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Pearl's Body: Spotting an Identity

Throughout *Pearl*, a Middle-English poem presumably created by the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, an alteration is taking place. The body of Pearl is presented as previously infantile and feminine, and thus alien to the notion of possessing, an entity contacted via the sense of touch. The visionary encounter the Dreamer has with his lost property, often interpreted as the figure representing his child, places the focus of the contact onto the sense of sight, which is associated also with the physical distance imposed onto the two characters. The change of Pearl's identity, or maybe even the fact of her having acquired one, may be viewed in the light of the theory of childhood created by Jacques Lacan and its feminist critique, or even its reworking, accomplished by Luce Irigaray. Hence Pearl can be perceived as a character who has transcended the boundary of the mirror stage, and as a female child masculinized under the influence of the Law-of-the-Father.

Pearl, not unlike most other literary works representing the dream vision as a genre, strives to present the visionary experience as such and its outcome for the mental state of the dreamer. Derek Brewer thus formulated the purpose of using the dream vision as a genre in the literature of the time:

It was the essential vehicle of the love-vision, and *Le Roman de la Rose* had set the fashion. A dream is so internal and unverifiable, yet so authentically personal; so vivid, yet so free from

everyday limitation of cause and effect; obviously symbolic, yet obviously attached to life. [...] It has the necessary non-responsibility of art, yet dreams from Biblical times have been claimed to reveal religious and other truth.¹

In the case of the work by the Gawain-Poet the ultimate state of affairs is predictable from the outset: the Dreamer's mental geography has to be altered as a result of the consolation he is going to receive in his dream. His previous desolation is transformed into the state of serenity. He finds his lost Pearl neither infantile nor feminine in her new identity, which is associated with the new domain in which she has commenced functioning. The sense of touch is replaced by sight and the space separating them becomes significant. The question of possession is at stake in the visionary encounter, when the Dreamer's position shifts from primacy to subordination.

The garden setting of the introductory scene, which reminds the reader of the *locus amoenus* [pleasurable place] topos present in numerous other medieval literary works, is juxtaposed with the Dreamer inner turmoil caused by the loss he has experienced. As he retells the event:

Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere;
 Thurgh gresse to grounde hit fro me yot.
 I dewyne, fordolke of luf-daungere
 Of that pryvy perle wythouten spot.

(9-12)²

[Alas! I lost her in garden near: / Through grass to the ground from me it shot; / I pine now oppressed by love-wound drear / For that pearl, mine own, without a spot.]³

¹ Derek Brewer, *A New Introduction to Chaucer. Second Edition* (Harlow: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1998), p. 90.

² *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, eds. A.C. Cawley and J. J. Anderson (London, Vermont: Everyman, 1962); all the ensuing lines refer to that edition.

³ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*, trans. J.R.R. Tolkien, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990); all the translation into modern English is taken from this edition.

The edenic setting is the *mise-en-scène* of the painful loss. The “tresor” (331) is dislocated, since the expression “wythouten spot” (12) may be interpreted as not only “unblemished” and thus innocent in its utmost purity, but also as “no longer assigned to any spot,” impossible to spot due to the change of location it has gone through. Such an interpretation is viable in the light of the comments made by Wendell Stace Johnson in her study *The Imagery and Diction of The Pearl*:

The possibility of an ambiguous reading [...] associates the gem’s disappearance with its purity: “wythouten spot” could also mean without location or place. *Spot* in the rest of this stanza group has only this meaning. The phrase is an important one, since *spot* is the key word to this first part of the poem, occurring in the first and last line of the next four stanzas; further, it represents the major and current theme of unearthly purity and brilliance.⁴

The motif of space becomes significant and the word “spot” is consistently used by the poet not only in the context of the gem’s impeccability, which has a connotation of her being *sine macula*, but also in the description of the present location of her body. Pearl’s demise turns the theoretically ideal “spot” into a graveyard, where the Dreamer searches for something he esteemed very highly, since:

So smal, so smothe her sydes were,
 Quere-so-ever I jugged gemmes gaye,
 I sette hyr sengeley in synglere.
 (6-8)

[So fine, so smooth did her sides appear / That ever in judging gems that please / Her only alone I deemed as dear.]

At that point of the narrative the act of perception becomes a source of grief, as nothing can be made out in the vicinity:

⁴ Wendell Stacy Johnson, “The Imagery and Diction of *The Pearl*: Toward an Interpretation,” in *The Middle-English Pearl: Critical Essays*, ed. John Conley (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), p. 33.

Sythen in that spote hit fro me sprange,
 Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande that wele,
 That wont was whyle devoyde my wrange
 And heven my happe and al my hele.
 That dos bot thrych my hert thrange,
 My breste in bale bot bolne and bele.

(13-18)

[Since in that spot it sped from me, / I have looked and longed for that precious thing / That me once was wont from woe to free, / to uplift my lot and healing bring, / But my heart doth hurt now cruelly, / My breast with burning torment sting.]

Watching, constituting a vital part of searching for the lost precious object, is a source of depression, whereas looking at the Pearl would lead to the Dreamer's consolation. The act of seeing has an enormous potential and that fact is clearly stated by the narrator himself.

His search is doomed to fail as the scene of the pearl merely slipping away from the narrator's fingers into the grass is purely allegorical. Thus the lost gem cannot be regained and the harm done to the Dreamer's possession is irreparable. He scrutinized the garden searching for his lost property, yet, his Pearl's visible location was already the clay covered with vegetation he could lay his head onto:

On huyle ther perle hit trendeled doun
 Schadowed this wortes ful schyre and schene-
 Gilofre, gyngure and gromlyoun,
 And pyonys powdered ay bytwene.

(41-44)

[There, where that pearl rolled down, a mound / With herbs was shadowed fair and sheen, / With gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell crowned, / And peonies powdered all between.]

Death metamorphosed the valuable entity's radiance into the darkness and dirt of the soil where the body was deposited. Neither the floral crown it was adorned with nor the new life embodied in the lavish flora springing from "that precios perle wythouten spotte" (36) could fully console the grieving Dreamer. Thus, Pearl is presented at the outset of the plot as vulnerable to time and decay, represent-

ing lucidity symbolizing innocence, yet easily destroyed by the earthly darkness and able to be perceived purely as a plastic mould which posthumously is turned into a new life in the completely different form: that of "spryngande spyces" (35). The motif of the Pearl, which constitutes merely a matrix, or malleable matter new beings are impressed onto, corroborates with that character's implied sex – the female one. The tradition of representing women as shapeless matter goes back to the Greek philosophy, where the role of the female in the act of conception is presented as fully passive. Thus Pearl may be perceived as feminine in her becoming a source of new life, and infantile in her vulnerability and powerlessness.

Throughout the introspective passages Pearl is presented as a dual entity. On the one hand she is a paragon of purity, blemished by the mould that "marres a myrry juelle" [mars a pleasant jewel] (24), but on the other she exists only in relation to another being – the loving Dreamer or other creatures who take advantage of her perfection, leading to her physical destruction, as it happens in the case of lavish flora springing from her grave. As a child she is fragmented even when she is still alive, an incomplete human form which can easily be transformed or disintegrated, which brings about associations with the perspective on the figure of a child as such that was present in the psychoanalytic theory.

Jacques Lacan was a thinker who wrote about childhood as the stage of bodily fragmentation and instability. As Elizabeth Grosz summarizes and comments on his theory in her study *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction*,

For many months, the child remains physiologically incapable of controlling its bodily movements and behaviour, "stuck in his motor incapacity and nurselling dependence." Its body is an uncoordinated aggregate, a series of parts, zones, organs, sensations, needs, and impulses rather than an integral totality. Each part strives for its own satisfaction with no concern for the body as a whole. It has no experience of corporeal or psychical unity or of occupying a stable position within a corporeally limited space.⁵

⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan. A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 33.

Apart from its fragmentation, in the Lacanian theory the figure of the child is associated with not being assigned to any specific location, remaining “spotless,” as Pearl is described, in the sense of not possessing a specific locus. The child’s body can be objectified as it is not characterized by a stable identity. Pearl’s contact with the Dreamer was direct and substantially based on the sense of touch, which is straightforwardly presented in the description. Thus Pearl used to be a child, more an object than an independent being in the hands of her “jueler” (289). A direct reference to the female character’s age at the time of her demise occurs at the moment when the Dreamer addresses her: “Thou lyfed not two yer in oure thede” [You lived not even two years in our land] (483), which again corroborates with the thesis suggesting her uncertain “position within a corporeally limited space.” If she was a very young child at the time when she died, she was not assigned to any specific part of space.

Yet, at this point I am far from suggesting that the figure of Pearl has to be interpreted as only the Dreamer’s child and there is no allegorical dimension in her character. A medieval work of art functioned on multiple levels of meaning and what I am trying to do here is to deal with only one of those levels, at which Pearl’s identity as a child is taken into account. The question of Pearl being an exclusively allegorical or solely human figure has been discussed in detail by numerous medievalists – to mention only Izrael Gollancz, G.G. Coulton or W.H. Schofield – which makes it inadequate to point to those issues here.⁶ My premises are that the character can be just as well treated as a representative of both of those tendencies in the literature of the time – allegorical literature and a (semi)biographical, elegiac one.

Transcending the boundary of life and death by Pearl in the part of the poem mentioned in the retrospection may easily be associ-

⁶ See: the commentaries in the editions of the poem by R. Morris (London, 1864), I. Gollancz (London, 1891), G.G. Coulton (MLR, II, 1906), pp. 39–43; W.H. Schofield, “The Nature and the Fabric of *The Pearl*,” PMLA, XIX (1904), pp. 154–215.

ated with the transformation every child has to undergo according to Jacques Lacan. The mirror stage, being a transition stage between the real and the imaginary, constitutes a vantage point in the psychic development, since it

Relies on and in turn provides a condition for the body-image or imaginary autonomy, which in turn helps to distinguish the subject from the world. By partitioning, dividing, inscribing the body in culturally determinant ways, it is constituted as a social, symbolic, and regulatable body. It becomes the organizing site of perspective, and, at the same time, an object available to others from their perspectives – in other words, both a subject and an object.⁷

The child's body is no longer incomplete and unstable. It is transformed into the entity that can be defined in terms of an independent self. Once the self is constructed, a distance is formed between "I" and everything that is not "I," which therefore may be classified as the other. The question of perspective arises – the notion that is strongly associated with vision. Thus, the child is no longer solely tangible and contacted via the sense of touch. The child perceives and, what is more crucial for his or her development, starts perceiving itself as different from the (m)other. Moreover, the mirror stage marks the point at which the child's reflection is treated by him- or herself as the Other. Pearl entered the mirror stage when she transcended the border between life and death, the moment when apparently she "doun drof in moldes dunne" [sank down into the dark brown earth] (30).

The stabilization and the end of fragmentation directly results from the domination of the sight over other senses in the mirror stage and beyond it. The body is stabilized once it is perceived as a whole and acquires a self, which is different from the mother. A distance is created and an identity is acquired.

In the dream the narrator of *Pearl* has he discerns that the distance between him and Pearl is not only spiritual, but also physical as they

⁷ Grosz, *Jacques Lacan...*, p. 37.

are separated by a stream. The physical obstacle is insurmountable for him; it constitutes a border that cannot be traversed. A divine garden here is such an enclosed space that it brings about associations with the horticultural space in *Le Roman de la Rose*:

Byyonde the broke, by slente other slade,
I hoped that mote merked wore.
Bot the water was depe, I dorst not wade,
And ever me longed ay more and more.

(141-144)

[Beyond that stream by steep or slade / That city's walls I weened must
soar; / But the water was deep, I dared not wade, / And ever I longed to,
more and more.]

Abowte me con I stote and stare,
To fynde a for the faste con I fonde;
Bot wothes mo iwysse ther ware,
The fyrre I stalked by the stronde.

(149-152)

[To find a ford I did then explore, / And round about did it stare and stand; /
But perils pressed in sooth more sore / The further I strode along the
strand.]

The function of seeing is again quite forcefully stressed at that point of the narrative, since the Dreamer expresses his emotional state by staring at the surrounding landscape in utter amazement. The descriptive role of such verbs as: "dyscreven" [discern] (68), "se" [see] (46), or "frayste" [examine] (169) is forcefully stressed in the introductory part of the dream. Vision becomes the Dreamer's primary source of cognition though earlier he maintained physically closer contacts with the child by means of the sense of touch, as the reader may infer from the description of the gem's appearance: "so rounde" (5), and "so smal, so smothe her sydes were" (6). Moreover, the sense of smell was significant before the dream: the flowers were a source of "fayr reflayr" [fair fragrance] (45) and the "odour" (58) that led to the Dreamer's dozing. In the visionary experience itself sight undertakes the task of the dominating sense. Moreover, the Dream-

er does not remain the one who watches, he is also the scrutinized part of the dialogue in the encounter with Pearl, as it follows from the course of their conversation.

Staying in a close physical contact with Pearl is replaced by seeing her when she appears on the other shore of the stream. The memories of staying in close proximity with the gem confounded the father's grief – stricken mind after the child's death, whereas in the encounter scene the sight of the figure maintaining a physical distance almost deprives the dreamer of his senses:

Bot baysment gef myn hert a brunt;
I sey hyr in so strange a place,
Such a burre myght make myn herte blunt.
Thenne veres ho up her fayre frount,
Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yvore.

(174-178)

[But dumb surprise my mind amazed; / In place so strange I saw that maid, / The blow might well my wits have crazed. / Her forehead fair then up she raised / That hue of polished ivory wore.]

The Pearl is surprisingly envisaged as a fully-grown maiden who does not bear resemblance to her previous physical and, what is even more important, mental form with her infantile defenselessness and lack of a stable self. If one interprets it as the situation of having entered the domain of the imaginary, she already functions in another psychical sphere, which is, in Lacan's words, "the order of images, representations, doubles, and others."⁸ Vision is the primary sense within that "order of images," since a distance is established between the newly formed self and the other, a subject and an object. Moreover, the theme of a double recurs throughout the presentation of her figure against the background of the new, divine setting.

Pearl in her maiden form is not in the least a mirror-image of her former infantile form. She is recognized by the Dreamer as the same yet altered, an apparition of the person he once knew and cherished:

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

I hoped that gostly was that porpose;
 I dred onende quat schulde byfalle,
 Lest ho me eschaped that I ther chos,
 Er I at steven hir moght stalle.

(185-188)

[A ghost was present, I did surmise, / And feared for what might then
 befall, / Lest she should flee before mine eyes / Ere I to tryst could her
 recall.]

The phrase “I hoped that gostly was that porpose” (185) refers to the dreamer’s expectations towards the person he can discern. The Dreamer suspects that the vision has a spiritual meaning for him. The alteration of the lady is broached on in the ensuing lines, where she is referred to as somebody who “ryses up in hir araye ryalle” (192), in the visual metaphor of upward movement again stressing the importance of eyesight in the mutual contact between the two characters and lack of the powerlessness once characterizing the child.

Pearl is altered in the sense of looking and actually being older than her former mundane form, yet, her voice also sounds as if she has been radically transformed. It is marked by strict didacticism since in the first words she utters she corrects the Dreamer’s misconception by addressing him:

Sir, ye haf your tale mysetente,
 To say your perle is al awaye,
 That is in cofor so comly clente
 As in this gardyn gracious gaye,
 Hereinne to lenge for ever and play.
 Ther mys nee mornyng com never nere.

(257-262)

[Good sir, you have your speech mis-spent / To say your pearl is all away /
 That is in chest so choicely spent, / Even in this gracious garden gay, / Here
 always to linger and to play / Where regret nor grief e’er trouble her.]

The comment from the beginning of the conversation marks a different quality of their mutual relationship. The one to be educated becomes the educator and the “spotless” character, not as-

signed to any specific space, reminisces her former "spot," the coffin she was laid in, and emphasizes the eternal quality of the edenic location she was placed in. Therefore the Dreamer has to accommodate his notions to the celestial logic his gem voices.

The question of possession is forcefully presented at that stage of the dialogue. In her past on earth Pearl was both female and a child. According to Lacan children do not have the sense of occupying any specific space, whereas the notion of ownership differs from anything that is feminine, as Luce Irigaray maintains in one of the articles included in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. As she insists:

Ownership and property are doubtless quite foreign to the feminine [...] But not *nearness*. Nearness so pronounced that it makes all discrimination of identity, and thus all form of property, impossible.⁹

Hence it is feasible to postulate that Pearl's mentality has changed quite considerably since she describes her existence in terms of being the lady of the realm. She has become less feminine and more obedient in terms of observing the Law-of-the-Father. Moreover, she seems to have become similar to a feudal ruler in the eyes of her Dreamer, with "her semblaunt sade for doc other erle" [her appearance grave for duke or earl] (211). She realizes that she used to be her jeweler's property, and that after her death her body was spatially limited by being enclosed within a "kyste" [chest] (272):

For that thou lestes was bot a rose
That flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef.
Now thurgh kynde of the kyste that hyt con close
To a perle of prys hit is put in pref.
And thou has called thy wyrde a thef,
That oght of noght has mad a cler.
Thou blames the bote of thy meschef;
Thou art no kynde jueler'.

(269-276)

⁹ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 31.

[For what you lost was but a rose / That by nature failed after flowering brief; / Now the casket's virtues that it enclose / Prove it a pearl of price in chief; / And yet you have called your fate a thief / That of naught to aught hath fashioned her, / You grudge the healing of your grief, / You are no grateful jeweller.]

The character previously having no sense of belonging now postulates being the dweller of a specific space, who takes into account the Dreamer's notions of having owned the precious gem and his feeling of deprivation. In the harsh consolation she provides her interlocutor with she voices her Lord's theology and thus it may be stated that she mirrors him in the divine economy she postulates: the loss resulting from her death was not a loss at all, but a gain since the beloved creature was placed in paradise afterwards.

The image of Pearl's transformation presented in the course of her speech is straightforward: she voices another perspective on the act of losing a gem. The eternal jewel's nature was that of a transient rose, fragile in its beauty. Here, the juxtaposition of the pearl and the flower resembles the allegorical images present in the literary works belonging to the Courtly Love tradition, and primarily *The Romance of the Rose* with the comely figure of the flower. The setting of the poem we deal with here is replete with the elements bringing to mind the descriptions of the beloved one within that tradition. To quote one of the Harley lyrics in modern translation:

I know of a beauty, a beryl most bright,
 As lovely to look on a silver-foiled sapphire,
 As gentle as jasper a-gleam in the light,
 As true as the ruby, or garnet in gold.
 Like onyx she is, esteemed in the height;
 A diamond of worth when she's dressed for the day.
 Like coral her lustre, like Ceasar or knight;
 Like emerald at morning, this maiden has might.
 [...]
 Her maiden-bloom's red, like the rose on the spray,
 And lily-white loveliness shines in her face;
 Like snallage, anise, alexanders' array,
 Surpassing the spring-flower and periwinkle too,

Most glorious of girls in her fur-trimmings grey,
 She blooms in her beauty like blue columbine,
 The fairest of finely-robed women, I say,
 As fragrant as sage or the small celandine.

[...]

A nutmeg, a mandrake with power from the moon;
 A true cure as told by tongues in high heaven;
 Such liquorice will heal from the Lyn to the Lune;
 Such quick-salving sugar all searchers must seek.
 Christ blesses her gladly and grants me my boon
 When our darkly-hid doings are done in the daylight.
 As green in its seed makes the gromwell known,
 And the tops tell of cubeb and cummin, so she,
 Like cinnamon chested or fennel far-famed,
 Valerian or ginger or clove, is acclaimed.¹⁰

The imagery used in the Pearl's description is similar to such instances of elaborating on the female character's beauty, purity and spiritual steadfastness as the poem quoted above is. It can be stated that the maiden in the dream-vision in question is described by means of a series of clichés: as a gem, a flower or a being surrounded by herbs and therefore associated with odorous spices. Thus she is presented as a stereotypically feminine figure by dint of the poetic diction typical for the Courtly Love tradition. Yet, Pearl received not only a maiden appearance, but also the masculine stern voice she rebukes her jeweler with. The former creature whose identity was similar to that of an insane person due to her instability and fragmentary nature of her self, admonishes the Dreamer because of the "mad porpose" (267) of his reasoning [his having made a mad resolve]:

'Bot, jueler gente, if thou schal lose
 Thy joy for a gemme that the was lef,
 Me thynk the put in a mad porpose,
 And busyes the aboute a raysoun bref.'

(265-268)

¹⁰ *Medieval English Verse*, trans. Brian Stone (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 205.

[But, jeweller gentle, if from you goes / Your joy through a gem that you held lief, / Methinks your mind towards madness flows / And frets for a fleeting cause of grief.]

As Philippe Ariès postulates in his *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of the Family*, in the Western civilization children have been excluded and hence isolated similarly to the insane, the poor and prostitutes.¹¹ In the poem the jewel has been transformed from a child-like character into an authoritative masculine figure. Pearl, who previously was a female child and therefore a creature close to insanity in her lack of bodily coordination, now chides the Dreamer for the madness his reasoning represents. In the world she inhabits posthumously humans are perceived as mere jesters and irrationally behaving creatures, as she suggests:

‘Jueler,’ sayde that gemme clene,
 ‘Wy borde ye men? So madde ye be!
 Thre wordes has thou spoken at ene:
 Unavysed, for sothe, wern alle thre.
 Thou ne woste in worlde quat on dos mene;
 Thy worde byfore thy wytte con fle.
 Thou syas thou trawes me in this dene,
 Bycawse thou may wyth yyen me se;
 Another thou says, in thys countré
 Thyself schal won wyth me ryght here;
 The thrydde, to passe thys water fre-
 That may no joyfol jueler.

(289-300)

[“Jeweller,” rejoined that jewel clean, / “Why jest ye men? How mad ye be! / Three things at once you have said, I ween: / Thoughtless, forsooth, were all the three. / you know not on earth what one doth mean; / Your words from your wits escaping flee: / You believe I live here on this green, / because you can with eyes me see; / Again, you will in this land with me / Here dwell yourself, you now aver; / And thirdly, pass this water free: / That may no joyful jeweller.]

¹¹ Philippe Ariès, “Preface,” to: *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of the Family*, trans. Robert Baldrick (London, 1962), p. 9.

The misconceptions the Dreamer cherishes are thus destroyed: his Pearl doubles her Lord in her regal behaviour and the didactic tone. The Dreamer is accused of not comprehending the language he uses and it appears that the maiden is the one to have grasped a full command of it. In Lacanian terms by going through the mirror stage she has entered “the domain of the Other, the domain of Law and Language, law-as-language.”¹² She is able to use the masculine language of theology and knows the Law imposed by the Name-of-the-Father. She occupies the celestial space along with her divine parent and can be identified as Pearl, in opposition to the stage when her name was so insignificant it is not even mentioned by the Dreamer. The paternal metaphor endows her with a name and a language. As Lacan maintains, it

diagrams the child's entry into the symbolic order and the social world beyond the family structure, as regulated by the other. The paternal metaphor names the child and thus positions it so it can be replaced discursively by the “I,” in order to enter language as a speaking being.¹³

The language Pearl uses is the primary source of her power in the confrontation, as the Dreamer tries to protect himself by beseeching her: “Rebuke me never wyth wordes felle” [Rebuke me not with cruel words] (367) and by asking for comfort. The discourse she applies in the conversation with the Dreamer is replete with harshness and lack of sentimentality stereotypically assigned to male interlocutors.

Pearl doubles her beloved Prince with whom, as other chosen maidens, she stays in the relationship of mystique marriage. That union becomes the source of her new identity. In spiritual terms she becomes a mirror image of her spouse. Moreover, the jewel she carries on her neck, a “whyte perle and non other gemme” (219) mirrors her newly acquired spiritual perfection and uniqueness. She is the same as she was before yet altered, chosen by her Lord yet

¹² Grosz, *Jacques Lacan...*, p. 66.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

the same as thousands of other maidens loved by Christ, simultaneously unique and a double.

In *This Sex Which Is Not One* Luce Irigaray applies the notion of nearness to the category of the feminine. The sense of touch was dominant in the mundane relation of the Dreamer with Pearl. There was no distance between them and the femininity of Pearl manifested itself in her non-identity and lack of the sense of belonging to any specific space. She was “nerre then aunte or nece” [nearer than aunt or niece] (233) to the Dreamer. A close relative confirmed the supremacy of her marriage to Christ over mundane relationships. The ephemeral earthly rose, symbolically representing nature in medieval literature, was transformed into an eternal pearl. As Herbert Pilch points out in his essay “The Middle English *Pearl*: Its Relation to *The Roman de la Rose*,” the idea of a rose as a creature of nature may primarily come from the work of Alanus de Insulis, where the flower constituted a part of Nature, namely her shoes, which were in tangible contact with her body.¹⁴ Hence Pearl used to function as a metamorphosable, feminine character in the Dreamer’s world, whereas after her demise she was transformed into a stable, masculine figure. A “natural entity” is transformed into an artifice, a gem constituting a double, a constructed entity existing only within the borders of an artificial construct, an ideal celestial city.

Thus the transitory flower is juxtaposed with the unchangeable precious stone, in fact popularly imagined as having a soothing effect for the eyes, as Andrzej Wicher notices in his study of the poem included in *Archeology of the Sublime. Studies in Late-Medieval English Writings*.¹⁵ Therefore other senses, like touch or smell, if we consider the olfactory proprieties of roses, are then, as a result of the transformation, dominated by seeing and being perceived and

¹⁴ Herbert Pilch, “The Middle English *Pearl*: Its Relation to *The Roman de la Rose*,” in *The Middle English Pearl: Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1970), p. 181.

¹⁵ Andrzej Wicher, *Archeology of the Sublime. Studies in Late-Medieval English Writings* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1995), p. 156.

thus medicinally beneficent. The encounter with Pearl is important both for the Dreamer's outer sight (as sympathetic magic has it) and for his spiritual perspective.

It is paradoxical that a creature who is feminine in her outward appearance speaks a masculine voice and mirrors her Prince to such an extent. The physical distance she imposes on her interlocutor has been compared to the biblical scene where resurrected Christ forbids Mary Magdalen to touch him. The resemblance to the *Noli me tangere* motif has been noticed by Lynn Staley Johnson in the article "The motif of the *Noli me tangere* and its relation to *Pearl*."¹⁶ The biblical quotation comes from John XX. 11-18 and the exact words Christ utters are the following: "Do not touch me, for I am not yet ascended to my father." In the same mode Pearl voices the concern that the Dreamer cannot transcend the border between the dead and the living, since: "Er moste thou cever to other counsayl; / Thy corse in clot mot calder keve" [First you must follow another course of action: your body must sink down cold into the ground] (319-320). The visible is thus exposed as unreliable; Pearl's body is not what it seems to be, but an entity belonging to another reality.

Moreover, Pearl voices the divine perspective on the act of seeing with the words: "Ye setten hys wordes ful westernays / That leves nothynk bot ye hit syye" [You twist his words awry who believe nothing unless you see it] (307-308). Perception is an act that should be secondary to faith and not constituting its basis. The comparison to resurrected Christ in the *Noli me tangere* scene might be treated as yet another argument in favour of the view that Pearl is a mirror image of her celestial Lord and lover. When talking to his regained treasure, the Dreamer voices the concern that Lord might not be pleased with his words: "Ne worthe no wraththe unto my Lorde, / If rapely I rave, spornande in spelle" [Let it not offend my Lord, if I rashly rave and stumble into speech] (362-363). Hence it may be stated that throughout the conversation Christ is present in the space occupied by the interlocutors.

¹⁶ Lynn Staley Johnson, "The motif of the *Noli me tangere* and its relation to *Pearl*," *American Benedictine Review*, No. 30 (1979), pp. 93-106.

According to Luce Irigaray, both identity and language are male. A woman cannot speak a language unless it is a male one.¹⁷ Moreover, since for Irigaray the notion of identity is intrinsically masculine, it may be interpreted that Pearl, who has acquired a stable identity and grasped the notion of possession, was transformed into a masculine character.¹⁸ Her identity was shifted into the masculine one, or even acquired, if we treat identity as the notion that can be applied only to male figures. She became a part of the divine space: the city of Jerusalem, predictable and feasible to spot.

The description of the “cete of God” (953) bears a certain resemblance to the description of Pearl in her new self:

The borgh was al of brende golde bright
 As glemande glas burnist broun,
 Wyth gentyll gemmes anunder pyght;
 Wyth banteles twelve on basyng boun-
 The foundementes twelve of riche tenoun-
 Uch tabelment was a serlypes ston;
 As derely devyses this ilk toun
 In Apocallypes the apostel John.

(989-996)

[Of gold refined in fire to hue / Of glittering glass was that shining town; / Fair gems beneath were joined as due / In courses twelve, on the base laid down / That with tetoned tables twelve they crown: / A single stone was each tier thereon, / As well describes this wondrous town / In apocalypse the apostle John.]

The city is presented as adorned with gems which makes the description similar to that of Pearl, the “spot’s” new inhabitant. The “ryally dyght” [royally adorned] (987) Jerusalem seems to be to a certain extent an embodiment of the spiritual qualities of its founder and His doubles. The shift from the horticultural setting which at least implies nature in its “pure,” untouched form to the splendor

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 107.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

of the celestial city, constituting an artifice, emphasizes the alteration of Pearl: primarily a flower and secondarily a gem similar to the ones adorning the city's "body," if one may liken architectural patterns to the corporal ones.

The order of images Pearl has entered is completed by the celestial image of eternal happiness which provides the Dreamer with the consolation he has been craving for: she finds her "in a lyf of lykyng lyghte, / In Paradys erde, of stryf unstrayned" [in a life of pleasure, in the land of Paradise, untouched by strife] (247-248). The unity of a father and his child is replaced by duplicity as far as identity is concerned:

Now I hit se, now lethes my lothe.
And, quen we departed, we wern at on.
God forbede we be now wrothe,
We meten so selden by stok other ston.
(377-380)

[My sorrow is oftened now I it see. / When we parted, too, at one we were; / Now God forbid that we angry be! / We meet on our roads by chance so rare.]

Pearl's body was altered as a result of passing through the transition period which could be likened to the mirror stage, yet, another transformation concerned her identity. She was masculinized throughout the process, as she received a strong voice and grasped the notion of possession, which replaced the feminine nearness characterizing her contacts with the Dreamer. She changed the Dreamer's mental geography by voicing theological statements concerning the space she occupied and her role within it. He searched for the lost jewel and the state he found her in rendered him serene and consoled. The ultimate scene combines two senses as far as the Dreamer's experience of his daughter's happiness is concerned. Both sight and hearing are the source of his state, which again borders on insanity, but at that moment in the positive sense:

Delyt me drof in yye and ere,
My manes mynde to madding malte.

Quen I sey my freely, I wolde be there,
Byyonde the water thagh ho were walte.
(1153-1156)

[Delight there pierced my eye and ear, / In my mortal mind a madness reigned; / When I saw her beauty I would be near, / Though beyond the stream she was retained.]

Madness out of grief is transformed into insanity out of overwhelming joy. The Dreamer undergoes an alteration of his mental state and becomes accustomed to the physical distance that separates him from the child. The rose, once inseparable from nature, now turns out to be a steadfast entity with a fixed identity, more masculine than previously.