

SEEING JOHN: A COMMENTARY ON THE LINK WORD OF *PEARL* FITT XVII¹

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For some, Fitt XVII is a letdown. After the uncanny landscapes and emotionally fraught reunion earlier in the poem, *Pearl's* presentation of the Heavenly Jerusalem is an “authority-ridden vision [that] seems rather flat.”² Critics complain that it is derivative of the Book of Revelation and not a real theophany: the description is “decidedly secondhand,” and “John’s vision is authoritative and reliable, but the narrator’s own dream is subject to doubt.”³ The Dreamer relies upon John’s script, and when he deviates most “his reason and self-control also begin to fade.”⁴ This slavish translation from Revelation is taken as proof that *Pearl* recounts not a contemplative experience but a meditative one, a sequence of thoughts inspired by reading the Bible, not by having an encounter with the divine.⁵ Perhaps Fitt

¹ I would like to thank Karl Steel, Tara Williams, and the editors of *Glossator* for their generous advice as well as the staff of Watzek Library, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon. This essay was completed before it could benefit from Susanna Fein, “Of Judge and Jewelers: *Pearl* and the Life of St. John,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (2014): 41-76.

² John Finlayson, “*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision,” *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 314-43 (333).

³ Sandra Pearson Prior, *The Fayre Formez of the Pearl Poet* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), 16-17, 66. See also Ann Chalmers Watts, “*Pearl*, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss,” *PMLA* 99 (1984): 26-40 (29-32); P. M. Kean, *The Pearl* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1957), 210-12.

⁴ Jennifer Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject,” *Chaucer Review* 44 (2010): 314.

⁵ Denise Louise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1989), 115. J. J. Anderson also suggests that the reading of Revelation here is colored by the Dreamer’s experience of meditative texts and images used in affective piety (*Language and Imagination in the Gawain-Poems* [Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press and Palgrave, 2005], 69-70). Ad Putter, more sympathetic, still sees this reliance on Revelation as proof of the Dreamer not being a

XVII's close correspondence to Revelation attests to a medieval taste for demonstrating deference to scripture as well as an enthusiasm for pastiche that many modern readers no longer share. But if Homer can occasionally nod, then here, most critics would have us believe, the *Pearl*-Poet snoozes as deeply as his Dreamer.

I am unsatisfied by the suggestion that the description of Heavenly Jerusalem is deliberately flat in order to displace the poem's emotional crescendo to the crossing of the river. Nor do I fully accept those interpretations that make Fitt XVII a referendum on the Dreamer's moral state, arguing that the poet intended us to be bored by the description in order to underscore the Dreamer's obtuseness and his separateness from the celestial celebrations before him. I tend to believe that the modern readers, rather than the Dreamer, are the ones who don't get it. Instead of either using this passage to evaluate the spiritual state of the narrator or judging these verses aesthetically according to the rest of the poem, I shall consider Fitt XVII mainly in isolation, particularly its link word. In a poem almost devoid of proper nouns—even Pearl is introduced first as a gem and remains an ambiguous symbol—John's name ringing as a refrain is all the more conspicuous, particularly as it is linked with that other refraining name, Jerusalem. Several scholars have already carefully documented how the *Pearl*-Poet responds to John's Revelation in a larger context of mystic vision.⁶ I am here more concerned with what John himself would have meant to a fourteenth-century reader as well as writer. Who was "the apostel John" for a medieval English audience? How is John a vernacular

mystic: "At what for Dante and many medieval mystics was to be the culmination of their visionary experience, the Dreamer only sees...what John saw.... It is no exaggeration to say that this section of *Pearl* is largely a string of quotations from this biblical text. By the end of it, we know no more about the City of God than what we could have read for ourselves in the Bible. Perhaps this is a disappointment, but it is indicative of the modesty of a poet who did not presume he could see any further than his audience" (*An Introduction to the "Gawain"-Poet*, [London and New York: Longman, 1996], 194).

⁶ Along with Finlayson ("*Pearl*: Landscape and Vision"), see Ann R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), and Theodore Bogdanos, "*Pearl*": *Image of the Ineffable, A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), esp. 99-142.

authority? And is seeing with John a defensive strategy or a liberating move for the poet?

John and the Pure *Auctor* of Vision

In *Pearl* John is identified as the author of the “Apocalypsis,” and both the Dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden cite him as an authority on the New Jerusalem. John the Apostle was in fact a scriptural *auctor* several times over, for a gospel, three epistles, and the Book of Revelation were attributed to him.⁷ While scholars today doubt that the same person wrote all five texts, medieval exegetes believed that John composed Revelation while exiled on the Isle of Patmos, banished by Emperor Domitian. Cast as a message to the seven churches of Asia, Revelation describes a sequence of unfolding visions of the end times, including the opening of seals, the blowing of trumpets, and the pouring of abominations from bowls. Sinister yet enigmatic threats such as the Whore of Babylon and the Beast are ultimately overthrown. *Pearl* makes no use of this terrifying iconography of judgment and punishment, instead borrowing from Chapter 21’s description of the final vision of the New Jerusalem, where the saved shall dwell with God. Unlike many other visions of the afterlife, the dreamer does not engage in infernal tourism nor receive a preview of the end times’ torments; rather his concerns are the fate of one particular soul.

However, John’s ability to glimpse heavenly secrets long predated Patmos. At the Last Supper John is described as “lying on Jesus’ breast” (John 13:23-25), a special tenderness that Peter encourages John to exploit by asking the Lord which of the Apostles would betray Him. Like many medieval commentators, St. Thomas Aquinas interpreted this physical intimacy as a symbol for John’s “knowledge of mysteries, which were made known to him by Christ, and especially for the writing of this Gospel. He says he was lying close to the lap of Jesus, for the lap signifies things that are hidden.”⁸

⁷ There was also an apocryphal *Book of John the Evangelist* associated with the Cathars; see the translation by M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 187-93.

⁸ “secretorum notitiam, quae ei Christus revelabat, et specialiter in conscriptione huius Evangelii, unde dicit quod *recubuit in sinu Iesu*: per sinum enim secretum significatur; supra I, v. 18: *unigenitus, qui est in sinu patris ipse enarravit*” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher, O.P., and James Weisheipl, O.P., 3 vols. [Albany: Magi Books, 1998], 3.28-29, ch13.1804).

Often artists would depict this moment as John actually slumbering on Christ's bosom, suggesting that his access to divine mysteries came through dreams. Hence why this scene sometimes appeared in Anglo-Norman illustrated Apocalypses as an explanatory prelude to the vision of the end, for several manuscripts situated Revelation within John's *vita*.⁹



FIG. 1 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 20, f. 1. By permission of Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

⁹ For a table of Apocalypse manuscripts containing scenes from the Life of St. John the Evangelist see Appendix II in Nigel Morgan, *The Lambeth Apocalypse: Manuscript 209 in Lambeth Palace Library* (London: Harvey Miller, 1990), 269-70. The usual moments that were illustrated included the resurrecting of Drusiana, the changing of the stones, the raising of the youth as well as the criminal, and the empty tomb.

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 20 makes the association even stronger: here John's nap at the feast is visually linked to Revelation, with the dining table carried through into the next panel as the prow of the ship depositing John at Patmos, thereby causally connecting sleep and vision as we read these images from left to right (FIG. 1).

Thus, even among the Twelve Apostles, John held a special status, rivaled perhaps only by Peter in prominence. Early on John exhibited a special sight, allowing him to recognize Jesus's divine nature while in human form, and his Gospel is considerably more preoccupied with the unearthly side of Christ than the Synoptic texts. Thus Origen refers to John's book as "the firstfruits of the Gospels," for the Lord "reserves for the one who leaned on Jesus' breast the greater and more perfect expressions concerning Jesus."¹⁰ John was present at a number of key moments of Christ's revelation of his divinity, including the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36) and the empty tomb on Easter morn (John 20:1-10). For this clarity of vision, piercing even the secrets of heaven, John was likened to the eagle, which the bestiaries explained "is named [*Aquila*, or 'eagle'] for its keenness (*acumine*) of sight"; eagle chicks proved their nature by "vigorously maintain[ing] a calm focus of vision, a steady gaze at the light cast by the sun" while dangling from their parents' claws.¹¹ In most portraits John is depicted with his totem eagle, not only in Evangelist portraits in Bibles but in

¹⁰ Origen, *Commentariorum in evangelium Johannis* 1.21-22, as found in Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, 2 vols., Fathers of the Church 80 (Washington D. C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1989), 1.37.

¹¹ "Aquila ab acumine oculorum vocata.... Asseritur quoque quod pullos suos radiis solis obiciat, et in medio aeris ungue suspendat. Ac si quis repercusso solis lumine intrepidam oculorum aciem inoffenso intuendi vigore servaverit, is probatur quod veritatem naturae demonstravit" (quoted from Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text, and Translation* [Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006], 166-67 [ch. 52]). As Debra Hassig notes, the eagle was also an emblem for baptism and the renewal of the flesh: *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 81-82; for a Middle English instance, see *An Old English Miscellany Containing a Bestiary, Kentish Sermons, Proverbs of Alfred, Religious Poems of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS os 49 (1872; Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 3-4.

Books of Hours as well, which often included synopses of the Gospels (FIG. 2).



FIG. 2 Georges Trubert (active Provence 1469-1508), Book of Hours
Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS 48 f. 13. Digital image
courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

So prominent was this image that it even crept into iconophobic settings, the example in London, British Library, MS Royal 1 C VIII being the only known miniature in all surviving Wycliffite Bibles.¹² According to Isidore of Seville, John's gift of heavenly wisdom confirms his name's etymology, "in whom is grace" or "grace of the Lord": appropriate for "the disciple whom Jesus loved," as he referred to himself in his Gospel.¹³ Another sign of this especial favor is that it was to John that Jesus entrusts his mother after his death (John 19:27), so that he becomes Mary's surrogate son. We should assume that the *Pearl*-Poet and his audience would have most frequently encountered John in this role *in loco filii*, as represented in the ubiquitous motif of the Virgin and John at the base of the Crucifix, blue and red-clad figures flanking the cross in numerous panels, windows, illuminations, alabasters, and sculptural groups on Rood screens in churches throughout Europe. (Among surviving late medieval English examples in parish churches are the Rood screen and glass in Sts. Peter and Paul at East Harling, the remains of the Rood screen at St. Agnes at Cawston, and the painted wood panels in St. Catherine in Ludham, now in the chancel arch.) John's custody of Mary was also emphasized in the widely known liturgical sequence *Johannes Iesu Christo multum*.¹⁴

Returning to *Pearl*, John as the patriarch closest to Christ and dreamer of heaven's secrets is an appropriate authority to confirm the veracity of the Dreamer's account of heaven. At first glance, the Dreamer's fidelity to a text by the most privileged of the Apostles seems a protective move. His humble deference to John's Apocalypse balances his audacity of citing Scripture in Middle English and claiming to see the Celestial Jerusalem while still a layman. The repeated insistence that John is the author of this passage, not himself, and the dreamer's implicit imitation of John, resembles somewhat the defensive strategy that Spiritual

¹² Kathleen E. Kennedy, *The Courtly and Commercial Art of the Wycliffite Bible*, Medieval Church Studies 35 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 68-72.

¹³ *Etymologies*, VII.ix.11, in *The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, et.al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169.

¹⁴ Nancy van Deusen, "Verbum dei deo natum and its Manuscript Context," 55-79 (65), and Lori Kruckenberg, "Music for St. John the Evangelist: Virtue and Virtuosity at the Convent of Paradies," 133-60 (142-44), both in *Leaves from Paradise: The Cult of John the Evangelist at the Dominican Convent of Paradies bei Soest*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for Houghton Library, 2008).

Franciscans and even at times Wycliffite writers resorted to.¹⁵ In this sense John's presence in Fitt XVII is unremarkable. Yet there are a number of further correspondences between *Pearl* and John as represented through his cult and legend that suggest that the poem's emphasis on John is not simply authorial citation.

Like the Dreamer, after his vision John does not remain in heaven nor retreat to a cloister but instead returns to a full, active life. Post Patmos, John is kept especially busy raising people from the dead. Most famously he revives his friend Drusiana, whom he commands to wake up and fix his lunch.¹⁶ But he also, while reprimanding some apostates, resurrects a recently married youth to serve as a credible witness on the pains of hell; another time, as if surviving a poisoned draught were not enough to convince an obdurate pagan, John performed the further miracle of reviving the two criminals who had died drinking from the same chalice.¹⁷ Thus, in the context of *Pearl*, a poem agonizing over loss, John repeatedly reminds us that death can be overcome through faith and love.

He himself is the best proof of this, as John is the one apostle who does not die. There is no account of John's martyrdom, and hagiographies describe him as living to an old age. When his allotted years expired, John was either left to sleep beneath the earth or else was taken bodily into heaven, perhaps to where Enoch and Elijah rest. Scriptural support for this miracle was drawn from John 21:21-23, when Peter, just learning that he is to follow Christ to death by crucifixion, asks what will happen to John; Jesus replies, "So I will

¹⁵ Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion: Censorship and Tolerance of Revelatory Writing in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 214-15, 222-23.

¹⁶ "And whanne he come into the cite, Drusiane his frende that hadde gretli desired his coming was born dede.... And thanne the apostell comaunded to sette downe the bere and vnbynde the body and saide: 'Oure Lorde Ihesu Crist arere the, Drusian, arise vp and go into thi hous and make redi my mete'" (*Gilte Legende*, ed. Richard Hamer, Early English Text Society os 327 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 1.50-51). Perhaps the most well-known incident after his writing of the Apocalypse, the raising of Drusiana was the subject of a play by Hrotsvit of Gandersheim (*Calimachus*) and of numerous images in *predellae* and manuscripts, as well as in the North Dome mosaic of the Duomo of Venice (c.1100-25); Giotto's Peruzzi Chapel in Santa Croce, Florence (c.1320); and later Filippino Lippi's fresco for the Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence (c.1502).

¹⁷ *Gilte Legende*, 1.50-57.

have him to remain till I come, what is it to thee?" Dante famously scorned this legend in the *Paradiso* when he has the Evangelist himself chide the Pilgrim for his astonishment at not seeing John's body, assuring that his corpse is rotting on earth with the rest of us.¹⁸ But in doing so Dante was once again bucking authority, for even St. Jerome at times declared that John simply "fell asleep" and was spared death.¹⁹ (St. Augustine, however, expressed skepticism on this point.)²⁰ John's shrine in Ephesus corroborated this legend of assumption or dormition, as it was claimed that when later visitors dug up John's grave in search of relics, all that were found were his sandals. Soon afterwards, holy white dust miraculously bubbled forth from the burial mound on his feast day, thought by some to be crystallization of the slumbering Apostle's breath. This *manna* was itself an eagerly sought relic, pilgrims collecting the powder in *ampullae* for prophylactic uses.²¹

While doubtful that the *Pearl*-Poet would have journeyed to Ephesus himself, particularly as in 1308 it had ceded from Byzantine to Turkish control, he most likely was familiar with this legend, as it was discussed in commentaries and hagiographies, as well as *Mandeville's Travels*. A John whose body was incorrupt makes for a striking contrast with the Pearl "withouten spot" that at the same

¹⁸ *Paradiso* 25.124-29: "In terra è terra il mio corpor, e saragli / tanto con li altri che 'l numero nostro / con l'eterno proposito s'agguagli. / Con le due stole nel beato chiostr / son le due luci sole che saliro, / e questo apporterai nel mondo Vostro" [On earth my body is earth, and it will be there with others until our number equals the eternal purpose. Only the two lights that ascended (Christ and the Virgin Mary) have the two stoles in the eternal cloister, and you shall take this back to your world] (*Paradiso*, ed. and trans. Robert Durling [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011]).

¹⁹ *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.26, although in *De viris illustribus*, IX, Jerome states clearly that John died.

²⁰ *In Johannis Evangelium* 124.2, as in St. Augustine, *Gospel of John, First Epistle of John, and Soliloquies*, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, for *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st ser., ed. Philip Schaff (New York: 1888), 7.447-48. St. Thomas Aquinas also demurred on this crux, cataloguing the contrasting views of Sts. Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Jerome: *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2646-57.

²¹ Maggie Duncan-Flowers, "A Pilgrim's Ampulla from the Shrine of St. John the Evangelist at Ephesus," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert G. Ousterhuot (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 125-39.

time “to rot is runne” (26) and “doun drof in mode3 dunne” (30).²² The Dreamer has an unflinching obsession with the pearl decaying in the mound, turning moldy (“To þenke his color so clad in clot! / O moul, þou marrez a myry juele” [22-23]). This morbid image of a rotten discolored pearl that sends forth spices and flowers from its decay is a strange variation on the Evangelist’s mound containing untouched corpse, breathing forth white *manna*.²³ Both mounds simultaneously signify the presence and absence of their occupants.

John’s body was inviolate also in the sense that tradition held that he was a virgin. Having been called away from his wedding feast, John was presumed to have remained chaste. In his prologue to John’s Gospel, St. Jerome remarks that Christ called John *de nuptis*, a phrase usually interpreted to mean that John became a disciple at his own wedding, presumed to be the Marriage at Cana (John 2:1-11): Jesus may have granted wine to the guests, but he took the groom with him. Interpreting the bridegroom as John also implies that he was key in initiating Christ’s ministry, for the transformation of water into wine at Cana was His first miracle, performed out of affection for both His mother and His hosts. Jerome cited John’s example in *Adversus Jovinianum* (1.26), for of all the Apostles John “remained a virgin, and on that account was more beloved by our Lord.”²⁴ John’s intactness granted him a number of special privileges with Jesus, over Peter in particular: John was the one who lay on Christ’s breast; he was the swiftest to the Easter sepulcher; he identified the resurrected Lord when the Apostles were fishing, for “the virgin alone recognized a virgin.” John’s virginity was even responsible for his incorruptible body: “Hence we have a proof that virginity does not die, and that the defilement of marriage is not washed away by martyrdom, but virginity abides

²² All quotations from *Pearl* are taken from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: “Pearl,” “Cleanness,” “Patience,” and “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,”* 5th ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

²³ *St. Erkenwald* also engages with the motif of the pristine corpse; for a recent defense of shared authorship, see Marie Borroff, “Narrative Artistry in *Saint Erkenwald* and the Gawain-Group: The Case for Common Authorship Reconsidered,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 28 (2006): 41-76.

²⁴ Translation from St. Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd ser., eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1912), 6.365-66.

with Christ, and its sleep is not death but a passing to another state.”²⁵ John’s virginal state may in part explain the frequent medieval visual tradition of depicting him nearly alone among the Apostles as an unbearded youth except for in scenes explicitly post-Patmos when he is an old man. (This reputation of John being “supremely devoted to chastity” may also account for Gawain’s swearing by St. John when declaring to his host’s wife that he has no mistress [1788-91].²⁶)

Pearl’s obsession with intactness makes John, the Apostle most associated with purity, a good fit. The Pearl Maiden repeatedly is described as spotless (12, 24, 36, 48, 60), and it is for her cleanness that the Lamb has called her to be his bride: “Cum hyder to Me, My lemman swete, / For mote ne spot is non in þe” (763-64). Furthermore, her purity grants the Maiden access to divine mysteries, for the innocent are distinguished from the merely righteous (681-83, 721-320). What Jerome said of John applies as well to the Pearl Maiden: “The virgin expounded mysteries which the married could not.”²⁷

Thus, John in his *vita* resonates with the Pearl Maiden as much as with the Dreamer. As a mortal who in this life glimpses the New Jerusalem, John is an authoritative forerunner for the Dreamer. And as a man of resurrections, John promises the renewal the Dreamer desires for his Pearl. Yet as a virgin granted special favor with the Lord, including access to celestial mysteries as well as a burial mound prolifically fecund, John prefigures the Pearl-Maiden. And as the Apostle who was allowed to see God without a martyr’s death, he becomes a comforting figure making the possibility for salvation

²⁵ St. Augustine is less strident than Jerome on this point, noting that “There are some who have entertained the idea—and those, too, who are no contemptible handlers of sacred eloquence—that the Apostle John was more loved by Christ on the ground that he never married a wife, and lived in perfect chastity from early boyhood. There is, indeed, no distinct evidence of this in the canonical Scriptures: nevertheless it is an idea that contributes not a little to the suitability of the opinion...that that life was signified by him, [namely] where there will be no marriage” (*In Johannis Evangelium*, Tractate 124.7 from St. Augustine, *Gospel of John, First Epistle of John, and Soliloquies*, trans. John Gibb and James Innes, for *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st ser., ed. Philip Schaff [New York: 1888], 7.452).

²⁶ Andrew and Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 272, n1788.

²⁷ *Ad Jovinianum*, 1.26 (6.366).

open for all, not simply the most heroic. Of course, Revelation's description of heavenly glories makes John's presence inevitable in *Pearl*, but even aside from his vision of the New Jerusalem it is hard to imagine which biblical patriarch or matriarch would better suit the concerns of the poem.

John the Vernacular *Auctor*

As an Apostle with five scriptural books attributed to him, John certainly qualified as an *auctor* far removed from the vagaries of the vernacular. At first the gulf between Latin scripture and Middle English alliterative verse appears great. We are used to thinking of Middle English as having a lowly, tertiary status behind Latin and French. This tension between Middle English and Latin especially becomes heightened by Lollardy's polemical translations of the Bible, and Archbishop Arundel's reactive Constitutions of 1409 bespeak of a fraught contest in late medieval England about how the vernacular can be a vehicle for scripture and its exegesis.²⁸ Yet scholars have tempered this picture of a stark binary of Latinity and vernacularity as well as a draconian regime of censorship.²⁹ Furthermore, while in the wake of different heresies church and royal prohibitions may have forbid translations of the Bible, there was never a complete restriction: For example, the Bible was entirely translated into French by the mid-thirteenth century, and it widely circulated in both France and England.³⁰ Certainly the *Pearl*-Poet is in good company with Chaucer and Langland as a Middle English author including biblical verse into his own, not to mention the popular fourteenth-century paraphrases of scripture in works such as *Cursor Mundi* and the *Prick of Conscience*. Therefore, while the citing of John so incessantly in Fitt XVII may be a deferential move

²⁸ Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409," *Speculum* 70 (1995): 822-64.

²⁹ Fiona Somerset, "Professionalizing Translation at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century: Ullerston's *Determinacio*, Arundel's *Constitutions*," in *The Vulgar Tongue: Medieval and Postmedieval Vernacularity*, eds. Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 145-57 (152-54); Alastair Minnis, *Translation of Authority in Medieval English Literature: Valuing the Vernacular* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 26-27; and Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, 397-401.

³⁰ Frans Van Liere, *An Introduction to the Medieval Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 194-95.

on the poet's part, we should not assume that it was motivated by fear of seeming to overstep his bounds as a vernacular writer.

Moreover, we should remember that Revelation was one of the most accessible parts of the Bible for an English lay audience. After the Psalter, the Apocalypse is the earliest book of scripture to be rendered in the vernacular.³¹ There were translations into both Old French and Anglo-Norman, in prose and verse.³² Revelation was also translated into Middle English prose twice, both times from French rather than Latin. These Middle English versions circulated independent of the Lollard Bible, although later they were incorporated into the Wycliffite translations.³³ There is even evidence that Revelation, as well as the Gospel of John, were so popular in Middle English that they were part of a small handful of scriptural texts speculatively copied as readymade booklets, available for binding into customers' collections at a moment's notice.³⁴ Accompanying commentaries were also translated. To some extent, then, we should think of Revelation as a vernacular book, and sometimes even a vernacular poem.

We should also think of it as an illustrated book.³⁵ While Revelation has a rich visual history in a variety of media, in the thirteenth century a distinctive tradition of Anglo-French illumination of the Apocalypse developed, which can roughly be divided into two iconographic groups, those with illustrations that accompany the Berengaudus commentary and those that are keyed to a French prose gloss.³⁶ The Berengaudus commentary on Revelation, already circulating widely in England in the twelfth

³¹ James H. Morey, *Book and Verse: A Guide to Middle English Biblical Literature* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 351-53.

³² For an edition of the prose see Léopold Delisle and Paul Meyer, *L'Apocalypse en français au XIIIe siècle (Bibl. Nat. Fr. 403)*, Société des Anciens Textes Français v. 44 (Paris: Didot, 1901).

³³ Elis Fridner, "Introduction," in *An English Fourteenth Century Apocalypse with a Prose Commentary, Edited from MS Harley 874 and Ten Other MSS* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961), xxv-xxx.

³⁴ Kennedy, *Courtly and Commercial Art*, 42, 46-51.

³⁵ And sometimes even a picture book: a few Anglo-Norman Apocalypses are almost completely illuminations, such as New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS 524 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D. 4. 17.

³⁶ Suzanne Lewis, "Exegesis and Illustration in English Apocalypses," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 259-75 (259).

century in unillustrated copies, interpreted the text from the standpoint of the Church Universal. While monastically focused in its commentary, this version of the Apocalypse was often commissioned and owned by lay folk, albeit aristocratic ones. These manuscripts frequently have a large image spanning across two columns, which dominates the page, creating a meditative, sequential unfolding of the Apocalypse. Often John is presented as a proxy for the reader, anxiously watching events unfold, but remaining outside the image's frame (FIG. 3).



FIG. 3 Dyson Perrins Apocalypse, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig III, f. 5. England (most likely London), c. 1255-60. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program

In contrast, the thirteenth-century French prose gloss on the Apocalypse was translated from the commentary to the *Bible moralisée* (which in turn was a Latin redaction of the *Glossa ordinaria*) and was influenced by the mendicants.³⁷ Manuscripts of Revelation

³⁷ For the mendicant elements of the prose commentary, particularly in its references to preachers, see Lewis, “Exegesis and Illustration in English Apocalypses,” 254; J. C. Fox, “The Earliest French Apocalypse and

with this gloss generated their own complex network of iconographic families, roughly divided between the cycle of 69 illustrations known as the Corpus-Lambeth Stem (so named for “core” manuscripts London, Lambeth MS 75 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 394), and the slightly later (c.1280-1330), more copiously illustrated group sometimes called the metrical Apocalypses, as the biblical text has been rendered into Anglo-Norman verse with the same accompanying French prose gloss.³⁸ Besides the use of French, the didactic vernacular gloss provided an interpretive paradigm that was more suitable for a lay, as opposed to monastic, audience. As Suzanne Lewis observes, “Whereas the older [Berengaudus] commentary invites contemplative spiritual meditation, the French prose gloss rallies the reader to deal with [Revelation’s] moral imperatives as a series of practical remedies to contemporary problems”; the miniatures likewise adapt to these different roles, those of the Berengaudus cycle suggesting allegorical, theological readings, while the pictures of the Corpus-Lambeth cycle figure John’s vision as a series of visualized sermons with “pictorial exempla.”³⁹ The *mise-en-page* tends to reflect this change, as images are similarly presented as a choppy series of interruptions to the text, sometimes only spanning a single column (FIG. 4).

Commentary,” *Modern Language Review* 7 (1912): 445-68 (454); Delisle and Meyer, *L’Apocalypse en français au XIIIe siècle*, l.ccxiv-ccxxii.

³⁸ Aileen H. Laing, “The Corpus-Lambeth Stem: A Study of French Prose Apocalypse Manuscripts,” *Manuscripta* 21 (1977): 18; Sammie Lee Justice, “The Illustrated Anglo-Norman Metrical Apocalypse in England,” Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 1993).

³⁹ Lewis, “Exegesis and Illustration in English Apocalypses,” 263-65. See also Suzanne Lewis, “‘Apocalypses’ in Text and Image: from Translation to Transformation in Fourteenth-Century Vernacular Apocalypses,” in *Tributes to Nigel Morgan. Contexts of Medieval Art: Images, Objects, and Ideas*, eds. Julian M. Luxford and M. A. Michael. (London: Harvey Miller, 2010), 141-47.



FIG. 4 Yates Thompson Apocalypse. London, British Library, Yates Thompson MS 10, f. 14. France, Central, c. 1370-90. Courtesy of The British Library.

Combined, 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. Nearly thirty more examples of illustrated Apocalypses in this tradition are extant by French or Flemish artists, mostly relying on English prototypes and from places with strong political and artistic connections to England, namely Normandy and Lorraine.⁴⁰ So pervasive were these illuminated books that, as Lewis notes, “In the *Manière langage*, a collection of dialogues used to teach French to English speakers, French was described as the language ‘des angels du ciel.’”⁴¹

Therefore, we should think of the *Pearl*-Poet’s experience of Revelation as possibly that of a vernacular book, with textual as well as visual commentary, that often circulated on its own as a luxury manuscript rather than as the final book of a volume of mostly clerical preserve. As much as John and his Apocalypse would signify the Bible they would also elicit associations with elite consumption. *Pearl* is a finely wrought piece of craftsmanship akin to these glamorous books.⁴² Both Rosalind Field and Muriel Whitaker have pointed out correspondences between iconography from some

⁴⁰ Nigel Morgan, “Some French Interpretations of Illustrated English Apocalypses c.1290-130,” in John Matthew, ed., *England and the Continent in the Middle Ages: Studies in Memory of Andrew Martindale, Proceedings of the 1996 Harlaxton Symposium*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies VIII (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000), 137-39. But see also the addendum to this argument that Morgan makes in “The Bohun Apocalypse,” in *Tributes to Lucy Freeman Sandler: Studies in Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Kathryn A. Smith and Carol H. Krinsky (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2007), 91-110 (95 n20): while the Latin Apocalypses made in France seem to borrow English iconography, the French prose copies made in France seem to be almost entirely independent of those made in England.

⁴¹ Lewis, “‘Apocalypses’ in Text and Image,” 141-42, quoting Paul Meyer, “La manière de langage qui enseigne à parler et à écrire le français,” *Revue critique d’histoire et de littérature* 12 (1873): 382.

⁴² Felicity Riddy discusses Apocalypses association with lavish craftsmanship in “Jewels in Pearl,” in *A Companion to the “Gawain”-Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 143-55 (146-47).

Anglo-Norman Apocalypses and images in *Pearl*.⁴³ Sarah Stanbury has remarked generally about the ways that both the illustrated Apocalypses and *Pearl* represent the sensory process of seeing.⁴⁴ And, as Barbara Nolan observes, the poet reveals a fascination with the technical aspects of manuscript production: “In his description of the apocalyptic vision, the poet even chooses words drawn from the illuminators’ craft. Not only is the city ‘brende golde’; the horns of the Lamb are ‘red golde cler’; and the wall of jasper gleams as ‘glayre,’ the white of egg used in making illuminations.”⁴⁵

Most of the manuscript examples these critics draw upon are from the Berengaudus family. One of the most striking aspects of these codices is the depiction of John as an animated spectator in the margins. Often he is shown as peering through a window, separated from the celestial events by a frame (FIG. 3).⁴⁶ While some art historians have shied away from calling this figure of the watching John the “voyeur” motif, in the context of *Pearl* voyeurism seems an appropriate descriptor.⁴⁷ The Pearl Maiden promises to share with

⁴³ Rosalind Field, “The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*,” *Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 7-17; Muriel A. Whitaker, “*Pearl* and Some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts,” *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-96.

⁴⁴ *Seeing the “Gawain”-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 24-31.

⁴⁵ Barbara Nolan, *The Gothic Visionary Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 200.

⁴⁶ For discussion of this device as a metaphor for mystical vision, see Suzanne Lewis, “The English Gothic Illuminated Apocalypse, *lectio divina*, and the Art of Memory,” *Word & Image* 7 (1991): 1-32 (esp. 2-13); and Cynthia Hahn, “*Visio Dei*: Changes in Medieval Visuality,” in *Visuality before and beyond the Renaissance*, ed. Robert S. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 169-96 (esp. 183-86).

⁴⁷ Peter K. Klein, who first applied the term “voyeurism” to the iconography of John gazing through the window (“From the Heavenly to the Trivial: Vision and Visual Perception in Early and High Medieval Apocalypse,” in *The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf [Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998], 247-78) has renamed it as the “external witness motif” (“Visionary Experience and Corporeal Seeing in Thirteenth-Century English Apocalypses: John as External Witness and the Rise of Gothic Marginal Images,” in *Looking Beyond: Visions Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane, Index of Christian Art Occasional Papers XI (Philadelphia: Index of Christian Art Department of Art & Archaeology Princeton University in association with Penn State University Press, 2010), 177-202. Richard K. Emmerson also quibbled with

the Dreamer a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, but there is a sense that he is furtively spying (on his own dream!), as he “lurked by launces so lufly leved” (978), skulking in the bushes in order to watch the procession. (Cotton Nero A.x. has its own marginal voyeurs, foliate faces peering out of the capitals; three of these four grotesqueries are in *Pearl*.)⁴⁸

The other families of illustrated Apocalypses related to the vernacular prose gloss, the Corpus-Lambeth Stem and the metrical Apocalypses, also provide suggestive comparisons with *Pearl*. The Corpus-Lambeth Apocalypses often do not have the spying John, nor do they generally have large depictions of the Heavenly City, such as that in the Trinity Apocalypse (Cambridge, Trinity College, MS.R.16.2). However, the Corpus-Lambeth’s more broken layouts, with column-width illustrations in a subordinate position to surrounding text (FIG. 4), creates a *mise-en-page* that resembles that used in vernacular romances.⁴⁹ And in the metrical family of Apocalypses the visual narrative is dilated so that almost every event receives its own illumination.⁵⁰ I find that this shifts the images from seeming to provide a synthetic interpretation of the biblical text, serving as separate visual glosses with their own integrity, to becoming illustrations more tightly keyed to the text. Often in Anglo-Norman Apocalypse illuminations John can seem a romance hero, encountering on his journey magical beasts, battles with knights, a damsel in distress, a dangerous temptress, and elaborate feasts.⁵¹ Combining these narrative and visual elements with the

the use of “voyeurism,” arguing that it misrepresents John’s vision as illicit: “Visualizing the Visionary: John in his Apocalypse,” in *Looking Beyond*, ed. Hourihane, 148-76 (156).

⁴⁸ The other face appears in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*: Paul F. Reichardt, “Paginal Eyes: Faces among the Ornamented Capitals of MS Cotton Nero A.x. Art. 3,” *Manuscripta* 36 (1992): 22-36.

⁴⁹ Lewis, “‘Apocalypses’ in Text and Image,” 143.

⁵⁰ Justice, “The Illustrated Anglo-Norman Metrical Apocalypse in England,” 5.

⁵¹ George Henderson, “Studies in English Manuscript Illumination—Part 2: English Apocalypse 1,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 30 (1967): 104-37 (116-17); M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 236-39; R. Freyhan, “Joachimism and the English Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 18 (1955): 211-44 (225-26). While not calling John a romance hero, Suzanne Lewis describes how John becomes a character

verse format of the Anglo-Norman translation, we once again can see how Revelation in fourteenth-century England may just as much have resembled vernacular romances as Scripture—a duality evidenced as well by the *oeuvre* of a poet who wrote both biblical poetry (*Cleanness, Patience*) and Arthurian romance (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

John the *Auctor* of Gemology

John was considered an authority not only of the glories of heaven but of the splendors of the earth. As the fourteenth-century Middle English *Bok of Stones* explains,

The appocalipse witnesseth vs þat god loued so moche my lord seint Iohn þe euangelist þat he did lede him be his aungel to se þe priuities of paradys; and also be a uision he sigh þe grete paradys as a Cite. There he sigh þe twelue stones that God named, and the xj stones þat hymselfe / named be the wille of God þat were þe foundement of þe heuenly kyngdome.⁵²

Sometimes in biblical exegesis these stones would be interpreted symbolically, as Nicholas of Lyra does in his commentary on the Apocalypse (1329), in which he reads the layers of gems as the “twelve articles of faith concerning Christ—six pertaining to his divinity and six to his humanity.”⁵³ But Revelation’s jewels would also be understood literally as the earthly stones, so that John was also cited as an *auctor* in works of natural philosophy, particularly lapidaries. One branch of Anglo-Norman gem books has even been dubbed the “Apocalyptic Lapidary,” as it is dedicated solely to the stones of Revelation as well as two other heavenly gems (the pearl of the gates and the diamond adamant of the foundation).⁵⁴

within Revelation in *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20-25.

⁵² *The Middle English “Boke of Stones”: The Southern Version*, ed. George R. Keiser, SCRIPTA 13 (Brussels: Omirel, 1984), 4; also edited in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, eds. Joan Evans, and Mary S. Serjeantson, EETS os 190 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 18.

⁵³ *Nicholas of Lyra’s Apocalypse Commentary*, trans. Philip D. W. Krey (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1997), 226-28.

⁵⁴ *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, eds. Paul Studer and Joan Evans (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Édouard Champion, 1924), 260-76. As they remark in their

England was particularly fascinated with the properties of gems. The oldest known vernacular lapidary is in Old English, and lapidaries were enormously popular in Anglo-Norman as well as Middle English; moreover, many Latin manuscripts of gem lore appear to be of English provenance.⁵⁵ As George Keiser observes, this prevalence of lapidarial knowledge meant that romance writers as well as the *Pearl*-Poet could assume an audience well versed in the properties of stones.⁵⁶ The virtues associated with each of Fitt XVII's gems have already been documented.⁵⁷ For now, I simply want to emphasize that the lapidary tradition provides yet another vernacular context for John as an *auctor*. And part of this lapidarial context was the conviction that stones, if not precisely alive, had animate properties; as several scholars have recently reminded us, medieval understandings of the environment perceived stone as possessing inclinations and virtues.⁵⁸

John's hagiography further links him with precious stones. According to the Golden Legend, John became scandalized when he saw a philosopher order his disciples to grind jewels into powder as proof of their contempt for wealth. Appalled at the waste—those gems would be better served as alms—John miraculously

Introduction, "Nowhere, indeed, did the lore of jewels enjoy greater popularity than in Anglo-Norman England" (viii). Cf. Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, rprnt. (1922; New York: Dover, 1973), 73-78. The Longleat manuscript of the Apocalyptic Lapidary contains the following lines on pearl: "Margarita: Unium ad colurs toutis maniers/ E engendré de la rosee del ciel" (*Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, 7, 275).

⁵⁵ London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius A.iii, dating to the eleventh century: see Evans and Serjeantson, "Introduction," in *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, xi.

⁵⁶ Keiser, "Introduction," in *The Middle English "Boke of Stones,"* vii-x, citing E. V. Gordon, "Introduction," in *Pearl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), xxxiv-xxxv.

⁵⁷ Robert J. Blanch, "Precious Metal and Gem Symbolism in *Pearl*," in *"Sir Gawain" and "Pearl": Critical Essays*, ed. Robert J. Blanch (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1966), 86-97.

⁵⁸ Valerie Allen, "Mineral Virtue," and Kellie Robertson "Exemplary Rocks," both in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington D.C.: Oliphant Books, 2012), 123-52 and 91-121 respectively, and Cohen's own "Stories of Stone," *postmedieval* 1 (2010): 56-63, the arguments of which will be expanded in his forthcoming *Stories of Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

reassembled the jewels from the dust, leading to the conversion of two wealthy youths, who sell their possessions to follow the Apostle. However, they soon have second thoughts, as seeing their former servants dressed more splendidly than themselves fills them with regret. Disgusted, John transforms driftwood and seashells into gold and gems, sending them to the jewelers to verify their worth. Later John inveighs against wealth, taunting the youths for the heavenly glories they have forsaken through their eagerness to grasp the gems of this world; the miraculously resurrected newlywed corroborated the Evangelist's account, describing how through their backsliding "thei hadd loste the euerlasting palais of ioye that bene made of precious stones and of mervailous light and full of all delites."⁵⁹ Abashed, the repentant youths re-pledge their faith, and John restores the shells and sticks to their original forms. These miracles would have been familiar not only through legendaries but also as celebrated in the well-known liturgical sequence *Verbum dei deo natum*.⁶⁰

While the ultimate message of this set of miracles is the worthlessness of material wealth compared to spiritual treasure, this legend further links John with precious gems and depicts jewelers as his allies, confirming the saint's miracles. John may be austere, but he is no iconoclast. He balks at the willful destruction of the beautiful stones and acknowledges that they have market value in this world. (One wonders what his reaction would have been to the rebels grinding John's of Gaunt's jewelry in mortars during the Peasants' Revolt).⁶¹ Moreover, heaven is described in comfortingly legible signifiers of luxury and wealth. The New Jerusalem is an even better version of these earthly splendors. St. Eligius may be the patron saint of goldsmiths and jewelers (including, presumably, the Dreamer),⁶² but through his *vita* John has ties to those professions as well.

⁵⁹ *Gilte Legende*, 1.52, lines 87-89. In the Middle English version, the seashells and driftwood are instead stones from a riverbed.

⁶⁰ Felix Heinzer, "Explaining the Bread of True Intelligence: John the Evangelist as Mystagogue in the Sequence *Verbum dei deo natum*," 89-90, 97 (81-99) and Erika Kihlman, "Commentaries on *Verbum dei deo natum* in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-century Manuscripts," 127 (101-31), both in *Leaves of Paradise*, ed. Hamburger.

⁶¹ Riddy, "Jewels in Pearl," 152.

⁶² St. Eligius is perhaps most familiar to readers of Middle English as the subject of the Prioress's oath (*Canterbury Tales* 1.120). A translation of his *vita* by Dado of Rouen can be found in *Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Thomas Head

In a context more directly pertinent to the *Pearl*-Poet, the Evangelist was further associated with jewelry. St. Edward the Confessor, who held a special devotion to St. John, was importuned for alms by a humble pilgrim at the dedication of a church to the Evangelist; as the king had already emptied his purse he gave his ring to the beggar, who turned out to be none other than St. John in disguise.⁶³ The pilgrim's ring became the Confessor's saintly emblem, as in the Wilton Diptych, where he supports a kneeling Richard II. In Westminster scenes of Sts. Edward and John together decorated sacred spaces (e.g. the Confessor's shrine, illuminated manuscripts of the saint's *vita*) and secular ones (particularly the Painted Rooms in Westminster Palace ordered by Henry III).⁶⁴ As Paul Binski notes, while the Confessor "was not widely portrayed outside royal circles," there was a special devotion to him by the successive abbots of Tewkesbury; the Tewkesbury connection leads to Edward le Despenser (d. 1375), who shared his name with the Confessor and who, among other titles, was Lord of the Manor of

(New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 137-68 (trans. Jo Ann McNamara). Taddeo Gaddi has some delightful *predellae* (c.1360; now at the Prado Museum in Madrid) depicting St. Eligius before King Clothar and at work when he is called to his ministry.

⁶³ Aelred of Rievaulx, *Vita Sancti Edwardi*, translated in *The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor*, by Blessed Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx, trans. Jerome Bertram, FSA (1990; Southampton: Saint Austin Press, 1997), 81-86 (for the miracle of the pilgrim's ring). Aelred seems to be responsible for inserting this legend into Edward's hagiography: Frank Barlow, "Introduction," in *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin*, ed. and trans. Barlow, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), xxxviii, n.107. This incident is also recounted in "La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur," by a Nun of Barking Abbey, ed. and trans. Jane Bliss, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), 146-52, and briefly told in *Gilte Legende*, 1.56-57.

⁶⁴ See *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*, eds. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1987 (London: Weidenfeld and Nelson and the Royal Academy of Arts, 1987), 214 (#35, the panel painting of St. Edward and the pilgrim, c.1370) and 341 (#330-39, copies of the Painted Chamber). Matthew Paris also illustrated this legend in his *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee 3.59, fols. 29r and 30r): reprinted in Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 250-51.

Tewkesbury and was commemorated at the monastery there.⁶⁵ And Despensers points to the *Pearl*-Poet's milieu.⁶⁶

Thus, along with being the Evangelist of eschatological sight John was a vernacular authority on gem lore. He was an associate of gems and jewelers. And he was a courtly saint, one closely identified with English monarchs as well as the great magnate at the center of the social and political milieu of the *Pearl*-Poet. As his holy-day (December 27) coincided with the Christmas season, St. John would be part of courtly feasts, as is the case in Bertilak's home in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (1020-24). Michael J. Bennett and John Bowers among others have done much to disabuse us of the idea of *Pearl* as a provincial poem and instead to see the poet's concerns as deeply adumbrated by the Ricardian court.⁶⁷ Felicity Riddy and Helen Barr have in particular discussed the Dreamer's profession of jeweler and how the poem's relation to elaborate, wrought objects heightens these courtly associations.⁶⁸ Now we can add the prominence of John to this evidence, for the refrain of Fitt XVII would conjure for the fourteenth-century audience more than simply a biblical elder but an active saint with ties to precious gems as well as the English monarchy.

John an *Auctor* of Gender-Role Reversal

John further authorizes the Dreamer to speak of heaven as a man. By the fourteenth century, visionary authorship was a role more and more employed by women. Richard Rolle aside, while many men authored works of advice for contemplation (e.g. the *Cloud*-author, Walter Hilton) or served as amanuenses guaranteeing a vision's orthodoxy, accounts of a personal experience with God

⁶⁵ Binski, *Age of Chivalry*, 214.

⁶⁶ Ann R. Meyer, "The Despensers and the "Gawain" Poet: A Gloucestershire Link to the Alliterative Master of the Northwest Midlands," *Chaucer Review* 35 (2001): 413-29.

⁶⁷ Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and John Bowers, *The Politics of "Pearl": Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); see also H. L. Spencer, "Pearl: 'God's Law' and 'Man's Law,'" *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 59 (2008): 317-41, and John Watkins, "'Sengeley in synglere': Pearl and Late Medieval Individualism," *Chaucer Yearbook* 2 (1995): 117-36.

⁶⁸ Riddy, "Jewels in Pearl," 143-55; Helen Barr, "Pearl—or, 'The Jeweller's Tale,'" *Medium Aevum* 49 (2000): 59-79.

were as often from female visionaries, such as St. Catherine of Siena, Mary of Oignies, and, a generation after the *Pearl*-Poet, Margery Kempe.⁶⁹ Moreover, the works of Continental female mystics, including St. Bridget of Sweden, the beguines, and St. Hildegard of Bingen, had a renewed currency in fourteenth-century England.⁷⁰ It is too much to call the Dreamer's visionary status an act of transvestism—although it is curious to think that the other great apocalyptic Middle English poem of the fourteenth-century, *Piers Plowman*, opens with its male dreamer going about in disguise. (Must male visionaries somehow step outside their normal social role as a requisite for sight?) But within this late medieval general feminizing of mystical vision, the emphasis upon John could serve as a reminder that men have access to contemplative vision as well.

The Dreamer's claiming of a position that by the late fourteenth-century had become more feminized seems part of a larger pattern of gender-switching in *Pearl*. The Dreamer has not a male angel guide, as John had, but a laywoman explicating Scripture and assuming the functions of cleric.⁷¹ Moreover the 144,000 virgins in the Lamb's train are transformed from men to women: Revelation specifically identifies them as "those not defiled with women" (Rev 14:4).

John himself embodied this fluidity of roles, as one of his epithets was the *sponsa* of Christ. This was a term he shared with Mary Magdalene, and both became types for the contemplative life.⁷² Commentators often puzzled over the significance that John was especially marked as "the disciple Jesus loved," pondering how

⁶⁹ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ Kerby-Fulton, *Books under Suspicion*, 188-203, 247-56; Jennifer N. Brown, *Three Women of Liège: a Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d'Oignies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

⁷¹ Kevin Gustafson, "The Lay Gaze: *Pearl*, the Dreamer, and the Vernacular Reader," *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 27 (2000): 57-77 (66-67). I would add that not only is the Maiden presented as a clerkly figure, but she is not explicitly a personification (e.g. Ecclesia, Truth) that a reader would associate with exposition; she is a young laywoman.

⁷² Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 152. Martha and Peter were their counterparts as the active life.

exactly the Lord would have a special favorite.⁷³ As Thomas Aquinas summarizes,

For the present, it is enough to say that John was more loved by Christ for three reasons. First, because of the cleanliness of his purity: for he was a virgin when chosen by the Lord, and always remained so.... Secondly, because of the depth of his wisdom, for he saw further into the secrets of God than others.... Thirdly, because of the great intensity of his love for Christ: “I love those who love me” (Prv 8:17).⁷⁴

While Origen shied away from recognizing an especially close intimacy between Christ and John, interpreting the Evangelist’s lying on the bosom as a sign for “resting on more mystical things,”⁷⁵ Aelred of Rievaulx was more bold, implicitly identifying John as Christ’s bride:

[O]ur Jesus himself, lowering (himself) to our condition in every way, suffering all things for us and being compassionate towards us, transformed it by manifesting his love. To one person, not to all, did he grant a resting-place on his most sacred breast in token of his special love, so that the virginal head might be supported by the flowers of his virginal breast, and *the fragrant secrets of the heavenly bridal-chamber* might instill the sweet scents of spiritual perfumes on his virginal attachments more abundantly because more closely.⁷⁶

As mentioned above, Christ and John would frequently be depicted together, with John tenderly asleep on Christ’s chest, as in this

⁷³ Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium*, Trac.124.4-7; Jerome, *Ad Jovinianum*, 1.26. John Boswell notes that Jesus’ naming of John as custodian of his mother replicates what would happen between spouses: *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 138-39.

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, ch.13.1804.

⁷⁵ Origen, *Commentariorum in evangelium Johannis*, 32.264-79, translated from *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 2.391-94.

⁷⁶ *Speculum Caritatis* 3.40.111, translated from Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor, Cistercian Fathers Series 17 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 299 (emphasis added).

elegant carving from Constance (ca. 1300; FIG. 5).⁷⁷ Nearly thirty examples of this sculptural group survive.



FIG. 5 Christ and Saint John the Evangelist, 1300-1320. Germany, Swabia, near Bodensee (Lake Constance), early 14th century. Polychromed and gilded oak; 92.7 x 64.5 x 28.8 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 1928.753

It is hard not to read this pair as eroticized, Jesus's head tilted gently towards "the disciple he loved," one hand protectively on his

⁷⁷ Eleanor S. Greenhill, "The Group of Christ and St. John as Author Portrait: Literary Sources, Pictorial Parallels," in *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff zu seniem 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern*, eds. Johanne Autenrieth and Franz Brunhölzl (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1971), 406-16.

shoulder while the other holds John's hand, fingers extended caressing the palm. Their weight leans in towards each other, emphasized by John's drapery folds as well as the angle of Christ's shoulder. John's beardlessness as well as deep-carved curls and full lips slightly feminize him next to Jesus. Other eroticized images of Jesus and John include scenes of Jesus chucking John on the chin (a shorthand gesture for romantic intimacy) and embracing him.⁷⁸ A late fifteenth-century German representation goes so far as to dress John's luxuriously long hair in a bridal chaplet and seat him at a wedding feast beside Christ as groom.⁷⁹ Virgin and visionary, John became especially popular in convents, nuns identifying with him as fellow *sponsae Christi*.⁸⁰ Once again, we see John as a double for both the Dreamer and the Maiden, the former as living visionary, the latter as virginal bride of Christ.

In Conclusion: Remembering John

As a final rejoinder to some of the earlier-cited criticism of Fitt XVII as tedious, I suggest that the monotony of the Dreamer's account of the Heavenly Jerusalem generates an incantational rhythm to these lines. As P. M. Kean noted, Fitt XVII is the most interlocked in all of *Pearl*.⁸¹ Perhaps this does create the most static section in the entire poem. But it is appropriate that among all the motion and energy in *Pearl*, soon to culminate in the procession of praise, that heaven should simultaneously be a point of stillness. The regular refrain of Fitt XVII keeps us still as well, forcing us to linger and look. The almost clinical catalog empties away the Dreamer, not in order to leave us without an emotional purchase on this scene but to make room for our own reactions to this splendor, for we must bring our own emotions to this vision in order to cement it in our memories for our salvation. Certainly English illuminated Apocalypses were useful as books of memory, with their images suitably vibrant, violent, and emotional for easy recall and with their series of unusual objects that could provide frames on which to hang

⁷⁸ Carolyn D. Muir, *Saintly Brides and Bridegrooms: The Mystical Marriage in Northern Renaissance Art*, Studies in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art History (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

⁷⁹ In Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität Basel, MS A.vi.38, fol.4r, reproduced in Hamburger, *St. John the Divine*, plate 25.

⁸⁰ Hamburger, *St. John the Divine*, 95-164.

⁸¹ *The Pearl*, 210.

other lists (e.g. Four Horsemen, Seven Seals).⁸² While Cotton Nero A.x's illustrations do not seem to lend themselves well as prompts for a memory image, Fitt XVII does provide a verbal *figura* for a memory palace, with each of its layers clearly demarked by stones of different colors. Repetitive images might make for a confused memory storehouse, but repetitive language can help with memorizing, especially when in verse and with link words. Thus Fitt XVII may be so constructed for aiding readers trained in medieval mnemonic practice to create their own visualization of the Celestial Jerusalem, and through internalization of the place allow themselves to be present. Like the Dreamer, we may be lurking on the other side of the river, but John shares with us his aquiline sight, allowing us to see the New Jerusalem in all its lapidarian splendor.

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⁸² On illuminated Apocalypses, see Lewis, "The English Gothic Apocalypse, *lectio divina*, and the Art of Memory," 13-32.