V

MEETING ONE'S MAKER: THE JEWELER IN FITT V OF *PEARL*

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In Fitt V of *Pearl,* the concatenating term *jueler* draws attention to the conflicted identity of the narrator/Dreamer, whose grief, loss, and frustration configure the poem's emotional landscape and propel the narrative forward. Because the relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl Maiden is arguably the most significant aspect of *Pearl*, this particular fitt offers much that can illuminate our understanding of the poem as a whole. It is here that the Dreamer first explicitly uses the title of jeweler, an identity that is then challenged by the Maiden. The changing nature of the repeated word *jueler* is also echoed in the interpretive slippage of other words associated with jewelers, such as *cofer, perle,* and *juel.* Such shifting boundaries of signification allow the reader to see what the Dreamer/Jeweler does not: that his identity, as well as the Pearl Maiden's, cannot be defined in only one plane of existence and using only one set of terms or signifiers. Indeed, this resistance to singular meaning is characteristic of *Pearl* as a whole, as two of its editors state: "Allegorical significance and individualized character, grandiose meaning and local event, vertical and horizontal language, in a word, heaven and earth: in the *Pearl* poet these are at once joined and strangely broken off from one another."[1] As the heavenly and earthly interpretive paradigms slide into one another, the status of the Jeweler also shifts; the reader is never allowed to settle into one mode of reading, but instead is compelled to hold alternative hermeneutic models in mind simultaneously.

The ability to move between these opposing models and problematize their separation from one another is imperative to our

[1] Malcom Andrew and Ronald Waldron, eds., *The Poems of the* Pearl *Manuscript: Pearl, Cleanness, Patience, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2007), 17.

reading of *Pearl*; readers need not be restricted by these deceptively simple dualities. In his discussion of figurative typology in the poem, Allan Mitchell quotes Elizabeth Salter's assertion that *Pearl* is a poem of both "transformation and continuity" – of change as well as similitude.[2] Ideas, spaces, and objects are at once conflated and separated from one another in a process of reversals, negations, and semantic shifts, making it hard to sustain any black-and-white view of the poem as one structured by rigid dichotomies. In her treatment of *Pearl,* and in particular of the Jeweler/Dreamer, Helen Barr resists what she considers the traditional interpretation of the poem as a timeless world of oppositions featuring an "antagonistic polarity between the earthly and the heavenly, and between what is literal and what is figurative."[3] While she certainly does not reject the idea that *Pearl* highlights such dualities, she urges readers to see the poem also as enmeshed in complex networks of social and economic relationships that blur the boundaries between these structuring oppositions. Barr sees the narrator's self-identification as a jeweler as central to the poem's participation in contemporary social practices, arguing that this characterization "establishes a material consciousness right at the heart of the poem" and emphasizes the narrator's socially (and, extension, spiritually) ambivalent position. Jewelers could be wealthy merchants who regularly interacted with the aristocracy, but they were not aristocratic themselves; they were "both inside and outside aristocratic culture."[4] They occupied the uncomfortable nexus of wealth, power, and birthright, boasting possessions and certain social advantages yet having no noble family heritage or the privilege of leisure.[5] *Piers Plowman,* a contemporary poem with theological concerns similar to those of *Pearl,* explores the liminal status of merchants during the scene of Truth's pardon:

> Marchaunts in the margyne hadde manye yeres
> Ac no *A pena et a culpa* no Treuthe wolde hem graunt […]
> Ac under his secrete seel Treuthe sente hem a lettre
> And bad hem bugge boldely what hem best liked

[2] Allan Mitchell, "The Middle English 'Pearl': Figuring the Unfigurable," *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 87.
[3] Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40.
[4] Barr, *Socioliterary Practice,* 44.
[5] Barr, *Socioliterary Practice,* 43-44, 48.

> And seethe sullen hit ayeyn and save the wynnyng
> And amende meson-dewes therwith and myseyse men fynde.[6]

Merchants here are relegated to the margins of the pardon and the margins of Christian society. They will not be included in the general pardon sent to Piers by Truth, yet Truth gives them a way out through a special letter under his "secrete seel" that promises them protection as long as they make up for their mercantile misdeeds by becoming more altruistic with their wealth. As a self-identified jeweler, the Dreamer occupies this mercantile and marginal space, and the difficulty he experiences in his interactions with the Maiden throughout the poem is due, in part, to his lack of a stable social identity, as Barr demonstrates. However, it strikes me that the shifting social positions of the Maiden and the Dreamer – the nature of their vexed relationship, in other words – is what makes the "antagonistic polarity" of their spiritual states and places that much more interesting. Barr's interpretation of the Dreamer/Jeweler as a socially liminal mercantile figure offers a way for readers to reconsider the larger dualities that structure the poem. While these dualities remain a presence throughout one's reading of *Pearl,* their stability and moral resonance are constantly changing.

Introducing the Jeweler

Before proceeding to a more comprehensive commentary on the narrator as jeweler in Fitt V, we must first consider the introduction to the narrator's role, which we find in the first stanza of the poem. Its place at the beginning does, as Barr argues, indeed establish a material consciousness in the reader's horizon of poetic expectations. The descriptions in this section reveal that the Dreamer is not just a man or a father, but an artisan, merchant, and/or collector of beautiful things. His attitude to his own jewel and the jeweled landscape reveals a "focus on courtliness mediated through the discourse of commodification."[7] In his fascination with his pearl and the jewels around him, he demonstrates his preoccupation with the social capital to be accrued through wealth and possession of objects. Ian Woodward, considering the

[6] *Piers Plowman* C:9:22-30. See also D. Vance Smith, *Arts of Possession: the Middle English Household Imaginary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), particularly Chapter 4, "Merchants in the Margins."
[7] Barr, *Socioliterary Practice,* 45.

relationships between human subjects and physical objects, suggests that objects become extensions of our own identity and deeply associated with our own social portrayal: "try to picture Jimmy Hendrix without his guitar, Satchmo without a trumpet, Groucho Marx without a cigar, Charlie Chaplin without his cane, a bus conductor without his portable ticket machine."[8] A jeweler without his pearl is no longer a jeweler; his identity is effaced, and he must cultivate a new one or recover his precious stone. For both Barr and Woodward, objects carry deep social signification by marking one's membership in specific communities.

It becomes increasingly clear, of course, that the Dreamer, whether or not he possesses his jewel, does not actually understand true courtly behavior or how to participate in that particular community. Instead, he has misunderstood wealth and beauty as constituting courtliness. His rich and impassioned description of the pearl in the first several lines of the poem is supposed to be compelling because, the stanza suggests, he has expertise in such things: "Ne proued I neuer her precios pere… Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye / I sette hyr sengeley in synglure" (4, 7-8). In these lines, the poet draws the reader's attention not primarily to the position of the Dreamer but to his most valued object: his pearl. The Dreamer judges the pearl's economic and social value by describing it as fit for a prince, surpassing even those exotic gems that come "oute of oryent"; its beauty and proportions (lines 6-7) are ideal. However, he also claims he can judge its more spiritual and metaphorical value when he tells us that he set her above all the rest because she is unique, precious, and pure (lines 7-8). He assesses gems; he determines their value. The Dreamer's focus on the beauty of his lost jewel, his sorrow at his loss, and his ability to judge its value all support Felicity Riddy's argument that *Pearl* "is positioned at the meeting-point between aristocratic and urban values which sanction acquisitiveness: the desire to own beautiful things, the taste to recognize and commission them, the leisure to enjoy them."[9] While the Dreamer, both here and later, uses his experience with jewels to affiliate himself with the courtly community, the reader should recognize the problems with deploying possessions and free

[8] Ian Woodward, *Understanding Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 152.
[9] Felicity Riddy, "Jewels in Pearl," in *A Companion to the Gawain-Poet*, ed. by Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 150.

time as markers of nobility. In particular, leisure is important here. The Dreamer is not historically embedded as an urban-dwelling, hard-working merchant; instead, he is a wanderer who ends up falling asleep in the grass while looking for something, much like the narrator Will in *Piers Plowman.* Will's character is problematic in part because of his lack of a clearly defined social role in the community, and it seems that *Pearl*'s Dreamer is similarly troublesome if one considers the social and not just the symbolic valence of his position.

The question of how literally we can take the Dreamer's role as jeweler is a vexed one. Although scholars such as Barr, Riddy, and John Bowers have more recently explored historicized interpretations of the Jeweler and read *Pearl* as contingent upon specific systems of economic and social exchange, [10] most scholarship over the decades has deployed a symbolic interpretation of the jeweler figure. As I indicated earlier, I believe the social matrix hinted at in the poem's jewel and jeweler references can offer a useful way of connecting or complicating the text's more obvious spiritual dichotomies. Riddy emphasizes the poem's place within "an aristocratic luxury system,"[11] citing not so much its literary value but the way the poetic focus on jewels may have echoed the luxury goods that surrounded or even enclosed the codex itself. This example of an economic understanding of the poem does not, however, exclude a symbolic reading; in fact, one could say that it parallels the symbolic enclosure of the Maiden, as a "jewel" herself, within the divine landscape that now functions as her "cofer" or jewelry box. Bowers's work explores the broad semantic range of the word "jeweler," which could refer to makers, keepers, and deliverers of jewels, but also emphasizes the close links between jewelers and goldsmiths, who had a solid relationship of patronage and gifting with the king.[12] The goldsmith/jeweler association lends support to Bowers's argument that the "longstanding social tensions between artisan and patron serve as an almost subliminal subtext in *Pearl* for the contentions and misunderstandings" between the Jeweler and the Pearl Maiden.[13] Indeed, the fraught power dynamics

[10] See Riddy, "Jewels," 143-56, and John Bowers, *The Politics of Pearl: Court Poetry in the Age of Richard II* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).
[11] Riddy, "Jewels," 148.
[12] Bowers, *Politics,* 103-5.
[13] Bowers, *Politics,* 105.

between artisan and patron – the question of who owns the art produced, of who can determine the value of the art, who truly "makes" a beautiful jewel – are evident in the Dreamer/Jeweler's blindness, disappointment, and erroneous assumptions about what his relationship with "his" creation (his Pearl) was, and what it is supposed to be. As these brief examples demonstrate, the symbolic and socio-historical readings of the narrator are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, they often support one another.

Tony Davenport responds to these recent historicized interpretations of *Pearl* with skepticism, arguing that *Pearl*'s lack of technical jewel vocabulary and the ambiguous nature of the title "jeweler" render a historical or social reading tenuous. He suggests that the wider cultural associations of jewels and jewelers – wealth, possession, luxury – offer a more useful way to understand the Dreamer, who is a "leisured being whose state of life is determined by possession and loss".[14] Despite Davenport's stated opposition to historicized readings, his position here is very similar to that taken by Felicity Riddy, discussed above. The Dreamer is not an artisan hard at work over the precious objects he shapes and sells; instead, he wants the pleasure and social elevation of owning and being associated with those objects. This "excess of possessiveness" is, Davenport argues, particularly evident throughout Fitt V, where the Dreamer's status as a jeweler is highlighted.[15] However, Davenport's own focus on the fraught nature of the term "jeweler" and the Dreamer's life of leisure actually reinforces the significance of some of the social readings he questions. As discussed above, the socially ambivalent position of jewelers with respect to their aristocratic patrons parallels the spiritually ambivalent position of the Dreamer with respect to the Maiden. Moreover, the Dreamer's failure to perform adequately as a jeweler indicates not just his failure as an artisan, but his inability to participate properly in the courtly circles with which he would be loosely associated, and by extension, the wider discourse of courtliness itself.

Susannah Fein has recently argued for yet another level on which we can understand the nature of the Jeweler: the

[14] Tony Davenport, "Jewels and Jewellers in *Pearl*," *The Review of English Studies* 59 no. 241 (2008): 513.
[15] Davenport, "Jewels," 513-4.

hagiographical.[16] Fein highlights features of several different medieval texts, including the Apostle John's hagiographies, illustrated Apocalypses, and lapidaries that connect St. John to jewels and judgers of jewels. For example, two stories from John's *Vita* involve the transformation or restoration of precious jewels, and the *North Midland Lapidary* and *Pearl* itself refer to John's naming of the stones that constitute the gates of Heaven. Fein suggests that the Dreamer functions as a shadow of St. John, and therefore becomes a figure whose insufficiencies are all too clear in the light of the apostle's sharp discernment and skill in valuation.

In Fitt I, therefore, the respective identities of both the Maiden and the Dreamer are initially configured according to their roles as jewel and jeweler, the made and the maker, but these identities are almost immediately destabilized. By Fitt V it becomes increasingly clear that the dichotomies associated with these roles (creator and created, organic and mineral, nature and humanity, pure and impure) are collapsing into one another. The power structures are reversed in this fitt as the jeweler, the one with the power to preserve, judge, and craft his jewels, cannot recognize what or where the Pearl is, nor can he recognize her true nature and value. This, in turn, implies either that he himself cannot be a jeweler, a judge of gems, or that the Pearl is not a real jewel. The identities of the Dreamer as well as the Pearl break down and the reader must begin reassembling them. Fitt V is a key moment in this process of breakdown and reconstruction as it begins to develop a vision of the Dreamer's ideal internal state – that is, the individual identity to which he should aspire.

Describing the Jeweler

Beginning at the formal level, Fitt V is framed or marked by a circular progression of adjectival phrases attached to *jueler* in the final line of each stanza: *joyless jueler, gentyl jueler, no kynde jueler, joyfol jueler, no joyfol jueler.* These phrases reinforce the ambiguous nature of this title and its relationship to the Dreamer's stalled spiritual and personal growth. The first stanza concludes with the Dreamer stating that he has "ben a joyless jueler" (252) since his pearl has been taken away from him. The second stanza's final line is the Maiden's comment that the Dreamer would be able to join her in her spiritual

[16] Susannah Fein, "Of Judges and Jewelers: *Pearl* and the Life of Saint John," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36 (2014): 41-76.

reincarnation only if he "were a gentyl jueler" (264). In the third stanza, the concluding line is the Maiden's condemnation that "Thou [the Dreamer] art no kynde jueler" (276), and the final line of the fourth stanza is the Dreamer's assertion that if he joined the Maiden "byyonde thise wawes / I were a joyfol jueler" (287-8). The final stanza of Fitt V ends with the Maiden's hard statement that the Dreamer is deluded about his assumption that he can cross the river to join her: "That may no joyfol jueler" (300). While the Dreamer moves from joyless to joyful in his misrecognition of where the Maiden is and how she got there, the final stanza clarifies that a joyful jeweler – that is, the state in which the Dreamer imagines himself to be fulfilled – cannot move to the new spiritual life that the Maiden represents. Casey Finch's translation of this line in Andrew and Waldon's edition of *Pearl* changes the resonance somewhat: he translates the Middle English lines "þe þrydde, to passe þys water fre: / þat may no joyful jueler" (299-300) to "You last aver / You'll wade this water easily. / You can't at all, my joyless jeweler!" The possessiveness of the phrase "my joyless jeweler" implies a changing power dynamic that is not apparent in the Middle English line, although it offers an interesting reversal of the Dreamer's sense of possession over the Pearl. Moreover, the translation's change from joyful to joyless in line 300 prevents the fitt from circling back to the "joyful" jeweler of the first stanza. Such circularity is structurally important in *Pearl* and should not be dismissed.

The change of "joyful" to "joyless" in Finch's translation also releases the reader from the need to evaluate why a joyful jeweler is problematic. Why can not a joyful jeweler (that is, one who now sees that the Pearl is no longer lost) join his jewel on the other side of the river? The Maiden earlier condemned the Dreamer for losing his joy because he lost a gem (lines 265-6), and now she says that no joyful jeweler can cross the waves to be with her. The pattern of joyless/joyful in this fitt, as well as the Maiden's response to those feelings, suggests that the Dreamer's focus on his joy or lack thereof is ultimately self-centered; he is unable to see beyond his own pleasure. Moreover, as Fitt VI reveals, one can only cross the water by first crossing through the earth – that is, passing through the grave, as the Maiden admonishes: "Thy corse in clot mot calder keve" (320). The Maiden herself experienced this when she, as a pearl, fell to the earth, "thurgh gresse to grounde" (10), before appearing near the New Jerusalem on the other side of the water. Only by going through the dark earth and "drwyry deth"

(323), thus temporarily releasing the grasping desire for earthly pleasure and joy, can the spiritual seeker achieve the ultimate place of deeper spiritual happiness. The progression of the *jueler* adjectives reveals that it is the Dreamer himself who values being a joyful jeweler; the Maiden, on the other hand, values spiritually-inflected characteristics such as gentility, nobility, courtesy, and selflessness. In the concluding lines of the second and third stanzas, she offers the possibility of spiritual transition for the Dreamer if only he was a "gentyl jueler" (264), but then condemns his anger and misunderstanding, concluding that he must *not* be a "kynde jueler" (276). While *kynde* and *gentyl* are not quite synonymous, their semantic range has a significant overlap.[17] The distinction between these framing adjectives (joyful versus gentle/courteous) allows Fitt V to articulate two systems of value: one's own pleasure versus bringing pleasure to others through graciousness and gentility.

From the beginning of Fitt V, it is clear that the Dreamer does not comprehend the distinction between self-centered pleasure and other-centered pleasure, or, correspondingly, the difference between the pleasures of earth and the pleasures of the New Jerusalem. The fact that the Dreamer's joy as a jeweler is contingent upon his ownership of his pearl calls to mind a parallel scene of emotional distress in the apocalyptic Book of Revelation:

> And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her [Babylon]; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet… And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing.[18]

[17] For example, although *kynde* often refers to something that is natural, this sense of the word also extends to heredity. The *Middle English Dictionary*'s third entry for this word concerns birthrights, legitimacy, and inheritance – all issues that populate the medieval discourse surrounding gentility and nobility.

[18] Revelation 18:11-15 (King James Version).

As Fein argues (discussed above), the apostle John, who wrote the Book of Revelation, was represented in medieval hagiographies as a judge and even a creator of gems, and yet one who did not seek to keep or sell them for profit. His attitude to the jewels he judges is in opposition to the merchants he describes in Revelation. The actual physical value of the jewels was irrelevant to St. John; what was significant to his spiritual credibility was his ability to discern their value. The Dreamer, on the other hand, wants to own his jewel's value. Materialism and possessiveness are closely linked to his joyful- or joylessness. Like the Babylonian merchants, he bewails the loss of his wealth without realizing that his wealth was never his to begin with. He wants the Pearl near him because she brings him joy, and the reason she brings him joy is that her very existence allows him to think of himself as her creator, keeper, and protector. Because he presents himself as a jeweler – as one who crafts jewels, who determines their value, and who controls their public circulation – his state of emotional satisfaction is dependent on the status of his jewel(s).

Stanza I (Lines 241 – 252)

However, it is clear from the beginning of Fitt V that "the state of being a 'jueler' is one that the dreamer lays claim to but does not earn."[19] Upon seeing the Pearl Maiden, the Dreamer's first question in the opening lines of Fitt V is whether she actually is the pearl that he lost: "'O perle,' quoþ I, 'in perlez pyȝt / Art þou my perle þat I haf playned'" (241-2). He thinks he recognizes her, but is not quite certain. This moment of near misrecognition occurs immediately after the conclusion of Fitt IV, in which the Maiden removes her crown and greets him; she attempts to bridge the gap between them by voluntarily lowering herself in an act of true gentility or *kynde*. However, the Dreamer's selfish focus on his own joylessness (due to his supposed loss of a possession) renders him unable to recognize the Maiden's new status and respond with the appropriate gentility to her. Instead, he appears to accuse her of misleading him, of forcing him into sorrow while she herself enjoys the lavish fruits of the dreamscape garden: "Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned, / And thou in a lyf of lykyng lyghte / In Paradys erde, of stryf unstrained" (246-8). His resentment, which he also extends to the fate ("wyrde") that tore her away from him, is co-existent with his joy at

[19] Davenport, "Jewels," 509.

rediscovering the Maiden. These twinned emotions result in the passive-aggressive tone of this first stanza, which concludes not with the Dreamer's statement of his newfound joy, but of his previous joylessness.

Stanza II (Lines 253 – 264)

Because the Dreamer responds to the Maiden's gracious greeting with an inappropriate focus on his own emotions, in the second stanza of Fitt V the Maiden is compelled to reinforce her status by replacing her crown (255) and chastising the Dreamer for his inability to move past his own interpretive horizon and, by extension, his own selfishness. Not only can the Dreamer not interpret or "read" the Maiden correctly, but he is also unable to provide an accurate account of his own experience. The Maiden tells him that "ȝe have your tale mysetente" (257) – in his telling of his story, he has distorted it. While the Dreamer saw death and destruction in his pearl's departure, the Maiden's speech reveals that the signifiers of death are simultaneously signifiers of new life: the "cofer" (coffin) that he imagines has taken away his pearl forever is actually a different kind of "cofer" – a jewelry box, in which the pearl is safely preserved and "comly clente" (beautifully enclosed) (259). The Maiden then extends this interpretation of "cofer" to the garden itself as a place of heavenly, perfected enclosure, changed from the darkness of the earth to which the pearl initially fell. This idealized garden is the reality of the coffin the Dreamer imagines. The Dreamer's failure to recognize these semantic shifts is a consequence of his preoccupation with his own joyfulness and his related inability to participate in an exchange of appropriate gentility with the Maiden. She tells him reprovingly that the same kind of coffer or jewelry box would be available for him as well, if only he "were a gentyle jueler" (264).

Stanza III (Lines 265 – 276)

As the Maiden continues her speech in the third stanza, she clarifies to the Dreamer that not only does he not recognize the changed nature of the Pearl now, but he did not truly understand what the Pearl was before. He did not realize that the Pearl/pearl[20] in its previous form was like a transitory rose rather than an

[20] The Maiden implies that the pearl that he lost is not the same entity as the Pearl that he found.

unchanging jewel: "For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose / Þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef" (269-70). The idea of the pearl being at once transitory and permanent is not unique in the medieval mystical tradition. The word *gemma,* the Latin root of the English word "gem" that the poem uses synonymously with "jewel," can refer to either a plant bud or a jewel – both the transitory and the permanent, in other words. Sara Ritchey points out that Hildegard von Bingen used both senses of the word together when she described the flesh of Christ in such terms, as both earthly and heavenly: "the word [*gemmae*] implied here that Christ's body is a living tree that forever buds new branches through the work of the virgins/virtues on earth, though in heaven he was festooned with jewels rather than leaves."[21]

Like the Pearl Maiden's body, Christ's body manifests at once in both planes: the temporal and organic, and the permanent and divine. It is therefore natural or "kynde," the Maiden implies, that the pearl disappeared into the ground only to be divinely re-formed. In the next line she uses the same term ("kynde") to describe the chest or box (the "kyste") that enclosed and transformed the earthly Pearl into the eternal "perle of prys" (272). Since the Dreamer has hastily and erroneously "called thy wyrde a thef" (273) – that is, blamed divine providence for taking his possession rather than recognizing the true nature of the pearl's transformation – he is "no kynde jueler" (275). He does not understand the true, pure, natural ("kynde") course of the pearl's existence, and therefore he cannot be a "kynde jueler" himself. He cannot be a judge of gems because he does not realize the full range of meanings that the pearl embodies, and which the Maiden has covered in a few short lines: the pearl as at once a transitory jewel, dead child, divine graciousness, and the Biblical representation of eternal value (the pearl of great price). Worse, he "blamez þe bote," or blames the cure (275); he is resentful about the Pearl's new spiritual incarnation because it means that he, as a mortal, has lost his bauble. Here, at the end of stanza three in Fitt V, the Dreamer and the Pearl Maiden are more distant from one another than they were at the beginning of the poem, when he could not see her at all. He expected to recover the possession he created, when in fact he is encountering one who now represents the God who created *him.*

[21] Sara Ritchey, *Holy Matter: Changing Perceptions of the Material World in Late Medieval Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 68.

Stanza IV (Lines 277 – 288)

The first lines of stanza four at first appear to be a reflection of the Dreamer's thoughtful acceptance of the Maiden's difficult words: "A juel to me þen watz þys geste / And juelez wern hyr gentyle sawez" (277-8). However, given the fact that the Maiden has just challenged the Dreamer's status as a jeweler, his insistence on focusing on her and her speech as jewel-like seems to be a stubborn resistance to that challenge. He does not want to feel disenfranchised; he still wishes to hold the power of judging gems. He has ignored the Maiden's condemnation of his abilities and, moreover, he has ignored an important moment in which she shows that he himself is a created thing and not the creator. When she accuses him of calling the "Wyrde" (fate or God) a thief several lines earlier, she describes the "Wyrd" as "þat o3t of no3t hatz made þe cler" – that is, God has made him, the Dreamer, out of nothing (274). While many earlier critics understood this line to refer to the pearl, Alfred Kellogg has shown through Middle English precedent and syntax that it must refer to the "Wyrd"s creation of the Dreamer himself. The Maiden's offense at the Dreamer's attitude stems from the fact that the Dreamer accuses God of thievery – the very God who created the Dreamer out of nothing.[22]

The Dreamer's description of the Maiden's statements as gentle words ("gentle sawez") in the fourth stanza therefore seems increasingly inappropriate the more one considers it. Like the friars in *Piers Plowman* who "glosed þe gospel as hem good likede"[23] – that is, who interpreted Scripture to suit their own desires – the Dreamer "glosses" the Maiden according to his wishes. Furthermore, just as he misreads his own jewel, the Maiden herself, he also misreads the "jewels" that constitute her words to him. While they are "gentle" in the sense that they reflect the Maiden's discursive courtesy and gentility, their message is anything but soft or easy. By this point in the poem, we cannot trust the Dreamer's ability to recognize appropriate gentility, and therefore his judgment of the Maiden's words as gentle – whatever semantic register this adjective occupies – is fraught with problems. He cannot accept her judgment of him, and therefore he reduces her speech to soft-spoken, lady-like

[22] Alfred Kellogg, "Note on Line 274 of the 'Pearl'" *Traditio* 12 (1956): 406-7.

[23] *Piers Plowman* C Prol: 58.

platitudes rather than a powerful spiritual condemnation and correction.

This reduction of the Maiden and her speech is even more pronounced in his use of the term "geste" in line 277, the first line of this stanza: "A juel to me then was thys geste." "Geste" can mean either "guest" or "story", from the French "geste" (as in the *chanson de geste*). The Dreamer is either referring to the Maiden as a guest who is a precious jewel to him (suggesting possessiveness), or to her words as a story, a fable. It is likely that both meanings of the word resonate; the second meaning suggests the dismissal of her statements as a flight of fancy, which parallels his general reduction of her authority, and the first is reinforced two lines later when he calls her "*my* blysfol beste" (emphasis mine). His resistance to her authority and her right to judge him continues beyond this fitt, becoming particularly clear in Fitt IX where he refuses to accept that she could be an actual queen in Heaven (492). His focus in Fitt V on the jewel-like nature of her speech and his refusal to fully recognize her judgments is his own missed opportunity; while this should have been the time that he examined his own perspective more thoroughly, he instead slides back into objectifying the Maiden, offering trite apologies (281), but essentially remaining spiritually stagnant. His attitude has not changed since the moment he met the Maiden and was enraptured with her beautiful jeweled appearance.

The remainder of this stanza foregrounds the Dreamer's lack of spiritual progress. His focus remains on his own state of emotional satisfaction as he shrugs off the Maiden's revelations by focusing on his ownership of the pearl and how its "recovery" has made him happy again: "My grete dystresse thou [the Maiden] al todrawes [relieves] /…I trawed my perle don out of dawes [I thought my pearl was lost] / Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste [rejoice]" (282-4). It is not the pearl's transformation that is important to the Dreamer, despite what the Maiden shared with him; it is the pearl's proximity to him and his control over it/her. He goes on to say, in his naïve gladness, that he will live with the pearl in the bright forest groves ("schyr wod-schawes") and love the God who has "broght thys blysse ner" to him (284-6). His focus on his own pleasure leads him to the arrogant conclusion that he will live with the Maiden in her new heavenly location after she has just told him he could not. His syntax also hubristically implies that he will love God *because* He has brought the Dreamer's "blysse" near. The Dreamer concludes this

summary of his intentions by saying that if he were beyond the waves (that is, across the river), he would be a joyful jeweler.

Stanza V (Lines 289 – 300)

In the final stanza of Fitt V, the Maiden responds to the Dreamer's shallow self-centredness with anger and derision. Her response to the Dreamer does to him what his response did to her: it reduces his speech to insignificance. She begins by highlighting his foolishness by suggesting that he must be making a joke: "Wy borde [joke] ye men? So madde ye be!" (290). His words cannot be authentic. Following this, she tells him that he has spoken three things without knowledge of what he says: "Thre words has thou spoken at ene / Unavysed, for sothe, wern alle thre / Thou ne woste in world quat on dos mene / Thy worde byfore thy wytte con fle" (291-3). Her condemnation empties the Dreamer's speech of signification, essentially reversing his treatment of her. She concludes by naming each incorrect statement: that he believes she is in the valley because he can see her; that he will live with her there; and that he will pass through the water. All of these, she finishes, cannot be done by a "joyfol jueler" (300). The Maiden's recognition of how the Dreamer attempts to negate her speech, and her quick and cutting reversal of that negation, reinforce the power dynamic that was implied when she replaced her crown. While her former existence as his jewel demonstrated the Dreamer's power, skill, and judgment, her reincarnation from the transitory to the divinely permanent reveals the Dreamer's true inadequacies. Instead of the item he crafted or made, the Pearl is now the figure he aspires to become and a representative of the Divine Being who created him. The poem is a quest not just for spiritual recuperation and fulfillment, but for personal spiritual identity.

Jennifer Garrison emphasizes *Pearl*'s "explicit focus on interiority and emotional reform rather than social acts,"[24] an observation that speaks to the significance of individual identity in the poem – an issue that was not often considered in Middle English poetry. Although personal identity was not a foreign concept to a medieval reader, it did not hold the same value as it did in later centuries. More often the self was configured along the lines of the

[24] Jennifer Garrison, "Liturgy and Loss: *Pearl* and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject," *The Chaucer Review* 44.3 (2010): 303.

community.[25] Identity, even in its most individual manifestations, was therefore considered to be formed externally rather than internally. The medieval tradition of moral exempla is an example of how identity formation was imagined on a practical level; an external model was required in order to sustain a sense of individual identity. While the Dreamer thinks that the Pearl Maiden's identity rests in his hands, it becomes clear that, in fact, she is the external model that should inform *his* identity. Rather than the made and the known, the Maiden is now a Lacanian Other who is at once ultimately unknowable but also desirable, whether that desire is understood as a need for God and redemption or for personal, human fulfilment. The Dreamer's desire to recover the Pearl transforms into a desire to be like her, and this desire is unachievable. Gregory Roper sees this kind of identity formation as a penance based on the subject's ability to follow a guiding model: the dreamer "must confront the weak self he has become and find a way to reshape that self on a new model, the one which the Pearl-maiden provides…he comes to a task which is not merely recovery of his pearl, but a recover of his own proper 'I'."[26]

The Dreamer therefore sees in the Maiden his own potential completion, although in Fitt V he still misunderstands the nature of that completion. At this stage, he still views the Maiden as something belonging to him, something functioning as an accessory that reinforces his role as a jeweler. He does not yet understand that his preoccupation with his so-called possession and the emotional satisfaction he gains from that are preventing him from attaining true spiritual transformation. Like the body of Christ as considered by Hildegarde von Bingen, the Pearl exceeds the categories of owned/owner, human/inanimate, and temporal/permanent. It is not the Dreamer's object; it is a "thing" in the sense used by Bill Brown, who defines thingness as "what is excessive in objects...what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects - their force as a sensuous presence....the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols and totems".[27] This "excessiveness" in the pearl is what renders it out of the Dreamer's

[25] David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing, 1360-1430* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 4.
[26] Gregory Roper, "*Pearl*, Penitence, and the Recovery of the Self," *The Chaucer Review* 28.2 (1993): 165.
[27] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2001): 5.

control, despite his initial illusion of ownership. She becomes something beyond him, and something which he longs to become. Her identity is "non-cognitive and unrepresentable" to the Dreamer at this point, and therefore his words are doomed to fall short of encompassing his relationship to her.[28]

Since Fitt V concerns the complexity of the Dreamer's role as jeweler and a judger (or mis-judger) of gems, it is appropriate that the repeating word in next fitt is *deme* – to judge, or judgment. Fitt V revealed that while the Jeweler should be able to judge gems accurately, in reality he judges the Pearl incorrectly at every turn. His erroneous judgments problematize his self-proclaimed identity and highlight his loss of power. Fitt VI focuses on this idea of judgment and extends it beyond the Dreamer and the Maiden to God Himself as the ultimate judge of human worth. Because in Fitt V the Dreamer can only hope to make a pretense of true judgment and discernment in his own actions, he experiences harsh and accurate judgment by the Maiden in Fitt VI. It is clear that he can no longer rely on artifice, on glittering surfaces that actually conceal hollow misunderstandings; he must be judged and exposed before he can become the "kynde" jeweler that the Maiden wishes him to be.

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[28] Mitchell, "The Middle English 'Pearl'", 92.

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