

DELYT AND DESIRE: WAYS OF SEEING IN PEARL

Anne Baden-Daintree

The nineteenth stanza group of *Pearl* marks both the culmination of the heavenly vision and the abrupt ending of the dream, and is held together by the concatenation word ‘*delyt*’.¹ This term has some resemblance to the modern English ‘delight’, indicating ‘pleasure, joy, gratification felt in a high degree’.² As the *Middle English Dictionary* makes clear, in the language of the late Middle Ages this often indicates sensuous pleasure, but in some contexts it might specifically refer to spiritual or intellectual delight.³ The frequent hints toward the erotic in *Pearl* might then lead us to misread the ‘*delyt*’, but its usage simply reflects the common practice in religious texts of the figurative employment of the language of the erotic and a vocabulary of sensuality to indicate spiritual pleasure and joy. In terms of the narrative and dramatic organisation of the poem, the ‘*blisse*’ which characterises the seventh stanza group moves from a description of remembered earthly joy and happiness in the father-daughter relationship, towards a depiction of heavenly joy. ‘*Delyt*’, in contrast, moves from the heavenly back to the earthly. Furthermore, ‘*blisse*’ carries with it a sense of assurance, of the state of experienced joy, and that which is promised; ‘*delyt*’ does not always indicate fulfilled desire, but can imply desire itself. So the movement from *blisse* to *delyt* ultimately articulates a movement away from the anticipated joys of heaven.

But this section of the poem is, it turns out, less about the spiritual or sensual pleasures implied by ‘*delyt*’, and more about a

¹ Apart from one early occurrence of the term ‘*delyt*’ in the poem (l. 642, where ‘out of *delyt*’ refers to mankind being deprived of joy through the Fall), it only appears in the penultimate stanza group. These occurrences all relate to the vision of the heavenly city, but specifically, as we shall see, to the *inhabited* city.

² *OED*, s.v. *delight*, n, 1a.

³ *MED*, s.v. *delit(e)*, n, 1a, 1b.

series of sense impressions, a succession of moments of awareness and multiple acts of perception which indicate rapid accompanying changes of emotion. Some of these moments are about ‘delyt’ as pleasurable experience, some play on the secondary meanings of ‘delyt’ as being about the expectation or yearning toward the pleasurable – something more akin to our modern term ‘desire’.⁴ It is worth noting that while ‘blisse’ is generally used to mean pleasure or happiness, it, too, can indicate that state of eager desire (and evidence of such usage is confined to other texts associated with the alliterative revival).⁵ So these stanzas encompass both the experience of spiritual joy, and a yearning toward the permanent condition of the joy of salvation.⁶ This does not, however, fully account for this stanza group’s processes. While translators and editors of this poem tend to employ ‘desire’ as the nearest equivalent to *delyt*, this not only masks the nuances of meaning which alter with repetition, but ‘desire’ inevitably carries with it the association of erotic desire. While this might be appropriate to the courtly metaphor which underpins the workings of the poem, it complicates the movement at the end of the poem from spiritual pleasure to a paternal longing expressed through erotic metaphor.

Rather than considering the balance between desire and pleasurable fulfilment, between the spiritual and the sensual, my reading of these five stanzas instead concentrates on the frequent shifts of the Dreamer’s attention, guided by the work, in particular,

⁴ *MED*, s.v. *delit(e)*, n, 1d, ‘a desire to have or enjoy something’. The *OED* also shows that in its medieval usage, ‘to have delight’ was equivalent to the French *avoir envie*, or ‘to desire’. *OED*, s.v. *delight*, n, 1b.

⁵ *MED*, s.v. *blisse*, n, 2a(b): See *The Siege of Troy*, l. 599; *The Wars of Alexander*, l. 2871.

⁶ Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron summarise precisely the purpose of this stanza group in the light of this term’s meaning: ‘The concatenation word *delyt*, with its overlapping senses of ‘delight’ and ‘desire’, suggests the function of this section – to emphasise both the bliss of salvation and the Dreamer’s growing desire to cross the water and join the saved’. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (eds.), *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript*, 5th edn. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007), 105, n. 1093-1152. All quotations from the text will be taken from this edition, however I also draw on the editions by Sarah Stanbury, E.V. Gordon, and Ad Putter and Myra Stokes. *Pearl*, ed. Sarah Stanbury (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001); *Pearl*, ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); *The Works of the Gawain Poet*, ed. Ad Putter and Myra Stokes (London: Penguin, 2014).

of Sarah Stanbury, A. C. Spearing, and Alain Renoir.⁷ Stanbury's work on focalisation and ocular perception, Spearing's observations on the mimetic processes of dreaming in *The Book of the Duchess*, and Renoir's analysis of cinematic processes in the *Gawain*-poet's descriptive techniques, all inform my reading of these particular stanzas. As Stanbury indicates, this emphasis on the visual, and the direct experience of the narrator, is embedded in the poem's literary processes, the 'structuring [of] descriptive passages according to the mechanics of perception'.⁸ As the poem draws to a close, both the dramatic narrative and the descriptive technique turn on acts of perception, with many swift shifts of awareness, and the quick cut cinematic techniques that mimic the process of dreaming. The visual and sensory delights that, prior to the dream, overwhelm the narrator and send him into a state of sleep, here dazzle him with their swift sequence and distract his mind leading to a final error of judgement.

This section of the poem leads from the Dreamer being granted a vision of the New Jerusalem, through to his viewing of the City's inhabitants, culminating in the sight of the Lamb of God, enthroned in majesty. The Dreamer then sees the procession of 144,000 virgins and among them his daughter, the Pearl-maiden. It is this final sight which leads him to attempt to cross the river, 'for luf-longyng in gret delyt' (1148). While this stanza group sees a shift in attention towards the heavenly city and then its inhabitants, and particularly the Lamb of God (before, at its close, the vision moves earthward again) it also demonstrates a number of shifts in its uses of key vocabulary terms. 'Delyt' is, in the first instance, attached to the pearls bound firmly to each maiden's breast, then to the character of their movement through the city (1105, 1116). Subsequently, 'delyt' applies exclusively to the Lamb – the pleasure of his coming (1117), of the experience of loving him (1128), of looking at him (1129), and then, in a rather complicated construction, the contrast of horrified contemplation of his wound which engenders grief rather than delight (1140). The final stanza of the group moves to the Lamb's

⁷ Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); A.C. Spearing, "Literal and Figurative in *The Book of the Duchess*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Proceedings, no. 1 (1985): 165-71; Alain Renoir, "Descriptive Technique in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Orbis Litterarum* 13, no. 2 (1958): 126-32.

⁸ Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet*, 2.

own experience of ‘delyt’ (1141), suggesting, perhaps, that the human emotions previously expressed might merely be reflections of the Divine. And finally the Dreamer’s attention is distracted, and the stanza ends with the (ultimately destructive) ‘delyt’ and longing for his daughter’s presence (1152).

Seeing the Heavenly Jerusalem

It has often been noted that the responses of the Dreamer to his viewing of the Heavenly City echo his response to his first sighting of the Pearl-maiden. This is a stunned silence that is articulated through a hunting metaphor, where ‘I stod as styлле as dased quayle’ (1085) clearly mirrors the earlier expression, ‘I stod as hende as hawk in halle’ (184). He is now ‘rauyste’ (ravished) by the radiant light emanating from the City, but this depiction of the qualities of the light of the Heavenly Jerusalem (compared to the dimmer glow of the moon) then continues into the next section with a different figurative emphasis:

Ryȝt as þe maynful mone con rys
 Er þenne þe day-glem dryue al down,
 So sodanly on a wonder wyse
 I watz war of a prosessyoun.
 (1093-6)

The emphasis in the first of these five stanzas is on ocular perception, an emphasis which continues, and increases in significance, as the poem progresses. The focus here is on how such acts of perception operate, overlapping and catching the Dreamer unawares. It begins with a simile derived from the impression of the sun and moon appearing simultaneously in the sky. The moon appears within the line of vision before nightfall, when the sun is still strong. And the moon is ‘maynful’. Commentators fail to agree on the precise meaning of this term, but it appears to derive from ‘main’, signifying strength and might, rather than the qualities of brightness and resplendence suggested by the *MED* (largely on the basis of this particular example).⁹ The sense, then, is of the moon rising powerfully before the daylight sinks down, and so this simile is about one element overtaking another in prominence. The juxtaposition

⁹ *MED* s.v. *main*; *mainful*. Stanbury notes the conventional formula ‘myghty and maynful’, *Pearl*, ed. Stanbury, 102, n. 1093.

of two opposing elements is the striking image here (and most editors comment on this) but, more than this, the poet wishes to draw our attention to the way in which we appear to be seeing one thing when suddenly another intrudes. The Dreamer has been gazing in wonder at the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, when he notices that the city is, in fact, inhabited:

Dis noble cité of ryche enpresse
 Watz sodanly ful, withouten sommoun,
 Of such vergynez in þe same gyse
 Þat watz my blysfyl anvnder croun.
 (1097-1100)

Is it the situation in front of him which has altered, or is it a difference in what he is able to perceive? Have the inhabitants, in fact, been there all along? The Dreamer's sense of being wrong-footed (as he has been several times in the course of his dream) is emphasised by the repetition of 'sodanly': he is suddenly aware of the procession and the city is suddenly full.¹⁰ Where 'sodanly' is used elsewhere by the poet it can include a sense of danger, an action that occurs without warning (as in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the surprise attack on Belshazzar as he sleeps, in *Cleanness*).¹¹ But in *Pearl* the sense of something occurring without warning repeatedly signals the Dreamer's inability to comprehend. 'Sodanly' also refers, in the final stanza group, to his movement out of the dream, and his expulsion from the presence of the heavenly Jerusalem and its inhabitants. It is a painful abruptness: 'Me payed ful ille to be outfleme/ So sodenly of þat fayre regioun' (1177-8). So the repetition of 'sodanly' at the beginning of this stanza group, as the Dreamer views the (now inhabited) City, emphasises his separation from it and prefigures his loss. His repeated failures of perception demonstrate (as the Pearl-maiden has already made clear) a groundedness in the earthly, and an inability or unwillingness to attain the heavenly.¹²

¹⁰ Gordon does comment on this aspect, the moon 'appearing as it were miraculously without any warning of its coming. So the procession in the Heavenly City appeared *wythouten sommoun*'. Gordon, *Pearl*, 84, n. 1093-6.

¹¹ *Cleanness*, 910, 'Sodomas schal ful sodenly synk into grounde'; 1769, 'Now ar thay [i.e. Belshazzar's enemies] sodenly assembled at the self tyme'.

¹² She criticises, for example, his reliance on the visual, his failure to believe anything unless he has seen it: 'Pat leuez noþynk bot 3e hit sy3e' (308).

The kind of perception and realisation that is at play in this stanza is very different, however, from the Dreamer's first sighting of the Pearl-maiden. At that point in the narrative a gradual sense of realisation and recognition is articulated such that we as readers follow the Dreamer's processes of cognition.¹³ This culminates in the shock of understanding when the sensory signals and intellectual comprehension result in a message that is incomprehensible: this is his daughter, yet also not the daughter he remembers. In the closing scene of his dream, however, the shock is more muted. While his perceptive faculties have failed him again, he seems to not be unduly troubled by this. By the end of this stanza group, however, further sudden shifts of perception bring everything to conclusion. Although we have seen the Dreamer twice rooted to the spot in desire and wonder, there is no real stability in his 'delyt': it oscillates between the earthly and the spiritual; he is repeatedly swayed, as Stanbury has observed, by the visual.¹⁴ His attention, and his desire, is diverted two more times during the dream: first by the appearance of the Lamb of God, enthroned, at the culmination of the procession, and second, when he is distracted by the sight of his 'lyttel quene'. Both of these sights generate strong emotions.

As this first stanza continues, there is a descriptive emphasis on female physical appearance, although it is very different in tone from the initial description of the Pearl-maiden. This is factual reporting, using the same series of physical attributes that recur repeatedly through the poem (crowned, in white clothing, adorned with pearls):

And coronde wern alle of þe same fasoun,
 Depaynt in perlez and wedes qwYTE;
 In vchonez breste watz bounden boun
 Þe blysful perle with gret delyt.
 (1101-4)

The irony, of course, is that the Dreamer recognises these virgins as being similar in appearance to his daughter, but cannot comprehend that she might be one of them. The account of the procession is

¹³ 'I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere' (164) gives way to 'On lenghe I loked [...] / Þe lenger, I knew hyr more and more (167-8).

¹⁴ Stanbury refers to his 'infatuation with physical forms', in *Seeing the Gawain-Poet*, 16.

drawn from Revelation 14.4.¹⁵ But the language of this entire stanza is replete with royal and courtly imagery (*prosessyoun, noble, ryche, crown, coronde*), confirming not only the very material concerns of the poem's figurative range in accordance with the desires of its aristocratic audience, but also the metaphor of heaven as a late medieval court (an approach which has led commentators to assume a direct and literal association with the Ricardian court).¹⁶ The City itself, we might note, was described as 'noble' and of 'ryche enpresse' (great renown) (1097).

While in the seventeenth stanza group the employment of material from the book of Revelation is applied in a straightforward manner, staying close to the Vulgate text (the plainness of the description of the New Jerusalem has been noted by several commentators), the poet draws freely on different sections of Revelation for this account of the interior of the City and its inhabitants.¹⁷ The 144,000 virgins following the Lamb are derived from Revelation 14: 1-5, which also confirms the 'spotlessness' of the Pearl-maiden drawn from the Song of Songs: *sine macula sunt* ('they are without spot', Revelation 14:5). The adornment with white

¹⁵ *et nemo poterat discere canticum nisi illa centum quadraginta quattuor milia qui empti sunt de terra/ hii sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinatti virgins enim sunt hii qui sequuntur agnum quocumque abierit* (and no man could say the canticle, but those hundred forty-four thousand who were purchased from the earth./ These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth). All Biblical quotations in this essay are from the Latin Vulgate (online version at www.latinvulgate.com) with translations from the Douay-Rheims (drawn either from the same site, or www.drbo.org).

¹⁶ See, for example, John Bowers, "Pearl in its Royal Setting: Ricardian Poetry Revisited," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 17 (1995): 111-55; John M. Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).

¹⁷ The construction of the city is based on a close approximation of John's words in Revelation 21, but this section of *Pearl* draws on Revelation 5: 14 (the procession of the 144,000), and 5:21 (the vision of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem), conflating different descriptive and narrative sections. It is worth noting Gordon's observation, however, that in *Pearl*, 'the Heavenly City has all the details of that in Revelation, yet it is imagined in medieval form as *bayle* or *manayrè*, (*Pearl*, ed. Gordon, 111). In my reading I also draw attention to the medievalisation of the poet's reading of Revelation, but in terms of social rather than architectural structures, and the specific conception of the heavenly hierarchy as reflective of the medieval court.

clothing and multiple pearls ('depaynt in perlez and wedez qwyte', 1102) confirms the identification of the Pearl-maiden with the 144,000, reinforcing the status of the communal over the binary relationships of father/daughter or bride/bridegroom, but it is also something which connects the followers of the Lamb with the City itself. Several commentators have drawn attention to the associations between the maiden and the City, particularly in terms of the lengthy physical descriptions of each, presented and displayed in their jewel-encrusted finery.¹⁸ This mode of presentation is biblical in origin: Revelation 21:2 describes the Heavenly City as 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (*paratam sicut sponsam ornatam viro suo*), and furthermore, each gate of the Heavenly City is also made of one individual pearl in the biblical account, replayed in the poem as the pearl in each maiden's breast. The account in Revelation of the City's gates: *et duodecim portae duodecim margaritae sunt per singulas et singulae portae erant ex singulis margaritis* ('And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, one to each: and every several gate was of one several pearl'), is transformed into 'In uchones breste was bounden boun/The blyful perle'.¹⁹ The language here indicates an individual distinctiveness ('uchones' and *singulas/singulae/singulis*) that is, paradoxically, enhanced by the concurrent reiteration of sameness (the 144,000 are dressed in identical clothing, as subsequent lines confirm), which chimes with the 'makelez' wordplay in descriptions of the Pearl-maiden.²⁰

The following stanza begins with terms that again confirm adherence to the account in Revelation (the golden streets gleaming as glass) while also emphasising the coherence of purpose and appearance ('alle in sute'):

With gret delyt þay glod in fere
 On golden gategz þat glent as glasse;²¹
 Hundreth þowsandez, I wot þer were,

¹⁸ See, for example, Sarah Stanbury, "The Body and the City in *Pearl*," *Representations* 48 (1994): 30-47, Rosalind Field, "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*," *The Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 7-17 (8).

¹⁹ Revelation 21:21

²⁰ See 780, for example: 'A makelez may and maskellez', where 'makelez' indicates unique, matchless, without peer.

²¹ Revelation 21:21 '[...] *et platea civitatis aurum mundum tamquam vitrum perlucidum*' ('And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were, transparent glass')

And alle in sute her liurez wasse.
 Tor to know þe gladdest chere.
 (1105-9)

The 'liurez' of the processing virgins is the livery which denotes service to a particular lord, and so the ideas of service and of coherence of appearance are also tied to the courtly hierarchy, the identification with one another, and with 'belonging' to this 'lord'.²² Then the text (and the Dreamer) shifts focus, and we turn to the source of this 'delyt': the Lamb of God. The Lamb with seven horns has a biblical source (Revelation 5:6), but the poet's additional detail of 'red gold' is not related to heraldry or livery, as might be expected, but simply reflects the quality of the gold:²³

Þe Lombe byfore con proudly passe
 Wyth hornes seuen of red golde cler;
 As praysed perlez His wedez wasse.
 Towarde þe throne þay trone a tras.
 Þa3 þay wern fele, no pres in plyt,
 Bot mylde as maydenez seme at mas,
 So dro3 þay forth with gret delyt.
 (1110-16)

Christ figured as the Lamb of God derives from a number of biblical sources, and, although the primary one here is the apocalyptic vision of the book of Revelation, the other sources also come into play in this stanza group, having already been explicitly paraphrased by the maiden at 801-4 and 822-4:

Isaiah 53:7 He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter (*sicut ovis ad occisionem ducetur*)

John 1:29 Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world (*ecce agnus Dei qui tollit peccatum mundi*)

²² Stanbury describes this as 'the official garb of a group or guild' (*Pearl*, ed. Stanbury, 102, n. 1108). And as the *MED* makes clear, the point here is the 'gifting' of the clothing or 'uniform' by the lord or king to servants or retainers. *MED*, s.v. *livere* n.(3).

²³ *MED* s.v. *red* 1f(a): 'Of the metal gold, gold coins, gold leaf: pure [as shown through becoming red when heated; cp. Pliny *Nat.Hist.*33.59].'

The pain of the Crucifixion and the redemptive powers of Christ underpin his appearance in the New Jerusalem. But the text is fairly static in dramatic and descriptive terms. Putter and Stokes suggest that this picture of the Lamb of God functions as ‘emblem rather than a metaphor, a visual image which actually discourages visualisation’.²⁴ Where much of the text of *Pearl* does provide pictorial detail which encourages ‘visualisation’, here, in accord with biblical processes, when ‘seeing’ God we are shown his Divine qualities and attributes rather than his physical appearance. The physicality is restricted, as the poem continues, to contemplation of his wounds, in accord with medieval affective tradition. As with stanza group 17 (where the architectural construction of the City is described), the reliance on biblical source material and the repetitive description of the procession towards the throne slows the pace, inviting the reader to share in the act of contemplation alongside the Dreamer as he enters a state of mesmerised expectation. But the straightforward rendition of biblical terms and the simplicity of the Vulgate’s diction nonetheless mask something of the sense of wonder that we are to understand in the Dreamer’s act of looking.

The various witnesses to the Lamb’s arrival are again derived from biblical sources, where the 144,000 virgins are joined by angels and ‘aldermen’ in celebrating the presence of the Lamb, and joining in praising him:

Delyt þat Hys come encroched
 To much hit were of for to melle.
 Þise aldermen, quen He aproched,
 Grouelyng to His fete þay felle.
 (1117-20)

But in *Pearl*’s account we return to the hierarchies of court life as well as the hierarchies of the heavenly realm. The description of the elders of the Heavenly City as ‘aldermen’ perhaps indicates civic governance more than the strictly courtly, but these men appear to adopt courtly postures when in the presence of royalty (although the prostrate position implied by ‘grouelyng’ occurs in religious texts as often as secular settings). The emphasis on the court is reinforced at the end of this stanza:

²⁴ Putter and Stokes, *Works of the Gawain Poet*, 448, n. 835-40.

Pe steuen mozt stryke þurȝ þe vrþe to helle
 Pat þe vertues of heuen of joye endyte.
 To loue þe Lombe His meyny inmelle
 Iwysse I lazt a gret delyt.
 (1125-8)

The image of the Lamb amidst his ‘meyny’ describes not the hired hands of the parable of the vineyard (542) but that ‘moteles meyny’ described in St John’s Apocalypse (as reported by the Pearl-maiden at 892, 899, 925, 960). These are his followers, his retinue, and he is their lord (a relationship which is figured in terms of courtly hierarchies). However, in between these depictions of the heavenly court, the acts of praise are expressed in an image which adapts a biblical source in a striking metaphor that merges the sensory with the spiritual:

Legyounes of aungelez, togeder uoched
 Per kesten ensens of swete smelle;
 Þen glory and gle watz nwe abroched;
 Al songe to loue þat gay Juelle.
 (1121-24)

The biblical source text is Revelation 5:8.²⁵ As the legions of angels cast about the sweet smelling incense, these scents are figurative representations of the prayers of saints. The poem does not make this explicit: it is concerned instead with extending the metaphor of the containment of spiritual virtues in material objects. As Putter and Stokes explain in their edition of the poem, the unusual word choice, ‘abroched’, is one associated with the ‘broaching’ or opening of a wine-cask such that ‘glory and gle are allowed to “pour out” like wine’.²⁶ The vials of prayers (incense) and the casks of glory and joy (new wine) then work together metaphorically to express the idea of an offering.

²⁵ *et cum aperuisset librum quattuor animalia et viginti quattuor seniores ceciderunt coram agno habentes singuli citharas et fialas aureas plenas odorum quae sunt orationes sanctorum* (and when they had opened the book the four living creatures and the four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints)

²⁶ Putter and Stokes, *Works of the Gawain Poet*, 461, n. 1123.

Just as we have seen the movement of the term ‘delyt’ from one object to another, so too, at this point in the poem does the image of the pearl move away from its apparently fixed association with the dead daughter. The Lamb himself is now identified as ‘pat gay juelle’ (1124) to whom all sing in worship. Both adjective and noun have been previously applied to the Pearl-maiden – she was that ‘gracios gaye’ (260) and simply ‘pat gaye’ (433) early in the exchange between Dreamer and Maiden (where ‘gay’ is used as an adjectival noun), and the Dreamer repeatedly refers to her as ‘jewel’ (23, 249, 253) and even her words are to him as jewels (277). But then she adopts his metaphor and applies it first to Christ as her heavenly bridegroom (795), and then to the inhabitants of the Heavenly City (929). The poem’s processes – the shifting metaphor of the pearl, the shifting meanings of all the concatenation words – only serve to emphasise the insistent references in this poem to interpretation, to perception, to relocating viewpoint. We might also note the opening stanza’s use of ‘queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye’ (7): now that the Lamb of God is perceived as the ‘gay juelle’ the jeweller’s ability to ‘judge’, to appraise or interpret, such ‘gemmes’ is brought into doubt.

The Wounded Lamb

The more detailed description of the enthroned Lamb of God follows, and concentrates first on demeanour before moving to physical appearance:

Delit þe Lombe for to deuise
 With much meruayle in mynde went,
 Best watz He, blypest, and moste to pryse,
 Pat euer I herde of speche spent;
 So worþly whyt wern wedez Hys,
 His lokez symple, Hymself so gent.
 (1129-34)

This formulaic description is misleading, however. While we might want to view the Lamb as exemplifying whiteness (and therefore purity), combining the modest humility of ‘symple’ with the courtly nobility of ‘gent’, this image is not straightforward. Moving from the generalised superlatives of character: ‘best’, ‘blypest’ (a range of meanings come into play here such as merciful, gracious, perhaps joyful), ‘moste to pryse’ (again raising the idea of value and appraisal

as well as praise), to the physical appearance which accords with the Pearl-maiden, and with all the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, a shock awaits both reader and Dreamer:

Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
Anende Hys hert, þurȝ hyde torente.
Of His quyte syde His blod outsprent.
(1135-7)

Why is this shocking when we know the facts of the Crucifixion? This is, after all, the Lamb of Revelation: ‘in the midst of the throne [...] stood a Lamb as it had been slain’ (Rev 5:6: *in medio throni ... agnum stantem tamquam occisum*). But it still jars in this mood of celebratory ‘delyt’.

This portrayal of the Lamb’s wound has produced much critical comment. Rosalind Field has drawn attention to the theological inappropriateness of the continued bleeding of the wound once the Lamb is enthroned in majesty, and draws comparisons with pictorial representation in Apocalypse manuscripts.²⁷ Muriel Whitaker also provides much pictorial evidence from such manuscripts as to the poet’s possible sources.²⁸ Sarah Stanbury, however, finds a psychoanalytical interpretation of the wound.²⁹ But in theological terms, it is the significance of the presentation of the Lamb of God as bleeding at the point when the Dreamer views him seated on the throne at the heart of the New Jerusalem, which is of concern. Once enthroned in the New Jerusalem the triumphal Lamb should be presented without visible and open wounds.³⁰ This stain on his

²⁷ Field, “Heavenly Jerusalem,” 13: ‘the *Pearl* poet might have been expected to introduce the ‘Jerusalem Lombe’ of Section 15 as the *Agnus Dei*, manifesting the wounds of the Passion, and then to follow the commentators and illustrators in presenting the Lamb in triumph in the New Jerusalem as the *Agnus Victor*, free from such wounds, ‘entier quant a sa deité’. In evident contrast to his audience’s expectation, the poet does the reverse.’

²⁸ Muriel Whitaker, “*Pearl* and some Illustrated Apocalypse Manuscripts,” *Viator* 12 (1981): 183-201.

²⁹ Sarah Stanbury, “Feminist Masterplots: The Gaze on the Body of *Pearl*’s Dead Girl,” in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed, Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 96-115.

³⁰ Revelation 5:6 describes ‘a Lamb standing, as it were slain’ (*agnus stantem tamquam occisum*). Subsequent references to the triumphant Lamb (Rev. 14)

spotless fleece complicates the message, whereby the maiden has already presented to us ‘thys Jerusalem Lombe’ (841), a lamb with fleece so white, that neither spot nor stain might adhere to it: ‘Pat mot ne masklle mozt on streche’ (843).³¹ Yet in the Dreamer’s subsequent description we see a graphic illustration of his wounds. In line 1137 the whiteness of his side is specifically juxtaposed with the gushing flow of blood, and the significance of the wound is, I think, its persistence. This is the damaged flesh that does not go away, the wound that fails to present itself as healed.³² In fact, this ‘blemish’ is at the heart of the poem’s conception of grief and salvation. Field demonstrates that it is the perception of this wound, this ‘mark of human suffering’, that is at stake: if read correctly, ‘the mark of death is a cause of joy’.³³ But, of course, the Dreamer is unable to see this. Instead, there is a direct relationship between the wounded Lamb and the ‘open wound’ of the Dreamer’s grief: the reader is invited to see an identification of suffering between the two. That this compassionate awareness of Christ’s wounds might be the path to the Dreamer’s salvation (even though the point may well be lost on him: his response is presented in terms of his lack of understanding) is indicated by the textual associations of the wound. Suggestive parallels for the poet’s emotive focus on the Lamb’s wounds are to be found, not in Apocalypse manuscripts (of which Field has only identified one where the Lamb is still presented as bleeding in the New Jerusalem), but in vernacular Passion lyrics, where the frequent calls to gaze upon the wounds of the Crucifixion and the spectacle of Christ’s bloodied, damaged body often turn (particularly in later lyrics) toward the wound in his side. The large body of literature based on the contemplation of Christ’s wounds refers specifically to the side wound caused by a spear when he was on the Cross, as told in John’s Gospel 19:33-4, and the Gospel of Nicodemus. It is also referred to by the Pearl-maiden at the end of stanza group 11, where she mentions blood and water coming out of the wound made by the spear (‘glayve’) 649-59. The phrase ‘wyde

and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22) do not mention wounds or marks of slaughter in connection with the Lamb of God.

³¹ Field, “Heavenly Jerusalem,” 11.

³² We might also read this in terms of Freud’s ‘open wound’ of melancholic grief as delineated in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), so that the Lamb’s sacrificial wound is to be viewed alongside the Dreamer’s psychological ‘wound’.

³³ Field, “Heavenly Jerusalem,” 15.

and weete' appears to be a formulaic alliterative construction occurring elsewhere in the context of describing a wound.³⁴ Both these descriptive terms are widely used of wounds (particularly Christ's wounds), respectively indicating gaping and bleeding, and also occur in one of the Grimestone lyrics on the Passion: 'wyde weren hus wondis wete'.³⁵

The problem in *Pearl*, however, is not the nature of the wound, but rather that the Dreamer can only see the wounded Lamb, not the Lamb triumphant.³⁶ It is significant that the Dreamer's perception is different from that of the maiden (she does not appear to see or acknowledge the wound): he is still in a state of imperfect understanding. However, the presentation of the wounds of Christ occurring at this particular point in the text (with the potential for access to the Heavenly City), does, in fact, have some biblical authority. In the closing verses of John's Apocalyptic vision comes the simple equation of salvation and redemption from sin, couched in precisely these terms:

Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb: that they may have a right to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city.

beati qui lavant stolas suas ut sit potestas eorum in lingo vitae et portis intrent in civitatem (Revelation 22: 14)³⁷

³⁴ *Destruction of Troy*, 1327-9: The Troiens full tyte were tyrnyt to þe gronde/With batell on bothe halfes, blody beronyn,/Wyde woundes & wete of hor wale dyntes. Source: *The Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy*, eds. G. A. Panton and D. Donaldson, *EETS* 39, 56 (1869, 1874; reprint as one vol. 1968).

³⁵ F. J. Furnivall (ed.), *Political, Religious and Love Poems* (Oxford: EETS, 1866, 1903), p. 276, 'In place as man may se', l. 159. MS Adv 18.7.21 (NIMEV 1523).

³⁶ The *poet*, however, presents both: the Lamb is triumphant *despite* being wounded.

³⁷ Although the washing 'in the blood of the Lamb' (in the Douay-Rheims translation) is not explicit in the Latin Vulgate text, it is implicit through its association with the opening blessings and salutations of the Book of Revelation: '*Iesu Christo [...] qui dilexit nos et lavit nos a peccatis nostris in sanguine secō*' (Jesus Christ [...] who hath loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood), Rev. 1:5.; and more directly to Revelation 7:14, where the 'great multitude' who are 'standing before the throne and in sight of the Lamb', 'are they who are come out of great tribulation and have

The bleeding Lamb of God is simply a metaphoric invitation to salvation and redemption from sin, presented to the Dreamer at a point when his resistance to verbal reasoning can only be resolved through visual ‘argument’. And of course, this precise image has already been presented verbally by the Pearl-maiden, at the heart of her bridal meditation upon Christ’s love:

In Hys blod He wesch my wede on dese,
 And coronde clene in vergynté,
 And pyzt me in perlez maskellez.
 (766-8)

This association between Christ’s wounds and redemption from sin was embedded in contemporary liturgical thought and practice, as is made clear from what Miri Rubin describes as ‘a most popular’ Eucharistic salutation for the elevation of the host: ‘*O aqua lateris Christi lave me*’ (O water from Christ’s side, bathe me).³⁸ That this is returned in *Pearl* to the more problematic biblical image of being washed clean by Christ’s blood is entirely consistent with the poem’s preoccupations with stains and blemishes (or their absence). And, as the text indicates, compassion for the bleeding Lamb exerts only a fleeting, momentary hold on the Dreamer’s attention.³⁹

But the shocking contrast of the gush of red blood and the whiteness of Christ’s side causes the Dreamer at this point to ‘see’ the fact of the Crucifixion for the first time. His response is instinctive, engaging with the wounded Christ on a purely human level: Who did this? How could they have hurt you?

Alas, þoʒt I, who did þat spyt?
 Ani breste for bale aʒt haf forbrent

washed their robes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (*qui veniunt de tribulatione magna et laverunt stolas suas et dealbaverunt eas in sanguine agni*).

³⁸ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 303.

³⁹ David Aers views this brevity highly critically: ‘the dreamer’s ‘luf-longyng’ shows no sense of relatedness to anyone but the object of his desire – and that [...] is *not* the processing Lamb of God on whom he bestows three lines of pity before turning away.’ David Aers, ‘The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*,’ *Speculum* 68 (1993): 54-73 (72).

Er he þerto hade had delyt.
(1135-7)

It is not that the Dreamer was unaware of the Crucifixion before this point, but now, confronted with the physical reality of wounding, he is able to see it clearly for the first time. His apparent lack of comprehension is, in fact, a breakthrough in terms of his deeper understanding, whereby the emotional acknowledgement enhances his intellectual and spiritual engagement. The Dreamer's concerns, we must remember, have been almost entirely earth-bound and literal. And the subsequent stanza continues to describe the Lamb with this naive sense of wonder:

The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene;
Þa3 He were hurt and wounde hade,
In his sembelaunt watz neuer sene,
So wern Hys glentes gloryous glade.
(1138-41)

Even though he is hurt and wounded, the Lamb's 'delyt' is evident. While the Dreamer's response to this vicious wounding is instinctive anger and incredulity, the Lamb, in contrast, demonstrates impeccable manners. In the courtly hierarchy which the poet employs as an emblem of heavenly hierarchy, the Lamb is lord or king, and it would not befit him to demonstrate any extreme emotion at this point that might disrupt the celebratory mood of praise. All the followers have demonstrated 'gladest chere', so how could his *sembelaunt* disrupt this? All his 'glentes' (glances) are 'glorious glade', in accordance with the expressions of his followers.

Desire and Loss

From here, however, we move into the final acts of looking that disrupt the vision, and destroy any illusion of continued relationship between bereaved father and dead daughter. With an abruptness mimetic of the rapid 'scene changes' that typify the process of dreaming, the Dreamer switches his attention away from the Lamb for a moment as he notices the 'meyny' (again, a term which describes the gathering in terms suggesting the household retinue). This is exactly the kind of movement that began this stanza group. Just as the moon rises while the sun is still shining in the sky, now,

gazing on the wounded Lamb of God, the sight of his entourage takes precedence in the Dreamer's line of vision:

I loked among Hys meyny schene
 How þay wyth lyf wern laste and lade;
 Then saȝ I þer my lyttel quene
 Þat I wende had standen by me in sclade.
 Lorde, much of mirþe watz þat ho made
 Among her ferez þat watz so quytl!
 Þat syȝt me gart to þenk to wade
 For luf-longyng in gret delyt.
 (1145-52)

Reading this aloud, it is impossible to ignore the frequent and sudden changes of tone in these few lines. We are carried along with the Dreamer's rapid readjustments as his understanding struggles to catch up with the visual evidence. This section of the poem has a cinematic quality, as, from the Dreamer's perspective, one visual delight overlaps the next in rapid succession. So we move from his conversation with the Pearl-maiden, to the vision of the City, to his shock and compassion at the sight of the wounded Lamb. And then the Dreamer sees the maiden, now inside the City, and his only thought is to join her.

It is the adjective 'lyttel' that intensifies the poignancy of this sighting. She is not just a queen of heaven but a little queen, his little queen, and the force of the father-daughter relationship hits the reader with the shock of remembering that this Pearl-maiden, this queen of heaven, is really the Dreamer's tiny daughter, dead in infancy. His surprise is based on the fact that he thought that she was still standing beside him on the riverbank, but now she is moved further away from him once again, emphasising the inaccessibility of death. She is irredeemably other, but he seems unable to fully accept this. His first comment, as he adjusts his lines of perception, is remarkably upbeat, reflecting on her demeanour with all the pleasure of a proud father:

Lorde, much of mirþe watz þat ho made
 Among her ferez þat watz so quytl!
 (1149-50)

And while the theological point here is that she is unperturbed by the Lamb's bleeding wound, and is able to share in his 'delyt' with 'mirthe', from a dramatic perspective it is specifically 'pat syzt' which causes the Dreamer to step forward out of 'luf-longyng' in his desire to be with her again. 'Luf-longyng', of course, recalls the compound 'luf-daungere' from the opening stanza, both phrases expressive of a desire to breach the distance or divide that separates the man from his object of desire. It is only in the final line of this stanza group that the poem uses 'delyt' to refer to the transformed and transplanted 'pearl'. When he realizes that his maiden is now transplanted into the city, the Dreamer becomes blind to its other inhabitants: as abruptly as he becomes aware of her changed position, all his delight and desires are transferred back to his Pearl-maiden. This moment of transition is the moment from which his multiple failures spin out. He is unable to hold on at once to his spiritual vision and to his earthly desires and needs. But again the complex associations of 'delyt' also complicate our reading of this passage: in this context it appears to speak not of a father overwhelmed by grief, but of a man swayed by the suddenness of sexual desire.⁴⁰ While some critics have emphasised this erotic charge, this is not quite, I think, what the poet intends. 'Pat syzt me gart to þenk to wade' (1151) refers directly back to the Dreamer's thoughts when he first explored the landscape of his dream and stood on the banks of the river, wondering what delights (even Paradise) might be on the other side: 'Bot þe water watz depe, I durst not wade/ And euer I longed aye more and more' (143-4). So the sense of wading across is already associated with longing, with the movement toward sensory experience which alleviates grief and sorrow, and also with a transgressing of boundaries (figuratively associated with ideas of trespass). Each of these could indicate a movement towards either the Heavenly City, or his daughter.

But the Dreamer's emotional state as he embarks on this final act of 'transgression' is ambiguous. The verb 'gart' (from 'geren'), indicates a sense of causing or compelling an action, and the other instance in this poem when it appears to be used in this way is when the Dreamer speaks of the role of the strange landscape in alleviating (or at least temporarily setting aside) his grief: 'The adubbement of

⁴⁰ 'Delyt', as Andrew and Waldron have observed, carries with it both desire and its fulfilment, longing and delight. See Andrew and Waldron, 105. Also see *M.E.D.*, s.v. *delyt* 1.d, 'a desire to have or enjoy something'.

po downez dere/ Garten my goste al greffe forȝete' (85-6). So there is a sense of compulsion arising directly from the sight of the Pearl-maiden. However, 'gart' also carries associations of the other uses of 'geren', and might indicate a getting ready, preparing oneself for action. But the action is slightly deferred – the phrase is 'gart to þenk to wade'. This hesitance, the sight compelling him to think to cross the water (or even the preparing himself to think of that act), cuts against all that we might understand about his impulsive action at this point in the narrative. It all happens so quickly that this divided consciousness is barely apparent. And this is more than a physical stepping forward into the river; it operates on a figurative level, too. To 'wade' also indicates a sense of immersion, a desire to figuratively wallow in 'delyt'. However, the construction 'wade depe', indicating a depth of absorption in love, only occurs in later texts, and so although this indicates the underlying sense of the sentence, it is not implied by the specific term 'wade'. So the Dreamer is distracted by visual 'evidence', and under a sense of compulsion prepares to immerse himself in the pleasures that crossing the water appear to offer. But as we shall see in the final stanza group, the movement towards what might be seen as his primary object of desire ultimately leads the Dreamer to exile from 'that fayre regioun': from the promise of 'blisse', to a perpetual situation of unfulfilled desire.

Anne Baden-Daintree is a Teaching Fellow in English at the University of Bristol. She is currently completing her first monograph, *The Grieving Subject: Loss and the Courtly Dynamic in Late Medieval French and English Poetry*, and is also working on a critical edition of a late medieval household anthology, Lambeth Palace MS 853. Anne has published articles and book chapters on the poetry of Charles d'Orléans, *Pearl*, and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*. Current research projects include a study of poetry and prayer in the medieval household, and a study of contemporary elegy in terms of its engagement with material culture.