

THEORETICAL LUNACY: MOON, TEXT, AND VISION IN FITT XVIII

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Introduction

Much has been made of *Pearl's* exquisite form.¹ Each fitt provides a gateway into the poem, revealing a new angle from which one might enter. This process of reading, whereby each facet succeeds the last without replacing it, generates the glimmer for which the poem is so renowned. Each stanza-set adds to the sheen, often by reimagining its central motif, generating “the” pearl anew. How does a pearl come to be? According to medieval lapidaries, pearls were thought to be formed from “droplets of dew or rain.” They were believed to hold healing properties and were often ground down and used in Arabic medicine. The fifteenth-century *Peterborough Lapidary* praises the pearl as “the chief of al stones.”² Indeed, the pearl is an exceptional sort of gem, not forged alone beneath the earth by heat and pressure. A pearl is a response to something alien. Medievals may not have understood the biochemistry behind these stone-like miracles, but they sensed the improvisational, malleable nature of their beauty.³ However

¹ “Pearl, indeed, is perhaps the most completely self-enclosed of all medieval dream-poems: the most perfect in its artistry, pearl-like in its circularity of structure, so ‘smothe’ that its surface gives no purchase for any attempt to lever apart the real and the imagined” (A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976], 120).

² R. A. Donkin, *Beyond Price: Pearls and Pearl-Fishing: Origins to the Age of Discoveries* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society), 259–260.

³ Regarding medieval metaphors of resurrected, glorified, and heavenly embodiment: “...they are revealing exactly because they are offhand and oblique, for images often carry speculation or intuition or hunch far beyond what the technical terms at the disposal of medieval theorists—terms such as *eidos*, *substantia*, *persona*—can bear” (Caroline Walker Bynum, *The*

mineral, pearls cannot come to be without the agency of an organic creature. A microscopic intruder works its way into the pillowy interior of a clam's shell. It scrapes and irritates the soft flesh. The clam registers this particle as a disruption but has to contend with its presence. To do so, it encases it within a combination of organic and inorganic material: nacre, which is composed of calcium carbonate and conchiolin. It wraps the particle within many layers of this translucent substance, and this layering produces the iridescence: the more layers, the more remarkable the luster.

This response neither ejects nor eclipses the strange presence. Rather, it builds upon it, conforming to and elaborating upon its shape while transfiguring its substance—and doing so with material through which light can pass. Where there is light, there is the possibility of vision. The pearl illuminates the small bit of matter even as it hides it. This combination of alarm at the unknown, the penetration of light, and the proliferation of glossy matter receives special (re)consideration in Fitt XVIII. The link-word “moon” works its way into the poet's mind. A pearl forms around the object, both critiquing and consuming it. Or perhaps the image of the moon throws yet another layer of nacre over the larger pearl that is the poem itself. Using the moon as a point and medium of vantage (in XVIII), the poet examines the interplay of light and matter as a means of displaying how poetry might unveil the indescribable realities of heaven.

Our commentary follows the physical process of pearl-formation. As co-authors, we have responded to one another's insights, each allowing his/her thoughts to be colored by the other's. We take our inspiration from the collaborative, accretive growth of a pearl. Countless layers enwrap the mysterious bit of heaven at the poem's core: the Apocalypse of John delivers the vision elaborated by a dream (triggered by human grief), glossed by the Maiden, recounted by the poet, and interpreted by generations of scholars. The Dreamer is outside of the city, then outside of his dream. We, outside of the poem, wrap our own layers of meaning around it, but always with words through which the poem's own light must pass.

Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336 [New York: Columbia University Press, 1995], 7–8).

There is no dissection, no scaffolding. At best, we share in the pearl by contemplating and responding to it.⁴

Stanza I

Drawing on Scripture, this section explores the tension between particularity and sameness. How does the heavenly city resolve or reconcile the individuality of souls with the inseparability implied by “one Body”? In what way are the discrete “components” of heaven held together and evaluated? The Pearl Maiden offers a mysterious alternative to the Dreamer’s possessive, earthly ideal of togetherness. Yet she does so solidly within the revelatory landscape of a prior vision (and text). The Dreamer’s vision in XVIII is both embedded within and eruptive beyond the Apocalypse of John, which the *Pearl*-poet glosses. “As John hym wrytes yet more I sye”, says the Dreamer (XVII). Only as this commentary concludes shall more be said about this “more.” For now, it is well to recognize that it is not the Maiden but the city that is crowned, in this instance, with four sides of three gates, “The portales pyked of ryche plates, / And uch yate of a margyrye, / A parfyt perle that never fates” (1037–39, cf. 205). Here is manifested the true pearl of great price that does not fade or die—the house of David, the Body of Christ, the Church of God, all-resplendent (cf. Eph 2.20–22).⁵ As a gloss on Apocalypse 21.21, the poet’s reading is remarkably incisive. The Douay-Rheims Bible translates, “And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each: and every several gate was of one several pearl.” The “several” is an interpretive transformation (cf. *et singulae portae erant ex singulis margaritis*), trying to make sense of a peculiar image: that each gate (*porta*) is a pearl, and each of the gates is of a single pearl (which is the literal sense of the Greek as well).⁶ In distinguishing “margyrye” (a synonym of “pearl”) from “perle,” the poet appears to distinguish

⁴ For the Middle English, we have relied on J. J. Anderson’s edition. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, ed. J. J. Anderson (London: Everyman, 1996), 39–41.

⁵ In dynamic parataxis, Psalm 89 [88].37 declares the following about the final and all-incorporating enthronement of David: “And his throne as the sun before me: and as the moon perfect for ever, and a faithful witness in heaven.”

⁶ Consider that each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel is named “Israel.” See 1 Kings 18.31; cf. Genesis 48–50. “Israel” is the new name that Jacob receives after he contends overnight with an angel and is not defeated (see Genesis 32.28). Jacob as well as each of his sons and their tribes is Israel.

the former from the latter as part from integral whole. The true and “parfyt perle that never fates” is that mysterious substance in which each gate and each gate’s pearl (read: “margyrye”) fully participates. The particular ascription with which the Dreamer had designated the Pearl Maiden, “perle,” is now applied to the perfect, trans-categorical reality that emits the “parfyt” and “unfating” (undying) light of glory, even as it assumes an edifice’s body.

For *Pearl*, however, true beauty is registered, not in terms of objects but in terms of relationality. As A. C. Spearing has noted, the entire poem is about relationships, and the way “the impact of the more than human upon the human” causes a “reassessment of human values.” For Spearing, the *Pearl*-poet does not make absolutely clear the Maiden’s identity. She is very reasonably understood to be the Dreamer’s daughter; and yet, the poet does not want to foreclose other possible relationships (e.g., one between romantic lovers). This indeterminacy “enabled the poet to write a poem not about one particular relationship, but about human relationship in general.” Accordingly, the dreamed envisioning of the Maiden leads to a beholding of an eschatological city.⁷

The city’s relations between parts and integral whole are (self-evidently) personal. Each gate (which is a pearl) is named with each of “Israel’s sons.” “Uchon [portale] in scripture a name con plye / of Israel barnes, folewande her dates, / That is to say, as her byrth-whates; / The aldest ay fyrst thereon was done” (1039–42). It is the name that is the unique index of value—precisely because it is the interval between word and visage, parent and child, beauty’s transcendent call and the image’s particular response. A pearl crowns each gate and so does a name. The all-surpassing worth of the substantive object (daughter, pearl, heaven) gives way to the crowning mystery in terms of personal relationality. The poet underscores this mystery of relationality. The Maiden is never properly named, even as the relationship with her that the Dreamer-as-father figures proves essential to the vision’s trans-earthly drama. Either, then, the idolized Maiden is irreducibly unnameable (as in, e.g., the postmodern Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*),⁸ or she is only

⁷ See A. C. Spearing, “Pearl,” in *The Gawain Poet: A Critical Study* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 147.

⁸ Mention of postmodernity and the “unnameable other” also brings to mind Lévinas; though for him, there is no correspondence between the

nameable by the One whose selfsame Name is above all other names (as in, e.g., the premodern and near-contemporary Beatrice of Dante). Regardless of whether or not the person as more and other than an object can be named, though, it is stunning that its relations can be figured.

There exists a remarkable parity between each of the gates and pearls and sons of Israel. Each is of measureless worth. And yet, they are ordered according to “birth” (cf. Gen 48.38; 1 Cor 15.23). In figuring that which lies beyond all earthly standard of measure (the justice of heaven), the scriptural and poetic authors nevertheless maintain standards of arrangement and order that are described in mundane terms (order of birth). This ordering, though, surpasses the Christian father’s medieval moralism. Even after appreciating his pearl’s bliss, the father disputes the rank of her splendor, giving voice to the age’s theodical questions about the status of children who die before the age of reason. The Maiden now lives as a veritable queen. But, the Dreamer reasons—himself having entered a kind of limbo—she had not sufficiently employed intelligent freedom to merit her place in heaven, having lived “not two yer in oure thede” (“but two years in our land,” 483). Without “penaunce” how could she afford “blysse to byye” (477–78)? In fact, she was never even old enough to pray or recite the Lord’s Prayer and Creed (484–85). Why does she enjoy such surpassing rank as to be comparable to Mary, the virgin mother, who, against all other human persons (save her divine-human son), possesses “synglerty” most truly (see 425–28; cf. 8)? It is here, peering into that most spotless of spots, that the Dreamer can begin to envision for the reader (even if he cannot appreciate for himself) the just ordering of persons that is heaven’s beautiful and integral arrangement. It is a place whose walls and borders do not obstruct, where no one evaluates another’s appearance as more or less worthy than one’s own; where every beatified soul is a king or queen, and “uchon fayn of otheres hafyng” (see 445–52; cf. 784–86, 847–50).

Heaven evaluates persons in relational—not objective terms. A person’s worth is found in the justifying call of God, which furthermore resounds when shared and celebrated between others. Address is the purest place. Salvation obtains within the dia-logical stretch between callings and namings. This is the register of

terms of the relation, and this asymmetry is fundamental specifically to the constitution of ethics, as first philosophy.

scriptural valuation, which reveals the glory of the sons and daughters of God (cf. Rom 8.19), those elected or called into the divinity's family. The baptismal call of the eternal Word's selfsame beauty is transmitted from heaven through preachers, Holy Writ, and their glossators, exhorting individuals "To bye... a perle was mascelles" ("to purchase an immaculate pearl")—one's personal call from glory on high to live forever, in accord with the words that are written in the Book of Life, which are the names of the holy ones (line 732; see Apoc 21.27). It is the conceit (in both senses) of revelatory poetry, whether canonical or not, that seeks to speak this distance between the mutually transcendent terms of personal relation. Indeed, it is the carrying-over work of revelatory meta-phor that *Pearl* so sublimely accomplishes.

Stanza II

Stanza two continues to explore the transfiguration of particular objectivity into relational, unitary being. It shifts focus from names and persons to optics and light. Here, poetry encroaches upon the brink of what can be imagined (rendered into images). It does so by taking the translucency of heaven's roads to both perceptual and conceptual extremes. The Douay-Rheims translators render the corresponding Scripture, "And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent [*perlucidum*] glass. ...And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof" (Apoc 21.21, 3). The *Pearl*-poet gives this transparency a literal sense, imagining material reality as suffused and transfigured by God's light.

The first line picks up the link-word "moon" only to abandon it. The New Jerusalem has neither sun nor moon because Christ himself illumines the city; he is the "lambe-lyght" by which all things are seen. Yet God does not merely emanate light (like the sun), and he certainly does not reflect it (like the moon, though medievals probably did not know this). God is the ground and wellspring of light, itself the physical phenomenon which formally conditions sight and, by literal and metaphorical extension, knowledge. As the Light beyond light, God relates all created phenomena to himself as their originating creator. And so, physical light, though a creature, seems to reveal God's nature in a special way, becoming a central poetic motif in language about the divine. Natural light seems almost as original as its supernatural origin. "Let there be light," God says upon creation of heaven and earth (Gen 1.3). Amongst all physical

phenomena, light appears the most auto-originary. It just is. It seems inseparable from the energies that produce it. The poet seems to appreciate this quasi-divine quality of light, and utilizes it as a means of figuring divinity. In this way, he is theologically Johannine, taking cues from the Gospel that figures the divinity of Christ in terms of light. This makes sense, as the poet would likely have associated the evangelist with Apocalypse, following the text's conceit regarding its own authorship. John describes Christ as "the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (John 1.9). He portrays Jesus as stating, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8.12). For John, true life can be found only in Christ, and that life is the light of humanity (John 1.4). Depicting the "trone" where "hyghe Godes self" sits, the *Pearl*-poet takes the reader to the source of all light. Yet God does not give as the world gives, and the world's wisdom is foolishness in his sight (John 14.27, 1 Cor 3.19). God does not reducibly illumine as physical light illumines, notwithstanding the analogicity between Creator and creation.

Light transcends the metaphorical in John's hands (without leaving it behind). Poetic projects that "translate" revelatory, apocalyptic realities into semi-imaginable terms often use their conceits paradoxically. In her essay on inexpressibility in *Pearl*, Anne Chalmers Watts characterizes this imperative neatly: "words say that words cannot say." Yet they "must ever maintain a reality outside these verbal and imaginative constructions that say they cannot say."⁹ Christ cannot be interpreted according solely to one's everyday experience of natural light. His is an-other light altogether, gestured at by physical light. Christ may be the "true light," come into the world to enlighten humanity, but that does not mean he is discerned as illuminative. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not" (John 1.10). What else fails to comprehend the light? "And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1.5). This is not (or, at least, not merely) the seething darkness of a dualism pitting evil against good in opposite-but-equal cosmic combat. While it refers primarily to the impaired vision (and by implication, cognition) in a postlapsarian world—like all poetic figures—it recursively operates on

⁹ Ann Chalmers Watts locates the content of *Pearl* within the larger context of contemplative praxis. Ann Chalmers Watts, "Pearl, Inexpressibility, and Poems of Human Loss," *PMLA* 99.1 (1984): 26, 29.

a literal, material level as well. This is the poignant reality of life in the physical world. Where there is light, there cannot be dark. Yet material reality itself obstructs the flow of light. Material substances cast shadows, and objects are illuminated in part because shadows limn and define them. Light bounces off materials, enabling vision. The moon is only the example *par excellence* of how most visible objects become apparent to the human eye. Unless it is translucent, an object that receives light also blocks light. Illumination seems to be a zero-sum game: objects come into view at the expense of other objects (or facets of objects). (This is implicit in the word *obiectum*, which means “cast before.” An object is necessarily an ob-stacle, its presence an impediment or blockage to one’s line of sight).¹⁰ Yet if all objects were wholly occupied by light, they would be difficult if not impossible to see. Humans squint in overwhelming brightness as well as in the dark. In this world at least, too much light inhibits sight. The physical reality here evokes the theological claim of humanity’s darkened condition. Natural existence in this world allies humanity to the dark. But what about heavenly existence?

If the darkness cannot comprehend the light, heaven is a land without shadows. The poet portrays the gleaming city in appropriately dazzling terms. The city blazes brightly, through Christ: “Thurgh hym blynsed the borgh al bryght” (1048). It is “bryghter” than both the sun and moon (1056). Nothing can compare to the brightness of heaven—but because heaven’s brightness differs in kind, not just intensity. In this stanza, the poet undertakes the challenging task of imagining what a city with truly supernatural, Christic light might look like. This leads him into a fantasy of looking, one conceivable only in poetic terms: “Thurgh wowe and won my loking yede;/ For sotyle cler noght lette no lyght” (1049, 50). (One might think of the “fabulist” artists Jorge Luis Borges and M. C. Escher, whose visions of impossibility dance between concept and image). “My gaze went through wall and building. For the subtle clarity let the light go unhindered.” The transparency that seemed merely to describe the glassy street now, for the poet, imbues all of the heavenly kingdom. This is a miracle

¹⁰ See Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “‘Obiectum’: Note on the Invention of a Word,” *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 403–43.; Nicola Masciandaro, “Obiectum: Closing Remarks,” *Speculative Medievalisms: Discography* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013).

of seeing; and since “sight” words metaphorize thought processes, it represents a phenomenological fantasy as well. The Dreamer sees objects without their blocking other objects; he registers them while simultaneously seeing through them. The scandal of particularity is purified but preserved.

This mode of seeing answers to the Dreamer’s relationship with his pearl. The barely (but assuredly) recognizable Maiden who first seems so alien is in some sense “the same” as the rest of the heavenly virgins. She is equally loved by Christ, a co-inheritor of his kingdom, one of many Brides—yet the Bride, the Church, one body in the Body, itself Christ’s body. The tensile relationship between particularity and sameness is resolved by Christ’s all-suffusive light, for it is the unhindered “light” that allows the Dreamer to see through edifices without their becoming invisible. The poignant concluding scene epitomizes this dynamic. Marching with what should be a homogenous mass of Pearl Maidens (a “meyny schene,” or “shining company”), the Dreamer’s daughter is still recognizable as “my lyttel quene” (1145, 1147). Many “margyryes” equates to one, “several” pearl. In his commentary on Apocalypse, Victorinus of Pettau (third century) insists, “It is one thing to speak of each of the pearls; it is another thing to speak of the one pearl from which they come... this one pearl is our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹¹

One should not, however, overemphasize the visuality of this poem. The Dreamer temporarily enjoys this fantastic gazing, but the reader apprehends it via poetic de-scription. The same applies to John’s vision, of course. The realities of heaven are given in linguistic form. Vision comes by way of words. The city “blysned” brightly because of the lamb. A blaze might be a fiery, auto-illuminative phenomenon, but a blazon is also a pictorial sign—an identifying crest. It is, as well, a poetic description of a holistic entity by means of its individual parts. The poet, following John, blazons heaven, painting it piecemeal with his words. The eternal Word of God enables such blazoning as the living guarantor of meaning for all words: Communion everlastingly underwrites communication.

The poet gives the reader nothing other than a vision of “The hyghe Godes self” sitting upon a throne (1054). How are we to

¹¹ Victorinus of Pettau, “Commentary on Revelation,” *Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation, Victorinus of Petovium, Apringius of Beja, Caesarius of Arles, and Bede the Venerable*, ed. and trans. William C. Weinrich (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), 58.

imagine this? By the end of this stanza, we seem to have moved from a vision of the lamb (the wounded, incarnate Second Person) to something more like God's selfsame, substantial glory. How to depict the invisible, all-surpassing Godhead? In poetry, this can be done precisely because it is not being done (cf. Isaiah 6). "As John the appostel [describes] in termes tyghte," so do we "see" God on his throne. These "tight terms" allow us to experience an eschatological reality eluding both physical vision and visual imagination. Poetry renders these hidden things in some way accessible. It insists on their being without their being-visible. The poet invites us into the poem explicitly, shifting abruptly to second-person: "ther moight ye hede (observe)" (1051). In what way might we observe? How can we, like the Dreamer, see "more" of what John describes? Through the mediation of words. Heaven's brightness is a kind of whiteness, like that of parchment (1026). Only on the page can apocalypse (the unveiling of heaven) be witnessed, at least until the sky finally does snap shut like a scroll (Apoc 6.14). Scripture gives textual witness to the Light, but witnesses are not themselves the Light (cf. John 1.8). They reflect it, like the moon.

Stanza III

Heaven's superabundant light is not the only element indicating God's saturating splendor. Water, too, rushes forth from God's throne ("A rever of the trone ther ran outryghte," 1055). This paradisaal river surpasses the sun and moon in its glittering beauty (1057), whereas earthly rivers merely reflect those bodies of light. The luminous, living water of heaven represents not a created effect of God's love, but the very source: uncreated grace itself. It gushes forth directly from the "trone" on which God sits just as blood and water flowed from Christ's pierced side (cf. John 3.5). This is no mere trickle, but a "foysoun flode," rushing swiftly through heaven's streets ("thurgh uch a strete," 1059). It has been suggested that this "flood" comprises the very river that separates the Dreamer from the heavenly city.¹² If that is the case, God's cleansing waters provide both the canal leading from earth to heaven as well as the moat separating the two. This topographical metaphor alerts us to a truth about God's uncreated grace (or Holy Spirit). It births a "new creation" while killing the "old man" (2 Cor 5.17, Eph 4.22). Because

¹² Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in Pearl," *The Modern Language Review* 81.1 (1986): 7.

God immediately sources the water, to plunge into it unprepared results in a kind of dream “death.” The Dreamer does not make it to the other side. He wakes up.

This image of a river surrounding paradise, both treacherous and full of promise, would have been familiar to the poet and his readers. A contemporary work, *The Book of John Mandeville*, was one of the most widely read texts in the later Middle Ages. *Mandeville* survives in over 250 manuscripts in multiple languages, and the *Pearl*-poet almost certainly “borrowed from it.”¹³ It doubles as travelogue and pilgrim narrative, and all the lands across which Sir John travels are imprinted with the sacred. His most ultimate goal is Eden itself: the earthly paradise. Like their heavenly counterpart in *Pearl*, the rivers that lead to Eden also render it unreachable. The *Mandeville*-author describes the fantastic topography of the terrestrial paradise in terms similar to the *Pearl*-poet’s description of the heavenly paradise. It sits on a mountain so high that Noah’s flood could not reach it, and a wall surrounds it (as in *Pearl*). One wall “casteth oute the foure flodes that renne thorowe dyvers londes” (lines 2707–13, p. 92). These “floods” source Eurasia’s major rivers, but the closer one follows them to paradise, the less navigable they become. They rage so roughly that some pilgrims die from weariness of rowing, some grow deaf from the waves, and others go blind (2734–35). No one can arrive at paradise without a “special grace of God” (2736). Again, the same goes for the heavenly paradise of *Pearl*: “The yates stoken was never yet, / Bot evermore open at uche a lone” (1065–66). The gates are never shut against anyone, and yet no one who “beres any spot anunder mone” dares enter (1068). In *Mandeville*, this inaccessibility occasions one of the most famous lines in medieval literature, comical and poignant in its pithiness: “Of Paradyse can I nat speke popirly for I have nat be there, and that angoreth me” (2705–06). The Dreamer of *Pearl* might as well speak that line himself, and the poet most likely read it. As A. C. Spearing says in his foundational study on medieval dream poetry, “The Dreamer is an inadequate vessel for the experience of

¹³ *The Book of John Mandeville*, eds. Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 1.

his dream.”¹⁴ One may not be able to speak properly of Paradise, but that does not stop one from speaking.¹⁵

Mandeville and *Pearl* share more than an interest in recounting paradise. The protagonists of both are travelers. Both are pseudo-romance questers and pilgrims who seek the face of God in the exotic landscapes in which they find themselves, however haplessly. The practice of journeying to a strange land in order to witness “foreign” epiphanies, then returning to report back, has a long genealogy. In ancient Greece, such religious tourism had an official status in the practice of *theoria*. A *theoros*, either private or civic, traveled beyond his city-state not only to witness, but also to participate in the religious mysteries of another place. He would then return, presumably changed, to share his experiences. Later, Plato and Aristotle metaphorized this cultural practice, using *theoria* to describe philosophical understanding as a “spectacle of truth.”¹⁶ In various disciplines, scholars call speculative, abstract, and/or schematic work “theory,” participating in a long tradition of philosophical thought. Yet it is easy to forget the origins of this term in itinerant and ritualistic religious praxis, and in the adventure of relationships between alien peoples and persons. As a spiritual traveler to a hyperreal heavenly landscape, one who returns to tell the tale, the Dreamer is a manner of *theoros*. That means that *Pearl* can be called “theoretical poetry.” Through language, it draws readers into visions of things that they have not seen—and even “more,” could not see with their own eyes.

Stanza IV

In Fitt XVIII, the poet draws the reader into these impossible visions by means of the moon, a figure for flux. An avatar of change itself, the moon is one of the most freighted symbols in premodern literature. Poets associated its round, modest glow with chastity, especially in the figure of Artemis/Diana. Later, Queen Elizabeth

¹⁴ Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 126.

¹⁵ Recall Augustine’s famous words toward the beginning of his *Confessions*: *Et quid diximus, deus meus, vita mea, dulcedo mea sancta, aut quid dicit aliquis, cum de te dicit? Et vae tacentibus de te, quoniam loquaces muti sunt* (I.iv). The Augustinian “restlessness” of the heart is bound up with the irrepensible desire to acknowledge through speech (i.e. to confess) the greatness of God.

¹⁶ Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 40–47.

would share the epithet “Cynthia” with the goddess as an homage to her virginity. Yet the moon’s seeming shape-shifting, its movement, and its dark spots also made it a figure of sexual inconstancy, disease, and sin. In Robert Henryson’s *The Testament of Cresseid* (fifteenth century), the goddess Cynthia appears “Of colour blak, buskit with hornis twa,” and “Hir gyse was gray and full of spottis blak” (lines 255, 260).¹⁷ The crescent moon evoked a cuckold’s horns for medievals, and the shadowy craters, the grime of sin. Fitt XVIII of *Pearl* proves a miniature case-study in lunar symbology. Critics never cease to marvel over the rich, non-schematic ways in which its images are working. A white, gleaming orb set in the heavens, the moon would seem an appropriate analogue to a pearl, and to the Pearl Maiden. Yet we see that the moon is “To spotty... of body to grym” to approach or exert itself in the heavenly city (1070). This repeats the point made in the final line of the third stanza, that no one enters heaven with his sin upon him. But the poet then shifts to an astronomical reason for the moon’s exclusion. In heaven, “ther ne is never nyght” (1071). Heaven is a land without shadows, always illumined by the lamb-light. As *The Testament of Cresseid* points out, Cynthia is best seen at night (266). Why would she venture to “clym” over heaven’s horizon when “that worthy lyght” would render her invisible (1072–73)? This goes for other heavenly bodies as well: the planets are in too poor a plight and the sun is too dim (1075–76). The poem has slipped from a tropological or moral register (too spotty) to a physical one (too weak/poor). This physical weakness collapses gravity and darkness. The natural heavenly bodies cannot make the climb, but the futility stems from their dimness.

As has been shown with the second stanza, God’s light is of a supereminently different kind than physical light; it penetrates and suffuses all things while preserving them as discrete entities. Hence, the simultaneous transparency and appearing of heaven’s content. Just as there is no darkness in heaven, there is no reflection. Everything shares in and pulses with God’s own light. This is why nothing spotty can be said to be in heaven, because God radiates through those souls, purifying and enlightening them. To have a spot or shadow in heaven would be to have a place where God is not,

¹⁷ Robert Henryson, *The Testament of Cresseid* in *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, ed. Robert L. Kindrick (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 163–64.

and what is heaven but abiding in God—enjoying the beatific vision? In Apocalypse, God promises to make all things new: to make a new heaven and a new earth. The New Jerusalem is not entirely Other, but, rather, a transfigured version of the earthly Jerusalem. As crystalline as heaven might seem, it is also strikingly organic. As in Apocalypse, the Tree of Life is present, returning Eden (with a difference) to humanity. Not unlike the “several pearl,” the Tree itself is given in the plural (“tres ful schym,/ That twelve frytes of lyf con bere,” 1077–78), divided up between the tribes of Israel (and/or Apostles), yet one. The fruits are not a static reality. “Twelve sythes on yer thay beren ful frym,/ And renowles nwe in uche a mone” (1079–80). They grow swollen and ripe, leaving it tantalizingly unclear as to whether they rot, but also leaving one free to assume the miraculous presence of birth/growth without death/decay. These unearthly fruits come to season not once a year, but every month. Immediately after banishing the moon from heaven, the poet tells us that the Tree of Life renews itself in each “mone” (1080). A new heaven requires a new moon. The Pearl Maiden is a cipher for that moon. She possesses her light as a perfect gift from a gracious Lord and avows that gratuitous ownership by invoking the parable of the vineyard. She does not only reflect and refract Christ, she abides in him. She—like the Scripture she cites and evokes—keeps his Word (cf. John 15.7). Despite the moon’s spottiness, medieval understandings made it an even more apt metaphor for the Pearl Maiden than our contemporary understanding does. For medievals, the moon served as mediator between earth and the heavens. Itself moved by the upper reaches of the heavens, it could act on the earth in turn.¹⁸ Since God divided the luminaries in the beginning, it was thought that the moon was created full. That and Easter’s dependence on the lunar calendar lent the moon a sacrality that belied its reputation for inconstancy and spottiness, associating it with creation and resurrection.¹⁹ Most medievals did not think of the moon as reflecting the sun’s rays. They would have followed Averroes, who theorizes, “The sun renders it [the moon] luminescent first, then the light emanates from it in the same way

¹⁸ J. D. North, *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1989), 255–56.

¹⁹ Stephen C. McCluskey, *Astronomers and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 77–78.

that it emanates from other stars...”²⁰ The medieval moon is made auto-luminescent through participation in the sun’s rays. So does the Pearl Maiden radiate a light uniquely hers by partaking in the Son’s grace. Warmed and enlightened by the Son, she is equipped to take up her orbit and illumine those in the outer reaches.

Even the moon’s spottiness assumes an illuminative function. How does the moon of *Pearl* appear to its readers? It is received as black markings on a spread of white: letters on a page. The moon’s spottiness evokes not only the grime of sin and the darkness of imperfect knowing/seeing (twin evils of postlapsarian reality)—it also evokes the inky stains of writing. The moon spells out seasonal change, dictating the Catholic calendar’s moveable feasts with its shifty hieroglyphs. As Augustine struggled to explain and understand, language, too, proves an irreducibly temporal activity.²¹ We read through time, moving across the page, and we speak one syllable at a time—the full meaning of which cannot be gleaned (if it ever can) until the utterance is completed. The dark blotches that mar the moon’s luminous face are—among other things—the necessary “marks” of signification. Necessary, that is, outside the heavenly city. In heaven, the lamb-light illumines all. When we shift

²⁰ Pierre Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) 481 (quoted). See also: B. R. Goldstein, *Theory and Observation in Ancient and Medieval Astronomy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985); Robert R. Newton, *Medieval Chronicles and the Rotation of the Earth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972); Francis S. Benjamin, J. R. and G. J. Toomer, eds. *Campanus of Novara and Medieval Planetary Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971); Jennifer N. Brown and Marla Segol, eds., *Sexuality, Sociality, and Cosmology in Medieval Literary Texts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); E. Edson and E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004); Rudolf Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages: The Physical World before Columbus*, trans. Angela Hall (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1996).

²¹ Book XI’s famous meditation on temporality analogically distinguishes between created speech and the uncreated Logos. “For it is abundantly clear that your speech was expressed through the motion of some created thing, because it was motion subject to the laws of time, although it served your eternal will. These words, which you had caused to sound in time, were reported by the bodily ear of the hearer to the mind, which has intelligence and inward hearing responsive to your eternal Word... In your Word all is uttered at one and the same time, yet eternally” (Augustine, *Confessions* [London: Penguin Books, 1961], 258–59).

registers from light to Logos or Word, we understand another aspect of heaven. The vision of the Word eclipses and opens earthly words, situated in space and time as they are. Communication becomes Communion. The walls of heaven “glent as glayr” (1025). They gleam like an egg white, a substance used in manuscript illumination.²² Critics have noted the *Pearl*-poet’s white, bright, glossy aesthetic.²³ Heaven appears as a blank page because all that needs saying abides within the Word.

The moon thus serves as a figure for understanding, mediating knowledge. It elaborates the Pearl Maiden’s role. She has charitably left the city proper, orbiting it in order to hold an exchange with one on the margin—to enlighten him. Her mien reflects heaven’s light; her words refract it, breaking it down into linguistic units the Dreamer can understand. As we have seen, though, this seeming reflection is no reflection at all. Rather, she abides in the original light. Lunar reflection figures the Pearl Maiden’s function without exhausting its mysteries. Though her relatively familiar person transmits God’s light as a candle might be lit from a wildfire, yet the fire dazzles the eye. Her gloss is not wasted on the Dreamer, though he misunderstands much of it. The dialogue in which they share comments not only on the city before them, but also on Apocalypse as well. Their space is textual, not simply because it is received in the form of a poem, but because their gloss on heaven’s white page (1026) evokes the prolific and colorful tradition of medieval marginalia.²⁴ The Dreamer tries to understand this wordless story from the outside. He and the Maiden proliferate marginalia, glossing the true mysteries with a secondary sheen. In so doing, the Dreamer undergoes a process of lunar understanding, engaged with a

²² *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, 39. (See note to line 1026.)

²³ Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 111, note 3; Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry: The Late Fourteenth Century and the Patronage of the Duke* (London, 1967), 146.

²⁴ “I could begin, like St Bernard, by asking what do they all mean, those lascivious apes, autophagic dragons, potbellied heads, harp-playing asses, arse-kissing priests and somersaulting jongleurs that protrude at the edges of medieval buildings, sculptures and illuminated manuscripts? But I am more interested in how they pretend to avoid meaning, how they seem to celebrate the flux of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’...” (Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* [London: Reaktion Books, 1992], 9).

mediating entity which, though necessary and beautiful, can only provide a “spotty” account of the immediate glory of the beatific vision. This spottiness derives both from the Dreamer’s own earthbound, sinful state, and from the simultaneously revealing and re-veiling quality of linguistic signification. Though the Pearl Maiden is herself spotless, the Dreamer is not yet equipped to see the light in which she abides. For the time being, he sees *per speculum in aenigmate*, through a glass (or mirror) darkly (1 Cor 13.12). He can see only reflected light, and that imperfectly. Yet the *caritas* between his Maiden and him—itsself auguring the fulfillment of God’s *caritas*—promises he might one day know even as he is known.

Following the Dreamer’s dialectical engagement with the mediating Maiden, the poem itself cycles through ideas and motifs, looping back around to explore them with a difference. The poem is formally lunar, aesthetically reproducing the phases of the moon in its structure. Though the Dreamer longs to see the city from within, he acknowledges his need for this commentarial mediation. His longing to enter remains a component of his attachment to his pearl. This attachment, though, points him towards the “several pearl” of which she is a part: the pearl of great price. If it is impossible to enter “without spot,” it also proves difficult to gaze without understanding. As the next stanza indicates, staring too long into the light, one might become moonstruck—met with lunacy without understanding. This ravishing madness, however, could initiate a super-linguistic movement across the white space between word and Word. Though not Wisdom itself, the moon is the pearl of wisdom.

Stanza V

In the presence of the Pearl Maiden, the Dreamer is “anunder mone” (1081). This place, however, is beyond what the “fleschly hert... myght endeure” (1082, cf. 1068). He is out of himself—and even, for this stanzaic moment in XVIII, in-sane: he has become a lunatic. And indeed, “lunatic” and “lunacy” derive from connections medievals drew between bouts of madness and the phases of the moon. Similar to the heavenly Maiden, the earthly Dreamer has transcended his own space, but without entering the other’s. However perspicacious his sight, he does not pass over into that city of light, to which his daughter gives lunar reference. His vision is studded with sensory impressions, yet he is actually removed from bodily sensation. As with the raptured man of whom Paul speaks,

whether the Dreamer is in the body or out of the body, “only God knows” (2 Cor 12.2). But as the lunar mysticism of XVIII makes clear, heavenly enlightenment involves a night of the senses.²⁵ The Dreamer “felde... nawther reste ne travayle” (1087). The state of *apatheia* is the supreme site of pathos.

The Dreamer’s vision was occasioned by wrestling with the departure of his “prvyv perle wythouten spot” (12). But “spot,” of course, is not only the stain from which the Dreamer’s pearl of supreme goodness and beauty (*kalokagathia*) was wholly free. It is also her place or location. The grassy mound where he fell asleep is, it seems, her grave; through burial and decomposition, it is the site of her disappearance. And this now is the only spot for the pearl, the site of her death. For the Dreamer, death alone “marres a myry juele” (23), even as, for the poet, death disappears as a stain.²⁶ Death situates and manifests life. The place to which no “I” can testify becomes the place of discovered reality. The fearsomeness of death is perhaps aesthetically undone, but its problematizing reality and phenomenological potentiality are not for that reason (*pace* Epicurus) to be denied. Death is the place of life: if the realm of the dead be conceived as the “underworld,” it is thereby foundational.

In meditating on the topos of his pearl’s death, the Dreamer has died there the death of sleep, likewise losing his earthly place. From the spot of her death, the Dreamer’s “spyryt ther sprang in space” (61). The *theoros* is transported to the place of his pearl, and here, he is truly able to address her, precisely because she most perfectly escapes his possession. Although the mystery of her beatitude is ultimately excessive of his powers—he cannot comprehend where she is, he cannot participate the mystery of her state—he nevertheless speaks with her and she responds to him. In this mystical conversation between Dreamer and Maiden, where

²⁵ “In these lines, with their obvious allusion to St Paul’s ‘whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth’, the Dreamer is claiming that, unlike St Paul, but like St John (in Apocalypse 1:10), he knows that this experience came to him not ‘in the body’ but ‘in the spirit’. ...He describes St John’s experience in the Apocalypse as a ‘gostly drem’ (790), and his own dream can be classed as an equivalent, though less complete, experience. ‘Gostly drem’ is the Middle English equivalent to what St Augustine calls a *visio spirituale*, a type of vision in which spiritual forces affect the imagination as if they were sensory images...” (Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 117).

²⁶ Field, 9.

speech has the power to locate, i.e. to address, they are placed in terms of each other's placelessness.²⁷

It is in two senses, then, that the Dreamer's pearl springs from him in that spot (13, cf. 61): as earthly loss and as heavenly gain. Because she is incomparable, her purity is unearthly: it is spot-less, place-less. As J. Allan Mitchell writes, it "is a world out-of-bounds."²⁸ Like the holy city of heaven that the Dreamer espies through her mediation (967–68), she too is unable to be situated or possessed; she cannot be placed or grasped (137–42; cf. 1157–63). And because she cannot be de-fined, she cannot be easily thought, though she must be de-scribed. By losing his mind's place on earth, becoming spotless himself, the forlorn father regains the delight of his daughter's presence, if but for a dreamscape's time. But this presence overwhelms him, utterly exceeding and confounding the categorial evaluation he had imputed to her. With nothing but his pearl's absence of spot to set upon, the Dreamer's ladder is placed upon the site of her dis/appearing. The pseudo-angelic *Pearl*-poet ascends and descends between heaven and earth, describing each realm in terms of the other, sending the Dreamer's and Maiden's words across to each other (cf. Jacob in Gen 28.12, and the Son of Man in John 1.51). The "fresch fygure" of Apocalypse's heavenly city, refracted according to the pearl-in-the-sky's spotless gleam, ravishes the Dreamer (1086, 1088). His reason and his senses are discombobulated. He is become mad. As the Maiden silently and invisibly withdraws from the scene, he is both carried away and yet, his body still resting upon the hillock where he fell asleep, he has not moved anywhere. To be driven crazy with heaven's light is the still point of the turning world, neither flesh nor fleshless, as Eliot sings centuries later. The unoriginated arrow of God's selfsame light, drawn by the moon, targets the Dreamer with nocturnal sublimity. He "stod as styлле as dased quayle" (1085). The lunatic's dazing, here, is not only due to wonder and "merwayle" but also terror. To invoke Coleridge's distinction, the Dreamer encounters not only the beautiful but also the sublime. He finds the sight doubly fearsome ("ferly," 1084, 1086) as he furthermore feels himself hunted,

²⁷ Cf. J. Allan Mitchell, who conceives the dreamer's/maiden's utopia thusly: "Death, the most radical of ontological divisions, separates the two worlds and becomes metonymic of the peculiar epistemological hiatus between 'here' and the otherworld." See Mitchell, "The Middle English 'Pearl': Figuring the Unfigurable," *The Chaucer Review* 35. 1 (2000): 95

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

mortally pursued. If he sees, it is because he has first been seen; if his gaze penetrates the translucent walls of the heavenly city, it is because he has first been pierced by the glare of the invisible God's glory.

And that which pierces must wound. The Lamb, whose earthly work manifests his incarnate identity as *lumen de lumine*, is necessarily and preeminently a wounded figure that also wounds (cf. 1135, 1142).²⁹ Nearing his throne, the Dreamer's sight is similarly stricken by all but the blow of death. "Hade bodyly burne abiden that bone, / Thagh alle clerkes hym hade in cure, / His lyf were loste anunder mone." (1090–92). There is only one who has "bodyly burne" this mortal apotheosis: the one, after whose title the Christian takes her name. As for the Dreamer, his near-death experience of wounded marvel, alone out of the entire poem, obtains "consciens sure" (1089). Only earthly insanity can manage heavenly clarity. The "glymme pure" (1088) that drives the Dreamer mad (without moving him) is precisely what gives him knowledge.³⁰ This "knowledge" is not of this world. Its certainty is therefore uncertain; its wisdom is folly. This knowledge is nothing more (though nothing less) than the assurance that lunar vision defies all bodily life. Here is a species of Augustine's *docta ignorantia*, which Renaissance writers (e.g., Cusanus, Ficino) eagerly take up. To awake, one must fall asleep; to live, one must die; to see, one must dream. This Dreamer is sure that he has seen the *ultima thule*: that which, like his pearl, is beyond all measure, and therefore, beyond all place. But he has not moved anywhere, even as his mind has sprung beyond. Beneath the spotted moon he has been rendered spotless. In suffering the moon's purifying light, the Dreamer has become a theoretical lunatic. The stultifying moonlight has transported him to witness the most sacred and mysterious of all mysteries. "As helde, drawn to Goddes

²⁹ In the Hebrew Scriptures, Jacob, whose dream-ladder stretched between heaven and earth (Gen 28.13), is also wounded in another nocturnal theophany, this one, in terms of wrestling with God or an angel (Gen 35.1–7). (Cf. n. 6, above.) Humanity cannot but come away wounded in its encounter with God. Relevantly, for Christianity, when God's incarnation is claimed to fulfill the encounter between divinity and humanity through the Christ's personal identity, it is "necessary" for him to "suffer and die." The Lamb, therefore, is both wounded and wounding.

³⁰ "In the dream, the Maiden had described him as 'put in a mad purpose' (267); now he describes as mad those who strive against God's will..." (Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, 128).

present, / To mo of his mysterys I hade ben dryven” (1193–94). He has been driven to see the unseeable. Though he ultimately leaves it unparticipated, he is yet still sure of what he has seen. Though his mind and senses cannot comprehend it, he yet still would describe it.

In Conclusion, “More”

As Watts observes, “The Pearl poet not only quotes the Apocalypse but also writes within a tradition of mystic vision shared by his near contemporaries, the English mystics and Dante.... By gradual discipline of contemplation, the mystic comes to a momentary experience of God’s light, God’s love, or eternal knowing.”³¹ This tradition’s very form thematizes the problem of theological expression, since “the experience passes beyond desire and language even sooner than it passes human understanding.” But what and whose “experience passes beyond desire, language, and understanding?” The seer/dreamer’s, the poet’s, the reader’s? Why should the reader of a poem declare that “language” (inter alia) is “passed beyond?” How does visionary experience relate to scriptural/poetic description? How do the seeing and commenting dynamics of Scripture’s Apocalypse relate with those of *Pearl*? Apocalypse, after all, is not only the ostensible record of a heavenly vision—it is also a commentary upon other books of the Bible (especially the prophetic books, Isaiah and Ezekiel, themselves containing visionary and even apocalyptic testimonies).³² Apocalypse is the Bible’s own most spectacular gloss. It is the Bible’s very own pearl.

As a gloss on Apocalypse, Fitt XVIII uses the moon to explore how words communicate measureless realities for evaluative beings.

³¹ Watts, 29.

³² One major theory about the potential origins of biblical apocalyptic finds a notable line in biblical prophecy—whether as a mystical/ethical movement or as a literary form. See, e.g., Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979 [1975]). Regardless of theory, the words “prophecy” and “apocalypse” have a certain correspondence. To “prophesy,” derived from the Greek, means to “pre-dict” or “say beforehand.” Two of the three Hebrew words for “prophet,” however, derive from words meaning “to see.” The prophet is one who speaks about the beyond because he has seen the beyond. And “apocalypse” is about uncovering hidden things that have been seen by an initiate (see below, n. 32).

In the hands of the *Pearl*-poet, the nature and properties of the moon trope the dynamics of scriptural commentary and mystical vision. Just as the moon draws the earth, leading her tides to cough up pearly treasures, the Bible's Apocalypse draws from the poet the treasure that is *Pearl*—a poetic secret to be rent open and disclosed. In commenting upon Scripture's ultimate book of vision, *Pearl* mirrors how Scripture figures and glosses divine reality. The form of this lunar and specular aesthesis is scriptural apo-calyptse: a worded revealing of what is otherwise unimaginable and inconceivable.

"Apocalyptic" or "apocalypse," whose Greek derivation means "un-veiling" or "un-covering," is an ancient Persian and Semitic literary genre. The reality of another hidden time and world is administered to a recipient, typically through the mediation of a trans-worldly being (usually an angel), generally to address a situation of crisis.³³ Apocalypse need not be fungible with accounts of "fire and brimstone." (Such associations proceed not from the Bible's final book, but from its first; see Gen 19.24.) Although the *Pearl*-poet is far-removed from the situation and concerns of traditional apocalypses, a personal crisis occasions the Dreamer's vision, in which the Maiden functions very much like a mediating angel. The poet's gloss upon Apocalypse weaves the aesthetics of Christian Scripture into the fictive Dreamer's experience of it. This gloss upon gloss or lunar mirroring produces *Pearl's* literary iridescence.

But is not XVIII's lunacy the negative overcoming of theological indication? Is not the Dreamer's silent leave-taking all that remains? Not quite. In the preceding Fitt XVII, the Dreamer recounts his vision just "as John" describes in Apocalypse (cf. 984, 985, 995, 997, 1020, 1032). Then the first line of XVIII announces, "As John hym wrytes yet more I syye" (1033). Contrarily, the seer of Apocalypse swears in conclusion to his book, "If any man shall add to these things, God shall add unto him the plagues written in this book" (Apoc 22.18). The penalty is the blotting-out of one's name from the Book of Life (Apoc 22.19, cf. Ps 69.28 [68.30]). But even if the poet's text is not intended to add more by way of divine inspiration or ecclesial canonicity, the question remains: What precisely is his dreamer's "more" and how is it seen? Perhaps it is

³³ See the standard-setting definition in John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1998 [1984], 5).

the more that remains unapprehended without personal experience and vision. Yet the poet purveys not a vision per se, but words to read or hear—a dreamer’s discourse.

Apparently, for the Christian scriptural imagination, there is no experience of vision that is not co-reducible to the hermeneutical experience of a reader/hearer. The poet trades upon the epistemic tension between words and vision, each of which can be prior to the other, and each of which can seem to surpass the other. For example, the poet’s Dreamer beholds his pearl in heavenly splendor (1147–52); and yet, because this supernatural order is fundamentally jarring to his earthly sensibility, the Maiden quotes Scripture to him: “In Appocalypce is wryten ... ‘I seghe’” (866–67). To justify a vision, words are cited, which themselves, testify to a vision. Such alternative priority and preeminence between words and vision yields a uniquely refractory discourse for Christian theo-logy, which would articulate how Life is revealed in the Word who is Light (John 1.14, cf. Ps 119 [118].105).³⁴ Consider the work of *Pearl* more generally apropos Apocalypse and Christian Scripture: the poet writes what the Dreamer sees, which is based upon what Apocalypse describes, testifying to what John sees, which is the opening of the sealed Book, which is accomplished by the Lamb who seems as one slain, being nevertheless the incarnate Logos or Word of Life, whom the Apostles saw, and therefore preached, as they performed great signs and wonders, while the evangelists recorded the Good News, which is ever proclaimed, even as Scripture is ceaselessly glossed. Each of these points is preceded and followed by another, even as each can initiate or follow the rest. Such is the prismatic mystery of scriptural “fulfillment” (see e.g. Matt 5.17).

However the Dreamer and reader of *Pearl* might “see” more than is read in Apocalypse, that “more” lives in the accrual of interrelations between reading/hearing and seeing because a speaker is showing and a reader/hearer is seeing. Like a pearl’s ever-accreting layers of nacre, each interval of worded vision adds

³⁴ The great twentieth century literatus-theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar says the following about the Christian phenomenology of the word: “Scripture is the word of God that bears witness to God’s Word. The one Word therefore makes its appearance as though dividing into a word that testifies and into a Word to whom testimony is given.” See Hans Urs von Balthasar, “The Word, Scripture and Tradition,” chap. 1 in *Explorations in Theology, Vol. 1: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale with Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1989).

another degree of luminescence. The “more” always divides beyond itself into another space, just as the Dreamer’s vision of eschatological increase begins where the “klyfes cleven” the skies (66), and just as the baptismal water that issues from the heavenly city cleaves mortal from immortal life (see e.g. 1157–64). In XVIII, “more” is found in the dark illuminations of the moon whose light is not its own. The moon’s “more” captures and chastens the “more and more” of transcendent desire that would be inexorably construed in earthly terms (see III, X). Such earthly terms would ultimately signify, as David Aers reads it, a kind of “suicide.” In vaunting the self above all else, the Dreamer actually succumbs to a transcendent lust that is “definitely not... in response to any theocentric yearnings.” Rather, “[the Dreamer’s] yearning is to terminate desire in the full possession of its (fantasy) object, a possession that dispenses with all mediations, all negotiations, and all language.” Perhaps the *Pearl*-poet, however, would save his reader from such supreme “injustice.”³⁵ At any rate, the link-word of XVII, “John,” is rightly followed by that of XVIII, “moon,” since John writes only what he sees, or, more accurately, de-scribes what is shown and commissioned him to prophesy (see Apoc 1.1–2). The moon is that medium by which one can always say more, since nothing of what is said is formally one’s own but the Other’s.

The Dreamer finally discovers that the beauty of his pearl is neither her own nor his own (much as the anonymous poet must have thought of his work). His pearl’s splendor and the recognition of it participate in a gift that is given from elsewhere, the truly “courteous” grace of a divine “Prince,” which is the “ground of all bliss” (see VII, VIII). The “more” of mercy is also the “more” beyond all measure; and this personal, relational gratuity disrupts and reconstitutes all objective, substantial figurings of what is “date” (or “due”, see IX). This grace of the Word who is the wounded but glorious Lamb redeems the economy of aesthesis.

The *Pearl*-poet’s work is therefore meta-phoric in the strongest sense: his words carry the reader’s thesaurus of meaning over into that divine space beyond mortal time, without leaving behind that

³⁵ Here, Aers is reading *Pearl* apposite Chaucer’s *Troilus*, and finds the *Pearl*-poet’s “preoccupations... thoroughly individualistic.” For Aers, then, *Pearl* is a kind of *pièce de résistance*. See David Aers, “The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*,” *Speculum* 68.1 (1993): 60, 68, 73.

which has been transcended.³⁶ Through the conceit of a dreamer's vision, the poet's twofold, allegorical sensibility leads beyond itself to much more, that is, to the typological style of an apocalypse—the unveiling of an archetypally destining beyond, which is the Kingdom of friendship between God and humanity. Exceeding all earthly measure, the existence and nature of this paradise (where lamb lies with lion) is not ordinarily conceivable, or even easily metaphorizable, but only transcendentally revealable: faith does not see that for which it hopes (see e.g. Rom 8.24). This unseeable beyond is precisely what the recorded vision of John's *Apocalypse* figures: "Write the things that you have seen!" (Apoc 1.17). And it is John's interlacing of visionary writing and scriptural vision that the *Pearl*-poet glosses, both the text and its textuality. Using this apocalyptic text and trope that intricately interweaves crisis and joy, loss and manifestation, darkness and light, worded witness and envisioned manifestation, the mind of the *Pearl*-poet "springs forth" with words of vision. He prophesies vision and apocalypses Scripture.³⁷ Appropriating and participating apocalyptic text and trope, the poet reveals how words of this world can figure and illumine an unfathomable hope—not through philosophical analogies of metaphysics (though without repudiating them), but through the scriptural metaphors of personally revealed afterlife: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Apoc 21.1). This apocalyptic theorizing can only take place (as it were) "anunder the mone." And for the earthly mind, to be sure, it is sheer lunacy.

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³⁶ "The *Pearl* dream-vision thus appears to be a sort of incarnation, which is to say, an embodiment *par excellence* of spiritual facts in human (linguistic) form—in this case, as mediated by the maiden's words, by the dream, and, in the final instance, by the poem itself. The 'figures' (in both senses: tropes and personages) in the poem are therefore simultaneously spiritual and literal, continuous with our world but signifying beyond it" (Mitchell, 90–91).

³⁷ See notes 32 and 33, above.