# INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

**UMI**

A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

# LEGIBLE LANDSCAPES: INTERPRETIVE TOPOGRAPHY AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF SPACE IN THE POEMS OF THE *PEARL* MANUSCRIPT

by

MARGARET C. HAMMITT-MCDONALD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 9732922

Copyright 1997 by
Hammitt-McDonald, Margaret C.

All rights reserved.

UMI Microform 9732922
Copyright 1997, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.

This microform edition is protected against unauthorized
copying under Title 17, United States Code.

UMI
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

© 1997

MARGARET C. HAMMITT-MCDONALD

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

22 April 1997
Date

Chair of Examining Committee

4/11/97
Date

Executive Officer

Catherine McKenna

E. Gordon Whatley

Steven Kruger

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Abstract

LEGIBLE LANDSCAPES: INTERPRETIVE TOPOGRAPHY AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF SPACE IN THE POEMS OF THE *PEARL* MANUSCRIPT

by

Margaret Hammitt-McDonald

Adviser: Professor Scott D. Westrem

This study analyzes the theme of interpretive topography (the hypothesis that places can be read like books) in the four poems of the fourteenth-century English *Pearl*-poet. It focuses on how the spaces in each poem are interpreted by protagonist according to his/her own limited human perspective. In each poem, the spaces are part of a larger system which attempts to educate the protagonist about divine purposes, but he/she consistently "reads" each place in a purely literal, physical way rather than considering the eternal truths which can be revealed by each space through reading more deeply. Furthermore, the narrow, confining spaces which each protagonist often prefers indicate his/her own restricted understanding.

In addition to this central issue, three related issues inform my study of interpretive topography in the *Pearl*-poet's corpus. First, I connect the poet's presentation of space as an interpretable realm, in which spatial features and relationships yield an understanding of some transcendent truth, with two commonplace metaphors in the medieval Christian world: the idea of the world itself as a text and the idea of pilgrimage as a way of interpreting this text. Second, I evaluate the poet's use of geographical boundaries to express marginalization, the position of the "Other" on the borders of both world and text. Just as a character's understanding of divine truths is presented through his/her perception of space, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

metaphorical marginalization of these various "Others" in the society of the *Pearl*-poet is expressed through literal spatial exclusion in each of the poems.

Finally, I consider how the interpretable spatial structure of each poem is questioned and subverted. Each poem is fraught with misreadings on the part of each narrator--interpretations of space which express the human inability to comprehend fully the divine order of the universe. In the *Pearl*-poet's work, human misreadings of God's spatial "text" ultimately problematize interpretive space as the unchanging agent of meaning in the *Pearl*-poet's corpus. Additionally, the individual spaces of each poem themselves occasionally deconstruct the entire orderly design of the spatial text.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Acknowledgements

No project of this size can be accomplished alone, and I have been fortunate to have had the invaluable academic assistance and moral support of many wonderful people, from the earliest drafts of the prospectus to revising the final version. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Professor Scott Westrem, for his detailed, incisive comments on every stage of my dissertation, as well as to my three fine dissertation readers, Professors Catherine McKenna, Gordon Whatley and Steven Kruger, whose comments and suggestions have always been helpful and inspiring. I also wish to acknowledge Professor Martin Stevens' role in reading early drafts of my prospectus and pointing me in the right direction. I wish to express my thanks, too, to all of the instructors with whom I'd had the honor of studying at the Graduate Center. Many times I've walked home from one of your classes, full of excitement about the subjects which we'd discussed, some of which produced the germs of ideas which eventually flowered into this dissertation.

Of course, I have also enjoyed the company of many thoughtful, intelligent, witty fellow students. I would particularly like to thank the members of the "Duguthe," our ongoing Old English translation group (Greg Darling, Jeff Cassvan and Shoshana Hantman), for providing me with so much mental enrichment during our lively lunchtime discussions. I thank Chris Vaccaro for his insights and suggestions on some of the themes covered in this dissertation (and for lunchtime discussions on subjects ranging from Aristotle to Zeno, with the *Pearl*-poet in between.) To all of the other students whom I've had the joy of meeting during my studies at the Graduate Center, your names are too numerous to mention, so I thank you all collectively for being a part of my life, academic and otherwise.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Finally, I wish to thank my family (Dad, Mom, Will, Seth and the cats) for your constant and unwavering support during the years that I've worked on this project. Your kindness and consideration have aided me immeasureably in completing this work. (Thanks, of course, for vacating the premises of the computer area when I needed to use the machine for this dissertation--more times than I can count!)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

**Table of Contents**


| | |
|---|---|
| Abstract | iv |
| Acknowledgments | vi |
| Introduction: Legible Landscapes: An Overview of Interpretive Topography | 1 |
| Chapter I: "Wythouten Spot": Mismapping and Misreading in *Pearl* | 40 |
| Chapter II: On the Margins of the Wor(l)d: Enclosure, Exclusion and Explication in *Clannesse* | 158 |
| Chapter III: In "Termes of Judé": Confining Spaces and the Borders of Understanding in *Patience* | 271 |
| Chapter IV: Pentangles and Entanglements: The Colonization of Space and Meaning in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* | 346 |
| Works Cited | 482 |
| Autobiographical Statement | 498 |


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Introduction:

## Legible Landscapes: An Overview of Interpretive Topography

In *The Songlines,* an evocative study of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, Bruce Chatwin posits that linguistic creativity is intimately connected to the migratory life. Basing his approach on a number of nomadic peoples, Chatwin suggests that in traversing a landscape, a people develops the ability to interpret it according to a mythological, symbolic system. The Australian Aborigines have created a particularly rich and sophisticated combination of journeying and interpretation which manifests itself in a cartographical storytelling system called the Songlines. Each Songline is both a literal path through the landscape and a mythical narrative told in the form of a song. When an Australian Aborigine walks along the path of a Songline, particular features of the landscape recall the doings of Ancestors in their mythological Dreamtime. The walker recalls this prehistory of the landscape by singing a verse of the mythical history of the land as he or she journeys along the trail. These verses are believed to have been sung originally by the Ancestor as he/she moved across and created the land by the power of the song. Thus the Songline is both the literal path (and its surrounding geographical features) and the song about the Ancestor's original journey in that place. Recalling the history of the land and the Ancestors by walking on their paths and singing their songs, the singer recreates the cosmos of the Aborigines.[1]

---

[1]Chatwin first introduces the concept of the Songlines by describing his friend Arkady's interest in them: "It was during his time as a school-teacher that Arkady learned of the labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as 'Dreaming-tracks' or 'Songlines'; to the Aboriginals as the 'Footprints of the Ancestors' or the 'Way of the Law.'

. "Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who had wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path--birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes--and so singing the world into existence" (Chatwin 2). He continues, recounting a conversation with Arkady: "In theory, at least, the whole of Australia could

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In *The Monkey Grammarian,* Octavio Paz explores the idea of writing as a path.[2] The text becomes its own geography, and reading is a journey through it towards a mythical city where the reader/walker will achieve transcendent understanding. For Paz, the literal journey to the Indian holy city of Galta becomes "reading a stretch of ground, deciphering a fragment of world" (Paz 47). At the end of the book, he reflects that he had intended "to write, to describe a text that was really a path and that could be read and followed as such" (Paz 157), though he subsequently states that the path of the story had escaped his control and led in unexpected directions. The sixteenth-century alchemist Paracelsus saw the matter in reverse. The journey through the world, and life, is as much a text as a text is a journey, or, in the words of Ernst Robert Curtius in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* "The whole earth is a book or a 'library' in which 'the pages are turned with our feet....'" (Curtius 322)

The Australian Aborigines, Octavio Paz and Paracelsus are not isolated in their perception of a relationship between language and landscape. During the European Middle Ages, the world was commonly viewed as a text written by God. This text could be moved through and "read," as if each of its features were phrases and sentences providing clues to divine intentions. Of particular scholarly interest to me is this theme of interpretive topography--the hypothesis that places can be read like books--in the four poems of the fourteenth-century English *Pearl*-poet. In this study, I propose to consider a single central issue in all four poems: how the spaces in each poem are read or interpreted by a narrator/protagonist (as well as by non-narrating characters) according to their

---

be read as a musical score. There was hardly a rock or creek in the country that could not or had not been sung. One should perhaps visualise the Songlines as a spaghetti of Iliads and Odysseys, writhing this way and that, in which every 'episode' was readable in terms of geology" (Chatwin 13). Finally, he explains the role of the human singer in recreating the cosmos: "The man who went 'Walkabout' was making a ritual journey. He trod in the footprints of his Ancestor. He sang the Ancestor's stanzas without changing a word or note--and so recreated the Creation" (Chatwin 14).

[2]This is an interesting contrast to Chatwin, for whom *reading* is the act of following a path.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

own limited human perspectives. In each poem, the spaces are part of a larger system which attempts to educate the narrator about divine purposes, but the narrators consistently "read" each place in a purely literal, physical way rather than consider the eternal truths which can be revealed by each space if they were to read more deeply. Furthermore, the narrow, confining spaces which each narrator often prefers indicate his/her own restricted understanding. For example, the narrow spaces in which Jonah seeks shelter in *Patience* display his own corresponding myopic need to take shelter in a narrow view of the cosmos and God's power over it.

The poems also invite their reader to decipher each landscape along with the narrator, but the reader is expected to interpret the landscapes more completely and insightfully than the narrator does. Indeed, the readings of the narrator and the expected readings of the actual reader of the poems depend upon one another. The poet makes the reader so conscious of the narrator's limited understanding of landscapes that the reader cannot help but read those landscapes with a more developed perspective, thus making the narrator's very limitations the source of the reader's correct, complete interpretations.

In addition to this central issue, three related issues will inform my study of interpretive topography in the *Pearl*-poet's corpus. First, I wish to connect the *Pearl*-poet's presentation of space as an interpretable realm, in which spatial features and relationships yield an understanding of some transcendent truth, with a pair of commonplace metaphors in the medieval Christian world: the idea of the world itself as a text and the idea of the pilgrimage as a way of interpreting this text.

The medieval idea of the world as a book is expressed in Alain de Lille's well-known poem, which depicts the creatures of the world as mirrors of divine intention: "Omnis mundi creatura/Quasi liber et pictura/Nobis est et speculum"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(Quoted in Curtius 319). Medieval Christians saw the world as a system of interpretation created by God for the purpose of enlightening its human inhabitants about the divine.[3] Each Christian was supposed to view himself or herself as a pilgrim through this world, and sometimes individuals went on actual pilgrimages or meditative walks through cathedrals--places which could be wandered through and read at the same time. I am interested in how the *Pearl*-poet makes use of this convention of the world as a narrative of divine intention in his own presentations of interpretive topography.

Second, I wish to evaluate the poet's use of the image of geographical boundaries to express marginalization, the position of the "Other" on the borders of both world and text. Some of these "Others" include unrepentant sinners in *Pearl;* adulterers, homosexuals, non-Christians or non-Jews and foreigners in *Clannesse;* beasts, women and non-Jews (as well as "the Jews" themselves) in *Patience;* and women and uncanny beings in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Just as a narrator's understanding of divine truths is presented through his perception of space, the metaphorical marginalization of these various "Others"

---

[3]In *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages,* Ernst Robert Curtius gives additional examples of this idea of the world as a book. "The 'book of the creature' remained a favorite concept of orthodox asceticism and mysticism. Thus in the *Imitatio Christi* (II, 4), all creatures are a mirror of life and the book of sacred doctrine: 'si rectum cor tuum esset, tunc omnis creatura speculum vitae et liber sanctae doctrinae esset.' ... In his *Simbolo de la fé* he [the preacher and mystic Luis de Granada] uses the expression 'filosofar en este gran libro de las criaturas' (to philosophize about the great book of the creatures) and varies it: "[¿] Qué seran luego todas las criaturas deste mundo, tan hermosas y tan acabadas, sino unas letras quebradas y iluminadas que declaran bien el primor y la sabiduria de su autor?...Asi nosotros, habiendonos puesto vos delante este tan maravilloso libro de todo el universo, para que por las criaturas del, como por unas letras vivas, leyesemos la excelencia del Criador...." ("What, then, will be all of the creatures of the world, so beautiful and so complete, except some of the letters, broken and illuminated, which declare well the primacy and the wisdom of their Author? And so, it having been given to us within this so marvelous book of the whole universe, that in the creatures thereof, as if through some living letters, we may read the excellence of the Creator--translation mine.) (Curtius 320) For Hugh of St. Victor, "Both the creation and the God-Man are 'books' of God...." (Curtius 320) Finally, "Nicholas of Cusa adopted the metaphorics of medieval philosophy. He remarks that there had been saints who regarded the world as a written book. For him, however, the world is the 'showing forth of the inner word' ('interni verbo ostensio'). Hence the things of sense are also to be regarded as 'books' through which God as our teacher declares the truth to us" (Curtius 321).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in the society of the *Pearl*-poet is expressed through literal spatial exclusion in each of the poems.

Finally, I am intrigued by the possibility of deconstructive readings of the interpretable spatial structure of each poem. Each poem is fraught with misreadings on the part of each narrator--interpretations of space which express the human inability to comprehend fully the divine order of the universe. The *Pearl*-poet did not invent the idea that humans can only dimly understand the total signifying structure of the cosmos: this is actually an orthodox Christian (as well as generally religious) expression of human imperfection found in the New Testament and elaborated on by Augustine and other patristic thinkers.[4] However, I find that human misreadings of God's spatial "text" ultimately deconstruct interpretive space as the unchanging agent of meaning in the *Pearl*-poet's corpus. An example is *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which the deconstructively-minded reader eventually recognizes that meaning is derived from social consensus and is subject to change, as if it were as transient and migratory as the wandering Gawain himself.

As a subsidiary point related to this third issue, I will also observe how the individual spaces of each poem themselves occasionally deconstruct the entire orderly design of the spatial text. For example, in *Clannesse* the spatial concepts of enclosure and exclusion initially indicate salvation or damnation, respectively. However, the poem ultimately implodes its own spatial categories

---

[4]I Corinthians 13:12 reads: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible* 1392).

In his *Confessions*, Augustine's descriptions of the limitations of human consciousness in general (and his own in particular) often make use of spatial imagery. One of his prayers states that "Narrow is the mansion of my soul; enlarge thou it, that thou mayest enter in" (I. 6., p. 4). When he begins to become aware of his own spiritual and intellectual inadequacies, he refers to his distance from God's perspective as a kind of exile: "And thou didst beat back the weakness of my sight, streaming forth Thy beams of light upon me most strongly, and I trembled with love and awe: and I perceived myself to be far off from Thee, in the region of unlikeness...." (VII. 16, pp. 146-7)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and moral margins in its final episode, when the antagonists remain inside of an enclosure and the protagonists invade it from outside. Though the crime of the invaded is still the violation of the vessels, their subsequent invasion by the Medes and Persians compromises the integrity of the poem's vision of enclosures as privileged spaces, and thus the "enclosure" of the poem itself.

## Critical Background and Sources

The critical background for this study links a number of diverse areas, including architectural criticism (studies of the built environment), linguistic theory, ethnography, literature on the history of geography, and art criticism. There are three main areas in which these fields intersect for the purpose of my study: analyses which consider the spatial qualities of narrative and/or language itself, studies which consider the linguistic or narrative qualities of built environments (like cities and cathedrals), and critical approaches on the use of space in the works of the *Pearl*-poet.

## The World as Book: The Narrative Qualities of Space

The field of architectonic analysis considers the way in which built environments constitute a spatially-articulated symbolic narrative. The arrangement of a single building with symbolic or sacral functions (a courthouse or a cathedral, for example), a group of buildings, or even a city, expresses a symbolic order. According to the architectonic analyst Donald Preziosi, because architecture represents the order of the world as it is perceived by the society that produces it, architecture is a system of communication which is analogous to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

language itself. Thus architecture does not just imitate the structures of language, but is itself a kind of language or text.[5]

Medievalists have applied Preziosi's definition of the built environment as "a system for the production of meaning by its user(s)" (Preziosi 75) almost exclusively to church architecture, particularly the Gothic cathedral. The pilgrimage routes described by medieval pilgrims are also spaces which have been organized and interpreted by those who move through them. I will briefly describe both of these forms of medieval interpretive space below.

According to Otto von Simson, the Gothic cathedral is an architectural, spatial representation of meaning, specifically of the divinely-fashioned order and harmony in the universe. He observes, "Designed in an attempt to reproduce the structure of the universe...the cathedral is perhaps best understood as a 'model' of the medieval universe" (von Simson 35). Critics also contend that the cathedral was not merely a static replica of the orderly arrangement (or "edifice") of the universe, but, additionally, a kind of narrative in stone and glass which could be "read" and participated in by the congregant who walked through it. Yi-Fu Tuan indicates that "The medieval cathedral was meant to be experienced; it was a dense text to be read with devout attention and not an

---

[5]Preziosi writes, "A house is not a 'machine for living' but a system for the production of meaning by its user(s)" (Preziosi 75). He then extends this observation beyond a single dwelling to a group of dwellings: "A built environment--whether an urban agglomerate or a seasonal or daily encampment--contains and broadcasts information about the social and cognitive world of a people" (Preziosi 80). Finally, he connects the development of architecture as a system of communicating meaning to the development of language: "We have taken as one of our working assumptions in this study that the emergence of the architectonic code necessarily emerged hand-in-hand with the emergence of verbal language...." (Preziosi 108-9)

Interestingly, Preziosi's images of the development of language are the opposite of Chatwin's. Chatwin asserts that narrative language bears resemblances and parallels to the migratory life, if it did not actually arise from the wanderings of nomadic people. On the other hand, Preziosi states that the symbolic system of architecture (which is the product of a sedentary and eventually urbanized culture) arose simultaneously with the structures of language. These perspectives may oppose one another in terms of the specific cultural structure which gives rise to spatialized language, but I find both views instructive because both insist that linguistic meaning emerged from a particular perception of space.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

architectural form merely to be seen" (Tuan 137). In *The Gothic Visionary Perspective,* Barbara Nolan notes that, by entering into and moving through the physical structure of the cathedral (in this case, Chartres Cathedral), the faithful learned about the structure of the cosmos and sacred history, as well as their place in both:

> Here, as at St.-Denis, the sculptural program traces the whole course of sacred history in order to teach that God's progressive revelation to mankind is both radically historical and visionary. But what is most important, the contemporary Christian has his place in this temporally-based revelation. It is vividly defined in his assumed ability to understand all the figures of sacred scripture bound together by the art of the cathedral and to participate spiritually in the grand human procession toward universal salvation. (Nolan 53)

In *Romanesque Signs: Early Medieval Narrative and Iconography,* Stephen G. Nichols links literary and iconographic narrative forms in cathedral art, specifically drawing on his studies of the Charlemagne window at Chartres Cathedral:

> Recent observations linking the stained glass programs, as well as the sculptural programs of twelfth-century churches with the symbolic systems of Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena suggest that the iconic signification of the windows should help our understanding of the way in which symbolic structure constituted a separate but related kind of meaning production to narrative discourse itself, whether iconographic or verbal. (Nichols 101)

In reference to the Charlemagne window, he writes that the shapes of each panel in the narrative sequence of the window create a "syntax" of their own, based on the symbolic associations of each of these shapes (circles being analogous to heaven and squares to earth) (Nichols 104) and argues that "with its axes pointing both vertically and horizontally, the diamond shape literally represents the horizontal and vertical progression by which one reads the narrative images" (Nichols 102). Nichols indicates that the window is arranged in a sequence

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which depicts the journey itself as a narrative (96). Each section of the window presents a separate Crusade cycle, and one of these, the Spanish Crusade Cycle, is divided, in ascending order, into three expeditions. Thus the arrangement of the images in a progressive sequence imitates the "journey" which the reader takes through a text, which in turn emulates the literal progress of a pilgrim through a series of sacred places that tell stories about salvation history (in this case, the literal progress of the Crusaders through the Holy Land.) This eastward journey on the part of the Crusaders may have also recalled to a medieval viewer the imagery of a soul's heavenly ascent in spiritual contemplation. On the symbolic world maps of the Middle Ages, east rather than north was the upper portion of the map, just as heaven was believed to be above earth. "Orienting" oneself, in either geographical or textual space, thus meant turning oneself both eastward towards the Holy Land and upwards towards heaven.

While Preziosi assigns the capacity to be interpreted only to inorganic structures, medieval thinkers also attempted to interpret organic space: the hills, mountains, streams, lakes, forests and fields which are God's "architecture." Just as the Aborigines of Australia view journeying as an act of interpreting and recollecting a sacred history inscribed in the "text" of their land, medieval European writers and thinkers represented the world as an instructive landscape which can be "read" while it is moved through, turning the pages with their feet in order to reveal divine intentions, or, as Gregory the Great states, "traveling towards understanding with the 'foot of the mind'" (Qtd. Gardiner 14). The natural world itself was recognized as a structure designed to communicate meaning--a structure upon which all inorganic structures were to be modelled. In *The World and the Book*, Gabriel Josopivici summarizes this approach to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nature as a "book" in which divine "sentences"--both phrases and instructions[6]--can be read:

> The universe...is a structure of relations, created by God and perceivable by man in his mind's eye. It is non-organic, quantitative, something that is made by an artificer rather than planted by a gardener. But if this is so then it is possible for the artifacts of man to be made according to the same principles, thus providing not an imitation of a fragment of the visible universe, but a model or analogue of the universe itself. Because the universe is seen in terms not of essences but of structures it is possible for the human craftsman to imitate the shape of reality itself. (Josopivici 32)

Though the world in general was viewed as an interpretable structure, sites of significant biblical and post-biblical events were particularly revered and became linked together in pilgrimage itineraries. The pilgrimage was a structured journey through a meaningful landscape, a journey intended to give one insight into salvation history as expressed by the land and the sites themselves. Like the cathedral and the world as a whole, this structure was often described as a book, as exemplified by the pilgrimage account of Ludolph von Suchem (c. 1350): "This land of Galilee also has been illustrated and glorified by many of Christ's miracles" (von Suchem 124). In this description, it is as if the land is a page on which the activities of Christ are like the illustrations of a text to be interpreted by future travelers. According to Mary B. Campbell, a fifth-century visitor, Egeria, also refers to the Holy Land as a text, calling the reader of

---

[6]Curtius indicates that the word *sentence* does not only mean a unit of syntax, as it does in modern English, but also signifies the pronouncements of various classical authorities: "In the antique poets there were hundreds of thousands of lines which put a psychological experience or a rule of life in the briefest form. ... Quintilian called them 'sententiae' (literally: 'judgments') because they resembled the decisions of public bodies...." (Curtius 58) The centrality of this notion of "sentence" is demonstrated by the fact that one of the most frequently-read philosophical treatises of the Middle Ages was Peter Lombard's *Sententiae*. The Host of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* expresses a commonplace medieval sentiment when he asks that the pilgrim's tales be edifying and entertaining at once, and states that the winning tale will be "of best sentence and moost solaas" (line 798).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

her book "a second pilgrim" (*Witness* 24). Campbell comments on Egeria's vision of the Holy Land as a kind of geographical book:

> ...her experience as a traveler bears a striking resemblance to the act of reading: the Holy Land in all its physical and cultural fullness is for her only a map of its former self. It is the place where something happened *in illo tempore,* and her descriptions tend to render that other, sacred time and not her own. (*The Witness and the Other World* 24-5)

In medieval pilgrimage accounts, the sites are inextricably connected to the events which had occurred there, or, as Campbell observes, "Places are almost always 'places where' someone did or said something; geography tends to be history; description then comes in the form of narration" ("'The Object of One's Gaze'" 6). Indeed, the significance of each site is derived solely from its relationship to biblical and apocryphal events, and the entire Holy Land is given meaning by Christ's incarnation and redemptive activities there, as Ludolph von Suchem declares:

> Now, the Holy Land, that is, the Promised Land, which God promised that He would give to Abraham and his seed, is beloved by God, praised by angels, and worshipped to men; for our Lord Jesus Christ deigned to consecrate the same with his most precious blood, to honour it with His presence.... (von Suchem 3)

Thus the sites of pilgrimages, like the Gothic cathedrals and the world itself, are interpretable structures rather than merely organic features of the landscape.

The interpretive quality of these places is further illustrated by descriptions of specific sites. Many of these descriptions virtually ignore naturalistic details and focus almost exclusively on recollections of the events which had occurred there in biblical times. In reference to the records of pilgrims in the Holy Land, Campbell notes, "...the visualizable details are iconographic epitomes of sacred history. The landscape of Palestine has simply been replaced by the events of the gospel" ("'The Object of One's Gaze'" 8). A good example is the twelfth-century pilgrim John of Würzburg, who begins his account with an exegetical interpretation of Nazareth,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the literal beginning of his journey as well as the metaphorical "beginning" of humanity's redemption because it is identified with Jesus of Nazareth:

> Now because our redemption was begun in the city of Nazareth through the incarnation of our Lord...we propose to begin our description with this same city....Nazareth is, being interpreted, "a flower," or "a shrub," and is justly so named, because therein grew the flower with whose fragrance the whole world is filled; that flower, the Virgin Mary.... (Würzburg 1)

Interestingly enough, the only flower of Nazareth which John of Würzburg mentions is a metaphorical one, (Christ or, in this case, the Virgin Mary, to whom Würzberg believed the name Nazareth, meaning "garden of flowers," referred)[7] excluding organic features of the actual topography in favor of elements in an exegetical topography.

In other accounts, even those which devote greater attention to natural features of the land itself, the landscape is "read" for signs of God's presence. In many cases, the land itself almost seems to furnish quotations from the Bible, as if it were a three-dimensional proof-text that could be read by its wanderers, as in a description of a well at the base of Mount Lebanon:

> Likewise there is a well of water which runs through this land...and rises therein; it is a fountain ever welling forth from the flat ground, and never falling off in quantity or form....These are the streams whereof we read "A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (Cant. iv. 15). (von Suchem 47-8)

Sometimes a particular site is not just the location of a particular biblical verse or event, but also fulfills a function similar to allegory in literature or the visual arts. Topographical features can comment on intangible truths, as do the attractive but ultimately corrupt fruits of the land where Sodom and Gomorrah had once stood:

---

[7]Würzberg is unusual in identifying the Virgin Mary as the flower to whom the name "Nazareth" refers; other travelers read the name as referring to Christ.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Yet all the country round about is full of trees and great fruits, exceedingly fair to see; but when these fruits are plucked and broken open, they are full of dust and ashes within, and for three days the hands of him who plucked them cannot be rid of a vile stench; for even all the country round about it is full of God's curse. (von Suchem 117)[8]

Here the seeming attractiveness but ultimate putrefaction of the fruits serves as a geographical expression of the fair-seeming but ultimately vile and rotten sin of the Sodomites. (It is also a topographical image which the *Pearl*-poet will exploit in his own description of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Clannesse.)* By walking through the ruined land and staining one's hands with its foul fruits, the pilgrim learns to avoid morally impure conduct. This is a particularly vivid example of how various constructed spaces--cathedrals, pilgrimage routes, and even the "edifice" of the world itself--can serve an educational function to those who read their divinely-inscribed signs while moving through them.

Another interesting aspect of medieval spatial thought is the idea of the macrocosm and the microcosm--namely that the individual human being is a miniature world and, conversely, the world itself takes the form of a human body. Though this concept flowered more fully in the Renaissance, elements of it appeared earlier, in the Middle Ages. Some of the most famous *mappaemundi* depicted the world as the body of Christ; notable examples are the Ebstorf Map, with the head, hands and feet of Christ displayed at each of the cardinal directions at the

---

[8]A similar description appears in *The Book of John Mandeville,* a popular account of Palestinian, African and Far Eastern places, both real and imagined: "Et si croissent arbres delez qui portent pommes trop belles et de tres belle couleur a regarder et toutes meures par semblant; mais qui la brisera ou trenchera par my, il ne trouuera dedenz que centre, en signe que par le courrout de Dieu les citez et la terre estoient ars du feu denfer" (Letts 283). This passage from the Paris MS. of *The Book of John Mandeville* (which was written in 1371, thus making it roughly contemporaneous with the poems of Cotton Nero A. x.) is echoed in the later Bodleian MS., a Middle English version: "And neer bisides that watir stondeth fair trees that bereth frute, as applis, that arn fair vnto a mannes si3t, but whenne men cutteth hem on sondre, thenne shal they nou3t ellis se but powdir and asshes, in tokenynge of the vengeaunce of God that drowned tho citees and brent hem with the fire of helle, for vengeaunce of that synne" (Letts 449-50).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

edge of the map ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 334-5), and the fanciful maps of Opicinus de Canistris, which superimpose world maps upon the body of Christ and vice versa, and in which continents incorporate human body parts in their outlines.[9] Macrocosmic/microcosmic imagery interests me because of the intersection between the body as terrain and geographical terrain, an image which emerges repeatedly in the four poems of the *Pearl* manuscript, for example, in *Pearl*'s depiction of the Pearl-Maiden's body and her space as the twin objects of the dreamer's desire, and in *Clanness'* parallel presentation of bodily and territorial invasions, both threatened and completed.

**The Book as World: The Spatial Qualities of Narrative**

While the image of the world as a book is a commonplace of medieval studies, not so frequently discussed is the parallel idea of the book as a world, which is the province of those scholars who are concerned with the concept of narrative space. The idea of the text as a particular kind of space which can be traversed (in an analytic if not a literal sense) by its readers has been applied to contemporary French poetry by Gaston Bachelard, whose classic *La poetique de l'espace* is a groundbreaking and lyrical inquiry into narrative space. Bachelard subjects built environments like houses or towns to the same interpretive scrutiny that words themselves receive, noting that "It therefore makes sense from our standpoint of a

---

[9]Opicinus' fascinating maps are fourteenth-century examples of macrocosmic/microcosmic theory. Plate III of Richard Salomon's edition of his writings and maps shows Christ's body with small world maps superimposed upon his chest and legs; smaller figures appear amid the maps. In Plate V, continents on a map take the form of body parts, including a face, arm and eye. Plate VI shows a lozenge-shaped world map with Christ's body superimposed upon it. Plate VII is a more detailed rendition of continents as body parts. A detailed face at the top of the map is labeled, as if with the names of cities and towns, save that these labels describe the body parts, such as "labia iniqua" and "barba antigratis". In Plate XI, another enormous body of Christ appears, with a map overlaying it from waist to ankle. Plate XXIII depicts a similar image, save that many maps cover Christ's body from neck to knees; these appear to be projection maps, each of them with rays emanating from the center and contained within circles interlocking with each other.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

philosophy of literature and poetry to say that we 'write a room', 'read a room', or 'read a house'" (Bachelard 14). However, he also insists upon the reverse: while places should be read as if they were poems, poems should also be explored as if they were places. To Bachelard, literature itself is a kind of space, where arrangements of words parallel the arrangement of furniture in a room, or rooms in a house, or of buildings in a community, as a form of personal and collective self-expression. Bachelard reflects, "Words--I often imagine them as little houses, each with its own cellar and garret" (Bachelard 147).

Bachelard's approach to narrative space has been applied to literature of many nations and historical periods; criticism of American literature is particularly replete with analyses of the intersection of place and word.[10] On the medieval front, narrative space is a comparatively more recent issue. Mary Campbell raises the issue when she states, "...metaphor itself is etymologically (and metaphorically) a 'change of place'; its equivalent in Latin rhetoric, *translatio*, was often used quite literally in this sense...." *(The Witness and the Other World* 1-2) One particularly

---

[10]A cursory glance at a bookshelf of criticism on American literature revealed the following titles: Louise Westling, *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens: The Fiction of Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1985), Monroe K. Spears, *Countries of the Mind: Literary Explorations* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1992), David C. Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1989), Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1970), Janis B. Stout, *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1983), Robert Glen Deamer, *The Importance of Place in the American Literature of Hawthorne, Thoreau, Crane, Adams, and Faulkner* (Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen, 1990), Héctor Calderon and José David Saldivar, *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* (Durham: Duke U P, 1991), Donald A. Petesch, *A Spy in the Enemy's Country: The Emergence of Modern Black Literature* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1989), Michael Pearson, *Imagined Places: Journeys into Literary America* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1991), Marilyn R. Farwell, "Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Subtexts: Toward a Theory of Lesbian Narrative Space", in Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions* (New York: New York U P, 1990, 91-103), Frederick Turner, *Spirit of Place: The Making of an American Literary Landscape* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1989), J.B. Jackson, *American Space* (New York: Norton, 1972.) Though the title bears no reference to this matter, William Spengemann's book *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1977) also analyzes the concept of narrative space in American fiction. (Though this is not an exhaustive list of all titles on the subject, it indicates the amount of scholarship which has been devoted to narrative space in American literature.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

enlightening study on narrative space is Warren Ginsburg's article on "Place and Dialectic in *Pearl* and Dante's *Paradiso,*" in which he argues that "When Boethius, in his *De topicis differentiis,* translated the Greek word *topos* as *locus,* he opened to the Middle Ages the possibility of seeing a place as both a physical locale and an argumentative setting" (Ginsburg 731). Ginsburg explains, "In rhetoric and dialectic, topoi were places where one discovered strategies of persuasion and demonstration." and that subsequently, after Boethius' translation, "...places become their own arguments" (Ginsburg 731). He cites Cicero, who states "'Itaque licet definire locum esse argumenti sedem'" ("Therefore let us define topic as the seat [i.e., location] of an argument") (Ginsburg 732). Ginsburg further argues that this philosophical discussion gave rise to literary places which were the sites of particular arguments. The realm of the maiden in *Pearl,* for example, becomes the *locus* for a particular argument of God, and the geographical features of this landscape become parts of the argument, if they are interpreted correctly.

In *The Book of Memory,* Mary Carruthers further treats this idea of the spatial locations of arguments in terms of constructing "places" in the mind by which arguments can be remembered. Memory itself, as well as the ideas that reside in it, was considered a "place":

> ...the educational structure [is] laid out in 'topica memoriae,' 'places of memory,' appropriate to rhetoric, dialectic, poetry, and jurisprudence--this structure gathers into one place (the trained memory) everything human knowledge has gained of the world. One is not born with this structure, nor is it passively gained; one constructs it oneself during one's education. (Carruthers 33)

Like church architecture, pilgrimage layouts and even texts, the locus of memory is not a naturalistic environment. Instead it is a constructed environment, a building which is fashioned by the rememberer in the act of remembrance: "One designs and builds one's memory according to one's talent, opportunities and energy. That

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

makes it a construction, an *aedificatio"* (Carruthers 43). Exegetical interpretation was also likened to the creation of a building:

> Philo speaks of Scriptural study as being constructed like a building, and the metaphor is a common one for the method of exegesis developed during the Middle Ages, whereby one builds layers of interpretation according to allegorical, moral, and mystical senses upon the foundation of the literal. (Carruthers 43)

Thus arguments, and the memories which contain them, are locations. Furthermore, these locations are built structures rather than naturally-occurring phenomena. Like the world itself, the divinely-constructed cosmos which many medieval spatial art forms imitate, these "places" of memory are built structures which organize their contents and educate the perceiver about them, and, eventually, their creator.

## Interpretive Topography in the Works of the *Pearl*-Poet: A Summary of Existing Criticism

Critical readings of narrative space in the *Pearl* manuscript have focused for the most part on a single poem rather than examining the theme in all four. Most of these readings concentrate on *Pearl,* which features the most obvious use of symbolic space in the four poems, with its play on *spot* as both physical location and moral condition. One common factor in all of these critical examinations is that they recognize an association between perceptions of space and interpretation of texts. In reading each of the spaces in which they find themselves, the narrators of each poem discover the meaning of the created world, and ultimately their own meaning as well. These critics also acknowledge a correspondence between the degree to which the narrators recognize the extra-physical implications of various spaces and how developed their moral understandings are.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Many readers of *Pearl* (including Wendell S. Johnson, O.D. Macrae-Gibson, Cary Nelson, S. L. Clark and J. N. Wasserman, Sarah Stanbury, Douglas Thorpe and Elizabeth Petroff) focus on the image of *spot* as place, moral condition, act of perception and site of argument. Some of these readers concentrate mostly on the dichotomy between the physically and morally "spotted" dreamer and the physically and morally "spotless" maiden and their respective realms. Thorpe has commented on *spot* as perception (the act of "spotting"). Stanbury, Clark and Wasserman, Thorpe and Nelson are particularly interested in the dreamer's "spotted spotting" (or limited perception and interpretation) of the maiden's realm or "spot." Clark and Wasserman and Petroff focus on the spatial argument of the poem, namely how the maiden and the dreamer use their physical perceptions and positions to state their moral positions. Restricted to his mortal place and his mortal frame of mind, the "spotted" dreamer reads space literally. Conversely, the "spotless" maiden, unfettered from both the mortal realm and its attendant sinfulness, reads geographical features as signs of something else: a divinely-established pattern leading to salvation and enlightenment.

I have not discovered any critical articles or books which make a central issue of narrative space in *Clannesse.* In criticism of *Patience,* scholars focus on the contrast between Jonas's narrow world-view and God's infinitely broad one, as exemplified by Jonas's preference for narrow spaces and God's control over an immense cosmos. Lawrence Eldredge analyzes all three narrow spaces which Jonas inhabits (the ship, the whale and the woodbine shelter) as expressions of his limited perspective. He contrasts these spaces with God's attempts to broaden Jonas's world-view by causing the cosmos literally to break into his shelters, thereby bringing about a corresponding mental expansion on Jonas's part. Clark and Wasserman focus more specifically on the interior of the whale as a representation of Jonas's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spiritual condition. Narrow, constricting and dark, the whale's innards also describe Jonas's self-absorption and blindness to larger realities.

Criticism of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is often concerned with explorations of signifying systems, as exemplified by the shifting sign of the pentangle and its antithesis in the green girdle. Thus approaches to narrative space in *Gawain* frequently concern themselves with the production of meaning and the marginalization of the "Other" by society. For example, Catherine Batt concentrates on the idea of enclosed spaces as metaphors for limited understanding and relates this idea to the poem's narrow presentation of women. The desire to delimit and control social meaning is related to the desire to delimit and control areas of space. Other forays into narrative space in *Gawain* involve the identification and description of real places in the poem, since, while *Pearl* contains the most elaborately wrought development of symbolic space in the four poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* features the most detailed evocation of actual landscapes on the borders of England and Wales. R. W. V. Elliott's *The Gawain Country* is the most thorough investigation of these real, geographical landscapes.

At present, the only book-length study that treats the theme of narrative space in all four poems is Sarah Stanbury's book *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*. Stanbury's main concern is with the field of the narrator's vision in each poem: how the spaces of the poems are perceived through the limited sensory awareness of each narrator. This restricted field of vision is analogous to each narrator's lack of spiritual perception--his/her inability to glimpse the deeper layers of meaning beneath the surface adornment of landscapes. Stanbury contrasts the narrator's limited, partial perception of spiritual truths in physical matter with God's perception of the total design. While in each poem spatial enclosures and restricted fields of vision indicate the narrowness of human vision, the expansive spaces beyond these narrow "enclosures" of human

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

understanding remind the reader that the entire world, including the narrator of each poem, is continually in God's sight--seen and known by God. Stanbury argues that, in light of the fact that strikingly similar themes of visual perception appear in all four poems, this connection between the poems offers new evidence for the common authorship of all four. As I will discuss below, this argument is not dissimilar to my own case for the single-author theory.

My analysis of interpretive topography in the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript is in some ways dependent upon the insights of the aforementioned readers, particularly in terms of the connections which they have made between place and interpretation in each poem. My study will add several important elements to the interpretation of narrative space in the works of the *Pearl*-poet, an area which is still comparatively unexplored. First, while the foregoing studies make a connection between perceptions of places and the process of interpretation, my analysis will extend this realization by considering *movement itself* as an act of interpretation: movement through space as an analogue for linear narrative "movement" through a text and toward further understanding, or, as Campbell states, "Writing is travel" (*The Witness and the Other World* 2). The narrator's position in the cosmos of each poem is determined not simply by how he/she sees space, but also by how he/she inhabits space: how the narrator passes through, becomes entrapped by, or attempts to flee particular spaces.

Many of the critical studies mentioned above refer to constructed space in general, or as it appears specifically in the iconography of cathedrals. A second contribution of my dissertation will be an examination of how the *Pearl*-poet responds to this idea of constructed space--of the world as a book, edifice or other orderly system of interpretation which reveals facts about its creator. I include references to other medieval examples of interpretable space, such as travel narratives, Marvels of the East literature, readings of cathedral art,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

macrocosm/microcosm imagery, and so on. Thirdly, I investigate how the poems complicate and sometimes subvert the common medieval representations of sacred truths in physical and imagistic space.

For decades, critics have been arguing whether the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript are the work of a single author, or whether each poem was written by a different author and the four happened to have been bound in the same volume. This debate is far too extensive to summarize here, but suffice it to say that my readings of moralized space in the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript provide new evidence, I believe, for the premise that all four poems were written by the same author. The highly spatial vocabulary, imagery and thematic content of all four poems reveals a consistent concern with the way in which space can be read and can allow its reader to be read in turn. The fact that the poet makes repeated use of similar spatial themes, and even the same spatial vocabulary, makes it unlikely in my mind that these four poems were written by four different poets. The connections which I make between the spatial vocabulary and themes of each poem throughout each chapter of this dissertation will strengthen this argument for a single author.

## Critical Terminology and Methodology

Throughout my dissertation, I will refer to my reading of the spaces in *Pearl, Clannesse, Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a poetics and problematics of space. I have borrowed the word "problematic" from Louis Althusser, whose concept of the problematic is summarized by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle:

> The problematic of a text is the unconscious infrastructure, the forms that determine how the text will behave and can be allowed to be

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> thought. The problematic lies beneath the text, as the base of the superstructure, but it is unspoken. (Adams and Searle 238)

In my exploration of the poems of Cotton Nero A. x., I will trace how the poet's use of space to indicate a character's moral or social position becomes increasingly problematized, with reference to Althusser's definition. Adams and Searle add that "The problematic is not thought by the individual subject....We must go further than the unmentioned presence of the thoughts of a living author to the presence of his *potential thoughts....*" (Adams and Searle 238) It is impossible to determine whether the poet himself intended to question the world-view of his time and place through his use of narrative space. Instead, I posit that the spaces of the poems themselves draw the cultural codes into question. These spaces create and express a problematic by interrogating medieval Christian notions of inclusion and exclusion, saved and damned, enlightened and ignorant, impure and pure, and so on.

In moving from the critical background of my study towards my own contribution to discussions of the *Pearl*-poet's opus, I find it necessary to define the terms that I will be using throughout this study. I will refer to my approach itself interchangeably as "spatial criticism" and "topographical interpretation," namely the way in which the poet's use of space both presents and problematizes the concepts of his culture and church.

Throughout this study, I will be speaking of interpretive topography and moralized geography. By "interpretive topography" I refer to Campbell's description of medieval world maps and pilgrimage routes, Nichols' description of cathedrals and their presentation of salvation history in the form of a spatial narrative, and my own reading of the *Pearl*-poet's landscapes. Interpretive topographies are places (whether natural, built or imaginary) which can be read as they are walked through, dwelled in, or otherwise spatially experienced. The cathedral and the very land of biblical Palestine were places which taught pilgrims about the medieval Christian

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

world-view as the pilgrims gazed upon these places or strolled through them prayerfully. Similarly, the narrator of *Pearl* can learn a lesson by exploring the landscape of his dream-vision without his limiting human preconceptions.

"Moralized geography" describes how spatial imagery is used to indicate one's moral position or development. One of the most powerful and pervasive expressions of moralized geography in MS. Cotton Nero A. x. is the idea of interior and exterior spaces. In some cases, interior spaces are morally privileged, while being on the outside of some place makes one a moral and social outsider. In other cases, interior spaces are narrow, indicating a correspondent limitation of the moral perspective of the inhabitant. Most insidiously, sometimes those who inhabit interior spaces--people who are expected to protect the social and cultural order of those inside--are actually subverters of both the morals and the structure of medieval Christian society.

Finally, I find it necessary to specify that whenever I use the term "medieval," I refer to the Western European Christendom of the Middle Ages (roughly extending from the end of the Classical period to the beginning of the sixteenth century), unless otherwise indicated (for example, if I am describing the perspective of medieval European Jewry in the chapter on *Patience.)*

In my consideration of the *Pearl*-poet's use of interpretive topography, I have not relied exclusively on any one critical methodology. Instead, I intend to make use of a variety of recent critical perspectives in order to formulate my own approach to these texts, an approach which I shall call, interchangeably, "spatial criticism," "topographical interpretation," or, to paraphrase Bachelard, "the problematics of space."

According to Lori Hope Lefkovitz, one of the central tenets of structuralism and semiotics is that "in producing texts (whether verbal, visual, or other), we are always encoding our world" (Lefkovitz 60). The medieval Western European

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Christian view of the world as a vast text, in which all living beings are words that yield an understanding of the divine author, almost inevitably invites a structuralist and semiotic interpretation. This medieval world-picture is rigorously structured, almost an edifice, as is the cathedral which embodies this orderly, teleological cosmos.[11] Yurij Lotman and B.A. Uspensky could be describing this aspect of medieval culture when they state, "To a culture directed towards expression that is founded on the notion of correct designation and, in particular, correct naming, the entire world appears as a sort of text consisting of various types of signs...." (Lotman and Uspensky 414) Lotman and Uspensky explain that not only are texts produced *about* a culture, and that these texts reflect social values, but the culture itself is a text which can be interpreted. Just as von Simson describes the Gothic cathedral as a model of the medieval cosmos, cultures (here, this strain of medieval Christian thought) create models of themselves:

> The model defines the unified, the artificially schematized image, that is raised to the level of a structural unity. When imposed onto the reality of this or that culture, it exerts a powerful regulating influence, preordaining the construction of culture, introducing order, and eliminating contradiction. (Lotman and Uspensky 421)

In terms of narrative space in the poems of MS. Cotton Nero A.x., as well as in many other medieval poems, paintings and theological and historical writings, contradiction is eliminated in a particularly powerful way: by marginalizing it, placing it on the edges of the interpretive terrain. The centralization of some people and ideas and the marginalization of others is achieved by making this artificial

---

[11]My description of this particular western European Christian world-view of the Middle Ages is not intended to suggest that all medieval Christians in western Europe saw the world in such a unified, systematized way. Indeed, some scholars have argued persuasively that a unified medieval way of perceiving the world is the invention of medievalists, not actual medieval people. Instead, I suggest that this is *a* medieval world-view (rather than *the* medieval world-view), consistently expressed and reinforced in theological writings, church art and moralized geographies of the time, which other medieval people (the *Pearl*-poet among them) both confirmed and challenged.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

order appear as if it were (in the words of Jonathan Culler) "a discourse which requires no justification because it seems to derive directly from the structure of the world" (*Structuralist Poetics* 140).

In my exploration of the *Pearl*-poet's poetics and problematics of space, I thus not only read the texts of the poems themselves, but I also consider the "text" of the poet's culture as it is reflected by the poet's use of spatial imagery. Again, here my approach relies much on the concepts of structuralism and semiotics. Geoffrey Hartman asks, "...are not social systems best defined by analogy to language systems?" (Hartman 139) Roland Barthes proposes a study of all kinds of cultural signs, a field which would have its roots in the study of language: "...culture, in all its aspects, is a language. Therefore it is possible today to anticipate the creation of a single, unified science of culture, which will depend upon diverse disciplines, all devoted to analyzing...culture as language" (Barthes 157). Just as the culture which informs and permeates the texts of the *Pearl*-poet's corpus can be in turn viewed as a text, in all four poems the landscape is a text which is interpreted by the narrator and/or protagonist. The texts of the poet's culture can be read in the spaces of the poem, and how these spaces respond to, embody or reject the texts of the poet's culture is a primary consideration of my study.

In viewing the poet's culture as a kind of text or language which underlies his own poetic text, the concept of intertextuality will be an important tool for my analysis. As Julia Kristeva has expressed the issue, "the concept of text as ideologeme determines the very procedure of a semiotics that, by studying the text as intertextuality, considers it as such within (the text of) society and history" (Kristeva 37). Culler elaborates on this definition:

> Intertextuality...becomes less a name for a work's relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive spaces of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. *(The Pursuit of Signs* 103)

The various texts which will have a bearing on my analysis of interpretive topography in MS. Cotton Nero A. x. will be both other literary texts (including pilgrimage accounts, travel literature, "Marvels of the East" material, bestiaries, *mappaemundi* and exegetical texts, as well as such essential sources as the Vulgate Bible) and cultural (i.e., non-literary) texts. These latter will include medieval cathedrals and their art, other forms of visual arts with allegorical themes, the architecture and spatial arrangement of medieval cities, and the texts of medieval Christian culture itself, with all its values and mores encoded in what to some medievalists seems a unified, hierarchical world picture.

Another methodological approach, essential to structural and semiotic criticism, which will be incorporated into my approach is the concept of binary opposition in cultural structures and texts. Culler encapsulates this idea: "...the relations that are most important in structural analysis are...binary oppositions" *(Structuralist Poetics* 14). He continues, "Structuralists have generally followed Jakobson and taken the binary opposition as a fundamental operation of the human mind basic to the production of meaning" *(Structuralist Poetics* 15). According to Harold W. Scheffler, the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss pursues this idea even farther:

> This principle, he assumes, is not only that which orders human thought processes, it is that which orders all of nature: man's mind and nature have the same structure. Lévi-Strauss' procedure is to search out all binary oppositions relevant to one another in a particular cultural system. (Scheffler 65)

Lévi-Strauss himself formulates his binary approach in *The Raw and the Cooked:*

> The aim of this book is to show how certain categorical opposites drawn from everyday experience with the most basic sorts of things--e.g. "raw" and "cooked," "fresh" and "rotten," "moist" and "parched,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and others--can serve a people as conceptual tools for the formulation of abstract notions and for combining these into propositions. ( Lévi-Strauss 31)

The question of whether binary oppositions are inherent to the human mind, human culture or nature itself is beyond the scope of this study. (I am inclined to think that they are cultural productions, not natural features, and I am also aware that theories of binary oppositions have recently been subjected to convincing critical scrutiny.) However, I find that binary oppositions offer a helpful approach towards both the culture of the *Pearl*-poet and the poet's own use of space. Binary oppositions are an integral part of the hierarchical universe which is a typical (though not entirely universal) aspect of medieval Christian theological texts, and were even considered to have a divine origin, as Lefkovitz asserts in her structuralist interpretation of the first three chapters of Genesis: "These oppositions [in Genesis 1-3], light and dark, heaven and earth, and so on, organize the chaos as God creates a system of classification that makes sense of nonsense by *mapping the world"* (Lefkovitz 72; emphasis mine). She adds, paraphrasing Ferdinand de Saussure, "...meaning is determined on the basis of where difference is perceived. Further, where there is difference, there is hierarchy" (Lefkovitz 72). While Lefkovitz applies her interpretation to the biblical text itself, her observations can also be extended to the medieval Christian world-picture that I have described above, which was derived in part from medieval interpretations of the Bible. Not only do the binary distinctions articulated by the Bible and identified by Lefkovitz take on the semblance of the natural order of things (as Culler had indicated earlier), but these differences were viewed by many medieval people as divine in origin--differences instituted by God.

A central focus of my discussion of the MS. Cotton Nero A. x. poems is this description of a particular medieval symbolic cosmos as an imagined divine order composed of binary oppositions: inside/outside, saved/damned, central/marginal,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

male/female, clean/unclean, etc. The *Pearl*-poet often expresses these oppositions spatially. Most obvious is his association of the saved and the damned with interior and exterior spaces, respectively. More subtle is the connection between narrow spaces and narrow minds, as opposed to enormous spaces and broad perspectives, and the general association between how one perceives space and one's correspondent advancement in terms of moral understanding. Sometimes particular individuals or groups inhabit particular places: sinners outside of the celestial Jerusalem and the saved inside in *Pearl;* the Sodomites outside of Lot's house and the angels inside with Lot's family in *Clannesse;* Jonas in Judea and the Ninevites outside of both that land and Jonas's perceptions of who is worthy of salvation in *Patience;* and men both outside and inside with women remaining inside in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* In all four poems, space is often used as a mechanism of differentiation and binary distinction.

The last essential concept which I have appropriated from semiotics and structuralism is de Saussure's view of difference as the source of meaning. According to de Saussure (here paraphrased by Lefkovitz), "meaning is located where difference is perceived" (Lefkovitz 62). De Saussure states that

> the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can say: the linguistic sign is arbitrary. (de Saussure 72)

Thus, according to de Saussure's approach, the English word "cat" has no intrinsic relationship to the furry, purring animal--an error of which many medieval sign theorists were guilty, incidentally. Instead, the word "cat" is differentiated from "cot" because one letter is changed and, naturally, the two are different entities. Hence, for de Saussure, meaning is located in the difference between words, parts of words and things themselves.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the *Pearl*-poet's opus, difference takes place in the spatial grammar of the poems as well as in the linguistic one. Landscapes often appear as the agents of opposition and differentiation, drawing distinctions between the saved and damned, central and marginal, included and excluded, flawed and perfect. This use of space as an agent of meaning through differentiation is an important focus of my study. This concept of space as the agent of difference also leads me to the second major source of my methodology: ethnography and studies of the spatial and cultural "Other."

The critic Edward Said has devoted much of his scholarly attention to this subject, particularly to the way in which Europeans have constructed an African, Asian and Middle Eastern "Other" against whom to compare themselves favorably. Said argues that an integral part of cultural self-definition is a distinction of one's own culture from another culture, a distinction which usually presupposes the superiority of one's own culture and the inferiority of the other culture:

> ....the dialectic of self-fortification and self-confirmation by which culture achieves its hegemony over society and the state is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of self from what it believes to be not itself. And this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the Other. (Said 611)

This process of cultural self-definition through creating an inferior "Other" appears in each of the *Pearl*-poet's works. In *Pearl,* the sinful human being in general becomes this Other, whereas in the succeeding poems, the Other takes on more specific cultural identities: sexual "deviants" and non-Jewish or -Christian cultures in *Clannesse;* non-Jewish Ninevites (and, more subtly, Jews) in *Patience;* women and otherworldly beings in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

As I have mentioned above, spatial distinctions are a means by which the *Pearl*-poet separates various "Others" from the chosen. Said argues that in the larger European culture, and all other cultures which rely upon distinguishing

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

themselves from others to reinforce their own identity, spatial terms are often used for social distinctions. The dominant culture is "designated as inside, in place, common, belonging, in a word *above,*" whereas the Other is "outside, excluded, aberrant, inferior, in a word *below*" (Said 612). The *Pearl*-poet's poetics of space is a powerful exemplar of this phenomenon. Who inhabits what kind of space and how one perceives space indicate both one's level of spiritual attainment and one's position in the social cosmos which underlies each poem.

A number of scholars have applied Said's insights about the social and cultural Other to medieval art and culture, and I am indebted to their insights in formulating my own perspective on the *Pearl*-poet's corpus. In particular, John Block Friedman discusses the placement of the so-called "monstrous races" on the edge of medieval world-maps, a geographical illustration of the need to banish the disorderly, deformed and disruptive to the edges of an orderly, symmetrical and lawful universe. Michael Camille connects the margins of medieval geography to the margins of medieval art, namely the edges of manuscripts and the inaccessible parts of cathedrals, where the outcasts are banished from the center of the manuscript, the cathedral, or society itself.

Scholars of the medieval margin dispute the nature of the confinement of these grotesque others. Following in the critical footsteps of Bhaktin and his idea of the carnivalesque, Mary Campbell insists that the margins allow the free play of the malformed Others, for in the margins they are incapable of affecting the protected center: "Like the medieval manuscript and the medieval cathedral, the world itself has a margin, where the grotesque is free to frolic because it is perceived as somehow inherently beyond the power (or beneath the attention) of any integrative force." She then states more forcefully, "Once firmly located in a margin, the grotesque poses little threat to the cultural order. It *need* not be integrated" *(Witness* 82).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Camille expresses doubts that the medieval world was safe from marginal elements. In his discussion of medieval manuscripts, he observes how marginal art does not just play docilely on the edges, leaving the text in peace, but instead actively questions and parodies the text which it surrounds--and thus in a sense decenters it. In both art and life, the marginal was considered a constant threat, as evinced by persecutions of heretics and wars with Muslim peoples over the ownership of the Holy Land. In the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript, I find a constant fear of marginal threats, especially (and most ironically) from within the center itself. The Other is always frighteningly close, and, in the case of the narrator of *Pearl* (who can stand for any flawed mortal), the Other is ourselves.

Though much of the poet's concern with cultural Others involves simply dividing the included from the excluded, his poems demonstrate an appropriation of space which presages developments of post-medieval European history, namely the invasion, conquest and exploitation of Africa and the Americas. Here I will be relying on both recent material concerning the notions of empire and hegemony (such as Said's work) and medieval texts, like the Marvels of the East material, *The Letter of Prester John, The Book of John Mandeville* and the account of Marco Polo's travels to the Far East. Campbell writes that, in depictions of Alexander the Great's eastern travels, conquest is an important motif: "Alexander is the great hero of early European travel literature, and his role as *tamer* of the East is important" *(The Witness and the Other World* 68). I use this material to examine how the *Pearl*-poems reflect medieval approaches towards conquest of other nations and how these perspectives foreshadow the post-medieval beginnings of European colonialism.

The chapters of my study follow the order in which the poems appear in the manuscript. In Chapter I, "'Wythouten Spot': Mismapping and Misreading in *Pearl,*" I focus on the various physical settings of the poem and the philosophical

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

perspectives which the poem's main characters (the dreamer and the maiden) derive from exploring these landscapes. At different points, I examine these geographies both in terms of their philosophical implications (for example, how they express eternal truths) and their sources in medieval travel narratives and biblical exegesis. In addition to this more philosophical approach to literary geography, I am intrigued by how the fictional dreamer's mode of exploring otherworldly landscapes presents a theme which is further developed in the other three poems--that of invading another land or a private space, with all of its connotations of colonialism, imperialism and exploitation. The poems after *Pearl* are filled with invaders: for example, Nabugodenozar's forces, who demolish Jerusalem in *Clannesse*, a poem which also ends with the Medes and Persians who invade Baltazar's kingdom. The legendary city-founders in the introductory lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome/Welne3e of al þe wele in þe west iles" (6-7). This approach to other lands as territory to invade and acquire appears in other Middle English poems and prose and ultimately presages colonizing attitudes expressed by Europeans towards other lands after Columbus' voyage.

This exploitative approach to the Pearl-Maiden's realm also has relevance to the dreamer's approach to the maiden herself as a woman (or girl). Invaders of the "New World" frequently characterized the conquered territory as a virgin female body which they "deflowered" (i.e., raped and annexed), and the dreamer's approach to the maiden's space is extended to her body. I discuss this connection between female bodies and terrain as legible and conquerable spaces, both in terms of the land as an extension of the maiden's body and as an extension of the body of Christ, whose ever-flowing wounds produce a stream analogous to the body of water which flows through the landscape and divides the dreamer from the maiden. This image of fructifying water evokes a rich language of liquidity and fecundity closely allied to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the female experiences of lactation and menstruation. The work of Caroline Walker Bynum, Elizabeth Robertson, Laurie Fink and Karma Lochrie have proven helpful to me in examining medieval imagery of the female body, particularly in the writings of female mystics, and of Christ's body as "feminized" in the writings of these women. My analysis of this aspect of *Pearl* also has implications for my later reading of *Sir Gawain on the Green Knight,* a central focus of which is women's spatial and social marginalization and containment.

In Chapter II, "On the Margins of the Wor(l)d: Enclosure, Exclusion and Explication in *Clannesse,*" I begin by examining how *Clannesse* both extends *Pearl*'s themes of interpretive topography as perceived by a narrator and contrasts with the vision of interpretive space that *Pearl* presents. While *Pearl* focuses on forward or upward motion as an analogue for narrative progress and potential spiritual growth on the part of the narrator, *Clannesse* concentrates on static spatial images of enclosure and exclusion, which represent moral conditions. The exploration of the dreamer's desire to invade sacred space in *Pearl* is presented in greater detail in *Clannesse.* Indeed, the poem is fraught with the fear of invasion of enclosed spaces--bodies, sacramental enclosures or vessels, cities and houses--from outside. These feared invaders are people who inhabit the margins of the medieval Christian world-view, often transgressors of a sexual kind or individuals who threaten accepted social hierarchies and/or the church's doctrines, rituals and sacramental objects. The marginal nature of these people and their supposed rejection by God are expressed by means of their physical placement at the margins of the world as well as the text. While those who have earned God's favor take shelter inside various enclosures, the damned, marginalized people are forced to remain outside.

In this chapter, I investigate the way in which the poet creates a spatialized morality of center and margin in *Clannesse.* Initially, the morally acceptable characters are enclosed within protective spaces and the morally reprehensible ones

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

are excluded from these spaces, despite their efforts to invade these enclosures. Yet this inside/outside model of the world becomes problematized as the categories gradually blur between the included and the excluded, starting with the clearly-defined, inside/outside opposition of Noah's family safe in the ark and the condemned sinners drowning outside, through the more ambiguous presentation of the Sodomites (excluded from Lot's house--and the bodies of his guests--but still enclosed within a city) and Lot (whose own behavior is questionable), to the last episode, which eventually yields a completely reversed picture of the original paradigm. In this last episode, the condemned are inside an enclosure and the divinely favored enter forcibly from the outside, subsequently violating the bodily integrity of Baltazar, who had earlier transgressed against the "enclosures" of the temple's sacred vessels. Here it is the divinely favored invaders who embody the fear of spatial, physical, sexual or sacramental assault which is expressed throughout the poem.

Finally, I consider the use which *Clannesse* makes of images of the world as a text. In *Pearl,* the reader is presented with the "spotless spot" of a heavenly realm, where error arises from a sinful reader's misinterpretations rather than from the land itself. In *Clannesse,* however, the poet makes use of images of books which have been damaged or destroyed, as well as lands which bear the marks of the sins which had been committed upon them. One can "read" these lands and discover what misdeeds had been done upon their soil. Throughout this chapter, I will investigate how the land itself becomes a "book" of warnings against transgressions, its bruised topography cautioning readers against repeating the sins of their forebears.

While at the outset *Clannesse* portrays enclosures in a largely positive sense (as spaces which protect and isolate the saved from the spatial and spiritual contamination of the damned), *Patience* consistently presents narrow, confined

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spaces as metaphors for the limited, circumscribed perspectives of unredeemed human beings. In opposition to these narrow spaces and their complementary restrictions of understanding are open spaces, representative of both the wider world outside of the confining spaces and the unlimited perspective of God. In Chapter III, "In 'Termes of Judé': Confining Spaces and the Borders of Understanding in *Patience,* I trace Jonas's spiritual development through his reluctant journey to Nineveh and the various spaces which he inhabits, whether in accordance with or against his will.

I am primarily interested in how two locative words which inform the spatial thesis of the poem--*poynt* and *termes*--express both spatial ideas and moral progress. The *poynt* which appears at the beginning and end of the poem in reference to patience itself, and which recurs throughout, is both a "point" in space and a "point" in an argument. The various points on Jonas's journey act as individual points in an argument by God. Jonas's limited cosmic awareness is also expressed by the phrase "termes of Judé." He has never physically left the borders of his land, and he is simultaneously unable to leave the mental and cultural "borders" of his home. While God shows concern for the Ninevites despite the fact that they do not belong in the geographical or symbolic "termes of Judé," Jonas does not wish to help them to repent because they belong to another culture, one whose violence and criminality he fears. He also avoids contact with the Ninevites because they are not Jews, the Chosen People, and thus Jonas cannot comprehend why God would wish to deliver them.

But the "termes of Judé" which limit Jonas are not merely an expression of the universally limiting human condition. In addition, they express medieval Christian cultural biases. Jonas's continuing ignorance and stubbornness, his preference for narrow spaces and narrow concepts, is also a portrayal of the limitations of the Jewish faith in the eyes of Christian thinkers. Jews were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

represented as stubborn, rebellious individuals who, like Jonas, deliberately turn their backs upon repeated offers of a broader perspective, perversely preferring narrow, enclosed spaces of belief to the expansive cosmos of Christianity.

It is perplexing that, in a poem in which the poet and God appear so anxious to expand Jonas's literal and metaphysical horizons by using space to teach him of his own limitations and God's limitless love, God ends up reinstating some of the limiting *termes* of the poet's own age. While the redemption of the non-Hebrew Ninevites is an example of God's concern for those outside of Jonas's *termes,* the Ninevites may be acceptable "Others" to the poem's audience because they foreshadow God's extension of the *termes* of salvation to non-Jews through Christ's ministry. This extension of divine concern to the Ninevites might also have been perceived as a foreshadowing of the eventual exclusion of the Jews from those very *termes* of salvation by Christian interpreters. However, certain "Others" remain "Others": particularly women, who are portrayed as innocent of premeditated evildoing by reason of their supposed ignorance and lack of intelligence, not because they are exempt from the sinful condition of their male counterparts. While Jonas is chided for the narrowness of his *termes,* at the end of the poem God's perspective is just as limited.

In my last chapter, Chapter IV, "Pentangles and Entanglements: The Colonization of Space and Meaning in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,"* I address the issues of how society "colonizes" meaning as well as space by establishing enclosed areas of social control and intricate protocol; how the "knots" or bindings of the poem reproduce these social structures as well as the spaces which enclose them; how marginal elements, beings and messages which come from outside of Camelot's comfortable enclosure, are absorbed into the "text" created by the court and transformed from subversive elements to part of the orderly narrative of the Arthurian legend, a "stori stif and stronge/With lel letteres loken" (34-35); and,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

finally, gender issues which the poem addresses in terms of enclosed and limiting spaces.

A consistent pattern in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the socially encoding function of walled or enclosed spaces. While the activities which go on inside Arthur's court serve to create Gawain's initial sense of himself as a knight, the court of Bertilak serves as their testing-ground. In this chapter, I consider how each of the enclosed spaces of the castle both ostensibly protect their tenants from harm (as do the social customs of the court) and at the same time entrap their inhabitants and lure them into transgressions. I also examine the poem's repeated imagery of binding, whether in the form of covenants, laces, ties and knots on clothing, or interlocked symbols like the pentangle, which expresses both the intricate "texts" which aristocratic society creates in order to define and protect itself, and the enclosed spaces in which these texts are enacted as social rituals, such as the games and entertainments of both courts. While in Camelot, the bonds of social interaction are tied, at Hautdesert they are untied in order to examine the entire structure of bestowing meaning through social codes--paradoxically, through the very "ties" which society has established. Camelot, on the other hand, manages to regain the power to bestow meaning and to exert social control by incorporating the marginal and disruptive into its overarching spatial and cultural "enclosure." At the beginning of the poem, it does so by making the Green Knight's uncanny appearance a part of their Christmas feasting rituals and transforming it into a story, and at the end, it reintegrates the potentially disruptive girdle into society by declaring that everyone in the court will wear one.

In*Gawain*, the impulse to create closed-in spaces, which are controlled by courtly mores and practices, parallels a tendency to exert control over people and their roles or meanings in that society, particularly women's identities and roles. In contrast to Gawain's physical mobility and his concurrent ability to change his

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

definition of himself in response to his trials, the women of the poem (specifically Guinevere and Bertilak's wife) are both incapable of leaving their castles (and thus are incapable of existing outside of their society, by which they are totally defined) and are "put in their places" by Gawain, ironically after he makes new discoveries about his own identity. However, in an intriguing contrast to Guinevere and Bertilak's wife, Morgan Le Faye exhibits a truly subversive power. While she is "at home" (2463) and does not directly influence events by leaving her castle, she is able to threaten both Gawain's personal integrity and Arthur's court itself. Therefore, despite society's attempts to contain it, there is an undertext of potentially disruptive female power in the poem which can overthrow the court, the arbiter of social meaning, itself. Morgan le Faye embodies the fear of invasion which so haunts *Clannesse,* which now becomes in this poem the fear of the destruction of the social order that creates meaning. When Gawain frustrates Morgan's designs, he restores the order which she has threatened--if only to threaten it again with his own discovery about his human "spottedness" and the court's own role in his crisis of conscience by causing him to adhere to the mutually exclusive chivalric and Christian codes.

I also investigate two other aspects of the association between social constructions (particularly gender constructions) and spatial concepts in the poem: the threats leveled at medieval gender roles by Gawain's potentially homoerotic relationship with Bertilak and Gawain's own "feminization" in Hautdesert. In connection with the first theme, I analyze how the poet has excluded homosexual, homosocial and homoerotic relationships as a possibility from the spatial and social world of the poem--a possibility only subtly revealed in the sensual kisses which Gawain passes on from the Lady to Bertilak. Gawain also becomes "feminized" in the poem when, at Hautdesert, he inhabits the narrow spaces usually assigned to women in the poem. Here, the Lady pursues him aggressively, as a man might

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pursue a lady according to the codes of courtly love. In fact, her pursuit of him has overtones of penetration, such as when she sneaks into a succession of concentric spaces in which Gawain takes refuge (his bedroom, his curtained bed itself, and finally his "locked" eyelids). She also reverses their roles by gazing at Gawain first: he is the object of her desire rather than vice versa. Gawain's disarming upon arrival at Hautdesert includes having his armor replaced by soft, flowing clothing, and in descriptions of his elegant dress, the poet dwells on his physical attractiveness, the altering of his identity from the active performer of knightly deeds to the passive recipient of female gazes and aggressive female attention. When he leaves Hautdesert and once more enters the exclusively male province of the outdoors, in order to be restored to his "manly" role as a knight, Gawain must cast away the lace which symbolizes the feminine entanglements of the Lady, as well as his own abdication of his masculinity as medieval English society would define it--at least until the Green Knight redefines it as a sign of heroic (manly) deeds.

Recent work by scholars in a variety of fields has proven that reading socially-constructed spaces as one would read a literary text (and walking through a text as one might walk through a place) is an intriguing and fruitful area of critical investigation. The medieval period, with its abundant references to the world as a book, and its multitude of worlds contained within books, seems a natural place (as it were) to investigate the development of these themes. I hope that the present study will be a valuable contribution, for medieval specialists and scholars in general, to an understanding of how one Middle English writer created a poetics and problematics of space which distilled the spatial readings of his time and foreshadowed developments of spatial reading in later eras.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Chapter I:

## "Wythouten Spot": Mismapping and Misreading in *Pearl*

In the introduction to her examination of gendered space among the Marakwet of Kenya, Henrietta L. Moore contributes to the discussion among ethnologists of space as a cultural text by arguing that purposeful movement through symbolic space is analogous to the act of reading:

> ...actual bodily movement through and action in ordered space are simultaneously both action and interpretation; they are therefore intelligible as an act of reading, where reading itself is understood as conjoined decoding and interpretation. (Moore 85)

Moore suggests that in the Marakwet world-view, space is a text that people "read" by traversing it in search of, or as an expression of, cultural meaning. I contend that this concept of "reading" space is also a central aspect of the *Pearl*-poet's "poetics of space." In each of the poems, interpretive realms are traversed by protagonists who read as they walk, and who are in turn read by the reader of the poem while they are in the act of moving through these spaces. How the narrator traverses each textual terrain reveals something of his or her character and presents to the reader both correct and incorrect, complete and incomplete, methods of reading the cosmos.

In *Pearl*, the recurrent word "spot" is an indication of both one's physical position in space and one's corresponding moral condition or "position" on the path to enlightenment and salvation. Furthermore, one's "spot" can represent one's philosophical positions in a dialogue about the nature of humanity, sin, redemption and divine love. My own exploration of what I would call *Pearl*'s interpretive terrain (i.e., features of the landscapes of the poem which can be read like texts, such as the Bible) rests upon a core assumption which has been discussed in numerous critical articles and books: namely that one's "spot," or physical location, informs one's perceptions of "spots" as signifiers in a spatial text created to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reveal divine purposes. If one is "spotted," or morally flawed as a result of his or her location on the imperfect earth, one's interpretations of spatial phenomena, in otherworldly realms as well as on earth, will also be spotted. This is the case with the narrator of *Pearl,* who invariably interprets locations in the world of his dream according to his incomplete mortal perspective. In contrast, the Pearl-Maiden uses the spaces of the otherworldly realm to re-educate the dreamer. As she leads him along the banks of the land's central river, the maiden also guides him along a corresponding "path" of arguments, which should eventually permit him to cross the river after death, provided that he is able to confront his moral and intellectual limitations. Since he proves incapable of transcending these limitations while in the dream-world, God ultimately expels him from it, just as God had expelled Adam and Eve, the first sinners, from the terrestrial Paradise.

The scholarly dialogue about the word "spot" in *Pearl* begins with a discussion of "spot" as meaning both "blemish" and "place." Wendell S. Johnson has considered the image of the pearl "wythouten spot" with reference to the pearl's lack of a place (at least in a mortal world) as well as its lack of the stains of sin. He writes, "The speaker pines for the loss of 'þat pryuy perle wythouten spot'...and the idea of purity ('wythouten spot'=without blemish) is strikingly opposed to the pearl's now being in the (pearl-blemishing) ground" (Johnson 33). He concludes that the Pearl-Maiden must inhabit a spot as "wythouten spot" as she is. O. D. Macrae-Gibson agrees with Johnson's assessment: "If the pearl is 'wythouten spot', then there is the submerged implication that it cannot be found in a particular 'spot'" (Macrae-Gibson 205). However, she is not entirely placeless. While she can no longer dwell on the spotted earth because she is spiritually "wythouten spot," later the dreamer finds her in a spotless spot where he is equally out of place.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cary Nelson has taken the discussion of "spot" further by considering the earth itself not just as a location, but as a bounded space analogous to human limitations:

> The poem's use of "spot" as both "flaw" and "place" elaborates the image of our violated earthly sphere: before man was banished from it, Eden was his whole world; endless and indivisible, it *was* the human sphere. But when Adam spotted the apple, Eden itself became not simply flawed but, literally, a spot--merely a location, a bounded space. (Nelson 32)

In addition to associating the terrestrial landscape with sin, Nelson interprets "spotting" as an act of perception, thus implying that in the very act of seeing, a flawed mortal (like the narrator of *Pearl)* displays a limited perspective by merely seeing the literal, or by mistaking entirely what he or she sees. While "catching of a glimpse of something" may not have been one of the medieval English connotations of "spot,"[12] Nelson's point is nevertheless valid because the poem certainly associates the dreamer's perceptions of landscapes with his spiritual limitations. Other scholars also link the dreamer's approach to places, and his place of origin in particular, with his spiritual spottedness. According to S. L. Clark and J. N. Wasserman, the spotless perspective to which the narrator should aspire is "lack of blemish and...lack of concern with 'spot/mote', that is, with physical position, since one becomes stained with sin in the mortal world" (Clark and Wasserman 7). By remaining attached to his mortal location and mortal ways of thinking, the dreamer is stained, both physically and spiritually, by this location.

Douglas Thorpe expands Nelson's concept of spotting as an act of (primarily flawed) perception by suggesting that the reader, too, spots the narrator: "...it is the

---

[12]Three of the connotations of *spot* which were in use at the time when *Pearl* was written were "a moral stain, blot or blemish; a stigma or disgrace" (*Oxford English Dictionary* XVI. 321), "a particular place or locality" and "a small space or extent of ground" (*OED* XVI. 322). *The Oxford English Dictionary* does not include the word *spot* as a verb implying "to perceive" or "to notice" until after the *Pearl*-poet's time. *The Middle English Dictionary* does not provide a definition of *spot* as an act of visual perception because this meaning did not exist in the Middle Ages.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dreamer who is 'spotted' by us (and by the poet), that is, seen, understood, located in a fixed place, and also blemished because he is so firmly spotted, rooted in the earth and the perspective of earth" (Thorpe 41). Because the narrator is so attached to his imperfect physical place, his spotting of landscapes is ultimately incomplete. The reader of the poem, however, is manipulated by the poet into "spotting" the narrator--namely, catching him in the act of topographical misprision--and thus is enabled to avoid committing the same error.

In my own discussion of the interpretive topography[13] of *Pearl*, I initially locate myself in this "cosmos" of spatial criticism of the poem by concentrating on its various physical settings and the philosophical perspectives which the narrator and the maiden express through their interactions with each other and their interpretations of the landscape. I will assume that both the terrestrial sphere and the allegorical heavenly realm are spatial texts which both the maiden and the dreamer read, for, as Henrietta Moore observes, "Movement through and action in a spatial context may be analyzed as discourse.... [...] Movement through and action in organised space are simultaneously analogous to both speaking and reading" (Moore 82-3). I will thus begin by investigating how the respective places of the narrator and the maiden in the topography of the poem dictate what their philosophical positions and readings of the landscape will be.

However, I intend to expand upon the foundation laid by other readers of *Pearl* in four ways. (I will be doing so as these themes arise in the poem, not in the order in which I describe them here.) First, I will examine the geographies of the poem not only in terms of their philosophical and theological implications but also in terms of how they recall the vast body of medieval travel and pilgrimage literature. Medieval pilgrimage accounts and fanciful discussions of the "Marvels of

---

[13]See the Introduction for definitions of my critical terms "interpretive topography," "interpretive terrain" and "moralized geography."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the East" are an intriguing source for how medieval people interpreted terrestrial (as well as heavenly) landscapes. The "otherworld" of the narrator's dream, while it is ethereally and luminously "other," has its analogues in such diverse works as *The Book of John Mandeville, The Letter of Prester John, The Travels of Marco Polo (Divisament dou monde),* and various descriptions of the Holy Land by pilgrims, as well as visions of heaven by medieval mystics. While the philosophical implications of the otherworld in *Pearl* have received ample attention, comparatively little attention has been paid to the relationship of the description of this heavenly realm in *Pearl* to contemporary depictions of actual landscapes and fictions of exotic Oriental places reputedly as jewel-studded as the Pearl-maiden's realm.

Second, I am intrigued by how the fictional dreamer's mode of exploring otherworldly landscapes presents a theme which recurs and is further developed in the three other poems of the *Pearl* manuscript--a theme of invading another land or private space, with all of its connotations of colonialism, imperialism and exploitation. The *Pearl*-poet's other poems are replete with invaders: for example, Nebuchadnezzar's forces, who demolish Jerusalem in *Clannesse,* which ends with the Medes and Persians invading Baltazar's kingdom. The legendary city-founders in the introductory lines of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "siþen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome/welne3e of al þe wele in þe west iles...." (6-7). This approach to other lands as territory to acquire ultimately presages certain colonizing attitudes expressed by Europeans towards other lands after Columbus' "discovery" of America.

The *Pearl*-poet's own perspective on the morality of invading landscapes is highly ambiguous. In the later poems, there are both evil and good invaders. However, in *Pearl* the poet condemns this pre-imperialistic mindset.[14] The

[14]The poet does not condemn the dreamer's proposed invasion of the maiden's land because invasion

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dreamer of *Pearl* views the maiden's jewel-covered landscape from both his general "spot" as a sin-stained mortal and his particular position as a jeweller, hence his continual impulse to appropriate features and residents of this landscape. He consistently interprets people and places in the otherworld as objects to acquire or invade, respectively, not as metaphors which point beyond themselves toward divine meanings. Though this tendency to look at the shining surface of places and people is perhaps an outgrowth of his self-described profession as a jeweller, as well as a more general expression of human interpretive limitations,[15] the dreamer's impulse either to take the Pearl-Maiden back home with him or to invade her land is eerily prescient of the post-Columbian attitude towards what would become for Europeans an exploitable otherworld.

This observation leads me to my third area of investigation: the constant association in all four poems (but beginning with *Pearl)* between women and territory, both being regarded as objects of conquest and exploitation. In his examination of medieval misogyny, R. Howard Bloch comments on the connection made between literary texts and women by patristic and medieval exegetes, who regarded both as excessively ornamental and deceptive because they are both fictional--the literary text because it is a product of the imagination rather than

---

itself is wrong. Instead, he denounces the dreamer's actions because God had not approved of this particular invasion. On the other hand, the poet and other contemporary writers believed that invading another land was appropriate, even encouraged, if God favored it. In *Clannesse*, the poet portrays the invasion of Judea by Nabugodenosar as an appropriate punishment for the Hebrews' transgressions (though his description of the victims is sympathetic, rendering his approval somewhat problematic.) A closer parallel (in terms of invasion figured specifically as a river-crossing) is the Hebrews' invasion of Canaan by means of crossing the River Jordan. Far from being viewed as transgressive, this river-crossing was held to be an antetype of baptism, and the entrance into the promised land of Canaan prefigured the eventual entrance of Christians into the "promised land" of heaven.

[15]Douglas Thorpe asserts that the dreamer's profession is partly responsible for his narrow-minded focus on acquisition and ownership: "The fact that he is (at least imaginatively) a jeweler and possessor of pearls is precisely his problem" (Thorpe 47). Later in the poem, the poet presents Christ as the divine Jewel (whom, interestingly enough, the dreamer has displaced with the maiden at the center of his affections).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

history or biography, and the woman as a decorated, deceiving artifice analogous to the fictional (and false) literary text. Bloch argues, "...misogyny in our culture [and medieval culture] consists of a series of specific associations between the esthetic and the feminine, which in essence turns woman into a text to be read, and thus to be appropriated" (Bloch 47).

This is precisely how the narrator of *Pearl* treats both the maiden and the landscape. First he tries to appropriate the maiden by insisting that she is his and, now that he has found her (and "read" her as his child or jewel on earth), he will bring her back with him to his earthly "spot." When this attempt fails, he tries to invade her land, reasoning that if he cannot have the maiden on earth, he can have her in heaven. Finally, when the maiden insists that God will not permit either possibility, the narrator tries to undermine her authority as a speaker by insisting that she does not qualify for heavenly queenship, having died at too young an age to have merited this position. Throughout their debate, the dreamer tries to take control by misinterpreting her discourse--and, by extension, God's--by adapting it to his own acquisitive and invasive purposes. While, as Kevin Marti suggests, "the body of the pearl-shaped text [is] itself an analogue and extension of the body of the maiden named Pearl" (Marti 90), the dreamer tries to take hold of the text of her arguments in order to take hold of her body and her land as well. It is not concidental, I believe, that the landscape which the dreamer wants to inhabit is the dwelling-place of a woman, that, in addition, the desired object is herself a woman whom the narrator consistently objectifies, and that the discourse which the dreamer attempts to undermine and distort for his own purposes is a woman's discourse (though ostensibly she merely articulates the words of a presumably male God). This conflation of the invasion of land, language and woman reappears in the other three texts, as does the idea of moralized geography itself.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Finally, a work so concerned with "spot" as physicality as well as moral blemish yields fruitful contributions toward the discussion of medieval body theory. I will provide a background to this aspect of "spottedness" in *Pearl* by discussing contemporary theological perspectives on embodiedness, bodily decay, reassemblage and resurrection, and medieval views of the female body, to which the body of the Pearl-Maiden is frequently opposed. Whereas she is pure and "wythouten spot" in a physical as well as a spiritual sense, the pre-resurrection female body was often seen as the epitome of spottedness, penetrability and decay. In this area of speculation, I am indebted to Caroline Walker Bynum's exhaustive treatment of medieval body theory, medieval visions of the female body, and resurrected bodies of both genders, concepts which I will discuss in more detail as they arise in the poem.

This discussion of medieval perspectives on the body, as represented in *Pearl*, is not unconnected with the images of interpretive topography in the poem. The land in which the dreamer finds himself is not only a land filled with female figures (the brides of Christ--some of whom were male in their life on earth, a fact which the poet does not mention directly), but is also a land which bears characteristics of the female body as it was perceived by medieval thinkers. The central geographical feature of the poem, the river which separates the dreamer from the maiden, issues from the throne of Christ in the center of the heavenly city. While the poet does not make a direct connection between the river and the wound in Christ's side, the wound, like the river, constantly flows, making his body seem as passable and penetrable as a woman's body was supposed to be. This flow evokes imagery of menstrual blood and milk, both exuded by the bodies of women. Indeed, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century paintings, as Bynum has observed, Christ's bleeding side is often iconographically linked to Mary's breast as a source of physical and spiritual nourishment (*Resurrection* 111, 114-5, 208; *Holy Feast* 249, 270-1). I find it intriguing that the land which the dreamer wishes to penetrate is also

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

symbolically linked to attributes of women's bodies as some medieval people saw them, much as the land which later European conquerors invaded was portrayed as a female body. I will discuss these images of lactation and menstruation in connection with stanza-group XIX.

These images of the body as penetrable, open and exuding life-nourishing fluids are also juxtaposed with images of the closed, crystalline, impassable body which Bynum describes as a common medieval representation of the bodies of the resurrected dead. In heaven, the maiden whom the dreamer strives to repossess has been given a shining, jewel-hard, perfected body more whole and unblemished than an earthly pearl--and as impenetrable by decay or desire. The realm which he tries to invade is also as hard, gemlike and enclosed as the maiden's body. For all the feminine associations of the river with open, nurturing, fluid-discharging female bodies, the dreamer finds the land closed to him, for he cannot cross the river and enter the land until he becomes worthy. Finally, though he tries to assail the arguments of the maiden with a combination of emotional pleas and faulty earthbound logic, the maiden's arguments remain as closed and perfect and unconquerable as her body and the "body" of the land. As I explore the polyvalent interpretable terrain of the poem, I will also investigate these juxtapositions of two distinct medieval imaginings of the body, and the art, visionary literature and scientific treatises which discuss these issues in the *Pearl*-poet's time.

Perle plesaunte to prynces paye
To clanly clos in golde so clere:
Oute of oryent, I hardyly say,
Ne proued I neuer her precios pere.
So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
So smal, so smoþe her sydez were;
Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye,
I sette hyr sengeley in synglure. (1-8)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The first lines of *Pearl* encapsulate--as if in the "enclosure" of gold in which line 2 fixes the pearl--the themes of location, loss and corruption which will develop through the course of the dreamer's search for his lost gem. The opening lines "set" the pearl, both in words (which define her as a beautiful, perfect object) and in space (in the flawless golden setting arranged by the jeweller). She is also set in a precise location in terms of her geographical origin: "oute of oryent," the very jewel-realm whose descriptions in contemporary travel writings the poet echoes in his later presentation of the heavenly otherworld which the narrator visits in his dream-vision, particularly in the second stanza-group. Yet her precise location also belies the dreamer's inability to grasp her in other ways. Soon he loses her to the "pearl-blemishing ground" (Johnson 33), and he also loses her metaphorically because he is unable to comprehend her true spotlessness, only recognizing her physical flawlessness, an error of perception which he demonstrates during his journey in search of her later on. In these first lines, the narrator creates a tidy, enclosing universe for the pearl, setting her both in a golden frame and in the idealized "space" of his adulation of her perfect features. His framing of the pearl establishes a sense of poetic closure and harmony. In addition, it indicates his desire to place the pearl in a "setting" where he can possess as well as admire her. However, her sudden escape from the confines of this setting foreshadows the dreamer's inability either to comprehend the new place which the transfigured pearl occupies in heaven, or to bring her back to his limited setting once death has allowed her to transcend it.

Though lines 1-8 might seem like an innocuous paean to a perfect gem, critics have noted that even in these initial presentations of the pearl lie the first evidence of the dreamer's ability to mis-set her: to misinterpret her true spiritual placement and thus her very nature. S. L. Clark and J. N. Wasserman state that "The jeweler's expectations concerning enclosure and singularity stem from a preoccupation with

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

precise physical placement, so that he attempts to fix the pearl in 'þat spot'...." (Clark and Wasserman 3). They argue that the dreamer's acquisitive desire to clutch his pearl is connected inextricably to his need for "precise physical placement" in the spatial world. Indeed, the dreamer's mortal (and professional) tendency to want to set the pearl in a gold frame, as well as its (her) evasion of such spatial restriction, end up "setting" him more than they do her. These lines establish his position in a restricted mortal space, a place where he can consider only the physical properties of things and their comparative monetary value.

What Clark and Wasserman do not mention is his suggestive elision from identifying the pearl as a thing to identifying her as a "she" whose "smoþe syde3" may refer to a shapely female body as well as a pearl's round shape.[16] This problematic connection between a valuable object and a beautiful woman will also be developed further in the poem as the dreamer attempts to re-set "his" Pearl-Maiden physically, by forcing her to come back with him or invading her realm, and mentally, by circumscribing her to the role of the young child who she had been in his own mortal space, or by assigning her the narrowly-defined role of a romance heroine. The pearl's identity as a "perle of oryente" is especially interesting also in terms of her relationship to the exoticized (and sometimes eroticized)[17] eastern territories which contemporaries of the poet were mapping and describing (even if more in their imaginations than according to real observation) and those lands

---

[16]Andrew and Waldron comment, "These lines clearly anticipate the identification of the pearl with the Maiden.... The poet draws on stock epithets used in courtly literature to describe beautiful women (cf., for instance, Chaucer, *Troilus* III. 1248)" (Andrew and Waldron 53).

[17]Descriptions of "alien" Eastern lands also include descriptions of the local women and the unfamiliar marriage customs of the realm, which are ostensibly condemned if they involve promiscuity or "wife-swapping," but these descriptions seem also to reveal a prurient curiosity about hidden matters of both the land and the supposedly freer sexuality of those who dwell there. For example, see Marco Polo's descriptions of the sexual practices of the inhabitants of Eastern lands in his *Travels*. Though the following list of references is not exhaustive, the reader may discover "deviant" sexual practices in Yarkand (where travellers' spouses may take a new spouse after the first one has been gone from home for over twenty days; 82), Kamul (where hospitality extends to offering one's wife to a guest; 88) and Tibet (where women are expected to have had many lovers before marrying, the more the better; 172-3).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which were the object of struggles like the Crusades--specifically the city of Jerusalem itself, which pilgrims like Daniel the Abbot (twelfth century) describe in the same splendid, bejewelled terms as explorers like Marco Polo described Eastern lands. These decorative, opulent, exotic lands of the east, as dazzlingly ornamental as women themselves were seen by many medieval male commentators, become objects of desire not only to the dreamer of *Pearl* (in the form of the heavenly realm where he rediscovers the maiden), but to conquerors and rulers of the time, as the similarly "exotic" and presumably gold-rich "New World" would seem to imperialistic invaders a century in the future.

It is not until the dreamer states "Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;/Þur3 gresse to grounde hit fro me yot" (9-10) that the dreamer's stanza of praise becomes a lament for a lost pearl. The dreamer had attempted to locate the pearl, both in language and in a jewel's setting, so that it (she) cannot be lost, but this line reveals the futility of his attempt to enclose the pearl, either in speech or in space. The dreamer's sorrow, like the pearl itself, leaps out of the attempt of the previous eight lines to "set" the pearl and establish its worth, introducing a human flaw into the idealized jeweler's universe delineated in the opening lines. The pearl's setting is now no longer an ornate frame of gold, but the "gresse" and "grounde" of the grave which the narrator mournfully contemplates.

The linking word of this first stanza-group (1-61) is "spot," the word from which the poem's entire paradigm of spatialized morality is derived. Douglas Thorpe reads the link-words, which are one of the identifying features of the poem's complex structure, in a spatial manner, analogous to the thread which guides one through the paths of a labyrinth:

> Yet at the same time...this [verbal] play is also a journey. We move through the dialogue, taking up themes or words that lead as if inevitably into other themes and words, with the linking words

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> themselves functioning like a thread that guides us through the labyrinth (Thorpe 50).

However, though the reader might move forward to a greater understanding as the link-words lead him or her through the text, here the dreamer does not travel forward in terms of his spiritual understanding but instead remains spiritually stationary, morbidly focusing on "spots": the site of the loss of the pearl (her grave, on which funereary spice-plants grow in lines 25-36) and the stains of decay which he imagines to be appearing on her "smoþe sydez" (22-4). Sarah Stanbury writes that the enclosed garden is a fitting location for the dreamer, who is similarly "enclosed" in his own limited perspective:

> ...the narrator immediately establishes that the garden is a circumscribed space in which he is the central figure. This enclosed space serves as both the locus of the jeweler's spiritual change and as a metaphor for spiritual stasis. The narrator at the first encloses his own troubled spirit within an enclosed garden, mourning the loss of a tiny pearl that paradoxically seems to enclose or subsume both the emotional and the physical space of the poem. (Stanbury 17)

Kevin Marti contrasts the dreamer's spiritual and physical confinement to one "spot" with the maiden's actual existence in many places at once: "The dreamer errs in mourning his pearl's confinement to a single location; her body extends itself in space through a multiplicity of enclosures. To understand the geometry of grace, he himself must leave that *spot*...." (Marti 120). Elizabeth Petroff observes that "...the spiritual condition of the narrator-protagonist is revealed through the details and configurations of the opening landscape, and through the response of the protagonist to them" (Petroff 186). Here, the dreamer's response to this landscape indicates both how he has "set" the pearl at the center of his life and predicts how he is to mis-set her in the future. After the loss of the pearl in a spot of ground, the dreamer addresses the earth, reproving it for staining the flawless pearl which it encloses:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Forsope þer fleten to me fele
To þenke hir color so clad in clot!
O moul, þou marrez a myry juele,
My priuy perle wythouten spotte. (21-4)

This initial effort to pinpoint the pearl's location is a misunderstanding of its (her) place in the universe. Lamenting the fact that the pearl is framed not in gold but in clay and decay, he does not understand that a physical place "Þer such rychez to rot is runne" (26) is not her final destination, or even her current location. Contrary to what the dreamer believes, the earth of her grave does not mar the morally spotless jewel/person who is buried there. Instead, the grave of the pearl is merely the point of departure to a spotless world in which she is more appropriately set.

As he will do in each of his subsequent misunderstandings of the interpretable realm of his dream, the narrator commits two sins: misplacement and misreading. The dreamer is unaware that the grave is not the place where the living Pearl-Maiden resides, a belief which he expresses when he grieves, "Þer wonys þat worþyly, I wot and wene,/My precious perle wythouten spot" (47-8) Moreover, he misreads the grave by mentally restricting it to a place of ending and loss, when it is really the beginning of a new existence. This fact should have been made clear to him by the appearance of living plants on the grave--natural growth which is also a metaphor for eternal life. His human feeling of loss prevents him from understanding the grave as the gateway into eternal life that the maiden later describes to the dreamer (319-24). He only understands it as a "spot": the place of the pearl's loss. Restricting her to this spot, he reveals his own spiritual stasis.

In the poet's depiction of the enclosed garden as the site of the narrator's loss as well as the "spot" to which his grief has rooted him, the imagery of growth and decay recalls the argument which Christian exegetes had engaged in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

since classical times--whether the resurrection of the body should be depicted according to the naturalistic metaphors of seeds springing out of the earth, thus attesting to how life continues to arise out of death, or if a more appropriate metaphor for resurrection would be a hard, brilliant, petrified body, like a jewel. In her exhaustive treatment of the subject in *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336,* Bynum writes of Harrad of Hohenbourg, "In her text, as in most other twelfth-century treatments, the resurrected body is a jewel or a translucent glass, a shining garment, a rebuilt temple or a statue reforged from its original material" rather than something blossoming or flowering out of decay *(Resurrection* 120). On the other hand, John Scotus Erigena (ninth century)

> elaborates natural images for the resurrection, making full use of Clementine cyclical metaphors and of the Pauline seed. The resurrection of the phoenix from ashes or the beetle from dung, the gradual unfolding of seeds in things, the turn of the seasons from winter to spring, all become analogies for a return to God that is transformation. *(Resurrection* 143)

The reason why such fertility imagery was controversial was, according to Bynum, because "To medieval theorists, fertility was also decay; the threat lodged in body was change itself" (*Resurrection* xviii). In the context of *Pearl,* the fertility of spotted earthly beings could also evoke decay and death--the latter which Bynum calls the "other" for medieval people *(Resurrection* xviii)--the physical manifestations of the morally marred condition of human beings. Peter Lombard is a twelfth-century example of this distrust of fertility and organic imagery of the resurrection. For him, "the organic processes of nutrition and growth are seen as threatening to the nature of things" *(Resurrection* 126).

*Pearl* is an intriguing example of how these two views of resurrection--as organic fertility or as inorganic calcification--interact with one another. Later, in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the heavenly realm, which is full of the hardened, glittering glory of jewels, the maiden states that she was once a rose that could decay but is now a pearl, as immutable and impassable as the realm itself. However, here the pearl's resurrection is witnessed by the plants which grow upon the grave.[18] In his morbid focusing upon her loss and decay, the dreamer fails to read these plants growing on the pearl's "spot" as a sign that she has not disintegrated so much as she has flowered in a heavenly garden much more spacious than the enclosed terrestrial garden to which he has confined himself (and her) in his grief.[19]

Though in lines 11-61, the poet locates the garden specifically as the site of the dreamer's grief, it can also be located more generally in a tradition of medieval representation which portrays the enclosed garden *(hortus conclusus)* as a reflection of the earthly paradise as well as a symbol for the unblemished enclosure of a saint's incorruptible body, the virginal body of Mary in particular. *In The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance,* Terry Comito observes that medieval gardens were typically enclosed, a form which appeared in the medieval cloister garden (Comito 25) and which, I would argue, exemplified the

---

[18]Hildegard von Bingen, a twelfth-century mystic, theologian and scientist, evinced a similarly ambiguous perspective. In her description of humankind's ascent towards God through good deeds and faith, holy people both "bloom" with the fruit of their good deeds and become jewels in heaven: "The soul floods us with its longing until, as we climb from virtue to virtue, we begin to feel a greening power. We start to bloom in the good works and examples left us by the Son of God. ... And just as the greening power and the flowering as well as the ripening of all fruits come to an end in winter, we also fade away at death along with all our good and evil works. Those of us, however, who have performed good works in our childhood, maturity, and old age will mount up with our soul to God, radiant in our good deeds and as if adorned with jewels. And the body by which the soul has done all these things will scarcely be able to wait until both body and soul are together again in the abode of joy" (Vision IV. 78: 113).

[19]The twelfth-century theologian Guerric of Igny exploits the image of the tomb as a garden in a way which could serve as a commentary on this concept in *Pearl:* "[Tombs] are full of every filth and of dead men's bones, [gardens] are full of flowers or fruits in all their sweetness and grace. What if tombs are sometimes seen in gardens? For the Lord was buried in a garden.

"If there are tombs in a garden surely there are not gardens in tombs. Yet perhaps there are, but in the tombs of the just. There indeed a certain most agreeable pleasantness which belongs to gardens will flourish as in spring, the springtime, that is, of their resurrection, when their flesh will blossom again. Not only the bones of the just man will sprout like grass but also the whole of the just man will spring up like a lily and bloom forever before the Lord. Not so the godless, not so. They are buried with the burial of an ass...subject to corruption" *(Resurrection* 169).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spiritually and sexually (as well as physically) "enclosed" nature of the monastic life. Margaret Freeman has noted that the *hortus conclusus* imitates the enclosed body of Mary:

> ...the *hortus conclusus* [is] an attribute of the Virgin Mary, inspired by the verse in the Song of Songs (4: 12): "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse". Alain de Lille, in commenting on this passage, says that the Virgin is "a garden of delights in which the roses of endurance and the lily of virginity are not lacking....[She] is a garden enclosed because she is a valley of charity that is sealed, into which nothing evil can break...since she is surrounded entirely by a guard of angels. (Freeman 136)

There is an obvious sexual connotation to this imagery of the enclosed garden as an inviolate female body. Both the Pearl-Maiden, and Mary, her "empress," are virgins, and thus their bodies (and, as the dreamer will later discover, their heavenly realm) are impervious to male invasion. However, the dreamer does not understand this imperviousness of either land or woman, for once he enters the land of the maiden, he attempts to possess her and to cross over into a part of the land which is closed to him. The dreamer also misinterprets the enclosed nature of the garden where the Pearl-Maiden's body resides. Just as he will look at her opulent realm with his own acquisitive desire for jewels in mind (both for the jewels of the land in general and the "jewel" of the maiden in particular), here he does not recognize the enclosure of the garden as an image for the maiden's physical and spiritual spotlessness. Instead, the enclosed garden becomes a topographical representation of his own limitations: his confinement by his grief and to the place where he believes the maiden to have been lost, whereas for the maiden, the garden is an image of wholeness and safety, not of imprisonment. Yet he is not entirely unaware of the flawed nature of this vision, which he ascribes to a desire against which reason, and God's word, wrestles within him: in lines 51-2, "A deuely dele in my hert denned,/Þa3

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

resoun sette myseluen sa3t," and in lines 55-6, "Þa3 kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,/My wreched wylle in wo ay wra3te." The dreamer's limited human perspective and desire for more than he has been given keeps him focused upon the earth where the pearl lies rather than upon the heavenly garden where her spirit resides.

For some theologians, the "garden" of Mary was as impervious to decay (whether physical or spiritual) as it was to invasion of a sexual kind. Bynum provides the example of the twelfth-century theologian Thomas the Cistercian, who

> sees Mary as a garden, but one enclosed to rot as well as to sin. The Virgin's triumph is that, flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bone, she shares in his resurrection, safe and immune from the law of corruption. Since the threat was decay, images of flowering, when they occurred, expressed the victory of changelessness in heaven, attained by the identical body on earth *(Resurrection* 170)

Other writers expressed the changelessness and imperviousness of Mary's body to organic processes such as decay by presenting her "enclosed" nature according to artificial rather than naturalistic metaphors, as does Ruysbroeck (fourteenth century), who called Mary's body "'a splendid court'" and "'a glorious temple'" *(Holy Feast* 267).[20] The dreamer, however, notices precisely that rot and decay from which the virginal, spotless "garden" of the Pearl-Maiden has been

---

[20]This association of women with enclosed spaces continues to be developed after the Middle Ages. In the Renaissance imagination, according to Peter Stallybrass, the enclosed body of the virgin (or the chaste married woman) was even conceived of as a state or nation: "When women were themselves the objects to be mapped out, virginity and marital "chastity" were pictured as fragile states to be maintained by the surveillance of wives and daughters. But paradoxically the normative "Woman" could become the emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the state. The state, like the virgin, was a hortus conclusus, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies" (Stallybrass 129). Conversely, the woman who allows herself to be "penetrated" by many men can become not an enclosed, protected space but a "commonwealth", a land owned and trod upon by many (Stallybrass 129). Later in the poem, the narrator will anticipate this extension of the image of enclosed garden/woman when he tries to invade the maiden's land and to make her "his" again.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

protected. He assumes that the garden's luxuriant growth derives from her decaying body rather than expresses her resurrection and incorruptible "unflowering" as a pure soul. In his description of the place where the pearl had fallen, all physical features of the land are related in some way to the jewel/person who was lost there. The spice-patch which the dreamer sees lies directly upon the resting-place of the pearl: "On huyle þer perle hit trendeled doun/Schadowed þis wortez, ful schyre and schene...." (41-2). Earlier he states that the spices arise directly from the pearl itself, which is likened to a seed: "So semly a sede mo3t fayly not,/Þat spryngande spycez vp ne sponne/Of pat precios perle wythouten spotte" (34-6).[21] The dreamer's description of this land with the pearl at its center reflects not only the centrality of her location in his heart, but also contrasts with her nature as a being "wythouten spot." Spotless, she nevertheless gives rise to a "spot" upon which the dreamer dolefully meditates, literally as well as figuratively. Not only does he passively reflect upon the pearl's loss by contemplating its site, but he also attempts in vain to grasp her physically ("Bifore þat spot my honde I spennd...."--49). However, in her spotless state she has become ungraspable, in terms of both the narrator's ability to grasp her physically and to "grasp" her transformed nature mentally.

Most revealingly, in lines 49-56, the dreamer's distorted perception of physical space as centered on the lost pearl, who gives the garden its meaning for him, causes him to displace Christ, the spotless person who should be at the center of both heart and landscape in the poet's Christian vision of the universe. Marti proclaims: "At every level, medieval culture derives its shape from the body of Christ...spatially, temporally, and doctrinally, Christ's body constitutes the center" (Marti 5-6). This centrality of Christ is expressed spatially in the

---

[21]This is a conflation of the two resurrection metaphors discused above. Here the pearl, an emblem for the impassable, closed, perfected resurrection body, is itself a seed, the source of new growth.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

thirteenth-century Ebstorf Map, in which the world is depicted inside the body of Christ. Each direction has one of Christ's body parts at its edge: his head at the east, his legs in the west and left and right arms in the north and south, respectively. While in this map Christ is not the literal center, his central role in the cosmos is revealed by the fact that his limbs both support the world and are its boundaries. Furthermore, Jerusalem, the center of his redemptive work, is depicted at the actual center of these maps (Friedman 46; Harley and Woodward 334-5). Michael Camille describes Christ's centrality in a more symbolic sense: "With God at the centre of the medieval panopticon, 'all-seeing' and everywhere at once, most models of the cosmos, society and even literary style, were circular and centripetal" (*Image on the Edge* 37). *Pearl* is no exception; the pearl itself is round, and the poem is structurally spherical, returning with its last stanza to the linking-word and other images of the first stanza, thus imitating in poetic form the form of the pearl itself. This roundness or sphericity in turn is a microcosm of the shape of the world, as Caxton acknowledges in his *Mirour of the World:* "God fourmed the world al round; ffor of alle the fourmes that be, of what dyuerse maners they be, may none be so plenere ne resseyue somoche by nature as the figure rounde" (Caxton 58)[22]. These spatial images of the roundness of the pearl, the cosmos, the earth and the poem ensures that the poem itself is a space which the reader can traverse and become enlightened by, paradoxically, through tracing the dreamer's misreading of that same space.

As a Christian, the dreamer is supposed to find comfort in Christ in times of grief. However, he decenters Christ and replaces him with the pearl at the center of the garden as the physical and moral center of his life: "Þa3 kynde of

---

[22]This English edition appeared in 1480-81; thus the *Pearl*-poet could not have read it. However, the Caxton version is a prose translation of the *Livre da clergie* or *Image du Monde,* written around 1246 by Gauthier of Metz and compiled from various sources, including the Latin *Imago Mundi,* attributed to Honorius Augustodunensis. The *Pearl*-poet could have had access either to the Latin text or its medieval French translation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Kryst me comfort kenned,/My wreched wylle in wo ay wra3te" (55-6).[23] Later, the Pearl-Maiden attempts repeatedly to correct his misplaced affections by redirecting his attention to Christ's will as expressed through the landscape of his dream. In this landscape, Christ's ever-flowing blood imagistically parallels the stream which the dreamer follows through the realm, but which also separates him from the maiden.

At the beginning of stanza-group II (62-6), from the "spot" of the mound in which he believes the pearl to have been lost, the dreamer's spirit ascends to behold the spotless world of the spotless pearl, a place which nevertheless has no specific earthly location; as the dreamer reflects wonderingly of the place which his spirit traverses in his dream, "I ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat hit wace...." (65)[24] Thorpe argues that this same feeling of placelessness is evoked in the

---

[23]Medieval depictions of the Holy Land treat the realm of the Bible in the way that the dreamer is supposed to treat the spaces where he finds himself: as a token of divine presence and purpose. This is how John of Würzburg sees Nazareth–a place centered on Christ's person: "Now because our redemption was begun in the city of Nazareth through the incarnation of our Lord...we propose to begin our description with this same city....Nazareth is, being interpreted, 'a flower,' or 'a shrub,' and is justly so named, because therein grew the flower with whose fragrance the whole world is filled; that flower, the Virgin Mary.... (Würzburg 1). Instead of viewing places as potential revelations from God and as centered on Christ, the dreamer tries to find the pearl in these places in order to possess her again–or to possess the place where she may be found.

[24]In his book on medieval dream theory, Steven Kruger writes that many poems involving dreams are about poetry itself: "Framing his or her poem as a dream, the medieval author focused attention on a human experience clearly linked to literary process, and the reader of a dream vision was prepared for a poem that, examining dream experience, might also examine its own status as poetry. ... Thus the Middle English *Pearl* concentrates its attention self-consciously on problems of understanding, asking how the human being can properly interpret, and convey to others, a superhuman experience" (Kruger 135). Though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact type of dream which the dreamer of *Pearl* is experiencing, the dream's allegorical content suggests a *somnium*, described by the late Classical writer Macrobius as a dream whose truths are couched in metaphors (23). Comparing the popular late Classical and medieval dream-classifications to types of literature, Pascalis Romanus (twelfth century) connected the *somnium* to literary allegory, which appears in an especially spatial form in *Pearl*. However, the dream of *Pearl*'s protagonist also displays qualities of other types of dreams. Some late medieval dream-theorists stated that dreams could arise "'sometimes from the mind through excessive solicitude or concentration on some matter,'" in the words of Pierre Bersuire (fourteenth century) (93). Another fourteenth-century writer, Robert Holkot, concurs: "'On the part of the soul [they] have [their] origin because of a strong waking concern about something. ... It happens that the soul forms for itself an image of the beloved....'" (95) The dreamer of *Pearl* would fit this profile, for before his dream he had been preoccupied with his grief at the death of his daughter, which, according to this late medieval

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reader: "...the poem, despite its careful physical descriptions and despite its own clear, circular boundaries, rarely lets one feel satisfied as to where, exactly, we are, either physically or linguistically" (Thorpe 37)

Thorpe is certainly correct in asserting that the dreamer's entrance into the otherworld is profoundly dislocating--both to the dreamer himself, whose assumptions about moral geography will be questioned in and by this land, and for the reader, who has just as suddenly been transferred from the earthly site of the maiden's grave to the unearthly realm of jewels which is her eternal home. However, this otherworld is not completely "placeless." Analogues for the poet's description of heaven can be located in medieval visionary descriptions of the celestial realm and travel narratives of either real or fictive explorations of the East, as well as in the biblical narrative of the Apocalypse. Moreover, the poet's later presentation of the heavenly Jerusalem bears traces of descriptions of the earthly Jerusalem and the Holy Land as seen by medieval pilgrims. The idea of reading landscapes as words or pages in a world which is a book yielding divine meanings can be found in pilgrimage literature, in which pilgrims visit a sacred site, describe its physical appearance briefly (if at all), then cite the appropriate biblical text. In these pilgrimage itineraries, both the physical place and the biblical text are "citations" in God's book.

Unlike a devout medieval pilgrim's "reading" of the Holy Land, in lines 67-156 (the rest of stanza-group II and the entire stanza-group III), the dreamer's verbal acts of mapping the maiden's landscape of jewels reveal not the true nature of this place, but merely reflect his own "spotted" method of reading earthly landscapes. Whereas the pearl is "wythouten spot" on earth and thus must find a place in heaven, the dreamer is both physically and metaphysically

---

dream theory, could have precipitated his dream of her. Ultimately, the dream of *Pearl* is a complex one, partaking of qualities of both the "higher" and "lower" orders of dreams according to the Macrobian system of dream classification.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

incapable of leaving the earth. He frequently recalls his earthly habitation while his body continues to lie upon the pearl's grave during his dream (62), thus ensuring his continued physical as well as spiritual restriction within the constraints of earthly space. While staring into the stream which is the metaphysical boundary between the dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden's spotless land, he sees that

> In þe founce þer stoden stonez stepe,
> As glente þur3 glas þat glowed and gly3t--
> As stremande sternez, quen stroþe-men slepe,
> Staren in welkyn in wynter ny3t.... (113-16)

Even though the narrator's position in space is above the gems which remind him of the stars that normally "staren" down upon him, the fact that he needs to compare the shining stones to the stars of his world in order to render this alien land more comprehensible through comparison to his own familiar geography is a reminder that his understanding has not left its usual place beneath the stars. His tendency to seek landmarks of earthly geography in an unearthly realm indicates that the dreamer does not belong in this place, for he cannot look at other landscapes save through reference to the marred earth which is his psychic, as well as his physical, location.

The dreamer's vision of a heavenly realm studded with jewels has equivalents in the terrestrial sphere, where the same jewelled rivers can also be found in medieval travellers' fanciful or factual descriptions of Asian lands. In these lands, untold riches in gems and gold dust wash from mountain springs into rivers, as in this description of Kara-jang in Cathay by Marco Polo: "In this province gold dust is found in the rivers, and gold in bigger nuggets in the lakes and mountains" (Polo 149). He reports of Kaindu, "The chief city...lies near the entrance to the province. There is also a lake in which are found many pearls--pure white but not round, being rather knobbly as though four, five, six, or more

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were joined together" (Polo 146). The city of Dem features a river which yields gems like those of the river in *Pearl:* "There are rivers here in which are found stones called jasper and chalcedony, in plenty" (Polo 52).

In his early fourteenth-century account of "the wonders of the East", Friar Jordanus explicitly states that the rivers which gave rise to jewels were also the rivers of Paradise: "Between this India and AEthiopia is said to be, towards the east, the terrestrial paradise; for from those parts come down the four rivers of Paradise, which abound exceedingly in gold and gems" (Jordanus 43). A brief text attached to *The Letter of Prester John,* a widely-circulated epistle attributed to the ruler of a mythical Christian kingdom and considered to be a source for some of Mandeville's descriptions of the East, describes Hulna, captital city of India, "Through the centre [of which] flow the limpid waters of the Physon, one of the rivers of Paradise, casting forth most precious gold and gems, which make the regions of India passing rich" (Letts 499).

According to Sarah Stanbury, one of the indicators of the dreamer's literal, "fleshly" interpretation of the landscape of his dream is his fascination with surface detail and adornment, a by-product of being the "jueler" that the maiden names him:

> The dreamer's serial perceptions of focused scenes describe not only objective correlatives of his spiritual progress but also his infatuation with physical forms, a condition for which the maiden faults him early in her discourse. *(Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 66)

This fascination is reflected in his descriptions of the landscape in the second stanza-group, which is structured by the word "adubbement," or adornment. The land's dazzling adornment with jewels is described repeatedly as a source of solace for the jeweller/dreamer, who asserts in lines 85-86 that "The adubbement of þo downez dere/Garten my goste al greffe for3ete." He wanders through the land in a state of dazed joy: "I welke ay forth in wely wyse...." (101) His spatial

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

disorientation is also reflected in an equivalent spiritual disorientation. Ignorant of the land's deeper meaning, the dreamer also does not know that it is God, not "Fortwne" (98), who has brought him here.

Understandably a land so rich in color and so bright with jewels might induce a trance-like state in any visitor. But the dreamer's entranced wanderings through and observations of the land in stanza-groups II and III also indicate his inability to see beyond the surface of things. The jewels and the shimmering, opalescent, multifaceted features of the landscape should perhaps give the dreamer (as it does the reader) a clue that this is the ideal "setting" for the pearl (especially in lines 81-2, where he finds that the gravel crunching under his feet "wern precious perle3 of Oryente," reminders of a fabled earthly landscape as rich as this celestial one, and as enticing to jeweller-invaders). However, he reads no meaning into the landscape, just as he will later notice only the pearl's "adubbement," not its significance.

The dreamer's inability to see this jewelled land as the heavenly setting for the lost pearl seems even more incredible when one investigates the wealth of medieval visionary material depicting the celestial sphere as a bejewelled paradise. In the late twelfth-century vision of Edmund, the Monk of Evesham, copied in 1197 by his brother Adam and included in translation in Eileen Gardiner's collection of medieval visions of heaven and hell, the monk describes the "Third Place of Glory" as a shining realm of gemlike quality: "...I saw what appeared to be a wall of crystal that was so high that no one could look over it and so long that there appeared to be no end. When we approached it, I saw it glittered with a most noble shining brightness from within" (Gardiner 215). The monk also depicts this realm as an almost harshly bright place of glittering surfaces, like the otherworld of *Pearl:* "But let no one ask how glittering was that inconceivable brightness or how strong was the light that

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

filled those places." However, "...that brightness, inconceivable as it was, did not blind the eyesight, but rather sharpened it...." (Gardiner 216).

Unlike the Monk of Evesham, the dreamer of *Pearl* has been blinded--not by the landscape itself but by his mortal preoccupations. Though the poet's description of the landscape might cause the reader to recall the jewel-bright images of heaven according to visionaries like Edmund, the dreamer himself misses the allusions all around him. He fails to associate the pearl-covered realm with the pearl which he has supposedly lost, nor does he understand it as heaven. Instead he sees it as a kind of glittering jeweller's playground which he wants to possess through greedy exploration. The dreamer's literal reading of the landscape as a place of pure beauty and enjoyment leads to the same possessive desire which he had exhibited toward the pearl and which he will soon demonstrate toward the Pearl-Maiden. So full of adornment, the land itself seems to prompt him to seek greedily "more and more," the phrase which expresses his acquisitive response to the landscape in the third stanza-group.[25]

Already "bredful [his] braynes" (126) with the wealth of glittering surfaces which he sees, in the third stanza-group, the dreamer longs to go still further and cross the stream which bisects the land. Expressing the desire for "more and more" which marks this stanza-group, he reasons, by virtue of the inaccessibility of the other side, that whatever is there is even more desirable than what he currently sees:

---

[25]According to Thorpe, even the reader is incited to seek "more and more" because of the exquisitely lapidary description of the (literally) lapidary landscape: "We, too, marvel and long for 'more and more', as if the language were a land in which we might live" (Thorpe 45). Ironically, the landscape of his dream is a place which the dreamer wishes to inhabit, but he ignores the fact that this is not his "spot"--and we the readers are tempted to make the same mistake. This notion of the landscape actually inviting the dreamer to explore and possess it will become more important later on, where I will discuss the implications of this notion in terms of the attitudes of contemporary and later conquerors to feminized landscapes. With rhetoric remarkably like the misogynist assertion that women invite sexual assault, conquerors frequently portray the land itself as inviting conquest.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> More and more, and 3et wel mare,
> Me lyste to se þe broke by3onde;
> For if hit watz fayr þer I con fare,
> Wel loueloker watz þe fyrre lond. (145-48)

In his explorations of the jewel-adorned otherworld in these two stanza-groups, the dreamer reads the landscape as if he were mapping it with an eye towards conquest. Instead of seeing the shining, crystalline character of the world as an indication that he is in heaven, he merely sees jewels to possess and "set" in his own limited, acquisitive frame of understanding. Contemporary descriptions of the wonders of the East sometimes caution travellers against adopting this acquisitive perspective towards the lapidary landscapes of that "exotic" locale, as *The Book of John Mandeville* warns through the account of the Perilous Valley, which Mandeville may have borrowed from *The Letter of Prester John* or the work of Odoric of Pordenonc. In this valley, rumored to be one of the entrances to hell and populated by demons, jewels and gold entice travellers:

> Il a en celle valee moult dor et dargent, pour quoy mains mescreanz et pluseurs Chrestiens aussi y entrent pour la conuoitise du tresor qui y est si grant. Mais pour en retournent, especialment des mescreans et des Chrestiens qui ny vont fors que pour la conuoitise de lor ou de largent a auoir; car il sont tantost estrangulez des dyablez. (Letts 390)[26]

The only people who could survive a visit to that tempting valley would be people very unlike the dreamer--faithful Christians who had partaken of the sacraments and confessed: "Mais toute suoies les bons Chrestiens, qui sont en estat estable et en vraye foy et creance, y entrent bien senz peril; car ilz se

---

[26]The Bodleian text of Mandeville translates the Paris text: "And in that vale is plente of golde, siluere, and precious stoens vnto mannes si3te. And forto gete therof comen thider manye men, and entren into the vale; but ther comen fewe out a3een. ffor alle thoo that comen thider for covetyse, they arn anon strangelid and born away with deuelis" (Letts 466).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

confessent et se saingnent et arment du signe de la croiz, si que les dyables nont pouoir sur eulz" (Mandeville 390).[27] Though the dreamer's own desire to acquire things, and his lack of proper faith, do not condemn him to death at the hands of devils, he will be cast out of that realm because of his attempt at invading it, which is evidence of his lack of faith or understanding.

While the third stanza-group is marked by the dreamer's desire to see "more and more," ironically the dreamer's approach to the realm of his dream indicates his spiritual limitations--how he understands less and less of the landscape. Stanbury connects the dreamer's spatial and spiritual limitations, his inability to cross the river and his correspondent inability to cross barriers of mortal understanding: "The use of geographical boundaries to illustrate bounded knowledge is developed quite explicitly in *Pearl*" ("Space and Visual Hermeneutics" 480). Revealing his limited perspective, the dreamer interprets the river not as a symbolic line of demarcation between mortal and immortal worlds (as the maiden explains to him later in lines 318-20) but only in terms of his longing for more. While Marti asserts optimistically that "The openness and expansiveness and all-inclusiveness of the place suggest the need (and possibility) for a similar expansion within the narrator" (Marti 21), here the narrator endeavors not to expand but to conquer. He seeks the other side not for further understanding but to behold more beauty, and thus, though he desires to go farther, he restricts his movement through heavenly space by viewing it through a limiting human perspective of need and gain.

When the dreamer first sees the Pearl-Maiden in lines 157-80, he cannot contextualize her as a part of a landscape replete with pearls and other jewels, but sees her only in relation to her former earthly identity. Noticing her by the

---

[27]The Bodleian text reads: "But god cristen men that arn stedefast in the feith of Iesu Crist entren into hit oftentymes and comen out a3een. But hem byhoueth to ben clene i shreve, and to resseyue Goddis body, and blisse hem wel" (Letts 466).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

crystal cliffs on the other side of the river, he declares confidently, "I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere" (164). Ironically, however, he does not know her as well as he thinks he does. He cannot associate her with the land in which she belongs, referring to her terrestrial "place" when he mistakenly reflects that she seems as "out of place" in the jewel-realm as he is: "I se3 hyr in so strange a place...." (175) Though the place is strange to him, he cannot yet accept that it is neither strange nor incongruous to her. The weight of his past association with the maiden prevents him from recognizing her true location in the geography of divine meaning and order, as a pearl among pearls. According to Barbara Nolan, the dreamer imposes the maiden's past identity on her, and also reads her realm only in the context of the mortal world which is not "strange" to him:

> ...though the pilgrim in paradise thinks he "knows" the maiden "more and more," he will learn to his chagrin that his understanding is sadly incomplete. As is his wont, he has failed to take account of the "strange place" in which he finds himself and in which his lady dwells. He had already reduced the joyful beauties of paradise to a place like his own fallen earth. To be sure, it is more artful, brighter, fresher, but the narrator has refused to recognize the eternal landscape in its own terms even as he will fail to discern the risen state of the Pearl Maiden or to understand the difference between earthly and heavenly justice. (Nolan 181)

Confronted by the spectacle of the jewel whom he had so longingly sought, in ll. 181-8 the dreamer tries, but is incapable of, stalling her with a shout. His anxiety about the maiden's leaving before he can call her evinces his continuing concern with capturing or "setting" the maiden so that she cannot escape, but this time he attempts to do so through words: "I drede onende quat schulde byfalle,/Lest ho me eschaped þat I þer chos,/Er I at steuen hir mo3t stalle" (186-8). While in line 2 he tried to "clos" the pearl physically in a setting, here he "stalls" her verbally by calling to her and choosing her as the object of his desire, halting her movement and at the same time imposing her past identity

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

upon her. The dreamer's attempt to "stalle" the maiden as she approaches is consistent with his earlier effort at "closing" her; though here "stalle" means "to halt" or "stop," in the fourteenth century, the word also implied the act of enclosing something, or, in its noun form, the enclosure itself.[28] He feels the need to "clos" her because he interprets her fall from his hand to the earth--her escape from a spotted, limited world through death--as a loss, when it is really a loss only on his part, not hers. Ironically, however, the dreamer becomes as still as a hawk waiting in a hall (184) when the maiden arrives, and she moves instead towards him (189-96).

In describing the maiden's beauty and her costume for the first time in lines 197-228, the dreamer reads her as superficially as he does the landscape in which he has found her--as a setting for shining, and in this case pearly, surfaces. When he first glimpses her, he speaks of her in language remarkably like the opening lines of the poem, in which she seems more an object than a person: "So smoþe, so smal, so seme sly3t,/Rysez vp in hir araye ryalle,/A precios pyece in perlez py3t" (190-92). Line 190 recalls the narrator's initial, somewhat anthropomorphic description of the pearl ("So smal, so smoþe her sydez were...."--6). However, while the poem's opening lines describe the pearl in terms also appropriate to an idealized female body, here the embodied Pearl-Maiden appears as a "precios pyece, in perlez py3t"(192). Though "pyece" can be

---

[28]The Middle English Dictionary provides these meanings (among others, which are not relevant to this passage) of "stalle" as a noun: "An enclosed or partially enclosed place for keeping a domesticated animal, a stall; a stable" (c. 1200); "a place for catching fish, esp. a pool of standing water in a stream where a net can be placed" (this one is interesting because the dreamer encounters the maiden by a stream, and his efforts at "catching" her seem akin to the hunt--or fishing--sometimes), "a particular place in a structure; an enclosed space" (c. 1400), "a fixed place, a position" (c. 1350) (578-9). As a verb, *stallen* means "To dwell" (1333), "kept in a stall or shelter" (c. 1200), "assign a place to" (1390), "to place...in a particular location" (c. 1400) (580). Though this particular instance of "stalle" means "to prevent...from escaping or advancing, stop" (580), these other meanings point towards activities which the dreamer attempts to do with the maiden: he tries to dwell with her and to enclose her, fixing her to her former "space" on earth.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

used as a synonym for "person," it also sounds like "piece," thus reducing the living maiden to a lifeless piece of art or jewellery in the mind of the dreamer.[29]

The word *py3t*, which is the linking word for this stanza-group, recalls the golden setting of the pearl in the poem's opening lines.[30] The jeweller sees the maiden as a setting for pearls, but her pearl-covered clothing has no spiritual significance for the dreamer. Instead he is fascinated by her pearls merely as physical adornment, just as he was intrigued by the land's glittering garment of gems. Like the land, in the eye of the jeweller, the Pearl-Maiden is a "site" for the setting of pearls. Her pearl-like coloration, "Her depe colour [that] 3et wonted non/of precios perle in porfyl py3te" (215-6), informs him that she is a jewel as well as a setting for jewels, but he does not understand that she is a pearl by reason of her unmarred spirit, not the physical flawlessness with which he is so entranced. By extension, the pearls that she wears are indications of her citizenship in the pearl which is the flawless heavenly city, represented by the "wonder perle wythouten wemme" which "Inmyddez hyr breste watz sette so sure...." (221-22)

The seamless way in which the poet's description of the lapidary landscape yields to a description of the Pearl-Maiden herself (157-68) is not coincidental. The spotless spot of the otherworld is the ideal home for the pearl "wythouten spot." Yet there is more to this association than the link between jewel-

---

[29]*The Oxford English Dictionary* furnishes the following definitions of *pyece:* "A separate or detached portion, part, bit, or fragment of anything....", "A person, personage, an individual" and "[a term] Applied to a woman or girl" (XI. 792-3). *The Middle English Dictionary* lists the following relevant definitions: "a fragment of an object, a bit or piece of a whole" (c. 1300), " a segment, section, part" (1300-25), "A particular piece of land; also, a country or large tract of land" (1300-1330; this definition is intersting in light of the dreamer's treatment of the maiden and her land as potential acquisitions), "A person, an individual, a being" (1300-25) (728-9).

[30]In his glossary of *Pearl*, E.V. Gordon states, "the usual sense of this word is 'riveted'....But neater syntax is obtained by taking *as* as correlative with *so; clente* then refers to the *perle* and may be rendered 'fastened, enclosed'" (57). *The Middle English Dictionary* reads *clente* as derived from clench: "A clinch, nail, rivet" (1336-7; 300), and, as a verb, "To fasten....make fast (with nails or rivets), nail...to enclose...lock up...of fingers: to clench" (1250-1400; 300.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

landscape and jewel. The dreamer's treatment of the landscape as a place which can satisfy his desires is extended to the maiden. Both are potential terrains for him to read, but instead of understanding their true nature, he wants to own both of them.

The dreamer's attempt to map and conquer both geographical and feminine corporeal territory appears in a context of growing awareness of land conquest and the subtler "conquest" of the closed female body through an emergent medical science. Whereas his earlier search for "more and more" in the jewel-land of his dream paralleled medieval descriptions of Asian riches, texts which satisfied a medieval curiosity for "more and more" knowledge of other realms, the dreamer's treatment of the maiden as he had possessively treated the land looks forward to post-medieval conquests of the New World, which was frequently represented as a virgin female body to be penetrated and owned by the conquerors.[31] The dreamer seamlessly ventures from traversing

---

[31]When the British joined the Spanish conquerors in mapping and appropriating parts of the New World, the land of Wingandacoa was renamed "Virginia" in honor of Queen Elizabeth (after her title "the Virgin Queen"). This was not only a symbolic seizure of the land through renaming it after oneself, but also a powerful act of associating land and woman as colonizable territories. Montrose argues that "In this royal renaming of Wingandacoa as Virginia...the discursive power of the inviolate female body serves as an emergent imperialist project of exploration, conquest, and settlement" (Montrose 148). The name "Virginia" recalls the inviolability and impenetrability which resurrected bodies--particularly the perfected female body of the Pearl-Maiden--and corpses of (often female) saints bear in the literature of the Middle Ages, and the *hortus conclusus* which is a spatial image for the Virgin Mary. However, in this post-medieval era of conquests, this image of enclosure belies the fact that Virginia's "virginity" is seen as an invitation for "her" to be violated, as in a statement of the English advocate of conquest Keymis, whose "discourse renders Englishmen not as territorial aggressors but rather as passive beneficiaries of the animated land's own desire to be possessed...." (Montrose 163). Annette Kolodny cites a poem written by an American colonist, comparing the land which desires to be cultivated to a woman who desires to be "ravished": "'Like a faire virgin, longing to be sped....'" (Kolodny 12) Here, then, is the inexcusable charge, still repeated in our own time, that both lands and women "ask" to be raped.

Walter Raleigh's description of Guiana is an example of a land portrayed as a closed body like the jeweled heaven of *Pearl* and its maiden/pearl inhabitants. However, while the enclosure of the maiden and her cohorts in the "cofer" of heaven, as well as their enclosure in their own impenetrable jewel-bodies bespeaks the inviolability of the resurrected body, Raleigh's description of the unpenetrated land of Guiana subtly invites its readers to violate "her," first in reading of her virgin beauties and then in actually conquering her feminized terrain. Raleigh makes invasion seem a sexually attractive endeavor, glamorizing both rape and conquest--as well as conversion, suggested by the title "christian Prince" which Raleigh applies to the land's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the landscape to obtain "more and more" of its jewelled topography to wanting "more and more" of the maiden--wanting to "stall" her so that he can speak to and possess her again. When this attempt fails, he will return once more to trying to possess the land, or at least to invade it and settle there as a colonist from the "Old World" of the imperfect terrestrial sphere. But the heavenly realm, unlike the New World, resists his invasion and remains inviolate.

Though medieval people had not yet "discovered" the New World and thus that the poet did not have access to the Renaissance fervor for conquering other lands and seizing their riches (both jewels and women), medieval people did speak of conquering territories and, at the same time, exploring and mapping the closed realm of the body--especially the female body. Writers like Mandeville encouraged Christians to re-take the Holy Land. Because it contained places sacred to Christians, places which were like words in a topographical Book of God's Works, the Holy Land was thought to be the rightful possession of Christians. Mandeville invited Christians to seize control over the Holy Land from the Muslim "infidels" in the introduction to his *Book of John Mandeville:*

> ...cest la terre que nostre seigneur nous promist en heritage, et en la dicte terre vouloit il mourir comme saisi, por la laissier en heritage

---

potential conqueror: "To conclude, Guiana is a countrey that hath yet her maydenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not bene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance, the graves have not bene opened for golde, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their Images puld downe out of their temples. It hath never bene entred by any armie of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any christian Prince" (Raleigh 428; qtd. in Montrose 154). While Raleigh presents Guiana's unspoiled terrain as a source of its beauty and desirability, inherent in that desirability is the impulse to spoil the unspoiled land.

This desire to possess land has been extended by colonizers to the women who live there as well, who are also seen as conquerable terrain, according to Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose: "The feminization of colonized landscapes can illustrate the positionality inherent in viewing/reading landscapes--and maps purported to represent them--as both visual and written. The association of indigenous women with colonized land legitimated perceptions of both women and land as objects of colonization" (Blunt and Rose 10). Patricia Parker also comments on this connection, stating that a woman is "the gendered sign of the territory to be conquered and occupied" (Parker 131), which is how the native women of the "New World" were frequently characterized by the invaders.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> a ses enfans. Par quoy chascun bon crestien qui pouoir en ha et de quoy, se deuroit pener et mectre en grant mains aus mescreans et de laproprier a nous. Car nous sommes appleez chrestiens de Crist, qui est nostre pere; et se nous sommes se drois filz, nous deuons leritage que nostre pere nouz a laissie chalenger et oster des mains estranges." (Letts 230)[32]

William of Rubruck, a Franciscan who journeyed to the lands of the Mongols in the mid-thirteenth century, described "...the most Christian lord the King of the French, who has come thither on a pilgimage and is fighting against the Saracens to wrench the holy places from out [of] their hands...." (Rubruck 48-9). The fourteenth-century Friar Jordanus expresses a similar hope for Christian victory in the Holy Land: "I believe moreover that the king of France might subdue the whole world to his own dominion and to the Christian faith, without the aid of any other" (Jordanus 56). As early as the ninth century, the legend of Ogier depicted God as favoring conquest of non-Christian nations:

> About the year 800 from the Incarnation of Christ, Duke Ogier of Denmark, with fifteen of his kinsmen and barons, and twenty thousand armed men crossed the Greek Sea, and, God favouring him, conquered for Christianity in many battles almost all countries, regions and islands, which were under the domination of the Grand Can aforesaid, and also all that were under the rule of this Emperor of India. (Letts 497)

Like these contemporary "conquests for Christ," biblical invasions were sometimes seen as sanctioned by God, according to medieval theologians, when they were intended to further divine purposes by rewarding or chastising the people of God. Even when the conquest was not ostensibly for the purposes of religious conversion, sometimes medieval writers saw the invasion of

---

[32]A rough translation reads: "This is the land which our Lord promised us as an heritage, and in that said land would he die, to leave it as an heritage for his children. For that reason each good Christian who has it in his power should take that land out of the hands of miscreants and appropriate it for ourselves. For we are called 'Christians' from 'Christ,' who is our father, and if we are his rightful children, we must challenge [the infidels] for the heritage that our father left us and take it from strange hands."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nations as divinely ordained and approved of, for example, in the case of the legendary colonizing of Britain by Brutus after the fall of Troy. According to Monika Otter, in his *Historia regum Britanniae,* Geoffrey of Monmouth justifies the occupation of Britain because the land was empty of human life (thus not necessitating seizing it from anyone other than "savage," inhuman giants who, because of their monstrous nature, had no right to possess it anyway). Conquest is also legitimized through the portrayal of the conqueror and the land as "meant for" one another, much in the same way that post-Columbian colonizers saw the land as naturally inviting colonization: Brutus' men "are also engaged in a quest: the ideal location for the capital does not simply present itself by destiny, but has to be sought out in order for the ideal site and its predestined conqueror to come together" (Otter 161). The Dianic Oracle, whom Brutus consults after the fall of Troy, legitimates Brutus' seizure and cultivation of the new land by terming it "aptus" (both suitable and ordained) for him and his people:

> When Diana, through her oracle, promises Brutus a new land, she uses the word *apta* to indicate its suitability for his people and calls it "a second Troy." This obviously prepares and legitimizes Brutus' appropriation of Britain....The word *aptus* appears twice, but it has become somewhat more pointed in meaning: it describes not merely the land's general suitability for various agricultural and economic pursuits, but its fitness, even predestination, for this specific conqueror and his people "in aeuum," forever. This is a kind of "manifest destiny" reasoning, here sanctioned by divine authority.... (Otter 160)

Where a pre-Christian deity legitimates the conquest of Britain by the pagan Brutus, one can assume that Geoffrey meant that the Christian God had approved of this invasion too. Geoffrey also expresses his approach to appropriation of territory through the phrase "gaainable tere"--land which is both arable and gainable, i.e. conquerable (Otter 157). In the twelfth-century *Vie Seint Edmund,* the phrase occurs three times, "each time as someone is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conquering a land or taking possession of it. Therefore, we may read *gaainable tere* not only as 'arable land' but also as 'available, conquerable' and 'desirable or coveted' land" (Otter 157). Otter also argues that medieval writers like Geoffrey had a difficult time conceiving of land uncultivated or unused by humankind:

> There is no such thing, it seems, as an unoccupied territory. In fact, the literary imagination of the [twelfth-century] historians [whom she cites] seems unable to conceive of untouched land; it is always imagined as already cultivated, or at least so "apta" to cultivation that it has no true existence apart from the cultivators and their desires. (Otter 164)

Otter also observes that medieval writers like La3amon establish (even if not intentionally) an association between conquest and writing. She finds this association in the description of Brutus surveying his land in *Brut*, which sounds remarkably similar to La3amon's description of his own attitude towards the books which he used as source material:

> ...Brutus looking at his land sounds strikingly like La3amon looking at his books. La3amon, too, had had to travel and search to find his treasured possessions: "La3amon traveled widely throughout the land acquiring the honored books he used as exemplars." Then, "La3amon laid open these books, turned their leaves, and viewed them fondly...." (Otter 170)

La3amon, like Brutus, ends up possessing the land--but La3amon does it through language: "...he immediately proceeds to make this land his own by leaving his mark on it--in this case, with a quill" (Otter 170). *Pearl* also features this association of text and land as conquerable terrains: the dreamer believes that he can both take control of the debate between himself and the Pearl-Maiden and enter into her land, making it his own. He also tries to "read" her, interpreting her as "his" lost possession, but unlike La3amon, he ends up misreading her, for she is no longer his, nor ever was, and her land cannot be his until he becomes like her in spirit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

At the same time as land was being mapped and appropriated, medieval medical writers composed treatises mapping the female body, including the internal organs (especially the sexual organs), thus rendering what was once closed corporeal territory as open and surveyed as conquered lands in books with tantalizing titles like the *Secreta Mulierum,* falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus. Even when opening or mapping the female body, medieval scientists still thought of it as a mysterious realm, according to Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset: "Indeed, right at the beginning of the Middle Ages, a language was established that revealed a certain conception of woman; man was already proclaimed as the complete being who held no mystery...." (Jacquart and Thomasset 14). On the other hand, woman "was still a creature who had something incomprehensible about her" (Jacquart and Thomasset 67). However, both medicine and theology "were discourses that explained and controlled behavior" (197). In their quest to open and describe the interior female "terrain," medieval medical theorists and practitioners also sought to regulate and control it. Actual treatment of "female complaints" by medieval physicians was quite aggressive, as Helen Rodnite Lemay indicates: "If we attempt to assess standard medieval protocol in treatment of diseases of the womb by today's standards, we may certainly characterize it as 'interventionist'. Women were treated very aggressively" for various uterine ailments. Some of these treatments included being subjected to vomiting, blood-letting, drinking "potions" and being exposed to foul odors (Lemay 324-5). Lemay argues that

> This willingness on the part of medical practitioners of both sexes to subject women to painful, often debilitating, treatments has been connected by feminist historians with a valuation placed on women as lesser beings. Although men, too, have submitted to "heroic"measures such as blood-letting and purging, the history of women and medicine has been marked to a much greater degree by

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> harsh treatment especially directed at the reproductive system. (Lemay 326)

The dreamer's approach to the maiden and her land is so disturbing because of its relationship to parallel literatures involving description, dissection and possession of both lands and women. Medieval descriptions of the Holy Land, the "exotic" East and Britain during the legendary time of Brutus do not merely catalogue the beauties and wonders of these territories. They also invite the reader to help seize the land for Christianity (in the case of literature about the Holy Land, and implied in literature about the East, which sometimes describes the lands of the "Great Caan" in terms suggesting their ripeness for missionary activity) or to view past conquests in a positive light (in the case of legends about the founding of Britain, in which Brutus' invasion of the land is portrayed as the heroic beginning of British civilization.) Medieval gynecological texts evinced a similiar attitude. They did not just inform the reader about the exotic "terrain" of women's bodies but suggested aggressively interventionist techniques, invasions of a medical sort. These sinister undertones to the literature of geographical and gynecological description, which form a backdrop for how the dreamer addresses the land and the body of the maiden, might cause the reader to wonder what he intends to do with her once he has recovered her or conquered her land. His desire to "set" her as a jewel in his collection reveals how he has objectified her, in the same way in which, in medieval geographical literature, lands become treasure-chests for exotic jewels to describe and acquire, and in medical texts, women's bodies become places to explore with invasive procedures.

Though in stanza-group IV the poet does describe the Pearl-Maiden in the language of romance, including such features desirable to medieval Europeans as blonde hair, a pale complexion and gray eyes as well as a slender figure, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

maiden seems strangely disembodied, more like a living jewel or crystal than a flesh-and-blood person. This description is consonant with Bynum's characterization of the resurrected body, according to the perspective of some medieval theologians, as a hardened crystal chrysalis, more a jewelled palace (like the poet's description of the heavenly Jerusalem later on) than a fleshly body: "in resurrection, it [the body] must become subtle, crystalline, perfect, and impassable...." (*Resurrection* 163). Bernard of Clairvaux indicates that the impervious resurrected body will possess "beauty so it will be clear and shining, with no spot of shadow or dirtiness" (*Resurrection* 172). The maiden's gem-like, glasslike appearance is thus the physical manifestation of her spotlessness. She is a body but she is not flesh, as St. Paul defines it, according to Karma Lochrie: "...Paul locates the source of man's evil in the flesh, rather than in the body. The body's role in human sin is merely that of a sort of lackey to the restless, rebellious, and intransigent flesh" (Lochrie 120). It is this jewel-hardened body which the maiden will later juxtapose with her previous terrestrial identity, represented by a rose, a naturalistic image of transient fleshliness, when she corrects the dreamer's assumption that she is still his lost pearl or child. A similar imperviousness and impassability was also attributed to the bodies which saints left behind--bodies which miraculously did not decay and which sometimes performed miracles. Even while alive, some saints' and holy women's bodies began to take on the imperviousness expected of a dead sanctified body, as Laurie Finke attests:

> The vitae of several mystics report the cessation of all ordinary forms of elimination. As a result of excessive fasting, many excreted neither feces nor urine, did not menstruate, never sweated, and discharged neither tears nor saliva. Some exuded sweet fragrances or oils instead, which had the power to heal others. The mystic's grotesque body was transformed into a classical one, closed and monumental. (Finke 93)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This first appearance of the maiden in an embodied form is also interesting for its presentation of a perfected female body in particular. Recent studies of the body often assume that the body to be described is a female body. In *Fragmentation and Representation,* Bynum describes a fifteenth-century illustration of *A Disputacion Betwyx The Body and Wormes,* a genre of poetry which can be traced at least as far back as the Anglo-Saxon poem "Soul and Body": "Because the female was especially associated with the physical, the poet depicts Body as female and stresses her descent from Eve" *(Fragmentation* 203). Finke describes the body, especially the female body, as a source of suspicion and distrust in the Middle Ages:

> In the medieval Church, the classical body was harmonious, proportionate, and monumental; it attempted to represent a sort of disembodied spirituality and thus, it never existed except as cultural representation. The grosser, more material aspects of 'the body' were displaced onto the 'grotesque body'. Women--along with other marginal social groups, specifically the lower classes--were constructed by the dominant culture as the grotesque body, the low ether, whose discursive norms include heterogeneity, disproportion, a focus on gaps, orifices, and symbolic filth. The grotesque body is at once feminized, corrupt, and threatening; it is a reminder of mortality, imperfection, and the wretchedness of human existence. (Finke 88)[33]

In reference to this contrast between the sealed "classical body" (which finds its expression in the crystalline, impassable bodies of the saints) and the porous, passable, spotted "grotesque body," Karma Lochrie states that women

---

[33]In terms of their analyses of medieval approaches to the body, Bynum and Finke seem to be at opposite poles. Bynum has argued that the medieval despising of the body is mostly a modern interpretation, and Finke presents love of the body as limited to a sealed, undecaying body which is more statue than person. From these superfically opposing viewpoints, one can conclude that medieval people viewed the body in far more complex ways than complete acceptance on the one hand and complete distrust and revulsion on the other. I find Karma Lochrie's distinction between "flesh" and "body" a helpful approach to the matter. Physicality itself is not the problem; it is the sins which "flesh" or mortal appetite desire, and which are enacted through the body as an "accessory to the crime," which are the problem. This is precisely the point of the poem: people are not of the flesh but of the spirit; their difficulties (like the dreamer's limited "fleshly" way of reading things) is carnal, not corporeal.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

religious in particular were called upon to transform their own passable, penetrable bodies into impassable, impenetrable ones by being enclosed in the sealed world of the monastery and by closing off their bodies to sexual penetration through the practice of celibacy.[34] In describing "the ideal of the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Hali Meidenhad*--that the good female body is one that is sealed off and enclosed" (Lochrie 130), Lochrie writes:

> When virgins are then instructed [in *Hali Meidenhad]* not to break that which seals them together with God and with themselves, they are being called to enclosure at many levels. The unbroken flesh ultimately means bodily closure and silence. It is no coincidence that female sanctity during the late Middle Ages was manifested through miraculous closure of the body. The seal is both boundary and suture to the consequences of the breached flesh. (Lochrie 126)

The Virgin Mary in particular is portrayed as a closed body, transcending the porous penetrability and thus the "frailty" of her gender by conceiving without intercourse. Elizabeth Robertson writes of how "The five joys of Mary specifically celebrate her transcendance of her sexuality: for example, she conceives without intercourse and gives birth without breach," referring to the

---

[34]The contrast between the "classical body" and the "grotesque body" was originally stated by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World.* He describes the grotesque body: "The grotesque body...is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world....That is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus" (Bakhtin 317). On the other hand, the "classical body" is the opposite: "As conceived by these [Renaissance] canons, the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protruberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed. The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kepts secret; conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown. The age represented was as far removed from the mother's womb as from the grave, the age most distant from either threshold of individual life. The accent was placed on the completed, self-sufficient individuality of the given body. Corporal acts were shown only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined" (Bakhtin 29). Though Bakhtin distinguishes between the grotesque body as a more characteristic medieval form and the classical body as a Renaissance image, scholars who have studied the *vitae* of medieval saints have found that the idea of the classical body can also be applied to medieval images of the bodies of saints, holy people and resurrected bodies.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

tradition that the Virgin gave birth without pain and without losing her virginal "intactness" ("The Rule of the Body" 127).

Thus the poet represents the Pearl-Maiden as both the opaque, impassable pearl of a resurrected body in general and as a perfected female body in particular, one which is closed, virginal, complete and unbroachable. Later in the poem, the land in itself will prove to be similarly unassailable. The dreamer is cast out of the realm before he can cross its river and enter the land beyond, where no spotted mortal can set foot. However, the poem's presentation of a sealed land and a Pearl-Maiden enclosed both by that land and by her own sealed gem-body will later be contrasted with a glimpse of a land as open and passable as the wounded body of Christ, which was also seen as a kind of landscape by medieval mystics,[35] and which female mystics in particular saw as akin to their own bleeding and nurturing bodies.

Lynn Staley Johnson states that the landscape of the narrator's dream expands with the arrival of the Pearl-Maiden, inviting the dreamer's understanding to expand with the otherworldly interpretation of the land which she offers to him:

> Originally, the garden's limits are the limits of the dreamer. The *Pearl*-maiden's sudden appearance begins to expand what was a finite space, as Christ's appearance in the Easter garden is a transformation of space. (Staley Johnson 184)

However, while the maiden offers a reading of space which transforms it from mere location or "spot" to a site and a sign of salvation, ironically it is only at the end of the poem, when the dreamer is ejected from the space of his dream, that he is able to accept such a transformative reading of space. After the Pearl-Maiden arrives on the other bank of the river, in stanza-group V, the dreamer

---

[35]I will discuss this imagery later in reference to Christ's perpetually bleeding wound in stanza-group XIX.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

continues his pattern of associating the otherworld and its imagistic landmarks with the topographical features of his own world. Insisting that the Pearl-Maiden is a lost object which is subject to the earth's laws of physical disintegration, he not only "sets" her as he had attempted on earth, but mis-sets her in an earthly identity which she no longer inhabits, even as she no longer dwells in his world. His tendency to mis-set the maiden as an earthly jewel is underscored by the word "jueler," the linking word of this stanza-group, which both the maiden and the dreamer use ultimately not to frame the maiden as his jewel, but to "set" the dreamer himself in his terrestrial identity as a possessor of pearls. The first words that he addresses to her are an inquiry as to whether she is indeed the pearl which he had lost in the terrestrial garden: "'O perle,' quoþ I, 'in perlez py3t,/Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,/Regretted by myn one on ny3te?'" (241-43) Though he could not enclose her on earth, being that the earth had already enclosed her in death, the dreamer still desires to enclose her in the restricted space of her previous, mortal identity. He also claims her by asking if she is his pearl, when she has never been his and now belongs to God.

However, the pearl cannot now be fixed in a particular spot, either of human language or of earthly location, because of her physical and moral spotlessness, represented by the flawless pearls that she wears. Because she cannot be limited to a particular place on earth, she also cannot be lost, as the dreamer insists that he had lost her. In refusing the dreamer's identification of her as his lost pearl, she also refutes his misunderstanding of her death as a loss:

> "Sir, 3e haf your tale mysetente,
> To say your perle is al awaye,
> Þat is in cofer so comly clente
> As in þis gardyn gracios gaye,
> Herinne to lenge for euer and play,
> Þer mys nee mornyng com neuer nere.
> Her were a forser for the, in faye,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

If þou were a gentyl jueler." (257-64)

Though she is unlocatable and irrecoverable in the spotted world, "lost" to the human sphere, the Pearl-maiden has been placed in the jewel-box ("forser") of God, a garden in which she can never decompose. According to Nelson, in order to instruct the dreamer, "the maiden gives other images to earthly enclosures...." (Nelson 40). Here, her grave ("cofer") in that spotted world has admitted her to the "cofer" or jewel-chest of heaven. But unlike the corporeal pearl, imprisoned in the setting of an earthly jewel and thus reduced to the status of an object with finite monetary value, in heaven the Pearl-Maiden is not imprisoned in a locked chest. By virtue of her gem-like purity she becomes a decoration, not a prisoner, in the casket of the heavenly Jeweller.[36] Instead it is the dreamer who is lost because he is still restricted to his human condition, a state of spiritual loss. He is "placed," defined and circumscribed by his spotted world below the heavens, in which he does not look upward towards God but directs his gaze vainly downwards toward the imagined place of the pearl's "fall," when it is really he (and all humans) who has fallen. Insisting upon assigning earthly identities to otherworldly "landmarks" of spiritual truths rather than reading both terrestrial and heavenly space according to Christianity's directions, the dreamer reads places with a "spotted" eye, an earthly (and therefore transient and corrupt) perspective.

Another important motif in the preceding lines is the dreamer's propensity to mis-set people and ideas specifically in language, a matter which the maiden addresses in her admonishment about how he has "mysetente" his

---

[36]Marti makes an interesting comment about the "cofer" and the typical coffins of kings and queens at the time of the poem's composition. According to Marti, royal bodies were often interred in a coffin whose stone lid was carved in the form of an idealized representation of that ruler--thus the ruler's own mortal, decaying body was contained within an immortal, incorruptible, perfected body. The Pearl-Maiden's body, on the other hand, is as perfect and incorruptible in heaven as is the "cofer" of the land in which she is contained.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

tale. In lines 257-8 the maiden says, "'Syr, 3e haf your tale mysetente,/To say your perle is al awaye....'" She points out that the dreamer has positioned the maiden falsely in reference to himself, putting her in the wrong spot through verbal means, since she is not "awaye" as he says but "in cofer so comly clente" (259). The word "clente" contrasts with the dreamer's attempt to clench the Pearl-Maiden in his grip, whether physically or verbally.[37] But, just as she had rolled away from his clutching hands, the Pearl-Maiden also avoids the clasp of his words, the verbal "settings" by which he endeavors to place her within a mortal space and a human context which are no longer hers. Now she is in a better "forser" than the dreamer's earthly jewel-chest, and if he were truly a "gentil jueler," he would know this.

The maiden compounds the dreamer's error when she explains that, not only has she not been lost, but that the dreamer does not even know the nature of what he has supposedly misplaced. Citing his "mad porpose" (267) and "raysoun bref" (268), she explains:

> "For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose
> Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hit gef;
> Now þur3 kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close
> To a perle of prys hyt is put in pref." (269-72)

In contrast to the dreamer's vain attempt to "clos" the pearl in a verbal definition (since he had proved incapable of doing so with his grasping hand), the treasure-chest ("kyste") of heaven is the appropriate spot for her, because it is by nature of that jewel-box that she is made a pearl. Petroff observes,

---

[37]*The Oxford English Dictionary* explains that *clente*, an obsolete past participle form of "clench," meant "to fix securely, make fast, as with nails, bolts, or the like; to secure (a nail or bolt) by beating back the point or end with a hammer after driving it through anything; to fasten (anything) by so clenching a nail or bolt; to rivet" (III. 309). Gordon glosses the same word as "fastened" or "enclosed" (57).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> ...when she attempts to console the narrator by proving to him that his pearl is not lost, she consciously exploits the metaphor of landscape as pearl setting with which the poem began. The narrator's pearl, she insists, is now to be found in its rightful setting, where grief and sorrow cannot enter. (Petroff 189)

The maiden's exploitation of "the metaphor of landscape," in Petroff's words, is twofold. First she depicts herself as she once was, a flower in the earthly garden, where she once bloomed but then faded. Then she contrasts this image of the terrestrial body as the site of fertility and decay (as the earth itself is) with her resurrected body as a jewel amid a landscape of jewels. Bynum describes Hildegard von Bingen's own twelfth-century exploitation of these images of rose and pearl:

> If putrefying matter that gives birth to pus and worms is her favorite metaphor for sin, Hildegard also has a strong sense that soil, seeds, and plants in fact give rise to life. To Hildegard, therefore, fertility is the other side of putrefaction, and organic growth (for example, the flowering of plants into blossoms and seeds, from whence come bread), can be an image of positive transformation *(Resurrection* 159).

For the Pearl-Maiden, as well as for Hildegard, the rose is a symbol of earthly fecundity (spiritual as well as physical), beauty and virtue, but, like the terrestrial body, the rose eventually dies. The pearl, however, can neither grow nor die. It is perfected matter and a crystallized, calcified soul. The rose which the Pearl-Maiden had been is now dead; the pearl whom she is now still continues to live, but she cannot return to her life as a rose, a transient and mortal thing. In the realm of hardened jewel-souls she will remain set, as resplendent, perfect and inviolable as the land itself. As a jewel in heaven, even her words are gems, as the dreamer states: "A juel to me þen watz þys geste,/And juelez wern hyr gentyl sawez" (277-8). However, just as he had misinterpreted her nature as a gem, here he only thinks he sees the gemlike nature of her words as a sign of their integrity and inviolability (for later on he tries to assault the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

integrity of her arguments in order to invade her land, possess her, or degrade her when he finds that he cannot have her) but instead as an attractive decoration--much as other, more disparaging medieval exegetes describe "ornamental" poetry and attractive, copious, but ultimately guileful and superficial, female speech.

The image of the rose also evokes interesting parallels in religious imagery and the language of romance. In the *Carmina Burana,* a poet refers to Mary as "mundi rosa," the "rose of the world," a trope deliberately exploited in a secular romance context by Guillaume de Lorris in his description of the garden of love in *La Roman de la Rose.* According to Comito, when Amant sees himself reflected in the pool of Narcissus, along with the garden around him, "The pool itself marks the simultaneity of two discoveries: of the world and the lady" (Comito 101). Through the image of woman as rose, Guillaume links woman and land (the garden in which the love-object blossoms), and the dreamer of *Pearl* approaches the Pearl-Maiden in the same way: as the object of desire in the center of an earthly garden. Comito continues:

> The lady's eyes are to the lover's gaze an image--in the words of an older poet, "mundi rosa," "cunctis speculum"--by which all of the potencies of the garden may be focused and internalized and so become his goal, that which he must try to possess. Seen in the lady's eyes, the world opens under the aspect of desire.... (Comito 102)

However, for some medieval authors, the rose is not only a symbol of earthly love but of its decay as well--and the decay of the beloved's body in the grave. An anonymous Goliardic Latin poem from the Gothic period honoring "Fair Rosamond"[38] plays upon the image of the "rosa mundi" when it describes

---

[38]Comito does not give a precise date for this poem, but he does place it "a generation or two before Guillaume de Lorris" (Comito 104). The poem appears in *Higden's Chronicle* 7. 22 (Rolls Series 41, VIII, 55).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Rosamond's decaying in her grave: "Hic jacet in tumba, Rosa mundi, non Rosa munda. Non redolet, sed olet, quae redolere solet" (Comito 104).[39] This poem seems to call attention to the folly of applying epithets originally aimed at the Virgin Mary to the decidedly mortal female love object of romance, much as the dreamer is remiss in referring to the Pearl-Maiden according to the language of love. In this different context, the Rose of the World, the fragrant virgin body of Mary in the enclosed garden, has become the mortal object of idealized sexual desire in Guillaume's Rose, and finally resides, mouldering, in a tomb as a worldly rose, not a divine one, a symbol of the natural decay of a "spotted" worldly lover on earth rather than the eternal blossoming of a spotless virgin in heaven.

Not satisfied with her explanation that he cannot possess her and bring her back to his flawed land, in lines 281-88, the dreamer tries to invade her land, but finds himself rebutted by the Pearl-Maiden. Chiding the dreamer for his verbal misplacement of himself on her side of the river, where in lines 284-5 he declares his intention to dwell with her[40] "in schyr wod-schawez,/And loue my Lorde and al His lawez....", the maiden insists that, instead of staying within the physical and behavioral borders of God's "lawez," he is guilty of a verbal transgression of the boundaries beyond which spotted mortals cannot venture: "'3e setten Hys wordez ful westernays/Þat leuez[41] nothynk bot 3e hit sy3e'" (307-

---

[39]"Here lies in [her] tomb the rose of the world, not the pure Rose [or Rosamond, the woman's name]. She does not smell sweet but stinks, she who was wont to smell sweet once."

[40]Actually the pronoun which he uses is not "hir" (her) but "hyt" (it). Though at the beginning of the poem, the narrator alternated describing the pearl as an "it" and as a "she," once he encounters her in maiden form, he refers to her consistently as a "she," an idealized female love-object. This return to describing the Pearl-Maiden as a thing indicates his continuing objectification of her, his effort at possessing her at the cost of her personhood. Interestingly, he calls the pearl "hyt" literally "to her face": he declares happily to the Pearl-Maiden herself that he has found "hyt."

[41]In his omnibus edition of the poems of the *Pearl* manuscript, William Vantuono notes that this word should be read as "loue3," "loves," rather than "leue3," "believes" (Vantuono 26). The confusion which some editors have experienced as to the identity of this word (most editions read "leuez") suggests an interesting ambiguity in the poem itself. Just as the dreamer cannot believe anything that he does not see, perhaps he is only capable of loving what he can see and understand.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

8). Gordon notes that the word "westernays" is unique in Middle English to *Pearl*. One possible definition of "westernays" is a west-facing rather than an east-facing church, a representation of sacred and cosmic space which has been turned around or inverted. *The Oxford English Dictionary* interprets it as a form of "bestorneis," which means wrongful or perverse (from *bestourn*, "to turn upside down, overthrow").[42] Thus the dreamer would seem guilty of misinterpreting divine words to the degree that he has inverted or overthrown the entire structure behind them. At this moment, he begins his third attempt at subversion. Since he cannot own the maiden, nor can he inhabit her land, he tries to question her legitimacy as a speaker by doubting her words, an enterprise which he will engage in to a greater extent later in their debate.

Provided that Gordon's reading of "westernays" is correct, the Pearl-Maiden's admonition to the dreamer has a peculiarly spatial resonance. Not only has he misinterpreted the words of God, but he has arrogantly misplaced himself and the maiden. His misunderstanding of his position in the divine design of the universe is ultimately an inversion or subversion of the structure of the cosmos, akin to a church which was willfully built facing the wrong way. At the very least, the dreamer's misreading of his place in the world is a reversal of the correct position of God's words and their intent, as Thorpe comments: "Because of his failure to understand the meanings of what he says...everything for the Dreamer is turned around or 'westernays' in its importance" (Thorpe 51). Instead of using the topographical features of the land of his dream to reveal his place in the universe--a "spotted" mortal state of spatial and moral immobility reflected by his inability to cross the stream into the spotless land of the maiden--the dreamer creates his own erroneous spatial and moral positions by insisting

---

[42]*Oxford English Dictionary*, XX. 166; II. 143.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rather childishly that the Pearl-Maiden's land is his place if his earthly spot cannot be hers.

The Pearl-Maiden also specifically associates the dreamer's circumscribed understanding in general, and his desire to appropriate her or invade her land in particular, with his manhood when she demands of him, "'Wy borde 3e men? So madde 3e be!'" (290). She could of course be referring to humanity in general rather than males or the male narrator, but subsequent lines, in which the narrator's limited perspective is attached to his maleness and God's perspective is expressed through the words of a woman, lend a more specific significance to these lines than that of a perfected being lamenting the flaws of mortalkind.

In lines 301-6, the Pearl-Maiden combines a rebuke of the dreamer for his discourteous speech with a discussion of the spiritual meaning of the river which he cannot physically cross. She corrects him for his inappropriate demand for a place by the river where he can stay, a demand by which the dreamer not only attempts to enclose her in a spot of his own devising, but which he uses in order to place himself in a spot where he does not belong:

> "Deme now þyself if þou con dayly,
> As man to God wordez schulde heue.
> Þou saytz þou schal won in þis bayly;
> Me þynk þe burde fyrst aske leue...." (313-16)

In contrast to the dreamer's brash verbal placement of himself on the other side of the river, the maiden invokes ideas of courtesy--remembering his place in reference to God--when she exhorts him to ask permission first.

The dreamer's bold assumption that he can enter the Pearl-Maiden's space is not just an example of the ignorance of a spotted mortal who does not understand why the closed, glorified jewel-land will not accept a mortal body on its soil--a body which represents all that the maiden has left behind: generation and decay, mortality, spiritual imperfection and a literal, limited, earthbound

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

human consciousness. The dreamer's rudeness and ignorance also arise from an assumed male privilege: that of being able to go wherever he wants. Claudine Herrman describes this frame of mind in a more modern context: "Physical or mental, man's space is a space of domination and hierarchy, a space of conquest and expansion, a *full* space" (Herrmann 115). This is partly why the dreamer is later so dismayed by the lack of earthly rank and privilege in the otherworld--this is his notion of the arrangement of space by civilization.

His attitude toward the land also extends to the maiden herself. First assuming that he can come live with her now that he has found her, the dreamer exhibits an approach towards space as power which Herrmann finds typical of men in patriarchal societies: "...for man, the disposition of space is primarily an image of power, maximum power having been achieved when he can dispose of the space of others...." (Herrmann 114). After the maiden proves that this cannot be accomplished, he tries to undermine her philosophical position--and, by extension, her own citizenship in heaven--by questioning her description of heavenly mutuality. If he cannot bring her back to his space, and he cannot invade hers, then he can at least "invade" and undermine the discourse by which she explains the heavenly landscape and her place within it.

He also arrogantly questions God's authority through interrogating the maiden's assertions, which are presented as the divine perspective, and the Pearl-Maiden sees this as a graver error than disputing her place in heaven and his outside of it. Interestingly, when the dreamer finally gets a glimpse of this God, he sees a wounded Christ who is remarkably feminized in his constant, nurturing bleeding. Thus the God whom the dreamer insults is in some ways the open, fluid-secreting, penetrable female body which the Pearl-Maiden no longer inhabits after her transformation from rose to pearl.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In stanza-group VI, the maiden explains that the dreamer must ask permission to enter her pristine space and warns him that such requests are not automatically granted. She adds that the route through the garden that Adam and Eve left--a geographical space--now runs through the tropological space of death, into which the dreamer must enter before crossing the river into her land:

> "Þy corse in clot mot calder keue,
> For hit watz forgarte at paradys greue;
> Our 3orefader hit con mysse3eme.
> Þur3 drwry deth boz uch man dreve,
> Er ouer þys dam hyn Dry3ten deme." (320-24)

The heavenly kingdom is not a place into which the dreamer can pass through pleas or demands. Marie Borroff states that the dreamer is still being too literal when he thinks that he can change his place simply by crossing the river: "In order to 'cross' it we must change not our position in space but our mode of existence, through the death of the body" (Borroff 167). Like the Pearl-Maiden, he must first pass through death, the "clot of clay" in which the pearl is buried and from which his spotless soul would likewise spring upward. The impassable river keeps "spotted" people from entering into and violating the pristine space of the maiden's land, much as in Mandeville's account of the Terrestrial Paradise, the four rivers converging at this place also act as barriers for preventing travellers from reaching the forbidden garden--as is the general maritime complexity of reaching this location. Of those "grans seigneurs" who had attempted to cross the rivers, the author proclaims that some were drowned in the great waves and others deafened by their roaring; thus, the author concludes, "si que nuls homs mortel ny puet approuchier, se ce nestoit par especiel grace de Dieu" ("therefore no mortal man may come there, except by the special grace of God.") (Letts 416). Like these terrestrial travellers, the dreamer of *Pearl* is not permitted to cross the heavenly river, since in his spotted state he

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

does not bear the "special grace of God." According to Comito, Philo linked the four rivers to the *hortus conclusus* as well:

> In Philo...the function of the four rivers...is in bounding, encircling; the wall of the Enclosed Garden of the Canticles, with which Paradise is conflated, is a guarantee of integrity, virtue's barrier against the wild boar of the world. Again and again, Eden is imagined in early Christian thought or literature in terms that suggest the Midrashic conception of a "secret place" (Comito 34).

Thus the natural barrier of the river acts like the "barrier" of a virgin's "enclosed garden," namely her body, defending the land (and the woman) against invasion. While the dreamer (like the male conquerors of both women and land) assumes that it is his privilege to enter the land of the maiden, the maiden indicates that even the land itself will resist his arrogant assumption of a privileged place in the enclosure inhabited by the female object of his desire. The dreamer cannot just "deme" that heaven is his place; he must be "demed" worthy by God. In line 324, God judges the human being as worthy of a place in the heavenly jewel-chest, and thus places him or her there.[43] This act of judgment and placement is the central theme of this stanza-group (VI), whose linking word is "deme." The act of divine judgment is an act of placement, in contrast to a human judgment of one's own worthiness, which cannot relocate anyone in the cosmos.

The interpretive positions of the dreamer and the Pearl-Maiden are further contrasted in the seventh stanza-group, marked by the phrase "grounde

---

[43]Gordon's glossary defines "deme" as, among other things, "to judge," "allow to go," or "to declare, speak." Thus the dreamer can "deme" (declare) to the maiden that heaven is his new home, whereas God can also "deme" (judge) him unworthy and not "deme" (allow to go) the dreamer into heaven. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides these definitions: "To give or pronounce judgment; to act as judge, sit in judgment; to give one's decision, sentence, or opinion; to arbitrate," "to sentence, doom, condemn," "to decree, ordain, appoint; to decide, determine; to adjudicate or award" and "to pronounce, proclaim, celebrate, announce, declare; to tell, say, utter" (IV. 360-1). *The Middle English Dictionary* offers these definitions: "To pass judgment on...judge, adjudicate," "To give an order or directions; order, direct" (1225; 956-7).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of alle my blysse." For the dreamer, the "grounde" of his bliss was a physical object grounded in an actual place: the pearl who was lost in the soil of the earthly garden as well as the soil in which she is interred. In mourning his loss of the pearl, the dreamer declares, "'Of care and me 3e made acorde,/Þat er watz grounde of alle my blysse'" (371-72). In attempting to excuse his love-longing, for which the maiden chastises him because this sentiment embodies an attachment to a romanticized love object which is just as reprehensible as his earlier objectification of her as a gem worth money, the dreamer identifies himself with the earth, which is his very nature. In the dreamer's mind, his thoughts are inextricable from the geographical space which he inhabits: "'I am bot mol and manerez mysse....'" (382) This association between his terrestrial place and his restricted understanding is corroborated by Aquinas, who quotes Wisdom 9.15: "'The corruptible body weighs down the soul.'" Bynum comments on this passage: "So no one living in this mortal flesh can see God" (*Resurrection* 258), nor can that person see the world from God's perspective when he or she is "bot mol." The dreamer's identification with this "mol" is reflected in the fact that in this stanza-group, he uses the word "grounde" in reference to his perspective three times, whereas the maiden only mentions it twice (and the second instance is "rote and grounde"). Being a creature of earth, the dreamer is more closely associated with the ground.

In contrast, the Pearl-Maiden's spatial and moral spotlessness dictates the ground of her own bliss, which is not a topographically identifiable place but Christ himself, who has chosen her as his bride. As she says of him in extolling his virtues, "'Hys prese,[44] His prys, and Hys parage/Is rote and grounde of alle

[44]For "prese" Vantuono reads "pyece"; as mentioned above, this phrase connotes both a "piece" of something and a woman or girl. In this reading, the maiden seems to participate in her own objectification as the possession of Christ, even as the dreamer had seen her as a precious "piece" for him to possess. The maiden's statement differs from his, though, in that she proclaims herself to be Christ's "pyece," not the dreamer's.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

my blysse'" (419-20). Unlike the dreamer, whose "grounde" of bliss is a physical spot in which he believes his pearl to be mouldering away, the Pearl-Maiden's "grounde" is Christ, whose presence is not restricted to terrestrial or literal geography, but who is himself the "site" of all Christian meaning. In these lines, the Pearl-Maiden removes the idea of "grounde" from its temporal and spatial sense as earth, the origin of the narrator's misinterpretations and the site of his body's eventual decay, and makes "grounde" a moral position and a conceptual "place" from which meaning emanates. By placing her trust in the divine "grounde" who is the source of the world's meaning and towards whom all of Christian sacred topography points, the Pearl-Maiden is able to be relocated to the sacred, spotless "spot" of heaven.

In describing Christ as the "grounde" of her bliss, the maiden's statement also invokes the allegorical association between the body of Christ and the body of the world as represented in the Ebstorf Map, which I have described previously: a map depicting the world with Christ's head, his feet and each of his hands extending from the globe in the four cardinal directions. The maiden's identification of Christ as the metaphysical location of her joy also calls upon a rich tradition of associating places with Christ. Each place in the Holy Land is identified in the writings of pilgrims according to what Christ (or heroes and heroines--as well as villains--of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially those who were typologically connected with Christ) did there. By indicating how Christ is the center of the universe, the Pearl-Maiden offers the dreamer a redemptive way of reading both celestial and terrestrial geography, a spatial direction which also indicates spiritual directions for orienting oneself towards salvation.[45]

---

[45]On many medieval maps, east rather than north is the cardinal direction at the top of the map. Thus one "orients" oneself by facing east. The fact that orienting also involves seeking the right spiritual direction may be another reason why features of the terrestrial Orient (as seen by Occidental writers) became incorporated in descriptions of the celestial realm. *The Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the use of "orient" to indicate turning oneself toward the east, or making

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Because the dreamer does not possess the spotless image of Christ as the "grounde" and center of his own soul's topography, but clings instead to physical objects located and lost in a decaying world (and claims himself to be of the earth of that world: "'I am bot mol and manerez mysse'"--382), he is not prepared to cross the stream and join the Pearl-Maiden, whom he stubbornly continues to associate with a lost object of the material world. The dreamer insists that, like the maiden, "'Bot Crystes mersy and Mary and Jon,/Þise arn þe grounde of alle my blysse'" (382-3). What distinguishes him from the maiden, however, is that his "blysse" is still connected to the maiden rather than the exclusive territory of Christ. The poet intimates that if the dreamer substituted Christ for the pearl as the source of his bliss, establishing God as the center of his spiritual geography rather than placing the maiden beside Christ, then he would be allowed to become a part of God's own topography, the pearl-filled realm of souls who are set in Christ even as they had set him in the center of their hearts. The dreamer also errs in associating the "mersy" of Christ with the mercy which he expects of the Pearl-Maiden, whom he seems to chide for speaking harshly to him:

> "In blysse I se þe blyþely blent,
> And I a man al mornyf mate.
> 3e take þeron fyl lyttel tente,
> Þa3 I hente ofte harmez hate." (385-8)

He does not realize that the maiden is being merciful in trying to redirect his attentions towards Christ, whose mercy ultimately would allow him to take a place by her side. Once he expresses humble awe at her elevated status, however,

---

a building or other constructed object face east (as well as the idea of metaphorically being turned in the right direction) did not occur until after the Middle Ages (X. 929-30). However, the *Pearl*-poet definitely makes use of the concept, even if he does not use the terminology. (Interestingly enough, though, for all that the east symbolized the direction of the sun and Paradise, monstrous races were also thought to inhabit the East, as well as the other three hemispheres.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the maiden welcomes him to "walk and byde" in her realm (399)--though he still may not cross the river.

In order to correct the dreamer's habitual mis-setting of her identity, in lines 397-420 and in stanza-groups VIII and IX, the Pearl-Maiden tries to inform him of the nature of her place in the heavenly city so that the dreamer may also occupy such a place. S.L. Clark and J.N. Wasserman describe the maiden's teaching method in ambulatory spatial terms, as opposed to the fixed, static position of the dreamer as he is entrenched in his earthly errors:

> ...the jeweler's belief that he can join his lost pearl in the select company of the blessed, merely by traversing a physical boundary, speaks to the heart of his misconceptions. His own thoughts and perceptions are so firmly rooted in the physical, the mundane and the finite, that it is necessary for the Pearl-Maiden to walk him through a rather complex philosophical argument couched in terms *he* can understand. Her interest...is to lead him to the spiritual truths to which he has blinded himself, but she ironically must effect this transformation by manipulating the very spatial metaphors upon which he has fixed his argument. (Clark and Wasserman 1-2)

Here "place" takes on an additional connotation as rank, a concept which the dreamer understands only according to worldly hierarchal arrangements, even as he had understood the Pearl-Maiden's place as the physical location of her decaying corpse and her position as an inhabitant of the earth whom he had lost. The Pearl-Maiden, in contrast, presents herself as socially as well as geographically placeless. In heaven there is both geographical simultaneity and equality of rank. The maiden is in the garden/grave where the dreamer has fallen asleep at the same time as she is in the jewel-chest which she later refers to as God's body in 460-1. Moreover, she is just as much "queen of heaven" as any other righteous soul without displacing or overshadowing any of them. The dreamer, however, cannot understand how everyone can be a king or queen, and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

worries that the Pearl-Maiden's status as jewel and queen might "displace" the Virgin Mary. At the beginning of stanza-group VIII, he questions her anxiously:

> "Art þou þe quene of heuenez blwe,
> Þat al þys worlde schal do honour?
> We leuen on Marye, þat grace of grewe,
> Þat ber a barne of vyrgyn flour.
> Þe croune fro hyr quo moght remwe
> Bot ho hir passed in som favour?
> Now, for synglerty o hyr dousour,
> We calle hyr Fenyx of Arraby...." (423-30)

Just as in the beginning of the poem the dreamer had "sette hyr [the pearl] sengeley in synglure" (l. 8), the dreamer sees Mary as unique, like the phoenix, and cannot understand how she and the Pearl-Maiden, whom he deems to be of lesser rank, can occupy the same place in the social arrangement of heaven. (Interestingly enough, just as he has characterized the maiden as a rose rather than a jewel, the dreamer also associates Mary with a flower, viewing her also as a natural but transient earthly life form rather than a solidified, undecaying heavenly jewel.)[46] O.D. Macrae-Gibson invokes images of spatial and temporal limits in the dreamer's protest against heavenly limitlessness:

> There ought to be a limit to it [God's grace], he feels, a "date", and this notion of the limit, universally applicable on earth but perfectly inapplicable to heaven, is the basis of the dispute which occupies this ninth group and its link-word "date." On earth, circumstances constantly impose limits. (Macrae-Gibson 209)

---

[46]The dreamer's characterization of Mary as "Fenyx of Arraby" also recalls John Scotus Erigena's reference to the phoenix's resurrection as a correlative to the resurrection of the body after death. While the phoenix's miraculous regeneration seems supernatural rather than natural, according to Bynum, Erigena also uses naturalistic images of resurrection, like the emergence of the beetle from dung (medieval science taught that some insects grow spontaneously from decaying organic matter) (*Resurrection* 143). Because the *Pearl*-poet uses images of inorganic calcification rather than organic rebirth to depict the Pearl-Maiden's resurrection, the dreamer's use of the image of the Phoenix for Mary seems to reveal his continuing attachment to earthly processes of decay and regeneration rather than heavenly preservation and immobilization in the form of a gem.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This very mortal confusion about rank and status becomes the dreamer's third attempt at invading heavenly space, particularly feminine space. In stanza-groups VIII and IX, he tries to undermine the authority of the maiden, questioning her placement in social space as well as questioning her discourse itself, which is also the discourse of God articulated through her. The Pearl-Maiden, horrified by his assertion that anyone could displace Mary as empress of heaven, replies, "'Bot supplantorez none wythinne þys place;/Þat emperise al heuenez hatz--/And vrþe and helle--in her bayly....'" (440-42) Instead, the Pearl-Maiden notes of the heavenly kingdom,

> "Alle þat may þerinne aryue
> Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng,
> And neuer oþer 3et schal depryue,
> Bot vchon fayn of otherez hafyng,
> And wolde her corounez wern worþe þo fyve,
> If possyble were her mendyng." (448-5)

The arrangement of the redeemed in the heavenly kingdom is like that of limbs in a divine body, and as parts of the same body, rather than competing individual bodies, each of the redeemed experiences accord and mutuality with the rest, even as no parts of the body would struggle for mastery but would function together for the good of the entire body. Citing St. Paul's statement that each Christian is a member of the body of Christ, the Pearl-Maiden says,

> "Ry3t so is vch a Krysten sawle
> A longande lym to þe Mayster of myste.
> Þenne loke: what hate oþer any gawle
> Is tached oþer ty3ed þy lymmez bytwyste?
> Þy heued hatz nauþer greme ne gryste
> On arme other fynger þa3 þou ber by3e." (461-66)

The Pearl-Maiden's suggestion of a kind of heavenly democracy, with Mary as "first among equals," turns out to be quite a radical assertion when it is situated in the context of another great debate concerning the afterlife: whether

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the resurrected people will be entitled to the same rank in heaven as they had on earth. In fact, according to Bynum, the majority of medieval theologians believed that people would indeed retain their rank and station--even their gender--once they had been resurrected. She writes of this majority perspective, "Never losing its sex or its size or the scars of its suffering, the body that returned was a conveyor of status and experience; it was rewarded for its *particular* sacrifices and achievements" *(Resurrection* 137). One dissenter was Honorius Augustodunensis, who, in his *Clavis physicae,* "ridicules those who think bodies rise with sex or age or stature, and rejects the idea that there will be any difference in glory among those present in heaven" *(Resurrection* 141). Interestingly, this argument is diametrically opposed to his position in the *Elucidarium,* where he asserts that the dead do indeed arise with all of their physical and social particularities intact.

In lines 445-68, the maiden--and through her, the poet--suggests that all are equal and indistinguishable in heaven, a concept which the dreamer tries to demolish verbally with the same assiduousness as some contemporary exegetes tried to combat the idea of heavenly mutuality and non-particularity in their debates. The dreamer finds this equality most difficult to deal with when he sees the maiden among the other brides of the Lamb, merely one "lyttel quene" among thousands of others. His earthly sensibility will not allow him to see human beings as solid and shining jewels, as perfected and devoid of particularity as a pearl, and the poet does not seem to judge him with complete harshness for this sometimes touching human frailty of perception and imagination, this need to cling to one's own individual earthly position in heaven, which many medieval thinkers exhibited as well.

Despite the Pearl-Maiden's use of biblical examples to support her arguments, the dreamer still remains unconvinced that she can be a queen

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

because she had died before she could either profess her faith or commit good deeds. He brashly declares that she has misplaced herself in the divine scheme by setting herself higher than she deserves to be placed. At the beginning of stanza-group IX, he protests against her explanation: "'I may not traw, so God me spede,/Þat God woulde wryþe so wrange away" (487-88). Ironically, the dreamer, who cannot cease measuring the maiden by earthly standards (which he now uses to her detriment rather than to establish her as a desirable object), now accuses her of a social misplacement. Additionally, the dreamer, whom the Pearl-Maiden had reprimanded for setting the words of God "westernays," now asserts that God could not "wryþe" or turn in a direction inimical to his idea of God by elevating the Pearl-Maiden to a status which he believes that she does not deserve. In fact, it is he who is spatially and mentally "twisted" when he refuses to recognize that God's grace is capable of placing anyone in the metaphysical position of a pearl--or a queen. Here the dreamer attempts to subvert the maiden's very being through questioning her discourse--not about social arrangements in heaven in general, but about her own place in particular. Ironically, in a stanza whose first line carries over the word "cortaysé" from the previous stanza-group, the dreamer behaves discourteously in defense of the hierarchies of worldly feudalism.

The dreamer uses the logic of worldly rank to support his disbelief, arguing that the child could, by virtue of her innocence, be made a countess or duchess in heaven, but never a queen:

> "Of countes, damysel, par ma fay,
> Wer fayr in heuen to halde asstate,
> Oþer ellez a lady of lasse aray;
> Bot a quene!--hit is to dere a date." (489-92)

Contrary to the dreamer's insistence that her queenly rank is "to dere a date," the maiden emphasizes the limitlessness of divine goodness, stating that "Þer is no

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

date of Hys godnesse" (493). As an illustration of the unrestricted nature of divine love and mercy, the Pearl-Maiden tells the Parable of the Vineyard. In contrast to the dreamer's rigid understanding of spatial, social and moral placement, the maiden's vision is of a kingdom where God's compassion is not circumscribed by time or place. The nature of God's kingdom is, like God's own being, limitless--it is the "grounde" with no borders. It is also interesting that, while the dreamer justifies his objections with references to imperfect terrestrial ranking systems and spatial delineation and limitation, the maiden supports her arguments with references to Scripture, the sacred "terrain" of words in which divine meaning is made manifest.

The Pearl-Maiden's use of scripture to support her arguments is particularly important in order to establish her right to be an authoritative speaker, for as a woman, some medieval traditions of interpretation would question her veracity and trustworthiness as a vehicle for the transmission of the divine word. Though medieval literature is replete with allegorical female figures exhorting male protagonists to behave morally, actual women were frequently viewed with suspicion as speakers, and certainly as preachers, a role that the Pearl-Maiden takes on when she interprets the Bible for the dreamer and which was forbidden to women by St. Paul.[47] Antifeminist literature suggests

---

[47]Kevin Brownlee states that this was one of the difficulties of Christine de Pizan, "the first French literary figure who explicitly incorporated her identity as a woman into her identity as an author," when she entered the debate about the *Roman de la Rose* with *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* (1399), *Epistres sur le Débat du "Roman de la Rose"* (1401-2) and *Dit de la Rose* (1402). Because "Her identity as a woman inevitably problematized her status as an 'official' speaking subject," Christine had to use the language of courtly love and the language of clerkly discourse in order to be accepted as an authority who could comment on and critique the *Rose*, along with male writers (Brownlee 234). (In medieval fiction, the closest parallel to the Pearl-Maiden would be Dante's Beatrice, whose authority as a female speaker would also perhaps have been questioned.) R. Howard Bloch writes of "woman as riot", a speaker whose verbal effluence and exuberance is comparable to the "excessive" nature of her own body: "The riotousness of woman is, in the medieval thinking of the question, linked to that of speech, indeed, seems to be a condition of poetry itself. And if the reproach against the wife is that she is a bundle of verbal abuse *(contenz, riotes, reprouches, requestes, plaintes)*, such annoyances make her at least the fellow-traveller of the poet. Because of the inadequacies of language that she is imagined to embody, she is in some

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that women do not just use language copiously and excessively--they are themselves a copious and excessive language, just as their bodies were seen as breaching their own boundaries, like Bakhtin's grotesque body, as Stallybrass describes it: "She is the gaping mouth, the open window, the body that 'transgresses its own limits'...." (Stallybrass 128). Women's verbosity can also be compared to her allegedly wanton sexuality (Stallybrass 127). Robertson observes that Eve, widely considered to have brought about sin through her verbal and physical seductiveness (i.e., in using her attractiveness to encourage Adam to eat the apple and thus inheriting a sexuality tainted with the pain of childbirth and the shame of female submission to males), is a "cackler," and, to be redeemed, a woman must become as silent as Mary: "The cackling Eve must be transformed into the passive, silent Mary rather than into an active, abstract thinker" ("Rule of the Body" 130). The ideal holy woman and the desired woman of the romance, like the later Renaissance portrait of an ideal woman according to Stallybrass, is as silent as her body is enclosed: "This 'Woman,' like Bakhtin's classical body, is rigidly 'finished': her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house" (Stallybrass 127)--she is closed as a body, a text and a land.

However, the dreamer does not just question the maiden's right to speak authoritatively because of the supposed nature of female speech. In lines 481-6, he also questions her validity as a speaker because she could not speak

---

fundamental sense already placed in the role of a deceiver, trickster, jongleur" (Bloch 20). According to Bloch, women's "linguistic inadequacies" resided chiefly in the realm of speech. A woman was supposed to be garrulous, speaking frequently of inconsequential matters and/or harassing her husband, so the dreamer's distrust of the maiden's speech is particularly apropos. Patterson describes this alleged feminine superfluity of language: "Antifeminist literature presents woman as an inveterate and interminable talker, wagging her tongue like the clapper on a bell. And for much of this literature, a woman's voice is not merely part of her weaponry but the very mode of her existence, the substance from which she is constituted as well as the means by which she is made manifest" (Patterson 320).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sufficiently at the time of her death to proclaim the Creed or recite the Paternoster--forms of liturgical speech which would render her a legitimate speaker, and a legitimate queen, in the dreamer's eyes. Thus the maiden is doubly doubted and damned: as a child who had not reached womanhood and adult professions of faith, and as a woman--even if she were an adult, she would be an adult female speaker and therefore untrustworthy. The dreamer manages to disrupt her discourse most effectively by diminishing her, by reducing her to the child whom she had been on earth.

Bloch observes that woman's untrustworthiness as a garrulous, slanderous, nonsensical speaker associated her with literature itself (which has been distrusted since Plato's time because it was considered a tissue of lies rather than historical or theological truth), theological interpretations which concentrate on the letter rather than the spirit (ironically, in *Pearl* the dreamer, a male speaker, finds it difficult to transcend the letter, despite the maiden's encouragement through her spirit-oriented discourse), and rhetorical forms which deceive and dissemble.

In discussing how woman had come to be associated with representation, especially literary representation, Bloch makes an analogy between woman-as-body and the "embodiment" of ideas in language:

> ...we cannot separate the concept of woman as it was formed in the early centuries of Christianity from a metaphysics which abhorred embodiment; and ...woman's supervenient nature is, according to such a mode of thought, indistinguishable from the acute suspicion of embodied signs--of representations. As Philo Judaeus maintains, woman's coming into being is synonymous not only with the naming of things, but with a loss--within language--of the literal. (Bloch 37)

Bloch then discusses the theological debates on Eve's emergence from Adam's rib, a first instance of the necessity for exegetical interpretation: "The [Church]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fathers thus identify a loss of literalness, and the consequent necessity of interpretation, with the creation of Eve, or with the appearance of gender difference. The origin of commentary is the origin of woman" (Bloch 38). He explains also that "the Fall implies a fall into mediations, signs, representations that imply a gap between inner and outer, the body and its cover" (Bloch 99). Commentary is seen by these church fathers as an intrusive form of writing, just as women intrude into the lives of men with their supposedly distracting and complaining speech.

Bloch's association of women with flawed bodies and the "flaw" of representation, though somewhat simplistic in its assertion of univocal body hatred among pre-medieval people, is an important concept and perhaps a reason why the maiden's heavenly form is a perfected pearl-body, a jewel rather than flesh. Because her body is not subject to the decay and corruption of the earthly body--particularly the earthly female body--she is a legitimate speaker of the spotless word of God. Even as her citizenship in the realm "wythouten spot" indicates her transcendance of earthly limits (including earthly limits of preception and understanding), her own perfected pearl-body, a microcosm of her jewelled land "wythouten spot," embodies her redemption from the excesses of both terrestrial female flesh and terrestrial female speech. Only in this perfected form can she, in the words of Finke, "speak the body of her text through the text of her body" (Finke 81).

A number of scholars who have studied the writings of medieval female mystics have also noted similar difficulties for these women in terms of establishing themselves as legitimate speakers. Their own mortal, passable, open bodies were one of the obstacles in establishing themselves as authentic visionaries, according to Finke, thus necessitating their transformation into the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pearl-Maiden's "classical body" prior to being accepted as legitimate mystics. She maintains that

> ...linguistic empowerment for women was tied to the social repression of the body in the Middle Ages. The discourse of the female mystic was constructed out of disciplines designed to regulate the female body, and it is, paradoxically, through these disciplines that the mystic consolidated her power. (Finke 78)

She argues that methods of self-mortification and self-discipline, while harming the body, were also used by female mystics to transform the body into a closed "classical body" like the maiden's and thereby to gain power:

> Mystics took disciplines designed to regulate and subject the body and turned them into what Michel Foucault has called "technologies of the self," methods of consolidating their spiritual power and authority, perhaps the only ones available to women. (Finke 94)

Bloch has also indicated that women were associated with theological interpretations that focus on the letter rather than the spirit of the law, precisely the form of interpretation of which the dreamer is guilty: "The contrast between the letter--on the side of the body, the senses, the temporal, and the worldly--as opposed to the spirit, which is on the side of mind, form, and divinity....functions to create an opposition betwen female and male that relegates the feminine, and ultimately woman, to the inferior side" of flesh and word (Bloch 31). This association between flesh, "fleshly" or literal interpretation, and women also extends to Jews, whom early medieval Christians saw as limited interpreters of the scriptures who only recognized the letter, not the spirit, of the texts, much as the dreamer of *Pearl* does according to Marti (Marti 91). Ultimately, Bloch argues, this same association between women and literal interpretations allied women with heretics:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Those who don't believe, who remain on the side of the letter, the body, and the senses, are perceived to be women, and women, those who do not give up the feminized principle of the body, tied to the letter of the law, are, finally, heretics. (Bloch 32)

It is interesting in the context of *Pearl* that women were frequently suspected of heresy in the Middle Ages because the argument which the maiden makes in stanza-group VIII, while not literal or limited to terrestrial terms as are the arguments of the dreamer, is itself rather radical in terms of medieval ideas about the heavenly hierarchy. As a man, the dreamer has a stake in insisting upon earthly cultural positions in heaven. As a woman (and having been a child on earth), the maiden has a stake in rejecting these cultural positions, which would have reinforced her own subordination and silence, in favor of a heavenly "classless society."

Finally, Bloch notes that women have been associated with rhetoric, "the art of persuasion, which by the thirteenth century was synonymous with poetics. Woman is figured as the sophist, the dissimulator...the seducer with false arguments or subtlety...." (Bloch 53). Rhetoric is akin to women because both use the beauty of their physical or verbal adornments to deceive:

> ...the reproach against wives synonymous with the varieties of verbal abuse--garrulity, argumentativeness, the spirit of contradiction, indiscretion, lying, and seduction with words--is virtually identical to the medieval reproach against rhetoric for being uncontrollable, untruthful, appealing, and deceptive to the senses. (Bloch 65)

*The Lamentations of Matheolus* (thirteenth century) takes this connection further by insisting that woman is herself a faulty argument or subversive discourse: "Woman is portrayed as a kind of false logic, a sophism, that vanquishes both grammar and dialectic, the sciences of the true" (Bloch 65).[48]

---

[48]Just as she had written *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours, Epistre sur le Débat du "Roman de la Rose"* and *Dit de la Rose* in response to the negative presentation of women in *the Roman de la Rose,* Christine

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The ornamental quality of both women and poetry is, ironically, the focus of the (male) dreamer's attention in the form of his obsession with the "adubbement" of the land and the maiden, and perhaps with the poetic language which he uses to describe them, which can be compared in its lapidary luxuriousness to the alleged excess of both women's words and women's bodies. The poet subtly overturns these misogynist assumptions by making the male narrator's obsession with surface adornment, rather than the adornment itself (of land, language or woman), the locus of wrongdoing. The Pearl-Maiden's legitimacy as a speaker is partly derived from the fact that the dreamer only looks at her exterior ornamentation, not at what those gems might mean as allegorical representations of the purity of the redeemed soul. Additionally, it is not the maiden who seduces through language or through her beautiful physical presence. Instead the dreamer tries to seduce her through language, to reclaim her as "his" pearl and to claim her land as his own. When he cannot do that, he resorts to his own "spotted" corporeal strategy: rather than verbal seduction, he opts for physical invasion.

Furthermore, unlike women's speech in misogynist literature, though the maiden's speech is replete with courtly metaphors, its ornamentation is intended to enlighten and educate the dreamer by means of terminology familiar to him, just as the jewels of the landscape, though they are objects which are familiar to the dreamer/jeweller, are jewels to be read, not collected. When the dreamer describes her "gentyl sawez" as jewels (278), he focuses on the beauty of her speech (glossing over the fact that these "gentyl sawez" are critical of his own words!) rather than on the fact that they are as perfect and unassailable as her realm and her resurrected body. Instead the dreamer's own speech and attitude

---

de Pizan wrote *Cité des dames* in response to Matheolus' rambling, mysogynistic verses in *The Lametations of Matheolus.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

possess the negative characteristics attributed by theologians and other thinkers to women's speech. It is the dreamer who verbally attacks the maiden (and through her, God) and who makes the "plaintes" associated with wives, always demanding more and never being satisfied with the unique privileges that God has already offered him through granting him a vision of heaven. It is the dreamer who questions, misleads and misinterprets, not the maiden. It is he who uses faulty argumentation (rather than biblical examples) to confound and undermine the maiden's arguments. It is also he who is guilty of literal, earthbound forms of thought and perception. Finally, while the maiden has a shining, impenetrable, jewel-like "classical body" that reflects her "classical," calm, reasoned jewels of speech, the dreamer's very spotted flesh, his source in the earth, and his grief (which the maiden criticizes for its excessiveness, just as women were conceived to be excessively emotional) make him the more apt representation of mortal and moral flaws than this perfected woman can be. The maiden's authenticity as a speaker is partially established by the poet's association of the dreamer with literalism, excessive and overly emotional speech, deception, subversive rhetoric and overconcern with ornamentation--all traditional characteristics of the speech of women according to medieval misogynists. In contrast to the dreamer's attempted diminishment of the maiden's arguments by relegating her to her former terrestrial position as a female child before the age of reason or speech, the dreamer ultimately becomes the one who has no right to speak or to cross the river, since these actions are both in opposition to God's will as described by the maiden.

The Parable of the Vineyard (497-588) is the maiden's answer to the dreamer's plaint. Instead of using ornamental forms of persuasive rhetoric, she locates her arguments in the authoritative text of Jesus' parable. This act of preaching is truly radical, for as a woman, the early and medieval church would

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

have denied her this privilege. However, the poet softens the potential subversiveness of this divine discourse mediated through a female speaker by (as I have just described) allying the dreamer with the "feminine" traits of excessive bodiliness, speech and emotion and the maiden with the "masculine" traits of a perfected body, measured speech and rational, biblically-based discourse. This "sex change" legitimates the maiden's identity as a female preacher.

The Parable, which is centrally located within the poem as well as central to the Pearl-Maiden's understanding of the divine arrangement of the universe, exhorts the dreamer on Christ's behalf to "Gotz to my vyne" (535), to labor righteously in a place where no one's work gives him or her superior placement in a hierarchy of workers. Like the "grounde" of the maiden's bliss, which is not a physical location but Christ himself, the vineyard is not so much a place as a state of being. The vine, of which individual souls are branches, is Christ.

In this vineyard there is not only no allegiance to the usual system of social rank, but the concept of temporal order and duration is also reversed. The owner of the vineyard (Christ) orders that those in charge of paying the workers """Bygyn at þe laste þat standez lowe,/Tyl to þe fyrste þat þou atteny""" (547-8). The biblical text reads "'Voca operarios et redde illis mercedem/incipiens a novissimus usque ad primos'" ("' Call the workers and pay them their wages. Start with the last-most and end up with the first.'") The maiden has thus added a hierarchal element. The biblical text merely mentions "last" and "first" in terms of when the workers had arrived at the vineyard. However, the Pearl-Maiden adds a class implication. Those who "standes lowe" are poor as well as late-arriving.

Later the maiden interprets these orders with reference to salvation: "'"Þe laste schal be þe fyrst þat strykez,/And þe fyrst þe laste, be he neuer so swyft...."'" (570-1). The biblical text states, "sic erunt novissimi primi et primi novissimi"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

("Thus shall the last be first and the first last.") The Pearl-Maiden's additional use of running and competitive imagery ("fyrst þat strykes," "be he neuer so swyft") seems to be a criticism of the dreamer's competitive approach, his contention that people must be ranked, as are winners of a race. The Pearl-Maiden overturns this and all of his other assumptions about how people should be "ordered" in hierarchies. Unlike the dreamer's mis-setting of God's words, God sets human social positions in the opposite of the socially acceptable direction--the right direction. God turns the place of people around by delivering them from the death which they had brought upon themselves by sinning in (and being cast out of) Eden and by paying every Christian with the same coin--salvation--regardless of the length of his or her labor.

Like the dreamer, the workers in the vineyard do not comprehend this egalitarian form of reward. Because they have done more work, the earliest-arriving workers demand a higher wage. They complain:

> "'Þese bot on oure hem con streny;
> Vus þynk vus o3e to take more.
>
> More haf we serued, vus þynk so,
> Þat suffred han þe dayez hete,
> Þenn þyse þat wro3t not hourez two;
> And þou dotz hem vus to counterfete.'" (551-56)

The biblical source reads: "et accipientes murmurabant adversus patrem familias dicentes/'Hii novissimi una hora fecerunt/et pares illos nobis fecisti quia portavimus pondus diei et aestus'" ("and the workers murmured against the lord, saying, 'These last have worked for an hour, and you have made them the equals of us, who have borne the burden of the day and the heat?'") Though the Pearl-Maiden recreates the substance of this text, in hers, the complaints of the workers are more colorful. Perhaps this embellishment could substantiate contemporary accusations of literature's (and women's) power of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ornamentalizing, exaggerating and seducing via the senses, but I believe that the maiden instead is attempting to appeal to the dreamer's own humanness through this immediate and "earthy" language of the poet's image of medieval workers.

The workers' demand for more recalls the dreamer's incessant desire to see more of the landscape of heaven than is permitted to him. His notion of his own worthiness as one who has toiled long in the vineyard (as compared to his child, who had died before the age of understanding) is predicated upon an earthly need to find one's own place in the world by comparing oneself to others, even as his profession as a jeweller demands the comparison of jewels to one another in order to establish their worth. The Pearl-Maiden has no such interest in comparison. In her mind (and, through her, God's), each of the redeemed occupy the same "place"--that of being delivered from death and hell--and are not jealous of one another. The heavenly realm exhibits a social mutuality which is not present in human life. As the Pearl-Maiden says at the beginning of stanza-group XI, in response to the dreamer's irate exclamation "'Me þynk þy tale vnresounable'" (590),

> "Of more and lasse in Godez ryche,"
> Þat gentyl sayde, "lys no joparde,
> For þer is vch mon payed inlyche,
> Wheþer lyttel oþer much be hys rewarde." (601-4)

When the dreamer levels an accusation against the maiden as a speaker, indicting her "tale" as unreasonable, she gently reminds him that this is God's tale, and his "ryche," not her own story or her kingdom. She reestablishes her legitimacy as a conveyor of divine words by reminding him that God's words speak through her. Her selflessness extends to her invitation for the dreamer, who wants more than he can have (and complains about it like a "garrulous woman"), to be satisfied with what he has. The Pearl-Maiden's stance, in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

response to the dreamer's continual craving for more (more freedom to explore, more explanations, more of the maiden herself), is summed up in a statement of spiritual submission to divine sufficiency: "'For the grace of God is gret inoghe'" (612).

Despite the poet's careful assignment of the voice of reason to the maiden, and the hysterical voice of unreason to the dreamer, he is not completely unsympathetic to the human protagonist. The ambiguity of this tale lies in the fact that the complaint of the workers--and the dreamer himself--is legitimate. While the maiden attempts to prove the mutuality and impartiality of God, in a way the divine system also appears arbitrary and capricious rather than a higher type of fairness. Indeed it is unfair from a human standpoint that the hardworking vineyard employees would get paid the same amount as those who had loafed idly about until the eleventh hour. It also appears unfair that the Pearl-Maiden, who had been a child of two on earth, would be placed on an equal level with those who have suffered and struggled against sin for their entire lives, as the dreamer objects. The fact that the dreamer has misunderstood the nature of the divine reward--salvation is the same "coin" for everyone, and God's mercy is "gret inno3e" to admit the late-repenting--does not totally gloss over the unsettled nature of this parable.

The maiden then explains to the dreamer in stanza-group XII that one does not enter the heavenly kingdom as a result of desire but because one deserves to be placed there. Unlike an earthly landscape, which can be entered (and possessed) if one wants to and has the military might to do so, the heavenly landscape resists inhabitation by the unworthy, as the dreamer will later discover when God casts him out before he can reach the shore where the maiden dwells. She outlines to the dreamer what sort of people are able to earn a place in heaven, paraphrasing the Psalms, "'Hondelyngez harme þat dyt not ille,/Þat is of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hert boþe clene and ly3t,/Þer schal hys step stable stylle" (681-83). These are the people who can "'klymbe Þy hy3 hylle,/Oþer rest wythinne Þy holy place'" (678-9). The Pearl-Maiden appears to be paraphrasing Psalm 14: "Domine quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo/aut quis requiescet in monte sancto tuo/qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur iustitiam/qui loquitur veritatem in corde suo/qui non egit dolum in lingua sua/nec fecit proximo suo malum/et obprobrium non accepit adversus proximus suos...." (O Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, and who shall live on thy holy hill? [That person] who walks blameless [literally "without spot"] and does rightly, who speak the truth from his/her heart, who does not slander with his/her tongue, nor does evil to his/her neighbor, and does not place blame against his/her neighbors....) The maiden's paraphrase emphasizes the innocence, even the childlikeness, of these chosen people, who come to Christ "ry3t as a chylde" (723). This statement overturns more of the hierarchal convictions of the dreamer. Children, who would normally be considered of less account than adults, are honored as the avatars of innocence and spotlessness. She thus also redeems her own terrestrial identity from the dreamer's narrow conception of it. While he had used her brief life on earth as a reason to doubt both her philosophical positions and her social position in heaven, the maiden renders her identity as a child on earth a reason why she was thus exalted and purified. Her child-identity becomes a source of power and authority, not a means of undermining them.

Extending this metaphor of salvation as the act of earning a place in a sacred space, she also later (in the next stanza-group) refers to the kingdom as having a gate which God will only "vnpynne" for those "wythouten mote" (726-8). The Pearl-Maiden clearly states here what she has implied before: being placed in the spotless kingdom which she inhabits is the result of her moral stance, with Christ's example as a "grounde" for her actions. Unlike the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dreamer, who, like a colonizer of earthly landscapes, presumes to place himself where he wants to be, the Pearl-Maiden recognizes the necessity of submitting to God's own estimation of where she belongs. She invites the dreamer to abandon his traditionally masculine control over his own space (and the space of others, like the jewels which he sets where he wants them) in favor of a surrender to wherever God wishes to place him--a submission expected of women to men in a patriarchal society. Instead of wanting "more and more" out of both land and God, she insists that the dreamer must be content that the limitless mercy of the Creator is "gret innoghe."

In contrast to the dreamer's overly emotional philosophical positions, based on an earthly logic as spotted as his terrestrial place, the maiden continues to ground her discourse in paraphrases from Scripture, and in one interesting passage she encourages the dreamer to follow Christ's footsteps through reading:

> "Ry3twysly quo con rede,
> He loke on bok and be awayed
> How Jesus hym welke in arepede,
> And burnez her barnez unto Hym brayde." (709-12)

This passage combines interpretation and motion through space, but as a means for becoming enlightened, not for the purposes of conquest and acquisition. Those who are able to read are exhorted to read the Scriptures and "be awayed," or taught, by means of the example of Christ literally "walking" in the world, among the people of ancient times. Through reading and interpreting the Scriptures correctly, the reader is able to follow Christ's footsteps and come to him, both spatially and spiritually--just as the children had done, much to the distress of the apostles. The medieval reader might also associate this peripatetic image of Christ with pilgrimages, on which one could walk in the symbolic or even literal footsteps of Christ *(vestigia Christi)*, as in this description of the place where Jesus had cast the moneychangers out of the temple: "On the right side of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Temple there is shown to this day a stone, which is treated with great veneration...it having been trodden on and bearing the mark of the Lord's foot, when He alone by Divine strength withstood so many men and cast them forcibly out...." (Würzburg 13). By travelling through places associated with Christ's redemptive work, the pilgrim "reads" the story of this work in the land (which is itself, along with all of creation, "the traces and footprints of God"--*Holy Feast* 254) and can in turn be led towards enlightenment, as Gregory the Great postulated, "traveling towards understanding 'with the foot of the mind'" (F.C. Gardiner 14). Mary Campbell indicates that medieval pilgrims, like the Pearl-Maiden, viewed the landscapes which they traversed as a text which could teach them divine truths:

> These writers were readers too--they read in the stones and fountains and eaves of Palestine the narrative that had lured them there, the story of the Jewish people (whose holy places the Christian church was already beginning to appropriate through such architectural projects as Constantine's.) *(Witness* 17)

The verb "be awayed" is also an interesting metaphor for the act of instruction. It is reminiscent of the "way," or the path to truth, which is also spoken of in a familiar passage from the Gospel of John: "I am the Way...." By learning from the example of Christ's "walk" through the world, one is oriented in the right direction on the path, so that one is no longer "westernays," or facing away from God, but oriented towards Christ. Through Christ's having marked the world with signs of his redemptive presence, the Holy Land itself becomes a teacher, as Campbell attests in the writings of Palestine pilgrims: "Places were referred to as 'witnesses' of those events and people, and pilgrims in them are witnesses of those places seen *as* events" *(Witness* 19). Ludolph von Suchem also characterizes the Holy Land as a teacher, or more specifically a book which Christ has "illustrated" by his miracles, which can in turn educate people like the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dreamer, if they were to interpret these illustrations correctly: "This land of Galilee also has been illustated and glorified by very many of Christ's miracles" (von Suchem 124). Because the Holy Land itself can be a teacher, the maiden intimates that the dreamer can also find lessons in his own landscape--he does not have to invade hers in order to become "placed" there. Ironically, if he could read God's word as a faithful witness in the book of his own world, he would be accepted into her own kingdom, as a heavenly bride, by God. The Pearl-Maiden teaches that when one reads and heeds Christ's call by means of repentance, he or she is able to be "relocated" in terms of his or her moral position in physical space--namely brought into the jewel-realm which he now desires to enter by force rather than by invitation.

Becoming like a child also involves a temporal reversal reminiscent of Christ's "the last shall be first" dictum. Through innocent submission to God's will, rather than through imposing one's own will on divinely-ordered space, one gains access to salvation. This paradox can only be understood, however, if the dreamer abandons his restrictive perspective on space, time, order and degree, as well as if he relinquishes the physical literalism of an earthbound consciousness. Instead he continues to test the boundaries of his own place in the universe, eventually causing himself to be thrown out of the interpretive terrain of his dream when he literally goes "out of bounds" by attempting to cross the separating stream.

The maiden's invitation in stanza-group XIII (723) to the dreamer to become like a child--namely to become like she was when she died, a helpless being whose very low status in the terrestrial hierarchy caused the dreamer to question her celestial placement--also implies that he must become like another lowly being in the medieval hierarchy: a woman. Though the poet's characterization of the souls of the redeemed as brides has biblical precedent in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Book of Revelation and appears in other medieval allegories (where women also personify such abstract qualities as Reason or Nature), in a poem which exhibits such an awareness of gender as well as social placement, this seems an interesting and deliberate choice. In the aristocratic society of which the Pearl-Poet may have been a part, women were both spatially and socially circumscribed.[49] The submission which the maiden asks of the dreamer--to cease demanding his rights over space and instead to allow himself to be placed, spatially and symbolically, wherever God sees fit--thus mirrors the spatial and social submission which was expected of medieval women on earth. The maiden hence invites the dreamer to become both like a child and like a woman (who was at the time, for all practical purposes, the legal equivalent of a child) to enter into the kingdom of God. The submission to God demanded of both religious women and men (and women and men religious) was also the submission to men which was demanded of women.

---

[49]Margaret Wade Labarge summarizes the inferior social position of medieval women: "The young girl or infant was in the same state of legal powerlessness as her brother, but her upbringing was mainly devoted to inculcating the feminine ideal of passivity and submissiveness to her parents and a future husband.... Her marriage, often at a very young age, meant total domination by her husband and, for all practical purposes, the extinguishing of her legal rights during the term of her marriage" (Labarge 27). Shulamit Shahar elaborates on the different social (and spatial) territories from which women were excluded in the Middle Ages: "By law, a woman had no share whatsoever in the government of the kingdom and of the society. A woman could not hold political office, or serve as a military commander, judge or lawyer. The law barred her from filling any public office and from participating in any institutions of government, from manorial courts to municipal institutions, royal councils and representative assemblies in the various countries. The literature of the estates declares explicitly: 'Women must be kept out of all public office. They must devote themselves to their feminine and domestic occupations'" (Shahar 11). This social exclusion also was reflected in women's spatial containment. Georges Duby observes that "The threat to established order appeared to stem from the most intimate, private aspects of courtly society"--namely the realm of women (Duby 77). "Hence, women of noble birth were kept under close surveillance and tightly disciplined. ... They were kept under lock and key in the most isolated part of the house: the *chambre des dames* was not a place for seduction or amusement but a kind of prison, in which women were incarcerated because men feared them" (Duby 77). Duby continues: "For fear of dishonor women were kept shut away and closely watched, cloistered when possible, and allowed out only with an escort when required for public ceremonies or religious duties. When a woman traveled, a part of the household 'conducted' her to her destination in order to make certain she could not be seduced" (Duby 82).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In this stanza-group, after trying to educate the dreamer about her (and his) placement in divine space, the Pearl-Maiden endeavors to impart her own understanding of metaphoric space itself. In contrast to the "unkynde jueler", as she earlier calls the dreamer when he misjudges the value of "his" gem, in lines 729-44, she tells the biblical story of the jeweller who buys the pearl of great price at great personal cost.[50] She identifies the pearl with the heavenly kingdom and with her own spotless nature as its citizen:

> "This makellez perle þat bo3t is dere,
> Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,
> Is lyke þe reme of heuenesse clere--
> So sayde þe Fader of folde and flode--
> For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,
> And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,
> And commune to alle that ry3tywys were.
> Lo, euen inmyddez my breste hit stode...." (733-40)

The pearl not only represents the perfection of the heavenly city which the maiden inhabits, but also inhabits her "inmyddez my breste," just as Christ encloses each of the pearls/souls in his jewel-chest while at the same time the faithful contain him in their souls, at the center of (or "inmyddez") their beings.[51] This image of mutual enclosure both disrupts the human

---

[50]The biblical original reads: "'iterum simile est regnum caelorum homini negotiatori quaerenti bonas margaritas/inventa autem una pretiosa margarita/abiit et vendidit omnia quae habuit et emit eam.'" ("'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking good pearls, and who, finding one precious pearl, went and sold all that he had and bought it.'") The maiden elaborates on this text, stating that the merchant "solde alle hys goud, bope wolen and lynne,/To bye hym a perle was mascelles'" (731-2). Perhaps she does so in order to appeal to the dreamer's professional experience in terms of the mercantile aspect of his vocation.

[51]Marti believes this image of the Pearl-Maiden wearing her own pearl is analogous to the Incarnation: "This arrangement reflects the dispersion of spatial centeredness effected by the Incarnation, whereby the body of each believer is both a temple for the Holy Spirit and a new center for the universe" (Marti 102). He describes the simultaneity of encloser and enclosed in incarnational spirituality: "The Incarnation imposes a paradoxical spatial organization of creation whereby God, who in himself contains all things, allows himself in turn to be contained by his entire creation; when Christ enters the innermost space of Mary's womb, Mary is said to contain that which contains her and everything else: 'illum continens, a quo tu et omnia continentur'" (Marti 11; the Latin quote is from St. Clare). An interesting aspect of this containment imagery which Marti does not discuss explicitly is that both Mary and the Pearl-Maiden are specifically

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

understanding of space, by insisting upon a kind of locative simultaneity of mutual inhabitation, and redefines the idea of enclosure itself. Whereas the dreamer had tried to "set" or enclose the pearl in order to protect it from loss, God does not "set" the maiden in the heavenly jewel-box as a gesture of possessiveness. Instead, the pearl in the center of her attire, and the jewel-studded landscape which she inhabits, both express her blemishless nature. Being within the landscape of jewels does not entrap the maiden, as would the decaying mortal world if she returned there. Instead, this spot is a fit setting for her spotlessness--and indeed its begemmed features "explicate" and define the maiden's condition.

The maiden's explanation of the image of the pearl of great price also reiterates the poem's central idea of space as signification rather than location, an idea which she had previously asserted in her proclamation of Christ as "grounde of alle my blysse." The pearl is the symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem, a space which is itself without definable earthly geographical placement but which is centrally located in the symbolic "terrain" of Christian spirituality. Like Christ, it is without blemish and does not concern itself with one's former "place" in the mortal world of rank. Finally, it is a symbol, as the Pearl-Maiden declares, that "'My Lorde, þe Lombe, þat schede Hys blode,/He py3t hit þere in token of pes'" (741-2). The Pearl-Maiden's notion of place as a site of meaning is reechoed in her address to the dreamer, as well as in pilgrimage literature, which concentrates on "places where" sacred events occurred (Campbell 32): "'I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode/And porchace þy perle maskelles'" (743-4). These lines recall several aspects of the complex spatial symbology of the poem. First the

---

female containers of the "jewel" of Christ. Both of them have unpenetrated virgin bodies, and it is by virtue of the unviolated enclosure of both their bodies and their souls (Mary having been immaculately conceived and the maiden having died before she was capable of committing sin) that they are able to contain the pure pearl of Christ even as he contains them and all of creation, as the Ebstorf Map illustrates.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pearl-Maiden makes clear the distinction between human, earthly space (the "worlde wode" whose imbalance the dreamer exhibits in his narrow, inverted reading of divine meaning) and the heavenly "perle maskelles" "in token of pes" which also represents a city that is named (not coincidentally) "vision of peace." Then she revises his understanding of her own nature by directing his attention away from his vain attempt to reacquire her as his pearl to the more proper quest for his own pearl--that is, his own way to salvation.

Predictably, the dreamer misses the point of this explication. He asks not how to find his own pearl but, demonstrating a continuing concern with physical and visual surface features, asks of the pearl whom he still desires for himself, "'Quo formed þe þy fayre figure...?/Þat wro3t by wede he watz ful wys....'" (747-8) Though the dreamer's question is not entirely objectionable (for its answer could lead him to God, who had created her "fayre figure") he still misplaces his attention by concentrating more on her "fayre figure" than on its creator in lines 749-54, where he exults,

> "Þy beauté com neuer of nature--
> Pymalyon paynted neuer þy vys,
> Ne Arystotel nawþer by hys lettrure
> Of carped þe kynde þese propertéz;
> Þy colour passez þe flour-de-lys,
> Þyn angel-hauyng so clene cortez."

In response, she verbally steers him to Christ, who is the source of her pearl-studded appearance, describing her journey from the "worlde wete" (761) of the dreamer, a site of both fertility and decay,[52] to Christ's spotless land in language

---

[52]Hildegard von Bingen's notion of the moisture and "greening power" of God is an interesting positive depiction of the wetness of the world. She describes the soul as "flooded" with the dew and warmth of the Holy Spirit (Vision IV. 25: 102) She likens the tears of guilt which produce repentance to life-giving earthly moisture: "And thus out of sighs and tears the greening life-force of repentance arises" (IV. 32: 107) in the same way in which "the moisture of the waters cultivate[s] the whole Earth, make[s] it fruitful, and complete[s] it" (IV. 36: 110). She also speaks of "the moisture of humility" (IV. 36: 111). The very physicality and fecundity of the earth serve as metaphors for the part of the soul which exhorts the body to transcend its physicality: "The rivers

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

touchingly like a courtly love lyric, a medium which the dreamer, who had addressed her earlier with romantic endearments like "my blisfol beste" (279), "my swete" (325) and "my dere endorde" (368), might more readily comprehend. The image of Christ as lover and bridegroom which appears throughout stanza-group XV is relentlessly masculine, unlike the later images of Christ's continually-bleeding wound, which, in the writings of female mystics, rendered him mother as well as male lover:

> "When I wente fro your worlde wete,
> He calde me to Hys bonerté.
> 'Cum hider to Me, My lemman swete,
> For mote ne spot is non in þe.'" (761-4)

Paradoxically, Jesus summons the maiden to his "mote," the city of Jerusalem, because there is no "mote" in her. Spotless, she is the perfect resident of his "spot." Obediently she follows him and establishes her "grounde of bliss" in the spotless Lamb. Having arisen out of the "clot" in which her body is clad on earth, the maiden rises to "pe hyl of Syon, pat semly clot" (789).

In contrast with the dreamer's misinterpretation of the Pearl-Maiden's location, in stanza-group XIV, the Pearl-Maiden herself uses language to locate the heavenly Jerusalem in which she does belong: "'Of Jerusalem I in speche spelle'" (793). Since the city is simultaneously without stain and without an earthly location, the maiden must express its spiritual contours in a linguistic

---

give rise to smaller streams that sustain the Earth by their greening power. All the rivers and streams are stirred up by the air...and cause everything to germinate by their warmth and moisture. This is how it is when the soul overcomes the desire of the flesh and founds its longing within us humans. The soul itself and the body complete their work in harmony, and as a result fly up in the pure joy they feel over holy actions and the sweet perfume of virtue. And just as the larger rivers pour out of themselves the smaller streams that cause the Earth to germinate, the soul--if it dominates the body--awakens in that body love, obedience, and humility as well as the other mighty powers of virtue by which the soul causes us to praise God and practice good works" (IV. 59: 112). This image of fertility and purification also recalls the riverlike wound of Christ, a source of spiritual nourishment in medieval theology, as I will discuss later in conjunction with the poem's presentation of it.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

form. When she speaks of Jerusalem, the Pearl-Maiden first invokes it as the physical place in which her "lemman" Christ was judged and slain, as if appealing first to the dreamer's limited, place-bound consciousness: "'In Jerusalem watz my Lemman slayn/And rent on rode wyth boyez bolde....'" (805-6)

The fourteenth-century pilgrim Ludolph von Suchem also characterized Jerusalem--indeed, the entire Holy Land--as a place which is sacred through its association with Christ:

> Now the Holy Land, that is, the Promised Land, which God promised that He would give to Abraham and his seed, is beloved by God, praised by angels, and worshipful to men; for our Lord Jesus Christ deigned to consecrate the same with His most precious blood, to honour it with His presence.... (von Suchem 3)

Because of its association with Christ, Jerusalem can be called the spatial and spiritual center of the world, as the early twelfth century *The Work on Geography* declares: "Jerusalem is the metropolis of Judaea and is situated at the navel of the earth, in the middle of the world" (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 198)--as the "wonder perle" and Christ are set in the middle of the Pearl-Maiden's body and soul, respectively. Like Ludolph and the author of *The Work on Geography*, the Pearl-Maiden addresses the dreamer's fixation with terrestrial space by invoking the earthly Jerusalem, but she moves beyond the city as mere location by describing Christ's activities in it, thus making Christ the "grounde" of this land even as he is the "grounde" of her transcendent joy. Yet, like the pearl herself, Christ may have been in the mortal world for a time, but he is not now confined to it. In the poet's Christian vision of the cosmos, Christ's death transcends time and space. By describing both the terrestrial and the heavenly Jerusalem as places with Christ at the center, the maiden also implies that he should be at the center of the dreamer's cosmos and consciousness.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In stanza-group XV, the Lamb becomes associated with the "mote" where he had been slain, in a passage where his "motelesness," or purity, is celebrated:

> "Þys Jerusalem Lombe had neuer pechche
> Of oþer huee bot quyt jolyf
> Þat mot ne masklle mo3t on streche,
> For wolle quyte so ronk and ryf." (841-4)

While Christ is identified as the "Jerusalem Lombe," the city gains its spiritual significance through the Lamb who was slain there. Other biblical places gain their significance from their association with Christ; for example, John of Würzburg writes that he will begin his account with Nazareth because of its centrality to the life-story of Christ: "Now because our redemption was begun in the city of Nazareth through the incarnation of our Lord...we propose to begin our description with this same city...." (Würzburg 1). As a result of his redemptive death, Jerusalem becomes a site of Christian significance, redeemed from locative and temporal particularity and transformed into an eternal image for the deliverance that was enacted there, just as Nazareth is the geographical and spiritual beginning of the story of salvation.

In contrast to her description of the earthly Jerusalem in stanza-group XIV, in stanza-group XV, the Pearl-Maiden describes the heavenly Jerusalem, adhering to the vision of St. John. Even as the Lamb had sprung victoriously up from the earthly spot where he was crucified, the spotless city of the heavenly Jerusalem is a non-terrestrial place which came into being because of Christ's redemptive death and resurrection. This spot, which is the image of the Lamb's spotlessness, is the heavenly answer to the earthly need for "more." In heaven, everything is sufficient, and no honor accorded to any individual diminishes the "place" of anyone else.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Not content to envision the image of the spotless city which the Pearl-Maiden causes to appear verbally, at the end of stanza-group XV, the dreamer insists that he must view the city himself:

> "Neuer þe les let be my þonc,'
> Quod I, 'my perle þa3 I appose;
> I schulde not tempte þy wyt so wlonc,
> To Krystez chambre þat art ichose.
> I am bot mokke and mul among,
> And þou so ryche a reken rose,
> And bydez here by þys blysful bonc
> Per lyuez lyste may neuer lose.
> Now, hynde, þat symplenesse conez enclose...." (901-9)

Though the dreamer tries not to offend the maiden with his repeated plea for "more and more," nonetheless his insistent speech becomes a discursive analogue to literal invasion of space. He declares that he does not wish to "tempte," to lead astray or defile with his plaints if not to seduce in order to defile physically, the woman who is Christ's bridal chamber, a spotless enclosure or "kyste" for the "gay Juelle" of Christ. Yet this statement only underscores how his speech has been invasive all along. He had tried to undermine her authority as a speaker earlier in order to reinstate his earthly world-view, and now he uses his repeated requests to wear down the maiden's resistance and permit him to enter a place which only Christ has the right to enter and dwell within. The dreamer also proves ignorant as well as arrogant when he assumes that the maiden, who is but a conduit for Christ's will, can grant him a privilege which only God can grant.

The dreamer's words also reveal that he has not entirely learned to see the maiden in a new way. Though he correctly (if rather unctuously) abases himself as "mokke and mul among," spotted and slimy earth, he calls her a rose, which perhaps cannot lose its life or its perfect beauty on the banks of the rivers of heaven. However, the image of the rose also recalls the mortal existence which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

she has left and had specifically repudiated when she had informed him that the rose was what he had lost: a transitory mortal body, not an immortal soul, not the pearl who belongs to Christ. Interestingly, in offering his next plea, he again likens her to an enclosure--in this case, as a kind of jewel-like "setting" for "symplenesse"--but nevertheless he does not realize that she is as closed to him now as the heavenly land is. In answer to her "nonetheless" of contentment with whatever God gives, the dreamer uses his "neuer þe les" to ask again for more.

The dreamer's later request of the maiden that she "'Now tech me to pat myry mote'" (936) not only displays his insistence and his belief that the maiden can take him to her realm (contrary to God's wishes), but also indicates his unrelenting literalness about symbolic places. The dreamer believes there to be a "mote," a corporeal city where the maidens reside, and desires to see such a place. Marie Borroff makes a connection between the dreamer's idea that the brides inhabit a city and his assertion that they live "under mone":

> In view of the fact that the poet distinguishes so carefully between sublunary and translunary realms, it would seem that the dreamer's use of the phrase 'vnder mone' when he inquires of the maiden where she and her companions dwell is to be taken as yet another sign of his characteristic misapprehension. 'As 3e ar maskeles vnder mone,' he says, 'your wone3 schulde be wythouten mote.' [lines 923-24.] They are not, of course, 'vnder mone,' any more than the city of Jerusalem the maiden is talking about is in the land of Judea. (Borroff 169)

The dreamer's desire to associate the maidens with a spot even in a spotless world is highlighted by a touching concern for their welfare as well as their potential "setting" in a city enclosed by walls, as befits their noble nature: "'So cumly a pakke of joly juele/Wer euel don schulde ly3 þeroute....'" (929-30) "Mote," the dreamer's epithet for the city that he believes the maidens to inhabit, is yet another play on the double sense of "spot" as "blemish" and as "place," for,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as the Pearl-Maiden notes, the heavenly city is as without stain as are Christ and his "flok": "'And as hys flok is wythouten flake,/So is Hys mote wythouten moote'" (947-8). She then explains to the dreamer the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem, a lesson which he sorely needs, since he still naively protests concerning Jerusalem, "'Bot in Judée hit is, þat noble note'" (922), revealing that he still thinks of places in terms of their terrestrial locations and not their spiritual meaning.

Continuing his plea in the last lines of the sixteenth stanza-group, the dreamer insists again on associating the spotless with a spot, contradicting himself unawares when he requests the "moteles" maiden to show him her "mote":

> "Motelez may so meke and mylde,"
> Þen sayde I to þat lufly flor,
> "Bryng me to þat bygly bylde
> And let me se þy blisful bor." (961-4)

When the Pearl-Maiden finally assents to his request at the beginning of stanza-group XVII, recalling that he will "'leuez noþynk bot ye hyt sy3e'" (308), she cautions him that he has no place in such a spotless city: "'To strech in þe strete þou hatz no vygour,/Bot þou wer clene, wythouten mote'" (971-2). Since he is a mortal spotted by sin, he is restricted to a physical spot (a hill) from which to behold the unmarred city, just as his body still lingers upon the mound where his pearl is buried while he is experiencing the dream-vision. Stanbury indicates that his vision of Jerualem is an optical, not a physical, experience: "When the Maiden promises him a vision [of Jerusalem], she expressly states, in fact, that it is a purely optical experience. He may not inhabit the space he will see...." (*Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 22) Unlike the hill on which the pearl's body decays, the place from which the apostle John had beheld the city in his vision was merely a spot from which his vision had extended upward to view a "moteles

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mote."[53] However, though the dreamer's own soul has departed from the spot where the pearl is interred, he has not physically or mentally left it, since he cannot reconcile the maiden's new "place" in heaven with her previous, terrestrial identity as a lost jewel or a young child, both of whom he claims as his.

The dreamer's (and the poet's) vision of the city in stanza-group XVII is constantly infused with the presence of St. John, whose name is the linking word of the stanza-group. The poem's invocation of the apostle is perhaps not only representative of a medieval writer's desire for a written "auctorite" to establish the veracity of the dreamer's vision, but may also represent an effort on the part of the poet to correct the dreamer's previous misunderstanding of the non-terrestrial space of Jerusalem. Like the Pearl-Maiden, the poet substantiates his own (and the dreamer's) perception of the city through references to the vision of Saint John in the Book of Revelation, from which the description and meaning of the place is derived. In each stanza of this group he lends apostolic authority to his view of the jewel-formed structure of the city with phrases like "As deuyses3 hit, the apostel John" (984) or "As John deuysed 3et sa3 I þare...." (1021) This deferral to scriptural authority on the part of the poet, and through him, the dreamer, may indicate that the dreamer's understanding is expanding, since the Pearl-Maiden has used scripture in a similar way in her earlier efforts at enlightening him. Nolan argues that this practice of seeing the place through John's eyes, traversing the imagistic landscape of revelation with him, was also a feature of late medieval Apocalypse illustrations:

---

[53]The apostle is also raised up by angels, elevated physically and mentally to view the city: "et sustulit me in spiritu in montem magnum et altum/et ostendit mihi civitatem sanctem Hierusalem/descendentem de caelo a Deo" ("and in spirit he raised me up to a great, tall mountain, and he showed to me the holy city of Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.") Like the dreamer, John is raised up in spirit and his body is left below, though the dreamer's understanding also seems to have remained earthbound, unlike John's.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Like the sculptural programs of St.-Denis and Chartres, these illustrations were to serve as guides for memory, fixing the "places" of St. John's spiritual pilgrimage in the reader's mind. Through John's example, the audience, turning the pages of the book, might perceive an intimate relationship between their own time and place and the course of sacred time figured forth in St. John's revelation. It is not necessary to insist on direct influence in order to suggest that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century poets closely paralleled contemporary artistic interests as they likewise chart their readers' way from sin toward salvation through a series of visionary "places." (Nolan 82-3)

The structure of the place seems even to have been built by the words of John, for in the descriptions of each segment of the city walls and buildings, the physical details are so seamlessly joined to the image of John recording his vision that it seems as if the place takes shape directly from the words of John--a place fashioned by language. In lines 997-8, the dreamer professes that he knows the names of the jewels in the city walls through John's vision: "As John þise stonez in writ con nemme,/I knew þe name after his tale." Then John becomes a builder of the city through describing it in words:

> 3et joyned John þe crysolyt,
> Þe seuenþe gemme in fundament;
> Þe a3tþe, þe beryl, cler and quyt;
> Þe topasye twynne-hew, þe nente endent;
> Þe crysopase þe tenthe, is ty3t;
> Þe jacynght þe eleventhe gent;
> Þe twelfþe, þe gentyleste in vch a plyt,
> Þe amatyst purpre wyth ynde blente. (1009-1016)

In his description of the jewels of the heavenly city, John becomes the kind of jeweller--and reader of interpretive topography--that the dreamer is not. The jewel-formed city of his description is not a shining land of surfaces, but a place, "joyned" through descriptive language, whose gem-formed walls describe the citizens inside. The gems are the substance of the city, not an ornamentation of it.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Besides being built upon the words of the apostle John, the poet's description of the heavenly Jerusalem in stanza-group XVII also has correlatives in the descriptions of the terrestrial Jerusalem by pilgrims, visions of the celestial Jerusalem by mystics, and depictions of the glories of the East by travellers like Marco Polo. Ironically, this "spot" "wythouten spot" can be located in a rich tradition of geographical and visionary landscape description. Tundale's mid-twelfth-century vision characterizes the celestial Jerusalem as a place of bejewelled splendor:

> And while they [Tundale and his angelic guide] had proceeded they saw a high wall...well built out of all the most precious stones, with different colors, and with metals placed between, so that it seemed to have gold for cement. Moreover, its stones were crystal, chrysolite, beryl, jasper, jacinth, emerald, sapphire, onyx, topaz, sardonyx, chrysoprase, amethyst, turquoise, and garnet. With these and similar stones the shining wall roused the feelings of those looking in great love of the Lord. (Gardiner 191)

In the early twelfth-century account of Thurkill, Jerusalem is depicted not just as a city of gold and jewels, but also as a city of shining light, as the dreamer later observes in his own vision of the city:

> ...they came to a most beautiful gate adorned with jewels and precious stones. The wall around it shone as if made of gold. As soon as they entered the gate, a kind of golden temple appeared, much more magnificent than the former with all its beauty, in its pleasant sweetness, and in the spendour of its glittering light. (Gardiner 234-5)

In Tundale's vision of heaven, the inhabitants are in appearance like the golden walls of the realm, just as in *Pearl* both the heavenly realm and its inhabitants are jewels:

> Many thrones appeared to them, of gold and gems and constructed of all kinds of most precious stones and enveloped with most precious silk. In them sat the elders, both men and women, dressed

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> with silk and white stoles, with crowns and all ornaments....The face of each one was truly splendid, just as the sun shines in the midday. They had hair like gold, and on their heads they had gold coins decorated with gems. (Gardiner 187-8)[54]

Descriptions of the Holy Land by medieval pilgrims also depict the earthly Jerusalem as a place of splendor and glory. Daniel the Abbot, an early twelfth-century Russian visitor to the Holy Land, describes the Templum Domini (which he calls "the church of the Holy of Holies," a name which does not appear in any of the Western accounts)[55] in splendid terms--though of "gilded copper" rather than gold and jewels, Daniel still manages to find the church of indescribable beauty:

> The church of the Holy of Holies is wonderfully and skilfully decorated with mosaics within and its beauty is indescribable; it is circular and it is artfully and indescribably painted on the outside; its walls have slabs of precious marble and it is beautifully paved with marble slabs. It has twelve round columns standing in a circle beneath the roof and eight built columns and four doors; these doors are fashioned of gilded copper. And the roof is skilfully and wonderfully decorated inside with mosaic and covered on the outside with gilded copper. (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 132)

---

[54]In interesting contrast to *Pearl*, the inhabitants of heaven are both male and female, and, whereas in *Pearl* the light of sun and moon have been banished from the realm, in Tundale's vision, the faces of the blessed are themselves like suns. On the subject of the single gender of the inhabitants of heaven, the word *maydenne3*, which the poet uses to designate them, does not necessarily indicate that they are all women; however, other words in the poem do suggest this possibility. Gordon discusses the gender of the chosen in *Pearl*: "*maydenne3:* renders *vergines* in Apoc. xiv. 4, where, however, the 144, 000 are specifically described as men. The word *mayden* in Middle English was used of either sex...and the poet here clearly intends his *maydenne3* to include women, since the Pearl herself is one of them, or possibly he thought of them all as women, since in 785-6 he describes them as *þe Lambe3 vyue3*. Many theologians understood the *vergines* to be celibates of the Church, irrespective of their sex on earth; Bede, for example, in *Explanatio Apocalypsis* (Migne xciii.173) quotes Augustine to that effect. And since this applied also to the maidens who were the wives of the Lamb in spiritual marriage, it is possible that the poet also held this view" (Gordon 75).

[55]Though during the period during which Daniel wrote, the building was used as a church (from about 1099-1185), it was previously a mosque and has been ever since. The fact that Daniel does not mention its previous identity seems a verbal form of seizing territory--by omitting its previous ownership by Muslims, Daniel rewrites the building as a Christian possession.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Like the heavenly Jerusalem, this church shines, its beauty surpasses language, its interior includes harmonious geometrical figures and its architects were attentive to numbers--twelve, eight and four--in constructing it. The Sepulcher of Christ, the earthly container of Christ's body as the heavenly Jerusalem is the container of his celestial glory, is as bejewelled as the heavenly city, according to Mandeville: "Dedenz cette eglise tout en my a vn tabernacle ainsi comme vne petit maison; et a vne basse huisserie; et est ce tabernacle fait en fourme de demy compas, moult noblement afaitiez de pierres, dor et dargent et dautres couleurs moult bien aournees" (Letts 269).[56]

Like the celestial Jerusalem, the terrestrial Jerusalem is spotlessly clean--but by virtue of its ingenious drainage system, as described in the *Gesta Francorum Expugnatiam Iherusalem*, c. 1106:

> Moreover the Emperor Hadrian made the city wonderfully beautiful and gave it a splendid adornment, paving its streets and squares. He is the one from whose name Jerusalem later came to be called Aelia. And he provided all the streets with drains, so that when the rains come, all the dirt in the city is washed away down them. (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 176)

Thus the "motelesness" of the terrestrial Jerusalem derives from human ingenuity as well as from Christ's redemption of the world in that "spot," which the Pearl-Maiden describes in graphically bloody (and decidedly not "moteles" or decorative) terms in lines 805-16.

The topography of the Pearl-Maiden's celestial Jerusalem also recalls Western European descriptions of the Orient, just as the jewel-land itself is reflected in the imagined riches of the terrestrial East. Marco Polo describes the

---

[56]The Bodleian text reads: "And withinne that ilke chirche is a tabernacle craftely and coryously i wrou3t, and is i garnysshed with golde, siluere, asure, and with manye othir precyous stones and colours; withinne wiche tabernacle towarde the ri3t side is the holy sepulcre of our lorde Iesu Crist" (Letts 445). This English text omits some of the description in the Paris MS, which portrays the sepulchre as a miniature house and made in the form of a "half-compass."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

palace of the Japanese emperor in terms not unlike Tundale and Thurkill's descriptions of the Heavenly Jerusalem:

> ...he has a very large palace entirely roofed with fine gold. Just as we roof our houses or churches with lead, so this palace is roofed with fine gold. And the value of it is almost beyond computation. Moreover all the chambers, of which there are many, are likewise paved with fine gold to a depth of more than two fingers' breadth. And the halls and windows and every other part of the palace are likewise adorned with gold. (Polo 216)

Through all of these analogues, some of which the poet may have read or at least heard of secondhand, the "moteles mote" of Jerusalem is nevertheless located in a literary landscape of many evocative places: other visions of the celestial Jerusalem, pilgrims' views of the Jerusalem on earth, and even palaces of the Far East. However, in viewing his own heavenly Jerusalem, the challenge to the dreamer is not to see this city in the context of other places, but to read the city as a series of signs intended to lead him to God and to becoming eventually worthy of passing through the gates of the heavenly city.

Though his attempt at describing the city through the words and vision of the Apostle John indicates that the dreamer is on the way to reading symbolic space as if it were Scripture, the refrain of "sun and mone" in the next stanza-group (XVIII) proves that he has not entirely ceased trying to comprehend another land through references to his own flawed realm below the moon. While in the preceding passages, the poet and the dreamer seemed to be viewing the city together, now the dreamer's flawed perspective once again intrudes. The absence of the sun and moon (1043-4) indicates that the spotless world of his dream is not susceptible to the mortal (and moral) decay of which the moon is emblematic, and that it is also unlocatable with reference to these familiar luminaries. The absence of these celestial markers of human time as well as

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

space also illustrates, by the very mention of their absence, the dreamer's longing for that mutable world which is his own familiar "spot."

Not only can the sun and moon not shine in the spotless city, but for the inhabitants

> Of sunne ne mone had þay no nede;
> Þe Self God watz her Lombe-ly3t,
> Þe Lombe her lantyrne, wythouten drede;
> Þur3 Hym blysned þe bor3 al bry3t. (1045-48)

The heavenly world is not illumined by lamplight or by the sun, but by the radiant Lamb. In the image of "Lombe-light," the corporeal sense of light as visually-perceived brightness is juxtaposed with the deeper connotation of light as redemption and transcendent understanding. In this description of the city's untainted light, there is a subtle play on "lombe" (lamp) and "Lombe," the title of Christ. The city is lit by "Lamb-light," an image which establishes Christ (or, more specifically, a verbal image of Christ in which he is simultaneously Lamb and man and divinity, even as the maiden is pearl and person at the same time), as the center of the city, as he was the center of the terrestrial Jerusalem by virtue of his death and resurrection there. He is the heavenly city's source of illumination as well as its "grounde," and, as light and Lamb, an image for the simultaneity and incomprehensibility (from an earthly perspective) of the city itself.[57] This incomprehensibility is also expressed by the city's simultaneous roundness or squareness, as Marie Borroff writes:

> The kingdom of heaven *is* round--the maiden has said so in expounding the attributes of the pearl of great price in section 13. If we object that the same city cannot be both round and square, we are thinking, like the dreamer, in terms of spatial dimensions as we

[57]This image of the Lamb as lamp appears in the biblical original: "et civitas non eget sole neque luna ut lucent in ea/nam claritas Dei inluminavit eam/ et lucerna eis est agnus" ("and the city did not need the sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God illumines it, and its lamp is the Lamb.")

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> experience them on earth. But the rules of geometrical and positional space...do not apply to the heavenly kingdom as it is imagined by the*Pearl* poet. (Borroff 167)

Christ is also both the spatial and the spiritual center of the heavenly Jerusalem, the source of its spiritual illumination as well as its literal source of light. The image of the city which is square and round at once also reminds the reader of the circularity of other perfect objects in the poem, namely the pearl as opposed to the moon, and the circular structure of the poem itself, which returns to the words and imagery of the beginning in its last stanzas. This structural roundness imitates the perfection of the heavenly city and the pearl which is its emblem.

The "lamb-light" of the city, that celestial light which the Monk of Evesham had described as "that brightness, inconceivable as it was, [which] did not blind the eyesight, but rather sharpened it" (Gardiner 216), is also symbolically present in the terrestrial Jerusalem as the German pilgrim Theoderic describes it in the late twelfth century--a metaphorical light arising from Christ's presence in the land:

> On the very top of the mountains, as Josephus and Jerome bear witness, is located the city of Jerusalem. This is held to be holier and more famous than any other city or place in the world, but not because it is holy in itself or for itself. It is holy because it is illuminated by the presence there of our God and Lord Jesus Christ and of his good Mother, and the fact that all the Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles had lived and taught and preached and suffered martyrdom there. (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 276)

If the dreamer could see places by this "lamb-light"--seeking Christ's presence in the land, whether on earth or in heaven--he would be able to enter the heavenly city after death.

The dreamer notes that the heavenly city has no church, but that "Þe Almy3ty watz her mynster mete...." (1063)[58] Christ is not only the source of

---

[58]The maiden is paraphrasing the description of the Vulgate, in which "Dominum enim Deus

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

salvation for the inhabitants of the city, but is also the literal location of their worship, the temple in which they pray and the sacrifice which is continually offered there (1064). He is, in fact, the geographical and spiritual center of the entire heavenly realm in that the river which separates the dreamer from the maiden and which flows throughout the land emanates from the throne on which he is seated:

> Sunne ne mone schon neuer so swete
> As þat foysoun flode out of þat flet;
> Swyþe hit swange þur3 vch a strete
> Wythouten fylþe oþer galle oþer glet. (1057-60)[59]

The identification of the dreamer with the moon of his physically and metaphysically lost world occurs again when he is warned that, though the gates of the city are never shut, "'Þer entrez non to take reset,/Þat berez any spot anvnder mone.'" (1067-8) The implication of this sentence is that the spot of sin is acquired not just through one's deeds but, additionally, as a result of one's spatial positioning in a marred world, which will eventually cause one to see sacred space in a "spotted" way if one cannot disassociate one's soul from it through penance (or through baptism, as is the case with the Maiden, who had died before she had been capable of sinning and needing penance.) Like the moon, which cannot enter the city or borrow the Lamb's light because "To spotty

---

omnipotens/templum illius est et agnus" ("The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were their temple.")

[59]This description paraphrases the biblical account: "et ostendit mihi fluvium aquae vitae splendidum tamquam cristallum/procedentem de sede Dei et agni in medio plataea eius" ("and he showed me the river of the water of life, splendid as crystal, flowing from the seat of God and the Lamb in the middle of the place in that [city].") Hildegard von Bingen uses a similar image to describe the rivers of the world: "In union with the watery air, the atmosphere stirs up the sea, out of which the different rivers flow separately to moisten and fortify the whole body with blood" (Vision IV. 59: 111). In *Pearl*, rivers are features of both spatial and bodily geography. The river flowing from Christ's throne and moving throughout the land is analogous to Christ's continually bleeding wound--thus the river is literally as well as figuratively blood. Symbolically, Christ's blood nourishes the land and divides it even as earthly rivers nourish life on earth and divide continents from each other.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ho is, of body to grym" (1070), those bound to earth by their sins and their limited, fleshly interpretation of the order of the world cannot become citizens of the Lamb-lit city.

The reference to the moon's "body" reminds the reader of the tangibility and physicality, the geographical "spottedness," not only of the moon but of the denizens of the world below it, who are marred both by their sins and by their very corporeality. The unredeemed human being is a decaying corpse restricted to a physical location which it cannot transcend, even at death, since in mouldering beneath the earth from which it had derived its substance, the body becomes an inextricable part of that earth. If they are still spotted by sin, human beings, like the moon, are incapable of attaining the light of the Lamb's offer of salvation, which is the result of the paradoxical embodiment of the Word in order to free humankind from its corporeal taintedness. If they prove unable to see beyond their earthbound perspectives, human beings, like the dreamer, remain physically restricted to the sublunar, spotted enclosures of their own bodies.

The dreamer's first glimpse of the Lamb (stanza-group XIX) causes him confusion, for in the body of Christ he sees both the impermeability and crystalline perfection of the Pearl-Maiden and the land itself--for Christ is the "gay Juelle" who is the source of the maiden's own transformed body and spirit--and the vulnerability of a mortal body, for the Lamb's side has been rent by a wound which bleeds as continually as the river which flows from the Lamb's throne[60]:

> "Best watz He, blybest, and moste to pryse,
> Þat euer I herde of speche spent;

[60]Interestingly, the piercing episode which was the source of this wound appears only in the Gospel of John--presumably the same John who had authored the text from which the poet had drawn his description of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

So worþly whyt wern wedez Hys,
His lokez symple, Hymself so gent.
Bot a wounde ful wyde and weete con wyse
Anende Hys hert, þur3 hyde torente.
Of his quyte syde His blod outsprent.
Alas, þo3t I, who did that spyt?
Ani breste for bale a3t haf forbrent
Er he þerto hade had delyt." (1131-40)

Though the Lamb's body and garments are as white and shining as the Pearl-Maiden's, his side is torn and spurting blood. This is the wound dealt by the spear of one of his executioners, though the dreamer does not recognize this mark upon God's body: he cannot read the "text" of Christ's wounded body any more than he can read the text of the heavenly landscape. This image of Christ's wounded body as a text appears in the writings of Richard Rolle, an English mystic who was a contemporary of the *Pearl*-poet. After observing that "The equation of text and body finds its most explicit explication in patristic exegesis: the Bible, especially, is often compared with the body of Christ," Marti suggests that "This symbolic equation came about partly via comparison between Christ's wounds and manuscript rubrication. Richard Rolle, for example, writes: 'Þy body is lyke a boke written al with rede ynke; so is Þy body al written with rede woundes'" (Marti 53). Many critics who analyze imagery of the body in literature have compared the "body" of the text to the female body as it is "read" end exploited by patriarchal cultures, and this connection of Christ's wounded body to a book is an interestingly different example of this phenomenon. While Christ's body is male, some medieval mystics connected his bleeding body to a woman's life-giving, nurturing body in that, just as a woman's body secretes blood and milk, Christ's wound emerges from his body in order to nurture the world spiritually.

The poet's depiction of Christ dwells specifically on Christ's body; in particular, the poet concentrates on rendering Christ's wounded body. Unlike

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

artists of the early Middle Ages, who preferred to represent Christ in glory and triumphant resurrection, and who depicted him as remarkably undamaged and triumphant even in images of the crucifixion, late medieval artists increasingly represented Christ's agonies and his wounds in sometimes excruciating specificity. The faithful were encouraged to meditate upon these sufferings in gruesome detail. Images of Christ as an invulnerable, perfected body yielded to images of Christ as vulnerable and perforated by wounds. Bynum comments on this transformation:

> As the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries wore on, theologians came to place the saving moment of Christian history in the Crucifixion rather than in the Incarnation or Resurrection; visionaries saw Christ in the elevated host not as regal lord, lavishly robed priest, or warrior against Satan, but as crucified man.... *(Holy Feast* 252)

These images became particularly potent sources of reflection for female mystics, who experienced Christ's own openness and woundedness in their bodies, and simply because women were often identified with the body, the mother being labelled by medieval medical theories as the partner who contributes the physical matter of the fetus, while the father contributes the spirit. In his human body, Christ was thus identified with the female human being because, having no human father, he must have obtained his flesh from his human mother. Bynum comments that "This sense that Christ as body is formed from Mary's body led Hildegard [von Bingen] to argue that it is exactly *female* flesh--the very weakness of woman--that restores the world" *(Holy Feast* 265). For some interpreters of medieval monastic traditions, Christ's permeable body in its wounded state is an inspiration (paradoxically) for women religious to cultivate closed, impermeable bodies, like Christ's at the Resurrection, as Lochrie attests:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Christ's wounds, far from signifying the perviousness of the female body, serve to remind women of the need to dam up their own vulnerable bodies. Instead of glorifying the feminine, imitation of Christ forces the recluse to internalize the association of the feminine with the breached flesh. (Lochrie 127)

However, other scholars disagree, finding instead that, in the actual experience of mystics (rather than in guides to women religious, usually written by men), the mystics identified with Christ's wounded state because of their own violable, vulnerable, "breached" status as women. Robertson states that medieval medical notions of

> ...the biological parity between blood, sweat, tears, milk, and urine meant that a woman's contemplation of Christ's blood was contemplation of her own blood, and further that her tears were equivalent to Christ's blood. The suffering body of Christ thus allowed a woman not only to pity Christ but to identify in him her own perceived suffering body; moreover, union with his suffering body would allow her to realize her perceived biological needs. ("Medieval Medical Views" 149)

Bynum concurs with this argument, positing that the bodily closure which female mystics cultivated through ascetic disciplines paradoxically allowed her body to become open in a different, transcendant way--a way which did not embody mortal spottedness but instead imitated divine spotlessness and generosity:

> Closing herself off to ordinary food yet consuming God in the eucharist, the holy woman became God's body. And that body flowed out, not in the involuntary effluvia of urine or menstrual blood or dandruff, but in a *chosen* suffering , a *chosen* excreting, that washed, fed, and saved the world. *(Holy Feast* 274)

Yet even involuntary secretions and effluvia which do not at first seem holy, such as menstrual blood, can be allied to the saving blood of Christ in the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

writings of medieval holy women. The revelations of Julian of Norwich, according to Robertson,

> are permeated with images of blood. She writes, "with him I desyred to suffer, livyng in my deadly bodie, as god would give me grace....And in this sodenly I saw the reed bloud rynnyng downe from under the garlande, hote and freshely,/plentously and lively, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head." ("Medieval Medical Views" 154)

Robertson translates "lively" as "a living stream"--a phrase that can equally describe the river in *Pearl*, which the poet imagistically links to the blood that, river-like, "outsprent" from Christ's side. Just as Christ's blood flows continuously from his side while the dreamer watches in pity and horror, Julian describes Christ's blood in her own vision as flowing "plentously." Moreover, Robertson links this blood specifically with Julian's own menstrual blood:

> Like menstrual blood, "the bledyng contynued"...and, as she explains of this vision..."this ranne so plentously to my syght that me thought, 3yf itt hadde bene so in kynde, for pat tyme itt schulde hafe made the bedde alle on blode and hafe passede onn abowte." ("Medieval Medical Views" 154)

However, in Julian's vision, women's blood is not just homologous to Christ's blood in its woundedness but also resembles his blood in its redemptiveness:

> Christ's blood is linked with all kinds of moisture, all redemptive of feminine excess: "God has made waterse plentouse in erthe to oure servyce and to owre bodylye ese, for tendyr love that he has to us. Botte 3it lykes hym bettyr that we take fullye his blessede blode to wasche us with of synne; for thare ys no lykoure that es made that hym lykes so welle to gyffe us. For it is plenteouse and of oure kynde" ... Excess moisture is thus redemptive, and thereby so is femininity itself. ("Medieval Medical Views" 155)

Bynum indicates that medieval medical theory, which argued that "breast milk was transmuted blood" *(Holy Feast* 270-1)--i.e., that the mother's blood was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

transformed into milk to nourish her child--provided a basis for theologians (and, by extension, authors like the *Pearl*-poet) to understand Christ's wounded body as containing both male and female aspects:

> A medieval theologian, whose assumptions about the body were formed at least partly by this medical tradition, might therefore see the blood Christ shed in the circumcision and on the cross as analogous to menstrual blood or to breast milk....Such medieval ideas made it easy for writers and artists to fuse or interchange the genders and therefore to use both genders symbolically to talk about self and God. As mystics and theologians in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries increasingly emphasized the human body of Christ, that body could be seen both as the paradigmatic male body of Aristotelian physiological theory and as the womanly, nurturing flesh that Christ's holy mother received immaculately from her female forebear. *(Resurrection* 114)

In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* she also notes how frequently medieval people associated Christ's redemptive activities with the nurturing behavior of a mother:

> Both men and women have described Christ's body in its suffering and its generativity as a birthing and lactating mother and may at some almost unconscious level have felt that women's suffering was her way of fusing with Christ because Christ's suffering flesh was "woman." *(Holy Feast* 260-1)

This imagery of Christ as a mother appears as early as the second century, when Clement of Alexandria "had spoken of Christ as mother, drawing out the analogy between a God who feeds humankind with his own blood in the eucharist and a human mother whose blood becomes food for her child" *(Holy Feast* 270-1). Jesus has even been described as a birthing mother by the thirteenth-century mystic Margaret of Oingt, and Guerric of Igny (twelfth century), Catherine of Siena and the Monk of Farne (fourteenth century) envision him nursing the soul *(Holy Feast* 266). Marti contends that in medieval theology,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> ...through the wound in Christ's side, his heart poured forth the water and blood of baptism, simultaneously creating the four rivers of paradise. This liquid effusion constituted the birth of the church, the figural coordinate of Eve's birth from Adam's side; the heart...shares the generative function of the womb. (Marti 132)

This series of images is particularly interesting in light of the association of body and land in *Pearl*. On earth, Christ's wound gives rise metaphorically as to the rivers of paradise, which Mandeville stresses are as uncrossable as the river which divides the dreamer from the maiden--namely, through his redemptive death, he has allowed humankind access to paradise once more and, hence, salvation. Symbolically, this river gives nourishment to the faithful in the form of the church. However, this association between Christ's body and the land--specifically, the rivers of paradise and the river which flows throughout the heavenly landscape--also calls attention to the dreamer's transgressive desire to enter a land forbidden to spotted humankind, a land which is also the body of Christ. Thus his unbidden entrance into the heavenly city by crossing the forbidden river would be like a violation of Christ's body.[61]

The dreamer sees Christ's blood only as a token of his woundedness, not as a symbol of his nurturing of humankind as well. Just as he does not recognize the one "who did that spyt" (1138) (i.e., who had wounded Christ) as the Roman

---

[61]This notion of the dreamer's possible violation of Christ's body through his desired penetration of the land is interesting in light of the fact that late medieval legends are full of descriptions of the eucharistic host's violations at the hands of sinners and unbelievers. In *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, Bynum describes this growing interest in the defiled body of Christ: "Insistently the host forced itself onto the senses of believers as flesh with firm boundaries. The many miracles of consecrated wafers oozing or streaming drops of blood were understood to be announcing not just the sins of individual Christians but also attacks by outsiders, especially heretics and Jews. Miracles of bleeding hosts, which proliferate from the twelfth century on, sometimes have sinister overtones. The host becomes flesh to announce its violation; the bleeding is an accusation" (*Holy Feast* 63). On the other hand, medieval mystics, particularly female mystics, frequently expressed a desire to enter into the wounds of Christ as if it were a landscape. The ambiguous nature of the dreamer's desire to enter the maiden's terrain, figured as the wounded body of Christ or the wounds themselves, thus indicates both his wish to follow the dictates of his faith and how his more flawed desires (such as his desire to be with the maiden again when he is not yet allowed to do so) war with these purer intentions.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

soldier in particular and all of humanity in general, he does not seem to be aware that it is this ever-flowing wound which has nurtured humankind with the "plenteous" (Julian of Norwich's word) flow of redemption. The association between Christ's wound and maternal nurturing through lactation occurs in late medieval (thirteenth and fourteenth century) paintings, in which Christ, offering his wounded side, is posed next to Mary, who offers her breast.[62]

Christ's body as it appears in *Pearl*, then, is a combination of medieval masculine and feminine characteristics, of perfected, impermeable, pearl-like wholeness and the permeable woundedness of the flesh--a woman's flesh in particular. The fact that his side-stream of blood echoes the copious flow of the river from his throne also unites Christ's feminized, wounded body with the land itself, which is also feminized and which the dreamer wishes to invade just as he had wished to claim the body of the Pearl-Maiden. Though the *Pearl*-poet's image of Christ's nurturing blood is not as elaborately physical, nonetheless it does recall these depictions of Christ's bleeding wound as nurturant and

---

[62]Bynum describes one such painting, the *Triptych of Antonius Tsgrooten by Goswyn van der Weyden* (1507): "Christ offers his wound to God the Father; Mary, in a parallel gesture, offers her breast. The symbolic significance of breast as food is underlined by the presence next to her of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom (according to a popular medieval legend) she gave milk" *(Resurrection* 115). In a painting closer to the *Pearl*-poet's own time, the anonymous*Intercession of Christ and the Virgin,* c. 1402, Jesus offers his side-wound to God the Father on the left side of the painting, and Mary offers her breast on the right *(Resurrection* 208). Some paintings even represent Christ as feeding saints directly with blood from his side: a fifteenth-century north German painting, *Christ and Charity,* reproduces an image of Christ feeding a female figure with blood from his side, an image which antedates this particular painting, as Bynum notes: "Although the female figure here is allegorical...this painting illustrate[s] the medieval tendency to associate Christ's feeding with female recipients" *(Resurrection* 111). Finke finds a parallel image in the life of Angela of Foligno: "...Angela compares herself to a nursing baby, drinking the blood of Christ from the wound in his side" (Finke 89). Sometimes Christ is actually given breasts to complement his nurturing wound, as in a thirteenth-century vision of Alice of Schürbecke, who "ran to Christ's breasts and wounds, in every tribulation or anguish, every depression or dryness, like a little child drinking from its mother's breasts, and by that liquid she felt her members restored" *(Holy Feast* 249). The image of dryness as a state of spiritual aridity is also described by Hildegard von Bingen in relation to penance: "Awakened again by our good deeds, we consider the seriousness of our sins so earnestly and so contritely that our flesh and limbs often become dried out" (Vision IV. 32: 107). Eventually the "greening power" or "moisture of humility" rescue one from this state of spiritual dryness. These salvific liquids parallel the secretions of women's bodies, nourishing the soul as breast milk nourishes the child, and cleansing the soul as menstrual blood is a cleansing of the body.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

redemptive. The river which parallels this stream of blood waters the heavenly land and produces growth; similarly, the blood of Christ promotes the spiritual "growth" of redemption--a redemption which the dreamer can only attain if he accepts this blood with the meek submission of the maiden and her colleagues, who do not insistently shove one another aside to gain access to him (as the dreamer tries to force himself into the Pearl-Maiden's realm), but instead follow him with the mild manners of maidens at Mass: "Þa3 þay wern fele, no pres in plyt,/Bot mylde as maydenez seme at mas,/So dro3 þay forth with gret delyt" (1114-16). To gain access to a God who is like a mother in his nurturant outpouring of blood, the dreamer must also become like a woman--as mild of manners and undemanding, as the maiden had earlier insisted that he become like a child--as she herself had been before her death. Just as Christ seems powerless and vulnerable in his wounded state, the dreamer must become similarly powerless, surrendering himself to God's will, in order to cross the stream which is so like Christ's copiously-flowing and redemptive blood.

In terms of *Pearl's* spatialized morality, perhaps one of the most fascinating and perplexing images for Christ's wounds in the later Middle Ages is the identification of Christ's wound as a place. In his survey of the visions of Middle English mystics, Wolfgang Riehle writes of "the metaphorical expression that the soul should look upon the wounds of Christ as its nest...." (Riehle 45) and observes that, for these medieval mystics, "Christ with his wounds has become a place of refuge not just for the individual soul but for all mankind" (Riehle 46). Julian of Norwich in particular conceived of Christ's wounds as a place: "In her tenth revelation Julian of Norwich sees Christ, who shows her his wounds and opens them, so that she sees in them 'a fayer and delectable place' which is large enough for all mankind to rest in peace and love" (Riehle 47). Angela of Foligno concurs with this sentiment: "'And it seems to my soul that it

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

enters within that wound in the side of Christ and walks there with delight....'" (*Fragmentation* 194). While the realm of the Pearl-Maiden celebrates Christ in glory more than it does Christ in pain, and the land itself bears the crystalline, metallic hardness of a resurrected body, the river flowing from Christ's throne serves to remind the dreamer of that other terrain, the permeable terrain of the divine wound where, if the dreamer were to walk there on his journey through his "spotted" life, he could find spiritual wholeness and salvation. Enclosed by Christ's redemptive wound as if by a womb, fortified by Christ's nourishing blood (which is homologous to the milk with which the infant Christ was nurtured), the dreamer could achieve redemption.

For some medieval visionaries, the wound of Christ took on sexual as well as nurturing overtones. As the site of ecstatic penetration in the visions of the Monk of Farne, the wound becomes not so much a womb as a sexual orifice--vagina or anus.[63] This connection between Christ's wound and bodily orifices is

---

[63]The wound of Christ as a place which can be entered is presented most curiously in the ecstatic visions of the Monk of Farne, who envisions himself entering the wound in a mystical union with Christ comparable to sexual intercourse. Just as Christ's body in *Pearl* is both of jewel-like glory and impermeability, and permeated, as witnessed by his bleeding side, the most sublime union of the soul with Christ can be likened to physical union--which can result in other human bodies. Wolfgang Riehle describes the Monk of Farne's vision: "Since the wound in Christ's side is given a new interpretation as an opening through which it is possible for the mystical lover to enter into his beloved and thus become completely one with him, this gives rise in Franciscan mysticism, especially in such an eroticized text as the *Stimulus Amoris*, to a typical and quite consciously intended analogy between this wound of Christ and the female pudenda: the *vulva*, as the place of sexual ecstasy, has, so to speak, been transformed into the *vulnus* of Christ as the place of mystical ecstatic union of the soul with its divine beloved. This is confirmed by the following statement of the Monk of Farne whose fourteenth century text represents the climax of Franciscan mysticism of the cross on English soil: 'latus meum aperio ut osculatum introducam ad cor meum, et simus duo in carne una'" (Riehle 46-7). Robertson reflects on this image and contemporary interpretations of Christ's wounds in an erotic way: "The fact that the Monk of Farne writes of plunging himself into the wounds of Christ to achieve orgasm suggests that Luce Irigaray's theory that the wounds of Christ are analogous to the female vulva is not simply a postmodern Freudian interpretation of Christ's wounds, but is also one that was prevalent in the Middle Ages ("Medieval Medical Views" 165). Another, perhaps less overtly sexual image is that of James of Milan's *Stimulus Amoris*, in which "the union of the soul and God is described in terms of the joining of both their wounds: 'vulnus vulneri copulatur'...." (Riehle 46).

This identification of Christ's wound with the female genitalia also appears in medieval art. Bynum writes of the *Altarpiece with Cycle of the Life of Christ* (center panel, *Arma Christi)* by the Cologne Master, c,. 1340-70: "In this typical depiction of the instruments used to torture

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interesting because of the previous descriptions of both the land and the maiden as impenetrable bodies, closed like a jewel-chest or a jewel itself. The dreamer's desire to possess, alternately, the maiden and the land is expressed as an invasive desire, a penetration against the will of the maiden, the land itself and God. However, the land will not remain permanently closed to the dreamer if he changes his ways of thinking and behaving. In the erotic implications of Christ's wound for some medieval mystics, theologians and painters, the dreamer could

---

Christ at the Passion, the side-wound is presented as an independent body part. ... The sexual overtones modern viewers find in such depictions may have been apparent also to medieval viewers, who frequently spoke of entering Christ's side as into a womb" (*Fragmentation* 278). In this illustration, Christ's side-wound is mandorla-shaped, strongly reminiscent of the vulva in its entirety or the vaginal opening; medieval scientists did not often distinguish the two. Jacquart and Thomasset describe this ambiguity: "Indeed, in the Latin of late antiquity, the word *vulva* designated a rather vague semantic field; it tended, depending on the authors, to designate either the woman's external genital apparatus taken as a whole, or, in the work of certain writers, more specifically the womb" (Jacquart and Thomasset 24). This uncertainty in medical language seems to reinforce a common conception of the mysteriousness and incomprehensibility of women and their bodies.

The association between Christ's wound and a sexual orifice does not automatically mean that the orifice is a female one. Though Christ's body is feminized in medieval art, literature and devotional writings through a connection between its bleeding and lactation and menstrual bleeding, the penetrability of this body is not necessarily a feminine characteristic. In his essay on homoerotic devotional imagery in which seventeenth-century writers focused on the penetrability of Christ's crucified body, Richard Rambuss critiques the arguments of scholars who figure Christ's body as feminine simply because it is penetrable. He contends that the reader should resist "the going tendency to encode unproblematically every figuration of the penetrable and penetrated male body--whether that body is Christ's or...the worshipper's--as somehow feminized. Accounts that purport to give us a paradoxically 'female' Jesus or a bisexed Jesus often do so at the cost of too quickly effacing the primary maleness of his body and its operations. ... ...such formulations work essentially to render the poetry's metaphorics of highly affective, erotically charged scenarios of (male) penetration of the male body (regularly accompanied by streaming discharges) as more familiarly, more comfortably heteroerotic. The male body penetrates; the body that is penetrated is 'female,' even if it is male" (Rambuss 264). Though here Rambuss refers to seventeenth-century devotional poetry written by male authors like Donne and Crashaw, his observations are also useful cautions to interpreters of medieval devotional writings, which also depicted ecstatic same-sex unions with Christ. Even a female mystic like Catherine of Siena depicted her lover Christ in at least one instance as female rather than male. Rambuss describes this image: "In fusing with the body of Chrsit and its exquisite suffering and bliss, Catherine sees herself intimately engaging with another female body" (Rambuss 268). The gender of Christ is ambiguous in Pearl as well: though the flowing of blood from Christ's side evokes feminine images of menstruation and lactation, Christ is also referred to as the bridegroom of the (female) souls of the redeemed. In his penetrability as a body, he is not necessarily exclusively female or male.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

find another model for redemption, as opposed to forcible penetration of the maiden's land: the mutual, willed joining of human lover to divine beloved through the image of intercourse. This imagery, though ostensibly sexual, addresses the human/divine relationship in a broader context. While the Pearl-Maiden is Christ's jewel rather than the dreamer's, Christ offers him an even better alternative: a chance for the dreamer to enter Christ's own redemptive "body" (the company of the redeemed), and through it the land of the redeemed with its ever-flowing stream, by means of securing his own salvation and thus becoming his own pearl.

For a while the dreamer is content to focus his gaze upon the curious figure of Christ as the "gay Juelle" (1124), the seven-horned but anthropomorphic Lamb whose flowing blood echoes the image of the city's stream--another physical referent with symbolic properties as the fountain of salvation. However, he cannot remain centered on the Lamb, the "juelle" whom he should put in the place of the pearl which he mourns. After gazing upon the Lamb, at the end of stanza-group XIX, the dreamer suddenly becomes aware of the absence of the maiden, who is now among the multitudes surrounding the Lamb: "Þen sa3 I þer my lyttel quene/Þat I wende had standen by me in sclade" (1147-48). Though she has relocated herself to the place most befitting her own "moteles" nature, rejoining her peers after showing the dreamer all that he is permitted to see, the dreamer fails to understand that the city, rather than the now-empty space at his side, is her "place." His worldly error is expressed through his possessive identification of the Pearl-Maiden as "my lyttel quene," as he had previously called her "my pryuy perle," when she is clearly not his, but the Lamb's. Unable to release her from the spot in his life which she had previously inhabited, the dreamer's identification of the maiden

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as "his" now leads to his final transgression--the invasion which he had only threatened before.

The final stanza-group (XX) details the failure of the dreamer to recapture "his" pearl. Because she has been lost to his world, the dreamer now attempts to conquer the otherworldly space which had not yielded "his" pearl to him. However, spotted as he is, he is expelled bodily from the spot at which he tries to cross the stream. Like the maiden, whose resurrected body has become an impervious pearl, the land too remains inviolate. While the river and its analogous stream from Christ's side had evinced a passability and vulnerability also attributed by medieval thinkers to unperfected (and mostly female) bodies, now the "bodies" of both the land and the maiden are closed to the dreamer, as impermeable as a gem.

The "maddeness" which the Pearl-Maiden had seen in the dreamer in line 290 becomes manifest in a physical and spatial way when he tries to cross the stream at the beginning of stanza-group XX. This madness is also linked again to his maleness as well as his humanity through the poet's use of variations on the word "man" and through the dreamer's behavior, which finally actualizes his (masculine) desire to invade and conquer. When he sees the maiden on the other side of the river, "My manez mynde to maddyng malte" (1154). Though "manez" can mean "human" in general, the emotion which drives him to his transgression is that of desire for the maiden, and perhaps a desire to wrest her from a rival (Christ), which is more specifically "male" in the context of behavior associated with men earlier in the poem, namely the desire to seize hold of a beloved female object or to invade her territory. This failing again appears ambiguously as a human flaw and a specifically male problem in the dreamer's later lament, where he relates, "Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente/Þen mo3te by ry3t vpon hem clyuen...." (1195-6). This sentiment seems universally

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

human (namely a desire to want whatever one cannot have), but is also specifically male in the poem. The narrator's desire for "more and more" earlier in the poem is spurred on by a desire for conquest presented as masculine. The desire for more also is presented in a violent or military context in line 1199: "Lorde, mad hit arn þat agayn Þe stryuen...." This "striving" is both the universal human struggle against God's laws and the more specific struggling or wrestling performed mostly by males in order to defeat an opponent or seize territory. God's realm is represented as territory to be invaded by the dreamer, who is then ejected by God's superior might.

The language used in the expulsion scene (the first stanza of stanza-group XX) is relentlessly spatial. While in the middle of his pursuit across the stream, "Oute of þat caste I watz bycalt...." (1163), and again, upon awakening from his dream, he laments that "For ry3t as I sparred vnto þe bonc,/Þat brathþe out of my drem me brayde" (1169-70). Awakening once more under the marred moon, upon the spot "þeras my perle to grounde strayd" (1173), the dreamer resolves to find his pearl in a way unlike his previous possessive insistence upon recapturing the child whom he had called "my perle," an acquisitive misappropriation which had barred him from continuing his exploration of the landscape of his vision and learning more from its interpretive geography. Instead of entering her world by force, the dreamer now tries to earn a place in the maiden's realm by making Christ the spiritual center of his own world, yielding as humbly to Christ as a child or a maiden at mass. He can accomplish this by adhering to his "Pryncez paye," the commandments of the Lamb who is the source of redemption from the mortal world's physical and spiritual "spots."

The dreamer's resolution to find a place for himself in the heavenly kingdom begins with a radical redefinition of his quest in 1165-1212. What distinguishes his new way of reading the landscape in which he finds himself

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

upon wakening, and his new plans for his life's path, from his previous brash attempt at trespassing is that his distress is no longer for "his" lost child or jewel, but for his own lost soul--the only pearl which he can possess. Having been forced out of the spotless world of his dream and returned jarringly to the mound of earth in which the pearl had passed from a lost world to a transcendent place where she could finally locate her own meaning as the jewel and bride of Christ, at last the dreamer begins to understand his place in the world as the maiden had attempted to instruct him. That the dreamer has renounced his possessive concern with reobtaining the pearl in favor of acquiring his own "pearl of great price" by submitting to divine will becomes apparent in the dreamer's reflection that

> "If hit be ueray and soth sermoun
> Þat þou [the Pearl-Maiden] so strykez in garlande gay,
> So wel is me in þis doel-doungoun,
> Þat þou art to þat Prynsez paye." (1185-88)

Not only does the dreamer accept that the "setting" where the maiden has taken her place ("strykez" having the locative meaning of "[she] goes") in the "garland" of heaven is a result of the will of God, but he also realizes and is resigned to his own "spot," the "doel-doungoun" which is the imperfect sphere of mortal life and the grave-mound of earth on which he had lain. Nelson writes about his return to his mortal enclosure: "Surrendering to God the miraculous dream-extension of his perception and accepting in its place the bread and wine, he submits to his earthly enclosure--world, flesh and poem" (Nelson 47). Paradoxically, it is only in finally accepting the place to which his mortal consciousness is restricted, even as his body had lain on the mound throughout his vision, that the dreamer can move forward on the path to salvation.

In reference to the dreamer's resignation to become placed once more in his rightful sublunary space, both Petroff and Staley Johnson make connections

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between the Parable of the Vineyard and the "vineyard" of the earthly realm in which the narrator must now work for his "coin" of salvation. Petroff notes that, in relinquishing his claim to ownership of the pearl or to her "place," the dreamer redefines his earthly spot: "With this acceptance [of the loss of the pearl] he must redefine earthly landscape; what he will return to is not just the place which enclosed his grief, but a vineyard in which he must work, in order to return to Eden" (Petroff 190). Staley Johnson addresses the connection between the growth and transformation of the narrator's "spot" with the growth of his understanding and power to love:

> The garden of the end of *Pearl*, though literally the same space, has become a place of spiritual labor, the way station for heaven's garden of love and marriage. The transformation of pastoral space is fitting, for the poet allows the traditional landscape of love to reflect the growth of love. (Staley Johnson 190)

Thus in the end, both the dreamer and the landscape expand as a result of his realization. He is no longer the brash conqueror of terrain and the holder of a pearl, child or woman not his own. Instead of invading lands, he will work the spotted land which is to be his place until he becomes worthy of relocation. In this way, he renews and surrenders himself to the God whose land, though as impermeable as a pearl to spotted mortals, is also marked by vulnerability analogous to the permeable body itself, which was frequently interpreted specifically as a woman's body. By becoming more like this wounded Christ, he can eventually become one of the brides of the Lamb; by becoming like a woman on earth, he can become a perfected (female) jewel in heaven.

The lesson which the dreamer learns from his sudden return to his original place in the sublunar world, and the decaying sphere of his own body, is that his place in the moral universe should not be determined by his own desires, but by the will of God. After his failed attempt at entering heaven

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unshriven (and still alive), he understands that his place in the geography of redemption will only be granted to him if he were to follow God's "paye":

> To þat Pryncez paye hade I ay bente,
> And 3erned no more þen watz me geuen,
> And halden me þer in trwe entent,
> As þe perle me prayed þat was so þryuen,
> As helde, drawen to Goddez present,
> To more of His mysterys I hade ben dryuen.
> Bot ay wolde man of happe more hente
> Þen mo3te by ry3t upon hem clyuen;
> Þerfore, my joye watz sone toriuen,
> And I kaste of kythez þat lastez aye. (1189-98)

He also laments the human tendency to want "more," for he would have been able to see more had he understood more and demanded less of God. When he offers himself (like the pearl) to the pleasure of his Prince in the last stanza, the pearl which the narrator proffers becomes no longer the "lyttel quene" whom he had striven to repossess, but the impersonal "hit" of a jewel or a soul lying prostate--the *hit* which the pearl was intermittently at the beginning of the poem. He offers this pearl to the Prince: "For pyty of my perle enclyin,/And syþen to God I hit byta3te...." (1206-7) The identity of "hit" is ambiguous here. Either he has relinquished any claim to the Pearl-Maiden and has given his former rights of possession to the Prince, or it is his own soul which he extends towards his maker in place of the lost pearl which had never been his. In either case (or if both are true), in surrendering his soul to God, the dreamer has learned the lesson which the maiden had imparted to him when she stated that only in relinquishing one's "place" in the world through death, and after having repented and adhered to the will of the Prince, can people like the dreamer finally become "precious perlez vnto His pay" (1212) in the kingdom of heaven.

The dreamer's reversal of his original perverse approach to moral space is made manifest in his new orientation towards Christ as the source of his

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

salvation from a spotted world, as well as a spotted consciousness which is aware only of the physicality of place. Placing himself in the care of Christ "Þat in þe forme of bred and wyn/Þe preste vus shewez vch a daye" (1209-10), the dreamer realizes that Christ, who inhabits the corporeal "setting" of bread and wine as well as the souls of believers, is the true "grounde" of bliss. On the simultaneity of identity and place which the narrator had misunderstood and denied in his dream, Clark and Wasserman write that

> ...at the end of the poem, in understanding that Christ can be both in Heaven and in the mass wafer and wine, the jeweler accepts the simulataneity which he previously denied, when he could understand neither how his pearl could be in Heaven *and* in the 'clot' of the garden, nor how so many pure ones could share the seemingly exclusive title of Bride of the Lamb. (Clark and Wasserman 10)

Thorpe observes that the poem itself takes the form of Christ's body, imitating this realization on the part of the dreamer (Thorpe 71). Marti also argues that "the body of the pearl-shaped text [is] itself an analogue and extension of the body of the maiden named Pearl...." (Marti 90). Like the body of its heroine, and the body of Christ (whom medieval mystics saw as spherical) (Marti 14), the poem itself is round because it forms an imagistic as well as a structural circle with the word "paye" which was the linking-word of the first stanza-group. The dreamer begins by centering his life on the loss of the pearl, a dead being and an object whose nature he misunderstands, and ends by focusing his faith and his deeds upon another round object which he does not misread as his possession, but which recalls Christ, who should be the "grounde" of his bliss. This eucharistic image also recalls the demeanor of the maidens in heaven, mild as earthly ladies at mass. No longer intent on possessing a maiden, the narrator becomes like a maiden, perhaps like that other maiden, Mary, who had accepted the "paye" of God, to be the vessel for Christ's incarnation, even if she could not comprehend

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

it. Thus he can become a pearl as well, a bride like the Pearl-Maiden. The roundness of the world according to medieval geographers; the roundness of the poem, of the heavenly "garlande," of the pearl and even the eucharistic host, combine to make the poem embody a world whose interpretive terrain leads towards the host, and towards the pearl--the perfected resurrection body which one becomes after accepting all of the spiritual lessons embodied in the host. Thorpe suggests that "The pearl he bestows is the poem itself, which only becomes a pearl as the process ends: that is, in the final lines of the poem, which makes the structure whole, complete, and also circular" (Thorpe 65). Thus the poem itself can become both a pearl and a site of salvation for those who read it, just as the earth can be a site of salvation for those who read its landscapes through the salvific activities which Christ performed in them.

The locative and geographical features of the maiden's world had been emblems for allegorical truths. Similarly, the bread and wine of the Eucharist simultaneously exist in space and point beyond themselves toward Christ, the source of all meaning in a Christian construction of the universe. Whereas he had once read the features of the heavenly topography in terms of earthly space, now, as Staley Johnson suggests,

> ...the dreamer's ability to use earth's symbols as signs of a greater reality testifies to the new life, the resurrection, he has found through vision. Like vision, which comes to a man from God, earth's signs are themselves manifestations of grace which proceeds from heaven to earth in order that a man can follow these symbols to their source in God. (Staley Johnson 202)

By relinquishing his soul's pearl to the will of God while at the same time accepting the body of Christ rather than vainly striving for the pearl, the dreamer may not only become redeemed himself, but can himself become the location for the salvific act of God. Far from restricting Christ in the way that he had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attempted to "set" the Pearl-Maiden, first in a corporeal sense and then in the non-physical sense of a lost identity, now the dreamer can become, like the circular world of the *Pearl*-poem, a "setting" for Christ the Jeweller by finally setting Christ at the center of his being and allows Christ, jeweller-like, to set him in his proper place in the cosmos.

In the beginning of the poem, the narrator had tried to set the pearl in gold as well as in the verbal setting of his idealized description of it. Similarly, at the end of the poem, the poet offers a sense of closure by creating a world as round and flawless as the pearl itself. In this world, geographical features explicate eternal truths, like glosses on the symbolism of scripture, and misinterpretation of these features derives from the flaws and limitations of the perceiver. In this elaborate, enclosing circular cosmos, God reserves the right to "place" creatures according to their degree of moral spottedness or spotlessness, and the resulting world has a design as intricate and symmetrical as the verbal structure of the poem itself.

This flawless verbal structure encapsulates what both the heavenly realm and the resurrected bodies of the redeemed are--closed, shining, perfected gems, impenetrable by those who still bear spots of sin after death--and what the round terrestrial sphere can become if its spotted inhabitants were to read the landscape as a text written by a divine hand and leading to salvation. The poem's circular return to the beginning, but with the dreamer potentially transformed into a pearl pleasing to his heavenly prince rather than a vain seeker of literal pearls pleasing to earthly "prynces" (1), imitates the closure of the perfected body, with its ultimate expression in the body of Christ as "gay juelle" and the round eucharistic host which is the replacement for the pearl in the dreamer's heart. The poem's circularity, its intricacy and its apparent technical as well as thematic

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

perfection, provides a picture of interpretive space with which the other three poems will engage themselves, develop and sometimes resist.

However, despite the appearance of circularity and closure of the poem, which so aptly echoes its themes of an enclosed world, an enclosed body and an enclosed discourse, unassailable by mortal rhetorical invasions, *Pearl* also has tantalizing hints of permeability. On a rhetorical level, the poem's very circularity and numerical perfection--1212 lines, a number of completion echoing the totality and harmony of the medieval Christian vision of the universe, like a verbal cathedral--comes into being because of a missing line. On a symbolic level, the poem manipulates and problematizes the very spatial and thematic categories which it creates. The poem's presentation of a land defined by Christ's ever-flowing wound, the image of feminine vulnerability and woundedness for some contemporary theologians and mystics, contrasts with other images of the land's inviolability. The poem's subtle exhortation for the dreamer to become like a woman as well as like a child--to submit to one's spatial and spiritual placement by God rather than to invade realms not open to one--is the most potentially subversive concept of this elaborately-written and verbally ornate poem, whose very rhetorical ornamentation is an example of the kind of writing which Bloch and Patterson indicate that some medieval critics of literature compared unfavorably to women. Indeed, the very elaborateness and technical completeness and closure, as much as it represents the closed, hardened "classical" body of the resurrected pearl, in its ornateness represents the excessive, copious, overflowing speech of women, as defined and derided by male writers. Thus the pearl, who gives both the heavenly landscape and the poem itself their luster and shape, embodies both the idealized male and the stereotypical female, save that this female has been transformed. In the end, the normative, closed body of the male becomes the symbol of the corrupt and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

marginal in the person of the spotted, exiled dreamer. The female, socially marginalized and physically prone to penetration and corruption, becomes the redeemed jewel whose body is luminous and monumental, and whose words are the words of God. Though it seems the encapsulation of a totalizing, completely enclosing, harmonious world (which later writers seem to project onto medievals more than medievals themselves consistently assert), the world of *Pearl*, circular and whole that it is, at the same time questions this image of the cosmos. Thus the succeeding poems in the *Pearl* manuscript seem less a questioning of a unified, idealized world-picture than a continuation of themes of subversion and inversion already present in the paradigmatic interpretive realms of *Pearl*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Chapter II:

## On the Margins of the Wor(l)d: Enclosure, Exclusion and Explication in *Clannesse*

Like the pearls, circles and geometrically perfect cities which appear throughout *Pearl,* on a surface level, the world-picture presented in this poem seems smooth, symmetrical and unmarred. The poem appears to stress the unity and harmony of the world which is a text. Any flaws in this legible cosmos are imputed to the faulty mental and spiritual faculties of the human interpreter/narrator, not to the designer of the divine spatial discourse itself. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, however, elements of the poem disrupt this seemingly seamless perfection. In *Clannesse*[64], a poem which seems more intrigued by vice, flaws and impurity than by the moral cleanliness which this title might suggest, these disruptions are more prominent. If *Pearl* concerns the center of the spatial "text" of the Christian cosmos (however problematic its representation of that text might be), then *Clannesse* primarily addresses the margins of that book--namely the nature of those who inhabit the edge of the medieval moral cosmos. In medieval manuscripts, the margin plays a double and seemingly contradictory role. On the one hand, marginal imagery frequently depicts aberrant or scurrilous behavior and beasts of the sort who lurked on the edges of symbolic world-maps like the Hereford Map. Thus the margin was the territory of the grotesque, the subversive and the rejected, who sometimes were designed to "decenter" the text in the center. Michael Camille quotes the attitude of Bernard of Clairvaux to these marginal creations and comments upon them:

> "We are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books". Yet it is precisely because they cannot be systematically "read", in reference to the written discourse of the church, that the contorted and constantly transforming

---

[64]I have retained the Middle English title *Clannesse* because I feel that the modern English word "purity" is not completely interchangeable with the Middle English word *clannesse,* which is also the first word of the poem. On the other hand, replacing *clannesse* with the modern English "cleanness" would also distort the meaning of the Middle English word, since in modern usage, "cleanness" seems more evocative of physical hygiene than moral cleanliness.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

creations of the sculptor can provide an escape from the fixed world of textuality and are always marginalised in relation to it. ("Seeing and Reading" 36)

On the other hand, the margin is also the site of the gloss, a marginal comment which enlarges upon and interprets the text in the center of the page--ostensibly a participation in the holy work of the text rather than a pictorial subversion of it. Michael Camille explains this function of the marginal gloss, as distinct from the interlinear gloss of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which translated the Latin text into a vernacular language: "The marginal gloss, by contrast, interacts with and reinterprets a text that has come to be seen as fixed and finalized" (*Image on the Edge* 20). Thus the gloss is at once an orthodox form of interaction with the main text, explaining and elaborating on its meanings, and also a site of legitimized subversion: a place where subsequent readers can add meanings which are not inherent in the central text, or question those which are.

Like a medieval gloss, the behavior of the "unclean" in the margins of the world-text of medieval Christian society comments upon the "cleanness" which lies in the center. But, paradoxically, in commenting upon the cleanness which the poet seeks to espouse, the "unclean" behaviors which one should avoid threaten--and even manage--to take the central position in the text, both thematically and spatially. The spatial discourse of clean and unclean is articulated in the poem through a use of enclosing versus excluding spaces. Initially, the redeemed or "clean" people inhabit protective and privileged spaces, while the damned or "unclean" remain outside. Most of these latter people are characterized by the poet as sexual transgressors, whose deeds "against nature" place them on the margins of God's *liber naturalis*. However, as the narrative progresses, this clear-cut model of enclosure and exclusion gradually dissolves, until in the last of the three main retellings of biblical texts (the story

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of Baltazar), the condemned end up inside of an enclosure and the divinely favored forcibly enter from outside, subsequently violating the bodily integrity of Baltazar by slaying him in a graphically lurid way. Ironically, at the end of the poem, the Medes and Persians, whose invasion bears the seal of divine approval, as it were, embody the fear of spatial, physical, sexual or sacramental assault which is expressed throughout the poem.

In *Pearl,* one example of the dreamer's inappropriate attitude towards the heavenly landscape is his repeated attempts to invade the morally spotless "spot" where the Pearl-Maiden resides. With its opposition between inside and outside, center and edge, *Clannesse* is permeated by a fear of invasion of enclosed spaces, whether these spaces are bodies, sacramental vessels, sacred buildings or rooms, houses, cities and castles. The people whom both the church and the poet have exiled to the margins are so threatening precisely because they do not remain on the margins but invade the center (or in the poem's terms, enclosed spaces), either by threatening the integrity of social hierarchies and/or the doctrines of the church, or by invading the bodies of other beings by means of transgressive sexual acts. In this way, the *Pearl*-poet invokes two marginal forces feared by the medieval church: the sexual transgressor "against nature" (usually a "sodomite") and the heretic.

Though several of the themes which I will develop in relation to the interpretive space of *Clannesse* have not to my knowledge been discussed in relation to this particular poem, I am of course indebted to many scholars who have laid the groundwork for the development of these ideas. Critics have previously recognized the enclosure and exclusion paradigm in *Clannesse.* S.L. Clark and J.N. Wasserman observe that the position of various individuals inside or outside of an enclosure indicates whether they have been saved or damned:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Salvation is...conceived by the *Pearl*-poet not only in terms of an individual's--or, collectively, a group's--moral stance but also in terms of the physical position of that individual or group, with the result that *Purity* [i.e., *Clannesse]* consistently exhibits a strong sense of enclosure effecting judgment; those within Noah's ark are saved, while those without are damned, and those inside Sodom perish, while those who escape from that doomed enclosure are spared. ("The Significance of Thresholds" 115)

This article is an important source for my own approach to interpretive space in *Clannesse.* My approach extends that of Clark and Wasserman by focusing on the separate categories of inside and outside and the moral implications of these categories as they develop throughout the poem. In their analysis of *Clannesse,* Clark and Wasserman concentrate more exclusively on the threshold or boundary-spaces--the places where inside and outside come in contact with one another.

One important theme which *Clannesse* critics have discussed is spatial, sacral and sexual invasion. Sarah Stanbury provides a specific link between the violation of sacred spaces, sacramental vessels and bodies:

> Noah's ark, Lot's house, Solomon's temple, and the holy vessels in *Purity* are all sacred spaces. Entrance into the temple to plunder the vessels is a violation that echoes the theme of sexual uncleanness or violation on which the poet bases his first parables. Sins against natural or covenantal cleanness are in their turn punished by expulsion.... ("Space and Visual Hermeneutics" 482)

Her discussion of bodily transgression is not a digression from the themes of interpretive space which she also analyzes. Just as imagery of bodily integrity and violation are combined with imagery of spatial integrity and violation in *Pearl,* the concept of the body enclosed (and enclosing), and presentations of invaders who would violate this enclosure, exists alongside and comments on the central inner/outer spatial structure of *Clannesse.* I intend to investigate this concept further in light of contemporary non-literary texts about what were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

viewed as sexual transgressions by medieval Christians, especially "sodomy", which supposedly violated not only bodies but "natural law" as well, thus necessitating the physical and social banishment of those who practiced this "vice."[65]

In her evaluation of the multiple symbols of unlawful penetration in *Clannesse,* Charlotte Morse concentrates more specifically on the sacramental vessels. She interestingly complicates the poet's use of enclosures by suggesting that not only do the righteous inhabit enclosures, but they are also analogous to enclosures in their moral inviolability. She relates that in *Clannesse,* "man is like a vessel, a vas, a ship, a temple, a cup" (Morse 1) and continues:

> Among some vessel images important to a discussion of...*Cleanness* are the Garden of Eden or the Garden enclosed, Noah's ark...the temple, the church, the chalice...and the hall or lodging--all images conventionally associated with each other in medieval biblical commentary. These images can also be understood as analogies to man or metaphors for him. (Morse 16)

This image of the human being as a sacramental vessel or sacred enclosure makes all of the threatened invasions of bodily space, as well as the more obvious spaces of temples or castles, all the more horrifying. I will enlarge upon this discussion with examples of medieval concepts of the body as a "vessel" and images of the sacraments, as well as the church, as the body of Christ.

Invaluable as a source for my own discussion of the spatial and moral center and edge in *Clannesse* is the work of Michael Camille on medieval marginal art. Camille observes how cathedrals and moralized world maps,

---

[65]I usually use the term "sodomy" because this is the term that medieval writers themselves frequently used, and not exclusively in reference to homosexual intercourse. The term "vice against nature" was used to refer to all manner of homosexual acts, as well as bestiality. I also generally avoid using the designation "homosexuality" because scholars are uncertain if pre-modern people had the same conception of identity in terms of sexual orientation. For example, Bruce R. Smith believes that medieval and Renaissance people saw homosexual relationships as a manifestation of humankind's sinful nature in general, not as an indication that certain individuals have a different essential sexual orientation (Smith 11).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which attempt to represent the medieval Christian world-view in a two- or three-dimensional space, use the spatial center and edge to represent the moral, metaphysical and/or social center and edge. Thus the poet's use of spatial enclosure and exclusion as analogues of moral acceptance and rejection continues an already established medieval Christian concept expressed in other art forms: "At a monastery or cathedral...the fringes are where we find ejected forms, taboos sculpted in stone that seem to identify the very desires they delimit" (*Image on the Edge* 9). Concerning the creation of textual and spatial margins as a means of controlling deviant behavior and vilifying difference, he observes:

> ...[the] control and codification of space represented by the labelled territories of a centrifrugal World Map created, of necessity, a space for ejecting the undesirable--the banished, outlawed, leprous, scabrous outcasts of society. (*Image on the Edge* 16)

Camille also states, "...the systematic incoherence of marginal art is placed within, perhaps even against, another discourse--the word of God" (*Image on the Edge* 13). The *Pearl*-poet puts a spatial spin on this placement of "incoheren[t]" marginal art on the outside of and in contrast to God's discourse by means of his initial placement of those who exhibit alternate discourses or behaviors outside of the enclosures where the divinely favored reside.

Essential background to the formulation of the ideas on bodily and spatial purity and contamination which I will discuss in this chapter can be found in the work of Mary Douglas. She could be describing the cosmology of *Clannesse* when she speaks of "the witch fearing cosmology":

> [In] Bodily symbolism in the witch fearing cosmology...always the emphasis is on valuing the boundaries, guarding the orifices, avoiding improper mixtures. This social experience tends towards setting a low value on the physical functions of ingestion and excretion... they show interest in purification, anxiety about health

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and sickness; they despise gluttony, treat sex with caution, and unregulated sex with horror. The derived theological attitudes tend toward celebrating the purity of the spirit and the dangers of fleshly corruption. (Douglas ix.)

Though she does not refer to it primarily in terms of medieval European Christian civilization, Douglas discusses the concept of the microcosm--the human body as a universe in miniature--in similar terms to the way in which the *Pearl*-poet treats the body in *Clannesse.* She writes that "Interest in its apertures depends on the preoccupation with social entrances and exits, escape routes and invasions. If there is no concern to preserve social boundaries, I would not expect to find concern with bodily boundaries" (Douglas 70). Douglas' suggestion that a culture's representation of the body is actually a representation of the culture itself is reflected in the treatment of the body in *Clannesse:* as an enclosed space, capable of being violated by invaders and penetrated (metaphorically) by a probing God in search of sin. My discussion relates how these bodily images parallel the spatial images of the poem: how places are also potential sites of invasion and violation.

In the discussion that follows, I will examine the three aspects of narrative topography in *Clannesse* discussed above: the central metaphor of enclosure and exclusion in spatial and moral terms; metaphors of exclusion as they relate specifically to marginalized groups in medieval western European Christian society; and how this pattern of enclosure and exclusion becomes increasingly problematized in the poem. Additionally, the poem contains suggestive metaphors of the world as a text which are congruent with the common medieval view (discussed in my introductory chapter) of the created world as God's book. However, in *Clannesse,* the text of the world is of a piece with the readers' fallen natures--or, as the poet describes it in the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, the land is a broken and burning book, scarred with the signs of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

human sinfulness. I will examine this image of a flawed *liber naturalis*--a land distorted by sins "against nature" or misreadings of God's "text" in the created world--throughout this chapter.

Metaphors in which the "enclosures" of the human body and soul are likened to spatial enclosures appear in the very first lines of *Clannesse.* The poem begins with a discussion of how difficult it is to find fair enough words to describe the virtue of "clannesse". Whoever discusses this virtue "Fayre formez mi3t he fynde in forþering his speche...." (3) Here the "fayre formez" imply figures of speech beautiful enough to convey the beauties of cleanness, but the image is also a physical one, especially since the poet's discussion of spiritual purity will so often be concerned with the purity of the body, the human "forme." The fairness of these verbal forms also contrasts, ultimately, with the grotesque physical forms of those who practice "unclean" sexual acts, or the beastly forms of the *baboynes* who appeared in the margins of manuscripts and the edges of sacred buildings and whom Bernard of Clairvaux labelled "deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas" (deformed beauties, beautiful deformities), implying that these fanciful forms are at the same time distorted and beautiful, which is what makes them so dangerously seductive (*Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici Abbatem* 915-6). These misshapen monsters will appear on the vessels at Baltazar's feast at the end of the poem, where human physical, behavioral and sexual "formez" will no longer be "fayre."

The poet then begins an exhortation to priests to be clean inside, since they enter into the "holy of holies" and handle the very body of Christ. The poet's description of the clean and unclean priest is not atypical, as diatribes against clerical excesses and abuses were common at the time.[66] However, the poet's

---

[66]Some of these include Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (written between 1180 and 1193) and the twelfth-century Nigel de Longchamps' *Speculum Stultorum.* Peter Damian's eleventh-century *Liber Gomorrhianus* particularly condemns clerics who practice the "sin against nature"; I will discuss

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

exhortation is unusual in that he uses remarkably spatial (and bodily) metaphors:

> For wonder wroth is þe Wy3 þat wro3t alle þinges
> Wyth þe freke þat in fylþe fol3es Hym after--
> As renkez of relygioun þat reden and syngen,
> And aprochen to Hys presens, and prestez arn called;
> Thay teen vnto His temmple and temen to Hymselven,
> Reken with reuerence þay rychen His auter,
> Þay hondel þer His aune body and vsen hit boþe.
> If þay in clannes be clos þay cleche gret mede;
> Bot if þy conterfete crafte and cortaysye wont,
> As be honest vtwyth and inwith alle fylþez,
> Þen ar þay synful hemself, and sulpen altogeder
> Boþe God and His gere, and Hym to greme cachen. (5-16)

The two marks of priestly privilege are that the priests can enter the sacred space of the "temmple" where no layperson can go and that they are able to handle God's "aune body and vsen hit bope." Being admitted into the holiest part of the

---

this work in more detail later as it relates to *Clannesse,* which also treats the two main themes of Damian's work: clerical vices and sodomy. Marginal imagery in late medieval manuscripts also frequently criticized clerics, who were depicted as engaging in various unclerical pursuits, as in an illustration for a copy of *Roman de la Rose* (Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, fr. 25526, fol. 111v), where a nun and a priest are shown copulating in a field at the bottom of the page, and in Bibliotheque Nationale, MS. lat. 10435, fol. 158r, in which a monk caresses a nun in the upper margin of the page.

Fear of damaging the body of Christ as it was present in the eucharistic host was widespread in the later Middle Ages. The veneration of the eucharistic bread as the actual body of Christ produced a fear of its desecration, as Caroline Walker Bynum acknowledges: "...later medieval theologians and visionaries saw in Christ as bleeding flesh not only the redemption of humankind but also an entity under attack" *(Holy Feast* 65). Miracles where hosts bled expressed fear of the violation of Christ's body from invaders both outside of and within the church: "The many miracles of consecrated hosts oozing or streaming drops of blood were understood to be announcing not just the sins of individual Christians but also attacks by outsiders, especially heretics and Jews. Miracles of bleeding hosts, which proliferate from the twelfth century on, sometimes have sinister overtones. The host becomes flesh to announce its violation; the bleeding is an accusation" *(Holy Feast* 63). Kathleen Biddick comments more extensively on this association between the violation of the host and medieval anti-Semitism, specifically in terms of how the body of Christ evokes the body of the Jew, alleging that 'The host...served as the site of haunting by the excluded body of the Other, the Jew. The haunting came to perform itself in the fantastical grotesque hybrid body of Christ in the Christian imaginary" (409). Connected to the Jew by virtue of his own "exteriority" to the body of Christ, the homosexual is also implicated in desecrations of the host, Biddick avers (408). The *Pearl*-poet expresses a similar fear of the violation of Christ's body when he inveighs against priests who "hondel þer His aune body and vsen hit boþe" (l. 11) while at the same time being unclean in their own bodies--and perhaps "using" the bodies of other priests.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

church allows them also to have contact with God's body in a way that the laity cannot. While here "vsen" implies handling the sacraments, later in the poem, it develops a sexual resonance, which is not entirely absent here in the phrase "His aune body." Because he "uses" the body of Christ in a physical way, the priest is also expected to be a pure "enclosure" like the "temmple" which he is permitted to enter. The word *clos* in line 12 makes this expectation clear, and also recalls the pearl "...clanly clos[ed] in golde so cler". Much as the pearl is framed in a setting which befits its purity, the priest should "enclose" purity in order to be allowed to step into the enclosure where the ultimate purity resides--the altar-space, where he handles the body of God, the physical enclosure of God's essence.[67] The impurity of the tainted priest is also described in terms of inside and outside, using the metaphor of clothing, which will occur again in the poet's retelling of the Parable of the Wedding Feast. Though clothed in the

---

[67]Though the poet states in no uncertain terms that the priest must be clean of body and soul to handle the spiritually and physically pure body of Christ, I am unsure if he would go so far as to question the validity of the sacraments performed by a priest in a state of sin. Part of the Donatist heresy was the belief that a priest's moral state could actually invalidate a sacrament (Strayer, "Donatism," in Strayer 4. 259-60). For an orthodox Christian, the moral state of the priest could not influence the sacraments. Transubstantiation especially would not be affected by a priest's moral state, as this transformation is believed to be effected by God with the priest as the agent. It is revealing that the *Pearl*-poet has chosen to discuss this concept here because, being a major issue for the Wycliffites, this issue was highly incendiary at the time at which the poem was written--so much so that Boccaccio and Chaucer also took part in the discussion. The Wycliffites (or Lollards) denied transubstantiation altogether and exhibited a disregard for the sacrament of the Eucharist (Anne Hudson, "Lollards," in Strayer 7.648). Ritchie D. Kendall indicates that, because Lollards emphasized the role of the Bible and de-emphasized the role of the sacraments as essential elements of the Christian faith, inevitably the priest, the instrument of the sacraments, would in turn be devalued: "For the Lollard, priestly efficacy came increasingly to depend not upon office but upon conduct, judged as for all Christians by the example of the Bible. The priest, in effect, became simply another medieval craftsman whose credentials were established by the production of his masterpiece--an exemplary holy life" (Kendall 21). Though the *Pearl*-poet's criticism of impure priests may bear some resemblance to the more serious and subversive views of the Donatists and Lollards (the latter who were his contemporaries), his perspective is still non-heretical in that his concern for the moral state of priests emerges not from a sense that the sacraments are secondary to the experience of reading the Bible and interpreting it oneself, but from a deep respect for the sacraments. The poet's luminous descriptions of the Eucharist in *Clannesse* and the other three poems indicate that his vehemence about the moral purity (or lack thereof) emanates from a sense of outrage at perceived abuses committed by the very priests who are entrusted with the exalted duty of performing the sacraments.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

outward semblance of purity, inside he is filthy, and he pollutes the act of consecration by virtue of the impurity of his soul's contents. This unclean priest is so vile because of the contrast between the contents of the sacramental vessels (the pure substance of Christ's consecrated body) and the contents of his soul (filthy deeds). Charlotte Morse comments on the relationship between the contents of a vessel and the "contents" of a soul:

> By defining man as a vessel or container, the authors of the *Queste* and*Cleanness* invite us to attend to what man may contain. They distinguish the content of the sinner from that of the righteous man and explain how the sinner may exchange his content for that of righteousness. (Morse 12)

Thus sinful priests do not just misuse the containers of the sacraments: they are themselves vessels which have been defined--and defiled--by their sins.

The poet then plays on moral as well as spatial positions in the parable of the wedding feast. He compares the "clene...courte" (17) of heaven, in which there are "angelez enourled in alle þat is clene,/Boþe withinne and wythouten in wedez ful bry3t...." (19-20), with an earthly court in which a king is to be married and one of his guests arrives in unseemly attire. An elaborate play upon the enclosure of the chosen and the disclosure of hidden sin occurs, using imagery of enclosing spaces and clothing. The poet introduces both this new narrative and these images by discussing how Christ "þus of clannesse vnclosez a ful cler speche...." (26) Christ's speech is clear because it is both pure and "vnclose[d]" or revealed, removed from an enclosure. However, the message that Christ "vnclosez" exhorts the reader to become "closed" in cleanness. Earl G. Schreiber posits that the vessels of the poem are not limited to clothing or the actual sacramental containers at the beginning and end, but also appear in metaphoric form in order to create a dialectic of cleanness as enclosure:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Clothing, however, is only one type of garb in the poem, and as the poem progresses, the poet expands metaphoric clothing to include a diversity of vessels: the pure soul (much like the angels who are 'enorled in alle þat is clene', [19] is arrayed with the luminescent clothing of faith and good works; the body is the raiment of the soul; the womb enwraps the body; Heaven enwraps the souls of the saved; the Church mystically subsumes all the faithful; and human society surrounds the individual. An imbalance in any term of this analogy often distorts and perverts all of the other terms. (Schreiber 134)

Through the metaphor of concealed sin as outer clothing which reveals one's faults rather than hides them, the poet establishes that what is interior to a person is exterior to God. In other words, while the sinner attempts to keep his/her trangressions inside, to God, this person's deeds are as visible as if the person were enwrapping his/her body in them. Thus the sinful human being is warned not to appear before God clad in impure deeds, on pain of exile:

> And so [Matthew's Gospel] saytz, to þat sy3t [of God] seche schal he neuer
> Þat any vnclannesse hatz on, auwhere abowte;
> For He that flemus vch fylþe fer fro His hert
> May not byde that burre that His body ne3e.
> Forthy hy3 not to heuen in haterez totorne.... (29-33)

The poet refers to uncleanness in terms of clothing: one "has on" uncleanness, and when this clothing of dirty deeds enwraps the soul, one is cast out of the space of salvation represented by the king's hall in the parable. The poet also uses a more physical metaphor: God cannot bear having such a "burre that His body ne3e"--next to God's body, like a garment, so God casts this filth away from the divine heart and body. The garment image also recalls the exclusion of unclean priests in the very first lines. The sacramental vessels are referred to as "gere" (16), as if they were not only equipment but "garments" enclosing the sacraments even as the bread and wine themselves are corporeal garments for

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the salvation offered by Christ.[68] Just as those who transgress against these "garments" of redemption are not worthy to touch them, those who wear the clothes of unclean deeds are not deemed fit to enter redemptive space and cannot inhabit God's body, the church. What happens to the ill-dressed wedding-guest could happen to someone invited to the banquet of the church--i.e., the Eucharist, through which one comes to salvation. For being caught at court in unclean clothes, the poet suggests that

> ...he schulde be halden utter
> With mony blame ful bygge, a boffet peraunter,
> Hurled to þe halle dor and harde þeroute schowued,
> And be forboden þat bor3e to bowe þider neuer,
> On payne of emprysonment and puttyng in stokkez;
> And þus schal he be schent for his schrowde feble,
> Þa3 neuer in talle ne in tuch he trespas more. (42-48)

In line 48, the transgressor's "trespass" is both moral and spatial, simultaneously representing his sartorial sin and his presence in a space in which he is not welcome because of his sin-stained clothes.

As a sign of social rank, the role of clothing in the wedding feast scene is fascinating because the heavenly court of God's wedding feast is the site of an interesting social reversal.[69] When the lord's original guests refuse to attend his

---

[68]*The Middle English Dictionary* defines *gere* as "clothes, dress; also, a garment" (78) as well as "Equipment of any kind; tools, utensils, instruments, dishes, musical instruments" (79) and "Behavior, conduct" (79). In their glossary, Andrew and Waldron also interpret *gere* as "gear, clothes" and "instruments, utensils" (321).

[69]In the Middle Ages, clothing was a complex social signifier. *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* summarizes the social purpose of clothing for medieval Europeans: "Clothes were social signatures. At a glance clothing informed an observer of the wearer's class, religion, particular craft or profession (and rank within it), geographic locale, and thanks to coats of arms and heraldic devices, the ancestral heritage of self or employer" (Madeleine Pelner Cosman, "Costume, Western European," in Strayer 3. 621). Marjorie Garber comments that the way in which clothing designated one's place in medieval and Renaissance society made it a kind of "text" which observers "read" to determine the wearer's status in a fixed hierarchy and sign system. This system was reinforced by the passing of sumptuary laws regulating who could wear what: "The ideal scenario--from the point of view of the regulators--was one in which a person's social station, social role, gender and other indications of identity in the world could be *read*, without ambiguity or uncertainty" (Garber 26). She specifies that such a "text" of clothing was necessary because social changes threatened to remove distinctions between ranks. Though Garber speaks in general of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

feast for various reasons, he has his servants bring other guests from the margins--i.e. outside of the privileged social classes, the ordinary people from "þe grete streetes," who are of various social degrees and both genders:

> "Þenne gotz forth, my gomez, to þe grete streetez,
> And forsettez on vche a syde þe ceté aboute;
> Þe wayferande frekez, on fote and on hors,
> Boþe burnez and burdez, þe better and þe wers,
> Laþes hem al luflyly to lenge at my fest,
> And bryngez hem blyþly to bor3e as barounez þay were,
> So þat my palays plat ful be py3t al aboute;
> Þise oþer wrechez iwysse worþy no3t wern." (77-84)

In line 96, after carrying out their master's orders, the lord's servants refer to some of the lord's guests as "renischche renkez": foreign or strange men. Thus the largesse of the lord under pressure includes even people outside of the dominant culture or religion, perhaps a reference to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the "feast" of salvation. All the people who are typically on the margins of society are invited: foreigners, people of low social status and women. However, the lord's inclusive generosity contrasts with the later pervasive instances of exclusion for those marginals who can never come "withinne": unrepentant sinners who strive to enter vessels which they are not permitted to touch, whether these vessels are sacramental containers, places or people's bodies.

Despite the lord's radical dismissal of social hierarchies when he invites outcasts to his gathering, he is nevertheless careful to retain some sense of social structure at his feast--an element which is not present in the biblical narratives

---

medieval and Renaissance culture, *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* specifically notes that the fourteenth century was the height of sumptuary law development, particularly because "conspicuous consumption by bourgeois and parvenu non-nobles...seemed to threaten the social order" (William Chester Jordan, "Sumptuary Laws, Western European," in Strayer 11. 507). Sumptuary laws were most well-developed in medieval Italy, but the *Pearl*-poet does not seem unaware of their significance in a poem which is so concerned with clothing. His awareness of the issue may be recognized in his characterization of Lot as a wealthy burgher whom the citizens of Sodom--perhaps intended to represent the old nobility in this case--resent as a "carle" and an "outcomlyng."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in Matthew and Luke's gospels. The poet reports on the treatment of the wedding-guests:

> When þay com to þe courte keppte wern þay fayre,
> Sty3tled with þe stewarde, stad in þe halle,
> Ful manerly with marchal mad for to sitte,
> As he watz dere of degré dressed his seete. (89-92)

The lord's behavior towards his guests both ostensibly flouts and ultimately reinstates secular hierarchies. Initially he pointedly ignores protocol by inviting guests irrespective of their social degree and national origin, but then he reinstates societal norms by seating them according to their social placement, as if alleviating the fears of his servants (and perhaps the readers of the poem as well) that his unusual invitation will invert or destroy the order of society. This hierarchal arrangement reappears in lines 113-8, where the ranks of the guests are indicated several times by the quality of their clothes:

> Whéþer þay wern worþy oþer wers, wel wern þay stowed,
> Ay þe best byfore and bry3test atyred,
> Þe derrest at þe hy3e dese, þat dubbed wer fayrest,
> And syþen on lenþe ledez inogh.
> And ay as segges serly semed by her wedez,
> So with marschal at her mete mensked þay were.

Here the basis for the hierarchal arrangement is ambiguous, namely whether the higher-ranking guests could afford better clothes, or whether, in a symbolic sense, the finer-clothed people were the noblest because, with clothes representing good deeds, the most finely-dressed were the purest. This ambiguity is restated when the poet reassures the reader that "Clene men in compaynye forknowen wern lyte...." (119). Andrew and Waldron gloss *clene* as "fine," thus implying noble rank, but the word also implies purity, suggesting that, while hierarchies do exist in heaven, they are based not on noble blood but on noble conduct. Thus the poet manages to be both subversive and traditional

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by depicting hierarchies in heaven which nevertheless follow different principles of arrangement.

When not enough guests have been found to fill the entire hall, the lord extends his invitation beyond the city to the fields, to what Michael Camille might call "the banished, outlawed, leprous, scabrous outcasts of society" (*Image on the Edge* 16):

> "Ferkez out in þe felde, and fechez mo gestez;
> Waytez gorstez and greuez, if ani gomez lyggez;
> Whatkyn folk so þer fare, fechez hem hider;
> Be þay fers, be þay feble, forlotez none,
> Be þay hol, be þay halt, be þay ony3ed,
> And þa3 þay ben bo̧þe blynde and balterande cruppelez,
> Þat my hous may holly by halkez by fylled" (ll. 98-104)

Again, the lord's choice to admit "whatever kind of people live there" to his court for his feast seems a fundamental redefinition of society--the remarkable suggestion that everyone, irrespective of rank, origin, gender or disability, is welcome within the kingdom of God. However, his generosity is not limitless. First he excludes those who had not heeded his invitation: brazen sinners like those of Sodom and Gomorrah, who make no effort to conceal their misdeeds, and the hapless wedding-guest who appears with his sins plainly legible upon his stained garment. After admitting the last group of guests, the lord then pronounces his judgment on those who had declined to come to the feast:

> "For, certez, þyse ilk renkez þat me renayed habbe,
> And denounced me no3t now at þis tyme,
> Schul neuer sitte in my sale my soper to fele,
> Ne suppe on sope of my seve, þa3 þay swelt schulde." (105-8)

Those who had rejected God's call to the wedding feast of salvation are permanently denied a place in the heavenly court and must remain outside, while those who had accepted the invitation are invited within.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However, it is not sufficient for the guests to accept the invitation and come inside: what is inside of them also must be pure. While mingling among his guests, the king espies "A þral þryght in þe þrong vnþryuandely cloþed,/Ne no festival frok, but fyled with werkkez...." (135-6) His garment, rather than being festive, is stained with his works--both the stains of labor and the stains of his sinful deeds, much like the clothing of Adam and Eve is a sign of their sin. Unprepared for the summons to his creator's court, this sinner had not yet repented of his unclean deeds and donned the clean garment of a shriven soul. As in the poet's biblical sources, the man is unable to answer the lord's query about why he has come to a wedding-feast without proper attire, but the poet adds more detail, fully depicting the man's feelings of shame and fear, because of which he "hurkelez doun with his hede, þe vrþe he biholdez...." (150). The man's earthward glance is a realistic portrayal of someone confronted with his misdeed, but it also has a symbolic resonance: in the feast-hall of heaven, the sinner glances down at the earth, the spotted realm which his sinful state has not allowed him to see beyond. As a result of the tattered man's disrespectfully sloppy appearance at the wedding feast, the lord commands his retainers to

> "Stik him stifly in stokez, and stekez hym þerafter
> Depe in my doungoun þer doel ever dwellez,
> Greuing and gretyng and gryspyng harde
> Of teþe tenfully togeder, to teche hym be quoynt." (157-60)

Schreiber comments that the poet's revision of his biblical source in these lines indicates his preoccupation with spatial exclusion as a metaphor for rejection of the sinner by God: "...the poet's substitution of the dungeon for the biblical outer darkness both utilizes the common medieval metaphor for hell...and initiates a spatial displacement of the wicked from the pure which pervades the poem"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(Schreiber 138).[70] Moreover, in light of the association made by Ambrose and Augustine between Adam and Eve's sin and their clothes (which I will discuss shortly, in reference to the brief Adam and Eve narrative), the lord merely continues with the tradition of banishing a sinner because of what he or she is wearing--in terms of deeds as well as clothes.

For an audience who was perhaps unaware of the patristic association of Adam and Eve's clothing with awareness of their sin--both on their part and on the part of God--it might seem excessive for the prince to cast a poor laborer into his dungeon for eternity in order to teach him to dress better. Thus the poet explains the meaning of the court, the clothing and the punishment of the wedding guest. He explains that the "frelych feste þat fele arn to called" (162) is the kingdom of heaven, and the clothes that "þou wrappez þe inne" (169) "Hit arn þy werkez, wyterly, þat þou wro3t hauez,/And lyued with þe lykyng þat ly3e in þyn hert;/Þat þo be frely and fresch fonde in þy lyue...." (171-3)[71] As with the priest who "in clannes be clos" (12), one is allowed to enter the privileged space of the heavenly kingdom if one is found inside of the clothing of good deeds, but if one is guilty of sin, "Þroly into þe deuelez þrote man þrynges bylylue" (180). "And in þe Creatores cort com neuermore...." (191) This characterization of clothing as an indicator of good as well as foul deeds is revealing in light of patristic ideas about clothing as an indicator of the fallen state.[72] Unlike some of

---

[70]The biblical sources (Matthew 22: 1-14 and Luke 14: 16-24) also do not include the lord's rather amusing command in line 160, which can be translated roughly as "That'll teach him to dress better!" The Bible does not emphasize the sartorial element of the guest's transgression, which the poet does, to humorous effect.

[71]Cawley and Anderson read "lyued" (172) as "lyned" or "lined." I find this reading persuasive because it would fit the clothing metaphor more precisely: clothing represents human works, lined with the fabric of love.

[72]Of course there are positive examples of clothing in the Bible, for example, the snow-white garments washed in the blood of the Lamb and worn by the elect in the Book of Revelation 7: 13-14. However, in the narrative of the Fall, Adam and Eve do not wear clothing at all in their sinless state--thus its initial appearance in the Bible's version of human history is an indicator of sin, not of virtue.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

their biblical sources, the poem's images of expulsion are quite violent: sinners are not merely cast out, but they are "hurled" (223) and "harde þeroute schowued" (44).[73] The poet uses such images to assert clearly the finality of the exclusion and expulsion of transgressors.

Having presented examples of spatial trespass (the unlawful entry of the sinner into the court of the heavenly king) and sacramental transgression (the consecration of the sacraments by impure priests), the poet then connects both of these forms of violation with the unlawful crossing of sexual boundaries when he proclaims that nothing angers God so much "As for fylþe of þe flesch þat foles han vsed;/For, as I fynde, þer He for3et alle His fre þewez,/And wex wod to þe wrache fro wrath at His hert" (202-4). The word *used* (202), used previously in the context of the enjoyment or partaking of the body of Christ on the part of priests, subsequently connotes sexual impropriety and the physical violation of others.[74] Uncleanness thus involves the violation of some sacred enclosure,

---

[73]In Luke's Parable of the Wedding Feast, this violence is not present. The lord simply excludes those who have made excuses not to attend the wedding: "quod nemo virorum illorum qui vocati sunt gustabit cenam meam." ("And none of those men whom I had called shall taste my feast" (Luke 14: 24). However, Matthew's gospel includes a violent image of expulsion. In fact, the fate of this wedding guest is worse than that of the *Pearl*-poet's. While the poet's unclean reveller is thrust into a dungeon for his "hateres totorne," the biblical transgressor is cast into "the outer darkness"--a less ambiguous image of expulsion, since a dungeon, while certainly a place outside of a normal castle-dweller's purview, is also an enclosure.

[74]*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *use* as "to celebrate, keep, or observe (a rite, custom, etc.)," "to partake of (the Sacrament); to take or receive (the eucharist)" and "to have sexual intercourse with" (*OED* XIX, 353). *Clannesse* invokes *used* in the context of sexual improprieties in the Noah story, in line 202 ("And penne founden pay fylpe in fleschlych dedez,/And controeued agayn kynde contraré werkes,/And used hem unthryftyly vchon on oper,/And als with oper, wylsfully upon a wrange wyse.") In the Sodom and Gomorrah story, "usage unclene" (710) refers specifically to sexual transgressions. This phrase derives from medieval discussions of sexuality, which labelled sodomy as "usus contra naturam," i.e., a "usage" or custom against nature. The initial exhortation to unclean priests also seems evocative of Peter Damian's warnings in *Liber Gomorrhianus* to priests who practice the "vice against nature"--warnings which combine "use" of the Eucharist with incorrect "use" (or sexual intercourse with) members of the same gender. Though the poet does not specify the sins of which unclean priests are guilty, the reappearance of sexual sins in each of the three main biblical paraphrases makes it certain that he had intended sexual sins to be part of his accusations against unworthy clerics.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

whether that enclosure is a sacred space reserved for the pure, the vessels of the incarnate divine body, or the vessel/temple of the human body.

Before the poet presents his three central examples of transgression and subsequent exclusion from redemptive space and divine favor, he considers the first two violations of cosmic boundaries: the attempt of Satan to seize the power of God and the first human disobedience, both of which result in expulsion from privileged spaces. The poet emphasizes that Satan was originally granted an exalted place in heaven, both in terms of the space which he inhabited and his social placement in the hierarchy of angels: "...he watz hy3e in þe heuen hoven vpon lofte,/Of alle þyse aþel aungelez attled þe fayrest...." (206-7).[75] However, Satan is not satisfied with his preeminent place in the angelic hierarchy, and he contrives to subvert both God's station and God's space when he declares, "'I schal telde vp my trone in þe tramountayne,/And by lyke to þat Lorde þat þe lyft made'" (211-12). Immediately after his declaration of sovereignty, Satan is cast into the abyss by God: "With þis worde þat he warp, þe wrake on hym ly3t;/Dry3tyn with His dere dom drof to þe abyme...." (213-14) Not only Satan but all of his followers are "hurled" violently "þeroute" from heaven to hell:

> Þikke þowsandez þro þrwen þeroute,
> Fellen fro þe fyrmament fendez ful blake,
> Sweued at þe fyrst swap as þe snaw thikke,
> Hurled into helle-hole as þe hyue swarmez." (221-3)

Falling like blackened snow, the impious devils who had attempted to seize divine power and position become literal filth, garbage which is cast out of

---

[75]The apocryphal fall of Satan and his angels was familiar to medieval writers. A contemporary recounting appears in *Cursor Mundi,* which also represents the devils' transgression spatially. As in *Clannesse,* Lucifer threatens to establish his seat in the north (459), and the poet writes of heaven's "court", "For in þat court þat is so clene/No fulþe may dwelle ne be sene" (Trinity College, Cambridge, MS. R. 3: 467-8), thus necessitating the ejection of the evil angels. In punishment, the archangel Michael "Out of þat court cast he him [Lucifer]" (472). Michael then cleanses the court of Satan's and his followers' taint: "And scoured þat court of hem so clene" (475).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

heaven and burned in the inescapable "helle-hole." Because of their moral "spots" (which they even come to resemble physically in the repellent imagery of charred snow and swarming bees), they are barred from the "spot" of heaven whose boundaries they had striven to violate.

Like Satan, the first humans were originally granted a special place by God: "Þer priuély in paradys his place watz devised,/To lyue þer in lykyng[76] þe lenþe of a terme,/And þenne enherite þat home þat aungelez forgart...." (238-40) However, as a result of violating the stricture imposed upon them both by God not to touch the garden's central tree, Adam and Eve are forced to leave Paradise and bring death, the most permanent form of exile, upon humankind. Both of the primal transgressions are punished by exclusion from a sacred enclosure--heaven or the Garden of Eden--a pattern which will ostensibly be continued in the poem's three subsequent narratives, but which the poet subtly problematizes further with each succeeding biblical account. In the case of Adam and Eve, their exile from the Garden represents the exile of all humankind to a "region of unlikeness," a fallen realm in which humanity is limited to "carnal" readings of the world, or, as Margaret Wade Labarge states:

> So long as his [God's] message comes to us "through the lattice of our flesh," his message is subject to a "fallen epistemology," the imperfect mode of knowledge Augustine associates with the linearity of language and the "region of unlikeness." (Labarge 850)

---

[76]The poet's use of this word is interesting because it is frequently used in sexual contexts--i.e., as sensual enjoyment and sexual pleasure. Though both *The Middle English Dictionary* and *The Oxford English Dictionary* initially define the word in terms of pleasure in general, both note that the word was used for sexual pleasure, including forbidden kinds (*MED* 1040; *OED* 8. 951). Patristic and medieval theologians debated about whether sexuality came before or after the Fall, and if it indeed had caused the Fall. If the poet had intended a reference to sex and not merely a suggestion of delight in general, he would agree with Peter Lombard, who believed that intercourse--albeit without lust--existed in Paradise. Pierre J. Payer cites him: "'Just as we move some bodily members towards others, such as the hand to the mouth, without the ardour of lust, likewise they would have used the genital organs without any itching of flesh'" (*The Bridling of Desire* 25).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The repeated images of broken or consumed books which appear later in the poem recall this original imperfect space, where God's text must be understood through bodies--our own flesh and the fleshly, locative signs of the created world in which God's message appears--and which, ironically, becomes marred by sins of the flesh. Ultimately, then, like the exilic landscape in which Adam and Eve find themselves, the purged land after the Flood and the unnatural, submerged land (or, more accurately, sea) of Sodom and Gomorrah become warnings against following the impulses of the very flesh through which "spotted" mortals are forced to read by their very corporeal, fallen natures.

The fact that the poet does not discuss Adam and Eve's post-lapsarian clothing is surprising, not only because clothing had played such an important part in the wedding feast narrative, but also because patristic writers associated the first garments with sin, just as the wedding-guest's clothing had indicated his fallen condition. In Ambrose's *De Paradiso* 13.63, according to Eric Jager, "...humankind's original state of virtue is represented by nakedness, whereas the deceit that enters the world with the Fall is symbolized by coverings of various kinds: 'garments,' 'cincture' (or toga), 'veil,' and 'folds' (or wrappings)" (Jager 125). Specifically, the clothing of Adam and Eve after the Fall indicates not only the fallen state of their bodies but also the fallen state of language in a "region of unlikeness." The *folia* or leaves of the fig tree which Adam and Eve use to conceal their nakedness was the subject of a patristic pun:

> As the biblical account has it, Adam and Eve "sewed fig leaves *[folia]* together and made themselves aprons" (Gen. 3.7). Through wordplay on the double sense of *folia,* botanical and bibliographical, exegetes linked the primal clothing to the "leaves" of the scriptural codex. (Jager 66)

Jager comments further that "As coverings for the genitals, they hinted at the link between writing and illicit desire or pleasure" (Jager 69)--an association

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which the *Pearl*-poet seems to take up in his many examples of illicit sexual pleasure in *Clannesse.*

The clothing which Adam and Eve are given by God after leaving the garden is also associated with books, this time because it is made of animal-skins *(pellis),* the same material of which parchment is made. Augustine associates these skin garments with the way in which post-lapsarian language--the "alieniloquium" in which a word and its referent are eternally separate--covers or conceals the truth: "...the concealing of the truth by the 'flesh' encompasses Scripture, too, in which the divine Word *(Verbum)* is covered or clothed in human words *(verba)"* (Jager 70). Jager also informs the reader that in his *Confessions,* Augustine associates Adam and Eve's garments with the Book of the Cosmos created by God:

> ...Augustine uses typology and wordplay on the term *pellis* to liken the skin garments that cover Adam and Eve to the scriptural parchment book that "covers" their fallen descendants: "You clothed men with skins *[pellibus]* when by their skin they became mortal. And so you have like a skin *[sicut pellem]* stretched out the firmament of your book, that is, your words which so well agree together." (13.15) (Jager 70)

For Augustine, the clothing which Adam and Eve are given to wear by God after the Fall are themselves a text. Like the actual clothing of medieval people, the skins of Adam and Eve designate their "status" as fallen mortals, doomed to live in a world as fleshly and concealing as their garments. However, the image of the world itself as a book offers a redemptive reading of Adam and Eve's clothing. If their descendants read this book attentively, they can leave behind the skin garments of their mortality and their uncleanness (for the skins of Adam and Eve also proclaim their sin, for without having sinned, they would not require clothes) and become a part of the harmonious Book of Nature penned by God, in which each living "letter" teaches a lesson. However, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*Pearl*-poet concentrates more thoroughly on clothes as a signifier of sin, whether in terms of priestly garments or the unwashed ensemble of the unfortunate wedding-guest in the next scene. In this scene, though he does not mention Adam and Eve's vegetable- or animal-derived garments, human mortality, the result and the sign of the first sin, becomes like a garment "draping" all people: "And þe dom is þe deþe þat drepez uus alle...." (246) Augustine associates the skin garments of Adam and Eve with flesh, which also produces the "carnaliter" or fleshly form of reading of which the dreamer of *Pearl* is guilty,[77] and *Clannesse* is concerned with misuse of the fleshly garment or "vessel" of the human body. Additionally, while Augustine's image of the parchment skin as the firmament of God's word ultimately uplifts the lowly physical object, the "world-book" of Clannesse remains a site of unlikeness, of sins of the flesh which alienate human beings from God.

The Noah story (249-544) contrasts the enclosing space of the ark with the vulnerable open space outside, a space which is open to God's wrath. In the Noah story the distinction between insiders and outsiders is clearest. While Noah and his family are "closed" in the ark, those outside of it are constantly driven out of their homes and onto higher ground, which does not protect them any more than their houses had. As a result of sexual transgressions, these people are banished from the ark and God's mercy: "Þat watz for fylþe vpon folde þat þe folk vsed,/Þat þen wonyed in þe worlde withouten any maysterz." (251-2) The particular "fylþe" which the people of Noah's time had "used" is the wrongful indulgence in one another's bodies. This transgression of sexual boundaries violates bodily space at the same time as it stands outside of the social "boundaries" of the marriage bond, which the poet extols in the Sodom and Gomorrah story.

---

[77]Augustine discusses this concept in *De doctrina christiana* 3.5.9 (*Patrologia Latina* 34: 68-9).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poet observes that Noah's ancestors were not bound by any more specific marriage laws "bot loke to kynde,/And kepe to hyt, and alle hit cors clanly fulfylle." (264-5) However, these people did not adhere to *kynde* in their dealings with one another. Instead they exhibited a complete lack of social boundaries, violating the laws of nature and performing unsanctioned sexual acts, acts which the poet presents as violations of a cosmic as well as a human, societal order:

> And þenne founden þay fylþe in fleschlych dedez,
> And controeued agayn kynde contraré werkez,
> And vsed hem vnþryftyly vchon on oþer,
> And als with oþer, wylsfully, upon a wrange wyse.... (265-8)

Instead of following the *cors*[78] of nature, their "contraré werkez" and "wrange wyse" indicate that these sinners have literally as well as figuratively turned themselves away from God or "forloyned fro þe ry3t wayez...." (282) This metaphor of misdirection recalls the *westernays* church in *Pearl*, an architectural symbol for turning in the devil's direction and inverting divine laws. The word *used* is also repeated here in a familiar sense to a modern reader. In debasing themselves and each other through unspecified sexual sins, the people of Noah's time transform one another into objects, inert vessels for one another's lusts, in much the same way that Belshazzar later debases the sacramental vessels by using them as ordinary wine-glasses during his orgiastic celebrations.

But in the Middle Ages, the word *usus* had another sense--the *usus contra naturam*, or the "sin against nature," a common designation for sodomy.

---

[78]This word *cors* can also mean "body", not an unimportant connection in a poem so fascinated by violations of bodies. *The Middle English Dictionary* provides this definition: "The body of a living person;, also, the body of an animal" (625), and, interestingly, notes that *cors* was also associated with "the consecrated mass-wafer," the body of Christ (625). In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Bertilak's wife invests this word with ambiguous meanings when she tells Gawain that "Ye are welcum to my cors," suggesting on the one hand that she is at his service, but also perhaps insinuating that he is welcome to her body in the most corporeal sense.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Though the poet does not specify the nature of the sin which the people of Noah's time practiced "vchon on oþer," Michael Twomey makes a persuasive case that the poet may have meant the reader to understand that the antediluvian humans were guilty of the same sin as the Sodomites. He relates how the language used to describe the sin of Sodom and the sin of Noah's time is similar, and he states that in lines 571-80, "The poet observes that God punished Sodom for the sin committed by the pre-diluvians...." (Twomey 205) In these lines, which form the transition between the Noah and the Sodom and Gomorrah stories, the poet emphasizes the grave nature of the sin by indicating that the transgressors had lost their land for it:

> Ful felly for þat ilke faute forferde a kyth ryche,
> In þe anger of His ire, þat ar3ed mony;
> And al watz for þis ilk euel, þat vnhappen glette,
> Þe venym and þe vylanye and þe vycios fylþe
> Þat bysulpez mannez saule in vnsounde hert,
> Þat he his Saueour ne see with sy3t of his y3en.
> Alle illez He hates as helle þat stynkkez;
> Bot non nuyez Hym on na3t ne neuer vpon dayez
> As harlottrye vnhonest, heþyng of seluen:
> Þat schamez for no schrewedschyp, schent mot he worþe. (571-80)

Other locative images appear here. The sin of Noah's contemporaries and the Sodomites is compared to the stink of hell, and at the end, the perpetrators are not only deprived of their land, but they are kept back from the presence of God, the ultimate exile. Twomey interprets the words which the poet uses to describe the sin of these unfortunates:

> ...*harlottrye* (579) suggests a specifically sexual offense, and *heþyng of seluen* recalls how the poet emphasizes that the pre-diluvians practiced acts against nature on each other. Thus, if the Sodomites perished for the same sin as the pre-diluvians, the words "contrary works against nature" (266) applied to the pre-diluvians could reasonably allude to the term *usus* (or *peccatum) contra naturam,* originally from Rom. 1:26-27 and later one of the chief medieval

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> designations for homosexuality, the traditional sin of Sodom. (Twomey 205)

Twomey argues that the *Pearl*-poet's possible source for the idea that Noah's contemporaries were also sodomites was Peter Comestor, who in turn derived the idea from the prophecies of the Pseudo-Methodius--specifically, the first (eighth- century) Latin recension of the text of these prophecies. Comestor's description is literally incendiary: "men caught fire coming into one another" (Twomey 206-7; *Patrologia Latina* 198: 1081). Twomey suggests other possible sources for the depiction of antediluvian sodomy in *Clannesse.* A fourteenth-century copy of the *Bible historiale* notes that "'An cinccentieme and de la seconde celiade habiterent encontre nature les hommes les uns as autres'" (Twomey 209).[79] The thirteenth-century Genesis and Exodus "notes that before the Flood 'golhed hunkinde he gunnen don' ('they practiced unnatural lechery,' line 534)" (Twomey 209). *Cursor Mundi* accuses women as well as men of practicing the "unnatural vice" of same-sex lovemaking.[80] But Twomey remarks that "*Cleanness* deepens the implications of the sin against nature by placing it against the background of a golden age of natural law" (Twomey 210).

Twomey's discussion explains thoroughly where the *Pearl*-poet may have obtained the interpretation of the antediluvians' sin as sodomy, but questions about the poet's apparent obsession with same-sex intercourse (as represented by descriptions which Allen Frantzen finds unique in medieval literature for their frank description of homosexual desire)[81] still remain unanswered. Though

---

[79]"...in the five hundreth year of the second chiliad men possessed each other sexually against nature...." (trans. Twomey 209; the text appears in Pierpont Morgan Library MS. 322, v. 1, fol. 20r.) Twomey observes that the *Pearl*-poet uses the same phraseology of "vchon on oper."

[80]This description appears in the Trinity MS., which reads: "Wymmen as we hit fynde/Wente to gider a3eynes kynde/And men also pe same wyse/As pe deuele wolde deuyse/Of sopfastenes as seip pe sawe/Pei left euer pe gode lawe/Pe lawe of sopenes ny of kynde/Wolde pei no tyme fynde (Morris 99; lines 1569-76).

[81]Frantzen believes that "the poet's narrowing of the definition of sodomy to male homosexual

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

diatribes against male-male sodomy especially were not uncommon in medieval Europe, the *Pearl*-poet's vehemence about the subject seems especially perplexing in light of his sensual rhetoric in defense of marital heterosexuality for other than procreative purposes. Perhaps some clues lie in medieval conceptions of nature and sexuality.

Medieval discussions of sexuality were often concerned with "natural" versus "unnatural" sexual conduct. Many writers referred to nature as a book which, like the Bible, could be turned to by the faithful as a guide for their conduct. Alain de Lille expresses this view in a famous verse: "Omnis mundi creatura,/Quasi liber, et pictura/Nobis est, et speculum,/Nostrae vitae, nostrae sortis,/Nostri status, nostrae mortis,/Fidele signaculum./Nostrum statum pingit rosa/Nostri status decens glosa,/Nostrae vitae lectio" (*Patrologia Latina* 210: 579-80).[82]

However, the medieval Book of Nature did not contain or valorize all human and animal behavior. Like the hierarchal, rigidly structured social world, which was believed to be a reflection of the natural order, the Book of Nature contained negative as well as positive exempla, and particular behaviors were excluded from it altogether. For example, in the bestiaries, compilations of animal lore based on the *Physiologus*, an early medieval Latin text, animal behavior and physical characteristics (much of it based on conjecture and invention rather than naturalistic observation) represented either the virtuous

---

anal intercourse" (451) is unusual at a time during which penitentials were increasingly less specific about the nature of sodomy. Earlier penitentials specifically named male homosexual intercourse as a sin and assigned specific penances to those who practiced it, whereas in later penitentials, "sodomy" encompassed a variety of sexual sins, and anal intercourse itself was perceived as too obscene to describe (454). Frantzen believes that the poet's depiction of male homosexuality is also unique in Middle English literature because "The author does not merely narrate the Sodomites' demise: he allows them to proclaim and justify their desires" (452)--though he condemns these desires.

[82]"The whole created world is like a book, a picture and a mirror to us; it is a faithful [i.e., true] sign of our life, our lot, our condition and our death. The rose depicts our state: it glosses our status with decency and is a lesson for our lives." (translation mine)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

or the sinful conduct of human beings. Pierpont Morgan MS. 832 (twelfth century) provides a revealing example on folio 4, as John Boswell describes:

> The center illustration of this Latin bestiary depicts two hyenas embracing, a common artistic reference to the animal's homosexuality. The text...relates that the hyena "is an unclean animal, sometimes male and sometimes female".... (Boswell, comment on Plate 9).

As is evident from this bestiary, one of the forms of conduct most subject to this discourse of nature was sexual conduct. Boswell reports that in the thirteenth century, images of nature as a beneficent, almost divine personification took hold, and any behavior which society had agreed was "against nature" became infused with particularly awful resonances (Boswell 311). In particular, Nature personified became "the champion of heterosexual fecundity" (Boswell 312). The concept of "natural law" also gained in popularity. This was originally a Roman concept, and, among other things, it was one ideological basis for insisting upon the union of male and female for procreative purposes (Boswell 313-5). Thomas Aquinas in particular "irrevocably established the 'natural' as the touchstone of Roman Catholic sexual ethics" (Boswell 318).

While medieval religious authorities frequently viewed all sexuality with suspicion and distrust, in the later Middle Ages, homosexuality was labelled a "vice against nature" and was punished with increasing severity.[83] The fact that

---

[83]Punishments for homosexual acts were apparently more lenient in the early Middle Ages and increased in severity from the thirteenth century onwards. The early medieval penitentials stipulate comparatively mild penances for homosexuals. The third Lateran Council (1139) was an important turning-point in the ecclesiastical treatment of homosexuality, and in the later Middle Ages, it became common to associate homosexuality with heresy. In the thirteenth and fourteenth century, according to David F. Greenberg, "...the association between sodomy and heresy or Islam was beginning to transform the sodomite into an alien who had to be destroyed rather than forgiven" (Greenberg 279). This view of the sodomite as an alien or "other" appears in *Clannesse*, especially in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode. In addition to a cultural prejudice which was widespread by the poet's time (and severe penalties--often paralleling the punishments of heretics--to reinforce these prejudices), the *Pearl*-poet's concern with the "vice against nature" could also have been precipitated by two historical events in which homosexuality played a role: the reign of Edward II and the dissolution of the Templar order, whose members were accused of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the *Pearl*-poet almost exclusively characterizes uncleanness as sexual transgression, and that he focuses on homosexual acts in the Noah and Sodom stories, is consonant with the increasingly repressive ecclesiastical and secular laws against sodomy. His portrayal of sexual transgressors as exiled from privileged enclosing spaces reflects the treatment of transgressors "against nature" in late medieval society, whether such treatment meant social ostracism, literal exile or execution.

In the case of the sexual sinners of Noah's time, the punishment "...for fylþe vpon folde þat þe folk vsed,/Þat þen wonyed in þe worlde withouten any maysterz" (251-2) is exile from the very earth which had been the site of their sins. The poet emphasizes the spatial element of the people's sins by repeatedly specifying that these sins were performed "upon folde" (251), "in þe worlde" (252),"on vrþe" (273, 276, where the sins of the people "on erþe ernestly grewen" like plants) and "on molde" (279). Disgusted by the uncleanness which has spread over the entire world, "When He knew vche contré corrupte in hitseluen," (l. 281) God "forþynkes" the creation (285) and vows to "...fleme out of þe folde al þat flesch werez,/Fro þe burne to þe best, fro bryddez to fyschez" (287-8). Like the angels allied with Satan, who are driven into the abyss of hell, God threatens that human beings will be "dryuen out of erþe" (289), which they had stained with their misdeeds. Interestingly, those whom this vengeance will fall upon are described as "wearers" of flesh, which includes not only the sinful humans but also "alle kynez flesch þat on vrpe mevez" (303): birds, fishes and animals, who are free from blame. Like the ill-dressed wedding guest of the initial parable, these sinners are dressed in their

---

homosexuality and heresy by opposing political forces who wished to slander them. For a fuller discussion of medieval ethical and legal attitudes towards homosexuality, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality;* Michael Goodich, *The Unmentionable Vice,* and David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

works. However, these garments are not clothes but their very flesh, which they had besmirched by engaging in the "fylþe of þe flesche." Once again, the body itself becomes the site of transgression and evidence of pollution. In transgressing against other bodies, the bodies of these sin-stained people become garments which reveal the "werkkez" of their wearers.

However, the poet notes that there are a few people who are free from the almost universal stain of transgression: Noah and his family. Unlike the transgressors, who use one another's bodies in socially and religiously unacceptable ways, "In þe drede of Dry3tyn his [Noah's] dayez he usez,/And ay glydande wyth his God, his grace watz þe more" (295-6). Not only does he "use" his days in a righteous manner, a foreshadowing of how priests should "use" Christ's body in a spirit of reverence and a state of moral purity, but Noah also "glides" with God, a spatial expression of his adherence to divine commandments which is in direct contrast to the behavior of the other inhabitants of the earth, who do not walk with God but have instead "forloyned fro þe ry3t wayez" (282).[84] Charlotte Morse addresses the simultaneous punishment of the land and the people:

> The *Queste* and *Cleanness* illustrate the pollution of the broken covenant through sexual sin and idolatry by using the correlative of the wasteland, which represents a condition of chaos and death within and without. The way out of the wasteland...as *Cleanness* demonstrates through the examples of Noah, Abraham, Lot, and Nebuchadnezzar, lies in faith, cleanness, and courtesy. (Morse 38)

This image of the land afflicted as a result of human wrongdoings appears in each narrative, but is most elaborately described in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode.

---

[84]*The Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that "glide" was used in poetry to mean "to pass from one place to another, to go or come." (VI. 575). Thus by adhering to divine commands, Noah "goes" with God both spatially and spiritually.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When God counsels Noah about the imminent destruction of the world and its sinful inhabitants, God declares an intention to demolish "Boþe ledez and londe" (308), the transgressors and the land alike. However, God intends to spare Noah this punishment on account of his adherence to divine laws. God instructs Noah to build an ark in which he and his family will be spared the ravages of the coming flood:

> "Bot make to þe a mancioun, and þat is My wylle,
> A cofer closed of tres clanlych planed.
> Wyrk wonez þerinne for wylde and for tame,
> And þenne cleme hit with clay comly withinne...." (309-12)

Not only is this enclosure a seafaring vessel intended to shelter the pure, but it is itself a "clean" vessel like the sacramental vessels of the church or the church itself. Made of "tres clanlych planed", its very means of assembly is indicative of purity.[85] Like the heavenly "cofer" in which the Pearl-Maiden is joyfully set, the ark is a "cofer closed". The latter word is reminiscent also of the phrase "to clanly clos" in *Pearl* (2), referring to the gold frame in which she is set as an indication of her purity--another example of a pure object or person being set apart by means of enclosure. In reference to the ark, this word *cofer* is used once in line 339 and again in 492. Additionally, just as the Pearl-Maiden is "comly clente" in the "cofer" of heaven, this "cofer" is "comly" sealed with clay in order to keep the water, as well as the sinners, out.

That the contents of the vessel are to be as pure as the vessel itself is emphasized when God instructs Noah to

> "Of vche best þat berez lyf busk þe a cupple;
> Of vche clene comly kynde enclose seuen makez,
> Of vche horwed in ark halde bot a payre,

---

[85]The "clanlych" materials of the ark is a description which is unique to the poet--the biblical source gives practical instructions and measurements for the ark, but does not discuss the purity of its materials.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For to saue Me the sede of alle ser kyndez." (333-6)

Like the ark, which is "comly" (312) and "clanlych" (310) in its construction, the majority of the beasts to be sheltered inside belong to "clene comly" species, whereas the "horwed" or ritually pure--and thus inedible--animals are fewer in number. Of course, it is perplexing that God includes the "horwed" at all. Their presence in the "clean" vessel of the ark seems to compromise the purity of the other inhabitants, though the Bible also mentions this detail.[86] Nevertheless, their inclusion reflects the ambiguous approach to marginal and impure beings throughout the poem: they are alternately included and excluded.

The pure-hearted human passengers of the vessel are also to be spared divine vengeance because, as God explains: "'For þou in reysoun hatz rengned and ry3twys ben euer....'" (328) The purity of the animals and the human passengers also contrasts with the sexual impropriety of those who had misused the vessels of their bodies and who are thus doomed to remain outside of the ark, their bodies in turn to be violated by the flood. God clearly indicates that each passenger is to be paired with an appropriate mate, from the male human passengers, who are each to come aboard with his wife, to the male animals, who are to be provided with females of their species: "'And ay þou meng with þe malez þe mete ho-bestez,/Vche payre by payre to plese ayþer oþer....'" (337-8) Unlike those who "use" one another in ways contrary to the poet's understanding of nature, performing sinful acts "vchon on oþer", both human and animal inhabitants of the ark are paired with their appropriate mates to perpetuate what the poet views as "clean" or natural forms of sexual conduct--and to please one another sexually in the process, a detail which the more procreation-minded biblical original does not include any more than it does the

---

[86]Genesis 7.2 reads: "de animantibus vero non mundis [tolle] duo duo masculam et feminam" ("and of the unclean species [take] a pair, the male and the female....") *(Vulgata* 11).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

poet's later celebration of (hetero)sexual pleasure in marriage. While it would seem that the most practical reason for pairing the animals by kind would be to propagate their species upon the barren earth, the poet does not offer this reason here.

The distinction between those enclosed within the ark and those who remain outside is made more apparent in the narrative of the flood itself. Sarah Stanbury asserts that the poet renders the exclusion of the damned even more absolute by barring the interior of the ark from the reader's sight and concentrating on the damned, whose fate is described quite fully:

> With the highly detailed description of the Flood...the poet creates a highly focalized scene, even though no eyewitness is technically present. In this parable, in fact, the poet seems to use description as a poetic of exclusion, aligning the viewer's gaze with the doomed rather than with the saved, Noah inside the ark. From the outset, the visual alignments in this scene seem to offer a commentary on our ability--or failure--to interpret signs and 'read' visual messages. *(Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 54)[87]

After the ark is assembled, God asks Noah if he has completely sealed it and made it water-tight: "'Now Noe,' quoþ oure Lorde, 'art þou al redy?/Hatz þou closed þy kyst with clay alle aboute?'" (345-6)[88] This final query is not

---

[87]What Stanbury does not mention is that this "poetic of exclusion" is also present in the biblical text from which the poet had derived his literary interpretation. When the floodwaters arrive, the biblical narrative also concentrates primarily on those outside of the ark: "Et aquae praevaluerunt nimis super terram opertique sunt omnes montes excelsi sub universo caelo quindecim cubitis altior fuit aqua super montes quos operuerat consumptaque est omnis caro quae movebatur super terram universi homines et cuncta in quibus spiraculum vitae est in terra mortua sunt et delevit omnem substantiam quae erat super terram ab homine usque ad pectus tam reptile quam volucres caeli et deleta sunt de terra remansit autem solus Noe et qui cum eo erant in arca" ("And the waters prevailed so strongly over the earth that all of the mountains underneath the whole heavens were covered; fifty cubits higher the water rose, covering over the mountains, and all flesh that moved over the earth was consumed: all human beings, and everything on the earth that had in its nostrils the breath of life, are slain, and all living things who were upon the face of the earth are smitten in the heart: human beings, as well as the reptiles and the birds of the heavens; they are blotted out [deleted] from the earth. Only Noah and those who had gone with him into the ark have remained") *(Biblia Vulgata,* Gen. 7: 19-23, 12).

[88]The lively conversation between God and Noah has no biblical precedent. In Genesis, Noah is merely ordered to enter the ark before the flood.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

merely a practical question but a grave, final distinction between the included and the excluded, which is reemphasized when God tells Noah to "stifly stekez yow [i.e., Noah, the beasts and his family] þerinne" (351). In line 312 *cleme* is used to refer to the act of caulking the ark. Here *closed* emphasizes the finality of the act of sealing the vessel, indicating that the ark is closed to everyone save Noah, his family and the chosen animals. The ark also has become a *kyst*, another word used in *Pearl* to describe the heavenly coffer in which the pearl is "closed" or contained ("'Now þur3 kynde of þat kyste þat hyt con close....'"--271) The ark has become a treasure chest in which the pure are preserved in safety, sheltered from the vengeance which befalls the impure who are outside of the ark.[89]

While the chosen humans and animals take shelter inside the ark, earth and sky burst open, setting previously contained waters free, rupturing the very earth:

> Þen bolned þe abyme, and bonkez con ryse,
> Waltes out vch walle-heved in ful wode stremes;
> Watz no brymme þat abod vnbrosten bylyue;
> Þe mukel lauande loghe to þe lyfte rered.
> Mony clustered clowde clef alle in clowtes;
> Torent vch a rayn-ryfte and rusched to þe vrthe.... (363-8)

The violence of such words as *vnbrosten, clef, ryfte* and *rusched* echoes the violence of the hurling down and casting out of those who had transgressed moral boundaries earlier in the poem. It also is a prolepsis of the description of Sodom and Gomorrah as a burning book which breaks in half (966). In response to the sinners who had rebelled against nature while living on the earth, that same earth, the medieval "book of nature," revolts by tearing itself open to

---

[89]For a quite different (and dubiously protective) ship, see *Patience* 101-8. While Noah's ship is truly safe and protective, Jonah's ship bound for Tarshish only seems sufficient shelter to protect him from God. Lines 149-56 reveal just how safe Jonah's boat is for a sinner, as opposed to the safe container for the righteous that Noah's ark is.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

punish the sinners. Those whom God desires to have "dryuen out of erþe" (289) are assaulted by waters which have burst out of containment in clouds and beneath the ground. Just as the rebellious angels were "hurled into helle-hole," now the waters of the flood are "hurled" into each dwelling, causing the victims to flee into the open:

> Water wylger ay wax, wonez þat stryede,
> Hurled into vch hous, hent þat þer dowelled.
> Fyrst feng to þe fly3t alle þat fle my3t;
> Vche burde with her barne þe byggyng þay leuez
> And bowed to þe hy3 bonk þer brentest hit wern,
> And heterly to the hy3e hyllez þay haled on faste. (375-80)

The houses built by the condemned offer them no shelter from the flood, in contrast with the unbroachable enclosure of the ark's caulked walls. Each of the condemned tries to seek shelter in the land itself, heading for the hills, embankments and mountains to escape the floodwaters, but this effort proves fruitless as the waters rise higher. In some of the most poignant lines of the poem, the sinners take shelter only in each other, and even this shelter is destroyed when death tears them from each other:

> Frendez fellen in fere and faþmed togeder,
> To dry3 her delful deystyné and dy3en alle samen;
> Luf lokez to luf and his leue takez,
> For to ende alle at onez and for euer twynne. (399-402)

Thus the flood not only destroys dwellings but also demolishes the more fragile "structures" of human relationships (perhaps the very relationships which led to the cataclysm, as could be indicated by the masculine pronoun of the lovers in line 401).[90] The poignancy of this scene does not appear in the biblical text, and

---

[90]This could also be accounted for by the non-inclusive pronouns of the time: "his" could have represented lovers of both sexes, or men bidding farewell to their ladies. However, the sameness in terms of gender of the two partners is implied by the use of "luf" for both, where "lover" might be used for a man and "beloved" for the female object of his desire.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the poet's merciful attitude towards the drowning lovers, whose deaths are sober and dignified rather than frantic and bereft of dignity, like the later reaction of Baltazar to the pronouncement of his impending death (1537-45), is a disturbing note because he sees nobility in the sinners whom God has chosen to condemn, thus making him appear to be more merciful than God.

This scene also reveals that the poet is not entirely unsympathetic to the plight of the sinners, just as he will later portray the invasion of Judea in poignant terms. The sober, dignified last moments shared by the doomed lovers bear no trace of the lechery of which they have been accused; the "unkynde" sexual practices of the people are contrasted with the conventional social relationships represented by the concern of the mothers for their children in line 378 (children who could not have been created by sodomy); and in their last moments, both people and animals alike do not curse God or their fate, but instead entreat God for mercy (393-4). While the poet asserts that "...His mercy watz passed,/And alle His pyté departed fro peple þat He hated" (395-6), the poet's own pity does not seem to have similarly left him. These glimpses into the last moments of condemned sinners, who seem more victims than justly punished transgressors, are the poet's own marginal glosses on the biblical original in the terms which I have discussed in the introduction to this chapter, namely, he expands upon and valorizes the text while at the same time questioning it. Whereas the Bible leaves no room for mercy except among the ark-enclosed family of Noah and his chosen animals, the poet draws attention to those who had been marginalized and excluded by God, not just as a negative example, but in order to show pity for them. The poet's expansion of the biblical originals thus both serves his society's scheme of enclosure and exclusion and undermines it. He reinstates social and religious values of his time by drawing

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attention to those who transgress them, and he subverts them by sometimes portraying the transgressors sympathetically.[91]

After everything on the earth has been destroyed, the floodwaters which had been permitted to burst free from containment are stopped up by God, much as Noah had sealed the seams of the ark against the water:

> Þen He stac vp þe stangez, stoped þe wellez,
> Bed blynne of þe rayn: hit batede as fast;
> Þenne lasned þe lo3 lowkande togeder. (439-41)

The re-containment of the waters is described as a kind of closing off, like the locking of a door--an image which is echoed in the ark "lowkande togeder." After the elements have been unleashed on those outside of the ark, they are enclosed once again and order is restored; after the marginalized are excluded, the values and people at the center are triumphant. In the next verses, the *kyste* of the closed ark is contrasted with the open earth, which has been released from the flood so that the land is now "bare erþe":

> Bot þa3 þe kyste in þe cragez were closed to byde,
> 3et fyned not þe flod ne fel to þe boþemez,
> Bot þe hy3est of þe eggez vnhuled wern a lyttel,
> Þat þe burne bynne borde byhelde þe bare erþe. (449-52)

Interestingly, not only the ark but the land which the dove searches after the raven does not return from his mission is referred to as a *kyst:* "And when ho fyndez no folde her fote on to pyche,/Ho vmbekestez þe coste and þe kyst sechez" (477-8). Now that the earth has been purified from the influence of transgressors, like the ark it can be a *kyst,* a treasure chest which shelters and protects the pure

---

[91]This sympathetic treatment of the drowning humans and animals also appears in the fourteenth-century *Cursor Mundi.* When they are threatened by the floodwaters, they exhibit a nobility which was absent from their previous sinful lives: predators and prey swim together, not attacking or fleeing, and "Þes ladyes tented not þo to pride/Þei swam bi her knaues syde/For lordshipe was þere no strif/Was no man gelous of his wyf/Oþere to helpe was noon so sly" (1791-5, Trinity MS.; Morris 111), yet nevertheless, "Alle þei drenched bi & by" (1796).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

survivors of the deluge. When the dove returns a second time with a branch in her beak, Noah knows then that the land is safe once more: "Þat watz syngne of sauyté þat sende hem oure Lorde,/And þe sa3tlyng of Hymself with þo sely bestez" (489-90). At this sign, Noah and his company can soon proceed out of their "cofer þat watz clay-daubed" (492) into the world.

Still inside of the ark, even after seeing that the world had been "dryed" (496), the redeemed praise ("loued") God but make no move to leave until God calls them out:

> Vchon loued oure Lorde, but lenged ay stylle
> Tyl þay had tyþyng fro þe Tolke þat tyned hem þerinne.
> Þen Godez glam to hem glod that gladed hem alle,
> Bade hem drawe to þe dor: delyuer hem He wolde.
> Þen went þay to þe wykket, hit walt vpon sone;
> Boþe þe burne and his barnez bowed þeroute,
> Her wyuez walkez hem wyth and þe wylde after,
> Þroly þrublande in þronge, þrowen ful þikke. (497-504)

The word of God invites the company of the saved out of their shelter, declaring that the place outside, the place of exclusion, is no longer unsafe but purified for them. Though God had "delyuer[ed]" them by means of ordering Noah to create the ark, the invitation to come to the door and leave the ark is the final sign of their deliverance--their ability to step out of the sheltering vessel and into the cleansed world. Clark and Wasserman write concerning the door of the ark, "...the door to the ark becomes a discriminating threshold to salvation" (Clark and Wasserman 118).

In thanksgiving, Noah manages to capture some of the fleeing animals "of vche honest kynde" (505) and offers them as a sacrifice. Like the ark in which they had taken shelter, and like those who had been sheltered, the sacrifice is "comly and clene" (508) and God's words to Noah are "In comly comfort ful clos" (512). The words *comly* and *clos,* which had described both the ark and its

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contents in lines 300 and 312, connect the vessel of the ark to the vessels of the sacraments as parallel vessels of deliverance. The sacrifice, which is as pure as the enclosure of the ark, foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ which is re-enacted in the celebration of the eucharist. Unlike the unclean priests of lines 13-16, the survivors of the flood are fit to "use" the purified earth, one another (in socially sanctioned sexual relationships), and later the sacraments themselves.

God then commands Noah and his family to go forth and replenish the earth (one of the poet's rare references to procreation--though it is not his own but probably was derived directly from Genesis 9: 1) and informs them that, as a result of their "clean" deeds (especially their "clean" method of multiplying themselves), the land will never cease to provide for them, allowing them to "rengnez...ye þerinne" (527) where previously the earth had been harmed by sexual misconduct and was thus made barren:

> "Bot waxez now and wendez forthe and worþes to monye,
> Multiplyez on þis molde, and menske yow bytyde.
> Sesounez schal yow never sese of sede ne of heruest...." (521-23)

No longer subject to destruction because of "fylþe vpon folde," the earth instead will yield its fruits to those who multiply "on this molde" in a divinely sanctioned as well as socially acceptable manner. The cleansed earth replaces the ark as the shelter of the saved. Unlike before the flood, where none of the damned could find shelter in even the highest mountains, the entire earth becomes a place of plenitude and grace for those whom God had spared.

At the end of the Noah story, the poet again admonishes the reader never to appear filthy in the court of God. However, this time he refers not to filthy clothing but to the body itself as a garment which can be stained by unclean deeds. The sinner can be found *in* unclean deeds, as if they were clothing or a place:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Forþy war þe now, wy3e þat worschyp desyres
> In His comlych courte þat Kyng is of blysse,
> In þe fylþe of the flesch þat þou be founden neuer,
> Tyl any water in þe worlde to wasche þe fayly. (545-8)

Like the ark, the court of God is "comlych", and to enter it one must in turn not be found clad in the very "fylþe of the flesch" which had caused the earth to be flooded. (The cleansing water of repentance in line 548 recalls these floodwaters.) Schreiber describes the inside/outside imagery of the heavenly court and its occupants: "...if he [a person] wishes to see God there must be a harmony between inner and outer, container and contained" (Schreiber 138). The righteous person is also described as a jewel which is contained in the "scyre howsez" of heaven, which are not penetrable like the flooded houses of the transgressors, but seamless, like the ark:

> For þat schewe me schale in þo schyre howsez,
> As þe beryl bornyst byhouez be clene,
> Þat is sounde on vche a syde and no sem habes--
> Withouten maskle oþer mote, as margerye-perle. (553-6)

To be admitted within the clean interiors of heavenly dwellings, one must likewise be clean within, like the pearl of *Pearl.* The ark is also recalled in this image of the jewel. Like the *cofer* or *kyste* of *Pearl,* which contains the jewels of pure souls, the heavenly kingdom and the ark both contain the beryls and pearls of the pure, who are "sounde on vche a syde" (555) and without seams or flaws. This seamlessness also recalls the physical attributes of the ark. The poet continually emphasizes the ark's water-tightness--the unbroachability of its joining and the integrity of its seams--and for a practical reason, since the vessel's seams must prevent the water from leaking in. However, the integrity of the seams of the vessel also indicates that Noah has managed to seal it against sin, that uncleanness cannot penetrate this sanctuary of the pure from outside.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Likewise, the vessel is "sounde on vche syde"--well-built and indestructible as well as symmetrical. Since the beryl in line 555 is round and thus has no sides, the "sides" here are perhaps intended to be a reference to the ark which prefigures the church and the heavenly city as sites of deliverance.[92] The rectangular ark does have sides, whose soundness and unbroachability are emphasized in contrast to the earth itself, which the water ruptures in order to break free,[93] and the homes of the damned, which are broken into and destroyed by the floodwaters.

In contrast to the impenetrability of the ark which protects the redeemed, and the "seamlessness" of the redeemed themselves, whom no sin can enter, the poet then describes the transparency of all souls, but particularly the unredeemed, to God's penetrating glance. In their eagerness to hide their misdeeds from God's sight, the hearts of the unredeemed seem like shelters for their sinful thoughts, but these shelters are as flimsy as the buildings in which the sinners of Noah's time had sought refuge from the flood. Just as the floodwaters had penetrated and destroyed the sheltering walls of the transgressors' houses, God's vision can penetrate the "shelter" of the heart in order to reveal hidden deeds, or, as the poet warns, "Per is no dede so derne þat

---

[92]Michael Camille relates that "Noah's Ark signif[ies] the Church" and reprints an illustration from Gilbert of Limerick's *De Statu Ecclesiae*, Cambridge, University Library MS. Ff. 1.27., fol. 18v, which depicts the hierarchy of the medieval church (and society as a whole) in the form of a cathedral window of progressively smaller divisions, surrounded by the turrets of Noah's ark ("The Book of Signs" 135).

[93]Though in *Clannesse*, the earth of Noah's time is contrasted with the ark in terms of its broachability, some medieval mapmakers depicted the earth in the shape of a stylized Noah's ark (i.e., as an ellipse), maybe in order to display that the world as Christians saw it was as enclosed and protected as Noah's ark. David Woodward and J. B. Harley reproduce an example of the Englishman Ranulf Higden's *mappamundi* of the mid-fourteenth century, which was drawn "Perhaps following Hugh of St. Victor's [c. 1096-1141] instructions for drawing a world map in the shape of Noah's ark...." (Harley and Woodward, plate 15). The illustration is reproduced from Higden's *Polychronicon*, Huntington Library 132, fol. 4v. Hugh of St. Victor's instructions appear in *On the Mystical Noah's Ark.)* Because Higden and the *Pearl*-poet were countrymen and near-contemporaries, I am uncertain whether the poet would have been familiar with Higden's maps or with Hugh's idea of a world shaped like Noah's ark, but I believe that this interesting image would have been appealing to a poet so enamored of locative imagery.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

dittez His y3en...." (588) While the innocent are invited to take refuge in sanctuaries like the ark and the Church, the guilty cannot take refuge anywhere from God. Ironically, God's sight penetrates the sinful hearts of violators in particular. Those who attempt to invade the bodies of others (or the more metaphoric enclosures of sacred vessels and religious laws) are in turn probed by the eye of God. God's ability to penetrate the spiritual walls raised around hidden guilt is likened to the groping of an invasive hand:

> Þer is no wy3e in his werk so war ne so stylle
> Þat hit ne þrawez to Hym þro er he hit þo3t haue.
> For He is þe gropande God, þe grounde of alle dedez,
> Rypande of vche a ring þe reynez and hert. (ll. 589-92)

While *werk* can mean the hidden deeds of the sinner, it also recalls the stains of "werkkes" in the clothing of the expelled wedding guest, and the phrase "in his werk" can remind one also of the encircling properties of clothing. Thus spiritual clothing, far from hiding the nakedness of one's sins, actually reveals what the sinner attempts to conceal. Furthermore, while God's ability to recognize hidden deeds was described previously as a kind of preternatural vision or hearing, here God's hand penetrates the interior spaces of the soul, chasing hidden deeds out into the open as the floodwaters had driven the damned from their dwellings and into the hostile landscape.

According to Ambrose and other patristic writers, clothing was a metaphor not only for transgression itself--the garment "fyled with werkkes" in which the unprepared wedding-guest's inadequacies could be read--but also stood for real texts, especially writing which deceives and dissembles, just as sinners offer excuses, like concealing clothing, with which to cover their misdeeds. In *De Paradiso,* Ambrose suggests that this use of clothing and verbal artifice to conceal one's sins had originated with Adam and Eve. Ambrose states

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that Adam and Eve, imitating the Serpent's verbal artifice, make or fabricate language into a covering for themselves. As the tempter "weaves" his verbal "nets," so they weave together *(intexit)* words; as he pieces together or composes lies, so they use patched-together *(compositis)* excuses. (Jager 126)

Though sinners might use both language and clothing to hide the "flesh" of their fleshly deeds, the *Pearl*-poet uses theological precedent to suggest that God can see through both of these concealing garments. What makes his image of God's perceptual penetration of sinful "clothing" unique, however, is the very corporeality or carnality of that image. God seems to penetrate flesh as well as spirit with all-seeing hands, opening the body of the sinner to divine scrutiny, as if the misdeeds of what Peter Damian called "carnal men" could be read only with an equally fleshly eye--or with actual flesh, namely God's surprisingly incarnate, groping hand, which appears again as rough and uninvitedly penetrating in the Baltazar episode. Frantzen discusses the physicality of God's moral probing:

> He is a "gropande"... God who touches and feels as he looks for filth, searching the hearts and "reynye3" 'kidneys' of every person (591-91). *Gropen* means "to feel with the hand or fingers, touch, stroke" and "to touch amorously, play with, fondle"... God's groping recalls the poem's introductory emphasis on priests who "hondel"... Christ's own body and his "gere"... (11-12, 16) and who handle sins in confession; it also anticipates the healing touch of God, which, after Sodom has been destroyed, is described as a "hondelyng"... that filth flees (1101-02), a touch that divides as it heals the pure and expels the impure. (Frantzen 453)

What Frantzen implies but does not state explicitly is that God's groping, while associated with a confessor's probing of his spiritual charge (as in "The Summoner's Tale," where Chaucer's Summoner describes his Friar probing a sinner's conscience during confession, using the same image of groping), is similar to the sexual deeds of those whom the poem condemns. God's groping is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

disturbingly like the illicit fondlings of the people of Noah's times and the Sodomites later in the poem.

God's perception of hidden deeds also has a locative resonance. Much as the evil deeds of the people of Noah's time had been enacted "vpon folde," and as the good deeds of Noah's family would be performed "on molde," God is the "grounde of alle dedez," the source of every action, but also the physical location upon which deeds are performed. Evil deeds are a violation of the body of God, and the perpetrators of such deeds are thus banished from the body of God and the salvation which is offered through its sacramental sharing. As in *Pearl*, where God is the "grounde" of bliss for the saved, God is not only the source of the human power to act, since it is God who gives the gift of human reason, but God is also the owner of the "grounde" where deeds are performed, the ruler of all space. Because there is no place which is not God's, even the "place" of the human heart is not hidden from God. While God may inspire the construction of sheltering spaces that protect the pure, no space constructed by humans can conceal anyone from God's sight.

The image of the groping God is most intriguing because this ability to reach into the protective space of the human heart parallels the violations which characterize the impure acts so hated by God. All of the most reprehensible transgressors of the poem attempt to reach into and defile places or containers which are not permitted to them: the holy Temple, the vessels contained therein, other people's bodies. As they attempt to penetrate these proscribed enclosures, God in turn penetrates their hearts and reveals their designs and desires.

In the Sodom and Gomorrah story (601-1052), the poet locates the potential violators of bodily and moral space not outside but inside of the protective walls of a city. The city actually condones the acts of violence against which it is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

supposed to protect its citizens and guests. In the city, social and moral values are overturned, particularly the idea of protection which is central to the notion of hospitality. The Sodomites are violators of this principle, desiring to breach the boundaries of the guest-host relationship as well as literally to tear open the host's gate, enter his house, and enter the bodies of his guests in a manner which is a double violation: as a homosexual act, it violates the law of God as the original audience of the poem interpreted it, and as rape, it is a further violation. While both Abraham and Lot are exemplary hosts, offering the protection of their dwellings to their guests much in the same way that the ark protected its inhabitants, the Sodomites transgress the boundaries of hospitality, offering not safety within their walls but potential assault and rape, a violation of both the physical integrity of the guests and the social order which is supposedly enshrined within the walls of the city. Because of this transgression of physical, spatial and social boundaries, God unleashes wrath upon the city.

The beginning of the narrative situates Abraham "Euen byfore his hous-dore, vnder an oke grene" (602). However, upon seeing "wlonke Wy3ez þrynne"[94] (606) traveling along the road, "When he hade of Hem sy3t he hy3ez bylyue,/And as to God þe goodmon gos Hem agaynez/And haylsed Hem in onhede...." (610-12), demonstrating his reverent hospitality by approaching his visitors as if they were God--who, indeed, they are.[95] Abraham then asks them

---

[94]The attractiveness of the three men, which the poet emphasizes in greater detail when two of them enter Sodom, does not appear in the Bible. By describing the physical beauty of the angels, the poet offers a suspenseful foreshadowing (and also a justification) of the Sodomites' desire for them. Frantzen comments on the angels' delicate beauty in the poem, which, he argues, bears traces of conventional descriptions of romance heroines: "Beautiful inside and out, the angels are so fair that they might be mistaken for women. But they are supposed to be seen as men--only Lot recognizes that they are angels--and to be thought about bodily, sexually, as the Sodomites perceive them. ... Likewise, in *Clannesse*, the attempt to conceal initiates desire: eyes are drawn from the surface of the angels' clothes to the pretty flesh beneath" (457).

[95]David C. Fowler writes that for medieval exegetes, this passage was an important prefiguration of Trinitarian theology, in which Abraham recognizes the three angels as one God: "In medieval commentaries...Abraham's encounter is seen as an important revelation of the Trinity--God manifesting himself to the patriarch as three men. Hence in addition to wondering whether

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to stay with him for a while under the boughs of the tree beneath which he had been resting:

> "3if euer Þy mon vpon molde merit disserved,
> Lenge a lyttel with Þy lede, I lo3ly biseche;
> Passe neuer fro Þi pouere, 3if I hit pray durst,
> Er Þou haf biden with Þi burne and vnder bo3e restted...." (613-6)

After this courteous speech, Abraham then busies himself with serving the needs of his guests in an example of model hospitality. When they have settled themselves under the tree, he fetches water to wash their feet and bids his wife to cook something for their guests. The poet describes in detail how Abraham has a choice animal slaughtered and serves the guests courteously. In return, the heavenly guests of Abraham promise him that Sarah shall conceive a son and thus give Abraham a descendant.

God, who has been disguised as the three travellers, then reveals the purpose of their visit to Abraham: to investigate "The gret soun of Sodomas [which] synkkez in Myn erez...." (689)[96] Though this image of Sodom's sins as a loud sound indicates (both in the poem and in the commentaries of patristic and medieval exegetes on this passage in the biblical original) that the sins are revealed despite the Sodomites' attempts to conceal them, the exact nature of the sins is not revealed--only their gravity. Even God does not know what the Sodomites have done and must investigate the situation personally. Frantzen

---

Abraham will recognize that his visitors are divine, the reader has an additional ingredient of suspense: will Abraham recognize that the three men are One?" (Fowler 176)

[96]The "loud cry" of Sodom--the voice of its sins--was a matter of interest for medieval interpreters of the Bible. According to Michael Goodich, in *Sermones de peccatis capitalibus*, Alain de Lille "introduces the view that the two most serious crimes are sodomy and homicide, both of which are described in Scripture as creating a loud disturbance that calls forth God's eternal wrath" (Goodich 34). In his early-fourteenth-century *Postillae super totam bibliam*, Nicholas of Lyra asserted that the "clamor" of Sodom "suggests the shameless failure of such sinners even to attempt concealment of their sins" (Goodich 36). Because of this failure to be ashamed of their sins (as Adam and Eve had been), their misdeeds take on a voice of their own, calling for the punishment of those who had perpetrated them.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

points out that the hidden nature of the Sodomites' crimes parallels the situation in penitential practices. When attempting to extract a confession of sodomy from a parishioner, the confessor was required not to mention the deed save circumspectly, with certain leading questions, both because of the alleged heinousness and shamefulness of the sin and because, if the parishioner was indeed innocent of this particular transgression, he or she might be encouraged to try it because the confessor had given the parishioner an idea that he or she ordinarily would not have had (Frantzen 456).

Of the Sodomites' transgressions God states, "'Vch male matz his mach a man as hymseluen,/And fylter folyly in fere on femmalez wyse'" (695-6).[97] The

---

[97]This identification of the Sodomites' sin with femininity occurs in other medieval texts. Alain de Lille describes "proper" heterosexual love according to the rules of syntax, where certain words modify others and some words are subject to others, both in a hierarchal and a semantic sense, thus cleverly invoking the inevitably hierarchal element of heterosexual relationships for a medieval public: "According to Alan's ideal, a man should modify, through sexual intercourse, a woman, just as a predicate modifies a subject. ...the sentence must be understood as referring simultaneously to the noun *subiectum* (a subject in grammar or logic) and to the verb *[subicere]*...from which the noun is derived; in one ordinary sense, the verb means 'to place under (so as to subject to the operation of),' 'to put (a mare to a stallion)'" (Ziolkowski 14-5). Alain's grammatical metaphor is telling. Besides putting women in the passive position by having them "modified" by males, the male is assured of his "active" role in both sexuality and society by being not only the "active" partner but the "action" of the sentence of sexuality--the penetrating preterite. Alain charges that, through homosexual relationships, human beings have undermined the laws of both nature and grammar. An important component of this subversion is that, through the act of sodomy, men relinquish their masculinity in favor of an "unnatural" hermaphroditism or effeminacy:

> Actiui generis sexus se turpiter horret
> Sic in passiuum degenerate genus.
> Femina uir factus sexus denigrat honorem,
> Ars magice Veneris hermafroditat eum.
> Predica et subicit, fit duplex terminus idem.
> Gramatice leges ampliat ille nimis (*De planctu* metr. 1.15-20; 431A) ("The active gender shudders in horror when it degenerates into the passive sex. A man made woman denigrates the honor of his sex; the magical art of Venus makes him a hermaphrodite (lit. "hermaphrodites him"). Predicate and subject become one term doubled"--translation mine.)

Peter Damian consistently characterizes homosexual transgressors as men who have forsaken "manly" virtues in favor of the "vices" of women. In this characterization, he not only presents the persistent stereotype of homosexuals as effeminate (which the *Pearl*-poet invokes in his reference to "femmales wyse"), but also maligns women, suggesting that virtue (which is derived from the Latin *vir*, man) is unique to males: "...'to be unmanly' is to relinquish the strong deeds of a virile life and to exhibit the seductive weakness of feminine conversation" *(Book of Gomorrah 70*--quotes are from 2 Samuel 3:29). Pierre Payer makes an interesting note about the Vulgate's phrase which Damian renders as "to be unmanly": "'one unmanly' translates the Latin

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

poet's accusation of female behavior on the part of the Sodomites, which paraphrases the accusation against them in Leviticus 18 and 20, suggests that they are marginal people because they have given up their masculinity, and also suggests that being a woman in itself makes one marginal. While the virtuous men of the poem retain their masculine identity, the Sodomites transgress by willfully becoming like another marginalized group, women. With the exception of the Virgin Mary (and perhaps the anonymous female victims of the three main outpourings of God's wrath in the poem), the women of the poem behave foolishly and even sinfully, thus reinforcing the idea that being female disposes one to being marginal and transgressive. Frantzen argues that, throughout the poem, women are actually the authors of sexual transgression--even male homosexuality:

---

'fusum tenens', which is literally, 'one plying the spindle'" (*Book of Gomorrah* 70). Spinning has been associated with women since at least the Middle Ages, and typically represents Eve's post-lapsarian feminine labor, hence its use as a derogatory term for a feminized man. It is also possible that the spindle is an image for male genitalia, thus identifying the effeminate sodomite as a man who "plies" other men's genitals even as he takes part in another traditionally female--and, for a man, degrading--activity.

Damian's misogyny is so complete that he personifies sodomy as a female figure, "the most pestilential queen of the sodomists," who "deprives her soldiers [sodomites] of the arms of the virtues and exposes them to the piercing spears of all the vices" (*Book of Gomorrah* 64). (The military metaphor is an intriguing choice because in classical literature, relationships between men were often positively depicted in a military context. Far from being "effeminate," these men were seen as the epitome of masculine virtue. For more on this subject, see John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Pre-Modern Europe*, New York: Villard, 1994.) This emasculating queen deprives her faithful sodomitical servants of the phallic spears of their masculine virtues and in turn penetrates them with vices, thus rendering them female not only in that they literally become passive recipients of her attacks upon their virtue, but also by making them the recipients of penetration, thus depriving them of their active role in heterosexual relationships as the "penetrator." Of course, only half of the "sodomites" could be "passive" at any one time, but it appears as if this partner was singled out for especial scorn as the one who had debased himself by assuming the subordinate "female" role. David Greenberg states that this "feminine" partner "came to be identified with the werewolf, the sorceror, and the outlaw and was depicted as a foul monster. The English words *ragamuffin*, originally the name of a demon (derived from *ragr*, effeminate), and *bad* (originally *baedling*, effeminate) reflect this development" (Greenberg 249). Of course the "active" partner was also considered reprehensible, but it was the man who "became a woman" who most often received scorn for becoming the subject of another man's preterite.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Once again, female sexuality has transgressed the order of nature, just as Eve defied God and just as women mated with fallen angels. Brundage argues that fourteenth-century legal theorists "contended that sodomy had begun historically with the practices of the women of Sodom and Gomorrah, the 'mothers of lust,' who were not satisfied with the sexual pleasure of intercourse with men and consequently invented new and perverse pleasures to appease their lust" (533-34). Men learned this trick from them. (Frantzen 456)[98]

God then offers the act of married love as an example of correct conduct: "'When two true togeder had ty3ed hemseluen,/Bytwene a male and his make such merþe schulde come,/Welny3e pure paradys mo3t preue no better....'" (702-4) There are two locative images here. In line 697, God describes the sexual act as a "kynde craft," recalling the ark, which is put together using "skyl," just as lovemaking is a "skyl." Of course, the ark is also a craft in another sense: a vessel in which the pure are kept. Additionally, these images are also linked to the eucharist. Both the ark and the eucharistic vessels are containers for salvation, and marital lovemaking, like the eucharist, was considered a sacrament.[99] Interestingly, this use of *skyl* and *craft* to describe lovemaking indicates that sexuality is a learned behavior, as constructed as the ark is assembled with *skyl*. This notion of shared sexual pleasure as a "skyl" perhaps unwittingly contrasts the poet's assertion that marital, heterosexual lovemaking is "natural." as in l. 263, where people are bidden to "loke to kynde" and also in line 709, where sexual transgressors are said to have "scorned natwre."

---

[98]This notion of women as the originators of homosexuality appears in *Cursor Mundi's* description of the sexual sins of Noah's contemporaries, where women are the first ones to choose partners of the same sex; see quotation in Note 17.

[99]*The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* confirms that by the *Pearl*-poet's time, marriage was viewed as a sacrament: "Whatever their hesitations about praising its sexual aspect, theologians saw matrimony as a holy relationship, one that by the thirteenth century was commonly held to be a sacrament. It was a symbol of the union of Christ and the church, a means of salvation for most men and women" (Michael W. Sheehan, in Strayer 4. 611).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The second interesting spatial metaphor is the poet's equation of lovemaking with an undefiled space. The pure and blissful act of marital lovemaking is compared with the garden of Paradise, the first shelter for blemishless human beings, as if by "using" or enjoying one another in a manner which parallels the priest's "use" or partaking of the sacraments, human beings can inhabit Paradise, the spotless spot, again.[100] There they can become sacred vessels for one another, like the sacramental vessels which are protected and partaken of by priests who "in clannes be clos" (12).

This "sex-positive" attitude towards marital intercourse seems unusual, if not unique, and does not appear in the biblical source, which also does not discuss the homosexual acts of the Sodomites. Jean-Louis Flandrin states that the medieval Christian attitude towards sexuality, as articulated by moralists and theologians, was that it was to be practiced for procreation only. In fact, "The majority of early theologians deemed that husbands and wives who copulated for pleasure were committing mortal sin" (Flandrin 115). Following in the footsteps of Jerome in *Contra Jovinianum* I. 49, many theologians believed that if a husband was too passionately in love with his wife, it was tantamount to committing adultery. He wrote, "'Nothing is so vile as to love one's wife as if she were a mistress....Men should come before their wives not as lovers, but as husbands'" (Flandrin 122). This distaste for excessive sexual passion between husband and wife possibly resulted from the potential for one to neglect one's duties to God in favor of too enthusiastically performing one's "duty" to one's spouse.

The *Pearl*-poet differs from these medieval theologians. As Michael Calabrese and Eric Eliason demonstrate, the defense of marital heterosexuality

---

[100]In this case, *use* is replaced by *welde* or "wield"; God commands married people, "þay mo3t honestly ayþer oþer welde" (705). The "ayþer oþer" of the married couple contrasts with the unlawful practices of the antediluvians "vchon on oþer."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which the *Pearl*-poet offers here does not include any references to procreation, which for medieval theologians was the only reason for it. Calabrese and Eliason suggest that "As a consequence of this omission--the absence of a procreative telos for sexual activity in the poem--a new sexual order based on pleasure emerges. The poem values the pleasure of sexual relations in marriage as 'a maner myriest of oþer' (701)" (Calabrese and Eliason 254). They note also that not only humans but animals also, in the form of the animals on the ark, are paired, male and female, so that they might "plese ayþer oþer" (338; Calabrese and Eliason 255).[101] Frantzen detects a potentially subversive statement in line 701. Though neither God nor the poet approve of such acts, he believes that in this line, even God acknowledges other forms of sex in labelling heterosexual lovemaking as "a maner myriest of oþer"--the "oþer" possibly being variant forms of sexual expression (Frantzen 456-7).

An interesting element in this discussion of the marital relationship is the notion of privacy. With those who are lawfully bound in marriage, God indicates that they can be as passionate as they desire, as long as they keep their lovemaking private:

> "Ellez þay mo3t honestly ayþer oþer welde,
> At a stylle stolen steuen, vnstered wyth sy3t,
> Luf-lowe hem bytwene lasched so hote
> Þat alle þe meschefez on mold mo3t hit not sleke." (705-8)

---

[101]The *Pearl*-poet's position may be unique among patristic writers, but it does appear in literary works and popular theological works, like sermons. For example, John Mirk, a near contemporary of the *Pearl*-poet, writes concerning marital intercourse: "...Fadur & Sone & Holy Gost made hit in paradis erthely....In þe whyche place is so myche ioy and blisse that no tonge may telle, ne no herte may thenke. And for encheson þat þis ordur was made in þat mery place, 3it holy chirch suffreth it to be made here in erthe wyth myrth þat is holy himself, and without vylony" (Calabrese and Eliason 257).
Poets like Chaucer and Guillaume de Lorris also celebrated the paradisiacal nature of married lovemaking (Calabrese and Eliason 258-60).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Not only is lovemaking supposed to take place in private, but God also imparted the teaching of this craft in private, as God proclaims in line 697: "'I compast hem a kynde crafte and kende hit hem derne....'" Thus God's imparting of this knowledge in secret can itself be seen as a sexual (albeit virtuous) act. The word *compast* is interesting too in that it is a locative metaphor. By engaging in this "kynde crafte," married people can be "encompassed" by the metaphoric circle of God's plan.[102]

While sins and transgressions are ostensibly committed in secret and yet manage to reach God as easily as if they were spoken aloud or performed in the open, God stipulates that the act of love requires privacy--a sheltering space much like the enclosed garden of Paradise or the ark which protects the redeemed. As Calabrese and Eliason write, "...God asserts a sexual ethic that makes passion and privacy--and not offspring--the criteria by which lovers 'mo3t honestly ayþer oþer welde'" (Calebrese and Eliason 256). Like the places which shelter the elect, the "place" designated for the act of love is an interior space, which is in turn like the privileged and protected space of the altar where the consecration is performed, and even the interior "space" of the sacramental vessels themselves.[103]

---

[102]In the *Pearl*-poet's time, a "compas" was not a ship's compass, but an instrument for drawing circles or measuring things, a bounded area or realm, or even a clever form of artistry or craftspersonship (*The Middle English Dictionary* 456-8). Thus *compast* evokes the constructed nature of the "craft" which God teaches the humans and also implies enclosure, as if marital sexuality not only takes place within an enclosed space, but is itself an enclosed space sealed against transgressive behavior. These lines imply that the sexual behavior of human beings should be "encompassed" or "enclosed" by the rules which God had taught. If one behaves otherwise, one is excluded both from the realm of sexually accepted behavior and society itself.

The word *derne* means, in a more general sense, "Secluded, solitary (place)" or "Recondite, profound, mysterious, unrevealed" (*Middle English Dictionary* 1006) and also implies secret deeds in a negative sense (1006)--deeds which human beings try unsuccessfully to hide from the "gropande God". It also appears in reference to the furtive lovemaking of illicit lovers (1007). Because of the association of *derne* with stealthy deeds and illicit affairs, it is interesting that the poet uses the word in a positive context here, to refer to the necessary privacy of married lovers.

[103]This idea of privacy as essential to lovemaking is based in actual medieval architecture and furniture construction--at least for the wealthy. Phillipe Contamine indicates that in the Middle Ages, "sleeping together was often considered a consequence of poverty. Anyone who could afford to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The act of love is even described in sacramental language, as if it were a sacrament itself, like marriage. Like entering the Holy of Holies to partake of the sacraments, lovemaking is the sacramental penetration of a privileged interior space, so long as it is according to the medieval definition of *kynde*. If it is not, it becomes an act of violation, as it is with the Sodomites, who are accused of misusing God's gift. Instead of "wielding" or "using" one another lawfully, "'Now haf þay skyfted My skyl and scorned natwre,/And henttez hem in heþyng an vsage vnclene" (709-10). Because of their unlawful penetrations of proscribed spaces (i.e. bodies), God decides to punish the entire city of Sodom as an example to the rest of humanity.

When God sends two angels into Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot, seeing the two beautiful men entering the city, entreats them to stay "þerinne" the safe enclosure of his house in words similar to Abraham's humble, hospitable greeting: "...'Syrez, I yow byseche/Þat 3e wolde ly3t at my loge and lenge þerinne./Comez to your knaues kote, I craue at þis onez....'"(799-801) However, the angels reply that they would prefer to sleep out in the open than to stay in anyone's house:

---

sleep alone wished to do so, or at any rate to sleep only with people of their own choosing" (Contamine 498). Thus the privacy which the poet advocates might only have been available to those who could afford it. The design of medieval beds also facilitated privacy: "...the 'complete bed,' represented in numerous works of art, comprised three elements: the wooden bedframe; the bed proper; and the various fabrics that were placed on or hung about the bed to enable a person to sleep safe from prying eyes and disturbing lights and breezes" (Contamine 490). The primacy of marital privacy for the *Pearl*-poet is not without precedent in courtly literature, as George Duby attests: "...one of the rules of courtly love was discretion. The lovers were obliged to hide themselves, to withdraw from society, not for brief copulation...but permanently. They lived within an invisible enclosure, where they constructed, in the midst of a crowd of familiars, a more private cell, a refuge for love constantly threatened by jealous rivals" ("Solitude" 520). Of course, the difference between privacy as the *Pearl*-poet advocates it and the privacy of lovers in secular love stories was that the latter lovers usually had an illicit relationship, and their privacy was an attempt to hide it, just as sinners strive to hide their misdeeds unsuccessfully from God in *Clannesse*. In *Clannesse*, privacy during lovemaking (and the privacy surrounding the topic itself, which is not to be discussed casually in public) is a sign of the honor of the act, not shame.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> And þay nay þat þey nolde ne3 no howsez,
> Bot stylly þer in þe strete as þay stadde wern,
> Þay wolde lenge þe longe na3t and logge þeroute:
> Hit watz hous inno3e to hem þe heuen vpon lofte. (805-8)

This insistence upon staying outside appears in the biblical source for the poem, but the poet expands upon its significance. Unlike Lot, the angels conceive of the entire created world as their dwelling-place and shelter, revealing that they have a wider perspective of the cosmos than Lot or other mortals have. Moreover, the heavenly majesty of the angels cannot be contained in a little house. However, according to Lot's perspective, the outdoors would offer no protection to the angels, for outside on the roads one may be assaulted. Peter C. Braeger argues that the angels' initial desire to sleep outside is not just a desire to be outside of Sodom, but (especially in 1. 808) "remind[s] the audience that the truly virtuous man needs no 'ryal' and 'ryche' building like Lot's for a home; only a place in 'heven'" (Braeger 85). Instead of looking for an earthly enclosure to protect them from terrestrial lusts, the angels encourage Lot (and the reader) to seek a heavenly home through "clean" conduct.

Lot eventually convinces the angels to accompany him to his home and, once there, requests his wife to make a meal for the guests, but orders her not to include any salt or leavening.[104] However, Lot's wife takes his request amiss, assuming thus that the guests are uncivilized, "And sayde softely to hirself: 'Þis unsaueré hyne/Louez no salt in her sauce; 3et hit no skyl were/Þat oþer burne be boute, þa3 boþe be nyse'" (822-4). (Interestingly, she refers to the guests as "unsavory" for denying her the "savor" of salt in the food and desires to "salt"

---

[104]This passage does not appear in Genesis. The disobedience of Lot's wife does not manifest itself until she looks back at burning Sodom and is transformed into a pillar of salt. Here the poet uses her transgression with salt in food to prefigure both her later disobedience and its saline consequences.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

them, but the Sodomites later find the two angels quite savory indeed and want to "taste" these foreign "dishes.")

The wife's rebellious statement bears revealing similarities to the sin of the Sodomites themselves. The word *skyl,* which she uses in the sense of "reasonable" or "sensible," and which is used again to refer to her cunning and secret disregarding of her husband's request ("And als ho scelt hem in scorne þat wel her skyl knewen"--827), is used by God in reference to sexual activity in the earlier diatribe against the Sodomites' wrongful "use" of one another: "'Now haf þay skyfted My skyl and scorned natwre....'" (709) The wife's objection that the angels "'Louez no salt in her sauce'" is also echoed by Lot's curious statement that "'Your fare is to strange'" (861) when he rebukes the townspeople for demanding that he surrender his guests to them. While the wife's sin of serving salty and spicy foods to the angels does not appear to be a grave one, this transgression against hospitable behavior is echoed by the sexual "fare...strange" in which the citizens want to indulge. Both food and sexual conduct are thus strangely spiced in Sodom. In addition, just as the wife's disobedience to Lot's bidding does not pass unnoticed, the sins of the people outside, however secret to mortals, are known by God. Indeed, these sins seem to shout towards heaven (689), proclaiming themselves (like the stained clothes of the wedding guest) rather than being kept hidden.

After the supper is finished, the men of the city come to besiege Lot's house, expressing their inversion of social standards by being led by the weak, which may also imply those who are incapable of controlling their unlawful sexual urges: "Alle þat weppen my3t welde, þe wakker and þe stronger,/To vmbely3e Lothez hous the ledez to take" (835-6). The actions of the Sodomites in these and the following lines are an evil reversal of the notion of hospitality to which Abraham and Lot had faithfully adhered. While Lot and Abraham had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

offered their heavenly guests the shelter of their homes, the Sodomites surround the house, not in order to protect the guests, but to break into the house and to violate the bodies of the guests inside. This sinister inversion of the principles of hospitality (and enclosure, which was an emblem of divine favor and protection in the Noah story) must have been especially shameful to the poet's audience in view of the fact that not only individual houses, but in many cases the entire medieval city, were walled in order to repulse invaders and protect those who dwelled inside. The guests of Lot are the guests of the entire city, but, instead of protecting these guests from outside invasions, the citizens of Sodom are themselves an invading force, assaulting those within their own gates. Lot's wife has a similar attitude: while she is supposed to treat her guests with respect, she violates her husband's instructions and serves them something that they did not wish to eat, using her *skyl* at cunning deceit against her guests in a way not entirely dissimilar to the perverted sexual *skyl* of the Sodomites with their "fare strange." The wife's insubordination also expresses the poet's fear that Sodom represented the inversion of all aspects of the social arrangement. Just as the Sodomites violate cultural expectations by choosing partners of the same gender, Lot's wife does not defer to her husband but serves what she pleases to their guests.

In the citizens' assault upon Lot's house, the poet carefully distinguishes between those on the inside and those on the outside of the building, thus distinguishing spatially between those who are accepted into the sheltering space of divine mercy (represented by Lot's house, since those who are inside--except the wife--will later be spared the destruction of the city) and those who are excluded from it. While previously the expulsion of sinners from salvific space was described in violent terms, here the violence is perpetrated by those who wish to break into Lot's house and into the bodies of the angels. The poet

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

vividly depicts the savagery of the Sodomite attack on the gates of Lot's house and, by extension, their intended assault of his guests: "In grete flokkez of folk þay fallen to his 3atez;/As a scowte-wach scarred so þe asscry rysed;/With kene clobbez of þat clos þay clatrez on þe wowez...." (837-9) (Ironically, though the Sodomites' desperation to get in is a source of fear to Lot's family, the Sodomites also are portrayed as scared scouts hesitantly probing the territory of the enemy.)

While the Sodomites are attacking the gates, Lot, his family and the guests are still protected by the walls of the house, which is referred to as a *clos*, linking it to the ark which was the protective space that shielded the redeemed from the flood in Noah's time. Clark and Wasserman associate the house, and even Lot's inner self, with the vessels and the sacred space of the altar which unclean priests defile: "Lot's heart and mind, direct metaphors for the Heavenly City, as is the house, are under attack by a force that seeks to penetrate and touch them, as the unclean priest attempts to penetrate the altar in order to touch God's 'aune body' (11)" (Clark and Wasserman 122). This association of unclean priests penetrating the altar space and mishandling the body of God with the Sodomites threatening to penetrate the house and mishandle the bodies of the angels occurs also in medieval treatises and laws against homosexuality. Michael Goodich gives an example from Alain de Lille. In his shorter version of *Liber poenitentialis* (c. 1199-1202), he describes sins against nature as "the expending of one's seed outside its proper vessel; this may include a variety of vices, among them masturbation, anal and oral intercourse, sex with nuns, incest, bestiality, adultery, rape, and sodomy" (Goodich 34).

Like the ark, whose seams were sealed against the possible invasion of water from outside, the walls of Lot's *clos* are impenetrable by the frenzied Sodomites, despite their vehemence. Like the ark, Lot's house is a *clos* which encloses and protects the chosen, regardless of how many invaders "umbely3e"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

it. Nevertheless, Lot is still terrified by the onslaught and uncertain of the house's ability to retain its integrity: "He doted neuer for no doel so depe in his mynde" (852). It is also ironic that *clos*, used to describe the impenetrability of Lot's home and his chaste guests, also seems to suggest the very act from which the house protects the guests. *The Oxford English Dictionary* provides an interesting usage of the word: "To come close together in contact or union; to join, unite, combine, coalesce, meet in a common centre." (III, 347) Thus it seems that *clos* invokes the act of (in this case illicit) joining which the walls of Lot's house--and the metaphorical boundaries of his purity--seek to prevent. Frantzen contends that anal puns in lines 842-8 also suggest the illicit desires of the Sodomites, particularly in lines 847-8 ("Þat 3et þe wynd and þe weder and þe worlde stynkes/Of þe brych þat vpbraydez þose broþelych wordez"), where the Sodomites' speech is compared to foul air--specifically, "breaking wind":

> *Brych* means "breech" [sic] or "violation" and hence "sin," but the word puns on *briche*, meaning "buttocks"...or "britches," the undergarment that covers the buttocks.... In medieval fabliaux, women stereotypically speak with the vagina, their chief sexual orifice, which is often portrayed, according to E. Jane Burns, as "a mouth devoid of speech" (189). It is fitting that the speech of Sodom should be portrayed as coming from the anus, the chief sexual orifice of the Sodomites. (Frantzen 458)

The Sodomites demand that Lot "'3ete vus out þose 3ong men þat 3ore-whyle here entred....'" (842) Once the guests are turned out of the house, the Sodomites declare that they will "'...lere hym of lof, as oure lyst biddez,/As is þe asyse of Sodomas to seggez pat passen'" (843-4). While the angels had previously declared their intention to sleep out-of-doors where they might potentially be assaulted by criminals, even in the city walls they are not safe. The citizens make it clear that, if the guests are brought outside, they will become victims of the *lyst* of the people--a *lyst* which is also outside of acceptable custom and convention.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

However, though the *lyst* and *lof* of the Sodomites are both literally to be enacted outside of the sheltering walls of Lot's house and outside of the boundaries of acceptable behavior as the poet describes them, the Sodomites have inverted all accepted customs to the degree that, rather than being viewed as an uncivilized and criminal act, assault is perceived by the citizens as a form of acceptable protocol. They declare that this "use" of visitors is a legally-enforced custom which is applied to all "seggez þat passen" (844). The city walls are thus the site of transgression rather than protection.

As a result of the din, Lot comes outside in order to address the increasingly violent and disorderly crowd. The poet is emphatic about Lot's passage from the inside to the outside of his house in order to admonish the mob:

> "Allas!" sayd hym þenne Loth, and ly3tly he rysez,
> And bowez forth fro þe bench into þe brode 3atez.
> What! he wonded no wo̧þe of wekked knauez,
> Þat he ne passed þe port þe peril to abide.
> He went forthe at þe wyket and waft hit hym after,
> Þat a clyket hit cle3t clos hym byhynde. (853-58)

The passage of Lot from house to gates is clearly delineated, as is the clicking closed of the gate's *clyket*. With the sealing of these various apertures, the house becomes a *clos* to protect the pure. The swinging shut of the *wyket*, Lot's gate, may remind the reader of the *wykket* of the ark, which Noah and his family open joyfully when God bids them to come outside into the newly-restored world. However, Lot's *wyket* does not let the people inside of the house pass joyfully outside, but instead prevents invasion of the interior of the house by the wicked people outside. Clark and Wasserman state that the gate of Lot's house is reminiscent not only of the door to the ark but also of the gates of heaven: "...the gate to Lot's door, like the gates of Heaven, is shut to the unclean" (Clark and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Wasserman 122). While the angels prefer "heuen" as their shelter, the Sodomites cannot come therein.

When Lot attempts to dissuade the Sodomites from assaulting his guests, he refers to their conduct as "fare...strange" (861), "vylaynye" by which they "vylen" themselves (l. 863), and "japez...ille" (864) The citizens themselves are "harlotez" (860), not civilized, urbane people. In contrast to the "vsage unclene" of the Sodomites, Lot offers to teach them another "craft": "'Bot I schal kenne yow by kynde a craft pat is better....'" (865) These are the same words with which God had described married love: *crafte* and *kynde*, implying that marital, heterosexual love is an art that is nonetheless dictated by the laws of nature, which the people of Noah's time had earlier disobeyed.[105]

However, the method by which Lot intends to teach the Sodomites the socially-accepted "craft" of heterosexual love is problematic. Lot proposes to substitute his daughters for the male guests, stating that the Sodomites are free to do what they want with the two young women, of whom he boasts,

> "Hit arn ronk, hit arn rype, and redy to manne;
> To samen wyth þo semly þe solace is better.
> I schal biteche yow þo two þat tayt arn and quoynt,
> And laykez wyth hem as yow lyst, and letez my gestes one." (869-72)

While there is no overt indication that the poet finds Lot's conduct less than righteous, it is ironic that Lot prefers harm to come to members of his own family than to his guests, who are strangers to him. This inconsistency in Lot's virtuous character and conduct may indicate the high esteem with which he

---

[105]Lot's joking manner with the Sodomites, where he refers to them as "iolyf gentylmen", may have been intended on the poet's part to be his nervous way of trying to calm the mob, but Peter Braeger posits that these epithets indicate Lot's over-familiarity with his neighbors and their ways: "Since he lives among the wicked Sodomites, he can regard them as 'frendes' and 'iolyf gentylmen.' Lot may have chosen these expressions only to better suit his appeal to his auditors, but at the same time the words reinforce the association between Lot and his neighbors suggested in his first appearance in the poem. For Lot, 'hendelayk,' ('politeness') (line 860) and social propriety have replaced moral concern" (Braeger 92).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

holds guests and his protective role as a host, in contrast to the behavior of the Sodomites, who assault guests rather than protect them. However, Lot's attitude towards his daughters is also disturbingly consistent with rather than opposed to the Sodomites' conduct towards guests in their city. Like the Sodomites' inversion of their role as hosts, Lot inverts the idea of family and the role of the protective patriarch. Rather than protecting his female children from the *lyst* of men, Lot offers them to that very *lyst*. Lot's relationship to the female members of his family is thus as problematic as the citizens' relationship to their guests.[106]

Of course, because this ambiguity in Lot's character appears in the biblical text itself, the poet would not be in a position to resolve it; however, his expansion of the text makes the ambiguity all the stronger.

The problematic relationship of Lot and his daughters is glossed over by means of a curious omission, much as other medieval texts eliminate or reduce

---

[106]According to Braeger, patristic and medieval exegetes frequently characterized Lot not as an entirely virtuous man, but as a type of the basically well-intentioned Christian struggling to retain his or her principles in an immoral world, to which Lot himself has begun to give in (Braeger 95). The church fathers offered various reasons for Lot's offer of his daughters, exculpating or indicting him to various degrees. Ambrose states in *De Abraham* that "'it was less serious to copulate according to nature than to commit evil against nature'" (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 14: 400; qtd. Braeger 89). In his *Postillae,* Nicholas of Lyra concurs with Ambrose, as Goodich paraphrases: "While he questions whether Lot sinned by offering his two daughters, he concludes that according to natural law the deflowering of a virgin is a lesser crime than sodomy; thus, in order to placate the Sodomites and avoid a graver offense and the attempted violence to his hospitality, Lot was correct to give his daughters" (Goodich 36). Augustine is more severe in his judgement in *Quaestionum in Heptateuchem:* "Quod ait Sodomitis Loth...quoniam prostituere volebat suas filias hac compensatione, et viri hospites ejus nihil a Sodomitis tale paterentur: ...nirium periculosissime admittur haec compensatio: si autem perterbationi humanae tribuitur, et menti tanto malo permotae, nullo modo imitanda est (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 34: 559; qtd. Braeger 90). ("Lot said that to the Sodomites...because he wished to prostitute his daughters with this justification: in order that the men who were his guests would suffer nothing such from the Sodomites....Doubtlessly this justification is allowed most dangerously. If, however, it is allowed for human confusion and a mind agitated by such wickedness, by no means ought it to be imitated" (trans. Braeger 90).

The problematic nature of the scene with Lot's daughters is glossed over by some accounts, which either shorten the scene or omit it, such as the English translation of the Heptateuch, the Middle English *Genesis and Exodus,* and *Cursor Mundi.* The *Pearl*-poet, however, lengthens the account from its biblical source, where it encompasses merely two lines (Gen. 8: 27-19, 7-8), as if to draw more attention to Lot's highly questionable behavior. However, even the *Pearl*-poet omits one segment of the story, as discussed above.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the length of the narrative of his offer of the women to the Sodomites. After Lot and his family escape Sodom (during which flight--at least in the poem--the poet fixates upon the fleshiness of the daughters in lines 974-7, as if there were some erotic element in their fearful running away:

> And þe wenches hym wyth þat by þe way fol3ed;
> Ferly ferde watz her flesch þat flowen ay ilyche,
> Trynande ay a hy3e trot, þat torne neuer dorsten.
> Loth and þo luly-whit, his lefly two de3ter....)

Yet this curious reference to the daughters' bodies only alludes to, but does not precede mention of, what Lot's daughters will use their bodies for later in the biblical narrative. The daughters, believing that they and their father are the last people left alive after the destruction of the city, coerce their father into drinking excessively and having intercourse with them so that the world might be repopulated (Genesis 19: 30-38). After all, the destruction of Sodom was probably enough to convince them that the rest of the world had been destroyed as it had in Noah's time. That incest might be as threatening to society as homosexuality is an issue which the poet has avoided by omitting this scene. He also thus avoids fashioning any further ambiguities about Lot's character as a righteous man.

However, there is another issue inherent in Lot's treatment of his daughters which is more immediately connected to the way in which the poem's use of space delineates one's position in the society of the *Pearl*-poet as well as in the community of salvation. Lot's easy suggestion of casting his daughters out of his house and into the clutches of the depraved Sodomites is part of a larger pattern in which women are both spatially "on the edge" of the poem--limited to bordering spaces like doorways, the outskirts of the city, and the kitchen, where male society does not enter--and socially marginalized and placed in positions of powerlessness and exclusion. The liminal and limited presence of female

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

characters in the poem is indicative of their marginal existence in the societies of the biblical stories as well as the poet's own society. Whether the poet is critical of this positioning of women on the borders of text and society is somewhat ambiguous.

In the story of Abraham and the angels, Sarah occupies a marginal role and a marginal space, and she, like Lot's wife, is somewhat contentious, shrewish and disobedient.[107] While Abraham enters and exits his house freely, Sarah remains inside, cooking and serving her husband's guests. When she hears the conversation of Abraham and the angels, Sarah is represented as an eavesdropper behind the door, an interloper who rudely laughs at matters which she cannot comprehend: "Þenne þe burde byhynde þe dor for busmar la3ed,/And sayde sothly to hirself Saré þe madde,/'May þow traw for tykle þat þou teme mo3tez....'" (653-5) Sarah is excluded from the conversation by her limited understanding, refusing to see how God can miraculously cause her to conceive, though she is "'so hy3e out of age, and also my lorde....'" (656) She is also physically and spatially excluded from the serious discussions of men, restricted to listening surreptitiously "byhynde the dor."

Lot's wife, who inhabits the kitchen (and transgresses there too), is punished for her disobedience to the commandments of her husband and God, both male figures in the poem. First she is punished for salting the angels' food when Lot had forbidden it, and then for having turned around and glanced at the vengeance being wrought upon the city. The women of the poem are thus

---

[107]It is interesting, however, that Noah's wife is not depicted as shrewish or contentious, since the argumentative *uxor* is a common figure, especially in medieval drama. In the Wakefield *Noah*, for example, Noah describes his wife: "For she is full tethee,/For litill oft angré;/If anything wrang be,/Soyne is she wroth" (186-9). In subsequent scenes, they engage in slapstick quarrels and the wife even refuses to get into the ark until she almost drowns in the rising flood-waters (370-2). (David Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975: 296, 301.)

The poet's characterization of Sarah as "madde" and foolish does not derive from the Bible. While Genesis records Sarah's amazed laughter at the idea of an elderly couple conceiving, the text does not pass judgment upon her behavior the way that the poet does.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both confined to restrictive spaces and bound by commandments issued by males which, if disobeyed, cause them to be punished just as God punishes those who attempt to violate other spatial, bodily or social boundaries--by exclusion. This spatial and social circumscription of women may explain Lot's callous treatment of his daughters. As a male, Lot is an arbiter of where women can go and what they can do, and he has the power to cast them out among the savage citizens, paradoxically damning the unblemished virgins in order to save the male citizens by teaching them "by kynde a crafte þat is better" (865). That such an act would be rape and not consenting marital sexuality is a fact not mentioned by the poet--it seems as if Lot's only concern is that the citizens couple with the opposite gender. The poet is also silent about the fact that the daughters' rape would be witnessed by the entire town, which is in direct contrast with the "derne" nature of marital sexuality as God describes it in lines 697 and 706. The poet's phrase "redy to manne" (869) also reveals Lot's callous attitude towards his daughters. The daughters' "readiness for men" ostensibly indicates that they are of marriageable age, but Lot is not proposing a permanent union or the idealized lovemaking which goes with such a union and which the poet had earlier described in such glowing terms. Instead, Lot is offering his daughters as victims of gang rape in the place of the angels--as if heterosexual rape were preferable to homosexual rape! In any case, Lot's behavior towards his family is disturbingly similar to, rather than different from, the behavior of the citizens to his guests, a fact which may indicate that within the walls of Sodom, all correct social conduct is turned upside-down. Thus the reasons for Lot's deliverance are problematic, as patristic writers also found.

Perversely, the Sodomites marginalize Lot for attacking their customs by calling him a foreigner and accusing him of having attained a place in their society to which he had no right:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> "Wost þou not wel that þou wonez here a wy3e strange,
> An outcomlyng, a carle? We kylle of þyn heued!
> Who joyned þe be jostyse oure japez to blame,
> Þat com a boy to þis bor3, þa3 þou be burne ryche?" (875-9)

The Sodomites' reminder of Lot's foreign status is yet another of their inversions of the divinely-instituted pattern of inside and outside. While the Sodomites declare that Lot does not belong in their city, that he is an "outcomlyng" and thus not fit to judge their customs, the situation is actually the reverse. The Sodomites themselves are foreign to the customs sanctioned by the God of *Clannesse,* and they are judged on the basis of their foreignness--their difference--from the religiously instituted norm which Lot embodies.

However, the Sodomites' declarations of Lot's foreignness are also interesting as social commentary. These declarations appear in the biblical text (Genesis 14: 12 and 19: 9), but they have an additional resonance in the poet's own time. Lot's marginality derives from the fact that he is a merchant, a "burne ryche" who has earned his wealth rather than inherited it. Braeger states that in his first appearance in the poem, Lot is mentioned in connection with his wealth, in the form of his splendid home (Braeger 84). In *Image on the Edge,* Michael Camille recalls that merchants as a class were still not entirely accepted in the *Pearl*-poet's time, as evinced by their marginal place in *Piers Plowman.* Camille observes that in this poem, the merchants have literally been banished to the margins:

> In Langland's fourteenth-century poem *Piers Plowman,* we read the phrase "Marchauntes in the margins." This refers both to the merchants' physical place in the written document described in this part of the poem, as well as to the adjunct position of this "new" class in relation to the traditional tripartite model of society. *(Image on the Edge* 20-1)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Sodomites might thus echo the situation of an old landholding aristocracy, enraged and threatened by the monetary ascendancy of a new mercantile class. Their refusal of Lot's offer of his daughters also marginalizes Lot a second time--this time by emphasizing the transgressive nature of Lot's own act. Just as Lot has refused to allow the Sodomites to molest his guests, the citizens in turn refuse his own suspect offer of his "rype" daughters "redy to manne" (869), spurning his merchantly attempt at barter as an uncivilized act comparable to their own potential breach of hospitality.

When the Sodomites threaten to kill Lot if he does not allow them to have their way with his guests, the guests themselves come out and pull him inside, safe from the mob:

> Bot þat þe 3onge men, so 3epe, 3ornen þeroute,
> Wapped vpon þe wyket and wonnen hem tylle,
> And by þe hondez hym hent and horyed hym withinne,
> And steken þe 3atez ston-harde wyth stalworth barrez. (881-4)

This rescue has moral parallels which extend the inside/outside metaphor of the poem. By bringing Lot inside of the house and saving him from the hands of the mob, the angels indicate that he will later be saved from the destruction that will befall the city; he will be both brought out of the city and into the purview of divine protection. These lines are emphatic about the distinction between inside and outside in their use of words like *peroute* and *wythinne* and in the acts of opening the gate and then barring the doors against invasion from outside. By analogy, when the doors are firmly locked against the frenzied Sodomites, the doors of deliverance are simultaneously barred to those who are moral "foreigners," strangers with "fare...strange" that transgresses medieval Christian norms of conduct.

As if to underscore the rejection of the Sodomites from the privileged space of the saved, the next line (885) refers to them as "þat banned peple"--those

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

who are both literally barred from entrance into Lot's house and symbolically exiled from redemption. Blinded by a great blast of light, "Þay lest of Lotez loggyng any lysoun to fynde" (887), finding no opening into either Lot's dwelling or into God's mercy. As each of the Sodomites "roþeled to þe rest þat he reche mo3t" (890), "Bot þay wern wakned al wrank þat þer in won lenged,/Of on þe vglokest vnhap euer on erd suffred" (891-2). When disaster befalls the Sodomites, even their own city and homes are no protection for them, just as the city walls did not protect their visitors but were instead the site of a potential bodily invasion and spiritual transgression.

The blindness of the Sodomites occurs in the biblical source, and Jerome associates Sodom itself with blindness in *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* (*Patrologia Latina* 23: 828).[108] The twelfth-century *Work on Geography* adopts Jerome's etymology: "The translation of Sodom is 'silent flock' or 'blindness'...." (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 184). Damian associates the blindness of the Sodomites with their desire to penetate Lot's house and the bodies of his guests and compares this illicit entrance with the prideful priest who tries to enter God's holy place after having performed an illicit "entrance" of another kind--a comparison which is central to *Clannesse's* twin theme of illicit sexual conduct and unclean priests handling the Sacraments:

> So Sodomites try to break in violently on the angels when unclean men attempt to approach God through the offices of sacred orders. But these latter are surely struck with blindness because they fall into such interior darkness through a just judgment of God that they are powerless to find the door. Divided from God by sin, they do not know how to return to him from that condition. For it is obvious that those who desire to approach God by the routes of arrogance and pride and not by the route of humility do not recognize where the entrance is, or that the door is Christ, as he

[108]Jerome interprets the name "Sodoma" as "pecus, silens, vel caecitas" ("cattle, silence, or blindness").

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> himself says, "I am the door." Those who lose Christ because of sins cannot find the door, like those who were unable to enter the dwelling of the heavenly citizens. *(Book of Gomorrah* 38)

Like the *Pearl*-poet, Damian conceives of both sexuality and the Eucharist in spatial terms. Sodomy and misuse of the sacraments are both presented as invasions that God ultimately frustrates by keeping the perpetrators out of the divine kingdom. Damian makes use of an even more sexual spatial metaphor when he explains "...And what is added there, 'that they were unable to find the doorway,' [Gen. 19:11] he [the Apostle] also clearly expresses when he says, 'to do what is unseemly.' This is as if he were to have said that they try to enter where they ought not" *(Book of Gomorrah* 39). Damian describes this illicit entrance as both spatial and sexual. Also like the *Pearl*-poet, Damian shows particular concern for the impurities of priests, insisting that priests who tried to "enter where they ought not" in sexual terms would not be allowed to enter the sacramental space:

> What else is it for one who is unworthy of an ecclesiastical order to try to break into the office of the sacred altar but to abandon the threshold and to endeavor to enter through the impenetrable barrier of the wall? Because a true passage does not appear for their feet, such men are deceived by their own presumption and are compelled rather to remain in the outer vestibule, while they promise themselves they can reach the sanctuary. Indeed they can strike their foreheads on the rocks of Sacred Scripture, but under no circumstances are they permitted to go through the entrance granted by divine authority. While they attempt to enter where they are not permitted, they do nothing else but grope vainly at the protected wall. *(Book of Gomorrah* 39)

Damian implies that a man who violates another man's bodily integrity would similarly strive to violate the protected body of the church, but unlike the frail human form of the sodomite priest's partner, the church would resist his invasion. Whereas the human body is unfortunately permeable, the church cannot be entered except through a single door. *Clannesse* uses a similar spatial

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

metaphor in line 887--that of the "opening" to Lot's house which the Sodomites cannot find in their sudden blindness, as Frantzen discusses. When the angels "stir up a terrific storm that blinds the Sodomites, leaving them unable to find a 'lysoun' 'opening' into Lot's house," this "consequence perhaps suggests a frustrated act of penetration" (Frantzen 459). All of this discussion of blind groping (as opposed to the keen groping of God's all-seeing, remarkably tactile eye earlier in the poem) and attempted penetration expresses the fear which lies behind medieval Christian homophobia: namely that the sealed, impenetrable male body can itself be penetrated and is therefore vulnerable. Being "modified" by the "preterite" of another male (in the words of Alain) or, in the sexual grammar of the *Pearl*-poet, being "manned" by the male citizens of Sodom, can cause a man to lose his manhood, as Jan Ziolkowski states in reference to *De planctu naturae:* "The man who fails Venus by engaging in homosexual practices sheds his grammatical sign (his genitalia or his hope of offspring)" (Ziolkowski 46).[109]

When Lot expresses fear to one of the angels that no place will be safe for him when Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, that the wrath of God knows no geographical boundaries (a fear which is not attributed to him in the Bible), the angels reassure him:

> Þe freke sayde: "No foschip oure Fader hatz þe schewed,
> Bot hi3ly heuened þi hele fro hem þat arn combred.
> Nov wale þe a wonnyng þat þe warisch my3t,
> And He schal saue hit for þy sake þat hatz vus sende hider,
> For þou art oddely þyn one out of þis fylþe,

---

[109]Earlier Ziolkowski had characterized the "sign" of a man as his penis: "In grammatical terms *signaculum* refers to the masculine ending of a noun, but in real life the *signaculum* (distinguishing trait) of a man would be his genitalia" (35). However, in Alain's sexual grammar, merely having a penis was not sufficient to distinguish one as a man--one had to use it in approved forms of intercourse--or at least not to use it in an ungrammatical way, since Alain, a priest, would presumably not be advising his fellow clerics to violate their vows of chastity in order to assert their maleness.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

And als Abraham þyn eme hit at Himself asked." (919-24)

Because they had sheltered the angels in their home and protected them from the lust of the citizens outside, Lot and his family will be given a privileged space in which they can take shelter from divine wrath. (However, Lot's fear of not being spared indicates his ambiguous status once more by drawing attention to how difficult it is to distinguish Lot from the doomed Sodomites.) Lot then praises God and declares his intention to flee to Segor: "'Þer is a cité herbisyde þat Segor hit hatte--/Here vtter on a rounde hil hit houez hit one./I wolde, if His wylle wore, to þat won scape'" (926-8). Lot declares that the city is "here vtter," or outside, of Sodom. This detail emphasizes the moral as well as spatial difference between the two cities. Because Segor is outside of Sodom, not only will it not be affected by the city's demise, but this outsideness is also an indication of its uncontamination by the sins of Sodom. Since Sodom's customs are outside of the boundaries of approved conduct, it is also outside of the borders of salvation; likewise, since Segor is outside of Sodom, it is inside the purview of God's protection. Just as the citizens of Sodom had inverted the practices of courtesy, the Noah story's pattern of enclosure as salvation is reversed here: salvation is secured by going outside of, rather than into, the city because true shelter can be found only beyond that site of transgression. As Lot and his family flee, the angels "hade hem by hande out at þe 3atez,/Prechande hem þe perile, and beden hem passe fast...." (941-2) Unlike at Lot's house, where the gates had been made secure against the invading mob, these gates keep the damned inside and the saved must pass through them in order to avoid the fate of the damned.

The entire world seems to participate in the destruction of Sodom, including the four winds, which God summons from the proverbial four corners of the earth[110]:

---

[110]The poem's mention of the "fawre half of the folde" would seem to substantiate the hackneyed

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Þe grete God in His greme bygynnez on lofte
To waken wederez so wylde; þe wyndez He callez,
And þay wroþely vpwafte and wrastled togeder,
Fro fawre half of þe folde, flytande loude. (947-50)

As in the Noah story, the earth (or hell, in this case) bursts open in order to receive the Sodomites and the citizens of the surrounding towns.

For when þat þe Helle herde þe houndez of heuen,
He watz feryly fayn, vnfolded bylyue;
Þe grete barrez of þe abyme he barst vp at onez,
Þat alle þe regioun torof in riftes ful grete,
And clouen alle in lyttel cloutes þe clyffez aywhere,
As launce leuez of þe boke þat lepes in twynne.
Þe brethe of þe brynston bi þat hit blende were,
Al þo citees and her sydes sunkken to helle. (961-8)

Ironically, while the gates of Sodom had opened to release Lot and his family, now the hell-gate opens to let the Sodomites in. The sinful people are brought inside the gates of hell, where they will receive perdition rather than protection, while they could not break open the gates of Lot's house, or even their own city in order to flee. Fire plays an extensive role in the destruction of Sodom as well, not only recalling the fires of hell which await the Sodomites, but, as Frantzen suggests in an interesting historical note, the fires which sometimes took the lives of convicted sodomites in the Middle Ages: "The extensive use of fire in this scene is evocative, since sodomites were often burned after they were convicted (Brundage 212-13)" (459). He also refers to the process of Sodom's

---

and untrue statement that medieval people believed that the world was flat and cubic or rectangular. Actually, scholars of the history of cartography note that medieval believers in a flat earth were in the minority. The experience of mariners and astronomers had proven the sphericity of the world; however, so as not to contradict openly the Bible's depiction of the earth as four-cornered, medieval *mappaemundi* often represented the world as a sphere within a square, or even as a sphere surrounded by the cruciform limbs of Christ, arranged in an artful interpretation of the four directions. For a fuller discussion of this subject, see David Woodward, "Medieval Mappaemundi", *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J.B. Harley and David Woodward, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987: 286-370, especially pp. 318-21.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

destruction as a process of turning the city inside out--an image which, to me, suggests the revelation of the heretofore concealed sins of Sodom, accomplished later through the cautionary "text" depicted by the Dead Sea in lines 1005-51, as well as the acts of "inversion" which the Sodomites had perpetuated by altering the "natural" order of sexuality which the poet alleges was the creation of God. The destruction of Sodom also seems to be a kind of rape of the land--specifically an act of anal rape, the act with which the Sodomites had threatened the angels. When God reduces the land to a burning, stinking pit of pitch, the place seems to have been "sodomized" for the transgressions of its people.

The book that bursts in half in line 966 is an intriguing self-reflective image of the poem's literary space as well as a play on the common medieval view of the world as a book. As a result of the transgression of moral and social boundaries in Sodom, the very structure of the world is marred and ruptured, as represented by a book which has been broken in half and burned. Frantzen argues that the book is an image of culture itself, and the broken book thus "represents the old order of Sodom, the end of its story" (459). This broken book of nature also recalls Alain's association of homosexual transgressions with misuse of grammar. By invoking the "natural" relationship of human beings as well as grammatical units--a relationship written in the very book of nature as well as in the texts of grammar--Nature complains that human beings have torn her garments, the "text" of the cosmos which she wears. According to Alain, animals, humans and other life forms "have syntactic functions to serve in the dialogue between creation and God" (Ziolkowski 18). However, once one performs the "vice" of homosexuality, "In terms of the grand discourse that Lady Nature embodies and describes, he loses all hope of participating in the syntax of proper conduct which links creation with God--the Verbum" (Ziolkowski 46).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ziolkowski points out that this connection between nature as a text and sexual transgressions as a form of misreading that text (or worse yet, writing one's own text in defiance of the book of nature) did not originate with Alain, though the latter expressed the connection most clearly and developed it most completely. A medieval French lyric by Gautier de Coincy expresses a similar sentiment, but here not only is the sodomite guilty of transgressing nature's grammar book, but he is also punished by being erased from God's book:

> La grammaire hic a hic acouple,
> Mais natur maldit la couple.
> La mort perpetuel engenre
> Cil qui aimme masculine genre
> Plus que la femenin ne face
> Et Diex de son livre l'efface.[111]

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the ruined land of Sodom later becomes a text itself. This poisoned land can be read as a warning not to engage in the behavior of the Sodomites, who had misread the book of nature and tried to enter forbidden enclosures.

The image of the book and sexual transgression also manifests itself through the fear of the "pleasure of the text" which was sometimes expressed sexually in patristic and medieval writings. Eric Jager indicates that Augustine was particularly concerned with this prospect:

> ...he commonly censures the abuse of signs, words, or texts as "fornication". [...] To enjoy the text in itself, to take pleasure in the sensuous imagery of its fleshly body, is tantamount to eating the forbidden fruit and hence to a readerly reenactment of the figurative "adultery" or "fornication" inherent in the Fall. (Jager 87-8)

---

[111] Ziolkowski translates the Old French: "Grammar couples *hic* and *hic*, but Nature curses this coupling. He who makes love with the masculine gender will engender everlasting death and God will erase him from His book" (36). Gautier plays upon the notion of gender and engendering by threatening that homosexual lovers engender damnation rather than children.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The verbal seductiveness of the text has often been associated with feminine physical allurements, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. However, here the concept seems to suggest interdicted forms of sexuality. As Flandrin and Calabrese and Eliason have stated, medieval theologians believed that sexuality was only acceptable insofar as it could create offspring. In a similar way, reading was supposed to edify and was thus "productive," like childbearing. Reading for entertainment alone was as much "fornication" to writers like Augustine as was indulging in sexuality for pleasure--a hallmark of sodomy, which, even if indulged in by heterosexual married couples, would never produce progeny.[112] The edifying "text" of Sodom after its destruction, with its unnaturally salty sea and brimstone banks, precludes any enjoyment. The reader is intended to shudder at this manifestation of the unnaturalness of unprocreative sex, and the

---

[112]Jager has assembled classical and medieval instances of this association between reading and sinning, between the text and a female body: "Apart from textual images per se, text themselves have a bodily aspect; the idea of the written text as a *corpus* ('body') and hence as offering erotic potential, a 'pleasure of the text,' runs from Ovid and Macrobius through patristic and medieval tradition, the text usually being equated with the female body in particular" (Jager 85). In "The book of *Jubilees* (second century B.C.) writing is associated with hidden or forbidden knowledge and an ability to evoke sinful responses in readers" (62). In a classical context, "Plato had equated script with illusory representations in general, and hence, ultimately, with the death of the soul" (62-3). Paul was partly responsible for a Christian suspicion of the written word and, thus, of reading: "Paul's famous dictum that the letter 'kills' whereas the spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3.6) adapts the Hellenistic suspicion of the letter to the Christian inheritance of Jewish law, associating the external, written code with the body, sin, and death" (63). Because of this connection, in the Middle Ages, "Typically, speech was associated with nature, life, spirit, and presence, whereas writing was linked with artifice, death, matter, and absence" (63-4). For Augustine, "...Scripture as a material whole, in its nature as a book of parchment (pellis), signified the subjection of humans to a fallen, fleshly order that was consubstantial with not only language in general but writing in particular" (72). The "fleshliness" of the process of reading and interpreting is of a particularly sexual kind for Augustine: "...he commonly censures the abuse of signs, words, or texts as 'fornication.' Sexual connotations flavor his warnings not to read 'carnally' *(carnaliter)* by subjecting the mind 'to the flesh in pursuit of the letter' *(Doc [De doctrina christiana]* 3.5.9)" (87). Augustine compares the act of reading for pleasure alone to the disobedience of Adam and Eve: "To enjoy the text in itself, to take pleasure in the sensuous imagery of its fleshly body, is tantamount to eating the forbidden fruit and hence to a readerly reenactment of the figurative 'adultery' or 'fornication' inherent in the Fall" (87-8). The story of the Fall, however, can also be read as a "set of principles about enjoying or taking pleasure in texts. As Adam must govern Eve, and reason control appetite, so the 'masculine' reader must resist the temptation embodied by the 'feminine' text. Or...the rational ('masculine') part of the reader must control or govern the appetitive ('feminine') part" (84).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

very repugnance of the description forbids him or her from taking a similar illicit, unfruitful pleasure in the language of the description.

When Lot and his family hear the cries of the dying Sodomites, only Lot's wife looks around and attempts to find out what is happening: "Bot þe balleful burde, þat neuer bode keped,/Blusched byhynden her bak þat bale for to herkken" (979-80). Like Sarah, who overhears and laughs at a conversation which is not meant for her, Lot's wife looks boldly where she is not permitted to look. Turning around to look at the city, she is violating the command of the angel just as she had earlier disobeyed her husband's order not to salt the food of their guests. Though her transgressions are much milder than those of the Sodomites, her overstepping of boundaries is the same kind of sin, and thus she is frozen in place, permanently stopped where she had halted in order to look around, in the form of the very salt with which she had violated Lot's order and spiced the guests' food.[113] Of course, the poet discreetly avoids comparing Lot's wife's misdeeds with Lot's own. While such trivial transgressions as salting food and looking back at one's burning city after one had been told not to are punished severely, Lot's sins are far worse and, as mentioned before, bear an uncanny resemblance to the misdeeds of the Sodomites.

The others continue in their flight, not noticing the disappearance of Lot's wife "Tyl þay in Segor wern sette, and sayned our Lorde...." (986) Like the pearl who is set in the heavenly coffer, the saved are "sette" in a place which is

---

[113]Pilgrims to the Holy Land confirmed that Lot's wife was still there in some permanent form. In his twelfth-century pilgrimage account, the Russian pilgrim Daniel the Abbot describes a stone pillar which had once been Lot's wife (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 148). Theoderic's late-twelfth-century German description of the salt effigy of Lot's wife is more fanciful: "As the moon wanes its size goes down, and as it waxes the size is renewed again. It has its head turned backwards...." (306-7), caught in the act of illicit gazing at her city.

The humorous description of Lot's wife as a salt-lick for beasts also appears in *Cursor Mundi*. The Trinity MS describes her fate: "As a salt stoon men seen hir stonde/Þat beestis licken of þat londe/And ones in þe wike to say/Is she clene likked away/And siþ þei fynde hir on þe morn/hool as she was biforn...." (2855-60). The *Pearl*-poet does not describe her Prometheus-like death and rebirth, merely noting "And alle lyst on hir lik þat arn on launde bestes" (1000).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

delivered from the wrath of God. After the destruction, the poet comments "Þat no3t saued watz bot Segor, þat sat on a lawe" (992). *Lawe* can mean both "hill" and "law": because Segor's citizens were obedient to the laws of God, both the people and their land are spared the destruction. Lynn Staley Johnson makes the same observation: "[In Sodom] All is destroyed, except Segor, which sits on a 'lawe.' The poet's reference to Segor perhaps contains a pun: 'lawe' means both 'law' and 'hill,' and, in terms of the poem, both laws and hills are places of refuge and order" (Johnson 126).[114] Here the land once again becomes a text, but Segor is an example of what happens to those who obey God's text--even as imperfectly as Lot does.

Unlike Lot's wife, Abraham looks at Sodom without incurring punishment from God.[115] Worried about the fate of his nephew, he looks toward the city "Þat euer hade ben an erde of erþe the swettest,/As aparaunt to paradis, þat plantted þe Dry3tyn;/Nov is hit plunged in a pit like of pich fylled" (1006-8). The reference to Paradise here echoes the comparison which God had earlier made between that perfect garden and hetersexual, married love.[116] Because the Sodomites had not engaged in the kind of relationships which the poem compares to Paradise on earth, their own land is transformed into an image of their transgressions and incurs punishment for their misdeeds. No longer reflecting the paradise of the heterosexual love which its inhabitants had

---

[114]This notion of hills as holy places appears elsewhere in the Bible, as in Ps. 14:1, where the psalmist inquires, "Domine quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo/aut quis requiescet in monte sancto tuo[?]" ("Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, and who shall reside on thy holy hill?")

[115]One could offer the rejoinder that Abraham is spared punishment for looking upon the destruction simply because he was not expressly forbidden to do so. However, I do not find the situation as innocent as this. The poem's emphasis on female obedience to God also expresses a concern about wives being obedient to their husbands and female social space. On the other hand, Abraham's gaze represents the confident "male gaze" which looks boldly upon spectacles of destruction and undress alike, not fearing punishment for this transgression of the eyes. Of course, the poet does not mention what would have happened had Lot looked back.

[116]The connection between Sodom and Paradise appears also in patristic commentary. In *Quaestionum St. Augustini in Heptateuchem*, I: xxvii, Augustine declares that Sodom had been comparable to Paradise prior to its destruction.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

refused, now Sodom and Gomorrah have become a pitch-filled pit--perhaps an anal reference, the "hell" of homosexuality, as Frantzen posits (461). It is described in language as ugly as that reserved for the wrongdoings of its former citizens:

> Blo, blubrande, and blak, vnblyþe to ne3e;
> As a stynkande stanc þat stryed synne,
> Þat euer of synne and of smach smart is to fele.
> Forþy þe derk Dede See hit is demed euermore.... (1017-20)

Like the Sodomites' sexual practices, which God had earlier described as contrary to *kynde* or nature, this uncanny dead sea "And alle þe costez of kynde hit combres vchone" (1024).

The gloominess and unnaturalness of the land serve as a reminder of the "unnatural" conduct of its former inhabitants. Charlotte Morse notes that there is a correspondence in medieval exegetical traditions between the wasteland and human transgressions: "Both the *Queste* and *Cleanness* reflect Christian interpretations of sacrilege in that both texts focus on the capacity of an individual to pollute himself, to make a wasteland of himself" (Morse 34). Of the Sodomites she observes, "They have...polluted the land with their filth, and the destruction visited upon Sodom makes the place seem what it is, a devastated land" (Morse 170). Whereas the land of Sodom reflects the degenerateness of its people, human beings can also "cultivate" their land and themselves through doing good deeds: "The individual believer...through faith and grace...remakes the garden within himself...[he] becomes a temple...[his]body is the sacred vessel bearing Christ" (Morse 34).

Morse's insights reinforce the idea that in *Clannesse* the land not only reflects the sins of those who live there, but the people themselves are a wasteland. (This image recalls the relationship between morality and space in *Pearl*, where the narrator/dreamer's spottedness directly reflects his location in a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mortal "spot," and vice versa--his "spot" in space exhibits his flaws.) In its repulsiveness, the Dead Sea itself becomes a warning and a lesson--a text--for future generations. Each physical detail of the environment is a commentary on the nature of the sin of the Sodomites: nothing grows there ("And þer water may walter to wete any erþe/Schal neuer grene þeron growe, gresse ne wod nawþer" --1027-8), just as no offspring may result from the homosexual unions of the Sodomites. (Of course, if the Sodomites were strictly homosexual, how the town remained populated is a mysterious inconsistency which the poet does not comment on.) If a person is put into the water, he or she must suffer perdition, much as the Sodomites were condemned for their transgressions:

> If any schalke to be schent wer schowued þerinne,
> Þa3 he bode in þat boþem broþely a monyth,
> He most ay lyue in þat lo3e in losyng euermore,
> And neuer dry3e no dethe to dayes of ende. (1029-32)

Like the sins of the Sodomites, which are poisonous in the sight of God, the land on the edges of the Dead Sea and the water itself are cursed by nature and venomous: "And as hit is corsed of kynde, and hit coostez als,/Þe clay þat clenges þerby arn corsyes strong...." (1033-4) Frantzen believes that these repellent qualities not only remind the reader of the sexual transgressions of the Sodomites, but of the anus itself, their chosen sexual orifice: "Like other places of death, the Dead Sea is an anal image, comparable to the privy into which the little boy is tossed in The Prioress' Tale (7. 571-73)" (460). Even the trees which grow on the lake, which are called "tres...of traytoures" (1041), are emblematic of the sin of the Sodomites. While each fruit is colorful and attractive on the outside, like the former city-dwellers or their evil deeds, "Bot quen hit is brused oþer broken, oþer byten in twynne,/No worldez goud hit wythinne, bot wyndowande askes" (1047-8). Thus, just as the land was like a broken, burning book during the destruction, after the destruction the natural-law-defying land

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

now becomes a text, a warning about the consequences of violating divine laws and a depiction of the attractiveness and eventual emptiness of unclean deeds. Schreiber's comment on a different passage of the poem is also applicable here, where the seeming beauty of the fruit-trees belies their inward corruption:

> Those who pursue *clannesse*, presumably by being clean and obeying God's order, have fair speech; those who pursue fylpe, as do the well-known examples later in the poem, lack such 'fayre formes', an obvious pun on body and word suggesting both physical and verbal debasement. (Schreiber 149)

This relationship between attractiveness in appearance and language is also apparent in this passage, where the attractive appearance of the fruit-trees manifests itself in both a physical and a verbal context--as vision and as text or warning. The poet notes of the place's various loathsome details,

> Alle þyse ar teches and tokenes to trow vpon 3et,
> And wittnesse of þat wykked werk, and þe wrake after
> Þat oure Fader forþrede for fylþe of þose ledes.
> Þenne vch wy3e may wel wyt þat He þe wlonk louies.... (1049-52)[117]

---

[117]These descriptions are of a piece with contemporary pilgrimage accounts. In the account of Ludolph von Suchem, written c. 1350, the author writes of the Dead Sea: "Yet all the country round about is full of trees and great fruit, exceedingly fair to see; but when these fruits are plucked and broken open, they are full of dust and ashes within, and for three days the hands of him who plucked them cannot be rids of a vile stench; for even all the country round about it is full of God's curse" (von Suchem 117). Mandeville's popular (and fictional) travelogue speaks similarly of the Dead Sea: "Et si croissent arbres delez qui portent pommes trop belles et de tres belle couleur a regarder et toutes meures par semblant; mais qui la brisera ou trenchera par my, il ne trouuera dedenz que centre, en signe que par le courrout de Dieu les citez et la terre estoient ars du feu denfer" (Letts 283; Paris MS, c. 1371.) The later Bodleian MS., a Middle English version, reads: "And neer bisides that watir stondeth fair trees that bereth frute, as applis, that arn fair vnto a mannes si3t, but whenne men cutteth hem on sondre, thenne shal they nou3t ellis se but powdir and asshes, in tokenynge of the vengeaunce of God that drowned tho citees and brent hem with the fire of helle, for vengeaunce of that synne" (Letts 449-50). *The Work on Geography* contains similar material: "The lake is so clear that through it can be seen ancient buildings and ruins. But it is so bitter that it cannot be endured long by any living being, and no birds fly across it. Islands are in the lake, on which green apples grow, which would be good to eat. But if you pick them they open and are reduced to cinders. They smoke as if they were burning. The woods on the islands seem to be covered over with cinders and ashes, as if to represent the fiery end of the cities (Wilkinson, Hill and Ryan 185).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The accursed land also expresses another lesson about unclean deeds. An inversion of nature, shunned by all living beings, the land itself is in exile, a place excluded from other places by the nature of its foulness. Just as sinners themselves are excluded from privileged places reserved for the clean--cast out of heaven or Paradise, denied entrance into the ark, swallowed by the earth, bound in a dungeon after being ushered from the wedding feast--the land itself, damaged by evil deeds and later representative of them, is also cast out from the borders of salvation. Both sinners and the sites of sin are beyond the margins of the redeemed world.

After causing them to witness the warning of the land itself, the poet admonishes his readers that if they are to enter the divine court and see God in that privileged place, they must imitate Christ, who is the paradigm of cleanliness. The poet uses a notable comparison to reinforce his point. Citing the exhortation of *The Romance of the Rose* (an interesting choice of text to cite in reference to loving and obeying God--perhaps a more appropriate choice of imagery for the love between God and the faithful would be the traditional Christian imagery of Christ as a bridegroom and the church as his bride, rather than a secular text celebrating extramarital love) to the lover to imitate the object of his love in order to win her favor, the poet warns his readers likewise to "Þenne confourme þe to Kryst, and þe clene make,/Þat euer is polyced als playn as þe perle seluen" (1067-8) Frantzen comments that the commandment to a male lover in the *Roman* to be like the female object of his desire may be seen as potentially transgressive, especially after the Sodomites had been accused of behaving sexually "on femmale3 wyse," once the reader is told to "confourme... to Kryst" in a spiritual sense, "'love dealings' that are sexually charged have no place here: whoever wishes to 'dele drwrye'... with the Lord must be like him, a manly and therefore 'natural' man, not a womanly, 'unnatural' man--a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Sodomite (1065)" (460). The poet reinstates the "natural" order of both sexuality and faith when he compares the relationship of God and the human being to the relationship between a male lover and a female beloved. In fact, the poet describes pleasing God in an amatory way: "If þou wyl dele drwrye with Dry3tyn þenne,/And lelle louy þy Lorde and His leef worþe...." (1065-6) The language of love which the poet uses here emphasizes the fact that the sin of the Sodomites was a sin of misplaced and unnatural love from his medieval Christian perspective. With the example of a male lover and his female beloved, the poet both inscribes the socially acceptable form of sexuality as divinely approved and compares the relationship of mortal and God with this "clene" form of human love. Of course, this depiction of heterosexual love also reinstates the "proper" "subject-predicate" positions of men and women to one another. Though the rules of courtly love invoked by the poet might seem to place the female beloved in a superior position, ultimately she becomes the "predicate" of her male suitor, and the sexual/gender order is once again restored.

In his subsequent description of the flawless pearl of Christ, the poet refers to the womb of Mary as a blemishless enclosure for the source of salvation, and simultaneously presents an example of plenitude and fertility which does not involve physical violation, as had the "fare...strange" of the Sodomites:

> For, loke, fro fyrst þat He ly3t withinne þe lel mayden,
> By how comly a kest He watz closed þere,
> When venkkyst watz no vergynyté, ne vyolence maked,
> Bot much clener watz hir corse, God kynned þerinne. (1069-72)

Like the ark in which Noah, his family and the chosen animals had taken shelter from the flood, and like the heavenly garden of *Pearl*, the virgin Mary's womb is a treasure chest for the pearl of the pure Christ. Morse indicates that the relationship between the unborn Christ and his mother is a relationship of mutual enclosure: "Christ is first the inhabiter of Mary--literally--and then the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inhabiter of men through grace; but since his body is the church, he is also inhabited, the house into which the faithful are gathered" (Morse 175). Schreiber agrees: "Christ is the sublime *perle* born of a spotless maiden, who together are the fullness of the vessel and clothing metaphors, and the absolutely pure union of the container and contained" (Schreiber 146). These lines of the poem emphasize the complete enclosure of the *kest* of Mary's womb, its absolute impenetrability, by using words such as *withinne, closed* and *therinne,* and also by stressing the fact that no "vyolence" or "vanquishing of virginity" had occurred in order to conceive the child. In direct contrast to the Sodomites' attempt at violating both the house of Lot and the bodies of his guests, the conception of Christ was not caused by the physical penetration of the vessel of Mary's body. Moreover, instead of marring her purity through the act of intercourse, God makes Mary even purer than before by entering her in a mystical sense. Frantzen contends that the pearl-like purity of Mary as a vessel for Christ is intended to contrast with the defiled anal vessels of the Sodomites. However, through his presentation of Mary as the fecund yet chaste ideal which closes the story of the Sodomites, he presents as the Sodomites' opposite not heterosexual married love but asexual fertility:

> Because the emblem opposite the male homosexual is not merely a woman and a mother but also a virgin, the negation of both male and homosexual affirms the female only as virgin. The opposition is played out in the contrast between a cesspool [the Dead Sea], where seed is wasted, and Mary's womb, where seed grows into Grace. (Frantzen 461)

Despite the poet's encomium to heterosexuality in lines 697-708 and his invocation of the *Roman de la Rose* and its celebration of male-female love, ultimately the reader is left with a pure bodily vessel which has not chosen an earthly partner of either gender.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Unlike the Sodomites, whose land becomes a broken book warning their descendants against opposing the strictures of the book of nature, Mary gives birth to the Word, the unblemished book of God incarnate whose life human beings read as the ultimate example of cleanness. Jager offers a patristic basis for this theology of Mary, Christ and the Word from Augustine:

> For Augustine, the fruit of Mary's womb was not only the divine Word but specifically a divine Book, the ultimate "written" Text. Augustine's most vivid use of this metaphor [is] in the Confessions.... The divine Book...will be "read" by resurrected humans, just as angels already "read that text in the heavenly Paradise: "Their book is never closed, nor is their scroll folded up, for you yourself are their book and you are forever." (Conf 13.15, qtd. Jager 74)

Bernard of Clairvaux characterizes the incarnation as a kind of writing:

> ...Bernard of Clairvaux depicted Mary as praising God for having "written" in her womb with the "pen" of the Holy Spirit in order to engender Christ. "Not [a word] scratched by dumb signs on dead skins, but one in human form truly graven, lively, within my chaste womb, not by the tracings of a dead pen, but by the workings of the Holy Spirit." *(Sermones in Laudibus Virginis Matris* 4.11, Sancti Bernardi Opera, ed. Jean Leclercq et. al, v. 4: 57, qtd. Jager 75)

Instead of using a fleshly image of impregnation, God uses a pen to inscribe Christ within Mary's body, thus writing Christ's incarnation as both the avatar of the fruitfulness of which the Sodomites are incapable and valorizing a transcendance of sexuality altogether. Unlike the Sodomites, whose unions are sexual but whose "fruit" is full of ashes, the virgin birth of Christ was not caused by intercourse yet was fruitful, both physically and spiritually. The asexual conception of Christ is also, strictly speaking, against nature, but this unnatural conception paradoxically allows for the redemption of human beings from their own mortal nature.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The reader is also invited to take part in this new, pure world of Mary's womb, a type of the church which chastely encloses believers. Morse argues that Christ's purification of whatever bodily or spiritual space he inhabits in a human being extends beyond his mother to all human beings: "Christ invites men to bear God in their bodies so that they, like the Virgin, may become cleaner through his presence" (Morse 175). Clark and Wasserman compare Mary and Christ to those doors and threshold spaces which lead to salvation rather than transgression: "...both Christ and the Virgin, the focal points of the 'Exhortation to Purity' which follows the story of Lot, are often spoken of as metaphorical doors or gates, that is, mediators to salvation" (124). Through bearing Christ, Mary herself becomes a text for believers to imitate, inviting them to enclose Christ in their hearts (and bodies, through the Eucharist) as she had enclosed him in her body.

The purity which Christ bestows upon his mother's body (1072) is extended to the stable in which Christ was born and the manger in which he was laid, a second enclosure glorified by his presence "withinne": "Watz neuer so blysful a bour as watz a bos þenne,/Ne no schroude hous so schene as a schepon þare...." (1075-6) The outer appearance of the place of Christ's birth is unimportant. Just as the beautiful trees of Sodom's salty sea yield corruption within, the surroundings of manger and cow-shed are humble on the outside and glorious within because of Christ within them. The outer appearance of people who come to Christ during his ministry is also unimportant: those who are outwardly blemished (the lame, blind and leprous) are allowed to approach him in order to be healed. Here the poet seems to reverse his original position on sin as an exterior item--a garment. In this parable, for Christ, filth is a matter of interior condition, not outward appearance, which, though sometimes

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reflective of inward filth, can be removed when the interior condition is corrected.

The poet then repeats his central question: "Hov schulde þou com to His kyth bot if þou clene were?" (1110) The poet compares the repentant sinner with a piece of hide being scraped to become parchment: "Bot ware þe wel, if þou be waschen wyth water of schryfte,/And polysed als playn as parchmen shauen,/Sulp no more þenne in synne þy saule þerafter...." (1133-5). Here the soul itself is a book (or the materials that will form one), but one which has been cleansed by penance just as the parchment is washed and prepared for writing. Having witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a broken, burning book, the poet warns the reader not to sully his or her "parchment" with sin after repenting. After all, if God had gone through the trouble to cleanse the parchment of the soul, it displeases God all the more to need to cleanse it again of one's latest mistakes. He then compares the soul to a sacramental vessel, which, once used to contain the body of God, cannot be filled with filth:

> Þa3 hit be bot a bassyn, a bolle oþer a scole,
> A dysche oþer a dobler, þat Dry3tyn onez serued.
> To defowle hit euer vpon folde fast He forbedes,
> So is He scoymous of scaþe þat skylful is euer. (1145-6)

Just as pure, redeemed souls are given places of shelter which protect them from the fate of those outside, the pure soul is itself a privileged space, an enclosure, a vessel for God. This imagery of sacramental enclosures introduces the Baltazar story, which presents transgressions against the very mechanisms and enclosures of salvation in its corporeal form: the sacramental vessels which purify the soul.

The poet begins the Baltazar story (1149-1804) by making a direct connection between the vessel of the soul and the sacramental vessels which contain Christ's body and, by implication, salvation itself:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> And þat watz bared in Babyloyn in Baltazar tyme,
> Hov harde vnhap þer hym hent, and hastyly sone,
> For he þe vesselles avyled þat vayled in þe temple,
> In servyse of þe Souerayn sumtyme byfore. (1149-52)

The fouling of the vessels by Baltazar is spoken of in terms reminiscent of the initial clothing metaphor of the poem: the story does not just present but "bares" the situation, as if it were verbally stripping away falsehood in order to reveal the truth of Baltazar's villainy. This stripping metaphor also recalls the threatened bodily violation of the angels by the Sodomites.

The background to the story of Baltazar's mistreatment of the vessels which his father had stolen from the Jerusalem temple has striking parallels to the Sodom and Gomorrah story, particularly in its imagery of spatial and bodily border-crossings. The Judaeans, having strayed from the acceptable worship of God, are punished by means of the destruction of their city, which "Watz disstryed wyth distres, and drawen to þe erþe" (1160). The poet describes the siege of Jerusalem by Nabugodenozor (Nebuchadnezzar) in terms that are reminiscent of the Sodomites' attempted assault of Lot's house, where the poet emphasizes how the Sodomites surround the house:

> Vmbewalt alle þe walles wyth wy3es ful stronge,
> At vche a dor a do3ty duk, and dutte hem wythinne;
> For þe bor3 was so bigge baytayled alofte,
> And stoffed wythinne with stout men to stalle hem þeroute.
> Þenne watz the sege sette þe ceté aboute.... (1181-5)

However, unlike with Lot's house, in which frightened humans cower, protecting their guests, those inside of Jerusalem are strong defenders. Ultimately, though, while Lot's gates themselves had kept invaders out, this castle, though strongly built and well-defended, gives way to the attackers because of the moral collapse of the defenders "withinne."

Part of the drama (as well as the significance) of these battle scenes derives from the way in which the poet contrasts the situations within and outside of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

walls. Almost each line alternately describes those "withinne" and the invaders "þeroute." In the next stanza, again "trwe tulkkes in toures teueled wythinne...." (1189) However, while the poem's previous biblical examples had established that the people outside are the cursed and those inside are the chosen, here the reverse is true. Those outside are compelled by God to overthrow those inside, who had besmirched the enclosures of the sacred city and its temple. The fate of those who desecrate the chosen place which they inhabit is to be invaded from without.

Eventually the siege is successful:

> At þe laste, vpon longe, þo ledes wythinne,
> Faste fayled hem þe fode, enfamined monie;
> Þe hote hunger wythinne hert hem wel sarre
> Þen any dunt of þat douthe þat dowelled þeroute. (1193-6)

The word *wythinne* applies here to both the body and the city. While the walls of the city had stood fast and repelled the invaders "þat dowelled þeroute," the body's defenses are weaker. The invaders are less successful than the hunger which comes from "wythinne"--both within the walls of the city and within the interior of the body. Thus the besieged multitudes are betrayed from within, by the lack of food in the city and by the weakness of their own bodies. Since they had not honored God within the holy spaces of the temple and with its vessels, the people in turn are left undefended by their enclosing walls. In fact, their very enclosure is the instrument of their downfall. Due to the limited food supply, the city becomes more of a prison than a place of refuge.

The troops of the king attempt to get outside before the invaders notice, but their plan goes awry when they are spotted by the watch of the enemy: "Bot er þay atwappe ne mo3t þe wach wythoute/Hi3e skelt watz þe ascry þe skewes anvnder" (1205-6) As in previous narratives, leaving a shelter brings certain doom, even though these escapees had thought that it would bring them

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

deliverance. Thus even Zedethyas, king of the Judaeans, is caught and brought before Nabugodenozar, who eventually blinds the king and puts him in a Babylonian dungeon. Like the wedding-guest at the beginning of the poem, the king's misdeeds consign him to imprisonment, while the reward of the faithful is the sanctuary of the temple, the church, and eventually heaven. The poet makes it clear that it is the king's trespassing which has resulted in his imprisonment: if he "Ne neuer trespast to Hym in teche of mysseleue" (1230), he would not have been placed at the mercy of the ruler of another land. The king's misdeeds are described in spatial terms--as trespassing, which evokes images of spatial violation, namely the invasion of a land which is not his--as well as the more familiar images of crossing social boundaries. These trespasses ironically cause his land to be invaded and the king himself to be imprisoned.

After the capture of the Hebrew king, Nabugodenozar's vassal Nabuzardan "...brek the bareres as bylyue, and þe bur3 after,/And enteres in ful ernestly, in yre of his hert" (1239-40). The city itself is finally penetrated and violated by Nabugodonozar's warriors in recompense for the spiritual violations of the people within its walls. As a result of the transgressions of the king and his subjects, the very bodies of the citizens are penetrated and disemboweled by the invaders, a fate which is a grim recollection of the sexual invasion that the Sodomites (or Lot) had only threatened: "Wyues and wenches her wombes tocoruen,/Þat her boweles outborst aboute þe diches...." (1250-51) The specific mention of the women's *wombes* is a painful reminder of the pure womb of the Virgin, but, whereas her body is described quite specifically as resisting invasion, the bodies of these women are fatally invaded and torn apart, as is the "body" of the city and the temple:

> And 3et Nabuzardan nyl neuer stynt
> Er he to the tempple tee wyth his tulkkes alle;

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Betes on þe barers, brestes vp þe 3ates,
> Slouen alle at a slyp þat serued þerinne.... (1261-4)

Like the gates of the city and the bodies of the people, the sacred space of the temple is entered and violated. As the entrails of their victims had spilled out of their bodies, the building is similarly gutted by the soldiers as the holy vessels and other valuable decorations are pillaged ("Now hatz Nabuzardan nomen alle þyse noble þynges,/And þyled that precious place and pakked þose godes...."--1281-2). The contempt with which the vassals of Nabugodenozar treat the holy vessels is poignantly described in that the vessels, so lovingly fashioned by Solomon, are thoughtlessly flung about, almost as the Sodomites had threatened to violate the guests of Lot:

> Alle he spoyled so spitously in a sped whyle
> Þat Salomon so mony a sadde 3er so3t to make.
> Wyth alle þe coyntyse þat he couþe clene to wyrke,
> Deuised he þe vesselment, þe vestures clene;
> Wyth sly3t of his ciences, his Souerayn to loue,
> Þe hous and þe anournementes he hy3tled togedere.
> Now hatz Nabuzardan nummen hit al samen,
> And syþen bet doun þe bur3 and brend hit in askes. (1285-92)

While the poet lingers as lovingly over the making of the artifacts as Solomon himself had done "so mony a sadde yer," the swiftness of Nabuzardan's pillaging of the building is effectively presented in the terse last lines quoted here. The effect is almost like the disembowelment of the women in lines 1250-1: the building itself is disemboweled and its "clene" contents treated with contempt, as the Hebrew king had done when he had turned from the worship of God.

Naburzadan also violates the very land, penetrating it to the "hyrnez," the corners of the kingdom, which can remind the reader of the four corners of the earth from which destruction comes to Sodom: "Þenne wyth legiounes of ledes over londes he rydes,/Her3es of Israel þe hyrnez aboute...." (1293-4) From these lands he abducts various nobles and presents them to Nabugodenozar:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Presented him þe presoneres in pray þat þay token--/Moni a worþly wy3e whil her worlde laste,/Moni semly syre soun, and swyþe rych maydenes...." (1297-9) Here the prisoners are compared to the vessels as booty to be presented to the king. Their value is much that of the rich vessels and, in the case of the "worþly wy3e"s, is associated with their worldly possessions, much as the king now possesses them. The poet's use of "her worlde" to describe the possessions of the noblemen of Judea is an interesting choice because not only have these people's worldly goods been destroyed, but so has their world, so "whil her worlde lasted" can refer to both their goods and their land itself. The word *token* ("took"), referring to the capture of the people who are now Nabugodenozar's possessions, also implies a particular form of abduction in medieval society: *raptus*, which originally implied mere kidnapping, often for the purposes of elopement, but which had acquired connotations of rape by the late Middle Ages, as has been documented by Katherine Gravdal.[118]

Nabugodenozar, however, treats the vessels with great reverence once he sees them: "He trussed hem in his tresorye in a tryed place,/Rekenly, wyth reuerens, as he ry3t hade...." (1317-8) Recognizing that the vessels are sacramental objects, he places them within a special location befitting their

---

[118]Gravdal explains that the Latin word *rapere* originally had a number of meanings, including the abduction of a virgin. However, "as early as 1155, the Latin *raptus* in the sense of abduction brings about the shift toward a sexual meaning: *rap* (c. 1155) or *rat* (c. 1235) designates abduction by violence or by seduction, for the purposes of forced coitus" (Gravdal 4). Christopher Cannon notes that a similar ambiguity exists in fourteenth-century English laws, where raptus and rapere could mean either abduction or rape (79-80); he discusses this issue in connection with the Chaumpaigne release, in which Chaucer is absolved by his accuser, Chaumpaigne, of the responsibility of either raping or abducting her. Eventually, according to Gravdal, the word *viol* became used specifically for rape in medieval French, and Gravdal acknowledges that this term has important spatial connotations: "It turns to a technical, legal term: to violate. This final choice (still in place today after three centuries) expresses a view of the female body as a place protected by law, an object to be respected, a site that is set apart and must not be invaded" (6). The invaders of Jerusalem are guilty of invading both political and bodily space, especially of their female victims, and though the poet makes clear that this is a punishment for the lax morals of the people, his harrowing descriptions are sympathetic, as with the hapless drowning sinners in the Noah story.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

special nature. Because of this reverent recognition of the sacredness of the objects, Nabugodenozar is rewarded by being permitted to rule over the earth:

> Þat ryche in gret rialté rengned his lyue,
> As conquerour of vche a cost he cayser watz hatte,
> Emperour of alle þe erþe and also þe saudan,
> And als þe god of þe grounde watz grauen his name. (1321-4)

In contrast to the fate of the transgressing king of the Hebrews, as a reward for his faith Nabugodenozar is awarded a truly privileged place--the entire known world--as his possession and is renamed "god of þe grounde."[119] However, with his death "For alle his empire so hi3e in erþe is he grauen" (1332). After his death, the earth becomes not his sovereign land but his grave. The word "grauen" here echoes line 1324, in which it is used in the sense of naming, where he is inscribed as the deity of earth. Now, ironically, he is "graven" at death, both inscribed and buried in the ground of which he had been "engraved" as a ruler. Like the text of Sodom and Gomorrah after their destruction, the land itself becomes an inscription of Nabugodenozar's greatness--and his mortality.

After Nabugodenozar's death his son, Baltazar, succeeds him. However, his son lacks his father's reverence, either towards God or towards the sacred vessels. Unlike the other sinners of the poem, who attempt to conceal their unclean deeds, Baltazar enjoys broadcasting his wicked ways. The poet denounces his brazen revelations of his misdeeds with a disgust that recalls the Sodom and Gomorrah story, where the Sodomites' practice of public sex is contrasted with God's intention for acts of marital love to take place in private

---

[119]It is also ironic that the poet has chosen this word "grauen" to describe the inscription of Baltazar's fame--on the ground, as it were. Especially because of its proximity to the phrase "god of the grounde," *grauen* would seem to recall the "graven images" or idols which were such a source of vexation for Hebrew prophets, and which the historical Nebuchadnezzar, as a non-Jew, worshipped. Thus, though Nebuchadnezzar eventually became a follower of the God of the Bible, the term *grauen* also reminds the reader that he was once a worshipper of idols, and himself became an idol for his people, worshipped as a great king in lieu of God.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and enclosed spaces: "Hit is not innogh to þe nice al no3ty þink vse/Bot if alle þe worlde wyt his wykked dedes" (1359-60). When he invites the nobles of various lands to a feast, where he can display both his riches and his wickedness to excess,[120] this feast is the direct opposite of the wedding-feast at the beginning of the poem. Here the poet's concern with interiors versus exteriors focuses upon the shining exterior "garment" of Baltazar's court and its lavish displays and the interior rottenness of his *werkkes*--his wicked deeds and twisted attitudes.

The poet devotes lines 1357-1488 to the magnificence of Baltazar's city and to the feast itself, with its elaborate service and ostentatious display of riches on the part of the king. Even the feast of the heavenly king is not described in such sumptuous terms--perhaps to emphasize the fact that Baltazar's palace is a place of gilded surfaces, much as the narrator of *Pearl* had read the land in which he found himself. However, unlike the realm of the Pearl-Maiden, this place *is* actually all gilded surfaces with nothing underneath. Even the elaborate cutouts of miniature castles illumine this quality of surface adornment. They are

> Lyfte logges þerouer [the platters] and on lofte coruen,
> Pared out of paper and poynted of golde,
> Broþe baboynes abof, besttes anvnder,
> Foles in foler flakerande bitwene,
> And all in asure and ynde enaumayld ryche.... (1407-11)

These small gilded dwellings are emblematic of Baltazar's own kingdom, which is full of bright surfaces but is also distorted, as the poet states in line 1355: "Al watz þe mynde of þat man on misschapen þinges...." The reference to "misschapen" and therefore unnatural things reflects also on Baltazar's sexual conduct. Not only are sodomites deemed "unnatural"--here Baltazar's promiscuous heterosexuality is an affront to the perceived order of things. The

---

[120]The Bible provides no motive for Baltazar's feast, only stating that he had a great feast for a thousand of his lords and drank wine before them (Daniel 5:1).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*baboynes* or grotesques on these decorations are reflected in the irreverent, blasphemous behavior in which he and his court indulge. The position of the baboynes "abof" also denotes an inverted hierarchy: just as these misshapen monsters are "on top" spatially in the vertical arrangement of the decorations, monsters like Baltazar are at the top of the Babylonian hierarchy. (Even semantically, there is little difference between "baboyne" and "Babyloyne," where people behave in bestial ways--as illustrated most clearly by Nabugodonozar's transformation into a beast when he disavows God, as Daniel later recounts.) Unlike the *kyst* of Noah's ark in which the redeemed were enclosed, or the *loge* of Lot where the angels were sheltered, Baltazar's palace encloses unclean people and deeds, even as it encloses the sacred vessels which are soon to be defiled. The inhabitants seem noble but behave like *baboynes* and *besttes*, distortions of nature and lawful conduct.

While baboynes, the fanciful and sometimes grotesque creatures who appear on the edges of manuscripts, church buildings and world maps, have elicited various interpretations from modern art critics, medieval thinkers frequently decried these representations as unedifying diversions at best and reprehensible monstrosities at worst.[121] Whatever their significance, whether

---

[121]Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes different forms of marginal art--peasant folk festivals as well as manuscript drolleries--as a form of subversive play called the carnivalesque, by which the common people could critique the powerful nobility and clergy. *Rabelais and His World* is his treatment of the subject. Phillipe Verdier also believes that these curious, playful, often scatological forms were intended as critiques of society, especially the artist's superiors: "The marginalia of Gothic manuscripts is almost always an eccentric world, at times like an underworld, parasitic on texts and commenting on them obliquely with devious humor, extending from a surrealistic imagination to a surreptitious criticism of the 'establishment' in contemporary society and a more or less brazen anticlericalism" (Verdier 122). On the other hand, some critics see marginal creations not as playful social criticism but as an effort to banish the misshapen and monstrous to the borders of society as well as the edges of the page or building. Piero Camporesi describes this fear: "People's fears were exorcised by dumping them on those who inhabited the edges of the known world, who were lesser in some sense; whether troglodites or pygmies...the outskirts are felt to be infected zones, where all kinds of monstrosities are possible, and where a different man is born, an aberrant from the prototype who inhabits the center of things" (*Bread of Dreams* 79) Michael Camille argues that this fear of the edge and the disorder it promised existed "precisely because they were so concerned with the hierarchy that defined their position in the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they were intended as social critique or fanciful portrayals of abhorred "others," one important function of the baboynes was imitation of and commentary on elements of the texts on whose margins they were placed, like the marginal gloss. Many baboynes are apes or creatures with features of monkeys--those playful, subversive imitators par excellence. In fact, the word *baboyne* is the source of our modern "baboon," and Camille refers to their playful, subversive and

---

universe" (*Image on the Edge* 16). He also argues that this rigid structure is what makes marginal play and inversion possible: "The medieval image-world was, like medieval life itself, rigidly structured and hierarchal. For this reason, resisting, ridiculing, overturning and inverting it was not only possible, it was limitless" (*Image on the Edge* 26). He also points out that there is ultimately no rigid distinction between center and edge, valorized text and impious, distorted marginal representations. While marginal art can make fun of the text in the center, it can also finally reinstate the validity of the text which it seems to subvert (*Image on the Edge* 30-1).

Many medieval writers viewed marginal art with disdain or disgust. As early as 745, St. Boniface addressed the lamentable presence of such creatures in religious art and spaces (where they sometimes occupied a central rather than a marginal position, as in the Lindisfarne Gospels, where entwined beasts appear in the illuminated letters of the text itself) in a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury: "these ornaments shaped like worms, teeming on the borders of ecclesiastical vestments; they announce Antichrist and are introduced by his guile and through his ministers in the monasteries to induce lechery, depravity, shameful deeds and disgust for study and prayer" (*Image on the Edge* 17). A more famous complaint appears in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici Abbatem*, an early-twelfth-century letter. Bernard expresses his opposition to the appearance of monstrous figures in the margins of texts and religious buildings: "Caeterum in claustris coram legentibus fratribus quid facit illa ridicula monstrositas mira quaedam deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas? Quid ibi immundae simiae? Quid feri leones? quid monstruosi centauri? quid semihomines? Quid maculosae tigrides? quod milites pugnantes? quid venatores tubicinantes? Videas sub uno capite multa corpora, et rursus in uno corpore capita multa. Cernitur hinc in quadrupede cauda serpentes, hinc in pisce caput quadrupedis. Ibi bestia pra fert equam, capram trahens retro dimidiam; hic comutum animal equum gestat posterius. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas apparet, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando quam in lege Dei meditando. Proh Deo! si non pudat ieptiarum, cur vel non piget expensarum?" (*Patrologia Latina* 182: 915-6. "What are those ridiculous monstrosities doing before the monks reading in the cloister? Look at those deformed beauties, these beautiful deformities! What [is] this filthy monkey [doing] here? These ferocious lions? This monstrous centaur? These half-men? These stained tigers? These fighting soldiers? These trumpet-blowing hunters? We see one body below many heads, and vice versa--in one body many heads. See here on a quadruped the tail of a serpent; here on a fish, the head of a quadruped. Here [is] a beast with the front part of a horse, and coming behind it is a goat; here this horned animal gives birth to the posterior of a horse. So many at the last! Just look ast how many diverse forms and varieties appear everywhere, all the more freed to read in the marble as in the books, to be occupied all day looking at each [awful] singularity [i.e., the unique forms of the invented beasts] when they should be meditating on the law of God. Oh God! If they are not ashamed of their ineptitude, should they not be ashamed of the waste?"--translation mine.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ultimately text-reinforcing function as "monkey-business"(*Image on the Edge* 12). He explains a serious association between the ape and the textual sign:

> That the term babewyn came to stand for all such composite creatures, and not just apes, is significant. Isidore of Seville, the authority on etymology throughout the Middle Ages, traced the derivation of *simius*, or ape, from *similitudo*, noting that "the monkey wants to mimic everything he sees done". A beast that was kept as an entertaining toy by jongleurs and as a pet by the nobility, the ape came to signify the dubious status of representation itself, *le singe* being an anagram for *le signe*--the sign. The prevalence of apes in marginal art similarly (sic) draws attention to the danger of mimesis or illusion in God's created scheme of things. *(Image on t the Edge* 12-3)

Thus it is significant that Baltazar's vessels include designs of baboynes on them. It is yet another example of how *Clannesse* repeatedly characterizes the lands or residences of sinners as cautionary antitexts, places which have been ruined by the sins of their inhabitants and which now stand as spatial reminders of the need to follow the strictures of nature's book. Microcosms of the world-text appear repeatedly in Baltazar's feast: the cut-paper castles which decorate his dishes, as opposed to the vessels, which themselves show castles and living beings. However, while the sacred vessels depict the variety of life in its heaven-ordained order--as did the cathedrals of the *Pearl*-poet's time--the baboynes on Baltazar's own cut-paper castle ornaments draw attention to the contrived, the manufactured or artificial, and the subversive. Unlike the hall of the wedding feast, which is a microcosm of the created world and the divinely-instituted hierarchy of saved and damned, the hall of Baltazar reflects his impure conduct, which, like the ape, subverts and blasphemes against divine order--and yet steers the reader towards cleanness by means of a negative *exemplum*. Baltazar's is a realm of the marginal and monstrous, where the drolleries on the edge whose invasions of holy spaces disgusted religious figures like Bernard of Clairvaux become a part of the central activities as well as the social center of the land: the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

king's court. Camille insists that marginal art--however outrageous and excessive (like Baltazar's own conduct and conspicuous wealth)--remained firmly in the margins,[122] but here the baboynes spill into the center as signs of Baltazar's own inverted and prideful "aping" of the wedding-feast and, by implication, God's own power and authority.

Drunk at his feast, the befuddled Baltazar summons his marshal "And comaundes hym cofly coferes to lauce,/And fech forþ þe vessel þat his fader bro3t,/Nabugedonozar, noble in his strenþe...." (1428-30) The violence of his act of invasion and seizure of the vessels is emphasized by the use of the word *lauce*, which is reminiscent of the disemboweling of the Hebrew women during the invasion of Jerusalem.[123] The invasive nature of Baltazar's order is also made evident by the explicit mention of unlocking sealed chests and compartments as his servants follow his behest: "And he [the treasurer] with keyes vncloses kystes ful mony...." (l. 1438) The opening of the various locked places which shelter these sacred items foreshadows the gravest invasion of the story: the misuse of the vessels themselves.

Once the vessels are removed from their hiding-place, the poet describes their adornments in intricate detail, as if emphasizing the preciousness of the objects in order to make their subsequent desecration even more grave. Like the castles "pared out of paper" with which Baltazar has his feasting-vessels covered, these sacramental vessels are themselves made to look like miniature castles, but made of sturdy, priceless gold rather than flimsy, less valuable paper:

---

[122]Camille outlines the limits of marginal art: "While often undermining the text, drawing attention to its 'openness', marginal images never step outside (or inside) certain boundaries. Play has to have a playground, and just as the scribe follows the grid of ruled lines, there were rules governing the playing-fields of the marginal images that keep them firmly in their place" (*Image on the Edge* 22).

[123]*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* also makes use of this word to describe the disemboweling of an animal slain in the hunt: "Alle þe rymez by þe rybbez radly þay lauce" (1343) and "Bi þe by3t a l of þe þy3es/Þe lappez þay lauce bihynde...." (1349-50) These two quotations provide additional evidence that the *lauce* in Nabugodenozar's command could also carry invasive connotations.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For þer wer bassynes ful bry3t of brende golde clere,
Enaumaylde with azer, and eweres of sute,
Couered cowpes ful clene, as casteles arayed,
Enbaned vnder batelment with bantelles quoynt,
And fyled out of fygures of ferlylé schappes. (1456-60)

These castles also differ in their design and the forms that they depict. Whereas the paper castles of Baltazar, with their simian inhabitants represent distorted deeds rather than protecting their contents from these deeds, these sacred vessels have covers to keep them "ful clene." Though the paper castles of Baltazar have baboynes "abof," subverting and mocking the natural and social order rather than remaining safely on the borders, on these vessels, natural rather than artificial creatures occupy this place, standing above even the cunning artifice of the castles themselves: "And al bolled abof with braunches and leues,/ Pyes and papejayes purtrayed wythinne,/As thay prudly hade piked of pomgarnades" (1464-6). Each of these vessels is a cosmos in miniature, like those constructed in church art or literature itself. Of course the opposition between the two kinds of castles is not so clearly defined as the poet might have intended: all castles, vessels and social arrangements are artificial, though there are many people, even in our own time, who might suggest that the latter are natural or divinely ordained. Though the creatures on the temple vessels are "clene" rather than distorted, ultimately they are just as artificial, since they are made by human hands and, rather than being flesh, are composed of gold and gems.

The parrots ("papejayes") are particularly interesting because not only are they real birds rather than invented or debased creatures, but they are also representations of the Virgin Mary.[124] The association between parrots and the Virgin reveals that these are true sacramental vessels rather than Baltazar's own

---

[124]*The Middle English Dictionary* offers this definition of "papajaye": "a parrot; *fig.* a lady, the Virgin Mary" (587).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

worldly drink- and food-containers, which are emblems of his wealth and which ape (but ultimately contrast with and mock) God's and nature's power, splendor and fecundity. Adorned with the symbols of the Virgin, the sacred vessels should remind the reader of the poem of how Mary had contained Christ, as if her own body had become a sacramental vessel, and how the wine and bread of the sacraments contain his essence as word made flesh. However, Baltazar mistreats these vessels in his decidedly fleshly use of them for his debased feast, a mockery of the Virgin where he celebrates his many concubines, and a mockery of the eucharist, as with the unclean priests of the poem's opening lines.

The poet's use of these contrasting castles thus moves his moralization of space to an additional level. Not only is Baltazar's conduct found wanting because of his invasion of sacred space and defilement of sacred containers, but his very world-view--as exemplified by the paper castles, which can be both a representation and a reversal of the poet's own world-generating art--is a misinterpretation of the rightful order of the world. By means of his unholy acts, Baltazar would have the world populated with perverse creatures and unclean deeds.

After the poet describes the craft of the vessels and their intricate designs, he returns to Baltazar's celebration, at which the vessels, so lovingly described a few stanzas earlier, are being frantically borne about by nervous servants, each attempting to serve his or her master as quickly as possible. The chaotic sight of the servants rushing to serve their masters is then compounded by the din of the covers of the vessels being quickly and carelessly removed:

> Þer watz ryngyng, on ry3t, of ryche metalles,
> Quen renkkes in þat ryche rok rennen hit to cache;
> Clatering of couaclez þat kesten þo burdes
> As sonet out of sawteray songe als myry. (1513-6)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the clatter and din of the feast, the palace has itself become the "topsy-turved" realm of the king's castellated food-covers. The guests, drunkenly gulping wine from sacred vessels, have themselves become beasts and grotesques, and though the lids of the vessels utter sounds as beautiful as a stringed instrument being played even when they are cast to the ground, no one in the castle is attentive to the sound. The presence of the sacramental vessels (albeit in such a profane context) also may remind the reader of the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist, in which the embodiment of God in the form of Christ is a sacred mystery, not a lascivious display of flesh, as at this feast, and which is a sacred feast, not a secular travesty of one. The decidedly fleshly, avaricious, prideful and gluttonous feast of Baltazar--a veritable buffet table of the seven deadly sins--not only stands in opposition to the sacred mystery of the Eucharist, but also evokes (and contrasts) medieval and patristic images of eating as "rumination" on sacred texts.[125] However, far from containing words to chew on, the vessels are now made to contain food--which makes them empty, however, in comparison

---

[125]Eric Jager lists a number of monastic associations between reading and eating: "In vocalizing (and memorizing) Scripture, monks were said to 'ruminate' on God's word, an alimentary trope that suggests a continual recourse to script to nourish the soul. Augustine had valued a silent 'rumination' on God's word with 'the mouth of the heart,' but monastic culture, following Benedict, reified this metaphor in the active pronunciation of the written word, especially in the *lectio divina*, the scriptural reading that accompanied monastic meals in the refectory. As Jean Leclercq defines it, *ruminatio* meant 'assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor.' A letter of Alcuin 'likens the lectio divina' to a repast: 'While the body is fed at the meal, let the mind be nurtured by the divine reading'" (Jager 154). Augustine emphasizes the written word as food: "The scriptural word is food, and reading is eating" (Jager 155). Caedmon was also described by Bede as "ruminating" on the biblical texts which he transformed into vernacular poetry. His position as a guardian of livestock is an interesting connection--he was in charge of protecting the very ruminant animals whom he imitated spiritually after he was given the gift of poetic composition. His ability had also emerged after he had escaped from a feast where he had been expected to sing. Once he is given the ability to compose religious poetry, however, he could take part in a more spiritual feast. Bede describes his method of poetic compos(t)ition: "At ipse cuncta, quae audiendo discere poterat, rememorando secum et quasi mundum animal ruminando, in carmen dulcissimum conuertabant, suauisque resonando doctores suos uicissim auditores sui faciebat" ("So Caedmon stored up in his memory all that he had learned, and like one of the clean animals chewing the cud, turned it into such melodious verse that his delightful renderings turned his instructors into auditors" (trans. Sherley-Price and Latham 249).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to the more nourishing Eucharist, by means of which the faithful partake of spiritual food.

Ironically, because Baltazar's hall encloses and protects not divinely sanctioned social values but degradations and inversions of them, the "gropande God" must invade his castle in order to restore order by means of an uncanny, disembodied hand, which writes a clear warning that he and his guests, sinners as they are, cannot comprehend. In its message and in its sheer rough physicality, the invasive appearance of this hand foreshadows the invasion of the city (and later of Baltazar's own body) which is his punishment for transgressing against the sacred vessels. The "gristly" hand which appears in order to warn Baltazar of his fate causes the king to become frightened enough to behave like a terrified animal in a trap:

> His cnes cachches toclose, and cluchches his hommes,
> And he with plattyng his paumes dispyses his leres,
> And romyes as a rad ryth that rores for drede,
> Ay biholdand þe hond til it hade al grauen
> And rasped on þe ro3 wo3e runisch sauez. (1541-5)

When the hand "...þe scrypture hade scraped wyth a scrof penne,/As a coltour in clay cerues þe for3es...." (1546-7), Baltazar is so frightened by the portent that he is momentarily transformed completely into one of the beasts of his paper castles--the beast that he is--and begins to perform terrified self-mutilations, which his murderers will later complete for him, tossing him afterwards into a ditch like a dead dog.

The hand and its pen, as well as its writing, are continually described as rough and harsh. (It is interesting that God, like a writer, uses a pen and not the biblical finger.[126] This writing image is consistent with the reference to Sodom

---

[126]The Vulgate text reads: "in eadem hora apparuerunt digiti quasi manus hominis/scribentis...." ("In that hour there appeared fingers like that of a man's hand writing....") (Daniel 5: 24-5).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and Gomorrah as a book broken open in line 966, and with the shriven soul as scraped parchment in line 1134.) While Baltazar's palace is adorned by lavish decorations and his feast served on priceless sacramental vessels, the news of his impending death is served by means of plain, even ugly, words written by a grotesque hand. God's hand is also allied to the "coltour" or plow of the peasant farmer, as opposed to Baltazar's ornamented dishes and other displays of his idle wealth. However, ugly as both hand and words are, they are true, unlike the glittering surfaces of Baltazar's castle and his false use of the vessels. The image of the hand's writing as the furrows "ceruen" into soil is an intriguing extension of the poem's multiple associations of land with a book. While Sodom became a burning book after its inhabitants had ceased to heed God's words, and Baltazar's castles of paper represent a realm of reversals in which the divine word is ignored and the vessels of that word are misused, the walls of Baltazar's palace become the site of a divine warning to transform his conduct. But while the furrows of a field eventually yield new life, the furrows carven in the castle wall are warnings of impending death, a death whose seeds Baltazar is even now sowing with his sinful actions.

But the roughness of the pen and hand of God also have more disturbing implications. Baltazar declares that the words themselves (and the fingers that write them) have the power to wound, invade and mutilate him, such as when he declares "'For al hit frayes my flesche, þe fyngres so grimme'" (1553). Like the lustful Sodomites and the invaders of Jerusalem, the hand of the "gropande God" assaults Baltazar, invading his body as he had misused the vessels in which God's body would lie, according to medieval typological associations of the temple vessels with the eucharistic vessels of the church. Daniel later describes the hand in the same invasive way: "Þe fyste with þe fyngeres þat flayed þi hert,/Þat rasped renyschly þe wo3e with þe ro3 penne'" (1723-4). Just as God had

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"groped" within the bodies and souls of sinners to discover their hidden transgressions, now God's hand assaults Baltazar, penetrating his body as the pen has penetrated and mutilated the walls of the castle with its rough writing. The very fear which the poet had exhibited in the Sodom and Gomorrah story, the threatened penetrability of a male, is now enacted, not by a Sodomite but by God. The word "renyschly" also associates God with another form of outcast, the foreigner; this is the term which the poet uses in line 96 to refer to the foreigners whom the lord includes in his wedding feast. Though it can be argued that this word underscores the inverted values of Baltazar (God is foreign to this court of transgressors), the imagery of God's rough hand--and pen--is disturbing because it parallels rather than opposes the conduct of other invaders in the poem. The invasiveness of God's pen contrasts with the redemptive imagery of God "writing" Christ within Mary's body, as discussed above. Here the pen is an instrument of rape rather than redemption because, while it terrifies Baltazar and assaults his mind, it does not cause him to repent but merely warns him of his imminent violation at the hands of the Medes and Persians.

Baltazar's summons of learned people to his court is somewhat reminiscent (in a darker sense) of his summons of the kings to his court for the feast, which is in turn an inversion of the summons by God of all human beings to the divine court. Baltazar promises that whoever can read the letters of the mysterious hand will be given rich clothing "And a coler of cler golde clos vmbe his þrote...." (1569) It is ironic that Baltazar speaks of "cler" things when he has no knowledge of moral cleanliness, and when he has so misused the "cler" golden vessels at his feast--a feast which was held for his "cler" concubines. It is also ironic that the word *clos* is used here. Previously the word*clos* designated spaces which shelter the redeemed and the rooms and coffers which had protected the vessels--rooms and chests which Baltazar had ordered "unclosed,"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as he had afterward allowed serving-women to open the vessels themselves and cast off their lids.

When Baltazar's wise men prove incapable of interpreting the vision, the queen reminds him of the prophet Daniel, whose powers she extols: "'His sawle is ful of syence, sa3es to schawe,/To open vche a hyde þyng of aunteres vncowthe'" (1599-1600) She then continues to describe how he had assisted Nabugodenozar:

> "He keuered hym with his counsayl of caytyf wyrdes;
> Alle þat he spured hym, in space he expowned clene,
> Þur3 þe sped of þe spyryt, þat sprad hym withinne
> Of the godeliest goddez þat gaynes aywhere." (1605-8)

The queen describes Daniel in terms which had been applied earlier to the vessels themselves and also to places which conceal and contain the redeemed. Not only can he "open" secret things as if they were enclosing spaces or covered vessels, but he himself is the container for the spirit of God, which is "withinne" him, and he can interpret mysterious portents "clene[ly]," as if the process of interpretation were as pure as a holy vessel or sacred enclosure. In Daniel, the act of interpretation becomes an opening of a closed space, but unlike Baltazar, who invades closed spaces where vessels are hidden as well as the enclosures of the vessels themselves, Daniel's "opening" of secret messages is a "clene" art. The queen also associates his "cler" art with both the earth and a book when she says, "'And þa3 þe mater be merk þat merked is 3ender,/He schal declar hit also clar as hit on clay stande'" (1617-8). The queen compares the clarity of Daniel's interpretation with the authoritative written word--in this case, inscribed upon clay, like a monumental carving in stone. (She also is referring to the actual physical placement of the words on the "clay" wall and suggests that the interpretation will become as clear as the words.) Clay is also made from the earth, which the poet has associated with books so many times. Here the earth of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the walls is a book of instruction for Baltazar, whose earthen walls have enclosed deeds contrary to nature.

Before he interprets the letters on the wall, Daniel explains to Baltazar how God has the ability to bring low those who defy divine laws and raise up those who adhere to them. He makes a special example of Baltazar's father. Though Nabugodenozar's conversion-story might have been more suitably told in chronological order, before the story of Baltazar, perhaps it is retold here by Daniel in order to educate Baltazar in the ways of the righteous:

> "For of þe Hyghest he hade a hope in his hert,
> Þat vche pouer past out of þat Prynce euen.
> And whyle þat watz cle3t clos in his hert
> Þere watz no mon vpon molde of my3t as hymseluen...." (1653-6)

The faith of Nabugodenozar is described in terms of a spatial enclosure: his belief in God is "clos[ed]" in his heart, just as the vessels had been enclosed in the temple of Solomon and the family of Noah was enclosed in the ark. In Nabugodenozar, the human soul itself becomes a treasure-chest in which the divine presence resides. Those who have faith in God "cle3t clos" in their hearts are able in turn to inhabit the privileged enclosures of the saved: the ark, the court of God, and, as in the case of Nabugodonozar, to have control over earthly kingdoms. However, as soon as Nabugodenozar had declared """I am god of þe grounde, to gye as me lykes./As He þat hy3e is in heuen, His aungeles þat weldes""" (1663-4), and praises himself for building Babylon, the most impregnable city in the world, God exiles him from the privileged enclosures of both land and divine grace, from his kingdom and even from humankind:

> "'And þou, remued fro monnes sunes, on mor must abide
> And in wasturne walk and wyth þe wylde dowelle,
> As best, byte on þe bent of braken and erbes,
> With wroþe wolfes to won and wyth wylde asses.'" (1673-6)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Because he had set himself up in the place of God, Nabugodenozar "'...carfully is outkast to contré vnknawen,/Fer into a fyr fryth þere frekes neuer comen'" (1679-80). As a result of his transgressions, Nabugodenozar becomes one of the grotesques which are depicted in Baldazar's paper castles: a hairy, uncouth beast who eats grass, exiled from human space and company as well as the human capacity to reason which had previously dwelled within him. His declaration of himself as "god of þe grounde" becomes ironically, literally true once God transforms him into a beast of the land, eating the grass growing upon the ground.

After telling the story of Nabugodenozar's penitential journey as an animal and his eventual repentance and restoration to his rightful station, Daniel then attacks Baltazar for his impieties in general and indicts him for violating the vessels in particular: "'And now His vessayles avyled in vanyté vnclene,/Þat in His hows hym to honour were heuened of first...'" (1713-4). Daniel contrasts the original placement of the vessels in the "hows" of God with the fact that the vessels are no longer in that sanctified spot and how they also in turn now contain unsanctified wine. Because of this invasion of the vessels by wine dedicated to false gods and debauchery, and because of the removal of the vessels from their protective rooms in the castle, Daniel states that the grisly hand had in turn invaded the hall in order to warn Baltazar of his fate:

> "And for þat froþande fylþe, þe Fader of heuen
> Hatz sende into þis sale þise sy3tes vncowþe,
> Þe fyste with þe fyngeres þat flayed þi hert,
> Þat rasped renyschly þe wo3e with þe ro3 penne." (1721-4)

The roughness of the pen as described by Daniel underscores the violence of any violation: the rough treatment received by the vessels, the places where they had been kept and the divine laws which Baltazar had flouted, as well as the violence of the imminent invasion of both Baltazar's palace and his body.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

True to Daniel's interpretation of God's prophecy, later that evening, "Baltazar to his bedd with blysse watz caryed" (1765), and in the morning, the armies of the Medes and Persians stealthily invade the city "er any steuen rysed" (1778). This arrival of doom in the morning refers back to Sodom and Gomorrah, which was also destroyed in the early morning hours (893-6). The silence and stealth of their approach then erupts into sudden violence as each house is broken into and its inhabitants slain, as the flood had done to the houses of sinners in the Noah story, and as the Babylonians had done to the people of Jerusalem. The deaths of ordinary people and the king himself are juxtaposed:

> Segges slepande wer slayne er þay slyppe my3t;
> Vche hous heyred watz withinne a hondewhyle.
> Baltazar in his bed watz beten to deþe,
> Þat boþe his blod and his brayn blende on þe cloþes....[127] (1785-8)

The city's invasion is consistent with all of the other instances of violation in the poem in its use of the word *withinne.* Though here it is in the context of "within a short space of time," the word recalls Baltazar's earlier invasion of the places where the vessels were kept and the benign example of Noah and his family sheltered "withinne" the vessel of the ark and Christ "withinne" his mother's womb. The connection between Baltazar's violation of the vessels and the violation of his own body is made clearer in the next stanza:

> The kyng in his cortyn watz ka3t bi þe heles,
> Feryed out bi þe fete and fowle dispysed.
> Þat watz so do3ty þat day and drank of þe vessayl
> Now is a dogge also dere þat in a dych lygges. (1789-92)

Not only is it ironic that the man who had had the presumption to use sacred vessels as feasting-cups is now himself treated as callously as a dog who lies dead

---

[127]The Bible merely reports on Baltazar's death; the grisly manner of his execution does not appear in the scriptural text.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in a ditch, but the punishment of Baltazar--being cast out of the palace, wrapped in the bloody "cloþes" and "cortyn" "fyled" with the "werkkes" of his awful demise, and exiled likewise from divine grace--is also a result of his literal as well as moral transgression of sacred boundaries. Because of his invasion of the sanctuary of the vessels and mistreatment of the vessels themselves, his kingdom is invaded and his own body mistreated.

Even the land itself suffers from the transgressions of its ruler, as the earth had suffered flooding and destruction in earlier times because of the misdeeds of its inhabitants. The poet connects the fate of the land to its king's misuse of the vessels which had once resided in the privileged space of "Goddez hous": "And þus watz þat londe lost for þe lordes synne,/And þe fylþe of þe freke þat defowled hade/Þe ornements of Goddez hous þat holy were maked" (1796-9). Because Baltazar had violated the privileged space of the temple and the enclosures of the vessels, his land in turn suffers invasion and subjection to a foreign power. Charlotte Morse connects this punishment of the land for the transgressions of Baltazar with the despoiling of the Sodomites' land because of their wrongdoings: "Just as the Sodomites pollute their city by sin, the sacrilege Belshazzar commits upon himself and then upon the Temple vessels extends also to the land" (Morse 198). As a result of his transgression, Baltazar also suffers exile both from his rulership and, in death, from the sight of God:

> He watz corsed for his vnclannes, and cached þerinne,
> Done doun of his dyngneté for dedez vnfayre,
> And of þyse worldes worchyp wrast out for euer,
> And 3et of lykynges on lofte letted, I trowe:
> To loke on oure lofly Lorde late bitydes. (1800-4)

Because Baltazar had been caught by God "þerinne" his unclean state, he is cast out of earthly honor and reward as well as exiled from heavenly bliss, forever to be "þeroute."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poet then ends the narrative with a prayer that, unlike Baltazar, who awards clean clothes to prophets whom he does not heed while refusing to wear clean deeds himself, "Þat we gon gay in oure gere þat grace He vus sende,/Þat we may serue in His sy3t, þer solace neuer blynnez" (1811-2). The poet implores God to grant himself and his readers the favor of allowing them to be in God's presence cleanly clad, and thus worthy of inheriting a place "withinne" the sacred, clean space of heaven. Unlike Baltazar, whose outward opulence of clothing and feasting had disguised a filthiness within, and who thus merited exile from the heavenly court, the poet expresses his hope in the last lines that the readers of his poem will be found as clean as the sacred vessels which are worthy containers for the divine spirit.

The word "gere" in 1811 echoes "God and His gere" (15) at the beginning of the poem. Whereas this instance of *gere* in 1811 ostensibly refers to clothing, the initial reference which it recalls refers to the *gere* of the sacraments, the vessels which priests must be pure of soul in order to handle. Thus being clean of heart and deed does not mean simply wearing clean clothes. It means becoming a clean vessel for God, undefiled by debauchery or any "vsage vnclene." The poem thus ends with an image of the potential enclosure of the reader and the author, the "vus" who also appear at the end of *Pearl:* the "vus" who is offered a vision of the eucharistic sacrament which can lead them on the path to salvation, culminating in their placement in the heavenly *cofer* by God. This final vessel image leads Earl Schreiber to the assertion that the poem itself is a kind of vessel:

> ...the poet is a vessel filled with wisdom drawn from the words of other men, and his poem is likewise a vessel filled with his wisdom and shaped by his function as teacher and discloser of truth. The reader similarly must draw wisdom from the poem so that he may make his vessel more pure and pleasing to God. (Schreiber 151)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Though both *Pearl* and *Clannesse* thus end with an attempt at closure, where the reader and author are both gathered in to the community of the blessed, *Clannesse* ends with a hoped-for enclosure as well as closure: the acceptance of "vus" into the protective space of salvation. The ostensible circularity and closure of the poem, apparent in both the parallelism between the two very different courts at the beginning and ending of the poem and in the poet's attempt to gather the reader into a unified community of the saved, reflects a need to place God and divine law at the center of the universe as well as to make the universe seem a coherent, orderly text, or, as Michael Camille writes, "With God at the center of the medieval panopticon, 'all-seeing' and everywhere at once, most models of the cosmos, society and even literary style, were circular and centripetal" (*Image on the Edge* 14).

While the poem's ending is a reassuring gesture towards narrative closure as well as triumphant, redemptive spatial enclosure, this closure cannot dismiss the progressive disturbances in the initial inside/outside representation of salvation and damnation. Though the poem commences with binary distinctions between the saved as enclosed in a protective space and the damned being cast out of that space, these distinctions are rendered increasingly ambiguous in each succeeding biblical narrative. Though the wedding-feast narrative seems to present a clearly-drawn picture of enclosure and exclusion, the way in which this binary spatial opposition is treated in the three main narratives of the poem is more ambiguous and problematic.

In the Noah story, the distinction between Noah's family safely within the ark and the sinners outside is complicated by the sympathy which the author expresses for the excluded, even if God does not evince the same sympathy. Their behavior before their deaths may indicate their (tardy) repentance in the face of drowning, but even so, their nobility calls into question the reason for

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

their punishment. In the Sodom and Gomorrah story, the city, which had a protective function in the Middle Ages, with sturdy walls designed to defend it from invaders, does not protect its guests--in fact, it is inside of the city that these guests are threatened with bodily harm. In addition, Lot, who is considered virtuous enough to be spared the destruction of the city (and ironically he must go outside of the city in order to be delivered), behaves in questionable ways. The poem is oddly silent about his willingness to sacrifice his daughters to the mob outside of his house. Though his offer is presented in terms of a desire to restore social order by teaching the citizens about heterosexual love, the poem (following the Bible) pointedly ignores the fact that Lot is offering his daughters to a violent mob who will undoubtedly rape them. It is ironic that a story which is so concerned with transgressions against the integrity of both buildings and (male) bodies, as well as accepted customs, is silent about a potential transgression against the female body, which Gravdal considers the ultimate protected space (Gravdal 6), and which, in the form of the Virgin Mary's body, remains an inviolate container: enclosing Christ without having to be invaded to effect this enclosure. The poem is also silent about the incest scene which occurs after Lot and his family have escaped from Sodom. The location of Lot, the angels and his family inside of the house and the Sodomites outside may seem consistent with the wedding feast's presentation of the chosen inside the hall and the rejected outside, but the disruptive elements above call this structure into question.

In the Baltazar episode, the distinctions between inside and outside, invaders and invaded, are blurred even further. Both at the beginning and the ending of this episode, the forces which invade, rather than the invaded, are on the side of God. While the poet attempts to explain that the invasions of Jerusalem and Baltazar's palace and body are punishments from God, the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

sufferings of the innocent are also highlighted even more clearly in the Noah story, where God "hates" the people for their sins. The juxtaposed images of the disembowled women and the gutted temple recall in inverse fashion the integrity of the virgin Mary's womb even after her conception of Christ, and the integrity of the *gere* of the eucharist. Again, though the violation of "wyves and wenches" and the temple are apparently sanctioned by God, the pitiful descriptions of these invaded spaces and persons seem to militate against unqualified approval of their invasion.

In addition, while the Baltazar episode ends with the casting of the king's body out of his castle and into a ditch, probably the most degrading exclusion of the poem, the careful reader will not have missed the fact that those who are slain outside of the palace walls are innocent of Baltazar's crimes. The king's crimes also take place not on the spatial or social margins of his city, but inside the privileged enclosure of his palace, which is a diabolic reversal of the heavenly castle and its wedding feast at the beginning of the poem. Furthermore, while the initial castle is the site of a socially acceptable bonding (i.e. ,a marriage), the final castle of the poem is the site of an unacceptable bonding (the celebration is, among other things, Baltazar's attempt to legitimate his selection of many concubines, whom he forces his guests to refer to as "ladies" in line 1370 and to whom the poet even refers as "cler" in 1400.) But the most potentially subversive invasion of all is when God's own hand performs the very bodily invasion which the Sodomites threaten when God's "gropande" hand flays the flesh of the frightened Baltazar.

This progressive questioning of the spatialized morality of center and margin presented in the narrative of the wedding feast is perhaps the best expression of the fear of invasion--the forcible penetration of the sacred spaces of vessels, buildings, bodies and the closed sphere of social protocol--which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pervades the poem. The ultimate invasion of *Clannesse* is not the violation of the vessels of ark, body, house or chalice. It is the violation of the structures which have upheld the distinctions between proper and improper conduct, as well as the structures which have upheld the poem itself. While the "text" of the ruined lands of Sodom and Gomorrah should be able to warn its readers away from the paths of sin, the "text" of Baltazar's paper castles represents another possibility: a cosmos in miniature which exemplifies not cosmic and social order, but the bestial breakdown of both, a cosmos in which the *baboynes* who normally appear on the margins of texts become central to them as the only inhabitants of these worlds cut out of paper. The increasingly fluid boundaries between inside and outside, center and margin, sinner and saint, in the poem cause the cosmos-in-miniature of this text to resemble not so much the vessels of Solomon, with their stylized depictions of the fecund natural world which follows the law of *kynde* and the idealized social setting of the castle, in which social norms are encoded, but the world of Baltazar's paper castles: a world where the marginalized beings become central and the invaders and violators receive the benediction of both God and the poem.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## In "Termes of Judé": Confining Spaces and the Borders of Understanding in *Patience*

At the end of *Clannesse*, the reader is left with a sense of enclosures shattered. The nested physical enclosures of Baltazar's palace, the inner sanctum of his bedroom and his curtained bed, have failed to protect him from the invasion of the Medes and Persians, and even the innermost enclosure of his own body is ruptured to spill its contents on the bedsheets. Additionally, in a symbolic sense, other "enclosures" are ruptured. The ranks of those excluded from God's mercy are filled with innocent victims whom the poet describes sympathetically, causing the reader to notice disturbing undercurrents in the poem's depiction of God's separation of the clean from the unclean.

*Patience* similarly presents several instances of the penetration or complete destruction of enclosed spaces, but features a vastly different approach to enclosures. While in *Clannesse*, enclosures generally represent places of shelter for the redeemed, where they can be preserved from contamination by the damned and ultimately spared the fate of the corrupt people "peroute," in *Patience*, narrow, confined spaces become metaphors for the correspondingly limited, circumscribed perspectives of human beings ignorant of God's mercy. These narrow spaces (and analogous bounded perspectives) exist in opposition to open spaces, which represent both the wider physical world outside of a dark, cramped enclosure and the ostensibly broader perspective of God. Though

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jonas[128] seeks narrow spaces to hide from his destiny as the prophet to the Ninevites, and as an expression of his own mental confinement, God teaches Jonas a broader understanding by manipulating Jonah's passage through the moralized geography of the poem.

Previous readings of *Patience* have concentrated on this spatial and moral pattern. In "Sheltering Space and Cosmic Space in the Middle English *Patience*," Laurence Eldredge contrasts Jonas's desire to hide in shelters with God's subsequent casting out of Jonas from each of these shelters into larger expanses of terrain and a similarly expanded moral perspective. He also discusses the educational function of space in *Patience:* "...the poet creates a series of counter-spaces to oppose Jonah's shelters and to correct his limited view of divine power and mercy" ("Sheltering Space" 121). He then contrasts Jonas's reliance on physical spaces for shelter with the more proper metaphorical reliance of the Christian on the Beatitudes, which ensure that he or she will have a shelter in heaven: "...rather than closing out possibilities, like Jonah's shelters, it [the Beatitudes] opens the way to heaven and salvation. This is the sort of liberating shelter of which Jonah's succession of shelters are merely parodies" (Eldredge 128). Besides the Beatitudes, Eldredge asserts, Christians ought to take shelter in the church and the sanctuary of the heart, the interior cathedral where God resides, and Jonas's shelters indicate his lack of faith in these physical or metaphorical structures because these shelters take the form of distorted churches. He uses the example of the ship in particular, which he describes as an upside-down church, perhaps symbolic of Jonas's inversion of Christian principles.[129] Gary D. Schmidt concentrates more specifically on the moral

---

[128]When referring to the *Pearl*-poet's character, I use "Jonas," the poet's own spelling. When referring to Jonah in the Bible, I use "Jonah."

[129]It would be more proper, however, to state that a church is an upside-down ship. Jesus' selection of fishermen as his disciples ("fishers of men") gives rise to a collection of maritime metaphors for the church, both as a spiritual entity and as a physical edifice. The most famous of these would be

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

topography of the whale as a commentary on Jonas's confined sensibilities; S. L. Clark and J. N. Wasserman have a similar focus in "Jonah and the Whale: Narrative Perspective in *Patience.*" Sarah Stanbury connects Jonas's moral state to his lack of visual acuity in his narrow spaces. In each of his shelters (ship, whale, woodbine), "...Jonah is engulfed in darkness, a condition dramatically paralleling his failures to perceive larger orders of creation and power" *(Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 72). She asserts that each of these spaces is "defined and ordered by the physical placement of Jonah, their chief inhabitant and viewer" (72). The poem is marked by "spatial boundaries that the prophet repeatedly sets as a screen or decoy between himself and God" (72). Stanbury also discusses Jonas's attempts to hide from God's sight in his shelters, as opposed to the visual penetrability of these places by the divine eye--a theme in *Clannesse* as well, as I have discussed in the previous chapter.

I am interested in developing these insights further by exploring how the locative vocabulary which informs the spatial thesis of the poem--the words *mote, poynt, termes* and *wayes*--express both spatial concepts and moral progress. The *poynt* which appears at the beginning and end of the poem in reference to patience itself, and which recurs throughout, characterizes patience not merely as a virtue, but as both a point in space and a point in an argument.[130] The various

---

the image of the church community as Noah's Ark mentioned in the previous chapter. The *Pearl*-poet makes use of the metaphor when he refers to the necessity of steering one's heart in the introduction to *Patience,* transforming the heart into a seagoing vessel. The church as an edifice also takes its form partially from that of a ship--for example, the main sanctuary of a ship is called the nave.

[130]Among the definitions which *The Middle English Dictionary* furnishes for *poynt,* the following are relevant to the way in which the word is used in *Patience:* "A small dot marked on a surface; also, a punctuation mark, period", "A point in space, a place, spot, location, ?also, a restricted space, narrow passage," "A point in time, a specific time," "A critical or decisive moment or situation, a crisis; the point of action or decision; the brink of disaster," "A subject, topic, theme; question for discussion, issue; also, a question, inquiry," "State of being, condition, situation, disposition" (1087-91). *The Oxford English Dictionary* adds two other relevant definitions: "that at which one aims...object, end. Also, (the expression of) an important fact or truth; a noteworthy comment" (XI. 1128).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

points on Jonas's journey act as individual points in an argument of God. These spatial and argumentative points teach Jonas two lessons: that God's awareness of and concern for the world extends beyond Jonas's narrow-minded limits, and that despite Jonas's efforts to escape his destiny, as the ruler of space, God can manipulate Jonas's journey so that he reaches Nineveh. God's manipulation of Jonas's spaces (both those which he chooses and those which he is forced into, like the whale) has a paradoxical character. Though Jonas's choice of confining spaces is consistent with his confined consciousness, God casts Jonas into various cramped places in order to teach him a broader perspective towards the cosmos. But Jonas is also expected to view smallness in a new way--not as narrowness of perspective, but as humility or poverty of spirit. At the end of the poem, Jonas is expected to become a *poynt* in the sense of a humble, patient person who acknowledges his own smallness in the vast cosmos and accepts that whatever befalls him is a result of God's plan. Thus the *poynt* of patience is a spatial term which also identifies what Jonas is and what he should become. Paradoxically, by recognizing the breadth of the cosmos and God's concern for it, Jonas can become small in the right way, as a humble *poynt*.

The word *termes*, which also appears frequently in the poem, has spatial and moral resonances as well.[131] Jonas's limited cosmic awareness is expressed

---

[131] *The Middle English Dictionary* offers the following relevant definitions of *termes:* "A limit of space or capacity," "a temporal limit," "terme of brede (latitude)," "?personal limitation, limitation of character or wit [a speculative interpretation which would especially fit Jonas]," "the boundary of a territory, a border; also, a boundary marker," "the territory encompassed by a border; also, the uttermost reaches of the earth, heaven, etc.; also, a part of a country, district,""the edge of an object, a bodily member, etc.; the side of a bodily structure," "A specific point in time; a time appointed for the performance of an action," "the temporal duration of a life," "A word; also, a grouping of words," "the technical vocabulary associated with a particular field, jargon," "A condition, stipulation, guarantee" (238-42). The phrase "putten out of termes" also means "to banish (a group of people)" (238), as Jonas does (albeit mentally) with the Ninevites. *The Oxford English Dictionary* associates *termes* more directly with limits, spatial or intellectual: "That which limits the extent of anything; a limit, extremity, boundary, bound (e.g. of a territory, region, or space)...Limits, bounds, borders, confines" (XVII. 799). The dictionary provides the phrase "termes of Judé" as an instance of this usage.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by the phrase "termes of Judé," which is the phrase that begins his story. Here Jonas has not yet left the physical borders of his land, and even when he journeys beyond Judea, he finds it difficult to leave its mental and cultural "borders" behind. God shows concern for the Ninevites despite their exclusion from the geographical and symbolic "termes of Judé," but Jonas does not wish to exhort them to repent because they belong to another culture, one whose violence and criminality he fears. Because they are not members of the chosen people, Jonas expresses bafflement at why God would want to deliver them. However, by the end of the poem, God's *termes* are contrasted with Jonas's. While Jonas has no room in his world-view for anyone outside of Judea, God's *termes* are broad enough to admit everyone. (How God characterizes those who are admitted to God's mercy is problematic, however, for God seems to reinstate as many narrow perspectives as Jonas is encouraged to abandon, as I will discuss later.)

But the "termes of Judé" which restrict Jonas to his narrow shelters and thoughts are not merely an expression of a universal human condition, namely the reliance of human beings on arbitrarily determined cultural standards and perspectives. This phrase also encompasses limiting medieval Christian cultural "termes" and prejudices. Jonas's continuing ignorance and stubbornness, his refuge-taking in narrow spaces and beliefs, are also typical features in patristic and medieval Christian polemics against Jews. The poet emphasizes these stereotypical features of Jonas, enlarging upon the Bible's depiction of the prophet to exaggerate his supposedly Jewish vices. In fact, the Bible never speculates on Jonah's motives nor demeans his character, merely reporting his unwillingness to prophesy to Nineveh, whereas the *Pearl*-poet not only imputes motives of cowardice and selfishness to him, but also portrays him as foolish and childish, a figure of fun, and associates all those features with his Jewishness by

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

calling him "Jonas the Jwe" precisely when he is most unflatteringly presented. I will discuss this under-examined aspect of the poet's moral cosmos with references to contemporary and earlier representations of Jews in religious writings and iconography, as well as how the poet's caricature of "Jonas the Jwe" is at odds with Christian identifications of Jonas as a type of Christ.

Another spatial term which reappears in the poem is "wayes." Ostensibly referring to one's path through space, *wayes* also refers to one's moral and spiritual direction. Initially Jonas chooses to disobey God's commandment to preach at Nineveh and seeks "sum oþer way"--a direction as far away from Nineveh as possible so that God cannot locate him, but also metaphorically a moral direction away from God. However, his experiences at God's spatial mercy, where he ends up going in God's direction (towards his destiny and on the right path of obedience), reveal to Jonas that all *wayes* lead to God. At the end of the poem, the poet encourages Jonas to go forth his *wayes,* which, one might conjecture, have become in harmony with God's *wayes.* However, the poem does not specify whose *wayes* are meant, or even if Jonas is just being told to return home. The reader is also left with the disturbing suggestion that one will be forced to follow God's *wayes* regardless, thus calling into question the very nature of the story of Jonas: if he was going to end up in Nineveh anyway, what was the point of his resistance? Indeed, does free will exist in a universe where God controls one's motion through space?

In the poem's initial evocation of its central *poynt,* patience is presented not just as a concept, but as a metaphorical "place" of shelter, particularly in times of distress:

> Pacience is a poynt, þa3 hit displese ofte.
> When heuy herttes ben hurt with heþyng oþer elles,
> Suffraunce may aswagen hem and þe swelme leþe,
> For ho quelles vche a qued and quenches malyce..... (1-4)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

While suffering can cause one to feel physically and psychologically "displaced," patience offers support and shelter, particularly to people afflicted by poverty, which is by definition a state which deprives one of one's place: a stable home or a reliable means of financial support. The poet argues that a poor person is safer taking shelter in patience than in protesting against misfortune: "For quoso suffer cowþe syt, sele wolde fol3e,/And quo for þro may no3t þole, þe þikker he sufferes." (5-6)[132] This condition of patient forbearance, the *poynt* of *Patience* which Jonas does not yet inhabit, is like the condition of being "wythouten spot" in *Pearl* in that it is a spiritual state which is described spatially, but which is not spatially dependent. When Jonas flees his misfortunes by taking shelter in narrow spaces, he actually exacerbates his sufferings, for he refuses to realize that the only "place" where he can be secure against misfortune is his own heart, if only he could render it quiet and steadfast enough to take shelter there. This paradoxical place which is not a place echoes the spotlessness which the narrator of *Pearl* must attain: a simultaneous lack of attachment to a particular mortal place and lack of sin in the soul.

The poet then suggests an antidote to suffering in the Beatitudes, which, according to Eldredge, function as a metaphorical shelter from distress. Unlike Jonas's unsuccessful places of refuge, which are expressions of his lack of understanding of and refusal to submit to his place in the cosmos, the poet's translation of the Beatitudes presents the importance of recognizing one's own

---

[132]Francis Cairns speculates on several Latin sources for the *Pearl*-poet's association between patience and material poverty. In *De Patientia*, chapter 11, Tertullian discusses the beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and interprets this verse as a commandment to endure patiently whatever adversity God sends, for example, material poverty. Augustine's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount makes a similar point. (Cairns 7). However, the most nearly contemporary reference to patience and poverty occurs in Alain de Lille's influential and popular twelfth-century manual on preaching, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*. In chapter 15 of this manual, "...Alanus contrives to associate patience--in fact the last beatitude--closely with (spiritual) poverty--the first beatitude" (11). Alain also connects spiritual poverty with "natural" or material poverty and prescribes patience for dealing with the latter (12). Because of his uncomplaining sufferings on behalf of humanity, Alain identifies Christ as the quintessence of patience (13).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"place" or condition in the world and the heavenly reward for one's forbearance in the face of such a condition. The poet associates having little place or power in the mortal world and being granted a larger place in the heavenly scheme, even to the point of possessing the heavenly realm if one has nothing on earth:

> Thay arn happen þat han in hert pouerté,
> For hores is þe heuen-ryche to holde for euer;
> Þay arn happen also þat haunte mekenesse,
> For þay schal welde þis worlde and alle her wylle haue;
> Thay arn happen also þat for her harme wepes,
> For þay schal comfort encroche in kythes ful mony.... (13-18)

The poet's paraphrase of the Beatitudes frequently makes use of locative words. The poet translates "pauperes spiritu" (poor of spirit) as those who "han in hert pouerté," as if poverty dwelled within them rather than merely afflicting them. Similarly, the meek *(mites)* are those who both exercise humility and "haunte," or dwell, in that condition.[133] Those who repent of their sins shall have comfort in many lands--a statement which does not appear in the Bible, which merely reads, "Beati qui lugent," "blessed are they who mourn," a verse which medieval exegetes commonly glossed "those who mourn for their own sins or those of others" (Andrew and Waldron 184). As their reward, the meek, the poor of spirit and the penitent are granted possession of the world and the kingdom of heaven, a reward which the poet marks with curiously martial and

---

[133]*The Middle English Dictionary* lists a number of applicable definitions of *haunte*. The most obvious one for this passage is "to practice (a virtue, righteousness, etc.)" (530), but, because the poet so often combines spatial and moral terminology, he could also have intended *haunte* to suggest "to stay (in a place); dwell in, live in" (519). Just as the *poynt* of patience is both a virtue and a place, the meek both practice and dwell in the virtue of humility. A *haunte* can also be "A topic, a subject of discussion" according to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (VII. 12). Though here the virtuous abide within it, *The Oxford English Dictionary* also claims that a "haunt" can be "a den or place frequented by the lower animals or by criminals" (VII. 12). But one other meaning of *haunte* is interesting in light of the poet's obsession with sexual vice in *Clannesse*. *The Middle English Dictionary* states that *haunten* can also mean "to resort to (someone's body) for sexual intercourse, have intercourse with" (529). Though there is no sexual implication here, this other significance of *haunte* recalls how in *Clannesse*, transgressors "haunte" or dwell in their transgressions, which frequently involve trying to "haunte" the bodies of unauthorized partners.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bodily metaphors. They can "welde" and "holde" these spaces, as if both realms could be both ruled ("welde[d]") and grasped in the hand. These dazzling rewards for earthly humility establish that patience and forbearance are the shelters which one can take against misfortune, and that these are far more effective than the narrow spaces--and the narrow world-view--of Jonas.

Among those who are offered heavenly rewards are those who are capable of steering their hearts: "Þay ar happen also þat con her hert stere,/For hores is þe heuen-ryche, as I er sayde" (27-8). Those who are able to guide their desires are likened to pilots of a ship. The ship image is reminiscent of the medieval metaphor of the church as a ship and, more particularly, Noah's ark in *Clannesse*. Because Noah is "ay glydande wyth his God" (296), steering his heart and not succumbing to the lawless passions of those around him, he is rewarded by being allowed to build and live in the ark, which will protect him from the flood. Similarly, those who steer their hearts are rewarded with control over the heavenly kingdom. This ship image is also in direct contrast to Jonas's behavior later on. He books passage on a ship not to heed God's will but to flee from it, and as a result he not only is incapable of steering the "ship" of his heart, but he is also incapable of steering the real ship (in fact, he is responsible for the mariners' inability to steer it) or exerting control over his journey--he ends up exactly where God had wanted him to be. If, on the other hand, one becomes the humble *poynt* of patience, the poet indicates that one can take refuge in the promise of the Beatitudes that one will have eternal shelter and comfort in the heavenly kingdom.

In the subsequent lines, the poet speaks in the first person, apparently addressing his own situation. He asserts that he is not speaking of poverty and humility as abstract concepts, but reveals that he himself is experiencing them firsthand: "Bot syn I am put to a poynt þat pouerté hatte,/I schal me poruay

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pacience and play me with boþe...." (35-36) Poverty, like patience itself, is described as a *poynt*: a figurative place or state of being where one is forced to be the humble *poynt* which occupies little space and makes no demands. The poet hopes that the monetary meekness and humility to which he is currently subject will enable him to learn a corresponding poverty of the heart, a spiritual meekness and humility which will gain him a heavenly reward. However, the poet does not express his resignation to poverty without irony. Poverty is depicted as an invader of one's life, as if it could break into and enter one's dwelling and force one to live with it, a state of affairs which the poet describes somewhat comically, as if poverty were an unpleasant houseguest who never wants to leave:

> For þeras pouert hir proferes ho nyl be put utter,
> Bot lenge wheresoeuer hir lyst, lyke oþer greme;
> And þereas pouert enpresses, þa3 mon pyne þynk,
> Much, maugré his mun, he mot nede suffer.... (41-44)

However, this humorous depiction of the poet enduring the invasive presence of poverty also has graver resonances from *Clannesse.* These lines are reminiscent of the invasive forces of various sinners and despoilers, who would not "be put utter" but instead demolish everything inside.

The poet then continues his humorous depiction of reluctant forbearance when he describes poverty and patience as "playferes" (45) and thus admits, albeit somewhat grudgingly, it seems, that it is better to accept them both together, since they come as a pair anyway: "Syþen I am sette with hem samen, suffer me byhoues;/Þenne is me ly3tloker hit lyke and her lotes prayse,/Þenne whyþer wyth and be wroth and þe wers haue" (46-8). The poet's humorous representation of poverty and patience as playmates reflects his earlier, serious description of the two as inseparable. Poverty of spirit should accompany material oppression and destitution in order to result in a heavenly reward, as

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he says in lines 37-9: "For in þe tyxte þere þyse two arn in teme layde,/Hit arn fettled in on forme, þe forme and þe laste,/And by quest of her quoyntyse enquylen on mede." ("Þe tyxte" refers to the Beatitudes which he had heard read at mass in line 9.) The word *sette,* which had a more humorous context here of being "stuck with" both patience and poverty, also recalls other, more serious and spatial references: the *Pearl*-maiden's setting, for example. Therefore, though the poet envisions himself being forced to endure poverty with patience, he can also see himself "set" in a place which will eventually allow him to possess the spotless spot of heaven if he endures faithfully and without "grychchyng" (49).

But the poet does not only complain about being confined to close quarters with poverty. He also broadcasts his distress at being made to go on journeys which he does not desire to, much as Jonas is forced to go to Nineveh and preach there, whether he wishes to or not. The poet explains how complaining about these errands will do nothing to change his situation: "Oþer 3if my lege lorde lyst on lyue me to bidde/Oþer to ryde oþer to renne to Rome in his ernde,/What grayþed me þe grychchyng bot grame more seche?" (51-3). Andrew and Waldron comment that "Rome" should be metaphorically interpreted to mean a long and difficult journey and also argue that

> Possibly the preacher-narrator also implies the situation of a priest sent to Rome by his bishop.... If so, this would serve to emphasize both the specific connection between Jonah and the narrator as men under an obligation to preach the Word of God, and (in more general terms) the universal relevance of the ensuing story of Jonah. (187)

The poet's complaint about being compelled to go on long, arduous journeys in the service of his lord provides a perfect opportuntiy to present

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jonas's story as an example of the necessity of patience.[134] The poet uses Jonas's story to indicate the necessity of taking shelter not in literal places where one can hide temporarily from hardships, but in the knowledge that one will eventually be rewarded for one's obedience. Before beginning to tell the story, the poet requests of the reader, "Wyl ye tary a lyttel tyme and tent me awhyle" (59), as if entreating the reader to exercise the very virtue which the poem will explicate. The poet places the reader in the position of a patient listener, much as the poet exhibits forbearance in the face of poverty and Jonas is expected to be patient in the midst of his trials.

The word *sette* appears again in these lines, immediately after its more lighthearted appearance in line 46: "Did not Jonas in Judé suche jape sumwhile?/To sette hym to sewrté, vnsounde he him feches." (ll. 57-8) Unlike the poet, who is *sette* in poverty and is determined to endure it through the assistance of patience, Jonas wishes to *sette* himself in a secure state by investing his trust in the various shelters which he seeks out in an attempt to evade the sight and control of God. Ironically, these "settings" are not providers of *sewrté* for Jonas, but instead cause him to face greater hardships. Instead of seeking protection in a physical place, Jonas is expected to seek protection in a state of mind: patience, with which he can endure his troubles and thus not flee but remain where he is, in the shelter of a strong, accepting heart. The juxtaposition of "Judé" and "sette" also characterizes Jonas's restriction to the *termes* of his land. Additionally, it expresses medieval Christian culture's view of Jews as stubborn people who are "sette" in their ways and calcified in their beliefs.[135]

---

[134]Myra Stokes observes that "...there is no precedent in exegetic or homiletic tradition for the use of the Book of Jonah as a *forbisne* linked to the virtue of 'patience'" (Stokes 354). Job is the biblical character more typically linked with patience. In fact, Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1270-1349) associated Jonah with impatience in *Postillae super totam bibliam.* He makes the connection three times: twice in his gloss of Jonah 4,4 and once in his gloss of Jonah 4,5 (Cairns 14).

[135]This attitude appears frequently in anti-Jewish polemics. For example, Peter the Venerable (c. 1092-1156) cites three different biblical passages calling the Hebrews "stiff-necked" ("Populae

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poem continues this theme when it situates the Jonah story in its proper place, time and biblical context: "Hit bitydde sumtyme in þe termes of Judé,/Jonas joyned watz þerinne Jentyle prophete." (61-2) Ironically, though the poet is careful to set Jonas and his story "þerinne" the *termes* or boundaries of his own land, Jonas's comforting boundaries--his *termes* both in the sense of known geography and familiar language and concepts--are violated in the very next line, when he is made "Jentyle prophete." Becoming a prophet to the Gentiles means that Jonas will not only have to leave the "termes of Judé," his familiar lands and people, but he will also have to leave behind certain limiting cultural concepts.

But Jonas's "termes of Judé" do not just refer to how Jonas himself has limiting, culturally-determined attitudes to other lands and people. This phrase also encapsulates how medieval Christians defined the "termes" of Jewishness in a narrow and negative way--specifically, negative depictions of medieval Jews. While Jonas was a pre-Christian Jew, the way in which he is represented suggests the prejudices which medieval Christians bore toward their Jewish contemporaries. Though the Book of Jonah makes only one reference to Jonah's Jewishness (namely when he reveals that he is a Hebrew in response to the mariners' interrogation of him), the poet mentions Jonas's geographical and religious placement five times--quite a lot when one considers the brief length of the poem and the fact that the reader could probably have known, or remembered after being told initially, that Jonas was "an Ebru." Each time one of

---

durae cervicis es"--col. 507) in the prologue to *Adversus Judaeorum inveteratam duritiem.* (Though these passages were originally written by Hebrew prophets to admonish their own people, anti-Semitic polemicists applied them to their own purposes.). Peter also accuses the Jews of having stony hearts and closed senses--blind eyes and deaf ears ("Caeci plane oculis, surdi auribus, lapidei cordibus"--col. 507). Thus his picture of the Jews (and that of other writers, particularly of the later Middle Ages) is one of living enclosures, Jonas's narrow refuges translated into human beings.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

these references appears, Jonas is portrayed in an unflattering light, thus associating Jonas's more negative qualities with his Jewishness.

Though I will discuss each of these particular occasions as they arise in the narrative itself, a more general discussion of the sources of the *Pearl*-poet's anti-Semitic portrait of Jonas is in order, while both Jonas and the reader are still "in termes of Judé." Anti-Judaic attitudes have existed among Christian exegetes since patristic times. However, these attitudes become increasingly virulent in the later Middle Ages. Augustine's classic statements in *Adversus Judaeos* (as compared to late medieval approaches) are summed up by Jeremy Cohen: "Augustine...instructed that God had ordained the survival of the Jews, in order that their presence and continued observance of Mosaic Law might aid the Church in its mission to the Gentiles, and so they might convert at the end of days" (Cohen 14). Of course, some patristic writers expressed more violently negative sentiments, like Jerome, who called the synagogue "a synagogue of Satan," Constantine, who referred to the synagogue in one of his laws as a *conciliabulum*, a term reserved for brothels in Roman slang (Parkes 12), and the especially vitriolic John Chrysostom, who characterized the synagogue as "a place of 'disgraceful behavior...[and] indecorous dances...ruled by gluttony and licentiousness" (Stow 25). Ambrose is barely more civil, calling the synagogue "'a home of unbelief, a house of impiety, a receptacle of folly which God himself has condemned'" (Stow 25). But however vicious these early polemics are, they still represent a particular attitude towards Jews discussed by Amos Funkenstein and then elaborated upon (and to some extent critiqued) by Jeremy Cohen, which would change in the later Middle Ages. Cohen explains that in general, patristic and early medieval anti-Judaic works addressed a Judaism of the past (what Cohen calls "a stagnant theological artifact"--Cohen 27), and their tone was condemning but not violent towards individual Jews. The main aim of these

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

polemics was to counteract a fear of Jewish proselytizing among early Christians by making Judaism seem obsolete and unattractive. However, later medieval polemics took a different direction. Contemporary Jews became their focus, and post-biblical theological works, the Talmud in particular, were attacked as evidence of present-day Jewish "perfidy" (Cohen 23-4).

A consistent motif in both early and late anti-Jewish polemics is the Jew as an alien, an interesting irony in terms of *Patience,* where Jonas looks upon the Ninevites (and, by extension, all Gentiles) as an alien people excluded from God's covenant and the physical and spiritual territory of the chosen people. In *Contra Faustum,* Augustine compares the Jews to Cain, "forced to wander the earth in memory of his 'crime'" (Stow 18). In Augustine's tract *Adversus Judaeos,* the Jews are Esau, the rejected older son of Isaac, not Jacob, with whom Jewish commentators associated themselves and their co-religionists. The alienness of the Jews was reinforced by legislation rendering them non-citizens and strangers, forcing them to wear distinguishing items of clothing as early as 1215. James Parkes discusses the Jews' legal status in Christian European countries: that of *servitudo camerae* or "serfs of the treasury" (Parkes 106-7). Parkes refers to Jews as "private property" whom kings could give as gifts or transfer to the control of other secular rulers (Parkes 111).

The Jews' alienation from medieval Christians came to be manifested with increasing extremity. Jews were associated with heretics (Stow 31, Cohen 48) and even with the devil, as Joshua Trachtenberg attests in *The Devil and the Jews.* Representatives of the latter view included Gregory the Great *(Moralia in Iob),* Ramon Marti *(Pugo Fidei)* and Matfrei Ermengaud, a late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century writer whose *Breviari d'amor* was translated into Middle English, among other late medieval vernaculars. This association of the Jews with the devil is reflected in medieval iconography, such as the figure of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Synagoga on the central portal of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. She wears the usual blindfold, denoting the blindness of the Jews to Christ, but here the blindfold is a serpent (Stow 8).[136] I will discuss this association of Jews with Satan more fully in reference to the hell-motifs in the scene of Jonas in the whale's belly (lines 265-338).

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries witnessed particularly virulent anti-Jewish sentiments (and actions). By this time the Jews had become an embodiment of all that medieval Christian society feared and despised. Kenneth Stow explains, "In thirteenth-century France and England...Jews came to represent for both kings and barons...the inverse of the right social and political order" (Stow 7). This alienation of the Jews was pursued more easily by envisioning them as social and sexual perverts, as Stow observes:

> ...in the sermons of William of Tournai, imagined Jewish sexual perversions proved as disturbing as did creedal diversity. For reasons, therefore, that were as political and social as they were also religious, the Jews became an object onto which medievals transferred their unexplained rage, their frustrations, and, most important, the blame for social inequities (Stow 8).

A particular example that Stow offers is "Guibert de Nogent's fantasies of the Jew as agent of sexual perversion, destroyer of monkish chastity, and fomentor of incest" (34).

Jews were demonized to the extent that they were banished from the community of humanity. In *Adversus Judaeorum Inveteratum Duritiem,* Peter the Venerable alleged that "the Jews' refusal to submit to incontrovertible proofs

---

[136]Emile Mâle descries a Crucifixion scene in a window at Bourges, which includes a typical portrayal of Synagoga: "To the right of the Cross they placed the Church, to the left the Synagogue. On the one side the Church, crowned and wearing a nimbus and with a triumphal standard in her hand, receives in a chalice the water and blood that flow from the Saviour's side. On the other side the Synagogue with blindfold[ed] eyes, her crown falling from her head, still grasps the tables of the Law....The atributes given to the Synagogue were taken from the prophet, 'for we have sinned, *our eyes are covered with darkness,* our heart has become sad, and *the crown has fallen from our head"* (Mâle 188-9).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and accept Christianity has placed them outside the realm of human reason, in the category of beasts" (Cohen 28). This belief was reflected in medieval iconography, as John Boswell provides an example with the hyena. A twelfth-century and a fourteenth-century manuscript both depict the hyena as "'an unclean animal, sometimes male and sometimes female'" which represents the Jews, as the earlier text insists: "'the children of Israel are thought to be similar to this animal, since they first worshiped their lord and then, abandoning themselves to pleasure and lust, venerated idols and now pursue avarice, which is service to idols'" (Boswell fig. 9). The text of the fourteenth-century manuscript also "link[s] the supposed sexual aberrations of the hyena to the infidelity of the Jews" (fig. 12). Though neither text explicitly states that male hyenas mate with each other, Boswell notes that the illustrations display this aspect of the hyena legend, thus linking the Jews to another despised group in the Middle Ages--homosexuals (note on fig. 12). John Block Friedman cites an exegetical commentary in which Jews were pictured as dogs, an image derived from Psalm 21: 17, where the psalmist complains about being "compassed" by dogs who have wounded his hands and feet, as Christ's will be wounded on the cross:

> ...Hugh of St. Cher, following Cassiodorus, explained that allegorically the dogs were the Jews, who were called dogs because just as a dog barks at what is strange to him, so the Jews rejected the new doctrines of Jesus and barked against them. Dogs also stood for heretics who knowingly rejected the truth (Friedman 61).

Kenneth Stow relates, "Jews...were mocked, despised, and attributed with the negative qualities of owls and monkeys" (Stow 235). Just as late medieval hyena legends link Jews to homosexuals, Stow also states that Jews were connected to yet another subordinate group--women: "...women's putatively haughty and stubborn behavior, disguised by a mask of humility, was sometimes denounced

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as a replica of that of the Jews" (Stow 235). (Needless to say, women were also associated with animals, including in *Patience,* where God insists upon sparing Nineveh because of the dumb beasts and witless women who live there.)

Jews were even compared to the monstrous races. Stow writes that "The Jew had become the perennial opposite, the contrary, the inverse" (235). The twelfth-century Peter of Blois "spoke figuratively of the Jew 'changing himself into monstrous shapes'" (234). Stow comments, "What, then, could have been more logical than to make Jews into the locus of all aberrant behavior, of all alien activities, and of alienation itself?" (238). Thus through the course of the Middle Ages, the Jews (particularly contemporary Jews, who had supposedly been presented with knowledge of Christian truths, which they then rejected) were transformed from a despicable but ultimately redeemable people to a demonized, perverted, inhuman race so diabolically different from Christians that they had to live on the margins of the Christian world, like the monstrous races clustered at the southern edge of *mappaemundi.* This alienation of the Jews was social and spiritual and, eventually, physical, embodied in the ghettoes and expulsions of the later Middle Ages.

Attitudes towards the Jews in terms of their association with land are of particular interest in *Patience* because this poem, like the rest of the *Pearl*-poet's corpus, is so rich in locative imagery. Ironically, though Jonas himself is bound to his own land at least mentally, in the Middle Ages, Jews were not associated with the land, as Parkes attests:

> In descriptions of European Jewish life language is often used which implies that the medieval Jew was entirely separated from the land and from any knowledge of the processes of agriculture. ... In so far as the urban life of the Jew is concerned, it is not he who has withdrawn from the land, but the land which has withdrawn from him.... (Parkes 262).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Of course, the Jews' "withdrawal from the land" was not entirely their choice. Parkes asserts that in the thirteenth century, the public in general saw Jewish land ownership as problematic, and in England in the latter half of that century, it became impossible for a Jew to hold land. Jews gradually relinquished ownership of land because it could be more easily seized from them, and, as an inheritance, it could be taken from them (Parkes 263-4). The view of the Jews as rejected by the land makes additional sense of the commonplace idea of the "wandering Jew," punished for rejecting Christ by having no stable home--a state which Jonas unwittingly imitates in his sojourns. This difference between Jonas as bound to Judea and medieval Jews as rejected by the land itself also reflects the medieval Christian distinction between pre-Christian Jews, who still inhabited their land in accordance with God's will, and post-Christian Jews, who were rejected by that land once they had supposedly rejected Christ. This concept of post-Christian Jews as landless also appears in its most violent form in the attitudes towards Jews fostered by the Crusades and the expulsion of Jews from many European nations. Stow alleges that the attitude which Crusaders demonstrated towards the Muslims as "polluters" of the Holy Land who had to be expelled was extended towards the Jews: "If Muslims were polluting the distant Holy Land, Jews were polluting Christian territories at home" (Stow 106-7). Eventually, expulsions of Jews occurred in order to purify these Christian territories (283).

The great irony of Jonas's position "in termes of Judé" is that his medieval descendants did not have a place in any land, but were spiritually--and eventually physically--outcasts with no "termes" of their own. Even "Judé" had to be purified of Jews and Muslims, according to the Crusader mentality. While Jonas's land lies at the center of *mappaemundi*, medieval Jews inhabited the social and physical periphery of medieval European Christian society. The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attitude prevalent in the *Pearl*-poet's time equated Jonas's descendants with the monstrous races, *baboynes*, unclean and suspect animals and degraded beings of all kinds--just like the Jonas of *Patience* has characterized the foreign Ninevites who dwell to the east, at the edges of his world-picture: the east, which the "Marvels of the East" literature and the Alexander Romances identify as the dwelling-place of wondrous beings, though some *mappaemundi* place these beings in the south or southwest. By the *Pearl*-poet's time, the Ninevites' spiritual descendants--people who had not been initially chosen or set apart by God but who embraced the Christian message more readily than Jews, just as the Ninevites are more accepting of and obedient to God's message than Jonas himself is--had become the center, the norm, the chosen, while the Jews had become peripheral, especially in England, from which they had been expelled a century before. I find it particularly ironic that the poet can so confidently speak of Jonas's "termes of Judé" (broadly understood) when, in the *termes* of his own country, Jews no longer dwelled.

Contrary to Jonas's narrow world-view, the poem specifies that God cares about even the Ninevites, a non-Hebrew people, one of many "others" in the biblical landscape of Jonah's time. The subsequent journeys of Jonas depict his stubborn attempts at clinging to the cherished but limiting *termes* by which he understands the world and which are represented spatially in the small, enclosed spaces which he chooses for himself. God's geographical lesson to him breaks open Jonas's *termes*--the boundaries of his shelters and his world-view alike--to cause him to accept whatever is outside: both the "other" of a larger cosmos and the "other" of an alien, despised people. However, Jonas's identity as prophet to the Gentiles (which the Bible does not assign to him--he is merely ordered to preach to the Ninevites) also has implications in terms of the anti-Semitism of the poem. As a type of Christ, Jonah spreads God's message to the Gentiles so

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that they, too, can be embraced by God's mercy, but God's inclusion of the Gentiles also implies, for a medieval Christian audience, the eventual exclusion of the Jews from the purview of God's mercy.[137]

The identification of Jonah as a type of Christ originally derives from Matthew 12: 40-1:

> Sicut enim fuit Ionas in ventre ceti tribus diebus et tribus noctibus
> sic erit filius hominis in corde terrae tribus diebus et tribus noctibus
> viri ninevitae surgent in iudicio cum generatione ista
> et condemnabunt eam
> quia paenitentiam egerunt in praedicatione Ionae
> et ecce plusquam Iona hic....[138]

However, other elements of the Jonah story also parallel the career of Christ. Jonah's mission to the Ninevites in order to deliver them from damnation prefigures Christ's mission to save all of humanity. Jonah's presence on a ship in a storm (which he causes) is an inverse prefiguration of Christ's presence on a ship in a storm (which he calms). Jonah's successful preaching to the Ninevites predicts how the Gentiles will receive Christ's redemptive message favorably. But though there are similarities between the two, in *Patience,* Jonas consistently exhibits a less-than-Christlike desire to avoid suffering and bodily harm, and instead of rejoicing at the Ninevites' conversion, his certainty that they will be saved is the source of his desire to flee. Attila Faj comments on this unfavorable

---

[137]Gregory the Great argues that this is the reason why Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh: "Prudenter quippe Jonas sapere voluit, cum ad praedicandam ninevitarum poenitentiam missus, quia electis gentibus Judeam deseri timuit, praedictionis officium implere recusavit." (*Moralia in Iob,* col. 746. "For Jonah desired to be sharp-witted in prudence, when being sent to preach the repentance required of the Ninevites, because he feared that, if the Gentiles were chosen, Judaea would be forsaken, he refused to discharge the office of that preaching"--trans. Bliss 335.)

[138]"For just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so shall the son of man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment of this [evil] generation and will condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, here is something greater than Jonah." (Translation mine. I add "evil" in brackets to "this generation" because the Latin pronoun *ista* often indicates that the noun which it replaces is to be viewed negatively. This is certainly the case with the generation which is condemned in the text.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

comparison, arguing that the *Pearl*-poet's identification of Jonas as less-than-Christlike has precedence in the writings of church leaders:

> Jonah, sent to preach to the Ninevites--writes Cyril of Alexandria--tries to escape from the presence of God in order not to be obliged to fulfil his duty. On the contrary, the Son, sent from the Father to preach to the peoples, was ready for his mission and did not try to shrink from it. Christ voluntarily submitted himself even to death. The author of*Patience,* in keeping with Cyril of Alexandria, tells us that the prophet does all he can to flee the word entrusted to him. (Faj 288)[139]

While according to the biblical account, God merely orders Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, *Patience* consistently characterizes this preaching in emphatically spatial terms. God's voice (which in l. 64 makes a rough, unpleasant sound in Jonas's ear, reminiscent of the roughness of God's hand in *Clannesse)* orders Jonas to go forth to Nineveh and to sow the divine words like seeds in the land:[140]

> "Rys radly," He says, "and rayke forth euen;
> Nym þe way to Nynyue wythouten oþer speche,
> And in þat ceté My sa3es so3e alle aboute
> Þat in þat place, at þe poynt, I put in þi hert." (65-8)

The words of God are to take root in the place as well as in the people, in whose hearts they are supposed to grow and produce the "fruits" of repentance. The poet's use of the phrase "at þe poynt" reinforces the spatial specificity of God's words to the city. While here "at þe poynt" means at the moment during which God puts the words into Jonas's heart, it can also be a rephrasing of "in that

---

[139]Cyril's discussion appears in *Commentarius in Jonam prophetam.*

[140]This seed metaphor appears repeatedly in the Bible, as Thierry Maertens reveals: "In the Old Testament, God's work on His people was characterized by two major themes: that of a field to be cultivated and that of an edifice to be built" (313)--spatial images which the *Pearl*-poet makes use of in different contexts and here applies to the Ninevites as well as the Hebrews. An instance more applicable to the Ninevites, perhaps, occurs in the New Testament--namely the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-9 and 18-23), where the "seeds" of Christ's ministry take root in some receptive soil, while stonier soil rejects them--just as some hearts might be more receptive than others to the Christian message.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

place," namely that Jonas will speak the words that God will give to him in the place where they are meant to be spoken. Since the words are meant for Nineveh, they will be created in Nineveh, planted like seeds in the place from which they will arise in order to answer the needs of its people. God's spatial specificity may also be intended to answer Jonas's as-yet-unspoken objection that Nineveh is outside of the "termes of Judé" and thus outside of salvation (and even consideration). Though Jonas's story begins "in termes of Judé," his message is supposed to leave this place and take root in another land, the land of a Gentile people, much as medieval Christians viewed the favor of God as departing from the "termes of Judé" and settling upon the Gentiles who had accepted Christ. God specifically directs Jonas to that place where God's message has not yet been planted. In fact, Nineveh proves to be a more receptive "soil" for God's message than Jonas: Jonas continually denies and tries to escape from God's will, but the Ninevites accept God's words (as transmitted through Jonah) immediately and without question. If the "soil" of the Ninevite heart is receptive to the "seed" of God's word, then the text would seem to suggest that Jonas's heart is too stony to sow it--as evinced by how he hardens his heart against the Ninevites even when he has transmitted God's message to them.

Jonas's role as prophet also necessitates that he will fulfill his role in a spirit of humble obedience, or, in the poem's language, to present the *poynt* or argument of God as a *poynt*--a humble soul exhibiting the *poynt* of patience, as the meek "haunte" or dwell in their meekness. In a sense, Jonas is also a *poynt* in a spatial context. As a speaker of words in the right place, he himself can be a potential site for salvation if the people heed him. All of this requires, of course, that Jonas remove himself, spatially and spiritually, from the "termes of Judé" in order to offer salvation to another people in their own *termes*--in their own place, in words that are meant for that place, and without condemnation or

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prejudice. Because "'hit arn so wykke þat in þat won dowellez'" (69), the people require their own language, tailored to their spot--their sins and their place. But this desire to include those outside of Jonas's termes in the sphere of salvation of course does not imply that medieval thinkers believed that everyone should be accepted on his or her own *termes*. If anything, the poem's caricatured presentation of Jonas as a Jew reveals the lack of acceptance of other cultures and religions, in this text or by medieval European society in general.

Jonas's response to God's task for him is also extra-biblical. In the Book of Jonah, no explanation for his conduct is given--Jonah merely flees for Tarshish. But in the poem, upon hearing the command, Jonas protests, fearing that the wicked Ninevites will imprison and torture him: "'I com with þose tyþynges, þay ta me bylyue,/Pynez me in a prysoun, put me in stokkes,/Wryþe me in a warlok, wrast out myn y3en'" (78-80). The very words which would release the Ninevites from the punishment incurred by their sins are considered by Jonas to be the source of his potential confinement, since he assumes automatically that the Ninevites will reject his message and thus reject the messenger too. Ironically, however, Jonas does not need the Ninevites to restrain him. He immures himself in his own narrow world-view, which does not admit concern for anyone other than himself and his own safety and comfort.

Part of Jonas's self-absorption is his idea that he can somehow escape from God, a belief that indicates Jonas's misplaced conception of the universe. By attempting to evade God, he expresses the belief that he, not God, controls his own movement through space. Upon hearing God's commandment, Jonas declares brashly, "'I wyl me sum oþer waye þat He ne wayte after;/I schal tee into Tarce and tary þere a whyle,/And ly3tly when I am lest He letes me alone.'" (86-88) Jonas expresses a number of misapprehensions about divinely controlled space here. First, he believes that there is "sum oþer waye" of which God is not

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

constantly aware, thus denying both God's omniscience and God's omnipresence. Second, Jonas uses the spatial image of an alternate path to insist that there is a metaphorical way other than God's, an alternate way of living which is therefore in opposition to God's *waye*. However, when God manipulates his journey for divine ends, Jonas learns that there is no "oper waye"--all ways lead to God.

The spatial images of Jonas's flight also have moral implications. Nineveh is to the east of Judea, and "Wonders of the East" texts associated the east with monstrous beings who have been excluded from the known lands, just as Jonas believes the Ninevites to be outside of the spatial limits of Judea and thus outside of the company of the chosen and unworthy of salvation. Just as the monstrous races represent medieval European fears of cultural and religious "others," Jonah renders the Ninevites as savage, criminal monsters to whom he refuses to convey God's word.[141] But the east is also the direction at the top of most medieval *mappaemundi*, the direction to which one "orients" oneself, as well as the direction of God.[142] Churches face this direction, and at the top (east)

---

[141]Jonas's refusal to help the Ninevites convert because he sees them as monstrous is particularly selfish and cowardly when one considers that medieval people saw even the monstrous races as candidates for salvation. David Woodward discusses the iconographic inclusion of the monstrous races in the scheme of salvation as it appears in *mappaemundi:* "When the body of Christ is superimposed on the map of the earth in an all-embracing dying gesture, as in the Ebstorf Map, the map itself becomes a clear symbol of the salvation of the world. Even the twenty-four monstrous races are embraced by the arms of Christ, although symbolically they are by his left hand at the very extremity of the world" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 334). Some medieval writers and artists speculated on the possibilities of converting the monstrous races, for example, the dog-headed Cynocephali, who sometimes represented Muslims. (For a through discussion of the theme of the possible conversion of the Cynocephali, see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, pages 61-73.)

[142]David Woodward avers that *mappaemundi* could face other directions, but the east was the most popular. He writes, "The term 'orientation' itself comes from primitive societies' preoccupation with the east as a primary means of ordering space" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 336); the easterly direction was important enough to provide some of the terminology for cartography as a whole. In terms of the popularity of certain directions, Woodward states that east was the most popular direction in which to orient maps, followed by north, south, and, finally, west. Judging from the negative qualities associated with the west (such as the *Pearl*-poet's own term "westernays") and the fact that churches faced east, this is not surprising.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of some *mappaemundi* (namely the Ebstorf, Hereford and Psalter Maps), beyond the sphere of the earth, Christ also sits in the margins--but in a position of judgment and mastery, surveying the world which is his, not hiding in shameful exclusion. By seeking to flee west to Tarshish, Jonas reveals how he is spatially and spiritually turned away from God--literally in that he seeks to go in the opposite direction from where he has been commanded to go, and figuratively because he has become "westernays," going against the divine directions which God has given him.

In subsequent lines, Jonas further misunderstands God's plans and concerns for the cosmos. He envisions God enthroned at such a distance from the earth that God cannot possibly care about Jonas's projected suffering at the hands of the Ninevites:

> "Oure Syre syttes," he says, "on sege so hy3e
> In His glowande glorye, and gloumbes ful lyttel
> Þa3 I be nummen in Nunniue and naked dispoyled,
> On rode rwly torent with rybaudes mony." (93-6)

What Jonas does not understand is that God is not distant from the creation, neither in terms of spatial distance nor in terms of lack of concern. His remarks are particularly ironic for a medieval Christian audience: Jonas imagines himself stripped and crucified, a fate to which God in the form of Christ is subjected. For the audience of the poem, the Crucifixion is the ultimate proof that God does not "gloumbe ful lyttel" for humanity. This act could be said to be the ultimate spatial expression of God's own limitless patience and acceptance of adversity, according to the iconography of the poem. Christ's restriction to the space and flaws--the "spot"--of the human condition paradoxically redeems humanity from its spots: both the spots of sin and the mortal "spot" to which sin confines people. Not only had Christ endured his own sufferings on the cross without complaining, but he also suffered for the sins or "spots" of all humanity, in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contrast to Jonas, who does not wish to suffer at the hands of the sinful Ninevites in order to redeem them. Jonas's terror of crucifixion, as compared to Christ's patient acceptance of this fate, is yet another example of Jonas's inadequacy as a type of Christ. Malcolm Andrew states that Jonas's

> allusion to the stripping and Crucifixion is unmistakable and is particularly striking because it makes so clear the contrast between Jonah and Christ. Here Jonah angrily and churlishly refuses to undertake a task because it might subject him to the risk of suffering the very fate which Christ was later to suffer for the sake of mankind ("Jonah and Christ" 231).

His fear of this particular form of execution also has anti-Semitic overtones. Jonas's "stiff-necked" refusal to suffer in order to save the Ninevites contrasts with Christ's selfless sacrifice. Moreover, one of the reasons why the Jews were supposed to have rejected Christ as their savior was because of the ignominy of his death on the cross--a criminal's death.

When Jonas ventures to the port in search of a ship, he seems to be all purposeful motion:

> Þus he passes to þat port his passage to seche,
> Fyndes he a fayr schyp to þe fare redy,
> Maches hym with þe maryneres, makes her paye
> For to towe hym into Tarce as tyd as þay my3t. (97-100)

This frenetic activity on Jonas's part is echoed by the industriousness of the sailors in preparing their ship for the voyage. (None of the sailors' activities on the ship are described in the Bible until the storm arises--the detailed summary of the mariners' duties is the poet's own.) However, all of this human busyness and mobility will later be ironically contrasted with God's ultimate control of space and motion when the ship cannot move safely on its journey until Jonas is cast into the sea, to continue on the journey which was ordained for him.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Interestingly, Jonas's descent to Joppa was also considered analogous to Christ's incarnation, according to Andrew: "Petrus Chrysologus interprets Jonah's descent to Joppa as symbolizing the Incarnation: 'Descendit, inquit, Jonas in Joppen, ut fugerit in Tharsis....Descendit Dominus de coelo ad terram, descendit deitas ad humana'"[143] However, Jonas's behavior also differs from Christ's in that Jonas descends to Joppa in order to escape his mission to deliver the Ninevites, whereas Christ descends to earth in human form in order to fulfill his mission to deliver humanity. Jonas' movements in space recall Christ's, but rather than anticipating Christ's activities in a positive way, Jonas prefigures these activities in a negative way: he prefigures Christ by way of opposition.

As Jonas gleefully contemplates how he has deceived God by booking passage on the ship bound for Tarshish, the reader is offered more glimpses of his ignorance of God's spatial mastery. Jonas is elated that the maker of the world has no control over the oceans (or so Jonas believes): "He wende wel þat þat Wy3 þat al þe world planted/Hade no ma3t in þat mere no man for to greue" (111-12). It may seem obvious that the "Wy3 pat al pe world planted" would be able to control the seas of that world, but Jonas believes that the sea is a place over which God has no power. Jonas effectively separates the sea from the land, denying its inclusion in the rest of the world over which God has control. In this statement Jonas expresses his ignorance about geography as well as about God. The poet's characterization of God as the "planter" of the world also reminds the reader of God's command to Jonas to sow the "seeds" of prophecy in Nineveh, which Jonas stubbornly refuses to do.

---

[143]"Jonah descended into Joppa, seeking to flee to Tarshish....The Lord descended from heaven to earth, deity descended to the human" (Sermo 37, "De Jonae Prophetae Signe," *Patrologia Latina* 52: 304; Andrew 230; translation mine.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Jonas again expresses this ignorance when he assumes that God can see no farther than Samaria: "Hit watz a wenyng vnwar þat welt in his mynde,/Þa3 he were soght fro Samarye, þat God se3 no fyrre" (115-16) Because Jonas cannot see farther than the "termes of Judé," he assumes that God cannot either. The poet comments on this foolish assumption by quoting a psalm, in which "Dyngne David" (119) states, "'Hit may not be þat He is blynde þat bigged vche y3e'" (124) By extension, the one who had *bigged* the world would not be blind to any part of it. (The word *bigged* is also interesting because it is normally associated with building, i.e. building an edifice--thus God is the "builder" of the "edifice" of the human eye--perhaps not a coincidental association in a poem so concerned with built spaces, like ships and bowers.) It is Jonas, not God, who is unaware and limited in spiritual vision as well as in geographical knowledge.

This particular erroneous assumption of lines 115-16 has anti-Semitic overtones as well. The previous lines describing Jonas's foolishness explicitly name him "Jonas the Jue" for the first time: "Watz neuer so joyful a Jue as Jonas watz þenne,/Þat þe daunger of Dry3tyn so derfly ascaped...." (ll. 109-10) The words "Jue" and "Jonas" might simply have been paired for the alliteration, but there seems to be something more complex operating here than merely poetic meter. "Jonas the Jue" is joyful because he believes that he has escaped God's notice, and his sneaky glee at tricking God calls to mind stereotypes of Jews as sly deceivers. His blindness to God's omniscience also recalls the frequent characterization of the Jews as blind, as Peter the Venerable accuses: "...aliis eum videntibus, audientibus, intelligentibus, vos soli caeci, surdi, lapidei permanentis" (*Adversus Judaeorum* col. 507).[144] The poet continues to represent Jonas's ignorance in the most insulting terms: "Lo, þe wytles

[144]"Although others have seen him, heard him, understood him, you alone are blind, deaf, permanently stony" (translation mine).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wrechche! For he wolde no3t suffer,/Now hatz he put hym in plyt of peril wel more." (113-14). Jonas's squeamishness about suffering, his desire to preserve the integrity of his own body, contrasts with Christ's free acceptance of suffering for all humankind. Jonas as a Jew is selfish not only because he wishes to keep salvation to his own people (a typical anti-Semitic caricature featured the Jew as someone who jealously guarded the "termes of Judé" against Gentile inclusion) but because he prefers his own physical safety to potential harm in the service of humanity. A final ironic detail is that the place to which he is fleeing, Tarshish, is also the place where the apostle Paul, called the "Apostle to the Gentiles," comes from. But unlike Jonas, Paul is a Jew who shares the message of salvation with the Gentiles.

Of course, Jonas's narrow-minded fantasy that he can elude God is proven false when God (or bad weather commanded by God, to be more precise) overtakes him. Interestingly, God summons these winds from the east ("'Ewrus and Aquiloun þat on est sittes'"--line 133), the direction to which Jonas was supposed to be bound and the location of the "monstrous race" of the Ninevites. While Jonah tries to go west, away from God both geographically and morally, the winds come from God's direction (i.e., God's instructions and God's geographical direction, where Christ himself "sittes," like the winds, at the top of the Psalter Map and the Hereford and Ebstorf *mappaemundi)* in an effort to "orient" Jonas correctly again. Against this onslaught from God's direction, the ship is proven to be a false shelter for Jonas, as it is powerless against the storm and begins to fall apart under its assault:

> When þe breth and þe brok and þe bote metten,
> Hit watz a joyles gyn þat Jonas watz inne,
> For hit reled on roun vpon þe ro3e yþes.
> Þe bur ber to hit baft, þat braste alle her gere.... (145-8)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Unlike Noah's ark, which was a safe shelter for the sinless and a metaphor for the ship of the church that protects the faithful, this ship is not a safe enclosure. Referring back to the metaphor of the ship steered by one's heart in the poet's paraphrase of the Beatitudes, Jonas's prideful belief that he can escape from God reveals that he not only cannot steer his heart, but the ship in which he hides cannot be steered, either by him or by the mariners, and the directionlessness of both prophet and ship result in disaster. Far from inheriting the kingdom of heaven, Jonas will soon be cast into the "hell" of the whale's mouth.

While the ship begins to burst apart at the seams, the cargo which it carries also bursts open, the contents shattering on the floor. The sailors even begin to throw the gear overboard which the cargo compartments were supposed to protect, in an effort to lighten the vessel:

> Þer watz busy ouer borde bale to kest,
> Her bagges and her feþer-beddes and her bry3t wedes,
> Her kysttes and her coferes, her caraldes alle,
> And al to ly3ten þat lome, 3if leþe wolde schape. (157-60)

In the previous two poems, the words *cofer* and *kyste* had been used to signify protective enclosures: the *kyst* or *cofer* of the heavenly garden, which is also a treasure-chest for the jewels of redeemed souls, the *kyst* of Noah's ark, which had protected the chosen few from the destroying flood, and the *coferes* of the holy vessels, which contained the physical substance of Christ's body and blood, themselves the physical "containers" of divine essence. This ship, however, is not only not a safe enclosure for its passengers, but is also unsafe for the things which it contains--the coffers and chests which contain valuable objects. Conversely, these vessels are considered a threat to the larger vessel of the ship, which founders under their added weight, and thus the *kysttes* and *coferes* are cast into the sea, as Jonas will soon be. These lines ultimately suggest that the ship itself is a false and faulty *kyst*, a *cofer* in which Jonas had wrongfully taken

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

shelter, in contrast to the heavenly *kyst* in which he should be taking refuge--God, whom he has defied.

Jonas's inability to control the storm at sea was considered a negative parallel to Christ's response to a similar storm. Attila Faj discusses this parallel:

> Cyril of Jerusalem points out the difference between Christ and Jonah in a critical situation. During a storm over Lake Genesaret Christ is sleeping in a boat. Awakened, he is asked to calm the raging elements, and the wind and the sea obey him. Whereas during the sea-storm Jonah is awakened and called up to beseech his God for salvation (Faj 289).

Here Jonas is an inverse type rather than a type of Christ. Christ displays his divine power by calming the storm in Lake Geneseret when he is awakened by his disciples. Jonas, on the other hand, is unable to still his own storm--it is only when he is hurled into the sea that the storm stops, and this is through the power of God, not Jonas himself. Christ's sleeping in the boat has no negative connotations, but in *Patience,* Jonah's sleep is a metaphor for the fact that he is asleep to God's voice and intentions, as the poet will soon reveal.

The mariners, afraid for their lives, become convinced that some sinful person who has displeased his deity is the source of the storm. Unlike Jonas, the wisest sailor recognizes that God has power over both land and sea and that upheavals in the cosmos are an expression of the divine will: "'I leue here be sum losynger, sum lawles wrech,/Þat hatz greued his god and gotz here amonge vus./Lo, al synkes in his synne and for his sake marres'" (170-72) Because of Jonas's presence "go[ing] here amonge vus," everyone may "synke in his synne" and perish. Intriguingly, the wise sailor creates a parallel between sinking in sin and sinking in the water, an image which parallels God's complaint in *Clannesse* that "'þe grete soun of Sodomas synkkez in Myn eres'" (689). As a result of falling into sinful ways and thoughts, Jonas will also physically sink beneath the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

waves of the water which he had thought God could not control--and will take the crew of the ship down with him. Andrew points out that the sailor's statement that everyone on board will sink because of Jonas's sin parallels the words of Caiphas in reference to Christ: "'Nec cogitatis quia expedit vobis ut unus moriatur homo pro populo, et non tota gens pareat...prophetavit, quod Jesus moriturus erat pro gente'" (John 11: 50-1; "Jonah and Christ" 231).[145] Here is another example of Jonas as a failed type of Christ: Christ has no sins to cause humanity to sink--in fact, as an innocent victim, he delivers humanity from its own sins--but Jonas's disobedience to God's word can actually cause the rest of the ship's passengers to drown for his crime. Andrew comments on this inverse connection:

> Christ is to sacrifice his life for an unworthy generation, while Jonah, fearing that such a sacrifice might be asked of him, risks the lives of the sailors and the souls of the Ninevites--who later prove their worth by repenting--in his attempt to avoid doing his duty as a prophet ("Jonah and Christ" 232).

Jonas's non-protective ship contrasts with Noah's ark and medieval allegorical interpretations of it. One of these allegorical representations portrayed the church as Noah's ark, a tidy, "clene" arrangement of the diverse social spheres believed to be in accordance with God's design. But Jonas has not taken refuge in such an ark--a fact which medieval Christians would begrudge Jews. Jonas's choice of a ship going away from God presages the acts of post-New-Testament-Jews, who have not climbed aboard the ship of the faithful and allowed Christ to steer their stony hearts. Because of their defiance, like Jonas, medieval Christians imagined that they would be swallowed by God's wrath, graphically depicted by the "hell-mouth" of the whale who swallows Jonah.

---

[145]"Nor do you understand that it is more expedient for you that only one man should die for the people, and not the entire race perish...He prophesied that Jesus would die for the people" (translation mine).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Another mystical association with Noah's ark, which I had mentioned in reference to *Clannesse,* was Hugh of St.-Victor's vision of a stylized ark as an ideal image to use for a *mappamundi.* If the ship which Jonas chooses is an inverse Noah's ark, a "westernays" church sailing west, away from God, then it is also a reflection of Jonas's skewed world-view, just as Noah's ark (or at least a stylized image thereof) is reflected in the representation of the world on Ranulf Higden's fourteenth-century *mappaemundi,* which portrays the world in the *termes* of Christianity rather than "in termes of Judé."[146] But Jonas cannot continue sailing away from God any more than he can continue to think in his people's supposedly narrow *termes,* as will be made clear by his subsequent fortunes. Like it or not, Jonas's world-view and his physical locations will follow God's intentions, as different as they are from Jonah's *termes.* Eventually the poet offers the hope that Jonas will have embraced God's world-view, as reflected in the *mappaemundi*--supposedly a broader perspective on the world than Jonas's own, but one which is just as slanted by medieval Christian European *termes* as were the *mappaemundi* themselves.

The wise sailor then suggests that "'...we lay lotes on ledes vchone,/And who-so lympes þe losse, lay him þeroute....'" (173-4) As in *Clannesse,* the guilty are not worthy of taking shelter in enclosures like the ship, but are instead cast *peroute,* to the mercy of the elements outside. Because Jonas's sin had caused God to break into Jonas's hideaway in the form of the waves and wind, threatening the safety and shelter of the sailors as well, he is to be offered to the

---

[146]This concept of the shape of a *mappamundi* reflecting the shape of an ark does not mean that Higden drew ship-like maps. Rather, his maps were oval in shape, an abstract representation of the form of Noah's ark, as Woodward states: "The oval shape of Higden's maps and its simplification, the *vesica piscis,* is a particular characteristic of his, but not original. ... It is...likely...that the oval shape was derived from the practice--described by Hugh of Saint Victor--of drawing maps in the supposed shape of Noah's ark" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi"* 315). Higden also created mandorla-shaped maps, which perhaps represent "a common Christian symbol of the aureole surrounding Christ...." (313).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

very power outside which he had striven to flee. This time the saved are not enclosed: the enclosure of the ship is the false refuge of the sinful Jonas, and that enclosure and all of its inhabitants are endangered until he is cast out.

When the sailors discover that not everyone is present for the drawing of lots, the other passengers are ferreted out of various hiding places on the ship, foreshadowing Jonas's eventual expulsion from the vessel. While the sailors are frantically repairing the ship, praying to their Gods, or looking for the other passengers, Jonas is sleeping, oblivious to the peril all around him:

> He watz flowen for ferde of þe flode lotes,
> Into þe boþem of þe bot, and on a brede lyggede,
> Onhelde by þe hurrok, for þe heuen wrache,
> Slypped vpon a sloumbe-selepe, and sloberande he routes. (183-6)

The poet is especially vivid in his depiction of Jonas's snoring, slobbering sleep, which does not appear in the Book of Jonah. The latter merely states that Jonah slept; the Bible unerringly presents Jonah with greater dignity than *Patience* does. But the description not only makes Jonas a figure of fun--it also makes his lack of awareness all the more profound. This complete oblivion to the affliction which God has sent indicates Jonas's total lack of awareness of both his environment and the divine source of the cosmic upheaval, a source which all of the other sailors recognize. Moreover, while the other sailors seek protection from their Gods, Jonas had used the ship as a refuge from God rather than taking refuge in God. In the shelter of the ship, he acts not with the reverence which the redeemed would show when they take refuge in the "ship" of the church or in the shelter of prayer, but dozes and drools obliviously amid the chaos of the storm. Instead of looking out of his narrow area of physical and mental confinement (which he misguidedly considers a shelter), he remains inside, unconcerned with what is happening to the larger world. This obliviousness also reflects badly on him as a Jew. As his descendants were accused of doing, in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his sleep, Jonas is blind and deaf to God's directions. It is thus no coincidence that the line before this description again labels Jonas "the Jwe": the only one who could not be found by the mariners was "...Jonas þe Jwe, þat jowked in derne." (l. 182) Jonas's lack of awareness is not the only trait which is portrayed as an aspect of his Jewish identity--the "derne" nature of his sleeping place also implicates Jonas as sly and sneaky, an attribute assigned to him the first time that he was identified as a "Jue" in ll. 109-10, and which corresponds to late medieval ideas about Jews.

When the sailors bring Jonas abovedecks and discover that he is the source of their peril, they chastise him and demand to know what he had done to endanger all of their lives. The treatment of Jonas by the sailors is harsher in the poem than in the Bible. In the Book of Jonah, the captain merely chastises Jonah for sleeping while he should be praying to God for deliverance, while in *Patience*, he is kicked awake (187), pulled to his feet by the clasp of his garment (189) and carried abovedecks by the chest (190). Once Jonas is among the sailors, exposed to the storm, they ask him spatial questions--namely of his origins, destination, and place in the world:

> "Of what londe art þou lent, what laytes þou here,
> Whyder in worlde þat þou wylt, and what is þyn arnde?
> Lo, þy dome is þe dy3t, for þy dedes ille.
> Do gyf glory to þy godde, er þou glyde hens." (201-4)

The sailors associate Jonas's journey with the evil which has befallen them on their own journey. However, asking him about his origins and destination also give Jonas an identity via geography. He is placed at a *poynt* in the cosmos as a result of both his location in politicized and ethnic space and the intentions behind his journey, how his purpose fits into the cosmic pattern as well as where it will lead him geographically. Jonas's journey is also compared with the journey of life, which the mariners fear is at an end for them. They entreat him

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to pray to his God before he (and the crew with him) "glyde hens" to the next world, where he would be judged for his going astray from the path that God had appointed for him. This association of "glyde" with Jonas's imminent departure from the world recalls the description of Noah in *Clannesse,* where that successful ark-dweller, who is protected from the sea rather than cast into it, "ay glydande wyth his God" (296). But Jonas's misdirection can lead him to peril on his own ship--a peril which will end, the sailors suppose, in death. Because Jonas "glydes" away from God, he is not protected from the sea; the sailors fear that his misdirection will cause him (and the crew with him) to "glyde" from the realm of the living.

When Jonas reveals who he is and the nature of the God from whom he is fleeing, he appears at last to understand God's absolute control over the cosmos, the sea as well as the land:

> "I am an Ebru," quoþ he, "of Israyl borne;
> Þat Wy3e I worchyp, iwysse, þat wro3t alle þynges,
> Alle þe worlde with þe welkyn, þe wynde and þe sternes,
> And alle þat wonez þer withinne, at a word one." (205-8)

Jonas also affirms that he has attained a broader perspective when he uses the words "per withinne." While he had previously regarded God and the cosmos as somehow outside himself and the place of refuge which he had sought in order to avoid his destiny, now he regards the entire creation--an expanse infinitely broader than Jonah's own world-view had been--as dwelling "per withinne" a single cosmic sphere over which God has power. In this vast enclosure, there is no smaller vessel in which he can take refuge from the divine perception or intentions. When he is about to be forced out of the ship, ordering the sailors, "'Forþy berez me to þe borde and baþes me þeroute'" (211), Jonas is forced out into a larger, more cosmic perspective. His shelter in the ship is proven to be illusory, since he reveals that "Alle þis meschef for me is made at

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

þys tyme" (209), and he can only take refuge in the God who rules the greater "vessel" of the universe.

The proximity of Jonas's declaration that he is "an Ebru" and his order to the sailors to cast him "þeroute" of the ship is disturbingly consistent with the anti-Semitic undertones of the poem. For a Christian audience, Jonas's disobedience to God is of a piece with his geographical and spiritual association with the "termes of Judé." Because of his stubbornness, concern with his own comfort and spiritual blindness, all qualities associated with Jews by Christian polemicists, Jonas (and by implication, all Jews who refuse to accept Christ) are to be cast "peroute" of the ship of the church. This thread of the poem is especially problematic because Jonas's imminent close encounter with the whale is also the part of his story which has traditionally caused him to be associated with Christ, owing to the passage in Matthew's gospel which connects Christ's harrowing of hell to Jonas's three nights in the whale's belly. It seems ironic that at the moment when his life most closely parallels Christ's, Jonas also embodies those who had supposedly rejected Christ.

Once Jonas has been cast into the sea, the storm calms, just as Jonas had expected. Having read the cosmic wrath of God correctly, he is "outtulde" (231) and the sailors are delivered. Immediately they praise God for having rescued them:

> Þer watz louyng on lofte, when þay þe londe wonnen,
> To oure mercyable God, on Moyses wyse,
> With sacrafyse vpset, and solempne vowes,
> And graunted Hym on to be God and graythly non oþer. (237-40)

In return for leading them to land in which to take shelter, the sailors take refuge in the only place in which they can truly be safe: God, rather than Diana, Neptune, "Mahoun" or "Mergot," the sun or the moon, whom the sailors had called upon in lines 164-8, when the storm had first erupted. Previously divided

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in their worship of their own regional deities, now the sailors are united in the worship of one God. This unity also has a spatial resonance. The various Gods of the sailors had belonged to their own limited geographical and cultural *termes*, but God controls all space, as the storm had amply demonstrated. As the ruler of all places, God is the rightful place of refuge for them. Their reverence is manifested in the sacramental act of offering sacrifices, interpreted by medieval exegetes as a precursor to the eucharistic sacrifice of the church, in which Christians are invited to take shelter.[147] In their decision to worship the God of Israel as one, the sailors prove themselves more virtuous than Jonas himself, who was supposed to have worshipped and obeyed God all along. In fact, Jonas's Jewish identity is mentioned again in the passage immediately following, but far from representing Jonas as a reverent member of the chosen people, here his Jewishness is mentioned in connection with his sentence to a watery death: "Now is Jonas þe Jwe jugged to drowne...." (245) Perhaps this judgment against Jonas implicates all Jews. While the Gentile sailors praise the God of Israel whom Jonas had neglected, this representative of the chosen people (and his people with him) turn away from God and thus merit damnation. Of course Jonas's impending death is averted by the arrival of the whale, but for the Christian audience of the poem, his descendants might not be allowed to escape this fate.

As soon as Jonas is engulfed by the sea, he is swallowed by a whale "Þat watz beten fro þe abyme" (248), which is literally the sea-bottom but metaphorically sounds like the "abyme" of hell. Though the biblical Book of Jonah does not comment specifically on how Jonah managed to survive inside

---

[147] The *Biblia Pauperum*, an illustrated collection of interpretations of biblical events, gives a number of exexamples. The near-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham was believed to be a foreshadowing of the Crucifixion, Christ offering himself as a sacrifice (Labriola and Smeltz 39, 81, 124), and the sacrifice of bread and wine by Melchisidec was considered a precursor to the Last Supper, whose fare of bread and wine becomes the eucharistic sacrament (Labriola and Smeltz 32, 74, 116).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of the belly of the whale, it does indicate that Jonah was protected by the power of God, as the poet of *Patience* assures the reader:

> For nade þe hy3e Heuen-Kyng, þur3 His honde my3t,
> Warded þis wrech man in warlowes guttez,
> What lede mo3t leue bi lawe of any kynde,
> Þat any lyf my3t be lent so longe hym withinne? (257-60)

Inside the whale, God is Jonas's protection, his shelter from harm. Here God's identity as "þe hy3e Heuen-Kyng" is mentioned not to assert God's distance from and lack of concern for humanity, as Jonas had done originally, but to establish God's control over the entire cosmos, even the alien and frightening world beneath the sea. While God is Jonas's shelter from death inside of the whale, a metaphorical "enclosure" which protects him, the whale itself is also a kind of shelter which protects him on his journey through the deeps, where the whale "swengez and swayues to þe se boþem,/Bi mony rokkez ful ro3e and ryelande strondes...." (253-4),[148] and perhaps a commentary on the shelter that he had sought in the ship. Whereas he had sought refuge from God in the ship, whose destination would have taken him away from God's plans for him, in the whale Jonas takes refuge in God, praying for his deliverance and pledging himself to the divine will. At God's behest, the whale also journeys toward Nineveh, where Jonas was supposed to have gone originally. While he had been cast

---

[148]Medieval geographical writers speculated about the nature of the sea bottom, some making surprisingly accurate conjectures, like Honorius Augustodunensis, who posits the existence of undersea mountains in *Imago Mundi* (though he suggested inaccurately that those undersea mountains were the source of the sea's salinity--*Imago* II. 23; qtd. Kimble 167). Others, however, were more fanciful in their projections, like the canon law teacher Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1160-1235), whom David Woodward associates with the drawing of the Ebstorf Map. According to John Kirtland Wright, in *Otia Imperialia* (c. 1211), "Gervase of Tilbury tells of an individual named Nicholas Pappas, a dweller on the shores of the Strait of Messina, who was forced by King Roger II of Sicily to dive into the waters. Being well known to the submarine monsters, he escaped all danger from molestation by them and afterwards used to tell about a grove beneath the 'Strait of Pharo,' how the tides wash first one way and then the other through the branches of the trees, and how he had seen submarine mountains, valleys, fields and woods, and trees with acorns" (Wright 198).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*þeroute* of the ship as a result of his flight from God's command, he is now *withinne* the whale, and *withinne* God's plan, once more.

Just as Jonas's failed attempt at taking shelter in the ship is vividly descriptive of his narrow, self-absorbed world-view, the whale is another shelter which expresses his interior condition, especially his perception of the cosmos--a shelter which the poet describes in detail, whereas the Bible does not describe the interior of the whale at all. Jonas seems to go directly from the non-shelter of the boat to the dubious shelter of the whale: "...fro þe bot into þe blober [Jonas] watz with a best lachched,/And þrwe in at hit þrote withouten þret more,/As mote in at a munster dor, so mukel wern his chawlez" (266-8).

Critics have differed on how to interpret the nature of the whale as a "space." Some have noted how the whale's mouth is often an iconographic representation of the mouth of hell and that Jonas's being swallowed by the whale is reminiscent of depictions of sinners being swallowed by the hell-mouth. For example, Schmidt compares Leviathan the whale to Satan: "...St. Gregory, the most influential disseminator of Leviathan material...identified Leviathan with the ever-present deceiver, who, with his open mouth, is always ready to swallow the sinful soul" (Schmidt 181). Andrew alleges that in the whale scene, "...the fish itself becomes an emblem of hell" ("Jonah and Christ" 232). In his *Etymologiae*, Isidore of Seville presents this interpretation: "Sunt enim ingentia genera beluarum et aequalia montium corpora, qualis cetus excepit Ionam: cuius aluus tantae magnitudinis fuit, vt instar obtineret inferni: dicente Propheta: Exaudiuit me de ventre inferni" (12. 6. 8, qtd. "Jonah and Christ" 232).[149] Andrew also presents evidence from the Middle English *Bestiary*, which states bluntly

---

[149]"There is a monstrous type of fish, and his body is as big as a mountain, and this is the kind of whale that swallowed Jonah: his mouth was so large that it attains [the status of] the entrance to hell, as the Prophet said: "You heard me from the belly of hell" (translation mine).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> that the whale stands for the devil. Indeed, the jaws of a sea monster were used to represent hell's mouth in the performances of the mystery cycles and appear with the same significance in the 'doom' paintings on church walls. (232)

Other critics associate the maw of the whale not with hell but with a cathedral. The interior of the whale is the site of Jonas's apparent spiritual transformation and his prayer to God for deliverance. Those who believe that the whale represents a cathedral (albeit not a very light-filled or tidy one) focus on the description of the whale's jaws as a "munster dor" in line 268. Sarah Stanbury is a proponent of the view of the whale as place of worship. She argues that the whale's belly is not just structurally similar to a cathedral, with its vaulted ceilings and spacious nave, namely the whale's ribs and stomach cavity, but that in addition, it suggests the spiritual shelter which the church offers:

> Its labyrinthine configuration signifying Jonah's spiritual chaos, the whale's gut also paradoxically implies the potential of spiritual transition or even redemption. In part the implications of the whale's salvific role are contained within the Christological imagery that grounds the poet's metaphors: Jonah's passage 'as mote in at a munster dor' and his own impression of the gut as a 'rode' or cross implicate both the spectator and Jonah himself in a process of reading in this punishment, which appears to defy any order or coherence, the imagery of the Church with its redemptive icons. *(Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 82)

This paradoxical association of the whale with hell, on the one hand (a more conventional association, as Andrew's quotations from Latin sources had attested), and with a cathedral, a place of deliverance, on the other hand (which seems to be unique to the *Pearl*-poet), reflects back upon the problematic which I have been discussing throughout this chapter, namely Jonas's typological association with Christ and the poem's representation of the stubborn, defiant, spiritually blind Jonas as an exemplar of the Jewish people as medieval Christians saw them. True to connections made between the Jews and Satan by,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for example, Gregory the Great in *Moralia in Iob*, [150] Jonah ends up "lachched" with the whale (266) because of his defiance of God. (This imprisoning metaphor makes it clear, moreover, that Jonas's fear of confinement in a Ninevite prison has manifested itself in a wholly unexpected form.) However, even as some Christian writers believed that the Jews would be converted at the end of days, the hell-mouth which devours Jonas is not ultimately an instrument of eternal torment where he suffers outside of God's concern, but a place of purgation and prayer, much like a church. In his whale-shaped Garden of Gethsemane, for the first time Jonas rises to behavior worthy of his identity as Christ's antetype. He accepts God's plan for him, regardless of his potential sufferings, and realizes

---

[150]Gregory writes, "Sordidis enim vestibus Jesus indutus est, quia quamvis alienus ab omni peccato, tamen in similitudinem venit carnis peccati. Cui venienti Satan a dextris stetit. Pro magno namque Dominus Judaicum populum, et pro nihilo gentes habere videbatur. Sed postquam incarnatus apparuit, gentilitas quae pro sinistro habita fuerat credidit; Judaicus vero populus ad perfidiam declinavit. Satan ergo illi a dextrus stetit, quia illum ei populum rapuit, qui dudum dilectus fuit. Sed quia ipse Judaicus populus, modo perditus, in fine est quandoque crediturus, propheta testante, qui ait: *Reliquiae salvae fient (Isa.* X, 21), Satan a dextris suis Dominus removet, dicens: *Increpet Dominus in te, Satan (Zach.* III, 1). Et ejusdem populi liberationem indicans, subdit: *Quia eligit Jerusalem (Ibid.*, 2). Qui nimirum populus, quia ad gehennae incendia, perfidia duce, defluebat, sed dum ad fidem reducitur ab eodem aeterni ignis incendio liberatur, statim de eo illic subditur: *Nunquid non est iste torris erutus de igne?* ("'Jesus was clothed in filthy garments,' because though He was a stranger to all sin, yet He came into the likeness of the flesh of sin. And to Him on His coming Satan stood on his right hand. For the Lord appeared to hold the Jewish People as great, and the Gentiles as nought. But after that He appeared Incarnate, the Gentile world, which had been held as 'on the left' believed, whilst the Jewish People swerved aside to unbelief. Thus 'Satan stood on the right hand to Him;' because he carried off from Him that People, which had been for a long while beloved. But because that same Jewish People, being now lost, shall in the end one day believe, as the Prophet testifies, who says, *The remnant shall be saved;* the Lord removes Satan from His right hand, saying, *The Lord rebuke thee, o Satan.* And betokening the deliverance of that same people, he adds, *because he hath chosen Jerusalem.* Which same people because under the guidance of unbelief it let itself run down to the burnings of hell, but whilst it is brought back to faith, is set free from that same burning of everlasting fire, has it directly added there concerning it, *Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"* (trans. Bliss 486). Just as Jonah is eventually released from the whale after repenting and reaffirming his belief and trust in God, Gregory believed that ultimately the Jews would be released from hell and accept Christ. This relatively positive view was not shared by later medieval writers, who increasingly cast Jews in a diabolical role, as Peter the Venerable did. As far as Jonas is concerned, the *Pearl*-poet seems to side with Gregory, but as for Jonas's medieval descendants, the poet does not make it clear whether they are to be similarly delivered or whether their own "diabolical" rejection of Christ is permanent, thus earning them a stay in hell more permanent than Jonas's Christ-like three-night stay in the whale--a matter which is further complicated by the widespread belief that the Jews would convert to Christianity en masse at the end of time.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

how the *poynt* of patience can help him to endure his misfortunes--though, arguably, his realization could have come under duress rather than through genuine conviction, as the poet himself states: "Now he knawez Hym in care þat couþe not in sele" (296). Just as the Jonas of *Patience* is neither completely a type of Christ nor a complete example "in malo," the whale does not have to be either a hell-mouth or a cathedral nave. In the cosmos of *Patience,* Warlow can be both.

The *mote* to which Jonas has been compared, that tiny speck of dust in the maw of the cetacean cathedral of the whale, is reminiscent of the *poynt* at the beginning of the poem. As it does in *Pearl,* the word has both a locative and a moral function: *mote* represents both "city" and "stain." While the Pearl-Maiden is paradoxically "moteles," a prerequisite to her admittance into the heavenly *mote,* the tiny *mote* of Jonas is now in an environment full of *motes*--the filth which the whale has devoured, which is symbolic of his own sins and the rest of humanity's. He is a speck of dirt symbolic of the *mote* of a sin upon an erring soul, and he also is one more piece of litter afloat in the garbage-strewn gut of the whale. But the whale himself is also a *mote* in the sense of a city. In his largeness, he seems like a city to the speck of dust which is Jonas. There is also poetic justice in Jonas's imprisonment in the whale: he had tried to escape his destiny, fearing the "mote"-filled "mote" of Nineveh, and now he has ended up in a place just as filthy, but literally rather than metaphorically. In discussing the various meanings of *mote* (sin, human, city), Clark and Wasserman assert that "mote" signifies both what Jonas is (*mote* as "the smallness of the sinful man") and what he will become ("the city-like largeness of the penitent man"--"Jonah and the Whale" 6). Like the *poynt* of patience, which encourages one to see oneself as small through the lens of humility, and yet which also allows one to broaden one's sphere of concern to include all beings, the *mote* of Jonas can be

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both infinitesimally small and cosmically large if he travels beyond his "motes" or spots of sin to preach in the "mote" of Nineveh with an obedient heart.

In the gut down which he travels, Jonas is subjected to all kinds of dirty things which are trapped with him in the whale's gullet:

> He glydes in by þe giles þur3 glaym ande glette,
> Relande in by a rop, a rode þat hym þo3t,
> Ay hele ouer hed hourlande aboute,
> Til he blunt in a blok as brod as a halle.... (269-72)

Unlike Noah, who is "ay glydande with God," Jonas "glydes" through that "glette" which is not allowed to flow in the stream that runs through the heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl*. His journey down the throat of the whale, helpless and in the dark, reflects his attempt to journey away from God. Despite his efforts, he is not in control of his destiny or his own journey. Jonas's descent into the gut of the whale is a reminder that he will follow God's *wayes* whether he wishes to or not--even if these *wayes* lead him down a hellish path into the inferno of the whale's belly.

The whale's belly has other cathedral-like features besides the "munster dor" of the creature's massive jaws. When Jonas rolls down the whale's gut, "a rode þat hym þo3t" (270), the throat of the whale is a kind of road which he is hurled down against his will.[151] Sarah Stanbury has also suggested that the "rode" could be a "rood" as well--a cross, as in the two aisles of a cathedral, which intersect to form a cruciform shape: "The account of the space Jonah traverses

---

[151] *The Oxford English Dictionary* informs the reader that the word "rode" or "road" was not used explicitly to describe a path on land until Shakespeare did so in 1596. However, the word *rad*, road, has appeared in compounds since Anglo-Saxon times in references to "sea-roads" or paths through the ocean (OED XIII. 1005). The phrase "roadstead," or harbor, was in use in the Middle Ages, and *rode* was also another word for "a voyage" (*Middle English Dictionary* 776). Being that the whale is a sea-creature, it is conceivable that "rode" could mean a path. This interpretation is borne out by the fact that the passage in which *rode* appears describes Jonas's unwilling journey down the whale's gut, as if he were travelling down a road--albeit one which he had no intention of following, just like he had had no intention of following God's *wayes*, either geographically or morally.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inside the whale also suggests church architecture, at least according to Jonah, who believes the gut to take the shape of a cross...." *(Seeing the Gawain-Poet* 80).[152] Metaphorically, the cross itself is a road: the road of patience, whose travelers bear whatever suffering is inflicted upon them. Moreover, the cross is a path to salvation for the Christian audience of the poem, and salvation is what Jonas was supposed to offer to the Ninevites, had he heeded the commandments of God. The cavern in which he lands (presumably the whale's stomach) is also like a hall, perhaps reminiscent of the nave where the congregation stood to worship in a cathedral--another maritime connection. Finally, the *sokor* which God offers Jonas in order for him to stay alive in the whale (261) is reminiscent of the spiritual sustenance of the eucharist, the round emblem of salvation whose revelation completes the structural and thematic circle of *Pearl.*

However, if the whale's interior represents a cathedral--and, metaphorically, the spiritual edifice of the church in which Christians take refuge--it is still a shelter which is initially characterized by Jonas's flawed understanding of sheltering or enclosed space. This cathedral is full of filthy garbage, as Jonas's own soul is still sinful, and his initial behavior inside of the whale indicates his continuing ignorance about and narrow perspective on the divinely ordained cosmos. After he lands in the whale's stomach, Jonas stumbles blindly about through the garbage, seeking shelter:

> And þer he festnes þe fete and fathmez aboute,
> And stod vp in his stomak þat stank as þe deuel.
> Þer in saym and in sor3e þat sauoured as helle,
> Þer watz bylded his bour þat wyl no bale suffer. (273-6)

---

[152]"Cross" (as opposed to "road") was the more typical reading of *rode* in the *Pearl*-poet's time. *The Middle English Dictionary* glosses *rode* as "the cross on which Christ died" and "a crucifix" (777, 779) and offers many other definitions related to these two. Stanbury's interpretation is thus on more solid etymological ground than my own suggestion of *rode* as "road." However, because of the poet's by-now-well-established pattern of associating moral terms with spatial ones and vice versa, I find it likely that he had intended both readings.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As with Jonas's decision to hide in the hold of the ship, here Jonas's need for shelter is connected to his desire to avoid suffering, in contrast with Christ, who accepts suffering on behalf of humanity. However, in the filthy gut, Jonas is unable to find shelter on his own--just as in previous attempts (i.e. on the ship) he had not found shelter from God's wrath:

> And þenne he lurkkes and laytes where watz le best
> In vche a nok of his nauel, but nowhere he fyndez
> No rest ne recouerer, bot ramel and myre,
> In wych gut so euer he gotz, bot euer is God swete.... (277-80)

Inside the whale's guts, Jonas persists in thinking that he can find shelter from harm (or at least ordure), but it is only God who can offer him true shelter. Ironically, though Jonas soon calls for God to see and recognize him inside of the whale, Clark and Wasserman recall that he had initially sought to hide from God inside of the visually impenetrable enclosure of the ship:

> ...being out of the range of God's eye is exactly what Jonah had earlier desired, and it clearly demonstrates the prophet's tendency to create a man-centered universe which excludes the presence of God and which is limited by his own narrow perspective. ("Jonah and the Whale" 14)

In despair, he calls upon God and admits to his error, labelling himself "gaule of prophetes" and admitting that "I be gulty of gyle" (285) Interestingly, Jonas's environs echo these spiritual states: he is surrounded by all kinds of *gaule* in the *gile* of the whale. The loathsomeness of the whale's innards enables Jonas to recognize the wretchedness and uncleanness of his own interior condition. He then calls upon God to rescue him "'And preue Þe ly3tly a Lorde in londe and in water.'" (l. 288) Once Jonah offers this prayer to God, he admits not only that God controls all space (including Jonas's own place in the cosmos, as well as the sea, a realm which he had earlier believed was beyond God's control), but also acknowledges that it is God--not any particular place--who offers shelter. Instead

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of seeking refuge in a narrow spot which parallels his narrow state of mind, Jonas now takes shelter in the power and mercy of God, thus indicating that his perception of God has grown.[153] Additionally, in contrast to *Clannesse,* where enclosures initially illustrate the purity of their inhabitants, here Jonas learns from the ordure in the enclosure around him of his own interior condition. Instead of "haunting" meekness or allowing poverty of heart to dwell within him, Jonas finds himself a *mote* of garbage inside a filthy gut, enclosing and enclosed by both literal and symbolic filth.

As a result of Jonas's decision to seek shelter in God, God gives Jonas a shelter inside of the whale, in a place where no filth exists:

> With þat he hitte to a hyrne and helde hym þerinne,
> Þer no defoule of no fylþe watz fest hym abute;
> Þer he sete also sounde, saf for merk one,
> As in þe bulk of þe bote þer he byfore sleped. (289-92)

The fact that Jonas has now truly found shelter is indicated by the lack of litter there and the poet's use of *þerinne,* a word which had designated privileged enclosures in *Clannesse.* Though Jonas's new shelter in the whale is compared to his previous hideaway in the ship, this new shelter differs from the first one in a number of ways. First, here he has found shelter with God as a result of his

---

[153]Some readers of *Patience* assert that Jonas's first prayer, which is the poet's own creation, does not indicate a spiritual transformation on Jonas's part. Indeed, his last words are an arrogant demand for God to prove that divine power extends to the sea as well as the land. Adam Brooke Davis discusses the multiple enclosures in which Jonas finds himself in this scene and Jonas's moral perspective in the first prayer: "Within the whale, within the sea, within the earthly plane, Jonas has thoroughly insulated himself from God, and is alone at his dark center. The first of his prayers asks mercy (284), but it is not a humble petition arising from spiritual poverty. Rather, it shows the same sort of calculation which he later projects onto the Ninevites: 'Wyth a prayer and a pyne þay my3t her pese gete' (423)" (Davis 276). Before being freed, Jonas must develop the right mental attitude--he must "discover himself to be a virtual nullity", as Davis characterizes Jonas's eventual awareness of himself as a *poynt* or *mote* (276). Though I would agree that Jonas's first prayer does not exhibit a complete transformation to the humble *poynt* of patience, I believe that Jonas's perspective has grown somewhat--he acknowledges God's mastery over the sea and, as a result of his changing attitude, is given a place of shelter in the whale in which he can come to a deeper understanding of his situation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prayer, as opposed to his unsuccessful attempt at taking shelter from God on the ship. Second, though Jonas would appear to be in more danger inside of the whale than he had been on the ship, God protects Jonas within the whale's belly, both from perishing inside and from the ocean outside, whereas his shelter on the ship had been lost in the storm, and he had to be cast *þeroute* in order to save the lives of the rest of the crew. Finally, on the ship Jonas had both literally turned away from God by journeying in the opposite direction from Nineveh and figuratively turned his back on God by falling asleep rather than praying to God for salvation from the storm. However, in the whale he is literally turning towards Nineveh again, and he has figuratively turned back to God as well, having addressed a plea of salvation to God and thus receiving both physical shelter in the whale and the spiritual shelter of divine favor. Eventually Jonas will be released from the whale, since he has once more focused his attention on the right *poynts:* Nineveh, the virtue of patience and God: "So in a bouel of þat best he bydez on lyue,/Þre dayes and þre ny3t, ay þenkande on Dry3tyn,/His my3t and His merci, and His mesure þenne" (293-5). Ironically, though, "Now he knawez Hym in care þat couþe not in sele" (296). Jonas only understands the *poynt* of patience when adversity forces him to be a *poynt*--i.e., to accept his smallness in the vast cosmos.

Jonas's journey is not the only one which has been altered and manipulated according to the will of God. The whale's own travels through the sea are precipitated by Jonas, whose presence in his bowels has started to make him feel ill, and thus the whale is ultimately goaded on his journey by the power and will of his creator:

> And euer walteres þis whal by wildren depe,
> Þur3 mony a regioun ful ro3e, þur3 ronk of his wylle;
> For þat mote in his mawe made hym, I trowe,
> Þa3 hit lyttel were hym wyth, to wemel at his hert.... (297-300)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The whale's condition parallels Jonas's: while both Jonas and the whale travel through various "regiouns" because of their own pride (Jonas's pride in pitting himself against God, and the whale's impulse to move through the roughest waters "þur3 ronk of his wylle"), it is actually God's will, the small but irritating *mote* inside, which directs their journeys.

Just as Christ's resurrection occurs after three days, after his own three days and nights in the whale, Jonas's attitude towards God, himself and the cosmos has changed for the better. While his previous prayer (281-8), though indicative of Jonas's changed perspective, was characterized more by demands than humble requests, the poet's paraphrase of the "de profundis" prayer of the Book of Jonah (303-36) reveals Jonas's new, humble acceptance of God's plan for him. Jonas recognizes that God "'Out of þe hole Þou me herde of hellen wombe'" (305) and had placed him there in the first place: "'Þou diptez me of þe depe se into þe dymme hert....'" (308) He acknowledges that God is in control of space, including where Jonah is placed in the world, whether on land or in the sea. He also recognizes that his presence in the whale is meant to teach him a lesson about both God and space: how God both controls and cares for all beings in the world, no matter how lowly their "place" might be. (Of course, according to the world-view which lies behind the poem, this divine caring is a selective one, which excludes the post-Christian descendants of Jonas the Jew and which stereotypes some of the recipients of salvation even as these individuals are embraced by God's mercy, as is evident in God's final words to Jonah at the end of the poem. However, here the poem expresses the inclusiveness rather than the selectiveness of God's mercy.)

Jonas's sense of separation from God, his complete aloneness and powerlessness, is expressed in terms of spatial distance. He complains of being

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cast out of both God's sight and God's site--God's temple, where he may be assured of his own deliverance:

> "And 3et I sayde, as I seet in þe se boþem:
> 'Carful am I, kest out fro Þy cler y3en
> And deseuered fro Þy sy3t; 3et surely I hope
> Efte to trede on Þy temple and teme to Þyseluen.'" (313-16)[154]

Unlike earlier in the poem, where Jonas had believed that God could not see past Samaria, now he knows that God can see him, even "'as I seet in þe se boþem,'" at the farthest point from God's place in heaven.[155] He states that he has been

---

[154]Here the poet has made several additions and corrections to the spatial references in the biblical original. The biblical prayer of Jonah mentions how he cannot look upon God's temple, but Jonas's fear of not being able to "trede" there, or physically inhabit that place, is unique to the poem. Also, though the biblical Jonah laments how his own eyes cannot see God from within the whale, he does not speak of being exiled from the glance of God. As I have mentioned previously, the ocular perspicacity of God is a consistent theme of the *Pearl*-poet, and one on which Stanbury focuses in all four poems.

[155]The idea that the sea bottom is the farthest place from God's throne in heaven is substantiated more by verbal descriptions of (or conjectures about) the earth's geography than pictorial representations like the *mappaemundi*, which are horizontal rather than vertical in orientation--they do not represent the heavens above, the land in the middle, and the sea below. In the *mappaemundi*, Jerusalem is sometimes the center of the world and the extreme north, south, east and west edges of the map are the farthest places from this spiritual and geographical center. God's throne also frequently appears at the top (or eastern edge) of the map, making the western edge rather than the sea bottom the farthest location from God's throne. However, written documents about the sea indicate that, even if it were not literally the farthest place from heaven, it was seen as an alien and distant realm. Peter Abelard's statement about the known continents and the sea was shared by other speculative geographers of the Middle Ages: "Abelard...said that all the earth's surface except the oikumene [the continents] was covered by water. While the author of the fourteenth (?) century *Lumen Animae* held that the sea is a thousand times the extent of habitable regions, and claims that astronomers have proved this, John Calderia of Venice shared Abelard's view...." (Kimble 162). The source of all the earth's waters was deep within the earth, Augustine and others believed--a secret place far beneath the heavens: "This source [of the waters] Isidore termed the 'abyss', maintaining that 'all the waters and torrents return by secret channels to the abyss whence they came'" (Kimble 161). In *Imago Mundi*, Honorius Augustodunensis "claimed that because blood-vessels penetrated every part of the human body, it was only reasonable to suppose that the earth was riddled with subterranean waterways or channels" (Kimble 161). *Imago Mundi* describes the deep source of the waters in language similar to Jonah's own "de profundis" prayer: "De profundis aquarum emergamus" (*Imago* 57). The sea was considered such an unknowable, alien region that William the Breton believed that only God could understand the nature of its tides (Kimble 164). The ocean was not only mysterious, though--it was also frightening: "Throughout the Middle Ages, the open ocean inspired a great fear in mariners, not only because of the dangers inherent in it, but also because they were unable to fix with certainty the position of their ships upon its surface" (Kimble 221).

Of all the regions of the sea, the bottom was the most mysterious and strange because, legends of Nicholas the Fish and Alexander the Great notwithstanding, no one had seen its bottom.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cast out from God's sight not as a boast that he can escape the notice of God, but as an acknowledgement that he has been cast out of the more symbolic space of divine favor as a result of his sins. He hopes, however, to be able to inhabit (both physically and spiritually) "Þy temple," to be accepted once more into the space of salvation. The temple into which he yearns to gain entrance also contrasts with Jonas's present situation: his presence in the inverse temple or cathedral of the whale, which is filled with filth and whose *rode* or main aisle is a slimy gut. He compares his situation under the sea with being imprisoned, and laments the fact that in his sinful state no land will accept him: "'Þe barrez of vche a bonk ful bigly me haldes,/Þat I may lachche no lont, and Þou my lyf weldes'" (321). Returning to his initial image of imprisonment in Nineveh, Jonas recognizes that he who is imprisoned by the *barrez* of each *bonk* (and who is "lachched" to the whale in line 266) cannot himself *lachche* ("latch") onto any *lont*. [156] Ironically, he had initially feared imprisonment in Nineveh as a result of his

---

It would be little wonder if such a deadly and unknown place was seen as the farthest location from heaven--a concept which is borne out by Jonas's comparison of the sea bottom to hell, which *Imago Mundi* also states: "Simili de causa in aliis etiam terris incendium surgit, et gehennam praeostendit" (*Imago* 54). ("In a similar case, even in other countries, fire rises, and hell thrusts itself upward"--translation mine.) This perspective on the sea bottom is also confirmed by the fact that the *Pearl*-poet frequently speaks of space in vertical terms, as he does in *Pearl*, where the dreamer arises from his sleeping-place on the pearl's grave and ascends to heaven, then is cast back down to his realm below the moon. In *Patience*, if the cosmos were viewed vertically, with heaven above the earth and the sea bottom beneath the earth, Jonas would be at the farthest point from God--as he is spiritually as well.

[156]In the Book of Jonah, it is not the "barrez" of each land which imprison Jonah but the bars of a single land below the mountains--which, to a medieval audience, would sound like Hell: "Ad extrema montium descendi: terrae vectes concluserunt me in aeternum: et sublevabis de corruptione vitam meam, Domine, Deus meus" (Jonah 2: 7). ("To the extreme [lower] parts of the mountain I have descended; the boundaries of the earth have enclosed me forever; and you will raise my life up from corruption, o Lord my God"--translation mine). The whale's gut as hell is another equivocal place-metaphor. On the one hand, Jonas as a type of Christ could be presaging Christ's harrowing of hell, a conjecture borne out by his (albeit reluctant) salvific mission to the Ninevites immediately following his travels in the whale. On the other hand, his presence in a hellish space also denotes his own sinfulness and deservingness of punishment. After all, God has put Jonas there and has to rescue Jonas eventually, whereas Christ's harrowing of hell is accomplished by Christ without assistance.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prophecies and warnings to the people, and, fleeing that imprisonment, has found a far more wretched form of confinement.

Jonas speaks of his prayer reaching God in a spatial way. When pain takes up residence in his soul, he hopes that his prayer for mercy will enter the residence of God:

> "For when þ'acches of anguych watz hid in my sawle,
> Þenne I remembred me ry3t of my rych Lorde,
> Prayande Hym for peté His prophete to here,
> Þat into His holy hous myn orisoun mo3t entre." (325-8)

Because he is trapped in the whale, Jonas cannot enter God's temple himself. Thus he pleads for his voice to enter where his body cannot. In turn, if his prayer successfully enters divine space, he can leave the "temple" (and the "hell") of the whale, where he has been praying as if he were in a temple. Just as the whale's belly is irritated by the *mote* of Jonas and thus he travels where God wishes him to, the pain of Jonas's situation irritates him and causes him to turn back to God. With misery dwelling in his soul and causing the memory of God's mercy and power to dwell in him as well, Jonas hopes that God's power will enter even into the abysm or hell-mouth of the whale as a result of his prayer entering the dwelling of God and being sheltered there. In a passage which does not appear in the biblical prayer, he also admits that those who are considered wise also metaphorically take shelter in vain things:

> "I haf meled with Þy maystres mony longe day,
> Bot now I wot wyterly þat þose vnwyse ledes
> Þat affyen hym in vanyté and in vayn þynges
> For þink þat mountes to nou3t her mercy forsaken...." (329-32)

Jonas asserts that those who take shelter in empty things that "mountes to nou3t" end up losing their shelter in the mercy of God, something that he himself is guilty of in having forsaken God's wishes for him because of his fears

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for his personal safety. Jonas had arrogantly assumed that God would not protect him from the Ninevites, placing his trust instead in the shelter of the ship bound for Tarshish. However, by relying on that false, Jonas-made shelter rather than on God, the true refuge, Jonas had actually placed himself in greater peril. This portion of the prayer also might be a reference to the Jewish authorities of the time, whom the Christian poet has a stake in discrediting--not because any actual Jewish communities were seen as a threat to medieval English Christians, since the Jews had been expelled from England in the late thirteenth century, but because, as a Christian writer, the poet had to assert a position of Christian theological superiority--namely that the Christians had supplanted the Jews as God's chosen people. Like the sages with whom Christ debates in the Temple, these elders trust in "vayn þynges" rather than in God's word and thus cannot be saved, in contrast to Jonas, who is about to be delivered from the whale as a result of his declaration of faith. But this depiction of Jonas and the Jewish sages is not just another link between Jonas and Christ, whom he prefigures in an inconsistent and flawed way. The sages whom both encounter and find so concerned with inconsequential things can also represent the medieval Christian view of their Jewish contemporaries, especially in light of the fact that by the *Pearl*-poet's time, many anti-Semitic polemicists had gained access to the Talmud and declared it a "vayn þyng."[157] Again, though this was not an issue in

---

[157]Peter the Venerable's *Adversus Judaeorum Inveteratam Duritiem* is particularly vicious in its denunciation of the Talmud. After citing what he viewed as a particularly blasphemous and ridiculous example from the Talmud, Peter declares, "Haec sunt mysteria vestra, o Judaei, haec intima sacramenta, haec sapientia, omni sapientiae etiam divinae praeferenda" (col. 648) ("These are your mysteries, o Jews; these are your intimate sacraments, these your wisdom--how can you put all of this even before the divine wisdom?") and then claims, "...nulla alia doctrina libros Judaicos implestis, nisi blasphemia, sacrilega, ridiculosa, et falsa. Pugnastis tanto tempore contra divinos libros diabolicis libris, et coelestem doctrinam infernalis putei fumo suffundere et offuscare laborastis. Nisi estis irretiti telarum vestrarum retibus, animalia stulta et aves incircumspectas dolosis laqueis aucupare conati estis" (cols. 648-49). (Loosely translated, "These Jewish books are filled with no other doctrine than blasphemy, sacrilege, ridiculous nonsense and falsehoods. You have struggled for so long a time against the divine books with your devilish books, and you have

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

England, the cosmopolitan *Pearl*-poet may have been aware of the controversies surrounding contemporary Continental Jews and their holy books.

Now Jonas acknowledges this error and places himself once more in the protective "place" of God's divine power, swearing that he will offer sacrifices to God, "'And halde goud þat Þou me hetes: haf here my trauthe'" (336), a pledge which is also extra-biblical. This last line illustrates Jonas's change of heart. In his previous prayer, the last line demands God to show the divine power which Jonas still doubts, but the last line of this prayer is a pledge on Jonas's part to fulfill God's desires of him. While the last prayer had ended on an arrogant note, here Jonas's final word is one of humble submission.

As soon as Jonas repents, God releases him from the whale, thus proving that God is the true shelter for the repentant human being:

> Thenne oure Fader to þe fysch ferslych biddez
> Þat he hym sput spakly upon spare drye.
> Þe whal wendez at His wylle and a warþe fyndez,
> And þer he brakez vp þe buyrne as bede hym oure Lorde. (337-40)

Just as the whale had answered the bidding of God and "wendez at His wylle," God's mastery over Jonas's journey is made evident by the fact that the shore on which God has the whale release Jonas is near the very place from which he had tried to escape: "Þe bonk þat he blosched to and bode hym bisyde/Wern of þe regiounes ry3t þat he renayed hade" (343-4). Jonas's arrival at his ordained destination despite his desire to the contrary illustrates the futility of fleeing from God. Unlike a more faithful prophet (and later, a Christian pilgrim, who journeys to sacred spaces in accordance with God's--or the

---

labored to cloud the heavenly doctrine with this infernal smoke. Unless you were to retract your attacks, you will have drowned yourselves in sorrow, like dumb animals and unaware birds.") For writers like Peter, Jewish sages concerned themselves not just with "vayn pynges" but with diabolical things, exhibiting not just foolishness but deliberate, infernal ignorance. (For a detailed treatment of the association between diabolical things and Jews, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews.)*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

church's--will), Jonas does not try to go where God wishes him to, but ends up going there anyway.

But even when he has come so near to Nineveh, Jonas, his clothing "sluchched" by his three nights inside of the whale and in need of washing, attempts to delay the journey again. This prompts a less-than-patient demand from God: "'Nylt þou neuer to Nuniue bi no kynnez wayez?'" (346)[158] This query echoes Jonas's willful declaration that "I wyl me sum oþer waye pat He ne wayte after'" (86). However, caught in the act of attempting to escape his destiny again, now Jonas acknowledges that God's way is his way, and he promises that he will follow the path that God had ordained for him: "'3isse, Lorde,' quoþ þe lede, 'lene me Þy grace/For to go at Þi gre: me gaynez non oper'" (347-8). Because he will follow God's way whether he wants to or not, Jonas now accepts God's way freely--and goes about it with greater alacrity. It is interesting in light of *Clannesse* that God exhibits such impatience at Jonas's latest delay, which is presumably because he wishes to wash his clothes ("Hit may wel be þat mester were his mantyle to wasche"--342), since wearing unclean clothes is precisely why the wedding-guest of that poem's first biblical example had been cast out of God's "castle." Yet perhaps here Jonas's clothes-washing reveals a greater concern with his exterior presentability than with his inward state, or perhaps it indicates a desire on Jonas's part to wash off the uncomfortable lessons which he had learned under duress, amid the filth of the whale, so God chastises Jonas for his ephemeral concerns. After all, the wedding-guest's unclean garment is his soul, whereas here Jonas exhibits more concern for his exterior garments than for the equally unclean souls of the Ninevites. Still, God's impatience here is

---

[158]God is less brusque in the Bible, which has God state matter-of-factly, "'Surge, et vade in Nineven civitatem magnam: et praedica in ea praedicationem, quam ego loquor ad te'" ("Arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach the prophecy there that I will tell you"--Jonah 3: 2). The poet emphasizes God's impatience with the word "bruxlez" ("upbraids"), which recalls the rough sound of God's voice in l. 64.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

humorous, especially when God has gone through such pains to transform Jonas into a more patient prophet. On a more serious note, though, this impatience on the part of God is echoed later in God's less-than-expansive characterization of the inhabitants of Nineveh. For the controller of all space, the God of *Patience* has the remarkable ability to be both impatient and mentally limited, uncannily like Jonas.

God's next instructions to Jonas describe the prophetic words to the Ninevites in terms of doubled spatial containment. While the message of God is placed inside of Jonah, the potential "container" of Nineveh's salvation, in order to take effect, the message must also be placed in its ordained spot--the "mote-full" *mote* of Nineveh. God instructs Jonas, "'Ris, aproche þen to prech, lo, þe place here./Lo, My lore is in þe loke, lauce hit þerinne'" (349-50). As in God's first command to Jonas to preach to the Ninevites, God is emphatic about the placement of Jonas's message to that wayward people. God conflates argument and location, as if the location is essential to the words, which are to be released in the land itself as well as in the hearts of the people. This spatial specificity is not present in the Bible, where God merely orders Jonas to preach to the Ninevites. The poet also makes interesting use of the words "loke" and "lauce," words which refer to both location and language. Previously the poet had used words like *barrez, lachched* and *loke* in reference to Jonas's fears of imprisonment (and to his actual imprisonment in the whale), but now he uses these words in a positive sense to refer to Jonas as a container for God's words; they are "locked" within him, to be released in Nineveh. The same word is used for the alliterative pattern of literature like the *Pearl*-poet's own works in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* where he writes of the tale of Gawain "With lel letteres loken/in londe..." (35-6), just as the words "locked" in Jonas will soon be "lauce[d]" in the land of Nineveh. *Lauce* is another word which appears in *Sir*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*Gawain and the Green Knight* in reference to bindings and knots of various kinds, including the "interlaced" structure of the poem itself. Here in *Patience,* the word also refers to language, but the language of prophecy, which Jonas will soon "plant" in the soil of Nineveh and which will cause the people to grow spiritual fruit.

Jonas is now a container for God's message, which has taken shelter inside of him. The words within Jonas are to be released within Nineveh, their new shelter, where they will in turn offer divine protection to those who heed them. Unlike the narrow shelters which had exemplified Jonas's narrow perspective on the cosmos, the message of God, while it is hidden in the small "enclosure" of one man, is infinitely expansive, offering salvation to more than just one person. Having understood God's *poynt,* Jonas now arrives at the proper *poynt* of his journey and his purpose as a prophet: to make God's *poynt* in that *poynt.* Those who repent in Nineveh can then take shelter in the *poynt* which is given to them through Jonas's words: not a physical place like their city, but a state of repentance which echoes Jonas's own humble submission to God in the belly of the whale.

Unlike Jonas's shelters in the ship and the whale's gullet, Nineveh is described as an enormous space: "Hit watz a ceté ful syde and selly of brede;/On to þrenge þerþur3e watz þre dayes dede" (353-4). The broadness of the city is perhaps an invitation to Jonas to expand his awareness and extend his concern from himself to others, even to the entire universe. When he exhorts the people to repent, he also instills in his listeners the correct perspective on themselves in the context of the cosmos, broadening and altering their awareness along with his own. In a passage that does not appear in the Bible (where Jonah simply warns the people that Nineveh will be destroyed in forty days if they do not repent), Jonas warns the people that the very land which they

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inhabit will exact revenge for the crimes performed in it unless they repent, speaking for the land which he had once attempted to avoid reaching:

> "Truly þis ilk toun schal tylte to grounde;
> Vp-so-doun schal 3e dumpe depe to þe abyme,
> To be swol3ed swyftly wyth þe swart erþe,
> And alle þat lyuyes hereinne lose þe swete." (361-4)

Jonas's warning also arises from his own experience. As a result of his prideful disobedience he had lost his shelter on the ship bound for Tarshish and had been at the mercy of the elements, as he predicts that the people of Nineveh will be if they do not change their ways. The very land which had sheltered them *hereinne* will devour them, as the whale, who was in some ways a parody of Jonas's own shelter on the ship, had "swol3ed" Jonas and taken him "doun...depe" to the "abyme" beneath the sea in line 318. This comparison is not part of the biblical original and indicates a connection to the Ninevites which Jonas had never felt towards a people outside of his "termes of Judé." By relating the consequences of his own disobedience to the projected punishment which the Ninevites will incur if they do not change their ways, Jonas indicates that he has recognized a kinship between himself and these Gentiles. Jonas also makes it clear in his warning that God will not allow the corruption of any place by the deeds of its inhabitants. As in *Clannesse,* the earth itself exacts retribution from those who have committed violations on it.

The lines that follow present more locative images of prophecy which are original to the poet, with his particular emphasis on the spatial dimension. If the land itself is injured and demands justice for crimes committed in "pe place here," it also absorbs the words of Jonas as they are spoken. The people's acceptance of Jonas's words is described as if the very land were being sowed by the words: "Þis speche sprang in þat space and spradde alle aboute/To borges and to bacheleres þat in þat bur3 lenged...." (365-6) The springing up of the words "in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

þat space" is reminiscent of how the narrator of *Pearl's* "spyryt þer sprang in space" (61) up to the kingdom of heaven. But while in these lines of *Pearl, space* refers to time, i.e., the instantaneous upward motion of the narrator, here *space* definitely refers to a place, and perhaps also hints at the swift duration of the spread of Jonas's words, just as *space* in l. 61 of *Pearl* had referred primarily to time but secondarily to space, namely the upward motion of the dreamer.[159] Just as the places which Jonas had inhabited had taught him how to perceive of himself in relation to the rest of the universe, now the lesson which he speaks takes root in and springs forth from the place where it is spoken, eventually causing the people to purge themselves, and even their physical spot, of the spots of their sins. God's *poynt* (i.e., statement) is made to the people by being planted in the *poynt* (i.e., place) where they reside, the spot which had been marred by their sins.

That the land itself must also repent for the misdeeds of its people is made clear in line 370, where the people are warned that "'Þe veray vengaunce of God schal voyde þis place.'" In return, the people repent and fast in unison, including nursing infants (391) and the animals who graze on the land (392-4). The Bible also stipulates that these individuals are included in the fast, but does not elaborate as the poet does. As with his depictions of hapless sinners suffering God's vengeance in *Clannesse,* the poet focuses on the sufferings of particular helpless beings, thus adding more sympathy for the Ninevites than the Bible does. As with *Clannesse,* the poet's empathy raises the disturbing question of whether the poet is more compassionate than his God.

---

[159]Gordon does not admit a spatial connotation to "in space" in *Pearl: "in space:* not 'into space' (meaning 'into spatial distance'), which is a recent use, but 'after a time'..." (Gordon 49). However, as I have pointed out here and in my discussion of *Pearl,* the poet does use *space* for space as well as time--perhaps the earliest use of this word in a locative sense.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On the surface, this collective act of repentant fasting on the part of the innocent and guilty alike expresses a startlingly modern perspective of the cosmos: the idea of the interconnectedness of all life in a given community, as opposed to Jonas's "termes of Judé," or the cultural *termes* of the poet and his readers. Though the animals and infants are not considered directly responsible for the sins of the adult Ninevites, the entire city is seen as an interconnected whole which must repent as one in order to be spared as one. This perspective is in direct contrast to Jonas's, which isolates him from the rest of the world and privileges him above all creatures, including God. Unlike Jonas, the Ninevites also assume that no matter how distant God is or how small they are in relation to the rest of the universe, their prayers will be heard where "...ay he cryes in þat kyth tyl þe kyng herde...." (377) Though now the loud noise of their lamentations is heard only by the king of the city, who also subsequently repents, the cry of the Ninevites "in þat kyth," in the place where they are (spiritually and spatially), is also expected to be heard by the heavenly king: "'Al schal crye, forclemmed, with alle oure cler strenþe;/Þe rurd schal ryse to Hym þat rawþe schal haue,'" the Ninevite king orders (395-6). While the Ninevites have realized their own smallness and proven this insight through humbling penitential practices, they also know that God is neither too high nor too large to hear them, unlike Jonas, who had not humbled himself by understanding and heeding God's *poynt*, and who also had believed that God was both spatially and spiritually inaccessible.[160]

---

[160]God's eventual redemption of the Ninevites also contrasts with another group of doomed sinners who had cried out to God for salvation: the people of Noah's time in *Clannesse*. However, the former sinners are saved because their repentance comes immediately after they have been informed of God's plans to destroy their city, whereas the repentance of the people of Noah's time comes too late--though this fact does not cause the poet to withdraw his sympathy from the latter group of doomed sinners.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In contrast to Jonas before his experience in the whale, the Ninevites also realize that to avert divine wrath, they must depart from their wicked path and follow the path of God's will. The king exhorts his followers,

> "And if we leuen þe layk of oure layth synnes,
> And stylle steppen in þe sty3e He sty3tlez Hymseluen,
> He wyl wende of His wodschip and His wrath leue,
> And forgif vus þis gult, 3if we Hym God leuen." (401-4)

In a word-play which does not appear in the biblical original, the people are encouraged to "leuen" (leave) their sinful ways and "leuen" (believe) in God. Additionally, they believe that if they leave the path of sin and follow the righteous path devised for them by God, God in turn will leave the "path" of wrath and spare the city. By walking the metaphorical path of righteousness once more, the citizens are indeed spared both their land and their lives.

However, just as Jonas had sheltered the word of God inside of him and had been sheltered by God in response to his repentance, now "So hatz anger onhit his hert...." (411) Perversely, Jonas has returned to his old *wayes*. Instead of letting poverty and patience dwell within him, Jonas exhibits the smallness of his understanding by allowing anger to take refuge in his heart because God had spared the Ninevites. There is literally no room for such mercy in Jonas's world-view, which is as bereft of vision as the darkness of the whale's belly. Complaining that the words which he had spoken against God while in his own country had been proven true, Jonas reveals that his attitude has not expanded much:

> "I biseche Þe, Syre, now Þou self jugge,
> Watz not þis ilk my worde þat worþen is nouþe,
> Þat I kest in my cuntré, when Þou Þy carp sendez
> Þat I schulde tee to þis toun Þi talent to preche?" (413-16)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Ironically, while Jonas's words had "spradde" in Nineveh, sowing the seeds of transformation and causing the people to walk in the ways of God, Jonas still looks back to the barren words which he had "kest" in his own country as if they have now borne seed. Not only has Jonas not left his own country in his mind, but he also has not left his old attitude behind, despite his experiences on the ship and in the whale's belly. Angrily he chides God,

> "I wyst wel, when I had worded quatsoeuer I cowþe
> To manace alle þise mody men þat in þis mote dowellez,
> Wyth a prayer and a pyne þay my3t her pese gete,
> And þerfore I wolde haf flowen fer into Tarce." (421-4)

As in the Bible, Jonas also asks God to take his life: "Now, Lorde, lach out my lyf, hit lastes to longe" (425). This request demonstrates how Jonas's behavior is a parody of that of other, less reluctant prophets. For example, when faced with death at the hands of Jezebel after having the prophets of Ba'al slain and the altar of God rebuilt, Elijah also prays for death, stating that he is no better than his ancestors and prophetic predecessors (1 Kings 19: 4). However, Jonas's own plea for death is petulant and selfish in comparison. The fuller monologue of Jonas might have been intended by the poet to justify Jonas's rather puerile, impatient actions somewhat. The poet also modifies Jonas's demand in an interesting way--by using the word *lach* for "take" (as in "take my life"). Used previously in connection with images of imprisonment or enclosure, here *lach* seems to suggest spatial exclusion through death. Jonas demands that God effectively "lock out" his life, excluding him from the land of the living. With this statement Jonas has marginalized himself, while all along he has marginalized the Ninevites and regarded himself as the center, both in a cultural and an egotistical sense, namely in believing that the world revolves around him. However, now that it has been proven that God's mercy extends beyond Jonas's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cultural center, he wants to be "lach[ed] out" of a world which can include the Ninevites.

Jonas attempts to justify his own straying from God's path by chastising God for granting mercy to the Ninevites, who (he insists) have departed from their sinful ways in a purely cosmetic sense. The *mote* of Nineveh is not "moteles" in his mind--he feels that the people have escaped with a light punishment not commensurate with the depth of their misdeeds. Jonas has already forgotten when he himself was a *mote,* a speck in the maw of a whale, one more piece of refuse for the creature to swallow. His lack of concern for the *mote* of Nineveh indicates that he has not yet become the *mote* or *poynt* of patience--the infinitely small speck in which God's *poynts* or arguments may dwell.

Aggrieved by what he sees as a personal injustice, once again believing that the entire world revolves around him--in a negative sense now, namely that every event has been created expressly to torment him--Jonas builds a bower for himself, "For hit watz playn in þat place for plyande greuez,/For to scylde fro þe schene oþer any schade keste" (439-40). While Jonas's shelter begins as a simple form of protection against the sun, it later becomes clear that this narrow space is also his protection against the light of an expanded understanding of the world, which is upheld by the divine mercy with which he is so irritated. The fact that Jonas's shelter is closed against the sun is evocative not just of comfort but also of a desire to escape, as the hold of the ship had been. When "He bowed vnder his lyttel boþe, his bak to þe sunne" (441), Jonas turns his back to the literal sun and the figurative light of the reality outside of his shelter. The imperviousness of the bower to the elements is augmented by the plant which God encourages to grow around the structure:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For hit watz brod at þe boþem, bo3ted on lofte,
Happed vpon ayþer half, a hous as hit were,
A nos on þe norþ syde and nowhere non ellez,
Bot al schet in a scha3e þat schaded ful cole. (449-52)

With a door only on the north side,[161] the almost complete enclosure of the woodbine shelter protects Jonas from the physical aspects of the place in which he has slept--particularly the hot sun--and the equally disturbing reality of God's mercy as well. However, the vine itself is intended by God not to protect Jonas from realizing the "brod" nature of both the universe outside and God's perspective of it, but instead to teach Jonas about these matters in a spatial way.

So far Jonas notices only the sun-screening properties of the woodbine growth: "The scyre sunne hit vmbeschon, þa3 no schafte my3t/The mountaunce of a lyttel mote vpon þat mon schyne" (455-6). The word *mote* again recalls both the city of Nineveh and the *mote* that Jonas had been inside of the whale. However, here no *mote* can enter the shelter, and likewise no sympathetic thoughts of the *mote* of Nineveh enter Jonas's mind. He also is incapable of thinking of the error of his ways, not recognizing the *mote* in himself. Unlike when he was within the whale, now no *mote* can penetrate Jonas and irritate him into moving according to God's *wayes.*

Jonas's response to his shelter, which appears in Jonah 4: 5 as well as in the poem, is indicative of his continuing narrow perspective of reality: "And

---

[161]The northward opening of the hut is interesting in light of medieval assumptions about the north. This was the realm where the ferocious people of Gog and Magog were supposed to dwell, kept from invading Christian lands by a wall built by Alexander the Great (Kimble 186). Like the "westernays" church in *Pearl,* the spatial orientation of Jonas's dwelling allies him with less-than-godly forces. Of course the orientation of the doorway may have merely allowed Jonas the best view of Ninevehduring its anticipated destruction, but this association with Gog and Magog is an interesting possibility, especially because thirteenth- and fourteenth-century geographical writers were quite fearful of the eventual escape of the bloodthirsty followers of these legendary kings and their subsequent destruction of the "termes" of the Christian world. In other medieval texts (such as "The Friar's Tale" and the late thirteenth-century poem "The Owl and the Nightingale"), the north is associated with hell and the devil, as in Isaiah 14: 13--another less-than-savory resonance to the spatial orientation of Jonas's hut.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

euer he la3ed as he loked þe loge alle aboute,/And wysched hit were his kyth þer he wony schulde,/On he3e vpon Effraym oper Ermonnes hylles" (461-3). Jonas appears also to wish that the woodbine were a house in which he could be sheltered from alternate perspectives of the world. It is notable that he desires that the woodbine bower were back in his own homeland, implying that he wants to deny the reality of Nineveh and dwell in both his comfortable, familiar country and his comfortable, familiar but ultimately limiting perspective of space and those who inhabit it with him. The physical reality of Nineveh and the spiritual reality of how it had been spared annihilation would force him to broaden his internal geography in dangerous ways. This broadening of perspective is comparable to the process of maturation, in which Jonas refuses to engage. Instead he indulges in ludicrously childish behavior for an elderly prophet:

> Þenne watz þe gome so glad of his gay logge,
> Lys lotrande þerinne lokande to toune;
> So blyþe of his wodbynde he balteres þervnder,
> Þat of no diete þat day þe deuel haf he ro3t. (457-60)

While Jonas looks "to toune" as if he is still interested in whether it will be destroyed after all, he does so while lying down within the bower--safely ensconced in his shelter and his limited perspective, half-asleep as he had been in the ship, oblivious to the world around him and the divine intention that is manifested in it. His childish skipping around is as undignified and thoughtless as that original slumber, in which he had drooled and snored while the sailors panicked. Clark and Wasserman refer to sleeping as a consistent pattern whenever Jonah is oblivious in a more spiritual sense:

> One recalls that Jonah's obliviousness to the infinite is consistently portrayed through the metaphor of sleep. Indeed the *Pearl*-poet indicates that sleep is to be understood as the correlative to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> enclosure, since Jonah, after all, is seen to sleep in the boat, the whale, and the bower. In fact, whenever Jonah's cosmic perspective is limited, such that he cannot see beyond the boundaries of his man-centered enclosure, he sleeps. ("Jonah and the Whale" 16)

While Jonas is unaware, having slipped "on a sloumbe-slep sloghe vnder leues" (466) , God arranges to have a worm devour his living shelter overnight, and the elements from which he had been protected by both the shelter and the willful ignorance which it had embodied are now able to penetrate "withinne." Now that the woodbine has decayed, God intends to teach Jonas again the lesson that he had learned in the whale but then failed to extend to others: that no manufactured place, be it a city, bower or ship, can protect anyone. Instead, it is God who is the shelter for all who become the *poynt* and *mote* of patience. Upon awakening, Jonas discovers an unpleasant surprise:

> And þen hef vp þe hete and heterly brenned;
> Þe warm wynde of þe weste, wertes he swyþez.
> Þe man marred on þe molde þat mo3t hym not hyde;
> His wodbynde watz away, he weped for sor3e.... (477-80)

That the west wind is the agent of the destruction of Jonas's shelter is notable. Previously the west had been associated with Jonas's willful turning against God when he fled westward away from Nineveh. But here a wind from the west serves God rather than opposing God, demolishing Jonas's shelter in accordance with the divine will. Jonas's misplaced sadness at the loss of the woodbine shelter is reflected spatially in his act of weeping on the bare earth. Not only is the bare earth all that remains of his lush shelter, but Jonas's act of lying on it recalls the association in *Pearl* between sinfulness and nearness to the ground. By falling upon the earth, Jonas indicates his spiritual closeness to this "spot." In addition, though *marred* is here used as a verb ("grieved"), as an adjective, it also means "stained," as Jonas is stained by sin. The bare earth drying in the sun is also a reminder of the mote of dust which Jonas is supposed to become through

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

humility. But here Jonas is small not because he humbly accepts God's plans, but because he is absorbed in his own petty concerns. Along with Jonas's vulnerable body, the smallness of Jonas's concerns is also exposed to the harsh sunlight when he complains about the loss of his shelter, which he sees as one of many injustices that have been committed against him by God with the help of the elements--an effort to displease and displace Jonas. Instead of submitting patiently to these catastrophes, major or minor, Jonas demands that God end his life with an anger as "hot" as the burning sun itself (481). Because he is trapped in the false shelter and security of his own confining attitudes, small and trifling concerns have become Jonas's whole world. God then chastises Jonas about his obsession with minuscule slights and his refusal to be a patient little *poynt,* to which Jonas responds with an angry denial:

> "Is þis ry3twys, þou renk, alle þy ronk noyse,
> So wroth for a wodbynde to wax so sone?
> Why art þou so waymot, wy3e, for so lyttel?"
> "Hit is not lyttel," quoþ þe lede, "bot lykker to ry3t;
> I wolde I were of þis worlde wrapped in moldez." (490-4)

Jonas's second request that God kill him is more spatially-oriented in its language than the biblical text, which does not speak of the "worlde" which Jonas now inhabits, nor the "moldez" which he wishes to enclose him. *Moldez* also plays upon *molde,* or earth. Jonas wishes to leave the *molde* where God's troublesome justice prevails in order to be wrapped in the *moldez* of a funeral shroud--the ultimate enclosure where suffering cannot enter, since in death, Jonas expects to feel no pain, another expression of his narrow spiritual viewpoint, for he does not acknowledge that the fate which he will incur after death would be less than restful if he were to die in a sinful state. But despite his desire to leave the world, Jonas's limited perspective only reasserts his

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attachment to the physical realm and its attendant spiritual limitations, as well as the cultural restrictions of Jonas's "termes of Judé."

God then corrects Jonas's narrow perceptions by comparing Jonas's sorrow at the loss of the woodbine, which Jonas had no part in creating, with God's own grief at the potential loss of Nineveh, whose people were created by God, along with the land in which they live and the rest of the cosmos. God describes the act of creating the Ninevites out of primal matter (503-4), a passage unique to the poem and a further justification for God's preservation of the city and its people. God takes pity on places as well as people:

> "And if I My trauayl schulde tyne of termes so longe,
> And type doun 3onder toun when hit turned were,
> Þe sor of such a swete place burde synk to My hert,
> So mony malicious mon as mournez þerinne." (505-8)

Unlike Jonas, whose "shelter" of indifference cannot be penetrated by anything outside until God destroys it, the pain and repentance of the creation reaches God and is heard *withinne* the place where it was uttered. The direct connection between God and the creation is expressed by means of an extraordinary metaphor of spatial sympathy. If the town were "type[d] doun" by God when its people had repented or "turned" in the right direction, its pain would have a similar downward movement and "synk" in God's heart. In contrast to Jonas, who grieves for the loss of things which he did not create, and who refuses to see connections between himself and the rest of the world, God is intimately connected to the creation. When one takes shelter in divine mercy, the ultimate place of refuge, God is incapable of destroying one's land or one's life.

God's use of the word *termes* is also interesting in comparison with how Jonas uses this word. While Jonas's "termes of Judé" had indicated his citizenship in the land of Judea as well as his mental restriction to the attitudes of his homeland towards an alien (and thus undeserving) people, God speaks of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*termes* in terms of the duration of the labor of creation, a process which has indelibly connected the creator to the creation. God's *termes* include the whole world: God has no borders or boundaries, but embraces all who repent.

God also tries to incite Jonas to emerge from his self-created woodbine shelter of deliberate ignorance by informing him that not all of the Ninevites were guilty of sins:

> "And of þat soumme 3et arn summe, such sottez formadde,
> Bitwene þe stele and þe stayre disserne no3t cunen,
> What rule renes in roun bitwene þe ry3t hand
> And his lyfte, þa3 his lyf schulde lost be þerfor;
> As lyttel barnes on barme that never bale wro3t,
> And wymmen unwitte, þat wale ne couþe,
> Þat on hande fro þat oþer for alle þis hy3e worlde." (509-15)

Part of Jonas's narrowness of attitude is that he has viewed all of the Ninevites according to a single category: condemned sinners fit to perish along with their land. However, the poet, expanding on the Bible's statement (which concludes the Book of Jonah on a rather abrupt note) that God spares Nineveh because of its 12,000 people "et iumenta multa," gives the inhabitants individual faces and descriptions, revealing God's own compassion for the innocent as well as encouraging Jonas not to enclose himself in a shelter of thoughtlessness which excludes the *motes* of other beings in the cosmos. God is particularly careful to extend divine mercy to those who are mere *motes* in the social world of the poet: not only the Ninevites as a whole, Gentiles and thus "others" par excellence, but women and children as well, who are "lyttel" in the social scheme. Ironically, however, the poet has God reinstate conventional cultural positions (such as the silliness and witlessness of women, a characterization which does not appear in the Bible, where lack of understanding is attributed to the Ninevites as a whole, irrespective of their gender) even while God establishes the importance of each being according to the divine perspective. God's mercy extends also to the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

animals: "'And als þer ben doumbe bestez in the bur3 mony,/Þat may not synne in no syt hemseluen to greve'" (516-7). Interestingly, all of the beings whom God had classified as innocent had been forced to undergo penance along with the guilty, perhaps indicating that even after having departed from their sinful ways, the people of Nineveh still possessed a humanly imperfect view of their world. The idea that all of the people of the city--innocent and guilty--are an interconnected whole is not entirely without flaws, as the people themselves are far from perfect, though they have repented.

Continuing the dialogue past the abrupt ending of the Book of Jonah, God then tells Jonas that had Jonas been God, surely he would have "hastif[ly]" condemned the repentant to an unjust death. God then explains that it is in the divine nature to forgive: "'I may not be so malicious and mylde be halden,/For malyse is no3 to mayntyne bout mercy withinne'" (522-3). God's use of the word *withinne* gently corrects Jonas's false assumptions about shelters. To be sheltered is not to hide inside limiting perspectives or to surround oneself with the armor of harsh judgment, which the sunlight of mercy cannot penetrate. Rather, mercy resides in the shelter of one's heart, and in turn one takes shelter in the divine mercy which resides in both the Beatitudes at the beginning of the poem and in God's redemption of the Ninevites at the end. Only with that mercy in one's heart can one go forth his/her own ways, as Jonas had initially desired to do. The poet[162] encourages Jonas, "'Be nou3t so gryndel, godman, bot go forth þy wayes,/Be preue and be pacient in payne and in joye....'" (524-5) By

---

[162]Andrew and Waldron indicate that it is difficult to determine where the voice of God ends and the voice of the poet begins again; I follow their text, in which God's speech ends with line 523. The last four lines are almost certainly in the voice of the poet, for it would be illogical for the God of medieval Christians to have to endure poverty--unless it were Christ speaking in mortal form, which is unlikely here. The poet's description of his difficult circumstances in the poem's prologue also suggests that these last lines are in his voice.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

now Jonas's ways are supposed to have become God's ways: the ways of patience by which he can truly become a "god-man."

To give a closure to the poem which the Book of Jonah itself lacks, in the last lines of the poem, the poet returns to his original *poynt:* the virtue of patience as protection against poverty and other forms of adversity:

> Forþy when pouerté me emprecez and paynez inno3e
> Ful softly with suffraunce sa3ttel mi behouez;
> Forþy penaunce and payne topreue hit in sy3t
> Þat pacience is a nobel poynt, þa3 hit displese ofte. (528-31)

At the end of the poem, the *poynt* of patience itself becomes a place of refuge for the poet as well as for Jonas. Rather than attempting to flee adversity, the reader is reminded to take shelter *withinne*--in the forbearance and sufferance which comes from the heart. In contrast to the smallness of Jonas's world-view the tiny *poynt* of patience stands: to be a small speck in an infinite universe, but nevertheless a *mote* or spot which does not seek refuge in narrow places or confining attitudes, a *mote* without the *motes* of pride or condemnation. Thus the poem itself becomes a *poynt:* the site of an argument for patience through which these teachings have been transmitted so that both the reader and the poet can become *poynts* as well.

The poem's conclusion articulates a sense of closure--not a stifling enclosure like one of Jonas's shelters, but, as Eldredge asserts, a reassuring promise that the reader can expand spiritually through a greater understanding of the cosmos and his or her own paradoxical smallness as a *poynt* in it ("Sheltering Space" 128). However, these last lines smooth over an indeterminacy in the ending of the Jonah story itself. While the poet's matching first and final words form a neat frame for the *poynt* which he had striven to present through Jonas and God's manipulations of interpretive space, the story

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which is framed by these words ends with a puzzling omission, as does the Book of Jonah itself.

Jonas is directed by God to "go forth þy wayes," and to go forth according to God's ways of patience as well, but, following the Bible, the poem does not specify whether Jonas indeed takes heed of God's command. Indeed, it is uncertain whether Jonas has expanded spiritually at all. His confinement in the whale had imposed patience on him, but this patience was perhaps more the result of being under extreme duress than a true change of heart, since Jonas's subsequent reaction to God's mercy on the Ninevites does not indicate greater understanding or compassion on the part of the prophet. The reader might assume that to go forth his ways implies that Jonas is free to return to Judea, his mission fulfilled, but it is uncertain whether he will return spiritually to the "termes of Judé"--its cultural prejudices and narrow spatial perspectives, which Jonas might not ever have left behind. This indeterminacy is not entirely the poet's fault, since he has been relying upon a biblical text which itself does not inform the reader what becomes of Jonah, or whether he has embraced God's mercy or continues to protest against it. Adding to the biblical text may have seemed arrogant to the poet, and so perhaps this indeterminacy in the poem was merely the poet's faithful act of reproducing and not augmenting the biblical text. However, Jonas's uncertain conversion is also interesting in light of the similar stubbornness of the narrator of *Pearl*. Though in the end the dreamer realizes his error in attempting to cross the river into the realm of the Pearl-Maiden, throughout his dream-vision, he had refused to accept the transcendant vision of heaven and earth which the maiden had offered to him. Though he is not a Jew like Jonas, he is also a "jueler"--perhaps a pun linking him to the *Pearl*-poet's other reluctant visionary.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poem's iconography of total spatial control on the part of God also establishes some disturbing *termes*. According to *Patience*, all of space, and all of the meaning derived from journeying through space, is controlled by God, whose parameters of perception and concern may be far greater than Jonas's, but are still bound by *termes* of their own. Human *wayes* will become divine *wayes* whether one likes it or not, as Myra Stokes argues:

> Obedience to God's word is not a virtue in this poem: it is a fact. It has almost the status of a physical law of the universe. When Jonah rejects God's bidding, the whole world (the elements, humankind, and animalkind) react against him in instinctive enforcement of it. ... Neither the narrator nor Jonah can choose but to suffer and 'be poor'; just as they cannot choose whether or not to go to Rome or Nineveh when commanded--only how. (Stokes 361)

Even if God is unable to teach a stubborn human being divine *wayes* through the spaces into which that person is thrust, the path through space which one follows is a path that is controlled by God. Resistance--the struggle against limiting geographical, social or moral *termes*--is futile because, even if one resists, God gets God's *waye* eventually. What is also disturbing about this element of the poem is that, if taken to its logical conclusion, it would seem that the story itself, and God's initial commandment to Jonas, were both futile. If Jonas was going to end up in Nineveh anyway, why would God bother to order him to go there, since God proves capable of transporting the struggling prophet there against his will? God's absolute control over space in *Patience* evokes problematic questions, not only about the doctrine of free will but about the necessity of narrative itself--for if everything were to follow a preordained plan, the conflicts and suspense of most Western narratives (including this poem) would be unnecessary devices and there would be no purpose to telling the story. In order to assert God's ultimate power, the poet seems to undermine the *termes* of his own art.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poet's attempt at closure also glosses over the inconsistencies and ambivalences of the poem's geographical and cultural *termes*. All along, the places through which Jonas travels at the behest (usually forcible) of God are supposed to expand his limited "termes of Judé" and cause him to be as concerned about the whole cosmos as God is. Yet at the end of the poem, it is not Jonas but God who reinstates some of the limiting *termes* of the poet's own time, such as the supposed witlessness of women, whom the Book of Jonah does not single out specifically as lacking in discernment. Additionally, while Jonas is expected to expand beyond his limiting cultural definitions, the poem's own portrait of Jonas falls prey to parameters which are just as restrictive. Seen since New Testament times as a type of Christ, in *Patience*, Jonas inhabits this role inconsistently. More frequently he exhibits the stereotypical features assigned to Jews by patristic and medieval writers, thus ironically reinstating the same limited cultural concepts in reference to Jews that Jonas himself had expressed in reference to the Ninevites. Though God's concern for the Ninevites is meant to encourage Jonas to reach beyond the constricting horizons of his own world-view, the poem ultimately resurrects these narrow boundaries of understanding in terms of Jonas's own people. While the poet is able to produce a critique of the assumed perspectives of those who had not been enlightened by the Christian message, the *termes* of the social and religious world from which the *Pearl*-poet himself wrote are not as completely and openly questioned here as in *Pearl* or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where the very process of creating geographical and moral *termes* is called into question.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Chapter IV:

## Pentangles and Entanglements: The Colonization of Space and Meaning in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,*

While *Pearl* presents an interpretive terrain through which heavenly mutuality, non-possessiveness and transcendence of earthly identity are expressed, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* expresses meaning in terms of an appropriation or colonization of space--exactly the error to which the dreamer of *Pearl* had fallen prey. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* social rituals, which give a place and meaning to each individual who takes part in them, are enacted in enclosed, "civilized" spaces, and give meaning to the landscape by appropriating and taming it. Catherine Batt remarks on the poem's opening lines:

> ...the opening stanzas' brief résumé of historical events stresses humankind's impulse to mark off fixed boundaries, to create particular areas of control, whether in terms of geographical or rhetorical space. ...the poem...replicates the desire to define and control spaces, actual and rhetorical, in its narrative movement.... ... Gawain, crossing the narrative's defined spaces both geographically and mentally, is the link between these spaces....(Batt 122)

As in *Clannesse,* in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* those who are marginalized by the social monolith are literally on the edge of society and the spaces which it controls. However, during the course of the poem, the center and margins of courtly space and meaning gradually become questioned. Perhaps this fluidity of courtly center and margins reflects an anxiety about the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

knightly order's actual place as a center of meaning in late medieval society. In *Image on the Edge,* Michael Camille argues that

> From the late twelfth century, enhanced royal authority and rising mercantile interests threatened the nobility from above and below. In the works of art made for knights, marginal forms appear that respond to their fear of the lower orders, and their wish to retain the signs of rank, blood, gesture and manners, all of which subjected their courtly bodies to a pseudo-spiritual code of ethical chivalric behavior and, in turn, subjugated all other bodies beneath them. It was already a dream of a lost order. While they placed others in the margins, they themselves were already halfway there. (*Image on the Edge* 99-100)[163]

This fear of losing power to marginalized social classes may also be reflected in the fictional Arthurian court's integration of the marginal into their

---

[163]Wendy Clein reports that this viewpoint, expressed by Johan Huizinga in *The Waning of the Middle Ages,* has been called into question by some scholars. According to Clein, Michael Powicka, Gervase Mathew, Juliet Vale, Malcolm Vale, Maurice Keen and other scholars have presented evidence that the chivalric ideal was still current in fourteenth-century Europe and England, influencing the development of the ethical standards of the late medieval aristocracy and inspiring the creation of secular chivalric orders (Clein 17). In fact, Clein staes that "Sidney Painter identifies chivalry's golden age as the fourteenth century" (17-8). However, evidence that chivalry was still a part of aristocratic life at the time of the *Pearl*-poet does not obviate the fact that the nobility may still have felt threatened by the forces which Camille describes above. In fact, the flowering of chivalry described by these scholars, with its emphasis on precise, detailed social codes, may have been a refuge from the perceived attacks upon the nobility by the "lower orders" and the royalty. Perhaps the nobility could convince itself that it was safe from the threat of social change if it took refuge in ever-more-ornate, crystallized patterns of social interaction. Victoria L. Weiss discusses this idea in reference to the elaborately staged tournaments, dramatic intervals and other forms of entertainment which were popular in late medieval courts. She argues that chivalry "has long been recognized as a beautiful fiction, producing a lovely, apotheosized version of the self with the capability of camouflaging one's failings and the uncertainties of life. The elaborate efforts to maintain this beautiful vision of one's class and one's self--what [Lee] Patterson calls the 'aesthetization of life'--underlies the record of lavish tournaments, feasts, vow-makings, royal entries, and other aristocratic entertainments of this period. ... The grand apotheosis effected by these beautiful forms of play became inextricably tied to defining the self" (Weiss 403-4). I would argue that these aristocratic entertainments acted not only to define the individual aristocratic self, but to define the upper class as a whole, causing it to take refuge in an ideal realm of intricate, exacting social codes while in reality its economic and political position was becoming more marginal. (In this chapter, I use the term "upper class" to denote both the knights and the royalty, between which Camille makes a distinction. Although the two were often at odds with each other in the Middle Ages, as Camille notes, in the poem itself, the mores and interactions of the court are not divided into knightly behavior versus royal behavior. Instead, oppositions are drawn between the court of Arthur and the court of Bertilak. Thus my analysis reflects the social situation described by the poem rather than the even more complex and stratified society of the poet's time.)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

central space, both literally (by containing potentially disruptive elements, like women, in confined spaces--from which they can still manipulate the social structure, as I shall later discuss) and metaphorically (by incorporating the marginal into the narratives of the court.) As an example of the latter method of appropriating the marginal, the uncanny display of the Green Knight's talking head is explained away by Arthur in 470-5 as part of the expected patterns of Christmas revelry, thereby divesting the event of its uncanniness, colonizing its meaning as effectively as the court seizes land. Far from demolishing the court or its conventional behaviors and mores, in 2513-8, Gawain's green lace is made into a jest, its potentially shattering meaning defused with the court's laughter and its adoption of the symbol as a token of honor rather than a badge of shame. Thus while in actual history, the court had already begun to lose its place as the physical and metaphorical "center" of the medieval world, in the "space" of fiction at least, it still maintains its central position, confidently assigning meanings, appropriating territory and even integrating the marginal into its interpretation of history and geography.

Each of the enclosing spaces of the poem acts as a corresponding "enclosure" for meaning, a place where the court's circumscribed world-view is practiced. In contrast, the exterior, marginal places serve as sites of testing. Eventually the boundaries of enclosed and exterior spaces are eroded, as the ostensibly conventional court of Bertilak becomes the location of temptation and trial. In addition to this central theme, I will also consider the recurrent images of binding and games, which are often used as correlaries to the enclosed spaces of the poem and even stand as symbols for the constructed cosmos of the court itself and the poem with its "lel letteres loken" (35) Finally, I intend to analyze the literal and metaphorical position of women in the poem: the spaces which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they occupy as well as the power, or lack thereof, which they wield within the enclosures of courtly space and signification.[164]

The introductory lines of the poem serve not only to situate Gawain's tale as part of a historical tradition about the founding of Britain, but also to establish that history involves a pattern of appropriating and colonizing space, as well as suppressing acts which are subversive to the social order. Sheila Fisher expresses this revisionary agenda in terms of idealized male roles:

> Through its emphasis on beginnings, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*...tries to revise Arthurian history in order to make it come out right. The purpose of this revisionary agenda is nothing less than to demonstrate how the Round Table might have averted its own destruction by adhering to the expectations of masculine behavior inherent in Christian chivalry. ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 129)

Though the poem commences with a description of the destruction of an ancient civilization, this moment of social disruption is downplayed by an immediately

---

[164]This issue has been examined by other scholars, in particular Sheila Fisher, Catherine Batt and Geraldine Heng. Fisher's position (expressed in her two essays "Leaving Morgan Aside" and "Taken Men and Token Women"), which focuses on the poet's relegation of Morgan Le Faye and Guinevere to marginal positions in the narrative, is that *"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* marginalizes Morgan Le Faye because her marginalization is central to its own revision of Arthurian history. ... Morgan and her marginalization are the means to the poem's end, because women are centrally implicated in the collapse of the Round Table and the end of the Arthurian Age. If women could be placed on the periphery, as Morgan is in this poem, then the Round Table might not have fallen. To deny the female would be to save the kingdom...." ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 130-131). Heng believes that the feminine presence in the poem is not so much safely in the margins, but erupts in the places where "the logic of the poem as the stage of the masculine actors founders and fails" (Heng 501). Female desire and female narrative appear not at the margins but "at the limit of the masculine narrative" (Heng 501); thus women's appearance in the text is not evidence of their successful marginalization and containment by males, but the failure of the male text to express their discourse adequately. She calls the poem "a theater of its feminine figures" (501) and states that the actions of the women in the poem form their own "endeles knot," like the pentangle itself (503). Batt's essay "Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, The Pentangle, and Narrative Space" most closely addresses my own concerns because it directly examines the spaces of the poem in relation to the poem's positioning of women, though her examination is not an exhaustive treatment of all of the poem's female-inhabited spaces. All three of these authors' positions on women in the poem have been influential to my own discussion, which will contribute to the larger critical conversation by tracing the contours of feminine space more specifically and systematically in the poem. I also consider particular associations between women, space, the body and Gawain himself which, to my knowledge, have not been discussed before.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

succeeding description of the founding of Britain. Thus the overwhelming sense of these lines is one of social and historical continuity--Britain rises out of the ashes of Troy and continues its greatness--rather than disorder and destruction. The process of Rome's (and eventually Britain's) founding is described graphically as an appropriation of new territory: "Hit watz Ennias þe aþel and his highe kynde/Þat sipen depreced prouinces, and patrounes bicome/Welne3e of al þe wele in þe west iles" (5-7).

However, the poet's attempt to conceal the historical and narrative rupture of the destruction of Troy by describing the founding of Britain immediately afterwards, almost literally arising out of the destruction of Troy, does not entirely succeed. "Þe tulk" of lines 3-4, who "watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe," is not named. But in line 5, the poet confidently asserts, "Hit watz Ennias þe aþel." These lines are perplexing because, though the succeeding lines indicate that Ennias is being named as the founder of Britain rather than the traitor who had brought about Troy's destruction, the proximity of the declaration "Hit watz Ennias" with "Þe tulk" who was made famous for his supreme treachery makes it appear as if the two were the same person. Thus the poet's establishment of a continuity between the destruction of Troy and the founding of Britain, while seeming to set up a seamless narrative and historical movement from one great civilization to another and minimizing the destructive aspects of war and conquest, is itself a subversive gesture because the ambiguity of the opening lines seems to suggest that this very continuity lies in an act of treachery. Though this connection is a traditional one and not the invention of the poet,[165] it still seems a subversive element in the story because

---

[165]This ambiguous association of the Trojan traitor with Aeneas ("Enneas") is not unique to the poet. Andrew and Waldron indicate that "Medieval legend associated Aeneas with the traitor Antenor in plotting with the Greeks," citing the Middle English alliterative *Destruction of Troy* and the *Laud Troy Book* as examples (Andrew and Waldron 207). This theme also appears in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* 2. 1474 and *The Book of the Duchess* 1119-20. While in *Sir Gawain*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the rest of the poem's introduction offers a sense of seamless continuity, not disruption, and in a summary of this length, Ennias' treachery could have been conveniently omitted.

After this initial expulsion or subduing of the original inhabitants, the poet describes the establishment of Rome and then Britain as a seamless process of building cities in the newly-acquired territory:

> Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis him swyþe,
> With gret bobbaunce þat bur3e he biges vpon fyrst
> And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
> Ticius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes;
> Langoberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,
> And fer ouer þe French flod, Felix Brutus
> On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
> Wyth wynne.... (8-15)

The poet only hints at the various instabilities of history in the final couplet, where he describes Britain as a place where "oft boþe blysse and blunder/Ful skete hatz skyfted synne" (18-9). However, in the following narrative of Gawain's exploits, the "blunder" is eventually subdued and "blysse" restored by incorporating uncanny and disruptive events into the life of the court and the narratives which give it meaning, just as earlier the land had been colonized in order to establish cities and their attendant social order.

When Britain's knightly society is described, the poet's portrayal of it includes the word *perinne,* which had often been reserved for privileged spaces in the preceding poems: "Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn rych/Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,/In mony turned tyme tene þat wro3ten" (20-2). The word *perinne* reveals the fact that Britain is a privileged enclosure, a place from which order and meaning arise. The fact that those who dwell therein love battle and thus can be potential disruptors of the social (or

---

*and the Green Knight,* "þe tulk" of ll. 3-4 could be Antenor, the syntax of the following lines suggests that it was Aeneas.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

even the religious) order contained "þerinne"[166] is quickly glossed over in the succeeding lines, in which the poet declares Britain to be the source of more wonders than any other nation and then introduces Arthur as the "hendest" of its kings. Hence the warlikeness of the Britons becomes a positive force, the source of adventures and wonders.

The poet then introduces the reader to the tale proper and invites him/her to attend to it. Interestingly, the poem speaks of itself in the same language used for a walled city or an armored knight:

> I schal telle hit astit, as I in toun herde,
> With tonge;
> As hit is stad and stoken,
> In stori stif and stronge,
> With lel letteres loken,
> In londe so hatz ben longe. (31-6)

The alliterative pattern of the story is as "stif and stronge" as the walls of a city or fortress. Even the knights of the tale are repeatedly referred to as "stif."[167] The "lel letteres loken" recall both literal locks and the imagery of binding and lacing which later depicts Gawain's network of promises, miniatures of those vows which hold society together, as well as the two very different "knots" of his pentangle and girdle, symbols of Gawain's spiritual state and definition of himself.

---

[166]Andrew and Waldron interpret *baret* as "battle, strife; enmity (with God)" (304). This latter implication appears in l. 752; the idea of *baret* as "battle" or "warfare" appears in both line 21 above and line 353, when Gawain refers to the prowess in battle of his fellow knights.

[167]For example, in line 104, "He [Arthur] sti3tles stif in stalle...." and later in line 107 he is again the "stif kyng". The Green Knight's horse takes after the knights, for in line 176 he is "A stede ful stif to strayne...." The Green Knight's axe is knotted and held strongly together, like the story with its "lel letteres loken": "Þe stele of a stif staf þe sturne hit bi grypte,/Þat watz wounden wyth yrn to þe wandez ende,/And al bigrauen with grene in gracios werkes;/A lace lapped aboute þat louked at þe hede...." (214-7) Of the knights and their fortress the Green Knight says, "And þy bur3 and þy burnes best ar holden,/Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde...." (259-60) He challenges the knights, asking if there is any "Þat dar stifly strike a stroke for anoþer...." (287) The Green Knight himself is again referred to as "stif" in lines 322 and 332. There are many more appearances of the word after these lines; it is always an alliteratively rhyming word.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In line 36 the story is pictured as a narrative embedded in the land of Britain itself. It is told in the territory which had been appropriated in order to found the nation. The story also gives meaning to the land as a history of the civilization founded upon it. In addition, the central role of the city or court in creating meaning is expressed in line 31. The poet speaks of his story as something that he had heard "in toun." It is from the city, the centralized space which gives rise to social constructs and customs, that the meaning of that civilization arises.

The story itself is once more bound to a physical location in lines 37-40:

> Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse
> With mony luflych lorde, ledez of þe best--
> Rekenly of þe Rounde Table alle þo rych breper--
> With rych reuel ory3t and rechles merþes.

The poet establishes Camelot as the center of Arthurian society, the place from which the social code emerges that has made the Round Table so famous. In the following stanzas, the court is described in terms of the elaborate, genteel ritual practices by which it observes the holiday. These social customs are symbolic of the construction and maintenance of a social order, which is in turn expressed through the creation of a central civilized space. Each activity is highly ritualized and structured: jousting, a formalized type of combat; gift-giving; the feast; and even the Mass and the games. Victoria L. Weiss describes the attitude which the nobility had towards games as rites of self-definition: "...noble men and women understood games or play...as a serious declaration of their status and worth...." (Weiss 404)[168]

---

[168]Critics have disputed whether or not the poet had intended to be critical of Camelot in this initial presentation of it. Clein conjectures how representatives of different strands of medieval thought might have read Arthur's court: "The portrait lacks any comment on the inner qualities of the court and instead praises externals: physical prowess and beauty. Since a concern with surfaces characterizes both romance and heraldic texts, readers might expect the narrative to be an uncritical celebration of aristocratic life. The 'fyrst age' would then represent the mythical, golden

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Interestingly, all of these highly formalized activities take place in some form of enclosed space: the hall, the chapel, even the jousting ring. The courtiers are portrayed as moving from one enclosed space to another: "Fro þe kyng watz cummen with kny3tes into þe halle,/Þe chauntré of þe chapel cheued to an ende" (62-3). These enclosures are symbolic of the social order, a closed system like the poem itself with its "lel letteres loken." The meanings which emanate from the court are likewise enclosed and unchanging, able to be threatened only by someone who comes from outside of the court--and, correspondingly, from outside of their range of acceptable appearance and behavior.

In contrast to the lively activity depicted in lines 64-71 (cheerful Noel greetings, exchanging gifts, playing flirtatious games) and on Arthur's part in lines 85-106, when he refuses to sit and eat until some marvel manifests itself, Guinevere is presented as a static object of admiration, a part of the wealth that surrounds her:

> Whene Guenore ful gay grayþed in þe myddes,
> Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:
> Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer
> Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe
> Þat were embrawded and beten wyth þe best gemmes
> Þat my3t be preued of prys wyth penyes to bye
> In daye (74-80).

---

origins of chivalry where knighthood existed in its purest form. At the same time, in recalling moralist condemnation of contemporary chivalry, this context allows equally for criticism. The poem's subtle invocation of both the courtly and the moralist perspectives colors our experience of the poem, making it difficult for us to read courtly passages without an uneasy sense of the way in which a moralist context calls romance values into question" (Clein 76). Clein's reading is astute here, to my mind, because she acknowledges the different viewpoints which the *Pearl*-poet encapsulates in his own text and the poem's playful resistance of a single interpretation. She asserts that "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* imaginatively re-creates for its readers the conflicts experienced by fourteenth-century knights in their practice of chivalry. The various roles readers are asked to adopt engage them in the problems the poem entertains, encouraging active involvement in the interpretive process. But for original readers who were in fact knights, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* would assume added meaning, for it dramatizes conflicts that formed part of their lived experience. For those readers, interpreting the poem would augment their understanding of their own lives" (Clein 53).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Like the Pearl-Maiden, Guinevere appears dressed in and surrounded by precious jewels and fabrics, but while the Maiden's priceless attire is a metaphor for her purity of soul, in Guinevere's case it expresses her position as a woman in secular society--as something which has been purchased "wyth penyes," just like her accoutrements. Just as the Arthurian court itself has been recreated in its "youth," without a hint of the disastrous end to which it will come through internal strife, Guinevere also has been recreated, not as the destroyer of Camelot (as "þe tulk" had been of Troy) but as a younger, pure, rehabilitated Guinevere who is rendered a silent, harmless object enclosed by her bejewelled canopy. The other source of Camelot's destruction, Lancelot, is conspicuously absent from the scene. Thus the exclusionary paradigm of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* not only keeps out potential subverters from the outside world, but it also has banished those members of the court itself who eventually cause its demise. Of course, such exclusion is never absolute in this poem. Guinevere's silence and containment in a restricted social and physical space (bounded by fine fabrics) presage Lady Bertilak's own confinement to activities in the equally narrow spaces of bedchamber (which also includes fabric curtains that screen the bed from view), private "closet" at Mass and the castle itself, as well as Morgan's presence "at home" with Bertilak. However, unlike Guinevere, whose confinement expresses the containment and suppression of her potentially destructive power, Lady Bertilak and Morgan are able to pursue their machinations unhindered by their spatial and social restrictions.[169]

---

[169]Numerous readers of the poem have commented on the initial presentation of Guinevere. Sheila Fisher discusses the connection of Guinevere to Arthur as a "sign" of his wealth, a silent female text pointing to the king who owns her and whose status she confirms: "...it is difficult to distinguish Guinevere and her worth from that of her splendid accoutrements. This is Guinevere fresh from the marriage settlement in which she, like most historical medieval women of her class, has been bought. This is Guinevere set at the high table for all to admire, a token of Arthur's wealth, still the chaste queen who is the sign and symbol of the king to whom she refers. Her rehabilitation according to the revisionist directive of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is inscribed in her stasis,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

By being described as a jewel-covered, static form, Guinevere comes to resemble not only the Pearl-Maiden, with her costume of pearls, but the Pearl-Maiden's city itself: she has become a place, a gem-encrusted site for the gaze of the court to attempt to penetrate as she peeks out from behind her curtains. As the wife of a king, not only is Guinevere a token of Arthur's power and wealth, but she is also expected to be chaste, a "space" inhabited by Arthur alone. Her enclosed position at the table reflects her status as a body enclosed, reserved only for his use. As a silent, contained figure, Guinevere is the "good girl" of Sheila Fisher's description, a static portrait "that emblematize[s] women's proper placement as tokens within the aristocratic world of romance" ("Taken Men" 73). She is the ultimate embodiment of chivalric womanhood in that not only is she enclosed, but she is herself an enclosure, a representation of that very restricted space to which medieval noblewomen were assigned. Yet in this supreme representation of cloistered womanhood, chaste wife as enclosed space, there is a seed of subversion: it is ironic that Guinevere, whose unchastity, though not a part of this text, in other Arthurian texts (which the poem's readers are likely to have encountered) eventually undermines the integrity of the Round Table as a social space, here embodies both feminine and courtly integrity, just as earlier Aeneas was possibly both traitor and hero. Guinevere's containment also foreshadows how women like Morgan and Lady Bertilak will shatter female

---

in her function as the emblem of Arthur. Because she seems incapable of movement, she seems incapable of the specific movement that would lead her to a treacherous union with Lancelot [whom the poem excludes from the "space" of the story]" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 134-5). Ironically, however, "the initial description of Guinevere is placed as close to the opening mention of historical betrayal as Morgan's agency is placed to the closing repetition of 'þe segge and þe asaute...at Troye'" (135).

Setsuko Haruta contrasts the immobile Guinevere with the very mobile and active Lady Bertilak: "What is supposed to be the queen's description is in fact almost entirely devoted to the gorgeous dais, the jewel-studded canopy and the silk curtains which separate and cover her presence from other participants at the feast. The only concrete detail which the poet mentions about the person of the queen is her gray eyes which stare around her through the curtains" She is "aloof, distant and static" (Haruta 209).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

social containment, paradoxically from within the same structures which confine them.

The ritualistic and formalized conduct of the court functions to uphold social hierarchies, as is demonstrated by the positioning of the various nobles at the table:

> There gode Gawan watz grayþed Gwenore bisyde,
> And Agravayn a la Dure Mayn on þat oþer syde sittes--
> Boþe þe knynges sister-sunes and ful siker kni3tes;
> Bischop Bawdewyn abof biginez þe table,
> And Ywan, Vryn son, ette with hymseluen.
> Þise were di3t on þe des and derworþly serued,
> And siþen mony siker segge at þe sidbordez. (109-15)

However, the poem soon contrasts this structured arrangement with the arrival of the Green Knight, whose appearance and behavior are outside of the norms of the court. It is fitting that this knight's disruptive arrival (complete with unexpected noises which contrast with the trumpet-blast announcing the serving of the first course) occurs from outside of the castle, the space which is enclosed neither by walls nor by the strictures of social convention.

The Green Knight is described on two occasions in the act of penetrating the courtly space and interrupting its rituals: first upon opening the doors and then as he rides across the floor and into the space of the feast proper:

> For uneþe watz þe noyce not a whyle sesed,
> And þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,
> Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,
> On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
> Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware and so þik,
> And his lyndes and his lymes so longe and so grete,
> Half-etayn in erde I hope þat he were.... (134-40)

The contrast between the conventionality of the feast and the uncanniness of the knight is emphasized in lines 134-5, especially in the contrasting words "kyndely served" and "aghlich mayster." The meal has just been served with the utmost

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

politeness when suddenly a very impolite and ghastly individual invades from outside. However, *kynde* has the implication of "natural" as well as polite or correct in terms of manners, thus drawing even more attention to the unnaturalness of the knight's appearance and, eventually, his coloring, his half-giant origin and magical powers.[170] The word *kyndely* also would seem to indicate that the court considers its highly wrought, artificial code of behavior to be natural--an example of how the society of the poem constructs and imposes definitions upon the world which it also has subdued spatially. The shocking appearance of the knight, his invasion of the court and his potential to undermine its structure, is also colonized and naturalized by the court in that Arthur integrates his arrival into the court's ritual system. After all, the king had not expected to begin the meal until some wonder showed itself, and thus the Green Knight's disturbing appearance is absorbed into the court's expectations and games.[171]

Interestingly enough, the knight's most uncanny feature--his greenness--is almost made an afterthought. Only after the poet has finished describing the knight's wondrous size does he mention the knight's unusual color:

For wonder of his hwe men hade,

---

[170]*The Oxford English Dictionary* glosses *kynde* as "that which naturally belongs to or befits one", "Natural state,form or condition", "A natural quality, property, or characteristic", "the manner or way natural or proper to anyone" and "proper, appropriate, fitting." (VIII. 436-8) Thus *kynde* embraces both what is natural and what is "fitting" according to an artificial system, like the social conventions of Camelot. (These usages were all current in the *Pearl*-poet's time; our current usage has changed so that "kind" has come to mean good-natured and thoughtful, as well as a type (kind) of thing.)

[171]Clein presents the disparity of Arthur's expectations of the marvel that will allow everyone to eat and what actually appears: when Arthur asks for "sum mayn meruayle" (94), "What he wants is a game in the heraldic or romance sense, a celebration of courtly culture in a controlled, artistic form. The entertainment Arthur calls for would be unremarkable in a fourteenth-century context, yet that which appears is alien" (Clein 78). However, this description does not take into account how accomplished the court is at familiarization of the unfamiliar. The court still manages to integrate this alien apparition into their Christmas merriment, hanging the axe in a place of honor, laughing about the Green Knight and finally settling down to eat after the marvel had presented itself on schedule.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Set in his semblaunt sene;
He ferde as freke were fade,
And oueral enker grene. (146-50)

The Green Knight's most marginal feature seems to have been marginalized by the narrative. While the court would have immediately noticed his greenness and been awed by it, the reader is not similarly startled by it--it seems almost normalized by the poet's tardy representation of it. Thus the text draws attention to itself as a space for colonizing the uncanny and controlling the reader/viewer's response to it.[172]

The contrast between the knight's unearthliness and his eventual absorption into the court's ritual patterns in lines 467-90 is also present in his wardrobe and the weapons that he carries. Only after a lengthly description of the costuming of the knight and his horse--which is as intricate and structured as the rituals of the court--does the poet reiterate that "such a fole vpon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes,/Watz neuer sene in þat sale wyth sy3t er þat tyme,/Wyth y3e" (196-8). These lines indicate the foreignness of the Green Knight and his horse: not only have such beings never been inside of the castle, but no place on earth can be imagined as their proper realm. They are complete outsiders, both from the space of the court and from the world which the court imagines according to its definitions of normalcy. This placement of the Green Knight in a space so distant from the court as to be unknown and unnamed is consonant with traditional medieval representations of the monstrous races, whom John Block Friedman describes as "always far away, in India, Ethiopia, Albania, or Cathay, places whose outlines were vague to the medieval mind but whose names evoked mystery" (Friedman 1) He further notes that the monstrous

---

[172]Of course, the poet's delaying description of the Green Knight's most uncanny feature until the last moment also adds an element of suspense to the poem, much as a contemporary horror novel or film might conceal the most obviously evil or ghastly feature of an antagonist until the last possible moment.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

races' "traditional placement at the world's edges was closely related to their monstrousness, both in character and in appearance" (Friedman 37). Thus the Green Knight's marginal appearance implies both a marginal geographical origin and potentially marginal behavior. As Gawain will discover, however, the most frightening aspect of the Green Knight's marginality (and of marginality in general in the poem) is that he is in actuality not that far away from Camelot, both in terms of Hautdesert's geographical proximity to Camelot (in the wilds of Wales, but still in the British Isles conquered by Felix Brutus) and in terms of its social closeness to Arthur's court (Hautdesert engages in the same social rituals as Camelot, Gawain finds, which conceals its otherness as the realm of Morgan Le Faye).

However, the Green Knight is not so marginal that he does not incorporate features which are a disconcerting reflection of the court's own physical and behavioral trappings. Batt observes that

> The Green Knight, at his first appearance at Arthur's court, embodies a disturbing combination of the unearthly and the courtly, and the breakdown of boundaries between wild and civilized space finds full expression in the place with which he is associated. (Batt 135)

Clein agrees that "He seems alternately terrifying and unnatural and handsome and well-proportioned" (Clein 79). The contrasting portrait of the knight as outsider and as a richly-dressed (albeit green) noble is expressed most succinctly in the description of his axe, which is both of terrifying size and genteel decoration:

> Þe stele of a stif staf þe sturne hit bi grypte,
> Þat watz wounden wyth yrn to þe wandez ende,
> And al bigrauen with grene in gracios werkes;
> A lace lapped aboute þat louked at þe hede
> And so after þe halme halched ful ofte,
> With tryed tasselez þerto tacched innoghe

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On botounz of þe bry3t grene brayden ful ryche. (214-20)

The weapon is at once a grim tool of killing and a beautifully-decorated object worthy of the court's rich appointments. It also features a number of knots and laces, objects which will come to symbolize the entanglements of society and its elaborate rituals, which can often lead one astray as well as give one a framework according to which one might live rightly. Like social obligations themselves, the axe both severs and entangles, is decorative and deadly at the same time.[173]

The poet emphasizes the Green Knight's invasion of the space in which the social order is enshrined with a second mention of his entrance into the hall, when he actually comes to the dais where Arthur and his knights are feasting: "Þis haþel heldes hym in and þe halle entres,/Driuande to the he3e dece--dut he no woþe./Haylsed he neuer one but he3e he ouerloked" (221-3). The knight's potential to disrupt the social order is expressed by the fact that he does not greet anyone in a courteous manner, but looks above their heads, as if defying the authority of Arthur and his nobles. The fact that he cannot identify the king among his nobles--by his placement at the table, the ornaments that he wears, or his clothing--confirms again that the Green Knight comes from outside the enclosure of the court. The words that he speaks to the court are also presumptuous--without preamble he demands to know where the king is, and to speak with him.

---

[173]R. A. Shoaf has a unique interpretation of the axe as it appears in line 209, as well as in these lines: "Crucially, the poet refers to the ax as an object 'to expoun in spelle,' as something, in other words, to be interpreted as if, almost, the axe were a kind of text. ... And if the ax is thus a kind of text, it is reasonable to suggest that the text is also a kind of ax, a mysterious weapon challenging the reader to a game in which he may lose his head. ...[T]he text is...a kind of ax in that it cuts between or severs the conventional relations between signifiers and signifieds so as to expose and test those conventions in the eerie but brilliant light of its own fiction. And our part is necessarily 'to expoun in spelle,' even if we thus risk losing our heads" ("'Syngne of Surfet'" 156-7). Shoaf's imaginative suggestion is quite legitimate in a poem where a pentangle and a girdle are texts in their own right, which gloss the poem itself, as Shoaf argues elsewhere.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Because the knights can neither name nor categorize the Green Knight, none is able to speak to him. Silence infiltrates the hall, disrupting the feast, just as the knight himself has:

> For fele sellyez had þay sen bot such neuer are;
> Forþi for fantoum and fayry3e þe folk þere hit demed.
> Þerfore to answare watz ar3e mony aþel freke
> And al stouned at his steuen and ston-stil seten
> In a swoghe sylence þur3 þe sale riche.
> As al were slypped vpon slepe so slaked hor lotez
> In hyye.... (238-45)[174]

However, they manage even in their silence to recover social conventions--or at least they disguise their terror of the knight behind a polite refusal to speak before the king himself addresses the marvel. The poet notes that not all are silent as a result of astonishment, but some, out of courtesy, wait for Arthur to respond to the knight:

> I deme hit not al for doute
> Bot sum for cortaysye--
> Bot let hym þat al schulde loute
> Cast vnto þat wy3e. (246-9)

Thus the knights both establish their difference from this invader and integrate him into their social schema "þerinne" by responding with politeness to his rude requests, even if they are not entirely sensible or expected. Arthur also extends an invitation to the knight to become a part of the life of the court by requesting that he dismount and join them for the feast:

> Þen Arpour, bifore þe hi3 dece, þat auenture byholdez

---

[174]Shoaf reads lines 233-4 and 237-40 in terms of their many references to the process of interpretation and its difficulties. He argues that this passage of the poem is important in terms of the court as a producer of meaning "for its indisputable insistence on the incapacity of the courtiers, despite their extensive acquaintance with wonders, to interpret the Green Knight, even after having seen many wonders, even after studying the Green Knight, they cannot interpret him--perhaps because they have seen to many wonders, even perhaps a surfeit of wonders?" ("'Syngne of Surfet'" 154).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> And rekenly hym reuerenced, for rad was he neuer,
> And sayde, "Wy3e, welcum iwys to þis place.
> Þe hede of þis ostel, Arthour I hat.
> Li3t luflych adoun and lenge, I þe praye,
> And quatso þy wylle is we schal wyt after." (250-5)

The Green Knight, however, states that it is not his mission to stay for dinner with the court, a refusal which further emphasizes his lack of manners: "'Nay, as help me,' quoþ þe haþel, 'He þat on hy3e syttes,/To wone any quyle in þis won hit watz not min ernde....'" (256-7) While it is not his destiny to relinquish his place as an invader of the hall's space, it is the Green Knight's mission to test the virtue of that court, and perhaps to call into question its integrity thereby.

In offering his challenge, both to an individual warrior and to the court as a whole, first the Green Knight speaks of what he has heard concerning the renown of Arthur, his knights, the court itself and the courtesy which is practiced within. He specifically offers his challenge as an outsider to those inside of the "hous" of the castle: "'If any so hardy in þis hous holdez hymseluen,/Be so bold in his blod, brayn in hys hede,/Þat dar stifly strike a stroke for anoþer....'" (285-7). When no one answers his challenge, he expresses dismay, not just at the knights but at the building itself, questioning whether he is indeed in the place whose renown he had come to test:

> "What, is þis Arþures hous," quoþ þe haþel þenne,
> "Þat al þe rous rennes of þurgh ryalmes so mony?
> Where is now your sorquydrye and your conquestes,
> Your gryndellayk and your greme and your grete wordes?
> Now is þe reuel and þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
> Ouerwalt with a worde of on wy3es speche,
> For al dares for deede withoute dynt schewed!" (309-15)

In his boast, the Green Knight challenges not only the place and its inhabitants, but the very tradition which is created by that place and the knights within. He accuses the court of lacking those virtues for which they were so renowned outside of Camelot and declares that Camelot itself has been subverted (literally

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

overthrown, like Troy at the beginning of the poem) by the words of an outsider. The Green Knight thus verifies that the walls of the castle, the social importance and centrality of those inside and the virtues for which they are famed can thus be penetrated and disrupted from outside.[175]

When Gawain accepts the challenge of the Green Knight, he manages to reinstate the court's definition of itself. In contrast to the proud and scornful words of the invader, Gawain's words are polite and he seeks to restore the proper social order by insisting that Arthur will not take on the Green Knight's challenge himself. Gawain further argues that it would be unseemly for the king to answer the challenge of a man who, he seems to imply, is completely lacking in manners, a social as well as a literal outsider:

> "For me þink hit not semly--as hit is soþ knawen--
> Þer such an askyng is heuened so hy3e in your sale,
> Þa3 3e 3ourself be talenttyf, to take hit to yourseluen,
> Whil mon so bolde yow aboute vpon bench sytten
> Þat under heuen, I hope non ha3erer of wylle,
> Ne better bodyes on bent þer baret is rered." (348-53)

Gawain reminds the court of the marginal status of the Green Knight by drawing attention to the place where the demand has been uttered--"in your sale."

---

[175]Weiss describes an interlude which occurred at the wedding feast of Edward I (1239-1307) and Eleanor of Castile, during which the king and his knights pretended to be Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, but, unbeknownst to his knights, the promises that Edward extracted from them in the play were really promises to commit themselves to a real battle: "The parallels with the opening scene of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are quite striking. Just as Arthur does in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Edward, after the first course is served, swears an oath that he will want to hear tidings before the next course is served. Just as Arthur's vow is followed by the appearance of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain*, Edward's vow is followed by the entrance of a bloody squire, who taunts those present in words oddly reminiscent of those used by the Green Knight.... ... The squire wants revenge against the Welsh for what they have done to him, and he asks the king and his knights to provide it. As in *Sir Gawain*, it is the king himself who answers the challenge of the squire, and the 'Arthurian knights' present promise to go with him" (Weiss 412). Weiss presents this anecdote from van Velthem (1248-1316)'s *Voorzetting van den Spiegel Historiael* to advance her argument that by the *Pearl*-poet's time, aristocratic audiences had a difficult time distiguishing play and reality (for example, Gawain takes seriously the Green Knight's demands in their "game") and that the *Pearl*-poet intends to be critical of the aristocracy's legitimization of itself through its games and art.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Because the knight has issued his demand inside the castle of Arthur, the combat must be undertaken according to the court's rules of conduct, which forbid a king from deigning to accept a challenge himself when his knights are capable of answering it. Gawain also demonstrates his courtesy on taking up the challenge on Arthur's behalf as a defender of his lord and kinsman, as a good knight should. It is also interesting in terms of the social and cosmological order of the poem that Gawain speaks of the knights of the Round Table as the boldest and fiercest "under heuen," as if they and their customs have received divine benediction. By highlighting the bravery of Arthur's knights "under heuen," Gawain also reestablishes the spatial and symbolic centrality of Camelot.

When he defines himself for the first time before the court and the Green Knight, Gawain speaks of himself in the conventional language of self-abnegation: "'I am þe wakkest, I wot, and of wyt feblest,/And lest lur of my lyf, quo laytes þe sothe'" (354-5). This practiced ritual humility is the first indication that the values of the court as a producer of meaning may be distorted, or, as Shoaf writes, Gawain's court-produced speech is "so mobile, so nervous, because *cortaysye* has become more doctrinaire system than meaningful code for expressing human relations"(*The Poem as Green Girdle* 62). Gawain is clearly not the weakest and least valuable of the knights, though he invokes the word "soþe" to indicate the truth of his claim. Though the Green Knight's declaration of his supremacy and invincibility is certainly prideful, it is closer to the truth than Gawain's self-effacing definition of himself.[176]

---

[176]By pointing out the false humility of Gawain's courtly speech to the Green Knight, neither Shoaf nor I intend to criticize Gawain's own behavior or character here. His words in response to the Green Knight are part of the formulaic discourse of the court, which demands a ritual modesty of its knights that seems more stylized than genuinely felt in most cases. The artificial modesty of Gawain's speech is an indictment of the court and its verbal gestures, not of Gawain himself, who speaks here as an instrument of the court. If anything, Gawain can be exonerated personally because these words are his society's rather than his own; this is not his humility (or pride) but the court's as a whole.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Another interesting aspect of Gawain's speech is his waiver of courtly responsibility for his words: "'And if I carp not comlyly, let alle þis cort rych/Bout blame'" (360). While Gawain asks that the court be absolved of blame if his words are not found acceptable, it is ironic that these very words come from the court. It is the court, not just Gawain as an individual, which would define Arthur's acceptance of the Green Knight's challenge to be an unseemly abdication on their part. It is the court which had invented Gawain as he has spoken of himself. His description of himself as the weakest knight is conventional modesty, not a heartfelt expression of his own inadequacies--a feeling which he will express at the end of the poem, only to have the court subsume his realization and transform it. While Gawain absolves the court of all blame for his words, this disclaimer ignores the fact that the court has created these words and has even created their speaker. Gawain is wholly defined by his place in the castle, both his location and his rank, but in the course of his journey, other places will challenge this definition.

When Gawain accepts the challenge of the Green Knight and Arthur blesses him, the two combatants first secure the necessary pledges from each other before beginning the game. These promises echo the kinds of vows and agreements which hold society together. The conversation is replete with words like "soþe," "trouþe" and "covenaunt," indicating the social relevance of these promises, which echo oaths of fealty that are offered to a king by his subjects.

When the Green Knight asks Gawain to swear to seek him out in order to receive a return blow from him, Gawain immediately asks where he might find the Green Knight:

> "Where schulde I wale þe?" quoþ Gauan. "Where is þy place?
> I wot neuer where þou wonyes, bi Hym þat me wro3t,
> Ne I know not þe, kny3t, þy cort ne þi name.
> Bot teche me truly þerto and telle me howe þou hattes,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> And I schal ware alle my wyt to wynne me þeder--
> And þat I swere þe for soþe and by my seker trawep." (398-403)

It is interesting that Gawain requests the knight's name and his place at the same time. For Gawain, the Green Knight is defined by his "place," his "cort." Gawain equates himself with his own court, for, as Batt states, "...a knight's domicile is part of his identity...." (Batt 127) At once he wants the Green Knight to "teche" him his name and his place: to teach him his name and show him to his place is a single action.[177] The word *teche* has this dual meaning in *Pearl* also, where the dreamer asks the Pearl-maiden "'Now tech me to that myry mote'" (936), requesting that she lead him to the heavenly city and teach him of its mysteries. Gawain believes that he can learn more about the Green Knight by learning of his place, his court of origin, but the knight refuses to give Gawain any information until Gawain strikes the blow, since otherwise he would not even have to leave Camelot:

> "3if I þe telle trwly quen I the tape haue
> And þou me smoþely hatz smyten, smartly I þe teche
> Of my hous and my home and my own nome.
> Þen may þou frayst my fare, and forwardez holde;
> And if I spende no speche þenne spedez þou þe better,
> For þou may leng in þy londe and layt no fyrre." (406-11)

Though the knight's statement here is rather literal--Gawain will not have to undertake a journey away from Camelot unless the Green Knight survives the encounter--the remark foreshadows the more symbolic journey that Gawain will undergo. In journeying to the place of the Green Knight, a place where the lessons, mores and conventions of his own place in Camelot are tested, Gawain eventually discovers his own "place" in a cosmos whose meaning is derived not from the court, but from God.

---

[177] *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *teche* as "to show (a person) the way; to direct, conduct, convey, guide *(to, from* a place)," "to show what is to be observed or done; to direct, appoint, prescribe, decree, enjoin," "to show by way of information or instruction" (XIX. 688).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

After Gawain deals his blow, the still-headless knight tells Gawain where he might be found:

> "To þe Grene Chapel þou chose, I charge þe, to fotte
> Such a dunt as þou hatz dalt--disserued þou habbez--
> To be 3ederly 3olden on Nw 3eres morn.
> The Knyght of þe Grene Chapel men knowen me mony;
> Forþi me for to fynde, if þou fraystes, fayles þou neuer.
> Þerfor com, oþer recreaunt be calde þe behoues." (451-6)

It is ironic that the Green Knight, who has just displayed his outsider status in the most uncanny way, and who has told Gawain of a place which is unknown to the court and undoubtedly perilous, uses a courtly definition for Gawain's behavior should he not answer the challenge. While the whole adventure is tainted with marginal and disturbing supernatural forces, Gawain would still be considered cowardly by convention if he did not fulfill his part of the bargain with the knight, however awesome and alien his adversary might be. The promise which he had made to the Green Knight as part of the game is a reflection of the more serious "covenauntes" made between different members of society, and so to violate this bargain would be to violate the very system of contractural obligations by which the court defines itself. The Green Knight's adherence to aspects of the chivalric code is also indicated by the fact that he acknowledges Gawain deserving of a return blow with the axe (thus proving that the knight has the same sense of contractural obligation as Gawain does, and perhaps a sense of guiltiness as well, which the poem reveals later.) Additionally, for all his uncanny wildness, the Green Knight obviously follows the same calendar as the court; otherwise he would not be able to meet Gawain at the next New Year. The fact that the court and the Green Knight share an awareness of holidays (which are imposed upon the year by society rather than being natural occurrences, like the seasons) and of the rules of a contract works

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

against the sense of uncanny otherness about the Green Knight which the poet had been at such pains to establish. Whereas all of the previous aspects of the Green Knight had suggested his difference from the court, here the poet suggests that the Green Knight is not entirely different from the courtiers after all. This implication that otherness is not always at a great distance foreshadows events later in the poem, such as the revelation of Morgan Le Faye's role in the plot.

The court's reaction after the departure of the Green Knight is particularly revealing. Initially they are perplexed, for though the Green Knight had named his home to Gawain, it is nonetheless outside of their own picture of the world:

> With a runisch rout þe raynez he tornez,
> Halled out at þe hal dor, his hed in his hande,
> Þat þe fyr of þe flynt fla3e fro fole houes.
> To quat kyth he becom knwe non þere,
> Neuer more þen þay wyste from queþen he watz wonnen. (457-510)

The Green Knight is represented once more as marginal to the life and space of the court. He vanishes through the hall-door, returning to the unknown land from whence he had come, demonstrating his alienness by, as the poet states with deceptive brevity, holding "his hed in his hande" as he rides out.

However, the court does not react with shock or awe at this abrupt arrival and departure and the entire series of uncanny events in between. Instead they attempt to integrate this experience of the marginal into the conventions of their ritualized lives. The first reaction of the king and his courtiers is to make the Green Knight the object of laughter and ridicule:

> Þe kyng and Gawen þare
> At þat grene þy la3e and grenne,
> 3et breued watz hit ful bare
> A meruayl among þo menne. (463-6)

It is as if, through the laughter of the knights, the uncanny occurrence is effectively colonized and made tame, like the land which the court has

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

appropriated. Just as the court appropriates territory, taming wild places in order to render them habitable, so the court also colonizes uncanny situations, like the arrival of the Green Knight and his eerie demonstration of his immortality, by making them a part of its amusements.[178]

---

[178]Laughter is essential to Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of medieval and Renaissance carnivalesque art forms in *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin writes, "All these forms of protocol and ritual based on laughter and consecrated by tradition existed in all the countries of medieval Europe; they were sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life out of officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated in more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year" (Bakhtin 5-6). "Christmas laughter" was sanctioned in such celebrations as the Feast of Fools (Bakhtin 14), and in the context of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Arthur and Gawain may have been sharing this "Christmas laughter" at the expense of the Green Knight as the Fool. Bakhtin argues that laughter was a characteristic of "folk" art, like the fabliaux and bawdy songs, asserting that laughter was foreign to the "official feast" of people in power, like Arthur and his nobles: "...the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it" (Bahktin 9). However, in its appearances in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, laughter comes not from the suppressed "lower orders" but from the aristocracy itself. Here, it occurs not at a carnivalesque festival of the people but at the "official feast" where such laughter is unwelcome, according to Bakhtin. It serves not a subversive function, undermining the existing social order, but a containing function, making the potentially subversive (the Green Knight's attack on the integrity of Camelot's reputation as an ideal society) become incorporated into the discourse of the "official" culture of the aristocracy, as merely a part of the Christmas entertainments of the court. Other examples of how laughter reinstates social norms occur in lines 1777-8, where Gawain's laughter helps him to evade the Lady's subversive suggestions and at the end of the poem, when the court's laughter transforms the green girdle from a token of shame to a badge of honor. Perhaps this court-sanctioned use of laughter is more subversive than Bakhtin had imagined. While this genteel laughter serves to reinstate the power of the court to construct meaning and morality, it serves also to deflect the criticism of its integrity which comes from outside. The Green Knight's challenge, though it emanates from a source outside of the (en)closed society of the court, is a legitimate challenge to the mores of the nobility. The laughter of the poem tends to come at moments when interpretation, and who has the power to interpret, becomes an issue, such as how the court should read the Green Knight and what meaning should be assigned to the lace. The paradoxically subversive laughter of the court, which itself produces social meaning, casts aside questions about other ways of interpreting signs in the poem, especially signs of the "carnivalesque" world from which the Green Knight hails, the "anti-court" of Hautdesert in which the mores of Camelot are tested in the person of Sir Gawain.

Arthur Lindley discusses *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a "tragi-carnivalesque" poem. He asserts that a major project of the poem is to interrogate the aristocratic process of identity formation which critics like Lee Patterson and Veronica Weiss have analyzed. He writes, "As Bakhtin argues, carnival degradation dissolves artificial social identity to reconnect us with the natural and universal. To do so, however, is to interrogate the whole idea of identity: what we are at the "lower bodily level" is...interchangeable" (Lindley 69). I will discuss more of Lindley's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Arthur continues this process of integrating the marvel into the conventions of the court when he reassures Guinevere that such lurid and terrifying spectacles are merely a part of the Christmas ritual:

> Þag3 Arþer þe hende kyng at hert hade wonder,
> He let no semblaunt be sene but sayde ful hy3e
> To þe comlych quene with cortays speche,
> "Dere dame, today demay yow never.
> Wel bycommes such craft vpon Cristmasse--
> Laykyng of enterludez, to la3e and to syng--
> Among þise kynde caroles of kny3tes and ladyez.
> Neuerþelece to my mete I may me wel dres,
> For I haf sen a selly I may not forsake." (467-75)

Arthur also reminds the court that the feast was dependent upon some marvel showing up on schedule. He is finally able to eat his dinner as planned, since something marginal and strange has obediently presented itself--not just in a story, as he requests of his knights in lines 90-99, but "in person," in the form of the Green Knight. Thus the court affirms its own spatial centrality and power to dispense meanings by making it seem as if even the marginal is part of the expected plan, to be integrated into the rituals which give the court meaning as well as literally to be welcomed into the court's inner spaces. By integrating these uncanny events into its own definition of itself via its rituals and customs, the court does not allow itself to be threatened by those who invade its space and its conventional standards. Conversely, the court's identity remains intact by at least trying to incorporate the marginal.

The integration of the adventure of the Green Knight into the life of the court is established again when Arthur requests that Gawain hang the axe where it can be seen and will become the object of tales:

---

readings of the poem later, in connection with the episodes at Hautdesert, which he focuses on most closely.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

He glent vpon Sir Gawen and gaynly he sayde,
"Now sir, heng vp þyn ax, þat hatz innogh hewen."
And hit watz don abof þe dece on doser to henge,
Þer alle men for meruayl my3t on hit loke
And bi trwe tytel þerof to telle þe wonder. (476-80)

Not only would telling stories integrate the axe into the court's continuing tale about itself, but its presence on the wall also indicates the court's awareness that they are becoming a legend. The act of hanging the axe would also seem to indicate that the court has prematurely proclaimed Gawain's victory, imposing its own closure on a story and a journey which have both not yet been completed. Like the enclosing walls of the castle, this narrative of the court is comfortingly enclosed, belying the unfinished nature of Gawain's adventure and the "loose ends" which will remain at its close, as well as the knots in which he will become entangled, partly because of the values which he has inherited from the court.

The court's ultimate inability to control reality is exemplified in the description of the passing of the seasons prior to Gawain's quest. The poet comments that, though Gawain finds in the games of the court a welcome release from his impending unpleasant obligation to the Green Knight, time moves inevitably onward, approaching the day when he must leave on his adventure:

Gawan watz glad to begynne þose gomnez in halle,
Bot þa3 the ende be heuy haf ye no wonder:
For þa3 men ben mery in mynde when þay han mayn drynk,
A 3ere 3ernes ful 3erne and 3eldez neuer lyke;
Þe forme to þe fynisment foldez ful selden. (495-9)

Though the court might attempt closure by integrating the Green Knight's presence into their own meaning-producing rituals, and by returning to their games in an effort to deny the very real challenge of the knight, the ending of this story has not yet been decided.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The poet compares the unpredictability of the endings of stories to the nature of the passing of the seasons. Though each season follows the others in a predictable pattern, winter is still a fearsome time, as uncanny and wild as the Green Knight himself and the untamed, undefined and unappropriated land in which Gawain will find himself. Initially the seasons are described in terms of the way in which society divides them by means of the liturgical year:

> Forþi þis 3ol ouer3ede, and þe 3ere after,
> And vche sesoun serlepes sued after oper:
> After Crystenmasse com þe crabbed Lentoun,
> Þat fraystez flesche wyth þe fysche and fode more symple.... (500-3)[179]

However, this image of the orderly passage of the seasons, which is echoed by the orderly, ritualized practices of the court itself, is superseded by an image of chaos: the seasons struggling against one another rather than gracefully giving way. First the spring forces the winter to retreat: "Bot þenne þe weder of þe worlde wyth wynter hit þrepez,/Colde clengez adoun, cloudez vplyften...." (504-5) and then eventually winter seizes control once more:

> He dryues wyth dro3t the dust for to ryse,
> Fro þe face of þe folde to fly3e ful hy3e;
> Wroþe wynde of þe welkyn wrastelez with þe sunne,
> Þe levez laucen fro þe lynde and ly3ten on þe grounde,
> And al grayes þe gres þat grene watz ere;

---

[179]Though all of the holidays mentioned are part of the liturgical calendar, the New Year's date of Gawain and the Green Knight's appointment is not a part of that calendar, which would have considered the Christian "New Year" to be Christmas or Easter. *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages* lists four potential dates for the New Year: Christmas (following Bede, Benedictine houses in England used this dating until the beginning of the seventeenth century), January 1 (following the Roman civil year), March 25 (known as the "Lady Day" style, this dating was popular in England, having been promulgated by the Normans, and remained in use until 1752) and Easter (the French court style in the thirteenth century). According to Strayer, "...the church had steadily opposed the use of 1 January as the prevailing style," though it did try to divest the day of Pagan undertones through declaring it the Feast of the Circumcision in the sixth century (Strayer III. 19-20). Because of this disagreement on when the New Year occurred, until the eighteenth century, the period from January until Eastertime was a liminal part of the year--a perfect time for Gawain to encounter the Green Knight a second time.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Þenne al rypez and rotez þat ros vpon fyrst...." (523-8)

The combativeness of the weather and the elements thus escapes the design which society tries to impose upon the seasons, disguising the violence of nature with social and religious rituals. It is this very violence of the weather, which "watz cumen wyth wynter wage" (533) that reminds Gawain of the invasive Green Knight and his impending journey to the home of that supernatural warrior. The capricious weather's "otherness" to the court's stately progression through social time also foreshadows Gawain's impending entrance into that state of otherness--his journey amid the violent winter elements. Even now, Gawain has become an outsider to the court in that he alone will venture "þeroute", in the perilous wild spaces beyond the court's control, as a result of his Christmas vow.[180]

After the court gives a celebration in honor of Gawain on the day before his departure, Gawain is ceremonially clothed in his armor. Not only is this process highly ritualistic, but the clothing which Gawain wears reflects the

---

[180]Felicity Riddy could be describing Camelot as the latest of a series of civilizations as well as the "bur3e" at the beginning of the poem (9) when she posits that "The 'burgh' is a bounded space, an enclave in the wilderness. Historical time--cultural time--is masculine. We could properly call it patriarchal since it is defined by conquerors and inaugurators of dynasties: Aeneas, Romulus, Langoberde and finally Brutus, the founding father of Britain, and of male heroes...." (Riddy 222) Thus in leaving Camelot for the wilds outside, Gawain is also leaving the patriarchal terrain of colonized space in which male conquerors "telde bigynne" and "lyfte vp homes." However, this is not a departure from masculine culture to feminine nature: Riddy makes the perceptive point that in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, nature is not figured as a feminine generative force, as she describes the personified Nature of Alain de Lille: "She represents a 'feminised' plenitude, nature as benevolent principle of ordered and procreative sexuality--Nature as culture, in fact" (Riddy 222). Instead, she notes that in the lines above, "Seasonal time is, if anything, 'masculine'. It is represented as conflict, as a movement through life to death. It is cyclical and renewing, but what is renewed is the endless process of being born in order to die. Gawain's own story, in which he sets out on a journey that seems certain to end in his death, looks like the restatement in an individual life of that process. He does not die at the end of the poem, but the lesson of the seasons is that his death has only been deferred" (Riddy 222-3). Riddy's insights have led me to conclude that in this poem, women are once more excluded because both the cyclical processes of culture (the destruction of civilizations and the founding of new ones through battle and conquest) and the "wrestlings" of the seasons with one another are portrayed as exclusively masculine events from which images of fertility and gestation, associated with a female Nature by medieval naturalist-philosophers like Alain, are basically absent.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

nature of the court itself and predicts his later entanglements, when the mores of Camelot are tested in places and social situations outside of the court. His garments are described consistently as being in some way knotted or interlaced. First is Gawain's hood: "And sypen a crafty capados, closed aloft,/Pat wyth a bry3t blaunner was bounden wythinne" (572-3). His armor is tied to him in various ways, and eventually Gawain becomes entirely enclosed by it:

> His legez lapped in stel with luflych greuez,
> With polaynez piched þerto, policed ful clene,
> Aboute his knes knaged with knotez of golde;
> Queme quyssewes þen, þat coyntlych closed
> His thik þrawen þy3ez, with þwonges to tachched;
> And syþen þe brawden bryné of bry3t stel rynges
> Vmbeweued þat wy3, vpon wlonk stuffe.... (575-81)

Each piece of his armor is richly ornamented, including "þe lest lachet oper loupe" (591). Even his horse Gryngolet's armor and accoutrements are full of the imagery of ties and bindings. His bridle is "with bry3t golde bounden" (600), and Gawain's helmet is "Embrawden and bounden wyth þe best gemmez...." (609)

These armorial knots and laces are analogous to the closed chambers and fenced-in lands of the court. Like these places, in which the rituals that give meaning to the court are enacted, the garments are described as "closed" (lines 572 and 578), "wythinne" (ll. 573 and 606) and "coyntlich" (578). Later the word *coyntlich* takes on the negative connotation of beguilement or trickery, but here it stands for both courteous behavior and lavish ornamentation.[181] The literal ornamentation of Gawain's costume is also an emblem of the intricate embroidery of the rituals which sustain the society, as well as the knotwork of

---

[181] *The Oxford English Dictionary* offers several interpretations of "coynt[lych]", the Middle English precursor to the word *quaint*. For the *Pearl*-poet, however, *coynt* could have implied "wise, knowing, skilled, clever, ingenious," "Cunning, crafty, given to scheming or plotting," "Ingeniously or cunningly designed or contrived; made with skill or art; elaborate" and "beautiful, pretty, fine, dainty" (XII. 968). In a perjorative sense, *coynt* could mean "cunning, crafty, given to scheming or plotting" (968).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the various intertwined social relationships, which are in turn enacted in enclosed, cultivated, colonized spaces. According to Robert Blanch, the images of binding also draw attention to the decorative and ultimately superficial concerns of Camelot:

> ...the knight's bonds and knots are frequently depicted within a context of elaborate decorative design, a pattern which reflects Camelot's concern with trappings ... protective chivalric coatings, and external form rather than with the inner spiritual values of courtly life. Identified with the tinsel ideals of Camelot--alluring yet insubstantial--the ornamental words and knots call attention to the underlying pride and worldliness of Gawain and Arthur's court. (Blanch 55)

Shoaf contends that the knot is frequently a figure for textuality itself in *Gawain*, as well as other medieval texts ("'Syngne of Surfet'" 160). Of particular relevance to *Gawain* is Dante's use of the figure of the knot in *Paradiso* 33. 85-93:

> The knot...is a figure of the book, and as a figure of the book, it must have attracted the Gawain-poet strongly. For in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a "volume" figured as a "nodo" capacitates the understanding of the knots of the pentangle and the green girdle as each a "volume," or text or sign, which ... must be read and interpreted, each in its own special way. ("'Syngne of Surfet" 163)

Heng describes the knot in terms of a point in the text to which one's attention is drawn:

> Unsurprisingly, a knot of some kind in Sir Gawain is always a place where the pressure of an investment speaks itself--a moment of becoming visible. It offers up ... that peculiar hitch or halting point in a text on which attention catches, and announces the working of a certain demand. The pentangle and love lace, notorious examples of the knot, are also knots of this kind. (Heng 503)

But bindings and knots are not only figures for texts (particularly those which are difficult to interpret, like the "endeles knot" of Gawain's pentangle), as Shoaf perceptively suggests. They are also metaphors for enclosed spaces, and also

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

spaces in which "knotty" or problematic situations arise, such as the bedchamber where Sir Gawain encounters Lady Bertilak. In *Gawain,* ultimately both the spaces and the bindings or knots take on negative connotations. Enclosed spaces become emblematic of the enclosed, limited world-view of the court, and the intricate embroidered lacings become commentaries upon the entanglements of human society, which are as likely to create tension and disorder as they are to establish order and meaning.

The ultimate example of these various bindings is Gawain's pentangle. It appears on the shield which Gawain wears about him so that he becomes literally enwrapped in the symbol as well as hidden behind the protective object: "He braydez hit by þe bauderyk, about þe hals kestes" (620-1). The poet then describes its physical structure as a completely enclosed figure:

> For hit is a figure þat haldez fyue poyntez
> And vche lyne vmbelappez and loukez in oþer
> And ayquere hit is endelez (and Englych hit callen
> Oueral, as I here, "þe endeles knot) (627-30).

Because the pentangle is completely enclosed, with no ends left unaccounted for, it is analogous both to the courtly society (Felicity Riddy calls the pentangle a "bounded cultural space"--[223]), which is in turn also represented by enclosed spaces, and the poem itself, with its "lel letteres loken," as A.C. Spearing has noted (*Readings in Medieval Poetry* 199). Batt indicates that the pentangle reflects "a general concern with containment, definition and control.... Mysterious, talismanic, infinitely glossable, the geometrical figure draws attention to the attractiveness of producing meaning through the imposition of patterning...." (Batt 123). The enclosed nature of the pentangle emphasizes the enclosing properties of the court itself: its impulse to encircle and thus protect society through its elaborate rules and its appropriation and taming of wild lands. Lindley describes the pentangle itself as an enclosed space: "Like the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

armor, the pentangle signifies enclosure: an 'endless knot,' pointed but impenetrable; its outline more containing Gawain than contained by him" and also implying "a fully knowable world, just as Arthur's dinner-time custom implies a world where wonders are domesticated...." (73). As Batt has also noted, it symbolizes the totalizing structure created by the court--its image of an orderly, patterned, almost numerological universe.

Even Gawain, the bearer of the knot, is shown to be closed within the symbol. His sense of himself, given to him by the court, is expressed by this endlessly interlocked, enclosed and self-referential figure. Like the pentangle, Gawain himself is the court's symbol, the embodiment of its values. Lindley comments on how Gawain is given the pentangle rather than taking it for himself; it "stands...not just for the individual but for the culture that supports him and for the epistemology that supports that culture. Significantly, it is not so much donned by him as presented to him [line 619]...." (73). It "represents a social judgment: Gawain as a reflection of the values of those around him" (Lindley 73). Gawain is revealed as a creation of the court when the poet describes him in accordance with the virtues represented by the pentangle:

> Forþy hit acordez to þis kny3t and to his cler armez,
> For ay faythful in fyue and sere fyue syþez,
> Gawan watz for gode knawen and, as golde pured,
> Voyded of vche vylany, wyth vertuez ennourned
> In mote. (631-5)

The next stanza elaborates on Gawain's various "fives" by describing the mixture of Christian and chivalric virtues which the knight bears, all in groups of five. As a result of bearing these multiple fives of absolute virtue, Gawain thus becomes a living pentangle, enclosure or knot, enclosing in his person five virtues corresponding to the five points of the pentangle:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Now alle þese fyue syþez forsoþe were fetled on þis kny3t
> And vchone halched in oþer, þat non ende hade,
> And fyched vpon fyue poyntez þat fayld neuer,
> Ne samned neuer in no syde, ne sundred nouþer,
> Withouten ende at any noke I oquere fynde,
> Whereeuer þe gomen bygan or glod to an ende. (657-61)

Gawain's virtues are endless, bound to and dependent upon one another, like the overlapping lines of the symbol. The five attributes of the pentangle are *fetled,* shaped, put or bestowed, upon Gawain, an intriguing word which suggests that the court has constructed Gawain as much as it has constructed the pentangle.[182] *Halched* is another binding-related word: each virtue is fastened around the other, enclosing or embracing the other, thus making Gawain himself seem like the knots, loops and bindings which festoon his clothing.[183] This imagery of the interlocked pentangle suggests that the court's values, embodied in Gawain, and Gawain himself, are a closed system. Blanch believes that the perfect, closed system of the pentangle is also indicative not of virtue but of superficiality--on the part of both Gawain and the court. He comments:

> Such embellishments--painted images and embroidery--suggest only the coloring and surface coverings of true Christian knighthood, for complete attachment to the spiritual bonds of "pentagonal" virtues is not yet part of Gawain's inner nature. Furthermore, the painted-embroidered pentangle may foreshadow Gawain's ultimate imperfections--his ensnarement in luxury, pride, and covetousness when he lingers at Castle Hautdesert. Finally, one other narrative detail--the depiction of the pentangle as

---

[182]*The Middle English Dictionary* defines *fetlen* as "to shape (something)," to "fix or prepare (a place or seat); put (in place); bestow (on someone)," "get ready or be about (to stay)" (534). The locative references are interesting: as a microcosm of the universe of the court's values, Gawain himself seems to be a place, an enclosure for these values, in the same way as the human being was seen as a microcosm of the universe, as David Woodward attests: "According to the microcosmic theme, the human body was viewed as an epitome of the universe, in which the elements, humors, and organs of the body (the microcosm) were directly related to and controlled by the universe (the macrocosm)" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 340).

[183]The Middle English verb *halchen* means "to fasten...fasten round, loop," "to enclose" or possibly "to embrace" (*MED* 876). Gawain's armor, as well as the value system of the court, is fastened about him as protective bindings, sheltering him from creatures which would attack his body, as well as anyone who might assail his courtly value system.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Solomon's sign of Truth--ironically signalizes Gawain's faults at Bercilak's castle, for Solomon, although traditionally associated with perfection, is shackled by the temptations of women and ultimately forsakes God. (Blanch 58)[184]

It is interesting that the pentangle of Gawain's virtues is referred to as a "gomen," the same word which is used to refer to the games which the court plays. Like the court's merry pastimes, which mimic in a lighthearted context the serious bonds, "knots" or interlaces of social obligations, Gawain's pentangle--along with Gawain himself--is a "game," a social construct which reproduces in microcosm all of the various interwoven strands of obligation and meaning that hold the court together. Furthermore, Gawain's pentangle is the central game. It exemplifies the most important virtues, the ones by which the court defines itself.[185] Fisher describes the pentangle in these terms:

> These lines can be read as presenting a wish-fulfillment fantasy of the ideal feudal fellowship: endless, interdependent, and incapable

---

[184]Lindley also has an interesting subversive view of the pentangle when he reminds the reader of the associations of the figure not only with Mary and Christ, but also with non-Christian or pre-Christian magic, which the Church condemned as evil: "Are we supposed to remember its black-magic associations? If so, are we meant to connect its excluded history with that of Gawain: his other-textual life as a seducer, which shapes the Lady's version of him? The fact that it is a 'syngne þat Salamon set' (625)...refer[s] in the end to the biblical hero's dereliction as much as to his wisdom, a sign of untrawthe presented to us initially as a sign of trawthe" (Lindley 74). Gawain also includes Solomon in his list of men wronged by women in line 2417. This is an interesting suggestion in light of the poet's project of rehabilitating the court at Camelot, and of Guinevere in particular, but it is not only Guinevere whom the poet disconnects from her sexually suspect role--it is Gawain himself as well, as Fisher alleges: "This revisionary regeneration is a central strategy of the poem's characterization--in what is essentially its rewriting--of Gawain himself", who appears in other medieval romances as a womanizer ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 132).

[185]Martin Stevens defines "game," in general and in the context of the poem, as an attempt "to reflect the large, often irrational patterns of social reality by imaginative and sometime distorted reflections. ... Organized play, which I would define as game, becomes the means by which man can pretend to govern the ungovernable. In the world of game, nature can be conquered; the battle of the sexes can be won; the infinite can be made finite" (Stevens 66). His definition of game in general is appropriate to the poem as well, for by means of the entertainments, covenants, contests and other games of the court, Camelot attempts to make sense of, and control, the world both inside of its castle walls and outside, in the wilderness. However, I would also characterize the more serious interactions of the court as games, not in the sense that all of them are lighthearted and fun, for some have deadly consequences, but in the sense that they are dramatic, performative activities which act out the values of the society. The pentangle is such a *gomen:* not so much play as a lighthearted pastime, but play in terms of drama or performance.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> of rupture. They assert belief in the stability, the eternality, the perfection, and the fundamental interconnectedness of masculine, aristocratic, Christian values. ("Taken Men" 75)

This game is also like the various spaces which the *Pearl*-poet represents in each of the poems, spaces which are constructions that reflect, ultimately, the interpretive "game" by which the social world understands itself. Ironically, Gawain and his virtues themselves have become a kind of metaphorical enclosure, a self-referential sign system which will be tested by the games of the Green Knight. Batt compares the pentangle as a symbol with the court's (and the poem's) desire to map and thus interpret space:

> But just as the pentangle's intricacy points out the desire for ingenious mappings of space even in its inscription as perfect figure, so the boundaries drawn in the narrative ultimately draw our attention to a desire for, and even the dangers of, compartmentalization.... (Batt 126)

Thus the "games" of the pentangle, its court-created virtues and the courtly use of space are ultimately confining--enclosed systems which must be penetrated and tested by outsiders. Shoaf contends that this need for the closed system of chivalric virtues to be entered into and evaluated by someone from outside is likened to the need for the poem's own closed system to be open to what exists outside of it: "...a poem will also question its processes. As a result, it will discover its iconicity--its formality and inherent closure. The discovery will interrupt that closure and prevent the poem's immunity from world and life" (*The Poem as Green Girdle* vii). It is precisely this immunity that Gawain's pentangle implies. The protective "walls" of the pentangle prevent him from being infected by vice, but they also keep him provincial and naive.

But the pentangle is not the only device which Gawain bears upon his shield: he also has an image of the Virgin Mary emblazoned on the inner side of the shield. This image is described somewhat incidentally, in the middle of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

poet's explanation of the connection between the pentangle and Gawain's virtues. When he comments upon the five joys of Mary, depicted by the pentangle's five points, the poet notes as an aside,

> (At þis cause þe kny3t comlyche hade
> In þe inore half of his schelde hir ymage depaynted,
> Þat quen he blusched þerto his belde neuer payred.) (648-50)

The image of the Virgin on the inner side of his shield reveals Gawain's piety--that he keeps her image on the inner side of his shield as he keeps it in his own "interior," his heart--but it also expresses a pervasive image in the poem: that of women's enclosure and marginalization. Though Mary's image is central to Gawain's arming and to his belief system, she is depicted on the inside of his shield, invisible to all but Gawain. She is also marginalized in the sense that, while the poet spends many lines describing the pentangle, he mentions Mary's image in a brief comment of three lines, almost as an afterthought. Fisher points out that Mary is marginalized here because she is invoked only in the context of her five joys in her son:

> Mary is included in the pentangle explicitly through her connection with her son and through the five joys that she derived from him. It is only through and because of this connection that the pentangle makes a token reference to Mary, the token woman of Christianity, who refers not to herself, but to the Holy Ghost who inseminated her and to God the Son whom she bore. ("Taken Men" 76)

In "Feminine Knots," Geraldine Heng allies Mary to Guinevere in her status as a silent female object:

> Where they first appear...Guinevere and the Virgin share the status of fetishized objects: Guinevere, evoking the puissance and grandeur of the Arthurian court, by being set in state on her dais, a royal jewel amid other gorgeous treasures; the Virgin, signaling Christian adventitiousness and advocacy, by being blazoned on the inner surface of Gawain's shield like a talisman.... (Heng 502)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mary is at last marginalized even more when Gawain goes from being her knight, the knight of "Our Lady," to being the knight of the other Lady in the poem, Lady Bertilak, when he calls himself "your [the Lady's] kny3t" in line 1538.[186]

With all the seriousness invested in games by the court and Gawain himself, the exchange between Gawain and the courtiers as he departs is rather curious. The people murmur among themselves that Gawain would be better off being given some dignified social position than losing his life for a Christmas game:

> "Warloker to haf wro3t had more wyt bene
> And haf dy3t 3onder dere a duk to haue worþed.
> A lowande leder of ledez in londe hym wel semez,
> And so had better haf ben þen britned to no3t,
> Hadet wyth an aluisch mon, for angardez pryde.
> Who knew euer any kyng such counsel to take
> As kny3tes in cauelaciounz on Crystmasse gomnez?" (677-83)

Predictably, the onlookers assert that Gawain should remain in their colonized land, perhaps to rule over part of it, rather than to be slain in an alien, uncivilized land by an inhuman knight. However, less expected is the degree of self-criticism expressed by the onlookers. They blame themselves for the potential loss of Gawain, admonishing themselves for vanity and pride, and obliquely chastise Arthur for taking games seriously--the very games which are the basis of their society. Most surprisingly, they do not describe Gawain's

---

[186]Fisher also argues that Mary is silenced in terms of her sexuality: "...the Virgin's virtues are determined more by what she lacks than what she has: she lacks female sexuality, and therefore sin, and therefore volition. Her identity is so inextricably bound up with figurations of absence that she can serve as the prototype for the particular version fo the eternal feminine that neo-Freudian theory would define as absence itself" ("Taken Men" 76). This delineation of Mary's virtues as absences hearks back to the poem's description of Guinevere in lines 72-84, where Guinevere's sexuality--which is so central to the downfall of Camelot--and indeed her very volition, are excised from the text by rendering her silent and immobile.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

journey as a heroic exploit, but condemn it as a waste of a brilliant young man, "britned to nou3t" for a set of empty values.

Nevertheless, despite the misgivings of the court, Gawain does go on his journey. The world in which Gawain finds himself once outside of the castle is completely alien to him, ungoverned by the meaningful social rituals which have enclosed his life, or, as John Ganim writes, "...the poem moves from architecture, enclosure, and order toward geography, nature, and vulnerability" (Ganim 378)--from the enclosed spaces and social "architecture" of the court to the wild natural landscape outside of Camelot, where he is made vulnerable to cold and privation. Unlike at the beginning of the poem, when the challenge of the Green Knight is depicted in a highly ritual context, now his lonely journey is not a game at all in Gawain's mind: "Now ridez þis renk þur3 þe ryalme of Logres,/Sir Gauan, on Godez halue, þa3 hym no gomen þo3t...." (691-2). In the wilderness, unlike in his homeland, Gawain is deprived of both the comforting enclosed spaces and the comforting rituals which govern his existence:

> Oft leudlez alone he lengez on nyghtez
> Þer he founde no3t hym byfore þe fare þat he lyked;
> Hade he no fere bot his fole bi frythez and dounez,
> Ne no gome bot God bi gate wyth to karp--
> Til þat he ne3ed ful neghe into þe Norpe Walez. (693-7)

Even the people whom he encounters are lovers of neither God nor chivalry: "In þe wyldrenesse of Wyrale. Wonde þer bot lyte/Þat auþer God oþer gome wyth goud hert louied" (701-2). However, even in this marginal land, no one as yet had heard of the Green Knight or his territory. His realm is still completely alien, even in this wilderness.

The marginal quality of the landscape through which Gawain travels is continually emphasized, as are the hardships that he endures on his travels: "Mony klyf he ouerclambe in contrayez ful straunge./Fer floten fro his frendez,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fremedly he rydez" (713-4). Here Gawain experiences a double sense of marginalization. He is trapped in a borderland outside of both Camelot's spatial limits and its familiar rituals and customs, but he has also become a marginal figure in this alien world. The marginal nature of both the land and Gawain's own experiences is expressed most poignantly in an anecdote in which the winter itself proves more ferocious even than the creatures with whom Gawain constantly does battle:

> For werre wrathed hym not so much þat wynter nas wors,
> When þe colde cler water fro þe cludez schadde
> And fres er hit falle my3t to þe fale erþe.
> Ner slayn wyth þe slete he sleped in his yrnes
> Mo ny3tes þen innoghe, in naked rokkez
> Þeras claterande fro þe crest þe cold borne rennez
> And henged he3e ouer his hede in hard iisseikkles. (726-32)

The country's marginal nature is also depicted by means of the various beasts which Gawain encounters and fights. In classical and medieval conceptions of the world, extremes of climate produced extremity in the physical forms and behaviors of the inhabitants of that land. According to Friedman, "Pliny, like his Aristotelian sources, saw a direct causal relationship between savagery in nature and savagery in men" (Friedman 52). In accordance with these classical and medieval views of geographical, climatic and behavioral extremes, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* the inhospitable, extreme winter weather at the edge of the poem's world produces misshapen, hostile creatures and people who show no reverence to the God of the court. However, like the appearance of the Green Knight at Camelot, which is uncanny but ultimately becomes integrated into the ritual practices of the court, Gawain's battles with monsters are an expression of both his utter physical distance from the court and his imperative as a knight to fight such creatures--a role designated for him by the court. Having to fight strange monsters is quite a far cry from playing games

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in a castle, but nevertheless he derives part of his knightly meaning from besting such creatures, which would be a threat to the very society that he has left behind if they ever chose to expand their territory in the same way that the court does. Paradoxically, then, the knight must go outside of the bounds of the court which has given him meaning in order to exercise an important part of that meaning. While the beasts seem fierce, they also seem somewhat interchangeable, their species irrelevant, since Gawain vanquishes them all anyway:

> Sumwhyle with wormez he werres and with wolues als,
> Sumwhyle with wodwos þat woned in þe knarrez,
> Boþe wyth bullez and berez, and borez oþerquyle,
> And etaynez þat hym anelede of þe he3e felle. (720-3)

In contrast to the uncivilized, dreary realm in which he finds himself, a forested land where "Pe hasel and pe ha3porne were harled al samen,/With ro3e raged mosse rayled aywhere...." (744-5), Gawain longs for a civilized place in which he may "to se pe seruyse of pat Syre pat on pat self ny3t/Of a burde watz borne oure baret to quelle" (751-2). (Interestingly, after all of his battles, Gawain invokes the God who had ended all spiritual strife.) In his prayer, Gawain specifically mentions needing to find an enclosed place in which to make these observances:

> And þerfore sykyng he sayde, "I biseche Þe, Lorde,
> And Mary, þat is myldest moder so dere,
> Of sum herber þer he3ly I my3t here masse
> Ande Þy matynez tomorne, mekely I ask,
> And þerto prestly I pray my Pater and Ave
> And Crede." (753-7)

For Gawain, these meaningful rituals, impossible to practice in the wild world in which he finds himself, are inseparable from a place--specifically, a church depicted as an enclosed garden *(herber)*, established and inhabited by non-marginal people. The building/arbor of the church spatially protects its

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inhabitants and allows them space in which to practice the rituals which give meaning to their culture. At the same time, the rites themselves are a metaphorical shelter: the "walls" which encircle the society with codes of appropriate behavior, religious symbolism, and meaningful interpretations of the seasons. Gawain's awareness that he is outside of a space like this is also an awareness of his marginalization, and his prayer for inclusion once more in an enclosed sacred space with his fellow Christians is quite touching.

This idea of the Christian city and its customs and practices as parallel shelters is re-echoed when Gawain actually catches sight of a castle in response to his pleas. Features of the landscape have double connotations as both topographical features and elements of the social and symbolic order of which the city is the shelter and the representation at the same time:

> Nade he sayned hymself, segge, bot þrye
> Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote,
> Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken vnder bo3ez
> Of mony borelych bole aboute bi þe diches,
> A castel þe comlokest þat euer kny3t a3te,
> Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,
> With a pyked palays pyned ful þik,
> Þat vmbete3e mony tre mo þen two myle. (763-70)

The fact that this castle has been established in accordance with the laws of the Church and serves to protect them is indicated by means of words used to describe the very features of the land. The "lawe" on which the castle rests ostensibly means "hill," but the reader may recall another "lawe" in *Clannesse*, line 992: the city of Segor, Sodom's righteous neighbor. In this case, "lawe" can be read as both "hill" and "law," namely the laws of God which the inhabitants of Segor had followed, unlike those of Sodom. Thus the appearance of the castle atop a "lawe" suggests both its physical location and its socio-spatial context as the generator of the "laws" of chivalric Christianity, the social boundaries by

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

which Gawain has longed to be encompassed during his journey through the wilds.[187] The castle which Gawain espies is apparently perched both on a hill and on a law: perhaps simultaneously the laws of the Church and the social contracts of a more secular kind. Furthermore, it is "pyched on a prayere"--a meadow and possibly a prayer.[188] This double meaning may imply that the dwelling is founded on the practices of the Church, its liturgical rites of prayer, as well as that Gawain's prayer to Mary caused the city immediately to be revealed in its meadow. Finally, the place is called a *mote*, a word with rich accretions from *Pearl*, *Clannesse* and *Patience*. This is an ambiguous word, however, for *mote* has been used for both the heavenly city "wythouten mote" and cities steeped in sin, like Sodom or Nineveh. This ambiguous use of *mote* may be a foreshadowing of the game inside which will cause Gawain's discovery of his own flaw, as well as a more general indication that all is not well in this realm.

In the above passage, the enclosed nature of the castle is mentioned twice, first when the poet notes that the place is ringed by trees and then when he states that many trees are themselves encircled by it. The forest, which had seemed so formidable as Gawain had ridden through it, is now tamed and subdued by the

---

[187]*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *lawe* as "The body of rules, whether proceeding from formal enactment or custom, which a particular state or community recognizes as binding on its members or subjects" (VIII. 712), "The body of commandments which express the will of God with regard to the conduct of His intelligent creatures" (713) and "A hill, esp. one more or less round or conical" (716). This dual meaning is well-suited to the *Pearl*-poet's poetics of moralized space.

[188]In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, *prayere* (also spelled *praiere, preyer[e], praiyer* and *prayer)* is "A solemn and humble request to God, or to an object of worship; a supplication, petition, or thanksgiving, usually expressed in words" (XII. 292). However, *prayere* is also a "variant of *PRAIERE* (meadow)" (293). The similarity of the spelling of both of these words makes it likely that the *Pearl*-poet was playing on both meanings; his preoccupation with issues and images of moralized space make it unlikely that he would have overlooked such an intriguing spatial pun.

Heng comments on the specific association of the prayer with the Virgin Mary: "In the course of his journey, Gawain's supplication to this Christian goddess for a safe residence in which to perform Christian religious rites, a plaint invoking the personal name of this sacred mistress, Mary (736-39, 754), seems to occasion the appearance of the castle where an aggressively secular courtly mistress (the nameless Lady) resides" (Heng 501). The juxtaposition of "our Lady" with Lady Bertilak reoccurs later in the poem; for example, when Gawain's moral condition is in peril "nif Maré of hir kny3t mynne" (1769).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

enclosing city walls. This double surrounding--of the fortress by the trees and the trees by the city--at first seems a solid assurance that the builders of this space had appropriated and tamed the natural topography. Perhaps, however, this double surrounding also suggests the easy blending of exterior and interior activities that takes place later in the poem, where the actions outside and inside of the castle walls serve to comment on each other.[189]

Another ambiguous word is *loken,* which at first recalls orderly designs like the pentangle and the poem itself, and therefore indicates the physical and moral stability of the fortress, its identity as a preserver of culture. However, as Gawain experiences his testing there, the "louked" nature of the castle suggests other kinds of locks and acts of binding: social obligations as well as confining spaces which will continually entangle Gawain, knots that will replace the pentangle with the green girdle. Of this castle's knotted nature, Robert Blanch states, "Although the castle is visually enticing, it represents a decorative image of worldly bonds--pride and luxury--and the beguiling setting for Gawain's future entrapment" (Blanch 58).

When Gawain enters the outer walls of the castle, wild nature is not only kept out, but the trees which had seemed so fearful outside have now been transformed into objects of beauty that adorn the castle: "Þat holde on þat on syde þe haþel auysed,/As hit schemered and schon þur3 þe schyre okez" (771-2). After thanking the "gentyle" saints who had led him here (774), Gawain then directs his prayer to the castle itself: "'Now bone hostel,' coþe þe burne, 'I beseche yow

---

[189]Michael Camille provides an interesting corollary in the manuscript illustrations of *Lancelot Del Lac* (New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book Library): "In this manuscript, the marginal 'play' glosses and provides an ironic commentary on the central action of the text and its illustrations, which narrate the adventures of the knights of the Round Table" *(Image on the Edge* 106). Similarly, the hunt of Bertilak and the lady's "hunt" of Gawain comment upon each other--though the poet does not establish which is the "central text" and which the marginal commentary. Furthermore, the court of Bertilak can be seen as a marginal commentary on the court of Arthur, save that its marginality is only disclosed in the Green Chapel, a more obviously marginal location.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

3ette!'" (776) When he is allowed to enter, the walls themselves appear fearless of any onslaught:

> Þe bryge watz breme vpbrayde,
> Þe yatez wer stoken faste,
> Þe wallez were wel arayed--
> Hit dut no wyndez blaste (781-4).

The next stanza continues to describe the amazing thickness, height and strength of the seemingly impenetrable building, which is "Enbaned vnder þe abataylment, in þe best lawe...." (790) Here *lawe* is used to mean decoration, manner or fashion, as if indicating that here the Christian and civil laws have been reduced to mere decorative rituals. John Ganim allies the intricate decoration of the castle with the ornate style of the poem itself in expressing a "single basic tendency":

> On the one hand, this tendency is a civilizing style, a mania for dividing and subdividing, an attempt to create in the microcosm of logic, architecture, and poetry an imitation of the hierarchies of creation. On the other hand, this attempt results in an impossible and utopian frenzy, for the nature of stone is resistant to classification, idealization, and immateriality. (Ganim 377)

After the solidity of the structure is established, in contrast, its decorations are described as delicate and "craftyly sleye" (797), words that will appear again in descriptions of the food and accoutrements of the inhabitants of this castle and that indicate the craftiness and slyness of the people and their social interactions, which are intended to deceive and damn Gawain.

When Gawain sees the decorations, he thinks that the whole structure appears as if it were made of paper: "So mony pynakle payntet watz poudred ayquere/Among þe castel carnelez, clambred so þik/Þat pared out of papure purely hit semed" (800-2). Paper is a more malleable substance than parchment, more easily cut into intricate designs, perhaps suggesting that the castle, its

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

inhabitants and the social system by which they give meaning to their lives and their world are more able to be cut and shaped than they seem. The papery look of the castle--almost like a cut-out imitation of a real castle--also draws attention to its fictionality, its likeness to the pages of a book. Not only is the castle the invention of an author, as is the whole poem, and the culture which the poem describes is a historical invention, but the castle and the social order which it embodies are themselves constructions, elaborate social fictions imposed upon people and the outside world. The chivalric code itself is a fiction, delicately, intricately and beautifully wrought, but also ultimately fragile and unreal. Despite the fact that the castle's walls are firm and hardy, it is these thinner walls of convention which Gawain trusts more fully to protect himself from the outside world and its attendant aberrant, deviant, marginal behavior. When he wonders "If he my3t keuer to com þe cloyster wythinne,/To herber in þat hostel wyl haylday lested,/Auinant" (804-6), Gawain desires to take refuge not so much in the physical walls of the castle as in the social structure inside, which gives him his meaning and place as a knight. His desire to hear Mass, which had been the main reason for his earlier prayer for shelter, seems to have conveniently disappeared.

Gawain's journey into the castle is a journey through successive inner spaces, accompanied by the courtesy which is protected by such enclosures. First he is allowed to pass through the gate by the pleasant porter, and his horse taken from him to be stabled. After that, "Kny3tez and swyerez comen doun þenne/For to bryng þis buurne wyth blys into halle" (824-5), where he is again courteously greeted by knights and Bertilak, the lord of the castle himself. After he is welcomed by Bertilak,

> Þe lorde hym charred to a chambre and chesly cumaundez
> To delyuer hym a leude hym lo3ly to serue;

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

And þere were boun at his bode burnez inno3e
Þat bro3t hym to a bry3t boure þer beddyng watz noble.... (850-3)

The effect of bringing Gawain into successive enclosures is twofold. First, Gawain apparently is entering a protected space, surrounded by so many walls and so much courtesy that nothing outside can harm him. However, these enclosures will later take on an imprisoning aspect as places of testing, trial and entanglement when Gawain eventually discovers that marginal behavior and temptation can also threaten him inside of a castle and inside the social order itself. When he is brought to his bedroom, the poet lavishly describes the hangings of the bed, perhaps foreshadowing how Gawain will spend a lot of time there, imprisoned in that very bedchamber as well as in the social customs with which the knight defines and protects himself.

After showing Gawain the elaborately-curtained bed (a stark contrast with his improvised bed in "naked rokkez"--line 730), Bertilak and his assistants help Gawain to remove his armor and exchange it for clothing more appropriate to the softer indoor atmosphere of the court:

Þer he watz dispoyled, wyth spechez of myerþe,
Þe burn of his bruny and of his bry3t wedez;
Ryche robes ful rad renkkez hem bro3ten
For to charge and to chaunge and chose of þe best.
Sone as he on hent and happed þerinne,
Þat sete on hym semly, wyth saylande skyrtez,
Þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed
Welne3 to vche haþel, alle on hwes,
Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez under;
Þat a comloker kny3t neuer Kryst made,
Hem þo3t (860-70).

This disarming of Gawain is also a disarming of a more subtle sort: in removing his arms, Gawain's hosts remove the symbols which represent his knightly identity; in effect, he is stripped of himself. He is also stripped of his defenses, not only in that he cannot protect himself as effectively without his weapons and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

armor, but also in that Gawain's guard has been lowered when his hosts offer him the familiar courtly accoutrements of fine clothing. Once he recognizes that this court is like his familiar world of Camelot, Gawain no longer perceives himself to be in danger, an assumption which is later proven wrong by the Lady's subtle assault on his chivalric mores.

Lindley suggests that Gawain's stripping is also an effort on the part of the court at Hautdesert to strip him of his knightly identity, much as carnivalesque drama interrogates and subverts the products of official culture. He reads the verb "dispoyle" not only as "to undress" but with the darker undertones of destruction and invasion: "To *dispoyle* means literally 'to strip...of his clothes' (*MED*, despoilen, 1b); but also 'to plunder or ravage' (2a); 'to take away or ruin (the mind, etc.)' (3a), and 'to deprive (...of honor, security, beauty, etc.)'" (Lindley 77). These words also have a spatial resonance which Lindley does not discuss: the invasion and destruction of territory, which occurs at the beginning of the poem and which is an aspect of the establishment of patriarchal culture. Gawain himself becomes a territory "despoyled" by friendly, well-meaning invaders. The use of the word "þerinne" in line 865, a word which usually appears in a spatial context, also makes Gawain's new clothes seem like a space which he inhabits, a narrow and close-fitting space much like those which the women in the poem occupy. This scene parallels the armoring scene before Gawain's departure from Camelot, but not only is Gawain being disarmed here--he is also being dressed in symbols of this court's understanding of him, much as the courtiers at Camelot had armed him with the pentangle, their symbol of his knightly virtues. Here, Gawain's chief virtue would seem to lie in his good manners and "luf-talkyng" (927), or so the court and the Lady read him, and so they dress him in fine clothing well-suited to this identity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When Bertilak and his assistants present Gawain with new clothing, they transform his identity in another way. They do not only disarm him, but they feminize him as well. Fisher connects the two "despoyl[ings]": "the threatened loss of chivalric identity for Gawain is figured initially as an implied loss of masculinity," arguing that "As Gawain settles down in this world of women, the poem begins to assign him the language that has earlier been associated with the tokenized women in Arthur's court" ("Taken Men" 77). Being enclosed "þerinne" his clothing foreshadows the poet's representation of Morgan as completely enclosed in her garments in lines 947-69, and Bertilak's repeated insistence that Gawain go to bed and rest (1071-4, 1096) foreshadows the Lady's activities in this small enclosure. Riddy observes that the transition of Gawain from masculine to feminine also reflects a transition of the adventure itself from the "masculine" open spaces of the wilderness and "masculine" activities (like battling monsters) to "feminine" interior spaces and "feminine" activities (like flirtation): Gawain "is 'feminised' by being associated with the domestic sphere, by the emphasis on his passivity in relation to the Green Knight, and by making *aventure* itself 'feminine'--not a matter of male heroics but of interiority and conscience, not public but private" (Riddy 220).

Gawain's gender transformation is also underscored by the poet's repeated references to the attractiveness of his body and clothing, where in the earlier armoring scene, the focus had been on Gawain's strength: the armor around his "thik þrawen þy3ez" (579) are replaced by "saylande skyrtez" in which he looks "semly" (865),[190] and he takes on the appearance of spring in his brightly-colored garments: "Þe ver by his uisage verayly hit semed/Welne3 to vche haþel, alle on

[190]By mentioning Gawain's "skyrtez," I do not intend to argue that this article of apparel alone feminizes the knight. In the Middle Ages, both men's and women's clothing had "skyrtez." Gawain's feminization is a result of his transformation from a doer of deeds to a passive object of female admiration, flirtation and attempted seduction, not a result of becoming what a twentieth-century reader might see as "a man in a dress."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hwes, /Lowande and lufly alle his lymmes vnder...." (866-8). The beauty of his shining limbs (as opposed to shining armor), and his appearance like the spring itself (which, for natural philosophers like Alain de Lille, was associated with a fecund feminized Nature and which romance writers presented as the season of heterosexual love--ironically also, Gawain appears springlike here, in the artificial atmosphere of the court, while outside it is still winter) feminize the image of Gawain the "stif" warrior according to the gender constructs of the time. Here stiffness is replaced by softness, and Gawain is made an object of admiration and attraction, like Guinevere and the Lady herself when Gawain encounters her in lines 943-5. The Lady gazes at Gawain first and is attracted to his comely appearance in lines 941-2; emerging from her "closet," she elicits his return gaze. Fisher avers specifically that Gawain moves from being "the object of male admiration...now diminished to the object of the female gaze" ("Taken Men" 78). Lindley addresses this transformation of Gawain: "...an image of Gawain is undone, then another, distinctly feminized, is constructed, a Gawain who sleeps in furs and soft robes rather than in his irons" (Lindley 77).[191]

More foreshadowing imagery of the eventual treachery of the castle--and the chivalric system itself--appears in a subsequent scene, where Gawain is feted by Bertilak. The chair in which Gawain is to sit at the fireplace in the hall "Watz

---

[191]Riddy provides an interesting historical note to this portrayal of the feminized, "luf-talkyng" knight. Apparently, around the time that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* was written, the chronicler Walsingham had accused Richard II's chamber knights of effeminacy. Riddy argues that, at a time when distinctions between human and animal (or monster) were being rigorously drawn, perceived gender differences were even more important to maintain: "The pressure on gender categories probably always generates, from the male perspective at least, an accompanying pressure on the boundary between nature and culture. The 'feminised' knight, the 'semi-vir' with his beardless face and refined manners, may represent a new androgyny, but this androgyny is not an ideal but a monster. The androgyne threatens the boundary between humans and non-humans. That is, the dissolution of the gender boundary brings another opposition into play, which renders androgyny terrifying, non-human, other" (220). According to Riddy's formulation, then, Gawain has become "other" here, paradoxically when he has rejoined a court like his own: he has ceased to occupy the "masculine" role constructed for him as a knight by his society and has come to occupy a role traditionally limited to women, again, paradoxically, at the request of another polite society like his own.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

grayþed for Sir Gawan grayþely with cloþez:/Whyssynes vpon queldepoyntes, þat koynt wer boþe...." (876-7) While the word *koynt* refers here to the cunning construction of the cushions and the drapes of the chair, it also may foreshadow the way in which the lady of the castle will have "koyntly bigyled" Gawain into accepting the green girdle and nearly transgressing the social laws by committing adultery.[192] It also again encodes the world of Hautdesert as feminine in that "coynt" or "queynte" was a euphemism for female sexual organs,[193] and Hautdesert is all about the seductions of the feminine, both in terms of the Lady's actual attempted seduction of Gawain and in terms of the attractiveness of the interior life of ease and grace which Gawain encounters in Bertilak's castle. When he is given his meal, the sauces which accompany the dinner are described as "sleye," which Andrew and Waldron define as "intricate, subtle" (346): "and ay sawses so sle3e þat þe segge lyked" (893). Though the sauces cannot be "sly" in the modern sense of the word, lacking the sentience to be "sneaky," their subtlety reflects the subtle world of social intricacies where Gawain has found himself, and where he feels comfortable, unsuspecting of the upcoming treachery of Bertilak and his lady when they later try to seduce Gawain away from both his vow to the Green Knight and his court-produced mores, ironically by using those very mores against him.[194]

---

[192]See previous note on *coynt[lych]* (note 19).

[193]This pun on *coynt* appears in "The Miller's Tale," where the dissolute university student Nicholas demonstrates two senses of the word: "As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte--/And prively he caughte hire by the queynte...." (*Canterbury Tales* 3275-6, Fisher ed.). Here, the first "queynte" stands for the subtlety, craftiness, cleverness and duplicity of Nicholas, and the second for Alison's sexual organs, which Nicholas less-than-subtly grabs.

[194]The *OED* reveals that several connotations of "sly" existed in the *Pearl*-poet's time, including implications both of skillfulness and shiftiness. The word originates from the Old Norse "able to strike," and in reference to persons, from the twelfth to the eighteenth century it meant "Skilful, clever, dexterous, or expert in doing something; possessing practical skill or ability; skilled, knowing, wise. (Also occas. of animals)" (XV. 763). In terms of objects, at the end of the twelfth century, the word came to mean "Marked or characterized by skill or dexterity; showing skilfulnes or ingenuity; cleverly or finely made" (763), like the sauces in the passage above. In a more negative sense, *sly* suggested a person "Adept or skilful in artifice or craft, using cunning or insidious

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

As at Arthur's feast, where Gawain had spoken with ritual deference about being the weakest of the knights, when Gawain praises the meal, his host replies "'Þis penaunce now 3e take/And eft hit schal amende'" (897-8). However, this statement is not merely false modesty on his part. The food is actually intended to fulfill a directive of the Church to refrain from eating meat on this day. However, the poet seems critical of the degree to which the court observes the prohibition. After all, they may be eating fish, but the fish are richly prepared. This is an early indication that the courtly values with which Gawain feels so comfortable and protected are not entirely consistent with the espoused values of the Church--or at least adhere to the letter, though not the spirit, of the Church's "lawe."

When the knights discover that Gawain has come from Camelot and that their guest is none other than "Þat fyne fader of nurture" (919), they thank their good fortune and prepare themselves to learn true courtesy from him. Gawain seems to upstage the Christmas holiday itself by gracing the castle with his presence:

> "God hatz geuen vus His grace godly forsoþe,
> Þat such a gest as Gawan grauntez vus to haue
> When burnez blyþe of His burþe schall sitte
> And synge.
> In menyng of manerez mere
> Þis burne now schal vus bryng.
> I hope þat may hym here
> Schal lerne of luf-talkyng." (920-7)

While the knights briefly mention the birth of Christ, they reserve most of their praise for Gawain. God has given them the gift not of Christ but of Gawain, and, as Christ had come to save the world according to Christian theology, so Gawain

---

means or methods; deceitful, guileful, wily, underhand" (763) and objects "Marked or characterized by, displaying or indicating, artifice, craft or cunning; of an insidious or wily nature" (763). The latter definition came into use at the end of the fourteenth century, contemporaneous with the *Pearl*-poet.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

has come to "save" the court by instructing them in good manners and "luf-talkyng" (927). Lines 921-3 seem particularly ambiguous. Though the sense of the sentence indicates that the knights are expressing their gratitude to Christ, who was born this day, for Gawain's arrival, the placement of "þis burne" in line 925 leaves in doubt whether the company will sing the praises of the newborn Christ or the birth of Gawain, the "fader of nurture," rather than "Almighty Father." This praise of the coming of Gawain, almost at the expense of the joy which such Christian knights should feel at the coming of Christ, indicates a misplacement inherent in courtly values, one which is reminiscent of the *Pearl* Dreamer's placement of the pearl rather than Christ at the center of his heart (not to mention his inappropriate use of "luf-talkyng" to her). In the hearts of the knights, the love expressed by God through the coming of Christ devolves into the advent of a knight who can teach them of "luf-talkyng." While the court acknowledges the centrality of Christianity in their own definition of themselves via their elaborate celebration of Christmas, it is Gawain who has taken the central space, both in their castle and in the metaphorical "space" of their values. Those values focus on the courteous but ultimately decorative and empty behavior which he can teach them, an ornate but meaningless code of conduct foreshadowed perhaps by the cut-paper appearance of the castle from outside.[195]

---

[195]Clein notes that the courtiers of Hautdesert also devalue Gawain himself by limiting his attainments to "luf-talkyng": "Bertilak's court translate Gawain's high virtues into the social attributes of refined manners and noble speech. Finally, in the rhyming quatrain (the wheel) that completes the stanza, the hero's chivalry is reduced to 'luf-talkyng.' Gawain's hosts demand not the complex ethical chivalry defined in the pentangle but rather a display of social skills that conforms to the practice at Camelot. If the hero abides by a more idealistic version of knighthood, his personal ethos guides him rather than the expectations of others" (Clein 97). Clein makes an interesting suggestion when she imputes Gawain's values to Gawain's own personal ethical system. I believe that the contrast between the expectations and ethos of Gawain and the courtiers at Hautdesert is also a contrast between Camelot and Hautdesert, however. I would agree with Lindley that the pentangle is a sign that has been imposed upon Gawain by Camelot more than it is a device which he personally chose with which to represent himself. Through the pentangle,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When the knights go to the chapel, the reader is offered a first glimpse not only of the "place" of religion in courtly society, but of the narrow spaces which women inhabit in the poem and the court as well. When the two most important women of the court first appear, both of them, but specifically the wife of Bertilak, are seen in a narrow, almost secret space: "Þe lorde loutes þerto [to the chapel] and þe lady als;/Into a cumly closet coyntly ho entrez" (933-4). Fisher relates that this space is characteristic of the Lady: "...containment...is the essence of the Lady who is always situated within and associated with enclosed and private spaces" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 137). She enters this private worship-place "coyntly", perhaps suggesting the "coynt" things that she will attempt in another small space, namely the bedchamber in which Gawain will later become physically and psychologically entrapped.

Fisher reminds the reader of another implication of "coynt":

> The poet's choice of thie adverb "coyntly" to describe her entrance into the private space of the closet suggests to readers of Chaucer the famous pun on "quoynte" as female genitalia, which marks the Wife of Bath's characterization of herself in her prologue. Interestingly, Gawain repeats this adverb again at the beginning of his anti-feminist diatribe [2412].... ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 137)

This pun on "coyntly" suggests not only the space of the bedchamber but the entrapping "space" of Lady Bertilak's body, the "cors" which she will offer

---

Camelot presents Gawain as the distillation of the court's ideals; the people of Hautdesert see these ideals differently. Fisher analyzes Gawain as a public representation of Camelot (or, as I would put it, as a correllary with the pentangle, which is itself a representation of Gawain as the court has constructed him in the same way that Gawain is a representation of the court's ideal view of itself): "Gawain, in assuming the Green Knight's challenge at Camelot, has ceased to be aprivate individual. He has assumed the responsibility of acting as a token of Arthur's fame and reputation. In this capacity, he has no room for private desires, or at the very least, his private desires must be trained to the service of the public good" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 139). I would argue that the "age difference" between the two courts is another factor in their difference from each other: the poet consistently describes Camelot as a "young" court, where the ideals of chivalry as bravery and honor are still current. However, Hautdesert is a more "mature" court, ruled by older individuals (Lord Bertilak, Morgan); thus their concept of courtly behavior is at the same time more nuanced and more corrupt, reduced to the "formes" of polite interaction.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain as a place for him to dwell. In contrast to the pure (or, more accurately, sanitized and reclaimed) space of Guinevere's body, surrounded by curtains and accessible only to Arthur, the "space" of the Lady's body can lead Gawain into transgression, thus expressing a common patriarchal (and medieval) view of the female body as the site of entrapment. Fisher does not mention another aspect of the Wife of Bath's presentation of herself (or, more accurately, the male poet Chaucer's representation of the Wife of Bath as a woman presenting herself) which would seem relevant to Lady Bertilak as a "space": the Wife of Bath makes use of the word *glosen*, associated with the process of "glossing" or interpreting a text (specifically a biblical or theological text), as a description of her listeners' gaze at her body and their own.[196] Later on, in her attempted seduction of Gawain, the Lady offers him her body (in ambiguous terms in lines 1237-40) and, when he does not accept her offer, she cites "texts" of knightly deeds which insist that he do so (1512-9). When he discovers that the Lady's offer of her "cors" had been a trick, Gawain consigns her treachery to the "text" of women's deceit found in the Bible (2411-28). Indeed, just as Gawain, both when he is in armor and when he is in unwarlike "skyrtez" at Bertilak's castle, is a text which presents the two courts' readings of him, the Lady's body is a "text" of masculine expectations of women in courtly society: she is an object of male desire marked by an

---

[196]In the prologue to her tale, the Wife of Bath's first use of *glosen* occurs in a standard context of reading and interpreting the Bible: "Men may devyn and glosen up and doun,/But wel I woot, expres, withoute lye,/God bad us for to wexe and multiplye;/That gentil text kan I wel understonde" (26-9). Her second use of "glosen" recalls the first, occuring also in the context of sexuality, but here a different "text" is glossed. Arguing that the sexual organs were meant for more than just elimination and distinguishing between the sexes, the Wife invites her listeners to "glosen" these organs as they would a book: "Telle me also, to what conclusioun/Were members ymaad of generacioun,/And of so parfit wys a wight ywroght?/Trusteth right wel, they were not maad for noght/Glose whoso wole and seye bothe up and doun/That they were maked for purgacioun/Of uryne, and oure bothe thynges smale/Were eek to knowe a femele from a male,/And for noon oother cause—say ye no?/The experience woot wel it is noght so" (115-24). The repetition of "Glose...up and doun" creates a double entendre: the clerks read their books "up and doun", and the Wife invites her listeners to gloss the human body "up and doun" in order to interpret the meaning of the sexual organs, as one might try to interpret a biblical passage.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interiority which expresses the space that she (and women in general) inhabits in buildings and in the social "structure" alike, and which seems a feature of her very body, as Fisher suggests:

> Contained as she is within the castle and the poem, the Lady and the femaleness she shares with Guinevere and Morgan become fundamentally associated with privateness. The Lady is associated with privateness because that is the realm which she inhabits. But she is so thoroughly associated with privateness that privateness itself becomes feminized in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Certainly, her privateness is linked to female sexuality, as the possible pun on "coyntly" suggests. ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 138)

When the Lady desires to look at Gawain, she emerges from her private pew: "Þenne lyst þe lady to loke on þe kny3t;/Þenne com ho of hir closet with mony cler burdez" (941-2). Though she can leave her privileged, but nonetheless small, space to meet Gawain, this first narrow space which he witnesses her entering and exiting is indicative of the social and spatial limitations in which women dwell in the poem. The Lady and her female attendants are never seen leaving the castle. Likewise, they inhabit limited roles, one of which, the temptress, Gawain angrily imposes upon the Lady during his confrontation with Bertilak (2411-28).

This image of female social and spatial limitation, as well as the power of women to entangle and entrap from within the narrow spaces to which they are consigned, is extended in the poet's description of the older of the two most noble women, whom Bertilak finally names as "Morgne þe goddes" (2452). Morgan seems to be entrapped in her clothing, which almost completely encloses her:

> Þat oþer wyth a gorger watz gered ouer þe swyre,
> Chymbled ouer hir blake chyn with chalk-quyte vayles,
> Hir frount folden in sylk, enfoubled ayquere,
> Teret and treleted with tryflez aboute,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Þat no3t watz bare of þat burde but þe blake bro3es,
Þe tweyne y3en and þe nase, þe naked lyppez.... (957-62)

While Morgan seems almost suffocated by her garment, as both women are surrounded and walled in by the castle and their limited social roles, later they both prove their own power to encircle and entrap Gawain in the narrow bedchamber and in the knots of the very social conventions which give meaning and purpose to his life.[197]

After he has met the women, Gawain allows himself to be enclosed, both in their narrow spaces (the spot near the chimney in the hall) and in the constraining vows of a social relationship which will later lead to his entrapment:

Þay kallen hym of aquoyntaunce and he hit quyk askez
To be her seruaunt sothly, if hemself lyked.
Þay tan hym bytwene hem, wyth talkyng him leden
To chambre, to chemné.... (975-8)

In line 977, it seems as if Gawain is being led along by their words to the private, cozy, warm space of the "chemné." This leading by means of language may be a more innocent presaging of how Gawain will be led into potentially transgressing his vows and his values by the words of the Lady. Line 977 may also suggest that the place appointed for Gawain--this place of ease, social privilege and privacy--is something constructed by society through language, as if social ties are complex enough to form a syntax and a space all their own.

The way in which a narrow, private space reflects a secret or private social condition is reflected in the conversation which Gawain has with the Lady at the feast the next day.

---

[197]Haruta has another reading of Morgan's garment: she stresses that Morgan's "manifold coverings [suggest] not only secrecy but also physical corruption and decay" (Haruta 209). I would construe this decay not just as the end result of the physical process of aging, but as the moral decay of Hautdesert which Morgan represents through her scheming to corrupt and destroy the younger court of Camelot and its youthful representative, Gawain.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bot 3et I wot þat Wawen and þe wale burde
Such comfort of her compaynye ca3ten togeder
Þur3 her dere daylaunce of her derne wordez,
Wyth clene cortays carp closed fro fylþe,
Þat hor play watz passande vche pryce gomen.... (1010-14)

This conversation is filled with imagery of both knots and enclosed spaces. The two "ca3ten togeder" great pleasure in each other's company (perhaps also indicating how Gawain will be "caught" by the demands which the Lady will later place on him). Yet the poet hastens to add that the metaphorical "space" of their conversation is "closed" to all transgressions and vice, just like a locked chamber, and their words are "clene." Lastly, their conversation is a "gomen," a microcosm of society and its bonds, like all of the games that the courtiers play, including the "game" of meaning expressed in the figure of the pentangle. Like the games of Arthur's court, this game also is more than innocent fun--here, it legitimates illicit desire through encoding it as sophisticated, playful verbal interaction. The enclosed nature of the conversation is reflected in the fact that the rest of the court pays no attention to it: "Vche mon tented hys/And þay two tented þayres" (1018-9). The court accords great honor to privacy and subtlety, as if privacy were a sort of closed-in space.

After the feast, enclosing space and enclosing promises are again allied in the conversation between Gawain and the lord of the castle. First Bertilak invites Gawain into his own space: "Gawan gef hym god day; þe godmon hym lachchez,/Ledes hym to his awen chamber, þe chymné bysyde,/And þere he drawez hym on dry3e...." (1029-31). This physical and spatial surrounding of Gawain--"lachch[ing]" him in an embrace, leading him to the private place, and detaining him there--are extended to potential social enclosures or bonds when Gawain promises to be at the lord's bidding: "'And I am, wy3e, at your wylle to worch youre hest,/As I am halden þerto in hy3e and in lo3e,/Bi ri3t" (1039-41).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once Gawain makes this promise, Bertilak attempts to bind him further (in both a spatial and a social sense) by inducing him to stay at the court:

> Þe lorde fast can hym payne
> To holde lenger þe kny3t;
> To hym answrez Gawayn
> Bi non way þat he my3t. (1042-5)

Despite his new obligation to his host to accept hospitality, Gawain still regards his vow to the Green Knight as a more pressing concern, refusing the enclosures of Bertilak's castle and his social circle in favor of the marginal spaces where the Green Knight may be found. However, bound as he is by the "endeles knot" and "gomen" of his learned courtesy, Gawain agrees to remain with Bertilak until he is required to leave for his journey.

The distinction between the two spaces--the court and the Green Chapel--is articulated when the lord of the castle asks Gawain what would take him away from the castle before the end of the holiday, something that is socially unheard-of, and Gawain replies, "A he3e ernde and a haste me hade fro þo wonez,/For I am sumned myselfe to sech to a place/I not in worlde whederwarde to wende hit to fynde'" (1051-3). In contrast to the castle of Bertilak, a place that is known and identifiable and also familiar in the sense that the same social rules which govern Camelot are also in force here, as far as Gawain knows, the Green Chapel is an unknown and marginal place. Gawain does not know how to get there, and the place is also the site of the uncanny Green Knight, an outsider.

However, to Gawain's surprise, Bertilak claims to know where the place is and promises to show him:

> Þenne la3ande quoþ þe lorde: "Now leng þe behoues,
> For I schal teche yow to þat terme bi þe tymez ende.
> Þe Grene Chapayle vpon grounde greue yow no more
> Bot 3e schal be in yowre bedde, burne, at þyn ese...." (1068-71)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once Gawain is reassured that he will fulfill his obligation and find the Green Chapel, Bertilak effectively imprisons him, both literally in the castle and by means of Gawain's social scruples, since now the knight has no excuse not to stay. He also restricts Gawain to a very narrow space--his bed. In some ways this is, though courteously offered, an inappropriate place for a strapping knight. Ironically, by releasing Gawain from the necessity of having to leave and seek the Green Knight so soon after arriving through his own promise that he will show Gawain the way, Gawain's host ends up binding Gawain to a new set of promises. The ultimate irony is, of course, that Gawain has bound himself to the same person through two separate obligations.

Gawain accepts his social and spatial restriction by promising to be at Bertilak's service: "'Now acheued is my chaunce, I schal at your wille/Dowelle and ellez do quat 3e demen'" (1081-2). Gawain describes Bertilak's behest as a kind of space in which he will dwell, as if Bertilak's commandments were walls. The capture of Gawain is complete when Bertilak "sesed hym" (1083) and brings the ladies to him, as his wife will come later of her own accord and attempt to imprison Gawain in other ways. The word "sesed" also recalls images of treachery and conquest from the beginning of the poem, when "þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye" (1). Though here *sesed* means "seized" and earlier it meant "ceased," the events in the opening lines of the poem, with their references to conquering territory and kingdom-destroying deceptions predict Gawain's own experience of "untrawþe" and his own "conquest" at the hands of Morgan, Bertilak and his lady. Even at the beginning of the poem, "seized" and "ceased" appear as connected actions: after the battle of Troy had ceased, Britain and other lands were seized by the simultaneously heroic and treacherous survivors.[198] Gawain reiterates the association between staying at the castle and

[198]One sense of *sese* is derived from *seisen*, "to take possession of (a country, city, land, goods, etc.);

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fulfilling Bertilak's wishes when Bertilak offers to make a wager with him: "'Whyl I byde in yowre bor3e be bayn to 3owre hest'" (1092). This is a perfect expression of the alliance between enclosed, socialized spaces and the social bonds which hold the place and society together. As long as he is in the house, he will similarly be enclosed by its lord's behests.

Bertilak orders Gawain again to go back to his bedroom, arguing that Gawain has not had enough sleep:

> "For 3e haf trauayled," quoþ þe tulk, "towen fro ferre,
> And syþen waked me wyth, 3e arn not wel waryst
> Nauþer of sostnaunce ne of slepe, soþly I knowe.
> 3e schal lenge in your lofte and ly3e in your ese...." (1093-6)

Little does Gawain know that this enclosed space will be the site of his testing by the Lady--a place which, though enclosed, is the site of a potential transgression. This paradox is also indicative of the irony that it will be the very "enclosing" social rules and obligations which protect Gawain from marginal behavior that will cause him almost to commit a marginal deed.

The game which follows is a lighthearted version of the serious covenants which hold Gawain's society together. The seriousness of the bargain and its ceremonial sealing are then softened by the shared laughter of all those present:

> "Who bryngez vus this beuerage, þis bargayn is maked,"
> So sayde þe lorde of þat lede; þay la3ed vchone
> Þay dronken and daylyeden and dalten vnty3tel,
> Þise lordez and ladyez, quyle þat hem lyked,
> And syþen with frenkysch fare and fele fare lotez
> Þay stoden and stemed and stilly speken,
> Kysten ful comlyly and ka3ten her leue. (1112-8)

---

seize...by force; capture" and "to take hold of...with the hand (s, grab, seize; take)" (*MED* 340-1). The other is derived from *cesen*, "To cease or desist (from action, movement, emotion, etc.); make a stop, leave off" and "To cease to be or to exist; be at an end, disappear; also, be suspended or discontinued" (133-5). The pun on these two words is possible because the poet (or scribe) spells them both in the same way.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The ceremonial nature of the game reflects on the constructed quality of the court's socializing itself, as seen in the formality of even the words and jokes and evening farewells that are heard afterwards. It is as if the activities of the court are so formal as to be an enclosure or knot of their own. The last words which they utter are words of praise about how "þe olde lorde of þat leude/Cowþe wel halde layk alofte" (1124-5). This would seem to suggest that the whole social world of the court is a kind of game, a series of agreements and promises which are demonstrated in a more lighthearted fashion in the games that the court plays. However, if the court is a game, this may also indicate that the members do not take their vows seriously, that the meaning derived from the court is relative. It can change with the rules of the game and the game's outcome rather than be something immutable which has been imposed from above.

The game of Bertilak and Gawain also indicates that the activities which happen outside parallel those inside. Both are to exchange their winnings from their respective places of action. Far from being threatening because it is outside of the castle, the wildness of the forest through which the hunters travel is subsumed into the elaborate social ritual of the hunt. The true danger of the wilderness is reduced by the formal nature of the hunt and the inevitable slaughter of each beast that the court pursues. Moreover, the hunt as a social construction, as enclosed as the social games enacted in the castle, is a parallel to and a commentary on what transpires inside both the castle and society itself. While the lord hunts wild beasts, the lady hunts Gawain according to a game with equally elaborate rules, and speaks in the language of chase and capture--a language of moral enclosure.[199]

---

[199]Clein views the hunt as an expression of the knight's ideal fearlessness in the face of death, as it is celebrated in what she calls heraldic literature (i.e., poetry concerned mainly with the battles of knights): "Away from the battlefield the sports of the fourteenth-century knights proclaim their defiance of death. The hunt, a favorite knightly occupation, is an elaborate and spectacular ritual in which the hunter demonstrates his control of life through stylized violence" (Clein 60).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

One of the first instances of this parallelism is in the use of the words "coupling" and "uncoupling" in reference to teams of hounds. As the hunters prepare to depart, "Þenne þise cacheres þat couþe cowpled hor houndez...." (1139) It was typical hunting practice to pair up hounds and then release, or "uncouple," them in pairs, as the hunters do in line 1147: "Couples huntes of kest...." However, this word may also be a subtly proleptic reflection of the lady's attempted seduction of Gawain--her hunt, whose end result would be to couple rather than uncouple.[200] The word also, more simply, refers to the "coupling" or doubling structures of these scenes, in which the structure produced by the hunt is reproduced in a different, more nuanced context in the bedroom scenes. The pairing of these scenes also involves and comments upon the production of gender roles. While the hunt is portrayed as an ideal, supremely manly occupation (including the "manly" process of penetrating and anatomizing the

---

This idea of "stylized violence" is an apt description of the elaborately ritualistic slaughtering of the hunters' prey in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Riddy discusses the social construction of the hunt as it appears in manuscript art of the late Middle Ages: "In many manuscripts, miniatures and initials depicting human activity occupy firmly bounded spaces, while animals range 'on the edge', in Michael Camille's phrase. Culture, that is, is symbolised as a bounded space and nature as what lies outside it; just as the court or the castle, for example, in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*--as in many other romances--is an enclave in the wilderness against which it is defined" (Riddy 217). She acknowledges, however, that this distinction between the wild and the cultured is not so well-defined in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and this blurring of distinctions is a part of the poet's program. She observes that nature and culture "are represented metaphorically as feast and flesh, as fur and pelt, as court and wildness, as bounded and unbounded. To these contrasts might be added self and other; history and seasons; chastity and desire. ... And yet the court is also, we discover, the wild: it is a place of danger and transgressive sexuality in which Gawain is hunted down by the lady. The sites of humanness and non-humanness are not so clearly identifiable as they may have seemed at first. The court is now nature to the culture of Gawain's chastity, and is...the locus of new binary configurations; that is, the categories shift into new contrasts as they take on new and contradictory meanings" (Riddy 219). An example of the fluidity of these identifications would be the simultaneous identification of Gawain and the Lady with the various animals whom Bertilak hunts. As objects of pursuit, the deer and the fox can be equated with Gawain, whom the Lady hunts. However, the female deer, who is opened up by the male hunters, seems more connected with the Lady in terms of her penetrability as a body, and the fox, due to his wiliness in playing a game of his own with the hunters, also is echoed by the Lady's wiliness in her game with Gawain. I will discuss these comparisons further as they appear in the poem.

[200]*The Oxford English Dictionary* supplies these specialized hunting definitions of *couple:* "A brace or leash for holding two hounds together" (III. 1047), "A brace of dogs used for hunting" (1048), "to tie or fasten (dogs) together in pairs" (1048). As the OED makes evident in other examples, the sexual connotation of this word was also present in the *Pearl*-poet's time.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hunted animals), the Lady's hunt of Gawain occurs in the feminine world of the bedroom and is perpetrated by a huntress. Daphne Spain could be describing how the doubled hunting scenes reproduce medieval masculinity and femininity in her analysis of gendered spaces:

> ...dwellings reflect ideals and realities about relationships between women and men within the family and in society. The space outside the home becomes the arena in which social relations (i.e., status) are produced, while the space inside the home becomes that in which social relations are reproduced. Gender-status distinctions therefore are played out within the home as well as outside of it.... (Spain 7)

But the concepts of "masculine" and "feminine" produced by these spaces are not quite such neat binaries. The outdoor hunt is an exclusively male preserve, but the indoor hunt involves a man--Gawain. The Lady's aggressive role in hunting him is also far from the passive female ideal displayed in the poet's portrait of Guinevere.[201]

---

[201]Carolyn Dinshaw observes perceptively that the gender roles reproduced by the hunting and bedroom scenes are specifically connected to heterosexuality, which she views as a structuring principle of meaning in medieval literature, with its vivid imagery of a fecund female Nature penetrated and quickened by a virile male principle (the sun or the seasons, for example). She presents the first eighteen lines of the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* as an example of cosmic heterosexuality: in these lines, "a whole cultural paradigm, structuring the seasons, the labor, the physical life and the spiritual development of humans, is set up: male [April] pierces female [the drought of March] to the root" (Dinshaw 207). She explains, "A sexual act inaugurates this work; that act is the link between humans and the cycle of nature (it is the principle of all generation) and the spiritual world as well. It is associated with desire, fecundity, generation, health, knowledge, the freshness of outside, public space, spiritual life. This act is...heterosexual, and heterosexuality in Chaucer's England is just this dense web of cultural relations that structures and locates individual subjectivity" (208). She characterizes the General Prologue as "the clearest late medieval hermeneutic according to which individuals read themselves and their worlds" (208).

But the *Pearl*-poet's structuring principles of space, nature and morality are never without complication. The season in which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* occurs is not spring, the archetypal fertile time during which the earth produces abundant life and (heterosexual) love begins to flower, but winter, a time during which nature becomes alien and harsh. The "feminine" world of the Lady is not a fecund, generative world; she invites Gawain to extramarital sex, not to reproduction. It is also a world of predatory females, not pliant, luxuriant Nature but sterile, "sleye," corrupting culture, in which people's behavior is dictated by texts (as the Lady later insists when she makes her sexual demands of Gawain). The hunt also reveals the shadow side of this heterosexuality: not romanticized union resulting in fertility but the disaggregation of flesh, penetrating a female corpse (in the case of the doe, the first hunted animal) and dismembering it,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The fact that Bertilak and his castle have sovereignty even over the wilderness is made evident when the wild creatures hear the sounds of the approaching hunters and are afraid:

> At þe fyrst quethe of þe quest quaked þe wylde,
> Der drof in þe dale, doted for drede,
> Hi3ed to the hy3e, bot heterly þay were
> Restayed with þe stablye, þat stoutly ascryed. (1150-3)

While during his wanderings Gawain had been frightened by the wilderness and its creatures, here the wild beasts themselves are terrified of the hunters, who surround and enclose them. Even the species of creatures which inhabit the wilds have been significantly "tamed": though wild, the bucks, boars and foxes which Bertilak hunts are not uncanny monsters like "etaynes" and "wodwos." Their space is completely controlled by the ritual of the hunt, which also demands that the male deer be set free (1156-7), while the females are captured and slain: "The hindez were halden in with 'Hay!' and 'War!'/Þe does dryuen with grete dyn to þe depe sladez" (1158-9). This convention of Bertilak's hunt both echoes and contrasts with the social conventions and games inside of the castle. Like the does, the women of the poem are entrapped within narrow spaces and roles. Unlike the does, however, the lady and Morgan, while they remain within small spaces, use their spaces and limited social roles in order to capture Gawain, who is not as lucky as the freed male deer.

While "þus laykes þis lorde by lynde-wodez euez" (1178), Gawain is unprepared to play his part in the games when he "in gay bed lygez" (1179), waiting for the lady to trap him. His bedroom is much like the hiding places of

---

male power over nature expressed through opening up a mute female body and ritually eviscerating it. Dinshaw's insight about heterosexuality as organizing principle in medieval culture is quite apt, but it is a different heterosexuality in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*--a darker vision than Chaucer's evocation of world harmony and fecundity, a vision of sex as deception and death, with the cruel winter as natural backdrop.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the animals, an enclosure where he may "lurk" under "cover" like a cowering creature: "[he] Lurkkes quyl þe dayly3t lemed on þe wowes,/Vnder covertour ful clere, cortyned aboute" (1180-1). The bedroom consists of successive enclosures which make it easier for Gawain to hide and which establish his presence in spaces ascribed to women, private concentric containers: the bedroom, the bed itself (which is itself an enclosure; as was typical of medieval beds, it is surrounded completely by a concealing curtain), and beneath the covers on the bed. Here Gawain's layers of armor are replaced by layers of concealing and containing spaces, most demarcated by rich fabrics.

The rest of the stanza continues in the language of hunting and hiding. The Lady's stealthy sound at the door provokes Gawain to look circumspectly out of his hideaway, but he warily refrains from coming out, feigning sleep as an opossum might play dead to deceive a predator:

> And as in slomeryng he slode, sle3ly he herde
> A lyttel dyn at his dor, and derfly vpon;
> And he heuez vp his hed out of þe clothes,
> A corner of þe cortyn he ca3t vp a lyttel,
> And waytez warly þiderwarde quat hit be my3t. (1182-6)

Though Gawain has not yet seen his visitor, it is as if he is already aware that he is being hunted, though he should have no reason to fear such things in the formal social space of the castle, where invasions or violence should not occur. Like the beasts outside, Gawain responds instinctively and keeps himself hidden. Yet there is an element of studied carefulness associated with culture here. He hears a noise "sle3ly," a word connected with the intricacy and subtlety of the court, but here more obviously evoking "slyness"--though, interestingly, Gawain is the one who is slyly listening to the stealthy sound beyond the door.

The Lady continues the hunting-game by sneaking into and penetrating his multi-layered hideaway, first entering his room and then the space of the bed

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

itself, with its concealing, containing curtain: "And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,/Kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne...." (1190-1). In this narrowest of spaces, this potential "knot" of unsanctioned involvement, Gawain continues to feign sleep, and then pretends to awaken and, "unlocking" his eyelids (1201), surprised to see the Lady, he crosses himself for protection from his hunter (1203). The image of Gawain "unlocking" his eyelids is interesting because here Gawain's own body is a space which can be opened and gazed into. Though he is the one who is doing the "unlocking," he seems to be deprived of agency because it is the Lady who has sought him out, and she is the one who is in control of the situation. Just as the Lady has "unlocked" the concentric spaces of Gawain's room and his curtained bed, now she will proceed to try to "unlock" Gawain himself by persuading him to accede to her sexual demands. This transformation of the woman from penetrated to penetrator (she is the one who enters the room and also becomes the sexual aggressor) and the man from the controller of the gaze of desire to the one who is gazed upon and eventually "unlocked" or penetrated, lends what would be a more uncomfortable implication for the poem's readers to Gawain's "feminization" at Hautdesert. This "unlocking" of Gawain's eyes to see the Lady also is all the more ironic in terms of the poem's imagery of binding, since Gawain will later be unable to release the social and verbal bonds which the Lady puts on him (symbolized most corporeally by the lace), just as he will not be permitted to leave his bed. Even when he unlocks his eyes, Gawain cannot see what is coming.

When she finds Gawain awake, the Lady speaks to him as if he is her prey and she has successfully captured him. She also reinforces her position as the penetrative partner or sexual aggressor with her description of being able to "slyde" into Gawain's hideaway. Unlike herself, he is "vnsly3e":

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"God moroun, Sir Gawayn," sayde þat gay lady,
"3e ar a sleper unsly3e, þat mon may slyde hider.
Now ar 3e tan astyt! Bot true vus may schape,
I schal bynde yow in youre bedde--þat be 3e trayst." (1208-11)

Gawain replies that he is already bound to her, as he is at her service anyway, attempting to shrug off the suggestiveness of her image of tying him up in bed. However, when he asks leave of her to let him (her prisoner) out of bed, the Lady insists that he remain there:

"Bot wolde 3e, lady louely, þen, leue me grante,
And deprece your prysoun and pray hym to ryse,
I wolde bo3e of þis bed and busk me better;
I schulde keuer þe more comfort to karp yow wyth."
"Nay, forsoþe, beau sir," sayd þat swete,
"3e schal not ryse of your bedde. I rych yow better:
I schal happe yow here þat oþer haf als
And syþen karp wyth my kny3t þat I ka3t haue.
For I wene wel, iwysse, Sir Wowen 3e are,
Þat alle þe worlde worchipez quere-so 3e ride,
Your honour, your hendelayk is hendely praysed
With lordez, with ladyes, with alle þat lyf bere." (1218-29)

The Lady has captured Gawain in several ways. She has trapped him physically and spatially so that he cannot get out of his drapery-enclosed bed (even to make himself more presentable so that she will be more comfortable talking with him, as he protests (1221)--he is more concerned with his appearance and her approval of it than she is). She has entrapped him socially because he cannot refuse the commandments of a lady, especially those of his hostess. Lastly, she even entraps him in his own identity and fame as the world's most courteous knight. If he were to get out of bed, which she has labelled a discourteous act (even though Gawain is attempting to be courteous by doing so, in order to make himself a more pleasant, less unkempt companion), he would be betraying his own nature and reputation. If this were not enough, though, she assures Gawain that he is literally locked in (and that they are safe

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from intrusion from outside, despite the fact that the Lady herself had managed to intrude):

> "And now 3e are here, iwysse, and we bot oure one;
> My lorde and his ledez ar on lenþe faren,
> Oþer burnez in hir bedde, and my burdez als,
> Þe dor drawen and dit with a derf haspe;
> And siþen I haue in þis hous hym þat al lykez,
> I schal ware my whyle wel, quyl hit lastez,
> With tale" (1230-6).

Not only is Gawain in the building and alone in the room with the Lady, locked in tightly, but all of the hunters are away and the rest of the courtiers are in their own rooms, including, presumably, the "losenger" or gossip-monger who, in the romance tradition, spreads rumors about the sexual conduct of members of the court, a role occupied, for instance, by Chaucer's Pandarus.[202] Thus the Lady ensures both their privacy and their entrapment. Fisher contends that this concept of privacy is connected with women's sexuality (and its potentially dangerous power) in the poem:

> Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are repeatedly associated with privacy, but the poem does not feminize privacy simply because this is medieval woman's historical place. It does so primarily to conflate the dangerousness of privacy with the dangerousness of women themselves. The two are one and the same. ("Taken Men" 78)

The Lady's words also play on notions of being bound and being free. Gawain is trapped in the closed chamber, but paradoxically they are at their liberty to do what they like. The Lady entraps Gawain by offering him freedom with her--even if he needs to imprison her against her will:

> "3e ar welcum to my cors,

---

[202]*The Middle English Dictionary* defines a *losenger* as "One who curries favor, a flatterer", "a liar, backbiter, calumniator", "a deceiver of women, also, a hypocrite", "an evil counselor, a traitorous counselor" and "a rascal, coward, idler" (1237).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Yowre awen won to wale.
Me behouez of fyne force
Your seruaunt be, and schale." (1237-40)

Her use of the word *won* (1238) is intriguing. While A.C. Cawley and J.J. Anderson read won as a variant of *win*, "pleasure" (Cawley and Anderson 205), *The Oxford English Dictionary* also defines *won* as derived from the verb *wonen*, "to stay habitually, dwell, live (in a place or with some one)" (XX. 491) and as "A dwelling-place, abode" (XX. 497). Thus in addition to asking him to take his pleasure *(win)* with her, the lady seems also to be asking Gawain to "dwell" in her--a phrase with spatial as well as erotic connotations. This sexual resonance is reinforced when she says, instead of the expected "3e are welcum to my hous, yowre awen won to wale," "3e are welcum to my cors," which critics have read as an ambiguous statement of "you are welcome to me" (i.e., she is at his service) and as, literally, "you are welcome to my body." Just as Lord Bertilak had welcomed Gawain to stay in his house (and, particularly, to sleep there and to be entertained there), now Lady Bertilak welcomes him to stay in her body, or, as Dinshaw phrases it, "The word *won* suggesting a metaphor of landholding, she tries to direct his desire by setting herself up as property to be inhabited" (212). Her ambiguous invocation of force in line 1239 is a subtle role reversal: though presumbly Gawain could "have her by force" and "dwell within her" as the sexually aggressive, penetrative partner, in actuality, the Lady has been the aggressive one so far, entering Gawain's private spaces and having her way with him. She returns to this dominant role when she pledges that she will be Gawain's servant (1240)--a reversal of the typical courtly love situation, where the knight pledges his service to his lady. Fisher comments on the Lady's use of courtly language: "For here, courtly love talk no longer represents the verbal game devised by aristocratic men to distance and define women's sexuality in reference to masculine desire" ("Taken Men" 81). But the Lady does not just

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

remove herself from a masculine economy of desire. She takes on the courtly male's own role of "servant," which is itself a role reversal, since in a patriarchal society, women serve men. Perhaps the Lady is drawing attention to the ultimate artificiality of (and thus freedom for playing games with) gender roles when she impersonates a man impersonating a woman.[203]

Their roles appear reversed again for a moment when Gawain grants the Lady leave to go, when it has been she who has prevented him from going anywhere: "Þe lady thenn spek of leue,/He granted hir ful sone" (1288-9). However, the Lady then imprisons Gawain more effectively than she has done before, by accusing him of not being the Gawain about whom she had heard. She encloses him in his fame as a surpassingly courteous knight, and in effect dictates his behavior to him:

> "So god as Gawayn gaynly is halden,
> And cortaysye is closed so clere in hymseluen,
> Couth not ly3tly haf lenged so long wyth a lady,

---

[203]The misogynist thirteenth-century *De conjuge non ducenda* presents this role reversal in a more malign sense: "In spite of her obvious inferiority, woman is still domineering; what is more, she wishes to usurp the male's right to rule *(semper domini vult esse domina)"* (Wilson and Makowski 128). (One wonders what this author would have thought of men pledging themselves as servants to disdainful women.) The same author could be describing the Lady when he says that "Women fight with their *lingua gladius* [sword-tongue]" rather than with a metal blade (Wilson and Makowski 128). Medieval vernacular sermons indict women for having "instabilitas loci," which Katharina Wilson and Elizabeth Makowski gloss as "an attraction to the outside world" (Wilson and Makowski 122). I would interpret this phrase more literally as an instability of place--both a refusal to adhere to their limited social position and, especially for such a spatially-aware writer as the *Pearl*-poet, a desire to have a broader geographical range. After all, "the world" is presented in this definition as a place outside of one's confining enclosure, and for women, this enclosure was small indeed. The desire to expand one's ambit did not have to assume a very large range of motion in order to be transgressive. Spain presents women's restriction to particular spaces in a broad historical context: "Throughout history and across cultures, architectural and geographic spatial arrangements have reinforced status difference between women and men. ... Women and men are spatially segregated in ways that reduce women's access to knowledge and thereby reinforce women's lower status relative to men's. 'Gendered spaces' separate women from knowledge used by men to produce and reproduce power and privilege" (Spain 13). This description is quite applicable to the circumscribed spaces of women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight;* however, the poem's reading of these spaces is more nuanced, for the women of the poem wield great power from within these small spaces, controlling the very plot of the poem, and are ultimately stifled by the same narrative.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bot he had craued a cosse bi his courtaysye,
Bi sum towch of summe tryfle at sum talez ende." (1297-1301)

In this situation, his own standards of conduct become a source of spatial and psychic entrapment for Gawain.

Gawain is also depicted as a sort of enclosure of his own virtues. Courtesy is "closed" within him, as if he himself were a space in which the rituals of polite conduct may take place. (This description of Gawain as a closed space also recalls his earlier "unlocking" of his eyes as his final exposure to the Lady when she penetrates each of his concentric hiding-places. In that earlier image, he takes the position normally inhabited by women, as a closed space which can be penetrated, as here, where she "penetrates" to his heart--his self-concept--and coerces him into consenting to her demands.) But he is also a closed system, unable to imagine alternatives to the codes of behavior which have now entrapped him. Thus he dutifully gives the Lady the kiss for which she had asked, accepting that this is correct behavior for a knight: "'I schal kysse at your comaundement, as a kny3t fallez,'" he informs her (1302). But for all of this language of Gawain as a closed body and a closed system, represented by the enclosing figure of the pentangle, these kisses will begin to cause the rupture in his "armor" of chivalric behavior which will ultimately lead to the physical sign of the broaching of his ideals, the nick in his neck dealt by the axe of Bertilak. Like the deer which Bertilak and his men will soon "unlace," the Lady is beginning to "unlace" both Gawain himself and the pentangle to which his ideals are "bound."

The Lady's insistence that Gawain behave in the way in which she expects him, according to the stories that had been told about him, also foregrounds the performativity and theatricality of Gawain's role as a knight--indeed, of all of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

courtiers' roles. Lindley posits that this is the Lady's most important tactic in her seduction game:

> The most fundamental of the Lady's tactics for subverting Gawain's pentangularity is to foreground the theatricality and textuality of courtly behavior. By invoking his public reputation, engaging him to "expoun/Of druryes greme and grace' (1506-7), and requesting that he teach her 'of your wytte' (1533), she emphasizes that she regards--or pretends to regard--the courtesy Gawain sees as essential to his character as a set of sporting rules and/or literary conventions. (Lindley 75)

As will be revealed in their next conversation, the Lady views Gawain himself as a text in which she can "read" whatever she wants--and she becomes disappointed when he does not perform according to the "script" or "plot" of this text.[204]

Even when the Lady has left, the imagery of Gawain's bonds to her continues. Gawain summons his chamberlain to help him get dressed, then "Bo3ez foth, quen he watz boun, blybely to masse...." (1311). Though here "boun" has the implication of "ready, setting off" (Andrew and Waldron 307), in *Pearl* it also implies "fixed, fastened" (Andrew and Waldron 307), as Gawain is both bound to the schedule of the court (Mass, then "mete") and to the Lady. His spatial and social situation is made clearer in the seating arrangements at mealtime, after Mass:

---

[204]Lindley believes that the Lady's foregrounding of the artificial nature of Gawain's identity is an ultimately liberating act: "By inviting Gawain to enact his desires...by showing him his potential multiplicity as well as questioning his right to his name, she subverts his identity and the system of hierarchies and exclusions, the official order, on which it depends. Hautdesert offers, as carnival usually does, the possibility of liberation and the threat of dissolution" (Lindley 69). I believe that this "carnivalesque" activity on the Lady's part has a more sinister motive than the rather benign desire to liberate Gawain from his confining conception of himself, though. Behind the Lady's actions lie the machinations of Morgan, who desires the downfall of the Round Table. Thus the Lady's efforts seem less directed towards freeing Gawain from his restrictive moral code than towards proving his, and through him, Camelot's, vulnerability and imperfection, thus undermining it through "despoyling" its most perfect representative.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Watz neuer freke fayrer fonge
Bitwene two so dyngne dame,
Þe alder and þe 3onge;
Much solace set þay same. (1315-8)

This placement of Gawain between the two ladies at dinner also implies how he has been placed more subtly between them: Morgan as the instigator of the plot, and the Lady as the instrument of it, completely enclose Gawain. Lord Bertilak is absent from the plot here, revealing the primacy of the two women in the plot. Only later does Bertilak claim responsibility for the plot ("'I wro3t hit myseluen'"--2361), excluding the women from it. (This does not, however, absolve them from blame in Gawain's mind, even if their role was ancillary, as he makes abundantly clear in his subsequent "antifeminist rant.")

When the description of the hunt continues, the poet relates in great detail the ritual of the butchering of the deer. Not only is this ritual highly ceremonial and formal, like Gawain's interactions with the Lady, but elements of it seem to be a direct commentary on their activities. Parts of the innards of the deer are described as if they were bonds being loosened or enclosures broken open with words such as "slyt" and "laucyng":

Syþen þay slyt þe slot, sesed þe erber,
Schaded wyth a scharp knyf, and þe schyre knitten.
Siþen rytte þay þe foure lymmes and rent of þe hyde;
Þen brek þay þe balé, þe bowelez out token
Lystily, for laucyng þe lere of þe knot. (1330-4)

Cawley and Anderson observe that the knot which ties up the "erber" refers technically to the first stomach of the ruminant deer, which the hunters strive to keep intact (Cawley and Anderson 208). However, the "erber" also recalls the many enclosed love-gardens in other medieval poems: enclosed spaces in which the formalized rituals of courtly love take place. Thus the hunt hearkens back to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain and the Lady's "luf-talkynge" in his chambers, a substitute for the walled space of the conventional garden.

Enclosed gardens appear with frequency in medieval love-poems, most notably in *The Romance of the Rose.* However, according to Margaret B. Freeman, the *hortus conclusus* also has a religious resonance:

> ...the *hortus conclusus* [is] an attribute of the Virgin Mary, inspired by the verse in the Song of Songs (4:12): "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse." Alain de Lille, in commenting on this passage, says that the Virgin is a "garden of delights in which the roses of endurance and the lily of virginity are not lacking....[She] is a garden enclosed because she is a valley of charity that is sealed, into which nothing evil can break...since she is surrounded entirely by a guard of angels. (136)

This sense of the garden as an inviolable female enclosure is problematized in*Gawain,* where women do dwell in enclosed spaces but invade the physical and social spaces of others, and the body, if not the *erber,* of the female deer is violently "sesed," penetrated and dismembered. Paradoxically, while dismembering the rest of the body, the hunters strive to keep some of it intact, as evidenced by their care with the "knot" (1334), just as the "intactness" of women is a vital component to her value before marriage. This ambiguity indicates that the perpetual preservation of intactness is an option for neither the deer nor women, for, just as the deer must be anatomized in order to be consumed, women's "intactness" is merely reserved for the man who is legally permitted to violate it.[205] The "slytting" of the "slot" (the base of the deer's throat) is an act of

---

[205]Lee Patterson presents an original and insightful view of the structure of La Vielle's narrative in the *Roman de la Rose,* which falls into the structural category of "dilatio," as an analogue to the act of [heterosexual] penetration. Initially Patterson speaks of the garden itself as a metaphor for the poem: "Within the enclosure of the garden, so says the form of the discourse, the origin and essence of love can be known and possessed: 'l'art d'Amors est tote enclose' (v. 38)" (Patterson 325). Patterson then discusses the framework of La Vielle's tale, which is not told in a linear way, but in an elaborate frame narrative of many nested installments (to which Gawain's successive enclosures in the previous bedroom scene seem spatial equivalents): "As well as its subordinating function, this emboitement structure has a figurative intention. It imitates the poem's climactic action, the gradual exfoliation of the rose that the final lines of the poem so graphically and embarrassingly

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

penetration which "sle3ly" hints at the potential penetrative acts of Gawain and the Lady in the bedroom--and an act whose violence would not have been absent from a medieval figuration of heterosexuality, as the conclusion of the *Roman de la Rose* proves (see Note 44).

The violent and yet orderly and protocol-governed "unlacing" of the deer actualizes what is only potentially possible in the parallel narrative of the Lady's hunt of Gawain. Though Gawain never actually "unlaces" her, the hunters' dismembering of the deer expresses the possibility, as well as the ultimate reinstatement of male superiority in that situation. Though if he gave in to the Lady's request, in a moral sense, Gawain would have surrendered himself and the Lady would have "won," in a purely physical sense, it is her body which would be occupied by him--patriarchal values would encode him as the "conqueror" of the Lady's bodily "territory," her "erber." The dismemberment of the deer by the hunters also actualizes a violent impulse only hinted at by the

---

describe. La Vielle's verbal dilation upon her themes, in other words, is organized so as to match the rose's floral dilation. This means that her discourse is erotic in perhaps the most immediate way possible" (Patterson 329). This sexual and textual opening of the rose is paralleled in a more violent way in the anatomizing of the deer above, and, more subtly, in the Lady's penetration of Gawain's successive enclosed spaces.

Dinshaw believes that "this unlacing of the body [of the doe] is the poem's visual representation of straight gender identity's failing. When such identity fails, the body perceptually disaggregatesm because it's that heterosexual identity matrix that--ideally and tenuously--accords unity to the body in the first place. The straight gender behavior that Gawain enacts is so fundamental that without its guarantee of unity he is subject to...corporeal disaggregation. And such disaggregation threatens the possibility of meaning itself. 'The image of [man's] body,' says Lacan, 'is the principle of every unity he perceives in objects' (*Seminar* 2: 166)" (Dinshaw 214). Dinshaw's presentation of the doe as Gawain's alter ego fits the pattern of the hunt/bedroom parallels, where Gawain is in the same position as the hunted creatures. Yet the doe is at the same time a female body "unlaced" by males. I believe that the doe's predicament parallels Gawain's on the surface (as the helpless prey of the Lady), but, more subtly, it allows for the clear representation of what is concealed in medieval (and later) descriptions of heterosexual love: the utter control of the female by the male, to the extent that the male slays the female in "conquering" her sexually. Thus the hunt of the doe seems to represent medieval tropes of patriarchally-constructed heterosexual relationships taken to their logical extremes as well as the disaggregation of the male heterosexual body when the female is allowed to be the aggressor. The undermining of the convention of male superiority in heterosexual relationships is all the more threatening because the male (Gawain) now gets the opportunity to see what it is like to be in a traditionally female position: spatially circumscribed, on his back in bed, at the mercy of a superior partner.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Lady when she speaks of "fyne force" (1239): the hunters penetrate the body of the deer as butchers, not as lovers. Perhaps a similar violent impulse toward the female body also underlies the chivalric code of love, with its elaborate avoidances and surface treatments of the disdainful lady as the superior partner. The anatomizing of the deer is a kind of sinister inverse of another form of anatomizing: the process of cataloguing ideally beautiful female body parts used in describing a courtly heroine--which itself is satirized in the poet's cataloguing of Morgan's withered body parts (957-63). Such underlying aggression appears in the *Roman de la Rose,* with its ravaging of the rose at the end, rape instead of consensual intercourse.[206]

---

[206]The ending of the *Roman* includes two juxtaposed scenes of forced entrance: the Lover's violent passage through the gate into the rose-garden and his conquest of the rose itself. These two scenes are permeated by constant double entendres referring to sexual intercourse, and the violence of the imagery, despite the narrator's protestations of love, reveal that here rape has been encoded as sexual love on the part of the narrator towards an inert female object. First the Lover approaches the sanctuary which bars his way to the garden, and "Et la baisay dévotement/Et pour estiver saulvement/Vois mon bourdon metter en l'archiere/Ou l'escharpe pendoit derrier" (21980-3) ("I kissed the image very devoutly and then, to enter the sheath safely, wished to put my staff into the aperture, with the sack hanging behind"--Dahlberg 352). However, a "palis" (paling, barrier) within does not allow him passage, so "Souvent m'y convint assaillir/Souvent hurter, souvent faillir" (21994-5) ("I had to assail it vigorously, throw myself against it often, often fail"--Dahlberg 352). He calls this procedure "jousting" ("veissiez"--21996) and compares it to the dismembering of Cacus by Hercules--an interesting parallel to the dismemberment of the deer and the potential "unlacing" of the seduction scene. In order to get through the gate, the Lover finds that he has to break the paling ("Mais le palis convint casser"--22013). The violence of this sexualized encounter with the barrier to the garden is echoed in the Lover's treatment of the rose, which he touts as a method that other young men should use to "gather" roses "et les ouvertes et les closes" ("either open or closed"--22057). When he takes hold of the rose, he desires to expose it completely so that he can look at it: "Pour les feuillettes reverchier/Car je vouloye tout cerchier/Jusques au fons du boutonnet/Comme me semble que bon est" (22100-3) ("For the rosebud seemed so fair to me that I wanted to examine everything right down to the bottom"--Dahlberg 353). This anatomizing of the rose recalls again the dissection of the hunters' prey: the gaze is scalpel-like in its scrutiny, penetrative and wounding. The encounter ends with the dismemberment of the rosebush, as the Lover plucks the flowers: "Mais il [Fair Welcoming] n'y met nul contredit/Qui ne preigne de baille et cueille/Rosiers et rames fleurs et fueille" (22117-9) ("...but he did not forbid me to take, to reveal and pluck the rosebush and branches, the flower and the leaf"--Dahlberg 353). Though all of this description is supposed to record the Lover's amatory triumph in the language of love, instead the consummation of the Lover's desire results in the destruction of the rose's body, this consummation having been accomplished by violent means. This disturbing figuration of heterosexual sex as violence is also treated by the *Pearl*-poet in his juxtaposition of hunting and seduction scenes.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In Gawain's case, because the Lady has made him the object of her penetrative attentions, the object of her assault is not a rose or "erber" but the pentangle which represents his virtues. Though she cannot violate his body because she cannot physically penetrate him, she can still violate him by breaking the "knot" of his idealized virtues--a five-pointed knot which can be seen as an analogue for the human body (with four points as the four limbs, plus the point at the top for the head), and Gawain himself as a body. Unlike the hunters, who are careful of the "knot" of the deer's stomach (perhaps parallel to the "lower-body stratum" of Gawain himself as the hunted animal--or her own), the Lady's purpose is to sunder rather than keep intact the knot of Gawain's pentangle.

The garden's association with courtly love also causes it to symbolize the larger "enclosure" of the court's ritualized social interactions, the meaning that it grants life through its games of love and hunting. Perhaps the hunters' desire not to disturb the "knot" indicates a parallel desire to preserve the social order, which is ensured, among other things, by this ritual triumph over nature. Any breach of conduct, be it in hunting or love, destroys the knot of meaning created by the games, just as any transgression would untie the "endeles knot" by which Gawain visually expresses his virtues.

The *erber* also may refer to the garden of *Pearl,* the first *spot* in both a physical and a moral sense. The spot in which Gawain has been placed--both his entrapment in his bed and his moral dilemma--can result in a deed which would make him morally "spotted." Thus the elaborate knot or enclosed garden of society, while it attempts to keep out all invasive threats to the social order, also is its own threat. What causes society to be held together is also, paradoxically, a source of unbinding, as reflected in subsequent descriptions of the "unlacing" of the deer. After its entrails are removed, the whole body is disassembled: "Alle þe

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rymez by þe rybbez radly þay lauce" (1343) and the literal backbone of the structure is taken apart:

> Bi þe by3t al of þe þy3es
> Þe lappez þay lauce bihynde;
> To hewe hit in tow þay hy3es,
> Bi þe bakbon to vnbynde (1349-52).

Similarly, the ritual conduct which is the "backbone" of society can also "unbynde" that very society and its ideal exemplar, Gawain, as the knight's ethical "knot" will later demonstrate.

In the exchange of winnings, what Gawain gives Bertilak is potentially threatening to the social order, though it properly fulfills his part of the court-sanctioned bargain. When Bertilak calls upon Gawain to surrender his winnings after he surrenders his own, courtesy and gaming are conflated: "Bifore alle þe folk on þe flette frekez he beddez/Verayly his venysoun to fech hym byforne;/And al godly in gomen Gawayn he called...." (1374-5). Gawain's kisses, however, are a potential violation of this order on which the poet curiously does not dwell:

> He hasppez his fayre hals his armez wythinne,
> And kysses hym as comlyly as he coupe awyse.
> "Tas yow þere my chevicaunce; I cheued no more;
> I wowche hit saf fynly, þa3 feler hit were." (1388-91)

Though it is part of the bargain that Gawain give Bertilak anything that he had won, what he does give is a threat of marginalized behavior which is outside of the court's definitions. After all, in an environment in which homosexuality is strongly disapproved of as a violation of the "natural" order, Gawain has presumably given the host the same kind of kiss that he has given the Lady, and has also promised to give more if he were to win more. Moreover, if he were to give in to the Lady's seduction, according to his promise to exchange anything

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that he had won with the Lord, he would have to have intercourse with the Lord too--a transgressive implication which the poet does not discuss.[207]

One could argue that, because it was not socially unacceptable for males to kiss each other in medieval European society, these kisses would not imply anything homoerotic, as they might in contemporary homophobic American society, which views almost all affectionate physical contact between men as evidence of homosexual desire. Dinshaw describes the context for such kisses in the poem:

> ...innocent kisses often occur between men at moments of heightened emotion in late Middle English texts...as when Arthur and his court regretfully kiss Gawain goodbye as he sets out on his journey [596]. Such kisses represent conventional cultural practices, informed by the rules of courtesy and hospitality; there is nothing problematic about men's kissing one another per se in the medieval romance context, as there might be today in the United States." (Dinshaw 210)

Dinshaw also informs the reader that medieval people were aware of the transgressive potential of male-male kisses, despite the fact that they were socially approved of in nonsexual contexts: "...the Fathers and Doctors of the Church saw that kisses between men could be sinful, a possible first step in homosexual encounters" (Dinshaw 210). The poet describes Gawain's kiss of Bertilak as "comly," which echoes the way in which Gawain and the Lady "comly bykennen Kryst ayþer oþer" (1307) right after the Lady gives Gawain the kiss, and

---

[207]Dinshaw explains why the poet does not mention the logical outcome of the secuction/exchange of winnings plot: "Homosexual sex is thus...*the* logical end of the interlocking plots the lady and Bertilak play out--but it is a forbidden end. Or rather, not forbidden, but *unintelligible* within the heterosexual world of this poem. ... Governed by heterosexuality's powers of normativity...the poem both produces the possibility of homosexual relations *and* renders them unintelligible. The narrative...produces the possibility of homosexual relations only to...preclude it, in order to establish heterosexuality not only as the only sexual legitimacy but a principle of intelligibility itself" (Dinshaw 206). Perhaps the unspoken possibility of intercourse between Bertilak and Gawain is another of Morgan's plots to undermine the moral centrality of Camelot, but, like Morgan herself, who is the agent of the various plots in the poem, yet who never speaks, this particular plot remains unspoken.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

how later the Lady kisses Gawain: "Þe lady loutez adoun/And comlyly kysses his face" (1504-5), thus establishing a symmetry between the Lady's kissing of Gawain and Gawain's kissing of Bertilak; they have kissed each other in the same way. Unless the Lady kissed Gawain in a non-sexual way, then, the kiss that Gawain gave to Bertilak was also sexual rather than merely friendly. However, its potential transgressiveness is diminished because the original bestower is presumed by the court (and known by Bertilak) to be female, and Gawain can hide behind the fact that he is merely dutifully giving his winnings to Bertilak, according to the terms of the agreement--he cannot possibly be giving these kisses to Bertilak as a sign of his own desire, the poem's structure suggests. Yet I would agree with Dinshaw's argument that the kisses are sexual, and that the sexual implication is at least there, even if the poet supplies evidence for its denial or suppression. Dinshaw argues for the sexual nature of the kisses because of their placement in an erotic context: "Yet the narrative of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* locates the particular kisses between Bertilak and Gawain in reference to a highly charged erotic plot and thus raises the question of their sexual force and valence" (Dinshaw 210).

Gawain also admits to his own potential transgression of the "territory" of Bertilak (i.e., his wife), but he manages to evade this question when Bertilak asks where he obtained the kisses and Gawain refuses to tell, insisting coyly that answering such a question was not part of the game or covenant which they had agreed upon:

> "Hit may be such hit is þe better, and 3e me breue wolde
> Where 3e wan þis ilk wele bi wytte of yorseluen."
> "Þat watz not forward," quoþ he [Gawain]; "frayst me no more,
> For 3e haf tan þat yow tydez; trawe 3e non oþer
> 3e mowe." (1393-7)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus Gawain uses the rules of their own game to escape accountability, an indication that the "knots" of vows which support society can themselves cause transgressions of a moral if not a spatial kind. The rules of the game leave a private space for secrets which can ultimately invade or subvert the larger public space of agreed-upon ideals.

The game is renewed again in conventional covenantal fashion, in the enclosed space of the "chemné":

> And syþen by þe chymné in chamber þay seten,
> Wy3es þe walle wyn we3ed to hem oft,
> And eft in her bourdyng þay baþen in þe morn
> To fylle þe same forwardez þat þay byfore maden:
> Wat chaunce so bytydez hor cheuysaunce to chaunge,
> What nwez so þay nome, at na3t quen þay metten.
> Þay acorded of þe couenauntez byfore þe court alle--
> Þe beuerage watz bro3t forth in bourde at þat tyme.... (1402-9)

This enclosed space suggests the mutual bond that they have sworn to uphold, the "enclosure" of the rules of the game. Additionally, the enclosure implies society itself and its approval, which is further indicated by the formal promise made before the entire court. By formally proclaiming their vow in this way, Gawain and Bertilak attest to the fact that social obligations are both witnessed and approved by society, the great spatial and symbolic enclosure which gives meaning to the wilderness by means of both its spatial enclosures and the "enclosures" or bonds of its games.

When the hunt begins the next day, the poet emphasizes the freedom of the hunters: their ability to go outside, to release the dogs, to impose their will upon the landscape:

> Bi þat þe coke had crowen and cakled bot þryse,[208]

---

[208]The crowing of the cock three times is an inescapable reference to the betrayal of Christ by Peter in the Gospel of Luke 22: 31-34 and 54-62, implying the potential betrayals of Bertilak by Gawain,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Þe lorde watz lopen of his bedde, þe leudez vchone,
Þe douthe dressed to þe wod, er any day sprenged,
To chace.
He3 with hunte and hornez
Þur3 playnez þay passe in space,
Vncoupled among þo þornes
Rachez þat ran on race. (1412-20)

In this passage, all of nature is overwhelmed by the sound of the hunt, the cries of the dogs causing the cliffs to ring: "Þenne such a glauer ande glam of gedered rachchez/Ros þat þe rocherez rungen aboute" (1426-7). When they reach a particularly forbidding and rocky spot, it seems as if this "knot" of spatial otherness will threaten them. But the hunters manage to surround and penetrate the place, making a "knot" or enclosure to ensnare the boar who is hiding there:

In a knot bi a clyffe at þe kerre syde,
Þeras þe rogh rocher vnrydely watz fallen,
Þay ferden to þe fyndyng, and frekez hem after.
Þay vmbekesten þe knarre and þe knot boþe,
Wy3es, whyl þay wysten wel wythinne hem hit were,
Þe best þat þer breued watz wyth þre blodhoundez. (1431-6)

While in the beginning of the poem Arthur's court is happily inside of their castle and the Green Knight enters from outside, here the hunters go outside and surround and threaten a wild beast. This surrounding and defeat of wild nature by the court and its ritual hunt also reflects Gawain's situation: his entrapment by the lady and his own socially-inculcated standards of behavior, which eventually cause his downfall. Just as Gawain's next encounter with the Lady reveals the potential danger of his situation, here the pageantry of the hunt cannot fully disguise the true danger posed by the boar, who is an outcast from his herd, "Long sythen fro þe sounder þat so3t for olde" (1440). This situation is

---

both as lord of the castle and as the Green Knight. Like Gawain if he breaks his promises, Peter is not just guilty of betraying Christ but of forswearing his oath never to deny Christ.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

much like that of Arthur's court when they are faced with the Green Knight. Though the knights attempt to integrate his uncanny presence into the ritual life of the court, they find it difficult to deny the danger that he poses to them, both by virtue of his apparent inability to be slain and by his potential to do violence to them and to their fame as brave, chivalrous warriors.

The changing identity of the animals which Bertilak pursues also reflects the changing situation of Gawain and the Lady in the bedroom scenes. The first animal, the deer, is a timid and helpless creature, merely fearful but not crafty in evading her pursuers. She is also the only female animal whom Bertilak kills. The boar is a more powerful animal and evinces more intelligence and agency in trying to escape capture. Though the reader is not placed in a position to doubt whether or not Bertilak and his men will capture the boar, there is more suspense involved than with the deer. When Bertilak offers the boar's flesh to Gawain, the animal is seen as no less noble than the deer of the day before. Finally, the fox whom Bertilak hunts on the third day is the most wily of all, and when Bertilak brings his pelt back to Gawain, he makes disparaging remarks about this "unworthy" creature. The increasing awareness and deviousness of the animals is in inverse proportion to Gawain's increasing difficulties with evading the onslaught of the Lady--in fact, it is she who grows craftier and more persuasive when Gawain does not give in to her advances immediately. Though the poem largely identifies Gawain with the hunted animals, sometimes they exhibit characteristics of the Lady, the fox in particular, whose wiliness is comparable to the Lady's own slyness with Gawain as well as to Gawain's own efforts at resistance, but ultimate capitulation, paralleled by the fox's ultimate death at Bertilak's hands despite his efforts at deceiving the hunters.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The danger posed to Gawain by the Lady's pursuit is at first comically contrasted to the Lord's frenzied chasing of the boar, since Gawain appears relatively comfortable and at ease by comparison:

> Bot þe lorde on a ly3t horce launces hym after,
> As burne bold vpon bent his bugle he blowez,
> He rechated, and rode þur3 rone3 ful þyk,
> Suande þis wylde swyn til þe sunne schafted.
> Þis day wyth þis ilk dede þay dryuen on þis wyse,
> Whyle oure luflych lede lys in his bedde,
> Gawayn, graybely at home, in gerez ful ryche
> Of hewe. (1464-71)

Ironically, only Bertilak, and not Gawain, the epitome of knighthood, behaves in knightly fashion, chasing the boar as if he were a warrior in battle, while Gawain rests inside the castle, looking attractive in brightly-colored clothing, like one of the ladies. In fact, the Lady's first words to Gawain during their second encounter are an accusation that he is not behaving like a perfect knight. She accuses him of not being Gawain because he has not only forgotten his manners, but banished from his mind what she had only taught him yesterday:

> "Sir, 3if 3e be Wawen, wonder me þynkkez,
> Wy3e þat is so wel wrast alway to god,
> And connez not of companye þe costez vndertake,
> And if mon kennes yow hom to knowe, 3e kest hom of your
> mynde...." (1481-4)

The Lady has again trapped Gawain in the narrow enclosure or knot of his identity: his very need to be polite will be his undoing when she induces him to kiss her again. Once again, she also introduces an ironic role reversal. While it is she who has captured Gawain in the "knot" of his own scruples, the Lady insists that he has power over her, to subdue her by force if he so desires. A further irony is that her power over him exists despite the fact that she inhabits

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

so narrow a space, limited to the castle and the stereotypical, though usually mutually exclusive, roles of wife and seductress.

In response to the Lady's suggestion that he can take her by force if he so desires, Gawain reminds her of the world-view of Camelot and how one must treat a woman--the privileged space which she occupies, paradoxically because of her limited role:

> "3e, be God," quoþ Gawayn, "good is your speche,
> Bot þrete is vnþryuande in þede þer I lende,
> And vche gift þat is geuen not with goud wylle.
> I am at your comaundement, to kysse quen yow lykez,
> 3e may lach quen yow lyst, and leve quen yow þynkkez,
> In space." (1498-1503)

While Gawain declares that the Lady has the ultimate spatial and social power--control over his person, choosing to kiss him when she wants and to come and go as she desires--ironically, the Lady is more powerless than he. Though he would refuse to use force to coerce her, the Lady is nonetheless constrained. She is incapable of leaving her castle and her social position. However, despite these constraints, she is capable of threatening the social order (violating marriage vows and Gawain's scruples at the same time) from within that very system, using Gawain's own socially-constructed values, his supposed protective devices against literal invasion and moral transgression, to cause him to transgress.

The Lady invokes the canonicity of love-talking, the behavior in which Gawain will not engage, by obliquely referring to the written tradition of stories about knights, in which valorous warriors fight for the honor of a beloved lady:

> "And of alle cheualry to chose, þe chef þyng alosed
> Is þe lel layk of luf, þe lettrure of armes;
> For to telle of þis teuelyng of þis trwe kn3tez,
> Hit is þe tytelet token and tyxt of her werkkez,
> How ledez for her lele luf hor lyuez han auntered,
> Endured for her drury dulful stoundez,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> And after wenged with her walour and voyded her care
> And bro3t blysse into boure with bountées hor awen...." (1512-9)

The definition of a good knight, articulated by the "tyxt" and "lettrure" of his approved knightly activities, is like a book created by society. Thus the Lady draws attention to the constructed nature of society, its power to create meaning and identity as well as its fictitiousness--and, ultimately, Gawain's own. She accuses him of falling short of this socially-accepted paradigm of knightly conduct when she says that "And 3e are kny3t comlokest kyd of your elde,/Your worde and your worchip walkez ayquere...." (1520-1), acknowledging that Gawain is himself part of an oral "text" of rumor and fame that travels or walks to different places, as Gawain himself is now wandering in the flesh, still lacking in the area of love: "3et herde I neuer of your hed helde no wordez/Þat euer longed to luf, lasse ne more" (1523-4).[209] Like the Green Knight, who questions the rumors of Camelot's valor when he sees that no one will answer his challenge, the Lady questions the "text" which Camelot has produced about itself and Gawain. According to her definition, he is a flawed knight, and since it is his nature to appease her, she is thus ensured that he will transgress, paradoxically by refusing to transgress the requirements of knighthood that she cites--a knighthood which is itself a text, in the words of Shoaf:

> ...the textuality of knighthood can become an icon, an absolute form, impervious to experience and innocent of the contingency of matter. The iconicity of this textuality repudiates the fallen and the fallible--the mortal: instead of a sweaty, clanking knight aching for a

---

[209]According to Erich Auerbach's definition of medieval knighthood, Gawain would be severely lacking: "Except feats of arms and love, nothing can occur in the courtly world--and even these two are of a special sort: they are not occurrences or emotions which can be absent for a time; they are permanently connected with the person of the perfect knight, they are part of his definition, so that he cannot for one moment be without adventure in arms nor for one moment without amorous entanglement. If he could, he would lose himself and no longer be a knight" (qtd. Dinshaw 213). Thus in Auerbach's view, Gawain's inattentiveness to matters of love would be not just a dereliction of his "Gawainness" but of his knightliness itself.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> bath (and perhaps for a green girdle), there is the formal beauty of a literary paragon. *(The Poem as Green Girdle* 73)

The text of knighthood which the Lady expounds is associated with surface qualities, one's outward behavior and presentation of a knightly demeanor, rather than the interior virtues which Gawain strives to exemplify. She would reduce the pentangle of his virtues to a design on his clothing rather than a symbol of what lies within. This aspect of the text as surface resonates with the many clothing references in this section of the poem. In the scenes at Hautdesert, the poet dwells on surfaces, such as exterior decorations on the castle walls, draperies, cushions and clothing. Gawain's own clothing in Hautdesert is luxuriant and beautiful, not merely functional, as the Lady sees his knightly role. This other definition of text--as clothing, specifically the exterior trappings or "clothing" of knighthood--is reinforced by the etymology of *textus,* which is related to textile (fabric) and weaving *(intertextus*="weaving together").[210] The idea of text as clothing also refers to the Lady's own "text": her words, as cunningly and daintily *(coyntly)* wrought as the various fabrics in the castle, by which she strives to lure Gawain in her verbal "hunt." Finally, this textile meaning of "text" presages the appearance of the green girdle, which replaces the pentangle as the icon of Gawain's knightly identity--a piece of fabric as text.

The Lady's presentation of knighthood (and Gawain himself) also has a spatial aspect: Gawain's fame "walks" through the land, almost like the poem itself is "in londe" (36)--his story is intimately bound to a place. As the avatar of Camelot's virtues, the "text" of Gawain also is the story of that place, and it is this "text" of Camelot which Morgan Le Faye, through Bertilak and his Lady, wish to

---

[210]*The Oxford English Dictionary* supplies the Latin origins of the word text, which have to do with fabrics rather than words: "L. *textus*...lit. that which is woven, web, texture...ppl. stem of *tex-ere,* to weave" (XVII. 851). The poem's structure, reflected in the interwoven figure of the pentangle and described as "lel letteres loken," resembles woven fabric. However, the girdle is also a piece of woven fabric, and the indeterminacy of meaning which develops as the poem goes on would seem to reflect this sort of *textus.*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

assay--as if they were deconstructing the text of Camelot through "unlacing" Gawain. After all, the images of lacing and unlacing, binding and unbinding, which relate to bodies and social compacts (which also appear as "texts") in the poem can also be applied to a book as a physical artifact. Just as a book is bound in order to be held together, it can be unbound so that it falls apart. The "lel letteres" of the poem can be "unlocked," just like the elaborate "text" of the pentangle, the emblem in which Gawain's virtues can be read, can be undone by the Lady's constant testings of Gawain's moral standards. Thus the testings which Gawain undergoes at Hautdesert are of a peculiarly literary kind: the Lady "interprets" him in light of what she has heard about him, and in terms of how he measures up to a "text" of sanctioned and sanctified knightly conduct, and ends up dismantling the "book" of Gawain which the pentangle represents by causing him to question his own standards. Because Gawain is identified with his standards by Camelot (as well as by Gawain himself, who constantly attempts to apply these standards to his interactions with the Lady), when the Lady causes him to question these standards, she causes him to question himself, provoking him to ask her question of himself, "Is this Gawain?"[211]

---

[211]Lindley makes the fascinating suggestion that this is an instance of the poem's self-awareness as a text, for the Lady has not only read about knighthood, but would seem to have read other pieces of the Arthurian tradition and is holding Gawain to his identity in these other texts, where he appears as a womanizer: "...the Lady sets about undoing Gawain's heroic singularity by confronting him with other 'Gawains,' separating what is from what is 'known.' ...[T]his poem's Gawain is not so much created from the previous versions of the character as created in opposition to them. He is a 'pentaungel nwe,' a chastened version. The other Gawains only enter the poem through Hautdesert's knowledge of them. Because (apparently) the Lady and her courtiers have read the Gawain-books which Gawain has not, they have the effect of making him suddenly aware of himself not merely as a text but as a different text. He is required to become...his own resisting reader: 'I be not now he þat 3e of speken' (1242)" (Lindley 77-8). This note of fictionality--and of the relativity of these fictions (this "version" of Gawain is but one of many)--is interesting in a poem which seems so concerned with rehabilitating Gawain and Guinevere, both appearing more conflicted and flawed in other Arthurian texts. Lindley believes that by drawing attention to the fictionality of Gawain, the poem explores "a whole series of narrative possibilities" (78), a series of alternate universes of discourse, as it were, ultimately serving a "carnivalesque" purpose. By presenting multiple Gawains, each equally valid, "What is lost here is Gawain's pentangular stability; what is seemingly gained is the freedom gained by treating 'Gawain' as a mask. ...[I]t is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

An important aspect of this "text" of knighthood is its association with games--the games of society by which it defines itself, as well as the "gomen" of the pentangle itself, the codification of the game. Dinshaw remarks on this "game" of knighthood, according to the Lady's definition: "The behavior that makes a knight is intensely rule-governed; it proceeds either as game or in the form of a game--tournaments, quests, courtship, 'þe lel layk of luf'" (213). This definition is consonant with the earlier presentation of Camelot's playful holiday activities. However, the Lady's game is more dangerous. Rather than being a game which upholds society, her game is meant to subvert Gawain's knightly identity. In asserting that she is holding Gawain up to a standard of knightly behavior found in chivalric texts, the Lady is ultimately trying to undermine that very text by enticing Gawain to violate his moral code, through the instrument of the very chivalric standards which he has pledged to uphold. Lindley asserts that "þe lel layk of luf" (1513) parallels the "lel letteres loken" of the poem itself (80)--but the Lady's game of love serves to loosen the bonds of chivalry rather than cement them.

She also tries to use the image of the game to make light of the potential transgressiveness of their activities. In a subsequent exchange, both the Lady and

---

the freedom gained by substituting the loose, endlessly retie-able lace for the endless knot of the pentangle" (79). However, the absolute relativity of the Lady's perspective (each Gawain is as good as any other) is not necessarily the perspective of the poem, and her goal is undermining rather than liberating. This utter indeterminacy is a frightening rather than a liberating prospect, as demonstrated by the nature of the speaker who is encouraging it: the Lady, whom Morgan Le Faye is using as an instrument in her plot to destroy Camelot. Far from releasing Gawain to "play" as he likes by drawing attention to the theatricality of chivalric identity, the Lady offers a terrifyingly nihilistic possibility: that all identities are meaningless performances, that ultimately everyone is a player in a game and nothing else, and thus the promises that Gawain makes--promises which are at the heart of his society's definition of itself, its "game," can be broken without any compunction, as she would break her marriage bond to Bertilak. Gawain later finds out Bertilak holds this bond in equally low regard, since he is willing to allow Gawain to be seduced by his wife if Camelot's social order could be destroyed. Indeed, Camelot's destruction is assured not only if Gawain transgresses, but also if he accepts the Lady's stance of absolute relativity and meaninglessness.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain draw attention to the "game" that they are playing. The Lady specifically refers to their pastimes as a game to play when her lord is away:

> "I com hider sengel and sitte
> To lerne at yow sum game;
> Dos techez me of your witte,
> Whil my lorde is fro hame." (1531-4)

This is a game which takes place inside the court's defining and protective space, according to rules which the court itself has created, but ironically it can only take place when the ruler of the court is out. Gawain then declares their exchange a game in somewhat ambiguous terms:

> "Gret is þe gode gle, and gomen to me huge,
> Þat so worþy as 3e wolde wynne hidere
> And pyne yow with so pouer a mon, as play wyth your kny3t
> With anyskynnes countenaunce; hit keuerez me ese." (1536-9)

Though "gomen" here indicates pleasure, the poem also uses it in the context of "game." Another game-related word is *wynne*, used here in the context of "come," but it could also be intepreted as "to win", as in "to win a game."[212] Thus Gawain seems to acknowledge that by entrapping him in the narrow space of the bedchamber, where no one can hear him scream, and by similarly entrapping him in the confines of his own duties as a knight, the Lady will win her game with him "here," in this place. He also pronounces himself honored that the Lady would deign to "play" with him as *her* knight, yet he seems aware that she is playing with him as the hunters and their hounds play with their prey.

---

[212]*The Oxford English Dictionary* offers these meanings of *win*, contemporary with the *Pearl*-poet: "Joy, pleasure, delight, bliss; a source of joy, a delight," "To be victorious in (a contest of any kind, as a battle, game, race, action at law, etc.)" (XX. 360).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain also slyly indicates that the Lady can hardly learn of love from him, since she is so much more knowledgeable about it than he, "wielding" it as if it were a weapon of battle like the sword of a knight:[213]

> "Bot to take þe toruayle to my self to trwlef expoun
> And to towche þe temez of tyxt and talez of armez
> To yow þat (I wot wel) weldez mor sly3t
> Of þat art, by þe half, or a hundreth of seche
> As I am, oþer euer schal in erde þer I leue,
> Hit were a folé felefolde, my fre, by my trawþe." (1540-5)

While Gawain would seem to be effacing himself by proclaiming his ignorance of love, as he had claimed to be the weakest knight in Camelot when accepting the challenge of the Green Knight, he also could be critiquing the Lady's own motivations. Her manipulations of Gawain--and the fact that she is a married woman, and Gawain not a married man--indicate that she also knows about love already and is only pretending ignorance in order to play with him. Here Gawain implies not-so-subtly that he, a "bacheler," is a virgin, while the married Lady most certainly is not.[214]

---

[213]In the Glossary of his edition of *Beowulf*, Klaeber reads the Old English word *wealdan* as "control, have power over, rule, WIELD, possess" (*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Boston: D.C. Heath, 1941, 420.) In the passage quoted above, the poet plays on the imagery of "tales of arms" and also indicates that the Lady can "wield" her expertise in matters of love like a knight might wield a weapon.

[214]The Lady is definitely married, but the poem does not present her as a mother, a role which was an important component to the medieval Church's definition of a married woman and marital sexuality; either she has no children, or the poem deems her potential motherhood unimportant. Wilson and Makowski's description of the courtly love ideal indicates that the Lady is a perfect romance heroine in that respect (and, intriguingly, describes courtly love and certain heresies as parallel developments): "The Cathars, Albigenses, and other eleventh and twelfth century Dualists deprecated marriage and the procreative ideal. At the same time and in the same location as the Cathars (Languedoc and Aquitaine), an ideology appeared, usually referred to as 'courtly love,' which celebrated love outside of marriage and rejected the generative purpose" (Wilson and Makowski 72). Referring directly to the Lady, Riddy argues that the transgressiveness of her sexuality is expressed through its nonprocreative nature: "The lady's sexuality is able to be represented as transgressive and dangerous--as a version of the wild--because it is detached...from the procreative cycle which traditionally gives it value. Only when female sexuality can be figured as fertility is it benign" (Riddy 224), as in Alain de Lille's portrayal of Nature as the fecund mother of all things. (It seems strange to me in general that procreation would be associated with culture and refusal or inability to procreate with wildness, since the ability and the desire to regulate fertility are products of culture rather than the natural world, but Riddy's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The perilousness of the game is revealed again when the Lady's challenge and Gawain's response are described in terms akin to hunting or dueling:

> Þus hym frayned þat fre and fondet hym ofte,
> For to haf wonnen hym to wo3e, whatso scho þo3t ellez,
> Bot he defended hym so fayr þat no faut semed,
> Ne non euel on nawþer halue, nawþer þay wysten
> Bot blysse. (1549-53)

While the game's outcome is potentially threatening to the accepted mores of society, paradoxically the rules of the game colonize and restrain wild emotions like passion and love. It is possible that Gawain could truly transgress with the Lady, but his courteous words with her allow this possibility to be tamed and nullified. Thus the "game" of the social order has a similar psychological function to the walls of the castle. Whereas the walls physically protect the space where the court enacts its ritual life and manage to keep out any invaders, the boundaries of chivalric conduct also banish any truly transgressive behavior. But just as the walls of Camelot cannot keep the Green Knight from entering, the possibility of transgression is inherent in the rules of the game. This fluidity of social boundaries--the possibility of an adulterous liaison between Gawain and

---

point is correct in reference to how deviant sexuality would be figured in the Middle Ages; homosexuality was viewed as abhorrent because it, along with heterosexual anal intercourse, bestiality and masturbation, is non-procreative sex.) It is notable, in fact, that none of the three women in the poem is said to have any children: Mordred does not appear in the text, and Guinevere does not have children here or elsewhere in the Arthurian tradition. The barrenness of the women of the poem also seems writ large in the winter season in which the action is set: during the winter, even Mother Nature is infertile, and the seasons are masculinized as warriors wrestling with each other. This theme of sterility in nature is extended to the deer whom Bertilak and his huntsmen pursue: they are "hynde3 barayne" (1320). Dinshaw reads Bertilak's hunt of these animals as "the masculine version of his wife's hunt of the man; the late medieval discourse of male-male sodomitical relations saw the passive position as a barren feminine one" (Dinshaw 215).

Gawain's own chastity (and therefore childlessness) is viewed in a positive light. Riddy contends that Gawain's transcendence of the cycle of nature does not label him "unnatural" but allows him to overcome death: "Symbolically, his transcendance of the body takes Gawain out of nature, and so out of the endlessly repeated cycle of the seasons, with their movement towards death." She also states that this chastity causes the Green Knight to spare his life: "It is not the green girdle but Gawain's chastity--the complex operations of culture--which is a talisman against death" (224).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Lady, the submerged homoerotic overtones of Gawain's exchange of kisses with the Lord--may be reflected in the interrelationship of the outdoor and indoor settings and their parallel hunts. Just as the hunt outside is a colonization of the natural world, the rules of the love-hunt inside encircle wild emotions with stylized words and actions. However, just as the hunt can (and is expected to) erupt into bloodshed at any time, so the love-game can burst out of its containing rules and cross social and moral boundaries.

When the narrator returns to describing the hunt, the boar demonstrates a similar behavior to Gawain's response to the Lady: "Bot in þe hast þat he my3t he to a hole wynnez/Of a rasse, by a rokk þer rennez pe boerne./He gete þe bonk at his bak, byginez to scrape...." (1569-71). Like Gawain, the boar tries to hide from his pursuers, though Gawain does not just try to hide in the space that he has available, but also takes refuge in polite conduct, which will satisfy the Lady but spare him from transgressing in the way that she ultimately plans. Just as the boar uses his instincts to take evasive action, Gawain uses his courtly "instincts" (the rules of conduct which he had been taught) to avoid complying with the Lady's demands. However, as Gawain's resolve eventually is undone, the boar, too, is eventually "unlaced": "Þenne a wy3e þat watz wys vpon wodcraftez/To vnlace þis bor lufly bigynnez" (1605-6). This unbinding of the boar parallels the gradual loosening of Gawain's resolve (ironically, by means of the very bonds of socially-acceptable conduct which he holds sacred). It also prefigures the means of his undoing: the "lace" which "unlaces" him when the lady offers it to him in order to preserve his life.

After Bertilak brings the boar home with his hunters, the game repeats itself in the same ritual manner as before. Here, however, Bertilak refers to his game as a knot, a series of covenants that are "knyt" together:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"Now ar we euen," quoþ þe haþel, "in þis euentide,
Of alle þe couenauntes þat we knyt sythen I com hider,
Bi lawe."
Þe lorde sayde, "Bi Saynt Gile,
3e ar þe best þat I knowe!
3e ben ryche in a whyle,
Such chaffer and 3e drawe." (1641-7)

He also seems to suggest that social obligations are entanglements as well, intimating a kind of duplicity inherent in the game: Gawain has been crafty in gaining all of those kisses. Bertilak also may be alluding to his own craftiness, since after all he knows the possible outcome of the game and has engineered it at the behest of Morgan le Fay.

The guileful nature of the game is expressed again when, at the feast, the Lady starts to bring their private game out of the narrow space of the bedchamber and into the public space of the hall:

Such semblaunt to þat segge semly ho made,
Wyth stylle stolen countenaunce, þat stalworth to plese,
Þat al forwondered watz þe wy3e and wroth with hymseluen,
Bot he nolde not for his nurture nurne hir a3aynez
Bot dalt with hir al in daynté, how-se-euer þe dede turned
Towrast. (1658-63)

In the games and the very spaces of the court, for the first time, their relationship becomes marginal, outside of the rules. However, the rules of Gawain's "nurture" (of which the court had earlier pronounced him the "fyne fader" (919) also dictate that Gawain acknowledge her glances, regardless of how the court might interpret the exchange. The guileful knot which has been woven about them now has become an entanglement of conflicting loyalties, a constricting enclosure from which Gawain cannot extricate himself in a way that is acceptable to the society which is partially responsible for the entanglement.

When Gawain asks leave of Bertilak to find the Green Chapel, Bertilak reassures him of his own control over space:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Þe lord hym letted of þat, to lenge hym resteyed,
And sayde: "As I am trwe segge, I siker my trawþe
Þou schal cheue to þe Grene Chapel þy charres to make,
Leude, on Nw 3eres ly3t, long bifore pryme.
Forþy þow lye in þy loft and lach þyn ese
And I schal hunt in þis holt and halde þe towchez,
Chaunge wyth þe chevisaunce bi þat I charre hider;
For I haf fraysted þe twys and faythful I fynde þe." (1672-9)

Bertilak's assurance to Gawain that he will arrive at the Green Chapel in a timely manner indicates not only that does he know the way, but also that he has some control over the situation. He again proves his power over wild nature by declaring that on the hunt he shall control the forest and, in his third session of the game with Gawain, he has the power to prove Gawain's own worth as well.

The possible duplicity of the Lord and Lady's game is reflected in the last hunt, where Bertilak and his hunters pursue a fox. This wily animal, who hides in the bushes much like Gawain hides in his bed and in the bonds of his scruples, is acutely aware of the game of the hunt and tries to play his own game with the hunters: "At pe last bi a littel dich he lepez ouer a spenné/Stelez out ful stilly bi a strothe rande,/Went haf wylt of pe wode, with wylez, fro pe houndes" (1709-11). The fox is like the Lady, who tries to lead Gawain astray; however, he attempts to lead the hounds away from him, whereas the Lady lures Gawain towards her.

When the huntsmen come upon him, they accuse the fox of being a thief:

Þer he watz þreted and ofte "þef" called,
And ay þe titleres at his tayl, þat tary he ne my3t.
Ofte he watz runnen at when he out rayked,
And ofte reled in a3ayn, so Reniarde watz wylé. (1725-8)

This hunt is thus a ritual punishment of those who are outcast or marginalized as a result of their behavior. The fox is literally as well as figuratively marginalized: he lives outside of and invades the enclosures of civilization in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

order to steal his food. Slaying the fox is thus an act of justice, the punishment of an outlaw. The fox's craftiness also becomes a part of the tradition when the poet calls him "Reniard," the archetypal sly fox of romance and fabliau.[215]

However, the censure accorded to the fox is inconsistent in that his behavior is uncannily akin to the crafty attempt of Lord and Lady Bertilak to lure Gawain into transgressing. In fact, the fox's spatial luring astray of the hunting party is juxtaposed with Gawain's subsequent possibility of being morally led astray by the Lady. While the hunting party wanders through the outside world as a part of the fox's game, Gawain lies entrapped in his bed:

> And 3e! he lad hem bi lagmon, þe lorde and his meyny,
> On þis maner bi þe mountes quyle myd ouer vnder,

---

[215]Though stories of Renard the fox were not widely disseminated in English (Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" and the mid-thirteenth-century short poem "Of the Vox and the Wolf" are the two examples given by *The Dictionary of the Middle Ages),* they were very popular in France. The *Roman de Renart* tradition begun c. 1174-7 with Pierre de St. Cloud's stories of the rivalry of Renard the fox and Isengrin the wolf, and by the early 12th century, the stories, mostly the work of anonymous writers, were collected in volumes. The stories were set in "the kingdom of Noble the lion, a society modeled on the feudal world of twelfth-century France" (John F. Flinn, "Renard the Fox," in Strayer X. 312). By 1250, more "branches" were added to the *Roman de Renart,* but "Gradually Renard ceases to be a joyous scoundrel who exposes the follies and vices of society, and ecomes the symbol of ruse, falsity, and hypocrisy" (313). After 1250, Renard became the protagonist of a series of satirical allegorical poems, such as Jacquemart Gielée's *Renart le Nouvel* (c. 1288), " a bitterly satirical moral treatise on the decadence of the feudal and chivalric society and the loss of Christian morality" (314). By the fourteenth century, Renard had become "a symbol, the personifcation of evil, of the devil" (314).

Several aspects of the *Roman de Renart* are germane to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* The earlier Renard material parodied other pieces of literature which enshrined the chivalric ideal, such as the Arthurian legends, as Flinn acknowledges: "...Noble the lion, solemnly seated amid his great vassals, inevitably evoked the image of King Arthur presiding at the Round Table" (313). Additionally, though the *Pearl*-poet's critique of the chivalric values of Gawain and Camelot is less pointed and bitter than the later Renard material, he certainly does not present the ideals and behaviors of the court uncritically. Lastly, an important episode in the Renard stories intersects with the seduction theme of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* In one of the most famous Renard episodes, the fox is accused of committing adultery with the wife of Isengrin, Dame Hersent. Gawain does not actually commit adultery with Lady Bertilak, but the presence of the fox in the final seduction scene does not appear felicitously, for in this scene Gawain comes closest to capitulating to the Lady's demands. The presence of Renard in these last paired hunting/seduction scenes is also interesting because both Gawain and the Lady can be identified with the wily animal, unlike with the previous hunted beasts, who are more clearly identifiable with Gawain. The ambiguity of the fox--clever outwitter of bumbling courtiers or wickedness personified--is reflected by the ambiguity of his association with both participants in the seduction game.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Whyle þe hende kny3t at home holsumly slepes
Withinne þe comly cortines, on þe colde morne. (1729-32)

The image of Gawain sleeping peacefully and "holsumly" "at home" is a comforting one, but this home is deceptive, for it is "withinne pe comly cortynes" that Gawain is under attack. By extension, he is being attacked from within in another way: the Lady uses the very chivalric system by which he defines himself to undermine him.

The treacherousness of their game is reiterated more strongly when the Lady comes into Gawain's chamber a third time, attired in a revealing manner, and entices him with more words of love:

Þay lauced wordes gode,
Much wele þen watz þerinne.
Gret perile bitwene hem stod,
Nif Maré of hir kny3t mynne. (1766-9)[216]

The knot by which Gawain is now bound is alluded to in the word "lauce." The Lady and Gawain have entangled themselves dangerously by their "gode" words, and now there is a chance that both will overstep the boundaries of acceptable conduct. The word "lauce" evokes many of the social entanglements of the poem: the knots which Gawain wears to indicate the intricately-interknitted virtues by which he abides as well as the society which has wrought them; the

---

[216]Heng has an original perspective on the Virgin's intervention in this scene: that rather than intervening in a conventional way on behalf of the faithful Gawain, "she and the Lady are momentarily shown to contend explicitly for Gawain as their desired prize...." (Heng 502). The Virgin intervenes, according to Heng, "not as 'moder,' but simply as 'Maré,' a jealous mistress calling back *'hir kny3t'* from the brink of erotic surrender to another woman...." (Heng 502). The title "hir kny3t" itself is evidence of this struggle over possession of Gawain by these two women: in l. 1538 Gawain calls himself "your kny3t" in reference to the Lady. The Virgin's appearance here is much different from her first appearance in the poem, where she is a mute image painted on Gawain's shield, much like Guinevere at Camelot. Heng states, "for it is now not the Virgin but Gawain who stands revealed as the captive, prized object; he is contended over by two female players in a drama that is suddenly elsewhere--no longer between the sexes but within the psychomachia of a feminine narrative" (Heng 502). This situation echoes in miniature the female agency of the plot itself, which, after all, has been devised by one woman (Morgan) because of her dislike for another (Guinevere).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

game of the hunt and its repeated ritual "unlacings" of the slain creatures; the bargain between Gawain and Bertilak and, finally, the green lace which will be Gawain's undoing--the "unlacing" of the pentangle representing the destruction of his own moral code.[217]

The seriousness of the entanglement is expressed in the next stanza, where the Lady forces Gawain to consider the consequences of either accepting or refusing her love:

> For þat prynces of prys depresed hym so þikke,
> Nurned hym so neȝe þe þred, þat nede hym bihoued
> Oþer lach þer hir luf oþer lodly refuse.
> He cared for his cortaysye, lest crayþayn he were,
> And more for his meschef ȝif he schulde make synne
> And be traytour to þat tolke þat þat telde aȝt. (1770-5)

Gawain expresses his fear of transgression in an interestingly spatial way. In fearing to wrong the lord of the castle by accepting the love of his wife, Gawain also fears transgressing against the castle itself, in which only socially approved activities can take place. Line 1775 is an interesting recollection of the opening lines of the poem as well. Whereas in the poem's introduction, "þe tolke" had been the "traytour" who had caused the downfall of Troy, here Gawain fears betraying another "tulke," Bertilak, a betrayal which, he later finds out, would have been the downfall of Camelot, since its most perfect representative would have been proven fallible.

He manages to escape the serious dilemma by taking refuge in laughter, as if denying the true danger of the game by drawing attention to its nature as a game, much as he and Arthur had laughed about the Green Knight in order to defuse the threatening atmosphere which he had left behind after his precipitous

---

[217] Andrew and Waldron gloss *laucen* as "[to] loosen, break, burst, undo; open," "relieve" and "utter, speak" (329). This connection between opening or loosening something (sometimes violently) and speaking is thought-provoking: as the Lady and Gawain "unlace" or release their words, these words can potentially loosen the social bonds implied by the poem.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

exit from the dining-hall at Camelot in lines 463-4: "With luf-la3yng a lyt he layd hym bysyde/Alle þe spechez of specialté þat sprange of her mouthe" (1777-8). The Lady, however, can only understand his refusal to love her if he is "festned so harde" (1783) to another woman that he cannot love her. In her part of the game, she neglects the fact that it is she who is so bound, and that her relationship with Gawain threatens to break her marital "knot" with the lord of the castle.

When she finally realizes that the knight will not be her lover, the Lady attempts to entangle him in another way: by giving him a gift. The Lady directly states that such a gift would bind him in a further knot of obligation when she pleads with him to take her girdle, which she insists will obligate him to a lesser degree than the ring which he has just refused:

> "If 3e renay me rynk, to ryche for hit semez,
> 3e wolde not so hy3ly halden be to me,
> I schal gif yow my girdel, þat gaynes yow lasse."
> Ho la3t a lace ly3tly þat leke vmbe hir sydez,
> Knit vpon hir kyrtel, vnder þe clere mantyle (1827-31).

Ironically, however, the "lace" of the girdle will be the source of a far greater entanglement for Gawain, for it will cause him to break the bonds of his promises both to the lord of the castle, whom Gawain neglects to give this last winning, and to the Green Knight, by using the girdle to protect himself from the knight's blows.

Gawain's acceptance of the girdle is an expression of his formal obligations to the Lord and Lady, which become mutually exclusive because of their opposing demands on him, and of his relationship with the Lady itself. Conducted in a narrow chamber, out of the sight of the rest of the court, this relationship is predicated on privacy and secrecy. Like everything else about the relationship (save for the kisses, which he shares with Bertilak, though without

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

naming the original giver of the kisses), Gawain is asked by the Lady to conceal the girdle, which would make Gawain as sly as the fox which the hunters pursue:

> (And he granted and hym gafe [the girdle] with a goud wylle)
> And biso3t hym for hyr sake discever hit neuer
> Bot to lelly layne fro hir lorde; þe leude hym acordez
> Þat neuer wy3e schulde hit wyt, iwysse, bot þay twayne,
> For no3te. (1861-5)

Paradoxically, in order to keep his vow to the Lady, Gawain must break his vow to the Lord, an entanglement which results from the very codes of chivalric conduct which are supposed to protect against transgression. This scene of transgression is juxtaposed with the punishment of the fox, a kind of surrogate for human crimes. When the hunters capture him and "tyruen [him] of his cote" (1921), it is as if they have restored order to the world in the context of a game. Similarly, in a non-sporting sense, society is presumed to punish the marginalized and reinstate the social order.

At the moment when Gawain accepts the girdle from the Lady, he has accepted another definition of himself, contrary to the definition expressed by the pentangle. While the pentangle is a closed figure which denotes each of his virtues, the girdle can be (and is) untied, loose, and an emblem of Gawain's imperfection, the breaking of his promises. The girdle thus supplants the pentangle as the "text" of Gawain and as a principle of interpretation in the poem itself. Readers of the poem have differed in their interpretations of the girdle as a symbol of signification: reading in general and reading Gawain in particular. For Shoaf, "The green girdle, in effect, is the most *critical* sign in the poem; it always occasions the crisis of interpretation" ("Syngne of Surfet" 156). He specifies that "the green girdle is often mentioned in the same breath with words for *sign* and *signifying*" (155). Shoaf contrasts the pentangle and the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

girdle, with a preference for the girdle, which he views as a more human sign (in contrast to the inhuman geometric perfection of the pentangle and the unyielding moral perfection which it implies):

> Unlike the knot of the pentangle, these knots [which characters tie in the green girdle] are hardly geometrically pure, eternal, like numbers or Platonic forms. Quite the contrary, these knots are signs of the human and human signs: they will submit to analysis, and life will go on. Unlike such geometrically perfect knots as the pentangle, transcendental in the universality of their form, these knots...like the knot of the green girdle, are not the termination of signification. They are rather terms of signification, the endless finitude of interpretation. ("Syngne of Surfet" 165)

Citing Shoshana Felman's statement that the word "analysis" means "the undoing of a knot" ("Postal Survival" 71), Heng writes that

> the specter of a knot coalesces at the precise moment and location in the text where analysis-reading is to occur; and our performance of that twin activity...mimes...the activity of the open, imperfect knot...of the girdle, in that we constantly repeat the gestures of unraveling and reconstitution that are conditioned--indeed, demanded--by the character of the knot itself. (Heng 509)

But Heng reads the girdle more ambiguously than Shoaf. Like Shoaf, she identifies the girdle as the sign of an indeterminacy which the pentangle cannot express, but this indeterminacy speaks more of the fragility of meaning than its fluidity:

> With the substitution of an imperfect knot, the Lady's lace, for the pentangle, a signifier is produced that situates identity as more tenuous and incomplete--a fragile, uncertain prospect that is always on the verge of unraveling and reconstitution in infinitely varied sequences of possibility. (Heng 504)

Heng and Fisher also assert that the girdle is associated not just with meaning and signifying in an abstract sense, but also with meaning as expressed through the body, particularly the body of the Lady, having been worn by her

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

before she gives it to Gawain and he wraps it around his own waist. Heng describes this association:

> Inasmuch as the pentangle is an abstract, bodiless sign, the girdle is a sign that is also a fully material object, one that carries, in its function and appearance, the impress and memory of the body itself. It is a detail of encirclement bearing the mark of the body and becomes metonymically, in the course of the Lady's theater of seduction, a sexualized, desiring, female term. (Heng 505)

Fisher more clearly identifies the girdle with the Lady herself:

> The girdle...is a metaphor for her. Like the Lady, the girdle has hidden powers, but as she offers it up to an unnamed and generalized male recipient, she offers it up, and herself in the bargain, as a commodity which would be given a higher price if its properties were known. In the process, the girdle and the Lady of the girdle become the objects of the evaluating masculine subjectivity. ("Taken Men" 85)

Thus in the end, Fisher would argue, Gawain's defeat at the Lady's hands is a double-edged one, for in causing him to capitulate and take her girdle (in lieu of her body), she has ended up making herself his object. In defeating him through giving a token of her body to him, she has given up her power as the pursuer and the aggressor, just as she would have if she had succeeded in seducing him. She would have succeeded in fulfilling her part in Morgan's plot, at the expense of becoming like the defeated deer in the end.

Dinshaw believes that the lace as a symbol of a system of meaning stands for heterosexuality itself, which she considers the underlying principle of meaning in late medieval Christendom. Using *Clannesse* (line 699), where heterosexual married love is itself called a "drwry" (love-token) by God, she discusses the girdle in the same context: "The 'drwry' here...is heterosexual sex, and it recreates 'paradys'; like the girdle, it is thought to produce wholeness and unity and coherence, to reunite those two parts of man, separated at Creation, as

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

one flesh" (Dinshaw 216). However, far from producing wholeness in Gawain, the lace is a reminder of his transgression, the fact that he is not whole--as the wound in his neck will also testify when the Green Knight deals him this blow. As a sign of indeterminacy, in contrast with the geometrical and moral enclosure of the pentangle, the girdle emblematizes both human failings and the unlimited potential of human beings to create meaning, to rename, to reconstruct--just as the poem itself has reconstructed Arthurian tradition and restored wholeness to a Camelot not yet destroyed by the illicit love which the Lady offers to Gawain. The girdle is neither entirely redemptive nor entirely condemning. It embodies the capacity of human beings to create texts, to assign meanings, even to conceal and coopt meanings, and, as the sign of a body which is absent (the Lady's), to embody meanings and be a "text."

When Bertilak returns from the fox-hunt, Gawain offers him his "winnings" first:

> He metez me þis godmon inmyddez þe flore
> And al with gomen he hym gret and goudly he sayde,
> "I 3chal fylle vpon fyrst oure forwardez nouþe,
> Þat we spedly han spoken, þer spared watz no drynk."
> Þen acoles he þe kny3t and kysses hym þryes
> As sauerly and sadly as he hem sette couþe. (1932-7)

Gawain's eagerness to complete his part of the bargain may be an effort to conceal the fact that he is not entirely fulfilling the covenant by getting the game over quickly, as evinced also by his quick response to Bertilak's teasing (1938-42). However, the way in which he kisses Bertilak reveals that this is no mere socially-prescribed physical contact between two men. These kisses are given "sauerly" (with relish) and "sadly" (forcefully), just as the Lady had given them to Gawain.[218] Gawain's quick words afterwards also have the effect of

---

[218]*The Middle English Dictionary* lists these definitions of *savourli:* "with relish, enjoyment, pleasure, or contentment; greedily" (149), all words implying sensuality; *sadli* is defined as "Fully,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

minimizing the erotic charge of the moment by emphasizing that they are a public fulfillment of the bargain between himself and Bertilak, and thus a part of the chivalric code which they both follow:

> "Bi Kryst," quoþ pat oþer kny3t [Bertilak], "3e cach much sele
> In cheuisaunce of þis chaffer, 3if 3e hade goud chepez."
> "3e, of þe chepe no charg," quoþ chefly þat oþer,
> "As is pertly payed þe porchas þat I a3te." (1938-42)

When Bertilak reveals that he has only caught a "foule" fox, Gawain's alliance to the hunted animal lies not in its helplessness before the hunter, but in the craftiness of the beast, reflected in Gawain's deception of Bertilak through his concealment of the lace which he had gotten from the Lady.

The potential transgression of gender roles inherent in Gawain's kisses of Bertilak is also hinted at by the way in which Gawain is dressed when Bertilak comes from hunting:

> He were a bleaunt of blwe, þat bradde to þe erþe,
> His surkot semed hym wel, þat softe watz forred,
> And his hode of þat ilke henged on his schulder;
> Bande al of blaunner wer boþe al aboute. (1928-32)

Before coming to Hautdesert, Gawain's appearance and clothing were not emphasized in this way (except when his armor was being described during his initial arming before departing from Camelot). However, here he becomes an object for the gaze of others: his clothes, which "semed hym wel," are looked upon by the court (including Bertilak) and found attractive on him. When

---

completely," "Firmly, steadily, stably," "without wavering," "without stumbling," "Tightly, closely; in close companionship," "earnestly," "vigorously, forcefully; forcibly, violently" (26-27). Under the last definition of *sadli*, the dictionary mentions this passage from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as an instance of this usage; thus, these kisses were certainly not halfheartedly meant or unerotic. The implication of violence is also interesting. Though in this context, the kisses are not attacks upon Bertilak by Gawain, the alternate meanings of the words above indicate just how strongly the kisses were meant, and perhaps also hint at the underlying violence of the seduction game, the potential danger of it, as well as the submerged implication of physical harm and use of "fyne force" which is expressed openly in the parallel hunting scenes.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bertilak enters, Gawain is enjoying the company of the ladies: "Among þe ladies for luf he ladde much joye" (1927). While Gawain has been in the company of the ladies during his entire stay at Hautdesert, and while this choice of the opposite sex as his companions may refer to his "ladies' man" reputation in other Arthurian narratives, here Gawain himself seems to have become one of the ladies, and the way in which he welcomes Bertilak home seems more wifely than fraternal, especially since he is passing the kisses of Bertilak's wife on to Bertilak--kisses which rightfully belong to a spouse.

On the morning of his journey, the uncanny and marginal once more impinge on the protective space of the court and Gawain as he leaves it. The coldness and harshness of the outside world contrasts with the warmth and civility of the court the evening before, when Gawain had taken leave of his hosts, thanking every member of the court for his or her courtesy--a final re-establishment of Hautdesert as an enclosure of civilized society, conveniently omitting mention of its lord and lady's attempt to undermine his status as the embodiment of the mores and practices of that society, and Gawain as the avatar of chivalry itself, conveniently omitting the lace and thereby his breach of his bargain with both Bertilak and the Green Knight. While the bitter weather outside is described as part of God's pattern for the world, it is hostile to the court and even to the wild creatures themselves:

> Now ne3es þe Nw 3ere and þe ny3t passez,
> Þe day dryuez to þe derk, as Dry3tyn biddez.
> Bot wylde wederez of þe worlde wakned þeroute;
> Clowdes kesten kenly þe colde to þe erþe,
> Wyth ny3e innoghe of þe norþe þe naked to tene. (1998-2002)

The night giving way to morning is described as a process sanctioned by divine law, but the cold weather is more marginal, indicated by its position "þeroute," outside of the safe walls of the court. Once more Gawain must enter the perilous

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

world "þeroute" to fulfull his bargain with the Green Knight, who is equally "þeroute," on the margins of Gawain's culture, though his agreement with Gawain is a mocking, testing parody of the games which the court plays to sustain its structure of ritualized contracts. The marginal nature of the world that awaits him outside is reinforced by the description of the north in line 2002. The wind from the north is frigid, harassing "þe naked" (which Gawain, in his rich clothing, is not), corresponding with associations of the north with the frigid zone on climate-oriented medieval maps (Woodward, "Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 337). But the north is a particularly marginal place on the east-oriented world maps: "...'north' was described by its position on the 'left' of east, and it thus became associated with sinister behavior, left-handedness, and evil. In Celtic languages, the words for 'north' and 'left' are closely related" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 337). The northeast corners of some *mappaemundi* were the location of Gog and Magog, prevented from overrunning Christendom by a wall allegedly built by Alexander the Great to contain them.[219]

Gawain attempts to hide in his bed from the weather outside, and, by implication, his imminent meeting with the Green Knight: "Þe leude lystened ful wel, þat le3 in his bedde--/Þa3 he lowkez his liddez ful lyttel he slepes...." (2006-7) Even Gawain's eyelids--and the refuge of sleep--are enclosures in which he tries to hide from his appointment with the forces outside, but these enclosures are broken into by the reality of his quest and he must go "þeroute." Gawain's locked eyelids also recall his "unlocking" of them to behold the Lady in line 1201. His adventure with the Lady over, Gawain returns to a sense of

---

[219]Woodward describes Gog and Magog, who "appear in Ezekiel and in Revelation, where they are described as the forces of the Antichrist who will be loosed at the Day of Judgment to overrun the civilized earth. Alexander the Great is said to have built a wall. with a great brass gate in the Caucasus Mountains, in order to contain them. On the *mappaemundi*, Gog and Magog were personified as two giants situated somewhere in the northern or northeastern part of Asia. Sometimes they were shown contained by Alexander's wall, often mistaken for a representation of the Great Wall of China" ("Medieval *Mappaemundi*" 332-3).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

himself as a closed system at the same time as he returns to his original knightly quest and identity, but with a difference: the broken circle of the green girdle which has supplanted the closed figure of his pentangle.

Gawain's armoring before departing the castle parallels his armoring at the beginning of his quest, but reflects this difference: the girdle figures prominently in his armoring, but the pentangle is absent from the description. The entire process is permeated by the imagery of enclosure, as if Gawain's successive layers of protective clothing were a way to take the enclosing walls of the court with him and wear them on his person:

> Whyle þe wlonkest wedes he warp on hymseluen--
> His cote wyth þe conysaunce of þe clere werkez
> Ennurned upon veluet, vertuus stonez
> Aboute beten and bounden, embrauded semez,
> And fayre furred withinne with fayre pelures--
> 3et laft he not þe lace, þe ladiez gifte;
> Þat forgat not Gawayn, for gode of hymseluen.
> Bi hi hade belted þe bronde vpon his balwe haunchez,
> Þen dressed he his drurye hym aboute,
> Swyþe swebled vmbe his swange, swetely, þat knyght;
> Þe gordel of grene silke þat gay wel bisemed,
> Vpon þat ryol red cloþe, þat ryche watz to schewe. (2025-36)

Once again, with his enwrapped, interlaced layers, Gawain resembles the knot which is his symbol. However, this knot has become complicated by the presence of the girdle. Because the girdle represents the entanglements which eventually prove Gawain faulty, he is wearing not so much a device of enclosure and protection as a symbol of his own entanglements: his conflicting promises and his own flawed nature, which cause him to value his own life more than his ritual promise to the Green Knight. Clein emphasizes how putting on the green girdle would have been considered a breach of the chivalric code, not just because "the green bar which now crosses the pentangle signifies that its unity is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

broken" (118), but because Gawain's use of a magical talisman to preserve his life goes against contemporary rules of arms (119).

This second armoring is also remarkable in that, while the original armoring was martial in tone, emphasizing the strength as well as the beauty of Gawain's armor, here the beauty of Gawain's clothes alone is mentioned, and the armor itself seems missing, replaced by "wlonkest wedez" (2025). In the initial armoring, Gawain appears as "þe stif mon" who "þe stel hondelez" (570), "his legez lapped in stel" (575), wearing "þe brawden byrné of bry3t stel ryngez" (580) and "wel bornyst brace upon his boþe armes,/With gode cowters and gay and glouez of plate" (582-3). Steel is the most predominant material in this earlier description; Gawain is surrounded by so much metal that he has become a "man of steel." Even the body underneath is presented as sturdy and strong, armor-like, with "thik þrawen þy3ez" (579). In the second armoring, however, though the armor does appear again, the emphasis is on how it is highly polished and its ability to make Gawain look attractive: "He hade vpon vche pece,/Wypped ful wel and wlonk;/Þe gayest into Grece...." (2021-3). More emphasis is given to Gawain's "wedez"; steel is replaced by velvet and fur. The pentangle, which represents Gawain's virtues, is supplanted by the girdle, which serves a cosmetic purpose: "Þe gordel of þe grene silk þat gay wel bisemed" (2035). Even Gawain's body has been altered by his stay at Hautdesert: his "thik þrawande þy3ez" have been replaced by "bal3e haunchez" (2032). Andrew and Waldron define "bal3e" as "smooth and rounded" (Andrew and Waldron 304). Gawain's muscular thighs seem to have atrophied during his stay at Hautdesert, replaced by the smooth and rounded haunches which were ideal features of a lady's rather than a man's physique, as in the roundness and "smoþe sydez" of the jewel-heroine of *Pearl* (5-6).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once the knight and his guide leave the castle, whose gates are now "vnbarred and born open" (2070) to let them out into the wilderness, the land again becomes uncivilized and gloomy. In contrast to the castle, the Green Chapel is referred to as "þat tene place" (2075), whose uncouth nature is reflected in the almost surreal landscape surrounding it:

> Þay bo3en bi bonkkez þer bo3ez ar bare;
> Þay clomben bi clyffez þer clengez þe colde.
> Þe heuen watz vphalt, bot vgly þervnder,
> Mist merged on þe mor, malt on þe mountez;
> Vche hille had a hatte, a myst-hakel huge.
> Brokez byled and breke bi bonkkez aboute,
> Schyre schaterande on schorez, þer þay doun schowued. (2077-84)

The landscape is full of features which exemplify either confusion or destruction. The mist and the clouds obscure the vision of the travelers, and the rivers which rush tumultuously down mountains indicate that here nature has not yet been tamed by the court. This is not the landscape of the hunt into which Bertilak and his companions had ridden. That landscape, while full of crags and cliffs and dense thickets, was ultimately penetrable and controllable by the hunters. However, this landscape is neither visually penetrable in its entirety, nor can it be tamed by human efforts. Gawain is now truly "þeroute" as he had not been throughout his stay at the castle, but as he had been when he had not yet found Hautdesert.

Along their journey, Gawain's guide warns him about the Green Knight, who is as perilous as the terrain that he inhabits. One of his most marginal features is that he kills everyone who passes by, regardless of his or her social standing in the world organized by the court:

> "For he is a mon methles and mercy non vses,
> For be hit chorle oþer chaplayn þat bi þe chapel rydes,
> Monk oþer masseprest, oþer any mon elles,
> Hym þynk as queme hym to quelle as quyk go hymseluen." (2106-9)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Green Knight is marginal not only because he seems to take such joy in killing, but also because he has no regard for the social positions that his victims occupy. Thus the guide advises Gawain to choose another path, much as Jonah had taken it upon himself to go "sum oþer waye" against the will of God: "'Forþy, goude Sir Gawayn, let þe gome one/And gotz away sum oþer gate, vpon Goddez halue!/Cayrez bi sum oþer kyth, þer Kryst mot yow spede!'" (2118-20). The guide speaks of the Green Knight's land as a place abandoned by Christ and urges Gawain to find a place that is not so threatening, a place perhaps more like the enclosing and colonizing court.

If Gawain were to turn back, his guide promises not to tell anyone that Gawain had not finished his quest:

> "And I schal hy3 me home a3ayn; and hete yow fyrre
> Þat I schal swere 'Bi God and alle His god hal3ez',
> 'As help me God and þe halydam', and othez innoghe,
> Þat I schal lelly yow layne and lauce never tale
> Þat ever 3e fondet to fle for freke þat I wyst." (2121-5)

This oath not to reveal Gawain's flight from the Green Knight is similar to Gawain's own promise to the Lady not to reveal the secret gift of her love-lace to her lord. Interestingly, the guide even uses the word "lauce" in reference to the telling of tales, as if the tale of Gawain's potential abandonment of his quest were a knot that he refuses to untie by telling anyone. However, despite Gawain's previous entanglement--the secret of the girdle which he had kept from the lord of the castle just as this man is promising to keep his secret now--Gawain refuses to accept further entanglements. Instead he accepts the traditional definition of a knight, insisting that running away would be cowardly and thus committing himself to his journey once more:

> "But helde þou hit neuer so holde, and I here passe,
> Founded for ferde for to fle, in fourme þat þou tellez,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I were a kny3t kowarde, I my3t not be excused.
Bot I wyl to þe chapel, for chaunce þat may falle,
And talk wyth þat ilk tulk þe tale þat me lyste,
Worþe hit wele oþer wo, as þe Wyrde lykez
Hit hafe." (2129-35)

Though the guide would keep Gawain's story tightly knotted, enclosed in himself so that the fame which had developed about Gawain would remain as intact as a sealed chamber, Gawain has internalized society's definition of knighthood and insists that he will know himself a coward, even if everyone else does not. While no one else might see him as marginal or transgressive, he will at least internally remain outside of the customs and standards appropriate for a knight.

Once Gawain rides into the valley where he will encounter the Green Knight, he is astonished by the wildness of the land, which is described in terms of its lack of shelters:

And þenne he wayted hym aboute, and wylde hit hym þo3t,
And se3e no syngne of resette bisydez nowhere,
Bot hy3e bonkkez and brent vpon boþe halue
And ru3e knokled knarrez with knorned stonez;
Þe skwez of þe scowtes skayned hym þo3t. (2163-7)

While the lack of shelter may refer to the fact that Gawain cannot hide anywhere and take the Green Knight by surprise, it may also mean that Gawain is measuring the wildness of the place by its lack of an enclosed, civilized space, a castle or a dwelling. The landscape is not surrounded by walls: it is open and perilous.

When he sees the Green Chapel, he sees something resembling a hill, a natural feature rather than a dwelling:

He se3 non suche [a chapel] in no syde--and selly hym þo3t--
Saue, a lyttel on a launde, a lawe as hit were,
A bal3 ber3 bi a bonke þe brymme bysyde,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bi a for3 of a flode þat ferked þare;
Þe borne blubred þerinne as hit boyled hade. (2170-4)

It is revealing that the mound which Gawain sees is referred to as a *lawe*, since in *Clannesse* and in the description of Bertilak's castle, *lawe* has implications of lawfulness. Here in the wilderness, however, there are no laws--a fact that is emphasized by the wild waterfall that swirls and bubbles about the mound, and by the Green Knight's later conduct.

When Gawain gets a closer look at the mound, he finds that it is not a "lawe" but a cave, and its uncanniness makes it a marginal rather than a lawful place. In fact, in his mind it is not only outside of his understanding of the world as provided by the court, but also inverts the court's ideas of meaningful space. Instead of enshrining and protecting Christian mysteries, this chapel is devoted not to God but to the devil, at least as Gawain sees it:

"Now iwysse," quoþ Wowayn, "wysty is here;
Þis oritore is vgly, with erbez ouergrowen.
Wel bisemez þe wy3e wruxled in grene
Dele his deuocioun on þe Deueles wyse;
Now I fele hit is pe Fende, in my fyue wyttez,
Þat hatz stoken me þis steuen to strye me here.
Þis is a chapel of meschaunce, þat chekke hit bytyde!
Hit is þe corsedest kirk þat euer I com inne!" (2189-96)

Because the Green Knight is associated with this place, he becomes even more marginalized, transformed into a being who lives his life contrary to the divine law. In seeking a "Green Chapel," Gawain would have envisioned an architectural structure built by humans and testifying to the presence of a Christian community, the community to which he belongs. Instead he has found a sinister natural feature overgrown by weeds. While in his earlier prayer for shelter (particularly a chapel in which to celebrate Christmas), Gawain described this place as an "erber" (755), there is a difference between an "erber" and the Green Chapel. The "erber" is a garden, a constructed space, a natural

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

place managed by humans, tamed into precise beauty and arranged artfully as a backdrop for the activities of culture, such as stylized forms of courtship. The Green Chapel, on the other hand, is wild nature, untended by human hands. Whereas the garden is an enclosing space that exhibits the hand of culture, if wild nature is enclosing, it is a trap.

The places inhabited by each character also dictate how he/she behaves. In the castle, everyone's behavior is as stylized and artificial as the castle itself. However, in this natural yet uncanny place, the Green Knight now behaves in a rude way. He makes Gawain wait for him to emerge, though he says that he will be ready momentarily (2217-20), angrily approaches Gawain (2233) and refuses to bow in greeting (2236). He also informs Gawain that his "place," the Green Chapel, has different rules from the ones to which Gawain is accustomed. According to Ganim, the landscape outside of the court is the place where Gawain's principles are put to the test: "For Gawain must now test his ideals outside of their immediate social context, in this timeless landscape, literally outside of the court from which they sprang" (Ganim 378). The Green Knight not only puts these principles to the test but also to some degree rejects them. After he calls Gawain "sir swete" (2237) and declares, "Iwysse þou art welcom, wy3e, to my place" (2240), the knight dispenses with politeness and insists that the two of them can behave as violently as they like here, being that they are alone (just as the Lady had told Gawain that they can behave howsoever they liked, being alone in his chamber):

> "And we ar in þis valay verayly oure one;
> Here are no renkes vs to rydde, rile as vus lykez.
> Haf þy helme of þy hede and haf here þy pay.
> Busk no more debate þen I þe bede þenne
> When þou wypped of my hede at a wap one." (2245-9)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Green Knight suggests that they are both outside of the rules of society not just because they are in a place which is outside of the sphere of the court, but also because they are in a place where no one can see them. The rules of the social game thus ultimately reside not so much in a particular place, but with society itself. Outside of the purview of people, Gawain and the Green Knight can follow different rules.

In this place, the rules seem to have changed--and Gawain has also. When Gawain shrinks a little from the first blow aimed at him by the Green Knight, the latter declares that he is not Gawain, just as his wife had done in the castle:

> "Þou art not Gawayn," quoþ þe gome, "þat is so goud halden,
> Þat neuer ar3ed for no here by hylle ne by vale,
> And now þou fles for ferde er þou fele harmez!
> Such cowardise of þat kny3t cowþe I neuer here." (2270-3)

While Gawain had remained bold in all other places and situations, here in the Green Knight's chapel he has not proven his worth. All of the rumors about Gawain which are recited by the knight are also not substantiated, just as the rumors which the Lady had heard about Gawain's prowess with women had been proven wrong. Both of these strands of tales are hearsay created by the court, so that Gawain is as much a construction as the walls built by the court to keep out marginal elements. When he does hold still for the second blow, though, his steadfastness is described in terms of a natural feature: "Gawain graypely hit bydez and glent with no membre/Bot stode stylle as þe ston oþer a stubbe auþer/Þat raþeled is in roché grounde with rotez a hundreth" (2292-4). The artificiality of the courtly space cannot help Gawain here, but being like the gnarled trees in this rocky land enables him to be steadfast.

As in the exchange of winnings game, when Bertilak demands of Gawain whom he had kissed and Gawain coyly replies that disclosing this information

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was not part of their agreement, here Gawain insists that the three blows which the knight gives him are not within the terms of their covenant:

> "Bot on stroke here me fallez--
> Þe couenaunt schop ry3t so,
> Festned in Arþurez hallez--
> And þerfore, hende, now hoo!" (2327-30)

Like the castles and rooms, and, more subtly, the social interactions of the court, the various games have boundaries as well, fencing people around with rules so that their interactions do not become a chaotic free-for-all. Gawain insists that the terms of their agreement enclose the Green Knight, who will meet with violence if he oversteps them.

He also evokes Camelot as the place of the game's origin. The agreement had been "festned" there, binding the two parties and binding the game to the place of its origin as well. This statement indicates that all other social games also originate from the court, just as Gawain himself has. Additionally, Gawain thus manages to make the Green Knight's marginal existence and behavior become centralized, saying that their interaction is rooted in Camelot and the social order, no matter how disruptive of that order the Green Knight had attempted to be.

The Green Knight, however, reverses Gawain's orderly assumption about the game and changes his attitudes about marginal and central individuals and behavior. He insists that his blows were not "vnmanerly" (2339), "Ne kyd bot as couenaunde at kyngez kort schaped'" (2340). Rather than violating the terms of their agreement, the Green Knight explains that each of his blows corresponds to both the agreement made at Camelot and the agreement made in his own castle to exchange winnings. Thus, contrary to Gawain's accusation of marginal behavior violating the terms of the game, the Green Knight interprets his actions in concert with the previous agreements: one blow for each night of their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

exchange of winnings. This marginal individual is thus in control of the game and its rules, and he even shows Gawain another way of interpreting their game, as if insisting that Camelot does not have the exclusive right to assign meanings. It is Gawain, not the Green Knight, who ends up having overstepped the bounds by choosing to hide the green girdle. Gawain also discovers that the green man whom he had found so marginal in appearance and behavior is actually the same person as his idealized host, thus blurring his definition of marginal and central people and actions. The Green Knight is the center of the whole game and thus in a sense of the whole world, for what Gawain had thought to be unnoticed, secret behavior, performed with the lady at the margins of the court, was known about and even instigated by the Green Knight, who says of the seduction, "'I wro3t hit myseluen'" (2361). In making this statement, the Green Knight both absolves his wife of responsibility for the seduction attempt (though this does not stop Gawain from indicting her in lines 2411-28) and renders her marginal to the plot, depriving her of the power which she had exerted over Gawain as the sexual aggressor while he gives himself "mastery and command over the Lady's text and all its strategies," as Heng writes (507). Bertilak assumes possession of everything associated with women in his castle; as Fisher describes it, "The girdle is his; the wife is his; the testing is his" ("Taken Men" 89). Heng discusses this reappropriation of the girdle (and the plot) by the Green Knight:

> By claiming the girdle as his possession ("my wede")...the Green Knight is able also to lay claim to rightful ownership of the seduction game after the fact ("I wro3t hit myseluen") and thereby assert his domination over its supervisor, the Lady ("my wyf"). To legitimate his access to the girdle, he artfully alludes to its colors, green and gold, which are pointedly his own colors as well...and stealthily reintroduces the motif of the hunt, a motif we are habituated to think of as belonging to him, by casually offering Gawain the girdle for a souvenir: "And I gif þe, sir, þe gurdel..." (2358-96). (507-8)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Green Knight is also making a more subtle offer in extending the girdle to Gawain as a gift. Because the girdle is associated with the body of the Lady (or is a substitute for her body, since Gawain had accepted the girdle when he had not accepted the Lady herself as a sexual partner), when the Green Knight offers it to Gawain, he seems to be offering the Lady to Gawain again, as he asserts that he had done when he claims agency for the seduction plot. But this time he offers his wife to Gawain not as a sexual partner but in reconciliation, as a friend rather than an "'enmy kene'" (2406). This time, however, Gawain accepts the Lady only as a target for blame. Yet, at the same time as the Lady is being offered back to Gawain, she is being eclipsed as instigator and prime mover of the seduction plot, as Heng states. Through offering Gawain the belt as he had offered Gawain the spoils of his hunts at Hautdesert, the Green Knight's action

> seeks to eclipse the primacy of the Lady's part and her responsibility for the stalking of Gawain, since it works to dissolve the specificity of her particular subtle hunt and all its scenes into a panoramic generality of hunts dominated by Bertilak-the Green Knight: the Lady's project is to appear as only one act in a grander, vaster design overseen by a male supervisor, with its crucial preeminence accordingly withheld. (Heng 508)

Fisher also notes that this reappropriation of girdle, plot and wife on the Green Knight's part also is the beginning of "a process of redefining the girdle that enables Gawain ultimately to bring the token back to Camelot as an emblem referring to himself and to his reinstatement in feudal society, and not to the Lady's shopping spree," namely her "purchasing" of Gawain through her discovery that his "price" is his fear for his own life ("Taken Men" 89).

When Gawain realizes that it is he, not the Green Knight, who has overstepped the boundaries of the game, he acknowledges the fact that he has violated the boundaries of knightly behavior and even of his own nature:

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Þenne he ka3t to þe knot and þe kest lawsez,
> Brayde broþely þe belt to þe burne seluen:
> "Lo! þer þe falssyng--foule mot hit falle!
> For care of þy knokke, cowardyse me ta3t
> To acorde me with couetyse, my kynde to forsake:
> Þat is larges and lewté, þat longez to kny3tez.
> Now I am fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben euer
> Of trecherye and vntrawþe--boþe bityde sor3e
> And care!" (2376-84)

In untying the knot of the girdle, Gawain seems prepared to untie his own moral and philosophical "knots." However, he still manages to avoid centering the blame on himself, blaming the belt instead for tempting him away from his own better nature, as if cowardice were a force outside of himself which had managed to lure him astray. Heng contrasts this gesture of assigning blame to some object outside of himself with his later insistence that his guilt will never leave him:

> Even as Gawain is passionately averring that his "harme" can never be removed from him...his mechanism of strategic distancing, of inserting a space between what is self and what is not-self (but an unfortunate supplement or addition devised by a woman), has already enacted a scenario of self-removal.... (507).

He also does not acknowledge that it is his own human nature to be flawed. He sees himself as having deviated from a norm of knightly perfection rather than seeing that the virtues of a knight are things to be aspired to, not a state in which he had already existed and from which he has now fallen. Gawain thus errs in both deflecting blame onto the girdle or an emotion exterior to himself and which had subsequently invaded him, and blaming himself for falling from an ideal that he had never truly attained. Shoaf also argues that Gawain has erred in identifying himself as the source of chivalry rather than a follower of the chivalric system:

> Properly a creature and therefore a sign of chivalric ideals, Gawain in his confusion comes to think that he is the Creator of the ideal--that he is chivalry itself. ... Gawain becomes so engrossed in *being*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> chivalry that he finally forgets to practice chivalry, and accepts the green girdle. (*The Poem as Green Girdle* 69-70)

The marginal Green Knight again surprises Gawain by first performing a function associated with the priesthood--absolution--and then by giving a new interpretation to Gawain's girdle, an interpretive function associated with the court itself. Whereas the confession which Gawain had received in Bertilak's castle was a formality because Gawain had presumably not confessed the secrets of the girdle and his liason with the Lady, here the Green Knight absolves him completely of any guilt:

> Then lo3e þat oþer leude and luflyly sayde:
> "I halde hit hardily hole, þe harme þat I hade.
> Þou art confessed so clene, beknowen of þy mysses,
> And hatz þe penaunce apert of þe poynt of myn egge,
> I halde þe polysed of þat ply3t and pured as clene
> As þou hadez neuer forfeted syþen þou watz fyrst borne." (2389-94)

While Gawain had seen the chapel as diabolical, an inverse church, ironically it is here on the margins that he has gained a truer absolution than in the socially central and correct castle of Bertilak--who himself has been transformed, through the course of the scene in the Green Chapel, from devil to courtly lord to priest. Lynn Staley Johnson comments on Gawain's myopia: "Whereas Gawain sees only a fit landscape for his own demise, the chapel that looks like a cave becomes a site for his spiritual renewal" (Johnson 88). Fisher interprets this scene more critically, in reference to the masculine economy of signification which the Green Knight has reinstated through claiming agency for the seduction plot and ownership of the girdle:

> In order to reassert masculine control over the systems of exchange that Morgan and the Lady have owned and operated at the center of the narrative, the poem transforms the Green Knight, Gawain's life-threatening enemy, into his moral instructor and father-confessor. ("Taken Men" 88)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This process of reappropriation and control is reciprocal, though. Just as the Green Knight here assumes the capacity to absolve Gawain of his faults, Gawain also absolves the Green Knight, not excoriating the knight even when he claims responsibility for the plot which had caused Gawain's downfall. Instead, Gawain implicates the Lady in the plot once more by blaming her for his misdeed, even after the Green Knight had claimed that she was merely the plot's agent, not its deviser.

Here on the margins, Gawain also receives a new interpretation of the girdle as a token of having emerged victorious from the Green Chapel:

> "And I gif þe, sir, þe gurdel þat is golde-hemmed;
> For hit is grene as my goune, Sir Gawayn, 3e maye
> Þenk vpon þis ilke þrepe þer þou forth þryngez
> Among prynces of prys, and þis a pure token
> Of þe chaunce of þe Grene Chapel at cheualrous kny3tez." (2395-9)

Once Gawain returns to his familiar social setting, the Green Knight insists that his girdle will be looked upon as a "pure" token of honor (as his pentangle had been), not a badge of shame. But in doing so, he also restores the girdle to an exclusively male meaning, excluding the Lady from it. It has now become a token to be read by "prynces of prys" and "cheualrous kny3tez" in terms of their exclusively masculine community's values, a community in which women are peripheral: objects to save, to be seduced by (and to seduce) or to purchase. Fisher argues that

> the girdle will have meaning when Gawain circulates through the homosocial world of "'prynces of prys'" because it is now a pure token, cleansed as Gawain himself is, of association with the female. Moreover, the girdle will have meaning to men because, as a cleansed token it refers to men, to the escapade in the forest (and not in the bedroom), to the doings that go on among "'cheualrous kny3tez.'" ("Taken Men" 92)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

But the Green Knight does not entirely leave his wife out of the picture, thus providing an occasion for Gawain to express his rage at being "vsed" in a way which he had not done after the Green Knight had revealed his role in the plot to undermine Gawain's chivalric values. When the Green Knight invites Gawain to make peace with his wife, "þat watz your enmy kene'" (2406), Gawain completely absolves himself of blame for his cowardice, but paradoxically exacerbates his fault rather than acknowledging it. First he notes that the ladies "þus hor kny3t wyth hor kest han koyntly bigyled" (2413), indicating that it is the women who had tied him up, not Bertilak, who had engineered the entire thing, nor Gawain himself, whose love of his own life had caused him to accept the girdle. He then declares that, according to the exegetical principles of his society in reading the Bible and other narratives, women have always been the lurers of men:

> "Bot hit is no ferly þa3 a fole madde
> And þur3 wyles of wymmen to be wonen to sor3e;
> For so watz Adam in erde with one bigyled,
> And Salamon with fele sere, and Samson, eftsones--
> Dalyda dalt hym hys wyrde--and Dauyth, þerafter,
> Watz blended with Barsabe, þat much bale þoled." (2414-9)

It is notable that Gawain uses the word "ferly" (wonder), for this word had also been used for the wild, marginal beings with which he had earlier done battle. Here he indicates that female wiliness is not marginal but central to the court's interpretation of female behavior. However, he reveals his own imperfect interpretive powers when he reads some of the biblical examples wrongly, particularly when he acquits David and blames Bathsheba for their relationship.[220]

---

[220]This was a common position of antifeminist tracts, such as Walter Map's *Dissuasio Valerri Rufino ne ducat uxorem* (c. 1180-90), which, according to Wilson and Makowski, "next to Thophrastus' tract, is the most widely quoted and used work of philosophic misogamy" (Wilson and Makowski 87). In this work, Map presents Bathsheba as a bad influence upon David, much as

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain uses these examples of famous men to indicate that he should be excused for his own transgression:

> "And alle þay were biwyled
> Wyth wymmen þat þay vsed.
> Þa3 I be now bigyled,
> Me þink me burde be excused." (2425-8)

While he indicts women and absolves himself of his own flaw, taking refuge from his own particular sins in an antifeminist tradition, he seems to acknowledge male complicity when he notes that these are women whom the men had "vsed." Thus to some degree, the woman goes from instigator to object of male temptation. However, after this brief acknowledgment that men collude with their own temptations, Gawain once more excuses himself.

Lindley is convinced that Gawain utters his antifeminist diatribe partly to reinstate the cultural constructs which had been so disturbed by his sojourn in Hautdesert. Lindley argues that "From the moment he receives his wound and the knowledge of the falsity of his perception of things, he is preoccupied with naming and categorizing, redrawing the lines that have been erased" (Lindley 83-4). Gawain's complaint is "a sustained attempt to restore the official hierarchy, not to mention the literary dignity, that has been subverted by the carnival at Hautdesert" (Lindley 84). Specifically, Gawain's antifeminist rant "serves the important purpose of locating an enemy safely outside of oneself and timeless" (84). Batt also comments on the diatribe as Gawain's effort to reinstate norms, specifically the lineaments of his own identity, in spatial terms. To Batt, Gawain's indictments of women

> can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim control by constructing another "space" for himself, one so limiting as to make possible only one reading of his behaviour. He therefore assigns a meaning

---

Gawain blames her for their association (Wilson and Makowski 90).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> to the girdle different from that accorded it by Bertilak and defines himself to Arthur's court as no longer "enclosed" by virtue, but by a constraining viciousness.... (Batt 138)

This image of Gawain himself as a narrow, confining space is telling. While small, close spaces had been the terrain of women in the two courts, here Gawain claims narrow space for himself as a man by means of his narrow-minded, one-dimensional portrait of women. Through this one-sided view, Gawain both puts women in a narrow space (their limited definition as seductresses) and establishes himself there (as someone who can read women, and himself, in only one way). I also would contend that Gawain's vociferous attack on women (whose vitriol seems so out of place (literally) because Bertilak had revealed the nature of the plot much earlier, when Gawain's anger should have erupted) is related to Gawain's assumption of a feminine role in Hautdesert. When he implicates all women in treacheries against men, creating a kind of parallel history to the succession of collapses and foundings of civilizations at the beginning of the poem, Gawain not only excoriates women, but exorcises the "feminine" part of himself which had manifested itself at Hautdesert, just as he attempts to cast his own capacity for falsehood and oathbreaking from his being by throwing down the girdle and assigning the blame for his actions to this piece of cloth rather than his own heart. After having assigned all guilt to women (and femininity) and having absolved himself, Gawain can now resume his manly status as a knight. Fisher analyzes this transformation of the girdle--and Gawain--in terms of the Green Knight's pronunciation of absolution, "'Trwe mon trwe restore'" (2354), where *mon* for Fisher means not just "must" but "man" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 142):

> The green girdle is a sign not now of the woman, but of the tested man, who has not been found so wanting after all. The woman in the middle has effectively been displaced from the center, to become

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> as marginalized as Guinevere and Morgan. And thus the token is pure, cleansed of female signification, and particularly of male alliance with the female at the expense of bonding with the male. "Trwe mon trwe restore." ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 144)

The irony of this passage, though, is that, while Gawain absolves himself and the Green Knight, who is more the architect of the seduction than the Lady, who is its instrument, he ends up making central what he had striven to marginalize. Making women the architects of male faultiness, Gawain gives women a central place in shaping society, just as he renders himself and the Green Knight powerless and peripheral. A particularly striking example of this is Gawain's inclusion of Solomon in the group of wronged men--Solomon is the creator of the pentangle, Gawain's symbol of knightly identity, a closed system which Gawain strives to reinstate here by excluding women from his knightly identity and reestablishing the social terms by which he had defined himself before being tested at Hautdesert. Yet Solomon is also one of those men deceived by women, as Fisher notes ("Taken Men" 92). The creator of the pentangle was also lured by the lace. However, the male voice still gets the last word: though the female characters are in fact central to the plot, the revelation of their centrality occurs at the end of the story. Thus the structure of the story marginalizes the women once more, as Fisher attests ("Taken Men" 94.)

Gawain also makes an interestingly ambiguous statement when he excuses himself at the end of his rant: "Me pink me burde be excused" (2428). Whereas here *burde* has the sense of "ought" ("I ought to be excused"--Andrew and Waldron 308), this word also appears as a noun meaning "woman," as in the poet's description of the Lady's "mony cler burdez" (her female attendants) in line 942.[221] Thus, after indicting women as the architects of his fault and placing

---

[221]*The Middle English Dictionary* states that *birde/burde* was used generically of women, as well as of noblewomen in particular; *burde* means "A woman of noble birth; damsel, lady, lady in waiting...also, woman" (876). The word was also "Used of the Virgin Mary" since 1225 (876). The

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

himself in a literary tradition of deceived men (a kind of inverse to the texts of knights as lovers which the Lady had invoked), the word "burde" seems to cause Gawain to excuse women inadvertently even as he condemns them.

In order to accept the girdle from the Green Knight, Gawain does not find it sufficient to accept the knight's redefinition of the girdle as a token of their encounter at the Green Chapel rather than his earlier encounter with the Lady. Fisher avers that he can only accept it once he has associated it "directly with his sins, and only marginally with the Lady" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 144). After excoriating women as the source of all temptation, Gawain then exorcises them, reinterpreting the girdle as a reminder of human mortality and corruption, to be specifically used in a masculine context:

> "Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte,
> When I ride in renoun remorde to myseluen
> Þe faut and þe fayntyse of þe flesche crabbed,
> How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylþe.
> And þus, quen pryde schal me pryk for prowes of armes,
> Þe loke to þis luf-lace schal leþe my hert." (2433-8)

Gawain renames the girdle not as a sign of the Lady's body but as a reminder of human faultiness in general, to be looked upon particularly when he is engaged in stereotypically manly pursuits, such as "rid[ing] in renoun" (either in tournaments or in battle) and when pride arises in his heart because of his "prowes of armes," as if Gawain is ignoring the fact that the fault had occurred in the first place because of a romantic rather than a martial adventure. However, he cannot completely excise the feminine origin of the girdle from his definition. It is still a "luf-lace," and though his reference to flesh in lines 2435-6 could be a generic reference to corruption, it also recalls how his transgression was specifically a "sin of the flesh," a desire to preserve his own fleshly body, as well

---

word survives in our term "bride," though the meaning has become more narrowly restricted to a just-married woman, and in the slang term "bird" for a woman.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

as some near-sins of a sexual kind: capitulating to the Lady's desire and its unspoken consequences, namely having intercourse with Bertilak as well. Fisher asserts that Gawain can only include the Lady in his recuperated reference to the lace by associating her not with the seductiveness of the body, but with the more generalized corruptibility of flesh itself:

> At this point, the Lady's marginalization and the placement of the female in the poem are complete. The Lady of the girdle is reduced to the corruption of the flesh, in an image that specifically evokes withered, old Morgan, the 'auncian,' as she has been described in Fitt II (947-69). The Lady, through this rapid deterioration, has been revised. ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 144)[222]

After Gawain condemns women and excises them from the girdle's new meaning, the Green Knight puts women in the middle again. He acknowledges the central place of women in creating the social "game" when he declares that all of his uncanny powers are the result of Morgan Le Fay's magic: "'Þur3 my3t of Morgne la Faye, þat in my hous lenges,/And koyntyse of clergye, bi craftes wel lerned....'" (2446-7). He then declares how Morgan is responsible for the entire plot of the poem, including the initial beheading game as well as the attempted seduction of Gawain:

> "Ho wayned me vpon þis wyse to your wynne halle
> For to assay þe surquidré, 3if hit soth were
> Þat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table;
> Ho wayned me þis wonder your wyttes to reue,
> For to haf greued Gaynour and gart hir to dy3e
> With glopnyng of þat ilke gome þat gostlych speked
> With his hede in his honde bifore þe hy3e table.
> Þat is ho þat is at home, þe auncian lady;
> Ho is even þyn aunt, Arþurez half-suster...." (2456-64)

---

[222]Fisher also stresses the fact that Morgan herself has been "revised" in the sense that, as the sister of Arthur, she should not be so ancient--after all, Arthur himself is "sumquat childgered" (86). She concludes that Morgan's advanced age also connects womanhood to the corruption of the flesh usually associated with aging ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 144).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This fact is ironic as well. Elderly Morgan manages to engineer an entire plot against Camelot, a plot which not only tests the famous virtue of Camelot as it had Gawain's own personal worth, but which could also bring that civilization to an end. However, twice Bertilak speaks of Morgan being "at home." While Morgan is physically confined to the walls of a castle (as are all the women of the poem), despite this physical limitation, her powers enable her to control and even undermine society. Fisher describes her paradoxical position thus: "...by Bertilak's admission, she is always simultaneously lurking at the fringes and inescapably at dead center, related to Arthur and to Gawain, just as her influence is at the narrative center of the romance" ("Leaving Morgan Aside" 143).

Though the Green Knight reveals that women (Guinevere, the Lady, Morgan) are central to the plot of the poem, he marginalizes them at the same time through subtle strategies of language. Fisher observes aptly that, though Morgan is revealed to be at the center of the plot of the poem, the fact that the Green Knight unveils her agency at the end marginalizes her rather than placing her at the center:

> At this point in the poem, with about a hundred lines left to go, Morgan's agency can be admitted to Gawain because, at this point, it does not matter. The disenfranchising and displacing of women have been accomplished successfully enough to admit Morgan where she belongs, on the margins of the poem. Because the poem has converted the Lady into the token of the male through Bertilak's speeches and Gawain's responses, it can afford to name Morgan, and, for the first time, it can afford to tell the truth about itself and its narrative. ("Taken Men" 94)

Morgan's power is also diluted in that it has come to her through Merlin. Though Merlin was not the source of the plot, the power to engineer the plot was originally his, therefore rendering Morgan's magical abilities (if not her abilities to wreak social upheaval) secondhand ("Taken Men" 95). Finally, the construction of the passage during which the Green Knight reveals Morgan's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

central role allows him to render her peripheral. After offering a long parenthetical phrase in deference to "Morgne þe goddess" (2452) in lines 2448-55, he makes himself central to Morgan's plot by emphasizing how she sent him to carry out her plans ("Ho wayned *me*"--2456, 2459) ("Taken Men" 95; emphasis mine).

Even with the Green Knight's revisions, the true centrality of women is also established when the Green Knight speaks of Guinevere's potential death at the sight of the gristly head speaking. He presumes that Guinevere is so important to Camelot that if she were to die, the whole society could collapse. The Green Knight also reverses Gawain's expectations in that his marginal appearance is a guise and his more normal appearance his true one, and at the same time his castle appears to be a bastion of civilization but is truly marginal, since it is the abode of Morgan Le Faye, who seeks to use her powers to destroy Arthurian civilization, which controls both meaning and space. Of course it is also ironic that, after the Green Knight confesses all of this, he invites Gawain to come to his court again (2467-70), as if it were still the same physically and morally safe place that Gawain had initially envisioned it to be.

The moral as well as geographical locations of Gawain and the Green Knight are depicted by the places to which they journey after their parting:

> Gawain on blonk ful bene
> To þe kynges bur3 buskez bolde,
> And þe kny3t in þe enker grene
> Whiderwarde-soeuer he wolde. (2475-8)

While Gawain returns to a known destination, the civilization from which he had come, the Green Knight remains a marginal figure, his destination unnamed, his future exploits uncertain. Though in the next stanza Gawain rides on "wylde wayez in þe worlde" (2479) and "ofte he herbered in house and ofte al þeroute,/And mony a venture in vale hevenquyst ofte...." (2481-2), the reader is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

assured that he will return to the safe shelter of the court, whereas the Green Knight will remain on the margins.

When Gawain returns home to the castle, he wears the green girdle as an emblem of his new identity as a flawed knight, marked by the "knots" of the entanglements that had been his downfall:

> Þe hurt watz hole þat he hade hent in his nek
> And þe blykkande belt he bere þeraboute,
> Abelef, as a bauderyk, bounden bi his syde,
> Loken vnder his lyfte arme, þe lace, with a knot,
> In tokenyng he watz tane in tech of a faute. (2484-8)

Now Gawain himself has almost become a knot, "loken" in the girdle as he had been in the pentangle, the knot of his virtues, before his journey. Blanch elaborates on the significance of this final "knot":

> While the ornamental knot of the baldric represents a ritualistic memento of his guilt, Gawain is no longer entangled by material bonds--the encircling trappings of worldly elegance and pride. With a clear perception of the limitations and frailties of human beings and perhaps, of the chivalric code itself, Gawain will now lead his life in the spiritual bondage of penitence and humility--bondage which will ultimately set him free. (Blanch 60)

Other readers would argue, however, that such a stern, unbending view of human faultiness is almost "un-Christian." This is the opinion of Clein, who finds the court's reinterpretation of the lace more humane than Gawain's stern interpretation of it:

> The court's gesture implies an acceptance of the hero's imperfection which Gawain himself lacks. By contrast to other, more tolerant perspectives in the poem, Gawain's absolutism seems un-Christian. The court's gesture reminds readers that the hero is not unique but one in a line of noble but flawed men from Aeneas down. (Clein 126)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I would argue that, despite Gawain's efforts to expunge the marks of women's bodies and plots from the girdle, the girdle still bears their taint in the form of Gawain's own reading of the girdle as the "text" of his sins. Gawain has associated the girdle with the corruptibility of the flesh, and, as a sign of his sins, an inverse of the pentangle which was the "text" of his virtues, it is also a sign of the feminine: the flesh which had corrupted him into accepting the girdle, the flesh which the girdle had encircled. If he had adopted the feminine role of being a creature of adornment, regarded by the approving gazes of others, while at Hautdesert, here Gawain exemplifies the shadow side of this culturally-defined femininity: femaleness as corrupted flesh, the sign of the body as mortal, permeable, subject to decay. If he had once been like the Lady at Hautdesert--beautiful, youthful, gracious, clad in beautiful clothing--now he is like Morgan, the "auncian," the symbol of physical and moral decay who was hidden in her suffocating costume.

Once he has arrived at the court, Gawain tells the people of his adventures, interpreting the lace for them as an emblem of his flaw:

> "Lo! lorde," quoþ þe leude, and þe lace hondeled,
> "Þis is þe bende of þis blame I bere on my nek.
> Þis is þe laþe and þe losse þat I la3t haue
> Of couardise and couetyse, þat I haf ca3t þare;
> Þis is þe token of vntrawþe þat I am tan inne.
> And I mot nedez hit were wyle I may last;
> For non may hyden his harme bot vnhap ne may hit,
> For þer hit onez is tachched twynne wil hit neuer." (2505-12)

Perhaps the word *bende* which he uses of the lace, is a reference to the "bend" on a heraldic device, in particular the "bend sinister," which indicated that the bearer is descended from an illegitimate ancestor.[223] Similarly, Gawain declares

---

[223]*The Oxford English Dictionary* furnishes this specialized definition of *bende:* "An ordinary formed of parallel lines drawn from the dexter chief to the sinister base of the shield...." whereas a *bend sinister* is "a similar ordinary drawn in the opposite direction: one of the marks of bastardy" (II. 105). Other definitions relevant to Gawain's *bende* are "A moral or spiritual bond or restraint"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

himself an illegitimate knight, ruined beyond repair. Though he never calls the lace a "bend sinister," he does call it "þe bend of þis blame" and assigns to the lace all of the negative qualities which he believes to have discovered in himself. As a token of "vntrawþe," it could be analogous to a form of spiritual "bastardry." It is interesting also that he refers to the "vntrawþe" as something that he was "tan inne," as if his fault were a narrow space or constricting bond in which he was caught, like the beasts hunted by Bertilak. This phrase also makes it seem as if Gawain had no part in his own transgression: rather than knowingly sinning, he sees himself as having been inadvertently caught in sin, as if in a trap.

The court has the ultimate authority to assign meaning to his new symbol, however. Instead of blaming him, the court adopts his outfit as a part of the dress of each member:

> Þe kyng comfortez þe kny3t, and alle þe court als
> La3en loude þerat and luflyly acorden
> Þat lordes and ladis þat longed to þe Table,
> Vche burne of þe broþerhede, a bauderyk schulde haue,
> A bende abelef hym aboute, of a bry3t grene,
> And þat, for sake of þat segge, in swete to were. (2513-8)

The court thus ultimately has the power to reappropriate and co-opt meanings which have been arrived at by individuals. However, the particular meaning which they assign to the baldric is uncertain. Do the knights laugh in sympathy with Gawain or because they simply do not understand his discovery? Do they wear the baldric in recognition that his fault is also their universal human error--for, as Shoaf has noted, Gawain has also "returned with the meaning of Arthur's court" (*The Poem as Green Girdle* 63) as well as his own--or simply to assuage Gawain's sense of shame? They assume that "for pat [the girdle] watz acorded pe renoun of pe Rounde Table" (2519). However, does this renown

---

and "Anything with which one's body or limbs are bound; a band, bond or fetter" (104).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

emerge from the fact that the court's empathy with Gawain and recognition of its own faults are admirable qualities, or is the court's sense of morals so skewed that it actually rewards Gawain for misbehavior?[224]

While these questions are left unanswered by the poet, the poem makes an attempt at closure, demonstrating how the court turns its interpretations into institutions and how Camelot has itself become a part of a codified romance tradition:

---

[224]Shoaf has an optimistic answer to this question: "Arthurian civilization and its ideal exemplar are not perfect and their imperfection is serious; but their awareness of their imperfection grants them a freedom and a recourse from superbia which suggests that Britain may not repeat the Fall of Troy. Similarly, the poem itself, less a pentangle than a green girdle, less a fixed icon than a fluid sign, is aware of its own limits as art...." (*The Poem as Green Girdle* 3). Other critics are more condemning of Camelot, suggesting that the courtiers' shrugging off of the girdle's penitential implications reveals their shallowness. Lindley characterizes the poem as "tragi-carnivalesque" because, for all that Gawain's experience would allow him to discover the multiplicity of meanings in the world--their "play"--in the end, he and the court try to reinstate the very meanings which Hautdesert had tested and questioned. In the poem, "Carnival...does not lead, as C.L. Barber would have it, 'through release to clarification,' but to a chaotic dissolution the only solution to which is the reimposition of order for the sake of order: Gawain's elaborate and patently inadequate attempt to expound his story by naming his sin, separating his antagonists into enemeies (the Lady), friends (Bertilak) and unmentionables (Morgan), and re-symbolizing himself as the knight of the green 'bende.' In the process, Gawain loses a world of discourse in which his identity, his relation to truth and to others, seemed certain, exchanging it for a world of (necessary but jerry-built) fictions" (Lindley 70). Fisher reads the reappropriation of the girdle as a simultaneous reappropriation of women; this reading is consonant with Heng's and my own analysis of the lace as a symbol of the Lady's body. In the court's reinterpretation of the girdle, "they not only convert the token of Gawain's dishonor into a sign of honor and take the 'un' off the 'vntrawþe.' They also make the private public, as the girdle moves into the domain of public currency and public signification. In this way, the privacy of the Lady and the privateness associated with her are erased, as is her relation to Gawain as the source of his dishonor. In one respect, then, the court's appropriation of the girdle suggests a way to rehabilitate the Lady and, by extension, the privateness, the pwer, and the sexuality of women. When women are made the public tokens of aristocratic honor (that is, of aristocratic men), then they can be admitted to the court; they can be the 'ladis' that with their 'lordes' 'longed to þe Table' (2515)" ("Taken Men" 98). Because the poem (and the poet) seem to cherish ambiguity and indeterminacy so, I would say that the poet leaves it open as to whether the court is to be praised for its compassion for Gawain or condemned for its misunderstanding of his transformation and its attempt to conceal the moral import of Gawain's "bende" through embracing it as a symbol of honor. Above all, the court's adoption of Gawain's lace as its collective symbol demonstrates the ability of society to reintegrate the marginal, to transform wrongdoing into bravery and brotherhood--which has been the poem's own project, with its rehabilitation of the womanizing Gawain (transforming him into a more Galahad-like exemplar of Camelot's virtues) and the adulterous Guinevere (through silencing her and making Lancelot absent), as well as its transformation of the traitor who had caused Troy's downfall into the builder of a new civilization.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

For þat watz acorded þe renoun of þe Rounde Table
And he honoured þat hit hade, euermore after,
As hit is breued in þe best boke of romaunce.
Þus in Arthurus day þis aunter bitydde--
Þe Brutus bokez þerof beres wyttenesse.
Siþen Brutus, þe bolde burne, bo3ed hyder fyrst,
After þe segge and þe asaute watz sesed at Troye,
Iwysse,
Mony aunterez herebiforne
Haf fallen suche er þis. (2519-28)

The story returns to its beginning with the fall of Troy, giving a sense of a continuous tradition as unbroken as the pentangle which Gawain had worn. However, the inconsistencies and disjunctions are overlooked: that Gawain's girdle, now a badge of honor for the entire court, was originally emblematic of a flaw, and that the founding of Britain followed the destruction of Troy. The text thus recreates the process of the colonization of meaning which had appeared in the beginning of the poem. All discordant elements, like Gawain's discovery of his fault (a discovery which is itself incomplete), are glossed over. When the court adopts his baldric, his own marginalization, as a sinner and a knight who has not met the expectations of a knight in general and the rumors about Gawain as a perfect knight in particular, is reversed and he is made central once more, the main figure in a grand tradition. The poet overlooks the fact, however, that the tradition itself is flawed if its central character is flawed.[225]

By relocating Gawain in an established tradition about chivalry and civilization, the poet has managed to evade the disquieting questions which

---

[225]C. Stephen Finlay argues that this indeterminacy at the end of the poem is part of the poem's very structure: "...turning to the whole poem we can see that...it makes or completes, in itself, the figure of the 'endeles knot.' By this confounding of linearity the problem of closure and the subsequent indeterminacy of meaning become part of the poem's closure, part of its defection of totalizing interpretations" (Finlay 456). I believe that this avoidance of closure (expressed through the figure of the girdle, not the "endeles knot" which it has supplanted, as Shoaf posits) is not just a literary choice on the part of the poet. It expresses his point about how society (here represented by the court) can rework meanings, even history itself, making itself into "pe best boke of romaunce". Not only the poem, but chivalric culture itself, has become the "text," and this text--like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*--avoids being contained within a single meaning.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Gawain's exploits have raised, questions about whether the meanings which society generates are skewed and whether society itself is the appropriate arbiter of both meaning and space. While Gawain's conflict had been caused by his own courtly values, and the court both recuperates Gawain's status and removes all traces of his misconduct by converting his token of a flaw to an honorable symbol which eventually becomes a tradition, the ending of the poem overlooks the disturbing fact that the court has actually based its ritualized code of honor on the denial of a human failing. Thus the court not only produces meanings but distorts them as well, as the poem itself does by glossing over the court's ambiguous reinterpretation of both Gawain's girdle and his sin. The poet concludes by doing for the court as the court has done for Gawain: sympathetically disguising its error and turning it into a ritualized gesture of honor--the codifying of the court in a traditional text, a privileged literary enclosure where it would be rendered impervious to harm. This literary enclosure is particularly important in the poet's time, during which the court was already losing, or had lost, its power to dictate social significance:

> All the codes and signs that we now think of as quintessential to the Age of Chivalry were, in their own time, already nostalgic gestures, simulations. Only in the margins can we see the class code in crisis, as cowardly knights flee from snails and get it from behind, their nobility usurped, sodomized, by inferiors in the social order. (*Image on the Edge* 111)[226]

With the chivalric system in crisis or eclipse, only in the "enclosure" of the text is the court able to preserve its central place. For the real courts of the late Middle Ages, the true invader and despoiler might not be so much the uncanny

---

[226]In the last sentence above, Camille is referring to art in the margins of texts written for knights, which frequently have anal imagery of creatures or weapons threatening to impale knights from behind. This anal imagery is particularly interesting in light of the intercourse which the rules of their game would have demanded of Bertilak and Gawain, were Gawain to have given in to the Lady's seduction attempt.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Green Knight but the forces of time itself, in the form of the seasons which struggle with each other in non-chivalric combat--the reality which is prevented from invading the text by the cut-paper walls of the poetic castle.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

# Works Cited

## Poems of Cotton Nero A. x.:

*The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript.* Ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron. Berkeley: U of California P, 1979.

## Primary Sources:

Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo.* Trans. E. B. Pusey. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951.

Bevington, David. *Medieval Drama.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.

*Biblia Sacra, Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem.* Ed. Robert Weber. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969.

Caxton, William. *Caxton's Mirrour of the World.* Ed. Oliver H. Prior. London: Oxford U P/Early English Text Society v. 110, 1913, rpt. 1966.

*Dictionary of the Middle Ages.* Ed. Joseph R. Strayer. New York: Scribner's, 1983.

Friar Jordanus. *The Wonders of the East, by Friar Jordanus, of the Order of Preachers and Bishop of Columbum in India the Greater (Circa 1330).* Ed. and trans. Col. Henry Yule. London: Hakluyt Society v. 31, 1863 (rpt. Franklin 1970).

Gregory the Great. *Morals on the Book of Job.* Ed. and Trans. James Bliss. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1945.

Hildegard von Bingen. *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works, With Letters and Songs.* Ed. Matthew Fox. Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Co., 1987.

Honorius Augustodunensis. *Imago Mundi (Delw Y Byd).* Ed. Henry Lewis and P. Diverres. Caerdydd, Wales: Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1988.

John of Würzburg. *Description of the Holy Land by John of Würzberg,* Trans. Aubrey Stewart. London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1895, rpt. 1971.

Ludolph von Suchem. *Ludolph von Suchem's Description of the Holy Land, and of the Way Thither.* Trans. Aubrey Stewart. London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1896, rpt. 1971.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*Mandeville's Travels: Texts and Translations.* Ed. Malcolm Letts. London: Hakluyt Society second series v. 101-2, 1953 (rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus, 1967).

*A Medieval Mirror: Speculum Humanae Salvationis, 1324-1500.* Ed. Adrian Wilson and Joyce Lancaster. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.

"The Monk of Evesham's Vision." *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante.* Ed. Eileen Gardiner. New York: Italica, 1989: 197-218.

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version.* Ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger. New York: Oxford U P, 1977.

Opicinus de Canistris. *Opicinus de Canistris: Weltbild und Bekenntnisse eines avignonesischen Klerikers des 14. Jahrhunderts.* Ed. Richard Salomon. London: Warburg Institute, 1936.

*The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2nd ed. Ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

Peter Damian. *The Book of Gomorrah: An Eleventh-Century Treatise Against Clerical Homosexual Practices.* Trans. Pierre J. Payer. Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier U P, 1982.

Polo, Marco. *The Travels.* Ed. and trans. Ronald Latham. Baltimore: Penguin, 1965.

Riehle, Wolfgang. *The Middle English Mystics.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

"Thurkill's Vision." *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante.* Ed. Eileen Gardiner. New York: Italica, 1989: 219-36.

"Tundale's Vision." *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante.* Ed. Eileen Gardiner. New York: Italica, 1989: 149-96.

"Wetti's Vision." *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante.* Ed. Eileen Gardiner. New York: Italica, 1989: 65-80.

White, T.H. *The Book of Beasts: Being a Translation of a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century.* New York: Dover, 1984.

Wilkinson, John, Joyce Hill and W. F. Ryan. *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099-1185.* London: Hakluyt Society second ser. v. 167, 1988.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

William of Rubruck. *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World, 1253-55, As Narrated by Himself.* Ed. and trans. William Woodville Rockhill. Nedeln, Liechtenstein: Hakluyt Society, 1900 (rpt. 1967).

**Secondary Sources:**

**Background: Interpretive Topography, Typology, Cultural Studies, Sexuality**

Appleton, Jay. *The Experience of Landscape.* New York: Wiley, 1975.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space.* Trans. Marie Jolas. Boston: Beacon, 1969.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. P, 1968.

Biddick, Kathleen. "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible." *Speculum* 68 (April 1993): 389-418.

Bloch, R. Howard. *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.

Bloomer, Kent and Charles Moore. *Body, Memory and Architecture.* New Haven: Yale U P, 1977.

Blunt, Alison and Gillian Rose. "Women's Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies." *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies.* Ed. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose. New York: Guilford, 1994: 1-25.

Boswell, John. *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

Brownlee, Kevin. "Discourses of the Self: Christine de Pizan and the Roman of the Rose." *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception.* Ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992: 234-61.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336.* New York: Columbia U P, 1995.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

---------. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.

---------. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion.* New York: Zone, 1991.

Campbell, Mary B. "'The Object of One's Gaze': Landscape, Writing, and Early Medieval Pilgrimage." *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination.* Ed. Scott D. Westrem. New York: Garland, 1991.

---------. *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1988.

Camille, Michael. "The Language of Images in Medieval England, 1200-1400." *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England.* Ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski. London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1987: 33-40.

------. "The Book of Signs: Writing and Visual Difference in Gothic Manuscript Illumination." *Word and Image* 1. 2 (April/June 1985): 133-48.

------. "Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy." *Art History* 8. 1 (March 1985): 26-49.

------. *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art.* Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1982.

Carruthers, Mary J. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge U P, 1990.

Chatwin, Bruce. *The Songlines.* New York: Penguin, 1987.

Cohen, Jeremy. *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-J udaism.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1982.

Cohn, Robert L. *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies.* Chico: Scholars Press, 1981.

Comito, Terry. *The Idea of the Garden in the Renaissance.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U P, 1978.

Curtius, Ernst Robert. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.* Trans. Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper and Row, 1953.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Di Marco, Vincent. "The Amazons and the End of the World." *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination.* Ed. Scott D. Westrem. New York: Garland, 1991: 69-90.

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1991.

Doob, Penelope Reed. *The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity Through the Middle Ages.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1990.

Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology.* New York: Pantheon, 1970.

-------. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

Dougherty, James. *The Fivesquare City: The City in the Religious Imagination.* Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1980.

Duby, Georges. *The Age of Cathedrals: Art and Society, 940-1420,* Trans. Elizabeth Levieux and Barbara Thompson. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981.

Ferguson, Margaret W. "Saint Augustine's Region of Unlikeness: The Crossing of Exile and Language." *Georgia Review* 29 (1975): 842-64.

Finke, Laurie A. "The Grotesque Mystical Body: Representing the Woman Writer." *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing.* Ed. Laurie A. Finke. Ithaca: Cornell U P , 1992: 75-107.

Fowler, David C. *The Bible in Middle English Literature.* Seattle: U of Washington P, 1984.

Freeman, Margaret B. *The Unicorn Tapestries.* New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976.

Friedman, John Block. *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1981.

Gardiner, F. C. *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971.

Gellrich, Jesse. *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology and Fiction.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1988.

Geremek, Bronislaw. *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge U P, 1987.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Goodich, Michael. *The Unmentionable Vice: Homosexuality in the Later Medieval Period.* Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1979.

Greenberg, David F. *The Construction of Homosexuality.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Harbison, Robert. *Eccentric Spaces.* New York: Knopf, 1981.

Harley, J. B. and David Woodward, eds. *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean.* Vol. 1 of *The History of Cartography.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Herrmann, Claudine. *The Tongue Snatchers.* Trans. Nancy Kline. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1989.

Holloway, Julia Bolton. *The Pilgrim and the Book: A Study of Dante, Langland and Chaucer.* New York: Peter Lang, 1987.

Howard, Donald R. *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and Their Posterity.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.

Jacquart, Danielle and Claude Thomasset. *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages.* Trans. Matthew Adamson. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1988.

Jager, Eric. *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1993.

Jordan, Robert. *Chaucer and the Shape of Creation: The Aesthetic Possibilities of Inorganic Structure.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1967.

Josopivici, Gabriel. *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction.* London: Macmillan, 1971.

Kendall, Ritchie D. *The Drama of Dissent: The Radical Poetics of Nonconformity, 1380-1590.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1986.

Kimble, George H. T. *Geography in the Middle Ages.* London: Methuen, 1938.

Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1975.

Labarge, Margaret Wade. *A Small Sound of the Trumpet: Women in Medieval Life.* Boston: Beacon, 1986.

Lochrie, Karma. "The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse." In *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

*and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies.* Ed. Allen J. Frantzen. Albany: SUNY P, 1991: 115-40.

Lutwack, Leonard. *The Role of Place in Literature.* Syracuse: Syracuse U P, 1984.

Male, Emile. *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century.* Trans. Dora Nussey. New York: Harper and Row, 1958.

Montrose, Louis. "The Work on Gender and Sexuality in the Elizabethan Discourse of Discovery." *Discourses of Sexuality from Aristotle to AIDS.* Ed. Domna C. Stanton. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992: 138-84.

Moore, Henrietta L. *Space, Text and Gender: An Anthropological Study of the Marakwet of Kenya.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge U P, 1986.

Nelson, Cary. *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space.* Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1973.

Nichols, Stephen G. *Romanesque Signs: Early Medieval Narrative and Iconography.* New Haven: Yale U P, 1983.

Nolan, Barbara. *The Gothic Visionary Perspective.* Princeton: Princeton U P, 1977.

Otter, Monika. "'Gaainable Tere': Symbolic Appropriation of Space and Time in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Vernacular Historical Writing." *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination.* Ed. Scott D. Westrem. New York: Garland, 1991: 157-77.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism.* Chicago: Chicago U P, 1957.

Parkes, James. *The Jew in the Medieval Community.* New York: Hermon, 1976.

Patterson, Lee. "Feminine Rhetoric and the Politics of Subjectivity: La Vielle and the Wife of Bath." *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose: Text, Image, Reception.* Ed. Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992: 316-58.

Payer, Pierre J. *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993.

Paz, Octavio. *The Monkey Grammarian.* Trans. Helen Lane. New York: Little, Brown, 1981.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Porteous, J. Douglas. *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990.

Preziosi, Donald. *Architecture, Language and Meaning: The Origins of the Built World and Its Semiotic Organization.* The Hague: Mouton, 1979.

Rambuss, Richard. "Pleasure and Devotion: The Body of Jesus and Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric." *Queering the Renaissance.* Ed. Johnathan Goldberg. Durham: Duke U P, 1994.

Randall, Lilian M. C. *Images in the Margins of Gothic Manuscripts.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.

Robertson, Elizabeth. "Medieval Medical Viewsof Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's *Showings.*" *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature.* Ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.

--------. "The Rule of the Body: The Feminine Spirituality of the *Ancrene Wisse.*" *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism.* Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989: 109-34.

Roth, Cecil. *A History of the Jews in England.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1964.

Schulz, Juergen. "Jacopo de' Barbari's View of Venice: Map Making, City Views, and Moralized Geography before the Year 1500." *Art Bulletin* 60 (1978): 425-74.

Shahar, Shulamit. *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages.* Trans. Chaya Galai. London: Methuen, 1983.

Shepard, Paul. *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature.* College Station: Texas A & M U P, 1991.

Spain, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces.* Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1992.

Spitzer, Leo. *Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word "Stimmung".* Ed. Anna Granville Hatcher. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1963.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe.* Ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986: 123-42.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stow, Kenneth R. *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1992.

Trachtenberg, Joshua. *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983.

Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process.* Chicago: Chicago U P, 1969.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience.* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1977.

--------. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974.

Turner, Victor and Edith. Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives. New York: Columbia U P, 1978.

van Baak, J. J. *The Place of Space in Narration: A Semiotic Approach to the Problem of Literary Space.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1983.

Vance, Eugene. *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages.* Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1986.

Verdier, Phillipe. "Woman in the Marginalia of Gothic Manuscripts and Related Works." *The Role of Woman in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Rosmarie Thee Morewedge. Albany: SUNY P, 1975: 121-60.

von Simson, Otto Georg. *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order.* New York: Pantheon, 1962.

Westrem, Scott, ed. *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination.* New York: Garland, 1991.

Wilson, Katharina M. and Elizabeth M. Makowski. *Wykked Wyves and the Woes of Marriage: Misogamous Literature from Juvenal to Chaucer.* Albany: SUNY P, 1990.

Woodward, David. "Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 75 (1985): 510-21.

Wright, John Kirtland. *Geographical Lore of the Time of the Crusades: A Study in the History of Medieval Science and Tradition in Western Europe.* New York: American Geographical Society, 1925.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Zacher, Christian. *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth Century England.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 1976.

**Theoretical Background**

Adams, Hazard and Leroy Searle. *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Tallahassee: U P Florida, 1986.

Barthes, Roland. "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss.* Ed. Richard T. De George and Fernande M. De George. New York: Anchor, 1972: 155-67.

Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1981.

---------. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1975.

Hartman, Geoffrey. "Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure." *Structuralism.* Ed. Jacques Ehrmann. New York: Anchor, 1970: 137-57.

Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art.* Ed. Leonard S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leonard S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia U P, 1980.

Lefkovitz, Lori Hope. "Creating the World: Structuralism and Semiotics." *Contemporary Literary Theory.* Ed. Douglas Atkins and Laura Morrow. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1989: 60-80.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. "Overture to le Cru et le cuit." *Structuralism.* Ed. Jacques Ehrmann. New York: Anchor, 1970: 31-55.

Lotman, Yurij, and B. A. Uspensky. "On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture." *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: U P of Florida, 1986: 410-23.

Said, Edward W. "Secular Criticism." *Critical Theory Since 1965.* Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee: U P of Florida, 1986: 605-24.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. "Course in General Linguistics." *The Structuralists: From Marx to Lévi-Strauss.* Ed. Richard T. De George and Fernande M. De George. New York: Anchor, 1972: 59-79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Scheffler, Harold W. "Structure in Anthropology." *Structuralism.* Ed. Jacques Ehrmann. New York: Anchor, 1970: 56-79.

Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Poetics and Poetics of Transgression.* Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1986.

***Pearl***

Bogdanos, Theodore. *Pearl, Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism.* London: Penn State U P, 1983.

Borroff, Marie. "Pearl's 'Maynful Mone': Crux, Simile and Structure." *Acts of Interpretation.* Ed. Mary Carruthers. Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1982: 159-72.

Clark, S. L. and Julian N. Wasserman. "The Spatial Argument of *Pearl:* Perspectives on a Venerable Bead." *Interpretations* 11 (1979): 1-12.

Field, Rosalind. "The Heavenly Jerusalem in *Pearl." Modern Language Review* 81.1 (January 1986): 7-17.

Finlayson, John. *"Pearl:* Landscape and Vision." *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 314-43.

Ginsburg, Warren. "Place and Dialectic in *Pearl* and Dante's *Paradiso." ELH* 55.4 (Winter 1988): 731-53.

Gordon, E. V., ed. *Pearl.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1953.

Johnson, Lynn Staley. *The Voice of the Gawain-Poet.* Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984.

Johnson, Wendell Stacy. "The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl:* Toward an Interpretation." *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays.* Ed. John Conley. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1970: 27-49.

Macrae-Gibson, O. D. *"Pearl:* The Link-Words and the Thematic Structure." *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays.* Ed. John Conley. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1970: 203-19.

Marti, Kenneth. *Body, Heart and Text in the Pearl-Poet* . Lampeter: Edwin Mellon, 1991.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nelson, Cary. *"Pearl:* The Circle as Figural Space." *The Incarnate Word: Literature as Verbal Space.* Ed. Cary Nelson. Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1973: 25-52.

Petroff, Elizabeth. "Landscape in *Pearl:* The Transformation of Nature." *The Chaucer Review* 16.2 (Fall 1981): 181-93.

Schotter, Anne Howland. "Vernacular Style and the Word of God: The Incarnational Art of Pearl." *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett.* Ed. Peter S. Hawkins et. al. New York: AMS, 1984: 23-34.

Stanbury, Sarah. *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception.* Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991.

---------. "Visions of Space: Acts of Perception in *Pearl* and Some Late Medieval Illustrated Apocalypses." *Medievalia* 10 (1988): 133-58.

Thorpe, Douglas. *A New Earth: The Labor of Language in Pearl, Herbert's Temple and Blake's Jerusalem.* Washington, DC: Catholic U of America P, 1991.

Vasta, Robert. "Immortal Flowers and the Pearl's Decay." *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays.* Ed. John Conley. Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1970: 185-202.

Watts, Ann Chalmers. *"Pearl,* Inexpressability and Poems of Human Loss." *PMLA* 99.1 (January 1984): 26-40.

### *Clannesse*

Braeger, Peter C. "The Portrayal of Lot in the Middle English *Cleanness."* *Mediaevalia* 11 (1985): 83-100.

Calabrese, Michael and Eric Eliason. "The Rhetorics of Sexual Pleasure and Intolerance in the Middle English *Cleanness." Modern Language Quarterly* 56: 3 (September 1995): 247-75.

Clark, S. L. and J. N. Wasserman. "The Significance of Thresholds in the *Pearl*-Poet's *Purity." Interpretations* 12 (1980): 114-27.

---------. "The *Pearl*-Poet's City Imagery." *Southern Quarterly* 16. 4 (July 1978): 297-309.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Davis, Adam Brooke. "What the Poet of *Patience* Really Did to the Book of Jonah."*Viator* 22 (1991): 267-78.

Frantzen, Allen J. "The Disclosure of Sodomy in *Cleanness.*" *PMLA* 111.3 (May 1996): 451-64.

Morse, Charlotte. *The Pattern of Judgment in the Queste and Cleanness.* Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1978.

--------. "The Image of the Vessel in *Cleanness.*" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 40 (1971): 202-216.

O'Bryan, Daniel W. "Sodom and Gomorrah: The Use of the Vulgate in *Cleanness.*" *Journal of Narrative Technique* 12. 1 (Winter 1982): 15-23.

Schreiber, Earl G. "The Structures of *Clannesse.*" *The Alliterative Tradition in the Fourteenth Century.* Ed. Levy, Bernard S. and Paul E. Szarmach. Kent: Kent State U P, 1981: 131-52.

Stanbury, Sarah. "In God's Sight: Vision and Sacred History in *Purity.*" *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet.* Ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller and Julian N. Wasserman. Troy: Whitson, 1991: 105-116.

Twomey, Michael W. "*Cleanness*, Peter Comestor, and the *Revelationes Sancti Methodii.*" Mediaevalia 11 (1985): 203-17.

Wallace, David. "*Cleanness* and the Terms of Terror." *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet.* Ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller and Julian N. Wasserman. Troy: Whitson, 1991: 93-104.

### *Patience*

Andrew, Malcolm. "The Diabolical Chapel: A Motif in *Patience* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Neophilologus* 66.2 (April 1982): 313-19.

--------. "Jonah and Christ in *Patience.*" *Modern Philology* 70. 3 (February 1973): 230-3.

Cairns, Francis. "Latin Sources and Analogues of the Middle English *Patience.*" *Studia Neophilologica* 59. 1 (1987): 7-18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Clark, S. L. and J. N. Wasserman. "Jonah and the Whale: Narrative Perspective in *Patience.*" *Orbis Litterarum* 35 (1980): 1-19.

Eldredge, Laurence. "Sheltering Space and Cosmic Space in the Middle English *Patience.*" *Annuale Mediaevale* 21 (1981): 121-33.

Faj, Attila. "Marbodean and Patristic Reminiscences in *Patience.*" *Revue de Littérature comparée* 49. 2 (April/June 1975): 284-90.

Glassman, Bernard. *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes Without Jews: Images of the Jews in England, 1290-1700.* Detrioit: Wayne State U P, 1975.

Padolsky, Enoch. "Steering the Reader's Heart in *Patience.*" *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* 53 (1983): 169-80.

Schmidt, Gary D. "'This Wrech Man in Warlowes Guttez': Imagery and Unity of Frame and Tale in *Patience.*" *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet.* Ed. Robert J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller, and Julian N. Wasserman. Troy: Whitson, 1991: 177-94.

Stokes, Myra. "'Suffering' in *Patience.*" *Chaucer Review* 18.4 (1984): 354-63.

### *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Ashley, Kathleen M. "Bonding and Signification in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" In *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet.* Ed. Robert. J. Blanch, Miriam Youngerman Miller and Julian N. Wasserman. Troy: Whitson, 1991: 213-20.

Batt, Catherine. "Gawain's Antifeminist Rant, the Pentangle, and Narrative Space." *Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 117-39.

Bergner, Heinz. "The Two Courts: Two Modes of Existence in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *English Studies* 67.5 (October 1986): 401-16.

Bergner, Sidney E. "Gawain's Departure from the *Peregrinatio.*" *Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association.* Vol. 2. Ed. Mark D. Johnston and Samuel M. Riley. Normal: Illinois State U P, 1985: 86-106.

Blanch, Robert J. "Imagery of Binding in Fits One and Two of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Studia Neophilologica* 54.1 (1982): 53-60.

Clein, Wendy. *Concepts of Chivalry in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1987.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. "A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Diacritics* 24. 2-3 (Summer-Fall 1994): 205-26.

Elliott, R. W. V. *The Gawain Country.* Leeds: University of Leeds School of English, 1984.

Farrell, Thomas J. "Life and Art, Chivalry and Geometry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Arthurian Interpretations* 2.2 (Spring 1988): 17-33.

Finlay, C. Stephen. "Closure and Indeterminacy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Papers on Language and Literature* 26.4 (Fall 1990): 445-58.

Fisher, Sheila. "Taken Men and Token Women in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism.* Ed. Sheila Fisher. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989: 71-105.

------. "Leaving Morgan Aside: Women, History, and Revisionism in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition.* Ed. Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe. New York: Garland, 1988: 129-51.

Ganim, John M. "Disorientation, Style and Consciousness in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *PMLA* 91.3 (1976): 376-84.

Gertz, Sun Hee Kim. "The Green Knight Teaches Gawain How to Read." *Semiotics 1984.* Ed. John Deely. Lanham: U P of America, 1985: 73-83.

Hanna, Ralph, III. "Unlocking What's Locked: Gawain's Green Girdle." *Viator* 14 (1983): 289-302.

Haruta, Setsuko. "The Women in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995: 206-14.

Heng, Geraldine. "Feminine Knots and the Other *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *PMLA* 106. 3 (May 1991): 500-14.

Howard, Donald R. "Structure and Symmetry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Speculum* 39 (1964): 425-33.

Lenz, Joseph M. *The Promised End: Romance Closure in the Gawain-Poet, Malory, Spenser and Shakespeare.* New York: Peter Lang, 1986.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Lindey, Arthur. "'Ther he watz dispoyled, with speche3 of myerthe'" Carnival and the Undoing of Sir Gawain." *Exemplaria* 6. 1 (Spring 1994): 67-86.

Newman, Florence. "Sir Gawain and the Semiotics of Truth." *Medieval Perspectives* 4-5 (1989-1990): 125-39.

Nickel, Helmut. "About Lace and Knot in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Quondam et Futurus* 1.1 (Spring 1991): 15-24.

Riddy, Felicity. "Nature, Culture and Gender in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." *Arthurian Romance and Gender: Selected Proceedings of the XVIIth International Arthurian Congress.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995: 215-25.

Shoaf, R. A. "The 'Syngne of Surfet' and the Surfeit of Signs in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *The Passing of Arthur: New Essays in Arthurian Tradition.* Ed. Christopher Baswell and William Sharpe. New York: Garland, 1988: 152- 69.

--------. *The Poem as Green Girdle: Commercium in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Gainesville: U P of Florida, 1984.

Spearing, A. C. *Readings in Medieval Poetry.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge U P, 1987.

------. *The Gawain-Poet: A Critical Study.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge U P, 1970.

Stanbury, Sarah. "Space and Visual Hermeneutics in the *Gawain*-Poet." *The Chaucer Review* 21.4 (1987): 476-89.

Stevens, Martin. "Laughter and Game in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Speculum* 47. 1 (January 1972): 65-78.

Weiss, Victoria L. "The Play World and the Real World: Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*" *Viator* 72. 4 (Fall 1993): 403-17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

## Biographical Statement

Margaret Hammitt-McDonald received her A.A.S. (Applied Sciences) from Keystone College in 1985 and her B.A. (English) from Fordham College in 1987. She continued her studies at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education, receiving an M.A.T. (Secondary Education in English) in 1990. She began her studies in the CUNY Graduate Center's Ph.D Program in English in September of 1990. She presently teaches Rhetoric and Composition at Bronx Community College. In addition to her academic and teaching responsibilities, she enjoys backpacking, rock climbing, creative writing, interpretive dance, exploring new ideas and making chain mail costumes.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.