

“MERCY SCHAL HYR CRAFTYZ KYPE”:
LEARNING TO PERFORM RE-DEEMING
READINGS OF MATERIALITY IN *PEARL*

James C. Staples

Abstract: With its concatenating word “demen” (to judge, condemn, ordain), Fitt VI of *Pearl* demonstrates the complexity of judgment. Indeed, if we read *Pearl* too quickly, our own “deeming” might lead to a damning dismissal of the poem’s possibilities. We should read and deem the poem, but also re-read and re-deem the poem, simultaneously learning how to re-read and re-deem the world. By becoming co-participants in the “deeming” that takes place, we learn that such acts of judgment (whether aesthetic judgments or the Last Judgment) do not necessarily coincide with wrath, but might be the spaces for both mercy and beauty.

Following the discovery and recognition of his lost pearl, the dreamer quickly learns that things are not as straightforward as they first appeared. The maiden has just criticized the dreamer on three accounts: he believes only what he sees, he thinks he will be able to dwell with the maiden in paradise, and he is sure he can cross the river. Fitt VI begins with the maiden providing her own glosses for these “pre wordez.” The maiden’s response, in an initial reading of this fitt, might seem counterintuitive or even coldhearted. She says that jewelers are not very good at their job if they make only aesthetic judgments, which she compares to doubting God’s spiritual promises based on rational inquiries. If the dreamer insists on relying only on reason, he will never recognize the promise of eternal salvation. She then asks him to judge himself based on his accusations against God. If he wants to dwell in Paradise, he first needs to ask the permission of a judgmental God, and then he is capable of entering Paradise only once he suffers the dreary death he deserves. The dreamer gets upset and exclaims that the maiden is condemning him to sadness, and he is getting tired of the fluctuating movements of his mind from extreme delight to distress, from finding his pearl to losing her again. He would rather suffer a

fall or exile than continue in the enduring sadness. The maiden proposes that by dwelling on this lesser sadness, the dreamer might actually miss out on greater things. He should forget about his feelings and stoically love God, because endurance is greater than impatience. She then argues that judging and accusing God will not make matters any better. The only thing that will help his fallen situation is to beg for mercy, because God is the judge of all things.

Perhaps, though, this summary of Fitt VI is too simplistic. A. C. Spearing has argued that a major narrative shift occurs at the end of Fitt V, where the development of the story transitions from a meditation on symbolism to a more straightforward theological explication: "For more than four hundred lines the pearl symbol undergoes no further development, and simpler, more explicit forms of exposition take its place."¹ If we follow Spearing's reading, we see that the dreamer has clearly failed to recognize the theological truths expressed within the symbolic world around him, so he needs a more straightforward remedy (like the gentle remedies that Lady Philosophy uses to treat Boethius).² But does the maiden offer the dreamer such a "more explicit...exposition"? Theodore Bogdanos critiques what he sees as Spearing's oversimplification of the discourse between the dreamer and his pearl: "Despite the generic function of the rational guide that the Maiden brings into the poem, can the reader...really expect her utterance to be more intelligible or less alien to the human sensibility? For, after all, her utterance is an extension of her symbolic substance as symbolic action in verbal form."³ Bogdanos proposes that nothing in the poem can be read as straightforward, especially explications of theological revelation, as

I would like to thank Karl Steel and Nicola Masciandaro for commenting on previous drafts of this essay. In addition, I would like to thank Ryan McDermott for his assistance and encouragement in writing the essay, along with Zach Moir for his feedback and support.

¹ A. C. Spearing, *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: University Press, 1970), 152.

² "Sed quoniam firmioribus remediis nondum tempus est...hanc paulisper lenibus mediocribusque fomentis attenuare temptabo" (Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. James J. O'Donnell [Bryn Mawr: Bryn Mawr Latin Commentaries, 1990], Book I, Prose vi, s.21).

³ Theodore Bogdanos, *Pearl: Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 83.

the critical tradition surrounding *Pearl* seems to support;⁴ however, somewhat surprisingly, scholars quickly move past Fitt VI and its unsettling accounts of God’s judgment in order to discuss the more pleasant sections of the poem.⁵

My summary above is only part of the meaning of these five stanzas. As the maiden reveals to the dreamer **Al Iys in Hym** (360), and only when the dreamer (and we, the readers) recognize the poem’s insistence on the complexity of God, of his Word (and words), can we learn to discover the promise of salvation in even the most discomfiting images. Through our examining closely the many accumulated layers of the words (like jewelers deeming multilayered pearls), we find that the maiden’s warnings and accusations might be read in a more forgiving or merciful light.⁶ By the end of the fitt, with this transformative reading in mind, we learn that the final stanza may not be a warning from the maiden about a wrathful God, but instead an invitation, asking the dreamer to turn his eyes upon Jesus (**Deme Dryzten**), to take part in the creative

⁴ Sarah Stanbury points out that the central problem with the poem becomes a crisis of interpretation: “By centering perception on the dreamer, together with the primary interpretation of what is seen or heard, the poet exploits a technique of narrative engagement that subverts the Maiden’s text on ocular skepticism without offering an alternative epistemological model, dramatizing rather a crisis of interpretation” (Sarah Stanbury, *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991], 17). See also Catherine S. Cox, “Pearl’s Precios Pere: Gender, Language, and Difference,” *The Chaucer Review* 32.4 (1998): 385; Jim Rhodes, *Poetry Does Theology: Chaucer, Grosseteste, and the Pearl-Poet* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Lawrence Beaton, “*Pearl* and the Pelagians,” *Religion and Literature* 36.1 (Spring 2004): 15-38; Lawrence M. Clopper, “The God of the ‘Gawain-Poet,’” *Modern Philology* 94.1 (Aug, 1996): 1-18.

⁵ This is most apparent in Sandra Pierson Prior’s *The Pearl Poet Revisited*, where she jumps from line 264 to line 483 in her summary of *Pearl*’s plot. Sandra Pierson Prior, *The Pearl Poet Revisited* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan Int., 1994), 27.

⁶ Anselm of Canterbury emphasizes how perspective relates to questions of justice: “For it can happen that one and the same thing is, from different points of view, both just and unjust, and for this reason, is judged by people who are not considering the matter with care, to be entirely just or entirely unjust” (Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 273.)

process of composing an understanding of God through all of His creation (**and Hym adyte** [endyte]) and, simultaneously, composing an understanding of all of creation through Him (**Al lys in Hym to dyzt and deme**).⁷ To understand how such a judgment is possible, I suggest that we might both resist the desire to speed through the poem and resist trusting our first impressions too strictly (both of which, I argue, are contained in the maiden's initial critique of the dreamer: he **levez wel pat he sez wyth y3e**).

1. Illogical Logic

We are first confronted with a decorated first-person nominative pronoun, **I**, belonging not to the first-person narrator of the poem as we might first assume, but to the maiden who is assumed to be the pearl. In fact, the maiden establishes her subjective self for the first time with this initial letter–**I**. Prior to this moment, the maiden has merely exercised her observations as a “me”—an accusative pronoun that places the subjectivity on the side of the narrator, whom she calls **juelere** (well, whom she *would* call a **juelere** if he would submit to certain conditions).⁸ Here, though, the maiden announces herself with an elaborately decorated **I**, and here she takes on the role of judge, the jewel judging the jeweler, taking in her object of appraisal, and finding him to be of “**lyttel...prayse**” (300). He is nothing like the pearls (or pearly white fleece) of the Lamb: “As prayed perle His wedez wasse” (1112). If this were a

⁷ Following Adam Zachary Newton, Noah Guynn argues similarly for the intersubjective participative act between reader, narrative, and character in reference to two medieval lays. Guynn summarizes Newton's argument as follows: “Narrative is a mode of moral instantiation that nonetheless resists totalization and abstraction. It evinces instead the uniqueness of actors, actions, and circumstances and the ethical obligations inherent in communicative exchange” (Noah Guynn, “Hybridity, Ethics, and Gender in Two Old French Werewolf Tales,” in *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*, ed. E. Jane Burns and Peggy McCracken [Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2013], 160); see also Adam Z. Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995).

⁸ Tony Davenport reveals the multiplicity of roles of a person called “jeweler” in the Middle Ages, where a jeweler is not necessarily a craftsman who shapes and sells jewels; a jeweler could also be an appraiser or even patron of gemstones. Tony Davenport, “Jewels and Jewellers in *Pearl*,” *The Review of English Studies* 59.241 (2008): 513.

reckoning of the worth of jewelers, our jeweler would be found wanting.

But why exactly? How has this jeweler failed? He simply believes **wel þat he sez wyth yze**. Should a jeweler be condemned for making value judgments based on material conditions?⁹ Wouldn't a good jeweler look at the surface of the objects of his trade before he examined any further qualities, such as the stones' virtues? Should we view the jeweler here as a figure of St. Thomas,¹⁰ needing the undeniable evidence of a penetrative finger, a finger that has the ability to see an unseeable God (fingers, even without eyes, have the ability to see, according to Augustine).¹¹ The so-called Theophilus reminds us that jewelers must bore holes into pearls in order to use them properly for the edification of their fellow Christians. He tells us, in quite materialistic terms, that we conform to what we see: “But if a faithful soul should see the representation of the Lord's crucifixion expressed in the strokes of an artist, it is itself pierced.”¹² Does piercing a pearl have a similar effect on the soul of the one who pierces it? (As we soon learn, ultimately the pierced pearl is the pierced Lamb, who must, as we recall, be pierced by the seeing finger of his yet-to-be-believing brother). So maybe the maiden's rebuke underscores that the jeweler has not yet extended his finger—maybe he has *only* seen *wyth yze*, and would be more praiseworthy if he also saw with his finger, fully engaging with material reality. Or maybe he should be more willing to believe things unseen. “You

⁹ David DeVries points out the necessarily troubling foundation for a poem that sets out to tell the experience of a vision while simultaneously downplaying the role of the senses. He argues that the “ludic celebration of the play of language” serves to reveal both the failure and the triumph of the human subject within the text. David N. DeVries, “‘Unde Dicitur’: Observations on the Poetic ‘Distinctiones’ of the Pearl-Poet,” *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 130. Others note the apparent irony in the maiden's condemnation of the jeweler, e.g., Bogdanos, 85; Rhodes, 127; Beaston, 31; Stanbury, 17.

¹⁰ Beaston suggests this comparison (Beaston, 31).

¹¹ Augustine argues that “sight” is used instead of “touch” because sight more generally refers to understanding: “Non ait: tetigisti me; sed: *vidisti me*; quoniam generalis quodammodo sensus est uisus.... Tange et uide? Nec tamen oculus ille habebat in digito” (Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium*, CXXI.5).

¹² Theophilus, *On Diverse Arts: The Foremost Medieval Treatise on Painting, Glassmaking and Metalwork*, trans. John G. Hawthorne and Cyril Stanley Smith (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 79.

believed because you saw me,” Christ tells Thomas—is this a rebuke?—and Christ then blesses us for belief without sight (*beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt*).¹³ Maybe jewelers ought to judge with their eyes closed.

Or maybe we ought not move so quickly through the poem. Let us return to the why of the jewel’s judgment—the jeweler **levez wel þat he sez wyth y3e**. The traditional reading of this line confirms all of our transcendental thoughts about materiality—good Christians should not simply believe what they see—isn’t faith the exact opposite?¹⁴ (Why would it be necessary for me to articulate a faith in something that everyone has the ability to see?) A reading of line 301, then, supports this reading—the material world serves no purpose for post-resurrection Christians. Or maybe the maiden is saying the opposite—she finds a jeweler of little value who too quickly turns away from the materiality of the world.¹⁵ Maybe the entire meaning of this line (and the poem?) rests on the understanding of the word “levez”, which possesses the meaning of both “to believe” (as it does in the following line, and twice more in this stanza) and “to leave, to abandon” (a reading that makes much more sense in light of the profession of a jeweler).

Such a jeweler, who too quickly judges based on appearances, is also a jeweler who **leuez oure Lorde wolde make a ly3e**—by examining the material world, God’s creation seems to be lying. Reason becomes irrational, or maybe reason is always already

¹³ John 20.29.

¹⁴ As Hebrews 11.1 states in the Vulgate, “Est autem fides sperandorum substantia rerum argumentum non parentum.” Stanbury refers to the maiden’s speech as an exhortation to ocular skepticism, an exhortation that mimics the opening lines to Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*: “Her terms, that he should not entirely trust what he sees and also that he should have faith in things even if he cannot see them, echo the Chaucerian commonplace” (Stanbury, 16). See also María Bullón-Fernández, “Byzonde þe Water’: Courtly and Religious Desire in ‘Pearl,’” *Studies in Philology* 91.1 (Winter, 1994): 47; J. Allan Mitchell, “The Middle English ‘Pearl’: Figuring the Unfigurable,” *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 95-6; Beaston, 31.

¹⁵ Seeta Chaganti argues something similar: “*Pearl* acknowledges the necessity of physical remains in the process of approaching the holy. As the pearl maiden herself points out, in order to cross over into the realm of the heavenly Jerusalem, ‘Py corse in clot mot calder keue’” (Seeta Chaganti, *The Medieval Poetics of the Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription, Performance* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004], 115).

irrational, since reason always relies in part on what one **sez wyth yþe**. The natural world that encompasses the dreamer reveals a nature that does not entirely obey its own laws—nature is unnatural. Reason is irrational. And God is a liar.¹⁶ Or maybe the jeweler needs a better light to view things with his *yþe*. The writer of John’s first epistle reminds us: “God is light, and in him there is no darkness.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”¹⁷ Without the light of Christ, the jeweler suffers in darkness from the same literal-mindedness as the Sanhedrin, who fail to recognize how a temple can and cannot fall down and still be rebuilt; how a man can be a king while simultaneously not being a king.¹⁸ The jeweler has not (yet) learned the importance of wonder, of enchantment. Jane Bennett argues, “To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday. Starting from the assumption that the world has become neither inert nor devoid of surprise but continues to inspire deep and powerful attachments.”¹⁹ The dreamer is too modern. His world has become disenchanting. According to Bennett, such a person “ignores and then discourages the affective attachment to that world.”²⁰ He needs the enchanting refrain where “sense become nonsense and then a new sense of things.”²¹ But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The dreaming jeweler must first recognize his problem. He’s being **vincortoyse**. He’s failing at being a courtly nobleman, or at least failing to recognize what a courtly persona might value,

¹⁶ Robert Blanch and Julian Wasserman argue that the poems of the Cotton Nero A.x manuscript all relate to moments where God seems to disrupt his own laws. Citing Augustine and Aquinas, they argue that man’s disruption of natural law results in sin, but God’s disruption of natural law leads to the miraculous: “Generally speaking, then, a miracle represents an incident, either *praeter* or *supra naturam*, wherein the laws of nature and principles of reason are seemingly violated or held in suspension in order to generate wonder; the breaking and eventual transcendence of reason are the first steps on the journey of faith” (Robert J. Blanch and Julian N. Wasserman, *From Pearl to Gawain: Forme to Fynisment* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995], 46-7).

¹⁷ 1 John 1.5-6, 10.

¹⁸ Matthew 26.57-68.

¹⁹ Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.

²⁰ Bennett, 3.

²¹ Bennett, 6.

which, for a jeweler, should be a chief concern.²² (But doesn't courtesy also rely on exterior judgments? On self-presentation?) His blameworthy, discourteous judgments of his Lord, the liar, relate to his accusation that the Lord's **hyzt** (promise) cannot be true. Based on what the jeweler has seen, continues to see, and believes, Fortune always wins. **Fortune dyd your flesh to dyze**, and his flesh will die. Even the wheel of Fortune follows the logical law of noncontradiction.

But God does not follow such a law, or so the jeweler's eyes suggest. Or maybe God is a liar. The jeweler's beloved pearl/daughter died but is alive. She is both lost and found. Again the maiden brings up the jeweler's ocular beliefs—you **leuez nobynk but ye hit syze**—and the whole experience is **westernays** (literally dis-orienting. The confounding **hyzt** of the Lord makes the jeweler feel like he's attending a church that uncomfortably "orients" itself toward the west.²³ A western orientation—another logical conundrum). Fortune says all must die. The maiden has died. The maiden lives. And the sun rises behind the jeweler as he takes his communion—the Lord rises again, and the jeweler, like the foolish virgins, has missed the whole affair.²⁴

All because the jeweler relies on his eyes too much. All because he believes too strongly (the maiden criticizes him four separate times in this first stanza for incorrectly believing). The final blow

²² I disagree with Bullón-Fernández's reading, where she argues that this accusation of the jeweler's being "vncortayse" refers specifically to a "religious courtesy", which she distinguishes from the courtly notions of courtesy arising in the later concatenation of "cortaysye" in Fitt VIII (Bullón-Fernández, 41-2).

²³ In his edition of *Pearl*, Sir Israel Gollancz speculates the following etymology for the word "westernays": "From the use of the word [*bestornez*] in the *Romaunt of the Rose*, it is clear, too, that popularly the word was used with the idea of 'turned towards the *west*.... My opinion is that the poet of the 'Pearl' tried to naturalise *bestornez* in English by changing it to an understandable form, viz., *westornays* or *westernays*; it is to be noted that he required a *w* word for alliteration, and the sound of Fr. *ez* for rhyme; *widishins* would have satisfied the alliteration, but not the rhyme; it is doubtful, however, whether this word was known to our poet. *Ye setten hys wordez ful westernays* may be compared with a parallel from Middle High German, *den namen erwiderrinnes las*, i.e., 'he read the name backwards, perversely'" (Sir Israel Gollancz, ed., *Pearl: An English Poem of the Fourteenth Century* [London: Geo. W. Jones at the Sign of the Dolphin, 1918], 115-16).

²⁴ Matthew 25.1-12.

from the maiden seems to the jeweler (and to us on a first reading) to be as cold as her calcified shell—she unites the jeweler to the father of sins, and this time explicitly through the pride that results from his too-rational beliefs.²⁵ She accuses him of excessive pride, the type of which drives him, like his ancestors before him, from goodness to evil: **And þat is a poynt of sorquydryze, / Þat vche god mon may euel byseme, / To leue no tale be true to tryze / Bot þat hys one skyl may dem.** But this same type of pride, **sorquydryze**, is the renown of Arthur’s courts in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The Green Knight arrives, expecting to find “sorquydryze”, but he only finds people cowering “for drede” (*SGGK*, 311-16). Courteous men exhibit their **sorquydryze**, but their **sorquydryze** makes them **vncortoyse**. Clearly, logic is not going to mean much here.

2. Jewels Judging Jewellers Judging Jewels

The first stanza ends with **dem** and the next stanza starts with **deme**. This act of judging (“deeming”), becomes the point around which Fitt VI revolves. Even before the keyword is mentioned at the end of the first stanza, the maiden has already begun judging, taking on the role of the appraising jeweler for herself (though her judgment takes the form of **halding**, and she holds his appraisal value as **lyttel**). The jewel judges the jeweler, and she judges him primarily for judging things too quickly, based on his **one skyl** (reason alone).²⁶ She begins the second stanza, though, by commanding him

²⁵ Many critics point out the apparent cruelty or lack of sympathy expressed in both the maiden’s and God’s judgment of the dreamer. Edward Condren argues, “The maiden judges his remarks harshly.... What she says is not actually offensive; indeed, her explanations of medieval Christian theology are apparently sound, according to those who have studied the matter. But she says it with a surprising lack of sympathy. Instinctively readers want to see her greet her father (if father he is) with the kind of warmth his bereavement yearns for.... But we get none of this. Instead, from her opening lines she levels at him charges that he is mistaken (257), mad (267), that he is ‘no kynde jueler’ (276), and that he speaks before thinking (292-94)” (Edward I. Condren, *The Numerical Universe of the Gawain-Pearl Poet: Beyond Phi* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002], 52-3); see also Bogdanos, 86; Spearing, 154.

²⁶ A.R. Heiserman argues for the aptness of the concatenation of “deme” in Fitt VI, where the jewel judges the jeweler: “Then as jewel chastized jeweler, the word became *deme*, a term whose several meanings—think, say, judge, expect—were wrung from its use in the linkages. Thus the aptness of the

to **Deme now byself!** She has, again, turned the tables on the jeweler—before he makes judgments about the materiality of the jewel-like world around him, he should be judging his own jewel-like self. And more specifically, he should be judging his jewel-like **wordez**. And through the refrain of the word **deme**, an iteration that reveals more the gaps in meaning than the sameness of meaning, we learn that the words of the poem are just as multilayered as finely cultured pearls, inviting judgment from the highly trained eyes of a jeweler. W. A. Davenport argues that the repetition of **deme** “calls his judgment more and more into question.... The Dreamer’s want of judgment is contrasted with the decreeing power of God....”²⁷ Andrew and Waldron argue in their edition that the repetition reveals a gap between the dreamer and his Creator: “The different meanings of the concatenating word *deme* (variously ‘allow,’ ‘consider,’ ‘judge,’ ‘condemn,’ ‘ordain’) draw attention to the gap between the Dreamer’s fallible will and judgment and the power of God to ordain what will be.”²⁸ Over and over again in *Pearl* scholarship, we see a jeweler rightfully judged by a just God. Spearing proposes the hard justice of God’s final judgment, but argues that sympathy falls both with God and with the jeweler: “Our own thoughts and feelings should be engaged on both sides of the encounter; we shall recognize the absurdity of the Dreamer’s position, and yet—because it is based on a completely natural human response, and because the Dreamer is ‘I,’ not ‘he’—we shall also share in his suffering.”²⁹ The sympathy here seems to revolve entirely around judgment—we can sympathize with the maiden and God in their judgment of the subpar jeweler; we can sympathize with the jeweler in his distress at what appears to be an unfair treatment by a hard and just God. Or maybe the “justice” here comes from the turned tables—maybe the jeweler, the usual judge, finally learns what it feels like to be judged by the object of his judgment—the object-become-subject (through the **I**) judges the

concatenatio contributes to the very structure of the debate” (A. R. Heiserman, “The Plot of Pearl,” *PMLA* 80.3 [Jun., 1965]: 169).

²⁷ W. A. Davenport, *The Art of the Gawain-Poet* (London: Athlone P, 1978), 43.

²⁸ Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 68.

²⁹ Spearing, 154.

subject-become-object. And we are expected to feel, through sympathy, this radical shift in roles.

“**Deme now þyself**”, she commands, as if to say, “you’ve judged everything else long enough, pointed to the spots that mar the surfaces of the objects around you, and you have a giant plank sticking out of your own eye!³⁰ Judge yourself for a change!” Consider the **wordez** that man **to God...schulde heue**, and judge your own when you did converse (**con dayly**) with Him. (Or perhaps this dalliance is more like a flirtation with God.) Richard Newhauser proposes an allusion to Job 6.26 in this judgment of words³¹—does the jeweler here speak like Job’s overly judgmental companions, dressing up their eloquence only to rebuke, with the words flying away with the wind? *Ad increpandum tantum eloquia concinnatis et in ventum verba profertis.*³² Maybe the jeweler’s jewel-like words have little value. Maybe they only appear (to the eyes) to hold any merit because they have been dressed up, *eloquia concinnatae*. Like his judgments of the jewel-like landscape, his judgment of the meaning of his own jewel-like words relies more on appearances than on anything else.³³

The maiden specifies exactly which **wordez** she judges to be idle (which *verba* the jeweler *in ventum profert*), and these words do not immediately seem to relate to his accusation of God as a liar—they are that he shall cross the stream and live with the maiden in her jewel-like coffer: **Pou saytz þou schal won in þis bayly / ... / Pou wylnes ouer þys water to weue**. And such words are worthless because the jeweler wrongfully judges himself worthy to be kept in the company of fully developed pearls—pearls that reside “in cofer so comly clente / As in þis gardyn gracious gaye...” (259-60). In order to cross the stream, the jeweler must become a pearl, like the maiden, “þurȝ kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close” (271). Because he has not yet been reborn through the womb-like grave

³⁰ Matthew 7.3.

³¹ Richard Newhauser, “Sources II: Scriptural and Devotional Sources,” *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 272.

³² Job 6.26.

³³ In reference to Job 6.26, Gregory the Great distinguishes between two false types of speech—flattery and rebuke. The jeweler seems to be guilty of both here: “Duo sunt genera locutionum importuna ualde et noxia generi humano; unum quod curat etiam peruersa laudare, aliud quod studet semper etiam recta corripere” (Gregory the Great, VII.xxxvii.57).

(which, as I describe below, might be more appropriately compared to an oyster), he cannot yet dwell with her. And he continues to call God a liar, because God has condemned man to death and yet man lives.

3. Seduction, Sadism, Salvation

Before he can cross the river, before he can enter into the luxurious jewelry box on the other side, he must suffer death: **By corse in clot mot calder keue**.³⁴ He must ask permission, he must be denied permission, and he must wait until he has been purged of any remnant of his material humanity: **Me þynk þe burde first aske leue— / And 3et of graunt þou myʒtez fayle**.³⁵ Who knows what good it will do, but he might as well submit himself to God and ask for permission, only to be rejected. Is this extreme humiliation, as Tison Pugh suggests? Later, the maiden will demand, **Þe oʒte better þyseluen blesse, / And loue ay God, in wele and wo**, and Pugh argues, “Resistance is futile, as humans must abide by and endure God’s judgments, no matter how arbitrary or unkind they appear. The only proper response to this hierarchical relationship is willed sufferance leading to abject submission and a complete acceptance of God’s will.”³⁶ God’s judgments are quite dismissive, his expectations seem arbitrary, so the jeweler ought to prepare himself for humiliating suffering. According to the maiden, before anyone can cross the stream (**Er ouer þys dam**) God has judged (**Dryʒtyn deme**) that man must die a dreary death (**drwry deth boz vch man dreue**) because of something his forefather did (**Oure ʒorefader hit con mysseʒeme**). And the apple probably doesn’t fall far from the tree. This is perfectly just, isn’t it?

³⁴ Katherine Terrell offers a reading of the “corse in clot” in which the dreamer develops from viewing the grave of his pearl as a place of rot and decay to recognizing the grave as a “fertile place” for “spiritual renewal” (Katherine H. Terrell, “Rethinking the ‘Corse in Clot’: Cleanness, Filth, and Bodily Decay in ‘Pearl,’” *Studies in Philology* 105.4 [Fall, 2008]: 429-47).

³⁵ Cox argues that the dreamer’s carnality “is the necessary step in the process of signification.” She, however, argues that because the maiden establishes here a carnal/spiritual dualism, the dreamer must “transcend carnal origin” in order to “appreciate fully the spiritual” (Cox, 380). See also Bogdanos, 86.

³⁶ Tison Pugh, *Sexuality and its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 41-2.

Or maybe this kind of justice involves a little bit more play, a flirtatious back-and-forth that involves a subtle invitation followed by a coquettish rejection, followed by further invitations. Maybe this kind of abjection could be something the dreamer learns to enjoy (or already does). Maybe when the jeweler **con dayly** (did dalliance) with God, the **wordez** that the jeweler heaved **to God** were met with God’s own flirtatious replies, and these replies come across as coy.

This scene of absolute judgment, of extreme humiliation and denial, might be nothing more than the rituals of courtship found in *fin’amors*. According to C. Stephen Jaeger, an erotic flirtation that resists sexual union is an “ennobling love,” one that cultivates virtue in the two lovers: “In order to ennoble, love had to be a subject of virtue; it had to derive from virtue and in some sense also be its source. And so ennobling love had to manage sexuality, hold it in its place by severe discipline, or—the most ascetic position—banish it altogether, demonize it, lay heavy taboos on it.”³⁷ And, as Jaeger suggests, the sexier the courtship process, the more praiseworthy the resistance, and the more refining the love is for the lovers.³⁸ The flirtatious back-and-forth between the jeweler and his coy God reflects Mechthild of Magdeburg’s amorous frustrations with (and intensified desire for) her seductive lover-God. Describing the threefold favor of God, she argues that God shows to his Creation tenderness, sublime intimacy, and, finally, intense suffering: “I much prefer to remain in this [last] state than in the other two.... The nature of love is such that it...becomes full of longing in rejection.”³⁹ The jeweler has been seduced by the beauty that God ever discloses to him in this dream landscape (and in the real world?), and then God denies complete access to the jeweler.⁴⁰ Following Mechthild, we

³⁷ C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 7.

³⁸ Jaeger argues, “The more private and intimate, the greater the force transforming matter into spirit. The exaltation is all the more intense, the more it lends itself to ridicule” (Jaeger, 144).

³⁹ Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, ed. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 249.

⁴⁰ Stanbury describes the Dreamer’s ultimate attempt to cross the stream as an act of seduction: “The method of the dreamer’s visionary process is vision itself, a faculty that is finally self-consuming when sense impressions seduce him to attempt to ford the stream, and he awakens” (Stanbury, 17). See also Cox, 385.

might recognize God's own desire in His denial, a desire for the jeweler to increase in his desire—this dalliance seems to be bordering on tantric sex. Such a pursuit of ecstasy, where one desires “to push sexual pleasure to its limit and beyond” is similar to what Jean Baudrillard discusses in *Seduction*: “In the absence or denial of the orgasm, superior intensity is possible. It is here, where the end of sex becomes aleatory again, that something arises that can be called seduction or delight. Or again, sexual pleasure can be just a pretext for another, more exciting, more passionate game.”⁴¹ Rather than immediately giving the jeweler what he wants, God withholds *jouissance* from the jeweler so that the jeweler can agonize (and bask) in his unsatisfied cravings.

Perhaps Julian of Norwich was right. Perhaps Adam's fall is a delightful *felix culpa*. Julian comforts us by reminding us, “I saw that he will that we wit he taketh no herder the falling of any creatur that shalle be saved than he tok the falling of Adam, which we know was endlessly loved and sekerly kepte in the time of all his nede, and now is blissefully restored in hye, overpassing joyes.”⁴² Like Mechthild, Julian reminds us that our fall keeps us turning toward God's love: “And than wene we, that be not alle wise, that all were noughte that we have begonne. But it is not so. For it nedeth us to falle, and it nedeth us to see it. For if we felle not, we shulde not knowe how febil and how wreched we be of ourselfe, nor also we shulde not fulsomly know the mervelous love of our maker.”⁴³ Let us, then, join our voices with the angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, to sing with the Middle English Lyricist: “Blessed be the tymē / That appil takē was, / Therefore we mown singen, / ‘Deo gratias!’”⁴⁴

And although the death might be dreary (**drwry**), the death is also a courtship gift (a **drwry**). The jeweler does not just have to die; the jeweler *gets* to die. In *Cleanness*, God grants (hetero)sexual lovers a love-gift in the form of a “drwry”:

⁴¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 1979, trans. Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 18.

⁴² Julian of Norwich, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love*, ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 293.

⁴³ Julian of Norwich, 315.

⁴⁴ “Adam lay y-bownden,” *Medieval English Lyrics 1200-1400*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), 145. I also allude to Rite Two of the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church.

I compast hem a kynde crafte and kende hit hem derne,
 And amed hit in Myn ordenaunce oddely dere,
 And dyȝt drwry þerinne, doole alþer-swettest,
 And þe play of paramorez I portrayed Myseluen.
 (*Cleanness*, 697-700)

God grants earthly lovers a **drwry** that is “doole alþer-swettest”, so we can only imagine what kind of “doole” he grants to His own lovers! The jeweler gets to enter into an oyster-like “kyste”, a transformative chamber that purges him of any material impurities and allows the jeweler to develop into a jewel. (And I would guess that this “doole” is not, as the jeweler first thinks, a **doel-dystresse**, unless, of course, that’s what the jeweler is into.)

4. Producing Perfect Pearls

This “dom”, the effect of the maiden’s “deme,” is not simply a value judgment (as her “halde” was at the beginning of the fitt), but a prescription (maybe a punishment or maybe a reward? It’s still difficult for the jeweler to distinguish).⁴⁵ He accuses the maiden of condemning him to **dol**, which causes him, he thinks, to **dowyne**(n), or to dwindle into nothingness. The jeweler has not carefully considered his words, though, because when the maiden prescribes a **dol** for the jeweler, he seems to brush past the fact that the word **dol** can mean either a “sadness” or a “gift”, and each of these *dols* could result from the two meanings of *demen* here (to prescribe a punishment or a reward). When the maiden **demez** the jeweler **to dol**, she could, in fact, be presenting him with a gift (like the “doole alþer-swettest” of *Cleanness*).

Moving into the third stanza, into the poetic “kyste” at the heart of Fitt VI, we discover the inner workings of the refining process. Within this central stanza, the jeweler finally begins to fight back. He has heard enough of the maiden’s seemingly cold-hearted words, and he resists, but although he resists (or through his resistance?), we see that he not only has become the object of deeming and the object of the sentence, but also becomes even more clearly the object of appraisal—the jeweler becomes the jewel: **Demez þou me?** The jeweler’s speech within Fitt VI, his first response to the maiden’s

⁴⁵ In the *Middle English Dictionary*, entry 9 for “demen”, most closely defining the use of “demez” here, includes both “To prescribe or impose (a penalty)” and “to...make an award (to sb.)”

accusations, physically figures the placement of a pearl within an oyster—he is a bit of material that has entered into the encasement of the maiden’s discourse, and through such a “kyste”, the jeweler might begin to develop into a refined pearl. But the jeweler does not yet understand how this refining development works. He does not understand the irritating resistance required for a pearl to develop.

The jeweler, utterly confused and beginning to fear the unquenchability of his desire, hurls questions at the maiden and demands some answers: **Now haf I fonte þat I forlete, / Schal I efte forgo hit er euer I fyne? / Why schal I hit boþe mysse and mete?... / What seruez tresor bot garez men grete,/When he hit schal efte with tenez tyne? / ... / When I am partlez of perle myne, / Bot durande dole what may men deme?** His questions, in some way, all ask the same thing: “Why do you keep me from getting what I want?” The jeweler desires to have his pearl, and God has said no. Sometimes desire should go unfulfilled, even (especially) when the object of desire is so alluring. He knows only two things for sure: he’s in pain (which suitably coincides with a disruptive hole in the manuscript page), and, without his pearl, he has no reason to live. **My precios perle dotz me gret pyne. / ... / Now rech I neuer for to declyne, / Ne how fer of folde þat man me fleme.** The jeweler fears that he dwindles (**I downye**), and he thinks that this roadblock to his getting what he wants will cause him to lose the one element that gives him a sense of personal value, and it will cause him to fail before he becomes fully refined. **Schal I efte forgo hit er euer I fyne?**⁴⁶ He still believes that value comes from the ownership of external things, but he fails to recognize that the resistance to his desire, the unattainability of satiety, actually leads to his refining, to a growth that is actually the opposite of the dwindling that he fears.⁴⁷

In order to explore the jeweler’s misconceptions, we should hedge our bets regarding the meaning of the maiden’s initial classification of a failed jeweler (one **þat leuez wel þat he sez wyth**

⁴⁶ I am taking the word “fynen” to mean “to refine”, along the lines of “Fin’amors”, rather than “to end”, as it is generally understood in this context.

⁴⁷ W. R. J. Barron notes the comparisons in lines 327-30 between the jeweler’s suffering and *fin’amors*: “Like the courtly lover who fails to recognize the power which separates him from his love, he accuses her of heartless indifference to his suffering” (W. R. J. Barron, “Luf-Daugere,” quoted in Spearing, 121)

yzе), and we should turn to the material workings of the world for some evidence about the ways that a pearl becomes refined. The mineralogist G.F. Herbert Smith describes in 1912 the process of pearl development, with Freud’s notions of sublimation apparently serving as a subtext: “Tortured by the intrusion of some living thing...or of a grain of sand or other inorganic substance, and without means to free itself, the mollusc perforce neutralizes the irritant matter by converting it into an object of beauty that eventually finds its way into some jewellery cabinet.”⁴⁸ The medieval account of the formation of pearls relies even more on the interplay between the material and the spiritual, but duration (**durande doel**) and refinement (frequently linked to purging) are necessary for the process. Mary Carruthers has noted the ways that pearl-formation compares in the Middle Ages to the process of mnemonic development: “Creatures who make pearls [margeries] are also in marginal [marges] evidence. Medieval natural lore held that snails made pearls in their heads, which is where a reader should also be creating pearls of great price from the matters of the book.”⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Carruthers compares the “hermeneutic irritants” of medieval discourses to “an irritant like that eventually producing a pearl.”⁵⁰ Such irritants appear in the ludic wordplays and contrarities within the dialogue between the maiden and the jeweler.⁵¹

Turning to the *Cambridge Lapidary*, we see elements of pearl-refinement that seem to relate directly to the jeweler’s unsettling

⁴⁸ G.F. Herbert Smith, *Gem-Stones and their Distinctive Characters* (London: Methuen & Co, 1912), 294.

⁴⁹ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 162.

⁵⁰ Carruthers makes this connection between hermeneutic irritant and pearl-formation in her reference to Catherine Brown’s *Contrary Things*. Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013), 203, n. 67.

⁵¹ Bogdanos points out the extreme highs and lows of the dreamer’s emotional state, which further supports my reading of the dreamer-as-pearl, becoming refined within the heart of this fit: “The Maiden’s rebuke and the prospect of self-dissolution that faces him, if he dares cross to her realm, catapult the dreamer from exultant hope to plangent despair, thus continuing the poem’s emotional dialectic between joy and disappointment. No metaphysical argument can persuade away his anguish at the realization that discovering the ideal can be more painful for imperfect man than losing it” (Bogdanos, 85-6).

situation. According to the lapidary, a newly conceived pearl (*naisel*), which always risks the dangers of a miscarriage (*donkes tone durement / La conche avorte de sa pierre*), forms within the womb of a base oyster through the spiritually impregnating powers of a drop of heavenly dew (*rosee*):⁵²

Unes a conches en la mer,
 Qu'eschafotes solons clamer;
 E ceste par la rosee
 En la gravele gist bae:
 De la rosee ki descent
 Prent li naisel concevement;
 Un cerclez vient la dedenz
 De la rosee bel e genz.⁵³

For a successful birth, a drop of dew (that could easily be mistaken for a rose) must enter into the open oyster through an act of penetration, and it must remain long enough within the oyster to lead to a large and praiseworthy pearl (*grosse et lee*). Comparably, a rose, which might as well be a drop of heavenly dew (*rosee*), has penetrated the dreamer, leading to an irritating (but joyful) development of a *naisel* that must develop over a full term. The jeweler experiences an ocular penetration similar to the dreamer in the *Roman de la Rose*, whose penetrative gaze becomes penetrated by the virile rosebud:⁵⁴

⁵² The standard description of a pearl's development in the Middle Ages compares remarkably to descriptions of the Incarnation of Christ. E.g., Mechthild of Magdeburg describes the Incarnation: "The sweet dew of the eternal Trinity gushed forth from the fountain of the everlasting Godhead into the flower of the chosen maid; and the fruit of this flower is an immortal God and a mortal man and a living hope of eternal life. And our Redeemer became a Bridegroom" (Mechthild of Magdeburg, 49).

⁵³ "The Cambridge Version: Introduction and Text," *Anglo-Norman Lapidaries*, ed. Paul Studer and Joan Evans (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1976), ll. 1187-94.

⁵⁴ As critics have noted, the presentation of the rose in *Roman de la rose* is decidedly phallic. Simon Gaunt argues, "At the end of the poem, Jean [de Meun]'s figurative language apparently enables an increasingly explicit account of sexual intercourse, but if it is always assumed, perhaps a little hastily, that the allusions to penetration (21607-42) refer to heterosexual sex, the description of grabbing the rose's stalk and shaking it... is less easy to

El miroër entre mil choses
 choisi rosiers chargiez de roses
 qui estoient en un destor
 d’une haie bien clos entor;
 et lors m’en prist si grant envie
 que ne lessasse por Pavie
 ne por Paris que n’alasse
 la ou je vi la greignor tase.⁵⁵

Roses (or is it *rosees*?) are absolutely necessary for the process of pearl-birthing, and the maiden, who is a pearl and a rose, holds the impregnating potential to fill the oyster of the jeweler’s heart and mind with heavenly dew.

In the previous fitt, the maiden informed the dreamer that the material pearl he lost “watz bot a rose / Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef” (269-70). And for the rose to become a pearl, the rose must be enclosed in the oyster-like “kyste”: “Now, þurȝ kynde of kyste þat hyt con close / To a perle of prys hit is put in pref” (271-72). The maiden/rose/dew must enter into the “kyste” that is an oyster, a grave (**clot**), a text, and, finally, the jeweler’s heart/mind (which is also a **clot**-like oyster/grave). The maiden becomes the penetrator in this queer relationship, raising the maiden to a masculine *domna* and placing the jeweler into “the ‘feminine’ role of passivity and submission,” a gender reversal that Jane Gilbert argues is “an entirely standard part of *fin’amors*.”⁵⁶ For the jeweler to develop a pearl and to develop into a pearl—to conceive the *naisel* and to become the *naisel*—the jeweler must be receptive to the

translate into a stage in ‘normal’ heterosexual intercourse” (Simon Gaunt, “Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the Romance of the Rose,” *New Medieval Literatures* 2, [Oxford: Clarendon P, 1998], 71-72). See also Karl D. Uitti, “‘Cele [qui] doit estre Rose clamee’ (*Rose*, vv. 40-44): Guillaume’s Intentionality,” *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992), 39-64.

⁵⁵ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2009), ll. 1613-20.

⁵⁶ Jane Gilbert, “Gender and Sexual Transgression,” *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 58-62.

maiden's rosy penetration.⁵⁷ He must become an ever-ready womb and simultaneously desire to climb into the spiritual womb of the **clot** to be born again as a *perle of prys*.⁵⁸

But we must remember that the roses from Christ are not always recognizably pleasant; in fact, sometimes the rosy **drwries** (love-tokens) from Christ the Lover can actually seem **drwry** (dreary). The Blessed Henry Suso's life story is filled with roses—the rose actually becomes his identifying characteristic in iconography—but Suso's roses are Suso's sufferings. They are the sufferings that spill all over a spiritually masochistic saint by his overly generous lover, and, as a breathtaking youth explains to him, “This multitude of roses are the many different sufferings God intends to send him. He should accept them cheerfully from God and endure them in patience.”⁵⁹ No wonder the maiden encourages the jeweler to humble himself completely to the judgments of God. The creation of a pearl might require **doel**, but it does not have to be **doel-dystresse**—the jeweler has, again, misjudged the situation. All the jeweler has to do is to endure patiently (he **nedez schal pole**, and **be not so pro**) and to continue loving God, his beloved lover, who desires His beloved jeweler to desire to submit himself (or is it raise himself?) to the status of a jewel. Sufferings and roses develop beautifully when endured patiently, and by enduring them patiently, like the purging effects of a refiner's fire, or, more aptly, an irritant that enters into the womb of an oyster, the jeweler will allow the *drwry drwry* of the pain-inducing rose/*rosee* to develop into a fully formed pearl, one that has become both *grosse* and *lee*.

⁵⁷ The sexual act that results from the penetration by this rose/*rosee* resists heteronormative categorization, since both images simultaneously suggest and challenge the binaries of passive femininity and active penetration. Although the images of dew and roses may traditionally suggest femininity, medieval authors frequently present both images as penetrative. Following the argument proposed by Simon Gaunt in n. 54 above, the maiden-as-rose is penetrative, even phallic. Further, the image of dew contains suggestions of insemination both in Mechthild's description of the Incarnation, described above as “sweet dew of the eternal Trinity [gushing] forth from the fountain of the everlasting Godhead into the flower of the chosen maid,” and, relatedly, in the famous opening lines of the *Canterbury Tales*, where the “droghte of March” penetrates with virile force.

⁵⁸ John 3.1-15.

⁵⁹ Henry Suso, *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 137.

5. Re-Deeming Readings

The maiden reveals two options, maybe resulting from the two meanings of *demen* and the two types of *dol* described above: one where the jeweler **lurez lesse** and one where he gains **þe mo**. His assumption that the **doel** that results from a **drwry drwry** is a **doel-dystresse** could very well result from the amount of noise (**dyne**) that such a logical misidentification screams at him. And when reading about God’s judgment on mankind, the fall of man, and **deþ**, we, too, might have a hard time drowning out the probability that **doel** means “grief” in this context; however, as we have discovered, logic does not always serve us justly in our exploration of this otherworld/poem. If the jeweler and we learn to drown out the noise of the **doel-dystresse**, the very **doel** that would cause him to **downe**, the jeweler might actually begin to grow, to become refined, to gain **þe mo**, through a **dol** that is *alþer-swettest*.

Suffering is part of the process, but the suffering is glorious and glorifying. And although the **doel** might lead to the dreamer’s **anger** (which **gaynez þe not a cresse**), the exhausting goings and comings of God-the-lover—the moments that seem like absolute abandonment or heartless judgment—are nothing other than a passionate **daunce**, a dance between a doe-like jeweler and his roe-like lover. This roe has all of the energy of a youthful fawn, and he can dance all night if necessary. Bernard of Clairvaux delights in such a cervine description of the lover in the Song of Songs,⁶⁰ through which we learn that the lover is both a merciful savior and a just judge:

While this bridegroom, in the ardor of his love, seems to rush eagerly into the embraces of the beloved, he nevertheless knows how to direct his steps, or rather his leapings, with prudent consideration, being wary as to where to place his foot. A comparison with the [roe] as well as with the fawn is therefore called for, since the latter expresses the desire to save and the former the decision to choose.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “Donec adspiret dies et inclinentur umbrae revertere similis esto dilecte mi capreae aut hinulo cervorum super montes Bether” (Song of Songs 2.17).

⁶¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon 55: How We Ought to Judge Ourselves Lest We Be Judged,” *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, 2014, <http://pathsoflove.com/bernard/songofsongs/sermon55.html>.

God, the youthfully virile roe, might **braundysch and bray** alongside his dancing doe, but He has not chosen to dance with his beloved jeweler in a moment of thoughtless passion (though Passion obviously plays a key role in this union). God-the-roe, instead, has thoughtfully deemed the jeweler as his beloved, has decided to dance with the jeweler for as long as it takes for the jeweler to tire, and hopes that the exhausted jeweler will find comfort in the realization that his lover has everything under control (**When pou no fyrre may, to ne fro, / Pou moste abyde þat He schal deme**). And once the jeweler has finally fallen asleep, his lover will do everything possible to ensure that no commotion from the other dancing deer awakens His beloved, saying, *Adiuro vos filiae Hierusalem per capreas cervosque camporum ne suscitetis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam quoadusque ipsa velit*.⁶²

So **Deme Drzyten, euer Hym adyte!** The pearl instructs the jeweler–judge God all you want—or maybe something more like “consider Him and all the possibilities that he could provide for you—possibilities that you cannot even imagine for yourself”; or “regard him as your lover, and learn how everything works out in the end” (all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well, as Julian’s loving God reminds her).⁶³ This judgment (*dom*) that has lurked so menacingly over Fitt VI is nothing other than the dominion of a lover who has the jeweler’s well-being as his chief concern, and he never strays: **Of þe way a fote ne wyl He wryþe**. But if the jeweler continues to dwell in sorrow (a **sorþe** that is a **doel-dystresse**), if he continues to ignore the wonder that he experienced on discovering the beauty of this dreamy landscape, if he worries about losing his pearl more than he remembers the temporary joy that the pearl brought him (and the greater joy that the pearl’s beauty revealed to him in a more fulfilling lover), then his recompenses (**mendez** that are *dooles alþer-swettest*) will never **mounte**; they will only **dowyne**. And so will he. Grains of irritating earth must learn to read their own materiality and the material wor[ld] with open minds if they ever desire to achieve the **blyþe** that results from their nacreous transformation. The jeweler must **sech Hys blyþe ful swefte and swyþe**. This transformation is, in part, a reading practice that requires an epistemological shift (one that we

⁶² Song of Songs 2.7.

⁶³ Julian of Norwich, 209.

the readers learn alongside the jeweler), a reading practice that is not straightforward, but that requires a bit of slanted, or queer, reading.⁶⁴ The epistemological shift that occurs from one reading to the next further instructs the reader on how to mentally perform the very redemption (or “re-deeming”?) of the material world that the poem describes. Reading the poem *Pearl* too quickly might result in a deeming that results in a damning dismissal of all of the possibilities the poem and its words offer to us (we must not **leve wel** [abandon too hastily] what we see **wyth yze**). We should follow the advice of Mechthild’s *Flowing Light of the Godhead* and read the poem multiple times in order to more fully understand it. The introduction to Mechthild’s book says, “[This book contains] many things unheard of that you shall understand if you read this book nine times in faith, humility, and devotion.”⁶⁵ We should read the poem and we should deem the poem (like jewelers), but we should also re-read the poem and re-deem the poem, and from this process we will learn to read the world, re-read the world, and, simultaneously, re-deem the world. Such a reading practice might be the very **craftz** of **Mercy** that she shall **kyÐe** to us. We become co-participants in the “deeming” that takes place in Fitt VI, where we learn through praxis that such acts of judgment (whether aesthetic judgments or the Last Judgment) do not necessarily coincide with wrath, but might in fact be the very spaces for both the enactment of mercy and the refinement of true beauty.

James C. Staples is an English PhD student at NYU, where he researches contemporary theories of desire, sexuality, and embodied experience through the defamiliarizing lens of medieval religious poetry.

⁶⁴ Sara Ahmed argues that a “queer orientation” to the world allows new ways of seeing and experiencing the world that “have been made unreachable by the lines of conventional genealogy” (Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* [Durham, Duke University Press], 107).

⁶⁵ Mechthild of Magdeburg, 36.