PEARL AND THE CONSOLATION OF SCRIPTURE

by Lawrence M. Clopper

The Pearl-poet is fond of playing with texts—and consequently with his audience—in the interests of achieving spiritual enlightenment, an understanding that is not earthbound even while it is mediated by worldly images and language. The poem initially recalls to the reader’s memory Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, but through the Dreamer the poet puts a host of other texts before us. First we are presented with a worldly littera (here the garden), which the Dreamer ornaments with the conventions of spring and love laments, but before the reader can realize the profounder meaning of this “text,” he is transported to a new, disorienting spot. The description of the marvelous land and the Dreamer’s assumptions about where he is suggest he thinks he is in the garden of the Roman de la Rose, or some exotic land of “aventure” like those in the romances of Guy of Warwick or Bevis of Hampton, or perhaps the orient that Mandeville describes so faithfully. These texts, like the garden he habituates, limit the Dreamer’s expectations regarding the land in which he arrives; consequently, the Maiden, much like Dame Philosophy in Boethius’s Consolation, is forced to wean him from emotive love-poetry and romance—both worldly constructs—to a literal meaning of Scripture as the best indicator of supernatural existence. In the dialogue which eventually results in the substitution of scriptural “Resoun” for reasoning (or “skylez”), the Pearl-Maiden provokes him with images and parables that offend his sense of justice so that she might move him to a comprehension of righteousness. Once she has brought the Dreamer to a state of humbleness in which he is prepared to be instructed, the Maiden opens the scriptures to show their concordance (a typological strategy), as a consequence of which he can make the transitus to a reading of John’s Apocalypse. The Maiden presents this last book of the Bible as the closest analogue of her present condition, a translation so substantial that it cannot be expressed rationally or discursively but only in arcane images.

My summary is intended to create an image for a unified theory of Pearl’s structure. Most criticism implies that the poem is epistemological insofar as it analyzes the Dreamer’s “progress”; however, two models, consolation and contemplatio, have been proposed for the structure of its epistemology.¹ Both models, however, are unable to

¹The consolation model can be further subdivided into those which regard the poem as personal elegy and those which call it a Boethian consolation. Those scholars who understand Pearl to be occasioned by the death of a child, whether fictional or real, acknowledge the influence of Boethius, but narrow their idea of Boethian philosophical consolation to solace for this particular death. As a consequence, a number of these critics have felt that the poem digresses when it turns to theological matters (Spearing, Kean, Davenport). Not all the contents of the dream, they point out, are concerned with the death of the Maiden; nor is much of the debate between her and the Dreamer, strictly speaking, consolation. Boethian commentators seem
account satisfactorily for some parts of the poem. I believe we can achieve a unified theory if we understand Pearl to be an epistemological poem which incorporates consolation into a meditative scheme.

I propose that a unifying structure for Pearl can be found in Augustine’s theory of vision (seeing) as it was incorporated into late medieval descriptions of the contemplative ascent to God and of the epistemological steps of the learning process. In the last books of the Confessions and in the De trinitate Augustine speaks of the way he came to understand that which he believed: that God was one God but Three Persons. He says that he sought understanding first through examination of material analogies in the world which led to a consideration of those of the mind and thence into that of the soul where the best analogy exists in the relationship which obtains between the memory, intellect, and the will. Some medieval thinkers—Bernard,

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1. See the commentary and summary in P. Agaësse’s édition, Oeuvres de saint Augustin 16, pt. 2 (Bruges 1955); and Olivier du Roy, L’intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustine: Génèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu’en 391 (Paris 1966) esp. 413–466.
Bonaventure, Richard of Saint Victor—made the analogy between the stages of Augustine's epistemology and the four senses of scriptural interpretation. In biblical exegesis, the book is the letter or historia and the threefold sense leads through a progression to the spiritual understanding of that littera. The usual sequence in which the senses appear in biblical exegesis is the literal followed by the threefold allegorical sense, in the order, typology, tropology, and anagogy.

Bonaventure, Bernard, and Richard, as Lubac has pointed out, use a different ordering of the threefold sense—tropology, typology, and anagogy—when they describe an epistemological progression. They understand moral perfection to be prior and necessary to illumination of sacred ideas in intelligible form. Similarly, the contemplative accessus, when it is likened to scriptural exegesis, can be read as an unfolding of the allegorical sense from the literal sense of the scripture.

I believe that the Pearl-poet adapted this structure to a slightly different purpose, one that reveals its Augustinian roots more than an indebtedness to scriptural interpretation or contemplative accessus per se. As in Augustine’s, but especially Bonaventure’s, search, the poet’s littera is not Scripture but the world, specifically the garden in which the Dreamer lost his pearl. The vision contains a progression through the threefold allegorical sense arranged according to themes and images that suggest tropology, typology, and anagogy. We can mark the vision into sections but I would like to stress that the vision is seamless and generative. The distinctions between sections are not rigid; indeed, transitional passages between the major sections seem intended to ease the movement from one section to the next by recalling the images of the preceding section and anticipating those of the section to follow.

I divide the poem as follows:

The LITTERA: section I, lines 1–60: The world of the Dreamer is both the ground of the limitation of his comprehension and the base from which understanding arises.

The TRANSITION to tropology, sections II–IV, lines 61–240, gives us a picture of the garden of the opening scene in a superessential but recognizable form. The description of the Pearl-Maiden completes the analogy by recalling the jewel imagery of section I.

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5The poet’s strategy accords well with Bonaventure’s description of the way one comes to know God; see his liherarium mentis in deum, a text that has a fundamental place in Blenkinsk’s discussion.

6Citations will be from The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron, York Medieval Texts, ser. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979).

7Readers such as Wendell Stacy Johnson stressed the discontinuity of, the “ubiquitous sense of contrast” between, earth and heaven in the poem (“The Imagery and Diction of The Pearl: Toward an Interpretation,” ELH 20 [1953] 161–180 [in Conley (n. 1 above) 27–49]). Commentators since the 1950s seem agreed that the garden imagery is continuous as well as discontinuous; that is, the garden setting contains materials which go through a series of transformations in order to make clear how radically different the Maidens world is. Nevertheless, knowledge begins with and depends on worldly things and experience. See Spearing, Kean, and especially Blenkinsk, “Pattern of Traditional Images” (n. 1 above).

8Blenkinsk (n. 1 above) suggested the relationship was typological and concluded that the poem, therefore, imitated the contemplative ascent as expressed in the sequence, typology, tropology, and anagogy. However, typology describes a relationship between two historical events in Christian history (see Lubac [n. 4 above] 1.2.489–548; and A. C. Charity, Events and Their Afterlife [Cambridge 1966]). The movement from the garden to the marvellous land is analogical; it marks the distinction between the world and the other-world, but in order for understanding to begin, there must be similarity (analogy).
TROPOLOGY: sections V–XII, lines 241–720: In the first part of the dialogue the Dreamer seeks to understand—by disputing with the Maiden—the nature of the relationship that exists between the material world and heaven; consequently, he is in search of an understanding of the moral life requisite for salvation and the kind of life that is enjoyed there. The Dreamer’s understanding of the moral base for salvation is hindered by his mundane economic values and by his presumption and pride. At the end of the section he learns to control his will and is able to progress in spiritual understanding.

The TRANSITION to typology, section XIII, lines 721–780, involves an apparent return to the question of the nature of the Pearl-Maiden’s office (see 755–756) which had been resolved in the earlier discussion based on high and low, more and less, and merits and deserts. Since the Dreamer then asks what the Lamb is, I believe the first part of this section is intended to ease the movement from tropology to typology.9

TYPOLOGY: sections XIV–XV, lines 781–912: The Maiden’s concordance of Scripture seems intended to provide a way into the more difficult reading of Apocalypse; consequently, she makes the link between tropology and anagogy a typological one. The Lamb, an Old Testament figurative term for the Messiah, is identified as Christ, the Lamb of Jerusalem, who points to the Lamb on the throne of the New Jerusalem. Significantly, the typological relations are simpler and more immediately comprehensible than were the tropological relations discussed earlier in the vision.

The TRANSITION to anagogy, section XVI, lines 913–972, is effected by the polysemity of the link-word “withouten mote”; the link-word has the mystical multitude of senses that we associate with anagogy, the mode of Apocalypse.

ANAGOGY: sections XVII–XIX, lines 973–1152: The Dreamer has sight of the New Jerusalem and the Lamb.

The AWAKENING in longing: section XX, lines 1153–1212: The Dreamer awakens enlightened to some degree, but he is more conscious of the insubstantiality of his “erbete.”10

The poet enriched the epistemological strategy I have just described in two ways: First, he had his poem recall the Boethius so that he could transcend it. Rather than asking the Dreamer to depend on reason to orient himself to the good, the Maiden insists that reasoning is inadequate, indeed, at times, a deterrent; consequently, the Dreamer must base his understanding in scriptural texts, especially as those texts confirm and explicate one another. The poem might be read, then, as a Christian response

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9A number of scholars have noted that line 721 marks a major division in the poem; see Spearing, Gawain Poet (n. 1 above) 159–160; Davenport (n. 1 above) 21–22; and John McGaillard, “Links, Language, and Style in The Pearl,” in Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later: Studies in Honor of Rudolph Willard, ed. E. Bagby Arwood and Archibald A. Hill (Austin, Tex. 1969) 279–299.

10While my essay was under review, Jane Chance published an analysis that draws on the preacher’s habit of expanding a text by developing its threefold spiritual sense. She divides the poem into tropology (sections II–VII), allegory (VII–XIII), and anagogy (XIV–XIX), the remaining two sections (I and XX) constituting a frame. There are few similarities between our structures, and I remain puzzled by some of her conclusions: How, for example, is the description of the marvelous land (sections II–IV) tropological or moral? Her model derives from the elaboration of the letter of Scripture, but there is no such biblical text in the poem; rather, there is the garden. There is a basic disagreement, therefore, in the sources for our models. See “Allegory and Structure in Pearl: The Four Senses of the Ars Praediconandi and Fourteenth-Century Homiletic Poetry,” in Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives of the Pearl Poet, ed. Robert J. Blanch et al. (Troy, N.Y. 1991) 31–59.
to the philosophical *Consolation*. Secondly, as we will see below, this movement from Boethius to Scripture is paralleled in the early sections of the poem by allusions to secular texts which suggest the Dreamer’s mental world and the gradual replacement of them by scriptural texts. The language and imagery of the secular texts are countered by the Maiden’s use of an analogous set of terms. Initially these two competing systems create confusion in the Dreamer’s mind because he assumes she is using the same language as he; consequently, he misinterprets the Maiden’s referents and the situation. However, the ultimate effect of the Maiden’s discourse is to provide translation of the secular language into sacred reality.\(^{11}\)

The poem follows—though playfully—the rationalizing of Boethius rather well up to section XII where it begins to diverge because philosophy can penetrate the divine mysteries no further. The narrator has had the ill fortune to lose his pearl—it does not matter whether it is a gem or a girl—and like Boethius, he falls into lamentation so great that he can neither solace himself nor remedy the problem. Suddenly, a superior guide appears, someone the narrator has known in the past who now must help him recollect who she—and he—is. In the case of the *Consolation* the guide is Dame Philosophy, Boethius’s nurse, who apparently had instructed him in the philosophy which he has forgotten since his incarceration. The Pearl-Maiden personalizes something the Dreamer has lost as a consequence of which he is unable to remain firm in his faith that he—and she—is of the “kynde of Kryst”; instead of taking comfort in that “kyndenesse,” with its implication of life after death, the Dreamer’s will rebels against his reason so thoroughly that his reasonings (“skyllez”) become even more entangled with other “skyllez” (lines 49–56). The dialogue with Dame Philosophy does not remedy Boethius’s ill fortune; rather, it reorients him to the good (the summum bonum). He is told to turn from the world and look into the light of heaven. Similarly, the Pearl-Maiden turns the Dreamer’s eyes from the world of chance and change, both the garden and the marvelous land, to the brilliantly lighted world of the New Jerusalem.

Essential to this strategy is a narrator of limited vision who misrepresents and misconstrues the situation.\(^{12}\) Equally important is the Pearl-Maiden herself because she is the source of the Dreamer’s illumination. I think that the poet deliberately misleads—and has misled—his readers by forging sympathy for the Dreamer when he compels us—initially—to see and experience things from the Dreamer’s point of view. The debate between the two, however, puts readers in an equivocal position because on the one hand they understand the Dreamer’s sorrow and witness the Maiden’s lack of sympathy, yet on the other, they understand, intuitively if not rationally, that the Maiden’s ‘crawyng’ of heaven is closer to that reality than is the Dreamer’s desire for a heaven modeled on the world.

*Pearl’s* imitation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* is most apparent in the characterization of the narrator and his relationship with the Maiden. Boethius opens

\(^{11}\)For a related interpretation of this movement, see Larry Sklute, “Expectation and Fulfillment in Pearl,” *Philological Quarterly* 52 (1973) 663–679. Kean (n. 1 above) documented the allusions to secular texts.

\(^{12}\)On the narrator, see Charles Moorman, “The Role of the Narrator in Pearl,” *Modern Philology* 53 (1955) 73–81; repr. in Conley (n. 1 above) 103–121. Moorman’s essay has had enormous impact on our reading of *Pearl*. Criticism had centered largely on the Pearl-Maiden: Moorman’s analysis shifted attention to the narrator as initiator of the action and as the focus for the reader’s perception of the events in the dream. One result was a de-emphasis on the Maiden’s role in the poem; she became the facilitator of the Dreamer’s progress whose symbolism shifted as the poem progressed.
with a poem of lamentation in a high and emotive style. The speaker is old and self-pitying. He seeks the comfort of the muses who aided him in the past. Dame Philosophy chases away Boethius's muses, whom she calls "strumpets," because they feed rather than assuage his sorrow. These "affeccions," she says, "which that ne bien nothing fructifyenge nor profitable, destroyen the corn plentifulous of fruytes of resoun" (lines 55–57).13

Despite her hostility to this particular kind of poetry, Dame Philosophy uses what she calls music to lead Boethius out of his wailing toward the light of reason. In her poetic response (metrum 2), she laments that Boethius wishes to know the causes of things as a consequence of which he has enslaved himself to Fortune and the belief that things are arbitrarily fate (cf. Pearl 265–276). She echoes his complaint at beginning and end (metrum 2; p. 399), then switches back to prose to apply the first dose of medicine: "But tyre is now . . . of medicyne more than of compleyne." She says that he has fallen into a sickness because he has forgotten who he is. He will remember himself if he has known her in the past or knows her now. She dries his eyes with her hem. His poem, metrum 3, celebrates the removal of the darkness from the stars, an allusion to the clearing of his sight, but one that we should note is poetically conceived as night. We have far to go before Boethius sees the light of day.

Halfway through the Consolation Dame Philosophy creates a moving account of Orpheus and Eurydice in order to demonstrate that Orpheus's turning back to look at Eurydice is like looking back into, even desiring, the hell from which they almost escaped. Orpheus's songs, like those of Boethius and the Pearl-narrator, do not console but bind him to the thing he loves most. The loss of his wife motivates Orpheus to search for her, and ultimately to succeed in winning her back. But, as Dame Philosophy asks,

what is he that may even a lawe to loverys? Love is a gretere lawe and a strender to hymself thanne any lawe that man mai yyven. Allas! Whanne Orpheus and his wif weren almost at the termes of the nyght (that is to seyn, at the laste boundes of belle). Orpheus lokeede abakward on Erudycse his wif, and lost hirte, and was deed.

The directness and simplicity of the last line, the compressed description of Orpheus's act of love, his loss, and his death assaults our emotions and makes us sorrow over the tragedy. Having produced the desired effect, Dame Philosophy wrenches us back to her point:

This fable apertenth to yow alle, whosoeuer desirith or seketh to lede his thought into the sovereyn day, that is to seyn, to cleernesse of sovereyn good. For whoso that eveere be so overcomen that he fiche his eien into the put of helle, that is to seyn, whoso sette his thoughtes in ethly thinges, al that eveere he hath drawen of the noble good celestial he lestith it, whanne he looketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the ethre.

Orpheus's act of desire, of love, is a turning back to the world, which is likened to looking into the pit of hell. The emotional content of the story is suddenly undercut by this moralization in order to effect a reversal akin to that with which Boethius must turn himself away from the world.

The dreamer in Pearl is Orpheus; he is Boethius. He is trapped in the "trammels" of his courtly verse; he laments in the artificial style of a lover; he creates ambiguities, puns, and verbal echoes to adorn his lamentation:

13Boece, lines 1–6 (The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry Benson et al. [Boston 1987] 397).
PEARL AND THE CONSOLATION OF SCRIPTURE

Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye
To clany clos in golde so clere:
Oute of oryent, I hardyly saye,
Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.
So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
So smal, so smope her sydez were;
Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye
I sette hyt segeley in synglure.
Allas! I leste hyt in on erbere;
Pur3 gresse to grounde his fro me yot.
I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere
Of þat pryuy perle withouten spot.

(lines 1–12)

Like Boethius, who complained that changeable Fortune provokes "unagreable duelllynges in [him]," the Dreamer laments:

Pa3 resoun sette myseluen saʒt.
I playne my perle þat per watz penned,
Wyth fyrce skylez þat faste ðaʒt.
Paʒ kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
My wrecched wylle in wo ay wræʒte.

(lines 52–56)

The Maiden performs the same function as Dame Philosophy; she reorients the Dreamer's gaze, in this case by responding to him with what appears to be the same poetic vocabulary that he uses. Like Dame Philosophy, the Maiden uses the art she claims impedes the Dreamer's progress in order to get him to give it up.

But the poet also plays against the Consolation. His selection of a two-year-old guide is humorous yet essential to the thesis of his poem. Dame Philosophy is aggressive, sharp, and testy, but she tempers her occasional loss of patience with genuine concern for the man who once was her ward. The Pearl-Maiden is bratty, contentious, and an altogether disagreeable child, a Duchess of Mistrule to the kindly, paternal narrator. But, of course, that is all part of the poet's joke, for the Maiden is not a child, nor is she the narrator's inferior, as he often assumes she ought to be. The humorous confrontations provide glimpses of parent-child relations as they ought not to be; they induce a kind of vicarious sympathizing with parents—and the narrator—that, the Maiden makes clear to us, is to be deplored in this instance. Her sharp responses ultimately are intended to divorce the Dreamer from his worldly referential system, so she, like Dame Philosophy, is a guide to higher understanding. But the two guides are radically different. Dame Philosophy is described as darkened by age, and her garment

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is tattered, the results of the abuse of reason or the partial reasoning of small philosophers. Sometimes she is the height of a man, which suggests the diminutive status of man’s reasoning ability; sometimes her head reaches up to and even partway into the heavens, which suggests her potential and perhaps Plato’s attainment. By contrast, Pearl is small; she died before attaining the age of reason. Yet she is in heaven. Her “cnauyn” is superior to Dame Philosophy’s. The Pearl-Maiden’s wisdom is a child’s understanding. It is simple, unitive, and nonrational.

The Boethius provides consolation by an appeal to reason. Pearl consoles by reasoning to the point at which Resoun is redefined and a demonstration according to faith is substituted. The dreamer has been engaged in a debate with the Maiden over the justness of the celestial economy in the parable of the vineyard. He has asserted that there is no justice to it; it is unreasonable, he says (line 590). The Maiden leads him by reason to see that an early worker in the vineyard becomes more stained than a late worker (section XI). Consequently, it is just and reasonable that the late arrival, the one who has labored least, receive the same or even a better reward.

The link-word in section XII is “ryȝt” which the Maiden personifies as Resoun:

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But Resoun, of ryȝt pat con not raue,
Suæz euermore þe innosent;
Hit is a dom þat neuer God gaue
Dat euæ þe gylyþe schulde þe schente.
þe gylyþe may contryssyoun hente
And be þurȝ mercy to grace þryȝt;
Bot he to gyly þat neuer glente
As inoscente is saf and ryȝt.
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(lines 661–672)

“Resoun,” here an epithet for God, names an essential quality of the deity. The modifying clause that follows indicates that by its very nature Resoun cannot stray from “ryȝt.” Resoun, therefore, is not the reasoning capacity, since it would be subject to change and shifts of logic; rather it is justice or justness. The “reasons” she shows in the next stanza (673ff.) are not “rationalizings” but scriptural statements; they necessarily are true. The Dreamer must accept them rather than what his reason may suggest to him.

This section of the poem seems to have two purposes. First, the Maiden tries to persuade the Dreamer that his will rather than his reason is the superior faculty and that he must, therefore, cease opposing his reason (or reasons) to God’s providence and omnipotence. The reason is a defective faculty, the source of man’s pride, the faculty that leads him into error or obstinacy. Earlier he had said that his reason set him at rest but that he lamented his pearl with “fyrc skylles” that fought against one another. He is a prisoner of his will (= his emotions) so that his reason is disordered and he reasons pro and con without being able to come to any resolution. “Kynde of Kryst,” faith in Christ’s human nature and resurrection, offers solace but his will rejects it. The Maiden uses “ryȝt resoun” or “righteous reason” to quell his emotions to set free his will. This reorientation will make him receptive to faith.

Not only do I believe section XIII begins the transition to typology, but I think the

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break in the concatenation (line 721) is thematically justified. Where we would expect a repetition of "ryst," the manuscript reads "Jesus":

De innocent is ay saf by ryst.

XIII

Jesus con calle to Hym Hys mylde.

Andrew and Waldron regard this as a scribal error and emend the line to preserve the link-word.\textsuperscript{17} I think the relationship between "ryst" and "Jesus" to be a telling example of typology. "Ryst" is a quality we most often associate with the Old Testament Father; mercy is usually associated with the Son. The shift from "Ryst" to "Jesus" is parallel to the historical pattern described by the relation of the Old Testament Father to the Son, and that pattern is the subject of the typological section of the poem which follows. The Father's "ryst" prefigures, and here necessitates, the Son. The sudden break in the linkage suggests that the Father's "ryst" is the Son's "mercy," as is reasonable.

The transitional nature of the section is suggested by the key words, "mascellez" and "makelez." In response to the central question—Who is the Lamb?—the link-words point in two directions.\textsuperscript{18} "Mascellez" (spotless), recalls the tropological orientation of the preceding sections. "Makelez," which contains two senses, points back to the tropological sections and forward to the description of the Lamb. "Makeles" ("without match") describes a moral condition; "without mate," a status. In addition, the second sense, by irony and self-contradiction, also represents the status of the Maiden in the section that follows: She is "makeles" in that she is peerless or without peer, a condition of the heaven she describes. However, she is not "makeles," that is, without a mate, because she and all the others have the same mate, the Lamb. There is one further play on the word which derives from its usage to describe the Virgin Mary: the Virgin is "makeles"; the maidens are "mated virgins," a distinction the Maiden drives home at the beginning of section XIV.

The latter distinction is used to make the transition to the typological identification of the Old Testament Lamb with the New Testament Christ:

Of Jerusalem I in speche spele.
If þou wyl knaw what kyn He be—
My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle,
My Joy, my Blys, my Lemman fre—
Pe profete Ysaye of Hym con melle
Pitously of Hys debonente:
"Pat gloryous Gyhtlez þat mon con quelle
Withouten any sake of felonye,
As a schep to þe slaȝt þer lad watz He,

\textsuperscript{17} Poems (n. 6 above) 87, line 721n. E. V. Gordon, ed., Pearl (Oxford 1953) 88–89, also assumes the break results from corruption. But see Denis Causing and V. J. Scattergood, "One Aspect of Stanza-Linking," Neophilologische Mitteilungen 75 (1974) 79–91, who argue that breaks in linking may not be instances of incompetence on a poet's part or of faulty transmission, but deliberate in order to focus attention on an issue or a particular part of the poem.

\textsuperscript{18} There are several important discussions of link-words in Pearl. See O. D. Macrae-Gibson, "Pearl: The Link-Words and the Thematic Structure," in Neophilologus 52 (1968) 54–64 (repr. in Conley [n. 1 above] 203–219); Kean (n. 1 above) 178–185; and John McGalliard (n. 9 above).
And, as lombe þat clypper in hande nem,
So closed He Hys mouth fro vch query,
Quen Juez Hym jugged in Jerusalem."

(lines 793–804)

The image, which is figurative, is of a slaughtered lamb, not Christ in his person. The next stanza, by contrast, uses realism to recall the New Testament events and thus to create a picture of Christ as historical person:

In Jerusalem watz my Lemman slayn
And rent on rode with boyez bolde
Al oure balez to bere ful bayn
He toke on Hymself oure carez colde;
With boffetez watz Hys face flayn
þat watz so fayr on to byholde.
For synne He set Hymself in vayn,
þat neuer hade non Hymself to wolde;
For vus He lette Hym flyeze and folde,
And brede vpon a bostwys bem;
As meke as lomp þat no playnt tolde
For vus He swalt in Jerusalem.

(lines 805–816)

The shift from figural language to historical person in these stanzas signifies that Christ realized the prophecy. The figural words are incarnated in Christ; they become flesh and blood.

Throughout these sections, the Maiden uses "Lamb" to refer to Christ; it is the image that links the Old and New Testaments with Apocalypse when she ties the two prophecies of Isaiah and John the Baptist with that of Saint John (lines 829–840). Her strategy is to use typologies that the Dreamer should know in order to help him begin to understand mystically. If the Old Testament Lamb has been revealed as the historical Christ, then that concordance can provide a ground for understanding Apocalypse where the historical Christ is represented as a Lamb on the throne of eternity. A reading of Apocalypse also explicates her present status.

Section XVI provides a transition to analogic vision by means of the link-word "mote,," which, like "makelez" and "mascellez," collects several meanings into a single sense. Some usages have moral sense, some a geographical or physical sense, but all move toward dimensionlessness. Together, the many meanings suggest the polysemity and unity of analogogy which Lubac has argued, in some paradoxical way, subsumes all meanings.19 At the end of the first stanza, the Dreamer says,

As 3e ar maskelez vnnder mone,
Your wonez shulde be wythouten mote.

(lines 923–924)

Literally, he only means that since the Maiden is spotless, so must her city be. Unwittingly, however, he recalls a quality that the Maiden attributed to the inhabitants of the city: they are not quarrelsome, for spotless pearls "of mote coule neuer mynge" (lines 853–856). His statement also implies, perhaps without his being aware of it, that

19Lubac (n. 4 above) 1.2.621–656.
the city must be without a moat since the inhabitants are pure and therefore would not need a defense. There is another available pun in the lines that follow: she is outside the "mote" (= city) enjoying the landscape (lines 925–936).

The Dreamer has been confused by the Maiden's earlier references to Jerusalem. His limited comprehension has placed Jerusalem in one geographical place at a particular historical moment, and insofar as Jerusalem is a worldly city, it cannot be said to be "without mote" in any sense. The Maiden begins to illustrate the inclusiveness of anagogic meaning when she suggests that his Jerusalem was but a historical and temporal manifestation of the Jerusalem in which she resides and which has always existed invisibly outside space and time. The Maiden joins in the wordplay on "mote" when she says that the "mote" the Dreamer refers to is in Judea, which suggests that the kingdom in which she resides, therefore, is "without mote," but then she goes on to say that the Lamb ferried his host to where she is:

And as Hys flok is withouten flake,
So is Hys mote withouten moote.

(lines 947–949)

The aural puns of these lines suggest both that the "flok" and the "mote" are without spot but also that the flock is not a flock and the "mote" (kingdom) is without a "mote" (city). It is only now that the Maiden makes the assertion that there are two "motes" called Jerusalem, the one in Judea, and the other called the "ceté of God" or "syt1 of pes" (line 952). Finally, when she tells the Dreamer that she will "vhyde the mote," she suggests that it is some small object capable of being hidden under something; it is a "mote," a speck, or, perhaps, a compressed essence (line 973). The interchange is paradoxical: the Pearl-Maiden is "withouten mote" (she is outside the city; she is without spot); the mysterious kingdom is without spot (it is pure) and has no spot (place) where it is located; the kingdom is without a city or dwelling ("mote") because both are unnecessary since the weather is clement and there is no strife ("mote"); and, since the latter is the case, the "mote" where the Maiden dwells must be "withouten mote" (have no moat). The Dreamer, therefore, does not see the "mote" she does or does not dwell in because she is "withouten mote."

To the Dreamer's request to see the city, the Maiden says he may see "'Wtwyht . . . bat clene cloystor . . . bot inwtht not a fote'" (lines 969–970); however, her statement is not entirely or literally true, for the Dreamer sees deep within the city. First, he sees only the surface, the twelve strata of gems. But he is eventually able to see all twelve of the gates simultaneously, and his eye penetrates into the city (lines 1048ff.) until he sees the throne from which runs the river that separates him from the Maiden. Suddenly the apparently empty city is filled with the procession. He sees the Lamb with the seven golden horns and the spotless fleece (lines 1110–1113), the Lamb whose looks are so "symple" (line 1133), and then his wound (lines 1135–1137). He sees the Maiden in the procession, and says, "Pat syt me gart to þenk to wade / For luf-longyng" (lines 1151–1152). Most readers understand the "syt" to be the Maiden, but I think the line is sufficiently ambiguous to allow that the "syt" is the procession and the Lamb as well. The Dreamer, therefore, is not only consoled for

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the death of the Maiden but is led to see the summum bonum, the Lamb and the Heavenly Jerusalem.

It is important, I believe, that the narrator thinks about his dream before declaring it a "veray avysyoun." To me this suggests that the dream was a divine revelation, not a mystical experience arising out of spiritual exercises. That it was a dream sent to a man whose will was turned away from God demonstrates the deity's benevolent concern for his creatures.

An epistemological model for the poem adjusts the consolatory and contemplative models in two essential ways. First, it moves the consolation model away from elegy and back towards Boethius's *Consolation*, an epistemological work that is intended to redirect one to the greatest good; and it removes the principal impediment of the contemplative model—that the Dreamer is not a contemplative—in order to universalize the experience. An epistemology describes the process whereby anyone can come to understanding, in this case not rational understanding so much as an inward comprehension of the spirit. The Dreamer, therefore, need not be a monk or contemplative but what he apparently is: a layman who was married and had a child and laments her loss.

There are other implications to this reorientation. The epistemological model stresses the moral base of understanding: before one can understand, one must achieve a state of moral "perfection," not perfectness but the disposition to perfection. One must orient the will properly. The prologue describes a man whose will is improperly oriented. He imagines it to be fighting against his reason, but within his disoriented will, he also imagines reasons ("skyllez") fighting against other "skyllez." In the section of the poem that I have marked tropology, the Dreamer is led to see that the proper orientation of the will is preceded by a *subordination* of the reason: this is the point at which *Pearl* departs radically from Boethius's *Consolation*. The properly oriented will is enabled to see personified Resoun, that is, Rygt (= Justice; Righteousness). The Resoun is not the reasoning power, the center of disputation, which is divisive since it breaks things down by making distinctions; rather, it is a simplicity, Rightness, which is what Resoun is in esse. The method of Dame Philosophy is superseded, therefore, by its source, Resoun, which is necessarily a simple unity whereas its worldly manifestation is multiple and subject to change and unreason.

An epistemological model for the poem, however, is inadequate in that it describes only one of the processes in *Pearl*. The poem begins with the world as text and journeys to revelation. It shows us the progress of the Dreamer as he moves from worldly sense phenomena through reason to a proper orientation of the will. In medieval, or Augustinian, theories of cognition, however, the ultimate source of knowledge is not the material world but the deity who illuminates the mind so that it can recognize things in the material world, then proceed to thought and abstraction, and thus, by means of material things, come back to the knowledge of immaterial things. In *Pearl* the Lamb, the source of the light, has infused himself into the world as a way of

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enabling the narrator to trace his way to a “cnavyng” of him. The Pearl-Maiden is the means by which this illumination occurs; she is the lens of the divine light.\textsuperscript{23}

If we look at the poem from the point of view of the source, then, we recognize an ironic reversal in our understanding of what the Word is or what words mean or are. In the epistemological model, we proceed from the literal to the allegorical or figurative sense. As moderns, we think of the literal as the real or historical and the allegorical or figurative as interpretive or conceptual, as meaning imposed on or extrapolated from the literal rather than as a meaning that is inherently there in the literal. I believe we can associate this misapprehension of the literal and figurative with the Dreamer and worldly medieval readers as well.

In the criticism of Pearl, this misreading has resulted in an erroneous description of the relationship between the Dreamer and the Maiden. The Dreamer is said to misapprehend where he is or what the Maiden says because he is too “lateral-minded.”\textsuperscript{24} It is true that the Dreamer attempts to understand his new experiences by translating them into worldly terms, but this misperception is not a result of his being “lateral”; rather, it is the consequence of his entrapment by figurative language. In the opening stanza of his lamentation, the Dreamer is unclear about whether he lost a gem or a girl; it remains unclear through most of the poem whether the girl is his mistress or a relation or perhaps some other thing. He speaks to her as if she were his lover, on the one hand, and is extraordinarily reluctant, on the other, to state in simple terms exactly what her blood relationship to him is. If she is his daughter, his love language is inappropriate.

When the Dreamer awakens in a landscape of higher awareness, he imagines himself to be in some exotic romance world, not the heavenly paradise. It is a world, he thinks, that is governed by the “chaunce” associated with the mundane world. He uses romance vocabulary and style to describe his “aventure” (lines 64–65): he was brought by “Fortwne” into a land “Beth pe rerefor to deuyse / Nys no wy3 worpe / Pat tone berze” (lines 97–100). When he first addresses the Maiden, he reverts to the ornate poetry of the proem:

\begin{verbatim}
O perle . . . in perlez py3t,  
Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,  
Regretted by myn one on nyste?

Pensyd, payred, I am forpayned,  
And þou in a lyf of lykynge lyzte,  
In paradyse erde, of stryf vnstrayned.
What Wyrde hatz hyder my juel vayned,  
And don me in þys del and gret daunger?
\end{verbatim}

(lines 241–250)

The Maiden corrects the Dreamer’s archaic, poetic vocabulary:

\begin{verbatim}
þou hatz called þy Wyrde a þef,  
þat o3t of no3t hatz made þe cler;
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{23}Blenkner’s “Pattern of Traditional Images” (n. 1 above) contains a particularly effective description of the intensification of light that occurs as the Dreamer moves from the world to the kingdom of the Lamb.

\textsuperscript{24}The following scholars comment on the Dreamer’s “lateral-mindedness”: Finlayson; Spearing; Milroy; Lynn Staley Johnson; Sklute; Chance; and Gross.
Because of the similarities between his language system and the Maiden’s, the Dreamer mistakes hers for his and so quarrels with her over meanings and ideas much as two participants in a love debate might argue.

The Dreamer’s figurative language—the rhetoric of love—refers to what he regards as the real: the world and the loss of his pearl. However, that world is but a figure whose source is the light of the Lamb. We might recall that the Dreamer talks about the way the plants shadow the “‘hylp,” a perfect image of the world. It is a place that is shadowed; indeed, it is shadow because it is distant in being from the source, which is Lamb-light. The Dreamer’s language, therefore, “appropriately” figures a world that is sign rather than res.

The Maiden’s language indeed seems much like the Dreamer’s; at one point it even sounds close to mockery. But it is obvious that she uses this language, much as writers of lapidary hymns to the Virgin do, to express her spiritual exultation:

Of Jerusalem I in speche spele.
If þou wyl know what kyn He be—
My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle,
My Joy, my Blys, my Lemman fre.

The Maiden’s language, as is clear from the continuation of this passage, is not figurative; it is scripturally based and literal.

Since the Maiden uses a language that appears—both to the Dreamer and to us at first—as allegorical and figurative, we read the usage figuratively whenever she refers to Christ as the Lamb of God. When the Lamb of God turns out to be a lamb in the poem, there is a shocking realization, or reification, of the language of the Maiden and Scripture. I believe that one of the reasons the poet moved to such a close translation of John’s Apocalypse before the final revelation (lines 1000ff.) is that he wished to signal a return to the literalness of Scripture, or perhaps a better way of expressing it is that he wished to return to simplicity, to direct essence.25 I think it is particularly important in this final section that the Dreamer is likened to Saint John who saw the New Jerusalem. The Dreamer sees the letter of what John saw, and what John saw is left unexplained.

The anagogic revelation at the end, as a consequence, ought not to be understood as the highest level of, or as having the most abstract, meaning; rather, it is the simplest in that it is the most “literal,” that is, the most revelatory of essential reality. It is simple in the sense that it encompasses all meaning and all being. This “simplicity” is symbolized by the movement away from the Dreamer’s emphasis on the Maiden’s “singularity” toward his perception of her union with the Lamb. In the first stanza of the poem, the Dreamer’s unassuageable grief is tied to the fact that he “sette hyr sengeley in synglure.” To him, she was singular; that is, she was unique, the best

25Early scholars regarded the “‘flat’” or “‘literal’” translation of the passage from Revelation as a flaw or an instance of the poet’s napping. In recent years scholars have suggested rationales for the ploy. See, for example, Kean (n. 1 above) 210–217; Finlayson (n. 1 above) 331ff.; Spearing, Gawain-Poet (n. 1 above) 103–104; and Barbara Nolan, The Gothic Visionary Perspective (Princeton 1977) 199–200.
of something, someone who stood above all others. Further, he has considerable
difficulty in the debate understanding how she could be “singular” and yet neither
single nor superior to all others. The Maiden, at one point, says it is the Virgin alone
who possesses “synglery” (line 429). As the poem moves toward its conclusion, the
emphasis turns increasingly to “simplessness,” not just childliness but unity and
indivisibility. At the end of the section I have labeled typology, the Dreamer
acknowledges the difference between the Maiden and himself and recognizes her “sim-
pleness”; “Now, hynde, pat sympnelnesse conez enclose, / I wolde he aske a hynge
expresse” (lines 909–910). Simpleness is the essential character of the Lamb himself:

   Best watz He, blythest, and moste to pryse,
   Pat euer I herde of speche spent;
   So wrothly whyt wern wedeys Hys,
   His lokez symple, Hynself so gent.

   (lines 1131–1134)

But the Lamb and his procession are also “simple” in the sense that they are indivisible, for there is only one pearl on the breasts of the 144,000: “In hvonez brest be watz bounden boun / be blysful perle with gret delyt” (lines 1102–1103 [my emphasis]; cf. line 854 where the Maiden implies the same thing).

In making this analysis of the language, I am not trying to assert that the poet
believes that Christ is literally a pearl-lamb. Rather, I argue that the poet uses mispercep-
tions about language and reality in order to demonstrate the gulf between sign,
a word, and thing, an essence. He is not concerned to depict what spiritual essences
look like if they could be said to look like anything at all; rather, he uses pictures that
are based in scriptural language as a vehicle for transporting the Dreamer and the reader
beyond the conceptual frame of this world into the awesome reality of that other world.
It is the recognition of that world, a kind of uncovering of the soul’s marriage to the
kingdom, that results in the Dreamer’s suffusion of love-longing and his rash move-
ment across the river.

I think that this transformation provides the key to the poet’s method from the
beginning of the poem. What must occur is that the Dreamer learn to get beyond his
worldly language, his figuratively conceived littera, into allegorical meaning which is
revealed to be a littera of essence. He must replace his Boethian poetical lamentation
with faithful acceptance of scriptural littera. We begin in the Orphian garden of love
where the Dreamer expresses his longing for those things that inevitably fade; this is
a world of “schadowed hyules” and fading roses, a world ruled by seeming chance,
fate, and destiny. Gradually his language and will are transformed as the Lamb becomes
the courteous love object, both unchanging and resplendent, in a relationship that can
only be suggested through the image of a lamb wedded to a host of pearls.

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26For a related view, see Anne Howland Schottter, “Vernacular Style and the Word of God: The Incarna-
tional Art of Pearl,” in Ineffability: Naming the Unnameable from Dante to Beckett, ed. Peter S. Hawkins