

FITT XX – “PAYE”

David Coley

Pen wakned I in þat erber wlonk;
 My hede vpon þat hylle watz layde
 Þeras my perle to grounde strayd.

Pearl, 1171-73¹

“Fie on’t, ah fie, fie! ’Tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely.”

Hamlet, 1.2.135-37²

The end of *Pearl* begins with delight. But while the “delyt” informing Fitt XIX oscillated between communion with the divine (“With gret delyt þay glod in fere” [1105]) and the Lamb’s concomitant love for his faithful (“The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene” [1141]), the “delyt” of *Pearl*’s last fitt is manifestly human, a longing that the Dreamer registers as a near physical force. Sensual, fleeting, maddening—this is the delight of the body, of the eye and the ear, of the “manez mynde” (1154). No longer the transcendent love of God, “delyt” here modulates into corruption, human flaw, “spot” (12), “wemme” (221), “mot” (843), “masklle” (843)—those stubbornly terrestrial traits that the Dreamer cannot expunge from his always corporeal, always desiring self.

¹ All parenthetical references to *Pearl* and the other poems of MS Cotton Nero A. x, art. 3 are from *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 5th edition, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007).

² William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 1996), 1659-1759. *Hamlet* will provide an occasional intertext for my reading of Fitt XX, as the grief expressed by Shakespeare’s Danish prince aligns in surprising ways with the grief registered by *Pearl*’s Dreamer.

Delyt me drof in y3e and ere,
 My manez mynde to maddyng malte;
 Quen I se3 my frely, I wolde be þere,
 By3onde þe water þa3 ho were walte.
 I þo3t þat noþyng myzt me dere
 To fech me bur and take me halte,
 And to start in þe strem schulde non me stere,
 To swymme þe remnaunt, þa3 I þer swalte.
 Bot of þat munt I watz bitalt;
 When I schulde start in þe strem astraye,
 Out of þat caste I watz bycalt:
 Hit watz not at my Pryncez paye.
 (1153-64)

George Edmondson describes *Pearl* as a poem in which the “work of mourning, whether understood as personal or impersonal, factual or allegorical, exceeds its immediate object.” He further shows how the libidinal desire that *Pearl* stages, a desire inscribed into the poem’s elliptical form, “forever [circles] around a lost object that can neither be forgotten, because it embodies the trauma of lack, nor directly recuperated, because it also embodies a residue of impossible enjoyment.”³ The wild delight that dissolves the mind of the Dreamer “to maddyng malte” (1156) and drives him over “meruelous merez” (1166) portends both consummation and exile. If *Pearl* is a poem that eddies around the unattainable object at its center, the Dreamer’s ill-fated rush into the river separating life from death marks the point at which it swirls the closest—physically, psychologically, geometrically. And yet, even as the synapse between Dreamer and pearl shrinks, so too does the Dreamer’s desire increase, eventually and inevitably becoming a madness that exceeds the will of the Lamb and returns the Dreamer to “þat erber wlonk” (1172). In this respect, the madness to which the Dreamer succumbs has much in common with the “woodnes” described by the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a madness arising from the struggle to experience the spiritual world through always-flawed

³ George Edmondson, “*Pearl*: The Shadow of the Object, the Shape of the Law,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 29-63, at 30, 40.

human faculties.⁴ Indeed, as he attempts to cross the river separating the earthly and the divine, charging into it as though it were a physical barrier to be overcome through force of body and will, the Dreamer becomes one of those who “turne their bodily wittes inwardes to their body agens the cours of kynde; and streynyn hem, as they wolde see inwardes with their bodily ighen, and heren inwardes with their eren, and so forthe of alle their wittes, smellen, taasten, and felyn inwardes ... [and] at the laste they turne here brayne in here hedes.”⁵ His is both a human madness and a visionary one; the crisis that it precipitates—the crisis that begins Fitt XX—is thus fundamentally a crisis born of the Dreamer’s own “wreched wylle” (56).

Tellingly, that crisis is marked throughout the stanza by the poet’s persistent use of the first person singular, particularly the personal and possessive pronouns. “Quen I se3 *my* frely, I wolde be þere, / By3onde þe water” (1155-56), the Dreamer declares. It is an assertion that not only restates his claim to “*my* lyttel quene” (1147) from the previous stanza but also, and perhaps more problematically, alludes to his first encounter with the Maiden, in which she corrects him precisely for asking “Art þou *my* perle þat I haf playned, / Regretted by *myn one* on ny3te?” (242-43). Such intimations of the Dreamer’s possessive, desiring self redouble throughout the first stanza of Fitt XX: *I* wanted to be there, *I* thought nothing would hold *me* back, *I* was called upon; *my* man’s mind, *my* dear one, *my* Prince. Paradoxically, as the Dreamer grows more self-referential, so too does the poem increasingly insist upon him as the object of a will outside his own, a will that drives him, fetches him, obstructs him. Simultaneously desiring subject and desired object, the Dreamer registers at the moment of his expulsion both his most strenuous resistance to the Divine will and also the radical impossibility of such resistance. He makes his furthest incursion into the otherworld of the dream even as he confirms the inevitability of his return. David Aers refers to this chiasmic moment as one of “regression,” a moment that reveals the Dreamer’s “defiant readiness to die in his transgression of boundaries so clearly given

⁴ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), 79, l. 1806. I am grateful to Nicola Masciandaro for pointing out this correspondence.

⁵ *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 79, ll. 1809-14.

him.”⁶ I want to suggest that it is precisely in the Dreamer’s “regression” that *Pearl* shifts its focus from “delyt” (1153) to the link word for Fitt XX, “paye” (1164).

The two words are near synonyms, but as with so many synonyms in *Pearl*, the anxious disjunctures between them are far more revealing than their surface equivalence. Like “delyt,” “paye” can signify pleasure, enjoyment, delight.⁷ The poem’s first lines, “Perle plesaunte, to princes paye / To clanly clos in glode so clere”(1-2), offer just such an initial sense. In the luminous but artificial clarity of that opening, in the naïve moments before the poem begins systematically to reveal the shifting and contradictory meanings of its central terms, the pearl appears simply as a beautiful gem, a luxury object whose value lies in its rarity and in the sensual pleasure that it offers.⁸ It is delightful to princes for its sheen, its shape, and its bright gold setting.⁹ To be sure, the *Pearl*-poet is not alone in aligning “paye” with the pleasure of the senses. In the *Confessio Amantis*’s sixth book, which treats the sin of gluttony, Gower uses the word to describe the excessively sensual (and overtly sexual) appetite of the debauched Roman emperor Nero: “And thus what thing unto his pay / Was most plesant, he lefte non. / With every lust he was begon, / Wherof the bodi myhte glade, / For he non abstinence made.”¹⁰ “Paye,” then, offers shades of the “pleyn delit” in which Chaucer’s epicurean Franklin spends his days, the same kind of sensual “delyt” that bewitches *Pearl*’s Dreamer and reduces his “manez mynde to maddyng malte” (1153).¹¹

⁶ David Aers, “The Self Mourning: Reflections on *Pearl*,” *Speculum* 68 (1993): 54-73, at 68.

⁷ *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Frances McSparran, University of Michigan, <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>, s. v. “pai(e) n. 1(a); “dēlīt(e) n.(1) 1(a).

⁸ See Sarah Stanbury, “Introduction,” *Pearl*, ed. Sarah Stanbury (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 1-20, especially 3-7.

⁹ In their edition of the poem, Andrew and Waldron subtly encourage just such a terrestrial reading by leaving the word “prynces” uncapitalized. By the end of the poem, when the now richly metaphorized pearl again serves to “pay þe Prince” (1201), the editors capitalize the word, encouraging a reading that recognizes the prince not as a worldly governor but as God.

¹⁰ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 3 vols., ed. Russell Peck (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000, 2003, 2004), 6.1208-1212.

¹¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), I 336-37. Also consider Chaucer’s

But while “delyt” frequently collocates with modifiers like “flesshly” and “foul” in Middle English poetry—the “flesshly delit” that Chaucer’s Parson describes husbands and wives taking from one another and the more dubious “foul delyt” that Jason seeks from Medea in the *Legend of Good Women*¹²—“paye” more often attends to the divine, referring not only to the pleasures of the flesh but also to those of the soul and spirit, the pleasure and the will of God, “goddess paye.” Thus, while the Dreamer’s belated lament, “Hit watz not at my Pryncez paye, ” may hint at the temporal delight that the word connoted earlier in the poem, “paye” resonates more strongly in the wake of the Dreamer’s vision with Piers Plowman’s spiritually attuned assertion “Ich haue ybe his foloware al this fourty wynter / And yserued Treuthe sothly ... / And thow I sey hit mysulf, Y serue hym to paye” or with Hoccleve’s admonition to “Do þat right is and good, to goddess pay.”¹³ In other words, when “paye” returns to *Pearl* in its final fitt, it returns thoroughly recontextualized. The “paye” of *Pearl*’s opening line, like the Dreamer’s “delyt” from Fitt XIX, is both contained within the “Pryncez paye” of Fitt XX and contested by it. The internal tension that exists within the word, moreover, is close kin to tensions that the poem animates between the earthly garden and the celestial paradise, between the Dreamer and the Maiden, between the spotty quick and the “mascellez” (732) dead. The Dreamer recognizes too late that his human desire and the Prince’s divine will are coterminous but not identical, that while “paye” may, on the one hand, encompass “delyt,” it also, on the other, entirely transcends it.

Whether or not the Dreamer ultimately sublimates his human desire into God’s divine “paye” remains a central and unresolved question, one that occupies an important place in *Pearl* criticism. For some readers, the Dreamer who emerges blinking from the otherworld of his vision “has progressed from the love of the transitory earthly pearl to longing for eternal bliss,” becoming in the

Manciple’s warning, “men han evere a likerous appetit / On lower thyng to parfourn hire delit / Than on hire wyves” (*CTXI* 189-91).

¹² Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, *CTX* 904, *LGW* 1380.

¹³ William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, 2 vols., 2nd edition, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), C VII 188-92. Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. Charles R. Blyth (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), 2498-99. The passage from Hoccleve also appears in the

process a figure whose “will is now completely reconciled to the divine Will.”¹⁴ Other readers are more equivocal. Jim Rhodes writes movingly of how the Dreamer “can accept the vision of the eternal world, God’s world, and its fulfillment. But he also accepts the fact that there is a real world here and a will to enjoy its pleasures and pains, to understand his purpose in the present life, and to comprehend still further his work here.”¹⁵ More darkly, Ross Arthur sees the Dreamer as offering little more than “a confession of his own spiritual inadequacies and of the limitations of his understanding of the truth even when it is displayed to him,” a confession that is “perfectly congruent with the man who will later seek even eternity as if it were a physical possession.”¹⁶ My own sense of the poem hews more closely to these latter readings. If the Dreamer submits to the will of God, to “þat Pryncez paye,” his submission is a grudging one, and it brings with it a dubious comfort.

Hit payed Hym not þat I so flonc
 Ouer meruelous merez, so mad arayd.
 Of raas þa3 I were rasch and ronk,
 3et rapely þerinne I watz restayed,
 For ryzt as I sparred vnto þe bonc,
 Þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde.
 Þen wakned I in þat erber wlonk;
 My hede vpon þat hylle watz layde
 Peras my perle to grounde strayd.

¹⁴ Louis Blenkner, “The Theological Structure of ‘Pearl,’” *Traditio* 24 (1968): 43-75, at 68. See also Ann Astell, who sees the Dreamer’s experience as leading to “a deeper moral and mystical union with God” (121), Sarah Stanbury, who asserts that “in his spiritual vision of the Lamb of Christ, the Dreamer has seen the beatific vision: he has seen God” (42), and Katherine Terrell, who argues that the Dreamer’s “new awareness of eternity allows him to revise his conception of the world’s significance and place it in proper perspective (446). Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Stanbury, “The Body and the City in *Pearl*,” *Representations* 48 (1994): 30-47; Terrell, “Rethinking the ‘Corse in clot’: Cleanness, Filth, and Bodily Decay in *Pearl*,” *Studies in Philology* 105 (2008): 429-45.

¹⁵ Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 144-45.

¹⁶ Ross G. Arthur, “The Day of Judgment is Now: A Johannine Pattern in the Middle English *Pearl*,” *American Benedictine Review* 38 (1987): 227-42, at 240.

I raxled and fel in gret affray,
And, sykyng, to myself I sayd:
'Now al be to þat Pryncez paye.'
(1165-76)

The second stanza contains both the critical moment when the Dreamer awakes from his vision and, perhaps more important, his first verbal utterance outside of it. For readers who see the Dreamer as fundamentally transformed by his experience, this single line of dialogue (or monologue, really, since the Dreamer is alone within the garden) is of central importance. After all, the Dreamer claims to commend "all" to the pleasure of God, including, we must assume, the very pearl that, only moments earlier, he attempted to reach in spite of the Lamb's opposing will. If this declaration stands at face value—if, in other words, we read the Dreamer's ambiguous "sykyng" as a prayerful resignation to God rather than an expression of exasperation or defeat¹⁷—the Dreamer's abrupt exile from both the New Jerusalem and the redeemed pearl seems to have performed in a single stroke what the Maiden's "gentyl sawez" (278) never managed, impressing a divine perspective upon an all-too-human loss and allowing the Dreamer to surrender his grief to the irresistible (if unfathomable) will of God. The Dreamer is brought into harmony with the divine at precisely the moment he is torn away from it; he is snapped into an appropriately submissive relationship with God with the same suddenness and finality that he finds himself cast out of God's paradisiac otherworld.

Such a sanguine resolution to *Pearl's* central spiritual crisis is surely, as another grief-stricken dreamer might put it, "a consummation devoutly to be wished."¹⁸ Nonetheless, it is a consummation that can't help but seem, if not cursory, then at least

¹⁷ Such a reading might gather support from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Gawain sighs to himself before uttering the prayer for deliverance that precipitates the appearance of the Castle of Hautdesert: "And þerfore sykyng he sayde: 'I beseche þe, Lorde, / And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere, / Of sum herber þer heȝly I myȝt here masse / And þy matynez tomorne, mekely I ask, / And þerto prestly I pray my Pater and Aue / And Crede'" (753-58). Curiously, Gawain's request for an "herber" where he might hear mass clearly bears close affinities to the concluding moments of *Pearl*, where the Dreamer returns to his own "erber wlonk" before subsequently attending mass and receiving the Eucharist.

¹⁸ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.65-66.

suspiciously sudden in the face of the Dreamer’s continued spiritual uncertainty. Like the Dreamer’s equivocal sigh, which resists stable interpretation at the very moment the Dreamer most seeks resolution, the language that marks the transition from visionary sleep to mundane wakefulness hums with a sense of uncertainty and struggle. In the last few moments of his dream, the Dreamer flings [“flonc” (1165)] himself impetuously into the water separating him from the Maiden, springing [“spered” (1169)] toward the bank in a frenzy of desire only to be “restayed” (1168) by the Lamb like an impetuous child.¹⁹ Upon waking, the Dreamer continues in a state of marked consternation and dismay [“gret affray” (1174)], and his reemergence at the very spot where “*my* perle to grounde strayd” can’t help but recall both the possessive language of the previous stanza and the penetrating cry of loss from the poem’s opening fitt: “Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere; / Þurȝ gresse to grounde hit from me yot” (9-10). Indeed, looking ahead the poem’s final moments, when the Dreamer commends his redeemed daughter to God with “Krystez dere blessing and *myn*” (1208), the indelible language of possession and desire—the Dreamer insists upon not only Christ’s blessing but *his* as well—persists even to the final lines of the poem, revealing a powerful individual will that always resists being sublimated into the will of God. Such contexts complicate the Dreamer’s easy assertion “Now al be to þat Pryncez paye” (1176), and they remind us that for all of its investment in God’s perfect divine love, *Pearl* is equally invested in an imperfect human love, a spotty, hungry, joyous, tangled emotion that even the recompense of salvation does not entirely displace.

I don’t mean by this to suggest that the Dreamer is untouched by his vision; his experience affects him in important, even fundamental ways. I simply want to propose that the terrestrial aftermath of his dream, unlike the crystalline world that he temporarily inhabits during his vision, is necessarily a spotty place,

¹⁹ On the Dreamer’s childishness: the word “restayed” appears earlier in *Pearl* when the Maiden, drawing from the Gospel of Luke, describes how the disciples of Christ attempted to prevent children from approaching him: “For happe and hele þat fro Hym ȝede / To touch her chylder þay fayr Hym prayed. / His dessypelez with blame ‘Let be!’ hym bede / And wyth her resounez ful fele restayed” (713-6). Christ, of course, tells his disciples, “Do way, let chylder vnto Me tyȝt; / To suche is heuentryche arayed” (717), or “Suffer children to come to me, and forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16, Douay-Rheims version)

still interwoven with threads of grief, love, jealousy, desire. In such a world, the Dreamer's sigh strikes a significantly less resigned note. Within the enclosed world of the earthly garden, the Dreamer does not simply accept the Lamb's promise of life eternal as a balm for, to quote again Prince Hamlet, "the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to," nor does he do blithely accept God's will as a substitute for his own bitter grief.²⁰ Rather, he accepts God's will within the context of that grief, a mingling of human loss and divine grace that remains as volatile at line 1200 as it did at line 12. "I raxled and fel in gret affray," the Dreamer declares, giving voice to his continued suffering, "*And*, sykyng, to myself I sayd: / 'Now al be to þat Pryncez paye'" (1174-76). The key word in these lines is "and." As with the poem's recursive structure and hypermetaphorical lexicon, the acceptance of loss toward which *Pearl* moves is an additive one, building upon but never entirely replacing the Dreamer's initial loss.²¹

The Dreamer's unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) struggle to align his desire with God's continues to find expression in the *fitt*'s link word, for even as "paye" speaks strongly to the divine will, it also speaks to another kind of indomitable will, one that is suggestive for both the spiritual and the temporal realms. As Howard Schless has shown, the phrase "Pryncez paye," evokes the legal maxim "quod principi placet legis habet vigorem [the prince's pleasure has the force of law]," an aphorism originating in the Roman *Corpus juris civilis*, codified by Justinian I in the sixth century and rediscovered

²⁰ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.64-65.

²¹ In his facing-page translation of the works of the *Pearl*-poet, Casey Finch makes a telling substitution at just this point in the poem when he renders the lines "I raxled and fel in gret affray, / *And*, sykyng, to myself I sayd: / 'Now al be to þat Pryncez paye'" as "My mind was marred with agonies, / *But* sighing to myself I prayed: / 'Let be whatever that Prince please!'" Finch's substitution of "but" for "and" underscores the challenge that the poem presents to its readers: How can human suffering coexist with the love of a benevolent God? Finch's "but" allows the Dreamer to relinquish the former at the moment he fully accepts the latter; however the "and" of the original Middle English offers no such easy resolution, insisting on the fact that both of these seemingly contradictory impulses still exist within the poem. See *The Complete Works of the Pearl Poet*, trans. Casey Finch, ed. Malcolm Andrew, Ronald Waldron, and Clifford Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 99.

in England in the thirteenth.²² The presence of this legal commonplace within *Pearl's* careful series of link words “at once establishes the poem’s primary confrontations ... between absolutist and comparative, between New and Old, between divine and human, law.”²³ It also carries through a distinctly legalistic discourse within the poem, one that is particularly pronounced in Fitts VI and XII. In the former, which is organized around the word “deme,” the Pearl Maiden upbraids her earthly father for proposing to stay with her in the Heavenly City, reminding him both, “Pou most abyde þat He [God] schal deme” (348) and “marre oþer madde, morne and myþe, / Al lys in Hym to dyzt and deme” (359-60). The verb “demen,” like all of the poem’s link words, is richly layered, but its primary senses relate to the law: “to judge, to sentence, to condemn, to rule, to ordain.”²⁴ The word “ryzt,” which structures the latter fitt, carries similar connotations, signifying not only that which is morally right but also a legal right, a legal judgment, the law of the land.²⁵

When the Maiden argues in Fitt XII that “Þe innocent is ay saf by ryzt” (720) then, she invokes a divine law that is anathema to the Dreamer’s earthbound understanding, one in which “more and lasse” (600) are the same thing, in which 144,000 brides occupy their kingdom with “supplantorez none” (440), and in which a maiden “ful zong and tender of age” (412) can be “quen mad on þe fyrst day” (486). The “ryzt” to which the Maiden appeals is, I would suggest, the same “ryzt” implicated in the “Pryncez paye” of Fitt XX, one that proposes grace as the foundation of the Lamb’s divine law. It is a grace, as *Pearl* reminds us again and again, that operates independent of human logic, that transcends the comparatively localized, culturally determined, and necessarily flawed underpinnings of human law. “Across the stream,” as Schless again suggests, “*grace* and *ryght* are one; but for the Dreamer, whose humanity is defined ... by the comparative..., the absolutist doctrine of ‘quod principi placet’ seems not just a change in degree but a change in kind, a change that ... can only come about through an act

²² From *Fleta*, quoted in Howard H. Schless, “*Pearl's* ‘Princes Paye’ and the Law,” *Chaucer Review* 24 (1989): 183-85, at 184.

²³ Schless, “Princes Paye,” 184.

²⁴ *MED*, s. v. “dēmen” v., 1(a), 2(a), 3(a, d), 4b, 8(a).

²⁵ *MED*, s. v. “right” n., 1(a), 2(a), 3(a), 4(a), 5(a).

of grace.”²⁶ Insofar as it speaks to the simmering tension between grace and law, the implicit legal valences of “paye” link the Dreamer’s unslaked desire for his lost pearl to the poem’s elegiac mode, even as they align the Dreamer’s uneasy submission to God with *Pearl*’s broader allegorical meditation on Christian soteriology.

Considering the manifold semantic frames developed in *Pearl*, and particularly considering how it develops the legal overtones of both “ryȝt” and “deme,” the implied relationship between “paye” and the *Corpus juris civilis* is not wholly unexpected. More subtle is the potential for “paye” to operate in the poem as a bilingual pun, a homonym for the Anglo-Norman “pais,” meaning “country” or “land.”²⁷ When the Dreamer commends the pearl to the pleasure of the Prince, is he also surrendering her to the land on the far side of the river, to Hamlet’s “undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns?”²⁸ Such a secondary meaning comports with the Dreamer’s grudging acceptance of his loss, and it affirms the Pearl Maiden’s apotheosis as one of “þe meyny þat is withoute mote” (960), the spotless denizens of the New Jerusalem. Clearly, the potential for such bilingual play readily exists in the poem. As a courtly maker writing for an upper class patron—or even, following the groundbreaking work of John Bowers and Michael Bennett, a poet operating within the ambit of Richard II’s Royal court²⁹—the *Pearl*-poet could have expected his readers to be comfortable with Anglo-French. Moreover, he occasionally reveals his own knowledge of French and its poetic forms in the other poems of the *Pearl* manuscript, alluding to “Clopynghel in þe compas of his clene Rose” (*Cl.* 1057) in *Cleanness* and giving Bertilak’s castle in *Sir Gawain*

²⁶ Schless, “Princes Paye,” 184.

²⁷ *Anglo-Norman Dictionary Online*, ed. David Trotter, University of Aberystwyth, <<http://www.anglo-norman.net/>>, s. v. “pais” n., 1. I am grateful to Geoffrey Morrison for the thought-provoking seminar conversations that helped lead to this insight.

²⁸ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.81-82.

²⁹ See John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Michael J. Bennett, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Literary Achievement of the North-West Midlands,” *Journal of Medieval History* 5 (1979): 63-89, and “The Historical Background,” in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 71-90.

and the *Green Knight* the Francophone name “Hautdesert” (*SGKK* 2445), a double pun on “noble wasteland” and “high merit.”³⁰

It is precisely from the Prince’s *pais*—the Prince’s “fayre regioun” (1178)—that the Dreamer finds himself “outfleme” (1177) in *Pearl*’s final fitt. Following both the beatific vision of the Lamb and the final glimpse of the Maiden herself, the expulsion pains him, compounding the loss of his pearl with the loss of paradise itself.

Me payed ful ille to be outfleme
 So sodenly of þat fayre regioun,
 For alle þo syʒtez so quyke and queme.
 A longeyng heuy me strok in swone,
 And rewfully þenne I con to reme:
 ‘O perle,’ quop I, ‘of rych renoun,
 So watz hit me dere þat þou con deme
 In þys veray avysyoun!
 If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
 Þat þou so strykez in garlande gay,
 So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun
 Þat þou art to þat Prynsez paye.’
 (1177-88)

The abruptness of the Dreamer’s exile from the jewel box of his vision, the jarring return to the garden and to the “body on balke,” overwhelms the fitt’s third stanza. The Dreamer is outcast “sodenly” (1178), and the longing that comes to him in the moment of waking “strok in swone” (1180). Even the memories that he maintains of the vision itself are described in clipped and harried terms: the sights of the otherworld “so quyke and queme” (1179), the Maiden who “strykez in garlande gay” (1186). Here, rendered almost onomatopoeically, is the shock of return, the eyelids snapping open and the sharp intake of breath, the body reanimated into clothes redolent with sweat and still heavy with sleep.

What does it mean to awake or, in the case of *Pearl*, to be awakened? “Awak!” cries the golden eagle in Chaucer’s *House of*

³⁰ *ANDO*, s.v. “halt” (variants “haut,” “haute”) adv. 1 (“high, high up”), 3 (“nobly, in a venerable way, aristocratically”); “desert,” n. (“desert, barren, wilderness”); “deserte,” n. 1 (“merit, meritorious conduct”), 2 (“reward”). See also Peter J. Lucas, “Hautdesert in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *Neophilologus* 70 (1986): 319-20.

Fame, and the sudden exhortation leaves poor Geoffrey, still within the strange world of his dream, trembling in the bird's "grymme pawes stronge" and watching the ground recede beneath him.³¹ In *Piers Plowman*, Will becomes wakeful at the moment that Conscience recommits himself to "gradde aftur grace."³² In a much later work, Ebenezer Scrooge awakens once to the terrible sound of Marley's shade clattering up from the cellar in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and again, more fundamentally, when the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come gestures toward his neglected headstone.³³ Like these admittedly disparate dream visions, *Pearl* invests the moment of waking with the expectation of transformation, and even if *Pearl*'s Dreamer does not entirely abandon his grief with the promise of the beatific vision—he is no Scrooge, it seems—the poem nonetheless limns the vision's transformative potential. Crucially, what *Pearl* seems to propose at the Dreamer's awakening is not so much a displacement of the Dreamer's desire but a change in its object, a longing not for the return of the pearl but rather a wish that she be fulfilled within "þat Prynsez paye," within His country, His desire, His will, His pleasure. If she is well, the Dreamer asserts, so too is he in the "doel-doungoun" (1186) of earthly life, the dungeon of sorrow that his vision has made of "þat erber wlonk" (1171).³⁴ It is a painful irony that any consolation the Dreamer takes in his daughter's redemption also brings with it an intensified recognition of the ongoing travails of his own existence. The burden of loss, the poem suggests, must be carried always by the living. It is not for the apotheosized Maiden to relieve the suffering of her earthly father, nor is it for the Edenic otherworld of the Dreamer's vision to offer permanent repose to one still trudging through the mortal world. The Dreamer, it seems, must haul his own pail of water all the way to the very end.

If it contains the potential for transformation, the moment of waking is also riddled with a lingering uncertainty, an uncertainty that has a broad tradition within the Dream Vision genre. Chaucer's

³¹ Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, HF 556, 541.

³² Langland, *Piers Plowman*, C XXII 387.

³³ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, ed. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover, 1991), 62.

³⁴ Even here, Hamlet stalks the margins of *Pearl* in his inky cloak, telling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that Denmark is a goodly prison, "in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons" (2.2.241-42).

narrator Geoffrey opens *The House of Fame* with an anxious 58-line ramble expressing his continuing doubt over the veracity of his (or any) vision—“God turne us every drem to goode!”³⁵—while the irregular rhythms of waking and dreaming that structure *Piers Plowman* make any possibility of resolution seem tentative at best. And of course Scrooge tries to dismiss Marley’s ghost as “a fragment of an underdone potato” before he is finally convinced by the gruesome rattling of its heavy chain.³⁶ In *Pearl*, even as the poem nears its end, the vision of the celestial otherworld that the Dreamer once claimed “bylde in me blys, abated my balez, / Fordidden my stresse, dystried my painez” (123-24) now serves to diminish the *hortus amoenus* to a prison stew. A resolution seems no nearer at hand.

The Dreamer registers the uncertainty of awakening in his own words, and his caveat in his apostrophe to the pearl, “*If* hit be ueray and soth” (1185), casts his acceptance of God’s “paye” in a decidedly conditional light. Ironically, in the preceding line, the Dreamer seems to affirm the truth value of the dream, referring to it as “pys veray avysyoun” (1184), this true vision. Does his subsequent “if,” then, suggest that the Maiden herself may be capable of falsehood, even among the redeemed souls of the New Jerusalem? Does it speak to a continued spiritual crisis, a continued uncertainty in the face of loss? Or does the “veray” in the deictic “pys veray avysyoun” simply act as an intensifier – this very vision rather than this true one? Edmondson regards *Pearl* as a work that both recognizes and explores “the troubled intersection of mourning and signification” (32), a poem moreover whose “fascination with language cannot be treated separately from the question of the Dreamer’s subjectivity.”³⁷ I would propose that the tour-de-force linguistic play that largely defines the poem is inseparable from the doubt and uncertainty that the Dreamer continues to express, and *vice versa*. The Dreamer can no more cease to doubt and to desire in the wake of his vivid dream than *Pearl* can cease to ply its continually changing metaphors and puns. The Dreamer, fallen as are all those on this side of “pat foyssoun flode” (1058), inherits and inhabits a language that is likewise fallen. Thus, even as the poem struggles for transcendence it also circles back toward the signal imperfection—the spot—of its

³⁵ Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, HF 1.

³⁶ Dickens, *Christmas Carol*, 12.

³⁷ Edmondson, “Shadow of the Object,” 31, 33.

first stanza, an ouroboros down to its circular form and its looping semantics.

Does the Prince's "paye / pais," then, begin to suggest the "spot," the location or place, of the poem's very first fitt?³⁸ Does "paye" move toward the idea of Fitt I's "spot," just as Fitt XIX's "delyt" moved toward the idea of "paye" only a few stanzas earlier?

To þat Pryncez paye hade I ay bente,
 And ʒerned no more þen watz me geuen,
 And halden me þer in trwe entent,
 As þe perle me prayed þat watz so þryuen,
 As helde, drawen to Goddez present,
 To mo of His mysterys I hade ben dryuen.
 Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente
 Þen moʒte by ryʒt vpon hem clyuen;
 Þerfore my joye watz sone toriuen,
 And I kaste of kythez þat lastez aye.
 Lorde, mad hit arn þat agayn þe stryuen,
 Oþer proferen þe oʒt agayn þy paye.
 (1189-1200)

The first half of *Pearl's* penultimate stanza doesn't seem to foreground "paye" as "pais," though I will argue that the sense does return by the poem's end. The link word here seems clearly to refer to the will of the Prince, and if the bilingual pun on country is present it is only lingering in the background. But even if "paye" doesn't at this moment tend toward "spot" in its sense of "location" or "space," the stanza itself may still gesture toward another primary sense of "spot," as spiritual flaw or blemish. To be sure, what the Dreamer purports to describe in these lines is precisely the flaw that precipitated his ejection from the heavenly city, the "spot" or "weme" that prevented him from experiencing more of God's mysteries. That "spot," the Dreamer claims, that flaw, is that he "ʒerned" more that he was "geuen" (1190). He desired more than he was supposed to.

There can be little doubt that the desire of the Dreamer, or at least a desire within the Dreamer running counter to God's "paye," caused him to be thrust out of the world of his dream. We see such

³⁸ For spot as both "flaw" and "location," see Sylvia Tomasch, "A Pearl Punnology," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88 (1989): 1-20.

desire in him throughout the poem, from his mad dash across the river, to his longing to see the fine “wonez in castel-wal” (917) where he supposes that the Maiden must live, to his consternation that the Maiden has received “to dere a date” (492) for the labor of her short life, to the “longeyng” (244) for the pearl that leaves him “a joylez jueler” (252), to the increasing desire that he registers upon his first glimpse of the paradise of his vision. “Euer me longed ay more and more” (144), a key phrase from Fitt III, utterly defines, even circumscribes the Dreamer throughout the poem. And so, on the one hand, the admission that the Dreamer desired “more þen watz me geuen” (1190) makes perfect sense. But on the other hand, there is something that rings hollow in his easy recognition of his toxic desire, wreathed as it is by still more longing, still more yearning. “If only I had wanted less,” the Dreamer moans, “I would have been given more.” Particularly in view of the generic expectations of transformation that the dream vision invites, the irony of this final assertion should not be lost on the reader.³⁹ Even if it slides from the gem to the Maiden to the heavenly city to the mysteries of the Lamb (all of which, within the accretive semantic logic of the poem, register linguistically as the same thing), the desire of the Dreamer remains, excessive, stubborn, and manifestly human.

David Aers, whose psychoanalytically tinged reading of *Pearl* remains an important critical touchstone, is worth quoting at length on this subtle disjunction in the poem’s final fitt.

The narrator maintains that visionary joy and knowledge of God’s mysteries was removed from him because he, like humankind in general, coveted more happiness than he was entitled or able to have. However correct this generalization about our inability to accept limits to pleasure, it is a little off the mark as a description of his own motivation as we have been shown it This is not a matter of boundaries or degrees on some kind of ladder of perfection. It is rather a question concerning the form of memory and kind of desire.⁴⁰

³⁹ Blenkner offers evidence of such a generic expectation, noting that “the psychic change wrought in the Dreamer is of central importance, and thus *Pearl* is truly an ‘interior drama’ (“Theological Structure” 44).

⁴⁰ Aers, “The Self Mourning,” 69.

Within the broader context of the poem, the question that Aers's analysis implies is clear: does the Dreamer's failure to grasp "mo of His mysterys" reflect a failure to curb his desire, or does it reflect a failure to direct his desire toward a more appropriate object, toward the Lamb rather than toward "*my lyttel quene*" (1147)? The question necessarily informs our understanding of the Dreamer and our sense of his transformation. If the Dreamer's "spot" is, after all, predicated on an overweening love for the lost pearl / Maiden / daughter, then the conclusion of the poem shows the Dreamer beginning to bend to the "paye" of God, shifting his desire from a longing for the riches he one had on earth to a longing for the eternal riches glittering beyond the river of life. Such a shift also echoes the Maiden's own admonition from earlier in the poem, "'Her were a forser for þe, in faye, / If þou were a gentyl jueler. // 'Bot, jueler gente, if þou schal lose / Þy joy for a gemme, þat þe watz lef, / Me þynk þe put in a mad porpose, / And busyez þe aboute a raysoun bref'" (263-68). And the Dreamer will, before the stanza's end, echo the Maiden by referring to himself as "mad" for striving against the "paye" of the Prince, reinforcing her initial diagnosis and further suggesting that perhaps, as one optimistic critic puts it, she "has not instructed in vain."⁴¹

But if the flaw within the Dreamer is desire itself rather than desire's object, then his transformation is more uncertain. Indeed, the desire to know "mo of [God's] mysterys" seems as powerful for the Dreamer at the end of the poem as his desire for the pearl was at its beginning, and his response to being denied that knowledge—"my joye watz sone toriuen" (1197)—is all but identical to his response to losing the pearl, "I haf ben a joylez jueler" (252). Is a desire to know more of God's mysteries (what a more comic figure might refer to as "Goddess pryvetee"⁴²) more licit than a desire for the pearl itself? R. A. Shoaf suggests that within *Pearl* "the desire in man for God is endless, always therefore potentially transgressive, even in its very goodness, and thus it must be chastened by the will to re-frain."⁴³ Desire is desire; longing is longing; grief over one loss

⁴¹ Blenkner, "Theological Structure," 68.

⁴² Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, CTI 3454. The phrase, of course, comes from John the carpenter in *The Miller's Tale*, and his considered opinion that "Men sholde nat knowe of Goddess pryvetee" serves as an interesting counter to the sudden theological longing of *Pearl's* Dreamer.

⁴³ R. A. Shoaf, "*Purgatorio* and *Pearl*: Transgression and Transcendence," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 32 (1990): 152-68, at 160.

is grief over another. The flaw that marks the Dreamer, the flaw that both prevents him from crossing into the New Jerusalem and precisely makes him human, is not the object of his desire but desire itself. Indeed, *Pearl* provides for this truth of humankind’s fallen condition as early as Fitt III, in its use of the linking phrase “more and more” (132) to suggest how the Dreamer both succumbs to the Edenic world of his dream and also recognizes the “mayden of menske” (162) as his lost pearl. It is, however, a truth that the Dreamer himself seems only belatedly to recognize: “Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente / Þen mo3te by ry3t vpon hem clyuen” (1195-96).

The insatiability of human desire is also a truth, I would argue, that is inscribed in the idiosyncratic poetics of *Pearl*, in its slippery puns and repetitions, its pregnant synonyms and unstable metaphors, its structure and carefully concatenated link words. Indeed, we might ask, what does it mean in *Pearl* to say that the Dreamer desires the pearl? In the poem’s opening lines, the pearl is a precious stone “oute of oryent” (3) enclosed in a golden setting, one that slips from the Dreamer’s grasp and is lost within a garden. Thus, the Dreamer can be said to desire that valuable jewel. Later, described in terms evoking an ethos of courtly love, the pearl becomes a woman, perhaps a lover, for whom the Dreamer claims to “dewyne, fordolke of luf-daungere” (11); later still, after the pearl has appeared in the vision as both a “faunt” (161) and a “mayden of menske, ful debonere” (162), the Dreamer states that she was nearer to him than aunt or niece (233) and “lyfed not two 3er in oure þede” (483), thus intimating that that the pearl is his infant daughter. The Dreamer desires these earthly beings as well. But as the poem continues, the pearl takes on spiritual valences. It is the “mascellez” (732) Pearl of Price from the Gospel of Matthew, for which the jeweler “solde alle hys goud, boþe wolen and lynne, / To bye” (731-32).⁴⁴ It is the fleece of the Jerusalem Lamb, which “hade neuer pechche / Of oper huee but quyrt jolyf / Pat mot ne masklle mo3t on streche, / For wolle quyte so ronk and ryf” (841-44). It is the Lamb himself, described by the Dreamer as “þat gay Juelle” (1124). And it will be, in the poem’s very final line, the redeemed human soul, transcendent and at home in the “paye” of the prince. It is, crucially,

⁴⁴ “Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Matt 13:45-46, Douay-Rheims version.

all of these things severally and all of them at all times, daughter and Lamb, lover and jeweler, soul and stone.⁴⁵ The metaphorical equivalence upon which the poem insists, an equivalence that is both embedded within its nearly flawless poetic form and fundamental to the motion of its concatenating link words, means that the Dreamer's longing for one is tantamount to the Dreamer's longing for another. Desire for the pearl is desire for the pearl. And that desire, as desire, is an innate part of the human condition, even a defining part of it. To push things even further, we might say that desire is conterminous with living in *Pearl*. To cross the river of life and join the Lamb and "His meyny" is to die on earth. The desire that sends the Dreamer flailing into the river and ultimately prevents him from dwelling forever among those "kythez þat lastez aye" (1998) is, thus, not only transgressive but possibly suicidal. In this respect at the very least, the Dreamer's desire can not be to the "paye" of the Prince.⁴⁶

The dogged humanity of the Dreamer and the impossibility of his struggle make his assertion in the next stanza, the poem's last, particularly puzzling:

To pay þe Prince oþer sete saʒte
Hit is ful eþe to þe god Krystyn;
For I haf founden Hym, boþe day and naʒte,
A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.
Ouer þis hyul þis lote I laʒte,
For pyty of my perle enclyin,
And syþen to God I hit bytaʒte,
In Krystez dere blessing and myn,
Pat in þe forme of bred and wyn
Pe preste vus schewez vch a daye.

⁴⁵ In her introduction to the poem, Sarah Stanbury emphasizes the simultaneity of the pearl's many metaphorical valences within the poem: "The economy of metaphor, or rather its hyper-economy, lies in its uncanny ability to express both equivalence and multiplicity.... The pearl *is* a gem, *is* a two-year old child, *is* a beautiful young woman, *is* the immortal soul, *is* the heavenly city—as well as a collective of the properties that inhere to each term singly."

⁴⁶ "O that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, / Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / his canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, O God, / How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!" (*Hamlet* 1.2.129-34)

He gef vus to be His homly hyne
 Ande precious perlez vnto His pay.
 (1201-12)

The word “eþe,” often glossed as “easy” but also signifying “comforting” and “agreeable,” seems a painfully ironic choice.⁴⁷ The Dreamer’s own struggle to “pay þe Prince” has proven to be anything but easy, and his exile from God’s eternal kingdom suggests that he has, in fact, failed on some level to do so. Moreover, the comfort that the Dreamer receives from the divine is necessarily a cold one, concluding not with a reunion with his beloved pearl but rather with the continued deferral of his desire, even to the point of his own death. Aers calls the Dreamer’s assertion “theologically superficial and psychologically superficial”; Stanbury says that it “fails to be fully convincing” since the Dreamer “still seems to believe that he could have stayed in the visionary realm [and is] still unwilling to accept that the condition of living in the world is a condition of exile”; and J. J. Anderson, more simply if no less emphatically, asserts that “the difficulty in taking this statement at face value is that it makes it all sound *too* easy.”⁴⁸ Similarly unconvincing, I would add, is the progression of epithets that the Dreamer uses to describe the Godhead: “A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.” Certainly we see the Lamb as God, and so too, in the strenuous demands that he places upon the Dreamer, do we see him as a lord; however, the phrase “a friend ful fyin”—a true friend⁴⁹—

⁴⁷ The editions of Andrew and Waldron and Stanbury both gloss the word as “easy” (Andrew and Waldron 110 n. 1201-02; Stanbury 68, gl. 1202). Marie Borroff translates the lines, “To content that Prince and well agree, / Good Christians can with ease incline” (Marie Borroff, *The Gawain Poet: Complete Works* [New York: Norton, 2011], 159).

⁴⁸ Aers, “The Self Mourning,” 70; Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 32; J. J. Anderson, *Language and Imagination in the Gawain-Poems* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2005), 76. For a counter-opinion, see Jennifer Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject,” *Chaucer Review* 44 (2010): 294-323.

⁴⁹ I read “fyin” here in the following sense offered by the *MED* s.v. “fin” adj.: “pure, true, genuine, perfect; faithful; constant, unwavering” (6) The word also links in important ways to other key terms in *Pearl*, as it can mean “Free

stands out here both for the casual relationship it presupposes between Dreamer and God and for the apparent gulf between the epithet “friend” and the figure that the Dreamer has alternately resisted, denied, disobeyed, and raged against over the course of his visionary experience. Even if the vision is granted by God in friendship, even if the intent of the vision is ultimately to instruct and to succor, the summation that the Dreamer provides of both the vision and of God misaligns with his account of his experience in alarmingly underwhelming ways.

Overshadowed by the Dreamer’s dubious consideration of how easy it is to accede to God’s will is a more subtle but no less important shift in the fitt’s link word, which appears for the first time, and powerfully, as an infinitive: “To pay þe Prince” (1201). Earlier in the fitt, the word most frequently appeared as a noun (1164, 1177, 1188, 1189, 1200), just as it did in the poem’s opening line. Where “paye” does appear as a verb in Fitt XX, the force of the word is somewhat diminished by the poet’s passive construction: “Hit payed Hym not” (1164) and “Me payed full ille” (1177). The infinitive resounds much more strongly, and while its primary sense may still be “to please” (just as the primary sense of the noun is “pleasure”) an additional sense emerges clearly: “to pay” as “to render in payment, to pay, to recompense.”⁵⁰ To pay the Prince is not simply to please him but, quite literally, to make a payment to him. Such a meaning recalls the parable of the Pearl of Price and thus *Pearl*’s soteriological program; however, the reference to payment also reasserts the temporal, social, and mercantile aspects that the poem develops for the Dreamer, aspects grounded in a desire for worldly riches that is anathema to the heavenly economics articulated by the Maiden. A jeweler by trade, the Dreamer sells his wares to customers who are almost certainly his social superiors, mostly members of the aristocracy and the upper reaches of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁵¹ He is a capitalist, and his very vocation is rooted in payment for services rendered, not in the Lamb’s heavenly

of impurities or blemishes” (3.a), as well as “rich, valuable, precious, costly” (1).

⁵⁰ *MED* s. v. “paien” v. (3-6).

⁵¹ Heler Barr examines the implications of the Dreamer’s identity as a Jeweler in “*Pearl*—or ‘The Jeweller’s Tale,’” *Medium Ævum* 69 (2000): 59–79. Also useful in this regard is Felicity Riddy, “Jewels in *Pearl*,” in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, eds. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge, Eng.: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 143–55.

grace. By subtly reasserting the mercantile exchange that exists at the very core of the Dreamer's earthly identity, the link word “paye” vexes any clear and comfortable sense that *Pearl* might offer of the Dreamer's transformation into a “god Krystyin,” insisting instead that his earthly identity and his newfound desire for union with the Lamb continue to mingle with an uneasy friction. The Dreamer is not Saint Francis of Assisi, selling all he has to live a life of service to God. His claim on the Pearl of Price remains uncertain, as does his ability to render the Prince his due, his pleasure, his pay.

It is out of this friction that the poem makes its final, and arguably most unexpected turn. As the Dreamer explicitly looks away from the transcendent and visionary realm of his dream, he specifically locates “liturgical devotion to Christ in the Eucharist [as] the solution to his problems of grief and longing.”⁵² For some readers, the Dreamer's assertion of the primacy of the Eucharist rings as hollow as the claim that it is “ful eþe” (1202) for a good Christian to please God: John Bowers in particular calls the concluding reference a “gratuitous assertion of the Real Presence” and implies that the *Pearl*-poet may have included it as a salve for orthodox-minded readers in the time of Wycliffism.⁵³ Jennifer Garrison, countering this view, argues instead that “Eucharistic devotion provides a way for [the Dreamer] to practice emotional and spiritual control,” the very control that he so pointedly lacked in his vision.⁵⁴ The Eucharist thus becomes not an endpoint but rather part of a process toward becoming “þe god Krystyin” (1202) who pays the Prince with ease, the good Christian that the Dreamer still strives to become. Such a reading has the great advantage of comporting with *Pearl* as a poem more invested in seeking resolution than in resolution itself, a poem that recognizes the inevitability of human desire even as it also recognizes desire's transgressive potential. I want to add to Garrison's ecclesiastically inflected reading by proposing that the sacrament of the Eucharist performs not just important soteriological work for the Dreamer at the poem's end but also important social work. Indeed, inasmuch as the Sacrament of the Altar is fundamental for the individual “god Krystyin,” it is still more fundamental as “an essential action within the Church which

⁵² Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss,” 294.

⁵³ John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge, Eng.: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 53.

⁵⁴ Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss,” 320.

constantly reproduces the Church” and which thus binds together the Christian community itself.⁵⁵ By concluding with the Dreamer participating in the communal sacrament of the Eucharist rather than continuing to praise God in the solitude of the garden, *Pearl* both suggests his reintegration into the living (if spotted) community of the faithful and foreshadows a future for him among the spotless and eternal “meyny” (1127) of the Lamb.

The image of the Dreamer receiving “Krystez dere blessing ... in þe forme of bred and wyn” (1208-09) thus leads naturally to the poem’s concluding two lines: “He gef vus to be His homly hyne / Ande precious perlez vnto His pay” (1211-12). It also allows for the fitt’s link word to manifest, and all at once, its full semantic range. At its most transcendent, “pay” here suggests that the Dreamer recognizes how God has, through grace, given him the opportunity for eternal life within the heavenly city, his soul, like the pearls set within the Lamb’s 144,000 followers, given to the pleasure of the Lord, to God’s eternal *pais*, to the “kythez þat lastez aye” (1998). Still in the realm of the spiritual, it also suggests the Dreamer’s lingering potential to sell all that he has in order to buy the Pearl of Price, the heavenly kingdom imagined in the Book of Matthew. Communally and socially, “pay” articulates the Dreamer’s motion from the isolated and isolating enclosure of the garden toward the living Christian community. And finally, at its most terrestrial, it suggests both the losses associated with the human condition and the costs associated with living in the world, both the incalculable losses, like the loss of the Dreamer’s daughter and the loss of paradise itself, and the more readily quantifiable ones: the loss of money, of value, of labor, of goods; the loss of a “Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye” (1).

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⁵⁵ Catherine Pickstock, “Thomas Aquinas and the Quest for the Eucharist,” in *Catholicism and Catholicity: Eucharistic Communities in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Sarah Beckwith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 51.