

84. Spiritual transformation through divine teaching in medieval dream poem *Pearl*¹

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the spiritual transformation of the Dreamer/Narrator on his way from a sinful nature to divine virtue in medieval dream poem *Pearl* by the *Gawain*-poet. At the beginning of the poem, the bereaved dreamer is grieving for the loss of a girl, most probably his daughter and mourns for his lost “pearl”. He cannot comfort himself by any means and fails to surrender to the divine will as a consolation. As a typical aspect of the genre, the dreamer, then, sleeps and finds himself in a vision where he meets the “Pearl Maiden”. The maiden looks like his pearl, yet he notices that she has been transfigured. She marks that she lives blissfully as a queen in the New Jerusalem now as one of the brides of the Lamb. Through a theological argument, the Pearl Maiden intends to teach him divine values and make him abandon his worldly desires to which he is too loyal. After this peculiar experience, the dreamer wakes up and realizes that he is also transformed into a person who can now comfort his intense grieving by submitting himself to heavenly virtues. In this light, the paper examines the way the dreamer in *Pearl* changes his perspective from a penchant for worldly desires to a total heavenly conduct under the guidance of the Pearl Maiden.

Keywords: *Gawain*-poet, literature of revelation, dream poetry, *Pearl*, medieval poetry

Orta çağ rüya şiiri *İnci*'de ilahi öğreti yoluyla ruhani dönüşüm

Öz

Bu çalışma, *Gawain*-şairi tarafından yazılan *İnci* isimli orta çağ rüya şiirindeki rüya gören kişinin/anlatıcının, günahkâr bir mahiyetten ilahi fazilete giden yolundaki ruhani değişimini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Şiirin başında, matemli anlatıcı muhtemelen kızı olan kaybı ardından kederlidir ve “inci” için yas tutar. Hiçbir şekilde kendini rahatlatamaz ve teselli olarak ilahi iradeye teslim olamaz. Türün tipik bir özelliği olarak anlatıcı incisini kaybettiği bahçede uyuyakalır ve kendini “İnci Bakiresi” ile karşılaştığı bir tasavvurda bulur. Bu kız, kendi incisine benzer ama anlatıcı onun değişmiş olduğunu fark eder. Kız, ona artık Yeni Kudüs'te, Hz. İsa'nın gelinlerinden biri ve kraliçe olarak mutlu bir şekilde yaşadığını ifade eder. Dini bir tartışma yöntemi aracılığıyla, İnci Bakiresi ona ilahi değerleri öğretmeyi ve çok bağlı olduğu dünyevi arzuları bıraktırmayı amaçlar. Bu özel tecrübeden sonra, rüya gören kişi uyanır ve artık ilahi idareye teslim olarak yoğun yasını dindirebilen birine dönüştüğünü fark eder. Bunların ışığında, bu çalışma *İnci* eserindeki rüya gören kişinin

¹ This paper is a revised and extended version of the study entitled “Healing through Divine Teaching in Medieval Dream Poem *Pearl*”, orally presented at International Başkent Conference: “Health and Healing in Culture and Literature”, Başkent University, Ankara, Turkey, 13-15 March 2019. The main theme of the study is examined in detail in the first chapter of my ongoing dissertation entitled “She ys ded!”: Loss and Transformation in Medieval Dream Poetry: The *Gawain*-poet's *Pearl*, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* and Robert Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*.

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kendini İnci Bakiresi rehberliğinde, dünyevi arzulara karşı olan güçlü meyilinden tamamen ilahi bir yaşam tarzına olan deęiřtirme şeklini incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Gawain*-şairi, vahiy edebiyatı, rüya şiiri, *İnci*, orta çağ şiiri

Introduction

Classified as the MS. Cotton Nero A.x. in the British Library (Bond, 1991, p. 3), the four poems of the anonymous poet, often referred as the *Gawain*-poet, are one of the most distinguished works of the late fourteenth century. Written in the alliterative tradition, one of these works is *Pearl* which is in the category of devotional works in medieval dream poetry. Among all medieval poems, *Pearl* is authentic for not only its subject matter but for its complex and high artistic structure, as well. The poem consists of 1212 lines and 101 stanzas, each of which includes 12 four-stress lines. All the stanzas, except for one, are designed in groups of five and there is a consistent rhyme-scheme. This ornate style complies with the subject matter of the poem as the poet gradually paves the way for the Dreamer to attain the ultimate truth and perfection, that is heavenly order. There are numerous discussions about the genre of the poem. It is considered as an elegy, total allegory, an exemplum, a Biblical epic or even “an interior drama” (Blenker, 1968, p. 221). Specifically, John Conley (1955) discusses it as a conventional “Christian *consolatio*” (p. 347). Conley’s assertion does not seem too far-fetched once the central motive of the whole poem is considered. Juxtaposing earthly and heavenly realms, the *Gawain*-poet converts a unique and individual experience to a universal one through his devotional poem. The poet conveys this transition from earthly values to the heavenly ones with the help of shifting symbols, images and debate. However, it should be noted that the work is an example of dream poetry. It is a unique work which incorporates all the above-mentioned genres as minor entities. In a conventional dream poem- secular or devotional- the dreamers are expected to reach a higher truth and knowledge. Accordingly, the knowledge the Dreamer acquires in *Pearl* results in his transformation of his approach to loss and life. Furthermore, this particular change is only achieved by his visionary experience.

In *Pearl*, the dreamer conveys his experience over the loss of a girl and grieves in an inconsolable and traumatic state. The girl is most probably his daughter as he mentions that “Ho watz me nerre pen aunte or nece”³ (*Pearl* 233) and “þou lyfed not two 3er in oure zede”⁴ (*Pearl* 483). In a dream vision, he meets the “Pearl Maiden” who is crowned with precious gems and living happily in a heaven-like landscape. He cannot be sure if she is the pearl that he has lost. She expresses her new life as a queen married to the Lamb. After talking about her life, she aims to teach the virtues of God to the Dreamer. These teachings sometimes take the form of scolding for the Dreamer who is too stubborn and insistent on his worldly perception of grief during this Boethian-like argument. So as to reinforce her argument, she refers to various scriptural texts, including “The Parable of the Vineyard”. She also depicts the alternate place she lives in, the New Jerusalem. After witnessing the life she leads there, the sacrifices of the Christ and the splendor of the new landscape, the Dreamer longs to live there with her. In a futile effort to cross the river, the dreamer is involuntarily woken up and only then could he understand the full implications of finding peace under God’s guidance. As a result, the dreamer is transformed into a person who can now overcome his intense mourning by submitting himself to God. Throughout their conversation, the heavenly nature of the maiden and the earthly values of the dreamer are constantly juxtaposed. The maiden uses their discussion to cure his misplaced idea of grief, which allows him to become a true

³ “she was nearer to me than aunt or niece.” - All the modern English translation in this paper is taken from Andrew, Malcolm and Ronald Waldron (2007). *The Pearl Manuscript in Modern English Prose Translation*. Liverpool, Liverpool University Press.”

⁴ “You lived not two years in our land.”

Christian. It is upon this transformation that he can find the true remedy for his grief in the order of heavenly values. The discourse between the two is designed to make him understand Christian doctrine and thus to release him from his grief.

The significance of dream poetry

In analysing the aspects of dream poetry, A. C. Spearing (1976) specifies that dream vision poems have “a set of clearly discernible conventions” (p. 2). In this specific tradition, the dream itself is employed as the most significant component of the poems in conveying the transcendental experience of the dreamer. Conventionally, the dream persona is preoccupied with some troubles and goes to sleep with these thoughts. What is called the dream proper starts hereafter. During the dream process, the poets feature a number techniques in dealing with this transcendental voyage. Therefore, the poets pay particular heed to the process in dream poems. In this tradition, as Stephen Russell (1988) puts it,

the dream vision begins by announcing itself to be a certain kind of experience: it does this by introducing a certain sort of persona or speaking voice and determining a specific relationship between that persona and the reader. The text is in the hands of or proceeds from the muse of a specific individual, and all of the words have this person as their ultimate source. Thus, the lyric persona is both the reporter of the narrative (or complex of emotions) and also the text's ultimate (and probably only) subject [...] the dreamer is regularly depicted as troubled, depressed, and alienated from the comforts of society: he may be suffering from love languor or be in mourning or he may, like "Long Will" or the dreamer who dreams of the Palace of Fame, be suffering from a deeper, more pervasive anguish or depression. In any case, he is the sort of person who has dreams, the sort of sensibility we might expect in a lyric poet but one in whose hands we might not feel terribly secure. (pp. 115-116).

This precarious situation of the dreamer is due to his lack of truth and the whole poem is intended to teach him this truth step by step. As a result, he cannot be reliable and is slow to learn in the development of the poem but becomes a dynamic figure through the end of this “spiritual adventure” (Spearing, 1976, p. 6). In addition, Steven F. Kruger (1992) points out that dream narratives, in which the personae are instructed in secular or divine matters, are “consistent with the belief that the dream provides a route to higher knowledge” (p. 124). The most significant result is that they are “given oneiric access to a higher moral or eschatological realm, he or she awakens enlightened, ready to lead an improved life” (Kruger, 1992, p. 124). Therefore, it may well be inferred that unwritten aftermath of the poem may be predicted through a thorough reading of the process in the poem.

A bereaved father in search of consolation

The poem begins with the dreamer who enters the same “erbere”⁵ (*Pearl* 9) where he has lost his pearl. He mourns for his loss in this isolated garden “turning away from the social world to dwell in his grief” (Barootes, 2016, p. 746). He states that she used to be the source of all his bliss on Earth. These opening stanzas obviously indicate that the Dreamer is conveying a very personal experience of loss and it is through his eyes that this unique story is told. After all, his change is going to be in the foreground throughout the poem. The dreamer assures that an equal in value to the “perle plesaunte”⁶ (*Pearl* 1) who “pleases prynces”⁷ (*Pearl* 1) can never be found even in the Orient. It is with these lines at the beginning of the poem that the dreamer gives away the first hints of his earthly and partly selfish nature. He focuses too much on his loss and sorrow and the first mention of the image of pearl here is obviously a worldly depiction. The prince here is an earthly ruler and the image of pearl used by the dreamer is an earthly,

⁵ “garden”

⁶ “lovely pearl”

⁷ “pleases a prince”

material gem. When he repeatedly mentions his “perle withouten spot”⁸ (*Pearl* 12-24-36-48-60) in the first group of stanzas, he saliently means a visible and earthly gem which is “clad in clot”⁹ (*Pearl* 22) now. However, trying to deal with his pain, he is also aware that having so much grief is a blasphemous approach. He states:

A deuely dele in my hert denned,
 Paz resoun sette myseluen sazt.
 I playned my perle pat der watz penned,
 Wyth fyrce skyllez pat faste fazt.
 Paz kynde of Kryst me comfort kenned,
 My wreched wylle in wo ay wra3te.¹⁰ (*Pearl* 51-56).

The irony here is that before experiencing it, the dreamer is predicting the central motive of the poem, that is the opposition between earthly and heavenly values. However, he cannot fully grasp the merits of faith. Although he acknowledges that both reason and Christ could give him comfort, he consciously ignores them and affirms it when he speaks of his “wreched wylle”¹¹ (*Pearl* 56). After falling asleep and the dream proper begins, he finds himself in a new landscape in his dream. He describes it as a quest where marvels occur. It is an extremely beautiful setting, the most remarkable spot of which is a stream and a Paradise-like city behind it. The place is beyond the perceptions of the material world since it is “[s]o al watz dubbet on dere asyse / þe derþe þerof for to deuyse/ Nis no wy3 worþe þat tonge berez”¹² (*Pearl* 97-100). The beauty, brightness and radiance of this landscape are strongly emphasized, and he considers that Fortune has brought him there, thereby ignoring God’s plans and highlighting the haphazard nature of Fortune. He knows his deficiencies and thus states that his earthly heart could not be enough to absorb all this beauty. Everything that is presented to him on this realm are worldly beauties and he desires to see and learn “more and more” (*Pearl* 132-144-156-168-180), the repetitive words ending this stanza group. At this point, he imagines that these material assets could assuage his pain and cause him to forget all his grief. When he sees the Maiden for the first time, his initial impressions are depicted in a courtly manner. The Maiden is “[a] mayden of menske”¹³ (*Pearl* 162) and she is thus portrayed in a courtly language. She is fair, radiant; wears a crown and royal arrays adorned with bright pearls and other gems. In this fourth group of stanzas where her physical appearance is depicted, the repetitive rhyme is various forms of “precios perlez” (*Pearl* 192-204-216-228), signifying the idea of an earthly gem once more. Additionally, when he starts talking to the Maiden for the first time, he refers to himself as a “joylez juelere” (*Pearl* 252) and accentuates his inconsolable grief:

‘O perle,’ quopþ I, ‘in perlez py3t,
 Art þou my perle þat I haf playned,
 Regretted by myn one on ny3te?
 Much longeyng haf I for þe layned,
 Syþen into gresse þou me agaly3te.

⁸ “spotless pearl”

⁹ “clad in mud”

¹⁰ “A desolating grief lurks in my heart / Though reason wiser comfort sought. / I mourned my pearl that was prisoned / With arguments that fiercely fought; / Though Christ’s grace bade me understand /My wretched will fresh sorrow brought.”

¹¹ “wretched will”

¹² “arrayed in so entirely splendid fashion [that] no one capable of speech is able to describe the glory of it.”

¹³ “a courteous maiden”

Pensyf, payred, I am forpayned,
 And þou in a lyf of lykyng lyzte,
 In paradys erde, of stryf vnstrayned.
 What Wyrde hatz hyder my juel vayned,
 And don me in þys del and gret daunger?
 Fro we in twynne wern towen and twayned,
 I haf ben a joylez juelere.¹⁴ (*Pearl* 241-252)

Amazed by this transfigured girl, the Dreamer explicitly expounds that what he has lost was of earthly value and is buried in the grass now. That is why he calls himself a joyless jeweler who thinks more of the material value of a gem. This underscores his misplaced material understanding of loss and grief. Mary Vincent Hillmann (1945) goes as far as to say that “his inordinate love of earthly goods” (p. 242) is an indicator of greed, one of the seven deadly sins. Milton R. Stern (1955) agrees with her when he marks that his approach to loss is “accompanied with pride” (p. 73) on the grounds that he is aware of his “lack of faith” (p. 73), yet he is not ready to act accordingly at present. What he really needs is “a complete renunciation of wealth and hence earthly standards of wealth” (Moorman, 1969, p. 117).

The Pearl Maiden as a Divine Instructor

Upon being asked if she is the pearl he has lost, the maiden makes her first verbal existence by warning him that “[his] account is mistaken” (*Pearl* 257), he speaks heedlessly and unlike his cogitation, his pearl is not entirely lost (*Pearl* 258). She condemns him for having “a mad porpose” (*Pearl* 267):

‘Bot, jueler gente, if þou schal lose
 þy joy for a gemme þat þe watz lef,
 Me þynk þe put in a mad porpose,
 And busyez þe aboute a raysoun bref;
 For þat þou lestez watz bot a rose
 þat flowred and fayled as kynde hyt gef;¹⁵ (*Pearl* 265-270)

She concludes her remarks by calling him an “unnatural jueler” (*Pearl* 276). He is unnatural for her as her idea of a jeweler is totally different from that of the Dreamer. While the Maiden’s notion has a heavenly connotation, the Dreamer’s perception certainly possesses an earthly nature. By evoking the medieval flower and leaf tradition, the Maiden highlights that he cannot get any good from the mortal rose he has lost. Only if he imagines a figure of a rose in heavenly terms, could he attain an everlasting love of his pearl. Moreover, his “crooked” (*Pearl* 307) words are an instance of pride for the Maiden. Calling his statements “vnavysed”¹⁶ (*Pearl* 292), the Maiden blames him on account of his three faults: believing his eyes, considering that he can live with her there, and he is able to pass the stream. She maintains that he constantly speaks of nothing but his own grief after his repeated mentions of his own

¹⁴ ‘O pearl,’ I said, ‘arrayed in pearls, / are you my pearl that I have mourned, / grieved for alone at night? / I have concealed much longing for you, / since you slipped away from me into the grass. / Sorrowful, wasted, I am overcome by pain, / and you [are] settled in a life of pleasure, / in the land of paradise, untroubled by strife. / What fate has brought my jewel hither, / and caused me this sorrow and great deprivation? / Since we were severed and parted from each other / I have been a joyless jeweller.’

¹⁵ ‘But, courteous jeweller, / if you are going to lose your joy for a gem / that was dear to you, / it seems to me that you are set on a mad purpose, / and concern yourself on account of a transitory cause; / for what you lost was only a rose / that flowered and withered as nature allowed it;

¹⁶ “thoughtless”

loss and pain. Even though he is slightly relieved by the blissful state of the maiden in the “heavenly lot” (*Pearl* 385), he acknowledges that he is still “a man disconsolate”¹⁷ (*Pearl* 386) and demands to learn more about the life she is leading there. Much to his surprise, she announces, “Bot my Lorde de Lombe purz Hys godhead, / He toke myself to Hys maryage”¹⁸ (*Pearl* 413-3). The Maiden informs him that he is taken by the Lamb as one of his brides and she is very happy. Learning that she is a queen, the Dreamer cannot comprehend her status as she only spent two years on Earth and openly mentions it: “Bot a queen!- hit is to dere a date”¹⁹ (*Pearl* 492). The appalled dreamer cannot figure out how God could do such a “wrong” (*Pearl* 498) to make her a queen in a single day and remove the crown of Mary. Obviously, his understanding of heavenly grace is limited by his nature as an earthly man and having no other choice, the maiden has to refer to a scriptural story by using a “sermon technique” (Andrew and Waldron, 1978, p. 77). She tells the “Parable of the Vineyard” as told in Matthew 20:1-16 in which the workers in the vine receive the same amount of money regardless of the unequal hours they spend working. The story is about God’s merit and grace and underlines the fact that God is equal in justice to everybody regardless of the time they have spared in work. At the end of the parable, Jesus Christ announces: “þe laste schal be þe first þat strykez, / And þe fyrst þe laste, be he neuer so swyft,”²⁰ (*Pearl* 570-572). Incorporating the parable in this section, the poet specifies that “the penny paid for a day’s work in the vineyard becomes a metaphor for salvation” (Bahr, 2020, p. 731). Nevertheless, owing to his blind obedience to earthly values, which is the main problem of his extreme grief, the dreamer finds this story “vnresounable” (*Pearl* 590) and the maiden fails in her attempt.

Focusing on the repetitive lines of “God is gret inoghe” (*Pearl* 612-624-635-648-660) in the next group of stanzas, the Maiden uses the innocence as the focal point so as to convince the Dreamer. It takes her five stanzas to make him understand that only the innocent have the right to salvation. To exemplify it, she defines the great pearl she is wearing and associates it with that in the “Parable of Pearl of Price” from Matthew 13:45-6 (Andrew et al, 1978, 88). With its “wemlez, clene and clere”²¹ (*Pearl* 737) nature for which a man gives all he could, this pearl on her breast signifies purity, salvation and hence heaven. The Maiden also tries to transform the idea of pearl in the Dreamer’s mind and introduces the idea of a heavenly pearl by calling Christ a jeweler and thereby signifying the idea of heavenly pearl. She advises: “I rede þe forsake þe worlde wode / And porchace þy perle maskelles.”²² (*Pearl* 743-744). The dreamer, then, begins to recognize some heavenly values when he asks her who had formed her heavenly figure (*Pearl* 747). It is apparent here that he starts to comprehend that she should not be depicted in an earthly fashion, since he says “þat wro3t þy wede he watz ful wys”²³ (*Pearl* 748). Upon being called “vnblemyst”²⁴ (*Pearl* 782), she does not agree that she is matchless since she is one of the 144.000 brides of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem. Aspired to see the New Jerusalem, the dreamer requests it from the Maiden. The vision of the New Jerusalem is the climax of the poem as during this vision the maiden makes a comparison between the Old Jerusalem, where her “Lemman was slayn”²⁵ (*Pearl* 805) and the heavenly one. Through this comparison, the maiden aims to compare the heavenly and earthly values, “in the form of Christ’s suffering in the Old one and her new life in the new one” (Moorman, 1978, p. 118):

‘Of motez two to carpe clene,

¹⁷ “sorrowful”

¹⁸ “My Lord My Lamb put his divinity. / He took me in marriage to Him.”

¹⁹ “but a queen! – it is too exalted a rank.”

²⁰ “The last shall be the first who comes, / and the first shall be last, however swift he be”

²¹ “flawless, fair and bright”

²² “I advise you to forsake the mad world / and buy your flawless pearl.”

²³ “Whoever made your clothing was most skillful”

²⁴ “unblemished”

²⁵ “love was slain”

And Jerusalem hyȝt boȝe nawȝeles—
 þat nys to yow no more to mene
 Bot “cete of God” oȝer “syȝt of pes”—
 In þat on oure pes watz mad at ene;
 With payne to suffer þe Lombe hit chese;
 In þat oȝer is noȝt bot pes to glene
 þat ay schal laste withouten reles.²⁶ (*Pearl* 949-956).

Emphasizing His innocent nature, the Maiden uses Biblical allusions to interpret the crucifixion. On the other hand, when she is depicting the New Jerusalem, she is interrupted by the curious dreamer who cannot discern the meaning of having no dwelling-places with “castel-walle” (*Pearl* 917). His earthly values outmatch here one more time and as E.V. Gordon (1966) observes, here “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” (p. 77). By underlying the innocence again, the maiden tells the avid dreamer that he has no power to enter there “[b]ot þou wer clene, withouten mote.”²⁷ (*Pearl* 972). However, in an attempt to alleviate his anguish, he is allowed to a sight of it. He perceives that it is the same as John the Apostle described it in the Apocalypse. The precious gems here do not possess materialistic value as he calls them “gentyll”²⁸ (*Pearl* 991) now. It is a majestic city embellished with a number of precious jewels. It is a city which needs “ne sunne and mone” (*Pearl* 1044) since “God watz her lombe”²⁹ (*Pearl* 1045). A very bright river runs from the throne of the Lord, and only the ones without stain can enter this heavenly city. After witnessing the pain of Christ for all humanity and his “lyttel quene” (*Pearl* 1146) is “with lyf” (*Pearl* 1145) there, his perspective begins to change, and he notifies that his pain disappears:

þen saȝ I þer my lyttel quene
 þat I wende had standen by me in sclade.
 Lorde, much of mirȝe watz þat ho made
 Among her ferez þat watz so quyt!
 þat syȝt me gart to þenk to wade
 For luf-longyng in gret delyt.³⁰ (*Pearl* 1146-1152)

His fears and doubts begin to fade away upon witnessing the happiness she is leading in the New Jerusalem. In spite of all the warnings, he hastily takes an inconsiderate step and intends to cross the river. He is aspired to join the maiden in her blissful life. The dream proper ends here as he is woken up by this careless attempt. However, as soon as he wakes up, the first thing he says shows that he has abandoned his previous selfish rebels: “Now al be to þat Pryncez paye”³¹ (*Pearl* 1176). He surrenders himself totally to the teachings of God. In addition, addressing his pearl, he marks,

If hit be ueray and soth sermoun

²⁶ “To speak plainly of two cities, / both nevertheless called Jerusalem / that means no more to you than “city of God” or “vision of peace” / in the one our peace was made certain: / the Lamb chose it to suffer pain in; / in the other there is only peace to be gleaned, / which will last for ever without end.”

²⁷ “Unless you were pure, without stain.”

²⁸ “noble”

²⁹ “God Himself was their lamp”

³⁰ “then I saw there my little queen / who I thought had stood beside me in the valley/ Lord, how happily she behaved, she who was so pure, among her companions/ That sight caused me to resolve to wade across fore love-longing in my great desire”

³¹ “Now may all be to that Prince’s satisfaction.”

Þat þou sostrykez in garlande gay
 So wel is me in þys doel-doungoun
 Þat þou art to þat Prynces paye³² (*Pearl* 1185-1188)

He is still sad and sorrowful, but now is closer to being consoled in his loss and contended that his pearl has pleased God (Hillmann, 1945, p. 244). From the directions he has acquired in his vision, he goes through a transformation “from mourning to no less intense by the ordering of a new metaphysics” (Andrew et al., 1978, p. 30). Furthermore, he is excessively regretful of his lack of faith before, wishing that he had desired no more than that was allowed to him and been satisfied with what had been given to him. Moreover, he expands the experience to all human beings by declaring, “Lorde mat hit arn þatagayn þestryuen/ Oþer proferen þe o3t agayn þy paye”³³ (*Pearl* 1199-1200). It is evidently indicated in these lines that he has already forsaken his subjective approach to the understanding of loss. He is no longer an “unnatural jeweller” since he adopts God’s teachings and makes universal comments about the mankind’s situation as a humble servant to the heavenly pearl:

To pay þe Prince oþer sete sazte
 Hit is ful eþe to þe god Krystyn;
 For I haf founden Hym, boþe day and nazte,
 A God, a Lorde, a frende ful fyin.³⁴ (*Pearl* 1201-1204)

He ends the poem by echoing the first line- “[a]nde precious perlez vnto His pay”³⁵ (*Pearl* 1212). The prince here is not the earthly one as in the beginning, but the Lamb. In this cyclic frame of the poem, the garden he wakes up is not the “erber” in the beginning but is now the “erber wlonk”³⁶ (*Pearl* 1171). It is with his vain attempt to cross the water that he ultimately comes to realize he is not allowed to go beyond it due to his earthly nature and previous refusal of the virtues of God. Upon waking up regretfully, he succeeds in reaching a consolation by totally understanding and submitting to Christian doctrines. He now knows the limits of the mankind and could be happy to imagine that his pearl is happy in the kingdom of God. Edward Vasta (1970) aptly encapsulates the poem and states that *Pearl* is,

a religious poem in which the narrator becomes more than reconciled with the loss of a loved one. He becomes reconciled with himself, re-establishing the interior harmony of his soul’s faculties [...] with the laws of physical universe, [...] with the mortality of earthly beauty, coming to see that the changeless beauty of Heaven is far more splendid [and] finally with the “kynde of Kryst”, that is with the moral and spiritual orders of reality in which one good must give way to a higher good and one life must be lost that a higher life may be gained (p. 185).

Conclusion

Through a revelatory “gostly drem”³⁷ (*Pearl* 790) the Dreamer, whose intense lamenting was once keeping him from saving his soul, fulfils a spiritual transformation. This change throughout the poem becomes the key point and it is only achieved by his encounter with the Pearl Maiden and her doctrinal teachings. As a result, benefiting from the divine instructions he takes from the Pearl Maiden, the

³² “If it is a true and real account / that you go thus in your bright garland [i.e. crown], / then it is well for me in this dungeon of sorrow / that you are to that Prince’s pleasure.”

³³ “Lord, those who strive against You are mad, / or who propose anything against Your pleasure.”

³⁴ “To please the Prince or be reconciled [to Him] is very easy to the good Christian; / for I have found Him, both day and night [i.e. at all times], / a God, a Lord, an entirely perfect friend.”

³⁵ “precious pearls to His pleasure.”

³⁶ “fertile garden”

³⁷ “spiritual vision”

Dreamer heals himself by applying those doctrines to his own conduct and reaches a higher reality. Thus, the bereaved father at the beginning of the poem shifts his focus from his own mourning to the acknowledgement of heavenly order. His transformation could be achieved through his vision. As a consequence, he is supposed to have a refashioned understanding of life in his waking world.

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