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FEARL:

A SEMANTIC AND STYLISTIC STUDY OF THE VOCABULARY

by

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being a thesis presented to the  
University of St. Andrews in  
application for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Philosophy

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TL 8186

I hereby declare that the thesis herewith submitted by Mr. David Speedie, M.A., is entirely his own work and has been carried out by him in complete conformity to the regulations laid down.

Supervisor

### Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a record of my own research, that it is my own composition, and that it has not been previously presented in application for a higher degree.

The research was carried out in the Department of English, United College of St. Salvator and St. Leonard, University of St. Andrews, under the supervision of Dr. J. P. Oakden, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt.

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D.C.S.

## ABBREVIATIONS

The following are used as abbreviated titles of works referred to repeatedly in the course of this study.

Where the reference is to an edition, all quotations are taken from that edition.

- B/T      An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller (Oxford, 1882).
- M.E.D.    Middle English Dictionary, ed. H. Kurath and S.M. Kuhn / S.M. Kuhn and J. Reidy (Michigan, 1956-1970).
- O.E.D.    Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford, 1888).
- Gordon    Pearl, ed. E.V. Gordon (Oxford, 1953).
- GGK      Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, ed. J.R.R. Tolkien and E.V. Gordon (Oxford, 1925); 2nd edition ed. N. Davis (Oxford, 1968).
- Purity    Purity, ed. R.J. Menner (New Haven, Conn., 1920).
- Patience Patience, ed. J.J. Anderson (Manchester, 1969).
- Chaucer    Geoffrey Chaucer: Complete Works, ed. F.N. Robinson (Oxford, 1933).
- O/N      The Owl and the Nightingale, ed. J.W.H. Atkins (Cambridge, 1922).
- Borroff    Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study, Marie Borroff (New Haven, 1962).
- Davies     Medieval English Lyrics, R.T. Davies (London, 1963).
- Lewis      The Allegory of Love, C.S. Lewis (Oxford, 1936).
- N.C.E.    New Catholic Encyclopedia, (Washington, 1967).

Pearl: A Semantic and Stylistic Study of the Vocabulary

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

## INTRODUCTION

A study of words may interest different scholars in different ways. Words may be treated, by the grammarian or the philologist, as linguistic abstractions, in isolation from other words within the sentence or the immediate context. The type of study attempted here, however, the study of the language of a poet, is basically the study of language in use; thus we shall make constant reference to the context in which a word occurs insofar as that context may affect or even determine the shade of meaning the poet wishes to achieve. The use of certain words in certain contexts for certain effects is part of the poet's style. Professor Marie Borroff offers, as one possible definition of the word 'meaning', "the power of a word to evoke a certain idea"<sup>1</sup> and lists the stylistically conscious use of words, along with metre and imagery, as the 'how' as opposed to the 'what' in the poet's machinery---that is to say, the 'manner' in which the 'matter' is expressed.

All writers, of prose and poetry, are conscious of their 'style', and all discerning readers may be expected to be aware of the writer's individual 'style'. Style is by definition an intangible

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1. Borroff, p. 9.

quality; it constitutes, in fact, a kind of bond between the writer and his readers. We may come to recognise a certain style as characteristic of, and to expect it from, our contemporary or classical writers--the mathematical precision of Bacon's "essay style", the reasoned flow of Pope's close-knit argument in verse, the terse masculinity of Hemingway's prose. In the case of older writers, removed from us in time and hence in language and idiom, we frequently encounter a particular difficulty in that modes of style current in their time and employed by them in their works are also far removed from us. As we shall see later in the study of the archaisms in the traditional alliterative vocabulary employed by the Gawain-poet, an outmoded stylistic feature may constitute a kind of distancing effect between the medieval poet and us, his modern readers, which may not have existed for his contemporaries. In such a situation we must try to enter the world of the medieval audience, to penetrate the author's mind and purpose as through their eyes.

We stress at the outset the dependence of a stylistic study of vocabulary on a study of context, since the use of a word will in all cases be determined according to whether it is appropriate to the context. As Borroff says:

... a word having a range of meanings usually

has a range of stylistic values as well, so that its stylistic status will vary according to the meaning in which it is used.<sup>1</sup>

To quote her illustrations of the semantic and stylistic range of possibilities co-existing in one word<sup>2</sup>: the word knight may, according to context, indicate either a human being or a piece on a chessboard; the reader or listener will decide which is the appropriate alternative. The notion of stylistic choice is, however, carried a stage further if we go back in time and examine the Middle English word cniht, as used by Lazamon in the Brut.  
of the  
Two words which Lazamon uses with the general sense of 'man' or 'warrior' are cniht (passim) and rink (once). The difference between the two, Borroff maintains, is one of "stylistic value"<sup>3</sup>. She refers to H. C. Wyld's comments in Studies in the Diction of Lazamon's Brut<sup>4</sup>, in which Wyld noted the widespread use of cniht in the Brut, beside the solitary instance of rink. Wyld considered this disparity remarkable, as the word rink frequently appears in Old English poetry and also in the later alliterative romances. Borroff goes on to note that

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1. Borroff, p. 28.

2. Borroff, p. 42ff.

3. Borroff, p. 42.

4. Language 6, 9, 10, 13 (1930, 1933, 1934, 1937).

cniht is not found in Old English poetry in the meaning 'soldier' or the later meaning 'military servant' .....

... Rinc in Old English poetry has only the general sense 'man, warrior', and occurs only in poetry. It is described in BT as "a poetical term", and in O.E.D. (s.v. rink sb.1) as "only poetical".

For Lawman, therefore, cniht and rink differed radically in stylistic value, the former belonging to the language of real life, the latter to the traditional language of literature ... The stylistic difference between the two words was preserved through the Middle English period. Cniht continued to be used in a wide range of contexts, both literary and non-literary, while rink retained its exclusively poetic status. Both words appear in Gawain (as kniht and renk) and in other alliterative poems of the fourteenth century. But rink did not long survive the dying out of the alliterative tradition; it is last cited by the O.E.D. from sixteenth-century poetry. Cniht, as knight, descended into modern English. It is not a distinctively poetic word today (compare swain) even in its historical sense.<sup>1</sup>

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Borroff,

1. p. 43. Wyld's view of the "archaic" nature of Lazamon's diction has generally been held valid. E. G. Stanley may come nearer to the truth when he states that: 'Onomastic evidence shows that some of this seemingly archaic element may represent contemporary dialectal peculiarities of Worcestershire in the later thirteenth century' ("Lazamon's Antiquarian Sentiments", Medium Aevum vol. 38 no. 1 (1969), p. 28). Stanley's modification of this assertion, however, recognises Lazamon as typical of the conservative nature of the dialects of the West Midland in general. It was in thirteenth century South-W.M. that Lazamon wrote his great alliterative history; and, as Stanley says: '..... archaizing accords with Lazamon's sentiments as they emerge from his work .... the wish to archaize is rooted in a love of the archaic; the archaistic is merely imitative of the archaic, and derives from it by a deliberate act of recreation' (op. cit. p. 25). The alliterative tradition, we know, was nursed and given new life in the West in early M.E; and as Borroff has shown, the works of the Gawain-poet preserve residual evidence of archaic alliterative vocabulary, despised by his Southern contemporary, Chaucer, but nevertheless an integral part of his literary inheritance.

It has been appropriate to illustrate the process of stylistic selection by an example from a Middle English writer; but a wide range of stylistic alternatives exists for us in Modern English. Whether we use 'horse' or 'steed' depends on an intuitive process of stylistic selection according to what is appropriate to the given context--in this case, whether the situation demands formal or informal modes of expression. The distinction between the two possibilities is clearly not semantic but stylistic, and illustrates the obvious fact that the 'meaning' of a word entails much more than its lexical definition. When the Gawain-poet describes his hero as a burne or a freke he is consciously using elevated vocabulary appropriate to his noble knight and already archaic in fourteenth-century English. Such terms would be recognised as 'elevated' archaisms by the medieval audience; and in so employing them the poet offers one illustration of Borroff's definition of the 'meaning' of a word (in use) as "the power of a word to evoke a certain idea".

Such terms as burne, freke, listed above, are in a sense 'specialist terms'. In a chivalric romance such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight they convey the idea of the "warrior-knight". Such 'specialised' vocabulary occurs in all walks of life, up to modern times. The legal profession, guilds, scientists, all professional and social groups, have their own special vocabulary of words and phrases. Our poet elsewhere shows in writing for his cultivated audience a wide acquaintance with 'specialist' terms of his day

from various sources--the terms of the chase in the description of the hunts in Sir Gawain, the terms of contemporary music.<sup>1</sup> In Pearl the same range of selection of lexical material is apparent, and will be investigated below. When our poet uses the phrase put in pref (272), for example, he is making conscious use of a contemporary legal phrase appropriate to the spiritual debate between the Dreamer and the Maiden.

To sum up our preliminary argument: from a range of possible alternative words or phrases, any writer has to exercise a choice; he exercises this choice with regard to appropriateness in the particular context. The purpose of this study will be twofold: to pay tribute to the Pearl-poet's skill, range and infinite care in this choosing of his basic material; and to outline some of the main categories of 'specialised' vocabulary which fall under the heading of vocabulary used for a definite effect in a given context.

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1. See C.O. Chapman, "The Musical Training of the Pearl-Poet", Publications of the Modern Language Association of America 46 (1931), pp. 171-181.

CHAPTER ONE

## CHAPTER I

### THE JOY OF THE MAIDEN AND THE DESOLATION OF THE DREAMER

In the following chapter is offered a selection of words which are difficult to categorise or to consider in terms of a group-entity. At first glance these words seem to have little or no symbolic significance; they are bound together, however, in that they are terms of common usage, unremarkable in isolation, but which, when considered as a group, illustrate a motif central to the poet's purpose, and which gains momentum as the poem develops.<sup>1</sup> In order to avoid overstating the case, and to hold back from over-fanciful or metaphysical connections of words, we have supported most instances listed with references to the text and external evidence.

. . .

#### 1. The Maiden

##### (a) Blysful

The poem abounds in references to the bliss, the joy, the perfect contentment of the Pearl in her Heavenly setting; she is blysful (421, 1100) / [blysfol (279)]; blybe (738);

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1. Cf. Spearing's comments on the 'dynamic imagery' of the poem in The Gawain Poet: A Critical Study (Cambridge, 1970).

bryzt (769, 755); myry (781). The occurrences of blysfyl and related words in the poem are numerous, but a consideration of each of the individual instances shows a clear pattern emerging. Wherever the adjective or the root noun blys(se) appears, it refers specifically to the perfect joy of Heaven. This is the case with blysfyl, --fol, when it is used of the Pearl (279, 1104); of life in Heaven (409); of the bank of the river with Heaven on the other side (907); of the "bower" or dwelling of the Maiden (964); and, as substantive, of the Pearl--"the joyous one"--at 421 and 1100.

In Pearl, therefore, wherever blys and related terms are used, the reference is to the joy of Heaven. This is also true of the two instances of blysse in Purity: at 546 God is the Kyng...of blysse, and at 177 the divine warning is uttered:

For fele fautez may a freke forfete his blysse, ...

Under M.E.D. blisful 2(a) we find: 'Full of the bliss and glory of heaven; glorious, glorified, transfigured, beatified, sanctified;' And in some contexts the notion of the blessed state of Heavenly bliss has become so dominant that stress is laid less on the joy itself, and more on the spirituality of its nature--thus M.E.D. blisful 2(b): 'blessed, holy, sacred.' Christ brings His followers to this state of bliss, hence M.E.D. blisful 1(a):

'giving joy, joyous, pleasing.'

(b) Blybe

Closely related to blysfyl in meaning, and in its use in Pearl, is blybe. The word means generally 'gay, merry' (and hence modern blithe). The word occurs in this sense in GGK as 'merry, glad, bright, gay'. In the instances of the word in Pearl, however, it conjures up a more restrained type of joy, a spiritual gladness which brings calmness, serenity to the carefree joy of courtly frolick in the sister poem. Thus at 352-354:

Pa3 pou for sor3e be neuer blybe.  
Stynt of by strot and fyne to flyte,  
And sech hys blybe ful swefte and swybe.

Here blybe refers to the serene contentment of Heaven, and stands in direct contrast to the strot--the obstinacy and sorrow--of the earth-bound Dreamer. The same perfect contentment reappears in the same word at 1131 where Christ is described in these terms:

Best watz he, blybest, and most to pryse,...

The word is similarly applied to Christ in Purity 1085:

Penne watz her blybe barne burnyst so clene ....

and in the same poem at 1228 blybe Lorde has the spiritual sense of 'gentle, kind'. This branch of the word's development from

the basic idea of the perfect peace and joy of Heaven is evidenced in M.E.D. blithe<sup>adj.</sup> 2: 'mild, gentle; merciful, gracious'.

Like blysfol, then, blybe has overtones in our poem and also in Purity of spiritual serenity; and that the poet is aware of this possible nuance, and makes use of it, is perhaps most clearly observable in Purity 1718; in the passage where Daniel in his prophecy chastises Belshazzar for his luxury and debauch, for leading astray the people

Pat blypely were fyrst blest wyth bischopes hondes,...

The meaning of the adverb blybely in this context comes close to the M.E.D. rendering of blisful 2(a) noted above: 'Full of the bliss and glory of Heaven, glorious'.<sup>1</sup>

(c) Miscellaneous

Other general terms of joy, felicity, are charged with this spiritual force in Pearl.

(i) In the case of the everyday adjective glade at 1144, the ...glentez glorious glade reveal the graciousness, the spiritual joys of Christ. Compare this with Purity 641:

And God as a glad gest mad god chere,...

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1. I.e., the people are made glorious through the laying-on of the bishop's hands.

(ii) At 781 the Pearl-maiden is described as a myry guene, and her state of being myry goes hand in hand with her attainment of the rank of guene in Heaven, and hence of Heavenly Bliss. The same usage is seen at 850 in the phrase be mo be myryer, to emphasise the perfect felicity of Heaven, flawless as the Pearl herself. Likewise at 435 the Maiden invokes Mary as

Makelez Moder and myryest May,...

Clearly the force of the word here transcends the normal general sense of 'merry, gay'. In Purity, for example, Menner concludes that myry carries the vague sense of 'merry, pleasant'. In contrast to the spiritual overtones of the word in Pearl, in the instances listed above, he suggests that it is used "sometimes as mere epithet",<sup>1</sup> and sometimes as part of an alliterative formula, with the same insipid quality. In GGK, myry is simply one convenient alternative to describe the vague meritorious attribute of courteous behaviour, decorousness. Once again we have clear evidence of the meaning, the semantic force, of one word varying in its respective contexts.

(iii) At 659 the Maiden declares that the blysse (658)

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1. By "mere" he presumably means vague, colourless, without any great semantic force. See Purity, Glossary, p. 173.

forfeited by Adam is restored to man

... in sely stounde; ...

(at a happy hour).

O.E. \*sēlig/sēlig → M.E. sely conveys the general idea of 'happy, blessed' and readily takes on a spiritual colouring.<sup>1</sup> B/T quotes O.E. \*sēlig as glossing Latin felix, beatus. Thus from Christian O.E. sources the word takes on the two senses of 'happy' and 'blessed', and again we have an echo of that specifically spiritual happiness implied by blysful and blybe in Pearl. The fusion of the two senses of \*sēlig in O.E. survives and is evidenced in Pearl 659:

And þat is restored in sely stounde;

the joy referred to is that of the blessed--the beati in the kingdom of Heaven.

In view of the discussion of words above which convey the state of joyful beatitude in which the Pearl-maiden finds herself, some explanation must be given of the use of the adjective sade to describe the Maiden at 211. In

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1. This is the etymology followed by Gordon (Glossary, p. 152). Cf. also O.E.D. s.v. seely, esp. 3: 'Spiritually blessed, enjoying the blessing of God ....'.

Her semblaunt sade for doc ober erle

the meaning of the adjective is not, of course, to be taken as 'sad'. Gordon comes as close as is possible to a one-word translation in rendering the word as 'grave, dignified', and in this sense sade is not at all incompatible with the category of words applied to the Maiden which emphasise her perfect joy. Her joy is not a childlike joy; it is not a human emotion at all; hers is the transcendental joy of the Heavenly Host. Similarly, her graveness of expression, unexpected in one who died so young, and misunderstood by the Dreamer and some sympathetic critics, emphasises her spirituality, her other-worldly state. How the adjective in question came to have the modern meaning 'sad' is further discussed by Lewis in his Studies in Words.<sup>1</sup> He traces the developments of English sad and Latin gravis together, because of the "likeness between their semantic histories".<sup>2</sup> Lewis recounts how the original sense of each and of related words (Lat. gravis, O.E. sad, O.N. saddr, Lat. satur) of 'heavy', 'full', 'sated', 'filled', attained a moral overtone to describe one whose opinions 'hold weight', who

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1. C. S. Lewis, Studies in Words (Cambridge U.P., 1967), pp. 75-85.

2. Op. cit., p. 75.

is 'sound', 'firm' or 'steadfast'. Thus in the Manciple's Tale we find the lament:

O deere wyf ...  
That were to me so sad and eek so trewe.  
(274-5)

"Sadness" in M.E. becomes the proper virtue of mature people.  
Hence the maxim of Lydgate:

In youthe be lusty, sad whanne þou art olde; ...

and, in a paradox, of Griselda in the Clerkes Tale:

But thogh this mayde tendre were of age  
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee  
Ther was enclosed rype and sad corage.  
(218-220)

The same paradoxical use of the word strikes the reader in Pearl 211, where an infant who, we are led to believe, has died before the age of two is described as 'sad'. To quote C. S. Lewis once more:

The narrator in Pearl had last seen his daughter as an infant; by a contrast of immense poetical power she comes before him in the trans-mortal country with 'semblant sad for doc oper erle' (l. 211), with all the state and gravity of a great nobleman. So, later in the poem, the Elders before the Throne are 'sad of chere' (l. 887).<sup>1</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 80.

In both instances of 'sad' in Pearl, therefore, 'grave' or 'dignified' is clearly the rendering desired in the context of Heavenly delights.

It only remains to be noted that the poet uses the word sad(de) in a similar way elsewhere. In GGK we find for sadly 'firmly, steadily; vigorously'. In Purity 595, 640, the sense implied is 'solemn, dignified'. The Pearl-maiden's contentment, joy and dignity are perfectly compatible aspects of her Heavenly nature, and elsewhere in the poem the latter quality is emphasised in other terms. Stronge 476 and stable 597 testify to the seriousness and steadfastness of her faith.

## 2. The Dreamer

The joy of the Maiden, the radiance, harmony and contentment of her Heavenly kingdom are, therefore, images in the forefront of the poet's mind; they are, moreover, to be taken as a clear and deliberate contrast to the wretchedness, the darkness and doubt of the Dreamer's mortal state. If the poet is at pains to convey the joy of the Pearl in her setting, he is equally intent on creating the impression of dull and futile despair in the words he chooses to apply to the Dreamer and his actions. Where the Maiden is blysful, blyþe, glade and myry, he is mornyf (386), mate (386) and wreched (56); and just as the Maiden's joy is symptomatic of

her Heavenly state; so the Dreamer's discontent is symptomatic of his human misery, of one who sees all in human terms, who has not yet come to accept God, and who is thus unready to share in the joy of the elect. The despair of the Dreamer, in other words, is as spiritually based as the joy of the Maiden.

The spiritual significance of his despair is recognised by the Dreamer himself at 53-56. He talks of his wreched wylle (56); he recognises this as a human weakness, as a selfish emotion in conflict with the spiritual comfort Christ has to offer:

Paz kynde of Kryst me comfort kened, . . .  
(55)

This is the Dreamer's human dilemma: he realises he should be reconciled (saxt 52) to God's will, but his human reactions prevent him from reaching this peace of mind enjoyed by those whom God has reached. His bitterness is self-defeating, and this is implicit in the word wreched which is used to describe it.

At 1167 the Dreamer is described as rasch and ronk, which Gordon renders as 'eager, active; impetuous'.<sup>1</sup> The words indicate specifically the Dreamer's impetuosity, his lack of reflection in trying too soon to cross the stream--the symbolic barrier between himself and the bliss of Heaven. The meaning in this context, in fact, verges on modern 'rash'--it implies the

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1. See Gordon, Glossary under rasch and ronk.

short-sightedness which is at the heart of his woe. It is for this short-sightedness, for his despair and his rash anger (wroþe 379), that the Pearl chides him, for it is a sin.

Who nedeȝ schal þole, be not so þro ....

she warns him at 344. Pro in this context is clearly to be taken as 'stubborn' (so Gordon). The word is derived from O.N. brár (from the noun brá, 'obstinacy, persistence'). The Maiden is condemning the obstinacy of the Dreamer, his stubborn opposition to the will of God, his sinful presumptuousness. An identical use of the word is attested in Patience 6:

And quo for þro may noȝt þole, þe þikker he sufferes.

Pro occurs also at Pearl 868, with a meaning clearly different from that explained above. In this instance the word occurs in the phrase bryuen and bro, which Gordon translates as 'fair and noble'. The use of bro in this sense Gordon explains by suggesting that the source brár (see above) has been influenced by O.N. bróask ('thrive'). The two branches seem to converge logically: in Furty 220 we interpret bro as 'violently' and at 590 as 'quickly'; Menner derives the meaning at 590 as from the sense in Psalm 93 v.11, and justifies his assumption by suggesting that the more normal meaning 'eager, persistent' could easily develop to 'quick, swift'.

He lists also under this heading GGK 1021, where the suggestion by the editors in their glossary is contextual.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in GGK, we find the word rendered by 'intense, steadfast' (645), 'oppressive' (1751), 'fierce' (1713) and, as adverb, 'earnestly, heartily' (1867, 1946). Clearly the basic sense which links the two divergent streams is that of a violent or active state of movement or mind.

The Dreamer's spiritual arrogance is again deplored by the Maiden at 401-402:

Maysterful mod and hyze pryde,  
I hete þe, arn heterly hated here.

This is her solemn warning; the Dreamer's maysterful mod constitutes a spiritual sin. His presumptuousness must be contrasted with the serene acceptance of God shown by the Elect, and indeed ultimately with the meekness, the freedom from the sin of pride, of Christ himself. It is interesting that the adverb proudly is used of the Lamb at 1110, but does not recall--indeed is the very opposite of--the false pride of the Dreamer; at 1110 we are to translate the idea of Christ passing before His Host as 'with dignity'. The

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1. See GGK, Glossary under bro, as bro, equally crowded with delight 1021. J.A. Burrow, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (Penguin, 1972) suggests 'vigorous, festive'.

same contrast (between Christ and the Dreamer) is implied in 1134, where Jesus is referred to as symple. The meaning of this word in M.E. has not the pejorative or condescending overtones of Modern English simple, when applied to a person, but conveys specifically the idea of 'meek, free from pride' (perhaps also with the suggestion of Christ's "simple" or undiluted faith, His constancy). Reference to other contexts reinforces this interpretation. In Purity 746 the word is used in an entreaty to the Saviour, who is 'open, free from guile'; and in the same poem at 120 we have:

And 3et þe symplest in þat sale wat3 served to þe fulle,...

where the superlative symplest must be translated as 'humblest, most lowly'.

It is therefore clear that the words used by the poet to indicate the state of bliss enjoyed by the Maiden and the dejected condition of the Dreamer have a special spiritual colouring in the context of Pearl. What contributes, moreover, to the central religious theme 'is the careful and repeated placing together by the poet of the two extreme states of Heavenly joy and mortal grief so as to form a kind of spiritual contrast. The opposition achieved by a careful choice of words is paralleled by the technical device of contrast by juxtaposition of these words.

In the opening lines of the poem we are confronted by the

Dreamer's confused state. His former happiness, his precious pearl, has now led him to bitter remorse in its loss:

Syben in þat spote hit fro me sprange,  
Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele,  
Þat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange  
And heuen my happe and al my hele.  
Þat dotz bot þrych my hert þrange,  
My breste in bale bot bolne and bele;...  
(13-18)

His sorrow for the lost one is a human emotion bound to arouse our sympathy. In the context of redemption, of joy in Heaven, however, such bliss is illusory and evanescent, and this is what the Dreamer has to learn. The first hint of his error is given in line 50; he feels a care ful colde:

A deuely dele in my hert denned,  
Þaz resoun sette myseluen sazt.  
(51-52)

He seems to realise he is in the grip of an irrational and dangerous passion--thus 53-56:

I playned my perle þat þer watz spenned  
Wyth fyrce skyllez þat faste fazt;  
Þaz kynde of kryst me comfort kenned,  
My wreched wylle in wo ay wrazte.

When he feels cheered at 121 it is for the wrong reasons; he is semi-intoxicated by the glorious unearthly garden setting which has

Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez.  
(124)

And the gladande glory he feels at 171, on seeing his precious one, is also misplaced. He feels he is seeing the physical embodiment of his beloved daughter, and wishes to be physically re-united with her. This vain joy of the Dreamer is instantly seen in the contrasting emotion of the Maiden; she exudes the transcendental joy of her Heavenly home. The Dreamer is stunned by her radiance; his futile and pathetic wish is to share her happiness. His opening entreaty to her continues the contrast of the mortal and immortal states; at 241 he begins his tale of woe, relates how he suffers on her account, culminating in the extravagant outburst of grief at 246:

Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,...

The next line is a significant contrast:

And þou in a lyf of lykyng lyzte,  
In Paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned.  
(247-248)

Where the Dreamer speaks only of desolation and loss, the Maiden in reply talks only of the real and everlasting joy--and it is significant that the Maiden's joy is in opposition both to the sinful grief and the superficial "joy" of the Dreamer; where the Dreamer says at 268 that he would be a ioyful jueler if he could be reunited with her, her repetition of his words ioyful

jueler (300) is to be taken, in context<sup>1</sup>, as a rebuke, a warning of his short-sightedness. The Dreamer, however, has not yet reached this state of awareness, and his confused joy and grief at seeing her are echoed in the paradox at 330:

My precios perle dotz me gret pyne.

The Maiden's task is to persuade him to accept God's will, and through acceptance to attain true joy; for this reason she tries to put his grief in perspective:

For dyne of doel of lurez lesse  
Ofte mony mon forgos be mo.  
(339-340)

The Dreamer's cruel dilemma forms the core of the debate which follows between himself and the Maiden. His awareness of his Christian duty and the natural human responses which hinder him, are always apparent. Thus at 371-2:

Of care and me ze made acorde,  
Pat er watz grounde of alle my blysse.

at 373:

My blysse, my bale, ze han ben bope,...

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1. "Pat may no ioyfol jueler."

at 382-4:

I am bot mol and manerez mysse.  
Bot Crystes mersy, and Mary and Jon,  
Pise arn þe grounde of alle my blisse.

and at 385-6:

In blysse I se þe blybely blent,  
And I a man al mornyf mate;...

This repeated to-and-fro process, between joy and grief, is part of the Dreamer's confused state, of the struggle going on within him. The urge towards Heavenly joy, the hindering millstone of transient human emotion, are the mighty opposites which compete for his soul; it is on the outcome of this struggle that his real and everlasting happiness depends.

CHAPTER TWO

## CHAPTER II

### THE COURTLY VOCABULARY

The appearance of words, expressions and sentiments born of the medieval world of courtly romance in a work so fundamentally and overtly religious as Pearl will surprise no reader already acquainted with the background of medieval religious literature. Throughout the Middle Ages secular and religious literature underwent a constant process of mutual influence, with a cross-current of themes, vocabulary, imagery and ideas between the two. There is clear evidence that a medieval audience would be accustomed to encountering the expression of the faith, and of the teachings and dogma of the Church, at the immediate level of everyday life and activity; evidence, that is to say, of a kind of "popularising" of the Christian doctrines. J. Huizinga makes note of this phenomenon:<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the Middle Ages two factors dominate religious life: the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images.

Individual and social life, in all their manifestations, are imbued with the conceptions of

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1. J. Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London, 1924), p. 136.

faith. There is not an object nor an action, however trivial, that is not constantly correlated with Christ or salvation. All thinking tends to religious interpretation of individual things; there is an enormous unfolding of religion in daily life.

A similar process of borrowing from the round of everyday experience in writings of a religious nature is clearly and frequently observable in the medieval religious lyric--a genre to which we shall repeatedly refer in the course of this chapter, as it provides valuable illustrations of, and parallels to, the relevant material in Pearl. Davies remarks on the images from nature which abound in the religious corpus of lyric verse--the idea of the Blessed Virgin as a flower, the descent of God into her womb as life-giving dew from Heaven. Moreover,

such characteristic Christian figures as darkness and light, fathers and sons, washing, feeding and making free are the coin of everyday life.<sup>1</sup>

We have, therefore, a body of "simple and familiar imagery" which, on its symbolic level, becomes "the natural vehicle of profound and complex religious experience".<sup>2</sup>

One point, perhaps the major point, at which the secular and

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1. Davies, Introduction, p. 17.

2. Ibid.

the religious spheres of literature found a confluence was in their respective attitudes to, and treatment of, the theme of love. To quote a specific example: Lewis perceives the debt of love-worship of a knight for his lady in the Romance code as a clear echo of the Christian's adoration of the Blessed Virgin. Whether the courtly ethos first modelled itself upon religious love, or vice versa, is not altogether clear<sup>1</sup>; nor is it a vital factor in our present study. What is important for us is the ready and free correspondence which developed between the ideals of medieval "Frauendienst" and the cult of worship of the Virgin--the "noble fusion of sexual and religious experience".<sup>2</sup>

It was just such a "noble fusion" that enabled one lyric poet to address Christ as "Jesu, my love, my sweting",<sup>3</sup> and which led to the identification in many lyrics of the Blessed Virgin

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1. As Lewis says at two different points in his argument, "... there is no evidence that the quasi-religious tone of medieval love-poetry has been transferred from the worship of the Blessed Virgin: it is just as likely--it is even more likely--that the colouring of certain hymns to the Virgin has been borrowed from the love-poetry" (Allegory of Love, p. 8); and, "As against any theory which would derive medieval 'Frauendienst' from Christianity and the worship of the Blessed Virgin, we must insist that the love religion often begins as a parody of the real religion" (p. 20).
  2. Lewis, p. 21.
  3. Richard Rolle, "A song of love for Jesus", contained in Davies no. 36, line 73, p. 110.

with the medieval lady. The cry of help from the sinner to Mary as the Swete Levedy<sup>1</sup> ... or as the dere damsell<sup>2</sup> typifies a convention in which the suppliant sinner addresses Mary "as a lover might his mistress, reciting her excellences point by point, and entreating her merciful aid"<sup>3</sup>.

The complementary process takes place when the earthly lady, in her attitude and behaviour towards her lover, is given an absolute power akin to that of Mary over the suppliant sinner. The romantic medieval concept of love as a feudal ideal was taken to the extreme of a "solemn amatory ritual"<sup>4</sup>. The would-be suitor is reduced to the humble servant, or indeed the prisoner, of his lady, who offers in return harsh and inflexible cruelty, indifferent and unfeeling in the face of his passionate attentions. Love becomes an "erotic religion"<sup>5</sup>, and the metaphor, when fully carried through, amounts to a "close and impudent parody of the practices of the Church"<sup>6</sup>. The question of the object of the

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1. Davies, no. 34, line 17, p. 103.

2. " , no. 104, line 4, p. 199.

3. " , Introduction, p. 21. This aspect of the worship of the Virgin is of particular relevance to certain key words and phrases used to describe Her in Pearl, and is more fully discussed below.

4. Lewis, p. 2.

5. " , p. 32.

6. " , p. 20.

lover's wooing, the hope of his love's fulfilment, is totally subordinated to the idea of the sanctity of the actual state of being in love. The passion itself, though consistently frustrated and unrequited, is both a "noble and ennobling passion",<sup>1</sup> a spiritually uplifting experience. This feudalisation of love is central to the courtly ideal. In the whole religion built around love, knightly lovers are seen as members of a kind of "order of love", swearing solemn vows of love, exalted by love. To resist love, even to succumb unwillingly, is an act of treason against love's piety<sup>2</sup>; in the Knight's Tale 1158 false love is described by Arcite as "affecioun of holynesse".

Huizinga sums up the spiritual tendency of love in the medieval context as follows:

Because of his love, the courtly lover is pure and virtuous. The spiritual element dominates more and more, till towards the end of the 13th century, the 'dolce stil nuovo' of Dante and his friends ends by attributing to love the

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1. Lewis, p. 3.
  2. In GGK, we observe Gawain's acute embarrassment as he counters the advances of Bercilak's lady. His predicament results from the conflict of two ideals--the irreconcilable demands of his trawbe (in this instance his duty as a guest to his host), and his obligation as a knight to give no offence to the lady. The strongest point in the lady's argument is that to refuse her offer of love is an affront to her, and to Gawain's "courtesy", or knightly code.

gift of bringing about a state of piety and holy intuition.<sup>1</sup>

Huizinga then gives an instance of the elaborate details of love-worship in the account of Charles d'Orleans of the celebration of his love:

"J'ay fait l'obsequé de ma dame  
Dedans le moustier amoureux;  
Et le service pour son âme  
A chanté Penser doloureux.  
Mains sierges de soupirs piteux  
Ont esté en son luminaire,  
Aussi j'ay fait la tombe faire  
De regrets...."

(I have celebrated the obsequies of my lady  
In the Church of love, And the service for  
her soul Was sung by dolorous Thought. Many  
tapers of pitiful sighs Have burned in her  
illumination. Also I had the tomb made Of  
regrets...) <sup>2</sup>

One final illustration of this vital point may be taken from Lewis's account of the love of Chrétien's Lancelot for Guinevere:

The submission which Lancelot shows in his actions is accompanied, on the subjective side, by a feeling that deliberately apes religious devotion. Although his love is by no means super-sensual, and is indeed carnally rewarded in this very poem, he is represented as treating Guinevere with saintly, if not divine, honours.

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1. *Op. cit.*, p. 95.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 108, note 1.

When he comes before the bed where she lies he kneels and adores her; as Chrétien explicitly tells us, there is no corseynt in whom he has greater faith. When he leaves her chamber he makes a genuflexion as if he were before a shrine.<sup>1</sup>

The lover, therefore, is to be seen worshipping at the altar of love. The secular-religious association is complete; as Lewis concludes: "The irreligion of the religion of love could hardly go further."<sup>2</sup>

It has been appropriate to examine in detail the mingling of the religious and the secular literary traditions in the theme of love; we can proceed directly from this analysis to the first specific echoes of the courtly tradition in Pearl, in the use of particular words and phrases. Our discussion will focus on the following: the Dreamer, in his vision, sees the Pearl-maiden as a medieval lady of court in all her beauty and dignity; much of the Dreamer's attitude towards the Maiden is reminiscent of that of the medieval knight expressing his love; and, the spiritual relationship which matures between the two and which forms the heart of the poem, is in places given imaginative expression in the terms of amour courtois.

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1. Lewis, p. 29.

2. Ibid.

The poem begins with an elaborate compliment to the lost one. Emphasis is laid firstly on her flawless beauty--she is quite unique:

Ne proued I neuer her precios pere . . . .  
(4)

and

I sette hyr sengeley in synglere . . . .  
(8)

Secondly, we see her preciousness to the Dreamer, who now mourns her loss. She is his priuy perle (24), and Gordon defines priuy as meaning here 'one's own, of special intimacy or favour'<sup>1</sup>. All this accords with the generally accepted interpretation of the relationship between the Dreamer and the Pearl as being that of father and daughter, and that his is the deep sense of loss over the death of a beloved and, as far as we know, only, child.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Glossary, p. 148.

2. It should be noted that in the first few lines of the poem, the symbol of the pearl, which later takes on elaborate spiritual overtones, conveys at this stage simply (a) the sense of physical perfection, and (b) the sense of something of precious value to the "owner" (i.e. the Dreamer).

The controversy over the development of the pearl-image of these opening lines into a person closely related to the Dreamer, has been so frequently rehearsed that we do not intend to discuss the problem here. Mo. Angela Carson (in "Aspects of Elegy in the Middle English 'Pearl'," Studies in Philology vol. 62, 1965, pp. 17-27) regards the love-language of the Dreamer as more

Yet there is something more than the surface relationship conveyed in the Dreamer's mourning. A careful scrutiny of the words and formulae with which he expresses his grief, reveals something of the romantic exaggeration of the courtly lover laying bare his feelings and passions to the object of his love. In terms of the best courtly tradition, with the loved one life is all--without her, nothing. This is seen in our poem, firstly in the antithesis of feeling contained in lines 14-18:

Ofte haf I wayted, wyschande þat wele,  
Þat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange  
And heuen my happe and al my hele.  
Þat dotz bot brych my hert brange,  
My breste in bale bot bolne and bele ...

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(continuation of footnote 2, p. 31)

appropriately addressed to a lover than a child. The theological merits of the Maiden's status, however, in the vital passages of the Parable of the Vineyard and the Apocalyptic vision, clearly demand a young child who died before puberty.

Of less value and credibility is Edward Wilson's attempt (in "Word-Play and the Interpretation of 'Pearl'" in Medium Evum vol. 40 no. 2, 1971, pp. 116-135) to substantiate a claim that the concept of a pearl is never extended by the poet beyond the surface physical object of the precious stone. The pearl-image, in its later personification in the Maiden, and in the developing imagery of the Apocalyptic vision, clearly carry us beyond the level of the physical jewel itself. Retrospectively, we perceive in the compliment of the early lines of the poem--which are ostensibly an account of the beauty of the inanimate gem--a sense of living beauty and femininity (see below pp. 40-52).

This same tone is repeated in the Dreamer's complaint to the Maiden at 241 ff:

'O perle', quod I, 'in perlez pyzt,  
Art pou my perle bat I haf playned,  
Regretted by myn one on nyzte?'

Here and at 246:

'Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,...

he contrasts his own joyless state with her lyf of lykynge lyzte (247). His despair carries with it the accusation that she is the cause of their parting and of his consequent wretchedness. This is evident here, in the emotional words of the Dreamer, and in his lament at 325-6:

'Deme3 pou me', quod I, 'my swete,  
To dol agayn, penne I dowyne....'

again at 331-6:

... 'What seruez tresor, bot garez men grete  
When he hit schal efte wyth tenez tyne?  
Now rech I neuer for to declyne,  
Ne how fer of folde bat man me fleme.  
When I am partlez of perle myne,  
Bot durande doel what may men deme?'<sup>1</sup>

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1. Cf. also Knight's Tale 1273-4:

Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,  
I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye.

and, finally, in his words at 371:

'Of care and me ze made acorde, ...'

These outbursts of grief reinforce the image of the Dreamer as the courtly lover in utter subjection to the capricious inclinations of his lady, and testify to the misery he suffers as a result of her power over him. The Dreamer's life and happiness are totally in her hands:

'My blysse, my bale, ze han ben bope, ...'

he protests at 373. The paradox sums up concisely the points already made -- that when he is with her life is complete, without her it is empty and not worth living. His life or death, joy or grief, are completely dependent upon her. Compare with the Dreamer's unhappy state the plaint of the lover in the lyric The one I love is gone away:

My lefe is faren in a lond--  
Alas! why is she so?  
And I am so sore bound  
I may nat com her to.  
She hath my hert in hold,  
Where-ever she ride or go,  
With trew love a thousandfold.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Davies, no. 142, p. 246.

Other illustrations from lyrics on the subject of amour courtois will serve as useful parallels to the feelings of the Dreamer.

Compare the unhappy state of this lover:

'My deth I love, my lif ich hate, ...'<sup>1</sup>

with the Dreamer's words at 325-6 (quoted above, p. 33) and at 333:

'Now rech I neuer for to declyne, ...'

The power of the lady is forcefully conveyed in this same lyric,

'My sorewe, my care, all with a word  
He mighte away caste ....'

(13-14)

and in another lyric of love-suffering,

'Farwell! my joy, and welcom paine,  
Till I see my lady againe.'<sup>2</sup>

We are reminded of the Dreamer's

'My blysse, my bale, ze han ben bope, ...'

The Dreamer himself acknowledges his complete submission to the Maiden's will, inclinations and actions. We have seen how his joy

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1. Davies, no. 9, line 1, p. 59.

2. Davies, no. 141, lines 4-5, p. 245.

or grief is regulated by her presence or absence. He also excuses himself humbly when she rebukes him, as in the self-deprecating words of 381-2:

'Daz cortaysly ze carp con,  
I am bot mol and manerez mysse....'

In terms of human sympathy, and quite apart from the spiritual role each fulfils in the poem, we are bound to feel for the Dreamer. With his passionate declarations of a love which dominates his whole life, the Dreamer confronts the Heavenly Maiden, whose stern inflexibility, natural and necessary in the context of the spiritual lesson he must learn, is yet reminiscent of the cold, unyielding cruelty of the medieval lady on her haughty pedestal.

By way of corroboration of this particular aspect of the relationship between the Dreamer and the Maiden, perhaps the most important single piece of evidence is offered in the opening lines of the poem. In line 11 the Dreamer's desolation at the loss of his loved one is conveyed in the phrase fordolked of luf-daungere. This phrase sums up despair and a sense of emptiness and loss. M.E.D. gives the following as the general meaning of daunger-- 1 (a): 'Domination, power, control, or possession (as exercised by a ruler, lord, or adversary);' and 2: 'The domination or sway (of Fortune, Love, etc).' The compound luf-daungere emphasises the pathos of the Dreamer's

sorrow in love; but the word daunger alone was frequently taken to mean 'the power of love to inflict harm' or 'the wounding power of love'. Gordon agrees that "The wounding power of love was a familiar idea;"<sup>1</sup> and this is clearly the sense in Pearl at line 11, and later at line 250. Daunger, in this sense, was used repeatedly in secular lyrics to denote the aloofness and merciless indifference of the courtly lady. M.E.D. daunger 4(a) reads: 'Resistance offered to a lover by his lady-love; disdain, aloofness, reluctance, reserve;' 4(b) reads: 'anything or everything that frustrates a lover'. Similarly, Robinson renders daunger as: 'lordship, power, control; ungraciousness, disdain; hesitation, offishness, the quality of being "difficile"'.<sup>2</sup>

One example from Chaucer will serve as an illustration.

At lines 195-6 of Anelida and Arcite we find:

And for she yaf him daunger al his fille,  
Therfor she hadde him at her owne wille ....

Suffering in love is also the theme of Chaucer's lyric, Merciles Beaute: hence the poignant line:

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1. Gordon, p. 46.

2. See Chaucer, Glossary, under Daunger.

Your yen two wol slee me sodenly;<sup>1</sup>

And in A cleric courts his lady, the lover bemoans the fact that love has smitten him with woundes fele sore.<sup>2</sup> It is perhaps Davies's definition of daunger which gives us the clearest insight into the Dreamer's state of mind in Pearl. Davies sees this peculiar power of love as

... that stimulating self-containment and aloof power, which could be caprice; and which prevented or deferred physical fulfilment (so that she was often called merciless), while, at the same time, it intensified the lover's desire and increased his sensibility. It could embolden him in battle and provoke effort to please her, for example, by improving his manners; but it could also result in abandonment to sentimental self-pity and despair....<sup>3</sup>

Consider this in the context of Pearl. It is self-evident that what we have here is not a frustrated love-affair.<sup>4</sup> But what the poet has done, as he so often does, is to make use of the parallel type of situation on a symbolic level. The Dreamer's despair, spiritual and worldly, is imaginatively described in terms of the predicament of

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1. Chaucer, pp. 638, line 1.

2. Davies, no. 9, line 60, p. 61.

3. Davies, p. 44.

4. Despite Mother A. Carson's argument (see above, pp. 31-32).

the courtly lover. The description of the Dreamer's desolation as a result of luf-daunger, the account of his "keeping vigil" for his beloved, brings the relationship between the two into the world of the lover ennobled by suffering.

As a corollary to the idea contained in luf-daunger, the Pearl-poet associates the idea of love's wounding power with terms which suggest the idea of a love fulfilled as a remedy for the lover's wounds. The Dreamer remembers the Maiden has been both his blysse and his bale. The same idea is contained in lines 15-16:

Pat wont watz whyle deuoyde my wrange  
And heuen my happe and al my hele ...

Also at 280:

'My grete dystresse pou al todrawez ...'

and at 369:

'Bot kybez me kyndely your counforde ...'

Again the poet is making use of a popular idea--compare these two examples from lyrics:

A swete kos of thy mouth  
Mighte be my leche.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Davies, no. 10, lines 23-24, p. 63.

and

That at a revel, whan that I see you dance,  
It is an oinement unto my wounde,<sup>1</sup>  
Thogh ye to me ne do no daliance.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of love's injurious or remedial powers--as a blysse or a bale--testifies once more to its all-sufficiency and all-consuming power.

We shall now go on to discuss other specific terms used by our poet which contribute to the courtly strain in Pearl. Firstly, we make mention of the details selected by the poet in his description of the Maiden. Just as we found in the love of the Dreamer for his dere endorde elements of the typical love-relationship of the courtier for his lady, so in the description of the Maiden herself we find corresponding suggestions of the idealised picture of feminine beauty which serves Romance convention. The first mention of physical beauty is contained in the wistful reflection of the Dreamer in the opening lines of the poem. This passage is largely devoid of specific physical details of the lost one; the emphasis is on the Dreamer's sense of loss, and we can only accept the beauty of his loved one as implied by the depth and sincerity of his sorrow. That she is indeed beautiful is, however, certainly conveyed by

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1. Davies, no. 53, lines 6-8, p. 133.

implication in the elaborate compliment of the opening lines (1-12, 25-36), and particularly in such general hints as

Oute of oryent, I hardyly say,  
Ne proued I neuer her precios pere....  
(3-4)

and:

I sette hyr sengeley in synglere....  
(8)

One item of descriptive detail is contained, however, in line 6. The Dreamer says of the Pearl:

So smal, so smobe her sydez were, ...

and this compliment is re-echoed at line 190:

So smobe, so smal, so seme slyzt, ...

The features the poet has emphasised in these compliments--smoothness of skin and slender figure--are typical attributes of the paragon of medieval feminine beauty. D. S. Brewer has gathered together from diverse sources features which make up an ideal of female beauty in medieval literature.<sup>1</sup> Many of the details which Brewer has collected

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1. "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature," Modern Language Review L, No. 3 (July, 1955), pp. 257-269.

give us a valuable insight into the Pearl-poet's use of specific items of description in the picture of his heroine. Just as at line 6 of our poem, for example, emphasis is laid on the "smooth sides," so, Brewer tells us, in the lyric The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale, the lover praises his lady whose sides are as "soft as silk", and Matthew of Vendôme describes Helen of Troy as having a "figure incomparable" and later praises the same lady for her smooth skin and "splendid form".<sup>1</sup> In The Romaunt of the Rose, Idleness is described as "smothe and softe" of skin.<sup>2</sup> In The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale, the heroine is "slender of waist". Chaucer, in Troilus and Criseyde, notes in his description of Cressida:

Hire sydes longe, flesschly, smothe, and white ...  
(III, 1248)

Finally, from our own poet, in GGK, the beautiful wife of Bercilak is, among other things,

be fayrest in felle ...  
(943)

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1. The above quotations are taken from Brewer's article.
  2. Chaucer, p. 669, l. 556.

Other physical details selected by our poet have similar direct echoes in Romance literature. Firstly, the poet stresses the pure whiteness of the Maiden's complexion. At 178 he talks of

Hyr vysayge whyt as playn yuore:...

At 212 we are told of

Her ble more blazt þen whallez bon ...

and at 753 the deep white of her complexion is conveyed in the Dreamer's compliment:

'Py colour passez þe flour-de-lys;...'

Examples of this as a feature of beauty abound in medieval literature; as early as the sixth century we find in one of the first formal descriptions of female beauty, by the writer Maximian, praise of his lady's "milky whiteness".<sup>1</sup> Matthew of Vendôme in the Ars Versificatoria stresses the purity of Helen's complexion. Her forehead is "white as paper"; the space between her eyes is white and clear, a "milky way"; her neck is "like snow". Instances else-

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1. 'Aurea caesaries demissaque lactea cervix,  
Vultibus ingenuis visu sedere magis,  
Nigra supersilia, frons libera, lumina clara ...'

Maximian, Elegies, I 93ff., quoted by Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe Siècle (Paris, 1924), p. 80.

where bring home the image of pure whiteness; a beautiful complexion can be like snow, like milk. In The Romaunt of the Rose the ideal lady is white and red, like the lily and the rose.<sup>1</sup> The Fair Maid of Ribblesdale, too, is lily and rose, and her teeth are "white as bon of whal".<sup>2</sup> Chaucer, in Troilus and Criseide, pays tribute to the beauty of Criseide's "snowisse throte", and marvels at

Hire sydes long, flesshly, smothe, and white ...  
(III, 1248)

Finally, to refer once again to the lyrics, in The White Beauty the lady has

A waile whit ase whalles bon, ...<sup>3</sup>

From all these examples, two things are clear: firstly, whiteness of complexion was considered as an important attribute of feminine beauty in the Middle Ages; and secondly, this feature was popularly expressed by comparing a beautiful complexion with objects of great

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1. Thus, of Beauty:

'Hir chere was symple as byrde in bour;  
As whyt as lylle or rose in rys, ...'  
(Chaucer, p. 674, 1014-1015)

and cf. the parallel reference to the Pearl as being frech as flor-de-lys (195) and cf. 753.

2. For this traditional idea of pure whiteness of whalebone cf. again Pearl 212.

3. Davies, no. 21, line 1, p. 80.

beauty or value--polished ivory or the lily, pure driven snow. In both the feature described and the similes used, this aspect of the description of the Pearl-maiden is recognisably conventional.

The second important attribute mentioned is the comparison of the Maiden's hair to shining gold thread--at 165:

As glysnande golde þat man con schere, ...

and again at 213:

As schorne golde schyr her fax þenne schon, ...

Long, flowing hair like spun gold frequently adorns the medieval beauty. Maximian offsets the perfect whiteness of his lady by drawing attention to the pure gold of her hair.<sup>1</sup> The compound gold-tressed, 'golden-haired' is listed by M.E.D., and is used by Chaucer :

The gold-ytressed Phebus heighe on-lofte ...<sup>2</sup>

The picture is completed by the attention paid by the poet to

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1. Op. cit., p. 80.

2. Chaucer, p. 540, l. 8.

the radiance of her eyes. The beauty, the sparkle and vivacity of a lady's eyes captures the attention of the medieval beholder (Matthew of Vendôme compares Helen's eyes to stars).<sup>1</sup> Our poet, at 254, mentions the yzen graye of the Maiden. M.E.D. grei 2(a) reads as follows: 'Bright, shining, glinting; gleaming in a grayish or bluish colour;' and grei 2(b) reads: 'of eyes: bright, gleaming (of indeterminate colour)'. This aspect of beauty is again praised by our poet in GGK where, in the context of a general and lavish compliment to the beauty of Guinevere, he writes:

Be comlokest to discrye  
Per glent with yzen gray, ...  
(81-82)

Chaucer's Prioress, whom the poet ironically sets up as a combination of religious fervor, conventional beauty and cortaysye--she is repeatedly described in such terms as "semely", "faire", "digne of reverence"--has, among other attractions, eyes greye as glas.<sup>2</sup> In Sir Launful we find:

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1. As above, p. 42, references are taken from Brewer's article.

2. CT, General Prologue, line 152.

Be lady was bryzt as blosme on brere,  
Wytheyen gray, wyth louelych chere ...<sup>1</sup>

Finally, in the secular lyric, we find such compliments as

... that swete thing  
With eyen gray.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence gathered testifies to one fundamental point concerning the nature of the Pearl-maiden. On one important symbolic level, she is not to be seen as an infant--the two-year-old physical being the Dreamer has lost. This is, of course, the object-lesson which the Dreamer is in the process of learning. The Pearl does not talk, act or look like a child of two; she is no longer an earthly being at all. The Maiden is now of the Heavenly kingdom, one of the Brides of the Lamb; and one of the ways in which the poet conveys to us her new and elevated status is in his elaborate metaphor, founded in the terminology of medieval courtly romance, and deliberately designed to distance her from her former state, that of the lost and mourned child. The Pearl, as we have seen, is strikingly reminiscent in appearance of the gracious medieval lady. In the

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1. Sir Launful, ed. A. J. Bliss (London, 1960), lines 934-5.

2. Davies, no. 21, lines 23-4, p. 81.

courtly atmosphere of the kingdom of Heaven<sup>1</sup> she lives a life of ladyschyp gret (578); she enjoys a ladyly lyf (774).

In this context, various other significant terms with courtly overtones are used to describe the Maiden. She is a bryd (769)--a possible metathesis of burd(e). Wyld has noted <sup>2</sup> that the word burde, used on five occasions in the Brut, means "damsel, maiden, lady", and always implies great respect for the person to whom it is applied. It is a term of dignity and honour, reserved for noble ladies. This is most obvious in Brut at I, 387, when the Virgin is referred to as the bezste alre burden. M.E.D. refers us to birde .2(a), where, in a description of the Virgin in the York Plays, we find

Marie, my berde so bright.  
(105, 78)

the  
In Piers/Plowman C 21:121 the word is applied to the personified figure of Mercy:

And a ful benygne burde \* and buxum of speche ....

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1. See below 52 f. for corroboration of this idea.
  2. Language 9, 1933, p. 58. The obvious meaning is 'bride'; see M.E.D. bride, esp. 4 Theol. M.E.D. quotes metathesised form bird, which recalls M.E.D. birde n.1: 'A woman of noble birth;...'

And, in a more specifically courtly setting, the word is used on several occasions in GGK--and always referring to a noble lady, or company of ladies. At 613 it is used of the ladies of Arthur's court; at 942 and 1373 of the ladies of Bercilak's court. At 1283 it is applied to Bercilak's wife; and there is one instance of the word being used of the Virgin, at 752.

The Maiden is described at 162 as debonere. Gordon has rendered this adjective as 'gentle, gracious', and a glance at the meanings offered in M.E.D. will show that the word reflected more varied and positive qualities than modern "debonair". M.E.D. lists under debonaire 1(a): 'mild, ... gracious, ... gentle, ... humble'. In GGK the word is repeatedly used as a general courtly term suggesting courteous behaviour or demeanour. In Purity 830 it is used to describe the noble guests at the feast, and in Chaucer's Knight's Tale the noble Emily is described as having herte debonaire (2282); Robinson, in his Glossary, offers a range of meanings in Chaucer similar to that found in M.E.D.--  
"debonaire: (lit. "of good disposition"), gentle, gracious, courteous; meek, calm".<sup>1</sup>

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1. From this basic Romance use of the term, there is an extended sense in Pearl which implies a spiritual quality: this we shall discuss in the context of the substantive form debonerté in the discussion of the metaphorical description of the kingdom of Heaven which follows below.

The Maiden is described at 962 as a lufly flor. The M.E. adjective lufly has lost much of its original force in the development to modern "lovely". In GGK the word is used repeatedly in the sense of 'pleasing, gracious, fair, courteous'; it is, in short, one of those many general terms of courtly compliment. Gawain, for example, behaves luflyly (369)--i.e. in a gracious manner, in a manner befitting a courtly knight. At 1606 the sense must be 'willingly'--specifically Gawain's willingness, as befits his knightly code, to be of service. Finally, at 2389, the meaning is again 'in a becoming or seemly manner'.

Thenn loze þat oþer leude and luflyly sayde: ...

In Pearl, the poet has adapted this term from the world of romance to suit his context. Here (and in Purity), he uses the word in the spiritual sense of 'fair, beautiful'. In Purity 1804 we find lofly Lorde, and in Pearl the term refers once to the spiritual beauty of the Maiden,<sup>1</sup> once to the Heavenly kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Nor is this merely an idiosyncratic usage on the part of our poet. Wyld pointed out that the word was used more in connection with spiritual than with physical beauty in Old English, and that Lazamon too used the term

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1. lufly, 962.

2. louely, 693.

(leoflich) chiefly in a spiritual sense.<sup>1</sup>

Other general terms of courtly colouring require little comment. The Maiden is comly (259), gracios (189), gentyl (278, 602). She is, at 162,

A mayden of menske, ful debonere;...

For the courtly nature of this Scandinavian-derived term menske we need only look as far as GGK where the adjective menskful is applied, in the sense of 'worthy, noble', to the assembled company of knights (555), and to Bercilak's lady (1268).

Finally, the very dress of the Maiden is of the rich quality of a lady of court. She is dressed in a bleaunt (163). This is the same word used to describe Gawain's cloak:

He were a bleaunt of blwe þat bradde to þe erþe, ...  
(1928)

On one level, then, the Maiden is clearly the medieval lady of courtly romance. She is, in the words of Brewer,

"splendidly crowned, a courtly heroine in a setting

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1. Language 9, 1933, p. 69.

of unearthly brilliance."<sup>1</sup>  
(p. 63)

It is this "setting of unearthly brilliance" which we must now go on to discuss. For what completes and gives symmetry to the extended courtly metaphor in the poem is the descriptive detail and the symbolic nature of the kingdom of Heaven.

If the Pearl-maiden is to be seen, from one point of view, as a medieval lady, attention is also paid by the poet to the courtly setting in which she finds herself enthroned. There can be no doubt that the form in which the Heavenly kingdom appears to the Dreamer in his vision--the seat of God's power and love, inscrutable to man, and of which the Dreamer is vouchsafed

'... a syzt ... burh gret fauor ....'  
(968)

--is that of a splendid medieval city. Typically enough, something essentially indescribable is symbolically represented by the poet in terms of the most appropriate earthly counterpart available to him--

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1. D. S. Brewer, "Courtesy and the Gawain Poet," in Patterns of Love and Courtesy: Essays in Memory of C. S. Lewis, ed. John Lawlor (London, 1966), pp. 54-85.

the courtly splendour of a royal medieval seat.<sup>1</sup>

As Gollancz indicated, the ultimate source of the description of the Heavenly City in Pearl is the Vulgate Bible, Revelation 21-22. The city in our poem has all the important features of its counterpart in Revelation<sup>2</sup>; but it is, moreover, described by the poet as a bayly (315), or a maner (918) [manayre (1029)]. Gordon renders maner/manayre as 'mansion, abode; lordly establishment', and notes that

"the dreamer thinks of the Heavenly City as a feudal town, consisting of a castle with a cluster of buildings set within the castle wall."<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, he draws our attention at 992 to topographical features of the City which are reminiscent of Bercilak's splendid secular abode. In particular, the bantelez (992) [bantels (1017)] in Pearl -- the

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1. Cf. W.S. Johnson who states a similar view :

"Because he needs a positive means of symbolising the celestial life, the poet uses the most vivid one accessible, the one found in the Apocalypse. And from these two biblical passages -- the parable of the Vineyard and the Apocalyptic description of the Heavenly City -- the poem draws its imagery and substance."

"The Imagery and Diction of the Pearl: Toward an Interpretation", Journal of English Literary History, 20, no.3, 1953, p. 178.

2. Gordon, Introduction, pp. xxix ff.

3. Gordon, footnote to 917, p. 77.

'projecting horizontal coursings at the top of the castle wall'

remind us of the architecture of the castle in GGK (790 f)

Enbanded vnder þe abataylment in þe best lawe; . . .  
(790)

('Fitted with horizontal projections in the finest manner.')

And Gordon adds a further parallel, in Luridy, where the cups at Belshazzar's feast are described at 1458-9 as:

. . . as casteles arayed,  
Enbanded under batelment wyth bantelles quoynt, . . .

Within this setting of regal splendour--the breathtaking radiance of the City stuns the Dreamer (1085-1088)--the lord of the maner has his court, as the poet describes it at 445. The word court in M.E. is basically a secular term with romance connotations. M.E.D. court 4(a) renders the meaning of the word as 'The establishment of a sovereign or great lord, with his entourage'. Here the term can refer either to the court itself or to its noble members and, thus, lends itself readily, by metaphorical extension, to the domain of the Supreme Lord, the God of Heaven with his retinue of angels. Hence M.E.D. court 5(a): 'the (court) of heven', the heavenly host. This is the way in which the term is used in Pearl; it is an adaptation of the Romance concept--the royal court of

Arthur and his band of knights in GGK. Concerning those chosen elite who dwell in, and, indeed, constitute the court of God, the Maiden explains the established system of rank (at 445.f).

'The court of þe kyndom of God alyue  
Hat3 a property in hytself beyng:  
Alle þat may berinne aryue  
Of alle þe reme is quen ober kyng, ...'

In the mind of the Dreamer, those who make up God's entourage are pictured as courtly figures: the countes (489); the noble ladies

'Of ladyschyp gret and lyuez blom, ...'  
(578)

and who are also described, in best and most decorous courtly fashion, as

'So mony a comly on-vunder cambe ...'  
(775)

Emphasis is laid on the ethical values and qualities of the court, again reminiscent of the conventional points of excellence to be looked for in medieval knights and their ladies. The generosity, the perfect contentment, the total lack of any unworthy jealousy, the genuine desire that all might be even happier--if that were possible--the perfect order and absence of disharmony: all these are included in the catalogue of virtues of those who live in

Pis noble cité of ryche enpryse ...<sup>1</sup>  
(1097)

In discussing the values of the courtly milieu in Heaven, most detailed attention must be given to that quality repeatedly referred to in the course of the description of the divine kingdom. Cortaysye in M.E. comprised a wide and varied range of connotations in connexion with the medieval courtly ethos. Derived from the word court itself, its primary meaning may be taken as 'pertaining to a court, to the code of conduct expected of members of a court'. To reach the fundamental meaning of cortaysye as used in Pearl we must, however, pursue an oblique course: for the poet, broadly speaking, employs two distinct but related usages of the word in Pearl and in the other three poems commonly ascribed to him. For the first of these usages it will be profitable to examine the appearances of the word in the sister-poems of Pearl, and to see how this usage is developed in Pearl; and then to make note of a second, related sense in which the word is repeatedly used in Pearl and which appears only sporadically in the other poems.

In GGK the concept of "courtesy" is all-prevailing. The two

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1. The qualities listed above are also, of course, manifestly Christian virtues, stemming from the example of the all-embracing virtue of the Lamb Himself. We have, therefore, another clear instance of the ready correspondence, made use of by the poet, between the values of a noble life on earth and the ideal life in Heaven.

courts described in the poem, those of Arthur and Bercilak, are represented as paragons of "courtesy". An analysis of the occurrences of cortaysye and related words in GGK reveals the following pattern: cortaysye itself is to be taken generally as 'courtesy, the manners and virtues of chivalry'. Individual instances of the word in the poem convey the various aspects of character which go to make up the "courteous" knight. At 276 cortays (adj.) means 'gentle' (knight), a general term of courtly compliment. At 469 and 1013 it refers to 'courteous, chivalrous' speech, or speech which becomes a noble knight. At 539 it is again used to describe chivalrous knights, and at 1511 and 1525 the general sense of 'courteous, knightly'<sup>1</sup> is appropriate.

There are two instances of the related adverb, cortaysly--at 775 and 903---and in each instance the sense is the general one of 'courteously, graciously, kindly'.

The noun cortaysye is frequently found in the poem: at 247 it means 'seeming or fitting behaviour'; at 263 'chivalric or knightly behaviour'; at 1773 it refers to Gawain's knightly reputation; at 653 it can be taken as summing up all the virtues recounted in the lines which precede it (fraunchyse, felaȝschyp, clannes, and later at 654 pite). Cortaysye is, in fact, a generic term comprising an amalgam of all the virtues one would expect to find in a noble,

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1. At 1511, cortaysye and knyztly are actually used as equivalents.

free-minded, highborn knight of court--generosity of conduct, frankness, compassion, chastity, humility, freedom from any unworthy act or thought, general goodness. This one word stands out as the acme of knightly excellence. It is the one basic, yet complex quality which enables Gawain to wear the pentangle, and the token of that impeccability which he must at all times maintain in order to protect this precious right. Finally, it is a term of the highest echelons of society, a term of social graciousness, the complete antithesis of churlishness.

In M.E.D., courteisie is illustrated as a general term of courtly excellence, an amalgam of virtues : courteisie 3(a) gives : 'Benevolent or humane disposition or conduct; good will, kindness, hospitality, generosity;'. In all these senses the word illustrates the studied perfection, the virtue and practice of chivalry to which Gawain has dedicated himself. His "courtesy" is well-known, we are told at 206; it is seen in his natural and seemingly deference to Arthur and Guinevere, and in his self-control, boldness and mesure in his confrontation with the azlich mayster. Later in the poem, we see the joy of Bercilak's entourage when Gawain, the fyne fader of nurture (919), graces their court with his presence. They recognise his courtesy. Its reputation has spread far and wide. From this paragon of knights they look forward to hearing

...teccheles termes of talkyng noble  
(917)

Gawain's tribulations at the hands of Bercilak's lady stem, ironically enough, from his cortaysye. His temptation throws into relief a conflict between two aspects of his knightly code, and the lady knows this and makes use of it. As a noble knight, Gawain cannot simply repel the lady's advances for fear of insulting her; on the other hand, he cannot abuse the hospitality of his host by committing adultery with his wife. Finally, as Brewer has pointed out, the way in which our knight skilfully extricates himself from the dilemma is the ultimate vindication of his "courtesy".<sup>1</sup>

Courtesy, then, is a key concept in Romance literature, carrying with it other, related, subsidiary qualities to form one complex ideal. But from our discussion of what is meant on this level by cortaysye, we shall show how a transition can be made from the Romance to a more specifically spiritual context. The use of this one word to cover both the knightly virtues of a terrestrial court and those of the blessed company of the court of God, does not appear such an artificial or forced process when we consider that even in GGK, where cortaysye is first and foremost a courtly term, the word has spiritual colouring. Gawain's virtues--humility, chastity, generosity--are, after all, those of Christian chivalry.<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Courtesy and the Gawain-Poet", p. 76.

2. As Brewer notes in Chaucer In His Time (London, 1963), p. 145: 'Courtesy came from heaven, says one of these (courtesy) books, ... and all virtues are contained in it.'

Gordon's remarks testify that it is on this level that the poet develops and extends cortaysye in Pearl:

... more than a sophistication of behaviour in polite society; he sees it as a gentleness and sensitiveness of spirit pervading personal relationship. This is seen in his application of its terms to devotional and theological concepts.<sup>1</sup>

Gordon then goes on:

... there had been for some time a strong reciprocal influence between the ideas of cortaysye and those of religious thought, and a tendency towards interchange of terms; and Pearl affords an admirable illustration of the basic conception of cortaysye which made such interchange natural ... the Christian charity of the kings and queens of Heaven is cortaysye, not only because of the symbolism of royalty, but because cortaysye expresses the ideal of gentle behaviour which is the manifestation of divine charity.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the association of one "courteous" company in GK with another in Pearl is much more than a symbolic one, with the kingdom of Heaven imaginatively portrayed as an elegant and splendid terrestrial court. Cortaysye also implies a whole range of moral values; the term is shaped and fitted by the poet for the adaptation from one specialised context to the other, from earthly nobility to divine charity.

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1. Gordon, Introduction, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

2. Gordon, Introduction, p. xxxiii.

The cortaysye of the kings and queens of Heaven in Pearl, which Gordon renders as 'courtesy, nobility',<sup>1</sup> is analogous with that of Gawain in that it implies a general nobility of spirit. Where it differs from, or rather transcends, the courtly sense in GGK is in the shift of emphasis to indicate a more specifically spiritual quality. Where in GGK the quality is that of the most excellent human being, in the Heavenly Host it is that of beings who have transcended human limits; cortaysye in Pearl is perfect goodness. Similarly, where Gawain is a noble member of an earthly court, in Pearl the noble ones are of the court of God. The whole concept, the whole situation, is on a higher, indeed the highest, plane. The kings and queens in Heaven are "courteous" in their generosity of spirit towards each other, their complex lack of any feelings of envy, their perfect and unfailing code of Christian charity, and, finally and definitively, by virtue of their total and unquestioning reliance on God's judgement. Theirs is the perfect inner goodness, the nobility of thought and conduct to which Gawain, as a mortal, can only aspire. Theirs is cortaysye in its purest, complete, form.

In the same way the Dreamer serves, until his ultimate submission to God's will, as a kind of antithesis to the cortaysye of the Pearl and her companions in Heaven. His basic faults--his churlishness, his doubts and fears, his unwillingness to believe what the Maiden

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1. Gordon, Glossary, p. 125.

tells him--are symptomatic of his lack of cortaysye. Moreover, they underlie his failure to accept God's word unquestioningly, to approach Him with childlike faith. He is, in total contrast to those whom he would join in Heavenly bliss,

... much to blame and vncortayse ...  
(303)

This flaw in the Dreamer illustrates the new spiritual dimension of cortaysye introduced in Pearl. As Gordon puts it:

... the dreamer who has not faith enough to accept Christ's word without visible proof is uncortayse, lacking in spiritual sensitivity, though he is as conscious of his manners as Sir Gawain himself.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the Blessed Virgin is referred to in 432 as Quen of cortaysye. Of this description Gordon writes:

The Virgin Mary is Quen of cortaysye, not only because she reigns over the noble society of Heaven, but because she represents the ideal itself of Christian behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

It can be conclusively stated, therefore, that this basically romance term, cortaysye, and terms related to it, have been consciously elevated by the poet in the spiritual context of Pearl. The finest

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1. Gordon, Introduction, p. xxxiii.

2. Ibid.

manners of polite society have become the perfect goodness of Christian charity. But while Brewer is correct in arguing that the concept is enriched and completed in Pearl,<sup>1</sup> the spiritual possibilities of "courtesy" were recognised and used by the poet elsewhere. He uses the term cort ironically in Purity, in the description of Belshazzar's court (1368-74, 1530), the corrupt extreme of courtly sumptuousness. The crucial point, the point behind the irony, is that for all the external trappings and splendours of this courtly setting there is lacking the basic ingredient of true cortaysye; cortaysye, in GGK, and to a much greater extent in Pearl, must be rooted in internal standards of nobility of conduct and thought. Again, in Purity, in the section on Christ's praise of purity, the term is obviously used in the sense of the inner spiritual goodness of the true Christian:

Bot if þay conterfete crafte, and cortaysye wont,...  
(13)

The Christian goodness is also indicated in the substantive Cortaysye = 'gracious one' (1097), referring to Christ Himself, and in the adverb cortaysly = 'graciously' at 564, referring to God:

He knyht a couenaunde cortaysly wyth monkynde þere,...

Likewise in Patience at 417 we find the substantive form cortaysye

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1. See "Courtesy and the Gawain-poet".

referring to God's generosity or benevolence. It is this instance which leads directly to the special sense of the term in Pearl. When the meaning 'nobility of conduct' or 'generosity, charity' is applied to God, the result is the specialised sense of '(divine) charity' or, in specifically Christian terms, '(God's) Grace'.

This notion of grace plays a vital role in the picture of life among the blessed as the Pearl recounts it to the Dreamer; the Dreamer is urged to give up ideas of merit gained on earth, and to submit himself to God's grace or mercy. There are several occasions in the poem where cortaysye is applied specifically to the state or operation of divine grace. Thus, of the poet's use of cortaysye at lines 432, 444, 456, 468, 469, 471, E. V. Gordon and C. T. Onions have written:

The use of cortaysye in these lines is not well satisfied by the ordinary synonyms 'courtliness', 'courteousness'; the obsolete meanings 'generosity', 'benevolence' (recognized by N.E.D.) come nearer to what is required. But it would be more satisfactory if we could go further and assume that the poet meant us to apprehend it as a synonym of grace, varying its application from the technical use in theology to the more general 'divine favour or condescension'.<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Notes on the Text and Interpretation of Pearl", Medium Evum 2 (1933) pp. 165-188. Gordon restates this view in his edition when he lists as the various possible translations of the word: "courtesy, nobility; favour, generosity; divine grace (especially as manifested in Christian love and charity)". (Glossary, p. 125). Under M.E.D., courteisie 4, we find listed, "Of a deity: beneficence, grace, mercy, or an instance of it."

Where cortaysye is attributed to God, therefore, it becomes that unique quality of generosity whereby God extends His redeeming power to men. We are saved from our sinful existence on earth, and admitted to the kingdom of God, by the bestowal of His grace. The elevation of 'courteous' conduct has been carried to its final stage--to the context of the Almighty and the All-merciful. It is with this in mind that we interpret lines 457-8:

'Of courtaysye, as sayt<sup>z</sup> Saynt Paule  
Al arn we membrez of Jesu Kryst ....'

(By grace, as St. Paul said, we are  
all members of Jesus Christ)

or, to paraphrase,

'It is by God's divine favour that we are  
members of Christ's flock in Heaven.'<sup>1</sup>

The poet brings out this specialised use of cortaysye by means of juxtaposition of the word at 468, and later at 480, with the use at 469. In the former two instances (and also at 457 and 481) the reference is clearly to divine grace or "condescension". But at 469 the meaning clearly hearkens back to the more usual sense of the

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1. The poet, moreover, uses the word in this sense on at least one other occasion. In Patience 417-420 we find:

Wel knew I þi cortaysye, by quoynt soffraunce,  
Py bounte of debonerté and by bene grace,  
Py longe abydyng wyth lur, by late vengauce,  
And ay by mercy is mete, be mysse neuer so huge.

word described above--the cortaysye or noble conduct of the kings and queens of Heaven. This use of cortaysye in the technical device of stanza-linking throws into relief the two related meanings we have discussed.

The same contrast is brought out in those places in the poem where cortaysye is applied to the Blessed Virgin. At 444 Mary is described as Quen of cortaysye, and in line 433 as Cortayse Quen. Here, as Gordon and Onions suggest,<sup>1</sup> Mary, the Quen of cortaysye, is surely to be taken as a direct echo of Mary's theological epithet, regina gratiae. It is significant that in the few lines which precede the reference in 444, the Pearl-maiden is expanding on her statement in 425 that

We leuen on Marye þat grace of grewe;<sup>2</sup>

Mary is thus seen here in her traditional rôle as mediatrix between the sinner and God, the hope of man, the one to whom he must pray as intercessor with God that he may thereby attain a state of grace. Mary is in this context something more than what is contained in Gordon's observation quoted above (p. 55). Mary is Quen of cortaysye, "... not only because she reigns over the noble society

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1. Op. cit., p. 172.

2. Gordon and Onions compare this line specifically to the equivalent theological description of Mary as Mater (divinae) gratiae.

of Heaven", and not only "because she represents the ideal itself of Christian behaviour",<sup>1</sup> but also because in these lines we are reminded that she has, in theological terms, a central rôle in the whole question of man's approach to God and the attainment of grace.

Having examined in some detail the cortaysye which prevails among the kings and queens of Heaven, it remains to conclude our survey of the courtly terms in Pearl by taking note of several other words whose background, and use in the poem, contribute to the courtly flavour of the Heavenly kingdom in the poem.

1. The adjective gracio(u)s conveys a general Romance sense of 'fair, pleasing, charming'. In GGK 216 the beautiful designs on the handle of the Green Knight's battle-axe are described as gracios werkes. The same sense is to be taken in Pearl 95, where the gracios gle of the garden in which the birds sing sweetly is to be translated as 'delightful joy'. We find the word applied to the Maiden at 189 and to the Heavenly Garden at 260. The modern sense of the word is best seen in GGK 970 in the adverbial form:

When Gawayn glyzt on þat gay, þat graciously loked, ...

The development of the word to the modern usage "gracious" clearly

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1. Gordon, Introduction, p. xxxiii.

represents a devaluation from the original meaning of the word--a vague sense of fairness, beauty, good manners, indicated in the instances listed above. But the poet also conveys some of the older force of the word--its relationship to grace--in other places. At Patience 26 we find:

For þay þe gracious Godes sunes schal godly be called ...  
('For they shall justly be called the gracious (= by grace) sons of God')

We see from this usage that the original sense of "gracious" is to be derived from the Christian concept of "grace". In this sense it can be used either 'of God--good, merciful, benevolent;' (M.E.D., gracious 1(a)) or 'of a person, an action: filled with God's grace' (M.E.D., 1(b)). This latter sense may well be in our poet's mind at 189, where he describes the Pearl as

Pat gracios gay wythouten galle,...

We previously rendered the adjective here as 'fair, pleasing, beautiful, charming', and the Maiden certainly is a figure of beauty; but she is also a figure on whom God's grace has been bestowed.

2. At 184 the Dreamer is described as

... hende as hawk in halle ....

Gordon in his glossary gives as the meaning of hende in this context 'quiet, still'. At 909, however, another form of the same word is to be found: hynde, 'gracious one'. The word is derived from O.E. gehende 'convenient', and was adopted into courtly vocabulary in the sense of 'courtly, gracious, courteous, behaving in a manner which befits a noble knight'; or, as M.E.D. puts it under hende 1(a) : 'Having the approved courtly or knightly qualities, noble, courtly, well-bred, refined, sportsmanlike;'. Under hende 2(a), M.E.D. lists the possible meanings of the word when applied to God, Christ, the Virgin: 'gracious, merciful, loving ;' and under 2(b) :

'Of men: virtuous'--many Christian virtues are derived from this basic sense, probably according to context--'gentle, mild, kindly, generous ... humble, obedient, patient.'

The word is clearly, then, a general term of courtly behaviour whose meaning is coloured by individual context. Thus, when our poet refers to God, in Patience 398:

pat is hende in þe hyzt of his gentryse? ...

the reference is to the "gracious" or "merciful" Christian Lord. The same interpretation is applicable in Hende Lord (Purity 612). In GGK heuen the term is used on numerous occasions (e.g. hende/quene, 647) in the sense of 'noble, courtly', and once as the substantive hende (2330)

in the sense of 'good sir'.

The use of this courtly term in Pearl 184 implies in this context, therefore, that the Dreamer, who is hende, is not simply 'quiet' or 'still', as Gordon translates, but that he behaves in a manner which befits the situation--he is justly still and attentive as he gazes upon the Pearl-maiden. One might justly contrast his behaviour here with his lack of cortaysye later.

3. Repeatedly used in the poem are the two near-synonyms gent(e) and gentyl--two words of courtly genealogy and with a wide range of related meanings according to the context in which they are used. Gordon lists as the possible meanings of gente 'courteous, gracious, fair, elegant, noble'. A similar range of possibilities is quoted in GGK--thus, gentye kniztes 'noble knights' (42), gentylest knyzt 'most noble knight' (639); and as sb. bat ientyle 'noble one, knight' (542). Referring to Christ and St. Julian, gentye is best translated as 'kindly, merciful' (774), and at 1022, describing the revelry at Bercilak's castle, the term seems to have the vaguer sense of 'excellent, wonderful'. To take a wider view, the same general flavour is found in M.E.D. gentil <sup>adj.</sup> /3(a): '... noble, gracious, refined, graceful, beautiful'; but M.E.D. under gentil /1(a) gives a more precise sense, when applied to persons 'of noble rank or birth, belonging to the gentry, noble;...' There is an extension here

from the general to the particular, from the vague courtly compliment (as in such phrases as gentyl and fre, fair and gente/gentyl) to the moral attribute. Thus, also M.E.D., gentil n. 1(a):

'A member of the nobility or gentry;... often implying a person of refined or aristocratic tastes; collectively, the nobles, the gentry-- hence (lordes) and gentiles, gentiles and communes.'

At this level, the word is used of one who has the character, or manners, prescribed by Christian chivalry--thus M.E.D., gentil n. 2: 'A chivalrous, excellent or worthy person'. The link between this sense and those listed above is clearly the connexion in the medieval mind between high social rank and refined tastes and manners.

Once again, all possible shades of meaning seem to be exploited by our poet; a few further instances will serve as final illustration. The poet uses gente of precious jewels in Pearl 118, 253, and, in Purity, gent 1495, in the sense of 'beautiful, fair'. Applied to one who is 'courteous, noble, chivalrous', we see in Patience 62 Jonah described as gentyle prophete. Similarly in Pearl 602 the Maiden is Pat gentyl. The notion of noble birth or lineage may also be intended in Pearl 605 and 632, where gentyl(e) is applied to God, and at 895 to Christ; finally, at 263-4 the Dreamer is rebuked for his ill-mannered doubts and questioning of God in the following terms:

'Her were a forser for þe, in faye,  
If þou were a genty ljueler.'

A contrast to this vaguer, courtly colouring is provided at two points in Pearl where a moral value is implied--in the "gentle" words of the Maiden at 278, and the "gentle" discourse of the Heavenly thronge at 883.

4. Debonere is a perfect example of a word whose meaning has been devalued over the years. In modern usage, the word 'debonair' is applied, often for slightly ironical effect, to one who possesses, or assumes, the social graces. In medieval times, however--and this is attested by our poet's use of the word and of the related noun debonerté--debonere was yet another of those terms which conjured up a wide range of courtly values. M.E.D. lists under debonaire 1(a): 'mild, gracious, gentle, humble'. Chaucer was able to use the word in the general sense of 'gentle, well-disposed'; thus of Emily in the Knight's Tale:

This Emelye, with herte debonaire, ...<sup>1</sup>

Alternatively, the term could be used to imply virtues more emphatically spiritual: humility, modesty, kindness, meekness. Debonerté is one of Gawain's knightly and Christian virtues, and in the context is perhaps best rendered as 'courtesy, graciousness'; the same meaning is to be

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1. Chaucer, p. 46, l. 2282.

attached to the adjectival equivalent in Purity where the poet describes the noble company assembled for Lot's feast:

Be gestes gay and ful glad, of glam debonere,...  
(830)

In Patience, however, the noun refers to the kindness and mercy of God, as it is used in Jonah's plea to the Lord:

'Wel knew I bi cortaysye, by quoynt soffraunce,  
By bounté of debonerté and by bene grace,...'  
(417-8)

In Pearl 798 debonerté is used to describe the meekness of Christ, and as an extension of this the same word (in the form bonerté) is applied to the state of Heavenly Beatitude in

'He calde me to hys bonerté:...'   
(762)

5. Fre, fra(u)nchyse. The original sense of fre is, of course, 'one of free rank' as opposed to 'one in bondage'. For fré .1(a), M.E.D. lists as the primary meaning:

'Of a person: free in rank or condition, having the social status of a noble or freeman, not a slave or serf.'

As we saw in the case of gente, gentyll (para. 3 above), however, this mark of social status was extended to denote a moral quality to be expected of those who enjoyed free or high rank. Thus M.E.D., fré

2(a) : 'Like a freeman; noble in character; gracious, well-mannered;...'; and 2(b) : 'Generous, open-handed'--as in fre herte 'kind heart, generosity', fre of speche 'speaking freely, outspoken, frank'. Again, this openness and generosity of character commonly attributed to those of high birth, is obviously to be contrasted with the "churlishness" or meanness of character which, to the medieval mind, typified low birth.

The same process is at work in the medieval meanings of fra(u)anchise. The primary meaning, as listed under fraunchise 1(a) in M.E.D., is: 'Freedom (as opposed to servitude), the social status of a freeman'. But, from this, we have M.E.D. fraunchise 2(a) : 'Nobility of character, magnanimity; liberality, generosity; a noble or generous act.'

This extended implication of courtly excellence and noble manners is illustrated in the use of both words by our poet. In Pearl at 796 we find:

'My ioy, my blys, my lemman fre,...

Applied to Christ, this may here be best rendered as 'my joy, my bliss, my perfect love'. At 481, however, when the Dreamer says:

That cortaysé is to fre of dede,...

his complaint is that Heavenly favour seems too lavish or generously given. In GGK, fre refers to the noble gathering at Arthur's court (101); to Gawain (803); to Bercilak (847, 1156); and the ladies of Bercilak's court (1885). In all these cases a general courtly compliment is intended. The same may be said of the substantive form fre (= 'noble lady') at 1545, 1549, 1783. In Purity 88 fre means 'free men, noblemen', but in other instances--203, 275, 607, 861--a more general, vaguer, "mere conventional epithet"<sup>1</sup> such as 'noble, fair, righteous' is appropriate.

Fraunchise, too, may have a specific or more general flavour according to context. In GGK 652 fraunchyse is a key term, one of the hero's knightly virtues--openness, generosity, magnanimity.<sup>2</sup> At 1264, however, Gawain simply uses the word as a compliment to the lady--it is an instance of the

...tecchelez termes of talkyng noble, ...  
(917)

for which he is renowned.

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1. Purity, p. 149.

2. It is also one of the virtues on which Gawain falls down: in concealing the "trophy", the magic girdle from Bercilak, he shows a lack of fraunchise, frankness (the two words are cognate); he compromises his reputation for honesty and open nobility of character.

Finally, the word may be applied to the generosity (grace, mercy) of God--as in Purity 750:

3if I, forloyne as a fol, by fraunchyse may serve ...

and in the problematical passage in Pearl, at 609-10:

Hys fraunchyse is large þat euer dard  
To Hym þat matz in synne rescoghe;...

In the context, fraunchyse is best taken as rendering the generosity of God rather than the alternative suggestion of privilege, liberation of the free man (in approaching God).<sup>1</sup>

The terms discussed above are the main ingredients which give the description of the kingdom of Heaven the flavour of the splendid medieval court. Other courtly terms are used by the poet and require little or no explanation as their meaning is self-evident. Honour, renoun, proweess, pris, are among the courtly values which abound at the Heavenly court, and its noble courtiers are, among other things, dere, noble, comly. The courtly pattern constructed by the poet is consistent and deliberate; the Pearl-maiden is a lady of this court, and a noble court is her Heavenly home. The poet is aware that the most exalted of earthly settings befits the description of what is essentially indescribable, and so it is this setting of almost earthly

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1. So Gordon, p. 67, note 609-10.

perfection that he most naturally uses.<sup>1</sup> Gordon by no means overstates the case when he makes note of

... the evident reliance in the poem on courtly manners as an unquestionable ideal of behaviour, and the influence of courtly love on the terms of thought .... The poet must have been a man of polite education, probably of gentle birth, who knew his cortaysye at first hand: the courteous tone of the conversation, the manners, the details of dress and architecture, the jewels, belong to the aristocratic world of the time.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. above, p. 53, footnote 1.

2. Gordon, Introduction, p. xxxii.

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER III  
THE LEGAL VOCABULARY

Background to Church Law

In this chapter we shall examine our poem for evidence of legal terminology and procedure for in a poem such as Pearl, so thoroughly steeped in the dogma of the medieval Church, we should expect to find some reference to the legal aspects of the teachings of the Church. The Western Church has from earliest times been preoccupied with the question of the laws that govern her--laws which prescribe a code of worship (a code of canonical obedience and a strict code of morals) to be observed by all members of the Church community.

In the earliest days of Christian worship the Church lived under, and was subject to, Roman law, a law drawn up and administered by laymen. But at an early stage and from the third century at least, the local Christian community, wherever it had established itself, possessed adequate machinery for its internal government. The term "Canon Law" (canon being derived from Greek κανών 'measure, norm, rule') is used to designate this system of law that is proper to the Church (I shall hereafter refer to the Roman Catholic Church as "the Church"). Original ecclesiastical laws and legal procedures were periodically revised by the General Councils of the Church, which met to legislate on all matters of faith and discipline.

The passage of time saw a strengthening rather than a diminishing of the scope and power of Canon Law. One authority describes the situation which arose after the break-up of the Roman Empire:

The disappearance of the Emperors from Rome, the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, left the popes in a commanding position with regard to the Western Church. They stepped into the place of the Roman Emperor, and issued Decretals which the clergy considered as binding in ecclesiastical matters.<sup>1</sup>

Jenks goes on to add that this internal legislative power became more and more independent as time went on. In the Anglo-Saxon period, the independence of the Church in matters of legislative authority is attested in the Ecclesiastical Laws of Knut and Edgar, and contemporary Scandinavian law-books contain the Kirkiubocker (Church books), which deal specifically and exclusively with laws of the Church.

In the twelfth century there appeared the great work of Gratian of Bologna, Decretum Gratiani, which, although clearly a personal collection from the vast mass of existing ecclesiastical decrees and resolutions, was gradually received as an authoritative statement of Church law. The interest of the Church in legal matters continued

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1. E. Jenks, Law and Politics in the Middle Ages (London, 1898), p. 27. References below to specific works on Church law are derived from Jenks's account.

unabated throughout the Middle Ages and her legal authority was reinforced by such momentous additions as the Five Books of Gregory IX (1234), the "Sext" or Sixth Book added by Boniface VIII in 1298, and the decretals of Clement V in 1317. "By this time," Jenks concludes,

the Church has grown strong enough to repudiate the system which was its foster mother. Roman Law, after all, is the work of laymen; and by this time the Church has become a sacred caste, and will acknowledge no secular authority .... from the ninth century to the close of the Middle Ages, not the most autocratic monarch of Western Europe, not the most secular of lawyers, would have dreamed of denying the binding force, within its proper sphere, of the Canon Law. It had its own tribunals, its own practitioners, its own procedure; it was a very real and active force in men's lives.<sup>1</sup>

The pattern is clear: as the Church itself became stronger, more firmly established, we observe a corresponding growth and strengthening of the body of laws which the Church saw as essential

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1. Op. cit., p. 29. We have italicised Jenk's qualifying phrase, "within its proper sphere", since this is the key to the relationship, or the theoretical relationship at least, between Church and State in matters of law. While in general the Church recognises its submission to the common law in all questions which are proper to common law--Catholics are just as liable to civil prosecution as anyone else--the Church nevertheless claims certain spheres of conduct which are subject to ecclesiastical law, and which would not be treated by civil law. Heresy is an obvious example of an offence for which the Church had its own trial procedures and punishments--penance, ultimately excommunication. In other words, a resort to secular law in purely internal Church matters, to civil prosecution or punishment, would be neither just nor relevant.

to its structure and organisation. Consequently, in matters proper to the Canon Law, its dictates constitute a solemn and binding covenant of obedience for all Christians. The rigid independence of the Church in the operation of its legal code has been preserved until the present time--jealously guarded from the intrusion of lay authority.<sup>1</sup>

The Middle Ages, however, witnessed a significant development in the relationship between Canon Law and its secular counterpart--a development vital to our consideration of the debate between the Dreamer and the Maiden in Pearl. With the growth of ecclesiastical courts, a study of other forms of law and a knowledge of civil law procedures had become imperative. By 1300, the New Catholic Encyclopedia tells us, this attitude had been carried so far that a civil law degree was considered desirable for one who wished to proceed to studies in the Canon Law. Catholic schools of law were established:

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1. As late as 1928 we find an Archbishop deploring what he considers to be "an intolerable level" of state interference in matters of the Church, and reaffirming "the fundamental principle that the Church, that is, the bishops together with the clergy and the laity, must in the last resort when its mind has been fully ascertained, retain its unalienable right, in loyalty to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to formulate its faith in Him, and to arrange the expression of that Holy Faith in its form of worship".

... primarily to enable their students not only to obtain solid professional legal training but especially to receive a thorough grounding in legal philosophy and jurisprudence in harmony with basic Catholic principles.<sup>1</sup>

The Church's wholesale borrowing from the procedure, the constitutions, and even the terminology of post-Conquest Anglo-Norman common law, coupled with her protection of the integrity of her own canons, lead us directly to our analysis of the legal colouring of the debate in Pearl.

From the background given above we hope to establish the following:

- (1) There are present, in the poem's central debate concerning life and reward in Heaven, instances of contemporary legal terminology and procedure.
- (2) The poet recognises two levels of legality and justice--one proper to the law of man, the other to the law of God. Each is valid and efficacious in its own sphere; there is no basic conflict between the two.<sup>2</sup> But neither must impinge

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1. N.C.E., vol. 8, p. 550.

2. As one commentator has remarked, human and divine laws together cater for 'the spiritual and temporal factors in human life' (R. Hanson, Church and State London, 1936, Foreword p. 7).

Moreover, law as a general concept prescribes to man his duty, whether it be as a member of the community at large, or, in the case of the Canon Law, his duty to God. N.C.E. thus offers as a general definition of law:

'A principle that connotes order, whether this be the order of the physical universe or that of morality. In a more specific sense, law is the rule and measure of human acts and relations.'

upon the rightful domain of the other. This theme is given dramatic prominence by the poet through the figure of the Dreamer, who, as we shall see, seeks to impose human values on God's supreme justice.

### Background to the Medieval Debate

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that our poet, in one vital passage of the poem--perhaps the very heart of the poem--makes conscious and consistent use of both the terminology and the procedure of the medieval legal debate. The passage in question focuses on the contentious dialogue between the Pearl-maiden and the Dreamer, on the nature of Heavenly reward, on whom it is bestowed and in what degree.

The popularity of the debate form in the Middle Ages, and indeed its establishment as a literary genre in its own right, is attested and illustrated by J. W. H. Atkins in the introduction to his edition of The Owl and the Nightingale.<sup>1</sup> The earliest manifestations of the genre, Atkins informs us, are to be seen in the pastoral eclogues of Theocritus and Virgil--in particular the type of contest (as in Virgil Eclogues 3,7) consisting of a dispute between two singers and concluding with a verdict pronounced by a third party.

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1. O/N, pp. xlvii f.

For the direct ancestor of the medieval debate form, Atkins directs us to the Carolingian era; the eighth-century Conflictus veris et hiemis of Alcuin (or one of his school) is the finest product of this type. From this early model

poems of the [debate] kind had been constantly appearing, in Latin for the most part, though occasionally in the vernaculars as well; and while the 12th and early 13th centuries witnessed the greatest popularity of the form, it is represented intermittently right on to the end of the Middle Ages. The debate had thus an extensive vogue: and it was known under a variety of names--the conflictus, certamen, contentio, disputatio, altercatio, estриф, plet, disputoison. But in every case the essential element was the same: there was always a spirited contest in verse between two or more disputants, each of whom claimed supremacy for the views he held.<sup>1</sup>

In direct descent from the Latin tradition come the French chansons de geste, the fabliaux, and the Provençal lyrics. In England the appearance of O/N provides us with a fresh and original native vernacular type, and also testifies to the predilection for the debate form as a "...natural expression of the medieval genius".<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between Pearl and the earlier O/N must not be overstated; we shall make no attempt at a detailed comparison of the gay, secular irreverence of the birds' dispute in O/N and the solemnity

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1. O/N, Introduction, p. xlvii.

2. Ibid.

of the debate concerning life and reward in Heaven in Pearl. But Atkins remarks on two facets of the debate tradition echoed in O/N which may also be found in Pearl. Both poets have clearly drawn upon: (a) the corpus of words and phrases--mostly of Anglo-Saxon lineage--of legal terminology; and (b) the procedural aspects of the debate which clearly reflect the format of the 13th century law-suit<sup>1</sup>.

In a more recent study, E. G. Stanley<sup>2</sup> has submitted some of Atkins's conclusions to critical scrutiny, and has set in perspective the influence of the medieval law-suit on O/N. We have found Stanley's modifications of the claims of the earlier editor to be useful in establishing the nature of the legal fabric in Pearl. Stanley asserts that the legal element in O/N is 'incidental rather than central' (Introduction, p. 28) to the poem. He questions Atkins's findings of an accumulation of technical legal terms; were this the case

'... we should have expected far more technical details, and not merely terms that would have been familiar to the layman.'

(p. 28)

The only phrase in O/N which lends weight to Atkins's suggestion of contemporary legal diction in the poem is bare worde (547), a direct gloss on A.-N. nude parole cf. Lat. simplex dictum. Otherwise, as

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1. Cf. O/N, Introduction, p. liii.

2. E. G. Stanley, ed., The Owl and the Nightingale (London, 1960 ).

Stanley proves by illustration, the borrowing is

'from O.E. law rather than from contemporary  
French legal terminology.'

(p. 28)

Moreover, although the formal procedure followed by the two birds is indeed reminiscent of a 13th century law-suit, the parallel is more specifically with Canon Law practice---as Stanley observes, for instance:

'The offer made by the Nightingale ... to take the case to Rome is in exact conformity to canon law procedure; the impetration of a papal writ was looked upon as a regular first step in English canon law litigation, the Pope being the last arbiter in ecclesiastical disputes.'

(p. 29)

Likewise in the debate in Pearl, we shall see that the vocabulary is mainly of Anglo-Saxon lineage (although a stock of terms of French origin--pref, daunger, resoun--testifies to the introduction of Anglo-Norman terminology in the English law courts in the late 13th century); and that the ultimate appeal is to a spiritual rather than a secular authority.

(a) Legal Terms in Pearl--253-360; 414-420; Miscellaneous

The point at which we begin to find evidence of legal terminology in Pearl is at the dramatic moment when the Dreamer first addresses the Maiden (241 f). We have heard hitherto of his

deep-felt grief at losing his beloved one: of how, in his distress, he falls into a deep sleep in the balmy atmosphere of the garden; and of how he passes in his dream into another garden, the loveliest ever seen, and the marvels of which

Fordidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez ....  
(124)

The emotional climax comes at 157 f. when the Dreamer sees in this unworldly setting

A mayden of menske, ful debonere; ...  
(162)

She seems familiar to him. He feels a surge of conflicting emotions-- joy, fear, astonishment, longing. At 184 we see him hende as hawk in halle (motionless as hawk in hall), longing to call out, yet fearing what may happen. Finally, he overcomes this confusion of emotions and addresses her. The tone of the Dreamer's first words to the Maiden precipitates the debate between the two. He bemoans his loss, emphasising his own unhappy state in contrast to her lyf of lykynge lyzte (247). His tone is one of grief, complaint, almost of accusation. In a sense, he is laying a charge at her feet. She, and the Dreamer's own unhappy destiny (wyrde 249), are responsible for the sense of loss and desolation which have overwhelmed him. That the Maiden recognises this as a sort of charge is implied in the line:

Sir, 3e haf your tale mysetente, ...  
(257)

('Sir, you have wrongly stated your case')

Atkins notes the legal use of tale as: "'speech'; hence 'indictment', 'charge'" (of a prosecuting counsel, for example).<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the word is an English gloss of the Anglo-Norman legal usage parole in such a context. In view of the tone of the speech the Dreamer has just made, this interpretation is more satisfactory than Gordon's "account, statement, words."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a suggestion of legal diction has been introduced by the poet a few lines above. At 250 the word daunger, on the one hand, echoes the Dreamer's words in the opening lines of the poem:

I dewyne, fordolked of luf-daungere ...

('I pine, wounded by the power of love')

--the basic idea being love's dominion, authority, or power (to hurt or harm). However, daunger also has a legal sense which would fit the context here. Mrs. Kean offers two possible legal usages:

(1) 'Under jurisdiction', and (2) 'Having incurred a liability'.<sup>3</sup> The

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1. O/N, Glossary, p. 225. This interpretation is purely contextual: Stanley in his edition does not interpret tale in this way; and O.E.D. does not record the noun tale as having this legal meaning. A possible corroboration of Atkins's suggestion, however, may exist in O.E.D. tale vb. 2: 'To lay to the account of someone, to charge or impute (a thing) to (only O.E.)'.

2. Gordon, Glossary, p. 156.

3. P. M. Kean, The Pearl: An Interpretation (London, 1967), p. 186.

second possibility clearly suits the passage and the discussion in that it conveys the idea of "forfeiting" (e.g., goods) as a result of legal processes. The Dreamer feels that he has lost or forfeited to fate something which is rightfully his.<sup>1</sup>

The same legal sense is recorded in O.E.D. danger sb. lb: 'Liability--to loss, punishment, etc.', and also in M.E.D. daunger n. 6: 'Obligation, liability, debt', in such stock phrases as daunger and dette, ben in daunger. The Dreamer is therefore seen in the role of a plaintiff. This is attested by the tone of his opening complaint and by the two key words daunger and tale (and others discussed below). Conversely, the Maiden's task--in terms of a legal interpretation--is to answer his tale, his charge; she is, as it were, counsel for the defence. This seen in her stern rebuke at 257 (above, p. 86). Her attack is resumed at 267-8.

'Me þynk þe put in a mad porpose,  
And busyez þe aboute a raysoun bref; ...'

Both raysoun and porpose have the sense of 'cause, purpose'. Gordon, however, indicates (in his glossary under raysoun) the meaning 'ground, cause' (for bringing a legal action against someone) as that best suited to the context of the Maiden's counter-charge. The folly of

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thus

1. Cf. later, where the Maiden reprimands him: "And þou hatz called by wyrdē a þef, ..." (273).

the Dreamer's complaint on these grounds emerges in the lines which follow:

'For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose  
þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef.  
Now þurz kynde of þe kyste þat hyt con close ...'  
(269-271)

The precious pearl whose loss he laments is now set in the bliss of Paradise. Like all earthly things, it flourished briefly on earth and then died (269); but now

'To a perle of prys hit is put in pref ....'  
(272)

Gordon translates this line as 'it has proved in fact to be a pearl of price'. He renders pref as 'test by experience'. The word (from OFr preuve, preve) is, in fact, originally a legal term. O.E.D. under proof sb. 4 quotes the legal phrase 'to bring, put, set (something) in, on, to, proof', where proof has the meaning of 'Evidence such as determines the judgement of a tribunal'. proof sb. 1b. The translation of Pearl 272 should read, therefore,

"has proved conclusively to be a pearl of (great) price".

Similarly, in Purity 1748 we find:

As to þe prynce pryvyest preved þe þrydde, ...

(Which was shown to be the third most precious to the prince')

with the verb preue in the sense of 'proved to be' (as a result of trial or test). Patience 288 reads:

And preue he lyztly a lorde in londe and in water.

The same force of 'conclusive proof' is found in GGK 1630:

And praysed hit as gret prys þat he proued hade,...

The opening exchange between the Pearl-maiden and the Dreamer establishes, therefore, the basis of the theological debate which is to follow. The Dreamer has made his accusation, and the Maiden has countered it. The opening procedure and terms used therein contribute to the legal atmosphere; and the formal solemnity of the legal tone adopted by the Maiden, compared with the Dreamer's emotional outburst, defines her changed rôle in his life. The human relationship they once enjoyed, that of father and daughter, is a thing of the past: she is no longer an earthly being, and hence no longer his daughter. The object of her appearance to him is not, cannot be, to be reunited with him on a mortal basis. Rather, like Beatrice in the Divine Comedy, she is to be his Heavenly guide on the road to self-awareness.

If the first exchange between the Maiden and the Dreamer serves to illustrate the futility and sinfulness of his grief, the second speech of the Dreamer (279 f.) introduces the theme of Heavenly reward and how it may be attained. The Dreamer again puts himself at fault

by a presumptuous request to be reunited at once with his beloved; and again the Maiden is quick to point out to him the fruitlessness of, and false reasoning behind, his demand.

'Pre wordez hatz pou spoken at ene:  
Vnavysed, for sope, wern alle pre ....'

she reproaches him at 291-2. Here, wordez must be translated as 'claims, assertions of right' (to be allowed to cross the river, to live with the Maiden in Heavenly bliss). In O/N 547 the term is used in the legal sense as bare worde, which, Atkins indicates, is a gloss on the French legal phrase nude parole and earlier Latin simplex dictum.<sup>1</sup> In each case this is a technical phrase (to be translated as 'mere assertion') which indicates that the charge is made by a plaintiff without the support of witnesses.

The Dreamer's wordez, then, in his rôle as "plaintiff" within the context of the debate, are unavysed. The Maiden proceeds to enumerate the flaws in his assertions, and to elaborate on them one by one, thereby destroying his whole argument. Here again, one is reminded of a feature of the debate between the two birds in O/N. Atkins compares them at one point to a couple of "wary and seasoned swordsmen",<sup>2</sup> ready to pounce on any flaw in each other's arguments.

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1. Cf. above, p. 85.

2. O/N, Introduction, p. liv.

So too here, the Dreamer has blundered, and the Maiden is quick to seize on his mistakes and use them to her advantage.

At 311-2 the Maiden warns the Dreamer that it is folly for a man

To leue no tale be true to tryze  
Bot þat hys one skyl may dem.

In the four stanzas which follow, the word dem(e) is used nine times,<sup>1</sup> and by looking at each individual use in its context we can be sure that the poet was aware of, and utilised, the many varying shades of meaning of the word in Middle English. From O.E. deman we can trace two basic meanings: 'to judge' and 'to pronounce judgment'. Other, derived, meanings can be added to these: (1) 'As a result of judgment: to examine, prove, doom, condemn'. (2) In a more general sense--'think, consider, estimate, reckon'.

In Middle English, we can discern, broadly speaking, three separate streams of development. From (2) above, we have such general terms as "to suppose, hold or express an opinion, discern, discriminate, judge, say, tell, consider, regard as (good or bad)," etc. It is from this category that the modern weakened sense of deem 'to consider (to be)' is derived. The second M.E. category of

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1. Not only is dem(e) used repeatedly, it is also given a key rôle by the poet in the verse structure of these lines. Cf. below, p. 98.

meanings are gathered together under the broad sense of judgment, judicial power: 'to rule under the law of the land, decide, decree, give orders or directions, ordain (when used of God), allot, assign'. The third category consists of words of specifically legal meaning and usage: 'to pass judgment on, render a verdict, sit in judgment, hold court, judge, criticise, condemn, impose sentence or penalty, pronounce judgment, act as judge or arbiter'.

These would appear to be the three broad divisions to be made in the development of the verb dem(e) in M.E., from the evidence and illustrations offered by M.E.D. deme (vb.). Instances from all three groups are to be found in the passage in Pearl 312-360; but of particular interest to us, in relation to this present study, is that on six occasions in this section of the poem the meaning which fits the context is a specifically legal one. This will be made obvious by an examination of each instance in turn:

a. At 312, dem can be profitably considered along with tryze in the preceding line. We would follow Mrs. Kean here in taking the meaning of tryze as 'to test, put to the test, try (a case)'<sup>1</sup>—i.e. a legal meaning. The translation of 311-2 reads: 'to believe no statement to be true when put to the test, unless his reason alone should judge it to be so'.

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1. Op. cit., p. 187.

b. At 313 deme has a more general sense of 'consider, think, reflect', but ....

c. At 323-4 we again have legal overtones in:

'Pur3 drwry deth bo3 vch man dreue,  
Er ouer þys dam hym Dry3tyn deme.'

('Every man must pass through cruel death before God (as judge) will allow him (as a result of judgment) across this stream')

The other possible meaning here is also a legal one:

'Every man must pass through cruel death before God adjudges him worthy to pass across this stream'.

d. In the Dreamer's emotional appeal to the Maiden at 325-6:

'Deme3 þou me', quod I, 'my swete ,  
To dol agayn, þenne I dowyne ....'

('If thou shouldst condemn me once more to grief ...')

e., f. The occurrences of deme at 336 and 337 are not specifically legal in nature:

336--

'Bot durande doel what may man deme?'

carries the sense of 'consider, hold (to be)', thus 'what can that be considered but lasting grief?'

337--

'Thow deme3 no3t bot doel-dystresse, ...'

is to be rendered as 'You speak of nought but pain and sorrow'.

g., h., i. The most crucial part of this section lies in the last two stanzas (337-360). In these climactic lines deme occurs on three occasions (after 337 discussed above), and on each occasion in a legal sense. In each case, too, we have a key word in the two lessons which the Maiden urges upon the doubting Dreamer. Firstly, she warns him of the futility of sinful wrath and complaint, of blaming God: this is his fault. Secondly, man must rely upon God's mercy, submit himself to His judgment, since all power of judgment lies in Him: this is to be his lesson. Thus, at 348:

' Pou moste abyde þat he schal deme.'

('You must abide by what He ordains')

and at 349-350:

' Deme Dryztyn, euer hym adyte,  
Of þe way a fote ne wyl he wryþe ....'

('Judge the Lord (adversely), always arraign Him,  
and He will not turn aside one step (to help you)')

The legal force of deme (349) is reinforced by the use of the word adyte, which M.E.D. aditen vb. (b) lists as occurring in legal contexts in the sense 'to accuse, indict; also, to condemn'.

Finally, there comes the crux of the Maiden's whole case at 360:

'Al lys in hym to dyzt and deme.'

('All (power) lies in him to ordain and decree')

The phrase dyzt and deme is in fact a stock legal phrase, to be compared with M.E. dight dom 'to give, render, judgment'. Such a coupling of the two legal words occurs elsewhere in the work of our poet, in GGK 295, where the Green Knight asks of Arthur to

'... dizt me þe dom ...'<sup>1</sup>

('adjudge me the right')

The fact that dem(e) is used repeatedly and with subtly varying shades of meaning, in this comparatively short passage of Pearl, gives it prominence in the theological debate. It is interesting to note not only the poet's semantic use of the word, but also the key position he gives it in the verse-structure. From

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1. Dyzt as a verb with much the same range of possible meanings as those discussed above for dem(e) appears in various legal formulae in Furty:

243 For a defence þat watz dyzt of Dryztyn selven ....  
( 'For a defence ordained by God Himself' );

1266 Dizten...to deþe, ...  
( 'condemned to death' )

In Patience we find:

488 'Why ne dyzttez þou me to dize? I dure to longe ....  
( 'Why dost thou not condemn me to die?' );

49 '3if me be dyzt a destyne due to haue, ....  
( 'If a proper destiny be ordained for me' ); and

203 'Lo, by dom is þe dyzt, for þy dedez ille; ....  
( 'Thy doom is fixed, as a result of thy evil deeds' ).

the above examples we observe that dem(e) always appears either in the first or last line of a stanza. In this position it also serves to carry the poem's argument further, step by step, since its appearances in the first/last line (and often as the first/last word of that line) in successive stanzas carry with them an echoic effect. Dem(e) as a link-word in this passage affords us a clear example of the way in which the poet combines structural and semantic progression in the interests of thematic development.

An examination of the other works commonly attributed to our poet will reveal a similar range of meanings for dem(e) and related terms. In Patience, both at 386:

'Do dryue out a decre, demed of my seluen, ...'  
( 'Proclaim a decree, which I myself have issued' )

and at 432:

'For any dede pat I haf don oper demed þe zet? ...'  
( 'Because of any deed that I have yet done, or ordered you (to carry out)?' )

the speaker is God and the meaning is 'to ordain, decree'. The same translation is required in Purity 110:

And diden þe dede þat (is) demed, as he devised hade, ...  
( 'And they did the deed that was decreed, as he had ordered' )

and 1745:

Pen watz demed a decre bi þe duk selven.

('Then a decree was issued by the duke himself')

1118 should be rendered as:

Pa3 hym not derrest be demed to dele for penies.

('Though he did not think it most worthy to be  
exchanged for pennies')

At 1020:

Forþy þe derk Dede See hit is demed evermore, ...

demed simply means 'named, called'. In G&K 240, when the Green Knight appears at Arthur's court:

Forþi for fantoum and fayry3e þe folk þere hit demed, ...

he is 'adjudged' or 'considered' to be some sort of supernatural creature.

'Dowelle, and elle3 do quat 3e demen.'  
(1082)

shows deme in the sense of 'consider, determine' (to be right or proper). Finally, the simple meaning 'tell, say' (a weakening from 'utter, pronounce judgment') is to be found at 2183-4:

... he coupe hit nozt deme with spelle.

As a noun, dom usually means 'judgment, doom, fate' when used by our poet--so in GGK 295, 1216, 1968; Purity 214, 219, 246, 597, 717, 1756; and Patience 203. Noteworthy exceptions are the dome--the 'power' or 'influence'--of Daniel in Purity 1325, and in the same poem at 1046 where the meaning 'mind' is appropriate.

As any dom myzt device ...

('As any mind might suppose')

We have dealt at some length with M.E. dom(e) and its related noun dom in order to convey the power and range of the word in its usage by the poet as a pivotal term in the lines in question (312-60). The legal colouring of this passage is reinforced by several other expressions which are worthy of our attention. At 316-7 the Maiden advises the Dreamer:

Me þynk þe burde fyrst aske leue,  
And zet of graunt þou myzteþ fayle ....

The use of the word graunt is significant here in its expression of the permission which the Dreamer seeks from God. Graunt in M.E. is primarily a legal term, indicating the official or authoritative approval of a court. Hence the legal phrase listed by M.E.D., under graunt n. 1(a): 'at his graunt'= in his power. The legal sense is

also conveyed in M.E.D. where graunten vb. 3(c) = 'to give authoritative sanction to, approve (laws)'; and M.E.D. also notes under graunten vb. 3(a) that the word is often used of the supreme sanction of God (as the noun is used here)--'to allot, decree, ordain, appoint'.

At 319 the Dreamer is advised further:

Er moste þou ceuer to ober counsayle....

Counsayle is to be taken as 'plan, course of action (taken in a legal case)'; hence, modern counsel. In 319, which can be best translated as 'you must attain another viewpoint (course of action)', the phrase ceuer to ober counsayle is a stock legal formula.

The poet first turns, therefore, to legal vocabulary and procedure in that opening section of the dialogue which serves to illustrate to the Dreamer the futility of laying charge against God for human suffering, and of opposing His will. Rather, man should set aside vain questioning and approach God with the innocence of a child. He should renounce the sin of despair and place his hope in Heavenly reward. Having accepted the wisdom of the Maiden's guidance on this point, the Dreamer then seeks to

ascertain the exact nature of this Heavenly reward. Two main points are brought into the argument, which together constitute the main cause of contention between them: the question of the rank which the Maiden has attained in Heaven and whether she is worthy of such high position; and the more general question of Heavenly reward--to whom it is extended and in what degree.

The chief obstacle facing the Dreamer is his deep personal attachment for the Maiden. Her rank or status in Heaven has brought an estrangement which is theologically necessary but emotionally distressing. The Dreamer has repeatedly referred to the Maiden as being his own dear one--she is My priuy perle (24), My precious perle (48).

I knew hyr wel, I hade sen hyr ere ....

he says at 164; and at 233 occurs the line often quoted as evidence of their close personal relationship:

Ho watz me nerre þen aunte or nece; ...

Finally, when he addresses her, she is my blysfol beste (279), my swete (325). Many other instances illustrate this same point. These, and the general tone of his plea to her, prove conclusively that there existed a close personal relationship between them before her death.

What the Maiden discloses to the Dreamer in the passage we are about to discuss does not refute the theory that they were once very close; but it emphasises that in the changed circumstances since her death she belongs to God and to God alone. It is in the notion of the Maiden as the property of God--the theme of the vital passage from 414-420--that we find the second rich vein of legal vocabulary.

Specifically, the crucial lines are 417-420. The Maiden describes herself as being one of the Brides of the Lamb, as portrayed in the Apocalypse. The Lamb took her at a tender age to hys maryage (414) and made her a queen in Heaven. She continues thus:

'And sesed in alle hys herytage  
Hys lef is. I am holy hysse: ...'  
(417-8)

The important items here are sesed in and herytage. The phrase sesed in (lit. "seized in") is a purely legal expression. In feudal law it could refer either to someone in possession of a land-holding or of a certain office or dignity, or to the possessor of a dowry. O.E.D. lists the phrase under seize vb. 1(b): 'to be seised of or in', an archaic expression meaning 'to be the legal possessor of'. Thus, we should render the phrase to be seised in fee as 'to be the possessor of the "fee-simple"'. The verb itself, seize, is of legal origin, meaning, according to O.E.D. seize vb. 5: 'to take possession of (goods) in pursuance of a judicial order'. The modern development of

the word now suggests a violent or illegal acquisition, and a certain ambiguity in the meaning of the term was apparent already in M.E. In Piers the Plowman<sup>1</sup> C7,271

To sese to me with here sykel that ich sew neuere.

we see violent action implied. At A2,69, however, we have

...I sese hem togedere:...

with the sense of 'grant, endow'; and at C21,311:

And sutthe we han beo sesed seuene thowsend wynter, ...

with the sense of 'put in possession, established'. This latter, original sense of the word is clearly that intended at 417 of Pearl:

'his beloved is made possessor of all his inheritance'.

The use of herytage in Pearl 417 as the object of sese in reinforces the notion of legal ownership. O.E.D. gives as the general meaning of heritage: 'Anything given or received to be a proper and legally held possession'.<sup>2</sup> The same notion of a rightful or legal inheritance is contained in M.E.D. under heritage 1(a): '... a legal inheritance',

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1. W. W. Skeat, ed., Piers the Plowman (Oxford, 1886 ).

2. O.E.D. heritage sb. 3.

as in the phrase beren heritage, 'to receive an inheritance; inherit'. Furthermore, and with special reference to Pearl 417, M.E.D. notes that the idea of heritable property (to which the heir has a legal right) came to refer specifically to the life to come as the just inheritance of the innocent. The idea of God or Christ as the heritage of the innocent is seen in M.P. Psalter 15.5 (c.1350): M.E.D. heritage 1(a)b "Our Lord is part of myn heritage and of mye ioie" / . Again, M.E.D. defines heritage 2(a) as 'a spiritual inheritance or bequest; an allotted place in heaven or hell'. Rolle, Psalter (c.1340) 134.12 reads: 'The heritage of heuen, the whilk deuyls forsoke thoro pryde, he gaf til gode cristen men:...' ; and Ayenbite 102.16: 'We ssolle habbe þe eritage of oure uader, þet is, þe blysse of paradys.'<sup>1</sup>

There is one further shade of meaning which is relevant here. M.E.D., heritage 2(b) reads: '(Fig.) God's inheritance or property; the Hebrews, Israel; Christians; righteous men'---i.e., all of these are seen in different contexts as the rightful property of God. This accords with what the Maiden is saying at 414-20. She is not only the rightful owner of the divine herytage, but is also part of it: she is at once the possessor and the epitome of divine grace.

In this brief passage we have learned much about the Pearl's

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1. Cf. also O.E.D. heritage sb. 1(c): 'The portion allotted to or reserved for anyone; e.g., that of the righteous or the wicked in the world to come'.

status. She is one of the chosen few--the Heavenly Innocents for whom salvation and eternal joy is a rightful inheritance. As a Heavenly being she is not only the owner of Christ's herytage but also a part of it; she belongs to Him and to Him alone. As a Heavenly being, moreover, her only interest in the Dreamer can be for his spiritual well-being. The idea of legal right, the use of words such as herytage, sesed in, with the strength of the law behind them, are used as the natural vehicle of Heavenly symbolism.

Instances of the poet's use of legal diction occur sporadically throughout the rest of the spiritual debate between the Maiden and the Dreamer. In the description of the Heavenly paradise and of those who may enjoy it the Maiden emphasises repeatedly the idea of man's solemn and binding obligation to God, his duty to adhere faithfully to God's laws if the Heavenly reward is to be his. This duty is frequently referred to in terms of a legal bargain or agreement. At 562, for example, in the account of the parable of the vineyard, we meet the word couenaunt, referring to the terms of employment of the workers in the vineyard. When they complain, the vineyard owner reminds them

'Watz not a pené by couenaunt pore?'

M.E.D. covenaut 1(b) has the basic legal sense of: 'A formal contract'. M.E.D. also records, however, the use of the word in M.E. in the sense of: 'A covenant between God and man, or Christ and man'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, we have phrases such as covenaut of bapteme, meaning 'man's solemn pledge by the act of baptism'. In Piers the Plowman the word is used in this sense in solemn admonition:

In couenaunt that thou kepe holy kirke and my-selue  
Fro wastours and wyckede men that this worlde struen.  
(C9,26-7)

Gordon is, therefore, correct in translating couenaunt as "agreement".<sup>2</sup> But the underlying idea of a solemn legal contract adds much greater weight to this notion of an agreement between man and God.

The same idea is present in the word tozt, which occurs at 522 in the account of the parable of the vineyard. When the owner and the labourers come to terms, we find the expression made hit tozt. The word is derived from O.E. tēon "to draw", giving the sense "drawn tight", that is, the concluding of a bargain.

The covenant of baptism is lost for man through the sins of life. Thus, at 617-20 the Maiden poses the rhetorical question:

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1. M.E.D. covenaut 1(c) theol.
  2. Gordon, Glossary, p. 125.

'Where did you ever hear of any man who ever lived who, no matter how holy in his prayers, did not, in some way and at some time, forfeit the reward of bright Heaven?'

The use of M.E. forfete here is significant. M.E.D. lists under forfeten vb. 1(a): 'To transgress, offend, misbehave; to sin ... ;' and more specifically, 1(b), 'to break (a law)'. The phrase forfete ageines, to may mean, according to context, 'to break (a law or rule), to offend against (established authority), to wrong or injure (a person)'. Derived from this is forfeten 2(a): 'to lose or be deprived of (something) as a punishment, to forfeit;'  
Forfete is used at 619 in the sense of man transgressing against God's law, and hence forfeiting Heavenly reward. A related legal sense of the word is also listed under M.E.D. 3: 'To deprive (someone of something), to exact (a penalty), collect (a fine), confiscate (goods or property); to fine'. And the noun forfeting can mean either (a) 'Offense, transgression' or from this (b) 'penalty for violation of law, a fine'.

(b) The Concept of Justice in Pearl as Reflected in the Legal Vocabulary

Thus far we have quoted examples of the poet's use of legal terminology and procedure, and sought to show how each word or phrase is used in its context. It is possible, however, to relate the poet's policy of using legal terms to the one broad concept which runs through

the whole debate--the concept of justice. We have already mentioned that the Dreamer can be seen in one way as a kind of plaintiff figure in the debate in that his complaint amounts almost to an accusation which the Maiden takes upon herself to answer. The Dreamer is, in fact, obsessed by justice, or, more correctly, with his own standards of justice. He feels that he has been unjustly treated and, indeed, that the Maiden has been unjustly rewarded. This is the substance of his plaint; and it amounts to accusing God of an injustice, as the Maiden solemnly reminds him at 304:

'Pat leuez oure Lorde wolde make a lyze, ...'

The lesson he learns from the Maiden, therefore, is necessarily concerned with correcting his error in applying the criteria of human justice to the workings of divine authority. The logic of human justice demands that Heavenly reward is first extended to the righteous on earth; but in terms of divine justice the only ones for whom salvation is a right are the Innocents, those who have died before falling into the ways of sin (i.e., before adulthood).<sup>1</sup> The man who is conscious of his sins and strives to expiate them may also find God's grace, but he must not regard it as a right. This is plainly stated by the Maiden at 669-72:

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1. Jenks, op. cit., p. 77.

'Pe gylytyf may contryssyoun hente  
And be purz mercy to grace pryzt;  
Bot he to gyle þat neuer glente  
And inoscente is saf and ryzte.'

The Dreamer is therefore exhorted to approach God as a child; that is, to accept the supreme grace of God as the basis of salvation, with the simple faith of a child.

'Alegge þe ryzt, þou may be innome, ...'

she urges him at 703. The meaning of this line is in doubt, but the result of either interpretation is the same: 'If you allege your right (to salvation) you will be trapped', or 'Set aside your (claim to) right, and you will be received'. What the Maiden achieves in the end is to persuade the Dreamer to abandon his own standards of justice and to accept those of God; to forsake the arrogance of demanding salvation as a kind of reward for good conduct, and to realise instead that God's justice is based on mercy, and on His grace, which is all-sufficient<sup>1</sup>---

'For the grace of God is gret innoghe.'  
(636)

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1. The contrast between human and divine terms of justice is also manifested at a later stage of the poem and in a different context. At 799 Christ is referred to as Þat glorious gylytlez who was charged and judged according to human law Wythouten any sake of felonye (800) ('without any criminal charge against him'). Yet, he made no playnt (815) (no "accusation" or "charge"). The passage is a poignant comment on Christ's fate at the hands of human "justice".

Thus, when the Dreamer appeals to my Lorde and al his lawez at 285, his invocation is out of order since it is not until the end of the debate that he shows an understanding of the workings of divine justice.

The lines which constitute the climax of the Maiden's exhortation to the Dreamer (696-707) contain the final instances in the poem of legal terminology and procedure. Firstly, the Dreamer must submit himself to God's dome (699). Our discussion of the verb dem(e) above has indicated the many possible meanings of the word and of its related noun dom(e), but here the sense is clearly "judgment, trial". M.E.D. dom 1(a) notes the basic legal sense of: 'the administering of justice' or 'the act of judging'. Under M.E.D. dom 1(b) we find that this was frequently adapted in M.E. to the religious context of: 'The Last Judgment; ... the judgment of the soul at death;..'

The poet immediately reinforces the notion of the act of final judgment by referring to the Heavenly corte (701), or court where all causez (702), "cases for judgment", are to be tryed (702). The general sense of trye has been seen at 311:

'To leue no tale be true to tryze ...'

('to believe nothing to be true when put to the test')

The same word occurs in tryed tolouse in GGK 77, where tryed obviously

means "of fine, proven quality".<sup>1</sup> Interesting too is Purity 1317:

He trussed hem in hys tresorye in a tryed place ...

where the meaning is "chosen"---chosen, that is, presumably as a result of testing and proving safe.

A more specifically legal meaning is appropriate where tryed appears in Pearl (702, 707).

'Forþy to corte quen þou schal com  
Per alleoure causez schal be tryed, ...'  
(701-702)

is to be translated as 'Thus when you come before the court where all our cases are to be heard'. This is echoed in when þou arte tryed (707), 'when you are brought to trial'. On both occasions the reference to a trial clearly evokes the Christian Day of Judgment.

At 704 the Maiden warns the Dreamer about his spech before this court of final judgment, when his turn comes to be "tried". The word spech here does not simply mean "speech, tale" but, as Gordon suggests, a "plea".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Cf. also the tryed tasselez on the Green Knight's tunic at 219.

2. Gordon, note to lines 703/4, p. 71. Cf. also O/N where Atkins records in his note to line 398 the legal sense of speche as "(law)suit, plea": the owl regrets that she has taken her speche so far.

The legal flavouring which we encountered at the beginning of the debate is also detectable at its conclusion. If we compare the two vital passages at 253-360 and 701-708, which mark the starting point and the climax of the debate,<sup>1</sup> we see the full force of the Maiden's achievement. From the presumptuousness and error of his original role as accuser, the Dreamer is now equipped to find happiness by submitting himself to the scheme of divine judgment elucidated by the Maiden.

### Conclusions

A brief recapitulation of the circumstances in which legal terminology is used by our poet will shed light on his intentions in resorting to this specialised, and in certain instances, highly technical, vocabulary.

In the first passage examined (253-360), the Dreamer had to learn the folly of charging God with his misfortunes. The legal

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1. What follows in the remainder of the dialogue is largely descriptive rather than argumentative. Having proved the validity of her case, the Maiden now serves to satisfy the Dreamer's curiosity concerning the Heavenly kingdom, rather than to answer his charges. The subdued tone of the Dreamer in the latter part of the dialogue is evident in 901-36 and 961-4. The last hint of accusation comes at 769-80; the Dreamer confuses the two key words repeatedly used by the Maiden to describe her state--maskellez ('without stain, spotless') and makelez ('peerless, without equal'). The Maiden's correction of his error is easily achieved (781-7).

words used served to underline the unequivocal terms of the Maiden's reprimand<sup>1</sup>; and the solemn composure of the Maiden's argument stood out in contrast to, and eventually overcame, the Dreamer's irrational weakness.

In that phase of the debate (414-20) where the argument turned to the question of Heavenly reward in general, and the Maiden's enjoyment of it in particular, the poet once again found, in a number of key words from legal sources, a clear and solemn means of expressing religious conviction. At 417, for example, the whole essence of the Maiden's rank in Heaven and her relation to Christ was made obvious by phrases such as sesed in and herytage. The weight of the law and its vocabulary is chosen by the poet as the most appropriate vehicle for expressing and affirming theological truth.

The same recognition of the power behind legal diction was seen in the use of couenaunt (and related words discussed above) to convey the idea of man's solemn and binding duty to live by God's laws if he is to attain salvation. We conclude, therefore, that the

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1. Cf. Appendix 1. The power of legal vocabulary to give clarity, unambiguity, and utter seriousness to any bargain or pledge, any reprimand or sanction, recounted in its terms, is also apparent in key passages of GGK.

poet saw in the concept of a legally binding bargain, the strongest, perhaps the one effective, means of expressing the seriousness of man's commitment to God in life.

The thread which runs through each of the passages is, therefore, of the same type as that found in similarly crucial sections of GGK.<sup>1</sup> In both poems, at a moral or spiritual crux of the argument, the poet has recourse to the formal terms of legal discourse. In both poems, moreover, the hero has to face the demands of duty or obligation. In Gawain's case, the duty is to Arthur; to the Green Knight; to Bercilak, his host; ultimately, to his own high standards. In the case of the Dreamer, the obligation is the supreme one---to God and His laws.

The strain of legal vocabulary which runs through both poems underlines the solemn and binding force of an agreement entered upon, a duty to be faced. In Pearl, the effectiveness of the Maiden's assumed rôle of Heavenly advocate is seen in the transformation in the Dreamer by the end. Although he is not yet saved, the means of salvation are within his grasp.<sup>2</sup> He has come to see the Maiden as a symbol of the true happiness, and through this he realises that his

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1. See Appendix 1.

2. Thus 961-4, where his acceptance of the Maiden's lesson is implied; and, in a more positive indication of spiritual insight, 1182-1200.

"case" must be argued, and justice sought, at the court of God and according to His laws.

CHAPTER FOUR

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ALLITERATIVE VOCABULARY

The works of the Gawain-poet belong to, and in their high quality form the apex of, the 'alliterative revival' in M.E. The alliterating, stressed, unrhymed form of Anglo-Saxon poetry had been submerged by the upheavals of the Norman Conquest. In the re-establishment of a native verse form in the early M.E. period, however, elements of the old verse pattern clearly reappear; and these have been held up as evidence of a continuity in English poetry extending back to Anglo-Saxon times.

C. L. Wrenn has noted that a certain degree of continuity is inevitable from one generation of poets to another, since "the poet, in using language, consciously or unconsciously is influenced by the shades of meaning, the verbal nuances, the associations and connotations and suggestive qualities of all the poetry he has ever read or heard".<sup>1</sup> To illustrate this point, Wrenn quotes Shelley:

A person familiar with Nature and with the most celebrated productions of the human mind, can scarcely err in following the instinct, with respect to selection of language, produced by that familiarity.<sup>2</sup>

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1. C. L. Wrenn, "On the Continuity of English Poetry," in Word and Symbol : Studies in English Language (London, 1967), p. 82.
  2. In Preface to Revolt of Islam, quoted by Wrenn, p. 82.

Evidence of such continuity throughout the course of English literature can be readily evinced for aspects of style, theme, use of language, from one age of poets to the other. English poetry and prose are, moreover, now regarded as continuous developments from earliest times. The continuity of English prose through the darkest years of the Conquest has been admirably illustrated by R. K. Chambers in his introductory essay to Harpsfield's Life of More.<sup>1</sup> More recently, an acknowledgement of the appreciation and use of Old English poetry and poetic techniques by such "moderns" as Hopkins, Pound and Eliot has served to explode the myth that "English" poetry begins with Chaucer.

To relate this general principle of continuity to the question of metrical developments in Middle English, we find clear evidence of an eclectic and careful process of selection on the part of many poets in their choice of a versification technique. For example, Wrenn, in the essay already quoted, evaluates Chaucer's great influence in medieval metrical developments:

(He) acclimatised Continental metres and a common medieval Latin and French poetic diction to England.<sup>2</sup>

The key word here is, of course, 'acclimatised'. Chaucer departs,

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1. Early English Text Society, vol. 186, 1932.

2. Op. cit., p. 84.

as Wrenn shows, far less radically from the O.E. alliterative pattern than many critics have previously allowed; he is aware of the unique effects of sound which the old native form can achieve, and when it suits his purpose he readily reverts to a freer form of the received alliterative rhythm. By way of example, Wrenn quotes from the Knight's Tale 2609 f:

The helmes they tohewen and toshrede;  
Out brest the blood with stierne stremes rede;  
With myghty maces the bones they tobreste.  
He thurgh the thikkeste of the throng gan threste;  
Ther stomblen steedes stronge, and down gooth al; ...

In his 'assimilation process', however, Chaucer compounds the inheritance from O.E. with continental influences he has encountered.

In the poetry of Chaucer,

... in metre English has passed from one (form) primarily dependent upon stress and initial rhyming or alliteration, to one partly syllabic which yet retains much of the older stress-patterns; but with the replacement of alliteration by end rhyme.<sup>1</sup>

The first few lines of the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, for example, show not the rigid syllable-counting of the French, but a variation of the number of strong stresses in the line, a relative freedom in syllabic stress-patterns not too far removed from O.E. As Wrenn says:

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1. Wrenn, op. cit., p. 86.

Despite some still-surviving academic tendencies inherited from the Latinate schoolmasters of the Renaissance to scan English quantitatively into iambs, dactyls, etc., the patterns of ordinary English verse have remained primarily a matter of stress which is variable in relation to the number of syllables in the line, but by no means purely dependent on the counting of syllables.<sup>1</sup>

Chaucer, therefore, varied his metrical technique by drawing freely on both native and imported forms.

A more consistent and widespread adaptation of the native English alliterative pattern is to be found in the poems of the 'alliterative revival' of West- and North-West-Midland dialects of early M.E.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 86.

2. Inevitably, the lapse of the old alliterative technique into the poetic wilderness after the Conquest led to a modification, a general dilution of the strict and regular O.E. principles in the alliterative revival of M.E. The new, more permissive, alliterative style allowed alliteration of unstressed verbal prefixes, and alliteration of h- with a vowel. We see the formation of additional alliterative consonant groups--for example, wh may alliterate with w-; the gu- of Northern dialects with wh-. Sometimes this practice results in overexposure or exaggeration with as many alliterating forms as possible crammed into a line for decorative effect. Our own poet is occasionally guilty of this; vide Purity:

'Wheþer þay wern worþy oþer wers wel wern þay stowed, ...' (113)  
'Þenne sayde oure Syre þer he sete: 'Se! so Sare lazes, ...' (661)  
'His hert heldet unhole, he hoped non oþer  
Bot a best þat he be, a bol oþer an oxe.' (1681-2).

Alliterative poetry in M.E. constitutes, therefore, a rebirth of the thematic and metrical traditions of the O.E. past--as one commentator has observed, "a revival, a renewed poetic vitality and inspiration".<sup>1</sup> The regeneration of heroic theme and form together was a natural development. For the renaissance of native heroic verse,

The alliterative metre was already to hand. It had survived through a long and curious development, so that when it emerges into literature once more, it is in a strange disguise, but has become a metrical form better adapted to the needs of the changed language. The spirit which these poets had inherited from the past likewise called for the old alliterative metre. The wit and brilliance of the French made no appeal to the Western writers, and when they do try to imitate the French, as did the author of William of Palerne, they are not very successful. The heroic spirit, the 'high seriousness' which came to them so naturally, found its only suitable embodiment in alliterative verse.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate significance for our study of this rebirth of alliterative poetry some two centuries before Pearl lies in the fact that the alliterative technique was fostered and revived in the West-Midland areas of M.E. Oakden notes that the O.E. literary tradition found its strongest upholders in the West, and that

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1. J. P. Oakden, Alliterative Poetry in Middle English: A Survey of the Traditions (Manchester University Press, 1935), p. 86.
  2. " , pp. 86-87. For further discussion of the survival of the alliterative tradition into e M.E. see Appendix 2.

It is not unlikely that the *Lazamon* tradition lived on in the west, and that other works of a like kind were written which are no longer extant.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of literary tradition and geographical location, therefore, the *Gawain*-poet's favouring of the alliterative form can be satisfactorily explained in terms of his N.-W.-Midland origins.

The tenacity of the O.E. literary tradition in these Western areas was not, moreover, confined to the form of the verse. The survival and eventual revival of alliterative poetry entails a similar preservation of much of the traditional O.E. poetic diction--the poetic compounds so felicitously and imaginatively coined in pre-Conquest verse, and the stock alliterative "tags" or formulaic phrases. Concerning alliterative vocabulary, Oakden writes of

... the growth and development of the diction, the gradual decay of the nominal poetic compounds, and the survival of the Old English poetic diction in *Lazamon* and through him to the poetry of the revival. It will be seen that the older poetic diction like the metre is gradually transformed until it is no longer recognisable. A distinctive alliterative vocabulary is evolved, based largely, though not exclusively, on native foundations, enriched by all the purely poetical words available to Middle English poets in general. The vocabulary is saturated with local and dialectal forms and steeped in the poetic and archaic traditions of the past, until out of this welter of conflicting influences there emerges a diction adequate to the genius of the alliterative poets.<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

Our purpose in the remainder of this chapter will be, therefore, to record some of those words and phrases which are almost exclusively the property of alliterative poetry, and to see how our poet draws on this traditional "word-hoard".

The first comprehensive analysis of the Gawain-poet's use of alliterative vocabulary was carried out by August Brink in his study of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.<sup>1</sup> Brink sought to establish that a close connection existed between the semantic and stylistic value of a word and its use as an alliterative unit. Brink's concept of "rank" in alliteration was related to the poetic or non-poetic status of the word in question. A majority of commonly-used words are not, as a rule, found in alliterating position in M.E. The type of words alliteration selects for use are the semantically "strong" words of a poetic or archaic nature--words in many cases restricted to poetical usage. Thus, from his study of GGK, Brink was able to conclude that whereas man(n) has no regular alliterative status in the poem, words like held, rink, and other more elevated synonyms of the humbler man are almost invariably used as alliterative units.

A simple, but often revealing, test for words of alliterative rank in M.E. is whether they have survived into modern English. For

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1. A. Brink, "Stab und Wort im Gawain: Eine Stilistische Untersuchung," Studien zur Englischen Philologie LIX (Halle, 1920.).

freake?

example, burne, freke, abel, have not been handed down into modern English; already by late M.E. they are archaic and restricted to poetic usage. These words regularly occur in alliterative position in M.E. verse. Words like prince, man, noble, knigt, on the other hand, have survived into modern English and are not regularly alliterative words in M.E. From categorising poetic vocabulary in this way, Brink was able to reconstruct the archaic poetic stock-- words of a 'lofty', 'elevated', 'courtly', 'elegant', 'emphatic' nature,

die ihm [the poet] besonders poetisch erschienen sein müssen und die dem Glanze ritterlichen Lebens angehören.<sup>1</sup>

We should note that Brink's research throws light on Chaucer's limited use of alliterative words and formulae in his poetry. Chaucer must certainly have known from Old English such words as burne, freke, gome, and other alliterative archaic terms listed above, yet he avoids them just as he tends to avoid other archaisms. In contrast to those poets--among them the author of Pearl and GGK--who drew freely on the 'ausgestorbenen Dichtersprache', others, including Chaucer,

... benutzten das lebendige Sprachgut des modernen M.E. und schufen hierdurch eine moderne Dichter- und Schriftsprache.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 6.

2. Op. cit., p. 5.

A comprehensive list of words of alliterative "rank" used in GGK is offered in Brink's admirably exhaustive study. For our purposes, however, the significance of this study lies in the following three conclusions that can be drawn from it:

- (1) There is evidence in the works of the Gawain-poet of a diction which is at once archaic, in a sense artificial, and proper to poetry.
- (2) The alliterative "rank" or status of a word depends primarily not on metrical or syntactical or any other considerations, but on its poetic status.
- (3) In his use of a particular versification technique, namely alliteration, the poet acknowledges the stylistic necessity of choosing vocabulary appropriate to the alliterative framework.

Brink's conclusions concerning alliterative vocabulary in GGK cannot be applied wholesale to Pearl. In Pearl we see a fusion of the old and the new in terms of metrical technique: a combination of the native alliteration and the end-rhyme imported from the continent. The nature of the poet's technical achievement in Pearl is best summarised

in the introduction to GGK:

Instead of the unrhymed alliterative line the poet here uses four-stress rhyming lines in 12-line stanzas, embellished by alliteration and with a complex system of stanza-linking.<sup>1</sup>

This amalgam of different techniques, this eclectic selection of metrical details from various sources, gives the poet added scope in using metre for stylistic effect. We have already discussed the importance of such words as makelez/maskellez and dem(e) in the simultaneous processes of thematic development and stanza-linking.<sup>2</sup> We shall now consider the stylistic effects achieved by the 'alliterative embellishment' of the stanzaic verse structure. In the course of this survey of the native alliterative tradition in English we have repeatedly emphasised the connection between the alliterative rôle and the elevated or poetic "rank" or status of the word used. This connection is recognised by the Pearl-poet in his use of alliterative vocabulary. Oakden has examined and classified those archaic terms which are to be considered "chiefly alliterative", that is to say

... found but rarely or even not at all, outside the alliterative poems.<sup>3</sup>

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1. GGK, p. xxiii.

2. Cf. above makelez/maskellez, p. 113; dem(e), p. 93 f.

3. Op. cit., p. 175.

He lists the alliterative words and phrases found in the "Gawain group" on pages 179-181 and 267-312 of his study. For example, of the archaic terms for 'man, warrior' cited by Brink, the following occur in Pearl, all in alliterative position: burne 397, 617, 712, 1090; gome 231;<sup>1</sup> habel 676; wyz 100, 131, 722 (pl. wyzez 71, 579). Other words listed by Oakden as "chiefly alliterative" and used thus in Pearl, are carpe 381, bro 344, note 155, wlonk 122, blusche(d) 980, 1083. The 'alliterative embellishment' in Pearl, however, is not a purely haphazard exercise. It has come to our notice that the poet regularly resorts to alliteration for striking effect at vital points of the spiritual lesson in the poem. An alliterative group or phrase is used, not for empty or gratuitous decoration, but to add colour and emphasis to an important point in the argument of the poem. As examples of this we would cite such phrases as:

oure balez to bere (807)

blysned be borz al bryzt (1048)

in blysse to brede (415)

my blysse, my bale (373)

blo and blynde (83)

Wyth bodyly bale hym blysse to byve (478)

be brokez brym (1074)

be blod vsbozt fro bale (651)

clene, and clere (227, 737)

oure care is kest (861)

corounde be kyng (480)

care ful colde (50)

dyzt and deme (360)

carez colde (808)

morne and mybe (359)

meued my mynde (156)

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1. Gome also occurs at 697 in non-alliterating position.

This selection from the many examples which can be gleaned from a systematic study of the poem testify to the poet's selectivity in his use of alliteration. All these groups are concerned with the state of mind of the Dreamer--his marvellous experiences in the course of the vision, the revelation to which he is led by the Maiden. Alliterative terminology is also in evidence at other vital points: (a) in the description of the Pearl-maiden--lufsoum of lyth and lere (398), meke and mylde (961); (b) in the account of the beauties of the Heavenly Garden, and the later vision of the New Jerusalem--such lyzt þer lemed (1043), rawez and randez and rych reuerez (105), folde and flode (736), fowlez þer flowen (89); (c) in the description of Christ in His Heavenly setting--ronk and ryf (844), mode so meke (832), and

'For vus he lette hym flyze and folde  
And brede vpon a bostwys bem; ...'  
(813-14)

The use of alliteration in Pearl extends beyond the corpus of words and phrases of poetic status discussed above. We find in our poem, as elsewhere, many stock alliterative 'tags'--a stylistic feature which English has never lost. We still use such popular phrases as 'plain as a pikestaff', 'meek and mild', 'the more the merrier'--the latter two actually occur in Pearl (961, 850 respectively). Other stock phrases can also be quoted: by stok ober ston (380),

wele and wo (342), I wot and (I) wene (47, 201).

It is this looser, less elevated type of alliterative practice that characterises much of the inferior poetry of the so-called 'alliterative revival'. Oakden records this, and notes how this widespread use of 'tags' to fill out lines contributes to a general looseness and shoddiness of style, overburdening the line with wearisomely repetitive alliterative plugs:

... too many of them [the alliterative poets] are content to fall back on such colourless adjectives as blisful, bryxt, dere, according to the needs of the alliteration.<sup>1</sup>

Oakden acknowledges, however, that our poet generally managed to avoid the pitfalls of over-use of the alliterative technique:

The better poets moulded this traditional phraseology to their own ends, but most of the alliterative poets too readily yielded to the temptation to write fluent verse by the aid of all sorts of tags and phrases. The demands of alliterative verse were admittedly great, yet the vocabulary was rich in synonymous words and phrases which came to the poet's rescue, often to his own undoing. Except in the case of the 'Gawayn' poet, no distinctive style is evolved and the literary inspiration behind the Revival died before the point of maturity was ever reached.<sup>2</sup>

The dangers, therefore, are obvious when a poet over-employs

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1. Op. cit., p. 392.

2. Op. cit., pp. 110-111.

a useful technique to the point where it ceases to be effective and becomes monotonous and stale. The defense of the Pearl-poet against this charge lies in the strict control and selectivity he exercises in his use of alliterative vocabulary. Even words which become hackneyed in less skilful hands--blysfol, blybe, dere<sup>1</sup>--rise in Pearl above the level of empty or trite decoration.

In this respect, as in the others we have had occasion to refer to elsewhere, our anonymous author reveals himself to be a master of selection in the mechanics of his verse.

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1. Cf. comments on these words in Chapter II.

CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION

H. C. Wyld, in his study of the vocabulary of Lazamon's Brut consulted in Chapter IV, stated the dilemma which faces one who attempts a study of an author's use of words. The problem, quite simply, is that the form of such a study must inevitably take on something of the appearance of a glossary--if it is to have any pretence to comprehensiveness; the compiler's task is to present his list of words in such a way as to sustain the interest of the reader. As Wyld saw it, the defence of this glossary or list presentation is that the only way to give an exhaustive and thorough 'definition' of a significant word as used by a poet is to quote all the instances in which he uses it:

... to quote the most pregnant passages in which the word occurs, so that it may be studied in its various settings. Only so is it possible to grasp something of what the poet has in his mind. It is true that a word has an atmosphere of its own which it imparts to a line; it is no less true that this emotional quality of a word is varied and modified in intangible ways, by the words with which it is associated in a particular context. It is important indeed to be informed what characteristic words a poet uses, but far more so to know just how he uses them.<sup>1</sup>

The relation of word to context, and to other words in that

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1. Language 9, 1933, p. 49.

context, has been the kernel of this study of the vocabulary of Pearl. The choice of 'le mot juste', as we have taken pains to illustrate, is a vital part of the poet's armoury; and the 'justness' of the word is determined by its appropriateness in the context in which it is used. In trying to look into the Pearl-poet's mind, to see the motivation behind his use of certain words, we have been able to draw up clearly-defined categories of words: to point to situations in which a related stock of words have been used in association for a certain desired effect (the 'legal' terms, the 'courtly' terms).

It is significant that this meticulous care in vocabulary selection has been most marked in vital sections of the poem, at some point where the argument reaches a crux. Frequently, the use of an evocative word or phrase is cognate with an emotional, thematic or descriptive peak in the Dreamer's vision. Thus, we considered the debate between the Dreamer and the Maiden as to the nature of Heavenly reward, which is vital to the Dreamer's progress towards spiritual awareness. His conversion from arrogance to humble acceptance, from error to truth, from blindness to recognition of God's purpose, is a step-by-step progress towards the final scene, the confessio in the last lines of the poem. The way in which the poet achieves the dramatic intensity of the confrontation and dispute between the Maiden and the Dreamer is to create in these lines the atmosphere of

the medieval debate, with assertion and refutation, charge and counter-charge; and the authenticity of this situation is achieved by the spicing of the argument with the words and phrases of contemporary legal diction. The use of the legal terms, with all the weight and authority of the law behind them, helps subtly to underline the irrefutability of the Maiden's case.

Appropriateness, therefore, is the poet's yardstick in his choice of words in vital passages of the poem. Legal terminology is a fitting medium with which to introduce the Maiden in the rôle of divine advocate; and this central point of appropriateness is further illustrated in the other special categories of words treated in our study.

In his description of the Heavenly City of the Dreamer's vision the poet is faced with a unique practical difficulty--that of describing what is essentially indescribable in mortal terms. The problem of portraying Heaven, in the various branches of the arts, has been treated in widely differing ways. Blake, in his water-colour "The River of Life", represents Heaven as a paradisiacal milieu of light, radiance and life. For Blake, God is generally an Old-Testamentish figure, stern and with long flowing beard, awesome and fearful.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See "God Judging Adam", "The House of Death".

How is a poet, however, without the aids of visual art, to bring to realisation the Heavenly world beyond the ken of his readers? Milton, in Paradise Lost, solves the problem by side-stepping it: he talks of "things invisible to mortal sight",<sup>1</sup> and thereafter the physical aspect of Heaven is summarily treated. God is introduced without physical description, and

About Him all the sanctities of Heaven  
Stood thick as starrs, and from His sight received  
Beatitude past utterance.

(III, 60-62)

Our poet, in his portrayal of the "things invisible to mortal sight", follows closely--as did Dante--the account of the apostle John in the Apocalypse (as he himself tells us at various points in the poem--944 et passim). In order to bring the Apocalyptic vision to life, however, the poet has sought some imaginative idiom in which the scene might take on substance for the medieval audience. And for the medieval poet, what metaphor could be more natural, more appropriate, than the splendour of the contemporary court--the pinnacle of human society--fostered and developed in the Romance tradition? What more appropriate, in other words, than to draw the unfathomable scene in terms of the most exalted human

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1. Book III, 55.

milieu? Thus, as we discovered in our chapter on courtly vocabulary in Pearl, the courtly motif is consistently carried through: Heaven itself is the medieval court; God is the lord who presides over its noble members (the Elect). The fusion in the medieval mind of courtly status with the refined manners expected of the high-born is also carried through by the poet:

'Among vus commeȝ nouber strot ne stryf; ...'

says the Maiden at 848; and the perfect contentment and impeccable decorousness of the Elect in Heaven is re-emphasised time and again. The Heavenly company is described as bryzt, comly, pure; and by use of a wide range of words which all have the same courtly flavour of 'gentle, noble, generous (in spirit), courteous' the poet reinforces a central idea with a variety of courtly near-synonyms. The words which enable him to achieve this uniformity of impression through diversity of expression are: dere, fre, gentyle, gente, hende, noble and, of course, the vital cortayse--all of which were discussed in their contexts in Chapter III. The same range of closely-related ideas is achieved by the poet in his choice of nouns to describe the central concept of cortaysye in Heaven--proweſſ, honour, renoun, fraunchyse.<sup>1</sup> In the

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1. By contrast, the Dreamer is much to blame and uncortayse (303). His conduct suffers by direct comparison with that of the Heavenly company; the spiritual lesson is contained by implication in the courtly metaphor.

cases of both nouns and adjectives listed above we have a series of concepts which are etymologically distinct, yet which in translation can be used almost interchangeably--thereby allowing the poet stylistic range with unity of effect, a cumulative force in his development of the courtly idiom.

Finally, appropriateness of vocabulary to situation was observed in the chapter on alliterative terminology in Pearl. We made note of the poet's use of alliteration to embellish his rhyming stanza form at climactic points in his argument. For specific examples of this technique we refer the reader to Chapter IV above. The point to be re-emphasised here is that our poet uses alliteration wisely and sparingly and where it is most appropriate--namely, where it serves to highlight a crucial point in his argument. In his hands, the alliterative technique never lapses into mere decoration.

Even where no formal categories of words were detected in the poem, instances were found of individual words used in association for a particular effect. This was the case in Chapter I, which we found appropriate to entitle "The Joy of the Maiden and the Desolation of the Dreamer", since we discussed therein the recurring contrast in the poem between the Heavenly happiness of the Maiden and the mortal discontent of the Dreamer; we showed how the words used to contrast these opposing states found their basis in the spiritual core of the

poem. All that is blysfol, blybe and bryzt refers to the perfect joy and contentment of Heaven, the physical radiance of the Heavenly City being complemented in the poem by the good cheer of those who live there. The wretched state of the Dreamer, on the other hand--he is nate, mornyf, wreched, pensyf--is clearly to be taken as symptomatic of the doubts and fears of the mortal man who has not yet prepared himself for God. The Dreamer is blynde (83) and it is this blindness which is the root of his discontent.

A study of the vocabulary of Pearl reveals, therefore, a man who shares with his great contemporary, Chaucer, a wide knowledge of specialist terms from a broad range of activities and interests of his time. This facility for embellishing his theme is evidenced not only in the legal and courtly diction of Pearl, but also in the hunting terms in GGK, and in the knowledge of contemporary music illustrated in the specialist terms in GGK and Purity.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond this range of vocabulary on which our poet draws--a range which testifies to an intelligent man of his times--there lies the poet's flair for selecting the right word or the right phrase to suit the context. The use of courtly terminology to describe the kingdom of Heaven gives birth to a metaphorical motif imaginatively envisaged

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1. Discussed by Chapman, op. cit.

and effectively realised. The use of the legal mould in which to cast the Dreamer and the Maiden provides an idiom which brings these two central characters to life. Their debate is no sterile lifeless theological speculation; it becomes, in the poet's hands, a dramatic confrontation. In his obvious care in choosing and handling words we can see in our poet not only a man of wide human and intellectual range, from whose pen could come such diverse works as Pearl, Patience, Purity and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; but also one who took pride in his technical skills, a poet whose range of themes and situations is matched by his versatility and meticulous care in creating them for us, his audience.

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

SIR GAWAIN AND THE  
GREEN KNIGHT

By way of corroborating our findings in Pearl of legal vocabulary (Chapter 3 above), it is profitable to cite detailed evidence found elsewhere of the poet's interest in, acquaintance with, and use of, formal legal language.

The passage for analysis occurs at GGK 283 f. Gawain's strange adversary has just appeared, and proceeds to issue his challenge, stating the terms of his Crystemas gomen (283). What the beheading challenge involves is, of course, far more than a 'Christmas game'. We see in retrospect that it involves a deadly serious pledge of faith, in which Gawain's whole trawbe--his loyalty to his pledge--is called into question. The Green Knight makes this immediately and perfectly clear to us in, as J. A. Burrow has described it, the 'grave, formal, and rather legalistic language'<sup>1</sup> in which the challenge is couched. His tone, moreover, is solemn, his meaning clear and unequivocal. His manner is, in fact, that of one who wishes to avoid all possibility of ambiguity or misunderstanding. He pledges that to whomsoever accepts the terms of the 'game',

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1. J. A. Burrow, A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (London, 1965), p. 22.

' I schal gif hym of my gyft bys giserne ryche, ...  
... I quit-clayme hit for ever, kepe hit as his auen, ...  
(288, 293)

('I shall give him as a gift this splendid axe ...  
... I renounce my claim to it forever, let him  
keep it for his own, ...')

The phrase 'quit-claim' is of legal origin and carries the meaning of (O.E.D.) (a) 'a formal discharge or release', (b) 'a formal renunciation or giving up of a claim' (clearly the meaning here). Specifically, a 'quit-claim' in common law is the acquitting of a man from any charge which has been made against him.

At 295 the Green Knight appeals to Arthur to dizt me be dom. The word dom--and related verb dem(e)--are rich in legal associations in Old and Middle English: the numerous shades of meaning have been discussed above (p. 93 f). Here the sense is clearly the general one of "judgment", and the legal formulaic phrase demen dizten is recorded in M.E.D. dom sb. 3(a) as having the sense of 'to make a law'.

At 296 the Green Knight offers his prospective combatant

' ... respite,  
A twelmonyth and a day; ... '

The word respite is the technical term still used in legal circles in the sense of the period given or asked for the discharging of a

debt; the one subjected to this process being 'put in respite'.

O.E.D. respite sb. 1 quotes an instance of the phrase from

Stubbs Const. Hist. II, xiv 21:

The articles that concerned the debts of the Jews, the right of entering and leaving the kingdom ... were likewise put in respite until fuller counsel could be had.

In GGK, the sense is that of the time given to an adversary to carry out his part of a bargain. Moreover, the phrase a twelmonyth and a day, as Burrow has pointed out, is a conventional time-span employed by a medieval court to ensure the course of one full year's respite.

Later, when Gawain takes up the challenge, the terms of the agreement are solemnly and carefully restated; once again we find words with legal overtones and from legal practice used to underline the seriousness and binding nature of the pledge:

'Refourme we oure forwardes, er we fyrrre passe.'

says the Green Knight (378)--'Let us restate the terms of our agreement, before we go any further.' For(e)ward (O.E. fore-weard,--ward: 'precaution') has in M.E. legal diction the sense of 'contract, treaty, bargain, ... pledge, promise' (M.E.D. foreward 1). It thus suggests something solemnly and legally binding. This is explicit in an

Suppl.  
illustration listed under M.E.D. foreward 2(c): S. Leg. Bod. 371/86

'For to brekin him forward hit is gret deshonour.' Gawain recognises the serious nature of the agreement in his formal reply. The words In god fayth (381) imply this recognition, and he, with the same care and precision as his adversary, repeats each individual clause of the bargain, ending with the vow:

'And þat I swere þe for soþe, and by my seker traweþ.  
(403)

He realises that he has entered into a couenaunt, as the Green Knight describes it at 393. The couenaunt is, of course, the pledge of his faith; it is also the legal term commonly used for 'A formal contract; a contract under seal ...' (M.E.D. couenaunt (law 1 b)). The binding force behind couenaunt in M.E. has already been observed in our discussion of the word in Pearl where it is used of the unique pledge between God and man.

Later in GGK we find the terms and procedure of a legal bargain systematically followed; and again, Gawain's trawebe is directly involved in the terms of the agreement. In the passage at Bercilak's castle, Gawain and his host agree to exchange the spoils of hunting (in Gawain's case, of course, the 'hunting' referred to is an ironical reference to his temptations by the lady).

'  
'  
... a forwarde we make: ...

suggests Bercilak at 1105. Gawain enters into this formal agreement and to conclude the bargain, they

Recorded couenauntez ofte; ...  
(1123)

Here we see a final instance of the 'covenant', the solemn pledge.

APPENDIX 2

## APPENDIX 2

ALLITERATING WORDS AND  
PHRASES IN LAZAMON'S BRUT

An early contribution to the study of alliterative vocabulary in M.E. was made by H. C. Wyld in his Studies in the Diction of Lazamon's Brut.<sup>1</sup> Wyld accounted for the differences in diction between the two extant MSS. of the Brut by accepting the Caligula (C) version as some fifty years older than the Otto (O). According to Wyld, the O-scribe set about removing many of the archaic terms surviving from the original and retained in C. A systematic investigation of the revisions and substitutions carried out by the O-scribe apparently reinforced Wyld's view of the later MS. as an attempt to bring up to date much of the obsolete diction preserved in C. Thus C aehete 'possessions, wealth' becomes O tresur; C aelder 'prince, chief' is replaced by louerd. Elmes-mon 'beggar' becomes pore man; at-breac 'broke away' becomes ascapade; bidan 'to await, undergo' becomes isoffre; blanke (O.E. blanca 'a (white) horse') becomes hors; the very common duzebe from O.E. dugub 'body of retainers' becomes cnihtes or simply men; gume becomes cnihtes; and another of Brink's elevated terms, leod, has suffered particularly from the pruning and simplifying process in the O-MS. Leod-cnihtes

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1. Cf. above, p. 3, footnote 4.

(al pas) becomes alle beos knihtes; leod-ferde becomes folkes;  
leod-guide 'national speech' becomes oure speche.

The O-scribe goes so far at times as to replace an archaic English term with a borrowed French term (this is remarkable because, considering the size of the Brut, the number of foreign borrowings is negligible). In O, however, boc-runen of C becomes lettren; mabmes becomes riches; heinen becomes saruy.

More recently, E. G. Stanley has questioned the validity of Wyld's account.<sup>1</sup> From his basic premise that the Brut is of

a more archaic flavour than that of other West-Midland texts of the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Stanley sees Lazamon as essentially conservative in sentiment and style--this is reflected in his handling of poetic diction. In his choice of words

archaizing accords with Lazamon's sentiments as they emerge from his work.<sup>3</sup>

This appraisal of Lazamon's work leads Stanley to a view of the

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1. Cf. above, p. 4, footnote 1.
  2. Stanley, "Lazamon's Antiquarian Sentiments", Medium Evum vol. 38, no. 1 (1969), p. 23.
  3. Op. cit., p. 25.

relationship between the two MSS. of the Brut which differs from Wyld's. For Stanley, ~~temperamental~~ rather than chronological factors prevail in the divergent treatments of the original by the two scribes. The C-scribe is faithful to the spirit of Lazamon; the O- a zealous reviser. Because of the uncertain date of composition of the Brut, Wyld's theory cannot be dismissed: on the other hand, it cannot be conclusively proved. Stanley's theory does not solve the problem of chronology but gives more emphasis to the individual methods of the two copyists. What we may have, Stanley argues, are two scribes closer in time to each other than Wyld allowed, but clearly apart in their attitudes toward the traditional poetic diction.

There is no basis, from available evidence, for accepting one theory and rejecting the other. As a general comment on both MSS. of the Brut, one may describe Lazamon's vocabulary as archaic in flavour, preserving features of the O.E. poetic tradition. Where in the C-text a word has become obsolete, archaic, or even unintelligible, the O-scribe regularly substitutes a current alternative. Most frequently, such substitutions occur for words in alliterating position. Both Wyld and Stanley have observed, moreover, instances in the O-text where the substitution process breaks down and an apparent archaism is preserved. Once again, one cannot be certain as to whether this may be attributed to a poetic form remaining in

current use, or simply to an oversight on the part of the scribe.

From the confused picture of the vocabulary of the Brut, two features may be remarked upon as vital to our present study and unaffected by the controversy surrounding the relationship of the two MSS.

- (1) The Brut affords a valuable and early illustration in M.E. of the archaic poetic diction fostered in West-Midland areas in the post-Conquest years.
- (2) Alliterating words or phrases are most commonly subject to revision by the O-scribe--since it is in the preservation of O.E. alliterative formulae that archaic diction is most regularly preserved by Lazamon and other M.E. poets.

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