her Lamb and her “lemman,” which in Middle English means “lover.”<sup>18</sup> The intimacy of the Pearl-Maiden’s relationship to Christ, as his Bride, is signaled by the word “lemman,” but Christ’s role as lover is directly linked to Christ’s fulfillment of the role of the unblemished Lamb of God. This can be seen earlier in the poem when the Pearl-Maiden first describes her spiritual marriage. The Lamb first calls her “my lemman swete” (l. 763), and then washes her clothes in his blood (l. 766), an image with its source in Revelation 12:11. In both Revelation and *Pearl*, the blood of the Lamb represents the blood Christ shed on the Cross. For in Christian theology, the suffering and death of Christ, endured at the Crucifixion in order to provide an atoning sacrifice for sin, unites fallen humanity to a pure and perfect God: it is what makes the Pearl-Maiden’s marriage possible; it is the ultimate revelation of Christ’s love.

It should therefore come as no surprise that in the third stanza of part XIV, the Pearl-Maiden describes Christ’s Crucifixion.

“In Jerusalem wat3 my lemman slayn  
 And rent on rode wyth boye3 bolde.  
 Al oure bale3 to bere ful bayn,  
 He toke on hymself oure care3 colde.  
 Wyth boffete3 wat3 hys face flayn  
 Pat wat3 so fayr on to byholde.  
 For synne he set hymself in vayn,  
 Pat neuer hade non hymself to wolde.

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<sup>18</sup> See Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “lemman,” <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>.

For vus he lette hym fly3e and folde  
 And brede vpon a bostwys bem;  
 As meke as lomp þat no playnt tolde  
 For vus he swalt in Jerusalem.” (l. 805-16)

[“In Jerusalem was my Love slain  
 and torn on the cross with bold boys;  
 to bear all our sorrows willingly,  
 he took on himself our cold cares.  
 With buffets was his face laid open  
 that had been so fair to behold.  
 Because of sin he made himself empty,  
 who had never had any inclination to sin himself.  
 For us he allowed himself to be scourged and bowed  
 and stretched upon a cruel beam.  
 As meek as a lamb that utters no complaint,  
 for us he suffered in Jerusalem.”]

The Pearl-Maiden’s description is particular, focusing on the Cross (“rode”), the buffeting of Christ’s face (“Wyth boffete3 wat3 hys face flayn”), and the scourging (“He lette Hym fly3e”), noting in addition the moment when Jesus gave up his spirit (“folde”) after being stretched out upon the torturous cross-beam (“brede vpon a bostwys bem”). It is notable that this is not a historical summation of the betrayal by Judas, the desertion of the disciples, the trial by night, the walk to Calvary, or the events that took place at the foot of the Cross with John, Mary or others such as is found in the Gospels. The Pearl-Maiden’s particular focus here is on Christ’s suffering on the Cross. It is less in keeping with a historical account and more with mediation consonant with contemplative devotion and affective piety.

For the Pearl-Maiden is clearly expressing a compassionate, co-identifying, emotional response to Christ’s suffering. Her description is so vivid it is almost as if she were present at the foot of the Cross herself. She imagines herself there, and through her description to the Dreamer, invites him to behold the Crucifixion with the eyes of his heart as well.

At the conclusion of the stanza, the Pearl-Maiden characterizes Jesus as humble lamb (“meke as lomp”)<sup>19</sup> who makes no complaint. The humility and silence the Pearl-Maiden notes are both important here because they are exemplary, worthy of imitation, especially for one entering the contemplative life who wishes to draw near to God in prayer.<sup>20</sup> The Pearl-Maiden is inviting the Dreamer to think, to imagine, the way a Christian contemplative does. She is subtly leading the Dreamer forward toward the greater visions that will be revealed later in the poem. Will the Dreamer come to see Christ as Lamb and Lover as the Pearl-Maiden does?

### Prophecy of Isaiah

In her speech to the Dreamer, the Pearl-Maiden is, in many ways, like a medieval preacher. She paraphrases scripture in her own vernacular words, she shows the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, and she appears to seek, through her exegetical exposition, to affect the heart and mind of her listener.<sup>21</sup> This becomes further evident in the fourth stanza of part XIV:

“In Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galalye,  
 Per as baptysed þe goude Saynt Jon,  
 His worde3 acorded to Ysaye.  
 When Jesus con to hym warde gon,  
 He sayde of hym þys professye:  
 ‘Lo, Gode3 Lombe as trwe as ston,  
 Pat dot3 away þe synne3 dry3e  
 Pat alle þys worlde hat3 wro3t vpon.

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<sup>19</sup> Here, as elsewhere in the poem (e.g., l. 1046 “Lombe-li3t”), the poet uses “lomp” as a *double entendre*, referring to Jesus as both the Lamb and the Lamp (or Light of the World).

<sup>20</sup> In the Middle Ages, humility was considered the first rung of the ladder of contemplation that ascends into God. See, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gradibus*, in *Select Treatises of Bernard of Clairvaux: De Diligendo Deo and De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, ed. W.W. Williams and B.R.V. Mills (Cambridge University Press, 1926).

<sup>21</sup> Jane Chance discusses the Pearl-Maiden as preacher in her essay, “Allegory and Structure in *Pearl*: The Four Senses of the *Ars praedicandi* and Fourteenth-Century Homiletic Poetry,” in *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the Pearl-Poet*, ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman (Troy, NY: Whiston, 1991), 31-59.

Hymself ne wro3t neuer 3et non;  
 Wheþer on hymself he con al clem.  
 Hys generacyoun quo recen con,  
 Pat dyzed for vus in Jerusalem?" (l. 829-40)

[“In Jerusalem, Jordan, and Galilee,  
 where the good Saint John baptized—  
 his words agreed with Isaiah.  
 When Jesus went toward him,  
 he said of him this prophecy:  
 ‘Lo, God’s Lamb, as true as stone,  
 that does away the heavy sins  
 that all this world has wrought.’  
 Himself, he never wrought any,  
 but on himself he can take all.  
 His generation who can reckon,  
 who died for us in Jerusalem?”]

In this passage, the Pearl-Maiden recalls the ministry of John the Baptist in the geography of the Holy Land: Jerusalem, the Holy City; Jordan, the river where John baptized Jesus, and Galilee, the land where Jesus was raised from childhood to manhood. She then memorializes the moment when Jesus walked toward John to be baptized, and she paraphrases John’s words (“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”), noting how they accord with the prophecy of Isaiah 53 concerning the Suffering Servant (Jesus, according to Christian interpretation). But the Pearl-Maiden does more than paraphrase: she expands her source with her own metaphor. Specifically, she adds that God’s Lamb is “as trwe as ston.”

This simile is apt in the context of *Pearl* for it highlights the jewel-stone motif that rolls throughout *Pearl*.<sup>22</sup> Christ is also elsewhere called a “Jewel” (l. 795 and l. 1124); so is the Pearl-Maiden herself (ll. 23, 249, 253, 277), and so are souls in heaven (l. 929). The simile may also constitute an allusion to the idea that Christ is the stone that the builders rejected but who has become the

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<sup>22</sup> For discussion, see Johnson, Wendell Stacey, “The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*: Toward an Interpretation,” *English Literary History* 20 (1953): 161-80. Rpt. Conley, 27-49.

Cornerstone.<sup>23</sup> Certainly the Pearl-Maiden's words further develop the symbolic imagery used in the poem to represent Christ.

In this stanza, as in the previous one, the Pearl-Maiden emphasizes the Christian theological point that the Lamb's death is for "synne" (cf. l. 811 and l. 824) and "for vus" (cf. l. 816 and 829). She paraphrases Isaiah 53:8 when she asks, "Hys generacyoun quo recen con?" In the context of the original biblical passage, this question (a statement in Isaiah) is filled with pathos, for the Suffering Servant dies without issue, without child or heir, which was considered a tragedy in ancient Israel. Yet in the new context of *Pearl*, the question in Middle English may have another resonance, implying that Christ's "generation" – his offspring – cannot be reckoned, not because there are none, but because they are so many! Christ, through his death, regained all the children of God for heaven.

This, of course, is what Christian salvation means: to receive forgiveness from sin, the mercy of God, and entrance into heaven to live eternally with God and all the saints and the angels. The Pearl-Maiden appears to want the Dreamer to remember this. For she will go on to describe heaven (in part XV) before obtaining permission for the Dreamer to behold heaven in a vision that he sees with his own eyes.

It is worth observing that the Pearl-Maiden is, from a late-medieval perspective, a most unusual preacher: not male, but female; providing exegesis not on earth, but apparently from heaven; not from a pulpit, but in a vision. A medieval English member of the religious orders with a license to preach in the fourteenth-century might have shared similar, orthodox insights about this passage from John's gospel. But the Pearl-Maiden's "angelic bearing" (l. 754), her unique beauty and shining appearance, coupled with her articulation of knowledge – that should have been beyond her reach as one who knew neither the Lord's Prayer nor the Creed (l. 485) before her death – makes the force of her sermon all the more powerful to the Dreamer and the readers of *Pearl*. For she has apparently gained her understanding not from traditional catechizing, but from intimate relationship to Christ.

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<sup>23</sup> See Psalms 118:22, Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Acts 4:11.

**Revelation of John**

In many ways, part XIV is “bookish,” concerned as it is with the complex hermeneutical relationship between Old Testament prophecy, New Testament fulfillment, and translation of both into vernacular English poetry. The section’s final stanza is especially so, elaborating on the Revelation of John and referring to the written record of it (“recorde”), the book of Revelation itself (“Apokalype3”), and the opening of the book with seven seals (“Lesande þe boke with leue3 sware / Pere seuen syngnette3 wern sette in seme”) by Christ the Lamb sitting in the midst of the throne.

“In Ierusalem þus my lemman swete  
 Twye3 for lombe wat3 taken þare,  
 By trw recorde of ayþer prophete,  
 For mode so meke and al hys fare.  
 Þe þryde tyme is þerto ful mete,  
 In Apokalype3 wryten ful zare;  
 Inmyde3 þe trone, þere saynte3 sete,  
 Þe apostel Iohn hym saz as bare,  
 Lesande þe boke with leue3 sware  
 Pere seuen syngnette3 wern sette in seme;  
 And at þat sy3t vche douth con dare  
 In helle, in erþe, and Jerusalem.” (l. 830-41)

[“Thus in Jerusalem my sweet Love  
 twice as a lamb was taken there,  
 by the true record of another prophet,  
 in a manner so meek—thus all his fare.  
 The third time completes all.  
 In the Apocalypse written full clearly,  
 in the midst of the throne, where the Saints sit,  
 the Apostle John saw him plainly,  
 opening the book with square leaves,  
 where seven seals were set in the seam.  
 And at that sight all shall bow,  
 in hell, in earth, and in Jerusalem.”]

The Pearl-Maiden’s deep meditation upon scripture, evident in her learned discourse, reflects a practice among contemplatives of the medieval period known as *lectio divina* or divine reading. This practice fostered the ability to interpret the layers of meaning in

scripture: literal (or historical), allegorical (or spiritual), moral (or ethical in application), and anagogical (or revelatory of things to come). It makes sense to reflect on this practice, and Christian contemplative hermeneutical approaches, before examining the final stanza more closely.

The practice of *lectio divina* was encouraged by the early Church Fathers: Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory as well as Origen and Cassian. Divine reading was actually a series of practices that could include beginning in silence, reading aloud, meditating, praying, contemplating and eventually applying the truths of scripture. Such intensive reading helped train contemplative Christians to read scripture for its multiple meanings. The four recognized levels of scriptural interpretation compelled the devout to pursue contemplative reading that could foster deeper understanding of biblical passages. The four levels are aptly summed up in a Latin phrase: *littera gesta docet; allegoria quod credas; moralis quid agas; quo tendas anagogia* (“the literal (sense) teaches deeds; the allegorical what to believe; the moral what to do; the anagogical where to go”).<sup>24</sup> To derive the meaning from these senses required time and thought, which the founders of the monastic orders, particularly Saint Benedict, fully recognized. To accommodate *lectio divina*, Benedict’s Rule permitted two hours of private scripture readings to monks, but three during the season of Lent; St. Caesarius of Arles likewise permitted two hours of private readings to nuns in his Rule.<sup>25</sup>

By the twelfth century, the stages of *lectio divina* were codified in a letter to a fellow monk by Guigo II, a Carthusian monk, and the letter circulated as a treatise known in Latin as the *Scala Paradiso* or the *Scala Claustralium*.<sup>26</sup> Guigo advised that the *lectio divina* include

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<sup>24</sup> This medieval phrase occurs in various places, including a sermon of Jacobus de Fusignano, a Dominican friar and later bishop (fl. 1280s-1330s), in Siegfried Wenzel, *The Art of Preaching: Five Medieval Texts and Translations* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 60-61.

<sup>25</sup> Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964, repr. 1978), 29.

<sup>26</sup> It was later translated into Middle English under the title *Ladder of Four Ranges*. For an edition, see the one included in Barry Windeatt, *English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 248-52; see also Guigo II the Carthusian, “Ladder of Monks” and “Twelve

reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. His letter begins in this fashion:

When I was at hard at work one day, thinking on the spiritual work needful for God's servants, four such spiritual works came to my mind, these being; reading; meditation; prayer; contemplation. This is the ladder for those in cloisters, and for others in the world who are God's Lovers, by means of which they can climb from earth to heaven. It is a marvelously tall ladder, but with just four rungs, the one end standing on the ground, the other thrilling into the clouds and showing the climber heavenly secrets. This is the ladder Jacob saw, in Genesis, that stood on the earth and reached into heaven ...

Understand now what the four staves of this ladder are, each in turn. Reading, Lesson, is busily looking on Holy Scripture with all one's will and wit. Meditation is a studious in searching with the mind to know what was before concealed through desiring proper skill. Prayer is a devout desiring of the heart to get what is good and avoid what is evil. Contemplation is the lifting up of the heart to God tasting somewhat of the heavenly sweetness and savor. Reading seeks, meditation finds, prayer asks, contemplation feels ...

Reading puts, as it were, whole food into your mouth; meditation chews it and breaks it down; prayer finds its savor; contemplation is the sweetness that so delights and strengthens.<sup>27</sup>

For Guigo, then, as well as other Christian contemplatives in monastic environments, the practice of *lectio divina* connected his earthly experience with heavenly realities, as Jacob's dream of the ladder did for him at Bethel (Genesis 28). The stages of *lectio* were active, entailing commitments to seek, find, ask, and feel, and they

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Meditations," trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, *Cistercian Studies Series 48* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> This translation is by Julia Bolton-Holloway. See "*The Ladder of Four Rungs: Guigo II on Contemplation*," <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html>.

were metaphorically akin to eating because they provided food for the soul.<sup>28</sup>

It is especially notable that Guigo anticipates that both those living inside the cloisters, oath-bound to the monastic life, and those living outside of them, as lay Christians in the world, would practice *lectio divina*: “This is the ladder for those in cloisters, and *for others in the world who are God’s Lovers*, by means of which they can climb from earth to heaven” (emphasis added).

While the *Pearl*-Poet’s status as a monastic or lay Christian is unknown, the visionary poem *Pearl* gives strong evidence that he practiced divine reading, for he paraphrases scripture throughout the poem, using it to compose, create, and interweave the four levels of meaning that he found in the Bible into his dream vision. Furthermore, the Dreamer’s ascent through three ever rising landscapes – the earthly garden, the paradisaical dreamscape, the heavenly vision of Jerusalem – act metaphorically like Jacob’s ladder, the *scala paradiso* connecting earth to heaven and heaven to earth. The apotheosis of the poem, the grand vision of the New Jerusalem based upon Revelation 21, shows just how deeply the poet has meditated on scripture. But the Pearl-Maiden’s revelations in part XIV demonstrate that she has gone before the Dreamer and scaled the stages that lead to heaven, with Christ’s help, to become the Bride of Christ; she then comes to the Dreamer, Beatrice-like,<sup>29</sup> and lead him upward. She is actively pursuing this purpose at the conclusion of part XIV.

In the final stanza, the Pearl-Maiden again calls the Lamb “my lemman swete,” echoing and repeating Christ’s own words to her earlier before he washed her clothes in his blood: “Cum hyder to me, *my lemman swete*, / For mote ne spot is non in þe” (l. 763-64, emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> The concatenation word, “Jerusalem” (meaning “City of Peace”), is repeated in the first and last line of the stanza – as it has been in every stanza – and will be once more in the first line of part XV, when Christ is called, “Jerusalem Lombe” (l. 842). The image presented of the Lamb in part XIV, however, is not the Lamb

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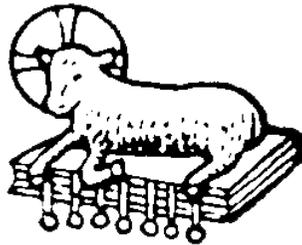
<sup>28</sup> See Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Liguori, MI: Liguori/Triumph Publications, 1996) and chapters 3-6 in Guglielmo Cavallo and Robert Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Beatrice is one of Dante’s guides in *The Divine Comedy*.

<sup>30</sup> This passage alludes to Song of Songs 4:7-8.

led to the slaughter in the earthly city, but the Lamb with the book with seven seals in the heavenly city. This Lamb is depicted in Revelation 5-7 as being seated in the midst of the heavenly throne with a scroll, sealed with seven seals, which he alone is worthy to open.

In medieval iconographic tradition, the scroll was represented as a codex with seven signets and the Lamb resting or standing upon it.



### Conclusions

In part XIV of *Pearl*, the Pearl-Maiden answers the Dreamer's question: "Quat kyn þyng may be þat Lambe / Pat þe wolde wedde vnto hys vyf?" (What kind of thing may be that Lamb / that he would wed you as his wife?) (ll. 771-72). She does so through a complex meditation on her role as Bride of Christ, Christ's role as the Lamb of God, and the Crucifixion of Jesus in the historical Jerusalem as well as the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the Suffering Servant (Jesus) and the Revelation of John regarding the Lamb on the throne at the time of the Last Judgment. Her explanation reveals that the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* and meditation on the four layers of meaning in scripture inform her understanding and that she seeks to similarly inform the Dreamer. She is preparing him for a future vision of the New Jerusalem. Indeed, the last line of the final stanza, "In helle, in erþe, and Jerusalem" (l. 841), suggests a ladder leading from death, through earthly existence, and into heaven.

Just as the Pearl-Maiden with the Dreamer, so the poet with his readers is issuing an invitation in the dream-vision poem to a deeper understanding of divine things. This is made manifest in subsequent parts of the poem and its conclusion, when the awakened Dreamer reveals his transformed understanding of Christ, whom he now regards not only as his Lord, but his Friend (l. 1204), and in the poet-

narrator's reference to the Eucharist, which all believers partake of in the communal Mass.

Overall, part XIV acts as a foundation and preparation for future understanding, reinforcing knowledge of the relationship between the historical Jerusalem and the heavenly one and, most importantly, the Lamb's atoning sacrifice in the first and lordship in the second. The images of the Lamb that the Pearl-Maiden describes are iconic and meant, in the private contemplation of the heart, to draw readers closer to the love of God. Regardless of where readers are in their spiritual journey, they are invited to ascend higher into heavenly realms.

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