A DISCUSSION OF THE PEARL STANZA AS AN APPROACH TO THE POEM

by

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I. The Pearl Structure

Pearl, written in the second half of the fourteenth century, remains today an intriguing combination of lyric and narrative poetry. Dramatic throughout, it at the same time has an emblematic quality which is developed through symbolic ornamentation. Both of these levels work toward a cyclic effect, and the end of the poem is a return to the beginning. Themes work against and/or with each other to create tensions, and even these tensions are at times elusive. Much scholarship on the Pearl has sought to find the key to disentangling the shifting themes which are so abundant in this psychological vision. In most cases, however, questions concerning the artistic nature and the structural form of Pearl are never raised. At the end of his interpretation, René Wellek called attention to the fact that Pearl scholarship is wanting in this type criticism. "The actual study of the artistic value of the poem is still in its beginnings," he wrote. "Even the obvious approach through questions of meter and structure has not been much utilized hitherto."[1]

There is, indeed, much to be said about the intricate structure of Pearl. Even on a superficial level the

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[1]Rene Wellek, "The Pearl: An Interpretation," in Sir Gawain and Pearl, ed. R. J. Blanch (Bloomington, 1966), p. 36.

form is interesting, for the poem breaks down neatly into 101 twelve-line stanzas, 1212 lines altogether. The stanzas are linked into groups of five (except for the fifteenth group, which includes an "extra" stanza, giving it six stanzas) by the repetition of at least one word or a derivation thereof in the first and last lines of each stanza in any given group. The poet also succeeds in nailing each group together, structurally speaking, by again repeating the linking word in the first line of the new group. He even links the end of the poem with the beginning. The last line,

> He gef vus to be His homly hyne
> Ande precious perlez vnto His pay,
>
> (He gave us to be his servants dear
> And unto His pleasure precious pearls,)

contains two words repeated from the first line:

> Perle, plesaunte to prynces paye!
>
> (Pearl, pleasing to the fancy of a prince!)[2]

The sequential, and finally circular, effect then becomes apparent; and so serves to emphasize, as does the general device of constant repetition, the interdependent nature of the whole poem. This structural characteristic reinforces the symbolic interrelationships in the poem. It

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[2]Quotations and translations of Pearl are from Sister Mary Hillman, ed., The Pearl (New York, 1959). I will give line numbers in parentheses for subsequent quotations.

also enhances the uncertain but seemingly progressive nature of the dramatic development.

The basic structural unit of the poem remains, however, the stanza. These twelve-line units are the building blocks of the total poem. Each stanza divides itself into an octave and a quatrain, the rhyme scheme being consistently a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b/b/c/b/c. (The "c" rhyme is repeated through the five-stanza group.) The poet has placed limitations on the development of each stanza by allowing only three rhymes. Each stanza is tightly knit together, as this rhyme scheme would indicate. There is within the twelve-line unit a concentration on some particular aspect of the total poem. The _Pearl_-poet gave each stanza an emphasis which has hitherto remained relatively unexplored by _Pearl_ critics. It is necessary for a fuller understanding of the way the poem works to realize the neatly developed form of each stanza. In order to arrive at the sense of totality which _Pearl_ achieves, it is also necessary to be able to differentiate between what parts of this psychologically and symbolically complex poem are being expanded within individual stanzas.

Sir Israel Gollancz, a relatively early critic of _Pearl_, gave to this stanza-unit considerable importance in his 1918 edition of the poem by placing a single stanza on each page. Furthermore, Gollancz emphasized the 8-4 division by indenting the final quatrain of each stanza. The effect was that his book resembles a collection of twelve-line poems, each one closely adhering to a similar

and pre-determined structure. The rhyme scheme is consistently a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b/b/c/b/c, and the rhetorical development basically follows an 8-4 division, with secondary divisions which provide variety to the 101 stanzas. Gollancz prefaced his book with the remark that "the flow and ebb of the sonnet's octave and sestet are heard more lightly and with more lyrical cadence in the octave and quatrain of the Pearl stanza."[3] With this statement Gollancz became the first critic to articulate the similarity between the Pearl's stanza divisions and the early sonnet form. Nearly fifty years later, in 1965, John Gardner echoed Gollancz (referring to Gollancz's remark) in the introduction to his edition of the Pearl-poet's works by comparing the twelve-line stanzas of Pearl to primitive sonnets. Adding to Gollancz's idea, Gardner observed that each stanza is a complete unit--that each one develops a particular and single "dramatic tension, image, or philosophical idea."[4] A consideration of individual stanzas as self-contained poems supports Gardner's statement. The overlapping of one stanza with the next or with the previous is explained on a basic level (excluding the factor of the multi-level symbolic development) by the requirements of narrative progression. The interdependency of the stanzas approximates that found in some early sonnet cycles.

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[3]Sir Israel Gollancz, "Introduction," Pearl (London, 1918), p. 12.

[4]John Gardner, "Introduction," The Complete Works of the Gawain Poet (Chicago, 1965), p. 20.

At this point some discussion of the early development of the sonnet form and of the sonnet cycle is in order. For the similarities between Pearl and the sonnet form are present at any rate, though without some historical investigation the resemblance seems vague. When Pearl is reviewed in light of the early sonnet form (as critics have been able to reconstruct it) the relationship of the one to the other is illuminated. This approach then is informative to the reading of Pearl.

The earliest extant examples of the sonnet are from the first half of the thirteenth century. They were Italian, and the majority of them were love poems. E. H. Wilkins cites 31 examples from the period of Frederick II (1220-1250). Twenty-five of these he attributes to Giacomo da Lentino; the rest to his followers. Giacomo, Wilkins says, is the first documented sonnet-writer. He was interested in metrical experiment; he was also a Sicilian, and Wilkins shows the significance of this information by tracing the octave of the sonnet to a popular Sicilian form (the eight-line Strambotto.)[5] The structure of Giacomo's sonnets divides into an octave and six remaining lines (sometimes two sestets, sometimes a quatrain and a couplet). Interestingly enough, and contrary to that structure popularly accepted as the earliest Italian octave rhyme pattern, Wilkins gives the

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[5]Ernest H. Wilkins, "The Invention of the Sonnet," Modern Philology, Vol. XIII (1915), 463.

original sonnet octave rhyme-scheme as a/b/a/b/a/b/a/b.[6] This form was apparently lost or discarded when Dante and Petrarch began to write sonnets. Wilkins further analyses the octave of the early sonnets by dividing them into two-line units.[7] These two-line units are primary in the structure; but the quatrain division, very popular later, is present from the beginning of the form. Wilkins observed that experimenters in the second half of the thirteenth century modified the octave form by the addition of two lines rhyming a/b so that the first part of the sonnet contained ten lines. But the last part of the poem in every case continued the development of the main idea of the sonnet.[8] From the time of its creation, the sonnet form has been used to express one and only one idea. This idea, or theme, is proposed and expanded in the first part of the poem, and confirmed and concluded as it is brought to a full point in the end.

The early sonnets, moreover, were not restricted to fourteen lines. Charles Tomlinson calls attention to sonnets of 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, and 20 lines in length. Sonetto, or pre-sonnet, according to Tomlinson, was a term "applied to every kind of lyric poetry that was accompanied by music, and composed of stanzas united

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[6]Wilkins, p. 469.

[7]Wilkins, p. 473.

[8]Wilkins, p. 472.

together by corresponding rhymes."[9] The vast majority of early sonnets were parts of cycles or collections, and the sonnet sequence form developed naturally with the sonnet form.[10] The notable feature of the sonnet sequence is its ability to express unity within a larger unity.

Hallett Smith, discussing the sonnet in the context of Elizabethan poetry--with particular reference to the Shakespearean sonnets--describes the sonnet process as the solution to the problem of

> how to record experience and the analysis of it simultaneously; how to achieve a combination of probability and strangeness; how to make the sonnet cycle seem to reflect actual life. . . but to reflect life not so much in its external conditions as in its inward meaning and significance.[11]

Another critic, Houston Peterson, views the development of the sonnet form as the product of a psychological need for a controlled, masterful, "unrelenting" structure to deal with "especially intense and fierce emotional experiences." A certain freedom resulted, Peterson continued, from variations within the ideal form and from linking

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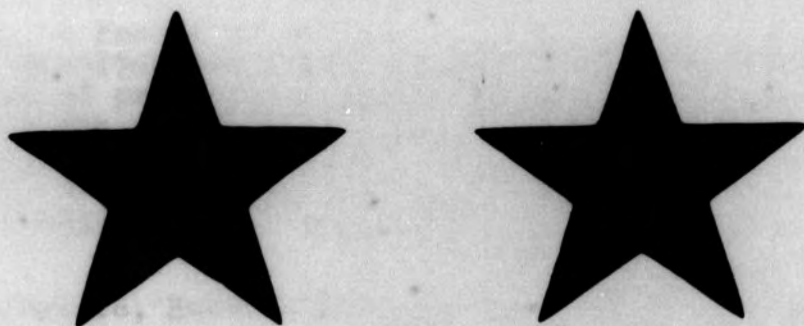
9Charles Tomlinson, _The Sonnet: Its Origin, Structure, and Place in Poetry_ (London, 1874), p. 22.

10William T. Going, "Sonnet Sequence," _Modern Language Notes_, Vol. LXII (June, 1947), 400.

11Hallett Smith, _Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning, and Expression_ (Cambridge, 1952), p. 136.

CORRECTION



PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR

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the sonnets as stanzas (as in narrative progression).[12] His statement implies a basic need for a severely ordered structure.

This linking of sonnets to create a sequential narrative is exhibited very early in Dante's Vita Nuova. Considered by C. S. Lewis as the ancestor of Petrarch's sonnet cycle Rime,[13] the Vita Nuova consists of 31 poems, the majority being sonnets or variations thereof, joined by prose links which contain much of the narrative. When these prose links were later dropped, according to Lewis the sonnet cycle lost any identification with the narrative form. "It is a form which exists for the sake of prolonged lyrical meditation, chiefly on love but relieved from time to time by excursions into. . . what you will."[14] In his discussion of the narrative aspect of the sonnet sequence, however, Lewis is trying to defend it from those who would use it as a biographical playground. He uses the metaphor of an archipelago to describe the essential lyric quality which he sees in the sonnet cycle.

Directly related to the conclusion that some Pearl scholars have found themselves facing is Lewis's remark that "the narrative, still more the biographical, reading of a sonnet sequence may obscure its real qualities."[15]

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[12]Houston Peterson, "Introduction," Book of Sonnet Sequences (London, 1929), p. iii.

[13]C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), p. 327.

[14]Lewis.

[15]Lewis, p. 328.

The poet's mind, Lewis said, should be regarded as a symphonic operation, not a historic one. Finally, what Lewis means when he says that one must first grasp that the sonnet sequence is not a way of telling a story,[16] is that critics must guard against unwarranted biographical, and even narrative interpretations. "Take away the would-be 'personal-references,'" W. H. Schofield asserts, "and their absence (in Pearl) is hardly noticeable."[17]

The nature of the sonnet sequence, then, from the beginnings of the form, of necessity presupposes the relatedness of the sonnets within it. The sequence develops through mood, theme, philosophical idea, dramatic action, or a combination of these elements. Within that unity there is also another unity developing within the single stanza. The Vita Nuova, for example, may be divided into three groups of subject matter: 1) the effects of love on the poet; 2) in praise of his lady; 3) the effect of the death of his lady.[18] The sequential unity implies movement through time, in a narrative sense, and a story is told as it creates a mood. But the individual poems in the Vita Nuova hold up under scrutinizing analysis. When examined individually they remain examples of excellent poetic expression. In fact, Dante felt

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[16]Lewis.

[17]W. H. Schofield, "Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the Pearl," PMLA, Vol. XXIV (1909), 631.

[18]Charles Singleton, An Essay on the Vita Nuova (Cambridge, 1949), p. 87.

that each sonnet was important enough to warrant some prose discussion in the text immediately following the individual poem. Sometimes he gives an account of the origin of the sonnets; sometimes he provides a gloss or interpretation.

In the sonnet cycle it is as though two creations are happening at the same time. The individual sonnet is complete in itself, but it also reinforces the development of the cycle of which it is a part. This same duality is present throughout _Pearl_. To draw a rather rough analogy, each stanza represents a rotation, while the whole poem revolves. Both developing processes compose the final effect of totality which the _Pearl_ achieves.

Little attention has been given to the stanza-unit of _Pearl_. This element of the poem nevertheless bears inspection. The formal structure of the _Pearl_ stanza has already been discussed. The main division of each stanza is the quatrain. The first eight lines describe and expand on the subject; the last four lines offer a solution, contrast, or further illumination of the topic. The stanza-unit contains three rhymes; each of its lines, following the tradition of the alliterative revival, has four stresses. The numbers three, four, and twelve are basic to the stanza development. C. O. Chapman has pointed out some interesting recurrences of these three numbers in _Pearl_ in an essay on numerical symbolism. The poet is guilty of three errors in understanding (ll. 290-300), he asks four questions (ll. 560-65), he addresses four

terms of adoration to the Virgin (ll. 433-36), he mentions flowers of three colors (l. 27), and there are four flowers on the hill (ll. 43-44). The description of the new Jerusalem mentions twelve foundations, four walls, twelve gates (set three in each wall), and the book from which Christ reads is square. The references are from Revelations, but the Pearl-poet relates his stanza form to the numbers--by using the same numbers. Three's, four's, and twelve's pervade the whole poem, both symbolically and structurally.[19]

This use of numbers is reminiscent of Dante's symbolic numbers. Although no attempt will be made here to define or to give relation to the Pearl-poet's philosophy behind his numbers, some parallels between Pearl and the Vita Nuova may be noted. The Vita Nuova divides itself into a numerically balanced structure: 10 sonnets; canzoni 1; 4 sonnets; canzoni 2; 4 sonnets; canzoni 3; 10 sonnets. Charles Singleton breaks the poem down into an order of 1:9:1:9:1:9:1, which reduces it to the numerical terms in which Dante consciously constructed his poetry.[20] The first and last compositions compose an introduction and an epilogue to the poem. That the Pearl-poet used a similar device is evident in the dream-vision nature of Pearl. The first five stanzas and the last five stanzas act as an introduction and epilogue

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[19]C. O. Chapman, "Numerical Symbolism in Dante and the Pearl," Modern Language Notes, Vol. LIV (1939), 259.

[20]Singleton, Vita Nuova, p. 134.

respectively. The core of the poem is the 91-stanza dream vision. The structural similarities between Pearl and Vita Nuova may be construed to imply further similarities between the stanza-units of both poems. The argument of the basic sonnet nature of the Pearl-stanza may now be brought into question. Some generalities about the stanza-form of Pearl having already been stated, it is now appropriate to apply these generalities to some specific stanzas.

II. Analysis of Stanzas

Because it so clearly demonstrates the type of rhetorical development which is found in individual stanzas throughout the poem, the opening stanza of Pearl is a good starting point for analysis. The first eight lines of the first stanza describe the pearl-jewel which the narrator, at this point a jeweler, has owned. The last four lines explain that the pearl is now lost, and that the jeweler suffers greatly for it. The octave begins with a fond thought of the pearl itself; it then develops this reflective mood through several details. The narrator-jeweler pictures himself setting it apart from all other gems, giving it a peerless quality. The final quatrain completes the exposition of the situation. What the stanza does is describe the pearl with affection and then remove it from the picture. A mood parallel to that which the jeweler has experienced and is experiencing is created for the reader by the way in which the stanza is developed. The final quatrain of each stanza will be divided from the octave in this paper for visual purposes, following Gollancz's method of indention as described above.

Stanza One

Pearl, pleasing to the fancy of a prince!
To set without flaw in gold so clear,
Out of the Orient, confidently I say,
I never tested its precious peer.
So round, so perfect in every array,

So fine, so smooth its surfaces were,
Wheresoever I bright gems appraised,
I set it apart in particular.

Alas, I lost it in a garden--
Through grass to earth it went from me!
I pined away, sore-wounded by the love-dominion
Of that pearl of mine without a spot. (ll. 1-12)

The poet draws on several sources in the first lines of the stanza to demonstrate the importance of his pearl. He says first, musing over it, that it would please a prince, and then that it betters anything from the Orient. It is set in gold. These suggestions are chosen to give the jewel greater value. They are hints of the perfection which the poet wants to attribute to the gem. In the second four lines--the last half of the octave--the narrator describes the jewel in his own terms--roundness, smoothness, brightness--and explains that he himself set it in a separate place. Working with precious stones was an important artistic endeavor in the fourteenth century. The relationship which the poet has described in this stanza is one between an artist and his creation. The "endearment" is real enough in these terms to support the sense of loss which is developed in the final quatrain. The poet begins the ninth line with a simple, direct statement: "Alas, I lost it in a garden." The force of the statement is made real by the poet's refusal to exaggerate this fact. The tenth line again describes the pearl, this time as it is seen moving out of sight and away from its jeweler. The sense of loss gains momentum. Then, as a cap to the stanza, the narrator describes

how he felt after his prized possession was lost: "forfolked of luf-daungere" ("sore-wounded by the love-dominion").

Thus this first stanza states the situation which occasioned the writing of the rest of the poem. Already a mood has been achieved. The narrator is psychologically correct in his presentation. He first thinks of the pearl, which was a source of joy for him. Sister Mary Hillman punctuates the first line with an exclamation point, which is what the line implies. Then the narrator follows up on all the aspects of the jewel which he values. He has momentarily repressed what the reader does not know: that the pearl is now gone, and that he does not have this source of joy. But at a certain point he remembers this crucial fact, and he does so at the ninth line of the stanza. At that point the reader is made aware of what the narrator is recollecting. The feeling is intensified by the method of rhetorical development and because it is consistent with the chain of mental associations the narrator makes. The development of the mood and the structure of the stanza are perfectly consistent. When the stanza ends the mood has been created.

A second example of this unit development is the fourth stanza. Here the narrator describes his return to the garden where he lost the jewel. The appeal of this lyrical stanza is to the senses. The first four lines give some information regarding the atmospheric conditions inside the garden. The sense of ripeness and perhaps smothering heat which is associated with

the month of August, "When corn is cut with sickles keen," prepares the stanza for the lush sensory stimulation which is to follow.

Stanza Four

At that spot which I in speech set forth
I entered into that garden green,
In August in the season high
When corn is cut with sickles keen.
One hillock, where the pearl went rolling down,
These plants shadowed, full bright and fair--
Gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell,
And peonies powdered everywhere.

If it was lovely to look upon,
A fair fragrance also floated from it.
There fittingly that abides, I know,
My precious pearl without a spot.

The second four lines of this stanza list the different flowers the narrator sees on the hill. The description is handled in such a way that every inch of ground is covered. The gillyflower, ginger, and gromwell are "shadowed," a word which brings to mind a painting of such a scene. When the narrator adds the observation that "Pyonys powdered ay bytwene," he is being consistent with his picture-making metaphor and also completely fills up the scene with flowers. There is a certain sense of overabundance of eye-stimulation in these four lines. Then the emphasis is moved from sight to smell in the ninth and tenth lines. The narrator refers to the "fair fragrance" which all these flowers are emitting, and ends the stanza with the thought--the hope--that the lost pearl is there.

The central development in this stanza is the painting of the spot in the garden. The poet literally surrounds the actual picture which he creates with an odor-laden atmosphere. His picture is presented in the middle of the poem. The poet started with the sensation felt upon first entering the garden, then described the garden itself, and finally moved to the odors present there. The sense of smell is better able to describe the emotions of the narrator than the sense of sight, and it is for this reason that the description of the flowers is surrounded by what becomes the atmosphere of the stanza. The three quatrains are distinctive. The first is expanded by and unified with the third, and both are related to the middle of the poem.

The next stanza in Pearl again uses the sense of smell. Stanza Five, however, also develops its own action.

Stanza Five

Before that spot my hands I wrung
For the care full cold that seized on me;
A wicked grief lodged in my heart
Though understanding would have brought me peace.
I mourned my pearl which there was locked
With violence which swiftly reasonings fought,
Though the nature of Christ would have taught me comfort.
My wretched will in woe aye tossed;

I fell upon that flowery sward.
Such fragrance to my senses shot,
I fell upon a deathlike sleep
O'er that precious pearl without a spot.

The first thing to be said of this stanza is that objection must be taken to Sister Mary Hillman's punctuation. The extant manuscript bears no punctuation. Sister Hillman explains in her introduction to the poem that she has studied the language closely and is attempting to "clarify the meaning."[21] In this case, however, she has neglected the careful dramatic development which is the key in this stanza. The first eight lines are a powerful expression of grief and its physical manifestations. The narrator paints himself as wringing his hands in the first line. Then he follows through with other complementary feelings--coldness, "A deuely dele in my hert denned," the violence of conflict between reason and emotion--until at the end of the octave the poet is ready to faint to escape the tension which is present, again, even in the sounds of the words. "My wreched wylle in wo ay wraghte," the poet says in the eighth line. The reference to Christ in the seventh line is translated in the subjunctive by Sister Hillman, meaning, finally, that it expresses an idea contrary to fact. There is no resolution for the narrator at all; consequently, by the ninth line the reader is ready for the turn of action: "I felle vpon that floury flaght." The remaining three lines in the final quatrain relate the evolution of action which completes the movement of the poet into a state acceptable for a visionary

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[21]Sister Mary Hillman, "Introduction," The Pearl (New York, 1959), p. viii.

experience. The fragrance "schot" to his senses immediately upon his falling down. And then, "I slode vpon a slepyng-slaghte." Sister Hillman translates "slode" as "fell;" in other words, it is a parallel line to the ninth line in which the poet actually uses the verb "felle." These two lines work together in the final quatrain to achieve the sense of shifting meaning which the _Pearl_-poet often creates through semi-repetition. The idea is the same, the associations are similar, but the meaning has changed. He says first that he fell upon the ground, and then that he fell or slid upon a deathlike sleep. All of this action takes place over the spot where the pearl is lost. It is plausible to accept the ambiguity in this stanza as being a real dual-level shift. The poet has successfully created a sense of paradox.

At this point in the development of _Pearl_, it is not possible to assume that the pearl is a young girl. The metaphor which is consistent throughout the first five stanzas, as well as consistent in this individual unit, is that of a jeweler who has lost a jewel--a relationship which presents the same kind of bonds as if the narrator had lost a child. The idea of creation is inherent in both relationships. That is to say, the jeweler as an artist feels the same sort of attachment to the jewel as a father would to a child. The jeweler feels that the pearl is something made out of himself. To call the pearl a human-figure at this point in stanza five is to read more into this stanza than it warrants. But as he

shifts levels in the final lines, the poet is preparing the reader for a psychological turn. In the next part of the poem, where he finally sees the "Pearl-Maiden," he "immediately identifies her with that which had absorbed his thoughts just before he fell asleep, that which he loved most in this world and for which he had searched in vain--his lost pearl."[22] The technique used in the final quatrain of this stanza is consistent with the manner in which the poem is held together throughout.

Stanza twenty tells of the first meeting of the narrator and the Pearl-maiden. It is a narrative stanza, but it also has its own dramatic development. It describes the girl's approach to the narrator. He has been looking at her for four stanzas, but has been unable to speak. The tension has been building throughout the preceding stanzas, and the narrator has made it clear that he hardly knows how to think about such a miraculous, out-of-the-ordinary experience. Referring to the pearls in which the maiden is attired, he said in Stanza Nineteen as an indication of the paralyzed state of his mind that:

> A man's judgment must in exhaustion stop
> Before the mind dissolve in appraisal of it.
> (ll. 225-226)

Having left himself in this position--completely at the will of the female-figure, the narrator now must further the dramatic development of the stanza and must move it into a position where dialogue may commence.

Stanza Twenty

Adorned with pearls, that precious one
Across the stream came down the bank.
No gladder man from here to Greece
Than I when she was at the brink;
She was nearer to me than aunt or niece.
My joy, therefore, was much the more.
She proffered me speech, that being rare,
In woman-fashion bowing low,

Caught off her crown of value great,
And greeted me with a cheerful word.
Fortunate for me that I was born
To answer that sweet one in pearls adorned!
(ll. 229-240)

The actual confrontation, described in the last four lines of the stanza, is drawn with a great deal of dramatic flair. The Pearl-maiden is described in courtly love language, and comes onto her stage with all the pomp and dignity of a courtly lady. The first part of the stanza is committed to drawing the approach of the Pearl-maiden. The narrator's joy and anticipation grow line by line as she comes closer: the promise of recognition is a possibility. One can see the narrator straining as he awaits. Finally, "Ho watz me nerre then aunts or nece." This line, often interpreted to be a clue that the girl actually is a relative of the narrator (his daughter or younger sister, by inference) falls neatly into the stanza development if seen first as an oblique expression of reduced distance between the maiden and the narrator.

This nearness is defined in terms of space in earlier lines. She has moved down the bank and stands now on the brink, close enough to talk to or to reach

out and touch. But here the closeness is a sensation not limited to space; it involves the whole concept of woman in the courtly love tradition. She is distant, formal, and unapproachable, yet she embodies for the admirer all that is of value in his world. The level has suddenly shifted again. When the narrator gives her "wommon lore" in the eighth line, as she bows before him, he is retaining the metaphor of the courtly lady. The first eight lines, functioning as an octave, have put the maiden in a position to speak to the narrator. The ninth line represents a shift in dramatic development as the reader sees the maiden take off her crown with a great sweeping bow and toss out a cheerful greeting to him. Although he doesn't answer until the next stanza, he finishes this stanza with the thought that he is the most fortunate of men to be in such a position.

The analysis of this stanza as a unit-structure leads to the conclusion that it applies one level to the illumination of another. First, it is a narrative development in that it prepares the poem for the dialogue between the maiden and the narrator which is to follow. It refers to the first words which the maiden spoke. But it is secondly a dramatic development, in that the maiden is described as moving nearer to the narrator. The poet uses this spatially-oriented metaphor within the narrative structure of the stanza.

A fine example of a stanza-unit, one which uses and develops a single, distinct metaphor, is found in Stanza

Thirty Nine. The pearl-bedecked maiden is attempting to explain the concept of heavenly courtesy. In the previous stanza she had said:

> Each one who thither may arrive
> Of the whole realm is queen or king
> And yet shall never dispossess another;
> But each one is glad of the others' having
> And would their crowns were then worth five
> If possible were their enhancement. (ll. 447-452)

The narrator has not been able to understand the lack of jealousy between the equally endowed "queens." Nor could he fathom the idea that "Queen Mary" would allow such a court to exist. So the maiden, who of course embodies infinite patience, proceeds to try a new approach to make her thought clear. She compares the equality of heaven to the make-up of a human body. She speaks in terms of Christ's body because the Church (by extension, the human race) in Catholic theology is the mystical body of Christ. But she is speaking in realistic detail when she says, as in the first four lines, that the head, the arm, the leg, and the navel connect absolutely to one's "body." The second four lines, which continue the idea of unity, refer to the statement in the first part of the stanza by comparing "every Christian soul/ (to) a limb belonging to the Master of Might." Then she says in effect--getting ready to make her point--look at your own limbs and see whether they are jealous of each other. The final quatrain again utilizes a detail before it concludes the idea which the stanza embodies. The head would not be irritated if the finger wore a ring,

she says, and then, "Thus fare we all in love and joy."

Stanza Thirty Nine

Through courtesy, as says Saint Paul,
We all are members of Jesus Christ;
As head and arm and leg and navel
Connect to his body full true and tried,
Just so is every Christian soul
A limb belonging to the Master of Might.
Then look whether any hate or rancor
Is fixed or fastened among thy limbs.

Thy head hath neither wrath nor irritation
Though on arm or finger thou wearest a ring;
Thus fare we all in love and joy,
As king and queen, with courtesy. (ll. 457-468)

The stanza is constructed in groups of three four-line quatrains, although the first two are closely connected by their parallel nature. This close unity of quatrain one and quatrain two follows the pattern of the octave form. The final quatrain confirms, concludes, and brings to a full point the theme of this particular stanza. Moreover, the theme of this stanza is made whole through the development of the twelve lines. When considered as a poem separate of the larger poem of which it is a part, it manifests its own particular strength. It works well within its own structure and successfully creates a sense of roundness and unity which is attributable to the structure of the stanza, but which also enhances the thought which the stanza expresses. The eighth line, for example ("Is tached other tyghed thy lymmez bytwyste") lends the octave a sense of powerful entertwining which is present in the sounds of the words themselves. "Lymmez bytwyste" literally "wraps up" the

octave in a way perfectly complementary to the sense of the stanza.

The imagery of this stanza is developed in such a way that it is unique in Pearl. That is, this is the only stanza which speaks in terms of the unified body as a metaphor for the unity which the Maiden-queen is trying to explain. The reason for its singular occurrence may may well be that it serves its purpose within this stanza. In this sense it performs a limited function. In many stanzas this is not the case; for much of the imagery in Pearl is overlapping. The imagery in each stanza does create, however, a separate facet of that general "symbol" with which it is dealing. Considered in this light, much of the problem of the shifting levels of symbolism is de-emphasized. In separate stanzas--if, as I believe, each stanza can be considered an entity--the references are defined and redefined. This structure makes possible eventual cross-references and multiplicities thereof, and the result is the kind of illuminating complexity which is displayed so forcefully in the final line of the poem as it draws a completed circle (without contrivance!) back to the first line of the poem.

Stanza Sixty Two is developed in such a way that it brings together within the twelve-line unit structure some of the different levels on which the metaphor of the pearl has been explored. This is not to say, however, that this stanza refutes the theory of individual stanza unity which is being described in this paper. It is a

demonstration, rather, of the mounting complexity of symbolic reference which the poem as a whole is achieving. The stanza maintains its own line by line development, but such development must be more encompassing at this point in the development of the whole poem, since it occurs almost two-thirds of the way through Pearl. Psychological shifts are more frequent in this stanza than in the earlier ones. This is because the poet is approximating the thought-associations which are inside the narrator's mind.

This stanza refers indirectly to the parable of the man who was counseled to sell all his earthly goods and follow Christ. The pearl, which has already been described as an immaculate creation, is now associated with Christ. But the Pearl-maiden, who is speaking (The fact that the maiden, who has previously been associated with the lost pearl, is delivering these lines, adds intricacy to the shifting symbolism in the poem.), makes reference to the large pearl which is in the center of her breast. Stanza Nineteen has already hinted at the special significance of this particular pearl. These two levels of pearl symbolism are welded together in the last four lines of this stanza when the maiden says that Christ put this pearl in her breast as a token of peace.

Stanza Sixty Two

This peerless pearl, which is dearly bought--
The jeweler gave all his goods for it--

Is like the Kingdom of Heaven's brightness:
So said the Father of earth and sea.
For it is spotless, pure, and clear,
And round without end and bright of tone,
And common to all who righteous were.
Lo exactly in the center of my breast its place!

My Lord the Lamb, Who shed His blood,
Firmly He fixed it there in token of peace.
I counsel thee to renounce the foolish world,
And purchase thy pearl spotless. (ll. 733-744)

The first quatrain of this stanza makes a simile between 1) the pearl for which the jeweler would pay everything, and 2) the brightness of the heavenly realm. The second quatrain develops this comparison by describing the pearl in terms of roundness, pureness, and clearness. The eighth line locates this pearl symbolically in the center of the maiden's breast. Thus, this pearl takes on--within the visionary nature of the middle of the poem--a physical manifestation for the narrator. This sense of concreteness is developed further in the last quatrain of the stanza. "My Lord the Lamb, Who shed His blood," refers to the human, and thus, physical part of the Christ-figure, which is the part which the narrator, being human, can understand and identify with. In the last two lines the maiden advises the narrator to "purchase thy pearl spotless." The pearl to which she is referring, as developed in this stanza, is first a thing worth more than all earthly goods. It is bright like heaven, pure and clear, and a boon of the righteous. It also is fastened to the breast of the girl, and was put there by Christ. This stanza pulls together in nugget-form the theology which the maiden is propounding

with the metaphorical exploration of the girl and her attire. It rounds itself by beginning and ending with the idea of a purchase. In between the first and the last line the simile is fully developed.

Throughout Pearl the Maiden-queen expounds Christian theology. She develops theological ideas in a variety of ways, this latter stanza-analysis being an example of one such way. Often, however, she is not so metaphorical and subtle. She can be quite straightforward, and, hence, openly didactic in her manner of discussion. Stanza Twenty-seven exhibits this side of the maiden's nature. She tells the narrator that he is mistaken to think he can wish to join her in her heavenly kingdom and thereby make it so. She says first that he must ask permission, and then, that he must consider the possibility that he might be denied. She explains that he must accept and "endure" death before being admitted to heaven. In the last four lines of the stanza she relates the present condition of man to the actions of the first man in the Garden of Eden. The sermon-like nature of this stanza then finds its basis in the idea of original sin.

Stanza Twenty-Seven

Judge now thyself if thou didst lightly speak,
As if man should hurl up words at God.
Thou sayest in this dominion thou wilt dwell.
Methinks it behooved thee first to ask leave,
And yet of permission thou mightest fail.
Thou wishest to move across this stream.
Thou must first submit to another plan:
Thy body in clay must colder sink,

For it was stricken in Paradise-grove;
Our first father did fail to value it.
Through dreary death must each man pass
Ere beyond this stream God judges him.
(ll. 313-324)

The first four lines end with a reprimand, that the narrator should remember his place and ask God for permission to enter heaven. This statement is expanded in the second quatrain as the maiden says, "And yet of permission thou mightest fail." The middle of the poem sets up the "if-then" argument, the "if" being the eternal life of joy which the narrator expresses a desire for, and the "then" being his patient acceptance of death which must precede the fulfillment of his desire. The third four lines extend this precedent--within the framework of Christian theology--all the way back to the beginning of man's existence. The reference is of course to Adam--"our first father"--who failed to acknowledge the word of God. Since that time in "Paradise-grove," man has had to pass through death before he could be in a position to be judged by God.

The progression of this stanza is clearly marked by the quatrain divisions. The first quatrain and the second one deal with the narrator's predicament. In the first four lines the maiden says that he must ask permission; the second four lines consider the possibility that he may be denied, and explain the problem which he must face. These eight lines also complement each other to form an octave; one idea is presented and expanded. It is not until the last four lines, the final quatrain

division, that the basic assumption behind the argument is revealed. The basic assumption goes back to the Garden of Eden, from which the idea of original sin has its roots. The last two lines sum up the necessity of the acceptance of the proposition, because of the crime against God which the first man committed. And the thought is again expressed in terms of "first," and "then":

> Through dreary death must each man pass
> Ere beyond this stream God judges him. (ll. 323-324)

The tone of the stanza is didactic. The maiden is putting forth a theological argument, and uses the tools of logic and rhetoric to make her point. She is consistent through the progress of the twelve lines, and the stanza is, finally, another example of the unity of development which the poet maintains within each stanza. The fact that the maiden refers twice to the "stream" which separates the narrator from her should not be taken as a metaphorical intrusion within the stanza. For the stream is a real part of the world where they are. Within the dream-vision structure of the poem the stream is the obstacle which the narrator faces. It is so "real" to him, in fact, that when he tries to jump into it in Stanza Ninety Eight, he is suddenly awakened and brought back to the garden where he fell asleep. "For just as I charged up to the bank," he says (ll. 1170-1171), "That violence wrenched me out of my dream." The force which the stream

exerts against the narrator is so real, and so physical, in the context of this psychological journey, that it finally wakes him up and throws him violently back into the world in which he lives. Thus, because the whole vision is in one sense metaphorical, the stream may be considered as an object of reference in Stanza Twenty-seven, and as such is in keeping with the tone of the stanza.

III. Conclusion

These particular stanzas--one, four, five, twenty, thirty nine, sixty two, and twenty-seven--were chosen for analysis because they are fairly simple and clear illustrations of the way the stanza-unit is developed in Pearl. It is difficult to discriminate between what is happening in one particular stanza and what is happening in the whole cycle. Stanza One develops a mood, but it also sets up the situation of the poem. Stanza Four turns on lyrical description, but it is also important for the preparation of Stanza Five, which in its turn presents a psychological shift in preparation for the encounter between the maiden and the narrator. Stanza Twenty is a narrative development which uses dramatic tension to point towards the relationship between the narrator and the maiden as it is to be expanded in the following sections of dialogue between the two. Stanza Thirty Nine develops one image, rounding it out fully within the limitations of the stanza, but it also causes natural associations with the Christ-figure which are to occur at the climax of the poem. Stanza Sixty Two combines two different levels of imagery, but these two levels are also reminiscent of other symbolic levels which are in the process of being associated with one another. Stanza Twenty-seven is a philosophical idea

in a nut-shell which at the same time pervades the whole poem.

It is not the intention of this paper to disregard the construction which is the 101 stanzas of Pearl. It is rather, to focus on the stanza development itself because it is so carefully created. A study of the stanza-unit finally reinforces the sensation that the Pearl-poet is building a symbolic complication which soon gets out of hand. Helen Flanders Dunbar describes the implosion-explosion experience of the mind that is confronting medieval symbolism:

> He who plunges at any point into the symbolism of the Middle Ages will find himself as it were in a solar vortex, his vision dazzled by the unnumbered diverging rays, any one of which he may follow indefinitely, strewing tomes behind him as records of his progress.[23]

This is an accurate description of the effect of medieval symbolic technique. But C. S. Lewis shows this description to be something of a misconception when he says: "(The Medieval Man) is like a man being conducted through an immense cathedral, not like one lost in a shoreless sea."[24] For although the medieval man--and the Pearl-poet is a traditionalist--did not profess to be able to see a final total order in the universe, he did believe that a total order was existing around him. This view of

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[23] Helen Flanders Dunbar, Symbolism in Medieval Thought (New York, 1961), p. 24.

[24] C. S. Lewis, The Discarded Image (Cambridge, 1964), p. 100.

CORRECTION

PRECEDING IMAGE HAS BEEN REFILMED TO ASSURE LEGIBILITY OR TO CORRECT A POSSIBLE ERROR

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the world allowed him a sense of freedom to closely inspect the world--his cathedral as it were--and to be exact about it.

It is this feeling of the recognition of unity and order through the perception of smaller and interrelated units which demonstrate the same sense of order that makes Pearl finally similar to a sonnet cycle. For in the sonnet cycle there are two emphases--the sonnet and the cycle--both of which reinforce each other. Pearl is constructed on the same principle. A cause-effect relationship between Pearl and the development of the first sonnet cycles may not be probable, but the importance of the fundamental unit of Pearl--its twelve-line stanza--should be recognized as a clue to the whole poem.

What should be said about the similarity of the Pearl stanza and the earliest sonnets, in rhyme scheme and rhetorical development, is that it implies the concurrent appearance of a need for order which this rigid but flexible structure provided. The similar characteristics embodied in each are part of two related art forms, or belong perhaps, finally, to a single art form. They may be taken as indications of such a relation, at any rate. The Pearl-poet is very careful to change even the alliterative combinations which he repeats from stanza to stanza, as R. J. Menner has pointed out.[25] Even this slight example of the poet's

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[25] R. J. Menner, "Introduction," Purity, A Middle English Poem (New Haven; 1920), p. xiv.

technique adds to the sense of accumulating convolutions which he is pouring into Pearl. He begins on the stanza level, and it is from that point that the poem works to its final effect. The poet, in his walk through the great cathedral, stops to look at, experience, and savor his surroundings each step in his journey.

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