AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF


Abstract approved:

Redacted for Privacy

Elizabeth Campbell

My current Project on the late fourteenth-century Pearl observes the workings of allegory, courtly language, and poetic landscape. During this study, I pursue the elements of the poem that suggest a lack of spiritual growth and change, and an abundance of pain, torment, and confusion for the poem's narrator. I observe the similarities between landscapes and how these similarities lead to the narrator's confusion and repeated misunderstandings. Additionally, I discuss the narrator's swaying emotions and connect this emotional instability to both his potential to experience the joy of memory, as well as his inability to hold onto and interpret the feelings produced by his allegorical surroundings. Throughout this study, I observe the close contrary between joy and grief. The narrator experiences the joy of memory, but he never understands how to use this joy as consolation. Despite the Maiden's attempts to enlighten the narrator, he never understands that his temporary joy is akin to the joy the Maiden experiences eternally in Paradise. I also address questions concerning how the narrator can change and grow spiritually when the Pearl-Maiden’s courtly language and attire reinforce his every earthly assumption. I find that the familiar landscape of the dream world, and the courtly language of the Maiden, only serves to stunt the narrator's spiritual growth.
Confusion and Disappointment in the Dream World: The Allegorical Senses, Courtly Language, and Poetic Landscape in *Pearl*

by

Michael Stewart Lewis

A THESIS submitted to Oregon State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Presented June 4, 2004
Commencement June 2005
Master of Arts thesis of Michael Stewart Lewis

APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

Major Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the Department of English

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the
permanent collection of Oregon State University
libraries. My signature below authorizes release
of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Redacted for Privacy

Michael Stewart Lewis, Author
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere appreciation to Rich Daniels, Elizabeth Campbell, and Kate Marvel without whom this thesis would not have been written or read.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion and the Waking Mind in The Dream World</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Confusion of Debate, The Flaw of Perfection</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confusion and Disappointment in the Dream World: The Allegorical Senses, Courtly Language, and Poetic Landscape in *Pearl*

Considering its permeating presence in *Pearl*, it is no wonder the symbol of the pearl in the late fourteenth-century poem continues to generate discussion among scholars and critics. It seems, in fact, that any study concerning the form of *Pearl* must observe the namesake symbol’s function throughout the poem. Most scholarship on *Pearl*, however, assumes the symbol of the pearl changes to represent different allegorical senses as the poem progresses, and these apparent transformations in the function of the pearl are used to divide the poem into groups of stanzas that best represent each allegorical sense. Thus, for the critics interested in form, “The pearl serves as a symbolic guide to each of the three parts of the poem” (Chance 38) – the physical “erber” (line 37) of the narrator’s waking life, his vision and subsequent debate with the Pearl-Maiden, and his return to the “erber” of the poem’s beginning.

While the presence of the allegorical senses – the literal (physical), allegorical (metaphorical), anagogical (spiritual) and tropological (moral)¹ – cannot be denied in *Pearl* as levels of interpretation crucial to the dreamer-narrator’s attempts to understand his daughter’s heavenly status, isolating groups of stanzas as a single sense and dividing the poem into allegorical parts contradicts the complexity of individual stanzas. Though the poem’s form consists of stanzas in groups of five,² tied together by the poet’s use of concatenation, single stanzas are self-contained units at once

---

¹ The poetic use of the allegorical senses arises from the art of preaching. *The Pearl*, Chance argues, derives its allegorical senses from the medieval practice of *amplificatio*. “One means of amplifying a sermon,” she says, “occurred through the use of the three allegorical senses” (33). This form of biblical interpretation is also derived from St. Augustine.

² In addition to the poet’s use of concatenation to signify a section, or group, of stanzas, the sections of the poem in the original manuscript are marked by “initial letters in blue, with ornament in red” (Gordon x). The poem has twenty initialed sections.
intertwining the allegorical senses, and continually pointing us to the symbol of the
pearl, not as a “symbolic guide,” but an equally self-contained representation of the
relationship between life and death. Regardless of which allegorical sense is most
strongly present in a given section, the remaining three allegorical senses are always
present, and the poem’s primary symbol follows this pattern. The symbol of the pearl,
like each individual stanza, is at once literal and anagogical, tropological and
allegorical. One intention of this study, then, is to show that Pearl is not about change
signified by groups of stanzas representing allegorical parts, but rather a poem that
employs all of the allegorical senses in not only the poetic sections and the primary
symbol, but also individual stanzas. While, in an Augustinian sense, the use of the
allegorical senses as biblical interpretation moves one from darkness and grief to “joy,
vision, and eternal life” (Chance 49), the interplay of all the levels of interpretation
within each stanza only serve to elevate the dreamer-narrator’s difficulty in
understanding the Pearl-Maiden’s heavenly status, signaling the conflicting realities of
life and death that become a “potent and energizing force” within Pearl (Bogdanos 4).
These conflicting realities, moreover, are further emphasized with the poem’s
“blending of courtly fashion and Christian significance…” (Gordon xxxiv).

While there are four allegorical senses, the structure of Pearl is “generally
accepted as tripartite” (Chance 31). “Why there are three rather than four parts to the
poem,” Jane Chance contends, “most likely adheres to the idea that the literal sense
within itself contains the three allegorical senses” (38). The literal sense serves as a
starting point for allegorical interpretation, a “thematic division,” Chance continues
“favored by preachers” (38-39). Since the literal sense “contains within itself” the allegorical, anagogical and tropological senses, the literal sense for Chance is almost always present in Pearl, demonstrating the earthly density of the dreamer-narrator in the “everyday values and assumptions” (Spearing 124) that are part of his material world, and making his ability to understand the Pearl-Maiden’s role of “quene” in heaven impossible.

While modern scholars and critics often divide the stanzas of the poem using the allegorical senses, the poet divides the poem through his use of form. However, further supporting the argument for the allegorically intertwined structure of Pearl, is the fact that the poet’s divisions also unify the poem as a whole. As Edward Condren observes, the form of Pearl employs “twelve line stanzas of only three rhymes each; the third rhyme sustained for all five stanzas in a section; a recurring echo as the first line of each stanza picks up the final sound(s) of the preceding stanza….” (49). This concatenation is achieved through a consistency of form in each individual stanza, rhyming ababababbcbec, where the “echo,” or refrain of the last rhymed syllable (c) is part of the “repeated phrase” (Muscatine 43), or keyword(s) of a section. Even when moving into a new numbered section of the poem, the poet begins the first stanza with the keyword or sound found in the last line of the previous stanza. The last (twelfth) line of the first stanza in a new marked section, however, changes, signifying a new part. Thus even without the “ornamented initial letters” of the manuscript (Gordon x), the parts intended by the poet are recognized. Additionally, that the parts are tied together by the keywords or sounds of the previous section demonstrates the poetic
unity of the poem. Every transition, like the symbol of the pearl, is smooth and there are no drastic changes in form, or, as will be shown, in content. In fact, the form of *Pearl* is an extension of its content (Olson 16). Each poetic part of the poem contains five twelve-line stanzas, with the exception of part XV, which has six. The poem has 101 twelve line stanzas, and, as will be shown, this numbers suggests a flaw in the seeming perfection of the dream world, as well as the Maiden’s physical form, the symbol of the pearl, and the narrator’s claim to bliss and joy in the final stanza.

Despite the *Pearl*-Poet’s use of concatenation and letters to signify sections, dividing the poem into three allegorical parts, without recognizing the intertwining of allegorical senses within individual stanzas, assumes that the dreamer-narrator is capable of change and growth. For Chance, each allegorical sense represents a lesson, and the dreamer-narrator returns to the “erber grene” (line 37) educated in the relationship between life and death, having gained the knowledge of his daughter’s heavenly status. There is nothing in *Pearl*, however, that suggests the dreamer-narrator is capable of understanding his daughter’s heavenly status. In fact, the exchanges between the dreamer-narrator and the Pearl-Maiden are “both comic and touching, because the Dreamer’s repeated misunderstandings are so obviously wrong....” (Spearing 124), and the central aim of this study is to demonstrate how the similarities between the landscape of the physical “erber” and that of the dream world confuse rather than enlighten the narrator. The narrator’s change and growth are also stunted by the Pearl-Maiden’s physical form and use of a courtly rhetoric familiar to

---

3 While I refer to the Andrew and Waldron standard edition of *The Pearl Manuscript*, I have regularized the alphabet using the Dunn and Byrnes edition in *Middle English Literature*. 
his waking life. Additionally, the poet’s intertwining of the allegorical senses in individual stanzas represents the dreamer-narrator’s confusion regarding the dream world because it is simply too familiar. Indeed its familiarity suggests that he simply has nothing new to discover, which is the source of his repeated wrongful assumptions. Thus what’s striking in *Pearl* is not its change and growth, but its utter lack of change and growth, and its abundance of confusion and torment.

The narrator’s lack of change is first witnessed in the dreamer-narrator’s movement from the physical “erber” to the poetic landscape of the dream world. Critics, however, often describe the landscape of the dream world as “dramatic,” and, even, “exotic.” J.A. Burrow, for example, describes the place of the dreamer-narrator’s meeting with his daughter as an “exotic supernatural landscape....” (7). Additionally, Ian Bishop’s study, *The Pearl in its Setting*, maintains that the dream world and the symbol of the pearl represent an ideal setting for the dreamer-narrator’s enlightenment. Most recently, though, Edward Condren and Jim Rhodes focus their attention on the idea of “expansion.” Condren, specifically, views the dreamer-narrator’s transition from the physical “erber” to the dream world as an expansion from earth to the “higher reality” (59) of the spiritual universe. Similar to Chance’s allegorical divisions, the idea of expansion assumes that dramatic change and growth are possible in *Pearl*. Furthermore, it assumes that the dream world is otherworldly. Through a comparison of the physical garden and the dreamer-narrator’s dream-state, however, one recognizes that the two worlds are strikingly similar. The narrator’s dream-state is brighter, and, I will admit, sublime in its “ rych rokses” (Line 68), and
“glemande glory” (70), but both worlds are described in relation to their season of harvest, and the Dreamer’s mind conjures a dream world similar to the “wortes ful schyre and schene” (42) of his material world. Consequently, the narrator conjures an image of the Pearl-Maiden that is consistent with his literal mindset. He believes she exists physically as she did on earth, just as he believes the dream world is a material reality. The poet captures this constant tension between the narrator’s waking life and the dream world by describing both worlds as bright, lush, and fragrant, and on this point Chance is correct in saying, “the paradise [the dreamer-narrator] enters in his dream signifies on one level the same arbor in which he lost his pearl” (41). Thus the lack of change and growth is first suggested in the similarities between the two worlds, and it is continuously reinforced by the interplay of all the allegorical senses in individual stanzas, further emphasizing the dreamer-narrator’s confusion and torment.

The Maiden’s use of a courtly rhetoric, furthermore, makes change impossible for the narrator because it reinforces his every earthly assumption. The environment of the dream world, then, is not otherworldly, and its similarities to the narrator’s waking life make him assume there is nothing to life, but what he physically sees. To demonstrate these similarities of courtly language and landscape, however, requires a close look at how the dreamer-narrator’s confused emotions work within the allegorical landscape of the poem. Also, a study of the dreamer-narrator’s dream as a visionary convention will point to how this medium creates both “an acceptable reason for the poet to portray himself as extraordinarily dense and confused” (Hieatt 62), and an ideal realm for the intertwining of the allegorical senses in individual stanzas. Finally, a look at
the Maiden's use of a courtly language familiar to the narrator's aristocratic waking life will illuminate the source of his earthly assumptions and confusions, as well as his utter lack of change and growth.
Emotion and the Waking Mind in The Dream World

It would not be plausible to draw a line between the dreamer's waking life and the vision he enters in the garden. Just as the allegorical senses in *Pearl* intertwine to create one self-contained unit, the dreamer-narrator's vision is tightly wound around his material world—his waking life. The poetic landscape of the dreamer's vision, in fact, grows from what he sees in the "erber grene" (Line 38). For this reason, as Constance Hieatt contends, the dreamer-narrator's dream is "psychologically motivated" (68). The dreamer-narrator's "human wish" (Bogdanos 40) to reconnect with his lost pearl, as well as the lush landscape of his waking life, motivates his vision, and he brings to the visionary world all the beauty of the "erber grene." Thus the dreamer-narrator's vision is shaped by his desire to see the Pearl-maiden, as well as by the physical garden where the narrator laments the loss of his "Perle" (Line 1).

Because of the striking similarities between the landscape of the "erber grene" and the landscape of the dream world, the dreamer-narrator's material and spiritual realities are in constant conflict. The sustained tension between the dream world and the dreamer-narrator's waking life create the grounds for his density and confusion (62), and just as the "heavenly and earthly" (Spearing 124) realms are bound by their similarities of landscape, so are the allegorical senses.

One cannot observe the workings of allegory in the dream vision of *Pearl* without recognizing its function in the physical "erber." The "erber grene" holds within it the landscape that the dreamer-narrator takes with him to the vision, as well as his range of confused emotions. For this reason, the narrator's vision begins even
before it starts. The "erber" of the narrator’s waking life is the ground from where the vision “mot grow” (Line 31).

The narrator’s vision grows out of the “erber,” and, in this sense, “physical form [does shape] spiritual meaning” (Bogdanos 19). However, the shaping of what Bogdanos calls “spiritual meaning” is recognizable before the dreamer enters the vision. Multiple levels function simultaneously in the “erber,” and thus the poem’s anagogical sense begins even before the narrator’s spiritual journey begins.

The way in which the poem functions on multiple, and intertwined, levels is first suggested by how little time is spent on the purely literal sense. Only the first three lines of the poem are devoted to the literal and material. The Pearl Poet writes, “Perle, plasaunte to prynces paye / Too clanly clos in golde so clere; / Oute of Oryent, I hardyly sayc....” (Lines 1-3). Couched in courtly, aristocratic language, the first lines speak of the poem’s primary symbol as being a material object, familiar to the dreamer’s waking life. There is nothing to suggest that the pearl will soon function symbolically, yet the fact that “Perle” is the first word, “isolated by a caesura” (Bogdanos 13), suggests its permeating force and essence. Beyond the first three lines, however, the symbol of the pearl gains identity. The Pearl Poet continues, “Ne proved I never her precios pere” (Line 4). Whereas in the first three lines the “golde” of the pearl’s setting brings “paye,” the fourth line provides the symbol with a gender. The narrator’s use of the pronoun “her” suggests that the Pearl functions on not only a literal level, but also an allegorical one. Additionally, the fourth line introduces the first of many mixed emotions in Pearl. Just after describing the pearl and its “golde”
setting as nothing more than a material object, the narrator laments that he never “proved,” or experienced, anything equal to the beauty of his pearl, and its loss compounds his grief. Nothing in the narrator’s world can equal the beauty of his pearl, as it has no “pere,” and this lament provides the poem with its elegiac tone. Thus very early in the poem multiple allegorical senses and emotions function within a single stanza. The narrator’s emotions, furthermore, change with the allegorical senses, highlighting the dreamer-narrator’s emotional instability.

More than functioning on multiple allegorical levels, though, the senses also intertwine as the first stanza progresses. By the sixth line, the literal, and the material, become intertwined with the allegorical. The Pearl poet writes, “So rounde, so reken in uche araye, / So small, so smothe her sydes were....” (5-6). After introducing the allegorical level in the fourth line, the poet returns to using words that describe the pearl in purely literal terms. What these two lines suggest, moreover, is an inability to provide the symbol of the pearl with a stable identity, which foreshadows the source of conflict arising during the dreamer-narrator’s debate with his daughter in the dream world.4 But even before arriving in the dream world, the narrator’s language expands the problem of identity beyond descriptions of his daughter, and into his own sense of self. The narrator’s inability to provide the mysterious, precious gem with an identity—living or non-living—is proof of his own emotional uncertainty. The narrator’s seeming lack of a stable emotional self expands in the dream world, where he cannot

---

4 Though scholars recognize the narrator’s difficulty in ascribing the pearl-maiden a stable identity during the visionary debate, few recognize the foreshadowing that occurs during the narrator’s waking life. A.C. Spearing, Stephen Russell and Constance Hieatt explore the problem of identity for both the narrator and his daughter, but only in the vision, and, more specifically, in the debate scene.
detach himself from the material reality of his waking life, complicating the spiritual lessons provided by the Pearl-Maiden.

The narrator’s inability to see beyond the material reality of his waking life plagues him throughout the poem. Even before entering the visionary landscape of the dream world, the narrator’s descriptions of the pearl demonstrate a dense preoccupation with his own grief. The narrator, in this sense, is an “isolated figure, within and without his dream” (Aers 57). In addition to the narrator’s grief, he is also “isolated” by his expression of emotion. As stated by David Aers, “[the narrator] can only be identified as belonging to a particular kind of community by his language, the language of a courtly elite” (57-58). By likening his daughter to a precious gem, and then confusing her for a literal pearl, while contemplating how the pearl brings “paye” to the “courtly elite,” the narrator demonstrates the limitations of his knowledge. Even among the “rych rokkes” (Line 68) of the visionary landscape, the narrator only expresses what he knows of his waking life. “The Dreamer,” Spearing states, “is an inadequate vessel for the experience of his dream” (126), and this inadequacy burgeons within the waking life of the “erber.”

Blooming among the “corne” and “crokes” of the “erber” (Line 40) are the confusions and tormented emotions the narrator will take with him into the dream world. In addition to the narrator’s inability to assign the symbol of the pearl with a stable identity, the descriptions of the “erber” and the memory of his child also enhance the torment of his grief. When describing the “spote” where he lost his pearl, the memory of past joy only serves to remind the narrator of his loss. He says, “That
dos bot thrych my hert thrange, / My breste in bale bot bolne and bele. / Yet thought
me never so swete a sange / As style stounde let to me stele....” (17-20). Similar to
the unexplainable reasons behind one’s “spirit [growing] not sad” (59) in the Old
English poem, *The Wanderer*, the narrator in *Pearl* is also perplexed by his ability to
feel joy in the sweet songs of his memory, amidst the reality of his sorrow and loss.
While the narrator is clearly saddled with “bale,” or sorrow, the memory of his
daughter smoothes the “bolne” and “bele” of his grief, and his changing emotion is
accompanied by a change of tone in line nineteen. The poet accomplishes this tone
change through both his use of the narrator’s change in emotion and the alliterative
tradition. Specifically, the narrator moves from the weight of his sorrow found in the
heavy alliteration of “breste,” “bale,” “bolne,” and “bele,” to the soothing power of his
memory, which is further represented by the smooth alliteration of the words, “swete”
and “sange,” a less obtrusive alliteration. Line nineteen, furthermore, is not end-
stopped, which allows for the enjambment of S sounds into line twenty, recognized in
the words “style” and “stounde.” This joy of memory, however, is fleeting for the
narrator, as it serves only to remind him of what is lost, saying, “To thenke hir color so
clad in clot. / O moul, thou marres a myry juele....” (22-23). While the narrator
temporarily transcends grief with the memory of his “myry juele,” his thoughts return
to the earth, where his pearl lies, which further heightens the circular nature of both
the poem and its primary symbol.

Though the narrator’s thoughts circle back to the earth, his temporary joy of
memory highlights his ability to see beyond his grief. His consolation is always
ephemeral, but his wish to maintain his joy is another element motivating his dream vision. The narrator wishes for constant joy, and the repeated swaying of his emotions suggests his desire for some sort of spiritual and emotional shaping. Just as a pearl is not created perfect, the narrator must also undergo shaping if he is to achieve the consolation his daughter provides. Thus placed alongside the pearl's "rounde" and "smothe" (5-6) appearance, one recognizes the jaggedness of the narrator's emotions, which serves as a guide to his imperfection and lack of understanding throughout the poem. In contrast to the pearl's perfection, one recognizes the imperfection of the narrator, and his inability to change and control his emotions.

Placed alongside the narrator's confused emotions, the Pearl Poet's descriptions of the "erber grene" in the "hygh seysoun" (38-39) of August create a stark contrast between the lushness of the poetic landscape and the narrator's confused psychological state of mind. Since the narrator's emotions vary between joy and grief in single stanzas, he cannot completely and permanently grow beyond what has been lost to find comfort in the memory of his pearl. While the life-begetting growth bringing the harvest in August is inextricably linked to his daughter's continued growth in paradise, the narrator's moments of joy are never long enough for him to complete this connection and allow it to assuage his suffering. Yet just before entering the dream world, the narrator does describe his daughter as a seed. He says, "So semly a sede moght fayly not, / That spryngande spyces up ne sponnne / Of that precios perle wythouten spotte" (34-36). While the narrator recognizes the possibility of death begetting life – that something "moght fayly not" to grow from his lost
"perle" – he does not use the connection to ease his pain. Rather, after describing the lush plant life growing in the "erber," he is again overtaken with suffering and torment, saying, "I playned my perle, that ther was spenned...." (53). The narrator’s quick return to suffering is accompanied by, if not a hatred for the earth confining his pearl, certainly a strong resentment. The narrator’s “mixed emotions” and misplaced use of the earth shatter any hope for “a smooth transition” into the landscape of his vision, which foreshadows a similar lack of “smooth transition between the earthly and heavenly” realm of the dream world (Spearing 126). Likewise, the lack of a “smooth transition,” foreshadowed by the confusion of his waking life provides an acceptable reason for the narrator’s difficulty in understanding the lessons his daughter attempts to provide during the dream vision.

Once the narrator enters the dream world, he is faced with the same grief, confusion and torment plaguing him in the “erber grene.” However, just as his grief is temporarily assuaged by memory in his waking life, the poetic landscape of the dream world also serves to console – even distract - the narrator, at least until he meets the Pearl-maiden. Thus, by all appearances, the narrator’s movement into the dream world is smooth. Since the landscape is an expanded “abstraction” (Spearing 21) of the “erber grene,” the dream world is, at first, free of confusion for the narrator in its very familiarity. The narrator walks with ease through the dream world because it is his psychological creation, triggered by the intoxicating “odour” (58) of the erber, as well as his wish to be reunited with his daughter.
The undeniable overlapping between the narrator’s waking life and his dream state is recognizable in the Pearl-Poet’s use of a gradual movement into the dream world. The narrator’s arrival into the dream world is neither psychologically jarring nor physically or mentally strenuous. This ease of movement is, in part, because of the similarities of landscape between the dream world and the waking life of the “erber,” but the poetic form of Pearl — its divided sections - also adds to the illusion of a “smooth transition.” In part I of the poem, each twelve line stanza ends with the keyword “spot/spotte,” referring to either a place or a blemish. When the narrator moves into the dream world in part II of the poem, the word is repeated in the first line, binding the earthly realm to the visionary realm, which is further evidence of the lack of a clear separation between the narrator’s waking life and the visionary landscape of his dream. The Pearl-Poet’s use of keywords at once signifies/divides parts and fuses the parts together. The overall effect of this structure is one of effortless movement for the narrator, and, in this sense, the poem progresses without ever leaving its beginning. Pearl’s form, then, is an extension of content, making smooth transitions between sections, but always leaving one to question whether the dreamer-narrator tells his story after awaking from the dream, or one follows his journey as it occurs. In any case, there is always a sense that the dreamer-narrator is neither fully awake nor fully asleep.

Indeed the narrator occupies both the material world and the visionary world throughout his visionary journey. Just as elements of the dream world are present in the “erber” of his waking life, elements of the material world are present in his vision,
making what seems a smooth transition problematic during the debate with his daughter. The *Pearl*-Poet achieves this dual occupancy through the similarities of poetic landscape between the two worlds. The visionary world is earthly in its “crystal klyffs so cler of kynde” (74) and it is these earthly elements that compel the narrator to force assumptions of the waking mind onto the visionary world, returning him to the literal sense, and making him a difficult student to the Maiden. Furthermore, the similarity of the visionary world to the literal earth heightens one’s sense that the narrator is on middle ground. The narrator is no longer on earth, yet he is not in paradise. The overall effect of the narrator’s dual occupancy is one of instability. On earth, the narrator is only a fleeting memory away from the joy of the visionary world, and, in the visionary world, the narrator is only a mistake away from returning to the physical earth.

The narrator’s lack of freedom from his literal sense always keeps him close to the physical earth, regardless of the allegorical landscape surrounding him. For example, upon entering the visionary world, the narrator mistakes the body of water separating his middle-ground world from “Paradyse” (137) for a literal, earthly stream (chance 48). He says, “For-thy I thought that Paradyse / Was ther over gayn tho bonkes brade. / I hoped the water were a devyse / Bytwene myrthes by meres made” (137-140). Though the dreamer-narrator is isolated within his literal sense, the stanza describing the stream intertwines all of the allegorical senses, which further highlights his confusion. The keyword tying this second part of the poem together is “more,” and the stanza is enclosed by the repetition of the word. The poet’s use of
concatenation in this stanza functions on a tropological, or moral level, suggesting that part of the narrator's density arises out of his desire for excess. The narrator quickly becomes tired of what he has in the beauty of the visionary landscape and desires the "more" he does not have on the other side of the stream. What the narrator cannot grasp is the fact that nothing is gained in the "kyndom of God" (445), but what is given, a lesson the Maiden attempts to provide during the parable of the vineyard, saying, "The laste schal be the fyrst that strykes, / And the first the laste...." (570-71). The narrator cannot use his will to gain "more," but rather his entrance into Paradise must be granted by God. The narrator's assumption that he can simply walk across the stream is taken as a kind of moral treason by the Pearl-Maiden, but the narrator fails to fully grasp his mistake both in the first description of the stream and the parable of the vineyard. Additionally, the first description of the stream also functions on both an allegorical and anagogical level. Allegorically, the stream represents the division between earthly literalism and heavenly reason, and the anagogical sense cannot be detached from this representation. In the same stream stanza, the narrator comments on how "depe" (143) the water is, which signifies the vast spiritual depths of all that the narrator must learn before entering "Paradyse" (137). Yet despite the intertwining of all the allegorical senses in the stream stanza, the narrator cannot escape his dense literalist mind set. The significance of this intertwining around the narrator's literal sense, furthermore, is that it represents the difficulty – even lack – of change for the narrator. While he is asleep, he sees as if he is awake.
The narrator’s “preoccupation [with] his waking mind” (Spearing 114) complicates his ability to understand his daughter’s role in heaven. However, upon first arriving in the dream world, there is nothing to foreshadow the difficulty the narrator will encounter in understanding the lessons the Pearl-Maiden attempts to teach. The “smooth transition” from the “erber” to the dream world is followed by “an ideal and symbolic landscape” (Spearing 4). The landscape for the dreamer-narrator is “ideal” in the sense that it assuages his grief and, at first, requires no physical or mental strain. Everything in the dream world is familiar to the narrator in its earthly characteristics, but the landscape is exaggerated just enough for the narrator to forget his grief. He says, “I ne wyste in this worlde where that hit wace, / Bot I knew me keste ther klyfes cleven. / Towarde a foreste I bere the face, / Where rych rokkes wer to dyscreven” (65-68). The poetic landscape of the dream world is not beyond the language of the narrator. For the narrator, the landscape is “ideal” in its exaggerated reality. The dream world, says Spearing, “is presented with none of the ironies and ambiguities which surround the dream-world in Chaucer, but quite straightforwardly as a reality” (119). The landscape of the narrator’s vision is of his “worlde,” and this familiarity allows him to accept the elements of his vision. In fact, the narrator’s acceptance of his dream vision guides him towards the Pearl-Maiden. The narrator is immediately drawn to the “foreste,” and he does not question the necessity to move in its direction.

Adding to the appearance of a smooth transition is “the ease with which the jeweler climbs the hills of the dream landscape” (Hieatt 106). Common to alliterative
poetry of the fourteenth century, the dream poem is an intellectual rather than physical journey. The dream poem, Spearing states, “gives access to some form of information or teaching. The visionary goes to the other world in order to learn something....” (18). Indeed there is no place for physical exertion in the dream world (the narrator attempts to use physical exertion to cross the stream and is then rejected from his vision), which differs significantly from the physical journeys of the classical age. The Pearl-Poet writes, “I welke ay forth in wely wyse; / No bonk so byg that did me deres. / The fyrr in the fyrth, the feyrrer con ryse / The playn, the plonttes, the spyse, the peres, / And rawes and randes and rych reveres - / As fyldor fyn her bonkes brent.” (101-106). The ease with which the dreamer-narrator climbs the “bonk” of his vision is further evidence that maneuvering through the visionary landscape requires more than physical exertion. In other words, while the ease of physical movement creates the illusion of a smooth transition into the dream world, it also suggests that any challenge presented to the dreamer-narrator will not require physical strength. Rather, all challenges presented to the dreamer-narrator during his vision – namely by the Pearl-Maiden – will test the intellect.

The journey the dreamer-narrator takes in Pearl is an intellectual and spiritual one. In addition to the uselessness of physical exertion in the dream world, the lessons the Pearl-Maiden provides demand a way of knowing and seeing beyond what is seen with one’s waking eyes. When the dreamer-narrator first meets the Pearl-Maiden, in fact, he is chided for only believing what he sees, which foreshadows the source of his inability to change. The Pearl-Maiden says, “Ye setten Hys wordes ful westernays /
That leves nothynk bot ye hit syghe” (307-08). By depending on his physical sight for understanding, the dreamer-narrator displays a strict literal mindset, which “is a reflection of the preoccupation of his waking mind” (Spearing 114). It is the narrator’s dense literal mindset, furthermore, that complicates his ability to understand the allegorical lessons provided by his daughter during their debate.

The dreamer-narrator’s literal mindset, first and foremost, will not allow him to view the Pearl-Maiden as anything but his flesh and blood daughter. The dreamer-narrator’s confusion is caused in large measure by the “authoritative figure” (Spearing 11) of the Pearl-Maiden, which is a distinct element of the visionary tradition. As Spearing contends, dream poetry tends “towards a certain complex of subject matter: an ideal and often symbolic landscape, in which the dreamer encounters an authoritative figure, from whom he learns some religious or secular doctrine....” (4). The dream vision of Pearl, however, works against the “authoritative figure” tradition in the sense that it reverses power roles through irony. In the dream world, the narrator is no longer the father, and he is the student rather than the teacher. The Pearl-Maiden is an uncompromising figure of authority in the dream world, yet, as David Aers observes, the dreamer-narrator repeatedly “tries to induce a sense of guilt in her, trying to make her see herself as a failing female, one whose refusal to fill the received role of female love object causes him great pain” (64), saying, “Demes thou me, ... my swete, / To döl again, thenne I dowyne” (lines 325-26). Thus the dreamer-narrator is plagued by “a competitive individualism which was basic to the culture of honormen and their courts” (Aers 65). The Pearl-Maiden’s new role in the dream
world, then, is to reverse the narrator's memory of her as a child through allegory – through seeing beyond what is witnessed by the eyes, and what is practiced and embedded in the narrator's memory. The poem, and, more specifically, the debate ask if the blemish, or "spot" of the waking mind can be reversed by the Pearl-Maiden's allegorical lessons.
The Confusion of Debate, The Flaw of Perfection

As suggested in chapter one, the dreamer-narrator arrives in the dream world positing a seemingly unflappable aristocratic discourse of love, power, and courtly expectations. Because of the similarities between the landscape of the physical "erber" and that of the vision, the dreamer assumes "human discourse" (Russell 160) will provide an acceptable explanation for his grief, as well as his daughter's role of "quene" (415) in Paradise. Compounding the dreamer's dense literal mindset, furthermore, is his lack of ability to see beyond what he witnesses with his eyes, prompting a chiding from the Pearl-Maiden upon their first meeting, saying, "Ye setten Hys wordes ful westernays / That leves nothynk bot ye hit syghe" (307-308). The narrator only believes what he can "syghe," and this is most costly when he mistakes the body of water in his vision for a literal stream, rather than a division between earthly literalism and heavenly reason. The dreamer cannot comprehend the anagogical and spiritual significance of the visionary landscape, and, in this sense, he is an abject "allegorical interpreter" (Honig 21). However, while he clearly cannot see beyond literal appearance in the visionary landscape, the narrator is expected to understand the allegorical significance of his daughter's dress, language, and anagogical lessons, and these expectations are demonstrated in the Pearl-Maiden's lack of tolerance for her father's mistakes and earthly assumptions. The narrator, then, is not prepared for the allegorical intensity of his dream, and this is most evident during the debate with his daughter. Additionally, the dreamer-narrator's lack of
ability to change and grow – to understand fate, accept consolation, and "[resign] to the will of God" (Gordon xviii) – is made evident by his confused and swaying emotions. However, as will become evident through a discussion of the debate, the narrator has every reason to be confused and disappointed, making one sympathetic to his utter lack of change and growth.

The dialogue between the narrator and the Pearl-Maiden "turns on verbal conflict" (Reed 404). However, the term debate cannot be restricted to "a verbal contest for supremacy" (3), intellectual or moral, because there is simply no "contest" in the dream world. The narrator is simply out of his element, and he presents not arguments to the Pearl-Maiden, but, rather, repeated misunderstandings prompted by his literalist, aristocratic mindset. Additionally, in contrast to debates of the classical age, intellectual superiority and persuasion are not at stake in Pearl. Rather, the narrator's spiritual enlightenment is the focus of the Maiden's attempts to provide the necessary allegorical lessons. While the Pearl-Maiden's attempts to explain her role in heaven require the narrator to stretch the limits of his knowledge and intellect, "supremacy" is not the desired end result for either party. The Pearl, then, stretches the limits of the term debate, but this stretching is consistent with "doctrinal dialogues as practiced in the Middle Ages" (Reed 3). These dialogues "involve an exchange between a naïve persona and an authority with obvious claims to moral superiority" (3). As will be discussed, the debate in Pearl is consistent with Reed's definition of doctrinal dialogues, as the Pearl-Maiden does claim, if not "moral superiority," certainly spiritual authority, as she is in her element. However, demonstrating
spiritual authority is not as much the Maiden's intent as it is attempting to lead the narrator out of the darkness of his ignorance. Furthermore, it is necessary that one question any sign of anagogical enlightenment in Pearl, as the dream vision does not provide an environment conducive to spiritual growth, consolation, or any conversion of thinking.

As I suggest in chapter one, when there are signs of growth and change in Pearl, they are ephemeral and transitory. When the narrator finds temporary joy, his brief elation is quickly replaced by grief and foreboding, and this swaying of emotions occurs within single stanzas. However, just before meeting the Pearl-Maiden, an entire stanza is devoted to the narrator's joy:

The dubbement dere of doun and dales,
Of wod and water and wlonk playnes,
Blyde in me blys, abated my bales,
Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my paynes.
Doun after a strem that dryghly hales
I bowed in blys, bredful my braynes.
The fyrre I folghed those floty vales,
The more strenghthe ofjoye myne herte straynes.
As Fortune fares ther as hō fraynes,
Whether solace ho sende other elles sore,
The wygh to wham her wylle ho waynes
Hyttes to have ay more and more. (121-32)

What is striking about this stanza is its description of the narrator's landscape-induced joy, and the narrator's seeming contemplation of "Fortune." Unlike any other single stanza in Pearl, this stanza is consistently joyful, and rather than contemplating his own loss and grief, the narrator contemplates the workings of fate and fortune. Indeed the Pearl-Poet's use of alliteration establishes an iambic rhythm that captures the
intensity of the narrator’s joy. Through the repetition of hard consonants, and the poet’s use of enjambment, it seems the narrator cannot begin to name all the wonderful things about his visionary landscape, saying, “The dubbement dere of doun and dales, / Of wod and water and wlonk playnes, / Blyde in me blys, abated my bales...” (121-23). Additionally, the narrator is comforted by the hills, valleys, and streams of the dream world, and, as in shorter sections of the poem, this comfort is, at least, suggested by the repetition of soothing S sounds. In fact, ten out of twelve lines in this stanza end with S, which further supports the narrator’s consistency of joy throughout the entire stanza. What’s more, the zeugma of line 123 demonstrates a growth – even a crescendo - of joy that consumes the narrator’s every emotion. The verb “Blyde,” aroused, brings “blys,” and this arousal of bliss assuages the narrator’s “bales,” or sorrows.

By all appearances the visionary landscape eases – even erases - the “bales” of the narrator. For the first time in the poem, twelve full lines are devoted not to mere descriptions of the landscape, or to the swaying of emotions, but to pure joy and bliss. It seems, in fact, that the narrator’s joy allows him to reach a higher state of consciousness, where he is capable of contemplating the impartial and “uncertain” workings of fate and “Fortune” (Boethius 15). Specifically, the narrator discusses how “Fortune” will send either “solace” or “sore” and his language suggests, for the first time, an understanding and acceptance that one must endure whatever “goddess Fortune” offers. However, the narrator’s consistent joy demonstrates the fact that he is more willing to endure joy than grief, and adding to this contradiction is his
assumption that whoever is granted “solace,” “Hyttess [chances] to have ay more and more” (132). But as demonstrated in Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*, fortune “pretends to be friendly to those she intends to cheat, and disappoints those she unexpectedly leaves with intolerable sorrow” (21). The narrator’s return to his unstable emotions in subsequent stanzas, as well as his repeated misunderstandings during the debate with his daughter, suggests that fortune is only temporarily being “friendly.” Also, the keywords ending this stanza and unifying the entire third part are “more and more,” which highlights the narrator’s assumption that fortune will bring “more” fortune, rather than more grief and disappointment.

The narrator’s repeated assumptions lead to both his misunderstandings and his disappointments. The narrator’s repeated false assumptions and misunderstandings stem from his inability to read and interpret the loss of his “perle” and the landscape of the visionary world. Like Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, the narrator’s journey in *Pearl* is one that attempts to teach self-preservation through allegorical interpretation (Honig 21). Boethius writes, “Philosophy answers that the only true joy is self-possession in the face of adversity” (27). The narrator, like Boethius, faces great adversity and personal tragedy, and as the Pearl-Poet’s bliss-filled stanza demonstrates, he lacks the “self-possession” necessary to interpret and question his joy. Rather than questioning the quick intensity of joy in the midst of suffering, the narrator accepts joy for joy, and fortune for “more” fortune, though, for both the narrator in *Pearl* and Boethius joy is transitory, and their consolation depends upon their ability to remain self-possessed — to maintain an emotional middle ground that
allows them to interpret both their joy and their grief. While Boethius eventually achieves consolation, however, the events of the dreamer-narrator's vision do not provide a stable environment where spiritual growth, change, and consolation are possible.

Contributing to his lack of growth and change, and consistent with his lack of an emotional middle ground, the natural elements of the narrator's visionary landscape are, in many respects, too ideal. It is, after all, the rich beauty of the landscape - a landscape made familiar by the "erber" of his waking mind - that makes the narrator covetous of the "Paradyse" (Line 137) beyond the "devyse," or division, of water (139). The land that must be between earth and "Paradyse" brings "blys" (126), but it is just familiar enough to make the narrator desire "more and more," suggesting that he is not "master of himself" and his emotions (Boethius 9). Rather, the visionary landscape controls the narrator's emotions.

The degree to which landscape controls emotion in *Pearl* is demonstrated in the *Pearl*-Poet's descriptions of the narrator's walk toward the river where he will meet the Pearl-Maiden. There are three key instances of the landscape's effect on the narrator's emotions, one of which calls into question its control. First, as suggested in chapter one, the narrator relates his ease of physical movement, saying, "No bonk so byg that did me deres" (102). The narrator's ease of movement assuages his grief the further he walks through the dream world. Next, two stanzas later, the descriptions change from an ease of physical movement to a release from suffering. He says, "The fyrre I folghed those floty vales, / The more strengthe of joye myn herte straynes"
The “fyrre” (farther) the narrator follows the “floty (watery) vales,” the more strength and joy he imagines he gains, which is direct evidence of the visionary landscape’s control of his emotions. Yet amidst the narrator’s ease of movement and landscape-induced joy, is a certain curiosity concerning how much joy the living soul can endure, saying, “For urtherly herte might not suffyse / To the tenthe dôle of tho gladness glade” (135-36). It seems that, on some level, the narrator senses the transitory reality of his joy. The living “herte,” in a sense, is not big enough to store even a “tenthe” of the visionary landscape’s joyful beauty. In other words, the narrator senses that his joy is too good to be true, but he never uses this sense to question whether or not his joy is already too abundant. Rather, the narrator wants “more and more” joy, and the Pearl-Poet demonstrates this fact by turning the narrator’s sights to the “Paradyse” across the river in the next line (137). Thus the narrator’s moments of questioning the landscape’s control over his emotions are always short, as they are quickly replaced by his covetous desire for “more” joy.

Indeed the landscape of the dream vision caters to the narrator’s every desire, which complicates his ability to fully question its control. However, the dreamer-narrator’s eventual disappointment in the dream world is intensified by the easy joy the landscape appears to provide. When the landscape of the narrator’s vision ceases to provide joy – when he is cheated by fortune (Boethius 21) - the remainder of his journey is incongruous with everything he has witnessed during his vision. The debate with the Pearl-Maiden, specifically, marks the end of the narrator’s easy joy, and it is the point at which “goddess Fortune” ceases to be “friendly” (21).
Furthermore, like every event in *Pearl*, the narrator’s disappointment is carefully foreshadowed by the *Pearl*-Poet.

One is first alerted to the narrator’s reversal of fortune by the ambiguity of the *Pearl*-Poet’s language. Upon first seeing the Pearl-Maiden from across the divide of the stream, the narrator is paralyzed by fear. However, the *Pearl*-Poet’s poetics isolate the narrator’s fear, keeping the reason(s) for his fear mysterious. He writes, “More then me lyste, my drede aros. / I stod ful style and dorste not calle” (181-82). By end-stopping both lines, the poet delays the explanation of the narrator’s fear. But what’s more, the end-stopped lines, combined with the caesura in line 181, are representative of the narrator’s paralyzed state – his disbelief in what he is seeing. Again, form is an extension of content (Olson 16). The narrator suspends his movement, and pauses before explaining the multiple reasons for his fear.

When the narrator elaborates on his fear, he displays a desire for continued joy, and, as his language suggests, he believes the Maiden will provide him with this continued fortune:

Wyth yghen open and mouth ful clos  
I stod as hende as hawk in halle.  
I hoped that gostly was that porpose;  
I dred onende what schulde byfalle,  
Lest hö me eschaped that I ther chos,  
Er I at steven hir moght stalle.  
That gracios gay wythouten galle,  
So smothe, so small, so seme slight,  
Ryses up in hir araye ryalle,  
A precios piece in perles pyght. (183-92)
As the stanza progresses, the narrator elaborates on the reasons for his fear and paralyzed state. What is most interesting about the remaining stanza is its focus on the narrator’s emotional fulfillment. Rather than being particularly concerned with the Maiden’s well being, the narrator fears the loss of his own joy if his eyes deceive him, and/or his daughter should “eschape” – elude – him. It is also important to note the lack of any further descriptions of the visionary landscape in this stanza. The moment the narrator sees the Maiden, the source of his joy shifts from the landscape to the Maiden and her “perles pyght,” and he expects his daughter to provide the same level of joy that he finds in the landscape. Additionally, the narrator expects his daughter to be the same as she was when he knew her, which is demonstrated with the repetition of “So smothe, so small, so seme slight,” terms used to describe the mysterious “perle” in the first stanza of the poem. The narrator assumes that he will still be the one in authority, and that his daughter will provide him with joy, where the landscape leaves off. These expectations complicate the narrator’s ability to grow, and they are some of the key sources of the debate. These sources also reflect an environment not conducive to change, but rather confusion and misunderstanding.

The environment of the narrator’s dream consists of the visionary landscape, as well as the Pearl-Maiden and her dress, language, and courtly manner. Once the narrator sees the Maiden, his descriptions of the visionary landscape cease, and his descriptions of the Pearl-Maiden begin. Just like his descriptions of the landscape, the narrator’s descriptions of the Pearl-Maiden are surface and lacking any form of allegorical interpretation. For the narrator, the Maiden is the daughter of his memory,
and he views the pearls she wears as literal, earthly gems. The narrator assumes the pearls his daughter wears are nothing more than material objects, and this literal mindset is suggested in his numerous references to being “a gentyl jueler” (265). However, one sympathizes with the narrator’s dense literal mindset, as the environment surrounding the debate is confusing in its earthly familiarity. It is because of this familiarity that the narrator assumes there is nothing to question or interpret – that there is nothing to learn, because nothing is out of keeping with the “courtly elite” (Aers 57).

The courtly manner of his daughter, specifically, is initially suggested in the Pearl-Poet’s descriptions of her dress. The Pearl-Maiden is adorned like a queen, and this is familiar to the aristocratic life of the narrator:

A pyght coroune yet wer that gyrl
Of marjorys and non other ston,
Highe pynaked of cler whyt perle,
Wyth flurted flowers perfet upon.
To hed hade hô non other werle.
Her here leke, al hyr umbegon,
Her semblaunt sade for doc other erle,
Her ble more blaght then whalles bon.
As schorne golde schyr her fax thenne schon,
On schylderes that leghe unlapped lyghte.
Her depe colour yet wonted non
Of precios perle in porfyl pyghte. (205-16)

The Pearl-Maiden wears a crown adorned with “marjorys and non other ston” (206), making her appearance courtly. Compounding her courtly appearance is her aristocratic manner. Her face, encircled by “Her here” (210) is stern, which foreshadows her future treatment of the narrator – “a mixture of firm pedagogy and
respectful sympathy” (Muscateine 50) – during the debate. Additionally, within the narrator’s description of the Pearl-Maiden’s attire is a strict adherence to the language of what David Aers calls the “courtly elite” (57). Though this stanza is rich with the allegorical symbol of the pearl, the narrator sees the gems only as earthly pearls, and his courtly language suggests his strict literalism. The narrator uses language that pertains “to love and [reflects] the material conditions, social structure, and refined ideals of an aristocratic milieu” (Gross 80). Indeed the narrator’s description of the Pearl-Maiden posits a strong discourse of love, which is evident in the language that compares her appearance to a “precios perle.” However, the narrator’s repeated comparisons between his daughter and the symbol of the pearl also highlight the dominant social structures of his waking life. While the narrator describes the “pyght coroune” worn by his daughter, he never likens her to a queen. Rather he classifies her as “that gyrle,” which suggests his assumption that – as on earth – he still holds some form of fatherly authority. The narrator, in fact, demonstrates a strict focus on the pearls, a focus that distracts him from attempting to interpret his daughter’s overall appearance and role in the dream world. This focus on the material gem is further illustrated by the narrator’s terse description of the Maiden’s flesh, saying, “Her depe colour yet wonted non / Of precios perle in porfyl pyghte.” Even when the narrator achieves a focus on his physical daughter, he compares her to a material gem, and this comparison at once demonstrates the narrator’s misplaced sense of authority and value, as well as his desire to have his daughter bring him joy. All told, the narrator demonstrates his “aristocratic milieu” with his inability to separate material joy from
spiritual joy. He expects that his daughter will bring him joy just as material pearls bring “paye” to earthly “prynces” (Line 1). However, the narrator’s assumptions, expectations, and confusions seem justifiable considering the courtly attire and courtly language of the Pearl-Maiden.

The Pearl-Maiden’s use of courtly language reaffirms the narrator’s sense of aristocratic authority. When the Maiden first speaks to the narrator, her courtly manner and attire is familiar from the narrator’s waking life, and he assumes the social structure of his waking life is still in place. Though Charlotte Gross contends, “the Pearl-Maiden’s courtly rhetoric provides an accurate indication of her spiritual state and the most nearly adequate vehicle for the expression of the ineffable” (80), I believe the Maiden’s courtly language and manner only serve to confuse the narrator and stunt his ability to change and grow with the Maiden’s attempted lessons. Considering the Maiden’s courtly manner and language, it seems this is the result intended by the poet. The Maiden’s courtly manner is simply too akin to the workings of the narrator’s aristocratic waking life.

The first words exchanged between the narrator and the Maiden demonstrate a clashing of intended uses of courtly language. The narrator uses language that expresses his love for his daughter and the pain of his loss, and he expects she will accept his elegy in a way that allows him to control her identity (Aers 62):

“O perle,” quod I, “in perles pyght,  
Art thou my perle that I haf playned,  
Regretted by myn one on nyghte?  
Much longeyng haf I for thee layned,  
Sythen into gresse thou me aglyghte.
Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,  
And thou in a lyf of lykyng lyghte,  
In Paradys erde, of stryf unstrayned.  
What wyrde has hyder my juel vayned,  
And don me in thys del and gret daunger?  
Fro we in twynne wern townen and twayned,  
I haf ben a joyless juelere.” (241-52)

As the narrator’s emotions change from the pure joy of silently observing the Pearl-Maiden to a mix of bitter joy and grief when he speaks, he uses words intended to reaffirm the social structure—father and daughter—of their relationship. In doing so, the narrator’s courtly language, and his intended expression of love, serves to place the responsibility of his bliss and happiness in the Maiden’s hands, saying, “Art thou my perle that I haf playned....” (242). Again, the dreamer-narrator shrinks the image of the pearl and the Maiden into one controllable, ownable material object. With his repetition of the pronouns “I” and “my,” furthermore, one recognizes that the narrator uses courtly language to focus on his own loss and grief as a means to re-establish his position of authority, while also comparing his “del,” or sorrow, to the Maiden’s “lykyng” in hopes that her words will restore his bliss and happiness. However, the Pearl-Maiden uses her courtly language to different ends.

The Pearl-Maiden speaks in a courtly language familiar from her father’s aristocratic life, but the content of her language shocks and confuses him. While the narrator expects his daughter to accept his elegy by offering him consolation, she chides him for his self-interested, literalist mindset:

“Sir ye haf your tale mysetente,  
To say your perle is al awaye,  
That is in cofer so comly clente
As in this gardyn gracios gaye,
Here-inne too lenge for ever and play,
Ther mys nee monyng com never nere.
Her were a forser for thee, in faye,
If thou were a gentyl jueler... (257-64)

Despite the narrator’s language of bittersweet grief and his focus – even obsession – with the Maiden’s courtly attire, he addresses her in familiar terms – as someone he has known. The Maiden, however, answers the narrator’s elegy with a cold, detached, and austere courtly rhetoric. The first line of her rebuttal, in fact, sounds as if she is addressing a stranger. She calls the narrator “Sir,” and is blunt about pointing out the shortcomings of his earthly assumptions. What is also striking about the Maiden’s first speech is the way in which it attempts to inform the narrator that his grief is all his own. The narrator experiences grief and loss, but these emotions do not exist for the Maiden. In the Maiden’s world there is no “mys nee monyng” (262). Indeed the narrator recognizes the Maiden’s apparent bliss, but he attributes her joy to her “perles pyght” (241). He assumes that the Maiden’s bliss lies in the apparent wealth of her attire. However, though the Maiden’s first response is terse and austere, she alludes to the true source of her bliss by telling the narrator what he stands to gain if he can see beyond his literal sense, saying, “Her were a forser for thee, in faye....” (263). The Maiden appeals to the narrator’s courtly and aristocratic mindset by suggesting her world holds a “forser,” or treasure casket if he is willing to see beyond his own grief and distress. Additionally, the harshness of the Maiden’s language is gauged by the narrator’s repeated mistakes and assumptions.
The maiden’s use of an austere courtly rhetoric is enhanced by the poet’s use of spondees and trochees during the debate. While the Maiden first responds to the narrator’s earthly assumption with a cold detached tone, the harshness of her language wanes as her speech progresses. Thus just as the stress of a spondee tapers with a return to a standard iambic rhythm in a single line of poetry, the remainder of the maiden’s speech loses its strength – its stress and harshness. She says:

“Bot, jueler gente, if thou schal lose
Thy joy for a gemme that thee was lef,
Me think thee put in a mad porpose,
And búyes thee aboute a raysoun bref;
For that thou lestes was bot a rose
That flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef... (265-270)

As compared to the Maiden’s initial use of a cold “Sir” in the previous stanza, the content of the Maiden’s speech softens. She ceases the blunt language employed to inform the narrator that he has his “tale mysetente” (257), and begins to reason with him. The blunt austerity of the Maiden’s language, however, tapers slowly as the Pearl-Poet’s poetics continue to use the stress of the alliterative tradition. In fact, the second stanza of the Pearl-Maiden’s first speech begins with the two successive strong stresses in “Bot, Jueler....”. The presence of this spondee among a slackening harshness of content reinforces the spiritual authority of the Maiden. The harsh content of her speech wanes, but her language always withholds the stress of authority, as she has the dominant spiritual epistemology. However, each time the narrator commits another earthly assumption or mistake, the content of the Maiden’s speech
matches the authoritative stress of her language, providing their debate with a structure that is both spondaic and trochaic in form and content.

Before the narrator makes another mistake, however, the content of the Maiden’s speech ceases chiding, and begins allegorical reasoning. First, she comments on how his grief is transitory and a “mad porpose,” as her life and death are simply consistent with the workings of nature. To place herself within the cycle of nature, the Maiden likens her life to the life of a rose “That flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef” (270). Thus the permeating presence of the pearl is temporarily usurped by a symbol of the natural world – a symbol that demonstrates allegorically the ways in which life is ephemeral and transitory. The Maiden, then, reasons with the narrator to accept her life and death as part of nature’s cycle through allegory. When the symbol of the pearl regains its presence, it stands alongside the rose as a symbol of the Maiden’s new life – a life of lasting bliss and spiritual purity. Thus the symbol of the pearl functions on an anagogic level as the Maiden’s “perle of prys” (272), and its temporary absence in this single stanza represents the short life of one’s literal sense in comparison to the Maiden’s eternal state of spiritual bliss and heavenly understanding. Like the life of a “rose,” earthly assumptions and the narrator’s grief are transitory in relation to the permanence of the Maiden’s spiritual enlightenment.

Once described in relation to the Maiden’s life in Paradise, the pearl becomes what Charles Muscatine calls “an emblem of moral purity” (49). The symbol of the pearl, then, also functions tropologically, in this single stanza (xxiii). The Maiden continues the second stanza of her speech, saying:
"To a perle of prys hit is put in pref.
And thou has called thy wynde a thef,
That oght of noght has mad thee cler.
Thou blames the bote of thy meschef;
Thou art no kynde jueler." (272-76)

What is striking about this tropological part of this stanza is the way in which the Pearl-Maiden demonstrates her "moral purity" through contraries. Morally speaking, the narrator is everything the Maiden is not. Whereas the narrator blames his "wynde," or fate, for his loss, there is no place for "blames" in his daughter's realm of moral purity. The Pearl-Maiden views "wynde" as fortune while the narrator sees it as a foe – the source of his loss and his grief, the "thef," or thief, of his joy and bliss (273). What the Pearl-Maiden hopes to impart to the narrator is that the "bote" (cure) of his misfortune is the very fate that took his daughter away, and allowed her "moral purity," which she later says is "the grounde of all [her] blisse" (372). However, the narrator remains confused by the Pearl-Maiden's familiar courtly language, and his confusion restricts his ability to interpret his daughter's allegorical language. One of the ways the Pearl-Poet achieves the poignancy of the narrator's confusion, as has been suggested, is through the intertwining of all the allegorical senses in single stanzas. The familiar, aristocratic environment of the dream vision in general, and the debate in particular, does not provide a stable allegorical focal point for the narrator, and this instability is recognized in his first response to the Pearl-Maiden's initial speech.

Because of the Maiden's slackening of harshness and her continuation of a courtly rhetoric, the narrator wrongly assumes that the aristocratic power structures of
his waking life exist, and benefit him, in the dream vision. But much more, the narrator assumes that the power structures of the father-daughter relationship will continue in the dream world. Even before directly addressing the Pearl-Maiden, the *Pearl*-Poet writes, "A juel to me then was thys geste. / And jueles wem hyr gentyl sawes" (277-78). The dreamer alludes to his supposed position of power with his assumption that the Maiden is a "geste" in his world, when in fact it is the narrator who is the guest. Additionally, the narrator mistakes the Maiden’s softening, reasoning tone for a voice that does not require allegorical interpretation. He is, in fact, so blinded by the eloquence of the Pearl-Maiden’s courtly rhetoric that he focuses on the beauty of her “sawes,” or words, rather than their actual meaning. Thus when the narrator addresses the Pearl-Maiden, it is no surprise that he makes another wrongful earthly assumption. The Maiden’s courtly rhetoric and manner, combined with her aristocratic attire and the narrator’s memory of their relationship, are simply too closely aligned with the aristocratic power structures of his waking life. Thus among the differences between the narrator’s waking life and his dream vision are enough similarities to reinforce his earthly assumptions. The environment of the dream vision allows – even encourages – the narrator to believe only what he sees and knows of his aristocratic waking life, because all of these elements are present in the dream vision.

The narrator sees his daughter, and, therefore, he believes she exists as she did during life. When the narrator makes this assumption, it is an interesting montage of fatherly authority and royal respect. In other words, the narrator’s language suggests
that while he assumes himself to have an authoritative role in the relationship, he also believes his daughter has the spiritual authority to allow him entrance into Paradise.

Only through God’s will and death can the narrator join his daughter in Paradise (Gordon xviii):

> "I-wyse," quod I, "my blysfol beste,  
My grete dystresse thou al todrawes.  
To be excused I make requeste;  
I trawed my perle don out of dawes.  
Now haf I fonde hyt, I schal ma feste,  
And wony wyth hyt in schyr wod-schawes,  
And love my Lorde and al his lawes  
That has me broght thys blys ner.  
Now were I at yow byyonde thise wawes,  
I were a joyful jueler."

(279-88)

Just as in the first stanza of the poem, the narrator demonstrates a difficulty ascribing the pearl – his daughter – with a stable identity. Again the narrator conceives the Pearl-Maiden as an object. It seems, in fact, that her entire identity is collapsed into an inanimate gem, which is here suggested by the words “my perle,” and throughout the poem with “my swete” (325), and “That juel” (241). When placed alongside the “blys” the narrator experiences speaking to the Maiden, one recognizes his sense of ownership toward his daughter. He is dependent on his daughter to bring him the same joy she supplied while living, and he attempts to use his fatherly authority to keep “thys blys ner” (286). However, within the narrator’s assumption that his daughter is as she was on earth, is his assumption that his daughter has the authority to grant him entrance into Paradise – to dwell “byyonde thise wawes....” (287). The narrator assumes he has some sort of fatherly authority of love over his daughter, yet
he grants her the authority to allow him into Paradise, just as a “quene” (415) grants one permission into her court. The narrator’s mix of fatherly authority and royal respect demonstrates the source of his density, stunted spiritual growth, and lack of change. His confused placement of authority, furthermore, suggests that the knowledge of his waking life makes him an inadequate interpreter of the visionary world, and, more specifically, the debate. The narrator, in this sense, is blemished by his knowledge of the physical world, which frustrates the Pearl-Maiden, sending her back into a harsh courtly rhetoric.

The Pearl-Maiden’s return to the harsh end of her courtly rhetoric demonstrates the trochaic structure of the debate. The poet’s use of this structure creates a form fitting the content of the debate. The return of harsh syllable stresses in the beginning of the Maiden’s next speech, place her frustration with the narrator in bold relief, while also demonstrating her range of emotion from thoughtful sympathy to harsh chiding:

“Jueler,” sayde that gemme clene,  
“Why borde ye men? So madde ye be!  
Thre wordes has thou spoken at ene;  
Unavysed, for soothe, wern alle thre.  
Thou ne woste in worlde what on dos mene;  
Thy worde byfore thy wytte con fle... (289-294)

The poet demonstrates the Maiden’s frustration with the narrator’s dense, earthly assumptions with a single stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable in “Jueler.” The poet’s use of a trochee sets the frustrating, indeed caustic, tone for the remainder of the stanza. Specifically, the Pearl-Maiden chides the narrator for being
an abject interpreter of the dream world and her role in Paradise. What’s more, the Maiden accuses the narrator, and all living “men,” of lacking the ability to know and interpret “what on dos mene. . .” (293). The narrator speaks before he understands anything about the dream world, and the remainder of this stanza outlines the three incorrect assumptions arising out of the narrator’s lack of interpretation:

Thou says thou trawes me in this dene
Bycawse thou may wyth yghen me se;
Another thou says, in thys countré
Thyself schal won wyth me ryght here;
The thrydde, to passé thys water fre,
That may no joyful jueler. (295-300)

In summary, the Pearl-Maiden chides the narrator for: (1) believing only what he sees “wyth yghen,” (2) believing that he may dwell in “thys countré,” and (3) assuming the Pearl-Maiden holds the authority to grant the narrator passage across “thys water fre.” The narrator does not govern his words with reason, and, for this reason, the Maiden accuses him of speaking before understanding what his words wrongfully assume.

Beyond the basic content of the Maiden’s reply to the narrator’s assumptions, however, is a question of the transcendent. More specifically, the Maiden addresses her concern that the narrator believes she stands in front of him in physical form – that she physically inhabits the “countré” of the dream vision. The Maiden says, “Thou says thou trawes me in this dene / Bycawse thou may wyth yghen me se....” (295-96). It seems that the source of the Maiden’s punctuated harshness of language arises out of her concern that the narrator will assume she remains in a physical body – that he will continue to assume she is a material, physical object, much like the pearls she
appears to wear. That the narrator believes his daughter lives as she lived on earth – in physical form – concerns the Maiden because her familiar form is the source of all other literal assumptions for the narrator. Her physical body, as well as her pearls, exists, because he sees them, and her words exist, because he hears them. However, the Pearl-Maiden wants the narrator to understand that his knowledge of life is inadequate in the dream world, and, more specifically, in Paradise. She also wants the narrator “to discover human discourse to be inadequate as a medium” of communication (Russell 160). Regardless of her sympathetic intentions, however, there is a fundamental paradox and imperfection about the way in which the Pearl-Maiden presents herself to the narrator.

The Maiden appears in the physical form best suited to the limits of the narrator’s interpretations of the dream world and the Maiden’s role of “quene” in Paradise. As has been discussed, the narrator is blemished by his knowledge of the physical earth, as well as the courtly procedures of his waking life. He only believes what is physically in front of him and familiar to his waking life. For this reason, the Maiden appears in a form that is “the most nearly adequate vehicle for the expression of the ineffable” (Gross 80). The narrator will only listen to and observe the physical – the familiar – because he lacks any metaphysical understanding. But the practicality of the Maiden’s form creates a convoluted paradox that problematizes The Pearl in both form and content. The Maiden must appear before the narrator in a recognizable form before even any hope of his spiritual enlightenment is contemplated. However, the Maiden’s familiar physical form and courtly language only serve to give the
narrator the illusion that life in the dream world, and even paradise, functions as it does on earth. The best evidence of this assumption is the narrator’s belief that his daughter exists in Paradise as she did on earth. Because of the Maiden’s familiar form, courtly attire, and courtly language, the narrator assumes there is nothing to learn of the dream world, or his daughter’s role in heaven, beyond what he knows of his waking life. Yet, if his daughter appeared in any other form, no debate could possibly occur. While Charlotte Gross suggests that the Pearl-maiden’s form and language provide an “accurate indication of her spiritual state” (80), the narrator is clearly more confused than enlightened by her form and language. Thus the Maiden’s physical form and courtly language are an imperfect “vehicle” for all “spiritual” expression in Pearl. All told, the narrator’s spiritual growth is stunted by an all too familiar dream world. However, upon waking from his vision, the narrator’s language suggests that he has indeed learned to accept “God’s inescapable will” (Aers 68), as well as his daughter’s role in Paradise, and this apparent enlightenment complicates the end of the poem – the narrator’s expulsion from the vision.
Conclusion

The narrator's rejection from the dream world hinges upon his attempt to cross the "meres," or waters, separating him from the "prosessyoun" in Paradise (1166/1096). After attempting to cross the visionary stream, the narrator awakens where the poem begins, in the literal "erber." That the poem ends where it begins suggests a lack of spiritual movement and change. In fact, the poem's 101 twelve line stanzas emphasize the narrator's disappointment with his lack of self-control, a disappointment captured in the terms he uses to describe his rash decision to cross the visionary stream, saying, "My manes mynde to maddyng malte. / When I segh my frely, I wolde be there, / Byyonde the water thagh hō were walte" (1154-56). In describing his "mynde" as "maddyng malte" (melt), the narrator demonstrates what Aers calls the "power of the unregenerate memory, one quite unaffected both by the maiden's lengthy teaching and by the more immediate vision...." (68). Despite the Maiden's "lengthy teaching" during the debate, the narrator maintains his swaying, unstable emotions. He is not of a sound spiritual mind at the end of the debate, and his desire to dwell with the Pearl-Maiden in Paradise "dispenses with God and the tradition into which the maiden sought to steer him" (Aers 68). In other words, the narrator does not learn that only "resignation to the will of God" in death can reunite him with his daughter in heaven (Gordon xviii). Thus by all appearances, the narrator demonstrates an utter lack of spiritual change and growth, and an abundance of regret.
toward his “maddyng” decision to bound across the water of his vision. Indeed it is this regret that prompts Charles Muscatine to view the poem’s 101 stanzas as “a sign of humility” (69), an inextricable part of its “Christian significance....” (Gordon xxiv).

While this sense of humility and regret appears to suggest a kind of “resignation to the will of God” – a sense of spiritual change - I believe the narrator’s extreme emotions in the poem’s last stanza only serve to reinforce the argument for his lack of change. The narrator’s regret upon waking in the physical “erber,” as well as his extreme joy and bliss in the poem’s final stanza, are the only instances in the poem that suggest any permanence of change and spiritual enlightenment. Whereas in the beginning of the poem the “Prince” is worldly and part of how the narrator describes the mysterious “Perle” as a literal, earthly gem (1201/1), the Prince he describes at the end of the poem is undoubtedly heavenly and spiritual.

While watching the “prosessyoun” in Paradise, which the poet draws from “the vision of the Heavenly City from Revelation xxi and xxii (Gordon xxix), the narrator says, “The Lombe delyt non lyste to wene. / Thagh He were hurt and wounde hade, / In His sembelaunt was never sene, / So wern His glentes gloryous glade” (1141-44). When compared to the poem’s final stanza, the narrator’s description of the Lambs “sembelaunt,” or demeanor, affirms orthodox doctrine. It seems he affirms God’s will and acknowledges the “wounde” of sacrifice the “Lombe” endures for the mercy of humankind, and the narrator emphasizes his acknowledgement of Christian doctrine by likening himself to a pearl devoted to the “paye,” or pleasure, of the
“Prince” in the poem’s final stanza (1212/1201). Indeed the narrator’s use of the words “pay” and “Prince” to show devotion to God’s will differ significantly from their literal usage in the first stanza, where they hold literal rather than anagogical significance. The narrator’s apparent change from literal to anagogical reasoning suggests that he affirms orthodox doctrine, and, in this sense, he appears to have gained spiritual enlightenment. However, his rash decision to cross the waters separating him from the heavenly “prosessyoun” challenges the narrator’s ability to change and grow spiritually, regardless of what his language suggests.

The narrator’s decision to cross the visionary waters of his dream suggest that he covets “more happiness than he [is] entitled or able to have” (Aers 69). Indeed the narrator continues to emphasize regret for his rash action (1189-90), but the very act demonstrates an uncontrolled desire and longing that “dispenses with God” and orthodox doctrine, and ultimately reinforces Aers’ claim that the dreamer is “unaffected” by the Maiden’s attempted allegorical lessons during the debate (68).

Additionally, and, most importantly, the narrator mistakes the waters of his dream for a literal, earthly stream, which corroborates the Maiden’s argument that he believes “nothynk bot ye hit syghe” (308). Further supporting the argument for the narrator’s lack of change, spiritual growth, and enlightenment is the “mad joy” he exhibits in the final stanza of the poem (Chance 47), saying, “He gef uus to be His homly hyne / Ande precious perles unto his pay” (1211-12). The poem opens with intense, uncontrolled grief, and ends with a joy that fails to acknowledge his inability to understand the Maiden’s role in heaven. The narrator expresses regret for his rash
action, but he does not understand that only death and God’s will can provide him with a full understanding of his daughter’s joy in heaven. Beyond acknowledging orthodox doctrine, the narrator does not change or grow spiritually. The blissful language the narrator uses in the final stanza is simply incongruent with the earthly density and spiritual doubting he posits throughout his entire vision. Regardless of his seemingly enlightened language, the narrator never learns that only complete “resignation to the will of God” and death can grant him full spiritual understanding. Thus, though the narrator blames himself for his rejection from the vision, the decision to stay is never his. The narrator does not change or grow spiritually because he never learns to believe more than what he sees and experiences. With his rash decision to cross the visionary stream, the narrator attempts to take more than he is given. While he is given the opportunity to witness his daughter’s new existence in Paradise, he wishes to have “more and more” (156) than what is given by God and by fortune, and this is the source of his stunted spiritual growth and enlightenment.
Works Cited


Harwood, Britton J. "Pearl As Diptych." Blanch, Miller, and Wasserman. 61-78.


